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## Ron Littlepage

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Robert McDermott

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Interviewee: Ron Littlepage  
Interviewer: Robert McDermott  
Location: Times-Union building, Jacksonville, Florida  
October 26, 2010, 2:15 p.m.  
Duration: 43:53

McDermott: This is Robert McDermott interviewing Ron Littlepage at 2:15 p.m. on Tuesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>. Okay. All right, so again, sorry about that.

Littlepage: That's all right.

McDermott: The biggest changes you've seen in the writing of the river from the late 70s/early 80s to today.

Littlepage: I think now more and more people are paying attention to what's going on with the river. And then . . . it's a . . . it's a . . . I think from a lot of the stories . . . the various things the mayors have done to improve access to it. Starting off with Hans Tanzler in cleaning up the raw sewage outfalls; Jake Godbold putting the Landing on the riverfront. The many problems he had with the Landing that did once generate a lot of attention to the river. John Delaney doing a lot to clean up the river, his preservation project to buy properties to preserve the natural resources we have in Duval County including protecting the river. And John Peyton has done a lot, as well, to get access to the river and continue to have the river as part of the full front of his administration. Delaney pushed to get the river designated a American Heritage River. So I think . . . you know you have a lot of us writing during this period of time. The people and the mayors were putting more focus on the river, so I think, you know, people paid more attention because of the things that were going on. It's a fantastic natural resource for the city. It's a . . . if we do it correctly, we can use the river to help develop downtown and to get people to want to move here, bring their businesses here and take advantage of the river. We have a great piece of property on the south bank, the JEA generating station, and a great piece of property on the north bank, the Shipyards site, so once we get out of this recession and the economy kicks up again we have opportunities to build and develop those areas where it has, whether it has hotels, businesses, whatever, it also offers a lot of public space. That's the key is having public space downtown. And one of the unfortunate ways the city has developed, if you live on the Southside you have very little public access to the river. Unless you happen to have a riverfront home. This side of the river didn't develop that way as much, because like in Riverside, Avondale, and through there, there's all these little pocket parks at the end of the streets that if you want to go down and look at the river and have a picnic or just enjoy it, you have that chance. Southbank not so much.

McDermott: Is that just the way Jacksonville grew?

Littlepage: That's the way we grew. You know that's all new development. And when they developed over here after the fire, the Great Fire of 1901, they didn't . . . the

developers didn't take every piece of property and put a building on it. They had parks, you know, if you're familiar with Avondale and Riverside, you have the great Boone Park and Willow Branch Park that were part of the development process back in that time. You didn't have that so much on the south bank, because that's newer, more suburban type development. But they have made strides. You know they've got some . . . the riverfront park in Mandarin and so forth to get access where you can. But that's the key. If people get to see the river, get on the river, enjoy the river, then they realize what an asset it is.

McDermott: Do you think keeping the river in the paper puts pressure on the politicians to keep up . . .

Littlepage: Yes, yes. I think, you know, when the paper writes a lot about the river issues now that people really pay attention to it, the politicians have to answer. Most of them are on board, so it's not like you have to . . . where the conflict comes, and it's going to come pretty soon on some of the efforts to clean up the river, is the, as you know, the problem is the nutrient overload in the river and there's a big fight between some environmental organizations that sued the EPA for not enforcing the Clean Water Act and they settled that suit and the EPA is supposed to establish what they call numeric standards for nutrients in the river. Businesses, politicians, all say that's going to cost billions of dollars, it's a tax on the water, dah dah dah, and so they're getting politicians to fight the EPA for being able to enforce those rules. That's the battle around now. So, yeah, you can tell the side I'm on. So I'm going to keep writing about it, trying to keep pressure on them to abide by the new rules.

McDermott: Why does it seem like the DEP is on the side of business?

Littlepage: Well, you have to understand how the DEP works. I mean, it's appointed by the governor and the governor is usually in this state in this day and times more favorable toward developers and to industry. I mean the Florida Chamber, the Associated Industries, all the ones that stroked the big checks to the politicians are the ones that are opposing the stricter standards. So that's why it's important to elect good people, because that's who gets to appoint people to the various . . . the DEP secretary to the members of the Water Management District board and so forth that can really determine what happens with the river.

