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Melinda Chavez oral history interview by Suzette Berkman, April 4, 2007

Melinda Chavez (Interviewee)

Suzette Berkman (Interviewer)

Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts (Interviewer)

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SB: I am here today with Melinda Chavez, who is Executive Director of the Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts. It is April 4, 2007, and it’s a beautiful day in Tampa Bay.

MC: Yes it is.

SB: And thank you so much, Melinda, for agreeing to do this. We’d like to know more about the Business Committee for the Arts. If—

MC: Sure.

SB: You could just tell—people don’t necessarily know what that is.

MC: All right. Well the Business Committee for the Arts, we’re actually an affiliate of a nationwide organization, which is based in New York and is—was founded in 1967 by David Rockefeller. And the Tampa affiliation began in 1989, and we’re one of about ten or eleven affiliates around the country.

SB: Do you interact with those affiliates?

MC: Yes, we do. As a matter of fact, we just had a national affiliates meeting here in Tampa last week.

SB: Oh, okay.

MC: And—

SB: And—

MC: We get together periodically to share.
SB: Why do you interact?

MC: Well, because we have our affiliations, as I said, all over the country, from New Hampshire to California, and Dallas, Kansas City, Denver, places all over. And each one of the organizations obviously works in a unique situation. And so although we all have the same general purpose, the way we do that varies from one community to another. And because different communities have different resources and needs and so forth.

SB: Sure. Could you explain a little more, exactly what you do?

MC: Sure. The Business Committee for the Arts, in my opinion, functions as a catalyst between the business world and the arts world. We exist and function to help and encourage businesses to understand why arts and culture are important to them, both from an altruistic point of view, but also from a self-interest point of view, in the sense that a community that doesn’t have a strong arts and cultural component as well as strong athletics is not going to be a full community, and therefore is not going to be a good climate for business. And by the same token, we also work to encourage artists and arts and cultural groups to understand that in order to be successful, they also need to understand the business process.

SB: Do you work with those groups?

MC: Yes, yes.

SB: What kinds of groups? Who would be some of the groups?

MC: Well, not the Performing Arts Center. I think Judy Lisi knows how to do what she does—

SB: Okay.

MC: Very well. But certainly with the smaller institutions, both—and we work both in Hillsborough and Pinellas County. And we do education programs, we do board training programs. We just met this morning with Robin Nigh to talk about some programs that we’re going to be working on with regard both to public art, and again, the business side of arts. The business of art.

SB: Would those be programs that would benefit your members? Or—

MC: They certainly may well benefit my members.

SB: Involve them.

MC: Our members are business people.

SB: Yes.
MC: So we—and again, one of the things we do with our members is encourage them to be involved as support, in support functions for cultural institutions.

SB: How many members to you have?

MC: About one hundred and fifteen.

SB: What types of businesses?

MC: It’s every thing from a small communications firm to very large firms like Citigroup or Raymond James. It’s a huge range. We have a lot of attorneys. We do have a lot of businesses that are in-kind members because they provide us with services or opportunities rather than cash-money.

SB: And how does it—if I were a member, how does it benefit me? Of course, you’d be a business logically to belong.

MC: Well, you get recognition of course, because we recognize all of our members—

SB: Sure.

MC: As much as we possibly can. We—

SB: You do that through newsletters?

MC: Through newsletters, on the website, through various programming and so forth. We are in the process of expanding our programming so that there will be more visibility for our members in various ways. And then we also provide services for members such as, if you are interested in having your employees more involved in the community in one way or another. We do some programming that gets them out into cultural institutions. We encourage businesses to provide board members and other types of support services for cultural institutions because they have skills and knowledge and experience that cultural institutions need.

SB: That’s terrific. Now you do a gala as well?

MC: Yes, we do a big awards gala every fall.

SB: How many types of organizations do you honor?

MC: Yes. We honor—well, we honor both business people and businesses themselves who have been in some way instrumental in supporting the arts. Typically, although not always, businesses and individuals are nominated by cultural institutions that have benefited from them. And again, this is an opportunity to showcase these people. And, of course, part of it is to provide them as examples—
SB: Sure.

MC: Of how you can be active in the community. But it’s really—both from—for, and I’ll use this in quotes, “Selfish point of view,” it makes you look good to have been involved in the cultural world.

SB: Sure.

MC: And it gives you recognition, it gives you a high profile. And that gives you the opportunity to support, you know, arts and culture.

SB: You have implemented a study, and if you could elaborate on that—

MC: Yes, actually—

SB: I think that’d be great to know.

MC: We do an economic impact study every five years. And we did our third one in 2005, and that most recent one showed that in the year 2004, in Pinellas and Hillsborough County, arts and culture contributed over half a billion dollars to the economy, provided 7800 jobs. And what that does of course is that the—a part of that impact comes from the building the cultural institutions do, and the people that they pay to as employees and so forth. But then those people go out into the community and spend their money at the department stores and buying cars and doing whatever else, paying taxes and so forth. So there, that money is getting returned back into the community.

SB: How does that compare with, say, the sports impact? Or—

MC: Well, I don’t—I would say that probably those impacts are approximately equal. I really don’t like to get into the—

SB: Okay.

MC: We’re better than they are—

SB: Yes.

MC: Because I think that, as I said earlier, a strong community is one that has all of those components—

SB: Sure.

MC: And if you’re missing one leg on the stool, it’s not going to stay on top.
SB: Absolutely. Do you know off hand what the economic impact though, is for the other areas?

MC: Well certainly for sports, I know that when some of these comparisons have been done in the past, it was probably about equal. Both in terms of the number of people who participate—and we’re talking things like Super Bowl, and all the big games and the teams—

SB: Sure.

MC: Sports teams and so forth.

SB: Sure. So really, part of your job though is to have people understand the economic impact?

MC: Exactly, very much part of it, yes.

SB: And then the other part is kind of networking?

MC: Yes, very much so.

SB: Really. How much of your day is spent networking?

MC: Oh gosh [laughter]. Probably fifty percent of it.

SB: Oh my gosh.

MC: But I mean, you know, there’s a certain amount of course, that’s done in the office. But then that’s hard to measure too, because a lot of that networking is done on email and on the telephone. I feel like I’ve got the phone surgically implanted in my ear!

SB: Oh my goodness, oh my gosh.

MC: And then a lot of it’s getting out. I mean I’m out on probably three to four nights a week, on both sides of the bay, representing the Business Committee for the Arts, and—

SB: Sure.

MC: And it’s amazing because—one of my private aspects of myself is that I really don’t like being out there, socializing that much [laughs]—

SB: [Laughs] oh my gosh!

