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## Orozco, Victor Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1996  
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #3  
Mr. Victor Orozco  
Holland's Past Fifty Years

Conducted by:  
Tracy L. Bednarick  
June 4, 1996

Abstract Topics include, in this general order: Family life, Victor's first time in Holland in 1962, early political life, his return to Holland in 1985, involvement in community government and City Council, involvement with the community, changes in Holland, how diversification is working, crime, the "Our Street" program, the "Weed and Seed" program, churches in Holland, job discrimination, quality of life in Holland, housing, traffic problems in Holland, growth, City Council "no" votes, Groningen, Netherlands, Queretaro, Mexico, goals, more profession women, and the differences between young and older generatiins,

Interviewee: Victor Orozco (VO), Holland City Councilperson

Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB), Oral History Student Coordinator

TLB: We are here at Victor's. How do you pronounce your last name? [Pronounces it for the tape.] If you could just state your name again, your date of birth, where you were born, and when you came to Holland?

VO: My name is Victor Orozco. I was born in Guanajuato, GTO., Mexico. Arrived in Chicago in 1952. Moved in to the Holland area in 1962. Moved back to Chicago and travelled the states until 1975. 1975 to 85 in Chicago again. Parent of four children.

TLB: Do you want to state their names?

VO: Anthony, Robert, Maylynda, Victor Jr., and Amanda Marie, who passed away at the age of eight months. I reside here in the city of Holland, since 1985, as a permanent resident.

TLB: You covered my second question, which was to tell me a little bit about your family. Do you want to talk about your wife or your children?

VO: We are very close; we are very united. We know what we have to face. At things as accepting responsibility, I think that we are pretty good. As far as knowing which direction we need to go I think we are pretty good.

TLB: Was that your son that I had been talking to on the phone my past few phone calls? He is always looking for you.

VO: Yes.

TLB: So you moved to Holland a couple of times then, can you talk about your first impression of Holland the first time you moved here in 1962?

VO: 1962, as a Hispanic, coming from the Hispanic side, as far as minority background, I noticed at that time that I used to wave at two, three, four, five individuals. We were in the city of Holland as far as Hispanics, and we waved at each other. I remember as far as the job market here is that I have always been able to find jobs here, so that was never problem. As far as housing, I never lived in Holland. I lived on the outskirts of Holland. That was never something that I really had an effect on here in Holland and housing concerned. However, I do have now my sister Anna, who owns a home here in Holland; my sister, Paula, who just bought a home here in Holland, Holland Township; I have another sister who lives in Holland Township also who just bought a house; I have another sister who owns another house. So there are five us who are already property owners in this Holland area. I see that from 62 to 85, I see that somehow we are seeing the Hispanic community grow more and more. That is what we are seeing now. It is a mixture.

TLB: What brought you to Holland originally?

VO: Back in 1962, my mom and dad when they lived in Chicago they came out to the country. They like it; they enjoyed it. My dad rented a small little farm on the outside of the city. Farmer. I worked the fields for just one summer. There is no shame of working in the fields, but for me it was just too rough for me. So I decided to go back to Chicago.

TLB: I was asking you what brought you to Holland originally?

VO: That was it, originally that was what it was. At that time, country life was not my setting. I was just too much in the momentum at that time. Back in 1962, the dad

and mom move up here. I had just finished working Kennedy's campaign, John F. Kennedy's campaign over in Chicago. That pretty much interested me into the political lifestyle, into the political arena. From then there on, I started working with Cesar Chavez in the grape boycott. From then there on, I took some research in Illinois lobbying the state legislation, on bilingual education on the Title Seven, which was supposed to be cut completely. Then I went to the president of the P.T.O. and parents to combat bilingual education that would be implemented in the schools, because it was a necessary thing. From then I pretty much went in to all different other educational issues, as far as political issues...campaigns and on and on. I married and I have my children. My children and I, we attended conferences together all over to Colorado, California, Arizona, New Mexico, New York. The kids were part of it, and my wife was also part of it. It was something that we had in common with ourselves so that I was not doing something that I liked, that she disliked, or that they disliked. It was a mutual understanding. Since then, we took a full time job in Chicago. The plant shut down. I said, "Now, I have got to make a move. What am I going to do? Am I going to stay in Chicago or what?" So in '85, now that I was getting a little bit older I wanted to settle down somehow. "I'm going move into Holland. Small enough town, nice and clean, enough work, plenty of work, quiet. Go sit there and just finish raising my kids." Moved up here in 1985. Still can't get out of the world of politics again. Going into the community again.

TLB: When you care about something it is hard to get out of it too.

VO: Yes it is, so in '85 I took me a job, started working.

TLB: Where was that?

