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SPEAKERS

Vince Lee, Jo Collier, Brandon Wolf, Kirk Baxter, Sara Fernandez

V Vince Lee 00:00

Okay, today is Tuesday, May 11 2021. My name is Vince Lee, and I'm the archivist for the LGBT History Research Collection at the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections. I'm here to talk with Sara Fernandez, Kirk Baxter, Jo Collier, and Brandon Wolf about The Banner Project, welcome all. And thanks for joining me today. I know that Brandon has written a wonderful article on the Banner Project, and also its history and how it came to be and that there's information also on your website, Houston, we have history. But the purpose for this conversation is to provide another avenue to tell and share your stories on the Banner Project. Because I know that people process and absorb information differently, whether it's in print, on the website, and also on audio visual recordings, which especially coming from the creators that were involved with the project. So just wanted to kick that off. For our viewers, and for folks that are coming across the banners project for the first time. And who's listening? Can someone tell me about the story of the project? And kind of how it can be?

S Sara Fernandez 01:30
Okay, perhaps I'll start?

V Vince Lee 01:34
Yeah.

S Sara Fernandez 01:35
Well, two things influenced the desire for the project. And one was that I had a friend that would tell very dramatic stories about his day adventures, and mean really wonderful stories, but he died. And when I asked his friends to remind me of the stories, they they couldn't remember. And that what he died, and it was a loss, all those stories went away. And then I went to the history tent, the first year that they had it. And I couldn't see what was there

because it was so crowded. So I like went through the history 10 and was unable to see anything. So that was a frustration. And then I took a trip to New York. And we went to a couple of museums that had these wonderful exhibits, and they highlighted activists and gay activists, and they highlighted the AIDS crisis. And that really inspired me that we should have something that we could hang and people could look at. So that's where the idea for the project came. And then the thing that enabled us to do it was the creating change, was having a conference here. And I thought, Wow, what a good excuse to put up this history for the conference goers.

V Vince Lee 02:53

So the creating change, I guess, was kind of the first opportunity or venue --

S Sara Fernandez 02:57

Yes.

V Vince Lee 02:57

-- to make that happen.

S Sara Fernandez 02:59

Yes.

V Vince Lee 03:02

I guess just to kind of go back to what you said. I guess part of the impetus would be kind of a lack of visual representation that captured that history being another factor for the --

S Sara Fernandez 03:17

Something I remember going to Pride festivals and parades. And you see this massive amount of people and then I'd look in the newspaper, and there'd be nothing written about it. Or there was something written it was sort of denigrating to the community.

V Vince Lee 03:38

Does anyone else have something personal, they'd like to add in regards to kind of the creation or start of the abandoners project.





Sara Fernandez 03:50

I'd like Jo to tell us about her timeline.



Jo Collier 03:54

Okay. I'm Jo Collier. I work for the Houston metropolitan research center. It's a special collection within the Houston public library. And I was a member of Houston ARCH. And as part of that, even before that, I'd kind of been working on a timeline of the history of the community here in Houston. And when when this project came up, I was kind of of two minds because I was also at that time working on the handbook of Houston with the Texas Historical Association, I was like, Oh my God, what are we gonna do with this? But the more Sara talked about, I was like, wow, this is really cool. Because it was kind of like with ARCH. We're trying our whole goal was to get everything online. And she was talking about doing something physical. So it's kind of like I didn't know which way to turn. But so my timeline was useful and trying to very quickly pick out some highlighted events. It was useful that way. And we use I think we use a couple of photos from HMRC on some of the banners I didn't do any of the writing, but I did some of the editing. I don't think I wrote any. I don't even remember. But it was pretty amazing. And Sara was, I mean, I don't know where she gets her energy. But, and Kirk was you were coming to the meetings to and hadn't you already created the Houston ARCH logo by before this?



Kirk Baxter 05:25

No, I? Well, I don't think so. I, I think it came afterwards, Jo. Okay, as I got into ARCH, because of make various matter and things like that. And then I saw that there was a competition for a logo design. And so I went ahead and enter that, but I think it was after the banners.



