

FEATURE ARTICLE

Continuing to Serve

Chris Cassidy & Kevin Basik, National Medal of Honor Museum

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Do you both mind sharing a bit about your background, your goals with the National Medal of Honor Museum¹ and the Institute, and why you are involved?

Cassidy: I'm a 1993 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. In my junior year, I was an exchange cadet at the United States Air Force Academy (USAF) and had a really awesome semester in Colorado Springs. One big takeaway from that was that all cadets and midshipmen are really the same people. The floor that your feet are on might be different, the walls are slightly different, but the culture, the humor, and the just get through it together type thing were all similar. I remember walking away literally thinking that the "Air Force is the same as Navy and then it's the same as West Point. It's just a different uniform and wrapper around each individual person."

After the Naval Academy, I spent 11 years in the SEAL teams, and during that time, I met the first Navy SEAL to become an astronaut. He inspired me to apply and try. Up to that point, I thought you had to be an aviator to be an astronaut. In fact, I didn't even think that there was a path for me. Through his guidance and mentorship, I applied in 2000 and didn't get selected. Then, 4 years later in 2004, I reapplied and got selected. I was at NASA for 17 and a half years and had three space flights. During the last of those in 2020 on the Space Station, I knew it would be the end of my government career, and I was going to retire.

All three of us have gotten to that point where we're like, "Okay, I conceptually understand leaving the government and hanging my uniform up. But what then?" I had just come home from space, and it was in that process of time where my friend reached out to me, who happens to be on the Board of the Medal of Honor Museum and asked if I would be interested in working with the project. And to be honest with you, at first I was like, "Well, maybe. But I don't know what direction I want to go." But then, I learned a little bit more, I met the people, I came here to site, and just felt like a really good fit. It just felt like a cool way to serve the country and continue serving the country, just without a uniform on. That was the summer of 2021, and I became the President and CEO. At night, I'd go home and go, "I don't know how to be a President and CEO." While there are books, actually, that help, there's nothing

¹ <https://mohmuseum.org/>

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like flying straight and level like doing it. You can read the book on how to fly straight and level, but then you have to get in the airplane and actually make the plane go straight and level.

In that process, getting to know the Medal of Honor recipients, I was excited about it. But then once, I don't know how Kevin feels, but I imagine it's similar. Once I started to meet the Medal of Honor recipients and they became individual people that I know, it just became even more exciting for me to be a part of this project instead of just like this, "Oh, that's a guy that's on page 98 of the book that is on my dining room table. It's a real human being." I just felt really excited and humbled about it.

Our project has three components—a museum here in Texas, with an institute that will be housed in the museum, and then a monument on the mall in DC. So, it's multifaceted. Initially, for good reason, we were just focusing on the closest target, which was building the museum. Then, when we got to the point where we're ready to develop the institute, the class of 1993 worlds collided. And when Kevin and I met, it was here we go.

Basik: I'm a 1993 Air Force Academy grad and gravitated to the Behavioral Science major because I love the people thing. I bought into the leadership thing at the Academy very early. I was one of those cadets who actually cared about my Military Performance Average (MPA),² not in a competitive or hard-core military sense, but because I wanted to do well as a growing leader. So, I embraced the leadership aspect of the Academy experience and wanted to just learn about it and dive into it. As a Behavioral Scientist going into the Air Force, like you Doug, I was sponsored to get a Master's Degree and

come back and teach at the Academy. It allowed me to go a little bit deeper into the topic. I studied industrial and organizational psychology, focused on leadership, particularly in small teams and units.

I went out and did some operational assignments in the Air Force and then got sponsored for a Ph.D. to dive even deeper. This time I studied leadership through the perspective of values and character because I knew I was going to be coming back to the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD). I knew part of my charge was going to be to help really clarify what we mean when we say, "We develop leaders of character." Given that, the lens that showed up for me was behavioral integrity, which is that critical alignment between the leader's words, their values, their commitments, and their actions. When that's out of alignment, there are big consequences. I bought into that big time.

