

Interview with John Rutkowski, Facilities Manager
Tuesday, April 5, 2022
The Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Recorded over Zoom

Interviewee: John Rutkowski

Interviewers: Adam Densman, Justin Entwistle

Duration: 50:25

Transcription generated by Zoom auto-captioning

John Rutkowski is the facilities manager at the Hill Cumorah property in Palmyra, New York.

Transcript

Note: The original timestamps from Zoom are retained in this transcript along with timestamps placed every five minutes through the recording.

[00:00]

Justin Entwistle: [indistinct] Okay. That was easy.

18:45:51 **Adam Densman:** So, you ready to get started?

Justin Entwistle: Yep. Alright. So, you want to start?

Adam Densman: Yeah, I'll take it off. So, my name is Adam Densman. I'm with my partner Justin Entwistle, and today we're interviewing Mr. John Rutkowski. He is a[n] employee of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and he was involved in the maintenance and property management of the Hill Cumorah Pageant. So... First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with us, John.

18:46:32 **John Rutkowski:** Sure, my pleasure.

18:46:39 **Adam Densman:** So, I guess to kind of kick it off, we were wondering if you could give us a bit of insight into your background within the Church—

John Rutkowski: Mhmm.

Adam Densman: And why you originally decided to take on the role you did with the Hill Cumorah Pageant, and how that kind of came about.

18:47:00 **John Rutkowski:** Sure. I've been a Church employee for 33 years now. My title is Facilities Manager. I was promoted, I guess you could say, or sent to the Palmyra sites in November of 2006. So, with that move from Syracuse, New York, came newer responsibilities in the Palmyra area for Church maintenance. Palmyra, New York, is a very special place to our faith. It's where everything started, and a lot of what the Hill Cumorah Pageant presented.

So, my first Pageant responsibility and experience as a facilities manager was in 2007. My family participated as cast members of the Pageant in 1994, so, you know, it's a much different experience being in the cast, and then [laughs] being responsible for everything that goes on, or most of what goes on, behind the scenes of the Pageant. So, previous to Church employment, I was in retail management. Did that for a while. Got some more college, and then landed a first facilities management job in Syracuse, New York, which was home for us back then, so that's my professional side of the Church, working for the Church. My membership, I've had many opportunities for leadership positions in the Church, which I'm convinced helps me professionally, and vice versa. I've served as a bishop of a congregation, a branch president of a smaller congregation, and many other opportunities to serve. So, yeah, that's basically some of my Church background, and I didn't choose to be involved with Pageant. It sort of came with the territory.

18:49:18 **Adam Densman:** Okay, so you've been pretty involved in the Church for quite a while now, even outside of the Pageant itself, though.

18:49:23 **John Rutkowski:** Yes. Yep. Yep. Yeah, when I was born, my mom and dad were both of different faiths. And Mom was Catholic. Dad was Lutheran. And I was baptized as a baby into

the Catholic Church. But I was about 2 or 3 years old when both of them converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So, I've basically grown up in the Church and, you know, still have [sic] to decide, like many others, "Is this commitment I want to make to Christ?" and that, so, yeah. I've been a lifelong member. [laughter] And I often told people, when you're a member of the Church, the Church is part of your life. When you're a member of the Church and you're an employee of the Church, it *is* your life. [laughter] Covers both aspects.

18:50:26 **Adam Densman:** That makes sense.

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

Adam Densman: All right, Justin, I'll hand it over to you.

18:50:33 **Justin Entwistle:** Okay, so... [indistinct] The process for setting up and dismantling. It's actually an interesting question. It's like—what was your main job in regards to setting it up, taking it down?

John Rutkowski: [05:00] Sure, okay.

Justin Entwistle: I would think there are a lot of steps, quite a procedure.

18:50:57 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah. Yeah. A famous question I would get around, you know, late May–early June, "Oh, you must be getting ready for Pageant season," and it's like, no, it really starts in February and March, you know, getting vendors lined up that you need help with and organizing things in that. A very exciting part of preparing for Pageant that just wasn't within the workforce, but sort of the community, was when the light towers would go up, and the light towers would go up early June. And we obviously had to hire a professional crane contractor for that, because those towers were quite high and heavy and that. And so, there'd be times where people would see the towers going up, and they'd stop and, you know, want to take pictures and capture that moment.

