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Lee Scandinaro

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What do you love about the city of Meadville?

It's integration, I think its sort of very its size and scale allows for a huge kind of integration between folks in town, sort of a synergy that's here.

Mm, and what do you mean by synergy?

Well, from just its scale alone, you encounter folks that you know at every juncture in your day, daily rounds, whether you're shopping, doing errands around town, or going to a meeting, or working in a volunteer group, you kind of work, and play and socialize with folks that you know or have known in another context, and its really so unlike some of the big cities that I've lived in that are so much more impersonal and so much more anonymous and your identity definitely gets kind of lost at times in that context.

Can you talk through maybe um one of those people or one of those encounters where you see someone in multiple occasions and you share multiple different worlds with them?

Um, a good question um. you know there's so many, I think maybe the most versatile kind of example that I can use is the group of folks that you represent - you and Autumn and Heather and Taylor, and um. Not only do we seem to work in multiple committees and efforts in Meadville, but um socially um but we live fairly close to one another and we end up socializing with one another and we share the ups and down of the work together in a natural way which is very conducive to support and um building resilience and um, you know I'm always happy to see you guys, there's a vibe and an energy to the way that you work that is is supportive and keeps the energy high, when you stumble into something as upsetting as the election recently you had kind of a natural support because we've worked hard on the very issues that were at stake in the election and we were sort of able to share hearts and um and put our efforts back into real work right after the election, so that it wasn't just all about despair, but so what can the next thing be, but what is the next thing that we can do to further the cause. hehe

Well, that's great - I like knowing personally, that I'm not a person who's all about despair...

laughing.

Well we share the same aspiration for you, I assure you.

Well thank you.

Maybe I can just ask you what brought you to Meadville?

Well, it was really very momentus in my life - I was very happily ensconced in Road Island on the ocean, and my wife got this unbelievable chance to come work at Allegheny, and it was just not something that we could turn down for her professionally or personally, and so I came here really sort of as what they call a following spouse um to support Ande's work here. and I was feeling very uprooted, like oh my god, where am I? And I had never been to Northwestern Pennsylvania, barely ever been to Pennsylvania, and I was kind of lost at the beginning and um the Allegheny did a very nice thing and that is that when they were offering Ande the position, she said would um, would it be okay for my husband to come down and see what would be here for him in Meadville? So they flew me down and they gave me a bunch of interviews with wonderful people for a day and uh when I woke up in the hotel room in the morning I opened up the curtains and I was looking right across at the Mind Body Wellness Center, which I spent the last 13 years of my career really doing work in Mindfulness and wellness, and I thought, this is a really good omen. And so I think that work has called me here to be honest with you. And once I stepped into it and what I called the synergy here, I just sort of networked my way from one connection to another to good people and where you are with good people, good things happen and so maybe there was a kismet, or some sort of evolutionary um cosmic reason for my coming here that I didn't know when I came here, but it seems was immaterial when I did come here, and I'm grateful for that.

That's great, and I want to follow up more about sort of when you did start encountering that spirit of Meadville, or that synergy, how did you evolve into that?

So important, so incredible. When I came, when I came, you know I could choose a number of really really...you know I remember a comment that you said at one of the breakout workshops for not Cranberry park but

Yeah, I know what you mean, uh Clyborne Park

Clyborne?

Yeah

Clyborne park. Um there's something that you picked up in terms of sort of the resonance of the imagery about the young man who'd committed suicide in that house and how it was resonant of the images of lynching in the South and race relations and I remember just connecting and just saying - wow , that was a really thoughtful observation and it had to do with race relations which I'm deeply committed to and worked hard on building in Boston and um, thought there's maybe there's an opportunity to work with that young man or insights like that - that's very encouraging to me to come here and see that. Um I can remember passing muster one time I think, when I went to a meeting with Jan Hyatt and I first got to the meeting I could really tell that I wasn't passing muster, but at some point during the course of the meeting her son John arrived and we really started - got off well, and somehow I said something about Joseph Campbell or something like that and suddenly we were off to the races and everything was fine (humor) and I left that meeting feeling that I had stepped into a network that could be really powerful and positive for me - so it happened like that for me a couple of times.

Yeah that's great. I remember that moment very well too - I had been thinking about that very moment in the play for a very long time, and that was sort of like the aha moment for me when it just sort of all made sense for me

yeah - that was powerful.

So what would you miss if Meadville wasn't here anymore?

I would really miss what I'm gonna tell you, Meadville you should know this, just about a month ago I felt after resisting it for awhile, it was as though a net fell over me (humor) it was like I was in a net, like a matrix, like I was in a zone I was becoming integrated with this community, and I think that I would miss that - I would miss very definitive connections with specific people in the community with whom I feel in some sense its Karmic, but with whom I feel a sense of deep mission connection and uh personal connection - I would miss that very much - and maybe some of those people may be held in here in the synergy in a very deep way that they, they're not gonna move, so they're gonna be here and they're gonna do their work here, and that's what I would miss I think.

So what do you maybe think are some things that maybe Meadville needs to keep in mind moving forward?

