

Max DelSignore: We are back with another edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. It is our pleasure to have Allen and Marilyn Splete join us to talk about their ties to the North Country and community philanthropy. This couple's affinity for the region is well known and we will explore their story through an array of topics in this conversation.

But before we open this chat, let's share a sincere thanks with our supporters, WPBS and the Northern New York Community Foundation. They are responsible for the production of these outstanding stories from the heart of our community. Be sure to check out what both organizations are doing these days. Head to www.wpbstv.org to see all the latest programming initiatives provided by PBS and hop over to www.nnycf.org to see all the community foundation has to offer. We hope you'll enjoy this interview with Allen and Marilyn.

It's great to have you both here.

Marilyn Splete: Thank you.

Allen Splete: Thank you.

Max DelSignore: Now we had a chance to visit at your home in Cranberry Lake earlier this summer and we covered a lot of ground about the community and your involvement in it. One of the things I took away from our chat was that you feel as if the journey in life has been fulfilled with a lifetime of doing. If you could explain to listeners what that quote or that statement means to you. Could you just elaborate on that?

Allen Splete: I think that the doing aspect of it is a result of early experience in caring for other people and it probably is a result of your family values and the environment in which you grew up. And most of the members of our family were involved in what I would call, service work or in doing things that got them out into the world. In many cases, in higher education or other areas in education, where they saw their work as a calling. A direct calling in trying to reach out and to have others learn and experience the satisfaction and rewards that come from giving back.

Marilyn Splete: Okay, well, my experience is very different from Allen's. He grew up in the small town of Carthage, New York, and I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But my roots go way back in the Philadelphia area. The original people who came from Germany, mostly, were part of the original Pennsylvania Dutch settlers in that area. And they were a group of farmers and shopkeepers and so forth. And so my parents, of course, were not, but in growing up where I did, there were still many opportunities for my parents to be involved in their local community and they were.

So I was always involved because they were. My Dad was a township commissioner for a while, in Abington. My Mom supported him in that and was

involved in politics. They both were involved with their church and I tended to follow along in that same tradition. And I've always been the one to raise my hand to say, "Oh yeah, okay, I can do that," and from a very early age. So I guess that's what we really mean by our involvement by doing, over many years.

Allen Splete: Just to add on to the point about the environment. One of the things about the small towns in northern New York, where I grew up in Carthage, is that there always was a segment of the population that seemed to be looking out for those who were also trying to make their way and may not have had the means to really achieve some of their goals.

So it was leading by example that you could say, within the community and the level of wealth one had, really did not make much difference. But there was a real attention to inequality for those people that you could help get the opportunities, that seemed so readily available, for perhaps the community leaders. So small-town is really an opportunity to perpetuate those values, in a different way, in a pronounced way.

Max DelSignore: To continue in that thread, in that vein, Allen, as you mentioned, your parents grew up in Carthage. Kind of neighboring community along the Black River. Very instrumental in a couple different ways in Carthage as well. Your father was the first director of the [inaudible 00:04:46] Boys and Girls Club in 1925 and your mother was an educator as well. Tell me just a little bit about their involvement in the community, what that meant to you and what you picked up on, at an early age.

Allen Splete: I think it was a direct example of watching how they were living their lives. In the terms of the boys club, it was clearly a melding of all of the people within the community. And there were no opportunities there for recreation or summer camps or things like that, until my father really became involved in that. And then my mother became a full partner in that, in terms of her teaching.

But it was the ability of people to go to a small town gym and shoot baskets, go to a carpentry shop, go to a printing shop and in the long winters in particular, that's where you really found those people gravitating. In other words, there used to be a little swinging door that led up to some major steps and there would be a waiting line for the kids to get into the club. So the fact that you could tangibly see the changes in other people's lives, as a result of their work, is something that I shall not forget.

Max DelSignore: Can you tell me a little bit just about what Carthage was like as a community, growing up as a kid? What do you remember?

Allen Splete: Oh, Carthage was a bustling town when I was growing up, because all of the paper mills, St. Regis, Champion, were all still full blooming. Probably the town at that time was about 5,000 to 6,000 if you counted the communities of

Carthage and West Carthage. And all of these civic clubs, Rotary, Lions, whatever it happened to be, were very involved in terms of trying to tie in to the boys club. In other words, they were buying into the examples of what they were seeing was happening through the work at the club directly. So you had a lot of charitable giving related to the club, whether it was camp cooking equipment, whether it was building a bench for the boys club in the town. Downtown was thriving, there were a lot of shops, a lot of markets right on the main street. So it was a period where there was a lot of activity.

