

This is the transcription of an interview with Tony Foster conducted on October 7, 2016 by Cassidy Clouse as part of Indiana University's Bicentennial Oral History Project.

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**Cassidy Clouse:** All right, well I'm Cassidy Clouse. Today's October 7, 2016. We're here at the IU East Campus Library. With us today we've got . . .

**Tony Foster:** Tony Foster.

**CC:** So where are you from?

**TF:** I grew up in the Fountain City area, which is just north of Richmond, so actually about 10 minutes from campus.

**CC:** What made you choose IU East when you were college searching?

**TF:** Oh, you know, I looked around, but IU East provided everything I needed for my career goals. And since it was close to home, I was able to stay and work at the family business while going to college full time. So it was a real attraction for me.

**CC:** And what was the family business?

**TF:** My parents owned a gas station garage in Fountain City, which that wasn't my goal to remain in that line of business. But it provided me with an opportunity to work and pay for college at the same time.

**CC:** Do you have a favorite class or professor that you remember?

**TF:** I was a business major, so I enjoyed a lot of my professors. I remember one. His name is Stan Spencer. Really, really nice guy. I really enjoyed Stan because he was also engaged in local politics in Preble County, just across the line from here.

And I didn't imagine I would end up in local politics after IU East, but that's where I spent 16—the first 16 years of my career. I guess he had a lot of impact on me and got me thinking in a different direction than I thought I originally would be going.

**CC:** Do you have any classes that stick out in your mind?

**TF:** Some of Stan's classes that—or Professor Spencer, I guess I should say [laughs]. And then some with Professor Vandana Rao. She was an economics professor, and I liked working with her quite a bit as well.

So those stuck out. And then what was also neat, I had an art class with Professor Ed Thornburg, which is the—was my elementary school art teacher [laughs]. So that was neat, kind of—

**CC:** —Full circle—

**TF:** —Full circle, yes. So that was a lot of fun.

**CC:** So you graduated in '97, right?

**TF:** Yes.

**CC:** How did IU East change from when you first got here to now?

**TF:** You mean as in present-day or?

**CC:** Yeah. Or when the last time you were familiar with it.

**TF:** Yeah, it was just a couple buildings. Three buildings, I think. And there were a lot of commuter students. It wasn't as it is today when the majority of the students are traditional students. It was maybe a 50-50 mix at that time.

So it felt a little odd compared to some of the college experiences that my friends were having at traditional campuses, but I saw, just in my four years, that that was changing and that student activities were becoming even more active, and there were more opportunities to get engaged as a traditional campus just in the four years, four and a half years, that I was taking classes here.

**CC:** How do you think that the feel of IU East has changed, both within IU East and then the community's view of it?

**TF:** I think it's changed tremendously, just due to the fact that it's no longer just considered a commuter campus, but it is now viewed as a campus for traditional students.

And what's neat is that when you are out and about in the community and you're active in the community, you see so many IU East students, especially student athletes, which

is a huge change from when I was here. So when you see the student athletes out and about in the community, it makes IU East more visible as a traditional college campus.

**CC:** So do you remember the campus being involved in the community at all when you were here?

**TF:** I do. And that—it might relate to other questions. The IU East students were active in the community with internships and other opportunities like that. So I do remember that that was very important back then as well.

**CC:** Did you have an internship?

**TF:** Yes, I did.

**CC:** Where was that at?

**TF:** I was able to get an internship at the Richmond Wayne County Chamber of Commerce Small Business Development Center. And actually, that is what started my career because they hired me on as a part-time employee as I finished my degree. And then I was hired on full-time.

And I worked there as an intern from 1996, and then I was hired on to a full-time employee. So I worked there about a total of three years. And then I left the Chamber of Commerce and went to work for the city of Richmond.

And I worked there for over 16 years. Just this year, 2016, I started at IU East as an employee on January 4. So I can trace my opportunities directly back to Indiana University East and that first internship which allowed me to meet so many people, which allowed me to progress throughout my career. So, I do owe it to IU East [laughs].

