

## Mart Liinve

Max DelSignore: Hi, folks, it's great to have you here for another Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. From humble beginnings to helping in the community, long time North Country resident Mart Liinve understands what it means to appreciate what you have.

Max DelSignore: On this podcast, Mart will talk about the adversity he and his family endured on their journey to America. He also takes us into building and sustaining a local business in the North Country, and also gives us a glimpse of how philanthropy has shaped his life.

Max DelSignore: Before we begin, let's take a minute to thank our supporters of the podcast, WPBS, and the Northern New York Community Foundation. They are responsible for the creation and production of these great stories from the heart of our community. Head over to [wpbstv.org](http://wpbstv.org) to see the latest from WPBS, and [nnycf.org](http://nnycf.org) to learn more about the community foundation's recent work. We are grateful for their contributions to our local communities.

Max DelSignore: And now, our conversation with Mart Liinve. Mart, it's great to have you here.

Mart Liinve: Well, thanks for asking me.

Max DelSignore: So let's start at the very beginning. You were born in Sweden, is that correct?

Mart Liinve: Yes.

Max DelSignore: And your family origin is Estonian, is that correct?

Mart Liinve: Right.

Max DelSignore: For those that may not know, Estonia is a country that kind of is across from Sweden, across the Baltic Sea, Gulf of Finland. And the country was once part of the Soviet Union. And you grew up in kind of the throes in World War Two, and a lot of traumatic unrest in Europe in that time. Could you just start by sharing some of your early family memories, and your family's immigration to Canada?

Mart Liinve: Okay. When the Russians came in Estonia, the second time, September of 1944, my parents caught the last train out of Tallinn. They were going to go to a port to try and catch a fishing boat to go to Sweden. My mother was three months pregnant with me and the time. And the train was supposed to go to Haapsalu, but the conductor stopped in Paldiski, a different city. And because he had a ride from there.

Mart Liinve: And so, my parents kind of wandered around ... A family took them in, gave them a place to stay on the floor, kind of overnight. And my father said he needs

to get a boat to Sweden. And well, go down to this bar by the harbor and talk to this guy, and that's what my father did, and convinced the guy to let them to go with them.

Mart Liinve: And so, the guy on this fishing boat, overloaded with a bunch of people. Everybody had to throw their suitcases off, because there were too many people on board. And a lot of these boats that were escaping with people were getting torpedoed by the Russians, and a lot of people didn't make it. Fortunately, my parents did, and they ended up in a displaced persons' camp in Sweden, where I was born. And my brother was born there.

Mart Liinve: We lived in Sweden from, well, till 1951. I was like six years old. I was born in 45. And we immigrated to Canada then. And originally, I remember we were on this boat going over to Canada, and me and a five year old girl, we ran away together and hit in a closet. We were having a good time. I remember being on board on the ship, and this tooth that I had, the wind just blew it away. And I remember being ... It was really stormy. And everybody was seasick and all that stuff.

Mart Liinve: And we arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia. And they had, I guess, a couple of crates of stuff. And they were supposed to go to Windsor, Ontario, but my dad decided to get off in Toronto, because there was a large Estonian community there. And I remember we ended up in this kind of a rooming house, where this one Estonian took people in, and we lived in one room, the four of us, no refrigerator. I remember mattresses on the floor. You put the milk out, outside on the window ledge, to keep it cold.

Mart Liinve: Anyway, so, it was interesting. By the time I was 10, we'd lived in probably eight different places. And then, 1955, four years later, my parents bought a house. I mean, we didn't have much to put in there, but it was amazing. And my mother lived in that house for 58 years. She's going to be 94 this year, but she's in a nursing home now.

Mart Liinve: But it was amazing. You know, here were immigrants that arrived with nothing, and four years after arriving, they bought a house. It's mind boggling. And I remember, everybody else got allowances and stuff, but no way, you know. Christmas was you got a new pair of socks, or new underwear, or something. It wasn't toys or anything like that.

Mart Liinve: And I remember, as a 10 year old, where we were moving into the house, going around the construction sites and collecting soda bottles, and getting the deposit. Because there was no allowance. There was nothing like that. So I've been working since I was 10.

