

Ron Pietro

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Ann Sandri

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Transcript – Ron Pietro

Interviewee: Ron Pietro

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Marist College Staff

Marist College (Poughkeepsie, New York)

Marist College – Social Aspects

Summary: Ron Pietro discusses his early years before arriving at Marist College as a coach. He talks about memorable events he had while coaching at Marist College with the help from his wife, Sally Pietro. He discusses his career after Marist in different states, such as Alaska and Rhode Island. He reflects on the college's ethos and suggestions for the Board of Trustees.

[00:03](#) **Gus Nolan:** Today is Friday October 7th. We have an opportunity to interview one of the outstanding coaches in basketball here at Marist in the past, Ron Pietro. Good morning, Ron.

[00:14](#) **Ron Pietro:** Good Morning, Gus. Happy to be here.

[00:16](#) **GN:** And along with Ron is Sally, his wife and the first assistant in the basketball training of our guys and feeding them for a number of year.

[00:25](#) **RP:** And a graduate of Marist.

[00:26](#) **GN:** And a graduate of Marist. Ron, I'd like to take a few minutes to just kind of quickly go over some of the events I might say before coming to Marist. Before Marist, your early years where were you born, brought up, high school and so on?

[00:43](#) **RP:** Sure. I was born in Yonkers, New York in 1941. Went through the Yonkers Public School System. Went to Gorton high school playing basketball and baseball then went to Manhattan College on a full athletic scholarship. Played in physical education. Got my bachelor's degree from Manhattan. Went to Penn State and got my Master's Degree from Penn State the following year started teaching at Urban...

[01:09](#) **GN:** Penn State was for the Physical Education?

[01:11](#) **RP:** Physical Education and Recreation, yes.

[01:13](#) **GN:** Back up a little bit to grammar school. In grammar school years, were you involved in activities? Were you in sport pretty much, work, any activities?

[01:25](#) **RP:** Pretty much sports down to the park which in those days. We would all go to the park and compete in a variety of different sports from whatever was appropriate at the time. And the park was right near my school. So I went six years elementary, two years seventh and eighth, one year junior high but had been involved in Little League Baseball and playing in CYO basketball in seventh and eighth grade, ninth grade. So sports was a very big part of my life growing up.

[01:54](#) **GN:** Through high school was baseball as important as basketball?

[01:57](#) **RP:** Yes. Yeah, I played baseball in the summer time for the Yonkers Chippewas, Yonkers Fords and was pretty successful at that as a pitcher.

[02:07](#) **GN:** Did you have an opportunity or did you need to work at any time during this early years in the summers or during high school?

[02:15](#) **RP:** Not so much in high school I don't think. When I got to Manhattan then we would always have a summer job but the summer job was down at that park. I was the recreation director and then through Manhattan, we went to a various boys' camps. Moosilauke was up in New Hampshire and we went there for... I went there for three years. Freshman, sophomore and then senior year and then worked at the parks, the other three years. So it always had to do with what kind of the sports activities which enabled me to continue in the Phys-Ed world.

[02:50](#) **GN:** OK you finished Manhattan and you went to graduate school. What's the next step? Did you work during that time too? Did you have a coaching job? Were you doing anything?

[02:59](#) **RP:** No I actually played basketball. It was way back we call it the CBA. Williams board a little bit. But I had the internship so I was dealing with intramurals doing thirty credits within a year in the summer to get that master degrees in science. I wrote a thesis which was pretty interesting at that time, never having that experience before so it was very good. And going from a small Catholic school in Manhattan to a big state university, Penn State was very good for me you know. It changed my whole outlook on things and was good. But it all had to do with staying within a physical education/recreation world.

[03:38](#) **GN:** OK and what's the genesis of you coming to Marist? How did that develop?

[03:43](#) **RP:** I was that Irvington high school for two years coaching basketball and baseball and teachings.

[03:49](#) **GN:** That's ...

[03:49](#) **RP:** Irvington, New York for two years and then Howard Goldman... a job opened up and

he actually came down. We discussed it for the first time to come to Marist and he was looking for an unusual match between a crew coach and basketball coach. So... crew was not my horizon and so he hired Paul Errol at the time. And so then two years later, as I think Howard had more money to deal with and everything started to expand. We got together again and so after two years at Irvington high school, So I came to Marist. That was in 1966, I think.

[04:35](#) **GN:** What were you expected to do it at Marist?

[04:38](#) **RP:** In the beginning, the instructor of physical education was the title and coach.

[04:44](#) **GN:** So you had a class. You had some students.

[04:45](#) **RP:** Well we had all the physical education classes. That's where we got involved in teaching, wrestling, fencing and golf and anything else. All the sports that we could put in that little small gymnasium you know with thirty or forty boys, men ... taking. I still have good recollections. I'll see some guys that remember that more than coaching and the athletic director should. You taught me wrestling. You didn't know what you're doing. (laughter)

[05:20](#) **GN:** The people you are talking about just now, Howard Goldman, of course stands out as one of the principles and who else would be involved in those early years?

[05:28](#) **RP:** Sure. Well Linus Foy obviously, when he was there and then there was the vice president, Brother John O'Shea and then a group of young people that also started together would be Tony Campilli, Frank LaRose was in that group. Dave Flynn Tom Wade and then the teachers Jack Kelly, Tom Casey, Louis Zuccarello, Vinny Toscano all started around that time as young educators.

[05:59](#) **GN:** Zuccarello, here yet?

