

Hudson River Valley Institute  
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories  
David Rocco

[Audio checks]

**Interviewer:** Alright, would you like to state your name for us?

**Rocco:** David Rocco.

**Interviewer:** David Rocco, and can you tell us where you grew up?

**Rocco:** I grew up in southern Westchester County—Yonkers—for about ten, twelve years and then moved to Mount Vernon where I finished up high school.

**Interviewer:** What is your job, your occupation?

**Rocco:** I started out in the meat business with my father, who was in the meat business since he was like fourteen years old, but then I had to get away from the business for health reasons and I got into carpentry. So I worked for New York City housing authority for almost eighteen years and then I retired seven years ago due to, well I injured my knee, so they put me on permanent disability.

**Interviewer:** Alright, so how long have you lived in the Hudson River Valley?

**Rocco:** I'm fifty-one years old so as long as I've been alive.

**Interviewer:** What's your overall impression of living in the Hudson Valley, what keeps you going and staying here?

**Rocco:** It has everything, you know it's such a beautiful area, lakes, rivers, of course the Hudson River. I've driven around the country a few times, and I couldn't think of a better place to live and die than here.

**Interviewer:** And so let me ask you a couple questions relating to the bridge itself. What role do you feel the bridge is playing within the community and the region?

**Rocco:** As of right now or what it could be?

**Interviewer:** As of right now.

**Rocco:** As of right now, it's still a pipe dream for a lot of people. This has been going on since 1992, this is now 2008, there was a lot of doubters out there because like I'm on the community outreach committee and I got people that come up to me and "you guys are never going to get it done" and I say, first of all, it's not our bridge it's your bridge. Secondly, you know, we need more help and right now it looks like we're on our way so we have to make them believe this.

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**Interviewer:** What do you think is the biggest challenge in getting the bridge going, getting the bridge completed as a walkway?

**Rocco:** Well the usual answer to that one is money. But also the cooperation between the many agencies that are involved, this is a major undertaking and include the fact that we're on a timeline because we want to get it open by September 2009, so that's a lot to ask for.

**Interviewer:** How long have you been involved in Walkway over the Hudson?

**Rocco:** I met Bill Sepe who was the original chair of the organization in November 2001.

**Interviewer:** And what first inspired you to get involved in it?

**Rocco:** Happened to be the Dutchess County office building because I lived in Dutchess County for about eighteen months. And I was renewing my passport and after I came down from the office, there was this information stand of things to do in Dutchess. And I saw the sign on one of the brochures, Walkway over the Hudson, I said, "God, what a beautiful sound to it, Rail Trail over the Hudson River". And I said, "I know all the rail trails in this area, how'd I miss this one?" So I called the phone number up at the bottom of it, figured I'd get an answering machine, and there's a voice—Bill Sepe—and I started asking him a lot of questions, well if you're so serious about it come up this Saturday to Pine Points firehouse, we're having a fundraiser and I'm selling books and shirts, and from that moment on I was hooked.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever been up to do a view up there?

**Rocco:** Was I ever up on the bridge?

**Interviewer:** Well up on, around the bridge to get views from around there?

**Rocco:** No.

**Interviewer 2:** No, ok [another interviewer jumps in] I'm just going to interrupt. David if you could rephrase each question that's asked, that way when it goes down on tape, as we go to edit these together, I know what you're referring to. So like the last question we asked, if you could like rephrase it, how I got involved with Walkway is...and then your answer. And if you could do that for each one, then that way we know exactly what you're making reference to at any point during the interview.

**Rocco:** Sure.

**Interviewer 2:** That'd be great, thank you.

**Rocco:** So start from the top?

**Interviewer 2:** No keep going, if you want to go back to some of the questions at the beginning, the last thing, maybe you just go back to the first couple of questions and then re-do them and then we're good. [first interviewer jumps back in] Ok so I'll go back to a couple of questions then. What do you feel is one of the best features of the Hudson Valley?

**Rocco:** I'm going to be biased, I mean once we get this bridge open I think the bridge is going to be a world wide tourist attraction, I mean think about it, when it opened up in 1888 it was the world's longest bridge. It will be a great asset to the Hudson Valley region because when we hopefully get it open by 2009 or thereafter, it'll be the world's longest pedestrian dedicated bridge.

**Interviewer:** And can you tell me what impact you think the bridge is going to make in the Hudson Valley, perhaps from an economic standpoint?

