

Max DelSignore: We are excited to have you here on the Northern New York Community Podcast. I'm your host, Max DelSignore. Bruce Irwin and David Stoodley are church-goers and close friends. While they attend service each Sunday at Asbury United Methodist Church in Watertown, they also choose to give back to their community together. Their passions and interests may differ, but their empathy for people in need is steadfast. On this podcast, we chat with Bruce and Dave about the importance of volunteering, their meaningful experiences in donating their time and where philanthropy can make a difference to the North Country's future. But first, we must take a minute to thank our supporters of the podcast, WPBS and the Northern New York Community Foundation. They are responsible for the creation and production of these great stories from the heart of our community. Head over to wpbstv.org to see the latest from WPBS and nnycf.org to learn more about the Community Foundation's recent work.

Max DelSignore: And now, let us begin our conversation with Bruce Irwin and David Stoodley. It's great to have you both here.

Bruce Irwin: Thank you.

David Stoodley: Thank you.

Bruce Irwin: Glad to be here.

Max DelSignore: So, how long have you two been friends and when did you first kind of get together?

Bruce Irwin: I would say about 25 years. Dave?

David Stoodley: Yeah, about 25 years.

Bruce Irwin: In Asbury (United Methodist) church.

Max DelSignore: Was it just conversation, you know, after service?

David Stoodley: Baseball.

Max DelSignore: Baseball? So, tell me about that, Dave. Where'd baseball come up?

David Stoodley: Well, we are both big baseball fans, and we both like the Cleveland Indians and they were good then, real good, like they have been the last few years, and we just got to talking baseball and it just evolved from there.

Max DelSignore: Now, Dave, you're from the area originally.

David Stoodley: Yes.

Max DelSignore: And we'll get to your passion for local sports here in a second; but, you're from Adams Center, correct?

David Stoodley: Yes.

Max DelSignore: What was it like growing up in Adams Center, southern Jefferson County as a kid?

David Stoodley: Well, it was great. I grew up on a farm, and I loved farming. I loved everything about it except I wasn't really crazy about cows. But, every other part of farming I enjoyed. I went to Adams Center High School, which is no longer there. I was from Kindergarten through 12th grade in the same building.

Max DelSignore: Wow. What was that like?

David Stoodley: That was great. I mean, there was only 500 kids in the whole school, and like, say from ninth grade to 12th grade there was probably 150 kids. So, you knew everybody and we had a lot of fun. We had bikes. We could ride our bikes around. We could go swimming at Stokes Pond, ice skating in the winter time. We played hockey. That used to get a little rough sometimes, but ... Of course, somebody would always get mad and storm off the ice. That was never me, of course. (Laughing).

Bruce Irwin: And take their pick with them. (Laughing).

David Stoodley: Yeah. (Laughing). Yeah.

Max DelSignore: So, was farming the vocation or profession that you were thinking about after high school?

David Stoodley: No.

Max DelSignore: Okay.

David Stoodley: Not at all.

Max DelSignore: What was the next step after high school?

David Stoodley: Well, I went in the Army and I served there. I served in the Reserves. That's one problem I have. I was in from 1956 to 1962, which was probably the most peaceful time in our country, and I've always felt I cheated, you know, because I didn't ... You think about these men that fought in World War II and Korea, Vietnam. I never experienced any of that. So, when they say honor thy soldiers, I feel like I cheated. And, that's one of the biggest reasons that I give back, is because I support the USO, the DAV, Wounded Warriors.

Max DelSignore: So, you were discharged in '62.

David Stoodley: Well, from the Reserves.

Max DelSignore: From the Reserves.

David Stoodley: Yep. My obligation was over.

Max DelSignore: So, when you returned home, come back to the area, what was the next chapter.

David Stoodley: Well, I wanted to be a truck driver. Yeah, I was going to be a tractor trailer driver. Which I did for a little while but I found out that, that's not all it's cracked up to be, and I didn't like it and I got hired by UPS. Well, I worked at the Brownville Paper Mill for a while. Then, I got hired by UPS and I was there for 30 years.

Max DelSignore: Those two, Brownville Paper Mill and St. Lawrence Explosives, was another, for a period time. Right?

David Stoodley: Yep. I worked there. I drove a truck for them.

