

**Winery Workers in Virginia
afc2017/017**

Name of Interviewer: Kim D. Stryker

Name of Interviewee: Neal Wavra

Transcription By: Eric Botts

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[00:00:10]

KS: So, this is Kim Stryker, and today is Friday, October 6, 2017 it's about 2:07pm and we're sitting in the upstairs dining room of Field and Main restaurant in Marshall, Virginia and I'm sitting here with Neal Wavra. Did I say it right?

NW: Yes.

KS: And you spell your name N-E-A-L?

NW: Yeah, yeah. W-A-V (as in "Virginia") R-A.

KS: Okay. And what is the address I can put down on record for you?

NW: Do you wanna use Field and Main?

KS: We can.

NW: Sure. It's um, PO box for mailing, but: XXX Marshall, Virginia

KS: Okay. And a phone number?

NW: (XXX) XXX... I'm sorry, XXX-XXXX.

KS: Okay. Email?

NW: XXXX

KS: And what was your date of birth?

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NW: XXX 1977

KS: And were you born here, grew up around here?

NW: Born just outside of Chicago.

[00:01:48]

KS: Okay and where do you live now?

NW: I live in Warrenton.

KS: Okay. And... Am I forgetting any of the major details? How long have you lived in Virginia?

NW: Since 2008. Brief stint, um, 2000... Gosh, what was that? 2003? For about a year, I was in New York. But I went to school in Falls Church.

KS: Oh! Right down the street from me. We talked about this... On the other side of Falls Church?

NW: Yeah.

KS: Cool. Um... 2008. Okay, so what would you... What is your position here at Field and Main?

NW: I'm the proprietor of Field and Main Restaurant, and as such, I do whatever is necessary.

KS: Right! All things! And when was Field and Main opened?

NW: We opened September 1st of last year, so 2016.

KS: Okay and what would... How do you describe your restaurant to people?

NW: We are a community-focused farm-to-table restaurant set on Main Street, but sourcing from fields, farms, and artisans that are around us.

KS: Okay, and so what is your relationship to Virginia wine.

[00:03:21]

NW: First and foremost back in the '90s, when I was an intern living in DC, I would come out to Virginia wine country and just the countryside here too spend as much of my time as possible. Fell in love with it from that perspective. Began drinking wines like Linden back then, and when I relocated here in 2008, I picked up that relationship again with Jim Law at Linden and...

[00:03:50]

KS: Jim Law is one of the names that keeps coming up over and over again.

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NW: He's the Zen master of winemaking in Virginia you have some older sage producers, you have some dynamos and dynamic folks, but Jim is one of the epicenters of Virginia wine. There are not any less of them--less wineries. There's many more today. I mean 20 years or so later. When I was drinking wine then it was just more of an enjoyment, a pastime, something that I just wasn't as passionate about it and excited about it, so as I came back and took over the dining program at Goodstone in Middleburg, I started to put together a list of Virginia wines and do Virginia-based wine dinners, and Jim was my first one. One of my first ones.

KS: When was Goodstone? When did you have that?

NW: 2008 and 2009, and so Virginia wine became something that I was interested in wanted to do more with, and it made sense--we were in the countryside, we were representing foodstuffs from the area--why wouldn't we represent wines too? So I started to try to get to know as much as I possibly could about the wines of the region I was in, and it was one of the major drawing factors to moving to Virginia, because I had a... I was looking at a job in California, and I was looking at a job here in Virginia, and California full scale wine would've been kind of the Napa area, which to me seemed like it was already done. Not that it certainly isn't dynamic and interesting still today, and it is, but that there was no real trajectory. It was sort of already a baked cake, which you could decide to have a slice of and enjoy or not, it was up to you, but you weren't gonna put an ingredient in the cake; you weren't gonna shift or have any say in what kind of cake was being made, and so I wasn't interested. I was more interest, I should say, in being here where some people are still questioning whether there should be a cake. And people like Jim were making really solid efforts and inroads into making some great wines and then his proteges were doing incredible things and excited things and, so, it was a no-brainer for me. I like the idea that on the East Coast you could have a frontier, and we do, I think, in the way of wine, yet have tremendous history going back--the longest history in this country of actual wine interest and not yet success to kind of match that interest. So it was on what I felt was a decent precipice of getting closer to, even in my lifetime, being able to see I think some really pretty wonderful quality wines that reflect place and are distinctive come about, and I might able to showcase some of that. And in 2008, the effort was to showcase. Now, at Field and Main, I think I have a different platform and an ability not only just showcase but maybe even help--Field and Main and my other company, Fable Hospitality, which I use...

[00:06:46]

KS: What is it called again?

NW: Fable.

KS: Okay. Like a fairy tale?

NW: Where the farm and table meet.

KS: You are good.

