Interview with Phil Saunders (part 2)

Mon, Nov 07, 2022 12:54PM • 55:04

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, business, rochester, olean, started, dad, saunders, grandfather, trucks, good, bought, henrietta, sold, truckers, brother, called, lived, boy scouts, carole, car

SPEAKERS

Elizabeth Call, Nicole Pease, Phil Saunders

Nicole Pease 00:01
Today is November 7, 2022. I'm Nicole Pease, Project Archivist. And with me is Elizabeth Call, RIT University Archivist, and we are conducting our second interview with Phil Saunders. Thanks for having us back today.

Phil Saunders 00:17
You're welcome.

Nicole Pease 00:20
Let's get started with how long have you and Carole been married?

Phil Saunders 00:28
Well, start in 1956. So, you do the math.

Nicole Pease 00:36
And how has she supported you in your career?

Phil Saunders 00:38
Oh, she's been supportive. She's been a good housewife. She's, she really doesn't like to be in the limelight. She doesn't like to be out with a lot of people and everything, but she's certainly done a good job managing our homes and our family.

Nicole Pease 00:56
Has she been a part of the philanthropic activities?

Phil Saunders 01:00
She was for many years. She was the president of it. And she has reluctantly released that to her daughter, Patty.

Nicole Pease 01:15
How do you think you managed a work-life balance?

Phil Saunders 01:18
Well, probably, probably not as well as it should have been because it did create some problems in our marriage for a few years back in the '70s, which we finally, we got through. But, when you work as hard as I did, for as many years as I did, you probably didn't spend as much time with your family as I should have. I probably, I tried to always dedicate Sunday to the family, which we did. We'd go visit Carole's family or my family and we would do something with the with the kids. But Monday through Saturday, I was not around too much because with the truckstops were spread around the country, so there was a lot traveling, you know. Usually, my office in Rochester, I was there, Fridays and Saturdays and most of the rest of the week I was on the road.

Nicole Pease 02:17
When did your family settle in the Western New York region?

Phil Saunders 02:21
Oh, they go back a long ways, they, it would've been in the early 1800s. They settled in Alfred Station. And that was I think Tobias Saunders.

Nicole Pease 02:38
Why do you think they picked that region?

Phil Saunders 02:40
I don't know. They were, they were farmers. So, it was an area that was being developed, you know, lumber was taken down the trees and they were making farms out of them. So, I assume they came here for farmland.

Nicole Pease 02:57
Have you had any genealogical research done?

Phil Saunders 03:02
No. No, no, that's not true. I did. And I'm English-Irish. You know?

Nicole Pease 03:10
Have you learned anything interesting about your ancestors?

Phil Saunders 03:15
Not really, but we do have the tree all the way back to when they came into Rhode Island back in the 1700s. They, they fought in the Civil War. They fought in the Revolutionary War they, they seem to have made it through all the wars.

Nicole Pease 03:35
Wow.

Elizabeth Call 03:41
Have you ever gone back to do any of those like ancestral trips?

Phil Saunders 03:45
No, no, no.

Elizabeth Call 03:46
Do you know where in England and or Ireland? They were living?

Phil Saunders 03:49
Yeah, in fact, it's in some of our history, but they settled in a little town in Rhode Island and they had some property disputes over some of the land which they finally got cleared up and they really became the head people in one of those towns and it's one of the towns now that's a pretty famous tourist area. So if they would have hung on to it, they'd have been worth a lot of money.

Elizabeth Call 04:19
What kind of farming did they, when you got your family first came to Western New York for farmland, do you would...

Phil Saunders 04:25
Dairy. Back then, the typical farmer in western New York State, he was a dairy farmer and he might have sold a little grain on top of that, but primarily dairy farmers.

Nicole Pease 04:42
You shared that your father was a businessman, did you have any other relatives that were businessmen too?

Phil Saunders 04:49
Yeah. They really have been entrepreneurs for many generations on my grandmother's side. They came up from Driftwood, Pennsylvania and they were store owners down there. They were in the lumbering business. And then on my dad's side, of course, my great-grandfather was a farmer; then my dad's father, he was a salesman for Belmont, Belknap, Belknap Catalog Company. And then he wound up owning a hardware in Olean, New York. So he was an entrepreneur. And then my dad obviously, was an entrepreneur in the in the fuel oil business, and then that obviously, that gene stayed with me. But, if you go back on both sides for a long time, it doesn't seem like any of them really ever worked for anybody other than actually, my grandfather, when he worked for Belknap. He was really a _____ you're like a commissioned salesman. For them, you had a book that was about a foot thick, and he went around the country selling hardware supplies to other hardwares. So that's he wound up in the hardware business.

