

Ben _ Dave oral history interview (2024-01-30 14_12 GMT-7)

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Interview with Ben Vagher

00:00

David:

All right. All right. So I'd love for you to start just by kind of introducing yourself, sharing your name, and just a little bit more about yourself.

00:08

Ben:

Yeah, this is Ben, Ben Vagher and I've lived here in Broomfield since 1975. I moved here right out of college and went to the University of Southern Colorado, and I got a teaching job up here in District, Adams County District 12. So I started out as a teacher and a coach in that district. And I had an uncle that lived here in Broomfield clear back in the 60's, and we used to visit him and I always like Broomfield a lot. So when I got the job of teaching, I really worked, I really wanted to live in Broomfield because it was a bedroom community, right?

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

It was, it was kind of like living out on the farm like I was raised. So I moved here, brought, started my family up here, and I taught school. I only taught school for about, oh it was about five or six years. And then I did a career change, I went into the world of construction. And we started our family In 1976. We had our first daughter, and then our second daughter in 1979. So anyway, we started a family here, I taught school until 1980. In the summertime, I would work for a construction company and asphalt construction company, because I needed the money to help supplement my teaching career. And I did that for a couple years. The second year, the president of the company approached me and said, we'd like you to come to work here full time. You have a math degree, and we need an estimator, and we think it'd be a good fit. And I said, nah, I'm teaching and coaching, and that's what I want to do, and, and then he told me what he'd pay me. So, so I said listen, I'll do it for a year and see if it's a good fit. And it was a good fit. And so I, I made a career change. I went into the world of construction, road construction and, and worked my way up in that area for sure. I've always been a big fan of Broomfield. I've seen a lot of changes in the 50 years we've been here. There was a point in time where it seemed like it was growing a little bit too fast for me, and I was losing some of that country feel. So we said, well

let's see, maybe we need to move away from Broomfield into more of a, further north or further east. Thank goodness we didn't make that move, because we've not been disappointed in Broomfield at all.

David:

Oh, that's great.

Ben:

We've had, I think we've had some tremendous leadership that helped grow this, this community we're in. And it, it's had that country feel, that home feel to it the whole time. Even as fast as we've grown, and all the increases we've had and everything else, it still is a great place to live. And it was a great place to raise my girls, for sure.

David:

Fun.

Ben:

So, you want me to keep going? Or you want me to . . .

03:34

David:

Yeah, well, I just have just a little bit of a clarification about something you said or just, I don't know, just to follow up on it a little bit. What do you think makes the sense or the feeling, and I've heard this from a number of other people that even, even despite how much Broomfield has grown over the years, a lot of people do talk about that kind of sense of community and that, you know, connection and small town even, feel, that sort of thing. What do you think it is that makes it like that?

04:03

Ben:

Yeah, I think a lot of it has to do with just the nucleus of people that lived here. I mean, they're just down to earth people, and a lot about how Broomfield is, it, from its very roots it's always been a community that's been, that's stuck together. Right? They always wanted to, to be engaged and, and always looking out for each other. And it's so easy to get around this, around Broomfield and, and introduce yourself and get to know more people all the time. Very, very friendly. And I think a lot of that has to do again with the type of leadership that was put into place to run this place. Our city manager was awesome. The Board, the City Council at the time, before we became a City and County of Broomfield, that was you know, they really, they did a great job of building Broomfield correctly.

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

So it's, it's just close knit, close knit, even, even some of the perimeter growth that's gone on here in Broomfield. Yeah, it has stretched us out a little bit, whether it's the Arista area, or whether it's the Anthem area, yeah, it has stretched us out. But still, even having said that, we still are a pretty strong

community. And I just, that feeling just hasn't gone away. It just, it just hasn't. And you don't even have to be somebody who's lived here 50 years to feel that way. You can talk to people who've been here for two or three years, and I don't think you're gonna get them to move.

David:

Right.

Ben:

You know, whether it's the services that are provided by the city and county, or whether it's just, you know, the friendliness that goes on, you can go on and on about what makes Broomfield feel so special. And you don't, you don't capture that in a lot of even adjacent cities, cities. You don't, you don't see that. You really don't. It's, it's not, we're not fragmented like some of the other cities are. We're not.

06:13

David:

I love that. So tell me a little bit more. You mentioned you had a couple of daughters kind of in the late 70's, that sort of thing. Were they with BVSD, or Adams 12, or where, which district were they in?

06:30

Ben:

Yeah they were raised, they went through grade school at Nativity of Our Lord School.

David:

Okay, yeah. Cool, yeah.

Ben:

And then from there, they went to the high school. And they went there and both of them graduated from high school there and then went on, one went to CU, and one went to CSU.

