

Citrus Hall of Fame Oral History Interview
Florida Southern College

Interviewee:	Jerry J. Chicone, Jr.
Interviewer:	Eugene Charles Fanning
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Others present:	Sue Chicone, wife of Jerry Chicone
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Fanning: *Okay to begin, could you please state your full name?*

Chicone: I'm Jerry Chicone, Jr.

Fanning: *Okay. And could you tell us about growing up in Orlando?*

Chicone: Well actually, I was born in Orlando because that was the only hospital in Orange County but my parents lived in a little town west of Orlando called Winter Garden. So I lived in Winter Garden through the ... my sixteenth birthday at which time my folks then moved to Orlando. So I moved to Orlando with them naturally, so I'm really a resident of both Orlando and Winter Garden because our groves have always been located in the Winter Garden area.

Fanning: *Okay, great. And your father was heavily involved in citrus?*

Chicone: Yeah, my Dad came to Tampa in 1920 when he was 20 years old and his first job was working with the Florida Citrus Exchange. And he worked there for a year in the office and they said, "Well we're either going to send you to Fort Pierce or Winter Garden to be the office manager of the exchange there."

And he had heard that the mosquitoes were bad in Fort Pierce so he got on the train and rode to Winter Garden. And he was the office manager of the Winter Garden Citrus Growers Exchange for five years at which time he formed a partnership with M. Y. McMillen and they went into their own business of citrus, real estate, and insurance.

Fanning: *Okay, great. And so you really grew up around citrus then? Was that a big part of your childhood and your childhood memories?*

Chicone: Well certainly. My dad used to always take me to the grove with him. In those days they didn't have all these fancy four-wheel drive vehicles that we have today and all the citrus people drove Chevrolets. And they were pretty bumpy and we got stuck in the grove quite a few times. I remember jacking up the car and putting brush under to get out. So I spent a lot of time with my dad in the grove and I always enjoyed it.

And you know, in my time growing up like in the late '30's and early '40's there were 60,000 acres of citrus in Orange County, today there are 3,000 acres. So it was the major economic force of Orange County—that's why the county's named "Orange."

Fanning: *Right. So you've seen a lot of changes in the area then over the years. What sticks out in your mind as really ... the things that have changed the most I guess?*

Chicone: Well, when I ... my first memories of citrus growing up with my dad was that all the picking crews, they were picking in the wooden orange boxes that haul 90 pounds and everything was for the packing house. And in fact, one man picked up a 90 pound box of oranges by himself and put it onto the truck. They don't make men like that today. And so everything was packing house.

And then I remember vividly when I was in dad's office right after the Second World War and Bob Bradford who was the chief manager of Heller Brothers came in and says, "Well Jerry," says, "have good news for you," says, "We're going to give you a dollar more a box than we contracted for." And I heard that and I said, "My gosh, it's not Christmastime, why is this happening?" He says "Well, they just invented orange concentrate and the market's gone crazy and all your fruit's going into the concentrate market."

So stage number two was concentrate. And that was great and Anita Bryant came and we were enjoying great sales and great covers. Then all of a sudden, chilled juice came in a carton and that was a big deal. So my mother and her generation squeezed oranges from the packing house. My wife and her generation used concentrate. My daughters and her generation pour out of a carton. Those are the three major stages that I've seen that we've gone through.

Fanning: *Okay, great. Well, and we'll come back to some of that but I want to go back to some of your early years and ... in your biography online it says you were the youngest Eagle Scout ...*

Chicone: True.

Fanning: *... in your area. And we were curious, what was your Eagle project?*

Chicone: Well, in those days Eagles didn't have a project like they have today. In those days you had to be 12 years old to join the Scouts, now it's 11 years old. And so times were just a little different and what the requirements to be an Eagle Scout is you have to have so many merit badges, and I think it was about 21 or something. But as far as a special project ... that wasn't required when I were there.

Fanning: *Okay. Alright. So you went to the University of Florida.*

Chicone: Right. And many of my friends came down here to Florida Southern by the way. So it was ... Florida Southern was a very popular college in those days. But I had been going to football games with my dad at Gainesville for six years prior to me going to college so it was kind of unwritten that I was going to Gainesville.

Fanning: *Right.*

Chicone: And I was, you know, happy to be there.

Fanning: *Right. And your connections to the University of Florida are pretty well known. How would you describe your time there? How did it impact your later life?*

Chicone: Well it impacted in several ways. Number one, I pledged Sigma Chi and later became president. And that was very good for me because taken my training as an Eagle Scout and having the leadership opportunity. We had about 140 members of the fraternity so that was interesting. Ironically, the president of the University of Florida when I was there was Dr. J. Wayne Reitz who had been a resident of Orlando who had worked with both the Florida and the Department of Agriculture.

My dad knew him well so, and he was a Sigma Chi. So we had a big reception for him and it was a good connection for me. In fact it was so good that after he retired as president and worked at the foundation

up there he used to call me and he would say, “Jerry, I’ve tried to get R. D. Keene, I’ve tried to get two or three others into the Hall of Fame and the Polk County boys don’t want to do that.”

And so I said, “Let me have it.” And so I got about six or seven men, and a woman or two, into the Hall of Fame. Not by myself but by encouraging the other members to really read the history and know what it was about. And so the University of Florida affected me greatly in those things. In addition, the people that I do business with now; I went to college with then—that’s 50 years ago.

Fanning: *And what kind of continued involvement have you had with the school?*

Chicone: Well, seems like I never left. I have been recognized as a distinguished alumni—which certainly didn’t go through my grades. [laughs] But I was president of the Gator Booster’s Organization. And have been honored by the Sigma Chis to be in their Hall of Fame. So it’s been ... they’ve done more for me than I’ve done for them.

