

Speaker 1: Northern New York Community Podcast. Stories from the heart of our community.

Max DelSignore: Thanks again for joining us on the Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. We're going to take you into the Adirondacks as part of this exploration into philanthropy with Lester Allen and Stephen Moyer. Les and Steve will share their affinity for the Adirondack region. We will discover how a community can stoke a passion for giving back through volunteerism and service. And also, we will examine how philanthropy is vital to the north country's future.

Les and Steve, it's great to have you both here. Thanks for coming on the podcast.

Stephen Moyer: We're happy to be here Max.

Max DelSignore: Let's start in the Adirondack park. It's a nice time of year to be up there, certainly as we record this. After a two year search for both of you, you found the perfect home in Wanakena in the early 1980's. Your individual experiences and history with the region dates back to before becoming seasonal residents, and you love the area. You've shared the natural beauty of those communities with others, who eventually became hooked to the area too. How would you describe the essence of the Adirondacks and especially Wanakena?

Stephen Moyer: Oh, wow. That's a good question. To me it has a remarkable amount of wilderness and beauty that has little tourism. So, for those that are attracted to that area, it's just a lot of raw wilderness. And we were looking for that, and we didn't know that having a community would become such a important part of what we enjoy about the area. It's a small community, and it suffered major economic blows right before we found the community in 1982. And it's been great to be part of and witness the spirit of this community, create such a great place to live, and take care of so many needs that there's little government help or infrastructure in place to handle.

Max DelSignore: How did you both come to appreciate the North Country and all it had to offer? Maybe even outside of the natural beauty?

Stephen Moyer: Gosh, it just becomes a part of you. Since I was a small child I spent time in the Adirondack Park, and it's hard to imagine not having that part of my life. The natural beauty is remarkable, and again, what we didn't understand was so important, and I hadn't experienced growing up in a remote place in the Adirondacks, is what it's like to be part of this great little community.

Max DelSignore: Now Les, you grew up on a farm in Williamstown, New York, on the eastern part of Oswego County? That's correct?

Lester Allen: Correct.

Max DelSignore: Could you share just a little bit about your childhood and the interests you picked up on living in a rural community.

Lester Allen: No tourism. So I enjoyed the woods, always played in the woods as a kid. Built cottages, whether they be above ground, underground, whatever. Gradually, as I got older, went to the city to go to school. Got into boating, which of course, took me away from the stream and the woods and I guess some of the lakes were very crowded. You had to keep the boats at yacht clubs, this type of thing. So, when we went looking for a rural place, we stumbled on Wanakena, and it had all kinds of properties that needed help. And that was big incentive for me to save something. I loved to salvage anything and everything.

Max DelSignore: Where'd that interest come from? Being able to rebuild and restore?

Lester Allen: I don't know. I think my grandparents did it, and then it skipped a generation with my parents. And then I went into it total.

Max DelSignore: Do you remember some of those ... you mention building cottages when you were younger. Were there other projects that you can recall, as a young boy that gave you great pride and joy because of something that you put together?

Lester Allen: Well, there's been different properties in the city and so on that I tackled and refurbished. It was always fun. It gives me something to do. But, it doesn't have to be properties, it can be anything that's damaged or broken, I'll try to save it and put it back together.

Stephen Moyer: Lester loves rehabilitation and recycling. He loves to save something that would otherwise be thrown away. All of our pets were adopted. They weren't bred pets.

Max DelSignore: Quick follow up question, Les, to what you said before. What drew you to the city? What was the thing that kind of said this is the next step, the next chapter in my life?

Lester Allen: I didn't go to college, I went to business school there in 1960, and my grandfather was on his deathbed and he wanted to know if I wanted the farm. My mother was an only child and I'm an only child. And I was going away to school, so my mother took the farm and I took the [wooduns 00:05:15], which I just sold last year finally to a developer. So, I kept it all these years and paid the taxes, thinking that maybe someday I'd want to go back.

Max DelSignore: Just in case

Lester Allen: Right

Max DelSignore: Can you share a little bit about your professional background too?

Lester Allen: I don't know what there is to say. I always like real estate, and I grew two companies, or headed up large real estate firms all my life. Taught real estate for 20, 30 years.