**Rocco:** The impact I believe will definitely create jobs, create businesses, tax revenue. The tourism that will come up from both sides of the river from New Jersey, from New York City, I mean think about it, the train station is a block and a half on the waterfront, ideally if we ever get an elevator up from the waterfront to the bridge deck, it can't be any easier than that to, even the elevator will be a tourist attraction. You know, two hundred and twenty feet high to get up to the bridge deck, it'll just be a magnet for people to come up here.

**Interviewer:** What sort of activities have Walkway over the Hudson been engaging in to raise public awareness?

**Rocco:** Walkway's been trying to, the last number of years, to gain public awareness through community outreach events, whether it's the kid's expo at the Poughkeepsie Civic Center, whether it's the Arlington street fair, the Highland Rib festival, the Highland Chili festival in January, Beacon has about five events every year, Clearwater has their big festival every June—it's a two, three day event which is a wonderful thing—wherever we go we feel we can reach a broader audience.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel the bridge is, or the walkway across the Hudson can work with the Quadricentennial celebration to get this job done?

**Rocco:** I think the bridge in regard to the Quadricentennial for 2009, can make a major impact to it because if you have a history of the 1909 celebration, which was just Hudson, Fulton, somebody was smart this time around and included Champlain, so you have Hudson, Fulton, Champlain. Back then you had Thomas Edison had the ability to light streetlights in New York City, the Wright Brothers were flying up and down the Hudson River, it was just a lot of wonderful things going on. There's really not that many things that they can take advantage of this time around, so here you have a bridge that was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and now we're refurbishing it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it could last even

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beyond that. And so it's like a length of tie into history, that you have to link up Hudson, Fulton, Champlain.

**Interviewer:** What do you find most interesting about the bridge from a personal standpoint?

**Rocco:** Obviously I find the size of the bridge just overwhelming. The length of it, the height from the river, the views, but what gets to me is that I do a public access T.V. show, so I had the ability to take a boat ride with the engineers when they were inspecting the piers last year, to film some of that vantage point. But to circle around the piers and to look at the work it was just to me the, the men that built the bridge, whether it was the engineers, or the workers, the carpenters, the iron workers, that I have just overwhelming respect for.

**Interviewer:** In inspecting the bridge and getting a close look at it, what would you say your opinion is the current condition of the bridge?

**Rocco:** Considering that this year's 2008, the condition of the bridge is remarkable because it opened a hundred and twenty years ago. They actually started on the bridge, I believe, in 1873 on the piers. It's just an incredible, incredible structure, the material they used, the labor that was used, I mean it's lasted the test of time.

**Interviewer:** And would you say, well tell me about your public access program.

**Rocco:** Well my public access program, I got involved with that just paying my bill one day online, and standing around I saw the sign, would you like to do public access? So I said, well, we're trying to promote Walkway in some fashion, maybe try it, see what it is. So they gave me an application, I send it down, I got the response back yes, so I had to take a three week course on how they do editing you know, lights and cameras or whatever. So I went to our office, got the old archives out and I started to splice together, edit together previous shows, also Fred Schaeffer, our chair, was doing the tour one weekend and I used part of that material as well. So obviously I got better in time with each show and more thing were starting to happen for walkway, current events wise, and I was able to use that as well

**Interviewer:** Can you describe what the difference, in terms of how the process of walkway, getting this job done is from when you started until now, what are some of the big things that have happened, how has the process gotten easier, has it gotten harder?

**Rocco:** The process of walkway's progression, when I got involved I was just starting out as a volunteer, I would help out, mow the lawns, whatever was up on the bridge. But then around, there was a changeover in the board in 2004, a new board of directors came in led by Fred Schaeffer, some left over board members from the previous administration. I sat around and watched them for a little bit and then I asked, I said, you know I wasn't happy with their production again, so I said I'd like to get on the board and I wanted to see what I could do. And at this point in time, again I did everything I could, where I live

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in Westchester County I promoted it down there as well, wherever I went I would talk about it, talk to people and you know applied for grants, talked to contacts, whatever we could get, and a few times it worked.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me some of the people, beyond just Walkway over the Hudson, that seemed to be getting involved or even raising attention to, and have been active in this?

**Rocco:** Other people that have been...can you repeat that again please?

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me, or describe some of the other people or, that have been involved in Walkway over the Hudson or people maybe outside Walkway over the Hudson that are taking an active role in getting involved?

