Roger Cichy

Cyclone Marching Band Oral History Project

Interviewed by Jay Chapman

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Time stamps reference the video interview.

**JC:** Jay Chapman

**RC:** Roger Cichy

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**JC:** This is Jay Chapman, an interviewer for the Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band Oral History Project. Today is Monday, October 30, 2023. I'm interviewing Roger Cichy via Zoom. Thanks for joining us, Roger.

**RC:** Nice to be here.

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**JC:** Well, could you start a little bit by just telling me about your early life, maybe where you grew up, your family, and that sort of thing?

**RC:** Sure. I grew up in Ohio, central Ohio, and ended up going to Ohio State, so it was twenty miles from my house. It was pretty close. I was in music education. I auditioned for the marching band and was in the marching band for four years. Loved it. Ended up getting my music degree, and my first teaching job was [in] a town in Pennsylvania called Mars, M-a-r-s, and people always laugh about that. Yes, there's a lot of jokes about that. That was my first teaching job. Great job for four years. Then, I wanted to go on and work on my master's degree, so I went back to Ohio State, and in two years, I about finished my master's degree. What I was able to do was, I was the grad assistant for the marching band for two years, so I got to hang out with the marching band again, write some of the shows, write some of the music. Had a great time. I mean to me, the college level is just—they are people that want to be there, you know, and I had so much fun with it and big-time football program and all that. It was a lot of fun to be associated with that band. Then I decided just to go back to teaching public school. I wanted to go into higher education. I had the degrees for it now, so I could go on. My first marching band job at the collegiate level was at the University of Rhode Island. I had all of sixty people in it because it was a very small band. We couldn't do much with formations and that, but it was a small town, a small-time football conference. But you got to start somewhere. I got a call from Joe Christensen, [Joseph Christensen, Director of Bands (1980-1998)] the director of bands the following year, and he said that, “We have an opening, would you consider applying for it?” I did. I got the interview, and I didn't even make it home, and there was a phone message on my machine that says, “We want to hire you,” so I packed my bags and came out to Ames, Iowa, and that was in 1986.

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**JC:** Okay, well, that's great. I know you obviously were director of the marching band. What other bands were you involved in at Iowa State?

**RC:** My title was the Associate Director of Bands. So, I had the concert band. We switched roles a little bit later. I ended up taking the symphonic band. I had the two jazz ensembles. I ran some jazz combos. So, a lot of the bands that we had at Iowa State--plus assisted with the pep band. We kind of all shared that, and so the pep band had performed at all the basketball games was also one of my responsibilities.

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**JC:** Sure, sure. Getting back to the marching band side of things, can you maybe talk about how you went through selecting a show, and going through the rehearsal of the music, and the process to ultimately getting a drill together and just doing a performance on any given weekend?

**RC:** Sure. You know, I always felt like the shows that had a common theme tended to be more coherent for the football audience. So, instead of just picking tunes out and going out and thinking the best would be entertaining, I felt it was more of an emphasis to try to have a theme-based show. Whether we're doing a Broadway show, or a sixties music show, or fifties, or swing show, or whatever. I just thought that had more entertainment value. We worked hard at trying to find music for it.

My first year there, which was 1986, Dan Phillips, [Daniel Phillips, Assistant Director of bands (1982-1988)] who was also assistant director of bands, was also involved the marching band, and for two years while we had Dan Phillips, we had a great time because we arranged all the music for the band and we could pick any theme we wanted and it worked out. We had a great time doing that. It just takes a lot of time to write the show and write the music, and most directors aren’t involved with writing the music, and our budget just did not allow us to go out and have custom arrangements. So, that worked really good. I felt like we were really in a creative mode for those first two years. Then Dan chose to leave, and our next associate director bands was not as skilled in arranging, so it was myself. I still did a lot of arrangement. That's when we had to kind of had to use other tunes as well, but we still worked them into a theme, from that standpoint. To-- obviously the music most important thing. I've always had the philosophy, you know if you're performing for an athletic crowd, a tune that's a minute and thirty seconds is almost too long. [both laugh] We kept everything down to that, you know, time to go on to another piece to keep their attention span. That worked for well for us. We usually got about four, five tunes per show in.

As far as the show writing, this is before computer—well, computer was just at the advent. The show design software wasn't developed at the point that it really paid off. So, for first five or six years, it was all handwritten charts. A lot of time getting writer’s cramp putting the little dots down, righting the numbers down, and all that, but our drills were always based on position drills that correlated with the music. In other words, it wasn't just so many counts of movement to the music. It was just, Okay music does this, so let's use this many counts to do this kind of maneuver, and then music does this for the next one hundred twenty-eight counts. So, let's do something here for that. And occasionally, you know, pop and do a rotating star or some interesting formation that had a lot of audience appeal. But about 1990, I think we started to use computer, but it still had limitations, so kind of a hybrid of half-written charts and half-computer-generated charts. But by the time 1994 came around, I think we were pretty much computer at that point. It certainly takes some time. So, they're(??) having to use drafting tools and dividers, and everything else to put the dots on paper and come up with the shows.

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**JC:** Is the software where it's at now today? Is it even further advanced where it was before then?

**RC:** Oh yes, and the thing about it is, it’s one thing that, you know, come up with the ideas and stuff like that, and you're still creating the ideas, but you’re using that to do the notation aspect of it. But the nice thing about it is they've developed so, so well now that you can actually see what would happen if you were like sitting in a press box, or sitting twenty rows up from on a twenty-yard line. You can actually position yourself to see what the show would look like because, again, with perspective, since you're at a high slant, not all the shows are going to look good because you're not looking them from a blip, you're looking from an angle. It's kind of nice to see that. Then you can do everything from print out charts to print out individual coordinates for each player. So, instead of having a whole chart, you could just print out the coordinate and have the coordinate and just follow the map that way, as opposed to having to see what everyone else is doing. There's some good options, and plugins, and bonuses with that, but the charting, you still have to be create them. You just can't put the counts in and it comes up with something on its own. You still have to be creative from that standpoint.

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**JC:** So, once you kind of got a show laid out, what you're going to want to do, what does a week of practice look like? How do you structure getting the band ready, how do you get the music taken care of and learn? That sort of thing. How does that game week, so to speak, work?

