**Transcription sponsored by Cuyahoga Valley National Park**

**Carol Maureen** [00:00:00] But I think I can... Okay. Well, today we are interviewing Rhonda Russell, who owns the Downtown Emporium in Peninsula, Ohio. And Rhonda, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. Some of them are kind of personal. And when when you born?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:00:21] I arrived in 1934.

**Carol Maureen** [00:00:24] 1934. And where were you born?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:00:26] I was born in Athens County, Ohio, in a town called Albany, very small town, very similar to Peninsula.

**Carol Maureen** [00:00:35] And how long have you lived here in Peninsula?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:00:40] I don't live in Peninsula. I live in Bath Township. And I've owned an antique store in Peninsula since about 1970. I've lived in Bath Township since 1967.

**Carol Maureen** [00:00:55] What attracted you to the area of the Cuyahoga Valley?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:01:02] I was teaching in a suburb of Cleveland and I taught in Parma and then I taught in Brecksville. And I, they were going to build a freeway over my house and so I started looking around and I narrowed out a lot of the areas. And had a friend who had some lots in Bath Township. And I couldn't afford to live in Brecksville, so I bought a lot in Bath Township and then had a house built. And I've never seen any place I'd rather be. So.

**Carol Maureen** [00:01:36] What was it that really sold your heart on Bath Township, aside from the fact that your friend had a lot?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:01:41] Well, I grew up in the country and I like creeks, and ravines, and trees, and woods. And my whole life, I, I had thought that I would have a house built on the side of a hill over a ravine by a stream. And I do. So it's just kind of been a conglomeration of things.

**Carol Maureen** [00:02:10] So it looked a lot like what you grew up with?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:02:13] Yes. I took one look at that lot and I said, I'll take it.

**Carol Maureen** [00:02:18] Your heart said yes.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:02:19] Yes, it did.

**Carol Maureen** [00:02:21] Now, what is your current role in relationship to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:02:28] I don't know of a role. I have been a member or a supporter of the park financially. I'm a member of the, the Association.

**Carol Maureen** [00:02:41] Association of what? What's the whole name?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:02:43] The Cuyahoga Valley National Park Association.

**Carol Maureen** [00:02:49] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:02:49] And I believe in supporting things that we talk about and enjoy and feel strongly about. I can remember, I go back to when John Seiberling was working on convincing people to support this park, and I can remember him saying at a meeting at the schoolhouse in Peninsula that if you don't support this park, your valley will look like Cuyahoga Heights in 20 years. And he was exactly right. He was a representative at that time and he lived right on the edge of the park down in Bath Township. So.

**Carol Maureen** [00:03:36] Was it hard, do you think, to sell park to the communities it was going to?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:03:41] Yes, it was, because Mr. Birdsell was the first superintendent and he had a very abrasive personality. And I think he viewed this as his land and he did not have the finesse and the approach that the park people have today. I think that he made people feel that they were going to have to sell their land, whether they wanted to or not, with no options. And there's still you know, there's still some feeling about that. I think that it's mostly overcome. But when someone says to you, I'm taking your house, that can engender a lot of thoughts.

**Carol Maureen** [00:04:35] Mm hmm.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:04:35] So but it happened. And I think that it, it was worth it.

**Carol Maureen** [00:04:42] So there were people who did have to make some sacrifices?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:04:45] Yes.

**Carol Maureen** [00:04:45] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:04:46] Yes.

**Carol Maureen** [00:04:47] And some people were perhaps more willing than others?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:04:49] I think so. And I hear today once in a while, well, they tore these all these houses down and now they're restoring the houses and encouraging farming. And it doesn't seem to be quite right. But I think that, you know, and it's been a long process, we've all grown. I've always been a park supporter and I love this valley.

