

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

Max Delsignore: Welcome into another edition of the podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. I'm very excited to speak to someone who is a familiar voice on the North Country airwaves, and along with accomplished career and broadcasting, this person is most notably recognized as the founder and leader behind one of the area's most respected non-profit organizations, the Disabled Persons Action Organization. The agency does more than help coordinate some of the best concerts in Northern New York each year, though. Joe Rich is here with us to talk about the DPAO and making a living in the North Country. Joe, thanks for being here with us.

Joseph Rich: Thank you, Max, very much.

Max Delsignore: So, let's start with the DPAO. The motivation to start the organization began with a local fundraiser to help Ronnie Donato [0:00:50], who was accidentally shot and paralyzed in a hunting accident, and this was in 1974. And after that particular effort, how did the idea of creating the DPAO begin to formulate in your mind?

Joseph Rich: What actually occurred was, after the unfortunate shooting, hunting accident if you will, of Ronnie, calls started coming into the T.V. and radio station from individuals -- family members, primarily -- who said, "What can be done for my family member who has a disability? You've done all this for Ronnie. What about my child, my adult?" So, calls came in, I would say, dozens, then hundreds. And it started to -- I started to think, "Well, what can I do?" I know darn well that I had to do something, and, first of all, the Johnson family was nice enough to let me raise enough money to put an addition on his home, and life support equipment. He couldn't even breathe on his own, and he was destined to stay in the hospitals the rest of his life. And now what can I do to further the effort? So, I started what was called the Foundation for the Handicapped, and it lasted that way until we were incorporated, and then it became Disabled Persons Action Organization. The actual incorporation, I believe, was 1976, but we started doing the concerts in 1974. And that's how it all started.

For the first several years, I wasn't paid anything; I just wanted to get it going. I would say probably five or six years, anyway. So, I was still working in Television News, and it's almost like things got out of hand, you know, to a point where so many people needed the type of services that we were offering Ronnie. In other

words, for the family member with a disability, to be able to stay at home and not go into a institution or a more formal setting, but to be at home with their family where more love and attention can be given to that person. And that's how it started.

And there wasn't any money on a state level or anything like that to help us move along, and we had to do it through fundraising activities. Finally, we got a grant, and finally, the commissioner for the Office of Mental Retardation -- from Watertown, I might add -- Tom Coughlin was able to provide additional funding so we could continue our services.

Max Delsignore: What other keys played a role in the -- in building that infrastructure for DPAO? Outside of the grant support, what are the other elements that were able to kind of build the organization up to where it is today?

Joseph Rich: Well, you know, it's a thing where I said, "What could we do to raise funds to help people?" And that was the bottom line. In other words, I wasn't being paid, but I needed a secretary, somebody to help, and we did hire a secretary on a part-time basis. Jefferson Rehab Center gave us some space to use. We did that for probably a year or two. Then we moved into the Glow Mall, and that worked out very well for us, as a starting point. But actually, most of the hard work that was provided was actually through my wife, Carol [0:04:38]. And also, I might add, with the understanding, if you will, of people that I worked with who were so wonderful and generous to me.

I'm a walking, talking billboard of goodness from other people, and for me to sit here and say that, you know, I'm the one that does everything would be a total fabrication. Everyone else was out there helping me, and that's why there was a lot of success. Honestly, it wasn't me. Everybody at Channel 7, at WNY, at WOTT, Jim Brett, Bob Tompkins, Ted Ford, many, many other people -- Kevin Mastellon -- a lot of other great people were there to say, "You can do it, Joe. Come on." I guess it was some sort of a shock when I did leave Channel 7 because there was no -- my intention was not to leave Channel 7, but I had to. Things got out of hand.

Max Delsignore: Well, and I think it's a good segue, I mean, to see that there's so many folks who were dedicated to the effort, I think, says something about the community that we live in in the North Country. But I think it does say a little bit about you and that there was a value, obviously, that you had within yourself, something

that had been taught to you to say, "I need to make the effort to give back, not only to Ronnie, but to others -- other folks that are calling me." Where did that value or those values come from?