**Rocco:** Other board members, in their own way have been helpful to the organization, not everyone can be a salesman or a promoter outside, there were people that could take care of the treasury, some people can take care of the newsletter, some people can take care of the website, you know they're comfortable in their areas. Remember it's an all volunteer based organization, the biggest, the greatest help to the organization has been I would say the Dyson Foundation, Rob Dyson with the help of Diana Gueieva stepped up back in June or July of '07, and has transformed this project, you know, from just a struggling non for profit that we all shared all these booths with another groups at these events that we go to, to possible that we could realize our dream.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that the, can you describe some of the frustrations perhaps that have come along with Walkway over the Hudson?

**Rocco:** The frustrations, again, there is the lack of [pause] activity to get people moving and involved, to try and get the money or the awareness to bring it to the point where we're at now. So there was just certain people that were constantly trying to keep plugging away at that. Now, the only frustration is the possibility, it's a very complicated situation, what we're involved in, but we just, we're frustrated that, we just hope that we can get this open by the celebration 2009 because again, we need that incredible cooperation between all those many agencies that are involved.

**Interviewer:** What sort of work needs to be done on the bridge to get it done?

**Rocco:** The work that has to be done on the bridge to have it ready for the celebration and for future use would have to be obviously the old rails and ties and walkways that are still on the bridge. What's still on the bridge is from the Highland side in Ulster County, across the bridge, over the river to the Poughkeepsie shoreline, that's still in tact, it's not in great shape but it's still there. From the Poughkeepsie shoreline in, everything was removed because there was a fire at about seven hundred feet of the bridge back in 1974, so that's already been stripped.

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**Interviewer:** From a local political standpoint how has the idea of opening the bridge been received by say the town of Poughkeepsie, the town of Lloyd, and maybe even New York State?

**Rocco:** In regard to support local, regional, and national, I can tell you first hand because I worked on the grant back in June with Dick Coller—board member- and his wife Noreen Coller. And in the three grants we worked on, we were asked to get letters of support and I just kind of figured out certain people who I should contact, and the next thing you know it started to steamroll and before you know it I had forty letters of support that are put together in the book. And it was just from Senator Schumer, Clinton, right down the line, from the local state senators and assemblymen, the mayors, the town supervisors, Scenic Hudson, Clearwater I mean, the River keeper, the Hudson River Navigator, on and on just all bringing endorsements, rails to trails. So it was a very, very good book and I'm proud to say that when I look at the final draft designs, it's including that, and it was well worth the effort.

**Interviewer:** Great, can you describe the response by the local business community to the bridge and opening up the bridge.

**Rocco:** The local business community's led by, in the chamber of commerce, is Charlie North, Charlie North also happens to be on the Board of Directors. They're very enthusiastic about it now, they're, obviously, cautiously optimistic like a lot of people are because it's been talked about for a long time, but I think they're very, very confident now like a lot of people are because both, you know, the Dyson foundation is involved, Governor Spitzer basically endorsed us in his state of the state message back in January, so we're pretty much on our way.

**Interviewer:** Can you speculate perhaps in ways in which business community will be benefitted by having this bridge connected, or this bridge opened up?

**Rocco:** Again, it's a big draw, its going to be tourism, the restaurants, the hotels, the coffee shops, whatever the, gas stations, you already have draws up here, the FDR, the Culinary Institute on this side of the river, Westpoint a little bit lower on the other side of the river, it just gives people another reason to either come up from the city and down that area, or people to come down from upstate. It's a beautiful location because the bridge originally was built for that reason, to be halfway between New York City and Albany, so you can draw people down from upstate as well.

**Interviewer:** What sort of safety concerns might go into having a bridge opened like this?

**Rocco:** The typical safety concerns are, what people are concerned about is, suicide situations. It's something we're going to have to deal with, everything has to be done legally and certain heights of the railings, certain spaces of the ties. This is going to be like any other bridge that's on the Hudson River, I believe they're also going to put up

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call boxes and, keep in mind, it's going to be a lot of people out there, so I'm sure if somebody does get a little out of hand, they'll be some people to try and stop it.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe any events that have been talked about perhaps in Walkway over the Hudson meetings to coincide with the Quadra-centennial celebration?

