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The UMB Pulse Podcast

Olympic Rugby Star & Maryland Carey Law Graduate: Carmen Farmer's Mission to Conserve Colorado Lands

SEPTEMBER 01, 2023 CHARLES SCHELLE SEASON 4 EPISODE 1

The UMB Pulse Podcast

Olympic Rugby Star & Marylan

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Show Notes

Transcript

Chapter Markers

Charles Schelle: 0:00

Dana, just breathe in that mountain air.

Dana Rampolla: 0:02

Oh my gosh, it is beautiful out here, Charles. We've got some haze in the background, so you can't really see the mountains too well today.

Charles Schelle: 0:08

Yeah, if you look out in the distance, you can see some peaks out there, but with that wind rolling off the mountains. It's a new school year breeze, as I like to say. It's a new season of The Pulse, right?

Dana Rampolla: 0:19

It is, and we're kicking it off with one of our own alumni from the University of Maryland Baltimore, Carey School of Law, and her name is Carmen Farmer. Carmen works out here, but she actually spent a fair amount of time in, um, in Baltimore studying and doing some interesting things on the Eastern Shore. We'll be hearing about that today.

Charles Schelle: 0:37

Yeah. And you're probably wondering, where are we? We are in Denver, Colorado right now at the Podcast Movement Conference. And we're here to learn how to improve the podcast for our loyal listeners, our Pulse Pals as we like to call them. So, uh, we figured why not do a podcast out here and talk to an alum? We have UMB alumni everywhere.

Dana Rampolla: 0:57

Yeah. And it was kind of hard to narrow it down. We, we have some dentists out here who we considered, but Carmen is our go to person for the day. She's a senior conservation project manager for the Northern Front Range and Lower South Platte Basin for Colorado Open Lands, and that's a nonprofit. They're dedicated to protecting land and water in Colorado. Colorado, and she's going to give us a lot more specifics about what that means.

Charles Schelle: 1:18

That's exciting. And on top of all of that, she's an Olympian. And as I say, once an Olympian, always an Olympian and representing Team USA rugby in the Rio Olympics. So that's going to be fun to talk about too.

Dana Rampolla: 1:30

Yep. Well, let's bring her on.

Charles Schelle: 1:32

Yes. Let's get the, uh, show on the road for the UMB Pulse.

1:39

You're listening to the heartbeat of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, the UMB Pulse.

Charles Schelle: 1:53

Carmen, uh, thank you for joining us here in Colorado.

Dana Rampolla: 1:56

Yeah. You said you hit a little bit of traffic, so it was a little, a little bit of a drive. But not too bad.

Carmen Farmer: 2:01

No, not too bad at all. Um, thanks for having me. Um, welcome to Colorado. You guys have a wonderful view here, obviously. And, uh, hopefully you're getting to experience a little bit of it.

Dana Rampolla: 2:10

Yeah. You must enjoy living out here. How long have you been in Colorado? I've been here seven years, seven years. And you came out here for work, right?

Carmen Farmer: 2:18

I did. Yeah. Um, initially to, to work with Colorado Open Lands, um, I'd been coming out here though, to train for rugby.

Dana Rampolla: 2:24

And we probably talk about that a little bit more in a bit, but, um, yeah, I love it. It's home now. I love the mountains. It's every weekend I'm out and about camping, hiking, climbing, skiing in the winter. So yeah. Charles, she's a hard lady to catch up with back from Africa, right?

Carmen Farmer: 2:39

Yeah, I did. I did a two week trip to South Africa to go, uh, volunteer at a rhino sanctuary. And uh, so yeah, I stayed pretty busy.

Dana Rampolla: 2:46

That's amazing. Tell us a little bit about your trajectory educationally. So we'll dive into work in a couple of minutes. But... How, what did you start out studying? How did you wind up at UMB and how did that ultimately get you out here?

Carmen Farmer: 2:59

Yeah, uh, I grew up in Richmond, Virginia. I went to undergrad at Virginia Tech where I studied urban planning, um, and then ended up going to law school at University of Maryland in Baltimore. Uh, and, uh, I had sort of an environmental, uh, lean there and, and studied land use planning and, and things of that nature. Um, subsequently to that, I, uh, clerked in federal district court in Greenbelt, um, and, uh, and then took a job with, uh, um, a land use law firm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and lived in Maryland for quite a while. So pretty special place for me.

