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TOM YOUSEY

Max DelSignore: Hello, there and welcome to another edition of Northern New York Community Podcast. It's great to have you here. I'm your host Max DelSignore.

Acts of philanthropy have brought Thomas J. Yousey many places, to the church, into schools, within a multitude of non-profit organizations and even soccer fields. Throughout his life, his definition of giving back has been to make someone feel awesome. As a Lewis County native and longtime resident, he has achieved that and much more.

Tom will share you his journey in civic service and community philanthropy which ranges from life experiences as the Mayor of Lowville, to finding a recent calling in becoming a deacon but before we open our conversation with Tom, let's take a moment 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 www.wpbstv.org to see the latest from WPBS and www.nnycf.org to learn more about the community foundation's recent work.

Now, a conversation with Tom Yousey. Tom, it's great to have you here.

Tom Yousey: Glad to be here.

Max DelSignore: For a time in your life, you have been a teacher, mayor, administrator, mentor, volunteer, deacon and I know I'm missing some others, but you check all of these boxes. What experience of those mentioned has added the most to your life?

Tom Yousey: Each dimension has, really. My life has been built from the many activities that I've been involved in. I guess I couldn't pick out one that has helped me define who I am. There have been many at various stages of that life.

Max DelSignore: To start with your parents and where you grew up, in Beaver Falls correct?

Tom Yousey: I grew up in Lowville.

Max DelSignore: Lowville. Your father, he had an interesting story before we just started the podcast too about your father really taking on some added responsibility as a young man, a teenager really. Could you tell us a little bit about his story?

Tom Yousey: When my dad was 14 years old, I think he was in the 8th grade at Beaver River Central School at the time. His father drowned in the Beaver River while he was fishing and the family had to reorganize. My grandmother took a job as a cook in logging camps outside of Belfort in the Adirondacks, and my father quit school because she wasn't able to earn enough money to support my father's six younger siblings. He went to work as a hunting guide and fishing guide at the age of 14.

Max DelSignore: When you hear those stories about your father and having that level of responsibility at a young age, what were those conversations like or how often did you talk about that with your dad?

Tom Yousey: Usually, we're out in the boat fishing when I was probably 10, 11, 12. We happened often to be fishing on Mud Pond which was right next to my great grandfather's ... No, it was a great uncle's hotel and he worked for my great uncle as a guide. He did a lot of guiding on Mud Pond and around Mud Pod. He'd start talking about the wealthy people who came up to Lewis County from Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, New York, Utica, Syracuse and he take them out everyday for a different fishing experience or a different hunting experience depending on the season. He had great stories.

Max DelSignore: You were raised as a Mennonite, correct?

Tom Yousey: I became a Mennonite late ... It was a part of my childhood, yes.

Max DelSignore: What were some of the core values that you learned from your parents and as you got to that point, the religion as well that were important to you?

Tom Yousey: Well, I think the Mennonite community is unique and I became fascinated by it. Actually, my parents were Methodists but my family, the Yousey's, have a Mennonite heritage. When I was 9 years old, my father's best friend, a man by the name of [Nick Gingrich 00:04:33] who owned a local appliance dealership, that's a whole other story, suggested to my mother and father that I should at least experience my Mennonite background and he offered to take me to the summer Bible school for two weeks at the Lowville Mennonite church where he was going to be the 4th grade teacher.

It was like, "I was going with Nick." I really want to go because at that time the Lowville Mennonite church had a softball field and of course, the boys that were going to be in the class I knew from school and we're going to have a great time playing softball, I thought. It ended up being more than softball and I developed, I guess I can't ... In my modern, my language today is a deacon of the Catholic Church, I could describe it now in terms of my faith but at that time, it was just a

community of people that I loved being with even though my parents weren't there.

I continue to go to church with Nick very frequently more than I went to the Methodist church even until I graduated from high school.

There's a phrase that's used in the Mennonite community, they talk about Mennonite insurance or they did then, I'm not sure if they do anymore. The Mennonite insurance just meant you take care of your own. I participated in three or four barn raisings. There was always something going on, helping somebody else because they needed it. Even as a kid without his parents in the church going when Nick, Nick was like my father in the church. I was involved in all that. Everybody was involved. It wasn't just softball.

Max DelSignore: Right. Did it have any bearing that experience on your decision to pursue education as a potential career?

Tom Yousey: I love school, everything about school. I love playing football. I actually did a lot of performing as a musician. I was in a lot of musicals. I even like classes. I remember, Latin was my favorite high school course and I admired many teachers. I have one favorite teacher of course like everyone else. I think by the time I was in 10th grade, I was going to be a teacher. I always thought I was going to be a music teacher but that changed as soon as I got to Crane.

Max DelSignore: What was the college experience like as you begin to explore where you're fit was an education?

Tom Yousey: Well, I guess in college you explore more than education. As an undergraduate, I think I like my education but it was the other things that I became engaged in that really engaged me and started to shape me in different ways. Probably the two biggest things I was involved in, in college was my fraternity but in a unique way when you think of fraternity. I was at SUNY Potsdam and when you think of homecoming for most colleges, they got the big football game.