- Mart Liinve: And 12, I was ... I remember shoveling people's sidewalks and driveways for a nickel or 10 cents. And by the time I was 12, I had a job delivering for a drugstore at 25 cents an hour. It was awesome.
- Max DelSignore: Was that work ethic just what you saw the sacrifice your parents had made?
- Mart Liinve: Yeah. I mean, it's like, I think today, the work ethic doesn't seem to be the same anymore. It's like, and I think unless you have lived through hardship, you don't really appreciate what you have. Like, my kids are totally spoiled. Well, not totally. I try to teach them the work ethic.
- Mart Liinve: You know, one's a ... My older daughter's a lawyer. My younger daughter is getting her masters from NYU. She's a registered nurse. And you know, they're both ... I try to teach them the work ethic, and I think it's worked.
- Max DelSignore: I would say. Two great career paths for them.
- Mart Liinve: Yeah.
- Max DelSignore: Tell me a little bit about the Estonian community in Toronto, and how that contributed to your-
- Mart Liinve: Toronto had the second largest Estonian population outside of Estonia. There was like 20 or 25,000 Estonians in Toronto at the time that we arrived. So it was a strong Estonian community. I went to an Estonian school. I would join the Estonian boy scouts. I went to Estonian camp. I sang with an Estonian choir.
- Mart Liinve: We didn't segregate ourselves from the rest of the community. We assimilated. Now you got people that don't assimilate. A lot of muslims, Hispanics, they got their own communities, they don't learn the language. We assimilated. We learned the language. We still maintained our culture a little bit.
- Max DelSignore: What were some of the important tenets of the Estonian culture that may differ from some other cultures across the world?
- Mart Liinve: I don't think there's anything much different. It's just, you know, you have the language. Estonians are basically pagans originally, although we're Lutheran. We're just people. We're part of the homogenous mix that is humanity.
- Max DelSignore: And that's such a diverse city, Toronto.
- Mart Liinve: It is. Well now, it's interesting. I was just up there last week. Toronto is now 60% non-white. It's amazing. Back when I lived there, it was practically all white. But Canada has become a country that accepts all people from all over. And I mean, you got huge communities of Sri Lankans, Indians, Jamaicans, not all of it good.

But it's interesting. My brother and mother still live in Toronto, and near where my brother lives, if you go to the local mall, whites are a minority.

Max DelSignore: I want to touch on your studies at the University of Toronto too. So, you enrolled in high school, or moved into high school at the age of 12, and then advanced to university at 17, so a pretty young age. Could you share a little bit about just the student dynamics at Toronto, and were there any disadvantages to being younger, enrolling in university?

Mart Liinve: Well, obviously. I mean, by the time I'm in grade 13, then the 9th grade girls were the right age to date. I mean, I didn't date. Because you know, it was like I was just this little twerp. And in university, it was interesting. I mean, I was 17, looked like 14, and yet we'd go into bars, and the drinking age was 21. I remember, we'd drink these 10 cent drafts. I remember getting sick as a dog, just because I was with my buddies, and they said, "Come on, Marty, we're going to have a few beers." I figured, well, I don't really drink. I hadn't drunk in ...

Mart Liinve: University was an interesting experience. I found out that, you know what, they don't care if you go to class or not. So I started out in engineering physics or engineering science. All the bright guys went there, apparently. And I discovered pretty early on that you know what, I'm not the smartest guy in the room anymore. These guys are all just as smart.

Mart Liinve: And I also found out that you don't have to class. And I learned how to play bridge. And I spent all my time playing bridge, rather than going to class. The Christmas of my first year, I was called in. They advised me to drop out of school, that I had had a bursary, which is like a scholarship-type thing, to pay for my first year education, and of course, that was toast.

Mart Liinve: Anyway, they advised me to drop out, but I was playing basketball for the engineering team, and our coaches were both industrial engineer students that were in 3rd year, I think, at that time, or something. And they suggested I switch over to industrial engineering. And so, I did, my first year, after the first semester, and somehow I managed to get through, and somehow I managed to graduate in four years, instead of losing a year, or whatever.

