

**Western Folklife Center  
America Works Project**

**Interview Log**

**Mary Korpi**  
**interviewed by Charlie Seemann & Meg Glaser**  
**at Elko, Nevada, October 3, 2011**

*Log prepared by Steve Green*  
*Digital Audio File: AW111003-Korpi.wav*

*Note: Charlie Seemann is Executive Director of the Western Folklife Center; Meg Glaser is Artistic Director at the Western Folklife Center; Steve Green is Archivist at the Western Folklife Center. Interview was conducted at the Western Folklife Center.*

*Note: Time stamps are approximate, as generated by the logging software (Transcriba).*

**00:10. Slate and introductory remarks.**

Charlie Seemann asks what jobs she has had.

**00:45. Mary Korpi tells how she got started in mining career.**

Began working for Newmont near Tucson, Arizona when she got out of college in 1976. Worked 11 years in Arizona and almost 25 years in Nevada. First job was as a quality control inspector. Finished product was copper rod that was eventually turned into copper wire for homes—had to run a series of tests on it.

**01:20. How long did she do that before moving on?**

About a year. It was good exposure. She was in “Operations,” getting to know the process and interacting with a variety of people. She went on to a variety of other jobs.

**01:42. What were some of her other jobs between then and now?**

Quite a few. Some were more technical since she has an engineering degree. Worked as a metallurgist in Operations, was a lab manager, worked with customers on the quality of the product, spent time in Health and Safety, ran that department for awhile, then had opportunity to go into Operations for a few years, a nice transition, nice time. Then ended up in this job. She has basically changed jobs within the company—has not needed to change company to change jobs. It's worked out well.

**02:29. What is the nature of her job now?**

She is Director of External Relations. Responsible for communications, community development, community involvement, media interactions, local government relations—a combination of things.

**02:50. How did she drift into that niche?**

General Manager called her into his office and said "Would you like to try this for a change?" She was totally surprised by the offer, thought about it very briefly—one of her mottoes is "Never say 'no' to an opportunity whether you know anything about it or not." She went for it, and she has been doing this for over 12 years now.

**03:20. Does she like it?**

Yes, it's evolved a lot. The business has changed internally with the company, also the world has evolved. There are expectations of stronger relationships with your community, local government, more communications so people know what [the company] is doing, also so the company knows what's going on externally. It's a two way street.

**03:53. How has the job changed working in Communications?**

Social media has had an impact. [Newmont is] doing work at the corporate level that will trickle down to the regional level regarding social media. Many people that have been in the industry a long time are not going to be around in the next 5 or 10 years. The people replacing [outgoing employees] do things differently, look for information differently, so the company has to step up its game in the social media end of it. The relationship portion is important. It allows you to build understanding, credibility and trust. But you can't forget about picking up the phone, or having coffee with somebody, whatever is needed.

**04:53. Does her job with External Communications apply to just the region?**

The responsibility is for North America but the majority of operations are in Nevada. They [Newmont] have a project in the Arctic. She had an opportunity to go up there. They don't really have full responsibility for that yet. If it evolves into an "operation" [her department] will be responsible for that part of the business. Then, there is a joint venture in Mexico, but they [Newmont] are not the operators. The Mexican company they partner with actually is the operator, so her department doesn't have that much to do with that group.

**05:39. Newmont is a Canadian owned company that operates in North America and worldwide?**

It is actually a U.S. based company, 90 years old in May [2011]. The founder grew up in Montana, made his money in New York—that's where "Newmont" came from. He took the "new" and the "mont" [and put them together to create the company name.] Newmont has been on the stock exchange—15th longest listed. The company has a long, long history.

