

**David Romig and Kenny Cristina
Cristina Ice Service – Marrero, LA**

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Date: May 11, 2011

Location: Cristina Ice Service – Marrero, LA

Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 14 minutes

Project: New Orleans Sno-Balls

[Begin Cristina's Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, May 11, 2011. I'm in Marrero, Louisiana at Cristina's, and I'm here with Kenny Cristina and David Romig. If I could get you each to introduce yourselves, tell me your first name and describe what you do for a living, we'll go from there? David, we'll start with you.

00:00:23

David Romig: I'm David Romig. We're in the ice plant, ice business, and we're manufacturing block ice and bagged ice.

00:00:30

Kenny Cristina: I'm Kenny Cristina. *[Phone Rings]* I'm in the business of producing ice mainly for the seafood industry and the shrimping and fishing—picnic people, and--and whatever.

00:00:52

SR: Okay, thank you. Do you need me to pause this or he's okay? Okay, could I ask you for your birth date Kenny?

00:00:58

KC: I was born in 1957.

00:01:02

SR: Thank you. So you just described this business a little bit when you described your occupation. Can you tell me when and how this started? I know that you are not the first generation here.

00:01:18

KC: No, actually we're the fourth generation. When this—this particular business was bought by my grandfather, and it was in Lafitte, Louisiana and disassembled and moved here; reassembled and built for handling the seafood industry and house-to-house ice needs where—before refrigerators were invented. And it's just kind of evolved into the sno-ball business, the picnic, and the fishermen, and to a certain extent the commercial seafood end of it.

00:02:04

SR: David, you had to go answer a phone call. Could I ask you for your birth date, please?

00:02:09

DR: My birth date is December 8, 1959.

00:02:13

SR: Thank you. So you said that your grandfather bought this business. I'm assuming it wasn't called Cristina's before he bought it.

00:02:21

KC: Actually this was the Fisher Ice Company, and when they started—when he started it, moved it here, it was called Community Ice Service. And then shortly around the time of the Second World War it became Cristina Ice and it was just involved with the family a little bit so they changed the structure of the business somewhat.

00:02:49

SR: And Fisher as in a fisherman, or was it spelled differently?

00:02:53

KC: I think it's Fisher—.

00:02:59

DR: I think it was a family name, I believe.

00:03:02

SR: So did your parents work here, or did you grow up around here?

00:03:08

KC: I've been exposed to it my whole life, being you know summertime jobs, working. My dad worked here off and on and he was also an attorney and a geologist, so he had other interests.

But it was a great place to have a summertime job and get exposed to it. And then as we got out

of college and everything, there was an opportunity to run the business so we just kind of stepped into it and took it from there.

00:03:42

SR: And so when you say “we,” do you mean you and David?

00:03:45

KC: Yes.

00:03:47

SR: And y'all are cousins?

00:03:48

DR: Correct, first cousins.

00:03:50

SR: Who is related to whom? Is it your fathers that are related?

00:03:53

DR: His father is my mother's brother.

00:03:59

SR: And David, you also grew up working here in the summers?

00:04:02

DR: Correct. I started when I was—the summer when I was 12 years-old working in the summers and worked every summer except one since then. One summer I got a job somewhere else. I worked a little while in the beginning and got a better job for one summer; I needed more money. They weren't paying good enough so I went somewhere else for one summer, but other than that since 1972 or '73, something like that. I can't remember what--what year it was now.

00:04:29

SR: What was paying better than this place?

00:04:31

DR: Kaiser Aluminum. [*Laughs*] My dad was a--worked at Kaiser Aluminum and they were hiring high school students for one summer, so I was able to work there.

00:04:41

SR: So your--your father didn't work here. Did your mother?

00:04:45

DR: My father actually did when he was very young because the place in Kenner—my grandfather actually worked at the Kenner Ice Plant for a little while. But my--my father worked there. I don't know how long but I remember him telling me about working there when he was a kid. And my mother—my mother never did.

00:05:00

SR: Let me ask—I'm interested about those summers, but let me go back even a little further. So what year was it, do you know, when your grandfather bought the business?

00:05:10

KC: Nineteen thirty-four, purchased this--this particular building and they was moved here in 19—put into production in 1935.

00:05:21

SR: And before we started recording you told me that you had up to five different locations in the area and you—and David, you just mentioned one in Kenner. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

00:05:36

DR: The Kenner plant was built in 1907, I believe, and it was a—our great-grandfather was involved with that but he was mainly as an investor. I don't think he ever worked in it, but he was in the ice business. I think it was originally—was it Kenner or Trucker's Ice first? Because we've got—I always thought it was Trucker's Ice but we've got an old, old picture that my uncle had that had Kenner Ice on the side of it, so not really sure about that. It's before our time. That had to be, like I said, around 1907 or something like that. And that plant stayed in business until Katrina. And Katrina did enough damage to it that it wasn't worth rebuilding, so we—that's been shut down since 2005.

00:06:21

SR: So you manufactured ice there and here. At the other locations, did you ever manufacture ice or did you just distribute it?

00:06:28

DR: Originally we have the five locations; four of them produced ice. We had Kenner, Marrero, Lafitte, and Gretna. Jefferson never—Jefferson Box we call it; it's a depot where we ship ice there and sell it but we never did produce it there. But then eventually we shut down Gretna first—huh, or Lafitte? Yeah, Gretna shut down production and then we had a depot and we sent ice there and eventually Lafitte was shut down in probably the mid-'80s, huh, something like that.

00:07:01

KC: That's correct.

00:07:03

DR: And then Kenner, like I said Kenner was shut down in 2005.

00:07:09

KC: At one time the peak production of all of our plants, we were producing 1,900 300-pound blocks a day, and it just evolved from lack of business and plants got shut down over the years

because just a lot of the big shrimp boats were phasing out using ice. They were putting refrigerated units on the boats, so a lot of the demand actually just dropped off.

00:07:40

SR: Okay. So it makes sense that the Kenner plant closed because of Katrina, but the other ones' closing was basically—that's basically because the shrimping industry is changing?

00:07:49

KC: That's correct. Just lack of demand for the product. A lot of people were putting in their own ice machines. The shrimp docks were--were putting in ice machines where they didn't have to buy a lot of ice from us, and just lack of--lack of demand. I have a list of ice plants across the United States and over the years it's—you know there were high numbers of plants. Just in the New Orleans area alone we had 30-something ice plants at one time.

00:08:25

DR: Block ice—that produced block ice.

00:08:28

KC: And now there's only one, and there's probably 30 to 40 plants in the whole United States that—block ice plants that produce 300-pound blocks.

00:08:40

SR: You're the only one in the New Orleans-area now?

00:08:43

DR: Correct.

00:08:43

SR: Are there other ones in Louisiana that you know of?

00:08:46

DR: Not that we know of. Somebody was saying there was one more somewhere but I don't--I don't know where it would be.

00:08:52

SR: When was that peak production time?

00:08:55

KC: Probably right before the World War II, before refrigerators became common. People needed ice to keep their groceries chilled, and when refrigerators became a commonplace the ice man started to phase out.

00:09:18

SR: And how many pounds do you manufacture a day now?

00:09:23

KC: We can produce—close to top production we can produce 30 tons a day in a 24-hour period and about 50 tons of bagged ice if we were to run 24 hours.

00:09:42

SR: I don't know if you want to tell me this information, but about how much do you sell a day these days?

00:09:48

KC: In dollar amount or—?

00:09:49

SR: No, no. I mean you said that you can produce that much, but do you produce that much?