**RC:** Sure. Yes, I've always felt like the hardest thing bands have is getting from the marching part of it to the march and playing part of the show. You can learn all the formations and that, and the drill, but once you put an instrument to your mouth, and you're trying to play and remember all that stuff, it's kind of a challenge. One of my simple devices I used was to always to record the music and bring it out even if it was not a good recording, so it might be a week that we only had one week to learn a show, so Monday, we pass the music out. We've kind of slopped through it, but at least got a recording of it so we can go out and learn the first drill and then I can put on a tape recorder, pipe it over the field, and we can start understanding how the music fits the drill. It seemed to really accelerate the learning process. If you're lucky to get a half of rehearsal in on music and then half rehearsal in outside, we were at least through the first drill. Tuesday might be, learn the rest of the drill, learn the rest of the show, and stumble through some of the music again. The music getting a little better, but still on recording on Wednesday, we would be trying to play through some of it with the drill. Then Thursday and Friday are basically clean days to clean up everything and really put some polish on it.

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**JC:** What would you say were some of your more--one of your favorite shows that you were able to do, something that was unique or different, or something that was really a special show for you? Anything that sticks out?

**RC:** Well, I guess one of my favorite shows was the very first show I did because, believe it or not, we started in Iowa, so it was an Iowa trip. We had a really unique thing. We were able to do an MTV show because MTV was just kind of in its infancy, and that was a big thing, and everyone had cable back then. Or as they called it, commercial free TV--which is not the case anymore. They all watched MTV. We had a really unique situation. We got a call from a rock star, his name was David Lee Roth [lead singer of rock band Van Halen], and he says, “I want to come to the game. Is there anything I could do with your band on the field?”

We said, Well, the game is in Iowa [University of Iowa]. Don't you want to do it with their band?

He said, “No, I want to do it with your band.” [Chapman laughs] So, we actually made all the arrangements to have him there. He had a camper bus, I don't know what it was, and then they had a holding spot for him in the tunnel. He came out and we are doing fine until--and we did one of us one of his tunes. So, we rotated one of the tunes out of there. It was a concert tune that we're going to stand and play. We end up doing his “Yankee Rose” is the name of it. We decided to swap out that tune, put him in there, let him do his thing in that, and entertain the crowd. We were quiet about it until about Thursday. We had to contact the athletic department of Iowa and let them know what we were doing. They had no earthly of who this guy was, so, Yes, sure it's part of the halftime show now. Well, two days before we were supposed to go there, all the sudden they got wind of who this was, and they got riled up. Then it hit the press. We got there, and this was like the middle of the show, and we were the first band on the field. Halfway through our show, people we're just chanting, We want David! We want David! The whole stadium was erupting. Of course, he comes out, and he's just like dancing around, wild man. He had leopard skin pants on and that. Goes up and kind of dances with one of the flag people who did not miss a *beat* [Chapman laughs] as he was body-rubbing her. He left, and the place was just rocking. We had one more tune left, so we finished that. Then the Iowa band came on. They had decided to do a patriotic show. Everyone went and got their hotdog then. [Chapman laughs] It was just the circumstances that happened that time, but it was pretty amazing. We just had our brand new uniforms. So, we had the first time we wore the red and white uniforms. It was an exciting show.

The other show I like really was—it's hard to re-create a lot of the music of today since it's so electronic and so focused on a solo performer as opposed to bands that we used to have in the eighties, nineties, and that. Chicago [American rock band, popular in the seventies and eighties] music played really well. Blood, Sweat, and Tears, [American jazz rock band, popular in the seventies] Chicago, and that--because they had horn sections built into the music anyway, so it transferred very easily. We just, you know, blew the socks off that stuff. I remember just going to all these high school performances we did when we were on away trips, and just parted everyone's hair because they had never heard a band be able to blast that kind of sound at them, with the size band we had. Those were fun. I loved doing those high school games because we were so inspiring for the fans, their band, their football team that hosted us, and the school that hosts us--to come on and show them what a big-time, energetic college band looks like. Those are great shows.

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**JC:** You talk about the size of the band, so how large was the band generally when you were there, and where is that going to compare to what other schools might have had?

**RC:** Well, we marked about a hundred and ninety-two. We did have a process where we would release some people. We usually ended up with too many flute players. Our flute players were all on piccolos, which made more sense because they just don't make any sound on a flute. We try to keep the upper woodwind numbers--I wouldn't say down--just in perspective to the rest of the band. We had about a hundred and ninety-two wind players. We had about twenty-eight percussionists. Then drum majors, twirlers, and guard then would add another forty people on the top of that, so we were about two-eighty or something like that. We weren't a big band. It was difficult recruiting a lot because we did not have a winning tradition football-wise, so attendance of games was not very good at those early years. I'm sure that hurt quite a bit. I was always told when I was at Iowa State that's why the band always had such a strong number for tryouts because there wasn’t a tradition there and people obviously died to be in the band. I’m sure that hurts a little bit those first couple of years, but we seem to maintain about that number for the time I was there, for the nine years.

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**JC:** You mentioned at that Iowa game that you debuted the new uniforms. Can you talk about what the style was, what they looked like, and kind of how they fit, or compared to what other schools were maybe doing?

**RC:** Sure. That was 1986 and that was something that actually happened before I got there. Joe Christensen, director of bands, finally got the approval and wanted to make a significant change in the uniforms, going from a black uniform to a red or white uniform with white plume and white shoes. What was nice about that is that I remember coming in, and one of the things they really wanted to do was go back to kind of a really high energetic, high step style. With the white shoes on turf, that just accentuated everything. The energy was so impressive with that. Ever since they have stayed with some kind of a red and white uniform. They sometimes get a little gold in there as well, but it's just that striking difference, and it made a big difference on the field because, again, looking at black uniforms and seeing these red, white uniforms, it made a big difference. Especially with the high step and the white shoe, that it really showed that energy. We went to Colorado that year besides Iowa, in 1986, and most of the other away games we went to, I mean, literally had people grabbing me from the stands saying, “Why can't our band be like yours because I saw the difference in the energy,” and it hadn't been for the red white uniforms, that wouldn't happen because it just doesn't work as well black on a dark field. It was great that we had those uniforms and like I said, they have stayed with cardinal and gold or some version of that every since--and white.

