

Ed Ullman

Co-Chair, North Port CHAT

In February 2009, members of North Port CHAT and Vision North Port* joined SCOPE for lunch with John McKnight of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute of Northwestern University. The goal was to hear about the Asset-Based philosophy and to see how the two groups might add to one another’s efforts. SCOPE staff talked with two participants about the experience, what they’re doing in community and why they’re doing it.



David Waring

Chair, Vision North Port

SCOPE: 1. Tell us about yourself. Where are you from? What brought you here? What are you doing in the community?

ED: I’m from upstate New York. I’ve been part of the North Port community close to ten years. My background is with the public side and private side.

On the public side, I have a Master’s in Public Administration from Syracuse University. I was the Mental Health Director at the County level, a County Legislator at 24. I was a national HMO Fellow at Georgetown Medical School and did a lot of very exciting international stuff in developing countries. On the private side, my background is in healthcare. I’m a registered pharmacist. I joined the early pioneering efforts for preventative wellness in this country. For the majority of my career, I was chairman/CEO of different HMO’s.

I became sour with traditional healthcare system, so I gravitated toward alternative medicine and that led me to Warm Mineral Springs. I believe in my heart we’ve put together the most gracious plan for an international health center here. We haven’t been able to get the funding to do it, but I remain hopeful. (...) To me the beauty of life is taking on challenges. What makes it hard is not just doing something but making sure to do no harm first, and then do something. Especially when dealing with such a special asset. Things have to be synergistic.

DAVID: I’m a native Floridian, born in Lakeland. I moved to this area at 12 or 13 so I’ve lived here pretty much my whole life. I graduated from Venice High and have been with Publix for 22 years. I live in Venice and work in North Port. I’m married with three kids. My wife, Jenny, is a professional photographer.

I like North Port because, although it is 50 years old, it’s still a very young city. There’s a lot to be done—that’s what drew me. I started being involved with schools through the School Advisory Councils (SACs), which was a natural place to start. Through the SAC, I met people who connected me with Vision North Port.

At that time Vision North Port was just getting off the ground. There was a lot of energy; It was an exciting time. That’s when I first heard about the Citizen Master Plan. It gave us history, a sense of where we are and where we are going. It gave us a feeling that we could really make a difference. I was

2. What did you take away from the meeting with John McKnight?

ED: What was reaffirmed for me was that one shouldn't be reinventing the wheel if you don't have to. [I appreciated] his **examples...of communities doing good things, solving the same problems all over the world. [It highlighted] the need to research them, the sharing of ideas.** Sharing is so important – seeing how communities all over handle problems.

Overall, it was not as much what I heard from John McKnight as the question at the end from SCOPE's Executive Director: **"How come we're not working together?" That was more of the catalyst.**

Since that meeting, CHAT has joined with Vision North Port team. We want to participate and encourage their success. Vision North Port has been very respectful of many efforts of CHAT. Vision North Port is focused on a citizen master plan. They have asked us to participate in the planning process.

There's a change and I think that's a positive feeling in both organizations for each other. We're two volunteer community organizations doing good work for North Port.

on the Advisory Committee with the YMCA but this was different because it was a citizen-based group. It wasn't all the same people you see on boards and committees of local organizations.

DAVID: John McKnight said that **there's a need for different kinds of organizations because they draw different kinds of people.** He said not to lose your identity, and that it's not *what* the group is doing but *how* they are doing it. If you're doing it in two different ways, [the way one group does it] might interest one person and not another. For instance, younger people might not be attracted to the formal way things are done on most boards. There was a lot of pressure from different people for the two groups to become one, but John McKnight said that's not always necessary.

Historically, there was a lack of communication between [Vision North Port and North Port CHAT]. I wish there were more results [in terms of collaboration between the groups]. Because of the Citizen Master Plan, we have not been as involved with the CHAT as we'd like. Really, CHAT put the best step forward by helping us through email to get the surveys out.

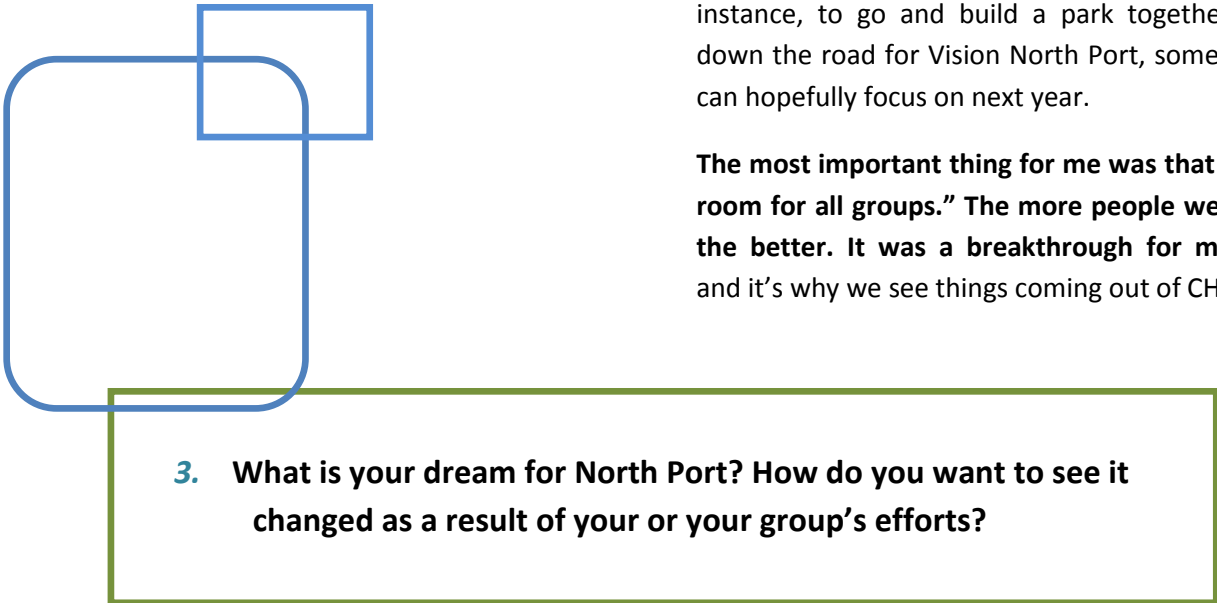
I foresee the relationship [between our two groups] being very strong.

