

An Oral History of Gaye Canepa

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Alicia Barber, Ph.D.

Born and raised in Ely, Nevada, Gaye Canepa moved to Reno after completing high school. At the time of her interview, she and her husband, Fred Canepa, owned and operated Fred's Auto Repair and Supply at 500 East Sixth Street. She was the longtime president of the Reno Sparks Business Corridor Association (RSCBA), spearheading community efforts to promote redevelopment and resist efforts by the City of Reno to locate a new homeless shelter along East 4th Street.

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GAYE CANEPA

Interviewed on November 17, 2011
Alicia Barber, Interviewer

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Photo by Patrick Cummings

Barber: I'm with Gaye Canepa, the owner, along with her husband, Fred, of Fred's Auto Repair and Supply, which is located at 500 East Sixth Street in Reno. Today is November 17, 2011. We're here at the University of Nevada, Reno. Where were you born, Gaye?

Canepa: Ely, Nevada, on the other side of the state.

Barber: How many generations back had your family been in that area?

Canepa: Three.

Barber: What brought the family there in the first place, do you know?

Canepa: They were Mormons, so they went and settled—thirty miles from Ely there's a little farming community called Preston, Nevada, and that's where the great-granddad and the granddad eventually settled. My dad was raised in Preston and Lund, and then he moved to Ely. He did not like farming.

Barber: They were farmers?

Canepa: Yes. Potatoes.

Barber: Do they still have potatoes out there?

Canepa: Yes, they do. They still grow potatoes in Preston and Lund, very good potatoes.

Barber: About what year would they have moved out there?

Canepa: Late 1800s.

Barber: Your parents were both from that area?

Canepa: No, my mom was originally born in Utah, and her dad just liked to travel. He went from place to place, and he'd settle here for four or five years and then he'd go back. So she lived in Utah, she lived in California, she lived in Ely, then back to California, then back to Utah and then finally she settled in Ely.

Barber: And they met there?

Canepa: Yes, they did. They both worked at Goodman Tidball Grocery Store.

Barber: Is that right in the middle of town?

Canepa: It was at that time, yes. It is no longer, of course.

Barber: What were their names?

Canepa: Neil and Shirley Jensen.

Barber: Why don't you tell me what it was like to grow up around there.

Canepa: It's a typical small town. Everybody knows everybody and what it is that they are doing, and I had to be especially careful because my dad was a public official. So I could not misbehave.

Barber: What was he?

Canepa: White Pine county clerk.

Barber: He was the county clerk for a long time?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: So there was definitely a lot of pressure on you, then.

Canepa: Oh, yes, and they were very strict about grades, social events or lack of.

Barber: You weren't allowed to participate very much?

Canepa: No. No.

Barber: That almost sounds like a minister or something. [laughter] Did you have siblings?

Canepa: I had a brother, yes. He was killed in [Viet] Nam in '69.

Barber: Oh, I'm so sorry. So you grew up in town?

Canepa: Yes, we were in the middle of town.

Barber: And you were there all through grade school, middle school?

Canepa: You only had grade school and high school at that point in time, and, yes, I graduated from high school there. I was something like fifth in my class. I graduated on a Thursday and moved on Saturday.

Barber: Was that the plan for a long time?

Canepa: That was the plan. [laughs]

Barber: Where did you go?

Canepa: Over here [Reno].

Barber: Had you been to Reno before?

Canepa: Yes. My brother lived here. I had a job waiting for me. So he and I lived together, and then he got drafted, and I got a roommate, and then met my first husband and got married. So I've been here since I was eighteen.

Barber: What year was that? When did you graduate from high school?

Canepa: 1967.

Barber: What was the job that was waiting for you?

Canepa: I worked at a bank.

Barber: Which bank?

Canepa: At that time, Security National Bank. I was the manager's secretary and did home loans.

Barber: Where was that bank located?

Canepa: In Carson City, so I commuted. Then I got a job with the State of Nevada. I worked for DRI for a lot of years. I really enjoyed it up there, started with Atmospheric Physics. At that time it was Patrick Squire and that group. Then transferred over to Water Resources, where I worked for Burke Maxey. Then when I had a child, I quit there, had the kid, then went back to work for Hydro Search and John V.A. Sharp, who had been at DRI. And then went to work for attorneys after John Sharp decided to move his offices and do some other things, and I worked for attorneys until I went to work for myself with Fred.

Barber: What kind of work were you doing for all those different people?

Canepa: When I worked for an attorney, I worked as their paralegal. I love union law. I love labor law, worked for Lamboli at that stage, and then I went into family law, and I've done bankruptcies and I've done business law. I still love labor law the best.

Barber: Were you ever interested in getting a law degree and going on your own?

Canepa: Never. Never.

Barber: Why not?

Canepa: Most attorneys have an identity crisis. They can't tell themselves apart from God.

Barber: This was not a feeling of yours, so you didn't need to go into that? [laughs]

Canepa: No.

Barber: When you first came to Reno then, you were quite young. You were trying to get away from a small town. What were your impressions of Reno? How did you feel about it when you got here?

Canepa: Oh, Reno was so beautiful. They had just redone Arlington Avenue at that stage, and it was absolutely magnificent, because it was very wide, very well lighted, all the green, with a tremendous number of trees, grass, flowers. What a beautiful place. Reno was small enough that you knew you could get from place to place very easily, but large enough that there were lots of things to do. It seemed to be very friendly. UNR at that point in time was busy growing, so that was a friendly place as well. Reno was lovely. It was a beautiful place to live.

Barber: Did you go downtown very much?

Canepa: No. There was nothing for me downtown. At that stage, I was underage so I would not do that, and on my wages, we didn't go out to dinner.

Barber: What kinds of things did you like doing for entertainment?

Canepa: We went to a lot of movies. We did a lot of outdoor things. I used to water-ski, jet-ski. I windsurfed. Rode bicycles at one stage, flew model airplanes at one stage. My present husband and I got into the car thing, of course, and we showed cars for years, and now we do the motorcycle thing where I teach how to ride. So most of our stuff is outdoors.

Barber: Did you go up to Tahoe from the very beginning to do any of these activities?

Canepa: I went to Tahoe a couple times to go to the lake. Got some of the best sunburns I've ever had. [laughter]

Barber: You would have been driving across Nevada before the interstate went in. You took Highway 50 from Ely.

Canepa: When I was with my brother, we could make it in less than four and a half hours because it was open highway all the way. You had six summits. That was the major contention. Now they've done away with a couple of the really bad summits, and they're enforcing the speed limits, which is a better thing. It's still wide open, still wonderful. A lot of people don't like desert. I love desert. So, to me, it's magnificent.

Barber: Then you were working in so many different places through the seventies and into the eighties.

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: Then you met your current husband, Fred. How did you meet him?

Canepa: Through a mutual friend. She had remarried, and he and her husband were good friends. They were up working on the boat, and she called and said, "Come on up." I hadn't seen her in years, went up, and met Fred. We had a lot in common, so we started meeting and having a good time. Then I went to the lake with him a couple times and found out we were really compatible.

Barber: Did he already have an auto business when you met him?

Canepa: Yes, he did. He was already self-employed.

Barber: Was that on Sixth Street?

Canepa: No, that was down on North Virginia and Mary, in that area, back in the back.

Barber: What was that called?

Canepa: Fred's Auto Repair. He was very original.

Barber: But he'd worked for other people before he had his own business?

