Mike Wood_Oral History Interview

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Participants: Paul Adams, Christopher Breiseth, Tim Gilmour and Mike Wood

Christopher Breiseth (CB): I don't want to exclude the beginning. Where were you born and raised?

Mike Wood (MW): Oh, yeah, okay. Well, first of all, thank you. As I said before, I consider this to be a great honor. I have enormous respect for all three of you, and I think, in different ways, you all really transformed this institution in positive ways. It has been the honor of my life to have spent such a significant part of my career at Wilkes in different circumstances and different kinds of roles. I was happy to have the little bit of time I had with Tim recently because it gave me an opportunity to really thank him for giving me the opportunity nearly twenty years ago. It was a very challenging period in the institution's history, and part of the challenges, as I was beginning to outline, is that there was a period of time at the conclusion of your term, Chris, and the beginning of Tim's, where there were six vice presidents in six years. I don't think Wilkes was really on steady footing when it came to fundraising, developing a team, and establishing good practices. I'm sure it's episodic in any institution. It comes and goes as people go and administrations change. It's always sort of a rebuilding, but I was going back and just doing the chronology, as I could remember it, and I had worked with Paul Strunk when I was with the American Cancer Society. So, let me go backwards a little bit. I grew up in Edgewater Park, New Jersey, and my family is all still there. I was the first in my family to venture out and go to college. All of those that I admired had a college education, and so it was just something I really wanted to pursue. I was a musician. I was a front man for a band in New Jersey, and I learned that the Secretary of State in the state of West Virginia, A. James Manchin, was forming a group. Fred Waring had "The Pennsylvanians," so the leadership in the state of West Virginia wanted their own thing, except that they couldn't afford to do the big Fred Waring thing. So, they were recruiting musicians to promote higher education in the state of West Virginia. I was recruited, and this group, which went on to be called "The West Virginians," rehearsed in some of the best musical spaces were at Alderson Broaddus University in Philippi, West Virginia. So, between that and classes at WVU (West Virginia University), I joined this group. They gave you a full scholarship. They would rehearse for about three months and go on the road. It was a trimester program. You would go on the road and tour for one of the trimesters, but it was very taxing. It was a year-round situation, so you never really got home. There was no summer break, because you're rehearsing and preparing for the next show. It was a very slick, professional ten-piece band. We were our own musicians. We were our own backup band. We were our own roadies. It was this tremendous experience traveling the States, Canada, and Puerto Rico, and I really think it helped me in establishing some confidence with people. You know, you go from a pink hot dog lunch at Great Swamp High School, and then that evening you're doing a champagne, gold plate dinner at Greenbrier. You need to be able to be malleable and adjust to the situation. So, I wasn't a very mature kid when I went into college, but I came out with a lot more life experience and maturity, not only from the education that I received, but just this experience of traveling, performing, and "the show must go on" sort of attitude that you built. It's hard to explain unless you've really done that kind of work and toured. So, when I finally graduated and we got done with our last tour, I got an offer to join some bands that were forming around the country. At that point, I had just gotten so sick of being on the road, not being home, living out of hotels and vans, and not having enough clothes or money. I was ready to move on, and I didn't know exactly what that would be. I graduated from Alderson Broaddus University and took quite a few classes at WVU, because I was in communications and marketing. WVU had an outstanding communications program, and it was only about fifty miles away, so we could work out doing some classes there. Sadly, Alderson Broaddus got overextended with a big loan from the Department of Agriculture, so they could build sports facilities and recruit into that, and went bankrupt. It's sad that I don't have that Alma mater, but after that, I went back home to New Jersey. My mom said, "Okay, you have thirty days and you need to be out of the house." Sort of hardcore and old school. You're going to have to be self-reliant, and you're not going to be able to rely on us. I understand that now more than I did then.

Tim Gilmour (TG): Hey, Mike, I was trying to figure out where Edgewater Park is. So, I apologize, but I know where it is. I saw it on the map. But did I miss the instrument you were playing?

(MW): Oh, so I was a vocal performer, but I played all the brasses. I played trumpet, French horn, whatever was needed in the band. We traveled with all of our instruments and whatever instrumentation was needed for the backup. So, it might be a trio upfront, and we back up with whatever instruments were needed. You had to be able to with such a small group. Everybody had to be pretty good. You had to have an extended range so you could cover vocal parts that were needed, and you had to be a good musician to just pick up your instrument and be the backup band. Whatever the performance and the particular song required.

(CB): Did you continue with any of this music at Wilkes?

(MW): No, you know, it's one of those things. After I got out of college, I did direct a couple of high school musicals. I enjoyed managing the process, and my vocal chops were shot from being on the road, so they really needed to rest. It's kind of sad. I never really continued with it. Part of it was just being burnt out, and I needed a break. Part of it was physical, the vocal demands and the toll that it takes. It was such hard work. The love of it was beaten out of you, and sadly, I never did, although I yearn for it now. I'd really like to get back into musical theater and some things, as I look at retirement and the things that come next, but I'd never really picked it up again.

Paul Adams (PA): But you passed it to your children.

(MW): Yes, true, I did. Both of my kids were musical. They never took up vocals, but my son was a trumpet player. It's kind of a funny story. So, you know, when you're in third or fourth grade and people are choosing instruments, my son decided that he wanted to learn the clarinet. I said, "Why?" and he said, "Well, because my friend Neil wants to play the clarinet." So, I said, "Alright. Do you know anything about the clarinet? Do you know what it sounds like?" "No, I don't really," he said. So, I played him some Benny Goodman and things that I could find with the clarinet. Then I said, "Do you want to hear something cool?" and then I played him some Maynard Ferguson. I played him all of my trumpet idols, and he thought the trumpet was pretty cool, so I was able to influence him to play the trumpet. We played some together, as he was learning, and that was fun. My daughter took up the flute, and they had a very musical upbringing. Their friends at Valley West were in the band, and, you know, these were the geeky, smart kids who played musical instruments. It was a perfect environment for my kids. So, I was able to pass it on. Thanks, Paul, but it's hard to explain. When you do it for five years and you're constantly rehearsing, there are high expectations. There was a full scholarship, full room and board. The only thing we had to pay for was books. It was the number of hours that you had to put into it. But I think I could pick it up again pretty quickly.

(CB): Does the music faculty at Wilkes know this about you?

(MW): Some do, and some don't. Phil Simon thought I had a PhD in music. He had heard I was musical and called me Dr. Wood the whole time he was here. Occasionally, he asked me to come in and direct one of his choirs, which I gladly did, but I didn't really get involved much with the choirs and choral work. As I've been reflecting, part of it is, there's this very specific kind of music I like to make, and that is small, complicated harmonies. So, most of the choral pieces that are done for larger choral groups don't interest me a whole lot, because they're not as sophisticated musically as I had enjoyed and performed. So it's almost like I need to find where that is, and I'm not really sure where it is.