Max DelSignore: And is that something that ... the career, is that just because of your interest in rehabilitation and the homes and being part of building a community and some of that early work kind of encouraged that path?

Lester Allen: Well, I started out at the nuclear sites. And of course, offered to go to Texas after Nine Mile and Fitzpatrick were finished. Didn't want to leave the area, being an only child, to take care of my parents. Always had a hobby of going through open houses. It's hard to find a job when you don't have a four year degree, making the kind of money I was at the nuclear sites. So, I went into real estate and was salesman of the year the first year of the business, and got pushed into management. And that was about it. I love looking at houses because I'm not a lover of new construction. I love old houses and somebody else's nightmare, and how to correct it and make it appealing for that new buyer. I've never really had to put a house on the market. You do some of these interesting features of, whether it be old fireplace mantels, leaded windows, adding features that most houses don't have, and they sell.

Max DelSignore: Well it's a really great success story to have position of not going to college, but going to business school, the path you chose, and to be as successful as you were. I know it's hard to maybe kind of reflect and say it in this way, but what was the key to your success? What do you think the key factor is to saying this is how I'm going to find success in real estate and beyond this path of positive outcome?

Stephen Moyer: Well, I will speak for Lester, he's very hard-working and he's determined, I saw from when we first met 45 years ago. He does care about other people. He brings people together. Being an only child he enjoys bringing people together. And he wouldn't necessarily have called it building community, but he would love to see people coming together, happily stay behind the scenes, and just enjoy making connections and having people come together and have a good time.

Max DelSignore: Steve, to go back to what you mentioned before about your summers as a child, Raquette Lake, the Adirondacks, that was kind of your first exposure or glimpse to the north country. Could you share a memory or two about those seasonal memories, and being up at Raquette Lake, and what it was like to get acclimated to north country?

Stephen Moyer: Yeah. We had a little cottage, six miles by boat, in a remote part of the lake. And I would spend summers as a little boy up there with just a few other families around. So I spent days boating, canoeing, hiking, and just finding it delightful to be out in the woods.

Max DelSignore: Did you know, that as you got older, Wanakena and the Adirondacks was a place you wanted to live later on in life?

Stephen Moyer: We both knew that the Adirondacks held such a great beauty and enjoyment for us, that we spent two years looking to replicate what was familiar to me and to Lester. A remote little cottage. At the time it didn't matter if it was remote, with no road access and no utilities, it was what I grew up with. We would have tired of that very quickly had we found it. You don't necessarily think ahead. So, ironically, it took two years of frustration of not finding anything that was either quite right or affordable, before we were open to something as different from what we thought we wanted, as the house in Wanakena turned out to be.

We were so exhausted and ready to give up, that we finally threw our hands up and said this is not at all what we were imagining wanting. But, we thought, what's the harm? We'll do it. And ironically, it was the perfect place. We can't imagine now how different and unfulfilling any other experience would have been. And how quickly we would have tired of the travel by boat and lack of utilities. It immediately became clear, in a big house and a small community, how easy it was to bring people together and become part of a community. And make the joy of being part of a community, part of the joy of being in the north country. To have both the remote wilderness right in your back door, and yet, the joy of being part of a community. And being able, in a big house, to bring family and friends together. Which would have been much more challenging to just be off by yourself in a remote part of the Adirondacks.

Max DelSignore: Your career, also in real estate, which is interesting. How did that profession kind of grab you?

Stephen Moyer: Completely from a different angle from Lester's. Lester loves houses and loves renovating homes. So, it was all about the house for Lester and his drive to succeed and accomplish things. For me, I'm quite the extrovert, and prior to choosing to work in real estate, I had done finance accounting work, which I was capable of, but it so little fulfilled me that I did a lot of volunteer work in the human service not for profit area. And found meaning in doing work with and for others. And when I decided to find something, at the age of 39, more meaningful than crunching numbers, no offense to people who choose accounting as a career, for me it wasn't fulfilling.

And it dawned on me after a year of frustration, not finding quite the right fit in the human service not for profit community, as an employer. It occurred to me that real estate was the perfect opportunity for me to bring all of my previous life experiences, aptitudes and interests, an accounting/finance/tax background, with Lester. We had renovated quite a few homes. My dad was an engineer. I knew my way around homes and house projects and maintenance items. And I had volunteered for years at a crisis line. I understood reflecting emotions and the process of helping people make a wise decision, was to me, all about real estate, not about selling a product. It was about helping people make wise decisions.