[06:01](#) **RP:** I think so. You know, within that first two or three years anyway so there was a great group of young people that were. I'm not sure they're all starting out but pretty much so.

[06:12](#) **GN:** Everyone you named there seemed to me that this is one of their first big jobs.

06:16 **RP:** I think so too. Even George Hooper I can remember.

06:20 **GN:** Don't mention George Sommer because he would not want to be classified in this category. We have some principles here, you see.

06:30 **RP:** Well anyway that was the group that. Oh Bob Norman was a key too.

06:38 **GN:** Let's talk about the organization of the basketball team. You must have had some heck of a job. First of all, getting their recruits to come to play for you and you were offering them very little except sweat and hard tears.

06:55 **RP:** That's a good point. Yes but you know as enthusiastic I'd played basketball in college and coached for two years. So the program was what was known as and still is N.A.I.A. So really had no good affiliation with any conference but we started out with the help of the admissions office. They packaged some people meaning they gave a little bit of scholarship and some loans. So we got some people and went out recruiting. You know actually went out and I think the first recruiting class probably was Bill Spenla and Joe Scott and Ray Manning in the early days but taking the players that were here for one or two years and then recruiting. Back then if you recall as a freshman, you were not able to play on the varsity. So that first year they would have to home-play freshmen and then we extended. So as we develop those players, we got better and better and you know and start to win some games.

07:59 **GN:** Dave Flynn was the recruiting guy?

08:01 **RP:** He was the admissions officers and so funny story with me, as we got to know Dave and his wife. He was from Beacon and I worked summer jobs down because his dad was a Commissioner of Parks so I had the summer down there for two years so we got to be good friends but he was very helpful and understanding what was needed academics, athletics, and trying to bundle the financial aid.

08:29 **GN:** Yeah I had a student. He's not a student. He's Terry Moore...was one of those, one

of the students who went out recruiting. He organized that that group that went and visited school and said we're students from this school. That was a kind of a novel idea. He happened to here last week and we're talking about this thing. Another piece of this, you're organizing this... How about the scheduling? Is it... did you have to do this? Who put the thing together?

09:00 RP: Howard, the athletic director would be in charge of it but as I took over we started to branch out and trying to move forward from this NAIA to a Division three status of the N.C.A.A. So in the beginning we were playing Bloomfield and King's College and probably right where it belonged. But as we got better I didn't see any future in that because it was playing against schools that were in a sense are unknown to me from in my background and in order to make the institution better and more prestigious and more noticeable, we started to move into playing other schools then that were more comparable.

09:37 GN: Okay at what point, do we talk about entrance into the N.C.A.A.? You know Category three as...?

09:49 RP: We would be division three which would be no scholarships still. Still based on financial aid and need. One of the great difficulties was having no facility.

10:00 GN: We didn't have a gym in those days?

10:02 RP: No, we had a practicing facility about as big as this room. So that was always a challenge so playing at Lourdes High School, picking up everything going over there and then playing at Dutchess Community College as a home court. So no matter what league you played in, it was difficult to get opponents to come because you weren't on campus. So I would say you have to go back in history. But probably four or five years, we started to make the move into NCAA Division 3.

10:34 GN: This is early seventies then?

10:35 RP: Yeah early seventies. I have to look that up Gus but I'm not sure about that. I think

we're right on the brink there for a while saying what because Howard Goldman would always promise the new facility in his office. He would have that new building there and every year he would change the finalization date because it didn't happen. And that was always his goal and it was his dream put up something like the McCann Center. So as we muddled along there and then I would start probably taking on more responsibility. We had football in and so I became like the assistant athletic director and I started a tennis program from men and then a tennis program for women, coaching basketball. Teaching still teaching in physical education. Going to school. Bill Austin and I have some great stories for I think there was a brother John O'Shea said well if you're going to stay here you have another degree. So he went to Southern Connecticut State for a degree in educational administration. Then we were talking about whether you get your doctorate or not then it became evident that teaching coaching administration, you probably didn't need your doctorate.

[11:46](#) **GN:** Did Howie have the doctorate at the time?

[11:47](#) **RP:** He had his doctorate when he came Yes and but I think as athletics changed the environment changed and there was less and less emphasis, probably on the physical education and then I think we start to go co-ed remember at that time too. So just teaching boy's, men's physical education was not as important as when we first came so kind of transitioned more in to athletics. So we did make assistant professors after getting another degree. So we have the Bachelor's and Masters', both Bill Austin and myself from Southern Connecticut.

[12:23](#) **GN:** So you were officially faculty then?

[12:24](#) **RP:** We were faculty.

[12:26](#) **GN:** That's a good point.

RP: We were instructor, faculty and getting an extra two thousand dollars to coach basketball.

GN: You were well-paid for that. You were working on a rather limited budget so far as travel

was concerned in those days. I have heard stories shared from other guys who've come by talking about the...wonderful transportation provided for them. Not only that but at least they were fed through the courtesy of your wife who made the sandwiches for the run.

RP: Not very much. It's kind of a unique situation. You know, when we're going down South, playing in the city... that time we're driving in vans as well. Sometimes we take a bus.

GN: Are you talking about New York City or Fort Washington?

