

An Oral History of Les Ede

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Alicia Barber, Ph.D.

Les Ede's great-great-grandfather moved to Nevada in 1872. Born in 1942, Les grew up on Sullivan Lane, near what was then the western edge of Sparks, and shares memories of his childhood neighborhood near Prater Way. He joined the U.S. Navy after graduating from Sparks High School, and then became a firefighter in Sparks, retiring in 1994.

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LES EDE

Interviewed on September 16, 2013

Alicia Barber, Interviewer

Les Ede's great-great-grandfather moved to Nevada in 1872. Born in 1942, Les grew up on Sullivan Lane, near what was then the western edge of Sparks, and shares memories of his childhood neighborhood near Prater Way. He joined the U.S. Navy after graduating from Sparks High School, and then became a firefighter in Sparks, retiring in 1994.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Barber: I'm here with Les Ede at his home in Sparks, and the date is Monday, September 16, 2013. Mr. Ede, I'm going to start out with some biographical questions. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Ede: Well, when was June 24th, 1942, Washoe Medical Center, Reno, Nevada.

Barber: Tell me a little bit about your family and when they first came to this area.

Ede: Well, how far back in history do you want to go?

Barber: Let's go as far back as when they came to this area or came to Nevada.

Ede: My great-great-grandfather moved to Nevada from Sierra Valley in 1872.

Barber: What was his name?

Ede: Stephen Ede. He had a ranch south of Reno. His next-door neighbors were the Huffakers. He and Mr. Huffaker gave two acres of property to the school district for Huffaker School. Stephen Ede's acre wound up being the playground.

Barber: This was the school when it was located on Virginia Street?

Ede: Yes, this is the school when it was on Virginia Street.

Barber: So he was a rancher?

Ede: He was a rancher. He had thirteen children, eleven that survived to adulthood. His oldest son inherited the ranch when he passed away, and the biggest problem there was he also gave each of his daughters, and there were five of them, \$1,000. There was not that much cash in the estate, so they had to sell the ranch to fulfill that.

The Thompsons bought the ranch, and Jared Ede became the foreman of the ranch. One of Jared's brothers was John Gleason Ede, J.E. Ede, alias "Jack." These great-grandparents lived in Wadsworth where my grandfather, Hubert, was born. When the railroad moved the division facility to Sparks, J.E. Ede moved with the town. He built a residence on 13th Street next to the Robison house. His barbershop, the Tonopah, was located in the Rialto building in the 1000 block of Harriman Avenue, AKA "B Street," AKA Victorian Avenue. The site is now inside the Bourbon Street Casino. My grandfather Hubert worked for the railroads—Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, and Great Northern. His family of three moved around quite a bit.

My father was John Stephen Ede. He was born in Reno, Nevada. His maternal grandmother lived up on Field Street in Sparks where Hubert, Grace, and John lived for a while. John attended school at Kate Smith and went to Junior High School for a couple of years. He graduated in either Colorado or Montana. He and my mother met at dances in Sparks. They were married in 1937. Their first child was born in '38. I was born in '42. They were divorced in '44. Basically, through most of my upbringing, my mother was single, through the late forties, early fifties. She didn't get married again—well, she did, because my younger sister is a half-sister, and mother and her father were married and divorced by 1953. My younger sister was five years younger than I am.

We grew up in Sparks, on the west end of Sparks. Actually, we grew up in Washoe County, because when you walked across the street, you got into the city of Sparks. My first school was Kate Smith School. It was a brick building, four rooms, four grades, and the principal at that time was Katherine Dunn.

Barber: A familiar name.

Ede: There's another school named after her here. She was quite the taskmaster, although I wasn't too appreciative of it. I barely got through most of my schooling. When I was in the service, that's when I learned the value of an education.

I graduated from Sparks High School in 1960. Two weeks after I graduated from high school, I was in the Navy. At that time, there was also the draft, so I was dodging the draft. I joined the service instead.

Barber: Good plan.

Ede: Well, the other thing is, is at that time the Navy had "in before eighteen, out before twenty-one." I turned eighteen on the twenty-fourth of June. I joined the Navy on the twenty-first of June.

Barber: Now, tell me what that means, in at eighteen, out at twenty-one.

Ede: I had to spend three years in the service.

Barber: Is that all that was required at that time?

Ede: Four years was the requirement, but the Navy had a special thing. In before eighteen, out before twenty-one, which was three years, not four. But I did have a six-

year hitch, meaning the last three years was inactive reserve. All I was, was a name on a piece of paper at that time. I didn't have to go to any reserve meetings or anything like that. It was just in case they needed me, they could call me back up, but it didn't happen.

Actually, the time I was in the service was basically just when Vietnam was starting to get hot. I did go through the Cuban Missile Crisis on board a ship.

Barber: Where were you?

Ede: I was in Cuba. Basically, I was a diesel engineman there. On a destroyer I was assigned, we had a couple of Liberty boats that were diesel-driven, and also the emergency generator was diesel-driven. So I was in charge of those. The ship I was on was commissioned in June of 1942.

Barber: It was an older ship?

Ede: It was an older ship. We were following one particular blip on sonar for three days, a brand-new destroyer frigate showed up, took over, lost the blip in three hours. I'm sure it was the sonar operators, the difference in quality of them. Anyway, that was that.

Also while I was in the service I spent most of my time on the East Coast.

Panama City was my first seagoing station on what they call an oceangoing minesweeper. It's 172 feet long, 35-foot beam, built out of oak. It was a wooden ship for magnetic finds, had no magnetism around it. There were four diesel main engines in that ship, and it had aluminum blocks, steel pistons, stainless steel crankshafts, which were very expensive, nonmagnetic. This is all nonmagnetic stuff.

One incident, we were doing what they call a degaussing run, we're running through a magnetic detection field, and one of the engines blew an oil line. Before we could get it stopped, it burnt the crankshaft up, no oil. So I'm down underneath there, pulled the pan off of it, and there's only like about 12 inches' clearance between the ribs of the ship and the pan. So I was the skinniest guy, so guess who got the dirty job of getting that hot oil pan out from underneath there, all 172 quarter-inch bolts?

Barber: How do you repair something like that?

