

Interview with Nick Larmorte

NL: Well, I'll try to give you some kind of a chronological, that's the only way I can be organized in doing this. I'll probably still be all over the map.

FV: That's all right.

NL: My name is Nick Lamorte. I'm the CSEA president for Long Island. I'm very happy to have this position, and to be elected to it. My story. Everyone has a story. My story starts back after high school when I needed a job to work my way through college. At first I thought I was going to get a scholarship to be a football player for Howdy Meyers at Hofstra University at Hempstead, Long Island. I did have an opportunity to maybe go away to Cortland, Cornell, Syracuse, but I chose to stay home. I was all of eighteen years old. And, of course, I thought I was in love with a high school gal and Hofstra seemed the best for me. So I get my head beat in at summer camp. There were some really big guys from Ohio and Pennsylvania and I knew then "This is not going to work out too well." So, being a fairly popular guy in high school and being a phys ed person, I went back to the high school and I asked the head custodian, his name was Jay Farrell who is since deceased, if there were any jobs. They had put a big extension on the school, the high school, and he said "Yeah, we need cleaners." People who could sweep the floors, clean the toilets, wash off the desktops, clean the stairwells, things of that nature. I says "Well, hey, listen, I'm available, I'm going to school full time during the day." He says "Well, you work four hours at night and when you get done working, if you get done quickly, you can study." So I said "Boy, this is a great job." So, I get the job and in the springtime all the Lacrosse players that were then high school students, they went out to play Lacrosse and so a full-time job opened up. So, good old Nick Lamorte, still needing money to pay his college tuition said "Hey, listen, is there an opportunity for me to take the job full time?" So they said "Yes and by the way we'll ask that you be appointed." I said "Appointed. What is that?" And he says "Well, we're going to actually give you the job and along with the job comes benefits." I says "I'm not going to be here more than a few months. I don't need benefits or any of that kind of stuff. I'm just going to work my way through college." So, the summer goes by, the summer of 1970, and lo and behold I have an opportunity once again to get appointed. Now it's November of 1970. So they said "OK. Fill out the application. It's going to be a formal thing. The Board of Education appoints you and blah, blah, blah." Well, there seemed to be some kind of a problem with my x-ray that I had gotten from college. So this delayed my appointment until February of 1971. OK? Now, I couldn't become a union member because we didn't have what we would call the part-timers or the per diem employees, of which I was. So I said OK. I get appointed in February of '71 and I immediately joined the union, where I'd at least have dues taken out. I really didn't know what the union was or what it was about. But I soon find out, come the summer of 1971. Jimmy Farrell comes out and he says "OK, guys, we're going to lay out the vacation schedule." OK. So we all stand around and as a group of night workers there must have been anywhere from twelve to fifteen of us, predominantly male and predominantly young, college, older high school kids. And he says "Bob, you get three weeks. Kenny, you get three weeks. Nick, you get two weeks. Freddie, you get three weeks. Harry, you get three weeks." I go, "Whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. Time out. Go back to Nick, Mr. Farrell?" He says "Yeah, what's the matter, you get two weeks." o I says "Well, how come Kenny, and Bob, and Freddie, how come they get three weeks?" "Well, they get three weeks because the union negotiated an agreement that anyone appointed November of 1970 and before gets three weeks vacation, grandfathered in. Anybody appointed November '70 and after gets two weeks." But he didn't give me any explanation after that as to

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what that one week meant. You know, now that I'm a region president, I know that everything has a money value to it. So at that point, being nineteen years old all I knew is I got screwed out of a week's vacation. So I'm gonna track down the people in this union and I'm gonna find out what it's all about and how do I get my week back? It should be no problem. My x-ray was what caused the problem, not getting appointed in 1970. They just got to back it up a couple of months, I get my three weeks, they never hear from me again. OK. I go to the union meeting and, unfortunately, how I understand some of the members today, they felt that they get a runaround. So I felt I got a runaround at that point too. I got a lot of double talk, back talk, you're a young guy, I've been here twenty years. And all that stuff. So the next time we go to the next meeting, which is the next month, I brought the whole group with me, all of the guys that, although they had their three weeks' vacation, I guess I just had a way about me that persuaded them to help me out and "Let's all stick together" and "If this is what this union stuff is supposed to be all about, a group of people sticking together to make it better for everybody, let's all show up and see what happens." So we show up and this time it was our turn. And we didn't want to hear any of the double talk, any of the back talk, any of the side talk or any of the baloney that we were given, or what we felt we were being given. Just nineteen years old, just about all of us. And I'm speaking to guys my age now. Unfortunately, and I do say it's unfortunate, they all resigned. They didn't want anything to do with all these young bucks that were coming up through the system and they don't have to take anybody else's crap. They do this job for nothing. It was all the stuff that I say to people now, OK? So, we had to now form a union, another group of folks that were going to step up and get involved. And I had no idea, no idea what this whole union business was all about. I did finally realize that you have an opportunity to speak for a group of people and not just twelve or fifteen and not only just because of a vacation issue. But you could go to your employer and try to make life on he job better for a lot of people. And I happened to like that. So, all right, I'm still working and I'm still going to collect. At that point, I was working full time so I'm going to college part time, which meant that my college was going to stretch out a little bit. So instead of getting done in four years, I wound up getting done in seven years. But, you know, I still did it. And along the way to get more money, you take promotional examinations. So I was not the president of the unit, that's what we would call Farmingdale unit, but I was the salary person that gathered up all the negotiation material. I liked doing that. I had to compare what the other surrounding school districts were making, what their benefits were, the length of contracts, percentages, and I thought that was pretty neat. I thought that was pretty cool. And what that did was, it gave me exposure to other people, other CSEA union people in what they called a local. I had no clue what a local was. So I meet three gentlemen and their names were Ed Parotte, Frank Fasano, and I did meet Clark Champney and another gentleman named John McPartland. Now this is back in 1971, I'm still back there. Ed Parotte I find to be the head custodian of Plain Edge High School. No at this point I'm now, from a cleaner, I had become a custodian. OK? And a custodian had a little bit more benefits and of course, I was interested not in the benefits as working benefits, but as in the money. Show me the money. So I go on to start visiting Ed Parotte at High School to pick his brain because he was the president of the whole entire local. And whatever it was between us, we had great chemistry and he liked me and he said "Listen, I want you to start coming to the meetings of the local. They're held at the Bounty Inn down at Peninsula Boulevard in Hewlett, which was to me the other end of Nassau County because I lived up in Farmingdale in North Massapequa. So every few Saturdays we would make the journey and, of course, I would try to bring a few people with me to go