Max DelSignore: Those were two pretty prominent companies and industries, really, of this area at that time.

David Stoodley: Yeah, they were. Yeah.

Max DelSignore: Can you share just a little bit about the size of those companies and both of those businesses being here locally, because they had a number of employees.

David Stoodley: Yes. Well, we used to drag dynamite around. That really is not dangerous because, I think Bruce knows this, dynamite won't explode unless it's got a cap, it's got to be confined. So, you're pretty safe. In fact, I wasn't involved but, one of our dynamite trucks caught fire at one time and the State Police were there and they were scared to death that the truck was going to blow up. Well, you know, John Sibley happened to be on the truck that day and he told them not to worry, that dynamite will burn, yes, but it won't explode.

David Stoodley: I went all over New York State. It was great. All these quarries and mines that are in New York State. It's unbelievable. The Warren Brothers, St. Joe Lead Company, Jones & Laughlin Steel; delivered to all those places. It was a very busy time. John Dunk was the owner operator of that business. He was the son of Claude Dunk, famous lawyer in this area. But yeah, it was great. It was a lot of fun because I got to see a lot of mines and quarries that you wouldn't normally even know about. They used to be accidents once in a while. They tried to blow the face off the mine to get the rock that shot up, and once in a while the seam

would break loose, and it would smash windows out of trucks and offices and stuff. (Laughing). They had to know what they were doing... But still, accidents happen.

Max DelSignore: One of the things that you have always had a fondness, or an interest in, is local sports.

Max DelSignore: You've actually done a couple of books about area athletics, you know, auto racing, former Watertown Athletics, minor league baseball team, Frontier League basketball, which is high school. What inspired you to put some of these publications together?

David Stoodley: I just thought a permanent record should be made of these things. I'm waiting for somebody for years to write a story about Watertown Speedway; have all the final point standings, all the race results, every ... Somebody, you know, it should be a permanent record made of it because otherwise everybody's just going to forget about it. Of course, I waited for 25 years, nobody did it, so I did it. And I can say the same for the Watertown Athletics. I just thought that there should be a permanent record.

Max DelSignore: Well, it's part of the community's history, right?

David Stoodley: Yeah. Yeah, it is. A lot of people aren't interested in it but I was and I just wanted to have a permanent record.

Max DelSignore: I know this is probably a hard question to ask but, doing all the mining and the research that goes into the statistics and all that history, is there one nugget of information from any of those teams or any of the books that you've done that you always find most fascinating, or you think is really unique to this area?

David Stoodley: No, not really because baseball was big all over the country. At the time that the Watertown Athletics were here, from '46 to '51, there was 60 minor leagues in the United States. So, really, I mean it was just another league, you know. Only, it involved the border between New York and Canada. It involved Ottawa, Kingston, Sherbrooke, Auburn, Geneva, Watertown and Ogdensburg and Granby. A lot of those players in that big, well, not a lot, five players in that league, made it to the majors.

Max DelSignore: Some of them might have come through Watertown at one time.

David Stoodley: Yes, they did. Dick May, going to racing, Dick May raced in the Grand National Tour, you know, what they call Nextel Cup today. And he raced at Watertown Speedway. We had some very colorful and unique drivers out of this area, that raced all over, you know, but never on the national scene, but they were well-known all over New York State, you know like Neil Tooley, Gary Reddick, Guy

Robinson, Bob Zeigler. They were known all over here and Canada because of their ability to manhandle a race car on a dirt track.

Max DelSignore: Bruce, you're actually from a community further north from us in Peru. Tell us a little bit about your upbringing. A little further north in New York.

Bruce Irwin: Right. Peru is actually a hamlet south of Plattsburgh. It's sort of a bedroom community I guess, where the people go to Plattsburgh to work. My story is pretty similar to Dave up to a certain point. I came, I come I guess, from a family of nine siblings. So, that's a little bit different from Dave. Dave had a brother and a sister.

David Stoodley: Yeah, one brother, one sister.

Bruce Irwin: Yeah.

David Stoodley: That was too many. (Laughing).

Max DelSignore: (Laughing).

Bruce Irwin: As Dave knows, when you're brought up on a farm, it's a 24/7 operation. Especially a dairy farm, you never know when the cows are going to get out or whatever.

