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*Max Delsignore:* Northern New York Community Podcast. Stories from the heart of our community.

*Max Delsignore:* We're back with another edition of the podcast. Thanks again for listening to another inspiring community story. I'm your host, Max DelSignore, and today's guest was a lawyer, district attorney, and county court judge during his lifetime in Northern New York. And this person also devoted his life to helping the community whenever he was asked. He played an instrumental role in establishing a couple local net profits, helped generate support for the area agencies, and has been a long-time advocate for several community causes. Lee Clary's here to talk about his time in North Country, the role of being the county's district attorney and court judge, and how philanthropy played a role in his involvement and love for the area. Lee, we appreciate you coming on the podcast.

*Lee Clary:* Pleased to be here.

*Max Delsignore:* Being a district attorney and county court judge seemingly comes with a lot of pressure, I would think. You experienced great success, though, in both positions. What would you say were just the factors behind responsibly handling each of those roles?

*Lee Clary:* Well, there are pressures; there's no getting around that. When I became DA in 1977, I was the person who did the present -- presentments of the grand jury and developed the felony trials because there was myself and two assistants, both of -- there were three assistants, actually. It was busy. We had a lot of interesting cases and a lot of work to do. The pressure of being district attorney, especially if you're doing the felony trials, is pretty substantial -- I think, much more than being county court judge -- because you have to -- the preparation that goes into trying, lots of it is significant, and being the judge, you're kind of the referee in a sense during the trial, and then you're -- obviously, if there's a conviction. It's a very important role in sentencing, making sure it's a fair and just sentence, so -- yeah, there are pressures.

*Max Delsignore:* Can you share a little insight into just that preparation piece? You know, you mentioned being a DA, there's a lot of time that has to go into how you kind of look at the case, how you -- how you go about that. What were some of the keys you thought to make your -- make sure you were prepared for each of those cases?

*Lee Clary:* Well, that's the key to it for being either a district attorney or a -- or a defense attorney, any lawyer that tries cases, is preparation. A person who's best prepared has a big advantage, especially if his

opposition is not as well prepared, because -- yeah, so we have to look at the file, review it, talk to the witnesses, make sure that they're obviously available and they're on board as far as being willing to come in and testify, and then you're trying to look at what's the opposition going to -- going to present? What types of witnesses? Cross-examination, you prepare for that right before the trial starts.

So, there's a -- there's a lot of time involved in that. And if you're in a trial, in a lawsuit, and you're the district attorney, you also have other responsibilities during the day, so -- but you're obligated to be in front of the county court judge from, say, 9:30 until 5 with a break for lunch, so you have to do a lot of work before and a lot of work after. Nights are -- especially when you get down to the nitty-gritty in a trial, or even in the beginning, whenever something comes up, it needs some work. That's when you have to do the preparation work. Weekends. It's a -- it's a very, very time-consuming and interesting -- and for a trial -- for a person who wants to be a trial lawyer, and I always wanted to be one -- I don't know why; it's crazy because it's -- it is pressure-packed, but it's where the action is, where the excitement is, where the human interest, the stories are told in criminal court cases. So, I enjoyed it very much.

*Max Delsignore:* Well, and you're not a native of the area, too. It took some time before you came to Northern New York.

*Lee Clary:* Right.

*Max Delsignore:* Where did you grow up originally, and what was life like growing up for you as a kid?

*Lee Clary:* I really grew up in Syracuse, although I was born in Geneva, but I'd spent most of my growing up years from, like, third or fourth grade until I graduated from high -- from law school in Syracuse, with the exception of one year that I -- that I worked down in Manhattan for about eight months. So, I grew up. I was -- my -- I'm from a single family -- single-parent family. My mother and my father split up a couple of times when I was really young, and then from the third grade on -- so when I was about nine or ten, somewhere in there -- we were raised by my mother with my grandfather and grandmother's help in Syracuse. We lived with them, my two sisters, and brother, and I.

So, it was interesting. It was interesting. I guess we were poor, but we never knew it. Nobody thought that they were deprived or

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anything, and we had a great, you know, childhood, and, you know, so high school programs and everything. We were -- we were fine and dandy.

*Max Delsignore:* And your wife, Shirley [0:05:36], didn't live too far away from where you grew up. Is that correct?

