Mel Steely: 00:00:08 I'm Mel Steely. I'm the Director of the Georgia Political Heritage Program at the University of West Georgia Archives, and this is Blynne Olivieri, who is the Director of the Special Programs there. And today, we are interviewing former mayor Wayne Garner of Carrollton as part of the project to gather the papers and do interviews with each of our mayors and to build a political log, both visual and readable, that talks about their politics and the politics of the West Georgia region. Mayor, exactly seven years ago on June 9, 2009, was our last interview with you, which covered your period going into state office.

Wayne Garner: 00:00:57 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:00:57 In this interview, we're going to pick up the discussion from that period into the mayorship itself, which you said at the time was... You had just become mayor and were still somewhat virgin, and you said it was the best job you ever had, being mayor.

Wayne Garner: 00:01:17 I enjoyed it.

Mel Steely: 00:01:18 Yeah. Now, you've been twelve years as mayor.

Wayne Garner: 00:01:21 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:01:21 We'll ask at the end whether...

Wayne Garner: 00:01:22 Okay.

Mel Steely: 00:01:22 ... it's still your best one. For the benefit of the viewers of this video who may not have seen the earlier ones, we're going to start with some biographical questions...

Wayne Garner: 00:01:34 Okay.

Mel Steely: 00:01:34 ... and quickly move into the other.

Wayne Garner: 00:01:35 That's fine. Good, good.
And we should also note that this tape is not going to be edited and that this is a chance for you to just speak on your behalf about your experiences as mayor.

Okay, good.

It’s a chance for you to share your experiences. So tell us a little bit about your background and where you grew up.

Okay. I was born in Atlanta on May 8, 1951. Lived in Atlanta for just a very few years and then moved to Douglas County, where we lived. I had two older brothers, and we lived in, like I said, in Douglas County up through high school. My mother died when I was ten, and my grandmother raised me along with my father. And then when I was fifteen, I left home necessarily and moved into the funeral home with the Whitleys there in Douglasville, and they sort of raised me all the way through high school, and then came to West Georgia. Then in 1980-

I think you had a room back in... a cot back in the embalming room.

Yeah, I had a little room, a little room next back to the morgue back there, and I stayed there all through high school and even worked there when I was in college. And then in... I married Jerry, my high school... well, college sweetheart. We didn’t really date in high school, but we were married in ’74. Still married. I think my greatest accomplishment in all of politics is I ended with the same wife I started with, and sometimes that’s a chore in that business. And have three children.

So in 1980, Senator Ebb Duncan had a heart attack and passed away early in the legislative session, and I ran for that seat and was in a runoff and then was elected in April of 1980 and stayed there until April of ’93. I went on the parole board for Governor Zell Miller at that time, and then after a couple years on the parole board, I went to the Georgia Department of Corrections and was commissioner there for five years and then came out. And two friends of mine, we started a consultant firm about six or seven years ago in Atlanta and Washington and throughout the Southeast. And then came back and was elected mayor and stayed mayor for twelve years.

We’re going to step back a little bit more, and tell us about what schools you went to in Douglas County and in West Georgia.
Wayne Garner: 00:04:13 There was only one... Well, it started in the Douglasville Elementary School, and then it was Douglas County Junior High School and then the Douglas County High School. There was only one school in Douglas County at the time, and back then, the population of Douglas County was about 20,000. There's like about 175,000 now. For instance, when I worked at the funeral home, if someone died, we knew them all so well, we'd have the paperwork filled out before the family ever got there. We knew all the brothers, cousins. And so it was just a very small, very close-knit community.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:04:48 I'm sorry to hear about the early passing of your mom. Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?

Wayne Garner: 00:04:53 Yeah. My dad worked at Atlantic Steel for thirty years. He was a World War II veteran. He landed at Utah Beach a week or so after D-Day and was there. Mother was diagnosed with cancer in 1960, and she died in November of 1961. So Dad, my dad was an alcoholic, and he had his... I don't know. He had his giants he dealt with. So when I got to be fifteen, I was working. I worked at a drugstore, and I had a little janitorial service that I did around town there in Douglasville. And then Mr. Whitley, who owned the funeral home there, was a customer at the drug store. So I talked to him about a job, and so they took me in, and I lived out there and went to high school and then to West Georgia from there.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:05:57 Did you grow up in a religious household or practice religion with the Whitleys at all?

Wayne Garner: 00:06:02 No, not a lot. We didn't go to church a lot as... We didn't have a car till I was... well, really, I guess, after my mother died. I mean, we were living in a very rural, so we didn't have any means of transportation much. Daddy rode the bus to work every day, or either a car pool, and we were just way out in the country. We'd go to church from time to time. Mainly listened to the Gospel Jubilee on Sunday morning. Listened to the Florida Boys. That was the old times. That was about the extent of it. And then when I went to the funeral home, and I've been a funeral director for forty years, I went to church more than anybody probably because there was always... We'd have three or four funerals a week, so we heard a lot of preaching.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:06:57 Right. Tell us about your time at West Georgia College in the late '60s. I mean, there was a lot going on in the country.

Wayne Garner: 00:07:06 A lot going on. It was in... I sort of... My brothers went to Vietnam. I was in the National Guard. I sort of missed that...
was a little bit young to make that cut. But came to West Georgia. Well, actually in the fall of '70, I went to Fort Dix for basic training in AIT and came back and then was in the Reserves, and then started at West Georgia later. Then I was here for a couple or three years in '70, '71, '72, and then left. My wife Jerry was here, and she was an education major, and she graduated in '73, and then we were married in '74. But Carrollton was just a... It was a... Doctor Ward Pafford was the president here at that time. The main place to eat was the T Burger, which is now where Domino's Pizza is, and that was about it. I mean, you had... There was a truck stop there.

Mel Steely: 00:08:11 Mama Thaxton.

Wayne Garner: 00:08:12 Yeah, Mama Thaxton's Tea Room. And we mainly ate up with Ms. Smith Price. They had a little bitty restaurant... Let me see if I can tell you about where it is now. It's basically about where that Stallings building is and the new park, in front of the parking deck; it was about right there. I was a baseball equipment manager for Archie White with the baseball team, and a bunch of the baseball players were from Douglas County, and we were all friends, and we all lived out on Logan Road at the West Georgia Trailer Park. And Ms. Price would let us, about 1:30, come up there, and whatever was left, we could eat it for fifty cents, I think. She gave us a pretty good deal. So whatever was left, we'd all go up there and eat it.

Wayne Garner: 00:09:02 Mr. H. C. Ridley ran the service station right beside there. He was a real town character. And then they had one or two pizza places, and that was about it. But I would go back nearly every weekend and work at the funeral home. I'd go back on Friday afternoons. But it was good. It was really... It was just a great experience. I lived in Jackson Court for a while. That's where the Greek Village is now, and Mel remembers that.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:09:33 Do you have some profound experiences or memories from being on campus and what was happening at that time? There were a couple of protests. There were marches through the Square.

Wayne Garner: 00:09:46 Yeah, we didn't pay a lot of attention to that. I remember all the folks laying and burning incense and hippie kind of folks in front of the student center, but we weren't much into that. [crosstalk 00:10:02].

Mel Steely: 00:10:01 That's when you were courting Jerry.
Wayne Garner: 00:10:03 Yeah. Yeah. I had other things going on.

Mel Steely: 00:10:05 You had your mind on other...

Wayne Garner: 00:10:07 But one of the funny things I remember, I had Dr. Bill Thomas for psychology. Do you remember him?

Mel Steely: 00:10:12 Yeah.

Wayne Garner: 00:10:13 And you've just got to realize, we were just... All of those that were here, we grew up in Douglas County High School, and we hunted, and we were just old rednecks. And I was taking this psychology class, and I went to see him one day. I had to go talk to him about something, and his assistant told he was sitting in a tree, and I would need to go see him there. And he was down here, kind of behind this building, just sitting up in a tree thinking and whatever he was doing. And so I thought, "Well, that's kind of weird." But I sat there and talked to him. In fact, he had a brother, Joe Thomas, that lived in... He was an appraiser and lived in Douglasville, so I'd known him. But Bill was really a character.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:10:48 That's a great story.

Wayne Garner: 00:10:49 Yeah. He was just sitting in a tree enjoying himself.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:10:54 And you talked about... a little bit about your service in the National Guard.

Wayne Garner: 00:10:55 Right. I was in the National Guard for about nine years, and that was then from '70 to about, well, really... yeah, '70 to about '79 and was a scout platoon leader. Back then, there were still some civil rights issues in Macon, and I remember being deployed to go to Macon. And I remember the mayor down there, Machine Gun Ronnie Thompson. If you remember him, Mel, he was kind of a nut and had all kind of issues down there. So then from time to time, we went down there.

Wayne Garner: 00:11:29 There's a very interesting story. We were bivouacked in Griffin. That's where we'd station, at the County Fair out there, the County Fairgrounds is where I, where we were... And one of the marchers was shot. I remember it, and I didn't know anything. We didn't get involved in that. Not until years later when I was in the State Senate next to Arthur Langford, who was a state senator from Atlanta, and he told me... We got to talking. He was the one that was shot that day. And then later on, we
crossed paths and became great, great friends. And Arthur is now dead, but it was sort of an interesting...

Blynne Olivieri: 00:12:19 When did you start identifying, and correct me if I'm wrong, as a Democrat? Can you tell me a little bit about it?

Wayne Garner: 00:12:25 It's pretty much... It's really simple. Back then, if you weren't a Democrat, you didn't get elected. And it's like that now. If you're not a Republican in this county, in this area, you don't usually get elected. Unless you can be elected, then there's no need in pursuing it. But back when I was with the Democratic Party in Georgia, the Republicans were the liberals: Coverdell and all those very progressive-thinking people. I mean, it was Paul Coverdell that pushed mandatory seat belts, and at that time, that was a very liberal thought, that government could make you wear a seat belt. I signed the bill with him because I thought it was a good thing to do, and I remember Speaker Murphy chastised me severely about signing that bill with Paul Coverdell.

Wayne Garner: 00:13:13 And I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, you're just safer if you're in a car with a seat belt on than you are if you don't have it." He said, "That has nothing to do with it. He's a Republican, and you shouldn't be signing bills with a Republican." I said, "Well, you know, okay, whatever." Oh, well. And that's sort of how that came about. But I would say, under Zell Miller and Tom Murphy and nothing disparaging to Governor Deal. We've been friends for 35 years, very close friends, but that was a very conservative group of people. I think Mel would agree.

Mel Steely: 00:13:53 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wayne Garner: 00:13:54 Tom Murphy and Zell Miller...

Mel Steely: 00:13:56 Joe Frank.

Wayne Garner: 00:13:57 Joe Frank Harris. I mean, they continued to have triple-A bond ratings. They kept the rainy-weather fund full. They did not waste any money, and we worked on real things. Now, it just appears to me that all of the issues that the legislators, not only in Georgia, because they're dealing with these social issues, which we never did deal with that. I mean, the issue of abortion, we just thought, we assumed that was your business, none of mine. So we dealt with budgets and prisons and schools and that sort of thing and then steered away from the social issues.
Blynne Olivieri: 00:14:43 That's interesting. We're going to look back at the end of the interview to some of these questions again about Georgia politics...

Wayne Garner: 00:14:49 Sure.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:14:49 ... and national politics. But we're going to delve into your time as mayor in Carrollton.

Wayne Garner: 00:14:53 All right, good.

Mel Steely: 00:14:56 Now, you held just about every major office you could hold on the senate side and in state government, except for lieutenant governor and governor.

Wayne Garner: 00:15:09 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 00:15:11 And many people fully expect you to be governor. I remember when I quit working for Newt in '93, he said, "Well, you're going to go work for Garner and his governor's campaign." I said, "No, I'm going to go teach history." But he had the expectation that you were going to move on over. And you were a state senator and a majority leader, all kind of chairmen, president pro tem, chair of the State Board of Pardons, head of the Georgia Department of Corrections. I mean, you've had a full career. If you'd stop right there, that would have been a full career, and yet you came out here and decided to run for mayor of Carrollton, a little old town... well, not that little, but a small town.

Wayne Garner: 00:15:59 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:16:00 What happened between the time you left... you weren't forced out or nothing like that... and the time you decided to get back into it and run for mayor? What caused that?

Wayne Garner: 00:16:11 Well, we... I came back, and Gerald Pilgrim was the mayor. And Gerald did a good job and still is serving very well, serving the county. But Gerald was a good mayor, younger than me. But when he got to be mayor, I think after about four years, he'd had about all of that he wanted. I think Gerald, it was the first time he'd held an elected office, and as you know, politics is a contact sport, and it gets pretty rough at times. And he had young children, I think.

