

Interview with Julie Ann Dirksen
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Hosea: It is May 14, 2009 and we are talking to Julie Dirksen at her home in Springfield, Illinois. Julie, thanks for doing this of course. Can you give us some of your background and just a little sketchy history before you took your job with the [Illinois] Historic Preservation Agency?

Dirksen: Well, I think first of all, you need to know—and you probably will ask this somewhere in your comments to me—I am from Springfield and I grew up here. So to me, part of the reason that I was able to do this particular job and have the commitment that I did to it was because it was part of my lifelong pattern. I grew up on North Fifth Street right across from Lincoln Park and I got to see the top of Lincoln’s Tomb throughout my childhood. So it was kind of a very special feeling for me to grow up here and then to be a part of this whole undertaking. My background is that I have a degree in education and that was very beneficial to me in everything I’ve done because a teacher requires good listening skills and the ability to work with a broad frame of people. I taught for six years. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Then I was asked to serve on Memorial Medical Center’s first community organization, which is called Friends of Memorial. That was a

major commitment because there was not anything quite like that in the whole area. We put together a program that allowed people to support their local hospital but also to learn, because Memorial put together a whole education program to work with the community on healthy living. That wasn't done then. That was not done at that time. Now it's very common.

Hosea: You were over that whole program?

Dirksen: I was on the board, as a volunteer on the board.

Hosea: Okay, a volunteer at this point.

Dirksen: And I was so impressed with the people, that a year later they asked me to come on staff. I can still remember that I was laughing with my former husband and myself. I said, Oh my gosh, they're going to pay me for doing what I did for free. So I became the director of community services at Memorial and I had four different divisions that reported to me. The largest was the volunteer department. Then I did the buying for the gift shop, which was financial support to the volunteer department. I also worked in conjunction with community events with the Foundation; we had a program called The Gold Club which was a free service for people of Medicare age. And we did all kind of community organizations and training programs. So I had a wonderful career there.

Hosea: Now you established the volunteer program or was it going?

Dirksen: The program was started because in most hospitals, there were volunteers. There have always been volunteers in hospitals. It's just part of the community support. But what I was able to do was to take it to the next level. Because at that time, men starting wanting to volunteer because men were living longer, men were wanting to have something to do. So we formed the whole men's program for volunteers at the hospital.

Hosea: Up to this point, volunteers were almost all women?

Dirksen: All women, all women. Over the years we developed one of the biggest programs in the state; we have over 400 volunteers and about 150 of those were men. So then I was asked if I would be interested and coming to work for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Hosea: How did that subject get brought up? Just friends or people you knew or...?

Dirksen: All of the above. The job description that they were interviewing for was very much what I was already doing. So I was kind of a known entity. Plus the fact that because, even though I worked with volunteers all those years, I've always been a very active community volunteer myself. So I knew all these things that were going to be going on and I knew a lot of the people who were putting this together. At one point in the planning process I was the chairman of the Springfield International Visitors [Commission].

Hosea: Can you describe what that's about?

Dirksen: Well, there are international visitor groups throughout the United States and they are basically volunteers. It comes through the Mayor's office and people who serve on that committee are appointed by the Mayor and they are usually people who represent all different aspects of the local community. Springfield, because of Lincoln, was the third largest request city in the United States by foreign visitors. Of course, the first one—which I think is hysterical—was Disney World (both laugh) and then their second one was Washington, D.C. But the third was Springfield because people throughout the world love and revere Abraham Lincoln. And this was before we had the Presidential Library and Museum. But, you know, Illinois Historic Preservation, had all of these fabulous historic sites that people could come and see, and that's what they did. So as the chairman of that community organization, I worked with a wide range of community leaders, et cetera. In my position at the hospital, I represented hospital in a lot of different community organizations. I was the first chairman of the Festival of Trees and that was a huge community commitment. Even though it was part of Memorial we still worked with tons of people in the community because that's what it was all about – creating a holiday tradition for families. So when they started doing this, I was asked to attend a lot of the different planning meetings.

Hosea: Regarding the museum and library?

Dirksen: Uh-huh. You know I was not an historian.

Hosea: What year are we in about now?

