

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Harriet Libov

[Your Real Estate Connection in Westchester](#)

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Welcome to *Your Real Estate Connection in Westchester*. A show for people looking to buy or sell homes in the Northern Westchester County area. Join local real estate expert Harriet Libov as she shares her professional advice on the local real estate market, connects you with knowledgeable community residents, and gives you helpful insights behind the home buying and selling process. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

I work with many young buyers who are searching not only for their home in Westchester, but also for the community where they feel they belong. I remember when I was a young buyer living in Manhattan myself who drove in a neighborhood called Windmill Farms in Armonk, and I experienced that feeling and emotional response that I wanted to live there.

I also remember sitting in the Cheese Box in the center of town. Yes, I'm dating myself to those who remember that restaurant. I was sitting in the center of Armonk, and I watched Armonk residents who came in and out, and that experience confirm that this was the right place for me and my family.

So when I give a real estate tour to potential buyers, I always suggest stopping in town and having lunch in that town to see how it feels after looking at houses for sale. I suggest learning online about the community offerings and the schools. All that information is readily available, and it's so important when making a decision on where to live.

In 2013, a young couple was referred to me through friends of friends. Rachel and Matt Milam were living in the city and wanted to look in Chappaqua and Armonk to search for their new home. Rachel's college roommate grew up in Armonk, and at their alma mater, Cornell, they both knew of Northern Westchester from several people, and it sounded appealing to them.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Both Rachel and Matt grew up in Long Island, but felt these Westchester towns might be the place they wanted to call home. So we set up a tour to look at houses for sale and to find their new hometown. Well, lucky for North Castle residents Armonk is where they found their home. I had the privilege of meeting two terrific people who I have really enjoyed getting to know who are smart, genuine, personable, and a pleasure to work with.

Throughout the entire process of tours, negotiation, and closing, I got to see them in action. Nine years later, I just love seeing their kids with them when they're out and about in town. Matt is now a town council member of the town board of North Castle and will share that journey with us, what he's hoping to accomplish in his new position, and the importance of community involvement. He is setting an example for many of his friends, his community, and his family. I hope you will listen to this episode and become a major fan like I did the very first time I met him. So let's settle in and enjoy the conversation.

There are many ways to get involved in your community, and people get involved during all stages of their life. Giving of yourself when your children are young show the true colors of a superstar. It's a demanding and exhausting time in your life, building a career and a well-rounded family with sports and hobbies. The PTA chairs, the volunteers in their church or synagogue, the sports coaches, they all deserve our praise and appreciation.

There are so many ways to get involved, and at the end of the day, as demanding as it is, it's so beneficial for your mind and for your body. There is a sense of connection, solidarity, and strength that comes with organizing and participating within your own neck of the woods. There are tons of ways to volunteer your time, donate resources, join classes or groups, support your local sports team or retail scene, or even organize your own event for a cause close to your heart.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

You will meet new people and expand your network. You will find ideas that you are passionate about, and you will learn new skills, and you will become a more interesting person to everyone you come in contact with. It fosters personal growth and opens your eyes in a way you could not have imagined.

Living in a suburban community offers peace and quiet. Sending your children to quality schools, offering them safety and natural beauty is always high on the list when searching for a place to live. Living in a vibrant community gives people a sense of belonging, which is known to reduce the risk of mental health issues, lower heart disease mortality, and contributes to better overall health.

Coming from the city, I was not used to the lack of anonymity living in the suburbs, and that was a huge adjustment for me personally. But the flip side of that, living in a community that rallies around its people in need in a heartbeat is so great and heartwarming. I've witnessed it on multiple occasions and learned over the years to appreciate the benefits through personal experience. You are not anonymous, but you are part of something much bigger. The towns in Northern Westchester offer that possibility for new residents. The more you give, the more you get back.

Today, our guest is Matt Milam. Matt grew up in Long Island and went to Cornell Undergrad to study finance and economics. After college, Matt worked as an investment banker for three years then as a hedge fund manager for 14 years. In 2018, he left the hedge fund to start a small business that focuses on a niche area of finance. He has lived in Armonk with his wife Rachel and their three children since 2013.

Sports and the improvement of the athletic facilities were the driving factors for Matt to enter local politics and make a difference. His passion for the community of Armonk is now driving him to accomplish so much more.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Let's talk to Matt, and learn about his journey, and how lucky we are as local residents of North Castle to have the input and energy of a younger member of our town to help us be the best we can be.

Harriet: Hi Matt.

Matt: Hey Harriet.

Harriet: How are you? Thanks for joining me today. How's your summer been?

