

Prepare to Pivot 24-4 with Former York Community Foundation President Jane Conover

[Prepare to Pivot 24-4 Jane Conoverbmiijn.mp3](#)

Transcript

Jeffrey Schiffman

Prepare to Pivot is a series of conversations with Doctor Andrew Barnes, Dean of the School of the Arts, Communications and Global Studies at York College of Pennsylvania. Dean Barnes talks with leaders in the college, YCP alums and members of the York Community about the importance of the liberal arts. In preparing students to build careers where essential skills like critical and creative thinking, effective communications and analytical reasoning make all the difference. And now, here's Dean Barnes.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Hi, this is Andy Barnes and welcome back to the podcast. Prepare to pivot today. I'm very excited because I have a fellow Rotarian with me, Jane Conover and you are recently retired and I'm really jealous of this. So tell us. You're. You're recently retired from gives you a little bit of your background thing.

Jane Conover

Yes, I'm retired on December 31st, 2023. I was the President of the York County Community Foundation, which is a nonprofit in you. County, who does that? They do great things in terms of supporting the community, so I've been very proud to be in that position. And I'm also very happy to be retired.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That you are well, that that last gig from which you retired is come it sort of culminates a long sort of professional history that has been dedicated to community that has been dedicated to service.

Speaker

MHM. MMM.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

And that's sort of what your professional career has been about. How did you do that? How did you know? How did you do that? So how did you come to that? How did you realize when you were younger? I wanted to be involved in community. I wanted to be involved in service because a lot of people would not. Right. A lot of people get out of college. I'm going to make money. I want. To do this, my parents.

Jane Conover

Thought that would be a good idea.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Tell us a little bit then about your journey. How did you? How did you get involved in in community activism, as it were?

Jane Conover

Thank you for asking that question and it's really nice to reflect a little bit on the on my life and career and hopefully inspire other people to to, to look outside the box I. I think part. It really came from a life of being in Catholic schools I and through from first grade on and always doing volunteer projects. So I was helping out with older adults and I was doing food drives for school, the school and other things like that. I wound up going to Fairfield University in Connecticut, Fairfield. Connecticut, and it is a Jesuit university and the the curriculum there is called the core curriculum. So I took the very traditional track of taking a getting a finance and accounting degree and really like numbers. I really like math and I liked and I thought I could see a career path. I lived in New Jersey. I grew up in New Jersey. So I saw everyone from my town really commuting to New York, to Wall Street, to work. And so I thought, OK, that's it. My parents were like, yeah, that sounds good to us. Yes, they were. They were eager to have a well, you know, they didn't go to my mom, did not go to college. And so this was a real they were putting a.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Finance person, Wall Street Gov.

Jane Conover

Lot of hopes on their children to succeed. In college, the same thing kind of happened. I was very active. I became the vice president of the student body. I volunteered. I adopted a grandmother, a local nursing home. And so I went to see her. I just. I I was inspired by by. Being and felt really good and satisfied by being able to give back to the community. The Fairfield University curriculum is called the core curriculum though, so I was not just studying accounting and finance all day. They require us required us to take philosophy and theology and arts. And and so I got a chance to think about what the meaning of life is a little bit more than maybe if I was in a traditional career, I got, I had to take English, English and I took Spanish. So I really had a well-rounded curriculum there and it exposed me to things that. Kind of sparked and planted seeds sparked ideas, planted seeds and I actually worked at banks throughout my college career and this summer I know like I was working. Yeah, I know. Right. And it beat Burger King. I'll tell you, I tried that for six months and that was no, I didn't smell. I didn't.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Didn't you? Don't make sense, I guess. He didn't smell when he came home.

Jane Conover

Get overweight or anything so, but what? What happened to me was I actually got I did an internship my junior between junior and senior year. I was a a management training intern at Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City and Wall Street. Loved it was. Fun I was an internal auditor, so I you know, I learned a lot about writing and writing technical writing and how to how to write reports and make the make clear, concise arguments and they wine and dine us. You know, I got to go to Yankees games. Not that I would ever do. That now as a Phillies. And but you know, yacht tours, all sorts of fun things. So this sounded really good to me. And I was offered a a permanent full time position after college, as they're in the management training program there. And I said, let me think about it.

