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DAVID CASULLO

They are native upstaters so they have skin in the game. Casullo is from Little Falls and King is from Owego. During their respective careers, each started out in a different place, then were divinely brought together for a decade at Raymour & Flanigan, where they vowed to eventually work together one day, before going their separate ways again. Casullo established a Leadership Development Institute (LDI) at Raymour & Flanigan and King was responsible for branding and marketing.

“We were on an outstanding executive leadership team and had a special connection there,” King recalled. “I worked alongside Dave when he was developing the LDI and that sparked a real interest in focusing more time on leader development. We had always talked about working together again, but we didn’t know when or how it would work out, but we knew it was in our futures.”

King said it eventually came to a point where they felt ready to take the leap. They picked a date and just did it.

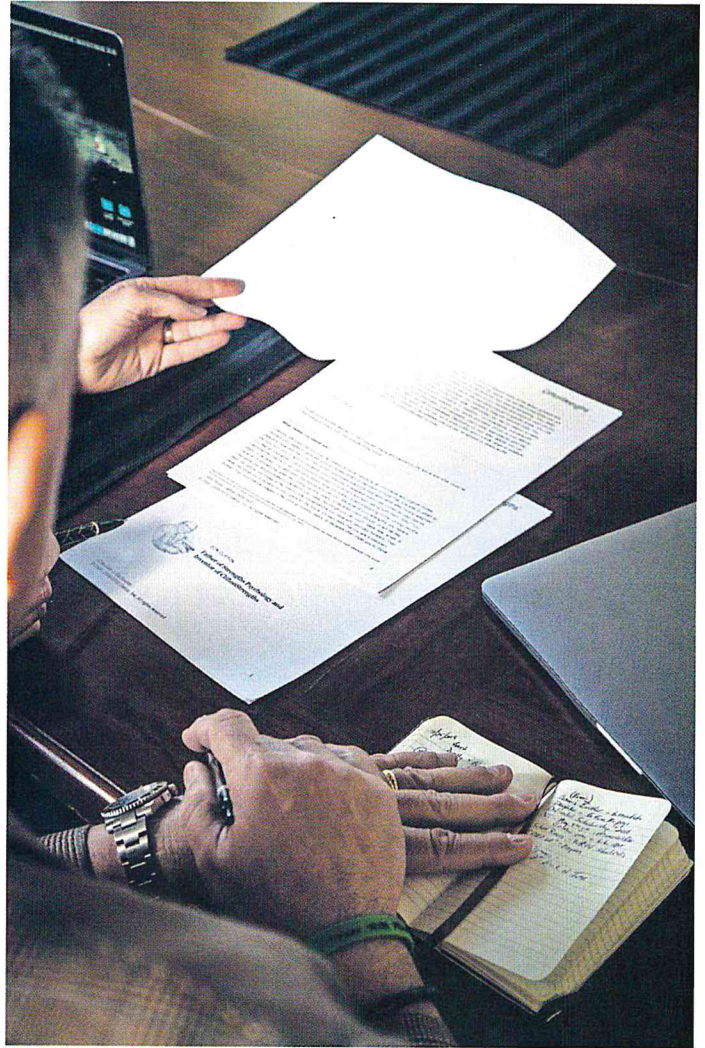
“What triggered the event was that we realized we shared a passion not only for leader development, but also for upstate New York, and why it is we’re giving back. It’s about creating something that hopefully continues to build on itself long after we’re gone,” she added.

They wouldn’t have taken such a bold step without being convinced of the region’s potential, which they believe can be better realized with sustainable leadership.

“We think there are many people here who are capable of more when it comes to leadership excellence,” Casullo said. “We’re helping to change the narrative about upstate New York in a way it needs to change. We’re not trying to change the mindset of negativity as much as trying to create better leaders, because they are here.”

The partners don’t necessarily believe there is a lack of leaders, but rather a lack of understanding of exactly what leadership and success look like. They say there’s a lot of modeling of behavior of what individuals believe success is, and they try to fit in with it. But everyone has innate leadership capabilities; leadership by definition is the impact someone has on another person or group, and we all have that opportunity if we choose to take it, Casullo said.

Their mission and vision is focused on creating a stronger bench of leaders, which is so vitally important to upstate’s present and



The Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment is used by Daneli Partners to identify people’s main strengths, which become the foundation for building a culture of leadership and success.

future success.

