**Connecting Conversations: A UNC World View Podcast**

**00:00 Introduction:**

Susan O’Rourke

Welcome to Connecting Conversations, a podcast of UNC World View. UNC World View is committed to developing global educators and creating a pipeline of globally competent K-12, community college, and university students ready to engage, work, and collaborate in today's dynamic global community.

This season, the podcast features conversations between UNC World View's Director, Charle' LaMonica, and leaders in global education who have inspired us with their dedication to developing future ready and globally minded students.

To learn more about UNC World View's programs and access global resources, check out our website at worldview.unc.edu.

**Season 2**

**Interview by Charlé LaMonica, Director of UNC World View, with Patty Pfeiffer, President of Wayne Community College**

**00:45**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Great educators around the world make positive changes in the lives of their students. Not only do they create a classroom of global learning, but they also encourage, inspire, and challenge students to do their very best. Frequently, we’ve found that students see a teacher or educational administrator, and they never know the story behind the person.

**01:09**

**Charlé LaMonica**: So today, here at World View, our goal is to learn from Dr. Patty Pfeiffer, President of Wayne Community College, in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

What sparked her curiosity about the world?

What educational experiences inside and outside the classroom shaped her into the leader she is today?

**01:31**

**Charlé LaMonica**: It gives me great pleasure to introduce today Dr. Patty Pfeiffer, a graduate of Wayne Community College, who began her career at Wayne Community College in November 1994, as a nursing instructor. She rose to Nursing Department Chair, then Dean of the Allied Health and Public Services Division, Chief of Staff, and Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, and then Vice President of Academic and Student Services.

She took on the role of Interim President of the college on June 24, 2021 and became the college’s sixth president on January 1, 2022.

**02:11**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Dr. Pfeiffer, welcome to World View today. We really appreciate your time sharing your story with us.

Let's begin with just a very basic question: Who influenced you in your career path?

**02:27**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Well, first and foremost, thank you for allowing me to be part of this podcast today. It is truly an honor to share my story because I do use that story to help influence others along their educational journeys. But I think the biggest influence for me—because I am a first generation college graduate and the first in my family—was my family as a whole, and especially our daughters. We have two adult daughters, and I wanted them to know that education matters and that women that have a drive and a passion and care deeply for others can be very successful in life. I wanted them to know that kindness matters and [that] setting goals that are […] high for themselves will help them go far in life. So, really, my family.

**03:26**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: I also had a very supportive husband along the way. He's also a first-generation college graduate. When I was thinking about this podcast, I could remember the many times that I came home, especially in my ADN [Associate Degree in Nursing] (I'm a nurse by trade, so I graduated from Wayne Community College as a registered nurse), and I'd come home with….what felt like a 100-page syllabus (It was probably 20-30 pages) and with several classes, and I would say, “I don't think I can do this.” And he always stood behind me and said, “Yes, you can,” through all of my educational journey. So, I'm very grateful to him for his support, but I’m very proud that I've been able to influence my daughters who now are both also college graduates.

**04:15**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, thank you for that so much. You mentioned the drive that women have and the passion, but I really love that you mentioned kindness…. as one of your high goals, too, as you progress through life, as well as your career. So, thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate that.

**04:33**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: You're welcome.

**04:36**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Also, the support of your entire family, your husband, and your children—but you really set the bar high for yourself.

Can you tell us a little bit about what was unique and significant to you about your educational pathway? Because I think you had a very different kind of pathway….We always say to students, “There's not just one way to get where you want to go,” right? So, could you share a little bit about that within the context of being kind and respectful?

**05:08**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Absolutely. And I'll be bluntly honest. I've already share with you that I was a first-generation [college graduate]. I grew up in a town called Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, and if you know anything about Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, [you’ll know] we are famous for Groundhog Day, on February 2nd. (It should be a national holiday, as far as I'm concerned. But I grew up in a small town, I graduated with honors, and I was accepted as a pre-med major at IUP, which is Indiana University of Pennsylvania. That is a relatively big university. went for one semester, and I left there with a 1.61 GPA. And, I'll be honest with you, I left there because I got totally lost in that big university…. I got very lost in a chemistry class, and I just stopped attending, not knowing I should have dropped that course.