Matt: Summer has been great. Thank you for having me. It's great to chat.

Harriet: Okay, good. I'm so excited to share all the work you've been doing for the town of North Castle. Your story is so important for our young residents to hear and follow your lead by getting involved. Tell me about what you've been up to.

Matt: Sure. So I decided to run for councilman in March of last year. The election happened in November, and I was fortunate enough to have got enough votes to win.

Harriet: It was a tough election too. There were a lot of people running right?

Matt: It was. It was a contested election. There was a lot of campaigning. I spent a lot of time going door to door meeting people, which was actually kind of nice, right? The campaigning was fun. The banter back and forth with the other candidates, not so much. But it worked out. So I started the term in January. I've been really just trying to make a positive difference. Trying to increase volunteerism in the town, improve our parks and rec offering, and try to guide us to make some better real estate decisions.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Harriet: That sounds good to me. Tell us a little bit about how you fell in love with Armonk after you and Rachel settled in.

Matt: Sure. You know we actually we fell in love with the town before we even moved in. We were invited by friends of ours who lived here to go to Fol-De-Role. So those of you that don't know Fol-De-Role, it's just had its 46th year. It's run by the Armonk Lions, which are a nonprofit. It's this big carnival and crafts fair that takes place in Armonk.

So we went to Fol-De-Role, and we really just kind of fell in love with the fact that it wasn't just a town. It really felt like a community. Armonk and North Castle, it's bucolic. It's got a country feel. It's only 45 minutes from the city, which makes it really kind of unique. We have an amazing school district, tons of cool history, which will really be showcased in a couple of years at the 250th celebration of the American Revolution. There's a lot of Revolutionary War history.

But really the most important thing to me is we really have this community feel. You have these events like Fol-De-Role, the Armonk Outdoor Art Show, Frosty Day, Halloween on Wampus and Glendale. These things really bring the community together. So that, to me, is what makes it special, and that's what I really love about the town.

Harriet: Good. It's actually what I fell in love about the town myself. So why did you make the decision to get involved in local politics?

Matt: So Rachel and I have always been involved in youth sports since we had children. We've got three now, as you know. Seven, 11, and 13. Rachel, my wife, has been involved in youth sports even before that. She was a college All-American lacrosse player. After college, she realized that was really her passion. She was a coach at a private school in New York City coaching six sports before we even moved to town.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

So when we got here and we immediately kind of got involved in youth sports for me as a coach and for my wife, she runs the town's lacrosse program. We kind of realized that even though North Castle and Armonk have so much to offer, our athletic fields and facilities are not as good as what we know they can be. That bothered us. Because I just felt like we weren't living up to our potential on that particular facet of our town.

So Rachel and I approached the town and tried to start a dialogue for several years. We would go back and forth, but it just didn't really feel like it was kind of getting anywhere. So Rachel decided the best step to take is to start a petition, which we started, and it got over 1,000 signatures. The petition was really focused on fixing the fields and athletic facilities.

We brought it to the town and tried to get further engagement and really a results oriented approach. Tell us a timeline, give us a path. Just something that we can kind of look at and track and know that we're going to get to the answer that we all really kind of want with a better park and rec offering specific to the fields.

So when we went down that path, and we just weren't getting the results that we wanted, I had to start looking at the next step to pursue that. The only other thing I could think of was running for office to join our town board as a councilman, to have a vote one of five, one of the five votes, to be able to go and actually kind of pushed this change as long as the rest of the community desired it.

As I kind of went down this path and decided to run, there were a few other areas that I kind of realized, aspects of town and issues, that I thought could be improved that I could really have a positive impact for the town. I really just found that motivating. So that was kind of how I got involved.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Harriet: Right? Well number one, I know how well liked both of you are in town. So I'm sure you have a big fan base, and you saw the need. They were very open to making the changes for the fields. In addition to the fact that a lot of people would have let that petition go and stop right there, and say how frustrating. Oh, well. But you didn't do that. So.

Matt: You can say a lot of things about me, but being a quitter is not one of them. I'm a very persistent person. So once I realized this was a problem, and I realized that a lot of other people shared with the concern, I wasn't going to be giving up or backing down.

Harriet: Right, lucky us. I found as a resident here for 34 years, every generation that settles into a community like ours has a wish list for improvements. The fields were one of them. If you think they're bad now, you should have seen them when my daughter was an athlete. That's how we got the turf field at the high school.

She played lacrosse. She wasn't like Rachel, but she played lacrosse with passion, and she was captain of the field hockey team. I think she got to play on that new turf field her last game before she went to college. But it was exciting. Then the score board went up and then the bleachers went up. A lot of facilities that we did not have.