Max DelSignore: What was it like to go back and see your father's name displayed as the Howard Splete Family Center, when the Y decided to dedicate the venue in your father's name, a couple short years ago?

Allen Splete: I think it was very important to my brother, Howard, who experienced the same kind of life and values that I did, very much. But it was a way of making sure that his contribution was not forgotten and I think the history display that we put inside the lobby of the Y is almost a historical contribution, you could say, like giving to a museum or historical society. So it was a way of just making sure that the person, we're presently doing a family history, which will relate and give to the community library. So it's a way of trying to make sure that some good things aren't forgotten and what you experienced is remembered.

Max DelSignore: And a piece of that legacy that will certainly go on is having an endowment fund in the family's name to support the club at the community foundation. To have that piece, that element built in, as part of the family legacy, what does that mean to you?

Allen Splete: It means a great deal, because it's going to allow funds to continue to go, to keep some kind of a presence where men and women in the small town can go and do their physical exercise, reconnect with other people, and it's just available to them. If it wasn't, they'd have to travel a long distance to do the same thing.

Max DelSignore: Marilyn, you mentioned before that you grew up in suburban Pennsylvania and parents steeped in politics and education, but were very philanthropic with their time. Can you share just a little bit about your childhood growing up and some of those values that your mom and dad taught you, that you felt were pretty important?

Marilyn Splete: My childhood in suburban Philadelphia in the '50s was remarkably similar to childhood in Carthage, New York. Because the suburbs of Philadelphia, the close in suburbs of Philadelphia were leafy and green and kids walked out the door in the morning and mom said, "Be back for lunch," and we roamed the neighborhood. It was that kind of experience. And what did I take from that? I think what I took from that or developed from that was a sense of independence, of being able to manage on my own. There were kids in the neighborhood and we all did things together and rode our bikes. Allen always talks about camping, but we used to sleep out overnight in the neighbor's

backyard on a tarp with a blanket, and the stars overhead, which was not all that much different.

But my parents were very hardworking and very hard to explain. Just very good people and very honest, very straightforward. When I said they were involved in politics, if you compare that to politics today, it was a 180 degrees difference. My mother would go door-to-door when there would be new people in the neighborhood. She would go knock on their door and say, "Hello, I'm Mabel Detweiler, and here is a packet of information on how to register to vote." And that was what she would do or she would call when the election was coming up and just call people and say, in her district, and say, "Hello, this is Mabel Detweiler, committee woman in ward seven, and I just wanted to remind you the election is Tuesday and your polling place is at the car dealership on York Road." I've forgotten the name of it. "I hope you'll show up to vote."

And then on the day of the election, my mother would be there when the polls open and stay till the polls closed, just so she could greet her voters. There's a distance that you can't be, close to the polls. But you can beyond that and so she would go and she would greet all the voters by name, because she knew most of them. And my Dad, his role in all of this was to bring her lunch and bring her a snack and bring her supper.

So that's the kind of involvement. He was a township commissioner, his main area of interest was parks and recreation. Again, it was politics of service, if you will, and I certainly grew up with this. I have a younger sister, she did too and it's those sorts of values of being involved in your community and doing the stuff that doesn't get all the publicity.

Max DelSignore:

Now, you decided to pursue a career in education and certainly into higher education. What were the catalysts to go down that road and into that career?

Marilyn Splete:

Luck, opportunity. I went to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I thought I wanted to be a teacher, so I took some education courses, but I never really finished that. And I was in my senior year and I had not done student teaching. I had just taken a couple of education courses, but one of the professors who were teaching some of the education courses was also working part-time in the admissions office at Dickinson. His name was C.O. Williams. And I had been very active in all sorts of things on campus and he said to me one day in my senior year, when I wasn't sure what I was going to do next, "Marilyn, there's an opening in the admissions office, they're looking for somebody to play the role of assistant dean of," not play the role, but to be the assistant dean of admissions. "It involves travel and just the sort of kind of opportunities that I think you would be good at this," is essentially what he said, and "Why don't you go over and talk to Dave Jefferson about it?"