RP: No, New York City. We played a lot of schools in New York. So it was always difficult coming back to games at seven-thirty, say and then finish nine-thirty, ten o'clock. You're coming back up trying to get home by twelve because of the school, the next day. You go to a diner or someplace, and now you have twenty people with you. Now it's another hour and half. Sally, my wife, said "Maybe we can help fix this." Because we used to live in south of here, Wappinger's Falls. We would have \$100 for meals. \$5 for twenty people. Sally would go and get rolls and take the orders. She could probably speak better to some of the orders. 'ham and cheese.' 'I don't want mustard' 'mayonnaise' this that. We used to pack them into a big bag. Get some sodas. Put them under a bunch and as soon as the game was over, you know, we get into a bus or a van and give it back and the guys be back in the normal time at midnight instead of two in the morning.

[14:10](#) GN: Yeah, those meals must have been... I mean the food was good. It's the accommodation which they were served. Smelly guys and all of this.

[14:18](#) RP: That right, right on the bus or in the van.

[14:22](#) Sally Pietro: Mostly buses.

[14:23](#) RP: By the time, I think we're probably in the mid-70s then with buses going down so we did that for a few years and it was a big boom for Sally because she probably made thirty dollars.

[14:34](#) GN: That was added to the income of the family.

[14:38](#) **RP:** Yeah right so it was good all around. And you're right many people remember that the sandwiches because they had some unusual requests.

[14:48](#) **GN:** Moving on, how about the building of McCann? Did you play a part in talking to with Howie or Linus about?

[14:57](#) **RP:** A bit. Somewhat because of my experience but it was really Howard Goldman's goal and idea and as he advance into that he gave me more responsibility as the assistant athletic director and run a whole program basically. Because he spent so much time and effort plus he was still always coaching too and he was teaching. He moved the academic side more into just physical education, wrestling you know teaching skills into what I think he developed here as far as certification for coaches, the history of physical education, history of athletics, the first aid and safety. And as the program evolved, Howard was very important in building that whole structure so as he spent his time in the classroom more so and as far as the McCann Center as it's named I took over more responsibility in the administration of the athletics program.

[15:56](#) **GN:** How about the swimming pool? Was Larry VanWagner on site yet or?

[15:59](#) **RP:** Yes. He was the first hire beside the two between that we had. He was really the first hire with the McCann center to come in as the running the pool.

[16:11](#) **GN:** Yeah. Okay. let's go back to the NCAA Discussion. Was there... you didn't have alumni behind you pushing you to say yeah lets go big, you know? Was there much of a...?

[16:24](#) **RP:** So I guess it was always my goal. I mean was my goal to go from the NCAA Division Three but without a building, facility to play in. It was Southampton we played against but other comparable smaller private schools, there was Dowling, Southampton. We developed that we call the Big Apple Conference. It always gave us an opportunity with the NAIA. It actually went to the national championship of the NAIA beat Dowling down there but the exposure was so small that I thought that we should develop into the NCAA That was going. So we went to

Division three and then with the building I had visions of going Division one and getting into a grouping with Fairfield, Manhattan, Niagara, Canisius, Siena. We always played Siena but comparable institutions private institutions, mostly Catholic institutions and kind of that was always my goal to get through that so when the building started go up in order to get to Division One, at that time, you had to go to Division Two for three years so Division Two provided NCAA allowed you to have scholarships now so the decision was made by the institution to start with scholarships at that time probably within the late 70s.

[17:49](#) **GN:** How many were you given, three?

[17:51](#) **RP:** Probably five or six back then you could package them too as well?

[17:56](#) **GN:** Half and half?

[17:57](#) **RP:** right and so we played in the Division 2 in a separate conference. All the other schools that we're talking about also joined in, Southampton. But the goal was still to my mind must elevate the programs and maybe because I went to Manhattan but that a catholic league that was around here seem to me to be the right place.

[18:16](#) **GN:** Yeah, you'd be away far off from St John's though? But you played them?

[18:21](#) **RP:** Manhattan played St John's. So yeah no ... They were at the top of heap then but that was really the goal and as the NCAA was evolving into different conferences in order to get into the tournament. Eventually what we joined we couldn't get into the Catholic league. We tried what we called ECAC North but it was a number of schools, Wagner, Fairleigh Dickinson schools like that enabled you if you were good enough to win that league you would get to the NCAA tournament which was so different back then so that all evolved in the late 70s and the early 80s. And the building was a part of that.

[19:01](#) **GN:** Because we had a building, they can come now.

[19:03](#) **RP:** Right and then I think after I left and Dennis Murray came on and then that move was

a few years later to get involved with the league that he is in now which to me always and I thought that was the way to go right from beginning. I think as he sets the situation that wasn't ready for a few years.

[19:27](#) **GN:** Tell me a little bit about your philosophy of coaching I have heard it said and I think I've seen it... winning is important but it's not the most important thing.

[19:38](#) **RP:** Without a question. I guess you'd always want but I guess one of the greatest challenges that I remember in trying to accommodate for players first but I had a manager by the name of Kenny what was Kenny's we'll think of his last name but he was a really great kids managers to me were just as important because they did all the junk work but kept us going and you know he worked and I played him in a game. So that gives you a bit of an idea of how I felt toward all the people that played for me and the other thing was getting the degree that was always important for my parents right from the beginning of trying to get a college degree and I think for the most part if you go back in time our graduation rates were really good so treating the whole person, pushing on the academic side because they all thought they were great players you know integrating that as far as a basketball player and I guess the greatest feeling that you would have as a coach is seeing the young man grow between a Freshman year and senior year and leadership abilities that occurred during that time and still maintaining their closeness with them.

