

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Born in a half-dugout, in what was Fonda, Oklahoma, Roger Hardesty went on to become a real estate developer and builder, making his mark on Tulsa in 1959.

During his late teens he began his building career by learning on the job, starting with concrete finishing, then single-family followed by multi-family housing units, industrial buildings, commercial retail centers, office buildings and hotels.

He owned Mid-Continent Concrete and founded and operated over 25 different business ventures including Alliance Transportation, the Quarry Landfill, and Bizjet International.

Roger was sixteen when he obtained his pilot license, which led to founding the United States Aviation, the country's premier independent Fixed Based operator facility, worldwide aircraft character services, and Black Hawk helicopter air crane business.

Roger and his wife, Donna, established The Hardesty Family Foundation with a focus on Tulsa nonprofits.

Listen to Roger talk about how he learned to build houses while hanging sheetrock, his love for flying, and his desire to give back to Tulsa on the podcast and oral history website VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 7:30

Leo the Lion

John Erling (JE): Well, my name is John Erling, and today's date is April 9, 2025.
So Roger, would you state your full name, please?

Roger Hardesty (RH): Floyd Roger Hardesty.

JE: OK, so where are we recording this interview?

RH: At United States Aviation, at our offices.

JE: OK. Your birth date?

RH: 7-24-38.

JE: And your present age is...?

RH: 86. Will be 87 in July.

JE: All right. So where were you born?

RH: I was born in Dewey County, in the little town of Fonda. Fonda doesn't exist anymore. It's gone.

JE: And then did you grow up in that area?

RH: No. At about 2 years old, we moved to Fort Cobb, Caddo County.

JE: What were the conditions that you were born in? Was it a hospital somewhere, or what was it?

RH: I was born in a half dugout at Fonda.

JE: And you have given me a picture here and I'm looking at that dugout. There's a horse. Who is the little girl there?

RH: That's a neighbor, and I don't know who it was.

JE: And you were born in that—you called it a half dugout?

RH: Yes.

JE: Obviously no electricity?

RH: No.

JE: Running water?

RH: No plumbing.

JE: So then how—if you were born there, how long did you live in that dugout?

RH: We left there when I was 2 years old and went to Caddo County.

JE: I need to put a picture of that on the website because it's just hard—it's hard to imagine, maybe yourself included.

RH: Yeah. Myself. Absolutely.

JE: Yeah, that's amazing. So then you grew up in Fort Cobb.

RH: That's correct.

JE: For how long were you there?

RH: I left there when I was about 15.

JE: OK.

RH: Went to school there.

JE: All right. Your mother's name?

RH: It's Ruby.

JE: And where was she born and where did she grow up?

RH: I'm not sure where she was born, but she was brought up in Caddo County.

JE: What was her personality like?

RH: Well, she was a tough gal. She was a farm gal, and we lived on a farm there in Fort Cobb, and then she done all the daily chores that a farm housewife done. Many, many jobs.

JE: I call people like her pioneer women.

RH: She was.

JE: And the strength that they had. How many brothers or sisters did you have?

RH: I have one brother.

JE: And was he much younger than you?

RH: Five years.

JE: OK. And then he was born probably in better conditions in...

RH: In Fort Cobb, yeah. He was born in Anadarko at the hospital, yeah.

JE: And then your father's name?

RH: Floyd.

JE: And did he grow up in that area?

RH: Yes, his family all grew up around Fort Cobb in Caddo County.

JE: OK. So then what was his profession? What did he do?

RH: He was a farmer.

JE: All right, so you grew up on a farm.

RH: Yes.

JE: Knew how to work the farm?

RH: Yeah, absolutely.

JE: The harvest and...

RH: Harvest and, we hand-milked 24 cows before daylight and again after dark, besides doing the field work.

JE: And what kind of row crops were you having?

RH: Oh, we done some row cropping, but mostly wheat.

JE: I'm told you had one of the largest combines in Caddo County.

RH: Yeah, that was quite later. That was after I acquired quite a bit of land in Carnegie, and I had a big tractor and big combine.

JE: Back to your dad—he would load up mules, take them to play donkey basketball?

RH: He played donkey basketball with a mule. It was a fun thing to watch.
(Laughing)

JE: I bet it was. Did you join him in that? (Laughing)

RH: Oh, sure. (Laughing)

JE: But OK, you said you acquired land, so you were intending to be a farmer?

RH: Well, it was more or less a hobby, John. We farmed 31 quarters in South Carnegie there—all wheat.

JE: So then, but then when you were in your teen years, you were able to purchase land?

