

Interview with Clint Gilchrist by Leslie Waggener for Wyoming's Energy Boom, 1995-2010: An Oral History Program, Accession #11749, October 12, 2010.

LESLIE WAGGENER: Leslie Waggener is interviewing Clint Gilchrist, a supporter of and participant in historic preservation and cultural heritage efforts in Sublette County. He has served on the Sublette County Certified Local Government, and as a vice president of the Museum of the Mountain Man executive board, and is head of the Pinedale Anticline Work Group Cultural Task Force. He is also co-creator and still runs, with a partner, Pinedale Online, a local news media outlet, and he and his sister, Kristy, are also owners of Office Outlet, a business service center in Pinedale. The interview is being conducted at the Chambers House Bed and Breakfast, a lodging house in Pinedale, on October 12, 2010. The interview is for the project Wyoming's Energy Boom, 1995-2010: An Oral History Program.

I want to start out, Clint, by asking how long you've lived in Sublette County.

CLINT GILCHRIST: I was born and raised in Sublette County, and I spent the first eighteen years here and then I went four years to college in Laramie at the University of Wyoming, and then I went ten years and lived up in Bremerton, Washington, working for the U.S. Navy Civil Service, and then I came back to Pinedale and I've lived in Pinedale ever since. I came back to Pinedale in 1996.

LW: When you were in Big Piney you probably saw the boom they had in the 1980s?

CG: We did. I was in high school at the time that, we call it the Exxon Boom, happened—

LW: This was around what, 1980—?

CG: Yeah, probably 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981; pretty much over by 1981. It was really quick. A lot of money and a lot of people came in really fast; much different than this boom we're seeing now. It was much more single men coming in to work, not families. There were places where they hired day laborers and so you'd drive into town going to school or whatever, and there would be a line of a hundred people at an office waiting just to get day labor, and people sleeping in their cars, and I think that man camp they put down, that I don't know the exact numbers, but thousands could more than quadruple the size of the town.

But it went away just about as fast as it came, it seems like. It was there for a year or two and really changed the town, but the locals kind of moved [laughs] out of the town a little bit just. You just didn't feel as comfortable going to town. I mean, we did, but it was kind of like we were invaded. But then it went away pretty big and that hurt a lot of people, I think, because people built businesses to take advantage of the boom and then it was just gone.

LW: That seems so typical of that previous boom. It just happened so quickly, like slam, and then it was done. Just to keep on that topic, what was different between that one and this one?

CG: I think the biggest is—I mean this one came in pretty big and there was a lot money, although it came in a little bit slower and not quite as fast but certainly this one's bigger than what that one was, ultimately. But the biggest difference I see is the companies that came in are bringing families, and they're hiring locals, now they are in this current boom. They're bringing families, they're putting down roots, the companies and the workers are putting down roots, and the first one just didn't seem like that. My perception of it was – it was just so much transient workers, almost everything was transient workers.

I think a lot of people in Big Piney were hired. It was down south and west of Big Piney so it mainly impacted Big Piney, not as much Pinedale. A lot of people had jobs and there was a lot of money, but there so much transient labor came in with all the problems with that. The bars were full of people and, I don't know if the crime was higher, but it seemed like that to us, as locals. [Laughs] We didn't feel as comfortable in town as we had before.

And, so I think the biggest difference if this one has a permanency that that one didn't. The attraction of families and the companies putting down roots, building offices is a big difference in this one that I didn't see in the last one, and makes this one seem like it's going to last longer. Well, it has. I mean, it's been here fifteen years now.

LW: You're right, fifteen, a good ten years for the boom. Just now the economic downturn lessened it but it's not going away.

CG: Right.

LW: It's just a lull I suppose you could say. You said that it changed Big Piney, that boom. How did it change it?

CG: I don't know if it changed it permanently because it came and went and Piney kind of went back to where it used to be, but again it was just—when you went to town and went to the store or went to do anything in town you were encountered by strangers, where Piney was a very small town before that and when you went to town you knew everybody and all the people that lived there, most of the people that lived there, been there a long time. Like I say, the population probably at least quadrupled in that time. You just seemed like a stranger in town, and that was biggest difference I saw. You didn't just idle around in town like you used to.

LW: You mentioned that big difference between these single working males coming in versus now maybe more families. Any thoughts about what's driving that change twenty years later?

CG: I guess I don't really know. I hadn't thought about it, or I don't know if it's the approach that the companies are taking. Certain companies who build [offices] here are hiring people more permanently. In other words, they're looking for people to move here and settle here, I think. I mean, I haven't been inside the companies and Exxon was the driver of the one in Big Piney and I don't really know what approach they took, but it probably has something to do with how the companies hired.

Like I say, there's no such thing as day laborers in this current boom that I've seen, but in Piney that was a common feature. There for a little while people were just sleeping in their cars and showing up at an office door in the morning to see if they could get work that day. And that brings a whole different atmosphere [laughs] and so it probably, I'm just guessing, that it was probably driven by the hiring practices in the company and the way they approached developing this stuff, would be my guess.

LW: I don't know what it was like back then. I don't know if Exxon thought, "Hey, get in, get it, go."

CG: Yeah, they came in with a heck of a lot of money I think. Again, I was in high school so I wasn't quite paying as much attention to the broader cultural things. But they came out with a lot of money. There

was a lot that came in but maybe it's hindsight that I'm looking back that it seems like—because it disappeared so quick, it didn't seem as solid. Maybe at the time it did seem as solid. I don't remember that.

LW: Yeah, it's hard to say. What got you interested in this area's history?

CG: Oh, I've been interested from a young age, probably younger than I really realized—just growing up here. I grew up on a ranch outside of Big Piney and we have the Lander Trail that crosses the ranch and so I was aware of that. But I was also aware of the Mountain Man history and I guess my parents always seemed to be interested in history and so it was just something that, I look back on it now, I was interested in even when I didn't realize it. I don't why I didn't go into a field of history because I enjoy it so much.

I've always—I can go back probably to junior high and Mom and I, guess it was my mom, took me on that trip to South Dakota and the Black Hills area and we came back down through Fort Fetterman but we also stopped at Custer's Battlefield and that had a big impact on me. There was a guy there dressed in a cavalry outfit telling a story of what happened there as if he was one of the people that was part of it. That was very grabbing to me as a junior high at that time. I don't remember the exact age. That was probably the first big one that I can remember that caught my attention. But then just talking to Mom and Dad and there's so much history around here that that's what I kind of grabbed on to and enjoyed studying.

LW: You mentioned that you left, were in Washington State for quite a number of years, and then came back. What drew you back?

CG: I guess this is where my roots were and this is the kind of place that I enjoy. I got out there to Washington and I enjoyed that as a young person right out of college because the whole world's open to you there. You know, Bremerton's not very far from Seattle and so we're close to everything whether it's major league sports or entertainment or skiing, either water or snow-skiing, you're close and so it was a great thing as a young person to get away and get to see a different world. But it really was a different world. I'd lived in—the Olympic Mountains are close to Bremerton and, because I grew up in the mountains, I kept wanting to get away from the city a little bit and I'd go out and hike and I could go hike for seven or eight miles and still be running into people on a regular basis. Here I can drive to places and I don't see somebody all day. That's the life that I remember growing up and it's still much like that.

And, so, that's what I missed. There were just too many people. You're waiting in line for everything—traffic, and that's just not the world I grew up in and so I guess I got used to this and that's what I wanted back, after I got done doing my playing. I'm glad I went and did my playing and saw the other world but—

LW: Made you appreciate this one, maybe, a bit more.

