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## Rodney Taylor

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## Rodney Taylor Oral History

Rodney Taylor is the Director of Food and Nutrition Services for Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools. He was formerly Director of Nutrition Services for the Riverside Unified School District in Riverside, California. He holds a B.S. degree in Public Administration from California State University. A noted pioneer and expert in farm-to-school salad bars, Rodney is known for establishing the “Farmers Market Salad Bar” program in 1997 while working as Director of Food and Nutrition Services in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. Rodney served on the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, the University of California President’s Advisory Commission for Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Network for a Healthy California Executive Committee. He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards. Rodney is a consultant trainer for the Institute of Child Nutrition.

JB: I’m Jeffrey Boyce and it is October 23, 2018. I’m here at the Institute of Child Nutrition with Mr. Rodney Taylor. Welcome Rodney, and thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

RT: Thank you very much. It’s good to be here.

JB: Could we begin today by you telling me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, where you grew up?

RT: Yes, I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, where I spent most of my adult life. And after 27 years as a food service director in California, I retired three and a half years ago. And a month into my retirement I got a call from a search company to see if I would be interested in going to work for Fairfax County Public Schools in Fairfax, Virginia. So that’s where I am now, and kind of wrapping up what is going to be a 31-year career in school food service, and about 42 years in food service.

JB: Wow, that’s quite a move, West Coast to East Coast.

RT: Yes. It was quite an opportunity to work in the tenth largest school district in the country and see if some of the initiatives and programs I put in place in smaller districts would work in a large school district.

JB: Before we get into your career too far, tell me about your elementary and high school experience. You went to school in LA?

RT: So I went to school in a city called Compton, which is part of Los Angeles, and it's a low-income, working class area. And I was a participant in the meal program in those days. That was back when they cooked scratch cookings, so I got good hot meals every day and looked forward to lunch each day.

JB: Do you remember some of your favorite menu items?

RT: Oh yes, Sloppy Joes, tacos – the usual – spaghetti and meatballs, meatloaf, basically what we called comfort food back in those days.

JB: Sounds delicious. Ok, once you got out of high school, where did you go to college?

RT: So I went to college down at San Diego Community College in California, and the interesting thing was halfway into the semester I realized that I was in over my head, so I left San Diego and went back home, did what I call rebuilt my foundation by taking foundational courses in algebra and in English and science, and went on to graduate from Cal State Dominguez Hills with a bachelor's degree in public administration.

JB: Ok. How did you get involved in the child nutrition profession?

RT: Well, it's interesting. I'd always worked in food service. In my family, my uncle was a maître d' on the Queen Mary. So at 16 you became a busboy, and at 18 you became a waiter. And then just on a whim I had gone by my mother's house and was speaking to her, and a friend was there and we were talking about jobs, and he said, "You want a job?" I said, "Yes." And so he took me and a friend to a meat company and he went in and he flipped a coin, and it was only one job, so my friend got the job at the meat company, and I ended up getting a career, because I ended up at Cal State Long Beach working in the dining hall for students that live on campus. And the dining hall that I was hired to clean in 1974, ten years later I was running that dining hall. And so that was the start of my career in food

service, and when I decided to leave Cal State Long Beach after 17 years I went to the Marriott Corporation, and I worked as a business consultant in schools, and that's how I got into school districts. So I worked for them in nine various districts, and inner city and up in Palo Alto and San Francisco, and really got a feeling for what school food service was. But in California the unions hated contract companies, so I decided to leave the contract company and try to go self-op. And I was fortunate enough to get a job as the director of food and nutrition services with the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District.

JB: Ok. Now when you were at Marriott, they were getting contracts to provide the meals to the schools?

RT: We just provided the management direction, if you will. And it was a great experience for me, great exposure, great working for the corporation, but really tough working for an organization when unions hate you.

JB: Tell me about some of the positions you've held and maybe how you dealt with the unions too.