Nicole Pease 06:11
Your parents were in their teens and started a family during the Great Depression. How do you think it affected them?

Phil Saunders 06:19
I don't think it affected them negatively. They, actually, they were past The Depression. They got married, like in '33 or '34. They were coming out of the Great Depression. And, and he was starting his own petroleum business. So I think he started sort of at the era where they're, the opportunities were arriving back on the scene. But the, but both my parents grew up during the Depression. And my dad I know had to leave college because his parents couldn't afford to continue to support him in college.

Elizabeth Call 07:00
What drew him to the petroleum business?

Phil Saunders 07:02
Well, he lived in Olean New York, and Olean, New York at the time had a refinery there was which was a Mobil refinery, which back then it was called, I'll think of it, it wasn't Mobil, but it was the forerunner to Mobil Oil Company. And so they were giving people the opportunity of buying the fuel oil that they were producing down there and taking it somewhere to sell. So he was, started out buying in Olean and hauling it up to Rochester. So that's how he really started and then when the canal started bringing it up the canal system, then he was able to buy it and Rochester. But initially, he was actually buying it in Olean and bringing it to Rochester. Socony Vacuum was the original company. Socony Vacuum Company, was in Olean and was the forerunner to Mobil Oil.

Elizabeth Call 08:09
Well, just curious, where was your dad in college before he...?

Phil Saunders 08:13
He was at Purdue.

Elizabeth Call 08:20
Wonder if that must have been hard on him, do you think?

Phil Saunders 08:23
I think it was hard on him. And we've got a few letters where he was writing back to his dad about staying and, and then we got another letter where he wanted him to send a letter to the provost at the college or somebody asked if he could come home early that year, because he needed to work the summer and help his dad so he'd have money to come back in the Fall. That was a pretty interesting letter, but, and he wanted his dad to write as precisely in a special way, so that, you know, the provost would understand what he was saying, but...

Elizabeth Call 09:10
But, didn't happen or...

Phil Saunders 09:11
Oh, no, no. Well, he did come home. But I don't think he ever went back. Yeah, he did come home early.

Elizabeth Call 09:20
What did he have to help his dad with?

Phil Saunders 09:23
Probably at the hardware store, or maybe he just had to get a job to help his family survive, you know, because his dad in the hardware business he, he wound up going bankrupt in the hardware business during the Depression. And a sad story about him, he, he had bought a building block in Olean and his major tenet was the Bank of Olean, First National Bank of Olean, somewhere here I've got one of their weights. And what happened is, the mortgage on the building was held by the First National Bank of Olean, but they were also his tenant and they had to pay him rent every month. Well, during the Depression, they couldn't pay him his rent. So they went to repossess his building. And he said, well, wait a minute, if you'll pay your rent, I can, I can, you know, pay my mortgage and they said, no, no, we don't have the money to pay you, but we're still going to take your building and which they did. And it's been, since been outlawed that banks can't do that. But there was a time when a bank could actually not pay rent on a building they were in and then repossessed the building from him if they had the mortgage. Must have been really hard for, this is your grandfather? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think was hard on him because he had a pretty successful hardware business, it was Saunders Hardware, Olean, New York. You know, I still got some memorabilia. I got yard sticks, you know, with "Saunders Hardware" on them and a couple other different things.

Elizabeth Call 11:09
Did you know your grandfather growing up?

Phil Saunders 11:10
Yeah.

Elizabeth Call 11:11
Okay, what kind of relationship did you guys have?

Phil Saunders 11:12
Oh, good. He was great. He used to come pick my brother and I up and take us to Olean and he had like a 1938 Ford coupe that'd take us like five hours to go there, from Rochester. And we was, of course, that was back before... if there was a gas station somewhere, it was just a one pump in front of a repair shop. And there were no convenience stores or a place to stop to go to the bathroom or anything. So we always stopped in Belmont in New York because they had a watering trough that, they came out of a spring and the water would pour into it. And we'd always stop there and get a glass, a drink of water. And then if we had to go to the bathroom, my grandfather would say, "well go in the woods, boys, and drain your pickle". So we always remembered that.

Elizabeth Call 11:19
The Ford coupe, that reminds me about the car you recently... Was that the same car?

Phil Saunders 12:17

No, that was a, that was my great-grandfather's car.

Elizabeth Call 12:22
Do I talk a little bit about that? Because that was a great story.