I did well in some of my other courses, but the course that I did the best in was ROTC. That ROTC unit happened to be a unit [where], when they were juniors rising into seniors, they were allowed to go to Airborne School. So, as a freshman in that one semester, I had a couple of chances to go watch them jump out of perfectly good airplanes and be on that drop zone. It intrigued me amazingly. Well. I already told you I dropped out after the first semester, went home, and took a job at a rest home as a janitor, and I knew that there had to be more in life for me than what was happening at that moment.

**07:02**

But there wasn't much in my small town that I felt like I was going to do unless I had the opportunity for education and experience. So, because I was so intrigued by my ROTC experience, I went to a recruiter's office, and I said, “I don't care what I do. I just want to jump out of perfectly good airplanes.”

**07:28**

**Patty Pfeiffer** and **Charlé LaMonica** smile and chuckle.

**07:30**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Yes, I was 18—What kind of sense do you have? But, nevertheless, I did join the army as an enlisted individual, and became an airborne parachute rigger. I got the opportunity to jump out of perfectly good airplanes because we had to jump what we packed.

So, the army gave me the opportunity, not only to see the world—we'll talk about that later—but [also] I did meet my husband in the service. He and I both happened to be stationed in Korea together.

**08:02**

I had taken a few college classes while I was in the army, so I always had aspired for that opportunity for education, knowing I was a relatively smart young lady, I just needed some direction and some guidance. We were very fortunate that we were able to come back to Goldsboro, North Carolina. My husband was stationed at Seymour [Johnson Air Force Base]. I got out of active duty and went to Fort Bragg in the Reserves and that's when I came to Wayne Community College and Wayne Community College was here for me. I was able to go into a medical field. Yes, I wasn't going to go into med school with an F in chemistry, but I was able to still enter a field that I had a passion for—which was healthcare—and then the rest is history. So I went off and worked for a while, and then came back to Wayne Community College. So…I just want people to know that the path is never a path that has to stop you. You just have to figure out a way to do it, and you have to have people that support you along the way, especially for me, in the community college setting. We have a much closer connection with our students. When I was at that big university, I was in that tiered lecture hall that you see in movies. That's what my cell biology class looked like. That was what my chemistry lecture class looked like. I was one of ~300 students, but, at the community college, there was a personal connection. I think that was very beneficial in helping me become the nurse that I am today and the woman that I am today.

**09:49**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, that is really fascinating, and I am really taken aback by the fact—personally—to hear you say that you wanted to jump out of airplanes. I'm just very curious….So you were stationed in Korea.

**10:05**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: I was.

**10:07**

**Charlé LaMonica:** I'm just curious if we could step back a little bit to that point. What was that like for you? How did your education within the ROTC shape you personally and professionally?

**10:21**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Well, obviously, ROTC is very much like the military [where] there's a lot of discipline….a lot of guidance….I think I thrived on that….When I joined the Army, I kind of knew what I was getting into, obviously, basic training….I went to Fort Dix for basic training. You know, that's an experience in [and of] itself. But it taught me responsibility. It taught me accountability (which, to this day) and GI things (I mean, I'll clean something in a heartbeat, but I think that's embedded in me). But, nevertheless, that accountability and responsibility and level of command that was taught through that period of time has been very, very beneficial, not only in my private life, but also in my professional life. So, I enjoyed that immensely. And to be 100% honest with you, going to [South] Korea was my first international experience, and I got to live there for 16 months. So I began to appreciate the culture, the people, the food….got to visit different places in that country. One of my wonderful experiences—I went to Jeju Island, and on Jeju Island, I had the opportunity to go to mountaineering school. So, we learned how to tie all kinds of knots, and then we also had the opportunity to do Australian repelling. Australian repelling is not where you bounce down the cliff; you run down it face first. So, I got the opportunity to do a 300-foot single rope, Australian repelling experience.

So yes, again, I was 18-19 years old, and—What sense do we have? But I'm a woman full of adventure! because recently we went to Iceland, and I hiked a volcano… and I'm in my sixties now. So, you know, still woman that looks for excitement in her life.