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**JC:** Definitely. You talked a little bit about people wanting to join the band, etcetera. What was the process for selecting students for the band, and maybe how did you decide who your drum majors were?

**RC:** Well, drum majors were actually tryouts, so we had members that had been in the band for a while that showed real strong leadership, and we actually had a tryout with the pep band, and I think it was a spring game too. We would have the drum major candidates conduct different tunes to see what their response was, to see what their quickness was in calling up cheers, to see what kind of response we got from the band as far as their just overall leadership and command of the band. That's how we chose the drum majors. That's typical for most institutions.

The other applications for the band positions--well, taking the flags out, taking the percussion out---for the wind players, we based it back then on date of application. It was a system that was there before I got there, and I just felt like it kind of emphasized the enthusiasm of a person. So, they learn six months before they go there, that they're going to be going to Iowa State. If they're that enthused about filling out an application, they're probably a good person to have in the band anyway. You know, the people that wait a week before an application is due are probably the people who are teetering anyway. I think that system worked fine. I talk a lot to the staff about, should we be in a position of actually auditioning people for marching? We auditioned people for music, and that was a different thing because it wasn't to make or break the band, it was to decide on parts, and also just to see where we were music-wise. I mean, it gave me a good sense of--an example of piccolos, they only play one part, but it still gave us an idea of where they were musically, stuff like that. Trumpets broke down in three parts. Trombones, clarinet, saxophones, all that broke down in different parts. So, it was necessary to figure out who are the better trumpet players to put on the first part and that. That was necessary, but that was not a make-or-break the band. That was just an organizational thing for the band. Percussion did audition because we had to decide on cymbals. We used quads back then, snare drum, and bass drum, multiple bass drums. We had to select from that, and we had to give a number from that. I guess that's changed. Now it's an audition thing. We kicked that idea around, but like I said, it worked for us the way we had it. There was just a few people that did get in that were kind of--I don't want to call them slackers, but just not--physically, they had some challenges, maybe is a better way to put it. Other than that, it seemed to be a good system at that point.

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**JC:** Did the instrumentation, did that maybe change how you arranged the song, or what song you might have chosen? Was there something that said, well, this maybe better suits this kind of instrumentation that you had?

**RC:** Yes, we were pretty close. It’s always best to have as many brass as you can because that's going to be the steam for the band, so trumpets, trombones, horns, euphonium, we use the baritones, and tubas, and all that. So, we really limit those. We did limit clarinets. We were somewhat close most years, maybe off by half a dozen, so maybe one year we might have twenty-four trombones, maybe next year we might have thirty trombones, and a case of that. We did have one unique year that we had instead of marching sixteen tubas, we had twenty-four tubas, and that makes a big difference because there's a sound phenomenon that occurs when you increase the bass of the band. It doubles the sound of the band, really. That worked out well for us. [laughs] That was just one year. We had tubas that barely worked. To come up with twenty-four tubas of the kind we had, we were scraping the bottom for that, but it worked. It worked.

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**JC:** You talked about the people at that they’re really excited to come and join. They sign up six months ahead of time. How does that kind of impact the culture of the band or shape the camaraderie or the excitement? Do you think that's an important thing for what you had in the band?

**RC:** Yes. It's going to happen when you do that, or if you have an audition procedure where you actually have cuts. The thing you got to remember is that students are going to spend—well, we had on the record, an hour and a half rehearsal time each day, and then Saturday, the game day, now we didn't have a performance every Saturday, but we also had away trips, we also had the Extravaganza [Band Extravaganza], and some other performances here and there too. With that many people together that many hours of a semester, it's got to be conducive to real fun and joy, but get the work done as well. It was great to have that kind of enthusiasm, and it was really necessary to build that kind of enthusiasm, so that we didn't have cases where we would have people dropping out through the semester. Which most bands have that problem--at that time. It's interesting to see. You start writing shows, and you got a certain number, and of course, as the season goes through, you write smaller shows because there's less people, just losing their interest and that. So, I was extremely excited that we kept our numbers up. We basically ended up with same number of players that we started with, maybe one or two, but we also had a couple of injuries like a broken leg or whatever. But they were still part of the band. But we really didn't lose players from that standpoint. I think it was really fun to work with the band and leadership. I mean, between the drum majors and the right guides that we trained ahead of time, brought them in and that type of thing and really worked with them. They would be, kind of, the ones to lead their row and be the inspiration for, you know, this is the way we do it and teaching traditions for each instrument as well. So, yes. Real important.

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**JC:** You mentioned traditions. What were some of the fun traditions or some of the unique things that were at Iowa State that really made it special or different from other universities?

**RC:** That was the one thing I tried to work on a little more was trying to come up with a little more traditions because it didn't seem like there was a lot of traditions there. I mean, the name, the ISUCF‘V’MB [Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band], was a tradition, but that really didn't show on the field. That was just the name. There was the X cadence, the swing cadence. That was kind of a unique thing. We didn't really do anything. There wasn't anything formation-wise. It was kind of a big tradition that's been done for decades, and whatever. I tried several things. 1986 I just when I was charting the pregame and coming up with the pregame formation, I looked at other previous films, and that--and of course, X cadence with running on the field was entertaining because of the cyclone and that type of thing. I thought, Well, what can we do with that?

The thing that threw me off with Iowa State is the stadium back then was two equal halves, and the home side was the opposite side. It was kind of weird, and the people that sat in the elite section was on the opposite side of the stadium that you normally have for home side. So, I thought, Well, this is kind of unique because usually you can have the shows all face one side because that's your home side. I thought, Well, maybe if I do this thing with the ISU and have it reverse, so it floats on the field and then reverses, and then the *I* becomes the *U*, and the *U* becomes *I*, and the *S* stays the same because the *S*, doesn’t matter which way you look at it, you know. I thought, Well, that would be really cool. So, I charted that out in 1986. That was the first pregame we did, and we did not have to do pregame for Iowa because when you go to away game, you don't have pregame. You just do halftime. The first time they saw pregame, I think, was the second game of the season that year, 1986. I thought it worked out well, you know, reverse the letters, playing the fight song. Still get into it with swirling, X cadence, and that. And that looked really cool.