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to the Bounty Inn and hear what this gentleman, Ed Parotte, had to say. His first vice president, his name was Frank Fasano, as I said. Frank was also the president of the Levittown School District unit and Clark Champney was his right-hand man who did a lot of the political things and actually helped publish a paper called the Long Island Review, which was just about school districts and school district issues for Nassau County and then eventually Suffolk County. And then at that point in time where I got to meet the other local, which we call our sister local or brother local, that would be Suffolk educational local 870. The gentleman who was the president then was a guy named Walter Weeks and Walter was a very flamboyant type of guy. First of all, he was a tall man, he was a grounds man, I remember, silver-gray-white hair. But he always wore these crazy red plaid trousers and you always knew Walter when you went to a meeting or something. He had a torso that was huge and he had these crazy long legs inside these beautiful Scottish patterned pants; red and green and yellow and all these bright colors. So that was Walter; he was a character. So getting back to the local issue, I start going to the meetings and I liked being able to meet all these different union people who had a lot of different things in common. One of the characters that I ran across was from Syosset School District and it would be terrible if I didn't mention his name; his name was Ben Gummon. Well, Ben Gummon was a very fiery-type of guy and he had a glass eye. And that leads to another story that I'm going to tell along the way. But Ben was at odds with Ed and Frank, the two leaders of the local. Ben, at one time, was a vice president underneath their direction but for whatever reason, they were at odds over different missions of where we thought the local should go at that point. And what they did was, they wanted to divide the county up into four quadrants for bargaining purposes. And what they wanted to do and I thought was a fantastic idea, but you also have to realize the politics of individual school districts. So what they did was, they divided the Nassau County map up into four quadrants and they were going to go out and they were going to negotiate for all the school districts in the different quadrants the same percentage and the same benefits for that quadrant. Now, of course, the grander picture was to try to tie all four quadrants together into one kind of a model contract but it just never materialize because who the hell was this union, CSEA Nassau Educational Local 865 to tell the custodians or the people in Massapequa that they should make the same type of money as the people in Manhasset. Or maybe the same or different than the people that maybe live in Roosevelt. Now we all realized that these are all different economic areas and the school boards and school districts run their own show and they don't have to listen to these grandiose ideas that might border on socialism or maybe even communism. So, it was an interesting concept. I don't really know where Ben stood in that but coming from Syosset, I would like to think he was very independent and he would say "Hey look you guys, you're full of malarkey and we're doing it this way" and whatever. So Ben became an adversary, basically. But the one thing that was good for me, Nick Lamorte, is that he always respected me and he did like me. So anytime there was a fray between Frank and Ed and Ben, I was kind of like the peacemaker and I would try to explain different points of view that each could try to at least make the peace so we could go on with the business of the local. And I have some very fond memories of that whole situation and trying to bring people together. So, OK. Eventually I do become the unit president for Farmingdale. Every negotiation, which was about every three or four years, I would always bring up the third week of vacation. I'm coming back to that 'cause I still haven't gotten that. So, in Farmingdale in the contract, I remember sitting at a negotiation table, it was at the East Junior High and Mike Aiello, God rest his soul, was our labor relations specialist, at that time I think they just called them field reps and he was also the collective bargaining

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specialist, which at that point he just negotiated the contract. So, we're sitting down there together and I got the committee behind me and I really don't remember who was on that committee. But the school board comes back in and they look me in the eye and they say "Nick, we're going to give you that third week of vacation. We're not going to give it to you starting from when you first started the job. You're going to continue to get two weeks vacation but after the completion of five years we're going to let them have three weeks vacation and then you go on from there. " So, I almost fell off the chair. Mike looked at me like "Well, you finally got it" and then I said "Yes I finally got it but they knew that my anniversary, my tenth-year anniversary was just last month." And when you reach ten years, you get four weeks vacation. But I took the deal anyway and I never got that third week of vacation back for myself but I got it back for everybody and even now that it still works for Farmingdale School District in Local 865. So to me that was still a win but it took me ten years to get it. So that's my point. I guess really the point is: Never give up and stick to your guns. So that was just one of the crazy things that happened within the Farmingdale School District. That was very interesting. But I remember the local starting with Ed Parotte. We had an office at 29 Jerusalem Avenue and it was basically a converted barn from a carpentry shop. So we used to hustle in there and we would meet at a long table and then Ed would have what we would think to be the president's office, which was nothing then, another room with maybe a couch and a desk in it. And John McPartland, who I mentioned before, he was an attorney that at that time, the CSEA is just -starting to grow now, it's starting to really come out of its shell, starting to represent local government members. The State was always very structured and very solidified because we started as a State organization, as you know, back in 1910. So, we wind up meeting and starting to grow and stretch and they allowed us at that time to have an attorney. We actually, as a local, hired an attorney that worked with us and for us in that capacity, which is real interesting. So I meet John McPartland and he seemed to be a nice upcoming man and a good attorney and whatever. And, of course, I knew Frank and we had a woman named Trudy Fox, she was our secretary, she came from Oceanside. We had a woman named Gloria Hall, Terry Hall, you know Terry was her nickname, she came from Bethpage. And we all had different titles. Bill Link, he was from Hewlett Woodmere. He was the treasurer. We really had a good group of local officers. Eventually Eddie Parotte retired and I was instrumental in helping with the retirement party and we had a real good time. It was down in Alhambra Beach, Massapequa. Nice little place. And Frank became the president. I think there was an election for president. Ben Gummon ran against Frank. I took Frank's side and ran with Frank as his first vice president. You know I came up thorough the ranks and just waited for Frank to retire, basically, in 1986. I didn't believe in pushing anyone out; I waited my time. I still was doing my Farmingdale thing, which was great. I thoroughly enjoyed being the first vice president with Frank. We would travel all over Nassau County. We would visit custodians and clerical workers and teacher aides and bus drivers and mechanics from Baldwin to Massapequa to, Syosset to all over the place, Merrick and it was just wonderful. Frank gave me such a great opportunity to meet people and to speak with them and to befriend them and to find out what they're about. But also find out what their wants are. What the union could do to make life better for them on the job. And even off the job. We went to a lot of charitable things too and you just have a big heart and you do all this. Well, in the middle of all this too in 1975, I wind up getting married, OK, and I have to admit that my wife knew exactly what she was getting into because even to this day when I come home late or sometimes I don't come home until the next day because I'm out all night long or doing what I am at a convention or a conference or wherever I am, she still understands.

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Although it's a little bit tougher now because we have four beautiful children and it's just, you know, she knew the life that I was going to lead her into. And thank God she accepted a lot of that; I'm not going to say I don't still get some flak but I can't say enough about that. But we were just, Frank and I were just really a good team. Eventually in '86 he did retire and I threw him a big party in Massapequa at Theresa's and, he went on his way in 1986 and I became the local president of Local 865. Now, that gave me an opportunity to, well I had met Danny Donohue before that. And we knew the history of some of the region things and I'll just speak quickly about that maybe. Well, nothing's quick with me. But anyway, I'll try to give you an overview of how I knew about region events. When I got into the union in 1971, I don't know if it was an election that November or spring or whatever but I do remember asking my grandfather who worked for Nassau County, he was a foreman in the mosquito control division, I guess it was a DPW unit and there was a guy named Flaumenbaum who was running for president of the local at that time. And I remember punching a hole in the ballot. There was a ballot that was sent to me in my name and you had to take a pencil or a pen and you had to punch these little round holes, you know now the chad thing is so prevalent, whatever. Well, this was the same type of ballot system where you would punch the hole in and you hoped the thing wouldn't fall apart, fold it back up, put it in an envelope and send it off to who knows where it went. But that I remember asking my grandfather, I says "OK, Gramps, who do I vote for in this Union stuff?" He says "Well, Flaumenbaum is a good union guy. He's a good union man and you'd be smart if you vote for him." I have no clue who else ran on that ballot. I remember some of the old names, good formidable union people, I'm sure but I couldn't remember. That was my first taste of something else besides, in fact I have to correct myself. It wasn't for the local, it was for the region. It was for the region because I only voted within my own local at that point. The only other way we would vote for someone would be at a region level. So it was my first vote for the region. And Irving eventually became the region president. Or the region chapter leader at that point because I don't think they actually formed the regions until 1972 or 1973, somewhere in that area. So I need to correct some of my dates. Frank would attend the region meetings and I would always ask him if it would be OK if I came with him because I thought just learning more about what I had gotten myself involved with could only be a good thing because I'm a very pro-education person. So I wind up going with Frank and I start meeting some of these other folks here from different locals and whatever. And that was another experience for me because now I'm meeting more folks. And one thing about me, although folks might think I'm very laid back sometimes and not as assertive or whatever, I would always go up to the folks who I thought I wanted to meet and I would just say "Hiya, Frank, how are you doing?" And they would not really know who the hell I was. I remember doing to Danny Donohue himself. You know, first time I met Danny, "Hi Danny, how ya doin'? Good to see ya. Blah, blah, blah." And then I would be turning around to leave and they would be saying to someone standing next to them "Who was that guy? Who was that? Who was that guy?" "Oh, that's Nick Lamorte. He's from the educational local." And that's how I got people to know who I was. Not by waiting for them to come and meet me. I would go up and meet them. And I would really put them on the spot like people do to me now occasionally. They'll come up and say "Hi, Nick. Do you remember me?" And now I know what to say "No, I'm sorry. I meet thousands of people everyday. I really forgot your name. Excuse me. Refresh my memory, would you please?" So that was just a little thing I did to try to get to meet people and get to get my name out there too. To push Nick. You know, I'm not bashful about that.

