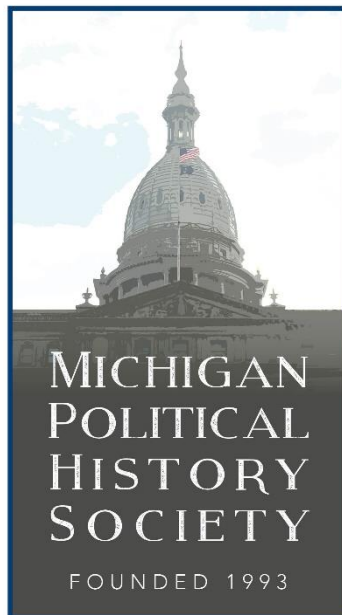


David Hollister

Interviewed by Walt Sorg

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Walt Sorg:

This conversation with David Hollister is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History, a project of the Michigan Political History Society.

Hi, my name's Walt Sorg. I've been in this building, the State Capitol and the ceremonial Governor's Office now on and off for the last 50 years. And for the last 48 it has been my pleasure to know this man, David Hollister. First elected to the legislature in 1975, a lifetime of public service.

And David, it's going to be a lot of fun just to go through the chronology of all the things you have done, but let's start off with your life right now. For the last quarter-century or so you've been fighting Parkinson's disease.

David Hollister:

I was diagnosed in 2000 and I really thought it was the end of my career, but I decided to go forward as I was mayor at the time, and I took a pledge to fight it every day and not focus on it and be straight with the public. We had a press conference, explained it. It has been 23 years now. I walk at least three miles a day. I exercise regularly. I participate at the MAC (Michigan Athletic Club) in a Parkinson's exercise program including boxing.

And I've been able to manage open heart surgery. I had a tumor in my heart that had to be removed and it was kind of complicated getting through the woods on that because of the medications that are involved and different strategies that get your heart in the operation, different strategies, so it's out there. I think about it.

I can sense a loss of memory. Sometimes I draw a blank and sometimes I have shakes, but for the most part, medications, stay on schedule, eat healthy, avoid stress, and live a normal life other than that.

Walt Sorg:

And give thanks you married a saint.

David Hollister:

She has been great. Her dad is 98 and she's caring for him and me at the same time and she's done a remarkable job.

Walt Sorg:

Let's go back to the early years. You graduated from Battle Creek Central High School, came to Michigan State University, got the first of what ended up being a pair of degrees, although the second one was a little delayed. And then you go out into the world and take on one of the toughest jobs out there. You're a school teacher and that didn't work out real well in the beginning.

David Hollister:

Well, I got hired on my first job. I was in Durand. I was teaching a unit on Black History, which was unique to the school. Durand is a railroad community, and the kids were very racist. Their attitudes are very racist. And I decided to challenge them and I invited an African-American leader to come into the classroom. And disrupted the school and the operation the day it happened.

And the consequence was that the administration adapted a policy of submitting your lesson plans a week ahead of time for approval. And I refused to do it. And there were seven of us that were given the

choice to retire or resign or be fired. And I went and took that. I retired, went back to the university, got a master's degree. And it turned it out to be one of the best thing that ever happened to me.

Walt Sorg:

Your early influences politically and probably just in terms of the direction of your life, were the same as quite a few people actually of our age, MLK and RFK. When did you first see Dr. King? I understand he gave a speech here in the Lansing area and that was one of the things that really turned you on to the civil rights movement even more than your involvement when you got fired in Durand?

David Hollister:

Yeah, the firing led me back to school and that led to my being back on campus. And I met King at that speech and volunteered as a result. He was so clear, so articulate. He had such a vision and he was sponsoring a program in the South, the Mississippi Freedom School Movement and asked for volunteers.

And he came off the stage in the auditorium, went down the kind of the side. I was sitting in the balcony, came down and met him at the bottom of the stairs and I volunteered to teach that night. I volunteered even though I hadn't consulted my wife.