00:09:55

KC: Generally we don't, but when shrimp season gets going full blast and there's a real good shrimp season we get pushed pretty hard just trying to keep up with them.

00:10:08

SR: So the shrimpers are your main clientele?

00:10:10

KC: Yes, yes.

00:10:12

SR: So refrigeration is not your friend?

00:10:15

KC: No, no.

00:10:16

DR: The ice machines aren't our friend. [*Laughs*]

00:10:22

SR: So you still do sell to a lot of shrimpers. What's the difference with their setup? They don't have refrigeration on their boats, or--or why are they still buying ice from you?

00:10:33

DR: A lot of the places have small ice machines that get them by other than peak times. And then when peak times [come] and they can't keep up, that's when they come to us to--to top off what they can't produce themselves.

00:10:46

KC: And then of course you have breakdowns when their ice machines go down and they have to wait a week for parts. They need ice and they need it now, so they'll--they'll come see us.

00:10:58

SR: So the ice that the fishermen are buying from the ice machines—does that bear resemblance to your product?

00:11:06

DR: Usually no. Usually when they get it from us we take a 300-pound block and crush it up and blow it into a truck through a hose. The ice they got is like a fragmented ice. It's a different-- it's a different style of ice. And some of them love our ice and some of them don't. We've got guys now that say it's the best ice you can put on a--on a--on seafood.

00:11:25

SR: And why is that—for the people who think that it's better, what do they like about it better?

00:11:33

DR: Well the crawfish people, they blow it on top of sacks of crawfish; it stays on there, where the fragmented ice, when they're driving the trucks it falls off to the side and doesn't stay on top of the sacks of crawfish. Or in shrimp I guess it vibrates to the sides instead—if it's mounded, instead of staying on top of the shrimp and having that cold moisture drip through them.

00:11:54

KC: This ice is actually colder than that ice. It's manufactured at a lower temperature so it tends—when you--you crush it up and you put it on the product it actually knits back together again. And it helps keep that product colder and lasting longer.

00:12:14

SR: I'm trying to envision what this looks like. So if a shrimper or a crawfish farmer—are these farmers you're dealing with or—? Okay, so do they pull up their trucks with their product already in it?

00:12:32

KC: Yeah, yeah and--and we take the--the block of ice and run it through a crusher and we blow it into the truck and they cover their product with it.

00:12:46

DR: Sometimes they'll come with just a bare truck. Like we've got one big customer that will bring a big truck and we'll blow 70 blocks of ice in his truck. And then when he gets back they shovel it on into totes, they call it, and use that to ice the shrimp down. So they get it both ways.

00:13:02

SR: So they don't take your ice out on their boats with them, or they do?

00:13:06

DR: I guess they--they do. We don't--we don't know after they leave here, we don't know what they do. Most of our big customers are, you know shrimp processing places that get it and they're buying shrimp from the boats and then either hauling it to the factories or distributing to other places, and that's--that's our biggest customer right now.

00:13:25

KC: Sometimes some of the shrimp docks actually give the ice away to the shrimpers so that they have something to put on their shrimp while they're out there fishing and then they bring their product back to the dock and send that—and to get that shrimp back to them.

00:13:44

SR: I see. Can you—one of you or both of you—describe to me how this ice is made here and, like you mentioned Kenny, that it's made at a lower temperature. I don't even really know what that means or why or how it's made.

00:14:01

DR: It's hard to explain. It's easier to show it to you but basically back there we've got a big—imagine a big swimming pool. And in the swimming pool is saltwater and inside the saltwater we have these forms. We call them cans and that's a 300-pound block. And it sits down in the saltwater that's circulating over coils that keep it frozen—keep it cold—and it circulates around these cans. And then we fill the--we fill the cans with water and then one of the secrets is for sno-ball ice, for clear ice, we actually blow air down the middle of the can to agitate the water as it freezes, and when it does that it then brings all of the impurities to the center of the block. So that's where you—if you just put water in a can and freeze it, it comes out white. Snow white. But by blowing air in it, it brings all the impurities to the middle and makes a clear 300-pound block. And then we—when it gets down to a size about--about that big, it's sucked out; the dirty water is sucked out and the impurities are sucked out and fresh water is put back in it.

00:15:02

SR: So you just made like a small oval with your hands that was—I don't know.

00:15:08

DR: I realized now. [*Laughs*]

00:15:10

SR: It's very small?

00:15:11

DR: Yeah, yeah.

00:15:11

SR: So the impurities are sucked out and then more fresh water is put in and frozen just down the core?

00:15:18

DR: Correct. You pull the air tubes out and then you--you replace that water with the impurities in it with fresh water.

00:15:26

KC: And unlike a normal ice machine that freezes ice at 32-degrees, freezes *water* at 32-degrees, this brine that's circulating—saltwater that's circulating around these cans—can get

down as low as 10-degrees. So it's a much colder temperature to freeze that water at and as such, the ice is frozen—the temperature of the ice in the center is actually colder than 32-degrees. So it's a colder product than regular machine-made ice.

00:16:01

SR: Is that why you use saltwater—or, why do you use saltwater?

00:16:05

KC: Well saltwater is the medium that transfers the cold from the refrigeration coils to the blocks to freeze it. If you had just water circulating that water would freeze up. So they either have to use saltwater or glycol to circulate, and that's what draws the heat out of the water to freeze it.

00:16:30

SR: Because saltwater freezes at a lower temperature?

00:16:33

DR: Correct.

00:16:34

KC: Exactly right.

00:16:34

DR: It's like making ice-cream. You know when you make ice-cream and you put salt in the outside? It's the same thing. You're making that--that area colder to make the ice cream freeze and the milk to freeze on the inside.

00:16:44

SR: So you mentioned glycol. I understand that some of the block ice machines—that's what they use?

00:16:49

KC: That's correct. More modern-type, smaller scale systems operate on glycol, but this process has been here since the 1930s and it's used with saltwater.

00:17:05

SR: I was going to ask, so are you using the same process that you saw growing up? Has anything changed?

00:17:12

KC: The only thing that's changed over the years is we pick up four ice cans at one time, which is 1,200 pounds, and in the 1930s they'd pick up one can at a time to harvest that 300-pound block. And now we just do it on a little bit quicker scale.

00:17:33

SR: Well how would they do it then, and how do you do it now?

00:17:35

KC: We--we connect these cans together with a bracket system and we lift it with a hoist. And before it was just each individual can was lifted up by the tank and the ice harvested.

00:17:51

SR: Also with the hoist?

00:17:53

KC: Also with the hoist, more or less sometimes with a chain hoist. It was before the time of electricity. A lot of these plants ran on diesel and steam and didn't--didn't actually have electricity in them, so they used hand-operated mechanisms to harvest the ice.

00:18:12

SR: It sounds kind of dangerous. Have there—I mean is there a big chance of injury lifting those things? Have you ever seen a bad injury?

00:18:19

DR: I guess you could have. We've had very few injuries as far as pulling ice. We would call it pulling ice, because when you manufacture block ice you—for some reason we always called it pulling since we were—. I guess it's a term of manufacturing ice. The only other thing I would say that might have changed a little bit since we've been here is--is the type of compressors we use for the refrigeration. When we started it was the old-time slow speed compressors and now

we're--got a little bit higher speed, smaller compressors that do the same thing. That's about the only thing that's changed. Like Kenny said, the way we pull the ice, the bracket system, and maybe the--the compressors that are used for the refrigeration have changed some.

00:18:58

SR: Do you take water just out of the tap, or what kind of water do you use?

00:19:04

DR: Yeah, we use regular tap water. But like I said, in the process of freezing it and blowing that air is what cleans it up.