Bruce Irwin: So, it has that aspect to it that's not particularly pleasant, but that's what it is. My family, also, was involved in logging, cutting trees, both for boards and also for pulp which is ground up and they'd, you know, make paper from it. So, we did that and we also had a side business. We had a combine. For those that might not know what that is, it's a machine that goes out and cuts wheat, buckwheat, whatever-

David Stoodley: Oats.

Bruce Irwin: Oats and it separates the grains of wheat from weeds. It's a single unit usually drawn either by itself or by a tractor. So, I mention that because there's a seat on the back of these combines, at least in those days. You had to have somebody sitting there that would bag up the wheat, oats, whatever, and it would bag up the weeds as well. So, you had to tie off those burlap bags and toss them off of the combine. The area where you sat wasn't very big and you had to be pretty quick because you may have a weed bag (Laughing) filling up at the same time as the wheat bag. I was small enough to get on that little back seat and do that. So ... But, anyways, that was an experience that a lot of kids probably wouldn't have.

Max DelSignore: In coming from a large family, I know that your mother in particular would end up being a charter member of the 4-H Club in Clinton County, and I know you

had shared that as kind of maybe one of those early examples of giving that you recognize.

Bruce Irwin: It was probably the earliest.

Max DelSignore: What do you recall from your mother's involvement with 4-H?

Bruce Irwin: Well, we didn't have a lot of money, so, there was no money really available to give, cash, so she got involved in other ways. She was a charter founder of the 4-H Club in Clinton County and she also led a 4-H Club in Peru for over 40 years, I guess. She received awards for that work, and so on. So, I saw that being done. Although, you don't need money to be a contributor to society, so, that was probably my earliest way of knowing that.

Max DelSignore: How did that strike you? I mean, with nine siblings, your family of nine I should say, what struck you when you see your mom devoting so much time to putting this together and doing all that she's doing at home and being on a family farm.

Bruce Irwin: There's enough work just being the mother in a farm family. Somehow, she found the time do all that work. It was being a club leader in the community. All the children in that community, just about all of them, would belong to a 4-H Club, least that was the case in Peru. So, she actually was a role model in a way.

Max DelSignore: You went to Clarkson University, had interest in engineering and management. Correct?

Bruce Irwin: Yeah. Yes.

Max DelSignore: Share a little bit about that.

Bruce Irwin: I found out early on I was not going to be ... I didn't want to be a farmer, same as Dave (Laughing).

Max DelSignore: (Laughing).

David Stoodley: No.

Bruce Irwin: It's too hard. Too much work but is a great way to grow up. I'm glad I went through it because ...

David Stoodley: Yeah, I wouldn't trade it.

Bruce Irwin: You learn values being on a farm that you wouldn't get if you were a non-farm family.

- Bruce Irwin: I didn't want to be a farmer. I was a good student, especially in science and math, so I wanted to go to an engineering school. Of course, the closest one was Clarkson and that's where I went for four years. And directly from college to a job with New York City DOT. At that time, it was called the Department of Public Works; later changed to DOT.
- Max DelSignore: Over time, your responsibilities changed there to a position where you were kind of a director in leading some of the operation for the DOT.
- Bruce Irwin: I was very fortunate in that I got my Professional Engineering license in five years and that's the minimal amount of time you could get that in. So, they put me ahead of some people who sort of took their time getting their license and maybe took the exam several times or something. That put me ahead of them and fortunately a position came up. At that time it was called the Planning Director. And then that job kept expanding because the responsibilities that DOT took over from other departments in the state went to that. So, I became a manager right after I got my PE license in 1968 and I retired in 2002, so you can do the math. I was a manager for a long time and kept getting promotions because the responsibility of that position kept changing and increasing.
- Bruce Irwin: So, a job I thought I would be at in Watertown for a couple of years, then go to Albany or some other place, turned into 40 years. There was a lot of responsibility to that job because the beginning of every project and the funds that we used, among many other things, were my responsibility. But, I had a staff. I had 23 people at one point.
- Max DelSignore: Can you share, Bruce, what the best part of that position was for you? Or, is there an aspect of the DOT work that maybe the general public just isn't aware of? You know, we see the DOT out everywhere, and you're doing all these different projects, but is there a part of what DOT does that you think is really valuable and the public just isn't aware of?
- Bruce Irwin: For me, that would be economic development. Most people probably wouldn't think of New York State DOT being an economic development group, and all of that part of it came was in my department so that got me involved with a lot of people outside DOT, that as well as my normal duties. So, I met and worked with every county manager all those years, city Mayors, town supervisors, all the public officials. Did a lot of public meetings that were, not only project-oriented with, for projects, you know where we were going to build, but also with economic development. I worked with a lot of people; most of the people involved in any kind of planning in the five counties for a long time. So, that would be one thing probably that most people wouldn't realize.
- Max DelSignore: A question for each of you to kind of transition into giving, who taught you what you feel are some of the main values of giving back?