So I did and he said, "Yes, would you like to do this?" And essentially what happened was, that this was 1964 and I became an assistant dean of admissions for a co-ed college. Now, to me, it was just a wonderful opportunity to have my

own apartment, my own car and to travel, but when I look back on it, the only other women in college admissions at that time were women who work for women's colleges. And I sort of did not really focus in on, even though I had read Betty Friedan's book *The Feminist Mystique* and I was all thinking about oh, there are opportunities out there, I did not think of this in quite that way until many years later, when I realized that gosh. the role I was playing was unique.

And that was how I met Allen because my boss knew the head of the New York State Deans and Guidance Counselors in New York State, who said, why don't you send Marilyn to our meeting at the Catskills? She might make some good contacts. And Allen was working in admissions for the University of Rochester and he was also at that meeting. And so we met there. I tell people we met in a bar, but that was only because I only knew one person and that was Bob Howard and everybody went down to the bar in the evening and he said, "Marilyn, I'd like you to meet some people." You had to know Bob Howard to know that was ... he knew everyone and so he introduced me to Allen and a couple of other people who were there and the rest is history.

Max DelSignore: So you made one good contact.

Marilyn Splete: Well, I went back to Carlisle and I said to Dave Jefferson, "What do you think of my visiting schools in the Rochester, New York area?" And he said, "We're looking to expand in New York State, sure, set it up." But that was how it went.

Max DelSignore: So once you started to maybe go to the Rochester area for recruiting or for prospecting, the connection was forged a little stronger. Do you remember ... when did the careers begin to kind of meet, where you're able to either be at the same school or be able to kind of at least stay connected in your careers and live closer together?

Marilyn Splete: How do we describe this? I guess, it was a long-distance relationship for a while, a lot of phone calls, visits back and forth when were free. I not only went to Rochester, I also went to Syracuse and Buffalo and Albany, and when I was visiting those areas, we would meet in the middle for dinner and then go back to our respective places. It was a long-distance relationship that lasted a couple years, and then finally, at some point, he said, will you marry me? And I said, yes.

And so because his career was leading him toward higher education administration, what was it? He was finishing a PhD in higher ed administration at Syracuse and so he was going to move from Rochester to Syracuse and so I left admissions and said, "I don't want to travel if I'm married." That was a sort of a vestige of the old sort of attitude of well, if we're going to be married, why am I traveling?

And so we went to Syracuse, had an apartment and so I decided that it would be nice ... I might as well teach, because I needed to do something to earn money. Again, it was luck and circumstance and opportunity. The man who had hired him, Frank Piskor, who was a vice president at Syracuse said, "Marilyn, out at Jordan Elbridge High School they need someone to teach social studies," and I was a history major and coached the football team, but it's August. "And I think if you go out and talk to I've forgotten the superintendent's name, he might be interested in hiring you," just maybe to teach.

And so I did and he hired me and he said, "Marilyn, you don't have to coach the football team, we will find somebody to do that." And so that was the beginning of a teaching career that I hadn't quite intended to fall into, but did.

Max DelSignore: What were the conversations like, given your interest in higher education, as far as policy and campus life and what were some of those discussions like, as you kind of began this path in higher ed and certainly, with Allen, you kind of continued on. Were there some really good hearty discussions about-

Allen Splete: We had good discussions. The career interests were beginning to mesh, when we got married and she knew where I was going with my career and we both had an affinity for small, private liberal arts colleges, which later on, after I finished my working at St. Lawrence and being a college president at Westminster, led me to Washington to lead a National Association. And the experiences that we had here, we were talking about this earlier this morning, it's sort of like living two separate lives, but your roots are still very much in the north country. In other words, where you grew up still calls you back, if that experience is something that is not only memorable, but you also come up with a caveat that you can make a significant difference in your life in a different way, when you relate to those people. Because the association is there.

Marilyn Splete: You need to say that Frank Piskor left Syracuse and went to St. Lawrence to become the president of St. Lawrence University in 1969. And in 1970 he said to Allen, "I would like you to come to St. Lawrence and be the vice president for academic planning," which was a position that he created because St. Lawrence had not done planning. Most liberal arts colleges weren't doing that.