Soon, I was back at the Air Force Academy, and we created what became USAFA's "conceptual framework"³—an approach for developing leaders of character. The idea of values-based leadership—working toward the identity that you're trying to create in your personal and professional life—I just got obsessed with that. So, after my time at CCLD, I got to explore that more in the Air Force at the Pentagon level and across the DoD. In 2017, I retired and started my own company, and it was just to continue that journey. I just loved that stuff. So, I was off doing my thing and working with a lot of government and corporate audiences.

Then, my dear friend, mentor and classmate, Mo Barrett called me and said, "Hey, some folks are asking about if I know you because they are exploring this idea of a Leadership Institute for the Medal of Honor, and they would like to pick your brain a little bit." I joined a meeting up in DC and got introduced to Chris and some other folks who were leading this charge, and it started

2 The objective of the MPA program is to help cadets internalize the Air Force Core Values by providing cadets with an accurate reflection of their officership development, using feedback and a competency-based rating process (USAFAI 36-2401).

3 <https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/21st-Century-LoC-Final-March-2021.pdf>

our journey together. What got me excited to come on board is that behavioral integrity concept. And you know this, Doug, when the test is on and the pressures are real, do you take a step and bring your values to life or not? And I cannot think of any context that demonstrates that more clearly than the Medal of Honor. So, when they said, “We’re exploring what you love through the virtues and values of the Medal of Honor. Do you want to play?” That just seemed like a natural fit.

Lindsay: Thank you both for sharing that. You are both very humble in your backgrounds. Chris, you had mentioned the idea, and I think it’s an important one, that we hear about these Medal of Honor recipients, and we have the notion that they are these larger-than-life people. But you mentioned once you got to know them and to interact with them, they became these very real people. Can you talk a little bit about that power of the exemplars beyond just the story, but the importance of having that interaction and having those exemplars be more than just a story?

Cassidy: Absolutely. There are 65 of them living today. When I came on board, we had a World War II recipient still alive – Woody Williams. He has now passed away. So, the population of recipients is from Vietnam and younger now. But every one of them, regardless of age or conflict, all had this message that the Medal was heavier to wear...that it is harder to wear than to earn. And that they are wearing it for the nation. They are wearing it for their brothers and arms that didn’t come back. Or “It’s the nation’s medal and I’m just keeping care of this particular one.” But the concept is all the same. As a side note, but for me personally, it resonated loudly because I have a similar feeling about service about being an astronaut. I feel really lucky that I got to go in space and I think, “Why me and not somebody else?” So, I understood that sentiment, and it really just means a lot to me. These are real people who grew up playing soccer or had a paper route or had the same conversation in their head of, “What am I going to do after the military that I

just did,” that Kevin did a couple years ago, and you did. They are real people who had an incredible challenging day and did incredible actions in that gap.

Basik: I’ll piggyback on what he said. A phrase I’ve heard, I think Medal of Honor recipient Kyle Carpenter is who described the medal as the “beautiful burden.” It is heavy to wear, and you feel the importance and significance of it. So, obviously you want to honor the Medal of Honor and everyone else who earned it, but also the stories that you get to tell about those who didn’t receive it but deserved it. There’s the whole community of folks who went above and beyond, but don’t wear the Medal. So that burden is powerful, but it’s worth it, so they can tell the stories of so many others.

The other thing is with regard to a human face. When you get up close and personal, their imperfections are so refreshing. The fact that they’re just normal people is a relief to the rest of us. Yes, in one moment, they rose to the occasion, and that deserves to be honored. But they describe repeatedly themselves as ordinary people who happened to do something extraordinary in a moment. But these same people also still struggle with other things. They still struggle with courage in other moments, or avoid having tough conversations in their own life like the rest of us. They’re scared of getting out of the military. They struggle being parents and spouses. They’re on the journey with the rest of us. For me, it was encouraging that someone who was able to achieve that level of honor in combat has within them the same imperfections that I have. So maybe by contrast, I’ve got within me some of the greatness that they displayed in that moment.

Lindsay: That’s an important point, that idea of the humanity, right? It shows the humanness of that aspect and the importance of thinking about it as the cost associated with having that designation from being in that moment. Because there is still the human side that they’ve got to still deal with. That’s pretty powerful.

