

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elzie Higginbottom

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Higginbottom, Elzie, 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom,
Dates:	April 17, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:18:49).
Abstract:	Real estate developer Elzie Higginbottom (1941 -) was the chairman and CEO of East Lake Management and Development Corporation, the largest minority-owned real estate company in Illinois. Higginbottom was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 17, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_030
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Housing developer Elzie L. Higginbottom was born on November 24, 1941 in Chicago, Illinois to Elzie Higginbottom and Katherine Skaggs Higginbottom. His parents instilled entrepreneurial and service values within him. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1965 with his B.A. in agricultural economics and was an accomplished athlete in men's track and field. In 1963, he was named NCAA outdoor All-American, placing fifth in the 440 yard dash in national competition. He also won Big Ten indoor titles in the 440. Higginbottom was a three time Big Ten champion, anchoring the mile relay to a conference title in 1962. He also held the University of Wisconsin-Madison records in the indoor and outdoor 440 yard dash for more than twenty years. Higginbottom was later honored by the university with the distinguished alumni award. All of his success as a track athlete taught him how to focus and discipline himself, which proved invaluable in his real estate endeavors.

Higginbottom was hired by Baird & Warner in Chicago, Illinois. While at Baird & Warner, he created and directed the Government Assisted Multifamily Finance Division, producing an annual loan volume of \$50 million to \$100 million for twelve consecutive years. By 1974, Higginbottom was promoted to mortgage vice president in charge of FHA financing. In 1983, Higginbottom left Baird & Warner and started East Lake Management & Development Corp., which grew to become the largest minority-owned real estate company in the State of Illinois. Mr. Higginbottom is committed to providing affordable, safe and comfortable housing to Chicagoans. He is also the first minority developer of hi-rises in the Chicago Loop and River North area including 200 N. Dearborn and 1250 N. LaSalle Street. He has developed and managed several thousand units for his own company as well as for the Chicago Housing Authority and others.

In 2005, Higginbottom made *Crain's Chicago Business* list of "Who's Who in Real Estate." In 2000, he was inducted into the Chicago Association of Realtors Hall of Fame and is the only African-American to receive that honor. In 2004 he endowed the Higginbottom Urgent Care for Kids Unit at Mercy Hospital. Wanting to inspire

young athletes, Higginbottom and Dr. Conrad Worril co-founded Friends of Track and Field in 2006. He is a board member for After School Matters in Chicago and a Trustee for Illinois Institute of Technology. He is married to Deborah Larsen and they have four children.

Elzie Higginbottom, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 17, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Elzie Higginbottom was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 17, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Real estate developer Elzie Higginbottom (1941 -) was the chairman and CEO of East Lake Management and Development Corporation, the largest minority-owned real estate company in Illinois.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Higginbottom, Elzie, 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Higginbottom, Elzie, 1941- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Real Estate Developer

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, April 17, 2012. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_001, TRT: 1:29:48 ?

Elzie Higginbottom was born on November 24, 1941 in Chicago, Illinois to Katherine Skaggs Higginbottom and Elzie Higginbottom. Higginbottom's maternal great-grandparents, Ellen Tetter and William Tetter, were landowners in Hopkins Park, Illinois, where Higginbottom's grandmother, Pearl Tetter Skaggs, was born. His grandfather, Ulysses Skaggs, was an orphan who migrated from Kentucky to Hopkins Park. There, he met Tetter Skaggs and raised Higginbottom's mother. His father was born in Mississippi and migrated to Chicago, Illinois with his parents, Ada Woods Higginbottom and Noles Higginbottom, at a young age. The family settled in the city's Morgan Park neighborhood, where Higginbottom's father attended Tilden Technical High School and sold goods with his father throughout Chicago's South Side. Higginbottom spent his early years on the family farm in Hopkins Park before moving to Chicago Heights, Illinois. Once there, Higginbottom's father opened a store, where he sold fish, watermelon and other goods.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_002, TRT: 2:28:56 ?

