

## **Mr. Stephen Booher**

### **Former City of Arlington Employee City of Arlington Texas**

*Interview conducted by*

*Alexa Bynum*

*On March 22, 2018 in Arlington, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor

Special Collections and Archives

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## **Biography**

Stephen Booher was born in 1956 in Gonzales, Texas into a family in which his father was an osteopathic surgeon and his mother was a nurse. Booher graduated high school in East Texas in 1974. After graduating high school Mr. Booher moved to Arlington and enrolled in UTA.

After graduating UTA Mr. Booher worked at a variety of different private companies in which he began to be active in the disability rights movement. After working in the private sector through the 1980s Mr. Booher moved into public work and worked for the City of Irving and the City of Arlington. While employed in the public and private sectors, Mr. Booher served on several Mayoral committees, and on a variety of different projects and trainings for disability rights and access.

Mr. Booher is now retired from the city and is a caregiver for his mother. Mr. Booher has retired to Denton, Texas.

## **Topics Discussed**

- Brief background on childhood
- Time in high school
- Time at UTA
- Time at Texas Instruments (TI)
- Dallas Mayors Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities
- Time at Raytheon
- Work at JC Penny
- 10 Commandments Class
- Work at City of Irving

- Childhood exposure to those with disabilities
  - Accessible playground
  - Work at the City of Arlington
  - Push America Cyclists
  - Retirement
  - Greg Dollinger Memorial AIDS Fund
  - Barbara Jordan Media Awards
  - Differences in public and private sectors
  - Working with Parks Department
  - Training all City Departments
  - Helping Restore Ability
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## **Bynum**

This is Alexa Bynum interviewing Stephen (Steve) Booher for the UT Arlington Texas Disabilities Oral History Project. Today's date is March 22<sup>nd</sup> and I am here on UTA's campus with Mr. Booher. I am here today to talk with Mr. Booher about his work at the City of Arlington and in the DFW Metroplex as an advocate for disability rights and access for the disabled community.

So first off, just give me a little bit of info about yourself, your childhood, your family

## **Booher**

Ok. Let's see. Well I was born in 1956, I know that sounds like a long time ago, it was! I was born in Gonzales Texas. My mother was a nurse, and my father was an osteopathic surgeon, so I grew up in a medical family. My grandmother who took care of us when we were little was actually blind in one eye from a farm accident as a small child so I became aware of people with disabilities at a very early age. My brother was injured in an accident when he was about six, seven years old he had all of his teeth knocked out, and when they grew back they were so distorted that he had to go to speech therapy, so at a very early age I got exposed to that kind of stuff, and it was always encouraged in our family to talk about things and, how do you help someone who has a disability, and how to treat them, and how to act around them, so, it was just something that was always part of our household.

## **Bynum**

Ok, so then I know you came here to UTA, so do you want to talk about your time here at UTA?

## **Booher:**

Sure, just before I came to UTA, I guess one of the things that happened to me, my family moved back to Texas, we'd moved a lot. My senior year in high school we moved to a small town in East Texas called Bonham, Texas. I was a senior in high school, I already finished most of my classes trying to figure out where I was going to go to college, and I joined the Future Teachers of America (FTA), and in that small town they didn't have enough teachers for the special ed classes so they used to come to the seniors at the high school and ask if we'd like to help out teaching classes and I wound up being the math teacher for the special education kids. So that really got me kind of interested in you know where education lays with people with disabilities and those kinds of challenges and I really enjoyed it, so it really helped to kind of ignite my passion for that.

**Bynum**

Ok.

**Booher**

When I graduated from high school then I came to UTA. And one of the things that was interesting, and that was 1974, one of the things that was interesting about UTA since I came from the country, into what to me was the city was to see all the advances that they had, they had ramps and they had elevator buttons with braille on them and stuff like that, I just never even thought about that stuff before. So, it was very stimulating to see just coming to college for the first time being around all different kind of people from all over the world all those things were factors that kind of got me involved.

**Bynum**

Okay, so I know that that after you graduated you had a little bit of time in where you worked in the more corporate setting, and you eventually moved to the city, so when you were in that corporate setting were you doing a lot of disability work?

**Booher**

Not so much. I worked for four fortune 500 companies over the years, two municipal governments and one international company was the private construction company.

**Booher**

Let's see, I would say it wasn't until I probably went to work at Texas Instruments (TI) that I started becoming more involved with issues around disability, so that was 1985 I started at TI. The thing that really got me involved with that was I had been in management and I was slowly moving my career into training and my manager at the time came to me and said that there was an employee that had some difficulties with other employees, and would I be willing to talk with her, and I said sure I couldn't imagine what would be the issue and she was one of our buyers and when I went to sit down and talk with her one of the things that my boss didn't tell me was that she was also a person who was deaf, and that the problem that she was having was she was feeling isolated by all the other employees and so in the course of talking with her I learned a lot of things, and one of the things I learned was that people weren't on purposely ignoring her, but we all sat in cubicles and so if you can't see someone you can't communicate with them, you know? And so, I simply sat down with the other employees with her permission and simply asked do y'all have anything against her?