*Lee Clary:* Well, when we -- yes, moved to -- 1960, we moved up to Roberts Avenue in Syracuse, and my -- we were on Robertson Cross at -- my wife was on Robertson Grandview, about three fairly short blocks away. So, it was a walking courtship, and then was pretty cool. [Laughter]

*Max Delsignore:* Now, for law school, where did the interest for pursuing that career come from, and do you remember how old you were when you started thinking, "This is the route I want to take?"

*Lee Clary:* Oh, yeah. I was about 22, I think, [Laughter] really, when I started seriously to consider law, because I had -- I had gone -- I was in a seminary, studying to be a priest for four-and-a-half years, and I had -- did obtain a bachelor's degree there, but as you can imagine, with a bachelor's degree with a major in philosophy and a minor in Latin, employable? Mm.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* Not so much. I did -- I had so many interviews when I dropped out of the seminary, federal and state civil service jobs, and it was tough. And then I got the job in New York City. Worked down there for eight months, and it was at that point during my eight months there that I -- because there were a couple of guys that were going to night school, law school, and were working in that same office; it wasn't a huge office, by any means. And I kind of got some inspiration from them, but I did not want to go to night school for four years in New York City and work fulltime. That was just -- that was just too much. So, then I decided to come back home to Syracuse, and I went to Syracuse Law School, lived with my mom and my siblings.

*Max Delsignore:* The difference between being in the seminary, practicing to become a priest, and then pursuing law seems to be the academy there. [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* Yeah.

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*Max Delsignore:* What did -- what did some of the education you received from your time in the seminary -- how did that help prepare you for law school and becoming a lawyer?

*Lee Clary:* Well, you had -- you had a course in ethics, and that's -- when you're a lawyer, you're bound by a significant canon of ethics, and, you know, there's a lot of similarities in there. It was good discipline. We got up at 5:15, and the major seminaries went to bed about 20 to 10. There was very strict rules in those times. We took -- one thing I remember, the preparation for certain courses. I -- we took a course in cosmology -- not cosmetology.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* This is cosmology. It's a study of the universe and all the -- and we had an oral exam for a final given in Latin.

*Max Delsignore:* Oh, wow.

*Lee Clary:* Yeah. You want to talk --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- about pressure?

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* I mean, I think I felt more pressure before I went in that. And it was one on one with the professor, and I felt more pressure going into there than I think maybe I ever [Laughs] felt in my life.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* I mean, you know. So, it was a -- it was an interesting experience. I think discipline, I don't know, was -- you know, I thought it was a pretty good preparation for just about any kind of a career. I didn't go there to be -- prepare for a career in law, by any means. I was in there for the long run, but made the decision not to go further after a lot of thought and discussions with people in my -- you know, counselors at the seminary, so, eh, it worked out.

*Max Delsignore:* You had mentioned before, when you worked in New York City and before we did the podcast today, that there was kind of a tipping point, a moment for you personally where you began to understand how important it was to give back. Could you share a little bit about that experience --

*Lee Clary:* Sure.

*Max Delsignore:* -- and how you started to kind of dab a little bit in community engagement and philanthropy?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah, it was -- I lived in a -- actually, I had a room on 107th Street in Amersham Avenue in New York, way up on the upper west side. And I remember the -- it was 11 bucks a week --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- and so, on our street, there was a -- was a catholic church, and of course I was catholic, and so I obviously became a parishioner there. Came a time when they had what we would call a bishop's appeal or hope appeal in Syracuse where they were trying to raise some money for projects, and they had us -- I volunteered along with a whole bunch of other people to go out and collect for, you know, a few days.

And I went -- I was given a few cards, and I went to this -- the one apartment I remember was not very far from mine, a substantial Hispanic family, so I think three generations; there was seven, eight people there. And, you know, you -- it was, well -- it was neat and everything, but you knew that these folks did not have anything, you know, really, any substance at all as far as -- and I said -- you know, I almost felt like saying, "Well, you know, it's been nice visiting you, and I wish you a lot of luck," you know, or whatever, and not take any money because I didn't think they could afford to give us any money. I was wrong. They gave money. Not a lot, which I was -- but I went out of there with a whole different feeling about people, their ability, and their generosity, basic generosity of even the poorest of poor. And so, that led me to be -- have a different slant on it. So, I might think about giving myself, and -- you know, since I was doing better than they were, I should turn back here and turn in some of that cash and do something with it.

