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An Interview with JoNell Thomas

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee White

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Interview with Jonell Thomas

January 12, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Claytee D. White

Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV's Lied Library.

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Preface

JoNell Thomas grew up in a large Utah family, went to Utah State and law school at University of Utah. She moved to Nevada in 1992; first as with the Nevada Supreme Court and then as a staff attorney with a Las Vegas firm, and currently is an attorney with the Clark County Special Public Defender's office. She and her husband, Billy Logan and their twin daughters have lived in the John S. Park Neighborhood since 2001. Their residence was constructed in 1956 on a large corner lot with lots of trees and a fifty-year-old swimming pool.

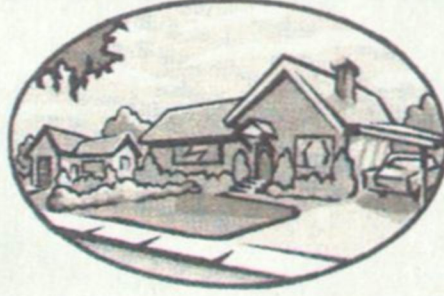
JoNell offers her observations on a variety of JSP events: Stratosphere's failed rollercoaster across the Strip idea; the proposed high-rise complexes; the Monorail lack of convenience to locals; effects of dropping home prices and downturn of economy; the homeless population and closing of Circle Park.

She helped create the early online community called the Downtown Neighbors website which provided information regarding , part activist, part practical info, for another of years until FB became the logical vehicle for discussions etc. Also neighborhood meetings...Commercial area vs residential area in the older neighborhoods...FBI cell tower

Many favorite local businesses are mentioned, as well as the fact that the area is lacking a neighborhood movie theater. Nevertheless, she sees promise of lasting possibilities in the John S. Park area as "more people focus on the quality of life and come to realize that they don't want to spend an hour a day on the freeway.. I think that the downtown area will continue to thrive." She explains that there are issues and struggles downtown that other communities will never have, but the John S. Park residents continue to face them, deal with them.

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Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Interview with JoNell Thomas

January 12, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
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This is Claytee White, and it is January 12th of 2010, and I am in downtown Las Vegas in the office of JoNell Thomas.

And JoNell, tell me a little about where you grew up, what that was like, what your parents did for a living.

I grew up in Murray, Utah. It's a suburb of Salt Lake [City]. I grew up with my siblings. My parents were divorced, so I lived in the house with my mother and stepfather and a few siblings there, so it was pretty crowded; at one point there were eight kids in the house. My mom worked a variety of jobs but most often was a waitress. She also did some construction work. My father had a business painting the lines in parking lot—striping parking lots—and had also worked as a bartender and just a few different kinds of jobs. So basically, I just grew up in Murray, Utah [and] went to school [there]. I was involved in debate. That was probably my big high school activity.

So what was it like growing up with seven sisters and brothers?

It was definitely a houseful. Most of them were older. You know, there was just always something going on and it was never calm or quiet, but it was good, you know, basically the only thing I knew growing up as a kid.

How many children do you have now?

Two. Just two. [Laughter]

No more?

No. No, I have twin almost-eight-year-old daughters.

Oh, that's great. So, where did you go to college once you left?

For undergraduate, I went to Utah State University, and I graduated from there in 1988, and then I went to the University of Utah for law school, and graduated from there in '92, and then that's when I moved to Nevada.

And was that to Las Vegas?

It was, for a few months. I took the bar exam down here. My younger sister lived here, so I lived with her and her husband for a few months, and then I took a job with the Nevada Supreme Court as a staff attorney in Carson City, and so I worked up north from '92 to '95.

OK, and then in 1995?

I moved back to Las Vegas and started working as an attorney in the office of Dominic [P.] Gentile, mostly doing criminal defense work but also some civil work, some First Amendment cases.

And is this the kind of law that you've always wanted to practice?

I'm not sure when I decided on it. I think it was [at] some point during law school, I decided this was what I wanted to do and started doing it, and certainly that was cemented when I went to work at the Nevada Supreme Court. There I had the chance to work on a great number of different types of cases, and really learn that this is what I like to do.

Well, wonderful, because not all of us are privileged enough to have the jobs that they want.