Dirksen: Okay, at that time... Let's see, the museum opened in 2005. So it was ten years prior to that that they were starting to talk about; what can we do, how can this be done. People were, you know, sitting down and having conversation.

Hosea: Now, are these state people or community people or both?

Dirksen: It was both. It required an **enormous** commitment from many people, but you always need a couple of people who are the driving force, I mean with something like this. Number one was our Senator Dick Durbin. Dick always said: How in the world can we have presidential library museums for all of these presidents and not have one for the most famous of all? We have to do this. Then the other one who was just determined to make this happen was Julie Cellini. Julie served on the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Board of Trustees, plus she's lived here for years and years and years and had been involved. The two of them are the ones that I really give full credit for being so insightful and determined to make it happen. Now, there were tons of people that worked to bring it all together, but it was their vision. So, anyway...

Hosea: So, as a volunteer and with your job with the hospital you were kind of involved with a lot of these meetings?

Dirksen: I was involved, yes.

Hosea: And so on and so forth.

Dirksen: Yes, yes, exactly.

Hosea: So, this job now is opening up and it gets mentioned to you through various sources that you would be a good person to do that?

Dirksen: Yes.

Hosea: Who actually interviewed you?

Dirksen: I was interviewed by several people. First of all I was interviewed by the Board of Trustees. But the one that I talked to a lot was the Director at that time of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and that was Maynard Crossland; he was the director at that time. Then one of the first people that they really wanted and had talked to about putting this all together was Richard Norton Smith.

Hosea: Oh, his name was being mentioned?

Dirksen: No, not ten years ago. No, this would be once they started putting everything together and having the building and the commitment and things like that.

Hosea: So, when you were interviewing, what year are we in?

Dirksen: When I was interviewing was 2003.

Hosea: 2003, okay. Richard Norton Smith was being mentioned, but wasn't on board at this at this point?

Dirksen: Correct.

Hosea: And so after a hiring process you were actually hired for the position. What was the formal title for your position?

Dirksen: My formal title was Senior Public Service Administrator of Guest Services.

Hosea: And what did that involve?

Dirksen: Well, initially they wanted me to hang the moon and the stars and the sun, then they finally realized that one person could not do everything that they wanted, so I was responsible for four departments, not six. So I was responsible for the front entry, which all the ticketing...

Hosea: To the museum now, we're talking about?

Dirksen: To the museum. All the ticketing, all the bus groups, all those planned events that goes through front entry.

Hosea: Okay.

Dirksen: I was responsible for the education programs. The education program was one of the most important functions, because that's even in the mission—about providing education.

Hosea: So this is working through teachers and schools and so on?

Dirksen: Yes, setting up the whole education program. And of course, the volunteers, which, you know I had had years and years and years of experience. It was just paramount that we develop a volunteer program, not only for the fact that you wanted to bring in the community which was very important, but that the volunteers would give a whole different perspective to the visitors, too.

Hosea: And then, the fourth one?

Dirksen: My fourth one. Well, that kind of went back and forth. They initially wanted me to do the gift shop and the café all together as one. That one I said no. I couldn't do that too, so then I was to do the facility rental and work with that.

Hosea: So that's special activities, that people rent the space to have a wedding or whatever?

Dirksen: Right, right.

Hosea: By the time you officially accepted the job and started work, that was your four areas of responsibility then?

Dirksen: Yes, but what happened then too, is that they did a lot of switching around; so my main focus, because of the large size of what I was having to put together, was front entry: the volunteers and education programs.

Hosea: Can you give us some idea, when you walked in the door in 2003, I guess...

Dirksen: I walked in the door—I started May 3, 2004.

Hosea: 2004, okay. When you walked in the door in May of 2004, can you give us kind of a picture of the situation with the library and the museum—physically and organizationally and so on? What were things like?

Dirksen: Well, first of all, I was the third person hired for the museum.

Hosea: The other two being...?.

Dirksen: The first one was Richard Norton Smith.

Hosea: So at this point he was on board?

