

REGGIE'S ANGELS INTERVIEW

Mary, Arlene Tom, Karin

2026.02.11 Interviewed by Lydia Lowe

Lydia: Alright, so maybe to start, if you can each say your name, and, yeah, and then we'll just go into the questions. So, this is Lydia Lowe, and I am conducting this interview on February 11th, 2026

Mary: I'll start, because I'm not shy. My name is Mary, and I am probably one of the original Angels that played in 1976.

Karin: And I am Karen Chue. My name is Karen Chue. And, I played on the original Reggie's Angels, similar, like Mary in 1976.

Lydia: So, I guess it's your turn, Arlene. She seems to be frozen. Arlene, can you hear us?

Mary: Technology, you gotta love it.

Lydia: Ok, maybe we should just go on. So, I never played 9-man myself, I used to go and watch the tournaments back in the day when they were played on the streets of Chinatown, that was really fun. But I'm really interested to learn, like, **how did women start getting involved in Nine Man, and what was Reggie's role?**

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Mary: Oh, he was a huge role. He wanted to form a women's team. He reached out to some of the girls that had played high school volleyball, I think, at the time, and then from there...I mean, I never knew Karen.

My sister played on JV while I played on varsity, then we've kind of just put the feelers out there, we recruited Karen, and then Karen brought along some other people, so it was probably by word of mouth, and there were, I think 9 of us? The very first year?

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And we just played in an exhibition match. I think it wasn't fully formed. I think Reggie just wanted to introduce it. So the team from New York, the New York Freemasons came out, and we played in an exhibition match.

Arlene: So just, just as a clarification, can you hear me now?

Lydia: Yes. Okay, so the women never started as 9-man?

Mary: Right.

Arlene: It was no such thing. Although, although I think at one point in time, Reggie might have wanted us to convert, it just wasn't gonna happen. Yeah. So, yeah.

And so, by the way, I'm Arlene Tom, and I am Mary's little sister, and I also played them the first year with them, so...

Lydia: So it's just volleyball, women's volleyball teams as part of this.

Karin: Yes, it was 6 man. It was under the 9-man, like, platform, but it was 6 people, 6 people on the court.

Lydia: Okay.

Mary: Yeah, we were playing by U.S. VBA rules, United States volleyball rules, you know, and the nine-man was not very, was not very well known in that realm either, so you have the 6-man conventional USA volleyball, and then you have the 9-man. Everybody seems to love the 9-man, too, though, because it's that much faster. I mean, when I mention it to other people, they're like, wow, this is pretty cool, and I go, yeah, it is.

Arlene: Yeah, and quite honestly, the, the modern game has adopted quite a few rules from the nine-man, like rally scoring, and some of the overhead receiving, and things like that, so it's my understanding is that the Nine-man really started first. I mean, not just in the Asian thing, but in general, and then but for whatever reason, in the non-Chinese thing, it never kind of went anywhere. But yeah, so here, for the women, we always started with the 6 men, six men volleyball. Six women volleyball.

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Mary: So the first year, I think it started with just the two teams, Boston Reggie's Angels versus New York Freemasons. The second year, I believe there were 5, if not 10 teams that showed up.

Lydia: So it was two teams, like, in North America, Chinese women's teams?

Arlene: It's an exhibition that Reggie wanted to start, so I think he wanted to start, and, you know, I think he was pretty tied into the New York Masons group. So they just came in, so it wasn't for the women, it was just an exhibition. It was just one, one game, or one...

Mary: Yeah, it was one game. And then we all got hooked. But, I mean, it's morphed into something so much bigger now. I mean, I think the last time we checked, when you were out in California, Karen, how many women's team were there? There was, like, over 100.

Karin: It's over 100 teams now, and so it's definitely become, it's huge now.

Mary: Yeah.

Karin: Previously, like, Lydia, it was played in the streets, of Chinatown, of the city's Chinatown. And, now, because it's gone so large, they've had to move this. You know, to, like— You know, now to convention center, convention centers, because it's so big, and for the fear of rain, they've moved everything indoors.

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Arlene: And so, unfortunately, it kind of has taken the community piece out of it, right? Because for the longest time, you know, **we were in the heart of Chinatown, we were supporting the local community, and, you know, people who were working came to watch, and, you know, so it was a very community thing.** Now it's, you know, just a huge business that, just volleyball. So, it's a little bit unfortunate how it's morphed. But..It's huge.

