

**Season 3, Episode 2: BONUS Episode**

**Host:** ESF President Joanie Mahoney

**Guest:** NYS Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli

**Assemblyman:** We have such beautiful areas within the city of Syracuse and all over Onondaga County. They should be preserved for people to just enjoy. They're asking ESF all the time for its expertise as far as algae blooms are concerned for invasive species, insects, all of these things. Where is all of this coming from? It's coming from ESF. It's coming from the scientists that are here.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Hello. This is Joanie Mahoney. I am the president of SUNY ESF, and I have really enjoyed the opportunity to have campus conversations and turn them into a podcast to share with people. I am having a bonus conversation and looking forward to my conversation with Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli, who I have known for a long time. Hello, Bill.

**Assemblyman:** Hello. Good morning, madam president.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Bill, you are one of the people whose name is very familiar in Central New York. People have heard your name for a long time, and I'm sure that they know that you're involved in local government, but I don't know how much they know about you. And so I thought we'd share a little bit about you and then talk about the work that you do that supports the work that we're doing at ESF. And I know that you, like me, are a native. A lot of the people that make their way to ESF have come from other parts of the country, and you are a native. So you grew up on the north side, in the city of Syracuse. Is that right?

**Assemblyman:** Absolutely, and haven't moved very far away from where I grew up. I still live in the city of Syracuse on the northeast side of the city. But yeah, I grew up on the north side. I went to Our Lady of Pompei grade school. That's still my parish. I still go to church there. I went to St. John the Baptist Academy for high school, which is no longer there anymore. It is now another school. And then Syracuse University for both undergraduate school and law school.

**Assemblyman:** So yeah, I'm a homegrown fella and have lived here all my life and very proud to call myself Syracusan and a Central New Yorker, and I love it here. I love it here. And you should know, I mean, we argued back and forth many years ago about who loved Central New York more when we ran for county executive. And I think I've come to know that you do love this area and so do I, and that's why it's easy to work with you and to work with ESF going forward and in the past. I think ESF is a wonderful institution. And I want to tell a little story to give you a little feeling for just how far back I go.

**Assemblyman:** I was going from seventh grade to eighth grade. It was a summer like this, hot, I remember. And I was chosen to be in a reading group. Now, if you're a guy about 12 or 13 years old, the one thing you don't want to hear during the summer is that you have to read a book a week and sit down and talk about it. But there was a librarian and her name was Mrs. Simone and her husband was a professor at ESF. And I believe I have the name right? Simone. She instilled in us how wonderful it was to read. I never really had a chance to just talk to a few people of my peers about a book, and it was always studying, et cetera, in school with the nuns, and it was different. This was much more conversational.

**Assemblyman:** And then at the end of the year, now this is a fella growing up on the north side of Syracuse, no one... The only thing I knew about Syracuse University was Jimmy Brown in the football team. All of a sudden she said, "We're going to take a field trip to Syracuse University. I'm going to show you the library, the Carnegie Library." Well, walking into that library versus the White Branch Library on Butternut Street, which I was very familiar with, was like a new world. What are these things? Stacks and books and card catalogs. I mean, it was just amazing. And then a tour of the quad and the campus, and then ending up at ESF because that's where her husband was. And he took us through, I don't know which building it is, but it's the one with all of the birds and everything on the walls. And-

**Joanie Mahoney:** That's where our environmental biology depart was.

**Assemblyman:** Environmental biology. So we went through that, and I was just blown away. It just opened things up. I saw students walking the campus during the summer. It was beautiful. It was just beau... I said, this is what I want to do. So I treasure those moments, and it's one of the things that really gave me the impetus to buckle down, read a little bit more, do better. So ESF is right there at the heart of me growing up, so to speak.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I can relate so much. I grew up on the other side of town, but with a very similar path and didn't know anything really about Syracuse University, except for the basketball team. I remember seeing the campus when I was a lot older, probably in my late teens, but it wasn't something that we interacted with as little kids. It was two different worlds. And we talked about that then when we became involved in the community and about how beneficial it is for our community to have these institutions here and how we wanted that to be closer. And I know you have worked with all of the chancellors at Syracuse University, with Neil Murphy here at ESF in particular, and made it so that the community surrounding could have more interaction with the universities. You supported the work that was done here that leads to the families being employed here and being part of our neighborhoods. But I'm listening to you and I'm thinking our stories are so similar. You and I can both go really deep on Central New York.