MC: And yet I will tell you that probably four fifths of the time of my going out, I will come home from that and say, “Darn I’m glad I did that.”—
SB: Oh, that’s great.

MC: I met somebody, and you know that’s a contact—

SB: Isn’t that wonderful.

MC: That I can follow up on, so—

SB: That is terrific.

MC: It’s very productive.

SB: Well, I know a lot of prominent businesses belong to this organization, and it was nineteen—

MC: Eight-nine—

SB: Eighty-nine.

MC: That we started in Tampa Bay.

SB: Who have been some of the leaders—

MC: Oh goodness.

SB: In that time period?

MC: Well, of course certainly, Raymond James is an example. But you know, it’s everything from the larger ones like Raymond James, Citigroup, Bank of America, Walter Industries, major law firms like Carlton Fields and Trenam Kempker and those groups. And then lots of smaller ones. I will tell you that the national statistics show that, I think it’s something like eighty-five percent—I’m not exact on these figures, but it’s in the right ballpark—about eighty-five percent of the giving that goes on in the arts, in the United States is done by small and midsize businesses.

SB: That is very interesting.

MC: So although the big guys get a lot of big splash for what they do, a huge amount of the actual giving—and this of course again is, it may be in financial giving, it may an in-kind giving, it may be in support services. But a huge amount of that portion is in small and midsize—

SB: That’s extraordinary.

MC: Yes.
SB: What percentage of your members are small to medium?

MC: Oh gosh. I think probably seventy-five to eighty percent.

SB: Okay.

MC: I think.

SB: Great. And what would constitute small or medium? The number of employees?

MC: Well, yes, I mean that’s certainly the way we do it in terms of membership. And I would say that small would probably range from fifteen employees down, and midsize from fifteen to one hundred. And then of course we do have the very large ones that employ a number of thousand, so—

SB: That’s interesting. And I know a lot of people who have benefited from networking with you. I have to give that testimony actually, it’s great. Some people would say, now, there’s a Chamber of Commerce.

MC: Yes.

SB: How do you differentiate from the Chamber?

MC: Well a Chamber of Commerce, it’s primary purpose for existing is to benefit its members, which they do. But their focus, at least in my experience with the Chambers that I work with is that they’re really focusing on business-to-business connections and ties, which are very important. And actually I sit on the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Chamber in which we act as sort of the cultural arm for the Chamber, recognizing again the—what the arts groups and art supporters, as you well know, have done in the community. And again, I will tell you that one of my passions as far as the Chamber goes, and I think—I’m very pleased that, I think we’ve made some progress in recent years—

SB: That’s good too.

MC: That we are gradually helping the Chamber, especially the Committee of 100, which is wonderful, to recognize that it is important to have a strong cultural community, and to do something about it.

SB: That’s quite significant.

MC: Yes, so I’m feeling pretty—

SB: That’s very significant.

MC: You know, struttty about that right now.
SB: Now, how did—do you have specific examples?

MC: Well, something that has not come to fruition yet, but I’m working on—but I’m talking about it because I just had a really good email exchange yesterday, was in some email conversations that I’m having with Myron Hughes who is the Chamber staff person for the Committee of 100. And there’s a big conference in town called the District Export Council, which is a group of people who—all around the United States who belong to this council—

SB: Okay.

MC: And they have a conference every year, and theirs is in Tampa this year. And in—we have timed Arte 2007 to be—to coincide with that district council. And I’m working on a project which—I actually learned about how to do this from one that was down in Broward County, of having a social event in which we get together these people from the United States who want to trade in Latin America, with invitees from Latin America, such as Mexico and other delegations of that sort—

SB: Terrific.

MC: And to have the Chamber do an event because they’re the economic arm here. To do an event in which we invite all these people together for a social event so they get to know each other, and have cultural events—

SB: Terrific.

MC: Based around that, so that you have a cultural experience that then contributes to the relationships for trade and business—

SB: That is exciting.

MC: Among the different countries.

SB: That’s networking.

MC: I mean, we’re not there yet, but I’m very excited because I’m actually making progress. You know, nagging is a wonderful thing!


MC: Arte is an ongoing event, a recurring event that started in 2005.

SB: Is it yearly?

MC: It’s every two years.
SB: Every two years.

MC: And it actually was begun by Judy Lisi and Margaret Miller. Judi of course from Performing Arts Center [and] Margaret Miller from USF [University of South Florida], as a means of doing an event that focused on Latin America. It started out actually years ago. We were talking about Cuba, but for various reasons that didn’t work. And so now it’s kind of gotten more diverse, but it just has to do with Latin American countries and their culture.

SB: Wonderful.

MC: Whether it be visual arts or performing arts and that sort of thing. And we now, this time, which is a much larger event than it was in 2005, have all the major institutions in Pinellas County, in Hillsborough County, and a couple of them from Lakeland. So it’s a three county—

SB: When exactly will that be?

MC: It will be October—I think it’s October, like seventh through ninth—

SB: Oh, wonderful!


SB: What types of activities will there be?

MC: Well, I mean there are art exhibits. One of the other Chamber issues that comes out of this you may know, that the Chamber does these trips to various foreign countries, sort of trade-mission type things. And last year they did a mission to Mexico, and several people went along. Unfortunately, my passport had expired, so I couldn’t go. But they went to Mexico, met with all of these incredible people in Mexico City and in other communities who were just the most forthcoming people in the world. And several of the performances and things that are going to be happening in this Arte grew out of that trip to Mexico.

SB: Wonderful!

MC: And so we’re—

SB: That’s exciting!

MC: Continuing to use—and this is a wonderful example of how a business institution like the Chamber can work with cultural institutions and have both business benefit and cultural benefit come out of it.
SB: That is just terrific. Are you working on anything else? Or is—I mean, you work on that to—

MC: Yes.

SB: To help expedite that?

MC: Well, I’m also working on a number of programs for—for example, like, we started a pilot project last year called cultural encounters in which we were able to bring a group—again, members—this had to do with our members and their employees, really. And we did a series of events, sort of behind-the-scenes events at several of the cultural institutions around the community. The benefit for the institutions was that they got people into their doors and behind the scenes that didn’t know—had not been there before. And the benefit for the members was that, in many cases, they use this as a way of rewarding their employees and giving their employees some extra perks and that sort of thing. So we’re starting some programming of that sort—

SB: It’s very interesting.

MC: And then at the moment, we’re working on a program called “Let’s Go Arts,” which will be an audience development program, to try to encourage people to go to performances. We’ll go as a group.

SB: How wonderful.

MC: And, you know, get these groups of people to go to these performances—there are other groups in town that do that sort of thing—

SB: Would you get the cultural institutions, say, to give a good price on their tickets to—

MC: Well, we’re still working that out.