Max DelSignore: So finding that first job, you get the degree, your focus is in engineering. What were the next steps on graduation from the university?

Mart Liinve: So I went to work for Nortel as a systems analyst. Basically, I designed an inventory control system... A couple of different projects that I worked on. One, inventory control system. Another one was capital expenditures tracking system. And yeah, it was basically just writing computer programs.

Mart Liinve: But back then, everything was on punch cards, and computer time was limited. So you'd have to wait for them to put your batch of punch cards in to run your program. So, after nine months, I was so bored of sitting around waiting that I quit.

Mart Liinve: And well, I had joined an investment club there at that company, and my boss said ... It was like \$10 a month you put in. My boss says, "Hey, if you're really interested in investing, you should buy some Velcro stock, whatever you can." So, I had like about \$1,000 saved up. Back then, my salary was like \$6,000 a year. And so, I had about \$1,000 saved up. And I bought three shares of Velcro at \$333 a share. And then, Velcro split 10 for one, went up to \$75 a share, so now my \$1,000 was like \$3,000, which was like half of your salary back then.

Mart Liinve: So anyway, I quit my job, and I bummed around for a year and a half. I traveled. They had Expo 67 in Montreal, big celebration. I was a cousin that was in MIT at Boston. I went to visit him. We went down to Fort Lauderdale for Easter break, down where the, was it the Elbo Room? Las Olas Boulevard, and US-1 right on the beach. And it was riots going on, and stuff, and the National Guard came out. It was just ... It was ...

Max DelSignore: Interesting time.

Mart Liinve: Interesting times, yeah. Then we went to the Bahamas, rode around on scooters, and stuff. Then I went over to Europe. I was supposed to meet somebody in London. They never showed up. And I hitchhiked from London down to Germany, went through Brussels and France. I had a friend that was stationed at a US ... He was a green beret in Germany. I went to visit him. And I ended up staying at that army base for six months.

Mart Liinve: Yeah, it was crazy. And I bought a motorcycle, rode around the alps, and skied all day, partied all night.

Max DelSignore: So, what did you learn about yourself during that course of time? What does an experience like that teach you?

Mart Liinve: I don't know. I think it gave me a broader sense of, trust yourself, be free. You know? Enjoy every day. And work hard. Play hard, work hard. It's all part of the same thing. I came back after bumming around, and I ran into this guy who ... Up where this Estonian camp was, I was up there, just visiting. We were playing volleyball up there, and I was walking down a road, and this guy pulls up, says, "You're Mart Liinve, aren't you?" I said yeah. You're not working right now. You're an industrial engineer, right? Yeah.

Mart Liinve: I had been confirmed with his daughter. We were in the same confirmation class at church. And so, anyway, I went over to his cottage. There was a bunch of Estonians, they had cottages around this Estonian camp that I went to from

the time I was six till I was 16. Every summer, my parent would ship us off there, right? Well, it gave them a break, you know? And so you learned how to fight, you learned how to have a good time. You learned how to be bullied, how to accept it. You learned all kinds of stuff. Life is a challenge.

Max DelSignore: Well, was it at this camp too that ... Your point before about being identified as an engineer, industrial engineer. Was that the introduction to finding this business and pursuing that a little bit?

Mart Liinve: Well, what happened, so I go over to this guy's cottage, and I see all of these tents everywhere, and I think, wow, he's got a bunch of people staying over here, camping out, right? Well, turns out they were doing pictures for his catalog, that he owned a tent making company. And he said, "Well, can you just come down and spend a couple of days walking through my business, and see what you think, from your industrial engineering background? We do time and motion study, and workflow planning, and equipment arranging, and all that kind of stuff." Some of the stuff that I learned in school.

Mart Liinve: So I spent a couple of days wandering through, well, what would happen if we did this, why is he doing that, what happens if you just move this over here, and do this. And so, he offered me a job as his engineer, as plant engineer. I mean, I didn't know anything about sewing, or making tents, or anything. To me, it was just trying to use common sense, what I thought. I was just looking at things from a different perspective.