RT: So in Santa Monica, where I first worked as a food service director, we had a personnel commission in the personnel office and the union really was pretty adversary in the beginning, but I developed a relationship with the union president, and we talked about instead of responding to when there's a problem, why don't we be proactive, take a look at where we're having problems, and then develop programs and initiatives to ward off those types of problems? And we were real successful in doing that to where originally what was adversarial was really very progressive, and had very few problems in terms of union. And then I went to Lynwood Unified School District in California. Now, Santa Monica-Malibu was a small, affluent school district. I went to Lynwood, which was a medium sized, 25 schools, low-income, high free and reduced, and the unions gave us fits. They just gave us fits, and I remember one time they were so angry with me that, in our central kitchen we had 19 employees. Thirteen of them called in sick one day. And so I get a call at five in the morning telling me only six people showed up. So I came in and brought in my assistants and we brought in a substitute driver, and there were nine of us that put out the meals that day. And I remember at the end of the day sending an email to the superintendent, asking her to join me in congratulating these nine employees that put out the meal that day that

normally it took 19 employees to do. What the employees were mad about is they thought I was working them too hard. So the superintendent said to me, "They're going to have a hard time getting the board to believe that you're working them too hard when nine of you put out what it took 19 of them to do." So that was probably one of the fondest memories I had of dealing with a tough situation and having it turn out positive.

JB: And so then after that district, that's when you retired from California?

RT: No. I went to Riverside Unified School District and I was at Riverside for 13 years. And I should back up and tell you that in Santa Monica-Malibu School District we developed a program called the Farmers' Market Salad Bar, and it was the first of its kind, where we put salad bars in all 15 schools. And we bought the produce from the local farmers' market, thus the Farmers' Market. So we'd go to the market on Wednesdays and Saturdays and negotiate with farmers, and the idea was to have fresh produce in schools. And I was a sceptic at first and didn't believe it would work. And when I went in the first day and saw this model that this parent had in mind, right away I knew he was on to something. The first program was for two weeks during the summer with child care, and it was truly my belief that it was going to fail in the two weeks and then the parent would go away and leave me alone. But I walked in the first day and I'm really taken by what I see. It appeals to the senses. It's colorful. It's user friendly. There are parents working with the kids to help them. And so I remember leaving that day – I never went back during the two weeks – but we developed a pilot in the fall of 1997, and in 2000 it was fully institutionalized. And there were those who said, "Well, it's too expensive. The kids won't eat it. It can't be replicated." So I moved to a district three times the size of Santa Monica in 2002, and in 2005 we started the pilot program there, and in 2010 we had it in all 41 elementary schools. So we were able to demonstrate that kids would eat healthy. The other thing we were able to demonstrate there, because it was a district that the program owed the general fund money, because they couldn't make their payment on this new kitchen they had bought – they owed \$5,100,000 – so we paid back the \$5,100,000, and we built a program around the salad bar to teach the kids to become lifelong healthy eaters. And what we were able to demonstrate is that you could have healthy kids and a healthy bottom line. That you could change perceptions about school food. I remember when I went in we were feeding 47%

of the children, and when I left we were feeding 70%. We grew our revenue at \$1,000,000 a year over a seven-year period. So we took what was an \$8,000,000 program in 2002, was a \$21,000,000 program 13 years later. And then the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill came in and did a study of the salad bar for two years, and what it demonstrated is that the salad bar was revenue neutral, meaning that you didn't make money, but you didn't lose money, and the second most important thing is the kids that had access to salad bars that could make their own choices ate healthier.

JB: How many schools were in that last district?

RT: There were 47 schools.

JB: With an enrollment of?

