

Interview Of Jim Goenner

A conversation with Jim Goenner And Don Cooper

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Title: Interview Of Jim Goenner
Date: 09/11/2019
Length: 00:35:50

Interviewer: Don Cooper
Founder: Jim Goenner
Location: Central Michigan University Education Bldg

Intro Music:	00:08	[inaudible]
Don Cooper:	00:08	Jim, thank you very much for being here with us today to talk about Michigan's charter history in your home land.
Jim Goenner:	00:13	I am excited to be here.
Don Cooper:	00:14	Great. So first, why don't you start off, why don't you, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?
Jim Goenner:	00:19	Well, I'm a father, husband and a passionate, uh, educator for excellence and we've got a big vision and that is we simply want all kids to find their inner genius, discover their purpose, their why, and not just dream big, but go be prepared to achieve their dreams.
Don Cooper:	00:42	And that's really what you've devoted your career to in the charter sector.
Jim Goenner:	00:47	I love this because I love seeing people grow and this whole movement has been about helping people find their voice, inspiring others to find theirs and becoming all they can be.
Don Cooper:	00:58	In your work in that is somewhat unique, not just in Michigan, but nationally because your career has really tracked with the development of the charter law in the charter sector once it started in the mid nineties.
Jim Goenner:	01:10	Well, I joked on that I couldn't make my mind up between business, education, and politics and charter schools had all three. But you know, the beautiful thing in all seriousness is I was able to work with real schools. I was able to work on state policy and I was able to work on the national scene and I called it the trifecta because you could work macro to micro and being involved in all of those, made each part better and I thought really strengthen my perspective.
Don Cooper:	01:39	So, so let's go back to the early days when it all got started in 93' 94', what were you doing? Where were you at and how did you get connected with the charter movement?
Jim Goenner:	01:49	Well, in 93' I was actually a grad student and I watched the law. I read the newspapers. But remember what happened and that was that law passed in 1993 as part of the proposal A reforms on school finance. Uh, the law took effect in January. CMU was one of the first to charter a school in 1994 and you'll recall that those first date schools got sued. And basically there was an

injunction by the Ingham County circuit court and said, these schools aren't eligible for funding. So they got thrown under the intermediate school districts. And then in 1995, the legislature passed what we call Six B of the law. And that's where I really came into it, full force. Um, Dr. Bob Mills was at Central Michigan University. He said, Jim, I've got an opportunity for you to get in on the ground floor of something big. And I said, Bob, what is it? And he said, just come to a meeting with me. And that meeting was the meeting of the Central Michigan University board of trustees in 1995. It was April and I will never forget it was at the Carlin, Carlin alumni house and the newspapers and cameras from around the state were there and the university authorized 31 public school academies. And the next day there was a seminar at the university where all these founders came and they were getting a education about the law and what had happened by Leonard Wolfe from Dykema and from the CMU team. And Bob said, Jim, do you want to do this? And I said, absolutely. And so I jumped in and became his associate and I had the privilege of working with all those founders Don. And so between April when they were authorized, and the fall, when they opened school, we got 28 of those 31 schools up and running. And I call it the blood, sweat and tears, cause people gave a lot to make that happen.

Don Cooper: [03:38](#)

So. So thinking back at that meeting, what were some of the schools that were authorized that were the most memorable to you?

Jim Goenner: [03:45](#)

Oh wow. There were so many of them. Um, I'd probably have to brush up, but I, one of them I recall was Dave Fredericks and New Branches Academy. Um, and Dave was from the Grand Rapids area, lifelong educator, but he saw this as a really powerful way to expand their vision, make their school accessible to more people. There were two that I'll never forget. Um, and I believe these were 96', but one was Carmen N'Namdi and Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse of Detroit and the Alex and Marie Manoogian school because these had both been private schools for about 25 years and they became charter public schools. And they both said to me, you know, it is such an honor for us to become a public school in the state of Michigan. And I never thought about it that way. And they both have rich histories. Manoogian is getting ready to celebrate their 50th year, 25 as a Michigan public school Academy and 25 as a private. And I had a chance to meet Mr. Manoogian, the inventor of the Delta faucet. And one of the things that he was really focused on was sustainability beyond him. And he set this school up as a public school academy so that it could, and it has. And that's really the vision, and the legacy. It's why I call charter

schools a lot of times the Michigan miracle, it's a miracle they exist, but it's also a miracle about what they've done for kids and for educators.