- Assemblyman:** Oh my gosh. I don't want to tell... Well, we are lot farther than you. Lucky you.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I don't think it's that much further, but I love Central New York. We have everything here in a much more manageable way. My son lives in New York City. I like visiting him, but I love Syracuse, and I can tell similar story.
- Assemblyman:** I think some of the people in Central New York and in Syracuse take a lot of the things that we have for granted. I mean, to have these first-class, top-rung institutions in the midst, the middle of everything that we do, Syracuse University, ESF, the hospitals, Upstate Medical Center, I mean, the Hill in quotes is really something that people in this area should embrace. I know there's a little push and shove. There's always the town gown type of controversies that come up. The students come in, then they leave. That type of thing. They don't care about the city. That's not really true, and it's definitely not true of the institutions themselves. They care about the city. I haven't seen anybody, I haven't seen anybody, any leader up at Syracuse University or at ESF who didn't care deeply, deeply about Syracuse and Central New York and what those institutions, not just them personally, but what those institutions could do for this area.
- Assemblyman:** When you talk about ESF, for example, I mean, how can you talk about the cleanup of Onondaga Lake and not mention ESF, not mention the scientists that have been laboring over that for decades and decades and decades. And now, what this community is seeing happening out at the lake, is it pristine? Maybe it never will be okay, but I'll tell you one thing and you should remember this too. It's a lot different from when I was growing up. There's no place that I know of that has those types of facilities right next to the city.
- Assemblyman:** I had a colleague of mine, Brian Higgins. Brian came into the assembly the same year I did. I'm not going to tell you how many years ago that was, but he now sits in Congress. He's a congressman from Buffalo, and Brian would drive in from Buffalo every week to go to the assembly, and he stopped at the Onondaga Lake park because he was a runner, and he would run. He said, "You have a linear park." That's what he called it. "It's flat. It's straight. It's perfect for running, and it's beautiful. I would do anything to have this on the lake front in Buffalo." So again, I don't think that the people of Syracuse in Central New York really understand just what we have here, and ESF is in the middle of all of that. It really is.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I couldn't agree more. And you mentioned my time as county executive, and that's where I, on a professional level, really started to interact with ESF. And I believe as I sit here today, I'm convinced we would not have the success with the lake cleanup project or those trails or that beautiful lake and all the amenities without the benefit of those scientists and students right here in our community.

**Assemblyman:** Absolutely.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I tell the story, Bill, about coming into office. We were under a consent order. The county was to clean the lake, and there was a plan to build sewage treatment plants-

**Assemblyman:** Oh, I remember it very, very well. I remember the Southside. I remember the plant that went up there and the controversy within the community, and I remember what you did. Kudos to you.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Well, it wasn't me on my own. I believe that Judge Scullin, who was the federal judge overseeing that consent order, I believe that the fact that what we were trying to do was being endorsed by people who knew about green infrastructure and knew about stormwater. We had these environmental engineers that had that stamp of approval from ESF. I think that's why, in large part, the judge made that leap of faith with us, changed from those sewage treatment plants in the city to a plan for green infrastructure to stop the runoff and work to clean the lake. We ended up cleaning the lake four years ahead of the schedule, and I remember we went to the [inaudible] boulevard. I was with my father and we were getting some scaffolding to bring back to set up to paint their house. I could not stand to be there. I remember putting my shirt over my face, the combination of the oil-soaked land and the sewage. I couldn't believe people could work there. It was just such an unpleasant place there to be and live there.