“That’s why we’re focused there,” Casullo said. “These are today’s and tomorrow’s leaders. There is a ripple effect when we work with executive management teams and CEOs and emerging leaders and they realize each has the power and potential to create a ripple effect around them. They continue to further the mission by being better leaders themselves, by understanding their strengths and working to understand the strengths of others to lead more successfully and fill the leadership gap that exists.”

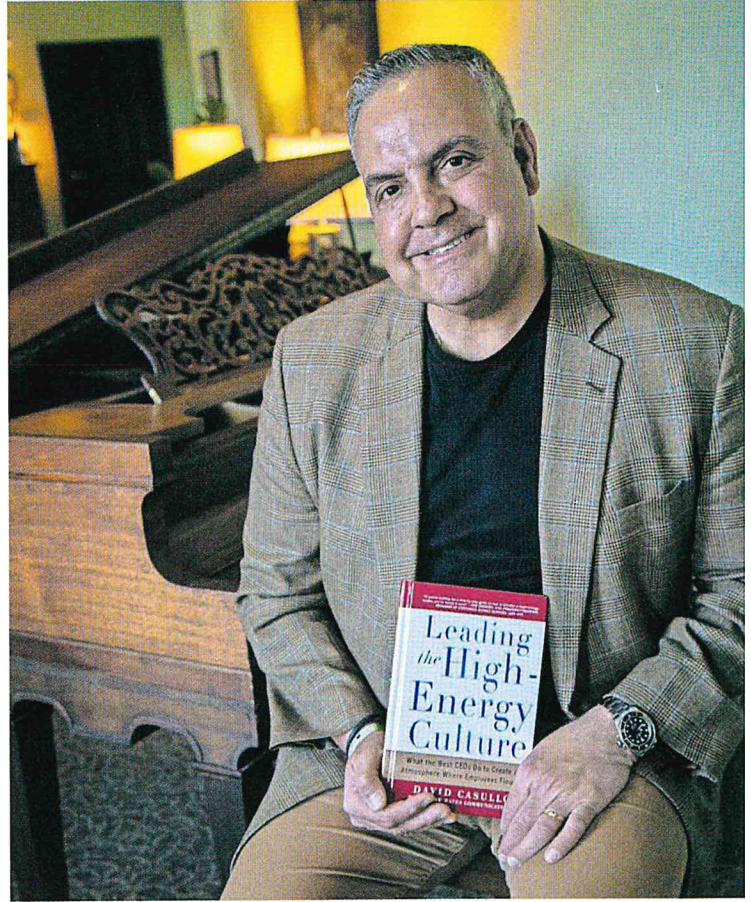
Sometimes, those in leadership positions experience angst in trying to be something they’re not and become ineffective and counterproductive. The partners get them to focus on what matters to them specifically.

“It’s a process of understanding personally, professionally, and aspirationally what matters,” King explained. “When we connect that with their strengths assessment, there’s a self-awareness and self-efficacy that occurs, and they see more clearly how to be more effective. That then becomes the catalyst to propel them forward and create a positive ripple.”

With technology advances, the business landscape looks far different than it did even 20 years ago, but that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Small businesses and entrepreneurs can live and work locally while doing business on a global scale.



Lisa King is President of Daneli Partners and believes that aligning one's core values with the core values of leadership is key to success.



Little Falls resident and Daneli Partners Founder and CEO David Casullo wrote "Leading the High-Energy Culture" to share his experiences and insights on leadership and the role it plays in creating success.

"There are talented people who can start businesses that have global impact and remain here in upstate New York, create jobs, attract people back here, and the quality of life is realized by more people," Casullo said.

The partners have a personal stake in all this because they have children and grandchildren living here. They realize full well that as much as executive management, entrepreneurs, and emerging leaders need leadership training and coaching to achieve personal and professional success, they must start planting the seeds of leadership much earlier. Youth are clearly the pipeline to the future.

They decided to utilize the same Gallup-Clifton Strengths Assessment they use for executives to now help high school students identify their top five strengths along with a detailed description of each. King says this gives them a sense of self-awareness that becomes very important as they navigate the real world that lies ahead.

"We felt we needed to go downstream and help college and high school students understand their strengths through an assessment, and work them through programs they could use the rest of their lives," she said. "The focus is on them to have a deeper self-awareness to make well-informed decisions not just based on academics or advice or dreams, but understanding their strengths and how they can fulfill their purpose in life."