Canepa: He worked for a dealership for a long time. He worked for the National Guard for nine years and then went into a dealership and then a couple of private enterprises and then started his own business.

Barber: For how long after you met him was the business located on Virginia Street?

Canepa: He was there when I met him, and then we managed to move him to Sixth Street in '79. He's been there almost thirty-six years.

Barber: Was there another business at your location before that?

Canepa: Yes. Stewart's Arco was there before that. That was really a great neighborhood at that stage, because you had a lot of residents, and then UNR was starting to come down that direction as well. And to make a residential area successful, you have to have good infrastructure, and the infrastructure, of course, is grocery stores, filling station, gas stations, retail, and all of that was down there at that stage.

Unfortunately, when they put the freeway in, it pretty well killed East Fourth Street. Sixth Street's done better because it's shorter. We had more residential, so it hung in there better, but East Fourth Street took a huge hit with the freeway.

Barber: Was the freeway already completed by the time Fred moved the business there? That was under way?

Canepa: It was under way, yes.

Barber: What was that like? That's pretty close to where the freeway was going in, just a couple blocks to the south of it.

Canepa: That's one of the reasons that we chose that particular location. We knew that there would be exits there and, hopefully, we would pick up some of the business from that. And, you know, I will give the city credit. Even when they did the trench and when they did the freeway, there was minimal mess. There was minimal construction. Right now the construction on the freeway and the exits are a bigger mess than when they made the freeway originally.

Barber: Really?

Canepa: Oh, yes.

Barber: It seems like they needed to move so much earth out of the way to put the freeway where it is now.

Canepa: They did, but it was not messy, even when they did the trench. We figured we would have a horrible mess and a lot of dust and dirt, and we did not. The city did not. They kept it very nicely watered down, and they'd already made arrangements where they were going to get rid of the excess dirt, and they held to it. They did a good job there.

Barber: What's the cross street where you are?

Canepa: Sixth and Valley.

Barber: So you are very close to the university.

Canepa: Yes. In fact, UNR's done a couple of studies. They would like to move down that direction, all the way to East Fourth Street and put that in their study area or their district, and I can understand it. I don't see it happening in the near future, but later on, yes.

Barber: What do you think would be the obstacles to that?

Canepa: One of the biggest obstacles, of course, is the fairgrounds. I know UNR at one stage made the fairgrounds an offer that they would swap some land, where the farm is down off of McCarran, for some of the fairground land. And they got turned down, which is really sad.

Barber: You think it would have been a good idea?

Canepa: Yes. Don't you think it's better, if you're going to have a fair with animals, to have pasture and a place to put them?

Barber: It would seem so.

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: So I want to talk a little bit more about what that neighborhood was like when you first went there. Did the person who'd owned Stewart's Arco go out of business or did they move?

Canepa: No, they moved. They're up off of Seventh and Keystone right now, and then they have another one down on Second, almost Keystone. He thought those were better areas, so he moved it, just shut that one down and moved to the Second Street one and then up to the Keystone one. Then he ran into some financial difficulties and closed the Second Street one, but I think he's still in business at Keystone, or his kid is.

Barber: What's his name?

Canepa: Paul Stewart.

Barber: So what else was in the area in your immediate neighborhood?

Canepa: We had Food King there. At one stage they had a motorcycle shop there. They've had a motorcycle dealership there. They've had a disco there.

Barber: You mean in the same location?

Canepa: Yes. Across the street where Bavarian World is, all of those things were, because it started initially as a Food King and then a Seven Diamonds Cleaner. And then

went to a motorcycle repair shop, then a motorcycle dealer, then a disco place and a dance place. We had an appliance store behind us. That was Harrah's Appliance. Now it's Three-C Auto Repair. We've had Commercial Hardware, which Tom Herndon managed to successfully sell to the Catholic Community Services and turn that into their headquarters there.

Barber: That's when it was Art Supply?

Canepa: No, that was Commercial Hardware. Art Supply was down further. It was in the old Spencer Hobson Building. That's the old brewery. In fact, if you look in that one corner, you can see a cap where the artesian well has been capped there, which is really a tragedy.

Barber: So they still have water.

Canepa: Yes. He still has the water rights, too.

Barber: That's an interesting development opportunity, one might think. [laughs]

Canepa: We tried. Spencer's difficult.

Barber: After the business moved, were you working for the business, for Fred's?

Canepa: No, I was working for attorneys at that time.

Barber: Did you feel a connection in this whole neighborhood from Sixth Street down to Fourth Street? Did it feel like it was one business community?

Canepa: Yes, that's always been a great neighborhood. Everybody knows everybody. They walked around, they talked, they helped everybody. It was really, really a nice neighborhood. At one point, it was well kept, well maintained. But, again, after the freeway came in, things started slipping. Most of the monies went downtown rather than the outlying areas, and the neighborhood started to deteriorate. When the freeway really hit heavy, then all the motels down East Fourth Street started making the change and went from being the nice little affluent motels to the weekly motels.

Barber: Do you remember when that really started to shift with the motels? Did the ownership change really quickly? Were they very rapidly affected economically?

Canepa: Yes, within five years, yes. They went from being busy all the time and well maintained and well kept and booked, to nothing. And they didn't have much choice. They either sold out and moved or turned to weeklies or just shut it down.

Barber: Was there any kind of business merchants' organization at that time for the folks in the corridor?

Canepa: No, no.

Barber: So you were seeing this shift happening then after you went in, your husband had located there to capitalize on the freeway, and did that prove to be sound? Was there increased business on Sixth Street because of the freeway location?

Canepa: Sure. They would take the Wells Avenue exit and then come back uptown to try to park and to do some gaming and possibly stay overnight, dine, whatever. I think one of the fallacies of downtown is that they never stopped to put conventions together until much later. They didn't realize that having the Convention Center out on South Virginia was going to be such a detriment to them. Now they've discovered that and they've tried to overcome some of it, but haven't been all that successful.

Barber: Do you remember any of the discussions about where to locate the Convention Center, or was that really before you got involved?

Canepa: That was before me, but Fred remembers it really well, because Joe Conforte offered the city of Reno a parcel of land, free, to put the Convention Center on. They turned him down because of his reputation, the baggage he brought with him, and instead bought the Peckham property, which is where the Convention Center is located now. So instead of it being something that they could have taken the money and used for better facilities, they opted to purchase the property and then make do with the facility.

Barber: Where was that parcel that Joe Conforte had, do you know?

Canepa: Across the street.

Barber: Where do you mean?

Canepa: They are on the east side of Virginia. He was offering property on the west side of Virginia.

Barber: Still on the south part of town, though.

Canepa: Oh, yes, same area. Bigger parcel. They didn't like his reputation.

Barber: Do you remember going in those early years down south of town for anything much?

Canepa: I lived down there at the end—let's see. I lived on Linden Street, and two blocks below Linden Street was farms. That was it.

Barber: Where's Linden? I'm not sure.

Canepa: If you go down Kietzke, you have Plumb, and then further south is Grove, and two blocks beyond Grove south is Linden.

Barber: So this is north of Moana.

Canepa: Yes. You had all the apartments. That was brand new at that stage, and that's where we all lived.

Barber: What kind of neighborhood was that?

Canepa: It was a real mixed neighborhood. You had college students. You had retired people. You had young families. It was just the run-of-the-mill apartment dwellers.

Barber: Did you live there for quite some time?

Canepa: About a year and a half. Then we moved.

