

Frederick Factor Season 2, Episode 5: The Solution Factor with Peter Brehm

Ashleigh: Welcome to the Frederick Factor. My name is Ashleigh Kiggans, and I'm the host of Season 2. Everyone who's lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick, Maryland knows there's just something special about this place. One of those things is the incredible diverse community that continues to grow. Here on this podcast, we bring you Frederick's underrepresented business owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders into the spotlight to share their stories with you and find out: what's their Frederick Factor?

I'm here with Peter Brehm, the treasurer of the Frederick Center. So Peter, welcome.

Peter: Great, thank you.

Ashleigh: We are very happy to have you. We're recording this in July, so we're coming off of a great pride fest, so congratulations to having another successful year. So I wanted to talk a little bit more about the Frederick Center, but first could you tell us a little bit about you?

Peter: Sure. I moved to Frederick about 14 years ago. And I had retired from the printing industry, which was in a state of collapse for lots of reasons. And the company I worked for, which was based in Baltimore, was in its third bankruptcy. And I said -- enough of that. And so I retired and took what I described as my encore career job, working at Hood College in the IT department. And so that job doesn't require any travel. Nobody reports to me. It's a job that starts and ends when it's supposed to start and end with no overtime. So I really wanted to become more involved with the community, and I especially wanted to support the LGBTQ+ community. So in 2012, Brian Walker and Cindie Beach and her son, Austin Beach, got together and formed the nucleus of what is now the Frederick Center.

And the background for that is illustrative. Austin was a high school student at Urbana, and he's gay, and he was bullied mercilessly by his classmates. And when he complained to the administration, they said, "Well, it's your fault because of who you are."

Ashleigh: Wow.

Peter: And so as a result, Austin -- and I give him full credit for this -- said: we gotta do better with that. And so the first program, which continues to this day, is a weekly youth group that allows LGBTQ+ kids to get together in a safe, affirming environment for 90 minutes. It's structured so that there's a facilitator, and we also have a LCSW who sits in. It's not a therapy session, but [they sit in] just to make sure that if something's going on, the LCSW expertise can come into play. And so, weekly, we have between 10 and 25 kids who get together and talk about topics. Sometimes there's a structured presentation, sometimes it's a facilitated discussion. Sometimes it's game night, and it's just a place for the kids to be affirmed and themselves, which is really important. So that's how I found the Frederick Center -- is through

Brian Walker and Cindy Beach and Austin Beach. And I was a founding board member and have stayed engaged with the organization since that time. As you mentioned at the start, I'm currently the treasurer.

Ashleigh: Wow. So you said that it's been around 12 years.

Peter: Since 2012. So 10.

Ashleigh 10 years. Right. So how have you seen things kind of evolve especially with the youth group? So are you seeing that now, with things starting to be more accepted and things starting to come more to light? Do you see more youth coming out and participating in these groups now?

Peter: Get ready for a complicated answer.

Ashleigh: <laughs.> Good. We love that.

Peter: So let's peel the onion on many layers. So the Frederick Center started with the youth group, and in response to community needs, we created a youth group junior for kiddos 9 to 12. Youth group is [for ages] 13 to 18. We have a young adult group, which is 18 to 24. It might be 26, I'm sorry. We then created a trans family group for parents and caregivers of trans kids. The kids don't go -- it's for the parents to come to terms, understand, get knowledge about raising a trans child, trans or non-binary child. We also have a trans partner group for partners of trans people, a trans teen group specifically for trans teenagers. We've have also started up a healing pride group for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced IPV intimate partner violence, or IPA -- intimate partner assault or sexual assault.

Peter: We have a group called Coffee with Pride for people who are retired and want to come by and have a cup of coffee and chat and network, and also a group for LGBTQ+ people who are experiencing substance use disorder. So we're growing to meet the needs of our community. We also have a transgender non-binary community group for trans people who are 18 and older. We also sponsor the Frederick HIV Coalition, which is a coalition of organizations helping to reduce stigma associated with HIV, as well as provide free home test kits, as well as provide testing out in the community itself. And that works in cooperation with the Frederick County Department of Health.

