

Max DelSignore: Hi, everyone, and welcome to another edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. Several communities, non-profit organizations and higher education institutions have been touched by the generosity of John and Mary Jo Deans. Their philanthropy has been embedded through different elements of the region, arts, history, education, human services and beyond. On this podcast we explore their experiences in giving and what they've learned. We'll also take a deep look at their affinity for the North Country and the future of the region.

Max DelSignore: But before we start our conversation, we must take a minute to thank our supporters of the podcast, WPBS and the Northern New York Community Foundation. They're responsible for the creation and production of these great stories from the heart of our community. Head over to wpbstv.org to see the latest from WPBS, and nnycf.org to learn more about the community foundation's recent work. Now let's bring in John and Mary Jo Deans into the podcast. It's great having you both here.

John Deans: Good morning.

Mary Jo Deans: Thank you very much.

Max DelSignore: Now you are now natives of the North Country, but you've made this area your home. What's the best part about living in this community?

John Deans: Well, I actually probably would be referred to as a native of the North Country.

Max DelSignore: Malone, New York, so ..

John Deans: Born in Malone, raised on a family farm. But we've been here in this area of the North Country. It's so huge, but this particular area of the North Country, we've been here since 1967.

Max DelSignore: What do you think has been the thing you appreciate the most about settling here, raising your family, raising your children, and really having two great careers living here in the North Country?

Mary Jo Deans: It could be the kindness of the people here. They're very welcoming and accepting. The summer weather is gorgeous, and we are very grateful for that.

John Deans: I think we had the opportunity, each of us, working with organizations that we really could truly identify with and become committed to. Both organizations are one, I would say we're working with more of a calling than it was certainly and probably many instances, but with the college and [inaudible 00:02:35] work with particularly the north country children's clinic, both of those oftentimes I think we probably felt like we were somewhat like missionaries.

And that of course always entails quite a commitment and quite a bit of reward from that kind of work.

Max DelSignore: John, you mentioned growing up in Malone on a family farm. [inaudible 00:02:55] part of your story growing up is the fact that your education really began in a one room school house, for eight grades, for eight years, I guess you could say. And with one teacher. Tell us a little bit about that kind of ... what's your recall being in a one room school house, one teacher eight years?

John Deans: Well, it turned out to be actually an extraordinarily positive experience. I mean, because the teacher for one Mrs. Fitz Simmons was just excellent. She was quite a disciplinarian but on the other hand, she was one who opened the world to us. Here we were in a rural area of upstate New York and many years ago every noon hour, [Anne 00:03:40] would come with a the radio and we would listen to the world news. And of course, I remember hearing many accounts of at that time, the war in Korea and Pork Chop Hill and those things stay with you for a lifetime. But she was also just extremely interested in that which went on around us, including in this case bringing the world to us.

John Deans: This was prior to the time that any of us had TV. So it was a great experience. There were, yes, we had a maximum size and that eight grades of 13 students and I can't say that our science experiences were very sophisticated. But by the time I went to the high school in Malone, my ninth grade, believe it or not, was largely review.

Mary Jo Deans: And John got measles, mumps, chicken pox.

John Deans: All in my first year of high school.

Mary Jo Deans: All in his first year of high school.

Max DelSignore: You built your immune system pretty quickly once you got to ninth grade.

Mary Jo Deans: Yes.

John Deans: Yes.

Max DelSignore: Some of the first examples of philanthropy that you share, John, were one of in particular was ringing the bell for the Salvation Army at Christmas time. What other memories do you recall from your childhood or examples of philanthropy that you noticed from your parents?

John Deans: Well, I think the one thing that I guess in [inaudible 00:05:05] I learned fairly early is that philanthropy comes in many forms. We often think of it as someone who has been quite successful, being very generous and leaving a large amounts

of money. But philanthropy as I learned it on the farm also meant that it really entailed the interconnectedness of people. We think of farmers oftentimes as rugged individualist, but they're also people who truly understand the need to be ready to support a neighbor. I saw a lot of that as I was growing up. I saw the biggest example probably was when we lost our barn to a fire. When I was just a teenager at that point, and neighbors came from all around and we literally had a barn raising that took place.

John Deans: It taught me that ... I think early on, I saw numerous examples of the old definition of philanthropy as love of humanity. People helping people. The interconnectedness of the world. So I think that ... and then the one I remember more conventional, maybe form of philanthropy, a modest form, but was ... I remember going with my father every year around the holiday time, and he would give each one of us money, and we would approach the Red Kettle for the Salvation Army. And it taught me that ... he realized because certainly we weren't affluent, and our donation gift, if you will, wasn't affluent but it kind of taught me the notion that, you know, you give. Everybody needs to give back in some manner. So there was a couple of ways that I think that I learned a little bit about philanthropy and why it is so important for all of us.

