

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM CMUnow: May 2020

Katlin Birdsall: Remarkable accomplishments are happening every day on the Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College campuses. From faculty instruction and research, to student projects and community involvement. CMUnow is a monthly segment of the KAFM Community Affairs hour, where we interview faculty, athletic coaches, and students to keep you up to date on all things CMU and WCCC. I'm Katlin Birdsall, along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we'll have two guests on the show today. And our first guest is Colorado Mesa University Foundation CEO, Liz Meyer. Welcome to the show, Liz! We really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to join us virtually and have a little chat with David and I and the KAFM listeners!

David Ludlam: Yeah thanks for joining us! And you know, I was thinking about, if you are the CEO of Foundation, you're essentially in a position where people are giving, and donating, and investing their money in CMU through you. And when people are giving their money, that's kind of an intimate thing, and I imagine that requires close relationships that you foster with people in the community, and donors. So I really wanted to kick things off by getting to know you a little bit. What is your life like, and how did you come to work at the Foundation?

Liz Meyer: Sure! Um, yeah you're right, it is absolutely a relationship based career. And interestingly enough, I grew up in Grand Junction, and went to school here, and my mom was actually the first full time director of what was the Mesa State College Foundation. So, when I was growing up, she was working in a little house, probably where the Mav Pav is now, and it was her and two other people in this little house. And they were raising money to buy up houses to the west of campus. And so I feel like I've known Mesa for a long time.

David Ludlam: It's kind of in your blood.

Liz Meyer: What's that?

David Ludlam: It's kind of in your blood!

Liz Meyer: It's in the blood, yeah! I didn't realize it was in the blood, but when I went off to college, I was looking for work on campus, and the call center that reaches out to alumni to ask for support of the University was hiring, and I told my mom about it. And, you know, she'd spent her career doing that, so she said, "Oh yeah, you can do that, it's easy. Just call people and ask them for money. It's no problem, you can do that."

David Ludlam: [laughing] Easy!

Liz Meyer: [laughing] Yeah, super easy! So I applied and I got a job doing that. I worked there for four years and ended up also working in the Advancement Office there. And so, when I got out of college and didn't know what to do, I had development experience and development offices tend to be hiring all the time. So, I got a job at Northwestern University when I graduated. And that kind of started my career and fundraising. And, my husband and I were both from Grand Junction. We moved back when our son was one and there was an opening at the Foundation. And I applied, and I've been with the foundation ever since, for about seven years now. And it's been really great. People in this community are just so supportive of the University and our students and it's been a great job! So, I'm happy to be part of part of the Mavily.

Katlin Birdsall: We're lucky to have you! Well, you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is Colorado Mesa University Foundation CEO, Liz Meyer. So Liz, the foundation plays an integral role in the health of the University, and really with supporting our students in all different kinds of aspects. Um, but I think it may be a part of the University that you know, isn't the first thing that comes to mind for a lot of listeners. You know, they might think about our Academics or Athletics or our Performing Arts. But like I said, it's a really important part of what we can accomplish as a University. So, I would like to know if you could kind of explain the role of the Foundation at CMU and how the Foundation has evolved throughout the years as CMU has evolved and grown?

Liz Meyer: Sure. So, yeah, you're right. We're kind of the behind the scenes arm of the University, and our role is really to encourage and engage private support of the University. So, outside of all of the public support that we receive, the Foundation and our staff, really, we work with individuals and businesses and private foundations to support all aspects of the University. But, one of the things that we've really been focused on over the last couple years, and we've had some tremendous growth, is focusing on scholarship support and supporting our students. And we've just seen some really great growth in terms of how much money and how many students individuals in the community are able to support through the Foundation. So, the Foundation has an endowment of about thirty five million, which has grown exponentially over the last ten years. I think ten years ago, we were at around thirteen or fourteen million, and we're providing about two and a half million annually in scholarships for students. And that has grown over the past five years from about eight hundred thousand. So we've really seen in an incredible amount of generosity from the community to support our students, and a lot of what we do is fostering those relationships and helping people support our campus.

David Ludlam: So, Liz, you mention the word generosity. I want to ask you a question related to that. So, I think everybody in the world, every business, every family, every individual, has in some way shape or form been impacted by the pandemic and there's need everywhere. And so I was reading on CMUnow, an article about the Maverick Relief Fund, something that I know you spearheaded, and there had to have been some concern about whether or not there was going to be the generosity available, given all the need to raise money for students. But from what I could tell, there has been a significant outpouring of support from donors to the Maverick Relief Fund. Could you talk about, I guess, what the Maverick Relief Fund is, but, why you think that even with all the need out there, donations are coming in the door, you know, every day.