RT: Of 47,000 students. So then I move on. I tell you I retired and a month into retirement I get a call from a search company asking me would I be interested in talking to Fairfax County Public Schools, and I said, "Sure." And I have to tell you the truth. I thought I'd like a free trip back to the East Coast. I'll go and listen to what they have to say. And they arranged for me to spend the whole day there, and there were interviews, and there were visits, and I really liked what I saw. The program had challenges, and yet it was a program that I thought also had great opportunities, and so I said, "Yes, I'd be interested in speaking, then." Went through the process and they made me an offer and I accepted and told them I'd stay five years and then I'd retire for sure. And I've been there three and a half and I'm going to leave probably at the end of this year, so in four years.

JB: Do you feel like your educational background helped you prepare for your career in child nutrition?

RT: Yes, it did, in the sense that - I went to school thinking that I was going to work for the FBI, I always wanted to go into law enforcement - but by the time I graduated I was 34 years old, I was married and had a one-year-old son, and the idea of being shot at didn't seem so sexy anymore, so I had at that time I think, 20 years' experience in nutrition and I thought, you know, I've worked in fast food, I've worked in dinner houses. I was a cook, I was a custodian, I was the baker, I was the manager. I thought I had a good, solid background, that if I could just find my passion and purpose. And it wasn't in making money, and that was the focus

in most of the places I was at. In fast food, in restaurants, it's all about the bottom line. I needed to do something that stirred the passion. Personnel management helped me to understand that employees are the most important tool that you have, and that if you can inspire your employees, and that they have trust in you and belief that there is an opportunity to move up in the way that I did as an employee, I thought you could be successful in food service. So between education and experience I thought I was really well prepared for the challenge of once I came into school food, and the challenge was to create a generation of healthy eaters to reverse the obesity crisis and teach kids to become lifelong healthy eaters. I think my education, along with the experience prepared me well to do that.

JB: Is there anything particularly unique about California or Virginia regarding child nutrition? Maybe you can compare and contrast the two.

RT: Well, it's interesting. California – we have great weather, we have a great economy and a lot of wonderful things, and it's free-spirited, free thinkers there, and there's competition. Everybody wants to be great. So there was all of that going on there. I didn't know much about the East Coast, and I remember the superintendent asking me, "What are your plans for us if you take the job?" And I said, "I don't have any plans for you. I don't know the East Coast. I don't know the demographics or anything else. What I can do is I can share with you what I've done in California." And I did that. And I talked about the daily outdoor barbeques in the middle and high schools, where kids had choices of five items of hamburgers, hotdogs, chicken patties, rib patties, and hot links, and how the idea was to smell up the campus with the smell of barbeque, because when we think of barbeque we think of festivities. And what I wanted to do coming into school food is I refuse to get beat up over what I did as a profession. And that's what we did too well in school food service. We did our jobs and we defended ourselves when we got beat up. And I wouldn't do that. I wanted to do a great job and I wanted to tell people about the work we did, and to change that. So that's what the barbeque is about. And that was the first change I made in schools in California. It was one of the first school districts to do that, and it went well. And then we had the salad bar, which went well. And we started our own line of sandwiches and salads geared toward adults,

because teachers are our worst critics, and the administration. And if we were going to change perceptions of children and parents, we had to win over the adults. So I hired a chef away from the local university and he developed a line of sandwiches and salads that we called our Signature Line. And I remember sending him out to Panera Bread, and I said, "I want you to develop a line of sandwiches and salads like theirs that adults can order by 8:30 and we can deliver to any site by 11:30." And we did that. It was just innovating and everything that came so naturally in California. When I went to Virginia what I found is there wasn't that kind of creative thinking, so I found myself having to spend a lot of time explaining how it would work in a bureaucratic organization, because that's a real challenge in innovating in a school district. It's built around processes and procedures and everything you want to do to build your program really goes against the grain. So it's getting people to understand no is not the answer. Tell me how we get there. Or what are the rules and regulations that we have to address here? And that was a challenge in Fairfax, but I can tell you that people, when they saw things starting to work, they really got behind it in a way that I didn't see on the West Coast. That once they saw 'Oh, ok, this can work, and yes, this creates excitement, and yes, this is good', I saw the whole school system get behind us. And I'll give you an example of what we faced in Fairfax. There was an organization of parents that wanted salad bars in schools. The food service director resisted. The parents were successful in getting the board to bring in a third party to do an assessment and survey of the program, and in that there were demands for a very different program than what existed in 2015, when I went to work there. And they wanted salad bars, and that was the main reason I was hired. And so we put together a plan to put salad bars in all 141 elementary schools. We got a commitment from the Let's Move salad bar campaign, and they donated all 141 salad bars. We have 44 in place. We're bringing on 31 a year for the next three years and it will be in all the schools. We have the daily outdoor barbeques, the Signature Line, rotational barbeques. This program had lost \$9,000,000 over the previous five years. We've made back \$6,000,000 of that in the last three years. And so we know we're on the right track. The revenue has grown by \$7,000,000. Slowly the participation is starting to grow and that will be continuing. Increments will