00:19:12

SR: I'm thinking about your really clear ice which I saw at--at Sal's Sno-Balls. It's really beautiful. I've seen a lot of sno-ball ice, and I've never seen it like that before. Was that in higher demand when people would get ice in their own homes and they wanted it to look pretty? Or--or why is there not as much a demand for that these days?

00:19:40

DR: Well the ice used for refrigeration didn't have to be perfectly clear like that. As long as it was cold, that's all that really mattered as far as refrigeration. And the plant we had in Lafitte we never did this process with because all that ice was going into boats and stuff like that. So we would manufacture it, what we called white ice—was not blowing in the air like that. And

because it was no need to blow air in it for it just to be crushed up to be used for refrigeration; usually the clear ice is used more for consumption.

00:20:09

KC: And a lot of people aren't aware of that fact; they'll make ice in their freezer at home, and if you notice how it comes out it's milk white. It's got an odor. And it doesn't last real long. And if you were to compare that with this ice, it's--it's cleaner, it's clearer because it's pure, the way it's actually produced. It's--it's a purer product because as we're freezing it, like David said, all of the impurities that comes through the water system are actually extracted out and left with the--the purist cleanest water to freeze up.

00:20:48

It would be almost the same thing as using distilled water in your freezer to make ice.

00:20:56

SR: Do you have, besides your seafood clients—. I know that Steven Bel from Sal's Sno-Balls gets his ice here. Do you have a lot of other sno-ball people, or bartenders—or, who else do you sell to?

00:21:11

KC: Sure, we sell to a lot of sno-ball stands. We sell to ice carvers that make ice carvings that go out on ships, that go into some of the finest restaurants. Yeah, I guess so, uh-hm.

00:21:29

SR: And do they all come in and pick up the ice themselves, or do y'all deliver?

00:21:32

DR: We're not really in the delivery business. The delivery business is a whole other game; we're mostly in the production end. That's our--that's our forte, is producing it. Delivery gets to be a headache and stuff like that—a lot of expense.

00:21:45

KC: At one time we used to deliver quite a bit of ice and it's just something we decided to stay away from.

00:21:54

SR: Well, back when people needed blocks of ice for refrigeration—tell me about that. Tell me about that era.

00:22:03

DR: They used to have what they called “peddlers” and they had their own trucks and they would pull here in the morning and load their trucks up with the block ice and then have a route. So you'd have multiple peddlers going to different areas of the city delivering the block ice for as far as the ice boxes were concerned. That's how that worked.

00:22:20

SR: And how long would one of those blocks last?

00:22:23

DR: That's kind of hard to say. [*Laughs*] It depends on what the heat load was on it. Now if it sat in a--in an icebox closed, I don't know; it was before my time. We always had refrigeration--refrigerators. I never had dealt with an icebox. But we've been on hunting trips together, and bringing block ice, and it's in the winter and it'll last all weekend with no problem.

00:22:42

I go to Mississippi like right now in the summertime, this time of year, and I'll get a block to last almost--almost the whole weekend. Block ice is a lot better than bagged ice. Bagged ice doesn't last anywhere near what block ice lasts.

00:22:56

KC: Another thing about these peddlers that used to go around, they would almost compete against one another for these customers. They would try and go and undercut the other guy just to get added business, and they'd have almost ice wars in trying to keep their customers and get other people's customers. And there would be people fighting, you know, that—"Hey, that's my customer; leave my--my guy alone," you know. So it was--it was something else, some of these stories you hear.

00:23:32

DR: Like ice wars.

00:23:33

KC: Ice wars. *[Laughs]*

00:23:34

SR: Yeah, so probably these ice peddlers were selling the same ice?

00:23:38

DR: Yeah, uh-hm.

00:23:38

KC: They were selling the same ice; they were just competing to get the most customers that they could and probably buying it at the same price but charging all kind of prices on it.

00:23:51

SR: So I'm thinking about Katrina and I'm guessing that the power went out at your plant in Kenner. How long can one of these huge blocks of ice that you make last?

00:24:07

DR: It was three weeks before we got back and we still had ice in the tank. Now you figure blocks—say roughly a little less than four-foot tall—when we got back we were able to harvest—. In three weeks we were able to harvest because the bottom part stayed. The top, as it melts the heat rises, so the top part of the brine got warmer. So the bottom of the block stayed and we were able to harvest some of that. In fact, Steve Bel got some of it. He was--he was ready to open the sno-ball stand up and we were able to harvest some of the ice and it was just maybe

100 pounds—up to 300 pounds—that was left, and we were able to supply him with a little bit to keep him going.

00:24:41

SR: That’s kind of amazing thought, that that stays cold that long.

00:24:44

DR: Yeah, we never experienced that, you know. When Betsy hit we were kids; I don’t recall what--what went on with the ice plant at the time, but we were a little shocked to find out we still had ice at the bottom of these cans after three weeks in--in August and September—you know, the hottest part of the year.

00:25:02

KC: Normally if you go say maybe about three days with no electricity, no refrigeration on the tank, the ice would actually start melting away from the cans. And as it would melt you’d have the water around the ice. And if you were to put the machinery back on and start refreezing it, it would refreeze that water, and as you know when you freeze water it expands. It would expand and actually ruin all of the ice cans in the tank because it would bulge them all out and make them unusable. So what you’d have to do is take and dump all of that ice out and start over with fresh water and start the process over again.

00:25:49

SR: Is that what you did? Or did you just sell what was left and scrap the—?

00:25:57

DR: Yeah, we--we harvested what we were able to get out of there. We weren't—we waited 'til it got small enough that we didn't feel that refreezing would--would damage the cans, so we did leave some of the—I mean it was small pieces in the cans, and started refreezing the tank after three weeks, but we couldn't do it right away because a lot of those blocks at the bottom were too tight to the side of the can and, like he said, they would have busted the cans open or--or expanded.

00:26:21

KC: And not only that; we were under a water ban from the Parish where the water was not deemed to be drinkable. So we couldn't use the--replace the water with city water coming in until we got the okay from the Board of Health. Once the Board of Health said the water is good and clean, then we were able to get back into production.

00:26:44

SR: How long did that take?

00:26:45

KC: It took almost a month.

00:26:47

DR: Yeah.

00:26:49

KC: After Katrina.

00:26:49

SR: So you did start that plant back up?

00:26:55

DR: Kenner?

00:26:54

SR: Yeah.

00:26:56

KC: No, we didn't. What happened in Kenner—yeah, what happened in Kenner was part of the roof blew off and water--rainwater got into some equipment and ruined it, and actually some people went in there to get ice out, which we had no problem. They could have taken all the ice. But they damaged some of the equipment and stuff like that and it--it just—we went in and did a survey of what it would cost us to put the place back in shape and it just wasn't worth it.

00:27:18

SR: I imagine that was a pretty hot commodity right after Katrina, that you had that ice. Who else did you hear from or sell to besides Steven at Sal's?

00:27:27

DR: Actually we've had a police officer come here after the storm and told us he was riding down the street and saw a pickup truck with block ice in the back of it and he pulled him over and asked where he got it and he came back here and found out somebody was selling ice here. We were—we had been evacuated. And not—if I got the story straight, the police department went and commandeered a refrigerated truck and came over here and took a bunch of the ice and put it on a truck and used it for their--for their purposes, which was fine with us. We'd like to see others--somebody get a use out of it than just to sit there, you know. *[Laughs]*

00:28:00

SR: Wow.

00:28:01

DR: And the same thing happened in Kenner. The Kenner police got in there and got some of the ice and--and was able to use it.

