

Colleen Sawyer and Gary Gagnon

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00:03 David

Colleen, thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate you being here. And I'd love to just start and have you kind of introduce yourself and share just a little bit more about yourself today for our Broomfield outloud project.

00:16 Colleen

Hi, David. Thanks for having me. My name is Colleen Sawyer. I've lived in Broomfield for 43 years. Originally, I lived in Canyon City. And I went to grad school at CU Boulder in the summer. And I just loved the boulder area. And I went back home and said, I'm moving to I'm going to move to Boulder. So I got as close to Boulder as I could. And my my partner, Gary, and I moved to Broomfield, we rented a house in 1979. And then then we bought our first house the year after that over in first filing. And we lived there for four years. And then in the meantime, we got married at that house. And then we we moved. We live in the Northmore Park area now. And we've been there for 40 years. Well in the same house and same neighborhood. We love our neighborhood. We've seen neighbors come and go, but we have great neighbors, and we're all very close and help each other in our neighborhood. So it's really great. That's one great place.

01:42 David

So can you tell me just a little bit more about maybe what the community was like and what maybe you can remember, like some of your first impressions as you're coming into Broomfield.

01:52 Colleen

Alright, well, when we moved here, there were only 20,000 people and we lived pretty close to Sheridan and 136. And that was the northern boundary of Broomfield; there was nothing north of 136 just fields, and also south of 120th. On Sheridan, there was nothing before Kohls and all of that, that was just open fields and, and farms. So it was kind of a small area. And it was the kind of it was just the kind of community where you could get to know people really well. And it really fast because there really weren't that many of us. So I was teaching in Adams 12 School District. Not in Broomfield but some of the schools were in Broomfield so and then I decided that I wanted to get more involved in the community by doing some volunteer work. So I kind of looked around to see what I could do. And I joined the library board so I was on the library board for 10 years. And in the middle of all that we we became a county and built the new library. So and then, yeah, and once we became a county, everything really did change. I mean, especially with city and you know, adding county services, we,

Broomfield was able to get involved in a lot of things that we could do as a county. Like for instance, SCFD, which is the Science and Cultural Affairs Department. Since we were County we could join that group and get and get money from the state for county cultural projects. So So after the library board, then I joined the Cultural Council and we were the very first Cultural Council in Broomfield which was really fun. Because, you know, we had never none of us had ever done this and we really kind of didn't know what we were doing but but when when cultural groups would come to us come to our, our committee, we we would have them do little performances. So you know, instead of just turning in a grant proposal that they wanted money for their group, we would have them do a little performance, sing or dance or whatever, you know, they're, they wanted their money for and, and it was really fun. It was really fun because then we got to know the cultural groups in town and You know, who are the people that were really doing a lot in Broomfield. So, so it's a lot of good contacts. So that was really fun. Then Then I joined the public art committee. And that was another committee that, you know, we started after we were a county. And that was really fun too, because we, you know, we, the artists would come and show us, you know, what they were proposing, and then used to drive around town looking for good spots to put public art, you know, so we went to all the parks and all the trails. And so it so you really get to know, you really get to know that area when you're driving around looking for public art space. So, sure, yeah. So I just got I just got really excited about, about all the things that were happening in Broomfield, you know, and one thing led to another, it's like, so. So I, and I'm not on any boards right now. But, um, but I have been pretty much, you know, for all these years. And in 2009, I got the Heart of Broomfield award for the Arts Committee. For just for you know, volunteering, so and that was really quite a thrill to, you know, to be a Heart of Broomfield, because that's, that's really kind of a big deal. Absolutely. Absolutely. That was fun.

06:40 David

Yeah, so tell me a little bit more. I'm curious. You said you kind of started with the library board. And I happen to know that you are somebody who is a lifelong learner. I feel that that's true about you. And so I'm just curious, like, what about libraries kind of drew you in? And what were the thing? Maybe specifically the Broomfield library? Like what? What led to that? Maybe?

07:08 Colleen

Yeah, well, in my career was in as a reading specialist in elementary school. So and I taught for 42 years, teaching kids to read. So I've always had, you know, a big love of reading. And I thought this. And then when I retired from teaching, I wanted to do something that was based on reading, but not necessarily teaching, you know, after 42 years of teaching, I wanted to give back in another way, but still, the library was a perfect fit for me, because I'm a lifelong reader. And, you know, and having kids in the library, helping them find books, and you know, it. So it was a good, it was a good fit for me not teaching but still being with kids and still dealing with books. So yeah. And I still volunteer at the library. Two days a week. And I also got involved with the Library Foundation, The Friends of the Library Foundation, and I've been, I was actually on that committee for 16 years. I was the chair of that for 16 years. And we raise money for the library and started the bookstore in the library. And I still I still volunteer in the bookstore. Yes.

