1014\_McCaffrey\_Sue

I: And as I told you, we were just interviewing people in our community. And we want to find out what they love about Meadville. And I have some questions, and one of them is: what do you love about the city of Meadville?

R: That's a long one, there's a lot of things I like about. I like the quietness, the small town knowing every fifth person as opposed to every second person, or maybe every fourth person we know. I like the idea you can do.. you know everybody you do business with, ya know? Trust. When I mail my bills, I walk them. I walk my bills. I go across the street and pay my water bill. I go down the street and I pay a bill. I mean, I just, I like the local, the smallness of it. Is that the answer you're looking for?

I: I am. That was good. Perfect. What things capture the spirit of your town. You almost kind of answered that in the first one, but can you think of any others?

R: Well, I still go to local sporting events, ya know? On the high school level. Because it's exciting, ya know? I follow our.. I'm happy when a new business comes into town, I'm very excited. I feel terrible when one leaves. I'm all for prorgress- downtown progress, community progress. I'm all for anything.. ya know, new bridge, this, that- I get excited. I'm a Meadville man. Do you want more?

I: If you want to.

R: Uh, the people that come into my business, I know them on a personal basis. I watch them with their problems, as well as mine. Divorces, marriages, failures, children, this and that. It's just a quaint little community. I've moved away before, but I always like to come back to Meadville.

I: What would you miss if Meadville wasn't here?

R: My friends. I mean, my acquaintances. Let's be clear. My acquaintances. Not so much my friends, but my acquaintances. The smallness of it, the camaraderie.†

I: Now, are we talking about just the downtown?

R: No, we're talking about everything. When I.. I'm still active referring. I referee basketball and softball. And I go to the surrounding little cities like Franklin, Oil City, Warren, and we still have contacts. We know each other. We remember us from going to school together, playing against each other. Same people that take tickets, same people that coach, ya know you get to know them after the years. And it's not on a real personal level but your'e acquainted with these people. I might go to Oil City or Franklin or Greenville and I know a lot of people there. So I like that. Not real real close, but close enough like 'hey how ya doing?' and this and that. Gary Desantis. He's a business man downtown, I know his business backwards and forwards. He knows ours. We just.. suggestions to each other. I like this smallness. Team.

I: And that is exactly why you probably stay in Meadville.

R: Yeah. It's.. I sometimes long for a city atmosphere. But once I'm in the city for a while...it's just different. I'll never forget when I lived in Miami.. I lived in Miami for a while.. and I'd walk down the street and I'd say hello to people and finally someone said 'you shouldn't say hello'. Ya know, everybody's looking at their shoes. You just don't do that. I would say 'hi, hello, how are you?'.. you just don't do that. You just kinda.. ya know what I mean? You just kinda walk on by. Ya know what I'm saying? They don't wanna be that quaint with you. They just.. ya know. I used to get my seat up on the bus all the time, and.. crazy stuff.

I: What would you change to make Meadville even better?

R: I mean specifically?†

I: Mhm.

R: You mean downtown people?

I: I mean I'm interviewing the downtown people, so if you wanna work with that.

R: I'm not crazy about parking. I'm not crazy about parking tickets. I think they're too high. Ten bucks is too high. Uh... What I would change? I'm not up for a lot of change. I would hope they would improve the tops of the buildings. Mainly the second floors.. see some development in second floor whatever. If you go downtown, you just see first floor. We're second floor down here. We're second and third floor. So like when you go downtown to these businesses, the next level up is empty. It would be nice to have some action.

I: Several years ago, I was on a downtown revitalization and we looked at that second floor and all of the buildings along here and... great space. Ya know?

I: It's gotta be reasonable. Rent wise. It's just the fact that it hasn't been taken care of for several years.. You can almost see who does something with their second floor and who doesn't. And it's got a lot of potential.

I: I think a lot of it too is when I was working on that, there were a lot of absentee landlords that owned those buildings. And when I say absentee.. I mean we're talking California.†

R: It's gotten better. I mean there's some go-getters down there like Bill next door and some of these guys that are really good at developing ideas. I mean he took over the old post office, ya know? He made that prosper.

I: I also think the†07:35†(indecipherable).

R: The Mercatoris building, where's that?

I: Oh that's where the second hand shop and the..

R: Oh okay, where they used to have the self defense place downstairs?

I: Yeah.

R: Oh yeah, that's a beautiful building.

I: Oh yeah, and I thought it was big until I walked these halls.

R: Oh you won't believe it when I showed at the end how big this is.. This is a big building. It's got 11,000 square feet.

I: Well thank you for saving it.

R: Well, it's been a lot of work. You can't even imagine what we've done in this place. Air condition, new lights, new track, clean. I mean, just developing floors, sanding, moving walls in and out.

I: Do you.. when you do any remodeling, do you have any problems with codes and coding new codes?

R: No, because we're grandfathered in. And we don't have to get wheelchair access because we're grandfathered in. But we still have to pass fire codes. But as far as what you're saying, a lot of, uh no. I'm pretty much good with codes.