Joseph Rich:

Thank you for the -- for the question, Max. I had a wonderful mom and dad and family. My dad was -- is from -- was from Italy, came to this country, learned the language very quickly, went to Columbia University, graduated from a class, I believe, in 1928, and a school of pharmacy. He worked in White Plains in Rye, New York, then came up here, met my mom, was going to buy his own drug store in Watertown. He had heard about an availability here and came up from Rye, New York. Met my mom; my mom had very little education. Back then there was Boone College, they called it. She went there, of course, but her family wouldn't let her go to Watertown High School because there was a lot of -- at the time, there was a lot of pregnancy there. I don't know if -- [Laughs] I don't know how true that is, but that was the reason my grandfather gave my mother. She never quite forgave him for that. [Laughs] And she later got back and got her high school equivalency.

Meanwhile, my dad, you know, what happened to him, he worked probably, I'm going to say, 20 years in Watertown, had his own drug store on Court Street. Was a very good drug store; great soda foundation. And -- but his -- he lost -- oh, how to put this -- lost his eyesight, and he could have had a corneal transplant, but back then the chances for success were less than 60-40, and he had one of the best doctors in the world, Dr. Walter Atkinson from Watertown, and he was very helpful to us. And my dad didn't have it done. So, he started doing odd jobs just to show us kids what hard work was like, and I have a -- you know, a great admiration for my family, and my dad especially was wonderful, and my mom, she was just a tough Italian lady [Laughter] that wouldn't let us get away with anything.

Max Delsignore:

What do you remember the most about growing up in Watertown? What was it like for you as a kid?

Joseph Rich:

[Laughs] Well, it was -- my mom and dad were both working, and so it was a situation where we were pretty much on our own at home, and so thank God I had sports I could rely on. Sports in which I wasn't all that good, [Laughter] but I wasn't terrible, either. But basketball and baseball and so on took a lot of my time. I had a tremendous education in the parochial school, and also at Watertown High School where those kind of values were part, "What are you going to give to the babies in the world that don't

have anything? What are you go -- what are you going to do to make a difference in their lives, the lives that here..." We were struggling, ourselves, as a family, and I was still trying to figure out what I could do to be of help to others. And my mom and dad were the very same way. Excuse me.

The -- my mom, it's a situation where we had two -- and I have two nephews. Both had muscular dystrophy, and both passed away at a very young age. My mom was involved in going door-to-door to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and it was wonderful that she had done that. And that taught me a little bit about what my mom would do for what she believed in, and in the future what I should do. And my dad was also a very good teacher in that regard.

Max Delsignore: Some folks may not know this. We discussed previously about playing sports as a kid and how that was kind of a catalyst, maybe, to pursue broadcasting, but we'll get to that in a second. But you also played violin when you were younger.

Joseph Rich: [Laughs] Yeah, I did. And the Sisters took good care of me, let's put it that way. [Laughter] It was at the Conservatory of Music on Washington Street in Watertown, and I had this big violin case. [Laughs] In the morning I'd go to school, bring it to school, then after, go for my lessons. And it was a good experience, and I -- they had a little orchestra there, and I was in the orchestra, and I wasn't very good. I was a second violinist. But I think, more than that, I learned a little bit about structure and about what's expected of me. We had a -- I think I mentioned to you when we met earlier that I did my very first speech before a pretty good-size crowd during a recital that we had, and my grandmother came all the way up from Rye, New York to see this. My grand -- my, actually, grandmother and my grandfather came up from Rye, New York, and my sister would play the piano, and I play the violin. She actually forgot where she was, and forgot -- she just had a real tough -- she panicked a little bit.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: And so, I turned to the audience and I said, "You're going to have to excuse my sister. She's very nervous, and I think you all are making her a little nervous." [Laughter] And I said, "Joanna, here's how it goes. It goes like this." Because I -- I mean, I saw her play her piece. So -- and then Sister Theresa came up and really got us on the path, and we finished it, and my grandmother was very pleased.

Max Delsignore: Well, and public speaking for you --

Joseph Rich: Yeah.

Max Delsignore: -- I think, kind of, over time became natural. I mean, you --

Joseph Rich: Oh, yeah.

Max Delsignore: -- really honed your craft, and had great interest in a broadcasting career. So, if you could, before DPAO you touched on a little bit --

Joseph Rich: Yeah.

Max Delsignore: -- in your --

Joseph Rich: Yeah.

Max Delsignore: -- reflection.

Joseph Rich: Yeah.

Max Delsignore: Where did your love and admiration for radio and television begin?

