

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University

Paul Lueken Interview

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Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

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LH: Hello, my name is Leah Harris and today we are doing RockVoices Oral History Project. Today is March 28th at 10 a.m. and we are in the Slippery Rock University Archives, and today I'm here with Paul Lueken. Hello.

PL: Hi Leah.

LH: It's so nice to meet you.

PL: Nice to meet you.

LH: So, let's start with just telling me a little bit about yourself. So, your name, date of birth, where you're originally from and where did you receive your education from?

PL: Okay. Well, my name is Paul Lueken, middle name's Arthur, after my dad. I'm originally from Marshall, Illinois, which is East Central Illinois. If you're familiar with Terre Haute, Indiana State University, it's right across from there on the Illinois side. I grew up in a small town. Two brothers, two sisters. I was a multi-sport athlete in high school: basketball and football; I had a successful basketball career in high school. I worked construction jobs in the summertime, mowed yards as I was growing up, all that kind of stuff for college. I went to Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, a small private Division III school, and played basketball and played some golf on the golf team. From there I went and worked for a year for Golden Rule Insurance Company, and then I went on, got my master's degree at Saint Thomas University, in Miami, Florida in Sports Administration.

I was fortunate to get an internship at Eastern Illinois University, which turned into a job. And I was there eight and a half years as a golf coach and Assistant Athletic Director: marketing, promotions, fundraising, about everything in Athletics; I really loved it there. It was close to home.

And then in 1994, I applied for and was offered a position as Athletic Director at SRU and moved my family out here not knowing anyone--I'd never been here before other than the interview--and put down some roots. And twenty-six and a half years later, I was still Athletic Director. Then I retired in 2021 and still live in the community. I've been very fortunate. My first wife had, unfortunately, passed away from cancer in 2010, but the community was very, very

supportive of me for that. And then, at the time, my daughter was still at home with me, and my son Adam was a pharmacist. He had just graduated from LECOM recently. And then we got through that, and another special lady showed up in my life, thank goodness, and got remarried and now we have four adult children and six grandchildren and then some wonderful, wonderful folks in our family.

LH: That's good to hear. So, was it a big change moving from your home state to Pennsylvania?

PL: It was, somewhat. I mean, I was in that area in Illinois for a long, long time, and I was familiar . . . it was my comfort zone. So, coming here was an adjustment. But, I mean, I grew up in a small town. We didn't have a university in it though, so I'm used to small town real life. That's one of the attractions to Slippery Rock. And then just, I mean, there's Midwestern roots here in the area in Western PA and I really enjoyed that. It's been a good place.

LH: All right. So, you said that you played basketball, and you were on the golf team for your undergraduate. Are those your favorite sports to play and watch?

PL: Well, my favorite sport to watch is probably football. It's just the excitement of the game and those kinds of things that I like. I mean, I like watching baseball, too. Right now, I play golf. Not well, but I love it, and I don't play it so much for the sport as I do for the interaction with people. That's always been very important to me is relationships and spending time with people. And I just like . . . I like that interaction. And being on the golf course is a great way to do it, you know, outside.

LH: Yeah. And then have you ever coached any sports, or did you move straight to athletic director?

PL: Well, I coached when I was in college and coached softball in the summertime--women's softball, and coached then with baseball. And then I went to Eastern Illinois. The golf coach had just left. And so, when I came as an intern, they were like, "Can you coach the golf team?" I'm like, "Well I can recruit and drive the van for sure." So, I became the golf coach, and I really enjoyed it. Getting to know the young men and working with them, and really learned a lot about student athletes after being one and then being a student athlete, Division I level, and then just getting to know them as people. And it was that was a lot of fun.

LH: I think that's cool. So, let's go to your career at Slippery Rock. So, when you were hired here--when were you hired and what positions have you held? So, like the department [and] title.

PL: Well, I was hired in 1994, in the summer of 1994. Started in August, early August. I was hired as Director of Athletics, and that's the job I stayed in for the entire time I was here. So, like I said earlier, it was, I thought it was time for me to take a step in my career, and I was very fortunate to get this position at a relatively young age. I was only 33 years old at the time I took the job. So, it was definitely . . . it was a hard transition. I have to say that. Two things: being

away from home and that comfort zone I had back in Illinois, and family, being away from family. And then two was just stepping into an athletic program that was solid but needed, I'm going to say modernization . . . upgrades. So that was that was a challenge.