No. Well when y'all go out to lunch how do you ask if she wants to go out to lunch? And they said, we just holler over the panels hey we're all leaving for lunch, and I said do you realize that if she can't see you she can't hear you, so her hearts broken cause you're not including her, and they immediately just said oh my gosh we had no idea and so that kind of really began to get me interested in the fact that most people will do the right thing, if you just tell em what the right thing is. So when I sat down with her and I said hey, you know your gonna have to learn to speak up a little bit more, that's when she told me that's not the culture she was raised in she was raised in a culture of don't stick up the nail that sticks up gets pounded down, so you know that funny joke between us that we've shared for all these years was I told her the old cliché The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and her response is what's a squeak? So, we both had to

adapt, but we became really good friends over that and because she was in a position that a lot of people came in contact with her as one of our buyers we were asked if we would consider forming an employee initiative. And so we formed the Deaf and Disabled employees network, and because there had never been something like that before we reached out and found there were a number of employees with different disabilities and we all came together and we started meeting on a monthly basis saying what could the company do, what could we do for the company, and what could the company do to be more attractive to people with disabilities and it was amazing.

Because of our work and putting people together and trying to be proactive to help the company recruit people we got money. We got funding, we got asked to join the TI diversity network which was a network made up of people from different racial groups like they were trying to attract more women engineers, more Hispanic engineers more African American engineers more Asian, and so they had all these different groups and there was a representative from each one and we got to also join, and the reason I say we is because Cheryl did not feel comfortable going to these meetings by herself she was very shy and she had some language challenges so she said you gotta go with me cause you're not afraid to speak up so I said alright, I will do what you need me to do until you say you no longer need me, well.

**Booher**

The other thing that TI did was they joined the Dallas Mayor's Committee for the employment of people with disabilities, and this is something that I believe Ron Kirk, Mayor Kirk put together, but he had a corporate representative from all the fortune 500 companies and they would meet once a month and talk about how can we make the workplace more attractive and remove barriers for people with disabilities to get more people working. And that was so exciting, because we got to hear what all these different big companies in the area are doing and then we got to work together on projects.

**Bynum**

Ok, so how long did you work at, you said you worked at TI for a little bit before you...

**Booher**

Yeah, I worked at TI a total of...14 years

**Bynum**

And how long did you serve on that committee there?

**Booher**

Ever since we started it.

**Bynum**

Wow that's awesome.

**Booher**

Yeah, as a matter of fact my division of TI got sold off to a company called Raytheon, and because the defense division which I worked for went over to Raytheon and when we went over to Raytheon, Raytheon said okay we want you to stay on that committee so I got to stay on the committee and wear a different companies hat as well, so it was really good.

### **Bynum**

So where did you go after you were done with TI?

### **Booher**

Okay, my stint with TI and Raytheon, Raytheon I only lasted about a year and a half and then they realized they had bought more people than they needed.

### **Booher**

So, this was very popular in the 80's, it was the buying and selling of corporations, and so I went to work for a division of JC Penny, and that's up in Plano, the division was called Direct Marketing Services which most people have never heard of, JC Penny's used to sell insurance. It was just, it was strange but Mr. Penny wanted insurance for all his family members so he started his own insurance company. And a division of it was right down the street from the home office, they had moved to Plano. And so, I went to work there and sure enough no sooner did I get there than they announced that they were going to sell off to a Dutch company called Aegean so in that time period after a while you just go I don't care as long as I'm getting a check, I don't care who it's coming from, you know?

### **Booher**

So, I worked for them for about a year and a half and one of the things they said was we heard that you teach this class, and I said yeah this class that I learned at a conference that TI had sent me to called the 10 commandments of communicating effectively with highly with people with disabilities, and I said yeah I went to a conference in San Francisco I met the lady who wrote the program it inspired the daylights out of me I came back I showed it to TI and said I'd like to teach it they let me do it and I've been teaching that class ever since. I even met the lady who wrote the material, brilliant, brilliant lady it's a simple class, I've taught it to boy scouts, church groups, any time somebody would come to my company and go we need a speaker do you have a topic they'd go, get Steve. He'll teach them how to communicate with people with disabilities. Well one of the things that I did when I got to JC Penny was I was able to talk to the CEO of our company and say you know this isn't just about being nice, there is a business reason for doing this, and I had heard a horror story from an employee that said that being in the insurance business we would have, it was a giant call center 3,000 employees and customers who had bought our insurance and had it for years would occasionally call in when Grandma would pass away to get their money. Well somebody called in one day through something called Texas Relay Services, and we hung up on them, and they called over and over and over and we kept hanging up on em, because we thought it was somebody crank calling the company.