Wayne Garner: 00:16:56 And he decided not to run, much to all of our dismay, because we really wanted him to. So we were talking, and I said, "Well,
dadgum it, we really need... We need to keep on moving and progressing." So I decided I'd run and was in a race with George Ward, who was on the city council at that time, if my memory serves correctly. And Dr. Roger Rossomondo ran. If you remember, he ran. And then we ended up, we won it without a run-off, and so then we started. That's how I got there.

Mel Steely: 00:17:33 Well, neither of those men were particularly negative opponents of yours.

Wayne Garner: 00:17:38 No, they were fine people.

Mel Steely: 00:17:40 What was the campaign like? Any major issues or anything?

Wayne Garner: 00:17:46 One of the major issues, if you'll recall, and it held around a long time, was our water. We had absolutely the worst water in the state of Georgia. Now, if you recall, back in the mid '80s, we had Cryptosporidium invade our water supply and made everybody in the town sick, if you all remember that. As a matter of fact, Governor Joe Frank Harris came out to the Chamber of Commerce to deliver the annual chamber speech, and he got infected by our water, and it made you very ill, very nauseous. He was sick for a week or two. That was sort of what I focused on. I said, "If I get elected, there's several things we're going to do. Number one, first and foremost, we're going to fix the water."

Wayne Garner: 00:18:38 And there was a lot of people just kind of stuck their head in the sand that didn't really think we had a water problem, but that wasn't true. So I think if there was an issue there, that was it. It was the fix-the-water issue. And then as most campaigns turn out to be, they turn out to be a beauty pageant, and whoever has the prettiest brochure and the slickest stuff and the most name recognition usually ends up winning.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:19:09 The prettiest face?

Wayne Garner: 00:19:10 Yeah, I don't know about that.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:19:11 I think you won on that score.

Wayne Garner: 00:19:12 I think Roger Rossomondo might have beat me in the pretty face.

Mel Steely: 00:19:15 Probably. Okay. Did the campaign differ a whole lot from your previous campaigns for senate? Both of them were focused locally.
Wayne Garner: Not really. We never... It was a more genteel time when I ran. I never ran, I don't think, the whole time I was running a negative ad, and I don't think I ever... Well, I kind of maybe had one negative ad run against me. But we always ran just very positive campaigns and really didn't... We kind of respected folks and didn't get too, at least not out front, ugly or rude like they are now. The campaigns now are just... They're something else. We don't see that so much on the local level, but if you just watched the TV, I mean, I've never... I mean, back in the '70s and '80s, you would just fall over if somebody went on TV and called their opponent a liar or cursed.

Mel Steely: And also they're treated rudely.

Wayne Garner: Yeah, yeah.

Mel Steely: [crosstalk 00:20:28] effect.

Wayne Garner: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mel Steely: My good friend.

Wayne Garner: My good friend.

Mel Steely: Yeah.

Wayne Garner: But no, the campaign was fine. Roger was a gentleman, and George... George probably he... George took offense to my complaining about the water because he'd been on the council, and I understand that. So he was sort of defending the water, and I think that really... Everybody knew we had a water problem.

Mel Steely: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wayne Garner: And you don't think about that, but that is the thing in the city that affects every man, woman, child, dog, goldfish, et al. Everybody drinks that water, and if it's not good, then you have a problem, and I think everybody was ready for that to be fixed. If that was an issue, I think it was. And I also think we had a little bit of a police problem back then. I talked about that a little bit. Depending on what side of town you lived on is how you were treated.

Mel Steely: That was difficult to discuss openly, wasn't it?

Wayne Garner: Yeah, yeah.
It's a lot like talking about black families with no father.

Right.

You hesitate to bring it up because it's going to cause all kind of stuff. And I remember the police thing.

You remember, because I remember one night I was at home, and this was before I got to be mayor. Julian Bond, who I served in the Senate with and we've been wonderful friends forever, called me at home late at night from Washington and talked to me about that problem, and so...

At any rate...

Tell us a little bit more about that.

It just appeared that, back then, if minorities were pulled over, they were just treated rudely, and they just had problems with indiscriminate ticketing and that kind of thing. Everybody wasn't getting a fair shake from law enforcement.

They had to let a number of officers go because they were just so openly beating up black people, that kind of thing.

Yeah. That was... It was a... You know, it was still... That was... It took a while. It took a while to get, you know.

And yet it never reached the stage that some of these other things happened.

Mm-mm (negative).

People did indeed meet together, and the black leaders of the community were very forceful and made their statements, and you and Pilgrim and the others, way before, back when you were in the Senate, I think.

Yeah.

Y'all met with them, listened to them.

Absolutely.

And appointed black policemen.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Mel Steely: 00:23:11 I think one of the best things y'all ever did was appoint the first black cop and put him on the Square.

Wayne Garner: 00:23:17 Absolutely.

Mel Steely: 00:23:18 He had to work the Square every day, and so he met every businessman, all the people shopping, and they got used to the idea of having a competent black man as a cop because they saw him all the time, and it really made a difference.

Wayne Garner: 00:23:32 And that was just... It was just kind of that undercurrent. I remember I voted for the Martin Luther King holiday when I was in the legislature, and I voted to change the flag when I was in the legislature, and my house had to be protected by the state patrol for months, and my children were taken to school in a state patrol car. You know, threatening to burn the house down and all that stuff. At any rate, it's a lot better.

Mel Steely: 00:23:59 You had a lot of those things... I remember... We haven't got to you're a funeral home director, but I remember one time a fellow showed up with a gun threatening to kill you.

Wayne Garner: 00:24:08 Yeah, he took me hostage for about an hour. Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:24:10 He sit there pulling that gun at you.

Wayne Garner: 00:24:12 I remember one night I got a call from the Ku Klux Klan. They had an office in Franklin, and it was about the flag, and they threatened that they were going to come burn a cross in my yard. I said, "Well, come and light it, and if you make it to the street, it'll be a miracle because I'm going to shoot you. I don't subscribe to non-violence." So he said, "Damn," and hung up. So I never heard anymore from him.

Mel Steely: 00:24:44 Well, in those early campaigns, you acquired some very devoted friends and allies that worked hard for you, and some of them are still around today. Every time you go down by the liquor store, you see the big sign. You expect to see "Vote for Garner" down there. Did you worry about putting together a campaign, or just built it as you went with your close friends and supporters and people that you knew?

Wayne Garner: 00:25:17 No, when I first ran, I figured out pretty quick that there was a science to that, a science that I didn't know anything about, so I found a guy. Probably the first time somebody ran something, I hired a consultant. His name was Dr. Wade Shoals. He was assistant school superintendent in Cobb County and he had run
Roy Barnes' races over there and a lot of judges know him, so I hired him. We put together the mechanics of the campaign in terms of direct mail, when to mail it, what to say, how to write it. More pictures, less words.

Mel Steely: 00:25:56 So you had already done all of that before you ever ran for mayor...

Wayne Garner: 00:26:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 00:26:02 ... as part of your-

Wayne Garner: 00:26:02 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:26:02 Yeah.

Wayne Garner: 00:26:02 And then when I ran for mayor, I got Joel McElhannon. You know Joel.

Mel Steely: 00:26:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wayne Garner: 00:26:07 Well, he came out and did the media stuff, the brochures and the mailers and that kind of thing.

Mel Steely: 00:26:15 Mm-hmm (affirmative). But you already had a built-in reputation and all of that. I know the people that liked you, liked you. And those that didn't, didn't.

Wayne Garner: 00:26:21 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:26:22 So you just...

Wayne Garner: 00:26:23 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:26:25 Yeah. Do you remember right off hand how much that mayor's campaign cost you? Not much was it?

Wayne Garner: 00:26:31 Not much.

Mel Steely: 00:26:31 $10,000?

Wayne Garner: 00:26:32 Yeah, maybe less than that.

Mel Steely: 00:26:33 Okay. Was being mayor different from being senator?

Wayne Garner: 00:26:41 Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Mel Steely: 00:26:43 Tell me about it.

Wayne Garner: 00:26:47 When you're in the legislature, you have to build consensus. In the Senate, you've got to get 29 people to agree with what you want to do. And being mayor, you just... If you want to do something, pretty much you can do it. So it's not a... You have to build consensus with the council, but that's two people. And we had a great council. The twelve years I was there, I don't think... I mean, I can count on one hand dissenting votes we had. I mean, we never got at cross purposes. We communicated. We all wanted to move the city forward.

Wayne Garner: 00:27:38 The first thing we addressed was the water. We went to Douglasville, and we stole an engineer down there and brought him up here and paid him well and said, "Fix it. You don't have a budget. Just fix it." And so we started membraning water here as opposed to the old ways you treated it. I think that was about $7 million we spent membraning the water, and then once it was... What we did was we left all of the water filtration as it was, and we filtered the water just like they always did, but then we ran it through the membrane, which takes out everything. Cryptosporidium cannot go through the membrane. And so then we began to have... We won water awards all over the Southeast. I mean, consistently ranked up there with the best water in the state. Once you got that done, then we began to focus on downtown. Downtown, when I first got elected, the Square, the vacancy rate was 65 to 70%. There was just nothing going on. Parking was atrocious. You couldn't get downtown. So we built... The first thing we did was we built the parking deck next to the Cultural Arts Center. And then we built the Amphitheater downtown. I was in Savannah. I think it was Savannah, I think, yeah. And I saw this amphitheater, and I went, "That's what we need."

Mel Steely: 00:29:10 Was that in your first term?

Wayne Garner: 00:29:11 Uh-huh (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 00:29:12 Okay.

Wayne Garner: 00:29:12 No, wait a minute. I was thinking it would have been in the second term.

Mel Steely: 00:29:16 I think you talked about it, and it was in the paper in the first term, but it happened in the second. Yep.
Wayne Garner: 00:29:21 Yeah. But I came back and told Casey Coleman, who was the city manager... I like Casey. Casey stayed with me the entire time. I said, "We're going to build an amphitheater." He said, "You have lost your mind." I said, "Well, I may have, but we're going to build it." And where the old Skinner furniture store was, we tore that down and built the Amp, and it's been a success. The hospital and all the businesses around town bought into it, and they sponsored the concerts. And so you have during the summer movies and concerts that are free. I mean, it just brings thousands of people downtown, so the Square began to... really began to move.

Wayne Garner: 00:30:03 Then we started focusing on green space, and we bought the Hobbs property out at the end of Rome Street, 275 or 300 acres. And people griped about that, "Oh, blah, blah, blah," And then we began to work on The GreenBelt. Laura Richards was very instrumental in that and put in a lot of money on it, and we helped her. And the city put in a million dollars on it. And if you'd get to a point where people were being onerous about it, we'd... I don't think we had to condemn any... We had to do one condemnation to get The GreenBelt in, but that has been such a boost for this community, The GreenBelt.

Wayne Garner: 00:30:45 So all of that began to come together. Another thing, we built a new fire station and got our ISO ratings to 2. The best you can have is... And then we revamped the police department, because I had a little bit of a law enforcement back...

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:31:04]

Wayne Garner: 00:31:00 Police department, because I had a little bit of a law enforcement background being commissioner of corrections and kind of understanding.

Wayne Garner: 00:31:06 I remember I was out of town and we had a business lady in town that was attacked in her business, and was raped. It was on a Friday. Kasey called and told me about it.

Wayne Garner: 00:31:23 And this is, we hadn't been in office, this was the first summer of my first term. I'd been in about five months.

Wayne Garner: 00:31:33 And I came straight home and I called Kasey, and said where are we on this case and he said, well they're all off until Monday, they won't be back until Monday. I said, who? He said, well the detective and everybody. I said, no, no, no. You get them all in here. Because if you wait until Monday, you'll never catch this guy.
Wayne Garner: 00:31:54 We got them all back and had a little “come to Jesus” meeting about how you investigate things like that. I called on some of my contacts at the GBI and then sent a profiler out here, and some other guys, and put a task force together and within five days, we’d made an arrest.

Wayne Garner: 00:32:15 That was one of the things I was proudest of, when I left office we did not have an unsolved murder.

Wayne Garner: 00:32:24 The one that took so long was the West Georgia College student that was abducted at Wal-Mart and was killed and put in the spray fields, that went seven or eight years, nothing ever happening and we just would not let it go, and finally made an arrest, and he's in prison now.

Wayne Garner: 00:32:43 That was, the police department we have got a great, great police department here. And we spent a lot of money on it. A lot of training. The fire department response times now are less than three minutes anywhere in the city. We were happy about that.

Mel Steely: 00:33:05 And they do an awful lot of stuff that has nothing to do with fires. And I remember when Dr. Wagner was dying, I was sitting with him, and he got up to go to the bathroom by himself and fell, couldn't get up. And I was too weak to lift him. We called the fire department and sure enough within two or three minutes they were there-

Wayne Garner: 00:33:25 Oh yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:33:25 ... all of them, great big boys. They picked him up, took care of him, carried him in, got him settled. They do a lot of things that have nothing to do with firefighting. Just public safety and support.