Charles Schelle: 3:32

Let's learn about the nonprofit you work for. Uh, what is Colorado Open Lands and why is it important to the state?

Carmen Farmer: 3:40

Yeah. Colorado Open Lands is a statewide land trust. Um, as you mentioned, we're a nonprofit and our mission is essentially to protect open spaces, uh, farmland, uh, ranch land. Uh, in Colorado we've protected nearly 700,000 acres. Um, and the reason we do that is because we're growing. I mean, you're, you've got this perfect backdrop because we have sprawling subdivision houses out here on the prairie. We're about 15 miles, uh, east of Denver, um, in a growing metro area. And, uh, like me, there's many of us that have moved out here because we enjoy the access to the mountains. Um, unfortunately, you know, we're We're growing at an exponential pace and eating up some of our best farm ground. So we're our best habitat for the other species that coexist with us out here. And, um, our wonderful views, um, and, uh, you know, our public recreational opportunities. We have a lot of public land out here. But at the pace that we're growing, we're loving it to death. If you go to Rocky Mountain National Park, they get four million visitors a year. You've got to get a timed entry pass to get into there now. Um, and so we're just crawling all over those open lands we have out here. And so part of our mission is to try to find those last best places that we can protect. Um, that both provide places for us to grow food, places for us to

recreate, and then places for rest for the wildlife and other species that, as I mentioned, are out here with us.

Charles Schelle: 5:00

It is surprising to see the sprawl here. It's a nicely dense city and then, as right behind us, you might be able to see newly constructed or under construction homes and townhomes and then some of those homes are approaching. Uh, you know, parkland on the border, like the Rocky Mountain National Arsenal. Like, you drive out and then, bam, there's a new development right there. So, but let's, let's talk about what the land actually covers it and your region. You're the senior project manager for the Northern Front Range and the Lower South Platte Basin for Colorado Open Lands. Paint the scene for us. Um, and it's a state in relation to where we're at here in Denver.

Carmen Farmer: 5:38

We're in that metro area right now. So the South Platte River runs through Denver. Um, starts, headwaters are up in the mountains in a place called South Park. Um, not to be confused with the TV show. Although the creators are from this area. Um, and there's an interesting nexus there. Um, it flows all the way out to the Nebraska border. So I kind of cover this entire area. Um, and this is the fastest growing part of Colorado, you know, for a while in Denver, we had 10,000 people a month moving to Denver. We, we have a housing shortage here. Um, and so that's why you're seeing all of this new construction. Um, we just can't keep up with the pace of people moving here. You're talking about traffic earlier. That's part of it too, you know, all the infrastructure that goes along with it. And so my job is to go out and meet with landowners, some of these private folks that are being approached by development and talk to them about conserving that land protecting that land and the way we do that is through a legal tool called a conservation easement. And that's where my law background comes into play. I structure those deals. I work with the landowners. There's some pretty sophisticated tax law that goes into it because there are really robust tax benefits both on a federal level and then on a state level that those landowners can avail themselves of if they protect that land. Now we do this in the context of all this growth. It's not like we just want to go out and prevent growth. That's not the idea. The idea is to try to think about those communities, how they can grow and how they can protect the places that are most important to them. Whether that's a riparian area that provides a lot of biodiversity.

Charles Schelle: 7:02

We have a little, uh, lawn mowing action in the background.

Carmen Farmer: 7:05

Yeah. Yeah. On this nice Kentucky bluegrass out here that's being irrigated with senior water rights. Oh. Yeah, nicely done. Very diplomatic.

Charles Schelle: 7:18

You know. We'll leave part of that in. But. But you were, um, just a reset after our little, uh, lawn mowing pause for a second, you were, you were talking about, uh, the conservation easements and what that allows, um, people to do.