Don Cooper: [05:11](#) So, so on the Michigan miracle, I think this was one of the first, first publications that you had put out when you became director.

Jim Goenner: [05:17](#) Oh, I was so proud of this because what it was, it was a story by year of the schools in their development, the evolution, and we call them miracles for a lot of different reasons, but primarily because it was a miracle they actually existed. If you understand the challenges and the pushback and, and even the constitutional legal battles that were around this, it was hard, and that's why I coined it the blood, sweat and tears. If you wanted to start a charter school, you better be willing to give blood. You better be able to be willing to put a lot of sweat equity into it and you're going to shed some tears. Some of those will be of misery and some will be of joy. But all of those that succeeded, I would say had the tears of joy because they took an idea and they made it become a reality. And it was for something other than themselves. It was to serve kids, provide options to educators, and support their communities. And it was a beautiful thing.

Don Cooper: [06:12](#) So, so as, as the sector was evolving and coming together in that time period, it looked a lot different than where it is today.

Jim Goenner: [06:20](#) Oh, absolutely.

Don Cooper: [06:21](#) So what are some of the things that, that, that you had to create in the team and the, in the mid nineties had to create in order for the sector to be sustainable and the schools to be sustainable?

Jim Goenner: [06:33](#) Well, you know, everybody talked in the early days about being the pioneers because it was new, it was blazing trails, it was creating paths. And I used to use the analogy with people because in those days, it truly was almost insurmountable to start a school. You had to have passion and persistence and fortitude. And yet people did it. Today, you can start a school and you can get \$1 million of startup money. Back in 1995 there was no startup money. The early charter school grants for, for maybe twenty five thousand, forty thousand dollars and that was if you could get one. And so you really had to do some remarkable things. There are stories that are not stories. They were true. People would use credit cards, they would take second mortgages on their house to get up, get the start up

money together to do this. Cause remember in the state of Michigan, you actually have to apply for a charter, get approved, you have to find a facility, equip it, staff it and supply it and start school. And the first time you're going to get a penny from the state is on October 20th and in fact, when I worked for Bob Mills In Central Michigan University, I'll never forget the first time the money flowed. Bob took a check and he blew it up and he put it on the door and he said, Jim, do you know what that means? I said, no. And he said, it means the system works. The money actually flowed from the state of Michigan to the authorizer, to the school. Now on the 20th of each month, millions of dollars gets processed and digitally nobody even gives it a second thought. And in the first days, the money flowed.

Don Cooper: [08:11](#)

So for those early pioneers, where did they go to for help and support?

Jim Goenner: [08:17](#)

Well, there was not a lot of infrastructure in those days and that was really key because they were going to the authorizers, Central Michigan being one of the leaders, the university also through Governor Engler's foresight in the state of Michigan was home to the Michigan Resource Center for Charter Schools. We now know that as the National Charter Schools Institute today, and it's an organization I have the privilege of leading, but there also was the establishment in 1996 of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. And that was really a group of J.C. Huizenga and Bill Allen and others that said, you know, it's important that we have an organization that for us in Lansing, that can be a unified voice for the charter idea. That could handle some of the public relations and government relations. And actually Central Michigan University gave me a leave of absence to go be the founding executive of that organization. And so I moved my family down there and in fact yesterday we celebrated our son's 23rd birthday. But what was so special about that is we moved to Lansing when my wife was eight months pregnant and she'd given up a great teaching job and you know the rest is history, if you will.

Don Cooper: [09:26](#)

So that's a deep personal and family commitment to the charter idea.