And so, somebody finally transferred one of those calls up to me and I listened all the way through the call and I realized this is a customer calling to make a claim, so I helped them through that process and then I got to go back to our CEO and say do you realize that we need to teach this to everybody? Because we're running off our own business, we're our own worst enemy. And, once again, once I started telling people

what Texas Relay Services was, and why to treat people the right way it was just, we got more interest, more business, and I really learned right then that it's about customer service more than anything. It really is. So, and then once again, I, I got laid off when that company downsized and I decided that, maybe I need to get out of corporate world, it's too volatile here in Dallas, everything was changing, everybody was buying and selling companies like a monopoly game, so what I did was I moved into government work. I thought, okay government doesn't lay people off like business world is doing maybe I should go to something a little bit more stable.

### **Booher**

So, I applied for and got hired by the City of Irving, and most people don't know this, but Irving was the 110<sup>th</sup> largest city in America at the time I went to work for it. And so, little facts you pick up, especially when you do new employee orientation, and I'm the guy who did that so, once I got over there one of the things they said was are you the guy that's on the Dallas Mayor's Committee, and I said yeah, and they said we got one for Irving, and so we would like you to join our committee if you're interested, and bring best practices and help us grow this because at the time Irving was beginning to really grow, and so I joined their committee they said we also heard that you teach this 10 commandments class would you teach that? And I said yeah, sure and I one of the things I was able to do with them was I was able to embed the core principles from that class into all their customer service classes. And I just can't tell you the response I got back from the employees because that's who my customers were, the municipal employees. The feedback I got from them saying, I never thought about making the workplace nice for people with disabilities, until I had your class and realized oh, I could do something constructive to help people applying for jobs, people coming in and asking for a service, recruiting people, it had just never dawned on them that they had the power to be nice to people, and make people feel welcome and that was the whole thing I constantly stressed to people is, you don't know what somebody's going through, you know? And you're working with people who could be your grandparents, you're working with people that could be people who just moved to this country 2 weeks ago, you just don't know what other people's stories are so, slow down take the time to listen to people and if you can't understand what their saying or they need some extra help ask for help, there's nothing wrong with that.

### **Bynum**

So, do you think that your early experiences in your childhood, with your grandmother and like helped you have better understanding? Or do you think that...Like kind of being aware of them? Where some people might not be, or do you think it was later on?

### **Booher**

I think it was the fact that in my family we could ask questions, and my, my father being a doctor was always and here's the difference between this and that, this is how that works that's why that doesn't work, it just wasn't a forbidden subject to talk about a lot of times my friends when I was growing up would come over and ask my parents things because my parents would give you the answer, I mean you know? If you asked them where do babies come from? He'd get out a medical book and he'd go this is how, there was nothing sexy about it, it was just here are the facts, you know? And, but answers were, if you asked a question you got the answer, and they were always tempered with be kind to other people be compassionate to other people, you know?

### **Bynum**

I think you can see a lot of that through your work. , so when I was doing a little research on you I saw that when you were at Arlington you helped to build, or you were helping with the development of the , oh my gosh I'm so sorry I had the name of it written down, of the playground that was.

**Booher**

Yeah, the accessible playground over here in Randol Mill Park

**Bynum**

Yes, so was that something that was your idea? Or was it kind of a group effort? Or...?

**Booher**

It was funny because yeah all the cities they tend to benchmark off each other, well Irving built an accessible playground, and it was through our committee that we were working on it with the Parks Department so the Parks Department had professional planners but they came to the Mayor's committee and said look, how do we decorate it, what kind of toys should we have or not have? What should we think about? Should it have a restroom? How high should the water fountains be, so what our committee did was we went and benchmarked on other playgrounds in the area including the Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas they were the best, so we went over there and said okay show us your park, and then they did, and we said, if somebody gave you a magic wand and a million dollars and you would get to build the park from scratch brand new what would you do and what would you leave out?

And from there we got notes that we could bring back to the park design people and say this is what we need to consider, they built the park and we had a grand opening it was wonderful! And so, somebody was benchmarking from Arlington, and said hey we got an accessible playground in Irving, but we don't have one in Arlington. About that time, I came to work for the City of Arlington, and they said hey you were on that committee, and you know where all the research stuff comes from, would you join our committee? I said sure, and so when the question came up well what could we do different, or what should we do different when we build this park? One of the things I suggested to them that we hadn't really considered there because it was a smaller city, Arlington was when I came here it was the 50<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States. So, its considerably bigger city and the park was already built they were gonna redo part of Randol Mill Park. One of the things that we did differently here was we said good customer service is you don't do things to people, you do things with people, so do we have anybody on the design committee who is a child who's going to use the park? No. Do we have any teachers who are going to bring children to the park? No. How about any parents or caregivers? No. So, is it okay to invite them? Sure! So, we just reached out to the school system here and said we'd like a couple of teachers, a couple of students, and a couple of parents to also come and sit in the committee and just make sure that we have everybody's perspective as we feed information to the designers. And that's how that got going.