be anywhere from two to three percent. We were feeding 44 percent of the kids, and so the hope is we will see the kind of success that we saw in Riverside, California. I won't be around for all of that, but I like to think that we put a succession plan in place that when I walk out there's a team of professionals that are inspired, that will continue to work, and they've got programs that they just need to continue to expand.

JB: What's a typical day like for you, or is there such a thing?

RT: I typical day for me is like, I learned a long time ago as a director that my job is to get the team through the day. Now, like anyone, I would have this to-do list most mornings, of things that I wanted to accomplish. And I viewed every phone call, email, or somebody walking in my office as an interruption to the tasks that I needed to complete. And it took me a while to understand that the most important task I had as the leader was to get everyone else through their day, that while their problem may not be high on my list, it may be the most important thing on their list, and the fact of the matter is their work dealt with what happens every day in getting the food fed to kids, whereas my work might be long-term planning, or getting the budget ready for March, and it's October. So I realized get your people through the day. Six hours of constant interruptions, if you will, where you're answering problems, or somebody wants to come in and talk to you, you're getting phone calls or whatever. And then what I learned, if I had three hours at the end of the day, I could accomplish as much in those three hours as I would in eight hours if I tried to keep working on things that could wait until the end of the day. And quite frankly I probably did a better job, because I could give my full attention to it after everyone left and the kids were fed. So when I came to Fairfax I made it clear I was staying five years, that we would hire an assistant director that would be responsible for day-to-day operations, so that when I left, whether they choose to promote that individual or not, they had a number two in place that was involved in the initiation of all the programs and everything, and that happened. So there's a good core of management team that I was able to hire, and people who are committed to the success of the programs. So for me it's just always thinking about how do we get better at what we do? That's the question I've asked myself for the past 30 years, and it's really that simple. At the end of the year my folks will tell you I bring them in a room and I say, "Ok, how do we get better at what we do?" And probably four or five years

ago at the Institute I learned that with one if their programs about smart goals, and I was involved in working with directors in districts to develop smart goals. I took that back to my district and to this day every year every supervisor is responsible for an initiative, and I want smart goals telling me that they're sustainable, they're measurable, all of those things that they need to be. They're time-sensitive and relevant. And you know what we find is? They get excited about that and we've seen a lot of success with that. So I see my work as an inspiration and motivation. I meet weekly with my folks. They give me Friday's Notes, which tells me what they did last week and what they plan to do. It's not a to-do list for me to say, "Oh, are you doing your job?" It's a way of keeping you actively involved in creative ventures about 'Hey, this is a fun thing we're doing, and we're going to do this next.' You're just keeping people engaged, and I say to them, "I want you to wake up with that fire in your belly that I have at 64 years, and I can't wait to get in there and figure out how we get better at what we do." And I teach my folks that there is no nobler profession than to serve children. I was raised in a home where we had to count on school meals. I know hunger far more intimately than I care to discuss. It wasn't just a matter for me of ensuring that poor kids had access to nutritious meals. That was important, but my two sons came up in a home where they weren't poor, and yet they had poor eating habits. And so we realized that regardless of what the social/economic status, whether it's riding on school buses, or waking up late and not having time for breakfast, or whatever, we found that second chance breakfasts in middle and high schools were very successful, because maybe a kid wasn't hungry at 6:00 when they woke up, but now after homeroom at 9:00 they could use a quick grab-and-go breakfast. We've learned that with breakfast in the classroom in elementary schools it increases participation, reduces the stigma of the poor kids going to eat in the cafeteria, creates a communal feeding environment that some of these kids will never see. So, you know, there are so many ways, and this is what I tell my folks, we touch lives every day. And I see my role, as small as it is, in every school district I've been in, I wanted to not only touch the lives of the kids in that school district, but I wanted to innovate in a way that I challenged the food service director in this school district, in this part of the state, in this part of the county, to do better. And if we all work, actively involved in this quiet competition about how we made our programs better, what better way to touch lives, well beyond kids you'll ever see in your lifetime? I'll walk away one day knowing I