Mart Liinve: Because they've been doing things the same way for, you know. And I'm just asking stupid questions. And I thought, this is not rocket science. So anyway, he offered me a job, and that was like ... I graduated in 1966, and 1967 is when I started bumming around. 1968 was when I started working for him. And so, he was planning on expanding to the United States, and they were already doing some exporting out of Toronto, and they were going to build the facility in Buffalo. And there was some construction strike going on.

Mart Liinve: And so, they started looking around the other end of the lake, and in Clayton, there was what used to be a sewing operation, that they made bathing suits, and T-shirts, and stuff. So there was an empty building there, and so, with the JCIDA, they decided to move down there, to start an operation down there. So I was sent down there to set up the American operation.

Mart Liinve: So I started with an empty building, and I had to buy equipment, I had to find people, I had to locate suppliers. And so, you know, I'm working 80 hours a week, but I'm loving it, because I was single, and it was just, it was a challenge.

Max DelSignore: What were your first impressions of Clayton, New York, at that time?

- Mart Liinve: I loved it. I mean, you know, right on the river. Right away, I got a boat, and after work, I'd go fishing. It was a little 18 foot in board out board thing. And I rented a place there. Anyway, the year that I moved down there is when I met my wife, in Toronto. Estonian.
- Mart Liinve: We had ... 1972, there was a big Estonian festival. So, people from all over the world, coming to Toronto from this Estonian festival. And she was from Australia. And her cousin was my dentist's wife. So anyway, I got introduced to her through my dentist.
- Mart Liinve: So, she was a lawyer, and she had just ... She had a law degree from Adelaide University, had a masters from McGill University. She had already studied in Canada, and she was going to be teaching at Osgoode Law School in Toronto. So, while I was in Clayton, she was in Toronto. We kind of had this expensive phone call stuff, and I would drive back and forth, and stuff.
- Mart Liinve: Anyway, she taught for a year at Osgoode Law School in Toronto, and then she got a job at University of British Columbia, teaching there. Well, that long distance relationship was a little bit trickier. I mean, I'd drive to Toronto, she'd fly in, or I'd drive to Toronto, fly to UBC. It's just a long distance thing. And this whole ...
- Mart Liinve: 1974, we decided, well, you know what, this is crazy. We might as well get married, right? So we got married in a Japanese ... Nitobe Gardens in British Columbia in April the 10th. The cherry blossoms were all out and everything, and we had a couple of witnesses, the two of us, and then I drove back, I went back to Watertown, and she went back to work.
- Mart Liinve: And when she finished her work, then we had a honeymoon. Well, actually, we had a three day honeymoon at Harrison Hot Springs, and then she went back to work, and then later on, I flew to Australia when she had gone back there... Then she moved to the States with me.
- Mart Liinve: Anyway, it's ... I've had a very interesting life.
- Max DelSignore: Well, and to be able to ... You might be able to connect here, and make the North Country your home. What were those conversations like? Was it just, try to build the business, would you be willing to come here and practice law? What was that conversation-
- Mart Liinve: Well, what happened was ... Yeah, so, I ... She moved down here, and then she went to Syracuse University. And in order to practice law down here, she would've had to do some courses, that she, well, I might as well get another law degree. So she went to Syracuse University and got another degree, did the bar exams and whatever, and went to work for the Wilmot firm. Wilmot, Scanlan, whatever it was, back in ... Well, it would've been 75, 70, something like that.

