

Season 5, Episode 6: Re-centering the Library in the College Community

Host: ESF President Joanie Mahoney

Guest: Matt Smith

Matt Smith: I've learned that the most important thing I can convey to a student early on is that I'm a person, too. I'm not just someone behind a desk. I have my own story. And once I take a few minutes to tell my story, then they're ready to learn.

The important thing that never changes is that the library is the intersection of people and information need and technology. The library has always been that. Any time I meet with a candidate for a role here on campus, I say, "You've had your career and you've been to good places. So have I. But you will not encounter a student body anywhere else like you will encounter here."

I want a facility as fantastic as our students with those 24/7 spaces they asked for that centers the student-facing services on campus.

Joanie Mahoney: Welcome to season five of Campus Conversations, the podcast. I'm Joanie Mahoney and I have the honor of serving as SUNY ESF. President ESF is a small college with big ideas, and this season, I'm speaking with the faculty, students and staff who make ESF mighty: the people working to improve our world and sustain the environment.

Today, I'm excited to welcome Matt Smith, who is the Director of College Libraries. Matt has a vision for Moon Library: create a 24/7 space where students can study, seek support, and have access to tools they need to be successful. I'm hoping Matt will share what's in store for the future of Moon, the treasured center of academic life at ESF. Thank you very much for joining me today.

Matt Smith: Thank you very much for the opportunity. It's my pleasure to be here and engage with the community in this new way and promote the library in a new way, as well.

Joanie Mahoney: You are a master at promoting the library, and it is true that it is the center, because whenever I am in the library, especially when the students are here, it is just filled to the brim. Everybody knows who you are, who your staff is.

Matt Smith: Yeah. Thank you for saying that. When I first visited campus when I was interviewing for the role, I remarked how busy the library was and the center of campus that it was, and I'm very pleased to say we've only gotten busier since then. Even after COVID, the students came right back, and just this academic year, from day two of classes we started at was the prior semester's peak usage levels. Trying not to toot my own horn too much, but I think we may be doing something right.

- Joanie Mahoney:** I think that's fair to say.
- Matt Smith:** I think that is being known to the community, and that's what we really do focus on, so I appreciate you highlighting that, as well, that people need to know who we are to feel comfortable and be engaged and come to the library.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So let's back up. I happen to know about you that you are a native of this part of the state of New York.
- Matt Smith:** Yes. Born here in New York, grew up in Oswego County, the small town of Mexico, New York, which is south of Texas, New York, and I never get tired of making that joke for those that aren't familiar with New York geography. And right now, I live in Madison County. I did move away for a number of years, but I found my way back to Central New York and Madison County, where my family actually originally came from.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, interesting. So they made their way to the big city of Mexico, New York?
- Matt Smith:** My mother moved up there, and don't remember these days, but a little cabin in Georgetown in the hills of Madison County, then Mexico.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And have spent some of your career here. You said you went away, so take us through that. You're a SUNY grad.
- Matt Smith:** I am a SUNY grad. Both my degrees come from SUNY: SUNY Oswego and SUNY Albany, and I think that really convinced me, because I grew up in a single parent household. My mother was a school bus driver, CSEA school bus driver, so we were not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination.
- The access and affordability of SUNY really fulfilled that promise of social mobility, one of those things that convinced me of the value of a SUNY education: great teachers, affordability, access.
- And this is my second time around in SUNY actually I was at prior at SUNY Sullivan, tenured, unfortunately retrenched due to economic conditions, so on and so forth. Left for a time, but came back, because I believe this is where I belong.
- Joanie Mahoney:** You had what role at SUNY Sullivan?
- Matt Smith:** I was the access services librarian there, so really essentially all public services: interlibrary loan, web presence.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So what was it about you growing up that set you off on a path toward libraries?

