

*Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Interview with Chancellor Travis Haire*

Jen Weidner 0:01: Today is September 15th, 2021, I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library conducting interviews for *Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*. This project was made possible with a grant from the Indiana Geological Society. I'm here today with Chancellor Travis Haire. Chancellor, how long have you been with Ivy Tech?

Travis Haire 0:26: It's been three years.

Jen Weidner 0:27: So, not long before the pandemic started?

Travis Haire 0:31: Not long. Almost longer in the pandemic than out.

Jen Weidner 0:35: Right. How have the day-to-day activities of the campus changed since the start of the pandemic to the school year starting?

Travis Haire 0:45: Yeah, so, well, one of the things that – Jen, are we going to go back and talk progression, or?

Jen Weidner 0:52: You could, whatever you want to do.

Travis Haire 0:54: So, Jen, one of the things, Jen, is, you know, first of all, if we go back to the very beginning, when, when this pandemic hit Ivy Tech as a community college pivoted, really quickly, and essentially went to a virtual working atmosphere, as well as how our students were...

Jen Weidner 1:16 That was, like, March of 2020?

Travis Haire 1:20: March, April, May.

Jen Weidner 1:22: Okay.

Travis Haire 1:23: 2020, maybe June, and we – yeah, March, April – and so, all of our classes became virtual online classes. Our instructors had to make those changes immediately. It was, one day they were in the classroom, the next day, we were virtual. I think it actually happened over a weekend. And the same with our, our employees. And when we first did this, all of our employees actually had to do a plan of work. So, we had all of our employees do a plan of work. And Jen, what's interesting is, prior to COVID, when students couldn't make it to class, those

were the barriers that we had removed. Let me give you an example: a child gets sick, a car breaks down, you know, how can we eliminate?

Jen Weidner 2:17: Life happens.

Travis Haire 2:18: Life happens. How do you eliminate that barrier to get the student to class? To the point where we had entered into a contract with Uber. And if somebody hears this 25 or 30 years later, Uber was a, the kind of taxi, if you will, that would go pick up those students and bring them to class

Jen Weidner 2:39: What a wonderful idea.

Travis Haire 2:41: Okay. Now, fast forward to the pandemic and we close. In this, Uber's going to come, if this will come back full circle. Fast forward to the pandemic starts to really ramp up, and the testing starts to happen, and I wanted to talk to you, and you and I talked offline for a minute, but the testing happened and we just believe, being part of the community, we had an obligation to make our facilities available for the greater good. And I will tell you, Jen, when I, when I was contacted by the state of Indiana, and said we're going to mobilize the National Guard, and we're gonna come down and we're gonna make Ivy Tech a testing site for COVID, it was a, it was probably one of the easiest decisions I've ever made. I said, "Yes, absolutely, when you want to come here." And we, we brought, we did it.

Jen Weidner 3:32: Well, you were here for the greater good, for the community here.

Travis Haire 3:35 : For the greater good, the community, and, and Jen, then I went, came to campus, because I had been working remote. I ended up working remotely for 13 weeks in a row, and I came to campus, and most of our facilities folks had remained on campus because they could not work remotely. And I remember meeting with the team, talking about, "Okay, here's what we're gonna do: We're mobilizing," and, you know, this is pre-vaccine, Jen, and I, and, you know, they, they, you know, they, we were worried about their safety, about our safety, my safety, the National Guard's safety, you know, the PPE, that personal protective stuff was, you know, we were, we were trying to make sure we have plenty of that lined up.

Jen Weidner 4:15: That was hard to get at the beginning.

Travis Haire 4:16: Yes, hard to get in the beginning, the spray, the wipes, the Clorox wipes, you couldn't find, let alone toilet paper, and I'm sure everybody's mentioned that. You know, it was all part of that, and then, Jen, the day happened. And I will tell you, it was the first time I had people question me about, "Why are you bringing all of those quote 'sick people', to one location," and it never dawned on me that there were going to be surrounding businesses that were concerned that we were going to have folks that were potentially sick with this pandemic, with this COVID, you know, trying to, whether it be, you know, stopping for fast food, or gas, or a bank, or what, you know, a lot of that had gone virtual, but there were still some hands on, and how in the world we bring in, you know, hundreds, if not thousands of quote 'sick people', to one

place, and it really made me hit pause. I think that, you know, it was important to me to do what was important for the greater good. And I think that's where my head was, and I knew that if we ever had a chance of minimizing this or beating it, that was the way to go. And, you know, it was, you know, you fast forward to the vaccine and the vaccine clinics, everybody wanted to have a vaccine.

