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

Welcome to this edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max Delsignore. Before we get started I just want to recognize our supporters, WPBS TV and the Northern New York Community Foundation, two organizations who believe in the importance of these stories, sharing them in the community and on this platform. The podcast just isn't possible without them. We appreciate their support and thank all of you for tuning in. One of the great joys in life is giving. When we give it is a testament to believing in something than yourself. It is sacrifice you make, resulting not only in community betterment but personal fulfillment.

Bob and Jean Sturtz understand sacrifice, hard work and believe in the things that make a community prosper. These are just a couple of the values that are at the center of their lifetime of philanthropy. Few have demonstrated love for the community and the North Country like they have. It's an absolute joy to have Bob and Jean here to share their story and talk about the importance of philanthropy on the podcast. And along with me today as well is Rande Richardson, who's the Executive Director of the Northern New York Community Foundation. Thanks to all of you for being here.

Robert Sturtz: Thank you.

Max Delsignore: To start I wanted to expand on the value of giving back and what that means to you, Bob and Jean. And especially the why. Why do you feel it's important to give back to the community in the area where you grew up?

Robert Sturtz: Well, I think there's several ways to rationalize this. I think it starts as a child, whether you're brought up with the idea that you're to save something and you do some good with something, and so on. And it is a nice feeling and hopefully you can give to the things that you like to see progress and you like to see going forward as a positive thing for the community as a whole. My gut feeling has always been that I would rather give directly than to pay taxes with the hope that some of that money might come back, because while it may come back it's certainly a very small part of what they take from you. That's the world we live in, that's the efficiency of bureaucracy.

Max Delsignore: Do you remember some of the first things with your family, with your parents that you volunteered for, gave back to when you were children?

Robert Sturtz: Well, being a boy, and I was seven years old I guess when the war got going in 1940 – 41. And so we were constantly working towards the war effort, and that was a great feeling. You went out, you did everything from collect papers, and I lived quite rural in a very small community, but and my father worked in a facility where they would take that for recycling. But – little country school I went to at that time, did the same thing. We collected everything you could think of. Little sideline joke is my grandmother, who was born in Switzerland but came here as a little girl, she was crushing cans and cleaning – you know, crushing them for the war effort. She went to a ladies meeting once and they told her, 'You know where those things go? They go for making caps for beer bottles.'

She never saved another can. But it was that type of an environment that I grew up in and you felt needed and you felt like you were accomplishing something. And yes, some of this you did turn in for money. Pop bottles were worth two cents a piece and you bought them – found them wherever you could in the dumps and whatever, and there were lots of those around at that time. And you washed them clean and got your two cents and so on, and it went from there. There were certainly obligations to – Sunday school and church and what have you. But that's kind of what I remember of it.

Max Delsignore: The church has been very important to both of you, I know. We'll touch on that a little later on, but was that really the environment for both of you, where some of these first philanthropic principles kind of were instilled in you?

Robert Sturtz: Well, Jean of course lived a little more outside in the country, and I certainly was country but there were a row of houses on either side and [Inaudible: 04:33] and I think we got a lot of it at school. I know they would come, the school superintendent would come, or it was a Mister Seeley in my case, and tell us what a car battery would do and you could – somehow or other there was enough led in there to make an anti-aircraft shell, and then you hoped one would bring down an enemy plane. And then of course when you went to see the movies you saw that they took thousands of those shells up there, maybe you got the plane, maybe you didn't.

But I think we live through that period of time when – and there was a great – I think no matter where you lived in the North Country at least there was a great sense of patriotism and were behind it. There was no soul that didn't know someone close to them that was overseas. And then of course there was the local war effort and all of those things.

Max Delsignore: Jean, did you see the same thing when you were growing up as a child, and you grew up in Louis County? Did you see some of those same efforts, the same kind of sentiments, you know, patriotism for country? What were some of the things that stood out to you?

Jean Sturtz: Yeah, we did. We used to bring cans to school, clean cans. I don't why [Inaudible: 05:53] but it was for the war effort they said. And we were taught all the while what was happening out there and it was – it was scary.

Robert Sturtz: You come to value things that I don't think we realize today, many people that didn't go through that period of time, that everything was rationed, from sugar to shoes to tyres and what have you. We went down to the country school, or wherever you went to school in – there was a lot of small first grade through eight, and then they cut them to six, and then they sent them – later closed the whole thing off and went to the centralized schools. But went to the school at night and identified to get your stamps so that you could buy certain things, and fuel got to where – my father only drove on – a little less than a mile to work, so he had the lowest grade of fuel allocated for his availability.

And so you just didn't go for rides, you just didn't do any of these things. There was about five years where even the cars that people have, my brother in law, whose father was in the car business, and all the new cars were locked up, and he kept them there. They didn't come and get his until the war was over, but he couldn't sell them. And that's how desperate that period of time was, and we really followed the news, it was all radio, but you just followed it every night. There was half a dozen well-known names that come on and some really scared you, like some of them weren't all that positive, either.