**CC:** What capacity do you work here now?

**TF:** I'm the executive director of the Area 9 Agency. We are an off-campus department. It's kind of a nontraditional department, but we are a department that serves as a conduit for state and federal funds that help people remain in their homes, versus going to a nursing home.

And we have a number of programs including Meals on Wheels, and we do support caregiver programs and a number of events that encourage health and wellness of our area's senior citizens and individuals that are disabled. So, we are a department of about 70 employees that not only affect Richmond, Wayne County, but also a five-county region as a whole, which is pretty neat.

**CC:** Yeah, that is pretty neat. When you were a student here, were you involved in any student government or organizations, clubs?

**TF:** I honestly can say I really wasn't. I came and did my—took my classes and then went to work. I was one of the students that came, got things done, then went home and worked [laughs].

**CC:** Do you have any favorite memories or experiences?

**TF:** I just think it was neat that . . . some of the classes were very unique. One of my favorite classes was probably a unique one where totally didn't relate to my major, but it was an elective, but it was an ornithology class. I had to be here every Friday at 6:30 in the morning.

And we walked through the woods of Indiana University East, and we would listen to birds. And then some of the tests that we—not just listen, but also try to identify. But then the tests that we had were relating what we had seen and heard and other things. A lot of people thought that was just going to be a real easy class. And in fact, it ended up being very challenging [laughs].

**CC:** Oh really? Actually going to make you do work in that one [laughs]. Yeah, I gotcha. That's great though. That's a really interesting class. Do you remember any events, whether it was an IU event or a national, world-wide event, that happened while you were attending IU East?

**TF:** I'm trying to think what may have happened. I . . . I really can't think of one off the top of my head. I should have prepared for that one better [laughs].

**CC:** That's okay [laughs]. If you can't think of one off the top of your head, it probably wasn't super important anyway, so yep. I know you talked briefly about your career and life after leaving IU, but when you were in those other positions in the community, did you stay connected with IU?

**TF:** Actually, we did. And what was neat about working with Chamber of Commerce, we were very connected, in constant contact, with Indiana University East. But also at the city, Chancellor David Fulton was the chancellor of IU East at the time.

He was very engaged with a number of community development projects, which was the department that I led. So I got to work very closely with Chancellor Fulton in his capacity as a community volunteer, and then how that also related back to IU East.

What was neat about that – being so connected with Chancellor Fulton – was that we had other opportunities to engage on campus to get student involvement in things. So that was really neat, being able to have that connection with the chancellor. It was a lot of fun.

**CC:** So you said that you are the executive director of Area 9, correct?

**TF:** Yes.

**CC:** What are some of the things that you do in that position?

**TF:** Well, again, we're . . . the conduit for state and federal funds. So, one of the things that is very important is just fiscal management . . . and keeping track of that. But managing and trying to grow the organization. I've only been in the position nine months, but we're trying to make it more well-known in the community and to be more of a player in the community.

Especially when it comes to community planning and other activities, not just in Richmond, Wayne County, but the region as a whole so that we are an advocate for senior disabled individuals, and so that their voices are being heard when it comes time for, let's say, a community's building a new park.

We want to make sure that it's suitable and built so that all individuals can use it and things like that. We want to be more engaged, also from a community development perspective, not just providing the case management services to make sure that they still are getting their federal programs, but to be more of an advocate and more out front for that population.

**CC:** So to what capacity do you work with IU East students and just IU East in general?

**TF:** Quite a bit. And actually, we're trying to rebuild and expand our relationship with IU East to have more internships, especially with the social work students. Interestingly, there's . . . I probably shouldn't say this on an IU interview, but we get a lot of referrals from Ball State and Earlham College.

And with IU East, we want to make sure that those students have priority in getting the internships and working in our department. Because we can provide real-life, real-world experience for their social work degrees that they're working on.

