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(Track 1 begins)

Wednesday July 13, 2005

(Track 1 ends)

(Track 2 begins)

LF

We're here this morning with President Sanders on July 13, 2005, in the President's Conference Room here at Naugatuck Valley Community College. President Sanders, why don't we start with your personal history, a bit about yourself, your family?

RS

I'll talk and you stop me when you've had enough. I was born and raised in Wisconsin. I went through the public school system there in a small town. I got a Bachelor's degree at the University of Wisconsin Au Claire, a Master's degree at the University of Wisconsin, and an Ed.D. Doctorate in Educational Psychology from Marquette University. I was - I suppose - I'll talk about my early career. I was in college prepared to be a music teacher. I had a double major in my undergraduate work, in vocal and instrumental music, and minors, fairly big minors, in history and psychology. So when I was licensed to teach I could actually teach all four subjects and I did teach in a public school for seven years in Milwaukee and a suburb of Milwaukee. And all the time I was doing that I was working on my Master's degree part time, not in music but in educational psychology. When I finished that degree I took a job for a time as a research specialist for the Milwaukee public schools and then I was offered a teaching job at a small liberal arts college in Wisconsin, Lakeland College. That was kind of an interesting situation because it had been sort of a dream all along to be a college instructor, professor, whatever you call it, was the, you'd arrived, I thought, well, that was the ultimate job and I was there.

LF

That happened pretty quickly.

RS

Yeah, it was in my thirties, early thirties, and I had reached that point. I worked at that job for one month teaching four sections of general and educational psychology and the president called me into his office and he said, "Ah, we've got a problem. We've had a resignation on our staff. The registrar quit, and I think he quit because we're converting from our old semester system to a four-one-four calendar and it has piled up on his desk and it's become more than he can handle, and he just left." And he said, "We looked at our staff and you looked like the one person on our staff who has a background in statistics that could probably help us out. Can you be a registrar?" and I said "Sure, I can be anything." So for the remainder of that year I taught four sections of courses and did all the evaluations and the transcripts and converted everybody that was a student there and all the new students into the four-one-four calendar and was a registrar as well. I got paid extra for it and everything.

LF

This was at Lakeland?

RS

It was at Lakeland, yeah. And then the following year he said, "Do you want me to hire a new registrar or do you want to stay in this job?" And I said, "Well, my dream has always been to be a teacher." And he said "Well, we'll pay you fulltime to be the registrar and we'll let you teach one class." So I thought, well, that's pretty good. So I've been an administrator ever since. I never prepared to do that, they just sort of called me in one day and said "Can you be an administrator?" and I said, "Sure."

LF

When you became an administrator and teacher, were you still playing music in your spare time?

RS

When I was teaching for seven years in music it got to be music in the morning before school, I was giving lessons before school in the morning, like at seven thirty; I had a choir of a hundred ten kids - this is in junior high school, my first job - a band of about a hundred twenty, eight general music classes and a study hall, and then during my lunch hour I would eat in a hurry and give music lessons, and after school; Saturday mornings I would give music lessons; I directed a church choir one night a week and on Sunday mornings; and I directed a madrigal group from the college, or, from the high school, and they were being invited to sing all over the place so, it was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week music and even though I loved it, I sort of came to the conclusion after a couple of years that that was too much, that I didn't want to keep doing that, so I decided to expand my undergraduate work into something I was very interested in, and make music my avocation; so after I got two other degrees I continued to sing and continued to play in orchestras and other kinds of groups like that and it became my hobby and it still is.

LF

What instruments do you play?

RS

I majored on French horn when I was in college and in voice; I had a double major.

LF

So music has been a big part of your life.

RS

Yes. Always has been.

(Track 2 ends)

(Track 3 begins)

LF

When did your family come along in this process?

RS

My wife and I had three children; when I was teaching in my public school job two of our children were born, and then we adopted a child later on when they were six and three. About ten years later we lost our daughter in an automobile accident in Minnesota and after a couple of years of trying to adjust to that and the aftermath of grieving and everything, we decided to have two more children and we were fortunate enough to have a boy and a girl spaced three years apart. I actually have four children that are living and one deceased daughter, so we sort of had our children in two groups, two batches.

LF

So it was a busy life already, in the beginning.

RS

Yeah, and I was going to school and had two of our children while I was teaching full time and going to school part time and working on advanced degrees and commuting, and some of that was like a hundred twenty mile round trip commute; I was teaching at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, and that was about sixty miles from Milwaukee and that was where I was working on my doctorate and in the last two years it was almost every day of the week that I had to commute from Sheboygan to Milwaukee and back. And at the same time work full time.

LF

Are your children musical too?

RS

Yeah, all of them are.

LF

So it's been a musical family....Let us know how you ended up at Naugatuck Valley from that process.

RS

I left Lakeland College and at the time, even though I was doing well and I enjoyed being a registrar and was teaching and all that, community colleges were popping up all over the country. In the nineteen-sixties and seventies we went from a place in the country nationally where there were probably oh, twenty or thirty community colleges to the place where there was over a thousand of them and that all happened in about a ten year period, and I kind of looked at education and recognized that there had been a big generation of baby boomers born starting in nineteen forty-six, all were reaching college in the sixties and seventies, in that era, and a lot of people that had been in the military were coming back with the G.I. bill dollars to spend were going to go to school and I saw the community college was the place where many of them were going to end up. It was going to be the wave of the future, from my perspective. So I said that's where I want to be. Philosophically I agreed with the philosophy of the community college: open opportunity, open access, keep the costs low, and make it possible for anybody to go to college who wants to. So I applied at a couple of colleges and I got to be a dean at a community college in Minnesota, and that's when I left Lakeland. And I spent ten years there and moved through three different kinds of deanships – an academic dean, then we expanded and I became the dean of students, then we got larger and I actually got to be the dean of community service so I covered all three areas of the responsibility.

LF

Still as a young man.