**Assemblyman:** Again, that whole area, I mean, we can be down on a lot of things. I mean, you can be down on all the money that's going in there, all the money that's going into the [inaudible] the lake, all the money in the amphitheater and maybe in aquarium and all of that. But when you think about what we grew up in and what we saw, like you say, the oil takes the dump. There was the dump. I mean, that's what you came into the city and that's what you saw. And people today, I mean... And I'm not down on young people. I love my children, but the 30 and 40 somethings, they have no idea. There's no reference back to what that was.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I don't know if the technology exists to capture that smell, but when I'm out there, I'm always telling people, "You have no idea. You would never have wanted to be here." And then even when the county was going through the approval process to put the amphitheater, a lot of the detractors where people saying, "No one would ever want to sit on that lake shore." And I said, "Oh, you haven't been out there. It's changed, and it's changed-"

**Assemblyman:** Did the Santana concert go off the other night? I mean, that was supposed to be huge, and I know that Chesney was out there last. I mean, they're packing the place. And the hotels are telling me that every time they have an event, they're full, especially the ones down by the lake.

- Joanie Mahoney:** Absolutely. I hear the same thing, but to be able to tie that back to the work that faculty and students were doing here at ESF to make that possible.
- Assemblyman:** It even comes closer to home, especially for me. I got a grant for the city of Syracuse. I don't know if it was 250,000 or 500,000 for Schiller Park, which Schiller Park is on the north side of Syracuse. It's where I would swim as a young kid all the time. And as a matter of fact, now, I'm just going to tell a story. Everybody can laugh out there, but I remember Schiller Park before it had the Olympic pool. I remember Schiller Park when it had a concrete heart-shaped pool on the bottom level, if you know what I'm talking to, the old bathhouse, and it was a heart-shaped pool, and talk about environmentally correct. It would be emptied and filled one day a week. There was no filtration. I mean, I think they threw chlorine into it. I have no idea, but literally they would, on a Tuesday, empty the pool at night and then fill it up. You couldn't swim. And then the next day, there was swimming for a week.
- Assemblyman:** But anyway, Schiller Park was a beautiful park, and the roundtop area just got totally overgrown and trees had fallen and invasive species of plants have overgrown parts of it. And I had asked people, can we bring this back? And the city said, "Yeah, but it's going to take money." So I got a grant. And guess who's doing the work? ESF graduate students are working with the city's arborist to basically clear out all the invasive species around the roundtop of Schiller Park, planting native species that were there from the beginning. Now, you could see the whole... It's just a beautiful view. Over the last few years, you couldn't see anything because it was all covered with trees and brush and everything else. In a year or two, this is going to be gorgeous. And the whole park is coming back, and they're talking about now doing the steps and things that were done during FDR's time, during the depression.
- Assemblyman:** We have such beautiful areas within the city of Syracuse and all over on Onondaga County, but they should be preserved for not just me to say, look at what a great job all these people are doing, but for the kids and for people to just enjoy. I mean, for seniors, to be able to go up to the top of that hill and see all of the city on a beautiful day. It's just gorgeous. And so I'm really thrilled about that, and another thing that ESF is doing. So ESF is just intertwined with the whole city of Syracuse, always very civic-minded, community-minded, and it's always a pleasure working with people from there.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, I couldn't agree more. As a young child knew of ESF, I had friends whose parents had gone to what they called the forestry school, but it wasn't until I was able to work side by side with ESF faculty and students and on that lake cleanup project that I really was in awe of the work being done at ESF. And then the timing couldn't have been better for me when the president at ESF decided to step down and I said, I'm going to throw my hat in the ring. I can't believe that I get to work with the people that I do and I get to do the kind of work I do. Sometimes, we turn the mic off and I say, "I can't believe that I have the ability

to ask people that are at the top of their field in climate science, in environmental work and ask them to just have a conversation. It's fascinating.