Basik: We call it the two bridges. Dr. Dave Keller, USAFA class of 1990, actually, is the one who introduced this idea. As we're trying to do what we do at the Museum and the Institute, we emphasize that it's not a military museum or a military institute. It's about values. Now, the stories we share happen to have played out in a military context. But as we describe the two bridges, the first bridge is you hear the story, can you identify the value that was on display in the story, or the virtue that was brought to life by their action? Usually, we easily identify that they demonstrated courage, sacrifice, commitment, and so on.

But the second bridge is the one that is our challenge and is the most important one, honestly. That requires you to connect the value on display in the story to your life. The bridge has to be, "I'm likely not going to be on a rooftop in Fallujah when a grenade rolls between me and my buddy, but I am going to face moments where I have to sacrifice for the people I'm leading. I am (now or in the future) going to have a moment where I need to make a call and put other priorities ahead of myself and make the hard call. So, maybe what helped that guy can help me in the battle of my life." One we use in the Institute is, "What is your battle?" because at some time, everybody's going to be afraid, exhausted, unprepared, overwhelmed, hopeless, etc. Our mission at the Museum and Institute is to take the clues left from the Medal of Honor recipients and offer paths for application into the battles of our lives.

Lindsay: That is so important because we all have those decisions, those moments, and that gap that we all have to decide to cross at some point. So, is it fair to say that part of the aspect of the museum is to really identify those exemplars and honor those that have earned that medal in that way. But secondary is to show how that can help inform others and how they lead, live their own lives and educate them?

Cassidy: You nailed it, Doug. You absolutely nailed it. That is exactly what we're trying to do. Kevin just wrote down the words, "inspire" and "equip," and that is our mission in the Institute and the Museum. It is a different experience. We want the visitor coming through the Museum to walk away inspired the same way as if they attended an Institute program, and the experience intertwines. It's all about that second bridge that Kevin talks about and how, "Okay do I take that piece of motivation and inspire myself to lead a better life through that example?"

Basik: Our goal is to go beyond the "what" of the recipient stories, which is inspirational just by its nature. When we see that on display, there's awe and wonder. You can't help but be inspired. But we want to then get from the "what" to the "so what" to the "now what" and equip people with whatever clues were just displayed in the story. Whatever insights the Medal of Honor recipients might be able to offer, maybe we can tease those out in our workshops or in the interactions in the Museum the realization, "I think I can take a step in this challenging moment in my relationship, work, or life in a way I otherwise wouldn't." Remember, inspiration is temporary. It's fleeting. You've got to connect it with a commitment to do something.

Lindsay: Well, you don't have to, right? We see that fall short a lot of times in leader development. Let's tell a story, let's get people invested and go, "Yeah, that was awesome moment." Unfortunately, when they walk away, they are left asking, "What does it mean for me? How does that change who I am? How does that inform, acknowledge or validate what I'm doing?" What I'm hearing from you both is the idea of the Institute is to help bring that education and tie in that experience, that inspiration to where the person is at and the challenges they are facing. That's the equipping piece of it. Regardless of your military affiliation, anybody who comes through there, you are able to give them an avenue to

really help put that on themselves, and equip them with those values.

Basik: We want to inspire, which is the easy part because of who we are spotlighting. We want to equip, so that you're ready for the battles to come. And finally, we want to connect people in a "community of honor," because there is power in knowing you don't have to do this alone. Leaning on each other, whether that's the cohort you go through an experience with, or just other people committed to being a little bit stronger in their honor or character in their life. This is also about the power of action. No one ever earned the Medal of Honor for *intending* to do something. They did something. In spite of all the obstacles, they took action in at least one moment. And, interestingly, 19 people earned the Medal of Honor twice. That's a whole other thing to explore! It's a demonstration that living honorably is not just about a single event or isolated opportunity. It could and should be part of our character across situations. Habits of honor.