Walt Sorg:

When you worked on the Bobby Kennedy presidential campaign in '68, how did you get involved? Was it just a matter of showing up at the door like a lot of political volunteers do even today?

David Hollister:

I got the kids that I had that were high school juniors and seniors and I went and joined the Kennedy campaign and took 20 of them to the Indiana Primary. And we raised money to go. We developed the curriculum, bought the books, volunteered, didn't get paid and spent two months in Holly Springs at Rust College. And came with the kids and the Kennedy campaign and Kennedy won that primary.

The kids that I took from Eastern outperformed their college kids that were there volunteering. They went much longer, they spent more time on it and they learned a lot. And so I just serendipity, I didn't know anybody, but I was driven by this passion for, I call it justice, equality and peace. And both Kennedy came and President Kennedy represented those values and so I just volunteered, got engaged, got the kids involved.

Walt Sorg:

You got your kids at Eastern directly involved in campaigns, not just the Kennedy campaign, but also your own, and I find it amazing. Your campaign budget was something that would absolutely boggle the mind today when you see people spending 25, 30, \$40,000 just for county commission, half a million for state representative, what was your budget?

David Hollister:

\$79.

Walt Sorg:

And you probably wasted half of that, right?

David Hollister:

I was popping potato chips. We ran the campaign in the basement. We used the old mimeograph where you cranked it out and one comes through.

Walt Sorg:

Yeah, you wanted to smell the ink, yeah.

David Hollister:

Yeah. We did the silk screen for the New York Times. Once we got the campaign together, had to get colors and so the colors I used were blue and gold.

Walt Sorg:

Shame on you.

David Hollister:

Even though I was a hardcore Spartan, but Eastern High School were Quakers and they were blue and gold. And so they chose, they ran the campaign. I mean the kids ran the campaign.

Walt Sorg:

And they got you elected? Even though you didn't have a clue what you were going to be doing as a County Commissioner.

David Hollister:

Hell no. I didn't know what County Commissioner was. But after King got killed, a group of us got together at the Student Union and include Lynn Jondahl and Terry Black and a whole gaggle of people, all of us. And so a group of us got together to decide whether we would go to Canada or we would get involved and try and change it.

And just about everybody in the room decided to run for something. And it came to me, I said, "What's left?" And there was County Commissioner was left and so I said, "I'll run for County Commissioner."

Walt Sorg:

It was during this period when Ingham County was beginning to move politically before, when I first got here in the late '60s, it was solid Republican, but by the time you were elected to the county commission, Earl Nelson had broken through to get elected to the State House. And then eventually you ran to replace him in the House when he ran for the Senate. Lynn Jondahl gets elected over in East Lansing and Bill Sederburg is the senator, but he wouldn't be a Republican today. A pretty progressive guy.

David Hollister:

We won the election, 19 Republicans and 2 Democrats.

Walt Sorg:

Very lonely.

David Hollister:

Brady Porter was the other Democrat.

Walt Sorg:

Let me ask you about the person who succeeded you. When you left the County Commission in '74, was your seat the one that Debbie Stabenow was elected to start her career?

David Hollister:

No, she was from the South end. I was in North end Lansing, the 20th district was the northern half. And Debbie followed me. In progression, her husband ran the first time and lost, but they did a brilliant campaign that was breaking tradition to even to have an impact. And Debbie had done that. Even though she'd lost, she'd built a heck of a campaign and it was then picked up by Tom Holcomb, have a Coke with Holc.

Walt Sorg:

Tom Holcomb?

David Hollister:

Tom Holcomb.

Walt Sorg:

Have a Coke with Holc.

David Hollister:

It was all based on the fact that we had grown from two Democrats in '68 to eight Democrats in '72. And then we took control with 11 Democrats. And I was named chairman of the commission. And we actually went aggressively to take over the party and the political apparatus. And I was a school teacher, so I was coaching the candidates and we developed a really strong operation.