RS

Sure, sure, yeah. And I finished ten years there; people around me who, I didn't have any disrespect for but there were people who I thought had a lot less ability than I had, were picking off presidencies of colleges in Minnesota and other places and I'm thinking, that guy can be a president, I can be a president; that lady can be a president, I can be a president; so I submitted my name a few times and I was offered a presidency not in Minnesota, but in Illinois and I took it, I moved I moved my family to Illinois. By that time my oldest son was going to college and he stayed in Minnesota and finished up up there. But I was a president of a college in Illinois for three years. After that my two oldest children were out of high school and the two youngest ones were very young, I think they were eight and five, talked to my wife and said we'd really like to live in some other part of the country. We'd like to just experience, we'd been in the Midwest all of our life - Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois - those are wonderful people out there but let's live somewhere else for five years. So I made some applications and I was offered this job in Waterbury, Connecticut to be president of what was called Mattatuck Community College at the time and a sort of a deal with my wife, we'll stay here five years and it's now twenty-one years later and we're still here.

LF

So you liked it.

RS

We got hooked. Yeah.

LF

Were there a lot of differences between the Midwest and here in terms of cultural aspects, and the people?

RS

Some, some.

LF

Took some getting used to?

(Track 3 ends)

(Track 4 begins)

RS

Some of it has to do with the people who settled various parts of the country. Wisconsin is very heavily diverse from Western European groups who came over in waves; lots of people of German ancestry there, lots of Scandinavians, Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, a fair number of Poles; at the time I was living in Wisconsin not as many people from Central America, South America; that has changed over the last twenty or thirty years. The waves of immigration were Poles, Germans, and Scandinavians mostly, because I think that part of the world, Minnesota and Wisconsin, probably reminded people who were immigrating here in the eighteen-hundreds of their homeland. The mountains aren't as high and that sort of thing but I think the climate was cold and severe and farming was the thing they did, that sort of thing. When I came to Connecticut the traditions are more Italian, Irish, some German, but there was a different group of people who settled this part of the country: English to some extent. I think the cultural traditions of those groups have influenced how people are and the names in the phone book and that sort of thing in this part of the world. Found some interesting things though; that there were people who actually immigrated, if you trace them back from Europe to Connecticut and some of the same families actually packed up and moved further west to Wisconsin and Minnesota, and some of the names of some of the cities in the east coast are also the names of cities that were in the Midwest and it's because the same families had a tendency to rename communities when they were founded after towns they knew in England, towns they knew in New England, towns that they named in the Midwest.

LF

Any Waterburys out there?

RS

Yeah, I don't know of any Waterburys, but names like that, yeah.

LF

How about coming from the more rural area to an urban area for your family?

RS

I don't think that was much of a cultural shock at all. I grew up in a small town but like I said I taught in Milwaukee for seven years and I guess I considered myself an urbanite. That was a city of three quarters of a million population and that was not a shock for me. I lived in Minneapolis and St. Paul for ten years and that's a good sized city too. There's some differences, they're subtle, they're subtle differences. One of the things I suppose I've learned about Connecticut is there's a kind of home rule provincialism of "we'll make our own decisions locally in a small group; don't tell us what to do from the state or the federal level." There's a kind of rugged individual attitude that pervades everything here. Not as much of that in Wisconsin or Minnesota; I didn't experience it; a little different. Some of that's based on the way churches make decisions here. The Puritan and Pilgrim experience is still evident in towns and communities even though people may not belong to those churches I think that the attitude about "let's have a local vote and a town meeting to make a decision" sort of thing comes out of that tradition.

LF

Do you feel that you're a Connecticut resident now or when you go back to Wisconsin is it..?

RS

I won't go back to Wisconsin. If I were to retire and relocate I'd probably move someplace further south. I don't like Florida, I don't like California, but maybe someplace in between. My son and his wife and two grandchildren live in Texas; that has some appeal to us. Maybe someday we'll move to Texas.

LF

I have a brother in Galveston so I've been to Texas a few times; it's a big state.

RS

Galveston has the distinction of being the city that has the worst weather tragedy in U.S. history. Practically wiped out the city. It was the second largest city in Texas at the time of that, it was about right about the turn of the century, right around nineteen-hundred.

LF

Storm of the century.

RS

Yeah, and they even had a warning that there was a hurricane coming but I guess everybody thought well, we can weather that, we've weathered them before. The surge and apparently the tide was high at the time and Galveston is on a big long island and it wiped out three fourths of the city. I don't know how many thousands of people died. It's worse than other hurricanes, it's worse than tornados; it's the worst tragedy in U.S. history. But I've been in Galveston; it's still, a lot of antique shops and things in the old buildings that still stand.

(Track 4 ends)

(Track 5 begins)

RS

I wouldn't want to be along the coast anyway. I see these people fighting the hurricanes now, in Florida, where it hit in Alabama and Louisiana.

LF

So you came here and it was Mattatuck and then...? Let's talk about from then on.

RS

I was hired and part of the interview was "Mattatuck Community College is a hotbed of activity. There're problems there, there's a lot of struggle going on." And things that were happening. Let me describe a little bit of that cause if I don't you probably won't get this from most other people.

LF

Excuse me, this is what year?

RS

I came in nineteen eighty-four; just like the book. This college was founded in nineteen sixty-seven; Mattatuck was founded in nineteen sixty-seven. This is some history you'll pick up somewhere else but it won't hurt if I repeat it. And some of this is word of mouth. There was a decision made; there was a struggle going on in Waterbury over "we want a four-year public college or university in this city." And the politicians were trying to get that established and it was at a time where they just weren't going to start any new colleges in cities that didn't already have them. So Storrs had a university, a public university; Willimantic had a public university; Danbury had a public university; New Britain did; and they weren't about to start another one here.

