

Reminiscences of Nic Anderson

March 5, 2021

Narrator: Nic Anderson, Director of Auxiliary Services and Transportation, Champlain College

Interviewer: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Location: This interview was conducted virtually, via Zoom

Date of Interview: March 5, 2021

Duration of Interview: 55:04

Transcriptionist: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Introduction

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Nic Anderson, Director of Auxiliary Services and Transportation at Champlain College, conducted by Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director, on March 5, 2021. This interview is part of the Champlain College Archives COVID-19 Oral History Project. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Interview Transcription

[Start of recording]

Donnis: Okay. So I'm going to start out just by introducing myself, and then I'll ask you to introduce yourself, Nic, and we can take it away from there.

Anderson: Cool.

Donnis: So I am Erica Donnis. I'm the Special Collections Director at Champlain College. Today is ... what is today? March 5th. I just looked over at my calendar. Today is March 5th, 2021. And we are conducting an oral history interview about the impact of COVID-19 on the Champlain College community. Nic, could you introduce yourself please?

Anderson: Sure. I'm Nic Anderson. I go by he/him/his pronouns, and I am the Director of Auxiliary Services and Transportation here at Champlain College.

Donnis: Great, thank you. So I'm going to start off by asking you to tell us about your role at Champlain. How long have you worked for Champlain, and have you had any other positions prior to your current one?

Anderson: Yeah, so I've actually been at Champlain College for six and a half years now. I started out originally as the Sustainable Transportation Coordinator, worked my way up to being the Director of Transportation, and then in June 2019 I became the Director of Auxiliary Services and Transportation. So I kind of added more responsibility to my existing role.

Donnis: Could you tell us a little bit about how your position fits in, in terms of the College's organizational chart?

Anderson: Sure. So my department, the Auxiliary Services and Transportation, falls underneath the Campus Planning and Auxiliary Services, kind of, division, so to speak. Which is ... also houses the departments of Physical Plant, or Facilities, and the Event Center and Conference Services department. So those three departments together are kind of what we consider Campus Planning, and that falls directly underneath the leadership of Shelley Navari, the Vice President for Finance.

Donnis: So who do you report to?

Anderson: I report directly to Shelley.

Donnis: Thanks. Could you tell us about your regular job responsibilities, if there is such a thing?

Anderson: [laughs]. What is regular? No, I think there is some regular-ness. So as part of my responsibilities, I manage all aspects of transportation. So that's dealing with parking, shuttles, biking, walking, anything that has to do with getting people to, from, and around Champlain.

On top of that I do auxiliary services, which I kind of liken to being all of the campus operational services. So I manage the contracts for all of our different contractors on campus, which includes Sodexo, our food service provider, the contract for our two cleaning companies. We have one cleaning company that just does residence halls, called CBM, and another one that does just academic buildings, called Janitech. So I oversee those contracts. I also oversee the contract for the campus store, or what everyone just calls the bookstore. And I also oversee the mail center as well.

And then I have the joy of overseeing the rental properties that we own down at 194 St. Paul Street. We have four commercial properties there and some residential properties down there, and then there's some residential properties up on the hill.

So a pretty good spread of different things, but essentially all of the different pieces that make the campus tick in terms of making sure our students are fed and living in a clean environment and have access to mail and the campus store. So lots of different things. I have lots of different hats. And that's my regular job, right?

And so I think that, you know, as ... as I look at that job, it hasn't necessarily been affected too much by the pandemic, but it has definitely become very important, right? When you think about [chuckles] a year and a half ago, when I took on the responsibility of being in charge of cleaning, I didn't think I'd be in charge of cleaning during a time when cleaning was infinitely more important than it was, you know, at the start of this pandemic, when we kind of were definitely scrambling around, [and thinking] "how do we manage this thing?" So my responsibilities haven't necessarily changed, but obviously the focus of what is most important has changed a little bit.

Donnis: So tell us a little bit more about your role in the College's response to COVID. I would guess that there may be phases to that, you know, that kind of track the phases of the pandemic as far as the College is concerned, but, you know, please feel free to elaborate.

Anderson: Sure. So at the start of the pandemic, in March [2020], as we were kind of just getting into it, all our students went home at spring break. We were kind of planning on them coming back after spring break, and so there was a bit of a scramble right at the start there of like, okay, what do we need to do to make sure that things like hand sanitizer, and there's appropriate posters and things in bathrooms teaching people how to wash their hands in the twenty-first century.