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NW: So I do... I have done some consulting with wineries, principally on hospitality related issues, but on a couple of occasions I've gotten a chance to blend wines and then kind of shift and focus on where those wines might situate themselves in the world of wine, benchmarking their wines, and I'm not a winemaker. I don't grow fruit. I don't pick them. I don't make those decisions, but I've had a little, tiny influence in that, and I've been able to share a broader perspective of, "Hey, if you want to sell your wines in a retail shop, if you want to sell your wines in a wine shop or in a restaurant, there are some things to consider, and then as a result of that I've been able to direct for the last two years the Loudoun County Wine Competition, which has been great because we... As I put together the program and as I was solicited to do so, I had a couple of parameters that I wanted to take place if I were to do it. I've been a part of a number of different competitions and some are more meritorious than others. Most of them we were asked to score wine, and best score wins a bronze or silver or gold or double-gold or double-platinum or some kind of medal. And that's beneficial perhaps from a marketing standpoint, but bronze is not great; it doesn't denote really quality. I remember often tasting certain wines and saying, like, "I don't care for this wine. This wine has a few faults and therefore it has to be scored X based on the parameters I've been given, but I probably would buy that wine for a restaurant for a certain application, and that's never information that was conveyed, so I put together a panel of judges, and I asked them to score the wines, but then I also asked them to fill out a questionnaire. And the questionnaire gives feedback and information and asks, you know, "Even if you don't care for this wine and you were tasked to serve it, how would you? Where would you? What would you do to improve this wine? What do you find that's positive about this wine?" And all that feedback goes back to the producers, and I give a presentation to the producers at the conclusion of the competition, sort of summarizing the general trends and comments overall from the competition. I think from the feedback I've gotten from some people, that's been extremely beneficial to some, so I feel like I have a greater impact in advancing not, sort of, what wines you want to make in your winery for your tasting room sales, which you can do with hospitality and the beauty of your setting and the gracious service that you provide and whatever else. Quality's not as big a component of that wine sale category, whereas if you're trying to sell in a restaurant or retail or be recognized on a regional, sub-regional, national, or even international scope, you need to think about things in different ways.

[00:09:43]

KS: So the strategies of, "What are your end goals?"

NW: Yes.

KS: If you want to win all the prizes, you go this way. If you want to...

NW: Yeah. And so that's been really beneficial to and then, as we're here now a year into Field and Main, we're starting to kind of make a greater effort of figuring out ways in which to showcase, and we still do wine dinners here once a month, principally, and they're not all Virginia focus, but maybe half of them or so are, and one of the major efforts that we undertook to start with when we opened was to try to demystify the idea that Virginia wine was always expensive in restaurants, and there's a merit to being expensive. It's handcrafted and hand harvested and smaller scale, and it costs more to do that, so it's understandable, but I got a lot of feedback when I was running Ashby Inn and trying to serve Virginia wine that "No, it's just too

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expensive, and it's not good enough." And there were plenty of times when I'd pour something, and someone would say, "Well that is good; it's tasty. I might consider that next time, but it's still pretty expensive. I can get a cheaper wine from somewhere else." And that's true. You can find cheaper wines almost always from somewhere else. So we created, with Early Mountain Vineyards, a series of wines that we can pour on tap. So we have a white, a rosé, and a red that we've blended to kind of go optimally with all of our food and comes in a liter or 1/2 liter or glass format, and it's very much akin to what you experience in Europe--say you're in Italy, you're a small town, and the local wine that's just in a juice glass, rocks glass; it's not anything fancy; it's part of the meal that you would not remark on more than you would remark on any other part of the meal, but it was absent it would--you'd be missing something from the meal, and so it contributes in a wonderful way too, and so... You know, it's \$36 for a liter. It's by definition one of the most... It is one of the most affordable things that's on our wine list, and it's 100% Virginia fruit and showcases a food and wine culture that should be part of the Virginia scope. You have a lot of folks go to wineries and purchase wines at winery, take them home, and consume at home. There isn't a full-on kind of restaurant culture in Virginia wine. That's changing.

[00:12:05]

KS: Yeah, um, you bring up an interesting point because just yesterday I was interviewing a woman at Greenhill winery, and she was talking about how especially Virginia wines are good for eating and drinking together, like they're supposed to be paired with food more than maybe a California wine which is made for big impact flavor--she called them sort of cocktail wines, and she said, you know, a lot of people don't understand that Virginia wine should be eaten with food, and it's not something you're gonna sit and just have a glass by itself. So, I mean, it puts you in a great position being a restaurateur, to have that opportunity to make those wines and foods shine together. Is that--that was part of your big goal, I'm assuming.

[00:12:55]

NW: It is. I do find that to be true. I said that before--I remember being at one of the Virginia wine summits, and and there was a panel, and they were talking about food wine pairing, and they were talking about the difficulty, perhaps, of selling Virginia wine, and I said, "Well the difficulty is trying to position Virginia wine to compete against a \$10 malbec." It's not as challenging in the restaurant context if your list is set up in such a fashion to focus on if you want California, and it's premium, it's going to be more expensive than the Virginia wines I'm going to carry and may not match as well as the Virginia wine might with whatever you're eating this evening, and so there's a greater level of versatility from Virginia wines in that context--100% true. And yet, it's kind of, perhaps, difficult to say, "I'm gonna pop home and drink a Virginia cab Franc or a viognier for my after-dinner... or my, my after-work, pre-dinner kind of cocktail wine." Those are wines that are probably more well-suited to just having with something to eat, which puts them in a different realm. I think most people who buy the wines from Virginia from wineries take them home and drink them through meals, but you don't find that happening as much in the context restaurants yet, and that's partly because of cost.

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KS: So going back to the cost issue, what what are the elements that you think that are creating that situation more specifically for why--why do Virginia wines tend to... I mean most wineries I go to, its \$26-28 for a lower price and up.