Absolutely, and I'm thankful for it every day. I like going to work. I like getting up in the morning and enjoy my job. I feel very fortunate.

OK, so I'm going to ask you about John S. Park and that neighborhood in a few minutes but first, what do you think about now having a law school right here in Las Vegas?

I love having a law school here. I'm a part-time teacher at the law school [William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, UNLV]. I work as an adjunct professor in the clinic program where they train the law students to be lawyers by working on real cases, working with attorneys in the community, and it's been a really great experience.

Oh, I love that! I didn't even know the answer to that. I didn't know you had any connection [with UNLV and the law school].

Yeah, we hadn't talked about that. I taught a course on the death penalty—we had a death penalty clinic—and right now I'm with the Innocence Project clinic. So it's great to work with the faculty, it's great to have the faculty as a resource for the community, and great to have a program that's really dedicated toward focusing on Nevada law. That's something the state missed for a long time.

Oh, that is wonderful. I love to hear good things about our law school because I think it's great.

Tell me about where you lived in Las Vegas. When you came back in 1995, where was your first place that you lived?

I initially moved back in with my sister, to save up money to buy a house. She had an extra bedroom, so that was nice. She lived in the unincorporated area of Clark County; roughly, I believe it was like Windmill [Lane] and Maryland Parkway. So pretty far south from downtown. And then I bought a townhouse quite near her. It was just over the

border in Green Valley, at Pecos [Road] and Wigwam [Parkway]. I think I bought my townhouse in '96 or '97, and then decided that I didn't want to live out there anymore; I wanted to live downtown. So I moved downtown in 2001. I probably started looking for the right house around 2000, and it was right about the time I was engaged. We were planning on getting married, and so we started looking for a home together. I had quite a few friends who lived in the John S. Park Neighborhood. I hated the commute on the freeway, didn't want to spend an hour a day on the freeway, and so I was really looking for something that would be close to the downtown area, which is where I worked, but also close to a large number of friends. For some reason I became friends with a bunch of sociology professors and there were a ton of them in the neighborhood. So, it was great to move near my friends and to be close to work. So that's how I picked John S. Park.

Wonderful! Describe the house that you picked. You don't have to give me the address but just the house itself.

Sure. It was built in 1956. It's on a corner lot. It's a one-story, as is almost everything in the neighborhood. The first thing that really drew me to the house was that the garage was on the side of the house instead of the front of the house. It's something that kind of annoyed me about Las Vegas is every house seemed to have the garage front and center, on the front of the house.

[Laughing] And it's ugly.

Yeah. And so I really loved that the garage was over to the side. And then there were also huge trees that had been there for fifty years. So it's about twenty-seven-hundred square feet. It's all on one level. It has a swimming pool out back with a ridiculously deep swimming pool; I mean it's thirteen feet deep at the deep end, which, you know, I love

but it's also a huge amount of work to care for a fifty-year-old pool. But yeah, I just really loved that the houses all look different, and they've got some character to them. And that was really what drew me. You know, I like my house but I really love the area.

Yes, tell me about the area. What do you love about the John S. Park area?

I like that all the houses look different, that they do have character to them. I love that my friends live in the neighborhood and that you can meet people just walking down the street and say hello to them and strike up conversations.

So do you and your family walk in the community?

We do. Yeah. In part just going to friends' houses, even if we're not going out for exercise, just to wander over to see what our friends are up to. I have kids now and they go to a magnet school and so it's tough to meet up with their friends from school, but they're fortunate that they have a lot of other playmates in the neighborhood who are their same age and who are the children of my friends; and all of the kids were born into that neighborhood and I love that they've got a sense of community between them. So, you know, often they're driving the agenda with what their schedules are, and parties and whatnot.

You know, I love that it's downtown and that I live close to where I work.

You could almost walk to work if you wanted to.

Absolutely. I've been able to ride my bike to work, which is nice. Walking, if I could ever get up early enough in the morning to get here [laughing], would be great. But I love that sometimes I'll forget that I have court in the morning, and I didn't wear a suit to work, and I can make it home in time and get back to work in time and still make it to the

office, or make it to my court appearance on time. There are very few people in this valley who I think can get away with that.

So, just breaking away for a moment now, is your husband's job as convenient as yours?