**12:35**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Dr. Pfeiffer, I am impressed. I am so impressed. I tell you what…the hiking now…and the repelling back then is something that, I'm sure, serves you well in your work as a president of a college, as well—just being able to handle what comes your way.

You mentioned that, most recently, you were in Iceland, and I know from conversations with you that traveling abroad is really important to you. Could you also share a little bit about why you think that's important [and] where you visited and lived abroad?

**13:09**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: I've lived in Korea abroad, but obviously the military gave me the opportunity to travel to some other countries…My first duty station was Fort Louis, Washington (out of my training…my airborne school… and then my AIT training to be a rigger)…and so at Fort Louis, Washington, we packed for the 2nd and 75th Ranger Battalion. So, one of the things that they did was jungle training, and that was out in Panama. So, I got the opportunity to go to Panama and some other places not so much international, but they allowed me to go to Hawaii with them….I packed for them in Hawaii. I did get the opportunity to jump into Hawaii, and Hawaii is nothing but one big rock….that was one of the hardest landings I've ever done….Professionally….I was part of….Go Global Latino Initiative and got to travel to Mexico with a group of educators, businessmen and some….elected representatives and [got to] be able to learn about the culture and the uniqueness of Latino/Hispanic culture[s]…..We had brought that back to Wayne Community College, and fortunately, four of the….community colleges that got to go [on the trip],….were able to secure a million-dollar grant and, through that million-dollar grant, each of us have put into place somebody that can make direct connections with….Latino populations in the county, especially in high school settings that have higher populations of Latino students….and, in some cases, higher dropout rates, especially among males. So I've got a success coach who's reaching out to the students and to the parents. We've got some scholarship money through this grant that we have secured, and it's called the Train the East Grant. So, again, it's an opportunity for us to travel but [to] be able to use it for good within my professional setting.

**15:22**

And then, personally, to be honest with you, I've been many, many places from Canada and Iceland to Japan. We went to England last year….the Netherlands….[and] obviously, all the places you go if you go on a cruise. We're planning a big trip to Switzerland this summer because we have some prior military buddies [who] are at the same age of us. Our children are grown, and we know that….the more that we can see now to our at our age, the more opportunities that we will have to bring those experiences back. So, I love to travel, and I do feel like I can use that travel for good.

**16:05**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, I tell you what, Dr. Pfeiffer, I appreciate you sharing that with us as well, because, when you talked about the professional program that you did in Mexico with our Go Global Colleagues, you really made things happen with outcomes when you got back….That is really so valuable to all those students sitting in high school classrooms that you mentioned. So, thank you for that.

And also just the adventuresome spirit and being curious about different cultures, I'm sure, impacts you throughout your professional work, as well….I'm really interested in learning about when you decided to become an educator because you you've had such an interesting path. When did you decide that you wanted to go into teaching and you wanted to then have this trajectory into administration at your level?

**16:55**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: To be honest with you, I don't know that it's something that I truly sought out– to be an educator—but at that point in my life, I was trying to find something different. So let me explain. I was working as an assistant director of a childbirth center in Raleigh, and I was working straight nights, and I did that for several years—for about three years, and it was just very hard on the family life….We were living in Raleigh at the time, but we had, I would say, for 7.5 years, lived in Goldsboro because my husband was stationed at Seymour Johnson, and I was reservist at Fort Bragg and would commute there. So, kind of on a whim [while on] a12-hour night shift, I knew the job was open [and] I printed out the job application and filled it out. It was paper and pencil back in 1994. I turned it in. I got an interview [and] had to do my teaching, and I got the position. So, I was very fortunate in having that opportunity. But, when I came into the teaching position at that point, I had already completed a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, but it was going to require a Master's [degree]. So they said, “Hey, we'll give you this position. But [we are] going to give you three years to get a master’s [degree].”