Wayne Garner: 00:33:38 Yeah. And another program we started called a Snap Program and that's if you, if someone elderly or whatever lives alone and they need, they don't have anybody to check on them, they could apply at City Hall. It's not an application, we just send the police over there and get their information and kind of, their schedule. There's a good many on that program, but police will come by, you'll get at least two or three visits a week, and two or three calls a week from City Hall, just to see how you're doing. And if you needed some medicine picked up or an errand run or whatever, they do that.

Wayne Garner: 00:34:21 It was a good run, we enjoyed it. I think we got a lot stuff done.
Mel Steely: 00:34:24 Okay, Blynne.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:34:26 Okay, you're second race was unopposed, do you credit that to really tackling this major water issue problem of what do you [crosstalk 00:34:36]-

Wayne Garner: 00:34:37 I think that helped a lot, and well maybe a lot of people just didn't want that job. I mean, you stay busy. I'm amazed now, but I would average fifty calls a day on my cell phone, and now I don't get but one or two, which is kind of nice. But it's a lot of work. The pay's tremendous, it's $100 a month is your take home pay.

Mel Steely: 00:35:10 With all the perks that go with it.

Wayne Garner: 00:35:11 With all the perks that goes with it.

Wayne Garner: 00:35:13 But I think so, I think people were just, were satisfied that we were heading the right direction, and they liked the downtown coming back. And then our relationship with the University.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:35:27 Right that was my next qu-

Wayne Garner: 00:35:30 Sure.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:35:30 I want to ask, was the hiring of the first black police officer, who was stationed on Adamson Square was that under your mayoral-ship or?

Wayne Garner: 00:35:40 I think that was under Gerald's or Joe.

Mel Steely: 00:35:42 It might have been Tracy, right before he-

Wayne Garner: 00:35:44 Well, it could have been.

Mel Steely: 00:35:46 It was in that period.

Wayne Garner: 00:35:48 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:35:49 I can't remember what the guy's name was and I knew him well. The black guy. You don't remember either.

Wayne Garner: 00:35:57 Oh, Brewer. Oh, you're talking about way back.

Mel Steely: 00:36:01 Yep.

Wayne Garner: 00:36:03 Yeah, hold on and I'll tell you. Golly bum. Well, it'll come to me.
Mel Steely: 00:36:10 Big heavyset guy, that really wonderful at dealing with people.

Wayne Garner: 00:36:16 Had a gold tooth. You remember?

Mel Steely: 00:36:18 That's right.

Wayne Garner: 00:36:19 Golly bum, he lived out near Wal-Mart.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:36:21 It'd be great to have his name [crosstalk 00:36:23]-

Wayne Garner: 00:36:23 I'll think of it before we leave.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:36:27 Tell us about the town-gown relationships between Carrollton and now the University of West Georgia, it's called.

Wayne Garner: 00:36:37 The twelve years that I was there, I mean, we had an excellent relationship. I understood clearly that this university is the economic engine for this part of the state. And you can't do enough for it. I mean, absolutely.

Wayne Garner: 00:36:56 We finished the land gift of the two, ever how many, hundred acres it was over there.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:37:05 The stadium area.

Wayne Garner: 00:37:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Blynne Olivieri: 00:37:06 Yes.

Wayne Garner: 00:37:08 The city owned that and we arranged to give that to the university so they could build a stadium. We donated probably over half a million, we talked the county into giving a million toward the stadium.

Wayne Garner: 00:37:23 And we were able to convince other members of the council, you just take this... I'd tell them, you go out there and you take a big old eraser and you wipe out the University of West Georgia, you now live in Hogansville, or maybe Bowdon Junction, that's where you live. They begin to get the picture of it.

Wayne Garner: 00:37:46 I mean, it's just, we had an excellent relationship with Dr. Sethna, and he, what a great guy. He and I got along famously. And Dr. Marrero now, I've enjoyed getting to know him. And we've always had that.
Wayne Garner: 00:38:05 And this goes back, I mean Dr. Townsend when I was in the legislature, Dr. Townsend wanted a sign on I-20 at Villa Rica that says for the exit to the University of West Georgia at that time, West Georgia College. And I worked on it, worked on it, worked on it. Tom Moreland was a highway commissioner, and he wouldn’t put it up he said, because you got to be so many miles, whatever some mileage thing. And I was driving to Savannah one day and I saw a sign that said, Statesboro exit here for the university there. Well, I just got off and drove, and it was the exact mileage just about that he said, you had to have.

Wayne Garner: 00:38:47 So, I called him on the phone. And he said, you got me, we'll put it up next week. I called Dr. Townsend and he was, I think that the most excited I’d ever heard him, but we finally got that university sign up on I-20 at the...

Wayne Garner: 00:39:05 But the relationship has been good, and I hope it will continue. I mean, I hope those that are in office now understand the value here. I know they want to do a baseball program, and we’d talked about that, and I was going to figure out some way to get them some money. The clock ran out on me. But I hope they'll continue that, because it’s just a great investment.

Wayne Garner: 00:39:31 And in talking to the chancellor and the Board of Regents, I mean, their budgets are getting tighter and tighter, and local folks are going to have to step in and help and they’re doing that around the state. And those that are willing to do that are going to be a lot better off.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:39:49 Right. How about the relationship between Carrollton and industry, like Southwire, and Tanner Health System, and Greenway. Will you, were there tax breaks, what kind of incentives did you have in place to sort of keep business in town and grow industry?

Wayne Garner: 00:40:10 There’s several ways you go about that. I mean, before when you would try to bring an industry here, you’d spend the day with them, and they'd kind of look around and say, yeah, yeah. But now when you bring them in, and you show them Tanner, the university, the Greenbelt, the city school system, and I've seen that time and time again. The downtown, the golf course, all of the things we worked very hard for the last 10 to 15 years of putting in this package at the end of the day, it's almost where do I sign. Yep, where do I sign?

Blynne Olivieri: 00:40:53 Great quality of life.
Wayne Garner: 00:40:54 Quality of life is far more important than, in many instances to the economic incentives you give someone for coming here.

Wayne Garner: 00:41:06 But having said that, when we brought in the frozen seafood place, I can't think, I'll think of-

Wayne Garner: 00:41:11 That's right. When I would meet with them, I would just say, I would always say just tell us what you want, and we'll see if we can get there. Because many times, cities will make them offers and they'll come back and get back, well, it's just kind of like dealing with a rug trader. You get something and they'll go back, come back with it.

Wayne Garner: 00:41:36 But anyway, we just upfront. And they were good. They said, here's what we want. We need the pad grated. We need water. Blah, blah, done. Done. That's how they got here.

Wayne Garner: 00:41:48 And Daniel Jackson, his crowd did a good job.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:41:51 At the Chamber of Commerce.

Wayne Garner: 00:41:52 With the chamber in bringing people in.

Wayne Garner: 00:41:56 And as far as Tanner, for instance there before I left Tanner wants to, they're going to do a big development across the street from the hospital, and be a big medical building. We then met with them.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:42:10 That's right on the other side of Dixie Street.

Wayne Garner: 00:42:12 Yes. But we took care, there was a big water issue down there. It was going to be probably a hundred to two hundred thousand dollars. And you could make a reach that the city could do that, so we took that on. The city did and did that and saved Tanner that money.

Wayne Garner: 00:42:27 Southwire the same way, if they needed help on anything, we'd do it.

Wayne Garner: 00:42:34 Greenway, we helped them with grants and one thing, kind of funny, Greenway wanted to bore a little hole under Hays Mill Road, they're going to drill a well across from it, but there was a rock up there they couldn't drill, so they wanted to drill a hole under Hays Mill Road to run the pipe and they were going to irrigate their landscaping. And I talked to the city engineer, I called him, I said they want to bore. Oh, you can't bore under it, you can't bore a hole under there. I said, they just bored a hole
under Boston. They just tunneled under Boston, you can't go under Hays Mill Road. Well, I guess you can, I guess you can.

Wayne Garner: 00:43:14 I mean, you know, my point is that we tried to figure out how to make it work as opposed just to say no.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:22 Yeah.

Wayne Garner: 00:43:22 And that for a long time in Carrollton, way back, I mean, that was the mindset whatever it was, no, can't do it, no, no. And we trying to turn that around.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:36 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:43:37 In fact, you sold your funeral home to Greenway.

Wayne Garner: 00:43:40 That's right. Yep. Sold it [crosstalk 00:43:42].

Mel Steely: 00:43:42 That's where their office was for a while there.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:44 Oh, interesting.

Mel Steely: 00:43:45 He had his own funeral home for a while.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:46 Yes.

Wayne Garner: 00:43:48 Yep.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:48 I didn't realize it was right at that site.

Wayne Garner: 00:43:50 Yeah.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:43:52 And your third term drew some opposition and was a close race. And what do you think, why do you think it was so close.

Wayne Garner: 00:44:02 I had the Tea Party after me. Mayor's races and the media, I wish they would run them on presidential years, but they run them on the not, off season years when the turnout is extremely low. And the Tea Party got after me, they didn't like me and I don't like them. I don't like their politics. About purchasing a building on the square for the West Central Technical College.

Wayne Garner: 00:44:32 We purchased the building, they took a million dollars and refurbished it, and we gave it over to the development authority. And for some reason, they didn't like that.
Wayne Garner: 00:44:44 They got after me, and I didn't, you know. I was at that point finally if they want it, they can have it, that was just fine. Probably wasn't the best attitude to have, but none the less, that's what it was. And I would attribute that to why it was so close. Two thousand people voted, and we had, I mean, I know all of them by name, they really worked hard, they about beat me.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:45:10 Were there some problems with the county government, and how did you get along with Carroll County commissioners and so forth?

Wayne Garner: 00:45:18 We had excellent relationship with, I started out with Robert Barr who was a great chairman, we got along just fine. He got fed up with it, and just quit. He called me on a Friday, I was in the mountains on vacation, he called me, he said, I'm not, I'm leaving. I'm not gone be chairman anymore. I thought he meant he wasn't going to run. But he said, he was going to quit that day. He quit.

Mel Steely: 00:45:46 You ever figure out why? He just got tired of it, or...

Wayne Garner: 00:45:49 Just got tired of it. I mean, Chappell and them was on him all the time, and the county was having.

Mel Steely: 00:45:53 They tell on everybody though.

Wayne Garner: 00:45:56 Oh, I know it. Horribly financially, the county was in horrible financial shape, and it was just more than he could deal with.

Wayne Garner: 00:46:01 But I got along with him, got along with Bill Chappell famously and worked very well with Marty. We worked at that, though. We worked at that. Because every Friday just about, almost every Friday, the chairman and myself and the city manager and a few more, we'd go eat lunch together. Because in terms of making all this work, the worse thing you can have is political instability, when you're bringing people in.

Wayne Garner: 00:46:33 They want to know that the mayor, and the commissioner get along, and they get along with the school people, and there's not all this in-fighting. And that is very unusual for that to happen in a Southern town, normally the mayor and the commissioners hate each other and fight. But we haven't had any of that, and that's not just my doing. That goes all the way back to Horrie Duncan and Dudley Cross and they all got along fine, except for Horrie and Judge Tysinger, they...
Blynne Olivieri: 00:46:57 Yeah, we heard a story about Horrie Duncan in interviewing former Mayor Joe McGinnis. That was quite interesting.

Wayne Garner: 00:47:05 Horrie when he was dying, I went to see him, and down at his house, and I got ready to leave and he said, well, you're going to hear that around town I called you an S.O.B. He said, I did, but I meant Henry Head. That was a solicitor. He called my name. I said, well don't worry about that, that's okay. But he was made at Henry but he called my name, so he wanted to make sure when I got back to town and heard that, that he didn't mean it to be me.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:47:39 I think Mel, had this great question about Bill Chappell and when we were talking about your relationships with county commissioners.

Mel Steely: 00:47:46 Yeah, Chappell came in while you were mayor.

Wayne Garner: 00:47:50 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:47:50 At a point where Robert had just quit.

Wayne Garner: 00:47:52 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:47:53 And put the program back together. Did a great job.

Wayne Garner: 00:47:57 Did a good job.

Mel Steely: 00:47:58 And going into your third term, you had a similar record. I mean, things looked good. I mean, you've just listed all the positive. And Chappell had all the positive and yet, you could walk out of a meeting with Chappell, and he'd give you everything you want, and you would hate his guts.

Wayne Garner: 00:48:15 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:48:16 It was a personality thing.

Wayne Garner: 00:48:18 It was.