Carmen Farmer: 7:33

Yeah. And so we, we use conservation easements to incentivize, um, uh, the protection of land and water rights. Water rights are a whole nother big thing out here. We've only got so much water. You probably heard about the Colorado River on the other side on the western slope, um, facing challenges. And that's because we've over appropriated those water rights. And a lot of those water rights are on, um, Irrigated agricultural farms out here, um, you know, contrasted to Maryland where we get 50 to 55 inches of rain a year, out here we're getting more like 12 to 14 inches of rain. So you can't grow much without water rights. Um, however, we've got, you know, competing interests when we build developments, we need water rights for the taps. For the irrigated grass that's at this hotel, all those things. And so there's this tremendous pressure on land and water out here that we're facing right now as we grow. And so what my job is to sit down and think about with the communities, whether it's Denver or Boulder or Fort Collins or any of the front range communities in this basin, how you can grow and protect those areas that you want to protect. Do you need more public recreational space that people can walk to? That's a big, you know, access is a big issue out here. Not everybody has a car or can afford to go pay 30 to go into Rocky Mountain National Park. And so we think about places that we protect as pocket parks or places that are in underserved communities where they historically haven't had access to green spaces. Think about COVID. When that went down, everyone went outside. We couldn't go to our traditional places to, to do the things we did. And so we all went outside and that was from a mental health perspective. So important. Um, a lot of these communities don't have access to that. Um, and so. When we talk about a community and what they want to protect, maybe it's their rural economy, so they want to protect the farm ground around it. Maybe it's just their growing population, um, and they want to be able to provide those places for people to just go walk. Um, or maybe there's a particular species that's endangered in that area and they're like, look, this is the last stretch of this creek where this cutthroat trout lives. We need to make sure that we protect that area. We can build a conservation easement based upon different outcomes. And so that's what we do. It's community based planning, essentially. Like I mentioned, I had studied urban planning and this was a big thing. Smart growth came out of Maryland. Um, and we, we did the same thing on the Eastern Shore where we were trying to protect lands over there, um, as, as Maryland was growing, right? I mean, you guys are very familiar with that. Um, and so that's kind of what we're doing here. Um, it feels like a. You're swimming upstream in many ways, but I like to think that we're putting a little bit of a dent in the universe and it's not just Colorado. I mean, my organization is, you know, we work within the corners of Colorado, but we're on the hill in D.C., right now working on the farm bill and negotiating with our senators, um, and trying to work on farmland protection funding that will not just come to Colorado, but go across the country. And so it's, it's kind of fun that, you know, even though, you know, I work within the four corners of Colorado, we're doing policy work that stretches across the country and, and, and actually as a model, you know, our state tax credit here, which is transferable, um, which is a big deal. It means that a landowner does conservation easement, gets a tax credit, they might not have a lot of income tax from a Colorado perspective, they can sell it to Amazon or sell it to Hewlett Packard. And so there's only five states that do that and Colorado was one of the first. And so there are a lot of innovative things that come out of Colorado that get taken by other states and applied in the land

conservation space. And so it's kind of exciting that, you know, even though we work within, You know the state we some of the policies and things that we do kind of have far reaching effects.

Charles Schelle: 10:47

That's good to hear This is my second time in Denver and the first time coming out here, I was surprised going up to Boulder just the lengthy walking and exercise trails that run along the highway and just seeing everybody out there. But the other thing that surprised me was about the, the water challenges when someone told me, it's like, this is basically a desert state. And I was like, I'm like, I wouldn't have guessed that because you have a lot of grass and then you have all these, you know, snow for, from skiing, but like you're tapped out. And to that point on the other side of the mountains, um, there are active wildfires and, and you're no stranger to here. And to that end, I think wildfires right now are in the front of a lot of people's mind because of Maui. And so I know you're, you're, you're focused on, land policy and conservation, but I'm wondering if anything that's had have happened out there and kind of like the postmortem of, of what caused those fires, if that's going through that those conversations are going through your organization at all about the utility company and people being prepared with emergency sirens and, um, you know, access to getting water because there's a, Uh, issue about people not providing water access to fight the fires out there. So, I don't know if any of those things are all of a sudden now top of mind.