LH: Yeah. So, walk us through what an average day would look like for you as Athletic Director, especially since you said you needed to work on, like, modernizing the program.

PL: Well, I mean, when I first got here, there wasn't even a computer on the Athletic Director's desk. So, we got that all straightened out. And that was one of the things we modernized in Athletics is that all the coaches got computers. At the time not all of them had them. And so, we really pushed hard and got that. And then facilities, really, really need attention. Also, academic support for athletics and student athletes . . . recruiting needed attention. Fundraising needed a lot of attention for scholarships. And then the renovation of almost every athletic facility that we had.

When I came here Bob Aebersold was the president. Outstanding guy. Loved working for him. Dr. Anne Griffiths was the dean at the time; I actually reported to her when I started at first. People like Bob Watson, those kind of folks just really helped me get settled in. And Bob Dispirito was a great mentor to me. I always thank him for that. And then our coaches, especially those who have been here a long time. Coach Mihalik, you know, he had a lot of history. I learned a lot from him in a hurry, but those are the things.

And then just, you know, kind of getting a feel--and trying to set the Athletic Department up for success. I inherited an NCAA violation for basketball, which I think, in a way--it was hard, but in a way, it was--maybe it had been a blessing because we were able to modernize the compliance portion and able to bring on the assistant athletic director for compliance, and strategized there and then brought on faculty support.

Phil Kennedy was our first faculty Athletic Director, he was hugely instrumental guy for me. Still friends with him today. Just, you know, we just really needed to get things . . . we started the university athletic council or committee. It was made up of people all throughout campus. That group still exists today to help steer the Athletic program and, you know, oversee us, and help us be well-connected within the university.

And then I kind of progressed up through—reported to the dean, then I went to Student Affairs, Student Life to report to a vice president. And then eventually I reported to the president. I worked for six different presidents and was able to get along with all of them. Every one was different, but I was able to work well with all of them and try to meet the goals they had for the university.

LH: That's great. The relationships that you're talking about, it seems like they were a really important part of the job. And that's really cool to kind of see, like how they influence the Athletic Department in such a good way.

PL: They really were. And, you know, when I came, it was [an] interesting time because we had a brand new Admissions Director, Duncan Sargent; had a brand new Director for Financial Aid, Mary Miller. We came in together at the same time. And those were two key proponents for recruiting with Financial Aid and Admissions.

And then, there was a really, a genuine interest in moving the Athletic program forward and being more competitive and increasing the scholarship support. When I started at The Rock, we awarded a little over \$300,000 in athletic scholarships; when I left were at \$1.2 million. So, we made some really nice advances over time. But, I mean, it was hard work, not just me--the coaches, the student athletes, the administration and the support from the presidents and the vice presidents; the great work with some great Foundation people. It was a team effort. And something that . . . we left this place in a pretty nice place. It was good.

LH: And what was your favorite part about being Athletic Director?

PL: Working those relationships that we talked about, the day to day working with the coaches and the staff and the student athletes. I miss that being retired although, one of the nice things I was blessed with is they made me Athletic Director Emeritus, which basically gives you a parking spot [laughs], and you get to keep your e-mail address [both laugh], which keeps me connected to the university. And then also, I still come and watch a lot of sports. Like today, I'm gonna go watch baseball this afternoon and, I mean, just be involved in all those things and be at the games, and then help out when I can. I've helped, and volunteered, and worked at some of the athletic events wherever they needed me, whether it be taking tickets at the door or running the scoreboard or public address announcer, or whatever. I mean, I'm happy to do all that.

LH: Oh. That's nice. So, what buildings did you work in while you were here?

PL: Well, my office was in the fieldhouse [pause] which--we did a lot of major upgrades there. Then the football stadium, Mihalik-Thompson Stadium; when I came it was Thompson Stadium. We did lots and lots of updates there with lights, and turf, and new weight room, and new locker rooms. All the outdoor athletic facilities were under my watch.