Max Delsignore: It seems that in that era when you were kids communities were very close knit. Families were close, worked in the same industry, and I think in a lot of ways it appears that maybe some of the same values were shared, some of the things that you learned as kids. You touched on a couple of things, sacrifice, hard work, ration,

what were some more of those personal values that have kind of infiltrated your philanthropy today that you learned as a kid?

Robert Sturtz: I think it messed me all up, because it gave me a great sense of material values and more so than I ought to have. But not that I need to hoard it all, I do believe in the [Inaudible: 08:25] but I really believe that what – everything you take in isn't necessarily for you. It should be used – the parts of the world where that first percentage of giving isn't given to the church or to your faith, but it's given to the poor, to help those that can't help themselves, and so on.

Max Delsignore: Jean, what other values do you think you were taught, either by your parents, you know, through school, through the church, that are some of the same values that you've carried on through your adult life today?

Jean Sturtz: Well, they're just similar to what he's been saying. Just trying to help anybody you could.

Robert Sturtz: There were a lot of people in need, really.

Jean Sturtz: Yeah, there was a lot of people.

Robert Sturtz: Picture that The Depression – born in the height of it, and it lasted well into the early 40s, until the money's being spent for the war effort came into being and yet it wasn't as, like you see, the terrible lines in the cities, major cities, where they went around the block, people with no job and no food, and waiting for handouts and we were close – had riots in some cities. The North Country was quite different. While neither one of us lived on a farm, you did have a vegetable garden and many, many places had a small farm, and then perhaps the male of the family would work elsewhere. And then of course the big change was as the war got going my mother went to work in the war effort.

And of course she came home when it was over but many rosy, the riveters did not do that, they stayed in the workforce. And I think we had a wonderful system [Inaudible: 10:14]

Max Delsignore: What do you remember about how the North Country changed post-war? When everybody kind of came – started to come back home, and getting resettled in this area, how did the communities begin to change?

Robert Sturtz: Well, goods and services are well – readily available again. The shocking thing to me, there was a very short period of time where we thought we had peace in the world, and the next thing we knew the Russians came out with an atomic bomb. I remember listening to the trials for Ethel Rosenberg, I believe it was, from giving away secrets. Whether that was like it was portrayed or not we're not sure to this day, I guess. But so we went from a relaxing peacetime to almost back to another crisis, it seemed. And as I've grown through the years I've realized that that's been going on for thousands of years, you know? There's been a few times when you had 100 years of peace in Europe, but we've also had 100 years of war in Europe.

Max Delsignore: Well, that's something that's still impacted this community at that time, even though the war effort was kind of a – had a global presence, it still had quite the impact here locally, and in particular that industry, to a certain degree.

Robert Sturtz: I can mention one thing that [Inaudible: 11:39] I remember – of course, as a child you're absorbing here a lot more than people realize, and it would've probably been in the – that's before we left – before we moved into the new house in 41, so it would've been 39 or 40, and I remember not sleeping well and I had – my mother had to tell me that they weren't drafting boys my age. Because I had that fear, that they would be coming to get me, and of course at that time we knew what was going on in Europe, in many parts, with 14 year olds and whatever, and I wasn't 14 at that time. But that was something, said my prayers, I guess that's when I brought it up that – and I was kind of put at rest with the idea that I was not part of that trap at that point in time.

Max Delsignore: Jean, when you started working at – you have worked at Saint Regis Paper Company in Deferiet, you were there for a period of time. You worked at the air break and many families, or family members were at the air break in those earlier years. What do you remember about life being like working in those two different industries?

Jean Sturtz: Life was pleasant. The work was pleasant, the people were pleasant, pay was [Inaudible: 13:00] so I was – had to live with somebody, with a family, and they were just like mother, father to you, they took you in and enjoyed your company and I enjoyed being there.

Max Delsignore: Were you the only one that lived with the family here locally too or were there other folks that worked either at the mill or at the air break at that time?

Jean Sturtz: The man of the house worked at the air break.

Robert Sturtz: I worked at the paper mill.

Jean Sturtz: Yeah, the paper mill. Yeah.

Max Delsignore: What was it like going from Lions Falls and then moving to Deferiet to be close to where you would go to work every day, but being with a different family? What was that environment like for you?

Jean Sturtz: Well, thanks to Bob it was alright, because he kept – he'd come and take me out. It's a little tiny place, you know, Deferiet's pretty small, wasn't much to do. So there was – going again at the time.

Robert Sturtz: You were fortunate too though, in that when you lived right in Deferiet a good friend of your fathers was [Inaudible: 14:00] superintendent [Inaudible: 14:02] and I think you stayed with him for a while, didn't you? So they were not relatives but friends of the family kind of thing, because he, as a superintendent [Inaudible: 14:14] he moved to many mills back after, you know, when we were married we went to Millinocket, Maine to – which was one long drive that – across Maine, I can tell you, and he was up there at that mill at that time and we stayed a couple – three days there, and we – Jean can tell you about the log drives and seeing the logs piled up at the mill in Lions Falls. They drove the Moose River right up until probably 47, 48.