Joseph Rich: Well, I think it began when I was old enough to enjoy the New York Yankees on radio. [Laughs] And that's how it all started. I was excited to listen to almost all the Yankee games when I was just a little kid, and I enjoyed sports. And I wanted to be in sports, not in -- not in news, but as luck would have it, that was -- that's what got me going. That got me going in that direction.

Max Delsignore: Now, and you actually pursued your education in Minnesota, and they had a --

Joseph Rich: Yes.

Max Delsignore: -- specific school to kind of -- kind of build upon a broadcasting career. Tell us a little bit about your experience going to school there.

Joseph Rich: Yeah. Well, I had family out in Minneapolis, and I wanted to go to Minnesota University, and they had a good broadcast school called Brown Institute of Broadcasting, which is part of Minnesota University. And I went there, and -- but while I was going there, I had to work, and I worked at Dayton's department store in downtown Minneapolis, stocking shelves. And I worked there and

went to school, as well. And then, when the season was over for buying, more or less, in the summer season, I no longer had a job. But I was doing okay in the broadcast division, and I was also broadcasting and electronics. And later on, I actually received a nice letter for -- from John McKnight, who was the dean of the school, when I wanted to pursue my education, and he wrote a beautiful letter to Empire State College. And that was the best way, I thought, because I was working at WWNV-TV to finish and get my degree would be to go through Empire State. But they had no office in Watertown, no school here.

Max Delsignore: Hm.

Joseph Rich: I had to go to Rochester, and I went there almost every single day, and then came back, and then did the news from two o'clock until eleven o'clock at night.

Max Delsignore: Do you remember your first audition, locally?

Joseph Rich: Yes.

Max Delsignore: Or the -- your first stories that you had on the air?

Joseph Rich: The first interview I had was with Earl Kelly, who was with WWNV radio and T.V., and he told me I wasn't ready to work for WWNV. I did receive a job at WOTT in Watertown, and Jim Brett was instrumental in my getting that job, and I worked there for four years, just out of the army, from 1963 until '67. And during that timeframe, I did some wonderful interviews, some of them with Bobby Kennedy, and introduced my wife to Bobby Kennedy. He took a liking to me, and whenever he came to Watertown he made sure I rode with him.

Max Delsignore: Hm.

Joseph Rich: And we actually -- there are some pictures taken at the Watertown airport of me holding a mic up to Bobby Kennedy's face and stuff, and he'd -- he said, "Joe, don't rub my face in it." [Laughter] But anyway, that kind of stuff. But anyway, I rode back with him from the airport --

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: -- to downtown Watertown, and we went on, let's see, the road to Glen Park and Brownville -- 12E [0:15:58], I believe it is.

Max Delsignore: Yep.

Joseph Rich: Anyway, came in on that road, and he saw that river, and he says, "Got to get my kayak out on this river. What a gorgeous place to -- for my kayak to run down that..." So anyway, we went, we cut across, and went past St. Anthony's School.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: And he says, "Joe, come on." Just like that. "Joe, come on." Ran out of the bus and ran over to the school, and he knocked on the door, and a Sister -- I don't know her name -- a nun answered the door. She almost fainted. There's Bobby Kennedy in front of her --

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: -- and gave him a big hug and stuff like that. I was there for that, and then we ran back on the bus again, and went downtown Watertown. [Laughs] I told you -- I know I told you a story about what happened, but -- anyway, so --

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: -- we're on Public Square in front of the Hotel Woodruff --

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: -- where the grandstand is, and he says -- I'm right near -- I'm not near where he's standing. My -- it was a wonderful speech. It was a speech of all working together to make the North Country a better place to live. So, after it was over and I had done my reports for radio, I went home, my dad was there, and I said -- I said, "How was it, Dad? Okay?" He says, "Yeah, pretty good." My mother said, "You forgot to say hello to your Aunt Lina." [Laughter] So, I had to call her and apologize, but out of 10,000 people, I couldn't find her at [Laughs] all on the Square.

Max Delsignore: Well, and that's one of the -- you know, Bobby Kennedy visiting Watertown in the North Country's one of the biggest stories of the last, well, several decades.

Joseph Rich: Oh, yes.

Max Delsignore: What are some of the other stories -- major stories you remember when you were on the air that were, you know, really well remembered or big for this area?