**Carol Maureen** [00:05:23] Do you, do you see a difference or do what do you? Who do you see coming through Peninsula in your store? That is it. That is perhaps drawn by the park, or do you think that its been a draw to the area and then people thought, oh, look at this little antique store?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:05:48] I'm the best measure of who comes here that you'll ever have. Several years ago, I thought, okay, this year I'm going to see if during the course of the year, someone from every state in the union would be in walk in my front door. And I had all but two states by I started in June and I had all but two states in May. And I heard a lady talking about Vegas in the back and, and I said, are you from Nevada? And she said, yes. So I got that. And, and then I got the last state. And then, so in conjunction with that, I thought, well, I'll try countries, you know, this is working. And so I have had people from 49 countries that have walked in the door of that little store. And I could do the state thing every year. I could. That would be easy. Because, and now what we're getting is we're getting people who visit national parks. This is a thing that probably because of the golden age pass and a few other encouraging things. I had two doctors from Italy who came to visit. They were visiting the national parks in this country and they, they picked this one. And, you know, living here, we take a lot of things for granted. And I said, why did you come here and what do you think? And they said, we just love it. We just love it. And that's been the reaction, which kind of surprises me because, you know, we don't have rides and whoopies and all that kind of stuff.

**Carol Maureen** [00:07:27] Mm hmm.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:07:28] You really have to enjoy nature if you're going to enjoy this valley. And so I find, I find that people that come. We now, we have this past week, we've had a lot of people from surrounding states in but it draws people from everywhere and I can document it.

**Carol Maureen** [00:07:53] Was that a surprise to you?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:07:59] I think it was when I first started, because when I come to work, I have one stoplight and that's one right outside my store and I come down through the valley, you know, alongside the river. I've canoed that river in the past from where the little Cuyahoga comes in up to Canal Road. I've biked this whole trail. I know this valley. And I thought, well, you know, what would I think if this was someplace else and I went to visit it? As we tell people about the herons. And of course, we're the best travel guides there are here. So I guess it kind of surprises me. It just tickles me that they come here. It just, it just tickles me.

**Carol Maureen** [00:08:49] So, so many all ages.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:08:51] All ages. Grampas. Grandmas. And whenever anybody has friends who lives around here in the surrounding area, has friends that come for graduations, or weddings, or things; they always bring them down to Peninsula. And it is Peninsula is, of course, the heart of the park. Only place like that in the world that I know of that have, you know, in the middle of a national park. And you can but it is unlike most of the places around parks that I've seen because we don't have any junk stores. We don't have any fast foods. We don't have any flashes of modern stuff. You can come, and you can walk, and you can enjoy your friends and nobody will bother you. And you can ride the train, or the trail or, visit and eat, and maybe shop.

**Carol Maureen** [00:09:51] Now, along those, those lines, what supportive services would be perhaps made available in the future that would not be junk stores, would not be junk food stores, but that would somehow enhance the park experience and, and also maybe give a little revenue to Peninsula or any other little town that happens to be along or in the park the whole length all the way from Cleveland down to Zoar? Can you think of what types of store, what types of businesses would support the towpath, the bikeway, you know, the whole thing and yet not be a detriment to... Can you think of?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:10:47] Well, obviously food, we are the only place that people on the trail that has food other than you're edging in with trail mix and, and park place. And up at Canal Road, there's some food. I think that we're blessed that we don't have souvenir stores. Although, I'm happy that Park Place is going to have some nice park souvenirs. I think that the park's missing a bit by not having things that people can buy, like caps and badges (that they, a lot of people collect badges from parks), nice souvenirs, nice shirts, nature related things, birding supplies and things like that. I think some place like Appalachian Outfitters could complement the trail, people on the trail. But, you know, the antique business is you can't predict anything with that and you can't predict anything. If you ask any of the merchants in Peninsula, the galleries, and we don't have a lot of merchants, but the galleries, and the Yellow Creek Traders, and myself we don't know when somebody comes in what they're going to do. You know, and particularly now, you know, business is down now. We do have an advantage here because we're close and you don't have to buy a lot of gas to get here. But as far as sales, I see only nature oriented shops and I think, I think they might succeed.