Lindsay: What I really like in what you guys are talking about is this idea of community. It's larger than oneself. You mentioned that with the Medal itself, is that idea of a burden to wear it? It's because of the connection to something larger, right? What it means in a larger sense than just that one action, or series of actions. That idea of community, that idea of being there for one another, supporting one another, and being part of something larger are so important because I think as a society, we've lost some of that connection to one another. So that's really encouraging to think about that community of honor, that idea that, "You are not in this alone." It's a larger aspect by being able to have the Museum and the Institute to showcase that, really points to the idea of how we are connected. And what does that mean for me, the so what, the now what? That whole aspect really draws me in beyond just inspiring. It gives me something I can commit to and something larger than me.

Basik: Exactly. And I will say that we've spotlighted six values that are so central to the Medal of Honor. In the Medal stories, you come to understand integrity, courage, commitment, sacrifice, citizenship, and patriotism. Those last two, I think speak to service to something bigger than yourself. That you're a part of something.

There's three parts to the essence of Honor. First, there's the group. That's the community who is defining whether you are in or out of honor. Maybe it's your profession, your family, your school, or your faith group. This is the community to which you want to belong.

The second part of Honor is the code. That's the standard of excellence expected by its members, defined by the group. We say "of excellence" to make sure we're shooting for a moral and noble target. With the SEALs, there's a standard that Chris and the others are challenged to live up to. It's right there in the SEAL Creed.⁴ Or for others, it is the Airman's Creed,⁵ the Hippocratic Oath,⁶ the Honor Code,⁷ or the rules of this family. Informally, it declares, "Hey, we do this, we don't do that. And if you keep doing that, there's a consequence."

That's the third part of Honor—the cost. Honor can be lost. If it can't be lost, it's not honor. So, the fact that you can be perceived by the group you want to identify with as dishonorable, that you have lost the right to be part of this group—that should pain you. The Medal of Honor is an American award. Yes, we're global citizens and all that, but the Medal of Honor is about an American standard of excellence. We say there are certain values and virtues in America that we think are worthy of upholding and living by, and that's the code that we lift up. There should be a cost if you say, "I'll opt out of that." What's at risk if you don't meet that standard?

⁴ <https://navyseals.com/nsw/seal-code-warrior-creed/>

⁵ <https://www.airforce.com/vision>

⁶ https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/greek/greek_oath.html

⁷ <https://www.usafa.edu/about/honor/>

Lindsay: Then, what happens if we fall outside of that standard? Can we come back? How do we think about that if we fall short? Is there a way to reconcile that? One way to reconcile is go, “Well, I don’t want to be part of that group anymore. I’m going to change what I say I am or who I say I am.” But the other part is, “Can I work my way back? Can I figure out where that is?” And because I think we have a lot of times where people get into a spot of, “Wow, I was not who I said I was, and I’ve got to reconcile that.” And when you’re alone, it’s hard to reconcile that because all we see is a repeat in our head of what we did wrong versus feeling like part of a community, and how do we get back, and how do we earn our way back, or think about what that means if it’s important to us. You are helping folks think through that process.

With that in mind, you talked about having the Museum, having the Institute, and then a monument in Washington, DC. As you think about where you’re at right now and then looking ahead 5 years from now, what would success look like for you?

Cassidy: Right now, people can name more sports stars than they can Medal of Honor recipients. If we can move that needle a tick or two and have the Medal of Honor recipients be household names to some degree. It’s never going to be exactly that, but certainly an increased awareness. Also, to have the programs and seminars and offerings at our Institute roll off the tongue as if you are talking about the other high-quality programs out there. That our programs and seminars are talked about in the same sentence. And that people leave our Museum with 12-year-old kids tugging on their parents’ shirt like, “Let’s go again.” Or sitting at dinner going, “Did you read that story about a Medal of Honor recipient? Oh my gosh, it was amazing.”

Lindsay: If I understand where the museum is going to be located, it’s in a really neat area surrounded by things like a sports stadium to really start normalizing this idea

of honor as being something where people want to go to, right? “Hey, we’re going to go to the ball game, but let’s stop by the Museum on the way out or on the way in.” Or, “Hey, I went to the Museum and it triggered something in me and I want to learn a little bit more about that.” Or I’m at the Monument and I see that, and I’m like, “Wow, where do I go for a little bit more of this? So, it becomes more normalized right?”