And so off went to St. Lawrence together. So I was totally unfamiliar with the Adirondacks in northern New York. I had been in the Adirondacks once, but not ... I'd been to Canon Daigle once. When we moved into this small town of Canton, New York, which was a university college town. Two colleges there, two colleges in Potsdam. I basically settled into precisely the life of a ... we had two children, we had one and then we had a second one. He worked at St. Lawrence and I stayed home with the kids.

I had many friends, it was the early ... well, it was the early '70s when half the people I knew were deciding that they wanted to ... they had got married and had kids and somehow or another they hadn't had time to be me, if you will. They'd say, don't you want to go and get a job? And I said, I've done that and

now this is what I want to do. And my mantra to myself was always, you can have it all, but not all at once. And so there are times when you're doing one thing and there are times when you're doing something else.

And so I was the happy supporter of him, but it wasn't just me. Frank Piskor created an environment at St. Lawrence where all of his major administrators and their spouses were committed to the enterprise at St. Lawrence. Committed to what Frank Piskor's vision was for St. Lawrence and we became good friends. People worked way beyond what you would ever expect them to do, because of their loyalty to Frank, to the institution and so forth.

And so I have a greater loyalty, as a result of that 12 years that we were there, to St. Lawrence than I do to Dickenson. Not that I don't care about Dickinson, but my commitment is to St. Lawrence and in the broader sense to the North Country. I've loved it up here. I also love the urban area, but I love it up here.

Max DelSignore: Allen can you just reflect on being able to serve your alma mater or play a role in the direction of your alma mater, your 1960 grad, Beta Brother, correct? What was it like when Frank said, come to Canton and come back and be the vice president of planning? What is it like to be in that position?

Allen Splete: It's very rare that you get called back to your alma mater, I think, directly to work to improve and make things happen. To actually be able to play a role in bringing about a change. And that to me was unique, because what I brought to the table, if you will, is having gone through the undergraduate experience. So I knew the school and that enabled me to work with classmates, other people, professors that I had known and it was a unique opportunity to forge a different relationship between staff and faculty and students, in a different way. And also, because of my interest in long-range planning, to be able to work with others, as I mentioned before, Dan Sullivan who was a president at St. Lawrence, he was at Carleton at that time, and there was one other person at Hamilton College.

And during that period, colleges were budgeting one or two years at a time. We developed five-year plans for the school and asked the faculty and staff to identify their priorities., once the priorities were established. Then it enabled us to go out to foundations and other people and say, this is our vision for this goal, this is where we would like it to go. And that was very rewarding.

So in a way, it was an opportunity for a small town boy to go back and to give back to the school that had given him so much, in terms of the impact on my career.

Max DelSignore: Very few folks get a chance to serve as a college president. You did so for Westminster College of Pennsylvania for three years. '82 to '85. What lessons in leadership did you take away from that experience?

Allen Splete:

I think, number one, the difficulties of being a college president, until you've actually sat in the chair, aren't something that you can relate to. When you look back in retrospect, it's trying to get a group of people with very disparate views and opinions to come together and to coalesce around an image or a direction that the school wants to go.

As a president, your allegiance really is pretty much determined by your role with the Board of Trustees. They hired you and that relationship is either going to work or it's not going to work, in terms of the long run. I think I learned about the identification of what I would call, movers and shakers within an institution, whether it be a faculty member or a staff person that you could have a discussion with and say, yes, this is a good idea, go and do it. And enforce that idea. Or if you saw something diverging and going in another direction, bringing the person in and explaining why that might not be the best path to go.

Consensus building and a compromise becomes extremely important and what you learn is like, it's like being a doctor on call, a 24/7 job. So you're really in the spotlight, your family's in the spotlight and I used to say to a lot of provost and others, if you don't like to raise money and be in the spotlight, it's probably not the place for you to go. Because that's what you're going to be measured on, your results, you are probably going to be remembered for that.

So the other thing that you remember is the strong people that can do the job when you're not on campus, because you're doing so much traveling. So the leadership is still a no matter where you are, getting a group of people to work together for a common goal. And that common goal has to be fueled by passion for a cause, as I've said before, Whether it's the Wilderness Health Care Foundation and working for the hospital in Star Lake, you have to have a passion for that and understand why it's important. If you don't do that work and it's not meaningful, it's probably not worth being involved in.

