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John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the Cause Conversations Podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Dwayne Murray:

To be at the intersection again where I've had some of the most formidable experiences of my life as a student, and then to combine that with the purpose, direction, and motivation that I found in the Army, I had to take advantage of this opportunity. It's the only calling for me that was bigger than continuing to serve in the military because I could pay back to my institution. I could pay back to the students that walk these halls. I could pay back some of the things, some lessons that I had, I could just share some of the experiences that I've had.

John Boccacino:

Well, our guest on this episode of the Cause Conversations Podcast, he is Dwayne Murray, deputy director of the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs, and a proud alumnus of the class of 1997. Now, Murray returned home to his alma mater in June of 2022 to take on this latest career challenge, which perfectly blends his passion for his country with his drive to help veteran and military connected students achieve their goals here at Syracuse University. I promise you Murray is one of the biggest orange supporters you'll ever meet out there. And on this episode, we're going to discuss the profound impact that he and his colleagues with the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs have had on campus and around the world. We'll also get you ready to celebrate 10 years of OVMA. We'll examine where Murray's love for this job came from, where his love for Syracuse University came from, and much more.

1903. And he's a Spanish American war veteran, and he comes back and goes to Syracuse University Law School and graduates in 1903. But there's a fascinating story. Unfortunately, he died in 1965. He was not admitted into the bar after graduation from the law school, to New York State Bar, but he was inducted into the New York State Bar, I believe in 2019. So fascinating story that is really, if there are trailblazers, and if there are groundbreakers, and if there are things that kind of start as an origin story, I think that that's the origin story that's baked into our DNA as a university.

And then as we advance forward, we think about the Student Army training Corps, which is the precursor to Army ROTC that trained Army and Air Force ROTC actually, because we always talk about having the longest continuously running army ROTC program, but also one of the original, I believe 17 Air Force ROTC programs in the nation was started at Syracuse University.

And so those two things really start to create this connection to our veteran and military connected student population. And then Chancellor, you now the story of Chancellor Talley being connected and being a writer of what we now know is the post-9/11 GI bill, right? And just having this explosion of connection to veterans and military connected students on campus around circa World War II, and creating this lifelong creation, this lifelong connection to our university and veterans.

John Boccacino:

I want you to paint the picture for us as a living example of, you were in the US army, you serve your country, you go on, you get your degrees here at Syracuse. Tell us exactly, maybe from your personal experiences, the challenges that you faced transitioning from active duty to then trying to go into your higher education career.

Dwayne Murray:

That is actually a great question because I'm still going through that adjustment. This is year number three being separated from the military. And I would point out that my wife Allison is also a veteran having served in the Army for 20 years. And she was actually, my wife points this out, she was the ROTC graduate and I was not. And so in our time at Syracuse, she as a student, she had the military connected student experience being an ROTC cadet, and I did not.

I was a student athlete, I was involved in a bunch of things, but transitioning out the military, everything has been scripted for you for so long. In my case, for 25 years, three months, and two days, where you're going to be for work, what you're going to do, the planning. And while it sounds rigid, there's a lot of autonomy baked into that. There's a lot of critical thinking baked into that.

But there is also some things that I didn't necessarily have to worry about or consider. And even right now, at three years into being out of the military, I have this, the itch. And the itch is, because I've been in the military for so long, every two to three years I move. And that equals about 15 moves that I can think about, packing up my entire house, moving, and changing, and transitioning into another job, still in the same enterprise, but transitioning into another job.

And so there's a little restlessness, there's little anxiety surrounding, well, it's time to go. And in this new phase of life in this chapter, it's not time to go. The thing that we always talk about in the army is when you're in a place and you find out that, you finally realize that you don't like it, it's normally time to go. But the downside to that is when you realize you're in a great organization and you feel like you finally liked it, it's time to go.

And so there was a little bit of imposter syndrome. Am I prepared to make the leap? Am I prepared to make the transition? What am I going to do next with my life? And the simple answer is, I can do anything I want to do with my life right now. And I do not know. And so I was actually, my wife's 9.5 (go.aphase) Tnsky thgaduow.on ab, stily have thgadun't lien whew

And so those things should bring about a certain level of excitement now, but it also brings a certain level of seriousness, of sobering seriousness because it's probably your forever move. This is probably... When you're out of the military, unless you're in some other unique career field, you don't move around a lot. You may change jobs, you may change careers, but you don't move states over, you don't move to another country. I'm really talking about that piece because you pull your whole family with you if you have a family. I have a wife, I have three kids, and we have to consider all those factors when you move. It was definitely a natural inclination or felt natural to come back to something that I was familiar with and fortunately something that my wife was familiar with, but that's not what everybody else has.

John Boccacino:

And the reason I wanted to bring that up was I feel like it adds another layer of relatability to the students



of using all my other experiences to focus on our student veterans, our veteran military connected students, but also focus on those students that are not veteran and military connected, and give them a little bit of love too.

And so again, it's pretty neat. It's pretty neat to walk around campus and see folks who were in my major and I understand being in the iSchool and what it's like, or being in sociology, which is part of the Maxwell School and experiencing that, or being a student athlete. And then I get to combine that with being a veteran. Oh my gosh, how is it not a dream job?

John Boccacino:

Was there a moment, like a light bulb moment, if you will, when you realized that this line of work was what you were meant to be doing?