Max DelSignore: Mary Jo you grew up in a suburb of the city of Poughkeepsie, one of nine children in an Italian family. Plenty of sacrifice and sharing I would imagine. What was it like having that many siblings?

Mary Jo Deans: Sharing is a good theme for that. Nobody had a great sense of ownership. We shared clothing and food and friends and meals. We rarely had a meal that someone else wasn't invited last minute usually my poor mother. My father was very generous to his fellow musicians. Not sure if you mentioned, but he was a musician, owned a music store in Poughkeepsie and we often had, I think you would call them homeless musicians now that he would allow to come and live with us. And they shared meals, they helped cook meals. They were all very unusual characters. I remember them than my sisters and brothers. And I tell stories about them.

Max DelSignore: Was there a stronger appreciation for music and the arts, not only because of your father's profession, but you've got all these eclectic individuals coming into your home and have all these different genres of music that they're interested in. Did you feel like that's where you're fondness, this kind of grew?

Mary Jo Deans: Absolutely. I just love musicians and I feel so good with the concerts on the waterfront, giving them a job there. They're such generous interesting people.

Max DelSignore: Same question I asked John, but just other examples of giving back that your parents did that struck you or were compelling to you that you knew it was a really good example and something you may want to emulate as you got older?

Mary Jo Deans: I think a lot of our charity was with people we knew and our relatives and not so much organizations, although I do remember my mother going around collecting for American heart or cancer. But generally it was our circle and you just shared what you had.

Max DelSignore: So you both met at Suny Albany?

Mary Jo Deans: We did.

Max DelSignore: Can you share the story about how you met?

John Deans: We were in the library.

Mary Jo Deans: Oh, the library. We're going to skip to the library, I guess. Okay. We actually met at an establishment where they serve adult beverages, but then he did seek me out in the library and it was a rainy day and I was quite bedraggled but he stuck with me anyway. So then we just started dating. I was 17. We went to college ... Both of us are early. John skipped a couple of classes and I went to school early. So we were ... I was 17 and you were a sophomore and you were just 18. Yes.

John Deans: You see in the one room school, it was very easy because if you're the only one in the grade and the teacher thought we were ready for third grade, but you're only in first. So you moved through first and maybe you got moved to third and ...

Mary Jo Deans: And you can bet he listened when the third graders were doing their lesson. So yes, we were young but compatible.

Max DelSignore: Yeah. So and the focus, was education social sciences primarily as you're finishing up at Suny Albany, correct?

Mary Jo Deans: Yeah. We're very serious about our school work. Both of us. We were both good students.

Max DelSignore: Why'd you feel education was so important? Or what at the time compelled you to say this is really where I feel the most passion and interest?

Mary Jo Deans: I was the first in my family to go to college. Very proud of it. Perhaps I thought it was a way out of the crazy house that I lived in. Although I always loved being there. And John, you were serious too.

John Deans: I think I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I wasn't sure where that would be. And I think the inspiration for that I think came from Mrs. Fitz Simmons that molded my life in many ways for eight grades. I didn't know that I would become a teacher in a community college because again, they weren't around

at that point in time when I was going through high school, they were just coming into the [Rhone 00:12:16] as institutions of higher education when I was in college. But following graduation, and the time that I finished my Master's degree, it was time to start looking for work and I did interview for a position in a high school in the Rochester area. And in fortunate was offered the job that day.

John Deans: So, well that's grand. But I also had this interview at this place called Jefferson Community College in Watertown, New York. And we drove up here and I remember as vividly today is when we drove down the long drive, the beautiful trees and then all of a sudden is what at that point in time was an outstanding campus. Many community colleges, were an old factories, old buildings that might've been formerly educational facilities K through 12, but here was this, small but set of five beautifully built buildings. And the people I met immediately inspired me. One of them was the first person I had as a boss was a fellow by the name of John [Vandewater 00:13:38]. And Vandewaters themselves very committed to education. And John loved, even though he was a French teacher, he loved the world. He loved talking about global events and he really was an inspiration for me.

Max DelSignore: How did you know to apply to Jefferson Community College or how did the opportunity come about?