- Mart Liinve: Yeah, and of course, once she finished, we lived in Clayton for a bit. Well, we moved to Watertown 1976, because rather than her having to commute for her job, I started to commute from Watertown to Clayton. And so, we moved to Watertown in 1976. And my interest in investing was still involved. I started an account for us, I think, with, ser-cher-ro-blots, something like that. I don't know. I can't remember the name.
- Mart Liinve: But anyway, I started investing there. And a few years later, I met Rhett Foster, who was ... It was Foster and Adams, then it became Tucker and Anthony, and then it became RBC. And Rett was the one that got me involved in what was back then the Watertown Foundation in 1986.
- Mart Liinve: Because I had a couple of good investments work on, and I always been frugal. I always lived below my means. I didn't care about fancy cars or stuff like that. It's just from my childhood, not having stuff. You learn to be frugal. Some people call me cheap. I would say I'm frugal.
- Max DelSignore: Well, and does part of that too come from the success of Ridgeline Industries, the business here, as it began to evolve and change over time. Some of the products that the business produced change, you know, contracts changed-
- Mart Liinve: Well, absolutely. We started out making camping tents. This was 1972. And we had a pretty good business with J. C. Penney company. And 1974 the parent company in Canada had some financial difficulties. They had ... Anyway, they went bankrupt.
- Mart Liinve: So the American operation, which I was running, was one of the assets. And so, people that came in and looked at us, and they'd say, "Hey, if we buy this, we'll give you 25% of the business." And I realized all of a sudden, you know what, I'm worth more than just a bit of a salary. I was making like \$10,000 a year. Back in 1972, that was you know, a lot, a fair amount of money.
- Mart Liinve: But all of a sudden, I realized, you know what, I have some value here. And so what happened was the two partners that owned the company in Canada, they owned the building that they were in separately, and they used that to buy back the American operation, not 10 cents on a dollar, a dollar on the dollar. And so, they bought it back, and I realized, well, you know what, I apparently have some value here, so I said, "Well, who's going to run it for you?"
- Mart Liinve: And I said, "If you want me to run it, I want a third. We'll be three way partners." And they said, "Yup, okay." So, I mean, for a minimal investment, I ended up with a third of the company. And then, two years later, one of the partners gets a fire cancer, goes through him in three months, dies, and now his share is tied up in the business.



- Mart Liinve: So, the other partner then says, "Okay, we'll try and sell the company." And so, he wanted three quarters of a million dollars or something for it. And I said, I'm cool with that. I'll walk away with a quarter of a million, or whatever. But anyway, it was way overpriced. I mean, it wasn't worth it. And so, he was trying to sell it for a year and a half, and my accountant says, "Well, why don't you buy it."
- Mart Liinve: I said, "I don't have any money." And he says, "Well, what you could do is you can take over the debts, the mortgage on the building, the loans for the equipment, and you can have them take back a seller's note, where you pay them off over five years, and then you can borrow money from the bank. It says you've got this contract with J. C. Penney, show them you've got some work that's going to provide some income."
- Mart Liinve: So in 1977, I bought the business. And unfortunately, in 1982, the United States dropped import tariffs on imported tents. So, all of a sudden, tents were coming in from overseas at 20 or 25% less than what I could buy my materials for, let alone make them. So, here I am, I'm five years into owning the company, and all of a sudden, I'm facing major bankruptcy.
- Mart Liinve: Because the camping tent business is gone, unless you're a specialty manufacturer, like ... I'm trying to ... Eureka, Binghamton, right?
- Max DelSignore: So how do you survive?
- Mart Liinve: How do I survive? Well, one of the people that I met early on was down in Kentucky, a competitor, and we were at a trade show in New York, and we had our booths next to each other. This is 1972. We both started our business at the same time. And so, we became like friendly competitors.
- Mart Liinve: We'd have material issues, like we imported flooring material from Japan. It was polyethylene, rolls of stuff. And so, he was in a jam one time, and he needed flooring material, and I had access, so I lent him some materials. And one time, I ran out of zipper chain for my tents, and he lent me some zipper chain. And then, one time, I had delivery issues, where I couldn't manufacture fast enough to meet the demand. He had excess capacity, so he built some tents for me. Another time, I had excess capacity, so I built some tents for him.
- Mart Liinve: And so, we were like friendly competitors. But with the demise of the camping industry, he got involved with making tents for the military. So in 19 ... Well, it'd be 1984 or 85, we got involved with this TEMPER tent program, it's tent expandable modular personnel, for the army. And so, he needed somebody to make the inner tent, the liner. These tents were going on these big frames. They're like 20 by 32 feet long, and there's a inner tent, which is a liner, and there was a frame, and there was a outer tent.