(CB): Thank you for sharing that, Mike.

(TG): Yeah, that really is helpful. I think I knew parts of it, but I didn't know it all. And I'll just tell you, I can understand the burnout part of it. It's not something you really need. When you're really almost dependent on it, the fun goes out of it.

(MW): Yeah, I think that's it.

(CB): And very few, by the way, make it through all four years because of the demands.

(MW): Trying to squeeze in your education when you're rehearsing three or four hours a night is very, very difficult to pull it off. Some people just couldn't, and for some majors, it just didn't work with it. So, I'm sure you can get burnout from a lot of things, and it's just so sad when you're performing at a high level. So, there are some extraordinary things that came out of that. For me, I felt like I had just catapulted my preparedness for professional life beyond my peers, because of those experiences.

(CB): For survivability at Wilkes. My mind is absolutely linked to what you've just described.

(MW): Yeah, thank you. So, I got a job relatively quickly. It wasn't really anything I had aspired to do, but it was work. I worked for CG Studios, which was the brother of Olan Mills, and we would go set up photo studios in stores on the East Coast. Ironically, one of my first locations where I did this job was in downtown Wilkes-Barre and the Pomeroy’s up at the mall. So, for a year, I lived in hotels. I had no apartment, nothing. I just traveled, hiring people and setting up these photo studios, and I was pretty good at it. I was so tired of travelling and in my first job, that’s all I did. I made a connection there that led me to my next job that I only lasted maybe nine months. After nine months or so I was hired for a marketing and broadcast group in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and I did marketing plans for small and medium-sized businesses that did not have the benefit of an ad agency. So, it's sort of smaller clients, and I really enjoyed that work, but it was still advertising and sales. It didn't really suit me very well, but my favorite client was the West Shore YMCA in Harrisburg. My mentor, Ron Nelson, gave me a shot to run marketing and communications, which was my major, which was really what I was passionate about. This was right about the time when desktop publishing was becoming popular. I was ahead of the curve with technology. I was 25 or 26 years old, and could see the future of desktop publishing. The marketing group that was with Hudson Broadcasting taught me the value of those who set up in-house advertising agencies. Ron Nelson was recruited for the Grand Rapids Metropolitan YMCA when I was 26 or 27. He moved to Grand Rapids and brought me with him (and my future wife Kim) and we set up an in-house advertising agency for the Y. I was the Vice President of Marketing for the Grand Rapids Metro YMCA at 27 years old, and we had huge success. The laser printers of the day printed at 300 DPI, which was the same as a newspaper. And, because of my music background, I was able to produce radio commercials with help from local voice talent. There was a local graphic art school that we brought in to do layout and design, and we worked all on the Mac platform, and created a great marketing strategy, mostly using in-house advertising. So, I had a career with the YMCA for about seven or eight years. When my son Ryan was born in 1990, we were looking to move back home. We just wanted to get more on the East Coast. I had a brief stint in north New Jersey, and then ended up in Wilkes-Barre running the American Cancer Society (ACS). The Wyoming Valley unit. It was a job, and it got me in the area. Got close to family, too. I didn't think much of it, but they kept giving me additional responsibility, additional units, and, before long, I was the regional Vice President for the American Cancer Society at about 33 or 34 years old. This is where I really started to get into fundraising. Annual support, special events, estate gifts were all part of the portfolio. I ended up being with ACS for thirteen years and I learned a lot about management and fundraising management. But after twelve years, I was ready to make a change. I was a regional Vice President. I had consolidated the units into a regional enterprise, which is a very heart-wrenching, difficult thing to do. I had to lay off a lot of people and disenfranchise a lot of volunteers so that we could operate more efficiently as a regional apparatus with more and more of the resources being national rather than local. So, it was just an evolution of the American Cancer Society. In 2004-2005, I started looking for other things, and I applied for a couple of different opportunities. I applied for a job in corporate relations at the National Office of the American Cancer Society, and, around the same time, Marty Williams had come on to Wilkes in the fall of 2004. He was looking for somebody to lead the inevitable campaign and handle things more from the operational side. That was intriguing to me, and so I sent an application using FedEx Direct to Marty, and we had a meeting at Hottles within a few days of him receiving that. That was early 2005, and then the job was posted, so the more formal process began. I was a finalist with Bill Beam from Kings, and I didn't get the job. Bill Beam got the job. This must have been mid 2005 when this all transpired, and fortunately, I got the national job. I was working in Atlanta. I had an office in Philadelphia and an office in Pittsburgh. “Cause marketing” was very popular at the time. I had relationships with companies where they would co-brand a fundraising initiative. I was working with Fortune 500 companies and got a nice promotion and raise. We were pretty happy about how things turned out. But then, in late fall and early winter of 2005, Marty called my house, as you did in 2005, because most of us didn't have cell phones, and got a hold of Kim, my wife. He said, “How's Mike doing?” and she said, “He's doing great. He got this new job at the National Office. He got a nice promotion. He loves it.” I think that was an expensive phone call for Marty because he had to work a little harder to get me, given the fact that he knew I was in a good place. But, I guess he realized that Bill wasn't going to work out after a few months. So, he was meeting with me clandestinely in early 2006 to see if we could figure out when a good transition would be and if I would be interested in coming into what we would call today, an AVP (Assistant Vice President) role. I was still interested in it, and they convinced me to come. I started with Wilkes in that role in mid 2006. Then Marty, a year later, had a stroke.

(PA): It was on Easter.

(MW): On Easter. That's right. I remember that call on Easter.

(PA): So that following Easter he had the stroke, and then what?.

(MW): There was a period of time when we were uncertain of whether he'd be able to come back and fully recover from it or not. Meanwhile, we're trying to staff up for a campaign that was set to launch in 2008, and so there's a lot of work that still needed to be done. We were still working on the case statement. We were still hiring people into the team to build out our full team. In the interim, Sanda Carroll became interim VP for a couple of months, and that, for whatever reason, wasn't working out. Then, Mike France became the interim VP and worked with me on this campaign execution, continuing to try and put the pieces together. By the end of 2007, I don't know how the conversation went, but Mike France basically went to Tim, as the story is told to me, and said, "I think you have your guy right here. I don't think you need to look any further." It would have been Marty, but sadly, he just couldn't come back to his role and I believe moved back to Salisbury, Maryland, where he had come from. So, we were trying to figure out what to do. I'm sure Tim can fill in more of this, but it would have been difficult, at that point, to completely go through another national search and continue with the campaign timeline that the board had put forward. So, upon advice from Mike France, Tim gave me a shot to pull it off. I'm sure he had a finger on the trigger, because I was really untested, but I felt pretty confident that we had built a good team. We had a good process in place. We had good leadership that I could carry forward.