Mel Steely: 00:48:20 The same kind of thing was forested on you, it's your third term, what is it about Garner that he does all this wonderful stuff and people so damn mad at him. They would compare the two of you, I don't know that it's a good comparison but nevertheless, the success rate of running a good office and getting rewarded for doing it was not evident in either of your races. They were fairly close together.
Wayne Garner: 00:48:47 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:48:48 What do you think about-

Wayne Garner: 00:48:50 Zell Miller, my mentor said this about politics, that politics was the art of making less than half mad. When you've been there as long as I'd been there, you get to that saturation point, where you'd like for everybody to love you, but they don't. And you do a lot of good stuff, but you make a lot of people mad. I mean, there's a lot of people didn't like that amphitheater and a lot of people didn't like buying that building and buying that Hobbs property, although I thought it was good. And you know, I'm my own worst enemy, I guess, I didn't, I knew what we needed to do to move this town forward and make it good. And I just didn't pay any attention to the naysayers. Just, you know. And that's not very smart, but nonetheless, I knew I was right.

Wayne Garner: 00:49:54 You pick up some baggage. And Bill, Bill Chapell is a genius. I mean, he has a Master's Degree from Georgia Tech, he's an engineer, but he can just, if he don't like you, he didn't like you. I mean, he just, he could be gruff and rough.

Mel Steely: 00:50:16 What was the difference between he and Horrie? Horrie could be very gruff, I remember many times going in with a very good case for something, and he'd say, no, I ain't going to do it. And that'd be it. Chapell would give you what you wanted, but it would still be with the same kind of attitude.

Wayne Garner: 00:50:36 He's a little like Tom Murphy. Murphy was like that, I mean, he was... I told Tom Murphy one time, I said, if you looked like Robert Redford you'd be the most popular man in the world, but he had that old big ears and wore that old Stetson, and a cigar in his mouth. Just sort of a stereotypical Southern politician, and was gruff and rough, but yet he did a good job.

Mel Steely: 00:51:00 He worked at that image though.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:02 He did, but in the end, it beat him.

Mel Steely: 00:51:05 Yep.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:05 At the end.

Mel Steely: 00:51:06 You know, he had seven brand new Stetsons in his basement.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:10 Really.
Mel Steely: 00:51:11 And still in the boxes.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:13 Really.

Mel Steely: 00:51:13 People had given him, and he'd bought them.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:16 I loved the guy.

Mel Steely: 00:51:17 Well, I did too. I mean [crosstalk 00:51:18]-

Wayne Garner: 00:51:18 I did.

Mel Steely: 00:51:18 ... I thought the world of him.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:20 It didn't offend me that he called me son, it made Pierre Howard so mad, he couldn't stand it.

Mel Steely: 00:51:25 He did it on purpose with Pierre. And he didn't call him what he wanted to call him.

Wayne Garner: 00:51:29 No. That's right. I mean, he didn't have to call me, he called me son and boy and all that, I didn't care. I mean, he was old enough to be my grandfather he didn't, he had a right to call me son.

Mel Steely: 00:51:39 Garner didn't like the “boy” thing. I remember telling Horrie one day when I was working for Gingrich at the courthouse, I said Horrie let's get the boys together and go have some lunch. And oh he just erupted, don't you call me “boy,” I ain't no “boy.” Okay. That's all I'd heard all my life, but to him “boy” meant you were a black man. And that's how he interpreted that, and he wasn't having any of it.

Wayne Garner: 00:52:10 But you know, back then too, it was just, I don't know, people were easier to lead, I think back then. With all the, everybody's mad now. I don't know why [crosstalk 00:52:22] they're mad.

Mel Steely: 00:52:22 They didn't take everything as serious.

Wayne Garner: 00:52:23 Well they didn't know so much.

Mel Steely: 00:52:24 Nobody cared who went to the bathroom, as long as you didn't bother them.

Wayne Garner: 00:52:27 That never crossed my mind.
Wayne Garner: 00:52:29 But you didn't have a cell phone, you got home at night, returned your calls, you didn't have twenty-four hour news. You got your news about six o'clock and Guy Sharp told you if it was gone rain or not. And it was just a more laid back simple time. But now, everybody's just mad.

Wayne Garner: 00:52:42 And that just drives me crazy, because I don't understand what everybody's mad about.

Wayne Garner: 00:52:50 I see Trump's Make America Great Again, I think it's a pretty great place for myself right now. I mean, I don't know that. I mean, I've been hungry before, and I've been nearly homeless before, and I got a pretty good deal now. But I think people forget about that.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:53:06 Well going back to your mayorship, you had some great relationships with state agencies in your role as mayor, and surely you just had all these contacts, did those contacts in state agencies help you as mayor?

Wayne Garner: 00:53:20 Oh, absolutely. For instance, when I told Kasey we were gone build a new fire station, I said now we're not gone build a metal building. We're gone build a nice looking fire station. And I said, I'm going to the highway department. I said, I hear they not gone do that overpass out there at Northside Drive. And I went to see Harold Lenningcall who was a highway commissioner, and I said, let me, we're fixing to build a nice fire station, how about letting me swap you some land for that piece right there where the fire station is now. That belonged to the highway department.

Wayne Garner: 00:53:57 And he looked, and he said, well we can work that out. He said, we're not gone use it. We swapped him some land over there behind the soccer fields, just enough to make it work, and then we got that prime piece, that's a two million dollar piece of property, probably, maybe more.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:54:13 And this is the intersection of 166 and Bankhead.

Wayne Garner: 00:54:15 That's right. The bypass, where the new fire station is, and so...

Blynne Olivieri: 00:54:18 Right.

Wayne Garner: 00:54:20 That helped. And with the DNR, we had great relationships with them. And the highway department, yeah, it was beneficial to have those contacts.
Wayne Garner: 00:54:35 But I think the biggest thing was being able to build that nice fire station, that's just sort of, that sort of sets the stage for when you come into town, you see that there with the flags and all that. And we built a heliport there when we were building it, and Tanner's been able to use that from time to time in transporting patients or looking for people that's come up missing.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:54:58 You've talked a lot about all that you accomplished during your mayor... Fixing the water problem, the Amp, the fire station, the Greenbelt, what else do you count among your greatest successes during your whole mayoral terms, your three terms as mayor here?

Wayne Garner: 00:55:15 Well, the depot, I was excited about that. We looked at it, they had a committee, a depot committee, and they hired these architects and all this, they came in with a price of like seven million dollars to refurbish the depot. Well, and we had a grant of a million, half a million dollars or something like that.

Wayne Garner: 00:55:42 We looked at it, and I told Kasey, I said, you know what, let's send that grant back. And let's see if I can't get us an inmate crew out here for about a year and a half to redo that depot. I said, you know, it just needs to be nice, we don't need to spend seven million dollars and bring in these not archeological, that's not the right term.

Mel Steely: 00:56:04 Architectural.

Wayne Garner: 00:56:05 Architectural, these historic architects and all this stuff, it doesn't have to be a $1500 light that looks like a lantern. We can buy something for fifteen dollars and make that work. So, that's what we did.

Wayne Garner: 00:56:22 We sent the grant back, so we wouldn't have to comply with all the stuff. And we brought in, I talked to the Department of Corrections and they gave us an inmate construction crew. And the thing about an inmate construction crew is you have to be very patient, because it takes them about three times as long to do something, because you're having an inmate electrician, and he'll get about halfway done, then he'll get paroled then you got to wait on another electrician to get in trouble, so you can come back and have somebody to work.

Wayne Garner: 00:56:51 But they stayed there about three years, but when they finished it was absolutely beautiful. And instead of spending seven million, we spent just about a million, just a little bit above that.
Wayne Garner: 00:57:05 The depot, we were glad to get that done and the land across the street bought, and the parking lot there.

Wayne Garner: 00:57:11 And the other thing, that I tell people, one of my happiest things about that, we never put an answering machine in City Hall. We paid somebody to sit there, normally the whole time there is Miss Ellen, Miss Ellen Miller, who was the sweetest lady in the world. She'd answer that phone and if you needed somebody she'd find them for you. And if you going in there mad about something, by the time she got through, you were just as happy as you could be. That was a big thing.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:57:42 That's interesting, so high personal contact.

Wayne Garner: 00:57:49 No city trucks or city vehicles can park in front of City Hall. I went by the other day, and I saw one of the trucks parking there, if that'd been a year or two ago somebody'd been chewed out, because you had to use the back of the parking lot and let the taxpayers park up front.

Blynne Olivieri: 00:58:05 And how about your great challenges. You talked about the Tea Party, but sitting as mayor there's a lot of people with opinions and divisiveness and anger, what kind of challenges did you face.

Wayne Garner: 00:58:20 When I first got to be mayor, there was lots of people at the meetings, and the former administration had just set aside citizen comments toward at the end of the meeting, and limited them to two minutes, and people would be mad, I mean, by the time they got to talk about what they were up there to talk about, you'd already voted on it.

Wayne Garner: 00:58:51 And the news media, the media had to sit out in the audience, and they couldn't hear very well. When I got to be mayor, I set up a media table, gave them some ice water and glasses, and treated them like you should treat people. And as far as public comments, we just said if you've got something you want to say, just raise your hand and say it, when we get to something you want to talk about.

Wayne Garner: 00:59:17 And when we did that, the crowds quit coming. I mean, for the twelve years, the longest city council meeting I had was 45 minutes. Normally they were about thirty. No one was ever prevented from saying anything they want to say. But I found out once you take that kind of attitude and we never had a single executive session in twelve years. We just, it was all out there in the open. We bought property in the open, we fired
people in the open, we bought equipment in the open, never had not one executive session in twelve years.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:00:11 Tell us about the Rocky Horror Picture Show.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:14 Oh my.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:00:17 2011 [crosstalk 01:00:18]-

Wayne Garner: 01:00:18 I guess, if I could back up, that'd be the one thing, that's the one thing I would undo. Well-

Blynne Olivieri: 01:00:24 Tell us about that, and why would you change your opinion.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:26 I just caught hell. I mean, I'm telling you right now, woo it was awful. I got letters from China. I mean, all over the world that's unbelievable.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:36 Well, [crosstalk 01:00:37]-

Blynne Olivieri: 01:00:37 A lot of news coverage of that.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:38 Yeah, oh yeah.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:00:38 National new coverage.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:39 Yeah, international.

Mel Steely: 01:00:40 You made them mad, didn't you. Herman Talmadge used to call, they gave me un-shirted hell.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:46 Un-shirted hell. Oh I know it, it was horrible.

Wayne Garner: 01:00:49 Well, what happened was, I didn't even know what Rocky Horror was, I'd never heard of it. And Casey Coleman called me, and said you need to come up here. I went up to the City Hall and they were some people, some concerned parents there, they had videoed the rehearsal of this Rocky Horror.

Wayne Garner: 01:01:08 That was gone be at the cultural arts center. And I looked at it, I said, what. I mean, it was the most, I know this is unedited, but I can't even get into how suggestive that was.

Mel Steely: 01:01:29 Very sexual.

Wayne Garner: 01:01:30 Very sexual, and all I could think of, my God, they have that down there and if Miss Barbara Tanner or some of these people
Wayne Garner: 01:01:47 Penny Lewis who was the head of it, I love Penny, she didn't like my decision, but she accepted it and did a good job, but it really, it really cranked-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [01:02:04]

Wayne Garner: 01:02:00 A good job again. But it really cranked folks up. They ultimately had it out here. My point was, you know, that if you have it where you could control who's coming in, who's coming out, but I mean, we kind of have a G-rated arts center there. I mean, the kids are all back in the classrooms and all over the building, and then you do them. So they ultimately, I think, had it out there at the university. I think it went fine. But yeah they were-

Speaker 1: 01:02:27 Would you have changed how you handled that, retrospectively?

Wayne Garner: 01:02:32 If I had that to do over knowing what I know now, I think I'd just said, "To heck with it," because there're some things that aren't worth fighting, and that ended up being something that was just too much grief for that. But I don't know. I still say that wasn't an appropriate ... Our venue wasn't an appropriate place to have that.

Mel Steely: 01:02:59 But you did learn that lesson didn't you?

Wayne Garner: 01:03:01 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:03:03 I remember meeting with you, less than two years ago. When the NAACP wanted to remove the Confederate soldier statue from the courthouse.

Wayne Garner: 01:03:12 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:03:13 And you and Sam Pyles, commissioner, and a bunch of us met, and they made their case. He listened to them. Asked a few questions, and they were arguing back and forth. Sam and I made our case for the SCV, and you finally just said, "Well, I ain't going to be mayor that much longer. And as long as I'm mayor, it ain't going to be moved."

Wayne Garner: 01:03:37 No.
Mel Steely: 01:03:37  It ain't worth the fight that it would take to deal with it.

Wayne Garner: 01:03:43  That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:03:44  Which is like the Rocky Horror thing, that if you would have known then, you would have said it ain't worth the fight. And they said, "Oh, okay." You suggested they go talk to the next mayor and let him deal with it.