The following year in 1987, I tried something else because the one thing that a lot of stadiums have is you don't see the band until they come out for their entrance, so I tried a four-corner entrance. Again, just trying to come up with something traditional. It was somewhat effective. It was kind of hard to split the band up and kind of hide them between the four corners. But the idea was just trying to come up with that. It was somewhat effective. I just thought, you know, I like the floating ISU. It just seemed to flow down the field, play to both sides of the field. I guess that is a traditional because they still have that now, so I'm glad. I still have the charts from 1986. But I scribbled that by hand, and I just thought, and again, it was interesting because it was that stadium, the way they treated it not like a normal home side, and I thought, Well, we got to play to both sides so let’s flip the ISU around. From that standpoint, that was kind of a tradition we did.

Some of the things too that I felt like I wanted to start. Got to create some more traditions and that, and some of us had to do it off the field stuff. In other words, you see the band at the football games, you see the pep band at the basketball games, but, you know, can the band still have an image off the field? Back then we used to go to the bookstore and there would be racks of postcards. They would have a picture of the stadium, a picture of Beardshear Hall, stuff like that. Why would you want to picture the stadium without the band on the field, spelling something out? So, I contacted a postcard company, and we actually got a picture of the band on the field, so you go to the bookstore and there's the band. Again, it's the image type of thing, off the field.

Nineteen eighty-six was also the year we started the recording projects, which were never done. That was kind of a rush job to get that first one done. What I wanted was a two-year set, so would take two years worth of recordings and make one decent recording of it. Believe it or not, that was back in cassette days, but we were just thrilled to have that because now we can sell these because people come to the game, you give them for Christmas presents, birthday presents, whatever, and have the sound of Iowa State marching band in their car when they're driving to a game or whatever. That was a big thing, to kind of, again, have the band be off the field but still have a presence and an image. Again, just try to push the image thing, I came up with the band logo and made t-shirts so that when the people walk around campus, they see that. Because we really don't have anything other than a jacket that Kappa Kappa Psi [National Honorary Service Fraternity for band members] sold that you had to buy. It wasn’t something that was automatic. I really felt like the image of the band was something that really was lacking to a point where most bands had a lot of that going for them. And I just really pushed to see what we could do to do that. In 1987, that's when I hired a plane and a pilot, and a–. We set Dennis Warren [spelling?] up in a plane at halftime. We sent him up during the Iowa game because the state was filled for that. It's the only time the stadium was filled. At the right moment when you have the cyclones formation on the field, that's where the picture was taken, and sold those as well. It’s not just a picture of the stadium, might as well have a picture of the band on the field as well to really reinforce Iowa State in that, but also put a plug in for the band. Those were some of the traditions.

And the other thing I noticed this, again, a lot was due to the circumstance--the football team was not very good, and the season ended on a flat note because the last half of last game was always cold, and it was just a real downer. Game’s over. Okay, let's turn in our uniforms, turn in our instruments. That’s it. Now we’re done. And that type of thing. So, I said, We got to do something better than that. Actually, because it was so cold by that time of year, the band got a little slap-happy and did some things that really—let’s be a better image for the university. I told myself, The band needs another time to be together. So, the following year, which was 1987. I said, “We have to have a time let down, to release, to end the season. So, we're not ending in on the football field.” So, we started the Band Banquet [end of the season ceremony for the students], and I think the following year is when we started the slide show to kind of cap the season as well. Those are traditions that I feel good that we put in there.

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**JC:** And they're still there, again, like you said. You mentioned travel, maybe talk a little bit about what it took to get a band from Ames, Iowa, to say, Boulder, Colorado, all in one piece. What did the travel all look like?

**RC:** Well, we had myself, Joe Christensen, director of bands, we had the assistant director of bands, Dan Phillips for just a couple of years, Pat Miles for a couple years, we had Betty Bush [Temporary Instructor (1989-1990)] for the other time I was there. And we had one secretary. So, we had to do our own travel stuff. We divided up some of the work, most of myself and Joe [Joseph Christensen] because we were on summer side for that, but it was a challenge because you're trying to do the creative stuff and deal with the band, but you're calling bus companies, you're calling hotels, you're trying to procure a banquet for lunch or breakfast or something like that. Contact the Athletic Department of the school you're going to. Contact the band. It was a lot of work. It really was. [laughs] You wouldn’t imagine the football coach or assistant coaches having to do that for the football team, but poor band had to do that. It was very time-consuming, but it had to be done. We didn't have a choice. There was a process. I mean, you had to grab the buses first because that was the biggest expense, then the hotel. Then we would find a host band to host us the night before the game, and then a hotel afterwards. Then meal package, whatever. Usually, after the game, we would have a meal together at the hotel—check into the hotel, have a meal. Then there was breakfast and then the bus trip back. Colorado trip, Oklahoma trip, those were fourteen hour bus rides. I mean, those were long, and I hate to say, but boring. [both laugh] Travel all the way through Nebraska and tell me how you liked it. [both laugh] At night time, we can't see anything.

But they were great. I loved having the band at the high school. I mentioned that earlier, because it was just so showy, and so impressive, and so--just a shot beyond for these high school programs. But we would have interesting things happen when the students would be divided up with the band parents. So, sometimes the organization would be very good, sometimes, an hour and a half later after the after the high school show was over, we would be still trying to get the last couple of kids put in. Then we had a year where they couldn't put up all the kids, so we had to get a hotel for a couple, about a handful of kids. We had our challenge in that, but we worked our way through it.

There was one time--I think it was 1987--we went to Kansas, and their band gave up halftime for us to be able to do halftime. But their band had a competition the next day, so they were going to do their halftime show after the game. So, we thought, Okay, we got to stay for half of the game. Well, we didn't realize in Kansas, the game ended up being seven-seven. Well, you have to break the tie. By the time the game was over an hour and a half later, it was thirty-five to thirty-five. It was eleven-thirty at night. The fog was rolling in, and their high school band was doing a halftime show because they had to do it, and then we had to get put up with the band students that night. So that was one of those circumstances, but, you know, we live through it.