So, we're trying to expand that and get the students more engage. Again, in my short tenure, just 9, 10 months in this capacity, those are—that's one of the goals, and we're slowly working on that.

**CC:** So if a student took an internship at Area 9, what are some things that they would be doing?

**TF:** A number of things. They could be helping with event planning because we do a lot of events for senior, disabled individuals to promote health and wellness. But on the other side of it is the real nuts and bolts of what we do, and that's the case management side of things and learning what our case managers do to go out and assess the situations that seniors and disabled folks are living in and trying to connect them with programs that are going to help their living situation.

So they would be able to go out and witness that and then also just kind of learn from that. And also, help us with maybe some statistics and studies and reports that—we get so busy in the day-to-day activities that we need to do a better job of recording what

we're doing and compare statistics to see if we're actually improving situations. We have a lot of ideas of how we can engage our students a lot better than what we are now.

**CC:** Do you have a favorite memory? I know you said it's only been about nine months [laughs]. Do you have any favorite memories of just those moments that really, you know where you need to be?

**TF:** Yeah, it was real neat. The . . . I was—I guess the memory about this job, working here, is that I was nominated and received the award for being an IU East Alumni Hall of Famer in 2015. So the week of that event, the chancellor had a reception at her house, and it was at that reception when she offered me this position.

So that's my big memory was that was a nice event and a huge honor to be inducted into the IU East Alumni Hall of Fame. And, at the same time, the chancellor herself offered me this position at her home that evening [laughs].

**CC:** That's a really great story [laughs].

**TF:** So that is a neat memory about this position [laughs].

**CC:** What are some challenges that you've had to face so far in your new position?

**TF:** Like any job—are you talking about just specific to IU East, or just in general?

**CC:** Any challenges that you have, but especially those specific to IU East.

**TF:** I guess it's—yeah, and again, nothing, there's nothing at all bad about working for IU East. I came from working in local government, municipal government for 16 years. So I was used to jumping through a lot of hoops, so it's just different hoops I had to learn to jump through.

Maybe a little—some of them are a little smaller, some of them are a little bigger. But there are different—the hoops are a little different working in academia than in local government. So that took some adjusting for me, but that's not a bad thing at all. It's helped grow me as a person and as a professional.



**CC:** This is kind of a very broad, general closing question, but what does IU East mean to you?

**TF:** Well, it's very, very important to me. I was very lucky to be able to have such a quality educational institution in my hometown, or literally minutes from home, that I was able to go to, be able to work and remain in the family business. But also one that was credible in the community and allowed me to get, again, my first professional job.

Because of that, that's what helped me through my career. And then to be able to remain connected with IU East throughout my entire career and now working for IU East, it's really, really neat. So it's been a part of my life for the last 20 plus years, so it's why I'm here today. I'm so very happy that I went to IU East.

**CC:** I just thought of this, but I believe you met your wife here, correct?

**TF:** We—

**CC:** —Or you both graduated, and then you met later?

**TF:** Well, we actually knew each other before we started here. But we ended up getting married when she was a senior here. So she has her teaching degree from IU East and is a schoolteacher in Centerville now. But yeah, we ended up getting married when I had just graduated and she still had a year to go, so that was pretty neat.

**CC:** Was IU East—do you have any IU East memories from your relationship, or how it was involved at all? Or was it pretty well-established when you got there [laughs]?

**TF:** Yeah, it was pretty well-established, but it was nice having that connection. We were kind of on different paths. Our classes—we weren't always seeing each other on campus as much.

She was doing the education thing, and I was doing the business thing. But she did work here. She worked as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholar—in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program here on campus. So that was neat. Once she had that job it was fun to go hang out in her office when I had breaks and things like that.

**CC:** That's great. Worked out well for you. All right. Well, do you have any closing thoughts?

**TF:** No. I appreciate this opportunity, and it's an honor to be able to talk about this and IU East is a great place, as we all know. And again, I'm very fortunate to be able to go here.

**CC:** Absolutely. Well, thank you.

**TF:** Thank you.