*Max Delsignore:* Well, and you had eventually, once you completed law school, made your way up to Northern New York. And before you made your move here, did you know where Watertown was or North Country? Had you been up here, previously?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah, I had been. I was a camper and a counselor and a dishwasher. I guess, camper, dishwasher. Think I was a counselor, but at least a camper and a dishwasher at Camp Towsee [0:12:07],

up in Hillside Lake, outside of Redwood for three or four, you know, summers. And so, I was familiar with Jefferson County. I worked, after I left the seminary, for my uncle in a trucking company as a trucker's helper, driver's helper on furniture delivery. We used to come up to Watertown, you know, maybe once a month. So, I generally was familiar with the geography. I did not know a soul in Watertown, though, when I moved up here, except for the people in the firm that I -- that I joined; Conboy Firm in Watertown. And those are the only people I had known before I actually made the move.

*Max Delsignore:* Carl Blackman was the one who actually recruited you to come --

*Lee Clary:* Well --

*Max Delsignore:* -- to join the law firm, correct?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah, he did. He came down to Syracuse Law School, and he was a good friend of Dean Miller, and he was -- he said, "I could use a man young who..." Young lawyer; he didn't say young man, but when I graduated from law school, it was 95 to [Laughter] 98 percent male dominated field. That was crazy. But especially considering all the changes, and -- this worked out to be so, you know, fortunate for everybody, but especially for the gals who wanted to be lawyers. So, any event, I -- Dean Miller and I had talked a little bit about maybe if there was a job opening that was something I'd be interested in; I told him what I wanted to do. I'm mainly interested in doing trials, if I could. Or at least, be -- start with them. So, Carl and I, you know, became acquainted, and he interviewed me, and I went up, said I'd do it. I wanted to give it a whirl.

*Max Delsignore:* And Carl also was maybe the same person who got you engaged in the community, correct?

*Lee Clary:* Yep, yep. He sure did. That was another memory that's just very vivid. After I went up to the firm, we were working for a while -- how long, I don't know -- and Carl had me in the office one day, and he says, "You know, Lee," he says, "I think that every young lawyer ought to do some volunteer work, some community service. They ought to work for some not-for-profit or be on some boards or do something to give back to the community." And he says, "I know just the community service, a not-for-profit that you'll -- should be working for." And I says, "Oh, what's that?" [Laughs] and he says, "March of Dimes." He happened to be the campaign

director that year for the March of Dimes. So I says, "Sounds good, Carl." [Laughter]

And so, I went -- I became, as well as a whole -- quite a few other good people that I met in Watertown became involved, these board members. But we did a lot of work, too, which was great. We sold bread. I drove some high school kids out and about in the community, and then we sold bread in January, which wasn't a lot of fun when it was, like, zero or five below.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* And we even had a couple of those kinds of Januaries. And we were involved in the Mother's March. I remember we were short of volunteers one year, and we had buttons that say, "Today, I am a mother."

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* So, I wore one of those and I went out and tried to raise some monies for -- money for the March of Dimes, and that was a great experience. Great experience.

*Max Delsignore:* Well, and what kind of transpired over time, it seems, after that, there were a lot of other activities you were asked to be involved with -- you and your wife Shirley were asked to kind of help participate in. One thing we talked a little bit about before this interview was your assistance or your help in establishing the Watertown Remission and the Credo Community Center. What was that experience like in collaborating with other community members to set these non-profits up to provide such a vital service in the area?

*Lee Clary:* Well, to say that I helped establish would be a -- you know, that would be puffing.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* You know, that would be above and beyond what I actually did. But we had a group of people. For Credo, it was Father Ray Wertman, it was Charlie and Edie Marcelas. They were the folks that got it going, especially Edie and Father Ray, who were wonderful people, and still are. We helped along with the Mapheys, Phil and Joanne Maphey. Phil was city court judge three years in city Watertown, and a great guy, and my -- he was the low

man on the totem pole at the Conboy Firm when I came, and then when I walked in the door, he ascended to --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- up the ladder a little bit, so -- but he was a great guy, and he worked hard on both of those organizations. And it was -- actually, Archie and Rosie Laverty, and Jim Cordiule, Reverend Jim Cordiule and his wife, Shirley, established the Urban Mission along with the help of Jack Smiley, a whole bunch of people who I -- back then, a lot of the churches and ministers were instrumental in that. So, I help with some donations and got the word around, and put my name on the mortgage along with four other folks for the farm at Credo out in Jenkins Road in Camilla. Fortunately, this -- the payments were all made. [Laughter]