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So, we get on now with meeting, I did have an opportunity to meet Irving Flaumenbaum probably two months before he passed on. I did meet Danny Donohue at that time. Danny becomes president and we're all rallying around him.

FV: President of the ... ?

NL: President of the region. But, I think the biggest thing that happened of Dan Donohue is when in 1986, all these still fairly young, and they were basically men, they were males, guys like Bill Macaro, Hank Jenny, Nick Lamorte, Mike Curtain, Al Hennenborn, Tony Ruggiero. We all ascend to be presidents of our own locals. And the common denominator, the person that helped us somewhere down the road was a guy named Danny Donohue. So, he became the region president and a number of years after, to help him and boost him up in '86, it winds this whole group of folks who used to like to have a slice of pizza, either before the meeting or after meeting, to just hang out and discuss things, becomes known as The Pizza Connection. Now, there might also have been a little something to that because most of our last names ended in a vowel and, yes, we were mostly Italian. But there was a character with us, and Lord rest his soul too, named Mike Curtain that could out-eat any one of us. As big as we are even today, this guy, Mike Curtain, I'll never forget after one of the first meetings that we had with Danny, and Dan would stay behind and do his paperwork just like I wind up doing now, and the folks leave and hopefully they'll go out and have a peaceful drink or a meal or something or whatever. We would do that too. And we went to a place called LaScala's, which is still here off of Motor Parkway up here in Comack. It was a pizza place and they had a back room. So we all sit down, you know, Paulie DeLeo and the names that I mentioned before and I'm trying to think if there's anybody else that I missed. And here's Mike Curtain and he says "I want a big bowl of pasta." I says "Mike Curtain, you're an Irish guy. What do you know from pasta?" And we're all having pizza and who's having maybe another little dish here or there. Well, this guy takes the ground hot pepper, the red Italian hot pepper. He didn't sprinkle it on. He opens up the jar and he pours out basically most of the jar on top of this, just like if you had a big bowl that Mamma used to make the spaghetti in, like a pound of the family style? Well, that's what he was eating out of. And he was eating to beat the daylights with the sweat beads coming out of his forehead, just taking the napkin and wiping it off and just loving every minute of it. So, that was when we named him The Seagull. He became The Seagull 'cause he could eat anything, just like a seagull.

And that began for at least the two years that Dan was the region president underneath this group of The Pizza Connection from '86 to 1988. We started jokes on one another and every region holiday party we would do something to just liven up the party. OK? That's the best way I could say it. And after we would have our drinks at the cocktail hour, we would go in and the place that they loved to have their parties was The Swan Club up in Glen Cove. And we would come in and we would have our cocktail hour, like I said and then we would present some of us with these little gifts. So, this guy named Bill Macaro, he was the president of the Smithtown unit but he was also all of Suffolk County 852 president. And, again, he was one of those guys from The Pizza Connection that came onboard in 1986. So, for Bill, a group of us got together. Now Bill had his left arm amputated. Actually it was caught, he was a New York City sanitation worker, OK? Union guy. And unfortunately he had an accident on the job and he gave up that profession and came out here and worked for Smithtown, got the job and blah, blah, blah. And over the years, you know? But he also had a hook. And it was a hook that used to open up like this, OK? So, we had the opportunity one time to go to a conference or whatever up in Albany and going through the

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lobby of one of the hotels we saw this plastic hand and you would put batteries in it and it would just move around like this. So, need I say more? A bunch of us, it was a holiday party but being good Italian Catholics, we thought it was a Christmas party but you don't say things like that, it's a holiday party. And it was a holiday party but we still believed in the Christian gift-giving benefit. So we got Bill this plastic hand and we put it on the table for him and he opened it up and he was just blown away. He just loved it. He was a good receiver of a joke. And there were some in the room, I have to say, that thought that we were the most terrible people. How could we do something like that? Well, that's what we did.

Now, for Tony Ruggiero, who was the president of Stony Brook Local 614, he was a fairly short gentleman. He must have been maybe 5'3", maybe 5'4" on a good day. Tony was a whirlwind, though. In fact he eventually became an LRS and worked for the region for CSEA. But in this capacity, he's still the local president. But we were always teasing Tony because at one of the conventions, he was sitting down with a whole bunch of people and the waitress would come by and the guys, they would flirt with the waitress and they'd give her a dollar tip and all this other stuff. And this one waitress, she didn't actually take a liking to Tony but she would like to kid around with him, OK? So, we were calling him Shorty or whatever and when we got up to leave, she came walking by and the only thing she said to him was "My, you ARE short!" And that was it. We knew from that day on, we had to do something for poor Tony. And we even made a sign in the men's room when we would go to relieve ourselves from the day's proceedings. There always usually is a little shorter urinal for young men or little boys. Well, we put a sign Reserved For Local 614 President, Anthony Ruggiero. And boy, you should have hear him coming out of the men's room that day, "I'll get you guys! You dirty blah, blah, blah!" That was part of our little thing. But for the holiday party we bought him, well actually I made it. I used to do a lot of the joking because I was the youngest one, still am. I made him a pair of stilts. So we brought him out a pair of stilts made out of two by threes and it was a great joke.

Now, for our lady who you interviewed this morning, Rita Wallace, she became the madam of the group, you know. And she eventually because of her physical inability, she was resigned to either a cart or a wheelchair or some mechanical thing. A scooter actually. Well, I took the shovel from a snow shovel and I bent it and I made two runners on it. It didn't really fit the scooter but when you got it as a gift, you would know that ... Because she would always complain "Oh, it's snowing out. I don't know how I'm going to get around." So we made her a snow plow for her scooter. And that's what we did for her. And she was just like wild. "You guys! A ha ha ha ha." But that's the kind of thing we did.

We had at that time a director who was an interim director. His name is Ross Hanna. Now, right now Ross Hanna is up at Contract Administration, he's an attorney, you know, a big shot. But for us he wasn't a big shot. We got him a T-shirt. We called him The Big Guy because he was fairly big and he did lose a tremendous amount of weight once he did go back to Albany and it's good for him. But when he was down here, he was a chunky guy like me. But he was a lot taller so he had a lot more chunk cause he was a taller guy. So we called him The Big Guy. So we went to a baby shop and got a baby T-shirt and we had imprinted on it The Big Guy with the little shirt like this. It was funny as hell as these guys put this little shirt up next to him.

But those were the kind of things we did as a social side after working hard as a local president getting very few thank yous, a lot of complaints and "Where were you?" and "How come you didn't call me back?" and "You didn't come to my

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meeting." Those local presidents, including myself, that had units, you're stretched far between all the different corners of, it could be Nassau County or whatever your jurisdiction. So, we enjoyed each other's company. And certainly we enjoyed supporting Danny in 1988. We would like to believe that because of our concerted effort that we helped get him elected as executive vice president of the entire union. That was the first time a downstater had ever broken through the glass ceiling and got upstate to be in Albany. We knew that Irving Flaumenbaum had made a bid to run for president of the state organization but was unsuccessful. That's just part of that history that's so near and dear to me.

