

Notes from Dan Budd interview, January 12, 2024.

10:45 - Introduction – why Red Hook?

Born Morristown, NJ, moved to VT when four years old, West Rutland. Wanted to be a forester or restaurateur

Came to Hudson Valley to attend CIA 1985. Visited Rhinebeck & Red Hook. Spent 10 years in NYC as a pastry chef, met wife in Brooklyn, opened restaurant there. Rated among top ten pastry chef chocolatiers. But knew he wanted to live in Red Hook, looked at 30 places, decided to build on the first property he looked at – 2 ½ acres at the end of Mill Pond.

10:50 - Was on Budds Corners Lane. Next door was Thomas Budd – distant relatives through Eugene Budd (Wynkoops maiden name). After 911 they changed the road to Linden Ave.

Was a professor at CIA for six years, loved students, helped design Apple Pie Bakery. Had a food truck before food trucks, made desserts at fairgrounds.

Wife is a math teacher at RHHS. I stayed home with the kids and became at home dad for Allie & Jordan.

1998 heard about a property on W. Market St. Started business in 2000. Called it the White Rabbit. Goal was to make sure everyone felt at home there.

10:55 - My parents were hopeless volunteers, mom one of 15 children, parents true Vermonters since 1972. Am at core a volunteer & family man. Scoutmaster Troop 42 (son's troop). Daughter Girl Scout Gold. Wanted to be knitted into the community, show that people need to step up and volunteer and be an example for young people. One of my heroes was Lord Baden Powell (Scouts founder). Became a kid again working with the Scouts in Red Hook.

11:00 - Pandemic – signs of disease in China. Day after son started honor program at St. Chris school, shut down. I knew it was serious – wrote a note to family on the calendar – “sorry to write this but there may be widespread financial and economic failure, may see deaths.” The restaurant went dark, a lot of murmuring. Went to Economic Development Meeting – was formulating in my head a volunteer program. One night at 3 AM I felt lifted out of bed, felt it was God standing next to my bed, He had picked me.

11:05 - I e-mailed Nick Ascienzo to tell my wife that I was going to throw my life on the line. For 3 months slept only 3 hours a day. Woke to a gigantic task list every day. Wanted to show to people that goodness can be done. Politics was a disaster. Politicians weren't demonstrating what a good person is – just sound bytes, bullying, disgrace. You don't need to be voted into office to be an example. I wanted people, esp. youth to see goodness go into the world and it's not measureable. Mr. Rogers – look for the helpers. Goodness has no barriers. We as a community could feed a broken family. Gift can carry on the rest of life.

Adults were panicking, I gathered the youth I knew. Called Chris Donahue. Looked at volunteer software. I had started three entities so knew how to do that.

11:10 - Financial sponsors. Nicole Jenson looked for facilities. Nick Ascienco was there. Steve Appenzeller. Nick Heron. Needed big space where could be distanced. Found Elks Club. Town & Village were on board. Town bought software. Village paid for communication software. Local farms were in. Migliorelli said use his cooler. Within two weeks was dispatching drivers to deliver meals., 12-15 operators on the phone. 20-30 people who could do neighborly chat (Chris's idea). Cross-generational.

11:15 - I got to be the pilot. Everything was tracked. Well over 50,000 meals. I can see all requests and what drivers are doing. We serve Red Hook and Rhinebeck school districts.

11:20 - But how do you step away? How does the founder not get in the way? Have many partners – churches, NE regional food bank. Transition to 501c3 with help of Rhinebeck attorney Steven Cohen.

First executive director Jeung Il. Then Nevill Smythe as interim, now Bianca Verrilli. Leslie Pulver executive chef. Madison Curry volunteer coordinator.

Feel good about making this decision and outcome. World is still fragile. Need to be more aware of values as a country with local examples. I have been given awards, try to be humble, focus on setting good example, empowering people. Good leader leads people who think they did it. Would rather give the whole community credit – nothing happens without community giving.

11:25 - E-mails - Wrote inspirational messages, some on the edge, was my own healing too. Many times stories of my own life. Examples like Don Quixote in Man of La Mancha and Jean Val Jean in Les Miserables. Hoping my stories would hit volunteers in the heart. What is important is to act, not just talk. Red Hook Responds is really about acting, people give money and came in to volunteer because saw actions. Even out-of-towners from PA and NYC.

11:30 - Neighbors helping neighbors. Having organization being weightlifters so they can have a finger on the pulse of the community. Love knowing that if I'm ever one of those people who needs help, RHR is there.