00:28:09

KC: And we—I actually had a cousin that stayed here during Katrina and a few days after they got in touch with me and I told them, “Go ahead and--and donate the ice,” you know. People were lined up to get ice. “Go ahead over there and they can take ice and--and give it to the people so at least—“ It was going to melt regardless. So they just gave it away to some of the customers that came by.

00:28:32

SR: Would you do anything differently if there's another hurricane evacuation, or is there any way to keep it on a generator or anything?

00:28:41

KC: We always stay and--and try and take care of as many customers until we have to shut the plant down, because you have to shut it down a certain period before in order to refreeze everything. So you got a time window that you have to operate in and during Katrina, both David and myself, left just to get out of the immediate New Orleans area and figured we'd be back in a--in a day or two and it just—it didn't work out that way. But you would have to have a pretty--pretty large-size generator, and even if you had the generator and you don't have the water you're not in production. All you can do is keep the ice that you have. So it's kind of cost-prohibitive to do that. And the way FEMA operates now, that when you have a storm or a natural disaster like this they ship ice in from all over the country. And they're giving the ice away so it's kind of hard for you to compete by staying in--staying in business and selling ice when just down the road they're--they're giving ice away. So it's—probably wouldn't do anything any differently.

00:29:53

SR: How long does it take for one block to freeze?

00:29:58

KC: Going full production you're looking at about 44 hours to make a 300-pound block.

00:30:05

SR: And how many of these cans do you have?

00:30:13

DR: The whole tank is 360 cans. Top production, you can produce right about 200 blocks in a 24-hour period.

00:30:24

SR: What about the oil spill and its effects on the fishing industry? Has that impacted y'all?

00:30:32

DR: Severely, because we—the backbone of the business has always been the seafood industry, and since the oil spill—I mean last year was--was a bust. We had no shrimp season whatsoever and it's affected the fishermen; you know shrimpers, possibly crabbers, anybody—oyster people—that we would have business with. It's really hurt us bad.

00:30:55

SR: I mean I guess you've had enough business to stay in business, but has it gone back up?

00:31:07

DR: Not really. We're hoping—the shrimp season opens next Monday. So we'll have a good idea of what's going on when they go out and start—if they start catching shrimp hopefully we'll get the business back. But if they go out and there's oil problems or anything like that and they're shutting down areas it could affect us severely. We're kind of counting on it being good.

[Laughs]

00:31:27

SR: Yeah. Could you get any help for your loss of--your financial loss?

00:31:34

DR: I might say the wrong words.

00:31:33

KC: Yeah, that's not a good topic right now. We've been fighting more or less with the--the BP and GCCF to compensate us on our losses, and they--they're dragging their feet quite a bit. You know they're dropping the ball a little bit, so hopefully sooner or later they'll--they'll make things right, you know, and we—hopefully we can stay in business long enough that hopefully it'll come back, but time will tell.

00:32:07

SR: Before the oil spill—and we're talking about the oil spill in 2010—did you see, you know, a long future in this business? It sounds like it's been dropping off and dropping off, but on the

other hand there are people like Steven at Sal's who—I don't know what he would do if you went out of business. I mean he--your ice is one of the main pride points about his business.

00:32:39

KC: Well you're right. There is a certain niche that we have and over the years the--the sales of ice—this type of ice—has dropped off dramatically, but I think in the last 10 years or so it's leveled and it's been holding its own as long as some of the seafood customers don't put more ice machines in. But you always have people going fishing that need ice. You always have picnickers and you have restaurants that need ice. And so there is a need there, and hopefully you know we could keep the business going and at least this generation. And we've had the next generation actually working in it and hopefully we could keep it long enough until we're ready to retire and see what that brings.

00:33:32

DR: It's shifted some from the block ice more to bagged ice. We see an increase in the bag sales, and to give you an example, for the hurricane we were working the platform and we had a line around the corner of people waiting to buy bagged ice, and the block ice was available. You could step right up and get it, which is the best product in the world—to last to put in your ice chest. And we couldn't convince people to buy the block ice. Everybody wanted the bagged ice, and it just—it doesn't make any sense. We'd look at each other and go, you know, "What's going on with this?" Because they could walk right up and buy a 25-pound block and it would last them a day or two and be back home, but they'd stand in line waiting for us to produce bagged ice to take it home. I just--we never did—couldn't understand that.

00:34:13

KC: And it's cheaper. Yeah, it's cheaper ice than bagged ice but it's not as convenient because when people have to use it they have to use an ice pick to chip it up. But if you're trying to keep something cold and you're trying to keep your--your meat from going bad out of your freezer and things refrigerated, it's the best thing for--for doing that process.

00:34:36

SR: So this was after Katrina that this was happening, or before when people were preparing?

00:34:43

DR: Both. Probably before but I remember mainly after. Once we got producing again we were able to produce the machines that produced the bagged ice. You know, we'd have to limit people to a bag or two bags a person, and then they would stand in line and the machine can only produce so much so it would dump and we'd bag the ice and sell it to so many people. And then they'd have to stand there and wait for the machine to do the next dump, whereas the block ice was available right then. We could have--we could have sold them the block ice. It's confusing to me; I don't understand. And it's probably a generation—older generations knew that; the younger generations aren't hardly even aware of block ice so I guess they don't know the benefits of it.

00:35:19

SR: It's an educational problem.

00:35:23

DR: Maybe so. Maybe--so maybe you can help us educate them, huh? [*Laughs*]

00:35:28

SR: With the bagged ice, is that a totally separate machine or do you crush the ice that you've produced in the cans?

00:35:34

DR: Originally we did that. We crushed the ice in 300-pounds blocks and bagged it and also cubed it with a machine that would cut it in cubes and bag it, but it was a very inefficient process. So since then we've gone to more automated machines that produce the--the cylinder ice, which was what we sell and that's a separate thing than the block ice now as far as production.

00:35:58

SR: So Kenny, you mentioned there will always be fishermen; there will always be picnickers. Do you get just, you know, anyone off the street coming in to buy ice to this place?

00:36:09

KC: Oh yeah, we've had people that come down the street and say, "Oh, I didn't know. I've lived right here in Marrero. I didn't know y'all were selling ice here." And you get people like

that, but sure, you—word of mouth, too. You know they’ll come by and--and buy ice to go on a picnic and—absolutely.

00:36:31

SR: So I’m working on a sno-ball oral history project. What percentage of your business would you say is the sno-ball industry?

00:36:43

KC: That would be a tough one to answer without sitting and analyzing some bookwork, but we have numerous sno-ball people. Some of them only come get a couple hundred pounds a day; some of them are bigger customers and they’ll get 600 pounds a day. So it’s hard to tell how many customers we have that actually use the block ice for the purpose of sno-balls versus another use.

00:37:18

SR: Well, of the sno-ball people that you talk to, why do they tell you that they come here and get this ice rather than, say, buy their own block ice machine or get it some other way?

00:37:29

KC: Well I think if you interview Steve Bel, he will tell you that--that this ice makes a better sno-ball. And I think David might be able to elaborate on that a little bit, but it’s just the type of ice and the way the SnoWizard machine cuts it up. It just makes a better product.

00:37:52

DR: Yeah. Steve, he's—I'm sure Steve has opportunities to produce his own ice, but he knows—he's a smart businessman. He knows the expense of going out and doing that and it's an inferior product. So why spend your money when you can come over here and buy it whenever he needs it—we always have it for him and it's a much better product?