Bruce Irwin: I had an early experience. When I came to work for New York State Public Works, that's what it was called at that time, the District Engineer we called the person at that time, now it's a Regional Director because of changes in the departments and so on. He was a wonderful man. While I was promoted to a management position early, so I reported directly to him. Got to know him very well. Got to know his wife. Early on, too, I was doing income tax work on the side because I like numbers and so on, and he asked me to do his tax return. (Laughs). I said, "Well, I'll give it a try." And from doing his tax return, I realized how much he donated to charities, church and charities. It really blew me away. I didn't realize people gave that much.

Max DelSignore: Did you ever ask him, as a follow up, you know, can you tell me a little more about why you give or the number of things you give to?

Bruce Irwin: He just thought it was his responsibility. That he was fortunate that he got to where he was, which was pretty high up in DOT. He just thought he was very fortunate. He was a religious man, of course. He went to church regularly and gave a lot of money to his church. It just sort of came natural to him, I guess.

Max DelSignore: Dave, how about you?

David Stoodley: Well, I remember, my mother would get a notice from the Red Cross every spring with envelopes and a canister and they wanted her to canvas our neighborhood in Adams Center for the Red Cross; and she used to do that, faithfully, every spring. But, as far as giving now, I just kind of started on my own because when I retired in 1998, I had Social- well, I didn't have Social Security but I had a retirement and I'm not working but I'm getting this money, and I'm thinking, you know, this is something I've got to start giving because I was giving at the church. And like I said before, I felt that I needed to support the DAV and the USO and the Wounded Warriors because, well, I just felt I had to. So, between those three and then you've got Special Olympics, the Red Cross, and the Cancer Center in Buffalo?

Max DelSignore: Roswell Park.

David Stoodley: Roswell Park. So, I get those six faithfully, every other month. It's just something that I'm blessed with the retirement income (Laughs). So, I just thought that I should give back.

Max DelSignore: Why do you feel it's important to give just to help those in need.

David Stoodley: Because through sickness, unemployment, these people need a hand up. Especially, their families. You can't make a wife and kids suffer because the husband doesn't have a job through no fault of his own. I just think they need a hand up.

Bruce Irwin: You see it if you're out in the community at all, which both of us are, you see the need. The agencies I'm most involved with are mission, Salvation Army. You know, you see it every day and you start to wonder, "Well, can I do something? Even on a small scale."

David Stoodley: I remember one time I was at the Urban Mission and this Amish lady was there and she had five or six little kids with her and she needed bread really, really bad and the Urban Mission didn't have any bread at all. And I'm thinking, and I'm looking at her, she's got these little kids with her. So, I gave her \$10 to go buy some bread. Made me feel good.

Max DelSignore: Well, you're taking care of the mother those children.

David Stoodley: Yeah. She didn't have the money. She didn't ... You know, I don't know the exact circumstances, I just know there was a buggy and a horse out there in the parking lot.

Bruce Irwin: You know, every week, Dave and I...

Max DelSignore: I was just going to ask about that.

Bruce Irwin: Yes.

Max DelSignore: Tell me when that started because you help with the food pantry.

Bruce Irwin: Dave actually was the start person for that program.

David Stoodley: Yeah, back in '06, or 2006 because we used to have a food pantry donation every week we'd carry a basket down front and people used to fill this basket and more every week and we would have- Sacred Heart you would get the trophy every year for most giving but this particular year we were ahead all year long. So, I thought, "Boy, we're going to get the Span Trophy this year. Come to our big meeting in February of '06, Sacred Heart got it again. I couldn't believe it. So they put a big rush on at the last minute and beat us. So, then I said, "Well, that's not going to happen again. I'm going to start some kind of a fund at church." And I started it with \$5 a week, each member.