Fanning: *And so after graduation, what did you do immediately after graduation?*

Chicone: Immediately I went into the United States Army, which they were required, all able-bodied men in those days. And when I came out of the Army there was a book out and it said, “Europe on five dollars a day.” And I had about a thousand dollars saved and I took that book and I went to Europe. And I stayed for about five or six months, ran out of money and I wired my dad, “I’d like to come home. Would you send me a plane ticket?”

And that’s ... and actually he sent me a boat ticket so I came back on a ship. And then I went to work for Battaglia Fruit Company, they had a packing house. And I didn’t want to start in the family’s operation, I thought I would start with someone else. And I worked so hard for him, went to work at 7:00 in the morning and got off at 11 at night because the packing house ran until 11. And it was fun but it was certainly tiring; I never got to see the outdoors and I decided right then that I wanted to work outdoors, not indoors.

So at the end of that year I talked to my dad and I said, “Well, I’ve worked for Mr. Battaglia and he’s tough as nails, you couldn’t be any tougher than that so I’d like to come work for you.” So I started right with the men in the fields, trying to learn what it took them to prune, and to hoe and things like that. And my dad had a great memory and he knew where everything was in every grove. And so I had to learn that and the way I learned it was that Henry Swanson was the agricultural agent of Orange County and I made a grove chart of all the groves that we had.

And that required you to walk with the graph paper and put down whether it was a mature tree, or a young tree, or a sick tree, what variety it was. So that every grove you had a plan, that you knew ... that’s the only way you could get to know them. And Henry Swanson taught us that if you had a vacant space in your grove you put a star by it. And I remember saying, “Why do you put a star?” And he said, “Because if it was a boarding house, that’s what you would call a ‘star boarder’ meaning he wouldn’t pay his rent.” So in those days you always tried to keep all your resets going and things of that sort.

So ... and of course I was so smart that I went out and bought several spiral notebooks and I wrote down every day what we did for a year. Because then, when the second year came all I had to do was open the notebook and I knew what to do. The only problem was, everything changed every day and nothing worked. So ... and I used to, all my buddies were lawyers, or doctors or something and so they always wore a tie every day and were all shaved up.

And I was out in the grove not dressed too well and I’d go to the same civic clubs they would attend but I’d never have a tie on. But I found out that that didn’t matter; it’s not how you were dressed it’s what you did.

Fanning: *And so, how did having your father involved in the business help you develop your career?*

Chicone: Well, my dad's been gone about 10 or 12 years and seldom does a day go by in business that I don't wonder what in the world he would do. He was a whole lot smarter than me, he had a whole lot more experience, and he was just a very good businessman. Now I have certainly grown the business since I was able to be the principal risk taker. But I don't consider myself any smarter than he was. And it's been a great experience; it certainly was a great start.

I get a big kick out of the citrus industry because it is Florida, and history is very interesting to know when you ... I have some old books that are 50 years ... 100 years old and I read about how they did things a hundred years ago. In fact, when we had our bad freeze in 1987, before we made a decision to replant, I went back and read the old, old history books. And I remember the line, and primarily there were Englishmen that were orange growers in Orlando and the line was, "Many left, those that stayed prospered." So I replanted based on the hope that history would repeat itself.

Fanning: *Okay. And talking about the freezes, I'd like to go back and touch on that some. How did the freezes affect your groves and your career?*

Chicone: Well the first bad freeze that I remember was in 1957 which I had just gotten out of school and started working. And in the Winter Garden area which is just south of the great big body of water Lake Apopka, we were very, very fortunate—we had few problems. And so I thought that was great.

But then when the '80's came and we had those three freezes in pretty short duration of time we were hurt pretty badly. In fact many trees were killed and we actually bulldozed out a lot of groves and we had to decide which we were going to replant and which we weren't. So, it's good news/bad news.

It's bad news because it was a financial bad time when you have a freeze like that. There's no insurance or there's no way you can take credit for it or anything like that. You've lost your ability to produce an income. But the good news is that I never thought in my lifetime that I would have the opportunity to select which variety of oranges I was going to grow, how I was going to plant them, and what I was going to do.

And I was on the Florida Citrus Mutual Board in those days and I sat by Phil Herndon; Phil's not living anymore but he was a processor. And I remember turning to him and I said, "Look, I have the opportunity to set out a few hundred acres, what do you think you're going to need?" I wanted to plant something that would have some value. And he says, "We need color. We need Rhode Red Valencias."

So I planted Rhode Red Valencias. It took me a year to get all the trees. But we planted them and they're now about 18 years old. We produce about 100,000 boxes a year and they are a great variety. They go into Florida's Natural at Lake Wales but they love the color of the juice because they can blend it with Hamlins which are an early orange which are light in juice. So they combine it and it makes a darker juice for everything.

Fanning: *Okay. So what were you growing before the freezes?*

Chicone: Well, in the old days they used to, because it was packing house fruit primarily, they would grow fruit that would come in early season, middle season, and late season. Plus, we'd grow a lot of tangerines, we'd grow a lot of temples, we grew great varieties because packing houses shipped different seasons. And like temples, we used to get 14 dollars a box for temples, I mean it was unbelievable. And the freezes wiped them out; there are very few temple oranges left anymore.

Dancy tangerines, there are very few Dancy tangerines anymore. But ... so we used to grow a whole lot more different varieties for the packing house. Then when concentrate came along, they wanted Valencias—that's the best juice orange. Problem is, to grow a Valencia you've got to go through the

winter with them on the tree, so it's a greater risk. Now for chilled juice they still want Valencias. And we took the chance to ... because you get more money we took the risk.

Fanning: *Okay. Who, besides Henry Swanson and your father, who were ... did you have any other close associates that you worked with in your early career?*

Chicone: Yeah I had a friend named Jack Ross, his father had leased land from my father to run cattle on, so we had a family connection. And Jack is about five or six years older than I am. So when I got into the business he was the production manager for South Lake Citrus Growers Association. And I used to take my lunch over to his house, we would break for lunch, and sit and eat with him and ask him what they were doing and how they were doing it.