And so we went from two Democrats to 12 to control in four years. So I was the youngest County Commission chairman at the time, some common sense, but it was part of my teaching skills that got me in the successful side of the politics.

Walt Sorg:

In '74, you run for the legislature. Was it an easy decision for you to run for the legislature after you knew that Earl was going to move into the Senate?

David Hollister:

I was committed to the county until we took control. And then we took control and never lost since. So I achieved what I wanted to achieve. I could have gone or stayed. I enjoyed what I was doing, but I could see that I was a healthcare advocate, I was an advocate for the poor, a peace delegate. So you weren't going to get much done there. So we decided to run for the House. It was a primary, I beat Al Woodsy who was-

Walt Sorg:

Very prominent local labor.

David Hollister:

Labor democrat. And there were nine other people in that primary, and I came out on top.

Walt Sorg:

When you got to the legislature, you went under the wing of a remarkable man who very few people outside probably the members of the society know, a high school graduate and one of the most brilliant and remarkable people I've ever met. And you as well. A guy by the name of Bill Ryan who went on to become Speaker of the House when Democrats took the majority. How did Mr. Ryan get you ready for what turned out to be almost two decades in the legislature?

David Hollister:

He was a mentor to me, became more like a father figure to me. He took me under his wing, counseled me, gave me books to read. He was a reader. I mean he took his time when he was in Lansing and we weren't in session we'd go to the library or I'd go to see him and just read history. He was a remarkable guy, well-informed but very personable and very loyal. And he treated you like his favorite son. And fairness, civility, clarity of advocacy, what you're doing, but compromise. And he was a remarkable legislator, speaker and mentor.

Walt Sorg:

He also, he wasn't in it for the power. He voluntarily stepped down his speaker and turned it over to another one of his proteges, Bobby Crim, and stayed as a member of the House, sort of like what Nancy Pelosi has done in the US Congress. And he was very proud to speak with the transition. He enjoyed the process, he enjoyed what he could accomplish, but it wasn't about power.

Yet one of the things he did that really helped your career was he gave you substantial power by putting you on the Appropriations Committee.

David Hollister:

He told me, when he made that appointment, he asked me, "Now, do you really want this? Because if you take this position, you will never be governor of this state or you'll never rise above the spot you're in now, because I'm going to ask you to chair the welfare budget. And that only gets clobbered every year."

And the Republican Party had used it as a vehicle as anti-abortion. I mean it was just every minefield that you can imagine was hidden away in the Social Services budget because it dealt with policy issues, racial issues. Every year was a new fight.

Walt Sorg:

And it was also a big chunk of the state budget.

David Hollister:

Oh boy, yes. And we were in a recession, we had to go down to Wall Street. I was one of the legislators who went down to Wall Street and five Japanese banks signed Vivas to keep operating or we would've gone into bankruptcy.

And you throw that into the mix with the auto industry, be so dependent on gas prices and petroleum and international relations and that it impacts everything. And when you cut the budget, you're County Commission Chairman and you've got mental health services you can't provide and children's services you can't provide and senior services that you can't provide, and all the legislators want to provide the service, didn't want to pay for it.

And so they come after the poor. The lobbyists and people who are well-intentioned but not particularly concerned about the impact of these decisions. And so you'd have to muscle it through. And I did it year after year. And I enjoyed every minute of it, but it took a price.

Walt Sorg:

Just to make sure your political career was doomed. You also were on the subcommittees on Mental Health, Education and Public Health and probably the only popular one there is Education.

David Hollister:

Yeah, I chaired that one year because Jimmy O'Neill had a heart condition, and was out, so they asked me to step in. And so I was dealing for us in the State budget. And picking all up in a very short period of time because had one thing led to another and just gradually he was not able to function. And it wasn't until the speaker told him to step aside and get this heart taken care of him and just ask Hollister to do it.