(TG): One other aspect, and I can't remember his name, but the consultant. Jerry Panas? There was somebody else, and Marty was a mentee of his. I'll think of it.

(PA): What was his name? The name Jerry was it? No.

(TG): It wasn't. Anyway, he thought you were good. Where is he from? Gosh! I can remember his face as we were starting that campaign. I was talking to him, and he's a very interesting guy. He may not have worked that closely with you, but one of the things that made me feel comfortable was that he said, “I brought you, Marty, and I. I know where you are, and I'd like to work with the new guy to help him make that transition.” I think Nancy Wilson might have come in after that, but with his assistance. But, anyway, it ended up working out pretty well.

(MW): Yeah, because they were working on the feasibility study at that time. They were doing the campaign readiness assessment. They were doing the staff assessment. That was in process even before I came on, so they would have been close to the situation. I was trying to execute on all the aspects of things that they had laid out. It was a very interesting time. At one point, I went back and took a look at the sequence as I understood it. When Tim first came on, Paul Strunk was, I believe, in the VP role.

(TG): Yes.

(MW): Then Paul left, and Dawn Atwater came on. In 2002, when Dawn left, Paul Adams was interim for a while.

(PA): Forgot all about that.

(MW): Yeah. And then hired Marty Williams in the fall of 2004. After Marty had his stroke, Sandra Carroll took over as interim. Mike France took over interim, and then I became VP sometime in late 2007 or early 2008. So that's seven people in a period of six years. It was a period of real unsteadiness and inconsistency. What donors need to see is trust, reliability, consistency, and know who to call. Different people have different opinions about processes and donors. You know what the donor needs to get out of the experience, how you communicate with them, and year-end statements and pledge reminders. All these processes are really important to get right, because there's so much a part of the donor experience, right? I remember Nancy Weeks coming to me, she was our research person and our daily analytics person, and she said, “Look, we haven't sent out a pledge reminder in like three years. We need process improvement.” There were some things really meaty to dive into right away, and I think that instilled confidence with the staff. They had some leadership, and we had a way forward. That was really great, except for the fact that we were launching a campaign in August of 2008.

(TG): You came into a difficult situation, and the thing that is kind of sad is that inconsistency. Chris, you can correct me, but Paul Strunk, I think, was a capable guy, and he actually left, as I came on board, to go to the University of Scranton, and it was his. I think I would have done that if I hadn't been in this position as well. And, actually, I think it ended up not working out as much as he had hoped. But, there was one other guy, Chris, Tom Hadzor?, who was really great.

(MW): He was a very capable guy.

(CB): What is Marty's last name?

(PA): Williams.

(CB): I don't think I ever met him.

(TG): But, in any event, it was tragic that he had that stroke, you know? We moved on, and we were fortunate enough to get you on board and get some real consistency. Maybe I shouldn't fill in the blanks for you here, but as you took over, you began to hire some people who were obviously folks who really gave us some substance.

(MW): Yeah. Sue Jolly and Angela Buckley were two people that I knew I had worked with before. Angela worked for me in estate planning with the American Cancer Society. She was very capable, a major gifts person, and she had a particular affinity for seniors. And Sue had some history with the institution. She had some credibility with the athletic folks.

(CB): Wyoming Seminary.

(TG): Yeah, that was the other part. She was really pretty well connected to that elite community.

(MW): I think I actually stole her from WVIA at the time she was there. I just needed people that were a known entity.

(TG): That was just smart. I somehow had met with her early in my time, and always thought she would be a great hire for Wilkes.

(MW): I think that turned out okay.

(MW): And so, we had a really good team with Sue and Angela. Janice Boylan was there for years and years, and she was consistent. She was just our data entry person, but the value of having the same data entry person enter data the same way for a prolonged period of time, so that when you do data pulls that are actually accurate, was a godsend. Nancy Weeks basically worked with iModules. She could pull reports for us. She could do research. She was a jack of all trades. Evelyn Topfer did operations for us. She was very capable. Sandra was there for a little while. Mirko was great. Actually, Mirko's knowledge of eye modules saved our bacon during the flood scare in 2011. We flipped our whole platform, because we were going to run out of power. The generators ran on diesel fuel, and they would only last a certain number of hours. So, our whole system for the web and communication. Our front door to the whole thing. Mirko came up with the idea to move that over to iModules, and they would host it for us off-site. It allowed us to maintain communication with everybody. So, he was really invaluable. Michelle Zabrisky, you might remember, was in annual giving. She had great relationships. I remember one of them was Peter Parog in South Carolina. She would take kielbasa to him every year, so she was very good with those high touches. And Lauren Plusky is now working for the Geisinger Foundation. She's going to have a very great career in fundraising. And then later, Bridget Giunta, who was on Marty's search committee in 2004 as a student. I just learned yesterday how all of these things are intertwined. And Jackie Eovic and others. So, we had a really good team, and that team was consistent for several years. We had puts and takes from that group, but by and large, there was the continuity for a period of probably seven years. We had our systems in place. We had continuity. And the problem was, we had a great, ambitious case statement. In fact, Tim and I at one point shopped as much as an 80 million dollar campaig. We had the science, health, and engineering building, which was a very costly idea. We had a lot of ideas for an energy institute, because the shale and gas industry had sprung up during this time. So, there was a lot of discovery around what exactly our campaign was going to be and what we thought we could do. Eventually, we settled on a 60 million dollar campaign. That was a comprehensive campaign. A combination, as you do with capital and annual, faculty, and endowment support. We had really good leadership. Mike Mahoney.

(TG): He's great, he's great.

(MW): And the Hedy Rittenmeyer.

(TG): Yeah. Ron and Hedy.

(MW): Also, John Cefaly. So, we had co-chairs for the campaign. John was a million-dollar donor. Hetty was a half-million-dollar donor. We had co-chairs, and Frank Henry and Bill Sordoni were honorary co-chairs. We had a very good committee. We had all of the underpinnings of a very good campaign. Good staff in place. We launched the silent part of the campaign in August of 2008, and we all know what happened in October of that year. It was probably the worst time to launch a campaign, and so the committee had decided we should pause the campaign until we could steer our way clear. As it went into 2009, that group was having a difficult time in their conversations with people. We weren't seeing anyone really able to make a large commitment from appreciated assets that were no longer appreciated. And so, they were getting a little skittish about the comprehensive nature of the campaign and decided, through a series of conversations with the cabinet, Tim and me, and with other leaders on campus. A decision was made at some point. Tim, I'm not sure exactly when in that year of reflection from the fall of 2008 until mid 2009 that we decided to change the campaign to a project-specific capital campaign to get the new science building built.

