

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES SCOTT EMERSON

CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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This is Claytee White. It is December 21st, 2017. I am here in the Oral History Research Center with Mr. Emerson.

Would you please pronounce and spell your full name for me?

Yes. It's Charles Scott Emerson; C-H-A-R-L-E-S, S-C-O-T-T, E-M-E-R-S-O-N.

Wonderful. Thank you for coming.

It's my pleasure.

First, I just want to ask you about your early life. Tell me where you grew up and what your parents did for a living; those kinds of things.

Sure. I grew up in a small farming community in Missouri just south of Kansas City called Clinton, Missouri; it's about eight thousand people, a great place to grow up. Everybody knows your name, but also everybody knows your business. You know how that goes. My mother was a nurse for one of the surgeons in town; she ran his medical office for him. Then my father owned a construction company in town. So when he came back from the Vietnam War, he picked up on the family business of construction and started Emerson Construction Company. Both are now retired and enjoying it immensely.

Wonderful. Are they still there?

They are still in Clinton. I'm going back in a few weeks, as a matter of fact, for the holidays. I'm an only child, so they notice if I'm not there.

What is the name of the city once more?

Clinton, Missouri.

Is it still eight thousand?

It's still about eight thousand. It's had some people move in, but some industry moved out, and so it's ebbed and flowed, but it's still around there. I went to school there. My parents went to school

there. They were high school sweethearts and been together ever since high school. So I graduated from Clinton High School, as well. I actually went off to college for a year at the University of Missouri in Columbia and was going to be a flight nurse for the Air Force; that was in 1989. I had a scholarship that paid for the last three years if I paid for the first and then I served four years. I thought that was a pretty good deal. In '89, the Berlin Wall came down and they started downsizing the military, and so they doubled the number of years I was going to have to serve because my scholarship was not yet paying yet because I was still in my first year. So I declined that because I didn't know at that age if I wanted to spend eight years in the military or not and went back home. I got a summer job as a dispatcher at the local sheriff's department because, being that small of a community, we knew the sheriff. I ended up staying there seven years and becoming a sergeant and a deputy on his force and was one of only two to make the transition to a new sheriff after elections. I enjoyed my time there immensely, learned a lot about people.

So now, after being a dispatcher, did you become a police officer?

I did, yes. I dispatched and then I worked the jail for a few months and then I went to the academy, graduated first in my academy, and then went on to become a patrol officer and then elevated to the rank of sergeant. It was an interesting experience because I'm in my young twenties and I'm supervising people in their fifties, sixties and above, and commanding the respect of the position was a difficult task, but I did it.

They say that that was one of the most difficult things that our current graduates are going through. They're coming out with bachelor's and master's degrees. They're real young. And because they are computer people and gamers, they don't know how to communicate with people.

Yes.

You weren't a gamer, but tell me how you did that.

I stuck to the basics. I stuck to the mission and what it was we were there to accomplish. The sheriff saw something in me that he didn't see in the rest and that was, I think, some energy, some vitality and some creativity. We kind of revamped how we approached our investigations. We became very successful in clearing burglaries. Not to bore you, but the national clearance rate at the time was about 5 percent or so, so that meant that 95 percent got away. We were upwards of almost 70 percent at one point in time because of the way we approached it.

What did you do? How?

Just good police work, as they say in the business, knocking on doors and talking to people and getting out in the community.

Getting into the community.

It's all about just getting into the community. If you're part of the community, the community talks to you. You just have to listen. So it's not complicated, it just takes a lot of discipline. Some of them had forgotten that. Also, when you're in a position of authority, you have to engage because people don't engage with you.

You have a gun.

Right. Yes, yes. And I can take your life and liberty legally away from you and that's not a welcoming conversation for most people because the only time you interact with them most of the time back then was if there were problems. There was going to be a winner and loser every call. Just getting out and making friends in the community, it really, again, wasn't all that difficult.

Oh, I love that. Did you do anything about the way new police officers were trained in the

academy?

The academy, no, because the academy was very short. The academy really just prepared you to get home alive at night. It wasn't like academies in the big Metro areas. So we just acquaint you with laws and would acquaint you with how to shoot your gun and do some of the basic things. All the rest was up to you.

I had a judge that was a good mentor of mine long before I was in law enforcement. We crossed paths in the Boy Scout program and his son was in the Scouts with me. He said, "If you study fifteen minutes a day, you'll be a subject matter expert in a few years." He also told me, "There's no reward for effort; you either make it or you don't." So both of those were very strong lessons to learn at a very early time in life, but served me incredibly well.

Talk about that fifteen minutes. I like that. So if I study a topic fifteen minutes a day...

Yes, within a couple, three years you'll be a subject matter expert on it. He had a philosophy that adults stopped learning after a while. He was definitely a practitioner of lifelong learning, and so I picked that up from him. When I was doing my law enforcement, I volunteered at the Red Cross at the same time and that's what helped keep me balance because I saw what the career could do to some people, not all, but to some people; they could become jaded, and I didn't want to be that and people were counting on me not to be that. So there was a lot of responsibility at an early age.

Tell me about volunteering at the Red Cross in your hometown. What was that like?

Being a small community, we went to home fires. We had some home fires, about three or four a year there. Much more here in Las Vegas nowadays. But I also would travel the country and do disaster relief work, and so I would take my time off and go spend two or three weeks somewhere. I got to see other communities. I got to meet people that I never would meet

otherwise. There are some people that you just feel smarter sitting next to and Red Cross was that channel to get me in the same room with those people. It was really almost a happenstance; it wasn't by design. I wasn't that strategic at that age; I didn't know. But the opportunities it afforded me now, I'm just truly blessed to have. When they asked me to become paid staff, I turned them down twice because I liked being a volunteer and as a volunteer you can say no.