With that in mind, we also do outreach and teach something called LGBTQ+ 101. People can contact the Frederick Center and we'll go onsite and work with the organization and their employees or their volunteers and talk about LGBTQ+ stuff. And in that presentation, people will ask exactly that question: Have things changed and gotten better? Well, yes. We have RuPaul's Drag Race and *Will and Grace* has been on TV, and there are a lot of other LGBTQ+ characters that are in the media. And so along with that and education and marriage equality and the Policy 443, which in Frederick County is the school policy that affirms a trans child's use of the locker room and pronouns and name of the child's choice and bathroom of the child's choice, where

their gender identity aligns... Things have gotten better. And the problem is that the statistics associated with our community still indicate that there is a huge amount of social stigma and pushback to people who identify as LGBTQ+. So for example, one statistic is that 40% of all runaways are LGBTQ+ kids. So if there are a thousand runaways in the United States, 40% of them will identify as LGBTQ+. And why is that? Well, it's because an enormous number of kids are kicked out of their homes. Once they identify as LGBTQ+, that's terrible. 50% of trans kids under the age of 21 will have attempted suicide. Now, what's troubling about that is that there is another statistic that says if the family affirms the trends or non-binary child, then the rate of suicide drops down to what it is for straight cisgender kids.

Ashleigh: Wow. That's incredible.

Peter: It is incredible. Sad and incredible. I'm going to forget the statistic, but the number of LGBTQ+ kids who are assaulted on a high school or middle school campus with a gun or a stick or fists is incredibly high. It's like 36% compared to straight cisgender kids. The amount of self-medication that's taking place -- LGBTQ+ kids are more prone to using alcohol, using drugs, smoking, having unprotected sex, all kinds of self-medicating things are going on. So yes, structurally, things are getting better, but culturally, we have a long way to go before our LGBTQ+ kids are being affirmed. Now, in addition, the statistics for adults are grim. So all of the self-medication stuff continues on. And, added to that is obesity and other healthcare signals that LGBTQ+ people because of social stress just have more issues to deal with on that.

But there's a third and a more troubling issue that's afoot, and that is -- with every change, and this happened with African Americans, it's happening with Hispanic people, and now it's happening with LGBTQ+ people. With every step forward, in this case, let's just use marriage equality as the example, there's pushback from people who want the world to look like it did in 1950, and they argue that those are the good old days. Well, those are the good old days if you were a straight white man. But for the rest of us, it didn't quite play out so well. And so that's why we're seeing school board members take all of the pride books out of the Brunswick Library so that "their child won't see this perversion." That's why this [inaudible] tragic group is arguing that to introduce the concepts of LGBTQ+ people in kindergarten through fifth grade -- not to teach sex -- that's a complete misrepresentation on their part. But to introduce the fact that Johnny might have two daddies or two mommies or that there are kids who are going to wear a dress even though they don't necessarily have a female name.

All of that infinite variation that exists in the world today, they're arguing that that is sexualizing our children and making teachers and people into pedophiles. It's horrible. It's just horrible. And I heard on NPR recently that the Proud Boys are behind this campaign. So I find it shameful, shameful that these people are doing this. Anyway, there's that kind of pushback.

There's the pushback from our elected leaders. Dan Cox is behind some of this hate speech as well, demonizing LGBTQ+ people, the Supreme Court's *Roe v Wade*, where Justice Thomas says, "We're gonna revisit marriage equality and revisit the sodomy laws and revisit contraception under the fact that the right to privacy isn't necessarily going to include those

things." All of that, plus the bills in Arkansas and other places that are preventing parents from providing healthcare to their trans kids, plus these rules in other states that trans kids can't play in the sport on a team that aligns with their gender identity. All of that has a ripple effect especially to our kids, and to our adults as well, but especially our kids. And the feedback is, "Why do these people hate me?" And that adds to that social stress. So the answer is yes, on one hand things are better, but they're really not that much better culturally. And then we have these hate groups that are springing up, and that's creating all kinds of legal barriers as well as social stress barriers as it relates to the LGBTQ plus community.