King and Casullo needed a group that would be willing to give it a try. Enter Scott Sugar, CAA, Fayetteville-Manlius Schools Director of Physical Education & Athletics. One of

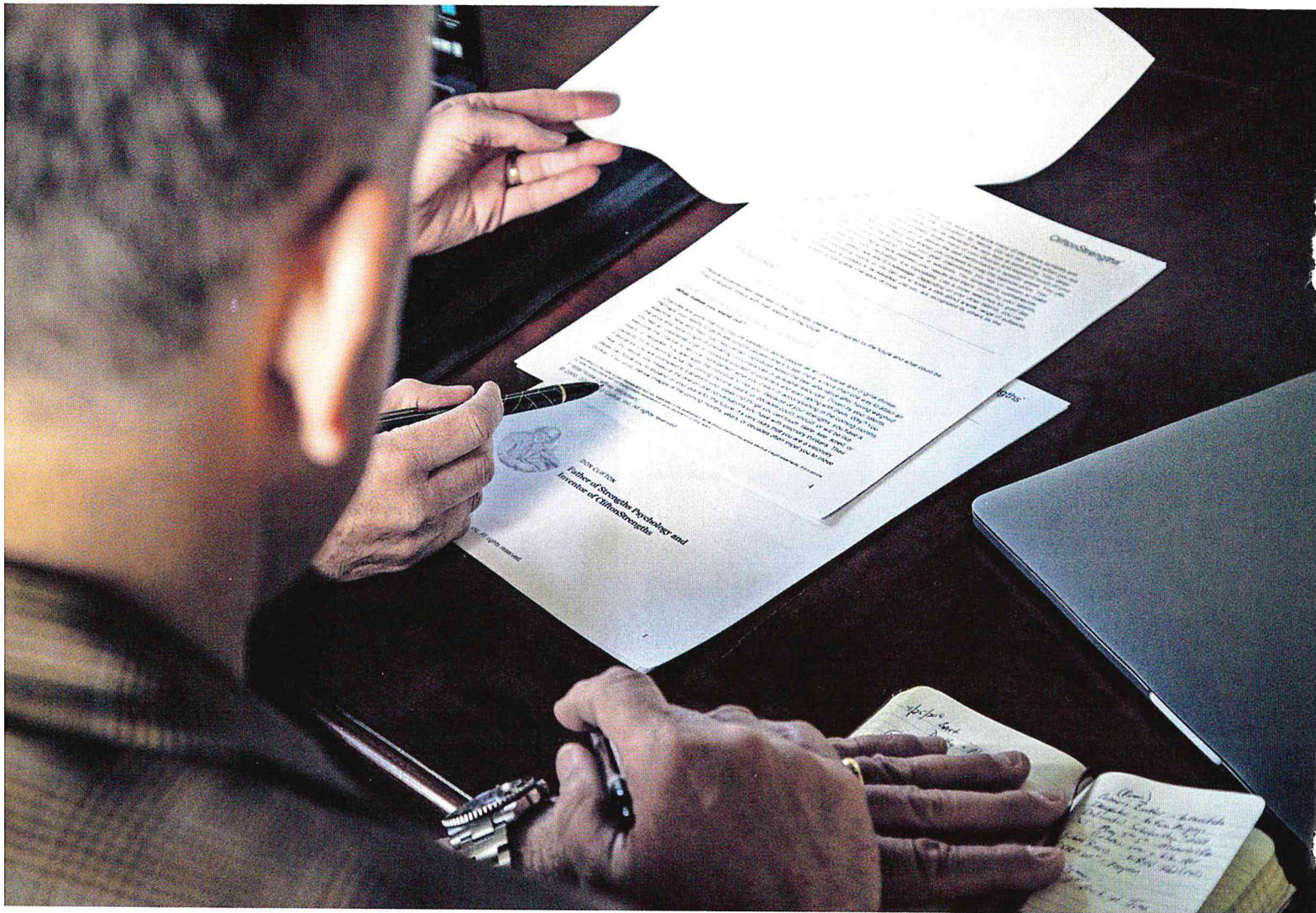
Sugar's strategic goals was to create a student leadership organization with representation from the high school's boy's and girl's varsity athletic programs. He had support and assistance from social studies teacher and head football coach Paul Muench, who was previously involved as a motivational speaker with the Leadership Development Institute (LDI) that Casullo founded.

As head of the New York State Athletic Administrators Association at the time, Sugar hosted the organization's state conference, at which Casullo and Muench were keynote speakers. That was his introduction to Daneli Partners and when the time came to bring professionals in to conduct some hands-on leadership training for the students, he thought they were the perfect choice.

"Their passion is to strengthen the community in terms of leadership and to make upstate New York everything it can be," Sugar noted. "Paul talked about their program being for college students and executive management, but also for youth. They help identify their strengths and the strengths of others for success as a group and as individuals, and to help find their passion in life."