But as soon as we found out that students weren't coming back after spring semester [spring break] that definitely changed into "what can we do to prepare for when they do come back?" Whether or not that's next week or next month or next semester. So there was a lot of planning that started there. I was instantly part of a pandemic response team that got formed. And it involved different players from different parts of the College, and I was the representative from operations, or facilities, essentially. So we spent a lot of time planning, talking through scenarios, so many scenarios, unbelievable amounts of scenarios. What could happen, right? It was that crystal ball. Kind of, you know, doing our best to make sure we were prepared for everything. Prepare for the worst but hope for the best. So I was kind of heavily involved in those pandemic response meetings there.

And then as ... as you know the months trickled away, and we realized that we weren't getting our students back for [until] the fall semester, that pandemic response team, which was kind of a phase one team anyway of like "how do we deal with this?" dissolved, and was reconstituted as a fall reopening team. Different people, different players, but we switched our focus from how do we respond to how do we plan forward. So different people on that. And that was more about: how are we going to manage occupancy in our buildings? What do we need to do for cleaning those places? Do we need to clean after every single class, or can we clean just once a day, or do we have to clean our bathrooms five times a day or two times a day?

So cleaning was a very time intensive piece of my role at that [time]. Parking went away, shuttles went away. So there was less focus on transportation for sure, but more about how do we set up our classrooms, and how do we make sure facilities are clean and ready, what do we need to do in our residence halls to make sure that our cleaning crews have what they need, how do we get supplies?

And so, you know, I teamed up with the Events Center, who are also part of my team anyway, but we were kind of assigned the responsibility of working out classroom capacity, and what we could really fit in. There was some definite pressure there to work out pretty quickly how many people we could fit in a room, based on the six-foot social distancing requirements. And given that every single building on campus is a different shape and size, and every classroom has different kind of pieces to it, whether it's a traditional classroom with desks, or it's a lab with computers, whether those computers are a certain type or a different type, definitely kind of impacted the layout. So there was a lot of work on trying to work out what is our future capacity so that the Registrar's Office could then work out which classes [classrooms] to use and how to do enrollment. So it was kind of a ... a very important first step so we

could work out how to bring our students back in the fall and have enough space to fit them in. So that was a definite priority as we looked towards the fall reopening.

One of the other really big priorities that I was tasked with was the procurement of supplies. So pretty early on, right, there were shortages of all sorts of different things. Thankfully we didn't have a shortage of toilet paper because we have a commercial supplier, but there was times where the supply of hand sanitizer got really low. We couldn't for the life of us get any of the disinfecting wipes that we use for wiping down tabletops and computer screens and keyboards and all of those different pieces. You know, there was just national shortages of Clorox. And we use medical grade wipes for all of our cleaning products, so we use ones that have really quick ... quick cleaning times. So that if we get in there and clean a classroom that within a couple of minutes it's reusable again instead of having to wait ten or fifteen minutes for a typical kind of wet disinfectant. So I became very knowledgeable on types and alcohol contents and suppliers.

But it became pretty evident at the start that I was the one that knew the most and had the most kind of connections on supplies, and so I became the centralized PPE [personal protection equipment] purchasing agent for the college. Another new responsibility. But essentially trying to look at how many disposable face masks would the college need for the next twelve months, and how much disposable gloves would be needed for all of the different departments, and the people who needed it. So there was lots of collaboration there about who needs what and where and why and how. Massive spreadsheets. Massive WB Mason orders. Orders from lots of different places. But the hardest thing I think of all – we got plenty of different supplies through all of the different providers we had, which is great – but we definitely struggled on trying to find Clorox wipes or our Oxivir wipes. There was definitely a national shortage until about November.

Donnis: So you started touching upon this question, this next question, but I wanted to specifically ask it again to see if there's anything else you'd like to add. Tell us about reopening Champlain College's campus for the 2020-2021 academic year. What were some of the factors involved with that?

Anderson: More meetings than you can ever imagine [laughs]. Yeah, so, running a college, whether it be the operational side, or the academic side, or the administrative side, right, there's a thousand pieces to that puzzle. And it's like operating a little miniature city. And so making sure that we were all collaborating with the right people at the right places, there was definitely lots of meetings. One of the kind of stable pieces of that was that we had a reopening team or a full opening team meeting that was scheduled every single Monday morning. So we could check in and see what the new state guidelines and requirements were about are the borders closed or not, or what. That travel map was a common discussion thread throughout.