So this was in Clinton.

This was in Clinton. I got offered a paid staff position of the Red Cross. They asked me to move to Springfield, Missouri, a much bigger town, about two hundred and fifty thousand.

The capital?

Not the capital, no. It's in southwest Missouri.

I have forgotten my capitals. Columbia—

Jefferson City is the capital of Missouri. It's actually just south of Columbia where I was going to college at, so a lot of folks would travel back and forth between the two cities a lot back in college. So I moved to Springfield, Missouri. I was worried that I would get burned out doing it full time and might not enjoy it and that was my concern. I knew I'd love it. I just didn't know if I could govern my passion.

Tell me what the work of the Red Cross is on the ground for someone working there.

Explain it to me.

Most of mine was disaster relief work. We had other friends of mine in high school that taught life-saving classes and swimming classes to young kids; that's a lot of what we did in town. We did first aid courses, CPR; that kind of stuff. Then we also connected military families during times of crisis. If there was someone that was deployed and there was an emergency, then the family would contact the Red Cross. We would verify the information and then we would

transmit that message to the person in the military that was deployed. Red Cross kind of acts as that third party, independent verifier so that people know that if they're deployed, family is taken care of, and if there's an emergency they're going to hear about it, so that way they're not distracted. Because in the military if you're deployed and you're distracted, it can mean your life. It could mean your life. We had Whiteman Air Force Base just north of us and we had quite a bit of military presence in our community because we're a bedroom community for that Air Force base, so we did a lot of that. But then most of mine was in disaster response work.

Is a house fire a disaster?

A house fire is a disaster in the Red Cross world. Back then we would have four or five a year. It would leave someone homeless. Red Cross would come in and make sure they had emergency food, clothing and shelter. We'd write vouchers back in those days that they could take to Wal-Mart to get some clothes or get some food, the local motel for a couple or three days while they kind of got up on their feet. Because even if you have insurance, it takes a couple of days for the adjuster to get there and for somebody to give you some money upfront. Then you get the check and you don't have any ID because it burned up, and so you can't cash it at the bank, so the check is kind of useless for a while. You have to get all that stuff lined out before you can become a member of society again. That's what Red Cross does; it helps people become—I won't say become whole again, but get back up on their feet.

Over the years I've worked many disasters across the country. I have had the pleasure of working almost every state in the union. I also have worked Ground Zero at Nine-Eleven and ran a respite center for emergency workers inside the secure perimeter there. I also worked with Kosovo refugees when they brought them over during the Balkan crisis. That's where I truly learned the meaning and mission of the Red Cross because, as I walked across one of the open

fields near some housing units, this lady came out and was just sobbing and speaking a language I didn't know, but came up and just hugged me. The message was clear. The message was thank you; you saved my life; we're in a land now where it's safe. Two days later I'm walking across the same field and the lady ignores me, and I thought, *well, that's an end to a quick relationship*. Then I realized I wasn't wearing my Red Cross vest. It wasn't me, as much as I'd like to think it is. It wasn't me, it was the Red Cross vest.

Exactly. It's an internationally recognizable...

It is. It's an international society. We are also the keepers of the Geneva Conventions that govern the treatment of noncombatants in time of war and prisoners of war.

They had been airlifted from an area where their neighbors turned on them overnight, just genocide. We, living here in the United States, can't really comprehend genocide where we are neighbors and friends one day and the next day we're not. There are some real traumatic events that those folks left with. But we had a wedding that we facilitated. We had soccer teams that we facilitated. We had citizenship classes, civic classes, if you will. Each dorm made their own community government with its own mayor and city council because they wanted to learn, what's life in the United States like? It was also my first encounter of the Muslim faith, and so being educated on that to respect the faith and certain time periods and what they do and where they do it, it was a new adventure for me, so it made me appreciate things.

I had a great mentor once. We used to teach a diversity class together. He said, "There's only one-tenth of one percent of us that are different. Because if it wasn't, medical science would never work. It's just the color of our skin and sometimes the way we're brought up that's different. But most of the rest of us mechanically are all the same." That resonated with the students. It resonated with me. Certainly, working with the Red Cross, you get to see that

firsthand. Being able just to serve humanity, but having to learn how to deal with people just as humans. At an early age we're taught to group things together, in elementary school. We're taught to promote on differences; that's how sports teams and chambers of commerce and communities compete for business. Our entire life we're taught to divide. We're not taught to unify. So the Red Cross is about unifying. That was a really interesting journey to me and continues to be one even today.

I see my job now as I get a living stipend to do my volunteer work full time, and that's a different outlook than some of my peers that are hired into it as a management job. We have some really, really amazing volunteers here in Las Vegas. We have the largest pool of trained responders in the community because our volunteers go to other places and respond and then come back. There's no other organization in town that really does that. Fire departments can go do that, but it's a limited number of people and for a limited number of time. In our community, just in our volunteer core, the director of the Red Cross response to Flight 93 on Nine-Eleven lives in Henderson. The Red Cross director of the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting response lives in Pahrump. A lot of the folks that are in our volunteer ranks have incredible life experiences in addition to the Red Cross experiences. So being able to bring their life experiences, their professional credentials...Because Red Cross is 97 percent volunteer and it's all about bringing people together to solve problems. That's our core competency is collaborations. That certainly came true on One October.

Are you sure you're going to leave?

It's tough. But the good news is, I'm just going back to being a volunteer now.

Oh, what does that mean?

My paid staff gig with the Red Cross ends January 31st. February first, I become the president

and CEO of United Way here in Las Vegas. The reason for the move is simply to allow me more creativity and flexibility like I used to have in the Red Cross. We've evolved and changed to be modern and to remain relevant in the community, but it also means roles have changed internally. I don't have as much creativity whereas I used to, and it's not a bad thing, it's just different. That's why I'm moving to United Way. The good news is in the Red Cross you can always volunteer, and so now they get me for free, but for some different things.