**Bynum**

Okay, so you actually worked on both of them?

**Booher**

Mhmm.

**Bynum**

So, what made you switch from Irving to Arlington?

**Booher**

So, there's this thing called "The Stadium" that Irving lost, that was their big money generator, so when you lose the big money generator you shrink your organization. And I got laid off, but then one of my Professors here, one of my good friends here at UTA was John Dycus, and I called John Dycus and I said oh John, I just got laid off, you know I came to work here because cities never lay off and now they do, and he goes yeah they lost their big money maker, and he goes so what's your deal, and I said I'm going to have to look for another job, and I don't' even know where to start, and he said, what's the first thing you should have learned in business school? Follow the money. Where did that stadium go? I said, it went to Arlington, he goes, well why don't you call up the City of Arlington and see if they're hiring anybody who does what you do? And I called them and they went, you're available?

**Booher**

And in 30 days I was working here doing the exact same job I was doing there, working here in the HR department as the Employee Development Trainer. It was so cool.

**Bynum**

Sorry, so you just pretty much just picked up and shifted so you were doing some of the similar things Were they interested in your 10 commandments class as well?

**Booher**

They were interested in everything I had. Everything I had Supervisor training programs, customer service programs, ethics, everything. I just brought it all came over here, plugged me in and they said go crazy Steve, you know, bring us whatever you know, cause that's an area they really hadn't really gotten into they were really focusing on the stadium and so one of the things that we were able to do with the Arlington Mayor's Committee for people with disability, and I made good friends with Donna Mack who was the head of that, we were able to talk with, with the people from the stadium, so it was the Jones' , about how accessible is the stadium gonna be? And so, they invited us to be on the advisory committee to the design committee for the stadium. And it was so cool, and then when they were getting near completion of it the very first public event they held in that stadium was the Barbara Jordan Media Awards. And that year it was being held here in Arlington and the Arlington Mayor's Committee was hosting it, so we got to have the first public event inside the stadium I mean they were still building stuff and there were scaffolds and everything but our name and everything was up on the big screen and we were able to get people tours through there , they did anything that we suggested they doubled it, they had twice as many parking spaces, twice as many accessible restrooms, water fountains, we talked about watering stations for service animals everything we could bring up they were going, how great! We hadn't thought of this we hadn't thought of that you know? And so, it was just really great from a community building point of view, is inviting people to, it was constantly being talked about.



**Bynum**

So, that's another project, do you have another project from either your time at Irving or Arlington or really throughout that was kind of a, I don't want to say a favorite, but a favorite, or something you're really proud of for helping with development?

**Booher**

Well I can tell you one connected to UTA that we did every year. Cause you know it's about UTA, right? So, one of my favorite people on the planet is Coach Garner, okay? And , so when I moved here I joined I was asked to be on the board of directors for Helping Restore Ability which is a nonprofit agency here in Arlington, the headquarters is here in Arlington it services the whole state, and it was started by two UTA Also, one was Sam Providence and the other one was John Dycus, Sam Providence has passed away, John Dycus is , I'm not exactly sure what his title is, but he was an editor and a teacher for the Shorthorn, and several publications, and he invited me and the board invited me to be on their board. So that was exciting to me, and then the part with UTA and Coach Garner is, so all these people are connected, and that was one of the things I liked to do was I liked to make sure that do you know who these people are in our own community working for the same thing?

**Booher**

I came over here and I met Coach Garner and the Moving Mavs' and all that kind of stuff, and I found out that one of the things that we sponsored every year was the Push America Cyclists, from the Phi Beta Kappa Fraternity so they have a cross country bicycling team, that goes from the West Coast to the East Coast 3,000 miles and the halfway point of the Southern route, so they have 3 routes, a North Route, a Central US Route, and a Southern Route, and the Southern routes halfway point is Arlington, so around the fourth of July, that bicycling team cycles all the way from California to here, and spends the night. And when they're here, we got them a reception and a proclamation from the Mayor, a press conference with the Mayor, and a proclamation, then we served them lunch, so the Spring Creek Barbeque people donated lunch every year and we fed em, there's about 80 to 100 young men that do this event, and then that afternoon they do an exhibition game that's open to the public with the Moving Mav's, and so they play basketball, and they teach the young guys how to play wheelchair basketball, so those guys who've been cycling all have to sit in the wheelchairs and learn to play, and it is a hoot. It's called the Jim Hayes exhibition game, and we have done that every year, so that's a continuing thing, so it's just so exciting and the parents who live nearby come to see their kids, and just to hear the feedback from the public, and the parents, and the city employees who come to watch that, and the students here at the University, it's just so much fun. It's just so much fun.

**Bynum**

That sounds amazing, I didn't even know that that's something that goes on.

**Booher**

Yeah.

**Bynum:**

I learn something new every day.

**Booher**

You betcha, so we do that every year.

**Bynum**

That's so cool. So, I know that you also have left the city, are you retired?