SB: The businesses.

MC: I mean, I certainly—we may do that, or my other—what I’d like to do is find some sponsorships for it, so that it’s a win-win for the person or the company that’s the sponsor, because they get the recognition for it.

SB: Sure.

MC: And it then enables us to subsidize or to benefit the cultural institutions—

SB: Sure.

MC: Because I’m not here to do something that’s going to be detrimental to them.
SB: Sure.

MC: And then it also builds audience so that people don’t necessarily have to pay, you know—

SB: sure.

MC: A huge price for a ticket.

SB: Which—you may not have worked this out, but which institutions?

MC: Well the one we’re—and this is not a, since this probably isn’t going to be really published, it’s okay to talk about—

SB: Oh—

MC: I mean, it’s not any big secret or whatever—

SB: Oh, okay.

MC: But the place we’ve started is the Master Chorale.

SB: Wonderful.

MC: Because they’re doing some new sort of experimental programs that we wanted to give an opportunity, but—

SB: Sure.

MC: And we’ll really again be focusing probably on the smaller institutions because—

SB: I see.

MC: They’re the ones that need that kind of support. One of my experiences in both Hillsborough and Pinellas County is that the big guys do really well. You know, the Performing Arts Center, Ruth Eckerd, and the Museum of Fine Arts, and these large institutions know how to do their fundraising and know how to do well. But there’s a midsize to small set of cultural institutions that don’t have the expertise and wherewithal, and we need to grow them. And so those are my focus really.

SB: So you provide any marketing help?

MC: Not in a direct format, but I am occasionally able to get some sort of marketing support.

SB: Okay.
MC: Through, from members or—

SB: That’s great. Well, again I know from talking to members that [you’re] very well received and you’ve been doing a great job.

MC: Well, thank you.

SB: Now, who did you replace, Melinda?

MC: Franci Rudolph—

SB: Okay.

MC: Was my immediate predecessor.

SB: And she was there for how many years?

MC: She was there for probably, I’d say, seven or eight years.

SB: Okay. And prior to her?

MC: And prior to that was Susan Freeman.

SB: Okay.

MC: Was the founding mother, so-to-speak.

SB: Okay, interesting. And now, nine—how many did you say there are national groups?

MC: I think there—I think there’s ten or eleven. We just added a new one, which is Nashville. And then there’s one in California that we’re never quite sure whether they are or not—

SB: Oh, okay [laughs], okay—

MC: [Laughs] they keep kind of coming and going.

SB: It just seems like such a great idea, you would—

MC: It is.

SB: You would really think all major cities would—

MC: Well, some cities have—
SB: Have an equivalent.

MC: Some cities have equivalents, such as the Business Volunteers for the Arts, which I think is run by Americans for the Arts.

SB: Okay.

MC: They are often adjunct branches to arts councils, so—

SB: Okay.

MC: What we do is done in other places, just not always necessarily by a Business Committee for the Arts—

SB: Okay.

MC: As other agencies in the area.

SB: Very interesting. Well, again, you’re serving a tremendous need. Will it be curious how it—your past experience led up to this moment? What did you do prior to this?

MC: Well, if I—I’ll start at the beginning—

SB: All right [laughs].

MC: I think that would be easier.

SB: Absolutely.

MC: Growing up in Tampa, we had no arts when—

SB: Okay.

MC: I was a child. And so I had no exposure to it until I went to college. And in college and graduate school, I did begin to have some interest and so forth, and sort of started moving that way. And then I came back to Tampa, and as a very young bride and volunteer, I got involved at what was then, the Tampa Bay Arts Center, predecessor to the Tampa Museum.

SB: Where did you go to college?

MC: Emory University—

SB: Emory.

MC: And then graduate school at University of Virginia.
SB: And did you—what did you study?

MC: History.

SB: Okay.

MC: Because they didn’t have arts programs [laughter] offered in those schools at those times!

SB: Oh no! That’s terrible!

MC: But I became, you know—started dabbling in it. And anyway, so came back to Tampa, got involved as a volunteer, and absolutely loved it. And then started, what is a typical [inaudible] taught school for fifteen years. And then—

SB: I would like to go more in depth though with your experience—

MC: Oh, okay.

SB: At the Tampa Bay Arts Center if you could.

MC: Well at the Tampa Bay Arts Center, I had a transformative experience I think that really made a huge difference. I was in the Junior League and became involved as a docent at the Arts Center. And went through a course with Mernet Larsen, who at that time was a professor of Art History at USF. And she is one of the most articulate teachers I have ever had. And she just was amazing. She was able to combine theoretical, and very sort of esoteric philosophy with what was on the canvas, and how they related to each other.

SB: It’s a gift.

MC: And it was just absolutely fascinating. And so I went through that experience for a couple of years, and then ended up teaching school for fifteen years, at which time they were just starting a Humanities program at Berkeley Prep.

SB: Okay.

MC: And so I immediately—they said, Oh, well you’ve had all this experience. So I started teaching a course—

SB: Isn’t that wonderful.

MC: And just, you know, once you start teaching something, then you become more and more versed in it, because you’ve got to know what you’re talking about before you teach.
SB: But you began the Fine Arts program at Berkeley—

MC: I was—we team taught the Humanities program.

SB: Okay.

MC: So I did start that, and then a number of years after that we did start the whole arts program, arts department at Berkeley, and I was a founding mother of that arts department then.

SB: That’s great.

MC: So that’s what I got—

SB: Yeah.

MC: Involved with. And it was, it was—

SB: With the arts.

MC: And it was really quite wonderful. And I loved it. And then, then left teaching, worked with my husband in [a] catering business, which I hated. And after a number of years said, “Okay, what do I really want to do? I’ve got to grow up here. And—”

SB: I do have to add a P.S.—

MC: Okay.

SB: It was very popular, very successful, and everybody knows Chavez Catering—

MC: Well—

SB: In Tampa.

MC: I’m glad that they did—

SB: Extremely—

MC: Enjoy it, and I’m glad I’m not doing it anymore!

[Laughter]

MC: That’s not one of my favorite—but I started out of that experience thinking, Okay, what do I like to do? And what have I enjoyed doing? And was able to eventually to move through several positions to get where I am now.
SB: Well, the—Mernet Larsen, is she still alive?

MC: Oh yes, she’s very much alive.

SB: And she—she teaches at?

MC: She has retired—

SB: Okay.

MC: You know there was a whole class of professors, Theo Wujcik and Mernet, and Bruce Marsh, and the whole—they were like the first generation I think, of that group of people that—

SB: And they’ve been in Tampa forever.