05:51

Okay, because I wasn't sure how you got involved with the banners. I was thinking, well, maybe that's how we knew of you.



Kirk Baxter 05:58

With Sara, because of [? Make Berries Matter ?]. Sara and some other people, friends from the Hyde Park Civic Association. Were interested in that project. And Sara, and I got to know each other through that, I believe, right there. I didn't really know, Sara or many others before getting involved with ARCH and, and so forth. And so I'll have to check my own timeline.



Jo Collier 06:35

Gosh, yeah.



Vince Lee 06:37

Jo, thanks for leading us into that because you, you and Sara can read my mind about kind of where that next question would go. And I know that

S

Sara Fernandez 06:44

Can I get Brandon to tell us about his desire for museum?

B

Brandon Wolf 06:48

Sure.

B

Brandon Wolf 06:54

Well, yes, before I discovered the GLBT collection -- the LGBT collection at U of H, I had been trying to advocate for an actual museum in in Montrose, that would consolidate all of the history that we have. What I remember about The Banner Project, though, is that Sara had built a big timeline out of paper. And she had it on the walls of a, an art gallery that had loaned her the space. And I was kind of fascinated with that. That's originally the idea that it was going to be for the creating thing was an actual timeline. And I kept watching, and I got to view people to come and give her information about different historical events in in the community. But, and I watched that she did it on her software, but I just couldn't quite figure out how she was going to pull it off. And then she kept the deadline kept getting closer and closer, and she was struggling with it. And then finally, I believe it was that you saw banners over at Rice University. That right, Sara?

S

Sara Fernandez 08:23

That's right.

B

Brandon Wolf 08:24

That were - for their, that they had hanging around on lampposts around the campus, showing off different historical events in Rice University's history. And that kind of sparked her interest. And she put that together with what she'd seen in New York at this display up there, and change the idea to to a banner, if I remember right to the owner of the art gallery said that it would be almost impossible to do a timeline because it would sag you know, trying to make something so big and long. In personally, I had thought it would be a lot harder to read. And so finally, the idea just emerged in Sara's mind to make banners, which I thought was a great idea. Fantastic idea. And then Kirk got involved and does spectacular job of making them up graphically. And I'm just really impressed. I think that it's a pop up museum. It's an incredible concept because it's hard to teach people you know, decades of history and the community in anything else in such a fast paced society, but The Banner Project is something that they can look and take in you know, within a matter of minutes and, and, and get an idea of the high points of Houston LGBT history. So that's my memory of the evolution of The Banner Project.

S Sara Fernandez 10:14
So one of the things --

J Jo Collier 10:16
I had forgotten --

S Sara Fernandez 10:20
But--

10:21
I was gonna say I had forgotten that I'm sorry, it's just so hard innit


S Sara Fernandez 10:32
more to say, but what you forgot?

10:34
Oh, I was just I had forgotten that you had it had been at first you were wanting we're wanting to do more of like a physical exhibit, rather than a banner thing. Because with the history of ARCH that was there was always that kind of some people wanted the physical location for everything, and other people were more focused on the digitization thing. And I think that's part of why we first came with this. I was like, Oh, my God, no. But the banner idea change everything, everything. It's yeah.

S Sara Fernandez 11:07
So I have two things that really helped JD start when we picked some topics. And I picked topics with Brian Riedel. He was very, very helpful. And once we pick the topics, JD started sending me some pictures and information that he has on his website. But the thing that really got us moving was Kirk, because with Kirk, we then had the person who could actually do the design of the banner, I had gotten to the feeling that I was going to have to draw up something myself. And that was going to be a big challenge. So it was a godsend that Kirk came along and, and said he would do it. It's

K Kirk Baxter 11:55
Sara a little bit, I was like, I'm sorry. I was like, I cuz I knew the it was a huge project. And there

was only like two weeks left before creating change and everything, but we pulled it off.

 Kirk Baxter 12:11

And it's I like how it's been able to continue on by adding new banners every, every so often, at least once a year, we tried to add some new banners. And it's in a format that allows it to expand.