Liz Meyer: Yeah, so, the Maverick Relief Fund is something we started in March, last month, or two months ago, right as the pandemic broke. It was becoming very clear that a lot of students were going to need additional financial resources and some of the stories coming from our students, you know, we knew we had to step and to try and provide some additional funds for our students who were losing employment, their families were losing employment, and they were just struggling. And I think you're right. You know, right at the heart of uncertainty and a stock market that was rapidly declining, we were a little unsure of, you know, how it would play out, and, you know, if people were going to give. And I think what is most remarkable, and what I think is special about CMU is our donors are intimately connected with the institution and they really care deeply about CMU and our students and I think the fact that we've been successful in raising a hundred and twenty five thousand just in a few short weeks for our students is really a reflection of that, and people's commitment to the institution and to our students. So I wasn't surprised, we were a little hesitant, but I think it's really a reflection of just our donors' commitment to our students.

David Ludlam: Well congratulations on the success of that fund, I know it's helping a lot of students.

Liz Meyer: Thank you. It is, I hope so. Yeah, I know that it's, we've already exceeded the amount we've raised and we're continuing on so that we can continue to get them the support they need.

Katlin Birdsall: Great! Well, you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is Colorado Mesa University Foundation CEO, Liz Meyer. I know I've been following the Maverick Relief Fund pretty closely, just because I handle a lot of our social media. So we get Outreach from different students that are struggling a lot and it's been great to be able to direct them to this Relief Fund to let them know we do have the financial support to help a lot of them. And it's been really incredible to see the way our alumni and faculty and staff and donors have stepped up to support this fund. And then recently, I also read that our

Associated Student Government and then the Help Colorado Now Fund also did contributing gifts of about forty thousand dollars. And I read that as of May 4th, the fund had awarded 115 students a total of more than three hundred and twenty four thousand dollars in relief funds and I think it's really impactful to hear those numbers, but I think it's even more impactful to hear stories from students that have benefited from the relief funds. So I don't know if you could maybe talk to us and the listeners a little bit about any of those student stories that you've come across or you've heard of who have really benefited from the relief fund?

Liz Meyer: Yeah, I think you're right. We've been able to help a lot of students and one student in particular comes to mind, who, her mother was a single parent and, you know, was helping contribute part of her paycheck to her daughter's education and because of, you know, COVID-19 lost her employment, was no longer able to do that. And so she found herself in a place where, you know, making decisions like rent and tuition and all those things was very difficult. And so we were able to give her a micro grant that helped her offset some of those costs, allowed her to register for school next year, and really kind of took that burden off of her so that she can continue in her studies. And I think one of the most important things we can do now is not shy away from educating these young people because certainly they're the next nurses, doctors, engineers, you know, the people that we need helping us in these types of situations. So it's been really great to help a variety of students, and many of them have, you know, a lot of different stories of how this virus has impacted them. So we're really excited to be able to help all of them.

David Ludlam: Well, Liz, you just mentioned students and we've been talking a little bit about them, but I wanted to ask you about your donors. And, what's always amazing to me, when you publish your annual report, is a diversity of donors that you have: foundations, older donors, and younger donors, student donors, faculty and staff, and everything in between. A huge diversity of donors. What is it about people that give, or what is it about donors that no matter their age or no matter where they come from that, that kind of makes them the same or what do they have in common? And how does it give your job meaning to be able to work with people like that?

Liz Meyer: Yeah, I think you're exactly right. We have such a broad range of people who contribute, from small amounts to large amounts, and I think the one thing that unites pretty much all of them is a commitment to helping students. It always goes back to students for the vast majority of our donors. They want to help kids achieve their dreams. They understand the importance education, in terms of not just an individual, you know, what that does for an individual and their life, but what that does for a community as a whole. And so I think the number one underlying thing is a commitment towards educating young people.

David Ludlam: Ok, well, maybe as we kind of round out the show here, I want to put you on the spot and ask you, is there a donor that stands out? Without mentioning names, or a situation that has really moved you with their generosity, or a case that kind of helps give you energy when you think about it? That you've had over the last few years?

