

**Susan Brown**

**Marist College**

**Poughkeepsie, NY**

**Transcribed by Aubrey Geisler**

**For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections**

**Transcript – Susan Brown**

**Interviewee:** Susan Brown

**Interviewer:** Gus Nolan

**Interview Date:** December 1st, 2010

**Location:** Marist College Archives and Special Collections

**Topic:** Marist College History

**Subject Headings:** Brown, Susan

Marist College – History

Marist College (Poughkeepsie, NY)

Marist College – Faculty

Marist College – Social Aspects

**Summary:** In Part 1 of 2, Susan Brown talks about her time before working at Marist and her time working at the College. She discusses the establishment of Longview Park, her involvement with several stakeholders through her time at the College as the Special, later Executive Assistant to President Dennis Murray.

[00:01](#) **Gus Nolan:** Good afternoon, Susan. Today is December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. We're having an interview with Susan Brown in the Marist College Library. Good afternoon, Susan.

[00:15](#) **Susan Brown:** Good afternoon, Gus.

[00:17](#) **GN:** Susan, there's like three major parts to this first part of our interviews with you. Before Marist, Marist, and then after Marist. And so, we look for a little thumbnail sketch about Susan before Marist, the early years. You know, where were you brought up and went to school and so on? Can you say something about that?

[00:36](#) **SB:** Sure. I was born on Long Island. My folks lived down first in Levittown and then in Huntington. My father was a pilot for Pan American and needed to live near what was then Idlewild Airport. So despite the fact, both of my parents were from Upstate New York. They lived on the island until 1963 when we moved to Millbrook, where I went to high school and graduated. I don't know how much you want to know about my high school years.

[01:07](#) **GN:** Well, just briefly. While you were in high school, you did well in your studies because you eventually came to Marist, so we knew that had to be part of your career. But what other interests? Like, were you in choir? Hobbies?

[01:23](#) **SB:** I wasn't blessed with a strong singing voice, but I was involved in many clubs. I played all four sports that were available to women. Field hockey, volleyball, softball, and basketball. I also was very active in the theater club. Performed in plays in high school.

[01:40](#) **GN:** Did you play major roles in some of those? Would you?

[01:43](#) **SB:** I don't believe [...] I can recall '*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*,' but I really don't even recall some of the other ones. I think they were sort of [...]

[01:54](#) **GN:** I know that role. I was in choir often.

[01:56](#) **SB:** The young ingenue role. But that pretty much [...] that and my studies I was. I took Latin and Spanish for four years and Advanced Math.

[02:16](#) **GN:** Are you still familiar with Spanish?

[02:19](#) **SB:** Un poco, Un poquito. (laughter) I wound up having a very good accent because my teacher was a Cuban refugee, of course, in '59. Many of the well-educated, upper-class Cubans escaped, and he was [...] We were very good on conversational Spanish and not so well instructed on the mechanics of conjugating verbs.

[02:45](#) **GN:** How about summer activities?

[02:48](#) **SB:** I worked a couple of summers, but primarily summers were fairly quiet around our house. My father was sort of [...] It was a bit like growing up [...] you know, the shoemaker's kids have no shoes. My dad flew all over the world for a living and was really a homebody. He loved the outdoors and gardening and hunting and fishing and so.

[03:10](#) **GN:** When he wasn't flying, he was at home.

[03:12](#) **SB:** He was at home, and all throughout my childhood, we went on one vacation. As a family. So I think I still have a bit of wanderlust of liking to travel because I think I was deprived of it.

[03:26](#) **GN:** Are you an only child?

[03:27](#) **SB:** No, I have. I have an older sister and a younger sister, and a younger brother.

[03:33](#) **GN:** OK. Moving on from growing up there, how about earlier adulthood? Community service. What were you doing?

[03:43](#) **SB:** Well, I went to Wells College, where I majored in English. And was active in some programs with the college in their development office and P.R.'s Office as a volunteer. I probably became most active in volunteerism, and it was something that, you know, I think I learned from my watching my mother, who had the good fortune not to have to work and was able to stay home with the four children. And she did a lot of volunteer work with the school and the church, and the community. But fairly early on, I became involved with the American Cancer Society as a volunteer, and I don't know if I'm jumping the gun here, but it is an example I give to young people who are job hunting and trying to make connections and network. I got to know the Murrays, President, and Mrs. Murray quite well. Because Marilyn Murray was on the board of the Cancer Society at the same time I was. And it was, in fact, through that relationship and getting to know them that Marilyn had suggested to President Murray that he contact me when I first [...]

[05:00](#) **GN:** Let's go back to college

[05:01](#) **SB:** We'll go back to college.

[05:02](#) **GN:** What did you study? Is there a major field here?