Ede: Well, it took a bunch of us. We had to drop the pan, get two guys under there to get the crankshaft down, and after we got it down, we could slide it out, but it's a 12-cylinder engine, so that's a big, heavy crankshaft. The easy part was getting it out. The hard part was getting it back in, because getting it out, you didn't have to worry about banging things around or scraping things or scratching things. It's shot anyway. You didn't need it. But when we put the new one in, we had to be very careful on where you put it so you would not scratch any of the bearing surfaces, and that was a real job. Of course, one nice thing about that, everything was cold. It wasn't hot.

On board that ship, that was the USS *Vigor*, MS0-473. I spent two years on her. We went to the Mediterranean. It was a fast boat. It took us thirty days to go from Charleston, South Carolina, to Gibraltar, max speed 12 knots, which is about 13 miles an hour. Thirty days without seeing land. It was an experience.

The other thing that was kind of unusual about the ship, there were four minesweepers in our fleet going across there, and the ship that was being our oil tender was an LST, landing ship tank, which had a lot of fuel tanks in it. But the name of it was the USS *Washoe County*. I was the only person on board ship that could pronounce it right. [laughter]

So it was quite interesting. Spent nine months in the Mediterranean. We went to Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Sardinia, and it was a lot of fun.

Barber: Was that your closest call, something going seriously wrong with the ship?

Ede: No, no. We just got out of dry dock in Charleston, South Carolina, after we came back from the Mediterranean, and a hurricane was coming through, so they hurried it up and got us out to sea, no refrigeration, no ice, no air conditioning, no nothing like that. So we're out trying to skirt around the hurricane, and I had the mid watch this one particular morning. Mid watch was from twelve o'clock midnight to four o'clock in the morning. So at about three-thirty, I had to go up and wake up the relief crews. So I come up out of the engine room, got into the main passageway, just about two steps into the main passageway, the ship rolled and I took the next two steps on the wall, then it rolled back up, and I walked the rest of the way on the deck. Well, later that morning, the skipper got on the intercom and said, "Gentlemen, we're the luckiest ship alive. Last night, we took a 37-degree roll. This ship is only supposed to come back from a 35."

Barber: Do you know if any other ships capsized at that time?

Ede: I don't know. I don't think so. We never heard about anything capsizing at that time.

Barber: Terrifying.

Ede: But I do have a picture of our sister ship sitting on top of a wave with the screws out of the water and the sonar dome out of the water.

Barber: Which is not supposed to happen?

Ede: Well, which gives you very little boat in the water. [laughter] Very little boat.

But getting back to growing up here in Sparks, like I said, I went to Kate Smith School.

Barber: Now, how many grades? You said there were four grades. Which grades were those? The youngest?

Ede: Yes, one through four. I had to go to kindergarten at Robert Mitchell School, and then one through four there. Then I went to Robert Mitchell for the fifth grade. At that time, they moved the Sparks High School from where it was on C Street between 15th and C to where it is now, and they made the old high school the junior high, which is now called middle school. So sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, I was over there in the old

Sparks High School building. My older sister was in the first class that went into the new high school from freshman through senior year.

Barber: So a little more continuity at that point.

Ede: A little more continuity at that point. The other thing that was kind of unusual, I had one teacher for six years, never flunked a grade, Mr. Graves.

Barber: The same teacher for all of that time?

Ede: All that time. He was a P.E. teacher and basketball coach. So in the seventh grade he was a P.E. teacher; eighth grade he was a P.E. teacher; went to Sparks High School, he was a P.E. teacher and basketball coach at Sparks High School. So I had Mr. Graves for six years.

Barber: Well, I hope you got along well. [laughs]

Ede: Mostly. Mostly.

Barber: Tell me about where you were living that whole time. Where did you grow up?

Ede: Well, basically, when I first started to do any writing, at that time there were a lot of freebies on cereal boxes. So you had to send the cereal box in to the company, and they would send you stuff. It took me a long time to learn how to spell Sullivan Lane, and at that time we lived at 85 Sullivan Lane.

About the time I started junior high school, my first stepdad was working for the power company, and power company employees could get natural gas in their house for free. We lived in the county, and the power company couldn't put gas in a house that was in the county. So between the power company and my folks, they went down and got the city to put the city limits right around our house.

Barber: Now, was that for any physical reason or is it just because of the jurisdiction?

Ede: Just a jurisdiction issue. The city had the franchise for the gas, the county didn't, so suddenly we're part of Sparks, and they changed the address to 585 Sullivan Lane, instead of 85.

Barber: To correspond with the rest of the city.

Ede: Right.

Barber: Now, you were actually on a ranch, weren't you? There was a lot of property there.

Ede: Well, there were five acres of property, and just after my mother divorced her second husband, she had to sell two and a half acres of it, so I basically grew up on the other two and a half acres.

Barber: When had that property come into the family?

Ede: My grandfather on the Wiltse side bought the property in 1927.

Barber: What was his first name?

Ede: Frank. Frank Wiltse. He died in '37. My grandmother, Julia Wiltse, died in '44.

Barber: And had your mother lived there when she was younger?

Ede: Yes, she was raised there, basically. She was born in '17, so she was ten years old when they bought the property there and started building the house.

Frank Wiltse built the house that I grew up in, and it was a two-story with three bedrooms—two bedrooms upstairs, one downstairs. The bathroom was an add-on after the house was built, before I can even remember. It also had a half basement under it. I still remember canning jars of peaches, apples, tomatoes, zucchini, everything, and putting them on shelves in the basement, and in the wintertime going down to the basement to get a jar of whatever to have for dinner.

Barber: Were you growing those things on your property?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: All of those, with an orchard and everything?

Ede: We had a full orchard. On the south side of the house there was a peach tree, plum tree, several different kinds of apples, crabapple tree, a shed that had a chicken coop, because basically the ranch they were running when my Grandfather Wiltse was alive was a chicken ranch, with eggs.

Barber: Had they had more chicken coops than that, or did it just take one chicken coop?

Ede: They had more. That's the only one that survived when I can remember growing up. There were a couple of concrete pads in the back that we used to play on a lot and get chalk and draw on and make hopscotch and other games on it. But that was the only one shed that had anything that we could put chickens in.

Barber: Did you have chickens there when you were a kid?

Ede: Oh, we had chickens.

Barber: Any other animals?

Ede: Dogs, cats, rabbits.

Barber: Any livestock or anything?

Ede: No, no large livestock. Just the chickens and a few rabbits once in a while.