Max DelSignore:

Arguably your most influential work came as the President of the Council of Independent Colleges, which you referenced before. You did that for 14 years. The organization provides services to campus leaders as well as seminars, workshops, programs that assist institutions in programming and administrative and financial performance, as well as visibility. Where does this work rank on your professional scale?

Allen Splete:

It ranks at the culmination of my career and my legacy is probably going to remain in higher education, for what occurred in that period of time on the national scene. And here it was an opportunity to take my experience, all the experience that I had at St. Lawrence and at Westminster, and to apply it to other groups, to get them to work together. In a way, it's an opportunity to shape a national agenda and to have a big impact on a larger stage, if you will, and what you're doing is employing the lessons that you learned and the leadership principles that seemed to work. And for me, it was an opportunity to work with the United Negro College Fund schools in a different way, all of the

church related schools in the country, and then what I would call, the broadly based liberal arts colleges in the country.

And what you do is to create a climate where those people can learn from one another. They may not have known one another, particularly college presidents, and you got them to come to meetings and they found that no matter where they were from, they could learn from the other person. They just hadn't thought about that before, but they had to get out of their box, as a traditional way of doing things to say, hey, maybe this small Catholic College in Philadelphia has something for this elite college, Franklin and Marshall and Lancaster. And inevitably, that worked. So what the colleges said is you're right, you can be nimble, you can be innovative, you can respond and that enabled them to continue to survive.

So I guess the legacy is we helped a lot of schools get stronger and some continue to exist. The travel took me all over the country. I probably visited 700 colleges, which is very unique and until you get there to find out what their needs are, it's very difficult to relate. In other words, you can't sit in your office and look out the window and say, I know what those nine schools in Pennsylvania need.

Marilyn Splete:

I would just like to add to that. Probably the two key elements in his success in doing that, were believability, first. He had been there, he had been a college president of a small liberal arts college and as a result, he could walk into the office of a president in Alabama or wherever that might be, and while he wasn't saying, I have walked in your shoes, he had the believability, because he had been a president of a small college that had a variety of needs.

And the second was what he just referenced and that was, he went to these colleges and walked on their campuses and talked to people there and he had, probably, a broader sense than almost anyone in higher education at the time, of what was going on at the very local level and what was going on in the minds of these colleges, college presidents and on the campuses of these colleges.

And in addition to what he was able to do for them, it also gave him a perspective that I think was unique in higher education and the institution of CIC. CIC as an organization, since he retired, has just grown exponentially, because the man who replaced him didn't have that, but he built on the shoulders of that and his experience enabled him to broaden the reach of the organization to the point where it is today, which is outstanding.

Allen Splete:

It also relates I think, in a way, to the small-town background again, because many of these institutions are located in small towns and quite far apart. And it also gives you an opportunity to see how change can occur, if you can get the people working directly and to use the nonprofit world with charitable giving and so on, in different ways. So there's less reliance perhaps, on the bureaucracy.

My job was wonderful because I didn't have to worry about all of the politics that go with higher education. I could focus on programs and ways to improve the institution and find sources to do that. And as you know, here in the North Country, it's the same way. You get a core group of people who want to make a difference, they'll find a way to make it happen.

Max DelSignore:

The same can be said here at the community level too, and not necessarily just with local colleges, but any other community endeavors. You'd mentioned the hospital in Clifton Fine, certainly. And your ties to Cranberry Lake, to Canton, to the north country as a whole, have always been stronger here. Marilyn, you kind of alluded to this earlier in the conversation, but could you just explain a little further why the ties are just so much stronger to northern New York than any other place that you've lived?

Marilyn Splete:

I think possibly because I was able to do a lot of things that I was wanting to do. I may have been at home with children in the '70s, but in a small town, you are involved in the community. And also, I started getting involved with the hospital guild, for example, and other local community efforts, as they presented themselves. And of course, things on the campus as well. We were always ... it seemed as if we would be involved in a lot of say, parents weekend.

There's a lunch and there's a dinner. I had small children at home, but across the street from me, were teenage girls who for 50 cents an hour, would come and be with my kids at my house. All they had to do was run across the street and I would call Pam and I would say, "Pam, I have to go to this luncheon or this meeting or something else, can you come and stay with Heidi and Mike?" And, "Sure Mrs. Splete," and in she would come. It made it possible for me to live in two worlds, to feel as if I was doing right by the children, but also to involve myself in a variety of things.