Liz Meyer: Yeah, um, it happens a lot actually. You know, I have one donor that stands out in particular who is not local, lives on the east coast, and his family has some business in Grand Junction, and he called me up a few years ago, and said, "You know, we really understand how important the University is, and how important it is to educate." He comes from a long, long list of educators in his family, and said, "We want to do something for the students." So we talked about setting up an endowment, and he and his brother set up an endowment. And they've come out to campus a few times, and I've taken the around and introduced them to some of their scholarship recipients. And, they've just become so committed, you know, from living back in Pennsylvania, they send annual, monthly gifts now, well beyond what their initial commitment was. And I think, you know, they're more excited about CMU, which none of them went to CMU, but they totally understand the culture, and what we're doing is so important in this community and beyond this community, and their generosity is just amazing to see, you know, from afar, that they're still committed. So, that's one that stands out for me.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well, Liz, thank you so much again for coming on the show today. We really appreciate it. Don't go anywhere though, because after a short break, we'll be right back with Tomlinson Library's Head of Access Services and Outreach, Laureen Cantwell.

SEGMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable work happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our next guest, Tomlinson Library's Head of Access Services and Outreach, Laureen Cantwell. Welcome to the show, Laureen!

Laureen Cantwell: Hi! Thank you!

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, thank you so much for joining us virtually today, we really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to do that!

David Ludlam: Yeah thanks for being here!

Laureen Cantwell: No problem, my pleasure!

Katlin Birdsall: All right, so why don't we start off today with you telling the listeners just a little bit about yourself and your background so they can get to know you a little bit better?

Laureen Cantwell: Sure, so, I actually grew up on Long Island, which is a much more watery area [laughing] and flatter, flatter too. And I was kind of there all through college years. I did my bachelors at Vassar College, I was an English major, and then ended up moving to Philly where I did grad school at Drexel University, for Library and Information Clients, and then I ping-ponged around a little bit, I was in Iowa for a year, I was in Memphis for two, and then I ended up out here as the Reference and Distance Services Librarian for CMU back in the Fall of 2014. And uh, as of around, I guess, October or November of 2019, I became the Head of Access Services and Outreach.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, and, you know, it's always interesting for me to hear, you know, we've worked each other for the last couple years, but to hear your background, that you've been all over the U.S., and then it's interesting that you landed here in Grand Junction, Colorado.

David Ludlam: Yeah it does sound like an interesting career, and I was looking at your title, and I was thinking about, you know, libraries are not the libraries of one's childhood. They've become different, more technology driven, they're more complex. And your title, what does that mean for folks that maybe aren't familiar with what a modern library like ours offers in terms of services? What do you do? What does your title engender?

Laureen Cantwell: Oh, these days, it feels like jack of all trades, but, you know, so when I was Reference and Distance Services, my primary functions were assisting with student needs at the Research Help Desk, through our virtual chat service, through instruction, and particularly keeping an eye out for students who are based at a distance. So the distance service component of things, so I get confused a lot with Distance Ed, and we have a lot in common, but my role was a little bit different and focused specifically within the library. Shifting into Head of Access Services and Outreach, what that means is that I am looking out for our checkout services, our reserves, both print and electronic, and fun things like anatomical sets and rock sets and things like that. Also our interlibrary loan services, which are particularly critical for our students and faculty right now. And then, on the outreach side, it's the programming, it's our events, it's making sure that we have strong touch points with our community be those virtual or in person. So just making sure that our services have really high expectation and high success with our delivery. Fixing problems, communicating upwardly and downwardly, that kind of thing.

Katlin Birdsall: Great! Well you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Tomlinson Library's Head of Access Services and Outreach, Laureen Cantwell. So Laureen, I know I've been an avid reader for most of my life, and I've spent a lot of time in libraries, and there's just a feeling when you enter a library, like, I know for me, it feels very at home, I love the way it smells, I love the quietness of it. I love just getting to see all the books and the opportunities that are there at the library, so, I can only imagine what it feels like to work at one! So what would you say is the best part of your job and what you get to do?

Laureen Cantwell: That's a great question, Katlin. So, I can also sympathize with your feelings of walking into a library and what that experience feels like and means to you, as just, a member of our population. Just the fact that you can walk into a library and see and touch everything. You know, I feel like Belle when she enters the library in Beauty and the Beast, you know, where I just want to twirl around, and read all the books!

Katlin Birdsall: Exactly!

Laureen Cantwell: But, I think, for me, it's always been a safe space, and I try not to get too emotional when I talk about it, but when I was growing up, I lived near a small local library – Brookhaven Free Library, shout out! – and, I mean, just tiny, but special, because the people who worked there, had been babysitters of mine. They had taught me in nursery school and shifted into library work, things like that. So even though I never worked there, we joked that I had a cot in the basement [laughing].