But there was also just, you know, countless other meetings. Countless other connection points to make sure that all of the different pieces were working towards that common goal of being able to open safely in the fall. And working out what would that reopening look like. Was it [a] hybrid approach to classrooms, was it fully remote, but still open residence halls. There was lots of different factors that kind of came into that, and they all played into each other. It was really hard, right? Everyone's trying to look into the crystal ball and guess what the future might be.

Thankfully we had Kerry Sleeper on our team for the fall reopening as being a consultant, which had a lot of skills. He was the state of Vermont's emergency response director for many, many years, and he was contracted by Champlain to help with our planning. And he was pretty instrumental in keeping us on track. But also having his kind of connection with the state, we could ask really specific questions and he could pop out and get an answer and come back again. So we definitely had lots of collaboration, I think, was one of the key points.

But we all made decisions too. It wasn't just a matter of everyone kind of coming up with ideas and thoughts and leaving it to administration to kind of decide. Administration were very open to saying, "Tell us what we're doing." And so it was a ground up, kind of, leading the charge from our own seat, kind of thing, as opposed to listening and waiting for our leaders to come up with a decision. We told our leaders what the best thing to do was to be able to go forward and to open up. So it was definitely exciting and made that a lot easier.

But it was a lot of work. I think I definitely ... during kind of that March through August time frame, was probably the busiest I've ever been at Champlain. And there was this crazy juxtaposition between ... you would go to a Staff Council meeting in April, and people would be asking what people were doing with all their free time, and all those kind of things. And all I could think about was that I have less free time than I have ever have. You know, I'm working sixty hours a week to try and make this thing happen, but other people have no job at all, or you know ... There was this really funky time where some people were ... that was their busy time, and others were a little chill. And then I think that definitely flipped around August or September for me. Is that all of that planning that got us to opening, was like this [exhales] we made it. And now I don't have to do all this extra work to get people here, because they're already here. So it actually slowed down for me in September and October, which was lovely. But the summer was crazy. So it was funny to hear colleagues and things talking about all this free time that they had. I was kind of cursing them from the background. But. So yeah, it was a crazy summer.

Donnis: So how has Champlain College as an institution handled operating during the pandemic?

Anderson: [sighs]. Handled operating. Well, there's obviously a definite shift just in the numbers of humans on campus. Over the summer but also through this semester, right? So we've definitely pared down our physical on campus operations to the bare minimum. If you go to campus now, you kind of see some Physical Plant people, some students milling back and forth, and that's about it.

But our operations kind of team stayed relatively the same. The Physical Plant team was amazing in terms of being some of the only humans around that could get things done. So they worked extra hard over the summer too in all of those different aspects. But, you know, as we looked to reopen the classrooms for August there wasn't necessarily a huge change in how the Champlain staff did things.

We did change our janitorial contracts quite significantly. As you can probably imagine, right, there was definitely a demand or a concern or a need for more cleaning. And so on the academic side our company, Janitech, added a lot of different features. You know, through collaboration with us on how can we make our employees and students feel safe. They beefed up their number of restroom cleans

and cleaning of door handles and all touch points. From what would normally be once a day, to between four and five and six times a day, depending on where it was. You know, the highly trafficked areas, those handles were being wiped like every hour. And those bathrooms are getting cleaned three or four times a day instead of once. But we added some signage on the back of the doors where they actually wrote what time they cleaned the bathrooms so that the customer of said bathroom could actually see and feel comfortable that it's getting, you know, looked at more frequently and touched more frequently.

Same goes with classrooms. We weren't necessarily ... we decided on a plan to not clean after every single class, just because of the level of employment that would need, but also disruption – people waiting for the next class, not being able to enter the room, and things like that. We kind of judged it around when there's blocks of time where there isn't classes and there's an active custodian in that building, that they would get in there.

Janitech, you know, 90% of their crew would normally work after 8 p.m., so 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. You wouldn't ever see them. We totally flipped that, and now we have almost all of our janitors are working 8 a.m., or 7 a.m., to 3 p.m. So that they can follow people around and clean. They're more of a visible presence I think on campus than they were before. But that doesn't necessarily cost us more. We just flip at what times they did work.

