

**Oral History Interview of:
Ruth Gutierrez-Martinez**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
January 29, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Project***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Ruth Gutierrez-Martinez on January 29, 2013. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Gutierrez-Martinez, Ruth. Oral History Interview, January 29, 2013. Interview by Daniel Sanchez, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1k/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Daniel Sanchez

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Christopher Cunningham

Editor(s): Cammy Herman, Leah Blackwell

Final Editor: Daniel Sanchez, Elissa Stroman

Interview Series Background:

The Hispanic Interview Project documents the diverse perspectives of the Hispanic people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Ruth Gutierrez-Martinez. Ruth discusses how she got involved with the Democratic Party in Lubbock and how she ended up at the elections office. Ruth discusses various issues with voting and maintaining regulations.

Length of Interview: 00:57:48

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Basic introductions and background info	4	0:00:00
Having a pastor for a father	8	0:07:41
What subjects Ruth enjoyed as a student	9	0:10:17
Going to Lubbock from San Marcos	11	0:13:48
Career with Southwestern Bell	12	0:18:40
Getting involved with the Democratic Party in Lubbock	13	0:22:55
Ruth discusses her current position at the elections office	15	0:27:24
Public opinion about the elections office vs. what they really do	16	0:33:20
Problem solving in the elections office	18	0:40:30
Discussion of voter fraud	19	0:45:22
Bilingual issues in the elections office	20	0:49:05
How the elections office maintains regulations	21	0:51:20

Keywords

Hispanic politics, Lubbock county, Democratic Party, Elections Office, voting policies and procedures

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is January 29, 2013, and I'm with Ruth Martinez at the Southwest Collection in Lubbock, Texas and we're interviewing Ruth as part of our Oral History Program Project. Ruth, thank you very much for sitting in today.

Ruth Gutierrez-Martinez (RM):

Thank you for having me.

DS:

And the first thing we want to do is state your legal name.

RM:

Ruth Gutierrez-Martinez.

DS:

Okay, and when and where were you born?

RM:

I was born May 6, 1954 in Beeville, Texas.

DS:

Okay, could you tell us about your parents and then your grandparents? Who were they? Where they were born?

RM:

My parents are Adam Gutierrez. He was born in Beeville, and my mother is Amelia Garcia Gutierrez and she also was born in Beeville. My maternal grandparents, Antonia Garcia and Agustin Garcia is my maternal grandfather. I'm not really sure where they were born. I believe that they were born in Beeville as well. My paternal grandparents are Adan Gutierrez and Francisca Gutierrez, and they've all since passed; I'm not really sure where they were born either. Now one of my cousins has traced back our genealogy on my maternal grandparent's side and we go back—I think we've been here—we are the fourth generation Americans.

DS:

Okay, and what kind of occupations did they have?

RM:

My maternal grandfather worked for the highway department. Both my grandmothers were stay at home moms. My paternal grandfather died when I was six years old so I don't really know what he did. I think he died of lung cancer, and he called me his chivita.

DS:
Chivita.

RM:
Apparently I used to like to jump around a lot. (Laughter)

DS:
You know I've heard of one other chivita. (Laughter)

RM:
Yeah I was one of his favorites. I remember on November 4, I always remember that day we buried him. It was either we buried him or he passed, but I always remember that date.

DS:
Well let's go a little bit into your parents. What were their occupations?

RM:
My father, when we were in Beeville, ironically, he delivered beer. He drove a truck and delivered beer. My mom, she was a stay at home mom. I think when she was growing up she worked for—nanny type—for some medical doctors. But he became a minister. And between the third and the fourth grade we moved to Goliad, because he became a Baptist minister—a pastor of a church there.

DS:
That's quite a swing. (Laughter)

RM:
Yeah, exactly. That's why I said it was a little ironic because he used to deliver beer.

DS:
You know you mentioned your brother David earlier. Do you have any other siblings?

RM:
Yes I have my younger brother that's Adam Gutierrez.

DS:
So what was it like growing up in Beeville and then Goliad?

RM:
I don't remember a lot growing up in Beeville. We moved there when I was in the third grade. I

do remember he had a house built when we were little and it was in a new part of town and it didn't have a bathroom but it was a new house so we had to go out into the backyard and we had a little out—what do they call them?

DS:

A little outhouse?