NW: Yeah, and that's, I think, principally you have a pretty substantial investment to get any vineyard off the ground and then most wineries, and particularly tasting rooms, didn't just put up a shed or a shack. They put up a very nice facility.

KS: They're beautiful image space...

NW: They're gorgeous spaces.

KS: Yeah.

NW: Greenhill is a spectacular base, and so on and so forth. There's 216 or so wineries, and almost all of them have something at least to be proud of and excited about by way of a space to entertain, and that costs money, and then it costs money to staff, and then you're talking about productions of 1,500, 2,000, 3,000, maybe 6--we're talking a lot of production. 18,000 cases, I mean... I remember one tasting out in Californian, I think it was Sterling, and Sterling was talking about a sauvignon blanc--a small production sauvignon blanc, kind of off the general track of what they usually do, and it's 16,000 cases. That's four times, five times the average production of a small winery here, you know. It needs to cost a little bit. It is hand-tended, and we have a lot of variability in the vineyards, and weather's a challenge--climate's a challenge here, and site location can be a challenge. There are not ways you can mechanize production in the easiest way, and so you have to be hands-on, and that costs money. And other the regions in the world have made that argument and charged more for that, and people generally pay for it. What they haven't done here in Virginia yet is figure out that that's what our message is, and so, some producers are making that case pretty compellingly, but production is always low, and so putting your wine into a wholesale situation to get it more broadly available means you're undercutting your potential to sell at retail pricing right out of your tasting room where you're not paying someone to even take it at a loss somewhere else. So building the Virginia name or the Virginia brand is something that hasn't happened as readily. It is being worked on by the folks at the Virginia Wine Board, and certain producers are taking it on themselves. Some distributors work to try to do that as well, but overall there isn't, or hasn't been as cohesive an effort as there is presently underway, but hasn't been it's been as cohesive an effort because it just is not as cost-effective, and the return as a sole operator is not there.

[00:17:16]

KS: Right. Well, and it, I think the sole operator thing is a bit of an issue too because you've got so many independent people, personality-wise, and financially who have set out to make whatever wine they're going to make, and they have their own interests and their own passions and whatever they're bringing to it, so do you see that sometimes being an issue in Virginia wine in particular that not always everybody wants to be on the same page as far as what we're trying to make here?

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NW: Sure, sure, absolutely, that's a reality I think of any such situation and circumstance, but at some point the best regions, or the most recognizable regions, that were not once recognizable, the ones that have emerged, that have gone from emerging wine region to now fully emerged, got together and had a folks who kind of agreed on a certain number of things, and said, "This is, this is the message we're going to put forward, and that doesn't mean that we're precluding anybody else from doing something different, but that's not the message that goes forward. And if you don't fit this sort of scope, you're not going to come forward to be a larger representation of what's happening here." And I think some of those efforts underway. It's a challenging thing to do politically; it's a challenging thing to do socially. And yet at the same time, the idea of, you know, the rising tide rises all ships would potentially benefit people coming this way. Some might argue, and maybe justly, that "I don't really need that to happen. I got a beautiful venue. I'm in a good location. I make wine, and people... I could make twice the amount of wine and sell that too, so why would I care?" That's a fair argument from my perspective. As a restaurateur who likes to promote Virginia as a region and as a place, that doesn't attract me, but then that person, that winery's not also looking for me to represent them.

[00:19:14]

KS: No, yeah.

NW: They don't need me to.

KS: You're mutually not interested.

NW: Yeah yeah. I mean, I have full respect of what they're doing and probably wanna go visit their space and enjoy their hospitality and their location, but as a whole, the Virginia wine... Virginia wine that needs that branding and that approach, but it also needs the underpinning of that, which is a broader spectrum of quality wine production that reflects the right grapes planted in the right place, harvested in the right way, and made in the right fashion to reflect that place. Those are things that you see certain producers doing now that are raising the level of quality, and that quality is a good thing. I'm not interested in Virginia just cuz I'm romantically interested in Virginia and I'll take whatever comes my way. It has to be good. And if it's more expensive and of less quality, what's the point?

[00:20:07]

KS: Right. Getting drunk, I guess, I don't know.

NW: Well, there's a lot cheaper ways to do that.

KS: True. True.

NW: A lot cheaper ways. Not that cost is the only consideration. For me the greatest joy in Virginia is finding the relationship with someone, say, like Jim Law and getting to try... Oh, I don't know, we could even talk about sauvignon blanc, for example, the sauvignon that we poured at my wedding, and it was a very meaningful to me. That connection is what's most exciting about Virginia, and the fact that... I mean I love France; I love Italy; I really enjoy those wines; I've spent time in California and Washington and Oregon; I like those wines. I like wine.

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In almost every region--there's a few regions right now that are kind of exciting that way. They have emerged. You're already drinking established producers, and the vintages are coming out from them, and they're exciting, and they're neat, and they're different, but they're still kind of understanding. We are drinking the curve in Virginia, where you might get a producer who goes, "Ahhh, that was the wrong decision, but let's drink that wine and figure out, okay that next year make this shift and..." The next 20 years are gonna be so dynamic and so much more... The next 10 years will eclipse the last 20. The next 20 will eclipse the last forty for sure, and I think that, you know, the next 10, the 10 after that will just dwarf what we're doing. We're making so many more advances because people are starting to talk and share and say, "Oh my gosh, that's a good practice, so how are you handling that, and yeah, you know what, we are in clay, and clay not where I'm gonna put the cabernet sauvignon, but we should try merlot here and your site's is different than mine; were really close to each other, but they're just different, and we should be treating them different."