Karin: And there was, Arlene and Mary, there used to be, like, parties where, you know, the teams, got together, and it was, like, one big, huge social event. Now, because of the enormity of the, of the game, right, especially in the Nationals, it's, you know, having this big banquet—Doesn't happen anymore because of cost.

Mary: Right.

Karin: Even though they're charging teams previously, they weren't charged, the teams weren't charged, and it was all, like, you know, fundraising, the city's fundraising, but it's gotten so, more expensive that it's, it's too hard for the cities to take on the cost.

Lydia: That's too bad, that's a little bit like Dragon Boat, you know, how they had Dragon Boat Festival? Back in the day, it was, like, really fun, and it was very community oriented, and now it's very corporate.

Arlene: Very much so, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary: I mean, when we were playing, we, there were so many bonds, between just playing. You build the bonds with the fellow players from the different cities, too, and I think, originally, it only started with maybe five. It was, Washington, New York, Boston.

Mary: Where was the?

Karin: Toronto?

Arlene: Toronto.

Mary: I think Toronto

Arlene: Toronto was one of the original cities? There were. Yeah, so the four, what, Toronto, Boston, New York, DC. And then San Francisco was added, I guess. And then Chicago had one, or they had a team, but they never hosted, and then Montreal came along, yeah. So the, the...

Lydia: It started on the East.

Mary: It started on the East Coast, yes.

Arlene: Yes.

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Mary: I mean, it started out with a bunch of, I think a lot of the cooks from the restaurant, you know, when they take the breaks, they would just go outside and just start playing volleyball, the nine man, and so it was a lot of camaraderie, it was a lot of, hey, let's get together type of thing, and then it's just kind of morphed into this bigger. For me, it was very social. I love meeting the people from the different areas. And I think, you know, it's funny, because I think all the girls actually ended up with a volleyball male counterpart.

Arlene: Yeah, there was a lot of, yeah, there was a lot of relationships. So, I mean, Karen's spouse is, was from another team. I married somebody from a New York team. There's countless relationships across the country. Just because of this. Yeah, so it was quite the social thing.

Karin: Yep. And ourselves, we've, you know, stayed friends for, I'd say it's, like, is it 50 years? Oh my gosh, yeah.

Mary: We started playing when we were 16, but we are now 67, so it's 50, 50-plus years! A long.

Arlene: a long time. It hasn't.

Mary: Okay, yeah.

Lydia: Yeah, that's what I really noticed from, you know, all the people that I talked to. That volleyball is just, has just been so central to people's, like, whole social life, and growing up, and who they've been connected to, and it's almost like it's the Chinese-American sorority/fraternity.

Karin: Yeah.

Lydia: It's like everything is somehow connected with volleyball. Yes.

Karin: And I didn't live in Chinatown, so I lived in Allston, and... So, when this team was formed.

I didn't have a way, aside from taking public transportation, of getting around, so when we had to go to any tournaments, or if it ran late, you know, Reggie was the one person that would make sure that I got home safely. Which I really appreciated. He, you know, he's helped myself, I think in a lot of us, on, you know, just...like, the whole social piece, also, making sure that, you know, like, I mean, I've gone to him and asked him for a job. I was, you know, I was a kid that we didn't have, you know, much money. My mother worked in the garment industry, she worked in Chinatown, and she you know, there wasn't any money to be had, and if I wanted to, to, you know, take the T, or I still needed money. So, he definitely helped, you know. I recall, you know, I worked at the restaurants, he, you know, because he, he had connections, and he always made sure that we all were,

Mary: Taken care of.

Karin: Yeah, taken care of.

Mary: He was so instrumental in all of this. I mean, I give him so much credit, and I think, I think he would be proud of how it's come to be, because I think that was his end goal, but like I said, it lost a little bit of the—

Arlene: the community.

Mary: The community aspect.