RM:

Yeah a little outhouse out there and bathed in the tubs in the kitchen. And I never understood why if it was a new house, it didn't have a bathroom? But it was because they didn't have plumbing to the new development for some reason. And I do remember going into the first grade because we went to kindergarten at our church. And then when I went into the first grade I remember them putting me in a classroom with all Hispanic children, assuming that I didn't speak English. And after half of the day they moved me into an English speaking class and to me that was very strange. But my parents have always spoken English to us for that reason I guess. They never wanted to speak in Spanish, and I guess because that was during that era where it was not acceptable. In hindsight I can read Spanish well and I can write it well but it's difficult for me to translate fast enough to speak it because I think in English so it's—but they always spoke to us in English growing up. And like I said between the third and fourth grade we moved to Goliad. It was a nice little town of about two thousand people.

DS:

What was that like there?

RM:

That was a really nice little town. I enjoyed living there. It was small. We lived a block from the courthouse square. It was a beautiful little town. Of course there was a lot of history. "Remember Goliad, Remember the Alamo." Or "Remember the Alamo, Remember Goliad." There were two or three missions there—a fort at one of the missions. We walked everywhere. I have good memories of growing up in Goliad except for a couple of times I didn't get up early enough and my dad made me walk to school. Learned my lesson but it was nice. I liked Goliad.

DS:

How long did y'all live there?

RM:

We lived there—I went to the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade there. And then before the seventh grade we moved to San Marcos, and I was there until the tenth grade. Everybody likes San Marcos. Of course it wasn't as big when we were living there. Of course because he was a minister, a pastor of a church we always lived next door to the church we always lived next door

to the church so we were in church all the time. I've always been a little resentful because we were there Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night and anytime there was anything else—you know choir practice. And I never got to watch the *Wizard of Oz* as a child because it always showed on a Sunday evening, and we always had to be in church. And I grew up a little resentful because as a parent I thought God would understand. God is a just God and he would understand if you wanted to stay at home with your child and let him or her watch the *Wizard of Oz*. So that's one of my roots probably.

DS:

We'll go into that therapy later. (Laughter) But what I want to ask you though, is what was it like growing up in a household where the father was the pastor? Can you talk about some of the things that you as children were not allowed to do that other children were? Or the disciplinarian type thing?

RM:

Well I don't think he let us do a lot of stuff because he was the Baptist minister, so much as he was a very, very stern disciplinarian. And I think it just has to do with him growing up as a Hispanic father, you know? He was very, very strict. He wouldn't let me spend the night with my friends or things like, that but he did make us—I don't know if I should say this—when we did something wrong he would punish us by making us memorize parts of the bible, verses from the bible. And I never understood that. And I feel like it just kind of hurt me growing up but there were a lot of things we couldn't do. We couldn't go to dances—

DS:

Was there a different standard for boys and girls there or was it the same?

RM:

He was always a little more lax with David. He was much more strict with me.

DS:

And David is very gregarious so what's it like growing up with a brother like that?

RM:

Well he started working when he was thirteen. One of our members of the church was a manager of a convenience store and so he had him come in and help him stock and things like that you know. And then from there that manager opened a restaurant, a Mexican food restaurant, so he took David with him. So he's been working since he was thirteen; so he kind of got out of the house early. So he didn't deal with a lot of the stuff that I had to deal with. But he's done really well. I'm really proud of him and yeah I don't know—what can I say?

DS:

Well let's—we have an interview with David so we have his stuff on there so I want to concentrate on yourself. So let's talk about when you went to school. What type of subject matters did you like?

RM:

I liked grammar. Not so much the literature part of English but the grammar part. I hated math. It never clicked with me. I never understood. Probably, if I had taken—in retrospect I would have liked to have taken some psychology type classes, you know. It's always intrigued me, why people do the things they do and how the mind works and things like that. I didn't really like school that much.

DS:

So what were you thinking about for your life after school? Were you thinking about that when you were in high school?

RM:

No, I think just—I was one of those that just wanted to get married. I went to Tech for a semester, and I didn't like it. I got married in July right after high school and went to Tech that semester and didn't really like it. And then the following semester I didn't enroll, and I went to work for the phone company and just forgot about school all together.

DS:

And that's back when you could go to work for the phone company and work your way up.