In the residence halls, the kind of cleaning piece as well. The operations changed there in terms of our level of cleanliness again. Typically a lot of our residence hall employees are daytime employees, right? We don't want them wandering around in the middle of the night in a residence hall. But we recognized that again those bathrooms and touch points were only really getting touched [cleaned] once a day because they would move their way through the 26 res halls per day. So we added a whole new second shift that went back through and cleaned. You know, did door handles and bathrooms and things like that as well, so we actually doubled the amount of touches that happen in all those different res halls. And I think that has probably played a big factor in terms of (A) people's comfort levels, right, because that's a lot of what ended up being important during COVID was actually optics. But also, you know, we hope that that helped towards having our really low case of COVID numbers on our campus, which was really great.

I'm also in charge of food service, right, and food service changed dramatically. We have an in person residential dining hall where all residents who live on campus have a carte blanche meal plan, so they can eat as many times a day as they want. Just wander into the dining hall, sit down, eat their food, whatever. And then we have a second dining facility that is our retail, kind of more of a commuter, employee facility, where you could go and get yourself a hamburger, but you don't have to have a meal plan of any kind, you can pay with cash or card or whatever.

And so those historically have been dine-in at our residence hall dining hall and take out at our retail facility. But with you know, the anticipated number of ... or the reduction required of our capacity, we had to work out other ways of making sure that our students ate, but that we didn't have the good old days of giant lines out the door and hundreds and hundreds of people sitting inside a dining hall. So our

320 person capacity dining hall, give or take, went down to about a 75 person capacity dining hall. So we, you know ... it was essentially 25, 30 percent capacity.

And we flipped our entire dine-in model to be majority take-out. So we invested heavily in so many disposable takeout containers, which we never had to do before, right? We had plates and knives and forks before. And we gave students the option of sitting down to eat or the option of grab-and-go. And we anticipated that there would be a lot that were fine with sitting down to eat, and then that some that would grab and go, but we found that everyone grabbed and go. During the fall semester the most number of humans that we had sitting in the dining hall at any given time was nine. Out of hundreds and hundreds of people, right? So everyone would go grab their lunch, dinner, breakfast, whatever it was, and either take it back to their residence hall room, or they would go outside. In the fall it was really nice, because many people would go and sit on a ledge or a park bench and eat their dinner outside. Good fresh air. But that kind of takeout mentality, even when we relaxed our restrictions a little bit and made it a little more personable to eat in the dining hall and made it a little easier, people got stuck in their ways of doing takeout, and they would just take out completely.

And so that takeout model continued through the spring, and led to its own challenges. So we as a college have a very solid push towards sustainability, and we didn't want to have all these plastic takeout containers everywhere, and increasing our trash. So we required our provider, our food service provider, to have all compostable everything. So not only were there compostable clamshell container that they got their dinner in, but it was a compostable cup, with a compostable lid, and a compostable straw, or no straw at all, depending on where you were. The knife and fork were compostable. The little tiny plastic bag that the knife and fork were in was compostable. So we pushed everything to compost, which is great, because Vermont state law in July was that composting was required. But what we didn't anticipate was that the, kind of, just the volume of compostable products that we were pushing out there totally overloaded our compostable refuse transfer kind of system. And so we went from having twenty or thirty compost bins in centralized locations around that our waste hauler would haul, to having forty or fifty of them, and then having giant bins in every single res hall, and then still having them be overloaded every single day. So there was definitely a compostable container crunch of August and September 2020, until we worked out that system and balanced it down again.

But yeah, it's ... you have all these different unforeseen circumstances that we during COVID, right? We had ... deal with one issue, creates another issue, so we deal with that, creates a third issue. It's just kind of always pivoting. Always having to be flexible. Not sitting back and being like, "ah, we did it! We made it!" It always kind of looking at what we did and having to change it again a few months later.

I became very friendly with our Casella friends. Casella is our waste hauler. I have him in my cell phone. I text him four days a week, probably, about different things here and there. The level of collaboration with our waste hauler is great right now. Forced through, you know, this scenario, but definitely strengthened that relationship, which is kind of nice, and we get good results.

