My name is Abe Voelker, interviewing Bob Niemela 3/27/96

AV:  Bob can you tell me where you are from?

BN:  Calumet

AV:  What kind of educational background do you have?

BN:  High school and training through IBM

AV:  When did you first come to Northern

BN;  1969

AV:  Wy did you come here, what position were they offering at the time.

BN:  They were not offering a position at the time.

AV:  Who was your boss at the time?

RN:  Dave Johnson

AV:  Was the computer center in existence at the time.

RN:  Definitely

AV:  Where was it located?

RN:  Longyear, the basement of Longyear

AV:  What was it's primary function?

RN:  Payroll and accounting, and some student record stuff.

AV:  What type of equipment did they use?

RN:  ? 1 computer, CAD equipment that is our student record equipment.  The 487,519,548 interpreter, the 85 collator, 83 solar a 519 punch in interpreter, and a 1401 computer.

AV:  Were these all IBM machines?

RN:  All IBM machines, ? ? our unit record, in those days everything was done by cards, keypunch I mean.

AV:  (couldn't understand this question) this was in 19..

RN:  1969

AV:  So they were just used for call people,

RN:  Calling, role, and student records, all the registration and stuff was on a card.

AV: Is it possible to highlight some of the changes the center has undergone? Hardware and some of the different responsibilities that has taken over since you have been here.

RN: Responsibilities are pretty much the same as they have always been. That we run payroll, and accounting, take care of student records do services for the students. The only thing that has changed is equipment as far as computers is concerned. We have gone from a 1401 to the 360 generation, 370 generation the 4300 generation and now we are up to the 9000 generation. The new CPU 9162 are being installed probably this weekend. That will be the server CPU, that is going to be current technology.

AV: So the computer center today does everything it used to 30 years ago.

RN: everything it did 30 years ago plus supply networking for students and staff and the Upper Peninsula.

AV: The Upper Peninsula.

RN: Because we service all the library's in the Upper Peninsula, we network all the libraries together and some of the school districts are net worked in also. So although

AV: All through the computer center.

RN: yes through the computer center, right.

AV: How many are employed there?

RN: Right now we are at about 19 employees.

AV: Okay, and what is your current position?

RN: Senior computer operator.

AV: And what does that entail?

RN: I am the lead operator in the room.

AV: So your the boss.

RN: yes sort of

AV: The does everybody else do just programmers?

RN: The programmers do programming for the system. They have software packages come in such as, I don't have the software package called "IA" that is the company that supplies it, part of the crew takes care of the financial resources, we have a couple programs working on human resources, which controls the payroll system, we have a couple of programmers working on the student records, which is the SYS system, we have programmers working on

the Alumni system, so everybody has something out there, there is more work than entertainment.

AV:  They are on 24 hour shifts.

RN:  We are on 5 days a week, and programmers work an 8 hour shift everyday, supposedly, when there is extra things for them to do, special runs, or special runs then the programmers put in extra time.  even some weekends.

AV:  I understand this Robert Ikala? the original

RN:  He was the original director.

AV:  Original director of the computer center, which opened in '63

RN:  '63 yes

AV:  I was wondering if maybe there was a certain person or party, a president or a dean that pushed for the ? computer equipment or was is just kind of a ?

RN: No ah well a University thing, I think Harry Rajala, he worked in registrar at the time, he was encouraging Bob Ikala to get involved in the computer business, I believe, and he was doing key punching originally that is how it all started out.  And it grew from there then.  He hired a key punch operator finally and started hiring more people to do programming and stuff like that.  Got some more equipment, mainly the registrar area.  And Vice President for business and finance pretty much supported that, because they knew this was going to change.

AV: So the Universities around Michigan about that time were

RN:  Just beginning or interested in it. right.

AV:  Do you feel that we kept pace with the rest of the ?

RN:  Sometimes we were ahead of other Universities and sometimes they were ahead of us, but we kept pretty much pace with other Universities. Right now they are slightly ahead of us because they have telephone registration and stuff like that.  But we are moving in the same direction and won't be long and our students will be doing the same thing. As far as test storing and student record keeping and stuff like that it is the same.  The CPU that is going in this weekend is state of the art it is brand new.  It was just built two months ago.

AV: So who, someone must be responsible for looking at all the new things.

RN:  Dave Maki is our systems programmer, senior systems programmer, and Dave Maki is in charge of getting all these things we need, and he can foresee what is coming and he has good

connections with IBM naturally. He goes to a lot of meetings and schools and things like that. And he finds out what is going on. and he is the guy that is instrumental in ordering equipment. And ? ? ? ?.

AV:   How about as far as the funds for this project.

RN:   Dave Richer and Mathews is pretty good at that, they can talk with the Vice President of Business and Finance and they between the two of them they work out they can get the money, and there are ways of showing savings as far as changing equipment you may think that updating from one CPU to another one is an expense but in a long run is a decrease in funding for the computer center.

AV:   It is more efficient

RN:   it is more efficient, and maintenance contract on them is a lot less.  Actually they save money by upgrading, it doesn't seem that way but it is.

AV: When did we first hook up to the Internet?

RN:   The first thing was called BitNet and Michigan Tech had Internet started and we kind of connected through Michigan Tech for awhile, so I would say it is about 5 years old.

AV:   So it is relatively new then.

RN:   Relatively new yes.

AV:   Have you run into any particular problems in the computer center today, things have run relatively smoothly.

RN:   Very smoothly,

AV:   Are you going to see any changes made.

RN:   No it is run pretty good the way it is.  We like to involve students as far as student operators are concerned and we like it the way it is.  And we like, we work with a lot of students, doing registration and things like that, it makes it interesting nice to work.

AV:   The academic side of the computer system, campus systems, is pretty much separate from you do here.

RN:   They are to a point, that is far as getting like learning how to CICS and stuff like that, software packages, it pretty much comes through the computer center.  And Dave Maki is again kind of instrumental in getting making sure all the hubs are working for networks out there and stuff like that.  He pretty much the big guy to get that thing working so, when you log on to the internet across campus your getting on without any trouble.  He is pretty in charge of that.  Dave Maki started out as a student operator out

here.  About I would say 10-15 years ago.  From student operator he became the assistants printers, when Mr. Ikala he was given the director.

AV:    Well besides other systems that is going in Saturday, any other big plans that you see in the future.

RN:  Not right now, I don't see any major changes, you know just minor changes, as far as whenever new technology comes along.

AV:  Any problems with the location of the station.

RN:  No, no problems, our equipment is getting smaller so our space is getting a little easier, not real ?.

AV:  Even there is more people here than the beginning and there is the equipment can do more. It takes up a lot.

RN:  It takes up a lot less space.

AV:  This building in?

RN:  In 1975 right.

AV:  Thank you very much

RN:  Your welcome.