RM:

Yes and they actually, at one point, they would pay for your education and David kept encouraging me to do that. He said, "You should take advantage of that." Because they would reimburse you for classes that had to do with—but after we were married three years, two years, we had our first child in our third year and I just enjoyed being a mother. And I was still working for the phone company, so between that and my children and my husband I just didn't find the time and it wasn't important to me. Because every job, even though I did so many jobs at Southwestern Bell, the only job that I didn't like for them was selling. I'm just not a salesperson. I just couldn't lie to somebody and say, You have an efficiency, you need a phone, three different phones in that little efficiency. It just wasn't me. But every job I worked for them, twenty-nine years and I loved everything that I did for them. They were a good company to work for back then. They treated Hispanics well. They treated women well.

DS:

So were you there when they broke it up into the different—?

RM:

Yes.

DS:

What was the like for the workers?

RM:

Well Southwestern Bell, you had to be able to accept change, be very flexible. Because it just went on constantly. So I think it was a surprise to everybody but we got the best company to work for with Southwestern Bell out of all the break ups you know. They're the ones that ultimately became AT&T again so it was not that big of a shocker.

DS:

And the other thing we kind of jumped over was how you got to Lubbock from San Marcos.

RM:

We were in San Marcos until I was a sophomore and then when I started my junior year my dad came in view of a call at Primera Iglesia Bautista here in Lubbock. He was here during the [1970] tornado because they were having a revival and across the street what was then Arnett Benson Baptist Church which is now Templo Nueva Vida or something like that on Boston and Amherst or something. There was a tent across the street, and he was here during the tornado and we moved—the end of May is when we moved to Lubbock, right after the tornado hit. So we didn't know how things looked before the tornado or anything like that. So he plucked me out of my high school after everybody—you know by your junior year everybody's made their friends and so. Yeah I had to move and David moved too, but he went to Lubbock High a month and hated it but was able to go back to San Marcos and graduate there. But you know David, he was very popular in high school so he wanted to graduate with his class so he went back there and lived with an uncle. So he left me here by myself to go to Lubbock High. But I met Billy—we met at church, my husband now, we met at church. So we started seeing each other *a las escondidas*. My dad never did like him of course, but he was pretty much my friend during high school. You know I had a few but like I said everybody had already made their friends and mainly the ones that I had were girls from the church that I had made friends with.

DS:

What were the big changes for you from San Marcos to Lubbock?

RM:

Oh my goodness. Lubbock High was huge compared to the high school in San Marcos. And you know the whole town was. I'm basically a very shy person so it was very difficult for me to

adjust to Lubbock High and to the changes. In San Marcos they had a college campus type you know they had an English building, and a Science building, and a Math building and the cafeteria was separate. All the buildings were separate. In Lubbock High everything was together and it had three stories, and it was just very different for me and being shy I pretty much kept to myself.

DS:

So what year was it you graduate from Lubbock High?

RM:

Seventy-two.

DS:

Seventy-two and then you got married that summer?

RM:

Yeah I turned eighteen in May, graduated in May and then we eloped in July of '72.

DS:

Did Billy graduate the same year?

RM:

No he graduated in '69. Probably another reason my dad didn't like him too much because he was a college kid. He was at Tech. (Laughter)

DS:

He was a couple of years older than you. (Laughter)

RM:

Yeah he was already at Tech.

DS:

Yeah he was one of those that were out here trailblazing for others.

RM:

Mm-hm with the Tertulianos and that group. Yeah.

DS:

So how soon after y'all married did Billy finish college?

RM:

Um—a year? Yeah.

DS:

So was—I'm not sure if Billy was active yet in his civic activities back then or was that later in life when y'all both got involved.

RM:

That was later. Yeah that was later. We've always been interested in—we've always voted. We'd always been political in that way but we never—with both of us working and trying to make a living for our kids and ourselves and involved in our churches. We were very much involved in our church at the time. You know me—I have always been involved in the choir and things like that. We didn't really get involved until later in life.

DS:

What brought that change?

RM:

We've always been interested in it. We've always had opinions on it. Things like that but I guess because we just had more time. And then Billy—I guess with his union. He just happened to get—when he went to work for the union he got more vocal and more—and then I got involved with—and I guess this was maybe after I retired from the phone company. Or maybe before that, you know we involved with the Democratic Party in town, and then I retired from the phone company. They offered me a buyout. I started as an operator. A directory assistance operator and then long distance operator back when they had the cord boards, you know? (laughter) Dating myself. But yeah, we had the cord boards and then I went into the business office and handled the residential, and then from there I went to the business section and then I stayed with the business section until I retired.