- Matt Smith:** That is a really interesting question, and it comes down to one of those moments with my then called undergraduate advisor, the late Dr. Karen Nicholas, Medievalist, wonderful woman, and she said to me, "Matt, you'd make a great historian. If you do that, go right into your PhD program because the master's level won't help you. However, there are no jobs in it, so consider library science."
- I still laugh about it this day. At the moment it seemed very inconsequential, that advice, but I really do think that a moment like that highlights the real importance of good advising and having advising load that you can know your students and understand them and who are, so I really do hold onto that moment and cherish that moment.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I think it's interesting. So in the moment, maybe not as significant; but looking back, it changed your trajectory?
- Matt Smith:** Because at the time I was an operations manager for FedEx ground working second and third shift. It's the real dull part that people don't associate with the business. It's moving the packages in between the times they're on the delivery trucks, the main line loads that go state to state.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So you had a career in between college and grad school?
- Matt Smith:** Yeah, and at one point I just kind of listened to what I was saying. Self-awareness is one of the most challenging things ever.
- Joanie Mahoney:** We don't do a great job at it, some of us.
- Matt Smith:** Humans as a whole, I think. But in hiring people there, I would say you have to be able to do the same thing every day. We move boxes. We don't build anything, we don't improve anything. We just move boxes. And if you can't deal with that type of work, you're going to have a hard time here. And then I had that moment of realization that I do not have any stimulus.
- Joanie Mahoney:** How much time lapsed between your bachelor's and you heading off to grad school?
- Matt Smith:** Oh, I took maybe 18 months there.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So that's a good chunk of time.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. Yeah, it was a good time to recharge and perspective and things like that.

- Joanie Mahoney:** I say that to my kids who are in that ballpark age group, and I say, "It's very important right now to learn what you don't want to do." And I would say FedEx moving boxes might have fell into that category for you.
- Matt Smith:** It was what I needed at the time to support myself. I absolutely don't regret my time there at all. It was a really hard job. Everything's honestly been easy after that. Yeah, it's a different world working for a for-profit entity that does something like that, and I could go on about that, but I don't really want to.
- Joanie Mahoney:** It's very interesting that you say that, because I spent a chunk of my time in college as a waitress, and I will say the same thing: not a more difficult job that I've ever had.
- Matt Smith:** Oh, absolutely. Food service before then, they cooked the line and really hard and then the...
- Joanie Mahoney:** Just yelling and move it, move it, move it, move it.
- Matt Smith:** The pressure. And it has to be on time because late is bad, but early is worse, and training the almost universally young people that come in to do the job, because it's extremely physically demanding.
- Joanie Mahoney:** But we now both have these experiences in our past that help us be grateful with where we are.
- Matt Smith:** Absolutely. I learned a lot about management and managing people at that time, because it was a high pressure environment with very strict standards.
- Joanie Mahoney:** So then you left that job at FedEx and then...
- Matt Smith:** I cashed out my 401k because it had lost about half its value at that point in the economy at the time, and went to graduate school.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Interesting. And that's remarkable, because you just said that you grew up in a single parent, CSEA employed bus driver, and for you to be able to make your way to grad school, I would imagine that you can relate to the students here better than some of us can.
- Matt Smith:** I've learned that the most important thing I can convey to a student early on is that I'm a person, too. I'm not just someone behind a desk or an automaton that comes into their class to try to educate them on one or two things: that I have my own story, and once I take a few minutes to tell them my story, then they're ready to learn because I'm a person to them.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I'm sure that's very powerful.

Matt Smith: It is. And that opens the door to relationships. In our instruction program, we might do one-off sessions in various classes for various topics, and those are really difficult to make useful, because you're ripped out of a context or you have a very limited context, you have to teach and you have a very limited timeframe, and you may never interact with those students again.

But once I made the shift to focusing rather on the technical skills I'm trying to demonstrate to them and getting them to learn to knowing I'm a person that they can interact with, well, that just opens the doors, because now if they don't get all of it or don't recall all of it, they know me and they can come to me.

Joanie Mahoney: And feel comfortable, and that is one of the most important parts of your role, is that people, students especially, are willing to approach you to ask for help, and that is one of the most difficult thing for students, is to get up the courage to admit, "I don't really know what I'm doing here," and you're a comfortable person for them to come to.