Elzie Higginbottom grew up in Chicago Heights, Illinois, where he was raised in the Church of God in Christ faith. In Chicago Heights, Higginbottom's father owned a retail store, which carried goods such as coal and ice. After school and during the summers, Higginbottom often assisted his father in selling goods from the store throughout Chicago Heights' African American community as well as the southern suburbs and South Side of Chicago, Illinois. Higginbottom attended the Chicago Heights' predominately black Franklin School and Washington Junior High School. He then went on to attend the integrated Bloom Township High School in Chicago Heights, where he focused on business studies and joined the school's track and cross country teams as a sprinter under Coach Ralph Steben. Despite a hip injury during his freshman year that almost ended his running career, Higginbottom became a track star as an upper classman, and was recruited by the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Madison, Wisconsin.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_003, TRT: 3:31:19 ?

Elzie Higginbottom's father purchased a building in the Morgan Park neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois, where he opened the Morgan Park Laundromat. As the business became more successful, Higginbottom began assisting his father there on the weekends. In Chicago Heights, Higginbottom attended Bloom Township High School, where he excelled as a sprinter on the school's track and cross country teams and won the state championship in the quarter mile during his junior year in 1959. Although an injury kept him from becoming state champion during his senior year, Higginbottom was recruited by Coach Charles "Rut" Walter at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Madison, Wisconsin. There, Higginbottom became the school's top quarter mile sprinter. After working in construction during his sophomore year, Higginbottom developed an interest in real estate. With attorney William Allen Nathanson's assistance, he secured a summer internship at the real estate firm of Baird and Warner in Chicago during his junior year.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_004, TRT: 4:31:04 ?

Elzie Higginbottom worked as an intern at Baird and Warner in Chicago, Illinois during his junior and senior years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Madison, Wisconsin. Following his graduation, Higginbottom was hired as an appraiser in the company's real estate finance department. As the first African

American appraiser at Baird and Warner, Higginbottom was supported by the company's owner, John W. Baird, when discriminated against by clients. While there, Higginbottom managed the South Commons housing development in Chicago, and facilitated financing for other developments under the Federal Housing Administration. During this time, Higginbottom also served in the National Guard, and was deployed to the West Side of Chicago during the riots of 1968. In 1975, Higginbottom founded East Lake Management and Development Corp., which developed, rehabilitated and managed property on Chicago's South Side. He remembers Chicago businessmen Albert W. Johnson, George Johnson and John H. Johnson.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_005, TRT: 5:29:33 ?

Elzie Higginbottom founded the East Lake Development and Management Corp. real estate development firm in 1975, while continuing to work at Baird and Warner. As the proprietor of a black business, Higginbottom often relied on the support of the activist community as well as politicians like Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, and Congressmen William L. Dawson and Ralph Metcalfe. With their help, Higginbottom improved housing developments in Chicago's predominately African American neighborhoods. In 1984, Higginbottom left Baird and Warner to work full time at East Lake Development and Management Corp. Although he did not initially support Harold Washington's mayoral campaign, his firm saw major growth during his administration. The company acquired an \$80 million residential building located at 200 North Dearborn Street, and managed 3,500 units for the Chicago Housing Authority. As part of his efforts to expand the company, Higginbottom employed and mentored minority subcontractors.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_006, TRT: 6:31:00 ?

Elzie Higginbottom and his firm, the East Lake Development and Management Corp., handled the construction of the Harold Washington Cultural Center, which was erected at the former site of the Regal Theater in Chicago, Illinois. Although the community had originally hoped to restore the demolished Regal Theater, its replacement became a center of entertainment for the African American community. East Lake Development and Management Corp. also oversaw the renovation of the Supreme Life Building, where the Supreme Life Insurance Company of America once resided, and several residential units on Chicago's South Side. Throughout his career, Higginbottom served on a number of corporate boards including the Illinois Gaming Board, which was instrumental in establishing the Rivers Casino to Des Plaines, Illinois. Higginbottom talks about Chicago's African American residents fleeing the city to move to the suburbs and the need for more entrepreneurs within the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Elzie Higginbottom, Section A2012_030_001_007, TRT: 7:17:09 ?

Elzie Higginbottom was the CEO and president of East Lake Management and Development Corp., which provided affordable housing in Chicago, Illinois. The firm strived to meet the standards of the city's ever changing housing codes, although they were penalized with violations and fines at times. Higginbottom talks about the state of African American businesses in Chicago, and the rise of minority CEOs in major corporations. As a former college track star, Higginbottom partnered with Conrad Walter Worrill to form the Friends of Track and Field organization, which sought to provide better gym facilities for

Chicago Public Schools' track programs. With his wife, Deborah Higginbottom, he had four children. Higginbottom reflects upon his life and legacy, and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.