VO: I started working at Howard Miller. It was my first job. I started as a temporary; I went through Manpower. I went through my, what you call, your period before you get full-time. I got hired there. I worked there for six years, and then I went to S2, which is where I am now, at S2 Yachts. I also worked at Worden's for five years. I am presently working at S2. Work is plentiful here. In 1985, there was a group that approached me about voter registration here in the city of Holland. It was a group of Hispanics that came up to me and I told them just exactly how important was the significant vote as far to whether party decisions were made, major legislation, your policy making. You make those differences within your life regardless of the way it affects you, that's what affects your life. So I started campaigning and registering people with other volunteers right along with the program. We started. Out of that came Luciano Hernandez, who was the first council member here in the city of Holland to have not just a Hispanic representation, because I don't want to label it just as a Hispanic representation as to just earmarked for the Hispanic community. What I wanted to do is for us, as a Hispanic community to take pride that we have one of our own in city council who is making decisions on an area wide basis. That was the encouragement that I have gotten from them. From there on I volunteered on different boards, different commissions. I volunteered here in parks, and different cultural events, and social events. Been asked to join Habitat for Humanity, which I was part of. I am now a board member for the Holland Corral board of directors. On and on. And it is not that I don't enjoy it. And it is not a personal pleasure, but

yes it is a pleasure of accomplishment.

Since then I have been pretty much going back and forth. '89-'90 I was asked by a few individuals if whether I wanted to accept the appointment for city council member. I said, "I don't mind campaigning, but I don't want to be sitting there in City Hall." I said, "I don't think that that is my cup of tea."

They said, "Try it, I think you will do it. I think you can do the job."

I said, "Well let me see." I thought about it twice, two, three times. I said to myself, "No, yes." I went through it. Let me tell you when you take to competing with four other individuals who have lifetime residence in Holland, and here you are coming here in the year in 1985, seeking a position in the City Council as to what this is based on, local government. I felt a little bit resentful. Not resentful that...toward myself I did. For the reason that here they were, lifetime residents of they were going for the appointment, they should of really just thought about whether they "deserved" it or earned it. It was based on this. And when I based it on this, as far as the qualification. Given them the accomplishment of something that they have worked for, yes I would have said fine. But when I was in the level playing field I said, "Wait a minute, I have done just about as much as they have done since they have been here all their lifetimes, so why not me seek the appointment?" So I did. I became a Council member and got a lot of congratulations from a lot of people.

One of the things that I have learned from Council, is that ever since that I was in City Hall and have been a Council member, is the respect that you get in City Hall. You walk in and people say "Hi" to you, they shake hands with you, and you

just don't want to say that you are putting your collar up. I'm it! No. It is a matter of people accepting other people who really want to contribute something for the community and do something worthwhile to the best of their abilities. And I enjoyed that. I really did. I took it as a responsibility. I knew exactly where we were at that time in the city. I knew just what flaws we had as far as the momentum of the city was going. As far as the whole picture was concerned. And I said, "Yes, I think I am going to have to now."

As far as the intellectual part of City Council, as far as the ordinances; and whatever goes in with the whole part of being a council member: zoning planning and the whole picture, industrial sector and you are talking about capital improvements. You are talking about infrastructure. You are talking about city services: your police, your fire department. You pretty much grow into that. You pretty much know the system by then. You learn to work with the system.

Then I ran again. After those nine months, I figured they wanted somebody to be appointed who was going to be able to run again for nine months. So I ran again for two years. I defeated my opponent. Just last November, I ran again and I defeated my opponent again. This is going to be my first full term for November 1995 to 2001. This will be four years. It will be my first one. I said, "Yes, I am going to."

So far I believe that since 1962, to the very present day that we are sitting here, I can say that I have accomplished a lot. I think I became a lot. I came here with no money whatsoever. Now sitting in my front room, which I just bought this



little house about three years ago. I think that I have accomplished a lot. And it is not that I am gloating or trying to say that I did it, but to me as a politician, an elected official that makes decisions and legislation, if you could do it, if you can try you can accomplish it. You may not get rich, but you want to make yourself comfortable. You want to set yourself in a surrounding where you are comfortable. And so far I have done that on an individual basis. I have succeeded. I am not saying that I am rich, but I am comfortable.

TLB: It helps you relate to people who are trying to get started too.

VO: Yes, as you can do it too! Yes.

TLB: Be a source of encouragement.

VO: Yes, it is. And that is something that I believe, in this community there is a lot of it now that we are seeing. It is that transition. We are starting to see a lot of the Hispanic community, Hispanics moving in to the area. Yes, at this point in time I would say, "Yes, I want to serve in Council. Yes, I want to be here in the city of Holland. And yes, I know I can make a difference and make that transitional change to a comfortable change and to make those families feel as comfortable as they can here in the city of Holland. I know what they can do and I know what I can do. We know what we can't, but we can pursue it. That is basically it.

TLB: Let's move on to another question. You talked about some of the organizations that you have been involved in. What are some of the biggest changes that you have seen in Holland since 1962, but more concentrating on 1985? That is when you have been here permanently.

VO: As far as organizations you are talking about?

TLB: Or just changes in general.

VO: As far as public institutions and organizations?

TLB: And changes that you have seen in the town.