Barber: Do you remember what business was like for Fred's at the beginning? Were there attempts to get new customers, or did Fred mostly bring his existing customers with him?

Canepa: He brought his clientele with him, because he'd already been in business over two years at the other facility. This was so much easier to get to, perfectly accessible now. You had the freeway, plus you had Virginia Street, Kietzke, Second Street, Fourth Street, Sixth Street. So he brought his own business, and that was good.

Barber: Did he have to improve the building in any way or change it, or was it perfectly ready for business?

Canepa: It was not perfectly ready for business. We had to make some changes, and then we added on the second section. Oh, gosh, that had to be in the early eighties, someplace in there.

Barber: Was that an easy process to do, at least, with permitting?

Canepa: No.

Barber: It wasn't?

Canepa: No.

Barber: Why not?

Canepa: The city of Reno isn't the easiest to deal with. They just are not. We had the property because we have two lots down there, but we had purchased another metal building, the same structure as what we had. We had to hire an engineer to downgrade the specs because it was too strong, and they didn't understand that.

Barber: What does that mean, too strong?

Canepa: That building could go through a hurricane and still stand. We don't have hurricanes here, so they did not understand that.

Barber: Inside your front door is the office, and to the left is the main work area, so are you talking about an area that's behind that or to the left further?

Canepa: To the left further.

Barber: On the east side?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: What's the rest of the building made of? Is that a brick building?

Canepa: No, we just put a stucco front on it. It's a solid metal building. That's why it always tickles me when every once in a while the Fire Department will show up saying, "We've come for a fire." I have nothing that will burn. [laughter]

Barber: It's pretty impervious.

Canepa: "You are at the wrong location."

Barber: So when did Bavarian World become Bavarian World? Was that pretty recent?

Canepa: No. Klaus Ginschel moved in there—the kids were working there and I was working there. That had to be thirty years ago.

Barber: So those changes happened long ago.

Canepa: Long ago.

Barber: Early on, you were meeting a lot of business owners along Fourth Street.

Canepa: Sure.

Barber: Who were some of the folks who had businesses along there who either aren't there now or whose businesses aren't there, but that you remember knowing early on?

Canepa: You had Louis' Basque Corner. Louis and Lorraine have retired, and that's good. Louis is a cutie. You had Alpine Glass. They ceased to do business there. I mean, they just closed it down. We had Landa Muffler. Larry is now deceased. Motor Machine and Supply, because that kind of work isn't being done anymore, and Bill has retired and Mike is deceased. We had the little grocery store on the corner, a little gas station and grocery store, and they moved out.

Barber: Which corner was that?

Canepa: That would be right across the street from Catholic Community Services.

Barber: There was a little family-owned grocery store?

Canepa: Yes. We've always had the nightclubs down through there. You had Earl Scheib Paint Shop. You had some of the thrift shops and Commercial Hardware. We still have Martin Iron Works, which is wonderful. We still have Levrett's Transmission, which is also wonderful. Still have D Bar M—they're third generation as well, a third-generation business there.

Barber: Is Jack the owner?

Canepa: Yes, Judy and Jack. They're real cute, nice people. All along the corridor you had all these businesses that had been there forever, and then, again, the freeway impacted business and we started watching the deterioration and the turnover. I think, as with anything, people try to do things with the best intentions, which often don't work, but because we already had some of the topless places, the city tried to put what they called the red-line district where they were going to have certain areas with gaming and certain areas with topless, and our area was the one that they decided they'd do the topless in.

Then they changed the red-line district when the Ponderosa went in, and it changed to White Orchid or Wild Orchid or one of those. Then Gentlemen's Club went in on Center Street, and that changed the district too. So we are now no longer the proud owners of all the topless bars.

Barber: That's not really a question of zoning so much as it is just getting a license to operate that kind of business?

Canepa: It's got to be zoned.

Barber: So it has a special zoning category?

Canepa: Oh, yes. You've got to have special zoning there, yes.

Barber: Now, you think about Highway 40 being the main freeway through town. I can understand how the motels would suffer quite a bit when the interstate went in, because they are tourist-oriented. Why do you think the residential-oriented businesses also suffered when the highway shifted?

Canepa: Well, you have to have people work, and the people who were working in those businesses who suffered lived in the residences. They lived close by. A lot of people walked to work. When the business suffered, then we lost workers.

Barber: Oh, I see.

Canepa: And that area also has a lot of absentee landlords, you know. You go further up to Denslow. At one stage, Denslow was a gorgeous neighborhood.

Barber: I'm not sure where that is. Is that along Fourth?

Canepa: No, that's along Valley. It's up above. It is to the north.

Barber: East of the university?

Canepa: Yes, and most of the landlords who own those apartment buildings don't live there, and they didn't care. The neat thing is that the city finally stepped up to the plate, and sent massive code there, and it's starting to turn around. The code actually shut down two of those buildings, and they should have.

Barber: Apartment buildings?

Canepa: Yes. That's what happened. You lose the business, you lose the workers, you lose the dwellers.

Barber: So the motels along Fourth Street had been owned by local residents, even residents of the nearby area.

Canepa: Yes. Well, the Bally Slot Machines was there too. It was right up the street from us where Greg's Garage is now, and it employed around 150 or 200 people at one stage, so we had a really good neighborhood, a busy neighborhood.

Barber: You're right across the street from a couple blocks of residences that extend from Sixth Street up to the freeway. The residences used to go all the way up north from that. Have you seen that residential neighborhood change over the years?

Canepa: It's deteriorated. It's like any old neighborhood. What a city does is you start growing and you go out, out, out, out, and pretty soon you have reached the outermost boundaries. There's no more land available. So then it collapses and goes right back in, and you start the whole process all over again. And we're in the whole process of starting all over again now.

When our organization [the RSCBA] got busy and stepped up and started pushing really hard, people paid attention to what a neat neighborhood it was, what it could be, and they started putting more money into the neighborhood and started paying more tax revenue into the neighborhood. They also recognized the fact that UNR is very close. Just one block away we have one apartment building that is almost 100 percent the Japanese UNR students.

Barber: Is it up on Valley?

Canepa: No, it is off of Elko.

Barber: You were working downtown, you had a different career from your husband, and then at some point you got involved or even started this business association, the RSCBA. Can you tell me how this happened?

Canepa: I went to work for Fred, and we were oblivious. Because we were so busy making a living, we were forgetting to live. Then all of a sudden all over the neighborhood there were these fliers about how the city was planning to put all the homeless down with us, and they were having a meeting. We went to the meeting, and sure enough. So all of us got together, because we did not like what they were proposing. We did not want the homeless facilities down there. That's a killer for business. That is just a killer for business.

The association got up and going. At that point in time, I was still working part-time for an attorney, so I didn't attend all the meetings, but the person who was doing the meetings, he travels a lot. He has his own business. He wasn't able to keep it all together.

Barber: And who's that?

Canepa: That was Mike Eardley. He really is a nice soul.

Barber: Does he own a business down there?

Canepa: Yes, he does. He bought Nevada Fine Arts. That's his building. He does a lot of the filming and the videos and all of that. Tanglewood Productions is who he is.

So we all got together one morning, and Mike wasn't there. He wasn't able to come. Things were falling apart. They said, "We need new leadership," and we all looked at each other and went, "Hmm. Who?" Somehow it ended up me, and, okay, it's well worth the time and the energy I'm going to put into this, and it was.