Phil Saunders 12:25
Well, yeah, I, my brother and I went down and visited the family homestead, which was my great-grandfather's farm. And I had gone there when I was a young boy. So I remembered about where it was. And we did find it. And amazingly, we took pictures of it. It's almost identical to the way it was when I, when I went there. And we have historic pictures of the family sitting on the front porch back in the '30s and the '40s. And the front porches is exactly the same, in fact, I took a picture of my brother sitting on the front porch. And it looked like the same front porch as it was then. But when I was there, my grand, my great-grandfather had passed away and my aunt had taken over the farm. And so I would go there when I'd go to Olean, she'd always take me out to the family farm and I'd sometimes stay overnight with her. And one Sunday, she said let's take a ride and in great-grandpa's car, his Model T and I said, "okay". So she fires up the Model T and we head down the road, so. Many years went by and I went back there with my brother. I found the place and we went and knocked on the door and an elderly lady that owns the place now bought it from my aunt, she's like in her 90s, just recently passed away last year. And so I asked her about the car, if it was still in the barn and she's, "oh, I sold it to a guy in Bel... not in Belmont, in Porterville, a few years ago and he restored it. And then he sold it to somebody else and they love it." Oh, I was thinking maybe I'd go see it. Maybe I could buy it, "oh, they would never sell it they put so much time into restoring it nice." I said "okay." So I came home and about a month later I said, you know, I'm going to pursue this a little bit. So I, I called the, I went down to see the lady again. And she told me where this guy who lived in Porterville, who happened to be the librarian at the school earlier but now he's in his 90s and he, but he worked at the regular library in Porterville on Saturday mornings so she's said, "you go there Saturday morning and he'll be there." So I go there and sure enough he's there. And he's "oh, I sold it to Howard Lindquist" and let's see what town he was in...Bolivar and "Harold Lindquist in Balavar owns a little Cub Cadet dealership and it's in his showroom, he'd never sell it." And I said, well, okay, but at any rate, I said, I think I'll just drive out and see it. So I walk into the dealership and the woman behind the counter says, "Oh, you must be Mr. Saunders." He called him and said I was coming. And I said, "Yeah, I just came to look at that car and was wondering it'll ever be for sale?" And she said, "well, you're a lucky man today. My husband died six months ago. And none of my son-in-laws want it. So I'll sell it to you." So, I got it. So, we bought it and took it back to the farm and it runs good. It's in mint shape. It's beautiful.

Elizabeth Call 15:36
I wonder how long it would take to get to Rochester in that thing?

Phil Saunders 15:41
Oh, it'd take quite a while. Actually it wouldn't, today, it would probably take you two hours it'd probably drive along 30 miles per hour. But, the difference is you're on an expressway versus when we used to go to Olean with my grandfather, we would leave Rochester and we probably had to go on 10 different route numbers, you know, and you had to go through all these little, little towns and I mean, the roads

were narrow. I mean, it was, these were not like our state roads of today. I mean, they were more like country roads back then.

Nicole Pease 16:20
What kind of activities did you do in Olean?

Phil Saunders 16:24
Well, first of all, we, we, it was a small enough city that we could walk around in. And in Rochester we lived on, in Gates, so we didn't really, weren't around the city. So we could walk up to the park which was about a quarter of a mile away from the house. We could go down the street, always give us a little money so we could go down and get something to drink and they had this, this orange drink called Ni, Nihi beverage, was a good orange drink a so I'd alway go down and get a bottle of that. And, but we would, we'd play around the house, he'd always take us somewhere we do, we'd go trout fishing with him, different things. Both my dad, my grandfather, and my kids, and me we're all, we've all been trout fishermen, you know, fly fishermen and stuff. They always, when I first got there, we'd always run to the refrigerator because my grandmother always made custard for us. Custard would be in the refrigerator, that was good. And, and she made good meals. So we always had a lot of fun there. I just don't remember any activities other than just walking around the streets and playing in the yard and going over to the park and chasing the squirrels around and the pigeons around in the park. I thought the pigeons were the greatest things going, but nowadays I hate 'em.

Elizabeth Call 17:54
Sounds like young boyhood, right?

Phil Saunders 17:57
Yeah, it definitely was.

Nicole Pease 18:05
Did your mother work?

Phil Saunders 18:07
Nope. My mom never worked. She raised the three of us, was a great mom. For many years, I mean that she became an alcoholic, she, and then that changed her lifestyle. And my dad became an alcoholic too, which you know, created some, a lot of hardship for my brother, my sister, and I growing up in that atmosphere, and it sort of started when my brother and I were like, oh, 10 years old. And my sister was really young. She was a couple years old when it started, so, she never really got to enjoy them when they, when the alcoholism wasn't an issue. Like my brother and I did get to enjoy them some years before the alcohol became an issue. But it was a serious issue in our family.

Nicole Pease 19:01
Was there a catalyst?