**Carol Maureen** [00:12:43] And support the park, advertise the park, and yet not.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:12:48] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:12:48] Junk the park up.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:12:48] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:12:50] Right?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:12:50] Right. The train does a good job and they sell things on the train. So and that's another big plus that we have that we have a train that runs through it. It's like that river runs through it. It's just a remarkable coincidence of things here.

**Carol Maureen** [00:13:10] Coincidence and yet it was helped.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:13:13] Sure.

**Carol Maureen** [00:13:13] To happen so it also supports the park.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:13:15] Yes. Yes, it does greatly.

**Carol Maureen** [00:13:18] How did you come to get involved in the antiques in the park and how did all that come about?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:13:24] I don't know.

**Carol Maureen** [00:13:25] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:13:25] I have no idea. I didn't have, my family didn't have any antiques. It's, it's antiques, it's like the Civil War. You have to be a curious person to be involved with it. It's a big puzzle that will never be solved. So I like puzzles and I love my corner in Peninsula. So, you know, I can tell everything that's going on in the village from that corner, so.

**Carol Maureen** [00:13:49] Okay. Okay, can you outline at all like a timeline of your personal involvement with the kind of Cuyahoga Valley National Park project? We started with that meeting in the school house with John Seiberling.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:14:03] Right. Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:14:04] And he started he said, you know, if you don't do something...

**Rhonda Russell** [00:14:06] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:14:06] About it, this is what the end result is going to be in 20 years. Okay now, this obviously hit a chord with you, and what was your next step?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:14:16] Well, I don't know about hitting a chord. I thought, you know, this is a really interesting idea and I think he's right. And then I watched it start to develop and I worked with Jeff Maugans, who was one of the first people to work at the tried to work at the Environmental Ed. Center with programs for kids. And at that time, I was teaching in Brecksville and I wanted to get that school involved because it's very, very hard to get teachers involved in outdoor education. They're willing to take the kids, and drop them off, and then pick them up, you know? And I shouldn't say that about teachers, but it's pretty true. And I remember when Jeff was laying out the trails over there at the Environmental Ed. Center, and he did, he really did a good job. And we got our kids down and got them involved. And I think that kind of started. And now they are involved.

**Carol Maureen** [00:15:14] They are involved, yeah.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:15:14] And I think the education programs... I've always worked with kids. I had gifted kids for a while and I've always worked with kids involving them with their surroundings outside trees and leaves and not grabbing things, but looking at them. And, you know, you have to you have to work at that. And I think that's such an important part of this park that has evolved with it. That's not true of a lot of other national parks. You know, they're you don't see environmental education centers in other parks.

**Carol Maureen** [00:15:54] No you don't. No.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:15:56] I just, I looked this morning to see what national parks I had visited, and I think it's about 31. So I have a pretty good perspective on what goes on with them.

**Carol Maureen** [00:16:09] Well, this is about the only one you've ever seen with an environmental education program. But environmental education is huge.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:16:15] It is.

**Carol Maureen** [00:16:16] Education right now.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:16:16] It is. And we have, it's been a long road to get it, you know, this far.

**Carol Maureen** [00:16:23] Now is Jeff, Jeff's named Moggins? M-O-G-G-I-N-S?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:16:27] M-A-U-G-A-N-S and I think he, he went out to the Rocky Mountain National Park from here.

**Carol Maureen** [00:16:34] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:16:35] And his wife was curator at Garfield place and she obviously is out west too. Nice, nice man.

**Carol Maureen** [00:16:43] Well that's, I'm glad you brought up the Environmental Education Center because that is a huge thrust, and now in sixth grade just about everybody has to go and have some type of an environmental camping experience. And we actually two years ago, were there in the summertime, we lived there for a week and it's a beautiful facility and you really are involved with nature and they have beautiful programs. Yeah, they were excellent. Okay, well, from your perspective, why is this project important?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:17:23] Well, I think it's unique in this country, where else do you have an entire river valley preserve between two major metropolitan areas? That would be. I just, I don't know of any place like it. And the, the challenges here are more, I believe, than in most parks because of the development around the perimeter. But it's just it's such a unique situation and we did it right here.