But we got the DSL finally and Lubbock was picked to sell the DSL in the whole state of Texas. So one of my good friends was in charge of that call center so she really wanted me on her staff and yada yada yada. And I never wanted management. We were very involved in the union, and I never did want to be on the management side. But she took me to lunch one day, she and another one—and offered me a job. So I went home and talked to Billy about it, and of course the boys were older so we talked to them. And they all were, You should take it, you should take it. So I took it and then a few years later they offered me a buyout (laughs) because they were doing away with certain positions and all that stuff. But it was a good time to go. I had enough time. I'd been with them twenty-nine years.

But the best part of that is that they sent us to—some of us that took the buyout, across the five areas that Southwestern Bell had, they sent us to Florida to open up a call center there. So they paid us after we retired, and they kept paying us and we were able to get our vacation for the

next year because it was going to last from November until the following year. We went to Tampa, and they put us up in an extended stay hotel and provided us with rental cars. We each had a rental vehicle, and it's nice to work for private companies for a profit. (laughter) They would bring us home every other week or they would pay for one of our family members to go there. So I rarely came home because all the family wanted to go over there. So Billy would go over there. We'd spend the weekend together. We got all the kids there with their spouses, and we went to Disney World. They even gave us tickets to Disney World. So we were able to travel, you know how big Florida is, so we were able to travel pretty much all of Florida.

And I think that's when I learned to do really stuff on my own because the weekends that we couldn't come home I just went out and explored the whole state. It was really nice. And then that was the year that they had the Super Bowl in Tampa so they sent us all home because all the hotels would up there prices, and they weren't going to pay for us to be there at five hundred dollars a night. So they sent us home for the Super Bowl weekend. But it was really interesting leading up to that, you know all the activity that went on in Tampa to set up for the Super Bowl. And then once we finished there, they sent us to Dallas to help with the call center there, and we were able to work with them. I finally decided I had enough of it so I came home in July. And some of the other ladies, and I think there were a couple of men, they stayed on until like August or September of 2001. That was when I actually retired. Then I stayed home—I think I got off track. I don't remember what you asked me about.

DS:

Well covering some of your career, but earlier you had mentioned about when you guys started getting involved with the Democratic Party. So I was thinking, did you get involved when Irma Guerrero was involved with?

RM:

Yes.

DS:

What was she like to work with?

RM:

Irma was great. She was so easy going. She had a lot of connections. She was able to be there I guess because of what she did for a living. She was able to spend a lot of time there. She was so passionate about getting the Hispanics involved in the party. She was very passionate about just about being—everybody's rights and having equality and that's what I was leading up to. When I came home in July, we had gotten involved with the party and then I got involved with—Esther Zepeda got me to run for an office on the Hispanic chamber. So I served on the Hispanic chamber. I think I was secretary or something for a couple of years, and then they moved in to another building and they allowed her to hire a secretary so I went on as her administrative

assistant or whatever and did that for a while. So I got to know a lot of people then. She introduced me to a lot of people and a lot of networking. And I think that's when we really got involved in the community. And then I also worked—this is during the time after I had retired. When they no longer needed a secretary, I went to work for the League of Women Voters for part-time. I just wanted to have some interaction with—because I had stayed home for a couple of years, and I got bored being at home after I retired.

DS:

Let me back you up. You mentioned the Hispanic chamber. What were some of the needs that you saw that the Hispanic business owners needed that were different than those that were typically of the Lubbock Chamber?

RM:

Gosh, Daniel I don't even know if I remember that. No. Sorry. (laughter)

DS:

Alright well then let's go back to the League of Women Voters. (laughter)

RM:

Yeah I went to part-time and worked for the League of Women Voters and then Irma had to—we had a primary coming up and at the time the parties handled their own elections. So the county clerk handled the main elections but the primaries belonged to the parties so they had to conduct their own elections. So Irma hired Evelyn Davis to take care of her election for that primary and she asked me—Evelyn asked me if I would help her out, and they were going to pay me a little bit. I was gone quite a bit, away from home, and that was during the time that I had retired. So you know, I seemed to really like it. It was something I really enjoyed doing. And finally Billy told me, "If you're going to be gone this much why don't go out and find a real job that will give you benefits and pay and everything," because I wasn't making anything. So that was when I went to work for the elections office.