Phil Saunders 19:03

No, I don't know. My mom always blamed it on dad not being around and maybe having a girlfriend and stuff like that. But, it was, and then, but she was a binge, when she'd get drinking she'd just go and then he was the same way. And it was, they were, I mean they were tough, they would fight and they, we had gunshots go off in the house one time, really. So, it was, it was a, so my mother wound up committing suicide when she was 48. And basically over that, she just couldn't live and cope with the situation. She tried actually, she, she tried to commit suicide twice, the first time I caught her in time and got her to the hospital. The second time when I got to the house, she was already passed away. I found her both times, and at the time, that my dad and she had been separated when she finally committed suicide.

Elizabeth Call 20:05
How old were you? At that time?

Phil Saunders 20:08
I was probably about, well it was 1968 she passed away, so I would have been 29.

Nicole Pease 20:20
Her name was Helen?

Phil Saunders 20:21
Mhm.

Nicole Pease 20:26
What were their views on financial security?

Phil Saunders 20:31
Well, they were, they were, I would say good managers of their money. I mean, dad was an entrepreneur, he had a nice, nice little business. I would say at the time you would consider us upper-middle class, not wealthy people, but a very upper-middle class, we could certainly afford whatever we needed. We had a nice home, nice cars. We'd never lacked for, for anything, but they were they were good stewards of their money and good managers of their money and never had any bill collectors knocking on the door.

Nicole Pease 21:17
When your father told you that you wouldn't, you weren't going to be returning to school, how did that make you feel?

Phil Saunders 21:24
It didn't make me very happy. Moreso just because I loved playing sports. It wasn't so much for getting an education, you know, that part of it was secondary to me. But it was certainly an upsetting time. But, I don't know, my mind switched to, very quickly, to figuring out how to live in the world and I would say within two days, it was gone and I was, you know, figuring out how to survive.

Elizabeth Call 22:02

You were 16 at that time?

Phil Saunders 22:04
No, no, I was I was 17. Yup, I was 17. It would have been it was September or October of 1955.

Nicole Pease 22:25
I'd love to ask you if you have any specific memories of Boy Scouts.

Phil Saunders 22:30
A lot of good memories of Boy Scouts. I, I was with a group where we had five Eagle Scouts in our troop. We had about 20 kids in our Boy Scout group and we had five Eagle Scouts. All of them were good friends of mine. One of them just passed away. And I think Bob Bore is in a nursing home here in Rochester. The other one's my brother and me. And I'm trying to think of who the, maybe there was only four of us. Let's say there was four and, but, we had good outings you know getting your merit badges was great. Back then, which, they just can't do it nowadays, they would, to get your camping merit badge, they would put you in a car after dark, they drive you out into an area and just have you get out of the car in the middle of the night and it was in a like on a park or something and grab your stuff and wander in the woods and set up camp and survive.

Nicole Pease 23:37
How was your experience of that?

Phil Saunders 23:38
Oh, it was okay. You did it alone, they didn't let you go with other people when you did that. You were, it was a alone thing.

Elizabeth Call 23:47
Did you see any animals?

Phil Saunders 23:49
No, no, no, I didn't see any animals. But it was, all the merit badges were a lot of fun to, fun to get and, and it was just a good group of guys in there. Our Scoutmaster Clements, he was a he was a good guy. And I always liked being around other kids and sort of always a little bit of a team leader, you know. So we had, we had a lot of fun in boy scouts and learned a lot, learned a lot. And I think the ethics and the pride of having good ethics and good morals stuck with me through my life. And I think boy scouts had a lot to do with that.

Elizabeth Call 24:37
At what age did you join the Boy Scouts? What, how old were you when you joined the Boy Scouts?

Phil Saunders 24:37
I was probably in it from like, we were in Cub Scouts. Then we went to Boy Scouts. And then I was actually, the last year I was in Explorers. Maybe when you get to be 16 you got to go to Explorers. But, I was in in scouting for probably six, seven years in total.

Nicole Pease 25:15
Growing up on Lake Conesus provided you with one of your very first opportunities as an entrepreneur. Would you tell us about that?

Phil Saunders 25:23
Yeah, we were, we loved to water ski. And there weren't many skis around that you could buy. And though I'd become a ski jumper, where we jumping off of a platform and everything, and so I decided I was, I took my brother and another friend of ours, and we found a place that was making skis out in, I believe it was Illinois, and I'm 16 years old and we borrow my dad's car or my mom's car and I don't know if we had permission to take the car or not, but I don't think they knew we were going to Indiana. We went out there and we watched them make them in this factory. So we came home with an idea of how to how to make them. On the way home in Ohio we took a little side trip down to a little lake; how we found this little recreational lake I don't know, but, and it was on a dirt road, coming out of there my brother wanted to drive the car for a little bit, he wasn't, didn't have a license yet. We come around a corner and here comes another car and they, we hit fenders and damaged the car up pretty good. So we went home with a car with a with a bent up front bumper, fender that wasn't, didn't make my parents very happy at all. But, it was it was a fun trip. And from that you know, I then bought the lumber and made some water skis; they had a special way they were forming the heads and I couldn't do that, but I did it a different way out of a couple tires that I had, that I could, two rubber tires that I could blow up and put the wood between them to create the curve and I made a few sets, mainly I made the very small ones that we used were, before you could, our boats weren't fast enough to ski without skis. So I made these ones that were about 18 inches long. And we would ski on those. So it wasn't a successful business because it was happening at the same time that I was getting kicked out of the house so I had all the materials and made a couple sets but that was the end of it. I had to get a better job when I got kicked out of the house.