Ashleigh: The extremists. We all went through sexual education in school and how is that any different? You're literally teaching.

Peter: Well, when I was growing up, and in sex ed, there was no mention of LGBTQ+ people. We did not exist. We were erased. So that's a problem. Now in Frederick County Public Schools, there are references in the family life curriculum at an appropriate age to sexual activities that involve two men or two women. The problem is that some number of those teachers, according to our youth group, report this as disgusting. So you're talking about my sexual orientation in a manner that is offensive and demeaning. How, what's up? Yeah. So that, I mean, it's another example of where the rules are there, but the spirit to make those rules work is sometimes not there based upon the person.

Ashleigh: Well, and you labeled a lot of examples too, that are right in our community. When I read the article and the *Frederick News-Post* about the person running for school board who pulled the books -- and number one, that's a lot of time and effort to put into hatred, basically. And, having those books available for those students who do want to, there is nothing wrong with that. They are not being placed in every single student's hand saying, here you go, go home with this. So you're taking it to a whole nother level. They should be available. I mean, that's like pulling African American history from the shelves saying, "Sorry, we don't want you to know that." And you know, I grew up in Northern Virginia, which was still very much Virginia. I grew up in Prince William County, which is now considered more Northern Virginia than it was when I was growing up there, at least the eastern side of Prince William County in Woodbridge is considered more than it was.

Peter: It was rural back then.

Ashleigh: It was rural, but we had a weird sort of line of people from Fairfax County who moved into Woodbridge. But yet Stafford County was only one hop away. And you know, I knew where you don't want to go, but I can recall. My fiance grew up in Philadelphia, and when we talk about what we learned in history, even back in school, and I'm like, yeah, you know, X, Y and Z was left out of my history. And, we learned things from a Confederate side basically. I mean, Jefferson Davis Highway was a highway I grew up off of. Stonewall Jackson High School, all of these things we were taught. I went to Mills E. Godwin Middle School, which was a highly racist governor. So, all of that history was pulled from us.

And, there's this evolution now that you hope that these kids are going to be able to at least make those decisions for themselves, to have the sources, the resources, the books, things like that available, so that if they do want to go to a library and check it out, they can. Because the other thing too is what are you really accomplishing? Everyone has access to the internet. These kids have access to the internet, so isn't it better for them to learn from something that has been approved to be in a school than for them just to start going on the internet and start searching whatever they want and learning things that may not be as kid friendly. I mean, it's, it's very shocking to hear and to hear that that's being done so publicly, and with no remorse, no thought of it, to think that it's the right way. And, you know, it's an interesting thing because everyone thinks Frederick is so progressive. And while Frederick City may be starting to get more progressive, that is only one small part of our entire county.

Peter: I'll tell you a story about that. And I agree. Frederick City is, in my experience, very affirming, and also very blue from a political standpoint. Frederick County, not so much. But five or six years ago, *Frederick Magazine* approached the Frederick Center and said, "Hey, how's this for a story? We'll have some same-sex couples go around to different places in the county, and we'll have a photographer in the background somewhere, and we'll ask the same-sex couple to show affection, and then we'll see what the results are." And we all looked at the Frederick Center folks, volunteers looked at one another, and said, "Are you crazy? Why would I want to get hit with a baseball bat out in the county by showing affection with a same sex person?" So that's the degree to which that divide exists. And again, I'm not gonna say all county residents are that way. I'm just saying that there is a great anxiety that there absolutely are a lot of people out in the county who just soon have us not be there.

