

An Oral History of DAVE AIAZZI

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Born in Reno and raised in Sparks, Dave Aiazzi ran his own computing business for many years. He served as a Reno City Councilman for Ward 5 from 1996-2012, when issues of concern along 4th Street included locating services for the homeless there and planning general street improvements. He was instrumental in bringing art projects to 4th Street.

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Barber: This is Alicia Barber. I'm here with David Aiazzi, who's a member of the Reno City Council. We are on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, and today is Monday, February 6, 2012. I want to start with some biographical questions. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Aiazzi: I was born in Reno, Nevada, at St. Mary's Hospital on February 10, 1956.

Barber: Were both sides of your family from this area?

Aiazzi: They were from Nevada. My dad was from Carlin. He came to Reno to go to UNR and stayed here. My mom's father worked for AT&T, so her family traveled all around Hawthorne and the northern Nevada area.

Barber: And their families were both from Nevada as well?

Aiazzi: Yes.

Barber: What do you know about the origins of your family?

Aiazzi: Not a whole lot. I know that my father's side was from the Tuscany region in Italy, and my great-grandfather and his two brothers came to Nevada and settled. People always ask me if I'm from the Yerington Aiazzis. That's one of my great-grandfather's brothers. Three brothers came to Nevada, and they split up and formed three clans of Aiazzis. The smart one went to Yerington and set out to buy land. The ones who stayed in Carlin and Elko said, "I'll work on the railroad." [laughs]

Barber: Do you feel a connection to this area's Italian community?

Aiazzi: To a certain extent. I've lost it recently, because I don't think there's that old-time Italian connection anymore in Reno and Sparks, but there sure was a lot when I was growing up. There are just not as many ranches around as there used to be.

Barber: What did your parents do for a living?

Aiazzi: My dad had a lot of professions. He delivered beer for Bekin's Distributing, right by UNR, and then he was an electrician for a long time. His mom was Joe Conforte's housekeeper. My mom worked at AT&T, and her mom was a bartender. My parents met at the Buffalo Bar Saloon in Sparks.

Barber: What part of town did you grow up in?

Aiazzi: I grew up in Sparks. I went to Alice Maxwell, Sparks Junior High, and Sparks High.

Barber: What do you remember about growing up in this area?

Aiazzi: I grew up in the very new part of Sparks. There was one house across the street, and nothing but potato fields past that. We had potato fields all around us. The biplanes would still fly over and spray the fields with pesticides. I think when I was delivering newspapers, they'd be spraying DDT in the morning to kill mosquitoes. It was very simple. It really was.

Barber: Was that on the north side of Sparks?

Aiazzi: Yes. A lot of Sparks was built on a swamp, so it's always been pretty full of mosquitoes down there. The swamp and wetlands have been built over now, so there's not that big of a problem anymore. Further on the east side, way out by the Marina, there are still some places they spray. With the potato fields, there was standing water with creeks and ditches everywhere that the farmers would use to water their fields, so there were a lot of mosquitoes.

Barber: Did playing in the outdoors figure largely in your childhood?

Aiazzi: Oh, yes, that's all we ever did. We just had to be home when the streetlights came on. You'd get up in the morning and leave the house, and you wouldn't come home a lot of times until the streetlights came on.

Barber: When you went into town to go shopping, did you go into Sparks or Reno, or would you go to both?

Aiazzi: It was mostly Sparks. My grandmother lived in Reno, so we'd make the long drive to Reno every two weeks or so, to come visit my grandmother.

Barber: Would you drive along what was Highway 40 then?

Aiazzi: Actually, we'd take Oddie Boulevard up by the park. She lived off of Kings Row, so we'd take that route and not go on Highway 40 at all. We'd take the streets up by the university and that neck of the woods.

Barber: Do you remember Reno and Sparks being very separate towns at that point?

Aiazzi: Oh, yes. They said there were three miles in between them. Now that I look at it, it wasn't three miles, but you definitely passed Sparks city limits and then the county, and then Reno city limits.

Barber: When you think about some of your early memories of Reno, what do you remember coming over to do?

Aiazzi: Mostly, we came over for the movies. The bus would stop on the corner where I grew up on Eleventh and York. On Saturdays, all the kids would hop on the bus and we'd go downtown, get off the bus and go to the movies all the time.

Then, of course, every August or September you'd have to go downtown to shop for your school clothes, at Penney's and Gray Reid's and places like that, until the mall opened, the Park Lane Mall. That was in the late sixties, I want to say. It wasn't an indoor mall then; it was outdoor. Now it's not even there anymore.

Barber: Tell me about the movie theaters. Which ones would you go to?

Aiazzi: The Majestic was still there, on the corner of First and Center Streets. That had a loges section, so you could sneak upstairs and sit in the good seats. The Crest Theater, on Second Street, was an older theater. It seemed like it wasn't the nicest theater. The Granada was a very nice theater on First Street.

Back then you'd come in and— I remember 7-Up Bottling Company used to always do this thing—if you brought two bottle caps in on a Saturday morning, they would let you in for free. So kids would save up the bottle caps and go to the movies for free. It would be two feature films with cartoons in the middle, so it would last three or four hours, easily, to go to the movies.

Barber: At what age did you take the bus over to Reno to go to the movies?

Aiazzi: I'm thinking I was eight, nine, or ten. I had an older brother, so he'd make us go along with him. It's something people really wouldn't imagine letting their kids do today.

Barber: Do you have a couple of siblings?

Aiazzi: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

Barber: Did Reno seem like a pretty big city to you at the time?

Aiazzi: Yes, it did, but downtown, unless you were with your parents, there wasn't anything to see and do besides go to the movies. It was full of casinos. There weren't a lot of choices back then. My dad always worked two jobs, and my mom worked, so we were a middle income family. We didn't spend a lot of money going out all the time; I think we went to the drive-in once a month. There was only one TV station in town, so you didn't have cable TV. It was, as I say, a much simpler life because you didn't have as many choices as you have today.

Barber: There were a lot of changes in the area in the 1970s. Do you remember some of the big

city-shaping changes? I'm thinking of the construction of the interstate or the MGM Grand, for instance.

Aiazzi: The MGM Grand was the biggest project I remember, because I started working when they built all the casinos at once, not just the MGM Grand. I think there were five major casinos going in at one time, and there were people living along the river. They had jobs, but there was no place else to live in this area, so they'd bring their campers and trailers. There was more work than the people who lived here could handle, so there were people living all over the place, just like hobos now. People would get mad now, but that's just where they would live so they could work on these great casino jobs.

Barber: Which other casinos were under construction?

Aiazzi: I'm trying to think. Circus Circus was one of them. The Sahara, the Reno Hilton downtown. I think the Peppermill was adding on at that time. I believe there were five. I think Harrah's was building their tower at the same time. Fitzgerald's was built at that time. I worked on that job.

Barber: This was after you were out of high school?

Aiazzi: That was 1974. 1975 is when Fitzgerald's was built. That was the year I was out of high school. I got out of high school in '74.

Barber: And you went to work right away?

Aiazzi: Yes. I got married right away, had kids right away, was working at Ralston Purina for a while. I got in the electrical trade in the union and did electrical work for a long time.

Barber: How did you get trained in electrical work? What kind of system was that?

Aiazzi: That was a union system, and depending on how much work they had, they'd take a certain number of apprentices every year. When I got in, work was starting to get bad, so they only took five electricians that year, and then work started really picking up with those casinos after I got in, so then it got really big.