[05:04](#) **SB:** Yes, I always knew that I was going to be an English major. What I didn't expect was that in the course of taking what were then called distributional requirements, you know, that general education or core curriculum courses. I took a couple of courses in the history of religion from the Chairman of the Religion Department and became absolutely fascinated with Biblical Studies, and you know, particularly the intersection of literature and Biblical writings. It was just a fascination, and I took another course and then another course. And then another course then, I realized by my junior year that I probably was going to accumulate enough to do a double major.

[05:49](#) **GN:** I would love to have you in Religious Themes in Literature here, which is one of the courses I had early on.

[05:53](#) **SB:** Yeah, it really, I mean. It gave me an interesting perspective. Both in English classes, where I mean so much of literature, there are themes that tie religion in. And my English Studies gave me a different perspective among my colleagues who were Religion majors. Yeah. So it was it proved to be quite a fascinating sort of co-curricular approach. Not that I ever used. Religious studies. You know the History of Religion. "History and Philosophy of Religion" was the actual major. But it's certainly enriched. It's one of the reasons you go to a liberal arts college. You get to experiment and take a variety of courses. It strengthens any major.

[06:43](#) **GN:** What kind of social life was college? Do you still have friends from those years?

[06:47](#) **SB:** I do, actually. Wells was then one of the Seven Little Sisters, as they called it there. There were still quite a number of women's colleges in the late sixty's and early seventy's when I went. My older and younger sisters both went to Vassar. But I wanted to be more than twenty minutes from home. So I went upstate to Wells. It was the terminology that often was used back then was a suitcase school because we all kind of went away on weekends. Cornell was about half an hour away. And for me, I was a freshman when I met my husband to be who was a senior at Hamilton College. And so the social life around the college is back in those days, very, very different from Marist. Even the Marist I came to back in late '83. Where you traveled quite a ways, there were formal mixers that were set up for the women's college students to be able to meet, and I imagine it was not unlike the reverse so when Marist was an all-male school. But it was because of the isolation being up in the Finger Lakes, Aurora of New York, where Wells is. It's a beautiful town right on Cayuga Lake. It's like a country club. There's a Robert Trent Jones Golf Course because his wife was a class of '32, and play tennis courts, and a boathouse with sailboats so.

[08:17](#) **GN:** Numerically, how big was Wells College?

[08:19](#) **SB:** When I was there, it was about 600. It dipped quite a bit, and in fact, that led to the financial stress that prompted the college about five years ago to go coed. Which was a very difficult, traumatic event in the life of that college. I know the President fairly well, and she's an alum. And it was a real challenge to get over the hump, but the school is really climbing back up in numbers, and I think it's about thirty percent male now so. There you know [...] it's a very good academically rigorous institution. So life was, you know, with a double major and a lot of paper-writing type major. You know, Monday to Friday noon, it was 'grind, grind, grind' in the library, and you know you sort of lived to work, and then you pack up and take off for a party weekend, and it was.

[19:19](#) **GN:** You mention something there now; it was just a kind of a nice entree. You mention writing. How much of your writing?

Was it natural for you to come to be a writer as you are?

[19:30](#) **SB:** You know, I go back all the way to writing in high school, for instance. I recall, I believe, receiving the English Award both junior and senior year for writing and clearly a lot in college. I really don't recall. But my parents are both college-educated. They had two-year degrees. My dad was in horticulture and environmental conservation, and my mom was in [...]. She studied to be a dietician. So there wasn't a writing background there. But it's [...] I think that clarity of thought leads to clarity of expression. And where I got the clarity of thought, I don't know. But it's something that has always been relatively easy for me. Although it is a craft as well as an art., it's interesting. I've been asked over the years to speak to freshman writing classes or to students who are involved in speech writing. I spent a brief time as a newspaper reporter, so there is, of course, another form of writing for journalism. You know, I talk about [...] There are techniques that you can do to strengthen your writing, and a lot of it is just always second-guessing and revising and rethinking, and I often will proof out loud. Because my ear will catch things that my eye gets lazy and doesn't see. But it's something that is not unlike playing tennis or golf or riding the bike. You know you have to kind of keep in practice.

[11:16](#) **GN:** We were told [...] the best way to increase vocabulary is to study poetry. Because the poets work so hard on the words to express the thought.

[11:26](#) **SB:** A great deal of significance with each and every word in something like poetry.

[11:29](#) **GN:** I'll have to be very careful now as I word these questions as we move on. In those writing experiences from college now. When you went to work when you volunteered, were you doing writing then?

[11:43](#) **SB:** Yes, I actually. Well, I worked a couple of summers. My then-boyfriend, now-husband, was managing a summer theatre up in Vermont. Between my [...] I guess junior and senior year [...] after I graduated and I did P.R. and publicity, so you know I was writing there. I think that writing just has always been something that's been an integral part of what I've done. I'm trying to think my [...] very first job. I was very fortunate because of some volunteer work I've done with the public relations office at Wells College. I was hired as the assistant director of public relations immediately after graduation. So I graduated, went home for two weeks, and tried to drive back to campus in the middle of what was Hurricane Agnes which moved up the East Coast Right after I graduated from college. So I worked in public relations, and it was basically a two-person shop with a secretary and a student assistant. And I did most of the writing, and my boss did a lot of the publication work, the layout, and the design.