I then went on to look higher. I felt that there was a disruption in our union back in 1989. After Danny had left and gets elected, a fellow named Jerome Donohue, a corrections officer, he was the president of Local 830 at the time. He assumes the presidency of the region and he had, I guess, an alternative plan, an ulterior motive for accepting the job. He was the first vice president under Danny in the region so he did ascend per our constitution. But he had a different idea about how the union should be run and other issues. He had some good issues. He had some representation issues that today I still am fighting for, believe it or not, about how our board of directors should be more reflective of the membership of the region that we have. And you know we only have six representatives down here on Long Island yet they say we're one of the largest, we were supposed to be the largest, I heard now we're in second place but we'll defer to whoever it is, probably Region 5. But there is a matter of representation for the amount of people that send up their dues money, that participate in this union and we're cognizant of that fact. We're still fighting Jerry Donohue's battles. That's something that we need to do. So he takes over and he has a different idea of things and what happens is he leads a de-cert and he tries to decertify. At that time it was twenty-two thousand members. Nassau Local at that time was probably more like fourteen thousand people so that was the portion he was going to try to take with him and I think there was something about the town of Hempstead and maybe another town that he thought he was also going to latch onto and take with him. And then there was an emergence of new faces, of new activists, of people that came to the aid of CSEA, people that knew that that was the wrong thing to do. That we needed to stick together as a union and that CSEA with maybe some of its faults was not the worst thing in the world. The worst thing in the world that could happen is to form an independent outside this whole thing. And also we had to look back at the fact that we had just recently affiliated a short ten years with the AFL-CIO and this would have been a group going backwards, to go back to an independent mode where then-president McGowan, who I thought had exceptional vision, in lieu of the PEF decertification. I should say PS&T, which formed PEF. There's a whole history that you have to fit all these pieces of this puzzle together. But anyway, for Nick Lamorte I see an opportunity to move to a different level to offer a whole different group of people from being just a local president and fitting in as a group of, at a certain level, to maybe have a way about me to offer a little bit different leadership than the person that took over after Jerry left. And that person was Gloria Moran, who was a wonderful lady, I couldn't speak enough about her ambition and her moral character but as far as a leader, I just didn't feel the leadership ability was there. So in 1990, I run against her. She did make me the third vice president of the region after the reorganization as people moved out in support of Jerry, there was a void created. I became the third vice president. A woman name Eileen became the fourth vice president and we tried to help Gloria do certain things. I felt that the direction and the drive weren't there, wasn't good enough for me, wasn't satisfying enough for me. So I went ahead and I ran against her. A lot of the local presidents at the time, I

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did have some backing but most of them, I must admit, felt that we didn't give Gloria enough of a chance to really prove herself or maybe disprove herself to be successful or not be successful. I lose by four hundred and twenty-five votes out of thirty-nine thousand ballots cast. Now, I'm not saying that thirty-nine thousand ballots came back but I would say at least fifteen to eighteen percent that did come back, I lose by four hundred twenty-five, four hundred fifty-five, somewhere around there. So, OK. At that point in CSEA's history, we had the ability to run against the higher office but still retain our office should we lose. So what happens to Nick? Well, all right, my nose got a little bloodied. I remembered that when I was playing football back in the late '60s, early 1970s. So there was no big deal to me. I says "OK." My pride was a little hurt but I knew I had to go out and meet and greet a hell of a lot more people at least two hundred fifty that would turn the balance and elect me.

FV: If you just knew which two hundred fifty people they were.

NL. Ah ha, that was my only problem. I had to find out which two hundred fifty. So I went out and you're right, I didn't know which two hundred fifty so I went out to talk to thousands of people. It didn't bother me. So I went and did that and for the next three years, I'm out doing the right thing. I'm showing up for meetings. I got thrown off the political action committee. I got stripped of my school district leadership committee at the region, which I expected. To the winner goes the spoils and to the loser, you gotta live through it. But I held my head up and I said "I can do this." In fact, Gloria Estefan came out with a song in 1993, which became my thing. "Get up, get on your feet. You can make it happen." And I took the words from that song and I said "That's going to be my own internal thing. I can do this. I'm gonna win." So I go out and I scraped the barrel and got some money together and I got things printed and I asked people to help me. I had a lot of good friends that believed in me at that point. And I guess one of the best things that happened was, for whatever reason, Gloria really didn't become the president that some of those local presidents thought they were going to give her the opportunity to become. So they saw what I was doing in the school districts. I had endorsed Joe McDermott, then president, for his first term, back in 1988 and I endorsed him for his second term when it came around in 1991. And he did tell me "Nick, I'm going to try to help you solidify the school districts." Because in Nassau County, Nassau Educational Local 865, we only represented about twenty-five hundred people. Because when they gave the school districts their charter, and that's the piece that I forgot to mention back in 1972, in March, they allowed only the schools that wanted to go into the educational locals when they were created. That's when I was talking about how local government was just building and coming into its own. Everybody wanted a little piece of the action but they all still wanted to stay within CSEA, which was great. So when we got chartered, we were only allowed to pick up fifty-one percent of the school districts that formed the charter. And the other forty-nine percent stayed within Local 830. And my mission, after my three weeks vacation issue, was also to solidify all the school districts in Nassau County. Suffolk County had done it. They had already done that because there wasn't another political base like 830. There was an 852 but Suffolk County had the wisdom to say "No, those schools belong to the school district local. We don't want to have this bifurcated system here. It's not right." Nassau local, for whatever reason, I figure it had to do with dues money, they kept on to those schools. As far as I was concerned, they never really represented school district employees or members the way only school district employees and members can be represented. So, OK, fine. So

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McDermott promises me that should he be successful, that he's going to do this great thing and he's going to give us these schools eventually.

All right, so Joe gets reelected in 1991. I says "Wow, I'm on my way." Except 1993 comes this regional election again. So I say "Well, I've gotta make a decision here. I got to either trust on this guy after already one term and a half and he hasn't done anything and I still want this other job, and I knew it was fairly good paying, I'm not going to deny that." At that point in time now my kids are ready to start to go to college; they're in high school. Like I said, I have four children. And "Boy, what a wonderful thing that I could possibly be" I said, "able to afford to send these kids through school, not have to work through school like yours truly did". Of course, we always want something better for our children than we had, that's the way it works. That's the way it worked with my parents. And I said "I'm gonna run." So I run for office and just as I win by fifty-five votes, fifty-five votes, Joe McDermott divides Nassau local, these twenty-two thousand people and creates Local 882 which becomes a municipal, actually it was the town of Nort@ Hempstead, it became all the villages, all the libraries, roughly about twenty-five to twenty-eight hundred people into a local for Nassau County, take them away from Nassau Local. Nassau Local now just represents county employees and at that point it was about twelve thousand, OK? So you had your twelve thousand Nassau County employees, which stayed intact. But he split off the town of Oyster Bay, which was about eleven hundred people and the town of Hempstead, was about another twenty-three hundred people. And they gave them their independence. They were charted as locals and that began another, you know, expansion within CSEA within Region 1. And it brought our locals up in numbers and there was a little bit of a hassle with board representation that still plagued us and it still plagues us too today. That we did have a defeat of a resolution, which, of course, Regions I and 2 and part of 3 did support but we were thrown a negative by some of the regions upstate that enjoy more representation than I believe they really should have. But that's my own opinion. But, what are you gonna say?

So, anyway, I now had a great opportunity in 1993 to be the region president. My goal is to become the best region president that we've ever had down here@- And I know that was going some because we had a great man in Irving Flaumenbaum who helped found this region and we had even more of a Herculean task of being better than a guy named Danny Donohue, who was still currently our president. But I still say that to this day: I want to be better than Danny was, I want to do things better and I want to offer people more of an opportunity to know what CSEA is about. And I want to work harder than anyone else. I have given myself an internal mission that nobody's going to work harder than me. I don't care who it is. I don't care who it is in what section of this union. And the only people that suffer is my family. Because I'm never home 'cause I'm out doing this mission. You know, I want to be better; I want to be the best. I just love this union so much and that's become my focal point.

All right, I get through that and Danny becomes the president in 1994. I said to him when he announced his candidacy "Wow, wouldn't it be great that I'm the president of Region I and you're the president of the whole damn state? This would be really great, Danny." And it's just been a great relationship up until today. So that's where we went with that. Now we talk a little bit about my administration. When I won, I didn't win with everyone that was on my slate so I take in the folks that won with me but that were on my ticket. And this is before slate voting came about in our union. Slate voting came in on the next cycle, where you would actually put a team together and go as a team. As a slate, I should say. I got elected as a team. It was, you know, the Lamorte