RH: No, it was after a loan. That was 20 years ago, something like that.

JE: OK.

RH: And I've since sold all the farms.

JE: Right. But you weren't even thinking about what you wanted to be at that age?

RH: No, I wasn't wanting to be a farmer.

JE: You knew that.

RH: I knew that. It was a hobby.

JE: Yeah. OK, and then you went to grade school in Fort Cobb?

RH: Right.

JE: And then on into high school, all there in Fort Cobb.

RH: Right. All there in Fort Cobb.

JE: What were your interests as a child? I'm trying to track—sometimes we can figure out a child has certain interests and that propels them into what they're going to do. Did you have any special interests at that time in flying or whatever?

RH: The flying came probably the last couple of years in high school. I had the opportunity to ride in an old Stearman with a crop duster there in the county, and I took a fancy to it and have flown ever since.

JE: Wow. How old were you when that happened?

RH: Fifteen.

JE: But back to your brother and you—you actually had a lion?

RH: We did have a lion. He was an African lion, and he was a big pet. He thought he was a dog. He'd go hunting with us.

JE: What was his name?

RH: Leo.

JE: Leo the lion.

RH: Leo the lion.

JE: Right. OK. How do you come up having a lion?

RH: We bought it from the Tulsa Zoo.

JE: Oh! (Laughing) And we're just across the road from the Tulsa Zoo right now.

RH: Yeah. He got so big and powerful that we got concerned that he might hurt somebody, and we gave him back to the zoo. He was a specimen of a lion—beautiful mane—and they used him for breeding purposes. They put him in with a female and, thinking he was a dog, she killed him.

JE: Oh, really? Oh, my. And so what would you feed a lion like that?

RH: We never fed the lion any meat. We fed him dry dog food.

JE: And he hung out with dogs as well?

RH: Yeah, we had a German shepherd at that time, and the dog and the lion would go hunting.

Chapter 3 – 8:50

First Business

John Erling (JE): I believe it was in 1953 that you were married.

Roger Hardesty (RH): That's correct.

JE: And your wife's name?

RH: Donna.

JE: And she was how old?

RH: Sixteen.

JE: And you were...

RH: Fifteen.

JE: So that had to cause a lot of talk in the family.

RH: I'm sure.

JE: You've probably forgotten that now. Could you even get a marriage license?

RH: No, you obviously can't at that age. And we made several attempts and finally I got my father to sign for us, and we got married.

JE: Yeah. OK. How many children did you have?

RH: We have two girls.

JE: And their names?

RH: Deborah and Michelle.

JE: Maybe we need to talk about your children. How many grandchildren?

RH: I have three grandsons and two great-grandchildren — one boy and one girl.

JE: But let me say that here we are on this date, 2025, that you and Donna are about to celebrate an anniversary, I believe.

RH: Yeah, December 23rd is our anniversary.

JE: Seventy years?

RH: Really, seventy-one, yes.

JE: So anybody who knows somebody who lives a long life or is married a long life—how in the world did you stay married that long?

RH: I made a deal when we got married, to stay, and we've done just that. We enjoy each other.

JE: Yeah, that's remarkable, isn't it?

RH: Yeah.

JE: It is very remarkable. When you got married then, were you going to live off the land, or did you need to get to work to support your family?

RH: Right. The first job I had was laying pipe underwater for Sunray DX in Corpus Christi. They would have turned over if they had known how old I was, of course—and they didn't know that—and we were laying pipe underwater to the offshore rigs.

JE: You were diving then, weren't you?

RH: Right.

JE: And did you go down there looking for work, or how did that happen?

RH: A friend of mine in Fort Cobb, an older gentleman, was able to get me on down there.

JE: And so you would have been 18?

RH: Yeah.

JE: Maybe seventeen?

RH: No, I was diving when I was about 16.

JE: In that job, was that your first diving experience?

RH: Oh, yeah.

JE: You must have looked older for your age.

RH: I did. And big.

JE: And tall?

RH: About the same size I am now.

JE: Right? So you're about 6', 6'1" or something like that?

RH: 6' 2".

JE: Yeah, right. So that helped you.

RH: Yeah, sure.

JE: So how long did you lay underground pipe in Corpus Christi?

RH: Well, the job lasted about eight months. And then all of the people I was working with transferred to Alaska to work on that Alaska pipeline, and I didn't want to go to Alaska. So I came back to Fort Cobb.

JE: And then what?

RH: Worked as a sheetrocker for a company in Lawton.

JE: Is that kind of introducing you to the building business?

RH: That's right.