Basik: Yes. The Museum in Arlington, Texas, is surrounded by the entertainment district. But when you look around, you see these huge stadiums as monuments built to excellence in sports. But this Museum is a beautiful contrast because it is about excellence in life. It’s excellence in humanity. I hope the contrast prompts people to consider which one’s more important in the grand scheme of things. Still, this Monument is pretty grand in scale too. It proudly declares, “Hey, you want to talk excellence? Pay attention to these stories. This is world-class.”

Lindsay: When you talk about that idea of excellence in virtue, or excellence in honor, or excellence in life, it starts to put that as part of the conversation of, “We can think about this, we can study this, we can get better at this. I can see myself and I’m not showing up the way I want to. How do I move the needle on that? How can I get better on how I want to do that?” Or, maybe I’m struggling, but I realize I’m not alone and where can I go to learn a little bit more about that? So, is the idea then that the Institute becomes that action arm in a way of serving? Is it serving communities? Is it serving schools? Is it all of that? Or what’s the vision there with how you’re rolling that out?

Cassidy: It’s all of the above where we’re going to inspire kids, adults, and the nation. We can’t do it all in person, right? If you want to inspire the nation, you have got to reach out electronically and through the internet and have multiple paths to impact a person. That is actually what we’re exploring. Right now, we’re developing some

really world-class, interactive products and curriculum with partners at EverFi and the NFL that will help us engage the nations' youth. This is just a first, exciting step in scaling the Medal of Honor impact nationally, but we feel like we have a good roadmap to that success.

Lindsay: So, to be a place that people can go and be, like maybe in a workshop, but something that can be exported as well. Or they could bring it into a school and go, hey, here's some curriculum, or program, or speaker, or event.

Basik: Absolutely. There's going to be a physical structure where we will have the opportunity to host experiences in person. But there will also be a need and an opportunity for us to deploy things virtually and in-person to the nation. As Chris said, we are partnering with some other organizations that are already integrated into schools across the nation, so we can offer Medal of Honor stories, and the Medal of Honor values as an integrated part of the curriculum for teachers, parents, and coaches, but also for adults in the corporate world and the military. Our goal is to hit them all. It is to create a national culture of honor.

Lindsay: That's exciting to hear about because I think a lot of times we think about the student, we think about the recipient of some of this training, but I think a lot of times what gets lost in there are the teachers of the content. It is also the faculty. How do we teach elementary school teachers the foundations that undergird this idea of honor and what these virtues and values are? How do we give them the information they need so they can be the example?

Basik: But you hit it. If those force multipliers, the teachers, parents, community leaders, and coaches are bought into it, we can move the needles. If they are lit up about the importance of it and believe their job is to develop leaders of character who happen to play lacrosse, or study biology, or work in their stores, then they can

easily weave character into their conversations. But if the teachers aren't bought into it or they are not equipped to discuss it, that's a tough sell for the kids to pick it up by themselves. I'll quote Arthur Schwartz, "Character is taught, but it's mostly caught and sought." If we can get the adults to embrace, model, and emphasize the values of honor where they live, it can be contagious.

Lindsay: That is very exciting. The Museum will be completed when?

Cassidy: Two years.

Lindsay: Between now and then, what is the goal you work toward that? Is it socializing the idea, building the infrastructure, getting the word out about what the vision is, and what you're trying to do? You've got an impressive Board and everybody who's bought into the idea of what you are doing. What does the next couple years look like as you're starting to roll this out?

Cassidy: You described it well. Using these 2 years to really get the infrastructure in place such that when the doors open physically at the Museum, the Institute will have a full offering of programs and seminars, and opportunities to impact people. Of course, we'll tune that up as we go and we'll learn things. But right now, the conversations and the partnerships that we're forging are so helpful. I think to be on a path that takes advantage of the lessons learned from a lot of other institutes that have walked the path ahead of us.

Basik: Exactly. The goal is to build a strong foundation of who we are, what are we trying to espouse, what's our philosophy, and our theory of change. Then build momentum over the next 2 years and start rolling out a very deliberate portfolio of offerings. I think we can also work through social media, maybe some publications, but even partnerships with organizations like CCLD⁸ at

⁸ <https://www.usafa.edu/character/>

the Air Force Academy. For example, in February, we are hosting our second Medal of Honor Service Academy Character Summit—a ½ day interactive workshop with cadets and faculty from all the service academies. It’s a powerful event that rolls beautifully into the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS).⁹ So those momentum-building events will help us scale as we get closer to 2025.