Carmen Farmer: 12:07

Yeah, I mean, it's, well, one, you sort of, you feel for those people out there. I mean, you don't think about something like that happening in a place like, like Maui. Um, it's, it's always top of mind here. You all came at a pretty good time. Usually this time of year there's some fire going on. It might not be in Colorado, it might be two states over. Um, you know, in 2020, we, uh, we had fires that, you know, in Denver that were 200 miles away where you go outside and there'd be ash on your car, um, because it blew, blows in and, and so air quality is a massive issue. In the mountains, um, forest treatment is an issue in terms of, you know, we have a lot of mountain communities that, you know, that we've got 100 years of fire suppression. And so what that's done ecologically is created this tapestry or this, this, this carpet of just forest monoculture trees, a lot of Douglas fir, essentially not to get in the weeds here, but there, there's a lot of fire danger and climate change and climate building and climate resiliency, whether that's access to water or thinning those forests or starting to manage those forests in a way that they were, you know, historically for tens of thousands of years, um, managed with, you know, out suppression. So that's fires that were started by lightning or fires that were started by First Nations. You know, we're on the ancestral lands of the Cheyenne, the Ute and Arapaho right now, and they would start fires. Um, that was part of the landscape and part of clearing out meadows and bringing in, uh, species, game species and things like that. And so, you know, we've created this system here, um, where, you know, we are susceptible to fire and it, it's, it's top of mind for a lot of folks. Um, And then you combine that with, you know, we've been in a 20 year drought until this past year. We had the biggest snowpack we've had in 20 years, and then we had the wettest spring we've had. Um, but other than that, you know, we, we've been living consistently with drought out here. And, and so. We're constantly thinking about fire and thinking about utilizing resources and having the emergency systems in place and also just managing for fire. Um, you know, a lot of, a lot of communities, Boulder

included, they had a fire on New Year's Eve a couple of years ago. It was crazy. Um, you think about the middle of the winter, then you're going to have this fire, but that's what we, we live with. And so a lot of it's the land management techniques. So getting out here, grazing grasslands, thinning forests so that they, they, they look a little bit more like they historically did. Um, having a little bit of a, um, more diverse forest system, not just one set of trees that are the same age. Um, and so this is getting a little bit into the weeds. But yeah, it's always, um, top of mind for us. I think you guys got a taste of it earlier this year with the fires that came down. You saw the apocalyptic photos in New York City. Yeah, um, that's every summer here. Not to that extent, but you know, somewhere along that spectrum. And so that's part of living in the Mountain West. And yeah, it was eye opening when I came out here, because you think about all the rain we get in the water, water, um, in the Chesapeake Bay area. It's just very different and, uh, it's going to continue to be an issue as we have, you know, climate change and drier climate and these, these crazy storms and things like that.

Dana Rampolla: 14:55

Well, you just mentioned the Chesapeake Bay, so let's take it back to Maryland for a minute. You were a land use attorney on the Eastern Shore for a bit, right?

Carmen Farmer: 15:03

Yeah.

Dana Rampolla: 15:03

And was that to help farmers and the produce that's growing there or how did that work?

Carmen Farmer: 15:07

It was a mix. You know, I was, I was a young attorney coming out of law school, um, and worked for small firms like five attorneys, um, a junior associates. You kind of get handed everything.

Dana Rampolla: 15:16

Okay.

Carmen Farmer: 15:17

It was, it was a great way to learn. You know, yes, sometimes we were working with farmers that were, and we were representing them and they were interested in protecting their land. Other times I'd have a landowner that was. You know, had this big second home property on a, you know, river on the bay. And they were like, Hey, I'd like to build a 10, 000 square foot house, you know, in the critical area, as close to the water as possible. And I want to have a helipad so I can like get to my office in Baltimore. Uh, and so you, it was mixed, you know, you, you kind of take whatever you can get. And, um, You know, it was, it was a fun learning experience, and I did that for about five years. I'd started to interface with the land trust community, and that's what really spoke to me. And, and that's where I, you know, kind of made the conscious decision, okay, like, I cut my teeth in private practice, um, but I want to do work that's a little bit more meaningful to me. And so then I, I, I, Went over to the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, which is another nonprofit similar to Colorado Open Lands, but focused on the east of the six counties on the eastern shore, um, that we worked with in the upper watershed and, uh, loved it. Um, it was like, okay, this is, this is what I need to do with, with my life. And there's also a little more work life balance there. So you could go

recreate, you know, there it was, you know, weekends looked a little bit more like going out on the boat. Um, now you're up in the mountains. Yeah. Yeah. So a little bit of a contrast. But, um, just being outside. Yeah.

Dana Rampolla: 16:33

Did, um, would you, is there anything in particular about attending the University of Maryland Carey School of Law that, that you feel really contributed to your ability to grow in those areas and become involved?