Barber: You said your father had been an electrician. Did that influence you?

Aiazzi: It helped me get the job, that's for sure. It helps when you have people in the organization. It was a very good-paying job at the time.

Barber: When you say there was a limited number each year, was that for the whole city or the region?

Aiazzi: All of northern Nevada. I was in the Northern Nevada Electrical Workers Union, the IBW, and had to go through the union training. They only took a certain number of apprentices each year.

Barber: Did you attend school after high school?

Aiazzi: I took some classes at TMCC. I got an AA degree there and took a couple classes at UNR.

Barber: But you had a career as an electrician by then.

Aiazzi: Correct.

Barber: Was there continuous work or did it come in waves?

Aiazzi: There were a couple of waves, but it really started going down again in the mid- to late eighties. There was about a ten-year stretch when there wasn't any work. I got out of that field and got into computers at the time.

Barber: What kind of computer work did you get into?

Aiazzi: I started off doing a lot of consulting. It was when personal computers were first coming out, and I learned them really quickly. I did that for about fifteen years.

Barber: That is very early in computing. Were you self-taught?

Aiazzi: Oh, yes.

Barber: Was that connected to your electrician work at all?

Aiazzi: No, it wasn't connected to that at all. There really weren't any classes for computing. You just had to learn it all on your own through magazines and getting one. They were a lot simpler than they are today, so I thought it was pretty easy to learn. I was training other people in how to use them. There were only three kinds at the time. You had an Apple, an IBM, or a Tandy from Radio Shack. [laughs]

Barber: What kind of clients did you have at that point?

Aiazzi: A lot of businesses were just starting to use computers. I consulted for a lot of the appraisers in town, who were some of the first to computerize their work. Accountants were another major type of client, with their spreadsheets, and also word processing attorneys. Even though computers were really expensive, it was still cheaper for them to be able to hammer out some documents and make a lot of changes to them with computers. It played out very well for them, I think.

Barber: I want to go back to that time of incredible growth with the casinos being constructed. Did the city do anything at some point to relieve that housing shortage?

Aiazzi: I think that's when everyone started buying property outside the city limits for major

development projects. I don't know if people remember this. Now people blame the city of Reno or get mad at them for a lot of the growth, but the county approved much of the housing that was actually constructed. Out in the Double Diamond area, all of the construction was approved by Washoe County. A lot of stuff north of Sparks in the Spanish Springs area was approved by the county. Later on they got annexed by the cities.

Barber: So some of those developments already were underway by the early eighties?

Aiazzi: Yes. That's the way it goes. If there are a lot of workers who need housing, then people are going to build houses. That's just the way it's always going to work.

Barber: The changes to downtown Reno in that period seemed pretty drastic. Do you remember the whole environment changing so that you didn't do the same types of things in downtown Reno that you had done before?

Aiazzi: No, because at that time they just took down older structures and built in the same locations. They weren't demolishing whole blocks, like in Las Vegas. The projects were still pretty small. Go down and look at the footprint of Fitzgerald's. The MGM was world-class above everyone else as far as size and scope. It still has the largest stage in North America, I think. The other ones were fairly small. I think people remember that when Circus Circus and the Eldorado built the one project together, they took out Gray Reid's, which moved out to Old Town Mall and became the anchor of the mall.

Circus Circus also took out the Reno Little Theater. That was right on Sierra Street, close to where the gas station is right now, where Interstate 80 meets Sierra Street, I believe, where the Circus Circus garage is. I think they bought the Reno Little Theater.

Barber: Then they were without a home for quite some time.

Aiazzi: All that time. They just opened up this year in a new location, right off of Wells Avenue, down south, almost where Wells hits Virginia Street.

Barber: Did you still live in Sparks in the eighties?

Aiazzi: No, actually, right after I got married, we moved over by Virginia Lake and then we moved around Reno a couple times, and then in the mid-eighties we moved back to Sparks. So we lived in Reno for about ten years, then back, always within the McCarran ring, even though the ring wasn't there.

Barber: What was the area around Virginia Lake like at that time?

Aiazzi: We moved into the apartments on Brinkby, and they were brand-new apartments, so it was a very nice area at the time. I was working all the time, so I didn't really get to go out and see a lot. There was so much work. You could work twenty-four hours a day if you wanted to. It was very easy for me to not really go out and see everything. I was underage, I was only eighteen, so I couldn't go gambling, and I had a baby at home. We pretty much stayed in the apartment and went on some walks.

I always thought the Virginia Lake area was a little nicer back then because they took care of the island, and they had more money and they seemed to take care of that area a little more. I think in the last ten years they've been putting in some of those fountains and bringing it back, so that's nice.

Barber: You got married at eighteen?

Aiazzi: Yes. We had two kids. Three grandkids now.

Barber: What was the name of your computer consulting business in the eighties?

Aiazzi: ZZI Consultants. I wanted to be last in the phone book, so I took the last three letters of my last name. That was the name, and it worked out very well.

Barber: Where was your office?

Aiazzi: I worked out of my house for a long time, and then I had an office on California Avenue near Arlington, right across the street from what's now the St. James Infirmary bar.

Barber: I know there must have been some developments in between running your computing business and running for City Council in the mid-1990s. What were you involved in during that period of time?

Aiazzi: I was doing computer work, and my kids were turning eighteen and twenty, so they were out of the house. I didn't need to worry about them anymore.

In the early nineties, the City of Reno was going to sell the Sky Tavern where the Junior Ski Program was held. I learned how to ski on Sky Tavern. It was operated and run by the City of Reno at the time, and they were going to just get rid of the program and sell the property. I went to City Hall that night and I told them that they really shouldn't be doing that, and they actually listened to me, and they said, "If you think you could run it better, why don't you form a nonprofit and run it?"

So in 1992, I think it was, I formed a nonprofit with about five other people, and we ran the whole Junior Ski Program. For the next three years I ran that. We built a chairlift up there, which it didn't have, so you couldn't have snowboards there. That's where I learned that you get more done working with the city than working against the city.

Barber: The city still owned the property?

Aiazzi: Yes, they still own the property to this day. It was jointly owned at that time by Reno and Washoe County, and we got Washoe County to step aside, and I got some money from the [unclear] Foundation and the City of Reno to build the chairlifts, and it's still an active nonprofit to this day, and I'm very proud of that.

There were about five of us who really worked really hard the first three years to figure it out, get the articles of incorporation, address the legal questions and work through the issues for the first couple years. We didn't have any snow at times, so we had to figure that out. We worked with Mt. Rose ski area and Diamond Peak, and we actually moved the program to their

areas a couple of times.

We had a lot of challenges, but it was really fun because everyone was volunteering. We didn't pay anyone at the time, so everyone was doing it for the love of it. They all wanted to make sure this was a gem that stayed in the city of Reno.

Barber: What kind of program was that? What was the age range of the kids who were involved?

Aiazzi: The kids could be anywhere from two to eighteen, and it was almost totally run by volunteers. If you wanted to volunteer to help teach kids to ski, or volunteer to drive the buses up there, you got a reduced rate for your kids to go. If not, you could just drop them off at the buses. I think it was \$60 a year back then, and we'd drive them up there in the buses and give them lessons all morning, and they could do free skiing in the afternoon. Then we'd drive them home. It was, as I say, run totally by volunteers. People would volunteer to teach, and the Ski Patrol was up there, and people would volunteer to run the snack bars. It was a very, very well-run machine because the group of people who wanted to keep it going were very dedicated, and we had a very fun time.