Lindsay: How do you create those synergies? How do you get that going? How do you cross-pollinate between the different domains that exist out there, business, military, nonprofit, academic, all of those that have a part to play in this?

Basik: You are hitting on the third piece of the trifecta that I previously mentioned. We want to connect people around the spirit of honor. We want to be the organization that brings together people to have conversations they otherwise wouldn’t have through issues and ideas related to the values of honor. We could be the catalyst to explore ideas like courage, resilience, duty, sacrifice, and decision-making in crisis. Who is better? There are a lot of great thought leaders and practitioners out there in the trenches doing great work, and we can facilitate learning and sharing among them. We can really benefit from hearing and sharpening each other. So, when the doors of the Museum and Institute open, we want to be the place that people go, “Hey, this is the logical place for us to huddle and dive into this topic we all hold dear.” We want to be the engine for thought leadership, ideas, and solutions around topics of character and honor.

Lindsay: You have talked about the Medal of Honor recipients and how they feel the weight of that, of carrying that around. What has been the response from them, the 65 that are still alive, to this endeavor or being

able to serve back and be a part of that and be connected to something larger? Because it can maybe seem a little isolated when that honor is placed upon you for something that you did in the moment. Being able to connect them or bring them. What has been their response?

Cassidy: What’s interesting is that there have been a few efforts over the last 50 or 60 years to get a national museum going for them. So, some of the older ones with that experience go, “Well, we’ve seen this rodeo before and those didn’t pan out for whatever reason.” And for me, in just a year and a half that I’ve been part of the project, it’s been interesting to see a little bit of that reaction to we are actually coming through with it. It’s no longer just PowerPoint. Literally, just out the window here is construction, concrete, and steel, and donor money is coming in. So, it’s been fun to see that mindset, particularly on the ones that understand the efforts in the past go, “Oh my gosh, well, this might actually happen.” And the younger recipient crowd, they’re excited. As you mentioned, we’re right here next to AT&T Stadium. The Cowboys are a big part of our existence because of Charlotte Jones being on our board. We have events here in town. The salute to service game that every NFL organization has in November, the Cowboys are generous to recognize Medal of Honor recipients on their salute service day. It’s just really exciting to see the enthusiasm grow in the recipient community of, “Wow, this is going to be a real thing. And my story will be told in there.”

Basik: And the scale and the size of it are noteworthy. It is a significant structure, as it should be, because it represents the legacy of the stories. But all these recipients are so humble. To a person, they are so humble. I think they appreciate that this building will also carry the legacy of the stories of the other service members who did not receive the Medal but demonstrated courage, valor, and honor nonetheless. As the Museum goes vertical, I think people are thinking, “I get it. I see it.

9 <https://www.usafa.edu/character/national-character-leadership-symposium-ncls/>

And I see what this does for the stories of those who need their stories told.”

Lindsay: What’s been the biggest surprise and what’s been the biggest encouragement that you’ve seen in your time since you said, “Yes, I want to do this?”

Basik: It’s not easy to get a monument on the mall in Washington, DC. It’s on this dang National Mall! It is not easy to get on that mall. But it was unanimously approved by Congress! 100%. 100% approval. Just simmer in that for a second. This could be the type of thing that can unify a nation. Even if folks are not necessarily pro-military, the values embodied in the Medal are enduring and commonly significant. We can invite people to rally around living those values by sharing the stories of courageous but imperfect people. For me, I’m excited about what this can do to our nation. And it was demonstrated in Congress for crying out loud!