So he sort of guided me along because you know, you don't have anybody out in the woods; that's long before cell phones. And when you're 20 miles from everything and you're out there making decisions you don't have any way to call and ask anybody, you've got to do something one way or another. And so I had to learn from Jack. Ironically, where we live now about 18 miles west of Orlando on Lake Butler it's in the middle of an orange grove we had, and Jack Ross lives next door to me.

So we still talk about ... an interesting thing in writing, I told you that I kept these notebooks when I first started. Well, same way on whether you ... what you spray and what you fertilize with, you try to keep up with that but it changes every year. One funny little story is when we first started replanting groves I had to go rent a stake body truck and buy wooden tomato stakes, about four feet long. And we took a whole truck load of tomato wooden stakes and drove through and dropped them out and drove them into the ground with a hammer, that's where a tree was planted. It was a big deal.

Well the last grove we planted 18 years ago, the man came out and he had a box of drinking straws and I said, "What are those for?" And he said, "That's how we line up a grove now." So, you forgot all the wood, all the truck, all the work that ... because they were heavy—you'd get an arm full of them and go down and drop them ... all they did was stick a little straw in the ground. It's too bad that he couldn't patent the idea because it was a wonderful, labor-saving device.

But that's the great thing about the industry, we change so much. For example, prior to the '57 freeze everyone had these tall pipes above the tree called "overhead irrigation" and they just bragged on it—it's the greatest thing in the world. Freeze came, they ran the water, the trees froze completely because the water was all over the base of the trees. So somebody said, "Oh, we need a small sprinkler under the tree like they have in Israel."

So we put these little small sprinklers under the tree, it works. So there are still innovations to be made in the industry. The old groves, when they first planted them they planted like 40 trees to the acre because they let the cows run through the grove and fertilize it. Now they plant 140 to 144 trees per acre or more. And then of course hedging came along after the Second World War. We never used to hedge trees, now we all hedge trees.

A wonderful product named "Temik" came along and you put that out once a year, it's very expensive. And I asked a friend of mine, I said, "Well, what is Temik?" He says, "Well, the nearest way I can explain it to you; it's like a dog's flea collar. You put it on and it relieves all the stresses of the tree." I still use it, it's a great product. It's very ... you've got to be very careful with it, it's a restricted pesticide but it's really a good pesticide.

Fanning: *And speaking of changes, what work have you done to change the irrigation process for groves? The type of water being used?*

Chicone: Well a very close friend of mine, Bill Frederick, was the mayor of Orlando about 20 years ago. And he came to me one day and he says, "We have a great problem in the city, we're about to put a building moratorium over the whole city because we are sending our wastewater to Osceola County and to Kissimmee and we're messing up the Kissimmee River. So we have a new plan, copied from Egypt, where we're going to treat the water and send it 18 miles west out to your grove and you can water with it free."

And I said, "Gosh, Bill, if I did that they'd shoot me." I said, "To disrupt the whole county digging lines all around and sending waste water out?" I said, "I don't think that can be done." He said, "Well I've already committed it's going to be done." He said, "How long will it take you to work it out?" I said, "Well, give us six months and let's have an educational meeting, let's see if we can do it."

First meeting we had three men came, that live in the area they were going to put the water, with shotguns and they stood up and said ... seriously! They stood up and said, "You bring that stuff near me we'll shoot you." I mean it was a very emotional issue. And so we worked on it and worked on it and finally, we decided that it was all being treated and that it was going to be okay. And so, I was the first one to sign and when I signed ... well first, I didn't know what to do.

Now I went in my dad's office and that was ... well he would have been in his '80's in those days. And I had this big, thick contract that scared me to death and I said, "We can have water," and I put it on his desk and I said, "How about studying this and letting me know what to do?" Came back a couple days later and it was at the same place that I had put it on his desk. Because he was the age ... I didn't realize it ... but he was the age he wasn't going to worry ... I mean he didn't, you know, he was not the least bit concerned. That was supposed to be my responsibility.

So I said, "I need a sign, tell me something." And the only thing he told me was, "Water adds value to your land." That's all he said. So I was at least not too dumb, I picked up on that and I went back and I called Bill and I said, "Okay, we're the first ones to sign up." Well when I did that, people thought that I knew something that they didn't know and within the week everybody signed up and we had the water.

Now the bad news is it was a 20 year contract, free with a renewable clause. Everybody changed in government and last year when the 20 year contract was up they wouldn't renew it. Now they charge us for the water and so we're not real happy with the situation but you know, that's a change and we're still ... it was a good experiment while it lasted.

Fanning: *Right. Now reclaimed water is pretty widely-accepted?*

Chicone: It has a value and other people are using it too, right. Excuse me, one thing that did come up around the table when we were talking about this; we'd almost finally worked everything out, then for the first time the media started talking about AIDS. And of course we didn't know anything about AIDS and so we had this big meeting and we said, "Hey, we don't know about this water."

Man, we could be out there unstopping the sprinkler or something and we're going to die of AIDS." Really! It was emotional and scary. So that's when they said, "Okay, we will come in and we will have a lab and we will have a scientist and we will test this water every day and we will send you a weekly [report] so you'll know." So, you know, we were satisfied. And nobody died of AIDS so I guess we're okay. [chuckles]

Fanning: *Yeah. So there's been a lot of development in the Orlando area. You said there was a big reduction of groves but there's also a lot of building. What kinds of things have you seen being developed in Orlando?*

Chicone: Well, it's a whole lot better being a citrus grower than it is being a developer. But the truth is that everybody in agriculture is doing something on the land waiting for the value to increase. I mean that's just the way it is. And while everyone doesn't want to sell out, and doesn't want to be developed ... I had somebody meet me in the post office the other day he came up ... they formed a rural area in a little area in Orange County and that meant they couldn't develop their property.