**Booher**

Yes, actually I retired last year, my mother came down with cancer and so and I had already put in my years with the city, but she's still able to get around and do things and so I want to maximize the time she has left. So, I retired early so I could help with her.

**Bynum**

Ok.

**Booher**

So, I retired and I moved to Denton.

**Bynum**

Okay, so do you still do any advocacy work? Or...?

**Booher**

Not so much, being her caregiver eats up a great deal of my time at the moment, but I have been called, I from time to time I do a training class for somebody who knows me cause I know a lot of people, and they say hey Steve, and when I get talking about my favorite subjects I'm very passionate, and so I did some classes for a couple of small companies and I'm also just recently been asked to join the board of a non-profit, it's called GDMAF, which is the Greg Dollinger Memorial AIDS Fund, and they raise money for an emergency fund that they've had for almost 24 years now, to help people with HIV/AIDS who live in the North Texas Area, who have an emergency needs. So, it's really great they have just done wonderful work over the years and I've known the people who run it some of them are former coworkers of mine, but they asked me to join the board so I'm on the board right now and I'm learning how to write grants. I've sent off a grant application recently to the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS foundation and the Elton John AIDS foundation. Fingers crossed, but I'm learning how to do that.

**Bynum**

Right well that's fun to, I guess interesting, fun is my go-to adjective, that's interesting that you can kind of change your advocacy as your, even know you're retired, but you're still doing something, just geared a little differently. So that's very interesting., so I don't know if this is exactly worded right, but like what made you interested in, or wanting to help with those in the disabled community. Cause I know that you said that kind of some of them, like with Cheryl, that it was just kind of organic, and it just kind of happened, but after that was it when you or was it before then?

### **Booher**

That's a good question, as I moved out of management into training, I would have more opportunities where a coworker would come up to me and say, I couldn't understand what you were saying, do you have text for your PowerPoint slides, and I went Oh, I need to start having text for my slides in case somebody needs that, I would have somebody come up to me and say I can't see your slides, because the font's too small, or I'm colorblind, and I never thought that Oh there are people in my audience who are color blind, maybe I shouldn't use blue and green on my slides I can switch it to Black and White or brown and something else, but or you know use a pattern, and so over the course of time, it was really responding to the needs of my customers, who were saying this is what I need, this is what I need, and then I also because I worked in HR, that's where my office was located, I began to learn about all the services that were available to employees that maybe they didn't know about, like the Employee Assistance Program, a lot of big companies have them, but most people don't know how to access them, so I learned how to access them, and I would say do you know? Like I would have an employee say I have a child with a disability and it's affecting my attendance, and I don't know what to do, I can't find any services, I would, I would say, you know I can't give you advice, but here have you ever called these people, and most people would say I didn't even know we had that, so it was just yeah, very organic like you said, that in me trying to take care of my customers I would respond, and incorporate that stuff and there you go....It's just like the issue of being an advocate for people with HIV and AIDS, my cousin died in 1995, I had a cousin who passed away from AIDS when nobody knew what it was or had heard about it or anything, and he died very quickly they didn't have any treatment or anything, but I felt so bad about that I wanted to do something to help raise awareness like why are we doing this? And I just by happenstance came in contact with a person here in Dallas who was on the World Health organization and who also was the person who was showing the names quilt at Dallas Market Hall, and we became friends, and a couple of years later, I'm showing the names quilt at TI, and raising money and donations for the charity that he founded, so it's just, it's just amazing how things are cross connected you know?

### **Bynum**

So, sounds like your advocacy for AIDS started back in 1995 when your cousin passed away, so have you been doing stuff throughout that time, or?

### **Booher**

Oh yeah, I walk in the life walk for AIDS, you know, I help raise money and now I'm on this board, so to me they're all interconnected, the chronic illness, people can become disabled from an accident, from a disease, from birth you know all of these things are just, you know they're interconnected.

### **Bynum**

And I think, like you were saying the customer service aspect you know? You don't realize how hard it can be until you have a customer who comes to you and says Oh my goodness I can't, this isn't working for me.

**Booher**

Yeah, yeah.

**Bynum**

So, we talked a little bit about your time in the private sector and a little bit about your time in the public sector, but if you had to pick a favorite overall like time period, or something that you did what would it be?

**Booher**

Pause.

**Bynum**

It's a broad question [laughs]

**Booher**

Yeah.

**Bynum**

Maybe something you're most proud of?

**Booher**

I can tell you, the thing I'm most proud of is I actually won an award, and I really don't need awards, I have boxes of awards at home for different things that I have done, pause, I don't need em, I've had my picture in the paper, been on television, I've won awards, those are nice if you've never had those things, but after a while you have so many of em you go [indistinguishable], but I did get nominated for an award and it was the Governor's Award, and it was, it is the Governor's trophy which is part of the Barbara Jordan media awards, and that was really cool. I got nominated for it, and I won the award and I got to take my coworkers and my family down to the awards ceremony where they presented me with the award, the award is named the Lex Friedan award and Lex Friedan was the co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and he was there, and so I mean I got to meet this guy, and he was just incredible, and my family got to meet them, and, and basically what the award was, was for all the years of stuff that I had done, people had nominated me for that and I won that, and to me that was like, I wouldn't take anything for that. You know it just said hey you did something good, you made a difference.

