## **Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project**

Interviewee: Jessica Diaz

Place of Interview: Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston, 205 Calhoun St.,

Charleston, SC

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tourism, NonProfit Organization, Local farmers, Food and beverage

**Abstract**: This interview with Jessica Diaz, Sales and Marketing Manager of GrowFood Carolina - extension of the Coastal Conservation League. Particular focus is held on the preservation of local farming and infrastructure, increasing rent prices and the communities entanglement with the environment. Throughout this interview you will hear about the importance of GrowFood and the work they do to connect local farmers with restaurants and grocery stores in the Charleston area, as well as Ms. Diaz's own personal experiences living in the city.

**Biographical Note**: Ms. Diaz is originally from New Orleans but moved to South Carolina in elementary school. In 2011, she moved to Charleston, S.C. to assist in the development of GrowFood Carolina, an extension of the larger Coastal Conservation League project.

## **Project Details:**

In the summer of 2018, student researchers from the College of Charleston conducted oral histories for the research project, *Voices of Southern Hospitality*. The project documents diverse opinions and stories about southern hospitality in Charleston, South Carolina, but also offers a deeper and more intimate history of a changing community. Over the past thirty years (early-1990s to 2018), the Charleston peninsula and its surrounding islands have experienced rapid economic growth and rapid cultural and ecological changes. The *Voices of Southern Hospitality* project chronicles this profound transformation with the personal histories of Charleston residents.

The project was launched in June 2018 with funding from The Committee for Innovative Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the College of Charleston. In addition to documenting important stories, the project was designed to train College of Charleston students in oral history research methods. Five student researchers and 42 interviewees participated in the first phase of this project (June and July, 2018).

Interviewer Initials: TM Interviewee Initials: JD

**Interview Begin** 

**TM:** Alrighty. Hello, thank you for joining me today. My name is Tanya Matthews and I'm sitting down today with Jessica Diaz, Sales and Marketing manager at GrowFood Carolina on the 12th of July, 2018. To start, Jessica, do you mind telling me where you're from?

**JD:** Sure, originally from New Orleans but I moved back to South Carolina where my mom's family grew up when I was in fourth grade and then lived in Columbia until going off to college in California. And then moved back here in twenty eleven, to Charleston.

**TM:** Sure, where did you study in California?

JD: U.C. Berkeley.

TM: And what were you studying there?

**JD:** I studied genetics and plant biology.

TM: So, you came to Charleston in 2011. What were you involved in while you were here?

**JD:** Sure, I moved here for work. So the Coastal Conservation league started a project called GrowFood Carolina, in 2011 and I was hired as their first Sales and Marketing manager. The goal of the food hub was to promote economic development and conserve rural land for agricultural production. So the goal, really... simply, is to make farmers money. Keep them on their land and keep that lands productive, as far as growing food. Yeah, so it's just another conservation strategy.

**TM:** About how many farms would you say that you interact with?

**JD:** Sure, currently about eighty or so. Some of them we work with year round and others just come in for a couple weeks or a month...seasonally, depending on what they're growing. For instance, you know, if a farmer just has a pecan tree and they sell us their pecans, they will only deliver to us

when they are producing. So, it depends, but about eighty farms in total throughout the year.

TM: Throughout South Carolina?

**JD:** Yup, so we're only South Carolina farms at the moment. There's one or two items that are regional products. For instance, a local ExcelloPress canola oil that uses farms in South Carolina and Georgia, but the goal would be to grow the amount of South Carolina growers that are producing canola so that we could get our own processing facility in the state. And if that program grows it could be an all South Carolina product as well down the road.

**TM:** Sure, and once you gain the produce and everything, where does it go?

**JD:** We distribute mostly to Charleston area restaurants, grocery stores, institutions like the college of charleston. We also distribute to the Savannah area, Greenville and Columbia currently. But most of it does stay in Charleston.

**TM:** And this is more along the lines of personal experience... when you first moved here how did you feel? What was your experience?