With all that knowledge.

That's the strength of the Red Cross is that there is no jobs ever reserved for paid staff, but there are jobs reserved for volunteers, such as our chairman of the board and board and that kind of stuff. We have numerous alumni that have been in our paid staff ranks that now volunteer for us. When something like One October happens, they all come back. They all come back.

What happens if you are selected to go to Houston because of the flood? Tell me what happens once you're on the ground.

I was there. I actually arrived back home at five p.m. on October first from Texas. I had been working on Hurricane Harvey relief operation there. I got sent in because of my tact. Apparently, someone thinks I have tact. So I was there because of my tact and savviness. I was in charge of our external relations in Beaumont, Texas, which means working with our elected leaders, community partners and that kind of stuff. I flew into Texas and then drove up to Beaumont up north and was there for several weeks helping our team get the resources they needed to do their job and then communicating to leaders about what's going on because in times of crisis, you don't have time to watch the news. So if you don't tell people what you're doing directly, then they likely don't hear it. We wanted to make sure that they knew what we were doing for their community and also to find out pockets of their community that may be missed because some

people are very proud and very independent and they won't come forward right away. It's the typical answer, how are you today? I'm fine. Well, you just lost your home, you're not fine. But that's our typical response in society, so to be able to ask different questions. Then as people run out of their personal resources, because they think it's only going to be a short-term thing, then they need help.

The great thing about Red Cross is it helps anybody based on need with no regard to anything else. So if you state that you have a need and you have a house in that area, you live in that area, then we're there to help you. The problem a lot of the folks had is they couldn't prove they lived there because homes had been handed down from generation to generation and nobody went to go retitle it at the County Assessor's Office or Recorder's Office. Nobody had official title deed to homes, and so it was difficult for them to prove residency. When it comes to getting federal aid, you have to prove that. Most of them did not have flood insurance because there's special insurance for flood. So over 80 percent of the people there had no flood insurance.

That's the payoff for me with Red Cross; it's not the paycheck, it's the payoff of seeing somebody smile and being able to help them and make their day a little bit brighter.

Amazing.

It's good work. It's good work.

So you just got back home at five o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, October first.

Yes, I did. I flew in and landed. I thought, *great, I'm going to have a couple of days off*, because I hadn't had a day off in almost three weeks. I went to bed. I'll be honest, I turned off my phone because I was supposed to be off for the next two days. I woke at eight o'clock to the reality.

Eight p.m.?

Eight a.m. Some of my team wasn't sure I was even back yet; some of them even thought I was

still in Texas. Our volunteers jumped to the call at ten o'clock that night, started our response. It really speaks to the system we have because it doesn't take me to make it happen. It's a collective effort. If some people are not here—because a good number of our volunteers were in Texas still doing flood operations and hurricane operations, and so we recalled those. Others were in town that were back filling those positions and they kicked off the response for the Red Cross just fine.

The gentleman I told you that lives in Henderson, his name is Jeff Varnes. Jeff was the one that directed the Flight 93 response during Nine-Eleven. He's also the former CEO of the chapter. He came out of retirement as a volunteer and led our response that night because he has experience with mass casualty responses. Then as the night went on and the day went on, we continued to grow our response.

Mostly the first day or two is really the police and fire and emergency medical systems, stabilizing life and protecting life and that kind of stuff. It's not until another day or two later that we really come in with a role to start supporting the families because we're not first responders. We help the families and stuff. We also help the responding agencies, though.

Explain that to me.

For instance, during our response, we were talking with Las Vegas Metro because they're one of our close partners. We had someone this their command center from that night forward on. One of our board members is a retired deputy chief from there and he said, "I just talked to one of their HR people and their employee assistance people are overwhelmed because the way it works is they contract with local providers." Well, every organization in town is calling on their contracts during One October, many of them for the same providers. Metro had some of their own and they just said, "Our mental health folks are just exhausted; they just really are." So we actually embedded several Red Cross mental health and spiritual care providers in their ranks for

their police officers to come talk to.

Many times police and fire will not come forward. Number one, it's a pride thing. Number two, they don't want to come forward necessarily to their own employee assistance program because ten years down the line, if they have a promotion possibility, they're afraid that may come up again and it may stop them from promotions. It's not true, but it's their reality, and so you have to work with that. That's why whenever we embedded Red Cross folks, we got a bunch of police officers that came to us because we weren't affiliated with the police department; we're independent and neutral. It's all about finding different ways to serve the community and being in touch with the needs of the people affected because at the end of the day policemen and firemen are people, too.

One of our retired disaster directors, he used to be a deputy chief for the fire department here and for several weeks he couldn't talk to me on the phone about it; he could only text me. He was at the event. He ended up jumping in and doing triage at the Excalibur because that's where they took a lot of the wounded was right next to—because the Excalibur has a large parking garage and field right next to the site. He said, "In all my years I've never, ever seen that kind of carnage." He's seen shootings and he's seen other things, but this was almost a war zone-type carnage and he had not seen that before. It really troubled him and he thought he had all the skills to take care of it and he's a big macho man. We've had some talks about that. I'm very proud of him of becoming vulnerable a little bit because it's good for him and his family. But there are stories like that all over the community.

Some people deal with it better than others. Families don't deal with it; it's individuals that deal with it, and so you can't base your support on a family dynamic. You have to base your support on the individual. Because if there's four people in the family, they're all four on their

journey. They're just traveling together, but they're having their own journey. One may be fine and deal with it okay. Another couple may be just broken down and really need support. The fourth one could be in shock and could be just like, *everything's fine, until months later and then they crash.*

Tell me what you did the next morning. Eight o'clock in the morning, you turn your television on.