Bruce Irwin: Five dollars a month.

David Stoodley: Five dollars a month, I mean. Five dollars a month, yeah.

Max DelSignore: So, it was a competition amongst local churches to raise as much money as you could for the food pantry.

Bruce Irwin: Provide food ...

Max DelSignore: Provide food.

David Stoodley: It really took off. A lot of people gave me more than \$5 a month. Some people gave me a lot more than \$5 a month. Well, anyways, I had this fund, so I started going to ... Well, Aldi's wasn't here then. I'd go to Price Chopper and Tops and different places and pick up food. And, of course, we won. We blew every church away in '06. And it's grown every year since then.

Bruce Irwin: We're spending about \$180 on average every week from that fund.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Bruce Irwin: And we're picking up items from Tops and from our own people as well.

Max DelSignore: How many members of the congregation would you say are, or what percentage of the congregation would you say-

Bruce Irwin: It's a large percentage. Dave would know pretty close.

David Stoodley: There's about 100 people in it. So, I would say 80% of the congregation.

Max DelSignore: They bought into the concept of what you've created, saying this is a really good thing.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Bruce Irwin: And unbelievable to me, we ... Well, first off, the Urban Mission has a group of church delegates. There are over 50 churches that Urban Mission is dealing with in this. Dave and I have tried to sell that option to ... Well, every- Well, not every time, but many times when we have our quarterly meeting with that group.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Bruce Irwin: And we have not been able to get it going in other churches. We haven't stopped trying ... It surprises me.

David Stoodley: Yeah. Well, it takes somebody that's got to go out and collect money.

Bruce Irwin: Yeah, that's the main reason.

Max DelSignore: There's always trick. There's certainly a craft, a skill, to that.

Max DelSignore: Obviously, you and Asbury have kind of mastered that a little bit. You've kind of found a concept that works.

- David Stoodley: Yeah. I never had any trouble asking people for money if it's for a good cause.
- Max DelSignore: Why do you think it's important to just have, whether it's members of a congregation or people in a community, just participate in giving. It doesn't have to be about the size of the dollar but just give something. Why is participation important?
- David Stoodley: It makes people feel good.
- David Stoodley: You're just doing the right thing.
- Bruce Irwin: A lot of them don't have the wherewithal to give \$50 every week to some cause or something like that, or even every month to some cause, or a group of causes but with \$5 a month, most people can do that and then several, a lot of, give more than that. So, ...
- David Stoodley: Well, you don't ask people that you know can't ... You feel like you're taking things, something, away from. You ask the people that you know can afford to do this. And most people feel blessed. I feel blessed that I'm able to do this. You know, I don't ... I'm not in need of anything. I don't travel. I don't ... You know, I just ... I'm happy with what I'm doing. I go to Brownville every once in a while.
- David Stoodley: I just feel that it's just the right thing to do. I mean, I'm very blessed and I want to share that.
- Max DelSignore: What do you learn about the community from volunteering at the Urban Mission or helping with the Urban Mission every week?
- Bruce Irwin: Well, one thing, you know, is you learn right away that there are many, many people in need, and if you can help satisfy that need, in the case of what we do at Urban Mission it's a fairly good percentage of the food products that are brought in to the Urban Mission by other groups. Of course, they get goods from the central New York food bank ... Well, Dave and I were this week and there were some items they didn't have any ... Nothing on the shelf. And that happens quite often. So, we know when we go in there what they need, we go and buy it.
- David Stoodley: Yeah, that's where we have a little advantage. We find out Tuesday what they need. This week is was juice and pop and ravioli and-
- Bruce Irwin: And they wanted instant potatoes.
- David Stoodley: Oh, potatoes. Yeah.
- Max DelSignore: Oh sure. Yeah.

David Stoodley: So, that's what bought.

Bruce Irwin: We were able to buy that.

David Stoodley: So, we get what they need. Where somebody just dropping off donations, it's great, but they're just dropping off donations. You know what I mean?

Max DelSignore: Mm-hmm (affirmative). This way you're kind of touching on-

Bruce Irwin: We can meet a weekly need.

Max DelSignore: Yeah.

David Stoodley: We get what they need.