I got involved with the League of Women Voters and the part that interested me was the whole voter education area. So I volunteered to organize, meet the candidates nights. It's pretty low-key when you're talking about a meet the candidates night in Potsdam, New York, but still, people came and the candidates came and there were views exchanged and I felt as if I was doing something. When you're a mother of small children, you can begin to think your mind is turning to mush, if you are not involved in some things that are meaningful to you. And so I simply took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves and as a result, I was a happy person.

And so I might have been a happy person if I had been somewhere else, doing something else and with someone else, but because I was here, there's an old silly saying about bright in the corner where you are, or something. And so you get involved and you do what sits in front of you. And so I was the supporter. I've done a lot of editing in my life, as a result of all the speeches he has given. I've done a lot of writing to help get things moving along and that led to books that we got involved in and we got involved in Frederic Remington.

First, because we were interested in him as a Western artist and second, because Atwood Manley, who is a well-known expert on Frederick Remington, lived in Canton and we became acquainted with him and his wife. That led to visiting obviously, the museum, but also writing a book, because Atwood said originally, to Allen, "St. Lawrence has just gotten a whole new collection of Frederic Remington letters to add to their original collection of letters. Somebody ought to do something about that." And so he got a grant from the John Ben Snow Foundation and set out to work with these letters and get copies of as many letters as he could. Well and good. That was in 1979, I think, or '80.

In 1982, we left to go to Westminster, so he could be president at Westminster. You know how much time college presidents have to work on books? Not much. So guess what? Guess who got involved? I said, "I can do this," so I got involved in it and before long, it became a joint project. We're good friends, we can work in the same itty-bitty little study, with his desk and my desk and still get things done without biting each other's heads off.

We have different strengths and mine are more in the writing and editing and his are in the researching of who was this person, that Remington was corresponding with? And so we did that while we were at Westminster. We left Westminster, went to Washington, we continued the project and it was finally published in 1988. It's called Frederick Remington's Selected Letters.

But what that has done is cement more of our connection with the north country. We've been involved with the museum. I served on the board and in the early 2000s, for three terms. And one thing leads itself to another and so now, because Frederick Remington ... and we didn't plan it this way, exactly, but Frederick Remington, who grew up in Canton and then in Ogdensburg, visited Cranberry Lake every summer, between roughly 1889 to 1899.

And so we can go and visit places where he used to visit. He never owned property, but we know a lot about what he did at Cranberry Lake and we take people out on the Art of Dining tours that the Remington does for fundraising every year. We take a group of people out on the lake and we show them where he was. Now there's nothing there left, but there sure are lots of tales to tell about what he did when he was there. And people seem to enjoy it, we certainly enjoy it and so again, we're making a difference, a little bit for the Remington museum.

And so each one of these things reinforces the ties that I was already developing here in northern New York. And so as a result, this has just become our focus of involvement, more so than in Maryland, where the opportunities are much more diverse down there and not as personal and not as real to us.

Max DelSignore:

What's it like to be able to share your passion with other folks in the community? Very passionate with the history of Remington and being able to do the boat tours and you'd mentioned before, Allen, the passion you have to be

able to champion a cause like raising money for the hospital. To be able to engage the community in your passion, what does that feel like?

Allen Splete: I think it's terribly rewarding and satisfying, because you're seeing the difference that is being made.

Marilyn Splete: You have a connection to it.

Allen Splete: It's more tangible, as well as trying to convince ... I don't want to say ... it's contagious. In other words, if you're trying to recruit other people to help you do it and you see a spark of interest in there, as particularly as you're aging, one of the things that you're trying to do is to identify younger people who will be able to carry the torch, if you will, and to continue to do the cause.

We know that the hospital is actually critical to the people in the immediate area. If it wasn't there, they'd have to travel miles. And in many cases, they don't know what's there and the ability to expand the service. When we first went to Cranberry, there were people who were driving miles to do just basic rehab after an operation, and they didn't even know they could have blood tests in the lab. And these were seasonal people who were coming back and forth.

I think it's the joy, number one, of watching something physically happen. Always wonderful to see a tangible result and then to say, well, we've got 10 people here and there's nothing that we can't tackle, if we really want to tackle it. So it's a matter of getting agreement on what is the most important thing to do?