Sugar said there was complete buy-in from the students from the get-go.

Last winter, 40 student athletes completed the Gallup-Clifton Strengths Assessment, which identified their top five strengths by presenting a choice of 177 paired statements and giving them 20 seconds to rank which is more important to



The Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment consists of 177 paired statements and gives respondents 20 seconds to rank which statement is more important to them.

them. By all accounts, the results are uncannily accurate. King says the chances of two people having the exact same results are in the neighborhood of 33 million to 1.

"They were really intrigued," Sugar said, "and incredibly enthusiastic and wondering what it all means and how do we use this. I took the survey as well and I was reading my characteristics and they were absolutely 100 percent spot on," Sugar said. "I said, OK, this has some value."

The students received their results soon after, and brought them to a four-hour, hands-on training session led by King and Cassulo designed to help them apply what they discovered about themselves and the others in the group.

They received a presentation and then worked in break-out groups on a variety of exercises related to real world leadership challenges and situations. They formed four companies and assigned each other roles and responsibilities that were best suited to their individual strengths.

"The day was really hands-on and they all said they wanted more training like this," Sugar said. "And the educational part for us is that they're interested in gaining more knowledge. It was four hours and the kids said it went too fast."

Muench said he was in awe of how open the students were about themselves and their lives, and how incredibly attentive they were toward each other. He uses words like deep thinking and introspective to describe them, and is convinced the day

had tremendous value for everyone.

"We could see the wheels turning when they had a chance to play this out and get away from their phones and the rigors of academics," he said. "They had a real chance to think about themselves and what that means as they move forward. It was a real springboard into their next endeavors, and that was exciting for me. It was really constructive."

Sugar's takeaway was equally positive, touting the benefits the training provides and its application in the students' present and future lives, be they athletic, academic, personal, or professional.

"These kids walk out of there with a better understanding of what their leadership characteristics are personally, and how they can use them to better themselves and whatever it is they choose to do either now or later in their lives. They're not going into the world unarmed. They have these strengths. I learned that this is something I should have done a while ago."

Mitchell Seabury, an 18 year-old senior who plays varsity football and baseball, will be among those walking out the door and starting a new life as a student athlete at the collegiate level when he attends Ithaca College in the fall.

Seabury took the strengths assessment and learned that, more than any other characteristic, he is a maximizer. He takes full advantage of opportunities wherever they arise.

"It was so accurate and so cool to read the descriptions and



From left, Fayetteville-Manlius Schools head football coach Paul Muench, senior Mitchell Seabury, and Director of Physical Education and Athletics, Scott Sugar

say 'yeah, that's me exactly,'" he said. "You can really hone in on those things and realize you can use them and build off them. It gives you a greater level of confidence."

The follow-up training session with Daneli Partners imparted a strong message about leadership going far deeper than simply being a good teammate or showing good example, although those are important, too.

"The program showed us that we don't define ourselves by past failures," Seabury explained. "Leadership comes from using these strengths that we've discovered about ourselves and using them to the fullest. I enjoyed being able to talk about yourself and also hear what other people have going on in their lives, and how they're dealing it. That's a beneficial thing."

As part of their strategic plan to reach out to even more future leaders, Daneli Partners will be launching either half or full-day Open Enrollment sessions for students and the general public in the near future. A half-day program for high school students with the theme "Finish Strong" is scheduled for Sunday, June 2 at MVCC's Utica campus in the auditorium. Visit danelipartners.com for more information.

"There's a benefit when people get to interact with one another," King said. "We'll be helping people understand their strengths and how to use them going forward in ways that are important to them."

At its core, leadership comes down to having clarity about what matters and recognizing one's distinctive strengths, and the strengths of others, the partners said.

"You're no longer able to excuse yourself from behavior that doesn't move you towards what you've figured out is really important," Casullo said. "You're now accountable for what you've come to realize is important."

Above all, people shouldn't wait until they think they have the title of leadership in order to lead.

"You can lead today," Casullo said. "It doesn't happen when you get a management title. It happens when you make the choice to lead. We're helping people become their very best selves and we suffer it when they don't. We want to be effective in every way we can."

Casullo, who published a book entitled, *Leading the High Energy Culture*, embraces the ideal that everyone is capable of leadership once they know where their strengths lie. It just takes experienced professionals to help figure that out and then explains how to apply that knowledge in real life.

"We want to uncover people who want to create results and do something important," Casullo said. "We'll help you figure out what that is and how to get there." **A**

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