[13:00](#) **GN:** That serves well now. I can understand better now the next transition. You know, coming on board at Marist. Well, tell me, what did you envision in coming to Marist? What were you going to do?

[13:15](#) **SB:** Well, I worked at Wells, and then I worked at Hobart & William Smith Colleges again. Starting to follow my husband, his career. He was hired by Hobart & William Smith. And I worked as the assistant to the Provost, and I did faculty newsletter and did grants information and grant work with the faculty. And I also spent a year in Delaware again with him. He was hired to teach at the University of Delaware. As the associate news editor for the university P.R. Office. So, I have this writing background, and I had a portfolio, and as I had mentioned alluded to earlier, [...] we had moved back to my hometown of Millbrook in the early 80s. And I was only working part-time just prior to Marist. I was doing public relations and programming for Adrian's Library. My father had a heart attack and massive stroke, and I was still very much involved in assisting with medical care and caretaking [...] And so I had purposely light-loaded a schedule so that I could kind of hold things together for the family. And that's when Dennis was looking for someone with a strong writing background for a couple of projects. And because Marilyn knowing me and I was actually part of my volunteer work at the Cancer Society was doing communications and PR. So, I was initially hired; I believe the title was special assistant to the President. There was an existing executive assistant to the President, Tony Cerna. Whom you know went on to become President at Sacred Heart University, and there were two projects primarily. One was the President had just been asked to chair a brand-new commission set up by the State Education Department called the Hudson Valley Commission on Excellence in Education. And you may remember a bit because a certain member of the staff here named Liz Nolan was very involved in that and so the President needed somebody who could coordinate the work, organize some conferences. It covered eight counties. And it brought together school superintendents, teachers, college educators, business leaders, and teacher unions, all of those who had a role to play in strengthening both the quantity and quality of teachers in our region. That was [...] it was '83-84, and there was a real concern about the first huge wave of the Baby-Boomer generation retiring. And how we were going to come up with teachers. So that was one task. The other was that the President had been working off and on and without having somebody who can devote attention to it, not making a lot of progress on a book that he wanted to write about evaluating fundraising programs. As you know, he came to Marist

with a very strong fundraising background and certainly has demonstrated that acumen during his years here. So, writing, research, editing that became a major focus when I initially came here. Those were the tasks I was hired to do, and I was able at an interview with him to produce a number of examples, everything from news stories and future articles that I'd written as a reporter to major studies that I did when I was working at Hobart & William Smith Colleges.

[16:56](#) **GN:** Liz mentioned that conference. Do you remember some of the details? When was it? You organized the whole thing, if I understand.

[17:02](#) **SB:** We did two conferences, and then I produced conference proceedings. We taped it and produced.

[17:10](#) **GN:** This is '84.

[17:12](#) **SB:** One was '84, and one was '85, as I recall, and I do in my files if she doesn't have any or if the college doesn't have copies. I do have, I believe, a copy of the proceedings from both of those. I think what we've one of the most interesting things we did because I was coming at this, I wasn't particularly experienced as a conference organizer, nor had I been a K-12 educator. But I set up roundtables and very purposely made sure that there was nobody from the same district and nobody who was from the same professional slot at the table. So we really had cross-fertilization of ideas. So that an IBM business leader and a school superintendent from Ulster County and a teacher from Westchester County, and a college education professor from Orange County might all be at the same table. And so some of the potentially natural adversary [...]

[18:15](#) **GN:** Off the top, how big was this conference, would you say? Were there 100 people there?

[18:19](#) **SB:** Oh easily, easily, I'm going to guess we probably had 12-15 tables. Of 10 or so at a table. But both of them, I think, were very well-received. There was a great appreciation that Marist and particularly the President of Marist, was willing to take the lead on this. So as the President was often fond of saying, "There are show horses, and there are work horses."

[18:50](#) **GN:** Well, this was a good foundation really for what developed then in the Hudson Valley.

[18:54](#) **SB:** Absolutely. And I think that it was there are still some contacts that I think we made back then that have been useful to the college even to this day.

[19:09](#) **GN:** This question, then I just want to move on because we have miles to go here and not much time. In a sense, I would say it looks like the work is the same, but it changed. And how would you flush that out?

[19:25](#) **SB:** Well, initially, as I said, there wasn't actually positions aligned. And so I came on, what was called the special assistant line. The following year I think, was when Tony Cernera moved into the College Advancement V.P. Position, and that enabled the President to put me permanently into the executive assistant to the President line. And I think that over the years, the job evolved. The research and the writing were always a primary focus from the very first day in November of 1983 until you know '05. But as I grew into the job and as I learned more about the college and as people came and went. And my tenure continued; I think that the job really grew and evolved quite a bit. There were a lot of special projects that I became involved in. The role eventually [...] A few years before I left Marist, the title was changed to a senior advisor to the President. There'd been some sort of title movement with the title executive assistant being more support staff. And I think that really sort of spoke to the role that I played increasingly in being able to provide advice, assistance, and research and counsel behind the scenes without any portfolio.