We had to get the towers up first because, shortly after that, the Hill Cumorah Pageant work crew would start arriving, and that's a group of about 20 young men who put in an application to be part of the work crew, and they're really more responsible for setting up Pageant than anyone else. They build the stage. They take down the stage. They put up the light system, the sound system, and all that. My responsibility in that area was, you know. I just made sure the towers were up and ready, and then they came in. They had barracks back near our facilities management complex behind the Hill Cumorah, which is no longer there, with the changes that have been made to the Hill, and provided them with the equipment that they needed, some tractors and that, to haul things around in that. But the real credit for setting up and dismantling the Hill Cumorah Pageant staging and that goes to that work crew, as we call them. So, at the end of Pageant, you know, they have to dismantle all the staging and store it in the tractor-trailers where it would be stored during the off season, again back behind the Hill Cumorah, and then I'd arrange for the tower or the crane company to come and take down the towers. A lot of the cast would also set up the tents—if you've been to the Hill Cumorah Pageant, the tents where the cast members would meet and work on their parts, and that. So, during—once Pageant started in full force, my responsibility and my staff's responsibility was more of a support. You know, we get the calls, "This isn't working," so we'd have to fix it. We'd get the calls, "This is not clean," we'd have to go clean it and that. So—but yeah, our responsibility and role was more of a help, and assisting the set-up and take-down.

18:54:39 **Justin Entwistle:** Okay, and I actually have a question that I just came up with, that isn't on the list, but... Was there... how did you go about it, like, if someone outside wanted to apply to help and assist with this procedure? How would they go about applying?

18:54:58 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah. It was... It was very... It was outlined very clearly that the cast members who wanted to be in the Pageant, they had to get in an application [coughs]—excuse me—by the end of November for the previous Pageant year, and it was the same for the work crew. They would have to submit an application. There were always way, way more applications, and numbers of people who wanted to participate in Pageant, than could. I was not involved in any of that decision-making. That was the responsibility of the Hill Cumorah Pageant Presidency, a President and two counselors. They would go through all the applications and that. [10:00] But with cast and work crew and directors and lighting people and all that, it was usually about 8- to 900 total people involved with the Pageant. I—so, you know, you couldn't just show up two days before Pageant, and say, “Hey, I'd like to be a part of this,” you know, but they would use the local congregations to do volunteer help with parking and security and that. So, something like that could probably be more last-minute, “Hey, I'd like to help and be involved some way,” but to be part of the official cast or work crew and that, that's all through application.

18:56:42 **Justin Entwistle:** Okay, and then, just a follow question on this section here, so, if you have a ballpark, I'm assuming you don't have an exact total, but if you had a ballpark, like, I can't imagine how much it costs [John laughs] for everything. Yeah, nobody likes to hear the damage, but...

18:57:02 **John Rutkowski:** Right. Yeah.

[Justin says something indistinct]

John Rutkowski: I had a specific Pageant budget. You know, that just wasn't for the Pageant's two weeks. You know, it was to maintain everything, all the buildings and the utilities, and that... I honestly can't remember what it was. I know to set up and take down the towers was

about \$60,000 dollars, but you're talking 12 huge towers, and a huge crane, and two other cranes to pick them up in the back, put them on a tractor-trailer flatbed, bring them out; another crane picks it up, wheels it over to the front of the hill, and that—so, that was not inexpensive. But yeah, and all the money that was used to fund the Hill Cumorah Pageant came from Church money. I believe that was made off of some of the Church farms that they had. So, it was funded a little bit differently than other Church activities would be. But, you know, everything has a cost to it. The Church obviously did not make money on the Hill Cumorah Pageant; it was free attendance, free parking. You know, we had the local Rotary Club and Lions Club. They came in and self-managed their concessions, tents, and that, and so, they made money during the Pageant, which the Church was happy to allow that and support them and community support and that. But yeah, the Church didn't have—wasn't a moneymaker. It wasn't meant to be. It was just to share a good message, and, you know, provide good feelings for people about our Savior and that. And yeah, so, again, hard to put a price tag on it, but, you know, the decision to no longer have Pageant had nothing to do with money. You know, the Church didn't say, "Oh, we're going to save all this money." What the Church would do is say, you know, "If we're not going to use the money here at a pageant, we'll build some churches in Africa or something." You know, the money would be used for other good things.

