

## **Talk CNY- Transcript for S1E14**

Andrew Fish 0:06

Welcome to CenterState CEO's semi monthly podcast Talk CNY, presented by NBT Bank.

Kate Hammer 0:12

On Talk CNY, you get an inside look at the people, planning and projects moving Central New York forward.

Andrew Fish 0:18

I'm Andrew Fish, Senior Vice President of member and business experience at CenterState CEO Central New York's leading business leadership and economic development organization.

Kate Hammer 0:26

And I'm Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. We are your hosts for Talk CNY. Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for new episodes every other Wednesday.

Nancy Eaton 0:39

Most people care and they want to make a difference, and what we've realized and we often say to them now is: Alone we do what we can, united we do more.

Andrew Fish 0:51

This month we are going to focus on giving back and the impact that the business and philanthropic community has on our region. On this episode of our podcast, we welcome United Way of Central New York's President, Nancy Eaton. Nan, thank you for being here.

Nancy Eaton 1:04

It's great to be with you.

Andrew Fish 1:05

I know that August is a very busy month for you. So I really appreciate you taking the time looking forward to the conversation.

Nancy Eaton 1:10

Me too.

Kate Hammer 1:11

So for those who aren't as familiar with the United Way or with you, we would love for you to just tell us about yourself, tell us about United Way, and just tell us what United Way does to serve this community.

Nancy Eaton 1:24

Well, I'll say that for me, I grew up on Long Island. So I'm a New York State resident initially, and then went to college in Buffalo and came to Syracuse a number of years ago, had my kids here, and I love this community. I think sometimes those of us who didn't grow up here may even appreciate it more than those who did. So I'm a huge fan of Central New York and I plan to spend the rest of my life here. United Way here has a wonderful history that many people don't know, which is we are a local, not for profit. So while we're part of a worldwide network, we have a local board of directors, people who are part of us who give to us. The money is used here for folks in this community. But we began on the steps of City Hall on June 18, 1917, when the mayor of Syracuse brought together 100 community members to present what he called his war plan for fighting poverty in need. Right? So after World War One, imagine the time's right. And I think he wisely understood that government alone can't do it all. And he was seeing need everywhere. And so he asked these community members to go throughout the community and speak to their neighbors, to their friends, to their colleagues, and invite them to invest wherever they could in one pot of money that could then be used to help people, right, meet needs, with whatever folks needed help. And you know, and so, believe it or not in 1917, his goal was to raise \$600,000, which is still a lot of money, right? Well, this community in three weeks donated over \$1.1 million. And that's how this United Way began. So 1917, four years later, it was officially formed, Incorporated, as the Syracuse Community Chest. And then in 1972, we became the United Way of Central New York. So this community has a long history of thinking about doing things together. And so what we've done since the very inception of this organization is brought people in the community together, to think about me to continually monitor need, and then to think about how we can sort of mobilize resources and people to help meet those needs. So now, today, as we're sitting here, we, through the community's contributions are funding 65 different programs at 26 local human service organizations, in addition to providing what we call support grants for some smaller organizations that are doing really great work, they may not have as long have a history or a track record, but we want to help them get there. We coordinate volunteers. In fact, we were delighted to have our Day of Caring on August 3, where 1,000 plus people in this community all volunteer in one day.

Kate Hammer 4:28

That is so cool.

Nancy Eaton 4:29

Dozens and dozens and dozens of locations. And you know, volunteerism is a huge piece of what we do. But we like to say we want to make it easy to make a difference. And so if you care about people and you want to help people in this community, we would love to partner with you. So whether that's you have time to share or whether you want to connect us to efforts that people are getting underway, that they think we could perhaps bring more people to the table or we might have data as I said we monitor community needs. But we have coined the phrase, united we do more. And so I think that's really the case. You know, our, our wonderful Marketing Officer Ray Manasa says, you know, "alone, we do what we can. United we do more." And so that's really what United Way is all about.

Andrew Fish 5:17

It's amazing. I am shocked at that origin story in the in the level of resource that was brought to bear in 1917. That is amazing. Well, we'd already mentioned it August, a big one for United Way. And you talked about the Day of Caring but tell us a little bit about the ways in which, you know, not just that, but the other initiatives are having an impact? What are some of the stories you can share about things that are happening in our community right now with the support of the United Way?