Nicole Pease 27:50
What were some of your very first jobs prior to working at the truck stop?

Phil Saunders 27:57
Well, you know very first jobs were in Livonia, summers picking potatoes and doing things on farms in the area and most generally, it was a farm family of one of the guys I was playing sports with. We did a lot of picking of, harvesting of potatoes in the summertime was one of the bigger things, shoveling people's driveways; we used to love for it to snow so we could go shovel people's driveways. Weren't too many pick-up trucks with plows on the front of them that plowed everybody's driveway back then, it was all done by shovels. And then in the summer mowed lawns for people and raked leaves and stuff like that. Those are some of the Summer jobs. Then when I got to be, I guess, 14 or 15 I started coming in the city in the summertime and working in my dad's petroleum company. And for some reason, because my dad didn't think I was too smart, this is true, he would have me work outdoors in the summertime and I would sandblast the bottom of oil tanks with a jackhammer and repaint them. And one summer we were, they were putting up a fairly good-sized tank. And they needed to put this insulation around it, which happened to be the asbestos type. And you had to wrap it around it, all the way up around the top of this tank. So he had me on that job. Fortunately, I never got any problems

from the asbestos, but I _____in it. It was in sheets. It wasn't airborne, but I'm sure there was still... and my brother was inside the building in an air-conditioned office he would he would do degree days for the oil company in the summertime because that took somebody with a little mental ability and I mean they didn't think I had any mental ability, this is true.

Elizabeth Call 29:51
Did your father get along with your brother more or was...?

Phil Saunders 29:55
Uh, I think my mom and dad, I don't know if they liked him any more than they liked me. I don't know if I could say that. My dad, I think he liked the fact that I was a good athlete, where Jim really wasn't a good athlete. So he, I think they liked him for how smart he was. They liked me for being a good athlete, even though they never in my, in my sports career did my my parents ever come watch me play sports once? Not once. Don't give me that pained expression, I'm long over it, so.

Nicole Pease 30:44
Can you share about your role at Enterprise and the NYTT Meat Dispatch?

Phil Saunders 30:50
Say that again, the En, what?

Nicole Pease 30:51
Enterprise and the Meat Dispatch?

Phil Saunders 30:54
Oh, Henrietta Enterprises, Henrietta Enterprises. Henrietta, when I, when I came to Rochester to work at the truck stop that my dad had, in the beginning, there was nothing going on there at night. So there was nice garage bays and everything. And so I met a fella and we bought some dump trucks, and we maintained them there at night. So we had, I think we had five dump trucks called Henrietta Enterprises. Carole, Carole did the bookkeeping. And she was very good at that, my wife, Carole. And then I happened to meet a guy from Neisner Brothers who headed up their trucking, and being at the truck stop I was always talking to truckers about what they were hauling and where they were going and different things. And so I got interested in trucking in general. And so this guy from Neisner Brothers in visit with me, said they had like 100 stores in Florida. And they were, it was all going down there in a railroad, but the railroad service was very bad and it would take a month to get their supplies to their stores in Florida. So they decided we're going to put it on trucks. So I solicited them and wound up convincing them that I could buy some trucks and we could do it. And we already had a couple trucks that were hauling meat from upstate New York and into New York City. That's why it was calling Meat Dispatch. So we bought a bunch of new trucks. We bought six new trucks and we started hauling Neisner Brothers which was a, fi-, they were a five-and-dime store. Today, they're probably more like a Dollar General, but they were a forerunner to, well, I guess the the five-and-dime wound up getting, dis-, I guess, disappeared when the K Marts came along and then the the drugstores came along, and it sort of left them in a void. But I think the Dollar General was pretty pretty similar to what a five and dime was, if you think about it, so it was, so we would haul their products down and deliver it. We would,

each truck would have about 20 deliveries on it. Then we would pick up Tropicana and come back to upstate New York, it was a pretty good little, little business. And again, because I was in the truckstop business in by now I'm starting to put truckstops around the country. I had one in North, in Virginia that they'd stop at and then there we had one in North Carolina, they'd stop at so they would, so I could keep a good eye on where my trucks were too.