[00:21:50]

KS: I mean that's definitely one of the challenges people keep bringing up is that we have all these kind of little micro climates and, with all the hills and valleys and whatever and the mountains, that you get some super minerality and then some really hard-packed clay and some wet bottoms and, you know, arid high tops and all kinds of stuff. I mean you can try to grow all sorts of things, but maybe you only have little pockets to work with that have that particular thing you're looking for.

NW: That's right. And, I think you had this--you had this growth of a few folks who wanted to plant grapes who were driven to do that and got a spot--Gabriele Rausse with Monticello, the Zonin family coming in at Barboursville and Luca, Jim Law--starting out with that idea like, "Let's plant a vineyard." Then you have folks who saw them kind of starting at it and going, "Yeah, I have X amount of acreage in my family plot. We used to raise cattle. We used to do X. We had this farming. We did tobacco," or whatever it was, "Let's plant a vineyard now," which put some vineyard space on, but those aren't necessarily the ideal locations for vineyards. They might have a few spots on the property that work well, but they were not sited for vineyards; they were sited because they owned them. And now you're getting to see some of the protegeses from the great producers starting, figuring out, "I gotta go find a different site," or "I can't find a site, so I'm gonna work with a bunch of different growers who are already an establishment and make the best I can under them." The next wave to come to Virginia, and that's where I think this next 10 years is incredibly important is, where is the best vineyard land. It doesn't have to be, and probably is not going to be, where there's a crossroad, where there's a population center right where you're going to have a fantastic tasting room, but it may be where you go get your grapes and bring them back, and there are plenty of other models for that which exist. Willamette Valley's a model. Walla Walla, Washington's a model where you're not visiting the vineyard; you're visiting the winery maybe, or you're visiting the tasting room, which is put in intentionally where a population center is.

[00:24:08]

KS: Do you know areas like that, that have been identified in Virginia. I'm thinking like maybe like people who used to farm tobacco or something like that that are no longer able to make a living there. The land might be really cheap and...

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NW: I know people like Paradise Springs and like Sunset Hills, for example, are looking at Shenandoah. It's much farther away; there's limestone out there; it's cheaper land than trying to build on 50, right outside of Middleburg or something. Or off of 7 or 9.

KS: Where you'll have your tasting room.

NW: And they already have tasting rooms. Paradise Springs is one of the closest to DC, and Sunset Hills has 50 West, and it has Sunset Hills, and so it has two tasting room outlets to put in.

KS: Oh, that's--50 West is right next to Cana?

NW: Yes.

KS: Okay.

[00:24:51]

NW: Yep. And they're already kind of working that model, and that's exciting, I think, what they're trying to do and their partners in on developing multiple different vineyards out west, and that makes sense. The Blue Ridge here, and all this Blue Ridge, there's hillside there that, well, especially up here is probably too expensive to develop. But you've got two really good vineyards right on that, right here where if we were a little bit higher you could probably see that. And then on the flip side of that is Delaplane, but you've got two good growing spots doing pretty well. More of that could be planted, for example, and maybe it will, maybe it won't. And you've got Spring Lot Vineyards up there as well, which is close to Hog's Farm.

KS: What are they called?

NW: Spring Lot Vineyard.

KS: I haven't heard of that one.

NW: John Everson. He's a wonderful man. He'd be great to interview. John sells his fruit to Delaplane.

[00:25:43]

KS: Oh, okay. I do have calls in with Delaplane.

NW: Yeah, Jim and Betsy'd be great to talk to too.

KS: Yeah, a lot of people...

NW: Good people.

KS: Yeah, yeah.

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NW: But, so Jim's model--they have vineyards planted, and they started in 2007, so they didn't really have any of their own fruit, and they don't have enough of their own fruit to, kind of, make an estate-only production, so they source, and they have sourced, and they source from people like John at Spring Lot. They source from Williams Gap. They source from their own site. And they buy some fruit where they can otherwise when they think it's of quality. Jim's a very good winemaker. Business buyer by Jim Law. One of those people who kind of went to a couple of those classes and said, "I want to do this and, here I go, I'm gonna make it in my garage first. Then I'm gonna go to like four different wineries at, like 2 in the morning and get started and then buy that space and get going there." So it's really inspirational. It's really neat. He and his wife do a great job up there, and their wines are... So, um... That's exciting. I'm sure that's the case in other wine regions too, but this one is filled with those stories, and the next vintage is always more promising. You learned a lot last year. The extent that they're all trying to run small businesses--you know, I have an absolute understanding and appreciation for that. They don't get a chance to kind of exchange information as much, but that's starting to happen more, and the more that that happens, just things get better.