And it was something to see.

Max Delsignore: How often would – well, I should backtrack, so when you were at Saint Regis Paper Company, and Bob would come to see you, how long had you been together at that time, how did you initially meet, being from different communities in Louis County?

Jean Sturtz: I don't know. I don't know.

Robert Sturtz: Yeah, I met you at a Polish dance, I think it was.

Jean Sturtz: And I loved to polka.

Max Delsignore: Oh, okay.

Jean Sturtz: He doesn't dance very – he doesn't like to.

Robert Sturtz: I'm not good at it. I'm not a polka.

Jean: Not a polka.

Robert Sturtz: One swing around and – a friend of mine, somewhat older, we both had cars but I went with him one night and we stopped there and I think it was a – maybe the results of a wedding or something, or maybe not, they used to have those. But it was always – halfway to Boonville, that house I think it was, and he said, 'There's somebody I want you to meet.' He went over and introduced me to Jean but he really didn't know Jean either, but he was that kind of a promoter. I mean he was always – he knew everybody and if he didn't know you well he still knew you, you know? [Inaudible: 16:02] he was kind of a guy who would walk around with a cigarette behind his ear. You can tell how old we are. That's World War Two stuff.

Max Delsignore: But did the polka clinch it for you? I want to go back to that for one second.

Jean Sturtz: He still doesn't polka.

Robert Sturtz: No, I don't.

Jean Sturtz: Has no interest in dancing.

Robert Sturtz: No. No, I went to see her a couple of times borrowing my father's car, and one time I was driving late, and I kind of run late and behind somebody, and they didn't go around the corner I thought they were going to, they went straight up into a road and I rolled the car over. And I thought well, I probably can fix it, and of course it was beyond fix, and so dad got a much nicer car and my mother insisted that I get my own car. So – and I was – that's the night I didn't get to see Jean, she was still living in Lions Falls and I come home and said, 'Oh god, I have a little issue here.'

Jean Sturtz: Rolled the car over. That's an issue.

Max Delsignore: Yeah.

Robert Sturtz: So from that – I think I borrowed someone's car a couple times. It went on for quite a while.

Jean Sturtz: Forever, you're still here.

Rande Richardson: Is it okay to just interject, I have a question to that, is it okay, sort of in the interest of free falling? So I've known you for a long time and your children certainly, and you probably get asked this a lot but I'd like to hear it from both of you. What do you attribute to the success of your marriage? You know, in today's world it is an accomplishment. What, from both sides, what would you say has kept you in your strong marriage together?

Jean Sturtz: I still love him.

Rande Richardson: Okay.

Robert Sturtz: Well, we're busy supporting each other, I think. Jean certainly had her hands full and there were times when I felt neglected a little bit, because she did what a mother's supposed to do and she looked after one of the five children. They were spread out as you know. Bobby was the youngest child at your age, and Susie was about 14 years old, or maybe something like that. And two other – three other sisters in between, so we had children for a long time and that was great. But the story was we ended up renting in Watertown for about a year. I was sent to Messina when they built the sea way. We were there about six and a half years and of course as it went down it was hard to sell houses, there were just lots of them.

We were in a small house, it was built for Plan Core for the aluminum works when Alcoa – well, it wasn't Alcoa, it was the government came in and built the aluminum plant, later sold it to Alcoa when the war was over. We lived in one of those houses, it [Inaudible: 18:57] adequate, it was on a circle, it was called Homecroft Circle, Homecroft Housing, built in the 40s. And when I was transferred back to Watertown the head of the sales department, and traveled in the area pretty much, Jean was left there because we couldn't sell the house for quite some time. We bought a house from [Inaudible: 19:22] over on Washington Street and it needed some doing. Everything else does, even if it's just because you're a different person.

And we went on that and finally we rented the house and got Jean back here, and we had two children then, the third child was born after we came back, and that's when you first knew us, probably -

Rande Richardson: Yeah.

Robert Sturtz: - was on Washington Street.

Rande Richardson: So Jean, if you were going to give advice to someone that's just starting out in a marriage, are there two or three things that you would say this is what I've learned about how to have a happy marriage?

Jean Sturtz: First of all, you should both belong to the same church, and you should go to church and take part in everything that the church offers. And you should agree on how you want to raise your children. I mean one can't be the whole boss, you have to share that. What else?

Robert Sturtz: You have to make those decisions together -

Jean Sturtz: Yeah.

Robert Sturtz: - not in front of the children.

Jean Sturtz: Yeah.

Robert Sturtz: You know, because they -

Jean Sturtz: But we really -

Robert Sturtz: - they're brighter than you think, they'll play you off.