I did. Actually, I looked over at my phone and the battery was half rundown and it was blinking like a disco ball because of all the messages and the texts and all that kind of stuff. I thought, *my goodness, what's happened?* My partner, John, told me before he left for work, he goes, "Well, there's been a shooting on the Strip." I had never imagined anything like this. I imagined maybe somebody shot somebody, got drunk or out of hand or something. When I saw my phone and how many messages there were and turned on the TV, I quickly learned what happened.

I had the same kind of feeling I had when I learned of Nine-Eleven. It's just this hollowness that just overtakes you all the sudden. It's like all your life energy just drains from you and you just go, *oh my God, no.* Having worked in law enforcement, having worked at Nine-Eleven at Ground Zero, I know how it impacts families. I know how it impacts people. That is incredibly sobering. At that point the toll was around fifty-five I think that they had confirmed and it grew to fifty-eight, but I know that it was beyond just that, and those aren't just numbers; they're people.

One of the first calls, quite honestly, was a gentleman by the name of Michael Severino with Southern Wine and Spirits. We had partnered on our Centennial event in June; Red Cross is a hundred years old. We're the longest running nonprofit in Las Vegas. He called and he said, "What do you need?" He goes, "Whatever you need, we're here for you. What do you need?"

That set off a whole string of calls. Every call I got from somebody was exactly that; what do you need? So I told him, I said, "I need about four people to figure out and get our people organized." So he sent his HR department over to us, and so for Monday they worked for us. That repeated itself all over the place. We needed people to coordinate shifts.

Our national organization kicked in concurrently and started activating specialists in our Red Cross that are volunteers who had been to these events before. By the next morning—that would have been October third, I believe it is—we had about fifty leadership folks on the ground here to augment what we had. Virtually all of them with experience, either at the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, the Boston bombing, the Newtown, Connecticut shooting, San Bernardino shooting. That's the unfortunate sign of the times is that we've got volunteers with those experiences, and so they answered the call and they came. We immediately started setting up a bigger relief operation because we knew it was going to be longer term.

Also, you had people from other states and other countries that were impacted. It wasn't just people here in Las Vegas. Actually, most of the deaths were not in Las Vegas. Most of the deaths were people from California, not from Las Vegas. But we have a responsibility to support those folks if they choose to come here and what have you. Some people will choose to come to a location and see it; some want nothing to do with it. Again, it's about their personal journey and what they want, and so we're here to help support them whatever that journey happens to be.

They had already connected with fire and police that night. We reached out to the coroner's office because John Fudenberg, the coroner, is not only a good friend of mine, but we've been colleagues for years and there's plans in place for, what do we do? The actions that happened after One October were all pre-scripted and planned. I will say that the agencies executed their plans brilliantly with great finesse and professionalism under incredible duress.

The coroner's office in our plans would first set up the Family Assistance Center. That was set up at the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Center, the halls as they call it. In our plan the coroner takes the lead in that because it first is going to be a reunification point where families can come and find out information on loved ones. From there, it was to transition, which it did, into a more robust service location with wraparound services for the families and everything else, so it served more than just an information and identification center. We participated in all levels of that, and we're still participating in the third iteration of it now, which is the long-term Resiliency Center, which is over by UMC. That will go on for several years.

Several years.

Yes. There is a Department of Justice grant that lasts for three years. We suggested that our local leaders get people from Orlando here that have done this before. In these types of events, Red Cross turns off its fundraising mechanism and it's public affairs mechanism. During the response, you didn't see much from the Red Cross because we want the airwaves clear for people to look at their elected leaders and let their elected leaders guide the community through this crisis. We don't want to add to any background noise and any media distractions that's out there.

Same with fundraising, we don't want to be opportunistic. There was already a fund set up and rolling, anyway, to help the families. We have an ongoing disaster relief fund that we use to fund this out of that's for any kind of disaster. Some of our largest donors will give us money and say, "We trust you to use it however best you need." It's that unrestricted money that allows us to do things like this. We embed ourselves; we become a servant leader in the community and we embed ourselves with elected leaders and response agencies and say, "We've been through this before; let us help you. We're not here to take the limelight. We're not here to run things. We're here to serve the people and that's our one and only focus." After a couple or three days,

they realize the wisdom of the people around them, and so it really was a servant leadership type of role that we played in the community.

Mayor Goodman executed her plans exactly as we had planned in Emmitsburg, Maryland, because there's a FEMA training center in Emmitsburg, Maryland, right outside of Gettysburg. Her second week in office, myself and her and all of her department leaders went there and we actually walked through a terrorist event. Of course, the scenario was in downtown Las Vegas because it has to be in the city limits because she's the mayor. This event, of course, was out in the county. But to the rest of the world, she's the Las Vegas Mayor. She did exactly as we had practiced in that training. It comes back to you just like yesterday. Even though we may not have talked with each other frequently, we all knew what each other was going to be doing. It was the absolute test of trust because everybody trusted each other and we counted on each other to do what we said we were going to do during our planning meetings, and we all did that.

Part of her plan was to be on television?

Yes, yes, to reassure people. It's not just to protect our economy and base here, but it's also to display empathy and support to people. Within just a few days, they did the remembrance garden downtown on a piece of property down there. It's about bringing the community together to heal because at that point the response was over, the healing process was to begin, and the community needs some leaders to heal. There's nowhere to put that pent up anxiety, frustration, stress because there's no prosecution to direct it towards, and so people want to help. People want to do something. Then people will get angry. It's a normal reaction. It's a normal process. Any psychologist will tell you that. There's a time frame that people go through with that. So you've got to help them through that in the most productive way.

This is just like that process of death, of dying.