Ashleigh: There's so many parallels in the Black community and the LGBTQ+ community -- you know, rights to marry. It was funny -- every year, we always celebrate Loving Day because my fiance is white, I'm black. And so many people comment and say, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe that was true. I can't believe that's happening." What people don't realize is, I believe it was either Mississippi or Alabama, that it wasn't until actually the 2000's that the law actually legally allowed for interracial marriage. Now, it wasn't always enforced, but the written law there was that you could not be interracially married. It's the same thing when you fast forward to looking at same-sex marriage... And I've had the pleasure of going to multiple same-sex weddings, which I always absolutely love going to. And, it's part of just being an ally to the community. Just thinking about how 5, 10 years ago, there was no opportunity to do that, or you would have to fly to another state. And now to hear that those rights may be at risk is terrifying. It's also comical that of all the justices, it's Clarence Thomas who says it -- because he is married to a white woman. You are here pulling rights, but yet 52 years ago, your marriage to your wife would've been illegal. How do you not see that those parallels are so, so similar? But once again, it's almost like we have forgotten the case of what politics is supposed to be. And now it's gone to extremes and to hate. There's very few people who are still in the middle ground area, and it's really sad.

Peter: Well, when I taught leadership back in the printing industry, one of the tenants that trained the trainer class would explain that it's easy to lead people against an enemy. It's hard to lead people with a positive. And so what I see the Republican party doing is demonizing African Americans, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and using all of that as a way of coalescing mostly white, cisgender people to rally around "we hate all of these people and therefore we're together on this." But before we go any further, I do want to acknowledge though, while I appreciate your analogy, that LGBTQ+ and African Americans have been on a similar or the same path. I would disagree as a white cisgender man. African Americans -- even the gay community has been discriminatory. And that should be acknowledged and something that I'm not proud of, but it's just something that we have to acknowledge.

I think we're better as a community, but I just want to make it clear that even racism within the gay community -- which is a complete oxymoron because people who are under the thumb of the law should know better than to put somebody else into that -- but LGBTQ+ people could and can pass. And that's not possible when you're African American. So I just want to acknowledge that the struggle, the institutional racism, the cultural racism that has existed in this country has made its mark much more harmful on the African American community. And that's not to dismiss what's been going on with the LGBTQ+ community over the years,

Ashleigh: Absolutely. Yeah. And I appreciate that clarification of it too. You're correct. And, there has also been prejudice on the side from the African American community towards the LGBTQ+ community sometimes. And, once again, I agree with you. These are two communities that have been pushed under.

Peter: Well, I read something about that. Now, again, I'm not African American, so this is me reading, not me living, because the African American community has been traditionally, historically to this day, under such social pressure. The church was one of the mainstays -- the church and the family. And then on top of those two was the overlay of, "Well, whatever I do in public has got to be perfect, because otherwise I'm going to be judged as flawed. And so my children have to be on the straight and narrow. My husband, my wife, my family, everything has to be just as perfect as I can make it." And so now we have the cultural issue of, well, anybody who's LGBTQ+ is sick or psychotic -- I mean, these are all 1950s, 1960s things, which affected my parents. What did you do wrong that made your child gay?

And I still hear people say that about people of trans kids. Well, what did you do wrong that made your child that way? The parents do nothing wrong. The child recognizes his, her or their identity. Sexual orientation or gender identity. And then it is manifested. It's not something that we choose, and it's not something the parents did or didn't do. But that cultural overlay of "what did you do wrong," runs straight into fundamentalist religion and runs straight into a cultural requirement that "I have to be better than everybody else in order to be as equal as they are." And I completely understand the conflict. I completely understand the conflict and also recognize it's not uniform with all African Americans. But I also understand culturally how there would be these pressures to say, "I cannot acknowledge that I have an LGBTQ+ child because

that tarnishes my family's image, or it goes against what I'm being told at church. Both of which are really important pillars of my cultural identity."

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Ashleigh: I can recall in maybe the third or fourth grade, going to church with a friend of mine who went to a Southern Baptist style church. And, the comment of "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." And it's something that stuck with me through the years just because -- and I'm not going to dive into the religious side of things at all, because I did grow up Episcopalian through my life. But it was just something that always kind of stuck with me where in my mind I said, "I'm always gonna be an ally no matter what. I always wanna be an ally. I always wanna shift. I never wanna have my children, my family, think of people in that way and want to always just bleed out love as opposed to anything else."