Rande Richardson: And just to pick up on that, then I'll go back to Max, but in the respect of that in your marriage and the decisions and such, how do you view your philanthropy both as a couple and as individuals? How do you make that work, because you're going to have some things that you like and some things that you like, and how does that work in a marriage, when that's an important part of your life?

Jean Sturtz: I don't know, it seems like we've always just agreed on what we should be doing.

Robert Sturtz: We had a similar mindset, I'm sure. We also were very busy as far as – there wasn't a lot of idle time because we all had – we had things we wanted to do together, we built a – the same kitchen I think three times. Some of it was my idea, some of it was Jean's. I came home once and Jean had decided that there was a petition that would make her kitchen much nicer, and she took a hammer to it once she got through the plaster and at last she realized there were pipes in there. So then -

Jean Sturtz: And wires and all that.

Rande Richardson: Yeah, yeah.

Robert Sturtz: So we -

Rande Richardson: That's great.

Robert Sturtz: - we've had some of those. But it is so important that – in life that you not hold things – things that upset you for the moment need to pass and go beyond and not be brought back in your mind or between you. Blame is a terrible thing and it generally involves everybody. And I think avoiding that has been a great thing.

Max Delsignore: Touching on one thing that you just shared, when deciding on the level of support, either of your time, your talent, your resources, giving something in the community, what are the expectations that you have that you want to see if you're going to be willing to support something in this area?

Robert Sturtz: Well, it's a strange answer, there are a lot of great causes and you may not agree with the way they go about doing it but on the other hand I always have to remind myself that I'm too busy doing my own thing, so I'm not participating in the methodology, with the how it's been doing or whether it's wasted or not, wasted. You can find all kinds of excuses why not to do something, and that's wrong. You really shouldn't. If you're not willing to be part of it then don't participate, and/or – wondered if you can. I think Jean can give a great answer there, as to how this whole thing started. When we were in Messina we had a minister who lost his hand in a buzz saw over in New England as a boy, and he was an interesting man.

Had a couple of daughters and a wife and they lived in the [Inaudible: 23:45] next door, and he's the one that has said if you were a little tied, and he said, 'Well, we're just getting by,' and he said, 'Well, that's probably true.' That you'll find you have more if you – and you don't – you can't tie from what's left because most of us don't have anything left. We live in that time when they can get your interests somewhere, to put your resources and your savings or whatever. So we started doing that, and that was at that time, you know, it was ten percent of – there's always a discussion well, it's after taxes. Yes, but it was ten percent.

Rande Richardson: Right.

Robert Sturtz: And it just made a whole difference in our life that day on. But we had the opportunity to help people a few times too. We were sent out to a house, it was the saddest thing I ever saw. This woman was out trying to split wood to keep the place warm, it was in the winter in Messina, and we took a bag of groceries out and it turned out that she needed some wood split, as well as the bag of groceries. But you know, when you saw some of those hardships -

Jean Sturtz: So Bob split wood.

Rande Richardson: Yeah.

Jean Sturtz: I sit.

Robert Sturtz: You probably piled it.

Jean Sturtz: I nearly piled it but I didn't split it.

Robert Sturtz: And I don't know how long we were there, but I just remembered the sadness and she was alone with children, if I remember right. And a very, very poor place, but – and there's a lot of that, no matter where you go, you don't have to travel far to find it.

Rande Richardson: What do you think is our responsibility as a community or yours, or to make sure that the next generation, those that come after us, understand this like you do? Tell me about your feelings on the importance of that and how you think we get that message across.

Robert Sturtz: It's certainly important, and it becomes so difficult, particularly in the society that we're living in. You don't have the community as much as you did. You know, back in the 40s and 50s and whatever, you knew so many people in the immediate area that you went to school with and many of them stayed later on. Education was different, you – maybe you went through high school or up in – growing in society, that wasn't even necessary when they were able to get – I think it was 16, they would – dad said you know enough if I need help on the farm, you know, there was a lot of that went on. But how do you promote the giving? The only thing you can hope for is example.

I know of nothing else that makes much sense, and it's so easy. You know, it's so easy to come up with rationale in your own mind. Like, well, if I had his job I would do that too. If I had his means. That guy you're speaking about didn't start there, in most cases.

Rande Richardson: Well, I think, you know, part of one of the main reasons we're doing this is 50 years from now when we're replaying these stories we want to make sure that the next generation can hear from your own experiences and your own thoughts why this is important, because there was a whole group before you that hoped that you would do it. And so part of why we're doing this is so that when I'm gone and you're gone and Max is gone we still have a community that's vibrant and all the things we like. And just on that note, if you had to leave the area and move away, what would you say you would miss most about the North Country?