VO: The changes in the town. I'll tell you. It is very interesting. I read an article in the paper a couple of Sundays ago about just exactly how diversity was working in the city of Holland. And it is working. I think that since '62 and '85, I think what you see now is more of a diverse background of minorities involved in more organizations. You are starting to see them in the professional field, in colleges, high schools, public institutions, museums, the arts council. You are starting to see them now more actively involved as far as how they want to fine tune their city opportunities that they have here. I see that growing. Now that we are gaining...We have in our High Schools, our first school administrator; we have Rick Muniz. We have other ones in there. Hope College who has some now such as Alfredo Gonzalez. Whether we have enough in the place or not. I think that now, I don't want to say the Dutch community, which it is still a very Dutch community, but however now they are starting to see the diversity as far as interactions within organizations to make sure that somehow we are learning from each other as far as cultural differences, but not discrimination issues. These are working related problems that are affecting the goodness out of any organization. I see that and it is good. I never saw the transition that we have been doing in the last five years as to at this point in time in that field: the education field, like I said the arts. It is so

moving at a pace where you don't want to fast track it, but you want to stop, pause, ask questions, but make sure that it is very clearly refined, fine tuned, and make sure it comes out for the betterment of the whole.

TLB: Do that check and see what we have done sort of thing.

VO: Yes. It is moving. As far as our police department, our fire department, your BPW, you are seeing the diversity. You are starting to see it. Yes.

TLB: You talked a little bit about what some of the causes of these changes are. Do you have any other reasons for why the diversity and recognition is increasing and what is helping that?

VO: Yes. Professional and community participation on both sides. The willingness for any kind of skill, talent that anybody has; any kind of gift. And those who offer it and do it on a volunteer basis are the ones who pretty much put a pretty good picture, a fine tuned picture of exactly what we want. And that's what is working, that little working relationship. Before you saw maybe just two professionals meeting on the playing field somewhere, but then yet they didn't know how to interact with one another, or talk about the business community or talk about the arts, or talk about the educational components of it. Now you are starting to see the mingle of more white suits together, a little bit more educators together, a little bit more families together. Anglos and Hispanics and this and that exchanging of foods, exchanging of culture, exchanging of the arts - this is what is working. We are getting away from a lot of the political syndrome; now we are going into the area where we are doing a lot for people to socialize. I think that the socializing aspect was the one where you getting

to know somebody on a first name basis. You get to exchange dishes just as much as you get to exchange intellectual ideas on the market or whatever. And that is working. That is the fabric.

TLB: Right. This is a question about the Dutch community and about the other ethnic populations in the community. How do you think they play in the community and how do you think they influence the make-up of the city of Holland? Some of the things you've talked about have covered this. What influence does this have on the way the city of Holland runs: the ethnic populations, the Hispanics, the Laotians, the Vietnamese, and then also the Dutch heritage? How do you think that influences Holland as a city?

VO: There is only one word that I would like to say to how it influences Holland, that I can't think of right now. Yes there are some people - it is not 100%, however that little Rainbow Coalition that I will call here within the city of Holland is to make sure that it is now blending in more. I really do see it. We are having a transient population moving in here, but I think that the ones that are strong entrenched in already are pretty much okay. I am starting to see more blacks and Asians. That Saturday Unity March parade at downtown Holland, which I attended, and the one over at Centennial Park that followed it up, and then at Kollen Park where we went for the picnic...If people would have just noticed that there was about close to 200 people, but to exchange dishes and to just be there and to exchange ideas with the Asians and the Blacks and Hispanics and the Anglo community that was there. I think that it reflects exactly that it really is working. There really is no more that I

could say about that. It is starting to work.

As far as the Asian community, I've always had access to the Asian community. I meet with them; I talk with them. They'll call me up and they'll have a problem in the park, or a problem here and there. They'll call me up and they'll ask me, Victor this and that. They'll sit down and I will sit down with and they'll explain. The black community also too. I had one individual who attended city council one time and accused the city of racism, that there weren't enough blacks being hired. I invited the man to my house, he came over, we sat down, we had coffee. By all means we had a lot in common, but we had different directions and we pretty much set our own course as to how we can make those changes.

As far as the Dutch community, I respect the Dutch community. I think the Dutch have to be respected for exactly all the contributions they have made since Van Raalte founded Holland. I think the rich work ethic, the rich religious values, the rich family values, which we all have, have somehow reflected and somehow were seeded in the city of Holland through the Dutch ethnicity. I think that is a really good thing. I have no problem with the Dutch. As a matter of fact, I am very proud of their heritage. It is a very clean people, very honest working, strong workers, and religious. Ever since then, I respect any founder who founds a town that is going to give me a comfortable way of lifestyle. I respect the man for that. The Dutch community and the rest of the community is going through that little fine tuning of diversification.

TLB: Have the problems facing the general citizen of Holland changed since you have been

here? How have they changed? Is crime different?

VO: Crime is a very hard issue. About four years ago, I know that I remember that I was starting to see it. My youngest son, Victor, came up to me. He said, "Dad, we are starting to get gangs that come up from Chicago, Muskegon, and Grand Rapids."

"Gosh," I told him, "don't tell me."

He said, "Yeah." He came and told me, "not even that, young kids from Holland, the kids that are homegrown they are not aware of the gangs, they don't know what it takes to become a gang member."