**JC:** Makes for an experience, right?

**RC:** You live through it. Yes.

[00:37:01]

**JC:** Were there any times where the band kind of experiences difficult times or challenges while you were director?

**RC:** Yes. You know, our biggest enemy was weather. We had times when we just had just three or four days of rain or something like that, and when it’s forty degrees, fifty degrees, you can’t take a band out and really work on anything in that. So, you spend a lot of time inside really honing in on music. You can spend time on describing the charts and explaining the drill and that. But there were some times, because we did not really have a real practice field—a lot of universities have a modified practice field that’s astroturf, so no matter what happens, you can still go out there, even with a raincoat. Leave the instruments back inside, learn the drill at least in that. We did not have that. We had muddy fields if it rained like that. We had times we actually had to go down and, between myself and Joe Christensen, paint lines on a parking lot down by CY Stevens [Auditorium] after we got permission. Here we are with the machine, and paint, and everything else like that, and adding that to our job resume. Just because it was a paved field and that. And of course, you lose rehearsal times because everyone’s got to go down to CY Stevens now, which is a fifteen minute hike to go down there and practice. That was our biggest enemy. Those were challenges.

The other thing that was a problem--well, it was happening in 1991, and that was when the travel budget was yanked from us, and we have a very, very small budget for that. That was a year we had to tell everyone, Sorry, we can't travel. We do what really can. We're lucky we can be on the field, but we're not being funded the way we should, and this is where we're at. So that was a hard year. That was a hard year. Students rose to the occasion, but that's a fun thing, to go out and travel for the time you put in, the blood, sweat, and tears you put in, and get a little trip out of it is something to look forward to. So, that was a problem.

[00:39:19]

**JC:** Sure. So when you came in, did you get any advice from any other directors? You mentioned Dan Phillips would have been here before I think perhaps you got here. Then maybe as you had decided to move on, did you give any advice to subsequent directors?

**RC:** Well, Dan was here as assistant director and that. What I really enjoyed was working with Dan and Joe Christensen because they knew that they wanted the band to shift back to the high step, energetic thing and that. So, in a sense, any director that would have done that would have succeeded. I was lucky I was the one that did. So, that really worked out well. I always called ourselves the three musketeers. I remember we would meet over at Memorial Hall. We would get out of the music building, we would meet over there at eight o'clock in the morning, get ourselves a coffee, whatever, that type of thing, and just sit there and go through list after list of things that had to be done that week. Dan would say, “Oh, I can do that.” And Joe would say, “Well, I can do that. I'm going to take this.” We kind of all divided it up. Really great years because everyone knew the work had to get done, and we could share it, and like I said before, Dan did some of the arranging. Those were where we are the most creative because we had the talent to do that. After Dan left, the person we hired—that was hired, I shouldn’t say we hired him—really didn’t have much marching skill at all. He did best he could, but he didn't have the marching skills. So, it was even harder then to pass around the work list and say, What can you do? Because he just didn't have the background that much to do that. But, you know, getting there in 1986 with Dan, with Joe, I mean it just worked out really well. When I left, the thing I made sure that we left every form, every letter, every marching band chart, every hotel list in a compilation book so that the next person could easily go through and see what was done. Obviously, had the videotapes to watch of halftime shows. We kept all the music, so we had a very huge library of music. So, if they wanted to do something that was already done. You know, I was just hoping that I left enough stuff there for the next person to come in and be able to take over the job.

[00:41:51]

**JC:** Kind of along those lines, how do you think if the band has changed over time from 1986 when you started to the end of your tenure, and now what you've seen it it's done since then? How do you think that's changed over time, and maybe what's been consistent across time?

**RC:** A couple of things I think about, number one is that--well, you know, as we work on really trying to change the image, just making it more available and that. That really seemed to help out quite a bit. We had posters, we had postcards, we had a number [of] recordings. In fact, we started out with cassettes, and the last recording we did, actually, a CD for a change. We did that every two years. So, the band, from that standpoint, was able to build an image that was off the field. You didn't have to go to a football game to see the band or hear the band. I forgot your initial question. [laughs]

[00:42:52]

**JC:** Well, I'm just asking about how it's maybe changed over time. You know, you kind of take one spot to another--

**RC:** Oh! So, what I think what’s happened is that I think technology has helped out quite a bit because now you can chart, like I said, individual coordinates for the players. What I think is cool is you can actually have their phones attached to their instrument now. Instead of having a music wire, they have the phone wire now. So, the coordinates, they can learn it that way. I just think there's a lot more technology that's available to make more quicker progress, with everything and that. So, it’s still the high energy. It still has the red and white uniforms with the gold trim on it. It's still active in participation in the games themselves, which is something I really pushed with adding a bunch of cheers. I think they have added more. So, they're not just sitting there waiting for halftime and playing at the quarter changes. They're part of the game and part of the, you know, part of the activity there. Which we need to do. I mean, that's what we're there to do is be part of the athletic event. So, from that standpoint, the band really looks great now. What's nice is I think with the improvement in football, and winds and that, there’s more people that want to be in the bands. The band is actually bigger, which doesn't hurt.

[00:44:25]

**JC:** Doesn't hurt, yes. You mentioned, you know, different kinds of performances. So, were there things that the band did that were maybe outside of just--you talked a little bit about Band Extravaganza, but outside the playing field, where there other performances that you had?

**RC:** Yes, we usually had maybe two or three things that the athletic department asked us to do. We actually had a few things that were in the spring semester that were kind of asked of us from the president's office or whatever. Because they wanted to have the marching band present at some big event. Capital campaign was one, and that. We were willing to do that because we knew that number one, we wanted to make sure our faces were there, and we knew that the band represented the clean-cut student life on campus. You know, productive student life on campus. We did probably about six or seven performances a year. Some of them might not be full band, but it could be a thirty-piece band or something like thirty-two-piece band, depending on what we needed. But yes, there was one year that we had call from the president's office. They were having some big dinner with a lot of the big donors and that, and they wanted the marching band to come up, and I said, “Well, you know, the problem is that marching band is only a fall semester thing,” and that man just really would twist their arm. And Joe said, “We have to do this. We really have to do this.” We hadn’t even sent the uniforms into the cleaners yet. [Chapman laughs] So we had them--the people that we chose, I think we chose about thirty-two players—come back. And you got to remember, this is not just show up at some hotel down in Des Moines. This means, okay, we got to have rehearsals so we can polish off what we play. We have to have some kind of organization about how we're going to march in, where we’re going to stand. We just got to, you know, stand for band and just kind of amoeba in. We're dealing with this uniform situation because we had to go find a uniform that doesn’t look so bad and let's see what we can do with it, and stuff like that. But we did what we needed to do. We stayed, for the most part, on the good side of the upper administration, which is a good thing. But, yes, there was a lot of performances like that that we had to do.