We were able to stop the city from their initial plans. We were able to force the city to put some regulations in. Their idea of dealing with the homeless is to be able to do a press conference and say, "We have cured the problem of the homeless. We have a facility there," the warm and fuzzies, ooh, ooh. What they had actually done is they just enabled. They did not empower. There's a big difference.

Barber: For those people.

Canepa: Yes. The idea of a homeless facility is not a bad idea. It's their clients. That's the killer. I can't tell you the number of homeless I have had arrested on my premises for breaking and entering into my cars, my customer's cars, trying to panhandle. If they ever spent a night in your car, it's done. You have to get rid of the car. You can't get the stench out. And they have no idea of hygiene. They have no idea that this is not a bathroom as well as a place to sleep. They don't think anything of rifling through your stuff, because they're looking for money. So, yes, just turning them loose on us was not an answer.

Barber: Did you see any change before and after the Community Assistance Center went

in, in your experience with the homeless in the area?

Canepa: Yes. Oh, yes. It was better because we actually could call the police and they had to show up and do something with them. At this stage of the game, we're kind of back to first base, because we're horrendously underpowered with police. We have a very small force, and they have to make the decision of, "Do I go to the armed robbery in progress or do I go over to Fred's, where we have a bum?"

Barber: You said that your association was able to derail the initial plan that the city had had. What was that initial plan?

Canepa: That initial plan was to put them in Sage Street, the Firestone Building, and the roller rink, so we would have had them in a line.

Barber: Oh, in three different buildings?

Canepa: Three different locations, oh, yes. The soup kitchen was up across the street from the Sands, and they would have left the soup kitchen there.

Barber: The Sands on the other side of town?

Canepa: Yes. The Reno-Sparks Gospel Mission was originally on Commercial and Arlington, and that was really a rundown, nasty building. The soup kitchen was further up across the street from the Sands. So you have all these people migrating now, making the rounds. What we really need to do and what we still need to do and what they still are not doing, is they need to say, "Who are you? Where did you come from? What are you doing here? What are your plans here? How are you going to support yourself? What services have you accessed?" They've not done that yet.

They are hesitant to do that because they do not want to violate their civil rights. A lot of people, when you get into their face saying, "Who are you and what are you doing here? Why are you here?" that's when you discover that they've been mentally ill and they need more than being out on the street, need more than one hot meal a day. If you say to them, "These are the services available," you find out that some of these people have the education to move into these services and actually become productive citizens. So many folks who end up homeless and out on the streets, it's just because of one really horrific incident. They lost their job, they got sick, someone in their family got sick, and they can't stay home because they're making minimum wage. It's just a really ugly cycle that they've unfortunately landed in, and there's no way out for them. If we did a better job of communicating amongst the providers, and if you've ever attended a RAAH meeting, you will see. They will sit there and say how well they communicate, and then you'll find out that they've taken care of the same client at three different places and didn't know it. They want to think they're communicating, but they're not.

HUD has said, "You need to communicate," but they're not. What do you do?

Barber: What is that RAAH that you mentioned?

Canepa: RAAH, Reno Area Alliance for the Homeless. At one stage that was headed up through—they met over at the Salvation Army’s big building, and Ann Curry of the United Way was in charge of it. Then one day she came in and said, “Oh, my aunt’s sick. I’m done,” and left. So whether or not RAAH is still in existence, I don’t now. I’m pretty sure it is. I don’t know if it still goes by RAAH. But it got to be where you’d go to the meetings and they’d discuss the same things over and over and over, but never had a solution.

Barber: So you would go to these meetings?

Canepa: I would go to that, yes, I was like a couple of the other members who finally said, “Enough. I’m done.”

They’d all sit there and mumble and grumble, “Well, while I’m here, I can’t be getting my work done.”

And I finally said, “Yeah, but while you’re here, you’re still getting paid. I’m not. I’m self-employed. This is a waste of time. Do something.”

Barber: When those initial discussions about where to locate the homeless services were going on, were you going to City Council and testifying at City Council meetings, or did they have different committees?

Canepa: At that point in time, [Mayor] Jeff Griffin was really good about doing workshops. He was really great for public input. So I attended all of those. I spent a lot of my life going to Planning and to City Council and meeting with commissioners and talking to them and going through the corridor showing them what’s really here, what you’re going to kill if you put here.

The Sage Street site is adjacent to the railroad tracks, less than fifty feet. So when they proposed this facility, it was less than five feet from the railroad tracks. Now, here’s the problem. You have Martha, who isn’t quite right, and the train really upsets her. She’s going to stand on this wall that’s the barrier between her and the train. She’s going to jump when the train comes down. Okay?

Martha’s family is now really agitated. They’ve lost Martha. They’re going to sue U.P., S.P., City of Reno, City of Sparks, Washoe County, because by the time you get this train stopped, you’re no longer even—well, maybe some of the cars are in Sparks, so you’ve got jurisdiction there. You can stop in Reno because you’ve got jurisdiction there. And you are in Washoe County, so, hey, there’s another jurisdiction.

Sparks, Reno, and Washoe County banded together to put Martha in this facility, so this could have been a really, really good moneymaking proposition for Martha’s family had that happened, and no one ever thought about that. It never dawned on them that every entity involved could be liable for Martha’s mishap. So Sage Street really wasn’t a good fit.

At that point in time then, again, they started looking elsewhere. The Firestone Building looked to be a really great fit in their world because that was a big building and they had lots of space. They could jam in a ton of cots. You could probably put a couple hundred people in there.

Barber: Mostly one big room, wasn't it?

Canepa: Yes, it's one big room, and then you had an office area, so they could do that. Close to downtown, so they felt that it might be easily monitored, the whole bit, but, again, we're back to putting two hundred people, some of which have some mental instabilities, some of which are convicted felons, some of which just fell on hard times, put that together, that's not a good fit, not for any neighborhood.

At one point in time, we wanted them to do the Springfield plan and to have a really good look at it, and I got all the information. Springfield, Missouri, did some interesting things. They started the same way that Reno did. In Springfield, a very nice little nun felt sorry for some of these street people, and she put them in an older building in an older section of town. Then all of a sudden, it started blossoming. You build it, they'll come. And that section of town got very agitated and said, "No, we're not going to suffer all of this. Every area of the city should take this on."

So what Springfield did is in each neighborhood they put a facility of some sort. They met with the neighbors. They made an alliance. They would monitor, maintain, keep it legal, keep it clean, keep it relatively under wraps for the neighborhood, and the neighborhood, in return, would help by giving special discounts, helping with repairs, helping with food.

So in Springfield, if you are in the Family Center there, people don't know it. You don't have the same horrible label on the homeless kids in Springfield that you do in Reno. We have the East Fourth Street kids, which are very few now. Most of the children are out of East Fourth Street, but at one stage we must have had three hundred kids down there.

Barber: In the motels, you mean?

Canepa: Yes. And all of them have that label, "Oh, you're an East Fourth Street kid. You're living in the motel. You're homeless. You're this. You're that," and that's traumatic for little children. They don't understand that. Springfield doesn't have that, because they have this scattered throughout the city.

We brought that up and how effectively it worked, how well it worked, how none of the neighborhoods had complained. I had all the statistics. Well, needless to say, the rest of the neighborhoods in Reno went ballistic. [laughs] We were called the NIMBYs [Not In My Back Yard]. Oh, my goodness, they were worse NIMBYs than we ever were.

I'll give Jeff Griffin credit in that he said, "You know, I'm having trouble finding one [location]. How am I going to find four or five? No, not even going to consider it," which was sad, because it's a workable solution.