Wayne Garner: 01:03:56  They had one guy that was really, really making them mad. I can't remember his name. He was from [inaudible 01:04:03]. He would go up and stick those Confederate flags into the mortar joints of the statues.

Mel Steely: 01:04:09  Oh, I know.

Wayne Garner: 01:04:09  That's what was making him mad.

Mel Steely: 01:04:11  Oh, he made all these people mad around here. All the SCV.

Wayne Garner: 01:04:14  And I told them, I said, "I'll do this. We're going to stop him from that." And we did. We stopped him from doing that because he was just, you know, being ornery, but yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:04:29  There are those kind of people.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:04:33  Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:04:33  We've touched on a whole number of people that you have associations with, and even mild association with President Clinton, at one point there.

Wayne Garner: 01:04:43  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:04:46  Let me give you some names and just have you react to them and talk to me about them as politicians and your interaction with them and then why they were important people. And we're going to start out with the man you called your mentor, Zell Miller.

Wayne Garner: 01:05:00  Zell Miller. What a great guy. I mean, I served in the Senate with him. When I was elected the first time, as you recall, he was in a race against Herman Talmadge for the United States Senate and got beat. But I think he did set Herman up to get beat by Mack Mattingly in the general election. I think Herman had so much scar tissue, he just couldn't survive.
Wayne Garner: 01:05:31 But any rate, I served in the Senate with him, and after the flag issue, and telling you about my kids having to be hauled to school. I'd about had all that I wanted, and I went to see Zell. I said, "I'm not going to run anymore. I've just had about ... I've had it with all this."

Wayne Garner: 01:05:55 So he said, "Well, don't go home." Said, "I want you to go on the parole board." 'Cause Zell was very conservative. I mean, he had a mean streak. He's an old Marine, and he didn't like the way corrections was going in the state. He didn't like the fact that the inmates had all these weights and all this stuff. So he sent me over there to sort of straighten that out.

Wayne Garner: 01:06:20 And I went over and became chairman of the parole board. Then I was chairman of the public safety committee. Then on a Friday, after I'd been with the parole board about three years, he called me to come to his office, and I went up there. And he said, "I want to name you Secretary of State." Max Cleland left to run for the Senate or something. I can't remember what he did.

Wayne Garner: 01:06:47 I said, "Secretary of State?" I said, "Oh, Lord."

Wayne Garner: 01:06:52 He said, "Well, just think about it."

Wayne Garner: 01:06:54 I said, "Okay." And I didn't really think that much about being Secretary of State. Well that was on Friday. On Sunday, he called me, and he said, "I'm taking back my Secretary of State offer. You're going to be commissioner of prisons." See, Allen Ault, who was commissioner, just resigned on a Saturday. He and Zell didn't like each other, so he resigned. So any rate, that's how I got up there.

Wayne Garner: 01:07:15 But the thing about Miller was he just ... Norman Underwood dubbed him "Zig Zag Zell," but I never saw that from him. I mean, he was always just supportive and strong and, I mean, you know, he had his way of doing things and he was a tough boss, but he was just a super guy. And still is. I talk to him about once a month.

Mel Steely: 01:07:41 I understand he fell again and hurt himself.

Wayne Garner: 01:07:43 Broke his hip and some ribs, but he's doing better.

Mel Steely: 01:07:48 Good.
Wayne Garner: 01:07:48 Yeah, he was at a Young Harris ball game, and I remember one thing about this thing about Miller, how tough he is. But when I was commissioner of prisons, we'd had a rash of executions, about nine of them. And usually electric chair, at that time, and that was just, you know, I could see that thing ... That was going away. So I went to see him. I said, "How about let's do this." I said, "How about letting me propose a lethal injection bill in the legislature? This coming up legislation. Let's get rid of that electric chair." I said, "I think it's just a thing we need to do."

Wayne Garner: 01:08:26 And he looked at me, and he said, "Well, damn, you've done gone soft."

Wayne Garner: 01:08:32 I said, "Excuse me. I'm out of here." I got up and left. I never mentioned it again. But yeah, he was tough.

Mel Steely: 01:08:40 I remember Matt Towery ran for lieutenant governor.

Wayne Garner: 01:08:43 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:08:44 Famously failing and wanted to have the traveling electric chair.

Wayne Garner: 01:08:50 Yeah, I asked in the Senate.

Mel Steely: 01:08:52 I know. It's wherever you committed, great. If you kill a man in Carrollton, they're going to bring the chair here on the square and do it to you right on the square where everybody can come watch you.

Speaker 1: 01:09:01 Hmmm.

Mel Steely: 01:09:01 And Zell thought that a great idea.

Wayne Garner: 01:09:04 Oh, yeah. It passed in the Senate. It didn't get my vote, but it passed. It didn't go any further once Tom Murphy got on top of it.

Mel Steely: 01:09:12 He was tough, but he was a fair guy.


Mel Steely: 01:09:15 I remember doing reapportionment, and he was governor. Newt and I went to see him because he'd have made a real difference if he decided to weigh in. We sat and talked for a good while, and he said, "Newt, I'm not going to get involved in your race." He said, "I'm not going to do anything to help you, but I'm not going to do anything to hurt you. I'm going to stay
out of it. You do what you need to do, and don't worry about me being involved one way or the other."

Wayne Garner: 01:09:41 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:09:43 And he kept his word.

Wayne Garner: 01:09:44 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:09:44 Stayed out of it, and Newt got what he needed. But you're right. He is one of the nicest, also meanest.

Wayne Garner: 01:09:55 He's mean, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:09:57 I visited him in Washington when he was a senator. His staff couldn't believe about him being mean and all else. One time I was in his office, and he kept pressuring me about what did the university people want? Were they upset about ... So he had a few of them that were upset about you building that big golf course up there and giving jobs to all your relatives and what all.

Mel Steely: 01:10:20 And oh my goodness, Wayne. He jumped out of that chair and grabbed me by the lapels and picked me up and just yelled at me. "After all I've done for you people, and y'all won't let me build a little golf course for my friends! Da-da-da-da."

Mel Steely: 01:10:35 And they all said, "Did he really do that?"

Mel Steely: 01:10:37 I said, "Yeah, he really did." I said, "It's a different side of Zell."

Wayne Garner: 01:10:40 That was my last session of general assembly. I was the president pro tem, and he called me down there. It was getting to budget time, and his golf course and all that was in the budget. And Skin Edge was the minority leader from Newnan, and a great, dear friend of mine. And Johnny Isakson was back in the Senate after Zell beat him for governor.

Wayne Garner: 01:11:04 And Zell told me, he said, "You go tell them two that if they block my golf course, I'm going to line item veto everything they have in the budget." And Skin had about three libraries, and Johnny had a bunch of stuff in Marietta.

Wayne Garner: 01:11:17 So I called them in the office, and you've got to understand, we were all friends.

Mel Steely: 01:11:20 You were pro tem then.
Wayne Garner: 01:11:21 Yes. I said, "I'm just the messenger." I said, "Zell says if you all fool with this golf course, he's going to line item veto all your stuff in the budget." Well they went nuts. Johnny Isakson said, "Damn! This is blackmail!"

Wayne Garner: 01:11:38 I said, "Well, that's what I'd call it!" I said, "That's exactly it, but you make up your mind what you want to do." They left his golf course alone.

Mel Steely: 01:11:46 Because it is a promise that'll be kept.


Mel Steely: 01:11:52 But he had a good heart in him and still does.

Wayne Garner: 01:11:53 He does.

Mel Steely: 01:11:55 And he's a good politician.

Wayne Garner: 01:11:56 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:11:57 Your other close, good friend, maybe not as close as Zell, but still close. Roy Barnes.

Wayne Garner: 01:12:02 Roy.

Mel Steely: 01:12:02 One-term Roy.

Wayne Garner: 01:12:05 Huh?

Mel Steely: 01:12:05 One-term Roy.

Wayne Garner: 01:12:06 One-term Roy, yeah. He tried to do too much. Roy and I served in the Senate together, and we just were the best of friends. And I, in fact, I helped him when he ran against Zell. I helped him, and we got beat. And I called Zell the next day. I said, "Well, congratulations." I said, "I've sinned and come up short. What do I need to do?"

Wayne Garner: 01:12:27 He said, "Bring me $3,000, and we'll be even." So I took him a campaign donation!

Wayne Garner: 01:12:37 But Roy Barnes is one of those guys, I'm telling you. He could call me right now and talk me into just diving right out that window. I mean, he just has that about him. And he could've ... I know when he got to be governor, there was a big mess out at Stone Mountain. They'd privatized it, and nobody liked it. They
were having to send the state patrol out there to have meetings with people just ...

Wayne Garner: 01:13:02 So he'd call and he'd say, "Why don't you go out there and straighten that out." So he made me head of the Stone Mountain authority, so I went out there and stayed there a while. And then we'd talk back and forth, but Roy just ... You know, he called me about reapportionment that year. I said, "Just leave it alone." I said, "I've been through three of them." And I said, "In the end, the court's going to draw it. All you're going to do is make you a bad man."

Wayne Garner: 01:13:23 Well, he didn't. He got right in the middle of it. The flag. I said, "Wait 'til your second term to do that." But then they got mad at him. The teachers got mad at him. The flag folks got mad at him. It just didn't end. In fact, the morning after he was beat, I went to the Little Gem Barber Shop. Rusty Crawford, the barber up there-


Wayne Garner: 01:13:51 That's right. Oldest barber shop in the state of Georgia. We've got the older barber shop in the state of Georgia and the oldest bookstore in the state of Georgia. But Rusty said, "You know what happened to Roy Barnes?"

Wayne Garner: 01:14:02 I said, "No, I'd love for you to tell me."

Wayne Garner: 01:14:05 He said, "He made the educated and the uneducated mad." And that there wasn't anybody left.

Wayne Garner: 01:14:12 So I called Jim Wooten, who was the editor with the AJC, and told him he could put that in his editorial about the barber shop synopsis of why Roy got beat.

Mel Steely: 01:14:23 Well, they had such a different ... Roy could charm you and be reasonable, and on the other hand, he'd turn around and do the dumbest-


Mel Steely: 01:14:35 Dumbest things. And I asked him when I interviewed him. I said, "Governor, it just seemed like in your second year and third year, that you woke up every morning saying, 'Who can I go make mad today?'"

Wayne Garner: 01:14:48 That's right.
Mel Steely: 01:14:48 And I said, "Your first year was wonderful, and then you just got in fights with everybody about everything."

Wayne Garner: 01:14:54 When he ran that first time, he had the endorsement of the Sierra Club and the NRA. Go figure, that. And he had every sheriff in the state for him. And then when he run for the second term, he didn't have a single sheriff for him.

Mel Steely: 01:15:15 It was just amazing to me to watch a guy that was so capable. I just didn't understand it, and I still don't understand it. I told him one day, I said, "Can we blame it all on your chief aide?"

Wayne Garner: 01:15:29 You could, Kahn.

Mel Steely: 01:15:30 I said, "Same thing was with Joe Frank when he was there. He had an aide that ran everything like a gang, and you did, too."

Mel Steely: 01:15:38 He said, "No, don't go blaming nobody but me." Roy did.

Wayne Garner: 01:15:42 Well I know when ... I'm trying to think ... I was doing something with Greenway, and they were helping Roy do something. And I was on the Greenway plane and flew Roy and Marie down to Destin, Florida, for some governor thing he was going to. And I was hitching a ride because I had been doing something for Greenway that day, but my wife and I was at the beach at Seaside, and I was going to down there. And I told Roy and Marie, I said, "If y'all get through with your meeting or whatever, call! Come down, we'll be cooking hamburgers on the beach and join us." I was just being nice. I didn't really want them to come, but I was just being a gentleman. Well sure enough, they called me. They came down, and we all had a big time.

Wayne Garner: 01:16:31 Paul Trulock, who I was in the Senate with. You remember Paul. He was down there, and we were going to cook over at Paul's house-

Mel Steely: 01:16:39 He was part of your gang of seven, wasn't he?

Wayne Garner: 01:16:40 Five. Gang of five, that's right. Yeah, Paul was there. Any rate, so we get in the car and go down to Paul's, the little beach house they rented, and he didn't know Roy was with me, and Marie was just ... Paul was in the back cooking hamburgers, and I walked up by him. I said, "Well, you got an extra one if we're feeding the governor?"
Wayne Garner: 01:16:58 He said, "Well, if we're feeding the governor, I might go buy one."

Wayne Garner: 01:17:01 So I said, "Well, we are." So Roy stepped up. They were good friends, but then that was the night. The next morning, Roy called me about Paul Coverdell having a stroke, having an aneurysm.

Mel Steely: 01:17:14 That was so tragic.

Wayne Garner: 01:17:15 It was awful.