(TG): Yeah, we just had the fisher cut bait. I think you were strong on this point that we needed to have a real focus that people could rally around, and so we did the science building as the focus. I don't remember the exact sequence, but I can remember talking with Jerry Panas about the campaign, and I think he helped us think through that. And Jerry was the guy who was the mentor of Marty.

(MW): Oh, Jerry Panas.

(TG): Yeah.

(MW): During this transition time, we decided to bring in Panas-Lindsey as our consultants, letting go of our previous firm, just to really get serious about what we were going to be able to pull off.

(TG): And I think Jerry gave us a little extra horsepower than he would have normally done for what we probably ended up paying, because of his commitment to Marty. And he was quite a truth teller. Jack Miller, Gene Roth, and some other folks were also pretty prominent in buying into the idea that we have that focus and get that building done. I don't mean to talk too much here, but you were talking about this big science, engineering, and health building. It was actually an interesting concept. I'm not sure what was going on in my head, but what came out of it was a proposal from the then-president/dean of the Commonwealth Medical College. I can't remember his name right now. Maybe somebody else does. But, he was a good guy, and he very early recognized that the real scientific strength in Northeastern Pennsylvania resided at Wilkes, and not at a university north of us that certainly felt that they were the dominant player. And so, what we were proposing was that his faculty would do their research in this building and split their time between that and the med school. The numbers worked out. It would have been about an 80-90 million dollar building. And so, he and I are talking about this, and it seems to be moving along. The inner circle of the board was comfortable with this, and we went to this meeting of the presidents of the Northeast, and I knew all these people. It was a cold day, and at that point, the president of the University of Scranton stood up and said, "We understand that the Medical School and Wilkes are talking about doing a joint building." This is not a direct quote, but basically it was, "It will be over our dead body." We assumed that we would get a fair amount of state money, and there was no reason why we should, if we could, put together the coalition in Northeastern Pennsylvania. I don't know whether it's good or bad, because the current building, as I understand it, is working pretty well for the faculty. But, I think it would have been exciting to have those two faculties, the researchers working together, and that was really what we were thinking would be quite exciting. But the University of Scranton did not want it to happen, and it did not.

(CB): That's the most overt clash between the two institutions that I know about.

(TG): It was very overt.

(CB): No, but I mean, we had another one when the NEPIRC started. Bob Casey had a deadline, and they were looking for collaborative examples of institutions, including universities. We literally, in a day, met and designed a program that would be involved. Wilkes and the University of Scranton are jointly helping to put this new work office together and from Northeastern Pennsylvania. They were absolutely flummoxed. I mean, they couldn't say no, but they wanted to. And so, it got established. Then, ironically, the first director was Andy Shaw. So, our business faculty was directly involved, but that was really behind the scenes. But I've never heard the Medical School story. This happened so much after my time, and it was just one dimension of it, but obviously very important.

(TG): I mean, what I saw was a way to get a very substantial facility done that hopefully would become a magnet for research, and we certainly had in mind other institutions participating. It was just that it should be located at Wilkes because of the strength of this faculty, which I also thought was an interesting indicator. But, anyway, Mike, we need to get back to you. Sorry.

(MW): No, I think it's salient to the conversation. That's what was happening at that particular time, and we were talking about the opportunity for biomedical research, and how this region might support that with our institutions. But, sadly, it mattered who won. There wasn't a collective thinking about what was right for the region. Nobody in particular wanted Wilkes to win above Scranton, Stroudsburg, or wherever. I just think that Wilkes, although it was uniquely positioned to be that kind of partner, the strings of the institutions carried a lot of weight on how some of these things went politically, and also financially.

(TG): Yeah, I'm a little embarrassed that I can't remember the president of East Stroudsburg at the time, but he was the only other president in the room who was supportive of the concept, which I thought was kind of interesting. They were already building some labs at East Stroudsburg to build something of a research competence, but he said, "This would be so much better for my faculty to have this kind of exposure." I thought that was pretty progressive.

(CB): You know, while there's a slight lull, I'm just interested in terms of the transition from my residency to yours. Was March Lundy still in the picture?

(TG): Initially, yes.

(MW): So, they did a feasibility study.

(TG): For a period of time. It was a campaign feasibility study, and basically an advancement assessment.

(MW): That I think was influential. I've read that document. I'm sure that had a lot of impact on how Tim proceeded.

(CB): They were. They were our consultants from the beginning, as they had been under Farley.

(TG): To be honest with you, I didn't think the report was good that you referred to, Mike. I mean, it did help focus on where we needed to go, but they had really not put their first team in. You just had the sense that they were going through the motions for a small, private university. That's why we went to some other firms, because it just seemed like they had more of an edge and were willing to do things. Well, they were an old-school firm, too.

(MW): They were a smaller firm, and they were really bogged down, in my mind and on my read of this, and used very old, tried and true practices.

(TG): More modern approaches to things.

(MW): So, our institution had grown beyond them, or the talent of our leadership had grown beyond them, and I think we ended up getting really good counsel from Panas Lindsey, who, arguably at the time, were some of the best in the business.

(TG): Yeah. Jerry Panas was a character. God, he was. I had tangential experience with people who had worked with him, and he had the habit of telling the truth. That sometimes got in crosswise with people, and I heard the crosswise other side of the story. But, boy, I'll tell you that I had a first meeting with him, and the only way we could get together was when I was in Kansas City. So, we met at the airport in Kansas City, and I just didn't know what the hell I ran into. It's just amazing to see how he grabbed it, knew who I was, got us focused, and was very helpful.

(MW): Yeah. He practically wrote all the books on it, so he really knew what he was doing. We were lucky to get him.

(TG): I think that was due to both the fact that he thought he had some possibilities with you, but I think the other thing is that he felt some obligation, because Marty had sort of faded on us.

(MW): Yeah.

(TG): He wanted to see us succeed, and that was because Marty had gotten him engaged.

(MW): Did Marty work for him, because I know Marty was doing independent consulting?

(TG): He did. He worked for him.

(MW): Oh, yeah, that would be a reason then, that Jerry Panas wanted to be extra helpful.

(TG): And you were right with it, Mike, but where we got was where we absolutely needed to be, which was to run a focused campaign on something that everybody knew we needed and would, for a change, produce some real money. I mean, money that actually came in. There weren't the usual accounting tricks that happen in capital campaigns, and we produced real money, as I recall.