Robert Sturtz: It's still a relatively peaceful place to live. You know, it's somewhat different than it was when we came back here, in 61. But even here, it's surprising. You know, I grew up in two little towns. My dad worked in [Inaudible: 27:55] and my grandparents were there, and I was there much of the time, and I don't know the population but I knew everybody there and they knew me, which meant as a little boy -

Rande Richardson: Sure.

Robert Sturtz: - word will get back, you know?

Rande Richardson: Yeah.

Robert Sturtz: Before you get home.

Rande Richardson: Right, right.

Robert Sturtz: So that – of course that has all changed, and – but we're forcing children to grow up so early on and it's – there's all kinds of factors in that. Certainly this focus on sexuality and young people, to the point of little children are developing much sooner than they did. I see in the paper two days ago talked about a girl, 13, going off to college. She's probably ready in some ways, mentally, but you know, what happens to childhood? Childhood is supposed to be a good time, and I think it has been for most of us in the past. You have some nice memories, some lessons you learn, you know. I remember coming home with something, my mother said, 'Where did you get that?' Well, it was a plank, and I was always collecting wood or doing something. It was a walkway, and I said, 'I got it over there.'

She said, 'Well, you better take it back.' I wasn't brought up with fear. I think for not coming home right from school once my dad gave me a couple of whacks and made me sit down. But the

discipline I grew up with was – he had a tremendous grip and he'd take you by the arm and set you in the chair.

Rande Richardson: Got the point across, right?

Robert Sturtz: Something I remember well that serves me, and it bothers me to see my grandkids doing it, I had a cap pistol and I stood out by the corner and a neighbor was pumping water out of the well, and I bang, banged at him and dad saw it. He locked the cap pistol up with his guns. I bet I was six weeks before I had nerve enough to ask for it. The response was, 'Do you know how to handle it properly?' And now I see this, and even – it bothers me even with squirt guns, because it's so much violence, and you see so much of it on television that life – you talk about life mattering, well, it doesn't seem to matter much. It's almost like there's nothing final about being run over with a car, or hit or something.

So these are terrible messages that we're sending to young minds. Many of them can handle it very well but as we've seen lately, there's a number of people out there over time with problems. We don't want to go lock them up until they've done something. I'm not sure that's – it's a good response to it but I am concerned about – things generally can only get about so bad, and they do get better. That's something that has been going on a long time.

Max Delsignore: Because the communities are changing so much how important is it then to share with this next generation, as Rande alluded to before, how important is it to share with the younger demographic why giving back can really impact the region, or how can it affect the future of the region? Why is giving back so important to this area, for this next generation?

Robert Sturtz: It can do more for you in giving back than it does for the people you give it to. It really does. I guess it goes back to my grandmother. I've heard her tell – my grandfather saying, 'If you work for a man, work for a man,' and if you don't like that then find somewhere else to work. But you don't necessarily like some jobs. I do things that I just – I'm sure most of us do. It might be writing a report and the sooner you do it the better. But you just don't like it. Like the thought behind it, the energy it takes and the mental process. But in most cases if when you finish you feel good about it, that's quite a reward. And the reward is the accomplishment, and looking back and saying, you know, doesn't that wall look better, I fixed that wall.

Or I trimmed the tree, or I did this with that. And the process is sometimes as laborious, but the good feeling you can get from it, and I think that's what's driven both of us in many cases, where we're trying to – you don't think about it, but until you come back and try to explain why you did what you did.

Rande Richardson: Well, I think that's an important message because I think there's so many people who never experience the joy of giving, either because they just didn't think they were capable, because they didn't think they had the ability, or they just never explored it. But I think, and you've said that, I mean don't you think giving back is an important part of citizenship and just a vibrant, healthy, productive life?

Robert Sturtz: I do, and I think the cop out often is, well, someone else will do it. It's like, you know, we have a daughter that will throw a wrapper on the ground and walk away and she says, 'Well, they get paid to pick that up.' Well, you know, if they are getting paid they're probably being paid with tax dollars that we're still paying for. And so it's so easy to push it off to the idea that oh, a little bit doesn't make any difference. Maybe you can only give ten cents or a dollar a week to whatever it is you believe in. But it's important, if everyone did that. I think – I just think it's terrible that we spend – I think – I'm all for the military monies we spend, but what bothers me is the amount of food we have in storage here with the world starving.

And many of our problems are overseas – this is getting out of line here – come from poverty, come from being hungry. You know, you promised me something, it's worth a try. I mean here I am with nothing, or hurting very badly. So as a nation we're not as generous as we should be, and yet we're head and shoulders above the rest of the world. But we have the means and the wherewithal to do so much more. I know some of the gifting we've done has been turned against us and it looks like it came from our very adversaries, and all that goes on. I knew – if I was told about watching the Communists with a big stamp hitting every bag of wheat that came off the truck, with a stamp, and sure, we get taken.

But if you refuse to participate, or if you refuse to give, because it may not be well used, or it may be wasted, that's a cop out too, that's a cop out. Some is, of course. Nothing is 100 percent.