MC: Oh, forever and ever. And they, you know, started in the sixties and it’s—early to mid-sixties. And then they all retired about, probably six or seven years ago.

SB: But they were teaching at USF.

MC: But they were all teaching at USF.

SB: And so for this program, were those the only people who taught at the Tampa Arts Center?

MC: Oh, I don’t know. They probably had a whole range of people. Mernet was the one—I think they hired people in on an adjunct basis to teach.

SB: But you taught the school kids coming in? Give us a little idea of what it was like.

MC: When I was a docent there—

SB: Yes.

MC: Yes. It was then the Tampa Bay Arts Center, and it was a part—

SB: That was on North Boulevard?

MC: It was on North Boulevard. It was really kind of a part of University of Tampa [UT].

SB: Oh, okay.

MC: Or it was housed in UT buildings, which were practically falling down. And it was just kind of—it was an all volunteer thing. You probably know Pat Carter, and—
SB: Sure.

MC: And Jean Winter and those people. And they were the ones who really started all of that. And had—still would tell stories about how they painted the walls and hung the art, and all that kind of stuff.

SB: Isn’t that wonderful.

MC: And so that’s how it all started. And then I—

SB: That was kind of the foundation for the—

MC: Yes.

SB: Current Tampa Museum of Art.

MC: Exactly. Yes, the Tampa Bay Arts Center merged with the Children’s Museum, which was at that—the original—

SB: Never knew that.

MC: Children’s Museum was over on Dekle Avenue in an old, actually, it was in a building that had originally been the Helen Hill Private School, where—which was my cousin’s school, and I went to school there, so [laughs]—

SB: Oh my goodness [laughs].

MC: Very small world. But anyway, so they merged and that’s what became the Tampa Museum of Art.

SB: And the current Children’s Museum is—

MC: Now—

SB: On Sligh [Avenue]? 

MC: On Sligh Avenue right next to Lowry Park Zoo—

SB: Sure.

MC: And they’re in the process of doing a capital campaign—

SB: Sure.
MC: To build a new museum just south of the Poe Garage right next to what will be the new Tampa Museum of Art.

SB: And that was how many years ago? This was—

MC: That the children’s museum was added in?

SB: Well, and as part of the Tampa Arts Center.

MC: Well the Tampa Museum I believe, is formally—as it’s new incarnation—

SB: Yes.

MC: Started I believe in 1979. So it’s probably, what—

SB: Well, again, I just didn’t realize there was a children’s—

MC: Yes—

SB: Museum—

MC: There was.

SB: Component. Of course—

MC: Right.

SB: I’m familiar [with] where it is now.

MC: Right, yes.

SB: Did not realize it had—this is the second generation.

MC: Right.

SB: There.

MC: Right. And it started actually as Safety Village, and then when—

SB: Okay.

MC: The old museum had sort of disappeared—

SB: Oh, okay.
MC: They transformed it into a children’s museum. And now it’s really moving into it’s own I think—

SB: Sure it is.

MC: As they build this new facility.

SB: Yes, of course. But it has taken some time.

MC: Oh yes.

SB: To have all of this evolve.

MC: Well I think that’s probably true of many communities, Tampa’s just a little behind—

SB: Probably so.

MC: Some of the others.

SB: Sure. But so many of the same people, interestingly stayed—

MC: Yes.

SB: In Tampa.

MC: Oh yes.

SB: What keeps people here, do you think?

MC: Well, I think—obviously, well, I’ve grown up here, so I don’t have an outsider’s point of view—

SB: But you didn’t have to stay.

MC: No, well actually—

SB: Do you?

MC: It was my first husband that—

SB: [laughs] okay.

MC: [laughs] Brought us back, and then here I was, and I had children! But I think Tampa is a very friendly town. I think it’s a very receiving town. And I think it’s easy to
move into the community and make a difference, and so I think people come and stay because they like it, and because—

SB: Yes.

MC: You know, it’s nice people.

SB: They can make a difference, yes.

MC: There’s not, I don’t think—it’s not to say there’s an old guard, because there is. And the boys with the power kind of thing. But as compared with my impression of other cities, it’s—if you want to make a difference in this community, there is nothing to stop you.

SB: I agree with you. I think that’s kind of why we have stayed too. But you mentioned the old guard, and my memory of that is very interesting. Now I understand they were kind of resistant to change.

MC: Oh yes.

SB: And how did that affect all of this development? In your opinion of course.

MC: Well, the—I think that the world changed. I mean if you just think about the banks, because I remember watching the rotation of banks, and you know, the First National Bank, which was founded by you know, an old—[inaudible], an old family. But eventually it got bought by somebody, and that got bought by somebody. And there’s a number of people—if I went back and thought about it, I could give names of people who, you know, either survived all those purchases, and now everything’s owned by the Bank of America, or they didn’t, and they went and did something else. But that certainly contributed to the loosening of the ties of the old guard.

SB: Do you think they wanted Tampa to be the growth magnet that it is now?

MC: I don’t think—I don’t think they had any choice. I can remember [laughs], I had this funny memory of sitting in a restaurant next, at a table next to some of these people that were talking about how they just didn’t have the power that they used to have—

SB: [Laughs]

MC: And what a real shame it was [laughter], and so forth. And I was just so amused—terrible—

SB: I won’t ask you to name names! [Laughs]

MC: Oh no, no! [laughs] and terrible eavesdropping, but it was lots of fun [laughter].
SB: Well, from what I read in the papers and what I experienced, it appears to be the way it was.

MC: Oh, yes.

SB: And it would seem that perhaps the climate, perhaps the idea that it was just growing, and people wanted to be part of the growth, it happened.

MC: Oh, I think so.

SB: In spite of people.

MC: Well, there’s a funny story about Leadership Tampa, that a number of—quite a long time ago, back in the late seventies, I guess, there was a group of men that went out on a fishing boat, and they were all the power elite of Tampa. And they suddenly realized that if that boat had sunk, there would be no leadership of Tampa.

SB: Oh my—

MC: Because it was all on the boat!

SB: Oh my goodness!

MC: And so they came back, and said, We need to do something about this. So they started Leadership Tampa as a means of expanding the knowledge base of the—

SB: That’s very interesting.

MC: Community.

SB: And when would you say that was?

MC: Late seventies I think is when. No that’s—this is somewhat—

SB: Sure, sure.

MC: Mythology. But this is a gossip level story I’ve heard.

SB: Could you share some names? Those original—

[End Tape 1, Side A]

—

[Tape 1, Side B]
SB: I think it’s really interesting to hear about Leadership Tampa, and I know you’ve been a part of it. Could you tell us?