[21:12](#) **GN:** Let's talk just to define that research a bit. How would you say that was done? This is just computerized, or is it?

[21:21](#) **SB:** It would be. Well, I worked on a lot of speeches over the years. One of the first things that I worked on with him in terms of speechwriting was the PCs in Higher Education. Let's go back to 1984-85. PCs are really just starting to come on the scene. If you're really lucky, you got an XT. So Ron Rosen, who was then part of the computer center here, was a very brilliant computer scientist, and his wife, Marilyn, worked on the speech with us. So we had to try to craft a speech that could be given to an IBM audience or a business audience that talked about how the PC could be used in higher education. And so really I think my role [...] That's just one example, but the topics that he might cover would run the gamut. And it might be about F.D.R. and Four Freedoms if he was asked to introduce one of the award medalists. And so the library where we sit at this moment was a vital resource. Again let's remember, we're

talking before Google was anything other than a silly word, a three-year-old might say. And no Internet. And so you know it was the old fashion.

[22:55](#) GN: Again, it's so current. You were doing things then and moving ahead. The Roosevelt Library and the contact with that whole institution.

[23:03](#) SB: The first IBM joint study was had just been announced about the time I came here. And I actually became quite involved in [...] The initial one was a \$16 million five-year joint study. The major focus of that was well obviously upgrading the network here and the mainframe. But a major focus was the beginnings of that whole FDR-IBM-Marist partnership to create what is now just an incredible resource. The digital library.

[23:41](#) GN: The backdrop of your whole experience has a certain sense of growth and development. And I was wondering where you saw that as the focus to say something?

[23:54](#) SB: Sure. I, actually in contemplating our interview today [...] I pulled out of my files the little set of remarks I gave it Founder's Day when I was honored for my 20-year mark. This was in 1983, I believe. And I had pulled out some stats, doing my research, of course. In late 1983, Marist had about 250 students total. And I believe again, someone can verify the stats of today better than I can at this moment in time, but I think we're around 5,000 now.

[24:29](#) GN: I wouldn't be surprised.

[24:30](#) SB: And 90 faculty, tuition was \$4,900. The budget was \$25 million. And the Marist fund had just broken the \$200,000 mark. The campus, of course, was totally different. The old gym had just been converted to Marian. Two trailers which, of course, we euphemistically called modular buildings, sat in the parking lot of Donnelly Hall. And I think things like career services and the co-op was there. The only buildings north of Waterworks Road were Benoit and Gregory. Which, of course, just disappeared this past year. And the soon-to-be-opened student townhouses that we now call Foy Townhouses were just being built. So I guess in every aspect that you can envision and measure an academic institution, Marist went through an absolutely phenomenal change. I'm sure in our relatively short history, even a hundred years from now, someone looking back at Marist will look at the Dennis Murray years as years that were absolutely, I mean, there was never, believe me, I can attest to this, there was never a dull moment. Because his vision for moving this institution forward has never wavered for a second in all these years.

[26:08](#) GN: Just take it. Even the McCann Center, which was up, has been added to with the whole new exercise complex.

[26:15](#) SB: And it's about to be again.

[26:17](#) GN: And it's about to be again.

[26:19](#) SB: But if you look, I mean one of the most visible changes is clearly the campus. Nothing was across the street, of course, across Route 9. The campus was clearly visible, but if you look at you know the number and the quality of the students, of the faculty, of the academic reputation of the programs here, the public perception about the college, and the Board of Trustees. I, from the very beginning, was privileged to be at board meetings and to work with the Trustee Advancement Committee. Just the type of board members, their ability to support the college, both through connections and through financial means, has grown tremendously.

[27:11](#) GN: Just an accident, a by long of what you're saying, I just interviewed Gerry Dahowski the other day; who was the last Board member that I think that Foy appointed? And now he feels he is getting at the end of his term here more than thirty years later.

[27:33](#) SB: I mean, the college is blessed with longevity in the right places. Some of the other things that I think I have taken away and something that has been so incredibly useful to me. I feel sort of like I earned a Ph D. in Senior Administration over the term of my work here. But the sophistication with which the college does its planning and all types of planning. Not just the annual operating planning, the financial planning, strategic planning, master plan, and the campus planning. It's just been increasingly more and more sophisticated. I think that's certainly a tribute to Dennis Murray. the team he's put together. The trustees who have driven a lot of the challenges that we need to rise to the next level, and it really has enabled this institution to grow and prosper during times when a lot of other schools, including my own alma mater, have been really challenged.

[28:47](#) **GN:** Speaking about the planning, Middle States comes to mind. I mean, that's the academic aspect.