Jim Goenner: [09:30](#)

Don, I tell people we didn't have two nickels to rub together. I would actually drive from my house down to the charter schools office, right MAPSA and I would start the fax machine at night so it could run all night at a lower cost. That's how frugal we were. But there was a guy that founded a school up in Petoskey named Steve Overton and he always used to tease me and say,

Jim, you ought to get out of that ivory tower of the university and come out and really find out what it's like. And boy, I'll tell you, after founding MAPSA and doing the work of a startup, I knew what he meant and it really was a humbling and a learning process. We were gifted a, uh, office by Dykema Gossett, the law firm. And my first day in office, I sat in the chair and I spun around and I'm like, what do I do? I don't have letterhead, I don't have a computer. Nobody's telling me what to do. Lucky I brought a pen. And so we actually went out to staples and best buy and at that time it was 0% financing for six months, and I said, I'm going to buy a computer. And they said, Mr. Goenner, there is no credit history for the Michigan Association Public School Academies. So I said, well, I guess put it in my wife and I's name and we'll figure out how to get paid back. And that's what we did. And that's what a lot of the founders of the schools did. They figured out a way to make it happen. In today's world, when we talk about students and education, we'd call it being resourceful, being adaptive, leveraging your resources, being persistent. Those were the qualities that it took. And there were a lot of people that brought that to the table and our state is the beneficiary today.

Don Cooper: [11:04](#) And the policy environment in Lansing was a lot different than it is today.

Jim Goenner: [11:09](#) Oh, it was, um, you know, it was before term limits. So you had a lot of veterans and they knew how to make the wheels of government work and how to prevent things from happening. And so a lot of the things that we think is kind of the structural components of how charter schools work today, were really vestiges of political compromise and the people that had the levers of state government in the day.

Don Cooper: [11:34](#) So one of the issues you had mentioned earlier was the lawsuit. When the charter law had originally passed, it was almost immediately challenged, is that correct?

Jim Goenner: [11:43](#) It is. The first schools opened, and actually about three days before that October 20th deadline, the Michigan Department of Education said, we're going to fund these schools. And about a day or two later, the MEA through a coalition called the Coalition Against Parochial Aid, got an injunction with, uh, I believe it was Judge Colette from the Ingham County Circuit Court and said, these schools are unconstitutional, not just illegal, unconstitutional. And that stopped all funding and that's why the legislature moved them under the intermediate school districts as kind of an emergency solution. The legislature came back and dealt with a lot of the courts issues and passed what

we called Six B, the revised school code. And then that new round of schools opened in 1995. But it was not until 1997 after losing in the Court of Appeals that the Michigan Supreme Court said, these are public schools, these are constitutional and they are eligible for state funding. That was, you know, in some ways the equivalent of the shot heard around the world because what it said is that these are public schools, they're eligible for public funding and they're serving the public and that the legislature had control over how public education works in our state. And so one of the things that is really a lesson to be learned is that if you want to do education choice and reform, you need to start with the constitution and the constitution makes it 100% clear that it's the legislature that has authority over how public education works. Just because we grew up with school districts and they were the only provider of public education and community does not mean that's what the law says from a constitutional standpoint. And so when the legislature changed the law, they opened a whole new realm of opportunities and we really, in some ways, even after 25 years and 300 schools and 150,000 kids being served, we're just scratching the surface about what's possible to reinvent how public education works.

Don Cooper: [13:41](#)

So it was a case like that that goes all the way up to the Supreme Court. That must've taken a lot of perseverance, a lot of commitment, a lot of, a lot of resources from stakeholders to to drive that forward.

Jim Goenner: [13:52](#)

Well, it absolutely did and there was so many people involved. But I want to highlight one, because after losing in Circuit Court and the Court of Appeals, it looked pretty bleak. But Jim Barrett was the president of Michigan Chamber of Commerce and he and through his foresight and will took the chamber and said, we are going to appeal this. And he really helped to drive it to the Supreme Court. And in the Supreme Court we won overwhelmingly and wasn't even close. And that's really where now we have case law that says these are public schools, they are eligible for public funding and that the legislature has control through its constitution, through the governor, through appointments of university boards, and through these board members that swear a constitutional oath of office, and govern these schools. And that it didn't have to be absolute control. It had to be some control. And so it frees up the system to think differently and do differently. And if you think back 25 years Don, it's amazing because in a community there could only be one provider of public education. Now in so many communities, we have multiple providers of public education. And what's beautiful for that, and I'll just use my own family. This year, the

Goenner family has a high school junior at the Mount Pleasant Public School district. We have two daughters at the Sacred Heart Academy Catholic School. And we have our Natalie at Renaissance Public School Academy, a charter school. That's choice. And what it allows parents is to find the best school that meets their kids' needs. And we think that's a beautiful thing.