18:59:52 **Adam Densman:** So, it sounds like for the most part, though, the Church tried to do kind of do everything in-house, like, everybody involved in it, in the set-up and maintenance process, were all members of the Church?

19:00:03 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah, it was all, yeah, all-volunteer. You know, it—when—again, when my family was in it, it's about a 20-day commitment, so people who are—families that are coming to participate in Pageant are taking two–three weeks' vacation to be in it. All the local

people who are being nurses and doctors in it, all other support, they're taking time off from their regular jobs. So, that's a good question because I think it gives this answer that's important to know: The volunteer hours far outweighed the financial output that the Church was [15:00] doing, because again, everybody was just volunteering. When my family and I were in it in 1994, I kept good records of how much it cost us, and we did it the cheapest way possible, and it costs us \$1,000 dollars, you know, monetarily, to do—to be in Pageant. And then I realized, well, gee, the family that we're working with in Pageant right next to us flew out a family of six from Washington State. So, they had airplane tickets. They had to buy the catered food, you know, all that. I couldn't imagine the dollars that people would spend for the blessing and opportunity to be in Pageant. And again, that's why I can confidently say, you know, the amount of sacrifice that people gave in their time and money to be in the Pageant far outweighed what the Church was putting in towards paying the utilities and setting up the towers and things like that.

19:02:02 **Adam Densman:** So yeah, obviously this Pageant has been important to a lot of peoples' lives. I mean, you talk just about how expensive it was for families to actually even just come and see it, or even go so far as to participate in it. So, I imagine, it's probably a pretty good social dynamic within the people that are helping set all this up and participating in it.

19:02:25 **John Rutkowski:** [coughs] Excuse me. Yes, definitely, a lot of people, I've heard comments along the lines of, you know, "This was the most spiritual community I've ever been a part of, where everybody's helping each other, everybody's getting along, you know." Whether they have different social or political views, or whatever, you're all there for one purpose. And so, yeah, everybody was getting along. And towards the end of Pageant's run, as the attendance started going down, that never went away, hearing the people just say how wonderful it was to be in an—and the phrase they would use is a Zion-like community. Zion is a word in the

Scriptures and that that portrays just a group that gets along great, and everything's good and that. So yeah, that was a huge factor, and that's why you would have families desire to come back more than once and participate in Pageant more than once. So, that was always a challenge that the Pageant Presidency had was, trying to balance bringing back some experienced people and letting others gain that experience, and that. Like I said, our family was in it one year, and we applied a second year, but we didn't get in that second time, and it was disappointing, but it's like, "Oh, we got to do it once."

19:04:12 **Adam Densman:** Yeah, that makes sense. All right, Justin, I'll hand it back over to you.

19:04:15 **Justin Entwistle:** All right. Okay, so this one. This one's a big one, and I wish I could talk to other people, and maybe someday I will, that were involved in it, but... What was your reaction to the announcement, when you realized that the Pageant wouldn't be happening anymore due to COVID?

19:04:44 **John Rutkowski:** Well, do you mean just COVID, or that it wouldn't happen anymore altogether?

19:04:49 **Justin Entwistle:** I guess both.

John Rutkowski: Yeah, yeah.

Justin Entwistle: There must have been a change in dynamic.

19:04:55 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah, yeah. Yup. Well, it did not surprise me when the Church made the announcement that the Hill Cumorah Pageant would be coming to an end. Part of my responsibilities as the facilities manager in the area is to maintain and keep track of the condition of the facilities. The facilities, the support buildings at the Hill Cumorah Pageant, were very old. There was a newer administrative building. We did some upgrades on what was called the study