Woman: Sorry, I just want to make sure we got this point, it's an important point in case the recorder wasn't working.

Littlepage: Sure.

Woman: You mention when you came to Jacksonville from San Antonio, Texas, that the Riverwalk wasn't here?

Littlepage: That's correct. I came here in 1978 and one of the things I found fascinating . . . maybe if you're familiar with San Antonio, what they've done to basically a ditch

that runs downtown is turn it into this great tourist attraction. And here you had this spectacular river running through the heart of downtown that the city basically turned its back to, and that evident because there was no river walk. There was parking lots built on the river. [chuckles] I mean, parking lots on the riverfront and the buildings away from the river. You know, once you find out the city has been dumping all the sewage into the river for years, it became obvious why people didn't want to have much to do with this . . . heavy industrial use where the Shipyards were . . . it's a polluted river. So you know since Hans Tanzler began the cleanup then Riverwalk was . . . Mayor Godbold not only did the Landing, but he did the Southbank Riverwalk. And it was the billion dollar mile, that's what he called it. It would bring attractions down there. And for a long time, the Southbank Riverwalk was the hotspot. You know, they used to put food festivals on it and the hotels had, you know, Friday afternoon partying on the decks overlooking the water. A lot of people went there. Then the Northbank was built under Mayor Delaney's administration. Southbank, there were some flaws in the design, you know. The wood planks were not some of the best material to use. It's old now, its decrepit. It got dirty and the boards warped. And the other problem with the Southbank Riverwalk is there's not a whole lot of access to it. If you want to go to Southbank, where do you park? That's why, right now, Mayor Peyton is redoing the Southbank Riverwalk. They're taking Friendship Fountain and, you know, going to leave the fountain but they're taking all the concrete that goes around it, going to make a park study and redo the riverwalk with concrete rather than the wooden planks. So yeah, this is a huge improvement from when I first got here. You didn't used to have that kind of access. So now you have riverwalks on both sides. This riverwalk here is fantastic. You take the Northbank Riverwalk you go all the way down to the Fuller Warren Bridge. Eventually you'll be able to go to Memorial Park. And then proceed in the other direction. Right now the structure's in place already at the Shipyards for the Riverwalk. Now that the city's getting that property back, they can take down that fence and open up even without development have a riverwalk that goes all the way up to Metropolitan Park in that direction. Which is pretty cool.

Woman: You also said that the Super Bowl helped to bring more pride to the river.

Littlepage: Right. I think when the Super Bowl was here, and at the same time the Northbank had just been completed . . . Northbank Riverwalk had just been completed, so that was new. They closed down the Main Street Bridge to vehicular traffic so you had the ability to walk back and forth between the Northbank and the Southbank. They lit the bridges so that they at night . . . the night you could see it, it was great. People, if you were here at that time, you had all these crowds walking up and down the riverwalk and enjoying the river. So I think that helped put attention on the potential. If you had that opportunity, the best views of Jacksonville is coming up the river at night on a boat and you see the skyline lit up. But if you don't have a boat, you can't see that. Now with the advent of the riverwalk and so forth you get that feel. Once people get to see the river and enjoy it, they take a lot more pride and want to protect it.

McDermott: What about citizens groups? Or could you just rely on politicians for the cleanup of the river? Or, do you think too the citizens groups, as opposed to maybe in the 70s, 80s, writing about citizens groups. Are they taken more seriously now that they're better organized?