So food service definitely had lots of things to deal with. But again, we partner with a really great direct provider, who has food service all over the country and the world. So they were easily able to be flexible and pivot and do whatever they need to do to make sure that our students had food and could eat

safely without feeling like they might get sick if they walk outside their dorm. So they've done a really good job, and I think we have a lot to be proud of. I can't wait to get away from the old takeout model, but being able to pivot and reopen in a different way that we had never anticipated before definitely was a good success story throughout this whole thing.

There was a thousand success stories, right? Of just doing things we never had to do before, but doing them well. I think testing probably falls under that too.

Donnis: Absolutely, yeah.

Anderson: Yeah, the other thing that I was relatively involved in, right, again kind of around the cleaning aspect and operations, is just trying to find a home for our on site testing location for COVID testing compliance. And working with the Event Center on, you know, if we move here, what does that mean for cleaning? And if we move there, what does that mean for cleaning? And what does that mean for food service? And who do we need to kick out of wherever?

The piece around testing was definitely a huge part of our discussions on a weekly basis with that kind of fall reopening team as well. Yeah, something we wouldn't have anticipated that we needed to plan for, and hopefully we don't, soon enough.

Donnis: So earlier in our conversation you referenced working with Kerry Sleeper, and getting ... trying to implement the guidelines that were coming through from the state. And I wondered if you could just tell us a little more about that process. Or, you know, what were the specific guidelines that had the greatest impact on our campus operations, and how did they kind of roll out over time?

Anderson: Yup. It was really funny, actually. So for the longest time, right, there were no guidelines, and we just ... there's something in my box right here that I can pull out [pulls out a thick printed document]. For the longest time there was no guidelines at all. And the state of Vermont was kind of leaning on us to ask us what we're doing. And we were kind of waiting for the state to tell us what to do. So we were kind of at a bit of a roadblock in terms of what should we do. Kerry was already kind of ahead of that curve I think in a lot of different ways. And looked outside of the state and outside of colleges and found some really great documentation. Things that, you know, we could use as a starting block, or as a template. And so he sent through ... the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security came out pretty quickly with a document called Open Smart EDU. [holds up document] And it was pretty solid, you know, 95-odd page document, that had kind of all sorts of different pieces within that. It even was kind of bullet points around what colleges could do, to try and help us think through all of the different pieces, right? It's pretty easy to get stuck in one chain or one kind of tangent and forget about the other things. So this document kind of became the Bible for a little bit, while the state was meeting with all of the different kind of higher ed consortium folks about trying to come up with a good plan.

So we already had a plan before the state had a plan, by following these Open Smart EDU guidelines. And one day in the middle of the pandemic Kerry Sleeper texted me and said, "Hey, have you got time to talk? I really want to sit down in person, because I've never met you in person" kind of thing. So we sat at, one at the far end of a conference room in Perry Hall. And he asked me, "So I wonder, have you

ready those Open Smart EDU guidelines, or anything?" [chuckles] And I pulled it out of my bag, like it was my Bible, and I was like, "Oh, you mean this one? That I've got like X marks and crosses all the way through?" And he was like, "You're my man. We got this."

So yeah, it was good that we had some good documentation up front. Kerry at one point said, "You know, there's three important people I see on this campus right now, and that's the president, and the provost, and you." [chuckles]. And I'm like, "me?" And he's like, "yup." [laughs]. "You're the one doing all this operational stuff, and we can't open if we're not ready." And I was like, "okay, cool." So, no pressure.

But it was a really great relationship with Kerry, and you know, even though we waited a lot to find out from the state about things, he typically had the intel before it was official. Like before we got ... there was a press release saying that we updated new guidelines on this, that, and the other, Kerry would already have talked with us the day before and said, "you know, I think this is where the governor is going to go, so let's start going in that direction anyway." So he was awesome. It was a really great kind of strategic move at that point to pull him in to Champlain. Luckily he didn't get pulled into like UVM [the University of Vermont] or someone else bigger. But yeah, it was really awesome to have him around. I think he's a Champlain alumni, isn't he?

Donnis: Yeah, I think so too. Yeah.

Anderson: Having an alum on our side is always good. So yeah.

Donnis: So what do you feel has been your greatest achievement during the pandemic? Or, at least so far, at this point in the pandemic.