Don Cooper: [15:29](#)

So at what point did you come back from your career in Lansing founding MAPSA, back up to Central Michigan?

Jim Goenner: [15:36](#)

That was a great story. So I loved Lansing, you know, we were wheeling and dealing with the influence makers and making a difference on the public relations. And you know, that was fun and exciting. But I got a call and it was a call after Central Michigan University had gone through a pretty tough performance audit from the Michigan office of the auditor general. And basically the headlines were no oversight and accountability. Really wasn't true, but that's the political games that were being played. And it was largely because all of the paperwork, the documentation, wasn't in place versus the things weren't happening. And so I got kind of tapped by the governor's office and by the university to come back and take over the office. And at that time I believe there were eight people. And so we could sit around a table, look at each other, make plans, and we put a lot of quality control mechanisms in place because the number one assignment from the board and the president were, Jim, we want to be a state national leader in this. We know people are trying to push us out, we're not going. But number two, we need a clean audit. The auditors are coming back. So we put two things in action, number one, quality controls with the schools to really try and get the processes and systems and documentation in place to be able to demonstrate oversight and accountability. And the great news is we were wildly successful at that. But the other thing is we were trying to build a vision for what this could do for kids, for educators, for communities. And I say those three because a lot of times we talk about choice for kids and families, but the reality is charters have provided great opportunities for the educators themselves. New opportunities for teachers, and it actually was one of the original goals in our law to provide new educational opportunities, new teaching techniques. And it's something that I want to make sure in the oral histories we don't lose that because teachers have benefited greatly. They tell you all the time, as do school founders that when your hands are untied, what you can do. And the thing that I think's always been funny in the story is that some of the fiercest opponents were school superintendents and about the time they retire and want to do something different, they come and

they say, Hey Jim, you got any opportunities? And then they come in and they start working in the charter school world and they say, you know, with our hands untied we can do amazing things. We've seen those people come in and work in the authorizing agencies. We've seen them serve on boards, we've seen them work in schools. And you know what, they're so talented and they know what to do and when their hands are freed, they've been able to accomplish even more. And that's what we want for everybody.

Don Cooper: [18:06](#)

So I've often heard of you talk about charter schools as an idea but also as a promise as well. Maybe you could share a little bit about your thoughts on it.

Jim Goenner: [18:15](#)

I uh, it's why I love this book. This was 2008 but we went with the title proving the promise and what we were trying to really emphasize with that is charter schools were a promise. They were an idea that said, give us some freedom and flexibility and let us deliver results. Now I like to joke that, you know, theoretically charters were freed from all the rules and regulations and that that's a great idea, and sometime we outta to try it because the reality, particularly in Michigan is they were freed from essentially nothing. They've got more rules and regulations than anybody can imagine. And so many of those are counterproductive. Some of them are necessary for safeguards. These are public dollars. Ther're students, they need those protections. But there's a balancing act in that. But the reason proving the promise was so important. I'll give you an example. One of the times we had to close a school and people would say, well, that's a failure. And I'd say, no, that's the charter promise, because the promise was if you delivered for kids, if you were good fiduciary of the taxpayer's money, you got to keep doing this.

Don Cooper: [19:18](#)

And you've gone through some tough closures as well.

Jim Goenner: [19:20](#)

Oh, I say I've got the battle scars to prove it, but you know, that was where the promise and the idea was so important because after you've intervened, you've gone through the progressive discipline, if you will, and you decide that this school needs to be closed, it was important that the promise worked. Because remember up to that time, no public school in Michigan had ever been closed for not performing. The charter promise proved that actually could happen. And so we didn't like to close schools. That was kind of the worst day on the job, but when it was necessary because the school wasn't serving kids wasn't being a good fiduciary of the taxpayer's money. It had to happen and we proved that the promise worked.

