



Scott Johnson

Mayor – Saratoga Springs

Success Magazine: How do you measure success?

Scott Johnson: Success is measured one step at a time, evolving throughout your lifetime. The love of your family, personal relationships and respect of your peers, are far larger measures and of greater importance than financial accomplishments. Add integrity into the definition and you're set. Certainly, love and family top the list.

“To be truly successful, whether personally or professionally, I've always tried to be balanced, to listen before deciding and then have the courage to take a stand.”

SM: You came from very humble beginnings. How has this contributed to who you are today?

SJ: My background growing up certainly had financial challenges. However, I wouldn't change a thing. Oftentimes the struggles and challenges you overcome only make you a stronger and better person with a balanced perspective. I try never to lose sight of how many people in our community face financial challenges every single day.

SM: From the time you were old enough, you held several jobs while attending school. To whom or what do you attribute your work ethic?

SJ: My parents, especially my mom, instilled in all five children the importance of a strong work ethic and to earn your own way. The lesson was pretty basic: If you want something and strive to get ahead, work hard and always believe in yourself.

SM: To what personal characteristic do you attribute your success?

SJ: To be truly successful, whether personally or professionally, I've always tried to be balanced, to listen before deciding and then have the courage to take a stand.

SM: Where did you get the drive to strive for more, to do better for yourself?

SJ: My inspiration and determination has always been based on family. My mom, Jane, was an early role model following my parents' divorce, at a time when single parenting wasn't nearly as common as today. Later in life, I continued to find more inspiration from my wife, Julie, and our son, Conor.

SM: As a child living in Jefferson Terrace, did you ever imagine that you would one day be the Mayor of the city?

SJ: I never thought I'd be Mayor until the opportunity arose last year. Clearly, I couldn't have contemplated this when I lived in Jefferson Terrace as a child. If nothing else comes out of my administration, I hope the underprivileged youth in our city, especially the children in the Terrace, will realize America is still the land of opportunity, regardless of family wealth.

SM: Were future political aspirations part of your decision to go to law school?

SJ: While politics have always intrigued me, my decision to go to law school was an attraction to the rational process of the law and the intensity of litigation.

SM: You were a very successful lawyer. At what point did you know you were ready to leave the profession?

SJ: After 26 years in litigation, I sensed it was time for new challenges. I retired in December 2006, a few years after assisting New York State recover damages from Big Tobacco. Without doubt, the tobacco lawsuit became a hard to match pinnacle of my legal career.

SM: You have been involved in the political arena for some time. How did you become interested in politics?

SJ: While being Mayor is the first elected office I ever sought, my interest in politics developed many years ago. I was on the Saratoga Springs Republication Committee for a few years in the 1990s. I've always believed that voting is not just a right but a privilege. I vote in every election, whether local, state or national.

SM: What is it that attracted you to the Republican Party?

SJ: When I was 18 years old and first registered to vote, the Saratoga back then basically required you to be Republican to obtain certain summertime jobs, and I had to earn money for college. That being said, I've always identified with some very basic tenets of the Republican Party, namely, self-reliance, less government interference and lower taxes. But all politics really is local, at its core, and my party affiliation is irrelevant when it comes to solving the challenges facing our community.

SM: What do you enjoy the most about living in the Capital Region?

SJ: Of course I'm partial and very parochial when describing the wonderful quality of life we enjoy here as Saratogians. It's really the generosity of many hardworking people that remains our city's greatest asset. So many of us share the pride of Saratoga.

SM: What achievement are you most proud of?

SJ: My family continues to be my proudest achievement. I'm grateful to have shared 22 years and counting with my wife, Julie, and together our proudest moments are found in our son, Conor.

SM: Do you remember the moment that you decided to run for Mayor of Saratoga Springs?

SJ: In early April 2007, I was approached and asked if I was interested in running for Mayor. After much thought and family discussion, I realized many of us were unhappy with the state of affairs and where the city was heading. Rather than just complaining about it, I decided to act. It was really that simple.

SM: What are your goals as Mayor, both long and short term?

SJ: My immediate short term goal is getting re-elected. My long term goal is getting re-elected. Seriously though, our city is facing many fiscal challenges that require us to provide non-traditional, creative and affordable solutions. The days of simply bonding for infrastructure or other capital needs is unacceptable to the present day taxpayer, who already feels overtaxed. Saratogians now rightfully demand more from their elected officials, perhaps more than ever before. Since taking office, I've been meeting with financial experts to arrive at the most cost effective solutions for our needs. I expect to be making some major announcements rather soon. Both in my campaign and since the election, I've stressed fiscal responsibility and the need to prioritize the multitude of capital needs facing our city. Simply put, I've never been and will never be a tax and spend liberal.

SM: What has been the most challenging aspect of this position so far?

SJ: Being Mayor has many challenging aspects but perhaps foremost is completing the enormity of the tasks with both limited staff and a lean budget. There simply isn't enough time every day to complete each challenge. So you prioritize. That being said, I'm a 24/7 Mayor and feel privileged to work with such a talented staff. Another challenge can be remembering the names of all individuals I meet on an almost constant basis. At times I wish I had the public's luxury of simply calling out "Hey, Mayor."

SM: How have you overcome that adversity?

SJ: The day to day challenges in office are best dealt with in one word: organization. It's also imperative to remember that

today's perceived crisis, particularly those that seem to rotate through City Hall daily, may well be forgotten or cast aside tomorrow. It's all perspective.

SM: How has your life changed since becoming Mayor?

SJ: Perhaps the biggest change in being Mayor is the loss of anonymity, practically wherever you go. Of course, there's great benefit in making innumerable acquaintances and contacts that may lead to lasting friendships. Julie and I have always been rather social and involved in the community. What better place is there, than Saratoga Springs, to be the Mayor and be out and about?

SM: How do you balance your work and personal life as someone who is always in the public eye?

SJ: Striking a balance between work and home can be difficult but is crucial. Julie, Conor and I always strive to make time for each other, maintain our priorities as a family, and never lose sight of the big picture.

SM: What is the best advice you have ever received?

SJ: Always listen to advice but trust your own instincts. As a child, I remember old Joe in Saratoga's Dublin neighborhood also giving us some sage and lighthearted advice: Wash your feet and go to bed.

SM: How has your family responded to your new position?

SJ: My family has been extremely supportive of my entering public service. From the outset, it had to be a family decision since being in the public eye affects the entire family. I wouldn't have undertaken the office without their full support. My mom is just thrilled and reminds almost everyone that her son is the Mayor.

SM: What do you consider to be the most pressing issue currently facing Saratoga Springs?

SJ: The single, most pressing issue facing our city continues to be the increasing costs of living, whether its taxes, housing and now escalating fuel costs. We must continue to work toward expanding our year round economy and expand our tax

base to lessen the increasing burden on the average taxpayer.

SM: Who would you most like to emulate in life?

SJ: I don't believe in absolutes so there is no one person I emulate. I try to pick and choose admirable traits and strengths from all walks to life. Attitude and humor are invaluable in my role models.

SM: Would you consider the public the most demanding employer that you have had?

SJ: Saratogians may not be the most demanding employer around but we are certainly emphatic in how we approach our issues and certainly our politics. The demands may be many but the rewards are greater. Public service is often vastly underrated and I value each accomplishment, day to day, that can make a difference in a life.

SM: If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?

SJ: There are many "one words" that constitute my self-image, really more of a collection: rational, affable, approachable, and loyal. But I've never been one to toot my own horn. I'll let the public decide.

