

Interviewers: Ethan White & Cashton Woods
Interviewee: Larry Yaggie
HBR modern history
21 November 2025

Oral history of Hinckley Residents- Transcription

Cash : How long have you lived in Hinckley?

Larry: Since 1979. Actually, I was already about 20 some years old when we moved here. My wife and I got married in 1977 and decided that we wanted to move out of Aurora. So we started driving west and ran into Hinckley. We thought that Hinckley had more to offer than anybody North or South. In 1978, we came back out. There was an ad in the paper that a new subdivision was going in called Highland Estates No. 2. All we could see were cornfields. All they had put up were some flags and a sign saying this is a new subdivision. A couple of months later, we bought our lot, built a home, and have been here ever since.

Ethan: Where did you grow up?

Larry: I grew up in Aurora. I was born at Copley Hospital in Aurora and lived on Pigeon Hill, on the East side. My father was in the Navy for about eight years, so my mother and I lived with my grandparents. When I was about five or six years old, we moved out to the Montgomery-Oswego border in Kendall County. I stayed there until finishing sixth grade. We moved back into Aurora on the west side where I went to school at Jefferson Junior High and then graduated from Aurora West.

Cash: What was your favorite place in Aurora?

Larry: I think it was probably on Route 31, which is Lake Street in Aurora. I was a gearhead and liked to build cars. Back then, it was not frowned upon to take your car up to Lake Street and run light to light. The police didn't care as long as we were safe about it. That's where I brought one of my cars that was a drag car that I used in drag racing. One of the officers got really mad at me for bringing it up behind the ACE Hardware, smoking out the tires, and filling the entire parking lot full of smoke. After we got done talking, he wanted to see what's under the hood. That's where it all started; my drag racing and everything else. Growing up, I just couldn't do without it. So Lake Street was my best spot, other than maybe going to my grandparents' home. They were always great because I learned a lot. I am a heavy Romanian, so I started to learn how to speak Romanian from my aunts and uncles that had come over from Romania. Don't ask me to speak it now because I couldn't.

Ethan: What was your favorite spot in Hinckley?

Larry: Oh, let's see. It was Ginny and Earl's, which is now the Half Moon. We used to love going in there for fish fries; Tomoko catfish. It was the most amazing catfish I've ever had. There were a couple of other locations too. The park, we went to the park quite often. The kids always wanted to play. Of course, the soccer field. If I could get over on the soccer field every day, I would be pretty happy. Whether I was working out, running around, doing laps or anything to do with soccer, I was in pretty good shape.

Cash: Are there any events in Hinckley that are special memories?

Larry: Events, yes, the car show that the Lions Club has had, the 4th of July, and the Fall Festivals. I wish they'd bring them back. I've been lucky. My wife is very strong in community support. She has been the president of the Hinckley Public Library now for 30 years. And seeing the new library down here being built is like her dream. She was also on the board for Harvesting Our Future, which created the mural that's on the west wall of the South Moon Barbecue. She is vice president of Lions, so the Lions Club has always been a big part of our life. Just about anything that she was involved in, I got dragged into. I didn't mind it at all; helping her out was kind of fun. We also got involved with groups both of the boys joined.

Ethan: Why did you start Strypes Plus More?

Larry: Well, I went to school when there was a three-year high school. That kind of dates my age, as you know. I played sports all the way through school; both soccer as well as football at the same time. In 1974, my school counselor came up to me and said, you can skip your senior year and graduate early if you'd like. You have enough credits because of all the additional things you've done in school. I was a student aide, assistant in the PE class, and got credits for every one of the sports I was in. I thought that'd be really great to leave a whole year early. Well, my parents thought that wasn't a great idea. They thought maybe I should continue in school so I could graduate with the kids I have been going to school with for the last six years. But I don't want to go to school all day because I wanted to go help my grandfather and learn some of the trades. He was a carpenter.

My counselor went to the school board and asked to create a program where I would stay in school, but take classes that would follow my interests. I really loved art. So the board asked Ms. Becker, my art class teacher, to create something for me. She created a class in oil painting four, then oil painting five. Because of that, and because of staying in school, I started developing more art type things, painting and everything else. I got so involved that I responded to an ad for somebody to do stripping on cars. Back then in the 1970s, it was only using 13 colors and very few people were doing it. If you got stripping at the car dealership, that was one thing. But there weren't many people like me in the country. So I started doing it then, and I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed it to the point where I said to my wife, "I think I'm going to open a business.

