

**Interview with Corky Moss (Edited)**  
Founder of Oktoberfest

**Interviewer:** Leslie Hagerty (LH)

**Interviewer:** Alexis Thomas (AT)

**Interviewee:** Corky Moss (CM)

**LH:** Well who's idea was it to start Oktoberfest?

**CM:** When I first came here we were encouraged by Bruce Rochester to get involved in community affairs and join community clubs service clubs which I did. Uh the first was in a community club with him and uh I was wondering where was Chamber of Commerce office was and he said well its not active anymore. And I said are you kidding me, I said why don't we have a chamber of commerce. He said well it kinda went by the wayside. I said well we need to restart that. So that's the first thing I did. I was also the (phone rings) any way I restarted the Chamber as the President and we were very busy that first year so the following year we were trying to decide on projects and um we thought me particularly since we were a German town founded by the German Colonization Society that it would be good to some sort of German event and then we were trying to think why do we need one and mainly it was to promote tourism for the area and bring people in to see us and visit because this us and visit because this and always has been sorta the gateway to the North Carolina mountains but we needed to give people a reason to stop.

**LH:** Right

**CM:** And giving birth to the Oktoberfest was sorta like having a baby. It was a WHOLE lot of work and I had my Directors and I going all over the Southeast to look at festivals everywhere and we knew about the little town over in Georgia that has Oktoberfest and is a German town. We didn't want Walhalla to be another German town like that which is strictly devoted to tourism but we wanted to celebrate our heritage and being a Lutheran where most of our German settlers built that church to start with we thought it would be good to celebrate our heritage. I'm not German, I'm Scotch-Irish and Indian a little bit so but we had a strong Irish history here too for the railroad as well.

**LH:** Definitely

**LH:** So what were those earliest ones like, other than the near beer year?

**CM:** Well it was that was just you asked me what some of the biggest problems we had we wanted to have, and i left a 5 year plan when I quit directing it, we wanted to have arts and crafts and games for the children and rides for the children and something that the community could get behind i.e. the churches, and the ladies groups, so um German food was a big bonus and plus and we had a lot of churches doing everything from cakes to German food and they

still do. Um we tried to start a juried arts and crafts to begin with and it was sorta a hit and miss we had really great artists and craftsmen there and what we wanted to do and did do for the first four or five years was have really great artists and craftsmen coming from all over practicing their art on the field because that's very interesting to watch a potter throwing pots or somebody caning chairs or making glass or any of a number of things. It's also interesting if you're just a spectator to watch and people enjoyed that and then we had because of Helen Georgia the little town I mentioned they had balloon races every year but they could only have one every five years because the wind and weather kept them from being able to race the balloons that much. But we got in touch with some balloonists. Greenville, SC had some balloon races as well at Donaldson Air Force base and they were very popular so we talked to some of the festival people there and at Helen and got some names of balloonists and we found some that actually lived in Atlanta and around and we got some who would agree to come up to Oktoberfest and do tethered balloon rides which is you get in the balloon, go up a couple hundred feet and get pulled back down, not free riding. Although we did as directors get to do some free riding and it was wonderful but we were worried about the liability of giving free floating rides so we kept them as tethered rides and they were very popular. And we also had, being a Clemson man, and knowing that we had people who did jump out of airplanes over there and we got some of our guys from Clemson to come over every year and do free fall demonstrations and land right there on the field on targets and they hardly ever missed more than a foot or so but it was nice to watch them come. And we also had to contend with things like football games, Clemson football games, we had decided early to always make Oktoberfest the 3rd weekend of October. Sometimes we had wonderful weather, sometimes we had rain, snow, sleet, just all sorts of different things but it stayed steadily the 3rd weekend in October.

**LH:** Were there any major challenges with that? I'm sure there were

**CM:** OH YEAH.

**(Laughter)**

**CM:** Well yeah we didn't since Oktoberfest is German and German's drink beer we didn't anticipate some of the local reaction in having beer at Oktoberfest and the very first year we had a congregation of ministers protesting Oktoberfest and of course we had to answer all of those objections, putting it mildly, but long story short the very first year we had Near Beer. I don't know if you've ever tasted Near Beer but it's almost like one of the worst things you can swallow.

**(Laughter)**

**LH:** Yes

**CM:** It doesn't resemble beer in any shape or form but um the next year I don't know if I really want to get into this but the next year I agreed to have a debate with one of the strongest objectors ministerial wise to Oktoberfest on the radio and of course Miss Dorothy Friend was a

friend of mine, she owned the radio station and I told em yeah I'd do a debate with him since I was a debater in college and my uncle was the probate judge here had been forever.

**(11:10)**

**LH:** Ok do you mind

**CM:** Judge Ballenger

**LH:** Do you mind telling us who the debatee was?

**CM:** I'd rather not but he was a Baptist minister in one of the largest Baptist churches.

**LH:** Ok

**CM:** And he was a friend of my uncle the Probate Judge J.W. Ballenger

**LH:** Yeah did that? Go ahead.

**CM:** And JW told him that you really didn't want to debate him but it was adamant that he did so we went to the debate and as we started and were being introduced on the radio I said you know I understand that you have a strong objection to this but I don't understand why. You know we already have beer halls and we sell beer at the grocery stores and it is readily available and whatever we would have down there on the field would be under one tent and it would be with German bands and music and would be carefully patrolled by the police and people could not drink it out from under the tent spread out all over the field so you know anybody buying beer there would show would have to show that they were of age. And I said but I'm here to debate you but I got one question. And he said "What's that?" I said if you can explain to me the difference between taking bus loads of youth and children down to Atlanta to ball games routinely during the year where beer is sold all over the stadium if you can explain to me why you don't object to that and you do object to us having beer at one place and charging a high premium price for the beer so people are not going to come there just to get drunk then we'll just not have beer. He got up and walked out.

**(Laughter)**

**(13:11)**

**CM:** And that was the end of the debate.

**LH:** That's a good point. So did that just kinda put things to rest for a while or?

**CM:** No. We still had rumbling about it but we were very careful that we did monitor you know what we were doing and if any body would have had too much to drink the community club that

ran that was instructed to cut them off and be polite about it and if anybody had too much to drink they were escorted nicely away from Oktoberfest. People quickly learned that we were not going to be a drunken beer hall.