**Carol Maureen** [00:18:02] You had challenges to overcome that a lot of parks don't have.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:18:05] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:18:06] And yes, we've overcome.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:18:09] Right. Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:18:11] Can you think of what would be a highlight or a watershed moment in the history of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park movement?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:18:22] I think when it became a park instead of a recreation area, because that brought funding and they were able to do more things. And the other thing, I think is that John Debo is a remarkable park superintendent, the way that he works with the communities. He has worked with us in Peninsula. And he is and Debbie Yandala also is a wonderful person to work with. And when you have people like that in charge, you know, you're going to have a lot of good things happen. So.

**Carol Maureen** [00:19:10] So these are people with vision?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:19:13] Well, I, oh, Deb has vision. You know, she's, she is, she has a lot of things going on in that head of hers. And John does too. They alternate. They work. I'm the vice president of the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, which is about this big. Steve Bures is president, but they work with the, with us. They help us out when they can. They involve themselves in activities that we're having. Right now we're working on having Python Day in July. And they're, you know, they're involved in with that.

**Carol Maureen** [00:19:53] Python Day?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:19:53] Oh, yes.

**Carol Maureen** [00:19:56] With snakes?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:19:56] Yes. Well, there's a famous legend about the Peninsula python that in 1944 it escaped from a circus wagon and came up through the valley.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:06] Oh my.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:07] And.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:07] It's still out there?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:07] We're going to have all kinds of wonderful things happen on July the 19th.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:11] Okay, that's wonderful. Now, what is Deb's last name?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:14] Yandala.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:16] Yandala. Can you spell that?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:17] Y-A-N-D-E-L-A [sic], I believe.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:20] Okay. Well, what changes have occurred since the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Project began? I know you feel as though that's a little redundant, but it's just hitting it from another side.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:32] Well, we have more traffic.

**Carol Maureen** [00:20:38] Have people accepted that do you think?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:20:42] We're dealing with it. We're dealing with it all the time. The, I forgot to mention that the bike trail because I talk about the bike trail and the store all the time. I think this is the most successful bike trail in the country because it's easy to ride and we get tons and tons and tons of people on the trail. If you have a bike trail built on a railroad track, you know, railroad tracks run right straight ahead through whatever brush and all kinds of junky stuff. But this, if you build it on the towpath of a canal, wherever you have a canal, you have to have a river to have water for the canal. And wherever you have a river, you have beautiful scenery and you were going to have a different kind of wildlife. And so that's another thing that has developed with this park. I'm a birder. That's how I get to a lot of the, you know, the other parks. And this is one listed as one of the best birding areas in Ohio now. And that's going to, that's made a difference. We have a lot of birders coming here. So and I went off the paths with that one. So.

**Carol Maureen** [00:22:02] What hurdles do you think have existed as the project has developed?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:22:07] Money.

**Carol Maureen** [00:22:09] Okay. Money? Funding?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:22:10] Funding. Funding for personnel and funding for land acquisition. And funding, we'd like to see some more funding for the village of Peninsula to help with our roads and our police department. So [and] they're working on that. But funding.

**Carol Maureen** [00:22:33] So since it became a national park, funding became a little more available?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:22:37] Funding from the, from Washington, became more available. But then with this administration, park funding has been cut in all the national parks. And we don't, in this country, unless we have a leader that believes in conservation, they don't follow Teddy Roosevelt's example. You know, that's, that's a good place to cut because nobody, nobody sees it immediately. So we, we have not funded our national parks well.