My husband is a stay-at-home father. So he is in the neighborhood all day long, every day.

Oh, you are so fortunate.

We really are. You know, it comes at a price. We don't drive super-fancy cars and there aren't big vacations to Europe, but it's been great for the kids that he can drive them to and from the magnet school. And I'm really flexible with my schedule.

How did you select the magnet school, and how far is it from your house?

My girls go to Mabel Hoggard Elementary [School], which is at Tonopah [Drive] and Washington [Avenue]. It too is pretty old. I think that campus was built in the early Sixties and it's certainly not one of the glamorous campuses, but I love the program there. I love everything about it—the teachers, the faculty. I love that the student body is diverse, both in ethnicity and socio-economic levels, and I think it's really providing a great learning experience for my kids.

One of the big advantages and one of the tough parts about the John S. Park Neighborhood and the John S. Park Elementary [School] is that they have a lot of kids who move in and out during the school year, which I think makes it really difficult to learn, when you've got that kind of instability going on. And at the magnet schools, if students move out, they don't replace them during the year, so the student body is very stable. And then there's also a significant degree of parental involvement. You have to

apply to get in and it takes some effort and so I think that really adds to the experience there as well.

We had tried some other elementary schools and preschools. We've been at the Las Vegas Day School, which is a fine institution but really not what I was looking for with my kids. I grew up in Utah in an all-white school, and I just don't think that's reflective of the community that my kids will grow up into, and I want them to really focus on people as people, now, and I think having them in an elementary school with diversity really helps them in forming who they will be as citizens of the community in the future.

I also feel that most of your friends' children are also probably going to magnet schools, outside [the John S. Park Neighborhood]?

Magnet and charter schools. If you were going to religious schools. I can't think of any of my friends who have kids going to the John S. Park Elementary.

I know. Yes, yes. So we have a community now where we have some people who moved there fifty years ago when the community was [new]. What is it like in the community now with all of that diversity and age difference and gentrifiers like yourself coming back into the community? What is that like?

I think it's been a really good mix of people, and you know there are still a few problem places, but there's been a really great cohesiveness with the people who have been there for fifty years and the new people coming in, in part I think because we're all dedicated to the neighborhood that we're living in, or a great number of us are dedicated to it. We want to live there. We picked that neighborhood on purpose. We love the old houses and want to keep them, you know, and basically celebrate that Mid-Century Modern

architecture, and love the big trees and just the community feel to it. You know, I think, through our neighborhood meetings and in the work we've done in front of the City Council, we've really been able to develop a good sense of community, and kind of uniting against some ideas that we all disagree with.

So tell me about some of the political activities that you have been able to be involved in.

You know, one of the earliest things that happened right after I moved into the neighborhood was the Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino] tower and their rollercoaster, and that was really what introduced us to a lot of our neighbors. The proposal was coming before the City Council. We thought that it was a bad idea.

So tell me about the idea.

Yeah, the Stratosphere tower wanted to build a rollercoaster which would go from the top of the Stratosphere across Las Vegas Boulevard and down to the street on the east side of Las Vegas Boulevard, which is really very close to the neighborhood, particularly the Beverly Green neighborhood. We already have small issues with the Stratosphere, you know, which are fine, which are understandable but certainly we're aware that the property is there. We often hear people screaming from the amusement rides up at the top. They would have outdoor concerts a while back which would go on till midnight and which were really pretty loud. And certainly we wish them well. We want it to be a successful property.

Yes, but you didn't want the rollercoaster.

No, we were very concerned about the rollercoaster from a couple of standpoints. One was the noise level, because we believed it was going to be crazy loud and would

probably go late into the evening. We were also very concerned about traffic issues, because quite often if there is something going on on Las Vegas Boulevard, traffic will get diverted through our neighborhood. And it's a residential neighborhood in the heart of the city, which is tough with traffic issues sometimes. We've got young kids. So when people are using it as a diversionary road and going forty or fifty miles an hour down the road, it's most definitely a problem—particularly because there are stretches in the neighborhood that don't have sidewalks, so if we want to be out walking, we're forced out into the road. A lot of people have babies in strollers, they can't get up on the curb with gravel or the grass, people are walking their dogs, and without having those sidewalks as a buffer, traffic is an important issue to us. And we were very much concerned that people would be focusing on the rollercoaster crossing the street, because it's very unusual, and that that would really slow traffic on Las Vegas Boulevard, and that that would then result in people going through the neighborhood as a diversion. So that was one of the primary issues as well.