And because it's totally client-based and relationship-based, the way I do real estate, sure enough, each year because of repeat business and personal referrals, my practice grows with no self-promotion. And so I feel gratified regularly that I'm helping people achieve something important in their lives. I don't think of myself as a successful sales person. I think of myself as a successful facilitator and relationship manager.

Max DelSignore: Well, that's quite the talent that you do have to craft over time. Some folks I think have the ability or it's part of their skill set, but it's a good craft to be a relationship-builder, in any profession. Somebody who's very talented at that. Certainly it's a key to success.

Stephen Moyer: Oh, exactly, yeah.

Lester Allen: I always say he doesn't sell houses, he makes friends.

Max DelSignore: Well, he's made some really good friends in the Wanakena area and the Adirondacks certainly. To go back to those early years. So, you buy the home in 1982. You begin to see the community around you. First question actually Les, will be for you. As you begin to see the homes and start to think about okay, which one of these can I begin to rehabilitate, or bring back, to help revitalize where we live, what was the early process or thoughts about it? Did you know which house you wanted to start with? Or, were there some friendships you had to make first before you could kind of attack a home?

Lester Allen: Well, it was, I think difficult in the beginning because due to the mines, the mills, going out of business, there was so much disrepair, and the people wanted to keep their town their town. They didn't want outsiders.

Stephen Moyer: Lester sensed a resistance to change, and being new to the town, Lester felt, correctly or incorrectly, I think at times he perceived some strong personalities as adding up to resistance for someone coming in from outside and buying up houses. So, he didn't rush to do this.

Lester Allen: Yeah. I took time. And had various discussions with local people that if something was on the market a year and hadn't sold, then it would be fair game for me to buy. And once I started repairing the houses and making them look better, it was amazing to watch the self-pride of the individuals start picking and fixing their places up. Which is what helps every area, is when you have a community that's participating together.

Stephen Moyer: And Wanakena is so small, it's rare that one individual would have an opportunity to, by only renovating four or five homes, make such a major shift in the feel of the whole town. Most communities are so big that it would take a major effort to change the feel of the whole town.

Max DelSignore: What was your reaction, Steve, to just watching Les' passion on display? As he began to go into each of these homes, bring them back to life, and see the community really progress?

Stephen Moyer: Well, I think like so many things in life, only after the fact in retrospect, you fully appreciate what was going on. When we were doing it, we were just following our passions. I am such an extrovert, and when I see people I think might enjoy the Adirondacks, I just invite them to come and experience it. That was the pleasure of having a seven bedroom house, is being able to bring people together. And Lester just loved ... Bringing something back brought him joy. Seeing these great old homes that were left and forlorn. It was just in his DNA to want to bring them back to life. And so, together, I would connect with people and bring them all to the area, then Lester would share his enthusiasm for both the location and the houses, and before they knew what was happening, they fell in love with the town. And one by one, friends, and people we knew would come, fall in love with the place, and buy cottages there.

Lester Allen: And I thought at the time it would make a great retirement for me because I would do the financing, hold the mortgages myself. A miraculous thing came around called creative financing. So everybody [re-fi'd 00:16:25], and now I'm sitting here broke.

Max DelSignore: But you're rich in friends. Many good friends that you've met along the way.

Lester Allen: Yes. He always has a full house. And that was, I think, one of the key things growing up as an only child and no family. I had bought my first cottage and had parties there, and therefore, there was people around. So I've always been ... I like to be behind the scenes. I'm not out on the porches or whatever with crowds of people. I'd rather be in the kitchen and seeing people enjoy themselves.

Max DelSignore: And there was at least one or two people Les, right, that were integral in some of the rehabilitation with you, in Wanakena, correct? Could you mention a couple of those folks who kind of helped with some of the projects that you worked on with those homes?

Lester Allen: Oh, there was a gentleman that lived there with his wife and worked in the city as a finished carpenter. And so he pretty much ... I'd give him a list of everything I wanted done to each house. And fantastic gentleman, and he'd do it during the winter while I was gone, and never had a question or varied on price even a dollar. And so, that made it a lot easier for me to know that I had someone that was so capable.