So your desire to improve our athletic facilities from here has led you to so much more that you want to accomplish. We're so grateful for that. Anything else that's on that agenda that we should know?

Matt: Yeah, there are definitely a few things. So you talk about the school. This is not my purview, but one thing that I do think a lot of people would really like and I think would be a big improvement is if the school ever decided to look into in a little bit of a deeper way the idea of having permanent lights installed.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Harriet: At the high school.

Matt: At the high school turf field.

Harriet: Agreed.

Matt: Having Friday Night Lights football games is the kind of thing that brings the community together. It really increases the usability outside of that for teams to be able to practice, particularly in fall and winter and early spring months where the daylight hours are really cut short. But that's separate. That's not a town thing.

Harriet: No, but that is a great thing to look towards raising some funds for. What other communities in Northern Westchester have lights? Does anybody have that currently that we don't?

Matt: The vast majority of high schools that have turf fields have lights. Chappaqua has two turf fields at their high school, and they both have lights.

Harriet: Oh. Okay. Good to know.

Matt: Onto the town stuff, though because you asked about town improvements and things I'm looking to accomplish. So first, on the athletic fields, I do think a town turf field would be a really nice thing to have, but it's not necessarily the solution. It might be. The problem that we have right now is we have too few fields for the amount of usage that they get. The benefit of turf is it can absorb a lot of usage so that you can rest the other grass fields to allow them to regenerate. But if you don't have a turf field and you only have grass fields and none of them really have drainage, that's where the problem comes in.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

So you have a few potential options. Turf is an option, drainage is an option, or more fields are an option. But if you don't use any of those options and just have a ton of usability, you wind up getting really beaten down fields kind of no matter what you do.

Harriet: Is there another land option that we have for more fields?

Matt: There are land options out there. The town does own certain parcels, but none of them that I'm aware of are ideal for playing field. For example, you have the Johnson tract or Johnson Park, which is a parcel that's basically the size of IBM Community Park, but it's in a residential neighborhood, which is not the ideal place for a new field complex. Also you'd have to grade it and clear a lot of trees.

Harriet: I'm embarrassed to say I don't know where that is. What neighborhood?

Matt: Oh, yeah. So it's actually close to my house. If you went out day road and made a left onto North Greenwich.

Harriet: Yes.

Matt: It'd be on the right hand side about a mile down the road.

Harriet: Okay. Interesting. Never knew that.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah. So that's item number one is kind of improving our athletic fields and parks. One really interesting thing that I'm going to tell you that's kind of hot off the press, I don't think everybody's aware of yet because while the data is out there, it hasn't been formally presented yet to the town. We just did a park and rec town wide survey. This is the first time we've done this in more than a decade. It got a lot of responses.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

I can tell you the overwhelmingly largest response by an order of magnitude is that our residents want improved fields, improved athletic fields. That was number one. There are a lot of other things that people talked about. Dog parks, bike paths, all the kinds of things that you would probably expect to come out and in a park and rec survey, but improved athletic fields was number one by a large, large margin.

Harriet: Hmm. Okay. That's awesome that you did that. I also love your videos and the way you've communicated with the public here through social media, email signups. I think you have set an amazing example for our young residents in the community with a more modern approach that our town council was not doing. They all work really hard, but there was only one way to do things.

I'm sure you've met so many people as you expanded your network here in town, and they know that you are working to help get the community in better shape. How do you think you can bring more volunteers to the community?

Matt: I think exposure is probably the biggest single part of it. The vast majority of residents in our town don't really know what's going on within the town. They don't watch town board meetings because they last several hours, and they're on late at night. There isn't--

Harriet: They're not aware of how to even get the links or anything.

Matt: I agree. So, to me, this was the impetus for the five minute every other month YouTube videos that I send out is make it really easy for people, make it really digestible, and really put it in front of people in a way that they can see everything that's going on in just a very short period of time.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

I'm gonna butcher this, but there's a famous expression, I would have written something shorter, but I didn't have enough time. Actually, it takes a lot of effort to really condense it down to that kind of five minute level, but I think it's important. So letting people know what's going on is a great way to engage people. Let me give you a great example. I got involved. I told you about Fol-De-Role and about how passionate I am about that event.

Harriet: Yeah. It was going to fall apart, right?

Matt: It was going to fall apart after 45 years. The reason it was gonna fall apart is because the Armonk Lions Club, which is the nonprofit that puts this event on, and all the money, by the way, goes to charity. The Armonk Lions that put this event on, they were running out of new members to step up and join their ranks to help volunteer. Their problem was they didn't really know how to communicate with sort of the younger portion of the town to encourage this kind of volunteerism. So when this process—

Harriet: It was an old established group in Armonk.