At SUNY Potsdam, the only musical comedy was ever performed in those days was once a year for homecoming and the musical comedy was totally student produced by one of the fraternities and they alternated from year to year. In my junior year, it was our turn and because of my experience in musical comedy in high school, none in college at that point, I became the director. Because of Crane, all the vocal majors want a part. It's building the resumes, if you would and there's some very talented people. I almost felt like I was in the wrong place.

I was constantly saying to myself as I prepared for this, for months, "Do I have the talent to work with these talented people? They should be working with me." That's when I discovered something that I think it's stuck with me my whole life and that is; if you can help others be the best they can be, be the

director. They take the bow, that's such a cool feeling. I can still remember the last night, four nights of performances, house is packed, alumni all over the place and everybody hugging and just so happy about the result which was pretty awesome and I'm just standing there watching it and it's like, "Yes, I like this."

Max DelSignore: You were able to orchestrate some future teachable moments and had some really good exhilarating experiences as you moved on education and you taught for a brief time at Carthage Central School ,but a long stint at Lowville academy your alma mater in social studies, correct?

Tom Yousey: Correct.

Max DelSignore: You also had a chance to be a professor and a teacher education coordinator through SUNY Potsdam. When you're finally in the midst of education as the core of your career, what was it like to teach social studies but also help oversee this program within SUNY Potsdam, to see it from both levels or two different levels of education?

Tom Yousey: I used to say to teachers, "Teaching is teaching whether you're helping your infant learn how to use a spoon or whether you're helping a graduate student who is an English teacher in high school already." My job is to recognize their strengths, recognize their challenges and help them grow. Help them become even better than they are already. It's the same thing it's just that you're approaching a little differently with that infant in high chair than you are with a graduate student in English.

Max DelSignore: Do you feel like your method and approach even though might be different ages along the way, was is still the same?

Tom Yousey: Yes, it was. Don't tell anybody.

Max DelSignore: How would you describe it? How would you describe that method?

Tom Yousey: I saw each classroom that I was in as a community. My job, first and foremost was to strengthen that community so that everyone in the room is helping everyone else and by the same token, not hurting each other. The rule in my confirmation class room now and the rule in my alternative high school classrooms and the rule in my 8th grade classrooms was always the same, one rule,; Help, don't hurt.

My first job was to create a community because together we'll all learn better when we're helping each other and not hurting each other. My second job is to get to know each one of those individuals in there and then in the context of what we're learning, know where they're at and help them get move along. That could be different for each of the individuals in the room. For some, it's going to be very challenging to meet the goals that the state or the institutions have

established for them. For others, it's going to be easier and it's an opportunity to push them beyond if you can.

A story if you will, I'll never forget. I was actually an associate's coordinator when I was hired at Carthage and one of my missions is imposed by the Board of Education and the administration was, they were trying to make a transition for all students to be taking Regents classes, no more non-Regents classes because they felt non-Regents classes were watered down and every student need to have the best quality curriculum.

I went to the 11th grade teachers who were too excellent social studies teachers at Carthage at the end of the first year and said to them, "I'd like to do away with Regents next year in 11th grade or excuse me, non-Regents, have everybody to Regents class." They were dead set against it and finally, one of them was a football coach and a man I really respected. He chuckled and he said, "I'll tell you what." He said, "Next year, I want you to teach two classes with Regents and non-Regents kids mixed and we'll teach Regents and non-Regents classes and if your classes do better on the Regents than ours, we'll do it."

Max DelSignore: The result?

Tom Yousey: The result is important but the first day of class in that class the next year, I'm telling the students they're all going to take the Regents at the end of the year. I tell them all I want from them is that they do their best and if they follow my guidance, they'll be fine and if they don't pass the Regents, they'll be fine. It'll be just like taking a non-Regents class. When I get done with the discussion, there's a 11th great girl, 16 years old, sitting in the front row with tears coming down her eyes and everybody left and I stopped her at the door and I said her name and I said, "What's the problem?" She says, "I don't do Regents. I can't do Regents."

At the end of the year, after the Regents scores were posted, in those days we posted their grades on the wall in Carthage, I was coming down the hall as she was looking in the grade and her grade was 70, she passed. She ran down the hall and she jumped on me and hugged me and said, "I do Regents." That's what it's all about.

Max DelSignore: You met your wife Linda while she was a teacher at South Lewis, yes?

Tom Yousey: We actually met in college.

Max DelSignore: Yes, correct. I forgot about that.

Tom Yousey: We were married before she went to work at South Lewis.

Max DelSignore: To have the same career trajectory or interests both in education, what was that like to walk that path with Linda together?