We built Jack Critchfield Park, a beautiful baseball facility. The baseball field when I got here was behind the President's house. It was a nice little field, but it was hidden. The softball complex, when I got here, there was just a backstop, there was no fencing, no dugouts, nothing. So, we completely rebuilt, and we added new locker rooms, and an office complex for that. We renovated all the locker rooms. We renovated Morrow Fieldhouse, which is due for another

renovation, because that was back in 2000, so 25 years ago. We built a field hockey/ lacrosse complex. We upgraded the soccer facilities, the tennis courts, all that kind of stuff.

Everything was at a point where we had a lot of deferred maintenance that had not been done, and we needed to do. And so, we just kind of chipped away at all of it, and I enjoyed that, I really did. I mean, I've had a little bit of a construction background and working with contractors in the summertime, and I really enjoyed doing that and making things nicer for our coaches and student athletes.

LH: Yeah, and you got a lot of work done. That's a very large list. That's really impressive.

PL: Yeah, it was, it was a lot of work.

LH: Which one are you the proudest of, of all the renovations?

PL: Probably Jack Critchfield Park because it's just a gem sitting there. Nobody else has that in our conference, and not many have it in Division II. But the renovations to the stadium and also transforming Morrow Fieldhouse into a much more usable facility with more bleachers, more seating, a new floor, new lights. You know, at the time when we did all that, in 2000, we put in a new scoreboard and now they have just put another new scoreboard in, which is great--continued those upgrades. So, but probably Jack Critchfield Park, it was just the one that really stands out because it's just something that is just really unique for a place like Slippery Rock.

LH: Alright. And so, going a little beyond athletics, what was it like at the university as a whole when you first arrived here? And what changes have you witnessed?

PL: Well, it was a collegial place. Although at the time the enrollment was going the wrong direction. I think we were around 6,000 students, and we weren't really moving in the right direction, from that point of view. So obviously the university has made great advancements there.

I think a lot of it started when Bob Smith came as provost and then president. He always went around and said, "If we keep doing what we're doing, we shouldn't expect more than what we're currently get." So, people bought in and the whole campus bought in, which was awesome . . . we got increased enrollment, and we got to do some major things academically to make our programs more marketable and more appealing to the students.

And then the transformation of the buildings, you know, the new science technology building, obviously, all the new residence halls, that was really cool to watch. And how we tore down the old and replaced them with new and then all the academic buildings have been--a lot of them have gotten attention. This library is transformed into something that's really kind of cool. I mean, and then the athletic facilities, too.

I saw all that and loved it all. I mean, I got the chance to be involved with a lot of strategic planning, and capital campaigns for fundraising, and then setting up for the future of The Rock, and looking at master plans and how things should work, and putting the walkway through the middle of campus, which used to be a road and making all those changes which really helped transform The Rock into being what it is today.

LH: So besides just your regular job, were there any committees, either campus or community, that you were part of?

PL: Well, I was on the master planning committee. Strategic planning committees, a lot of those. I was on a lot of searches, not only for coaches and administrators and athletics, but also across campus. I tried to be involved as much as I could, I think that one of the more enjoyable parts of my job is working with the folks across campus and in establishing those relationships.

When Bill Behre came as president, he said, "Paul, I want the Athletic Director maybe not to report to the president anymore, and where do you think you should report." And I said, "It doesn't matter for me because I've been here so long and I really know where to go to get the answers to all the questions. I know the folks at Facilities, from the carpenters all the way up to the directors. I know the Financial Aid folks; I know the Admissions folks I know . . . I know where to go and get answers. So, for me, it doesn't matter. But let's think about the next person coming in," because I was getting closer to retirement. And so, we decided, at the time, Vice President for Student Affairs, but now that's transferred back to the president again, which, I enjoyed that with Dr. Norton. She was awesome to work with, Cheryl Norton. All the presidents were really cool to work with. But I think that was the key. Yeah, I think that's the key.