Joseph Rich: Yeah. I did a series of interviews with Bobby Kennedy, and some of that was sent to the Kennedy Library. Now, others that I interviewed, like Jacob Javits, interviewed Nelson Rockefeller, you know, Senator Moynihan, but the Jacob Javits story, they were trying to get him as senator to take a stand on Vietnam. And finally, I got him on tape saying, "We should reassess how we're doing things right now in Vietnam," and that was a story every -- the media was waiting to hear. And so, it was on two or three major networks, my voice, and -- including CBS -- and there was also, at a young age on the board of directors, I think I was 23, of Associated Press Broadcast Division. So, I was very -- I was a very busy newsman. I really cared about doing a good job, and a lot of it stemmed, actually, from when I was in the high school, and I worked at the Watertown Times as a copyboy. And I even, one time, saw John B. Johnson. [Laughs]

Well, after that, I was never very close to the Johnson family, but I learned so much from them. The Johnson family is a family that I just held -- and still do -- in the highest esteem possible. I saw how they were involved in every fabric of life in Watertown, and how they improved life through the Watertown Daily Times and just by attending various meetings. Whether it was a college meeting, whether it was a meeting of officials in Watertown, they were always there. So, I learned a lot from the Johnson family, from John, John Johnson Jr., Harold Johnson, and Susan, and Sue [0:20:02], as well, and now Young John, who's the editor of the Times. And they're wonderful people. I learned a lot from them, and I always took that learning experience with me. I'm not saying this to get on anybody's good side at all, but I had the same kind of feeling, though, Max, when it came to WWNY radio, WOTT, with Jim Brett at WOTT, and with the people I had mentioned at Channel 7, who were so good to me to get me over the hump so I could have a career in broadcasting. And I'll always remember that.

Max Delsignore: And the stories that you covered, there was an array of things that you saw. And you saw the North Country evolve over that time. When you look back at that era of news and what the North Country looked like, and you see what's happening in our area today, what are some of the community needs that were really prevalent at that time that are still very much so, today?

Joseph Rich: Well, I think, a sense of cohesiveness. One thing that I noticed is that -- a lot of people don't realize this, but do you know in Watertown it's a very caring -- Watertown in the North Country, I

would say, the general -- Jefferson County, primarily -- one of the most caring counties and cities in the United States. And I had called at one point and found out that per capita, more was given to charity here in Watertown and Jefferson County than anywhere in the country. I could not believe that. And my feeling was, "What can I do? What can I do to be of help?" But to get back to your question, some of those needs still exist today: a sense of belonging, a sense of incorporating Fort Drum more in our daily lives, to care about what's going on with our military, to care what's going on with our next-door neighbor. Those needs still exist.

There's a lot of charities out there that are doing wonderful work, not just Disabled Persons Organization, but looking at it holistically, there are so many great organizations that fall under the umbrella of, say, United Way, of, say, the Northern New York Community Foundation. You have no idea the impact that the Foundation has made on our lives. If it wasn't for the Foundation, I don't know if we would have existed as an agency. If it wasn't for the goodness and caring of people, I don't know if we'd have made it or not as an agency. But it was there. It was something that, I think, is still there. Sometimes we have to wake it up a little bit, but I think that sense of giving and wanting to be helpful is still there in our community.

Max Delsignore:

DPAO, and non-profits in general, have really evolved so much over time in this area, filling in some of those gaps, identifying some of those critical needs. How has the mission and services of DPAO evolved over the last 40 years of it -- since its inception, really?

Joseph Rich:

Yeah. The focus, primarily, was -- and still is -- to help people who fall in the gaps, who can't get the services they need, but is primarily in the area of developmental disabilities. But anyone who calls us, anybody, we put them to the right agency, and then we follow through to make sure they're getting the services they're entitled to. It's evolved from the sense that it is now driven -- initially, it was a program; you provided the program. Now, it's driven individually by individual families, by those with disabilities, who are able to tell us what they want. So, it's no longer we telling them we have this program. It's open to you; what do you want? How do you want to be served? That's how it's changed dramatically, and with that, services have changed, as well.

Max Delsignore: One of the major fundraisers for the DPAO is the concert series, of course.

Joseph Rich: Yes.

Max Delsignore: We talked about that kind of at the beginning. You've had a plethora of musical artists and entertainers, I mean, Tony Bennett, Steve Martin, Alan Jackson, the list goes on, and they've all come to Watertown to perform. How were you able to secure so many recognizable names over all of these years?