**JD:** So, I hadn't spent a lot of time in Charleston before I moved here. The only person I actually knew besides some people from work was one of my best friends since middle school, who had come here for the College of Charleston and graduate school, and was working for Mount Pleasant Waterworks as the lab manager. So, she kind of showed me around town and she told me that it had already changed a lot since she was in school and, you know, she was like "when I was in school nobody really went above, you know, Calhoun Street and there were parts of King Streets you just didn't go to" and that had already been changing when I moved here. And since... so, I think when I moved here, it was just starting to really get on the national scene for, you know, food and tourism. So, in the six years that I've been here I've definitely seen a lot of change in growth. A lot of it for the good, but having come from living in a bigger city in the San Francisco Bay area, you know, I'd really like to see Charleston learn from other cities' mistakes and, you know, apply the best research and practices and policies to maintain the quality of life for people who live here while it's still growing its' tourism economy. I think we're at a stage of growth where we can still make those decisions for the positive and well-being of people who've lived here for a long time.

**TM:** Could you describe the community and how you felt upon coming here?

**JD:** Sure, so I kind of came in to a well established, tight knit culinary community. I work mostly with a lot of the chefs in Downtown Charleston, which were really tight knit group and very... a lot of them very committed to already working with local farmers directly, but also seeing the need for GrowFood Carolina's work. So, the community was very supportive of what we were doing and looking forward to being able to source high quality local vegetables from even more farms than they were already working with and also recognizing that an organization like GrowFood would be able to deliver more efficiency, both on the chef side and the farmer side by having one hub that's serving lots of restaurants and serving lots of farmers, we kind of act as that food hub that can connect everybody. With just one phone call, they can reach over eighty farms so the community was very supportive of us. The restaurants that started purchasing from us, even stuff they didn't need initially, I mean when we first opened all we had was like, collard greens and some rutabagas and Husk was our first customer. You know, Travis Grams who's the Executive Chef now told all of his employees, you know, "whatever they have, buy it. We need to invest in their long term growth". So you know, I think that's a really good example of people understanding the need and supporting us, even if they didn't necessarily need what we had at that time so that they could support our growth for everybody's benefit down the road. So we are at a place now... six years...six and a half years after opening, we've returned over five million dollars back to South Carolina farmers. And all of that money mostly stays in those rural communities, you know, where they continue to support

all of those local businesses in those small towns that need it. So we've seen a lot of support from the chefs. The farmers... we're always getting calls from new farmers who want to work with us, too. So I think the farming community has really embraced the work that we do and are really grateful as well for all the services that we provide. So I would say that the community was overall very, very supportive and really passionate about what they're doing everybody's really passionate about helping each other.

**TM:** Definitely. Where is GrowFood Carolina located?

**JD:** We're Downtown Charleston which is great. We're located at 990 Morrison Drive so it's easy access coming from multiple directions for the farms. Which is very important because if they're driving here, most of them are either in larger trucks or hauling trailers behind them. So being in a location where they can pull in, get their trailers unloaded without having to deal with Downtown Charleston traffic which is great. So we're really close to the 26 exit and really close to the bridge going to 17. So, you know, it's a great central location and also we can get all of the downtown restaurants deliveries sometimes, you know, the same day the farm comes in or within a day or two.

**TM:** That's awesome. Do you have any social responsibilities as a company?

**JD:** Oh sure! Well we're a Non Profit Organization. So, you know, essentially we're a farmer service organization that's part of the Coastal Conservation League's larger conservation mission, so everything we do is mission driven. Absolutely. So the goal is to preserve, you know, the farmland. To keep it in productive landscapes, and also we're always (emphasis) bottom line here to help and support farmers. So everything's driven by that mission, everything that we do... that's the first question we ask: "is this benefiting the farmers?". So I would say in that sense, absolutely.

(09:03) TM: Could you explain a little bit more about the Coastal Conservation League?

**JD:** Sure, the Coastal Conservation League has been in operation for over twenty years. They do really great work to conserve land all along the coast and throughout South Carolina, and they definitely focus on land that's important for the larger ecological landscape, as far as targeting land that they're going to conserve. So they work with businesses and other community organizations to make sure

that the right important pieces of land are conserved from development.

TM: Sure. What... could you describe some of those pieces of land that they would protect?

**JD:** Um, sure. I would say some of the early ones were (thought pause) that everybody is most proud of...that took a lot of cooperation with other organizations was, like the Ace Basin area.

TM: Ace Basin area?

**JD:** Yeah, and then right now, they're working on pieces of land along the Ashley River as well. So, yeah, all of those.