shelter, where they would all meet together for devotionals and instruction and that. But all the other buildings were sixty-plus years old and built into the side of a hill. So, half of the building was [20:00] underground, and then you had all the electrical and plumbing, and that was just old and outdated and continually breaking down. So, I had to report year after year to my supervisors the condition of the buildings, and the infrastructure in general, for the Hill Cumorah Pageant. And it wasn't good [laughs], and so the Church recognized that there were three options. Number one, fix everything up—you know, tear down old buildings and rebuild new ones on the hill. The second was move where the Pageant was being held, and that was seriously considered. The Church owns quite a bit of land in the area, and if you just went a little bit north of where the Hill Cumorah is and the Hill Cumorah Pageant was presented, there is another hill, and that was seriously looked at and priced: If we do this, this is what it's gonna cost. And then the third option obviously was to say, well, we're done. And so, when the Church had decided that the Hill Cumorah Pageant and other pageants that were being presented in different areas were going to come to an end, it didn't surprise me.

Probably the most disappointing thing was, with COVID, was in 2019, the 2019 Hill Cumorah Pageant was going on, nobody knew that was the last Pageant, because COVID hadn't made its scene yet till months later. So, in 2020, it was postponed, and then the plans of 2021 having the last Pageant, but COVID wasn't cleared enough for the top Church leaders and that to say, "Yes, we'll do it," so they just said, you know, "Pageant's over." So, sadly, it was pretty anti-climactic. [laughs] Like I said, the last year and the last presentation of Pageant was happening with nobody knowing it was it, so...

But yeah, my reaction to the announcement was—it didn't surprise me because I was personally involved with providing information so a decision could be made. I had no authority

or vote in any decision. My job and part of my responsibility was to just share information, real information, and I didn't want a sugar coat anything. If a building's falling apart, it's falling apart. I don't want to say, "Oh, it'll stand another 10 years," and then somebody gets hurt [laughs], you know. And the stage, we invested a lot in materials and money to continue to keep that stage strong and sturdy because the cast members total kept growing. I think I shared with you the number, probably total 8- to 900 people in Pageant. In '94, when we were in Pageant, I think that the total number was less than 500. So, it had grown, but the stage had stayed the same, but, you know, it needed much more support to hold a lot more people. So, we continued that because that was the number one priority; that's the—you know, the biggest part of Pageant is the stage, so we continued to make upgrades on that. But then it got to the point, like I said, where the Church made the decision, and one of the decision-factors was the Pageants just were not presenting the Church to as many non-members as they used to. It was a missionary experience and that, and it just wasn't working as well, and the Church wanted to do different ways of missionary work, and being a global Church, not everybody could go to Palmyra and [25:00] see the Hill Cumorah Pageant. So, I suspect part of the Church's decision was that they could have a greater impact on people globally with some of the pageants being ended.

19:11:11 **Adam Densman:** Yeah, so, you talked a lot about kind of the logistics behind the reasoning that they shut it down, as you talked a lot about like the facilities starting to kind of get run down and everything. Obviously, those that don't have your background, though, don't necessarily know all those details, so I imagine a lot of, maybe—like, your friends and family were probably a bit emotionally disappointed that this large part of their life was suddenly going away. So, I guess my question is, how do you gauge the reactions of the other people around you that don't necessarily have the behind-the-scenes look that you do?

19:11:45 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah, and there was a lot of that in the beginning, and there continues to be a lot of that. You know, there's people that think the Church is making a mistake. You know, how could we take this away? We are—as a faith—believe in modern revelation, and so things will continually change as the Lord directs. So, what I try to do and have done is, for people who are really disappointed and frustrated with the decision, I share with them as best I can that part of that decision also—you know, it wasn't just like, "Oh, we're just gonna end the Pageant. We have no idea what we're gonna do next." No, the Church knew what they wanted to do next. So, I am involved with the major project that's going on at the hill right now, and it's called the Hill Cumorah Rehabilitation Program, or Project. So, the goal is to restore the Hill Cumorah back to what could have been—[what] it looked like in the early 1800s, when the story of Joseph Smith and his revelations and that took place. We... The Church desires that the Hill Cumorah return to more of a sacred feeling place for members and others to visit. There are some, and at times myself included, that felt like the Hill Cumorah was becoming a little circus-like, you know, with all the tents that were on the side and that, and the big production of everything. So, it's a swing, and what the Church hopes the Hill Cumorah can portray again to the members of the Church, and any other visitors, [is] that it would be more of a spiritual, peaceful experience versus a big pageantry event. And again, that Pageant only lasted two weeks, but, you know, for a month—month and a half, it was under Hill Cumorah [Pageant] preparation or dismantle, and all the other times when people would come to the Hill Cumorah, it would be more of a sacred experience and that. But again, the Church knew what they wanted to do when the Pageant was gonna end. It wasn't just a "We're gonna end it, and we'll figure out what we're gonna do." They knew what they wanted to do.