Bruce Irwin: Ramen noodles, tuna fish.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Max DelSignore: Well, it seems ... This might actually coincide with the next question, too, Bruce about Salvation Army. But, it seems like An Urban Mission, Salvation Army, and some of these area food pantries, one of the areas where they seem to struggle is with hygiene products. There always seems to be a dearth of these and always a great need. Is that something you've kind of observed and no food pantry can only provide so many food products. I don't know if hygiene products is another area where those donations are needed or ...

David Stoodley: Well, we go to Walmart for that because you can get shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant really inexpensive.

Bruce Irwin: Razors, all that kind of stuff.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Max DelSignore: With the Salvation Army, Bruce, you've been affiliated with that organization for more than 20 years, whether it's chairperson, volunteer; you pretty much have done it all.

Max DelSignore: What does that agency in particular mean to you? And, also, what does the Salvation Army mean to this community?

Bruce Irwin: First off is the church. People don't realize there's that. But, it's a church and there's a Sunday service every week. People mostly from that area, where it's located, come to church services; a few others. So, that's the basics of the Salvation Army.

Bruce Irwin: Personally, it goes way back. My mother was a Salvation Army cadet back in the late teens. I'm talking about 1918, I think. She was a cadet and very well established with the organization at that time. I think that happened because her mother died when she was 13. She had three younger siblings which she had to help with. Of course, her father had to work two or three jobs at least to support the family and keep them together. And the keeping them together was something that Salvation Army did, or helped very much. They knew the family. They knew the problem they had and they kept that family together. And later, my father met my mother at a Salvation Army dance and ...

Bruce Irwin: It's a very personal thing with me there.

Max DelSignore: And the organization is such a connector to that community, or the part of the population that has that great need. Can you just share why the Salvation Army is so important to the community today. Not just Watertown, but obviously there's other chapters across the North Country.

Bruce Irwin: Yes. In Watertown, as you probably have heard or know, we do a soup kitchen six days a week. It's more than a soup kitchen really, it's a hot meal every day except Sunday. And there are people, if not for the Salvation Army soup kitchen, they would not have a hot meal every day. So, that's one of the biggest things we do, I think. People are in need of a lot of things in that particular community off State Street. So, we do a lot of summer programs too for kids. There's a drop-off program where parents can drop off their kids and go to work. Almost daily, there's a program at Salvation Army; mostly for children.

Bruce Irwin: So, it's just an organization you can't help but like if you get involved in it. And there are a lot of volunteers that work with the Salvation Army, especially at Christmas time... The staff there is ... Two people are officers, sometimes we only have one, which is really difficult. But we have two now, should have two, and then we have two employees, that are employed and work in the kitchen, three actually, and we have administrative assistant and that's it, that are paid. None of them, including the Majors, get paid very much. Therefore, with the volunteer help and those people that are employed, they don't get a full week; they don't get ... Thirty hours a week, I think, is max. But the overhead is very small because you can do that with so few people.

Bruce Irwin: So, if you give a dollar to Watertown Salvation Army, you can expect that most of that, probably 90%, is going to go towards the soup kitchen, programs for kids and so on. There aren't many organizations that can do that.

Max DelSignore: Dave, what are some other examples of giving back that you see in the community where people, or organizations, are making a key difference.

David Stoodley: Well, start with the Northern New York Community Foundation is huge. The Six Town Community Fund, which I'm also a part of, has done so much for southern

Jefferson County, as far as scholarships go. It's helped out some kids. A couple of them I know personally. It really helped them to further their education. They might not have gotten this ... Who knows? But they got it because, Six Town Community Fund. I just joined George C. Boldt (Scholarship Fund). I'm not sure what that's all about, but we're going over to Boldt Castle Tuesday... He's matching every donation. This is George Boldt's great-

Max DelSignore: Great grandson.

David Stoodley: Great grandson is matching every donation for scholarships.

Max DelSignore: For scholarships, yeah, for students. It's not necessarily those who excel in academics but might also be a ... Were either a student that maybe averaged but showed some civic-mindedness, but also non-traditional students. So, it could even be an adult learner that's going back that could be eligible for that.

David Stoodley: Yeah. I'll find out more.

Max DelSignore: So, it's a really neat legacy piece to kind of compliment all that George Boldt is familiar with up in this area.