Don Cooper:	20:04	And at that time, the number of charters that universities could, could issue was pretty scarce.
Jim Goenner:	20:10	Great story Don. Because when the law was originally founded, there was no cap. The cap came in later and the cap was on the universities alone. And so each time you'd hit the cap and bump up a little bit, but when you were to the last charter, I called it, who's got the last ticket to the Superbowl? Like how do you issue the last public school that could happen? Because you never knew if the cap could be lifted. And that was really important because it made you look at the whole state. It made you look at the different proposals and the people and what I called it, their ability to implement because people could come with great dreams, they even hire consultants to write a great application. But the core question really became, can you implement this? How many students can you serve? How many lives can you change?
Don Cooper:	20:56	So let's talk about the cap lift for a second. Could you share with me a little bit about some of the efforts of maybe to try to affect the cap over time and...
Jim Goenner:	21:06	Yeah. Well, you know, the cap lift is fascinating from multiple angles, right? You have, first you have just the idea why is there a cap? Why would you ration excellence? Reality was it was more of a political deal, right? It was a way to contain and stop the growth of charters and chartering and choice. And so it needed to be pushed back against. And so as a compromise, you'd raise the cap, it might be by 25 schools a year. And so then invariably over time you had more universities come involved. And so now in Michigan, we've got eight public universities that charter schools. And so you had a rationing process. So then one of the ideas was why don't we have a smart cap, that if we have these schools and they're really demonstrating excellence, they graduate out of the cap. And so you and others worked really hard on that idea. And I believe that was a compromise between Tim Melton as the Democratic Chair of Education and Wayne Kuipers, the Republican Chair of Education. And we were the first state in the nation to have a smart cap. And people were excited. We were proud of that work. And it actually did work. We had schools that demonstrated excellence, they moved out of the cabinet, made room for more to come in, and I think that was a great idea and we saw it spread. But then politics changed as well. And through elections, ideas have consequences, elections have consequences. And the Republicans came into place and they said, you know what? While we like the smart cap, we actually don't think there should be a cap on choice. That if there are

great proposals, why limit and ration them? And so that's when the cap came off. And again, that, you know, it was a series of political compromises, but it freed up choice to be able to start to flourish. And then the fear-mongering came in. Well, no, with no cap, you know, we're gonna have this rampant wild West. Well that wasn't true and it never was. If you actually look at the numbers, you'd say the growth has been rational. And the reason for that is because Michigan has a really pretty robust system of checks and balances. And so there's a great due diligence and quality control that comes through. But the bigger point was if there's a great idea and there's a need, it should be able to happen. And now we're seeing that Michigan's the beneficiary this year for the first time in a long time of a federal charter school grant, \$47 million. You want to start a charter school, now you've got the support of an authorizer, you've got the due diligence of the Michigan Department of Education. You can get \$1 million to help start that school. If it's a high school in a high need area, you can get a million and a quarter. That's amazing. And when you go back to the original schools that had no startup money, you can see how far we've come.

Don Cooper: [23:51](#)

So I'd have to imagine that that where we're at today and the capital especially where probably some of the more rewarding times in your career.

Jim Goenner: [23:57](#)

You know, it's was really rewarding after more than a decade of thinking, there shouldn't be a cap to see that come off. And yet it's one of the things that I think was one of the dumbest things I ever said because when the law passed, governor signed it. I said to myself and to a few of my close friends, I said, you know, our work's done politically. Now we just have to do the implementation. And the reality is that was really naive because the politics never end. And so keeping that focus on quality, not getting undermined, that right to exist, all of those things have continued on even though the cap was removed.

Don Cooper: [24:38](#)

What were some of the most challenging experiences in your career in charters?