Carmen Farmer: 16:46

I mean, absolutely. The environmental law program they have there, it's, it's renowned and, um, you know, Professor, uh, Bob Percival was one of my influential professors there. And, um, having the access to environmental groups, uh, like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and just right in your backyard. I mean, they're based in Annapolis, you know, we're in Baltimore. Um, I think there's an also interesting intersection between the, you know, the urban planning departments at the University of Maryland College Park. Um, where smart, the term smart growth or the concept came out of, um, and so there were a lot of synergies there that I really appreciated. And then of course, DC is right down the road. So in terms of policy and having access to that, um, from a federal standpoint, um, yeah, it was, it was a wonderful place to go to school and I got there right when the new law school was built. So, you know, we, we were in this state of the art building that was just. It's beautifully designed from an architectural standpoint, but then also just an inspiring place to learn. Um, and, you know, I lived two blocks away, you know, in the shadow of Camden Yards. And it was, it was fun, you know, I was a kid that came from rural Virginia and this was my first time living in a city. I now live downtown Denver in a little condo. Um, so it was, it was in terms of me, like from a personal growth perspective, but also professionally like it was, it was a wonderful place to be.

Dana Rampolla: 17:59

That's great. That's fantastic.

Charles Schelle: 18:00

I think you, you touched on this a little bit earlier, but how is managing land farming and other resources in Colorado different than in Maryland? I mean, obviously geo geographically, it's very different.

Carmen Farmer: 18:12

Yeah. I think the biggest one is just the water component. You know, you can, you can grow corn in Maryland without. Irrigating it, you know, you can, you get enough rainfall or for other crops like that. And so out here, if you really want to have a productive agricultural operation, you've got to have irrigation water. And the irrigation water is in some cases more expensive than the actual land. And so, uh, That's part of, there's a whole history of the riparian doctrine versus the prior appropriation doctrine out here which is very different than what we do on the east coast. At the east coast you have a creek that runs through your property you can access that water. Here you've got to go file in court to get a water right and there's a prior appropriation doctrine so first person to put it, you know, if you have an 1862 water right that's superior to a 1950 water right and so if

there's not enough water in the river your junior water right, your 1950 water right or whatever, you might not be able to draw upon that water. And so there's this complicated system that we've done out here in the West, in Colorado and in other states in the Mountain West, um, where, you know, there's, there's a saying out here that, that whiskey's for drinking and water's for fighting. Um, and, uh, that's just because there were, you know, in the, in the 1870s and stuff.

Dana Rampolla: 19:19

You seemed awfully happy this morning!

Carmen Farmer: 19:21

A little whisky in my cup? No. Um, uh, yeah. I mean, there, there were a lot of fights over water and there still are in court, um, because it's, it's a resource that we. If over appropriated, we don't have enough, but it unlocks everything here. I mean, we are in a high altitude desert. You're at a little over 5, 000 feet here at Denver in elevation. They call it the Mile High City for a reason. It's hard to grow things out here, but yet we have one of the biggest rural economies in the country. Weld County, just north of here a little bit, is a top 10 producing county in the entire country. And so they are competing with places like Southern California, where you have a much longer growing season. Um, and so you can grow a lot more crops, and yet we're able to export, I mean we export to China, we export to, um, the EU, I mean it's a major part of the economy out here. Everybody talks about like the ski economy, or like we have a growing tech economy and other things like that, but, um, one of our biggest, um, from a GDP perspective, um, economies out here is the agricultural economy, um, and so, you know, contrasting that back east, it's the water. You know, we wouldn't have that economy. if we didn't have the infrastructure in place to store water, to divert water, the ditches, and all those kind of things out here, um, to put it to use. I mean, we wouldn't have this hotel here without the water. Right.

Dana Rampolla: 20:36

Do you do anything like Florida with gray water?

Carmen Farmer: 20:39

We do. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's become a big thing here. Water efficiencies, conservation. Um, We're starting to see communities pay people to take, you know, Kentucky bluegrass out and to do zero escaping and things of that nature. Um, It's just part of, part of the equation in terms of how we can make that water go a little bit farther. We reuse water multiple times. So there's a, there's a saying here that in Denver, when you flush your toilet, it gets used seven times before it hits the border in Nebraska. And that there's some truth to that because it goes back into the river system. It gets picked up by an irrigator. They put it on their farm. Their crop might consume some of it, but some of it gets, you know, return flows back into the river system or the aquifer, and so it gets picked up multiple times.