[20:54](#) **GN:** But it seems to me. You have a concern for a kid who comes all the practices and he's like tenth on the bench you know he has to have his chance in the sun.

[20:02](#) **RP:** Well, we tried to do that too. As you move to division one winning becomes significantly more important.

[21:11](#) **GN:** Tell me about two or three memorable basketball games, surely there were some that...

[21:18](#) **RP:** Well the Siena game was always very important. We used to be able to play them home and away and so those games were rough and tough. And I'm not sure these are good memories but two memories up at Sienna was when Jimmy Norman was the Red Fox and he had them as the Indians. They double teamed him, flipped him over on his back, his hat came off and it was a big mess up there and then the next time we went up there the fans behind the bench were very rude and on the players. I mean it was a fight you know our players went back out after them so I'm not sure that was a great memory. But that's something I kind of do remember. I do remember beating Dowling in the third time way back in the NAIA to get to the NAIA tournament so we took the whole group to Kansas City and played in a big memorial arena with thirty-two teams and that was a significant factor that was important. I guess the other time we finally got Manhattan come up and play us when the McCann center before I left. To me that was a big game as well. But you're right because the wins and losses weren't the most important thing. It was kind of the preparation, the playing and relationship with the players.

[22:29](#) **RP:** OK

[22:31](#) **SP:** And I think just to interject I think it ... You were always looking for the goal moving whatever it was division one. And probably why you eventually moved to administration because that's where you could do that better than coaching.

[22:52](#) **GN:** One of the things you know I came here as a young student in '48 and graduated in '52. I'm as stunned every time I come on this campus now as most who are here from the beginning when we had a farm pigs and cows and apple orchards and things of that sort but I think it's a truism to say that one of the reasons that this has developed has to do with you know the sports programs that were operating here that sports does bring students an interest you know if you didn't have sports, you wouldn't have Marist.

[23:35](#) **RP:** I think that's a very true statement because we also have some club sports like club

football which generate a thirty or forty or fifty young men.

[23:42](#) **GN:** You should hear from those guys, Coach Levine.

[23:46](#) **RP:** Coach Levine was here you know yelling screaming moving you know creating that atmosphere of coordination and friendship and those guys go back a long time.

[23:57](#) **GN:** He was all paid. He was given a thousand dollars every year for ten years

[23:59](#) **RP:** He was paid a lot of money. You have to give him a lot of credit. And the crew. The crew has been very instrumental part of Marist from the beginning because being near the water and trying to get the shells, the fundraising and have the event here but that brought a lot of young men. I remember Bill Austin would always say well who are you... When we had tryouts for basketball, who are you cutting because the best crew athlete would be six foot two or six foot three, kind of tall and slender ... that he could teach how to row because there's not a lot of teaching involved in before you come to row at Marist so that involved. And so we had a decent good program in its beginnings in your right and I think Tom Wade was the basketball coach back there. George Sturgess maybe and I'm not sure that's his name. I am kind of mixing schools hear too but you know you always had the basketball which is a key component of most Catholic schools anyway but the crew is always a big part of it and then when Howard came, he brought that soccer right along because that was his favorite.

[25:08](#) **GN:** And he did well when he had the Brothers here from Spain.

[25:11](#) **RP:** That's right.

[25:13](#) **GN:** Yeah, he was able to do a few things but it does even to this day like when we had a survey done as to where we should go a number of things put on them. A new classroom building. A new science building. A stadium. You know well I thought the stadium would be one of the last things that we'd ever really want you know. Why do we want a stadium for, you know? But I tell you it's really been some kind of a piece of development here. I mean when you

see that kids don't get to Notre Dame I mean there are other places they can go.

[25:58](#) **RP:** That's very true. I think as the athletic program developed and John Garland and the McCann foundation was a significant factor here, you know understanding I believe what you're trying to say that it would bring some prestige to the institution and as we started also remember you have females coming in at the same during that time period too so. Emerging into institution that athletics, both men and women, was important you know we kind of started all that and in the late 70s, early 80s, yeah, but now when you look at the facilities at Marist I mean that baseball field is as good as it can get you know with the football now I think of the expansion. But the fields up on this side, we never dreamed of that. We didn't even know that Marist owned the land out there.

[26:47](#) **GN:** We might not have.

[26:51](#) **RP:** But the components of the program always were basically the crew and basketball and soccer you know and football now is resurrected itself a little bit but you have to give credit to Ron Levine because he was instrumental in making it happen back then which was good for the institution because it brought thirty to forty kids that thought that they could play.

[27:12](#) **GN:** Right and they have friends and.

[27:15](#) **RP:** Absolutely and probably some of your best donors from that group at this point.

[27:19](#) **GN:** Today. Absolutely yeah I wouldn't hesitate to say that at all. I'll come back to this again. Let's leave Marist. A little bit, what happened after Marist? You went to Alaska?

[27:32](#) **RP:** Right in 1984 there was a lot of transition going on. Personally for me you have to remember that '82, '83, '85, I was the basketball coach, the tennis coach, the director of athletics and the building manager. So I had a big load and doing a lot of stuff in the summer time which I'll get so later on so. A decision was made to do one or the other you know whether it was athletic director or basketball coach and so at that time, we had been here for eighteen years and

had a good friend in Alaska who played for me and said that this job is open we went out there and at the time you're going to Alaska you know it's big change. But it was probably one of the best moves we made because it enabled us to make more money to get involved in strictly an athletic administration instead of just you know all this piled together so when they offered the job, thank god for my wife and you know we had four children at the time and we moved Alaska and in retrospect, it was a great move for us personally.