00:38:13

Now as far as—he doesn't even refrigerate his. When he takes his ice from here puts it into—I'm sure you've seen over there, like big ice chests, so he doesn't refreeze it or anything. He just maintains it as it is and if the temperature—. He makes a better fluffier sno-ball than the manufactured little sno-ball blocks that the machines make. It's--it's not as good of a product. And actually ours is less expensive than those usually are to buy them from somebody.

00:38:42

SR: Were sno-balls a part of your childhood?

00:38:44

DR: Oh absolutely. In fact, the machine I was telling you about that made the cubes actually did it with saw blades and made a very, very fine, almost like a snow dust, and we used to bring syrup in a cup and put it in there and make our own sno-balls here. *[Laughs]*

00:39:01

SR: What kind of syrup would you bring over?

00:39:02

DR: I was a grape fan myself. I was a big grape—he was spearmint.

00:39:07

KC: Strawberries.

00:39:07

DR: I thought you were—. [*Laughs*]

00:39:10

SR: And where would you get the syrup?

00:39:11

DR: You could buy it. You could buy the extract and sometimes you had to mix your own with sugar water, or sometimes they actually made the syrup already, you know, with the--the sweetener in it and everything, and you could just pour it on there.

00:39:23

SR: You had your own ice--your own sno-ball-making machine.

00:39:26

DR: My dad would make it 'til I got sick sometimes, I'd eat so much of that stuff.

00:39:29

KC: Not only that; we'd have sno-ball wars. We'd grab the--the ice and people would be throwing it back and forth.

00:39:37

DR: And realize we were kids when we worked here—you know, 12, 13, 14 years-old, and a little rambunctious.

00:39:43

SR: Well that's one of the things I was going to ask you about is: What were your duties when you were working here as a kid?

00:39:49

DR: When I started I was 12, but the old man in Kenner that was training me—I guess I was a pretty big kid so he basically—and before I was finished that summer I was doing his work for him and I was glad for it though because not too many 12-year-olds had jobs at that time.

00:40:04

We started off on the platform mainly selling ice, but I always liked the production and I used to have them go back there and show me how to pull the ice because it was a crane, so there was only a certain amount of physical work you had to do other than [what's] called standing up a block. That was--that was a chore there, but I used to like that end just as much as working the platform.

00:40:24

SR: What does that mean, “standing up a block?”

00:40:26

DR: When the blocks are produced they come out of a dump, we call it, and they slide out of these cans on the--on the floor. So they're horizontal when you get them, when you produce them, but you have to stand them for storage. So you have to—you stand them up, or head them up, which is to take ice tongs and stand the 300-pound block on edge.

00:40:47

SR: One person does that?

00:40:47

DR: Yes, yes; still does. It's done the same way still. We'll let you try one. [*Laughs*]

00:40:56

SR: Okay. What kind of form will I have to sign before—?

00:41:01

DR: You'd have to sign multiple releases, I can tell you that because if--if you've done it long enough you've dropped a block on your foot. And it's not fun. It's not fun.

00:41:12

SR: [*Speaking to Kenny*] Did you have the same kinds of duties when you first started working here?

00:41:16

KC: Yeah, pretty much. I was hired to work on the platform as a youngster. We didn't get paid very much at all. I think I started out at 25-cents an hour. But you did make some tips and run ice out to customers' cars and--and just help out on the platform during the summertime, which was the peak sales time in the summer.

00:41:42

SR: Yeah, tell me about the seasonality of this business. What are your—I mean I would imagine that summer is busier than winter, but other than that what is the sort of ebb and flow of the business?

00:41:56

DR: Basically the peak time is 4th of July. That's when we usually hit the peak. It depends on the shrimp season also, but usually the wintertime is done for maintenance and getting stuff in shape and just to take it easy for a little while because usually by the end of October, November, you're kind of worn out. So and then we were both hunters so we'd get into the woods in the winter time to be able to get away a little bit.

00:42:24

KC: Basically shrimp season opens up. The brown shrimp seasons opens up in the first or second week of May, and then it'll last until shortly after July 4th, and then you get a little--about a month break. And then in August, the white shrimp season would open up and it sometimes would take you all the way into October. So you'd have that peak timeframe, and then in October you'd start getting cool fronts coming in and that would shut down the shrimp season. And it just—kind of make it through the wintertime and do some repairs on equipment and machinery and get everything prepared for next summer and do it all over again.

00:43:07

SR: But you still have oysters and crawfish in the winter, right?

00:43:13

DR: Yeah. The crawfish scene—at one time we had a lot of crawfish business but I think the same thing with the ice machines have affected that. The crawfish season the last couple of years has been real slow in the beginning. In fact, last year it wasn't a good season at all. This year it took a while before they got started. And normally we could start seeing people in January if we have warm enough temperatures. This year they didn't--they didn't start for a while. It was a while before we got any crawfish business.

00:43:42

SR: You said that you do repairs and--and maintenance and things in the winter. With your equipment—I mean it sounds like some of it might be kind of old. Who repairs them? Do you have a hard time getting parts, or--or how does that work out?

00:44:02

DR: We do the repair. We do all the work ourselves. Very rarely do we have to send out for anything. We can't afford to--to pay someone else to come do this--this work. If we can't find a part, sometimes we have to make it and we've done that before.

00:44:17

KC: Absolutely. My uncle and my dad actually did a lot of the--the maintenance on these plants and as working as summertime employees, we were exposed to that a little bit and they kind of taught us a little bit about refrigeration—a little bit about refrigeration, a little bit about you know the machinery, the maintenance part of it, and how to tear down a compressor and rebuild it and buy parts. And sometimes you couldn't get those parts, you know, so we--we were showed how to--how to weld, how to machine parts on a lathe, and we had to make parts and scrounge old machinery sometimes just to rob parts off of that to make this other piece keep running. So we have a lot of old equipment around here that's no longer running but it's still valuable to us because—just for the parts in it to keep the things that we have running right now in operation.

00:45:20

SR: So do you have a machine shop here or it's just kind of—?

00:45:25

DR: We've got a little bench lathe back there, but you'd be amazed at the work you could get done on it sometimes if you—you know, if it's something big we'd have to send it out but

usually we can do most of the smaller--smaller things on our lathe here. It's--it's a workshop but it's not anything technical.

00:45:43

SR: Where are the--the big pieces made, the machinery that makes the ice?

00:45:48

KC: They're actually out of production now; the big, big machinery is out of production.

There's companies around that specialize in some of that old stuff [and] you can contact them and tell them. "I have this model compressor from 1928; you know, I'm looking for a piston or I'm looking for a crank shaft," and they'll search around and find some of these machinery graveyards that still [have] some parts laying around and--and you get them. Or if the--if it's too expensive, you'll just junk it and find another old compressor and put in its place.

00:46:24

We have a few of them in the back right now that we've swapped out three or four times, taking the roof off and having a crane come in and lift the compressor out through the roof and put another one in its place on the same base, so—.

00:46:41

SR: So if somebody at this point wanted to start from scratch and build an icehouse [*Laughs*] according to this model, would that even be possible?

00:46:50

DR: Not the way this plant is. If you started from scratch you'd be a lot higher tech than what ours is. You'd have to—and I'm sure there's a lot more regulations that they have to abide by to put something together. We always talked about, it would be so nice to build a new plant, but it would be pretty expensive I think. That's why we just keep the stuff we got going. It's a lot more efficient to do that than to try to go buy new--brand new compressors and stuff like that. We've never built a brand new compressor, Kenny and I. We've always bought them used and fixed them, you know.