*Lee Clary:* We kidded because we -- the five families that did that said, "Well, you know, if things go belly-up, we can all have a commune out there.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* We got a big ranch house out there, and a farm, and we can grow vegetables [Laughs] or whatever," and so we kidded about it, but it was -- it was a successful program from almost the beginning. It was a little bit of controversial, but it sure took off, and the state helped, and we have Credo Woods today, which is huge program and an asset to the community.

*Max Delsignore:* What did you learn the most from those experiences? You know, navigating the obstacles of helping establish a non-profit, but then getting it up and running. You know, what were the personal takeaways you took from that experience?

*Lee Clary:* Well, obvious -- I think, you know, you -- Edie and Father Ray and Jim Cordiule could tell you a lot more about how they got it established. I just was along for the ride. If they needed a donation, fine, if they needed something else. Some of the people, you know, volunteer to paint and do this, I mean, when things were really beginning. And then I was -- tried to be helpful in getting the word out, and it was -- it was really -- it was funny because Credo and the Urban Mission started almost the same year, within a year or two of each other, and that's over -- I don't know, that's almost 50 years old now. They're 50 years old, both institutions.

*Max Delsignore:* What was it like to be able to give back or to help in the community along with your wife, Shirley? You know, to be able to do that together, as a couple?

*Lee Clary:* It was a great feeling. It's -- we've got a wonderful community here in Jefferson County and the North Country. You know, financially, we may not be the richest county in the state by far, but the richest area, we have our problems, but we've got a lot of wonderful, natural assets, and we've also got some great organizations that -- and so, to help them, you know, whatever I could do was -- it's just a great feeling to see them grow and be successful and help so many people like Urban Mission, like Credo. It's just been great.

And then when I retired, Shirley and I retired within two days of one another, and you're asked -- Don Alexander asked me to be on the North County Community Foundation Board, and I knew about the foundation, but I wasn't particularly close to him. I had three kids -- my oldest three kids all benefitted from scholarships which are made for them to go to school, and we had three children in four years, and most of the time when they were being educated at college, I was district attorney and the money wasn't substantial, and that was a big help to me. And I said, "Yeah, I think, you know, if you -- if you've been giving something, you ought to be get -- giving back, and so, sure, ought to -- I'll be on the board. I don't know what great expertise I bring to anything, but I'll -- you know, I'll give it a shot," and it was a wonderful 10-year experience. Met so many great people, and established some friendships, and I was a big fan of Alex Velto; I thought he was a wonderful guy. And Rande Richardson, I know, succeeded him, is a terrific guy, and both have big hearts, and they're -- and the programs that have been started and been continued to be supported by foundationers, near and dear to me, so.

*Max Delsignore:* What was the best -- or, what were the best experiences of serving on the Community Foundation Board in comparison maybe to the other boards or committees that you served on?

*Lee Clary:* Right. Well, I always said, you know, "What can -- which better job can you have than giving away other peoples' money, you know?"

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* So, you know, it was great. But one of the things -- one of the areas that I was particularly attracted to -- and this, I think, started

towards the end of Alex's being director of -- you know, before his untimely passing. He started this non-traditional scholarship help, and in other words, people who were not your four-year high school, going into college as 18, 19-year-olds, and then -- and, of course, that program was very successful and been funded quite generously for years. But this was more the person who maybe was switching careers, had started off doing something and that didn't work out, and then wanted to do something else, but at that point they were maybe a single parent or maybe they were in a parent -- in a house with three or four kids, and they needed some educational or some training, you know, like, for career training, and they couldn't afford it. And this non-traditional scholarship program was right on the money, and we just -- well, we had a committee that used to interview people for those scholarships.

And, boy, the stories we heard, and, you know, and then it was just a, you know, pure pleasure to be involved in that committee, be able to award those scholarships. And we had some great success stories, and I'm sure they're continuing to be successful because, boy, if you can get somebody that has, you know, in -- really in it, and kind of in the middle of the road here wondering, "Where do I go now?" and "I don't want this. It's not something that's working out for me. I want to do something else. I know what I want to do, but I can't get there because I just can't afford it." It's a great, great solution. So, that was one area that I particularly liked.