**Rocco:** The only thing I can think of, I heard of some sort of parade tying in the communities, (with children, which is a great idea) with costumes and stuff like that. Again, that was talked about a year or two ago and it's a fabulous idea, but I think the way it would work out would be all the communities start their little celebrations and then they would climax on the bridge the day we have the big celebration. Now the fact that (we) look like it's going to happen, I'm sure they're really going to get serious about that.

**Interviewer:** And...

**Rocco:** Can I add something to that?

**Interviewer:** Sure

**Rocco:** Because this summer, August of 2008, will be the bridge's one hundred and twentieth anniversary, of the construction of the bridge. So with the help of Chris Silver from the Bardivon Theater, we're going to be part of his celebration that has the Hudson River arts festival in the third week of September, so he's going to allow us to be a part of that to promote the bridge, and celebrate the bridge.

**Interviewer:** Can you talk about also some other ways in which Walkway over the Hudson is planning for, maybe working with local communities in putting together celebrations?

**Rocco:** Again, I'm not up to all those details about how Walkway will be involved in the celebrations, I know there are meetings going on between Ulster County tourism, Dutchess County tourism, the city of Poughkeepsie is very, very involved in this. So it's just the matter that, again, it's serious now, people can really actually get down with the nitty-gritty and plan events.

**Interviewer:** What is the bridge, on a personal level, what does it mean to you? How do you envision you and perhaps maybe your family using the bridge if it gets completed?

**Rocco:** What's the bridge mean to me and to my family? To me, how I got involved in it, it was just; it was a no brainer because it was just sitting there for years doing absolutely nothing when something could have been done to it. I mean when Bill Sepe got involved in it the rails to trails program wasn't that popular and big yet, so like everything in life, it's a matter of time, so at this point in time, rails to trails is very popular, people try to exercise more. I just thought it was an honor and a privilege to be a part of something like this. Down where I live in Westchester County there's the old

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Putnam line, which is part of the New York Central line that was abandoned, but they took all the rails and created the trail system, it's called the north and south county trail way which leads up to Putnam county. So to me, when I saw this opportunity, I said I should get involved on the ground floor level to help something else since I was retired from my job, and like I said, it involved the forgotten railroad history, it involved the rails to trails projects, and it involved the Hudson River, so to me it was a trifecta.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe your own personal role to Walkway over the Hudson? What do you do for the organization, what's your role within it?

**Rocco:** My role in the organization is first a board member, secondly I'm involved with the community outreach committee, I'm involved with the oversight committee, and anything else basically when people need help, pretty much I'll lend them a hand.

**Interviewer:** Have you seen any change in activity regarding the bridge since Governor Spitzer's announcement that the bridge will be part of, be declared a state park, do you think there's a working solution?

**Rocco:** Well, the first change I saw was the fact that the same day the Governor gave his speech, there was a public information meeting at the Grand Hotel, and the original estimates were confined reservations, one hundred and twenty, one hundred and twenty five people. When we got there that night, there was five hundred people there, so apparently a lot of other people saw the speech as well. So it really, really is gathering a lot of interest and momentum, a lot of the old members of the organization that left were there, and it was good to see those old faces, and they were all excited because that's all everybody really wants. You know, whatever the reasons were to raise the money to get the job done, we all wanted to be able to walk across that bridge.

**Interviewer:** How do you envision the walkway working with New York parks on this project? Do you think it's going to be more all volunteer or do you reckon it's going to be more involved with businesses getting it done as well as volunteers? How do you imagine that the process is actually going to come to fruition?

**Rocco:** Our relationship with parks in regard to the bridge will be, in all likelihood, friends of walkway. I guess we'll be involved in events that will be held on the bridge, or the upkeep of the benches when the benches are put in, flowerpots or whatever the case may be. When there's celebrations we'll be involved in that way so...

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that there's going to be a cost for the average person walking across it, do you endorse that, do you think that might be a bad idea?

**Rocco:** Oh I would hope it's for free.

**Interviewer:** You hope it's for free?



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**Rocco:** Yes, I would hope that cost, it might be a cost instead of walking across the bridge at a charge, it might be a cost for maybe the elevator, to help pay towards the elevator, and again, I hope the elevator is for free as well. I mean, you know, the bridge authority might have questioned us, why they want to get involved. The answer would be, bring more cars into the area that normally you wouldn't have, so you make up the money with the tolls.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any suggestions for perhaps renaming the bridge, or naming the park or anything along those lines?