And for 20 years they've had this rural development and now all the owners are up retirement age or older and they want to sell their property and they can't. It's not ... no value because you can't develop it, so good news and bad news. When I graduated from high school in Orlando most people said, "Gee, wish we could stay here." But there are no jobs, there's no entertainment, and there really is not proper medical care.

Well, here we are, flash-forward 50 years and now we've got the greatest entertainment in the world, we've got jobs all over the place and certainly diversified, and we've got so many hospitals we don't know what to do with. So the only problem we didn't know that with that comes crime, which we have a lot of, and traffic, which we have a lot of. We didn't have either one of those. So there's a ... there's a mix there that it's good news and bad news.

Had the citrus market kept going up or stayed the same, you would not have seen so much development. But when Brazil and Mexico could pay labor three dollars an hour and grow oranges and ship them in here and they can sell their oranges in the stores for much less than we could, then in a sense there was not that great need for people to continue to grow oranges.

We have sold a couple of groves and we still have a couple and keeping them going. I'd like to keep the ones going, going. But when you reach the point where it's just a hobby and you're not making any money, then with taxes going up the way they are, labor costs going up ... in fact the first time we knew Disney World had opened in Orange County was when they came out and stole all of our tractor drivers.

In other words, they were getting paid 10 dollars an hour to drive a tractor in the grove, Disney came up and said, "We'll give you 25 [dollars] if you come see us." So all the experienced tractor ... we had trained these men for years, they all went to work for Disney. Which you can't blame them, you know it's a better deal, the grass was greener. So that's a ... you know, that's a question in an area that ... good news/bad news.

Fanning: *And how have you seen Walt Disney World affect the area there?*

Chicone: Well, I was at the meeting in Orlando when Walt Disney himself came and told us what he was going to do. He said he was going to duplicate Disneyland in Orlando and that because they were buying 30,000 acres of land they were going to have an environmentally undeveloped circle around the theme park. Well that was great. That sounded fine.

He died before Disney World opened and his predecessors [successors] were very greedy and they built all around it and they built things that were identical to what we already had in town. And they actually caused us some bad things to happen. For example, Church Street Station was a great entertainment area in downtown Orlando and they built Pleasure Island. In fact, we just ran into ... Saturday ... Dick Nunis who was one of the ... I guess you could call him in charge ... president of Disney World. He was one of the ones that really drove that against Orlando.

I would have been just as happy if Disney World was located down in Sarasota so we could still attend it but it wouldn't have affected us the way it did. We get a lot of traffic, we get a lot of ... I mean it's just, it's a hassle. And they ... they're very, very clever. They have a huge list of lobbyists in state government and we had all worked to have a nice toll road on the west side of Orlando and sure enough, we finally got a toll road on the west side of Orlando, 429.

The only problem is that where we thought the interchanges ought to be, they aren't there. But there's an interchange right at Disney World. I mean they are ... they're smart, they're good businessmen but they really capture a lot of our road money and things on there and they don't build all of their roads, most of the roads are built at the taxpayer expense. So while they're a good corporate citizen, they probably made more negative changes to Orange County than they did positive.

Fanning: *Okay. And going back to some of the reduction in citrus groves, are there any government incentives now to grow citrus?*

Chicone: I don't know of any if there are. In fact, I've only been involved in two government programs in all my years. The first one they came out with what they called a "Tree Assistance Program" and that was after our freezes in 1980. I learned at the last minute that if you go through all these hoops and do all this work and come present yourself at the Farm Service Agency and then they ask you another 100,000 questions of all things—it really is a harassment session.

But anyway, after it's all said and done about six months later you do get a check for 35 percent of the cost of your new trees that you buy. So when you're completely wiped out and got to buy all new trees, it was a good program—called the "Tree Assistance Program." They also have a crop insurance plan now but we pay a portion of that also and the government works with you on that.

So really we don't look to the government for anything. Those are two programs ... for years, until this year the word "citrus" has never been in a law passed by Congress. Wheat, barley, all the things they grow out mid-west, they get everything. But we were finally smart enough up there to insert the word "citrus" into the Farm Bureau ... bill, the last Farm Bureau bill that was passed. So that does open us up for some programs. Of course, we haven't had to use it yet but it certainly is nice that we're equal to the other farmers.

Fanning: *That's amazing. What was your position in the Florida Citrus Commission? And what kind of work did you do with them?*

Chicone: My position with the Florida Citrus Commission; I was a grower who sat in a seat out in the audience. I have never served on the Citrus Commission. I've served as president of Showcase in Winter Haven. I've served on the Growers Administrative Committee. I've served on several blue ribbon committees that the Florida Citrus Commission had. And I have a lot of good friends that were there.

So I've done a lot of good things but I've never actually served on the Citrus Commission which proves to me ... you don't have to sit on the Commission to have an effect on the industry. One of the things that I smile about in the industry is that I could see the bumper sticker when I was about 35 years old or something and it said, "Squeeze oranges not growers." And there must have been 5,000 of those on cars in the industry. And of course the message was, that was when the processors were paying very little money so they got the message. They felt like it was a slam at them because they weren't paying; they were squeezing us rather than squeezing the oranges.

But it was kind of a mood, and a kind of an effort by everybody to join together and it worked. It got everybody together and put the growers on more of an equal level with the processors. The interesting thing about the Commission was that I used to attend all the Commission meetings and in those days the processors were on one side and the growers were on the other. And it was ... it was a pretty rough relationship, I mean.