Joseph Rich: We had someone visit from the New York State Fair, Joe LaGuardia, and Joe said, "How in the world does Watertown do it? How can you have all of these major entertainers when I have a difficult time at the State Fair bringing them in?" It was something that I wanted to do, not only to help people -- I don't mean to say it was just me, but a lot of people maybe had influence in what I would do -- but what can I do to improve the culture, if you will, of Watertown? Why can't Tony Bennett come up here? Why can't Robert Goulet [Laughs] come up here?

Max Delsignore: Right.

Joseph Rich: Why can't some of those entertainers come up to Watertown? Well, it was scary, initially. They always say, "Build it and they will come." They're already coming, and they're -- they came from all over -- from all over the Eastern Seaboard, from Canada. Things have changed now, Max, to the point where I don't know if I can continue to do the major shows that we have done for over 20 -- or, 40 -- over 40 years, over 40 years. I don't know. The reason being, a lot of the development of multipurpose facilities have been done in Syracuse. Live Nation is in there doing shows all the time, shows that we would bring in that would cost \$300, \$400,000 a crack. I don't dare touch now because a lot of the disposable income is not all [Laughs] fun and games, you know?

Max Delsignore: Right.

Joseph Rich: A lot of the disposable income is now at itself.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: And it's very difficult to compete in that environment. We are trying, we're doing our best, we hope to continue to do our concerts, and -- because I think it brings entertainment to our area. It's a win-win situation; it's always been that way.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: It's win-win because we do the shows to improve the quality of life.

Max Delsignore: Right.

Joseph Rich: People enjoy music. It's a win-win because people come from all over and spend their money here in Watertown. It's a win-win there, but it's a win-win because it helps our kids and our adults with developmental disabilities. And I just think not to be able to do that any longer bothers me a great deal.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm. So, I have some quick-hitting questions for you --

Joseph Rich: Uh-oh.

Max Delsignore: -- related to some of --

Joseph Rich: Uh-oh.

Max Delsignore: -- the performances the DPAO has had.

Joseph Rich: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Max Delsignore: Are you ready?

Joseph Rich: Yeah. Yes.

Max Delsignore: So, looking for one-word answers or, well, you know --

Joseph Rich: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

Max Delsignore: -- brief answer, I should say. So --

Joseph Rich: Okay.

Max Delsignore: -- I've got -- I've got four here for you.

Joseph Rich: Okay.

Max Delsignore: Who was the best performer from the con -- from any concert series that you ever saw?

Joseph Rich: I would have to say Robert Goulet.

Max Delsignore: And why?

Joseph Rich: Despite the hardship that was caused [Laughs] by -- can I say this -
- by someone in this party, despite those challenges, he put on a
wonderful concert, and when he sang the song from Camelot, and
when he did all of those -- I'm prejudiced because I love classical
music like that.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: I'm not saying that Willie Nelson didn't do a great show.

Max Delsignore: Sure.

Joseph Rich: He did, also. Four times, he did. Okay, he was there four times, but
there were many others who did wonderful shows. The Beach
Boys did a tremendous show; Tony Bennett was absolutely
wonderful.

Max Delsignore: Who was the one performer or entertainer you always wanted but
could never get?

Joseph Rich: Frank Sinatra.

Max Delsignore: Really? How many times did you try? Did you try? I don't know.

Joseph Rich: No, I never tried because I knew what he wanted, [Laughter] and it
was -- it was a million dollars, you know.

Max Delsignore: Wow.

Joseph Rich: And now, there's several that want a million dollars.

Max Delsignore: Sure.

Joseph Rich: So, we did bring Frank Sinatra Jr. in, and [Laughs] Tony Melara
[helped me greatly with that because we had to meet with a
bodyguard and also the advance person for Frank Sinatra Jr. Atino
Bartsley, his name was, and it was a very [Laughs] interesting get-
together we had, and it worked out very well. He did a tremendous
show, by the way. Very patriotic. Did a wonderful show.

Max Delsignore: Is there a big-name performer/entertainer that almost came to
Watertown, but the deal didn't come together?