Littlepage: Yeah, we've always had groups that worked to try to protect the river. Friends of the St. Johns River, dah dah dah dot. But in my view . . . my view . . . the way that really became more serious and became more effective was with the advent of the Riverkeeper organization. You know, the Riverkeeper organization was founded on the Hudson River in New York. Bobby Kennedy Junior was very active in getting that started, and it was a very aggressive campaign in New York to clean up the Hudson River. I mean, they did a . . . if you ever read the history of the Riverkeeper organization, they would do like commando operations to go out to take pictures of pollution being dumped into the Hudson, and really gained people's attention. Now that group was so successful there. And one reason it was successful, it had fishermen. It had, you know, business people. Groups that not only didn't work together working together. And so that idea then grew into if we can do it there we can do it in other areas like North Carolina on the rivers there. And so the talk began why don't we establish a Riverkeeper organization for the St. Johns River. And like anything there's politics involved with the various groups. And finally it got established and I think that's turned the course of people paying attention to the river. And . . . cause they're not doing the commando operations but they'll go to court now, you know. If you don't follow the Clean Water Act they'll go to court to make it happen. And they've attracted all kinds of membership from the Preston Haskells and Wayne Weavers of the world to crabbers, to fishermen to boaters to, you know, a wide range of people. The current Riverkeeper, Neil Armingeon, is particularly effective at getting out the message of what the river is and what's wrong with it.

McDermott: So writing in a more conservative town, you're writing about the river have you met opposition, you know, as far as coming across more as an environmentalist and having your views seem suspect? How would you write to change that opinion?

Littlepage: I get . . . when you're in the business I am half of the people are going to agree with you and half the people aren't going to agree with you, so that's just the way it is. And, I get . . . a lot of people say you're an environmental whacko and that kind of stuff. You aren't going to change people's minds. What you just need to do is keep, you know, have an issue out there in the forefront and realize there's going to be, especially in this day and time, we're political, so divided and so, you know, if you're not on my side you're evil it seems to be and that's something we grow out of. But follow what you believe and keep . . . and you know when they call and complain, hey, they're reading the column. So [laughs] at least the thought is getting planted in their mind somehow.

McDermott: Well did you notice a difference after the 2005 algae blooms where you could see it

on tv and as we talked about before if you're not on the river you still could see that and experience that?

Littlepage: Yeah, that was a big . . . that was a turning point. It was an awful thing to have happen but I think it really captured the people's attention that we do really have a problem with the river. This year was almost as bad, because we not only had the algal blooms but we had that huge fish kill. Now I've been here for a long time, as you know, and I've seen minor fish kills, but I've never seen a fish kill like we had that began around Memorial Day and lasted for almost a month-and-a-half to two months, and it was . . . what was unusual about it was the big fish. I spent a lot of time on the river while it was going on and it was really disheartening to see hundreds of these redfish, like twenty-seven to thirty inch redfish just floating belly up. Because redfish is a really strong fish, and for it to be affected it had to be something really wrong with the river. Now they still have not pinned down what the cause of it was. But it was not, I think, the highest priority of some in the DEP, because that I think sometimes they don't want to know what the cause is. Cause if they do, they know it's going to be tough to fix. But, once again, it's a bad thing, but it grabbed people's attention.

McDermott: The fish kill was from Lake George, pretty much, to downtown?

Littlepage: Lake George to downtown, and it was most . . . it was strange it was mostly big fish. Redfish, a lot of skates, and I saw some jack crevalle and some big gars. Normally you see the menhaden and all that, and there was some of that, but it was mostly the big fish. Which was confusing. But yeah, that was a bad deal. Of course we had the foam come after that. You always see foam in the river at some point. I never knew what caused it. In any event, it was triply bad this summer. It covered much bigger areas than I had ever seen before.

McDermott: And how would you compare the *Times-Union* to central Florida newspapers? Because now they want to siphon three hundred sixty?

Littlepage: Uhhh . . . two hundred sixty. Yeah, well obviously we've been not supportive of that. In central Florida, the *Orlando Sentinel* has good environmental writers. St. Pete does, as well. So I think they've covered the issue objectively. They don't have a columnist attacking it like I am, but you know, it's a . . . probably they'd be a bit more understanding of taking the water, since they need the water. But I think those newspapers also understand that there's some better ways to go about it than taking water from the river. Conservation is obvious. If we can save water, we're not taking it from aquifer, you know. If you're pouring half the water out of the aquifer on your landscaping maybe you're not using the aquifer water properly and we can conserve and not have to go after the surface water. But there's some good newspapers down there that have done a good job covering it.