Tom Yousey: I think Linda and I were on the same trajectory even before we were married and education was a big part of that, kids were a big part of that. Linda loved kids particularly little ones. She taught kindergarten and 1st grade most of her career. She did teach some other things but mostly kindergarten and 1st grade and if you talk to people they would tell you, she had this magic with little children. I taught the older ones

We did a lot of things together for kids. I think she was the sole inspiration for that work. She was the organization for that work and I just followed along maybe, I'm not sure but, yeah. Our commitment to children extended throughout our lives in many different ways.

Max DelSignore: You credit Linda with a great deal of your community engagement and you said in our previous conversation that she was the one who always approach you and say, "You should do this, Tom. Why don't you come and do this with me?" to what you alluded to a minute ago. What were one or two of those early examples of her influence and involvement, which you also have said was pretty contagious?

Tom Yousey: As you're saying that, I can think of lot of examples but the most interesting one, I think, was the start of youth soccer in Lowville. I'd been coaching modified JB soccer from the start up of soccer at Lowville with the Lowville School. A man by the name of John Hayes really started the whole program, he was the varsity coach. We were pretty awful but the kids had no experience in soccer and we were building.

At the same time, our children are probably about age 7 or 8 and 5 or 6 and of course, my son and I are playing soccer in the backyard all the time. We're actually and in social occasion, I don't remember exactly where it was, with the varsity coach and his wife and some other people and people were saying, "It would be nice if our kids could play little league soccer like there's little league baseball." The varsity coach's reaction was, "Oh, I got enough to do right now. I can't start a program for kids." I was having the same reaction and of course, Linda ... She was a great skier but she had no experience in team sports or whatsoever ever, took it on as a project. The first thing she did was try to find where there were little league soccer. It ends up being American Youth Soccer Organization, AYSO soccer. She finds it in New Hartford, New York.

Now, she's originally from Utica. She was looking at the Utica paper and they had an article about, I think, it was 300 or 400 kids playing every Sunday at New Hartford from age 6 to 17 and she said, "I got to meet these people." She somehow, I don't know how she did, she found out who were the leaders of that program. It's a small world because there was a husband and wife team and the husband was a kid who went to Beaver River when I went to Lowville and we crossed paths all through high school, I knew him.

That couple connected Linda and me because I, of course, I go with her to American Youth Soccer Organization. In two years, we had 300 kids playing all summer in Lowville. By the way, Linda just from there, talked other people into coming onboard and making this happen and, well, by the end of two years, it was happening.

Max DelSignore:

Just an example of other folks joining the effort, giving of their time to see something like this happen, really strong youth opportunity. How does it make you feel as somebody who's from Lewis County to see some of these other Lewis County families pitching in and see a good thing for youth and recreation sports and seeing what the final product was, to see AYSO really thrive at that time?

Tom Yousey:

Yeah. AYSO thrives and it spread from Lowville to St. Lawrence County, Jefferson County, actually Western New York, and it was wonderful and not unusual in the sense that with a little organization, amazing things happen in our North Country communities. It's not surprising at all. It happens over and over and over again.

There's another part to this story. AYSO was a little different organization that their theme was, "Everybody plays, everybody wins." If a child sign up for AYSO, whether he is going to be the future Olympian or if she's going to be playing on one leg with crutches, they're all going to play the same amount of time and they're all going to play. They also believe that you learn to play soccer by playing soccer. Forget all this practice stuff and just play and keep it fair and keep it safe.

They had a tradition of tournaments called a Soccer Fest. AYSO was really based in California, figures, anyway. A soccer fest instead of bringing a team to a tournament, a family would come with their kids. Right on the spot, they'd put on a team and they play all day in a tournament with kids from all over California or all over the Western United States, whatever it may be the soccer fest was. Well, the Northeast we had a fair amount of AYSO regions growing within three or four years. We were at a national convention and people were saying, "It would be nice to have a soccer fest in the Northeast." Typical Linda, we were sitting around and say, "How much work would it be to do that?" Linda said, "Well, let's do it."

She got together the leaders of the areas in the Northeast and someone made a contact, not Linda, with West Point who thought this was the coolest thing to bring all these kids to West Point to play soccer and see the academy. They set up on one field 15 soccer fields, end-to-end parallel and at the end, far end; there was only room for one more so we ended up with 15.

They provided medical services. They had the fields ready to go but then Linda had to figure out, of course, Linda is the chairman of this event. Linda had to figure out, how do you take 800 kids from the Northeast, have them arrive on Saturday morning at 8:00 o'clock and have them play four games and be gone

by 4:00 in the afternoon? Who made that happen? The people from Lowville. Seventeen families from Lowville organized themselves so this tournament happened for three years.

Max DelSignore:

It's incredible story.

Tom Yousey:

It was amazing. I thought was amazing because I watched it.

Max DelSignore:

Participated, I'm sure.

Tom Yousey:

Well, I was the chief referee but that's just that.

Max DelSignore:

One of the other things, Tom that you were involved, in at a young age was making the decision to run for the Mayor of Lowville. Serving in that capacity for eight years, is that accurate?

Tom Yousey:

Seven.