**Joanie Mahoney:** And every single day, I'm learning things from the people who work here and I'm watching them change the world around us. That example with the lake bill, I had people from San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York City that wanted us to come, and we did, and we brought our team to share what we learned from the ESF work that was done on the lake. And there's green infrastructure being done all across this country because we did it here first, and we did it well. Onondaga County was the first municipality in the country to have a consent order mandating green infrastructure, and it was because ESF was here and they did that work and they did it so well that it's been replicated across the country.

**Assemblyman:** Madam president, unfortunately, I think that the people of this community just don't understand what you just said. They don't. Like I said at the beginning of this podcast, people don't realize what we have as the center of this city, and ESF is a major, major part of that. And what I like on a state level is that ESF is being pulled to work with others. Like you're working with Clarkson as a center of excellence. That's more money that we were able to bring to the hometown, so to speak.

**Assemblyman:** But again, dealing with water, we're asking ESF all the time for its expertise as far as algae blooms are concerned, for invasive species within our forest, insects, all of these things. Where is all of this coming from? It's coming from ESF. It's coming from the scientists that are here, right here in Syracuse. And they're making a difference in our way of life not only on the local level, which we've been talking about now, but also on a statewide and national level. The federal secretary for the interior or whatever they're called, he was at ESF probably about 10 years ago, and he was lauding what was going on in the halls of ESF and what it meant to the country as a whole.

**Joanie Mahoney:** And that story that you told about your teacher instilling a love of reading, for me, that was such an interesting story because you are also someone who has been really laser-focused on supporting education. And that is a big part of what we do at ESF as well is educate the next generation, we call them, of climate warriors up here at ESF. But at all levels, K-12, higher ed, you have been a big supporter of education, and hearing that story and the impact that teacher made on you makes a lot of sense to me.

**Assemblyman:** I know you and I have talked about this, but the ESF should be a part of Onondaga Lake. And the idea that this expertise can be shared, not only with the public, but with the world right on the lake that was cleaned, if people don't think that that's a big deal, it is, and for nothing else, but just have others from all over the world come to talk to the people at ESF as to "How did you do this? This was the most polluted lake in the entire world," some people said, and now

fish are living in it. People are going to be able to swim in it. I mean, there's boating. There's recreation. And as you said, you can walk around the lake and enjoy it and not cover your face because of the smell. This is an amazing turnaround.

**Assemblyman:** And we, as Central New Yorkers, not only ESF, now, I'm going to take a little away from you here, but we as Central New Yorkers should be proud of what we're doing and how maybe we had to be pulled yelling and screaming every once in a while, but we've done it. This community has done something that's extraordinary and it should be shown not only here, across the state, across the nation, across the world. And we don't think that way in Syracuse. We just don't. We take for granted the world-class things that we have here, and that, to me, is so frustrating. I think both of us-

**Joanie Mahoney:** But it's also kind of charming because we're-

**Assemblyman:** Oh, charming, charming. See, you're too nice.

**Joanie Mahoney:** We are historically a hard-working town. The salt industry in the Erie Canal and the actual labor that went into creating this part of the country and opening the rest of the country to the world, that mentality didn't give people a lot of time to sit on their porches in their rocking chairs and discuss all the benefits of the community we live in. So there is something kind of charming about the fact that we take for granted everything that we have in Syracuse.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I want people from ESF to come into this city because yesterday we had an event where I was able to have some lunch with faculty and staff, and we were talking about local restaurants and local things to do. And people who transplant here because of this college, I don't think also really get to know Syracuse to the extent that I hope they can and I want them to, but there is something about the mentality in Syracuse. We have this little bit of cynicism and-

**Assemblyman:** Oh, a little bit? Seriously?

**Joanie Mahoney:** But I do want to highlight the work that you have done. I know you have teachers in your own family, but you have been such a big supporter for education at all levels. And I just want to make sure that the people that are listening understand that it's not just your work on local government issues, but you've been really supportive of the teaching at, as I said, K-12.