JE: And were you in the concrete finishing jobs?

RH: After the sheetrocking, I started as a concrete finisher and worked at that for a few years.

JE: What does that mean—concrete finisher?

RH: You would pour floors and walls, and then you finish it.

JE: Finish it off, right. So was that on your own—your own company—or on yourself?

RH: I was a partner with a fellow. We migrated to Tulsa to do these houses out at Traffic Circle at that time. That's how I got started in Tulsa.

JE: All right. So then that's actually when you become a business person.

RH: That's right.

JE: Was that your goal? Were you never going to work for somebody? Were you going to work for yourself, or...?

RH: Well, at that early age you're limited to who you can work for. When they find out how old you are, it's usually over. So I was kind of forced into doing my own thing.

JE: Isn't that amazing? That made you do that for all these years.

RH: Yeah.

JE: What kind of money do you think you were making back then?

RH: Probably \$1,000 a month, probably—something like that.

JE: All right, sheetrock business, concrete business—somewhere you started building single-family homes.

RH: That was after the concrete business.

JE: OK. What led you to think that you could do that?

RH: Well, I watched it as we poured the concrete on it and I figured out I could do that. And we grew the house building business into one house a day—about 370 in one year.

JE: One house a day?

RH: We could build a house a day, yeah.

JE: How big a house was that?

RH: Oh, most of them were 1,200 square foot to 2,000 square foot.

JE: That's amazing.

RH: Yeah, we'd have 50 or 60 under construction, but we turned out one a day.

JE: And where was that?

RH: In Tulsa. We built at Mingo and Garnett on 31st. All those subdivisions were where we built.

JE: All right, so you're 18 or 19 years old...

RH: Right.

JE: And you're with a partner doing this?

RH: No, I was on my own on house building.

JE: So that's actually your first company by yourself?

RH: By myself, that's right. We would sell the houses at night and build them in the daytime.

JE: These people—was it easy? How about financing for these people?

RH: Donna, my wife, was active in the operation, and she handled all the applications.

JE: OK. But that was not enough—just building single-family homes. You probably got bored with that, then you went on to multi-family housing units.

RH: That's right.

JE: So they were significantly bigger?

RH: Oh yeah, much bigger.

JE: And you couldn't build those daily?

RH: No, you couldn't build them daily, but we could build a 300-unit apartment complex in 90 days. Now it takes two years today for a builder to build one.

JE: So was anybody else in the construction business? Must have been at that time.

RH: Oh yeah. We were the second largest garden-type apartment unit builder in the country. The only one bigger was Lincoln Properties, and they had partnerships that built in all the cities. So they were turning out more units than we did, but we were number two.

JE: Lincoln was not local though, was it? That was national.

RH: They had a local partner.

JE: But there were other local contractors who were probably looking at you wondering, "What's this guy doing anyway?" Because nobody had probably done it that fast.

RH: No. It's all organizational.

JE: The business side of it and managing the money and all—was that Donna's part, or...?

RH: No, I took care of that.

JE: So then you had a natural affinity for doing that. Not everybody thinks that way.

RH: Well, I'm a trader. I like to do a deal. I'm not economically driven, but just to see if I could make happen what I wanted to happen. And I developed a pretty good expertise in trading and negotiating a deal, so that's been a big benefit to me.

JE: What's the key to a good negotiation—having lots of leverage?

RH: Well, leverage always helps, but like Trump says, you need the cards to make a deal. But I think one of the big advantages in negotiating is being able to read the fellow you're sitting across the desk from and understand what he wants—and be able to come to a compromise that's good for you.

Chapter 4 – 7:13

Inspired Others

John Erling (JE): So when you were building the single-family homes, you had to go out and get a loan for that, didn't you? Do you remember who granted you your first loan?

Roger Hardesty (RH): Bill Fryman at Mercury Mortgage.

JE: Mercury Mortgage here in Tulsa?

RH: Yeah, at 15th and Utica.

JE: And you were 19?

RH: Somewhere, yeah, around that when we got started.

JE: And did he know how old you were?

RH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Bill was a good friend, and yeah, he knew everything about me.

JE: He probably took a chance on you.

RH: Well, he did take a chance on me, and obviously it worked out—worked out good for me and it worked out good for Bill. He was not only making a loan to us, but he got the end mortgage on all that stuff we were building, so it was good for him.

JE: So was that a continued source of loans from him as you continued on to the multi-family housing?

RH: No. Mercury made the first two or three apartment projects, but they were small projects in the TU area—20-unit at a time. And we had a friend in Boston, The Loyal Protective Life, and they made the end loan. And once you got the end loan committed, the construction loan was pretty easy.