08:34 David

Yes. That's, that's wonderful. So I'm thinking too, about the kind of, it feels like, in some ways, the heart of Broomfield award is a little bit of like a culmination of a lot of work over a period of years and a lot of effort and volunteering and supporting people and that sort of thing. So, when, when that award was given, I just kind of walk me through. What were some of the things and I know this can be hard sometimes, but like, why, why, what why were Why did the community say Colleen Sawyer, somebody that we want to honor with this? Well,

09:17 Dolleen

it's not the whole community. It starts with one person. One person, you know, recommends and then then that person gets other people to write letters, and that was Karen Garrity. And she was the cultural affairs manager at the time, and she recommended me and wrote a letter in there. There is a committee for the for the Heart of Broomfield. So she wrote a letter and several other people, Roberta Depp was the library director at the time and she and she wrote a letter. So I had quite a few letters of recommendation. So then I was selected for that. And yeah, one thing I do want to talk about the with the library connected to the library. I'm also kind of a history buff and working at the library volunteering at the library. I was we're the Mamie Doud Eisenhower library. And one time, Roberta dept is asked, she said, we should have a birthday party for Mamie Eisenhower. And, you know, is there anybody that wants to play that part? And I said, why? Well, I will, I think not knowing anything about Mamie Eisenhower. Yeah. And and I said, Oh, I'll do it. I'll do it. So I dressed up like Mamie, and we had a birthday party and the kids came and, you know, we had cookie well, and fudge. You know, Mamie was famous for her fudge. Yes. So so that was really fun. And it just led to a huge career as me, you know, presenting or representing Mamie Eisenhower. Yeah. So I went on to do a lot of research about Mamie and get the costumes and then the veterans museum moved into the first library, the first Mamie Eisenhower library. And so they're in that space. Yeah. And garden center. Yeah. 12 garden center. And that's where Mamie and Ike actually came in 1963. I think it was, and dedicated that library. So so now I do a lot of Mamie presentations at the Veterans Museum, whenever they're, you know, celebrating Ike and Mamie so yeah, so that. And so then that led to taking history classes at Front Range, and doing a lot of research. And that led to several other presentations, historic presentations that I've done of other characters besides Mamie. So yes.

12:27 David

I recall you did one a couple years back that was kind of letters from the homefront type of thing. Yeah, that

12:35 Colleen

was like I yeah, I have one on On the homefront just what women were doing at the on the home front. But also I have letters from World War Two love letters that were going back and forth between the GIs and the people at home. So yeah, and so it's fun because everything is connected, you know, history is connected to reading is connected to Broomfield, is connected to, you know, so it's all. I just have a lot of interests and I'm able to, you know, to pursue all of my interests in Broomfield. There's so many opportunities to, to do that. And now I'm on the Friends of Broomfield history board. So now I'm learning more about Broomfield history, and not just, you know, Mamie history.

13:33 David

That's great. And I think one of the things I had a history teacher in to talk the other day, and we were just talking about, you know, why history? Why is it important? And there are different ways that we can share history and certainly the kind of formal environments where you're in a classroom is one of those. But then this more informal discussions with people or talking in as you're portraying characters another way to informal education. So what do you what have you seen as maybe those differences? And how do those work in different ways? Maybe I'm just curious what your thought processes, philosophy?

14:16 Colleen

You mean between taking a class and? Yeah, well, I like to take the class because it gives you a context for what was going on in the world or that part of the world and what those people were doing because history is nothing but stories of people. Famous and not so famous. And, and then that kind of sparks when you start reading the history. That kind of sparks the people that were making the history, and some of them were were obscure, more obscure. And And that's really interesting. And then you can just go deeper and deeper into that particular person and why, you know, and their place in the big picture. Because all history isn't military history. You know, a lot of a lot of our history is, you know, military and war. But that affects all the other people that aren't directly involved with the military. You know, I mean, there are all kinds of other people who are supporting, you know, what's going on in any country? Absolutely. But um, and you know, Broomfield history is much shorter, of course, than Colorado history and, and US history and Western civilization. So, you know, we we have a shorter history. And it's fun, because some of the people that were making the history in Broomfield are still around, and you can still talk to them about, you know, what was going on and why we, you know, became Broomfield and so that's really fun. So it's more on a local level. It's fun to start out big and then bring it down to, you know, to real people, because these real people are, you know, were and still are making history. So it's fun.