Peter: And kind of touching on that, looking at Pride Fest. So as I mentioned, we just came off of an incredible, incredible Pride Fest. It was the first year I attended, it was actually my nine-year-old who has decided she wants to be an ally. And, I said, "Hey, it's Pride Fest this weekend." We had just gotten back the day before from a weeklong vacation. And I said, "Do you want to go?" And she said, "yeah, can we go?" And so we went and she's very into making beaded bracelets. So she was making all these beaded bracelets. She made a rainbow beaded bracelet, neck or necklace for me. We just had a blast. And this kid is not a kid who likes to be outside in 90 degree weather. And she made us walk -- I think we walked a total of almost five miles. Just walking up and back and up and back. I know this is the 10th year and I think the turnout this year was at --?

Peter: Well it was at least 10,000. It might have been as many as 15,000.

Ashleigh: It was incredible. I get chills now talking about it because the feeling that you got, it was so beautiful to see how many people in the community that I know were participating. So I'd love for you to talk about, obviously this one, but really where it all started from.

Peter: The First Pride was 2012, the year the Frederick Center was founded. We rented a pavilion at Ballenger Creek Park. And had 300 people and a picnic. A drag queen put a boombox up on the table and did a dance, and we all cheered and went home. So that was

great fun. And then the next year we moved up to Utica State Park and had a bigger space, a bigger pavilion and space behind a snow fence. And so that was a lot of fun. And then we dipped our toe into the big city and then moved it to Carroll Creek. And it's been on Carroll Creek ever since. So this year we expanded over to East Street to have a car show in the MARC Parking Lot, and then a beverage garden at the top of the hill there on the Carroll Creek.

Ashleigh: The car show was great, by the way. The fact that you could grab your beer up there -- and it was fun to do that because obviously having a child with us, she doesn't want to just sit there while we're drinking a beer. We walked around, and I believe she picked out whoever's blue BMW M3, I think it was, that was there. That's the car she said she would like. So, just shy of \$88,000.

Peter: Christmas is coming. <laughs>

Ashleigh: Yeah. Thank you guys for that, by the way. <laughs>. Apparently the Honda Civic I would plan to buy her, like I had, is not going to work anymore. But it was so nice to be so extended all the way out. And, we stopped and watched the show too. And the drag show of course, was great, but the fashion show that they did for the teens [was the best part of the show]. Oh my gosh, that was so much fun. It was so much fun. And the kids had a great time. And so we were standing in the back, and I didn't realize there was a stage on the ground because all of a sudden I saw one of the teenagers do the splits. And I was like, oh my gosh, they're doing the splits on the brick. That's gotta be painful. Then I saw another one, I was like, okay, there's gotta be something down there. Was that something new for this year?

Peter: We take advantage, with thanks to the Downtown Partnership, for the Alive @ Five setup. And so that stage was an Alive @ Five edition. So thank you, Alive @ Five, for including the stage so that we could do splits.

Ashleigh: So have you guys found that since you've been on the Creek the last few years, that the community and Downtown Partnership -- all of these people -- have just really started to kind of follow with excitement?

Peter: Yes. As we've gained experience with different aspects of Pride and as the community has come to understand the event and the type of things that go on, yes. For example, Downtown Partnership, now we'll provide them with Pride flags. This year it was a Pride flag that said "Save Trans Kids" or "Trans Kids Matter." I can't remember the imprint, but then they give that out to all of the Downtown Partnership members.

Ashleigh: Right. And then I think there was a window competition as well.

Peter: Right. Well then, the Pride Committee -- thank you, Pride Committee and especially Amanda and Diana -- said, "Well, why don't we have a window decorating contest?" And so they organized that.

Ashleigh: And once again, like we were talking before we even got on here, when I moved to Frederick, and started working in Frederick, I really felt like this was home. And to come out and really see just how many restaurants downtown were so supportive and were really, really getting into it. And, we stopped and had lunch at JoJo's and with our flags that we got, we all put them in the candles. They weren't lit, but we're putting our flags at each table in the candles and stuff. And, when we left our waitress, we noticed she had her Pride earrings on. And instead of them saying, "Have a good day," it was, "Happy Pride" in every place.