Mel Steely: 01:17:15 I had met with Coverdell less than, I don't know, six months earlier and did a short audio tape with him about how the Republican Party grew in Georgia, and we were waiting to do a major, like we're doing right now. And he said, "Well, after the session's over, and we can get together, we're going to do it." And then he died before we ever got it done.

Wayne Garner: 01:17:35 What a great guy. I loved him. He was such a good, good man. Yeah, he was something else.

Mel Steely: 01:17:42 I was on a lot of committees with him, appointing marshals and judges and things like that.

Wayne Garner: 01:17:48 So he died. I went to his funeral. Roy spoke, and then I remember Ted Kennedy came to his funeral. Everybody liked him. He was just a great guy.

Mel Steely: 01:18:02 All right. Next man up.

Wayne Garner: 01:18:04 Oh, Lord.

Mel Steely: 01:18:05 Sonny Perdue. Your predecessor as president pro tem. That's an interesting relationship, isn't it?

Wayne Garner: 01:18:15 Yeah. Sonny, when we were in the Senate together, you couldn't find a nicer guy. He was just smart, and we got along great. But when he got elected governor, and I've talked to him about it, I don't know what happened. Something flipped. I don't know. His staff was afraid of him. He had subject to fits of temper, and I think I went in his office one time the eight years he was governor. I mean, he never did anything to bother me or hurt me. We would speak and talk and this, that, and the other, but he was just ... I don't know.
Mel Steely: 01:18:57 We all got along. I remember he came over to your house here in Carrollton.

Wayne Garner: 01:19:01 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:19:02 Fundraiser and stuff.

Wayne Garner: 01:19:03 Yeah. We got along fine. I never could put my finger on what. He just stayed mad all the time.

Mel Steely: 01:19:14 I don't know what it was, either.

Wayne Garner: 01:19:15 I don't know.

Mel Steely: 01:19:17 I know when he got elected governor, he wasn't really sure it was going to happen.


Mel Steely: 01:19:22 And I didn't think it was going to happen. I remember we got close to the election, and he came out here to Carrollton for a Republican meeting. And I was there and introduced him, and then after a while he and I went outside and just stood around talking. He told me then, this was in the middle of October, and he said, "You know, Mel, I think we may win this thing."

Mel Steely: 01:19:48 And I said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Why do you think that?"

Mel Steely: 01:19:52 And he said, "I've got black teachers coming and telling me they're supporting me."

Mel Steely: 01:19:55 And I said, "You're kidding me."

Mel Steely: 01:19:59 He said, "Nope."

Mel Steely: 01:19:59 These are people with the NEA and what is that other one that they have? GT?

Wayne Garner: 01:20:06 Oh, GAE?

Mel Steely: 01:20:07 Yeah, GAE. He said, "These are people that should be with Roy, but they're mad at Roy."

Wayne Garner: 01:20:14 Well I took Roy and Marie to Blairsville. We went on this United Community Bank plane. So I picked them up. We went up there for a fundraiser the bank was hosting and wanted Zell’s golf course. We flew up there, and we were standing on the runway
in Blairsville, and Roy said, "Well, what's it look like out your way?"

Wayne Garner: 01:20:32 I said, "Well, I'm going to be honest with you. I haven't talked to a single soul that's going to vote for you. Not one."

Wayne Garner: 01:20:40 He said, "Ah, don't worry about it. We're good. Polls are fine." And he was showing me his polls and Sonny's polls showed the same thing, but they didn't count the unexpected voter. Those that normally didn't vote got up and went out and voted against him.

Mel Steely: 01:20:58 Well they tell me, I wasn't in the room, but the election night with his group and all was a mass confusion because they couldn't really believe that it was happening, and he was the only one who was saying, "It's going to happen. I'm going to be the governor."

Mel Steely: 01:21:14 And everybody else was saying, "Well, let's wait a minute. Let's get these other ..." People just couldn't believe that the teachers and all these different groups had turned on him. The flag people.

Wayne Garner: 01:21:25 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Reapportionment. The highway folks were mad. The reapportionment. All these communities that he split. Just like Carroll County, we've got three or four representatives, two senators, I mean, just the county's just ... But I think Sonny was as surprised as anybody, but, you know, anyone on the ballot would've beat Roy. Roy beat himself. I mean, that was a very anti-

Mel Steely: 01:21:55 Carol Murphy, who was at a teachers meeting, that's Tom Murphy's daughter-in-law, was at a teachers meeting where Roy spoke. And being the Speaker's daughter, she sat up front with Marie, Roy's wife. And it was their annual teachers meeting, and he got up and just excoriated the teachers. I mean, just really went after them. "We've got to change this. You people are protecting bad ..." I mean, just ugh. And Carol told me she looked around and Marie had big tears running down her cheeks. She couldn't believe. Roy had not cleared any of that with her. Let it flow.


Mel Steely: 01:22:47 Carol told me, "I don't think there was a teacher that walked out of that room that's going to vote for Roy."
Wayne Garner: 01:22:51 Uh-uh (negative), uh-uh (negative).

Mel Steely: 01:22:56 And people were just, like I am and you are, dumbfounded. What in the world happened?

Wayne Garner: 01:23:00 That resentment of him was deep. I know I was in south Georgia for something down there, and we were having a dinner at Richie Bland's house. They had it catered in, but a couple of the people that was working under the caterer were teachers. They just worked there part-time. I asked them, I said, "How about the governor's race?"

Wayne Garner: 01:23:18 And they said, "Oh, we’re not going to vote for Roy. He's going to lose down here." So I mean, he got beat all over the state.

Mel Steely: 01:23:24 Well it's like you said. When Sonny first ran, he had a pretty good reputation.


Mel Steely: 01:23:33 In fact, that's where I first met him. You introduced him to me as the pro temp.

Wayne Garner: 01:23:37 Yeah. He and I bummed around together when we were in the Senate. We'd go out to dinner and that sort of-

Mel Steely: 01:23:45 People were still angry that he had switched parties.


Mel Steely: 01:23:48 That made a difference to some, but most people had good things to say.


Mel Steely: 01:23:54 And he did some pretty good stuff while he was governor, but he did make some people angry. I think his cousin David, the senator, has learned from some of Sonny's things.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:24:04 But interviewing him, like I am you, he was just mellow and he could be.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:08 Sonny was?

Mel Steely: 01:24:09 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:24:10 His review was, "I've spent eight years as a businessman trying to help Georgia."

Mel Steely: 01:24:14 I said, "You going back to the p ..."

Mel Steely: 01:24:18 He said, "No, I never was in politics." He said, "I went in to try to help the state."

Wayne Garner: 01:24:20 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:24:21 And now I'm out. I ain't going back.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:23 And very wealthy.

Mel Steely: 01:24:28 And very wealthy. And very wealthy. And got people fishing down in south Georgia.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:31 Got them fishing. And you know he's doing all the trucking for the ports.

Mel Steely: 01:24:35 Oh, is he?

Wayne Garner: 01:24:36 Oh, yeah. When he left office, he had about four trucks hauling stuff out of the ports. Now I think he's got about six hundred. Yeah, they're doing good. [crosstalk 01:24:48]

Mel Steely: 01:24:47 That goes back to the question we asked you earlier about the connection scale.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:52 Yeah. Evidently in his-

Mel Steely: 01:24:54 In his case, they kind of lost it financially, but in yours-

Wayne Garner: 01:24:55 Well, they had David.

Mel Steely: 01:24:57 Yours has been kind of balanced, too.

Wayne Garner: 01:24:58 Yeah, he had David on the Ports Authority.

Mel Steely: 01:25:02 Yeah, making sure that vote was going to be-

Wayne Garner: 01:25:04 That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:25:06 I understand. But if you were with Sonny today, you'd feel pretty good with him.

Mel Steely: 01:25:14 Nathan Deal.

Wayne Garner: 01:25:16 Nathan Deal. Oh. Well, when I was majority leader ... When Pierre won the lieutenant governor's race, Nathan became president pro tem, and I was majority leader. We did all the conference committees on the budget and had been friends for-

Mel Steely: 01:25:31 He was a Democrat at the time.

Wayne Garner: 01:25:34 That's right. That was before he changed parties. Before he ran for Congress. He ran for Congress as a Democrat one term and then switched. You know, like I said before, the tide turned, and if you wanted to run, if you wanted to win, you had to do that. But a great guy. I mean, I can't say anything bad about Nathan Deal. He's probably just one of the most straight-up guys and how he's gotten this, I mean I don't know anything about his dealings now, but how he's gotten this mantra of being crooked or whatever ... But when he was in the Senate, we always affectionately referred to him as Reverend Deal because he was just that straight.

Wayne Garner: 01:26:12 I think Nathan's done a good job. I was so proud of him when he vetoed that religious freedom bill, and I was proud of him-

Mel Steely: 01:26:21 The Preacher Protection Act.

Wayne Garner: 01:26:22 The other Baptist Preacher Protection Act, what was the other one he vetoed?

Mel Steely: 01:26:28 Guns on campus.

Wayne Garner: 01:26:29 The guns on campus. I was proud of him for that. He really, in my opinion, stepped up to the plate on those two issues.

Mel Steely: 01:26:37 And had done a pretty good job in Congress. [crosstalk 01:26:41]

Wayne Garner: 01:26:41 He had done a ... Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:26:43 Exceptional. I mean, just a very solid congressman.

Wayne Garner: 01:26:46 Nathan's just a solid guy. And I'll tell how I judge people over the years. I judge people by how they treat folks that can't do anything for them. Waitresses or flight ... whatever, you know. But if you talk to the Troopers that guard the mansion and the
governor and this, that, and the other, I mean, I've had him tell me when they would pick Sonny up, he would say, "My luggage is in ... Go get my luggage."

Wayne Garner: 01:27:16 And said, "Nathan carries his own suitcase." And one of them in particular was working the guard shack after he was elected, and Nathan called him and asked him had he had supper? He said, "Not yet." So he and Ms. Deal took a pot of soup and cornbread and went down there and ate in the guard shack with that guy.

Wayne Garner: 01:27:34 So I mean, you watch how he treats those folks and us lobbyists. People think we're always eating at some fancy place. Normally we're at the state cafeteria every day at lunch, and three times, four times a week, Governor Deal comes over and gets his tray and fixes his stuff and goes through and pays for his meal and sits over there with his staff in the state cafeteria. And so, you know, he still remembers where he came from.

Mel Steely: 01:28:05 He was still a Democratic senator but a leading one when Charles Thomas, our state senator, introduced me to him, and he was not ... Your personality and his are very different. You're very outgoing. You would, "Hey, hi, I'm glad to ..." And he was very reserved.


Mel Steely: 01:28:25 "Hello, I'm glad to see you. You're a friend of Charles." That kind of thing. But I followed him when he came to Washington while I was working for Newt out there, and he was still reserved but a guy you could always talk to.

Wayne Garner: 01:28:39 Yeah. He'd always see you and always make himself available. When Pierre was elected, when all the Young Turks kind of took over-

Mel Steely: 01:28:49 Pierre Howard?

Wayne Garner: 01:28:49 Yeah, Pierre Howard. We went to Athens for the Biennial Legislative Institute, and we had a basketball game up there where the Senate was opposing the House. I was the coach for the Senate, and Tom Murphy was the coach for the House. Well Don Johnson, who later went on to Congress and then got beat, he got his leg broken in that basketball game, and Nathan Deal got elbowed in the eye. Pierre Howard knew an ophthalmologist up there, so we hauled Nathan around Athens
all night long trying to get to an ophthalmologist. He had a torn retina, so they had to ... That was a rough ballgame!

Mel Steely: 01:29:30 You’re glad you were coaching.

Wayne Garner: 01:29:31 Yeah, I’m glad I was coaching. I wasn’t going to get out there in that crowd. And Chuck Knapp was the referee. Dr. Knapp, who was president of the university at the time.

Mel Steely: 01:29:40 Yeah. Okay. Now, one of your favorites, Newt Gingrich. Tell me about that one.

Wayne Garner: 01:29:48 I like-

Mel Steely: 01:29:50 And while you’re at it, kick in the famous story about the Wayne Garner Parkway.


Mel Steely: 01:29:56 That's worth having on tape.

Wayne Garner: 01:29:59 Newt and I, it was so funny. We would kind of "yeah yeah" with each other. Now I was a Democrat, he's a Republican, and we got the same vote in every box. They liked him, and they liked me. Any rate, Highway 61 here was a two-lane road, and 27 to Bremen also was a two-lane road, and there was question of, you know, how we're going to get these roads? They wanted four-lane, one of them. Tom Moreland, who was the highway commissioner ... Normally, you figure we'd do the one to Bremen first because Speaker Murphy was up there. And Tom Moreland called me one day and said, "Do you want to do 61 before we do 27?"