CG: It did, yeah, absolutely. I wanted to get out of here at the time I graduated. It seemed like, you know, agriculture was dying and this seemed like a dying area and I didn't want to be in ranching and so that

was just my attitude of “Let’s go conquer the world.” But once I got away from it, I realized what I had and missed it.

LW: You said “a dying area.” Was this during the downturn in the 1990s?

CG: Well, no, it was in 1982 when I graduated high school and so we were right—I guess the Exxon boom was still happening in Big Piney but, to me, that was never something. I didn’t care about—that boom wasn’t something I was comfortable with and it’s not something I wanted to stay and be a part of. So my whole perception was the ag industry because that’s what I grew up with, grew up on a ranch, and so if you weren’t going to stay in ag there didn’t seem to be much to stay for. So that’s more what I was looking in at. It’s not really a sense that it was depressed or anything. It was actually a fairly decent time.

That boom must have gone away just after I graduated because I can remember they passed a bond issue to build a brand new school. I remember my dad talking about it because his property taxes were going to go up and they didn’t even start building the school, or they had just started, before Exxon pulled out. That was the year after I’d left, and I can remember talking to my dad after that cause I was gone by then but, once they built the school— they did go ahead and build it because they had passed a bond issue—but they debated not using it because they couldn’t afford to maintain it. So the gas boom was still happening but ag wasn’t something that I thought I wanted to be a part of.

LW: Just to stay on that topic for a moment concerning agriculture, I’ve heard it said that this oil and gas boom has even lessened the diversification out here. Do you think ag is still dying out here?

CG: Yeah. The land values are so high that nobody can come in here and buy a ranch and make it work on ag. I mean, there’s hobby ranchers. There are people who come in and buy a ranch to have a ranch and, as long you got outside money to supplement, you can—unless you’re a family that has inherited the land and you’re not paying for the land itself then you make a living on ag. Although it’s not anything like it was back in the 1960s, and so, yeah, I don’t see a lot of future in ag. I see some ag staying here because we have so much ranch land and with some of the conservation movements that are happening. But it’s almost—as the generations grow and other opportunities happen you just slowly—ranches are being sold to richer people that don’t need to operate it for an income, or don’t need to operate it for a living.

LW: Do you find there’s some of the industry executives are doing some of that?

CG: I haven’t really noticed that. I mean, maybe that’s happening on a smaller level. I noticed the big ones of the—there’s really big money that’s come into this area, and was even in the 1990s. That’s really where I think this area was heading before this boom happened. It was becoming a second home and a getaway sort of place for people and so, you know, multi-millions, even billionaires coming in and buying tens of thousands of acres, at least thousands. That’s the trend that had started before the boom hit, but has continued.

LW: It has continued?

CG: Yeah.

LW: It didn't scare those people off?

CG: Maybe some. That was one of the jokes we had when all the gas rigs came in and everybody's told about how ugly it is, and, "Well, maybe that'll slow down the millionaires coming in." [Laughs] Not that we didn't want the millionaires. But the part that I didn't ever like is—well, I grew up with knowing all the people who run the ranches, especially down in the south end of the county, and have somebody come in a buy up a ranch that forever has been in a family and it's not anymore. It just seems like you lost something, even though the ranch is still there. The community has lost something there because that family is no longer doing that— part of the, being that part of the—

LW: The tradition is gone.

CG: Yeah, the tradition is gone; so for that reason. Not that the people coming in buying were evil or anything, although they come in with different attitudes. And so, first thing they do, a lot of them, was come in and just burn down the old buildings and get rid of them and, you know, that's part of our cultural heritage too. [Laughs] So that didn't feel real comfortable either.

LW: Especially if someone loves history like you do.

CG: Yeah, and I grew up with a—my dad was probably the last of it. My dad and mom—well, my dad started it—but they were married shortly after that. He desert-claimed land in the 1950s. It was probably the last of that generation that was able to dream of having their own ranch and go get it and build it and make it work. That's just not possible anymore.

LW: Because the property values are just that high, even the desert land. If you can even get at it now with the gas development, I suppose?

CG: The problem is you buy a desert-type land and you can't grow as much. I mean, like in my dad's case, they were able—it was called a desert claim—they built a canal, or finished a canal, but it allowed them to bring Green River water to it and essentially make hay fields where there was really desert before. Those opportunities just don't exist anymore. But even that land is too expensive. It's not as productive as the river bottom and so it's cheaper than the river bottom. But it's still too much to make a living on ranching and pay for the land. Again, if you can buy the land some other way and then ag can still pay.

LW: When you were talking about the tradition and the old families in ag, Pines End [Ranch] came to mind and that's been a real hot topic here in Pinedale. Can you talk a little bit about what's going on there?

CG: Yeah, that's a touchy one. First of all, I didn't grow up in Pinedale and so I don't have the long history with that particular ranch that some other people here who have opposed that development. So I want to qualify it with that because I've been surprised there's—I guess my opinion is—I think it's inevitable that the major roadways coming into town will be developed in a commercial, maybe not industrial, way. That was kind of the big debate on this one is, "Okay, maybe we accept the commercial, but do we do the light industrial?" And that was, I think, a contention with a lot of people. But, I tend to think it's

inevitable so it doesn't scare me as much. I don't have the attachment to that particular land that people who around here [have]. But I do know people who have an attachment to that being a pretty neat part of the culture around here and so that makes it tough.

I guess that's one of the things I've—in my studying of history you don't make history without progress. People like me who like to preserve history, you got to realize that we can't preserve everything and, unless things progress and new things happen, like gas developments or whatever, then you don't develop history. We don't talk about a sixty year history of a town that was essentially dead and nothing changed. We talk about when things change is what makes history and so that's kind of the way I look at it—is there are some sacrifices to progress. But fifty or sixty years from now that's history. It takes fifty years for what I call the “Grandfather Age” for people to get nostalgic about something and then it becomes worth remembering and saving and the traditions of it. That's what I see with this.

LW: And lets you be more philosophical about it as well.

CG: That's true. And, you know, this is a huge gas development that's happening right here and I've made the joke that fifty years from now there's going to be somebody like me that's preserving a well site that people today fought like hell to get them to try to reclaim. [Laughs] I mean, that's the kind of stuff that happens. I guess that's the way I see Pines End [Ranch]. It's one of the costs of progress. Is it the right one? I think people can have different opinions, and be legitimate different opinions. So that's what I think made it so hard. I didn't take a strong position on it because I didn't have a strong position on it. But I talked to a lot of people on both sides that were very passionate about both sides and I can see their point of view.

LW: On the topic of historic preservation, I want to ask your opinion of something that happened in early 2006: the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office [SHPO] and the BLM made an arrangement that allowed the BLM to determine whether an area has history properties and then tell SHPO of its findings, and apparently this was being done because this SHPO office was being inundated by requests to review surveys of cultural resources on federal lands due to energy development. Did you know about that agreement?

CG: I guess that's probably the—I can't remember what they called it—but I do remember that “Wyoming Cooperative Agreement” or something, they call it, which was kind of a—I think maybe that's what—although I'm not real familiar with it, but my understanding was it was a way that the BLM could work with, or the federal people could work with, the state office and have some things pre-determined that didn't have to go through the full process to try and accelerate some of that.

LW: And did that cause any issues? Or did it seem to work okay?