So how did that play out? Did you remember participating in any of the [meetings]?

Sure. We started with basically just contacting friends in the neighborhood and people who knew people and ended up with a core group that decided to basically really lead the action against the rollercoaster.

And could you name some of that core group?

There was Ben and Deonne Contine, John Delikanakis, Bob Bellis, Kate Hausbeck [Korgan], Barb Brents. I'm sure I'm forgetting people. It's been so long.

But that's very good.

And so we met together to have strategy meetings and then divided up different roles. Some people circulated petitions throughout the neighborhood. I was a lawyer and I believe Dian was either just thinking about law school or had just started law school, and so she was able to assist with some of the legal aspects of it. We had people who had been involved in the John S. Park Neighborhood Plan and the historic documents, all of which came before my time, and so those people were very active in handling that angle. Some people were really good at the politics about meeting with City Councilmen and talking. We tried to meet with the Stratosphere people to explain our concerns, and to see if there might be some compromises—you know, perhaps if they put the rollercoaster to the south or the north of the building instead of cross Las Vegas Boulevard and could agree on some time restrictions and basically to make it clear that we weren't anti-development, we weren't anti-casino, but we just didn't feel that this project with its proximity to the neighborhood was right.

So it was a pretty involved effort, and we met in front of the Planning Commission and then met with the City Council and ended up winning on the Stratosphere case, and then the Stratosphere sued in [U.S.] District Court and then went to the Nevada Supreme Court. So Dian and I and John Delikanakis worked on the legal work about filing an *amicus* brief on behalf of the neighbors, and really getting our voice out there and making it clear that the City Council made the right decision. And I hear stories now about how the Stratosphere is happy that we won, that they realize now that that rollercoaster would not have been what they wanted in today's economic climate and in the direction the company is going, which I think is an interesting twist.

But that was the beginning of the really active involvement that I had with the City Council and with getting everyone together. And then we really used that same group as we ended in subsequent years with all of the high-rises that were wanting to be built up next to the neighborhood, and the reality, especially looking back now, is 98 percent of those were complete frauds. They were people who were wanting to flip their property. They never had any intention of building those high-rises. They were getting zoning changes and plan reviews in hopes that they could sell a property which was worth, you know, maybe five hundred thousand [dollars] for several million, but the reality was that they were never really intending on building. But we were afraid that they might, and back in the day it looked like that could've happened, and it was very important to us that we not have thirty-foot buildings in our back yards. And certainly we recognize we're unique, we're downtown, we're part of the urban core, and we're not opposed to development along Las Vegas Boulevard at all, but to have high-rises directly adjacent to the neighborhood, we really thought, would infringe upon the quality of life that we had in the neighborhood, both by having strangers peering down into our back yards, to the construction hassles that would've been enormous, to having a huge shadow cast over the neighborhood, and not being able to have a view of the mountains any longer.

So, that became a several-year process that was difficult, and I think it's a flawed process, where if a developer wants to yank an item from the City Council agenda, because it's clear that there's going to be a lot of neighborhood opposition, they're able to do so almost routinely. And so it became difficult, when you're asking people who have full-time jobs and families and homework to do with the kids to set aside time. And then

it was a scenario where I was very fortunate to have a stay-at-home spouse, because there were many, many mornings I was up until midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock, sitting at the City Council chambers to fight these high-rises. It was amazing how late into the night those meetings would go. And, you know, my kids and husband were home watching it on television and, you know, they'd wave goodnight to the TV to say goodnight to Mommy, which was just crazy that that was the process.

But do you think that that was probably part of their strategy?

At some point, yeah, it became part of the strategy. If it was apparent that there was going to be a big neighborhood opposition, then they would move it to another day in hopes that the neighborhood would not show up and that our resolve would be lessened or just that it would become too much of a burden.