**06:20. Does she remember her first day of work back in Arizona?**

She graduated from college, got married a month later. She and her husband moved from Michigan to Arizona and she started her "first real job." She did not grow up in a mining environment. Her husband at the time had mining background so they ended up in mining. She remembers safety orientation that first week—it's always safety the first week—then went to her boss and they told her she was going on shift work. Another new aspect of entering the mining life was exposure to rotating shifts. She was not used to that. Her parents were in education. She remembers saying "Wow, nobody told me about this." Within the first week, she was on rotations and thrown into something totally different than she had been hired for. Someone had gotten sick, a vacancy arose, they needed to put someone in that spot. A good place to start.

**07:28. Different shifts around the clock must have been a shock to the system.**

Yes, but she was young so it was easier to get used to it. 8-hour rotations. You adapt.

**07:51. Was she thinking about going into mining when she got her engineering degree?**

Her degree is in chemical engineering. At the time, she wasn't quite sure where she was going to go. When she decided to marry a metallurgical engineer, mining became the focus. Newmont was operating copper mines in Arizona at the time, so she and her husband thought they'd go there for a year or two, then go back home. 35 years later, she is still in the west. Doesn't think she'll ever leave.

**08:37. Describe her place of work?**

She works in the North American regional office [a two-year old building in Elko]. Most of their focus is on the Nevada operations. Nice to have an office with a lot of the people she interacts with. She has opportunity to travel quite a bit. Important to keep connection with the sites—they are the ones that make the gold and ultimately make the business prosperous. She [and her colleagues] try to get to the operations on some kind of a regular basis, make sure you know what's going on. Keep the communication going.

**09:25. How many people work in the regional office building?**

About 150—support services, accounting, materials management, employment, some of the environmental and social side, also, the senior managers for the region.

**09:46. Was new building [in Elko] tied to expansion of gold mining in the area?**

Partly, but more because a lot of technology and aspects like payroll and accounting did not need to be at the mine sites. Bringing people together in one location is more efficient. A lot of those people didn't need to be on the road driving to the mines—it helped eliminate travel. Now, if you have an IT question, you just go downstairs. At the mine site, people were fairly spread out. Efficiency improvements resulted from the building.

**10:42. Are younger people coming in at the entry level in those different jobs?**

The job market in mining right now is pretty crazy. It's a good area for people to look at. [A new hire class might have more than 35 people in it]. All age brackets because they have many different jobs available. There are professional jobs for engineers, IT techs, accountants. Also, a lot of truck driving—always looking for trade skills: maintenance, electrical, underground miners. Lots of different opportunities for people.

**11:23. It's a bright spot in the economic job picture nationwide?**

Yes. When you look at hard rock and coal, sand, gravel aggregate, they're suffering a little because the construction industries have slowed down some. [Gold mining] is an area to look at if somebody is looking for a job and have skills that might apply.

**11:57. It is attracting people from all over the world?**

They have engineers from all parts of the world. They have operations around the world, on all continents, so some people have transferred. It's interesting if you go into some of those technical areas because you'll encounter a diversity of people and languages.

**12:23. Can she walk us through a typical day?**

[Laughs] She doesn't think there is such a thing. Internally and externally, there are always meetings, that's part of the job, the ability to communicate. There's a lot of strategic planning going on now because the industry is very prosperous and they have a huge growth strategy in front of them. Over the next 5 years, a lot of work to do, a lot of challenges to address. A lot of time is spent on how to achieve that growth, planning resources, people, equipment. When you buy mining equipment, you can't buy it off the shelf—delivery times might be in excess of two years. So you have to put that into place, "How are we going to get there?"

**13:35. In External Communications, things probably pop up everyday you didn't plan for?**

They do. There were fires around northern Nevada this weekend, many bordered right up into [Newmont] operations so a lot of activity centered around protecting people and infrastructure. That involved a lot of internal and external communications.