Irma was very innovative. She had a lot of contacts so she was always able to get people to donate. When she had a cause that she was really interested in, she could just call some people up and say, "Hey this is what I'm interested in. Do you have any financial backing you could provide for us?" (laughter) But you know I still miss her, and she became a good friend.

DS:

Yeah that was kind of sudden wasn't it?

RM:

Yes it was. It was shocking.

DS:

Well you know you mentioned you had gone to your current position. Can you talk about that? You've been there how many years now?

RM:

Eight years going on nine. David had introduced me—David my brother, when he was sheriff, I had gone over to his office or something because I was going to go get my license plates renewed. And I went by his office just to say hi since I was downtown, and told him what I was going to do. And he said, "Hey let me take you over there." You know David; he can't stay in one place at one time very long. So we went over there and he introduced me to Dorothy Kennedy who was over voter registration at the time that was in the tax office at the time. So we visited and I told her that I'd always been interested and I said "Hey if you ever have an opening here at the voter registration let me know. I think this is something that I think I would enjoy." And I don't remember when that was, but a few years later she called me because she knew that I was involved—we were involved with the Democratic Party. And they were thinking about opening an elections office at the county and the elections administrator was going to be appointed by the Democratic Party chair, the Republican Party chair, two of the—I guess the commissioners, or the judge and maybe two commissioners. I can't remember who—there's five people that are involved in appointing that person, and she really wanted that job so she wanted me to talk to Irma about it. So I did.

And then they formed the elections office in October of 2003 with her and Roxine, she's our chief deputy. She's our numbers person. She's very good at the budget and all and then Gloria Armenta. And then in February of 2004 I found out that they were looking for part-time workers. She called me, and I applied for it. They hired two of us as part-time workers, and I interviewed and they said, "How do you feel about overtime?" and I said, "Yeah I don't mind overtime." She said, "It'll just be a few hours." I said, "Yeah that's fine." And I was going to work three days a week. So that's how we started out and that was in February. In March right before the primary, one of their other employees—they had hired a full time employee. She quit out of nowhere, right before the primary. So they had an opening so I applied for that job. They talked me into applying for that job. That's when they asked me about the overtime. Do you mind? How do you feel about it? I said "I can—few hours."

Well, a few hours turned into—one night we were there twenty-two hours and the next night we were out there twenty-three hours. And working for a union private company for close to thirty years where you get a break every—you can't work more than five hours without a break and you have to have lunch after five hours, and if they kept you more than ten hours they would provide dinner. And I'm working for a government that they don't care if you eat, they don't care if you get a break or anything. (laughter) I was in shock, but that's government. They're not there for profit so you've got to deal with it. It was quite an adjustment but we pushed through, and I enjoyed it. We worked hard at it, everybody there.

Right now we have a staff. This May I'll be there nine years. And the staff that we have now, there's ten of us there. Nine of us are full time and everybody there, you can tell, enjoys what they do. They love what they do, and they're good at it. Dorothy has surrounded herself with a really good staff. In May of 2011 she got sick on us, and we had an election to conduct because the cities and schools are in May. We managed to do it without her because she was in the hospital and completely indisposed. I started out as voter registration and now she likes for us to do everything.

The only thing I haven't been really trained at is working with the equipment. There's a lot to do with setting it up and cleaning it out to get rid of everything from the previous election. The physical manual labor part which is fine with me, because right now I place all the workers at their locations and most people know if you're working with people you've got to learn their personalities. You find out who doesn't like who. Who doesn't get along with who. Who's got allergies so they can't be around somebody that wears perfumes. All this stuff you have to take into account so there's certain things that even though she has us cross trained you just don't get familiar with because you have to concentrate on what you do.

DS:

So what are some of the perceptions, whether they be right or wrong, that the public in general might have about what the elections office does?

RM:

They think that we do nothing after the election's done. We have a lot of people that we run into and they say, "Well what are you doing now? Are you still working there?" Yeah we have a full time staff because, for example, after this presidential election we had—everybody updates their—the election worker, when you go vote, they have to ask you if you've moved, and you tell them whether you have or not. A lot of times we know because we get mail back. The post office cannot forward stuff that we sent to them unless it's in an envelope or something then they can forward it. But if it's certain things, you know, jury summons, they're not forwarded. Our certificates can't be forwarded so when we get bad addresses or the yellow thing saying their forwarding addresses. Even the ones with the forwarding addresses we can't just assume and arbitrarily change their address without their signature. So when they ask you if you've moved and you fill out a card, that comes back to us.