So after a lot of fighting went on they finally got an agreement that they could start a community college here, and that would be a two-year school. And I think in the minds of the people who fought for that - - there was a lot of local business people and educators and others - - I think they always thought "well we'll get a two-year college and then some day we'll make it into a four-year college; we'll get our foot in the door." So that started and they gave the authority, there was legislation passed state-wide to have a community college system and it was okay to build one and to establish one in Waterbury. But there was an understanding when they sold the idea of the community colleges that this not cost the state a lot of money; New Englanders and Connecticut people were very frugal, very...you know, "we don't want to spend a lot of money on something and not get our money back."

So there was a kind of a promise in the legislation that said, "We'll do this in established buildings. We'll either take over a school that has moved out and closed, or something like that, or a storefront or a factory, and we'll do some renovation but basically there

won't be a lot of building, we'll do with the existing facilities." And so, when they okayed one in Waterbury and they decided to name it after the Native American name Mattatuck, which is the name for Waterbury, they hired the first employee and it was Dr. Kinney who was a professor and administrator at Central Connecticut State University and he came down here sometime in the spring of sixty-seven I guess and was told "you have a year to get this off the ground and we'll give you a little money to work with and we think that if in the fall of sixty-eight you could have things with a few hundred students that would be good." He said, "Well that's not quick enough." And over the summer of sixty-seven he did a bunch of advertising and hired a number of employees, he found a bunch of people that were either professors in colleges who were willing to moonlight, or people who were local educators who were in the public schools who had Masters Degrees who said "I'll take a chance."

He had the school off and running by the September of nineteen sixty-seven. And they opened in Kennedy High School as a late afternoon and evening program. When the kids would leave high school at two or three in the afternoon on weekdays then the college students would move in at four, five, six, seven in the evening and hold all their classes. And they did that for a time, and when that didn't work then they moved in some other temporary facilities. There was an old – it was either a roller skating rink or a bowling alley, I'm not sure, on South Main Street that they called it Harvester Road I guess, that was a temporary facility for a couple of years. It was very crowded from all the people that I've talked to who were here when that was open. But it was intimate, it was close, you could step out in the hall and yell and everybody who worked there could hear you cause it was like an old barracks kind of building, and so they had fond memories of that place.

And that happened for a while and then the city and the state decided that they wanted to begin building a campus in spite of what the promise had been about we won't build any new buildings. They lobbied to try to get a place for this college to be. And another college existed in town called Waterbury State Technical College, part of a different system that the state had set up for technical colleges, and that was on this campus on Chase Parkway already. It was built in the early sixties. And then there was a branch of the University of Connecticut that was here.

(Track 5 ends)

(Track 6 begins)

RS

It was a two-year freshman/sophomore level branch that had a campus on Hillside Avenue. Neither one of those were very big colleges and they were again lobbying for "let's get a four-year college here, let's make Mattatuck a four-year college." They didn't get it. But as a kind of compensation for the fact that they weren't going to get a four-year school they said "We'll let you build a higher education center in Waterbury. We'll give you the money to do that out of the state. And a higher education center will be a place that will house two, four, or two-year, excuse me, three two-year colleges (I get the numbers wrong here). Three two-year colleges. And it would be a two-year college

called Waterbury State Tech, and a two-year college called Mattatuck Community College, and a two-year branch of the University of Connecticut. In order to save money they will all be on one campus when it's fully developed. They'll have a common library/learning resource center, they'll have a common heating and cooling and maintenance facility, they'll have indoor parking that they all share; they'll have a cafeteria, one will serve, and those will all be central services, and then each of them will have their own building and it'll be wonderful, they'll all collaborate and work together, and students will be able to take classes."

And it was a dream that they sold to the legislature to develop a higher ed center. So in legislation if you read the old blue books actually until this day we are still called a higher education center, Central Naugatuck Valley Region Higher Education Center. And they began building buildings here and things started to develop. They had a building that we're in right now that was put up doing what they call fast track construction: put up the frame in steel, then they hung outside panels of pre-formed concrete and everything, on the side, and then they slapped it all together and within a very few months they were able to put up a building and operate. This was called Mattatuck Hall for a while. Of course Waterbury State Tech had its building; it's now called Founders' Hall, over on the other end of the campus. Later on they ... I probably have the sequence wrong, cause they built the heating and cooling plant in the middle probably first, then Mattatuck Hall, and then they built a building that was called UConn Hall, it's now called Ekstrom Hall, and so in effect they had two of the colleges' buildings done: the one that was supposed to be for UConn, the one that was supposed to be for Mattatuck, and then Waterbury State Tech should have got the third one and then when the dream came true it would have been something like three colleges all with about two thousand students each, total six thousand students all living happily ever after.

It never happened. Waterbury State Tech never got any bigger than about twelve or fifteen hundred students, up through the eighties; Mattatuck took off, and was all of a sudden three or four thousand students already, and the branch of the university never got more than five, six hundred students. So little by little it didn't unfold as a higher education center. When I came here in nineteen eighty-four we still had a group called the executive committee that made the policies for this higher ed center, had regular meetings with the president or the director of each one of the three colleges that were involved and we did that up through about nineteen ninety and then the legislature said "we're going to change all that, we're going to give it over to the college that's gotten the biggest, Mattatuck, and let you be the runner of the higher - you know - the operator of the higher education center."

And that fact that we didn't all develop in the same size, about nineteen ninety-two the legislature said "We've taken a look at where things are. The University of Connecticut has refused to move in to the higher education center; they want to stay where they are; Waterbury State Tech is declining in enrollment and Mattatuck just seems to be taking off;" They gave the direction that said, "You will merge into one institution in nineteen ninety-two." I was selected as the president to merge the institutions. We took a new name because we didn't want to use the name of either of the two previous institutions so

we ended up with one college here, Naugatuck Valley Community College, and we do have some guest institutions that are still here that have been invited in. Western Connecticut teaches classes here, Central Connecticut teaches classes here, Charter Oak State University has an office here to meet students that go through their programs so we are a higher ed center but not like what people dreamed of.

LF

So you stepped right into a changing environment. How was that?