Joseph Rich: There were so many, it's hard to name one. You know, everybody from Andy Williams -- was one, but primarily, you always dream to have somebody like that in, and then they can't come for one reason or another. Sometimes, the agents look at it and say it's a very small facility or it's outside and it's not really what we want. We want something inside where there's no chance of rain or whatever. Sometimes, the agents get involved before the entertainer. In some cases, like with Harry Chapin and with others, you get a chance to talk to them directly and be with them. Harry -- there's some wonderful stories about Harry Chapin and Willie Nelson and so on, and some of them I can talk about, and some of them I can't. [Laughs]

Max Delsignore: Well, let's get to that last question. So, you've -- I should say, we have been fortunate enough over many years to hear some of the stories, maybe some of the all-access behind the scenes anecdotes of performers who have come to Watertown, and you've been gracious enough to share those stories publicly. Is there one in particular that you could share about a performer, but maybe you haven't talked about yet?

Joseph Rich: Yeah. Well, actually, there's several.

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: But take Willie Nelson.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: After I had done the first concert -- I think all together we did four concerts with Willie, and after the first one, he was kind of looking for me. By that, I mean he would -- he would actually get on a speaker and say, "Joe, you're out there. I know you're out there. Come on the bus."

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: You know, and I go on the bus, and -- one time, I went on the bus and I couldn't see Willie. [Laughter] It was -- there was so much smoke in that -- on that bus. So, as I waded through the smoke --

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: The other thing I can tell you about him, he was a very caring person.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: And, yes, he did -- wasn't well, have a bad habit there of smoking something, but --

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: -- he was a very wonderful person. He gave me money one time, and he said, "Joe, here's a thousand dollars for your respite home, I was reading through your book." I said, "Willie, you can't afford a thousand dollars. Willie, you owe the IRS \$14 million." He said, "Joe, I've got more than that buried," he says. [Laughter] So --

Max Delsignore: So -- and so, even so, you -- he was still very gracious and understood --

Joseph Rich: Oh. Oh.

Max Delsignore: -- you know, the efforts --

Joseph Rich: Absolutely, absolutely.

Max Delsignore: -- in what you were doing what DPAO did for this area?

Joseph Rich: Oh, he would sit there and cross out expenses like monitors. I'll never forget this, \$1,200 for a monitor. "Don't worry about this, Joe."

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: [Laughs] That was probably after [Laughter] -- no, I'd better not get into that.

Max Delsignore: [Laughs] I want to go back on something you mentioned to hitting on some of those values again, personal values of philanthropy. How was your engagement and investment with the DPAO, some of the other local boards that you've served on, how has that influenced how you have given back over time?

Joseph Rich: It seemed to me like everybody was doing something for me, Max. Everybody. And, I mean, as I've talked about --

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: -- not only, you know, in my everyday life, my wife, Carol, and everything I had done, my mom and dad, other people I mentioned,

as well, always cared about me and cared about what I was doing and how I was doing it. And I said if I ever had the opportunity to help others, I would like to do that if I had the ability to do it. Well, as luck had it, I was able to come across some dollars. Not a lot of money, but I was able to give to the church; I was able to give to a college and serve on the college board; I was able to help another college, as well; I was able to help a hospital provide for unmet needs. So, I was able to do all those things and develop a scholarship at one of the colleges. Small potatoes compared to what others have done in the past, but still important to me to do something. Just as my mom had done a lot for muscular dystrophy, I wanted to be able to do something for others in need. And I tried my best.

One time -- to show you what I mean -- and I didn't have the money to do this -- the IRS came in and did an audit. In the audit, they said, "What is this \$10,000?" This was very in DPAO's existence. And I said, "It's \$10,000 that I loaned DPAO so we can make payroll." And my wife, Carol, didn't even know about it, that I had borrowed \$10,000 on our home --

Max Delsignore: Hm.

Joseph Rich: -- to do that. The fellow from the IRS said, "I've seen enough. You know, don't worry about the rest of the audit." He left. That was it.

Max Delsignore: Well, and I think those demonstrations, those examples of giving back are something that our younger generation, and hopefully younger audience that listens to these stories, hopefully understands. If you were to encounter any youth or had a chance to speak to some younger students to talk to them about philanthropy and giving back in the North Country, what might you say to that audience to encourage them to do so and give back, as you have and many others here in this area?