We hear now that they put it down on us because that's where the services are. What services? There are no services down there. Closest services, Catholic Community Services, they moved the soup kitchen down there, which is part of Catholic Community Services. Salvation Army, they're clear over on Oddie, across the street from the fairgrounds, Oddie and Sutro, so that's a distance. DMV, where you would go to get I.D., it's clear down almost to Sparks. So what services are we talking here? And we could never get an answer for that.

Barber: It sounds like they were looking to reuse a lot of old existing buildings. That was their first choice, not to construct a whole new facility.

Canepa: Correct. Correct.

Barber: ...which they ended up doing at, I would imagine, quite an expense.

Canepa: It was.

Barber: I'm wondering if they just eventually gave up on this idea of finding an existing building that would work.

Canepa: Correct. They just couldn't find one that was going to have everything that they needed in it. There was no way that they could house all these people and have all the services put together like they wanted in any of the existing buildings. Then when it became very apparent—because we were very public, we filed a lawsuit, the whole bit, to stop this.

Barber: Oh, you did?

Canepa: We did two lawsuits against the City of Reno, yes, and because we went so public, then some of the buildings that they had been looking at and not telling the owners what they planned to do with, the owners put it together and would not negotiate with the city. They wouldn't even talk with them, thank you very much.

Barber: Those buildings you were talking about before, you mean, like the Firestone Building?

Canepa: Yes. And we were very fortunate there. We got the Firestone Building twenty-four hours before the city of Reno was supposed to get it. We were not on their hit list.

Barber: It's quite a thing to put together a lawsuit. Who actually put that together? Did you have the assistance of attorneys?

Canepa: Oh, yes, we paid for that. The association paid for that, and we had attorneys. The first one we lost, and we knew we were going to lose. What we won was the time that we needed. Our attorney was Mark Gray [phonetic], and he was very good, and he got us the time we needed. When the judgment came down that we'd lost, it didn't matter. We'd already accomplished what we needed within the timeframe.

Barber: Getting those other properties off the table?

Canepa: Yes. The second lawsuit we instigated after they put in the campus down here, and why we did that is we wanted them to mediate the damages that they did to us. We wanted more lights. We wanted more police protection. We wanted all of this other stuff.

We wanted some redevelopment. We wanted some benches. And that happened too. We had Chuck Zeh. He was very good at that.

Barber: So that was successful.

Canepa: Yes, we were very successful. The only thing we lost out on is they were going to put in a police substation in the Alpine Glass Building, and that did not happen, which is really sad. They left the substation in at the bowling alley, and I don't know if that's still there. I've been very fortunate. I haven't had to go over there in about a year. The substation in the Alpine Glass Building would have been wonderful.

Barber: That's still vacant now, that building?

Canepa: Yes. They will never be able to successfully do anything with that building.

Barber: Why not?

Canepa: Because of the campus there. Because who will take it on?

Barber: It's right next door.

Canepa: Yes. There's nothing that can be done with that.

Barber: What do you think of that building?

Canepa: It's an old building. Underneath that awful, god-awful orange, is a beautiful old brick building, and, yes, it's a crying shame. It's like the Barengo Building. That's a crying shame.

Barber: The homeless issue, obviously, took up a lot of your time and it was a lot of what the association worked on.

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: But there were a lot of other plans that you were working on, including the Barengo Building. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Canepa: Sure. We thought how fun that would be, because the Barengo Building does have historic overlay, and it does have railroad track access. So we went and met with the Portola people, a couple of us, and Portola has historic trains. They would be willing to run one of their trains from Portola down to the Barengo Building, and we could have done the dinner trains. We could have done some of the sightseeing things in the summertime. That would have been so much fun.

We were getting this together, because if we did the Barengo Building, we could actually put in dining and we could put in some retail. Needless to say, the people downtown viewed this with, "Oh, my god, they'll get all our business." So they did

everything within their power to scotch that, and they succeeded, so the building sits there empty now.

Barber: This is the old NCO depot.

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: How were they able to scotch it?

Canepa: It is very difficult to try and get investors and developers when you have other people who have bigger investments and bigger developments standing there saying, “Well, we won’t back this. We won’t let this work with us.”

And we kept telling them, “We are not in any competition with you. We want to complement you, because if somebody comes down and buys a bouquet of flowers from us, we’re going to say, ‘Well, why don’t you go have lunch downtown. Why don’t you do this.’”

Downtown really never has worked well together, and they still don’t. They don’t work and play well together.

Barber: That plan for a train, was that before the homeless services was located where it is now?

Canepa: Yes. Even so, you know, even with the campus being there, that still could work, putting that train, that dinner train in. That still could work very easily. However, there is—and I don’t know if it’s going to happen, but it had to be two or three years ago, there was a developer who needed to get rid of some of the train crossings, and one of the crossings was down at the campus, because we’ve always been terrified if the train goes through there, if a child’s going to end up on the hit list.

Barber: Right down Record Street.

Canepa: Yes, and they were going to close some of those crossings. However, the development didn’t go in, so they didn’t pursue it. To put in one crossing, you have to take out another one. That’s the way the UPSP works. And dealing with the railroad, if you write them a letter, you’d better have a couple years to wait because they do not respond rapidly. They take their time.

Barber: So a train still runs right by Record Street?

Canepa: Yes, it goes right down through there, yes. We still hear it. There’s usually three a day, and that’s okay.

Barber: So what are the other activities you did? You told me before about working with John Hester on some ideas for the corridor.

Canepa: Yes. John was great. John’s really a nice, nice man, and he came up with a lot of

really good ideas. One of the things that we wanted to do— we thought it would be nice to have the road, then the curb, and then an area of grass, and then the sidewalk, and a lot of the sidewalks down there are big enough to do that. They actually now still have dirt.

When they went and put the lights in, what we wanted for them to do was to run all the hardware for the lighting either in that area and put bricks over it or run it in the street and put bricks over it, so if any of the lights went out, we weren't constantly digging up the streets. That didn't happen.

We wanted to put in trees. We wanted to put in grass. After the lighting came in, we wanted to do our own banners down there. At Christmastime one year, we actually did a lighting thing, and it was really pretty. All the businesses put up the little twinkle lights and decorated. It was great fun.

They were looking to see if a trolley was viable, and it would be. How much fun would it be to run a trolley from Victorian Square right up East Fourth Street to end up right downtown and then back again? And we have the room. When downtown was busy grumbling about Hot August Nights and closing Virginia Street, we said, "We'll take it." We'd love it. We'd let them cruise the middle two lanes. They could have the inside lane going east and west. We don't care. That gives us the outside lane and still some parking. We'd love it. Oh, you would have thought I killed their puppy. All of a sudden it was okay for them to shut Virginia Street and Sierra Street rather than give it to us.

Barber: Why do you think there was that resistance?

Canepa: Money. They were absolutely terrified that we'd get an extra dime. Car people are funny. They don't spend the same amount of money that motorcycle people must spend. I will tell you that much.

Barber: Who spends more?

Canepa: Motorcycle people. When they go to an event, they spend more money than car people do.

Barber: Why is that?

Canepa: Well, if you have a \$50,000 to \$200,000 car sitting there, you watch it pretty carefully, and you stay right there with that car. However, if you have a motorcycle, even mine's a custom bike, I'll park it and leave it; no damage comes to them. People don't think anything of walking up to your car, opening it up, and getting into it, but they do not get on your motorcycle.