But you came to the meeting and you fussed and you cussed and then you came out of the meeting, we pretty well by consensus learned to live together until the next meeting. But you know ... it was ... but now today another change is that those that are on the Commission today, they're nice people, most of

them work for the head man or the head woman. In the old days the big men all sat around a table and they made the decisions. Today, they almost have to call somebody else to make the decision.

And of course in the old days the real purpose of the Department of Citrus, the Florida Citrus Commission was to promote and sell orange juice. Today we're so concerned with, and we should be, with greening and all these other terrible diseases that are after the industry, that we're spending all of our money and all of our time on trying to research and take care of those and we're overlooking the strong sell that it requires to sell orange juice.

Fanning: *And what kind of work did you do with the Political Action Committee?*

Chicone: Well, Florida Citrus Mutual has the Political Action Committee. One of my friends in the citrus industry passed away a long time ago, Bob Hester, he joined the national independent business association, NFIB. And after a year, they had some program when he'd renew his membership he got to nominate someone else so he called me and said, "I just nominated you for membership in NFIB." I said, "Well, coming from you that's fine."

So about a month later or something I got a letter that said, "Welcome to the membership. And by the way, our president's going to be in Orlando," and told me when. So I arranged a meeting with the mayor, and I arranged a meeting with the chamber of commerce, and I arranged a meeting with the media for the president. I thought that's what you were supposed to do. So he came in and he did all that.

About a month later they came back into town, they said, "We've elected you to the board." There are only 10 members of the board, it's a national board and it was ... we met with the President of the United States once a year and lined up for a photo-op. I'm going to tell you two funny stories about that. Now that was when George Bush the first was President and ... who else, let's see ... yeah, Ronald Reagan—those were mainly the two that we met every year.

And so Ronald ... no, George Bush had been a suitemate of George Bailey who was the owner of the Winter Garden paper. So I knew that and so when we lined up to have our photo-op I went up to President Bush and I said, "I bring you greetings from your suitemate George Bailey from Winter Garden." And he said, "Well, that's fine." He said, "Does he still own the newspaper?" I said "Yes." He said, "Well, tell him I said hello and I remember those good days." So I went back, and of course every other member of the board said, "What were you talking to the President about?"

You know, that's very unusual, you're supposed to go up and get your picture taken and come back. So I did that for about three or four years and then I'd come back and tell Bailey what I had done. And so he knew that I'd be going the next year, you know, so it was kind of interesting.

The other interesting thing was that we had seen Reagan two or three times, he was a great guy and they'd take your picture and they'd send you your picture and everything. So we had three pictures of my wife Sue shaking hands with President Reagan. So Sue said, "You know I'm really embarrassed. This year I'm not even going to go up with you, you just go up yourself so you can have the picture." I said "No, come ahead with us." She said, "Okay, I'll just keep my hand behind my back."

Well we go up and before I even know it, click—here's Reagan with Sue's arm. So my wife Sue when we got home she cuts my picture out of another picture and pasted on her face and now I have my picture with the President. [Laughs] And I did get to go back to meet with Reagan in the East Room. There were eight of us around a table and we talked about historic properties, primarily downtown historic properties which I was involved in, too.

But it was ... that was just because I was active in the citrus industry and a friend of mine put me on and you get that far. We started a political action committee in the NFIB. So I took the bylaws and everything back with me to Florida to the Mutual meeting and I said, "We should have one of these." So we copied everything from the political action committee. I was the first chairman and that's how it got started.

Fanning: *And what kind of work did you do with that?*

Chicone: Well we're continuing to do it, I was just at ... in fact I was just across the lake somewhere at the Lakeland Yacht Club building about two weeks ago and Adam Putnam spoke and we had about a hundred people there and everybody gave a small check and we raised money for federal PAC. And you see I didn't realize ... and this is something ... this is a change in the industry—in the old days we would support our local congressmen and the US senator like Spessard Holland.

Today, you don't just have to support your own Florida people, you've got to pick out the eight or 10 people in Congress or in the Senate that are on the Agricultural Committee or the Ways and Means that make the decisions that affect Florida citrus, like trade and things like that. So that's what Florida Citrus Mutual does. Their lobbyists kind of pick out the key players. In fact, one of the key players is from Florida but he's from Panama City. Boyd is his name and you know I couldn't understand why do we support Boyd? But we support him because he's in a key position and he can help citrus.

Fanning: *So you took a lot of trips to Washington then, I assume?*

Chicone: Been to Washington, went to Brazil to the groves and enjoyed a day talking with the people that grow oranges there. We've been to California, to Texas, Mexico, tried to get around to see ... plus we've ... one year, Willard Roe from Winter Haven picked our red navels and he said he was going to send them to California to the Lucky Stores.

So I came to Winter Haven, first I went to the grove and watched them pick our fruit, then I came to Winter Haven and watched them pack our fruit. Then we flew to California and went to the Lucky Stores and watched them sell our fruit there, which was kind of an interesting little synopsis to see, you know, what goes on.

Fanning: *What kind of brands has your fruit been associated with?*

Chicone: Okay. All of the Florida citrus labels that you see, most all of them, are packing house brands. The packing house has the brands, very few growers have a label because we don't have any way to pack it and to put it on a box and send it. Now I do, in recent years I have developed a label. It's called the Clock Tower brand, which there is a clock tower in downtown Winter Garden. And that's to be used on red navel shipments. But primarily all your labels are packing houses.

Fanning: *Okay. And speaking of labels, we have your book here. What kind of work have you done with the historical preservation of the citrus labels?*

Chicone: Well, in 1976, the Bicentennial year, everything was on TV, "Save paper history. Whatever you have, save it." So I thought, "What could I save that meant something to me that I might have known the packing house owners or known the brand?" So I decided I was going to labels. And the one reason I decided to do that is that Jim Ellis, when I was the president of Showcase in Winter Haven that year, we put a four by eight piece of plywood up in the main dome for exhibits.