[28:39](#) **GN:** How old were the girls then?

[28:41](#) **RP:** Michelle, the oldest was first year college so we left her here. Brian was going to be a junior. He was playing at Lourdes and he became the Alaska State player of the year which he never would have had in New York State. Carrie was third-grade and Kristen was seventh-grade so you know is a good mix and but in retrospect, it probably from my personal advancement was a very good move you know because enable me to get the next job at the University of Rhode Island you know.

[29:13](#) **GN:** How long were in Alaska?

[29:14](#) **RP:** Eight years, eight years. But we hit in the right time in a sense they had the great Alaska shootout. They just moved out from the very poor facility into a brand-new basketball arena, downtown. They're on probation with the NCAA. They had a lot of problems which in my mind were pretty easy to fix and with some help from the chancellor-president. And the great Alaska shootout at that time I was able to get E.S.P.N was just evolving so we came back to New York a few times on the second year we had E.S.P.N covering the games because late night up earlier up there is late night here and it fit right in there program so that generated more money and then we were able to get very good teams and then advance hockey into national the W.C.H.A as well. So it was a good job in a sense because they need some direction.

[30:14](#) **GN:** You are more of athletic director.

[30:16](#) **RP:** Athletic director right. No more coaching at that point and there aren't many teams up there but going back to here is some of the memories is you know I coached tennis at those old courts down at the side down there that were developed right.

[30:32](#) **GN:** The ball didn't always bounce right.

[30:33](#) **RP:** No well it hit of those back walls we taught. And Bill Austin and I did a course work for our master's degree at Southern Connecticut. We did a teaching tennis down there and it's the funniest thing we look back at it, you know. We had to hit forehand, backhand again but that you know when I think back of the crazy things you do that that we play tennis matches down there. I think Louise Greenspan might have develop that you know a little bit so that with the wall that were sideways you remember that?

[31:03](#) **GN:** making the deal with the city.

[31:04](#) **RP:** Good point yeah.

[31:05](#) **GN:** Take the sand out of there it use to be the reservoir.

[31:08](#) **RP:** That's right and the courts were a little tilted but that was kind of a home advantage.

[31:13](#) **GN:** Good for training. You could play right after the storm but I still have a couple of pictures. At home of the women's team and the men's team, we had some good men's players at that time probably. Again when you think back I think, Gus evolving this whole program to get larger and larger to get more kids to come to school and playing in sports.

[31:36](#) **GN:** How big was Alaska? How big was the college?

[31:40](#) **RP:** Oh fifteen thousand but a lot of day hops remember in Anchorage you have two major facilities for the armed forces and the army bases, the two big bases so they had young kids a lot there that were going to school and families would be there the wives would come and. As that program was there but it needs to join in to a league I guess I am pretty good at getting into leagues honesty because starting through here and so we got them into conferences and got

the hockey team into what's called the Western Collegiate Hockey Association so we were very successful with those programs.

[32:23](#) **GN:** Ray and Maureen Murphy. They were talking. She was a travel agent at one time and they got a lot of traveling things done and they went to Alaska and the cab driver taking from the airport to the hotel where you're from Poughkeepsie. Oh we have a coach up there, Ron Pietro. Even among the cab drivers you were known.

[32:41](#) **RP:** I was there at the right time I guess you know it evolved just as that program was growing so it was a good job and then I also got into the NCAA Council from the Western region so that certainly helped me gain in knowledge of how to do things with the NCAA as well and so you know, we were president of two or three conferences but we're dealing with Colorado, New Mexico you know the travel difference was so significant. I mean three and a half hours from Anchorage to Seattle before you then started playing other teams but just think of that conference was Hawaii, Montana, Washington, Colorado and Alaska, you know. So you know the travel already have ten schools involved and still going on you know at the Division-Two level but the great Alaskan shootout was the component that brought the city together, eight or nine thousand people with television and good teams and good relationships back then when it was

[33:48](#) **GN:** Big time.

[33:49](#) **RP:** Yeah, I really it was at that point we had Jerry Tarkanian was there. Rollie Massimino was there you know teams that had just won the national championships. And again my kind wife here we used invited a lot of the coach, Valvano was there. Great story with a Calipari because he was at U.Mass and he comes out. He has no money and we gave him the ski van and he drove around and he won the tournament. And he evolve from there. He still remembers that so we were able because of my contacts really through Marist in this whole Northeast sector

were always over to referees and teams from the East Coast to come there at the time and that's what made it so successful.

[34:36](#) **GN:** What's the move to Rhode Island where is that fit in this now.

[34:39](#) **RP:** We have been there eight Years seven or eight years we started looking around to move. Yeah, I think we grew up on the East Coast and so to be in Alaska for ever was I don't think our goal so it evolved.

[34:54](#) **GN:** It's dark there a lot.

[34:57](#) **RP:** So that job came up and you know I've been really Alaska is division two except for hockey and skiing so I started looking at division one jobs, smaller jobs that I thought I could get so we got hired in 1992 so we have been in Alaska eighty four to ninety two, eight years and you know that's probably when you look at it with administrators that six to ten year time period, it is time to move on to get better at something but the Alaska thing personally which would need to know at all really helped us out because every time after eight years you get vested after five and a health insurance is paid it was just a wonderful thing and being a little naive going in because the salary was double of Marist for doing one thing but it's really helped us out in our lives for ... the rest of our lives you know and so it was a good move. And Rhode Island came up which was a Division one. Kind of the same thing happened there was we have an old building as athletic director again, athletic Recreation. Now we talking twenty-two sports and significant you know state institution. That was the other thing in Marist does private institution dealing with Jerry Cox and the president you know trying with budgets and everything and working interior but when you went to the public institutions was a whole different story. Bidding, everything got bid out going through centralization. You know different types of budgeting different types of analysis of the budget and so to get good training in Alaska which really helped in Rhode Island.