CG: I haven't seen any problems. Again, I don't work with that on a regular basis and so I don't really have hands-on experience with it. But, from somebody who pays attention to the cultural preservation in the area and the historic preservation, I think in the gas fields the BLM and the state working together have done a tremendous job to protect the resources out there and to mitigate the impacts to the resources.

LW: That makes me think about the Lander Trail. That was one of the things, I believe, you worked on, and Ann Noble as well. Can you talk about that effort?

CG: Yeah, I guess I mean the Lander Trail, of course. In the 1960s, the [Sublette County] Historical Society took an interest in re-establishing that as an important part of our history and marked the trails all throughout the county which then made it more visible to all of us that came after that. In other words, there's now something that we can talk about and go to and so, like I say, I've been aware of the Lander Trail forever, for all my life, and I think the county really has too.

When this boom started happening, it wasn't so much the stuff that was happening on the federal ground that was a problem. I think the BLM and SHPO have worked together. They've put a quarter mile no-surface-occupancy and so they try to stay away from the Trail. They even have a three mile buffer beyond that that they try to minimize the visual impact to the Trail.

LW: Ah, the view shed of the trail.

CG: The view shed, yeah. And they've done a very good job with that. For the most part the gas companies have been willing to do that and to work to try to minimize that impact and the BLM's been really good, I think; BLM and state working together to make sure that that's preserved.

But the thing we started seeing on the Historical Preservation Board, which is the Certified Local Government, is, because of the money coming in to the development, people start subdividing land and there seemed to be side effects of the primary gas development of just people moving in here and more commerce and the ripple effect.

LW: So it's more of a housing thing?

CG: Yes. So we started seeing places where the Lander Trail was, essentially, on private ground being carved up and we had a big debate as to what we do about that because this is very big private property area, and I'm a big, very big, private property person. Land is an extremely important part of our culture and having your land and being able to do what you want to do with it was an important part of our culture. So we had to develop a strategy of saying, "Well, we want to try to preserve this essentially national asset and the place where it's in jeopardy is on private ground. How do we do that?" And our conclusion was: the only way to do it was to work in cooperation with the land owners. And so that's what we've tried to do is find ways that it's in the interest to the land owners to try to preserve it also. That means things like buying leases and buying land.

The New Fork Crossing Park that we just announced this fall, that was a mitigation effort that the BLM and the state negotiated with Shell, Ultra, and PacifiCorp. Those three companies ended up buying the eighty-two acres on the west side of the New Fork River where the old crossing was, and that's now going to become a park that the public can access.

LW: And that was part of the Lander Trail? That section of the Lander Trail is what they purchased?

CG: Yeah.

LW: Or the land around it?

CG: Yeah, the land and really there's not a lot of the Trail left here because river crossings—the river's moved so much over the last hundred and fifty years that it's really wiped out. Well, we don't know. We're going to do lots of archeological investigations but the surface visible parts of the Trail are mostly gone there. But the thing that was so neat about this property is the setting was exactly the same. There was an island there at the time that the immigrants were using it and the island was there at least until the 1940s before the river cut the island in half. Well, because of that, it's made that area not good for fields so nobody's ever plowed it up, and nobody's really changed the setting. It's still a river bottom cottonwood grove and it's just a beautiful area. It was a major camp spot for the—it was probably the most difficult river crossing on the Lander Trail and so, almost inevitably, everybody camped there on one side or the other.

So that was, I think, a real important thing to do because, right now, the federal government owns lots of desert versions, or lots of desert pieces of the Lander Trail, but all the camp spots and river crossings—camp spots were primarily at the river crossings or at the river—and that stuff was homesteaded and become private property. I think that's been the biggest benefit is we were able to find a way to take private property and preserve a trail asset that couldn't have been preserved before because it didn't have anything to do with the federal government.

LW: I think it's interesting that you said Questar, the energy companies, helped you out with this effort even though they're based in Canada, and they're based in Houston, but that's where you got some of this assistance.

CG: Well, yeah, and I mean there were trade-offs there because, I mean, it was a mitigation negotiation between the—

LW: Like an offsite mitigation type of thing?

CG: Right. In other words, because the main development of the Anticline impacts—oh, there's about a ten mile desert section of the Trail that the Anticline goes right through the middle of and, even though they're not directly impacting the Trail, they're certainly impacting the setting. There's rigs around there. And they're minimizing that as much as they can. I think they've made a good compromise.

So what this mitigation was is, "Okay, no matter how much we try to mitigate the impacts to that federal government section, it's impossible to do development and not have some impact." So, the gas companies and BLM recognized that we need to do something additional to compensate for that lost Trail experience through there, for people who visit the Trail. And so that's what this came out of. It was Shell and Ultra. Part of the agreement was a voluntary agreement, but in trade they got some concessions from the BLM so it accelerated some of their permitting processes when it came to the Trail and there was actually some—I won't get into all the details—but there were some combining of well-pads and moving of well-pads and stuff to allow them to try to get to develop what they need to, but yet minimize the impact on the Trail.

LW: Were you working on this as Chair of the Pinedale Anticline Working Group Cultural Resources?

CG: I was originally brought in to the negotiation processes. The BLM asked me to come in as an interested party representing the Sublette County Historic Preservation Board, which is the Certified Local

Government. So that's the way for a local government to be part of those mitigation discussions. That's really the role I was playing when I came in and started that. But certainly the Pinedale Anticline Working Group Cultural Task Group debated the issue quite a bit and had input on it from that perspective, too.

LW: I'm glad we've brought those two things up because I was wondering—You're not still on the certified local group—

CG: Yes.

LW: You are still on it?

CG: Yes.

LW: And when did you start serving on that?

CG: Let's see, I think that was about 1996 or 1997, probably 1997.

LW: Is it a historical preservation aspect that you work on with that?

CG: Yeah, we got several major historical county—and maybe I should—I don't know if this is appropriate to go ahead and define the difference of the ones right now.

LW: Yeah, just so we'll have a basis.

CG: The Sublette County Historical Society, which runs the Museum of the Mountain Man and the Green River Valley Museum, are both non-profit government-independent groups. They are not part of government, but they're both funded—they both have significant funding through the government and that's done through a group called the Sublette County Museum Board. That's a board appointed by the county commissioners and their role right now in this county is to entertain requests from those two non-profits to get budget money through the county coffers.

Then, the fourth historical organization is the Sublette County Historic Preservation Board. The only reason it really came to exist in the first place is because it's part of the Certified Local Government, which is a National Park Service project run through the State Historic Preservation Office. There's federal grant money available to Certified Local Government groups. And so, to be able to apply for Federal Park Service money, the Certified Local Government was formed and appointed by the county commissioners. So, both the museum and the historic preservation board are appointed by the commissioners but they can't have two different functions. So, those are the four main organizations. [Laughs]

LW: And you've served on all of it, or with all of it?

CG: I haven't served on the Museum Board and I haven't served with the Green River Valley Museum, but I've worked with both of those pretty extensively. I am on the Preservation Board which is the CLG, and the Historical Society Board, and then the PAWG Cultural Task Group was, of course, a group that

was set up under the Pinedale Anticline Working Group Advisory Group. It had a very specific task to advise the BLM on cultural issues related to the Anticline development. I'm trying to remember what your question was before.

LW: You did a good job of explaining some of the entities involved with historic preservation. But the last one, you were talking about the PAWG, Pinedale Anticline Working Group. I'm just going to call it PAWG. You're the chairperson of the Cultural and Historic Task Group for the BLM's PAWG. How long have you been a part of that particular group?