**14:05. Mines have a limited lifetime of productivity. Newmont must have given thought to**

**what they leave with the community—what's next and what's left behind?**

As she always says, "What's the legacy?" What do you want to leave behind so people 100 years from now say "Look what was here." It's important. We've all been to areas where it hasn't been thought about much. They joke in the company—they started operations in Nevada (1965) with a [projected] 10-year life. They shut that particular operation down in 1993, so it was almost a 30-year life. It doesn't make economic sense to go out and totally drill out a deposit, you're always exploring, and technology changes so much. They may say they have another 15-20 years, but that always continues to add on. So they are not quite sure when the end actually will be. In planning for the future, they know there will be changes in the community, and those need to be addressed. Last year, they revamped their "community investment" program. One portion of it has an endowment fund. Employees can put in and the company will match and there won't be withdrawals until there's no longer mining in this area. Haven't yet determined criteria for utilizing those funds, but ideally, if Newmont is in the area another 45 years, that money will continue to grow, and can keep us healthy here in rural Nevada. The other thing they are spending time on is what's left behind after operations. A lot of operations have infrastructure—power, water—so potentially other industries could come in and keep jobs available. Lots of different thoughts and efforts toward the future.

**16:30. What are the significant changes in technology since the old days?**

The size of equipment. The first ore hauling trucks were about a 35-ton truck. Now you see 300-400 ton trucks. The magnitude of scale of operations allows you to be more efficient because you're moving larger quantities of material. The amount of gold in the ore on the surface is very low grade, but underground it gets to be higher grade. Newmont went to underground operations in the 1990s. That process is very different than the one used for ore that doesn't contain as much gold. There have been changes in scale, technology changes, computerization. The haul trucks have computers in them. They are told where they need to pick up the rock, and where it should be delivered. Automation in so many different areas. Processing is controlled by computer rooms. You still need people to go out and visually check on things but it's a lot more automated than it used to be.

**18:06. Newmont has a lot of IT and computer people on staff?**

In some ways, everyone is an IT person. A lot of training goes on to all levels of the employment base.

**18:31. What does she like about the job she's had for the last 12 years?**

The diversity of the job. It's not a strict schedule. Some days there's a lot going on but there's constant diversity and that's something she likes. She appreciates the people she works with, the management staff, because they have a lot of confidence in her so she can do her job and get it done. She likes and appreciates that.

**19:11. Anything she'd like to change about it?**

There's not a lot she would like to change. One thing that makes the job a little difficult—the industry has risks associated with it. Sometimes there are serious incidents that may impact people. Those are the tough days—when you maybe have to deal with someone who may be injured. Those are things you don't like to see happen and you do everything in your power to make sure those "don't have any repeats."

**20:01. What was her favorite and most meaningful job?**

She's had many, sometimes has stepped back and said "I never really had one I didn't like." There's tasks, there's projects that you don't get too excited about, maybe they don't challenge you, but you get through them. From a meaningful standpoint, when they've gone through periods

of growth, with more people coming on board, more opportunity there, changes in the organization—she's found that even though those are the most stressful times, they are also the most exciting because there's so much going on. It doesn't matter what your role or responsibility is during those growth periods, you're part of it. You might be in Safety trying to deal with things, or Operations trying to expand your area—how do you communicate it, how do you prepare for it—that's when juices get flowing because there's non-stop momentum.

**21:24. What would be her dream job?**

It's a great job. She has never regretted accepting this job.

**21:49. She's been with Newmont for 35 years. Looking down the road [will she stay?]**

That's the "million dollar question!" [Laughs]. You work all your life but you have to realize there comes a point when you step back and say maybe new blood will do things a little differently. Also maybe step back and enjoy some of those other things you haven't had time to do. [Retirement?] is probably a few years [away] "but not too many."

**22:36. Does she think she'd stay in this area [northern Nevada]?**

We [she and her husband] like northern Nevada. They have a home and land here, also a winter place in Arizona where it's warmer. She's not real fond of cold even though she grew up in Michigan. They are "seriously looking," thinks they will stay in Nevada. Many good friends and experiences, love the land and open space.

**23:24. Where is her place in Arizona?**

Just outside Tucson.