Marilyn Splete: It's not a one-person operation. I think what makes it work is the fact that you have, as you said, well, 10 people. Okay, pick a number, who all have the same goal and they all bring different strengths to whatever this common goal is, which is the betterment of the Clifton Fine Hospital. It's always more fun to do things with someone else than to try and be the lone ranger out there, leading a march. And so by having the support of others here or there, it works. It becomes not just an undertaking but it becomes friendships and advancing a common cause, I think.

And then people like me go along behind to support the effort, as I always say. I come along behind and carry the bag, but it's still ... it becomes a family effort because we're both involved in it and me more in the background right now and him more out front, but it depends on what we're doing.

Max DelSignore: There might be some folks that listen to this interview and have yet to demonstrate some form of philanthropy, whether it be a charitable gift or maybe even volunteerism. Could you share a little bit of why you feel it's important to be able to give back locally and invest in the place where you live?

Allen Splete:

I think number one, you have identified a source that you know the organization well. You know the leadership in the organization. They may or may not have an established track record, but you're saying again, you're coming back to a matter of priorities and choices. And the one thing that is hard to do is to inculcate, I guess, that's the right word, an interest in giving back and in philanthropy. As you know, it's just like a college graduate and having a recent college graduate say, can you give \$10 or \$20 this year? In other words, how do you establish that attitude?

And I think Marilyn has already alluded to the fact, part of this is circumstantial and accidental. How you criss-cross what things are there, which path are you going to follow, right or left? And once you do that, then you get immersed in that, but you have to have the passion. The passion could be related for health concern and a family. It could be related for an industry that has died and you're trying to revive it, or you're just saying, what could we do to help the economy, for example, in this whole area?

So you look for little places where you can get involved and time and talent are just as important as the actual physical gift, I think, of money, in a way. And generally, somewhere along the line, those things are going to coalesce, if you find yourself in a situation where you can do that.

But I keep coming back to the satisfaction. That's very important, particularly as you age. In other words, it really is very significant, if you can point to that and say we did it and it's there. And whether it's a living monument or whether it's something that's still there, because you gave part of your life to it. That is very meaningful.

Marilyn Splete:

Yes, I think you wake up in the morning and you look around you and you say, I am here and maybe I don't like where I am or I don't like this element of where I am and what's going on. Then you have a choice. You can either choose to ignore it and go read a book or you can choose to involve yourself in whatever it is that's going on.

And so I think any of this involvement begins with your time and your interest and your ability to help with whatever is going on. I think it doesn't start with money necessarily, because you invest your time in something, you invest your energy in something. If an opportunity then it presents itself to say, make a donation to that effort, it may be a small donation, it may be that you give them \$100 or something because that's how much it's going to cost to do whatever it is that this group that you're involved with wants to do. But you've made the commitment to the success of the effort and the commitment begins with your time and your energy and whatever talents you bring to it.

And at some point, you are less able to do the physical act of what you're involved in, whatever it might be. You have less energy or you can't ... you're not well, you have to care for someone else. As you age, all these things arise, but at that point, you have a commitment to whatever the cause was or the

place and at that point, you probably have more money than time, whereas when you were younger, you had more time than money.

And so you begin to be willing to consider, well, I have more money now and how can I and in what ways can I make a contribution that will be lasting? And it's more about making the progress that you were able to make continue and getting, as Alan points out, younger people interested.

Allen Splete: I think the younger part that we talked about at Cranberry Lake is very important, with respect to the concept of community service. So in other words, the other end of the exposure, Max, is how do we expose these people to that and to what the needs are? You've got service-learning now in almost all the colleges, you've got a number of community hours for high schools and other schools that are doing that. And I see that as the area of real promise, that a high percentage of those people, because they've been exposed to it, begin to realize that they can make a difference in a different way.

Marilyn Splete: There's another thing here too and that is ... it's sort of a general principle. People like to be invited to do something. People are not always quite willing to step out of their comfort zone to join an organization or to participate in a particular committee or cause or whatever, but if someone invites them to come and do it and invites them to be a member of a board or invites them to do something small, and not too consequential, but to just step out and be involved, it's amazing how that will then lead to involvement.

And so I think there's ... we could go on for a long time, as we did on our porch about how you involve young people and new people in the causes that you believe in. But I think it has to start with personal outreach and personal invitations and an involvement and then you don't say to this person, come and join our committee and then you leave. You stay too and teach them what they need to know and pretty soon, they're off and running, and then at that point, you sit back and say, okay, all right, you're doing fine. I'm here if you need me, but I'm less available to do what I've always done, but you're great.