Matt Smith: Absolutely. And that, I think, highlights one of the most important roles that there is for the library. It's that third space where, except for those students in my one little class, we don't issue a grade. We're not there to judge, so we can be a safe place for them to come and ask questions.

Because a student will, in the classroom, smile, nod, say, "Yes, I know how to do this," because they don't want to betray that within the power structure of their instructor. And there's nothing overt there. It's just a human reaction. It's not that their instructor isn't approachable or anything like that, it's just what's grilled into us in this education system where, "Oh, I have to perform and questions are weaknesses and so on and so forth."

The important role, just like tutors, I always tell any one of my enrolled students, "What's the difference between an A student and a B student?" Tutor. Tutoring isn't just for people that are struggling; it's for people that want to do as good as possible.

Joanie Mahoney: I know. And it's one of those places where youth is wasted on the young, because could you imagine if we all had this stable of tutors available to us as adults in our professional life, how much we would avail ourselves?

Matt Smith: Truly.

Joanie Mahoney: Oh my gosh. And they don't because they think it's for students that are struggling to pass.

Matt Smith: Yeah. It's the connotation, and this problem has existed a long time, and I don't know how we begin to crack that nut, because all these people are

approachable and wonderful to work with and do so much for our students. It's just the opportunity to reach them all at a time when they need it, to just show them we're human, too.

Joanie Mahoney: I'm curious, when you arrived at Albany and you started your graduate program, did it feel like a good fit right out of the gate?

Matt Smith: That's tough to say, because it really was whiplash. I had that moment where I realized I'm not moving boxes anymore. I'm done with this. I looked at programs, I looked at application deadlines, I looked at my 401k and did process the withdraw right then, and in a month, I was in graduate school.

Joanie Mahoney: Wow. That is fast.

Matt Smith: I said, "I'll stay through the holiday rush," and started in January.

Joanie Mahoney: Wow. That is whiplash.

Matt Smith: It is.

Joanie Mahoney: And brave.

Matt Smith: Yeah. Sometimes you just have to, and fortunately, I was at a position I could. Not everyone has that opportunity.

Joanie Mahoney: You didn't have a giant safety net if this went poorly.

Matt Smith: No, I didn't. I had a few thousand dollars and figured, "All right, I can go this long before I need to get some income coming, and I'll take loans." But sometimes you just have to do these things. My concern is that it's ever increasingly difficult to do that in the world and the opportunity that's lost for folks that just can't.

But yeah, I think by my second semester, I started working at the New York State Library, or maybe even over the summer after that spring semester, I started working in the New York State Library as a graduate assistant there and got to know the folks there and tackled some projects.

Joanie Mahoney: What an interesting place to work.

Matt Smith: It is, and I try to encourage anyone, if they know they're going to Albany, please stop by and see it, because what a unique institution that exists to serve the people in the state of New York. It's a public library that is also an R1 research library.

There is eight miles of stacks below ground, and the collections they have and the people that they have are just really incredible. I think probably because of that job, then I was like, "Okay, this can be neat. This can be enriching. We can do this."

Joanie Mahoney: I can't imagine. I think in some alternate universe, I would absolutely love to be in a library for work or a museum, but I will say, what you do is beyond what I ever really mastered as a student, and I'm someone who's made it through law school, but that ability to find what you're looking for, and that is hard. That is a difficult job.

Matt Smith: It is. And honestly, it's harder than it was when I started my career.

Joanie Mahoney: Well, have you seen the chart about the information?

Matt Smith: Yes. The proliferation of information increasing at exponential rates. It's going to explode due to AI and the ease of creating information, and not absolute trash information. There's still plenty of that, but 18 months from now... I'm going to take a step back.

A couple of years ago and speaking to a department chair here, I said, "In five years, AI is going to be writing these academic papers that we're writing right now," and it was dismissed. I'm like, "Okay, whatever." And here we are. Now, there's absolutely no denying that, that we are on the verge of a complete shift in how scholarly information is processed and produced.