[00:27:07]

KS: Well that's one of the things, too, that they've been bringing up at, um, the hospitality aspect of it: you may love looking at grapevines, you may love making wine, you may love farming, but the hospitality thing is a big component of what I think makes the Virginia wine industry quite different than some other areas. It's really a lot more about this day trip in the country and having this lovely view and sitting in this lovely space and kind of being a little bit pampered, and that's different than even what you see sometimes in Napa and Sonoma, where it's just much more, like, efficient about, yeah it might be a beautiful place, but they're like, "Come in, drink the wine. No, we don't serve food. See you later." You know they're kind of like, "You're here for the wine..."

NW: "Get in line for the tasting."

KS: Right.

NW: Get your 2-ounce--or ounce pour, rather, and move on.

KS: And move on, yeah. So what do you think it is about that, about why the hospitality aspect of it has become such a big part of Virginia wine.

[00:28:18]

NW: I think that you have a distance to travel for most of the population to get to you, and so if they've got to come out to you, they want to stay a little moment. I think that was a natural way for the establishment of a lot of these vineyards right off the bat, to have, "All right, well if you're gonna come out for the day, it's an hour, hour-and-a-half away or whatever it might be, you can bring a picnic blanket and just hang out, and that wasn't a big deal for the first couple wineries, and I think also the classification of what they were; they were farm wineries, so they had less regulation, they could do a little bit of whatever they wanted, they couldn't serve paired foods per se, but they could showcase for you their farm wine, and you could go visit the farm,

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and that's the idea. And I think that sort of set out the idea of, "Are you gonna go apple-picking this weekend? No let's go check out the grapes, and let's go drink some wine, and maybe, you know, have some bread and cheese and bring a picnic blanket."

[00:29:16]

KS: Right, or, "We'll take the kids apple-picking, and then when they're tired, we'll go drink wine."

NW: Yes, and I think that kind of established when you had less wineries, and it made sense, and it came sort of a de-facto model, and then grew from there too, where people started to build bigger facilities, nicer facilities, facilities that could do more and then some folks decided, "You know what, I don't even need to have grapes or a lot of grapes, and under the farm winery ordinance, maybe I could just do events and produce a few grapes, and I'll have basically a liquor license, which allows me to do that, or a wine and beer license--it's actually wine license rather..." So that kind of, I think, pushed a sort of organic trend of people coming out and visiting to a whole different level, which some counties push back on and others embraced fully.

[00:30:07]

KS: I do remember... I feel like, early in this whole development, hearing arguments of like, "Well, we need to be able to serve food because there's no... There's nothing out here." I mean, before you guys came with Field and Main to Marshall, the last spot I remember being able to get things was in the planes, and they were only those couple restaurants, and they were only open limited hours, and, you know, if you happened to hit it right, you might be able to get some food, and then it would be all the way out to like Front Royal or Winchester on the other side, so there was this kind of dead zone of retail and commercial that I feel like people were using the argument, like, "Well, we have to be able to serve people something, like bottled drinks and cheese or, you know, some kind of packaged things." Is that sort of what started chipping away at that and then...

[00:31:02]

NW: I think to extent, and then Fauquier County--this county, where we are--is pretty steadfast on the idea that you're not gonna do a lot of serving of food. I mean, food trucks can come into certain spaces and do some events, but they're not interested in having a lot of commerce take place in the countryside. They wish to have the commerce in the villages and the townships that are in the county, so Field and Main can exist on Main Street in Marshall, but it couldn't exist on a farm in Delaplane, for example.

[00:31:36]

KS: So that actually is prohibited. There's like...

NW: Yeah, they would probably not allow that to happen. And wineries themselves can have a certain amount of events in a given year that invite people over and have it catered and do something along those lines, but a day-to-day service of food is not something that's allowed in Fauquier. You see it changing in other places. Lost Creek, for example, just hired a chef in Loudoun County and are producing small bites and bits of food on a regular basis at their winery. And that's changing, which is neat. I mean, there's lots of models, like you said, too. In Napa, in-

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out, but you go to Melbourne, and you go to Mornington Peninsula, for example, in Australia, and every place is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and they have world class cuisine—full-scale kitchens that are producing amazing food matched with wines, but it's not a tasting; it's a dining room... You sit down to a full-on wine list. Yeah, you can go to the cellar or what they call tasting rooms, and it's amazing. I'd be very interested in the economics of that. I don't know how exactly we support it on a seasonal basis. We did get into that with them there. And that's part of the challenge here too. And a lot of the wineries here see a lot of traffic. You go to Stone Tower, for example, a huge facility.

[00:33:10]

KS: I haven't been there yet.

NW: It's just a ton of people.

KS: Yeah, but they take buses and stuff as well.

NW: Yeah, takes everything. Lots and lots of groups.

KS: A lot of these places are kind of selective about how much they wanna engage that. There's some places, there are no limousines, no buses, no groups over whatever, no bachelorette parties, no... all of the other stuff, but that's more about setting a tone, I guess, for what they want to be seen as. But we definitely have some party--party spots as well.