John Deans: Well, at that point in time it was a much less sophisticated process in terms of the advertising. And what happened is I had an advisor at Suny Albany who was very interested in this phenomenon of community colleges, and he would point out to us occasionally where there were positions open. And that's how I really heard about the position at Jefferson. At that point in 1967, it was a grand time for community college that were beginning to really take off, and I really, after having the offer from Jefferson was able to add offers from some others in New York state. But there was something about Jefferson Community College that said to me, this is where I'd like to be.

John Deans: I didn't ever envision that we would be there for 35 plus years. But because everyone thought, well, we'll start maybe at a community college and we'll move on. Well, we discovered there was a real college right there and I really enjoyed the fact that I was working with people, many of whom were, I guess as I was just had this strong commitment to taking education to many people who never otherwise would've had that opportunity. My first class that I went to in the schedule in the fall of 1967 was an evening course in American history. And I literally was the youngest person in the room.

John Deans: Because at that point in time, continuing Ed was primarily older working people and that was quite an experience in addition to the fact that I was all done in an hour and I heard the class was an hour and a half. Well, that happened I guess

that one time in my career and after that I'm sure that the students would have said, "Why does he just stop?"

Max DelSignore: As that happening, Mary Jo, you transition to become an educator at North Junior in Watertown. What was that experience like to kind of be following that same path and education together?

Mary Jo Deans: Well, I had worked at the Albany home for children while I was in college, so I was moving in a direction of, that time they referred to those kids as emotionally disturbed children. So when I got to Watertown, there was a special class at North Junior for children who were troubled, who were potential dropouts. And so they gathered all those children and they were, my class. I don't have no idea if they do jobs like this anymore, but I would communicate with the teachers and see what the kids had to do and help them with it. But we also had a class of our own and I would enrich them or do what I thought as a 25 year old girl at that time, what I thought would enrich them. So we did fiddler on the roof.

Mary Jo Deans: We did plays, I played them Broadway shows. We met one of these fellows on the golf course, a successful guy on the golf course later on. And he remembered that effort with enjoyment, I think. So that was my job at North Junior which I enjoyed a great deal until I became pregnant with our first child. And at that time, women did not work when they were pregnant. I worked until probably November which was late. So then I was home with children for quite a while until I decided to go back. And this time I decided to go back into nursing.

Max DelSignore: Why Nursing?

Mary Jo Deans: I was always good at sciences, I enjoyed it. I used to read the American Journal of Nursing. My mother was an RN. So we always had that magazine and I read it cover to cover, just fascinated with that idea of helping, curing, helping to cure. So I went back at JCC. John was academic dean at that point, I believe. And people used to ask me if he was my father. And [crosstalk 00:18:57]. Oh yes. So that was, two years. Because I had already had a bachelor's from Suny Albany, I didn't have to take all the courses, but the nursing courses were very intense.

Max DelSignore: It's interesting that when you switch fields, you're taking courses at JCC. John is there beginning his progression through the college. So the affinity for the institution just I think seems to like continue to build, I would imagine over time. I mean you're both there almost every day at that point in your lives. How did the college start to change in that point we either as a student, an adult learner technically at this stage, and then as academic dean, somebody who was there at the beginning. What were some of the observations or things that you both noticed about how the college was changing?

John Deans: Well, certainly, the one thing that I saw over the years was the dramatic growth of the college. Much of that occurred as a result of that decision in 1984 to reactivate the 10th Mountain Division and find it a home here at what would become a new [Fort Drum 00:20:20]. The college changed, Of course, the whole North country community changed, I might say to the better in virtually every way by bringing a lot of new ideas and diversity and new people to the area. And for the College, what I always saw as a major benefit was the fact that just the growth in numbers of people and the diversity of the population and other interests as far as majors were concerned, it allowed us to grow and expand our offerings and really better serve the whole community as a result.

John Deans: So that was probably the biggest change that occurred and it's one that still impacts the college to this day fortunately. So Fort Drum in the college early on we became a major partner in any effort that took place to try to improve addressing the issues that might arise and try to improve the ways that we could serve the north country. Some medical center certainly did the same as the fact that there was no school. Indian river and Carthage and put those two in particular. Even Sackets Harbor has a number of military related students but those two had the lion's share of students who are military related.

John Deans: I think the north country did an amazing job of addressing the fact that there would be no education offered on Drum itself. No military schools, if you will, on Drum. But I think for the ... it just was again, it strengthen all of our institutions in the north country that things went that way. The fact that so many members of the military community to live in the community and not on the installation, all of those kinds of things I think it turned out to benefit both Fort Drum and the community around it.

Max DelSignore: So in 1992, you become president of Jefferson Community College. What do you remember was your focus at that time being the president of the Higher Education Institution?