RS

It was very challenging. They wanted somebody, and I should probably retract, go back, where I was when you asked me about coming here in 84, they interviewed me and they said "We have all these challenges. We don't want a president who is learning to be a president in his first job; there are problems here. One of them is that this is a higher education center; there are these expectations that it will be a three-college..."

(Track 6 ends)

(Track 7 begins)

RS

...college, about the same size operation, that will grow and they'll all be sort of co-equal partners in using that institution." And that wasn't unfolding, wasn't happening at all. Then we had some labor problems and then it was really kind of topped off by the fact that President Kinney who was the founding president who, God bless him, he got this college off the ground in three months when people said it should take a year he was up and running. He decided after, oh it was about nineteen eighty, to retire. He'd been around before he'd been here before, he said "I got my job done, I got this college started, facilities are being built." So he retired. And they brought in a new president and her name was Dr. Patricia Yarborough, and she came in from Texas of all places, and said "I have some new ideas." She moved a whole bunch of people around, she reassigned people, people who had been deans were not necessarily demoted but they were given a different job, people who weren't deans were made deans, she fired some people, and really things were pretty much in turmoil -

LF

Doesn't sound like it was always positive.

RS

- of course many of the faculty and staff were scared because they thought, "Am I the next one that's going to lose my job?" The union became very active saying, "We need to protect ourselves; this president's changing things and not necessarily asking us what we think." There was a lot of union activity and then what would probably, was a surprise to everybody: she upped and left. She was here eighteen months, got things kind of stirred up, and she took a job with a local company, and left here, and the system decided, "We need to do something on a temporary basis." So they named Dr. Sommerer, Dr. Ken

Sommerer who was a deputy executive director of the system to come down here and be acting president and he spent two years here as acting president and during that time they did the search. It took a year to locate a president and that was the year that I applied, in nineteen eighty-four. I came in August of nineteen eighty-four and I was told, "Here's the history: it was founded in sixty-seven; Charlie Kinney got it off the ground; Pat Yarborough came in and stirred things up; there're a lot of unhappiness there and a lot of people that are scared they're going to lose their jobs; Dr. Sommerer hasn't made a lot of changes he's just sort of keeping a lid on things. You come in and make it operate." So that's what I inherited. "And by the way, it's a higher education center."

LF

So a lot of challenges right off the bat.

RS

Yeah.

LF

But you were ready for that.

RS

Well I knew what I was getting into. When you're a young, aspiring – well, not so young, but – relatively young, aspiring president who says, "I want to make my mark, and I want to do something nobody else has done," that's what you look for is someplace where there's a problem, and you go in and do something about it, and we did.

LF

What was it like those first few weeks?

RS

I think I was in my office about one hour and the first problem came to my desk already. People were just waiting for a more permanent president to come in to fix everything that had been unfixed. I had people who said, "I want you to put it back the way it was before Dr. Yarborough came." And I said, "I'm not going to do that." I had people who began siding against a person who had become dean who they didn't think should have become dean, who were working behind the scenes to say "Let's get him out of that job." So a lot of intrigue, a lot of turmoil. One of the other things that had occurred was that there had been a very intense election held because in the Four Cs union that represented most of the professional employees who taught here - - I shouldn't say most, but many of them anyway - - both the administrators, counselors, and librarians, and faculty, were all in the same union, and they are till this day. There had been an election proposed, for the labor relations board, that that should be broken into two unions. This was the hotbed, this was the campus that was the heart of much of the campaigning, to try to break away from the union that were faculty members, and administrators, counselors and librarians. Two or three months just before I came, the election was held and the vote to break those into two unions failed by one vote. So when I got here we had a bunch of unhappy administrators, counselors, and librarians who had been working very hard to break away

from the union that was filled with full-time teaching faculty, so they could have their own separate union because they didn't think they were getting equal representation.

(Track 7 ends)

(Track 8 begins)

RS

Didn't pass. So there were all those frustrations also. Then I came in as president and they wanted me to fix that. They wanted me to, again, lobby for another election. I said, I'm not a member of the union; I'm not going to take on a challenge that is really your responsibility as members of the union. Management first of all shouldn't be doing that. We have to stay away from that. So that was part of the mix.

LF

Sounds like there was a lot on the plate right from the start.

RS

Uh huh.

LF

When you arrived, did you have a long-term plan that you then started to implement, or did that take time to develop, in terms of your own career?

RS

I had some things that I had learned in ten years of administration of a community college in Minnesota and three years as president, that I saw weren't here, that were necessary to operate this place or any college efficiently. So my first plan was to begin to try to do that. Of course, settle the place down and get people focused on "Let's serve students, let's serve the community, let's stop fighting among ourselves, let's stop spending a lot of time and energy on things that are not productive for students." So that was my basic goal.

But there were a lot of things we didn't have; it was my impression and strong feeling when I first came that any good college needed to have a book and a system of policies and procedures that was published and was understood by everybody. We were essentially operating with word-of-mouth policies and things that had just been past tradition, but had never been recorded and we were being inconsistent in the way we were dealing with people in terms of personnel and that sort of thing, and salary structures and even though the system had some of that it was not very well codified at this campus. So my goal was to establish our own college policies and personnel procedures manual and we do have one today. I started writing; I personally have written a lot of the things that are in it. Some of those are policies that come out of the system office but some of them are ones that we have locally. You know what the book looks like that we have? It's online now, but for years it was just a book and it became my, I suppose, goal to get that established to make administration consistent here. Then I didn't

think communications were very effective either here, that there were all kinds of rumors. People actually started rumors with the idea that "If I can get this rumor started maybe it'll happen." You know those kinds of strategies? So I tried to cut down the rumor mill by putting out a regular publication called my Weekly Bulletin. I think when people first heard that, they thought, "Oh good, now we'll find out who has gotten married, who had a baby; we'll find out whose birthday it is." I said, "I'm sorry but that's not the kind of publication I'm putting out. I'm putting out a document that tries to announce things that are new that are happening, things that we expect to be happening or that we're considering to happen, and it will really become a governance document that will allow for people to provide input before final decisions are made." It took me a few years before people finally caught on to the fact that this was not a newsy newspaper, that those kinds of things were published as the first bit of information but that they were in fact a statement of changes that were being considered, opportunity to provide input to those changes and then notification when they were finally implemented and usually a rationale for why. We still have a weekly bulletin. If you wanted to write a book called The History of Mattatuck Community College/Naugatuck Valley Community College, you could go and ask Roseann, "Where are all the weekly bulletins from nineteen eighty-four?" I don't think we've missed... if we've missed one Wednesday or at least one mid-week in the last twenty-one years I'd be surprised. We've put out a weekly bulletin mid-week every year since nineteen eighty-four and most of what's happened at this college is recorded in those. In the last two or three years they're electronic, and they're real easy to find. The first eighteen or so years they were paper that are probably yellowed like some of the things in the Learning Resource Center but it's all there; the history of this place is all there in the weekly bulletins.