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team. They're wonderful people. A woman named Sue Duff; she was a nurse from Nassau Medical Center. She ran and she got elected on her own. Another woman named Barbara Jones; she was from Local 830 and there's a lot of power in Local 830. These are Local 830 people. And what I found interesting was that I won against a Local 830 person, Gloria Moran, running for her second term at that time. So I knew I had to get the message out. And it must have gotten out where people had the trust in me that I would do something or I would make a difference. So I create different committees. One of the first committees that I'm very proud to say that we changed the direction of was called the Minorities Committee. But when I think of the word minority and I think of the word minority committee within a union, I think it's just made up of minorities. And then I got to thinking "Well, what are minorities?" I mean there are people who are white that are minorities. There are people that are Catholic; they could be in a minority. There could be people that are Hindu or Muslim. I mean everybody really is a minority. But one thing we all strive for is human rights. So I said to myself "Why don't we change the name of the committee from Minorities Committee to the Human Rights Committee?" And we fight for everybody's human rights. And we fight for everybody's human rights because you never know who the hell the minority's going to be. So we changed the committee and they really went with me and we grow into this human rights committee a mission of telling everybody what we are. Who we're made up in this region. So I had this idea that I kind of stole from George in Region 2, I admit that. And he knows it. But he tried to do something and it wasn't as successful. So I said "I think I could take this thing. I think I could make this successful." And that was have an International Day. We'll have an international festival in this room and the surrounding area and we'll just invite members from different ethnic backgrounds, from wherever you want to say you come from, we invite you to make a little dish of food that you're proud to present to people. And we had this little idea of a notion of these little toothpicks and everybody takes a little bite? So who brought the lasagna from the Italian group? Who brought the kielbasa from the Polish group? Who brought the corned beef and cabbage from the Irish group? We had curried chicken from the Jamaican group. We had hocks and all the ethnic flavorings of anywhere you could think of. We had Mickey Cruz, one of the LRS's that just came into the region at the time. He gets us hooked up with a Mariachi band. Here are these Mexican people that are here on Long Island somewhere, come in with these big thick guitars, these big sombreros, dressed up with beads and their whole ethnic native wear in the corner over here in the room, they're playing a Mariachi tune for us. Da Da Da Da Da. It was unbelievable. We had people from Filipino descent. They did a candle dance. And today on the rug you can still see the stains from the wax candles which Liz our region manager was ready to kill me because I ruined the rug. But this is our place, this is our dues money that built this place and it's the members' building and if we have to repair the rug or we have to scrape it with a butter knife we're gonna do it. But it was just phenomenal. We had Irish kick dancers. We put up a wooden floor that they... We built a wooden floor actually. Great guy, great activist who does our Children of Hope, actually it's his Children of Hope from the ambulance technicians, Tim Jacquard. He saves babies. He does it as a living and then he did it and he took another step... You know Timmy?

FV: Sure.

NL: And he just gives of himself. So, he owned a couple of floral shops. He's very handy with arts and crafts and floral arrangements and he builds things and whatever. So he puts this wooden floor together with, I helped him a little bit

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but he did most of the work. And then when we're done, he unscrews it, and don't tell Home Depot, but he returned it and they accepted it with all the nail holes in it. I couldn't believe it. "Timmy, only you could get away with this." It was like rented for one day and it didn't cost us a dime. But that's the kind of guy he was. So we build a stage and we transform the room into a cultural bonanza with all different kinds of things. We had people that wanted to sing for us. Willie Allen sings Old Man River. He's now the Local 430 president at Long Island Developmental Center. I had a fellow that I worked with that actually taught how to clean rooms. A little short Irish guy named James McGuire. He was singing Danny Boy and then he started singing O Sole Mio because he had some formal training when he was a young man, to sing. And we just had a festival that, we brought soda, no alcohol, no beer, just pure entertainment from different ethnic groups. Just to bind the region. And it really did, it really helped bind us all together to see what we're all about. And that was the whole part of it. And then we brought, of course, diversity training and everything else. But we like to think that came after us. They learned from us.

That was just one thing that I would love to brag about, about the Human Rights Committee. Just getting other committees active. Bringing people in. Telling them that there is a place here and that "this is the direction I would like you to go in and then take off and do it. You can do anything you'd like, of course within reason. Just let me know how much it's going to cost so we make sure we have funding for it, it's got to be budgeted." You know, we do everything according to the rules and regulations within CSEA. But you could turn any committee we have in this region into a blossom, a flower that will just bloom and everybody gets a chance to sniff at it and look at it. We did that with our People Committee. Unfortunately the People Committee has fallen off a little bit but one of the first things they did was they win the People Cup. I get elected, within two years we win this People Cup, which is a great thing for AFSCME and CSEA where we bring in members to contribute, to support congressional people that are going to be friendly to CSEA issues. And an education and training committee where we revitalized what we call the local union training instructor where we have like a "train the trainer" where I train you and you go out and train the members. It's like a vast network of mobilization and stuff of the membership through education. Shop steward training, grievance training, lunch and learn. Just take five minutes off to talk to somebody and have a good spin about what the union's all about. So that was a whole other issue that we could do. So we had a great education and training program initiated. The political action committee. I felt that CSEA should become the most powerful political union on Long Island. Not very different than the mission of Dan Donahue and certainly the mission of someone we don't like to talk about but Dennis Rivera from 1199. Building an army of members, grassroots, registering people, getting them then to get out and vote. And, of course, to vote for the candidate that we know is going to be pro-union or pro-CSEA and be successful. So I like to think we've been somewhat successful. Like I told you, the first election in 1990 I lose by four hundred fifty-five, 1993 I win by a mere fifty-five votes which some folks thought was a fluke. So then again, in 1996 Gloria Moran who is still working, in fact, I laugh at myself because I like to think of myself as a good person. I was asked by President McDermott at that time if I would continue to let Gloria work out of Nassau Local 830 on full release time. And I said "You gotta be crazy. This is like giving the hen house to the fox. She's gonna be out there campaigning against me for three ears." You know what, but I'm gonna do so many positive things, even with that great perk and the opportunity that that person has to overthrow me, I'm gonna do it. I want to be a man of my word

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and say "Go ahead, you can be on release time." Of course, I kept two eyes on her and a lot of other people looking after her too, and she was out there banging my brains out for a while but I- expected that of her and I don't speak of her with any malice at all. In fact, we share the same birth date, February twenty-third. And he husband's is on my wife's birthday, the same birthday. I think she has a kid or two who have the same birthdays as my kids. So it's too crazy to even worry about when you've got too much of that in common. So, I beat her by three thousand votes in 1996. She then feels that it's time for her to retire, which may my day very happy and I even went gave her a plaque at her retirement party to make sure it really was happening. It's just politics. That's just the way it is. Just politics. Then we moved to four-year elections, whatever. And sometime in February or March 2000, I run unopposed and serve today at that level with great pride. And I probably left a lot of stuff out.

FV: Well, I'm going to go back and...

NL: Pick my brain.

FV: That's a great history of the region. But what I want to do is get your take on the presidents of the statewide union from when you started until now. So we start with Wenzl?

NL. Yup, Teddy Wenzl. What do I remember about Ted Wenzl? I remember Ted Wenzl as me being a young person and looking at a very older man, a very stately looking man, a distinguished-looking man, an educator because I know he came out of the State Education Department or something to that effect. But I also have to give Ted Wenzl a great deal of gratitude. A great deal of gratitude on behalf of the educational local people that he allowed to break away from the county locals. Because it was under his presidency that the charters for the educational locals, from which I come, so it's from my perspective, of course a very personal one, that allowed us to do our own thing. To have the Ed Parottes the Frank Fasanos the Ben Gummons of the world out there to do good for school district people to have a voice just for school district people. And that's the greatest thing, I think that for me, under Ted Wenzl's leadership could happen to us in CSEA, the school district people.