Vision North Port has been talking more recently about what we can do with other groups. Without communicating with other groups, we'd only be able to do what we've done within the 140 members of our organization. We've talked about CHAT's style versus our style and how to draw on strength of theirs for our organization. I look forward to working on that.

John [McKnight] also stressed **being inventive about reaching out to new people. [Also,] people want to volunteer in walking distance of their home.** That plays into what we're trying to do with the Citizen Master Plan.

Mr. McKnight also talked about people going out and working in the neighborhood together—for instance, to go and build a park together. That’s down the road for Vision North Port, something we can hopefully focus on next year.

The most important thing for me was that “There’s room for all groups.” The more people we involve, the better. It was a breakthrough for my group, and it’s why we see things coming out of CHAT now.



3. What is your dream for North Port? How do you want to see it changed as a result of your or your group’s efforts?

ED: Number one is that the heart of North Port remains a lower to middle income community. Number two is it remains inclusive and respectful of the many cultures that have been attracted to North Port. Number three is it become a state leader as a celebrator of the national environment—eco-tourism, green technology, etc.

This is a young city with a lot of potential.

I also hope that they create something that will retain the young population that’s the heart of North Port. I hope to see a connected, integrated health care system, entertainment, recreation, library system, transit system, sports arenas. Right now we don’t have a town center, a place for people to hang out.

The challenge to communities, businesses, and non-profits that don’t have that wealth is to focus more on synergy, enthusiasm, planning, and motivation. It’s harder to achieve an outcome and creativity is of a greater value.

ED: I love watching communities develop. Part of the journey we’re on should be to develop an internal strength along with our ability to be

DAVID: Personally, I want to see an industry in North Port. We are working on a Talent Bank in North Port, so we can tell what we have and what we have a lack of in our work force. For example, if we find that we have a lot of teachers we might then be able to work on bringing a University in to town. We need something to come in and stabilize our economy. That’s my personal goal.

The goal of Vision North Port is to make North Port a place where everyone loves to live, work, and play. [Right now,] it’s a bedroom community. Almost everyone who lives in North Port works somewhere else—in Sarasota, Venice, or even Port Charlotte. **We want to start building something in North Port that keeps people in North Port. We really want to see it make a name for itself.**



4. Why do you do all of this?

DAVID: To be honest, I started off as being supportive in my community on behalf of my store. I used to be involved in my church—my life was pretty much work and church. When we moved to North Port and I got involved in schools, I started to

healthy and have consideration for others. Part of the great challenge here as Americans dealing with this issue is: **How do we deal with challenges as a community? How are we reading our impact in the world? How can we listen to young adults—to engage them [and all voices] in the discussion?**

These are all the challenges we face.

The greatness of American capitalism historically has been the empowerment of the human spirit to do its best work but to share with the community some of the bounty. Without that balance, we are shifting off of the definition of American capitalism—the heart of our economy. 🌐

See how much energy there was here.

Also, it was like a blank canvas. If you have noticed, there is no real center to North Port. People say they want so much more from North Port. You can see efforts, but there hasn't been a bonding agent.

If you go get involved, in any line of work [you'll find yourself useful.] I manage just over 100 people. When I sit in these board meetings, [I find that] some of the issues that they deal with I can handle in a matter of minutes. For instance, if 200 bottles of water are needed for an event, I can get on the phone and have an answer right away. **So it's really not hard work to go out and do. Anybody can do it.**

It's nothing new for us—we've always done a lot in our church. But I began to see that there's so many people doing so much for one organization, so I said, "let's see what else is out there."

When you get out into community, it's amazing how little you can do and get so much appreciation. Of course, my wife and I do it out of a desire to serve, but lately as she's been getting more involved she's seeing how **you can do so little and have it mean so much to so many people.** 🌐

* North Port CHAT

Community Health Action Teams, or CHATs, are groups focused on improving the health of a specific community. CHATs identify and research health issues facing the community, then take action to address these issues.

To learn more about North Port CHAT, visit www.chip4health.org/chats/northport.htm

* Vision North Port

VISION North Port is a citizen-based community service organization whose vision is to unite the city, county and community to preserve, build, and vitalize North Port as a unique, environmentally attractive, and economically viable community.

To learn more about Vision North Port, visit www.visionnorthport.org/



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