Max Delsignore: One of the things that you have committed to, and have been strong supporters of, is one time having the Black River Valley Club being such a strong local institution, civic group in this area,

and the re-purposing of that building to what's going to become the Northern New York Philanthropy Center. What does it mean to give to a project of that magnitude knowing the potential impact that's going to have?

Robert Sturtz: Just a nice feeling, I guess, as much as anything. I am – I was very pleased with what Rande put together, with the idea that the identity of the Black River Valley Club will still remain in the front of the building. I think that's great. It was another era. Between [Inaudible: 35:56] and myself we did everything we could think of, along with a lot of other people. And it just was the wrong time. Times have changed, people live a little different lifestyle. People have different needs and demands. You know, that flourished when there were more millionaires in Watertown per capita than there was in anywhere in the United States. So we don't have that anymore. We still have them, but being a millionaire isn't what it used to be either.

You still use the same numbers but you're probably not going to do anything along that you don't get a good feeling from. Or you don't feel satisfied by doing it, or you don't hope that it will do some good. You don't necessarily need your name on it. You've got to live with yourself. What others think about you is not that – over time that comes and goes.

Rande Richardson: Obviously the building is symbolically important to you and your investment and commitment to that institution, but beyond that, based on what you know of what we're trying to do there, what appeals most to you in terms of this next phase of the Community Foundation's impact on the community? What that you believe is going to go on in there is going to be lasting and of value to the community?

Robert Sturtz: Well, you'll probably delete this. I do wonder sometimes if we're becoming such a social society that more and more people are going to live with their hands out, and that does bother me. There'll always be great needs and they need to be addressed and they need something to be done about them. And you can't just wait until they explode upon you, you have to plan and garner ahead so that that's conceivable to do that. As I say, socially I don't like the direction we're heading, but that'll turn around too hopefully, some day. I think it's very important. I have problems with this non-profit thing. I wish they'd quit talking about non-profits.

You can't run a non-profit, you either make money or you lose money. So yes, it's non-taxable, that's okay. But I have trouble with the idea that oh, we just – we're non-profit, we've got a – boy, it takes some accountant to run down the line and never have a [Inaudible: 38:27] You know, we can't do that. So we've got to plan for profitability to exist and to grow and to go on, and there's nothing wrong – profit's not a dirty word, and I know the reason it's called non-profit is from a tax standpoint, and nobody's supposedly taking any of it home with them, other than the salary that they earn. But maybe more so as I've gotten older and had some success together here, we have become – expecting people to be able to do more for themselves.

And I think they do need to do more for themselves. I think staying active for many – for the most part has to – a longer life. Certainly a bit more content, a happier life, the sense of accomplishment. Or some sort of, 'I paid my way,' or, you know? You see people, every now and then there's someone who worked as a janitor in one of the major cities puts his four, five kids all through college and still has a nest egg. That's because he didn't spend ahead of his earnings. You know, and plus he was – he knew how to manage his own means. If I could advise grade schools and junior highs to teach people how to spend their money and how to get value, I think we do that very poorly, and I think it's very important.

Some of these kids won't get a high school, or won't get beyond high school, and if you can just give them a sense of values. Maybe it's being done more than I realize, but I think there's a great need to -

Rande Richardson: Do you – so in that respect, I mean how both of you, for either of you, clearly you've been successful. You've been successful in many of your endeavors. How do you explain your success?

Jean Sturtz: God is good. That's it. Really.

Robert Sturtz: Yeah, yeah.

Jean Sturtz: You take a chance, that's it.

Robert Sturtz: And part of it's good health. You know, lots of people are cut down when they don't necessarily pass away but they don't have the wherewithal, the energy, the desires to go forward. A positive outlook is very helpful. I think reading the right books doesn't hurt. You don't have to agree with all of it but it's going to have an effect on you.

Rande Richardson: From a business perspective, explain your success from a business perspective.

Robert Sturtz: Oh, that's fairly easy. I say it is. I spent 30 years working for a farm and I stayed there, so it must've been okay. But I saw so many things done that were counterproductive, that hurt their own business. It was a small family business and they were – there was jealously involved, didn't want anybody to get ahead too much. I saw the owner get all upset once because a man who'd been with him quite a long time bought a colored TV, and he didn't have one. The boss didn't have one. 'Who does he think he is?' You know, that kind of a thing. Treating people well, and you can only – and first of all, I think I said it before but you can put me down for saying there are no bargains in labor, because I really believe that.

You could write a book on the fact that you can't get more than you pay for long term. You might get lucky, yes, I knew Mister Cooper well, and he had some of the most dedicated people and they weren't overpaid, I can assure you. But they were – it was a different day. Some of those people came back – came through that period when just having a job was important. They had contractors work for me when I was in Messina, who told about their father here in town here, masonry contractors. They'd have a big job of it when they come out in the morning, Monday morning, and grabbed some guy – might be the best worker he had, grabbed him by the shirt and said, 'Get out of here!' Scared the hell out of everybody.