(10:12)

**TM:** Sure, okay. So, this is a bit of a different question now. How do you personally define hospitality?

**JD:** Hospitality... I would define hospitality as an industry that involves all of the kind of service...like any kind of service industry. So restaurants...bars... I would include museums, anything, that's an attraction for tourists to come see, I would say, or for locals to enjoy. So, like any kind of extra curricular activities, I think that falls under hospitality. That would include, like our parks, our museums, restaurants, any kind of business that also involves, like outdoors activities. Like coastal expeditions is great, where you can go rent kayaks and paddleboards and enjoy nature. I think there's a really important aspect to enjoy the beautiful landscape we have around as well as the restaurants.

**TM:** How...what makes a good host in your opinion?

JD: Um, I think making people feel welcome. But I also...personally, I think valuing the quality of life of local people should be a priority as well. And I think that's something we have a little bit of area to improve upon in Charleston. Things are getting pretty expensive and it almost seems like the way that the development is happening it's only catering to rich people from out of town. People who actually live here can't really afford to live close to where they work anymore and it's creating all of these issues especially within the restaurants that I work with closely. I remember a chef telling me that...well, all of them are dealing with staff issues and that's having a lot to do with the lack of good public transportation and affordable housing in the Downtown area close to where people need to work. So that people are getting forced to move farther and farther away to areas that they can afford rent but without good public transportation or good parking or shuttles or anything like that it's hard for people to make their shifts on time. One of the chefs told me a story about how their dishwasher wasn't homeless but had to sleep in the park overnight to make their shift in the morning because the bus schedule wouldn't get them there in time. You know, so there's all kinds of stories like that and when people can't depend on a reliable labor pool, it creates a lot of unnecessary stress in those businesses as well. I know all of the chefs and restaurant owners are dealing with that right now. So I think that's something important that needs to be addressed, so yeah I am not sure if that answered the question.

**TM:** Yeah it did. So this is along the same lines. Do you think that southern hospitality is different from that definition that you gave?

**JD:** Um, no. I think southern, I mean, I think what people look for and is true in southern hospitality is a true openness and kindness and I think we definitely have that. Having lived in California for a long time, too, I can definitely say, like that's, not something you see everywhere, you know. In Charleston, we definitely have a more open, inviting...just attitude. In general, I think people are willing to help you out, be nice, start conversation, you know, and

just a general pleasure in making people feel welcome. And I think that extends to not only the service industry, but just the way people live their lives, you know? So I think that's definitely a cultural thing that we do have here.

**TM:** Sure, how would you describe the culture of Charleston?

**JD:** Like a small town, being a big city, you know, it's still somewhere where you can pretty much go anywhere, and know somebody. And but it's got a lot of features that are kind of like a big city as well. So it's, kind of in the middle, I would say, but definitely more towards the small town aspect. I like, you know, like, being able to go everywhere and know, at least somebody. And it just makes it feel like a more tight knit community. Yeah.

**TM:** Do you think that southern hospitality has played into the appeal of Charleston as a tourist destination?

**JD:** Absolutely, absolutely, definitely. I think people expect that. And I think everybody knows that. And not only is it true, but I think people are willing to oblige and understand, like, you know, you can definitely recognize, like, a tourist walking down the street. And, you know, point out like hey, you look...you look like you're hot and looking for something that would let me recommend this place down the street that might be somewhere you can go get some ice cream and cool off for money, you know. So I think it definitely has that vibe where everyone is willing to help, and everybody appreciates the tourist, too. It's, like a very important part of our economy. So I think it's important to make people feel welcome here. So, yeah, I do think that is something that's expected, for sure.

**TM:** Has this identity influenced development recently in your opinion? This southern hospitality?

**JD:** I mean, in the fact that there's been a lot of hotels built lately. I mean, I think, speaks to people's expectations of what our economy is going to be. It seems very much driven by hospitality. So, yeah, I've seen a lot of hotels go up downtown for sure. Yeah.

**TM:** Has that changed your community in any way?

**JD:** Definitely. I think that...well, I can't speak from the experience of people that I work with...for me personally I have noticed my rent almost double since I moved here six years ago to the point where, like you know, I'm college educated and my boyfriend's an architect and with both of our incomes combined we can barely afford to live downtown. And I can only imagine what it's like for someone like who's the dishwasher at one of the restaurants downtown, you know, so I think that is one of the top issues we need to be addressing right now.