And we had about six or eight labels and we stapled them on this panel and just stuck it there. And for the week the people that came around they stopped and they studied them and they asked questions about them and they wanted to buy one. So we knew there was an interest in it and from that I actually went back to Battaglia packing house—that's my first stop to get labels. And the son was there and we

walked up in the attic and I got a full box load of labels, as much as I could carry. Carried it out and from that I started the trading with other people.

And Jim Ellis was one of the first ones that we traded. And we started what we call the Florida Citrus Labels Collectors Label's Association and that's when Brenda Burnett got involved. Then we decided to do this book and the interesting thing about the book is it cost about 30 dollars to print, we sold them for about 50 dollars. But today ... and it's out of print, it's 10 years old ... today on the internet there are two listed for sale for 600 dollars.

Fanning: *Wow.*

Chicone: So I thought that was rather interesting but it was ... it was very interesting to print that because we had to do a lot of research. And, for example the ... there's a Miss Winter Haven label in there and a pretty lady and we found out ... we identified her. We had to find out ... you know, go back and go back and we tried to identify a picture of a dog, what dog was it? And we found out that like "Rags" was the name ... the real name of the packing house owner's dog, he came to work with him.

And so that was an interesting, you know, example of things. But Brenda's very smart and we wrote most of that book by facts. She did a lot of the copying; I did a lot of the identification. And the labels are all mine.

Fanning: *We've come across a lot of pretty interesting labels here at the Archives Center. Do you have a particular label that's your favorite one?*

Chicone: Well there are a lot of interesting labels. One of the most interesting labels I have, you can't show and you can't talk about ... and I'm going to talk about it today. It's called the Nigger Baby brand N-I-G-G-E-R and it was not done as a slur necessarily in the days ... you've got to realize in the '20's and '30's things were just different. And when we printed this book the Tampa Tribune did a story on it and he had heard that I had this label so he asked me if this label was in the book?

And I said, "No, I chose not to put it in the book." So he wanted to write a letter ... a story on that label but not about the book and I said, "No". I said, "That's not a proper thing to do. Just leave that out." But there are a lot of ... first, the labels were drawn to attract the interest of primarily older Jewish fruit buyers in New York and Chicago in the middle of the night in a tin warehouse that was dimly lit.

So visualize where you are—you're in ... it's cold, it's dark and a man smoking a cigar in the middle of the night is walking through this old warehouse where all the fruit is stacked and all he can see is labels. So naturally, that's why a lot of pretty women were put on labels—it would catch their attention. Or something, for example Willard Roe had a label that had some funny writing across the top and I just took for granted that it said "Florida" in Spanish ... no not in Spanish but in German or some other ... come to find out in later years that it was a label that that was for the Jewish people to read and it did say "Florida" but their letters you start over here and you come back this way (motions with finger from right to left).

So you know, we weren't real smart on those things, we had to learn from somebody else. But I couldn't say one label is better than the other. They're colorful. They're interesting. There's a whole series of labels that we call "stock labels" and that was for ... the printer printed them in case you ran out of labels you could use something that was colorful and then just stamp their own name on it. So nobody wanted to collect those and I started collecting them because what I had was I had a lot of family names and a lot of packing houses in a town that nobody else had.

It wasn't really the image it was the information on there. And also I learned that most families did not keep their labels. There was no interest in the label and most of them were burned; they didn't keep

them. So one of my great pleasurable items with labels has been that I've been able to return to the families their own personal label that they didn't keep. Gently's I've done that to, Dr. Phillip's labels, several more that ... and people call me say, you know, "Do you have my label?" and I try to find it.

Fanning: *How many labels do you have in your collection?*

Chicone: Well, I don't spend a whole lot of time counting them but I think that I have over 4,000 labels. Pretty sure, last time I checked. I really ... you know that was a great quest and I loved it but the last eight or 10 years, every now and then if I see something or if somebody calls I'll pick up an extra label but I really haven't been on the hunt because the hunt's kind of extinct right now.

It used to be it was great. I mean you could really find ... for example, one of the companies that printed labels was in Tampa; Florida Grower Press. And the widow of Mr. Mullen had an antique stall in the Ybor City Flea Market ... farm ... antique place. And every ... once a month on Sunday we would drive over from Orlando and we'd go to her booth and I would pay 50 dollars for probably 50 labels and I'd leave.

We did this four or five times thinking that they'd always be there. Came back one day and somebody had bought her completely out and so that was gone. One time we heard that there was a printing company in Johnson City, Tennessee—International Printing Company. And Sue and I were up there and we rent a car and we head about five hours to find it.

So we drove into town, I let her off at city hall, I went to the library and nobody at the library knew anything. She got a clue at city hall. We got together, we went to the International Printing Company and got right in to see the president. He says, "Well, we have a president of our ex-employees, Jesse Bean, he lives about three blocks over here." So we walked over to his house.

He said, "Come on out back." We go out back there's a tin shed with a clay floor. We sit down on the floor and he brings these piles and piles of labels and I picked out every one I didn't have which wound up to be a hundred different labels and I probably gave him a hundred dollars. And we left and I told somebody that several weeks later and they went up there without my knowledge and bought the rest of them out. But it's interesting how many are available in those days; they aren't available now.

Fanning: *Well there's one label that's kind of stuck out in our mind a lot going through some things. And it's actually called "El Duce" and it has a picture of Mussolini on it. Are you familiar with that one?*

Chicone: Yeah. Yep. I don't know the background of that one—it's strange. I don't ... I guess, well ... it goes back to the shock image, the man walking through seeing this, it would get his attention and it would get him to go over and ask that question. To me that was just kind of a crazy label. I always stuck with all the good looking girls on the labels, that's what I was looking at more than anything. [laughs] But I'll have to do some research on that and let you know. I don't know the details on that one.