[28:52](#) **SB:** How did I forget the Middle States. Major projects that I was either be on the committee or the President's liaison. Numerous Middle States reports and visits. Numerous five-year strategic plans.

[29:08](#) **GN:** They go on all the time, right. You just finished one and start the preparation for the next one.

[29:12](#) **SB:** And of course, as the years went on, some things became sort of more routine for me. The welcome-back memos which got longer and longer and longer, and they're even longer now, I think. And you know, newsletters to the trustees before each of their full board meetings three times a year. Writing, as I said, writing just was a pervasive theme throughout.

[29:40](#) **GN:** Two questions: one opposite of the other. Was there any part of this that was more stressful than another? In other words, was there angst about dealing with some issues? Must have been over twenty years.

[29:57](#) **SB:** I think that you're talking to someone who's a Type-A personality. So I can find angst probably in any situation. But I think that there were a number of challenges. One was that; the bar was always very high as it should be. So the expectation was that research would be accurate, writing would be perfect, everything would be on time. And as a one-person shop, I was supported by a very able executive secretary, but as a one-person office, essentially, if multiple deadlines would happen at the same time, no matter how well you do your planning and try to lay out what's going to happen [...]

[30:46](#) **GN:** You stay late some nights.

[30:48](#) **SB:** Most nights. But there were always things that would come up at the last minute. A trustee would need something, or there would be a crisis. I think that part of my role was to sort of be the go-to person. Because my only role was to support the work of the President. And so I was on call at any moment in time if something came up. Time management was always an issue, and it wasn't that it was something I was not adept at. It was that I really could only anticipate so much of what might come down the pike. So I think it was juggling an ever-increasing workload and, of course, as time went on when you work side-by-side with someone for so many years. It got to the point where he could start a sentence, and I could finish it. I was the logical person to turn to, even if there might have been someone else who should have been doing a portion of this project. And, of course, that may have, on the one hand, been burdensome. On the other hand, I take it as a tribute to the acceptance of the quality of my work that he had. And I think that that's one of the reasons that we worked so well together for over twenty years.

[32:27](#) **GN:** You talked about the bar. It constantly went up. Wasn't there more to do? It seemed as if the college grew and developed.

[32:37](#) **SB:** Absolutely, absolutely. I think that. And of course, You know the old saying that 'if you want something to get done, ask a busy person.' But that was always a challenge. And I think over the years that I try to prioritize the work, but there were [...]. That's probably the most challenging.

[33:03](#) **GN:** To talk about the other side of the coin. Other specific accomplishments you take great joy for instance?

[33:11](#) **SB:** Yes, it's certainly. Anytime I had the opportunity to be out in the community representing the President and the college with the great reputation - the institution and the President have, was a real pleasure. And I've always enjoyed development and public relations work and done well at it. So I always enjoyed that part. But I think that there were special projects that came along that I really enjoyed, and I think it gave me a bit of a break from the more, you know, sort of routine research and writing. One of the things I did that was a great pleasure was to manage the McCann Foundation's Computer Grant Program. And I did that for about twenty years. And over that time, somewhere in my old office files, there are stats. But dozens and dozens and dozens of not-for-profits and private, parochial schools here in Dutchess County were the beneficiaries. And Marist helped to implement these grants because Mr. Gartland knew early on that he was not a computer pro, and it was easy to make mistakes in not matching tasks with technology. So the college was asked to be involved, and because of the great importance that Mr. Gartland and the McCann Foundation had for the college, the President wanted it handled out of his office. So that was a project that I became involved in, and it was, you know, they were not huge amounts of money for the most part. But those grants, again, remember this was early on when accessing computer technology was a real challenge for the not-for-profits and the private schools. And then we come to Longview Park. Do you want to



come to Longview yet?

[34:58](#) **GN:** It's on my next page. Before we leave, just one other thing. Was there any surprise grant that we received that came out of the blue from your office? In other words, was there somebody who like, for instance, the stadium, Pepsi Chairperson, or the Hancock donation or...? Was there some surprise? I mean, some of these had naturally been worked on, but I was wondering if you would kind of just open a letter and say, "Oh, look at this."

[35:36](#) **SB:** You know I'm not recalling. Most of the funds that came to this college that were notable and significant were the result of many years of careful cultivation. Primarily by the President and worked behind the scenes by Advancement and sometimes by myself in terms of research and drafting case statements for things.

[36:18](#) **GN:** But on this point, the former President Foy has mentioned, you have to have people involved in the institution and committed to it before they see the significance of what they're doing. So this doesn't happen. As for any instances, Mr. Rich gives an example I have distance familiarity with, but I know the property very well.

[36:43](#) **SB:** And that was a relationship that was cultivated over many years. Of course, Dennis also wrote a second book on fundraising called "The Guaranteed Fundraising System," that I assisted in doing research and editing on. He was also asked to do National Conferences for the Council for Advancement and Support of Education which I assisted with as well. Probably did fifteen or twenty of those over about a ten-year period. He talks a lot about the process of fundraising that it's not a one-time active asking for a gift, But it's a process that begins with identifying a prospect and understanding what might interest them, and figuring out a way to introduce them to your organization and then building that relationship that deepening sense of what we're all about in appreciating what we do and then getting them involved. So it's a multi-level process, and it's something that he and this institution have been very, very successful at.