LF

Now, you mentioned the community college system and I was wondering if you wanted to talk about how the campus here - in your early years - how you had an influence on the development of the community college system a little bit more.

RS

This college is organized in a different way than many of the other ones across the country because we're part of a state system of community colleges.

(Track 8 ends)

(Track 9 begins)

RS

Let me tell you how colleges in other places are sometimes organized. In a state like New Jersey, Illinois, places like that, the county is an important political entity and so, McHenry County in Illinois can say, "We want a community college. We're going to tax people so many mills on their taxes for either their home or their income or something, and we'll take the money that we get and we're going to build a community college and we're going to pay the salaries and we're going to operate it with the tuition that we collect and with the taxation that we get from the local county residents. There are some

laws in Illinois about how to do that but basically McHenry County can have its own community college. We don't in Connecticut really have a system of county government like they do in other states. A county doesn't really mean anything. Some counties in other states have their own police department, they have a sheriff's department, they have their own courts, they have their own ability to tax, some of them run their own schools; so a lot of things are organized around that unit. Connecticut is so small, ironically so provincial, that it's never let the county be anything. So when they came to organizing a community college system, it's one community college system for the entire state that happens to have twelve campuses, or twelve colleges. Instead of having a board of trustees that makes policies for each one of the colleges like they would in New Jersey or in Illinois, they have one board of trustees that makes all policy decisions for the entire state, all twelve.

Whether we're big or small, whether we're on the eastern end or the western end or where we're located, we all operate under the same rules by the Board of Trustees and we are an agency of the State of Connecticut because that's our primary source of income. When the General Assembly decides that they have completed their budget for the next biennium, they vote an amount of money that goes to the community college system, and then it's divided up by formula according to how big we are and how much our costs are to heat and cool and all that. That's how we get our money. We can't levy a tax. If we're under funded by the state we just have to live with it. We do get money that we collect from tuition. We can raise tuition if we need more money to operate but that's capped also by state law, how fast the tuition can go up, how many dollars we can go up every year, and the amount.

So we are different than a lot of other states. Took a little getting used to for me when I came here as new president in nineteen eighty-four to understand that this is a state system with one board of trustees. I don't have my own board of trustees, I don't report to a board of trustees like most presidents do in other states in the union, and that was an adjustment. I made the adjustment but it's different.

LF

Let's see. Do we want to take a little break? You've been talking quite a little bit?

RS

Sure.

LF

So we continue on. So you're here. You're newly arrived, you're soothing the waters. So there's a twenty-one year history to talk about. How do you want to start with that?

RS

Usually you talk about things chronologically from day one to day twenty-one. It's sort of fun to do it in reverse sometimes. Where we are right now is that this is a college of fifty-six hundred credit students, probably with another five thousand non-credit students, so a total of ten thousand students. The facilities have been developed to some extent;

we're expecting to get a new building, a new technology building, within - I hope - construction will start within the next six months and then three years from now we'll be occupying it. Then that probably means that Founder's Hall will become expendable because that's an old building of almost forty, it'll be fifty years old by the time the new one gets done. So it either has to be torn down or it probably given to somebody else to use for something else and we live with the facilities we have.

We've come a long way: how did we get here? I told you that we had to go through a merger. That started in nineteen ninety-two and here we are thirteen years later and people will say, "This is a merged college," like it's a completed job. I always say, "Whoa, wait a minute; it should be called a merging college." We're still merging. A lot of the things about job descriptions and some of those things have been accomplished but there are some elements about the merger that still has us still thinking separately like, "I was a Waterbury State Tech person and here's how we did things, here's the number of hours I work per week, and I was..."

(Track 9 ends)

(Track 10 begins)

RS

... a Mattatuck Community College instructor and here's how we did things" and it didn't match. There was supposed to be harmonization in the contracts over the years but there was not any legislation that forced the teacher or the professional unions to find one collective bargaining union to represent things so we as a result have two unions that represent faculty and we have another union that represents some of the professional workers. We actually have three professional unions.

There's some elements of the contracts that are not the same, so we aren't really merged yet, totally. Our name says that we're merged and there's a lot of integration of the curriculum that we've accomplished. Back in the nineteen ninety-two, ninety-three year they had a whole set of courses and a catalog for the State Tech college we had a catalog for the Community college; all of that had to be integrated so that the psychology taught by the State Tech faculty and the Mattatuck faculty would end up being a three-credit class that had basically the same description, the same syllabus, the same number of credits, would transfer the same way. That had to be done, that was a lot of work, a lot of people had spent a lot of time merging those. We got that done. We've moved people around various different offices so that what were called technology programs back in the Waterbury State Tech days, maybe in a different location under a different division of the college, would have been if they had been a separate college, some of their English faculty are now in the Arts and Humanities division in this building; some of the programs that Mattatuck had - - the Automotive Technology program ironically wasn't in the Tech College it was in the Community college. So there was some strange lining up that had to all be worked through.