And it was fun. I learned a lot. People didn't think I could handle that, but had a great staff and had a great relationship with the Republican staff. And they gave me some great support. And they did what staffing were supposed to do, look at the policy, explain the options, and help the policymaker and legislators make the right choice. And so the chairman of the Appropriation Committee on Social Services, Mental Health and Joe Young, who was from Detroit became one of my best allies, Charlie Harrison from Pontiac.

Walt Sorg:

First African-American elected in state.

David Hollister:

And Carolyn Kilpatrick, became my best allies because I was advocating for so much that impacted Detroit. When you talk about poor, that's where the concentration of dollars would go. And so I was always in the fight. And it was always a fight of civil rights, fairness and the whole anti-government, anti-social services, anti-women, who would express themselves and then we would go put together a coalition of hardcore Democrats, Democrats and Republicans. And that's how we pulled it off year after year.

Walt Sorg:

Your 18 years in the legislature, so many things that you were deeply involved in, and we can't hit on all of them, but there are a couple that I'm really fascinated about. You spent literally years fighting to open up government a little bit through freedom of information and open meetings. How deep was the resistance to getting rid of all the secrecy that surrounded state government?

David Hollister:

A total war. I mean, I couldn't take this on alone. And one thing I did as a legislator that served me well was to form citizen task forces. So if someone would come to my office and whined or complain or have an issue, I would say, "Well, what do you want to do about it? What will you do? How will you join me in this effort?"

And I had Jim Clark who was a trustee at Delta. I was concerned. He was a board member, that there were secret meetings going on. I got involved in this because of the County Commissioner and there's two of us, Grady and I, we'd go to the board of commission meetings once a month and the decision had been made someplace else, this is going too fast.

And it took me a while to figure out that the Republicans were having a caucus. I think we met on Tuesday night. Republicans had a caucus on Monday night at the Red Coach Bar in Mason. Mason is the...

Walt Sorg:

The county seat. Good place to have a meeting.

David Hollister:

Yeah. And they didn't invite us. So, "I'm going to stop that." And so I got elected, I ran on that issue, open government. And of course this when Nixon was under pressure. I don't want to get sidetracked, but I discovered an ally locally who would help and formed this committee and we formed a meetings committee, then we formed a senior power group.

I had a group of men here every Monday morning, a senior citizen, no cost in the conference room in the Mutual building, but these would be seniors in the region and we'd have speakers come in. And so I had a network that could be mobilized. And we got the open meetings group going and it was lawyers, healthcare advocates, and we made it a big issue. And legislators were getting mail on all these. We never got mail on anything.

When I was a legislator, if you got 10 letters, there's a revolution. Something big is going on out there. And if you got a personal visit from a local school board member saying you need to open the meetings up, because they was doing all these dastardly deeds. So anyway, my experience as the County Commissioner, this had to be an issue to be addressed. We took it on seriously. **Flueckiger** had some interest in the Senate.

Walt Sorg:

David Flueckiger from Dearborn.

David Hollister:

And they got it through. People didn't think it could be done. They had senior power day became a tradition around here and they one day a year where we take this network and grown now over the years and they would present a platform after going to committees and getting resolutions, having lunch, we had someone from Congress, come down and speak to the group. This is a good group. And they'd 90% of what they wanted and didn't spend a dime. It was just a network.

And so when I came in the room, it wasn't just some hot shot legislator, it was this hot shot legislator with an army of people behind him. We took on Blue Cross and Blue Shield and I don't remember who asked me to do it, but I agreed to take it on. And took on the UAW in the process because Blue Cross was offering to bail out the other one. And they had traditionally had a stronger role in labor and this made it more of a consumer co-op. And it was one that touched everybody and we had a big impact.

Walt Sorg:

How long did it take from start to finish? I think it was two or three sessions. Two or three legislatures, five or six years.

David Hollister:

Under 10, but more than six. The one that took a while was the Right to Die. Back then that was personal. That was personal.