And so, you know, I try to educate people on that. And when I have that opportunity, some people say, “Oh, I get it.” And I’ll be truthful, there’s still some people that say, “No, they’re making a mistake.” [laughs] But it’s like, well, there’s nothing to be done about it now because Pageant’s gone. Oh, and what was funny, too, is, as soon as it was announced in 2021—like, in March or April last year, that Pageant was being canceled and finished because of COVID, we started taking things down right away for the Pageant. It was dismantle time. It was “go” time. Then, as it’s getting closer to June, and COVID was going [30:00] back a little bit, and things were going back to normal, people were like, “Oh, maybe they’ll change their mind and put Pageant back on,” and I just think to myself, “It’s gone! [laughs] It’s gone!” There were still some things up, but it was the point of no return. I had to have my FM [facilities maintenance] complex—again, that was behind the Hill Cumorah—emptied and out by June 14th, and we were one of the last to leave, so many of the other buildings were already down and destroyed by then. They gave us a little bit more time because we had so much stuff to move, all the stuff that supported Pageant, the buildings, and the tools, and the machinery, and that; we had to all move that out. But yeah, it was a little comical, you know, but it showed how much people loved Pageant, you know. “Oh, there it’s good, it’s better now. We can put Pageant on.” But it’s like no, it’s *gone*. [laughs]

19:17:02 **Justin Entwistle:** Yeah, again, that’s gotta—you never know how much you miss something till it’s gone, you know?

19:17:08 **John Rutkowski:** Oh, exactly, yeah. And again, like I said, people were so disappointed—so many people were so disappointed when it was announced [that] Pageant was coming to an end. But everybody looked so forward to the last year, and then, sadly, the last year had already happened, and, like I said, nobody knew it. So, I remember personally—I would be

at Pageant for many nights, you know, which made a really long day for me, starting at 7–7:30, and, you know, work until midnight. But usually by the end of the Pageant, I’m exhausted, and so, I didn’t go Saturday night. You know... I—you know—it’s—Pageant’s almost over. If anything’s gonna go wrong, if the toilets are gonna overflow, it can wait till Monday, you know? And, so... I didn’t go, and then, you know, I have to realize myself, it’s like, “Yep, I missed the last night of Pageant myself, but I was the facilities manager!” [laughs]

19:18:28 **Justin Entwistle:** So... Did you have a favorite part of the process? Like, was there something that stood out as like a... I don’t know; everybody has their preferences—

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

Justin Entwistle: Just as, like, your job? Did you have a favorite aspect of it?

19:18:45 **John Rutkowski:** Well, it was exciting. You know, it was exhausting, but it was also exciting. Again, you know I think and understand, too, that, I mean, people just come from all over to see the Pageant, to come to Palmyra and see the historic sites and see the Pageant, so, you know, I’ve had many friends in the Church that moved away, but they’d come back in July. So, not just for me, but for so many Church members, it was like a big family reunion or family gathering. You’d always run into somebody in the audience that you knew. So, that was always—that’s probably the thing that I would miss most is just, you know, running into old friends and old acquaintances, and that family atmosphere that was there.

It was always exciting to see how many people sacrificed their time. It’s easy when you’re working something like that to get a little frustrated with your long hours, with the things that get broke or go wrong, and then you realize, “Well, gee, everybody else is *volunteering*, and I’m getting *paid* [laughs] to do this.” So, yeah, it was just the excitement of watching people come and participate. The weather always made things memorable, whether it was too wet or too

dry. I'd always tell people I'll take too dry any day over too wet. They both have their problems and create issues, but when it's too much rain, it causes a lot of headaches for everybody. But yeah, my favorite—and the thing I'll miss the most—is just, [35:00] you know, the friendships that you get to catch up with and new ones that you would make. I worked very closely with most of the staff from Pageant, and you become good friends with them. And, like I said, just some cast members or volunteers, you just—you always run into somebody you know, and that.