David Stoodley: Those three are really outstanding. I mean, just ... It's got to inspire everyone if they know about it; you know, know about them. And I think Rande and you certainly doing that part of it, getting that out there.

Bruce Irwin: I can't believe how much your organization has grown.

David Stoodley: Oh my gosh.

Bruce Irwin: It started very small, as you know, and-

David Stoodley: Yeah. It stayed small-

Bruce Irwin: And it expanded out into other areas as well, right?

Max DelSignore: Well, I think it speaks to the importance of what a community foundation can do for a community in the long term. And I think it's because of supporters and the generosity of others, much like the two of you and a host of others, that believe in a community foundation that were able to, as an organization, deploy these resources if it's for scholarships in education, or grants to make communities stronger and non-profits stronger that's really the whole purpose of why they were started almost 100 years ago. So, to have one here in northern New York, I think, is really pretty special and affords us an opportunity to help our non-profits be stronger but also make our communities thrive.

- Bruce Irwin: I like to support the arts and of course the Community Foundation is a big supporter, not just in this county but in St. Lawrence County as well.
- Max DelSignore: Can you articulate just why the arts in a community are such an important piece to the quality of life in where you live.
- Bruce Irwin: I am concerned that the arts, you know music ...
- Bruce Irwin: Orchestral, any kind of music really. Orchestra especially, smaller groups are not going to survive unless we give them enough support. It's got to be very difficult for, especially, small organizations to keep going if they don't get more support. I've always been involved in music and liked music, so I support, not only the Community Foundation because they support those organizations, but I support several organizations, art or music organizations directly. I think it's very, very important. I know there's some schools now that are stopping their programs, music programs. That's terrible trend. I'm concerned about that and what little I can do, I try to.
- Max DelSignore: What have you each learned about yourselves through all the volunteering that you've done?
- Bruce Irwin: Well, I think, in my case, I've learned that you can make a difference. Dave and I show that every week through the Urban Mission and, well, through the Salvation Army with me, also. You can make a difference and it doesn't take a lot of money. It doesn't take a lot of effort. Of course, it's great if you have a lot of money to give, but it doesn't take a lot of any of those. It just takes time and, well, we have the time. Some people don't but some people have a full time job and also contribute. So, ... I base it on the fact of the volunteers I see are not older people, necessarily, at both of the organizations we've been talking about. You can make a difference and you can see that difference.
- David Stoodley: Well, the thanks that we get every week from the people at the Urban Mission is very rewarding. I mean, they just love us over there. When we hear it every week and even our congregation, because we, you know, when you get up around 30,000 items a year, the congregation sees that in the bulletin. Every week they put the running total in and we get a lot of thank yous for that. You know?
- Max DelSignore: You know, one thing we talked about before is about the importance of just kindness, and how kindness really is a form of philanthropy and that very much is embedded in gratitude. Why do you feel kindness is such an important thing that maybe sometimes gets forgotten or lost in the chaos of our daily lives?
- Bruce Irwin: Well, being kind doesn't cost anything, right? For one thing.
- David Stoodley: And it is contagious.

Bruce Irwin: And if you're kind to someone, in many cases that person probably will be kind to others as well. It's a growing thing.

David Stoodley: Yeah. It's not hard to do. Anybody can do it.

Bruce Irwin: And I see a lot of kind people every week, either at the organizations we support or just out in general.

Max DelSignore: Bruce, you talked about the Arts as one area where you're concerned about its future and resources available to continue doing really good programs or having events. Are there other areas of our community that might benefit from more philanthropic activity? Be that financial resources or just volunteering.

Bruce Irwin: Again, through the organizations I work with, there are a lot of homeless people in this area and right now there is not a shelter for those people in Watertown. I know some people are helping individuals and that kind of thing that are homeless. But we really need a shelter. But it's a big undertaking to build a building, get the funding for that structure and to pay people. You've got to have, sometimes, people working.

David Stoodley: You got these-

Bruce Irwin: But I would like to see more people pick up on that, and maybe someday we can have a shelter. It's needed. There's no doubt about that.