[37:57](#) **GN:** Okay, back to what you just hinted at, and I think this is one of the jewels in your crown: the Longview Park Project. In brief, what is the genesis of this? How did it all happen? From the beginning.

[38:10](#) **SB:** We have to go quite ways back, actually, and I'm not sure I can hit every single benchmark by date, but I can certainly give you an overview of this project.

[38:23](#) **GN:** Henry Hudson sailed at this river.

[38:24](#) **SB:** It seems like it was almost that long ago that when we started. Back in 1996, I believe it was. The state passed the Clean Water, Clean Air Bond Act and was going to make funds available to local governments. You know county governments as well as not-for-profits to do projects that would promote clean water and clean air, including recreational projects. And especially things that would focus on bringing people back to the river. Never one to miss an opportunity, the President put together a little task force. And we started exploring what we might do with our waterfront, which back then was a rather forlorn, kind of neglected area. No real site improvements. Cornell Boathouse was then being used and rather overused by a number of high school rowing clubs. The Marist Boathouse, of course, was the focus of the men's and women's crew team, but there wasn't a lot more happening there. The waterfront was in pretty rough shape. So we worked. A team was put together. And we had the architects of Liscum McCormack and van Voorhis and the College's engineering firm, Rhode, Soyka, & Andrews, work with us, and we put together a grant application. I know we are not visual. But I am showing Gus a very large, maybe, about three-inch-thick binder, which represents that initial grant application for what we decided to call Longview Park. Now the site had many, many deficiencies. And what we envisioned was bringing back the glory days of rowing. And because of that rich tradition which was another major research project for me, I knew very little about it when I started working on Longview Park. We really had a compelling story to tell because we knew that this would involve a lot of government relations work and a lot of interaction with very highly placed elected officials. Once again, the President wanted a presence, the President's office, mainly myself, to be involved in to make sure that you know we were coordinating all of these outreach and cultivation activities. And over the course of working on developing the proposal and then trying to market our concept to the powers that be, we had visits from then-Governor Pataki, then-Congresswoman Sue Kelly, the then-Commissioner of the DEC John Cahill, the park's commissioner at the time, Bernedict Castro (?), the heads of Greenway; there are two Greenway organizations, the former Secretary of State of New York, Sandy Treadwell as well as Senators Saland and county executive, Steinhaus, who were both then still in office and still today. And so we really did a lot of presentations and talked about our visions.

[42:02](#) **GN:** Were these folks invited to the campus, to the site?

[42:04](#) **SB:** They came. Yes, we invited them to the campus. We had materials that our architects and wonderful display boards that our architects put together. The President and I did a lot of dog-and-pony shows. We still haven't decided who the dog and who the pony was. But we made a lot of presentations, and we talked about the vision of a waterfront park, A public-private partnership because A. we were going to open it to the public even if we didn't want to, we would have had to because these are public dollars we were asking for and B. a part of our waterfront park site is owned by the City and Town of Poughkeepsie jointly. That's where the water treatment plant is. And so it was a very complex project from day one because you had these two municipalities owning one piece of the land and the college owning the other, easement to get under the railroad tracks from. CSX, the railroad company. A private college road, waterworks road to come down, so there were a lot of legal issues, there were a lot of environmental issues. And there were a lot of fundraising issues and a lot of design and planning issues. And so I really wound up coordinating all of that work. We submitted our first application to three state agencies.

[43:36](#) **GN:** That's in Albany; now we're going to New York State Authorities.

[43:41](#) **SB:** And the Federal. We were looking for federal money. We submitted applications to numerous sources and were funded for all of them. We, over the years, raised about three million dollars. And the college committed right upfront a million dollars. There's been no attempt to estimate the staff time that certainly myself but our Physical Plant Director, a number of others, The Executive Vice President, and President. There's been a tremendous amount of time put in, but we got grants from Greenway, Hudson River Valley Greenway. The New York State Office of Parks for Recreation and Historic Preservation. The New York Department of State which has a Division of Coastal Resources and Waterfront Revitalization. From the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Those were all of the state-level grants. At the federal level, we were extremely fortunate to get to very substantial member items approved by then-Congresswoman Sue Kelly. One was for through the D.O.T: to do improvements to the tunnel and the light that now is at the tunnel and the parking lot, so it was sort of road and sidewalk work. And the other was for bulkhead restoration. And that is another whole story. The bulkhead restoration project was coming out of the Army Corps of Engineers' budget. And instead of that grant coming to us or to a sponsor. If it needed a municipal sponsor, the county was going to be our sponsor. That grant wound up going to the New York District Office of the Army Corps of Engineers. So it became a Corps project rather than a college project. We were permitted through the Corps. We had to have three different permits to do the work we wanted to do. Once it became an Army Corps project, all of the design and engineering that had been done, that had been approved by the Core had to be completely redone because if it's a, and I'm quoting here, "a Corps project." It has to meet a whole lot of different standards. So we wound up being delayed two or three years because of that. So it was one of those should we look a gift horse in the mouth, maybe. But it was substantial. It was between \$650 and 700,0000; on the other hand, by the time we got done, it cost a lot more.