NW: We do. Absolutely, and that's part of what's kind of nice, the broad scope of the industry at the moment is that you have people doing "bring your dog, come out with a picnic lunch, hang out all day, we love you, you're part of the family," versus "come once/twice a year to assess the wins that we produced for the year, buy your cases and go home. We are serious winemakers who want to focus on a wine that reflects a particular place, but we don't expect you to... But you're gonna buy wine while you're here." It's about, "you're collecting our wine. And, you're part of that family," and it's a very different focus. But that one took a while to get to. And Linden's a great example where they had apples and blueberry picking and things and the picnic tables and picnic blankets and, "come one, come all." And then the apples went away, and more vines were planted, and the blueberries went away, and more vines were planted, and then it's, "You can picnic if you're buying a case of wine. You can sit on our balcony if you bought a case in a year," to "You can visit us a couple days a year, and come visit us to get our wine, and that's what we focus on." And it took a while to get that established, but good for them. It's what they wanted. It's nice to have a couple different things. I have guests that come in with their children and are serious wine people, but they don't want to take and aren't going to be allowed to take their child to Linden or to Delaplane and... go to Barrel Oak and hang out and have a good day and...

[00:35:15]

KS: Play cornhole.

NW: Yeah, it's fun. It's more that festive kind of idea behind that. And it goes back to your point or question about hospitality and tasting rooms, and so it just depends. Some of the better

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producers would like to do--probably they wouldn't say this, but they would like to do less hospitality and more focused on the interaction around evaluating a tasting and appreciating wine, and that's it, and of course they would have a hospitality component for those people who are coming to do that, but not necessarily an overall hospitable space where...

KS: Not have the carpet rolled out all the time.

NW: Right. It's not a park, it's not a public space.

KS: Right. Because I know there's been some issues, like at Greenhill, they just recently, I think this spring, decided to make it 21 and over, which upset a lot of people that had been going there who thought, "Well, we love coming here with our kids or whatever, and they're like, 'We can't do it anymore.'" For them, they decided, they said it was more of a liability issue with parents just not really keeping an eye on their kids and their kids that... Just not wanting the kids to get hurt.

[00:36:20]

NW: Yes.

KS: But yeah, you do see, like rumpus room kind of stuff happening in some of these. Yeah, and I think it's funny because, with the orchards, it's the same sort of thing, where they're trying to balance, "How much of a fun fair do we wanna be, and how much do we wanna be a farm?" You know. And that's one of the arguments that they're going back and forth with agritourism. What did we really get into this for? Let's get back to some of your work history, cause you went from Good Stone to Ashby?

[00:36:56]

NW: To the Ashby Inn.

KS: Okay, and so, when was the Ashby Inn?

NW: 2009, I guess we opened, or reopened the space in October, I think, of 2009.

KS: Okay, and what was your role there?

NW: I was sort of the general manager.

KS: Okay, and what is your training in, or do you have any specialized training in different things?

NW: I went to college, undergraduate, and then I went to graduate school, and college was French and English literature, graduate school was trade policy and commercial diplomacy and conflict resolution, and then I went to culinary school after a couple years of government, and culinary school I guess would be, I guess the related training and experience.

KS: Where did you go to culinary school?

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NW: The Culinary Institute of America, in High Park, New York.

KS: It's beautiful.

NW: Yeah, it's not bad spot to live.

KS: And so, with that, did you have a focus, like in hospitality, or were you leaning towards a chef or...

NW: Yeah, I mean, I love food, and I liked cooking, and I certainly went to CIA with that intention. I liked cooking since I was... I mean, when I was 16, I was given a wok and all implements for subjecting my family to really horrible stir-fry for a couple years. I avoided the culinary arts because it wasn't legitimate. Or so I thought someone else would think, even though I was, like really excited about it and spent my time doing food and wine.

[00:38:30]

KS: When were you at CIA?

NW: 2003 and '4.

KS: Yeah, that would have been still pretty early in this before all the celebrity chef stuff happened.

NW: Yeah, there was some out there for sure, but it wasn't... I didn't necessarily wanna become a celebrity chef. The driving factor in going back to culinary school post government was, it was pivotal moment where my boss... I advanced a proposal to her, and she turned it back to me with one flick of the wrist without looking at it and said, "We're about maintaining the status quo out and not about innovating." And I knew that wasn't gonna be for me, and so, I did sort of a full-scale that evaluation of what I wanted to accomplish in life, and whether I spent 20-25 years in government, where would I be--an assistant secretary of something if I had worked long in the bureaucracy and really would not be moving more than the status quo, and that wasn't gonna be exciting for me. So I concocted the idea that if I could be an entrepreneur and run a small restaurant, I could hire 20-50 people and impact a couple thousand people who are clients and guests of ours and have more meaningful kind of experience in life and make that linkage of where the farm and table come together in a way that hopefully might actually make a difference. And if didn't make any greater difference than a difference in my own outlook in life, then at least it would be that much better. So I chose to go to culinary school as a result. But the idea that I wanted to learn as much as I could as fast as I could, 'cause I was career changer, I was in my mid-twenties, and didn't have a time to be an 18-year-old like, "Alright, I'll work 2 years in this place, 2 years in this place, 2 years in this place, and start to learn that way..." So I had every idea and intention to be probably more restaurateur than chef, but I thought I'd probably go at it the chef route. Post-culinary school, I won a couple scholarships--wine-related. Wine was definitely a big interest of mine in school. I took the wine class as every student does. There's a bifurcated schedule--an AM class and a PM class. I took both. I just stayed all day in both classes and became a wine tutor, and it was something that I definitely got more out of and

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put a lot more into. Won a couple of scholarships that helped me travel, one of which allowed me to travel and eat, and when I was eating in some of these amazing places...