Arlene: Yeah, it's a big tournament, and it's not nearly as social, you know, the link to Chinatown or actually being Asian has, really significantly gone down, you know, everybody is, it just goes into wherever they are to play, and that's kind of it. Before, like, to Karen's point, before, you know, it was a real social thing, you know? I remember my summer, that was, like, the highlight, so we would practice, you know, five times a week. And, you know, then we'd, you know, we would, everybody would be fundraising for these tournaments to get us there to, you know, help with the support that Reggie was giving us, in particular, and then. so it was, like, this one social thing all summer long, and then there was, like, a big lull after Labor Day. It was, like, this big, like, down thing.

Karin: the money.

Arlene: So it was, but it was huge for us. And for Reggie in particular, I think there had always been, you know, some, competition, and not quite animosity, but just really differentiations between the different organizations, like the Masons, which are now called the Hurricanes, and the Knights and stuff, and **he was the bridge. Like, people didn't get along, but he was the one person, I think, that actually was trying to get everybody together, so they had a Freemason team, and they had a Knights team, and then, you know, like, all of these other groups. He was, he was that glue.** It was just amazing how... It was just really that important to him.

Mary: Hmm.

Lydia: Yeah, Reggie was really somebody who got along with everybody. Right.

Arlene: And he really wanted, I mean—

Mary: Chinatown.

Karin: Yeah, he just, **the goal was—**

Arlene: **To really, you know, get the community together.**

Mary: And it didn't matter who won or lost, it was just a matter of bringing it together and just, the whole camaraderie.

Lydia: So why, **why do you think, why was it important to Reggie to bring women into the volleyball scene?** The Chinese volleyball.

Arlene: Yeah, I don't, I don't know, it was interesting. I don't know, it, he was, I think my, my feeling was always—he was more tied to the Knights, and my take of it, and, you know, maybe Mary and Karen could, you know, add their thoughts, but I always thought that he wanted the, a women's version of the Knights. And so, to perpetuate this, you know, they were the fraternity, we were the sister-sorority kind of thing.

Arlene: **So I think he really wanted to create a long-lasting organization that supported the women's side of the community.** It just didn't quite—

Mary: But I think he was very forward-thinking. I mean, think about it.

Arlene: Oh, absolutely.

Mary: You had a lot of the women's rights coming around, and then, you know, the Title IX, and there was just so much that was going on, and I think he kind of actually foresaw the outcome of what could potentially be, and that's why I think he started what he wanted to start, by adding the woman into it, because I think we were definitely not, a well-spoken-up group, as it was. You know, we were always in the background.

Karin: Yeah, he was very, I recall, Reggie being very inclusive. You know, so he was that type of person. Because he, it was the outreach, because he had the ability to reach out to people and connect. And like, like Arlene was saying, he was like—everybody looked at him like the godfather in Chinatown, was the glue that kept everybody together, then when there was trouble, he'd try to get in the middle of it and mediate.

Mary: Yep. He was very good.

Karin: Yeah, he was. He was kind.

Arlene: Yes, and extremely generous, extremely generous, with his time, not just money, but just with his time, you know, he really saw Chinatown as being more than just Boston, even, right? I mean, it was all the other cities and... He was, he was central to a lot of things.

Karin: And he, and Lydia, I think that, now, we haven't... You know, I'm, I find myself, I'm still involved with Nineman. So I give Reggie a lot of credit, and I also drag Mary in a lot of times, because now I'm involved with the, with the Boston Hurricanes, where I started the clinics, right? We have clinics, and we have, women's teams, we have juniors, where there wasn't juniors, so I give Reggie all that credit of changing me and kind of directing me as, as a teenager, and, you know, showing me the way how, you know, how I could make life. You know, impact another person's, a child's life.

Mary: Hmm.

Lydia: So who.

Mary: So did that answer your question?

Lydia: So who called it Reggie's Angels?

Mary: Oh, I remember how that came to be. We were having the, as you know, there was probably a banquet at the end of the tournament. We were invited. We didn't have a name. And Charlie's Angels was so popular back then, and then I think the girls are kind of sitting around and goes, what are we gonna call someone? And then they go, how about Reggie's Angels? And it stuck. And that was us. Yeah. So it was really Charlie's Angels that started it, but Reggie's Angels, so!

Lydia: Excuse me.

Mary: That was, that was some really fun times. Good memories. Yes, awesome memories.

Lydia: So, yeah, so do you, how do you see, you know, women—The women, you know, in volleyball today, and do you think that that's still a really important part of the community?