00:47:24

KC: I don't think you see many ice plants like this being built across the country. You know if--if there was something to it I think more people would be doing it, you know. When somebody builds an ice plant today, basically it's a--a packaged ice system where they produce in bags to sell in grocery stores or gas stations and that type of—.

00:47:51

DR: I wouldn't think anybody is building a 300-pound block ice plant. I would doubt that anybody has ever done that in the last maybe 10 or 15 years at best. It's just not--not done anymore. They don't build 300-pound block ones.

00:48:03

SR: Can you tell me how much money you make off of a 300-pound block of ice?

00:48:09

DR: It depends; it's all different prices. We've got wholesale prices and retail prices. And to figure out exactly what each block costs us is next to impossible because there's so many variables: how much you're producing, when you're producing it. So it's hard to get an actual exact cost. So you don't know, you don't really know. When you're in peak production, it's when the cheapest costs are to produce the ice. When you get in the wintertime it costs you more to produce the block because of the other factors that you're not—that are not at peak production.

00:48:41

SR: What if I were to just—I just wanted to come in and buy a 10-pound bag of ice?

00:48:49

DR: We have 22-pound bags and 45-pound bags. If you wanted to buy a 22-pound bag it would cost you \$2.50. If you wanted to buy a 25-pound block it would cost you \$1.75.

00:49:00

SR: So that's a lot less expensive than if I were in the grocery store buying those small bags and adding them up.

00:49:05

DR: But it's convenience. People just, today's—everybody wants it--wants it fast and wants it now. So instead of realizing they can come to the ice plant and save money, they just as soon pay

a whole lot more money at a convenience store. Maybe you can help us educate them that way too.

00:49:20

SR: I'll try. I'm looking around and it's not only the ice production that's old-school here.

[Laughs]

00:49:29

DR: Look at the adding machine in the corner. My uncle that was--that sat there for years—he's retired now, but he never used a calculator. He used a hand crank adding machine, so it's kind of like a monument sitting over there in the corner right now.

00:49:42

SR: What was your uncle's name? I wanted to ask you names of your—.

00:49:45

DR: Our uncles' names—the oldest one was Lawrence Cristina. He's passed away now. His brother was Robert Cristina, and then there was Kenny's dad, S.T. Cristina, and then the youngest boy was Calvin Cristina. That was our four uncles that we were in partners with when we came into the business.

00:50:02

SR: And are they all deceased now or—?

00:50:03

DR: Just two—there's two of them left, Robert Cristina and Calvin.

00:50:08

SR: Are they involved at all?

00:50:09

DR: Calvin comes in on Mondays and Fridays. He does more with the family business but he's here if we need to talk to him. And Bobby is 90—?

00:50:18

KC: Ninety-one; he'll be ninety-two this year. Born in 1919.

00:50:23

DR: Yeah, so he's--he's fading away a little bit.

00:50:27

SR: And your father's name?

00:50:29

DR: Salvador.

00:50:30

SR: Okay. ST—Salvador. What does the T stand for?

00:50:34

KC: Thomas. The same as my grandfather.

00:50:37

SR: And he was the brother of your mom?

00:50:42

DR: Correct.

00:50:42

SR: And what was, or is, her name?

00:50:44

DR: My mom was Joy Cristina, Joy Ann or Joy.

00:50:49

SR: And what nationality are—ethnicity, I should say?

00:50:54

KC: Italiana. [*Laughs*]

00:50:54

DR: Italian and German really.

00:50:57

SR: It's funny because in the sno-ball world I've noticed that there's heavy Italian in the origins—well I don't know about the origins of New Orleans sno-balls because that probably goes way back, but once machines started being built and stuff, and even sno-ball stands now have a lot of Italian bloodlines. Was the ice business that way too?

00:51:22

DR: It seemed to be. I couldn't tell you exactly the reason why but a lot of—looking at some of the old peddlers' names, everybody ended in a vowel, so I guess it was a lot of it that—a niche that the Italians filled I guess. It was hard work, so I guess they were used to hard work. I can't—I can't answer that. I'm too young for that.

00:51:40

SR: Sorry. So I got caught up on the names, but this office—I don't see a computer.

00:51:48

KC: No, you don't. *[Laughs]* Just recently we have got online service here for my bookkeeper when she comes in on Fridays so she can have internet service. But no computers here.

00:52:02

SR: She brings her laptop in?

00:52:02

KC: She brings a laptop.

00:52:06

SR: Do y'all have computers at home?

00:52:07

DR: Yes.

00:52:07

KC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I'm used to a computer at home but really have no use for it at work.

00:52:14

SR: You haven't thought about converting?

00:52:17

KC: No. I like the idea of having everything on paper. I don't have to worry about my computer crashing or can't find this data, or everything—everything is written down. You know I have all of my daily reports, all done by hand; keep the sales and keep all that information and I don't have to worry. If the electricity goes out I can--I can work in the dark you know.

00:52:44

SR: Well I like the look of that and it must be kind of nice to get away from the computer once in a while. Not many people get to do that when they go to work.

00:52:51

KC: That's true. [*Laughs*]

00:52:52

DR: Yeah.

00:52:53

SR: Let me see. You mentioned that there's a younger generation that is working here. Who would that be? Do y'all have children or—?

00:53:03

DR: It's our first cousin's daughter actually. After Katrina we were in trouble for labor, big trouble. So we contacted my cousin who was a contractor and saw if he had anybody that wasn't being used. And he gave us two guys. One of them was very good and one of them wasn't very good at all so we kind of weeded him out. And when I asked him, "We need somebody else," he said, "What about Brittany," his daughter? And I--we didn't really know Brittany that well. We knew who she was but it was like, "This is a physical business."

00:53:29

Well Brittany came out and turned out to be probably one of the best baggers we've ever had. And she worked here up until the end of December. And trying to get back into school and doing stuff like that—she was probably 22 or 23, something like that, and wanted to go back to college and had other issues she wanted to deal with, so she pretty much retired in December. But she--she turned out to be a very, very valuable employee.

00:53:55

SR: What is her last name?

00:53:56

DR: Cristina.

00:53:58

SR: Oh okay.

00:53:58

DR: Yes.

00:53:58

SR: And what does that mean, a bagger?

00:54:01

DR: That we bag ice. We manually, basically manually, bag the ice. You know there's machines now that it's all automated; well as you can see, we're not very automated. So we actually physically bag the ice ourselves and she was--she was the one bagging the ice and producing it that way.

00:54:19

SR: What are the different job descriptions here? I guess maybe we could start with: How many employees do you have?

00:54:27

KC: It--it varies. It's a seasonal—. We have job titles of ice bagger, we have ice pullers that handle the block ice, and we have platform workers that handle the sales, and we've currently—right now we're running two shifts on the platform and it's just basically one person that handles the sales except for peak times like Mother's Day, 4th of July, when we'll have five or six people out there working. But you know an ice bagger, we might have two or three ice baggers at one time bagging ice and we'll have one ice puller at a time. Sometimes we'll run two or three shifts of ice pullers. Basically that's--that's it. Since we're not in the delivery business we don't need truck drivers and--and people on the trucks to do that anymore.

00:55:30

SR: I just heard a truck. I was wondering if that was pulling up.

00:55:32

DR: No, I told him if you get anybody let us know.

00:55:35

SR: Why is Mother's Day a hot day?

00:55:39

DR: Mother's Day is probably—4th of July is the biggest day. Easter is a big day or big weekend. Mother's Day for some reason—I guess a lot of people picnic and I don't know, but Mother's Day is usually pretty good--pretty good weekend.

00:55:54

SR: Father's Day?

00:55:55

DR: Barbeques. Father's Day is nothing.