So we have thousands and thousands of people that addresses we have to change. So we do that. We get jury mail because the girls that handle the jury, they get mail back, and then they bring them to us so that we can update or send out what we call confirmation letters so that people can fill out a card and tell us, Yes we have moved, or for some reason the post office sent it back and they shouldn't have. And they just confirmed that they are at this address or their not and they give us their new one. So have to handle all of those. We prepare for an election six months, seven months ahead of time because there are so many things that have to be submitted because of the Voting Rights Act in the southern states where they messed up. And now we have to

submit so many things to the Department of Justice to make sure all our elections are on the up and up. We're being fair to everybody. We have to do a lot of submissions so they're done seventy-five days ahead of the election.

So there are a lot of things that we have to do. So right now we're already working on the May election and we started that in December. We meet with all the entities that are going to be involved and they know that they've got elections because they've got terms that are up so we do that. We go to, especially in these off years, we go to—like we had a conference in Texas Association of Elections Administrators had a conference in January that we went to. And we have a group from there that goes to the legislation, if there's certain things that we are interested in—bills that are out there that might affect us. They go there and testify or lobby for them or whatever. So we do that. Dorothy right now—because we are the first county that started vote centers which we called super precincts at the time. We get a lot of requests to go and speak to a lot of counties. We put on a presentation in Corpus [Christi] on vote centers because Dorothy and our Chief Deputy were in Washington for some legislations, things that were going on there. So we did a presentation.

DS:

So what brought those about in the first place?

RM:

I guess Dorothy had heard about them. There was a county in Colorado, or two counties actually in Colorado that were doing them, so she was very interested in it. And we actually—she took all her staff, and she took two commissioners, and she took some IT people, and she took two maintenance people because it takes so many departments to be able to run that. Because the maintenance department, we count on them to deliver equipment. They drive the trucks to deliver the equipment. Our warehouse technician goes out to the locations to make sure that all the locations are ADA compliant. So she goes out there and she measures the doors. Makes sure wheelchairs can go through, make sure there [are] ramps. Make sure the door knobs—even that. Just little things that the average person doesn't think about, and if they don't then our maintenance department can do certain things to help us, like they can build ramps. I think we've gotten to where we buy them now, but they have a lot to do with that. And then they deliver the equipment.

Of course the commissioners are involved because they'll go to places to try to—of course when they went with us initially to Colorado, they needed to know what it cost and what the savings would be if we went to that. So we got to visit those two counties, and it was election day when she took us up there in Colorado. So we all got to talk to our counterparts there in Colorado. So when she came back we as an office got together, and we just knew we could make it work. And in the long run initially it wouldn't save us any money because you had to buy equipment because you had to have real time check-ins. So we had to buy computers for all the locations to avoid “Joe Blow” voting here and then going across town and voting again. That other location

had to be able to know that they had already cast their ballot. So initially it cost quite a bit of money but now you can see we have a savings of 15 to 20 percent per election.

So anyway, she visits a lot. She went to College Station to put on a presentation, and then she's going to Williamson County next week I think, to put on a presentation there. She's taking a couple of commissioners because they're in their budget hearings and they want to know what it costs and all that. She just knew that we could make it work and save money in the long run and use less workers. And so it was pretty—we're very proud of being the pioneers of that in Texas.

DS:

Well and you mentioned something about protecting the vote by the real time computer thing, and in fact there was something online today about that but we'll get to that later. But the other aspect of that is planning for changes. Like the redistricting that just happened and they kept moving the date closer and closer to election day. How do y'all deal with that and being able to get everybody's cards out in time?

RM:

It was pretty frustrating to say the least, but I don't know. Like I said she's surrounded herself with good people in that office and amazingly enough, everybody's personalities—it just turned out well. We just have learned how to work it out, and you just do the best with what you've got. Luckily we have a very good G.I.S. [Geographic Information System] person in the office. She deals with our maps and she makes our maps and Dorothy's on top of that and she's on top of that, making sure she involved her in all the redistricting. And you just go with it. (laughter) You had your hands tied with the legislators and the judges and the courts.

DS:

Yeah because I know there were a lot of us that were antsy. When are we going to get our new cards, but you know we just had to trust in the system.