19:21:19 **Adam Densman:** Yeah, that makes sense. So, I guess, kinda turning more towards what you do now, you mentioned how you're still pretty active within the Hill Cumorah property and working to make it more towards the sacred site that you were talking about earlier. How would you compare just, like, the number of hours you have to put in weekly now versus what you used to put in outside of Pageant season?

19:21:45 **John Rutkowski:** Sure. It's about the same, you know; just responsibilities change. When I first came to the Palmyra area, like I said, [at] the end of 2006, the responsibility of the facilities manager in Palmyra was to take care of everything the Church owned within the Palmyra area, so that included, obviously, the Pageant buildings, the missionary visitor centers, the historic sites, the Palmyra temple, the bishop's storehouse, the young women camp, the meeting houses, [and] the regular chapels. I had all that responsibility. As Pageant was going away, and the Church was shifting how they were going to have the meeting houses taken care of, my work responsibility shifted in that now I am a historic sites region manager. So, I'm still based here in Palmyra. I still take care of all the historic sites and the missionary visitor's centers in Palmyra and all of New York, but also we have historic sites in Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Ohio that I'm responsible for. So, you know, same amount of work hours; it's just—the big difference is, when Pageant was postponed that first year in 2020, I took a week off in July. I

never could take a week off in July [laughs], or June, probably, because we were getting ready for Pageant, and like I said, the total hours during those two weeks of Pageant were pretty intense. So, you know, *that* I don't do anymore, but still, I've got plenty of hours of work with my new responsibilities.

And again, you know, the project, the Hill Cumorah Rehabilitation Project is—takes a lot of my time. I'm involved with the project team, and I'm the one on the ground, so helping the contractors as needed with things and that, and the eyes for people out at headquarters who come out periodically to check on things. But, you know, I'm here on location, so [I] need to play a big part of that. But yeah, you know, like most jobs, you know, your responsibilities can change. And so, the Church gave me a new responsibility, and I love it. Like I said, the Palmyra historic sites are probably the number one attraction for Church members. And so, with my experience taking care of these sites, the Church felt very comfortable expanding my responsibilities to the four states, and so I visit those sites usually once a month, and I have staff there that run things day-to-day and that. But you know I have that full responsibility, and it still keeps me plenty busy—but again, I can take time off in July now. [laughs]

Adam Densman: Yeah, that's certainly nice.

19:25:19 **Justin Entwistle:** So, I got a... Do you guys use the same props? We had a small—we had to do a small little [photographic preservation] project on some of the costumes, and... But you guys use the same, like, props, costume, [and] towers like you had for the sites as well?

19:25:46 **John Rutkowski:** No, the sites don't have props like the Hill [40:00] Cumorah Pageant would. Sometimes, you know, the missionaries will dress in period clothes for special events and that. But, yeah, all of the costumes and wigs that were part of the Hill Cumorah Pageant cast, I believe a lot of that was donated locally to other theater groups and that, the materials and that.

I'm sure if you're interviewing some Pageant Presidency people, they would know better about that. But, you know, the Hill Cumorah Pageant itself, that was—those were big-time volunteer needs. I think there used to be three, four, maybe even more people that were involved with the costumes, and the fittings and the beards and the wigs and... You know, when I was in Pageant, I played—I portrayed Joseph of Joseph and Mary, in the birth of Christ, and so I had to get a fake beard put on every night and get my clothes fitted and all that. So... But—yeah, but as far as the props and that, there was the work crew. They would repair props or make new props. Every year was maybe a little bit different. But your directors had a vision of what they wanted to do, and they would do that. Did that answer your question?

19:27:27 **Justin Entwistle:** Yeah. Yeah no, I was wondering, 'cause they seemed in really good shape, and I was... So, I mean, obviously, you guys did a great job preserving. It looked really nice, and I figured—you know, [I] wonder if they still do anything with that, or...

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

Justin Entwistle: If you guys maybe plan on using different [props and costumes] in the future.