touched a life. There's a kid that didn't go hungry. There's a kid that stayed in school. There was a kid that, because the lunch lady remembered their name and called them honey, something that they may not have gotten at home, because I tell people this and they don't realize it too often, and that is if hunger is the worst thing a kid faces in their home they're doing good. There are a lot of things that go on in those homes where we could provide to ensure that kids don't give up. Something that I saw too often growing up in my community, where just at 18, where it was an opportunity to move on in life, people had already given up. And so you could see in the things I talk about it's more than food. It's about love, it's about service, and I can't think of anything better to serve than children.

JB: That's true. What are some of the biggest challenges you faced in your career?

RT: The biggest challenges for me is I've been a rebel. I realized that some of the challenges I had were just me and my personality – not being someone who wanted to fit in, to go along to get along, but someone who wanted to make a difference, someone that was willing to buck the status quo. Early on in my career I would always hear directors explaining to parents who complained about food that their meals were compliant, as if being compliant with USDA guidelines was enough. And I saw USDA guidelines as a basis or a foundation, that at the minimum we should be here, but why don't we strive to be here? [indicating a higher level] And it's in that that I can tell you everywhere that I worked it was a challenge, because I don't know if I felt like people just wanted to see me fail because I was so driven, so self-assured about it, fearless about failure. My desire to succeed and build a program was far greater than my fear of failure. I determined early on if I got fired for trying to be a good food service director I could live with myself. It goes back to - to me it was a purpose I found, my passion and purpose in children. And I wore that on my sleeve and I came to work every day, and sometimes it worked against me. And I know that, and that's ok. I still had a great career. I tell people all the time I've done some fun things. In retrospect as an old man looking back maybe I would have been a little less direct, have chosen my words a little more softly, but I was just driven. And then I should say there's always, trying to innovate in a bureaucratic organization creates challenges in and of itself, but the fun thing is when you overcome those and you learn to work with – it takes a village, and working with the farmers' market, with the city. I remember with a farmers' market the school district couldn't figure out

how to pay the farmer on Thursday for the produce we got on Tuesday, and these small farmers needed their cash flow, so the city paid the farmers, and then we paid the city, until the school district figured out yea, they could do this. So it was that kind of thinking. It wasn't the difficulties, it was just getting people to yea, there's a way around it if we rethink this. So it was a lot of rethinking how we do things.

JB: What changes have you seen in the profession over the years?