Charles Schelle: 21:15

It seems like, uh, water rights are almost as, uh, great as, uh, rights for, gold and prospecting for mining.

Carmen Farmer: 21:23

Yeah, it's getting to that point. Every once in a while you hear about, um, you know, efforts to, oh, we'll pipe water from the Mississippi, or, well, yeah, just because it gets to a price point where it's so expensive to acquire water rights because there's only so many of them and it's a commodity, right? Like... Yeah. Um, and, and honestly, I wish in law school, I'd have had access to studying water law. I mean, it was, it was, uh, kind of thrown into that deep end when I came out here, because I didn't have any experience in that. And I was like, Oh, wow, I need to pick this up quickly. That and the mineral development. Um, you know, that's something we haven't touched upon here. And a part of what we do is trying to figure out, because there's a lot of oil and gas development out here. Um, and, um, when, if you head north a little bit, you'll see. Uh, wells everywhere and they're constantly still drilling and there's a fair bit of fracking going on and we're trying to figure out how we come to terms with that in the case of protecting land and coexisting with, with those natural resource extraction activities. Um, yeah, I mean this place was settled because of gold and silver mining. Um, so there's always a history of some sort of extraction, whether it's that or oil and gas or timber, you know, and so trying to figure out how all those multiple different users. Use the water and the, the, the, the land is, you know, it's an interesting place to, to be.

Charles Schelle: 22:34

Absolutely.

Dana Rampolla: 22:36

Well, Charles alluded to in the beginning, there's another, a whole nother side to you. We, we know you're an outdoorsy kind of person. Um, I think it's really interesting how the, the Rockies and the plains intersect here. Tell us how your life intersects with. with athletics and specifically rugby.

Carmen Farmer: 22:50

Yeah, I, um, well, I grew up, uh, playing sports, um, basketball, went to school in undergrad and played softball on a scholarship, um, and so it was always kind of part of my life, um, and then I went to law school and it was kind of like all focused on school, um, and then after that career, and so there's a 10 year period where I didn't really have any sort of athletic sport components to life, um, and then, um, And I turned 30, I went on a trip with actually a couple of other University of Maryland grads. A friend of mine, Brianna Strapoli, she's listening, um, she organized this trip to Africa, to Tanzania, um, to climb Kilimanjaro. And um, while we were up there, it was kind of an epiphany. This was also the time where I was transitioning from private practice to, uh, the land use field and non profit sector. Um, I mentioned, I ran into someone that was on that trip that was from Australia and they mentioned this rugby thing. And I was like, what rugby? I never really heard of rugby. Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's pretty underground here. Um, and so she was like, you'd probably be pretty good at it. And I was like, Oh, I'm kind of trying to like, reincorporate some level of sport in my life. I'm 30. Like, if I'm going to do that, this is the last chance I'll probably have to do that. So I got home, looked it up. There's a club in Annapolis, Severn River Rugby, um, a women's club and a men's club. And I'm like, these adults do this? Like there's an adult league. Um, and so I showed up to a practice and was like, Whoa, this is, this is cool. This is different. Um, and, uh, it, it kind of escalated into this whole thing. Like I played a season with them. We went to nationals. There's a national championship every year. Uh, and there were USA scouts there and they approached me afterwards after we had just actually lost a national championship game. And so, uh, you know,

we're all having beers and you're just sort of like trying to relax. He's like, what do you think about your rugby career? I'm like, what, what's a rugby career?

Dana Rampolla: 24:29

I have a career. I haven't had a long time to build.