[00:47:02]

**JC:** Sure. We can talk about performances and talk a little bit about cassette tape. So, there was a television show called “Coach,” and the Iowa State University band was chosen to help do a segment for that. Can you kind of tell us some of that story?

**RC:** Sure! That was 1984, [1995] and about halfway through the season, I got this letter from MCA [Music Corporation of America] who's the parent company for the production of “Coach,” and they were going to have a marching band competition where they ask you to videotape a segment on the field in reflection of the show called “Coach.” At first, I thought, Well, what can we do? And it turned out that I thought, It wouldn't be a bad shot to do this. I asked Andy Mask and Matt Hovey [Mathew Hovey, Music (Curriculum) (1990-1996)], who was our student assistant at that time to kind of come up with something like we did when we did the Johnny Orr [Iowa State Men’s Basketball Coach (1980-1994)] surprise letter where it kind of explodes into the word Orr. I say, Can we do that with ‘Coach? And said, “It's going to be up to you guys to chart that, but there's a concept and let's see what we can do with it. It's last game of the season.” I think it was Nebraska, so it was supposed to be a pretty big crowd because Nebraska, back then, used to bring everyone to the game. [Chapman laughs] Because there’s nothing to do in Nebraska, you know. So, I thought we could probably get a good videotape because with Dennis being the videotape master, he was. I knew it would be a good-quality take. The band plays the theme from the “Coach” show, and we march a little bit, and then something blows out of the word coach, and we sent it in, thinking, Who knows?

I got a call from them about a month later saying they've chosen our band, so what that allowed us to do was to have that portion of the show shown on national television as one of the ending episodes. So, instead of their normal episode ending, they swapped it out with that, and there was the Iowa State Marching Band marching with “Coach” and playing “Coach” and that. We actually, when I did the arrangement of it, I modified it so it ended with a little bit of a paraphrase of Fights [“ISU Fights”] in there so we can put our little ISU stamp on it.

What was fun about that was that out in Hollywood, the USC [University of Southern California] band always gets the gigs because they're there, they're in their backyard. So, every time someone in Hollywood needs some band or something like that to perform, whether it be they need to ban the show up for Wheel of Fortune or some movie or something like that, it's always Art Bartner [Arthur Bartner, Director of USC Band (1970-2020)] and the USC Band, the Trojan Band. I get so tired of that because they just happen to be there, willing to do it. I thought, Well, finally, we get a band that’s not USC band on television for once. So, that was a great thing, and they thought it was cool [laughs]--it's kind of a joke now--they wanted to produce ten thousand CDs of us playing the “Coach” song. What I don't think they realized is the “Coach” song is like thirty seconds, and the fight song is like twenty-one seconds, so the entire CD is like less than two minutes or something like that. But they sent us--and I think that's a miscalculation on their part as far as what they did with that--but they sent us ten thousand cassette tapes [Chapman laughs] known as “The ‘Coach’ Tapes.”

**JC:** “The ‘Coach’ Tapes.” That’s right.

**RC:** But, you know, it was just--again, thinking about image was a great thing for the university to see that the band was on a national television program like that.

[00:51:09]

**JC:** Kind of as a personal note, you had a little extra piece to do on the show as well, is that right?

**RC:** Yes, they brought me out, and it was kind of goofy thing. I thought that I could work a better ending than they did, [laughs] for the show because I was on the very end of the show. But they had me come out, and it didn't have anything to do with ISU at all, you know. I was hoping they would do something like I’d try to convince them--I forget the team they were at the point, the Breakers from Florida. Now, it would be fun for me to walk in and say, “Hey, I'm Harold Hill, [character from *the Music Man* who poses as a band instructor in order to scam a small town] and you need a marching band,” or something like that, you know, [Chapman laughs] a little innuendo and flip it around and says Iowa State on it or something like that at least. But they had some other thing to do, but yes that was, I thought, a real good feather in the cap for Iowa State to have their band on a national program like that.

[00:52:04]

**JC:** Okay. Well, are there any other kind of special or unique memories or things that kind of jump out yet, that hey, this was something that was special or different that kind of was unique to Iowa State.

**RC:** You know, I give the band a lot of credit because one year, we had one of our trips to Iowa we had been contacted by the Amish community over at Iowa City, and they volunteered a number of families that would put up our band members that night after the high school game. I thought, Well, do our students really know they don't have lights? So, after the football game, you're going to go back, and there's going to be some candlelight there, and that's about it. You're not going to have an alarm clock and things like that. I thought, I’m not sure this work out well, but I just, I remember going to rehearsal saying, “How many people would be interested in that?” And geez, a number for that experience. A number of hands went up. We had thirty-five people that were able to be housed by the Amish people, and what was interesting about that, I remember we had pictures of it. We collected the students at the high school. The buses take them to high school so we had six buses sitting there waiting for everyone to come back from all the parents that were bringing them back. Well, the Amish don't have cars. They have horse and buggies—and you had to be fully dressed. So, here's the band member being brought back, full uniform, in a horse and buggy, you know, to the bus to go to the game that day. I just thought, first of all, I thought it was so cool that that many people in the band wanted to do that. Second of all, the Amish volunteered that. What an experience. Just it was almost hilarious how you see these horse and buggies showing up at the buses with band students fully dressed because you got to be fully dressed to get on a bus, go to the game, and all that. That was really interesting. So, those were some of the standouts. I mean, there was a lot. I mean, I could go stories forever, but you know.

I remember going, for the first year I was there, we went to Colorado too that year, besides Iowa. The staff always stayed in the hotel. The students went home with the band students and parents, and then we went to the hotel. I got up in the morning and--I forget what the call time was, pretty doggone early--I got ready, and I come out of the room, and I'm looking around, and no one else seems to be up at all. So, I go knock on Dan Phillip’s door and ask him, “Dan, what's going on? Got to get going!”