Nicole Pease 33:36
How long did that business run?

Phil Saunders 33:38
It ran until after I sold to Ryder and Jim Ryder wanted to buy that company and make it, but I wound up selling it to my partner who wanted to stay in the business. I had a partner in it, and so I sold it to him.

Elizabeth Call 33:55
What year was that around?

Phil Saunders 33:57
That would have been 1972. The trucking business was probably from '60, probably from 1966 to '72. And the same with the dump truck, once, once I sold to Ryder and moved to Florida, you know I was, I got out of the mea... I couldn't be around and you know I would fiddle with the trucks on the weekends, and, you know, I'd be involved to hire drivers and soliciting people to work for with the dump trucks and stuff like that.

Nicole Pease 34:36
You shared in your first interview that many of the veterans that returned from the war became truckers. Do you have any particular memories of any of the truckers that you got to know?

Phil Saunders 34:50
Not, I mean, I have many memories of them but nothing, nothing very, very specific. They were, and they were hard workers. They were good American souls and you know once in a while if the truckstop was full because of a storm and I didn't have rooms for them, I'd take a couple of them home, they'd sleep at my house. I mean, they were, they were just such trustworthy guys, but I mean, I did know a few of them. Jim Witter was one of them who was a great friend of mine and he's sort of was a very loyal customer and Dutch Schultz and a guy by the name of Dean, Dean Knight, _____, Bobby Dumas, I can name a lot of 'em if I sat here and started. And I've always wondered if some of them are still alive. I know Jim Witter died because I stayed in touch with him. But, I know Bobby Dumas became the, like the highway superintendent out in a town of Ontario. That's the last I knew of him, but some of them were from New England. Most of the truckers that came in the truckstop here were out of New England, and they would come into upstate New York with fish and things from New England. And then they would haul produce and canned goods back from here, a whole lot of Duffy-Mott and Seneca Foods, and we had Gerber's back then we had Beech-Nut here, we had a whole bunch of people that produced food products back then. Which, most of them are gone today, but, you know.

Nicole Pease 36:37

Did any of them talk about their experiences in the war?

Phil Saunders 36:41
No, no, we never really got into that, nope.

Nicole Pease 36:50
Would you tell us about the Fleet Control Service?

Phil Saunders 36:53
Yeah, FCS was a was a spin-off of Truckstops of America, really. And as I started to grow the chain, the truckers said, well, I need a place in, in Denver, and I need one in California. Well, I can't go that fast. Well, we like the idea that you send us one bill every month and or every week and we don't have to have bills at a hundred truckstops or have our drivers carrying cash around because it was actually really, credit cards weren't really there on a commercial basis. MasterCard, maybe was just arriving on the scene, but just barely. I mean, at the truckstop in the old days, were gas customers, they, most of it was cash. But those that didn't pay cash either had a Texaco or a Mobil credit card. there just weren't, the credit card industry wasn't here yet. So I said well, I went and I, I had started an organization called NATSO, National Association of Travel Centers. And we, we had our our founding 13 members, which I don't know if you got a picture that out at RIT or not, but we had with 13 founding members. But then we started bringing in truckstops from all over the country to be a part of our association. And some of it was working on government regulations and different things that would help the, the truckstop industry. But through that organization, you know, now I had contact with a truckstop in Washington, State of Washington, one in Denver. And so I, they became part of FCS and they would accept the credit card. So we would tell the trucker that we've checked them out. It's an honorable truckstop they're going to be, treat your good like I do, but the billing will all be centralized through us.

Nicole Pease 38:59
Did you use that concept in any of the other businesses?

Phil Saunders 39:02
No, no. It was really the only one where that would have made any sense. I mean, all the other businesses were more regionalized and not on a national basis.

Nicole Pease 39:25
Can you share a little bit about your role in American Rock Salt?

Phil Saunders 39:31
Yes, when it started, they were having trouble raising the additional money they needed to get it going and there was a little squabble between the people who would, were the original investors. So I got some people together to help raise the balance of the money they needed to, to get it going. And then at the same time there was an issue over who was going to run it because of the squabble amongst the head owners. So they wound up in the in the court, actually got a little bit involved in this judge Telesca in Rochester. So I wound up being the original president and I was the president, I think for five years. And it was a lot of fun, I enjoyed it a lot, and good people. Miners are a little bit like truckers - they're

honorable, hardworking people. And most of ours came from farms, you know, they were farm-type people that were used to working with their hands and working with machinery and trucks and tractors and stuff like that. So great people. So it was a nice experience.

Nicole Pease 40:52
With regards to the hotel business has there been anything that surprised you?