[00:40:45]

KS: Best scholarship ever!

NW: It was a remarkable scholarship. It was a stipend for school; it was a stipend for travel; and then it was touring this importer's, basically, portfolio in California, France, and Italy, and they gave us--6 of us--money and we pooled our money, and we went to 1-, 2-, and 3-star Michelin restaurants, almost a couple week--it was a 7- or 8-week trip. And so every one of those experiences was memorable in the context of food, but I don't remember the dishes; I remember the experience. So as I left that and went back to Chicago, which is where I'm from, and started looking for a job--cause you can't travel on someone else's dime for the rest of your life.

KS: Unfortunately!

NW: Unless you're hired to do so. I started looking out in the *Wine Spectator* and started looking at restaurants that had the Grand Award, basically, the three cups--the three glasses in the *Wine Spectator*, Trotters is one of those spaces. And I applied to a couple of them--True was another one. And just said, basically, I wanna start there and try to [unclear] cuisine at the time called me and said, "Alright bring your knife roll and your whites and come on in, and let's do a stage." I said, "Actually, I think I'd like to go," and it wasn't something I had rehearsed, but "I think I'd like to go in front of the house," and from right there, at that point, I had made a decision, and I have been in a professional kitchen since. I can cook. I know enough about--a lot about--what happens in the kitchen, but hospitality was my greater focus because it made a greater impact on me. I think my background in was one that allowed me to communicate effectively--graduate degree, undergraduate degree--I had more than just culinary skills. And I mean, I was okay in the kitchen. I wasn't bad, but I wasn't as proficient as I am in the front of the house--from my own evaluation standpoint. So it allowed me the opportunity, I think, to really focus on service, hospitality, and presenting cuisine in the right context--making it approachable, making it understandable for a variety of guests, and then completely was fascinated by how food and wine go together.

[00:42:54]

KS: Which is such a hallmark, I think, of what you're doing here at Field and Main. Yeah, it really does seem like...

NW: We really do try to focus on that.

KS: So we were going around to the Ashby Inn, which reopened in 2009, which is just down the road in Paris. And you did the Ashby Inn for how long?

NW: About 5 years, till 2014.

KS: Okay, and then is that when you decided that you wanted to do something different?

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NW: Yeah, it was time for us to do something on our own. And that's when we started Fable Hospitality. So Fable was the idea that running an inn in a restaurant was great, but what of that was our favorite? And my wife and I talked, and it was like, well, doing wines and presenting seminars, and talking about food and wine, and telling stories and helping people with hospitality kind of became what we did and what I did, really, principally, for about a year and then started looking kind of at this, and this took a while to develop. So it was a good idea, an idea that we're still doing stuff with but not as focused on. Although...

KS: Well, I remember you doing stuff like that at the Ashby Inn, cause I remember you, I think I was on the Facebook page or something, and it would always be like there's some kind of special workshop or "meet-the-producers" or different things like that.

[00:44:22]

NW: Yeah, and we're continuing that work here at Field and Main. And that really is where Fable kind of organically grew from, and it was the launching point from that point to be on our own, doing our own thing, choosing what we're doing, more than having to do all the things that went along with running the Inn and the restaurant. So Ashby definitely set us up, I think, well to have those connections with people, those relationships, and the knowledge of the wineries too.

KS: Yeah, in this area, in particular.

NW: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:44:54]

KS: And then in between that time while you were getting Field and Main off the ground, you were helping at the Slater Run tasting room.

NW: Yeah, so part of... One of my clients is Slater Run--um, Fable Hospitality's clients is Slater Run, and they contacted me and said, "We're gonna... We've got a vineyard. We're starting to make wine. We want a tasting room, and we purchased the building, and we'd like you to come out and take a look at it and maybe help us with the space and maybe anything else." And so, we got chatting...

KS: And had you known them before?

NW: I had met them before. In the context of them coming to dinner at Ashby, and so I didn't "know" them. But I knew her parents--Kiernan's parents--and her aunt and uncle. Her uncle and aunt really came in almost weekly or every other week, and so I knew Tom and Scottie Slater a lot more than I knew her parents, but sometimes Bob and Alice would come with Scottie, and so I knew of them, and they would say, "My kids are planting a vineyard," and it was like, oh nice, how neat!

KS: How good for them!

NW: Yeah, are they sure they wanna do that? And came back to the point where someone mentioned a couple times, "Hey there's these folks that should get in touch with you," and then, I

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guess the same thing was said to them. And we finally did. And then that's been one of the most rewarding relationships that I have.

KS: Yeah, well, they're awesome.

NW: Professionally and personally. They're just remarkable people.

KS: They are.

[00:46:23]

NW: And they're approaching what they're doing in the best of all possible ways. They do things right and take their time. They try to find quality and represent themselves, their lineage and heritage, and then the community they work with, the people that work with them--they represent them well and care for them extremely well, exceedingly well, so they're special people. And the project was a wonderful one. It was a great opportunity for me to use the hospitality and then some design to bring those two things together. I'm not a designer, but I'm a functional designer from the context of, "You don't wanna put that too far away from the person who's gonna have to use that sink. Make sure you have enough glassware and the storage for it. And yeah, that's a beautiful thing to put over there, but it's not gonna work if someone has a wheelchair," or all those types of elements that I've picked up on and that were painful from a hospitality perspective.