We've continued to build ever since I got here in nineteen eighty-four. We're still hoping to put one more building up. There was a master plan late seventies and they drew out what - - we have about a hundred and ten acres, something like that, of land here all together, on the west side of Waterbury and we were fortunate to get this land. I believe it was a gift to the city of Waterbury, and we haven't developed all of it. The plan never unfolded in the way that they had envisioned it in the late seventies. They started out with putting the heating and cooling plant in the middle, two levels of parking, they built centers on top of that: Fine Arts Center, Student Center, Learning Resources Center. They attached what is now called Kinney Hall after the founding president at Mattatuck; Ekstrom Hall, that was named after the president at Waterbury State Tech at time of merger. They're all connected by a walkway on level five so that there's a bridge where you can drive underneath it but you can walk almost through the entire complex without ever going outside, and when they build the new technology building that will be attached at other end of the building, on the east end where Ekstrom Hall is. So there will be one complex where you could drive your car into a covered parking ramp, get in an elevator, go up to level five, and walk through the entire complex and never have to go outside. That took some planning, took some work. It's nice, it's one of the advantages that we have. How many people get to, for free, live in a college or work in a place where they can drive inside and get parking indoors so when it snows in the winter, your car's inside; when it rains and the sun's hot in the summer, your car's inside. We have all that; it's nice. We had some other good things that happened in the development of this campus. Must be fifteen, eighteen years ago we named the area out in front that has a little pond and that's marshy, we call that the Tamarack Arboretum. There's been a series of plantings by the Agro-Biology Club, and more recently the Horticulture students to develop that. There was a graduate student from the University of Massachusetts who was working on her Master's Degree, and she said, "I'm working in..." - - ah, something to do with plant design or horticulture or something like that - - "I'll design a planting plot for you, for your arboretum, and I can get my Master's Degree by doing it, you get a chance to provide input." We got that done, she has provided it, and we have been planting for the last fifteen years according to that plan. So that the tall trees are in the back and the short trees are in the front and there are rows that are relatively in lines, they blossom in sequence, they're all labeled, it's a park, it's an arboretum, it's beautiful. It's one of the most charming things about it.

(Track 10 ends)

(Track 11 begins)

RS

We're the only college in the system that has a designed arboretum. People come and walk their dogs through it and just marvel at the beautiful flowering trees and plants and everything. We have some wildlife; there used to be, I don't know if it's a beaver or a muskrat that lives down in that pond, and the ducks, the geese, stop off there during the year and have their young and all that. I can look right out my window and think I'm in the north woods someplace, because it's like that.

LF

It's a lovely campus.

RS

So, to continue to backtrack. All those things have developed over time. They all had a start someplace. It was because we had some people here who had some vision - - not me, just - - but other people. We have a professor who works in biology who had a vision of what an arboretum could be and he's worked long and hard and got his students in the Agro-biology club to do that: Dr. Faryniarz. We've got a lot of Dr. Faryniarz's kind of people here who've had a vision of what things could be. The whole Learning Resource Center has developed into a place where it's electronically based. It was almost like pulling teeth here a few years ago when we suggested, "Let's get rid of the card catalog." Oh my gosh, you can't find anything without a card catalog. Well here we are - - there's no card catalog, is there?

LF

There's a few bits of it left, yeah. We're just finally getting rid of the last bits.

RS

You've squirreled them away someplace. But basically everything's electronic and that's how you find things. It's a different kind of place and that's all evolved because somebody had the vision that we needed to spend some money on making this library electronic, we needed to have inter-library connections to other places so we can borrow things, the internet of course has helped, but we have agreements that we have a world-class library, it's really great. We have a lot of other resources in there.

So what am I proud of? I'm really proud of the fact that the facilities are developing, we're continuing to have a great physical plant for our students to learn and to be able to do research and those kinds of things; we're not done but we're getting there, but it doesn't look anything like the plan that was drawn twenty-five years ago, whatever time, thirty years ago. It changed quite a bit. There was a plan at one time for us to have athletic fields up on top of the bluff behind us here. We don't have any athletic teams anymore; it's gotten so prohibitively expensive that we don't have inter-collegiate sports. That's true of a lot of the community colleges in this state; it's too expensive.

A lot of the people that were here when I first came have retired, have left us, and I find myself being one of the very few people - - and I wasn't the first one here - - who remembers some of the history back in the early eighties. A lot of the times I'll sit down in a meeting and I'll start saying, "Remember when?" or "This comes up as a result of ..." and there'll be blank stares at me like, "What're you talking about?" and I look and I realize nobody else was here so they don't know that and so I end up sort of passing on oral history traditions in most of our meetings about where things are and why they are where they are and how we got there, a lot. One of these days I'll retire and then you'll have to call me up to find that out.

LF

We've talked about the state system a little bit. What about the Waterbury community? What are your thoughts or any comments, anything to relate about the college and its impact on the Waterbury community?

RS

I've said this quite a number of times in front of the professional staff just to remind them of the kind of work that we do here: There are hundreds and probably thousands of students who live in the Greater Waterbury area or the west central part of Connecticut that if there had not been a two-year community college and a state technical college at this site, never would have gone through higher education or would never have gone as far as they've gone. They would not have been able to afford it, they had families, they had jobs, they had other responsibilities where they couldn't afford to be gone from this area to commute up to other locations like Storrs or go to Yale, or someplace like that. So the fact that we were close by made it possible for them to work on getting at least an Associate Degree or at least credits toward a degree. I keep running into people at lots of different locations who say, "Oh, you're the president at the college...I went to Mattatuck back in...and do you remember...?" and a lot of reminiscing goes on, and that sort of thing. There's hardly a place in the greater Waterbury area where you don't run into people who have gone to school here and are doing jobs that are essential...