Max DelSignore:

Seven. Why'd you decide to run for office and what did that experience teach you?

Tom Yousey:

I think there were two factors that led to my running for office. First one was when I was a senior in high school, I was president of the student council and there was a tradition that the president of the student council got to be mayor for the day. I got out of school for a day and I spent the day with the mayor. I was so excited to do that because I really didn't understand the village government at all and I love my community. I love where I live. I expected this was just going to be a thrilling day. This is inspiring from the opposite point of view, so it ends up being ...

The mayor at the time told me to meet him at his office at his regular job at 9:00 in the morning and I sat all day while he did business and I did nothing. He did business for his business nothing to do with the village of Lowville. At 3:30 in the afternoon, he loaded me in his car and we went to a village board meeting. I understand probably 90% of what happened because they ... It was four trustees, the mayor, I still can picture the room. Four trustees, no public there. Four trustees, the mayor, the village attorney who was the budget officer and the village clerk taking minutes, they just did routine business like they would do in a meeting. No one told me what they were doing or why they were doing it and it was over, we did say goodbye and I walked home.

It's funny but it planted the seed in my mind that there must be something more to this and secondly, I had a question on my mind, how can people serve the public and then ignore ... I'm the public, I'm there but they ignored me. I just had this picture that wasn't the way local government should work. I was granted a leave of absence in 1978, I believe, for two years from my job

teaching social studies at Lowville Academy to work for the, what was then the temporary Tug Hill Commission.

They received \$600,000 in grants, Federal grants. The money was to be used to help the people of the Tug Hill region, the two parts of the Tug Hill region; the Adams, Lorraine, Rodman area and the Williamstown, Parish, Altmar area, to help them understand better the value of the resources that they lived and worked right beside every day.

I don't know if those people learned a lot but I sure did and suddenly realized what I didn't realized because I had to be ... When you're teaching, you got to learn your subject before you can help people learn it. I spent two years at town board meetings, at village board meetings, at planning board meetings and zoning board meetings. I trained assessors. It's pretty amazing because I had to train myself. I knew nothing about taxation at the time but there's something going on the state where assessors needed training. The Tug Hill Commission needed to provide it, but as a whole, awareness for me of, first of all, the value of this world that we live in, in Northern New York.

I learned about the aqua for under Tug Hill and how it literally supplies water to most of Central New York yet it could get messed up. The amazing thing was that people of Altmar and Williamstown did realize they were living in an aqua. I could go on and on and on but as I watched the local governments work, I just got the bug. I had to become a part of it and that's why I ran for mayor.

Max DelSignore: In seven years serving in that role, what did that experience teach you?

Tom Yousey: I can illustrate it with a number stories but if you have time, I got two.

Max DelSignore: Sure.

Tom Yousey: I think it was the second year I was mayor. I was still teaching full time at Lowville Academy and I was done at Tug Hill. A young mom called me, of course, I'm at the point I'm 30 years old, she's a little younger than I am and says, "Could you come to my house for a coffee someday? I have a group of women that get together with children and we'd like to talk with you." Lowville Academy was very generous with my time. I did my job but they let me use my planning periods to be mayor if I needed to.

One planning period at 10:00 in the morning, I just could walk to her house from the school. I walked over to the house and here were three women around the kitchen table and I think six kids, 6 and under, playing around the house. It's called a play group. They said to me, "We're sick of driving to Watertown for our kids to play in a playground. We need one in Lowville and we'd like you to make sure that the village builds one."

Now, I'm really shortening the story but that's where we went. At the end of the meeting I said to them, "It's not going to happen. The village has too many high priorities and needs that a playground will not come to the top of the list. It just won't happen," and then I said to them, "but if you can make it happen, I'll volunteer to be a grant writer and fundraiser." Thinking it would never happen. Really, that's what I was thinking and I walked out the door.

Four months later they had made an arrangement with an architectural firm to meet with the kindergartners of Lowville Academy to design a playground. They have persuaded the Lewis County Agricultural Society, if you would the Lewis County Fair Board, to donate a piece of land on their property for the playground to be built. At their first meeting of interested parents and anybody who wanted to come, they had 300 people ready to volunteer.

Max DelSignore: They were ready?

Tom Yousey: And I had to write grants. One year later, the playground is built and my wife was a lot involved in this too and they kept track of all the volunteers. Nine hundred volunteers, roughly, from around Lewis County had a piece of building that playground that started in that woman's kitchen about 18 months before.

What I learned when I was mayor from experiences like that was the power of community. What, probably I was thinking one stupid idea, turned into a community gem. It's still there. The kids are still playing on it.

Second story. We had a big fire later in time I was mayor. Probably, I don't know. I'd have to guess. I don't remember the years exactly, 1981 maybe in Lowville. One of three big fires we've had in downtown Lowville. It wiped out four thriving businesses; Mr. Sup, Montgomery Ward, [inaudible 00:33:10]. I remember standing with the firemen in the middle of the night as this thing is totally engulfed in flames right next to it as an old hotel that's been abandoned for years and people have been bugging me as Mayor, they think I should just snap my finger and something would happen with that building. I remember saying to the Fire Chief, "Let it burn." They didn't. It was still there.