Dwayne Murray:

Yeah, the last three jobs I had in the military, the last two jobs I had in military rather, were insightful and informative for me. The second to last job I had, I was in recruiting. And I worked out of San Antonio, Texas. And I worked in the fifth recruiting Brigade, which is responsible for a geographic space, all of Texas, Arizona, all the way up to Colorado, and Wyoming, and Oklahoma, and a very large footprint. And I got to really see what it takes to recruit, to engender people to commit to serving in our military. And so I got some really good recruiting experience.

But then after I left that job, I had the chance to be the professor of military science at Alabama A&M University, which is in HBCU in Huntsville Alabama. And I got to work with some brilliant, talented, awesome students to prepare the next set of leaders to join our military as army officers. And so to go full circle and say, I got a chance to talk to people who were thinking about joining the military and joined, I got a chance to talk to people who were going to be leaders in our military, and now I get to be in a space where they land after service by going to the OVMA.

And so the opportunity to do that again at my alma mater, it meant so much more. So yeah, I think being an ROTC, being an ROTC professor of military science, military science at Alabama A&M, commissioning second lieutenants was ultimately the light bulb that turned on.

John Boccacino:

It's time to celebrate. We get 10 years of OVMA coming up during the 2024/25 academic year. How are we going to celebrate and commemorate this occasion?

Dwayne Murray:

It's a year long celebration. It's again, baked into everything we do, but there will also be a very interesting event that'll probably take place in the fall to really celebrate and commemorate these 10 years. Our planning team led by Jennifer Pluta is working to put something, put together a celebration. And it'll be worthy of 10 years of celebrating the Office [inaudible 00:21:03] Military Affairs.

John Boccacino:

This isn't just an on-campus impact, I mean the impact of OVMA goes all around the world. How would you describe that impact that this program has had globally?

Dwayne Murray:

Great question. I would say the sun never sets on the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs, just like it never sets on Syracuse University. We have students all over the world. We have veterans that are serving

and they're either alums or they may be seeking programs, seeking support through our fantastic programs.

Actually, we have close to 60 veterans that are enrolled in our law school. And so there's a doctorate interactive program, which Syracuse University has one of the very few fully online accredited law program. And so there's an opportunity for veteran military connected students to complete their law degree completely online. So that's just an opportunity. Think about where they can be serving. They could still be currently serving, they could be veterans, but they could be anywhere in the world, to your point, globally earning their degree.

As we send alums who complete our military photojournalism course, some of the folks that participate in that program will go back out to their branch of service and they will continue to serve, and they'll be anywhere in the military inventory. Some of our folks who are finishing the Defense Comptrollership program, which is

coming to Syracuse as well. And so this sweatshirt... And now my sons are here. My oldest actually is senior here now studying forensic science and chemistry.

John Boccacino:

Oh, that is so cool.

Dwayne Murray:

Yeah. And so he's here, but he's not here because he's in Spain this semester.

John Boccacino:

I see, the study abroad, Syracuse-

Dwayne Murray:

Study abroad, right. And so again, he's not just living my dream. I went to London. I studied abroad, and I went to London. And so I went to London. He went to Spain. He called me last week. He said, "Hey dad, I'm going to Mallorca next weekend." Yeah, I went to Mallorca. Oh, yeah. And so, my sons, my six and 10-year-old are at the football games. They've already found their favorite football player on the SU football team. And the fact that my wife is an alum and she's a cheerleader, she was a cheerleader, and she did ROTC. It makes all these connections so, not just easy, nothing.

So like I started before, it's a labor of love. It's not work. When your purpose aligns with your passion, it's not really work.

John Boccacino:

And I love it. I do want to give a little bit of undergraduate experience for our listeners here, because had the sociology degree, and you had the information studies degree, and you did run track and field for the orange too. Is it possible to summarize, is there one lesson? Are there any that your undergraduate experience molded you into the person you are today?

Dwayne Murray:

My junior year, I went to London and I had already, I was pretty much almost done with sociology as a major, but I had this great experience in London. And I took a whole bunch of classes in the iSchool. What I learned in that semester was fascinating. I learned about myself more than... I actually learned about myself in London more than I learned probably the other three years I had on campus, in that one semester. And I came back energized, renewed, more purposeful than when I first got here.

And what I would say is, as an undergraduate student, there is opportunity here for you at Syracuse University. And all you have to be willing to do is participate. All you have to be willing to do is take ownership over the space that you're in. You belong here. Regardless of where you come from, if you've decided to come here, you absolutely belong here. And it's a story of opportunity. It's a story of folks not giving up on me. There's so many people that poured into me while I was here, professors, and I had professors that were mentors.

And I remember the dean of the And I re youst I (nsat were dimusid refwin+50 had thawalkbe willl has take )Tj 0-

leaped at it. And they're still here in this space today. So I owe them a debt of gratitude because they became my second family at this university.

And so the one lesson is when you decide to be orange, you are part of the family, you're part of the Orange Nation, you're family, you are welcome.

John Boccacino:

And you have orange all up and down your family tree. And I know you mentioned, I need to give your better half a little bit of love on the podcast here too, your wife, Alison Murray. We need to shine a little bit of light on her, because she also has a really strong military connection and recently got a brand new position at Hendricks Chapel as the assistant dean for student assistance, an incredible career. I think you guys are an example of Orange Love, military passion. We have Veterans and Military Families Month coming up in November. Just how special has that dynamic been, you two getting to share