- Mart Liinve: So, this was early on in the program, and he had this small contract to build some prototypes and stuff, and he needed somebody to make the liner. So I said, "Yeah, I'll make the liners for you." So, that's how I got into military contracting. And that TEMPER tent program expanded significantly.
- Mart Liinve: And in 1986, there was a big contract out there, and so, we were going to work together, me, and him, and a third company who made the frames. He was going to make the outer tents, I was going to make the liners. And so, we put a bid in on this huge contract, 20 million dollar contract. And so, we all kind of ... He was going to be the lead guy, and said, "Well, why don't we all put bids in individually as well?"
- Mart Liinve: So, there was nine companies that bid on this contract, and the company that won it was a company called Anchor Industries out of Chicago. But they didn't want to take the whole contract. They said, "Well, 20 million is too big. And well, we can take 10." So, the other 10 was ... What they did was they put names in a hat, of the other eight bidders, and they drew out Ridgeline's name, my name, our company's name.
- Mart Liinve: So the thing is, we had to meet their price, right? So, here I'm going to be the tail wagging the dog, out of this 10 million dollar contract, 6.5 million dollars is the outer thing, 2.5 million dollars is the frames, and the liner part is 1.5 million. But I'm responsible now for a whole 10 million dollar contract, because I'm now going to be the prime contractor. Anyway ...
- Max DelSignore: Did that make you anxious, hoping you could do it?
- Mart Liinve: A little bit, a little bit. But it's crazy. So I wrote up this little three page agreement, saying whoever was responsible for any delays or whatever, even though I'm responsible, that they're going to have to make it up. They signed it, and it worked out. We got the contract done and ran it for like, two years.
- Mart Liinve: And then, so I kind of found my little niche in making these liners. And then I got involved with other projects, working with Natick Research and Development labs, where they do different things, where we designed boot walls. We did the solar shades.
- Mart Liinve: I worked on a solar shade project for a number of years, which solar shades became a big thing for Afghanistan, and for Iraq. We got the huge temperatures. So we built these 50 by 50 shades that you would hook together, and cover with materials, and everything will cut the ambient temperature by 20 degrees or something. So anyway, that was kind of my swan song.
- Mart Liinve: And I ended up with some health issues in 2002. And I got kind of burned out. And I had these companies, they said, well, we want to buy your company, or whatever. So I think, you know, maybe it's time for me to retire. Maybe it's time

for me to kind of get out. And so, this guy came along and bought my business, and he made out like a bandit on those solar shades for a couple of years, because I always priced my product from the bottom up. Materials, labor, overheads, and then you put a slice for profit on the top. And he went out and he says, look at what the market would bear. And so, he priced totally different. He made a ton of money for two years.

**Mart Liinve:** But then, my buddy down in Kentucky, he heard about this program, and big contract comes out, and he underbid him. So he lost that business. And it turns out that that solar shade program saved my buddy's business in Kentucky. And it's kind of crazy.

**Max DelSignore:** As you reflect, and from an engineer's and analyst's perspective, what do you feel were the most important keys to having a successful North Country business, even though you served maybe a nation-wide and global presence?

**Mart Liinve:** I think staying close to your people. Every morning, I would walk around and talk to every individual that worked for me, and say, "How are things going? What's happening? How is your kid? I heard your husband had a little thing." Or whatever. And just to be a listener to offer support. Even though you can't solve their problems, just to be empathetic, and to let them know that you cared about what's going on in their life. It's not just about work.

**Mart Liinve:** because I know, if you bring your problems to work, it can affect how you work. But if you feel that the people you work for support you and care ... I started a pension plan for the people that worked for me back in 1979. Okay, maybe I didn't pay the most, but these people, they weren't savers. So I started a pension plan, that I would put 10% of whatever they earned, I would put 10% into the pension plan.