Barber: Was that resort also open to the public, or was it exclusively for the children's program?

Aiazzi: No, it was only for this program, and it always has been only for the program, even today.

Barber: So there's a separate slope, a separate area just for this program?

Aiazzi: Yes, Sky Tavern Junior Ski. You can see it if you drive up the Mt. Rose Highway. It's right after the really sharp curve.

Barber: So this is different than the Mt. Rose resort?

Aiazzi: Yes. It's two miles away, although it's right across the highway from the Mt. Rose Resort. It's pretty much the top of Sky Tavern.

Barber: Were you doing this at the same time that you had your computing business?

Aiazzi: Yes. That's what allowed me to do it, because I could set my own hours and it was very freeing to not have to report to someone else, so I could do stuff when I wanted to.

Barber: But at some point you wound down your involvement with Sky Tavern?

Aiazzi: Yes, after about three years. I was really burning the candle at both ends, and it was time to move on to something else. Then I started thinking about running for City Council.

Barber: Let's talk about that, because that's a big thing to undertake, and I'm wondering if prior to that time there were other issues involving the cities of Reno and Sparks that got you interested in politics.

Aiazzi: I'd always been sort of interested overall. I'd been listening to talk radio for a long time, so I was always calling and I thought I knew what was going on. I think a lot of people think they do until you actually get in there, when you see what really happens. But I really enjoyed talk radio, and that really helped shape what I was doing.

I knew some people who were on the Sparks City Council, so I knew some of the people who were involved, and they were encouraging me to get a little bit more involved. And I thought, "Why not? It doesn't cost much to run, so I'll do that."

Barber: Was that true, it didn't cost much to run? I'm wondering what campaigning was like at that time.

Aiazzi: I think it's the same now as it ever was. It costs as much as you want to spend. You could spend \$25 and just pay your fee and not do anything additional, or you could spend a little bit more. Mostly it was talking to people and getting your name out there, and being first on the ballot doesn't hurt.

There are a lot of little tricks to running on the cheap, which is what I did. I had only a certain number of signs. I'd move them around. I worked on my own signs all the time. When the air races were in Stead, I'd move my signs to Stead. When the balloon races were at Rancho San Raphael, I'd go out to Stead and pick them up and move them around to the balloon races. I'd do all those sorts of things.

Barber: You obviously had moved back from Sparks to Reno before that.

Aiazzi: Yes.

Barber: What ward were you representing?

Aiazzi: Five, northwest.

Barber: Did you still live inside McCarran at that point?

Aiazzi: Yes, yes, always have.

Barber: That was intentional?

Aiazzi: No, it just always worked out that way.

Barber: Did you run against an incumbent?

Aiazzi: No. Jim Pilzer was in the position before me, and I was going to run whether he ran or not, and the day before I signed to run, he said he wasn't going to run. So it was just Mike Chaump, myself, and Neal Cobb.

Barber: For the same ward?

Aiazzi: Yes. The newspaper even said it was one of the best-run campaigns because we didn't

snipe at each other. We all said we're running for a job, not against each other, and so it was a very non-combative campaign.

Barber: Did you have some kind of a platform or specific issues that you were campaigning with?

Aiazzi: I just thought we needed to spend more on parks and rec. That was sort of my background. I still to this day say the city has a lot of money; we just have to decide where to spend the dollars that we have.

I remember one thing that came up right about the time I was going to run. They were talking about tearing down the Riverside Hotel to allow Mill Street to go through. That was probably the moment when I said, "No, I don't want that to happen. That doesn't make sense to me." I think that's what really made me decide to run.

Looking back on it now, it probably wasn't something that the City Council decided they were going to do. I see how it works now. Just because someone had proposed it doesn't mean the Council voted to do it. It was a proposal, and I didn't think that they should do that. In my mind, I thought, "They don't have to do that."

Barber: You thought you could influence them?

Aiazzi: Yes, and it's still there.

Barber: There were a lot of closed properties downtown in the eighties and nineties, like the Riverside, the Mapes and a number of other properties.

Aiazzi: When I was an electrician, I had actually worked on the Riverside, doing a complete makeover of it. I worked there for about a year and a half doing electrical work, so I knew it was a very well-constructed building. I did that as a fourth-year apprentice, so that must have been 1980.

Barber: When you were campaigning, how long did those campaigns last? The election was in the fall. Do you remember how much time you needed to spend campaigning?

Aiazzi: You signed up in April, I think. If you made it through the primary, then you had to go all the way through November. That made it short if you didn't make it to the primary, but I managed to do that, and then I won the general. It was the first Tuesday in November.

It wasn't hard. It was long. I spent a lot of time on it, just moving signs and going to all the free events that people invite you to. People invite you to a lot of events, a lot of fundraisers. People make money off politicians a lot by saying, "You've got to come to this event, and it's \$100 a table." [laughs] So you pay your \$100 and there wouldn't be anybody there, except the same people. You'd see all the candidates all the time, and you start getting smarter about that. You start to think, "Well, I really don't need to go to that event anymore."

Barber: Have you ridden in the Nevada Day Parade?

Aiazzi: No, never have.

Barber: Is that on your list?

Aiazzi: No. I think that's more for when you're running for statewide offices, not really for the city of Reno.

Barber: Who was the mayor when you took office?

Aiazzi: Jeff Griffin.

Barber: And you served in a building that is not the current City Hall?

Aiazzi: Correct. That was a very interesting building. I thought it worked very well. There was a lot of conversation about the shape of the Council table at the time. We sat around a conference table, as opposed to a dais like we do now. We brought people in and asked them what the shape of the table should be—because it was a really big deal. The speakers were no more than a foot and a half from me. That's how far apart you were from people coming up to speak under public comment, which is great under some circumstances, but sort of unsettling when some people came up, because there are a couple of scary people out there.

Barber: Was the space overall pretty small, in every part of the building?

Aiazzi: Yes, it was a lot smaller. We were in cubicles then; we didn't have offices. We just had cubicles. But, quite honestly, there were only a couple of us who were there most of the time. I had my own job, so I was there every day, and Tom Herndon was there almost every day, and Sherrie Doyle would show up occasionally, but the other Council members were hardly ever there. So I had a lot of room to myself because people just weren't there.

It's a very strange job being on the City Council, because you don't have to do anything. You don't have to go to a meeting. You don't have to read a book. You don't have to take a vote. You don't have to do anything. Once you're elected, there are absolutely no requirements whatsoever, except that you not get arrested for a felony, and you have to live in your ward. Those are the only things that really have to happen.

Barber: There really is no enforcement?

Aiazzi: There's nothing to enforce. There's no job description that outlines what you have to do. It doesn't say you have to attend the meetings. It doesn't say you have to take on all the other positions that you have on City Council, like the RTC and the governing board and the Flood Management Committee and the water company. Those are all other boards that you serve on for free, but you don't have to do any of those things, and there are people who are elected who don't do any of those things, and barely show up to meetings.

Barber: It is a paid position. In some cases, many people consider it their full-time job, their primary job.

Aiazzi: Yes, it is a paid position in the city. I think we get close to \$70,000 a year. When I

started, I think it was \$15,000 a year. We voted to keep raising it, although I was always on the back end of that, because you can't raise your own salary. You have to wait until you're reelected again to get that increase. But we thought, honestly, if you made more money, that more people would run for office, because I really believed that more people should run for office. It's startling how few people think that they should do this.

Every time I talk to someone, they say, "Well, people wouldn't like me and I wouldn't get very far." That's the same thing I thought when I was there, that nobody's going to like me, and a lot of people don't like you, but you have to just keep pushing on.