It is. It's a whole grieving, shock process, yes, absolutely.

Tell me how you felt about the response of this city, just regular people.

I thought the response of the city was incredible. When I moved here back in 2004, my job caused me to travel quite a bit, and one of the things that I always had trouble doing was connecting with community. I came from a small country town in the Midwest where it was all community—everybody knew each other—to here where I didn't know my neighbors. You have to intentionally work to network and meet friends and make friends.

This event is one of the unfortunate events that almost every community goes through during its adolescence. Because we don't have natural disasters to pull us together like most of the country, we have just begun our adolescence. The events of One October pulled us together unlike anything else ever could. I did not receive a single *no* from anybody any time I asked for anything, and we had some requests that you wouldn't think would be typical. The night before the Family Assistance Center was to open, some of our team took a look at that and they said, "This is very stark. It's a convention center. It looks like a concert arena. We don't want that to be a trigger for people when they walk in because they'll walk in and go, *oh my gosh*."

Here we go again.

"It would almost be like entering a firing field again in their minds." Again, Michael Severino of Southern Wine and Spirits, I said, "Mike, I have a strange request for you." I said, "I need plants. I need tall trees and plants. And I know you all do about three hundred events a year. Do you have somebody?" He said, "Absolutely, here's my guy." On his business card he actually has, "I'm a guy that knows a guy." So he put us in touch with his florist person that they've used for almost thirty years. He said, "Absolutely, I'm doing an event the next morning at Southern Wine and Spirits. I'll bring all those. I'll bring some other stuff." So he dressed up the place for us.

Mike said, "Don't worry about the cost. If there's any cost, Southern Wine and Spirits will pick it up." This is not a tale just about Southern Wine and Spirits, but that happened all over the place with every community, every company, every company.

I just want you to know that the few bottles of wine I'm buying for Christmas, I'm going to Southern Wine and Spirits. I just want you to know that.

Good, good. They've been a big part of the community and they've grown up. That's the thing is, everyone came together and whatever we needed, we got. Leadership Las Vegas, I got called to gather at a meeting of my classmates from Leadership Las Vegas and they said, "What can we do to help?" I said, "Well, there's two things. Number one, you can schedule a blood drive, but not right now because we have enough blood and blood expires. You can't freeze it and keep it. But during the winter months, it's slow because kids are out of school, parents are doing family things and they don't do blood drives." So they did one December sixth and exceeded their goal, which is great.

The other thing was, I said, "You need to thank the silent heroes because right now the police and fire and medical folks are getting all the accolades in town and they earned it. They absolutely deserve every bit of what they're getting and more. But there's an entire group of people at this Family Assistance Center, there's the Attorney General's Office, there's the Driver's License Bureau." Because they have to replace IDs because many people dropped their purses and left, and so all that becomes a crime scene and all that stuff becomes encumbered and they can't get it yet. "As well as Legal Aid because there's immigration issues, a lot of the vendors and workers, a lot of the attendees." There is nuisances about when you're part of a crime, you automatically get some protected status, and so there is ways to work through all that.

People you would never imagine is involved in this, is in this giant convention center.

Red Cross, as the navigator, as we call ourselves, we will take the family from station to station and just kind of walk them through. There's also a play area for kids. We have a partner that comes in and does a play area for kids. They're actually trained in trauma and childhood trauma intervention. So while they play with the kids, they also look for signs of trauma so they can give the family guidance if they need counseling or something like that. There's Nevada mental health providers and that kind of stuff. All those folks are silent heroes in this room that nobody knows about.

They went on a card-making spree with the Boys and Girls Club because the CEO happens to be in our Leadership class. They made lots of cards and lots of thank-you stuff. They split it up. They delivered a bunch of gift cards along with these cards to the coroner's office and people like that because they've been working twenty-four seven.

And the coroner's office, no one thinks—

You don't think about them.

Well, we don't think about them and we think about them as something to kind of be afraid of, a little intimidating.

Yes. You don't look forward to ending up there.

Exactly. That's what I'm trying to say.

Yes, they're not forward and front of mind, but those kinds of folks are the really hidden heroes in the community. I hope the oral histories and through the chronicling of this, the library system and the museum system that those folks get remembered. The people that spontaneously do things, like the memorials and the crosses at the Las Vegas sign and things like that, just the expression of support and love, it's what humanity is about; it's what community is about. Las Vegas, true to form, showed its hospitality to all of our visiting staff, any of the visiting staff that

came in. MGM did a phenomenal at donating anything we needed. We actually also helped work with some of their mental health and staff and stuff, with their folks.

Ironically, before I went to the hurricanes, I stayed four doors down from the shooter's suite because I had won a staycation and I knew I was headed off to Texas and it was going to be long hours. My partner and I went and took advantage of that. Then when I came back, he was fine with it because he didn't think it affected him, until he learned one of his real estate agent colleagues got shot in the arm. Then when we were picking up just papers around the house and he saw the receipt for the room, it dawned on him what the room number was and he just went flush. Those kinds of stories are happening again throughout our community inside homes every day.

Vegas is a town where the show must go on, but there are people hurting in our community right now and as the holidays approach they are hurting even more. New Year's is going to be here and we love to celebrate with lots of fireworks. Those are all huge triggers for shooting victims. People will hear them go off throughout the valley because you cannot escape it and some will relive this tragedy all over again at midnight on January first. We have a responsibility to get to know our neighbors and get to know each other and embrace each other and be one. We do.

I agree with everything you've said.

You and my mother, two people that agree a hundred percent. I love that.

I became a practitioner at my church a couple of years ago. On that second day I wanted to help with some brief counseling, but our practitioner's training is not at that level. How do you get training at a level to do trauma?