Stephen Moyer: Yes, looking back, it's remarkable all of the pieces that came together quite remarkably. Chuck Cassidy, this delightful person with so much talent, he loved Lester's creativity. He loved a challenge. So, these board on board cottages, some of the smaller cottages that were for all the work men there in the day of

the lumbering, it took a special carpenter to understand how to make some of these things work. And to work with all of the architectural elements that Lester had over the years of following the wrecking business in Syracuse and salvaging interesting [newell 00:18:27] posts, banisters, stained glass windows ... Lester's parents barn was full of all these things Lester had salvaged, and he found in each home places to enhance the character of these homes.

And Chuck loved, and had the talent, to make it all come together. So each cottage was enhanced with a lot of architectural detail that was consistent with the period the cottage was built, but maybe not the decoration that when it was built as a work man's house it might have had. So, it was fun for Lester to incorporate all the things he'd salvaged all these years, into the cottages, and make them even more interesting than they were. And Chuck was the perfect person to do that. Had he not been there in town, to find someone with his experience and talent would have been a tall order. And Lester, as talented as he is, he wouldn't have been able to do some of those projects on his own.

Lester Allen: I'm great at tearing apart, but I can't put it back together.

Max DelSignore: To have another kind of partner in crime with you to kind of build those along.

Stephen Moyer: Oh, the two of them just had the best time. It was Chuck's passion to do the work and do it as creatively ... the more creative and challenging the project, the more he enjoyed it. So, he did some amazing thing. And for the 15 or 20 year run they worked together, it was a huge shock and disappointment when, barely into his late 50's I think, he passed unexpectedly. And that was the end of Lester's ... By then the whole town was off and going.

Lester Allen: Each individual that purchased a home, I think in their own way, reached out and I think became an integrate part of the community. Whether they started the historical societies, the tours.

Stephen Moyer: Remarkably, what Lester's saying is that this tiny little town that needs so many ... the talents of virtually everyone. Most of us that live in bigger cities just give up the roles of all of the caretakers of the services to government and agencies. We just live our life and assume everything is gonna be done. The water's gonna come on when you turn it on, the sewer's gonna go away and be gone, the trash'll be picked up, and you just call a contractor when something needs to be done.

Lester Allen: One of the people that came in ended up running the store ... you know that bought one of the first houses from me ... running the general store.

Stephen Moyer: Well, almost everyone that has come has found some way to contribute. Whether it's playing the organ in the church, or starting up the historical association, or the volunteers that are there, that we saw come to the town after we got there, that now volunteer to monitor the water system and the

sewer system and keep the village green mode, and the people that organize events. We have a cultural committee that bring in concerts in the green all summer long, and it's hard to think of anyone who doesn't love the wilderness. But also, totally gets and participates in helping the community be the community. We really sit back now and just marvel.

Lester's knack was behind the scenes rehabilitation. And the town is beautifully rehabilitated now. And now people that want to actively be involved in preserving the history or making the quality of life better, are all doing their thing. And it's just phenomenal to watch that.

Lester Allen: Dave Zamba, right?

Stephen Moyer: Dave [Ziamba 00:21:47].

Lester Allen: Ziamba's. He's come on. Took over the store, but then he got involved with the water systems, and the things going on in the square. And he's tremendously vital,

Stephen Moyer: [crosstalk 00:22:01] He had a career with [Wegman's 00:22:00] in Buffalo. He and his family just had an epiphany one moment 30 years ago, where they did not want their children to grow up in Buffalo, and they wanted to come back to Wanakena where Dave had attended the ranger school. And this is not uncommon. That ranger school experience proves to be very powerful and important to so many people, that many folks are coming back to Wanakena that had that ranger school experience. And Dave was one of them, he and his wife came, they raised their children there. He ran the general store, and he is now a huge volunteer keeping all the infrastructure going. And driving the school bus. And the wife is a nurse in the Clifton Fine Hospital.

Max DelSignore: Well, it's unique to see all these different forms of philanthropy kind of come in confluence together to make Wanakena what it is today. You know the community it is. If it's Dave, or Chuck Cassidy, or the two of you, seeing those contributions being made over time to add up to what is the community today and everything that's happening. Is really kind of special. It makes each community unique.