It's a very, very interesting position to be in. You set your own time and rules. But it's also freeing that you can do as much as you want. The other side of it is that I was able to take on a lot of responsibilities that nobody else wanted to do because I was on my own time, and a lot of other people had jobs they had to go to.

There are three of us on the Council now who don't hold other jobs: me, Sharon Zadra, and Jessica Sferrazza.

Barber: You've been reelected three times, so at what point did you stop operating your other business?

Aiazzi: In about 2002 I was working for an insurance company. They wanted me to come to work for them for full-time, so I did for about two years. Then when I got reelected again in 2004, they said, "You're spending too much time on City Council and not enough time here," and they were absolutely correct. I thought I liked the City Council more than I liked the computer stuff, so I said, "Okay, you're right. Kick me to the curb and I'll go work on City Council," so that's what I did.

Barber: Aside from the Riverside Hotel issue, which took a little time to get resolved, what were some of the other big issues at the forefront when you first joined City Council in 1996?

Aiazzi: The biggest one right after I got elected the first month was the Alturas power line which was coming through, and whether it should go on this route or that route or be underground or above ground. It was only a month after I got into office when we had to have that meeting. I do like to tell the story that the very first mistake I made in City Council was before I even took office. In the city of Reno, you get elected on a Tuesday in November, and you think, "Okay, I'll have till January to learn what's going on," because you take office in January. But not in the city of Reno. You take office the next week. So the next day, on my doorstep I got this big packet, and it was literally six and a half inches high of stuff I had to read before the next Tuesday, in order to be up to speed on what was going on.

Then we had the Alturas power line issue. I remember that was a tough, tough meeting, and the place was packed. Because of the way the table was, my back was to most of the people. It's just the way it was, so I could just see people staring at me the whole time. If I remember right, I cast the deciding vote on whether to underground it or not.

Barber: What was the source of contention for that particular debate?

Aiazzi: A lot of people wanted it underground. These are the huge power lines on the side of the road that go from Alturas up the Stead corridor, Highway 395, into Reno. A lot of people wanted

them underground. They didn't want that route at all. The line was first going to go along the base of Peavine Mountain, and those people who lived on Peavine got that route taken off, so it went right to where more people were affected, along the 395 corridor.

There's a similar one being proposed as we speak. They want to have another one go from the Alturas line over out to a plant in Verdi, and one of the routes will take it along Peavine.

That was a very tough decision, and I had to do my homework about undergrounding them or not in a very short amount of time. I remember my vote on that was to not underground, because at that time the power lines were so high voltage, they had to case them in oil to keep them cool, and they really couldn't track how much oil started leaking out. I didn't think it was environmentally sound to have oil encased in the ground if they didn't really know if it was leaking. So I voted to keep it up aboveground, and I think it was the deciding vote. So it was very tough. My very first really controversial vote was way out there.

Barber: It's always struck me that the City Council has to face such an incredibly wide spectrum of issues, and I've always wondered how much education or direction you are given to do that, or if it is primarily self-education about these issues.

Aiazzi: I think it's mostly self-education because there's no one who sits you down. You meet with people. You try to meet with the pro side and the con side, and get their issues out there. But there's no school to go to to say, "Here's how to deal with this," so it's mostly what you learn. It's on-the-job training.

Barber: Who else was serving on City Council at that time, do you recall?

Aiazzi: Sherrie Doyle, Candice Pierce, Pierre Hascheff, Jeff Griffin, and Tom Herndon. Judy Pruitt got booted out because she moved out of her ward.

Barber: So that's one way that you can lose your job. That's one of the few ways. [laughs]

Aiazzi: Yes, one of the very few ways. Move out of your ward and you're gone.

Barber: It seems that redevelopment was a big issue at that time, and I believe the Riverwalk had already been completed?

Aiazzi: The one piece of it over by the Riverside had been completed. That had been done. They had just purchased the parking garage where the movie theater is now, and they had started that demolition before I got into office that summer of '96. There used to be a parking garage where the Riverside Theater is now. They had already purchased the Mapes Hotel, so I didn't have to go through the cost of purchasing that. They were talking about all of that, but they didn't really have a plan for any of it when I got into office. The thinking was, "Let's just buy this stuff and then come up with a plan for what we're going to do with it."

Barber: At that point, was the City Council serving as the redevelopment agency?

Aiazzi: Yes.

Barber: Would you say that those discussions about redevelopment in downtown Reno figured pretty large in the scope of what the City Council was looking at at that time?

Aiazzi: That was probably the biggest of the more controversial issues that we talked about, which is sort of unfortunate because people in the other parts of the city think that the City Council doesn't do anything for them. It's because the media decides what's controversial or not, really, not us. We still built parks and worked on projects outside of downtown, but most of the stuff that we dealt with was in the downtown area. The movie theater and tearing down the Mapes were big issues, and then ReTRAC came along, and that was really, really big. That took over everything.

Barber: What do you think accounted for the Mapes Hotel controversy picking up so much in the late nineties? The Mapes had been vacant for quite some time at that point, and you said the city had already purchased the property before you joined City Council.

Aiazzi: It had been vacant for eighteen years. I think there was a very strong history of people believing Charlie Mapes about how well he built the building, and he just flat out lied to everybody. He didn't ever build it as well as he said he built it. We had brought in engineer after engineer.

In fact, I knew the daughter-in-law of the guy who owned the Mapes before I got on the Council, and I had been in the building. I had the plans for it, trying to see what could be done with it and looking around, and nobody said it was a good building. The engineers said it was not a good building. Everyone said, "It's just not worth saving at all. It's not going to be safe no matter what you put into it." I remember the one quote was that it was built more like a parking garage, where in an earthquake the building might still be standing, but all the bricks would be on the ground, because the bricks weren't part of the structure; they were sort of glued onto the façade.

When they started doing the demolition, the guys who did it took my wife and I through and showed us some of the stuff that they found. They had to do some analysis of how much dynamite to use, or TNT or whatever it was they were using, and they cut a big hole in the floor. They said, "This is supposed to have some iron through here," and it really wasn't any iron through the building. The girders were falling off. They were supposed to be connected. You took off part of the wall, and you could see how it was constructed. A lot of it was built right after the war, so it was hard to get material. So instead of bricks, there would be a little piece of wood here and a piece of wood there, just taking the place of bricks.

But people liked it. My grandmother used to tell me stories about watching Liberace play up there, and I had my high school overnight party there. Everybody knew what a building it was and they had fond memories of it, but it just was not a very good, safe building. It had been closed for eighteen years. Remember they had that concertina circular wire all around there, like Stalag 13 movies. It looked horrible, and it just could not be brought back.

I never did vote to tear it down or to condemn it, but when the Riverside people came, ArtSpace, and they looked at the Riverside Hotel to save that, we begged them to go look at the Mapes. They went and looked at it, and they told us the same thing, and they're in the business of restoring old buildings. When they told me, "We can't even touch this," I got the feeling that Charlie Mapes may have been trying to pull the wool over our eyes.

Barber: Did the work on the Riverside get resolved before the Mapes? The Mapes was

demolished in 2000.