(MW): Yeah, I've always maintained that the danger of a comprehensive campaign is that it's so easy to count everything, but sometimes it's hard to move marble on any one thing. It's going to endowments and scholarships, and it isn't necessarily going to what's needed most, because it's the donor's choice. The interesting thing for me, retrospectively, in a single-purpose capital campaign, is that we raised real dollars. That helped us get just about 20 million dollars for a 35 million dollar building, which is what we set out for in a relatively short period of time. We got that building up and going, and, by fundraising standards and university standards, in record time. We got the design, the 70,000 square feet of labs and offices, 63 new fume hoods, and all of the stuff you need to move the marble when it comes to our health sciences. So, it was the right thing for us to do, and it was well executed, I believe.

(CB): How did you get Larry Cohen?

(MW): I have a great story about Larry Cohen. So, Larry was my first one-million-dollar gift here at Wilkes. Larry, of course, was on the board and knew what we needed to do. He called me to his office one day, and he said, “Mike, I'm going to commit a million dollars to you today.” I said, “That's fantastic,” and he said, “I like you. I don't want anybody else to get credit for this, and I know how these things go. As soon as somebody makes an announcement, everybody's going to say that they convinced Larry Cohen to give this gift. I want you to get the credit.” This was a few years before his 80th birthday, and he had committed by his 80th birthday. He would fulfill this pledge for the one million dollars. Later on, Chuck Cohen got involved, and that's when we started imagining the naming gift that would recognize not only their cumulative giving to the university, but also real dollars. So, I think they ended up committing two and a half or three million dollars in real money to help us pay down the debt that we had taken on in advance of completing our fundraising. But that's how that came about.

(CB): I'm glad I asked.

(TG): That offered a little color commentary on this, which was kind of on the side, Mike, absolutely. You got the gift, and that should be credited. We met with Larry every time I went to Florida, and it was always fun. You know, they don't make a lot of money in the dental supply business, but he'll do everything he can. He was kind of stymied because he knew if he moved in any direction, the other one would be mad. In any event, at some point, Chuck came into the equation, and I had the impression he might have come in a little bit earlier than you implied there, Mike. But, basically, when he came into the business, he knew finance and knew that his dad had the capability to do a lot. And that's how, gradually over time, he got him to that big number, realizing that that was quite possible. But, to my understanding, that original one-million-dollar gift was his way of also saying to some others, "It's about time for you to pull out the checkbook and give in a manner that's equivalent to your capability." He, Gene, and somebody else in that class of '57 really wanted to pressure Seymour.

(MW): Jesse Choper, I think.

(TG): I see, yeah, absolutely. And they really ran a pretty good play. Gene had laid out, "Look, Seymour, you'll make money by giving money." But for some reason, he simply could not do that. But, we need to credit Larry. That's the way he played the game. He wanted other people to get the credit.

(MW): No, it was very sweet of him to do that, but you're exactly right. I think Chuck gave him permission to say, "Look, you can do this if you want to. We have enough." You can start to imagine the good you'd like to do, and that might have been other than the JCC (Jewish Community Center). And you're exactly right, he complained about Seymour and others who were more capable than him, and he really wanted to send that message. I just thought it was kind of, for me, interesting. Larry always did things a little bit differently. He told me once that he would never come to another John Wilkes Society event, because they were boring and the same people would go all the time. He said, "If you play *Midnight Cowboy* at the Darte, maybe I'll show up." He was that kind of character, and I love him. He calls me often, to this day, and that is one of the great thrills and meaningful things of being in this role is the people that you get to meet of all flavors of life. Those who want to do good things, and the conversations and relationships that they don't want to let go of. That's why I think the continuity and the trust that they have with an individual over time is really crucial to successful ongoing support for an institution, not just financial support, but support in the community. Knowing who they can rely on. So, that's one of the gifts you get out of a job like this.

(CB): One of the guys that you missed, Paul, you would remember him, was Frank Casella. Frank, Seymour, and I, and there was another person in that class, all drove across the country after graduation out to the West Coast. They apparently had a hellishly good time. I was working on that post-graduation trip as a way to get through to Seymour. I mean, I did everything I could with Gene Roth, with Larry Cohen, with Jesse Choper. My meetings with Jesse out in Berkeley were always ultimately about how to get Seymour to unlock it. Anyway, I don't remember why we had this, but we were having a series of trustee cocktail parties. It probably was a capital campaign-related thing. Anyway, we had two on adjacent nights and different homes, and I was with Frank Casella's wife, who was hilariously funny. So, the second night, I came over and talked to her. I said, "God, this is going to be kind of frequent." She said, "Different circus, same clowns." The two of them were just very witty, and Frank, who was as Italian as they come, was in this Jewish crowd. Of course, he was a partner of Seymour at Jewelcore. They had a huge break that did not end well. This is a very personal question that you may not want to answer. Was there an estate? Yes, for Wilkes, from Gene Roth.

(MW) From Gene, yes. I think I was out of the role at that point when Gene passed, so I can't recall exactly what came from it.

(TG): I was always amazed when we did those capital campaigns that Gene generously gave his means.

(MW): Well, I've been in this town a long time. He was the most generous guy. He told me something funny once. He was a very special mentor to me when I first came into this role. He was the chair of the Advancement Committee of the Development Committee, and was just sagely in his understanding of the people and how the community moved. He said, "I have a great affinity to Wilkes, and I will always support Wilkes, but you don't have something that the Jewish rabbis have. That's guilt. Guilt is a powerful motivator."

(CB): That's so true.

(TG): Yeah. Well, I think that's true. By the way, I always wanted to be able to wear a clerical collar on certain occasions. That seemed to me to be a very helpful tool. I do want to tell one quick story. Mike, you need to get to the rest of your time at Wilkes, but just a John Cefaly story, who was also extraordinarily generous. John worked for Cushman Wakefield and was a very senior guy in commercial real estate. Anyway, I think the number that we had concluded that Jack Miller and I should ask when we went up to New York City was half a million, and we thought that was a huge reach. Were you at that meeting?

(MW): I was. We were pregaming at a restaurant.

(TG): We were sitting there at breakfast, and Jack Miller said, “You know, I know how much those guys make. You're not asking for enough.” So, then we gamed around and talked about it, didn't we? Finally, the decision was, “Let's ask for a million.” Unfortunately, that day he did not have his Joe Paterno cardboard real-life picture there. John was great. He's always a nice guy. You can see why he did so well in commercial real estate, for sure. Very bright guy, too. But, we're sitting there, and it's clear that the ask is going to be made. It turns out that it's me, and I went, “A million,” and John said, “Yeah. Good.” That was it.