Speaker

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah.

Jane Conover

And interesting. You know, I think things you know, if you keep your your, your heart and your mind open things just come to you. And so I was sitting there at a lecture one day while a student who came back to Fairfield to tell us about her experience volunteering in an inner city. And she went through a program called the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and I sat there and I felt like I felt a kind of butterflies in my stomach. I felt something resonating with me and I said that sounds like a better way for me to spend my time then working 40 hours a week for Chase Manhattan Bank. I just wanted to give it a shot. I tentatively called up my parents and said that, you know. Guess what? You should have expected this all these years, and these Catholic schools for having. And so I made the decision to go into the Jesuit Volunteer Corps after college, and I got a position in Baltimore, MD, and I was a housing counselor there, helping lower income families. Buy houses so you know the finance and accounting came in handy, right? I had to help people with their budgeting and getting their down payments and going through the settlement process.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

I'm great.

Jeffrey Schiffman

It does come, yeah.

Jane Conover

But what I also brought with me was compassion, and because of my experience I had I, you know, I really wanted to see these people succeed, you know, see these. The folks I was helping you succeed. Plus, I had never lived in a big city. I got it. I was. I was. Working with people from very diverse backgrounds, economic backgrounds, racial. Backgrounds and it it opened up a whole world to me and this is one piece of advice I would certainly give to

students is that, you know, volunteering internships really can lead somewhere. So I got a full time job at that, that location I was working at Saint Ambrose Housing Aid Center, which is still there in Baltimore. And I wound up also developing.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Wow, that's great.

Jane Conover

Blighted properties in that community and providing housing opportunities that. You know, in a small nonprofit. And so as a nonprofit organization, you wear many hats. So I was helping to the Council people, but I was also giving speeches at groundbreakings for houses. You know, I had to write grants to raise the money for the the projects. And so I did that.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah, yeah.

Jane Conover

For a while. And after that I fell in love with someone and moved to Erie and.

Jeffrey Schiffman

I love all love.

Jane Conover

I I know. They worked with older adults in Erie at an air aging sun, aging and and and then I started realizing that I don't have credentials really in doing Human Services or social services. I knew at that point that probably it wasn't going back to the. Financial world per se. And so I came back to Baltimore and got my Masters degree in social work at the university. Maryland. So that was a big pivot, OK, from finances and not only finances, but also the culture of of of a major bank and.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yes, they were, yeah.

Jane Conover

Spending your time raising money for, you know, raising profits for an organization like that, and I really was. My heart was in another, in, in, in community service that way. So that was a major pivot. So I did wound up going back to school and that there was a decision I had to make there as well and.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jane Conover

I had been working one-on-one with a lot of folks individually and so in in social work you can go into a therapy track where you're you're learning how to be a therapist or you can go into a track that tries to address the systemic problems causing the challenges you're trying to help people with, and I chose the the second I became a I got my masters degree.

Speaker

Right.

Jane Conover

Social work. But it was community policy and community development. So again, I got hooked on the idea of like if you can fix sort of like. Economics challenges that people are facing right. Systemic systemic problems people are facing. Then their individual problems can be helped. So again, it got an internship at a place in Baltimore called Citizens Planning and Housing Association, and that turned into a full. Time job in.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Well, see again, internships are.

Jane Conover

Fact I. Actually. See, you know they're they're good and and.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Really. Yeah, yeah.

Jane Conover

And what the point is, is really to try new things and experience new things. Just don't try and you know outside the box thinking because that finance and accounting degree, I I wrote a grant really to get my first job to writing a grant for a nonprofit organization. Takes a lot of it takes not only finances, but it takes storytelling. You need to be able to write well and tell it a compelling have a compelling case.

Speaker

Yeah.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

We tell students this all the time that if you, if nothing else in college, if you can learn to write well, so many doors will open to you. And it's true because a lot of there's a lot of people out there do not know.

Speaker

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Right, just simple writing, but certainly don't know how to write a narrative. And if you can do that, lots of doors open for you.

Jane Conover

It is so true and I had to keep honing that skill. Yeah. So especially oral communication. When you start becoming making a case for support, even if you write a case for support, you have to actually articulate that. And so I eventually did go to a a speech coach. I did.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Oh, did you really?