**Carol Maureen** [00:23:16] Okay, and so this is a challenge that has to be somehow overcome.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:23:19] I think it's the biggest challenge that there is. If you're going to do anything about traffic, or taxes, or commerce, or visitors; it involves money.

**Carol Maureen** [00:23:37] Do you think that the corporate entities in the Cleveland/Akron/Canton area have picked up any of that slack?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:23:45] Some, some they're becoming, they're becoming a little more aware of it through the Canalway Coalition and through the, the park groups. And I know that Deb has people working on that through the association and we see more corporate involvement.

**Carol Maureen** [00:24:08] Now with that might also marketing might help, marketing the park. I mean nobody ever has to say Yellowstone. Everybody knows it's a national park. Grand Teton. Yosemite. Grand Canyon. Those are like the flagship big deal parks. Nobody has to think about it. What do you think the effect of marketing might have? What types of marketing might be helpful?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:24:36] I don't know. I don't know. You know, how do you market your neighborhood? This we don't have arches in and we don't have we have a waterfall. I think that with the chamber, we're working on that all the time. You know, where do we advertise? Who do we call? What would, where would we go with this? And I'm sure that John and Deb are doing the same thing. Advertising is in magazines and newspapers is incredibly almost prohibitive cost-wise. So the train is a very good marketer. We can market the things we have that stand out. And in Peninsula, we're basing our calendar on a series of events. We have five events during the year and that's good marketing. And we're getting so that will we repeat them now so people know and the advertisers know.

**Carol Maureen** [00:25:46] Is Blossom helping? Blossom Music Center?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:25:48] No.

**Carol Maureen** [00:25:49] No?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:25:50] No. They may help the restaurants some and probably simply the exposure. Once in a while, I'll get somebody that is here for a concert that they're hanging around, you know, waiting, but they come and they go. It's like they're kind of like the Coliseum. You know, the Coliseum didn't bring anything except trash. And they came and they went. So it, Blossom may have some effect, but I don't see much.

**Carol Maureen** [00:26:29] Long-term into the area. Okay. What criticisms do you think the project of the national park has encountered?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:26:49] Well, I don't know. I think there's still some resentment about some of the homes that were taken. And there's a little concern about the amount of tax money that Peninsula has lost because of park-owned property. And that's kind of an ongoing process. But I think overall. That. The park is pretty well thought of. It is outside the area. And I think in this area more and more, I hear, you know, wonderful things. You know, my neighbors come down here, everybody, you know, comes down to check the river and the lizard and, you know, it's our valley. So I don't, I don't see a lot of.

**Carol Maureen** [00:27:54] That's good. Well, how has the landscape changed both in Peninsula and in the Cuyahoga Valley area since the project's creation?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:28:09] The landscape has not changed in Peninsula.

**Carol Maureen** [00:28:12] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:28:13] Peninsula is such a fabulous example of historic preservation with such small lots and in the park is around the village that I don't think that it has changed. The rim of the village, or the rim of the pardon me, the rim of the valley is what's affecting the landscape, particularly with flooding. And the housing developments that are being built on both sides of the valley, and with the cement driveways and the curbing. Every time somebody builds a house now they have to have a big curb. And what that does is it channels the water instead of letting the water disperse and run down in a natural way, it's channeled. And so we've had we have a lot of flooding. We have much more flooding. And that's affected the park all the way up and down from Canal Road down to Akron. The best thing about that is that the Coliseum was not converted to a housing development because that would have been about the worst thing that could have ever happened, because in, you know, this whole area here would be gone with washing down the hills. But so that would be the biggest thing.

**Carol Maureen** [00:29:32] So, the park was able to buy up the Coliseum land?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:29:34] No. I think they brokered a deal with the Nature Conservancy or a coalition of conservancies. And it, it now belongs to the park and it has become one of the best grassland breeding areas anywhere in the state.

**Carol Maureen** [00:29:52] Was that a surprise to everyone?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:29:54] It was sure a surprise to me because there were [three] sparrows, two sparrows, and another bird up there this year that have never been seen here.