Wayne Garner: 01:30:44 I said, "Absolutely." Because he'd gotten mad at Murphy. So mad at him that the reason Highway 27 from Bainbridge to Chattanooga's named after Martha Berry. Tom Murphy did that because he never wanted any part of that road named for Tom Murphy. So Tom ended up getting I-20 named for him. So they just didn't like each other.

Wayne Garner: 01:31:07 Well any rate, they decided they were going to do it, and we had talked about it, and they knew I thought he overreached a little bit and took most of the lion's share of credit for getting 61 to four-lanes, and he congratulated me on being on the team, and it was a team effort. I got mad and in a local paper I said, "If it was a team effort, Newt Gingrich was the bat boy."
Wayne Garner: 01:31:30 Well, oh, Lord, oh I got in trouble about that, but, really, Newt has been a good friend, great guy. I would give anything if he could be the vice presidential nominee. I don't know if that's going to happen, but our politics was a lot different, but he's a good man. And has been-

Mel Steely: 01:31:53 I remember you really getting mad, politically. It was when he recruited Merritt Lane to run against you.

Wayne Garner: 01:31:58 Well, that's right. That's the other thing-

Mel Steely: 01:32:00 You were really ticked off.

Wayne Garner: 01:32:02 I called and just cussed him out because we had agreed not to get in each other's race that year. Well, the day of the election, on the radio station, it was Newt Gingrich just giving me down in the country. Well I called him in Washington, got him on the phone, and just cussed him out. Just chewed him out, and he said, "There's been a mistake! That was supposed to be on the Hispanic radio station in Lithia Springs."

Wayne Garner: 01:32:33 I said, "Well, it wasn't!" But we went up, you remember me and you and Gene Beckham all went up and spent time with Newt. We were in the-

Mel Steely: 01:32:44 He took us down to the men's bathroom in the floor of the House.

Wayne Garner: 01:32:47 Yeah, took us all through the Capitol at midnight. We were the only ones in there. In the House chamber.

Speaker 1: 01:32:54 What an experience that must have been!

Wayne Garner: 01:32:56 Oh, it was something else. Do you where the Speaker sits up there, do they change that chair? Or has it just been there forever?

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:33:04]

Wayne Garner: 01:33:00 The speaker sits up ... Now do they change that chair or has it just been there forever?

Mel Steely: 01:33:05 No.

Wayne Garner: 01:33:06 Well, if it's still the one that was up there, I turned it over that night and put my card in the spring under the chair.
Mel Steely: 01:33:12 I think it may be ...

Wayne Garner: 01:33:13 It may still be there.

Mel Steely: 01:33:14 The speaker gets to take, well, any Congressman, gets to take his chair, but it's the one in his local office.

Wayne Garner: 01:33:22 I got you. Yeah. But the chair up on the dais where the speaker sits.

Mel Steely: 01:33:29 They get to take their wooden gavel and whatever gavel they use they can take that with them but they can't take the furniture in spite of Hillary taking all that stuff from the White House.

Wayne Garner: 01:33:40 Another funny Gingrich story. We were running. I was campaigning down in Veal a little community down below Bowden. I got out of this country store and back then I had a head full of gray hair and at a distance Newt and I ... You know, there was a resemblance.

Wayne Garner: 01:33:58 And I started to hand this guy my card and ask him for a vote and he said, "Don't hand me your card. I know who you are. You know what, I wouldn't vote for you, Newt Gingrich. I despise you." So he thought I was Newt. And so I just told him, I said, "That's fine. I've made arrangements to do without your vote." And, oh, he got mad.

Wayne Garner: 01:34:15 Then when I met Newt and we had a lunch, a political lunch. I told Newt. I said, "Don't go to Veal today. There's a man down there very mad at you."

Mel Steely: 01:34:26 But you two got along pretty much from the beginning.

Wayne Garner: 01:34:28 Oh, we got along. Yeah. Absolutely.

Mel Steely: 01:34:31 I know there's ... Like I told you, when he ...

Wayne Garner: 01:34:34 He endorsed me when I first ran.

Mel Steely: 01:34:36 I know he did.

Wayne Garner: 01:34:37 At a Kiwanis club. He said, "I want you to split your ballot." He said, "I want you to vote for me and then I'm going to vote for Wayne and I'm going to tell to vote for him, too."

Mel Steely: 01:34:46 That's right.
Wayne Garner: 01:34:47 But then, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:34:47 Yeah. He sure did. And thought I was going to come work for you, that's why I kept working for him. Because I know more than once I've heard him talk about people with built in natural political ability and you and Bill Clinton were compared.

Wayne Garner: 01:35:10 Well, I tell you.

Mel Steely: 01:35:12 And to me, later on, quoting him. You know, just natural political sense. That Garner and Clinton are two of the best. It's always great amazement to him that you didn't get to be governor. We had a lot of circumstances. Okay. Let's see. We've talked about your lobbying. You say it helped you rather than hurt you, as far as you know. There were a few people that didn't like the idea that you were getting paid, as a lobbyist, to go back to Atlanta and work for the same people you had served with. And I won't call any names but the "oh, he's a crook, he's a crook. Go up there, taking money." And so forth. He's a lobbyist.

Wayne Garner: 01:36:08 Yeah, you know. You've got to make a living.

Mel Steely: 01:36:09 Did you run into much of that? With people talking to you directly?

Wayne Garner: 01:36:18 No, no, no. If I'd charged the city for what I normally charge to get a seven million dollar piece of property, put a fire station on, I could've retired.

Mel Steely: 01:36:31 You had three terms. That third one was a contentious one. You won, if I remember, by about five votes.

Wayne Garner: 01:36:40 Fifteen.

Mel Steely: 01:36:41 Fifteen. I remember I called you "Landslide Lyndon" after Lyndon, Landslide Lyndon.

Mel Steely: 01:36:48 Why? Why did you just decide, "I'm not going to do this"? A fourth term? 'Cause I know you were back and forth.

Wayne Garner: 01:36:55 Yeah. My wife, she had just had all of it she wanted and all she could stand. And I was the same way. And I just didn't want to ... it just got to where it wasn't worth it. To go through ...

Wayne Garner: 01:37:09 And I like to go back to what Mather says, art of making less than half mad, and then when you run a race and win by fifteen
votes against an extremely marginal candidate, you've probably reached that saturation point.

Mel Steely: 01:37:30 Did the Democratic Party ever really help you do anything?

Wayne Garner: 01:37:33 No, it never ... no. I've always said about Democrats and Republicans, if you don't have anything better to do than go to a Democratic meeting or a Republican meeting on a Saturday, you need to buy a dog or something. I found that all those people that meet at a Democratic meeting or a Republican meeting are the fringe folks. When I was mayor, I never attended one single GMA meeting, I never went to a conference, a convention, a district meeting. I never participated in that. I just did what I did and go home. I'm big on going home.

Mel Steely: 01:38:18 I know what you mean. I put in twenty-five, thirty years and I don't go to any of it, anymore. Not local, not state, I'm out. You put in your time and that's enough.

Wayne Garner: 01:38:29 Yeah. But you know what I'm talking about.

Mel Steely: 01:38:35 Yeah, I do. She doesn't know what you're talking about. 'Cause she hadn't been in politics.

Wayne Garner: 01:39:07 You know, the whole time I was in the legislature, I came home about every night, I didn't like that business of staying in Atlanta, no. We did some, when we had to, but more times than not, I came home. But as far as getting up on a Saturday morning, go to some rally, listen to somebody ranting, raving, that's not me.

Mel Steely: 01:39:06 I agree with you.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:39:07 Looking over your mayoral career, those amazing three terms, what do you feel best about? What do you take the most pride in, and what do you regret?

Wayne Garner: 01:39:21 Well, I probably will regret Rocky Horror. The other thing I regret is the clock ran out on me, and I hope somebody'll pick this up, I'm going to talk to Councilman Bird, I think he's a guy with a vision for this community.

Wayne Garner: 01:39:37 We did the depot, the Amp, the downtown's good, water's good, all the Greenbelt and all this stuff, but one thing we have not done is secured a place to talk about the history of
Carrollton. And Doctor John Burson would like to sell his house on Dixie Street, and about four acres of land-

Mel Steely: 01:40:06 That the one beside yours?

Wayne Garner: 01:40:09 Right beside Worthy Park, the big ... It's got a pool-

Mel Steely: 01:40:13 And then you're the next one after that.

Wayne Garner: 01:40:15 I'm four houses down.

Mel Steely: 01:40:16 Four houses down from the corner. Just thinking this through. Okay.

Wayne Garner: 01:40:21 There's a slave house on that property. It was built in the early 1800s, it's still there, in pretty good shape. It's about three or four acres, back there. And we need a history and environmental center. I think Southwire would buy into that, Tanner would buy into that, the Quilt Museum, and begin to archive the history of Carrollton.

Wayne Garner: 01:40:45 We haven't done that, and I had nearly had that worked out, and the clock ran out. That's my single biggest regret. I wish ... Doctor Burson hadn't decided he wanted to sell it until it was almost too late for me to get it put together and get the coalition built, but I took a lot of people through that house. It's immaculate. He has spent millions of dollars on that house, and it's just like it was.

Mel Steely: 01:41:11 My brother-in-law went through it.

Wayne Garner: 01:41:13 Is that right?


Wayne Garner: 01:41:18 That's the only piece I think we're missing. The thing's got three floors, you can have University of West Georgia Railway, you could have all the history of the university, Southwire could do some environmental stuff. You got a slave cabin back there, something about Black History Month. Children could go and camp out in a real ... see how it was.

Mel Steely: 01:41:42 So one place where the Yankees marched down the street [inaudible 01:41:45].

Wayne Garner: 01:41:44 Exactly right.
Mel Steely: 01:41:46 So it’s got that all going for it.

Wayne Garner: 01:41:48 But I’d like to see that. I might just take that on as a project, see if I can get somebody to try and help get it built. Well, you’re not doing anything, you can help me on that. We’ll see if we can’t get that done.

Mel Steely: 01:42:01 That’d be worth doing, it really would.

Wayne Garner: 01:42:03 Yeah, that’d be nice.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:42:04 In the meanwhile, the university will help preserve Carrollton's history through endeavors like this.


Mel Steely: 01:42:11 Your predecessor, Suzanne Durham, did a bunch of stuff with photography and got old pictures and postcards and did two or three books of Carrollton, Bowden, trying to preserve that part of it. And the stuff that we have at the university in the special collections is huge.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:42:33 Family genealogies and stuff.

Mel Steely: 01:42:33 We got a lot of stuff that just needs somebody to work with.

Wayne Garner: 01:42:36 See, and this thing could generate income just like the depot generates income for wedding receptions. You could have receptions, it already has this real nice pool in the background and all that stuff. It really is first class.

Mel Steely: 01:42:47 Have a cotillion.

Wayne Garner: 01:42:49 You could have a cotillion.

Mel Steely: 01:42:50 Yeah.

Wayne Garner: 01:42:52 I won’t go, but you could-

Mel Steely: 01:42:57 Well ... Blynne?

Blynne Olivieri: 01:42:59 What do you think is your lasting contribution to Georgia and to Carrollton?

Wayne Garner: 01:43:09 I think to Carrollton, in these last twelve years, I think we’ve really built a good foundation with the water, the depot, the two parking decks. I think our single greatest accomplishment
was convincing the county to build a courthouse downtown as opposed, because there was a time, you remember, after Barr left and Herman Ayers was the chairman, he was going to move it out on the bypass. That's where he was going to build that, near the jail.

Wayne Garner: 01:43:44 And I just blocked that, until we could get him gone. And then when Chapel, I guess, was elected, then we said, "if you'll build a courthouse downtown, the city will build a parking deck." 'Cause parking, of course, was an issue. And we did. We struck that deal.

Wayne Garner: 01:44:05 So now we have a vibrant downtown. I ate today at the courthouse café. There was not a seat available, you had to wait. I mean, it was just packed. So that courthouse bid downtown has been a huge engine.

Wayne Garner: 01:44:21 And the parks, I like the parks, I never saw a piece of land I didn't want to make a park out of. We made the Courthouse Square Park, Hobbs Park, the park along East Street, Alice's Park, right downtown, you go by, see a lot of weddings. Worthy Park, we spent a lot of money building a gazebo up then, and changing it.

Mel Steely: 01:44:45 The fountain.

Wayne Garner: 01:44:46 The fountain, and ... yeah.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:44:47 And when you were talking about the Burson house, is that Burson property right adjacent to the Steve Worthy Park on Dixie?

Wayne Garner: 01:44:54 Yes, yes.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:44:54 Right next to it.

Wayne Garner: 01:44:54 That big white house, yeah. You go behind it, there's a house also that, Doctor Burson, they don't live in it.