JE: But by that time you had also proven yourself.

RH: That's right. As a single-family business.

JE: Right. But then that didn't stop you either. You had to move on in building industrial buildings...

RH: And high-rise and motels.

JE: And there's a hotel you built?

RH: Yes, the one across from Oral Roberts I built and operated.

JE: That's been under different ownerships, I think.

RH: Lately it has.

JE: How did you get out there? Were you a friend of Oral's?

RH: Yes.

JE: And what about that friendship?

RH: He said he needed a motel out there by his operation—the hospital and university. And of course, we didn't sell any alcohol at the hotel. And it kind of went downhill for Oral for a while, if you recall, and then the hotel got pretty skimpy. I sold it.

JE: Oh, through all that time when it got tough, you had owned the hotel all along, and you agreed not to sell alcohol in it?

RH: That's right.

JE: That's the only way he would have entered into a partnership.

RH: Yeah, he wouldn't have stood for that. And we all built all the apartments out there for Oral.

JE: So did you have much private time or back-and-forth time with him at all?

RH: Not too much, but we were definitely friends.

JE: That would have been, I think, in the late '70s, early '80s?

RH: '70s. Early '80s. Right.

JE: Did you build anything on his campus?

RH: No.

JE: In your building business, getting started or whatever, did you have difficult times? Like sometimes the economy doesn't always match what you're doing. Kind of talk to us about if you had any problems.

RH: You've got to stay tuned up to your local market. Tulsa's been kind of on the opposite side of downturns. Tulsa held up real good. And we were able—when the national word was “recession”—we kept going. We kept building. We figured out a way to do it. If you'll recall at one point there, interest rates went to—30-year treasury was yielding 16%. Made it very difficult to get permanent loans for people. But we worked it out.

JE: So you were able to keep the cost down to the potential buyer?

RH: Right. We were selling houses — lot and all — for \$10 a square foot.

JE: OK. Right.

RH: They're \$250 now, for that minimum now.

JE: Somehow Mike Case and the red cube comes along in here.

RH: Yeah, that was a long time later. Mike started with me right out of high school. He went to school in Sand Springs—right out of high school—and ran the completed operations, the management side of the apartments. We managed around 30,000 units at one time, and Mike looked after all that. I think he applied for a maintenance job at the apartment.

JE: Oh, really?

RH: We taught him well.

JE: Yes, you did!

RH: After a few years, he went out on his own.

JE: And then it was his idea? That red cube was a very nice idea, wasn't it?

RH: Sure. Mike's a good marketer.

JE: And you pretty much dominated the apartment building business in Tulsa.

RH: Oh, definitely. Yeah.

JE: You know, here's a name that you inspired. Because I was talking to Jay Helm a couple of months ago, and I get inquisitive about people and what their lives are, and I said, "How did you get involved in that?" He says, "Well, I just went to Roger Hardesty," and he talked to you. Do you remember that meeting?

RH: Sure. Jay grew up across the fence. His mother was with the FHA. So I knew Jay from a young kid, and we've known each other forever.

JE: Well, you got him inspired.

RH: Yeah.

JE: He's been not too shabby.

RH: He's doing all right.

JE: You probably have other people too that you've influenced—many you don't know—that have come to you for advice and you're able to launch them.

RH: That's right. And a lot of them stop back by to thank us and visit, so it's been great.

JE: Isn't that great? For people to be thoughtful enough to come back and say, "You're the guy that helped me." We all need to take a lesson from that.

RH: That's correct.

JE: I think throughout your career, you built and managed over 30,000 multi-family units.

RH: Yes. We built them and we operated them after they were built. We were doing business in 16 states.

JE: And I have towns here—Oklahoma City, Stillwater, Wichita, San Antonio, Austin, Nashville, Lexington, Jackson—all those that you'd been moving on into. Did you ever think, "Wait a minute, I'm getting too big here. It's tougher to manage"?

RH: No, it was easy for me.

JE: Where were your main offices when you were doing that?

RH: Tulsa.

JE: And in a certain building in Tulsa was the location?

RH: Well, yeah, we built all those tall buildings at 41st and the Broken Arrow Expressway. We officed in one of those.

Chapter 5 – 5:38

Art of Making the Deal

John Erling (JE): You were one of the largest privately held real estate development firms in all of the United States.

Roger Hardesty (RH): Right. That's correct.