(Track 11 ends)

(Track 12 begins)

RS

...to the welfare of this community. We really have changed people's lives. That sounds like a cliché but it's very true. I compliment our staff, I say "If you weren't proud and are not aware that you do very noble work at this college, think about it." That a person, maybe young, maybe not so young, who goes to school doesn't have very good grades from high school or has been out of school a long time, comes in here, takes a test and we say, "You know, you don't have the skills to go to college but we'll teach you the skills it takes to go to college." We teach developmental classes, we get them up to speed in reading and their ability to write and think, and that sort of thing. They succeed in the first class, they take some more classes, and maybe four years later they get a two-year degree, going part time with a family, with a job. After that they say, "I love learning so much that I'm not going to stop. I'm going to go back to school some more. I'm going to go to Central, I'm going to go to WestConn, I'm going to go to Wesleyan." So another four years later they've graduated with a bachelor's degree, and then there are some who don't quit, and say, "That's not enough for me. A Master's Degree." So we, for the last couple of years, have had some people come back who we call our success stories. We had one at commencement a year and a half ago - - well, not this year but the year before - - who's the director of a nursing program in Maryland who came back, was our commencement speaker. She's a graduate of our nursing program, very successful. She's the dean of nursing school at a university. She's just one example of the people that have done great things. We've had a real impact on this community. If we had not been here, like I say, thousands would not have done higher education. They wouldn't have done it

at a branch of the university that's here. They wouldn't have done it by commuting someplace else, if they hadn't gotten this start.

LF

Local industry, businesses...?

RS

We do dozens and dozens of training programs for employees who come in, who don't have the skills that they need in order to work in a company, or people who are working at a company and the job changes, computerization takes place and people didn't learn how to operate computers and they will come back and they'll take courses with us. We teach sometimes at their location; many times these are not course courses for credit, they're non-credit classes because they are not necessarily interested in degrees, they're interested in the skills. We've impacted the businesses of the area a great deal. There are workers all over this area that got their training here.

LF

What about the new building; can we talk a little bit about the near future, and the new building? What will that look like; what does it look like to you now?

RS

We had a building called Founder's Hall that had the engineering technologies, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, manufacturing, those kinds of things in it. It's very old and it was built in early sixties. We had a company take a look at it and they said, "How much money is the state going to make available to you to build?" and the state said thirty million dollars. That seems like a lot of money. The company did an analysis and they said, "You know, you could spend thirty million dollars and fix up that Founders Hall building, and it would probably work for you. But for thirty million dollars you could also have a brand new building. We wouldn't have to do any asbestos abatement, we wouldn't have to blast any concrete poured walls in order to make it big enough to get certain programs in there, and that sort of thing. We think in the long run if you're going to spend the same amount of money you ought to go for a new building."

The new building will replace many of the programs that we had in Founder's Hall when that decision was made. It will replace a facility that we lease on Thomaston Avenue, it's a ten thousand square foot auto technology and alternative fuel conversion center that we've been leasing for about the last fifteen years. I guess, and fairly expensive lease by the way, and bring them on campus. Then we had six buildings that looked like Quonset huts from the Second World War that were temporary. For a long time we didn't want to call them temporary because every time you call it temporary you had somebody in higher education at the state level who wanted to tear them down and we needed them because we were using them. So we renamed them Terrace buildings. It still had a T designation in the computer. We call them Terrace buildings; there isn't a terrace out there... Those all have to come down. So you take no more Founder's Hall, no more Terrace buildings, and let's get out of the lease on Thomaston Avenue, and you bring that

all on campus, we'll put it into the new technology building, and that's the plan. That's what we're going to do. We've begun some of that already. We've already begun...

Track 12 ends)

(Track 13 begins)

RS

... evacuating the Terrace buildings and expecting construction to begin. Involve the faculty and staff in designing the spaces, the labs, talking about state-of-the-art equipment, assuming that three years before we occupy it we know what state-of-the-art equipment is, because it changes so fast. We'll get a chance to have the best of everything we can buy with the amount of money we have.

LF

I'm looking forward to that time certainly; I think it's going to be a big capstone of your history here anyway.

RS

It will also tie us together, sociologically and psychologically, because, because I said that the merger isn't really still done yet. We still have people who have their offices in Founder's Hall which is physically detached from the rest of the campus. You bring everything from there over and attach it to the building and make it part of the main complex and physically locate people here: that'll be the day when the merger is probably done. That's a psychological thing that you don't have to walk from someplace else to get here, to be part of the campus.

LF

Are there any things you want to add to what we've already said?

RS

Other than the fact that I'm glad that somebody is finally putting together a history of this college, these colleges, the two of them. It's amazing how things get forgotten, and lost. Many things are not written down. I've tried to get somebody interested in writing a history of the college. We've had a couple of historians retire and I've said "Won't you, in retirement, wouldn't you like to write a historical account of this college?" "No, no, I don't want to do that." And I'm probably not going to do it. I'm an amateur historian myself but I'm not the best person to do that, it really needs to be somebody who knows historical research, and the methodology for how to do that. We haven't done a good job of keeping archives. I know the library is beginning to collect some things but a lot of the old documents, they may still be at the central office, as far as blueprints and things like that are concerned; but some of the things I'm talking about weren't written down; some of the things that have happened here over the years, some of stories I could tell you, about what's gone on I guess, those are not written down.

LF

It's those stories we're hoping to capture too, the anecdotes.

RS

Let me just talk for a moment, I don't know how much time you have left, but some of the things that people first told me when I came. There must have been a really monumental occurrence in the city of Waterbury back in the late sixties, early seventies when they brought a controversial speaker, Dick Gregory, to Waterbury. At the time, if you remember, there was all kinds of protest going on in other parts of the country, there was unrest in the cities, they were burning going in many of the big cities in the country, and the Civil Rights movement was getting started, and there was assassinations in the sixties and Dick Gregory was invited here and there were people apparently who were just enough young mavericks on this campus that they wanted him to come, and there were other people in Waterbury who were offended that he was being invited. So there was actually I believe a protest of the fact that he was going to speak here. There were pressures, I think, on Charlie Kinney - - this is all hearsay now, so don't take this as fact - - to cancel the visit because somebody might be offended. People prevailed with Charlie to say, "No, don't do that. This is a college, this is a place where ideas and the exchange of ideas, even if they're controversial, ought to be able to be expressed. Let's have him here." One of the first things they told me about was the day that Dick Gregory came to this campus and the events that occurred during that time and how it was successful but there were people that were always offended by the fact that he was invited to speak here. That ought to be part of the history because it was with pride that they did that.