Jane Conover

Because there's ways to tell a story that's succinct, but it's also compelling. And it's an art form. So I encourage people to. I would, I would have been so afraid

to take a speech class in college. I think how old was I with the bullet? But it helped me so much. It gave me a lot of confidence. So. So that's kind of how it came to it. It was really.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah, a lot of people.

Jane Conover

Exposed to volunteering, realizing and trusting my gut and what was making me, my heart sing. And that's what made me decide. Keep shifting to community service, yeah.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That's a great story. That's really you're listening to WVYC, and you're listening to, prepared to pivot. And today, my, my guest is Jane Conover talking about her, her, her, her career after just retiring. I'm quite jealous of and. And the idea of service. It's interesting. We don't know each other very well. We're Rotarians, but we have some very similar. Background, which kind of surprises me. I too would look through a Catholic education. So yes, I I went through and I went to. I went to school very much like York. Mm-hmm. But it was my general education class.

Jane Conover

Did you laugh?

Dr. Andrew Barnes

There. I mean, I was accounting major because my entire family are accountant, so I had to be an accounting major, but it was an English professor who kind of lived spark in me that much, much later turned me, you know, allowed me to go and see a different path just to get this PhD in English. And so I, but I I do use my accounting degree.

Jane Conover

Uh.

Speaker

MHM.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Hot, especially my job. Now I use it a lot. Although I was an accountant, I also worked in South Baltimore. I managed HUD proper. 30S and I'm not and I I at this must have been in the 90s at some point and I yeah. So I know S Baltimore I used to manage HUD properties down there. We have a lot this very.

Jane Conover

Are you serious? MHM. Alright, well we do it here. I moved to York in 1998, so I was working in on with HUD on a project. I think I told you a little bit about, but because that citizens planning and housing association, we were talking about systemic challenges and what was going on at the time. I won't want to deviate too much.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah.

Jane Conover

But it's really interesting. That they were taking down the public housing high rises in Baltimore. They just, I mean, I don't know 20 stories high and they really became prisons for people because of the the violence in the stairwells, etcetera and across the country they were taking them down. And I did some research, which is another thing that I learned in school and.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah, another that's right.

Jane Conover

And we was able. We'll find some better examples of housing for affordable housing for poor people, for poor people, and so we ultimately brought those to the Housing Authority in Baltimore. And they said, you know, we're never going to be able to. What we were saying is that you. Need. To provide opportunities for people to live in non segregated non. You know, non high poverty areas give them opportunities to live throughout the community throughout the county. Even so, that they can have opportunities to be good schools and. There's just fewer. Problems in communities where there's there's a mixed income

community and so they said, well, if we're gonna, if you're gonna, we're not gonna be able to do that on our own. You're gonna have to sue us to do. That. Because politically it. Would be too hard, so we did.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

They asked you?

Jane Conover

To say that the housing Commissioner said, you know, I I think they have the right track, but in order for us to really do this, we're going to need to be sued and. Said.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Well, good for him. And he sued them and.

Jane Conover

The.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

We did.

Jane Conover

We did and it took 20 years really for us to fully implement the program, but people got support services and to to move out and then the the the results were more students graduated from high school, more people got better paying jobs and and quality housing. And so anyway, that was a way to impact thousands and thousands of lives.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

It's amazing.

Jane Conover

But we were there at the same time around.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That's very funny. You know, recently our our graduation and a fellow Rotarian, Dave Meckley, spoke at our graduation. He was the speaker, and he was telling this great story about the difference between New York and the city in Ohio. I forget the name where he came from.

Jane Conover

The same time, yeah. Indeed.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Two very similar cities, 2 very similar demographics and that city of Ohio is dying. And while York is thriving and he was talking about it, the reason it's it's thriving is because people who live here are involved in community. People who live here are not isolated, they are involved. In their community and giving back to the community and his advice to our graduates were hopefully you stay in New York. But if you go any place else, be involved with your community cause that's how it thrives and it's also you become a better person by being. And part of a community rather than, you know, being isolated or just, you know, work home, work, home, be part of the community. So it is that sort of community aspect that that helps the city thrive and also helps us thrive as as sort of people thrive and and who we are.

