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Dave Dahlen
September 13, 2012

Interview conducted by Rachel Brown, Neil Koch, Carol Petravaje, Janet Oden, and Jo Urion
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DAVE DAHLEN

By Rachel Brown

September 13, 2012

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Transcribed by Technitype Transcripts

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Stephen T. Mather Training Center

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Rachel Brown: This is an oral history for the administrative history of Mather Training Center, and it is September 13, 2012. We are speaking with Dave Dahlen, Superintendent at Mather Training Center.

Rachel Brown: Each introduce yourselves. I'm Rachel Brown.

Neil Koch: Neil Koch.

Carol Petravaje: Carol Petravaje.

Janet Oden: Janet Oden.

Jo Urion: And Jo Urion.

Rachel Brown: All right. So, we'll get started. We're just going to sort of start the beginning. So, what led you to the Park Service?

Dave Dahlen: Well, like a lot of people, I traveled around quite a bit when I was young, with my parents. We had a little travel trailer, and so we tramped all around the country and really enjoyed that experience. It was not something, though, that gave me that career path track idea outright or right off from the beginning, but it just kind of disappeared into my memory. Then later on as I got a little bit older, I'll explain the story how I came back to it.

Dave Dahlen: I went to college, was trying to figure out what I wanted to do, found a program that would lead me in a five-year program to a master's degree in forestry from Duke University, which is really one of the premier forestry schools in the United States and one of the original, and still is pretty high profile. So, I thought that was pretty cool until I started getting into some of the specifics of that career track.

Dave Dahlen: Something else that happened right along that time period was I was attending a junior college in Anne Arundel County and was walking across the college green one day, and there was a group of people, maybe fifteen, twenty people, over in one corner of the campus, and they all had signs and things. So, I wandered over there and said, "What's this all about?"

Dave Dahlen: And they said, "Well, don't you know? It's Earth Day."

Dave Dahlen: I went, "Oh, yeah? Tell me a little bit about that." So, it was the very first Earth Day, I think, 1972. So that was interesting. I was fascinated by that, and it all kind of came together for me. The combination of being interested in forestry and the outdoors and Earth Day and then my childhood experience kind of all crystallized in one big, blinding, flashing moment that, "I want to be a park ranger."

- Dave Dahlen: So, I transferred out of the Duke program and moved into a program at West Virginia University. That's how I got started in it.
- Dave Dahlen: Luckily, my very first seasonal position was at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, which I could live at home and commute to, which was cool. Then that led, like a lot of seasonals, it started to domino a little bit, and the experience and connections, the references, and such helped me to get subsequent jobs, another seasonal job the next year in the Everglades and then my first permanent job at Independence.
- Rachel Brown: You mentioned when we were speaking yesterday that you came to the training and development career path not necessarily as a plan, sort of career, for yourself. So, what brought you to training and development? Could you speak a little bit or elaborate on sort of how you got into that career path and then also how that brought you to Mather?
- Dave Dahlen: Yes. When I got that first job in Philadelphia, it was quite by happy coincidence that the Bicentennial was happening, and Independence was hiring a lot of people, but I was totally naïve as to what the Park Service career options might be. I just got hired, and so I just came, and I did the job, and it was an interpretative job. Public speaking was not my forte, but that was my job, so I got started in that. And after getting comfortable with it, you know, I became a little bit more confident.
- Dave Dahlen: Leaving Independence, I went to Grand Canyon and never had really thought about training at all, zero, but, of course, Grand Canyon has Albright Training Center. As part of my assignment out there, I was an intake ranger at Grand Canyon. One of my developmental options or opportunities was to go over to the Training Center and just help. It wasn't to go over and teach, just help out, be a gofer, but it was fun. There was a lot of energy in the training centers.
- Dave Dahlen: So, by virtue of that opportunity, somewhere along the line one of the instructors asked if I wanted to help in the classroom, and so I did, and one thing led to another. I gained more and more experience. I was going to be a park ranger. I didn't start out thinking that training was really going to become my principal career track, but that experience and that opportunity that they gave me out there really did trigger this.
- Dave Dahlen: I have to say the Training Center is a neat environment. People come from all over. You have the pleasure of meeting folks from all over the National Park Service with a whole range of disciplines and jobs and passion for their jobs. So, the Training Center is a fun place to work in that regard. You really do get a chance to get a good pulse on the entire Service.

Dave Dahlen: So, I did some of that work for a while at Grand Canyon, then transferred to a position at the Great Smoky Mountains, which was pretty isolated backcountry law enforcement kind of job, and there wasn't really a heavy public contact option. But Sylva [phonetic], the Sylva Vocational Technical College, had the seasonal law enforcement program down there, it still does, in fact, but it was early. This was very early in Sylva's history. They needed an instructor. They contacted the Smokies. The Smokies knew of my experience at Albright, so they said, "Dave, would you be willing to do a couple sessions down at Sylva?"

Dave Dahlen: I said, "Sure." So, I kept my hand in it.

Dave Dahlen: Then I transferred to the Everglades, and at that point all of this training stuff really started to get some traction. They had a national interpretive skills program that actually was started here at Mather Training Center, I didn't know it at the time, but I got involved in that for the Southeast Region to become an instructor on their interpretive skills team. So, again, more momentum in the classroom, more experience, and this was kind of fun because I could travel all around the Southeast Region and do these classes, so that was a great diversity of experience and exposure to different places in the Southeast Region. It was kind of fun.

Dave Dahlen: But what it had done all along, this parallel track of collateral duty training – it was all collateral duty – like I said, I wasn't a natural-born public speaker, but it had given me some confidence, some experience, a range of experience that allowed me, when the instructor job at Mather Training Center came open in 1987, I applied for it and I had a decent enough skill set to and very fortunate to get that job. Then I was in training for good, that's for sure.

Rachel Brown: You spoke a bit about your experience of working at Albright. So how do you see the relationship between Mather and Albright and the training centers for the Park Service?

Dave Dahlen: I think that's evolved through the years. Initially, Albright was established as a continuance or the reincarnation of the Kowski Ranger School, which was in Yosemite National Park. Frank Kowski in the fifties had started a national training program to try to organize a training strategy for park rangers. It was exclusively, I think, for park rangers at the time. So, you went to Yosemite, Yosemite Valley, and they had the school there.

Dave Dahlen: As part of the Mission 66 Program, Park Service expanded its capacity and built upon that early start, and the Kowski College, as they called it, was moved to Grand Canyon. It opened in the fall of 1963. Mission 66 was the funding source, it has classic Mission 66 architecture, but it was a continuation of that ranger school.