LH: Right. So going back to sports, let's talk a little about the mascots, because I read an article where you had a lot to kind of talk about for Rocky II and Rocky III. So, let's start with Rocky II. How did you decide on him (sitting behind you)? And where did you get the mascot from?

PL: Well, the mascot when I got here was kind of nonexistent. I can actually see behind you, the older Rocky, "I" I guess he was, but he wasn't--that mascot suit wasn't on campus when I was here, the student who . . . whose mother designed that costume, took it home with him. So, I mean, when I got here, I'm like, "Where's our mascot?" They're like, "Well, we don't really have one." And I didn't care for the look, to be honest with you, and Dr. Warren Smith and I decided that maybe we needed an update. So, we formed a committee, actually, and we had alumni involved, student athletes, campus leaders, and we were narrowing in on a mascot. We actually had already started to design one and then the vice president at the time, Sharon Johnson left, and then Dr. Watson came on board as Vice President for Student life. And he changed the focus of the committee and said--at that time we were really, we were really pushing Rock Pride, which we still have Rock Pride. So, it was like, we got those two lions in front of the Stoner Complex--we called it East/West Gym back then--maybe we could use that type of imagery for Rocky. And

then we wanted to kind of--and then all of a sudden it kind of got done in a hurry, and we bought this Rocky behind me, off the shelf, which, I mean, it's a great symbol, but it wasn't . . . a lot of people didn't like it. Especially the older alumni [they] didn't like it. I get it, I get it.

So that's transformed into Rocky III, which I had a big part in that. President Bob Smith, at the time came to me and he saw . . . we went to Bloomsburg for a football playoff game or PSAC playoff game. And saw their very nice Husky mascot and he said, "Hey Paul, how 'bout, let's look at designing a new mascot? I'll actually help fund it." I'm like, "That's cool." He goes, "But it has to be some sort of a lion-type thing. And I said, "Okay."

So, at the time, George McDowell was my assistant, and he contacted a mascot company, and we started building one, and he brought me a picture of a very cool looking lion and all the traditional lion colors. And I said, "Hey, George, tell them that I want gray and white fur, green mane, green tail." He goes, "What?!" I said, "That's what I want to see." Okay, so he brought it back and I saw it and I'm like, "That's it, that's it. That's going to be Rocky."

And so, I mean, anybody that sees this interview that doesn't like the current Rocky, okay, I'm the guy that made the decision on the color [laughter]. And then we introduced him and unveiled him at a basketball game. That was a lot of fun. And he's really taken off. I mean, we had a company that provided the current mascot logo, Rocky logo. Although it's not the official logo of Athletics, I don't think in my mind, the block S is what's most important to me. But this guy got this pretty popular logo, and it plays well with the student body. And the mascot's well received by most and especially younger folks and students. And it's a great marketing tool.

LH: So how important are the mascots to the sport and campus culture at SRU?

PL: I just think the culture, spirit, and team camaraderie and student body supporting athletic teams and supporting one another, and just to have some fun. I mean, Rocky walks into a room and you just have to smile, and we've had some great mascot--students that have been mascots. I was very blessed to have, you know, some folks that were in that suit for three to four years at a time.

We have one currently: Brandon Berns, he works on campus. He gives a scholarship for Rocky, which is *awesome*. I mean, so there aren't too many Division II schools where the mascot gets a scholarship. So, that means you have got to do a good job. And we've been very fortunate. I mean, there's some people that, like right now the mascot that's at the Altoona Curve, he was a mascot here. That's what he loved doing. We've had some great ones and, really, I never worried about them because they always were very well behaved, and they knew what to do. They enjoyed it, so. And Rocky, he goes now down into Pittsburgh and shows up at events and things like that when there's a lot of mascots showing up and that's cool. That's always cool.

LH: All right, so we'll talk a little bit about sports achievements later on, but you were inducted into the Hall of Fame. How was that?

PL: It was . . . it's an honor. It was a great honor. I mean, when I came to the Rock, we did the Hall of Fame in the spring at a hotel in April in Cranberry and, where I was at before, Eastern Illinois, we had it associated in the fall around football games. So, I brought that concept here once we got lights, we could play a night game. So, we had the Hall of Fame banquet in the afternoon, and that was really neat. It's a neat thing. And I mean, I just over my time here saw all the people we inducted were so honored to be in it and appreciative. I feel the same. It's one of the highlights of my career.