**18:20**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Okay.

**18:21**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: So I went on and got my first master’s [degree]. And I got that from Central Michigan. And you [might] say, “Well, why Central Michigan? You’re living in North Carolina.” Well, the base always had other schools….Central Michigan would fly their professors in, and we would have face-to-face classes on Saturdays and Sundays all day, every other weekend to fulfill a 16-week semester. I've got my first master’s [degree] from Central Michigan in administration, so that obviously was a springboard as I moved up into administration (having that master’s [degree])….Then once I became an instructor after a few years, there was somebody that I aspired to be [who] at that point was the dean. His name was Dr. Ron Taylor, and he is one of our retirees that I see quite frequently…..I always tell him….I aspire to be you one day, and I did get that opportunity. So, I was able to become a Nursing Department Chair when our department chair retired, and eventually our dean retired….I had that opportunity, and then doors just kind of opened for me along the way…I think that's when you're driven and you show purpose, and you show that you're willing to work very hard for a position….Because I knew when I was going to….or had the opportunity to potentially know somebody's going retire as a department chair, I knew I was going have to have a master’s in nursing. So I went back when I was an instructor….and got a master’s in nursing, knowing that that was going to be a requirement of that position when she retired. Then, along the way, one of my coworkers called me one day [when] I was headed to a grocery store, and she said, “Patty, I want to go get my doctorate, and I want you to come with me,” and I was like, “Oh, no, that is not happening at my age. You're probably 15 years younger than me.” She kept on me. She kept on me. Now I'm not going to lie to you. That was something I had kind [of had] in the back of my head said, “Okay, this is what I want to do,” but [I] wasn't sure what I was going do with it when I did.

**20:45**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Mmhmm.

**20:46**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: And but I finally jumped on that wagon, and we finished our program. And again, without that, I wouldn't be in this position today.

So, you know your journey is always different, but you use the opportunities that are presented to you for the betterment, and I can tell you, I love this institution, and I love the mission that we have at Wayne Community College because I truly believe that every student that walks in our door – we can change their lives in a better way [by] providing educational opportunities, whether that's finishing in a high school diploma that you never finished, learning the English language because you're coming from a different country into our country, whether it's a short-term training to get you “skilled up” for the workforce, or is a transfer program or completing a career and technical program like I did for nursing.

**21:52**

It gave me an opportunity, and that, to me, is one of the best things about the community college system is because we provide opportunities every day, and those opportunities are for that student, but they become generational opportunities. Just like in my family—I already shared with you—[My husband and I] are both first-time college graduates.

22:18

**Charlé LaMonica:** Mhmmm.

**22:19**

**Patty Pfeiffer:** Education, then, was going to not be an option for our daughters, and both of them are college graduates and very successful young women…. I just see the opportunities that we have. We all started somewhere, but we can give back, and that's what I feel like I have for the opportunity, as a president here, and in every role that I had prior to sitting in this chair, that I can give back to my students, and, in turn, that gives back to society as a whole.

**22:47**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, I tell you what, you had some fantastic mentors, but I can only imagine how exciting it is to work at Wayne Community College and also be a student there—to see you in this role—because you clearly set the set the guidance for everyone, in terms of how to inspire students with compassion and with your purpose-driven life really.

**23:14**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Well, you know I do tell them my story, and I tell them, “One failure never defines you. Two failures never define you. You have the ability to achieve your dreams, and there may be roadblocks that come up…. along the path and maybe bumps in the road, but you must believe in yourself sometimes, even when others do not. So don't let a failure define you. If I did, I'd never be sitting here today.”

**23:42**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Great advice, great advice. So now we've kind of taken a quick little tour through up until now that you're sitting there as the president and you're leading the college. Could you share a little bit about why you believe that providing students with a global education is important to you? Why is that important?

**24:05**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Well, I truly believe that it provides a rich understanding of the wider world that is around us and the diversity of people, and the diversity of cultures and how the interconnectedness that we truly all have. Through global education, I think we can build a better understanding of issues that others face in the world, that would include things like inequities and poverty and human rights. So all of those issues are important for people to understand, but sometimes, when you’re in your own little world, or if you've never left Wayne County—and I truly believe we probably have some students and some individuals that have never left the confines of Wayne County or the surrounding counties around them because I'll say to somebody, “Have you ever been to the beach?” And they've never been to the beach! I'm like, well, it's an hour and half away, but they don't have that opportunity. So, if we can provide some exposure to global education within the courses that we have at Wayne Community College, we are truly enlightening people's views of the things that impact the world as a whole. So, I'm just very blessed that we've had this opportunity, to be a School of Global Distinction and to integrate global concepts into our courses because I really think it is so beneficial to our students.