There are organizations out there that do training at that level. The time to do training is before

something happens. That's the hardest for people because the need isn't imminent and you don't see the clock ticking. But I can tell you that crisis happens in our world a lot more frequent than we'd think.

Especially now.

So now is the time to research that training and find out what training is out there because not all mental health training is the same. Some is childhood and family counseling. Some is career counseling of sorts. Some is dealing with addiction issues. But there's a special trauma track for folks and a special credentialing track. It's difficult sometimes to explain to practitioners that although they're credentialed, this is probably not the best spot for you. It's much about protecting them as it is the people affected. But there is not a shortage of places where you can put your skills to work. So even doing a group at your church, just simply getting folks together and talking about the event, because some people will need more intense intervention than others, some will need therapy, flat out therapy, but most people just need a guiding hand to talk about it.

In our office we've changed our language, so we no longer talk about deadlines because deadlines would infer that if you don't make it, you will die. We don't talk about pulling the trigger on projects. We don't talk about, did you make your target this week? It's more about, did you make your goal? Are we ready to launch the project? We don't realize how many words in our daily language are firearms related, and I don't know where it comes from, but we pick it up somewhere and we don't think about it.

Tell me about firearms. When you go to events like this, when you work them, do you change, pro or con, when it comes to firearms in this country?

That's a great question especially being I'm a former law enforcement officer. I've had

encounters with firearms before. I'm just talking from my personal experience, not theoretical here. From my personal experience, the criminals don't care what the law is and they will continue to get firearms no matter what the law is. People that are law-abiding, you never really have issues with other than just home safety, especially with children and that kind of stuff. From a law enforcement standpoint, they never caused me concern and I grew up in a small community where everybody had a rifle in the back of the truck and probably under the seat, truth be known. It's not the firearms. There's been a lot of talk about gun control since this. You can't stop a crazy person that is a lone wolf that is determined to die for a cause. You just can't stop them. So the most we can do is be vigilant.

I heard a lot of rhetoric about, how did Mandalay Bay not know? Well, if you threw a couple of guns in a golf bag, there's fifteen thousand golf bags a day just going through the lobby. Just watch. It's not Mandalay Bay's fault.

I thought that was the silliest thing.

That's the perfect example of where people are wanting to funnel this frustration and this anger. They really didn't—well, maybe some of them meant what they said, but it doesn't pass the logical test. It's an emotional utterance. It's just people trying to vent and do something. But, yes, it's trying to find that person that's going to act and it's hard to predict human behavior.

Right. But what you said a few minutes ago about getting to know our neighbors and learning people and talking to people in our own neighborhoods.

That's the best thing we can do because you're not going to go if someone is acting abnormal if you don't build a relationship to know what their normal behavior is, and we don't do that. So if people want to pour energy into something, pour energy into making a neighbor. When was the last time you actually went around and introduced yourself to your neighbors or hosted an open

house for people to come by? Yes, you may only get one or two, but it's a start. That's how everything starts.

That's a great idea.

It doesn't take a lot.

What about the bump stock?

The bump stock...Organizationally the Red Cross has no opinion on this, so I must state that upfront.

Of course. I'm not interviewing the Red Cross.

Yes. I must state that upfront. There is no legitimate legal purpose today for anything like that. There just isn't. Should it be made illegal or legal? That one I kind of teeter back on. It's a very polarizing conversation here in Nevada more than some states because we really are the pioneers in the west still and there still is a very independent pioneer spirit here and pioneer's code. Some people just don't like organized government and that kind of stuff. If we think about it, we're really blessed to live in a country where you can have those beliefs and, as long as you behave, you can still live here. Folks criticize. My dad went to Vietnam and fought for our rights and part of those rights were right to free speech and right to have your own opinions and stuff. But I just don't see where those have a real practical application at all with us. You're not finding me buying any.

You travel the country pretty often. Do you see any change or do you think, do you feel that there is any change with how people view Las Vegas prior to this and after this, Las Vegas as a community, not just Sin City? What are you thinking?

They do. At this point in time there's still empathy out there for us. It's put Las Vegas on the map for a different reason. Honestly, I think it's shown how Vegas can come together more than it

shows security vulnerabilities. I don't have a lot of people coming up to me to say, I think it's an unsafe place to go; I don't. The one thing that I kind of tell folks is I had the opportunity to talk to Vice President Michael Pence when he was there and I was trying to find a way to convey the Vegas spirit, if you will. I said, "Mr. Vice President, do not underestimate us. We are a people who built a metropolis in the desert. We have great resolve, more than you would ever imagine. This will not slow us down. This will not stop us. What we need right now is people to come and see that. Come to Vegas, see it, enjoy it, because it is an incredibly safe place to come live, work and play." I invited him to come stay some; he left, because he had somewhere else to go. But that's kind of the true spirit of Vegas. It really is.

Cirque du Soleil, their shows went dark Monday night when it happened and they resumed on Tuesday. What people don't know is Cirque du Soleil gave us almost two hundred tickets, actually, for our Red Cross workers to come escape what they were working with for ninety minutes. When I was having an e-mail exchange with their VP of Resident Shows, he said, "What can we do?" I said, "I have a big ask. I have two hundred people here and they need a break and the best way to give them the break is to immerse them into your magical world of Cirque du Soleil. I don't need two hundred tickets to one show. It's actually best if you spatter them out because they all get in groups and they want to go at different times and based on their work schedules and stuff." He said, "Whatever you need, we've got it."

We had a volunteer come in and that's all she did was coordinate people going to the show to get a break. You have to look out for your own people, too. With Red Cross volunteers, we're not always so good at monitoring our own empathy and passion. This was a great way to kind of break that up and give them a little bit of an escape and have fun.

I am just so impressed learning these behind-the-scenes stories. Tell me another one. We

have the smallest fund—

Yes, we do.