Arlene: In Boston in particular, or?

Lydia: I guess in Boston in particular, yeah.

Arlen: So Karin's probably the best person to respond to that, because she's involved still.

Karin: Yeah, I think that now, and maybe it's generations, generation gaps, it's, you know, I think that it's become very competitive. So, the goal, I think, has changed to more winning, you know, like, who has the better teams, and now the gaps between previously, years ago, when we were playing, like, San Francisco, the California teams were, like.

Mary: Dominant.

Karin: Team, very dominant.

Karin: Now, that gap has shrunk, and all the teams are never, are now very competitive. So I think that the women's teams, their goal is to win, and, fielding the best teams. However, I do see, you know, the, You know, the friendship there, and as a lot of the, the senior people, who are involved, who were involved and played, Nine Man in the past, still wants to incorporate that friendship. And, you know, it's still there, but I think that the main goal is to win. And, so, which is unfortunate, but also cost. I see a lot of, like, teams that, you know, there's rules of guidelines of you need to be, so, like, you had to have so many 100% Chinese on the court. Now, as the year, you know, it's harder to get that full Chinese, so now the game is, It's all changing, because they want to get the numbers, you know, they get the, you know, the high-level players. And the high-level and quality players, you need to now change the rules a bit, bending the rules.

Arlene: Yeah, yeah, and the enforcement of that has gotten a little tricky, so before, it was by almost default, right? You, you, you pull.

Karin: on a system.

Arlene: Midtown is a very community thing. You meet people, but, you know. Most of the people were full Chinese. And as the tournament, kind of morphed, and it became more about winning, people were recruiting from all over, like, for instance, 10 years in, you know, I was playing with people from New York for the, you know, so it wasn't before, it was, like, the merchants, the Chinatown merchants were kind of the central people that were, you know, almost the, I don't know if that is totally true, but it's the hierarchy of the whole thing, right? And, and every—the Masons, the Knights, and all of those kind of drove the different groups. Now, it's just every independent, whoever can pull in any, you know, player from any city, and they don't

even have to practice. You know, for us, practicing 5 days a week and being with all of our friends was the cool part of it. Yeah. And now it's really less so. So, yeah, it's a little bit unfortunate.

Mary: However, on the flip side, though, I gotta give credit to where, like, I see Karen running those programs for the young ladies. Those young ladies who have played when they were in the teens are now stepping up and mentoring younger

Arlene: Mmm.

Mary: girls now. So the tradition is still going on, and I think that's what Karen has instilled in at least, you know, the Hurricanes program. I'm not, I can't speak for all the programs, but, you know, I remember coaching that girl, and now she's actually running, you know, and I'm like, okay, I'm out here in California, I remember when you were a snotty little 16-year-old, now you're, what, a 21-year-old, and you're raising hell. You know, so I think it's great, because you're getting another new generation that's trying to instill whether it's sportsmanship or just being a woman in the United States.

Karin: Yeah, value.

Mary: 90s as well, yeah. Yeah, and a lot of them become interested, and they wind up going in to play college.

Arlene: volleyball, right? That was very rare when we played, when we started, and now it's kind of people are playing in high school or in middle school, and then they kind of graduate and play in college, so it's exposed them to the sport and really has grown the women, Asian exposure to the sport.

Lydia: So, what about Reggie Wong Park?

Lydia: Is Reggie, do you think, is it important to keep Reggie Wong Park? Why?

Mary: Definitely. Definitely.

Lydia: What is Reggie Wong Park to you?

Mary: Oh my gosh. For me, it was my savior. You know, growing up first generation, like Karen said, there was really nothing when we were growing up. My mom was a stitcher, my dad was a restaurant worker, there were 7 of us, 8 of us? Not a whole lot. And so, we were fighting for court time at Reggie Wong Park because there were just so many more teams coming around, but that was my safe haven. I enjoyed, I mean, I left the work at the restaurant just to come out and play, and that kind of gave me... Yeah, sanctuary.

Arlene: So for me, it was Sanctuary. I don't know about for Karen and Arlene, but for me, it was just a place to hang out with friends, be safe.

Mary: And have a good time.

Arlene: Yeah, I would agree with that. Yeah, the park itself is, is...