 12:26

[INAUDIBLE] from what I knew originally the size of each of the banners. And the whole width of the entire display was pretty much based on how much room you had in the hotel room. And that right there,

 12:45

Correct, the hallways, the walls could fit nine banners

 12:49

each. So so they fit just perfectly in there. I do remember when they were young, and I hadn't gotten to see them yet. Somebody took a picture and posted it to Facebook. And I was just blown away. It was so far beyond anything that I ever dreamed it could be. And what I know, people at the convention were very, very impressed with it. And find it very interesting to be able to, to learn so much about it in such a short period of time. And they look very impressive up there in that hotel room.

 Vince Lee 13:32

And you've anticipated in my other questions in terms of how did you settle on the dimensions of the banner? Because I wasn't sure if you had had to go through various prototypes or drafts or iterations of the banner beforehand before settling on, you know, its current dimensions, which seems self evident right now. But also, how did you also as a group settle on the banners as a medium because I could see how it could have been another medium or didn't use to express or capture that history?

 14:11

Well, originally when I thought of a timeline, it was going to be like a banner, but it was going to be this huge banner that just flowed where you had arts, health different topics. And they just sort of flowed along that the years and you can have different highlights. Maybe it's so complex, and there was so much that if you couldn't read it. And when he was talking about how are you going to hang it? It's like okay, that makes perfect sense. There's no way to hang this thing. So, yeah, the smaller banners were good.



Vince Lee 14:46

The constraints of something of horizontal as opposed to vertical.



14:54

And in the length, wasn't it Sara? We had to do the length of the George R Brown windows?



Sara Fernandez 15:00

Yes, it was the length of the window.



15:02

As we had to use the top and bottom mullion to attach Yes. So that that kind of determine the length I know and the width. I don't know how we came up with that if we



15:16

The width was to see how many banners we could put in that section. So seven was the perfect note nine. Nine was the perfect number to go in each section of the windows.



Kirk Baxter 15:29

And we had three sections



Sara Fernandez 15:31

We had three



15:32

It was the Hilton of the Americas right? Right there next to --



Sara Fernandez 15:36

Yes, yeah. And when the day before the conference, the conference organizer emailed me and said, Oh, we're so sorry. You can only have one section of Windows. And I said, No. No, we banners in three sections, and we're going to put the three sections. And she said, Okay, she's

 Vince Lee 16:05

Literally fill the space. Yes. So very, I was gonna say, just kind of circling back a little bit. Even though the banners project may have been your brainchild. Sara, it's it sounds like it's been very much a collaborative process that everyone had a role to play in terms of its kind of genesis and creation.

 16:27


It would not have happened with just me, because when I proposed it to the committee, to the Creating Change committee, I did not have a real plan. I didn't have -- Well, I didn't know the history as I should. And I didn't have money. There was I mean, I had none of the things that you need for a project. So but I just thought it was really important. I thought it was the time to do it.

 Vince Lee 16:58

Great. And I know that every time I've seen the banners, I know that the banners depict the history of individuals, organizations and events that have been pivotal to Houston's LGBT history. And I wanted to see if you could maybe share with us, if possible, what's the thought process and criteria for selection of individuals or events or organizations that have been part of that history for the banners?

 17:30


That is a very tough question it originally, it went off of Jo's timeline, and some history books. But it was very difficult. And of course, Brian helped me connecting me to oh my gosh, what's his name? Help me, Kirk or Brandon? Jo?

 Kirk Baxter 17:53

AD?

 Sara Fernandez 17:54

the arts? No, no.

 Jo Collier 17:55

James Sears



J Jo Collier 17:57

No, the James Sears was the book that we read. Randy Tibbets, Randy Tibbets did the art, the early art in the 1930s. We sort of selected people who were known and who were in publications. And upon reflection, I have really come to think that we don't have everybody who deserves to be recognized, because maybe they weren't in the publication, but they did great things for the community. So now I try to look for people who changed the community who made something better, you know, in advance something, and maybe not anybody, not everybody knows about it, but but it was very important to what they did. So it's really hard to try to dig for people who were these people. There's, there's a lot of people we have not recognized that deserve to be recognized.