McDermott: Looking through some articles from the '70s and the 60s of the *Times-Union*. I do agree that. . . I thought maybe they would be more pro-business, but I saw them

more on the side of letting us know who would be harmed with it. But the writing seems now more like it's trying to educate more. Would you agree? Or do you feel when you write about the river are you breaking it down more so that the readers can understand? Or can you write more about the scientific side?

Littlepage: I think . . . I try . . . obviously I'm coming from a point-of-view. They say you're not being fair, but I don't have to be fair. Okay, that's just the way it works.

[Laughter. The woman mentions something about it being an editorial.]

Littlepage: But I try to explain as much as I can what's going on with the nutrients, with the nitrogen and the phosphorous from a scientific standpoint. How, you know, we point the finger at Georgia-Pacific, which we need to do. We can point the finger at JEA, which we need to do. But we also need to point a finger at all of us, because we're putting fertilizers in our yards, you know, and driving cars that leak on the roads all of which goes into the river. So it's not . . . I try to educate people in those terms.

McDermott: That's what I found the big difference was. Writing about what we, as citizens, can do.

Littlepage: I think that's very important. I try to do that. The Riverkeeper's been good about, you know. . . The Water Management District. Go to their website. They've got great ideas on how to make a water friendly yard and things that you can do to conserve water. They're not all evil over there. They've got things that can help. I think that's been a change. I think six years ago, people wouldn't have thought about if I put fertilizer on my yard and I put too much it's going to go into the river, because the rain's going to come and it's going to down into the storm drain and into the river. Especially if you live on the side of town I live on, because, you know, Riverside was built before the retention pond. So those drains there go straight into the river. It's not allowed anywhere. So it's an education thing. The big issue, I think, that's coming up that will require a lot of education and a big decision on the health of the river versus jobs is with the poor and the dredging, continual dredging of the river. The port's a big job producer for Jacksonville, a big economic driver. But in order to meet the requirements of the bigger ships that will come with post-Panamax they have to have a deeper channel. The channel now is at forty-two feet and they want to take it to fifty. If you go back in history and look the channel used to be six feet. [laughs] You know every time you change the channel, the depth of the channel, you're altering how nature set up the river. Conflict is going to come as . . . in this part of the state, Water Management District is doing . . . removing the water and also the dredging. It's how that effects the salinity levels in the river, because it definitely changes the salinity levels if you take the channel that deep, how much further to the upriver does the salinity levels change. Which then changes the whole ecosystem, cause you know, the grasses that you need for the estuary and spawning areas don't live in salt water. So you get . . . it changes. So the conflict's going to come at some point. Are we going to have jobs, or are we

going to protect health of the river?

Woman: A few weeks ago, I woke up and I was listening to NPR and they mentioned the St. Johns River summit. They mentioned a person who called in and they said that it was quite hypocritical that the summit was actually funded by Georgia-Pacific. So they were saying why bother going to a summit if it is being funded by the very people who are polluting the river. Have you ever found a conflict of being a journalist versus being able to talk about the things you want to talk about but the newspaper has to bring in advertisements from companies . . .

Littlepage: No. I mean I will say that is one of the good things about working for the *Times-Union* and like I said I've been writing the column since '89, so I'm in my twenty-second year of writing the column. They've never said you can't write that. The various publishers I had recognize if you're going to have op-ed columns, opinion columns, you've got to let them have an opinion. Now, there's a certain balance. I know I'm not going to, you know, start a crusade to drive the banking out of Jacksonville, you know. But I've never had any pressure to do that. So that part has been good.

McDermott: What do you think the biggest change has been in the writing, since you've been writing with the *Times-Union*?

Littlepage: The biggest change was when I started out as metro columnist and then I got moved into the op-ed page, because our metro columns were too controversial. Which is fine. They're controversial, so . . . by moving me to the op-eds page they let me become more opinionated. [laughs] You know as opposed to what was on the metro front. That's allowed me to write in a different style than I would have opposed to writing as a metro columnist. But it's been good. It's been a privilege to get to write the column. They've been good to let me do it.