MC: Sure. I was in the class of Leadership Tampa ’04. And it was particularly interesting for me of course, because I was considerably older—in fact probably old enough to be the mother of many, most of—

SB: Oh, really?

MC: The class board members.

SB: What’s the average age?

MC: Well, I think they’re usually—because these are people who have been in business long enough to have started to be successful, but aren’t at the top of their field yet. But they’re definitely people who have moved into executive positions of one sort or another before they’re eligible I guess—

SB: Okay.

MC: To be accepted into a class. And so probably most of them are in their, I’d say, mid-thirties to early forties—

SB: Oh, okay.

MC: That level. So, so they were very nice to me.

SB: [Laughs]

MC: And very tolerant of me and so forth. But there was one other—there was one other guy who was my age and then there was one who had just graduated from USF and was the baby of the class who actually turned out to be one of my best friends in the group.

SB: Oh, that’s great.

MC: And—

SB: So these, these are people who have already somewhat performed—

MC: Yes, yes.

SB: In professions.

MC: They are people who have moved into leadership positions in their fields. And they—the whole point of the thing I think is to give them a sense of how the community works, how the business structure works, and the power structure, and all the different
aspects and facets of it. As a matter of fact, you know, we were talking at lunch about the Junior League, and that was one of the things that fascinated me, as a young bride right out of college, is I joined the Junior League. And they—you do a year program of education. And you have to go to County Commission and City Council meetings, and—

SB: Oh!

MC: All of these different things. And then these leadership programs do the same thing again, only it’s for people who are somewhat older.

SB: But you’re exposed to all the different components—

MC: Gives you a real sense—

SB: Of the community.

MC: Of how a community works.

SB: Wonderful.

MC: And who the players are.

SB: Would you say some genuine leaders, aside from yourself, came out of that?

MC: Oh, absolutely. I mean if you take a Leadership Tampa directory now, and go through, it’s—those are the people who are in—

SB: Of the who’s-who.

MC: The seats of power now.

SB: Wonderful.

MC: So—

SB: How it provides a service.

MC: Oh absolutely. It’s a wonderful, both education, but once you are in it, then it gives you—you can pick up the phone and call so-and-so because you just spent nine months with them!

SB: [Laughs]

MC: And you can pick up the phone and call somebody and say, “You know, I need help with so-and-so, could you tell me who to call or whatever?” And it’s a wonderful resource.
SB: Would you say that your experience teaching made an impact in terms of who you are today? What you’re doing today?

MC: Oh absolutely. Teaching was—is an experience where, I mean, I guess you could do a bad job of it, but if you do a good job of it, it certainly teaches you how to be articulate. And how to formulate your thoughts, and how to communicate with people. And those are the most important skills anybody can have.

SB: Could you describe the Humanities programs? Because really not every school has Humanities.

MC: I presumed they still have it out there, I don’t know. But when we taught it, and when we started it, I was a team-taught program, so that I taught the visual arts, we—actually the head of the school at the time, who was a fine musician taught the music segment—

SB: Who was it?

MC: Edgar McCleary.

SB: Okay.

MC: Was a founding head. And somebody else, a close friend of mine actually, taught the theatre. And then we went—

SB: And who was that?

MC: Linda—well she was—Linda Gibbs, now. She—

SB: Okay.

MC: Linda Bellville she was then.

SB: Okay.

MC: And then, you know we’d have other people come in, just—and the program changed. The course changed from year to year because we would sit down to figure out, Oh, let’s do a different unit this year.

SB: That’s nice.

MC: And we had the whole faculty of the school to draw on.

SB: Wow.
MC: So—

SB: Was it required?

MC: No. It was a senior—

SB: Or an elective?

MC: A senior elective.

SB: Wonderful. That’s terrific. Do you know anything about public school options in terms of the arts today?

MC: Well, I know that first of all, as compared when I was in public school, there are much stronger programs—we had—well, I remember taking an art course in the seventh grade, which is an example of why you shouldn’t have art in school unless it’s going to be good art. It was the most—I look back on it, it’s just embarrassing—

SB: [Laughs]

MC: To think about what that was—you know, that that was masquerading as art. We had a little bit of exposure to music, and—there were bands and things like that. But we just didn’t have arts programs. They did not exist. So, and then of course, in the last ensuing years, probably, what? Twenty, thirty, forty years, there have been some very strong arts programs. And although we hear, you know, cries of horror at the lack of arts programming in the schools, it really is much better than—

SB: That's good to hear.

MC: I think it's much stronger—

SB: That's terrific.

MC: Than the general reputation has it. Now that doesn't—that's not to say the arts programs aren't threatened [or] that we don't need to worry about them. There are certainly, you know, funding cuts and that sort of thing. But as compared with what it was like in [the] 1950s, it's phenomenal.

And then of course the AP programs have done wonderful things for the arts, and they're very strong—

SB: Very much so.

MC: And the magnet schools. So it's a lot better than general reputation would have it.

SB: Well it's exciting for you to be part of it.
MC: It is.

SB: And it really does give you a perspective on the arts happening—

MC: Absolutely.

SB: In the area today. We would love to hear about you more personally though. You said you went away to school, you mentioned being married once. Twice, perhaps?

MC: Well, I was married right out of graduate school, and my—

SB: Is that where you met?

MC: Yes. Well, I met my first husband at Emory in Atlanta.

SB: Okay.

MC: And we had two children together, and then the marriage just didn't work, and so forth. So I was divorced for several years, and then met my current husband and we've been married over thirty years now, so—

SB: Oh my gosh. That's wonderful!

MC: It's been quite a wonderful relationship.

SB: That's great.

MC: And he raised these two girls, and we—and one of the interesting, this—I think you may find this interesting, is that although there were negatives to it, one of the really—I think, formative things for the children was that we did have this catering business when we were growing up. And whereas it's not a job I would wish on anyone, the real benefit is that it was a place where the children worked during the summers, and they worked on the weekends. And when they came home from college—

SB: Isn't that wonderful.

MC: They worked in the summers. And it gave us, as a family, an opportunity to work together as a family, which is something that is rare in today's world.

SB: It is rare. Sure is.

MC: It's sort of like the equivalent of the farm experience. And so they grew up knowing what we did, doing it with us. They really learned the value of the dollar. I'll never forget my older daughter saying one time, she'd been working for a short while, and she kept checking the clock to see how much she had made [laughter] hour by hour. And she
finally said, "Gee, you know, I can't believe it took me this long to earn enough money to pay for these shoes I just bought!" [Laughter] I was like, "Yes!"

SB: That's great.

MC: And I do think that the children's work ethic now, and the reason that they are so highly successful in their fields is because they have that experience.

SB: What are their fields if you would share?