**Assemblyman:** I was married to a teacher for 47 years. God love her. And I have a son who's a teacher and a daughter who's a college administrator. So we are... And I can't tell you how many teachers, brothers, sisters, who are also teachers. So it does run in the family, so to speak. We're very big on education. And we're getting



away now, I think, and I'm really thinking about this at this point in time, but it seems like we're getting to a place where people have to be very specific on what they learn, very certified type of instruction so that you can do this or you can do that.

**Assemblyman:** And the idea of a liberal arts education, which I know you had up at Syracuse University like I did, is kind of going, "You don't need that. It costs too much money," I find that very, very, very troubling because the idea that young people shouldn't have the opportunity to kind of open themselves up to everything, to learn literature and art, yeah, it may not help you build the rocket ship to the moon, but on the other hand, it gives you an idea of what your fellow man is all about. So I feel very, very troubled by the way this is going.

**Assemblyman:** And a lot of it has to do with cost, and as you know, at ESF, we're always concerned about how much it's going to cost to go to a state school. We have to have enough money to run it. Right, madam president? That's important. But on the other hand, the cost of education is starting to get out of hand, and maybe we should be doing more to make sure that our young people are being educated across the board in terms of a very general education, as well as in the sciences, which we need today more than ever. But education to me, from that day I walked into the Carnegie Library, it's a cliché, but it blew my mind. It really did. It just opened everything up like, wow, holy smokes, I didn't know any of this stuff existed.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I don't know if I've told you this story. For people that are listening, they maybe have already gleaned that you and I go back a long ways and have become friends over the years.

**Assemblyman:** Yeah. After you beat me for county executive.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Yeah.

**Assemblyman:** And I think one thing we should say here, I mean, if you wanted to see two people who are diametrically opposite in many respects in terms of politics, and I know you're above that now because you're president of the university, but we are, but we became friends because we could do this, which is talk. And again, this is something that's so important today. And being able to sit down and find common ground and boy, oh boy, there's a lot of it. There's a lot of common ground, and we've got to start jumping on it.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Bill, I've said that within the last few days, I don't remember the context of the conversation, but I was saying, we've got this political system that really makes it seem like there's so much distance between the extreme right and the extreme left, but in my own personal life, where I interact with hundreds of people, they're all in that big swath of people somewhere in the middle. And my



admiration for you comes from the fact that you love the community that you're working in. You work really hard for the community that you're working in. It's clear that you've done your homework and you've supported issues that further the mission here at ESF. But that's what I wish that we would get from politics is just focus on the things that you can appreciate about each other and look for good people with good intentions and support them.

**Joanie Mahoney:** And I do remember while I'm talking, it was because I was talking to a group of young people graduating from an internship program at Brookhaven National Lab out on Long Island, and I was encouraging them to get involved in politics. And almost to a person, people are like, "Oh no, never. I would never throw my hat in the ring." And I say, "But if you don't, who's going to?" Right? We need the majority, which is the people in the middle that have a lot of common ground working together to solve these issues. So I wish that I had that moment that you talk about where you're in Carnegie library and it just opened your mind to the possibilities. And I do agree that the pendulum might be swinging too far. Everybody's focusing on these micro credentials and getting right out to work. And there is a place, for sure, for that, but we don't want to get away from that mind-blowing experience of appreciating something that you hadn't ever set out to-

**Assemblyman:** Well, that's why I said I'm troubled by this new turn, but it is a new turn. And for society, it's necessary. I mean, we need those credentials. We need those certification. We need those people doing that kind of work. And if you've made that decision that that's what you want to do, then fine. That's good. But I think degrading the idea that a more liberal arts education is not worth it, that's the troubling thing to me.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Yeah. Education is always worth it.