J Jo Collier 18:59

I do remember some conversations because as I said, I was working on the handbook of Houston then. And the kind of reasonings we had of you had to have made some kind of had some kind of impact on the community and you had to be dead. But at first I think I got your degree on that part had to be dead, but I think this kind of strayed away from that a little bit. But I mean, yeah, cuz there just have to be some kind of criteria. Otherwise you have people lobbying to have a banner for themselves or something. And that's yes, not what we want.

V Vince Lee 19:40

And I also noticed that banner is also trying to encapsulate diversity. Right, communities that are underrepresented, such as the trans community. African, the African American community, Hispanic Community and I'm sure, even within the Houston's diverse community, there could be future opportunities in the Asian community, but I'm not sure who or how that should fit. But I know that you also try to be diverse equity, equitable, inclusive in that process. And I know that the banners whenever I look at them, personally, and it evokes an emotional reaction for me. And I'm sure maybe, as you sit and interact with other folks in the community, or folks that interact with it for the first time, I'm sure there's a wide range of emotions and reactions, and maybe some personal moments that folks have shared with you. Any memorable instances of folks, or conversations or interactions that you can think of at various venues that stick up, stick out with you that you'd like to share?

S Sara Fernandez 21:07

I enjoyed sitting at the conference watching people come in. And they were surprised, and they were amazed. And they'd come up to the banners. And they'd say, Oh, that was my friend. I was there. And then they go get other people to come show the banners. It was wonderful to see how proud people felt and how happy they felt to see it up on the wall.

K Kirk Baxter 21:33

I remember at the conference, when Phyllis cry all them for the first time and she turned to me, I heard it and I think to Sara or JD and said what a gift. And I think that really struck me because truly, I believe it was a gift to be able to look back and give our community this visual

of what we have done as gay people. You know, all the accomplishments that occurred in Houston, I wasn't aware of people helping with the March on Washington or cross dressing ordinances, things like that, that I didn't know about. And so it's made me so much more aware of really how important and strong the Houston gay community is, and was and it needed to be recognized. And so I'm glad to be a part of it in that regard that we've brought this to the community and how it's being received, you know, it was they just hung in Toyota Center for the rockets. And we're in discussion with the Astros to to hang them at Minute Maid park for their bike night. And so, and a lot of that's coming from Tammy right with the Chamber of Commerce, she's taking it on to really promote these, which is a good thing, but I know it's a lot of work for Sara and myself, um, you know, getting them together, getting them to the location, getting them hung and then taken down and, you know, hope being that no damage occurs and things like that. So it's, it's Oh, it turned into a job I know for Sara, these past few months.

 Vince Lee 23:37

Can you talk about some other venues you've been a part of or been invited to on a regular recurring basis. And I'm gonna speak for the library. I mean, obviously, University of Houston, MD Anderson Library, we we installed the banners annually in October for National Coming Out month and also to raise awareness on campus and within the library and university community but any other venues. I know, Kirk, you mentioned the Toyota Center with the rockets. And you're working with the Astros any other local or statewide venues you've been involved with.

 24:19

The one place that's had as several years in a row was the Unity banquet, the transgender unity banquet. We've been at the HRC Gala. The Heritage Gala, the Pride festival history tent, obviously every year we set for this year. The library and we were at the MCCR M. R. -- Metropolitan Community Church for for a speaker and event and they left up the banners for their worship services the following Sunday. That's perfect. because that's what's at the top of my head.

 25:02

They're also going to be displayed, not the actual band. Well, they're at the Montrose Center. That's right versions. And now, Texas A&M is wanting a set, or at least some of them to put on exhibit up at their gallery or library space, but they're not gonna be the actual size banners. Because of limited room, we're going to print them, kind of like the Montrose Center exhibit. Okay.

 25:33

And I know that the Montrose Center, they purposely put it on the first floor, I was told because that's where the hatch group is located. And the kids just love to, to look at and find out about the history of their community that they're just coming becoming a part of. One of the thing I'll

say is that, you know, Sara, and Kirk won't pat themselves on the back. But I remember before the initial showing at Creating Change, they were working around the clock for about a week if I remember. And I got him up there. One way or another. It's it's absolutely amazing.