LH: That's great! So, who were the leaders whenever you first came to campus? You mentioned a long list of them, but what were your impressions of all of them?

PL: Great, solid people; cared a lot about the university; and wanted to see it continue to move forward and excel. I think the key to SRU's success has been its leadership; I really do. I think when you compare Slippery Rock University and the success it's had over the last couple of decades—actually last three or four decades—it's all been based on because of good leadership. People working towards a common goal, which is always important. So, I mean, there are silos at every university you go to, but here, the faculty and staff work together, where at other places they don't always do that. And I think that's important.

LH: So, who has been an inspiration or influence for you during your time here?

PL: Oh, lots of folks. I mentioned some of them earlier. I mean obviously Dr. Watson, Bob Watson; Bob Smith, great influence to me as a faculty member; Phil Kennedy, as I mentioned, colleagues that I had . . . a lot of people. And all the coaches have been influential to me. A lot of them I hired, but still just getting to know them as people. And then the great student athletes that have gone before me, they went through the program when I was there, I mean, and then a lot of them, then some great alums. We had super support. Some of them we've lost, you know, because of just . . . they passed on from this world. But those are all people who have been very influential in helping me and my family succeed here.

LH: Were there any student athletes that really stood out and inspired you while you were Athletic Director here?

PL: Hundreds [laughing].

LH: Hundreds [laughing]?

PL: I just--the number of championships we won, and the number of student athletes that were all region, all conference, All-Americans, it's just, I mean, the numbers when I looked at in my career that John Holtz, Sports Information Director, did a great job putting together my

accomplishments. And I was just like, wow, that's pretty cool. But it's all stuff they did. I mean, I was the guy on the top in charge kind of and, but I mean, they did the work and then all the coaches of the years that we've had and, all those successes. Yeah. Yeah, I can't pick out one in particular student, there's just been so many great student athletes here, and I've gotten to know and still stay in touch with a lot of them.

The nicest thing I got when I retired, one of the nicest things I got, I got a lot of nice things when I retired. One was, by the way, a helicopter lesson, which was really cool. Yeah [laughter], which was actually cool [laughing] I'm not going to become a helicopter pilot, but that was fun. But I got a really nice letter from . . . from a student athlete that was a member of the Student Athletic Advisory Council (SAAC). And she just talked, in her letter, she told me how much she appreciated the family atmosphere that I had created at The Rock. And I always preach that: family first. If you have a family emergency, you gotta go. Family always comes first, you know? And Coach Mihalik always said--told his football guys that, you know, you represent your school, your family, and yourself, and those are important things. To me, family was always number one, and it still is.

LH: That's cool; the care you have for the students really stands out. And it's just really cool to, like, see it and kind of see how it's influenced the university. So, it's really great to see.

PL: Thanks, I appreciate that.

LH: So, what are some lessons you've learned throughout your career?

PL: Oh, let's see. Patience [laughs]. Don't sweat the little things. Teamwork is very important. Not a 'me'--I'm not an 'I' guy. You know the thing I think I've learned here, and I learned throughout my career, is things always have a way of working out. I had an office assistant manager, she said, "You always say it's always going to work out, even when it looks like maybe it won't." And she goes, "You know, it kind of does, doesn't it?" And I said, "Yeah, it does."

You know, I had some struggles here, obviously from different times. The biggest struggle was losing my wife to cancer and watching her fight that. And you just learn what's important when you go through something like that.

You know, we had to downsize the Athletic program. We right-sized it in 2006, and we eliminated a lot of sports. And that was hard. That was, that was one of the toughest things here, as part of my job. But . . . standing before judges and lawyers, and getting drilled and grilled and at the time, Bob Smith said, "How do you . . . how are you not letting this influence you?" I said, "I just look at what's going on in my life. And this is just part of the job. It's important to me, don't get me wrong, it's very important. It's a big part of my life, but it's not the most important thing."