**Assemblyman:** Pick up a book. I tell young people, "I don't care what you read. I don't care if it's the comics. Read. Just keep reading." And another good Republican, we used to call it the tag team, and we said that lovingly, okay? But when groups of children came to Albany, Senator DeFrancisco and I would always come together, because our districts overlap. John always talked about reading. And then one went into the other and I said, "And after you read and you know the issues of the day, then you vote." And so it was reading and voting, reading and voting. And we did this for years and years and years.

**Assemblyman:** And the CFE case, the case on education that forced the legislature to put more money into education over the years, the trial court judge... And I do do my homework. I read the case. The trial court judge said specifically that the states mandate, as far as students are concerned, is to make sure they can read and understand the issues of the day so they can vote. That's in the decision that is the heart of the CFE case. So we're talking about the same thing here. It doesn't matter how you get folks to read, but it just opens up everything. I remember as

a kid, again, as a paper boy throwing papers, but I'd come home. First things you'd read were you'd read the sports page, had to know how Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris were doing. I mean, that's what I did. And then you read the comics and then, you know what? You started to read the front page of the paper.

**Joanie Mahoney:** And you become informed.

**Assemblyman:** And you become informed. And then all of a sudden who's running for president? And what is an assembly person? And all of this stuff just starts to come. You just have to start reading, and it opens up a totally new world.

**Joanie Mahoney:** That was the story I was going to tell you. So my father was in the army and he was stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska.

**Assemblyman:** Your father too? My father was in Alaska.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Isn't that funny? All these conversations we've had. So my father always told the story about how he was walking back from where he worked to where he slept, I guess. And my father said there was this tiny library up there, and this person that my father was with wanted to drop a book off and get another book from the library. So that was the only reason my father went into this little library, and he said, I just couldn't believe that someone was doing this because they wanted to. He had only been a reader because he was forced to, to do a book report or an essay, and in your free time, you're just going to go read a book. So he said he went in and while his friend was looking for a book, my father picked up a book, and I know the book is Desiree, and I've read it myself.

**Joanie Mahoney:** But my father said, reading that book made him realize how much he didn't know, and it just opened his mind, like you described, to this whole world of information that's out there if you'll pick up a book and read. And my father, it's amazing to me that he tells that story because I've only ever known him as a voracious reader, and he was reading history books. And he would, as I said, read about science. And when he was in the assembly, in the seat that you are in now, he took classes at Hudson Valley Community College, took a calculus class because he had time. He was in Albany during the week. And he was this lifelong learner that he can go back and pinpoint to that stop in the library up in Fairbanks, Alaska, just like you can tell that story about Carnegie library. And I wish there was something we could bottle about your story and his story.

**Assemblyman:** Well, I think what we need to do is make sure that kids get the opportunities, that one little field trip. You never know what's going to turn somebody's head and make that light bulb go off. That's why education is important. From pre-K and childcare learning to higher education, it's all important. And without it, I don't know how society is. We know it is going to get by. We need to keep

learning and to keep people interested. And I think it's fun. Now, I wish I could just sit down and read for a few hours in the middle of the day, I mean, something I'd like to read instead of all of the papers that are on my desk, but that would be fine.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I appreciate that you have taken the time to let people get to know the person behind the name that they've heard for a long time. Bill Magnarelli is very popular name in the community.

**Assemblyman:** Well, thank you.

**Joanie Mahoney:** And I want to thank you on behalf of the college. We've only touched on it a little, but I can say that everything that we've asked you for support for the college, you've worked to help us with. You've brought a lot of funding for the college and for some of the research that's done here. I know you support that CAFRI project. You support the Center of Excellence with Clarkson, the research that's done here, and it's clear that it comes from the heart because this conversation makes it very clear to people that you really value the education and the work and appreciate this institution in our community. So I've enjoyed our conversation as I always do.

**Assemblyman:** Thank you for having me. I appreciate it also, and we'll do it again sometime.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Absolutely. Thank you, and thanks everybody for listening. And Assemblyman Magnarelli, I will see you again soon.