Aiazzi: I'm trying to remember. It could have been about the same time. But we had them both up for demolition very close. I recall one meeting when we were going to demolish the Riverside. We had a contract in front of us to demolish the Riverside, which the city owned. We took a dinner break, and I asked the mayor, Mayor Griffin, "Walk with me over there." We walked from the old City Hall over to the Riverside, and it still had the big orange signs on the side. I asked him to look under there. I said, "This is a nice building." He agreed with me and we went back, and we asked the guys who gave us the contract to demolish it, "Would you keep the same price if you demolish just the newer portion," which was that back portion, "and you give us six months to work out the front portion?"

And they said, "We'll keep the same price for you." So that's how I was able to convince the rest of the Council not to tear down the old part, because it didn't cost us any more, and we looked more deeply into it, and that's how we got ArtSpace to come in. Sierra Arts Foundation also played a big role in bringing them in to do that. But that's how we got the time to save that building.

Barber: The newer addition wasn't as historic, clearly. Were there other reasons to demolish the section beyond it not being as historic?

Aiazzi: It wasn't historic. It was just built. I had the old plans, and the original plan was to build a duplicate of the Riverside Hotel on the west side, with a tower in the middle that looked like the Chrysler Building. Then the divorce trade came in, I guess, and they just put up some stuff really quickly, so they could get people living there for six months. So those plans went away, and they built that newer section just to get the divorce trade in there.

Barber: I recall that newer part not having a great deal of character architecturally.

Aiazzi: Right. Just "Let's build them quick."

Barber: That Riverside story was a big success, and clearly it serves as a focal point for downtown now, it seems.

Aiazzi: I think so. I think it's affordable housing for artists, and they're the first real people we told, "We want you to live downtown," to get people to actually move into downtown again. They sort of gave it that spark.

I think I gave an interview to someone about how Reno has always followed the Riverside. The Riverside was originally really small, and when gaming came, the Riverside started gaming. If you follow what the Riverside's doing, that's what Reno's been doing. Now it's a place to live and work with restaurants in the bottom, and that's what we're trying to make downtown into. I think it's been working out pretty well.

Barber: Were you involved in the arts community prior to the Riverside Artists Loft situation? Clearly the arts were a component of that, with Sierra Arts so involved. Had you been involved with the arts community in Reno before that?

Aiazzi: I was involved more as a patron, not as someone who did anything with the arts. I just would go to things. It was very selfish of me; I liked going to them, so I wanted to support them.

Barber: You've been the liaison for the Arts and Culture Commission for quite some time. Has that been the case for many terms in your service?

Aiazzi: Yes, for a while. When Toni Harsh got on the Council, I let her do it, because I always said that if somebody else wanted to do it, they should, since the arts organizations already know they have my support. Toni was a very big supporter of the arts. I'd rather have more people see what arts and culture do for Reno, and they get more support if more people understand.

Barber: There's a lot more I can ask you about the different issues you faced on the City Council, but let's turn to Fourth Street a little bit. Do you remember any issues with Fourth Street looming early in your service on City Council?

Aiazzi: The biggest issue back then was where to build the homeless shelter. That was a huge, huge issue even way back then, because before I got on Council, they were going to move it somewhere and then they decided not to build it there. That made a lot of people upset because they thought they'd supported people who were going to support a particular place, and then it changed.

I wasn't there on the Council, it's only secondhand that I hear this, but they were going to build it—the soup kitchen, they called it—a lot further east on Fourth Street than where it ended up being located. It fell into a sort of limbo for a long time because we couldn't get everyone to agree on where to put it.

Barber: Was the plan from the beginning to have a fairly sizable center that had housing and dining facilities and all the services that the current shelter provides?

Aiazzi: The push to include those services actually came from the local groups who provided them. That's what they wanted all the time. There was a group called RAAH. I think they're still around, Reno Area Alliance for the Homeless, RAAH. They came forward and they convinced the City Council, "If you build these buildings, we'll raise the money and we'll run it for you." Then they sort of went out of existence. So, Reno got stuck with it. It wasn't something we wanted to take on, but we were told, "If you find the money to build it, then we will operate it," and so we built it and then they disappeared. I think they're bubbling up again with the same name.

That was a very difficult time. I just took a long time to settle on how it was going to happen, and, oddly enough, it also related to these lawsuits about who owns the air rights over the streets in downtown Reno.

Barber: How was that connected?

Aiazzi: Well, the City of Reno was leasing space. You see all these overpasses, or skywalks, where the Eldorado links to the Silver Legacy, and then to the Circus Circus. The City of Reno used to lease that space to them, and then they found out that Reno didn't own the air rights over those streets. For anything before 1906, they weren't required to dedicate the

property for the streets. They just gave Reno an easement. So the adjoining property owner actually owned the air rights. If you owned property on both sides of the street, like the Eldorado did with the Silver Legacy, you actually owned the air rights. They didn't have to pay the city anything for their lease.

To resolve that lawsuit, the resorts said, "We won't make you pay us back if you put that money into building a new soup kitchen." So we put that money in.

Then, at the same time, we were told by the judges, "We're not going to put anybody in jail anymore unless you give us an alternative, a jail for people who are just vagrants and people who drink all the time. Unless you give me an alternative to sentencing them to jail, we're not even going to put them in jail anymore." So we were forced to build this, for a good reason. It was good that we did it. All the stars aligned and we were able to build it.

Then the railroad came along, and that's how we got the property where the center is now. We had a lot of fights with the people who operated the soup kitchen, Catholic Community Services. They got to pick where they wanted to go. It's their soup kitchen. We just can't tell them, "You have to move over there." They wanted to be closer to downtown because they said, "That's where our community lies." They have a job and that's to try to get people off the streets and teach them a better way to go, in their minds, so they didn't want to move too far to the east. So we all settled on this property that was ReTRAC property.

Barber: Can you explain that a little more? How is that ReTRAC property?

Aiazzi: When we built ReTRAC, which lowered the tracks below ground level, the railroad gave us all the ground-level property in downtown Reno that they had owned or leased. The City of Reno now owns a lot of land along the railroad that we can develop or sell, all the way from, and including, the big area behind the Chism Trailer Park. We now own some buildings on Keystone that were along the ReTRAC property. We got a lot of that property as part of their commitment to building the railroad.

We own the Amtrak Building now, too. There are a lot of parcels that we own now, and whenever we sell any of it, we use that money to pay off the bond for building the ReTRAC.

Barber: Was anything previously standing on the site of the current Community Assistance Center, at Record Street just south of Fourth Street?

Aiazzi: Yes. They tore down a building. I think it was abandoned. As a little sidenote, the guys who built the Granite Street restaurant, on Sierra, told me that they bought some of their stuff from there, so their tables were built from doors that came from that earlier building.

Barber: What do you remember about the discussions about where to put the homeless shelter? Do you remember a lot of people from that community coming to City Council a lot, or was this handled outside of City Council primarily?

Aiazzi: It was always at City Council. Back then we met every week, every Tuesday. Now we meet every two weeks. Every time we'd get close to picking a site, a lot of people would come up and tell us why we couldn't do that. At one time we were going to build one over at Washoe Medical Center, what now is called Renown. They came forward and said, "We don't want you building it over here." Every time we got close to building it somewhere, that's when people

would come out. Or they'd buy property right out from under us. That happened on Fourth Street a couple times. When people thought we were going to put it in an available space, they would buy the property so we couldn't build it there.

Barber: So the plan for some time was to use an existing building and adapt it?

Aiazzi: Just for the property, getting something large enough for what was going to go there. Catholic Community Services bought the old Commercial Hardware site on Fourth Street, so that's where Catholic Community Services went. They bought the property and moved some of their services into there, so that sort of defined where would be a good place for the whole campus. The area where they serve the meals is across the street from them just to the west, and then right across that little side rail is where the CAC actually is, where the shelter is.