David:

Very good.

Ben:

I, one of the things about our family is, our common denominator in sports is basketball. I played college ball and, and I coached, and I've always coached to some capacity. And whenever, I coached Nativity when they were at Nativity. And then when they went to the high school, I went right with him and got, and went over there and volunteered to coach, Coach Crowell over there, and I coached over there for 20 plus years.

David:

Oh wow.

Ben:

Yeah, it was, it was, it was a fun run and a neat run. So I'm a big fan of Broomfield High School. I've been engaged with them, I don't coach there anymore. But we go to the games, I'm going to their basketball games tonight. So I stay pretty close to that environment. We have, my oldest daughter, Leah, Leah Sarno, she, we have four grandchildren there, four, four with her first marriage, two with her, that she inherited, so there's a total of six. But they, all are gone, have gone or going through Broomfield High School right now.

David:

Oh nice, nice. Fantastic.

Ben:

So, and my other daughter lives clear in Nova Scotia and Halifax.

David:

Oh, wow.

Ben:

She, so we have two grandchildren there. So . . .

08:00

Okay. Do you get to see I'm pretty often, or kind of . . .

Ben:

Well the COVID

08:03

stuff stopped it for a while, right? But yeah, we try to make it out there two or three times a year. And then she tries to make it here every year with the kids and stuff, so . . .

David:

Nice.

Ben:

. . . we do the best, we do the best we can. My daughter just lives five houses from me, so . . .

David:.

Oh wow, that's nice.

Ben:

. . .that works out pretty good.

08:20

David:

For sure, for sure. So tell me a little bit more, I just want to talk about basketball for a minute. I'm from the Hoosier state and so basically it's in my blood. I have to like basketball. And I do. I love it. But what have you seen as far as like, how the, I don't know, just a sport has progressed in your time as a coach or like how the attitude of the kids, anything like that, anything changed over time?

08:48

Ben:

Well, because I had two daughters, obviously I coached in the, I did a lot of coaching for the girls, but I did coach my grandsons too, for sure. So I've coached both of them as they played. Yeah, the game of basketball has evolved. Right? It, it's changed some. A little bit more on the boys side than the girls side. Although the girls' side of basketball is changing as we go. We, we had five state championships in a row here at Broomfield, and then we skipped a year, and then we had another championship, but at a higher level 6, uh 5A. And we had some really talented girls at that time. More important though, we had a really, Coach Crowell did a great job of developing a good culture, a good winning culture over there.

David:

Right?

Ben:

It was a lot of fun to play, or to coach under that environment. The boys' coach, the boys program is strong too. The boys program, the boys basketball has changed. you probably know that, David. A lot of what is done in the game is amazing to me. They're very fast, very quick, they could jump. And a lot of the game is played out around a three point line, which I (inaudible) when I played.

10:09

David:

Yeah, there's a lot of things that drive and kick, it seems like you do a lot of like, post up that sort of thing back in the day, and now it's a lot of the drive and kick, three pointers and that sort

10:20

of thing, then.

Ben:

Yeah, post, you don't see much posting up anymore.

David:

No.

10:24

Ben: Now, now we did it in the girls game. We, we continue to do it there and, but no, it was all penetration then you're playing above the rim, that kind of stuff. But it's still, to me it's still very entertaining and it's, I enjoy watching the, you know, watching the athletes, I enjoy the game a lot in a

lot of different ways. But no, it's changed a lot over the years. They don't, they don't make a three second, I saw the first three second call I think I've seen in two years, just about a week ago or two weeks.

David:

Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

10:59

I feel like, I feel like the refereeing is also a little bit, like you just cannot quite defend as physically as you used to be able to, kind of like back in the day, you know. But you know, just differences.

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Let me, because that's interesting, because they did, CHASA did, or the, basketball tried to, tried to stop that, I guess you would say - the roughness, the toughness, the hand checking, all that. So there was an era there for a while where they said no hand checking, you know, none of that. I'll tell you what, they backed off of that. I think the game . . .

David:

Did they really?

Ben:

I think the last few years, couple years, two or three years. I've seen the game go back up in physicality.

David:

I think that's good. I think that's good.

Ben:

Which I like. I think if there's anything, I mean, if it's over the top, it's over the top. Make the call, right?

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

So . . .

David:

Interesting.

Ben:

But yeah, it's. I think I just see a little bit more hand checking, a little bit more, especially inside, you're able to push and shove a little bit more.

David:

(Inaudible)

Ben:
There you go. Yeah.

12:04
Did you play, David?

Ben:
Oh, just for fun.

Ben:
Yeah.