JE: Forbes magazine in 1982 said, "Roger Hardesty is to rental apartments what McDonald's is to dining out." (Laughing)

RH: Yeah, it was a project to keep all that financed. There was a lot of dollars involved, and we did business with the banks in New York—Chemical—and I can recall sitting, negotiating a loan in Stillwater with the underwriter at New York Life. We were just about to conclude and he said, "I don't believe we're interested in that loan." I said, "Why's that?" He said, "Well, you don't have one bike rack in the whole facility." I said, "Sir, we don't ride bikes in Oklahoma. We drive cars." So even today, a lot of the New Yorkers think we're still fighting Indians out here.

JE: We have tepees, right. So did he give you that loan?

RH: Yes, he did.

JE: So you got big enough that you needed to deal with big banks in New York.

RH: Yeah, the loan size was way too big for the Tulsa banks. We started out with them, but we reached their maximum loan very quickly.

JE: I can't imagine how many employees you were taking on about this time.

RH: Well, if you figure the construction people, it was over 10,000.

JE: I marvel at people who have gifts, and you had that entrepreneurial gift—that was just a knack.

RH: Well, I enjoyed the art of making the deal, no matter what you're trading. And it usually ends up as a compromise, you know.

JE: Were there mentors along the way that you think, "This guy actually helped me," or "That guy..." Are there any names that come to your mind?

RH: Well, probably the person that helped me the most was Bill Fryman at Mercury Mortgage to get started. Getting started is very difficult—you have no track record. You're young.

JE: Had you asked other people for a loan before you talked to Bill?

RH: Oh, I'm sure. But it wouldn't have been very many. Bill agreed to get us started.

JE: Mid-Continent Concrete—the ready-mix concrete operation. Did you buy that or did you start it?

RH: Well, what happened with that—as we were building all these apartments, especially in Tulsa—it required a lot of concrete. We bought a lot of concrete. And there was a company in town called Mid-Continent. It was operated by Charlie Lohman. He sold stock in the company to homebuilders to get his concrete company started. So as these homebuilders would decide to sell their stock, Charlie would send them to me, and I'd buy their stock and just put it in the file and forget about it. Well, it ended up that I owned 49% and Charlie owned 51%. And Charlie got into alcohol pretty heavy and had to retire. So we ended up with Mid-Continent. Then we started buying competitors and growing. When I sold Mid-Continent Concrete to the Mexican cement company, we had 33

plants, and we pretty well had all of eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas for ready-mix concrete. So that's the concrete story.

JE: And it's just interesting—you visit people, and it's just you're in the right time in the right place, and you throw in a bit of luck into some of that too.

RH: Sure. But I don't believe in luck. Luck is when you've got the wherewithal to take advantage when something presents itself.

JE: So you sold that, but then you also owned Alliance Transportation?

RH: Alliance—that was the trucking, the raw material trucking side of Mid-Continent. And it went with the concrete company.

JE: How about the quarry landfill?

RH: Yeah, we started the quarry landfill. When I bought McMichael, they had an old hole that was quarried out—60, 70 feet deep. And there's no water table out there in that limestone area in the northeastern part of town, so it was ideal for a landfill. And we developed that and eventually sold that to Waste Management.

Chapter 6 – 6:46

Flying Business

John Erling (JE): When did you get your pilot's license?

Roger Hardesty (RH): As soon as I was old enough to meet the FAA regs, I got my license. And of course, that's just the starting point. You've got to migrate into bigger airplanes—multi-engine, instrument. I ended up with about 27 type ratings in multi-engine jets. But what drove the aviation business was being in 16 states. I had to be on those projects, and I had to look after them. We had a superintendent out there, but you still got to be involved. We bought our first Learjet to get to all those projects. We could do three projects a day with them.

JE: So it became a need.

RH: It's a need.

JE: Yes, but you already knew you were going to be flying airplanes for the rest of your life.

RH: Probably.

JE: So BizJet International—what was that about?

RH: As we grew in the aviation business, we got more airplanes, and they were all GE-powered. So we did business with GE at Struther, Kansas. And the fellow that managed that was Butch Walker. Butch came up on retirement, and of course we'd been dealing with him for years on our engine work. He said we ought to start our own engine shop. So when we were in the old hangar down the taxiway here, we set up BizJet in the corner of that hangar where we kept our aircraft—and started BizJet.

JE: What was its service? What did it do?

RH: Engine overhaul.

JE: As a pilot—I don't know how many—15,000 flight hours? You have ratings in, is it 21 jets? ATP?

RH: Yeah, it's around 27 ATP.

JE: Gulfstream G550s, Northrop F-5A, F-5B, Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters?

RH: Helicopters.