Anderson: [chuckles]. The pandemic is over, isn't it? [laughs]. My greatest achievement I think was keeping it together, right? There, I mean, definitely some challenging times. But I think ... at some point I was kind of the rock. My employees would be like, "how are you managing all of this?" Right? You've got like a thousand hats, and I think it was hard, and it was a lot of work, and I was doing work until 10:00 at night every night. But ... but I think just keeping it together was like a huge achievement in and of itself. But with a calm face and smiling and making sure that, you know, we made people feel comfortable, that this isn't the end of the world. We can plan our way through it. We've just got to think strategically and do it, and maybe that's my planning background. But yeah, I think keeping it together was good.

I definitely became the hand sanitizer king. I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing. It's really interesting, the whole hand sanitizer world, right? There was a time where there was no hand sanitizer, and we were all out. And luckily we had plenty at Champlain because we had back stocks, or whatever. And we used this proprietary dispenser that uses this specific cartridge. And you couldn't use the dispenser with any old stock standard cartridge. So we had a bunch of those cartridges, which was lovely. It meant that we couldn't kind of sub in any other product. But it also meant that we weren't relying on that product stream. We already had our own proprietary one that was doing just fine. So, you know, throughout the pandemic I've kind of been comforted that we had plenty of hand sanitizer on

hand. We didn't have any students around all ... summer and at the end of the spring to use it, but it gave us time to actually look at where our dispensers were on campus, and just being shocked and amazed at how many there were that were hidden in a thousand different locations. Places that I would never imagine a hand sanitizer to be. And so, you know, I spent all summer finding where these dispensers were and then reallocating them to better locations. So instead of that hand sanitizer being in the men's bathroom only, and nowhere else in the building, we pulled it out of the men's bathroom and put it right at the front door. So that when you walk in the door, you had access to sanitize your hands before going into class or whatever. Trying to catch you before you've already touched three or four doors walking through the building. So we spent a lot of time with hand sanitizer. And I feel like I'm very happy with where we got to in the end.

Don't tell anyone this – now it's in the Archives so now it's too late – but we actually reduced the number of hand sanitizer dispensers on our campus. I took down 180 that I didn't put back up. But that's because they were in such terrible locations. So we reduced our load, which was good, because it reduced our need for refill cartridges, which were low at that point, but not terrible. But we reallocated all of our hand sanitizers so they're in good locations. So in all our academic buildings they're right inside the door as soon as you walk in. And all our residence halls, there's one on every single floor. So even if you're the resident who hasn't left your res hall in two weeks, and all you do is go from your room to the bathroom, and your room to the bathroom, you might go past a hand sanitizer on the way, and hopefully you use it.

So we did a really good job on hand sanitizers, but oh my God, it was four months of just constant work. You know, it's sixty buildings, and a good three or four or five in each building. Trying to get it down to just one or two per building so we had a manageable load. But also strategically placed so that they did what they're supposed to do, and people like kind of sanitize their hands before going in. That was a solid job.

And the most interesting part about our hand sanitizers on campus was how little they had been used in the last decade. So there was ... I can't even tell you how many, maybe 150 hand sanitizer locations that I went through, where the hand sanitizer was expired. It had been there for years and years. It was doing a really great placebo effect, but hand sanitizer does have an expiry date, because the alcohol evaporates, and as the alcohol evaporates it gets less and less effective. And so there was some hand sanitizers, you know, the majority of the ones I threw out were from 2016, was when they expired. But the oldest one I found expired – it wasn't installed – *expired* in 2008. So a thirteen year old smelly water. It was very fragrant, but obviously did absolutely nothing. So I was very excited to like actually have touched every single hand sanitizer in the entire campus and know that it was an effective amount of alcohol ratio, and was not expired, and would actually do what it was supposed to do. Instead of just having people *think* that they were protected, actually protecting them.

So it was a good exercise. We definitely brought ourselves up into a better place than we were in the past. And who knows how much they'll get used into the future, right? Because as we learn more about COVID, we realize it's less about surfaces. It's still definitely about cleaning your hands, but it's less about surfaces and more about air. And so, you know, I think we can be happy that we probably don't

need to clean as much as we did, or we don't need to disinfect five times a day. We need to just make sure that there is the appropriate distances and masks and not too many people inside.

So we definitely learned a lot. Every week it was something different. Oh, this doesn't matter anymore. Or this might matter more. But I'm glad that we're moving in a better direction. And that we realize that it's not all about surfaces and you're not going to get it from touching a table or touching a chair. You don't have to wear gloves everywhere you go. It's just better about like good hygiene and being smart.