Dirksen: Yes, and then he brought with him Eric Nelson as his assistant. Eric and I started the same day, but Richard Norton Smith was there. He was hired in December and I was hired in April and started May 3. I can give you... It was just an amazing thing. They had not moved the library staff into the library yet. They were still constructing but not finished. The exterior was finished but they were working on the interior. The library staff were all the people who were over in the lower level of the Old State Capitol because that's where the Presidential Library was. So there was Richard Norton Smith, Eric and myself in this enormous building, which it was enormous because it was empty—the library—and I was over in one corner and they were in another corner.

Hosea: Which floor? On the ground floor?

Dirksen: We were on the first floor. They were in one corner of the building and I was in another, so that was a very awesome experience to be there and not have anybody there with you. Across the street, across Jefferson, because that's where they were building the museum—the building was already up—**nothing** was done inside. And on Jefferson were all of the—oh what do you call them, not the Quonset huts—but the construction huts where all of the people who were building in the building, that's where their offices were. So Jefferson was only half open because it was all the construction site for the museum. So I would sit in my office and I could see across the street all the construction going on. That was amazing because I got to not only meet all of the contractors and the people who were building the building, but I got to work and meet the people with Bob Rogers Incorporated which were the design people.

Hosea: Were you part of discussions on the continuing issues? I understand there were a lot of them.

Dirksen: There were a lot of them. Some of them I was—not all of them. The problem that happened right away was that, be it good or bad, I came in to the whole thing as a person with no background in architecture or design. But I came with a lot of guest relations common sense and I have learned that often times these people who are architects or designers want things that look pretty and that you know give a good overview, but the design often times isn't applicable for the common people. For instance, to have such a small entry on the museum: there was no place for the crowds of people to come in and for people to exit, because when it's bad weather and we live in Illinois, we have terrible winters.

Hosea: The original design for the entry was much smaller?

Dirksen: Right, no, no, it was not much smaller, because it's small. I guess they thought people would not wear coats, because the coatroom is minute. The bathrooms, the place where the general public needs access, was very difficult. I mean it's common sense things that we think of but the overall building itself is **gorgeous**, absolutely breathtaking.

Hosea: So most of your focus was on the museum rather than the library?

Dirksen: No. My focus as far as implementation, yes. The first thing that we did though was, we had to prepare for the opening of the museum because that was going to be huge.

Hosea: And when was that? Was it scheduled for when it finally happened?

Dirksen: It finally happened. We did a six week preview opening of the museum and it officially opened with President Bush on April 19, 2005.

Hosea: And when you began work, was that kind of the date you were thinking of?

Dirksen: We knew it was going to be in the spring but we didn't know exactly when. But we knew that the museum wasn't even completed. I mean, we basically finished up the building just prior to the opening.

Hosea: And you of course had to have all of your procedures and so on, and people ready to volunteer, and so all of these things done?

Dirksen: Exactly. Um-hum, there wasn't anything. You know just writing up all the policies and procedures and then working with the various library staff people because there were no museum staff—none. And working with the library staff people to acquaint them with the idea of being open to the public for one thing, this huge influx of people which they were not used to because they weren't used to volumes of visitors coming; they were used to historians and research and scholars, but not the general public. And then the community was so excited they could hardly wait to volunteer and be involved. One of the things that I learned when I was doing all of the volunteer organizations at Memorial is, that to have a quality program you have to be prepared; you have to have all the different policies and procedures in place. You have to have job descriptions. You have to do a whole orientation. You have to do interviews because you don't accept every single person because sometimes they are not willing to work within the framework that is needed to have a successful volunteer program.

Hosea: At some point were you allowed to hire staff? Did you get a secretary, people to help you?

Dirksen: That was another learning curve for me. I worked in the private sector and I had no idea (laughs) about how the state and the union¹ worked for hiring procedures. There were several people already in place, long standing employees with Illinois Historic Preservation, that were fabulous; they were very kind to sit with me and literally tutor and train me on the various policies and procedures and how you did these things. You know, being very naïve I came in to it with the idea that I would be able to identify the various people to hire and bring them in, and that's not the way it works. However, with the candidates that were brought in to be

¹ The primary union was the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

interviewed, I did have some flexibility as far as being able to ask the various questions and to really critique their ability.

Hosea: What positions did you hire? Who was working for you ultimately?

Dirksen: One of the first people I hired was Linda Bee as the Director of Volunteers. And I was **so** lucky; Linda had basically worked in a variety of positions through the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency at various historic sites, so she was able to interview for that position. It was such a wonderful opportunity for her, and a very lucky person for me, because she came with so much background from state, how you work within the confines of the state and all the background of knowing who's who within the historic sites. That was a real learning curve too, because I always looked at the Presidential Library and Museum as the jewel in the crown for Historic Preservation, but never the whole crown, ever. There was a lot of animosity and we had to overcome some of the apprehensions by the other agencies, et cetera and we did. I know a lot of the credit goes to Linda because she would be able to say, Julie you need to go talk to this person.

Hosea: Any one or any other positions that you hired early on?

Dirksen: Alright, no, I didn't hire early on. Then we were able to interview for an assistant to Linda. Then we did hire a person for the education department. Then in December—now mind you, we decided by then we were going to open in March for the test opening—they finally let me hire the person in charge of front entry which is ...

Hosea: Who was the education person?

Dirksen: A person who was hired as the education person did not stay on in that position.

Hosea: Oh, okay.

Dirksen: The person who was hired ultimately left, and the person who is there now is the one we brought on later on. But in December I was able to hire Clare Thorpe who is just outstanding. And again I was **so** lucky.

Hosea: Was this education?

Dirksen: No, this is front entry.

Hosea: Front entry, yeah, okay.

Dirksen: Then after Christmas I was able to bring in Erin Bishop in charge of education.

Hosea: Is that A-a-r-o-n?

Dirksen: E-r-i-n. And she is just this fabulous young woman who has lots and lots of experience and has her doctorate degree. She's been excellent.

Hosea: Now were you and this group essentially responsible for the structure of these programs as they came so? For instance the really large number of volunteers that are used continuously when the museum is open essentially; that was a decision you folks made that this should be a large group?

Dirksen: Yes.

Hosea: What went into that decision, rather than maybe two or three volunteers kind of wandering through the museum, to actually have it as you have it set up now with all these different positions and maybe eight, nine, ten people there at one time?

Dirksen: Well, first of all, again going back to the very beginning, we had to evaluate what the needs were. That's important to have a strong volunteer program. You have to fulfill the needs of the institution. So when we started seeing how the museum was designed . . . Well, let's go back to the library first, because the library again had never been heavily visited when it was under the Old State Capitol. Now we have a presidential library. We have this magnificent building. We have the potential of a presidential museum across the street. So of course visitors were coming in droves. So how do you get these people in and what is their experience there? So what we did is, I met with all of the various departments that were in the library and interviewed them and talked to them and said: How can we help you, what are the needs that you see for having volunteers. Can volunteers do more than just bringing tour groups or how do we do this. We are not in any way doing job replacement. That is paramount that they understood that. That's the first sentence in every job description, that we are here to assist, we are not to replace. Very important. So we set up the volunteer program. In fact our first volunteer orientation—I started in May—was in August of that year and Linda started in July. I had to write everything, and create everything, then as soon as Linda came on board we worked nonstop to put together the program. And then we knew too, that with this particular volunteer program, people are going to come from all over the world; many of them are scholars themselves and historians. So they're going to know a lot and they're going to ask questions; how do you train volunteers to answer all the right questions and how do you this. So that's when we all decided that not only would we have orientation and we would have interviews, that we also would have a continuing education program for the volunteers. So we did all that with the library.

Hosea: At one point were there tours of the library?

Dirksen: Exactly. That's what we did. That's exactly right. Because of the interest in this place, you know, we had to schedule tours because there were so many. And we did a lot of speaking engagements too, because people in the community wanted to know, and I don't mean just Springfield but I mean surrounding areas...

So then when we got ready to start really seeing the format of the museum and we could see how it was going to be laid out, that really helped us formulate where

the volunteers would be placed and why they needed to be in those locations. So that's how we really did that.

Hosea: Since we were in an obviously post-2001² [referring to the 9-11 event] atmosphere at this point and you were head of guest services, was there a lot of discussion of security and how all of that would handled and so on?

Dirksen: They had, and they still do, a private company, Securitas, which came in. They gave the staff people a lot of background training. We also included in the volunteer training about what they were to do. One of the reasons that volunteers had walkie-talkies was for security purposes. But we were very fortunate. I think the fact that security was so visible throughout the museum, plus the volunteers were so interactive too with the public, we did not have any problem fortunately.

Hosea: The time, at least as I watched newspapers, there seemed to be as I remember a lot of false starts in terms of bringing the actual library materials over to the new library. Were you involved in that? All the air conditioning issues and all this stuff that went on?

Dirksen: I was there when this all happened, but I was not involved with it. Fortunately, that was out of my domain.

Hosea: Can you take us through the ramp-up to the opening and dedication of the museum, particularly when you knew such dignitaries would be coming?

Dirksen: Before we do that, in order to talk to you about the opening, one of the most important things that took place was the formation of a community organization called Company Is Coming.

Hosea: Company Is Company?

Dirksen: Yes, and what we did was—again going back to Senator Durbin. He had an interview with the Journal Register and their editorial board in, I think it was like August sometime and the year before, and he was saying to the editorial board, “Well, I know the building is going to be built. I know that there will be people hired. But I don't think that the city is ready. That's my fear.” Well because I know him so well and have worked with him on various things with all this, several of us sat down and talked about it and said, “He's right”. We have got to get Springfield organized. So what we did—and I honestly think it was smartest thing we ever did—is that we pulled together a very large committee of representation from every facet in the city: city government officials, the Mayor's office, all the people that were involved in that. The people with the Department of Transportation. We had to figure out the signage to put on the highway. We had to figure out how do we handle the buses, so we had to work with streets. We had to figure out, okay, what do we do with the police. We had police

² Hosea refers to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trader Towers, the Pentagon and the foiled third target attempt.

representation there. We had Springfield convention and tourism because they're the ones that schedule all of the school groups and the paid tour groups. How do you work that into the system? Because you can't just have people showing up at the door all at the same time. So we kept pulling in all ...

Hosea: Was there a formal chair for this?

Dirksen: So we started, we pulled them all together, and then the Chamber was there, all of these different components of the community. Through trial and tribulation we pulled this group together, and the best person was a local woman by the name of Marilyn Kushak and she was the chair.

Hosea: Can you spell her last name for me?

Dirksen: K-u-s-h-a-k.

Hosea: Thank you.

Dirksen: We would meet, and it was without a doubt the best thing we ever did because every single person that was there... Sometimes we would have 35 to 40 people sitting there. We had state government represented. We had federal government represented. We had every single component because to put this opening together—and I don't mean just the day of the opening—but I mean putting this all together so that people would be able to come in an orderly fashion and visit the museum and the library. I mean anything that you could think of. There wasn't anything. You have to understand, there was nothing, and we were able to put it together.

Hosea: And you were the Historic Preservation Agency representative essentially on that?

Dirksen: Well, I was the lead on part of that but we also had to have the historian. We had Tom Schwartz there because he would say, "Oh no, we can't do this for the library. You have to do this. This is what we need to do." We had the entire Illinois Historic Preservation [Agency]. We had the director of the Historic Preservation, Bob Coomer, who was the Director by that time. I mean, it needed all of those components. I mean the fact that we had nothing on highways to say turn here to go to the Presidential Library and Museum. We didn't have any signage in the city. We didn't have anything for the buses. We had special training that we put on for the hotels, the taxis, the buses, so that they would know what the plan was. Restaurants, anything that you can think of. So that by the time that we opened on April 19, 2005, everyone knew company was coming. And everyone was at the same place so that everyone knew what the expectation was.

Hosea: So your job kind of peaked at that point? Did it become more of a stable thing after the opening?

Dirksen: No. (laughs) No, no, no, no. No, because it was just another phase. It wasn't peaking; it was another phase because then the doors were open. Now there is a difference between a historical museum and Disney World or places like that. I'm talking presidential museum. No historical museum had the visitation that we did. In the first six months we had a million people. And **no** museum, **no** museum had that. The Clinton museum had opened just two years prior and they had, at that the time, the largest number, but we eclipsed that in six months. So, it was a different challenge. It was day-to-day operations.