Cassidy: For me, a large part of my job is to help spread the word and quite honestly, fundraising for the Foundation. Before I got into the job, I had this, “Oh, man. Fundraising. I feel like a used car salesman.” But the surprising part is that feeling of asking people for money is completely removed when you are selling this ideal of the Medal of Honor. The level of support it echoes is what Kevin said about the support in Congress. When we’re out talking to people and companies and family offices, the answer is always, “Oh my gosh, this is something that means a lot to me. And I can see many things where this is applicable to the nation.” And everybody supports in whatever is a meaningful way for them, whether it be just telling friends and family, giving financial support, or in the case of a business, providing some in-kind service. We even we have a local company that helps us with flowers for events, and every entity has their own way of supporting. That’s been cool to see. The answer is always “Yes,” in some way.

Basik: But think about that, that’s an important phrase. You say, the answer to honor is always yes. When people are offered just this pure thing of honor, people go, “Of course.” It’s that obvious. Maybe the answer to the value of honor is always yes. But, the ability to *execute* honor is not always “Yes” or easy, but there’s just something inherently aspirational and appealing in celebrating the values embodied in the Medal. Especially in comparison to the alternative—what we so often see in the world these days—when people are instead presented with the appeal of life lived with honor, the response is, “Yes! More of that!” I think that’s part of the reason they want to be part of what we’re doing.

Lindsay: That’s powerful because you have the recipients of the Medal of Honor, that’s the action, that’s what happened and you have the values that underlie that. But I think from a humanity standpoint, there’s always an aspirational aspect of that too. Seeing myself in that. As I think about courage, it’s like I want to be courageous when the moment comes. I want to have virtue when the time comes. So, I think there’s this connectedness to us of, “I see these people who did it. I understand what it’s about and why it’s important. And at a basic human level, I want to be connected. I want aspirationally to live that.” And from a real practical standpoint, to offer a little bit of healing in that community aspect of what we’ve seen society-wise on how some people are treating one another. That idea of getting back to values, and virtues, and that aspirational nature of it as, maybe I’m not there, but I want to be there. Okay, now let’s engage you right there.

Cassidy: Yes, the pursuit of our best possible selves.

Lindsay: Absolutely. I know my actual self because I live with it every single day. I’ve got to deal with that. But what you are offering is an aspirational self of who I can be and how I can grow and be better as a spouse, parent, a community member, a member of a profession, or whatever that is. I think you’re offering people something that they can see themselves in. That’s the connection piece that I think it’s easy to say yes to.

Basik: And that's bridge number two! "I know I want to be or need to be, better in *that* virtue in my life." Now the question is, can you equip me to do that? For example, "if I'm struggling with fear, maybe I can better understand how that guy (recipient) struggled with fear, and pulled it off. So maybe there's something there."

Lindsay: Maybe I can be a little less fearful in the moment when it happens because it's really about being in the moment of that aspect. That's pretty powerful. Looking forward, what are you excited about? What is it that helps you come into work every single day and go, "I am excited. I am exactly where I need to be. This is exactly what we need to be about."

Cassidy: We were just a small group of people trying to scream in the woods 2 years ago, and we weren't really sure if people could hear. Now that hard work is paying off, the staff is growing, the dollars are coming in, which I equate to awareness and effectiveness in our mission of getting it out there, and the building's coming to life. So, I'm most excited about standing there 2 years from now with the core group of people that made this happen before the living Medal of Honor recipients, opening the door and saying, "Welcome, gentlemen into your building. And this is for you, from the nation. Thank you." I say gentlemen, because the only female recipient, Mary Walker, is no longer alive. You can picture that

line of people walking in all with the blue medal. It gives me chill right now just thinking about that.

Lindsay: Because that's really what it's all about, right? That ability to sit here and say, "Here's what we can now offer. Here's how we can serve. Here's how we can give back." That's pretty powerful.

Basik: I see them walking in and looking around and going, "Oh my gosh, it's so much better than I imagined." Because it will be. I've seen the scale and scope. The values are represented here, but this is the megaphone that will send the message out. This building is big, but it's small in stature to the sacrifices made. It's going to amplify and it's going to be the beacon that sends these values out in a new way.

Lindsay: In a way that everybody can connect to.

Cassidy: Speaking of that connection, so far, we've raised \$232 million. We've got \$41 million to go to close out the formal fundraising for the Museum and Institute portion of the project. We are making progress!

Lindsay: I think that is a testament to that success, and where you're headed, and what it represents. Best of luck to you both.