As far as Bill McGowan, I think very fondly of Bill McGowan. Bill McGowan was more of a member-oriented president than, perhaps, anyone up until the time of Dan Donohue. He certainly had the members at heart. I think he was so right in affiliating with the AFL-CIO through AFSCME and going in that direction not only for the obvious reasons of other AFL union affiliates picking us apart, but we've held our own against all of them, including AFSCME. So, Jerry, if you hear it you know. But we held our own. We had a few de-certs and we had a few challenges and raids or whatever the terminology is. But it was McGowan who really, I think, put us on the map as a union, to make us go from the largest independent union, probably in the United States to the largest affiliated union within AFSCME and use that to our advantage. And to stop the bleeding because we had just lost forty-five thousand people or fifty-five thousand or whatever it was in one swoop, but also to use those resources. Now to become a part of the mainstream labor movement, a labor movement that started back in the eighteen hundreds. And I think we really came of age after so many years of being an independent and I think I gave us a lot more credibility. It gave us a hell of a lot more credibility within the labor movement because now we weren't looked as basically a bunch of rogues or, not quite scabs but in some instances, yes we still were up until that point in time. So I give him a lot of credit for that. And the only thing that I could remember about Bill McGowan because of him being

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such a down to earth, membership-oriented president, I remember being in a convention hall in Syracuse and it had to be somewhere in the beginning of the nineteen eighties or the middle of the nineteen eighties and I'm sitting with Frank Fasano, you know Frank and I did travel to all the conventions together and all of that stuff that I spoke about with Frank. And Bill McGowan coming onstage, standing up behind the mike and we're sitting up, it was like an amphitheater-type of situation. And here's Bill and he's got this thing sticking out of his mouth like this, it's one of those two-foot cigars that he used to use, and he's going like this and all I can remember hearing is "All right, you guys" and this thing is waving around, "we're gonna get the meeting started pretty soon." And I remember that so like it was yesterday with this guy and his cigar with his white hair and I just turned to Frank and I said "'Who the hell is THAT guy?" And he says to me "That's Bill McGowan, he's the president of the union." I just looked at him and I says "Holy cow! I'm gonna hang on, we're in for some ride!" And that was the first time I ever met him and had an opportunity to hear him speak and I says "Oh, my God, hang on, here we go." And it was one of those great moments in my labor history.

As far as Joe McDermott. The first time I met Joe McDermott, I basically told him to lower his head and stop looking at people through the nostrils of his nose because I thought that's where I thought Joe would look down on people, OK? I knew he came out of DOT management somewhat and he always used to look like this; that's exactly how he would look at you. And you would see the nostrils before you would see his eyes. And I told him, I says "Listen, pal, you want to get anywhere with the folks on Long Island," and I was just a nobody local president at that time. I mean I did have some influence on people but I just thought I had a little bit more common sense than some folks and to tell him. So is says "Well, I'm telling you. Stop looking down your nose at people. Get in their face and get to meet them. Stick out your hand and shake their hand and get to see who they are and be more personable. Because you're coming off like a pompous ass." You know like "Hello, I'm Joe McDermott." I says, you know, "Get down and meet the people. That's where you should be at and you will become very popular with them. You'll grow to be more of a personable person." So Joe, I think, did do that. I think Joe did that for awhile. Do I believe at times he'd revert back to looking down his nose at people? Yes I do. He had his moments. He wasn't as member-friendly as Bill McGowan was but Joe had his allies and I believe Joe built his strength on the power of the board of directors. He had elevated the board of directors to be somewhere very close to him and I think he alienated a lot of the delegates because of that. There was more of an awareness of a rift between what the duties of the delegates were once a year and the duties of the board, which at that point when he was president, we met quite religiously probably every two months. We did, he did have a preponderance number of board meetings. OK?

Of course, you know I'm going to say that the best president we've had is Danny Donohue. That goes without saying. First of all, he's still here and he still has a lot of control over a guy like me but besides that.

FV: Harvard?

NL: Yes, I did.

FV: I want to follow up on that.

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NL. All right. Well, Danny has a vision like no one else. First of all, he comes from a great background from the grassroots of membership, from being a laundry truck driver in a mental institution, which has to say something about his sanity too. But he stuck with a local that I got a feeling he knew eventually was going to be dissolved because of the fate of OMH and still the administration, whether it be Governor Pataki or some other governor, I really think that their whole idea about OMH and OMRDD issues are those that they want to run away from. The State doesn't want to be involved in those issues anymore and if they could farm them out and privatize them and get rid of them, they would. I think Danny saw that, I think Danny saw that a long time ago. Now, whether that meant that he was going to run for higher office or whatever, I don't think that's true either. Because Danny, we all know, got his job on the untimely death of Irving Flaumenbaum and that became Danny's pedestal and his opportunity to really show people what he was made of and what he was all about. So Dan moves on to become the region president and then, yes, like I said before, with a lot of help from a lot of people, a lot of good loyal local presidents in 1988 to get him elected to executive V.P. We knew it was just a matter of time when Joe would be leaving and Danny was the only candidate that I would think could be able to more than fill those shoes. And, of course, that was done. So he also has the vision to educate people, to build an education and training department, to mobilize members now. To recover from a mistake in a State contract that I don't know if there was anybody else that could have done what he did. That was phenomenal, to take that whole mistake of thinking that he had read the Governor in the right way and that maybe he misread the membership the wrong way in making the first contract that went down probably in CSEA history and then rebounding and coming up with an agreement that has just become so phenomenal that it transpires to changing civil service rules, to changing retirement legislation and giving people after ten years, a three percent raise on top of all the other raises that they had just because they put ten years in the retirement system. It's phenomenal! It's just like "How the hell did he...?" Now how do you top that? That's my question. So that's where my thoughts of Danny are and then, of course, to continue, because it wasn't Dan's idea to get involved with the Harvard group. It was Joe McDermott's idea. But that was more out of what I hear as rumor that Joe McDermott just wanted Jim Moore out of the region so he could run somebody else against him to try to unseat him. But Jimmy Moore, of course, is the most political animal that I have ever met in my political career and that, of course, did not happen. But Jimmy did wind up going to Harvard and it wasn't the six weeks that I did, he did it for ten weeks and I say "God bless you for that." Then following Jimmy, and I think that was back in 1995 when Jim went. Then following that, not too soon but four years later, Mary Sullivan has the opportunity to do that and Dan didn't send her there because at this point in time I think it's Danny's call, I think it was with great pride that he wanted to have someone there and who else but the executive vice president of the organization, so Mary went. And I think Mary went for the ten weeks also. Then they did change the program. The didn't change the program from the content or the material or the reading. They just changed it from the length so they shrunk it from ten weeks to six weeks but yet it still contained a full semester's worth of education in six weeks. So who gets to do that? Me!

So Danny sends me to Harvard. Actually there was a trip, which was a great trip from our insurance carriers that they send us to a nice place and they go over all the finances of the insurance programs and pick our brain and whatever. So they get to go south and I get to north, to Harvard. And it was great timing. So I remember my wife and kids, we're going to travel up to Cambridge.

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There was a short-term apartment that they lease for you, you don't stay in a dorm with the students. This was the Harvard Trade Union Program and it was supported by the Boston Globe, by the different IBEW locals, by CSEA, by anyone that sends anyone to this training, this Harvard program. And my wife and I and the kids, we get up there and I remember taking the ferry from Orient Point and landing at Mystic and traveling up to Cambridge and all the way in the car and on the ferry, my daughters who are now college and they're going to school and they're saying "Dad, yeah, you went to college but you went to Hofstra and you stayed home with Grandma and Grandpa. You were really never away from home." So now they're trying to psych me out, you know? Trying to psych the old man out. So we meet at Harvard Square, a lovely young gal named Laurie and Laurie's the coordinator and she's going to give me my keys to this long state care place, apartment, and I had to share it with another person. And that person doesn't know who I am and I don't know who they are but I knew his name was David Lawrence and I knew he was a boilermaker from Missouri. He was coming in the next day so I knew I had the jump on him because I got to pick the bed and if it was two different bedrooms. I had no clue what it was. So we go up to the apartment after Laurie gives us all the particulars of what we've gotta do and it was really a free day. We get to the apartment and the first thing my older college daughter does is take my briefcase and luggage up to the loft. Because you walk into the apartment and straight ahead was a bedroom with two double beds and a bathroom on the right and on the left was the kitchen. Just before the kitchen, though, there was a very tight spiral staircase and so she races up there. To the left of the kitchen is now a nice living room with a TV and a stereo and a nice table where one could study, a sofa and even a lounge chair, right? So I says "Wow. This is a pretty neat apartment. This is really nice. Cambridge is cool." So I hear my daughter yelling upstairs. My wife is setting me up with some other luggage in the downstairs bedroom. So my daughter, Nadine, she says "Dad! You gotta come up here! You gotta see this place!" So I go upstairs, up the spiral staircase and I get up there and here's a beautiful kind of walk-in closet to the left where you could hang up your clothes and place your shoes and whatever. There was a beautiful patio with a door that opened up into a small balcony but at least it was outside, fresh air, and there was a queen-size bed, not the two little double beds from downstairs, it was a nice queen-size bed and your own bathroom right off this little lofty bedroom. No living room or any of that stuff but that was downstairs. So I says "'Wow, Nadine, this is good." She says "Yeah, you should be up here, Dad, because if you want to study by yourself or you just want some quiet time, you could sit out on the verandah." I said "Nadine, it's January. I don't think I'll be doing much sitting out on the verandah but you never know if you want to crack the window or something and you have your own nice built-in walk-in closet type of thing and you're really out of the mix." And another thought she had, "Well, if you have a couple of the guys over or whatever, you could always come upstairs to bed and, you know, whatever. Downstairs, you gotta stay up because your bedroom is on the first floor." And you know, whatever. So, and there was no TV up there but that was fine, I didn't have a problem with that. There was a radio, which I made sure I got to one of the hip stations for the Boston area. So, that's where I stayed. So we packed up everything from downstairs and went upstairs. So I was upstairs and David would soon, the next day, come downstairs. And I met a very nice guy who is a representative for the boilermakers and we still converse to this day, we still talk about things. And we became buddies and we would walk to school together and the walk was a good half hour to forty-five minutes.