**Bynum**

So, when did you receive that?

**Booher**

I think it was about, must have been about, I think it's written here, 2012. Yeah it was in 2012, and then right after that in 2013, I got the Arlington Award for the Martin Luther King Jr. Award for Governance, for being an advocate for people with disabilities in Arlington. So I was really happy about that, and then the Barbara Jordan awards itself came to UTA the following year, you know like I said when it first came here it was at the stadium, when it came in 2013 they had it over at the new basketball facility and that was a big event I mean took the whole room up and everything, and they asked me to be the Master of Ceremonies for the Awards and I was like Oh My God this is really cool! I know get to host the thing that gives that award, you know so that was, that was also cool.

**Bynum**

Okay, so, and this could be a short answer, could be a long one, you worked in both the public and the private sector, and I think that kind of gives you kind of a unique insight into that, so was it different moving from the private to the public, in terms of kind of the help and response you got? Or either way, was there was one that was more helpful, less helpful?

**Booher**

You know, I guess, not so much helpful, as the speed at which things get done. In the private world if you can find a champion, and that's what I always looked for, I tried to find an Executive who either had a disability, had a family member with a disability, somebody else who had the power and the money who, and I would get them to be our champion, and my job then is to make them look good, and in return, they remove barriers. Here's some funding, or you can do this on company time, or here's some resources, or whatever, and so in the business world things move very fast, because they're using their money and they were wanting to do things in real time, in the government world they get money once a year. So if you don't have a request in now, it will be a whole nother year before the next influx of money comes along and in a year, that's a long time to plan things out, you can't respond quickly when things pop up, you don't have funding, your champions may go away or, or their energy goes away or they get pulled off in so many things because there are so few government employees per the organization. For instance, in Arlington, when I was on board here we only had 2500 employees that run the 50<sup>th</sup> largest city in America. Ok? That is crazy! That is just crazy, when you think how many people per employee there are, you know? The proportions are just... So, it's hard, it's hard to get things accomplished we still got things accomplished here but you really have to work hard especially when you don't have money and resources.

**Bynum**

Right. But so then kind of you have two different kind of customer sets there, you know? Like with the private industry you might be able to get things done a little bit better or faster, but with the public you're kind of a little bit slower, but your audience is obviously quite larger, did you prefer working with the larger audience or the smaller audience?

**Booher**

Pause

**Bynum**

It's kind of a trick question, cause you want to help everybody.

**Booher**

Yeah, you know, ...When you work for a private company you're working to help them improve their customer service with their customers, when you're working in a government setting you're working to help the whole community, so I guess the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, you know? You're actually serving the greater good here. So I think that working with the government is more rewarding because it touches more people.

**Bynum**

Okay, okay. , trying to think of other things, so you had a really great career, a lot of different topics, a lot of different groups you were able to help, so what was, so the first group, the first group you interacted with was the deaf community, with Cheryl, and then so who all have you worked with, I mean probably a lot with the city.

**Booher**

Oh yeah, from special Olympics to Easter seals to the Komen Foundation, the Life walk people, Autism speaks, any time somebody wanted to do something in the city they would either come to the Mayor's Committee or the Mayor's Committee reps would call and say we have somebody on our committee who works for the city and they can give you some advice like you know we had people who wanted to put on the Autism community put on one of their first races here. And they called me up and saying we're having, we're getting all these roadblocks, all we want to do is have a race, and I would come and sit down and say, look those are not roadblocks, those are requirements for anybody who wants to have a race in the city. If you have more than this many people you have to have restrooms, you have to have police to control traffic, you know you have to have all these different factors, so they're not picking on you they require that of everybody, so just somebody telling you, you know, telling that customer, it's not just you, we're not saying we don't want you, but you have to understand, these things are here for a reason, you know, and , I did that many times.

**Bynum**

So, is that how most of the Mayor Committees that you were on were? Was just kind of as a city liaison, and helping to...

**Booher**

Yes, it's a place for somebody to go to instead of just saying fill out this form, it's a place where you can go and sit down with other citizens and it just so happened, and a few employees, because I also lived in Arlington, and say they're not giving you the run around, or let us go talk to our internal contacts and see

if an exception needs to be made, or something else can be done, you know so. I could tell you one that stands out to me.