RT: Oh wow, the changes have been dramatic from when I was hired. I was hired at a time when, prior to me coming in, I saw school food service as programs that were driven by registered dietitians who know nutrition as well as anyone. And now there were these financial challenges throughout the country, and business managers were not only looking for dietitians, but they wanted people who could run a business, and that I knew I would be good at. I knew that part I would be good at. And so I came in at a time when we were bringing in McDonalds and Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, and so we were contributing to the obesity crisis without even knowing it. But I saw it as a fun time to innovate and create, and we were turning programs around financially, but we were also playing a very active role in creating the obesity crisis, so the big changes I saw, the focus go from bottom line oriented to USDA putting more pressure on us to bring in nutritious meals, to working with the Institute for Child Nutrition over the years with all the programs that they brought about to help directors focus their energies on improving meals and sharing strategies across the country. Everybody's not going to be me. Everybody's not going to want to push the envelope. And even if they want to they may not know the wherewithal, so the Institute has really been great as a facilitator in helping us spread the knowledge around the country, and creating programs where we can gain knowledge. And then as I say, USDA has really taken a very active role in assuring that to be compliant meant that not only were you just meeting the bottom, but it meant you were serving healthy foods. And we're seeing food, I mean the creativity around the country is unbelievable of what I see now, of what folks are doing around the country.

JB: I'll put you on the spot here and ask you what you consider your most significant contribution to the field.

RT: I would like to believe that my most significant contribution was this one as a cheerleader, a motivator, the person that told them, “No, it’s not enough to run a good program. You’ve got to tell your story, because if you don’t tell your story somebody else will, and if it’s the local newspaper you may not like it.” So it wasn’t enough for me to innovate. I wasn’t going to let people beat up on what I was doing. I wanted to tell the story. And that goes against everything that we’re taught as human beings, this vanity that we shouldn’t have. And we were doing great things in school food service and I see over the years, early on there was me and a few others telling the story, there are people who have taken social media and have just run with school food service to where School Food that Rocks, and others throughout the country, we’re telling our story, and we’re telling it in a very positive way. And I’d like to think that I was one of those cheerleaders and motivators and inspirer. That certainly was the goal all the time, was to inspire people to want to be the best. Inspire them to want to be better, to help them find their passion, and help them understand that when you truly do enjoy what you do it’s not work. It’s a blessing. I work in a field where over the past 30 years I’ve gotten recognition for the work that I’ve done, and I would think anyone in any field would like to be told ‘Job well done’ and when I walk away I’ll feel like I had a great career. I gave it my best shot. And that’s all anyone can ask of themselves. Even when I retire I don’t see myself retiring. I hope to be involved with the Institute teaching courses on financial management and any other thing that I might be able to help these young directors with – how to navigate in a school bureaucracy. That in and of itself is a challenge. How to be financially viable and yet invest in your program. More importantly, how do you create an atmosphere where employees buy into it where they believe in what they’re doing. That it makes a difference. That they can grow in the organization. And so I hope to keep waving the pom-poms and motivating and inspiring people to just enjoy the work they do.

JB: Do you have any memorable stories of special children you’ve served or people you’ve worked with over the years?

RT: There are a lot of little stories we hear. We go in and we do a rotational barbeque, and that means we’re at a different elementary school every day. And we do two a day in our district and you go into a school and kids want to know what is the barbeque for and ‘This is the best day of my whole life’ - to hear stuff

like that. Or even when we bring in the salad bars, the fun things that, the letters we receive from parents and all of that, but I think of, with my employees, most of our jobs are only 4-hour jobs. People can't live off 4-hour jobs. And so when you innovate and you create jobs, and you create upward mobility, and you create summer programs that allow employees to work 12 months, because, like students that leave school at the end of school don't know where their summer meals are coming from, our employees' bills don't stop coming in June, so it was important to me to grow the program and to create opportunities for people to move up. And so having employees say to me, "You really do get it. We're with you." I remember going into one school district, standing on the floor with 32 employees, where 16 of them are 4-hour employees, and the other 16 might be eight hours or seven, but they didn't work 12 months, and I remember on the floor, new director saying, "I believe that we're going to grow the program, and this is what we're going to do, and there's going to be a day that we all walk in at 5:30 in the morning and we're going to give it our best shot, and at the end of the day we're going to walk out with our heads held high, knowing that we did the best we could, and that in time every one of you 32 people will be 8-hour employees, twelve months a year. And when I left there that was true. That's the kind of satisfaction that people will never talk about. It's not going to be very often that people are going to come, like I have an employee that was working nine months, and I said, "You know, when I was at the university I would be off five weeks, and I'd have my finances together and not have an income those five weeks. I had to struggle, and just by the time I got back on my feet it was time for the five weeks off again. Well I had people like that during the summer, and they said, "You really do get it, you getting me and my husband, getting us this twelve months meant we didn't have to struggle." Those are the parts of the job that, in quiet places in my heart, that truthfully I get emotional about, because I know I can create opportunities for people, and that is important. And so that more than anything else – I've never laid off an employee. I remember once, being in the Santa Monica-Malibu School District and my boss said, "Maybe you need to cut your office staff back to eleven months." And I said, "I'm going to cut myself too." And he said, "No, you don't have to do that." I said, "Yes I do." I said, "I'm the leader. If I'm going to ask these people to take a cut, I'll have to do it too." And he said, "If you feel that strong about it keep them on." We were facing a deficit that year. We made it up. When you create this upward mobility, you create trust, and