Karin: It's easier to get to.

Arlene: Everything started.

Karin: Like, it was easy for me to get to, as well. Like, you know, came right off the Mass Pike. And if I was taking the train, I could walk down Kneeland Street and, so I could, its access was easy, and back then, I

needed that, you know? And it was free. I didn't have to pay, for any sort of, like, fee to use the park, and...So, for me, it was, I treasured it.

Lydia: Do you think it's still important? to people?

Karin: So, because I think there's, with the players coming from, like, Metro West, and it is harder. It is harder to get the, you know, the girls, in particular, to those, you know, to Reggie Wong. And also, I don't want to say that they're spoiled, however, Reggie Wang Park, it's gone, you know, like.: You know, they go in, and then there's, you know, these, there's homeless people there, so it wasn't, like, a very, you know, approachable area, like, it was a little dangerous, so parents want to, you know, now there's a lot of helicopter parents, and they want to make sure their kids were safe. Back then, there wasn't, it wasn't like that. It's a lot of kids were there, and it, those are the—A lot of kids use the park because it seemed very, it was safe. You know, there wasn't the number of homeless people that, you know, basically.

Mary: Secret?

Karin: you know, took over! I find it, they took over the park.

Mary: Nope.

Arlene: Yeah, and the way the tournament is now, you know, everything is indoors, you know, a majority of the money that is spent on the tournaments now is to set up the equipment, right? So the real nets, and they have a raised, floor, because most of the people play indoor, even a lot of the men, they play six-man indoor on wood floors, so, you know, we, when we played, it was on the streets, we would tie them to a pole, and, you know, we would dive on the manhole covers, so it's very different now. So a lot of, yeah, a lot of the players won't play on the street. So, I don't want to say it's become less important. I mean, I haven't been in Boston, in Reggie Wong Park in a while, but the last time I went, I actually saw these, like, old guys who just set up, and they're just kind of batting the ball around, you know, they're on their break, and it was as if I was in 1980. It was, it was actually kind of funny. But from the people who participate, the players that participate in the tournament probably are not nearly as nostalgic about it as us. You know, as the people in our generation.

Mary: However, but in answer to your question, I think Reggie Wong Park is very important to the community.

Arlene: Yes, it is.

Mary: It could be a great place for sanctuary for all the younger kids that are coming in now, and if it could be brought up based on, you know, all your fundraising and your renovations and your construction. It can be a sanctuary for so many more people, and, you know, it's a huge community, and it's getting bigger still. But, yeah, I would, I would think that it would be, it can be as important to the newer generation as it was to us.

Lydia: Yeah, I think because volleyball, you know, it's, it's regional. It's not just Chinatown, so it does become harder for everybody to, like, drive into Chinatown. You know, but— But Chinatown deserves a nice Reggie Wong Park.

Mary: Absolutely, absolutely.

Lydia: And

Arlene: Absolutely.

Lydia: I mean, I will say, because of gentrification, there's less families in Chinatown and less kids than before. But there's still kids, you know?

Mary: And.

Lydia: And, you know, there's both luxury and affordable housing development happening, so there's gonna be more, you know, more kids. And what we're trying to do with the, with the, you know, redesign is to keep the three court spaces, because that's really important, and we don't want to lose that. You know, we still are like, this is the home of volleyball, you know? But we're also making them, like, flexible, like, you could play pickleball there, you know, you can do whatever, you can play basketball, and... And then adding a small children's play area in the front on the Kneeland Street side, so it'll be a little bit more welcoming for neighbors to feel like they can go there with their kids, because then I think what happens is at night. Yeah, the restaurant workers will play volleyball at night, but during the day, it's mostly the skateboarders.

Arlene: Oh, is that right?

Lydia: And then the skateboarders kind of, a lot of people are intimidated by the skateboarders, because, you know, if they're, like, little kids. So we're trying to, you know, that's something we have to figure out, how to, you know, we can't kick out the skateboarders. But we want them to respect the other park users, the residents, and have more other activities so that they don't just take over.

Karin: Is it lit? I thought, because I remember...