19:27:46 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah, we had washers and dryers in a lot of the buildings. So, if the costumes got wet in a performance, they would get washed and dried right away. And they bought really good material to make the costumes with. Some of the costumes did go out to the Church History Museum, out in Utah. I think some of the costumes even went to one of the Palmyra museums locally. But again, I can't answer that for sure because that was not my worry or responsibility. But things that I heard... But... I do remember hearing that, again, a lot of that went to the local theater groups, which, again, if I remember correctly, they were just thrilled because, with Covid coming on and budgets and not being able to perform anything, they weren't making money to buy materials for costumes, and this was a great help to them, and it...

You know, it's good for the Church and Pageant to know that what we were using and no longer needed could benefit someone else. But yeah, a lot of care went into designing and making and taking care of those costumes, for sure. Well, they had to be big and bright, you know, 'cause you're sitting so far away from what's going on, they had to be extra colorful and all that.

[laughs]

19:29:28 **Adam Densman:** Alright, well, I know Justin said you have something at 8, so we don't want to keep you for too much longer.

19:29:33 **John Rutkowski:** No, we're doing good.

19:29:34 **Adam Densman:** Justin, do you have any last questions before we go?

19:29:39 **Justin Entwistle:** No, I think I—that we did good here. No, no, it's interesting, 'cause I grew up going to church as well. I grew up—I [always?] went to a Christian church, though, but we did a lot as a church community. We didn't do anything that involved a whole—you know—tourism and everything, gathering, and—nothing to that scale. But, you know, we orchestrated things like—we had—I remember one of my favorite days was like a church clean-up day, where we kind of had fun. We had breakfast and stuff, and we would clean around, do some lawn work around the church, and inside and out, clean. You know, we'd have music going, or we have food, and, you know, we kind of mess around; we have, like, some lawn games like [unclear] ball and—

John Rutkowski: Mhmm.

Justin Entwistle: Whatnot. But—so, it's always fun to hear different community things that people do around certain facilities like churches and whatnot.

19:30:45 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah. And part of my Church ecclesiastical side has been working with the youth a lot, and I know, yeah, we always like to, you know—they like the Church

dances, they like the fun things, too, but service projects are usually the most memorable. When the Palmyra Temple, late 1990s, was getting ready for construction, I was still in Syracuse, and we brought a big youth group from the Syracuse area to help clear the grounds, you know, this one road, the access road that was being made, and it *poured*. It just—everybody was soaking wet, and so that—the idea was to do that for a couple hours, you know, and then go to one of the churches for a big dance and pizza and things like that, and these youth are older now, but I’ll see ’em once in a while, and nobody forgets that activity, you know? Because the weather [45:00] stunk; everybody was soaking wet; but by the end of the night, they had a great time and a great day and a great memory. So yeah, it’s important, and the Church recognizes that, with the Pageant going away, that did take a lot of service opportunities away from families, individuals, and groups, but the intent, again, wasn’t, “We’re just gonna take that away.” The intent and thought was, “Well, now, go do that for your neighbor. Go do that for your community.” You know, “Go do that at your friend’s house, or whatever, so... to continue serving and providing service to others, but just in a different way, now that the Pageant’s gone away.” But don’t say, “Oh, good, you know, there’s no more Pageant. I never have to park cars again or be security again,” you know [laughs], but... to go find other things to do to make the world a better place. So... Yeah.

Good. So, is this a one-time interview, you think, or is that your intent? You’re gonna talk to different people just for one night, or—?

19:33:08 **Justin Entwistle:** I think we all have interviews, and I think we’re all gonna be presenting these, I think, at some point as well.

John Rutkowski: Okay.

Justin Entwistle: I'm sure that we'll hear from more people. Like, we've had a couple of people—members of the Church—come and talk to the class as a whole.

19:33:28 **John Rutkowski:** Oh, okay.

19:33:29 **Justin Entwistle:** So, yeah. We've had multiple different opportunities to interact with different people from the Church. So—but, you know, if we have any questions, we won't hesitate to reach out to you, email you if we have any questions—

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

Justin Entwistle: About it, because this has been a very huge part of our class, so—

John Rutkowski: Hmm.