(17:16)

So I see it affect me that way and then looking at local business owners or would be business owners. I have some friends who moved here to open a restaurant and have had many deals fall through because of funding. So not only is my rent expensive, you know, just as a tenant...but people looking to start businesses can't afford the rent on King street or a lot of areas downtown anymore. So I do think that the rapidly rising rent prices are shaping the kind of city were becoming, so there's less small businesses and more larger corporate offices opening that can afford that large overhead. So, you know, that's something we need to look at. I think that food is one of the big drivers of tourism here and people are coming for unique food experiences. So, if we want to keep...if we want to stay on top of being a leader in that trend, we need to make sure that we're making it accessible for those creatives to open businesses and thrive here. And not just, you know, large corporations. So that's something to be mindful of I think, for sure, I don't know what the answer's going to be because I don't think it's changing any time soon, so we'll see what happens, but that will be something that keep an eye on. Definitely.

**TM:** Do you consider the changes positive or negative, like, are there negatives you see coming from an environmental background?

**JD:** Sure. Well I think that's one of the things that, you know, the Coastal Conservation League definitely keeps an eye on is the kind of development that we're going to see. So I would say the negatives are sprawl. We definitely advocate for smart concentrated growth so that our footprint on the landscape around us is smaller. So I would say I definitely see negative effects with sprawl in suburban growth that's happening really quickly and I would say the smarter way to grow would be to develop more concentrated urban areas that make less of a footprint on the ecological landscape around us, preserve as much green spaces as possible. Ideally that being kind of preserving a kind of mosaic where wildlife can move around and still have larger territories. Those are wishlist items, you know, developers often have a lot more sway when it comes to zoning decisions that are made on the city and county level.

(20:15)

So it's important to have organizations like the Coastal Conservation League advocating not only for people who already live in rural areas - like John's Island - and want to see it stay rural because that's a right too...but also to preserve the natural areas that haven't been developed yet. So on both of those fronts I think it's important to have what I would say a smart, more concentrated development and obviously along with that we need to focus on better public transportation. So people can stay in this concentrated areas of growth and also not have to drive and have less concentration of vehicles on the road and parking downtown. So and, you know, we don't need to re-invent the wheel, here. There's been cities who have dealt with these same problems across the world and address them in really smart ways. So there's lots of lessons that we can learn from and apply that are already available to us. It's just a matter of will and funding.

**TM:** Yeah, in your memory is there a specific time where things drastically changed? Where you started to see everything change...

**JD:** I mean, the past couple of years have been pretty quick. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I moved here when a lot of the growth of especially, like the Mount Pleasant area had already been happening. My boyfriend is from Mount Pleasant and was telling me that most of what I had already seen moving here wasn't there when he was growing up. Like his house on 17 used to be, like, considered, like out in the country. And now it's just... now it's a Lowe's parking lot. You know, they like bought his grandma's house and paved it over. So the areas where, like his family, used to sell all the sweetgrass baskets on the side of the road that are now just part of the continuing stretch of suburban highway seventeen. So I would say, yeah, I've seen a lot of growth as far as expansion of, like hotels and restaurants downtown and a lot of new home development out in the kind of suburb areas.

**TM:** Yeah, you just mentioned something there about the development...I'll come back to it. Do you have a specific favorite place in Charleston that you like to have to go to?

**JD:** During the summer, I enjoy going to the beach. Definitely. I prefer Sullivan's, I think, because it's got like a larger beach. I know Folly can get kind of kinda slim when it's at high tide. There's not much sand there, so I like going to Sullivan's. So I definitely, like, enjoy living close to the beach, I think that's one of the biggest attractions of our area. I love going to eat at some of the restaurants I work with that are supporting farmers, so if I'm ever like going to get anything to eat I definitely try to support one of the restaurants we work with that's buying local.

Um, what else do I like to do? I like going to different events around town. There's like some really good local DJ's, like the event The Royal American had with all the bands coming out. So I like going to community events like that with music and people out there, like selling, you know, vintage stuff and art. My friends used to own the Southern Gallery, which had to close because of issues with the landlord... but I like supporting all of the local arts events, in particular. For sure.

**TM:** Do you have a favorite art event that you like to go to?

**JD:** Well, it used to be all the Southern Galleries openings. They've started hosting them at other than venues now since they've had to close their actual physical space. For instance, they're hosting Mary Edna Fraser and her daughter's works called *Family Ties*. It's at The Vendue. So I went to that opening last month. I think that's just a nice gathering of, not only to see like new art but also just to connect with all the other artists in the area, too.

TM: Yeah, have you noticed changes in these places as you've lived in Charleston?