- Dave Dahlen: At the same time – and I don't really have any facts or details – there was a push to have a similar facility in the East. Mather Training Center was then established on the site of the former Storer College, historically black college, that had been here for a long time previously, and the Mather Training Center took on an expanded role, I think, to complement what was going on out at Albright.
- Dave Dahlen: Albright was still kind of a ranger skills-based facility where rangers went and learned all the things that rangers needed to know. Mather was established, early on anyway, the early, I guess, portfolio of courses was built around communications and primarily interpretative methods, they called it in those days. But writing and public speaking, communications skills were the centerpiece of the Mather Training Center. So, they were complementary in that this was very focused on very specific interpretive piece, and Albright was the broader range of ranger skills.
- Dave Dahlen: What happened at Mather, though, through the years is because of the proximity to Washington [D.C.] and other disciplines and programs, people started discovering Mather as a place where courses in other disciplines could be presented. One of the early other discipline areas was administration, administrative skills courses, where it started to be located here. It wasn't long after that the Curatorial and Museum Services Branch downtown discovered us, and so curatorial courses and museum management courses started to trickle into our portfolio.
- Dave Dahlen: One of the reasons why, or at least one of the stated reasons that I've heard, that the Harpers Ferry Center was located here was to take advantage of the training and development opportunities. The nexus of the skills that were brought in next door in this training center would be, like, symbiotic, that it would allow the trainees to be able to see what was going on over there, and then allow that expertise to be used over here in terms of training the trainees.
- Dave Dahlen: So, all along, Albright, though, has remained largely centered on a broad ranger-skills platform. Eight or ten years ago when the Fundamentals Program was established, it really pushed that ranger-skills idea to a broader-based workforce-wide approach to getting not just park rangers through the training but get everyone through a training, a fundamentals kind of program, that would launch their careers in a pretty equal and well-distributed basis for the Service. So that's when the Ranger Skills Program had several incarnations through the twenty, twenty-five years that it was running, but when Fundamentals was established, it changed, I think, for the good, and permanently, to a broader-based strategy for the workforce.

- Dave Dahlen: So now, interestingly, the training managers that are located here at Mather now represent just about all of the disciplines of the Park Service, and their task or their role is to develop discipline-specific training for their portion of the workforce, a deeper dive, if you will. Fundamentals is a kind of a survey course that introduces you to about everything in terms of park operations, and now here at Mather it's almost like a virtual handoff. You get started at Albright, and then you're handed off to the programs that are being developed out of Mather now.
- [Unidentified]: So, you began to speak one of the questions that we've had, which during your earlier stint, if you will, here at Mather, we were interested in learning more about the evolution and specifically your role in that. One of the things you brought up a minute ago was this sort of people were discovering Mather. So, I guess my question about that was, were those changes in the nature of the coursework something that was driven by folks asking Mather to teach specific classes or more of something you and your coworkers created in that evolution? Does that make sense?
- Dave Dahlen: Actually, yes, and it's a well-crafted question, because the answer to that is both things happened. When I first started here, interestingly, we had three instructors and a superintendent, and that was it. The three of us as instructors, our marching orders were to reach out to as many program areas as were interested in coming here. Like I said, the Museum Services Group and Cultural Resources, in a broader context, is one of those groups that really started to expand its presence, just because we were reaching out to them. I have to say that – and this was in 1987 – the period from about 1987 to 1994, six or seven years, this team of three instructors basically tried to serve everyone. We all came in with different professional backgrounds, and so we didn't necessarily have subject matter knowledge in a lot of the courses that we were helping to put together.
- Dave Dahlen: We also didn't have much money. Funding for training in those days was really limited, and so there were a handful of courses that we paid for the people to travel to get here, and then there were quite a number of courses that were benefiting account, where the parks had to pay. Back in those days, the parks could afford it, and there were no travel ceilings. So, these benefiting account courses were not the scourge that they are now, because parks would see the need. You get a new [unclear] building, so you have to stand up a new collection, and it's like, "You, you're going to be our curator." So, the park had to get the person to training. I mean, there was an operational responsibility, an obligation. So, it wasn't as hard to fill those classes.

- Dave Dahlen: So, it was by a lot of shoe leather, the three of just trying to really keep having an aggressive, energetic interface with these programs downtown, maybe a little bit of word of mouth, that we would be able to put on a pretty good, pretty decent training class for you. Then Interpretation, in particular, had a huge level of both professional and financial support from the Washington Office of Interpretation, so whoever was running the interpretative courses was in high clover, as they say. It really worked.
- Dave Dahlen: The other programs were successful as well, but Interpretation, and because Mather had originally been established for that purpose and reason, if it was the bright spot on the fiscal chart, it was because of the history and the nexus with Harpers Ferry Center and then the really strong support by the chiefs of Interpretation downtown.
- Dave Dahlen: Where the training function generally did work and still works is training comes to the table with a piece. It's a structured professional piece of training discipline, and we also come with some money, and then the program area comes and says, "We have a need and we have a workforce, and here are the needs." So, we merge those two in a perfect fit. It's an equal partnership between the specialists and the trainers.
- Dave Dahlen: So, me not knowing about curatorial methods or being a trained conservator or curator didn't matter. I brought something else to the table, and the professional folks downtown liked that, because we could put structure and discipline to their wide range of content. So, we grew, and we were able to fill this classroom weeks on end, week after week after week. It was a treadmill; it was a real juggernaut to do that.
- Dave Dahlen: Now, I mentioned that there wasn't a lot of funding for training, and, interestingly, there were several rounds of review coming to that conclusion that training in the Park Service is so important, but it's so underfunded. In the early 1990s there were some national meetings that identified this shortfall of investment in the workforce. Some of the corporate models early on suggested that you should invest 5 percent of whatever your gross budget is on training of your employees. The Park Service was nowhere close to that, and so it was a real dilemma and a recognized dilemma, but yet an unsatisfied need for years. In the course of time, that has slowly changed.
- Dave Dahlen: Along the way, there's been a reinforcement of this idea that it's been underfunded, but the Park Service is limited in its total scope as well, and so it wasn't malicious or intentional; it was just simply there's not enough money to go around.

- Dave Dahlen: In 2008, the latest report citing our shortfalls came out, and at that time it got a little traction, and the report went to the National Leadership Council. At the time, Mary Bomar was the director. At the same time, the federal surveys, the employee surveys, were critical of the National Park Service for the fact that people liked working for the National Park Service but didn't like many things about what the National Park Service was doing for them.
- Dave Dahlen: So, all of this kind of came together in a perfect storm, and under Mary Bomar's initial guidance, the funding started to come. The report had a number of recommendations, and with a new chief of Learning and Development downtown, Kathy Hanson, she's a very energetic person and has a lot of creative ideas for meeting workforce needs, the team that came together, the ideas that were in the report, all kind of crystallized and brought both funding and focus together at the same time.
- Dave Dahlen: Right now, we are funded at a far higher level than I've ever seen. I've been in and out of training, obviously, since 1987 here at Mather, and our funding levels are far higher. That doesn't translate into classroom courses like it used to. What it's translating into is new, creative ways and means of delivering training, delivery strategies that have evolved with technology.
- Dave Dahlen: Before, when I mentioned back in the eighties and early nineties, the parks had discretionary money, and so benefitting account courses happened. Parks saw the need. They had the money. They sent the staff, albeit just thirty or twenty-four or however, it wasn't a lot of folks we were reaching. But nowadays, that discretionary money is pretty much gone, and discretionary time in the field is gone. So, courses that we put out and say, "Hey, we're going to have this class. It's going to be great. Send your staff," and there's no way, can't afford it. I mean, we can't afford the lost time. We have a travel ceiling. We can't afford the travel. And we don't have the discretionary funds in our budget to pay for your travel or per diem anyway. So, it's a different environment.
- Dave Dahlen: So, interestingly, maybe we've come full circle, I don't know, but now we're in the position of trying to launch into a new era of delivery strategies, trying to mix and blend both the classroom experience and online, distance, complementary pieces. So, these training managers that I mentioned, their principal focus right now is how to do that. How do you make good judgment calls on what needs to be in the classroom versus what can be delivered in a distance format and delivered in an appropriately engaging and effective way?