And because of me being in school, that's how I met my wife. She was in a band, so she passed by me. I couldn't be in the same classroom because I was oil painting three. So I took oil painting four at 8 o'clock. and oil painting five at nine o'clock and I was done at school by 10. Well, Karen went from nine o'clock to 10 o'clock in the band class and walked by me. So five days a week, I was out in the hallway and that's how we met. And because of that, I have a beautiful wife named Karen.

Cash: What kind of work does your business do?

Larry: It evolved from painting strips and the graphics, to the vinyl now. We install the vinyl on the vehicles and everything. Mainly right now, it's the emergency vehicles. But when I first started, it was automobiles and trucks that I did at the dealerships. And then I would go to the body shops because people wrecked their vehicles so they needed somebody to fix them. When I first started in 1980, it was October 10th, that's when I opened my own business. But I had

already been working for six years for a shop, learning how to do it the right way. And the funny thing is, the first vehicle that I put graphics on was an Aurora police car, number 126. And now I am the sole installer for the entire City of Aurora. I do squads and fire department, everything.

We do work for 1,800 municipalities. I do the City of Chicago, every single fire apparatus that either rolls, floats, or flies. I do work for Rockford, Aurora, and Hinckley of course. We've been doing Hinckley for probably 30 years. So it has been a wonderful opportunity. It's good money. It's steady work. I've enjoyed every minute of it. I'm 69 years old in two weeks, and I would continue another five to ten years if I could, if I can make it. I enjoy it that much.

Ethan: How has your business evolved?

Larry: We started with pinstriping cars at the dealerships. I had 183 dealerships that I did work for. And we have seen it go from 13 colors up to about 150 different colors. There was 3 mil material when it first came out but now we have what they call a liquid latex 2 mil, which is the best. I also install 24 karat gold graphics on the fire apparatus. Now we do a lot of things with print. We've done the school window covers, the design on the soccer field, basketball floor designs and a lot of banners.

It costs money for equipment if you're going to be in the game. We started with a small Acer 22-inch plotter, which is our vinyl cutter, and a small computer. We now have four full-size printers that are 54 inches. I have three plotters that are 54 inches. And we just ordered a new 54-inch plotter just to do the cutting. We have all of that equipment usually running every single day. We cut somewhere between 300 to 400 yards of vinyl every week. And right now we have about a seven-week backlog. We do work in five states which is a big increase from the general area of DeKalb County when we started.

Ethan: What have been challenges in your line of work?

Larry: Finding time to take a vacation. I was doing all of the work by myself up until my sons graduated and one of them wanted to work with me. I let everybody know three weeks to a month in advance of when I'm taking a vacation. Whatever you want done, get it to me. Still when I return there's 50 phone calls to answer because nobody listens to you. Illness is another challenge when you're working by yourself. If you get sick, hurt, or break a finger you're not working. And that's not a good thing. I'm lucky now, that my youngest son has been with me since 2005. Jay is a fabulous designer and installer. He has picked up on everything and he will be taking over the company when I gently retire.

Cash: What was a good decision you made to sustain your business?

Larry: Going into the striping and graphics for emergency equipment and first responder equipment. I had done them back in the 1980's, but went full head-on in the 1990's. The auto manufacturers decided they wanted to do graphics and pinstripes on vehicles. They sent me letters not to use their name in your graphics. So when I started getting those kinds of letters, I started shifting the automotive business into the first responders and graphics in the police vehicles. So that was probably my big change. We only do maybe 2% or 3% of automotive now, except for body shops that call us quite often to come in and fix things for them.

Ethan: Can you describe what it's like being a business owner in Hinckley?

Larry: Hinckley is a small community with few businesses, so everyone needs to help when groups come for a donation. I feel honored when they do come to us and to give some money for this or that. And that makes me feel good that I'm giving back to the community. The community has given me a lot, in the respect of growing up, having a great relationship with the community, and my kids being safe growing up. That's what it's all about. So when I'm asked to help with the Santa Claus breakfast or a Lions Club activity, that's all fantastic stuff as far as I'm concerned. And as long as I can give back to them because they gave to me and my family, I'm all about it.