**JD:** The places that I like to go to?

TM: Mhm.

**JD:** Yeah, I would say like the area on Sullivan's where I usually go...like everything is just getting more crowded. Everything's getting more crowded and there's a lot more traffic. So it just takes a lot longer to go do everything now. Everything's also getting more expensive. So, for instance, like I'd like to go and support all the restaurants that I work with, and like go eat their food and see what they're doing but because their rents increasing, their having to increase the prices on their menus and so even just going out to eat, you know, once a week become pretty expensive. So I would say rising prices, more traffic and congestion.

**TM:** Those are a lot of significant issues.

JD: Yeah! (laughs)

**TM:** Does that worry you? Do you think that you would have to move sometime soon?

**JD:** Yeah, I've thought about it... for sure. I mean, you know, I work for a NonProfit. Like, I...I'm dedicated to the work that I do for moral reasons. It's not.... I mean, I could definitely be making more money working for a different company but I choose the work that I do because I think it's really important and it's unfortunate that people like me and other people who like work in the arts or teachers or other public servants... can't really afford anything in Charleston anymore. Like prices, the housing prices have just skyrocketed. So I couldn't necessarily afford to buy anything when I first moved here and now I definitely can't. And so the looming question is also like... is the housing market going to...is it just a bubble that's going to burst? Like, do you just wait five years and see what's going to happen? Or is it going to be even more expensive by then? So, I would say housing costs and cost of living are definitely an issue that would... I've considered moving because of. Just a decreasing quality of life, for sure.

**TM:** Would you move somewhere inside of South Carolina? Or would you move somewhere else?

**JD:** Eee, I don't know. I mean, Charleston is definitely my favorite city in South Carolina. I still have family in Columbia. Where my boyfriend would move, it's a harder question. I mean, I wouldn't mind moving back to Columbia. I think they're doing a lot of really smart things there as far as making it like a more livable downtown area for themselves and kind of smart developments. I think their Mayor, Mayor Benjamin is doing a really good job. Other places I would considered moving, like Asheville, but as far as other places in the state, maybe Greeneville, maybe Columbia.

**TM:** Yeah. We touched on this a little bit about the housing bubble that's going on. Do you think that the environment will kind of play into that pop?

**JD:** Absolutely! I mean, sea levels are rising. Like that is something everybody needs to be thinking about. We seem to be having major hurricanes every year now. Everybody should be

considering that...it's terrifying, you know. So it's, like, even if you do buy a house, is it going to be underwater in ten years? Nobody really knows, there's not enough research being done about what that's really gonna look like, you know. So, yeah, I think that should definitely be considered and it's something that we should be focusing on as a city, preparing for. Its going to happen so I don't know. I think the human mind has a hard time dealing with really big threats in the future, that they're not seeing direct effects of now. So how we're gonna deal with that problem is yet to be seen. But I mean, look at Puerto Rico, you know. Like, lots of misuse of funds and lack of investment in their own infrastructure because of corruption issues and you have a whole island that's, you know, still dealing with lack of housing, water and power. So...and that's a U.S. territory that they've kind of just cast to the side. So, the other question is like, should we be planning on looking out for ourselves like will they're even be government assistance in this current administration. You know, like if Trump has a personal vendetta against somebody in South Carolina - which they're all kissing his butt right now, so we'll see but you know like what?...what are the options for government funding and support going to be in the future if we do have an even larger storm or disaster here. Were also on a major fault line, which nobody really talks about. So there's lots of things to worry about.

**TM:** Have you personally experienced a hurricane here?

**JD:** Yeah, yeah I evacuated for the last one.

**TM:** The December one?

**JD:** Yeah, I did evacuate for that one but my boyfriend stayed behind because his mom worked for the Department of Social Services and she had to work at a shelter. So he stayed with her. So... we did ok. The area that we were in didn't flood or anything but I mean it's scary. And also you know, I work with farms. So they're dealing with these consequences every year. I just was out visiting a farm out in Cameron who still has a huge dead area in the middle of one of his fields from where the flooding stood for a long time and killed all the crops in that area that still haven't regrown. So yeah... so it affects not just people on the coast but throughout the state.