Joanie Mahoney: And it's going so fast that policing it is going to be difficult. How are you going to know what information to trust?

Matt Smith: Really, no one has an idea yet, other than that we are going to have to use other sets of tools to do that, as humans are very easily fooled. We have our own biases and even experts are easily fooled. Something hardwired in us.

Joanie Mahoney: So you're a young person.

Matt Smith: I'd like to think.

Joanie Mahoney: But despite that, the library business has changed so much just over the course of your career.

Matt Smith: Oh, just over the course of my career tremendously. I started my career with the end of the print indices and volumes and volumes of...

Joanie Mahoney: Were you using the Dewey Decimal system?

- Matt Smith:** I've used Dewey and LC and Sudoc and that really bizarre law system that I've tried to block out of my head.
- Joanie Mahoney:** LexisNexis?
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. I've used LexisNexis when they were legal classification system. I had a small law library I maintained in my first library job. They had a paralegal and another program that I can't remember. It's almost 20 years now.
- Joanie Mahoney:** But you more than me for sure have really had to reinvent yourself as a librarian because the library has changed so much.
- Matt Smith:** Absolutely. But the important thing that never changes is the library is the intersection of people and information and even technology. The library has always been that.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And if you focus on that core mission, it falls into place.
- Matt Smith:** Yes. If you just keep yourself in the frame of, "This is what the nature of this is," and interact with your community to understand your patrons, your patrons' needs, learn how to interact with them to really get at the truth of the information need, and that goes back to what you're saying, finding what you need. Honestly, a lot of my job is asking people questions until they solve the problem themselves.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, you're like Socrates.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. But truly, that's the reference interview, which is an immemorial component of librarianship, the reference interview. And through those questions, people start to... Because often when they come to you, they don't really know what they need yet. You get occasionally, "Oh, do you have this book?" Okay, those are easy. "I'm looking for this article." Okay, that's easy. It's a known item.
- But I think what you're alluding to is going into the unknown to discover what you're really looking for, and that's where the reference interview comes in, and that hasn't changed. Maybe the questions or how you've searched and where you looked, but fundamentally, it's the same principles at the core of librarianship as the world moves on.
- Joanie Mahoney:** There's also an advocacy role that you play, and I've seen it here in my time at ESF. You are a very strong advocate for students, but you're also a strong advocate for your colleagues on the faculty, and I wonder, is that born of your union role? Or were you a natural fit to be president of UUP because that was your personality?

- Matt Smith:** I think that is my personality, and I did prior union work. I want to help people. That's really what it comes down to. I want to help people.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I think you and I together probably have a couple dozen examples of people feeling comfortable reaching out to you but not going elsewhere. You bring that information to us to try to solve problems for both faculty and students.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah, because ultimately it's these are the people we're here to serve, and that's one thing that's really great about ESF is that, really, we're all on the same page, which is wonderful. Yes, there's things we may quibble about or differentiate on from time to time, but frankly, inconsequential in the grand scheme.
- Joanie Mahoney:** One of the things that I value the most in our relationship is that you understand that the outcome wasn't necessarily deliberate, and by that, I mean there are people who will sit and feel like they're getting the short end of the stick, and you've said, "Speak up," because if they're aware, they'll make it more equitable.
- But there are things that I don't know as president of the college, and you can't assume that the way something is going was after people sat around in a meeting and said, "Let's go that way." Some of these things take on a life of their own, and you stopping and bringing to my attention something that needs to be addressed has been hugely valuable to me.
- Matt Smith:** I'm glad to hear that. It sounds cliché or hyperbolic, but ESF really is my dream job. When I saw the opportunity, I said, "That's really interesting."
- Joanie Mahoney:** How lucky for you to be in your dream job like that. That's awesome.
- Matt Smith:** It really is. I think I've had one day where I really didn't want to come to work all this time.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I hope it wasn't in the last five years.
- Matt Smith:** Oh, well, no. I should say one day here that I haven't really wanted to come to work, and I just think I was really tired. I just really want to stay in bed. I don't want to go to work today.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I'm glad that that passed quickly.
- Matt Smith:** But otherwise, it's real easy to get up and come to work because I know we get to do good things.
- Joanie Mahoney:** That matter.