David Stoodley: We got these zombie houses. I shouldn't say zombie houses because they're houses that mostly can't be fixed but there's houses around the city that are big that aren't being lived in. Couldn't they be converted into some kind of a shelter, at hardly any expense? I mean, a person living in a shelter isn't going to want room service. You know what I mean? There's houses in the city of Watertown that can be turned into shelters. I mean somebody would have to run them and pay taxes, and, yeah. But I just think-

Bruce Irwin: The problem is it comes down to money though, right?

Max DelSignore: The resources available.

Bruce Irwin: There might be grants available and that kind of thing, but not enough.

Max DelSignore: Yeah, that would probably be the trick, I'm guessing. But if there were an opportunity to repurpose some of these beautiful homes in some of these streets and neighborhoods, in particularly here in Watertown that could certainly help save those folks.

David Stoodley: Yeah, they're just sitting there. These houses just ... Nobody mows the lawn. I think if a person was staying in a shelter, he probably would mow the lawn and

take care and do things, you know, around it. Keep it up for nothing. Just for a place to stay.

Bruce Irwin: The city's doing a decent job in taking these places down and through Neighbors (of Watertown), you know, they're rebuilding some of them. That's a great thing that I would hope that would continue.

David Stoodley: Yeah, there's some houses that are vacant now that wouldn't take a lot to be brought back to respectability.

Bruce Irwin: The Salvation Army, as you may know, is taking down three buildings next to our corps building on State Street. Nothing good was ever going to happen to those buildings, so, we got a grant through the city and the Federal Government to help us with that.

Max DelSignore: And that's part of the larger vision for the Salvation Army.

Bruce Irwin: That's part of our larger vision where first we'll have a green space for kids. We don't have any green space right now. We'll have parking for Salvation Army events, you know, that we carry on, like the pancake breakfast-

David Stoodley: Yeah, I was going to say like the pancake breakfast.

Bruce Irwin: Thanksgiving day dinner and all that. So, we'll have that done at some point, I think, and pave the lot, and do it in stages. Eventually, we would like to get a bigger and better kitchen. The kitchen we have and the small dining room we have, are just not big enough. We're handling 80 to 110 people a day. So, they have to go in stages. They line up in the hall, and that creates problems because sometimes they get arguing with each other. So, if we had a bigger dining room, everybody could go in and get seated. So, that's our long range plan.

Max DelSignore: As we wrap up, thinking about the next generation a little bit, whether it's at a food pantry or elsewhere in the community, there's a standard I feel like your generation has really set. There's a bar that's pretty high of giving to your community or giving to things that you care about most. How can we inspire youth in the next generation to give to the level that you have?

Bruce Irwin: That's a tough question. I don't really have an answer. I think maybe schools could help in some way if maybe they could get an extra credit for kids that are willing to volunteer at some of these places; maybe work into the curriculum in some courses the idea of volunteerism. But it is a tough question.

David Stoodley: Or you could take people like my grandson. Take them to the Urban Mission and let them see, you know? Rande's son. Take them to a Salvation Army during the soup kitchen hour when they have dinner, lunch. Show them. Let them decide.

And if they've got any heart at all, I'm sure they'll see that you should give to help these people.

Max DelSignore: This really seems to lift the lens, or widen the lens I should say, a little bit more to what the community looks like when you have to your point, Dave-

David Stoodley: You have to expose them.

Max DelSignore: Exposure, exactly, so that awareness can kind of continue to build over time.

David Stoodley: Yeah.

Bruce Irwin: And I think there are a lot of kids out there that are doing good volunteerism-

David Stoodley: Yeah, you read about them in the paper.

Max DelSignore: Well, hope certainly that those students can be inspired by just having that access and exposure to those things and hopefully listeners to this podcast will take the initiative and be proactive in their approach to volunteering the way that the two of you have. You know, area for non-profits need a strong volunteer base to fulfill their mission and services, and you're certainly both leading the way as great examples. So, for that, we say thank you and continue to support all that you do.

Bruce Irwin: Thank you.

David Stoodley: Thank you for the opportunity.

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, Spotify or other podcast platforms when you search for the Northern New York Community podcast. We also have a website you can listen any time to other conversations, which also feature interview highlights, transcripts, photo galleries and much more. Just go to nny.com. We appreciate Bruce Irwin and David Stoodley coming on the podcast and sharing their story. Please join us next time for another edition of the Northern New York Community podcast.