To go back, Steve, to your experience with volunteerism and serving on boards and committees, you served on a variety of those primarily in central New York from the Onondaga Historical Association to Rise. You said though just a few minutes ago, that one of the most powerful experiences has been a volunteer for the local crisis line, which you'd done for over 20 years. In that kind of role as a volunteer, what did you learn the most about the needs of the community specifically. But also, what did you learn about yourself going through that experience?

Stephen Moyer: Wow. As far as the community needs, there's so much attention to brick and mortar, and meeting the basic clothing and shelter needs. Those are two major focuses of many human service endeavors. The counseling and crisis line really helps people who are in a crisis. Sometimes financial, but more often emotional crisis, and that was a dimension that I didn't fully come to appreciate. And I learned both about individual needs of humans, and I grew in my capacity to understand mental health issues and people who were suffering for personal reasons. But, I also came to learn it was a personal growth experience because prior to my time volunteering with the crisis line, I thought sharing my joy germs and my cheerful personality was the best way to help people. And I had no sense of going in my head to where they were.

So the personal growth, for me, was understanding that I had to just shut down my own mind and my own expectations, and I had to leave the sunny side of the street and walk with other people on the dark side of the street. If they were experiencing dark times, I had to reflect and understand and show an appreciation and understanding of what they were going through. And I think that serves well in all human relationships. It certainly serves well in understanding the emotional mindset that is pretty intense with my clients. More than half of my clients it's not a happy time. First time home buyers it's joyful, but death, divorce and unwelcome corporate moves or loss of job issues, those are very challenging times for clients. And in a community, and any human relationship, taking time to shut down your own thoughts and expectations and focus on what's going on with another person, is a powerful way to engage with that person and be there for them in a world where many people feel this fast-paced, electronically connected world. I think it's very common that people feel like they're disconnected and that no one really gets what's going on in their mind.

Max DelSignore: Did that experience either influence or impact your philanthropy? Or how you gave back at all over all the years?

Stephen Moyer: I think all of these together just enriched my understanding of the diversity and needs of people. The importance of growing and transcending beyond your own world experience, and experiencing the world of others, and the joy that gives you. To step outside your own comfort zone, to step outside your own world, and understand the needs and challenges of other people. It's a very powerful thing to do, and it's a very gratifying thing to do, to find ways to be there for other people.

Max DelSignore: Question for each of you, and you've answered this a little bit I think through your personal experiences that you've shared on this interview, but overall, what compels you to give? Be it a financial gift, be it your talent, time to somebody else, volunteering for a nonprofit, what would it be?

Stephen Moyer: Well there is so many answers to that question. Some of them, cynically and simply, the tax code makes it financially wise to give. And for some people that's enough, it's just the idea. For some people it's important to leave a legacy. They

realize that giving is a good way to leave a permanent impact that may not be there just in the normal pursuits of day to day life. But, to me, the key is the enrichment of your own life. And it came to me many years ago that when you seek happiness for yourself, it's often elusive. When you seek enrichment or happiness for others, you do tend to find it yourself.

Max DelSignore: Lester, what compels you to give?

Lester Allen: I think I would go a different route in that being in a management position most of my life and trying to encourage people, to give them incentive, I like contests. When you see someone else do something and ask that they match you or whatever, it creates, "Oh, I can do that." It's surprising how fast a community will come together, whether it's helping a church fund or whatever the cause may be. If you have someone step forward and make a generous donation, if they can match it, the community. I did it in sales for so many years to encourage salesmen to reach for just one more listing or sale, and I think some people sit back always expecting, whether it be the community, the government or whatever, to take care of everything. I think we as individuals need to step forth and help in a situation. And the best way is to have someone, take the lead if you want to put it that way. It's worked for me in the community.

Stephen Moyer: Lester is a person who likes to help behind the scenes, and help other people be their best. He likes to see them improve their lot in life, and he likes to see them step forth and be helpful too. And I've had the pleasure over the years of watching Lester be amazingly mindful of people around him in situations and find quiet ways to help out behind the scenes and help people find their better nature, and gently with humor, find ways to help people from going down dark paths or do disrespectful things. And to encourage them to contribute, and to be better to be the band leader, and to get everyone on board, and move in a positive direction.