[46:31](#) **GN:** What are the dimensions of it? How long an area is involved?

[46:35](#) **SB:** It covers about six acres, and about four of those acres are Marist property, where the two boathouses are, in the scenic overlook area. And the other two acres is where the first parking lot and the pump station are. That's the pump station that brings the water in from the Hudson to then pump it up into the treatment plant. But the work was extensive. Believe it or not, there was a septic field in the municipal sewer between the two boathouses. So the septic field had to be taken out. We had to dig tunnels under the railroad tracks through an amazing amount of rock to get up to the main campus, like near the student center, to be able to hook up to the municipal sewer system. We ran new water lines down there. That was the DEC Grant. The bulkhead was completely restored, and we put two new floating docks in. We built a little fixed fishing [boring?] pier that one can fish from, but it also can bring in small boats. We did from Day 1 (to) make sure this was going to be a non-motorized area because we wanted to, first and foremost, protect the young people who row down there, both the high school and the college kids. But we also felt that in keeping with Clean Water Clean Air that it should be.

[48:07](#) **GN:** Engine-free?

[48:08](#) **SB:** Yes, so a non-motorized zone. And I think that we did not want jet skis. In a way, the tunnel, which as anyone who knows our campus knows, that it's a pretty narrow sort of one-lane road. It was both a blessing and a curse; it was a curse because we had a lot of resistance initially from emergency services because of their concern of more development on the riverfront in their inability to get fire trucks or know large vehicles down there. And we worked that out and developed some good cooperative arrangements with

Fairview Fire District on that. But it also meant that people couldn't tow big boats down and try to launch motorboats because it's just too small a tunnel. We had other sources. We had, I mentioned, the state money, and I mentioned the federal money. Dutchess County gave us a very generous grant through the IDA, the Industrial Development Agency. We got a very substantial grant from them, and we got a private foundation grant. Actually, two of them were from the Hudson River Improvement Fund, which helped to pay for one of the floating docks. There was really broad support at all levels of local government. The Town of Poughkeepsie; they served as our sponsor for a number of grants. Some of these grants could only be awarded to a municipality. And so, they were a willing partner. They did not actually put cash in, but both the city and the town were partners because of the ownership of the land. The town served as our sort of sponsor or passthrough agency on a number of grant applications.

[49:53](#) GN: What's the timeline? Now that you look back, you said about '95-'96.

[49:58](#) SB: We started; I believe it was February of '97 that the first meeting was held to discuss the concept of perhaps trying to apply for money and what would we do down at the waterfront. We submitted our first set of grants in the Fall of '97. And I believe the first one was awarded in the spring of '98. Several were awarded in '98. I know that we submitted another one in 2004. (In 2004) we got another 75 or 100,000 dollars grant, so the money came in over a multiple-year period. The work was really halted for, well, not so much halted but not started because the bulkhead was the foundation of the project. You wouldn't build your first or second floor of your house till your foundation has been built. The challenges that the Army Corps presented us with really did slow us up for two or three years.

[51:06](#) GN: Where is that office?

[51:08](#) SB: The Army Corps New York district office is down not far from City Hall. In fact, we were working with the staff there when 9/11 happened. And I know that, within a few days of 9/11, I made an effort to try to reach out and find out what had happened to those folks. It was a pretty harrowing story. They were not too far away, and the staffer that we worked with was told as his co-workers were to just go north, and he walked all the way to the Bronx. It's pretty scary.

[51:54](#) GN: The revisions on it, in terms of that, did it change as it developed? Were both houses originally in the concept? Were you going to do both the Marist [...]?

[52:10](#) SB: Actually, interestingly, neither boathouse was part of the Longview Park design concept. For one very basic reason. These were mostly public dollars, and anywhere we were investing these dollars, we had to make it available to the public. And these are really private college buildings, and we've been very fortunate that the renovation of the Cornell Boathouse actually happened after I left Marist and was not part of the original Longview Park budgeted. But it was a centerpiece of the appeal and basically the pitch we were making of we have this glorious era on the Hudson River from 1895 to 1949. Poughkeepsie was the rowing capital of the world. And people came from all over the country, and crews came from all over the country, and 50,000 plus people would line the shores of the river right here and watch these races, and these beautiful boathouses were built, and we had the pictures of Boathouse Row which was called Regatta Row for the show-and-tell part of our presentation. And here today, the only remaining relic of that great historic era is the Cornell Boathouse. It would be opened, the outside the exteriors there. Interestingly, I am still working on Longview Park even as we speak. I was able to secure a grant through the Town of Poughkeepsie's sponsorship: another state grant to do interpretive signage. And we're going to be installing three signs like the ones you would see if you were at a state or national park. They're called low profile signs, and one will be about Henry Hudson passing right by this site on September 15th, 1609.