Fanning: *Yeah, we were just wondering about that. Okay well, while we're on the topic of historical preservation, what kind of work outside of citrus labels have you done in the Winter Garden area and Orlando?*

Chicone: Well we ... we've been very fortunate. My sister and I bought the Atlantic Coast Line historic railroad depot right in the middle of town, built in 1918. Gave that to the city, forever to be used for historic purposes. With a group there in Winter Garden we were able to help start the museum. It's a great little museum, nothing like the facilities you have here but we have every label from Orange County on the wall.

We have a whole room dedicated to citrus. We have a room dedicated to the pioneers. And we've written two more books—one about Winter Garden history and one about the Sunday afternoon rides

that you used to take with your family, the architecture of the town. And it's got a lot of people ... it's given a lot of people a sense of the place.

They've always lived in Winter Garden but they had not a whole lot to be happy about and it's given them something to be proud about and they're very ... and we were able to buy the Garden ... the Winter Garden Theater ... the old movie theater. And another group has raised three million dollars and that theater now is open. And so we were able to preserve the heritage museum. We've added the other depot in town on the other railroad tracks—it's a railroad museum.

Have a lady, Kay Cappleman, that does a wonderful job going into the schools and educates the fourth graders on Florida history. And she has a scavenger hunt in downtown historic Winter Garden and the student must be present and one parent must be present, both for supervision and for education because most of the parents didn't grow up there. So those are turning out real well, we've had good support on those. We're trying to keep ... Winter Garden is kind of like a movie set; there aren't any modern buildings in town, it's all like it was in 1920 so we're trying to keep it like that.

Fanning: *Great. What do you consider some of the most significant accomplishments of your career?*

Chicone: That I'm still living and still married. [laughs] I don't know, I ... when they nominated me for the Hall of Fame last year they put in that it was because of my leadership on the wastewater and conserve water situation. They thought that was ... as far as having an influence on the whole industry that was what they thought was important. I don't look at it that way, you know, I just ... I've had a great opportunity to keep ... and a great set of friends and associates and I've just been very fortunate to kind of fall into the University of Florida and you know everything.

I appreciate my dad being in the business and I was in it and I got a good start. But I don't think I rested on those laurels necessarily, I think I just hustled on. And I don't ... I have a little saying that I have a whole lot of friends that are a whole lot smarter than me, but I hustle more than they do.

Fanning: *Would you consider that kind of a personal philosophy on ... like a life philosophy or something like that?*

Chicone: Well, maybe. I really ... not in public but I just do ... you know you do the best you can and you keep moving.

Fanning: *Yeah.*

Chicone: And as long as you're moving forward you're doing okay. Sometimes you move backward but you know ... but to me the citrus industry has been a basis to enlarge on local Florida history. I love trivia things about Florida history and I've been very fortunate ... for example, when I was six or seven years old the man who lived two doors down from me used to come by and pick me up to go to Sunday School at the Methodist Church. And that was Frank Roper who at that time was Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Florida Southern College.

So, I mean, those are the little things that happened. The only reason I ever came to Polk County to work is my dad played golf with Bill Raley and Bill Raley called me one day and he says, "Come down, I want to talk to you." And I came down and met him at Showcase and he says, "I've been president here for a number of years and I'm ready to retire and you're my choice for the next president. I want you to start as my vice-president."

Well that was a great opportunity and I appreciate that. And from that we've gained a lot of friends in the industry and in other areas and that's, you know, that's good. So we've been a lot of ... you know they say if you're lucky ... you're very lucky if you have some luck. Well I think ... I think luck has a lot to do with it but I think that you have to make your own luck.

Fanning: *How have you seen the Showcase change over the years and how ...*

Chicone: I've seen ... I've seen it at its highest point when Carol Burnett and Garry Moore came in and they had their TV shows and the ... before my time the President of the United States came to Showcase to get a box of oranges. That's because the industry was great and it was the biggest industry in Florida. But about five or six years after I was president of Showcase it started to lose its touch because the board was not made up of all citrus people.

But when I was president I had a board and I went down the board and gave every member of the board something to do. Dick Pope was on the board so I said, "You're in charge of opening ceremonies." Andy Ireland was on the board and I said, "You're in charge of this." When I finished somebody came up there from Winter Haven and they said, "Jerry, we should have told you—those men were on the board just because of their names, we don't ask them to do anything."

Well, Dick Pope got all the Disney people here for the opening had a great opening and loved it. So, you know, fresh start and if you're dumb enough not to know what you're not supposed to do it worked out fine. And we had, we had some ... that's when the Showcase had just been built. It was a magnificent dome, very architecturally ... and they had hundred thousand dollar exhibits inside which were really nice. And so that was the peak.

The demise of Showcase was about three years ago when the director sent all of us letters and fired us from the Hall of Fame committee. And so we took that and formed a new corporation and came here and we were reborn. So they, you know, they're gone and we're rising higher than we ever knew so it's kind of interesting to see that when something doesn't fulfill its original purpose, best thing to happen to it is it disappears.

Fanning: *And you've seen the Hall of Fame develop out of the Showcase?*

Chicone: [nods] As I mentioned I've been to the first ... went to the first Hall of Fame deal and saw ... and very interested in the committee meetings prior to the induction. One induction ... one meeting prior to the induction I remember Bill Edwards was a very strong, outspoken person with Lykes Pasco, a big leader in the industry, in his later years he came to a meeting in a wheelchair and he was pushed in by a driver and he sat around the table and we started on two or three men and he was the most vocal, outspoken, loud, using four-lettered words on one or two things.