John Deans: Well, one of the things I never dreamed would happen, but it's certain ... I knew that by 1992 of the time had come. The college was starved for space. We were starved for facilities, if you will. And so almost immediately, we began formulating what became our first ever capital campaign. And that was quite an effort because we knew we needed additional buildings, we knew that they would all have to be equipped and we knew that the equipping them would not be a part of money that we might be able to derive from the state of New York or support from our local sponsor, both of which were very, very supportive. But it was going to take beyond that to bring the technology that was needed those facilities, et cetera.

John Deans: So we undertook the notion of a capital campaign. We were told ... I remember being told, particularly by people who certainly should have known or didn't

know or thought they knew that well, you're a public institution, you won't be able to raise much money. The public just won't do that. We were told that, no \$1 million will be beyond. Now this was in the early early 1990s would be beyond what you could do. Well, it turns out ultimately we raised over \$2 million and the community was overwhelmingly generous.

Max DelSignore: Why do you think that was?

John Deans: Well, we had an individual we worked with, a consultant who did the [inaudible 00:24:39] or so interviews in the community and he came back to us and I know that he met with the ... I'd met with him in some of the trustees, and he wanted to give us the findings. What did he find? And he said two things that always stuck in my mind. He said, "You know, first of all, you folks here have been really successful over the years and you've had different leadership, but nobody's gone to jail."

John Deans: Well, I thought that's quite an endorsement. And he then kind of laughed. He said, well, you know, seriously. He said, "I'm telling you that you really have never had anything crop up that would leave the public with a negative attitude." He said, and this really resonate. He said, "Frankly, this community has a love affair with this college." And I think he knew what he was talking about because as we went out to try to raise the money, of course it was a construction activity. So we were able to get people up and walk across the [inaudible 00:25:46] are some of the to be buildings. And the community responded enthusiastically and that engaged us with the community because as you know, we had to put teams of people together who would go out and work with us.

John Deans: You can't do it alone. That was really quite a ... that was something that if you'd asked me 10 years earlier, would that be on the agenda of a community college president? No. But now of course, it's something that has to happen periodically, as you realize you need partners and really worked amazingly well. And I think for a lot of people, we opened the doors of the college, the classrooms where names [inaudible 00:26:33] there still have the people who donated to the dollars, so that we would equip that classroom and buildings and so on. And the theater. We just discovered that there is an amazing generosity here in this area, the north country.

Max DelSignore: Of all the projects in the expansion that took place at that time. Even beyond capital, there was expansion of the academic programs themselves, the curriculum, creation of the center for community studies, had that as a community assessment tool. As you reflect on all of this, was there one particular project or effort that you are most proud of in your time as president?

John Deans: Well, I think probably I would have to say the Center for Community Studies. I had been here for a number of years and a lot of times I had heard from people out in the community that, you know, "We've got issues in this community that we need to try to address, but there's no forum for it." Or again, "We're going to apply for a not for profit and we're going to apply for a grant, but it requires all this data that we don't have that kind of information."

John Deans: So fortunately what occurred is I had heard that it was in my mind and I had the good fortune to receive the Shapiro Award and I think it was 1999, I believe it was. I utilized, I suppose you could say I use that forum that night at the award dinner to talk a little bit about what I thought college might be able to do if there were partners in the community who would work with it. And that was to create a place where people could come together, discuss issues, we could do analysis, we could do a polling, we could get a good read on what the community thought. And interestingly enough, after that appeared in the media following the dinner, the phone began to ring. Including people that at that point were associated with the North Area Community Foundation, saying, "How can we help? We'd like to join and we think that's an important initiative."

John Deans: And interestingly enough, JCC, I think I'm still safe, saying is really the only community college in the state that has such activity and it has had his had support from the community financially. The college provides support and it's a strong and now we're looking at coming up on a major anniversary here of the number of years that this annual survey of what used to be, we'd say the community meeting Jefferson County, but now it's Jefferson county, Louis County's involved, Saint Lawrence County's involved and they all appreciate the objectivity of the data that is gathered through that.

John Deans: And of course it engages students, as well as professors from the college. So that I was always quite enthused about. We used to do ... well, we did do for a while, we would have a major speaker on a major theme or issue facing the country. And that's the part that we need to build back into it. But again, it's just a question of having the staffing and the dollars to do that speaker series.

Max DelSignore: You had mentioned going back [inaudible 00:30:26] about those campaigns, people having names on certain spaces because of their generosity, two years ago, your name appears in the collaborative learning center. What was that moment like when you received the news that your name was going to be on what is now one of the newest buildings on that campus?