A lot of these guys that were coming in here they were pretty street smart from Chicago, they know how to deal with gangs, they know how to deal with drugs, they know how to get the money, they know where to get a free rent. So what they are doing is recruiting these young kids, school age, here in Holland and then encouraging them in to gangs." The young guys they want to act bad in front of their girlfriend, they want to act bad here and there. They want to say, "Well I'm bad. I'm bad." They don't realize what they are getting into. As a matter of fact I think that that is what happens, you have the family break up. Yes, we have some that are coming in here by all means that don't want to respect the law, respect the community, want to respect their neighbor. And yes, because of those we are going to have to set the law down. However those kids, who by all means want to have a change and take an opportunity to become more economically inclined as far as the job opportunities that exist and for them get a good paying job, get married, have some kids, raise a family. Yes we do have resources out there to try to help them.

They must seek those resources.

I see now that we are gaining a lot of bad people right along with the good people coming in to Holland. Somehow, I think that we are starting to see all that; I think we are working through the solutions to this.

Another problem related to the gang problem - is that I see a lot of single mothers that pretty much the younger ones. That is one of the things that saddens me more. That and the young ones that are getting involved in crime and going to jail. They don't ever really get to see the opportunities behind bars. They never really get to see real opportunity of what the world has to provide for them, what nature has to provide for them: a better way of life for them. That kind of bothers me quite bit.

As far as the gang enforcement is concerned, we are going to have to do what we are going to have to do. I wish there was another way we could do this, besides using the law and the court system to do that. I think that somehow we're paying more to keep them in jail than we do for them to be contributing members of society. I'll tell you right now we have so many thing in place here in the city of Holland. We have "Our Street." We have the "Weed and Seed." We have all the resources out there. We have agencies out there providing all these kinds of services.

Still single mothers are one of my biggest problems. The other one it single parents. That is another one of my big problems. I think when you get a single mother with a fifteen, sixteen, seventeen year old boy or girl, who by all means are uncontrollable and they have no respect toward anyone. Maybe he's going out with a different women, or she is going out with a different man, or vice-a-versa. And what

happens is the child see that at fifteen, sixteen, fourteen, thirteen years old; they see the lifestyle so actually what they do is they lose respect. They lose the family value tradition.

Sometimes I feel like those kids feel lost out there, like there is nobody out there to turn for them. The educational institution yells at them for one little thing, and they might get a little bit upset and then they go off course. So I think that sensitivity has to go along with the law enforcement. I think both have to work hand and hand together. Other than that, I don't think we are just relaxing from the gang problem. Yes, we do have one, I'm not going to say we don't. As large as we had it about four or five years ago, no we don't. We have a small segment. What we are having now, is a lot of transient gang related problems. Outsiders come in here trying to play the bad guy on the corner. They leave two or three guys upset at each other, they go away and they started the feud. A little breakout starts here. Then what happens? We have a problem on our hands.

TLB: Right.

VO: The other thing too that we are doing. . .I don't want to get into that because you might ask that later. . .I might as well. The "Our Street" was pretty much put together to work with the capital improvements, the old housing infrastructure, the make-up of the city within the area between 8th and 19th between Cleveland and Pine, to make sure that the housing stock was in better living conditions. I think that when you provide that kind of incentive and when you provide that kind of living for people to live in that very comfortable setting, I think that somehow you alleviate



some of the social problems. You live in a more comfortable setting.

TLB: Is it related to the respect to you community? Do you have an increased respect because it is a nicer place to live?

VO: Yes, exactly. Like you said, it is a nicer place to live. What if it is crime infested? Yes, because we have a mixture of rental properties. And again, I was very much and I still am...we have so much percentage of rental properties...I would still like to do away with some of them. I know that we are going to need rental properties for people that basically move in here. But here in the city of Holland, and surrounding townships you are having large condominium projects that are being built. You are having large duplex developments going up as far as housing is concerned. You don't have to house them in one little area; you don't have to warehouse them in one little area where we know that the social stability is not there. It is not there but, we want to make it. At this point in time I have been echoing that, "Yes, we need rental property, but let's target across the city." Spread it across the city, but don't direct in all in one little area. We finally got the picture the city is moving in that direction. As far as the parks, as far as the streets I think we are doing a fantastic job on that as far as providing in that area.

"Weed and Seed," well we know a portion of it is to "weed" out the bad elements of the city, like the gang-related problem we had. The "seeding" portion of it, I don't know if whether I still have a right or if I don't, but I know that a lot of people have said that there wasn't enough money put in to the "seeding" portion of it. Even then, I don't oppose the way that it is going now. I think that we are spending

more money on police and the law enforcement portion of it, but the "seeding" portion was...I believe that people had to realize that we have...if you pick up a book and you look at all those agencies and organizations who are there to provide that kind of help. I think that all the "seeding" portion of it was to coordinated all these resources in available organizations that were there to deal with the problem. What we had was a lot of duplication of place. There was this little agency fighting for this little group, there was another organization fighting for this little group. And I saw that, and I said, "Wait a minute, we are paying two individuals fighting for the same little group that keeps on crossing the same little street every day." Do you follow me?

TLB: Yes.

VO: So I said, "Wait a minute; let us close the street, and find out why they are crossing the street all the time. Then let the traffic go." And that was the "seeding" portion of it. There was money allocated for it, then I think that some of it has been distributed to the Boys' and Girls' club, some of it has been distributed to other agencies, and a little bit here and there. That was the main intent for the "Weed and Seed."

TLB: It is hard to see that, because it had kind of been there. You are working on what is already there, but people want to see something new.