McDermott: When the river summit first came about, so 2000?

Littlepage: That's about right, yeah.

McDermott: So, what I read was one of the goals was to get the river condition to what it was a hundred years ago. So was the goal realistic? Or was that . . .

Littlepage: That was Delaney's goal. And no, it's not realistic. But you set goals and you try to get as close as you can. The summit's . . . you mention the controversy over the last one with Georgia-Pacific. I'm a big fan of Georgia-Pacific being one of the main sponsors of the river summit, but whoever sponsored it . . . the good that could come out of that is you get more people sitting down and talking about the river. And hopefully coming to a consensus on the things you can do. One of the problems with the river, we're up here on the end and all those counties down south of us have different ideas about the river and how . . . their uses of it. To get all the counties to work together and say okay let's come up with a common goal of how



we're going to protect the St. Johns River and why it's important to do that. The summit at least, not all of them, but got some of those counties that had come in the past to begin talking. What could come out of it is, of course depends on what happens Tuesday, I'm not pushing one way or the other. But if John Thrasher is elected reelected to the senate he very likely will be line to become the senate president at some point. He's made a commitment to making the St. Johns River an issue in the legislature and to get the various representatives of the counties to form a caucus to look at the river issues and to come up a common way of approaching them. That would be big. The phrase you're gonna hear him say, and you've probably heard it, is they need an Everglades style solution to the St. Johns River. And they do. I mean it will be a lot cheaper to do it now than to wait like the Everglades and they're spending twelve billion dollars to try to restore parts of the Everglades. But if that happens, then a good thing will come out of that summit. And the good thing is we'll have John Thrasher on the record saying that's what he's going to do [laughs]. And if he's reelected and he doesn't, I'm going to remind him of that every other week that he's not doing what he said he was going to do.

McDermott: So you still feel, or would you feel that especially in economic times like this is development still going to be put in front of water quality? Or do you feel we've come to a point where we will take both into consideration and make a decision that's gonna benefit . . . still keep the river in a position . . .

Littlepage: I'll show you . . . now this is a political answer, because it is politics. The answer to that if Rick Scott becomes governor, the river's going to suffer. You know, his whole mantra is to get government out of the way and let business do business. Well how business does business is not good for the river.

McDermott: But in that sense, do you think that citizens groups are strong enough now opposed to what they would have been twenty years ago to put pressure on politicians?

Littlepage: They'd have to do it through lawsuits. You know, Rick Scott talks about doing what he did with problems with the Department of Community Affairs. Well, as bad as DCA has been they've been of the few steps we have between letting developers just run rampant and just do what they want to. If Rick Scott thinks that there's too many regulations and so forth that's holding industry back well then that means the Water Management District isn't going to be able to enforce the rules to protect the river. As poorly a job as Water Management . . . at least they've been there and done some things to help . . . We'll see. Unfortunately that is a political answer, because politicians will determine if we do what we need to do to clean up the river. Tough economic times. Absolutely. But you have to look at the cost of what will happen if we don't improve the river and protect the river. I mean it's a huge economic driver for Jacksonville, and up and down the river. If that river turns green more than just one month out of the summer, if you have fish kills regularly. First of all, property values, which are the base of much of the revenue for your city are going to go down. You'll lose your boating industry and your fishing industry. It will have a huge economic impact. So it's always going to be a battle with these

politicians.

McDermott: I noticed more recent articles are using the term new economy, but using the river then for tourism. And in the city, I know we mentioned earlier competing with the beach. It's just seem like I've always heard more about the beach being promoted for recreation than the river.

Littlepage: The beach is obviously the beach. It's gonna attract . . . one of the ways I see it and it's anecdotal, but what do you see on top of people's cars now that you used to not see much of? Kayaks and canoes. Most of that is in the marshes in the river, where that's taking place. You know, the Riverkeeper puts on several boat tours during the year where they take people, actually on the river taxis, and go down to Palatka.

Both woman and McDermott: We did that Friday.