LH: So, were there any major events that you were here for, like academic, cultural, or national events?

PL: Well, 9/11 was here unfortunately when I was here, and that was a tragic day, and a great time of sadness. At the end of my career, Covid was another interesting, tragic time for the country and tough to deal with because we had to just shut down the university and at spring break. No one came back. Teams were coming back from spring break and going home and that was difficult. But we got through it.

What else . . . I wrote some stuff out here [pause] oh, well, one of the events that I like was that we won the Dixon Cup for the first time [laughing], which was the 2007-2008 season, which Slippery Rock had never won. That's the all sports trophy. It's a mainstay of our athletic conference. So that, I mean, that's a pretty cool thing that happened here.

You know, there's been a lot of things. I mean, I've being here 26 and a half years; there's a lot of things have happened. So I mean, the ups and downs, I think one of the major things that I've seen culturally, in this town is the growth of the community and the number of new students, the size of the student body, the growth of apartment complexes all around campus that are huge, downtown renovation and all that stuff. I mean, those are all things that I got to witness, and they've all made this place a better place to be. So, yeah, those are the things that are, to me, that stand out the most.

LH: So, a big event on campus that I'd like to know more about was the APSCUF (Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty) strike. So, you were there during that. How did it affect your job? And just the university as a whole?

PL: Well, I was one of the few faculty members that crossed the picket line, which didn't sit well with my fellow APSCUF members. I'm a member of APSCUF and now I'm a member of APSCURF (Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Retired Faculty). I support that. I kind of understand why they went on strike, but I didn't think it was the right thing to do for the students. I also knew that we were going to continue athletics, and I knew our coaches weren't going on strike, and our student athletes, and they needed leadership at the time. So, for me, it was keep going, business as usual.

But I mean, obviously, just trying to be respectful to everybody. I don't look poorly on anyone that walked picket lines, and that was fine. And I would say that at the time the leader of the APSCUF local on campus, he did a phenomenal job, and he was supportive of me. He understood where I was coming from. And a lot of the things that the faculty . . . went on strike for weren't really part of what I do, I mean, I was a full release faculty member as an Athletic Director, more of a manager than a faculty member. But it was cool to be a faculty member, and I was tenured. I mean, I appreciate that. And the union contract had some pluses and minuses for

me. So, you know, we got through it, and it happened. And I'm glad it didn't prolong. And I hope it never happens again.

LH: Yeah.

PL: Especially for the students, because to me, that was what was most important, is how the students were handling it when they were here and when the strike was going on and, and all that kind of stuff. So, it worked out okay here on this campus.

LH: All right, so now we can jump to a little bit of a cheerier topic.

PL: Sure!

LH: Let's talk about the numerous championships that have been won during your time at SRU. So, do you remember the first one, and which one felt like the best to win?

PL: Whoa . . . the first one . . . I'm not sure I can remember the first one. I know the only national championship we won as a team when I was here was with water polo and they weren't actually NCAA . . . it was Collegiate Water Polo Association. They were just moving into the NCAA. And so that was that was cool for me.

I think [pause] baseball championships, going to the College World Series. We did that twice early on in my career here. That was really neat to see. And I enjoyed that. Phenomenal track and field teams here. And they still are, and they've won so many championships, and have done so well and have had national champions in various sport and various individual sports.

Obviously getting football going in the right direction and making the football playoffs and then getting to those two semifinal games really close. And then this year, gosh, they were really, really close to getting to the national championship game. Those are, I mean, those all stand out.

Women's basketball going to the Elite Eight was really a neat experience. It was really neat. I enjoyed that a lot. I was very proud of the team. And so, I mean, we've experienced a lot of championships, so, those are some of the highlights, I would think, but I'm missing some and I know that.

We hosted the Division II fall sports Festival in Pittsburgh. And that was that was a neat thing to do. It was a lot of good work from our folks that helped put that on. We didn't have any teams competing in it, but we were the host, and that was, that was big time. That was big time. So, but yeah, those are all the different things.