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We started off the program, it was six weeks. What they tried to do was rotate your time between the Kennedy School of Government, the Harvard Law School and a little place right out of Radcliff College, the School of Education. OK? So the first two weeks we wind up having to walk, and you had to walk to all these places because we were so far off campus that by the time you got to the bus stop, you might as well have just walked to class. It was that simple. So I can remember walking and I went out, of course you never do this but, of course Nick Lamorte does these things. I went out and I bought these new Scitchers because they had cleats and you were afraid of the snow and the ice and whatever. So I wear a brand new pair of shoes to class. These are going to become my Harvard boots or whatever. And they were really great and I still have them, believe it or not, and I can't wear them out. Anyway, you notice by the size of me I don't do much walking. But then I did, believe it or not, I did. And I did lose weight; that's probably why. But what an experience, what an experience! We sat down; there were thirty-nine people in the class. There were people from the NEA that worked for the NEA staff just like our LRSs worked for us but they're with a different union. Well this was a staff union for NEA, OK? And there were three of those folks, one from California, one from Florida and the other guy was from Michigan. I met three painters, one from Canada and two from Washington, D/C. And one of them is the son of the president, Al Monroe, I met his son, Al. And that was a great thing, to have an international president's son in class. That was really something. I met a guy that worked for a newspaper guild out in Minnesota. I met some AFSCME folks. I met Judy Carlson from, I think she's from Wisconsin, I forgot the council I think it's AFSCME Council 6. I met Gary Waterhouse, he's from an AFSCME council in Connecticut, I want to say 12 but I'm not sure. And I met a lovely gal named Cindy McManus from Council 93 in Massachusetts, right outside of Boston. And we bonded like, you know we had this AFSCME thing together. I met Jerry's wife, OK? She came out; she took us to lunch. She does this to the AFSCME participants every year. She comes out, she finds out who you are, what you're about, had you known her husband or not known her husband. I, unfortunately, had never met Jerry Werf. But certainly the camaraderie was there. We ate at the Harvard Faculty Club, which was wonderful. And I gotta tell you, the first time after my wife and children left, I took a walk around (with my Scitchers) and I went into Harvard Yard. God! It was like "What the hell am I doing here? What is Nick Lamorte doing in Harvard Yard?" It was like, I was overwhelmed. And I'm still moved emotionally by it. It's incredible. What an opportunity, what an opportunity.

Then we get into the curriculum. So we go to the John F. Kennedy School of Education and Government and I meet instructors and professors I would never meet in a lifetime, never. And we're talking about things about "What do you think about immigration?" Now this is before, well before, we have an incident out here where immigrant Mexicans are beaten up and almost killed and there's a whole thing going on in our lives out here on little old Long Island that is learned about eight months before at a place called Harvard. I mean, holy cow! I meet the economic advisor for Bill Clinton and, of course, that was in 2001, January is when Bush had won at that point. By then it was over and so I meet the guy that ran Clinton's economic policy for eight years..

FV: It's the economy!

NL: Exactly! Right. And he gives us this whole thing and then what happened, Enron and all this other stuff. It's like, holy cow, it was like a bunch of people from a crystal ball, like soothsayers or something. I still can't believe it. We did a lot of case studies. Our learning was a lot to do about reading,

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OK? When Mary and Jimmy found out that I was going, they said "Look, Nick, do yourself a favor. Bring your reading glasses and then go out and get a pair of stronger reading glasses." And, let me tell you, they were right. I would stay up 'til 12 o'clock at night trying to cram and read and absorb sometimes a lot of stuff that was still so much over my head with academia sometimes and the printing in some books were wee bit and some were regular normal size, which wasn't too bad. You know, I could use my less stronger pair of glasses. But the information that I got, we did a case study on Jet Blue. A new fledgling airline that because it's not unionized, what do you think, is it going to fail, is it going to succeed? A lot of us still feel that eventually it will unionize because it's getting bigger and bigger and eventually that industry, which is so heavily unionized, it will happen. But, they were in the paper last week. They went on the stock market, they're doing great, they got TVs in the back of the headrest, it's wide seats, it's all leather. You know? Incredible! How the hell could I tell somebody I heard about that a year ago?

Unknown speaker: We have to change tapes.

NL: Really? So, we were talking about Jet Blue and being from the public sector and there was only two or three of us in the whole class that were from the public sector. So we did have an instructor, David Kuhl, and he was more of a public sector person from the Kennedy School of Government. Because they also, believe it or not, have a school for administrators and public officials and that's what they do. So, the union folks get to see what they go through and they got to see what we went through, too. So that's OK. The only difference I hear was that the management folks, it's like three times more expensive for their program than it was for us, so maybe somebody in Harvard has a soft side for unions or something.

So, we got into case studies about "What would you do in this and what would you do in that?" And a lot of the answers were "Well, we'd go through the politician" and the private sector guys are going "What are you talking about? You should go through the grievance procedure and..." No, no, no, no. Everything in public service sometime is connected politically. So if you know the right political people, you probably can get our members out of a lot more hot water than would you do it, let it go through the legal system. Which, unfortunately is not really the right way to go sometimes but, you know what? We have to use all the tools at our disposal to represent our membership. And that's basically what my philosophy was. So then we spent a week at the Harvard Law School. I did have an opportunity to go into the Harvard Law Library for a full week and use their computers and look at the vast amount of knowledge and books and, uhhhh! It was just awesome. With that, also as we're moving from building to building, we had an opportunity to taste the different varieties of food that's offered during lunch. Basically, what went on was classes started at nine o'clock. At ten thirty they gave you a break for fifteen minutes where you have an opportunity to go get a cup of coffee or whatever you needed to do. At ten forty-five classes started again until twelve-thirty. From twelve-thirty to one-thirty, they gave you an hour, a full hour off for lunch, OK? And you just provided your own. You'd go out and if you wanted to go to McDonald's, if you could run down there if it was close enough or if you used the cafeteria, which I did mostly and we had some light fare. It was nothing extravagant but they did have a nice meal. Actually, the School of Education had the best cafeteria and we enjoyed that a lot. At one-thirty to five was the next session with a fifteen minute break somewhere around three or three-thirty. So we went from nine to five with an hour off for lunch, at which time they also, after the first week,