J Jo Collier 26:23

Yeah, that was a big, fat hairy deal.

K Kirk Baxter 26:27

That's kind of how most of my projects go. Right to Try to use to it, Brandon. But I know, it was kind of nerve wracking in itself to

B Brandon Wolf 26:43

I think, once it was up, it all looks so effortless. But I knew it was effortless the long, because I had been in touch with Sara that whole week. And I knew that she was working hard. And so is Kirk, I'm still amazed that y'all got intended in such a short period of time.

S Sara Fernandez 27:06

I have to say not everything was perfect. I had like Phyllis Frey came along and looked at our book. And she said, Oh, I need to make some corrections here. And we had people come by and say, Oh, this is a photograph from so and so for you, we got more information from having the display, people came up and said, Hey, this, you know, you need to add this or take this away, or it was wonderful.

V Vince Lee 27:31

That seemed to spur conversations and information, which as an archivist, I'm going to be I wouldn't admit I love because it's extra context and metadata you can add to for future reference. And I'm going to say you're keeping it real, I mean, every passion project, you're going to obviously work up until the deadline in the end and the unveiling it I'm sure it's like this big. Hold your breath moment, because you don't know exactly what reaction or responses you might get. But it seems that the community has embraced it. And I mean, personally, for me, every time I look at the banners, since they're hung high based on your dimensions, you look up and you're inspired, or it generates all these different motions in reactions. And I'm sure, even with community members and be folks that were family members that knew some of these individuals, they may share that personal moment or start with you all. So

B Brandon Wolf 28:35

I was pretty excited the first time that I saw that you have ah, because up until when all of the venues had been gaping. Yes. And so this was the first time that it was reaching out into the

larger community. And I just think it's great to check off but in every year.

V Vince Lee 28:55

Yeah. And I think if you could help me straighten up my memory, Sara and Kirk, was it 2017 or snow when they first went up at the MD Anderson Library, I am guilty that

S Sara Fernandez 29:11

it sounds about right in front my memory banks. And I was looking for a straight venue where we could hang the banners and I had reached out to you to say Do you know anybody who would want to hang these and I thought a corporation or or something? And you said oh, let me get back to you, man, you said we'd like to hang them and I thought, Oh, that's great.

V Vince Lee 29:36

And it seemed to just work for that space because I don't think we had a perfect measurements but in the atrium and each of those panels seem to be able to host each of the banners and then we can go on the stairwell and then even up one additional floor. So it's just a very well illuminated open space that has traffic coming in and out the library each and every day, pre pandemic, of course. And we get students that would come and also Tabeling, in partnership with the LGBT Resource Centers. So yeah, might enjoy the event. And also it gives us the opportunity to showcase our LGBT collections at the tables as well. So thanks for reaching out to us and making that happen and part of our history.

K Kirk Baxter 30:33

When I see photos, like from Brandon, or JD, or Sara, because I haven't been able to go and see him in person at that location, like I should, but that the photographs always make them look very nice. And they fit in with the railings and everything, which I'm always pleased about.

V Vince Lee 30:54

We should have you at one of our tabling events, and we can resume that again, you know, we miss you at that event. And since you're the graphic designer of the project, I mean, it seems only fair to have you also talk with students in the community and Banner Project.

K Kirk Baxter 31:14

Well, I'd be happy to vent, I know I need to do that. But I was a little concerned I think JD was about at the Toyota Center. Now that's really putting it out into the community, we thought even though it is pandemic time, and they could only have 4000 spectators, but I noticed

people were stopping and looking and reading them even though they were mounted high. I was intrigued by seeing that and and that made me feel good about what their purpose is and what they can accomplish.

V Vince Lee 31:58

I'm glad you shared that experience with me because I was always curious as to the reception. And if you were there during the evening that they had was a pride night at the rockets to see what the reception and

K Kirk Baxter 32:17

I think they went well. Sara, don't you I didn't hear any boeing or

S Sara Fernandez 32:23

nobody know. Very positive. Yeah.