Barber: Were there other properties in the immediate area that had more animals, that were operating ranches?

Ede: Not really. The property around us between our house and Prater Way was vacant, it was open field, with a ditch running down the middle of it. Behind us, from our house to where El Rancho is right now, most of that was vacant except the piece of property right straight behind us was Nevada Concrete Pipe Company.

Barber: That's where they manufactured pipes?

Ede: Concrete pipes. They manufactured concrete pipe there. I've got lots of small scars on the back of my head where we were playing tag, hide-and-go-seek, or whatever games, and you'd go through. At one time you could stand up and run through pipes. Well, the next time you come through the pipe and you scrape the top of your head on the pipe.

Barber: So it was not fenced in, that property?

Ede: Well, yes and no. It was a three-strand barbed-wire fence.

Barber: Kids will find a way. [laughs]

Ede: Oh, yeah. It's easy to climb over a barbed-wire fence. [laughs]

Barber: You were on Sullivan Lane. What would the cross street be now?

Ede: F Street dead-ended right at our front door.

Barber: So just north of Prater a little bit.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Was Prater at that point kind of a country road?

Ede: No.

Barber: It had been at one point the Lincoln Highway.

Ede: Yes. Well, at one point it was part of the Lincoln Highway. When I grew up there, it was still a main drag, but it was not part of the Lincoln Highway because they'd cut the S-curve in between the end of B Street and the "Y" there.

One little incident I do remember, in 1955, Harolds Club put in the first animated neon sign, Harolds Pony Express Lodge, and they had a cowboy riding a horse galloping, turning around shooting at an Indian, and the Indian was shooting the bow at him, and you could see the arrows.

Barber: How did the neighborhood feel about that?

Ede: Nothing was really said one way or the other.

Barber: Did it make an impression on you?

Ede: Well, yes, because it was an animated sign. Most signs outside at that time were just billboards, you know. Yes, it did. And the Pony Express Lodge, which was right there on the corner of El Rancho and Prater, was where Harolds Club, when they had entertainers come in, they set up the entertainers and high rollers in that lodge. They had a special limousine to take the people back and forth to Harolds Club.

Barber: Now, to your knowledge, seeing the buildings now, are those the original buildings, at the Pony Express Lodge? Is that how it's always looked?

Ede: Yes, as far as I remember it, yes. Looking from some of the maps and aerial photographs we've got, I think Harolds rebuilt a lot of those, tore them down and rebuilt those, especially close to Prater Way.

Barber: I know it had been the site of the Cremer's Auto Court. I don't know if any of those buildings were retained or if it had been completely reconstructed.

Ede: I don't know.

Barber: So tell me what it was like to grow up in this area then. Did it feel like you were in the country?

Ede: Oh, yes, because the thing of it is, it was all open on three sides of us. Grayhaven Lane all the way to Prater Way, there were four houses on the west side of Sullivan Lane. There was us, the Markes, Ziacks next, and then there's a large gap and then Rowes, and then you hit Grayhaven Lane, and just on the other side of Grayhaven Lane was the Stone family. I went to school with Charlene Stone.

Barber: And did they all have a good amount of property at their houses, or were those houses quite close together?

Ede: They were not that close together, no. There were gaps between them. Frank Rowe and I didn't along real well together. Of course, he's four years my senior and he

bullied the hell out of anybody that was smaller than he was. And Raymond Ziack—this is unusual—Raymond Ziack’s house, which was two doors down from where I grew up, which would have been probably three-quarters of a block away, that house was built in Fallon and moved to Sparks.

Barber: That’s a long way to move a building.

Ede: It is, but the thing of it is, at that time the contractor that was building those houses was advertising that. “Build you a house to your specifications, and we’ll move it to your piece of property.”

Barber: Just because they had their building company in Fallon?

Ede: I don’t know, haven’t got the foggiest idea, but I do remember the day that the house was moved coming down Sullivan Lane to get to that piece of property.

Barber: So, a framed house?

Ede: It was a framed house.

Barber: There was a lot of house-moving. I’ve talked to people who were telling me a lot about the Bevilacqua family, who were house movers, especially through Reno and even Virginia City, I think.

Ede: Yes. Well, the Park Motel, which was at 15th and Prater and F Street, the Park Motel was moved from Hawthorne to Sparks.

Barber: Is that right? Was it an operating motel there?

Ede: No, it was a barracks.

Barber: It was? Because the buildings are still there now.

Ede: Yes, the buildings are still there. The original kindergarten building at Kate Smith School was a barracks out at Sierra Army Depot and moved down as a temporary building, which lasted about fifty years. [laughs]

Barber: So just after the forties when they didn’t need as much housing in these places?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: That is very interesting. I’m wondering how you turn a barracks into a motel. Would all of these structures have been connected to each other?

Ede: Well, I think they were connected here to make the motel.

Barber: Did you know who operated that motel, the Park? Was it a family-owned business?

Ede: Yes, it was a family-owned business. The Park Grocery, Park Motel was owned by the Reinhardts. Their daughter, Diane Wallace, was in the museum the other day. She still owns it. Actually, the Park Grocery was the first twenty-four-hour grocery store in the State of Nevada.

Barber: Oh, no kidding? Do you have any idea when that opened? Was that open through your childhood?

Ede: Yes. According to Diane it opened the 24-hour schedule in the late 1950s.

Barber: And that was right beside the motel?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Is that building still there?

Ede: No. They tore it down and put that drive-through coffee thing there on the corner. Across the street where the 7-Eleven was, that was Gephard's Apartments and Used Furniture.

Barber: Pretty small furniture shop.

Ede: It was pretty good size, and they also had apartments in the back side of that. I was working for the fire department when that burned, and that was a hell of a fire.

Barber: So you came back after the service and you became a firefighter.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Right away did you go into training?

Ede: Well, basically I was fourteen years old when I fought my first fire.

Barber: Tell me about that.

Ede: Well, with a couple friends of mine, we were out rabbit hunting north of Sun Valley, and we're down this ravine. We looked up over there and we saw smoke coming up on the other side. What the hell's over there? So we hoofed it up over the top of the hill, and we started looking down, and here's this grassfire roaring up towards us. So we tried stomping some of it out. Just about then the BLM showed up and says, "What are you guys doing?"

"We're trying to put this fire out."