Jen Weidner 5:45: So, when did you all start having the vaccine clinics here?

Travis Haire 5:47: We started the vaccine clinic where we did J and J.

Jen Weidner 5:48: Okay.

Travis Haire 5:48: So, we brought J and J.

Jen Weidner 5:52: That was the Johnson and Johnson?

Travis Haire 5:55: That was Johnson and Johnson.

Jen Weidner 5:55: The one shot?

Travis Haire 5:56 : The one shot, and the National Guard did that, we had eight lines going through the entire campus. And I think we did 6,000 over a weekend, so it was pretty amazing.

Jen Weidner 6:09: That's amazing!

Travis Haire 6:10: So, it's been, it's just been a, you know, Jen, I don't know about you, but for me, when I went home and thought I was about to work on a lot, that this will be a week or two.

Jen Weidner 6:20: Oh yeah, we all did!

Travis Haire 6:21: Thought it was like a bad snowstorm.

Jen Weidner 6:22: The library thought, "Oh you know what? We'll just have to close for a while."

Travis Haire 6:26: Yeah.

Jen Weidner 6:26: We did close for a while, though when we came back, we weren't open to the public.

Travis Haire 6:29: That's right.

Jen Weidner 6:30: We did curbside services, we never thought we would be two years and are still trying to figure out, are we doing things right? Is everybody okay? Well, we'll get back to in-person programs and stuff.

Travis Haire 6:44: So, Jen, as the vaccine started rolling out, we started bringing about 50 percent of our students back to campus, and it was basically the hands-on lab classes or nursing students came back, or welding students came back. If you were in an English or math class—

Jen Weidner 7:02: Stuff you could not do online. It was not possible.

Travis Haire 7:05: —you still stayed virtual. And then as far as staff, we brought them, we actually put them into teams, and I put them in, we were bringing them back in about 25, 30 percent, and we had them working two weeks in a row, because that was, kind of, if they came down sick or...

Jen Weidner 7:22: You would kind of know.

Travis Haire 7:24: We would know if we had everybody come in every other day,

Jen Weidner 7:27: You wouldn't know.

Travis Haire 7:28: We wouldn't know, and then that way, if they had to quarantine, then it was quarantine, and they were off.

Jen Weidner 7:34: Okay.

Travis Haire 7:35: So, we did some of that. And then, Jen, you know this, and, and we received so much of the Cares Dollars from the federal government. And we call them now the HERF dollars, the Higher Education Relief.

Jen Weidner 7:49: Oh, right.

Travis Haire 7:50: And we, we, what we did was, we've outfitted 48 classrooms on campus to do what we call "learn anywhere." So, essentially, there's a TV monitor in the back, and there's a TV monitor in the front. And then, there's a sound bar and microphones in the room. So, we have our folks that still need to stay on Zoom. We call them "Zoomers". And then, we had the students in the classroom that are "roomers". So, we have our Zoomer students and our roomer students, and the teacher can instruct a class, and they can get it, you know, instruction.

Jen Weidner 8:28: However they need it.

Travis Haire 8:29: However they need to, and think about — let's go back to Uber. I don't need Uber anymore, because now, for cars broken down or a child sick, they can...

Jen Weidner 8:37: You just have to get more zoom accounts.

Travis Haire 8:40: That's right, that's right, that's right

Jen Weidner 8:41: It's safer.

Travis Haire 8:42: So, the point of that, is that's one of the lessons we learned, and how the college has changed. And the other thing is, we've learned that we were very productive from home. And you and I both know.

Jen Weidner 8:53: A lot of people have learned that you can be—

Travis Haire 8:56: A lot of people.

Jen Weidner 8:56: I got so much stuff done when I was stuck at home, stuff that never would have got, ever gotten done, and it was just amazing. Like, we actually can work from home, I mean, not a lot, a lot of library stuff you can't do, but a lot of it.

Travis Haire 9:09: That's right, well, and so now, we have an alternate work location policy where our employees can work from home a day or two a week.