**Rocco:** I would keep it Walkway over the Hudson.

**Interviewer:** Walkway Over the Hudson?

**Rocco:** There's no other name, I mean that's what it's known by for so many years, I mean try to rename something like that, it'd be sacrilegious in my opinion.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned Pete Seeger, can you talk, describe his role in the bridge?

**Rocco:** Pete Seeger's involvement in Walkway first is he's a member, and obviously most people know who Pete Seeger is. I had a great, great opportunity to meet Pete Seeger last summer at the Clearwater Festival down in Croton Point Park, which is in New York State. It's a two day music festival, and environmental advocacy festival as well. Pete Seeger happened to walk up to my table because I was there for two days for public outreach, and saw there was a book on the table called "Bridging the Hudson," and just remarked that, I never knew there was a book about the bridge. And I said sure, and he says, well where can I get this book? I said, it would be an honor and a privilege on behalf of Walkway to give you this copy for what you did for the Hudson River. So to make a long story short, I explained to him about the grant programs that we were applying for, so I asked him if he would mind writing a letter of support for us and he came through with it, and I would think it was very, very helpful.

**Interviewer:** Can you name any other people who have really played a pivotal role in getting this done, and how they managed to do it?

**Rocco:** It's a tough one because I hate to insult anybody that's, if I don't mention people that were involved that were pivotal to the success of Walkway, I mean it's not successful yet. I would have to start off with the original members of Walkway back in 1992 that saw this vision of saving this bridge, because they had been talking in the community of tearing this bridge down. Those people are being honored because they all spent money on planks, because the idea originally been to put planks on the bridge. So those so called plank holders are on a board case that we have on the Highland side of the bridge where their names on it and the numbers. It was probably thirteen hundred and eighty plank holders and we definitely want to thank them, and when I run into them at community outreach events, they say, oh I've got plank number sixty six, whatever happened to my plank? So and I say, well we're not going to use planks but we're

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definitely not going to forget you. Then the people along the way up until present, a little over two thousand, it's, the new board of directors have been very, very instrumental to steady the ship, keep it going, and hopefully just keep plugging away is what we did. Fred Schaeffer's been outstanding; he's all over the place doing presentations, tours on the bridge. Dick Coller's the nitty-gritty historian for the bridge, he's taken care of everything in regards to the engineers on the bridge now when they need something, when the Dyson Foundation needs something he's at their beckon call. And he's just, you know, contractor needs to go out on the bridge; he's over there already letting them in on the property. So there's a few people you know, in fairness to the other people, a lot of other people have full time jobs so they just do what they can do when they can do it. And of course, again, the key factor is the Dyson Foundation, they just legitimized us beyond belief, so now they truly believe in this project and they've always been good to the Hudson Valley from what I understand. So this is, I guess, a chance for them to really make a huge statement that how important the Hudson Valley is to them.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe the Dyson Foundation's role?

**Rocco:** The Dyson Foundation's role is first, they allocated a million and a half dollars to pay for engineer inspection. We had an inspection on the piers last year that we were able to raise money through governor Pataki before he left office. He gave us a hundred and fifty five thousand dollars which was allocated through New York State Parks, that got us to the point to have the underwater inspection piers, which was, outside of some maintenance issues, they were in great shape. Now once the Dyson foundation got involved, they paid for the inspection of the steel work, the design plans, and all the maintenance and land query that was needed, the surveys, title insurance, they were just phenomenal.

**Interviewer:** How do you envision walkway playing a role, if this bridge gets completed, if the construction and, gets opened, will walkway continue to play a role and in what way will they?

**Rocco:** Walkway's role at the completion of the renovations or reconstruction of the bridge, I would say, again it would be in the friends category. It's going to be a new territory for all of us, we just don't know the definition of what parks wants us to do yet. I mean they're so involved now in just trying to get this bridge open, that's something we're going to have to worry about later on.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe Park's enthusiasm or participation, who have you been contacting with and how have they been filling their role?

**Rocco:** Well, in Park's involvement, I had the first opportunity with a fellow board member named Mitch Markay to go up and meet Carol Ash, who's the New York State Parks Commissioner about a year ago, early March of '07. It must have been maybe three, four weeks after she was appointed to the job, one of the former board members was able to set that meeting up. I really didn't know much about Carol Ash but I found out more about her later, she was involved with the (Nation of Conservancy), she was

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involved with the Palisades Park Commission, she's from the area. So we were allowed to make our presentation and finally at one point, her hands come up, stop, you don't have to sell the bridge, I love the bridge and she said, we just don't have the money. The parks system wants the bridge because we want to tie in a rural area with an urban area, somehow we have to raise the money and you're not going anywhere, you (can) be friends of Walkway. So Parks and Deputy Commissioner Eric ( ) have been very, very helpful, enthusiastic about this because you know, all the people involved, the engineers that were involved, parks department people, this is an exciting, once in a lifetime job that they can work on, this will be something for them to put on their résumé.