[36:45](#) **GN:** And how long were then in Rhode Island?

[36:46](#) **RP:** Twelve years.

[36:47](#) **GN:** Twelve years in Rhode Island, okay.

[36:50](#) **RP:** From '84 to '92, '92 to 2004 and then we had decided it was time to retire from that and so we went to Hilton Head. We're trying to decide what to do and I had a couple of job interviews and the executive director of the women's Final Four was in Boston in 2006 and so they're looking for an executive director and Harvard and Northeastern where there are two key components as the institutions that help sponsor that. And I knew the athletic director at Northeastern really well and there's a woman at Harvard so I went through that interview stage and we were down in Hilton Head for what three weeks. And we moved back up to Boston and it was a base. What was really neat about that job, it was one sport. Basketball, women's basketball and there are some fundraising involved. We had to raise maybe I think two million dollars working with the community but they had a good foundation of that. We have Reebok. We had a lot of state bank. It was Governor Romney at the time so he was interested because he had just run the Olympics. So it was not very difficult to raise two million dollars to support that in Boston because it was a big deal as they never had a NCAA women's tournament and the event sold out and Maryland won in overtime. It was a great event. For us personally, we knew it was going to end. Again you know so it was a year and a half staying in Boston and administrating one sport. And once NCAA women's committee came in, I mean they had big booklets and you just turn the page and followed whatever they want to do but it was a different job because then you had the organization of the police because we needed... you know at that level they're flying charters in and taking...

[38:48](#) **GN:** Did you have secretarial help? Did you have assistants?

[38:50](#) **RP:** We had a group of three but maybe not too many you know maybe it was a staff of four. Because once the NCAA comes in, I mean they have all the help. You just kind of follow

them. You know keep it within the community and go from there. So that was a great transition from being an athletic director you know of twenty-two sports and five hundred student athletes and all the responsibilities of a twenty million dollars budget to this budget, one spot, kind of a guiding light with the NCAA.

[39:22](#) **GN:** Reflect a little bit back to Marist to summer program. Did you organize those?

[39:26](#) **RP:** Absolutely, Lee Sebarti, who's a graduate here who I cut from the basketball team who has been very successful in a sporting goods business. We started with the camps with basketball. Rich Stevens was cross-country. This is a pretty good story I think. Bill Austin would do the rowing, you know and we had and we just had as many camps. I think at one time we probably had eight camps going on at the same time between wrestling...

[39:54](#) **GN:** The dormitories as well.

[39:55](#) **RP:** Dormitory... Put them in dormitories as well as overnight camps. Everybody's heard about Nike and when Rich Stevens we have Marty Liquori some very famous cross-country runners coming up for his camp. We have seventy eighty kids running across the mid-Hudson Bridge and back. Stevens would go out in the morning we wouldn't see him till late afternoon till he came back for lunch. So one time this blue truck comes down from New Hampshire called Blue Ribbon Sports and Phil Knight who's the founder of Nike was in New Hampshire is selling shoes with this waffle back shoe might remember and that's where it came from. So he came down here to Rich Steven and trying to sell the shoe and Marty Liquori was here and some other famous guys. I mean really it is initiation of Nike back on east coast before he moved it out to the west and became such a successful program. So that was... let's see we had wrestling, basketball. We had swimming with Larry VanWagner. We had crew. We have Larry Menapace science camp one year.

[41:04](#) **SP:** We had a hiking camp [...]

[41:06](#) **RP:** My friend Jack Carrie from Manhattan came up hiking. I think we had eight at the same time so what was important was that the college was getting some money for the dorms not a lot but I mean it was certainly filled there.

[41:18](#) **GN:** And doing good.

[41:19](#) **RP:** And feeding them you know so you're paying that part of it as well and we were having some fun. And early on whatever money we made, I wasn't taking a big salary, we put back into the athletic program to buy uniforms or to help subsidize athletics. That was my probably weird thinking back then to put some back in so we had some really fun stories but remember we were working out of one gymnasium so what's down beyond the library was a big parking lot there. We had six basketball courts down there then using the field for cross-country running down at the boathouse for the crew that was a pretty influential part of our lives because it kept us going in the summer and I think it really transitioned Marist too. You know kids in the dorms with a little extra money so it works for everybody and we were able to provide some extra dollars for coaches.

[42:19](#) **GN:** To this day, it's a big program.

[42:20](#) **GN:** Yeah I think the last time we're here maybe when Howard died Howard Goldman died. We're down at the Marriott down here and a kid behind a desk checked us in said, "Mr. Pietro I was at your basketball camp." Now remember Digger Phelps came up here we had Jack Molloy, Jack Current from a Malloy High School had his camp here and so we have Billy Pauls, from the New York St John's University, so I think it was really a good thing for the community as well maybe I didn't even realize it at the time but and it was for boys and girls and I have... I still remember some girls coming and saying the same thing, "Oh I went to your camp." So that was instrumental in a number of ways until the last year, I really did take a lot of money from ourselves and then the last year over last two years I finally said, "Geez, Ron you know I put a

lot of times salary but all our kids went to the camps. You know the camp that our children remembers little peoples what Bob Lynch. That was terrific that then became junior counselors I guess and whatever. But that whole environment and still and being young and maybe foolish goes back to what we said in the beginning you know had all these young men like yourself, and Kelly, Casey, you know all those guys.