Jen Weidner 9:16: Yeah!

Travis Haire 9:17: So, you know, you think about, we went from where we first left and everybody had to have a plan, to almost two years later, we've got a new policy. It says, "You know what? You can work from home. You don't have to give us a plan." It's, I think it's the evolution—

Jen Weidner 9:29: I think it is.

Travis Haire 9:30: —of some of the good things that have come out of this terrible thing.

Jen Weidner 9:31: Now you don't have to be, like, well, I kind of, I don't feel great, but I don't feel bad enough not to come to work, but if I can work from home...

Travis Haire 9:39: That's right.

Jen Weidner 9:40: I don't have to worry about, or, if my child is sick, I have to go to an appointment. It just makes a happy workplace, when you know you have options.

Travis Haire 9:47: I agree. And if you, you know, if you're going to pay somebody to take a sick day and they're, it's their child that's sick, and they can be productive, you're paying them.

Jen Weidner 9:55: Let them be productive.

Travis Haire 9:55: Yes, let them be productive. So, it's been a, it's been a great win-win for us. So, as we sit here in September of '21 (2021), most, most, 80 percent of our classes, 80 to 85 percent of our classes are back on campus.

Jen Weidner 10:13: That's great!

Travis Haire 10:13: But they have a learn anywhere component.

Jen Weidner 10:15: They have options.

Travis Haire 10:16: So, they have, have options. We also have a virtual, and then we've got a blend, where they can do both. So, we've got a lot of different modalities.

Jen Weidner 10:25 And I think, just, that helps people want to come to school, want to come here, because they know they have options. They don't have to be here every class,

Travis Haire 10:35: Right.

Jen Weidner 10:36: As long as the teacher can see or have knowledge that they're participating somehow, it takes a load off, it takes the stress away.

Travis Haire 10:44: And, Jen, the other piece is, we had, we serve almost 5,000 Dual Credit high school students.

Jen Weidner 10:50: That's right.

Travis Haire 10:51: In the high schools, and we were able to keep up with that as they went remotely, so, you know, you never would have convinced me that you could run a campus with 10,000 students from home.

Jen Weidner 11:01: Yep!

Travis Haire 11:02: But we did.

Jen Weidner 11:02: But you did!

Travis Haire 11:02: And they ran, we actually ran Ivy Tech, the State College from home, and you know, we've, we've, we've learned a lot, we've been able to improve. I really do believe our services for our students, I think, we've continued to be helpful community partner, you know, we did the, the massive max vaccine clinic, but we've done four more since then for our students, just, you know, as they continue to be vaccinated and, you know, it's just, it's really changed, and, and I just want to say this to you, you know, having an undergraduate degree in history, it's important and I just, just value and appreciate what you're doing.

Jen Weidner 11:46: Thank you!

Travis Haire 11:47: As you're recording the history and just, when I read about this in the paper, wanted to reach out to you, and say, "Hey, you know, there's a, there's a piece of higher ed..."

Jen Weidner 11:57: Well, I'm glad that you did, because I hadn't thought about reaching out to—

Travis Haire 12:00: Yeah.

Jen Weidner 12:00: —a college a local college or higher education, because you know I didn't—

Travis Haire 12:05: Yeah.

Jen Weidner 12:05: —I just didn't cross my mind, you know? Like, and it's nice that you thought of like hey, I have a story.

Travis Haire 12:10: Yeah, there's a story. The story continues to be, and Jen, it just amazes me, the resilience.

Jen Weidner 12:18: We are very resilient.

Travis Haire 12:20: Or our students, of our faculty and staff, the dedication of our faculty and staff for what they've done for our students. And at the same time, the grace that they have allowed leadership here. You know, there was no playbook, tried in our best to keep everybody safe.

Jen Weidner 12:41: Nobody knew what to do.

Travis Haire 12:43: But, at the same time continued to have business, not as usual, but business, and it's been, you know, that, that gentle push-pull.

Jen Weidner 12:53: We are figuring it out as we go along.

Travis Haire 12:54: That's right.

Jen Weidner 12:55: I mean, everybody's like, "When we get back to normal." I'm like, there is no normal, it's okay, because it's the evolution, it's how things change and so, um, besides what you've talked about, like, here, what you've learned from the pandemic. What about personally, what have you learned from the pandemic? Like, when you step away from here, you go home to your family.