JE: What's your favorite plane to fly?

RH: Depends on what mood you're in. If you want to set your hair on fire, the F-5 is the way to do it.

JE: In all your flying, did you ever have any close calls?

RH: Never had any close calls. We've had mechanical problems, but they're all manageable.

JE: While in the air—mechanical problems?

RH: Well, it didn't shut us down.

JE: Nothing that you can share that's like—you were a big hero and landed the plane under duress?

RH: No. Just solved the problem.

JE: But there was a plane accident in northern Canada, where Robin Siegfried, Mike Case, and others we can name—they were on a caribou migration hunt, right? Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

RH: Well, obviously I wasn't there. But the outfitter apparently had a young, inexperienced pilot flying them around to hunt, and he made a mistake and crashed the aircraft—and hurt everybody. Tremendous injury. They all went to the hospital. We flew up and brought them home.

JE: Charlie Ryan, president of Nordam, died. Jimmy Peilsticker died. Robin Siegfried—I've interviewed him for Voices of Oklahoma—and he tells that story, how he was in the water for a long, long time. It was very cold and all that—just amazing. And he had many surgeries as a result of it.

RH: Yes, he did.

JE: In fact, he and I have a joke going because the day that happened, we heard about this crash. And then somebody phoned in and said Robin Siegfried has died. And I went on the air and I...

RH: I remember that. Yeah, I remember that.

JE: Oh man, I was so embarrassed. So every time Robin sees me, he says, "I just want you to know that I'm upright. I'm alive." You have, I believe, a business called Black Hawk Lift Service?

RH: Yes.

JE: What's that all about?

RH: We operate a couple of Black Hawk helicopters—Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters. We do lifts on top of buildings, towers.

JE: Oh, when they're lifting big...

RH: Air conditioners, and whatever—flagpoles.

JE: But don't you go out to help farmers in Oklahoma?

RH: We hunt hogs with it also. We do commercial hunting in Texas. In Oklahoma, we just help the farmer.

JE: So they're getting rid of hogs because...

RH: They're destructive.

JE: Do you go on those trips?

RH: I go on most all of them, yes.

JE: Are you still flying today?

RH: I do. I'm still ATP in the Black Hawk.

JE: And you'll soon be 87. How long will they let you fly?

RH: There's no restriction in the U.S. ICAO, which governs international flying—65. That's what those hogs do to the wheat field—looks like a bulldozer went through it.

JE: Yes.

RH: So they're very interested in getting rid of the hogs. Costly to them.

JE: How do you actually kill the hogs?

RH: We use...

JE: Rifles?

RH: We put four shooters in the Black Hawk and go at them.

JE: I'm amused at the businesses that you ended up in. Somebody must have contacted you and said, "We need some help out here."

RH: Well, it's pretty obvious if you know the farmers there in eastern Oklahoma. They're all plagued with hogs. We've pretty well thinned them out in eastern Oklahoma. There's not all that many hogs left.

Chapter 7 – 7:35

Hardesty Family Foundation

John Erling (JE): You established the Roger and Donna Hardesty Family Foundation?

RH: Yes.

JE: Why did you do that?

RH: Well, Tulsa's been pretty good to me, John, and I thought it was time to give something back. So we spend a lot of time trying to give it away correctly. It's harder to give away than it is to make it—if you do it properly.

JE: And why is it harder?

RH: Well, everybody wants money, John, and you've got to separate the wheat from the chaff. So it takes a lot of... it's a lot of...

JE: A lot of, you know.

RH: Yeah.

JE: One of those is the Hardesty Regional Library. I happened to have been out there yesterday in that area. I'd been in your library. In fact, I voted there one time. But yesterday, on purpose, I just walked in—and what a magnificent facility that is.

RH: That's great. That's one of our better deals. You know, the library supports everybody.

JE: Yes. And it's known as the Hardesty Library, but also Tulsa County Library. And then I noticed all the people's names in there who are supporting the programs of the library. So you, along with many others, have supported knowledge and reading and all that. In fact, I noticed one that was a reading jungle for children to go in there.

RH: So I guess you've seen Connor's Cove there—the auditorium? That's my grandson.

JE: I was wondering if it was named after him.

RH: Yeah.

JE: What's special about him? Do you have any heirs coming along that could be interested in your business?

RH: Oh yeah. Michelle and Connor. Michelle and Connor have never been involved with any company other than ours, so they're ready.

JE: How old is Connor?

RH: Twenty-seven.

JE: OK. So is he involved in your business?

RH: Yes, he is. He pretty well runs the FBO.