(MW): Yeah. The interesting thing about John is he paid off that pledge when we went from, so it was $500,000 cash and $500,000 deferred. He was one of our early asks, even prior to the campaign launch, because he was going to co-chair it. I went back to him later, when we were doing the science building, and asked him if he would do all cash, and he fulfilled that pledge, Tim, with just his bonuses from Cushman Wakefield over a four-year period. He would just have them send his bonus to us.

(TG): I didn't know that story. That's great.

(MW): Yeah, that's good.

(CB): One thing, Mike, that we've talked about with almost everybody is to capture the culture of Wilkes. Except for Paul, each of us we have interviewed, almost everybody has come from somewhere else and become part of the Wilkes and Wilkes-Barre community. What are some of your observations about the culture of Wilkes University? Good and bad, enduring and otherwise. Unique.

(MW): That's an interesting question. In some ways, it's why I'm here, and in some ways, it's also what holds us back. I was very much a part of downtown. I moved my family here in 1993, and put in some time here even before that. So, that was in the mid-eighties, never thinking this would then later be my hometown, right? This would be where I would raise my kids. So, I was here during the Mayors Namy and McGroaty years and, you know, the challenges between the city administration and the university, and frankly, a lot of other institutions. Wilkes wasn't really on my radar much, but very much a part of the conversations you have with the community. I did a Coaches vs. Cancer, and Paul Strunk was taking the lead on that at some point. So, that was really my first interface with Wilkes, but I knew it was always very much a part of the community. Gosh! It's such a good question. I love the sense of family, the size, and the scale, but I also love the willingness to really make an impact in the community. To do things when others are hesitant. Some of the things that we have done with the Chamber and Barnes and Noble are being a part of not only Wilkes culture, but also the culture and the success of the city. That's something I think we should be really proud of. But, one of the greatest culture shifts in my mind was under Tim's leadership, and the foray into graduate programming and online graduate education. That ended up being a little cultural earthquake, where we were trying to figure out how to move from these somewhat traditional liberal arts with great professional programs into the next real iteration of what Wilkes was capable of being. There was so much foresight. We were so fortunate to have Tim in that moment, and he took some real hits for it, but I can tell you that years later, it saved our bacon during Covid. The increase in online graduate programs was almost inverse to what was happening with our traditional undergraduate programs. So, it really helped us remain strong. There were a lot of institutions that really wished they would have had some online programs to offer.

(TG): Oh, I'm not sure I want to cut you off there, but once you get done with that, let me just make a comment that I think probably Chris will want to tag on to.

(MW): No, go ahead.

(TG): Well, what I was going to say is, yeah, I probably brought that programmatic line as a higher priority than it had been, but the beginning of that was Joe Belushi, and we've interviewed Joe. That was a fun interview. But even the technology piece started with Joe. You can see how that capability, then fostering it, and then really trying to make it almost a co-equal part helped. That's what I was interested in about Wilkes' programmatic mix. Then, I may have laid the groundwork for some big moves into new markets, and nursing is the one that is the first example, but you can see how this thing starts quite a way back with a somewhat different purpose, but really provides the institution with experience and capability that are just going to be core going forward. It's nice to see that continuing. It's sowing seeds. It really is.

(MW): Yeah, I can only look at this through my lens. While I've been around Chris a lot and have read his history, I wasn't a part of his history. I'm glad to hear. I'm sure it took lots of groundbreaking work to get it to that point, but as a strategic priority, I think that the effort, energy, and resources that were really piled into it were happening at an important time. That's continued to grow and is often surpassing our expectations, and thank goodness, we had that. But, it did cause a bit of a cultural challenge for the institution, and maybe a challenge in thinking about how the faculty felt about the change and how they felt about leadership at that time. Ultimately, it led to a lot of discontent with the faculty but when you spring forward into OPMs (Online Program Management) and other providers, revenue sharing, and everything that goes into delivering on an online platform, all these things are a little challenging. But I think overall, the culture is one of support and family. I love that. Both of my kids came to Wilkes. That will always be a part of our family's legacy, and I'm proud that they chose Wilkes before I even got this job. Both of them. Lauren came to the conservatory for piano lessons, and Molly, Mark Allen's daughter, was in the adjacent time slot. So, we got to sit and visit as we were waiting for our returns. Lauren got very comfortable coming to Wilkes, and she just decided that's where she was going to go to college. Ryan was on the NASA team in middle school and would come into the science building. They had a teleconference with NASA astronauts. It was sort of like a problem-solving exercise where every month they were given a challenge, and the students had to figure out a solution. Then, the NASA astronauts would tell them the solution they actually found. So, Ryan was coming to campus regularly, and once he saw the cafeteria where you could get both pizza and fruit loops, this was the place for him. It is a very special place, and I think the culture shifts a little bit here and there, and gets shaken, but by and large, it stands up, holds true, and moves forward with different people in the lead. I think it's sort of like its own microorganism that stands the test of time.

(PA): We should add that Lauren was a Commuter Council president.

(MW): She was. Heck, we lived on Third Avenue! It was like they could have walked to Wilkes. They were very involved and very active. Ryan was making films on campus and made an award-winning film which he edited in Fenner Hall, and Lauren was very engaged with Commuter Council. They were just here all the time, you know, they came home to sleep. So yeah, that was a very, very good experience for both of them.

(TG): That's great to hear.

(CB): Your view of the culture and the changes going on in higher education is really into some of the analytical work on where leadership is going in terms of higher education. What is your general sense of the viability of Wilkes over the next ten or fifteen years in this changing climate of higher education?

(MW): Well, right now, I think we have a very capable leader. Greg is a good businessman, and one of the things that Greg has said is that we needed to right-size our cost basis to a point where we can handle ebbs and flows, because it could have the potential of zigzagging. But, if we're going to survive, we need to baseline our expenses and be very careful about getting too much above that baseline so that we can weather storms. So, I think we're well-positioned from that standpoint, and we've had to cut back pretty considerably our overall staffing to a point where we can sustain ourselves in the way that I described there. But, I think we've got to continue to look at the diversity of income streams, and one of the things we're looking into is whether we bring the OPM in-house so we can make our online programs more profitable. And the fluctuating market in those that deliver online programs is changing. The fee structure is changing, and it's going to make it more vulnerable to additional costs, potentially. So, we have to continue to innovate and diversify income streams. That will allow us to weather the storm as the undergraduate volatility becomes more known or more stable. But, I will say, Chris, to your credit, a big reason why our undergraduate programs continue to do reasonably well under stress is that we have the professional program mix that we have. We have professional health programs, pharmacy, and nursing that continue to be highly sought after. We have professional programs in engineering, and everything that comes with that, and in business. So, it's what people right now are looking for. In addition, I think we need to find additional intentional pathways to employment. One of the programs that I helped to negotiate was a program with Geisinger where we identify a cohort of pharmacy students early on in their first or second year, and we create a special program in Geisinger internships, externships, and part-time jobs. You know, preferential placement in their internship experience, and give them a guaranteed job at the end of it, and pay for their education over time. The advantage for Geisinger is that they get to place them wherever there's the highest need, so it gives them a guaranteed pipeline. Parents love it because they're making a big investment, and they know there's a guaranteed job at a reputable institution. They are acclimated to the culture of the institution. They know the software that they use. They set them up for success, helping to pay for their education over time. I think those kinds of pathways can be established in accounting, in engineering, in nursing, and I think that we need to get more intentional about that, because that matters to people. I know that's not necessarily something that those who espouse a liberal education will especially embrace, but it's one of the expectations of higher education now.