Travis Haire 13:14: Yeah, well, a couple things. First of all, when this was in March, Jen, I remember, because we were on spring break, and I had actually driven to Florida, because it was just starting to happen.

Jen Weidner 13:28: Yeah, nobody thought it was gonna hit us, get to Southern Indiana.

Travis Haire 13:33: No, no, no. So, I knew that there was something out there, so packed up the car. My wife and I drove to Daytona on a, on a Saturday morning and had the wipes with us everywhere we stopped, put a glove on when you got gas, you know, you know, I, I don't think there were masks, I don't think we were masking.

Jen Weidner 13:51: No, not in the early pandemic, there were no masks, it was washing hands. Yeah, hand sanitizer, yep.

Travis Haire 13:57: So, get down there, stay Saturday, and get to a restaurant Saturday. This is 100 percent true story. And we're sitting in the restaurant and the TV, they interrupt the show that was on, and it was the governor in Florida announcing that they were closing all bars and restaurants in Florida, so they, we were the last people served and his little beach side diner, that when we got there Saturday—

Jen Weidner 14:22: Oh my gosh!

Travis Haire 14:23: —all the restaurants were closed now, they were doing some carry-outs but, you know, so we stay there Sunday, and then Monday was maybe the second week of campuses being closed, and it was so different, and I'll be honest, we were afraid we're gonna get stranded.

Jen Weidner 14:38: Yeah!

Travis Haire 14:38: I didn't know if we were gonna be able to get gas on the way back, didn't know about toilet paper, didn't know about anything. We loaded up the car Tuesday morning and drove straight back home. And, and stayed at home. Now, during the pandemic we did very little traveling, but we did travel a little bit as we were coming towards coming out, I guess, of the pandemic. And then we have a blended family and my daughter is in Dallas in Texas, and it was, you know, there were times when maybe we thought she was getting it, or one of the kids, you know, and you and I talked about this earlier, you know, it's the constant testing to see, you know, just, it was just that worrying about, you know, what happens if you, if you get this? There was very, very...

Jen Weidner 15:25: Or if your child gets, you know, if your child's, you know, nearly an adult still, as a parent, you worry.



Travis Haire 15:30: Of course, of course, and you know it, there was very little out there about any type of medication, at the time. And so, you know, you fast forward to now where, you know, being vaccinated, being fully-vaccinated, probably getting ready for a booster.

Jen Weidner 15:46: Yep.

Travis Haire 15:47: To be honest, you know, we've been able to do a little bit more traveling. I'm actually going to fly tomorrow.

Jen Weidner 15:53: You feel a little bit safer to be able to do everything.

Travis Haire 15:56: I'll still wear a mask, wash our hands, you know, and do those things but, you know, it's just been tough and, and you know, your, your question was when you leave here, you know, that was one of the things I think we all had to get used to, was, I wasn't leaving here during the pandemic, you were already home. And I think what was hard for a lot of people was to turn it off, you know, work until 6-7-8 o'clock.

Jen Weidner 16:20: And not realize it because you were at home, you were comfortable. That's right, that's right.

Travis Haire 16:25: And, you know, I know we did some, we did a lot of videos to the faculty and staff just trying to tell people to hang on and hang in there, you're doing a great job.

Jen Weidner 16:35: If they need to, you're there, and, yeah.

Travis Haire 16:38: It really changed the way, you know, I tell everybody the best part of this job is I get to be the chief storyteller. And I think that my, my role changed from the chief storyteller, the chief cheerleader, I mean, constantly, we're going to work through this but, at the same time, trying to keep everyone safe. We lost one member of our staff to COVID. And when we did kickoff, in August of '21, and came back, we put his initials on our t-shirt sleeves, that's how we did that, and—

Jen Weidner 17:09: I was gonna ask you, how many, or did you have very many faculty, staff, that got COVID?

Travis Haire 17:17: When we went virtual, it helped tremendously. That kept our numbers low. When we brought people back in, the rotation kept numbers low, so just the fact that we were having a low census kept our numbers low.

Jen Weidner 17:27: You were spread out, yeah.

Travis Haire 17:28: So actually, we fared pretty well there. When we, since we've come back we, you know, we've seen that, you know, I want to say a little bit of an increase, as far as campus, but there are more people back on campus.