**Carol Maureen** [00:30:05] So you'd have to get out your birding book and look whose.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:30:07] Oh, you know, they're, you know, it's, it's a wonderful area. And you'll see people. They have a trail. Now, I'd like to see it developed a little bit more. They have a small parking lot, but the birders love that area. Henslow's sparrow was up there. I've never seen one of those.

**Carol Maureen** [00:30:24] So in what ways will your efforts because I know you're trustee. I think secretary, vice president of your chamber.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:30:32] Oh. I'm, I'm a VP. I am in charge of vice for the...

**Carol Maureen** [00:30:36] Vice. Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:30:36] The chamber.

**Carol Maureen** [00:30:38] I love that. I don't think there is any vice in there. In what ways will your efforts protect or benefit the project?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:30:48] Well, as far as the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce goes, Steve Bures is the president and Steve and I are thoroughly committed to the town of Peninsula and this valley. We both love it dearly. We talk every day. He has Elements Gallery backed by the depot, and it is an ongoing commitment. And because of that, the other shop owners are pretty much in the same frame of mind.

**Carol Maureen** [00:31:20] You know, that's an interesting mental picture that you gave me, because on the one hand, you could be at loggerheads with the park, but you all chosen to be pro-Peninsula, as well pro-Park. So you know that your survival has to be a together survival.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:31:38] Right. Right. And we've been able to do that with John Debo. Most of the merchants in Peninsula are there because they, they really like the town and like the valley. It's an incredibly interesting town. I'm also a trustee of the Boston School, which is on the corner. The restored building on the corner down there. And we have that that's the last one to be restored. And we're almost done with the basement. So we have on that corner, the G.A.R. Hall, which is becoming a civil war museum, is completely restored in the period. And then the Boston School is restored and the Bronson Church is restored. So we have three historic buildings that are being used. All the buildings in Peninsula are preserved and used. You don't find that very many places.

**Carol Maureen** [00:32:36] Wow. I was thinking that...

**Rhonda Russell** [00:32:36] And that makes... That's why this...

**Carol Maureen** [00:32:39] Very unique.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:32:39] Yes, it is. It is incredibly unique. It's a very busy little town. We don't have anything boarded up. We don't have, you know, any junk.

**Carol Maureen** [00:32:48] Well, I'm thinking of places like Plimoth Plantation, Sturbridge Village, but they have erected these things.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:32:53] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:32:54] They have brought them from somewhere else.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:32:55] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:32:55] You, all of your buildings are in place.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:32:58] They're here. They were here in, from the 1850, most of them built 1850 to 1880.

**Carol Maureen** [00:33:04] Mm hmm. So it's really a historic village.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:33:06] It is. It is very historic. It's on the National Register.

**Carol Maureen** [00:33:10] I was just going to ask. Okay. So the village as itself is on the National Register.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:33:13] And that's due to Bob Hunker, who owned a lot of those buildings to start with and kept them from, you know, being decrepit.

**Carol Maureen** [00:33:21] H-U-N-K-E-R?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:33:21] Yes.

**Carol Maureen** [00:33:22] Okay. H-U-N-K-E-R. Okay. Well, this project has really been unfolding for 25, 30 years, right? Has it?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:33:33] Mm hmm.

**Carol Maureen** [00:33:33] Okay and, has it unfolded differently from what you might think in the past it was going to unfold as? And, I mean, I think you're pleased with the way things have turned out?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:33:51] I don't know if anybody had any idea in the past what should be done or could be done. I think a lot of things that could have been done were not. And, and we're very thankful they weren't. You could have had a lot of rashy stuff happened. I don't think anybody had anything, had any idea about there may have been a vision, you know, the government has to have everything all written down in long paragraphs that nobody reads. But I don't think that they knew really what they wanted to do other than to, you know, preserve this valley. And probably by blind dumb luck, most of it happened. You know, it is an absolute treasure.