Barber: How is the Gospel Mission related to this?

Aiazzi: Catholic Community Services is the Gospel Mission. They're the ones who serve the food, and they didn't want to move further to the east because they want to be close to downtown because that's where their clients are. That's what they would tell us: "Our clients are downtown and we don't want to be very far away from our clients."

Barber: They had been in the heart of downtown before, hadn't they?

Aiazzi: Well, to me, they are just as far away as they ever were. They were on Third Street, Third and West, I want to say. They've only moved from the west side to the east side, but the facility we built is much larger, so the people who are waiting don't have to wait outside and form long lines outside. Now they're inside, and it's much nicer. Also, at the time, they didn't have a facility to sleep. They were just serving food there.

We also found out at that time that there were a lot of groups serving food, and that's where the Reno Area Alliance for the Homeless actually helped. They all decided that it's silly for one group to serve breakfast at seven, another group to serve breakfast at nine, and another to serve breakfast at ten, because the same people would go from place to place. So they started just serving each meal at the same time, and that helped a lot, because I think they were also getting triple counted. They'd say, "Here's how many homeless are in Reno," and I never really believed those numbers because I don't believe it was that high.

There were a lot of little bitty parts that moved slowly, but things happened at the right time. When Bob Cashell was elected mayor, he decided to make it his goal, to get a homeless shelter done, and he went out and got some large donations and helped get that built.

Barber: What led to the establishment of the tent city that was at the shelter for many years?

Aiazzi: There are a lot of people who still don't like shelters. We built a women's and children's shelter there, which is very unique and I'm very happy we did it. But we didn't have a place where you could cohabitate, so a lot of men and women who were together, and didn't want to be separated, said, "We'll stay in a tent." I think in the summer months it got overflowing over there when it first was built, so people just started pitching their tents outside.

Barber: And at some point the city prohibited that.

Aiazzi: Well, we started finding other places for them to go. It would just get bigger and bigger and bigger if you just allowed that all the time, so we just had to say no more of that.

Barber: There have been in the past seven or eight years, a lot of developments on the east side of downtown, and the homeless shelter is just one of them. I think about the ballpark and the Freight House. What was the motivation for that? Clearly it was moving in a different direction, to develop the eastern side of downtown Reno, which really had been a neglected area for a long time.

Aiazzi: The homeless shelter came about because of the reasons I told you. There were a lot of things that happened. But baseball was something totally different. They were going to build in association with a development in Sparks out by the Legends, and I was told—and this is third-hand information—that the developer in Sparks didn't want the developers of the ballpark to build anything outside the ballpark. They said, "Well, that doesn't help us with our model," so they wanted to come to Reno.

We told them, "Well, you've got to break off ties with Sparks first. We're not going to irritate our neighbors to the east and say we're stealing you from them. You tell them you're not interested in going there and then come talk to us."

So they did that, and they looked all around for where they wanted to put it. It really wasn't our idea at all. They came and said, "Here's the area we want to go to." I think they liked the downtown area because it still brings in a lot of visitors. You might walk to the ballpark, even if you're just visiting here, and think, "Oh, let's go to a baseball game here tonight."

There were fairly large lots that they could acquire in that area. They only had to accumulate three lots, I believe, to construct everything they did.

The Freight House, again, was part of the property we acquired as part of ReTRAC. Downtown is a really tough place to accumulate property, but they were able to do it. There was a vacant lot and an apartment complex and then the city had the Freight House and the fire station site. So it didn't take too much to accumulate the size that they needed, and that's what helped.

Barber: Do you see more development or more activity helping the east side of town?

Aiazzi: That's the hope. Like I said, these guys want to develop. They have plans to develop across the street. In fact, their original deal with us was they could develop the first floor of the bowling stadium and also the old RTC site. That was part of their deal to come downtown. They had every intention of being larger developers, and then the bottom just dropped out of everything. They still have hopes to, but everyone thinks that's still ten years away.

Barber: On Fourth Street, I know that you have been involved in a burgeoning art scene. I'm wondering if you could tell me how that came about.

Aiazzi: That was sort of funny. Spencer Hobson came to City Council six or seven or eight years ago talking about this project he wanted to do at the old Brewery, and he had charts and graphs and pictures and told us about them building tanks, and just had a grandiose idea. Then he dropped off the scene for a while.

But I always remembered that building, and I'd drive back and forth on Fourth Street and I'd see it once in a while. I saw a big sign on it one time, and I called and they told me how much he wanted for it. I said, "Forget that," and waited another couple years.

Then I got involved in this re-piano project I wanted to do for Artown, where we got a bunch of pianos together and I got artists together, and they decorated and painted and added onto these pianos, and I needed a place for them to put everything together. I went to Spencer and I said, "Hey, I want to do this in this building," and we talked a little bit. I just said, "Well, I'm going to be delivering them next week."

So we cleaned it up and he let us work on them in that building, and that was just the starting point. I didn't have any artists in mind, but I already had money situated to buy the pianos, and once I got all that in place, I had the pianos delivered.

I sat there with my wife one day and said, "Well, I've got the pianos here, but I don't have anybody to do it." So I made one phone call and she called somebody, and then I let the artists just sort of pick themselves, and it worked out really well, and they became a pretty close-knit group.

Barber: Then these pianos were placed around town during the month of Artown?

Aiazzi: Yes, for all of July we placed these around town. I didn't ever provide a map. I wanted people just to find them. There were some on Wells Avenue and up at the university. There were some out by Virginia Lake. The first one we placed was at Virginia Lake, and up on the park on California Avenue there was one, and also a lot of them downtown. We had fifteen of them for Artown's fifteenth anniversary, and we left them there all through the entire month of July.

I took ten of them out to Burning Man that year and placed them around Black Rock City for a week. Then I picked them all up and piled them in a big pile and we lit them on fire on Friday night and burned them up.

Barber: When you got Spencer to agree for you to use his bottling plant building for these pianos and you went in that building, can you tell me what it was like inside?

Aiazzi: It's a beautiful building. If you go in there at the right time of day, it really is magical. It's got these skylights. It's a DeLongchamps building. Spence will tell you about how it was built, and I'll leave that to him. But it really is a magical place. The light in there is great. There are no overhead lights for us to work at night, but during the daytime it was just phenomenal how the light would come in and it looked like spotlights would be shining down all the time, so at certain times of day your piano would be in the spotlight and you could work on it. It was very interesting.

There was plenty of room to work. It's a free-span building, meaning there are no posts in the middle, so you easily could drive trucks around or forklifts and do what you had to do. In my mind, it was really huge. It seems a lot smaller now that I've seen them build other Burning Man stuff there, to the point that now it looks tiny to me.

We cleaned it up and I got the plumbing fixed so we could operate the bathrooms, and got the city to agree what we could do over there. They came with the code enforcement, checked us over all the time and made sure we were doing what we were supposed to be doing, and it worked out well.

Barber: Then did that site continue to be a space for art?

Aiazzi: It did. They had a couple of shows there. Spencer owns the entire block, so he also owns some property on, I think it's Spokane to the east. He owns a building over there that is entirely up to code, so he let them use that as an art gallery showcase. They were doing some art shows over there, and started to get some buzz in the local media about what they were doing. They called themselves the Salvagery Artists, and they formed a nonprofit. They worked for a little over a year, I think, in that building and around it and on the block. I think they've just been moving out this last month or two.