VO: Yes. Maybe sometimes those organizations themselves say somehow, "Well, we are not going to get no money." I didn't want to hear that. I want to hear, "Good they are taking the bad element out of here, so now we will have more time to deal."

What they could have done is come up with a more creative idea that was going to somewhat be tailored to their need of what they needed to implement out there to make sure that the resources were given to the best quality minded people that were going to do what they were hired to do.

TLB: Are you involved with the church at all?

VO: Yes.

TLB: What church?

VO: I go to Saint Frances De Sales Church.

TLB: What is your impression of the role that the church plays in Holland? How do you see how the church influences the city? And have you seen this change?

VO: I'll tell you, the churches they have their open door policy. I go to different churches once and awhile. I visit different churches; someone will invite me to their church. I go. As far as the church is concerned, I feel that the church plays a very critical role in the social-religious field. But that is about it, as far as the religious portion of it I don't like to get into that too much. I believe that religion plays very loudly in the community. Yes it is. There are a lot of churches here, which is a good thing to have. A lot of faith and it produces a lot of religious values in this area. I believe which that is strong to maintain a good community. As far as different denominations I don't get into that, I respect each and every one who has faith. That is about it on the churches.

TLB: What are some qualities that seem to stand out in the city of Holland? You mentioned the strong family values.

VO: Religious values.

TLB: Religious values.

VO: I think that you pretty much covered it. I think that Holland is very...I used to know Holland before. It was a very clean city, very clean and very neat. However, it was too quiet. [laughter] No really it was. And then now that you see the city, especially the downtown area, as far as you see more livelihood. You see more people walking, more people getting involved, ice cream vendors going here going there, and little changes. Different flavors of nostalgia come in to this city of Holland; now you see it a little bit more livelier, but at the same time controllable. That is good. That is one of the things...we hate regulations, we hate ordinances, but by all means if there are some flaws that are coming in with the package we are going ahead and dealing with them. As far as now, I think that the city of Holland is a little bit more livelier now. Look at the downtown area; it has developed a little bit more arts, a little bit more stores, now with the Seventh and Ninth Street improvement, you've got Hope College coming in with the Haworth Center, then you have other things going on such as institutions that are going up. The museum is an added thing. It has blended in perfectly.

TLB: Do you see any negative aspects to Holland, or any drawbacks to living in Holland?

VO: No, drawbacks to living in Holland, but yes I do see one negative in the whole city of Holland. We have a very strong industrial area - very strong and I will repeat this again - very strong. However, the weakness that Holland has is that it had not promoted enough minority individuals to CEO's, top management, supervision, raise

scale on wages. I think that that is something that this area needs to look into. I think that some how...I just got done talking about the whole city of Holland as far as what we are doing as far as diversification. Let's not forget that we only don't need to just talk about diversity in culture, but we also must talk about economic diversity. At this point in time I still don't think that there is a very level playing field in economic picture as far as promotional is concerned. That's at this point, one of the areas if we are going to survive with the city of Holland and all its residents are doing, with everything that I have mentioned before, that is one thing that I would like to introduce to the Chamber of Commerce to do a very steady, fine-tuned study of just exactly what is the minorities' wages, what is the minorities' end of supervision. Let's pick it up all the way from the lowest end percentage pay data to the just exactly all the way up to a lead position at work, perhaps there is a management CEO person. I know we're not very strong in the corporate world, in the big corporate world. However I think this would be some kind of introduction to try to encourage if we do have the qualified people, let me base it on that, because I don't believe in quotas...I believe in based on qualification. If there is an employee there that has been there 15 to 20 years, who all by means has more knowledge than the next man, and he competes for that position and it is not awarded to him I want to know whether if that still exist in these corporations. Whether we are going to maintain a very strong industrial area, I think that is one of the areas we need to do.

Another thing in that area that I think we need to do. I believe that our kids are being educated into a field of technical right now, with the computer age coming

up as far as that is concerned, however, I do think what we need is also plumbers and electricians. I think somehow a tech center or some place that is going to provide these kind of education opportunities for our youth or anybody really. Right now with a lot of blue collar workers losing their jobs, which is a very large percentage of the minority population that hold blue collar jobs. And it is a very large proportion of small professionals, who could very well by all means compete in the more competitive market out there. That is one of the weaknesses I still see in the city of Holland, as far as the employment picture is concerned. I think housing has made progress, but as far as employment I think it is very weak. I don't know whether that has to do with greed or what, maybe education.

TLB: So it is more like the jobs are out there, but it is not the high jobs instead it is the median level jobs.

VO: Yes, it the median level. It is a comfortable surrounding, but I think that if you are in the city of Holland...if you are going to survive, we are surviving however, but if we want to have less social problems. If you would give a regular worker a supervisor job, well not give it to him but if he earns it let him have the job. Not only that, that man will come back in his community. He will play the role model type. He buys himself a little van. Once a year he will take the kids out to the park, go out camping for a couple of weeks, go fishing. That little extra money gives him a little extra time to spend with his family and do this with them. And somehow I think that the family unit picture just falls in with that. The house needs repairs, he can't do it because there is not money. People drive in the street and say, "Well my

gosh, that house is awful. Look at how terrible it looks." They never realize that, that man is probably only making about \$6.00 an hour. That is far as the kids are concerned. If you notice around here people have to start realizing the reason that they can't do it is because everyone is driving a second hand car. Low income. Muffler breaks they are going to have to spend \$200-\$300, there goes another problem. One of the kids gets sick. Gosh, what are you going to do? Food is running out. Make a choice. What do you get, food or medicine?