And part of this is, probably back in the Stratosphere days is when we started an Internet group, the Downtown Neighbors website, part of which was about getting the troops together to get off to City Council or the Planning Commission, but it was also about referrals for plumbers or air conditioners and lost dogs and restaurant reviews for nearby places.

And you started that, I believe?

Yeah. I can't remember the year we started Downtown Neighbors. It started out as kind of a smaller group and then expanded to basically anyone in the neighborhood who wanted to get involved. And it was very strong for several years, and eventually Facebook™ seemed to take over and other people moved on with other obligations. But in those very active years, it was a really great resource to be able to have those discussions online. Yeah, I miss the group actually.

Oh yes. Now tell me what came out of that socially. I know that you have a lot of friends in the neighborhood now. Did that get stronger as the cause for such strong relationships?

You know, it did. I think it did. Certainly I met [many people through our political activism]. I think that we went through a lot together. I met many, many more people than I ever would have, had we not had all of that going on. We had neighborhood meetings a couple of times a year. They were often productive. There were times when there were a couple of difficult neighbors who would just try to bully over everyone else. And that was probably what was nice about the online community is sometimes you could just ignore the people who were [difficult].

Any of the people who were unhappy, were those some of the people who maybe didn't want the neighborhood to become a historic [neighborhood]?

Yeah, absolutely. There were some people who didn't want the historic neighborhood designation. There was one man in particular who wanted to sell his property as a commercial property, and I think the neighborhood has been very devoted to keeping the commercial aspect out of the neighborhood, and realizing that there are bits and pieces here where there has been a little bit of commercial encroachment, and are very strong about making sure that doesn't happen again. And, you know, that's a problem, when someone thinks they're going to become a millionaire by becoming a commercial property, and the rest of the neighborhood is saying no, this isn't what we want.

I own a third of a small building over on the north side of Charleston [Boulevard], on Eighth Street near Bonneville [Avenue], where there are some lovely older homes and then there are bunch of law offices and that's what I have. And I love that area and I'm

happy to have an office over there, but it's not the same as a neighborhood. It's a commercial area. There are businesses there. People go home at night. There's not a sense of community the way there is with the neighborhood, and I would really hate for the neighborhood to lose that community feel, and I'm confident that if they allowed law offices or other businesses, and we've had other types. There was a proposal for a methadone clinic right at Charleston and Sixth [Street], which we fought. We've had battles with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] over cell-phone towers, but we were able to reach a resolution with the FBI and convince them that the north side of Charleston was a better place for the big cell-phone towers, and had a very cordial meeting, but made it clear that the neighborhood would stick together and we would fight that type of encroachment into the neighborhood.

So it's been a really great experience. Certainly we're not going to all agree about everything all of the time, but I think that there is a big commitment of people who are there because they love living downtown, they love the neighbors they're with and really want to see that right.

And that aside, you still are very business-friendly.

Right. Absolutely.

Because there is a business called Luv-It [Frozen Custard, Inc.] in the neighborhood.

Right. Yeah.

Tell me about Luv-It.

Luv-It is a big hit. You know, it's a place that you can walk to with the kids at night and meet up with your other neighbors. And then the owner has been there forever and the

custard is fabulous, on top of everything else. The people watching from the parking lot can be pretty interesting, and recently there was a big to-do over [it]. On the Craig Ferguson Show, there was a comedian or an actress [Mindy Kaling] who had said what a horrible neighborhood it was and there was a lot of neighborhood reaction to that. I tend to put myself more in the moderate group. You know, she was wrong to characterize the neighborhood like that. On the other hand, there are some issues.

And she was probably on the Strip, on Fifth Street at that point, not in John S. Park.

Right. Absolutely.

But the neighborhood had a Luv-In. [Laughing]

Right, and I wish I would've been there that night. I had other plans. We drove by right at the end. But right, there was a big neighborhood turnout at Luv-It. And certainly the neighborhood welcomes any kind of businesses, you know, restaurants, absolutely. We would love to see more in the way of bookstores and coffee shops and, you know, a great little food market would be really great.

What do you think the possibilities of getting a Fresh & Easy [Neighborhood Market]TM or a Trader Joe'sTM [would be]?