00:55:56

KC: Father's Day, I don't know.

00:55:58

DR: No, not as big.

00:55:59

KC: I think fathers maybe go out and do their own thing, you know, but people barbeque with mothers and I think they need ice for their ice chest and family gatherings.

00:56:10

SR: So in--in the slowest season, how many people will you have on the payroll, like in December?

00:56:20

DR: Probably one, two—maybe four, maybe five at the most, because we've got one at the location in Jefferson and we might have three or four over here. It depends on what we're doing. You know we—this past year we had to cut way back because we didn't have the money from the summer from the shrimp—you know the shrimp season—and not being reimbursed by GCCF or BP, we had to really watch our money going out. Normally we keep people on even though we don't need them. We'll find something for them to do, just to keep them as employees, but we couldn't do it this winter. We had to really cut back a little bit.

00:56:53

SR: Then what do your employees do in the off-season?

00:56:58

DR: Do a lot of sitting. We've seen the platform guys sleeping, watching TV—

00:57:03

KC: Watch TV.

00:57:04

DR: —watch DVDs. You know we're not real hard on that because there's not a lot of business. But they're mature enough to know when it kicks in they're ready to go, you know. We've got a good--good crew.

00:57:14

SR: How do you divide your two duties? Do you have different titles or do you both do everything?

00:57:23

DR: Whatever needs to be done; whoever is there and it needs to be done, we do it.

00:57:28

KC: We each--each have a certain amount of office work to do—you know, accounts receivables, accounts payables, and daily reports, daily sales reports, bank work, you know a little bit of bookkeeping work, so we both share in those duties along with keeping an eye on the plant, watching out for potential breakdowns, preventative maintenance, and then maintenance when it catches you by surprise sometimes. We'll have to drop whatever we're doing and go fix something, you know, just to keep the plant running and sometimes you--you got plans to do something that night but you might have to be here working late into the night just to--to get it

going. Or you might get a phone call at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning and have to run out here and--and figure out what went wrong and try to get it fixed to keep things going.

00:58:27

SR: On a good day, what are your operating hours?

00:58:31

DR: We're open from 6 o'clock in the morning 'til 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock at night right now. That's about it.

00:58:39

SR: Is one of you always here during that time?

00:58:41

DR: No. Usually we—it depends; it varies. You know sometimes we come in a little bit early. Sometimes you go to stay a little later. There's no set—we don't punch a clock.

00:58:54

SR: Let me see. Are y'all—can y'all think of anything I'm not asking you? I'm sure I'll have more questions when I see the machinery, but let me see what I had written down. I guess one of my main questions was—and you've kind of answered it—the future of the business. But it really depends on things unforeseen.

00:59:26

DR: Right. We're just kind of hoping--we're just kind of hoping it'll last for us, and our uncles that are in with us [have] kind of bowed out, which makes it a little bit easier. We thought that was pretty nice of them. And they stayed—they know; they've been in the business their whole life. They know what's going on, you know, so they kind of bowed out and let us take care of things. I mean we've been running it for a while but now it's gotten kind of tough so they're letting us run it and enjoy it a little bit more [*Laughs*] if you know what I mean.

00:59:59

SR: What product has the biggest gain profit-wise—just if someone comes and buys like a 300-pound block?

01:00:12

DR: Well it depends on the price, like the price structure. We've got various prices and stuff but at peak production, yeah, I would think a 300-pound block would probably bring us the most profit for--for one single item like that. Like I said it's such a—

01:00:28

KC: And again, for the seafood industry, when you're talking--you're talking volume of ice. You're not talking high profit; you're just talking volume because you have to sell it to the seafood industry at such a reduced price, because they can't afford to pay retail price for it, you know. They--or they'd put ice machines in regardless if you charged them a ridiculous price. So

you try and encourage that business by keeping your prices low as you possibly can and keep them coming back to you instead of putting in a machine.

01:01:05

DR: Yeah, you can run yourself out of business quick if you price that ice too high. They would say, “Forget it; we’re not going to do it. We’ll make our own.” So you got to weigh—making sure you’re making enough money and not charge too much to chase them off.

01:01:20

SR: The sno-ball people—Steven might have told me this but it didn’t sink in if he did—do they take a whole 300-pound block and they go and break it up themselves or—?

01:01:31

DR: Steve does. Steve takes—. It’s easier to transport like that and it lasts--it’ll last better because it’s one solid block, so he’ll bring his truck here and load his 300-pound blocks and cover it with a quilt and he’ll run it back to his place and cut it up himself. But we have a lot of them come here and we cut it for them manually here and then they haul it like that. Steve is probably the only one that I know of right now that takes the whole 300-pound block. Most of them want it cut up.

01:01:57

SR: What do you—?

01:01:57

DR: They're not good enough at cutting it up.

01:01:58

KC: At least cut it up into 50-pound blocks.

01:02:02

SR: What do you cut it with?

01:02:02

DR: Ice pick.

01:02:07

KC: That's an art into itself, cutting ice with an ice pick.

01:02:12

DR: Yeah, yeah.

01:02:14

SR: A question for each of you: What is your favorite part of your job? What do you enjoy most?

01:02:23

DR: I would say probably being your own boss, and we've got a good relationship. If something comes up and he's got to go, "Go," you know. If something comes up and I got to go—so we got a little bit of flexibility and we both know when it's time to put your nose to the grind wheel and get things done. And I would say being your own boss and the flexibility we have.

01:02:46

KC: Yes, I'd have to agree with that too. And I know your next question is going to be, well, "What's the worst part of your job?" *[Laughs]*

01:02:55

SR: I don't have to ask that but I'm interested if you have an answer.

01:02:58

KC: The unseen. Sometimes you'll come into work and you'll find out overnight somebody broke in and stole the copper line off of your--your air-condition unit and you have no air-condition, or somebody broke into the plant and messed up something or somebody—a customer sometimes will show up right when you're getting ready to leave and he'll need 70 blocks of ice and didn't even think about calling to say, "Do you have the ice?" You know, so you'll have to scramble and try and get him the ice and make sure you got ice for the next guy that had it ordered. So there's the unseen that you don't know what you're dealing with sometimes that's--that can get quite frustrating, along with breakdowns of antiquated equipment. That's a challenge in itself, just to keep some of that stuff running. *[Laughs]*

01:03:56

SR: I'm sure. I'm sure there's just so much that you can't plan for. [*Speaking to David*] Did you have a worst part of your job?

01:04:04

DR: I would say the breakdowns at inopportune times. You know when you--you think you've got everything right and you--you need it to work for you and something goes wrong, that's the most frustrating. That's what I--I lose the most sleep over and, like Kenny mentioned, the--the thievery that goes on sometimes. We've had a whole refrigeration condenser stolen one night on one of our freezers; just walked in and just--just took it apart and stole the whole thing, and probably got very few dollars for it and it cost us thousands of dollars. So it's that that aggravates me a lot, when you think of something like that.

01:04:43

SR: Is that sort of a sophisticated thief to know how to take that apart, or no?

01:04:46

DR: No, no, they just go in there with hammers and they beat up—they're looking for the copper because right now—we can tell we're going to start having problems. Copper prices start getting up and, like he said, this past weekend they stole the copper off our air-condition so that's why we've got that window unit running now instead of our normal central air-condition, because they stole the copper.

01:05:05

SR: Did that affect where you make the ice? Is that just in the office?

01:05:09

DR: Right, but they--when they stole the condenser in the back, that affected us. [*Laughs*]

01:05:14

KC: It knocked--knocked a whole freezer out. I mean we didn't have any refrigeration on the freezer.