Dave Dahlen: That's the real challenge, because online training is so hard to put that together in a way that gets people involved. There's a trick to it. It's also expensive. The sticker shock on some of those courses, it's really remarkable. But the advantage is that it might cost twice as much to put together a twenty-four-hour training, but once you have it, you're reaching hundreds of people instead of the thirty that might come for the same price in the classroom. So that's what we try to keep in mind and realize that if we make it, it might be expensive, but once it's there, it reaches so many more.

Dave Dahlen: I've often thought there's no way for me, anyway, I don't have the aptitude to do this, but in my mind, I think, okay, so if we have a classroom that's 100 percent effective in delivering its content to 24 people, 100 percent or whatever that translates to, they all go back and they totally got it, we've trained 24 people for \$50,000, whatever it might cost. That's good. Except, twenty-four people. If we spend \$100,000 and we put together content that is 75 percent effective, but we reach 500 people, you know, that's the kind of question we have to ask ourselves. Or 750 or 1,000 people. Even if the parks had money, how long would it take us to train 1,000 people? So that's a driver. That's a reality, and, of course, new and incoming workforce is so geared towards immediately access to information and online training anyway, so there's an incoming workforce that predominantly, anyway, is apparently schooled in this stuff.

[Unidentified]: On, I guess, a more personal level in your career, you went from someone who probably received a lot of trainings as a young employee to providing training, to now even managing a training center. Were there particular trainers, friends, colleagues, mentors that really influenced your development in that arena?

Dave Dahlen: My first? Yes. Several come to mind. My first was Gene Daugherty, who was the superintendent at Albright Training Center when I happened to be out there. Actually, he's not the one who invited me over. It was one of the instructors on the staff. He was the one who, in my mind anyway – I only worked with Gene a short while, because he died in an accident not long after he became my mentor, but I think he gave me some early inspiration.

Dave Dahlen: Also, at Albright at the time was a master storyteller by the name of Ron Toman [phonetic]. He was an instructor. He was an interpreter by trade, but in the classroom he was a storyteller, absolutely mesmerized the group, and inspired me, not just in a classroom context but also in a public speaking and interpretive sense. So, I think those two at Albright in particular.

- Dave Dahlen: When I got on the Southeast Regional Interpretive Skills Team, chief of interpretation at Mammoth Cave at the time for a long time was Joe Waggoner [phonetic]. Joe was a crusty old guy, had been around for years and years, but he had a knack for both challenging participants and sparring with participants in a class, but then also distilling complex thoughts down to pretty basic homespun logic. So, I think he had a lot of influence on me in terms of maybe understanding where people were coming from in the class, that everybody has a different perspective when they come into the classroom, and taking these complex thoughts and discussions and distilling them down into something that's pretty basic thought. Or wrapping a discussion. Sometimes discussions in the classrooms can get pretty emotional or even heated or very deep, and coming out of those is an important transition to help people, first of all, take a deep breath, but then also to help the class that, okay, we're going to move on now and we'll move on in a certain deliberate way based on what just happened. So that kind of synthesis process, I think I got some insights from Joe on that.
- Dave Dahlen: Once getting here, there have been a whole range of people. I could go on. I'd have to think about it, but I could probably create quite a long list of people, not just those I've worked with, but a lot of the guest instructors who we have brought in, some really memorable moments.
- Dave Dahlen: George Hartzog was here, and it's an absolutely compelling moment. He had not been back to Mather Training Center for a number of years. He was here at the dedication in 1964, and I don't know how long it had been since he had been here. He came back, I want to say, probably in the early nineties and spoke to one of our groups, and it was the first time he was back in a long time. It's easy to see how he got his reputation for being the kind of leader and manager that he was. He was both forceful and in-your-face, but inspiring at the same time, kind of like a no-prisoners kind of style, but if you're with me, we'll do it together, the kind of magical personality traits, and it was amazing to watch him with the group. He came back several times after that. He even invited us down to his house, he and his wife hosted us or groups from Mather, before he passed away. It was very special.
- [Unidentified]: What would you say, I guess I'd say, just a couple or the really key differences between Mather then when you started or in those earlier years for you and now? What would those be here at Mather?

Dave Dahlen: Wow. I think the key difference for me, very frankly and bluntly, is this shift to a distance electronic mentality. You know, I'm a technological or IT immigrant, as most of us at my age especially are, so it's a very foreign concept to me, but back in those days we had way more limited scope of effect, and it was all face-to-face. It was all personal. It was all what we were trying to do, and still trying to do, is really touch every individual in a way that helps them do their job better.

Dave Dahlen: We had a special, perhaps, approach in those days of really trying to personalize it as much as we could. We were only reaching twenty or thirty people at a time, and so the reality was we were chipping away at a huge iceberg of need, but maybe we were chipping in such an effective way that we felt really pretty good about that, that folks would leave here really valuing their experience beyond the content and beyond the networking, that they really had been given an immersion in the level of quality and the commitment that the service strives for, and for a few brief days we tried to demonstrate for them. Because, I mean, you all know, and the group in the classroom right now, everybody comes with their own issues going on in their lives and in their jobs and their own shortfalls and their own frustrations. But there's a lot of positive stuff going on, and so, by highlighting the positive possibilities, we felt like we were really doing something pretty special.

Dave Dahlen: Now we have to find a way to do the same kind of thing in a whole different world, and I think that we're still reaching for that. I mean, you all are able to come here this week and we still do have classes, but we don't have them stacked up and backed up like we used to, because it is a different approach we're taking.

Dave Dahlen: So how do we do that? Or is that still in our mission, to try to have that level of personal effect on people like we used to? I don't know. I won't give up on that. I don't have that many years left in my career, and I hope we wouldn't give up on the whole component of training that allows a person to step out of their immediate cocoon, whatever that job is out there that you all have, and when you step into something we're doing, we take you someplace that's worth your time. Above all else, it has to be worth your time. Your time's too precious. If we can do that on a computer screen, then I think we will have transitioned into the bold new world and we can call it good. I think that's a significant challenge, I honestly do, because of the limitations of media delivery, but that's what we're doing, and we're going to give it a go.