Max DelSignore: Now, Allen, you were a commencement speaker at St. Lawrence in 2009, and in your speech to graduates, there was a piece of what you said that I wanted to extract and share and have you elaborate on a little bit here. You said that, "I would like to have you keep two thoughts in mind. Life is filled with taking things in and giving things back. Everything you do will relate to one or the other. The trick will be maintaining a balance between them." Can you talk about that message?

Allen Splete: I think the taking refers to the opportunities that are presented. You take the opportunity or not. The taking is the knowledge that you may have learned from a faculty member or a staff member or even from a relationship that you've had with a friend, whether it be on the playing field or in the classroom. So you're taking in things that are going to affect what you're able to do with your life. Those are opportunities.

Then when the opportunities present themselves and you have been able to use those things, in other words, they affected your talent, they affected your ability to become a leader or do what you were going to do, then the question becomes, what can I give back in return for what I have learned from that whole variety of people, from experiences? Whether they were small-town experiences in helping somebody or running all the way through your life.

So I think when you do get to those two paths, then the hope is balancing what you continue to take in perhaps, when you're highly successful, and at what point does it reach the level of saying, okay, what do I owe in return? Part of theme, as I said to you before, is that one of the things that I try to tell students to do is try to be extraordinary with your life. Reach out, do that little bit of extra that's going to make a difference. But it's also going to be satisfying to you, because in that giving, you're going to feel much more fulfilled and you're going to be a happier person saying, somebody gave me something and now it's time for me to pay it back.

Max DelSignore: Last question I have for you, actually. It's a question for each of you. What is the most important lesson that philanthropy has taught you? Marilyn, I'll start with you first.

Marilyn Splete: The lesson that philanthropy has taught me. I think it feels good to do things for others, which ... that makes it sound selfish, in a way. But I think when you can reach out and help someone else that somehow or another, whatever was not going well in your own life seems to go better because you've made someone else happier. I think when it ... I guess it comes down to that. Just giving money is important, but I think it has ... I like to see it go to something that I can then see a result. Not a result with my name plastered on it, but a result that I can see, okay, having the money to do this made a difference in the success or failure of whatever project it was.

And so I think the most important thing is seeing a result from what you're giving. We send money to the American Red Cross too, and it is satisfying to know that you are giving money to an organization that is helping people, like in the most recent hurricane situations and so forth and so on. And that's a kind of result too, and that's important. And sometimes when you're giving money to a university, for example, we have a scholarship set up at St. Lawrence, but we also give to the general fund and to the campaigns. That money is ... we don't say, tell us what you're spending it on. We're giving it to the university, in the knowledge that this is a university we support. We support their goals and aims and whatever they do with the money, they have decided that this is the best thing to do with that money.

And so when you get to the point where you have money that you can give, then yes, that's important too.

Allen Splete: Philanthropy really is the channeled opportunity to make the difference, in other words, when you are philanthropic, if you will. Philanthropy is an avenue.

It's an avenue through which you can channel your energies. It provides structure, just as your foundation does, it provides structure. It provides meaning and as Marilyn has said, both of us, I think, have repeated, once the choice is made, what you're doing is saying, I feel fulfilled inside, because it's been my conscious choice to do this and by doing it, I'm making a difference in somebody else's life.

Max DelSignore: It's a great message to finish on and certainly something that the audience should keep in mind, as they kind of re-listen to this interview and kind of think about all that you shared. It's a true pleasure to get your reflection and perspective on a wonderful life of giving from both of you. Splete family name will certainly be a pillar of philanthropy in this region for many years to come, and we appreciate your time in sharing your story with us.

Allen Splete: Thank you very much.

Marilyn Splete: Thank you.

Max DelSignore: We hope you enjoyed listening to this edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. Remember, every interview is easily accessible and always free, whether it's online or on your mobile device. Find us on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Play or other podcast platforms, when you search for the Northern New York Community Podcast. Check out our podcast website which also features interview highlights, photo galleries and much more. Just go to www.nnycpodcast.com. Our thanks again to Allen and Marilyn Splete for joining us, and thanks to all of you for listening to the Northern New York Community Podcast.