Nancy Eaton 5:40

Well, I think probably what most people would want to know. And I said, we monitor needs. So right now, in this community, as in communities, in many places in the country, we're seeing homeless numbers, unlike anything we've seen in over a decade. So before the pandemic, we as a community really were doing an extraordinary job of reducing homelessness every year. So unlike many cities, where homelessness was increasing, it was decreasing here. And it had been for a number of years. So we're really proud that the United Way is the home of the region's continuum of care, which is called the Housing and Homeless Coalition. And so we coordinate through our team that housing homeless services and that network of providers for three counties. So Onondaga, Oswego and Cayuga counties. So, as I said, before, the pandemic homelessness numbers were down and we were Rapid Rehousing is the model we use. So the most important thing is to get people into housing, right? The answer to homelessness isn't a job, it's a place to live. Right?

Andrew Fish 6:49

Right.

Nancy Eaton 6:50

And so, unfortunately, the situation now is that many of our families who have found themselves homeless in the last year, in fact, 75% of those families have never ever been homeless before.

Andrew Fish 7:03

Wow.

Nancy Eaton 7:03

They are working. But the cost of things went up so much, including an average 30% increase in rent, the boat tipped over. And so folks who've never ever thought about being in this type of situation are and unfortunately, affordable housing is really hard to find. So unlike previous years, where we would get them rapidly rehoused, and then help them, do the other pieces, get a job, all of those things. We're struggling to do that as a community right now. So that's certainly a challenge. And the other thing I would say two other needs, I would sort of highlight if we're thinking about what's happening right now. One is food. And so as we said, costs have risen, right, and many of our working families just unable to make ends meet. And so we're seeing food insecurity numbers higher than during the pandemic. And so that's a challenge. And we as a community, as we always do, are thinking about how do we meet that challenge. And then the other thing I would highlight is mental health. So we know across the board, the pandemic, really, I think, highlighted for so many people, feelings, maybe they had deep down, and then for some people, they suffered loss, some people are still struggling with things. So we're really looking at those as some of our big issues right now. And we're also looking at thinking about how we can bring people together in the community to think about those issues. I mean, that's one of the things we're really always proud to do is think about bringing people together. We have, as I said, companies and organizations that really historically support us, and they they allow their employees to do that. Some match their employee contributions, which is amazing. And so we'll give out a few awards to some exceptional partners, and companies who, year in year out are standing with us as we think about meeting needs in the community.

Andrew Fish 9:05

Fantastic.

Kate Hammer 9:06

Yeah, that sounds like a great event. Nancy, you've mentioned, partnerships, business collaborations, the way that you've been working with businesses in the community. Can you talk a little bit more about how that works? And maybe even give us some examples? Some successes?

Nancy Eaton 9:22

Yeah, you know, as I said, companies, often and we're grateful, do workplace campaigns. And so you know, we know people as work colleagues, and we know them and the job they do, right, and you'd never know what someone's life story is. So for example, we had a presentation we did at a company and one of the, we always say, you know, here's the list of

organizations and programs we support, if you want to learn more about any of those. So one of the folks who was actually a manager at one of these companies came up after him. He said that he wanted to tour the Salvation Army's family shelter, which we fund. So, arranged that. And he came to the shelter and I was there. And he did the tour. And at the end of the tour, he said, "Now I'll tell you why I wanted to see this. My family was homeless many times when I was a child. And we were in New York City. And we didn't stay in places that were like this. So I wanted to see for myself, what you're supporting in this community, because now I'm going to support United Way because I see what's happening." Another example, we have someone who's very involved with us, she, her dad worked at Carrier 39 years he gave to United Way as a carrier employee, because Carrier has been connected to us for a very long time. While when she was 29, living her life, she had a job friends in an apartment and had her plan, she started seeing spots. And so she went to the doctor, and the doctor said, Monica, because she would be happy to have you know her name, you're gonna go blind from your type one diabetes, and I'm so sorry, there's nothing we can do about it. And so six months later, she was completely blind, she sees no light of any kind. So she stopped working, moved in with her parents and Monica will tell you that she thought her life was over. She thought blind people can't do anything. So she would listen to television, she'd sit at home listening to television. And then thankfully, she heard about programs, we find it or of Central New York, another one of these wonderful human service agencies we have in this community. So she went to independent living skills classes to learn how to move about the world independently as a blind person. Well, that was 15 years ago. She has an apartment that another agency we fund helped her find. She has her own company called Vision With No Sight. And she goes and gives the most inspirational talks to people to help them realize you can overcome challenges. She'll tell you how grateful she is for the life she has. And she actually just became an employee of Aurora of Central New York. So she's actually doing peer support groups. So she is an amazing human being. And she tells people, "My dad paid it forward for the services he didn't know his daughter would receive." So we want to make sure that people in the community have help on it when they need it. And often folks think about money, right? So being in financial need, and and certainly, you know, we've, we've and CenterState has done an amazing job of acknowledging and our County Executive poverty, right, his P agenda, P is for poverty. So we certainly aren't shying away from the fact that we, as a community have that challenge, and yet needed so much more. And so we want to make sure the parents who are told their child has a disability, and have no idea what to do, right. We want to make sure those supports are there. So in that way, we partner with businesses, because anyone in our community could find themselves in need of some sort of human service. And that's what we want to make sure those programs are here to serve. And then the other way we partner, which is really exciting is to bring people together around the big issues we face as a community. So for example, literacy. So 15 plus years ago, we we as a community realized that whether we were talking about children or adults, literacy levels here were lower than