Lester Allen: Such as the community foundation that we're a part of here today. When I wanted to establish a foundation, I was asked what do you want your funds or whatever to do? And I said I'd rather leave that up to you. Because in this area, whatever, you know the areas that best need, where I wouldn't. And in turn, if it's something that's coming in to help all different causes, it works better than just picking one.

I don't know if I'm saying it right.

Max DelSignore: Well, in that same kind of thread, one endeavor you felt was important to start was the establishment of the Clifton Fine Community Fund, which kind of had that broad, far-reaching impact, and potential to do so in perpetuity. And that fund being at the Northern New York Community Foundation. But, why was establishing another fund devoted to the geographic region important to you both? Because you decided after, I think, that effort in supporting that, to create a fund that would help Wanakena long term. What was the catalyst for that?

Stephen Moyer: Well, we were impressed by the Northern New York Community Foundation and Randy, the executive director, was great at helping us be aware of what was being done. And giving us more insight than what we already had as to a lot of poverty issues and the huge amount of need and troubles in the area. And we knew there was a fund already in the area, but we were in a place where we were able to and chose to do one that brought a sharper focus to put the needs for Wanakena ... obviously that was our little community. We felt warmly toward the entire Clifton/Fine area. But we wanted one that would support the entire area, but also give a gentle preference toward the needs that were right there in Wanakena. That being, for 35 years now, so much a part of our lives.

Max DelSignore: Given what you've seen in over 30 years in Wanakena, really its transformation to what it is now, how important is the future of that community, Clifton/Fine region, and even we'll say the north country on a grander scale. How important is the region's future in terms of its philanthropy? What kind of role can philanthropy play to these next generations of these communities?

Stephen Moyer: Well, it's hard to even begin to imagine what needs will be there in future generations. But, two things are clear to me, the community foundation concept is a very powerful and efficient way to meet current and future needs. We would be foolish to think we could understand what the needs 50 and 100 years from now will be. There certainly will be needs, and the Community Foundation will be there to meet them, I'm sure, in so many dimensions. Whether you look at what scientists imagine climate change to bestow, and clearly the Adirondacks are going to be a great geographic place as coastline areas and farm lands across the world are going to be challenged with change in climate. The Adirondacks will always have a natural beauty, that scientists, based on what I read, is not likely to be as jeopardized as other areas. So it's possible to think that suddenly the Adirondacks may be a much more desirable place to live than places that are currently thought of as the place to live.

But, the dynamics of decades of loss of industry throughout the northeast, and specifically the challenges to the Adirondack region, it's hard to imagine a time where there won't be a challenge to try to live in the confines of a park, where industry and growth are challenged by the need to balance the needs of the nature and the park. So I think the community foundation will always find ways to help those that are living within the park and throughout the north country.

Max DelSignore: For someone who hasn't demonstrated, or hasn't quite yet participated in philanthropy in their own way, what would you say to someone who's thinking about volunteering for the first time, making their first gift to a cause or an effort, what would your message be to that person that is kind of on the precipice of starting their philanthropy but hesitant maybe to do so?

Stephen Moyer: Well, I think from the perspective of people who would be in a position to appreciate that help, they would understandably help that individual find ways to help in a way that brings meaning or connects with what is important to their life. The part that I would add on to the process of finding what's meaningful,

whether it's education or environment or helping individuals, whatever brings meaning to that individual who is considering it. But the part that some people, I don't think, stop to realize is how good it feels. How important contributing to the lives of others enhances your own life. And I don't know as though that is always spoken of or acknowledged or fully understood. But I would like to think that most people come to understand that helping others enriches your own life. And that's an important message that would be one I would always welcome people to be mindful of as they're considering ways to help other people, or either a contribution of their time. As we used to say in the nonprofit area, wealth, wisdom and work. Some combination. Those three gifts that people are able to make.

Max DelSignore: Lester, what has the journey been like going through a lot of these philanthropic endeavors, doing it together with Steve? Being able to give back, support a community, help so many causes the way that you have, and doing so together?