V Vince Lee 32:29

I mean, how can you move history or what has transpired? I mean? Well, at least that's from my perspective, as an activist.

K Kirk Baxter 32:42

It's to me, there was some bother some I, a friend, actually my nephew out of the Chicago area, went to YouTube. And there's a video on YouTube of that event, the rockets pride night, and it's different. No, it's the same video, though of me and Sara that night. But YouTube, you know, allows comments. And so as you scroll down, there's quite a few negative comments.

S Sara Fernandez 33:15

Never read the comments.

K Kirk Baxter 33:19

I was disappointed, but people are upset with the caucus because they're not doing so well. But they also then made comments of what pride night was and why they were having. So I guess that's how the world is.

V Vince Lee 33:38

— And I guess that's part of being open and out there with social media. But I think it's also an opportunity to have others talk about educate those that may have those feelings, and have at least the initial dialogue and discourse.

B Brandon Wolf 33:56

Has anybody ever complained about them being at your event?

V Vince Lee 33:59

Not to my at least not to not nothing that's gone back to me or my recollection since they've been up since 2017. From the students or faculty or anyone else, I mean, I think our campus it and the students and faculty and staff have embraced the banners as part of the the installation at MD Anderson library. And if anything, I think that that's something they look forward to each and every year. And ask me questions about that, because it's going to come back up. We're gonna see that because I think there are classes and faculty that want to engage their students in classes with our LGBT history collections. And I think the banners are an avenue to have that conversation and discussion. And for them to come into the archives and see what's there.

B Brandon Wolf 34:56

By the way, I checked smart website Because I'd written an article when they first appeared at U of H, and it was actually 2016 2016.

V Vince Lee 35:08

Okay, thanks for that correction. So for the record, it's it was 2016.

B Brandon Wolf 35:16

October 8, right? What the creating things was

S Sara Fernandez 35:22

2014 2014? Yes.

V Vince Lee 35:29

Another question I have for you all is what have you all learned from being a part of this project and working collaboratively together? What's been the hardest aspect of working on the project? What's been the easiest? What do you hope that others will take away when they

encounter the band's project? I know, it's a lot. It's a multi part question. One, but just wanted to generate thoughts and conversations. And

S

Sara Fernandez 36:01

I think for me, it's realizing that whenever you want something, you really want something, you can accomplish it. And you know, I had to accomplish it with lots of help. But you know, it's there for you. If you really are really seeking something out, you can get it done. And it tells me that anybody in the community, you know, if they think something is needed, they can go for it, and they can do it.

J

Jo Collier 36:34

If they hussle like you?

S

Sara Fernandez 36:37

Well, if you know, if they really think something's really important, you know, to put their heart into it, and I think it's possible for anybody

K

Kirk Baxter 36:50

think the hardest part for me, is, when Sara or JD, say here, or make this a new banner, and I'm like, okay, and sometimes, the photos aren't always crisp, or if the text is too long, or JD, gets mad at me and says, put this in there. Not that and you know, so. But that's all part of it. I think the easiest part is now is that there's a format and you just plug stuff in. And so a new banner is not as challenging as when we were needing to do 27 banners for the Creating Change. Conference, but so it's just part of my job description. And I, I understand and appreciate that, that I can take people's information that might be several layers or several pages or files and distill it down to get a nice looking banner out of it. And one that respects the person or event or group that it's representing.

V

Vince Lee 38:14

Jo or Brandon, any thoughts from you all and being a part of this project?

B

Brandon Wolf 38:27

Well, I think that I haven't been as closely involved as kirkin. And Sara and have been but I have, initially I helped do some of the research and pictures for some of the banners. I just feel very proud to every every time I get a chance to see the call, the banner is displayed. I feel really proud of the part that it did play. And I really have to give the major credit to kirkin and Sara for just an incredible amount of energy and, and creativity and talent. And I think the concept is just I've always loved the concept ever since Sara first mentioned the batteries

because I think it's anything else that I've seen people don't seem to react to that much. You know, you can have a history table you can have a history display that people have. Usually that's probably people that like to go up and read things in depth. But to have something out there that just you know, you can see such a sweep of history. Something like five six decades, if not more, in just a matter of less than five minutes is an incredible feat to accomplish. And the fact that it's the pop up Museum is even better because then you People don't have to come do it, it goes to people. So it's a very modern concept.