Now we have a burnout. For about a month, the embers and the ash just sits there and neighbors are complaining. They claim the rats are living there and they're getting in their houses and all these stories that happen that you hear is a mayor. By the way, each of the businesses own their storefront. By the way, the fire started in the apartments above. About a month later, I'm having breakfast in a local diner because I was teaching. I used to meet with the heads of departments in the village over breakfast in the morning every week, a different person every day. Linda was a very patient woman at the time. I was never home for breakfast.

We're in the local diner and sitting across the diner from us, I'm actually with the Superintendent of Public Works. Sitting across the diner from us is a group

of men over there for breakfast every day and one of them is the owner of a local feed mill, feed and grain business and the other is the owner of a local cement, sand and gravel business. I remember the head of the sand and gravel business who was kind of the guy who liked to dig people, says across the diner with everybody sitting there, "So Mayor, when are we going to get to take care of this burnout?" I said, "Well, the owners just can't get it together. They can't agree on who will take care of it." Two of them didn't want to use their money to even do anything. Three of the four were back in business in other locations. One wanted to go back in business there.

He said, "Well, do you have a plan?" I said, "Well, I've talked to the county and they said they'd give us the heavy equipment to do the job but the county and the village don't have enough trucks to do it efficiently." Then the guy from the feed mill said, "I heard that was the problem and you can have all my trucks and all his trucks next Monday." In three days, it was cleaned up. They paid their employees. The county brought in the heavy equipment. No cost to the owners. No cost to the community. It was done. Well, there was a cost to the county taxpayers but, done. The owners gave permission because it didn't cost them anything.

Now we have a big burnout in the middle of downtown and people are saying to the village board, "What are you going to do?" Like the village board can do anything, really. At the time, our Assemblyman was from Lowville and he'd always come home on Fridays and we'd all congregate in his office just hearing his stories from Albany. I don't know how the conversation went but the burnout conversation came up. I remember he said to me, "What do you think you need to make something happen here?" It suddenly turned from it just our fun Friday conversation to a serious conversation. I said to him, "I don't think there's enough money in the community to really put that back and no one's coming forward to buy the land and do something with it." He said, "We need an incentive, don't we?" I said, "Yeah."

He said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "Well, I've talked to the Tug Hill Commission and I've done this and I've done that but I haven't got any good ideas other than I said people are ... I'm intrigued with what's called an Urban Development Action Grant, Federal grant." I said, "I think we could do some creative things with that to make something happen but I certainly don't have the skill or knowledge to make it happen." We had the conversation. Life went on. About two weeks later I get a phone call, I'll never forget this woman's name and I never met her. Her name was Gretchen Ralph. She called the school. I got the call in the middle of a class. The kids are sitting quietly and she says, "Hello. I'm Gretchen Ralph. You don't know me but I am Senator D'Mannose representative in Central and Northern New York. I hear you got a problem and you're interested in you UDAG."

I said, "Yes." She said, "I'm going to give you the phone number of a man in Plattsburgh." His name was Jerry King and he ran a Community Development

Center through SUNY Plattsburgh for Clinton County in the areas up in there. She says, "Jerry's already agreed to consult with you."

Max DelSignore: Everything's set up for you.

Tom Yousey: Yeah, that's right. I'll have to make this long story short but it took four years and literally, a lot of planning periods from school and a lot of nights not home with my kids and my family but the Lowville Commons was built and at the same time, the village connected with Jerry King and a man by the name of Donald Exford that I worked with at the Tug Hill Commission at the time he worked in Lowville, came over to my house one night, sat down at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee and said, "I got an idea for there. If you can get a UDAG, we can make this happen." It did. It was very creative. The land on which the Lowville Commons is build is owned by the village of Lowville. It was purchased through the UDAG from those owners.

A third of the construction was paid for by the UDAG and the rest was done by Exford's team of people who were all partners; a contractor, a lawyer, an architect Exford. None of them put any of their own money in it. They just contributed what they had; the skill, the time and talent they had and they built it. The money came, ultimately out of the rental the property and ultimately, the sale of the property back to them. I don't think they made a lot of money.

Max DelSignore: Those stories tie nicely to the question of three tenets that you've shared with me in the past that I want you to explain because I think they fit really within this conversation about giving back to community and community philanthropy and what that means. I'm going to mention each one but I'd like to have you explain each one too, as we go.

I want to start with this quote, "Everyone is doing the best they can." What does that mean?

Tom Yousey: I served for nine years as the coordinator principal of an alternative high school at Carthage High School. It was the most profound educational experience I ever had. As a part of developing that alternative high school, we wanted a school that was uniquely different than traditional high schools for kids that traditional high school was not working for. In developing that, we had a team of people, five. Each one of us took a piece of, ultimately we're going to put together in this alternative school and ran with it, if you will. We had to go out and learn some stuff then we had to bring it back and train the team on how we were going to do X, Y and Z.