Carmen Farmer: 24:31

Um, And so I started going to these USA camps, um, rugby was reintroduced into the Olympics in 2016, um, and it was sort of like, wow, this, this could be a thing. And, and, um, it ended up really becoming a thing. My parents laughed. They were like, this is a cute little hobby you have. Like, is this like a midlife crisis thing? Um, and no, so I started going to camps. Uh, actually out here in Colorado initially, um, and then got really serious about it and had to move to San Diego. We have an Olympic training center outside of San Diego in Chula Vista, and so two years before the Olympics, I, I talked to, you know, I was working at the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy at the time. I was like, Hey guys, I have this opportunity. Would you allow me to work part time and sort of train out there? And so moved out there. I'd get up at like five o'clock to take, you know, eight o'clock a. m. meetings in, in Maryland. Um, work in the morning, go train all day, come home, work and, um, but it was one of those things I, it was, it was an interesting moment in life where you sort of ask yourself, okay, this is going to be really tough, um, both professionally, mentally, physically at that stage in your life. Um, but would you regret it? And, and that was the point. It was like, I had an outside chance. Like I was not like, I got invited out. They were like, we're not going to pay you yet. We're not quite sure. Um, and, uh, cause it is professional now. Um, but. I was, I was like, I'm going to take a chance. I can do it for two years and it somehow worked out. I ended up getting picked in 2016 to go to Rio, um, which was a, another amazing experience. Something I never would have thought would happen. Um, and yeah, so there's some, I mean, we're seven years removed from that now. Um, but it's, it's kind of interesting to look back on sometimes I'm like, did that really happen? Like, yeah. And I was an older athlete, I was 35 at the time. Um, I remember distinctly in the athlete village one time I got on the elevator cause you're, you know, we have a USA building. It's. Hundreds of us that are there. I mean, we're the largest contingent that goes and, um, you know, I got on the elevator and these, these coaches were like, what, what sport do you coach?

Dana Rampolla: 26:28

Thanks, bud.

Carmen Farmer: 26:28

I was like, I'm actually here to compete. Yeah. The average age is like, yeah, there's a bunch of like 22 year olds running around. This is all they do. They just train.

Dana Rampolla: 26:35

Right.

Carmen Farmer: 26:36

But it gave me this really interesting perspective because, you know, I have my professional life and it's such a mental game in terms of like. Getting to that point, like competing every once every four years, right? Like, and, and just like the, you know, we had sports psychologists and folks that

helped us think about that and deal with the pressure and all that stuff. But I was kind of like, this is just icing on top of the cake. Like I, I had no expectation to be here initially. Like, um, and so it gave me this sort of nice little armor where I was like, I don't care. Like I've got my day job. I'm going back to like, I love what I do. Like my passion is in my work. This is another part another dimension of my life. That's wonderful. But so it was an interesting place to be in. Um, Yeah, so

Dana Rampolla: 27:15

yeah, that's awesome. Thanks for sharing that. That's really wonderful. And rugby is such a great sport. You learn so many things from it. Self resiliency and just being strong and enduring.

Carmen Farmer: 27:25

Absolutely. And it's a very, uh, open, inclusive space. Um, you know, and, and, and it's always been that way come as you are all kinds of body types. Um, it doesn't, you know, where you're what your skill level is. Um, how you identify, whatever. I mean, we, we, we try to be pretty open and it's also, it's, it's a worldwide sport. It's not huge here. It's growing. But, um, you know, I've been all over the world, New Zealand, um, England, Fiji, um, just to play and, and, you know, it's, it's a worldwide community and it's, um, the camaraderie that, that goes into it as well. You know, we, we smash into each other on the pitch and then afterwards, you know, you host the other team, you, you, you do a dinner. You have drinks. And so it was, you know, it was very different than some of the other sports that I played. Um, and, um, I really appreciate that about it and have friends all over the world because of that.

Dana Rampolla: 28:12

That's amazing.

Charles Schelle: 28:13

You mentioned that it's growing and I feel like it's to the point now, especially in the last year or so, where it's going beyond that Olympic cycle and you're seeing more of it, especially on the East Coast, it's getting televised more, which is, you know, huge to get that exposure. I was looking up, I was like, well, I wonder if there's any teams around here. It's like, well, you, you don't only have a team, you have a women's team, the Colorado Gray Wolves, who are three time champions.

Carmen Farmer: 28:38

I played on that team. Really? Um. Yeah, yeah, it is. And it's I think the biggest thing that's starting to happen is you're seeing varsity programs in colleges and that for the longest time it was a it was a club sport. And so you didn't have scholarship opportunities You didn't have the funding that was going into it like other traditional NCAA sports and so that's going to be the To a point that really pivots it, I think, you know, like it's still like we're, we're competitive on the world stage, um, to a certain extent in the Olympics. We took fifth place. We didn't medal, unfortunately, um, but it's, it's, it's going to take, I think that investment both at the youth level, but really in my mind at the NCAA level, because that legitimizes it from a parent's perspective. So like if, if I'm a 16-year-old kid and I'm like, Hey mom, I want to go to college and play a sport, you know, they're probably going to be more interested if it's a sport like soccer or something where you can get a scholarship as opposed to a more obscure sport. And so I think that'll really be the trigger point where we'll start to see it grow tremendously, uh, in the next few years.