- [Unidentified]: We're going to begin to transition here, but I have one for my portion of our group interview, one last question that I wonder if you could just generally speak to the relationship of the Mather Training Center to the local community and the other local park units as well, if that has changed also or what that's like.
- Dave Dahlen: Well, I think the Training Center when we were doing so many classroom training sessions and when we had the dorm, the Cook Hall dorm, it was closed in 2000. So, between '64 and 2000, everybody stayed in the dorm. So, when we had that experience going on here, folks, they ate at the restaurants, they walked around the town, they visited the sights. We were very visible in the community. I think when the dorm closed and while we were still doing classroom courses, people started staying in the hotels. It was one of those things that they were still out there, but they weren't walking around the community as much, and so we weren't quite as present in the community. As our classroom course load has dwindled or dropped off, we've become less and less a part of the community in that way.
- Dave Dahlen: Of course, economics of Harpers Ferry are what they are, and I think that really is an unfortunate thing for the local businesses. We still contribute, but not to the level that we had been, which is really too bad. But we have also tried to do, at least in the last five or six years, is try to reach out to the local governments. The mayor of Harpers Ferry, there have been a couple of them now I've worked with, and even [unclear] to encourage them if they are interested in doing something that is related to the Harpers Ferry story and they want to have a public meeting about something that's related to the community but also relatable to the Park Service interests, trying to draw a line there or connect those dots, that we'd be glad to host them here. So, we've been doing more of that kind of thing.
- Dave Dahlen: We've had some public meetings, some city council, town council meetings. The local hotel over here, they're trying to renovate. We've had some public meetings about the hotel, and so we have reached out that way. That has changed. We haven't done really a lot of that in previous years. So, we're trying to stay engaged with the community that way.
- Dave Dahlen: Our relationship, I marvel at the relationship that we have with the other units of the National Park Service that are here, Harpers Ferry Center, Appalachian Trail, Potomac Heritage Trail, Harpers Ferry Historical Park, and, to a little lesser extent, C&O Canal. We all get along great.

- Dave Dahlen: Interestingly, the organizational hierarchy, we all have our own little track of the hierarchy. We don't report to a common central office. Maybe that's a good thing, I don't know. Maybe we're not in the same battles that way. That helps us stay a little bit separate and also keeps us from conflicting with our purposes. But we get along great. We had three or four high-level managers in the same sandbox, basically, and part of it is maybe the individual personalities, I don't know, but it's a good relationship.
- [Unidentified]: I was interested in hearing more about what occurred here at Mather during the time that NCTC was being planned and developed, because I'm pretty sure that you were here when they first started talking about that, and I was wondering whether the folks here were at all consulted or involved. You spoke a little bit about that, that Mr. Lemon came over here. So, I was wondering if you would speak a little more about that.
- Dave Dahlen: I will, and, for the record here, I do want to pass along – this is anecdotal, but I believe what I'm about to share is largely how things transpired. Senator [Robert C.] Byrd had originally conceived of a training facility in the panhandle of West Virginia, and one of the first choices on his hit list was to bring it to the National Park Service. The original idea was to have a training center/aquarium, and it would be a very large residential facility. It would be located perhaps about a mile west of the red light out here on Route 340.
- Dave Dahlen: Through channels, the Park Service was approached, and at the time, because of, I guess, the concept, they declined. We had a training center, we had Mather Training Center, steeped in tradition, been here for years. Why would we want to have an aquarium/visitor kind of facility hooked up with a training center? So, basically, the Park Service walked away from that opportunity, and Mather Training Center just kept right on chugging along.
- Dave Dahlen: Senator Byrd didn't give up, and the [U.S.] Fish and Wildlife Service came into the mix because of the aquarium, I suppose, and the idea evolved. The location changed, the idea evolved, and the Fish and Wildlife Service basically said, "This sounds like a good idea to us." At that point, Park Service is out of the picture. The aquarium dropped off the planning map. The visitor facility for the aquarium dropped off the concept, and the training center survived.
- Dave Dahlen: The Fish and Wildlife Service struggled with the location until a woman out on the Shepherd Grade Road, outside of Shepherdstown, offered her farm through some sort of, obviously, an estate agreement. I don't have the details of that.

Dave Dahlen: So, the location was then set, the training center was set, and Rick Lemon was given the task for the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop the concept and make it a reality.

Dave Dahlen: I was lucky enough to meet Rick very early in his background work. He decided – he told me, anyway – that he was going to try to visit every federal training center in the D.C. area that he could, to find out how we did it. What did we do? What did we think were our strengths? What would we recommend to somebody if you had a blank slate?

Dave Dahlen: The day that he came to Mather, I happened to be the acting superintendent for – it was either Martha Aikens or Mike, I can't remember. So, I had a chance to tour him around the facility, take him through the campus, over through the dorm and the training center, and give him some ideas from my perspective. When he came and visited, honestly, I thought, "You'll never pull this off." In the back of my mind, I thought, "Man, this is a big plan." I mean, I know how the government works. It's going to be really hard to reach what he's talking about, you know, recreational facilities and cafeterias and food courts and hiking trails. It's like, "Yeah, sure."

Dave Dahlen: He did it, and it wasn't maybe a year or two after that he invited us all over. We were on very good terms. Rick was, is, was, really outstanding in this area for the Fish and Wildlife Service for this training center. He was a good guy. He's retired now. But he invited us all over when they were pushing dirt. Even when they were pushing dirt, I'm thinking, "Wow. How can they really?" I had no idea what was going to end up happening. Then, of course, NCTC and the grand opening, and the rest is history.

Dave Dahlen: It also had an effect on us operationally. We were impacted. We have a quaint, historic dorm. It's really neat. It has a lot of atmosphere, and when you go there you felt like you were a college student back in your college dorm room, and you had to trundle down the hallway to a common bathroom and a shower. They have individual rooms, TV hookups, recreational facilities. They've got a gym over there, a weight room. And so, it was hard. We lost business, and at the same time we had to close the dorm. The dorm was a hard place to stay, and people were increasingly not staying there. The way in which we paid for the dorm was through the per diem that you paid when you came here, that the students paid, and if people were increasingly dissatisfied and disenchanted with the common bathrooms, like, "Whoops," it doesn't take long for someone to say, "I'm not going to Mather, because they're going to make me stay in the dorm."

Dave Dahlen: "Oh, you don't have to stay in the dorm. Just take your per diem and go over to the hotel," and that's what started happening.

Dave Dahlen: Then the program managers, they love us, and I think we had built great credibility with these folks, but when they saw NCTC, it's like, man. So, we started losing classes as well, so it did have an effect. It settled out, and we never really were in competition with NCTC, but it eroded some of our usage.

[Unidentified]: What do you think was the mood here when it began to be obvious that NCTC was going to be a reality and it was going to be this huge campus with beautiful residential dorms and other facilities?

Dave Dahlen: Probably if you'd polled the group at the time, there would have been a mixed feeling about it. The staff here was, and still is, pretty protective of this place. So, when we started seeing these impacts, I think there would have been some of them who would have been pretty resentful as to what might have happened. I think, though, frankly, because Rick Lemon, the force of his personality and his style, being such a good guy, it was hard to not like him. I mean, it's hard to not like NCTC, you go over there. So, there could have been some, obviously, differing opinions on the staff.