My responsibility was management. How are we going to get kids who don't really behave very well in school many of them, not all of them, in this school all ready to find a way to behave well enough to be successful in school and move on in life with some skills and some knowledge and some abilities to be successful.

I did my research with a psychiatrist from California, his name was William Glasser who had developed a way of doing psychotherapy, he was a psychiatrist, that involved the whole the whole hospital, if you will if it was a hospital, the treatment of the patients with the goal of getting him out of there and had great success. Then there were schools that were taking this and adapting it for the school. The first thing I learned ... Ultimately I became certified as a glass of reality therapist, a counselor if you would. The first thing I had to learn and I had to believe in order to be successful with this was that everyone is always doing the best they can to get their needs met. If they knew a better way, they'd do it. Sometimes the way they're doing it is hurting themselves and hurting others but they're doing the best they can.

As a part of that, I actually got to work with Glasser. Glasser told me that I had I had to learn to stop being judgmental and just sit with people and listen to them and believe every word because it's their reality. I still have conversations with myself all the time in my work today or I'll say to myself, "Get over yourself, Tom. You're not doing this for you, you're doing it to help someone else so stop judging and just listen understand and then see if you can help." It starts with believing everyone's doing the best they can at all times.

Max DelSignore: Next quote, "Anything I do alone is nothing."

Tom Yousey: It sure is. When I was mayor we did a study to see if we could better serve the people of the Lowville community by merging the town of Lowville on the village Lowville into one unit. By the way, I was in a hurry to just get it done. The town supervisor at the time was a wise sage. His name was Arthur Standing and he used to say to me, "Tom good things take time." That was one of his sayings but his second saying that really had an impact on me was, "If this is a good thing, then the community's going to do it and all we can do is help."

Max DelSignore: Last quote, "You can be powerful and no one knows you're there." What does that mean?

Tom Yousey: Well, I illustrated that already with the musical at SUNY Potsdam. I remember the first night there were 300 kids on all the fields at the Lewis County Fairgrounds playing soccer. Now, they're playing on fields that my 9-year-old son, my seven-year-old daughter and my wife and I had spent all day Sunday lining and making goals out of PVC pipe and putting nets on. We literally worked 12 hours as a family. Linda and I, our kids are out playing. Linda was coaching but she ... Sure game got done early and the other games were still going for whatever reason and I didn't have any part out there. I wasn't coaching. I wasn't doing anything at the time. Linda and I are standing on the grandstand at Lowville Academy looking out over these fields. They're having such a good time and families are cheering and there's coaches out there that know nothing about soccer, that have learned how to coach soccer. It was like, "Yes." It happened and it's so cool and no one knew what Linda had done.

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An actual fact, there were lots of people were taking credit and they deserved it because it was a community event. The whole thing involved so many people making so many things happen. The same by the way, the man who owned the feed and grain company that provided the trucks, I went to Lowville Academy and of course, at the last minute, like me I do a lot of things at the last minute. I think it was on Friday afternoon. I had to lime the fields on Sunday.

I went to Lowville Academy to get there liming machine I. was a coach there, I knew where it was to borrow it. they gave it to me. I guess they always assumed I'd used their lime. They didn't have any. It was summer they used it all up.

I said to the head custodian, "Where can I get lime?" He said, "Well, we buy ours from some distributor in Syracuse or somewhere," and he said, "but I think farmers use lime in their fields. Why don't you go see Rick Bush who owned the Lowville feed and grain?" I went to see Rick. Friday afternoon, they're about to close. He's the only one there. All of his crews is gone. He says, "You need lime for that new soccer program?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Okay. Just bring your truck around to the side." He says, "How many bags do you think you need?"

I just said, "I don't know I got a line X number of fields." He said, "I think I know." I come around the side and he comes out with his hand card and dumps five bags of lime, goes back in, brings out five more, go back in brings out five more. We fill my truck and I said, "Rick, you want me to pay you now or later?" He says, "I don't want you to pay me ever," and the fields were limed.

That's what I'm talking about. No one ever knew Rick did that but Rick didn't have any kids that played soccer. He had some grandkids eventually but whatever I saw him he asked me how it was going. He owned a piece of it.

Max DelSignore: A really unique part of the Lewis County history and support of nonprofit organizations and community projects as a whole is the impact of the Pratt-Northam Foundation and you played an integral role as its executive director for 13 years. What did that experience to and what the foundation does, what did that mean to you and could you even just explain what kind of impact that foundation has had on Lewis County?

Tom Yousey: The foundation serves the communities from Carthage to Booneville so a little piece of Jefferson County a little piece of Oneida County and all of the Lewis County. I think it's a quiet piece and I think that's just the way the Foundation Board of Directors likes it.