 40:05

Yeah, I agree. It's, you know, because I'm very library, he, I want to read things. So it I mean, I guess I shouldn't be surprised how well it was received. But it's like, everything is online, everybody thinks they want to read everything online. But that's not necessarily true. People love this, being able to see these hanging somewhere. I don't know. It's just, it's been amazing.

 Brandon Wolf 40:36

I would love to see something like this about other communities, and how its people and other communities put together something like this, I would find it very educational to get a really quick view of of what a community has gone through and what their high points are. And like Kirk said, I think it points out a lot of things that you still can be proud of that people wouldn't ordinarily think of Houston as being a city where first or first come from.

 Vince Lee 41:16

Do you also find that since we live in the world of social media, that the banners also are a great medium that lend themselves to being captured on Instagram or Twitter and kind of shared with various followers?

 41:32

Yeah, I guess that's true. They're so they're big, and they're graphic. And we didn't plan that. But we didn't. It works on so many levels that we just didn't know how good we were doing.

 Vince Lee 41:50

So that was not a consideration at the outset in terms of kind of planning that and know your follow the basic, or at least the kind of the rules of exhibits where you don't put too much text, you give enough text so that viewers can read through it, what's the air but also make it visual to accompany what's there. So that's what I've learned in terms of putting together an exhibit, especially a pop up exhibit.

 Brandon Wolf 42:19

I think a good word to describe it as it's been very organic. It wasn't something that people sat down and came up with all kinds of ideas and put them down on paper. It was like, you know, we're Sara was up against the deadline by the creating change, and she really wanted to have something there. And suddenly this idea, just pardon, the expression popped up. And then, you know,



42:49

we had people like Brian Yes.



Brandon Wolf 42:53

And then a good thing takes off. You know, when something is it's good. I'm it's so incredibly impressed that it was at the rockets. Pride night, I was absolutely stunned. And I'm amazed that the Astros are that you're talking to the Astros and that that's going to be a possibility too. It's just great to reach so many people.



Vince Lee 43:23

Organic sounds like maybe practicality and necessity, right or kind of also guiding the creation of the banners. Right.



43:32

Well, and I think that that Houston ARCH already created a new kind of had these people already clumped together. You know, so we were kind of primed for something to do. And Sara gave it to us. You know?



43:46

I -- Oh, I'm sorry. I thought I heard a story that when this started, y'all mad Sara's house and sat around her big dining table and we're passing around names and photos of it seemed like there were about 10 of you or so.



Sara Fernandez 44:04

Yes.



Jo Collier 44:06

Was that after we were at the gallery?

S

Sara Fernandez 44:10

That was after after the gallery? Yes, we did meet and I settled on the banners. I think yes, I met with Brian once. We talked about what the banners should look like. And we talked about maybe who should be there and then we had this big meeting to discuss who should be on the banners who should

K

Kirk Baxter 44:30

Right, like was Ray Hill there Sara or?

i

44:34

You know, so in the years have gone by I cannot remember I did consult with Ray Hill. And I asked him to introduce me to people which really we didn't do until after the banner exhibit when we were doing additional banners. I think Randy Tibbets came once I don't remember Brett Bryan was at that meeting He may have been. Brandon, were you at that meeting? Lady? I did not take photographs. So I don't remember

V

Vince Lee 45:18

if you had I would have approached you about, Oh, do you have the inaugural photographs of this project in the archives?

V

Vince Lee 45:28

I guess one other thing I wanted to follow back up with all of you on are what do you each hope that others will take away from the encounter in The Banner Project.

i

45:40

They'll feel seeing, you know, somebody like them up there, and they can relate to that and consider that they could be doing things that are just as important if they have the courage, you know.

i

45:59

I would hope that people would see how resolute the community is, and that, you know, gay people weren't invented in 1969. at Stonewall. We've been around a long time before, I believe the earliest ones on the banners are back in the 20s, or is it the 30s 30s which is amazing. And then then there's the power couple and the Diana's so many of those things that that occurred before Stonewall that are documented there. So that would be to see really resolute the community's ban. And how, how, and again, how much Houston has been a part of the National Gay effort that people wouldn't ordinarily think.