Dave Dahlen: Actually, what ended up early on, Carol, was the number of classes dropped off that we were working forty weeks a year of different groups every week, and so dropping off a little bit wasn't necessarily a bad thing. It gave us a little breathing room. I can remember that feeling where, "Oh, I've got a week to think here," instead of always being – you're always on when there's a class going on, and the staff loves it when a group comes in, but forty weeks of it, you end up really getting pretty worn out. So, I think there was some degree of relief. But then it kept going, and for the other reasons that I've described earlier, the number of classes is really way different than it used to be.

[Unidentified]: Did you all ever feel threatened? Did you ever feel like what was our future going to be?

Dave Dahlen: There was actually a period of time when that dialogue was going on. Why don't we just move the function of the Training Center to NCTC? Jerry Simpson, who was the associate director for Workforce Management, came onboard right at perhaps a high point in that dialogue. Why don't we go to NCTC and just be subsumed? So, I wouldn't call it a real serious discussion, but it was floated as a thought or an idea.

Dave Dahlen: The organization at that point was just going into this report, this 2008 report that I mentioned earlier, and when the role and function of the Training Center was redefined through that report, I think that pretty much put to rest the whole idea of basically moving over there and just being part of their facility. The Park Service never approached the Fish and Wildlife Service in any official way about that idea.

Dave Dahlen: Frankly, my feeling is it would have been dead on arrival. Fish and Wildlife Service loves their facility. They're very proud of that facility. I could not imagine that they would welcome the National Park Service, the big 20,000-person unit, coming in here and trying to encroach on their space. I really think that would have been a tough sell had it ever really gotten that kind of level of support.

Dave Dahlen: But the way that things have now evolved, interestingly, we're launching off into this new world, an unknown territory of trying to create good and effective blended teaching strategies. NCTC's trying to fill classrooms. It's interesting. Don't know how that's going to play out. Last year when budgets really got crunched, when one of those early shutdowns, the last shutdown warning rippled through government, NCTC lost a number of classes because people cancelled. So, it was kind of a wake-up call for them, you know. They've got to really work hard to keep their classes filled. I haven't talked with the director about this at all, but, I mean, you can just watch from a distance and see that, hmm, maybe that's something they're going to need to be watching and working with. So, I don't know how that will go for them.

Dave Dahlen: But I have to say one of the things that's interesting about me, just having been back here for six years, is how I think I'm making a transformation to this new mindset. I'm a classroom trainer. What I do best is being up in front of the room. It's funny. I'm so far from where I was when I started in this career, and so that's what I've always felt is the most effective stuff. Honestly, for thirty people, I'll always believe that. But the realities of our bureau and the realities of the new workforce and the economics of the situation and the reach, the potential reach of that class that's 75 or 80 percent effective in terms of what our needs are, I mean, what we're really trying to do here is help the workforce succeed in their work.

Dave Dahlen: So, I've come around to this belief now, I think. I swing back and forth from time to time, but I think I've come around to this belief that so what we really need to do is just make good choices between what is best served in the classroom? What has to be served in the classroom? And, (a), what can be done electronically, and, (b), how can we make it be that 80 percent or even higher? I mean, maybe I sell it short. I've been in some online classes that have actually been kind of fun. It's a little adventure how you wind your way through the learning, very expensive, but, nonetheless, if it works. So, I think that is the future, I honestly do, until something very different happens, I think.

- [Unidentified]: Do you think the construction development of NCTC might have encouraged Mather Training Center to go towards that distant learning, or do you think that that was just something that happened at the same time as you were making that move?
- Dave Dahlen: A little bit of both. Interestingly, that report, I came back from the field in 2006, and the folks running training when I came back, I think, were wondering about the future of Mather, the impacts of NCTC. So, the discussion could have been an open discussion at that point in time, but what was happening was the early meetings, the groups that were meeting to draw up that 2008 report, the dialogue was happening through those groups. So, we started hearing – I wasn't part of that discussion or any of those groups, and there was kind of a sequestered field-based group that [unclear] Dillon [phonetic] had put together to take a look at training, and so they intentionally didn't include a number of the current training staff.
- Dave Dahlen: So, we didn't get a chance to participate in the discussions, but we heard about the discussions, and so the whole notion that we might turn Mather into a distance-learning center, we knew about it. And I think because the big dorm question and the building of the new dorm was up in the air at that point in time, I think the folks who were driving the research and the report writing going on for that 2008 report and the administration in Park Service at the time thought it would be a good new direction to point Mather towards distance learning. So, I think they intentionally wanted to push us towards this distance delivery.
- Dave Dahlen: What I don't think was anticipated was the growth of the career academy concept, which has created these training manager roles and responsibilities, some of which are new. So, the academy which was proposed in the report, it didn't have a home and it really doesn't have a home, but the people who will be populating the content and the coursework, most of them do now reside here.
- Dave Dahlen: So, I think the attrition of classroom-based training, for whatever reason, the change in the finances, and the increased financial support getting pushed into learning and development along with the academy concept has actually allowed Mather to morph into something different than it used to be. I think we will still be a training center, but it'll be a training center that's both like an R&D shop and an innovative shop in training delivery strategies, far different than it used to be.

- Dave Dahlen: So, yes, I think it kind of morphed in front of our eyes. It was going to change over into some distance learning facility. One of the early reports or recommendations that the committee was kicking around was to actually turn the classrooms into an AV production studio where we would be pushing out video, much like NBC News or whatever, and the classroom space could be used to become AV production, similar to what NCTC has in its own basement over in Shepherdstown. That idea didn't get any traction, partly because TEL, the satellite program, is a good format, but it's a pretty one-dimensional format, and the distance delivery ideas through the computer are so much broader, that that idea never went anywhere. But the whole notion that the place would change was intentional, and after four or five years of watching it and because of the ideas I just mentioned a moment ago about how I'm changing my perspective; I think it's a good direction. I mean, I don't think it's guaranteed. I think we have a real challenge to make this work, but it's a good goal.
- [Unidentified]: So, I think Neil is going to ask you a little bit about your leaving [unclear] the first time and [unclear].
- Neil Koch: Right. So, Janet had alluded earlier to the now-and-later section of the interview, and we're interested in your personal evolution and your role as superintendent and your present status here and your personal legacy. But before getting into the present, what influenced you to leave Mather for Glacier National Park?
- Dave Dahlen: Well, you know, up until the time I came here, I had spent probably twelve or fifteen years in the field. It was my orientation. I liked the collateral duty idea, collateral duty trainer scenario where I can do my real job and then also go play in different parks and help train and do that kind of thing. It was fun. My supervisors – and that's an important piece – my supervisors let that happen, which I really do appreciate and probably never thanked them enough for.
- Dave Dahlen: But, anyway, once getting here, I became an instructor, and as I described earlier, lots of courses, lots of different disciplines. It was fun to learn about archaeology. It was fun to learn about ARPA or 10575 forms, stuff I didn't know about. So, through osmosis and just participation, I learned a lot about a lot of different aspects of the Park Service.
- Dave Dahlen: After about three or four years of that, you know, it was tough work. It was very demanding. I put a lot of hours in, and it was at a time in my life, in my personal life, where when I look back on it, I really maybe wish I hadn't put so many hours in. I've been asked that question, when you look back, would you do something different?