CG: I think I got on that group when it first formed in 2004, I believe. I mean, the PAWG had existed before that and went through some legal wrangling but the instance where it finally existed and kind of took off was about 2004 and that's when they formed the task group and I joined at that time.

LW: How has that been for you? How is the effectiveness of that group?

CG: I think it's been very effective. It looks ineffective because it's kind of chaotic.

LW: The whole PAWG system or—?

CG: The whole PAWG system. The Cultural Group has worked really well, I think, and its main function, or its main benefit, I think, has been it has allowed the general public and the BLM representative—the archeologist for the cultural people through the BLM—to get together and sit around a table and just debate issues related to cultural resources on the Anticline. There's a whole lot that I think has come out of it that never really even reaches any kind of level of paperwork or anything. It's just sitting around a table and somebody says, "Well, what—?" The BLM cultural guys are describing a particular site that they found and one of us, it's the general public, may say, "Well, why did you do this? Or did you do that?" Or, and they'll go, "Well, yeah, we did this but, now that you mention it, we could have done something else." Then they just kind of go and do it. It's part of their normal job and just sitting around the table and having the conversation and debating what is happening versus what could happen has been very beneficial.

I think overall that's worked well for the PAWG, although for anybody looking from the outside it probably looks really messy because there's always been kind of a power struggle of, you know, the BLM's really in charge but the people volunteering their time who don't feel like they can be told what they should do. So there's, ever since it existed, there's been kind of a power struggle to figure out how it fits. It's, from what I've been told, something like that really has never been done before.

LW: So a power struggle between—do the PAWG members feel like they should have more power than they're really granted?

CG: [Pause] Not necessarily. I mean, everybody understands that it's just an advisory group and so it really has no power but the things that it's dealing with—especially wildlife, air, water, cultural—those are our resources. We feel close to those here because we're here and we feel like they're ours and the BLM's having an impact on them. And so, whether we have authority or not, we want, we as a community in general, want input into how are you managing our resources. And so it's not like people in the PAWG,

I think, feel like they have any authority or should have any authority, but they certainly think the BLM should listen to the public. That's really my interpretation of what the role of the PAWG is: to give the BLM a public input into what they're doing.

LW: A public interface, I guess. And it sounds like your experience is better than some of the other things I was hearing. I've read in one of the news articles, somebody was saying, "Why do we bother to make public comments if BLM isn't listening to us anyway?" What do you think about a comment like that?

CG: I think there's some truth in that and it depends on—I mean, my personal experiences, it depends on the Field Manager and the leadership and, probably, even beyond the Field Manager. I'm sure they get a lot of pressure from the state and from the federal offices. And so, there's times where I think you feel like you—it does no good to make any comments cause they don't really want to hear it anyway, and that's a little bit infuriating, but there's also just tough, tough issues to try to handle and the BLM's got a responsibility to try to do gas development. But at the same time, you know, try to protect the resources.

Even though, again, like I said, it's been messy, I think the PAWG and the public input through that and other means has been pretty effective. Culture hasn't really been a problem. I think the system's done a great job with cultural and there's never been real big issues that have popped up. But when you get to wildlife, air and water, a lot of big issues have popped up and I think—because, I don't know if, I know what would have happened if there hadn't been a PAWG. But the BLM and the gas companies have definitely heard and responded to when there has been those big issues, whether it's an ozone issue or whether it's mule deer or sage grouse or some of those things. There has been changes and I think there's been positive changes. Now what caused those positive changes, what was the thing that made industry and BLM listen, I don't really know that, but certainly I think they've responded.

LW: It sounds like you're saying the public did have a voice that caused change.

CG: I believe so, yeah. And, again, the day-to-day operations of the PAWG, or month-to-month, can get pretty contentious and pretty ugly but I think the overall result has been pretty positive. And it certainly—it hasn't—I'm sure you'll get somebody from a different resource like wildlife or air that would say, "No, it hasn't even come close to working," because they're so passionate about those. I defer to them a little bit because I don't—I mean, I care about air and wildlife, too, but that's not where I focus all my attention, and so I defer a little bit to those who do. But I think in all those areas there's been progress made. There's going to be people that think not enough progress has been made and I fully understand that.

LW: Well, it does seem like some people I've talked to want it pristine like it was, though it's hard to say what pristine is.

CG: Yeah.

LW: A hundred years ago versus 1960. Pristine is what you see. Pristine would be somebody born now, well, this will be considered pristine twenty years from now, what they see today.

CG: Yes, that's absolutely true. I guess that's a perspective I get by studying history is we're constantly changing and the reality is we don't want to not change. I think we all, especially the older I get, but the older any of us get, you tend to want it to be like you remember it. You want it to not change a lot. But when you look back in history, when you go through times where nothing changes it's not necessarily the bed of roses that everybody makes it out to be. Everybody's got to make a living and when there isn't something going on and something changing, it makes it hard to do that. And we forget that part, I think. Me included.

LW: And I think I see a point in that. If something isn't changing it's usually stagnation and it's usually not very good. There's probably—it's something not very good going on in the community and economic recession. Whatever with stagnation is there, it's because, a lot of times, there's no money.

CG: Yeah, and the older people, retired people, that's not necessarily—stagnation's not necessarily a problem. But for young people stagnation is just a killer for, you know, like when I told you when I got out of high school to get out of here and go and find the real world, that's what my mentality was. Because it was fairly stagnant, at least the agriculture was fairly stagnant, and it was dying off at that point, even at that point it was showing signs of decreasing. So me as a young person, I'm thinking, "Well, I can stay on a ranch that probably is not going to be a very good future or I can go out and be part of the real world." Again, that was a mistaken perception, but that's the way your perception is when you're young.

LW: I'm going to kind of go back in time to pull in some perspective to today. After World War I some veterans moved to the West to start a new life and there were ten or twelve of these men who chose to relocate to Pinedale and they were referred to as "Pilgrims." Several of them became important community builders during the next few decades. They made this their home. I was just wondering if there was any comparison with some of the newcomers that came in lately. Or community builders?

CG: Absolutely. I mean, that's the fascinating thing that's history for me. I go back to the history, I guess, that grabbed my attention most is the Old West, in the beginning. That's prior to, really, the settlement era and the Mountain Man era. I've studied that a lot and I often—I guess history's entertainment to me and I immerse myself in it and I put myself in the position of the people who were back here.

I can see Shoshoni Indians kind of dominated this area back in the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s and 1850s before people really settled here but yet in the 1820s and 1830s the mountain man came in to trap beaver and in the 1840s, 1850s, 1860s the immigrants were coming through, and you just have to wonder what was going on in the mind of those people who were essentially being invaded. That's what it would have had to look like was they were being invaded.

I take that to today and, here we are, we're the natives now. That's what we feel like. We're the natives and here are these people coming in and wanting to change our world. I'm sure they felt that way. And there were some of them probably loved it, the younger ones, because it brought new opportunities. But there was the older generation probably hated it because it was changing who they were and what they are, and that's exactly what's going on now. I mean, that was a little more dramatic than here because we don't [have] as different a culture as developed back then. But I look at the founding of Pinedale and you got a guy that came from the eastern side of the state and brought \$5,000

worth of goods with him and came over here to set up a town and set up a store. What did the people who were already here think? I'm not so sure they appreciated it.