Senior citizens are another one. I think that we still pretty much take care of our senior citizens, yet I think that we still need to do more to support senior citizens.

That is the economic picture in employment though. I think that employment picture plays a very major role in just exactly how economically we are going to become in the city of Holland period. As far as a really level playing field, I still don't see that. I still have a very very weak stomach for that. That is the only thing that upsets me now. As far as how I have been in Holland, it is perfect. As far as the diversity is concerned it is working fantastically, but that economic picture, that employment picture has yet to improve. Until I see data that says, "Victor, we've got this. We've got that." Don't satisfy me. You are not satisfying me. What we are trying to do is make a viable community, make sure that it flourishes with everything that it has and everybody shares. That's it.

TLB: Have you had family or friends that have visited you in Holland and what impressions do they tell you that they get from the city? Do they talk about how Holland is like,

how it is different from where they are from?

VO: They like it. Living two blocks off of Lake "Mac." Tunnel Park, you've got... It is a very beautiful city. I enjoy it. I like it. People come over and they will say, "Victor, it is nice up here."

And I'll say, "Yes, do you want to go fishing?"

They say, "Where?"

I say, "We'll walk." Then they wonder. We go down there.

They say, "You live off the lake, you must have paid a lot of money for your house."

I say, "No, I didn't. It is one of the cheapest ones."

They say, "Oh come on."

I say, "Yes, I did." No, people enjoy it. They go to Saugatuck, they go to Grand Haven. They go around here. They see all the parks. We got our parks improved in the last five years. People enjoy it. Now you are starting to see more people from Chicago moving up here. They see the quality of life that exists here. It is a beautiful town, yes.

TLB: What are some things that can be done to maintain the quality of life that we have in Holland?

VO: "Our Street" is one. We are doing that. I think that somehow that if you notice that the transient population; the minorities, the Hispanic community, which is the largest percentage of minorities; they are moving right into the downtown area. A couple years ago when the "Our Street" came up in front of us and I read the whole report



and I read all the data I started thinking; and some disagree with me but that is good disagreement is good; somehow that the minorities are pretty much moving into the downtown area between 19th, Cleveland, 9th, and Fairbanks. We are talking about Hope College area. That's good. That little section is becoming what we call a Hispanic little section. And it is. There is a lot of home ownership that is changing around and it is becoming that way. However, the good part of it that I enjoy and I like about it is that the Historical District stands right in the middle; Hope College stands right in the middle. This by all means is an asset, because we are not going to let this area go down. We needed to fix up the housing, the little surrounding area, around the Historical District area. The Historical District area does a fantastic job keeping up their historical structures. The housing stock alongside the Historical District, we did seventeen houses last year, we painted. This year we have more in store. We are doing paving. We are doing this and that. I want to make sure that we are not telling the Hispanic community that we are doing this because of you. No! What I have envisioned in my head, I don't want to just go out and tell them, but I am going to set a surrounding as to the quality life you are either going to live or not. I'm landscaping there area. I'm landscaping so that in other words, so that their surrounding will be more comfortable. From there on they can color their house any which way they want; they could landscape it which ever way they wanted, but the housing structure is one of the areas where I am very sensitive. It is an old housing stock...codes, violations, and are going wrong with the city let them stay. They are very strict, very sound, and they say that this is what you are going to have

to comply with the city regulations. You are going to have to do it. You are going to have to abide by the rules. [Interviewer flips tape.] It is working. Even though I hate to say this, again we go back to the economic picture. Some of these houses that are being bought now, in this area are by people who can just barely afford to by a \$50,000 - \$60,000 home. I'll repeat that again, can barely buy it. We know that these houses are going to be in bad repairs. So if we know that the federal government has money for subsidizing grants like that, use it to its best potential to keep up the community looking like a community. This is what it is supposed to be used for. I don't have no objections. People say, "Why do they get the money?" Sure they have a little money to go out and maybe go bowling; I mean that is part of your social life that goes along with it. Why can't we help somebody else to maintain. I believe that. I hate to use tax dollars just for any old thing, but if the money is earmarked for that, let's use it for something constructive that is going to keep our community and that area pretty much relaxed for them and keep it in an infrastructure where they know that they are going to make a good living. It is simple as that. As far as the housing stock, we definitely want to work on that.

TLB: How do you think, I don't know if you will be able to talk too much on this, because this is kind of during the time when you weren't in Holland, but industry has increased a lot in Holland; how has the public reacted to the increase of industry in the city of Holland.