David:
Yeah, I still, I like to play a bit. Anyway, no, thank you Ben, I appreciate that. I usually wouldn't go that in depth on something like that but I, I love

12:18
basketball.

Ben:
Yeah, that's good stuff.

12:21
David:
Absolutely. So, so tell me a little bit more about some of the things you've been involved in, in Broomfield, like organizations, different groups that you've worked with, that sort of thing.

12:30
Ben:
Let me walk down my, my career path a little bit with you because it kind of ties together. After I went into the world of construction, I worked my way up in the, in this, in the construction, road construction industry. And then I made a decision in 1995 /96 to start my own company. I've always had that entrepreneurial spirit about myself. So I said, I'm going to start my own company. So I started my own asphalt company up and built it up to a pretty good size. It took about 20 years to do. But I was able to do a lot of work for the City and County of Broomfield, had a contract with them, with a lot of cities and county, and the state. So I was very lucky, very fortunate to be able to do that. We did it from scratch. Started out of our house and built it up from there. And my, I had an exit strategy. I had two girls who did, I'm sure they didn't want to be in the world of construction, road construction, so I had an exit strategy to build it and sell it at some point, which I did. I sold it probably about, you know how time goes, probably about six, seven years ago now. So when I sold it, I was very busy with the business, for sure. When I sold it, that and coaching basketball, but when I sold it, I told myself, I made the decision I want to, I certainly want to give back to the community that was so good to me, and that we live in, in a lot of ways. So I said, the best way for me to do that is to my, engage myself, whether it's on boards or

whether it's on volunteer, whatever may be. So I was very aggressive of, of just doing that. It wasn't that hard to get on, right? At all. I mean, and so I've been busy the last seven to ten years, let's just say seven to ten, on, on a, on a role of being a volunteer or being on boards. So I'm actively, I was actively involved with the Broomfield Community Foundation. I was president there for two years. I was term limited off. So a lot of exciting things happened at that point in time. I've been on the Senior Resource Board, SRB, I've been on that thing for too long probably, because they don't have term limits . . .

David:

Oh, okay.

Ben:

. . . so I'm the president of that and I've been there for pretty close to 12 years, on that, so that's an extended one. I'm also on the, right now I'm the Broomfield Rotary, I'm the president of the Broomfield Rotary, going on my second year there, very active in the Rotary. Because this does, does a great job of helping support Broomfield in the nonprofits. So we got a lot of moving parts over there we're doing, and I'm also on the board of Ba Swann.

David:

Oh, yeah, mmm-hmm.

Ben:

We're getting ready to tear that building down and build a brand new school, so that's exciting to do that. And I'm also chairman of the Republican Party, the GOP party here in Broomfield, also. So what else . . .

David:

Busy, you're busy, I tell ya.

Ben:

And I, you know, I, yeah, it's all by choice. Right? It's my choice, so, you know, that's, that's what I'm trying to do to give back to my community. I want to set a good example for my children and my grandchildren, that this is a great place to live, and it's just, it's, it's, it's important to be a part of it. And it's important to be productive, even at an older age, because, you know, I'm going to be 72 here pretty quick. So I just want to continue to do this. And my, my wife, Katherine, allows me to, to do this. As long as we take a vacation once a while we're fine.

16:28

That's good. Where do you like to go for vacation?

16:30

Well you know, we go down to Cancun quite a bit. We have a timeshare down there, so we just slip down there for a week. The kids love it down there and play around for a little bit. We always try to take a, one major trip a year, European trip, or somewhere else we haven't been. COVID slowed us down a little bit there, but we, we'll get something back on the, we went to Poland this year.

David:
Oh, wow.

Ben:
So we'll continue, yeah, we'll continue to pop in on a big trip once in a while.

16:57

David:
That's great. That's great. If you were to change one thing about Broomfield, or just kind of like, think about what, what can make Broomfield a better community. What, what are some things that come to mind?

17:16

Ben:
You know, that's a tough one. I, I, I think we're on a, on a good track right now. I think the thing that, that I would, if I, if I was to talk to somebody, like the mayor, or Jennifer Hoffman, which I talk to her quite a bit, I think the things we need to be, not so much what we could do positive, I just, there's some things we've got to be careful with what we do, right? Because, like for instance, the Bank Center that we're going to tear down over here, the Events Center, those kind of decisions we can't really afford to do anymore. You know, so I'm just, I get a little concerned on some of the projects we seem to be taking on, right? As a city and county, I don't want us, as a government to grow too big, where we're just bigger than what we should be. I just want us to be very efficient, very careful of what we do - very, very careful. Because if we don't, then we, we're going to become something we're not. Right? So I look at it more that way, and, and making sure you make all those positive moves. I don't need the City and County of Broomfield to, to do any more than that, to be very, very efficient for what they do because us citizens, us citizens, us nonprofits, turn it over to us. Let us, let us build this, continue to build the city and county the way it should be built - grassroots up. We'll do a good job.