16:29 David

Yeah. And then that kind of lens of big picture world history, then, you know, a little bit smaller than that in US history. And then you get even smaller and the community and then individual stories. I love that square. Wonderful. Can you tell me a little bit about what you brought here, you have a notebook?

16:49 Colleen

Oh, I just, I just have a notebook of different things that I've done. I just want to make sure I didn't forget anything. But you know, I got the, the channel seven Everyday Hero Award for for my work at the library. So that was kind of fun. And then

17:18 David

What year was that? Sorry.

17:21 Colleen

That was 2019.

17:24 David

Okay. Yeah, that's pretty recent that yeah,

17:26 Colleen

that was recent. And then before that, I got a present. I got an award from the Adams County Law Association. And, and that was for that was for and they they wanted me to dress up like me. And so that was kind of

17:53 David

super cool. I'm wondering to you brought somebody with you today. Yes.

17:58 Colleen

I was just gonna say, speaking of history and Broomfield. Speaking of history in Broomfield. My husband Gary Gagnon is also a big volunteer. And he has recently started volunteering with Meals on Wheels in Broomfield, which is another whole wonderful program that Broomfield does it absolutely helps so many seniors and yeah, so do you want to want to say a few words about Meals on Wheels?

18:37 Gary Gagnon

It's for me, it's been really good because you get to meet a lot of different people. And you start to get hooked into those people and vice versa. Yeah, yeah. And they're so then now that whatever we get together, they have to share a joke with me and I share a joke with them. So that part has been really nice. That's wonderful.

19:06 David

That's wonderful. So it's kind of that connection to people. That that drives that sounds wacky. But then you're providing for needs too which is important.

19:18 Gary Gagnon

Part of that whole program is, as you're delivering meals, you're also unobtrusively checking to make sure everything's okay. Yeah, you know, with that, and there have been a couple of times where I've let the coordinator know. You may want to give them a phone call because there was no response at the door. Yeah. Yeah. So that's all part of that program to kind

19:44 David

of checking up on each other again,

19:47 Colleen

but also Gary. Gary has been volunteering at the Butterfly Pavilion for 18 years, and that's going to be moving to Broomfield. The Butterfly Pavilion is also going to be part of Broomfield history.

20:02 David

That's exciting.

20:03 Colleen

So you can talk about that.

20:05 Gary

Well, I was just really excited when they decided to relocate in Broomfield because I, I've been involved with that program for 19 years here. And it's just an incredibly exciting place to be and you learn so much. And when they get to Broomfield, they have a few more million to raise before they can start breaking ground on that. But the facility is going to be three times larger than it is right now. So it's going to be a huge facility. And just a great addition to Broomfield itself.

20:40 David

Yeah, that's up on Baseline there.

20:44 Gary

In fact it's really funny because getting there now only takes me a few minutes from where I live now and they build it in Broomfield its going to take me longer.

20:55 David

Even though it's in Broomfield it's still longer. Yeah. Strange geography of Broomfield. Yeah. No, that's, that's wonderful. And what do you do there when you volunteer?

21:04 Gary

Um, I do. There are four different sections in the Butterfly Pavillion, so I'll do the Conservatory where the butterflies are. And I'm just like a docent, you know, when I'm there. And then I of course I do Rosie the tarantula, which is a big draw. Oh, yeah. No. And that's incredibly fun to watch. Not only the kids expression, but the adults expression too. And then there's a Water's Edge section. So I'm like a docent there. And let's see. That's pretty much it. I mean, there's, there's where Rosie is there are a lot of other insects and and arachnids in that. Yeah. That's

21:46 David

super fun. I love that.

21:49 Colleen

Yeah. It's gonna be great. Because it's going to be a research facility. And they're going to they have, they're going to have scientists from all over the world doing research at that facility,

22:00 David

it's a big deal to add that much space and expand. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. That's wonderful. So Colleen, I want to ask a question. And Gary, feel free to jump in too, about where do you see Broomfield in the future? And I've asked everybody this kind of question of what is what is Broomfield feel like right now? Where are some things that you see it your directions, you see it going in the future? And you can include like maybe I'm a little bit worried about this thing about Broomfield but here's something that I'm excited about or hopeful that it goes this way. That sort of thing. The Yeah, just question about the future. Yeah.