Katlin Birdsall: [laughing] I love that!

Laureen Cantwell: So for me, it's that, you can walk in there, and you can have comfort, and you can have a friend. And that friend can be a book, that friend can be the staff members there whose total aim is to help you and to figure out what you need and how they can make that happen for you. And there aren't that many places where you can have access to unfiltered information, and where people seek to provide that for you. So that, for me, is always what libraries have been meant to do, and what the best libraries achieve.

David Ludlam: I can really relate to what Katlin was saying about libraries, and how you described them too. I actually, uh, read Benjamin Franklin's autobiography last year, and I had no idea that he and others kind of invented the modern library. And that libraries are, sort of, a fixture of American society, at least in terms of how they're configured now. But they've also

had to really work hard to adjust to the times, and they've changed a lot, and I think they've been pretty successful at that, but lately, I assume, all the changes you've had to make in relation to the pandemic probably are nothing compared to what you've had to change over the last decade or so in terms of technology. Can you talk to us about what you've had to do to adapt to the pandemic, and how that might be similar or different to the adaptations you've been making over the last decade just from a technology standpoint?

Laureen Cantwell: Sure. Libraries have always, I think, needed to be agile organizations. I mean, from, you know, Alexandria where we had scrolls, to now where people are like, why do we need librarians? We have Google. You know, and you have to kind of navigate a really careful landscape of the amount of access that we individually have to information pursuits, and what it's like to need help with those pursuits. So, sure, yeah, we have more computers now, Google exists, Amazon exists, there's lots of resources out there. But I think, generally speaking, what people have found in libraries over the last ten years, is for families, things like cost savings. You know, public libraries in particular, that's a huge way to get your kid reading, to keep them active, to find programming, and for all of that to be absolutely free, is an amazing local service, that I think libraries have actually had a resurgence. I want to say there's been maybe more library visits over the last year than there were movie theater visits. You know, things like that. And people don't realize that. We always think it's just us that's going to the library. Just like, when you're in a classroom, you're the only person with a question. So, that remembrance of what libraries are meant to do, is really important. We're there to provide information, and we all have information needs all the time. So, just having a place to do that, whether it's over electronic databases or not, is really critical, and we have adapted to all of those things.

David Ludlam: So, you're saying that the archetype of this person sitting alone, their face in a book, in the library by themselves, has kind of changed, and now it's more of an experiential thing with your friends or your family, and that's one of the ways that libraries have stayed relevant within this technological shift?

Laureen Cantwell: Yes, I feel a little bit like you were spying on me circa 2002-2006, [laughing], but, yeah, it's changed. We're highly collaborative spaces, we've got study rooms for that. Many libraries have maker spaces, and all sorts of things, to make sure that students can collaborate the way that curriculum needs them to, and so that they can isolate the way curriculum needs them to. So our library also has two quiet spaces. But when you look at the pandemic situation, we're really in a unique circumstance that doesn't tend to arise for so many libraries at once. For example, you have the fire that hit the Los Angeles Public Library in the mid 1980's. That's a critical situation, but it's one building. Tons of collections, amazing things were lost, but one building. The flood that happened, I think at CU Boulder, a number of years ago, I forget exactly what year, maybe in the 90's, we invented services for interlibrary loan of articles and books and book chapters, and things, based on that flood. But that was just one library, um, so what we're really dealing with right now is what happens when all the

libraries are inaccessible. And how staff can navigate that, and how we can still provide services in that environment. So a lot of what I've been focusing on, within both outreach and access services, is really trying to figure out how we can adapt our services to still meet as many of the needs of our students, staff, and faculty, as humanly possible, while still, for the most part, working remotely, and not having the building accessible to patrons.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, I was going to say, you know, we sent out a survey recently to students about what virtual resources they were using that we provide, and I know the library was right up there as one that most of our students, I think it was like 80 or 90 percent, are accessing and using and are aware of the services that you provide at a distance. So kudos to you and your team and all of the great work that you guys have been doing over these last couple of weeks to still support our students as they work remotely.