Justin Entwistle: It's definitely not far-fetched that we might [John laughs] have a question or two to ask, and...

John Rutkowski: Okay...

Justin Entwistle: So, yeah, [unclear]...

19:33:52 **John Rutkowski:** Excellent, excellent. My previous calling in the Church, right before the current one I'm in—I was the young single adult branch president in the Rochester area, and so we had a lot of students from RIT as part of our congregation. So, let's see, I think the one that's still there, R. J. Purcell [best guess], does that name ring a bell? No. Okay, I mean, RIT's—

19:34:22 **Adam Densman:** It's a big school, a lot of people.

19:34:25 **John Rutkowski:** I know, yeah. Yeah, but sometimes, you throw out a name and it sticks, you know? But...

19:34:31 **Justin Entwistle:** Yeah, my dad might. My dad works at RIT, so I... He might know some of the bigger names, like—

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

Justin Entwistle: More known people.

19:34:43 **John Rutkowski:** But no, that was a great responsibility that I had. We had Church attendance of about 50, 60 people every Sunday, all your age—you know, college kids, still practicing the faith, and doing 16 to 20 credit hours and working part-time, and still finding time to go to Church, so... [laughs]

19:35:08 **Justin Entwistle:** Yeah. And I can see that could go well with—I don't know—I think that that would—that would count as, like, a co-op right? Because it doesn't have to be, like, a... so people could be used—you know—that'd be a nice way to do it.

19:35:19 **Adam Densman:** I think it would depend. Because I think usually co-ops have to be paid.

19:35:27 **John Rutkowski:** *Oh*, yeah, yeah.

19:35:30 **Justin Entwistle:** Do they? I don't know.

Adam Densman: Yeah, I'm not sure.

Justin Entwistle: They might have to? Yeah, me neither. I also have to start looking into a co-op soon, too.

John Rutkowski: Yeah.

[laughter; indistinct]

Justin Entwistle: So...

John Rutkowski: Well, awesome.

Justin Entwistle: I enjoyed this; it was nice.

Adam Densman: Yeah, [unclear].

Justin Entwistle: I'm going to have to hang on here for a minute to figure out what I gotta do [John laughs], because we have to get the recording file, then we have to get the [50:00] transcription, and, over the course of the next week or two—when is it due? Like, two weeks? The transcription part?

19:36:00 **Adam Densman:** Yeah, we got time.

19:35:02 **Justin Entwistle:** Yeah. We can go through it. I'm hoping it [Zoom] gives it to us! Because I really don't feel like copying every word for it [unclear].

[John laughs]

19:36:08 **Adam Densman:** You can stop the recording.

Justin Entwistle: Okay, yeah.

Adam Densman: Alright, well, like we said earlier, we do appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

[Zoom transcribed, but did not record, the following dialogue.]

19:36:18 **John Rutkowski:** Yeah, well, it was a pleasure. And like I said, I enjoy working with college-age youth, or young men, young women, and so, glad I could help. And when I saw RIT was part of it, like I said, I—you know, my heart's with it. A little bit from my experience with that, and I think what you're doing is great. And hopefully, you're learning some good stuff, too. And you'll get an A for it. It's pretty great. Yeah, good, all right well, yeah, you feel free to reach out if something didn't record right or transcript [sic], right? Or you got any other questions, and happy to help you out.

Dublin Core Metadata for the Interview

Title: Interview with John Rutkowski, Facilities Manager, Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Subject: Hill Cumorah Pageant; Palmyra, New York; Pageant; Facilities; Rehabilitation

Description: John Rutkowski is the current facilities manager for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and held this position for many years while the Hill Cumorah Pageant was being held on these grounds. During our interview, he discussed with us some of the manpower and equipment needed not only to set up and dismantle the Pageant each year, but also to care for the facilities and grounds year-round. We spoke at length about the end of the Pageant, his perspective on why the Church decided to end it, and his part in that process. He also shared with us his current role in the Hill Cumorah Rehabilitation Project and his role in that.

Creator: John Rutkowski, Adam Densman, and Justin Entwistle

Source: Hill Cumorah Legacy Project

Date: Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Contributor: Adam Densman and Justin Entwistle

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