*Max Delsignore:*

During the course of your time living in the North Country, whether it's you personally, you and Shirley doing some things together, or whether you served on boards or committees, it seemed as if you surrounded yourself with friends and peers who had the same mentality. You know, being able to help your community, make it thrive, continue to make it vibrant. Why do you feel it's important to surround yourself with those types of like-minded individuals that had the same genuine spirit that you have?

*Lee Clary:*

We were real fortunate because we were, at one point, going to Holy Family Church. There was a folk mass. The kids liked it. [Laughs] And -- but we go to meet not only -- we'd already known the Mapheys, but we got to meet the Lavertys and the Philes and the Marcelas and other families, and we both -- it just took off from there. They were -- they were interested. We went to a Marriage Encounter weekend up at the Guggenheim Institute up in Saranac Lake with the Mapheys and the -- also, Jim Cordiule and Shirley were there, and then I'm sure a number of the other folks that I've just mentioned. To be perfectly frank, I can't -- I can't tell

you that they were there or not, [Laughter] but I think they were there. At least we continue with that kind of thing for a while, and that brought us together. We had some meetings and fun things that we did as a group. And their example was amazing for Shirley and I. She got involved with Urban Missions. She was a secretary for a few years, as a member of the board, and she got involved with that. And, of course, she's been a friend of Rosie Laverty's for years. Archie and Rosie were very instrumental in Urban Mission. I think that was just a fortunate thing that happened, that we got to meet these folks that were so -- you know, they were generous folks. It rubbed off.

*Max Delsignore:* I'm going to jump back to your career, here. So, you took office as the County DA in 1977, correct? And served --

*Lee Clary:* Right. It was --

*Max Delsignore:* -- in that role for 10 years or so?

*Lee Clary:* -- '76. Me and Jimmy Carter, and --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- won that election in '76.

*Max Delsignore:* Going in it together.

*Lee Clary:* [Laughs]

*Max Delsignore:* What did you learn the most about serving as the county district attorney?

*Lee Clary:* What did I learn the most? Well, boy, it was an education on -- in the criminal justice system. I had never been on that system, DA. I'd done a fair amount of criminal defense work as -- mostly as assigned counsel in Jefferson County, did some in Syracuse for three years before I moved up here, so I got a -- I was attracted to the criminal justice system, the law, the trials of criminal cases. I just -- that just kind of -- just kind of zeroed in on that, so in '76 I decided to run for district attorney. You can ask my daughter, Mary Beth, who was 11 at the time, whether that was a good idea or not.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

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*Lee Clary:* We had a very interesting discussion on why I was making this move, being -- she thought I needed to be evaluated psychiatrically --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- because I was crazy, but, hey, it worked out. You just never know. But I just thought it was something I wanted to do, and my wife was very, very cooperative. I don't know if she was teaching when I announced I was going to run or not [Laughs], but she soon became a teacher in -- fulltime in '79, I believe, so it was a little down the line. And so, you know, it was -- it was quite an interesting experience. I just -- I got to meet a whole slew of lawyers and police officers, law enforcement people, probation officers. I had great relationships with all of those operations and those associations, organizations. We had some memorable trials, memorable, you know, activities going on. It was -- it was a great 10 years.

*Max Delsignore:* Is there one or two -- are there one or two cases, I should say, that stand out in your mind --

*Lee Clary:* Oh, sure.

*Max Delsignore:* -- from your time?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah, they're -- yeah, we had a -- I remember, I think about three of them, but one of them was with -- a retired BCI investigator was ambushed and killed by a shotgun middle of the night, and that was -- that was an adventure, and it had mixed blessings. Two of the people involved were convicted, but the shooter went to trial and was acquitted, which was a very, very tough moment in [Laughs] my legal career -- at least the alleged shooter, I should say. But -- and then, we had a terrible accident up in Cape Vincent, between Cape Vincent and Clayton. Five kids were killed in a car accident, and that was -- I was involved with that from investigation through the trial and ultimate disposition. That was a trial that wound up to be on jury because we had a bit of a problem with [Laughs] -- the guy was -- the defendant was not intoxicated; he came in as a blood level under that, was impaired, and at the time that made a significant different. So, oh, there were -- there were several homicide cases that were extremely interesting, and the one thing I tell people, I says, "You want -- you want to get a baptism by fire of trial work? One of -- first or second year I tried three burglary cases -- prosecuted three burglary cases. The jury verdict, nine days --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- and a two-week trial term.