I can remember the conversations always came up you know we need to do more publicity and then someone else would say, "Why? We're a private foundation. We have our own funding. We're not trying to raise money. Why do people have to know about us?" I did have arguments where the border. I said, "Well, the people who needed money needs to know about this because they didn't very often."

That foundation had some unique programs. Probably the most unique is called Workership and I think that illustrates the impact on the community. One of the directors, when I first was the Executive Director, the former executive director we get all ... By the way, the Workership was a ... What we would call an internship program but not exactly. Students aren't getting credit but they get a summer job and Pratt-Northam pays for it whether or not for-profit in those days, whether or not for profit. We had students working on the county highway. We had students working as lifeguards for rec programs, whatever. We didn't have them working for us. We funded the county, they are county employees. We funded the village of Lowville and they were village of Lowville employees working in the swim program at Lowville Academy or whatever. They were all over the place. Working in libraries, just everywhere.

It got to as many as 80 at summer. Eighty students could come home, live with their families, have a good job maybe have a job related to their career plan and because they can live with their families, maybe have some money left over to use for college expenses when they went back. The program still is going on. It's been going on for over 30 years.

Now, I'll get to that director. The Pratt-Northam Board on two occasions in the my 13 years started thinking about, "Should we doing this or it would be a better use of our money is doing something else for the community?" The former director used to get all those students together for a picnic every year and one of the directors would give a speech. He always gave the same speech and he'd say to them, "You know, this is an opportunity that we're providing for you but you got to decide what you're going to get out of this." He compared it to a baseball game and he'd say, "Your Workership will be a single if you just go to work every day and you take home a check."

He said to be a double. If they go to work every day, they take home a check and they do just one things that makes the community a little better than it was before they had the job. The he'd say it'd be a triple if the first two plus, they actually learned something that they could use in their life. Then he said, "It'd be a grand slam, a home run if all that happened and they came back home to practice their careers." This inspired them to do that.

Over the years, I don't know how many people have stopped me on the street at age 30 or 40 and said, "You know, I'm a Grand Slam." That's pretty cool.

Max DelSignore:

It is pretty cool. Your wife, Linda passed away in 2014. How does the loss of a loved one and in particular a spouse of 43 years, change you but also change the way in which you give back?

Tom Yousey:

I was on a trajectory to change the way I was giving back even before Linda died in partnership like everything else with her. Linda's last words to me ... Linda had a form of leukemia called MDS. The only cure is a bone marrow transplant. She had a successful transplant but the donor's bone marrow when it created a

new immune system, it attacked her living cells and they couldn't reverse. She was in the hospital for five months. I lived right beside her for five months.

Her transplant doctor said to me when I was getting down after about four months, "You need to be hopeful when you're with Linda at all times. I don't want to see you not hopeful and when it's time for you not to be hopeful, I'll tell you." He told me. He came in one morning with the whole team and the team is around her bed like they were every day for five months and he goes to me, "Come with me," We go out in the hall and go to a private room and he said, "It's time. She's getting worse and anything that we try now is just going to increase her pain and probably won't work. I think we should stop treatment."

I'm not going to finish that part of the story but we left that room and we walked into the room with all these people around her bed doing nothing just waiting for us. By the way Linda hasn't spoken to me at this point in probably a week. She's been in a comatose state, basically. We're walking into the room Linda sits up in bed and said, "I do not want to die. Who will take care of you?" To me, that's Linda.

Her last words, she's worried about me. All those five months in the hospital, she's worried about her community activities. I've spent literally an hour a day doing emails for her at some point when she can't do them anymore, supporting various community activities. I decided with Linda and with her support that at that point in my life, before she became ill, that I was hearing the call to become a deacon in the Catholic Church, to be ordained and to commit my life to service to the church. Not to the church, to the people of the church.

The last three months Linda was in the hospital, my study started and the church let me do them from the hospital when I missed all my classes. Well, Linda would want me to do what I'm doing. We did it together and now I'm doing it alone, but that's okay. She's still with me.

Max DelSignore: Tom, is there a particular example or two of community philanthropy, whether it's in Lowville or Lewis County and whether you participated in or not, that has really impressed you?

Tom Yousey: Two examples. One was in the alternative school at Carthage. The students had to do so many hours of community service a week. We actually connected that to graduation requirements. You don't need to know that. There was a freshman and one of the members of the team working with Big Brothers Big Sisters in Jefferson County, which isn't there anymore, organized an opportunity for our students to be big brothers and big sisters and they did it within the school. Not we, I was just watching this happen.

They did it within the school. Our high school students would be big brothers and big sisters to the middle school students. Big brothers big sisters provided a social worker who made the matches. Once a month had a community event for

all the bigs in all the littles that they sponsored in the school and our students met with their littles two and three and four times a week in school, help them with homework, play games with them, just got to know them.

