

Voices of the 250th Interview with Mark Freda 06-11-2026

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Mayor Mark Freda and Kim Dorman conducted on June 11, 2026. The interview took place at the Princeton Public Library as part of the Voices of Princeton Project's Voices of the 250th collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

[TRANSCRIPT]

Kim Dorman: [00:00:00] All right. Good morning. My name is Kim Dorman. Could you please state your name?

Mark Freda: [00:00:04] Mark Freda.

Kim Dorman: [00:00:06] How did you come to Princeton, and how long have you been here?

Mark Freda: [00:00:09] Born here, raised here, never left here, been here my entire life.

Kim Dorman: [00:00:13] Okay, fantastic. Thinking back to 1976, what do you remember most about the observance of the U.S. Bicentennial? Comparing that time to today, when we are approaching the 250th, how do those two milestones feel alike or different to you?

Mark Freda: [00:00:32] My, my gut is that I thought in 1976 that there was a greater appreciation for the significance of the event, and even though there was a lot of disagreement, you know, we were coming out of the, the Vietnam War had ended, you know, a little bit before that, I still felt that we were more united then than we are today. And I think there were, I mean, there's gonna be all sorts of activities throughout Princeton, New Jersey, in the country, but I bet I just, my sense was there was a, there was more events, and there was more interest in the events in 1976 than there is in 2026.

Kim Dorman: [00:01:25] Thank you. As you imagine the country changing over the next 50 years, what kind of political future do you hope for? What concerns you? When you think about the ideals of 1776, how do they show up, or not, in politics today?

Mark Freda: [00:01:42] I think one of the most important lessons from the Revolutionary War was that we all came together and everybody said things need to change, things need to be different, and I'm generalizing, obviously, but let's move forward in a direction that's in the best interest of most of the people. And I feel we're at a point today where we're very divided, and that doing what's best for the country comes second for our political parties. It's political party first, country maybe second or third, maybe not even second, hard to know. So, for the next 50 years that sense of we're one country, let's do what's best for the majority of people, and it's country first, and individual people, politically or political parties need to be second or third. So if we could get back on track with that, then I think we have a better chance for success, because I think we're probably in one of our most challenging times right now, but we've been in challenging times before. I mean, people that are, people that study history will know that we've, we've had a number of political situations over our 250 years that weren't the best, and at that time people were figuring this is the end of the, end of the country, and luckily it wasn't. But again, I think we need to look back. What was the goal of the Revolutionary War? What was created, and how do we sustain that going forward? And if we can just kind of focus on that again, I think we'd be better off.

Kim Dorman: [00:03:24] Great, thank you. The question number five, is there anything else we haven't talked about, but you wish to include, and are there stories about Princeton's past, which

you feel aren't well known enough? And I'd also like you to speak about founding the Spirit of Princeton.

Mark Freda: [00:03:41] Yeah, okay, okay. Yeah, so we'll talk about the Spirit of Princeton. Spirit of Princeton is a great group. Ray Wadsworth and Herb Hobler, and for people that have lived in Princeton for any great length of time, or people that study the history of Princeton, will figure out who those two people are. Those two came to me and said, "Hey, we're putting together this group, we're going to call it Spirit of Princeton. Can you join in with us?" And the three of us are gonna get this thing started, and we're roll with this thing, and the whole idea is we want to have patriotic events, we want to help instill that, that I guess spirit again, Spirit of Princeton, but that spirit of patriotism, celebrate that, and you know we originally we started out with the Memorial Day Parade, July 4th fireworks, Flag Day ceremony, and a Veterans Day ceremony. We had to drop the fireworks just because they're so darn expensive. And then we, we had a great initial group that put together those events, and Frank Tylus, another well-known name, if you know the history of Princeton, really helped us with getting the Memorial Day parade going, and for years Frank ran that parade. And we started all this in 1998 and here we are in 2026, and as I said, except for the fireworks, the other events are, are still happening. And I think it's important because again the main focus is, here are very important events that speak to patriotism and the meaning of what our country is, and it's good to remind people of those, and have people take part in those, and hopefully feel good about the country, and feel good about themselves being in this country.

Kim Dorman: [00:05:33] Great, thank you.

Mark Freda: [00:05:34] Yeah, and I think if we look at Princeton's past, I will always be a great defender of Princeton, a great supporter of Princeton, the municipality, but you know history is history, and there are times that we should look back at and say, what the heck were people thinking? I mean, segregated schools for very long time, students and administrators at the university having slaves on campus, I mean, really. So you have to look at what we did right, but also what we did wrong, and what were the things and the people involved in trying to say let's move from the wrong to the right, and sometimes how hard those efforts were, but also how successful those efforts were. But you need to always appreciate the past, where we came from, and have the ability to say, let's not go backwards, let's not repeat the mistakes of the past, and let's continue to move together, to move forward together, and be one community for everybody. And again, I think if we appreciate the past, it's going to help guide the future and help us make good decisions about–Princeton should be a place that's for everyone that wants to be here, we're tolerant of everyone, we're respectful of everyone, and we're welcoming of everyone. Not everybody was born in this country that built this country, so it's not just the past of Princeton, it's the past of the entire country. I mean, if we didn't have people come from all over the world to this country, this country would not exist as it does today, so let's just remember that, and use that kind of as a guidepost going forward.

Kim Dorman: [00:07:27] Thanks so much, Mark.

Mark Freda: [00:07:27] Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]