I do think that's partly—I don't know if in any other conversations you've encountered it, but there's an apparent difference in culture. Minor difference, but a difference in culture from South County, Big Piney/Marbleton, versus North County. I think the roots of it are in the founding of the towns. Big Piney and Marbleton just kind of evolved out of an agricultural need. Started as a post office, then you put in a store, and then just kind of builds around that, for the purpose of the people who are already there. Pinedale was different. Pinedale had people come in and say, "We want to start a new town. We want to do something different." That had to be upsetting to some of the people who had been around for, not a long time at that point, but some people had been around a decade at that point. And here's these outsiders coming in and telling us how to do our business.

Pinedale has always—Pinedale succeeded with those outsiders coming in and the locals eventually joined them, but I think that kernel has built over a hundred years and is still. Pinedale is the place that outsiders are going to feel more welcome than if they were to drop into Big Piney. They're going to feel more welcome here. There's a little bit more diverse thought, I think.

I guess me as – thinking I'm one of the locals now – when people come in, I am willing to accept anybody coming in and wanting to be a part of this community. I just think the responsibility is on the people coming in to at least understand what they're coming in to. The ones that come in and immediately start telling people why there's something wrong with them, or what they're doing wrong, that just doesn't go over well. I'm sure that's the case in any community. But the people who come in and appreciate the community for what it is and integrate themselves into it, even if they cause changes, cause they inevitably will, those I think work well.

So, back to your original question. I'm not sure the veterans specifically you were talking about—but there's no doubt in my mind when they came here if they chose this community because they liked what it was and they wanted to be a part of it the integration was probably pretty good and pretty quick and they could have easily gone on to change things and make things better but maybe in a more gradual way than somebody who just jumps in and says, "Okay, we're going to teach you hicks how to live." I think that's going on over and over and over and it's going on right now. There are people that moved to this town that have been here five years that I think are well integrated into the town and there's people who have been twenty years that I still think don't get it. They're still living—they haven't adopted the town for what it is and they want it to be something different, and that's always going to meet resistance. All over the long time, those things sort of mitigate and the town does move and does change, and the culture changes.

LW: How do some of the newcomers that came want to see change? What do they want?

CG: I guess I'll go back to the cultural stuff because that's what I care about, the historical preservation stuff. You have people that come in that, I think—today there are people who want this—it's a quaint little town and they want it to look like that. They want to be able to bring their friend here. They want Main Street to look a certain way, to look like an old west town or something and, that's not our heritage. Our heritage is people came here to get away from something and came here to make a living and don't so much worry about what it looks like and it's all about functional. "Can we make a living and what do we need to do to make a living?" And that's how Sublette County was built, and the whole area was built. And so people that come in and want it to be this little paradise that they have in their mind's eye;

it's equivalent to the white picket fence, you know. Somebody's got the dream house and a white picket fence and they want it to look perfect and that's great but when you move into a town and you want the whole town to do that, you want the whole town to look a certain way for you.

It doesn't bother me to have a building on Main Street that's abandoned. Old log building that's abandoned and just sitting there and hasn't been maintained but some day will. Some day somebody will need it and use it. Or somebody who builds a metal building on Main Street. You know, just a metal-sided building. I think there's people who want this town to be their own little paradise and that doesn't fit their version of paradise so they want to change that. They want to prevent people from building a metal building. Well, the reality of it is, for the bang for the buck and somebody's trying to make a living, that might be the most practical thing to do, even though somebody else looks at it and goes, "That looks ugly." And I might even look at it and go, "That looks ugly." But I also realize—I would rather us focus on—I think our heritage is focusing on the, "We need to make a living." And that's more important than, well, I've said it a few times, of making a movie lot. I think some people want to make a movie lot out of the town.

LW: You're thinking more of the old timers or the new people coming in, or both?

CG: No, it's new people coming in. I don't see—the people with deep roots here, now it depends what you say about deep roots. Again, I know people who've been here twenty years who would like still to control a little bit of what the town looks like so it'll look more in their vision of what their little paradise would be for them. So it's not necessarily a longevity issue. It's a mentality issue. I think the people that grew up on the ranches here, not that they don't want things to look nice, they do, but that always has to take a back seat to it needs to be functional and it needs to do the job it's intended to do. That's the attitude I see in the people who grew up in the community.

LW: Did you find that the newcomers came thinking it should look like a western town, that this is Wyoming—

CG: I think there's some who do and, you know, that's one thing—that's another, I think, benefit of the gas boom. I think prior to this gas boom happening, Pinedale specifically was well on its way to tourism trumping agriculture. Tourism and second home. Sort of, you know, amenity buyers were the people that were coming to this community and it was getting older. I think it was becoming a sort of a retirement [place] because of the second home. That can be attractive—this is my personal opinion—but that can be attractive from the point of view of it's a controlled environment and you can probably control it. People will want to control it and control what things will look like. But, at the same time, there's not a lot of industry there and it worries me that that would lead to a stagnant sort of town.

Tourism's a great supplemental industry. It's not a real good primary industry. I've never been to a town that was primarily tourist that I wanted to live. There's a lot of them I want to visit, but I don't want to live there. And so, one of the benefits, again my personal opinion, other people would disagree, is that the gas company coming in and dominating, or the gas boom coming in and dominating, the town has changed that a little bit and it has gone back a lot more to that, "Let's do things because we need to." I think it's probably pushed out some of the amenity buyers. Maybe it didn't push people out who were already here. But it might—I think it slowed down the movement of people that were coming for this to

be kind of their retirement place and their home-away-from-home. And I don't want that to go too far. I mean, we need a balance.

- LW: One thing someone did tell me, "If this boom hadn't happened, I don't know if my kids could have found jobs here and stayed." So I think of that when you say that it sounds like the town was going more and more to where those kids probably would have had to leave.
- CG: I think that's very true. The place I noticed the most, and it was probably about 2004, 2005, going to the Sublette County Fair and noticing thirty-year-old parents with kids and prior to—I mean we were quickly becoming an older community. Again, I haven't looked at the statistics to back that up. It's my perception, but we were becoming an older community with less energy both money-wise, but people-wise, too. And young kids bring energy. They bring energy for grandparents, for parents of course who are in the prime of their life trying to make a living and that brings energy. Sometime in the early 2000s, early to mid 2000s, I went to Sublette County Fair and sat there one day and looked around and thought, "Wow, there's families here. There's young people here." And that's a huge positive. I think that's the single biggest, I've mentioned it before, but that's the single biggest positive that the gas industry has brought.
- LW: I was wondering too, with some of these newcomers, how much they were participating in some of the community activities?
- CG: I think a lot, yeah. Again, the people who have come in and accepted this community for what it is and then participate in the community I think integrate extremely fast and are accepted extremely fast, and that's the majority, I think, that come in are like that. The ones who can't, who have a different vision of what this community should be and either want to change it or else they just want to leave, I think there's a lot of people who've probably come and tried it for a year or two and go, "This just isn't me," and they've left, and the community has a way of providing that kind of filter, I think. And so, I think, yeah, the newcomers have been very integral in the community organization.
- LW: When the newcomers were coming here, how was the reception for them? Any idea?
- CG: I guess, from my perspective—again, I'm fine with anybody who wants to come in and wants to be part of our community and vests in the community as I like to say, some way. They decide, "I'm part of this community and I want to be part of it," and that is either opening a business, getting a job and a home and saying, "This is where I'm going to live," or joining a community organization like the Lion's Club or Fine Arts Council or whatever and becoming a participating member of those. I welcome that. I think we need that kind of energy. The people we don't need are the ones that just want to come in, make the dollar, and leave. And I know there's plenty of those and that's part of development, but if you can skew it more towards the people who want this to be their home and want to vest in, I think the outcome is much better over the long term, for both sides, for the people who live here and the people that are coming in. I don't want to live in a community that does not have new people coming in to it. I just don't think that's a very good future for a community.