John Deans: Well, it was humbling and it was gratifying. And it's something that I'm just appreciative that the college was willing to do. I think that, as I said to Carol McCoy, when she told me about what was going to happen, Carol was the president at that point. I said, "Do you know, if I had had to try to dream up a building and what went on within it, nothing could be more pleasing to me than

what you have done with this building." You know, the library that was and I pointed it out where we met in the library. But the fact that the library is always there, the fact that the teaching that takes place there is collaborative learning, I think is something that's extraordinary important.

John Deans: And so we're just genuinely appreciative and the support of local businesses and so on that helped fund that effort and fund a scholarship that is established and hopefully will serve students for years to come. I've had an opportunity to meet with several of the recipients of the Dean's legacy scholarship and it's a joy each time you meet one of them because you realize that the college is really helping build community because it's giving strength and skills and education and some instances to folks who just couldn't get far enough the way to be able to get a way to do it, they do it here. Others do it here by choice and then go on and as we know become immensely successful educationally across the state and country

Max DelSignore: And hopefully some of them stay here.

John Deans: That's right.

Max DelSignore: That's all part of the hope or the plan as well.

John Deans: Yep.

Max DelSignore: Mary Jo, when you transition to nursing, part of the careers, you kind of made that transition was being affiliated and working with the North Country Children's Clinic for 15 years. In that capacity and in that role, what did you learn about the community that maybe you had not witnessed or seen before as an educator?

Mary Jo Deans: I think I did not know that there were pockets of poverty to the extent that there are in Watertown. I learned from the people, sometimes they were hopeless, but bringing back JCC that was always at a frequent aspiration of many of the young women that I met that they might go to JCC and start their climb upward. And of course I was more than happy to encourage that. We talked a lot about nutrition and at that time maybe people are more conscious of it now, but there was a dismal knowledge of basic nutrition and childcare.

Mary Jo Deans: I worked, especially with very young mothers who had not profited from the kind of mother I had and needed to be taught how to mother. And fathers who were stern and needed to be a mellowed a bit. So I did enjoy that aspect of my career. I worked at Samaritan before that, so I had a nursing background in pediatrics and newborn intensive care nursery. So it was a easy go to try to prevent premature births and ...

Max DelSignore: Did what you observed as a nurse ever influence the way you gave back to your community?

Mary Jo Deans: I don't know. I'm not sure exactly what you mean by that. You ...

Max DelSignore: Yeah, sure.

Mary Jo Deans: Yeah. I'm not sure what you mean.

Max DelSignore: Being a nurse and being exposed in that arena. Seeing these pockets of poverty, these people in need, you probably see some of that education to some of the children that are trying to prepare themselves and keep up with other students. I was curious, and maybe I should reframe the question. Being in the field of nursing, how it influenced the way you and John gave to your community. I mean, there's certain things you're passionate for, but because exposed to this or you see some things through that type of work, do you then transition and say, "Well, maybe we could volunteer here or give a little extra help with this organization." I don't know, perhaps, and you can pick that up right from here in Kelsey, probably.

Mary Jo Deans: Okay. Well, one who was a nurse is caring, above all must be. I think we became more sensitive to the needs of others. I'm just drawing a blank on this. I'm sorry, I'm not coming up with ...

Max DelSignore: It's all right.

Mary Jo Deans: You got any ideas on how being a nurse helped other than caring? [crosstalk 00:36:18] I don't know. There you go. Try something else.

Max DelSignore: If you want to come back to it, we can.

Mary Jo Deans: Yeah. Maybe I'll think of something.

Max DelSignore: I'll ask this question, for both of you. Why do you feel education is so important to this community's future?

John Deans: I would just say I would go beyond and say education is important probably to every community's future, but I think particularly for a community has a determination to remain strong or to become stronger, and people within it have that same feeling. I use my own life as an example, if I hadn't had good educators and good education, I never would have had the doors open to the kind of opportunities that I've had. So I think education remains the best single investment that any community can make. I believe that, and I think probably I've always believed in it and therefore it never was difficult for me to try to make a case, whether it was two members of a board of legislators or to try to

take the case to an individual. A private individual or a company that might be willing to support the college.

John Deans: It was never a hard job for me to say that this is the best single investment that you can make because the only way you strengthen the community and keep it strong is by keeping its citizenry, able to open doors and take new steps. And that is something I think education provides. We see that a lot. I think for some of the major philanthropic organizations across the country, recognizing that as we try to confront what I think is a single greatest challenge this country faces at this point, which is the inequality in income, the distribution of wealth, if you will, in the country. You see a number of people stepping forward and saying, you know, what? Education is that which will potentially open doors and give opportunity to help address that.