He says, “Did you remember we have a time change?” [laughs] I was still on central time, [Chapman laughs] and I got him got Joe and Dan very mad at me because I woke them up too early [Chapman laughs] but I was raring to go. But again, just things that happened that I was just proud of the band and proud of Iowa State. Just the compliments we got, especially when we went to away games. People grabbing me from the stands. I'd go up after halftime to go get a drink or something like that from the concession stands. People say, “You’re the band director. Your band is just amazing! Why can’t our band be like yours?” That was just a common thing throughout. It was just so neat to hear that from people that, you know, saw the difference and appreciated the energy that we were really striving for with the shows.

[00:55:44]

**JC:** What would you say kind of sets the ISUCF‘V’MB [Iowa State University Cyclone Football ‘Varsity’ Marching Band] apart from--you know, not just the name--but what sets it apart from different schools? What's something that’s unique or special about them?

**RC:** I think it's the decision to cater towards an athletic crowd. You know, both show design and by music selection. A lot of high schools are doing more choreographed shows with percussion pits and very highly artistic shows, but I don't think those are going to work. I know those aren't going to work so much at an event such as Iowa State, and a lot of colleges have tried that. In fact, that's kind of what I replaced when I came to Iowa State was kind of that concept, going back to the let's cater to our half of the crowd. So, I would say that's got to be pretty significant there. And the spirit. Spirit has always been very strong, and just doing everything from--we tried kind of a pregame performance outside of our collection spot over by Hilton. We tried to march halfway to the stadium, stand by some of the crowds and play, but we never really got the crowds to show up and that type of thing. Then [the] last couple of years I decided, let's do the circle stadium. So, we split the band—I’m sorry, we didn’t split the band. We would go all the way around the whole circle which ended up inside both halves, and that. That seemed to be really interesting, and now that the fact that they have this outside performance, pregame performance now is just icing on the cake, showing that this is the event, and college football needs to look different than pro football or pro sports. I think that's the flavor that Iowa State band gives that because the pro sports don't have a band like that, don't have a fight song, don't have a band that can be visible and part of the university. So, from that standpoint, I think that's great they have us those events that make it a college flavor, a college atmosphere as opposed to just going to a pro game and, Let's go find a bar afterwards and go drink, like that. It was fun for the students because the crowd loves to go down, We will go march down to Hilton to their pregame performance. Lot of high fives and thumbs up and everything else like that. People want that.

Then, of course, the Alumni Band tops because there's about, I would say, roughly 10 percent of the college bands in the country actually have an Alumni Band, and I think that makes a big difference because it shows the band members that, first of all, they're a chapter in the history of the band. You know, that's existed with traditions and a mold for a long time. It's something the alumni can still go out and do. You don't see the football team come back and run plays or whatever. They can’t even bend down anymore. But I think that really speaks highly of what the band meant to them as students and now as grown-ups further along--gayfully employed grown-ups, some retired—that they can come back and still exhibit that spirit that was really asset to the band.

[00:59:49]

**JC:** Sure. You mentioned the Alumni Band. What's been your involvement with the Alumni Band?

**RC:** I have come back a couple of times. Mike Golemo [Michael Golemo, Director of Bands and University Professor of Music (1999-present)] is very—can’t thank him enough. Every time I come back, he wants to conduct something [inaudable] or something like that. And it's great to just to talk to people. Some of them are not from my generation, when I was the director there, but I think they understand my role. Again, it's just a leader in a chapter of the band. With the pictures we put up in the band hall, and that trying to create the idea that this is a long-standing tradition. The band’s over a hundred years old, and you get to be part of it, you know, and you get to have fun like people fifty years ago, seventy years ago, and when they show you what those people look like sometimes on the football field, it shows the camaraderie, it the friendship, and the melding of the ages too, I think. It shows different generations of people, and I love it when there's attention to someone that has someone in the band at the current time, or a third-generation band member, or who knows what. That's to me really pretty amazing.

[01:01:19]

**JC:** Well, are there any other questions that I haven't asked that maybe you wish I would have, or any other subjects that you maybe wanted to touch on that we maybe haven't touched on yet?

[pause]

**RC:** Not really. I mean there was, going back to challenges, one of the challenges we had was just lack of a lot of the financial funding. Which really presented some problems, and it was just a point that we couldn’t afford a lot of things we would have liked to have done. Go get some custom arrangements or go get additional props for something. I mean, we did the best we could, but we really had our hands tied behind our back a lot of the time with that, just because we did not have that kind of funding. And I know--speak with Joe afterwards on that, and when they came up with the idea that we could have some of the funding from the paraphernalia logo. I can’t figure out what they call it. Trademark. Yes, that type of thing. Made a lot of sense because, again, that's such an important part of the university, and as I said before, having the president call you wanting you to have some band members present at certain events. You knew the quirks of it. I'm glad that has happened, and the funding is a lot better. And the staffing I wish would be better. That's the one drawback, because Iowa State does not have a graduate program in music. Every school does in the Big Twelve except for Iowa State. That eliminates a lot of grad assistants. When I was a graduate assistant, I was there with two other people. I mean, I remember the Iowa band would show up, and the first half of their bus, bus number one, half of it was the staff. The director, the assistant director, the assistant director, the assistant director, and then ten graduate assistants that would come off the bus. As we talked about trip planning and all that organization had to go for that. Some of that can be trickled down and dealt with a lot more staffing, and when it came down to basically Joe and myself and a little help from another assistant, it was just a challenge, a real challenge, you know. So.

[01:04:08]

**JC:** Any other things you wanted to touch on?

**RC:** I guess the thing I enjoyed more than anything was how students rose to the occasion. They knew they wanted to go out there and not look bad. It meant that we might be rehearsing in the dark. I mean we actually ended up having to in the last November games, that’s usually two games, we have practices that ended up in the dark because we had daylight savings time kick on. Between that and between the weather. We did have one game where we had a total blizzard. I called the athletic department up and said, “What's the scoop?”

They said, We’re having a game.