- LW: You said there were some young families. Were you finding the ones who were staying, the ones who were integrating, are they more the administration level? Are they some of the workers in the field? Any thoughts on what types were actually integrating?
- CG: Boy that's hard to say, you know. I'm not in the gas fields so the people I encounter really are the administrative people, especially with my business at Office Outlet. We're encountering the people that are in the offices. So that's the perspective I'm talking from. It seems to me like quite a bit of just the general workers are part of it too. But maybe I'm not the best one to make that judgment.
- LW: I just was curious how much they were integrating, or felt like they could, when it came to the workers and their families. If generally the father or the husband was coming here and leaving the family. But, I wasn't sure if the workers were bringing their families into the community.
- CG: It's probably mainly the administrative, like you say, the office-type people. Well, I shouldn't say office people because there's a lot of people who do oil field support that aren't actually out on a rig drilling or something. I think probably a lot of those crews that are the drill crews probably are a little bit more, "Let's come in and make the money and this isn't really our home." Probably the families coming in are the ones that are a support company. So, in other words, they open their own company that's a gas field support company of some kind, or they work for a company like that. Or they work, you know, Shell's got an office here and I think it's full of people who have bought houses here and decided this is home. Questar, similar. I guess that's the thing that looks to me to breed success. Most of the community moving forward in a reasonable way. Find people that want to come and live in the community. Well, of course, you want to hire people that are already here, too; that have already adopted that community. But I don't know for sure the real workers out there, how much they've adopted the—I mean, because there's a whole lot of people living in man camps that I don't necessarily encounter.
- LW: Yeah, because I think the man camps are more in the Big Piney area if I understand correctly. I don't know if there's even one around here. Is there? In Pinedale?
- CG: No, there isn't a man camp. There's one out Jonah Field and then one in Big Piney.
- LW: Oh, there is still one in Big Piney?
- CG: I don't know how much. I've driven by there and there's still a bunch of trailers down there where the camp was. At one time, they were talking, Encana was talking, about moving everybody out to the Jonah Field—
- LW: And they have done that.
- CG: But there is still a lot of facilities there at the man camp in Piney so I assume maybe, once Encana moved all their workers out to the Jonah Field, support workers moved in there or something. I'm not quite sure who's taking advantage, or who's using that right now.

LW: That'll be a question to ask for some of the Big Piney folks who we're talking to. But did you find that these newcomers were interested in the Sublette County Historical Society? Or interested in history in general?

CG: Some, but not for the most part. Not that they're—we have some new people that are involved in the organization that appreciate history, just in general, and wanted to be a part of it. But I think, for the most part, that's not the case. The core of the support of the history in the area is the people that have been here a long time.

The more common I see are people coming in new to the community and enjoying and loving the community. It's probably the environment that brings them as much as anything, the mountains and the hunting and the fishing and the hiking. That's the more common thing I see that people embrace than necessarily the cultural and the history. And I think that's natural. I think it just takes time when somebody moves in to adopt an interest in the culture or the history.

LW: Where their grandparents and—you know [laughs], it's true. Although I've always loved history like you have, some people it just takes a little bit longer to come to it.

Well, I want you to put on your Pinedale Online hat now.

CG: Okay. [Laughs].

LW: Pinedale Online, which I have to say is a wonderful source, and a source I used quite a bit for research for this project. It's grown quite a bit since it was established in 1997.

CG: Yes.

LW: And who are your readers for Pinedale Online?

CG: I think there's a broad mix. We certainly have a huge outside—I guess I haven't looked at the numbers lately, but probably eighty percent of the visitation is people that don't live here. But I think of that eighty percent, a whole lot of them have a connection to the area for some reason. Either they vacationed here, they got family here, maybe they've, you know, somebody they know has come to work here or because of the boom. So I don't know what percentage of that eighty are people who have some connection, but there are also some people who have just found it.

We've got a guy in Florida that's been a fan for ten years and he's never been here. He just kind of vicariously lives Pinedale through Pinedale Online. It's just amazing to watch because he's in a whole different world and he dreams of being in this world and it was—that was surprising to us because he hadn't even been here. [Laughs].

LW: It makes you wonder why he doesn't just move. [Laughs]

CG: Yeah, but how many people are like that I don't know. When we first started Pinedale Online it was more intended to be for the outsider. That was really—it was early. We knew there was a boom, or we knew there was gas activity happening at that point, but it certainly was nowhere near the magnitude it is now. And that was really targeted at the—we really were targeting the people from the outside who

were either interested in coming here, some tourism promotion, but people who had a connection that here's a way to keep connected with the Pinedale that you remember for some reason, whether you came and worked here a summer, or you visited a dude ranch, or whatever, and that was kind of our audience, really an outside audience. We didn't intend it to be a local audience, but the local audience has grown through the years and it has become fairly significant.

LW: What role did Pinedale Online play during the boom?

CG: Probably the biggest is just a lifeline to the outside world. People calling and wanting jobs and, "Where do I go find them?" And people like the daily information source of what's going on in the community. For a lot of people looking for jobs, the first indication they have of Pinedale is Pinedale Online. That's both my perception but actually anecdotal evidence repeated over and over and over. We hear people say that we get to know after they've come here and lived here a couple of years and say, "Oh yeah, when I was looking for a place to go find another job, that's the first thing I looked at is Pinedale Online." So I think that's what it's been because it's available all over the world instantly. It's been the lifeline for people who aren't here but are looking at this place for whatever reason, either to come work or to see what, you know, your brother works here and you want to see what their environment looks like and what's happening there.

LW: That's interesting to me because when I looked at it—it seemed like a good job, too, of covering—or doing kind of citizen's alert concerning the ozone, what was going on with the ozone, what was going on with PAWG as much as you could learn. You also did a good job, it seemed, of covering those, that local citizens would have wanted to read as well.

CG: Yeah, I guess we found that local stories had a broader interest also and so we just kind of evolved into more and more local stories. We've really drawn the line at—and I should give a plug here to Dawn Ballou because that's my partner in the business. The way this started is Dawn had a graphic artist's business in town. She painted windows and did brochures and was working out of her house doing a graphic art business. The Internet came along and so she was interested in learning it. At the time Office Outlet did computer service. When I came that's what I did is computer service, which I don't do anymore. But, because of that, I knew the Internet. I convinced Wyoming.com to bring Internet access into here. So she asked me a lot of questions of "Well, how can I do this Internet thing and do this Web page thing." Out of that come the realization for both of us is the town could use a Web site. And so that's how Pinedale Online started. Really my job is to keep computers running and keep the back end running. She does all the stories and so [laughs] I want to give her credit for she's the one that has really made it into what it is and gave it its character.

So, over time, the thing has shifted to where we would put local interest stories because we thought the papers aren't going to come out soon enough and people might want to know this. Because, at that time, we had a weekly news cycle. Now it's kind of bi-weekly with the two papers. But, for some reason, we thought the community would want to know something sooner and so we had put it up and we got great response from our outside viewers. Again, I think it's that people have an interest in Pinedale. They're living Pinedale through Pinedale Online and so they want to know the local stuff. And then the locals really started adopting it too. It became a place to go and find more frequent information than you could through the papers. So we catered to that a little bit. We still kind of draw

the line at—we don't go out and do investigative reporting. We don't have staff or budgets or anything to do that kind of stuff. The papers do a great job of handling that role. But anything timely and the community would need to know maybe quicker, we've jumped into that.

