

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project
 Michael Charles von Ree Interview Abstract
 June 19, 2019

Interviewee	Michael Charles von Ree
Year of birth	1947
Place of birth	San Antonio, Texas
Interviewer	Barbara Knotts
Interview date	2019-06-19
Interview location	Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>von Ree, Michael Charles von Ree, Susan Fladager, Dean Kindley, Field Knotts, Barbara Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Hiwasse, Benton County, Arkansas Bank of Gravette; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Gravette Historical Museum; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Shepherd's Chapel; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas Annexation City government Gravette Day Celebration Grocery stores Hospitals Music Parks Polio Politics Railroads Recreation Roads Small town life Volunteerism Walmart</p>
Description	<p>What makes living in small town Northwest Arkansas great? Let Michael Charles (Mike) von Ree answer that question. von Ree remembers the circumstances that brought him and his family to Gravette in 1992. After working for Hughes Aircraft in the Los Angeles area for 18 years, it was time for a change. The promise of quality--but smaller--schools for the kids, family in Gentry, and the friendliness of Northwest Arkansas people beckoned.</p> <p>von Ree and wife, Susan, drove around several Northwest Arkansas towns. Driving by a house in Gravette with its big yard and view of the park, they knew they'd found home. In the years that followed von Ree opened his Wizard's Works sign and</p>

	<p>plaque business while he and Susan raised their family. von Ree recalls a life where family ate produce from their own garden or visited the local farmer's market. They shopped at the local supermarkets, needing only occasionally to go to Bentonville's Walmart stores. Local medical was available as he lived with the aftermath of childhood polio. And there was still plenty of time to enjoy reading, cooking, his country music collection and visit the eagles on Spaninaw Creek. All these factors remain today as he and Susan enjoy their six children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.</p> <p>For von Ree, living in a small town meant being active in the community, both its politics and civic events. He's served several terms on the City Council and Planning Commission. Today von Ree is Gravette's City Clerk/Treasurer and City Planner. His stories provide the details of the annexation activities with Hiwasse and Gravette and the changing duties of both positions in a growing Gravette.</p> <p>Long active in civic events, von Ree's stories tell of Gravette Days, the 4th of July, and Christmas Parade. He's never missed a Gravette Day, having coordinated the celebration for six years. That included the year that, to the delight of local teens, he let the band play until midnight. For several years, von Ree and others made sure the community had fireworks: more than once they took a truck to get them. At the end of the Christmas Parade it was not unusual for residents to find him handing out hot dogs.</p> <p>von Ree's interest in the Gravette Historical Museum began when he became a charter member and later worked to get grants and donations to help expand and include Kindley House. He remains an active member today.</p> <p>When asked how Gravette has changed, von Ree says he sees more people and businesses, but the town itself has retained much of its small hometown feel. Today residents enjoy a safer community thanks to the railroad overpass, continued good medical facilities, new playground equipment, a splash pool, and expanding school sports facilities.</p> <p>von Ree helped create the logo and stationery for Gravette as "Heart of Hometown America." For him that sums it up perfectly.</p>
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Questions or Comments	https://nwaoralhistory.org

Interview sidebar	"My wife and I would drive around looking at all the small towns in Northwest Arkansas...When we drove through Gravette we liked the town and the house we are now in was up for sale. We pulled in the driveway, it's right across from Kindley Park...it's like having a big front yard for the kids...decided even before we'd parked I was going to buy the house...we bought it, and have been there 27 years..." [00:04:35]
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