Well, there's this is one girl who's a freshman. She was the only freshman that volunteered to be a big, mostly the bigs were sophomores, juniors and seniors, but she really wanted to do this and she's really connected with her little. Well, she's the big for that little for the next four years. But when she's a junior, she ... The Big Brothers Big Sisters is developing financial difficulties in Jefferson County and they pull the social worker out of the program and tell us if we can somehow provide the leadership that social worker did, that they would still sponsor the program. It would be Big Brothers Big Sisters but they really aren't going to have a hand in it other than they would train whoever volunteered from the school.

Their picture was some employee of the school would do this. This junior girl volunteered to do it and she was quite convincing that after she'd done it for two years, she could do this and she did. For the next two years she, made the matches. She worked with the principals and the counselors to make the matches. She did the monthly events just like the social worker did. She even did some fundraising for Big Brothers and Big Sisters in the Carthage community.

That's an inspiring story at that point. It was always our vision of what would happen as a result of this volunteer service requirement. I'm not done with the story now though, this woman is now in her 40s and she's acknowledged as one of the best school social workers in New York State.

Max DelSignore: It's pretty amazing. I know you're helping other organizations with current community projects that, that love does not stop. What inspires you these days to get involved and help?

Tom Yousey: Same thing that's always inspired me and that is, I like seeing community in action and I like just being a part of it. I don't have to be in charge, I just like to be a part of it.

It's interesting but my church work now is probably nearly a full-time job. I have less time to devote to other community activities. I've weaved them into my ministry. I've been engaged in hospice ... Another Linda story. I've been involved in hospice patient care for 13 years now. I've been a chaplain for six years and that's just part of my ministry but I was doing that before I was a minister and I'll continue to do it. I choose what I do now, I have to do it well as best. I can and I see myself more as someone who's supporting others in their projects as opposed to taking the lead.

Max DelSignore: Last question to wrap up, how important is philanthropy and giving back to the future of Lewis County?

Tom Yousey:

I think it's important to the present and the present leads to the future. I don't care where the community is. I guess all is straight with two stories.

We have this stereotype about urban communities but I think philanthropy's just as important there. My definition of philanthropy is simply giving of self for no other reason than to help someone else and it doesn't have to be financial. In fact, our communities need our time and our talent as much as they need our money. I think a philanthropist is a person who gives extraordinarily of themselves for no other reason than to build their community.

Two stories. First one happened in New York City. It's the night of Linda's death. Now we've been in that hospital for five months and the way they structure ... This is the city and you think it's very impersonal and there's no philanthropy going on, there's no sense of community. Well, Linda died at 1 o'clock in the morning roughly I let her I didn't tell anyone they left they were leaving us alone as I requested, the hospice chaplain at work.

I waited about an hour and I went out to the desk and I told her nurse that had been taking care of her for five months, we're family now, that I'm sure Linda has died and she said she'd be right in. When she said she'd be right in that meant in the next five to 10 minutes, she'd be there. I went back. Now before I finish this story you need to understand that Linda and I had a prayer tradition that we said every night before we went to sleep in our lives and so we got to the hospital, we continued it. When we were first there, it seemed like nurses would come in right when we were praying together and they would act like we weren't praying. They'd go about doing their thing and we continued praying. But after about a month, they would come in, notice we were praying and leave or if it weren't real busy they'd stand in wait because it took us about 10 minutes.

Then after a while, some people would ask us about what we were doing and even join in. Well, the night she died the only question that nurse asked me was, "Did you do your night prayer with Linda tonight?" I said no. I just was nervous that she was dying and I didn't do it. That's all she asked, said she'd be in, in 10 minutes. In 10 minutes, all the professional staff from the floor we're standing around Linda's bed saying night ... And when they walked, the nurse said to me, "It's time to do night prayer." There was a there woman in a burqa. I know there was two Jewish doctors and you felt the strength of community, that people loved you, they cared for you and Linda.

It was in the middle of New York City where you think it's everything's impersonal. That's my concept of philanthropy. They were busy people. They had a lot of patients to care for but they just gave their time for 10 minutes to pray for me, with me and with Linda. I think the best examples of philanthropy that I see in northern New York are those spontaneous events we have to care for somebody in some way.

They've happened in my life, they've happened that my family's life but I'm always amazed that when I walk into an American Legion on a Sunday afternoon when we're having a spontaneous fundraiser for someone who is in the hospital in Utica and that the family doesn't have the resources to be going back and forth and people are dancing and they're singing, but they're just generously giving their time, their talent and their gifts for no reason other than it's the right thing to do.

Max DelSignore: Tom, I know we covered a lot but there's more to be added to your story however you've given so much to Lowville and Lewis County in the North Country as a whole. Our sincere thanks for taking some time to reflect on your experiences and all the efforts that you've been a part of here on the podcast.

Tom Yousey: Thank you for asking me.

Max DelSignore: We hope you enjoyed this episode of the Northern New York Community Podcast. Remember, every interview is easy to access and always free whether it's online or on your mobile device. You can find the podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Play or other podcast platforms when you search for the Northern New York Community Podcast.

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Our sincere appreciation to Tom Yousey for joining us, and thanks to all of you for listening to this edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast.