Chris Nuzback

I: So we'll just get started. It's pretty casual, it's mostly about story telling. Doesn't have to be a formal thing. So can you tell me something that happens here in Meadville that really makes you love Meadville?

R: I could tell you a lot of things when I was younger, but the last few years I think because of the financial situation they're in, they don't do a lot like they used to. Um, I can remember that when I was growing up, they used to have sidewalk sales. And all the stores, or whoever would put things out, and they would close the whole town down and you could go all around town and visit all the different shops and stuff. And they would have entertainment and it was a big social event, and it usually happened towards the end of the summer. So you got to see people that you might not have seen all summer. They used to have street dances for the young kids that were like in middle school, high school. And they would have different bands and stuff like that come on like a Friday night and they would close down Diamond Park, the road that went around. And they would just run amuck. They would have the band and kids would just run around the street and ya know, it's just a fun thing. And I think things like that always made me think you had that relationship and it was a warm feeling. But they don't seem to do a lot of that anymore. They don't have the fourth of July celebration like they used to. I think they need to get back to trying to get people to come together again. I think that was the greatest part of when I was growing up. Like I said, in the last ten years or so, they've gotten away with doing special events or things like that. I just think they need to come back and do some things like that.

I: So what has made you stay here since some of those things don't seem to be here anymore?

R: My love of the MARC.

I: Could you say more about that?

R: I think the MARC is a very special facility. Especially for the size of our town. A lot of big cities don't even have a facility such as this, let alone 54 acres. I wish I had the staff like the YMCA does because there is so many things you could do here. It always comes down to the dollar. But I started working here, it'll be 35 years this April, and anyone that has ever worked at the MARC, no matter what capacity it is, I run into kids that used to work as a lifeguard or a concession attendant and they tell me 'this was our first job, and we loved it' and you get bitten by the MARC. And I think with a lot of people that use the facility, a lot of people out there that have volunteered here before, whether it's a church group that put a roof up for us or a fence or whatever, they realize how important this facility is to the community. And I don't mean just for the different uses and programs and things, but also because it's a great recruiting material for a lot of the big businesses that are in this town. I know Meadville medical center will bring in, when they're trying to recruit people, they'll bring them to our facility. And there has been a lot of doctors I know for a fact that have made their decision to come to this town because of hockey. Especially the Canadian doctors. Every day that you work here, or †you're inside this facility, there's a story to be told. How you relate to the customers that come in here, the children that use the facility. The adults. And now even the elderly. And we try to grasp all that and we try to get it on our FB. Personally, because of the amount of staff that we have, I think we do a really g good job for having good numbers. †I think we could do a really fantastic job if we could afford to have like a program director, and a lot more positions than what we have. Because there's only so many hours in the day and we all get stretched out and fortunately, and unfortunately, because I've been here so long, people always wanna talk to me. I love it. But you run out of time during the day. But I'm talking about the customer. Even when they call, they wanna book a birthday party, 'can I talk to Chris?' And ya know, that's something that the staff could do for me. And of course I do take care of them but I think it's important that the community and unfortunately, I think a lot of people that live in this community do not realize the importance of this facility and what it means. We can't say how many children have not drowned because of this facility. We can't say how many children have not drowned because we have the swim lessons. We have the fourth grade program. Although unfortunately, that has stopped. I try to always tell my staff when I'm starting to hire someone new that's in a supervisor position, and we have our staff meetings and that, that it doesn't matter if that child is 3, 4 years old, or if it's an 80 year old thats coming in, you have to respect each person that comes through that door. If there's a disciplinary problem, I usually will handle it in front of them so that way they see, kind of like my style. And I always believe that everyone is important and they should be able to tell my story of what happened, and then you wanna judge. But I think the one thing I try to stress with them is like we used to have an old concession lady that worked here years ago and finally I just let her go because she would have on the grill, a hotdog, that maybe cooked all day and it looked really terrible. And my thought was always you don't serve something that you wouldn't eat yourself. And so i would talk to her about ya know, because she would hand it off to a child. And I said do you realize that child grows up and that's gonna be our customer, hopefully with their family, but they're gonna remember what you did. So you have to think of those things and you always wanna respect everybody and treat them that they're all VIP, no matter where they come from, no matter their walks of life, and I always try to tell them that you're a counselor, you're a nurse, big brother, big sister, whatever, mom or dad or grandma, that they look at. Because there's a lot of kids that go home and there's nobody there to share their stories with of what happened during that day. So a lot of times they will come and they'll wanna tell you their story and you have to take the time to listen to them because I think that's part of our job here and it makes them wanna come back. Because they feel safe here and they feel loved here, and I think that's important.

I: Do you feel like, and maybe the answer is the MARC, but do you feel like there's something that captures the spirit of this town? An idea maybe

R: If I had to say something on that, i would probably say that the uniqueness of the town itself. I love the new lights and everything they put up. And they're going through town. But I think the stores. A lot of the stores downtown I think, I shouldn't say a lot, but the few that they have downtown now. But when they used to have them, they were owned by people that lived here. It's not a company that comes in and puts something in a storefront. I think they got to know people. You could walk in to the drug store, or jewelry store, and everybody knew everybody's name. And I think that was another unique thing. Or they would say 'oh I knew who your father is' or whatever. But everybody knew everybody. And I think back then everybody looked our for everybody. So there was a connection I think of friendship and unfortunately I think we've lost a lot of that. But I think there would be a way to get that back if we could cultivate that somehow.

I: Are there things that bring you into downtown Meadville now?

R: I do love Diamond Park. It reminds me of the old movie Peyton Place, which is probably way before your time.†

I: What is that?

R: It was a movie about a town, it was a love story. But they had a park like that in the middle. And I think about that when I come back. It was a small town like we have. I do think that now that we have, and I gotta be careful, but Andy Walker, um I think now that he's in the position that he's in and because he's an outsider, I think he has better views of things than maybe old administrations. I think they were kind of stuck in just letting things be the same, same, same. And I think you have to be able to look outside that. I think that sometimes on your boards you have to change things to get things to get moving. I didn't realize, and I had just heard this probably a couple weeks ago and I don't remember who told me, but they said there's 48% of nonprofits in Meadville. Just think of that against your taxes. I mean we're a nonprofit here. But maybe we should have to pay something. I mean it would certainly hurt us, but just like all the churches and everything you have. I don't know, maybe even the schools should have to pay a percentage of something. To be able to get the town up and moving again. We need to d something to keep our young people here. I'm astonished at how may Allegheny students stay here once they come. And it seems yesterday, when I was in the meeting for the remarkable, i didn't realize Dave Aster was an Allegheny, so we were talking and I said to him 'sometimes as we're growing up, people forget what the important things in life are. They're not the material things, they're not the kind of car you drive, what kind of big house you live in. Do you know your neighbor?' So many people like even in my neighborhood, they don't neighbor anymore. And I just think that you need to take the time. And when I say neighbor, it's not just your neighbor that lives next-door to you. I'm talking as a whole. And that's how I feel about our customers here. How can you try to meet their needs if you don't talk to them? If you don't know who they are or where they're coming from. Im not saying you can always solve all the problems, but i think you should always have an ear that you can listen to. And I think that if downtown, if they could start getting little shops back in. Ive gone to some communities where they have just, it's incredible how they've switched things around and done something like that. Like I got excited at one point when they were saying no run, they were gonna try to make it so there was a walkway around it, all through town and stuff and have little things. And I thought 'oh my gosh that would be beautiful'. And it would get people to come. To be able to see that. There's so many good people here and so many good, even nonprofits, that do good things, but unfortunately, there's only so many people here that can donate money and we all of course go to the same.. I wish we could do something that would get everyone together, maybe to do a huge fundraiser or something that we could all work towards and I just think it's a great place to raise a family. It's safe and other things are changing now, but I don't know.

I: Is there maybe, if you had like a magic wand, and there was something you could change about how Meadville is now, is there something in particular you would?

R: I think if Meadville could go and make the downtown, like I love going into the bank. I think that is a great place to go and look and shop.

I: And why is that?

R: It's unique. I think it's different. People are friendly when you go in there. I have to be honest with you, I haven't been in there for a while. But when they had the coffee shop in there. Do they still have it?

I: Yeah they do.

R: I figured they, yeah, I don't think it got a lot of business. Just like the market house though. I mean how many towns have something like that where the vendors can go in there and sell their stuff? And the little grille, the restaurant in the back. I think if they did more things like that, it would become a place people would want to come. Even tourists. You go up to.. oh gosh I can't think of it, and it's so neat, they have a candle store and you can see them making the candles and things like that. I think if they did neat things like that, it would just bring people here. Maybe go back to.. I've always wanted to go to the New England states, and I envision the stores like that up there.†

I: Is there any store in particular you'd like to see?

R: I hate to say this, but I do not like Walmart. They're such a big thing and I feel bad, a lot of times I go to Kmart even if I have to pay more because I think when Kmart goes out, Walmart is gonna be the only thing here. And how sad is that? And ya know, their prices, they're gonna be able to do whatever they want. So I remember when I was a little girl, we had JC Penny's downtown, we had Montgomery Wards downtown. I think if you could, even at the downtown mall, I'm sure they could expand that. But if you could get like a Target, a Kohls, somebody to come in. We just don't have anything. But I think that if you got a store in here that, I mean everybody drives to Erie. Which is sad. Even here, we sell just a few things, we used to have a pro shop that sold hockey equipment, figure skating stuff and swimming stuff. But everybody does it online now. So we're doing away with ours. I mean as soon as we sell out of everything, we're not gonna have it anymore. †I think you need something unique hough. Im not talking about a big dept. store to come here. I mean just like Christine's Chalet or whatever, that's unique. Stuff like that. If you could get stores like that to come in, but in all different things. Like there used to be a Crawford store. Every store was built. I can remember something too. Where Jack's is, that used to be a lot bigger, and it had a soda shop in it. So when you walked in, the pharmacy would be over here, but they had a lot of giftwares and stuff, and on this side, you could sit up on the stools and they would make you fountain drinks with ice cream and stuff so that was always a treat for us. There's nothing wrong with things fro the past or, just like you were saying about having little stores or stuff around the Diamond Park. I think that would be awesome, ya know like when I go up to Erie or when I was down in Pittsburgh and they have the little tables sitting outside with the little umbrellas and you can sit out there and eat. I think people like to do that stuff. Something different. Not just going into a restaurant and sitting in a booth. You wanna get them there and then keep them there.†

I: Well that's all I have. Did you have any last things you want to say?

R: No I just wish that somehow we could have more jobs here that would allow our young people to stay here. I do notice that sometimes especially when they start having their own children and their parents live here, that they do try to come back because they do understand how important family is to be together, but it really makes it difficult because of the jobs that aren't available here, or the wages that aren't available. Who knows, we'll wait and see what this new administration brings with the president. Hopefully. I don't know what the answer is to downtown but I think that since I've been sick, I've had a lot of time to think about some things and sometimes you feel so busy in your life that you forget to step back and remember what's important to you or what should be important and it's definitely your family and your friends and i think it would be nice if meadville could get back to where they used to know everybody and you didn't mind helping somebody next door. They'd say this person, something happened, and everybody chips in and tries to help that person. I hate the thoughts of kids going home at the end of their school day and they don't have anybody to share what their day was like. And I think a lot of that is because some parents have to work now. And some people, who am I to judge as far as if those people work. And there's not somebody staying home. We had, not so much right now, but there for a while we had quite a few fathers that were stay at home dads and the wives worked. And I thought that was really neat.†

I: I'd like to be one of those.

R: I can remember when my husband and I were first married, he always worked second or third shift, and I didn't work until all my kids were in elementary school, and thats when i started here. But we did that because we had three children, by the time we paid daycare, we would've been washed. So you have to do things like that. Some of these fathers are excellent, I love the fact these guys get involved. They would bring them for swim lessons then they would take them home and have their lunch and that and then bring back for swimming. You would be good at that.

I: Im hoping that's where my career path leads.

R: Have you talked to your girlfriend about this?

I: I tell her every time, I say 'can you just get a job that pays a lot of money so I can just be a stay at home dad?' Sounds like a lovely way. I said ill be the best volunteer there is, ill volunteer for everything.

R: Yeah the schools. Those are the fun times and memories. I miss those. That's what I love about FB. I can see the people that either use our facility, have used it, or used to work here, whatever. And they're having their families. Actually I was just at the the funeral home on Sunday and I ran into 6 people, 6 young people that used to work here at the funeral and they don't live here anymore, they were just in town, and terrible place to run into somebody. But it was so neat seeing them. And I told them, I said I just love seeing your family pictures on FB. I don't get to go on there all the time, but usually 2 or 3 times a week, late at night ill go on and just kinda surf through. It's just kind of interesting to see where they are and what they've become. Their family and that. How they've grown up. I often said we could probably have a reality TV here that could make us lots of money for a fundraiser. So just remember that.†

I: That's a great idea because I'm part of a group of people that wants to make videos and stuff and I told them like I want to make one at the MARC, I'm just not sure what it could be. So maybe we could make it.

R: There's a lot of stories that could be told. That's what I love about this place. Every day is different. And I mean, and just as you think that nobody that could come and ask you something that you've never heard of, it happens.

I: Think about if there was a really, really funny story or just interesting or a weird story and we'll come and we can act it out or something.

R: Did I ever tell you about the fish? Well the parks and rec had playgrounds.†

I: Is this the stuffed fish?

R: Yeah. The one that they put the rocks on.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. That, I thought was the best. I'll tell you what when I was going, it wasn't in 2016, it was 2015, they were talking about. We were getting with West Mead and the city and they had me going and they were talking about bringing the playgrounds back and they were thinking about talking to us about scheduling people and that. And I think that would be something that would be neat. I don't know that you would bring every playground back, but you could have them strategically set where you knew people were gonna use them. And you could have one at Forest green, you could have one, up in my neighborhood i know right behind where we live theres a park with a playground and stuff and when they had it over there, they had 30, 35 kids that would go. But it's the type of person that you put in there. It's gotta be someone that wants to work with kids. Not just say 'I want a summer job' and you're sitting there. You gotta be creative and that with the kids. I'll have to think about.. Oh I can tell you. I don't know that this is funny but.. My oldest son and all his friends used to come every Friday night and skate. And there was one, I'm not gonna say his name, he has passed since in a freak accident, but anyway he was one of those kids that was just a little devilish but you had to love him. I mean he was just the cutest thing and he would give you that smile that no matter what. I was supervising that night and our lobby used to be so packed, and I happened to look over to the concession stand and I thought 'what is he doing?' I noticed he had something white in his hand but at the time i didn't know what it is. And I saw him pick up the ketchup and squirt the ketchup and all the sudden it dawned on me, it was a women's kotex. The kids were out on the ice, he ran out there and just flung this thing. Everybody just screamed because they thought it was the real thing. So I get on the microphone and I said to him, I said his name and i said will you please go out and pick up your kotex? I mean you could hear a pin in the place. And his face got bright red. And this was a kid that was at my house all the time. Well he went out and he picked it up and i never had to say a word to him after that. He said 'I will never do another thing'. But he was razzed so bad by that by all the kids.

I: Where did he get it?

R: He had one of the girls go in the bathroom, he gave he a quarter to get it. He was something.

I: Alright well thank you so much I really appreciate it.