Dave Dahlen: And that would be something that if I had a means to do it, I would do less work. But, anyway, after three or four years of it, I started to get kind of – I hope I wasn't burned out, but you could use that term. I was just tired, just tired.

Dave Dahlen: But what happened was through these various studies, these self-studies about training, there seemed like there was always something new coming down, a new challenge, and the first new challenge was to put together – Corky Mayo, who was the chief of interpretation, wanted reinvigorate the Interpretive Skills Program, and so, he gave me the latitude to try to bring together a think tank, a working group, to come up with something new or different. It developed into the Interpretative Development Program, which had a lot of pros and cons to it. It had had an interesting history in its own right, but what it did was it reinvigorated me. I was excited about what was going on. We were coming up with new stuff. It was truly groundbreaking stuff. I like to think I was the conductor of an absolute topflight A-ranked orchestra, and the people, the talent that came in were just remarkable. Totally reinvigorated me. So, I had this moment in time where something needed to change in my career. I was looking around for jobs, and then this happened, so that's rolling along, ups and downs and bumps and bruises. But, anyway, we did that for a few years.

Dave Dahlen: Then the Park Service decided in the mid- to late nineties that we needed to reinvigorate our supervisory leadership training, so I was put on this work group that came up with the Leadership Seminar Program, and to say it had mixed success would be a very glass-half-full kind of thought. It really had some struggles organizationally in being successful, but what it was for me, it was an intellectual and professional challenge like one I've never experienced. It was tough to help this group. There's a little plaque on my wall over there that I have up there not so much because I'm excited about the totally wonderful, positive outcome of the program, but because of the professional challenge that it posed to me. I really struggled with that, but it was a good struggle. So, yet another morph of my job.

Dave Dahlen: At the same time, they upgraded the job to a training manager level. It seemed like every time I was at a point, a crossroads, something new would come along and it reinvigorated my energy. I'll have to say, a lot of people have experienced the same thing.

Dave Dahlen: During that very same period of time, my kids were going through school, local, and so it was okay, because we weren't moving them around or uprooting them or anything like that. But, finally, in 2000, 2001, I thought, "You know, maybe I've run my string here." I didn't really have anything new.

Dave Dahlen: There was a time when I decided or I came to the realization, “I’m not offering anything new to this equation. I’m in maintenance mode or maintain-ance mode. I’ve got to make a jump. I’ve got to do something.”

Dave Dahlen: It happened that Glacier came along, and some of my other colleagues had transferred out of these jobs and into superintendences. I had been here so long, fourteen years, literally half of my career at that point, that I didn’t have the skill sets or the marketability to step right into a superintendency, and I knew that. Besides, interpretation was my strongest suit anyway, so going to a chief of interpretation, especially at a place like Glacier, that was just terrific. And it was at a moment in our personal lives where the move was absolutely manageable.

Dave Dahlen: So, I went back to the field. Yes, that was a good move. It really was a good move. I needed to move on from here. People don’t generally stay fourteen years at a training center. That’s a long time. So, getting back out to the field, it was a hoot. I really loved it.

Neil Koch: I guess that begs the next question. What influenced your decision to move back here to Mather?

Dave Dahlen: Well, you know, I’ve told this story a number of times. This literally happened. I was driving out. I went out early. It was before the end of the school year, and my older daughters had flown the coop by then, but my wife and son came out at the end of the school year. So, I drove out early and started my job at Glacier.

Dave Dahlen: Literally driving across the Mississippi River bridge, someplace in Illinois, I thought, “What would bring me back?” We’re East Coasters. We’ve always been out east. I mean, we worked out west a little bit. “What would bring me back?” So, I thought about that over the miles, driving out to Glacier, and I thought, “The one job that I know would bring me back would be superintendent of Mather,” and I filed that away.

Dave Dahlen: A real close friend of mine, Mike Watson, was the superintendent, and I expected him to be working for quite a while. So, I did my gig at Glacier National Park and had ran into Mike at a conference, and he said, “I’m going to retire.”

Dave Dahlen: I said, “Not yet. I’m still having fun at Glacier” (laughter). Actually, it was one of those good news-bad news situations, because I wasn’t ready to come back. But he decided he was going to retire, so I said, “Well, if I’m going to take that job, now’s my chance.” So, I left Glacier a little earlier than I really would have liked.

Neil Koch: You alluded to this earlier, your connections and the contrasts. How do you see your role as a superintendent as compared to a training manager and also working in the field of interpretation? Compare and contrast potential interconnectedness.

Dave Dahlen: Well, one of the things I think I would hazard a guess I think it's safe to say that just about every first-time superintendent would agree with, is there's a real shock to the system of moving from a staff level or work-unit level to being a superintendent. At every other turn or twist in my career, I was part of a group, group of frontline interpreters, a group of supervisors, a group of training specialists, a group of training managers, a division chief. I always was part of a group, and there was a collaboration. When you become superintendent, you're all by yourself. I've always heard that. The reality of it was really startling. You're not part of the group anymore. A lot of folks don't mind that. I'm a little more social than that, so it was a transition for me. And you couldn't go to your colleagues to bounce ideas off of as much, because everybody's looking to you for the solution. So, it was a little different.

Dave Dahlen: I have a huge amount of respect for field superintendents who are park superintendents, because I'm a superintendent of a function that I know like my hand, and so there's nothing that really surprises me. I mean, there are things that challenge me, but they don't surprise me. Field park superintendents would have a different challenge. So, that's something that's really different, though. I would grade this or put it on a scale where my transition to being superintendent was stark and sobering enough to go from any other position to a field park superintendent would be even more so as a challenge. Now, the fun thing about it is that you do have a collaboration. I have five training managers and some training assistants and some training specialists, and we do have, I think, a pretty good relationship.

Dave Dahlen: The other thing that's a real transition from being a training manager is the one-dimensional role of your job versus the multidimensional role of being a superintendent. I have to worry about everything now, not just the narrow focus of being a training manager or the narrow focus of being a chief of interpretation compared to a superintendent. I do need to worry about why did we have that alarm go off yesterday. It's an annoyance for most folks. For me it's like, "Okay, so what's up with this? We need to get to the bottom of this. We can't have this." Or who's the next drop-in that might come in and catch me off guard? So, there's just a whole range of things as superintendent that are way different.