"Well, who started it?"

“We don’t know, because we were on the other side of the ridge.”

“Well, here. Here’s a shovel. Start movin’.”

And that’s how we got involved in firefighting, all three of us, and basically started there. A couple other wildfires they had, they called for help. Now they can’t do it anymore, but you used to be able to volunteer to go fight fires, and we got to where BLM would get a fire, they’d call us.

Then when I was in the service, being a diesel mechanic, I was part of the damage control system, so we had drills and things like that. Then when I came back out of the service, I was basically a certified diesel mechanic by the U.S. Navy, and so I come down here looking for a job as a diesel mechanic, and I found one, but the guy said, “Well, this is a union shop, so you have to go join the union.”

Okay. So I hotfooted it down to the union and told the guy I wanted to join the union, and he said, “Well, you can’t join the union till you’ve got a job.”

I said, “Well, I’ve got a job.”

He says, “Where is it? Because I’ve got people over here sitting on the bench that want it.”

I said, “Well, I went out and beat the bush to get it.”

He says, “Well, you can’t have it. These guys over here are sitting on it.”

I said, “Well, tough shit. Bye.”

So I left and got a job working for Johnson Chevrolet in the auto repair shop, worked there for a while and found out I don’t like this kind of a job.

Then I went to work for Singer Sewing Machine Center, and they closed up. I don’t know why they closed up. They closed up, so I went to work for McMahan’s Furniture, delivering furniture.

From there I went to Harrah’s for a while, slinging change, working graveyard shift again, and I didn’t like graveyard shift, so I quit that and went and found a job at Home Furniture delivering furniture again, and that was much better because it’s a higher-class furniture store than McMahan’s ever thought of being, and their main building was on Island Avenue and Sierra Street, had a seven-story building there, furniture building.

Barber: Is the building still there?

Ede: No, they tore it down to put the judicial court in there, but I think the building was better built than the judicial court.

Anyway, so I was working there. Then my two friends that I grew up with and I went through high school with got to volunteer on the Sparks Fire Department. They invited me in, so I went over there, and in 1966, Farr was looking for another firefighter and asked me if I wanted to join the fire department. I said, “Yes.” I took \$100-a-month pay raise to go there, \$399 a month, paid once a month. So that was interesting. Then, of course, Bill Farr knew practically everybody. He went to school with my mother. That’s the trouble with growing up in the same town. Every teacher I had except one either went to school with my mother or taught my mother.

Barber: I don’t think you told me her name.

Ede: My mother's name?

Barber: Yes.

Ede: Amy. Amy Wiltse was her maiden name. She's ninety-six years old, and if she wasn't going blind, she would probably be living at home again, and she's still sharp as a tack.

Barber: I'm so glad. So how long did the family own the property that you grew up on?

Ede: She sold the property in '61 while I was in the service, moved to another house over off of Brunetti Way.

Barber: Did that area transform pretty rapidly where you grew up? Were some of those old houses retained? Because it's now just complete neighborhoods.

Ede: Yes. Well, the McPherson house is still there. Coopers, who built his house while we were in high school, is on the corner of 21st and F Street. The house that was on the corner of F Street and Sullivan on the north side of the street is gone. They've got apartments there. And they had some huge, huge cottonwoods. Those cottonwoods had to be five foot in diameter.

The Markes' house is still there. Ziacks' house is still there. The Rowe house is still there. Stones' house is still there. Those are all on Sullivan Lane on the west side of the street. Everything else is new. G Street was not cut through until after I got back out of the service. First year my wife and I were married, we were living in the house that I grew up in, renting from my mother, and that's when they started building the apartments around, from F Street to Prater.

Barber: So it was becoming more desirable to live up in that area at that point, you think, or Sparks was just expanding?

Ede: Sparks was just expanding, and they were building a lot of apartments in there. Grayhaven Lane used to be not much wider than one car and dirt. Now it's a two-lane street, with sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and everything else.

Barber: There are some places that are long gone that you probably knew quite well. There was a dairy nearby, wasn't there?

Ede: When I was growing up, the remnants of the Mt. Rose dairy was there, but no, it wasn't operating at that time. Tarners, which was down here off of Pyramid Way, we got our milk from Morrison's and Tarners Dairy.

Barber: It was called Morrison's and Tarners?

Ede: Well, there were two different dairies. I remember in the wintertime going out on the front porch to pick up the milk with cream pushing the cap up that far.

Barber: About an inch more. [laughs]

Ede: It was frozen.

Barber: So they would deliver regularly?

Ede: They would deliver, yes, in glass bottles.

Barber: Every day?

Ede: Well, with three kids, probably every other day.

Barber: So were dairies the only businesses that would deliver with food? Would you go buy the rest of your food other places?

Ede: Well, Baker's Groceries, you could call in your order and they'd deliver your order.

Barber: Would you do that sometimes?

Ede: Mother didn't do that. She always went shopping. Although when she was growing up, they used to deliver eggs. Now, up on the hill on Wedekind, just west of Sullivan Lane, you can still see some of the old chicken coops up there.

Barber: They're empty but they're still there?

Ede: They're just empty. They're still standing. One of them the roof is collapsing in on. There were several chicken ranches up there. The Oppios had a dairy, which is right now where the shopping center is that used to be Albertson's. It's closed now. But that shopping center there on the west side of Sullivan and north of Oddie, that used to be the Oppios, and Cappurros were up there. Gaults were up there. Balmain's were up there. The rock house at the top of Sullivan Lane was built by the Balmain family, and that's native rock.

Barber: So this really was an area that had families who had been there for generations.

Ede: One or two, yes. The thing of it is, that was at one part Little Italy of Sparks.

Barber: I was going to ask you. There were a lot of Italian names.

Ede: There were a lot of Italian names there, Oppios, Cappurros, Brunetti. Brunetti had the fish hatchery. Their house is still standing there on the top of that little swale between I Street and Oddie Boulevard. That army goods and—now what is it—jewelry store right there by the bar, all that area was fish ponds. We used to go up there and walk through the fish ponds all the time and watch them feed the fish and things like that.

Barber: Does that mean they were manmade ponds or they were natural?

Ede: They were manmade ponds.

Barber: And they were harvesting fish and selling them?

Ede: No, they were actually—Nevada Fish and Game was paying them to raise the fish to a certain length and then they would take the fish out and plant them in the rivers and lakes, etc.