—of any disaster.

Yes.

Why is that? And what has been happening that we don't see?

That's a great question because Orlando was around thirty-six million dollars in fund. But I will tell you, you also had a hate crime there, and so you had a group of individuals that were part of the LGBT community and there is a lot of folks across the country that have big money that are sympathetic to that. I think there was a lot of transference with the LGBT community of, *gosh, that could have been me twenty, thirty or forty years ago*, and so there was a huge outpouring for that.

This was a nonsensical crime. It wasn't a hate crime. It made no sense whatsoever. It was totally random. And it's Vegas. I think we have a mentality of being tough. It's not the New York-tough kind of attitude, but it's just being people of great resolve. The other thing is that you didn't have just—I don't know what it's up to now, twelve million, thirteen million in the GoFundMe account.

At least twenty-two.

Is it? Because it grows all the time. But there's also a lot of people that have supported the organizations directly with their funding and some of the casinos have put in big chunks, but they haven't put into the GoFundMe account.

Where did they put it?

Some of them are still holding them to find out where the needs are because they know this is a long-term thing. Many of them talk with us and some others and said, "What do we do with

this?" At the end of the day, there is accounting implications to putting money into the GoFundMe account because it's not a not-for-profit. GoFundMe, I believe at this point, has said, "We're going to waive our fees," and that kind of stuff, but that wasn't evident in the very beginning. So the casinos just stood up and said, "We're going to dedicate this money to helping whoever was affected." None of them said it would go directly to those affected because the GoFundMe account was for that. Right now there is meetings in the casino properties about what to do with this now.

Our advice was pause. There's some organizations that have people for the first few months and there is a Department of Justice grant to come in to help with the Resiliency Center. We're coordinating with our colleagues in California and other places because that's where a lot of the victims lived. Almost half the ticket holders were from California. We've got the first wave of this covered, so let's wait and see what's going to need next because you don't know. That's what they're noodling around right now is, where are the emerging needs coming from? After the holidays I think it will be much more evident what the needs are, probably January, February, I predict is when we truly start getting back to whatever our new normal is and that's when you'll see friends and families worn out and resources have been exhausted and people starting to have this second wave of emotional tug that's occurring. I think that's a smart way to do it. Otherwise, I can't explain why it's less, but I just know there's chunks.

And maybe you have because I thought everything had gone... We heard about Boyd was going to give and what Wynn was going to give. I thought all of it went into that pot already.

No. There's about ten million, I think, if the math is right in my head, about ten million in some of the casinos that are not part of the twenty million GoFundMe. We're at about thirty million, so

we're not far from—

We're not far.

But, also, Pulse nightclub, if you look at the numbers, was it thirty-six I think that were killed there?

I think so.

There were fifty-eight here, but plus twenty-two thousand attending. So the numbers, you would expect this money to just explode. I also think people are getting donor fatigue because we also just had the hurricanes that hit Florida, that wiped out Texas and that wiped out Puerto Rico, and the shootings have become more regular.

I think maybe also some people are giving in California for some of the California people.

I have no doubt, yes. The thing to think about is that the Pulse nightclub was the most immediate predecessor to ours and that was about a year in advance; something like that. The Red Cross executive director from there reached out to me the next day, as well as their board chair reached out to my board chair, to kind of pay it forward. There's a thing on our office door right now that Orlando Red Cross made and they all signed it in the office and said, "We're with you, Las Vegas," and this kind of stuff because they understand the journey we're on now. Sadly, it was only a couple of weeks until we got to do the same to our colleagues in Texas when the church shooting occurred down there. So we were able to coach them through what to expect and what to do.

We are just now getting to the point of sending out thank-you cards to folks here. We were really torn, do you sent them now or after the holidays? Because you don't want it to land on the holiday and mixed emotions about all that. But we're getting those thank-you cards out in the mail now. We sent them to all the volunteers that were on the operation already and now the

community ones will go out after the holidays.

The work is not done and unfortunately this is becoming a recurring theme. I was talking to some folks the other day whom I can't name yet, but hopefully will come out soon. I told them during Nine-Eleven we did a whole thing called Remember, Support, Prepare; that was remember what happened, support those affected, and prepare for the future. That's how we're going to turn this community, is to remember what happened, still support those that are affected, but then we're going to channel their energies into preparing in the community. We'll do active shooter trainings for companies and individuals and organizations because with just a few things you can save lots of lives, such as the first thing to do is to run. If you notice in the videos, a lot of what people did was hunker down and stayed. If they had run, would there be more lives saved? I don't know.

We don't know.

I don't know. But the science tells you run; the odds are better.

Really? I interviewed a woman from a military background who thought she should hunker down rather than run.

It is harder to hit a moving target. It's almost impossible for most people to hit a moving target. The other thing is every step you take is more distance between you and the shooter. At first they didn't know where they were coming from, so I understand that; they didn't know where to run. But then eventually they did and you saw everybody start to run. It's only safe to hunker down if you're behind a barrier, if you're behind a bullet-proof barrier or if you're at an angle to where they can't get you. That's what the military does because they don't know where the fire is coming from, so they hunker down. In the civilian world, it's run, hide, fight; that's the mantra. So you run first; if not, then you hide; and at last resort you fight with your life.

People did what they did. I like to remember the fifty-eight people that perished, but I also like to celebrate the twenty-two thousand four hundred and something that survived, and we don't talk about that enough.

I like that. I like that a lot.

When you think about the twenty-two thousand attendees—and this is my numbers—and the four to five hundred vendors and security guards and ancillary folks that are around there, the tech people with the lights and the sound and the everything, I'm guessing it's four to five hundred people; I don't know.

So give me that number, twenty-two thousand...