That's so everybody would – because you couldn't find another job. What a cruel thing to do. So you know, we all have to work for a living, and at this point I'm working for the government. But it is really – it really is – it's all about selecting good people but treating them right. And if you've got – we have 100 plus people, so it's very important to have the personnel guy having that same – and I try to treat people and reciprocate the way you get along with others is a reciprocal thing, and you'll find that playing back and forth and working very well. Being in the right place at the right time, you can't take that away. You know, and I have to say God led me to that because I was 50 years old, 49 I guess, something like that, after 30 years with the other firm.

And I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I knew that the income that I expected at that age was pretty hard to find, a sales manager or technician, or whatever, you know? And this thing was owned by

my neighbor across his street and he kept showing some interest, Mister Woodwell, and there was a Woodwell colony there -

Rande Richardson: Yes, there was, there was.

Robert Sturtz: - there was several of us. And came over one day and wanted to know what I was – what I planned on doing. We were putting the pool in, I didn't have a job. Well, we had kids.

Jean Sturtz: [Inaudible: 44:07 – It was him who was smart? We was-]

Rande Richardson: Yeah, right, right.

Robert Sturtz: And we had about 70 rental units, it had to be looked after, and everyone said, 'Well, you've got a job enough, that'll keep you busy.' That's not a job. No, I want a job. I know I was getting a check before all those years and I'd had some jobs before that as well. I worked in a bank for a couple of years, and what have you. But so he said, 'Well, maybe you ought to come over [Inaudible: 44:34] chemical.' And he had a partner, Mister White, and so that afternoon Jean and I went over [Inaudible: 44:42] and drove around it. I hardly knew it was there, even though I was brought up seven miles away, and it was on an old street by the cemetery, and so then I went back and said, 'Yes, I'm interested.' 'Well, you know, it's not that simple. I've got a partner and what we really need is a manager, because we can't sell it. We don't have anybody to run it, and if we were to sell it we don't have that.'

So I went on as a sales manager, a manager of one. So – well, we had a part time guy that was selling the specialty things. And Bill and Fred participated some too but – so I worked a year and a half before I bought it, and even then, right up until the last minute it didn't look like it was going to happen. We had a fellow in New Jersey that was very interested, and then that fell through and my neighbor was in the banking business across the street and from one afternoon to the next afternoon we closed, and the urgency of the whole thing was because the tax laws are changing and they had to sell it before the 31st. And we made that happen, or they did. And it took me three months to get the finances working.

But the neighbors came up with the necessary money and they carried some of it, and then it worked just fine. But it worked because it was supposed to work, I guess. Not because anything that I did, you know? I had a good reputation, that's the only thing that -

Rande Richardson: It's a big thing.

Robert Sturtz: - I paid – we'd paid our bills. Jean did the paying, I didn't handle the money. I hadn't seen a check for any part of that for the last 25 years.

Jean Sturtz: Never sees a check.

Robert Sturtz: Well, I -

Jean Sturtz: You can look at it if you want.

Robert Sturtz: - I used to forget to pay the bills and I thought the man of the house was supposed to pay the bills, and finally Jean said, 'You know, probably they are but if you want to I will do that for you.' So -

Jean Sturtz: But you weren't really hitting them all. If I remember right you weren't always on the ball to hit them.

Robert Sturtz: No.

Jean Sturtz: To pay them when they were due.

Robert Sturtz: No. Well, they know we're good for it, what the hell.

Jean Sturtz: That's not the way it works.

Rande Richardson: I always have noticed when the checks come it's got Jean's signature on them. So I know that she's in charge of the billing paying, somewhat.

Robert Sturtz: Well, if I can say anything, there's no such thing as a self-made person. In this case without the two of us working together, none of this would've happened.

Rande Richardson: Sure.

Robert Sturtz: You know? And I think that so often is the case. This is for posterity, so they'll all be gone by then, but if you read the obituaries and when you get to my age you kind of tend to do that, it gets to be ridiculous because you don't know anybody anymore. But if you see the people dropping out at very young ages, now they have destruction habits and this and that and the other thing, but sometimes they've had two or three divorces, and that takes a lot out of people. It's not a healthy thing for most people. Some people of course don't have any problem with that, but I see that as

an indicator of happiness perhaps, satisfaction with yourself, and what's going on around you.

Max Delsignore: When you look at the big picture and you again reflect on everything that you've given, everything that you've supported over your lifetime, and the values that have been taught to you, and what you've shared with your children, and maybe even some of your friends, when you're asked the question of how do you want to be remembered at the end of the day, what would you say is the most important thing you want folks to understand about Bob and Jean Sturtz?

Jean Sturtz: We're Christians. That's the first thing.

Robert Sturtz: I think we'd like them to remember us as being fair.

Jean Sturtz: That all comes under.