I said, “Okay, we will be there with what we can.” We had some people that actually were down in Des Moines that couldn't even get up thirty-five because it was closed. We made a decision to allow the students because it was minus, with wind chill factor—it was horizontal snow—and it was minus, I think, twelve or something like that. So, I told the students, “Don't worry about your uniforms, or wear what you can but wear anything else that's going to keep you protected from frostbite or whatever.” We were there at the game, and full spirit with what we could. We had probably had about two dozen people that couldn't make it to the game because they were stuck because of roads being closed and that. But we were there for that game. They were snow on the game, and we couldn't see the lines on the field. The refs didn’t want to be there, the players didn’t want to be there. I think there was maybe a thousand people showed up for the game, but the band was there. Again, it's that idea of rising to the occasion, which every time we had to come up to tell the band, let's say, some bad news or something like that if there was bad news, their reaction was always supportive. I think they trusted us that we needed to do this this way, there's a reason, and they weren’t going to challenge it. That's shown a lot of respect from the students, and certainly made life easier for us. It’s always great to see--I'll be at an airport or something like that, someone will come up, catch me, and, “Oh! Did you remember me? I was in the band.” [Chapman laughs]

The other thing I really enjoyed too was we--as opposed to some college bands--we did a different show every game. What I liked about that is that number one, it's not boring for the audience because they haven't seen it yet. Number two, it’s not boring for the students because it's different, and we are not just pounding the same show down their throat week after week. Again, thinking about what happens after the season is over. The number of people that catch me and say, “Oh, I just wanted to say,” we did a swing show and, “ever since I was like five years old, ‘Sing, Sing, Sing’ was like the—I *died* to play that, and when I found out we’re playing that—that’s my favorite song!” Or someone else would say, “We played this. We played this Chicago tune,” or we did this, and for every student, it was different, but that was the nice thing about having shows that were different each week is that there was something in there that they really enjoyed. They heard it when they were little, and here they're in college now playing it. We stumbled on some things that, you were talking about traditions and that, we stumbled on “Hush.” I think that was about 1990 or something like that, and there was just a solo arrangement that had just seemed to create thunder.

I said, “Okay, let's do it the next year, too, as it stands too. Let's do the next year.” Again, we start a tradition by accident, but it's just you keep your ears and eyes open for things like that. It worked out well, and it was less than a minute and a half. [both laugh] And it was easy to transfer, to rotate everything into the pep band then, even though we had to cut down the band size. But it was easy to rotate because we already had some music that they could play. We could add more music to it. The spirit was there. We didn't have to really do anything different about the spirit of the band. You had to be in marching band to be in pep band. Even what I thought was incredible was how many flags we--I shouldn’t say how many--we had a small handful of flags would audition for pep band and make it then. They were they were flags in marching band, but they were wind players in pep band. I thought that was really pretty amazing that they did that. But that was an easy transition, that was a really easy transition. It was just hard to have to cut the band down because we had more players than we needed. Well, they only allowed us on this box because we're in the corners of the thing there. Of course, then the other thing was we always, since we did have a good basketball team and people wanted to be in the band, we had closed season play. The number was always thirty. We had to take thirty to Kansas City, we had to take thirty to NCAA and that was always hard. But the golden rule was we take the senior level band because they're the ones that do deserve it. They have been in band for three, four years. They deserve to go. So. But that was an easy transition to take the band from marching band to pep band, and we didn't have to practice an hour and a half each day. [Chapman laughs] But as I said before, we had we had times we had to go longer on rehearsal. You know, I remember one time we had in 1986, we were doing a country western show, *western* show. We learned the show in two days because it rained. It was like torrential rains for three days. So, we learn all the music and all that. We went out Thursday, and we knocked that show out. I couldn't believe it. So. But again, it's the enthusiasm and you got to keep that going.

[01:10:39]

**JC:** Yes. Well, anything else? Any last comments?

**RC:** Well, you know, one of the things Joe and I tried to do is show the band at its peak at a much different--I'm not sure what kind of words I need to choose for this one--put it in the perspective of, this is big time now. So, even when we create the band brochure, we want not just to show the pictures of the band, we wanted to show like a news, ESPN camera taking a picture of the band, showing the band on TV or something like that. We wanted to show this is not just the high school days where you know you go out there perform and that. This is big time, and you might be on national TV. You might be, you know, whatever. That was one of the things we worked on very hard is to show the band at that level. Because this is big time. I mean, it's fun to go to travel and go to a long-distance game like a Colorado game and have a couple thousand people patting you on the back because you’re there from Iowa State that traveled as fans. Or basketball, whatever. We always got a good reception.

We did try one time to do a performance at the state fair because the state fair was like a week and half before school started, and I thought, Well, it would be fun to get a group of students to go down there and just play. Because Iowa State had a booth in one of the big pavilions along with Iowa. I thought, Well, Iowa band does this, well, so let's see if we can get a small group of people to go down and toot their horn and that. We tried it. We got a couple of the merchants upset at us because it drew attention from them selling their lazy chairs, stuff like that. But we stood by the Iowa State booth and played a couple of tunes, and that was about it. But we tried it, but I think the fair felt like it was just—it would have been great if both bands were there, but if it was just us, they didn't think that was so great. We didn't get asked back. [Chapman laughs] But, I mean, we behaved ourselves. It was a full presentation. We just weren’t very well rehearsed because it was just before the season started and people haven't got their lips up yet. We had a short rehearsal before we went down there, but because we could use a couple more days on it, I think. [Chapman laughs] You know, so.

[01:13:18]

**JC:** Good. Well, anything else you want to chat about?

**RC:** Well, I--a lot of inside stories, but I think the main things we've covered for the most part. The goal was always trying to not be satisfied with what we've done but try to see if we can improve upon it. So, we worked hard trying to make like the best Extravaganza. That's where we decided to have the percussion come from the pit, smoke the pit before they came out. Of course, their changing the shows all the time now because it always gave us through life from that standpoint, but the staff itself, particularly me and Joe, had real strong discussions about what we might do differently, what other options there might be, or whatever angles we might consider or something. Just to keep things fresh. Just to keep the band being innovative, and attractive, and whatever else we could do.

[01:14:28]

**JC:** Great. Okay, well, thank you very much for your time. I do appreciate it.

**RC:** Of course, two minutes after we hang up, I'll think of some more things. [laughs]

**JC:** We'll just get some more video of you later on.

**RC:** Yes. So yes, I'll just keep an eye out. I think, like I said, I wrote down a couple of things, and I think I've covered everything that I had somewhere along with questions and that, so.

**JC:** Thank you.

**RC:** Jay, it’s been great talking to you.

**JC:** Yes, it’s been great talking to you too.