18:45

David:
Yeah, yeah. I like that. Thank you. That's, that's fantastic. So I'm curious too, just to ask a little bit more about your kind of early days in Broomfield and kind of, you said your first impression was a good one. You had an uncle who lived here or something?

19:05

Ben:
Yeah, yeah. You know, I, my uncle lived over, it wasn't even the first filing, it was over there on the east side, I mean the south side of 120th.

David:
Oh wow, old Broomfield, yeah.

Ben:

Old, old Broomfield. And he had a house that's still there.

David:

Okay.

Ben:

Yeah. It's over there by the rental place, a little bit further, right over there by A Precious Child, on the north side of Precious Child there's a few houses right there.

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

Yeah.

David:

Yeah, I know where that is, mmm-hmm.

Ben:

And so we'd come up here, we'd come up here, you know, once or twice a year for a few years, and again, he, I don't know what year he moved there. It could have been mid 60's at the latest. So we had a, and I mean it was, there wasn't much to Broomfield at that point in time at all, you know, and it was just kind of like a, kind of like, because I grew up down by Lamar. Colorado in a very small town. So it was like going to a small town, visit him in a small town. And so I always had an impression about Broomfield was, just a real small town. I liked it, you know. So it was easy for me, after I got out of college, was saying, and come to Broomfield I said, I mean, come to Denver area, I want to go to Broomfield, I want to live in Broomfield, so . . .

20:23

David:

Yeah. I like that. Yeah, it is interesting to hear people's perspectives too, because some folks will say, yeah, when I moved here it felt like I was moving to the middle of nowhere, and I hated the fact that I was moving to the middle of nowhere. And so some people have kind of the opposite, you know, oh but it's not like that anymore kind of thing, you know, so . . . Yeah, so it's really interesting to hear people's stories about, you know, their first impressions for sure.

20:48

Ben:

You know what, the other part to that, David, I mean, being on the Rotary and stuff you, some of the, some of the individuals that helped build Broomfield, other than just the leadership, is pretty dang impressive. I mean, you know, the Rotary started in 1958.

David:

Yeah. That's early.

Ben:

It's, it's, the history is pretty impressive. And, and some of the things that were accomplished here and some of the things that were done.

David:

Absolutely.

Ben:

Yeah, you know, and I, I like, I like reading about that, that's for sure.

David:

That's,

21:21

That's amazing. Yeah, I think I was thinking too about, you mentioned you were involved with Bal Swan and I, I had a chance to talk to Debbie Kunz, and then she referred me to Ann Hoffman, who was really early on an employee for the foundation, I think, I think it was a foundation at the time . . .

Ben:

It was.

David:

. . . yeah, but just really amazing when you think about how just, kind of, people who lived here said this is an important thing to do, and we want to make this part of our community. It's just really, really spectacular. So . . .

Ben:

Yeah

21:57

it is, you know, and some of that, I mean, they were just, a lot of that was just again, real grassroots effort, right? They had to do some of the shoveling, or some of the pitching of whatever, right? I mean it, it was truly hands, hands on.

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

Boots on the ground.

22:15

David:

Yep, just get it done and do what needs to be done.

Ben:
Yeah.

David:
Absolutely.

22:20

Ben:
Yep.

22:22

David:

Well wonderful. Ben, is there anything we haven't talked about yet? Or that you wanted to mention that we haven't, haven't discussed?

22:33

I want to talk about the, I like the future of Broomfield.

David:
Oh, yeah, let's

22:37

talk about it.

22:37

Ben:

Let's talk about the future. The future Broomfield to me is, because we're I, I don't know what the percentages are, probably 70% built out, or somewhere in that category. That additional 30%, I want to make sure that we don't lose what we've gained. I want to make sure as we move forward, whether it's bringing business in or bringing new residents in, things are changing, right? I mean density's changing, corporations are changing. There's change going on. But there was change going on in the past too. But that change, I, I think we just don't want to get lost in it to a point where we're not Broomfield anymore.

David:
Right.

Ben:

I think the next 30% of growth, it's critical that we just continue to keep Broomfield Broomfield as we move forward. If we don't, then we're, we're not going to like, we're going to lose something we shouldn't lose at all. I've got, I've, I'm working hard to, to, I'm hoping that some of my grandchildren, if not most of my grandchildren live here and raise a family here in Broomfield. And that's difficult to do.