Robert Sturtz: Yeah. That doesn't mean we did everything right, doesn't mean that somewhere you'll find people that think, 'Oh, that son of a gun, he did this, or he didn't do that,' and I'm sure it's out there. But if you're coming through saying just live a perfect life, well, you know, but he's up on a mountaintop somewhere is that guy. That's not the case at all, but you don't have – hopefully you have a focus for what you believe in and what you want to accomplish, and some kind of an idea, which is ongoing and growing. It's nothing that you – you don't sit down and write it up and for the rest of my life this is me. It's a growing, it's a living, not a document but a living sense of being, of thinking, and you change it as you go on.

We're all influenced by the people around us. I've been around a lot of people that I can't forget the way they acted but I certainly don't want to act like that, talk like that or think like that. Because I find it drags me down.

Rande Richardson: So can I just – I want to – I love that question and I want to just hone in on it a little more, maybe, for Jean too. And I'm going to ask Jean first and then Bob. Finish this sentence for me: Jean Sturtz is?

Jean Sturtz: She is a wife and a mother. And a neighbor. And a Christian. That should've come first.

Rande Richardson: Bob Sturtz is?

Robert Sturtz: Probably overly obsessed with his success. And that's not good. I'm not proud of that, but I am pleased with what we've been able to do, I would like to say that I have a feeling for others. I have a sense of – in my thinking that the people that make us uncomfortable, the people we don't like, whether it's racial or what it is, is primarily based on fear. I really think it is, and I'm awfully disappointed to see so many young ladies and men going around, you can't tell their race anymore because they've covered – almost covered with tattoos. If I was to disappoint my mother in her lifetime, even the smallest one would've done it.

Rande Richardson: I always figure if God didn't give it to me in the first place, I probably didn't need it, right?

Robert Sturtz: That's right.

Jean Sturtz: Right.

Robert Sturtz: That's right. Yeah. But – and it's probably harmless, but it brands people. There's a number of places that have rules that you can have your arm covered but you keep your shirt on and you keep it buttoned. You know, that kind of thing. Because it doesn't hurt anybody I guess, but it – again, and at least in my case, you come to associate certain activities and certain attitudes with certain levels of thought. Certain mentalities, I guess I'd say. It doesn't sound very good but it does drag people down, I think.

Rande Richardson: Well, this is probably a comment more than a question, but I think it's important to say that when people come to this town and they're being introduced to citizens and neighbors, I think that Bob and Jean Sturtz are ones that we hold up as the example, the model. Not perfect, none of us are, but embody a lot of what I believe makes the North Country great, and it isn't just about giving, it's about appreciating and knowing where we came from and realizing that this doesn't just happen without all of us being part of it. And I think it's important certainly for me, and I know Max shares this for you to know that that's widely viewed amongst this community.

You know, I have a relationship with you that goes back beyond that, but I've seen it both on a personal level and through my work too. So I think it's just important for you to know that you've done that and continued to. Hope you do, I hope you know that. I hope you know that.

Max Delsignore: I would add, you know, your spirit I think is the greatest gift of all to this area. It's kind of – it's exactly in line with what Rande just mentioned, but giving your support and everything that you've done, it's that spirit that we hope inspires the next generation and those that are listening to this, inspires them to follow the example that you mention. And I think you've done a wonderful job demonstrating that in your lifetime, and we're very grateful for that. We very much appreciate you sharing your story on the podcast with us, thank you for coming in and being able to discuss what your life has meant to this area and how much you've given to the North Country.

Robert Sturtz: Well, a lot of people have been very nice to us over time, at all levels. Whatever you do in life, don't waste your energies on getting even, or feeling slighted. It's done, it's over, and we have that philosophy that – Paul Peters does, all of our personnel, and he said, 'As long as you keep it civil you can say whatever you like and it will not be – it won't be held against you.' It may come to a point where I tell you what my side of the thing is, but remembering that so-and-so said this at some time or other is not a good thing, and we try to run the place that way. It's not easy sometimes and some people leave – well, when it's probably the best thing for them.

I have a philosophy that it's wrong to keep someone on that's not in the right place, not doing what you want, and say, Well, you know, he hasn't had a raise in ten years, so it's a pretty good deal.' It's not, you're wasting his life and you're wasting your position there. If it comes to that it's better to sit down and explain it. He can probably find a place that he will be happier and probably do – financially do better. And you can replace him with whatever it takes to make it work. Of course personally I don't do the hiring anymore.

Max Delsignore: Thank you for being on the podcast and sharing -

Robert Sturtz: You're welcome.

Max Delsignore: - all these great values and stories, and -

Robert Sturtz: Thank you.

Max Delsignore: - we really look forward to the audience listening in to this, and thanks again to everyone of you for joining us, and we hope you'll join us again on the Northern New York Community Podcast.

[Music playing]
Northern New York Community Podcast. Stories from the heart of our community.

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