Littlepage: And it's always packed. Well that probably tells you, hmm, there might be something you could do on a regular basis and bigger basis that people would do. Because we're used to this part of the river, but you go south of here and it becomes more of what you think of as a river. You know, it's narrow and winding. All the trees are hanging over the banks, stuff like that. I think done properly you could do a lot more to promote the use of the outdoor aspect of the river to people, especially down south. You have the springs and all that, which is a whole other attraction. And I think you're seeing more people not stopping going to Disney World, but wanting to do more than just Disney World. And one of the things they can do here is the S. Johns River is get out and see what a real Florida is as opposed to a fake Florida.

McDermott: You see towns along the Mississippi you know they play up the whole 18<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century . . .

Littlepage: Yeah, you know, I think there's things like that that can be done. I think more and more . . . you see more and more people wanting the ecotourism aspect of travel. They're still going to take the kid to Disney World, but maybe they'll spending a couple days out kayaking, paddling in the river and, you know, see real alligators up close kayaking . . .paddling down the river.

Woman: I think just from my perspective as a young woman I think one of the attractions for the river, honestly, is the wedding industry. People often don't think about this, but when you look at, if you map out where the wedding venues in Jacksonville are they're either at the beach or here on the river. And part of that is it's scenic and since the Cummer Museum and the woman's club over there, that's one of the primary spots. Because you have the gardens and that river.

Littlepage: That's another thing we can do, just talking downtown, this part of the river. If we get the Shipyards development going, we get the Southbank development going, and then you get a regular service going to the museums. You take the taxi to the

museums, take the water taxi out to the zoo. People don't get a chance to go on the river. You don't have to have a boat to do that. You get out here and have a regular outing. Take advantage of our museums and make a day using a route. The people could do . . . unfortunately I kind of screwed this up. You could do Quest Creek, which, I don't know if you know, goes under this building [laughs] Sometimes you see a boat come up and it disappears under the parking lot. [laughs] One time you'd be able to run it up to Prime Osborn and you could have gondola boats running back and forth. Some of the stuff they did with the Skyway they could've stopped that.

McDermott: That's another story.

[Laughter]

Littlepage: Yeah, that's another story. But, what I'm saying there are things . . . We don't know what's gonna happen. One of the uses of the Shipyard property might be to put a convention center there. So now we need hotels, convention center, people here for convention if they can get on a water taxi and go down to the Cummer gallery and look at the museum or go out to the zoo. Now you have things people can do. Spouse comes to the convention. Spouse doesn't want to sit through all the meetings, you know, can go do things like that. Then downtown becomes more active and you can get a lot more accomplished. That's when you need to use the river as a selling point for downtown.

Woman: It's really interesting. If I remember correctly the zoo already has a pier.

Littlepage: Oh yes, it does. It's got a pier and a dock and all that. What they'll need to do is dredge a little bit, because it's silted in. You've got to drive a really shallow-draft boat to get in there. But I know they're working on that, so you have that connection. Then you can get really carried away. You can take it out to the zoo. You can go over to Fort Caroline or you can take it up to Kingsley Plantation. You know, they've got docks at Fort Caroline and Kingsley Plantation. Barbara Goodman, who's the head of the park service here, keeps getting a little money at a time to establish . . .to go ahead and put in a ferry service between Fort Caroline and Kingsley Plantation. Which you'd have a naturalist on board, you know, and you'd go through the marsh and they'd point out all the different birds and vegetation and to me that would be a big attraction. Every time I see Barbara, she's been working on this for about ten years, and every time I see her she says hey I got some more money for the plan to put the . . . I think about now they'll put headquarters around Sisters Creek marina, but then yeah you come here from the Midwest for a convention. You get on the river and go to the zoo, go up to the Preserve. It's all interconnected. It'd be quite a treat for someone's who's used to looking out at wheat fields all the time. [laughs]

Woman: Sounds like a lot of fun.

McDermott: It does. I think it's, I think some of its generational. You have to have the people

that want to do it, and you know, that's one thing I've always thought about Jacksonville. Is this a town that people want to get out and something like that? To come downtown or is it more suburban type?