JE: OK. And so what do you do?

RH: Sweep out. Still try to trade and make a deal.

JE: And give him something to do?

RH: That's right.

JE: But I can go through a long list here—and I think we should—but that spirit of giving back... you wanted to help so much, that came on in time? You just realized, "No, we need to put this money to use in our community," I guess?

RH: That's right. You know, nobody takes any money with them, so you need to make use of it.

JE: We do have other philanthropic people in town. But there are a lot of wealthy people who don't want to get involved as much as people like yourself.

RH: There is, but the ones that do give outweigh the others. Tulsa is very good in philanthropy.

JE: Yeah. All right, so you have Hardesty Hall at TU...

RH: Uh-huh.

JE: Arts and Humanities Council, Hardesty Arts Center, the ONEOK Field...

RH: Right.

JE: How did you get—did you build that?

RH: No. The mayor was kind of driving that field goal—Taylor, yeah, Kathy Taylor. And they ended up short of what they needed to make it happen, and she came out and said, "You need to help us on this." We did.

JE: I'm glad you said that. Because we knew they were short, weren't sure where they got the money, and I don't know if that was publicly announced or not. Maybe it was, but I didn't know.

RH: I don't think it was.

JE: Yeah.

RH: And we did the same thing with JT and the BMX. They were short there, and we helped them get that national operation here.

JE: You're talking about Mayor Bynum. And with the City of Tulsa, you helped them out—built the BMX facility, bike motocross?

RH: Helped them out, yeah.

JE: Is there some satisfaction too, that you're behind the scenes and nobody knows about it—and you did that?

RH: I've just never put any work into trying to get it all out public.

JE: Here we are across from the zoo—Tulsa Zoo—the Hardesty Snow Leopard Exhibit. And I was reading in the paper this morning—they have elephants.

RH: The zoo—that's one of the greatest zoos in the country, you know. And since the city turned the management over to a private company, it's done fantastic.

JE: Hardesty Archival Center at Gilcrease. RDC Center for Fab Lab. Hardesty Center for Dance Education—Tulsa Ballet. Have you ever been to a ballet?

RH: Yes. Michelle's very active with me.

JE: OK. Hardesty Field at Holland Hall. For a man who came out of a dugout... Hardesty Leadership Center, Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma, Children's Center Rehabilitation Hospital, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Hardesty Family Adaptive Sports Complex at The Center for Individuals with Physical Challenges. Somehow I'm always driving by that area.

RH: I see that. They do a great job out there.

JE: And Michelle is the executive director of the foundation. Also, I think people didn't realize this—that you donated land for the location of Saint Francis South Hospital.

RH: Yes.

JE: So you went out and bought land?

RH: That used to be a concrete plant—well, mine.

JE: There? Oh, is that right?

RH: Yeah.

JE: All right. Hillcrest Hospital...

RH: South.

JE: That's... they're kind of all in that area there. Was that part of your concrete plant?

RH: No. Well, I owned a half-section, and the expressway went through it, you know. So we donated a lot of land to the hospitals out there. That's why you see that complex.

JE: So were you buying land in anticipation of apartments?

RH: That was an investment—raw land investment there.

JE: Saint Francis Glenpool—you were also involved in that one?

RH: Involved in that one.

JE: Anything else in medical services you can think of—surrounding communities that you've gotten involved in?

RH: We donated considerable to Grove Hospital up there—Integris

JE: Another one you've been involved in over the last several years—with the Tulsa Home Builders Association—to develop and implement a construction academy with Union Public Schools. What is that?

RH: Well, it's teaching these kids the trades—whether it be electrician or plumber. We're trying to teach them a trade where they can... you know, these plumbers and electricians making six-digit numbers. And there's no \$200,000 to \$300,000 debt going to college. So we're trying to teach them a trade. It's working well.

**Chapter 8 – 8:00
Advice**

John Erling (JE): At your age—86, to be 87—are you sleeping in until 10 and coming in to work at 11, or what are you doing?

Roger Hardesty (RH): Well, I get out here about 7, usually leave when the market closes, after 3.

JE: Here we are—one day people will be looking back at us. You say you play the market. The market's been up and down because of President Trump's tariff, and he's in a battle with other countries and all, and it's affecting the stock market. So are you concerned about that?

RH: No, it'll come back. Trump is one fantastic trader—he'll get the deal done. He likes the art of the deal.

JE: So you're not afraid of this tariff idea?

RH: No. It needed to be done. Should have been done 30 years ago. All of these former presidents talked about it, but they never done anything about it.