Mary Jo Deans: Go ahead. I think ...

John Deans: You were talking about the college when you asked earlier, has the college been an important part both of our lives, it occurred to me as not only did, I go to the Jefferson but Mary Jo did for a nursing degree and our three children all attended and I think one of them even had a doll named Jefferson.

Mary Jo Deans: I was thinking of that too. Yes, Jennifer. We asked her what she was going to name her new ... it was a stuffed animal or something and she said Jefferson Community College and she did name it. Jefferson.

Max DelSignore: She had been listening intently, probably to what mum and dad were sharing.

Mary Jo Deans: Jefferson Community College was a very big part of our lives and you know, children do what you do, not what you talk about, not what you teach. And I think ours saw the example that both of us were so involved. I can remember forcing my son to clean up a playground and volunteering him shamelessly to change the storm windows on an older couple's house. And he wasn't very happy about it when he was speaking to us. But everyone would say, "what a gracious boy, what a lovely boy." Because when he did the work, he did it with a big smile and he carries that on to this day.

Max DelSignore: Why was that important to you to make sure your children had those values of giving to others in need?

Mary Jo Deans: Oh, because it was one of our important values that we just unquestioned in our house.

John Deans: Yeah. I think you just ... the idea of, you know, some people use the term giving back, but I think just the idea of doing what you can do to help build your community. It strikes me that one of the opportunities ... and I've been blessed

with a number of opportunities and one of them was actually to serve as mayor and the village of Sackets Harbor. I'll always regard that probably as the second biggest opportunity I had after a JCC because it was an opportunity to work with people. It was an opportunity to help the community define a vision for itself. And I think sometimes we forget that communities are merely collections of individuals and you need a plan, you need a vision, you need something to strive for.

John Deans: Of course obviously then it didn't take me long to figure out and others agreed. I mean, that history is what will carry Sackets Harbor forward. We used to say we will build our future on our past. And I think that when we keep our eye on that prize, it keeps the community focused and we realize our connection with the past and gives the community identity and certainly a sense of pride.

Max DelSignore: Do you think local history is sometimes an element of a community that gets forgotten, but would be equally important to either endorse or promote to make the quality of life in that community better?

John Deans: Well, I think so. It's part of knowing who we are. If it's important for an individual, it's certainly important for a collection of individuals. They may not agree in every specific point, but at least you have some kind of ... there's something that connects you together. I think we see that in communities that ... well in Sackets, for example, not every community may care about historic preservation, but that has become now in Sackets Harbor, as we've kind of built the community's future, rather.

John Deans: It's something that you get pretty much unanimity of agreement on. That it's important that we not knock down buildings, that we try to save them because it's part of who we are and what we hope that the thousands of tourists would come annually to visit and hear about the war of 1812. And so it's very much a present day topic in Sackets Harbor.

Mary Jo Deans: Yes, I wish it wasn't so hard to preserve buildings. The process is so difficult to get grants and to find the funds. In the meanwhile, buildings like the old stone hospital just are deteriorating at an alarming rate.

Max DelSignore: You both served your community at other capacities. We've touched on it a little bit. How did you choose or what's the process of actually choosing where to devote your time and energy or resources?

John Deans: Well, I think sometimes it may be a conscious decision on your part. Other times it may be just, it's something that you kind of be evolved toward. Certainly the involvement that we had, is not as intense at the moment because we're not as connected. We spend our winters away. But when Fort Drum expanded, it was

important, I thought, given my role at the college to be as involved as we could with that.

John Deans: Well, we ended up getting more involved than we ever imagined. I got involved with the AUSA Chapter and ended up as the president of the chapter and then I got engaged with [FDRLO 00:44:32]. And we hosted meetings of both AUSA and then later after a little meetings at the college, and again, it was the bringing people together, but it opened ... it enriched us. We took more from it, if you will, than we gave in terms of effort because we learned a lot that we knew very little about and we met new people and that's always stimulating.

Max DelSignore: Can you share a little bit about serving as chairman of Fort Drum Regional Liaison Organization? One of the things I know the organization focuses on is just general awareness about the military in the Fort Drum element in the community. What were some of the things that are key takeaways from being a part of that experience?

John Deans: Well, FDRLO as we knew it and as still its official name now called Drum Advocate. You're right, it serves that purpose. We were the institution, if you will, that led the fight during BRAC [rollings 00:45:33] Base Realignment and Closure [rollings 00:45:35], and helping make the case for Fort Drum and why it was so important to the US military.