### **Booher**

They have, in the Parks Department here they have swimming classes for babies, I think it was like "Aqua-Babies" or something like that where they teach young mothers with infants how the kids cannot drown, okay, cause that happens a lot here in Texas. And, someone came to the class and said, I need a sign language interpreter, so she made a request, I need a sign language interpreter, and they said we don't do that. Then I got a call on the phone that said hey we got mad people, and we don't know why they're mad. So, I went over and I talked to the Parks Department and I said what was said, and I don't understand, why does she need a sign language interpreter? Is the baby deaf? I didn't understand what they were telling me. And they said no, the mother is, and so the teacher stands on the side of the pool, and the Mother's and the baby are in the pool, and they're giving instructions, and she said, I can't understand I need a sign language interpreter. Okay, who's going to pay for the sign language interpreter? Well guess what, the Parks Department needs to pay, because we're a public entity offering a service to the public and the law is quite clear on that, and they were like no, the HR department should pay for that, no you're the Parks Department, you're going to pay for that. And it was just getting that straightened out, and then who do we go to, oh okay, so this was the first time that somebody had ever asked that, then I went and talked to the employees who had kind of not been kind to the woman asking for help, and I said, do you realize what you said? And the way you said that is rude, or scary, or making her just shut down and go away, and fortunately she didn't take no for an answer okay times have changed, people now stick up for themselves, and I said instead of seeing this, and they were like well how are we going to do this, we don't know how we're going to do this, and it's just for one person, and I went if you can see that there is an advantage to this, and they said what's the advantage in this, and I said she probably has other friends who are mother's with kids, so instead of having one interpreter for one person, you might have to pay for one interpreter and have a whole class of people, oh, and that's that whole mind shift that you can just sense in everybody. Oh I didn't look at it that way, I didn't think about I didn't think that right down the street is a school for the deaf, go down there and ask them do you all want swim classes? You know, the next thing you know, hey you're doing a partnership with them, so yeah that's the cool part.

### **Bynum**

So did y'all ever? I actually work in a, I work at the City of Carrollton, I'm just an intern, but, but did you ever , that's an instance of when you kind of worked with the situation that popped up, but did you ever kind of coordinate with Parks to help develop like a specific class?

### **Booher**

It's really fun you say that cause the people in the parks department, I was here for eight years, and I was the trainer for all the city training classes, so from New Employee Orientation to customer service to anything you take I'm the teacher so I weave my magic into every class and I also turn all my students into advocates, and so almost everybody who works at the city knows who I am, and they know what I'm passionate about, one of the activities that came into, that crossed my path was that it ties in with what you were saying, we got a new Parks Director a couple of years ago and his name is Lemuel Randolph, and he is wonderful, I actually got him to come over and meet Coach Garner I suggested that maybe they look for an opportunity, if they're going to have big conferences here where they do basketball camps and work with the wounded warriors, that if they partnered the University with the City, they could use all these facilities and cross train the employees to help out with conferences, and competitions so, it was really great the Coach and Lemuel just got along fantastic, and Lemuel with the Metroplex parks' departments

on a regional conference, every year and the year that they came to me, it was going to be over in Grand Prairie, and he said we're going to do a regional conference for Parks and Rec employees, so a couple of thousand people are going to come in we got different subjects we want them to learn and we want you to come in and teach them about diversity, cause we're having more and more diverse people using our parks, and I said okay, well I talk about diversity too and I said well what do you want and they said well we want you to figure out something exponential something that's not a lecture, for all these people who work out doors all the time and they play games and sports and all this stuff so it has to be something that really physically and mentally engages them around the topic of diversity, so I came up with an activity for em, and that activity was I asked them to tell them what are the top five target groups that they're trying to reach out to and so what they did was they looked at their population and see who is not using the parks as much as the other ones are so they wanted to reach out to the African American community, they wanted to reach out to the Asian Community, they wanted to reach out to the Muslim community because these are people who aren't using the parks as much and they said, what do you think about that and I said can I add one? The disability community because they don't show up either so could we reach out to them. They said sure! If you can work that out. So what we did was we had an activity where I found people who I knew that represented those different groups and I asked them to come to our event and my friend Donna, who's the head of the Mayor's committee she came representing the disabled community and brought her assistant dog with her and so what we did was we had-we broke everybody up into groups and we had them go to each station and talk to a real person from that group and say here's how you respect me, here's how you disrespect me, here's how you should talk to me, here's some special things you might need to know about my culture and we had a blast. The people said you just made it free for us to ask questions in a where we're not afraid to ask questions. It was just amazing, and all the people who spoke that day as part of that activity, they were thrilled, they were all thrilled that they had an opportunity to teach city employees about their culture as well, in a non-threatening way.

**Bynum**

Right to get to talk about it in a way, and talk about their real needs and wants.

**Booher**

Yeah, yeah.

**Bynum**

So, we talked about Parks & Rec a little bit, but were there other departments that you frequently interacted with? Or teamed with?

**Booher**

Sure, I mean the police department, all of em. The police department, the fire department, the library, all of em. All, especially the big departments that come in contact with the, [indistinct], the housing department I did a lot of workshops with them. Simply because they deal with a lot of people that have special needs and so we want to make sure those employees have a sensitivity, I don't think there was one single department that I haven't spoken to.