Peter: So I'm gonna build on that. Again, in LGBTQ+ 101, when we talk to groups, we say our goal is for affirmation. Acceptance is nice. Acceptance is when you walk in the room, somebody shakes your hand. Affirmation is when you walk in the room and they give you a hug and say, "I'm so happy you're here." And so when people wear their Pride earrings when they say, "oh yeah, sure, put your flag in there." When they hang the flag, it's, it's signaling, "we're happy you're here. You're part of my community. I'm part of your community. We're in the same community." And, that's the kind of affirmation that we're looking for.

Ashleigh: That's awesome. Now, kind of moving forward and looking at the future, I mean, obviously I hope this continues for another 50, 60, 70 years as long as I plan to live in this community. My daughter's already told me that we need to put it on the calendar, and make sure we have it for next year. And that it's going to be something we're going to apparently be working our vacations around. <laughs>. Which, I have no complaints. But, what do you guys have up and coming in the next [year]? Is there anything that Fredericks Center is doing within the next year or so that you want to share?

Peter: One very specific one. We have a Youth Pride party. And it's for 18 and under. It is not an adult event. It is a youth event. Next year we're planning on Pride again for the last Saturday of June. And then, later on this fall, we'll be planning Little Song Little Dance, which is a fundraiser for our HIV coalition. And that will involve drag queens. So it's a drag show. So we're working on that. I don't have a date for that yet. But that's underway.

Ashleigh:

So. And where will that one be located?

Peter:

It'll be in town. I'm not sure of the venue yet. So we'll work on that. And then also later this summer, PNC has sponsored Ally of the Year, where we'll recognize an ally who has been a big supporter for the LGBTQ+ community this past year, as well as will provide a Lifetime Achievement Award to somebody. And then, also a recognition of an institution that's been an ally and recognition of a LGBTQ+ business. So it'll be four awards total.

Ashleigh: I mean, we've talked a lot about kind of diversity and underrepresented groups. And honestly, I have this as a question, but I really think you already answered it: What is the Frederick Center doing and helping to continue to do to support underrepresented groups? And

I almost want to flip that question and say, is there anything else the Frederick community can be doing to, to help, you know, kind of with the promotion of all that?

Peter:

The most important thing to do is to love your child unconditionally. And if and when the child says, "I think I'm a girl, I think I'm a boy" -- if there's a gender identity discussion, if there's a sexual orientation discussion -- [the most important thing] is to keep reinforcing how much you love your child. That is the most important thing to do. And then the second is, if you come into contact with an LGBTQ+ child or adult, but especially a child, and you are the professional, you're the school nurse, you're the teacher, you are the police officer, you are the crossing guard, the bus driver, it doesn't matter -- if you're the adult -- to also affirm that child. And that even goes for families. You know, we say in LGBTQ+ 101, when a child comes out, the family comes out. And if the families, if the grandparents or the church or the school or the neighbors, if they're hating, then mom and dad feel that pressure as well.

And that's not fair to them either. So it's just so important that we as the broader Frederick community affirm LGBTQ+ people because when we do that, then it starts to spread that message. And, to be an effective ally, we have to take one more step, which is a hard one. When we hear somebody saying hateful stuff, we have to say, "Please don't say that." That's the mark of a good ally: you hear the homophobic or the transphobic slur or comment. We, that person, have to say to whoever has said that, "Hey, that that isn't cool. I have LGBTQ+ friends and, and that's painful, so please don't do that." It can be awkward and I acknowledge that, but that would be the pitch. And I know Frederick can do it because I know that a lot of folks downtown are doing it.

So I know Frederick can do it. Another story. There was a member of the board who grew up out in the country and grew up on a farm. And from an early age, he liked to dress up and he came out as gay. And, when he was a young boy, people recognized that he was effeminate. And one day he was sitting at his grandmother's house and somebody came in and said a hateful slur to him. And his grandmother whipped around and said, "Don't you ever talk to my grandchild like that. I love him and he's a wonderful child. So if you can't deal with that, then get out." And I thought that is the kind of stuff we need more of.