Hosea: For you personally, what was the most challenging aspect of this? What caused you to say this is really a challenge and I've got to handle this somehow?

Dirksen: Opening, and going to work the first day. Literally going to work the first day and there was no one in the building but me—I mean, where my office was and Richard was around the corner there in the same building—and knowing that there was nothing. But that was also the fun. It was also the creative part of it.

Hosea: You did a little before, but just in general now, can you contrast the differences between working in the private sector versus working as a state employee?

Dirksen: First of all, I was very lucky. Memorial is a wonderful place to work. They are very much a community hospital, so they are very much involved in working with the community and were excellent with their employees. But one of the things that Memorial did—I always talk about this—is that they gave what they called leadership training; they have a man that they brought in and he was responsible for classes. And basically what it was, it was almost like, well it was, it was like creating your own MBA. The people who were in management positions had these required courses that you had to go to. Anyway, I was able to do that and that was just so amazing to me that I had that opportunity so it gave me a lot of business background. The other thing though that I got from Memorial—and this was a real hardship for me—was that I had flexibility in hiring. When you work the state you have certain mandates that you have to follow as far as union positions, non-union positions, et cetera, and it was very hard at times. I was **very lucky** in that, because it was new, nothing had been created yet. For instance one of the things I really wanted, with the front entry and with the volunteers I was just determined that the volunteers and the front entry people would make a positive first impression because first impressions are what it's all about many times when you go in to someplace. So I wanted the volunteers and the front entry employees to have a dress code; that was hard. They did not want me to do that and I had to fight on that one. But again because there wasn't something in place already, and this was the first time, I was able to create it. I wanted to have education, particularly for the front entry people because they're the ones that interact as staff people with all the visitors and they have to do so much about having a clear understanding of what all is out there as far as the visitors experience in Springfield. We put together a whole education program for them. We got to send them to class or I brought in people for them.

Hosea: About Lincoln or about their jobs?

Dirksen: Both, both. You know guest experience. We had a whole manual that we created for the staff so that they would have to go through a training program and follow those mandates. That was very important. You know, I always think, how can you expect anything out of anyone if they don't have a clear understanding of what their job is, and you have to give them the tools to do it. The volunteers have to do a continuing education program because there is so much that there is no way that I could give you a manual and say, "Now read this.". That's boring. Whereas if you get to have the opportunity for these wonderful speakers and go to these different things to see it, then you have an awareness that you can pass on.

Hosea: So even in your State association, I know there are a lot of oars in the water when it came to the museum: the federals, the governor's office and so on. You more or less felt you were able to do your job?

Dirksen: I was able to do my job because I learned how to move around some of this stuff, and also because it was new and there were not some of the roadblocks in place. So between ignorance is bliss and just moving around, and then having the opportunity to create, we did it.

Hosea: Looking back on it now with 20-20 hindsight and having seen it in full operation now for a number of years, is there any kind of major decision or initiative that you would have changed or wish you had done or not done. Any major regrets in terms of what you would have liked to have changed?

Dirksen: No, not really. I have just been so impressed with the number of people that I had the opportunity to meet and to work with. Certainly in the volunteer component of it, but the staff people. One of the hardest things as a manager—and this was hard and some of the people because of decisions that finally were made, they did not like that I made them—always, the first job as a good manager is make sure people get on the right bus. That's the first job. But, once you have people on the right bus the most important part is getting them to the right seat. And sometimes people didn't like the seat and they did not understand that, but as a manager, that's your responsibility. But that's just life, that's not . . .

Hosea: So, their job, what they're doing, is consistent with their abilities?

Dirksen: Exactly, and that to me is the hardest thing about working for the State. There are so many **wonderful** employees and IHPA (Illinois Historical Preservation Agency) has a ton of them. But not being able to move people to the right seat—that was hard. That was the hardest part for me, but I had no control over that. I just feel very lucky. It was a great opportunity and a grand adventure.

Hosea: Now, your decision to retire is that just a personal decision in your life that it was time to do that?