22:45 Colleen

Well, of course, none of us like change. We all want to want to keep it small and cozy and hometown feel and know everybody in town and, you know, know, everybody on the city council. You know, I think

that we as humans want that security. But that's not reality. And of course, Broomfield, you know has is four times as big as it was. And there are a lot of people that I know, I used to know everybody in Broomfield. Now, there's a lot of people I don't know. And there are a lot of neighborhoods, new neighborhoods. You know, like, David, you are saying, you know, we're, we're really spread out now. Yeah, we're really spread out and, and the crazy geography, we're miles and miles from each other. So, um, of course, none of us like the traffic, you know, there's more traffic, and, you know, there's no place to park and, you know, all that. But but you can't stop. I mean, it's such a wonderful community. I know why people want to move here. I know why we're getting crowded. I, you know, and we're very welcoming to people. So it's inevitable that we're going to have a lot more people. And we've just been having this discussion, because they're going to put up a three storey apartment building in our neighborhood, you know, right in the neighborhood, about a block away from us, and it's caused, you know, quite a bit of conversation. And I think that, you know, it's, I guess it's sad, but it's inevitable, that, you know, single family homes are really not going to be viable in the future with the population that we have. So So I think we are, you know, and we have homeless population, we have got to have places for people to live, you, you have to have a place to live, you have to have shelter. And with this many people, we're going to just have to have multiple dwellings now, you know, I mean, that it's common. And, you know, you can dig your heels in and say, No, we don't want all these people here. And we don't want apartment buildings. And we don't want condos and we don't. But and we don't want high rises. But you know, I just think that, that we have to do it.

25:44 Gary

Well, along those lines, too. One of the things that always impressed me about Broomfield was the fact that they've dedicated roughly 40% to open space, which is unheard of. I mean, there's not another city around including Boulder that has that kind of commitment. And they've really, the builders, of course, have put incredible pressure, you know, on the city council and their benefits, they've held firm on that, and the CEO of the Butterfly Pavilion is on that open space committee. So he and I have had many conversations on that. So that's always been one of the things that struck me about Broomfield was the dedication to the open space.

26:31 David

is it's a definitely a distinctive thing about it, for sure. Yeah. Yeah.

26:35 Colleen

Yeah. And we have, you know, beautiful parks and lots of places to work and animals. And I mean, really, that I, you know, I really hope that we stick with that and keep that. But I just think that we're gonna have to build more dense housing.

26:56 David

You know, just part of that development. Yeah. Just. Yeah. So population growth. Colleen, was there anything else that we didn't talk about that, that I should give you a chance to share about?

27:14 Colleen

So you can think of some topic we haven't touched on yet.

27:20 David

Yes, Gary.

27:21 Gary

Wanted to comment on we've noticed that since we moved here is how friendly people are in Broomfield, and I've had people, we've both have had people that have recently moved into Broomfield. And one of the things they've said is that they said I can't believe people will just come up to you and say hi, and you know how you're doing. And a lot of people have come in. They just weren't used to that. Yeah. That kind of thing.

27:48 David

Yeah. It is a little more a bit more rare for sure.

27:51 Colleen

But that part is we do have the hometown feel. We do. And yeah. And, and just people helping each other. You know, and we we have so many volunteers and but we have, you know, like 600 700 volunteers in Broomfield, which is incredible to me, absolutely. For a city the size that people really get out there and help each other and step up when the need is there. Very generous, very generous community. With time and with resources, very generous.

28:33 David

The volunteers are doing such a wide range of things too, which is just wonderful.

28:37 Colleen

Yeah. So I mean, you know, who doesn't want to live in a place like that? Very welcoming. Yes. I'm a fan. I'm a big Broomfield fan.

28:54 Gary

Dressed as Mamie.

28:56 David

Yes, I'd love to hear this.

28:58 Colleen

Oh. So at Mamie's birthday party? Yes. When I was greeting people, a little girl came up to me and said, Thank you for building this library. She thought because it was the Mamie Eisenhower library. She thought I built the library, first by brick. Oh, and then she said, And how old are you? And I said I'm 114 years old today, which I was. And she she just said? Oh. Not surprised. Oh, okay. Oh.

29:40 David

Well, thank you, Colleen. And Gary. Really appreciate your time today. Yeah, you're absolutely a wonderful part of the community. And I know for myself when I first started here, you were one of the first people that reached out warmly and welcomed and I appreciated that and and felt welcomed to the community. Right way thank you this alright thanks so much I'm going to stop recording.