Charles Schelle: 29:39

There is a DC team, Old Glory. you can see back home in Virginia in Leesburg. And, and I saw that, uh, some Australian teams are actually coming over to play some games in Las Vegas to get more exposure too. So, you know, they're, they're all in to, to grow the sport. And now we have the, you know. Olympics returning to Paris, uh, in 2024 next year. So are you going to try to keep up with Team USA or even think about flying out there to watch?

Carmen Farmer: 30:03

Yeah, definitely keep up. I still know a few of the folks on both the men's and the women's teams and they both have qualified, which is amazing. Um, I don't know if I'll make it out. I went to New Zealand to watch the Rugby World Cup last year, which was quite an experience because we also have a world, you know, much like the soccer world cup, the women's soccer world cup that just went on. Um, we do the same thing too with rugby. Um, we'll see, I don't know, you know, um, it's, it's going to an Olympics as a spectator is pretty special to you. After we were finished playing, I got to stick around and just go see different events. And I mean, it's. That's just, it's, it's such an interesting event. I mean, the, the, the world's eyes are literally on it and it's not just a niche sport. It's all the different sports, right? Um, and so it's, it's pretty, pretty cool to see all these different countries convene and even as an athlete, you know, we all have one dining hall sent like center and seeing all the different countries come together. And, and we're all literally breaking bread in the same room and the different countries that, you know, sometimes from a political perspective, we're not always getting along, but from an athlete's perspective, like we connect on that. Like, Oh, you went through the same struggles I went through to get here and you're a person just like me. And so there is something beautiful. There's a lot of things that are wrong with the Olympics in terms of infrastructure and other things like that. But, um, there are a lot of really nice, beautiful things about it too, that I think, you know, I, I get excited when it comes around every four years.

Dana Rampolla: 31:20

Maybe we should put a few of the politicians in a rugby game and then we'll see what they really got into.

Carmen Farmer: 31:25

Yeah.

Charles Schelle: 31:27

I was gonna say, it's probably nice, uh, to have those experiences in the, in the dining hall because I'm sure you, you might've been awestruck. I don't know if there was any other Olympian athlete that you're like, Oh, uh, Michael Phelps. Is that you?

Carmen Farmer: 31:40

We got a photo with Michael Phelps and I was like, Hey, I live in Maryland. He was like in what part Um, yeah, I mean, there's actually before the opening ceremonies, there's a big get together. It's almost like a, um, meet and greet between all the athletes. And so everyone's getting selfies, like with Serena Williams and, um, yeah, and we, we, we all, you know, we saw, I saw Michael and I was like, guys, we got to go get a photo with him.

Dana Rampolla: 32:01

Um, he's basically my next door neighbor.

Carmen Farmer: 32:03

Yeah, yeah, totally. Yeah, yeah, exactly. He's like, who's this girl? Yeah. Um, yeah, it, it, it is, I mean, it's, it's, it's pretty otherworldly when you start to see some of those other athletes there and, um, It's, most of us are staying in the same building. Some of the teams, like the, the women's soccer team, they're rock stars. They're staying at some, like, five star resort. We didn't run into them, actually, until we went to, we got invited to the White House afterwards. And so we ran into some of the, those players. And even, you know, us as, as rugby players, we were like, Oh my God, can I get a photo with you? I guess, totally starstruck. But, um, yeah, it's, it's, it's, it's such an interesting experience.

Dana Rampolla: 32:38

Well, Carmen, thanks for being here today, taking time out of your busy schedule and just sharing some information about your trajectory and how you got where you are, but it's really exciting to hear the personal part mixed in, so we appreciate you sharing that, and thanks for joining the pulse.

Carmen Farmer: 32:53

Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Charles Schelle: 32:54

Thank you.

Jena Frick: 33:01

The UMB Pulse with Charles Chalet and Dana Rampolla is a UMB Office of Communications and Public Affairs production, edited by Charles Chalet, marketing by Dana Rampolla.

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