You know, I think a Fresh & EasyTM is so compatible with that neighborhood. I think they would really do well to move in there. That's exactly the type of business that I think would really thrive. Basically, you know, anything that would [make it easier]. It's amazing how far we have to go away for some things. And we do have some wonderful restaurants around, and Dino's [Lounge] is certainly an institution, and it's right there [within] walking distance.

One of the problems with the high-rises coming in, and I still see this as a big issue, is they [the property owners] want to speculate about what they can sell their property for. So right at Park Paseo and Las Vegas Boulevard, we used to have a wonderful Thai bar and restaurant, [part of a shopping center called Thai Town], but the people there were convinced that they were going to sell that land, a high-rise was going to be developed, so they ended the lease with the restaurant and bar, and it's been sorely missed. They were right at the edge of the neighborhood, it was a place many of us went often, and we miss having them there.

And so, I think, you know, there may be this view out there that flipping properties, changing zoning, getting the site review plans approved doesn't harm the neighborhood, but it does. We almost had that with Marie Callender'sTM [Restaurant] and Tony Roma'sTM [Restaurant] and the German restaurant [Café Heidelberg] at Sixth and Sahara [Avenue], when people were wanting to come in with some fantasy project that was never really going to be built. That would've resulted in those three restaurants losing their leases and being removed from that property. There are other small businesses in there. And those are the businesses that have been there forever that the neighborhood loves having and would welcome more businesses of that type. What we don't want are more boarded-up, vacant businesses that were thrown out because someone thought they were going to get rich overnight by flipping a property.

I like this. You've really answered this question, but do you have a strong connection with the Strip, other than the Stratosphere, in any way?

Certainly, you know, it's the heart of the city. Frequently I'll be going to restaurants down at a big casino and I'll drive down the Strip. It's frustrating to me sometimes

because our [in] area of Las Vegas Boulevard, I wish the vacant commercial properties were required to pick up their litter and put up some decent fencing, and maintain their properties in a nicer way, so that they don't look poorly upon the neighborhood, and so that it feels welcome and doesn't bring in a lot of, you know. It makes the area look bad when those properties are not kept up. But certainly there are a lot of restaurants and businesses along there that we frequent, that we're happy to have there. Some of the hotels, you know, can be a problem, but they seem to be getting cleaned up and things seem to be going better. Certainly, you know, there are parades, usually on Fourth Street instead of Las Vegas Boulevard. We walk to those parades from downtown. Usually there's a pretty good-sized neighborhood contingent there, all the time. So certainly we're very aware of what's going on on Las Vegas Boulevard.

Downtown, the mayor [Oscar Goodman] has wanted to develop Fremont Street East, in a way that's similar to what you were talking about, coffee shops and just small businesses, and that would've been so close to your area, and there are some businesses that are making a contribution.

And there are, and I think, certainly people in the neighborhood go to the Griffin [Lounge] and the Beauty Bar and the Downtown [Cocktail Room], and we go to the restaurants down there. It was such a shame when we lost the movie theater at Neonopolis. It was great to take the kids there. Every once in a while I'd want to escape from work and I'd run over there for lunch. You can't do that now, and it's a shame that downtown has lost its movie theater. I really hope the Fremont Street East area gets developed. That would really be a great compliment to the neighborhood.

And I'm hoping that as soon as our economy picks up, that this is the first area that [is developed].

I do, too. And certainly the Arts District. It's been a huge enhancement for the people who live downtown.

Do you consider the arts, First Fridays and all of that, as part of this John S. Park Neighborhood?

In a way, certainly, yeah, and it's not next door but we can walk to First Friday, which is great. A lot of artists live in the neighborhood, which is also tremendous. There seems to be a good mix of old-timers, artists, sociology professors, and lawyers, and a few other people here and there, too, but that covers a lot of it.

So since 2001, what kind of changes have you seen? We're talking about a nine-year period.

You know, it's an interesting question, and it's a tough time right now. For a while when the whole housing boom was going on, in some ways it skipped the neighborhood. We weren't seeing the really outrageous prices that a lot of areas of the valley were seeing. And then at the same time, when everything started plummeting, for the longest time our area was not plummeting at the same speed. You know, other areas may have been losing 25 percent of the value while we were losing 10 [percent], and so it almost felt more stable from that perspective. A lot of people didn't move. A lot of us weren't interested in flipping our properties and moving out, and I don't know that the investor craze hit us quite as heavily as it did [others].