Walt Sorg:

Well, this is the Jack Kevorkian era.

David Hollister:

Yeah, my grandfather was a farmer and he had a stroke and was in the hospital and he'd never been hospitalized in his life. And he said after he recovered that if that ever happened to him again, he didn't want anything done. And he told that to my dad and he told it to me and he told anybody he encountered, "Don't treat me if I am not a whole person and don't put me on all these machines, I'm ready to go."

Well, he has a second attack. And grandma did what anybody would do, called the hospital, the ambulance comes out, takes him to the hospital. Now he's all hooked up to all the technology. My dad and I went to see the hospital administrator. And my grandpa was tied down because when he was conscious and competent and there were proof that his brain was damaged and so he never knew when he was making sense and when he was having hallucinations, so they tied him down because he had pulled out his IV's.

Walt Sorg:

Pulled the IVs out?

David Hollister:

The IVs out. And so my dad went and told them, "Grandpa told us what he wanted, we want you to stop." And the hospital administrator said to me, "Well, you're a hot shot legislator, we're not going to stop because we can stop and anybody objects, that's murder. So you go down to the legislation and fix it."

So I called the Governor and said "I'm not going to fix it by myself." I pulled together a coalition of hospitals, nurses, seniors, and we made that an issue. And out of the woodwork comes the Right to Life with signs saying Hollister wants to kill senior citizens. And seniors got it [inaudible 00:29:38]. They want to get this law fixed because they know firsthand the possibility that this health crisis, this individual is facing is complicated and it needs clarification.

So they called me a killer. They'd come in wheelchairs and black bands on the arms and it took me 16 years to get that passed. 16 years.

Walt Sorg:

You're a killer on Right to Die and a couple of other bills you put in, I'm sure made you a lot of friends as well. Mandatory seat belts, you're probably a fascist for mandating that everybody wear their seat belts when they're driving, which of course saves lives.

David Hollister:

This was Dick Austin, the president of the Safety Council and he said, "Dave, take these two studies, one from the University of Michigan, that if you were to mandate seat belts, you'd save this much amount money and there would be fewer deaths, less hurtful injuries and Medicaid savings. And take this other study from the University of Carolina, North or South Carolina."

And it was an analysis of public attitudes. And 80 or 90% of people opposed mandatory seat belts at the time.

Walt Sorg:

That's a good starting point.

David Hollister:

So, "Read it and tell me if you'll sponsor this bill." I read it and it was so convincing that you would save, I've got Medicaid experience on the committee and the budget. I know the impact. I know the cost of injury frankly if you want to be really honest about it. Do you have hope? It's fatal from a financial point of view because you're going to be so severely damaged.

We won that battle by convincing, using an educational campaign that the opponents were arguing for the right to go through the windshield. They were arguing civil rights.

Walt Sorg:

And then you took on redlining in the Detroit area especially, which basically was legalized discrimination against minorities, preventing them from buying homes, and that one probably made you a communist because you take over property rights, so you managed to piss off everybody.

David Hollister:

Yeah, that one I got because Ryan thought I had the chutzpah and the intelligence to handle a super complicated issue that had as it's undermining that's explosive, urban discriminatory, hateful segregationist.

Walt Sorg:

And the data was all on your side. It was easy to prove it was happening.

David Hollister:

Yeah, the evidence was there, but nobody was willing to take it on. And when they asked me to do it, I said, "Well, last time one of these cabinet members came to me and asked me to do something, I did it."

Walt Sorg:

So many other things you did in the legislature that I'd love to talk about, but I want to move on too, to your time as mayor, which was transformational in Lansing. But before we go there, you mentioned Bill Ryan as a constant ally in your many, many wars. And sometimes he was the one who threw you into war, but you had another ally too who literally, you're sitting almost exactly where his desk was back then. Governor Bill Milliken.