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threw us a little curve ball. They expected you to run to one of the nearest libraries, the Harvard libraries, and log on because they wanted you to become proficient in using a computer. So we all had to learn how to get into the AFL-CIO Web site. We were all brought into the HTUP Web link, whatever, and we were then given an e-mail address that we had to make up for ourselves. So I was longislandpres, you know, csealongislandpres, that's what my moniker was at hotmail, OK? MSN. So I learned how to do that. I did have an account with AOL but that was home and that was private and you had to do things their way. So we did. So, between trying to grab a bite to eat and getting into the library, we would be asked questions by the director, Elaine Bernard, and you better had gotten on there because, it was more of a peer thing, you know, that Nick didn't want to have admitted by Elaine in front of the whole class that he didn't do his assignment or didn't answer yet. So she had a very uncanny way about her of not really embarrassing you but making the rest of the class aware that maybe you didn't have an e-mail address yet. Or you hadn't performed up to her expectation, because your union is paying a lot of money for you to be here. So she was really awesome; she was unbelievable. So we wind up doing that and we take our break around three, three-fifteen. Five o'clock we're done. You then walk back to your room. I very rarely went out for a beer with the group or anything like that. I was, not one of the older folks, but I was one of the more senior students. The majority of the folks, I would think, were either in their late twenties or mid-thirties, probably more mid-thirties. It was a younger group but we all fit in. I had a lot of similarities with the younger folks, whatever. And we just had a great educational experience. We had a lot of people that came in, like I said, visiting professors, lot of different issues. I kept all my books. I took notes every day. I can tell you what every class was about. I kept a note by the date and the time of the session that corresponded with the program. I have, I should have brought it with me and I thought about it, I have a book this big and, of course, it says Harvard on it because I bought the binder in the bookstore. And I have photos; I love to take photos. I didn't have a digital camera at the time so I had my regular Olympus, which did an excellent job. I have photos of everything including the Hasty Pudding House. We went to the parade. We saw Drew Barrymore. I took a photo of her and, you know, I had all the professors. I had them autograph different things, their books. It was just great; I got so much out of it. Eventually we had an opportunity, I'm going to try to rush this to bring you up to date, I'm late, where CSEA tells us officers, the ten corporate officers, that they have a program through the Education and Training Department that's a concept that's called A Future Search. And what is a future search? Well, it's a search. It's a search of the future. What a group of people that get put together with my help would meet for a weekend and basically mind meld, you know the old Vulcan thing from Star Trek? Mind meld a group of forty-nine people, seven groups of seven different people, representing seven different issues or ideas to come together in a room for a weekend of training to take us where we've been, where we are and then where we would like to be.

...us up in Rensselaerville on the first weekend of March of this year and it was phenomenal. It was almost as good as Harvard. And we have currently now workgroups that are working through the regional committees, because these ideas, I believe, should be organized and I don't want to subvert or go around what we already have as an organization in place with committees and structure and officers and executive boards, etc. So I made a pledge to my executive board, which is the local presidents from all the different locals (we have 24 of them here), that we would bring back everything to them and we would work

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through the regional committees with these workgroups on all these crazy different ideas that might come up, and we're talking about mandating what ...

FV: ...people...committees and...

NL: Okay. Right. So we...

FV: You use the ideas implementing the...

NL: Right, so I made a commitment to the regional executive board which is all the local presidents and the committee chairs and the region officers that we would do this in an organized way so nobody would think that they're left out. So, we have one group which has already made its first report. They met twice. It's about re-instituting, once again, something that I spoke about earlier in the interview was the Program, because we did get away from it once again. And, of course, you know we're blaming Albany for that but it takes everyone to drop the ball that way. So we wrote a position paper that we are requesting from Albany, through Danny or whoever, that we re-institute the local union training instructor. Where we could go out and once again revitalize the membership by giving training, shop steward stuff and... a reduced cost to the organization because now you will be training other union members and it won't cost you to hire someone. It won't cost for the travel or the expensive overnight of bringing someone in from Albany. Okay? But we also want to do it under the direction of Albany because we don't want anybody to misunderstand what we're doing. And that means our staff. We don't want the staff to think that we could replace them or they're not important to us or any of that kind of stuff because they are. And we love our staff. And we want them to continue to challenge us in our thinking and what we do. And giving us these different ideas. So, that's one report that's already out already, and ready to prepare it to send it out to the executive board. We've already brought it to the committee and we've brought it to the education and training committee because that's where it fits in with the region.

They've all, and this just happened just two days so it's fresh off the burner, so now I'm ready to implement it and get it out to the region executive board like I said and we will then report it out to Albany and we will see where we go with it. And hopefully they'll take a bite. Another thing, another issue was, I think I started saying mandatory training. We believe, or at least the committee believes, that there are certain officers of the union that need to be trained. And it's not like, do you think you can make it? If you're making a commitment to be an officer of this union, to represent members, members who pay dues for their representation, we feel that you should have some knowledge and that you would be willing to be trained or to get that knowledge so you can then relate it to the folks that you represent. Sounds, you know, a little common sense to me, but who knows? Who gets elected because they want to be the president but they don't want to do anything? Who knows? Not us. So that's, so that's some of the area that this search has stirred up. They looked at job descriptions for the officers. They looked at accountability. Where people go if people are on release time. If people are provided with a vehicle. If people have different perks. If people ... people have to justify to the people that are paying them through the dues where they are, what they're doing, how they're doing it, are they successful, give us a report, things of that nature. So it's a fascinating thing and of course, it goes right in where I was all about through the Harvard stuff about learning how to get all of this stuff together and hit a different level of training or education. I just thought it was great, it fit right in

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like... like a piece of a puzzle. And so that's ... that's where we are and we're still continuing and so it's, you know...

FV: I'll tell you what's also important about that is to communicate the fact that you're doing that ...

NL: Exactly.

FV: To the rank and file.

NL: Exactly. Which I am not happy about ...

FV: Do it in The Workforce.

NL: Well, you just hit a big button for me ...

FV: Yeah? You've got to communicate...

NL: Because we've got one sentence in the issue in March and now I just saw another publication for region 6 who did one on just an industry. They took a future search and they just delve into an industry future search. Where we did a future search that's going to affect the whole region, which might also, and some of the issues, might affect the whole state of the organizational structure.

FV: Sure. Right.

NL: Because we talked about things like condensing the president and the first vice president or the executive vice president office into one office. We talked about condensing like AFSCME does the secretary and the treasurer into one office. Would that work? Would it not work? But we put together what we called this mind map, which we have photos of, which hopefully will make an issue, where we generate all these different ideas and then we vote and prioritize what we felt as a group of forty-nine what was the most important things or issues. And out of that came these seven different categories. We even got into one about national healthcare. We have two people that they thought that was a very paramount type of thing. There was only two that chose to do that, but out of the forty-nine we all thought that was one of the seven that was important. But although we only have two because there were others that wanted to do other things and they didn't feel that they could be divided up.

FV: Well, that's a big idea.

NL: But, it's just incredible. So, they're all meeting. They're all, you know, we're just going to see where we take it.

FV: That's wonderful.

NL: And that's where we're at.

FV: You've got a new communications guy, right? I haven't met him yet, but let him write that up... and of course there will be a new editor of The Workforce too, so it's a transition period. But that'll get in.

NL: Oh, it will. We're going to make sure it gets in. That's for sure.

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FV: Okay, now I've got a couple more questions and then I'm going to let you go.

NL: Sure. Okay.

FV: We've got to go back to Ben Gummon and the glass eye story.

NL: Okay, that...thank you very much. Thank you very much.

FV: (Laughs.)

NL: I'm the local president and... no, no I'm not the local president ... Frank Fasano's the local president, I'm the first VP and Frank never shared a room. Frank just ... he just felt, you know, whatever, whether it was because he wanted to bring his wife with him or whatever (which is a good reason why you don't share a room, because you have your wife with you) but he didn't take her often, but he really was just not that type of guy that would ever share a room. So he never did. I shared rooms with different people at times. On this trip for whatever reason, I don't have to share a room. I'm the first vice president. Now, Ben Gummon is sharing a room with a guy named Bob Verell. Bob Verell is probably 450 pounds to 500 pounds. He is a very big man. He is still walking on his own and he didn't need a Jitney yet but that comes on later. What winds up happening is Bob goes out drinking. And Ben Gummon is asleep in the bed. Okay? So Bob comes in and Ben is looking off to one side. Now, his eye is open. And the TV is on. So Bob, being not with quite all his facilities is speaking and talking away to Ben Gummon who he believes is awake. Well, you kind of know what happened. He's got a glass eye. The eye was open. He was sound asleep! And Bob is yacking away thinking that he was...he was awake. And that was just one of those crazy stories that, you know, it was just another crazy Ben Gummon story.

FV: Right.