Phil Saunders 40:58
No, it's, it's pretty much, very similar to the truckstop business in a lot of ways and my truckstops all had hotels attached to them and they were nice. Our hotels were designed after Holiday Inns, the original Holiday Inn that you would walk up, park your car in front of the door and walk in. So I had been in the hotel business before. And I had been looking for a different business to go into. And when I looked at apartment buildings, a different type of commercial real estate and the thing with with an apartment building is, you know, you've got a lot of permanent tenants, a lot of them you might have credit problems with and different things. And so it was, whereas with a motel there, they're here today, they're gone tomorrow, and they pay you, you know, they walk in with a credit card, they pay you and the next day they're gone. So it seems to me it was a more simple business to run with, as far as the relationship with the tenants and the, the hassle of chat with with tenants. And in general, I mean, being an apartment building owner is not the easiest business in the world, it's tough, and it's an emotionally hard business too, because nobody gets a kick out of kicking people out of a building. You know, on the other hand, if you own a building like that, you need to keep the rent coming in because you got a mortgage, you got to pay your mortgage. So if you don't pay your mortgage, then the bank takes over the building and everybody's out. So you know, it's at least, at least it, it preserves most of the people that are there. It preserves their, their apartment, you know, doing it that way, but that's hard for people to understand.

Nicole Pease 42:56
And you have other real estate holdings?

Phil Saunders 42:58
I do. Some commercial real estate holdings, single, single purpose real estate, more long term tenants like maybe a Starbucks is one, I own a lot of 7-Eleven stores which really were my original Sugar Creeks that are now 7-Elevens, so they're tenants and... But mostly what you would call a single tenant lease with one tenant leasing it for 20 years. And they're people with good credit. So it's, you don't go through a lot of credit issues.

Nicole Pease 43:31
And those holdings fall under Saunders Management?

Phil Saunders 43:44
They, actually they're under a company called Countryside, which holds all of my real estate.

Elizabeth Call 43:53
Which Starbucks do you own?

Phil Saunders 43:56
The one here is in Henrietta; it's the new one in Henrietta on East Henrietta Road.

Elizabeth Call 44:02
On the way to RIT?

Phil Saunders 44:03
No, it would, it was, it's East Henrietta Road and I think it would be Caulkins. It's next to the Wegmans or got the Wegmans and then I think a Walgreens and it butts up against the Walgreens, right on the corner of East Henrietta Road.

Elizabeth Call 44:19
I think I've been through that drive thru.

Phil Saunders 44:22
I don't know why people go to Starbucks to be honest with you. I go by there once in a while in the morning, there'd be 20 cars sitting in line to get a cup of coffee.

Elizabeth Call 44:30
No, I only go when it's empty. But, where do you get your coffee?

Phil Saunders 44:34
I make it at home before I leave. It's cheaper that way.

Elizabeth Call 44:45
Yeah, Starbucks is insane.

Phil Saunders 44:48
It is! Then they get to double caffeine, double this and the next thing they'll say is eight dollars.

Elizabeth Call 44:57
And it's this much coffee which is insane. Yeah.

Phil Saunders 45:00
I know.

Nicole Pease 45:00
Have your children have worked at some of your businesses: the Farm, Sugar Creek Stores, Griffith Energy, and Saunders Management. What do you think they learned from you that helped them become successful business people?

Phil Saunders 45:19

I don't, I, that's a hard one to answer. I would say, hopefully they they learned the appreciation of hard work, good integrity, treating your people fairly. And learning how to manage money. I think most of them did that quite well.

Nicole Pease 45:45
In your first interview, you said your daughter, Mary Beth, was a real entrepreneur, what qualities did she have that makes you consider her in that regard?

Phil Saunders 45:57
Well, she's, she just had more of an entrepreneurial spirit with how can we build this, make it better, or what can, maybe we can do this business? She was always thinking about the next, you know, maybe the next chapter, under, but at the same time, understood that the next chapter had to be profitable too. Oh, I would say just a more aggressive personality about building something, than the other ones have.

Nicole Pease 46:34
With regards to your ancestry, do you think your family's continuing a legacy?

Phil Saunders 46:42
I don't know. I think, I think the current generation is a little bit weak. Because I only got my daughter still involved. My, my one son is, that's still alive has got a lot of physical problems. Of course the other two passed away. The next generation coming along, too early to tell. So far, none of them are involved in the, in my businesses, but they're, they're involved in different things, the, more the girls than the boys. The girls seem to be more aggressive than the, on the boys side. The boys in the next generation have been, so far though, I mean, they're three of them work at the salt mine in Geneseo. And the girls are all you know, they're into more technical-type stuff and have gone to college. None of the boys have really gone and completed a college of the next generation. So, but the girls have; they've all gone and they've all done good.