Matt: Yeah, they're a group that had been doing it for—Really dedicated group, great people, a lot of fun, and they've been doing it for a really long time together. They really hadn't brought on new people. So when I realized this was the problem, and this was going to be what causes this awesome event to fall apart, to me, that kind of solution is something I think I can help with.

You go to Facebook, you talk to your friends, you kind of create a buzz. You say we all love this event. None of us really even knew. The vast majority people in town didn't even know that all this money goes to charitable causes within town, and it does. It paid for things like that arched bridge called the Lions Way Bridge in Wampus Brook Park and the gazebo and Wampus Brook Park. It paid for baseball dugouts, all this kind of stuff.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

So anyway, you tell people about this. You say do you love this event? Because if you do you have to step up or it's going away. All of a sudden people step up. The Armonk Lions went from nine members to 24.

Harriet: Oh, that's fantastic. I did not know that.

Matt: It's just a case study to me of if you engage people, you can get people to step up.

Harriet: Right. That's amazing. That's amazing. And to your point, I mean good communication is the best way to work your way through those issues. It's one of the reasons why I started this podcast so people could get to know me in a different way.

It's certainly not a podcast that is listened to by the masses, but a lot of my new buyers or sellers, I recommend that they listen to it just to even to get to know me. So that they understand where I'm coming from, what I've done, and how I want to move forward and come up with new ideas to do things. So are there any other new ideas coming down the pike and for you to communicate and get some new volunteers? Any thing you're working on that we should know about?

Matt: Yeah, so one of the other things. You mentioned earlier in the conversation what were things that were kind of on my to do list as Councilman. One of those things that is really important to me is figuring out a solution for our town pool. The town has had access to a pool. We don't own the town pool. We've been leasing it.

Because the town doesn't own it, and it's just been a one-year short term leases with extensions, the town rightfully so has been hesitant to spend capital money, capex, to improve it. Without capital improvements for the

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

last 15 or 16 years, it's gotten to a state where it probably shouldn't be in terms of disrepair.

So I along with a bunch of my colleagues on the town board, and ALE, which is the nonprofit that owns the pool, have been working really hard to try to come up with a solution for the town to purchase the pool or work something else out where we can have long term visibility into the pool potentially to be able to spend the money that the pool needs to make it a nice asset for the town. The idea and goal would be to do that in a financially responsible way that can really have a nice asset for the community that we can all enjoy.

So I think you mentioned about how does communication help. I think communication helps by explaining to people what it is that we're working on and why it makes sense. If we decide to purchase the town pool, we will be spending money to purchase the pool, but we'll be saving a significant amount of money in these lease payments. So much so that I think an investment of purchasing the town pool would stand on its own two feet.

So communication here can help. If people are nervous about the town's spending a big chunk of money, when you explain to them that it actually pays for itself and show them numbers, I think a lot of people can get comfortable. You could see this as a real win-win.

Harriet: 100%. As you know, I'm sure you're hearing everybody's opinions, people naturally for the most part don't like change. They're worried about their taxes going up there. They just don't like change unless they understand that it's for the greater good. I mean I think about how long it took for the town of Chappaqua to approve the Whole Foods Reader's Digest, which is such a great, great asset to that town. Looking at traffic patterns and figuring it out. I'm sure you're going to do this, and you're going to do it really well. So thank you for that.

Ep #25: New Residents Making A Difference in Their Community: A Conversation with Matt Milim

Thank you for joining me today. I hope our listeners now, if they didn't know you before, know how lucky they are to have you. Have a great summer, and give Rachel my love. Hopefully see you soon.

Matt: Thank you so much, Harriet. Really appreciate it.

Harriet: Talk soon. Bye. I hope this episode will enlighten future residents of Northern Westchester to what these communities have to offer, what they're all about. Yes, the suburbs are quieter from the city, but they do not have to be boring. Like anything you do in life, the more you give, the more you get in return. Thanks for joining me today. Enjoy these beautiful summer days. Until next time.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to miss an episode, you can subscribe on Apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. If you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you would leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Your Real Estate Connection in Westchester*. It doesn't have to be a five star rating, although I sure hope you loved the show. I want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value.

Visit connectnorthofnyc.com for step by step instructions on how to subscribe, rate, and review. Please share this show with anyone who may be looking to buy or sell homes in the area. See you next time.

Thanks for listening to *Your Real Estate Connection in Westchester*. If you want more information on the area or you'd like more info on local real estate visit connectnorthofnyc.com. See you soon.