Barber: I wasn't aware of that. So when you were talking about it being Little Italy, the people of Italian background seem to have a background more in ranching and farming, not in the railroad [unclear]?

Ede: No, a lot of them were machinists. Burgarellos were machinists, and now Tony Burgarello owns Burgarello Alarms.

Barber: That's the same family. I was going to ask.

Ede: Same family. Who else is over there? Pagni was up in there, and part of their family had ranches over here on the east end of Sparks, but the Pagnis that I knew were machinists in the railroad. The Southern Pacific during the twenties and thirties imported master machinists from Europe, and most of them were Italian.

Barber: And that's how some of these families got here.

Ede: That's how some of these families got here.

Barber: Now, you were telling me that that area a little bit further west on Prater, the neighborhood had some name that was related to the railroad. Were you calling it Conductor Heights?

Ede: Conductor Heights, that's on the south. Well, actually there are two sections of Conductor Heights. There's a section of Conductor Heights on the south side of the railroad tracks between Rock Boulevard, which was 17th Street, and 21st. And then another section was from up on the hill on the other side of El Rancho to Reno city limits, and it was basically View and Field Street and D Street. That little area in there was also, because that's where John Ede was living when he was going to high school.

Barber: And the Gallettis lived in that area, too.

Ede: The Gallettis lived in that area, too. The Gallettis owned the Coney Island Bar. I still think part of their family's involved with it. Copenhagen is Quilici's, and the Quilici that started that used to live across the street till he passed away.

Barber: I was researching that a little bit, and the Copenhagen used to be located closer to Coney Island, and then it looks like when the highway was going in, they tore down that building and they opened a new one in the current location.

Ede: Right.

Barber: Do you remember the highway going in?

Ede: Oh, yes.

Barber: That must have been very disruptive for the whole Prater Way area.

Ede: Well, it was.

Barber: What do you remember?

Ede: Well, I remember they took out some of the nicest houses in the area.

Barber: Oh, really?

Ede: Well, all the SP housing there on B Street Reserve where the Nugget sits now, they took all those houses out to put the freeway in. The trailer court motel unit that was right there on the corner of Coney Island, which is now Galletti Way, is gone, because they tore through there. Four or five of the houses there in Conductor Heights just disappeared because they put that in there. There was a lumber company just on the border of Reno-Sparks on the Reno side. I used to deliver papers to it, except the Sunday paper.

Barber: Except the Sunday paper?

Ede: Except the Sunday paper. Nobody was in the building on Sundays.

Barber: That makes sense.

Ede: That's the only intrusion into Reno that I had on my paper route. The area that my paper route covered was basically from I Street south to the railroad tracks.

Barber: To the railroad tracks south of B Street?

Ede: South of B Street.

Barber: That's pretty far.

Ede: And then from 17th, which is Rock Boulevard, to the Reno city limits.

Barber: And you would do that on your bicycle?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: How long would that take you, approximately?

Ede: On Sundays, about two and a half hours, but during the rest of the week, about an hour, depending on the weather.

Barber: When you first started to do that, were you seeing areas you'd never really spent any time in before?

Ede: Oh, yes, especially south of B Street between Rock Boulevard, which at that time was Home Furniture, but it's now the Rail City, which is 21st Street. That area in there I never ventured into when I was a kid.

Barber: What really struck you about the differences between areas? Were these very different neighborhoods from each other?

Ede: Yes. The area between B Street and the railroad tracks seem to be a bit more rundown, not real pristine, whereas everything on the other side, the north side of B Street, those people took a lot of care in their houses and they had really nice lawns, nice white painted fences, weren't rundown-looking at all. There were a lot of brick homes in there, too.

Barber: And you delivered to a lot of commercial properties too?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: But just on the outside, so you weren't going inside much?

Ede: Well, yes. The thing of it is, is the commercial properties I used to deliver to were either trailer parks or motels. I'd deliver a paper to the office of the motel, and then the manager of the trailer park and some of those permanent residents in the trailer parks would take newspapers.

Barber: So the Park Motel and the Pony Express Lodge, those were pretty nice places?

Ede: The Pony Express Lodge was really a nice place. Park Motel, I really don't remember that until I started high school, and then I was always walking down the back side, because I'd walk up and down on F Street, so I didn't see much of the front side of it.

Barber: Now, it must be that U.S. 40 at that point had bypassed Prater Way.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: So that wasn't really a busy stretch anymore for them.

Ede: Well, not for them, but for local traffic it was, because everyone north of Prater Way would take Prater and then go up Prater to get to Reno.

Barber: So you could have a lot of viable businesses, just not necessarily for tourists maybe?

Ede: Yes. There were just a couple, three different grocery stores, one drugstore that I can remember, two used furniture stores, and Home Furniture had an extension there, bowling alley, Sparks Bowlarium, the Oppios. That's another Italian family, the Oppios.

Barber: You said they had a bowling alley? Where was that?

Ede: Sparks Bowlarium. It was right across the street from Rail City. It's now a little Mexican bar, but it used to be a bowling alley that had ten alleys in there. I never did get a job setting up as a pin boy in there. I know a couple of guys that did, but I didn't.

And you had Wood's Trailer Park at corner of Prater and Sullivan, which is BoJo's now, because I guess Mr. Wood was trimming a tree and fell out of the tree and broke his back.

Barber: A while ago?

Ede: Yes, quite a while ago.

Barber: Now, were you going into places like the Coney Island from an early age?

Ede: Not really, no.

Barber: I just wonder if it was a popular place to just have lunch or anything.

Ede: Oh, yes. When I was growing up, Mother would go there and get tamales.

Barber: Oh, they still made the tamales.

Ede: They made the tamales there.

Barber: They were very popular. A lot of people were selling tamales, but they seemed to be very popular.

Ede: Well, theirs had a different flavor. Well, the funny part of it is, is here you've got Italians employing a German cook making Mexican tamales.

Barber: So they weren't made by the family.

Ede: They employed a cook there, and they were the best tamales. They always had one large olive in the tamale, one black olive. They weren't real thick cornmeal shells, they were not real thin, but they were kind of a medium thickness, and they weren't real dry. They were good. I mean, they were absolutely delicious, and I have yet to get tamales that even come close to what they made. I mean, they were that big. One tamale, one meal, one person.