These are the things that I think - are gonna be - hopefully just transitional, but very critical, and that is that um - their are 2 things: 1 is you know it should be more concrete, but there's this sense of inertia sometimes you know like that its like a ball of energy that's not, that's maybe afraid to move forward, that's maybe based on Economics or something like that or cold winters, or something, you know for some people that sense that what you have you have to really protect, and that to move beyond it might be really dangerous. And so there's some of that that those of us who work in social justice areas in Meadville sometimes come up against that and we get discouraged - our morale gets lower and I think sometimes there's - I feel it less, for a while I felt that there was um, in addition to the inertia,I felt that there was some potential fragmentation between the various initiatives that are afoot here - that people could become disaggregated or subdivided from each other and from their efforts to do the same or to reach the same goal in some ways - and that would be frustrating and that would be um discouraging and I think sometimes, its just almost bio-biorythyms and I think sometimes on days like today when its cold out and people's energy may be low and maybe their anx - uh - tired, I think that they withdraw and maybe step back and um I think Meadville will probably flush out most of us from our hiding pretty quickly but I think we might tend to jump might back into our peer group or our protective group at times also and not feel willing to venture forth, and I worry about that sometimes.

Mmhmm, so can you maybe talk a little bit more about the fracturing, either social fracturing or organizational fracturing?

Yeah, like ahem - like there are some built in sort of um subdivisions, like between town and gown (although I think that Meadville, I mean Allegheny does and amazing amount to bridge that, but some of it is still there just generically, intrisically) there's some between Meadville Crawford Central School and Allegheny and maybe some of the efforts going on in town, there's some unwilling - unwillingness to give up a certain um I don't know um - protective zone - or people want to or want others to stay within their zone, and think definitely CCSD umnAllegheny, Meadville - and I don't know - I hope that some of the other agencies in town are not set apart from that in a way - and sometimes I worry about how to keep connection with some of the social service agencies like ARC and CHAPS - uh MMC, and places like that - you know to just stay current with what they're doing and engage in efforts of those.

Its hard sometimes because there are a lot! of organizations and programs

An amazing number - so just in the number alone, the number of organizations and interventions that are happening with citizens every day, makes it hard to stay in touch and generate ideas and funding and collaborate with them and get friendly with them and get synergy going with them - um so that's probably just a quantitative item, and then you know some to merge - as we were talking about earlier with Kerstin's Wellness program and working with the farmers, doing the interviewing, getting the Food Hub going, getting some of the ideas - the reforms we would like to get going in the school system - to get some of the economic revitalization we want done, to get a community center for the kids, these are all things that we would like to work on together - um and to get them to merge together and to be working together proactively and structurally and logistically on sort of a day to day or week to week basis is a bit of a challenge and sort of sometimes can be frustrating um - and I think um - you know I think following up on last year's summit is going to be really important (Summer Summit: MMC/PiE/AC/City) and I think following up on the youth domain alone - I mean creating resilient youth, we would need to have a real clear cut idea of what we are doing and I think that idea has to come from the people who have and are already working in that domain for a long time - and to start collaborating between the various entities that have been working in that domain, to look at common problem solving, common funding, co-programming things like that really needs to be done - start being done now before next summer - we need to get another meeting together certainly by March, but hopefully by January and get everybody in one room and start talking about that stuff right away.

Mmhmm I think that's great.

So, those are some of the things, um you know I think that there is a pretty good relationship between the younger wave of social activists in Meadville and the sort of more seasoned and sometimes older, more established, or even retired members - but to keep that loop going and to keep that support going is really really important - to keep that nexus going is really important I think very important for the seasoned mature people as well as for the younger people that we both get so much from each other. We get a huge amount of energy from you people and hopefully sometimes we can have some wisdom to add. But to be conscious about those relationships is really important.

So, let me just ask, what is something that you just wish for Meadville?

Wow, these questions are so good, and sometimes to come down to a succinct answer is so good. But I do feel it - and I put into words a few times, but, I wish I could be more concrete - you know I wish complete wellness for Meadville, because I know that that entails economic revitalization, some options for the kids in school, some options for the mental and physical health level, but I think, if I could order off a seminal wish it would be probably that Meadville would have enough hope and belief in itself to really courageously and honestly to name its feelings and name what it would like to offer, um, and experience and that the people would be able to grow from that wish that was full of a sense of optimism, that they could grown well, physically, economically, emotionally, spiritually, um and that they could bring that to folks who aren't feeling that well in Meadville, so I think its sort of - I think what's powerful about this process is having people open up to the possibilities in Meadville, from their own voice. The possibilities really stem from the initial individual voices of hope and uh and uh caring for self and for community. I wish that I could say it better than that - I feel it but I haven't really put it into words - its very abstract.

Well, I think that articulated a vision, that is a vision in itself as something that is very valuable to have so thank you for identifying that.

That's all the questions I have today. Is there anything that you feel like you really want to talk about and you haven't had an opportunity to?

Well, it is - it is a great process - I'm really glad to have this opportunity to talk about Meadville, it is really a rich topic and I just have to say, I have never been in a town of only 13,000 people where there are as many gifted people with as much motivation - as much physical, spiritual, emotional energy that is Meadville, it is extraordinary. I've lived in San Francisco, New York City, Boston, London, you know, I've been places where there is a lot of energy collectively, and Meadville is extraordinary in that way, so I'd just like to say 'Go Meadville'.

Well Thank you - and of course you are one of those people who contribute to that.

Thank you.