people believe in you, there's nothing you can't ask of them that they wouldn't do. And that's what I've experienced over all the years that when I think about what is it that really impacts me besides knowing I'm touching children's lives is the elementary manager that I walked into her school and I watched her serving the kids and I watched her hug them, and honey this and honey that, and I said, "I want to put the salad bar in your school." I said, "I can tell you love my children." I said, "You do what I ask you to do and you continue to love my children, and you'll be the first salad bar." I said, "And if you're as good as I think you are you're going to be running that program." She was the first site. Five years later she had implemented it in all of the other 31 elementary schools. When I left ten years later she went from making \$17,000 a year to \$75,000 a year. When you can do those kind of things, and I can go on and on about how that happened, or how we created jobs that didn't exist, that nobody was hiring chefs back in the day and now everyone has chefs, so it's those kinds of things that I'll think about. Yea, you made a difference in your own way.

JB: What advice would you give someone who was considering child nutrition as a career today?

RT: I always try to encourage young folks, especially the interns that we get from universities, or young people I run into at conferences, and I try to sell them all on 'Why don't you come into school food service, where you can take Johnny at five years old and we can teach him to be a lifelong healthy eater, instead of going to the dialysis clinic when he's 60 years old, when what you could have done is prevented him through his nutrition from having to be at the dialysis clinic?', and then talk about how we create, through our own innovation and creativity, a work environment that's very enjoyable, where it's collaborative, where we don't hide behind job descriptions, where we blend the lines and we do whatever it takes to be a part of a team that touches lives. I do warn them that this isn't for the faint of heart. It's hard work. And if you're looking for a nine to five and you just want to do something normal, why don't you go somewhere else and do something? We need people who are committed to ensuring that all of our children get the best nutrition that they possibly can. And to get involved in their state conferences. I'm always steering people to the Institute either to get resources to get better at what they do, or if it's someone that has been around a while, 'Hey, go to the Institute and become a consultant to spread that knowledge,' because

not only do I worry about the people coming in, I worry about what happens with all this intellectual knowledge now that all the baby boomers are leaving. How do we transfer that knowledge so that these young folks don't get frustrated in the bureaucracy and leave?', because I've always likened being a food service director in a school district as to being able to swim in shark-infested waters. And that has to be taught. And so I hope to stick around and help teach some folks, and I certainly encourage my colleagues that are thinking about leaving to think about how they can give back and help these young folks, because they're bright. These kids are off the chart with their energy, with their commitment, and with their skills with social media, and with software and everything, so it's just being there for them to help them navigate. And that's my message, is if you're interested in nutrition come on. Here's some places I know you can go and get what you need, and call on me, and here's some other people you can call on. And we see that happening, it's happening.

JB: Anything else you'd like to add today?

RT: Not really. I think I've kind of said more than you were looking for.

JB: Oh, no. It was a great interview. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me.

RT: You're welcome. You're welcome.