**TM:** The one that happened in December/January...the winter cyclone, how did that make you feel?

**JD:** Um, I mean understanding a little bit more of the science behind it, like I understand that more intense whether patterns in general and more severe winter storms are just another part of global warming because it's changing weather patterns. And as the ice caps are melting at the polls, you're going to see more strong cold weather systems coming down. So that's just another effect of global warming and I understand that but I think it's unfortunate that we're not in a place that we can't just talk about it openly and move forward with plans of action, instead of debating whether or not it exists. I don't think any scientists really thinks there's a question about it. So I think it's just politics at this point. But I think South Carolina's in such a vulnerable position that we need to just bypass all of the political back and forth with it and go ahead and just make some plans, you know, deal with reality.

**TM:** Like, did you see the community respond to these events in any way?

**JD:** Everybody really had fun in the snow. That snowstorm.

**TM:** Or just any hurricane in general, any strange weather?

**JD:** I mean, the hurricanes are horrible for the farmers. So that's, really, really stressful. Many farms that we worked with had their crops completely destroyed. So like, for our pecan grower, he's down on Ladies Island, near Beaufort, um, his trees were really, really damaged and that's going to affect him for years down the road. So it's going to get to a point where, if multiple storms have really severe negative impacts on farms that are operating on really slim margins, that's definitely going to, have a huge effect on the farmers here in the state. Yeah.

**TM:** Personally, did you experience a moment of collective action, like a story that you guys came together?

**JD:** Um, well we always help, I would say, like the Coastal Conservation League and GrowFood go out of our way to try to help farmers apply for any grants that they're available for and also point them in the right direction for funding or assistance. That anything, anything that would apply to helping them out for any kind of situation like that we organize around trying to help them out that way

**TM:** So did you see any changes in the tourism industry afterwards?

**JD:** It's bad for business, across the board. You know, I don't think any landlord is saying "oh, you don't have to pay me rent this month because there was a storm". Right? So you're not only closing for a week because of evacuations but you're dealing with repairing damages, repairing roads, power lines. You're dealing with possible flooding in your business and also people who might have been coming to town to visit have canceled reservations. So not only are you losing business 100% percent for that week during the storm and evacuation, but afterwards. Things are slow to pick back up again as well but you still have all your same bills to pay. So it's definitely bad for business for sure, for all of the customers that we work with. Mostly like the restaurants and grocery stores. So that affects the farms as well.

**TM:** Hm, wow. So it's all cyclical.

**JD:** That's also right, exactly.

**TM:** Well, some of the final thoughts that I wanted to pull from you. Do you have a vision for the future of Charleston and how does tourism play a role in that?

**JD:** I think tourism is a huge part. I would... I envisioned a future of Charleston like my wish list. Focusing on eco-tourism, really valuing our unique and special coastline and the wildlife and landscape here, making that a priority for conservation. And I think that there's ways to do

both. There's ways to conserve wildlife and landscapes and also build a tourism economy. So, like I said I think the people who are coming here to eat at all the restaurants and do all of the things around town that are really fun to do, are coming for those unique experiences. So if... if we work to make it an environment where small businesses can thrive, where farmers are getting supported and we're focusing our efforts on making sure locals have a good quality of life, I think Charleston can continue to be one of the best cities in the country, you know, it's got a lot to offer.

**TM:** Like, developing the local infrastructure?

**JD:** Yeah, exactly.

**TM:** Shared bonds of commitments and everything.

JD: Yeah, absolutely.

**TM:** If you could change anything in regards to the communities general or tourism development, what would it be?

**JD:** I would say focusing more on marginalized communities that are getting pushed out, you know, those are the people who have made charleston what it is today and you know, if we don't focus on making sure that they can still afford to live and work here and have a good quality of life then Charleston's gonna be void of all the culture that makes this place unique. Yeah.

**TM:** And this is the final question that I have for you. This is an oral history project that were developing, and I'm wondering if you have any hopes for the project itself and you're involvement in it.

**JD:** Sure, I think projects like this are really important for hearing the actual voices of people, so I would love to see it become even more visible, and I'd love to help in any way I can in that aspect as far as promoting it for you guys whenever it's, you know, released to the public. So count me in to help out in that way. Um, I think, yeah, having people tell their stories and get their points of view is really important because, you know, the Chamber of Commerce represents a certain group of people, and but that's not going to be the same voices you hear on the ground. So I think you guys are doing good work and looking forward to help any way I can.

**TM:** Well, thank you so much, Ms. Diaz for sitting down with me today, it's been a pleasure meeting with you.

**JD:** Yeah, thank you.

**Interview End**