**25:46**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, thank you so much for that answer, because I couldn't agree with you more. I think we all need to collaborate together to serve all students, and everyone deserves a global view of the world [and] at least an opportunity to learn about the world, and I know you're doing a great job with that.

I'm curious what surprises you might have found along the way, coming in as president and doing some global work with students (I know you've got some fantastic instructors there. We know them well at World View). What are some surprises you found along the way, as a person leading global work?

**26:27**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Well, I think, one of the biggest surprises [is that] we're more alike than we are different….When you look at family, family matters to all cultures. So, there's a lot of things that we have in common across different cultures and different regions and different diversities of people. We all may be from different places, but we, our lives are enriched when we see and communicate with others from different places, when we visit different places. Sometimes that might not be a physical visit, because….our program connects with individuals in Poland and through virtual meetings with our students and their students. So, I think it enriches their lives in many different ways. And there's an awe to just learning about how people do things differently. When I was in my first graduate program for my first master’s in administration, one of [my] favorite courses I can still remember today was international business. So, …. we each got to pick a country, and we got to share about the customs and the cultures in that country and how it would impact you if you were in business and you were visiting that culture. So, it kind of intrigued me from way back then, and that has continued throughout. [It’s] part of the reason, probably, why I am like I am, and like to visit other countries and see those cultures…..[It’s] just so much….not only the culture, but just see the scenery and the architecture. We [the United States] are a young country [compared to other countries around the world]….[and that historical difference is visible when you compare] some of the architecture and the castles and all that you see in other countries. I cannot wait to this summer to see those Swiss Alps.

**28:25**

**Charlé LaMonica**: I tell you, I have no doubt you're going to have an incredible journey to see those Swiss Alps. I'm thinking about the interconnectedness, the diversity, and I can't help but think about how global North Carolina is. You know, global *is* local, and I know that's true in your county.

Is there anything… So we're kind of winding down now. This has been a really rich conversation with you. I'm so appreciative of your time. When I met you and talked with you for the first time, I thought, “We've got to share this widely because your story is so important for others to hear.” Is there anything that you'd like to share that I've not asked, as we close?

**29:06**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: Sure. You know, I think UNC World View is one of the richest resources that we have in North Carolina. You have provided multiple professional development opportunities for….not only educators but students to get involved in, at all levels of education, from K-12 all through university….Our mission is to develop global educators, or *your* [World View’s] mission is to develop global educators. But, more importantly, those educators then open that world of opportunity to all of the students that they have the opportunity impact.

So, I would say, if anybody's listening to this: “Get involved. Check out the website.” ….Our students are entering a global workforce nowadays, and, in many instances, that they need to understand global culture and global diversity global issues. (Much of that can be done through what you're doing in all of our educational entities.)

“Help them understand,….help them thrive, and help them be successful.” So, I do appreciate very much what you guys are doing and providing the resources that we have been able to integrate here right at Wayne Community College into our classes…. and what we've been able to do with our students, I am always impressed…. with the resources that you have guys have provided to us. So, I want to just say, Thank you!

**30:43**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Well, thank you. Thank you for saying that. I tell you, as we all work together to serve all students,….we're just much more stronger when we put our heads together. And I'm always inspired by students, but I'm really inspired today by you, Dr. Pfeiffer. Thank you very much. Thank you for your time.

Most importantly, thank you for the commitment that you have to all students….students in Wayne County and students across North Carolina as you as you serve as president of….Wayne Community College here in the state. So, thank you for your time, and enjoy the Alps!

**31:22**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: I will, I will! I will have to take some pictures and share that.

**32:26**

**Charlé LaMonica**: Sounds great. All the best to you. Thank you very much.

**31:29**

**Patty Pfeiffer**: You're welcome.