[54:18](#) GN: They've got it down to the day.

[54:20](#) SB: We've got one of the crew members' journals talking about what happened that day—quite a fascinating story. There will be one about the Poughkeepsie Waterfront in the mid-1800s and the phenomenal teeming industrial port that Poughkeepsie was and Poughkeepsie Ironworks, and the Vassar brewery and the whaling docks just south of the campus here. And the third one will be about the Poughkeepsie Regatta, and we've got some wonderful images in the archive here in the Marist Library.

[54:50](#) GN: I'd like to save the Poughkeepsie Regatta for another interview along with the historic. Just a few comments about you left Marist in '05, and you've been retired ever since doing nothing.

[55:01](#) SB: Actually, I have not been retired. I actually left Marist [...]. I was approached with a very interesting opportunity to set up

the development program at the Institute for Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, which is almost across the street from where I live and where I grew up. It's now, of course, called the Cary Institute. It's a research institute that has close ties with Marist College, actually. And so, with some regret, but with the promise of an interesting new opportunity and the blessing of my now-former boss, the President of Marist, I did make that move. It turned out that I only stayed there a year, the founding President decided to retire, and the institution was just going through a lot of transition, which made it very difficult to do fundraising. And I did something like been contemplating for some time, and it really grew out of my Marist Longview Park experience. I have set up my own grant-writing consulting business. And in fact, my first client before I ever got a business card printed was the Town of Poughkeepsie. I had literally been writing grants with the town's name on behalf of Marist for many years. And they knew I could write a grant and bring some money. And so I have been doing that ever since. Retirement [...] I must say the pace is a little bit different. I have a little bit more control over my time which as I contemplate a few years off. Retirement is a nice control to have. It's been it's really been a joy to be able to be back working with Marist again. As I told the President at a meeting just yesterday, I think this is the project that keeps on going. Like the gift that keeps on giving. Well, this is the project that keeps on going, and it's just been a wonderful experience, and I think that if a hundred years from now somebody looks back at Longview Park and says, "Well, that was a great idea." I will certainly be happy about that.

[57:18](#) **GN:** There's one little piece about it. There's a building down there or a shed. What would you call it [...] A shelter? Atop of the rock area?.

[57:33](#) **SB:** In our original design concept, I can show you in the design report we put together. Originally that knoll and the views from that knoll which we decided we would call the scenic overlook. That is such a spectacular vantage point. If you stand there, it's really what suggested the name of the park, Longview, because you're right in the middle of a very long open stretch of river, and sailors call those reaches. As the Dutch came up, in fact, Henry Hudson called it the Lange Rack or the long reach. And it was a very hospitable, open area. From a viewshed standpoint, it affords these great views to see the Catskills to the north, and you could see way down. You know, almost to the Hudson Highlands to the south. And so, we always envisioned that we would want to create. Again, this is the architects', both the physical architects and the landscape architects. We always envisioned we would have some kind of an iconic small structure. What it would look like, we really didn't know. We have a design concept in our regional application that is a bit different. It looks a little bit more like a little lighthouse kind of thing. But the architect that was brought on Jay Hibbs, to design that. I believe he's won some awards with it from the local or state chapter of the American Institute of Architects. But what we wanted to try to do was to create a little pavilion that would allow people to stand up there. At one point, we thought there might be some signage in it. But it provides a little gathering area, a seating area where people can just take in this incredible view. And you can turn around, of course, look up and see the main campus. When we started, of course, the library wasn't there, the Hancock Center, of course, wasn't there, and The addition on the Student Center.

[57:41](#) **GN:** The Walkway over the Hudson wasn't in place yet.

[57:43](#) **SB:** So, and of course, now with the walkway, it's really, it's another whole dimension. I really think what happened with that Clean Water Clean Air Bond act, I am not a student of political history, but I have a feeling that that change in public policy where monies became available to do things that would encourage the recreational use of the river. And the growth of organizations like Greenway, which was founded in, I believe, 1991. And so now we're what five or six years later, the bond act has passed. But the public policy that made those funds available really spurred a lot of this kind of activity. So that today, we have... I don't think anywhere quite as special as Longview Park, but there are a number of little pocket parks and small waterfront launch areas that people are able to use.

[1:00:47](#) **GN:** Well, we've just about gone about an hour now, Susan. So I want to thank you, and I wouldn't say this is the end. But it's the end of Part One. We will have to get you again soon for the historic sites, historic buildings on Marist, and more on the Poughkeepsie Regatta, another historical event. Thank you very much.

[1:01:07](#) **SB:** Thank you, Gus.