LW: I've always heard that there have been young people who have been raised in Wyoming and went to school in Wyoming but had to leave Wyoming to find employment whether you're kind of feeding their need to find out what's going on in their home area.

CG: Yeah, we hear from people like that all the time. Very much so.

LW: Who would like to come back in a lot of cases but just really need—their home is now elsewhere and their jobs even more so are elsewhere. So you have that component as well?

CG: Yes, yes. Definitely. And we had that component from very early on. That's probably some of the first people we started from before the boom really happened. Those are the people from the outside that we get feedback from of, "Thanks for putting up this information because I really wanted to know what was going on at home." They still call it home but then, as the boom happened and Pinedale started getting national attention, that's where we started getting people who knew nothing about Pinedale except they'd heard a name that, "Hey, there's a place to go get a job." Some of those people came and got jobs, some didn't. But even the ones that didn't, some still followed Pinedale. They've adopted it for some reason.

LW: And on the media topic, Pinedale's gotten a lot of national media attention. What are your thoughts about some of that attention that it's received?

CG: I don't know, I mean, most of it is uninformed. [Laughs]. It's frustrating to read it. You know, their agenda is completely different than us local people and they're looking for a national component and it ends up being a very simplistic representation of what we are, who we are, or what the subject is. In that sense it's frustrating. I guess it's good in the sense that, when your name's out and people are paying attention to you, it provides opportunities. It means people will look at your area and come here for maybe good reasons and be a valuable part of the community. But, most of the time, I read a national report on something, I come away more disappointed than appreciate it because it's usually just simplistic and doesn't really capture—

LW: the complexities,

CG: and sometimes it's just—they're just factually wrong, you know.

LW: What struck me in some of the articles—it was concentrating on the bad impacts that were happening in Pinedale.

CG: Well, we had one, I can't remember it's CBS or somebody, one of those broadcast news companies came in and probably four years ago or something when things were starting to tail off a little bit and the recession was really starting to hit the rest of the country. That must have been about 2008. They came in with film crews and interviewed some people and they did a story but it took them three to six months

to get the story out. By the time they got out the message of the story, maybe it was ABC, but, anyway, the message of the story was, there's one place in the country that's got all kinds of jobs. The Chamber [of Commerce] was inundated. We at Pinedale Online were inundated. The whole town, the Town of Pinedale was inundated with people. There were people who drove here just expecting to get a job and, by that time, it had leveled off. We hadn't gone into a recession. We still haven't gone into a recession like the rest of the country has but it wasn't like you can get a job anywhere because there were still people hiring but they were becoming more selective. They could become more selective because there was more of an applicant pool out there.

That one was really kind of a devastating one because dealing with those people who are grasping at straws, that's who responded to that, and then there really wasn't much here. Not that some people didn't get some jobs, but ABC, I think, maybe it was ABC, whichever one it was just did a huge disservice by the way they did that story. Disservice to us and disservice to the people who watched it. I don't know why it's kind of exciting every time somebody does a national story and I read every one of them but I've never really seen the value in it.

LW: I didn't realize that happened. That's quite a dramatic anecdote of how national media can make an impact on a community.

CG: Yeah, for about a month or so, the hits on our website doubled. For the week after, we were getting double the traffic that we're used to. I think that day it showed we probably got triple or more, I can't remember.

LW: Makes you realize how bad things were.

CG: Yeah.

LW: Although it didn't do a lot of investigative pieces—I was going to ask how your relationship was with the BLM office and the oil and gas operators. So, probably it was fine?

CG: Yeah, I think it's been very good. Dawn, again, is the one that's been the contact to all those, but I think the relationships are very good. There's times where Dawn in particular will think something is being swept under the carpet a little bit and will push a little bit harder, but we've never really seen that as our role. Our role is to—I think the tagline is still on there that we're trying to give a slice of life of Sublette County and that's more important to us. But, when some big issue hits we don't ignore it. We just don't dig into it necessarily as deep or we may try to hit an angle that isn't being touched. Or, if it's a national issue that we think is being misrepresented nationally like wolves or grizzlies or something like that, we feel it's important to get the real facts out as we see them, not as somebody from New York sees them. But I think Dawn's got great working relationships with all the major gas companies and with the BLM and so I think that's worked well.

LW: Was there a close relationship between Pinedale Online and Sublette Examiner and Pinedale Roundup?

CG: Yeah. Oh, we've tried to work—it's a little difficult at times because we're somewhat competition, but we've always tried to find a way to try to complement each other, for the most part, and not try to take

away from each other. Although there is some crossover stuff that's just inevitable. But we currently today have great working relationships with the radio station and both newspapers and have always tried to.

At one time, when Rob Shaul started the Sublette County Journal, which no longer exists, he ended up buying the Pinedale Roundup and merging the two papers. He started that paper and, for two years, he worked out of Office Outlet with Pinedale Online and his paper both worked out of the same office and he provided us content to put online and we provided him some outside exposure.

So I think we've worked well together with newspapers, and still do. We share resources when there's somebody covering an event that the newspapers either can't cover and they know we're going and they say, "Hey, can we use some pictures?" That goes both ways and we're always willing to share.

LW: Well, that's good to know that there is that working relationship. I'm going to go on to Office Outlet.

CG: Okay.

LW: And how long have you owned and managed it? Or co-managed it, I guess I should say.

CG: We opened it in December of 1994. I was still in Bremerton, Washington working in Civil Service as an engineer and my sister had worked for an office supply store here in town. She lived here in town and worked for the office supply store and it was going under. And her and the rest of the employees thought it was still a great business and so, why can't we reinvent it and start one our own. So Kristy came to me because I had access to—I had a real job and had access to money [laughs] and so kind—

LW: [Laughs] and you were her brother and so she could ask—

CG: Yeah, and so I could invest. It sounded like a good idea to me and so we started it in December of 1994 with my sister running it and me still in Washington. But, by January of 1996, it was clear that it was struggling really bad and we were losing lots of money. This was really kind of before the boom and so I had to make the decision of either we close the doors because I can't get any more money or I need to quit my job, go back there, and add services. So I came here in January 1996 to do computer repair through Office Outlet and add another revenue stream to the business.

LW: And that must have really helped because here you are.

CG: It did. It helped us get through those early years, but I'm glad I'm not doing it anymore. [Laughs]

LW: Well, how did the boom affect your business?

CG: It was huge. I don't know if we would have existed or continued in business if the boom hadn't happened. We were enough early—I guess we were probably in the right place at the right time that we were in early enough that we got buildings pretty cheap and had the basis of our business before it really took off. The gas companies are still a major—you talk to the big companies, the Shells, Ultras, Questars, BPs, Encanas, they do a lot of business with us that is directly maybe twenty percent of our business. But the ripple effect of what they do in town—we're a business service company because

we're an office supply store and most of our business is to other businesses and there are hundreds of support companies that are contractors to those big companies. That's the bulk of our business, I would say.

LW: Are you the only one in town who does what you do?

CG: We're the only one who does office supplies. The copy center and the office supplies, I mean, the grocery does like school supplies and notebooks and stuff but, for a full office supply store, we're the only one.

LW: What kind of services do you offer a lot of the energy companies and the operators? What are they asking for?

CG: It's mainly just office supplies. Well, office supplies and office furniture and then copy services. We have a copy center and we have a lot of stuff where they've got field manuals or whatever they want a hundred copies of. We're doing hundreds of thousands of copies a month. Some of those companies have their own copiers but it just costs a lot of time, manpower, to stand there and build books or whatever. We provide that service where they can drop it off and come back a day or two later and have their job done.