I can't tell you—we went to a car show and I came back and here's these people sitting in my car. "Hello. What are you doing?"

"Well, we're going to take our picture and then we're going to see how we look."

"No, you're not. You don't touch the car."

"We're not hurting it."

Barber: There have been other issues that have affected Fourth Street too. There've been

redevelopment plans, TOD plans.

Canepa: Redevelopment, we knew that we were going to get hammered with redevelopment simply because, in all honesty, of the three suggested areas, ours was the only one that legally qualified. It met all the specifications for the area. So we said, "If you're going to do that, here's what we would like. Our own redevelopment board. We don't want to be merged. Our own redevelopment funding. We don't want to borrow or lend back and forth. We would like joint meetings with the other redevelopment boards to compare successes and/or failures. We want to know where the money went. We want our people on that board."

When Redevelopment went in, they put Redevelopment 2, which is us, into Redevelopment 1, and loaned them the money, and then they pledged seven years of our redevelopment funds to go to the ballpark, which gives us nothing. So they took our monies and put it to the ballpark in the Freight House district. But legally they can do that. They can loan back and forth.

Barber: So Fourth Street, at this point, is considered part of a redevelopment district?

Canepa: Yes. We are in Redevelopment 2. We have seen nothing from it and we won't for at least eight, nine years. If they have any monies left over from the ballpark and paying that off, then maybe we'll see it, but we're not holding our breath.

Barber: What would that funding be able to be applied toward?

Canepa: You can do façading. You can do landscaping. You can actually do some street improvement, public area improvement, that sort of thing.

Barber: And the TOD?

Canepa: The TOD's a real interesting setup, because what happened there is we managed to get a special planning district put through, SPD for zoning, and we wrote our own zoning. That was why we were using the first lawsuit, to give us the time to get the SPD pushed through, and we did. We had hoped that the SPD would then not make it so easy for them [the homeless services] to move in; in fact, not at all.

Unfortunately, when you're dealing with the city, I was not aware that the city does not have to meet any of their general coding or laws or zoning. If the city wants to go in your backyard and set up a pawnshop with palm trees, they can and there's not much you can do about that. They do not have to meet their own qualifications. They should be a good neighbor, but they're not.

So we had our SPD in. It was working great. Business was doing well. We were attracting new businesses. Then they discovered that there was this transportation-oriented district that the feds were putting out. What that does is you have a certain highway, and you've got to have like seven blocks on both sides to qualify for this district. And if you set one of these up to get some transportation going, you're eligible for federal funds. Oh, boy, so, yes.

Downtown wanted the TOD. So you have a Virginia Street TOD, because they

needed the federal funds. But by doing that, now they're into a jackpot because seven blocks down, that puts them in our SPD.

So the city sunsetted our SPD. Yes, that was a real surprise. I went to a TOD meeting only to find out that the SPD had been sunsetted with no notification, no nothing, and they'd decided from Wells Avenue west is the downtown TOD, from Wells Avenue east down to the border of Sparks is the East Fourth Street TOD, and they have different parameters, because there are a couple of businesses on East Fourth Street that couldn't even begin to meet what they put in the TOD for downtown. I mean, we have some heavy-duty industrial things down there.

Barber: So it's kind of a zoning issue? It's supposed to be commercial, or what are the requirements?

Canepa: It is a zoning issue, and what it allows is basically not—it goes more for commercial and retail. If I close my doors to my business and it stays vacant for thirty days, to put my kind of business back in, you will have to do a special-use permit, which could cost anything from 100 bucks to \$100,000. Depends on what it is that you're proposing to do.

Barber: But if it were to be something commercial or retail, it would be easier?

Canepa: It was supposed to be, but what they failed to do—and John Hester tried to point this out to them and they didn't listen to John—we don't have a great deal of parking down there. When we did the SPD, we did shared parking amongst us, and that worked out great. The city then came in with the TOD and said, "Well, it's got to be like downtown. You've got to have X number of parking places for every business." Well, none of us qualified. So now to put in a business down there in the TOD is really tough. There's not parking.

Barber: So what it really affects is new business.

Canepa: Oh, yes, it killed new business.

Barber: Even in an older building it's still difficult?

Canepa: Very difficult, just to meet their specifications, what they want. At one stage, Claudia [Hansen] indicated that they were going to revisit the TODs and try and get some of this straightened out. You know, it's human nature to hurry, hurry, hurry. "We've got to get this thing pushed through. We've got to hurry. Right now we don't have time to wait." But we always have time to go back and fix it the second, third, and fourth time. Wouldn't it be better to do it right the first time? Human nature.

Barber: So the SPD and the TOD just weren't compatible because they had different structures. They couldn't both exist at the same time?

Canepa: They want the TOD in there. They didn't want the SPD in there. And, now, you

can't have something zoned two different ways. You can't have this zoned for education and then zone it for industrial, too. So that's why.

Barber: Now, you mentioned that the RSCBA had done these activities with the children in the motels. That's something you've really become known for. But you said there are fewer children in there than there were before. How did that program start? Did you have a good relationship with the motel owners, or how did you get this idea?

Canepa: I didn't. Klaus Ginschel did. It's all Klaus' fault. Klaus came to us fifteen years ago and said, "Oh, Gaye, we need you," because he thought, "bake cookies and take them to the children on East Fourth Street at Christmastime so people think we're not just bad people, that we, too, can be good neighbors." Okay. [laughs]

So we set aside one Sunday, and we went in and we made a hundred bags of cookies. That Sunday, the cookies froze within a block. It was miserable cold. Larry Landa had a hay truck, and he was pulling it with his truck, his pickup truck, and there was a group of us. Cold. And we had gone—there were three of us at that time and eventually it ended up just me—we went the previous Friday to every motel and put up these fliers that Santa Claus was coming to give cookies out.

So we get there, no children. We ended up going door to door, knocking and trying to get the kids to come out, and we were relatively successful, frozen but relatively successful.

So the next year, we decided, well, we'll do a little bit more. We'll do 250. And word got out, because Kirkland was trying to work with us. The sheriff's community program was in the old fire station by then.

He sent his gal, said, "Oh, we need to do this." She came and said, "We want to join you." Never look a gift horse in the mouth, right? We figured, well, sure, why not? We could do this thing.

So then we ended up with some toys and some cookies, and then it just grew and grew and grew. I will say that last year when we did it, very few children on East Fourth Street, very few families. A lot of vacancies. The economy is not good.

The most kids we ran into was at the townhouse which is on Second and Arlington. Up on West Fourth Street there were more children than down on East Fourth Street. We also did a group at Denslow, and that's like locusts up there. Whew. You can be picked clean within thirty minutes.

Barber: Lots of kids.

Canepa: Lots of kids, Hispanic, lots of kids. We would go to Reno Housing, but sometimes you question when they come out in Nikes with cell phones.

Barber: Reno Housing. What's that?

Canepa: Reno Housing Authority. It's down off of Ninth Street.

Barber: On the east side?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: That's public housing?

Canepa: Yes, low income. We went there one year. Family Resource Center contacted me, and they had a family that they needed help with, and I said, "Sure. What do they need?"

Well, they needed everything. I said, "Okay." They had eight children from the age of eight to two, and she was pregnant again. We ended up getting them WinCo gift cards with no tobacco, no liquor, but they could at least get food, Christmas tree ornaments, gifts for all of them. And the children, the older children, were very gracious in that they said, "No gifts for us. Give it to the little ones." Well, no, it doesn't work that way. No. So we give gifts to everybody, you know.