- Neil Koch: You mentioned the word “challenges” a couple of times, and I’d be interested to hear, how are the challenges here at Mather reflecting of the challenges of NPS as a whole and vice versa?
- Dave Dahlen: I think this whole challenge of addressing the diminishing discretionary money, funding that’s available to park sites, field sites, even central offices, I think that’s applying to us all. Even though we have a stronger funding base than we used to on training, the costs of everything and the need to be judicious or prudent in the way in which we use those funds is absolutely a challenge. I just had a couple conversations this morning with staff about that.
- Dave Dahlen: We’re developing these distance-learning platforms that I’ve talked about. The other hidden piranha is you have to maintain them. They have to continue to work. Whenever anybody changes a server out in Albuquerque, the links get thrown off. So, there are issues and challenges like that that are facing us as we head into this.
- Dave Dahlen: I think this challenge of how to continue to inspire, this is a philosophical challenge for me, but I think for training in general as well. How do we continue to inspire and infuse that enthusiasm in trainees in this new world is a real challenge. I think the Park Service has a real challenge in diversity and relevancy going into the future. How can we affect that in a positive way?
- Dave Dahlen: The United States demographic has just changed before our eyes in the last fifteen years. You don’t need to look at any numbers. So, what do we do in the National Park Service in response to that? I think traditional thinking needs to be thrown in the can and tossed out with the garbage. We have to do something different, and I feel passionately about that. We can’t keep trying to increase our own workforce demographic, let alone be relevant to new demographics, by doing the same stuff that we’ve done for ninety-five years, because it isn’t going to work.
- Dave Dahlen: Anyway, I’m off on a soapbox with that, but I think that’s a real challenge. Interestingly, I think that challenge is easily met through distance delivery. I think we can reach into places that we haven’t reached before. So that little bit of it, I think, is positive, but we do have to do things differently.
- Neil Koch: How does that change in training affect the specific workforce right here in Mather, and your training staff in particular?
- Dave Dahlen: Well, you know, again, we need to entice or interest a broader range of candidates, a more diverse set of candidates, for the positions that we offer here.

Dave Dahlen: I think in terms of pure diversity, the better we can do with bringing in a range of experience and cultural perspective for the same classic modeling and role modeling that it provides would be a good thing. I think we need to be proactive in developing training courses of some sort to help people understand the value of that diversity and how it helps us, as an organization, succeed.

Dave Dahlen: In fact, an idea I'm trying to get some traction on right now is to get a training program developed that is atypical, that is outside the traditional box of training that would entice people or encourage people to think a little bit differently about their workforce and their colleagues. I'm trying to get some money right now to develop that curriculum. Jury's out on it. I'm not sure if it's going to land or not.

Neil Koch: Looking into the future, what are some of your hopes for the Center, and how do they fit in with the larger Park Service mission? You mentioned engaging in an effective way. How can that happen?

Dave Dahlen: I've long felt that the future of the Training Center, I think, is embedded in this whole new strategy that we're going about, from a practical sense, but I also think the future of this Training Center can continue to evolve along the same track that it has from a cultural sense as a place of opportunity, as a place of innovation and change, tracking the early Storer College days and then the Niagara Movement in 1906, the NAACP, of the 1932 incident with the plaque outside here. The Park Service's recognition of multiple points of view in terms of its storytelling, it all could be easily encapsulated in an idea that I think would be good for the Center, and that is where have we been as a society and as a culture and where are we headed.

Dave Dahlen: So, I think the interpretative training, which back in the day was how to walk and talk, and I don't want to diminish that, because we needed it, but now it's evolved into how do we think and how do we ascribe meanings and relevancy. So, I think through that interpretative thread there's a trend that this place has been a locus for that. It's been a place where those ideas of who we are have kind of grown and evolved through the years. So, where I'd like to see this place head would be to, really, for us at this Training Center to feature that notion that this has been a place of innovation and change, both from the classroom perspective but also culturally. And going into the future, it could be a place where we explore those ideas, not just figuring out to make a decent computer-based training course effective, but we could explore the ideas of meaning and relevancy. We could take the concepts that this place has laid out for us and really explore it, where are we headed, and we could do it through our Park Service sites.

- Dave Dahlen: An argument can be made that culturally every site is relevant to our culture just by definition, but these meanings that are in sites around the country could be nurtured and teased out and enhanced, and we can do the same thing here. I'm kind of rambling a little bit here, but I think the idea would be this is the place and the space where that's happened through in the past. Why can't we take that foundation and explore ourselves within the Service and then push out a greater capacity on the part of our staff around the country to do the same thing for their places?
- Dave Dahlen: What is it? What's special about T [unclear] to you or to you? By you discovering that if you've worked there and then understanding your place and relevance, and then you sharing that with visitors that come in, you can help them discover their own relevance for T [unclear]. And therefore, we've discovered a little bit more about ourselves, and we've allowed that relevance of our sites to be important or valuable to somebody new.
- Dave Dahlen: How we transition to that reality is going to be an important challenge to the Park Service, because traditional relevance is fine, nothing wrong with it, but it's limited in scope. We have to find new relevance. I think Mather can be a place for that. Collectively here, this staff has over the last year actually started looking at the space in this place as a park, and we have a story. It's not just a Training Center, and so we're starting to engage in that a little bit.
- Dave Dahlen: I think to make it a space that has meaning and relevance, in addition to training, that's a little value added, but it also gives us that foundation to explore, to bring people in and to explore the whole notion of spatial and resource relevance. It's still a little abstract, but it's starting to come together. But I absolutely think unless we do something like that for our society, that that changed demographic isn't going to find us particularly relevant. Why should they? It's not my relevance. It's got to be theirs.
- Dave Dahlen: But, anyway, you're hearing a little bit of my long-held dream for this place. And wouldn't it be cool if we could find a private partner, well-heeled private partner, that could allow us the latitude of planning and developing symposia and other sorts of private-sector initiatives to explore those kind of ideas? And then we would be partnered with them so that their initiative to explore the notions of civil rights, of the evolution of our society, how our culture treats itself, where are we headed, what are the lessons learned, what are the lessons to avoid, all that stuff could be done independently through a foundation and a private partner, and then it would inform us. It would inform the Park Service and allow us then to pump that scholarly research into the parks. That would be cool.

- [Unidentified]: It sounds like sort of two really different components then to Mather, this park idea, or the relevance, the story, and then the distance learning. Those aren't necessarily integrated, right? You're kind of looking at two different things?
- Dave Dahlen: Yes. At the moment, yes, we're still sorting out the distance learning, and until we get a good foundational web presence – and that's how this is all going to become visible, will be through a webpage or a portal, a practical web-based platform for Park Service employees to go to and find out about training and what's going on and schedules and what great new computer-based courses are coming down the pike, and all of that.
- Dave Dahlen: Once that's visible, I think that will make the task of maybe integrating and making it more seamless, easier. Right now, our biggest challenge is just getting the stuff coalesced around a webpage, getting it built. It's much more difficult than any of us expected. We've long been wanting to launch this webpage, and we're getting closer, and once it's out there, then I think people will start to get a better sense for where learning and development's at and what's available. At that point in time, maybe we then can transition into some of that more conceptual meaning and relevancy piece, put some attention to that.
- Neil Koch: I'm curious to know, do you have specific individuals or maybe sectors of contacts that should be reached out to regarding this specific oral history project of the administrative history here at Mather Training Center?
- Dave Dahlen: Do I? Other people meaning—
- [Unidentified]: Yes, are there other people that whoever's picking this up should be talking to, other people that are key players that you think should be contacted?
- Dave Dahlen: Well, yes, there would be a number who were directly involved at Mather. You've got a couple of them coming in today, and that's really terrific. There are a couple of other former superintendents that are still core instructors that are still out there. They're getting older now, and so it would be interesting to see if they'd be willing to travel or able to travel.
- Dave Dahlen: Bill Wade, a former superintendent, he predated Martha Aikens. John Tyler has retired probably eight or ten years ago. He was an instructor here on the staff and worked in training for a number of years, former superintendent at Fort McHenry. "Flip" Haygood was the chief of training for a number of years, a really dynamic fellow. He works with Student Conservation Association now.