Lester Allen: I'm the quiet one behind the scenes. So I find all these questions difficult. I'm not as eloquent at versing as he is. So I find myself at the community foundation, when we first started our portion of it, whatever, there were people that had come to the house and asking for help on a particular issue. And all of a sudden there was another issue that came forth that was being taken care of by the foundation. And the other people had asked. And I felt terrible. So I took care of both. And I feel the foundation is beneficial in that they know the best usage in a given community, where I would only know an individual or a particular cause. It's hard to be fair if you're picking individually. So I think that's why another foundation was established or whatever in making donations to the hospitals or this or that. Personally, behind the scenes for years, I've always tried to help people, and it's difficult. Because if one person hears that so and so, well they just did this, then well why not me?

So I think the community foundation is playing a vital role in helping an area. That's about the way I would put it.

Stephen Moyer: Yeah, the process through the community foundation, of assessing community leaders and the foundation assess various applications for money and are in the best position to find the best use of the funds. So it takes the onus off you to say yes or no individually to a project.

Max DelSignore: To wrap up, and I'm gonna finish with a question I had for you Steve, but I want to hear what Les' response on this one is too. I promise, it's an easy one. Thinking of this younger generation, the standard that I feel you and others that have been part of this project, or others in the community who have demonstrated philanthropy, it's a very high standard, but it's been a good one I think younger folks should hope to reach for. What would you say, Les, to the younger generation to help inspire them, or get them to think about philanthropy and giving back to their community? Why it's so important.

Lester Allen: I'd rather he answer first.

Stephen Moyer: Well you can think about that.

Well, I think that young people at some point will come to appreciate the needs that are out there, and will find ways to meaningfully help other people, and find meaning in helping. And, I guess, young people no different than all people, that part of growing where you realize irrespective of the means you have, that there's so many ways to give and contribute to other people. And even if you don't have large sums of money, the community foundation is a great conduit through which to do that. But, I would encourage anyone to find any opportunity to volunteer or to find something meaningful where you can enrich the lives of others and thereby find more meaning in your own life.

Lester Allen: I really don't know how to answer. I think you see individuals that like to work. If you have that ethic from childhood of wanting to work and improve yourself, organizations, whatever, can look for these individuals and that in turn makes the organization develop faster because you have people that really want to succeed and work. There are so many people today that are used to some sort of program being given, therefore their attitude is that I should always be taken care of. You've got to have that feeling from within that nothing comes free. You've got to work for it. And that is the same with an organization, I think. You have to work and grow and develop, and that's why we're here today is that I'm trying to help, and you are too.

Stephen Moyer: You're an industrious person. You appreciate when people work hard at things, and in the end, there's the added benefit when you not only work hard for your own benefit, but working hard to benefit many others can be even further enriching than just working hard for your own benefit. And I think perhaps that would be you coming from a place where you like to improve things, you like to take things that are in decline or that serve no purpose any longer, and repurpose them, rehabilitate them. And I think for young people, you would be happy to help show them how you do it, help them encourage ...

Lester Allen: I think I come from the background that a lot of people still do here in the area. Is we had to grow everything we ate. I never got to a store until I was probably 16, 18. And you only had what you could make for yourself.

Stephen Moyer: Being self-sufficient and working hard and protecting yourself in the future. But I think you not only want to see other people work hard and improve themselves, but do something meaningful as you have had the opportunity to do, to make a major difference in an entire community. And I think you've found a lot of gratification in that. I think you would welcome other people to find ways to do things that can make a difference. Not just for themselves, but for others.

Lester Allen: Doesn't he say it well?

Max DelSignore: You both say it very well. What your experiences and perspectives, I think are really good lessons to take away, for those that have a chance to listen to the interview, and have had a chance to kind of go through this journey of hearing how your philanthropy started, how you make a community great, and how important it is for philanthropy to be here and present in the future.

Thank you for sharing those perspectives and that feedback. We appreciate your time here on the podcast, and many thanks for your years of generosity to the Adirondack region and to northern New York. It's been truly a joy to have you here to share your story.

Stephen Moyer: Well it's been a joy. And it's wonderful to think that others might be inspired to find ways to add meaning to their life through helping others.

Max DelSignore: That wraps up another 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, transcripts, photo galleries, and much more. Just go to www.nnycpodcast.com.

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Northern New York community podcast, stories from the heart of our community.