David Hollister:

He treated me better and more professionally than any other Governor. He was just a remarkable guy. We had the legislature tied up, one time, we were tangled up in the anti-abortion stuff. It was 3:00 in the morning, call from the House on, I don't know what the hell was going on, but I know I was point of it because I was holding him up and they wanted to go on vacation.

It was July 1st or whatever when the budget was trying to get done. And there were some amendments on the floor. This is the DSS budget, but it's an anti-abortion fight and it's very racial, and I got to pick up the phone at 3:00 in the morning. It was Bill Milliken. He said, "You're doing the right thing, keep it up."

I took that back to the caucus members who were mostly African-American. They were really paying attention at that time. And it strengthened us, that call, it meant so much. And he was such a gracious, humble, tireless, almost to a fault patient, and he made a friend for years.

Walt Sorg:

An amazing person. Let's move on to your time as mayor because it was so remarkable. 1994, you become mayor after a mini scandal at the Lansing City Hall over some early retirement issues, but you were in a situation where Lansing was on the verge of becoming another Flint. General Motors was ready to pull out and we saw what that did to Flint for literally decades and Lansing could have come the same way.

When you were elected because of all of your work on appropriations, especially, I had some business leaders tell me at the time, "Oh my God, we've elected a communist." Oh my. They were so afraid of you, yet you became the best friend of business and labor, possibly the city had ever seen in pulling off a miracle, not just saving GM, but actually getting them to expand here.

David Hollister:

We were the only community in the history of General Motors in the history of Michigan and probably the world, where General Motors executive board made a decision, announced the decision and that was to close. They were closing 100 facilities and Lansing was on the list.

And I got elected. I've been there just a little over a year and Ed Donovan comes to my office. He's a hotshot, lobbyist, one of the quality guys, and he is responsible for community relations and whatever, and the key lobbyists for General Motors. "I've got good news and bad news." I said, "What's the good news?" He said, "Well, we're going to be launching a new centennial series for the Oldsmobile, a week-long celebration, and we're going to build a new car in Lansing called the Alero."

I go, ""Well, that's great news. What's the bad news?" He said, "Well, we're going to be leaving here in five years. That run of car has a cycle of about five years, so you've got five years to plan, but we're leaving." The plants were the oldest in General Motors. Some of them had wooden floors and it couldn't be justified.

We turned that decision around. The only one in the history of General Motors and of the auto industry anywhere. We did it by the same model: Identify your partners, go to work, learn the material so you know what you're talking about, empower your partners, put together a plan, and you become a problem solver in convincing General Motors to stay and to reverse that decision.

And Ed said, "You can't do it. Take the five years and do the best you can. We'll help you, anyway we can." And I said, "Well, not good enough. I knew what the stakes were. I knew the budget probably better than most of the legislators who had never read the damn budget. This would've been devastating.

This was the auto industry when the oil was a problem internationally and competition and regulation and air quality and they were ready to throw in the towel and start something, raised a fine family and do what we're going to do, but don't count us in.

We pulled together a group of community leaders, regional leaders and said, "We're going to work to keep GM. And we are going to do it by becoming a one-stop regionally problem solving group that will address every single issue that General Motors has and we will become a partner."

And Jim Zepka who ran the plant here said, "We're going to run this on the second shift. We're going to show them that our workforce is so good that we can put the Alero, it's going to be the five-year great car." I bought the first one. And as the Mayor, bought 13 for the cabinet. So we were showing we're serious.

Jim builds on a second shift, car comes off the assembly line, they get an award for the best launch in the history of General Motors. They sent a check of \$20,000 to Jim for an award and he can have a party for his workers. And he says, "I'm not going to go with a party for the workers. I'm going to give that money to a scholarship fund that the mayor's working on." Because I had made education a big priority. And Labor agreed that every worker would contribute 5 cents an hour to an education fund for scholarships.

Walt Sorg:

As a result of that, now there's the Delta Assembly Plant, which is one of the biggest in General Motors and a massive battery plant coming in.