We went down there with all of this stuff, and here's a family with seven, eight kids, one more on the way, mom and dad in a two-bedroom housing, and I'm really sorry. It's called [whispers], "Enough. Stop it." Those are the heartaches. But, fortunately, not so many there, either.

Barber: Why do you think that is?

Canepa: No work.

Barber: They've just gone elsewhere?

Canepa: They've gone elsewhere, yes. These folks have relocated. A lot of these folks, families are doing what they used to do back in the 1800s where families live with families, mom and dad and grandma and grandpa and cousins and aunts and uncles. We see that a lot now.

Barber: Do you have plans to continue that program this Christmas?

Canepa: That will be done over at the Livestock Event Center on December 17th. That worked out very nicely. Brooke Howard set that up with the Sheriff's Office. That was her brainchild. Centrally located, have a ton of volunteers, have lots of good toys, lots of good things to give out. Last year they did it there, kind of a pilot program while we went and did our thing, and by the time she opened it, she had enough people that it was around the building twice, two deep.

So this will work because of the location. It's close enough to Reno Housing. It's close enough to the motels. There are no kids there, because I've checked again. It's close enough to Denslow, and it's close enough to some of the poorer districts down off of Sutro. So it works very nicely.

It's indoors. The kids seem to be a little more relaxed and a lot warmer. As you know, Sandi and Mike [Sullivan] do the hats, and those are always given out. You would be surprised how many children we at one stage saw with no shoes, no socks, no hats, no gloves, no coats.

Barber: So that was the same part of the giveaway, was giving them food and giving them hats? She did mention the hats.

Canepa: Yes. The hats are a great hit. And the Sheriff's Office, they're really cute, because that's the first thing these deputies do is they grab a hat and jam it on a kid's head, "See there? It's perfect." So, yes, it's been a very worthwhile setup.

I'm happy to say that there are no more kids on East Fourth Street. I'm really happy about that. I'm happy to say the kids that were in McGregor's—there used to be two hundred kids there.

Barber: In where?

Canepa: McGregor's Inn, down at the bottom of East Sixth Street. Maybe twenty, thirty kids in there. Pony Express down by—what is that? Where Sparks and Reno meet, there used to be a ton of kids there. Maybe twenty, thirty kids now. So, hopefully, they relocated to a better setup. I don't know.

Barber: With the business association, does membership in that extend all the way through Sparks?

Canepa: You can be a member. We're not picky. We welcome everybody. [laughs]

Barber: Where do you meet?

Canepa: When we meet, usually over at Klaus'. Every once in a while we'll meet at Mike Steedman's. So many of us are back to trying to make a living, we're not living, so oftentimes meetings get postponed or we'll find the same four or five of us there each time.

Barber: Are there current projects that you're working on as a group right now?

Canepa: We're waiting to see, number one, what they're going to do with this TOD, if they're going to go back and revisit it. If they revisit the TOD, then, yes, we've got to start putting some input into that. John Hester and that group, at one time they did a study and it probably worked in the city that the guy came from, but it would not work here. The park benches and the planters and the trash cans were really beautiful, but they sure wouldn't work here. Ours are out in the elements.

John saw that, and he was bright enough to take it and put the kind of benches and trash receptacles and lighting in that work here, and we'd like to see some more of that go. I'd actually like to see curbs and gutters and sidewalks go all the way down East Fourth Street. I'd like to see some more lighting go down East Fourth Street.

DOT doesn't own East Fourth Street anymore. They made a trade. They traded East Fourth Street for a chunk up on McCarran, so the City of Reno and the City of Sparks own East Fourth Street. That's why we could say, "We'll take Hot August Nights." Before, we could not say that because it was DOT. But now we can. We can do events down there because it is the City of Reno.

Barber: What are any other improvements that you think could be made to the street itself?

Canepa: Let's try pedestrian walks. Wouldn't that be nice to have pedestrian crossings? And especially with everything that's happened within the last two weeks, I've even offered. I told John, "Give me a can of spray paint." East Sixth Street, you have a pedestrian crossing at Valley. The next one is at Wells. That's five blocks. So you take your life in your hands if you're going to go across the street. East Fourth Street, same thing, no pedestrian crossings, and that's stupid. They keep telling me it has to be engineered. Okay. Bring him on, I'll help him.

Barber: How do Sixth Street and Fourth Street compare with the amount of traffic and the type of traffic that goes down those streets?

Canepa: Ours is more toward residence and business. That's Sixth Street. Fourth Street, it's a corridor between Reno and Sparks, so it has a lot heavier traffic, people going from one place to the other, and that in itself could be a really great thing if we did a trolley or improved some of the façading so people would want to stop on Fourth Street and check this out. That's one of the things we were hoping that the TOD would do, is make more bus stops, do better façading.

I know Mike Steedman's group at one stage wanted to pick up and do some arts and crafts and art fairs and things out on the sidewalks. Again, our sidewalks are big enough, we could pull that off. It's just a matter of getting the people together, getting ready to do it and doing it. I know that there are some real difficulties right now with the ballpark and the homeless. All the people, they hit them all up as they come in and out. I was sent a message via via so-and-so and so-and-so and so: "They're asking you guys to help."

And I just said, "Bite me."

Barber: You, the association, asking you to help?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: In what way? How would you help?

Canepa: Well, see if we can't get some of this homeless population controlled. Well, what do you want me to do? Come on. Think this thing through. You're the one who took the police substation out of there. You're the one who have more police patrols down south than you do up north. You've got a heavier concentration of things down south than you do up north, too, and I recognize that.

The nice thing about UNR, it has its own police department, doesn't it? And the best thing about them is they are multijurisdictional, so they can go into Reno and help and they can go into Sparks and help.

Barber: I wasn't aware of that.

Canepa: Yes, and they're willing to do that. UNR has always been a really good neighbor. When the developer put in the housing at the top of Valley Road, the Highlands, it was aimed directly for student housing. There were some real problems at one stage, and UNR got a task force together and they got their people together and went in and they educated the students, and they turned a really bad situation into something that is very good.

They monitor it. They have them totally aware of underage drinking, underage partying. They have been able to talk with parents when they bring their darlings here to go to school. "This is an apartment complex that's available, but these are the rules, and this is what we expect from your child. And if your child doesn't do that, we will call you." So they have been great neighbors.

Barber: What do you think about some of the other residential developments that have been put in more recently between Fourth and Sixth Street?

Canepa: They've been a good thing, you know. Cloyd Phillips and CSA [Community Services Agency] has done that Plaza at 4th, and that's turned out very nicely. Then we had the one on Record Street, right up above me. That's turned out very nicely as well. So they've been in good things. The neat thing about both of them is they're different. The one on Record Street is aimed toward seniors. Okay? And it isn't low-income housing. That's affordable housing, totally different. Whereas Plaza at 4th Street has children, it's family oriented, so we got the best of both.

CSA, also very good neighbor. Lloyd has maintained and monitored that, and, yes, he's with partners, but any of the developments you see of theirs are very nicely kept. We also have Orvis Ring, and that's up above and to the back, and that's low-income housing; however, maintained beautifully. Some of the people there pay \$35 a month, that's what they can afford, and the apartments are very nice. So, yes, it's been a good thing.

Barber: Do you think there could be potential for residential development along Fourth?

Canepa: Until we bring the jobs in, no. We have a horrendous number of vacancies right now, everywhere in the city with everything—warehousing, businesses, residence, apartments. But until we get back on our feet and have jobs, no.