- Matt Smith:** We get to help people. And they matter. I mean, yeah, we need those boxes moved. Okay. Or, "Great, I support a program that makes another e-banker. Yay." The world needs e-bankers, sure, but ultimately, I think they're more culpable for the world's problems rather than solving them.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And now you're working among people that are solving some of the world's problems. And I also read that you have a real appreciation for the academic mission of the college, and see your role as librarian as fostering other people's ability to do that work.
- Matt Smith:** Absolutely. I'm never going to be an environmental scientist. I work with information. I work with people. But I think this is where I can really draw on the broad experience of my career and different jobs I've had to positively impact those people and help them do their jobs, and that's how I can in some way change the world in a larger way.
- Joanie Mahoney:** You'll be on your porch on your rocking chair in your retirement and be able to point to some of these wonderful students that we have that have gone on to do great things.
- Matt Smith:** Hopefully. And that's one of those things that really is rewarding and good about a small institution. You can know those students and hang on to them. I have students I've stayed in contact with at any one of my institutions, but there's going to be a whole lot more from ESF, because again, we're all here for the same reason, so it's real easy to form this lasting bond with people, and that's a motivator.
- Joanie Mahoney:** One of the first things that Neil Murphy told me, my predecessor in the president's role here, was that when you start to get bogged down or not in a good place, you just have to go outside and interact with the students. It is so true.
- And you can't help but want to be supportive, because these students come here, and I say it all the time, they're not only smart, but they're so passionate and they're such good people that want to be in service roles to their fellow human beings. It's remarkable that we're like this giant magnet for really good people.
- Matt Smith:** It is. Anytime I meet with a candidate for a role here on campus, I say, "You've had your career and you've been to good places, so have I, but you will not encounter a student body anywhere else like you will encounter here." And I maintain that as good as they are, we have better.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Is as good as your students might be...

- Matt Smith:** Yeah, ours are better.
- Joanie Mahoney:** That's a very succinct way of saying it. So tell me just a little bit about your UUP role beyond what I see. I know you have an advocacy role on behalf of the college with your colleagues in UUP across the SUNY system.
- Matt Smith:** So I am chapter president here. I'm very grateful that the body here has entrusted me to do it again for my third term, now. It flies by.
- Joanie Mahoney:** How long are your terms?
- Matt Smith:** Two years.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Oh, that is a long time.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. And I'm going to continue to do it as long as they continue to trust me, as much as it costs. But yes, the advocacy role has become so important. And really in my prior union work, it was a service role, which is where I fit. But the nature of the world has changed enough that the advocacy aspects are just as important and enable the service capacity of the union.
- Yes, it involves working and contacting local politicians on behalf of ESF and SUNY institutions. It involves going to Albany. It involves engaging my membership to get them to do the same.
- Joanie Mahoney:** It must've been pretty gratifying last year to see the state respond to UUP's plea for more resources for SUNY colleges.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah, it really was. It was a tremendous win, and I think it really demonstrates that if people were feeling disenchanting with the political system that, well, maybe you shouldn't be, because look what we just accomplished.
- And then again, with a fantastic contract that broke 20 years worth of trend of ones and zeroes, and maybe a two that slipped our wages, unfortunately, far behind many of our competition.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Which is terrible for the whole system.
- Matt Smith:** It really is.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Not to speak of the individuals that are trying to support their own families, but for us as an institution, the number of people that don't take the job because of the salaries here is...
- Matt Smith:** Discouraging.