Donnis: How has the pandemic affected you personally?

Anderson: [looks around] I'm in my home office now, where I have been. So I actually spent I would say probably 80% of my time working, working remotely, and 20% [working on site] ... maybe during the summer I was like on campus five days a week, going crazy. But since the fall [semester] started I would only go into campus once or twice a week, do whatever I kind of needed to do.

But you know personally I am excited that I finished my basement last year, because that meant that I have a space that is mine, and it's not full of Legos, and it's not full of stuffed toys. Not too much, anyway. Just a few. But I do have kind of a ... I'm blessed with having a space that I can have an office in, right? There's ... I'm definitely not one of the ... you know ... I'm lucky, because I see other people in their kitchens, and in closets, and in places that are definitely not good for spending a large amount of time and being efficient at your work. So I'm blessed that I have a good space to be in, with my multiple screens, that's why I keep looking in different ways. You know, personally, for work-related purposes, you know, it's a huge shift, but it hasn't been too bad.

As an essential personnel, I still can go to campus if I need to, or I have to go to campus if I have to, I'm not stuck at home. And I recognize that it was probably a pretty difficult time there, where staff and faculty were told, you're not allowed to come to campus, right? And campus, part of your identity is being at work and being on campus, and being told you're not even allowed to come and water your plants, was probably really hard.

Again, don't tell anyone, apart from the world on this one, but like there was a moment when an employee called me up on my home phone and said, "I know you're allowed on campus, and I'm not. Can you go get my plants for me?" So I plant-rescued. I filled the back of my car with all the plants from their office and took them to their house. Because they weren't allowed to go to campus.

So yeah, I think that ... I recognize that I probably had it a little better off, in some respects. A little more freedom than other people, who just were cut off and said "Go home and work from home forever." I get to go to campus every now and again, and see it and chat with people and things like that. So it's a little different.

But personally, at my home, I have a ... when the pandemic started I had a seven and a nine year old. They both got older. And they were both home. A lot, right? And there was that ... definitely that really hard juggle of home and schooling, or home and anything. And work and getting them to do stuff. And

in some respects that was really challenging. In other respects it was pretty awesome to have family time.

And every April there's a bike event called Thirty Days of Biking. And really just it's kind of a call to action to ... if you put your bike away for the winter to get it out. Really, get it out April 1st, and see if you can just ride every day. Whether it's around the block or it's twenty miles. Whatever you want to do, just touch your bike. Every day in April. And normally, right, the kids are in school, I'm at work. It's a little challenging to do. But this April, the kids were home, I were home. Whenever I had like an hour or so break in the middle of my remote work day I could kind of say "Hey kids, want to go for a bike ride?" And they're like "Yeah, sure." So we rode every single day. We did like 305 miles of biking in April. And it was all of us. Like, you know, me and the two kids instead of just me biking every day, which I would normally do anyway. So that was cool. We had lots of family time on our bikes.

We had lots of camping time, actually, too. We found this one really remote campsite that wasn't part of a state park, so it wasn't closed, so to speak. And no one ever goes there, except for us. Five times in a row. And so we went camping every weekend for five weeks in like May and June. And so we got some really good family time in. With hardly anyone else around, right, because they're all locked down.

So personally it was great. I made the crazy idea – you know, pre-pandemic I made the crazy idea – of trying to do ... finish my Master's degree. So I started my Master's in January [2020], the second half of my Master's. And so come [laughs] come March when it was like "Oh pandemic!" I had ridiculous amounts of work, juggling family being at the house all the time, and doing my Master's every single weekend. So I did my Master's every night, if I wasn't working I was doing that, or I was doing both at the same time. So yeah, I would encourage to not try and do a Master's during a global pandemic next time, if I had, you know, some crystal ball to go back, maybe. That was ... that was, challenging. It was a solid commitment of my time. Maybe it was okay because we were in lockdown and there wasn't lots of hanging out with friends and doing things, so I was maybe a little maybe more focused on my Master's. But proud to graduate, or have graduated, December 23rd was when I finished officially. I had my degree or my diploma already in a frame on the wall. But it was ... 2020 was an interesting year to try and get an advanced degree. But I got it. I persevered. And there was a period in the middle of the summer when I emailed my advisor and said "I can't do it. I'm going to wait until 2021." And so I didn't do the second period in summer, Summer II. And then it got to August, and I told myself, "If I don't keep going, I'm going to take forever to do this thing. So I got back on the horse in August, just like all of our students, who came back to class in August. Got back on the horse myself and did schooling and all the way through to December, and finally graduated. So that's kind of cool. I guess I'll have a virtual graduation ceremony coming up in a couple of months. But yeah, doing a Master's in a pandemic kind of affected me personally, but I got through it. [laughs]

Donnis: Congratulations, that's great.