I: You've been here long enough, so you..

I: 31 years. Well he grew up here, so he's been here long..

R: Yeah, it's just kinda, ya know, I was substitute school teaching and this kid kept saying to me we need another partner who†09:16†(indecipherable). I said, god I'm teaching, I'm subbing, I just got married, I don't think I can do it. So I invested into it and they were admitting, there were four of them, they imploded and then somehow I went from subbing, which I would have maybe got a permanent job, maybe. And then getting in it, and then it was terrible money, but it was a lot of satisfaction. I kinda think you end up where you began in life, meaning.. Me, I was kind of an athletic background and this is kind of an extension of athletics, ya know what I mean? I'm sort of back, or at the beginning, does that make sense?

I: Absolutely. T.S. Elliot, the great poet, said 'In life, we return to where we started, and we know it for the first time.' It makes you more aware.

R: Not everybody's like that. People say to me 'you're still working?'. I say 'yeah.. I like working'. I mean I look forward to coming to work to see my friends and I like the problems, don't misunderstand me. But I love to go to work, I love to see my friends, and I love to.. I like the challenge of business. Ya know, you can go broke any day, I mean very easily. And I heard people say 'well not gonna make it now', and it's just exciting for me to go to work and everybody's like doubting you, you do something exciting. I'll make an improvement or I'll expand the free weight room, we'll put something in that will generate some.. ya know right now, Logan is getting big for us, we're developing that. And it's gotten bigger and bigger. And people know that. Free weights are coming back. The free weights are upstairs, and I'll show you them. Boxing, like amateur boxing.

I: Yeah, for women and men.

R: Women love it. Women love it because it's hard work out and uh..

\*someone walks in\* hello how are you?

I: Good.

R: Small town.

I: This is it. We should capture all this. That's a great reflection.†

I: Well I think you kind of answered this one also, and this is my last question. What about Meadville's important to continue into the future?

R:†11:44†(service?). Not because we're a college town. Take example Phil, he's an anesthesiologist. I would never.. and ya know, he's a big big football man, we argue every day. But ya know, he's part of my life ya know? I love Phil. He's from my old neighborhood and he's just a great person. Ya know, he's so smart and you just kind of like.. I say 'Phil what's wrong with my computer?' and he'll fix it. 'Phil what's wrong with this? What's wrong with the phone? The tv thing?' and he'll fix it. And he's an†anesthesiologist, yet he has all this†background. And he's just a wonderful person. And I run into people like that all the time. Guys that can do little things that I can't do. My dad was a gambler and when I grew up, I didn't have a lot of background with a wrench and tools. Now, I got wrench and tool in my hand, you know what I mean? I mean it's funny how.. in that sense, it's what you didn't expect, but it's what you receive. I mean when I was a kid, you couldn't give me.. I didn't know what a screw driver was. Now that I'm older I can start fixing things. Im starting to get better at it. Wish i wouldve had that back..

I: This is Pat Barko, owner of Body Firm by the way. Just to say that. This is great.

I: Well, actually, I don't think I have anymore more. I think you've answered these absolutely positively well and I think that that Orton foundation will go 'yay!'

R: Well, I'm just being honest and I think every business person probably has their own little quirks. And I'm certainly not about money. I mean if I was i wouldn't be in this business. But I'm about excitement, I'm about surviving. About innovation. Progress. Thinking. Going to the next stage

I: If you were to envision the next stage of Meadville as a community, how would you envision how you see it in your mind's eye?

R: Well, ya know, there's improvement here. I was so excited when they got the new bridge fixed. I was all for it, I was for the expansion of North St. And that was exciting to me because I go up to North St. I go up to the high school continuously to referee games, to go to meetings. And it was a log jam up there. And this is exciting. Anything that comes into.. There's a soul food restaurant coming to Meadville, and it's exciting. And anything that comes in, you're excited about. Ya know, you hear so much pessimism about downtown and smaller towns, but I wouldn't trade this little downtown for anything.

I: That's great. †Your enthusiasm is magnetic. It will pull things in.

R: Yeah, and ya know I'm the first one. If somebody comes back to Meadville that I've known from before, they say 'this town looks terrible'. I say 'on the contrary,†

we're doing good. Meadville is a progressive little town. It's got a college, a hospital here, it's got a fitness center out in the hill, its†15:14†is state of the art, we got movie theaters, and we're hanging in there'.

I: More and more restaurants.†

R: Yeah, we got some decent restaurants, but most places do. But who has a state of the art movie theater like we do out there? It's got like ten theaters in it, and its just exciting, ya know?

I: And it's also a very community theater. You can have your birthday parties there, you can have.. and it's really..

I: Cafe tables out there you can watch on the big screen..

I: Yeah.. it's really community focused.

R: And the little one downtown is kinda hanging in there, and they're making some moves to improve, ya know? So, that's all I can say.

I: Well I think that was very good.

R: So we're done?

I: Yeah.

R: (talking about grant)