Elizabeth Call 47:54
How many grandchildren do you have?

Phil Saunders 47:56
I think ten.

Elizabeth Call 48:01
Because you have one grand-, great-grandchild, right?

Phil Saunders 48:04
We have about six. Probably by the time you write this, it'll be eight. Because there are more on the way.

Elizabeth Call 48:19
Two, it sounds like, or?

Phil Saunders 48:21
I think we've got two in the hopper right now. One for sure.

Elizabeth Call 48:25
How old are the grandchildren, great-grandchildren?

Phil Saunders 48:28
Well, the oldest one is 23, I would guess. But, most of them are from, oh, eleven down to five months old.

Nicole Pease 48:49
What is your hope for future generations of your family?

Phil Saunders 48:53
You know, I really haven't thought about it too much. And I'm not going to think about it too... I think it's just, hopefully that they have good happy lives and are are good contributors to our society, you know.

Nicole Pease 49:09
In what ways did growing up in Western New York impact you and your career?

Phil Saunders 49:23
I don't really think it had much impact on my career. I like Upstate New York. I'm very familiar with it. I'm very comfortable living here. But, you know, I spent five years in Florida, I lived there. I wouldn't really want to live in Florida, but I think if I would have been born there and I started my entrepreneurial career there, I don't think it would have changed the outcome any. If anything, I would say growing up in Upstate New York in a farming, rural community, I, I grew up with a lot of great young people, mainly guys, because we all did things together, that were, were good, hard working people and went on to nice careers. And you know, and I don't think I would have got that in, if I would have been growing up in Florida, or near a big city, growing up out in the country, I think was, was for me was a good thing.

Nicole Pease 50:32
Why is it been important that your philanthropic activities be mostly focused in this region?

Phil Saunders 50:38
Well, I, I just think it's, it's makes sense to give back where, one, where you grew up, makes sense to give back where you were involved in and can see the fruits of your efforts. And, and know what's going on, I mean, if, if somebody brought to me a project in Pennsylvania, I just don't know. I don't have the same feel for what's going on, the people running it, what the financial success is going to be what, what their, you know, the, the educational basises the way I do about about here, I just have a good feel for our area. Plus, I think our area needs help. And I'm sure every, I could go anywhere else in the country. And I could use the same argument, but I think Upstate New York, well, New York State in general needs a little help, a little bit of that's a political issue that we're never going to get away from, so you know, we're stuck with a socialist environment, which will make it up. Slowly, we've gone, when I was born, this was the biggest state in the country, it was the Empire State. And now we're number

four, I think in population. California has now got twice as many people, they got 42 million people, we got, we've got less than 20, they've doubled us. Not that I'd want to live there neither.

Nicole Pease 52:18
What are your future plans for your business?

Phil Saunders 52:26
Think my future plans are just to, just to take what we've got and manage it, grow it on a conservative basis, and just, you know, get ready for what's going to be my next chapter of life, wherever that's going to be. But, I'm of an age where I'm not looking to go out and start a whole new business or anything, I mean I know how work that is so, just manage what I got and do a good job at it.

Elizabeth Call 53:02
You mentioned your brother a lot throughout both interviews. And I'm guessing he's still alive?

Phil Saunders 53:07
He is.

Elizabeth Call 53:08
And does he live locally?

Phil Saunders 53:11
He lived locally in Rochester until he was in his mid-20s, then he went out West, had a career out in California. And then he went up to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and was, headed an accounting business there. And then he moved back here, oh, about 25 years ago, I would guess, worked for me for 15 years, it was nice to have him working with me. And when, then he retired, lived in Victor. And about four years ago moved to Indiana, where my sister is, and he's very close with his sister, and whose husband had just passed away. So he's down in Indiana.

Nicole Pease 54:00
Did they come up and visit?

Phil Saunders 54:02
Yep, yep, they come here and visit and I don't go out there as much as I should. I'm more mobile than they are, but they do come up my, they've both been here in the last year. My sister's great. My brother's great. They're both great people. My sister is a die-hard Democrat, which we don't understand.

Elizabeth Call 54:28
I guess your brother is not?

Phil Saunders 54:29
Oh no, he's a die-hard Republican. Or so we can't even have civil conversations with her.

Elizabeth Call 54:39
But you still get along?

Phil Saunders 54:40
Oh, absolutely. As long as we don't talk politics.

Nicole Pease 54:51
Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Phil Saunders 54:54
No, I don't think so.

Nicole Pease 54:56
Thank you again for your time. This was wonderful.

Phil Saunders 54:59
Let's hope so.

Elizabeth Call 55:02
It's a lot, it's good.