47:00

Yeah, I agree with Brandon and, and I always find it enjoyable at the Pride History tent for people coming in. And how they stop and read them and walk around the entire tent. There's, there's things on the table, but then the banners are hanging as a backdrop. And I have always enjoyed how the young people stop and look at them and study them. And I hope it's a nice education for them to see that. Like what Brandon said, we weren't invented at Stonewall. But that we have been here and and we've contributed to society. So that's my big takeaway.



Vince Lee 48:00

No pressure, is there any mic for you?



Sara Fernandez 48:05

No, not about that. But my, my thing that I want to repeat is that Brandon's passion for a museum and Kirk's passion for make Mary's matters and history, AIDS and Jo's passion for the history and timeline and things being right. And JDS passion for keeping history and doing the obituary project. Those passions inspired me, also, and I and I felt energy from them. So



Vince Lee 48:39

and I'm going to put for the record. Unfortunately, JD Doyle could not be here today for today, this interview, but in this as for our viewers, but it seems that each of your particular skill sets and interests kind of intersected to help create the Banner Project to what it is today. I count that and please correct me, I count that you've created 46 Banners today for the banners project on your site. And what's the ongoing future hold for The Banner Project.



49:19

I have said I'm stopping at 50 because there's just too many banners to carry around. But I would love to have like keep saying this to people. And everybody looks at me like but something smaller where we could do more people have something shorter have a quote, have a photograph of a person. You know a little bit about what they did, and maybe a quote or just a little history, just something small, where it could be like bricks that you can put up on a wall but we'll see.



Vince Lee 49:59

Streamlining Installation obviously may be something that appeals to folks that have been involved in pop right?

 Vince Lee 50:13

Is there anything else you would like to mention or cover about the vendor project that I didn't necessarily cover or go over? From my previous question?

 Jo Collier 50:25


I guess just since JD isn't here, the fact that he hosted like, the online version on his his webpage, that he's kind of really the only one who had a solid web presence and was and could do that. So we're really fortunate that he already had his web page was so robust already. So because if you want to look at them all very quickly, you can do that on the web.

 Vince Lee 50:51

So through JDS website, he's literally hosting. Yeah, Houston, we have history, banners.

 50:58


That, well, what I like about that, too, is JD adds text that goes into further detail about the banner or the people on it. And that's even further enlightening to me. And he does a great job with all that. Thank you, Dee Dee.


 Sara Fernandez 51:23

Yeah, yes. And he has pictures of every place that we have exhibited. So he's got pictures of the events we've been at. And, and he does put links to obituaries, to articles that go with the banners.

 Vince Lee 51:41

So he's been your Archivist of sorts, locations and venues and locales that the banners have been to, from its creation and through its journey. Okay, where to go JD? Well, that's really all I have today, unless y'all have any final words or words of wisdom or final mentions to say about The Banner Project, Sara, Kirk, Brandon, Jo, and, of course, JD, I want to thank you all for joining me today to share your stories and your involvement with The Banner Project. And I really appreciate the opportunity to conduct this conversation in interview for posterity because I know that we've captured it. Online, we've captured it in photos, we've captured it within Brandon's wonderful article that was published in December of 2015. And Brandon, thanks for sharing that article. Because that's a great refresher on what went into, and what who was involved in The Banner Project and its creation and kind of its impetus. But I just want to thank you all again for for doing this and not only making this available, we're going to make this available through the archives but also through the collaborative exhibit that we're putting together for Texas A&M and Houston ARCH partners. So thank you all again for this. Thank you.

 Kirk Baxter 53:15
Thank you. Thanks.

 Vince Lee 53:18
And I'm not an oral historian. I just play for today, but I've done a couple of oral histories in the past but it just wanted to keep it conversational because I think that's the best way to do things and keep it organic.