

John Ellsworth Interview 3-19-2016

VCRM: I'm interested in hearing about your background, how you began collecting old radios and how that led to the radio museum.

JE: I was a public school teacher and I was teaching technology education, and saw myself as a wood shop teacher and a drafting teacher. And a couple years into working at Southington High School they asked me to teach electronics which I knew nothing about. So I started learning very, very quickly and kind of got into electronics and enjoyed it. So as time went on and I developed a little bit of knowledge I used to go out tag sailing and flea marketing all the time and I saw a little old vacuum tube radio sitting at a flea market one day and picked it up for five bucks thinking I would take it home and fix it with my new-found knowledge. And I did and got it working and that was my first mistake!

Next thing I knew, I had about two hundred radios floating around the house and I was an avid collector, picking up everything I could find that was old electronics. People would come over to the house and enjoy hearing the stories behind these pieces that I had around the house, and so we went public with it a couple of times. We'd put displays out at libraries and public display areas like that and people loved it...

VCRM: You said 'we'?

JE: My wife and I at the time. And so we said well, let's try a museum. I have no idea where that idea came from, but it came from somewhere. And that's when we rented a little 500 square foot of space at the bottom end of Arch Street, at the corner of Wallace Street in New Britain, and opened up the museum, and that's where this all started. And it went from there.

VCRM: So you've been in business for 25 years.

JE: Yes. We're starting our 26th! We just celebrated our 25th anniversary last September; September of 2015.

VCRM: And it's all been with volunteers.

JE: Totally a volunteer organization. Totally a labor of love. What happened, as time went on the museum collected two things: it collected a lot of stuff and it collected a lot of people. And the people are what make it go. And so we have all 100% volunteers. It's gone through six different transitions in terms of physical location. We kept on getting kicked around as tenants and eventually got ourselves to the point where we actually own the building. But we're still all volunteer – the complete staff. No Federal funding; none of that kind of stuff.

VRCM: Great! Anything else you care to add?

JE: It's been a fantastic experience. It's been a phenomenal trip. (Laughs) For everybody involved I think and we have a lot of fun doing it. It's been very enjoyable.

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