**Interviewer:** Overall it sounds like you're describing a lot of enthusiasm from both the community, from Parks, all the way up to Spitzer. Has there been any negative feedback on it, or people who maybe are not so enthusiastic about opening up the bridge?

**Rocco:** The negativity or feedback from the so called naysayers, or whatever government involvement is, that's money that can be used elsewhere whether it's highways, AIDS research, homeless, whatever. This is an economic development tool which will benefit everybody in the long run anyway, it's not a complete handout ok. So you're always going to get that and you're not going to convince everybody, you convince the majority as usual, and if they want to get this done, it's going to happen.

**Interviewer:** In talking to a lot of the community members, have you come across interesting stories, or anecdotes, or things that people have said that the bridge has meant personally for them?

**Rocco:** In regard to personal anecdotes from people I met in the community, I've been privileged again being involved in the community outreach. The stories you hear people, especially that lived in Poughkeepsie or the people that lived in Highland, one lady came up to me she said, when I was a young little girl around World War II and the military trains used to come across the bridge. She said, you knew it was a military train because they used to paint the windows, and I was standing there, I guess it was ( Duane (?) ) street or whatever it was over there on Delafield, and all of the sudden this paper would come out of the train and come flickering down. And it was a letter and on the letter it said, could you please mail this for me. So there were the GI's that were going to Europe wanting I guess, their family or their girlfriends or whatever to get these letters before they left. Another story that really stood out in my mind was a guy that lived in Poughkeepsie who had a job in Highland. And he was late to work one day so a freight train's coming by on the line going over the bridge. Now the trains used to have to go ten, twelve miles per hour over the bridge, the locomotives, but once they got over the other side they could start to speed up again. This guy didn't realize that, so he jumps on the back of the train figuring that he could easily jump off once it gets to the other side, except by the time it got to the other side, they were doing about forty miles per hour. So he dove off the bridge because he didn't know how much further he was going to go and by the time he got to work, everything was shredded on him, you know his clothes. So these are the type of stories that, you know, you get.

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**Interviewer:** Can you envision the bridge being used maybe as education tools or have you gotten any response from the local education community, schools and such, showing their enthusiasm?

**Rocco:** The Bridge being used as an educational tool, probably in various ways. First and foremost, we want to build our own museum somewhere underneath the bridge because we own a lot of property under the bridge, preferably on the Poughkeepsie side not far from the children's museum. The Mid-Hudson Children's Museum has been very enthusiastic about this as well, they let us use their pavilion for our meetings and stuff like that, and they also want to work together with us because all non-profits, we struggle. So again, if the bridge gets open and brings people up, people will discover the museum and then hopefully they'll get bigger and you know, more populated. The local schools, we had a great, great contest about three years ago, Dutchess Community College put together this design contest. Eleventh grade high school students from Dutchess County and Ulster County that had a possibility of becoming engineers or architects were invited to participate. So it ended up being twenty five students, each group of five was assigned an architect for the day, they were given the instructions to make a museum and access to the bridge deck from the waterfront. And each went to their own classrooms and they came back about, that was eight o'clock in the morning, they came back about five in the afternoon and all five groups had great ideas on, and one guy, one kid even had like a Ferris wheel type of device so people could get off and on. I mean it wouldn't work because of the historical nature of the bridge but, you know, it was great that they were involved.

**Interviewer:** Seems like the kids are really excited. Is there anything else you would like to say in regards to the bridge and the walkway's involvement?

**Rocco:** What I'd like to say, what I haven't said, again it's been an honor and a privilege to be a part of something like this, to see something that was said to me, that it's not going to happen no way, and it was close to it. But, and also be able to meet people such as Pete Seeger, Governor Spitzer, former Governor Pataki, Senator Schumer, you know all these people and just talk about some of their, obviously they can see enthusiasm is coming out of me, and passion. I just thought it was necessary that it should get done, I was going to do the best of my abilities what I could do. And I hope to stay involved with walkway and I believe the friends of walkway will be there long after the celebration 2009.