[00:47:20]

KS: And it's a really limited space that they had there.

NW: Yes they did. It was really kind of fun to kind of work in that space and get to paint with some broad rushes there where there was a wall running right through the middle of it. And you're just like, "Let's take out the wall." That was the best option, cause it's limiting every design we come up with. It's not gonna help you; take out the wall, and they did.

KS: And it's still standing. Even better! Yeah, no, it's a great space. So now, I believe she's changing the name.

NW: Yes.

KS: Cause it was called the Local Taste.

NW: The Local Taste, I think it's gonna be the Slater Run tasting room...

KS: And now it's gonna be the Slater Run tasting room...

NW: And cellar, I think, cause there still is gonna be retail wine beyond what they're producing.

KS: And the store next door, the general store.

[00:48:00]

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NW: Yes.

KS: So did you set up the Riccordino's? Is that you, too?

NW: Yes.

KS: And that's your Chicago, homage.

NW: Yes, yes, exactly. So we had the building. The building existed, and we were endeavoring... We started what we thought was gonna be a whole animal program. So we'll buy the whole animal and put the steaks, roast, and chops in Field and Main and serve them here, and then the rest, essentially the front and back end of the animal will get ground into sausage or ground beef made into beef roasts that we can splice and make into beef sandwiches to utilize that, and we've basically realized that that's not needed. We buy whole chicken; we buy whole pigs; we buy sometimes whole lamb; but whole steers, no way. And they don't want us to. We couldn't handle it. We tried, and it was really miserable.

[00:48:55]

KS: And you just were like, "Why do we have so much cow?!"

NW: Yeah, a bit too much. But the producers themselves, we thought it'd be hard for them to get rid of certain cuts, and it is. It's not hard for them to get rid of the whole animal; it's just certain cuts. So we've set along using say the eye-round, which Bill and Holly Martin have more supply of than other cuts, and so people have a demand for tenderloin, yes, that costs more, understandably. But the eye-round, they can't really find outlets for, so, "Instead of buying your whole animal, which you don't really need us to do, cause you actually need the tenderloin from that; you need the rib loin, you need the New York strips from that because people have demand for that. We'll just keep taking your eye-round for that."

KS: And kept making that a specialty of the house.

NW: Yeah, we did the same thing with... We started buying whole chickens, and we started shifting for last several months and just buying the hindquarters, the dark meat, the leg and thigh from our producer because he says the same things. When I'm fabricating fresh chickens, everybody wants the breast. I'll end up with a surplus of legs, and we put both the leg and the breast on our menu, and our legs sold better than our breast, like, "Well this doesn't make any sense. You keep the breast; we'll take the leg. It's not whole animal, but that doesn't mean we're supporting that system. So that's been nice to figure that out."

[00:50:07]

KS: Yeah, sometimes what looks good on paper isn't really what is needed.

NW: 100%.

KS: Yeah, that's awesome, that's great that that works out because I know that is an issue for a lot of producers who gets stuck with--they sell out right away of all the little things and then--white

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meat and all that stuff. Okay, alright, so I think we covered most everything we did. So you were with... at the Slater Run Local Taste for...

[00:50:38]

NW: So that was about, oh, a number of months. And I would work with them on a consulting basis post, kind of, the Slater Run tasting room.

KS: So you helped them get off the ground.

NW: Absolutely, so I was working much more feverishly with them in the development stage. And then I helped them once a week for a period of time once they opened the space, and then much less frequent from that point forward. And now we do periodic check-ins, maybe quarterly, maybe two times a year, just to touch base about wines or if they have any questions or "here's the new idea we're thinking about; what do you think?" Which is great. I do the same sort of things with Lost Mountain and Lost Creek in Loudoun. I worked with Stone Tower for a brief point before they open their new facility. Early Mountain was one of my clients for a while, and I don't do much with them anymore by way of consulting but have that relationship where they're making our wines, and we remain close, and I think that, from my professional timeframe, it was really great, where I could spend that kind of concentrated time with those clients when I wasn't working here, and now that I'm working here, I don't have as much time to devote to them in an intensive way, but we do meet occasionally and chat, and I'm a champion for what they do, and they've been very supportive of what we're doing here, so it's great.

[00:51:55]

KS: And so, just quickly, to sum up in the rest of your life. You're a father, husband.

NW: Yes.

KS: What other kind of obligations, connections do you have? Are you a coach of anything or...

NW: No, no, not at this point? I've got two girls that are 4 and 7 and a wife who's part of this as well, and no, yeah, that's principally. I play outside of this with Fable, and I judge wine competitions and run one, and I'm involved in that kind of thing. And we were trying our best to become more involved in the community by what Field and Main does here and endeavoring that. But the last year has been--the last several years, but the last year of being open has been intensively this.

KS: Yeah, to just get it really established and off the ground and train everyone and...

NW: Yes, yeah.

[00:52:48]

KS: Okay, well, we can wrap up there. I just wanna say that on the record that you agreed for this to be shared with the Library of Congress.

NW: I did, yeah. I'm very honored, thank you.

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KS: Okay, great, and thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it.

NW: My pleasure. If you need to follow up on anything, that'd be great. I'd be happy to do that too, so.

KS: I think that's great. I might just ask you...

[recording ends]