We know it is because housing is expensive, and we've got work to do to try to make that happen. But that's just the way it is. But I know that those, I'll just talk about my grandkids, I know once they start their family and stuff here, they're not going to be disappointed being, and living here in Broomfield. At all. So I'd like to see us go from one generation to the next generation to the next generation to the next generation.

David:
Yeah.

24:29

Absolutely. Absolutely. What do you think it would take for that to kind of happen, and I definitely understand the piece of like, it's really, just housing prices being what they are, it's difficult to, to make that work for a young family or for a young, you know, a young person coming into the community, but what do you think, what do you think that looks like?

24:51

Ben:
You know, it, we've got to be careful on how we support that or not support it. You know, when I was, when I moved to Broomfield, I couldn't afford a house, I can tell you that right now. I was on Sheridan and 136th over here on the west side, some of the starter homes and I could, I was lucky enough to get into a home there. But I couldn't afford the house payment. I had to go work, I delivered Denver Post newspapers, in the car. I delivered that for four years so I could live in that house. So I had to sacrifice. That's what I had to do at that point in time. And I was fortunate enough to move up, my fourth house here. So that, all that's good. Having said that, it's, it's, the escalation of housing prices and that type of thing, it's a tough one. It's tough for young children to be able to, to get to a point where they can afford it. And I don't expect, I don't expect the government to make them affordable. I really don't. They have to be careful on what they can do or not do there. You can't hit, you can't make it happen for everybody. It's impossible.

David:
Yeah.

Ben:
Right? I mean, I can see where maybe there's some low hanging fruit, you need to take care of. I get that. But we just need to continue because a lot of this is market driven and I don't have a great answer for you. I really don't. I just know that it's going to be tough to do.

David:
Right. Right.

Ben:
Just tough to do.

David:

Yeah,

26:26

yeah, for sure. So anything else kind of about that build out, you know, I think you're exactly right. There's, you know, what, 25%, there's the Baseline area up there is kind of the biggest kind of single area that is yet to be developed, but what, what would that look like kind of ideally in your mind when you think about it?

Ben:

So,

26:50

you know, we know it's going to be high density, right? It's going to be high density up there and you're going to have, you're going to have a, a different commercial area, different economy up there, because you have Highway 7, so all that's going to have a little different look to it, right? It just is. It, it, the key, not the key, the important thing about the Anthem area or that area, you've got to figure out, we've got to figure out how to keep them part of Broomfield and not be in some kind of satellite town.

David;

Right.

Ben:

Right? I mean you were separated, we are separated by, you know, 470, so we've just gotta be, work hard at, I, I challenge the leadership, when I see 'em, I challenge Jennifer, we've got to continue to figure out how we keep them in the loop.

David:

Yeah.

27:40

What are the connection points?

27:41

Ben:

It's challenging. I'm telling you, David is challenging because I'm on the Senior Resource Board, so we've got the Anthem area up there with seniors, and we're reaching out to 'em all the time, and they're kind of on their own little island up there.

David:

Yeah.

Ben:

They really are. And, and so we try to, we try to penetrate that as much as possible. And once we penetrate it, then they say, okay, you know, yeah, I'll come to Broomfield to do this or do that. But it's a challenge. There's no question about it.

David:

Yeah.

28:10

Ben:

But we can't

28:13

afford not to try. Cannot.

David:

Absolutely, it's really

28:17

important. We're, so I'm part of the Arts and History team, and we're really excited this year, we're going to Anthem with the Summer Concert Series, to a park up there. And so that's another way, you know, the City will be up there doing those concerts and I think that'll help as well to kind of create that sense of, hey we're, we're one community, you're part of us. And I think, I think that's really important to do.

28:39

Ben:

You're spot on there for sure. And you have to reach out. You're the one that has to reach out. They're not going to reach out to us.

David:

Absolutely.

Ben:

There's a lot of amenities they already have up there, right? They just do.

David:

Yeah

28:49

And they can just pop up to Erie if they want to get something else, you know, what ever thing, so yeah.

Ben:

We pull 'em in, we gotta pull 'em in.

David:

Yep, absolutely. All right. Well, Ben, thank you so much. Anything else before we finish up?

29:01

Ben:

No, I, I, I . . . no. This is, I think you got the gist of it. If you have any more you can ask me I, again in closing, for me I'm, this is a great place to live, a great place to raise a family. I'm very proud of what's been done, what's been accomplished. But there's more work to be done as we, as we move forward. So that's it.

David:

Thank

29:21

you so much, Ben. I really appreciate it. So what, I'm gonna go ahead and stop recording now.

End of interview.