VO: Traffic. I think that one of the biggest concerns we have now is traffic. I think that even though...if we are going to accept it. I think that somehow we built Pine Street

to put a through street from the bridge over on the North to the South. 16th street, you've got it all the way from Waverley all the way up here to South Shore Drive. You've got 24th street. You got 32nd street. You've got River. I think that these main arteries we are going to have to maintain them open. We are going to have to. One of the things that I really don't want to do, as far as we have become industrialized, is that I don't want to open up the side streets. I want to maintain the old neighborhood small little town flair at points throughout out the city. I am very much against it. However, the industrial sector is some very diverse industry; we have car, windows, we got wood working, we have all kinds. It is a very diverse industry, so in case of an economic downswing, let's say if all of a sudden people stop making cars--Gosh! There goes the whole town. We've learned experiences from Flint; we've lived experiences like that from Benton Harbor, where you see them ghost towns, and you see the downtowns that are completely down. The other thing too, is that you have to clearly understand too that it is an environmentally clean industrial sector. You don't see no smokestack coming out. The only thing that we've got is just a traffic challenge.

As far as the land development is concerned, we are going to have to abide with the book. We could just do our careful planning; we are not going to stop planning, but we are going to have to start planning growth. I think that was the big concern, because a lot of people were saying that you were going to have to stop growth. No you don't stop growth; you plan growth. I'll tell you in this city of Holland here, we do have a lot of good planners. I don't want to criticize, but I think

that around by Westshore Mall, that is a mess up there. I don't even go to Westshore Mall. I think that area there, I pretty much stay away, but growth is going to have to be planned. Industrial sector, like I said, we have a very diverse economy here, very diverse industrial sector. It is environmental clean. Yes. Let's do it.

As far as the tax abatements are concerned, I know a lot of people are against tax abatements, but the tax abatements, let us not forget that a large percentage of our SEV's that come from tax abatements goes into our city fund. A lot of the city fund provides a lot of the city services. And that is where our major tax role comes in. Yes, we give tax breaks. But we also have people holding jobs. If you want a good job market you are going to have to create jobs.

TLB: Tell me about some of the tasks you have done while you were working for the city council, that you really enjoyed doing.

VO: Oh gosh, I enjoyed almost everything.

TLB: Is there one task that you've had to do that you didn't like or that was hard?

VO: No, I think that the hardest one that I really had, as far as the decision making is concerned, I think that was the Schmuckel Oil decision. That one there I just didn't think we were doing the right thing by telling a person what to do with their land. Second of all, I don't like to tell anybody what to do on their property--property is their property. However, we do have regulations again--ordinances in place.

The other one was that bothered me--I was the only "no" vote on the video camera. As far as having video cameras out at that time when we had that little gang problem. I was very much opposed to that, because I believe that if at a certain point

neighbors are going to be holding cameras trying to film other kids and everything, I think it really creates animosity in communities. It creates divisions between families and what you do is create some hate between families, that can extend past two or three years. You don't want to create that kind of situation. I was opposed to that section of the video cameras. I was not opposed to video camera completely, because as long as we have our law enforcement trained to do that job let them handle the cameras, and let them do it. They are trained. We train our police officers to do that kind of job. So when we said that the ordinary citizen could have it I was somewhat a little bit upset about that, because I knew that it was going to create animosity. Nobody knew who was filming, somebody could have went and gotten hurt. That was the only reason why I voted "no" on that. Maybe some people probably still tell me, "Well, your still wrong on that." They'll still have to prove me wrong on that one. I think that those two are my only "no" votes, well my "yes" was to rezone into PUD on the Schmuckel Oil property. And then on the one on the camera, that was one that was really... My "no" vote was a "no" vote; that was my only "no" vote out of the whole council.

My biggest, so far until a month and a half ago, was the sister city relationship with Queretaro. And with the people from Groningen, from the Netherlands. Somehow I became very good friends with them. We became very acquainted. They gave me some architectural designs that Windmill Island will be looking at in the near future. The barns. It was very beautiful and very nice. I got to exchange words with them and they got to exchange words with me. As a matter of fact, one of them

from Groningen came up and told me he said, "You know what Victor, I hope you don't get offended if I tell you something."

I said, "What's that?"

He said, "It is good you are a city council member."

I said, "Why is that?" And I asked him very sincerely why.

He said, "Your Hispanic."

I said, "Yes."

"I like that." he goes, "But you know what? When I saw you walking down 8th Street during Tulip Time parade there was a lot of high school students and bands, there was a lot of other Hispanic kids and everything. Somehow you were walking with the Dutch, you were dressed as a Dutch, but yet you were reflecting the make-up of the community as with participation of how you celebrate ethnic, culture through their festivities and socializing."

And that is why I do it. This year I couldn't walk, because I had a muscle biopsy on my left leg, so I rode on the float on the last Saturday. But I take an active role with anybody from any other ethnic background, especially the Hispanic community, who walk along with the Dutch, with the Holland High School band who hold the flags and play the drums and the bugles, and just walk along with them. For them to see me and for me to say "Hi" to a few of them that know me. They'll say, "Hi, Victor." And I'll say, "Hi and enjoy yourself." And they will. It gives me pleasure to do that. The people from Groningen, they asked, "Why do you do that, Victor?" Well it is part of being a council member. Being a part of your community. Taking

an active role with every walk of life. That is why I enjoy that.