*Max Delsignore:* Wow.

*Lee Clary:* And the Friday aft -- which was the 10th day, I asked Judge Elwood and I says, "Judge, do you think could give me the day off from trials today? I'd like to catch up a little bit." [Laughter] He laughed and he says, "Gee, I think so."

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* So, you know, we had a lot of great experiences. He was a wonderful judge, too.

*Max Delsignore:* Being in that position, district attorney or county court judge, how did that actually open your eyes up to other community needs that maybe you felt became more important because you got to witness it firsthand or see some of these cases at a deeper level than the public might see?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah. I think -- for example, even before becoming district attorney, I was -- I did assigned counsel work for 12 years for indigent defendants and some of the -- some of the, you know, home environment, and, you know, some of their stories, you know, are, you know, really tough. And I got a education through that, and to the drug situations, you know, a lot of drug cases, both defense attorney and his prosecutor. Yeah, I think you get an idea of, you know, the poor -- the poverty area at -- where a lot of these cases came from. That was very, very difficult to navigate and open my eyes to, you know, a lot of significant problems.

*Max Delsignore:* You served as county court judge for more than 10 years?

*Lee Clary:* Yeah, 12-and-a-half. Right.

*Max Delsignore:* 12-and-a-half. How would you say your approach as a judge differed from what the general public might view a judge to be, or what you see on T.V.? [Laughs] There's always one perception --

*Lee Clary:* You know --

*Max Delsignore:* -- of how a judge is. How is your approach different?

*Lee Clary:*

Well, I was lucky because I think I had a pretty good background. I was -- you know, I like to say I was -- I sat at the defense counsel's table for 12 years, I sat at the DA's prosecution table for 10 years, and then -- so, I had a pretty good view of the criminal justice system from both sides, and I thought that would serve me well to be -- you know, to be fair. I -- some people that have been prosecutors all their career before they become judge have a view -- you know, and you can't help it -- of maybe one -- a little bit one-sided view of what should happen in a criminal case.

And if you were a defense attorney for your whole career, and -- you might have the opposite view or a different view. But you got to have balance if you've seen both sides for 20 -- I don't know, 20, 22 years, and -- so, I think that was helpful. I think I was -- I could listen to both sides. I tried to be fair to both sides, give -- not only give the defense a fair trial, but get the people a fair trial. You know, there's -- both sides are entitled to present their evidence and to have the jury decide the cases. Judge should not interfere with that decision. So, it was -- I guess I approached it from the point of being -- try to be fair. Use your background as balance for making decisions, and call them as you see them, and try to -- try to be fair to both sides.

*Max Delsignore:*

You've been fortunate enough, after you retired in 1999, to continue giving back. I mean, your engaging with the community really hasn't stopped. How important is philanthropy, in a general sense, to the future of the North Country?

*Lee Clary:*

Well, I think it's very important because financially, we do have problems. We had very generous donors for, you know -- but we -- there's a -- there's a real need for everybody that can give something to give something back. I was -- now, I was kind of taught by my mother and taught by my faith that -- I'm a very big believer in the gospels. If -- to whom much is given, much is expected. And it is more blessed to give than to receive, and more -- and more satisfying. Those are true -- those are more -- you know, they come from the gospel, but they're moral values that I think everybody should have. And if everybody that could -- was fortunate enough to have a little more than they need, they could give, you know, fairly generously to some cause that they believe in, we'd be all the richer. And we need it, because we have a lot of needs in this county, in this North Country -- I mean, substantial needs. And they could help meet those needs. And we don't want the government -- they have to fund everything, by any means. I mean, good lord, you know, people pay enough in taxes. You know, and they -- these things, they don't really hurt. I mean, yeah,

they shouldn't really hurt that much, and I just think that's an answer to keeping the tax level low -- has made the dollars, they can do it, step up to the plate, and help.

