

Alexa Wutt: This is Alexa Wutt from Michigan Sea Grant at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th, 2018. So, Peter, if you could please state and spell your name.

Jim Fawcett: I'm Jim, not Peter.

AW: Jim, if you could please state and spell your name, share your occupation and town, and today's date.

AW: Okay. Jim Fawcett, F-A-W-C-E-T-T. I'm with the University of Southern California Sea Grant Program in Los Angeles. Today's date is the 15th of May 2018.

AW: Awesome. So, Jim, thank you for coming in today to tell a little bit about your working waterfront story. So, first question I will ask then is, what makes your working waterfront important to your community?

JM: Well, I was the chief of planning for Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors. I am not there now, obviously because I'm with Sea Grant, but LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors is the agency that operates Marina del Rey, which is a huge yacht harbor, as well hosting about 5,000 yachts and 10,000 people who live in the Marina. So, it's multiple marinas in this harbor that was built for Los Angeles County by the Corps of Engineers.

AW: Wow, very cool. What do you and your community value about your working waterfront, and why do you care?

JM: Well, obviously, it's politically important because there are 10,000 people that live there, although in the context of Los Angeles County, that's sort of a drop in the bucket because there are 10 million people that live in LA County. But it's very important as a recreational resource for the residents of Los Angeles County, given that there are boat slips for over 5,000 boats in the Marina. That obviously doesn't count the boats that are put in the water via the launch ramp and are removed after a day of use. So, it's a big resource. There are boatyards there. Minimal aquaculture grow out there. It's an attempt to repopulate the white seabass community in Santa Monica Bay. There are a lot of people who go to the Marina, have no interest in boats, but go there just to recreate.

AW: That is awesome. So, I guess another follow-up question that would be, what is the story of that place in terms of the history or the community there?

JM: It's directly adjacent to Venice, California. The history of it is that at one point in the early part of the 20th century, there was an attempt to create something that appeared to be similar to Venice, Italy in Los Angeles and their canals and all sort of what you would find around a canal-based series of residences. But there really wasn't a yacht harbor. Actually, the yacht harbor idea came after there was an extensive amount of oil exploration and production in that Venice area. Population wanted a yacht harbor. There wasn't one around. So, Los Angeles County contracted with the US Army Corps of Engineers in the late [19]50s, in early [19]60s to design and build this yacht harbor for boaters and for the recreation population in the county. That's

how it came about. The coast of Southern California doesn't have a lot of rivers. In fact, very few and really are not the opportunities for boating without something like a big yacht harbor. So, that's why it developed.

AW: Makes a lot of sense. Do you find that there is any kind of competition between stakeholders with the multiple uses in this area with recreation and aquaculture?

JM: Yes. There are 10,000 people that live in the Marina and in apartments. Then the issue is really about having access to Marina del Rey. It's popular, but it can become so popular that it's difficult to get in just because of the traffic coming in on a summer day and issues of parking. The other issue is, and this is sort of an interesting issue that many times, and maybe I shouldn't say many times, but there are plenty of boats in Marina del Rey. They really never leave the dock. There are boats that are owned by corporations. They use it for entertaining, but they don't really sail the vessels. So, it's sort of like a parking lot for fancy boats that don't get used that much. Now, I'm not saying that that happens commonly, but there's enough of it that it becomes an issue for people who would like to get to the water and maybe would like to own a boat. Yet they can't because the boat slips are generally pretty much filled up. So, it's very popular, let's put it that way.

AW: That is awesome. That can, I am sure, be a positive because you have a lot of attention around the waterfront. But also then, like I said, you get into those competing issues or competing uses. I guess a follow up question then is, what – and I guess we talked about that a little bit -- what is the vision that you have for this community, for the future, if you had a blank slate of paper, you could find anything out?

JM: Well, there are a couple of issues. If we were going to do it all over again, just the design of Marina del Rey could be improved to improve flushing in it. So, from an environmental point of view, it could be designed a little bit better. That's one thing. The second thing is that the apartments in Marina del Rey are there to generate revenue, theoretically, to subsidize the recreational aspects of the marina. But frankly, the recreational aspects for non-boaters could be seriously expanded in Marina del Rey. We could knock down a lot of the apartments and provide more recreational space there for the general public. Access is always a problem. One of the things that would help Marina del Rey is if one of the light rail lines that serves or will serve Los Angeles airport were brought up north to Santa Monica and would come by Marina del Rey, so people would have easier access to Marina Del Rey. Right now, if you go there, you fundamentally have to drive there. So, it could be made a lot more accessible for the general public. But then again, it's only 800 acres, 400 water, 400 land. So, access is a rationing device for Marina del Rey because it can't accommodate everybody who would necessarily like to go there.

AW: Makes a lot of sense. I think John touched on that a little bit today with the connection between people and place and how there are little spots where you can kind of carve out a place for yourself on the water. But it is interesting that the conflicting issues of overdevelopment and then the issues associated with people not accessing the water kind of in competition there.

JM: When you have 10 million people in the county, and it's very famous. It's a big draw for

people to go there. It's adjacent to Venice Beach which attracts a lot of tourists. So, there are a lot of factors that make it an attractive spot for people to go.

AW: Have you seen any significant change in the economy in that area? Whether did it go from fishing originally to now this marina?

JM: No, it originally was designed to be for recreational boating, but there's commercial fishing that takes place there. Commercial fishing is recreational fishing. When I say commercial, I mean, these are not commercial fishermen. But they are party boats that the public uses to go out and fish in Santa Monica Bay. They're very popular. But we don't have any facilities in the marina for a real commercial fishing effort. Other than that, there are boatyards there. There's a large fuel dock. All the facilities you would expect in a large recreational marina. In terms of its vitality in its current configuration, I think that's probably likely to continue. I don't see the party boats leaving Marina del Rey, but it takes the vigilance of the public to keep that going. Also, the commitment of Los Angeles County to obviously maintain the uses there. So, I imagine it's going to maintain itself, but we'll see.

AW: Are you interested to see going forward?

JM: Yes.

AW: One thing relevant to going forward and moving into the future is how can the National Working Waterfront Network support you and your community going forward?

JM: Well, part of it is clean marinas and working on clean marina issues. That's particularly important in terms of the physical health of the water and of the marina itself. The other issue is that the marina, by its very nature, has not been gentrified. It was built with all those apartments there. What Marina Del Rey probably needs is to reverse the gentrification in order to make some more land available for public access. That's one of the most important issues.

AW: What are the tools, networks, or information that you need to better address your working waterfront challenges? As a corollary to the previous question.

JM: Well, working with clean marina techniques would make it easier for Marina Del Ray to be even cleaner than it currently is. That certainly would help. We're not really concerned about economic development. What we've got is excessive economic development. So, if we think about it as a trade-off between environment and economy, the economy part is already well-taken care of. The issue really is equity on the other side and the environment. Take better care of the environment and also provide more access for people in the county.

AW: Anything else that you wanted to add about the community or working waterfronts in your community or anything like that?

JM: I don't think so. I think that really sums it up in a nutshell.

AW: Well, thank you so much for your time, coming in and interviewing. I know the final

morning plenary is when the results of the interviews will be shared in, I guess, concentrated format. Then we will be communicating with everyone via the National Working Waterfront Network newsletter about next steps for this project on what is going forward.

JM: Cool. Good.

[end of transcript]