David Hollister:

I was the only elected official that ever went into the war room where they do their planning for the next 10 years, the Cars of the Future, and they bet the whole shop, the whole shop, when they decided to change their decision to close Lansing and to be the center for the new Cadillac. That decision is fundamental to saving the auto industry in entirety.

And if you look at what's happened with the pandemic, if you look at what's happening with artificial intelligence, climate, it's all changed. Fossil fuel economy's gone. You've got to be functioning now as if it's an electrification economy. It's all electric, it's going to be all solar. China's trying to jump atomic and go with solar and make the technology adjustment. We are the most innovative region in the world.

Walt Sorg:

At the same time, you were working on a lot of things that seemed like minor league issues compared to General Motors at the time, but really transformational. How you decided to build a baseball stadium in downtown Lansing, which at the time I thought was absolutely insane. And you also really focused on developing a cultural center for the city in Old Town. Again, two small ball things that have had a tremendous impact. What inspired you to do these things?

David Hollister:

Having no money. We had a million bucks of community development, some certain program, and had a million bucks total for the city for the year that I got there. And we were going to focus on three areas. You've only got to do so much. And so we said Michigan Avenue, Washington and Old Town. Every community has an Old Town where the center started.

Walt Sorg:

Every community's got a downtown. And we really didn't have one.

David Hollister:

We didn't have one. Michigan Avenue was a sin strip, high crime, drugs. And by doing minor league baseball, we could clean that area up. When Dixon came to me and said, "Would do you support minor league baseball?" I said, yes, if you bring it downtown, but not if you're going to build it out in the suburbs like they did in Grand Rapids." I wasn't going to be part of that, but we wanted to have be called dual social utility where you're achieving more than one goal with a program.

And it's done everything we've asked it to do. It's wonderful to go in a game and see a dad walking with a mitt in one hand and his young daughter at his side with a Lugnuts hat on and having fun.

Walt Sorg:

And it's affordable fun.

David Hollister:

It's affordable fun downtown and it's not just baseball. It's all kinds of activities. And for the first year, 50% of the people left the game, didn't know the score, they weren't going for the game. They were going to be entertained.

So as part of the design, we got a fence down there, we've got to build a fence 10 feet high so people can't look in, "What the hell are you talking about?" Homeless people, it gives them something to do on, sit down and watch the game on the sidewalk. And so we didn't spend time trying to keep people out and allow it to be divisive.

And I love the fact that it's a goofy operation and that the "Big Lug" prevails. I was afraid Big Lug would run against me. It could beat me. And I survived that.

Walt Sorg:

And Old Town really didn't cost you much of anything to do that was strictly building partnerships.

David Hollister:

Yeah, partnerships and people who really believed in the downtown. Not all of them succeeded and some big failures, but what didn't concern me, my only question was, "Is your money green? Are you willing to take some risks? We'll partner with you, but you've got to deliver for addressing the other issues that are involved."

Walt Sorg:

Another transformational partnership that you created, helped Jackson National go from big to humongous and to do it not in Lansing, but in the Lansing region and tied in with the city. A very unique situation you created with the Township Alliance?

David Hollister:

The 425 Agreement, which Bob Swanson who worked here as a staff member, had helped draft with Bob Emerson, the chief sponsor of the legislation. And I voted on creating this fund, this 425 Agreement, which is my way to have townships surrender some of their green space and get some revenues back from the city and state to make it a win for them.

My focus as I go into any discussion is what are you willing to do and give and how can we make this a win-win? And I will commit to not moving any plan that doesn't include mutual consent and I will not agree to anything that you can't support.

Walt Sorg:

And that was kind of pivotal in making Lansing one of the nation's insurance centers.

David Hollister:

It is now second only to Hartford. And that's what I mean, we are the most innovative community in the world and the university system with an engaged business community with highly skilled, intelligent, we have all the assets. I want to see the community take on the role of promoting itself to lead in this new electrification economy. The fossil fuels over.