And we all thought, "Isn't that great?" A man that's that old and that ... you know and he went home and he died two days later. And so all the Hall of Fame committee came to the funeral and we all sat around and said, "That's the way to go! Just before you die, be right in the middle of something and then pass away." But we've seen a lot of that, some very interesting ... Willard Roe was on ... most people that were on the committee stayed on for a lifetime.

Dick Kingham, who we just went to his funeral service Saturday, who is an alum of Florida Southern College, he was 78 when he passed away. He was on the original Showcase ... Florida Citrus Hall of Fame committee, he's the last original member. So most everyone stayed on for years and years and years; it's a very select committee and although there was politics in it, you pretty much had to do something proper to get elected.

[pause in taping]

Fanning: *Alright so, over the course of your career what were some of the biggest changes to the industry you've seen as far as like the groves and, you know, the workers in the groves and the way that the industry is organized?*

Chicone: Well, so many changes it's difficult to really get you through everything. I remember one of my earliest memories is coming out into the groves early in the morning and the fruit pickers would ride in those days in a truck and it would have a canvas top over the back of the truck and benches in the truck. And they would sit in the truck and they would drive them out to the field and it'd be 7:00 in the morning when they'd get to the grove.

And the foreman would be driving the big crew truck and he'd get out and he'd have a straw hat on. He'd take the straw hat and he'd turn it upside down on his head and he'd say "Tickets in the hat. Tickets in the hat." Every picker had a little picking ticket book about an inch wide and two inches long and one of those tickets would go on the box that he would pick and one would go in his pocket so at the end of the day they'd know who picked what; like a receipt.

So the first thing they had to do, the picker had to put his half of the ticket in the hat and then the foreman would line up on the row of trees and he would pick one ticket [out of the hat] and drop it, one ticket and drop it on the next row. That's how the pickers would know what their assignment was on picking the row. And the reason it was done that way is that was a democratic process to do it. He couldn't give his friend the row with the heavy fruit on it and the row that didn't have much fruit he gave to somebody else. You had to pick, that was your responsibility. So they'd line up and they'd pick.

And in early days, in the early '50's they had what they called "seedling trees" and those were about 50 feet tall and you used a very long ladder. And it took ... in those days you didn't pick fruit unless you were a very strong man. Pickers, we now refer to as African-Americans, there were no Mexicans around. There were very few white men that were able to pick oranges; it was primarily the African-Americans. They were strong, they were tough, they could work hard, most of them could pick a hundred boxes a day.

And as I said the truck that would come through the grove to pick up the orange boxes which weighed 90 pounds, the nickname for that truck was "goat." They'd say, "Oh, bring the goat through." So one man would drive the goat, one man would walk alongside the truck, pick up the 90 pounds with two hands, lift it onto the truck. And there was one man on the top of the truck then that would lift ... which, very unusual to do that.

They would usually have in those days a loading apparatus that they would dump down here on the ground and the little sections, the rollers would take it to the top of the truck. That was primarily when they were doing juice. But those changes then evolved like when we produce the fruit in the field for fertilizing we'd have a trailer on the back here with a great big dump system with the wheels on the back.

And the fertilizer would come in a 200-pound grove sack bag and one man would lift that 200-pound bag up to distribute it. I mean now, you know, it comes in 50-pound bags because it's all we can do to lift that. But ... and you would spray with a very unusual spray machine; the equipment was very unusual. And growing up in Winter Garden I had the opportunity to deal with Pounds Motor Company, who's in the Hall of Fame by the way, and all farm trackers in the late '20's had steel wheels on the back. And so we were just getting most of our country roads, or farm to market roads, paved with asphalt.

So when the tracker driver wanted to go to the grove on the other side of the road he just crossed the pavement. Well it dug big trenches in the ... so it wasn't long they said you can't cross the road. So Hoyle Pounds invented not an air-filled tire but a solid rubber tire to go onto this big steel tire. He has the patent. We have the patent in our museum. We have the tractor.

We have the ... everything. We have it on the rim it says, "Patented by Pounds Motor Company, Winter Garden." So that's a big change, that type. And then ... so those are production changes that type

tractors. We used to all be diesel fuel tractors; we changed to LP gas which was a waste product in those days. Cost three cents a gallon, now it's six dollars a gallon when you get it to your home—same material, gas. So a lot of changes there. In fact the citrus industry is full of changes. Full of changes.

Fanning: *Okay. Well before we wrap up, do you have any final thoughts about your career or anything else you want to tell us about your involvement in Florida citrus?*

Chicone: Well one ... the one thing that I am sorry about is that young men your age can't look forward to having a career in citrus. There are going to be a few that are going to be able to but it's ... we're ... when I was in school, in high school most all of my teachers had a 10-acre grove or a 20-acre grove; it was part of their retirement plan. The postman had a 10-acre grove; that was his retirement plan.

That's why the State of Florida in 1935 was able to pass the Citrus Code because it meant much to everybody that lived in Florida. It wasn't just the people that owned the groves or owned the packing house. It was everybody was involved. We've made the movement now just like all businesses; there are very few small businesses left. We now have four or five major grove owners in the state that own 10,000 acres or more.

And they of course think differently than a group of small growers that are all together, they think like the bottom line, they want to figure out ways that they don't have to pay their taxes, that they don't have to pay their fair share. And so it's a different ... it's a different deal now than it used to be. And as I mentioned Mexico and Brazil and I've mentioned the greening and the diseases that we face. I think we've talked a lot about changes today and I think one of the changes we're going to see, we're already seeing the changes of less people being involved in the industry.

And ironically it comes at the time when the country is talking about eating healthier, taking the soda pop out of the schools, I mean it really is a ... what we worked for in the industry all my life, we've finally reached where we're supposed to be on one side, and here we are not able to get in and take advantage of that.

Fanning: *Okay. Well thank you for your time.*

Chicone: Thank you. You've done your homework and I appreciate it.

Fanning: *Thanks.*

[END]