many other parts of the state. And so folks came together to say, "Let's all think about this together, right? We don't need another nonprofit. We need everyone to come to the same table and really think about how we address this." Right. So the business community came together the funding community, the County, the City, and so the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County was born. We're proud to be the home of that. But the goal is that everyone's part of it, right? And so we have funders, the County is the biggest funder. And then the central New York Community Foundation city gives us as well as private individuals. But if you have a child under five in this county and Onondaga County, you're probably receiving a free book in the mail every month for your child through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which the county funds and some others. And but the county is the largest funder for sure.

Kate Hammer 14:42

Yes, my two kids definitely did until they were five.

Nancy Eaton 14:45

Right? Mentally appropriate. They're perfect. The goal is to have families read together. Yeah. And then we're also looking at adults as well. So I want to acknowledge the person who was in this role prior to me Frank Lazarsky really had the vision to see that United Way could be the home of these community collaborations with them the home of the Early Childhood Alliance, which became its own nonprofit in January, we're really proud of having been the home till it was really its own nonprofit, it was big enough. And that, again, was our community, realizing so many kids across the community were getting to kindergarten and they weren't ready. And we had to think together about how can we be sure kids are getting ready. So they're successful from day one, right? Because if they're not succeeding by third grade, they're gonna always struggle. And that's not okay. And then, of course, there's WorkTrain, which we are extremely proud to be part of what CenterState and a funding community that has come together around it. And really, the brilliant, amazing team at CenterState had a vision, we were we're proud to fund it still. And we are the fiscal home. And CenterState, you know, that it needs to be its own podcast, to talk about WorkTrain, but I think that the most important thing is that that's a perfect example of the business community. And the philanthropic community and community members, community voice come together to say we have companies that need employees. We have people who are either on or underemployed, right? As an example, all the families who are struggling paycheck to paycheck to paycheck, how can we help people get the training in the things that interest them, right, give them the skills they need, remove barriers that are in the way, so Volunteer Lawyers Project, I mean, so many partners, EEOC, Educational Opportunity Center, and then help people secure jobs for which they are prepared. They have supports, and honestly looking at folks in our community who have been historically excluded for many types of opportunities. So looking at, really the systemic issues that have

really precluded folks, they've left and left out left behind, and then really thinking about how do we create a more robust workforce. So many people with abilities, were not able to use them in ways we all need businesses need people with skills and talent, and so many folks with talent weren't able to use their skills. And so, you know, we were proud to use a state grant to be the first 500,000 as pathways to apprenticeship and so many things have come out of it. So one of the things we I think, you know, our have been proud to do with the other funders is put some seed money in so that these great ideas can come to life. And then the team at CenterState and the example of WorkTrain has done an incredible job of working with the Walsh administration, the McMahon administration to bring millions of dollars to this community, and change businesses and change people's lives by offering opportunities.

Andrew Fish 18:16

Absolutely. We didn't talk exclusively about WorkTrain, but we had Dominic Robinson, our Senior Vice President inclusive growth and Amy Durfee, our Vice President of Workforce Innovation, they were in our February episode, so I have to. So they did talk a little bit, particularly in the lens of like, workforce development, growth, Micron, those kind of things. But you did a great job just now of really talking about the WorkTrain collaborative. And it's those types of partnerships. It's funny, you know, I think about the organizational ethos of the United Way and CenterState, and it's very similar. It is about bringing people together convening, creating those opportunities to together, we can do more we can you know, it's like there's just so much more opportunity when we're collaborating in that way. And we love the partnership and wouldn't be able to do many of the things that we've been able to do without United Way they're with us in that.