Joseph Rich: I think my message to them would be, "Don't be selfish." I would say, "You must know people who have done all they could do for you. You should work to try to do something for the greater good of mankind in our area, and you should make that a priority. Just like you tithe in church, you should tithe in the community, as well." And that's what my message would be. To do their best to not only take care of their immediate needs, but take care of their innermost needs, which are -- which would be giving back. Now, I don't have a lot of money to be of help, but I know we have wonderful people in this community who have done so much, Max --

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: -- to help Disable Persons Organization and to help others continue its mission. And without them, we would not have been able to help thousands of people over the years. And I just wish I could instill in the people that I'd be speaking with -- the youngsters I'd be speaking with -- is, "Don't forget to give back." That's got to be part -- to be true to one's self, you have to be philanthropic. You have to care about your community. It's not a question, do I want to? You have to. How -- if it's not giving money, give time, give your effort to help. It's not only money. It can be anything. It can be door-to-door, raising money for the Jerry Lewis Telethon like my mom did.

Max Delsignore: Mhmm.

Joseph Rich: It could be a number of ways they can be of help and to volunteer their time. But it's also nice to be able to give a few dollars here and there.

Max Delsignore: How important has it been -- you've touched on this a couple times already, but as we kind of begin to wrap up, how important has it been for you to share all of these memories and achievements with your wife, Carol, who you've been married with for 50 years --

Joseph Rich: Yes.

Max Delsignore: -- but your family, as well, and so many others that have joined you in these -- this effort?

Joseph Rich: That's what I worry about the most. With Carol, she has seen -- she had been part of it. In other words, if I'm able to help somebody, you can bet your bottom dollar her check is in there, too. She has been wonderful. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my wife, Carol. I had some heart surgery in 1998, aortic valve replacement surgery, that Toby Cosgrove performed. Carol was with me every step of the way. She's been there without fanfare, without anybody saying anything. I received an award at Fort Drum, for example, from General Oates, and I was so glad that she was up there also, because she was part of that award. And when they had the picture taken, I made sure she was in the picture --

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: -- that she was right there. But honestly and truthfully, I don't think I'd be here today without Carol's support.

Max Delsignore: So, as we finish this up, I want you to complete the following sentences. I have four --

Joseph Rich: Oh.

Max Delsignore: -- here, okay?

Joseph Rich: Oh, boy.

Max Delsignore: Joe Rich is...

Joseph Rich: The recipient of the good will of many, many people in our community, and without that good will and assistance, I wouldn't be able to do what I've done.

Max Delsignore: If it weren't a -- if it wasn't a broadcasting career, or being the director of an agency, Joe Rich would have been...

Joseph Rich: A pharmacist. [Laughs]

Max Delsignore: Really?

Joseph Rich: My dad was a pharmacist. And I couldn't understand why my grades were so good [Laughs] when I went to --

Max Delsignore: [Laughs]

Joseph Rich: -- Watertown High School, in chemistry and so on. And -- [Laughter] but I would've served people, still --

Max Delsignore: Right.

Joseph Rich: -- as my dad did. My dad had a big heart. I can remember people not being able to afford a prescription, and my dad would be there to help them, help that person. My mom was the same -- was the same way.

Max Delsignore: The future of DPAO is...

Joseph Rich: Looking for new opportunities to help people with special needs, looking for ways to improve the lives of people who need our help. And I think we're on board doing that now, through Cindy Fitzpatrick, who is our director, and the board of directors there.

Because of the -- the funding streams has changed; you have to be flexible in terms of the services you provide.

Max Delsignore: Last one. Philanthropy is important to the North Country's future because...

Joseph Rich: Without a true sense of caring, an agency is just -- or, a city like Watertown is just a city. With philanthropy and people caring about their fellow human beings, it becomes more than that. It becomes a way of life. It's because -- becomes something that we all strive to be part of. And thank God for those who are leading the way now, who are giving from their hearts, and I thank them so much for what they've done for me, but also what they've done for so many other worthy charities and organizations.

Max Delsignore: Joe, it's been a joy to listen to your --

Joseph Rich: Hey, Max.

Max Delsignore: -- story, and learn --

Joseph Rich: Yeah.

Max Delsignore: -- why you chose to grow and invest in the place that you call home. Thanks for everything you've done through DPAO, and so much more, and for being with us on the podcast.

Joseph Rich: I appreciate it, Max. Thank you very much.

Max Delsignore: We hope you enjoyed this visit with Joe Rich. Special thanks to our supporters, WPBS-TV and the Northern New York Community Foundation. Want to listen to more positive stories about the North Country? Many more are available and still coming on this platform, the Northern New York Community Podcast. Thanks once again for tuning in.

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