MC: Lavinia, my older daughter is the head of the research department for an investment firm that works with retirement homes and that sort of thing. And Deirdre, my younger daughter is a salesperson for a group called Beaux-Arts, which is an interior design firm that works with commercial businesses. And she has—her major accounts at this point are out at MacDill.

SB: I see.

MC: So—

SB: And both girls are in Tampa?

MC: They both—yes. I'm very fortunate—

SB: Yes, you are.

MC: One lives right down the street from me, and the other one lives right down at the end of Bayshore, so—

SB: You are very fortunate.

MC: I am hung with horseshoes.

SB: [Laughs] that’s great. Well, you did one thing in your background we didn't touch about—upon. And that was the Ybor City Museum.

MC: Ah, yes.

SB: And not to mention University of Tampa. So—

MC: Yes, well I—when I decided to make this change from the catering business, I sat—what I did was I sat down and thought a long time about what in my life I had done that I enjoyed. And what did I not want to do? And I realized that it was really the experiences as a docent at the Tampa Museum that I had enjoyed the most. And a piece of that, of course, was talking. And as you can tell, I'll babble on forever!
So I started looking at things that I could do that might have some relationship to that experience. So the first position I took right out of there was with the Preservation Board.

SB: Oh.

MC: And worked a year there. And certainly, you know, my historical background was helpful with that and so forth. And then a position came open at the Plant Museum. And I took that and was Curator of Education there. And I worked there for three and a half years.

SB: What did you achieve there? What did you do?

MC: Well, I—we really, I don't think they'd had a curator of education before I came there. So I created a series of education programs, both for the volunteers to sort of regularize what was in the museum and research on the various objects and so forth. And then obviously programs for the public. Children, and tours and adult programs and that sort of thing.

SB: For people who really don't know what the Plant Museum is, could you?

MC: Sure. One of the early major developers of the city of Tampa was Henry B. Plant, who brought the railroad to Tampa in 1894—[correction]—1884. And he both, brought the railroad here, but then he also brought a steamship line which connected with that railroad down at Port Tampa, and did—so it was a transportation system basically, that came from New York City to, ultimately to Cuba. Havana and Key West, and places like that. And then the third piece of that transportation system were a series of hotels that he built. I think he had like nine hotels around the community—around the state. Oh, and the flagship of that was the Plant Hotel, which is this huge brick edifice with silver domes and minarets and so forth. And eventually in the 1930s that became the University of Tampa, but it was taken over by the city after it had failed as a business venture, and became University of Tampa, so—

And so the southern end of that major building is the Plant Museum, which represents the lifestyle of the 1890s.

SB: And what is there?

MC: It's a really wonderful collection that Cynthia Gandy has put together of—I think when she took over there, it was just kind of a hodgepodge of—it was a mess. My earliest memory is that there was orange shag carpet in the halls, which—

SB: Oh!

MC: Wasn't exactly coherent with the history!

SB: Oh my goodness.
MC: So what she did was to clean it up, to turn it into an authentic repository of the objects that were original to the hotel—

SB: The—

MC: The Plant's had—

SB: Victorian—

MC: Well yes, Victorian. The Plant's had done these incredible shopping tours in Europe and bought all sorts of furniture from everywhere. Oriental pieces, and huge mahogany, and you know, sort of what we think of as typical Victorian furniture. And in addition to that, Cynthia took everything back so that it had the look of what it would have looked like in the 1890s, including the light bulbs that are very dim. And people in the—who come to the museum complain because they can't see the artwork and so it goes, Well, that's what it looked like. And so it's—

SB: How interesting.

MC: A period, a turn of the century piece. So it's really, it's one of the treasures of Tampa.

SB: Oh, very much so. And as Curator of Education, did you do school tours?

MC: Oh yes—

SB: Again, this is kind of—

MC: Lots of school tours.

SB: Like a docent.

MC: Absolutely, yes. And I—I ran the volunteer program.

SB: Okay.

MC: So what we did was train the volunteers, who could then do the tours.

SB: Were you responsible for the Christmas tours?

MC: Well we were all responsible for that.

SB: Okay.

MC: That's a staff thing that starts in August, and everybody—
SB: It’s quite big isn’t it?

MC: Yes, everybody who works there works on the stroll.

SB: And what happens on those tours?

MC: Well, typically from approximately the first of December, or the last weekend in November, the—we close the place down. When I was there it was we—for about a week just before that and transform it into some sort of Christmas fairytale. And we did different themes, different years.

SB: Okay.

MC: Sometimes it’s not particularly thematic, or not much of a story. And other times, we did for example, for several years, we did fairytales. So there was Hansel and Gretel in one room—

SB: Oh, really?

MC: And Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in another room—

SB: Oh how fun.

MC: And Sleeping Beauty, or so forth. So that was—

SB: Is—

MC: That [inaudible] hung a braid—Sleeping Beauty, or no, Rapunzel’s braid from one of—the minaret down at the end of the thing—

SB: Oh, neat!

MC: So—

SB: That’s wonderful.

MC: So yes, it’s—

SB: I’ve never been.

MC: Oh you must go.

SB: I can’t believe that—

MC: It’s quite an experience.
SB: In all these years. But I’m picturing candlelight everywhere—

MC: Well, there’s—

SB: Is that inside? Outside?

MC: There is—well, it’s always down.

SB: Okay.

MC: And there’s no—obviously, for fire reasons there’s no real candles in there—

SB: Okay.

MC: But often there, you know, electric candles are used.

SB: So now, where was the Ybor City experience?

MC: So then, after—as I had been there for three and a half years, this position came open at the Ybor City Museum, and that was a director’s position. And being the bossy woman that I am—

SB: [Laughs]

MC: I though, Oh, I think I could do that!

SB: [Laughs]

MC: So I went to the Ybor Museum. And I was the first director there, and—

SB: Had it existed before you went there?

MC: Well yes, it had actually. Through the really strong efforts of a number of people associated with Ybor City families who had grown up there and so forth, they had started putting together a collection, and the building—the main building that it’s in is the old Ferlita Bakery, Rose Ferlita’s family bakery. And so that became the core of it. And then as some of the urban renewal took place, and the government—federal government was coming through and taking down all the little houses that had been a part of Ybor City, called “casitas”—

SB: Yes.

MC: The Preservation Board at that time, back in the late seventies, early eighties, brought in a number of these houses and created a whole complex around the Ferlita Bakery. There was a park there that had been there I think as a part of the park service or
whatever. And eventually, this group of volunteers talked the Florida State Park Service into taking over this as an institution. So it is actually a state park.

SB: The whole area?

MC: The whole complex.

SB: With the homes?

MC: With the casitas and the bakery and—

SB: Everything.