Jen Weidner 17:41: Yes, so that makes a difference.

Travis Haire 17:42: That's right, and it's not out of proportion though to the other teams.

Jen Weidner 17:44: Yes.

Travis Haire 17:45: You know, and as business as we start.

Jen Weidner 17:47: You don't have a huge outbreak, like.

Travis Haire 17:49: Yeah, that's right.

Jen Weidner 17:50: People were almost two years and they were cautious, we know, wash your hands, hand sanitizer masks, social distancing.

Travis Haire 17:56: That's right, that's right.

Jen Weidner 17:58 Yeah. So, what do you want people in the future to remember about this pandemic?

Travis Haire 18:02: Well, you know, I think that a couple of things. One, it definitely has changed – this is an understatement – but it's changed the way we live and how we operate. And, you know, I think what you know about the future, you know, when generations look back and, you know, as I was, you know, I'm 51, and as I was coming up, you know, to work 40, 60, 80 hours, and go to work, that was the, that was the norm. And now, it's that work-life balance we hear a lot about working from home.

Jen Weidner 18:34: This COVID has made us have to do that.

Travis Haire 18:37: Made us realize, I think, the importance of family, the importance of relationships, and the importance of the time, that it's limited.

Jen Weidner 18:46: It's very limited, yep.

Travis Haire 18:46: And so, I think it's that, personally, and then professionally, you know, I want people to know that, at Ivy Tech in Sellersburg, we stepped up and had the COVID testing. We've been a community partner, we did the vaccine clinics in an attempt to do everything we could.

Jen Weidner 19:09: For Clark County.

Travis Haire 19:0: For Clark County, to help in whatever way that meant working – (coughing) excuse me – closely with the Health Department, making videos for the health department. Just anything we could do to help Clark County,

Jen Weidner 19:23: So, you did one of those videos with the Health Department?

Travis Haire 19:25: Yes.

Jen Weidner 19:25: Good, good, good. I have to go back and find that one.

Travis Haire 19:26: I'd love for you to.

Jen Weidner 19:30: Because it's important to let people know that they're not forgotten–

Travis Haire 19:33: Right.

Jen Weidner 19:34: –just because campus has changed.

Travis Haire 19:37: Right.

Jen Weidner 19:38: You're still there for them, it's not gonna change. What do you hope continues after the pandemic? Besides hand washing, we all hope that continues.

Travis Haire 19:47: You know, I think that it's a couple of things. One, there's no doubt, without going to a completely different subject in the middle of this pandemic, some of the social unrest, and, that we've faced as a, as a community here at Ivy Tech, higher ed. I've used this word once, but it's the resiliency of our students. The care and compassion of our faculty and staff to learn about each other.

Jen Weidner 20:25: Well, I think that's the thing, is, you have to have those awkward, difficult conversations that we don't want to have.

Travis Haire 20:32: That's right.

Jen Weidner 20:32: We don't want to, we don't want to. We just don't want to engage in that, because we want to keep things nicey-nice, but sometimes you have to go out of that and take that chance.

Travis Haire 20:42: And I think so. And we've done that, we, we actually, it's funny how you said that, because we had this series called 'Courageous Conversations.' And that's exactly what you're talking about, and I think the, the, the ability for us to hear each other, to work with each other, realize we have differences and that's okay. But we're going to continue to care for one another, show grace to one another. It has been really an interesting, moving, compassionate time.

Jen Weidner 21:15: I think without the pandemic, we wouldn't be having those conversations, we wouldn't be reaching across the table to people with different whatever's, you know, so that's yeah, so hopefully we do, we do continue to talk to people as humans, we're all humans at the end of the day, no matter what, no matter what we believe, or think, or feel, or color of our skin. Yeah, and that's, um, that's what Ivy Tech is about as well.

Travis Haire 21:38: Yeah, absolutely.

Jen Weidner 21:39: It's a big community here. Anything else you'd like to tell me?

Travis Haire 21:41: No, I can just, again, I appreciate you coming out.

Jen Weidner 21:43: Thank you.

Travis Haire 21:44: Appreciate your work. Thank you for doing this, and hopefully we may have done our small part in this pandemic.

Jen Weidner 21:50: Well, thank you for letting me interview you.