- Dirksen: It was. It was difficult for me to make the decision but I had worked very hard with some demanding situations for four and a half years at the museum library, and not knowing who was coming in to be the Director. I don't know if I could do this again. In retrospect, the woman that they brought in, Jan Grimes, is wonderful. If I had known Jan was going to be there, I would have stayed on. But, it was just like okay, I've done it.
- Hosea: But as I understand, volunteering isn't over for you.
- Dirksen: No, it'll never be over.
- Hosea: What's going on with the Bicentennial [of Lincoln's birth] now that you are involved in?
- Dirksen: The Bicentennial has been a just amazing experience. One of the staff people who I respect so much, Dave Blanchette, was saying that maybe it was the fact that we didn't have any money to speak of—which we didn't—made us all very creative and we were creative. And the people in the communities throughout the State just came forth and just did so much. What we were able to do for the miniscule amount of money that we had here in Illinois was seen throughout the world. February is over, but the party is not over yet and we're still working on it. We have a major event coming the first weekend in June.
- Hosea: Are you part of a board or organization?
- Dirksen: Yes, I'm on the State Bicentennial Commission as well as the Co-Chair of the Springfield Bicentennial Commission. And the Fourth of July is going to be a major three day event. It's just been an experience for the entire community. Really for the whole State.
- Hosea: A couple of other organizational things, then I'm going to let you go. Budgeting. Was that the typical State budget? Did you submit your budget and then go through an approval process?
- Dirksen: Oh yes, very much so. But you have to understand too that in the beginning—we had a budget, of course we had a budget—but we didn't have anything. We had to order everything. We didn't even have paper. It's hard to sit here and talk about the beginning because in the beginning they just gave us X amount of money and we had to order it and we had nothing. There was nothing. Fortunately we had these two wonderful people who were able to work with us on the budget but we were able to keep... Of course the visitation, the money far exceeded what they had projected. Far exceeded what they had projected. But, with everything else, at the end of the year of course they came in and swept the budget. But trying to figure out—which I did not have to worry about because it was not my position—but you know, all the different things for the exhibits. I mean that's a huge thing. After all, those exhibits change every so many months and so you have to create new exhibits. The maintenance of all of that high

technical equipment to run that museum and now it's starting to wear down and that's a real fear.

One thing that I haven't said and you have to have it in there too was the genius of Bob Rodgers Incorporated, BRC. They are the designers for the interior of the museum and all of the exhibits. Having the opportunity to work with him and his people—Oh my gosh, that was amazing.

Hosea: And finally, the planning process. Now you and your staff as they came on board would make these plans. Would you then take that to Richard Norton Smith and was that your approval kind of area?

Dirksen: Sometimes. Richard is brilliant. He's a brilliant historian. He's a brilliant speaker and a writer. He does not know anything (laughs) about working with people or day-to-day operations. So sometimes what we would have to do is we would just sit down, a group of us, and talk about things because again, there was **nothing**.

Hosea: So it was a consensus building sort of?

Dirksen: It was a consensus building; that's exactly what it was. You're exactly right. I'm not being purposely vague, it's just that to create something... The thing is too, again, I was brought on in May. I did not have my senior staff totally hired until December. I did not have the rest of the staff all hired and trained until two weeks before the trial opening in March. So, I mean we were busy, and we were open seven days a week.

Hosea: I said finally, but I lied. (Dirksen laughs) This is finally. One of the different things about the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum is that it has a separate library and it has a separate museum. Do you think that's a good marriage? Does it work well organizationally to be dealing with the research library on the one hand and a fully functional museum on the other? Is that a good marriage?

Dirksen: That's a good question. Never having done this before, I think it was great. The people who are in the library have a different focus totally from the people in the museum. But, what it did, I think, was it gave great credibility to both parties. Because scholars would come and they would have access to all the wonderful treasures that we have at the library; the Presidential Library of course has the largest Illinois collection of anything but also it has the second largest [number of] civil war artifacts, second only to out in Washington, D.C. It has all of these different artifacts and things that we already had **before** we opened the museum. I think they help each other as a strong relationship.

Hosea: Okay. Thank you Julie. I appreciate your help.

Dirksen: You're welcome.

Julie Ann Dirksen

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(end of interview)