MC: All of that. And—

SB: So that receives federal funding?

MC: No, it’s—

SB: State.

MC: It does—

SB: Strictly state.

MC: It gets some state funding, not a whole lot. The state park services are on a very thin budget. So the sort of adjunct group, which is the Ybor City Museum Society supplements—

SB: Oh, I see.

MC: The support through grants and other types of fundraising and events.

SB: Okay.

MC: And so they do the programming, and at least—I don’t know what they do now. When I was there, we ran the volunteer program for the volunteers who did the guiding through the museum.

SB: And how long were you there?

MC: Four years.

SB: Four years.
MC: And then I was very fortunate that this position came open that I’m in now, and was able to [inaudible] to.

SB: Well, of all of your experiences, today aside, I guess, what are some of your favorites?

MC: Oh, the one I’m doing now is by far the best.

SB: Okay [laughs].

MC: I just love it. I am so fortunate.

SB: How wonderful.

MC: Yes it’s—

SB: And why is it your favorite?

MC: Well because—well, it’s interesting because this has been very much of a growth process. You know, as—you may have had the experience that as life unfolds, it’s like, Oh, I didn’t know that!

SB: Sure.

MC: And what I have learned in the last four years is that—or actually, gosh, five—five and a half years. I can’t believe it’s flying by so fast.

SB: Oh gosh.

MC: I’m fascinated by business. I’m fascinated by watching how business works. And one of the real joys of my life that is—that I’m in the process of expanding, is to function in both the business world and the cultural world. And a very real example of that is what I’ve been doing today, which is, I started the day at a meeting, a small committee of the Tampa Downtown Partnership, where we are working on some programs to develop, redevelop downtown Tampa. And the specific aspect of it I’m working on is with seeing what we can do to organize the cultural institutions to help educate them about what we need to do to find some funding and some support from outside of the community on the Federal level to develop some programs that would act as—I think they call it “space bank.” Where we find spaces that are empty and vacant and derelict in downtown Tampa—

SB: Right.

MC: And find ways to get, specifically arts and cultural institutions, but small businesses, small retail into these spaces so that we don’t have a whole lot of empty spaces in Downtown Tampa.
SB: That’s terrific.

MC: And instead this space, instead of rotting away is going to be used—

SB: Sure.

MC: By institutions.

SB: Is it more cost effective to save those? Are these—

MC: It depends on how you do it.

SB: Historically important?

MC: If they’re not too far-gone.

SB: But the—one issue is historically important, although there’s—

MC: Sure.

SB: A good bit of fabric that’s been destroyed in that sense.

MC: But it’s also just to get people into downtown Tampa. You know, you’ve got arts groups out there who need a home—

SB: Sure.

MC: And you’ve got spaces down here that need—

SB: Sure.

MC: A tenant. Why not—

SB: Match them up?

MC: Put them together? Now it’s not—it’s a whole lot easier to say than it is to do—

SB: Sure.

MC: And that’s what we were discussing this morning. But yes, that’s been a—

SB: Are you spearheading this or working with?

MC: I am certainly an integral part of it.
SB: That’s terrific.

MC: Yes, oh it’s just—

SB: Wonderful!

MC: Amazing.

SB: And an incredible way to make a difference.

MC: Yes, yes.

SB: And why is downtown so important? I know that’s kind of a—

MC: Well—

SB: Very—

MC: I think—

SB: Big question in a way.

MC: I think the downtown is the heart of the community.

SB: Okay.

MC: And if the heart is dead, then the community is severely injured. And to take a contrast, I think and an object lesson, we have watched St. Petersburg go through this same process and they’re a little bit ahead of us now. In Tampa’s business heyday, one of the down sides of that was that because it—a lot of businesses wanted to be in downtown Tampa, builders and developers came in and tore down a lot of our historic stock and built new buildings. Now the new buildings are wonderful and I’m—I think a lot of them are really quite nice to have, although there’s some I could do away with if I could. But in St. Petersburg, that never happened because they didn’t have a business boom. And so they suffered from benign neglect, and they—

SB: That’s interesting.

MC: Still have a lot of the stock that is historical and gracious and lovely, and they have wonderful wide streets and so forth. As a piece of this, there were a large number of cultural institutions that didn’t do well, but hung on in downtown St. Petersburg from the Museum of Fine Arts, starting in the eighties, I guess, the Dali [Museum]. There’s a history museum, and then there’s the Arts Center and Florida Craftsman. And these places just kind of hung on. And now they are the center and the core, and the inspiration for the renaissance that’s taking place in downtown St. Petersburg. And it’s just amazing. And so that’s another piece—loved piece of my job—
SB: Sure.

MC: Is that I get to work on both sides of the bay.

SB: That’s really neat.

MC: And enjoy both—

SB: What percentage would you say, of your time is spent in the two communities?

MC: Well, I would say probably, probably honestly two-thirds in Tampa, a third in St. Pete. But we’re working on that, doing—we do—the board is very interested in expanding the St. Petersburg version of this.

SB: Is that because there’s a greater need right now, than Tampa?

MC: I think it’s well, a piece of it is. Before my time, they decided we should be the Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts instead of just Tampa. And recent board members and board leaders have said, If you’re going to have Bay in there, you’ve got to come forth with the reality. And it’s something that I feel very passionately about. Because I think that Hillsborough and Pinellas County each have great riches, and one would be far the less without the other.

SB: For sure.

MC: So for me, personally, it’s a real agenda item, to expand. And I’m very fortunate that we have some people in St. Petersburg who are very interested in helping us do this. Because without their support, if they don’t want us, then—

SB: Sure.

MC: Obviously isn’t going to happen.

SB: Sure.

MC: And then, and I should also say that we also have some real strong support in Clearwater. And I’m working on that too there.

SB: And Clearwater is included in your [inaudible]?

MC: Oh, absolutely. Oh, it’s—it’s two counties, Hillsborough and Pinellas County.

SB: Wonderful!

MC: So we have a lot of ambitious plans.
SB: Unbelievable. But so much so, that you’re working with so many organizations. I really don’t know how you keep things straight.

MC: Well, they all—

SB: And they all—

MC: Become your children.

SB: Are very important.

MC: Yes, no they are very important.

SB: Very important.

MC: And they’re wonderful organizations. And some of my, just—another little piece of why I love what I do—I’m very fortunate, and we are sort of expanding our whole purview, if you will. And I just finished a really wonderful, helping run a very wonderful conference for a group called the Conference Board, which is a national organization of major corporations and so forth. And Nancy Waclawek, with the St. Petersburg Times and I put together a conference on business and arts and culture. That was a two-day conference in St. Pete and in Tampa, that gave us the opportunity to bring together leaders—

SB: Wonderful.

