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Interview with the Mayor

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Interview
With the MAYOR

Ames Mayor and Iowa State accounting professor Larry Curtis has seen many changes in the community and at ISU over the past several years. Before becoming mayor he was an active city council representative for 12 years, starting in 1978. Curtis, who is an Ottumwa native, graduated from ISU with an undergraduate degree in engineering and a graduate degree in law.

Q: What brought you to Ames?

LC: I went to school here as an undergraduate during the 1960s. I thought Ames was a real comfortable place to live and it had a lot of good things to offer for people to enjoy permanent living.

Q: What do you feel is the most important aspect of Ames?

LC: I think Ames has a combination of a small-town atmosphere: people know each other; they have a fairly friendly attitude toward each other. They feel comfortable with each other, but yet it has some of the advantages of larger communities from the standpoint of cultural activities, entertainment activities and recreational opportunities. So we’ve been able to keep a balance between what’s hopefully the good of smaller communities and the good of what’s a larger community, and have a comfortably, reasonably sized environment. It’s got all the attractive aspects of the lifestyle people typically want.

Q: How has Ames changed in the last five years?

LC: Obviously, we’ve increased in population which, in the state of Iowa, is rather unique. A growing population brings a dynamic environment. It provides opportunities for people economically, it provides opportunities for people in terms of friendships and meeting different people, and growing as individuals. Secondly, I think our economic mix is changing. We used to be fairly dominant on government employment, namely the Department of Transportation, the National Animal Disease Lab, Iowa State University and the local government. They still are very dominant employers, but I think we’ve expanded our private sector job base much more. That seems to be a very healthy growth. The smaller companies that are coming out of the technology changes are growing. The diversity that we are finding in our economic base I think is very healthy. Another change that is taking place is just the physical appearance of Ames. I think, by and large, some of the things we’re doing are definitely improving such as entryways into the city such as Elwood Drive, once the gardens (Reiman Gardens) are completed, South Duff’s new renovation and Campustown’s renovation. All these physical things may not have a direct impact on the way people feel about themselves and about the community, but I think it has to have some impact on making people feel more positive about what’s happening.

Q: How is Iowa State a positive factor to Ames?

LC: The relationship has been very good between the university and the community. It’s the major employer. Iowa State is unique in that it influences the community, but it’s not an overwhelming influence. The academic community is separate from Ames, but they are certainly complementary of each other. Iowa State brings challenges to the community, and it brings diversity in all forms: cultural, ethnic and racial. In many cases, that’s a challenging experience. I think that’s very positive.

Q: What do you see in the future for Ames and Iowa State?

LC: I don’t think the university will grow any larger, but I think the community will as more people move in. If anything, Iowa State will decrease in population, and that has a lot to do with Iowa demographics. I see that as a constant trend in the next couple of years.

-by Shuva Rahim