(TG): I hate to say this, I probably need to check, but I think I'm going to have to leave you. I have to pick up my grandson at camp. So, this has been great. Mike, you've done a great job.

(CB): Oh, is there a name for these students who are in the program?

(MW): Yeah, they call them the Abigail Geisinger Scholars. So, it's the original founder of Geisinger.

(CB): Dr. Hood's wife?

(PA): No, Abigail Geisinger.

(CB): I'm just thinking that even with this and other professional programs that go into this, Frank Henry would have been a wonderful name for the scholars, because he was Chairman of the Board, a really critical point for Geisinger. At the same time, he was Chair of the Board at Wilkes. Frank was such a low-key guy, but he was so powerful in his economic leadership. A band.

(MW): I had an especially close relationship with Frank and Dottie. Dottie really took me under her wing when I first came to town, and was a force of nature. But that's a great idea.

(PA): See, it's one of the things that might be helpful for you to talk about, since we have limited time. So, Mike, I was going to have you talk about what I think is a relatively recent phenomenon is just the role of lobbyists over the last ten or fifteen years at Wilkes at the state and federal level.

(MW): Yeah. So Pat Leahy, when he came in 2012, we were wrapping up the campaign for the science building. I have been traveling a great deal for this campaign in a very short window of time, and after Pat and I spent about a year together on the road and finishing up these gifts, he was ready to start on his new strategic plan, his new campaign. We were trying to figure out how to leverage the Advancement Office for state funding for capital projects. They had had some success with this in Scranton using a lobbyist and tapping into state funding like the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) and the local share account funding that had come by way of the new casino and transportation funding that was passed through the state. These are all areas that we had not taken advantage of, but they had done a good job in Scranton. So, Pat and I began to carve out an idea to have me segue. We tried to do it in the Advancement

Office for a while, and I just said to Pat that if we're going to be successful, somebody needs to focus on it. So, either I need to bring in an AVP that's going to focus on it, or I'll focus on it, and you hire a new VP. That's what we ended up doing. I became Special Assistant to the President somewhere around 2014, and really focused on state funding for capital projects and external affairs. A big part of our strategic plan at that time was reinforcing our town, gown relationships, participating more in the economic development work that was happening in the downtown, and figuring out how to be a bigger voice and a better partner for lots of the things that were happening at the time. I started running point on those initiatives, but really leaned into using a lobbyist and a grants firm to help us not only identify, but package, lobby for, and deliver state funding for capital projects. We had already had a little bit of success with an RCAP. We got one for the law school that we transferred over into the science building, and we got a really hefty LSA (Local Share Account). The first two million dollars in the local share account that first year went into effect when nobody knew what it was. Our representatives came to us and said, "You really should tap into that."

(PA): Of course, that's the money from the casinos.

(MW): Yeah. So basically, the casino has a responsibility for tax relief in the schools. It's about twenty-four million dollars a year. Twelve million dollars goes directly to the schools, and twelve million dollars is put into a pot that the Commonwealth Financing Authority debates over proposals and then awards them out to institutions. We got really good at it. Since 2014, we've done twenty-two million dollars of state funding for capital projects. We started with multimodal and transportation funding for the streetscape and safety improvements. Derk and Edson did a whole comprehensive safety plan for us. We redid the sidewalks, lights, crosswalks, and the gateway projects. All of that came from a combination of multimodal and what was called the TA (Transportation Alternatives) Set-Aside, which was transportation funding for pedestrian safety initiatives. We fit right into that. We did a three-million-dollar RCAP for engineering, two and a half million dollar RCAP for pharmacy, two and a half million dollar RCAP for the Darte Center, a million dollar RCAP for the science building, and all of this transportation funding with the benefit of outside counsel and grants support. GMS is our grants partner, because everything is a reimbursement program. So, if the university is putting the money out, we've always been able to cash flow it pretty successfully. So, yeah, we've made a significant impact on campus beyond traditional fundraising to bring this new revenue source to the university over the past ten years. Our first project was a half-million-dollar multimodal project that built that gateway into campus. So, that change in direction and the addition of this position has really allowed us to leverage a brand new revenue stream that, I think, has in many ways really transformed the campus.

(CB): I have a really rare request at this point, and it's up to you, Mike, whether you want us to stop recording, but I am so excited that we're going to have Pat Leahy on. For a long time, we assumed he wasn't going to be open to this, but we're going to do it, which means we will have him as part of the oral history of Wilkes. Are there some angles of vision that we should consider as we interview him?

(MW): Yeah, I think Pat had a fantastic vision for what he wanted the campus to look like, and he does this with Monmouth University, too. I just watched an interview that he did for a football game, and it's much of the same vision. He has a very clear vision of how he wants the campus to look and feel and how he wants it to be perceived by others. He really focuses on US News and World Report with the rankings and institutional standing, and his vision was so precise that much of the transformation that was made with tapping into these transportation funding programs has allowed us to execute on that vision. That was probably his biggest gift to the institution. We did a lot fast and it took its own toll. I think that if Pat has any hesitation, he might have a feeling that he put us in a risky spot in the end. I think it was his ambition, his aggressiveness, the clarity of his vision, really helped Wilkes to gain standing. We really had to tap into all the resources available in order to execute on some of these. But he was good to me. He was great to work for, and he was really intense in this vision. In his mind we had to raise the standing of the institution for all who would visit it.

(CB): I remember how pleased he was when the economist identified Wilkes in terms of a top institution.

(PA): We milked that for a lot of years, Mike.

(MW): We did.

(CB): It was a breakthrough.

(PA): Yeah, but the economist only did that one time and hasn't repeated, I don't think.

(MW): But, Pat's one of those guys who's going to be a star wherever he goes, and I think we were lucky to have him at the time that we had him, because it has in many ways set us up for sustained success with undergraduate students. We're outperforming some just by our ability to sustain our undergraduate numbers. Our campus shows especially well.