Dave Dahlen: Some of the administrative staff, the support staff, are still around, Peggy Woodward [phonetic], Gloria Baker. Some former instructors who are now Park Service superintendents, Connie Backland [phonetic], Dale Ditmanson [phonetic]. Chuck Hannibal [phonetic] who is down at [unclear], he's retired. So, there are a number of folks still around who could – if you can have another iteration of this, it would be wonderful.

Dave Dahlen: I'm trying to think. I was talking with Roger yesterday. There was a gentleman by the name of Jerry Shimoda [phonetic], who was an instructor here in the – must have been in late sixties or early seventies. He was Hawaiian, is Hawaiian, and Jerry's just a fabulous gentleman, long retired. He lives in Hawaii, so somebody's just going to have to go out there and do an interview.

[Unidentified]: That's a real hardship (laughs).

Dave Dahlen: Yes, yes, it would be hard, I know. He's got to be getting up there. It would be hard for him to come here. So, I'd say that, not in jest, that somebody would have to go out there. Jerry would be a good catch. He was Hawaiian, and so prejudice, discrimination, and breaking barriers in the sixties for somebody like that would have been still a pretty reasonable perspective. He's such a gentleman, I don't know if he would be willing to go there, but he's a good guy and would be great to capture, if he's still willing and able.

Dave Dahlen: Let me think about it.

Rachel Brown: Well, thank you for spending the time with us.

Dave Dahlen: Well, this has been fun. I rambled a little bit there, sorry about that, but it's really a very happy convergence that this course has come here, because we are right on this, and we have such an important need over the next few years, but then also, of course, for the legacy of the Service, I think these training centers – Larry Frederick [phonetic], who retired from Rocky Mountain National Park, chief of interp out there, a year or two – well, maybe just last year. When I first got here, one of my jobs to support that team that was writing that report was to do research on training centers. How did you perceive the training centers? Same sort of questions perhaps that you'd asked earlier. So, I did a number of phone interviews, and I called Larry because I knew him. I have to paraphrase it, but he said, "Training centers are a place where we come together and get to know each other," and what he meant was get to know each other in our common goals and visions and hope and aspirations for the National Park Service. I would add to that that it's how we weave the fabric of our bureau together. Absent that opportunity, I think we're missing something as an organization.

Dave Dahlen: The greatest strength, and perhaps one of its strongest weaknesses as well, is the interconnectedness of the parks and the park staff, the sharing of the expertise, the knowledge that you're not in it alone.

Dave Dahlen: One of the places where that happens is here at these training centers. That's one of the reasons why absolutely we can't let go of classroom-based training. I'll never forget that Larry had only been to a few courses here and at Albright. It was so valuable to him to have had that opportunity and to come together in a way that stayed with him through his entire career. So we do need to hang onto the concept, and if we have to go the route of electronic delivery, I hope we don't lose that, at least that aspiration and goal that we will always understand the potential impact that we have on employees in a positive way so that for at least at that very one brief moment where we interact, we've recharged batteries and we've given you new tools so that you can soldier on towards your personal goals, meet your own development, but then also the Park Service mission.

[Unidentified]: Is there anything that you thought we were going to ask that we didn't, that you really wanted to touch on as you were thinking about and preparing yourself for the interview?

Dave Dahlen: Well, I have to be honest. I think I dumped in a bunch of stuff that I wanted to say (laughter). Tangentially, I think I covered a lot of what I might have been thinking about. The whole dorm piece, I hope that Mike Watson or someone talks about the ill-fated new dorm. It's quite an ambitious project. Sitting in that little cupboard there I have shovel-ready construction drawings for that dorm, and it never happened. So hopefully he'll dive into that a little bit.

[Unidentified]: I have to ask, because I've been looking at the wall there next to your plaque that you pointed out earlier, and it says, "Employee of the Year, 1998." You got that award when you were here, right?

Dave Dahlen: Yes.

[Unidentified]: Can you talk about that?

Dave Dahlen: Yes. It probably implies way more than it – as Senator Byrd was successful in locating satellite offices of multiple federal bureaus in the panhandle of West Virginia, it struck Don Campbell, who was the superintendent at Historical Park, it struck him that, you know, these federal bureaus really ought to come up with some mechanism to talk to each other, so they established an Eastern Panhandle and Federal Employees Executive Association, or something like that.

Dave Dahlen: So, it's all the managers of all these bureaus, and they would come together on a monthly basis and talk about either common problems or internal issues or whatever, and they'd have lunch. It was part social, part networking, that sort of thing.

Dave Dahlen: One of the things they felt was they should start to perhaps recognize, maybe they could have a way to recognize employees within the panhandle for outstanding contributions. So, they came up with several categories. It might have been the very first year. I don't know if it's the first year or not, but it was one of the early years, so I like to think that there wasn't a whole lot of competition back in those days (laughs).

Dave Dahlen: So, yes, nowadays it would be way – that's actually a true statement. Nowadays it would be way tougher to earn that award, because there are that many more federal bureaus out there. You know, I went to the award ceremony last year, and, honestly, the Team Award went to a group who designed a hydraulic mechanism to get them up and to be able to service the tail assembly for C-5 Galaxy jets. They won (laughter). And you know what? They were going up against a team that was researching a cure for stinkbugs, a mitigation for stinkbugs, and, of course, I thought, "Oh, stinkbugs." I had my money on stinkbugs. No. Then they described these people, from scratch they designed this thing. So, like I said, it was way easier back in those days (laughs).

[Unidentified]: What did you win it for? What was your project?

Dave Dahlen: It was back during the time when I had been working on the Interpretive Development Program and marshaling – there were over three hundred folks around the Service that I tried to vet this program with when I was working with OPM, and it was a tough slog at times. It was hard, at the time one of my biggest challenges that I'd ever really taken on.

Dave Dahlen: Then right before that, also was this other one that I was telling you about, the leadership thing. So, Mike Watson, who my boss at the time, was the representative over there, and he put me in for it. So, it wasn't quite a C-5 Galaxy Star lift for a jet aircraft.

[Unidentified]: Any follow-up questions from anybody? Well, then we'll turn this off, and thank you for your time, and we'll fill out the form.

[END OF INTERVIEW]