**23:40. Will members of her family or community will go into the same kind of work?**

Because the business has a real future, if the economics stay the same for mining, there will be a "ton of opportunity." When [gold] prices are up it's time to reinvest back into the business. You [the mine company] are doing more exploration, planning for the longer term. She thinks there will be a lot of opportunity for people in the mining industry in northern Nevada. They don't have control over the price of gold and that is one dynamic that influences what happens. Right now, there's definitely a future for a range of jobs.

**24:36. Does Newmont have economists on staff?**

In the region Newmont has a Group Executive of Business who oversees the business aspect. The Corporation deals with longer term finances for projects. As a global company, they're in competition with their other regions regarding where is the best investment of dollars for the company, it may not be North America, so you work as a region to know exactly what the costs and benefits are. They joke about if they could accurately predict the gold price, they probably wouldn't be working here because they would have made their money years ago. The company stays bullish on the price of gold. They expect it to stay there for awhile.

**25:55. Has she done a lot of traveling given that the company is global in scope?**

26:04. She's only been to the Newmont operation in New Zealand. Interesting because the mine itself is in the center of town. Something like what you might see at Butte [Montana] but on a much smaller scale. She had opportunity to go up to the Arctic Circle to a project back in August. It was exciting to see what has been done there and what it might become. She has not been to Ghana or South America or Indonesia.

**26:45. What advice would she give to someone starting out in her field or job?**

Just don't ever say no. "No, I don't want to do that, or no, I can't do that." Because you just don't

know what it's going to lead to. Give it a shot—that's the best advice anybody could have. Just go for it.

**27:25. Women in mining. Meg Glaser is seeing more and more women in External Communications as voices for companies. Are there special skills women have that they bring to that job?**

She was lucky when she started—it was on the technical side—the head of her department was a woman. This was 35 years ago. She'd been in the business for 15 years. It wasn't so much the novelty of a woman—she set a good example, was a good mentor, "we're all in this together," so she [Mary] never felt any discrimination—sometimes you were the only woman in the room or at the discussion, but it worked really well. As she became a superintendent in Operations, she told herself "don't pretend to know something you don't know." They had a lot of older people in Operations—she went to them early on and said "Hey, if something happens will you call me?" Her mechanic would call her every Saturday morning and give her an update. She tried not to pretend to know more than she knew. It set the stage for each job as she progressed. She agrees there are more women in the industry right now, both in technical fields on the operations side—engineers, chief metallurgists, etc. The communications end of things has a higher percentage of women, probably because many have gone into that field in college. There are still not that many women in engineering percentage-wise. Right now, the Vice President for Business is a woman. She transferred from Denver earlier this year. She comes from banking so she has strong financial [lean?]. There's more and more of that. Maybe [women] "have some of those skills that are just inately there that are easier for us to outreach to people or to interact with people than maybe some of the men." It doesn't matter what gender—you make it work.

**31:18. What does she think is important about mining that people should know?**

One thing people don't relate to is how different their lives would be if it wasn't for mining. As we become more technical, people take [things] for granted—a teacher told a child that we get electricity by plugging a cord into the wall. People don't understand where all that comes from. The demand for minerals and metals is only going to increase as developing countries demand what we take for granted. [Mining] is part of what makes our life good, and [it's] important to understand how it's done. You hear more of the negatives than the benefits of it. She thinks people should take advantage of the opportunity to tour a mine, find out how it all happens. "We would not be in the world we are in if it was not for the minerals and the metals that come out of the ground."

**33:27. Anything else she would like to add?**

She appreciates the opportunity to talk about her work.

**33:50. Closing remarks and thanks.**

She thinks it would be interesting to interview somebody who has been in Operations to get their history and perspective because they have seen so many changes.

**34:18. What is meant by "Operations?"**

She's thinking of someone who's worked in the mine and driven a truck for years... If you are looking for a perspective of what's changed historically from a people standpoint, the guys out in the field, they experience [mining] at all different levels.

**35:16. Charlie Seemann—It's important to do these interviews with people at all different levels within the industry to get as broad a picture as possible.**

**35:27. End of Interview**