[43:42](#) **GN:** And there's a pool over here before you got the McCann Center.

[43:45](#) **RP:** Right.

[43:46](#) **GN:** That was earlier.

[43:48](#) **RP:** That was earlier but that was probably a great area for young families you know to get together and see each other outside the teaching college curriculum so to speak. Yeah, I mean Sally remembered that and sitting by there and a place to go in the early, early days.

[44:10](#) **GN:** Let move it to the present day now. What's your thought about the students today? Do you have a chance to comment about the contrast between the changing times?

[44:20](#) **RP:** I think the technology is so different now than what we had. I would tell you that it was a big deal for us to videotape a game in any sport. Whether it be football or basketball and then take those videotapes, drive them down New Jersey to get them done overnight. Somebody picking them up the next morning, you know paying a small fee for that. Now the technology for the coaching for the student athletes is so different and so more advanced than we ever had then so I think that's a significant difference where people can analyze themselves. So the coaching technique is a little bit different as well because you can show ... There's a video out there that say you're playing football, take any team sport you want, we can isolate you for the whole game. And you'll see every move that you made and it's not a hard thing anymore. You know back then you're just trying to get the gosh-darn thing to show and putting people to sleep.

[45:20](#) **GN:** Try sitting in the stands sometimes to take pictures of it.

[45:22](#) **RP:** So I think that. I guess my analogy is with the grandkids because you know they're much more expert in all the little details with the technology than we'll ever be in a sense so I think that affects the college student as well I mean the advancement in that area so you know.

[45:45](#) **GN:** That's one point. Someone was here talking about is a dormitory is lining up to use the phone. Just to use the telephone was a big issue.

[45:52](#) **RP:** Good point and I remember recruiting an assistant basketball coach, Al Skinner. He had played overseas and I was down the Jersey shore I am trying to get him on a phone in the phone booth on the Jersey Turnpike you know back then. Now it's you know you if you don't have one of these flip-phones, iPhones. Yeah that's the big difference, big difference so I think from the athletic perspective the approach to coaching is different as well. And I think the individuals and maybe not ... is a lot more I as individuals but we had kids that were I you know they want, then you have to train them out of that so it became team.

[46:36](#) **GN:** Are they more dedicated today to their sport or?

[46:42](#) **RP:** To individual sports, I think. Back then it was, maybe because of my background physical education, but you know you had a wide variety of sports that you would play and then you emphasize one now. We have a grandson who's eleven years old playing AAU basketball, played forty games last year you know over the course of the winter, which is very unusual. You know so but that's the way it is. So now I think the younger kids and the parents that are getting them into these leagues and emphasizing one sport in the hopes that they'll be excellent that sport. So the overall athletic back ground is minimal as far as participation. And they'd rather go and play with the electronic games you know and football or basketball instead of participation. So that's that I see is a significant difference but athletes are trained better. The population is bigger and stronger so you know it's hard and I think the advancement of African-Americans into professional sports is so significant now too.

[47:45](#) **GN:** I think contrast Marist itself in the development of the staffing. I mean look at what's going on in the McCann now you know. You had a handful of guys now one department has more than you had.

[48:02](#) **RP:** Absolutely. Good point, very good point but you know smaller but you have twenty-two sports though now for men and women. And I find the difference is the across the board starting the professional ranks to the college rank is the number of assistants have evolved into like I need we use to do... We had one assistant and did everything basically now you have one person doing the recruiting, one doing offence, one doing defense you know so there's and now five or six you probably see that in basketball is five or six assistants, three on a bench and it's like that all over. I'm not sure that it's needed but that's the way it is.

[48:40](#) **GN:** Did you have much of a conflict between student body and athletes? In other words use of facilities or anything like that?

[48:45](#) **RP:** I don't remember that at all as a conflict. It was just a shared thing. We just worked out a schedule and Howard was always good at that so we just went on and even with the McCann center as that evolved and he was in there... it was him because he want to do indoor soccer. But you know it's a scheduling problem which is still alive today with men's and women's basketball wanting to practice at the same time you know because the classes and getting volleyball in there at the same time so that's eternal unless you have enough of facilities that you don't have to worry about that.

[49:16](#) **GN:** I've talked in Debbie Bell who's what her name now, anyways, she was in I was asking whether the students today would have the same opportunity to use the facility. Can they use the gym? Can they use the pool? Can they use the ball field? And she said, "Oh yea." She says, "Till two o'clock in the morning, they're playing intermurals out there right now." I didn't know that I don't go by here in two o'clock in the morning to see the place all lit up you know

and they will lean over to make it share.

[49:47](#) **RP:** And actually when I was at Penn State, my emphasis was recreation so we had that way back then where there were outdoor fields and playing at eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night. At Rhode Island, we did that a lot with recreation as well where the students would have the opportunity to use the fields and have some fun and play sports.

[50:06](#) **GN:** Okay, we're getting down to the end the hour and a couple of questions I really want to get to you to see what you would say on it because of your vast experiences. It's a matter of "how would you talk to those who need to be converted about the worth of college?" Is it worth going to college? The money, the time, the effort, and at the end of it, you may be not get a job the one you want. What about that investment?