Barber: How have you seen in the last five years, say, businesses from Fourth to Sixth Street in your area being affected? Have you seen some people going out of business?

Canepa: Lots of people going out of business. They just can't afford it. They just can't. Because we were small business. We weren't the big corporates. The other thing is that people also have to decide whether they're going to go to a big corporation where they can get massive discounts, or go to a smaller business where things are going to be a little more expensive because we can't offer those kinds of discounts. And we've lost business with that. Folks, they don't have lots of money. They've got to stretch that dollar wherever and however they can, and you can't fault them for that. So, yes.

Barber: Now, you're an equal partner in the business now with your husband, right?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: Are you there every day?

Canepa: Yes.

Barber: How do you divide the work?

Canepa: It's really easy. I hold what's called a 2G smog license, which means I can do the smogs and repair. If he does the repair, I have to sign off on it, because he is not licensed. And the reason I did that is if I make a mistake, they can shut me down. DMV can shut me down. I don't want to take him with me. I set up my own entity, so if I make a mistake, I take the fall, he's still good.

The things he likes to do I don't necessarily like to do. The things I like to do he doesn't necessarily like to do, so we balance really well and we work really well together. We have the same goals, really compatible.

When we have one of our what we call "heated discussions"—I guess other people call them arguments—both of us have sense enough to go, "Hmm," and walk away and let it lay until we can come back and settle it.

We're really fortunate. We have a good customer base, been there a long time. A lot of our customers are older now and we're losing them. It's very difficult now. The automobile industry is really tough, and a lot of people feel that you have to take your car to the dealer to keep the warranty. That is not accurate. What you have to do is show that you maintained the car under the warranty specs, so that if the dealer says, "Well, we're not going to warranty this because you didn't have the work done here," they can't do that unless they give you the parts and the labor for free. It's called the Magnuson Act. So it's always real interesting.

Barber: You work on all type of cars there, don't you, in your shop?

Canepa: Yes. We do both foreign and domestic.

Barber: You have some people who work for you, too, don't you?

Canepa: We used to.

Barber: Do you have any plans for the future of the shop?

Canepa: I don't know what he's going to do. He doesn't want to retire. Okay. I really enjoy people, so even if I retired, I'd go do something. I'd become a greeter or I'd volunteer or I'd do something because I don't want to stay home. No. And until he decides what it is that he's going to do, I'm just going to hang out with him. It works for us.

Not having employees allows us to have leeway that we wouldn't have otherwise. We've had some great people working with us, and I'm really happy to say that with the exception of one person, every person who's ever worked for us has gone on to bigger and better things. So I feel like we've added to their life, encouraged them to go and do and be now, make the most of yourself, and they've all been young people. I like young people.

Barber: Is there anything that you would like to say about the future of the Fourth Street area and what you'd like to see or what you think it could become?

Canepa: I want the Fourth Street area to become East Fourth Street again, like it was. We're not Las Vegas, we're not Baltimore, we're not New Orleans. We're East Fourth Street. Let's clean up the buildings, put the businesses back in. Barengo Building, put in a florist shop, put in a funky little outdoor café. You could put in studio lofts above that.

Spencer Hobson's building, we had it set up, [whispers] until Spencer screwed it up, where we had—are you ready for this?—a heavy-duty and Caterpillar Museum coming in. Yes. You'd be surprised. Lots of people like old fire trucks. You'd be surprised how many people like heavy-duty farm equipment and Caterpillars, all of that.

We also had a restaurant idea that was really pretty cool. Because the building's big enough, you can put partitions down and you light it with ultraviolet, and these partitions are done with black mesh, and you have two. So the waiter comes through the partition. He's there and then he's not. Poof! It's like a magic thing.

We also had that set up where we had a dining car from SP, I think, was going to loan us one, and we were going to hook it onto the side of the building so we could have meetings in there and cater and do all sorts of things.

We could have a micro brewery there. Wouldn't that be pretty? The catwalks are still there. So you could have your lunch, go up, walk around the catwalk and look down on the copper tubing and the piping and all of that of a microbrewery. It also has enough parking there for a parking lot. So we would have had three different businesses there. We would have had the museum, had the restaurant, and we would have had the brewery.

Barber: Do you think that could still happen?

Canepa: If Spencer got his head on straight, yes, sure, yes. That one has really neat skylights, so you can actually send light out of the roof there. So if you got into the Vegas frenzy and wanted that, you're right inside when the lights go.

Barber: This is the old Reno Brewery bottling plant we're talking about with the skylights.

Canepa: Yes. It's very cool. It just a really cool building.

Barber: Any other opportunities then for development? You've talked about the Barengo Building and the Reno Brewery Building.

Canepa: The Firestone Building is vacant again. You could do anything with that,

because that's a sizable building. You could turn that into retail in a heartbeat, or you could divide it up and turn it into multiple retails. At one stage what we'd like to see happen is to do the granny flats, so you have your business here and you live upstairs. That works very nicely.

But, again, until the economy picks up, until there are jobs out there, and small business is now—the SBA [Small Business Administration] is now dummied-up, so we have Nevada Micro Business as well. They are now going for the younger generation, the college graduates, your early twenties, early thirties, because these are the people who have the time, the knowledge, and the energy. And if you get one of them in your retail with a granny flat, and it's successful, he's going to expand, but he's going to say to his buddy, "Hey, this worked really cool for me. You could make it work. You take mine and the flat upstairs, because I'm moving six blocks down where it's bigger and I've got a bigger place," and that's how it starts developing.

But we're back to the economy. I don't know. That is viable with the East Fourth Street corridor there. That's something that could happen there very easily.

The Fire Building that's behind it, Kelly [Rae] turned that into a really nifty setup, and that's pretty cool because you've got the beauty shop there, and then she has some very nice lofts up above, very nice. She did a good job there.

Barber: What do they call that? 11 @ the Fire House.

Canepa: The Fire House, yes. So that's nifty. Unfortunately, to successfully redevelop that area, there are entities that need to be gone. Ferrari's Trailer Park, what an eyesore. And to do that, you've got to relocate these folks, so you need to find something that is exactly the same. So if they're paying—are you ready for this? They pay like 500 bucks a month to live in one of those things. But to move them, then you would have to find them another location, similar demographics, at 500 a month. So that presents a whole very difficult ball of wax.

Need to get rid of some of the motels on East Fourth Street. They've outlived their use. They would be better leveled. I am sure you've heard all the falderal about the Ponderosa and how substandard that was and is.

Barber: Do you think that was typical?

Canepa: Well, I can tell you I know of at least three murders that happened there. Yes, it's very typical. You want to vacuum your place, you have to pay \$20 to use the vacuum. Well, I can see where the landlord's coming from. Short of chaining it to him, getting it back, you don't know what state you're going to get it back in, and you don't know if you're going to get it back, so you have to have enough money to buy another one when that one doesn't get returned or it's broken.

Barber: So are any of those motel owners involved in the business association?

Canepa: Oh, no, no. We're not their best friends, because, unfortunately, we're saying, "You need to clean this mess up," and they don't want to hear that. Code has been wonderful. They have kept a pretty good eye on those motels, and when they see a

problem, they have tried to enforce to the max and get it cleaned up and straightened up, but they can only do so much, too. They're spread thin. Everybody's spread thin. Yes, some of those need to go away.

Barber: Thank you so much.

Canepa: You are very welcome.