John Deans: I think that was certainly one of the roles that we played. The other is, again I was at the American Legion post over on, I believe it was Clinton Street, when the announcement was made in 1984, [inaudible 00:46:04] the back of the room with the then president of the college, John Henderson, and the announcement was made that Fort Drum would be becoming home to the 10th Mountain Division. We began to, at that point see the change that was coming. And of course, at that point in time there was a lot of discussion, but all, how will this ever work? I don't know, is a north country ready for this, et cetera.

John Deans: The amazing thing is that I think probably we're as successful as any community ever has been in extending a warm welcome and in working with a military community to make it successful for both military community and the larger community. So I think that a lot of our effort was spent. Look at the schools and the programs the schools have put together. And now when you look at why do people like do come to Fort Drum, it's not for the snow particularly. Okay. But it is for such things as they'll say, rated high, the schools, the quality of the schools here in the north country. That's been a pretty consistent response. The outdoor, out of doors, the opportunities for recreation, et cetera.

John Deans: It isn't just happenstance that any commanding general that I can remember consistently, will get back to us with feedback of saying this is probably the most welcoming setting, community, in the US military. And I don't think they are

either exaggerating or saying it because it would make us feel good. I think that the community can be proud that we've done, whether it's in delivering education or healthcare or just being good hosts to neighbors.

- John Deans: And the fact that they are parts of our community, I think that's all been a strengthen part of the success of the 10th Mountain Division spreads here in the area. And FDRLO is one of the organizations only one, but it's one that's done its part to try to ensure there was sufficient housing, and try to make certain that we didn't get caught up in a realignment and closure activity. So you see great outpourings periodically where there's an issue. Great outpourings from the community coming together to make the case to address whatever the threat may be.
- Max DelSignore: You both mentioned just education history, how important those two particular items are to the quality of life of in a community. Education is certainly a critical [inaudible 00:48:54] and inspire our youth to give. What else do you think we can do as a community to encourage the next generation to give as you have?
- Mary Jo Deans: Well, definitely, as I said before, you set an example, you show them what needs to be done and how to do it. You've done the youth [court 00:49:23], I think has been a wonderful example.
- Max DelSignore: Community foundations Youth Philanthropy Council? Yep.
- Mary Jo Deans: Yes.
- John Deans: Yeah. I think philanthropy is like a lot of the ... I think it's a learned activity. I don't know if that [inaudible 00:49:39], we want to say, "Well, how do I give back?" I guess at birth, we're pretty self centered that way as babies.
- Mary Jo Deans: We sure are.
- John Deans: But I think that more examples one can provide. We talked about the good fortune we've had. We have been fortunate to be associated with a lot of organizations and efforts. We most ... well, say most recently, but we were involved with the urban missions capital campaign and what a story that organization had to tell. And the point is it hadn't been told all that extensively. And once it was, here's an organization that a lot of times was certainly not flush with money. It was in a setting that was in real need of updating and repair and once that story went out [inaudible 00:50:39] it does, not so much just what the need was, but what it does for the community. The response was overwhelmingly positive.
- Max DelSignore: That was a \$2 million campaign as well. Correct?

John Deans: Yes.

Max DelSignore: One of the things we touched on earlier to bring back around to is the importance of sharing some of those values that each of you had with your children. Now you lost your daughter Jennifer to brain cancer in 2014 and she fought the disease for about five years?

Mary Jo Deans: Yes.

Max DelSignore: I would be interested to hear just how the loss of a child impacts the way you give to others.

Mary Jo Deans: Well, it's ...

Max DelSignore: I think that ... that's probably the most difficult thing that anyone ever faces in life.

Mary Jo Deans: It is, but we became acutely conscious of how difficult life is for cancer patients. And we became aware when Jennifer visited us that how difficult it was to receive chemotherapy and radiation here without the cancer center that they now have. And so we were enthusiastic about supporting the Walker Cancer Center and we do that with good conscience and best wishes for all the people who had to travel to Syracuse and Utica who no longer have to do that.

John Deans: I think it was certainly a reminder. We're reminded periodically of how vulnerable we really are and I think it gives one a little ... it probably magnifies this whole notion of empathy. Empathy becomes something that, yep, I think I really understand what that is. People were empathetic with us and our situation. So it's sad as I said, but just phenomenal challenge.

Mary Jo Deans: John served on the Hospice board for years and years and we truly recognize that organization and how vital it is to a community. And we know that not all communities have a Hospice, particularly a Hospice house available to them. And I think that makes us very willing to support Hospice as we've done.