LW: What happened with your business in the downturn?

CG: You mean recently or ...?

LW: I'd say when the downturn hit. Now, you said the recession really hasn't hit this area like it has others?

CG: Well, I mean we have gone down, but certainly nowhere as bad as—I guess the way I look at it is we rose so high it was artificially high and we've kind of come back to what I consider more of a sustainable, normal level. And so we're not hurting by any means. Either my business, and I don't even think the town's really hurting that bad.

We still have a lot of gas activity here, but it's not as huge as it was. We, at times through the 2000s, early 2000s, where our business was growing fifty percent a year. Just huge jumps. And we have backed off a little bit. I'd say in the last two years we've seen the drop off and it's kind of stabilized a little bit now, I think. It's hard to tell but we've probably lost thirty percent of our business. And that sounds bad except we had such a huge ramp up that, when it came back down to that, it's still a very sustainable level for us and certainly nowhere as bad as the rest of the country. I mean, I haven't traveled the rest of the country that much but, from everything I read and everything I've seen, people are hurting a whole lot more out there than we are here. We don't have much to complain about.

LW: When the boom really hit and you were starting to ramp up you probably needed more staff.

CG: We did.

LW: But then I heard that it was difficult for businesses to find staff at that time because it was so much more lucrative to go to the energy companies. Was that affecting you?

CG: Yes, absolutely. Our wages had to jump significantly to try to attract people to come in. We had a lot of turnover trying to keep people. We had people specifically work there for a while and then get a desk job or something in the gas companies that was much more profitable and had benefits and that we just can't offer as a service company. So, yeah, it was hard to keep people. But, we've had the benefit—like right now, we have me, my sister, my mom, and my nephew are all working for the business [laughs] and so we've fallen back on family at the times when we're struggling to keep the store manned. There's always been my mom and my sister and her kids and I had a cousin, had several cousins that have come and worked at times. That's how we've kind of struggled through the—until we—we always try to fill in where we can hire somebody. But there were times where that was real tough.

LW: How about today? Is it that way?

CG: Not necessarily. My cousin just left and so we're looking for somebody but we're more in the mindset of "Let's get the right person" than worrying about we have to have a body. Because it's slowed down enough where we don't quite have to have as high a staffing level as we did. We're kind of in-between where we need to add somebody because at times it gets busy, but at the same time we don't really need somebody all the time and so there are people out there to hire now. It is easier to hire people but we tend to—we don't advertise for hiring. We do it through word of mouth. We get better people that way, and we have the luxury of being able to take to the time and do that.

LW: When maybe before when the boom really hit you might have been a bit desperate to find those people?

CG: Oh, we were and we had people that would work for a month or two and be gone. That's a big hit because you invest not a huge amount of time, but a good chunk of time getting people used to the business and then they're gone. I'd say in that time period from probably 2004 to 2007 that was probably the highest level and we had a lot of turnover. It was tough keeping enough staff to keep the thing busy but I'd rather have that problem [laughs] than not have business.

LW: What triggered you knowing that the downturn had hit Pinedale?

CG: I guess the most obvious one to me is just see the drop in sales, I mean from my business. But, we probably went in a four year period, maybe more, where every—our business has cycles. Summer is really busy and December and January are really busy and then the others are kind of a drop off, a little bit, but not a big drop off. And I always compared a January from year to January the next and we probably went, a four, maybe five year period, where every single month every year was bigger than the previous equivalent month from the previous year, and we started missing some of those. We started seeing drop offs in a January or drop offs in a July and those were my first indications of "Okay, something's a little bit different here."

But then there's always the rumor mill of how many rigs are up and running and is somebody pulling rigs out. Cause those have a ripple effect that everybody feels. Just pulling out one or two rigs, cause the new rigs drilling—so much of the initial part of this boom was the development part, the drilling of the holes and not the production as much. When that could fluctuate and when it did there were rumors and people talked about it and we would see the results of rigs being moved out.

LW: So, really, almost a psychological effect would you say?

CG: Yeah, there was some of that although—I mean, you always worry about, you hear about somebody's closing down or somebody's taking rigs out or something like that and you worry about what's it mean next month and the month after that. Some of those pan out and some of them don't. Some of them may be inaccurate information or they don't have the effect you expect. But the part—when it really hits you is when you see the numbers on the books. That was my true indication of “Okay this is not—“ And the first month you don't—you see it and you wonder what it means. But when you get two or three or four months in a row then reality sets in and you know that it's there.

But again, I don't want to portray this as a bust because we're far from a bust. We've dropped back down from our business personally but I think the town, too—just talking with other people and watching the activity in the town and there is still a lot of—I mean, if you compare what's going on in town right now with 1995, let's say when we opened, and it's night and day difference. We're not anywhere close to those levels that we were back then. That's the way I look at it.

I think from my business perspective we've been incredibly lucky because, through those early fragile first decade of a business, we got lucky and were in a right place at the right time. It makes me look like a great business person. [Laughs] So now we've got our loans paid and we've got our building paid off and and so we're much more able to back off a little bit and still be able to make money and make a living.

LW: Just one final question. A boom will happen somewhere else. Well, it's happening in Pennsylvania. It may happen in Eastern Wyoming. Fifty years from now, someone's listening to our tape, it'll be happening then. Got any pieces of advice for residents of that town?

CG: I think from a personal point of view you have, kind of, to take it for what it is and you need to kind of make it work for you. For some people that just means get in and make a lot of money or set yourself up for later. From a town perspective and trying to manage, and from a community perspective, that's a little bit harder. I think people shouldn't worry. A boom's a good thing if you can figure out how to manage it.

To me, I'll get back to the thing we talked about earlier, is if a community can work with the major developers and try to create a boom that is family-based not transient worker-based, I think it's good for a community. It will change a community, there's no doubt about it. That's just inevitable. But I also think that it's good for a community to change some, and you hope it doesn't change too much and you can manage it but, I don't know.

I certainly think you have to take advantage of the booms when they happen and you have to know a bust is coming and you got to prepare for it. [Laughs] You have to do those things that the opportunities are there when they're there, whether it's the town building streets and infrastructure or whether it's an individual building up their retirement account. You have to be willing to go in and use it for what it is, understanding that it probably won't be there forever. And I think we're incredibly lucky to have a boom that's lasted this long and really no signs of it going away big like the Exxon boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s. That really, truly just went away and went back to previous levels and those kinds of things I don't know how you manage those. Those are just painful to go through.

LW: Yeah, unexpected. The town didn't know.

CG: Yeah.

LW: I guess if this boom happened the same way you wouldn't have known either, but just know the bust or a downturn is going to happen.

CG: Yeah, I think you have to assume that's going to happen. Hopefully that doesn't, but you've got to assume it is and put in the infrastructure, whether it's community-based infrastructure or individual-based infrastructure, that you can. If you can get a home paid off and a business paid off while it's booming [laughs], you're in a whole lot better shape to handle a bust. And that's for the people who—you know, this is home to me. I'm not leaving Sublette County and my goal is I need to set myself up and my family up so that we can live here no matter what happens, and we will live here no matter what happens. For anybody who is coming in just to be a part of the boom, I don't know that it matters so much, you know.

LW: True. Well, thanks Clint.

CG: Thank you.

LW: Wonderful interview, lots of good insight from you. And did you have anything you wanted to add that maybe we didn't touch on?

CG: I don't think so—covered a lot of territory.

[End of interview]