Ashleigh: Absolutely. Absolutely. And, you know, I think there was a lot of affirmation shown at Pride, and hopefully it continues and it's not just that we're doing it for the month. Hopefully it really truly does continue and continues to grow. The way that you guys have grown Pride Fest is the same way that I hope that the affirmation continues to grow throughout not just in the direct Frederick community here, not just the city of Frederick, but really throughout the entire county. We've touched a little bit on religious stuff and I have to say one of the greatest things I saw at Pride was the number of religious groups and churches that were there in support and in affirmation. And I think that's a huge boundary that they've crossed and a huge hurdle that they've crossed. So I love seeing that support and in my opinion, if those groups can really find the love. And, I love that word of affirmation -- that's a great one. And if they can find love and affirmation, we all should be able to accept people too.

Peter: Well, I'm a member with my husband of ERUCC, Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ up on Church Street, and the pastor Barbara Kershner Daniel has emphasized, and the congregation emphasizes this as well -- it's a very affirming and welcoming congregation. But when Barbara has a sermon on any topic like this, she [emphasizes] that God is about love. And in fact, the Bible says the first commandment is to love thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy soul. And the second is like unto it, to love thy neighbor like thyself. And on these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets. So all the other junk that's been thrown at us about, "oh, Leviticus -- this proves why you're sick and there's no Adam and Steve." No, no, let's go back. The first two commandments are what everything hangs on. And so Barbara has emphasized time and time again that we have a loving God and God loves each of us. We are made in God's image, each of us -- LGBTQ+ people included.

Ashleigh: Absolutely. Well, as we wrap it up, my last question is always asking: what is your Frederick Factor? What to you, really makes Frederick and the community what it is?

Peter: Well, I've told somebody that the first week I was here, those many years ago, I walked out of the Tally Center gym and came across the end of the Kris Kringle parade. I don't know if you've ever seen the Kris Kringle parade?

Ashleigh: I actually was the emcee this year.

Peter: Well, in the first year, it was enough to make me tear up. I thought, "oh my God, I'm in Bedford Falls." It was just so that, and then as I got to know Frederick and, yes, we all have clay feet. Frederick has some sides that we need to improve upon. We have lots of work to do in lots of areas, but I am astounded at the generosity of time and talent and treasure that I have seen in Frederick with people sharing. And it's not just sharing like, "oh, here's a check, go away." It's, "Here's a check and I want to help. I want to be involved. I want to be part of the solution." And if it was a one-off thing, I'd go, oh, "well, that was just that person or that organization." But it happens time and time again where there's this intersectionality of organizations, churches and nonprofits and civic groups and agencies. All kinds of folks who in different ways, at different times, different places are really striving to make Frederick a better place. And it's just that consistency. Now, it may happen in other places. I haven't lived in all that many places, but I'm just amazed at what I think of as that Frederick Factor.

Ashleigh: Yeah, absolutely. I always say, Frederick is the Huggy Town. It's the town where everybody hugs you. And I've lived in a few other cities and none like this one. And it's one of the only communities where, as you pointed out, they don't care what building I just sold (me being in the real estate industry). They don't care what that deal I just did. They don't care about that. What they do care about is: What am I doing with my time? Where am I giving back? Where am I volunteering? The majority of the people that I've met outside of my industry have been people I've met in my nonprofit work. And this is one of those communities where we love people that give back. And I think that hits right onto what you're saying and that's exactly how the reflection of Frederick shows that.

Well, this has been a great conversation. I love sending out these questions and then only hitting half of them, because I always like to say that the conversation just has to flow. And, this has been an incredible conversation. So Peter, I greatly thank you for being here today.

Peter: Well, thanks for the invite.

Ashleigh: Yeah, absolutely. And please make sure, everyone, to go check out the Frederick Center. Keep an eye on the events they have coming up. So to close it out, I'm Ashleigh Kiggins, and this is Season Two of the Frederick Factor.

You've been listening to the Frederick Factor. Want to find out more about our diverse community that makes Frederick so special? Visit our website at www.frederickfactor.com. 'Til next time.