- Joanie Mahoney:** Yes.
- Matt Smith:** It's extremely discouraging, because you want these fantastic people to work with these amazing students.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And what we have here are fantastic faculty and staff that also have a willingness to sacrifice personally to be in an institution like ESF, and you can't really expect that that's going to happen forever.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. It's not going to happen forever, and that's part of my advocacy role and engagement with the membership. It's like, "Well, yeah, I have offers elsewhere, but they're not with those students." It's just, "No, I can't leave the students here."
- Joanie Mahoney:** Right, and that's ace in the hole for us.
- Matt Smith:** And it's a double-edged sword, like you acknowledged. It's ace in the hole. We can keep good people if we can attract them. But again, you got to pay your mortgage. You got to put your own kids through college. That's something I know we're working on, but it's really tough in the state climate right now.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And I know you're going back now as we're on the eve of another budget cycle in the state, and I know you were in touch with me yesterday to get information about what our finances look like so you can add our voice to that bigger conversation.
- Matt Smith:** It's fortunately easy to advocate for ESF.
- Joanie Mahoney:** I agree.
- Matt Smith:** Because we are an institution with purpose and what we accomplish is tangible and does change the world, and that sets our voice apart and above the others at the table.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And you have a bigger job really as the person representing ESF, because we're not like the others, and as I've said, sometimes I can sort of feel the eye rolling, like, "Oh, sure, you're special," but we really are, and I admire the state's determination to keep this education affordable and to keep tuition low.
- But when they do that and keep the allocation from the state flat, and you have a small institution that has small classes and STEM-based, not a college, there are in the SUNY system where you can put hundreds of students into a lecture hall and it makes financial sense

- Matt Smith:** And teach them with TAs. The one size fits none model, unfortunately. And I'll just keep delivering the message until they repeat it back to me.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And we're grateful for what you did last year, and it did translate into more money for ESF. I think it came up short of what...
- Matt Smith:** Not what it should have been, but yes.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And I appreciate that you think that and are going back with that same mantra, but we did benefit from the work that you and your colleagues at UUP did last year.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah, yeah. I appreciate you saying that. And we're not done by far. It was a great win, and then they kind of robbed us of it after the fact in a lot of ways, so now people are upset.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Well, there's more money in the system.
- Matt Smith:** There is, and that's important. There's more money in the system, and we've shown our advocacy can work, and our members see that it can work between that and the contract, so we're more engaged than ever.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Good. So let's talk before I let you go about your vision for the library, because it's pretty significant, the change. You and I met, I think it was last year, or was it two years ago?
- Matt Smith:** Probably both.
- Joanie Mahoney:** We talked about moving the archive.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah, a couple years ago now.
- Joanie Mahoney:** And that happened. Walk us through what you're hoping we accomplish now with the library.
- Matt Smith:** Yeah. Moon Library has changed a lot since I've been here at ESF. I recognized that we weren't using our spaces well. They were a bit of a legacy of days when everything was much more print-based. And again, having a great team of people that are all on the same page and here for the same purpose.
- It's easy to say, "We can ... to provide more to our students." So we did and brought the Academic Success Center in. We engage with our students. They said, "We need this type of space," so we move the archives off campus. That moves us there.

And what that moves us towards is delivering that library experience that our students would have at our peer and aspirant institutions that have perhaps benefited from better investment over time. And that is not a discredit to anyone here at ESF. It's a function of the state. We've not had the mechanism to invest in the facility.

I want a facility as fantastic as our students, with those 24/7 spaces they asked for that centers these student-facing services on campus so they don't have to go to different buildings where these offices move around every couple of years; that they know that they can go to the library.

Part of it's selfish. If they have a positive experience at the Academic Success Center, that reflects on the library and makes them more willing to engage with us because they've come here to get help. We just need these spaces that are flexible, adaptable, that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, that are just not these monolithic reading tables of days gone.

Joanie Mahoney: Actually need outlets now.

Matt Smith: We need power. Yeah. The 1968 electrical system in the building, believe it or not, is not adequate in 2023 anymore. But there's a great facilities team here that a number of them have had enough experience in academics to understand student use that have worked on other comparable projects, and I'm pretty confident that in the next few years, we can truly transform this facility of yesteryear to a space that really is made for everyone on campus.