Jim Goenner: [24:44](#)

Oh, you don't have enough time for that. But I, you know, some of them that were memorable were just fighting for the right to exist, and the political gamesmanship, the miss, the lies that were told, and you know, you almost were like, you beat the family dog if you did charter schools. And that just wasn't true. These were passionate people, true educators. They wanted everybody to succeed. And that's one of my themes today still is that a rising tide lifts all ships. Charter schools weren't just about helping create a school and serving some kids, they were

about an idea and a set of principles that would lift everybody. That's what we want. We want a better Michigan, which means we want a better education system, which means we want everybody to succeed. And so while the schools are important, the system's important as well. It's why the regulatory components, the governance, the legal, because every time you ask a school to do something else, form A, form X, form Z, it takes them away from what's truly important, which is educating those kids. And so we've really tried to say at the end of the day, two things are gonna matter. Are the kids learning? Is the money taken care of?

Don Cooper: [25:53](#)

Let's talk a little bit about the regulatory side because I know in your career you've worked not just to build up the systems here at CMU, but also to help spread great authorizing practices throughout Michigan and the nation.

Jim Goenner: [26:05](#)

You know, I did a Ted Talk on this and I said, I've been trying to transform public education for 25 years and what I've come to realize is I've always focused on the wrong things. You see, I was focused on changing laws and demanding accountability and building the perfect accountability model. And what I lost in that was that actually greatness happens at the individual level, that calling the child to greatness, helping the teachers believe they can make a difference. And yet that accountability work was so important. I tease my authorizer friends now that they're the school police and it's kind of true. If you look at the constitution and the law, an authorizer has a clear regulatory duty to make sure these schools are following their charter contract, following applicable law, and delivering results. And at the same time, that's not what is the really, truly compelling reason. You know, Simon Sinek would say the why we get involved in this. The why is because we want to better Michigan. We want better lives, we want kids to have opportunities, we want all kids to have opportunities. And so that really is the compelling reason we all get into this. And so now it's a balancing act. How do we make sure there's good quality control, that the taxpayer's money is protected, the kids are getting what they deserve, but also how do we support a better Michigan? And that's really where I think the opportunities of the future are coming, is that they're beyond charters. We like to see at the Institute, excellence knows no boundaries. And so that mindset is a shift. And it's one that we think is really powerful. And everybody around me knows I love Jim Collins because he talks about good to great. And he says, if you ever think you've become great, you've already started sliding back to good. And so what? We've come a long ways, we're not great. But the other thing he says about greatness is

great organizations deliver three key things. They deliver superior performance. They make a distinctive impact on their mission, their audience, the people they serve. And they have lasting endurance. 25 years into this chartering has lasting endurance. And what's novel about that in education reforms is most of them are fads. They come and go. Chartering as an idea has lived. Its strengthened and it's going to carry on. And it's sustainable beyond any governor, any founder, any president, because it's based on parents and families and teachers and communities choosing. And once they have that choice, they don't care that it's a charter, they care that it works for them. And that really is what ingrained these schools into their communities in a way that nobody can take away.

Don Cooper: [28:47](#)

So, so with Michigan being at the 25th anniversary of charters and chartering in our state, what are some things that you know now that you wish you would've known then?

Jim Goenner: [28:58](#)

Ah, you know, my father was a lifelong educator and he always used to say, son, it's what you learn after you know it all. And boy that is so true. And if I would've known, all the challenges and why versus know about right, because it was predictable, right? This is a political battle and there's these sides and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We all knew that. But it's different knowing about and really knowing and I think that's the wisdom that comes with experience. And what I think the key lesson is is that you just have to go into this doing the right thing for the right reasons, knowing you're going to get push back and that that's a badge of honor, knowing that you better have persistence and fortitude and staying power and yet knowing that you're making a difference. That's been, I call it the paycheck you can't cash because in a lots of jobs in life, they're that, they're jobs. This is a mission, it's a calling and, and a lot of times it's hard to know if your work is making a difference. When you can see somebody come to an idea and an application and then you can go to a ribbon cutting and watch these parents bring in their most precious thing, their kids and walking them through that front door with the excitement, the tears, best days because you knew you were making a difference. Now contrast that to some of the worst days. I'll never forget Colin Powell Academy named after General Powell with his permission. General Powell comes and says, Hey, I've had a lot of honors in my life, but this school being named after me is one of the most precious honors I've ever had. And so this Academy was in Detroit. It was serving some of the most economically challenged kids and families and it was a beautiful place for them, but they had a problem. Too many people wanted to come, so they had to hold a lottery, right? Everybody