[50:35](#) **RP:** I think it's one of the ... For the personal individual to have the accomplishment of getting a degree, it's something that's very important in my mind but for the individual is something that they earned that can never be taken away from them. And there aren't too many places in life where that can happen you know, in high school but getting beyond high school for those four years of whatever it takes to getting something that you have earned you, yourself and then something that you worked hard for over the course of time and there's no doubt in my mind whether there are jobs available or not. The person who has a college degree is going to definitely have an advantage over someone who doesn't have a college degree. So, yes. Time energy, money, you know plenty of us have gone through it over a period of time in whether we have loans. Or you know, you had scholarships or just worked. I still think it's one of the most important things in the United States is to continue the higher education so that people are educated.

[51:35](#) **GN:** And the quality of life the people you meet.

[51:37](#) **RP:** Absolutely. The experiences that you gain whether you're a day-op, whether you're

playing sports, whether you're in a dorm and people talk about that way beyond ... what happen in the classroom.

[51:50](#) **GN:** You've been around the world really in sports and coaching and all of that. If you had a chance to go to the board of directors here, the board of trustees, what would you tell them about preserving Marist?

[52:05](#) **RP:** To continue, I think I would commend them for advancing the facilities to be competitive in their conference because without the facilities and training and to attract good student-athletes and I was still call them student-athletes, that's very important I think they've done that with the advancement of that baseball field. Whoever thought that there would be a baseball field there. When we didn't even have the McCann center. But and you know obviously I think they're renovating the gym now you know it's a good size for here with Tenney adding. So you're getting other areas that make it easier for student athletes to come here because of the facilities and I really think that's important. So continue where they are. I don't think Marist is ever going be University of Kentucky or anything like that. But they've been very successful within their conference. I mean if you look back and seen what with that conference every year they drive the student-athletes that are academically sound. They've won a conference eight or nine years in a row and you can publicize that and it makes people feel good about it so my report would be stay on the course that you are, continue to improve the facility and you know support the teams.

[53:24](#) **GN:** Yeah, I think we're one of the highest in that country.

[53:27](#) **RP:** Without a doubt.

[53:28](#) **GN:** In terms of four-year graduates. I mean you go through you can play sports but you gotta stay in the classroom.

[53:34](#) **RP:** I agree but that league is like that the league that they're in Manhattan and Niagara

and you know Canisius. I think the emphasis in that Catholic education is that most schools have high graduation rates too and high indexes but Marist has stood out above all that league so that's really good. So it's a nice thing and I think when we get the bowl pins and the emphasis on which I think Dennis Murray deserves a lot of credit. We used to laugh. He always had a picture in every single magazine but his public relations is very good in the magazines that came out I thought excellent to continue that whenever he leaves because that's an important selling product I think for the college.

[54:20](#) **GN:** Is there something we might change?

[54:23](#) **RP:** Well you know I don't know enough about. I think all the building they all look great you know I don't know how you can make it much better. What's the enrollment now I mean?

[54:38](#) **GN:** Four thousand here but we got another four hundred Italy. And four hundred somewhere else. Florence is a big program.

[54:45](#) **RP:** I don't think you wanted to get too big either you know. The campus is nice. I remember John Gartland saying that at one meeting when we were doing the McCann Center trying to put something under the road and he said, "Oh we can never do that the state all that." And gosh it's right here.

[55:00](#) **GN:** And done in eight days something like that. They were able to close route nine and just drop it in there this summer. Linus Foy was out there taking pictures you know.

[55:12](#) **RP:** That's pretty cool. So when you think I mean when you think it's a long time and Sal and I were talking about that driving down and you know thirty years but it's evolved into you know really a great institution with everything that's needed for this, in a sense, a small college.

[55:27](#) **GN:** Part of a thing is the spirit that you guys brought you know the Donnelly Building, the same circle you had nowhere to go in fact we had a dormitory in there one time.

[55:41](#) **RP:** We had our offices in there one year too. I think in athletics, I remember not Howard

but Bill. Well because we have this one... Bill and I both had our office sucked in like yeah for a couple in over here.

[55:51](#) **GN:** Spacious office with a nice lounge chairs, telephones. Not really.

[55:57](#) **RP:** We did have our offices there yes. It's come all along way and to be part of something like that really it makes us feel good about that because to think the community of people at the time all the young growing you have probably gave the foundation for the place to be successful.

[56:15](#) **GN:** Yeah and I think that part of there is a certain spirit that remains here because you guys buried it and you know had the roots that this is what goes up the Marist kids seem to draw a similar kind of Marist kids you know. And even though as I was saying to Sally neither of us would probably be able to get in here now or afford it.

[56:37](#) **RP:** But you know the money's kind of the same all over so whatever it is it is. You pay fifty thousand to go to Harvard now so people somehow do it.

[56:50](#) **GN:** And you can go to Vassar and pay a lot but they don't have the river.

[56:52](#) **RP:** That's exactly right. That opening up and expansion is fabulous you know from over here now. But what I like is that the buildings are all similar you know so it gives you a nice look to the whole place.

[57:10](#) **GN:** Well, Ron it was a good run. I am so glad you came by is something we'll be able to put down will be recorded. it's recorded here by the disc along with the other seventy-four people that you saw listed there and I thank you very much for it as Sally be his support just all the way through this feeding the team and feeding him and keeping us all alive.