JE: There's always people worried—to sell or whatever—and your advice would be to hold?

RH: We're buying.

JE: Good time to buy? Do you have any special project right now that you're working on? I know you're building a hangar right next to you here. How is that going to be used?

RH: We'll store airplanes, just like this hangar here. We just needed more space.

JE: How many planes do you own now?

RH: Three helicopters, a G550, and the Carbon Cub.

JE: Have you ever flown commercially?

RH: One time in my life.

JE: Take us on a trip—what's the longest flight you've ever taken to other countries or whatever? You've flown to other countries, more than likely?

RH: I've flown a transport category twin-engine jet aircraft into most all major airports in the world.

JE: Why?

RH: Charter business. At times, we did all the demo work for Gulfstream. So when they got not only the buying prospect, but once they bought it, we introduced the crews to this long-range line. So we ended up going all over the world—every continent except Antarctica.

JE: What's it like flying into Berlin?

RH: Oh, Berlin's a walkover—no trouble at all. Some of the strips in Africa get a little dicey, but we know which ones are good and which ones are bad.

JE: So obviously, all these airports—everybody can speak English to you?

RH: We won that in World War II. All international airports have to speak English.

JE: And what about other languages?

RH: Meaning?

JE: I mean, can they accommodate other languages besides English?

RH: Well, they can speak their native language to the local pilots, but not the international flights. They must speak English.

JE: What's the most difficult airport? Oh, you already said probably — most difficult — is it Africa?

RH: Well, the strips and the surfaces in nowadays, yeah. Probably top-ranking worst airport is Aspen, Colorado.

JE: Why?

RH: Oh, it's a one-way-in, one-way-out airstrip, and it's mountains on all sides of it. A lot of people get hurt or killed at Aspen.

JE: Have you had close calls in the air with other planes? We're hearing about that recently.

RH: Oh, we've had to avoid some, but it's not all that bad.

JE: Seems like Reagan International right now is...

RH: Well, they made a lot of mistakes there. They shouldn't have those helicopters crossing that flight path at all. Hell, there's lots of airspace in this country—you don't need to do that. Training at night with those night goggles on and over the city—you can't see anything because of the glare of the lights.

JE: So it was a helicopter that interacted with another plane, and that helicopter shouldn't have been training apparently?

RH: Well, no, of course not. Low-time pilots. The gal that was flying had very low time.

JE: Are there many female pilots now?

RH: Yeah, there's quite a few gals flying airplanes.

JE: What advice would you give to young people who are listening to you? You've had that—you were blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit, you have a business mind and all—but there are those who would like to do what you do. I don't know if they can, but what advice would you give them?

RH: Well, you've got to be willing to sacrifice, John. You can't be at the lake or at the ballgame at night if you want to succeed. You've got to work, and you've got to put a lot of time and thought and effort into it. For some reason, the youngsters today think it's going to come easy. It doesn't come easy. You've got to put your shoulder to it, and you've got to put time into it.

JE: So while others are golfing, you're working?

RH: You're working.

JE: Did you ever—well, I do know your hobby. You've been a hunter.

RH: A hunter, yes.

JE: We didn't talk about that. Hunting where? For what?

RH: Well, I've always hunted Alaska—good hunting up there over the years. And I've done about 14 safaris to Africa.

JE: Do you like Africa?

RH: Oh, I love it. You know, they say if you ever drink out of the river, you'll always come back—and that's pretty well true. It's a wonderful country. It just has so many problems to solve.

JE: Yeah. So do you have a room that's mounted with animals that you've killed—hunted?

RH: They're here in two places—in the offices and in my home and the home in Aspen. I'm running out of places to put animals.

JE: Do you have any desire to do more of that?

RH: I'm done with that.

JE: What do you think—when you look back on—what are you the most proud of?

RH: I think my family. The growth that Michelle and Connor have had in the companies. It'll be a seamless takeover when I get boxed up. (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) You're in good health now though?

RH: Very good.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

RH: Well, I think the foundation speaks for itself. We're very proud of that foundation and what we've been able to do in Tulsa.

JE: Yeah, it's been enormous. And I want people to hear the sound of a jet overhead right now...

RH: (Laughing) Yeah.

JE: ... because we're close to the airport—and that's only fitting, isn't it?

RH: That's fitting.

JE: Because in this boardroom we have plenty of pictures and models of airplanes.

RH: Yeah.

JE: And all, so... so that's good. Well, Roger, it's been fun to sit across from you and I admire you and what you've done. So thank you for telling this to Voices of Oklahoma. Thank you.

RH: Thank you, John.

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