Just lately, we had dinner with the delegation from Queretaro, Mexico, our sister city. It took me pride to see someone from Queretaro, which is only about two - three hundred miles from my hometown in Guanajuato, GTO. Mexico. It took me so much pride for me to sit with them at dinner, exchange ideas: for them to come out here and look at the industrial sector, and look at the educational opportunities, Hope College link between two universities, exchanging students, exchanging cultures, visiting the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce to do economic exchange, to exchange job opportunities, maybe exchange workers or students, exchange cultural performing arts. I saw that and if you see the whole picture of what the sister city relationship could do to mend more diversity within the city of Holland and to bring new ideas to bring performing arts from Mexico to a larger scale, so that the whole city of Holland could learn more. As we become more educated with each other in different lifestyles in different ways, but all good religious moral values, family values, good work ethics. To mix this together with the old architectural old colonial lifetime style, then from here on we can learn and exchange ideas with the global. It fascinates me. That is the latest I have enjoyed and that is the most that I have enjoyed. I have never gloated on this, until right now, but I have really enjoyed the Queretaro city relationship with the city of Holland.

TLB: Is this the city Hope College is thinking of setting up an exchange program with?

VO: Yes.

TLB: Can you explain a major turning point you have had in your life?

VO: Oh!

TLB: I'm just pulling all these out for you.

VO: No, I think that I am a very religious man. I am somewhat of not a perfect individual man. I'm a blue collar worker; I have my regular job. I never had the opportunity to become academically or intellectually inclined to hold a decision to hold a higher office job. If I had my life to live all over again...a point in life is...funny thing when I lived in New York I lived close to Colombia University; when I lived in Greeley, Colorado, for awhile, I lived right there by the university; when I lived in Chicago I lived close by Circle Campus; and then when I moved to Holland now I live close by Hope College. Somehow I think that I'm not following the colleges, I think the colleges are following me [laughter].

But if there is a turning point in my life, I would really like to accomplish something in my lifetime. This is something that has been a dream of mine. I would not retract my whole family and livestock, I have my "goods" and my "bads." I've had some real bad ones in my life, but I have some really good ones coming up. But altogether I think, when I reflect back if I had to do it all over again due to economic hardships with my family, if I had the opportunity to go to high school, had the opportunity to go to colleges or universities. I think, I don't think I know that is still one of my goals. Whether I reach it in my life time, that is something that I would like to do is to graduate from the university. If there is only one university I would like to graduate from, nothing to do with Hope, mind you; I would like to graduate from Harvard. I don't know why. It is an Ivy League type of town. Not only that,



I've always liked law. I have books on law. I was self-educated. I was self taught. I was pretty much a librarian type. Play ball in the daytime when I was a kid, then go in the evening and spend two to three hours in the library. I would go to conferences, go to here, go to Circle Campus in Chicago, go to Colorado College. Go to all the universities and just walk in when they had conference or seminars. You would just sit there and listen and see what they say. Basically I have been learning on my own as I go on.

A turning point in my life would be back in 1972, when my daughter was born, and I lost my little baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It saddened me a little bit. Sometimes, I think she kind of coursed me in that direction.

TLB: It looks like I have just two more. This is the first time I have asked a man this question, but here goes. Concentrating on Holland, how do you think the role of women has changed since, probably 1962?

VO: Professional. There are more women in the professional field. As a matter of fact you go to travel agencies, you go to...Even now I know Susan Juliani holds an administrative position at Haworth. I know other women bankers, I know other people. I'll tell you, women's roles are becoming more professional, nothing wrong with that, I think that if they want to seek the opportunity to do that truly it is their individual right. I don't have anything against as far as the mother type - home wife. You are still going to see that, you are not going to change. I'm hoping that there are no barriers out there for women. But I think the role of women is very strong. We have two council members that are women. And you and I are glad that they are

there. I think that somehow they seem to be somehow better at getting things back on track. They can really say, "Wait a minute come back in here." I really see them in a really positive role from industry to education. I have nothing wrong with women, and I see a little bit more active role in leading positions. I've never studied women as far as what their mentality is, I always judge a women according to her ability to what she can offer of her best.

TLB: Have you ever noticed a generation gap between the ages in Holland?

Between the young people, the people that are making the decisions.

VO: I think, as a matter of fact, right now you have a young council. The oldest member is me, and now I am 54. Before you used to have an old council, where you used to have a lot of old traditional Dutch. Now what you are getting is a mixture of more community-minded people. Nothing against the old council, because they all had good interest. However I think, now what you are doing is taking the ones who are coming from the baby-boomers age coming into the lifestyle. Some come from really stronger religious backgrounds, some come from very strong work ethics, some come from business, it is a mixture now of what you put together. I see that now reflecting more of a different flavor in the city of Holland. It reflected and it needed to be done. Yes that I have seen in ages. However, you still need you senior citizen to somehow teach you or you learn from him from his past experiences. So that you never lose that communication. I don't think age barriers should be a major factor; it should be a contribution of acknowledging each one of our gifts that God provided us with to make sure that the fabric stays together. Yes.

TLB: That is it. Is there anything that you want to add about Holland and changing in Holland, how you have been involved in the changes? Any final comments or anything?

VO: No, I think I pretty much said everything.

TLB: Yes, you answered all my questions very fully. Let my just check this over. Okay then, that is it. [turns tape off]