01:05:20

SR: I wanted to ask earlier and we got off track, but did you—did y'all have careers before this?

01:05:27

DR: No. Like I said, I started when I was 12, worked a couple little side jobs when I was in college and stuff like that, but for—other than that one summer that I worked at Kaiser we've been here. I've been here since I was 12-years-old.

01:05:41

SR: What did you do study in college?

01:05:43

DR: I was in Electrical Engineering. Electrical Construction Technology was actually the term.

01:05:49

SR: And did you choose that with your eye on staying in this business, because I'm sure that helps?

01:05:55

DR: I don't really remember. I mean I was involved in the business but I just got interested in it. I had someone approach me about getting involved with it and I just took to it. It just--I just excelled in it, so I—it made you use your mind a lot to design stuff, so I just for some reason I got hooked up in it and I just--I took off with it.

01:06:18

SR: What about you, Kenny? Did you have a career before you came here?

01:06:23

KC: Not a career [*Laughs*]. I went to college and studied Marketing and Economics and working here at some summertime--summertime jobs and had a couple other jobs too in the summer. But my uncle kept wooing me and trying to get me to come back and kept telling me, "Look, I'm going to retire soon. I'm going to retire. Somebody needs to take over this business." And so when I got out of school I saw it as an opportunity and got involved with it as a junior partner in the company. And over the years took on more responsibility and then the previous generation was kind of backing away from it, and then when David got finished school I kind of

talked to him a little bit and convinced him that there was an opportunity here and--and he came on too, so that was great for me.

01:07:24

SR: Did y'all feel a lot of pressure? I mean you said that your uncle was kind of poking you a little bit. Did you feel a lot of pressure towards your family to keep this business going?

01:07:35

KC: I think it was something that they really strived to do, to keep the business going. And I think they—we knew in the back of our minds that they really wanted to see us put our best foot forward and keep it going and hopefully have another generation to take it over and--and just to see what it does.

01:07:56

But they--they didn't really push us to the point of where we felt pressure. I think it was more of a desire just to--to keep it operating. That was something that we wanted to do.

01:08:16

DR: Yeah, they never gave us an ultimatum to say, “Look, you got to get in now or that’s it.” But they did—we sat and talked to them and got a feeling for what it was, and actually it was a good opportunity also you know so—.

01:08:30

KC: We've never had sales quotas or anything like that that we had to meet. We just--we were always production-oriented and our biggest challenge was to keep producing, keep producing, and these customers that we had would keep coming. And it's just the way the--the economy was that ice machines became more affordable and some of our big customers would buy ice machines. So we'd just lose some of our demand and you can't go out and find those customers because there aren't any customers like that.

01:09:05

DR: I think what else has happened is we did have a--a seafood processing man, a plant or whatever, and they would say, "Okay, hop in the truck and go over to Cristina's and go get me 50 blocks." And now it's to the point where they realize, "I got to pay this man more, insurance is more, gas is more. Well let's just put a machine here," and they think it's--it's going to save them all kinds of money. And initially it might, other than the capital outlay that they got to put to buy the machine. They think—but when they start paying maintenance on that machine and all the--all the expenses and stuff, I don't know if it's always a good idea. But it's convenience. The thing we was talking about before, it's convenience. You see, where they would send a truck with no problem over here to get ice. Now it's--I guess it got to be where they didn't think it was worthwhile as much anymore.

01:09:47

KC: And as these people--customers would get older and they would retire and their business would shut down and somebody else would open up another business, they weren't exposed to the--the things that the older customers were and they just automatically—they put up their own

machinery and everything because that was the modern thing to do, you know, have their product on hand there. And so it's--that's what it's evolved to.

01:10:14

SR: It's got to cost people a lot of electricity also to run these machines, I'm thinking.

01:10:21

KC: Correct.

01:10:23

DR: Yeah, it's not cheap. I mean you realize what our electricity bills are and they have to take that on because now they don't have that bill when they come over here. Now all they got to do is go get the ice and it's over with. But I think just as much electricity in the first couple years you have a machine, we know—you know it's usually not many problems but as soon as you start having problems and you get a service man out there it starts costing you a lot of money. That ice cost goes way up because of that--that expense of, you know, fixing stuff and repairing stuff like that.

01:10:54

KC: It's like having to call a refrigerator and air-condition guy to your house. You know, everything is fine when you got a new air-condition but wait 'til it gets old and you have to have those service calls at inopportune times and you see what that adds to your--to your checkbook.

01:11:12

SR: Yeah, mine is getting old. *[Laughs]* What are your electricity bills like?

01:11:21

KC: Higher than I want to mention to you. *[Laughs]*

01:11:24

DR: Yeah, it's--it's a good—.

01:11:26

SR: It's a significant part of the business?

01:11:27

DR: Significant part of expenses, the cost of the ice, yes. Yes.

01:11:32

SR: I can imagine.

01:11:35

KC: Along with the high water bills, too. Water bills, insurance, and labor. Those are your expenses.

01:11:44

SR: Well I've been sitting here trying to think of how to educate people but it is just sort of the change of the marketplace. It doesn't mean it can't swing back around but—. You know there's a whole new wave—way of making cocktails where people use clear ice and chip away at blocks of ice. Do you sell to any bartenders?

01:12:14

DR: There's a new thing they're using now. They're taking a 300-pound block and they're making [what] they call a luge. Are you familiar with that? They take a 300-pound block and they lay it flat on an incline like this [*Gestures*] and they carve a trough through it and they pour liquor in it and it runs down this trough and as it runs down it cools and they put their mouth at the bottom of it and they drink alcohol like that.

01:12:36

KC: A lot of the college kids do that from fraternities and—.

01:12:41

SR: Have you sold people blocks of ice for that?

01:12:42

KC: Oh absolutely.

01:12:43

DR: Oh absolutely. Oh yes, absolutely. They'll come and pick it up in a car and they'll try to find some way to put it in the trunk. They don't care.

01:12:49

KC: They bring it all the way to Baton Rouge or bring it to LSU from here.

01:12:55

SR: I have not heard of that.

01:12:56

DR: That's a new business that we never had in the past. We'll take it [*Laughs*].

01:13:01

KC: Look that up on your computer.

01:13:02

DR: Yeah, ice luge.

01:13:06

SR: They put it in their--just put it in their cars, huh?

01:13:08

DR: Yeah, oh yeah they'll throw it in. I've seen them come in with a station wagon and put it in the back. I've seen them come in—one guy came in a Volkswagen Beetle and I left before I saw him get in it because I didn't want to watch. We were getting off at that time and they—I asked my guy. He said, “No, they got it in there some kind of way—slipped it in the backseat some kind of way. I don't know what they did.”

01:13:28

SR: Or how they got it out?

01:13:29

DR: How they got it out, exactly. That's tougher.

01:13:30

KC: Or how they got it out.

01:13:31

DR: You're right. That's tougher because it's like a slippery—it's a big heavy 300-pound mass of slipperiness, you know. **[Laughs]** It's not easy to fool with. But they would probably—I guarantee they got it where they wanted to. They had—they were pretty set on doing it.

01:13:47

SR: Well there's your new market. All right. Well I'd love to wrap this up in time to take some pictures including the both of you, unless you have anything else that you think we need to talk about.

01:13:58

KC: No, we can open it back up if you have questions or you want to ask something else.

01:14:04

SR: Okay, all right, thank you so much—both of you—for taking the time with me.

01:14:06

DR: You're welcome. Thank you.

01:14:10

[End Cristina's Interview]