Barber: So the Salvagery Artists originated with that piano project? That's how they began?

Aiazzi: Yes. They didn't know each other before then.

Barber: Where does the name come from?

Aiazzi: Well, actually, I was going to do a project. I have a friend in San Francisco who does this thing where he rents out cargo containers for artists in a yard, and they keep their stuff in their own cargo container and they can lock it up. I was going to do that at Reno Salvage, which Reno owns now. The City of Reno owns the property that Reno Salvage is on.

Barber: This is on Fourth Street?

Aiazzi: On Fourth Street. So I was kicking around names with some friends of mine one night, and I said, "Well, we'll just call it the Salvagery." So when I went to Spencer—you've sort of got to get to Spencer in the right way—I said, "Spencer, I'm going to work on three things while I have time left on the City Council. I'm going to do the Salvagery project, and I can do it at your building or I can do it over here. So you decide if you want me to do it in your building."

He said, "Yeah, let's do it over here," and a couple other things I was working on. So that's how that name came about, from Reno Salvage Company. I just picked Salvagery. It just seemed like the right thing.

Barber: Are there other issues related to Fourth Street that have come up while you've been on City Council?

Aiazzi: Well, we tried to make that place a little nicer. We know that putting the homeless shelter there causes some stress on certain businesses and other places, so we put all the streetlights along there. The NDOT has completely resurfaced Fourth Street. I know people don't understand this very much, but we didn't own that street at the time. NDOT controlled that street. After they resurfaced the street, we traded them for McCarran, so now we owned the street. The City of Reno has to maintain Fourth Street. So we've got all the streetlights that go all the way down to Wells Avenue to try to keep that place brightly lit.

At the same time we also had the fire station over there that used to have the bug on top, just on the other side of Wells Avenue. That's where we had the sheriff for a small amount of time operating that building. It was not a shelter, but that's where people would report when they had to fulfill their public duty because they got arrested and had to do eight hours of public

service or something. We got that and cleaned it up.

We recently sold that, and the woman who did that has done a good job turning that into some condos and some shops down below [11 @ the Firehouse]. They built that other building where that Zagol Restaurant is, again just to the east of Wells overpass. That came about in the last couple of years.

People have been opening up the older bars that were always there. I think that some of the same guys are trying to struggle along, but this art project has given them new life. I really believe that they see that that's a way that they can head in the future, because after we did this re-piano project, Burning Man came by, at least a group of people, to build the Temple of Transition at the same site, and that brought a lot of energy to Fourth Street.

Barber: Has that just happened one time so far?

Aiazzi: Yes, it's only happened once outside the Bay Area and that was in Reno last year. They prefabbed it all here. It was the largest structure that was ever built on the playa, and we prefabbed it here at that same location [Spencer Hobson's property], and so now it seems pretty small to me because we had some big pieces. A lot of wood went through there.

Again, we had to deal with the fire department and the code enforcement and all that, and we got that done, and now I'm really looking forward to seeing if we can get some more Burning Man artists in this area and particularly on Fourth Street again for this year's cycle.

Barber: Do you think any more development along Fourth Street is going to or has involved rezoning very much? Has that been an issue?

Aiazzi: That really hasn't been too much of an issue because there really haven't been a lot of people who have asked for rezoning to do a project along there. I think that's going to be for a long time the rougher part of Reno, and I don't mind that. I don't ever want to kick Martin Iron Works out. I'd love to have that stay there, and the salvage yard, and be able to have that part close to Reno where people can still get that free stuff. But we all know that when the artists move in, it's always cheaper and then it always becomes gentrified and everything changes.

I hope it will change in the future. It would be very good for Reno to redevelop that part of the city, and good for Sparks. It's a very big roadway between Reno and Sparks, and I think that's why the RTC's involved in this too. My role on the RTC board has been also to try to reinvigorate this Fourth Street corridor and put in some bicycle lanes and other parks.

Barber: Is that a priority for you, having bicycle lanes on Fourth Street?

Aiazzi: Not so much bicycle lanes, but maybe we can narrow it down and do what they call a skinny road diet and have one traffic lane in each direction with one turn lane in the middle. That frees up room to have parking on the street, and that helps the businesses that are there if someone can park right in front and go into Zagol for lunch or something. I think it really helps out to have more parking. Everyone will tell you that. It was just an arterial, and I just don't know if it gets so much traffic anymore that it needs to be four lanes wide going 35 miles an hour. I think it's time to change that, much like we did Wells Avenue.

Barber: Right, with the boulevard at the end.

Aiazzi: Right. RTC fought us on that one, too. They said, "If you narrow it down, all the traffic won't go on Wells anymore. It will go on side streets and the neighbors will complain." But they did a study after we were done, and 98 percent of the traffic the street had before is still using it now. I think the same thing would happen on Fourth Street. If people don't like Fourth Street, it's easy enough to take Interstate 80.

Barber: How far down do you think that that proceed to the east toward Sparks?

Aiazzi: I think it should tie into Victorian Avenue.

Barber: All the way out?

Aiazzi: Yes, because they have their bike lanes and stuff all the way up to where the Y used to be. Right where Kietzke Lane turns in, there used to be a big restaurant area there. I think it should tie into there and continue all the way into downtown Reno. That would be our connection to that part of town, because you don't have a big connection between east and west for bicycles and more pedestrian-type traffic except for the river. There's a path along the river and Mill Street, which is very busy, so this would be a good connection, I think, between the two downtowns.

Barber: Do you see any safety issues along Fourth Street now?

Aiazzi: Oh, yes. I think there's a lot of speeding. And there are definitely some safety issues with the type of people who are there. That's what you try to resolve by getting activity going on. You don't do that by ignoring a place. You do that by putting more into a place to try to resolve some of those safety issues.

Barber: Do you think there's a future for the motels along Fourth Street? A lot of people are very interested in those buildings.

Aiazzi: I think there can be, depending on what the owner wants to do. In the last year or two, the city's been going in and seeing the horrible conditions in some of these and closing them down. If the owners want to keep them up as motels or as weeklies, it could still be done, and they could still have a nice place. What would happen to them if they weren't motels, I don't know. I don't know if people are going to be traveling through on the Lincoln Highway anymore and will want to stay in those motels, unless we embrace this Lincoln Highway theme, which back East is a real big deal. There are people who travel the Lincoln Highway all the time, but we haven't been playing that up here. That might be possibly the next step in what we do, to say, "This is the Lincoln Highway," and get a couple of those motels to cater to that crowd and clean up and get some more neon back in there. People didn't drive 45 miles an hour so much back then. It was okay to go a little slower.

Barber: Do you think that area could be a target for revitalization?

Aiazzi: I think it would be very easy to do. As far as bang for your buck, from the city's point of

view, it would be beneficial because you don't need to put a lot into one of those properties to double its value. If you take one of these old properties and you just put a little bit into it, it will make it worth a lot more than it is right now. Even if you turn it into artist space or good bars, those kind of things can make a difference. You take some of the places in Austin—what was Austin twenty years ago, and who was transforming those areas you see at SXSW? It just takes some vision, a little bit of money but not a lot, just someone to want to do something with it, and cooperation from all the businesses.

Barber: Do you think the impetus would, like the ballpark, need to come from a developer or developers who can bring that vision? Do you think that's what it might take?