Like four hundred and fifty that actually survived. In our office I'm trying to turn that dialogue to, what do we do about the survivors and their families and that kind of stuff and to help people move on?

I like that. There was a woman, the woman with the military background, who talked about the word *survivor*. She said it's not powerful enough. She said they did more than survive. She said they were warriors; they helped people around them; they knew how to get out; they made ways to help people get out; all kinds of things. She's looking for another word.

I would agree with that because survivor is very passive sometimes.

Exactly. That's what she was saying and she said they were not passive.

They were not, yes, yes. We were brought to our knees, but we do not stay there long. We stand up and move on. That's what we've done. But it's just surreal in this town on October third going town the Strip and seeing people recreating and going to shows and eating dinner, with a whole different mood, mind you, but still doing that kind of stuff. I've heard some people criticize for

that, but I've heard others, more than the critics, say, "We're not going to let the son of a bitch stop us. We're going to get back to life. We're going to do this. We are going to move on."

I think the community has to wrestle with some things in the future. What do you do with that property? How do you memorialize this? Doing oral histories is part of that. But we have some decisions to make in the future. We will still have big events here. I just wish that the general public knew the efforts that went into police and fire training for these things. Being in law enforcement, I am even blown away. Had our fire department and police department not started cross training about a year ago for these types of events, I think more lives would have been lost.

When we start interviewing fire department members and police department, we'll have to talk about that.

You will.

We'll have to get that on tape so that people will be able to read about it.

Yes. Fire departments here are cross trained to go in during the fight and save lives, not wait until it's over. There is not many departments that, number one, have that kind of relationship in their community, and, number two, have the foresight to do this. Several years ago, I'm going to say five years ago or so, the Las Vegas area became the town of festivals. We're getting out of the four walls of the theater and we're having giant festivals, number one, because the theaters won't hold us anymore; the numbers are too big. But the care that is taken, the training that is taken, the steps that are taken is amazing and the average person never, ever sees that and part of that is security and so they'll never see it because secrecy is part of the secret recipe there. I am incredibly impressed with law enforcement from all departments and fire from all departments in this community and what they do for us every day.

This is amazing. I really appreciate this so much.

Well, thank you.

Now I want to know, what are you going to do at the United Way?

At the United Way...I can confess this. This is like True Confessions. I played hooky from the Red Cross yesterday afternoon for a couple of hours because the staff at United Way were having one of the regular staff get-togethers, and so I went over to say hi to everybody. There are a lot of social issues in this community. I got asked, "What does success look like to you?" I said, "Well, first off, we're not going to cure anything because you can't cure poverty; you can't cure hunger; you can't cure homelessness, because there's people that fall into it, get on their feet and get out of it, and so it's always present. But you need to have a system to where people can get out of it, to where people can move forward, to where people can have an above average chance of graduating from high school and not becoming attracted to the many diversions that this city has in it." My goal is to unify resources and people to give our youth in particular a better shot than anywhere else in the country at being successful. I hope that means they stay here, but if they don't, then that's fine, too, because they'll remember us down the road.

I am a product of some of that. When I was sixteen years old, I found myself living alone, by my own choice. I was hard headed. It had nothing to do with my parents not taking care of me. They were great parents. But I've been living on my own ever since I was sixteen. I had the great influence of a Scoutmaster and a couple of adults that guided me. I never thought about dropping out of school because I saw what it did to people. But if they didn't show me that and I had made another choice, where would I be? Some of that can kind of shake your world a little bit, thinking, *man, I was just one wrong choice and somewhere in my life away from being somewhere else.*

I can relate to the people that we're trying to reach and serve and I think that goes a long way. Just like me being a volunteer and being hired on to paid staff and relating to volunteers in my workplace at the Red Cross, I think the same about United Way. United Way is locally governed even though it has a mothership that's really for support. It's really all locally controlled. So there's a lot of innovation and creativity you can do to solve problems and that's what I want. That's what I need right now is my ability to spread my wings and use more of my skills in different ways because I'm not ready to leave Las Vegas yet. I'm not giving up on Las Vegas at all.

Oh, good you can't leave. You cannot leave.

Not at all. I get to help the community in a different way. Again, these are lives that we're changing. It's just like Red Cross. One October, we rushed four hundred and fifty units of blood into the valley and we supplied every hospital with blood. On a day-to-day basis, we are the leading provider of blood in Las Vegas, and a lot of people don't know that. They think it's UBS, but it's not. We supply ten of the fourteen hospitals. That night there was not enough blood on the shelves by UBS, and rightfully so. It's not a criticism. It's just the scale of their business, they just didn't have enough.

And it should not have been.

No, it should not have been. When lives are at stake, contracts don't matter. So we supplied every hospital in the valley with blood and we said, "We'll work out the details later; don't worry about it." Even UMC. That's the level one trauma center. Their chairman Mason VanHouweling is on our board of directors at Red Cross for this very purpose, so that we could build a better connection with UMC. Nobody could forecast what happened One October, but it paid off because we could instantly text back and forth and say, "I need this; I need that," and try to focus

people's desires to help and give blood.

The public messaging that went out was, go to UBS, and that was by design because at Red Cross we don't have a fixed site where people can go to—UBS does—and we didn't want to lose that potential in the community. We knew it was going to be big and probably overwhelming. Salvation Army went and paired with them to do some canteening to folks while they waited in line because it was long lines and all that kind of stuff. We go to people's businesses and stuff and set up, and so we actually added extra staff. We added extra blood drives. MGM hosted an extra couple of blood drives. Jim Murren actually donated and kicked one of them off just to get things going for the employees as a way they could help. It was incredible. But people don't realize Red Cross is the primary provider here, and we just did that about ten years ago.

I thank you so much.

Dedicate your life to others and they'll come back.

[End of recorded interview]