Jane Conover

It's true. Yeah. And I agree with Dave and I I think we become better people, but it's also filling your heart in a way, I know that.

Speaker

Yeah.

Jane Conover

Sound trite, but that that's what I'm so proud of and so happy that I spent my career doing. Is that this because I felt fulfilled and and there's so many ways you can give back. I was. I was working in York City helping redevelop a neighborhood there and you know.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah.

Jane Conover

Clean ups walking down the street I had we had children helping paint murals in the neighborhood. We, you know, there were so many with even just exchanging food or having a picnic for your neighbors. It's just amazing how many, how many, how.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah.

Jane Conover

Deep that can build a relationship.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Yeah. And I'm, I'm amazed when I moved here. I mean, I moved here a year and a half ago now, and I was amazed at York that it's so there's so much community involvement. I I was, it was kind of shocking to me that this sized town is like, wow, people don't give their time. They give their money. They're just, they're invested in the city.

Jane Conover

You know, it was we both here lived in big cities, right? And and moved here from Baltimore. And at first it was hard. At first I felt.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That's right.

Speaker

Yeah.

Jane Conover

There was a there was just. Different level of culture or different level of diversity, but I you can do so much in a town the size of York, you know, you know, you really can make a a big difference and you and you know you can know the

mayor you can know the county commissioners you can know the folks we're in bigger cities is there so many.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

You. A difference here? Yep.

Jeffrey Schiffman

That's right.

Jane Conover

Layers of bureaucracy. It's a lot harder to get things done.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Well, you know, I lived in New York for 30 years and I didn't sit on boards because I wasn't at that level where I could sit on boards in in New York. Yeah, I sit on.

Jane Conover

Right.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Five boards, I think, and can get back because you can do that here regardless of what your position is. You can do that here and you can make a real difference here. So I think that's that's that's sort of super important.

Speaker

MMM.

Jane Conover

And students can make differences, and young people can make so much, so many differences. I was at a clean up recently of the Corridors Creek and there were.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

And students can. Yeah, yeah. Right by my house. I live very clearly right here. Yeah.

Jane Conover

Vance Park and there were not a ton of students from the wrestling team at F&M. I should send another school, but yeah, OK. And there was another there. They were cleaning up and they were having a great time and they were learning. There were people finding sleeping bags along the Codorus Creek in tents.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

Then you can say afternoon, that's. No, that's great.

Jane Conover

And so again, my advice is just to explore, try new things outside of the box and and when you give of yourself, you're just going to get a lot more than you give actually.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That's true this. Is the question I asked people at the end of this and so I'm going to ask you this five year question. If you had to sort of think about it, what would you like to see happen in New York in five years? You're walking around New York downtown. What would you like to see that's not there now or that is there now you would like not to see anymore? The five year question.

Jane Conover

Well, my five year question has a lot to do with the people, the the quality of housing and quality of life for people that live in the city, not just the downtown. And they're they're even still their disparities in opportunities within the five square miles of the City of York. And there are people who are living in.

Speaker

Yeah.

Jane Conover

Dilapidated properties and have no other choice and they and they don't have a voice because they if they lose that property, there's nowhere else for them to go and children. In schools are being, you know, going being transferred to one

school to another because their parents are trying to find a solid place to live. So for me, I want the wealth of the downtown, the vibrancy of the downtown, New York to spread. And so, so that the the, the whole city is all five square miles of the city are thriving and that there's some. Opportunities for people to to do well, no matter what block. They live on.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

That's a great five year vision. Yeah. Jane. Thank you for coming and doing this. It was such a pleasure to get to know you a little bit better. And really, I applaud you for your dedication to service and to community that you've built a career on that and happy retirement. And I know you'll still be involved in in New York City and and.

Speaker

You're very welcome. Thank you.

Jane Conover

You know, there's lots of opportunities. It's a pleasure. Thank you for.

Dr. Andrew Barnes

So thank you very much. All right.

Jane Conover

Having me.

Jeffrey Schiffman

This program is produced in the studios of RWBY, CFM, the voice of your college, and produced by WVYC Radio station manager Jeffrey Schiffman joined Dean Barnes monthly for these ongoing conversations about essential skills in the liberal arts.