Lydia: There is lighting, but we're gonna, we're gonna update the lighting. Yeah, I mean, we're gonna do a lot of stuff. It's gonna be, like, you know, some new trees in the front, this climbing structure for little kids that's called a Wallholla, so there's, like, a little wall that, that prevents the balls from hitting people. And then, exercise equipment, like, on the side where, you know, where there's the side by the ramp. Some benches, we're gonna have, like, a drinking fountain. But aren't you pushing it more towards the back, too? So you have Reggie Wong Park in the front with the three courts, but we're pushing it more back because that's where all the property, or more

Arlene: Yeah, there's a lot of room

Lydia: The DOT wouldn't give us much more land. I mean, we argued for it. They have so much space there in that parking lot. They could have given us a lot more, but they were very stubborn, and so we just got this little, like, couple thousand square feet more, to be able to add that children's playground. But, yeah, but we're excited, you know, I think it's really, I mean, we've been working on this for almost 10 years now, like, a lot of negotiation, with DOT, but it's, you know, it's—I think it's finally going to happen, and that's, you know, so we're excited about that.

Mary: Right?

Karin: That's wonderful.

Lydia: So spread the word. I'll send you, I'll send you our emails that we just sent out.

Mary: Sure.

Lydia: Yeah, let people know we're gonna have this fundraiser on April 30th. We're still, we still have a little less than a million dollars to raise, so

Mary: Yeah, chump change.

Lydia: But, you know, it starts, it sounds like, I mean, it is a lot of money, but it all adds up, you know, if, like, if different, you know, if different clubs can, like, you know, sponsor, you know, or come, you know, pool money together and contribute. You know, and we're going after different, foundation grants and, you know, asking, like, for corporate sponsors for the event. So also, if you have any ideas about that, I'll just send you all the information. That'd be great. You know, if you have any ideas about sponsorships that we should go after. That'd be great.

Arlene: It'd be great.

Karin: That's all.

Mary: Okay.

Lydia: Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else that I didn't ask that you'd like to add, or is anything about, like why, you know, why was Reggie's Angels important to you?

Mary: like I said, it was my sanctuary. If I didn't have it, I wouldn't have had anything else to look forward to, to be honest with you.

Karin: And we wouldn't have built this friendship.

Arlene: Yeah, the friendship.

Mary: that came out of it. I mean, geez, Karen, 50 years!

Arlene: Longer than mine. Yeah, we owe so much to Reggie, it's not funny. And I had, yeah, at one of the tournaments, I remember I had said that to the large audience and just said, you know, Reggie, to me, was, yeah, had incredible vision, and was so generous, and he should be feeling really, really, really good about what, where this has gone. And, yeah, so many, so many relationships have

Mary: Formed.

Arlene: have happened because of volleyball, and you know, just like, you know, Karen was saying, you know, he was incredibly generous. He opened up a ming tree, you know, that year that we started. He gave a bunch of us jobs, and I mean, he was, he was just so generous. I mean.

Karin: Oh.

Arlene: Incredible.

Karin: Yeah. Yeah.

Karin: Yeah, Arlene, I worked at Mingtree as well. I worked there through high school, and then afterwards, like, you know, he helped us once when—I mean, I didn't want to work at Mingtree, I worked at other places, you know, in the.

Arlene: Yeah.

Karin: all driven by Reggie. Reggie's Angels was, you know, I mean, it started, it changed our lives. It used to give—

Mary: Secondary family. It really was.

Karin: And these ladies are all my, you know, family. I look at them like, you, you need something, you could definitely, I pick up the phone—Mary, I need you to help me, you know, like

Mary: Alright! Yeah, I'll be there.

Karin: you know, and Mary helped me with a pickleball fundraiser for the hurricanes. So, we've definitely helped each other out, and.

Mary: Definitely.

Karin: I think that, you know, like, Yep. I was, I'm an introvert, and I don't, it would have been really hard for me, for me to find friends. So, Mary, Arlene, and these were the more outgoing ladies, and then, you know.

Mary: No, I was a shy one.

Karin: Definitely helped me become the person I am.

Arlene: Yeah, I second that. And, you know, yeah, and even, you know, after a long time, he opened up Wedgie's Pub just down the block, and a lot of people would go there after, just, you know, just to keep it all central. He just had, he just had that community sense about him. It was just, it was so important to him to keep the community together.

Lydia: Thank you. This has been a great testimonial.