Mel Steely: 01:45:02 His momma used to live in it, behind it, didn't she? [crosstalk 01:45:07]

Wayne Garner: 01:45:08 He built a new house. But, you know, if [inaudible 01:45:15] hadn't sold to Doctor Burson, I mean, Doctor Burson's eighty. What's going to happen to that? That is really a gem in the middle of the city. Plus you have a parking deck behind it and
adjacent to the ... And the church, First Baptist Church, is going to buy the bank building, so all that'll be there forever.

Mel Steely: 01:45:36 What about that Stallings building that he bought, and it's just sitting there, adjacent to the park, that little bitty park. Is that usable at all?

Wayne Garner: 01:45:48 Greencourt is in there.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:45:51 Right, they refurbished it completely.

Wayne Garner: 01:45:52 Yeah, it's nice.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:45:54 Actually, that dates back to Sid Holderman. It's seen some rich action. Deep city history in that building.

Wayne Garner: 01:46:00 We bought that building with the intentions of tearing it down, the city. Casey and I walked in, I looked, I said, "we can't tear this building down." And then we kept it a while and sold it to Greencourt. That's Greenway Medical Court. They build a court thing where [inaudible 01:46:18] lies in all the courts.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:46:20 Bayless liner.

Wayne Garner: 01:46:21 So they're active and they're-

Mel Steely: 01:46:24 Good, I'm glad to see it get saved. I know Tracy had planned on selling his house to a sorority and moving in there with Shirley. Then the sorority thing fell through, and it never happened, and then they talked about condemning that building, and then he died, and ...

Blynne Olivieri: 01:46:42 But they were able to structurally make it work and retrofit it and ...

Wayne Garner: 01:46:47 We had to fix that wall, that's good, but that was it. But, yeah. It's good.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:46:52 Kind of helps anchor that park there.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:46:54 Thinking about Georgia and national politics, Governor Deal is wrapping up his governorship and isn't going to run again, there's some difficulty with the Republican Party and the potential Republican nominee, Donald Trump, and there's some news about who from Georgia will attend the Republican National Convention and who won't. There's a lot going on. What's your assessment of the political parties in Georgia?
Blynne Olivieri: 01:47:24 You talked about how you don’t like to be involved, but what do you think is going on?

Wayne Garner: 01:47:32 It appears to me that the mainstream Republican group have let the fringe folks take over. I think that's been Donald Trump's success. And I go back to that anger, there's just some anger out there. I don't know where it's from. Discontent, and if anybody thinks racism is dead, they are fooled. It's not. There's a great book out called Dog Whistle Politics, I don't know if you've read it or not, but how the terms have changed but the message is the same. And I think you're seeing that. Anti-gay ... It's just some people, and I hope it's not a lot of them, but it may be 35% of the folks out there just need something to hate.

Wayne Garner: 01:48:27 I think that's what you're seeing in those that have been voting for Donald Trump. His message, I don't know if he's going to change that or not, but that's what I see happening. I think Hillary Clinton, she may have a shot at breaking even in Georgia. Maybe even perhaps taking it, I don't know. That's just my assessment of it but ...

Blynne Olivieri: 01:48:59 Yeah, thank you.

Mel Steely: 01:48:59 There's a lot of work going on in the party to try to bring it back to the middle and get white voters to come back and to have a competitive candidate for any of the major offices, and they haven't been able to pull it off yet. Although they came close with that Carter boy.

Wayne Garner: 01:49:17 Yeah. If you had like a Josh McKoon from Columbus, the one that's all this stuff, anti-gay, all this kind of stuff, if they were to nominate a guy like him and then you got a Carter, they'd ...

Mel Steely: 01:49:34 Oh, none. None stronger.

Wayne Garner: 01:49:38 Yeah, absolutely. I've argued with some of my representative friends. I think they misread this whole gun issue. I think people are tired of all this gun stuff. The guns on campus had to be the dumbest idea of the century. I would say, it's not the issue of guns on campus, I mean, just shut up, they got them.

Wayne Garner: 01:50:05 But when you pass a law that says you can do this, then the light comes on, I think, in young people's heads that, "oh, I can have a gun so I'm going to go get one." You encourage them to go and do that, and that is so dangerous. At that point in their life to have these ... it was a colossal stupid idea.
Mel Steely: 01:50:34 And yet we've got a run-off for Congress with one of the candidates supporting both the guns on campus and the Baptist Preacher Protection Act.

Wayne Garner: 01:50:45 That's right, Crane.

Mel Steely: 01:50:47 And the other one's saying, "you guys are crazy, don't do that."

Wayne Garner: 01:50:49 He's one of the fringe guys. But as you know, you just go back, whatever you want to call them, fringe, or the moral majority, or whoever they all were, in a run-off, in a low turnout, they're dangerous. They really go back and vote.

Wayne Garner: 01:51:10 All this whole anti-gay thing, I don't think they have a constituency for that.

Mel Steely: 01:51:17 How do you figure the Bernie Sanders people are going to break with Hillary being the nominee? You got a feel for that at all?

Wayne Garner: 01:51:26 That's going to be a lot up to Bernie, but I think Joe Biden said it well yesterday, just give them some time, let all these wounds heal, 'cause there's some deep wounds there and everybody's mad. I say this, I think they're going to have a better time unifying the Bernie folks and the Hillary folks than they will the moderate Republicans to Trump.

Wayne Garner: 01:51:55 Both President Bushes saying they aren't going to support him, they're not going to the thing and Mrs. Barbara Bush the other night says she was sick of him. You got Jeb down there and Lindsey Graham who's saying, "if you're looking for an off ramp, this is probably it," when he criticized that judge. So I don't know.

Mel Steely: 01:52:16 A lot of people felt there were a lot of off ramps, nobody ever took them. They just keep going.

Wayne Garner: 01:52:21 He just keeps going. I saw there's more of them, he's paid four dollars a vote. And Hillary paid I think ten or eleven, in what they've spent. So that tells me that he going to have to spend a lot of money, but he only ... I look at it this way. He's got 40%, roughly 38 to 40% of those that voted in the Republican primary. If you put that across three hundred million people, that's not a lot.

Mel Steely: 01:52:53 Looking at Bernie, people say, "well, Bernie won't keep fighting, 'cause he wouldn't want to hurt the party." I keep thinking, he doesn't care, Bernie's not a Democrat.
Wayne Garner: 01:53:05 He's independent.

Mel Steely: 01:53:06 He's never been a Democrat. He didn't have anything locked in about wanting to save the party. Very different kind of thing. And Trump sure as heck doesn't care about the party.

Wayne Garner: 01:53:17 What amazes me about all of that, and you've been through campaigns, I've been through them, they are the hardest work and I'm just always in two little counties, but I don't know how Bernie Sanders maintains his stamina. That man's 75 years old.

Mel Steely: 01:53:30 He is something.

Wayne Garner: 01:53:32 Hillary is one. That's tough.

Mel Steely: 01:53:38 People are talking about Hillary, they're making up stuff on the internet, Hillary's got this. Had one the other day, Hillary has a brain tumor. They were doing a colonoscopy and found it. And now they're going to have to do something about it.

Wayne Garner: 01:53:58 I was just reading something the other day and I don't know if PolitiFact is legitimate or not, you may know a lot more about that than I do. I don't know if it's truly bipartisan and they just look at the... But if it is, they've rated her as the most honest one of them.

Mel Steely: 01:54:13 Of the two?

Wayne Garner: 01:54:14 Of all of them running.

Mel Steely: 01:54:16 Oh, Lord. Ain't that a sight?

Wayne Garner: 01:54:20 Yeah. If they are truly just look at the facts, then that is pretty interesting.

Mel Steely: 01:54:29 It is, it is. Now, what do you think of the characteristics and skills that is needed to be a good mayor? What do you have to do?

Wayne Garner: 01:54:43 You have to be available. This is still a small town. You've got to be willing for people to come to your house, have them come to your house, knock on the door. And you got to be willing to do that. You got to make yourself available. You got to call people back, and got to listen to people gripe. And when you're mayor and you want to go to Publix, you got to assume it's going to take you forty minutes because you're going to meet somebody in each isle that has some issue. And after you've been there a
while, that just gets more and more and more, and you have to be patient.

Wayne Garner: 01:55:22 I remember, I was at City Hall one day and Sherry said, "there's somebody on the phone, wants to talk to the mayor." I said, "Why, sure," I picked it up. This lady said, "Wayne." I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Did you know Tracy Stallings' phone's tore up?" I said, "No, ma'am, I didn't. I hadn't tried to call him today." Said, "Well, you go over and tell him his phone's not working. And tell him, too, I've been trying to call him 'cause his aunt died." I said, "Well, I'll go tell him."

Wayne Garner: 01:55:49 So I hung up, and Cherry said, "are you really going to do that?" I said, "Certainly." That's how this woman does business. You just pick up the phone, call the mayor, go get Tracy's phone fixed, tell him his aunt died, and then, that's what you're supposed to do.

Mel Steely: 01:56:03 Like the woman in Atlanta who called Wyche Fowler to fix garbage when he was in Washington.

Wayne Garner: 01:56:07 That's right. I remember when I got a call one night from a drunk, about two in the morning, fussing about kudzu, going up his guide wire. And I told him I'd like to help him, but kudzu is a federally protected plant, he'd need to call Congressman Gingrich. I had Newt's phone number to his apartment, I said, "I know he's there," I said, "Just call him now while it's fresh on your mind." And he went along. Newt called me, just chewed me out. That guy called him in Washington. And you got to have a good sense of humor.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:56:42 Politics is so local, isn't it?

Wayne Garner: 01:56:45 Yeah, it is, it really is.

Mel Steely: 01:56:48 If you had a young guy-

Blynne Olivieri: 01:56:51 Or woman.

Wayne Garner: 01:56:51 Or woman.

Mel Steely: 01:56:52 Or woman. We won't go that far. A young aspiring politician.

Blynne Olivieri: 01:57:00 Thank you, Mel.

Wayne Garner: 01:57:01 Thank you.
And they came to you and said, "Mr. Garner, we've watched you, daddy tells us how you did it, you've done it all. What advice do you give me as I start out, trying to get into politics?"

I remember asking Governor Buford Ellington that and he told me, never pass up a restroom. What would you tell people?

Gosh. I think I'd tell them just to use your common sense, maintain your sense of humor and just go out there and do it. I'm always amazed at what people are upset about. Usually it's just nothing. I guess patience would be one, and then ask them, "Generally, why do you want to do this?" There's a lot of ... J. Collins is a good example. He's done a good job up there as mayor, now as a representative. J.'s got a lot of common sense and he listens to people and he goes around to the stores and all that stuff.

Like you just said, it's all local. Just remember, if you get elected to something, that doesn't make you any smarter than you were the day before you got elected. You see people that get elected to something and all of a sudden the head gets real big and they don't make it long.

Senator Talmadge told me one time, said, "These new ones that come in," he said, "stay any time at all, either one of two things happen. They grow in office or they swell in office." And he said, "More of them swell than grow."

That's right.

You've seen it.

Yeah. Absolutely.

We just about run through everything, Wayne.

Yeah. I just about told y'all all I know.

Same here. We haven't even touched the surface, but we ain't got that time. You and I go get a beer, talk about the other stuff.

You adjusting okay to life outside?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

You don't want to get back in it?
Wayne Garner: 01:59:28  Mm-mm (negative)

Mel Steely: 01:59:29  What would you run for?

Wayne Garner: 01:59:30  I don't ...

Mel Steely: 01:59:31  City council? School commission?

Wayne Garner: 01:59:37  I guess my background makes me enjoy days more than other folks. I've had cancer. I've lost a child. My mother died at ten. Those are bad days. This is ... life's good. Life's good. What people get upset about, I'd just honestly like to shake my head, I think, I know what an upset day is and I hadn't had one of those in a long time. Like I said about eating, I'm a bad person to ask if something's good, 'cause I like everything. I would be a horrible food critic.

Mel Steely: 02:00:21  I follow you a little bit on Facebook every once in a while, it comes through, it does.

Mel Steely: 02:00:25  You got the question from-?

Blynne Olivieri: 02:00:28  No. Any last comments from you?

Wayne Garner: 02:00:32  No, I-

Mel Steely: 02:00:32  Anything you really just want to get off your chest?

Wayne Garner: 02:00:33  No, not at all. I really don't have anything.

Blynne Olivieri: 02:00:36  Well, Senator, senator majority leader ...

Mel Steely: 02:00:42  Senator, chairman, majority leader, president pro tem, commissioner, mayor ...

Wayne Garner: 02:00:53  The perfect has been.

Blynne Olivieri: 02:00:54  Thank you for your public service.

Wayne Garner: 02:00:54  Thank you, I enjoyed it. Perfect has been.

Blynne Olivieri: 02:00:54  Thank you so much.

Wayne Garner: 02:00:56  Thank you. I enjoyed it so much, it was fun. Thank you, buddy.

Mel Steely: 02:00:59  It was our pleasure.
PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:01:00]