Aiazzi: I see that the ballpark is literally on the other side of the tracks, so I don't know if that's really going to spill over into Fourth Street. The guys who bought the Lincoln Lounge, they just got lucky. They bought it before the ballpark came in, so that's something that is up on the Evans Avenue area that could spill over, because a lot of people still park on Evans and walk down to the ballpark. New people bought Louis' Basque Corner probably because of the ballpark, seeing a future there. I think it's helped the western part of Fourth Street. It's not going to help too much to the east because it's, like I said, literally on the other side of the tracks.

Barber: Fourth Street is really close to the university area, and it doesn't seem like there's a great deal of connection there. Do you see the city working to connect the university not necessarily to Fourth Street but to these areas south of the interstate?

Aiazzi: Well, I'd love to be able to do that. The other transportation issue I think we have to create is a bike lane running down Evans Avenue to get to and from the university. I've also talked to the university about having a bike lane that goes through the campus up to Lawlor Events Center to carry that through. But I'm telling you, working with the university is just like beating your head against a wall.

Barber: Why is that, do you think?

Aiazzi: Well, their mission is to deal with the students on their campus. They're much like casino property owners downtown: "I don't want them to ever leave my campus." So then, when they do, they think, "I don't make any money off them anymore." It's a business. The university is a business. They don't have any altruistic "Let's make the community better" sensibilities. At least in my experience, it hasn't been "What can we do for the community to make this a better place?" It's "What should the community do for us to make this a better campus?"

Reno used to be a university town. I don't think it is anymore. I'd love to get back to that feeling that we all go hand in hand, that we could do some of those things together. I'm hoping some of this will bring some of that back, by bringing the movies back downtown, the Sierra Spirit Bus.

I see more and more of the people maybe just out of the university living downtown, going to these bars, riding bicycles. In the summertime I see that connection. Whether they're university students or not, I don't know. But ten, fifteen years ago, you never saw that many people riding downtown.

The older people have moved out of the neighborhood. Neighborhoods go through their cycles also. I think the old southwest has gone through that cycle where now there's a younger

crowd moving in again and raising their families there, and that's helped the downtown area.

Some of the housing developments that have gone on close to the campus have helped that, but dealing with the university itself, not so much, not so much. Their interest is the university.

Barber: It's sounding like there's a casino entity, a university entity, and a city entity, and they don't necessarily work in harmony.

Aiazzi: Right. You try to work with them and ask, "Why don't you do this and this?"

They respond, "Well, it's not our mission to do that. We're not here to do that. Why should we do something like that? That's not what we do. We do this."

You know, they're not wrong. The university's job is to educate students, but you don't have to have a Quiznos every block. You could have it off campus, where kids would have to walk a little bit.

I thought Fifth Street could help in that way. We've upgraded Fifth Street a little bit. There's been some new stuff going on over there. I thought that the university students would at least move down to Fifth Street. There's that little development there that has the Starbucks in it.

Barber: On the west side of Virginia?

Aiazzi: Yes. Fifth Street's a nice wide street, so that could be developed very easily, I think, for university uses. But, again, the university itself decides to build student housing, so instead of letting the market do it, they're going to do it and they get it keep it. It's for dollars. "We'll keep the money here," instead of making it three blocks away where people might walk to campus and reinvigorate the area in between the two, which is what redevelopment does. Instead, it's just, "We're going to keep it all self-contained."

Barber: You are terming out soon as a City Council member. When you look back at your multiple terms of service, what are the things that you feel most proud of?

Aiazzi: There really is a lot that this Council's done, both as the City Council and on the other boards and commissions, like starting the water company. We bought the water company, which people didn't want us to do at the time. It's just something that goes unnoticed, but I'm very, very happy with the way we did that.

I like the stuff that we did downtown. I think that I brought a lot to the Council as far as arts and culture. We haven't cut our arts and culture budget. We keep that going. But we've also built a lot of parks outside. We tried to keep our eyes on what really is important to a city. I remember making a statement one time. We were talking about whether we should spend money on roads or spend money on arts and culture or parks, and I said, "I'd rather have a bumpy road with somewhere to go than a nice road with nowhere to go." The Council sort of agrees with me. We took some money from streets, and we were able to keep these things funded and build these nice parks and keep parks going.

I'm really proud of the redevelopment stuff. I don't think what was done there will be noticed for quite a while, but the movie theater down there was a big, big deal. I'm hoping the baseball turns out to be a big, big deal. I'll be the first to tell you, a lot of what you do is a gamble in redevelopment, and you do that because the private sector will not gamble on it. So

you have to take the risk as a government, and you wish people understood it, but it's okay if they don't. You have to take the gamble. Most of our stuff paid off.

The ReTRAC was a big deal. The stuff that I'm very proud of is stuff that most people wouldn't think of. It was a very, very hard battle getting ReTRAC done, but I'm really happy about little things, like not having to wait for a train. It's just huge. Then I always think about how much money it brought into the community during the construction phase. It was a big shot in the arm. Maybe it was to the detriment of Reno, but I think because of ReTRAC we didn't see the economy going downhill as quickly as we would have if we weren't doing that project. That was a \$250 million project right when all this was starting. People around here had jobs and that money was still flowing around. We spent a lot of money in the city, but it was always to keep jobs open, all the local jobs.

Even with the Mapes, I think that we've done a really, really good job with historical resources and saving those. We tried everything we could to save the Mapes, and I know a lot of folks don't agree with that, but we did, and I'm proud of the efforts we made to save it. I'm proud also of the decision to tear it down. Sometimes it's tough to make those decisions. I didn't really want to do it at the time. Pierre Hascheff and I were the only ones who said, "Let's try for six more months." But once it's gone, you move on and you build some stuff. I would still like to complete some stuff on that property. It's not what we thought it would be yet, but we were led down some paths.

The next thing we're doing is the Virginia Street Bridge, I hope. But there are a lot of little bitty things that I look back on. When I got into office, it was illegal to float down the Truckee River, and it was illegal to roller skate or rollerblade downtown, and now you have a roller derby down there and the Whitewater Park, stuff that was illegal just when I got into office. It really is unbelievable to me how much I had to fight to make those things legal, against all the people who didn't want kids downtown or didn't want to take the risk of people getting hurt and the city getting sued, and that still may happen.

I really enjoy those little bitty things that to me seemed sort of tiny. It didn't take much to build the Whitewater Park on our part, hardly any money at all for us, but the decision to do it was just a big decision. To let people in the river, my god, how would you let that happen?

I remember there was a performer who used to come here all the time. I saw him at the museum one time, and he came to do a set and he was all wet. He said, "You guys didn't tell me that there was a river here." He had performed at Wingfield Park. He didn't even know that you could get in the river. He said, "I'd have been here all the time."

Those are the kind of things I look back on and think we did some good work.

Barber: What are your plans now?

Aiazzi: I really don't know. I'm still trying to work hard through November and get some stuff going. Like I say, we're working on the Truckee River Bridge through the Flood Control Project. I'm on that. I go to Washington next week to talk about flood control.

There's still stuff to do. I was going to let off the gas, but now my wife keeps telling me, "You can't. You have eleven months left. There's still a lot to do." So I'm still pushing and trying to get some stuff done. I have to go through a whole new budget cycle. I'm hoping to keep everything funded, arts and culture, and maybe a little more this year to do some new programs.

One of my major goals this year is try to help the people running for Council as much as I can. I've asked the City Council to let them sit in up there with us when we're going through the

budget process so when they take office, they'll be prepared. Three of us are leaving this year, and two years from now at least three more will be leaving. So it's a huge, huge turnover for the city of Reno.

Barber: I want to thank you so much for talking with me today.

Aiazzi: Sure, my pleasure.