**Carol Maureen** [00:34:51] Mm hmm. Where do you see the project going? Where do you see the whole park?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:34:55] I have no idea.

**Carol Maureen** [00:34:57] No? But that's sort of been the way it's going anyway, right?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:35:00] Right. Right. It depends. I came back from out west after going in a circle of parks out there four or five years ago. And I told John Debo, I said, you know, if you were superintendent of Arches, you would you would be out making sure the motorcycles were all out of the park and that nobody was climbing on the rocks. And you'd have to drive 35 miles to have a beer. And that would be your big concern. And if you were superintendent of Zion, you would make sure that nobody fell off of something and, and take care of the traffic. And I said I decided that your job here is so much more interesting because of the challenges of all of the different communities around the edge of this park and the preservation of the river and the canal and things like that, that it just would be so much more interesting than one of the famous named parks, like you said, you know. And he said, you know, Rhonda, you're right. He said, I love my job. And he does.

**Carol Maureen** [00:36:15] How many years has he been on the job here?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:36:17] Oh, I don't know. He's been here quite a long time. But the challenges are up here in Boston Heights and, and Cuyahoga Falls and in Richfield, you know, the challenges are around the edge here. And the other challenge would be moving people through the park. So.

**Carol Maureen** [00:36:35] There is a lot of access to this park, it's not like in, at Yellowstone you have a few ways in and that's about it. Here, there's lots of different ways.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:36:44] Oh, yeah.

**Carol Maureen** [00:36:45] To get into the park.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:36:45] Yeah, and that's that's a big plus.

**Carol Maureen** [00:36:50] Because people can be really spread out.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:36:51] Sure. Sure.

**Carol Maureen** [00:36:53] I was surprised to see how many people actually attended this park.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:36:57] We were I think last year we were fourth in the country. And this year I think we're fifth or sixth, considering that nobody knows our name. And we're about this big if you look at the list of parks, it's, that in itself is a wonderful achievement.

**Carol Maureen** [00:37:17] I would say.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:37:18] But it's [and] as I said before, it continues to amaze me how much people enjoy coming here. They really, they really like it. So we have what we have maybe is something a way of life that is possible to see that is fading.

**Carol Maureen** [00:37:44] And yet we've been able to hang on to it.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:37:46] It's right here.

**Carol Maureen** [00:37:49] Is there anything that you can think of that you'd like to add that I didn't query you on?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:37:55] I don't think so. I've talked much too much.

**Carol Maureen** [00:37:57] No, no, you haven't.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:38:05] I don't see anything that. No, I think, you know, we've pretty much covered it. It is, it just is a wonder how much the valley have you seen?

**Carol Maureen** [00:38:20] You know, we have been traveling around this valley for three years and we're talking down and Canal Fulton and Zoar and up in the north part. And we've been everywhere on it. But I feel as though I've seen about that much of the park. We lived for a week at the Environmental Education Center and took all kinds of tours through there. But again, I feel as though I've seen the tiniest little piece of, of this park. I feel as though I really haven't gotten my head around it, my arms around it. I've brought students to the park on various science trips. We've gone to the Beaver Marsh. But again, I don't feel as though I've, we've walked on the Towpath Trail. I don't even remember from where to where, but it was with a lot of students. And but again, I don't feel as though I've had the park experience.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:39:22] Well, you know that if you were to define the park experience that would be pretty tough. I had a group of people from Germany and—last week—and one of them, the only one that spoke English was one of the best tour guides I've ever seen. She was the daughter of some of the others, and she had an itinerary of this park and she had taken them to Brandywine Falls. And she had to she even took them up to Blue Hen Falls, which is one of my favorite places that nobody knows about, you know, most of the time. And I told her about the, she wanted to know where the birds were, the blue herons. So I told her about them and where else. But she, and then they were all just lined up and ready to go. And they were having just absolutely the most wonderful time. She had plotted for a very short dinner. And then they were going someplace else here in the park. And on the way home, I went down. I swung around past the blue herons to see if they found them and they were all standing there. So I got out and got my binoculars and I said, you know, take a look at this one and take a look at this one, and they do this and so on. And they were all pointing to me, you know, and she was saying, you know you know, she came down to see us, but she had they were absolutely fascinated. Now, you know, if you go to Germany, there's a lot of things to see.