Joanie Mahoney: And I think we're on our way.

Matt Smith: I think we are.

Joanie Mahoney: I know that you and your staff, having the student relationship that you have has made it better. You have drawn things to our attention and been the voice for the students in an effort to make this whole project better, and I love the idea that there's this hub where the clubs will be, student government will be, as you said, the Student Success Center, and just an open door for students to come in whenever it works for them, and for that to be the role of the library going forward.

Matt Smith: And we are that important third space, that you can be here without agenda, and to realize that, that's what we need to do.

Joanie Mahoney: One of the things we talked about was the computer lab, and in going back and doing a little bit of homework, I've learned that we have 11 computer labs across...

- Matt Smith:** I think I've heard a figure like that.
- Joanie Mahoney:** But because of the conversation we had, the facilities team spoke up and said, "A component is that the lab needs to be around the people that the students want to be asking for help."
- Matt Smith:** Yes. A lab in the corner of a building is a lab. It's not a place for learning.
- Joanie Mahoney:** You have definitely had your voice heard in multiple ways here at the college, and I am grateful on a professional level and on a personal level. I also know that you and I both lost parents around the same time, and that especially for you as an only child, is a whole different... I'm one of a big group, but I know that we were both going through that at the same time. And it really gave me an appreciation for, as you said, the person.
- Here you are doing your UUP advocacy, advocating for students, doing your day job, being the boss of everybody at the library, and I know that over here you're dealing with this excruciating experience that we all have to go through at some point. But watching you do that, I just thought, "Wow, he's really a remarkable person."
- Matt Smith:** I appreciate you saying that, and truthfully, my job here helped get through that. And as you know, getting through that is a continuous thing. It's not a binary thing.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Exactly. It's one step forward, two steps back sometimes.
- Matt Smith:** Absolutely. And I'm still working on the estate and maybe I should have asked you more advice there.
- Joanie Mahoney:** Put my lawyer hat back on.
- Matt Smith:** Exactly. Put your lawyer hat back on as it's dragged out over a couple years now.
- Joanie Mahoney:** But you doing it on your own, I never really stopped and thought about what it must be like for somebody in that situation because I have a big family, and when you get to your wits' end, you look up and I have a sibling that can step in, and you're left to do it all on your own.
- Matt Smith:** It is a lot. And I'm grateful that my wife has a large family, so when the inevitability comes on her side, of course I'll be there for her, but that she has a host of siblings. But after going through this, yes, I'm going to try to wrap things up as neat and tidy as I can before my time.

Joanie Mahoney: I totally agree. I will tell you, I am Marie Kondo-ing my house after having gone through that experience.

Matt Smith: Absolutely. It's like, "All right, we can move this to a living trust."

Joanie Mahoney: Yeah, I know. And it's like, I think now when I look at things, how would I feel if this was being left to me? If I don't want it, then I'm going to take care of it. That experience was quite a learning experience.

Matt Smith: Absolutely. Absolutely. It is. It's one of those things.

Joanie Mahoney: Well, I look forward to many, many more years of working with you. I am enjoying our partnership and I'm very grateful for all the work that you do on behalf of the college in ways that we see and in ways that a lot of us haven't seen.

Matt Smith: I appreciate you saying that, and I want to reflect the same sentiment, that it's nice not having an adversarial environment to come into. We come in, we're here for the same reason, we can talk about our differences and we can work out a solution. And our commitment to making it better, that makes it easy.

Joanie Mahoney: Well said. I hope you have a wonderful holiday season, a little bit of rest and relaxation that you've earned.

Matt Smith: Thank you. And you, as well. I daresay may even not even look at my email for a couple of weeks.

Joanie Mahoney: And then we will roll up our sleeves and get going on Moon Library.

Matt Smith: Yeah. Lots of things to do. Yes.

Joanie Mahoney: Thank you, Matt, for taking time with us.

Matt Smith: Thank you very much for the opportunity.