Barber: So you would buy them and then take them home?

Ede: Take them home and steam them.

Barber: Is that what most people did?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Do you remember them expanding or when they started, if they kind of added more rooms over time? Did it seem like it was smaller at first? I know they had some expansions. I was just curious.

Ede: I know they did, too, but I don't remember them. Because I wasn't in that neck of the woods that often, know what I mean? Early in the morning, delivering papers, late in the afternoon, picking up the fees for the papers. Other than that, I didn't spend a whole lot of time there.

I do remember that hill going down View Street to get down to G Street and then trying to get back up that hill on a single-speed bicycle. It was murder. And on Sundays it was worse because I had a heavy load of papers still.

Barber: Now, it seems to me you were in a really good location as a kid and a teenager for a lot of things to do. It seems that there were a lot of drive-ins and different places you might have gone.

Ede: Well, okay. El Rancho Drive-in Theater was there, and one of the things we did as kids, especially in the summertime, is we'd go back there, and one of us would sneak through a three-strand barbed-wire fence, turn one of the speakers up as loud as we could, dash back across the street, and then sit there and watch the cartoons on the thing until an operator would come out and turn the speaker down. The minute he went back into the shed, we cranked it back up again.

And Frostop Drive-in was there. Used to be a used-car dealership there now, but the building is collapsing. There's nothing in there right now. The gas station is on the corner of 22nd Street, and the next building down was where the Frostop was, and then the car lot on the corner was where Eddie Howden grew up. I remember going up there to his house for Cub Scouts because his mother was a den mother.

Barber: Was the Frostop a drive-in?

Ede: It was a drive-in. It was like A&W. It was competition to A&W, and at our end of the town, we would go there instead of A&W. It was closer, and it seemed like the root beer tasted just as good, so I don't know.

Barber: And there was a Dairy Queen pretty close.

Ede: The Dairy Queen was on 15th, well, actually the same place it is right now, there at 15th. We would go to the movie, which is the Sparks Theater, which is at 14th and B. Walking home, we'd stop and get a Dairy Queen, and it was 5 cents for a cone about that big, 10 cents if you wanted it dipped. You could have it dipped in chocolate, cherry, and I can't remember what the other one was, but anyway, there were three different ones you could dip in, but I remember the cherry and the chocolate were the ones that tasted the best for 10 cents. Now, if you wanted a really big one, you'd get one for 25 cents, and that would last walking from there to Sullivan Lane.

Barber: [laughs] You had it timed out. That's great.

Do you remember how much you were paid for your paper route?

Ede: Weekly paper was 35 cents a week.

Barber: How long did you do that paper route?

Ede: Till I was a junior in high school.

Barber: So this was through in the fifties, the mid-fifties?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Did you have other friends who had paper routes too? You kind of had a pretty big territory, actually. [laughs]

Ede: I had a big territory. Well, when I quit—and the only reason I quit is I got into a fight in school, and the guy was bigger than I was, and we were doing a wrestling match, and we did a twist, and my foot stayed one place and landed on top of my ankle. The doctor said I would have been better off if I'd broke it, but I was in a cast for six weeks, so I couldn't ride a bicycle, so I had to give up my paper route.

But when I did that, the person who was managing it said, "We had to get two people to do your paper route. How did you do it?" Perseverance, I guess. I don't know.

On Prater there were little mom's-and-pop's grocery stores. There was one that I remember, it was a rock building right there at the alley between Prater and C Street. It's still there. The building's still there, but it's a motorcycle gang's bar. Then right across the alley from it was Handy Hobby's, and they're a tattoo parlor now.

Barber: And what was that?

Ede: Hobby shops. Hobby store. Plastic models, railroad models, airplanes, etc.

Barber: So when do you think a lot of these little markets started going away? There were so many of them.

Ede: Safeway.

Barber: Safeway, when that came in? Where was that located?

Ede: Greenbrae Shopping Center. And then Albertson's built there on the corner of 18th and Prater, which is now a Mexican grocery store. Then the other Safeway is where O'Reilly's Auto Parts is. Where they built that Safeway, all the little mom-and-pop grocery stores went away.

Barber: It really seemed to happen that quickly?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: It makes me wonder what those families did if they'd had those markets for so long.

Ede: Well, for a lot of them, basically, their house and the market were one and the same. They lived upstairs.

Barber: Was that true for some of the ones you went to?

Ede: Yes. Hanson's wasn't. My mother did a lot of grocery shopping at Hanson's, which was on B Street catawampus across from the Nugget. It's a vacant lot now. But when the Nugget started expanding, the two Safeway stores and Albertson's kind of dried up Hanson's, and the Nugget bought the building and made a Convention Center out of it. It was a Nugget Convention Center there for a lot of years. It was a block west of the Masonic building, so it was down on 13th Street.

Barber: Do you have any memories of spending time at Deer Park?

Ede: Oh, yes, all summer, swimming. I spent more time swimming in the summertime than you can shake a stick at. Because we didn't want to lose shoes or anything like that, we'd walk down there barefoot, and crossing the streets at one o'clock in the afternoon when it's 90-plus outside, the asphalt street was hotter than heck, and we'd run like mad across the street and hit the sidewalk and [demonstrates]. [laughs] Cool our feet off on the sidewalk and take a slow walk down that block to the next one and run like heck across the street.

Let's see. Mike O'Neal and Dan Reeder lived across the street from the Deer Park, and I remember swimming lessons we had ten o'clock in the morning, swimming at Deer Park, you froze your tootsies off. It was not a heated pool. It was cold, I mean cold, almost like Lake Tahoe.

Then the kiddies' pool, which was shallower, you'd get out of that pool and you'd go hit the kiddies' pool and warm up. [laughs] And the lifeguards kept trying to chase us out of there, because there were swimming lessons, and they've got little kids in the small pools. We'd go hit that pool just to warm up a little bit.

Then the other place that was warm was the building that was right here, and for about four feet away from the building, the concrete was hot. So we'd go lay down on the concrete to warm up, too, get the reflection off the building, the white building, onto the concrete. And then learning to dive off the diving board.

Barber: What was in that building?

Ede: That was a changing room and locker room for putting your clothes and stuff in.

Barber: So it sounds like it was very organized. They had lifeguards. They had swimming lessons.