**Carol Maureen** [00:40:55] Oh, I sure do.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:40:55] But she covered this valley. She was something. So you never know.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:02] No. No. Hunter, do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:41:08] Everything's full.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:10] Okay, Mike as long as you're here, do you have any questions you'd like to ask

**Mike** [00:41:14] No, but I do want to say the reason we have not seen a lot is not that we were lost. We've been in the Valley for three years, but we were not lost.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:23] No, no. We weren't lost.

**Mike** [00:41:25] A lot of ground to cover.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:27] That's right.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:41:29] Well, and if you think about it, there are only two roads.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:35] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:41:36] There's Riverview and A-P [Akron-Peninsula Road].

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:38] Okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:41:38] And you can't, I tell people, you know, this is the easiest place in the world to give directions because you're either in the valley or you're out of the valley. You're either on this side of the river or the other side. And, so you can't get lost.

**Carol Maureen** [00:41:56] But there's a lot of access from the various communities through which.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:42:00] Right.

**Carol Maureen** [00:42:00] It comes. And a lot of trailheads.

**Mike** [00:42:06] One question I do have not keeping us a little bit more. Is there anything in another park that you wish we had had?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:42:15] No. No.

**Carol Maureen** [00:42:15] Just badges and hats.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:42:18] The, the I think there are very nice park souvenirs. If you, if you stick to the, the nature notion of souvenirs and I've had people ask about do you have a badge because they put them on their hats. And I think nice caps, and nice jackets, and nice shirts.

**Carol Maureen** [00:42:46] Even socks.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:42:48] Yeah.

**Carol Maureen** [00:42:49] You know people who change socks when they get sweaty.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:42:51] So we'll see what Park Place has because there I'm going to work with Janice and tell her what people have asked for. They need to have film. They need to have bandaids.

**Carol Maureen** [00:43:06] Yes.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:43:09] They need to have [cross talk]. Yeah. Yeah. But I, I don't know. I'd like to see them have a lot of bird books and I'd like to see an illustrated bird guide of the valley. And they have done surveys and the information is there, but getting it on paper and ready to, you know, hand out would be nice. So.

**Mike** [00:43:38] So it sounds like you've seen a lot of other parks. Is there one that is comparable to this park?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:43:44] No, no. And that's, you know, goes from the Dry Tortugas up into Alaska and back around. They're all the national parks are all very individualistic, I find. But I don't see as much, I guess maybe involvement or opportunities for involvement that there are here and they are not as accessible as this is. This is just if you think about this river valley preserve, there's no place else like that. There are rivers in national parks, but not like this one with the towpath and a town in the middle, there's nothing like it. The other, a lot of the other parks are scenic parks. They're parks too. Capitol Reef is one of my favorite parks.

**Carol Maureen** [00:44:51] Where's that?

**Rhonda Russell** [00:44:51] It's in Utah. It's where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid was filmed.

**Carol Maureen** [00:44:57] Oh, okay.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:44:57] And it is, it. I really enjoyed that. But I, I can't pick out this is my favorite because it's mine.

**Carol Maureen** [00:45:11] Well, I want to thank you so much for all of your time, your thoughts, all of the preparation you have put into this.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:45:18] Well, this has been fun because it caused me to think and I'll share this with Steve and gives me something to ponder and something I'm thankful for every day.

**Carol Maureen** [00:45:39] Oh, you'll be getting a copy of this.

**Rhonda Russell** [00:45:40] Oh, Okay.

**Carol Maureen** [00:45:41] Okay, I think we are ready.