There's another word that will come up in the history, and that is that the way that they decided how to develop a higher education was a kind of tradition that comes out of a French tradition called the charrette. What is a charrette? I don't know; I didn't know when I came here. What people tell me it is, is a way of people who have carts where they sell their wares in French villages would start at the place where they live and along the way would stop in various locations and pick up this, and pick up this, and get to the marketplace by the end of the day. And it was a kind of a collection if you will, of the best of everything that was available, sort of a smorgasbord being collected along - which is a German word of course - being collected along the way getting to the marketplace. The metaphor is that the higher education center was developed as a result of a charrette...

Track 13 ends)

(Track 14 begins)

RS

... where they went from one community place, one business place to another, to another, and gathered ideas and it was like a public meeting but in series, where they gathered all the ideas about what this higher education center ought to be, and when they got to the end, to the marketplace if you will, it became an idea that was called the Central Naugatuck Valley Region Higher Ed Center, and it was to serve what the community needed and the charrette will come up when you talk to the old folks who have been

around here or have lived and been through that time. Whenever I say that now, everybody looks at me like, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I’m still the only one telling the story about the charrette.

LF

I only know the word because there is an art store in Cambridge, art supplies.

RS

It might have something to do with art too, I don’t know what the collection was . I use the analogy or the metaphor of food that they picked up, but it could have been other things but it was this trip to pick up things along the way, to get to the place where you were going to display them, and that’s what we are.

LF

Well, should we end on that note – temporarily?

RS

Sure

LF

Okay

(Track 13 ends)

(Track 14 begins)

RS (adds history of Heroic Individual Display)

I was a president at a college in Illinois, Lincoln Trail College, and in nineteen eighty-two there was a national convention of the American, at that time it was called The Community and Junior College Association; since changed its name to AACC, but at that time they had the word junior in it. At that convention there was a display from a college I had never heard of, in Connecticut, called Mattatuck. It was called The Heroic Individual Display, and it was, I don’t know, twenty drawings that were charcoal ink and charcoal, black and white, very stark, very large. They were on display, and the idea behind the heroic individual, by the artist, was that every student that goes to a community college has had to struggle: financially, with their transportation, with their education, maybe with their skills, and it’s been a real battle, and those who have made it and who have succeeded in their own sense, are heroes. And this was a celebration of the heroic individual. I didn’t think much about it other than the fact I do remember it was there. A year later, completely having forgotten about the display and everything, there was an ad for a vacancy for a presidency at Mattatuck Community College I submitted my name because I was interested in living on the east coast. A year later I was named the president of Mattatuck Community College and when I came here the president who had commissioned that Heroic Individual Display, was gone, had left. Pat Yarborough. And it was being, it was stored in boxes someplace down in the core of the facility and it

was not on display, and I began a little checking into it. Found out it had been a project of the foundation for Mattatuck Community College. They paid a local artist, Ken Larson who lived in New Britain, to come in. He brought a photographer with him and they went around the college and they snapped photos of a whole bunch of students, hundreds and hundreds of students. When they got done they picked out a representative group that included male, female, Black, White, Hispanic, other kinds of characteristics, ethnic characteristics. He did ink drawings, charcoal or ink, I'm not sure what the media is, but, medium is; and he developed twenty or whatever number of these, and then gave them to the college and was paid a fee for doing that. They were on display in St. Louis and I ended up here. So here I am at the college where I had no idea when I was seeing that I was even being a candidate for. I have made it my task to not let those stay in storage down there. They went on tour for a while after that, went around to a bunch of colleges in the country that wanted to see it; when they came back I have now had them posted on level seven of Kinney Hall and a little story written out there that I pretty much made up, so that it would describe for anybody walking by, "What the heck are these?"

Coincidentally, one of the people that was taken a picture of, and has a drawing of himself out there, is a person who has gone on now and has become quite famous, John Fusco. He was a student here in the early eighties, he was a high school drop-out, he knocked around for a while and played in a rock band, and whatever, traveled throughout the southwest. Then he came back, he met Professor Fred Ricci, he met Tom Kmetzo, got turned on to English and to writing, and theatre. Spent a couple of years here, didn't get his two-year associate degree, transferred to I think NYU in New York. Got a degree in writing, and when he did his thesis for his senior paper somebody, he submitted it at the suggestion of a professor, somebody in Hollywood picked it up and said, "We want to make a movie out of it." So in about nineteen eight-seven or eighty-eight the movie came out called Crossroads, and John Fusco was the, not only did he write the story for it he did the screenplay, the script for the screen. That launched him on a career. He has now had ten or twelve successful movies since that time. He did four or five with Steven Spielberg. The one that came out, Spirit, a year ago was his screenplay. He loves horses, he raises horses; he has a home in California, he has a home in Vermont where he raises rare horses. He met his wife while he was here; she sang in the choir and she's very talented also. But coincidentally, out of the heroic individual, of all of the pictures that could have been taken, the first one out here coming out on the hall on level seven, is John Fusco...

(Track 14 ends)

(Track 15 begins)

RS

... and just strange ironies, I find. You know, I'm the kind of person, I'm the only one who sees some of these things as coincidental and is amused and sort of intrigued by things. I tell this story to other people and they say "Yeah, well so what?" and I say "Oh no, no no!" This is, strange connections: St. Louis, Southern Illinois, Waterbury, Connecticut, John Fusco, Heroic Individual. All of that comes together and it's almost

like “Gee, isn’t that strange how that all came together?” John, I’ve told John this story; he comes and sees us occasionally.

LF

That’s a good idea; maybe I can interview him?

RS

He would be happy to do that, I think. When you talk to Tom Kmetzo, and when you talk to Fred Ricci, ask them about John Fusco’s days here.