MC: Including, Mayor Baker and former Governor Bob Martinez, and Judy Lisi, and Maria Emilia in St. Pete—

SB: Wonderful!

MC: People from both sides of the bay. And just did this fantastic event that I think really educated people. And then the—and coming up, in the next—this next month, I’ll be doing two American’s for the Arts series, supported and sponsored by the MetLife Foundation.

SB: Terrific.

MC: On arts—well, there will be two sessions, two forums. One on arts—arts education and the workforce, and the importance of arts education to develop a strong workforce for this next century. And then a second one will be on arts and aging, and—

SB: Oh that’s very interesting.
MC: How the arts experience increases brain elasticity and retards the effects of aging and so forth. And again, fantastic people that we have in this community—

SB: Wow.

MC: We don’t know the riches that we have in this community—

SB: Isn’t that terrific.

MC: Until we start exploring these things.

SB: So part of your job is—

MC: Oh yes.

SB: Is highlighting—

MC: Absolutely.

SB: These riches. Isn’t that terrific.

MC: So yes, I mean, you know—

SB: What would your legacy be, do you think? That’s a very tough question, I realize.

MC: Well, what I guess, what—

SB: Your goals.

MC: I’d like it to be is to have a truly strong presence for the BCA on both sides of the Bay in the community, all of the communities that have arts institutions, and to act as a catalyst to help audiences in this area to realize that the Bay is not a barrier, it’s a means of communication. It’s a road.

SB: That’s a very ambitious goal.

MC: [Laughs] Yes it is.

SB: My gosh [laughs].

MC: But you know what?

SB: It’s doable.

MC: I think we’re better than we used to be.
SB: I think we’re much better.

MC: And we just have to keep at it.

SB: But it is organizations like yours that help.

MC: Well we don’t have any axes to grind. We want the success of all these institutions, and the more of them that are successful, the more successful we all are.

SB: No question. If you think about it though, there are very few organizations that do bridge the bay, very few.

MC: Right.

SB: So your organization really is key.

MC: Another fun thing I’m trying to do—and I think we may succeed on it, I’ve got some good interests but I’ve approached two—well, an architect and a developer in downtown Tampa who are building some of the towers. And in hopes that at least one of them will have a—and they both expressed real interest—have a branch of Florida Craftsman invented.

SB: Really? Gosh, that’s exciting, very exciting.

MC: And this is kind of stuff that I am—

SB: Very exciting.

MC: This is the kind of stuff—

SB: Could you explain what that is?

MC: Florida Craftsman—

SB: Again, for people—

MC: Florida Craftsman is a statewide organization that includes craftsmen from—fine craftsmen—from all over the state. And they do have some branches in various places around the state. But they’re headquartered in St. Petersburg. And they have been very blessed to have a founding—well, I don’t know if she was founding—but Michelle Tuegel who I’ve known forever, as a probably, the executive director for like thirteen—I mean, eighteen years or something like that. She was there for a long time.

SB: Oh, I see.
MC: And she has recently been replaced because she’s moved to the Arts Council in Pinellas, and been replaced by a woman named Maria Emilia who is just an incredibly powerful, resourceful—

SB: Wonderful.

MC: Wonderful person. And she’s providing just some incredible programs. I’m having a lot of fun working with her on some different things, and would love to see if we can’t get her—

SB: What would those programs be that’d you’d like to see here?

MC: Well, funny that you should ask it that way—

[Laughter]

MC: They are in the process right now, or they’re in a program called, “At Home with Crafts,” which grew out of a situation, you know, they renovated the Mahaffey Theatre a few years ago. And when they did—and I don’t understand all the background of this, but for some reason they ended up buying just light fixtures off the shelf from some place. Well, the craftspeople and arts people over in St. Petersburg went, What are you doing?! [Laughter] We make these things! Why are you not using— it’s an arts institution, why are you not using arts things?

So I said, Okay, okay. Anyway, Maria got involved with this. She got together [inaudible] and Grady Pridgen [Grady Pridgen Inc.], who’s a major developer in Pinellas County. And a couple of architects over there. And Robb & Stuckey, which is a big furniture store, and then a whole bunch of crafts people, and they put together this exhibit. And what they have done is they— within the gallery space, at Florida Craftsman, they have constructed a model home. Which is your typical model home—

SB: Oh my goodness!

MC: The interior of a model home, like you go when you go look at a—

SB: Sure.

MC: You know, new development or whatever. Only it’s all furnished with furniture and hollowware and flatware and china—

SB: How interesting!

MC: And baby furniture and fountains, and outdoors event things—

SB: Items that artists have made.
MC: That have been made, handmade, absolutely beautiful.

SB: Isn’t that extraordinary.

MC: Wonderful things. And so that’s an exhibit that’s up at the moment to illustrate this. And then in May—and she—my association, I was asked to sit on the advisory committee for this group, which I’m just thrilled to be. And in May we’re going to do a symposium on all of these issues. And one piece of it will be the message to the building world, and the development world of, “You can use these kinds of things—”

SB: Wonderful!

MC: To make your homes and offices—

SB: Seems logical—

MC: Exactly.

SB: Time.

MC: But the other piece of it is the message to the artists, which is, If you want to work with developers, and architects and business people, you got to speak their language. You got to start thinking like a businessperson.

SB: That makes perfect sense.

MC: And you can make money while you make art. And so that’s going to be a big part of this education.

SB: That’s terrific.

MC: And what I want to do—

SB: Very impressive.

MC: Which is why I smiled when you asked me this question, because you’ve got—you led me right where I wanted to go—what I’m planning on doing—again with the Tampa Downtown Partnership—I was working this morning with Robin Nigh on some programs in which we’re going to do—not the same approach with this—with what they do with at Home with Craftsman, but a related—some related programming for artists, both who might want to do art in public places, but also just artists and cultural institutions in general about the business of art.

SB: That’s very exciting. If there are any artists listening to this, I should think it’d be very encouraging.
MC: Well I hope so.

SB: To know that there’s—

MC: Well, we’re thinking in these terms.

SB: There are possibilities.

MC: And we’re trying to make a difference—

SB: And jobs.

MC: So—

SB: Wow. That’s very exciting.

MC: Yes, there’s an awful lot that’s exciting that’s going on.

SB: That’s very exciting, gosh. Well, I really thank you for participating in this, Melinda.

MC: Oh, this was fun, I love talking as you can tell!

[Laughter]

SB: You’ve just generally—you have genuinely made a difference to the community, and—

MC: Well, thank you.

SB: You’ve been here long enough to have seen—

[End of Tape; End of Interview]