RM:

Yup, unfortunately (laughter) you just have to trust in the system. And I think the media—Dorothy has done well in developing a rapport with the media. She's very transparent. Most counties—there's a test called the Logic and Accuracy Test that you are required to do for the public where you build your ballot for that particular election, and then you mark all those ballots. You print so many ballots per precinct, and there could be a lot because if there's—like say the cities and schools elections. There so many like at Cooper. A voting precinct could cover three different school districts, so you have to have three different styles of ballots for that particular voting precinct.

So in the Logic and Accuracy Test we print all the ballots that have been built. One person is in charge of building a spreadsheet and saying this person is going to get this many votes. This race is going to get this many votes. This race is going to get this many votes. And then the next—we

have like I don't know how many ballots to each precinct because you have to—we mark them, we print them, we mark them, and then we vote them on our machines exactly how the ballot has been marked. And then they run them through the scanners so they can tally them up, so they have to balance. What you voted and what was marked on the ballot has to tally up the same way. So it's just a checks and balances type thing.

Well Dorothy has us do one internally to make sure that we don't have any surprises. A lot of counties you're not required to do an internal one, you're just required to do a public one. But Dorothy has one done—we do it, and some of them, like this presidential had a lot on the ballot. So it could take us days, and if we don't do it right and we can't find where the mistake was if there was one, then we have to scratch it and do it all over again and you have to mark all the ballots again. Anyway, and then when there's a public one and we put it in the paper so that anybody can come watch it. So she's very transparent and she's very fair, so I think that we've developed a good reputation as being a fair elections office. And she's got a good rapport with the commissioners too. There are a lot of counties that don't have that and consequently they have a lot of problems. So I don't know; we're very proud of our elections office here in town.

DS:

Well back to the issue that I was talking about earlier; there's been so much said about voter fraud. As someone that works in an election office as an election officer, what's that mean to you?

RM:

We think it's a little comical because there's not that much voter fraud. I mean there's not. The eight and a half years that I've been there, we had one person try to vote twice and it was because one of our election workers tried to get them to work twice and that election worker was gone after that. And then we did have one other situation, and we referred it over to the DA's office and then they decided what to do with it. But we don't have a problem with voter fraud. In Lubbock County we don't, and in most places the attempt of doing that is so small. And I think a lot of people think that the immigrants are going to try and vote but they don't want to get caught. Why would they risk trying to vote and get caught and then sent back to where they came from? So that's not going to happen.

DS:

Yeah because they'd have to have somebody else's information because they couldn't vote under their name.

RM:

Unh-uh. Yeah we don't have a problem with it. And you know you think about it, the certificates just go out. A lot of times we get complaints because they didn't get their certificate and we found that the material, the paper that they're on, sometimes they stick because they're thin. So

one person can get somebody else's and you think, well they could go—because you don't have to show a voter ID or a picture ID. Somebody else could take that and go vote with it and they could I guess, but you know we don't get complaints that it's being done.

DS:

I think the voter turnout in general is so low—

RM:

(laughs) Yeah, exactly.

DS:

—that it's not happening. It's hard to get the real ones to vote.

RM:

Mm-hm, exactly.

DS:

And the other challenges that we faced recently had to do with the voting but also with—I guess that's just it, the voting rights—

RM:

Voter ID, but that goes with the voter fraud and that's why they want it. And then the legislators think that it would be—they make all these laws, but they don't think about what it's going to cost to do that. We were thinking about it last year because it was such a big deal and we were afraid it was going to pass and they were going to pass on. Who's going to take the picture? Where's that picture going to come from? The counties don't have the budget to be able to buy equipment to take your picture. Who's going to produce all those? They just make the laws, and they pass them, and they don't think about things like that. They don't consider things like that.

DS:

And I guess the other big issue is the bilingual aspect of y'all's job. How many bilingual people do you try maintain at each one of the voting centers?

RM:

It depends on the locations because in the predominantly Hispanic areas I always try to put more. We always try, and almost always have one at each location. But in the predominantly Hispanic areas we always put more. And then if for some reason if there's not one, if we only had one assigned there—because it's difficult to find bilingual workers. And then bless their hearts when you do have them and you have to send them to Timbuktu, clear across the county because we need somebody there. I have a lot of problems at Roosevelt Clubhouse because I don't have any

in that area bilingual, so we have to pay them mileage to go out there from Lubbock. And that's the same with Shallowater and Abernathy and New Deal. It's hard to find them. So we pay mileage for them to go out there, but still. A lot of times we have a lot of females and you know they don't want to drive that far at night.