Ede: Oh, yes. The pool was built in 1942, opened in May of 1942, and the City of Sparks ran that, still does. They had lifeguards, although most of the lifeguards were teenage girls. They had one adult supervising lifeguard, and then they had the people taking the money was adults, and the rest of them were teenagers.

Barber: Did it cost something to swim there?

Ede: Ten cents.

Barber: Ten cents a day?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: So did that seem like a pretty good deal?

Ede: Oh, yes. All-day babysitting for 10 cents, that's a hell of a deal. [laughs]

Barber: Would you just stay there for hours and hours in the summer?

Ede: Oh, yes. We'd go down there, go down there for swimming lessons at ten o'clock, we would leave at eleven-thirty, and you'd come back in at one o'clock when they opened the pool, and I usually didn't get home until six.

Barber: Sounds like it was just a big summer activity.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Did they sell snacks or anything?

Ede: No. No food allowed in the pool.

Barber: Just swimming.

Ede: And it was lots of swimming. I remember a couple times we tried to swim there at night. I think it was either the O'Neals or the Reeders would call the cops. We'd hear the cops' siren and climb up over the fence and get away before the cops showed up. I think the cops did it on purpose. They'd hit the siren coming out of the station.

Barber: So is it like today where the pool is fenced off but then the park is always open, the rest of the park?

Ede: Yes.

Barber: Was the rest of the park used a lot for other things?

Ede: Everything. They had picnics down there all the time, different family events. Sundays were really crowded down there, some kind of an event going on all the time. In the springtime, a lot of the schools had their final days down there at the park, different classes. I remember Saturday nights they had some bands that played down there. That was always a big crowd.

Barber: Was there a little stage?

Ede: Oh, yes. The stage is still there, except when I was growing up, you could get under it because it was all pipes and a deck on top of it, and I guess they got vandals in there. Anyway, they closed off the underneath part.

I don't think they had power, but the bands—well, the thing of it is, it wasn't electric guitars either. I mean, they had clarinets, saxophones, trumpets, all the wind instruments. So it was a regular-type dance-band-type thing. Of course, at that time, Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, all the big bands were still well known, and you could get the records of them. That was before people got real hooked on TV, and people made their own music and things like that. So you had a lot of different bands.

There was always a baseball game going down there somewhere. Sandlot baseball was great. It didn't have any adults involved, so, consequently, you could have fun. There were about eight or ten of us that ran around together, basically probably age seven through seventeen. When we'd get a baseball game going together, kids under ten years old got to swing the bat until they hit the ball. Over ten years old, three strikes and you were out. We had fun. I don't remember a score. We didn't care. We just had fun playing ball, you know. And we used to play there at the Kate Smith School. Actually, that school grounds ran from the edge of the McPhersons' property, and their house was on Sullivan Lane, all the way down to 19th Street.

Barber: That was all the school property?

Ede: That was all school property.

Barber: Was it all fenced in around that?

Ede: It was fenced in. But the thing of it is, you had a gate in one section of it about as wide as that wall. There was a basketball court, but the basketball court was not smooth. It was not concrete. There was nothing on it. There were big rocks like this hanging, so you bounced a basketball and there was no way you could learn how to dribble, not on that.

Then they had jungle gyms and high bars and the swingsets and all kinds of things you don't see on playgrounds anymore, teeter-totters, monkey bars, jungle gyms. Fell off the jungle gyms, you only did that once. After that, you learned how to hang on. You learn by your mistakes a lot more than you ever learn by your successes. [laughs]

Barber: Now, tell me, do you remember, did you go into Reno very much? What would be the reasons to take that drive?

Ede: Shopping for clothes, Sears. I remember trying to keep up with my mother. She was a fast walker. Sierra Street, you had J.C. Penney's, Sears. Well, no. J.C. Penney's was over here. Sears, Montgomery Wards, J.C. Penney's. When we'd go looking for clothes, that's the three stores we'd go in, and I'll tell you what, it was a footrace keeping up with Mother as she was going from one store to the next. My wife wonders why I walk so fast.

Barber: So it really was shopping central.

Ede: Yes, it was shopping central, because, you know, you had Woolworth's over on Virginia Street side. You had J.C. Penney's, Sears, Montgomery Wards, the Wonder Store, Joseph Magnin, Granada Theater, Crest Theater. We never went to the Crest Theater. It was too damn expensive.

Barber: Oh, they cost different amounts?

Ede: Oh, yes. The middle one was the Granada. The Majestic and the Tower were cheaper. Sparks was the cheapest. I mean, it was like 15 cents. I remember for 25 cents I could go to the movies and get a candy bar at the movies.

Barber: So when you would go there, someone would have to drive you?

Ede: To downtown Reno?

Barber: Sure.

Ede: As we got older, we could take the bus down, but most of the time Mom would want to go see a movie, and we'd all go to the movie and either go to the Majestic or the Granada.

Barber: Did those cities seem very separate from each other?

Ede: Oh, yes. There were definitely three miles between Sparks and Reno.

Barber: What do you remember about the Reno side of 4th Street as you came into town?

Ede: A lot of motels. Actually, the Sandman Motel was the last building in Reno, because from there to Sparks was all empty. And when you got to Galletti, which at that time was called Coney Island Drive, you had the first motel on the south side of the street, and then on the north side was the homes. Then you had the Coney Island Bar there, and Copenhagen was down the street a little bit further.

Barber: So really between the Sandman and Coney Island—

Ede: Nothing.

Barber: Casale's, I guess, was there, the Halfway Club.

Ede: Yes, the Halfway House was there but—

Barber: Very small building.

Ede: Yes. But it was standing out there by itself. The gas station on the corner there at Galletti and 4th, B Street, didn't exist. That wasn't built until the freeway started being built through there, and Washoe County took over the old motel, what was left of it, after the freeway went through.

Barber: The motel by the Coney Island?

Ede: Yes. And of course I don't remember it, but that area was basically the Coney Island Water Park.

Barber: On the south side of Coney Island?

Ede: On the south side of B Street.

Barber: What kind of water park?

Ede: Well, boats and not much. In 1927 they didn't do a whole lot of swimming. They had different paddleboats, canoes, and things like that.

Barber: So do you ever remember anything there left? No, that was all gone.

Ede: That was gone by 1927. It lasted from 1904 to 1927.