Nancy Eaton 19:04

Well, I think it's good to invest in good ideas. We love being part of good ideas.

Andrew Fish 19:10

Well, we'll be back to continue our conversation and I'm really looking to talk more about maybe the greatest challenge and greatest opportunity. That's a little plug for that. But first, here's a note from our presenting sponsor of Talk CNY NBT Bank.

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Andrew Fish 19:54

This is Talk CNY, we're continuing our conversation with United Way's Nan Eaton and Nan, when we think about the growth that is inevitable for us, right, we've we've used that word before on this podcast inevitability, what is our greatest challenge? And then what's our greatest opportunity as it relates to that?

Nancy Eaton 20:15

I think the greatest challenge is a bundle of things that we've known and that I think have been multiplied many times over because of this growth that is happening. And certainly, you know, Micron takes it to a new level, but I do want to acknowledge people have been working super hard on many wonderful things were happening. So I think we have to think about making sure that we seize this opportunity, this challenge of our poverty, housing issues, transportation, right. Those are the challenges that I think this time, we can meet this moment, as people have said, and really ensure that, that we're offering everyone an opportunity to benefit from these things. It is hard work. And I've heard other, I heard Dave Kaveny on this, talking about what that means in terms of the whole community. But I do think that when we think about the investments being made, and the opportunities, micron is helping us come together, it's we've we have now a Youth Collaborative that's done STEM From Dance, which is so exciting, to performances in August by its great girls who had an opportunity, you know, black and brown girls who had an opportunity to combine these wonderful things. And we're looking at childcare, and how can we really think about changing a system that has needed change for a long time? So I think that that the challenges in a way, are also the opportunities. And, and, you know, let's stop being the community that has the most children living in poverty for any city over 100,000. Let's change that dynamic. That's, that's an old story. And I think we can change it to a new community story, where rebirth and and it happens right here.

Kate Hammer 22:14

Yeah, that is wonderful. And for anyone listening who's thinking, well, goodness, I want to get involved, I want to be part of this positive thing that's happening. How can someone get activated? What can a person do?

Nancy Eaton 22:27

Well, you know, I talked about sharing time. So we're very proud to offer a platform, [volunteercny.org](http://volunteercny.org), you can go there, and any nonprofit can list opportunities. So not just the work we do, which we say we're in the people business, but any any nonprofit can list opportunity. So you can go to [volunteercny.org](http://volunteercny.org), it's a really easy site to use. You can also follow us on social media, because then we'll we'll let you know what's happening and the types of things. We of course, use the money folks entrust to us very carefully and



strategically. So if you go to our website, [United Way-cny.org](http://UnitedWay-cny.org), you can certainly make a donation or give us a call. And we'd love to connect and talk about the different types of work we do. And maybe there's a particular passion for you. And then the other I would say is that you can also support some of the real, I think, sort of hands on very wonderful opportunities, like Book Buddies. So we're very excited to partner with the Syracuse City School District, we have our Community Education Director, Laurie Black, who's amazing. And we we have volunteers work one on one with kids kindergarten through third grade at three city schools right now, but we're hoping to expand so it's a great partnership with the City School District. And so folks could learn more about being a book buddy. And if you have an hour, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, and you want to have one on one time, it's you read with one child for 30 minutes and another child for 30 minutes. Great. It's a real, watch it seeing them make their progress and be so proud and helping them just get over that hump is a very special thing.

Andrew Fish 24:09

I know there are people on our staff here that participate in that and absolutely love the program. But volunteer your time, donate, learn more about the programs and the opportunities that are there and and get involved.

Nancy Eaton 24:21

Yeah, and I'll tell you, we have companies, you know, we have a lot of these real young solopreneurs or entrepreneurs. You don't have to do a workplace campaign. You can connect with us in other ways. So you know, we're the new United Way, in this new time in Central New York and folks can get involved in whatever way works for them.

Andrew Fish 24:41

Great, man, thank you so much for your time today. Really important in amazing stuff. And thank you for the partnership.

Nancy Eaton 24:47

Well, thank you. I'm proud to be on the board of CenterState. Wonderful, thanks.

Andrew Fish 24:51

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Kate Hammer 25:18

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