Mary Barra was going to, when she took over, she said, we're going to take 10 years and get rid of fossil fuel cars. And she had to move it forward. When they made the decision to go to Lansing, they did it because the labor force could meet the challenge.

We won the facility for Rare Isotope Beams and for studying the origin of the universe. This billion dollar program came to Lansing when Obama puts the senator in line to become president. And this was in his district competitive proposal, and Lansing Michigan won. And it's now leading the world in high-tech.

Walt Sorg:

You took the same philosophy as from mayor and transformed it when Governor Granholm took you away from the City of Lansing, made you the Director of the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, reorganization there so that you had more under your purview, but also you had the opportunity to really help Michigan do what you'd done in Lansing. And that's diversify its economy.

David Hollister:

Yep. And our current governor is a beneficiary and can I think, steal the leadership and represent for all Michiganders, an enlightened leader who understands and can manage this development. We're in a transition from the fossil fuel big engine to electrify cars.

Walt Sorg:

It doesn't hurt that the Secretary of Energy is your old boss too.

David Hollister:

Right. But we have a map. We have a tested model. The components, what they are and how to do it. We just don't do it because we're so fractionalized. And we just don't understand the profound change that has already happened. Mary and General Motors saw it coming, committed zero pollution in our plants. The Lansing plants don't have any pollution, and they recycle. And she was a leader. She did it because she had faith in our workers who were building that, not knowing the science.

It's got to change, as they go along and they've got to learn. And so we're sending people to Eisenach, Germany who are building their Alero. The auto workers are getting a two-week vacation to go to Europe and learn how to do this skilled manufacturing that takes these complex problems and ties in the technologies that are current. And this artificial intelligence is going to exacerbate that by 10.

Walt Sorg:

One last item, and that's something you worked on 20 years ago with Governor Granholm, that the state is still struggling with today. And that is population loss, brain drain, especially amongst the young. Governor Granholm called it cool cities and now I think it's better known as livability, but it's something that you saw then that was key. And my sense is that you and Jennifer Granholm were a little bit ahead of your time.

David Hollister:

That's putting it mildly. But I enjoyed working with Governor Granholm, she's willing to give you a lot of latitude as a director of Department of Labor and Economic growth and great friendships, had great memories, and no regrets.

Walt Sorg:

I think we'll stop it right there. David, always, always a pleasure to see you again and I wish you good health and another 20 years of being you.

And probably to wrap up, I asked your wife before we started recording, have you ever, ever, ever shaved off that beard? And she said it was once. But it lasted what? A day.

David Hollister:

It was two weeks.

Walt Sorg:

Two weeks? When did you grow it in grade school?

David Hollister:

I was part of my hippie development as the County Commissioner. My first time in the County commission, I had a peace symbol on my chain around my neck. I had a flag upside down on my butt. They were bell-bottoms. I've still got them. I could still wear them and I do wear them at some occasions. But the County Commission, I had to get a police escort home the first Monday night.

Walt Sorg:

You were ahead of your time there too.

David Hollister:

I had a resolution to stop the war in Vietnam and Grady had a resolution to support Cesar Chavez and the great boycott of California. And they laughed at us. The Republicans thought we were nuts, had two Democrats, but Brady and I could work together. And if you get a second, you can keep the meeting tied up for a long time. And they finally threw up their hands and Democrats took control. They knew what the hell they were doing and have served well since.

So it's fun. Don't get confused by names and labels and stereotypes. Find ways to work together and tackle these issues, but don't run from them. And don't bad mouth your neighbor because he or she doesn't see the world the same as you do.

Walt Sorg:

Some would call it persistence, others would call it pigheadedness. But whatever it is, it's worked for you for a long time.

David Hollister:

There's a formula there that can have an impact.

Walt Sorg:

David, thank you.