**Interviewer:** Great, great, I don't really have anymore questions for you, I think we're all done. [another interviewer] Just one last thing, if you could, just so I have an introduction to you, if you could just state your name and your affiliation with the project, my name is David Rocco, I'm a board member of Walkway and so forth. [random chatter]

**Rocco:** I'm David Rocco board member, Walkway over the Hudson, member of the community outreach committee, the oversight committee, and part time grant writer. [break in the interview and going back to older questions]

**Interviewer:** Can you talk about your relationship in chasing down some of these politicians and getting attention for them?

**Rocco:** Well, my relationship with trying to get attention for the bridge, you have to get the politicians involved, you have to get them on board. I had met Governor Spitzer at a fundraiser in Manhattan over the summer, unfortunately it was the day that the ( ?) report came out but it still didn't make a difference, he was very enthusiastic about the bridge, knew it well. I met Senator Schumer, Senator Clinton, Lieutenant Governor Patterson had a great conversation with me. He allowed me to present my information about Walkway, so he asked me about, you ever hear of the highline in Manhattan? The Highline's a former (ride away) elevator train bridge that's on the west side of Manhattan that goes through buildings. There's a group called the highline trying to restore it, he says, what do you think about the Highline? I said, I think the Highline's great I mean we're like, we're team players but remember, the highline looks at the Hudson River, we cross the Hudson River, so you know he broke off laughing. Another politician I think has been very, very instrumental to get us to where we are, who went out on a limb, and who I had the great, great opportunity to meet him in his office in Washington this past summer, was Congressman Maurice Hinchey. Now, Congressman Hinchey sponsored walkway and the transportation bill, I believe it was 2004, for 192,000 dollars, and it's going to be what they call eighty to twenty percent match. It's ministered by the New York State Department of Transportation, it's been a little difficult to get the money through them, much to the dismay of the Congressman and everybody else in between. But he put us on the map, at this point in time, which is an expression that I've come across in this not for profit arena, money begets money. So once you start to see on your résumé you have this person getting involved, that person getting involved, the next thing you know people are going to start to feel left out, they want to get involved because two things, one, they're going to be left out, and two, they know that money's going for a good cause, it's not going to be wasted. So, outside of that I think I covered just about everybody else.

**Interviewer:** Has it been hard to track down some of these politicians and get in touch with them?

**Rocco:** Sometimes I don't even talk to some of them, I talk to their chiefs of staff, and especially when I was tracking down those letters of support for those three grants that we applied for. By the way the three grants were, one was for New York State Parks—which we won 500,000 dollars—the other was for the department of environmental conservations—it was a forty thousand dollar grant—we were seeking 100,000 but well take the forty, and the other one was to Otis Elevator looking for a free elevator, and we found out a few weeks ago we're still in the running for that. So there's hope, there's hope, Otis Elevator, when I spoke to them, she said, “Well what makes you think that we would want to give you a free elevator”? I said, “Well do you ever look at your website?” She said, “Yes I do, I said, you have what they call a signature page on your website, in 2009, your elevator and our bridge will be on that page”. And she said, “ok here's the website for your application, fill it out”. So it's been fun you know, all these

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things, a lot of time, and the most important person I should thank, I'm glad I'm able to do this again, is my wife Ruby. She's been a very good sport for the amount of time and how much I've been away doing this, you know, running up and down the river. As a fellow member Bill Keating says—he's been very good to me also—he says you're connecting the dots of all these people and, dot connector he calls me. So I thank Bill for his guidance and support, when I wander off the reservation Bill kind of pulls me back in a little bit, and I thank my wife for what she has done.

**Interviewer:** Does she share your passion for the bridge?

**Rocco:** No, no, my wife doesn't share my passion. She knows that it's important to me, she knows I love history, she admires my dedication, my passion, and she knows my history of getting involved in something, I don't let go. You know like an old expression I like to use, a pit-bull with prime ribs, she's been good about it, she's glad now that our responsibilities have been diminished somewhat because it's all profession staff. And this is what we all work for, I mean some people say, how come you're not so involved anymore? I say, to a degree I am but, you know, we're going to get this bridge open, which was everybody's dream. Getting it open by September 2009, you couldn't pick better people than the Dyson Foundation, if anybody's ever going to get it done; it's going to be them.

**[End of Interview]**

**Transcribed by Jake Racette**