in charters knows if more people apply then you have room for, you have to hold a lottery. So they thought it was going to be a beautiful celebration. And you know, it turned into really an emotional trying time because the people that didn't get in Don, were in tears. They thought that they had missed out on the biggest lottery of their life because they saw this as a path for their kids to a better education, a better life. And it's experiences like that that bring you back to say, you know, we better buck up, we better get re-energized because what we're doing is going to be resisted. But for these kids, for their futures, we better be up to the fight.

Don Cooper: [31:50](#)

So. So looking into the future, looking into your future, what do you hope your legacy is in the charter sector?

Jim Goenner: [31:56](#)

You know, I want to be a lover, not a fighter. So I want my legacy to be one that helped change the conversation. I don't want this to be about us versus them. I want it to be about, we. I want it to be the rising tide that lifts all ships. Um, you know, legacy is a big one. Um, I had the honor of getting inducted into the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame and I thought I was too young. You know, I'm a baseball player. Like you get into the hall of fame after your career's done, if you hit a lot of home runs and did some good things. I just had the privilege of being in on the ground floor, working with a lot of great people and having those opportunities at a local, state and national level. But from a legacy standpoint, I want to be known as somebody that lifts people up, that always tried to inspire hearts and minds, that was willing to roll up the sleeves and do the hard work. And that actually helped build an infrastructure that lasts beyond me. Because at the end of the day, this isn't about me. This is about making a greater America, and Michigan, a greater state. And these kids, when you see them graduate, right? So if you'll recall that time magazine article with a kid with his hand up and he was the first charter school kid, that's 25 years ago, where is he now? What's he doing? Some of these charter school graduates are going to be running companies, being governors, maybe a president of the United States, and what we're going to learn from all of that is it doesn't matter what the name of their school is, it really matters what kind of education they're getting, where their head and their heart is, what's their character development, and that's the formation that can happen in these schools that are so personal. It's one of the things always people ask me like, Jim, what's special about a charter school? I say the parents can talk to who's in charge and you just stop and think about that simple thing for a minute. I can talk to who's in charge. Charters tend to be generally smaller, safe, family friendly. I can talk to who's in

charge. Imagine being a parent, you probably may not have had the best experience in education. You're in a big system. You don't even know where to go. You don't know if you can get your phone call return. You don't know if you can get an office hour. You pull into this charter school and there's the principal standing in the parking lot, opening your car door, welcoming your son or daughter and saying, how are we doing for you? Like that customer feedback, that ability to communicate at a very personal level. It's a game changer.

Don Cooper: [34:20](#)

Jim, last question. If you had to go back and do it all again, would you?

Jim Goenner: [34:24](#)

Absolutely. This has been not a job, it's been a mission and I have had the privilege to work with some amazing people, doing some amazing things. We've been able to lay an infrastructure here that's gonna carry on beyond any of us. If you just step back and think about Central Michigan University chartering the first school, being the first university in the country to charter a school, helping launch the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, the Michigan Resource Center for Charter Schools, now the National Charter Schools Institute, the Michigan Council of Charter Schools Authorizers, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, the Michigan Public Education Finance Authority. Like there's a legacy here, and I didn't even mention the 60 plus schools, the 30,000 plus kids that have been going on year after year after year, the work with its fellow universities. This has been a opportunity to serve and to use an institution that was founded in 1892 as a normal college to prepare teachers to actually expand educational opportunities for everybody. Would I do it again Don? Absolutely.

Don Cooper: [35:32](#)

Great, Jim, thank you for your time today.

Jim Goenner: [35:34](#)

You bet. Privilege.

Final Music: [35:50](#)

[inaudible] [inaudible] [inaudible].