**Bynum**



So typically, would you, you would give a training class, and then if somebody had like a situation or that they needed more advice on it, they would come to you for help?

**Booher**

Yeah, we had a catalog, just like college catalog that had all of our courses in it so people could pick the courses they went and they just had to get them approved by their supervisor. But also if like the housing department saw a big need or they may be hired a whole new crew-group of people in a large bunch they'd ask me to come over and do a special workshop for them because on that day they would close the whole place down and have an in-service and some people had taken the class maybe they took it 2 or 3 years ago this is a way to get everybody on the same page and at the same time it allowed the director to come back and say okay got questions let's talk about it now, you've got examples of people that you've dealt with before, let's talk about it while Steve is here and let's get some feedback, and if I didn't have the answer, and I always tell people, I don't have the answer to every question, but I got friends, and I am not ashamed or shy about calling them up on the phone and going what do you do if somebody asks this or what do you do if, you know how do we get this, you know? And we get the answer for them.

**Bynum**

That's awesome, it's really good to see advocacy like that just helping out and helping the community on clearly over many departments and many different people.

**Booher**

I think that's the biggest challenge for all these different people who are trying to help is there, they need to be networked, they need to connect somewhere and I don't know if we make a Facebook module, or or a YouTube situation but it would be really great if in the whole metroplex all this information was, and people were being connected.

**Bynum**

So that was one of the questions I kinda had, cause you worked all over the metroplex, really on the East side you know Dallas, Irving and Arlington, but just you had so many different things that touched so many different groups you know? , there was a question in there somewhere, sorry. , but was there a certain area that tended to be more helpful or was it just like you said that once people realized that other people needed help they were all pretty ready to help out.

**Booher**

I think everybody is really into helping, but they're geared their agencies are geared to help one thing. And so, when you start getting into other things it's like okay well we know about, we know about assist animals, but we don't know anything about vans. You know? Or we don't know about learning disabilities, you know? And so, it's still there's that area for improvement there is how to get the resources to the people that need the resources.

**Bynum**

Well kinda how you were talking about everything is interconnected and that hopefully that the Mayor's Committee is able to help a little bit in getting everybody in touch.

### **Booher**

It's growing, and you know, it's just like how if you look how few people go to city council meetings, but once you go to a couple it's just overcoming that initial if you just come to a couple, then you'd see there's some real value here you know? Now one of the challenges it's hard for people with disabilities for instance to come to a meeting of an evening, transportation is an issue, security is an issue, you know do we have an interpreter, do we have a power assist door all this construction think of all this construction that's been going on down here, yeah all of those are factors, so for instance the Arlington Mayor's Committee it meets in the daytime. Which is great on one side of the coin, but for other people they're at work or they've got kids and so they can't come, so you know it's a challenge, it's a challenge.

### **Bynum**

So, is there anything else broad topic or more minor that'd you like to talk about with your work with the disabled community in DFW?

### **Booher**

Well, something I'm very proud of and that's here in Arlington and I've tried to draw as much attention to it as I can, and it's somebody who I think two people you should consider talking to. John Dycus who's connected here to the University and you might want to interview him at the same time with Vicki Niedermeyer who's the CEO of Helping Restore Ability. When I first came to Arlington their office was so small it was located over here off of Division St. behind Lisa's Chicken in a little office building that was so small everybody was stacked on top of each other, and in the time that I was here it grew to a 10,000 square foot office space down there on I-20 behind the Climate Evangelista Clinic. Okay it is one of the largest non-profits in the state of Texas that provides assistance for people with disabilities to continue to live at home. Okay, so they do training and they do employment for people who help people with disabilities to be able to live independently, and that was John Dycus and Sam Providence's dream and it has this last I guess 10 years, it has just grown exponentially and I think that there's a wonderful story there we had the Mayor out for the grand opening of the new office building it is just unbelievable and it's through the work of Vicki and John that that exists and Arlington should be very very proud of having that because they serve the whole state of Texas, you know? The stories that come out of people that say oh thank you, I don't want to have to live in a nursing home. I can stay in my own home, and people do better and live longer and their happier living in their own home versus living in an institution, I mean that whole institution idea is just the dark ages. You know?

### **Bynum**

Did you ever help, did you ever help them with any of their projects or?

### **Booher**

I was on their board for six years so I helped with every project from designing business cards and flyers to doing speeches at all the different civic groups here in Arlington to you know moving furniture and hanging stuff on the wall, I did it all. Because it was just so exciting to see and hear people who are

benefitting from it. They, and Vicki's done a great job getting grants getting former Dallas Cowboys to be on the board of directors, you know and some other influential people that are now on the board helping them you know do the big work. So, yeah. So, there you go that's your future story.

**Bynum**

Alright well, do you have anything else?

**Booher**

No, that's it.

**Bynum**

Well thank you for the interview, I think it was very good, I'm going to try and figure out how to turn this thing off.

*End of Interview*