Laureen Cantwell: Thank you. I mean, it's actually been a pretty fun thought experiment, you know, trying to figure out how to make all this happen. But luckily, we have a staff that's super, super dedicated to, in particular, our students, but overall just customer service. And so even though at first it was like, oh goodness, should we be working from home? Then it very, very quickly became oh my goodness, but someone needs a chapter or book. But this article, or oh! There's someone with things on the hold shelf, how can we get that to them? And all of a sudden it was like, we want to be safe, but we want to provide and so we actually developed a curbside pick-up program. Our people can schedule a time to come pick up items that they put on hold, and we've had probably about a 50/50 split of students and faculty making use of that over the last month or so that it's been in play.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, I love to hear that! Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Tomlinson Library's Head of Access Services and Outreach, Laureen Cantwell. So Laureen, we're already getting to the end of our time with you. But before we let you go today, I figure there's quite a few people, you know, who are at home, working from home, staying home. And so I think it'd be maybe beneficial for them to hear from you. If there's any book recommendations that you would offer to those that are staying at home and quarantining at home? If there's like a top one, two, or maybe three that you could name out for them to read?

Laureen Cantwell: Oof, nothing like being put on the spot for a book recommendation!

David Ludlam: And I might add to that and ask for your favorite author too. Who's your favorite author on top of that?

Laureen Cantwell: I feel like someone just threw down a gauntlet in front of me. Okay, so, if you haven't read it yet, Susan Orlean's *The Library Book*, is actually really fun, since things like libraries are kind of on our mind in this conversation. It gets into the history of libraries, what libraries mean to people, and it actually does talk about the, quite a bit, the fire at the Los Angeles Public Library in the 80s and, you know, just how they handled it. How the city of Los Angeles came together to make sure that they preserve things. So that's all to say that libraries are resilient. And it's a great book. It's super well told and very compelling to read, so that's a great one. If people are interested in suspense type content, I actually got an early copy of a book called *No Exit*, and I'm not remembering the author's name right now. I might be able to Google it really quick. But, it's actually set in Colorado. It's Taylor Adams. Sorry, *No Exit* by Taylor Adams. And it's set in Colorado during a blizzard, which is nice to think about with summer coming and it's really, really suspenseful. I mean every time I thought, this has to end soon, it just kept going. Very cinematic, and he has another book called *Eyeshot* that's very much the same way but set in the desert and very cinematic. So those are great. Other books, I'm trying to think of, oh something non-political, that I've been reading lately

Katlin Birdsall: I think those are good, yeah those are great recommendations!

David Ludlam: Yeah that sounds like a good list, and I don't want to let you off the hook, I still want you to tell us your favorite author.

Laureen Cantwell: Oh! My favorite author I don't actually have one. It's something, I think, that people expect me to have because I am a book lover. But I don't actually have one because, I guess when it comes to authors, I'm very polyamorous. You know, like if you're good at what you do and it's suspense, I love you. If you're good at what you do and it's a trashy romance, I love you. I just, you know, it's Abraham Lincoln, right? Whatever you are, be a good one. And that's, you know, when you find truly great authors, you can really fall into books. The other thing that's great about books to keep in mind, particularly with things like fiction in a time like this, is that fiction helps develop empathy. Because we often end up putting ourselves in the footfalls of the characters of the book. So, that's where reading things that are different, reading things that are about people that you don't know or worlds that you don't experience, whether it's, you know, wealthy people, Asian people, you know, people from historical times, whatever it happens to be, those fictional components really help us, I think, develop within ourselves. So, kind of keep that in mind, too. This is a great time to kind of expand your worldview and touch on things that you're not that familiar with and learn more about everybody and what we're all handling. One thing I do want to plug really quick, while we're

keeping in mind things like reading, is that our special collections and archives at the Tomlinson Library is collecting journals, diaries, and other records from community members' experiences within the pandemic. This is our library in conjunction with Dr. Sarah Swedberg from the History Program, and we hope to make both the physical collection and a digital collection from anyone in the CMU, Grand Valley, or Western Slope community. So, anyone who wants to submit anything, we'd love to hear from you, and we'd love to really build something coming out of this. It'll be an important record.

David Ludlam: [in the background] That is an important record!

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well, yeah, I was going to say that sounds like a great project and a great way to end our show today. So, thank you again, Laureen, so much for joining us. And again, she's the Head of Access Services and Outreach at Tomlinson Library.

Laureen Cantwell: Thank you! It's been my pleasure, it's been a lot of fun, nice to talk to you both!

Katlin Birdsall: You too! Bye-bye! This segment airs on the second Tuesday of each month on KAFM Community Radio. You can also listen to a podcast of today's show at KAFMRadio.org. I'm your host Katlin Birdsall, along with my co-host David Ludlum, and we will be back next month for another edition of CMUnow on the Community Affairs Hour.

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