But the sense I get right now is that there is a problem with people who have homes foreclosed upon, and there are a lot of people who would like to buy those homes

but the banks seem more interested in people who will pay cash for investment properties, rather than people who want to live in their homes. The sense I get is that the banks will take an all-cash offer before they will take a higher amount if there's a mortgage, which I think is really unfortunate. There are a lot of artists and teachers and people who don't want to have a big commute on the freeway who would love to live downtown, but I think it's tough to find a house now that hasn't been through the foreclosure process and where the banks are behaving reasonably, which I think is really unfortunate and which I hope ends soon.

You know, other parts of the neighborhood I think, in a way it's calmer now because we're not fighting high-rises every day. We're not fighting big development constantly. Stuff still comes along. There's one in front of the Planning Commission this Thursday, not in the John S. Park area but there are other neighborhood groups that we're all very close with, Huntridge and Beverly Green and Southridge. Over at Sahara and Sixth there's a proposal for a big amusement facility. I'm not even sure what it's called. It's like a skydiving kind of experience, which looks like it would be an interesting facility, but also doesn't seem like the best idea for backing up to residential properties: it's very tall, it's very loud, it's not compatible with the nearby restaurants. And so we'll be there for that.

But things have definitely slowed down. On the other hand there are some other [things]. You know, there's a new Indian restaurant at Commercial Center that we're all very happy about. And Lotus of Siam [Restaurant] at Commercial Center is fabulous.

For a while, with the Las Vegas Monorail, there was a parking lot at Sahara and Paradise [Road] that made getting on the Monorail very easy and made visiting the Strip

very easy. They closed that parking lot and so now you have to go through the Sahara [Hotel and] Casino, which is much more of an obstacle, and you know, that's unfortunate. It would've been fabulous, and I think would've really been great for downtown, had they left that parking lot open and then extended the Monorail to the [McCarran International] Airport or to the university. It seemed like we were hoping that that kind of potential would happen. That would've been a tremendous resource for the neighborhood.

Yes. So what do you see as the future for that neighborhood?

You know, personally I think as more and more people focus on the quality of life and come to realize that they don't want to spend an hour a day on the freeway, or more, as traffic becomes congested, I think that the downtown area will continue to thrive. And certainly we will face our issues. There are crime issues, there are homeless issues, there's the whole Circle Park issue which we could talk about for days. There are struggles that we will have downtown that people in other areas of the community will not.

Quickly just tell me about Circle Park, just in a couple of sentences.

Sure. Circle Park opened. It was wonderful. It was so great. We would, you know, show up on Sunday mornings with brunch and the kids would play and it was a great community resource. Then there were definitely were issues, as is bound to happen downtown. We ended up with quite a few homeless people. We ended up with quite a few drug dealer or drug users, finding needles in the grass. Eventually it was decided to close the park. I don't think that was the right response. I think part of the problem is that the city hasn't addressed homelessness in an effective way and it basically was put on the

shoulders of the neighborhood. In part, that was the first public restroom and the ability to take a bath in a sink in privacy in the downtown area. And I think until the city, the county, the community really addresses the homelessness and provides some resources to some people, it's a huge point of contention between people who have properties and businesses and homes around the park, who felt that the crime rate was really going up, and it's an area where I just don't think the city gave enough focus and attention. We would love to have that park opened, but certainly some things have got to be different than before. We had concerts, you could do outdoor movies. It was a really wonderful resource.

Tell me what you would like to see your homeowners' association doing.

We don't have a homeowners' association, just a neighborhood association, which is a little bit different because it's not in the deeds, it's not that, you know, your house has to be the same color. You know, it's tough because sometimes we're very reactive to what other people are proposing to do to the neighborhood. Certainly organizing the neighborhood cleanups and developing a resource bank for remodeling, redevelopment of those properties to try to keep them in the great tradition that they're in. And I think just really building the cohesiveness of the neighborhood is really a fantastic goal.

I really appreciate this so much. This is wonderful. I've fallen in love with John S. Park.

Well, thank you. It's been great to meet with you. It's a fun area.

Yes. Yes, it is. Thank you so much.

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