Barber: I have some pictures from earlier there, and it seems for a while later they kept referring to Coney Island, but there must have been a variety of different things there.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: But then at some point an auto court seems to have taken over that area.

Ede: Yes. Well, the State of Nevada Department of Transportation, Automotive Division got one half of it, and the Washoe County Roads has got the other half.

Barber: So I guess one last thing I'll ask you to just kind of bring it all together a little, when you were a firefighter you talked about one fire along Prater, at one of the furniture stores. Were there other fires along there that you remember that you worked on?

Ede: Not particularly. The Gepford fire was probably the most notable.

Barber: Did it burn that whole building down?

Ede: Yes. Well, the thing of it is, is that Charlie Gepford added on to that building without rhyme nor reason and no building permits, so it was all chopped up. Unless you lived there, you wouldn't know how to get around inside of that, and being a firefighter, full of smoke, you didn't want to go in there because you'd get lost so damn easy. The thing of it is, is that the fire was—basically when we got there, the first engine companies who got there on the scene, it already vented through the roof, so there was no reason to go inside itself. We were trying a lot of different things to try to put that fire out, but it was just so tight in there. The hallways were basically almost only 24 inches wide so you could get more rooms in the apartments, and it was so full of stuff, especially the used-furniture section of it, there was just so much fuel in there, and no way of getting water into it. It was cooking. I do remember that they blew an engine out of one of the fire engines. It overheated and fried.

Barber: Pretty devastating.

Ede: Yes. I'm sure there were other fires on there, but it was either before I became a firefighter or they were held. They weren't multiple alarms. They were handled by the on-duty crews. A lot of the buildings were just torn down because people sold the property and the new property owners wanted to do something else.

Barber: So have you retired now?

Ede: Oh, yes.

Barber: When did you retire?

Ede: July 11th, 1994.

Barber: And you've been quite busy in your post-retirement.

Ede: Oh, yes. I belong to the Sparks Museum. I was on the board of trustees for eighteen years. I belong to the Sparks Kiwanis Club of Downtown Sparks. We have a bicycle project that we have. We've moved for the third time in five years, and most of it's been because we had to. Not only did we outgrow the space we were in, but the property owners didn't want us there any longer.

Barber: What does that project do with bikes?

Ede: Well, basically its primary purpose is to get and refurbish old bikes and give them to kids at risk. Now, it's not a giveaway program. The thing of it is, the kids have to earn the bike somehow. We just deliver the bikes to the program that makes the kids earn it. Boys and Girls Clubs, they have a bike up on the shelf, and for every bit of homework you do, you get a Boys and Girls buck, and on the bicycles, you've got to have so many bucks before you get that bike.

Schools, Washoe County Schools, especially the grammar schools and middle schools, they have programs where kids can earn bikes by getting good grades, improving your citizenship, and other processes to be able to earn that bike. It's not a giveaway.

In three of the middle schools, we have an after-school project that is bike clubs. We do this in the springtime for sixteen weeks. We go in and teach kids how to work and fix bikes, and if they do good enough work, they can earn the bike that they were working on. We also teach them how to ride safely.

So we give about 1,200 bikes away a year to different school projects. UNR students come up and buy bikes from us all the time because they can get around campus a lot easier on a bicycle. We have a lot of entry-level bikes so if people want to learn how to ride a bike or see if they would like to ride bikes, we have them come up and buy a pretty decent bike and learn how to handle it.

We're trying to put together a project now where we have Saturday morning bike rides and Wednesday evening learn how to fix your bike. We always figure that if you know how to fix your bike, you're going to ride it, because if you can't fix it, it's going to sit in the garage and collect dust.

The biggest fear most people have is changing a tire, replacing, fixing a flat. This area's got a lot of what we call goat heads, thorns. They've got two little horns on them like that and look like a goat head, and those things will go through a bicycle tire like you wouldn't believe. The thing of it is, you break them off, and that little point still works its way through the tire and punches a hole in the tube. But there are ways of getting around that, too.

Barber: That's a great project.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: I can see how that would be very popular, but that's also a lot of bikes to store, so you do need a lot of room for that. Where's that located now?

Ede: We're at 145 Catron, which is up off of Parr Boulevard. We've got about 25,000 square feet, and 19,995 square feet of bicycles. [laughter]

Barber: This has come full circle because you were such a bicyclist when you were young with your paper route. Now you're helping the other kids learn how to ride safely.

Ede: Yes. Well, the thing of it is, is that people don't understand that the state of Nevada, a bicycle, if it has a wheel that's bigger than 20 inches, 20 inches or bigger, is considered a vehicle with all rights, privileges, and responsibilities of any other vehicle on the road. NRS.

Barber: Is that unusual state-wise?

Ede: No, it's actually taken after another state's rules. Most all the states have basically the same kind of rule as if you're riding a bicycle on the street, you obey the same laws any other vehicle does.

Barber: Learn the rules of the road. [laughs]

Ede: Learn the rules of the road. You don't ride against traffic. You don't ride on the sidewalk. Helmets aren't required in the state of Nevada, but they're suggested, and I can show you some helmets that people have crashed with, and they're still walking and talking today because they had the helmet on.

Barber: And I'm sure you show the kids those, too.

Ede: Oh, yes, we do. We also have a demonstration where we have two cantaloupes. Cantaloupe is about the same texture as your skull. All right. How high off the ground is your head? We drop one in a helmet. We drop one out of a helmet. Guess which one survives.

Barber: That's a good exercise. [laughs]

Ede: Yes. And the other thing—I'm on my soapbox here.

Barber: That's all right. [laughs]

Ede: The other thing is that 85 percent of all serious bicycle accidents—the definition of a serious bicycle accident is where somebody's taken to a hospital in an ambulance—are one-vehicle accidents; you fall off your bike. And less than 5 percent are vehicles versus bicyclists, but yet everybody's petrified about hitting a car or getting hit by a car.

Barber: Just learn how to bike safely.

Ede: Yes.

Barber: It seems like a good note to end on. [laughs] Anything else you want to add?

Ede: No, I can get off my soapbox.

Barber: It's a very valuable way to spend your time, and I think that's just such a wonderful thing that you're doing.

I want to thank you so much for talking to me about Sparks. I may follow up with some questions, but I think that will do it for today. Thank you so much.

Ede: You're welcome.