Littlepage: I think . . . I tell you my children, really, are big outdoors people. They love being out on the river and in the woods. You see more . . . there's always going to be the suburban element. That's why, you know, the Avenues and the St. Johns Town Center is like, you know, a city within itself out there. But, I think, you know, it doesn't mean you can't have a city within downtown, too. You're going to have some young people, if they get more of an entertainment district downtown, more things like that going on, especially if you work downtown. I never understood the people who go live at the beach and work downtown. That means they've got to downtown everyday and five days a week to go to work. Whereas I live and work downtown, and if I want to go to the beach, I drive out there two days a week. I live ten minutes from the office, and they're driving an hour each way sometimes. But you've got to have more going on downtown than we have to get that. But many cities would die for what we have downtown. To have a river like this that runs through the middle of their downtown.

McDermott: Any city in particular you'd like to see Jacksonville . . .

Woman: . . . model itself after?

Littlepage: You know, there's a lot of . . . Indianapolis has done a good job. They've got a whole stream. Of course San Antonio I think is a good example of what you can do if you do things . . . There's a lot of cities that have done a lot with their downtowns, like Charlotte, that don't have the asset we have with the river. So if we took advantage of it, we could get there. But it's a tough climate at the moment to spend money.

Woman: Do you think one of the challenges with the . . . I don't know. I feel like this is a challenge for me. You asked me earlier before this interview if I'm from Jacksonville and I gave you the "uhhh" because I'm a military child. You have a lot of people coming to Jacksonville who are from outside the area, especially from up north. So you have that question are you a Jacksonvillian and they just look at you like what do you mean? Do you think the challenge of having people having pride in a central location is because of the fact you have Mandarin, you have the north side, you have . . . It's regionalization of Jacksonville, itself.

Littlepage: I think one of the problems that downtown has always had is Jacksonville is a city of neighborhoods. You know, a lot of times, it's not I live in Jacksonville it's I live on the west side. Where do you live? I live in Mandarin. I live in Avondale. One of the reasons Jacksonville's downtown kind of lost out when the migration to the suburbs. We've got to build that back. It's hard. But you know I'm a firm believer that every great city has a great downtown where they have these amenities. You live in Mandarin if you want to go to a really top-notch show you're going to have

to the Performing Arts Centers or to the arena, and so the downtown has to become everybody's neighborhood. And then, even though I live in Avondale, downtown is still mine. I get the hell, I never go downtown. You get that a lot. When was the last time you've been downtown? Well ten years ago. Well, maybe it's changed.  
[laughs]

Woman: Just a little bit.

Littlepage: You get that a lot when you write about downtown issues, but they are connected: the river, downtown, and it's all part . . . it's all put together, it's just gonna take a lot . . . and it's commitment. One of the problems we have with our political system in Jacksonville is the mayor's limited to two four-year terms. Yes, it's a good thing, but it's also a bad thing. You can't establish an agenda and get it done in eight years. You look at one of the most successful cities in the south is Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston's had the same mayor for about fifty years. He had a goal and they set it and they were able to . . . ours changes with every mayor that comes in. So I think what we need to do is set an agenda of where we want to go in twenty years and even if we change political leaders in that time, we 're still on that path. Which is . . . you get more and more people talking like that. They realize every mayor that comes in can't have a different agenda. We don't get where we need to go.

McDermott: Hopefully something like the river is something everyone can agree on. You know, either party and something that is longer term.

Littlepage: I tell you right now. All the parties will say they're for the river [laughs] and then when they get in, they change.

McDermott: Some of us are reading the book, *Mirage*, and it talks about Jeb Bush . . .

Littlepage: That's Cynthia Barnett's book? Yeah.

McDermott: . . . how to change to a degree his view.

Littlepage: Cynthia's sharp. She did a good job with that book. I think she's got another coming out pretty soon. She was looking at conservation in Japan or something like that. She was spending a lot of time over there.

McDermott: Do you have any more questions?

Woman: None that I can think of.

McDermott: I think that's gonna conclude the interview. Interview is ending at 3 p.m. on October 26<sup>th</sup>.