**Mart Liinve:** Of course, it wouldn't vest until you'd been with me five years. So if you've been with me a year, you're 20% invested. Second year, you're 40% invested. So we encouraged people to stay. And I got people that got six figure retirements. By the time I had to close the fund out in 2004 when I sold the business, because I had ... I was still administering the pension fund, and the new guy, he didn't want to take responsibility that weren't even working there anymore. And so, we ended up cashing it out, sending everybody checks, and told them to roll it over into IRAs. Some people did, some people went out and bought houses and cars, and paid the penalties.

**Mart Liinve:** And people are too, I think, material oriented, where you want instant gratification. You want to buy a new car, you want to buy a new TV. You don't worry about the fact that you're paying ridiculous interest on this stuff. And back then, it was ... interest rates were a lot higher, you know? I remember when I had 11.5% mortgage, and the quickest I could pay that off, I did.

Max DelSignore: The better off you'd be.

Mart Liinve: Yeah, and it's like ... Another thing, you learn the power of compounding. Saving is, I think ... That's how assets grow. You save, and you invest, rather than spend and borrow. It's one thing I've tried to teach my kids. It's one thing I've tried to teach the people at work with me, and ...

Max DelSignore: And being a good saver, and interest in investing certainly transitions, I think pretty well to your interest in philanthropy, and giving back to some of the organizations you care about here.

Mart Liinve: Right, well, that's what, 1986, back when the Watertown Foundation had assets of what, 1.8 million or something, is when I made my ... Rhett Foster, he says, "You know, hey, you made some money in the stock market. Rather than writing out checks every year to all these different things, why don't you set up an advised fund, donate stocks that have appreciated, and have the community foundation send out checks to United Way, and hospice, and Urban Mission, and all these local charities, rather ..."

Mart Liinve: It's a win-win, right? I don't pay tax on the gains, and it helps. So that's how I first got involved in 1986. So I've been involved with the foundation since 1986, and you know, I believe in the work that they do. And when Randy talked to me about the new facility of taking over the Black River Valley Club, and expanding it, and stuff, I just jumped on it. I said, "Hey, this is awesome." I was the first one to jump on the bandwagon and say, "Yeah, I'll help this thing."

Max DelSignore: So, what enticed you or what got you excited about the Northern New York Philanthropy Center concept?

Mart Liinve: Well, I think just to make it more visible, you know? Being on the 4th floor of the Marine Midland Building is ... I don't know. I mean, saving a historic building, and also being right out there could do nothing but help the visibility of the Northern New York Community Foundation, and I think it has, in the couple of years you guys have been there.

Mart Liinve: I'm just thrilled to be, feel like I'm a part of it, you know? It's ... Would you say it's better to give than receive? It totally is. It's like, I could probably ... My heart goes out to all the people that get involved, not necessarily monetarily, but the ones that volunteer, that do everything. I should probably do more hands on volunteering rather than monetary type stuff. But it's, I'm doing what I can in my way, and ...

Max DelSignore: So what inspires you to give? When you think about the organizations that you generously give a gift to, if it's the Community Foundation or another agency, what really compels you to make a gift to support the organization?

- Mart Liinve: I believe in the work that they do, you know. So many different organizations that help in their own way, and they do things differently, whether it's cars, or the volunteer transportation. All of these are worthwhile projects. It's... I've lived here in Watertown now more than half my life, in spite of the fact that I'm an Estonian Swedish Canadian American. I'm Estonian, I was born in Sweden, I got Canadian citizenship, I grew up there, went to school there, but I'm an American citizen.
- Mart Liinve: I'm American. I've been American now for over half my life. And I feel like I belong here, and it's a great country, and I want to do my part to give back to the community, where I've had the opportunity to run a business, and meet a lot of great people. I'm blessed.
- Max DelSignore: How important, Mart, is it, is philanthropy, really, to the future of the North Country?
- Mart Liinve: I think it's huge. I mean, right now, we're working on a project with the Y to try and create this new center, new aquatics center, and other sports center, to bring people back to the downtown. I mean, Watertown, the downtown has been hurting for a long time. Everything that's going on right now with this downtown revitalization initiative is fantastic.
- Mart Liinve: And the fact that we're trying to save some of these historic buildings, like the masonic temple. It's a shame that some of the old buildings were torn down. When I see some of the pictures from that ... Well, PBS did this fantastic thing on Watertown. I've got the CD, and I've got through it and looked at it. I said, man, this is an amazing city. And it's ... I'm thrilled to be part of it.
- Max DelSignore: You mentioned the Watertown Family YMCA project as something that's coming up, and is inspiring to you, or is going to compel you to support it in some fashion. Are there other projects or efforts that are going on in the community that inspire you, or compel you to continue to give to, or do you see some things coming up that you feel are going to be really important to this community's future?
- Mart Liinve: I can't say specifically. So I'm planning to do it through the Northern New York Community Foundation. My IRA and my brokerage account are going to go to you, Community Foundation, at least at this point.
- Max DelSignore: And is that part of your legacy too, and family legacy, to be able to kind of perpetuate the giving that you have support this community for so long?
- Mart Liinve: Yeah, well, that's the plan.
- Max DelSignore: How important is it to have that established, though, so that your giving can be enduring?