Anderson: Thank you.

Donnis: When you look back on the years 2020 and 2021, what do you think you'll remember the most?

Anderson: How incredibly slowly things felt while going fast. Like I look ... as I was in the moment, it felt like too much stuff to do, time was dragging, right, we're never going to get through this pandemic. I look back at 2020 and I'm like "where did that year go?" Like, it felt like a month's worth of a year, just [snaps fingers] passed by. So keeping busy, it felt like probably the fastest year I've ever felt in my forty years. But at the same time while living it, it was, like, a challenge.

But you know, I look back and think, "Could we have done it differently?" Nationally, yes. At Champlain, maybe not. I think we did a really great job. And I'm kind of proud, and I look back at the COVID tracker that they have online, and I look back and I see that, you know, we had like seven cases of COVID in the fall. And that is a huge testament to the amount of work that people did, to make sure that there was good education, people knew what they had to do, or where they had to do it, and all those kind of pieces. We did it. Maybe it wasn't the ultimate perfect experience for students, but I'm pretty excited that we did manage to do it in a way that we kept our [case] numbers low and we kept people engaged. And they came back in the spring, right? So it was definitely a successful year for Champlain in some ways. We've gotta dig ourselves out of the [financial] hole. And I'm saddened, you know, nationally, about how many people died, and I'm a little blessed myself that I don't have too many people on that front that were impacted.

My family's all from New Zealand, so they're happily partying and enjoying home, because New Zealand did a really swift lockdown, and kind of contained the virus as much as they could. Which is easy when you live on an island, right? It would be like just having Vermont's borders and then having the rest be water. It would make it a little easier. We wouldn't have to complain about all these Connecticut [license] plates we see driving around town.

So I look back at my New Zealand family and think wow, that they have it all right, right now. And that maybe we could have done it better here, but it's one of those things, you know, that we just have to ride our way through and do everything we can and flex and pivot, and yeah, just think of the collective whole as opposed to ourselves, right? There are so many times I've wanted to hang out with my best friend. I haven't seen my best friend, who I would see every single week for the last six or seven years. We'd go skiing together, we'd go rock climbing together, every single weekend we'd have like bacon and egg breakfast. I didn't see him for eight months. And it sucked. And last week was the first time I saw him. We met up at Bolton Valley and skinned up Bolton Valley together. Didn't carpool, which we would normally have done. I look back and I'm kind of like, you know, 2020 kind of sucked for friendships. Did a lot of Zooms and a lot of phone calls, but not much else. So as I look kind of forward to 2021, definitely looking forward to being able to hang out with my friends again. Maybe see my family at some point.

Interestingly my relationship with my family [in New Zealand] has never been better in terms of communication. I would normally, in the good old days, I'm pretty ... I've been an American for 14 years now. I was pretty independent as a kid, right? I hitchhiked my way to college and back and ... I would talk to my family, I don't know, once every four months or so, quick phone call, something like that. Since the pandemic started, my mother has been Skyping me at least every week, maybe twice a week. Yeah, I talk to my mum way more than I ever have, and my dad and my sisters and brother. So my connection with my family is actually stronger because of the digital ... kind of desires and the digital need to connect than ever before. But I'm ... I see my New Zealand family more than I see my friends

here in Vermont that live two miles away. So I'm looking forward to 2021 being over there. Spend a little more time with the folks I love.

Donnis: So we've come to the end of my prepared questions. Did you have anything you would like to add?

Anderson: No I think I probably just added way too much that you didn't even ask me about, right? No, no, I think ... I think we'll get through this, and we're showing some resiliency, at least here in Vermont, and I'm excited to keep on cranking and see where we can go from here.

Donnis: Well, thank you. Thank you so much. This has been great.

Anderson: No worries. Any time.

[end of recording]