I always enjoy traveling with some of the teams and going to see other places and then trying to pick up and say, "Hey, we could maybe do that at The Rock or do something better, or maybe we are already better than they are, you know?" There weren't too many places in Division II that I

went that I didn't feel like, "This is a lot better than what we have," because we were currently working on making everything here better. So those are those are some of the things.

LH: So, you have recently retired. Congratulations on your retirement. And how have you been spending your retirement and what are some ways you've stayed involved in the SRU community?

PL: Well, I've got six grandchildren, that's keeping me busy. We just picked up three new grandchildren--all new babies this summer, the past summer. So that's been fun. And they're all close. Butler / Mars area.

I became a member of the Slippery Rock Borough Council. So, I've been active with that. And actually, I just submitted a petition to run for a second term. I didn't actually run for the first term. I actually got appointed from a term that came open. Really enjoyed that, working with the community on that.

Butler County Tourism Convention Bureau--been actively with that and I was treasurer there many years ago for six years, and now I'm the vice chair of the foundation for that and enjoy that. I'm happy.

I'm very involved with Knights of Columbus at my church, right now in the middle of fish fry season. There's one tonight, so I do that.

And then just, you know, just trying to be as supportive as I can with things going on at the university, things going on in the community, being visible. I've helped with--my wife teaches at the high school--I've helped over there, the Athletic Director over there, taking tickets, doing things when they are in a bind, you know, help them out. So, I worked a lot on the softball field over there at the high school, up until this year. My wife retired as the coach over there. She's still teaching, but she gave up the coaching. So, I helped get that field. And we actually put a turf batting cage in up there, and I put the turf in myself and learned how to do that. So, but yeah, so I'm busy. I mean, and I like to golf and then, well, I didn't have time when I was working to hunt and fish, and taking some of that up a little bit, too. So, it's fun.

LH: Right. So, are you excited to see the future of SRU sports?

PL: Very! Yeah. Obviously getting ready to dedicate the softball field, softball facility, with new turf and lights and stuff. That's cool. Yeah! I think, you know, the university enrollment's good, strong. Upcoming renovations are planned across campus, which is really neat.

Academic programs: we continue to excel there, adding new ones, engineering's kind of neat now and all the health care programs we have. So, yeah, the university and the community are trying to work closely together to continue to grow. I think Dr. Riley, Karen Riley is doing a

great job with her involvement in the university, in the community. And so, yeah, I am. I'm very, very excited about it.

LH: That's great to hear. Do you have any words of advice for current and future student athletes?

PL: This is the place to be. The right place to go. I mean, if you want to come and have a good athletic experience and compete on the regional, national level; you want to have a good academic experience, this is the place to be.

When I came to Slippery Rock in 1994, the grade point average for the whole Athletic Department: 2.614 (I'm reading that here on my cheat sheet). When I left in 2021, the grade point average for the Athletic Department student athletes was 3.532. That's probably the best--that's probably one of the things--that *is* the thing I'm most proud of in terms of during my time at The Rock, is improving the academic performance of our student athletes. I knew we wanted to be good athletically and competitive, but I also knew that we wanted to be outstanding in the classroom. And that to me is very, very important. And so that's the kind of place this is. And, you know, as a student here, it's a really good atmosphere. You could be a number here, or you could be known here. It's how you want to do it. And it's a really neat size. And the community is nice, and safe, and supportive for the most part.

LH: And then our last question, do you have any words of wisdom for the broader Rock community members? And also, how would you like to be remembered?

PL: For the broader Slippery Rock community? Just keep pushing forward, continue to grow and make things and improve upon what you have. Don't be static. Don't settle for what we got. Let's continue to keep growing to get better. That's what's kept us going, made us better.

I would like to be remembered for--obviously making a positive impact and, a good family guy, a man that brought that to the athletic program and basically moved the athletic program into something that's very, very competitive nationally, regionally in the PSAC, and one that we're all proud of. And I want to keep it going. We want people to come here and have a good experience.

LH: All right. So, is there anything you'd like to add, or anything that we missed that you'd like to talk about?

PL: Ah, let me see. It looks like we got most of it, so. Yeah.

LH: All right, well--

PL: You did a great job.

LH: Thank you. So nice to get to know you. Thank you for coming today.