DS:

Yeah I was going to say especially early morning, late evening.

RM:

Yeah late in the evening. And then in times like that, or if we have one assigned there and for some reason they got sick or something happened, a death in the family, and they couldn't work, then we tell the judge or the supervisor there to call the office if they have a need. Or sometimes the locations where they are have—like we use some of the school administrative offices and they might have employees there that we ask them if they wouldn't mind if they had something come up that they could help them and they agree to do that. So we always try to cover it. We try to push it but it's hard to find bilingual workers.

DS:

And then there's another thing that happens around voting precincts on election day and that's when the candidates are outside.

RM:

Ay dios mio.

DS:

How do the voting offices deal with anything that might be perceived as a violation of what they're supposed to be doing? Do y'all take steps to do that or is there a different group that does that?

RM:

Actually if we know that there's races that are going to be like that, Dorothy will call the candidates in, and she'll have one-on-one meetings with them. Separately of course, and explain to them, This is how we do things. Don't do this, don't do that. And we were very concerned about one of the races in this last election, the commissioner race. We were afraid we were going have some problems, so she had a meeting with the staff. And another problem that we have also Daniel, in bringing that up, is because, like this race they were Hispanic. The workers and the voters, they all speak in Spanish and if there's some Anglo workers there they don't know what they're saying. So that becomes a problem too because who's going to be there to make sure that somebody is not encouraging somebody to vote because the Anglo person doesn't know what that Hispanic is saying.

She also had a meeting with some of the workers that were at those locations and said, This is what is going to happen, we're not going to do this. And a lot of those workers have been with us so long that they understand, and they're not going to do that. I had to go and talk to them. She had us—she's got three Spanish speaking bilinguals in the office on her staff. So she had a meeting with us and said, "We want you all to drop by these United's and just kind of put an ear to it and make sure nothing's going on." And we'd drop by and I even had a meeting with one of them because one of them candidate's camp called us and said, These people are encouraging—they weren't. I don't know what they were trying to stir up or anything. But you have to trust your election workers. You know, you've trained them well and done the best you could. And sometimes, we've had problems with some of them, but we hear about it and they're not there anymore. But the ones that have been with us for years, they truly believe in the system and they're there because—I mean they're there for the paycheck too. It's nice, but they believe in the democratic process and they want it to work, so.

But she did have a meeting with a couple of candidates this time. We also had a group, La Fuerza. She had a meeting with some of them also, and they turned out well. We got reports that one of the candidates was going through the United and shopping, or pretending that he was shopping, and talking, electioneering, and you can't have that. Of course when she has a meeting with them and tells them you can't be doing that, they deny it. So we don't know if they were doing it or not. Or they'll go in there and not realize that they've got their campaign t-shirt on, so the election workers will approach them and tell them they need to turn it inside or whatever, and they do it. Like I said, she's very open-door policy so she'll bring them in and talk to them and hopefully settle that.

We actually didn't have any problems like we thought we would. We had more problems with some election workers that we had to get rid of but they were in other parts of town and mostly they were health issues. They're getting older and they don't want to admit it because they enjoy what they do but we had to send them home.

DS:

I guess the biggest issue but it's taken care of during training with this voter ID, it's like it was almost to the last minute before it was going to be or not. So there's always that danger that somebody may think it's in effect when it's not.

RM:

Yeah we had to deal with that and we had to send out—like every night, the deputies, and every morning they go deliver what we call the Judge's Booth Controller that stores all the votes. So during early voting every morning, some of the staff is at the office at six o'clock in the morning. We have deputies that come and pick up that piece of equipment and take out any supplies that they need to the locations and then they bring them back at night. So when that came up Dorothy said, "Send out a notice to everybody," and we put it in bright neon color and let them know. Our system, also that check in, also has instant messaging. So we have a phone bank at our office and

they instant message us whenever they have a situation or questions or anything like that. Yeah we keep them pretty informed.

DS:

Well I think we've gone probably close to an hour. Can you think of anything else you want to discuss on this nice, wonderful day? (laughter)

RM:

No, I can't think of anything.

DS:

We covered quite a bit in a short period of time. Well I think I'm going to let you go because I know you probably want to get in and out of the cold. (laughter)

RM:

Alright, I appreciate it.

DS:

Thank you for coming in.

RM:

Thank you, Daniel.

End Interview

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library