*Max Delsignore:* And your willingness to help hasn't stopped, either. You know, you're still volunteering. Meals on Wheels is very close to your heart, I know, and doing some volunteer driving for the Volunteer Transportation Center. So, at 78 years old, you're still doing this; you're still giving back.

*Lee Clary:* Well --

*Max Delsignore:* Why keep going?

*Lee Clary:* Oh. I love to drive. I really do. I love to drive, and I think it's because when we were in Syracuse growing up, we, like many families, didn't have a car. We took the bus. Everybody got around. We had deliveries of groceries to the homes. How about that? Think that happens anymore? Our milk came, deliveries. You know, you could get by without an automobile, so I didn't get my license until I was, like, 22. And -- so, I'm making up for it. The times that I didn't drive, I'm driving now. I only -- I drive for the Volunteer Center two days a week, when I can, and I love it. I just -- I think it's a great service, I meet an awful lot of nice people, I hear a lot of great stories.

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* It's just -- you know, it's a great thing, and it's not -- it's not hard. You know, you drive an automobile, you can -- you know, I'm a glorified taxi driver, I guess --

*Max Delsignore:* [Laughs]

*Lee Clary:* -- for a number of folks, but -- and so, that's a great thing, and Meals on Wheels is one of my all-time favorite charities. They're not-for-profits because that is a bare-bones operation. We have recently been swooned [Laughs] into -- merged into the Urban Mission, which is terrific. They've been a great help to us. Our executive director now works fulltime, halftime for Meals on Wheels and then the other time for -- other half for Urban Mission. She richly deserves it. She's been doing that Meals on Wheels executive director work for over 30 years. Her mother-in-law, before her, they're the only two directors of Meals on Wheels in Watertown --

*Max Delsignore:* Mhmm.

*Lee Clary:* -- and they're wonderful people, and -- I mean, so Donna deserves a lot of credit, and the organization good -- is great. It's pure volunteer work, in other words, the people that drive -- and it's not a big deal because it's, you know, within five miles of the city -- the people that drive don't get reimbursed for gasoline or for their time or anything. And, man, they come and they drive, and they -- and they help in more ways than one. Some do it three, four days a week, and it's a great organization. So, you know, it's been a lot of fun doing those things, so I -- what the heck. Am I -- well, as long as I'm physically able to do it, why shouldn't I?

*Max Delsignore:* Well, and that's such a good point. One of the hopes, I think, for this podcast is to have the younger audience, the younger generation -- or should we say, really, the next generation -- to be able to demonstrate philanthropy and giving back to community much like your generate has. What would you say or what would you think is the important message that you would want to impart to that audience to just encourage them to give the way you have?

*Lee Clary:* Well, you know, I think I've talked a little bit about that. I just think that the satisfaction you get from helping out someone in need, or an organization in need, is just -- makes life worth living. I -- really does, and it's, I think, an experience that would be most satisfying to our next generation to try and be helpful. The foundation has started this young peoples' -- from different high schools have got a committee that receives some money from the foundation and then makes awards based on their -- assessing the needs in their particular community, in their area. And that's been -- I think it's been terrific. It's been very successful.

There are a number of schools that have done that, and I think that's great because that will encourage, obviously, the people that are on those leadership councils from -- as young students. When they, obviously, will go to college, some of them, and a lot -- most of them, probably, and get positions, and some will have trades where they'll make decent money, and then down the line will be encouraged to do what they did in high school: help out, you know, the organizations that they think are most deserving, and -- so, I think, my message is, God bless. Go for it. It's a rewarding experience. It makes the community so much better. And, you know, it's just all in all -- it's a win-win for everybody.

*Max Delsignore:* Lee, that's a great place to wrap up, too. Lee, it's been a real pleasure to have you offer your personal stories and why

philanthropy has meant so much to you and your family and this community, and we appreciate you doing this on the podcast. Thanks for coming on.

*Lee Clary:* Well, it's a pleasure. Nice talking with you, Max, and good luck in the whole program.

*Max Delsignore:* We appreciate it, Lee, and thanks to all of you for tuning into the podcast with our guest, Lee Clary. We are grateful to have the support of WPBS-TV and the Northern New York Community Foundation so we can continue to share these stories on this platform. There are more stories left untold, and we hope to continue sharing them here with you. Stay tuned and keep listening to the Northern New York Community Podcast.

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