- Mart Liinve: I don't know that it's ... It's not about me. It's about the community. I mean... Every day you pick up the paper, and you go to the obituary page. If my name's not on there, I'm okay. But you know what? So, you see, maybe it's a nice obituary column, but then what happens? It's another soul passed on. I don't really worry about whether anybody remembers me or not. I'll be fine with the fact that I've left some kind of legacy behind that's going to continue to do stuff for the community.
- Max DelSignore: How important has it been to involve your children in this process too?
- Mart Liinve: Well, I'm trying to get them involved. So, part of it is, they're going to be involved with some of the decisions on how some of the income is distributed. I want to get them involved, even if it's like indirectly, so that they get the sense of what it means, so they can pick projects that they want, but within this community mostly. One daughter lives in Virginia, the other one's in Manhattan, in New York City, but they still have ties to North Country.
- Mart Liinve: My older daughter in Virginia there, she gets the Watertown Daily Times via the ...
- Max DelSignore: Through online?
- Mart Liinve: Online, right, online. And my younger daughter, she still has friends here, and she comes up and visits. Yeah, I want them to retain some ties with the North Country.
- Max DelSignore: And why is it important, to go back to what you talked about earlier, why is it important to have a strong community foundation to be here to help this community and the North Country into the future?
- Mart Liinve: Well, I think the impact that the foundation has, as it continues to grow, is going to be a major factor in the survival of this city. Jobs are hard to come by up here. If it weren't for Drum, a lot of business would be hurting, and it seems like young kids, they graduate, they move away. They don't want to stay, necessarily. And this is a great area to raise a family, great area recreationally. We got the river. And it's a ... The pluses for growing up here are great. I don't know how to put it in the other way. And I'm glad that the foundation is a bit part of what makes this area stay healthy.
- Max DelSignore: Last question I'll ask you, you kind of mentioned here in this past comment, but as kind of a softer question to wrap up, share just what you appreciate the most about northern New York, given that you've lived here now more than half your life.
- Mart Liinve: That's easy. It's so simple. Traffic. It's not like Toronto traffic, man, I'll tell you. The winters kind of suck, especially this winter. But you know, it's ... I think it's



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people. You make relationships, and it's friendships you form that ... I think everybody, this life, it's all about relationships. And you make some strong ones after you've been living in a place for awhile, and it's the people as much as the place.

Max DelSignore: Well, we're certainly fortunate that you decided to ... You and Mai together, raise your kids here, contribute to the North Country the way you have, and very grateful for the generosity that you've shown to this area for many decades now, and thanks so much for taking the time to share your story with us.

Mart Liinve: Thanks for having me.

Max DelSignore: That concludes another edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. It is easy to find and listen to all these episodes of the podcast. Just search for us on Apple iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, Stitcher, or other podcast platforms. You can also listen to interviews, see other content, such as interview transcripts, and photo galleries on the podcast website. Just go to [nnycpodcast.com](http://nnycpodcast.com) to see more.

Max DelSignore: Our sincere thanks to Mart Liinve for joining us, and thanks to all of you for tuning in to the Northern New York Community Podcast.