(PA): I was going to say to Mike, it is interesting as we talk about this government money that we are finally fixing the Darte.

(MW): Yes. There's nothing that makes me prouder than to have raised the principal amount of money for the science building and watch it go up. The same goes for the streetscape improvements. The sod that was laid down. If you're involved in helping to bring in the revenue, it's very satisfying to see it come true. It's one of the great advantages. I asked Charlie Carey (our facilities chief) about six or seven years ago, when we were in the middle of this great success with different RCAP fundings and things coming through, “What's the number one project that we will never get to without state money?” and he said, “Making the Darte handicap accessible.” I said, “I think we have a governor that will support this. Governor Wolf.” That year, we shopped it around to our legislative delegation. We were getting support for it, and after much work, we got two and a half million dollars to make the Darte Center handicap accessible. It was in its 60th year. It is very satisfying, Paul, for me to now go over there and watch that happening.

(CB): Oh, that's great. I am thrilled with that. I mean, that was a huge issue for my era, particularly since many of our great supporters aged. It just became unrealistic. We could get them in at the stage entrance.

(MW): Yes, and we have three or four seats at ground level there, but this is going to be transformational. It's about a three and a half million-dollar project. If it's the last one I do, Paul, it'll still be very satisfying. Maybe it will be the most satisfying.

(PA): It's been for decades that people have been trying to get it done.

(CB): I have an observation to make. It has nothing to do with Wilkes, but it's triggered by your initial description of your musical career. I've lived in eight states and enjoyed it all. So I was like, what's my favorite? Each state has its own sense of identity or lack thereof. I came from Minnesota. Minnesotans are almost as bad as Texans. Pennsylvanians do not talk about themselves in terms of Pennsylvania. They talk about themselves in terms of Pittsburgh or Philadelphia, or even the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area. The parochialism you even referred to before between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre is the defining characteristic of our area, rather than the unity of it. I realized that the only reference that I knew culturally to the state that had some cachet was Fred Waring in the Pennsylvanians. Yeah, he was a kid. We used to listen to Fred Waring, and now that I know that you were the West Virginians, that's great. But, Pennsylvania does not have an identity. Culturally, it's got lots of separate ones, and partly it's the mountains and the terrain. When the Pennsylvania Society has to go to the Waldorf from its holiday party, because they can't agree between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, it's just a sense that there's no real cohering culturally, and, to a certain extent, politically. That also links to how loyal people are to their particular region. In the sense of family, you talked about Wilkes, but that's a sense you get just in terms of the small towns around. I'm staying with Joe Matteo these days, and he and his brother have a place now down in Hazleton, which is where that family came from. So, I join the dinners with the aunts, who are now in their nineties, and we go from one eating place in the Hazleton area to another. But, you know, they are totally defined by that area. I know a lot of people in Wilkes-Barre for whom that is true. One of my first big events is from a fundraising point of view. I came when there was a meeting of presidents. My wife and I went, and we stayed at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami. Ron Simpiro was our host. He was a vice president for restaurant beverages for the big hotel chain. He was a real hustler. His parents had the VIP Coffee Shop at the Old Sterling Hotel. We asked if he could put something on for us at the building that had regimes in it as part of the complex. So, we had a room that was a two-story room, and he had a bank of food that could have served fifty people, all stacked up beautifully. We had about 20 people. It was a good draw for the alumni to come out to this, and it was the first of several. By the way, Ron was wonderfully generous, and he was feeling so good about this. He said, “Well, would any of you like to stay for dinner?” So, all of us were ready to stay for dinner. We moved from that setting down to the main restaurant, and each of us had a waiter standing behind us. Ron made the decision that he was going to order for each of us. He felt he knew us well enough that he could give us something on the menu that would really please us. So, all this was done, the orders were put in, and then I asked, “What do you guys do when you come back to the valley?” They talked about Abe's Hot Dogs and Victory Pig Pizza. Here we were in this elegant setting, a bunch of valley kids, and they really loved Abe's Hot Dogs and Victory Pig Pizza. So, I mean, along with my concept that we don't have an identity as Pennsylvanians, we do have an identity that is regional and very tangible. So, you triggered a lot when you said Fred Waring. I haven't heard anyone talk about Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians in a long time.

(MW): It sort of dates one if you know about Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians. It was a moment in time that was very popular, and these were crazy talented people. Eddie Day Pashinski and I were talking about it, and Eddie Day auditioned for the Pennsylvania’s and didn't get it. He heard that I was successful in an exclusive band, given its size, built on the Fred Waring model. You actually pay people. You pay singers to be in your band.. That was something that he was talking to me about, and said, “Well, you must have been pretty good if you got in something like that.” The Fred Waring model was not an easy one to be successful in.

(CB): If you see Pashinski, give him my love.

(MW): I will. I see him pretty often. He's still doing a great job for us. In fact, he started in the House the same year that I came to Wilkes. We have been in lockstep with each other throughout, really helping with the House Democrats and their caucus. Now his seniority in that caucus helps us increasingly more, as time goes on, to be successful with some of these grant opportunities. He's been a real champion and a big help.

(CB): I'm going to jump off and take this phone call that I've been waiting for. It's been a pleasure. I've learned more about you in this than I think almost any other person we've interviewed. Thank you so much, Mike.

(MW): Great. Thank you.

(CB): I look forward to seeing you soon.

(MW): Thanks, Chris.

(PA): So, Mike, what will happen now is we'll get a transcript of this and we will give it to Suzanna Calev. Her students will put it in a format that's much more readable, and we'll send it to you so that you can take out anything that you're not comfortable with. Then we'll give it back to her, and she can put it in the oral history archive. I think you did a great job, Mike. I thought it was. You really hit on some nice high points, and tied all of the presidents together.

(MW): Good. It was an honor to be a part of it.

(PA): Obviously, they reacted well, so that's good.

(MW): You know, Bridget was saying the other day, “We used to refer to them as the old timers and ever increasingly realizing we now are the old time.” So now I've had the blessing of a career here. Horace Mann said, “Be ashamed to die until you have served some victory for humanity," and I feel like I've been able to do that.

(PA): Good! Well, terrific! Well, I hope you enjoy this. Do you still have your house in Delaware?

(MW): Yes, we were down last weekend. Lauren and Dustin are there now with the baby, and Ryan's going down next week. We were waiting for the rain to give us a break so we could enjoy some time down there.

(PA): Good! Well, enjoy it. Have a great summer.

(MW): Thank you. Thanks for including me, Paul.

(PA): Oh, sure, Mike, good to talk to you. Be well.

(MW): See you later.

(PA): Yeah, bye-bye.