John Deans: The good fortune that we've had, as I've been able to serve as a trustee of a local organization here that we oftentimes don't think of an organization like a bank as being philanthropic. But my role over the last decade with Watertown Savings Bank has driven home to me firsthand what an organization like that can do which is significant in terms of significant contributions to the good of the community and the life of the community.

Max DelSignore: In following that thread, where do you feel philanthropy can make a meaningful impact in the north country now and its future?

- Mary Jo Deans: Well, I've mentioned before, I'd like to see it easier to preserve old buildings because of our interest in historic preservation in Sackets.
- John Deans: Yeah. I think probably the answer, you know, there's not one best way. I mean there's so much need as we think about how do you create a healthy thriving community, everything from the health needs of the community to ... Again, you go back and put front and center the educational needs of the community. But I think there's just follows in ways that a person having read and learned a little more from you, just the course we're teaching now about philanthropy. Everything from the individual small act of kindness, that one extends for someone who is suffering is a form of philanthropy. All the way to the kind of things that the bill Gates's of the world do.
- John Deans: The Andrew Carnegie did so many, many years ago when he gave away 90% of his wealth. So I think there's just a lot of opportunity and a lot of ways. Serving on boards of organizations that have a mission one is comfortable with could be an immense contribution. Time. Time is a form of ... time and talent as I say it along with the dollars. That's all to me part of the ways that we recognize as humans, we're interconnected and that ... as Benjamin Franklin, used to say, we're all in it together or else we're all out there on her own and that generally doesn't prove to be very effective.
- Max DelSignore: Well, John you chose to create a course that you're starting to share now in Memorial library, kind of a class that you just touched on it a minute ago, but talks a little bit about philanthropy, civic engagement, why that's important to community. Can you share just some details about the course in general, but maybe the motivation for why you decided to do this?
- John Deans: Well, let me just point out that one of the things I've been fortunate and about with a lot of good things that have in life and in this case, I'm working with the guy who really takes the lead on that course is a fellow by the name of Dr Josh Canaly from Jefferson Community College and Connie Barone, talking about partnerships. Connie Barone who is at the battlefield state park. She has, I guess maybe this would be our fifth one. She usually makes an application to a New York state grant source. It used to be the New York state console humanity, [inaudible 00:57:20] a different name at this point. Gets a little grant which allows the books for whatever course we're dealing with to be available free. There's no charge to the students in the class. And we ended up doing a program ... we've done a program on World War I, a couple on the civil war and this latest one that we're doing now.
- John Deans: And again, I appreciate being able to sit in on and hopefully make some valuable contribution. Is one that looks at the whole notion of ... we use a book called The Civically Engaged Reader. And what it does is it talks about the various forms, the numerous forms that civic engagement can take. Of course, one of

those is the ... what we think of as the kind of the traditional philanthropy where we give all the world's great religions. They all have in one way or another, a theme of, it's important to take care of those who are, in this case, less fortunate is the reference. So the notion of Alms giving that I saw in India, grows out of that tradition.

John Deans: But charity on a larger scale, if you will, would be what we would see from those who had done well in life as far as financially. And we're able to give back gifts. And then more recently, looking at the work of organizations, it's the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller, Dorothy York community foundation where they have tried to look at what are the issues in our community that we might be able to focus some attention on. Down to the fourth area we do is looking at this whole notion of how do we promote efforts or situations where the citizens of a community can come together.

John Deans: And we'll talk with each other, maybe with many differences, but we've kind of lost the ability in our political arena to get people of different stripes to work together. Or at least maybe not as effective [inaudible 00:59:44] like. One theme right now we're seeing in some areas of the country is where every day Americans, citizens are coming together and saying, how can we solve the problem of you name it x, Y, or z? And that too, I think is a form of serving that is extremely important to our future.

Max DelSignore: Well, your resume of giving belongs to me kind of in the pantheon of generous donors who've believed in the north country and meet a genuine investment in the region's wellbeing. John and Mary Jo, thanks for your honest thoughts and reflections about your journey in philanthropy and we hope others will feel inspired to be connected and follow the example that you've set.

John Deans: Well, thank you.

Mary Jo Deans: Thank you for talking with us.

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

Max DelSignore: We also have a website as well for the podcast. You can listen to anytime to other conversations which also features, interview highlights, transcripts, photo galleries and much more. Just go to nnyCpodcast.com. We were grateful to have John and Mary Jo Deans join us on this podcast, and thanks again for listening to this edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast.



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