

Episode 10

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Eric Phillips, Ethan DeLeon

E

Eric Phillips 00:00

And I have to have a football analogy in this discussion or something because I love football. But it's something that we all have plans, we all come up with. But the key to those plans is always pick the low-hanging fruit that you can focus on in one year and do it. Because sometimes we're more worried about the film instead of playing the game. And you got to play the game. And don't— the film is important, no question about that. Plan is so important, but don't forget about playing the game. You got to play the game and do your best, and failure is always going to be a part of that game. But, but don't focus too much on the plan. The plan is there as a document, a planning document, but don't always set yourself to it all the time.

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:39

Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon, and I'm here with our founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we're excited to have Union County Economic Developer and Chamber President Eric Phillips. We want to welcome you to the Small Nation Podcast where we share some of the valuable lessons with what we have learned about entrepreneurship, real estate, economic development, and more. The point of this podcast is to create value for you, the listener, and to create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire. So, uh, Eric, welcome.

E

Eric Phillips 01:13

Thank you very much for having me.

J**Jason Duff** 01:14

Absolutely. Glad to have you today, Eric. Um, so Eric, for those that are listening, is kind of known as Mr. Union County. Um, I, you know, moved to Union County, it's probably been now about 7 years ago, And for most people that don't know that are listening, Union County is one of the fastest growing counties in the entire state of Ohio. And moving there, the thing that I think that impressed me the most is the amount of new homes that have been built in the last 10 years compared to a lot of other counties around. I mean, there's certainly, we're going to talk more, there's demand for more housing. I mean, housing is a need that is everywhere. But there's a lot of special things about the history of Union County, you know, of course, with agriculture, which is a big thing in Ohio. But about, you know, 40 years ago, Honda decided to build its manufacturing plants and its operations. And, you know, growing up, for those that have listened, family business was a big part of my background. Both my parents were small business owners. My dad, we operated businesses in construction materials. And so our, our very small at the time, um, business back in the '80s, we had a ready mix concrete plant that was located on old US 33 that was literally in the middle of nowhere. Um, there was mostly farm fields all around, but right across the street, that's where Honda ended up building its manufacturing operation. They started making motorcycles and then they started manufacturing cars. So for our family business, I mean, I was very young as that was happening, but I watched how hard my parents and grandparents were working to supply those construction materials. And of course, most of my friends and people that I grew up in, in, you know, Logan County where I was from, and of course our neighboring counties, most of, of my friends' parents and their family worked at Honda or worked at a Honda supplier. So being able to move to Union County, which is kind of the heart of all of those activities. It's pretty awesome. And Eric, being an economic development director, that is a critical role in a community. And those people that are looking to positively change what's happening, working with your local chamber and economic development, those are the people you want to connect with. So I'm so excited to have him as a guest today. Very cool. Eric, can you describe just your role and why is it important just to think about economic in general— economic development, excuse me, in general? Like, what is it that you do?

E**Eric Phillips** 03:51

Yeah, I mean, um, I really view economic development as the conduit in the community. It's your job to tie all the resources, uh, all the community leaders together to focus on what they want the future to be, to improve the quality of life, to grow the community in a certain way. And that's really what economic development is— tying those, um, resources and people together to make bigger things happen. And that's kind of how I view economic development. And, you know, a lot of times you're not going to have all the resources to support economic development. So what your job is, is to tie someone to someone else who might have those resources to provide to that business or to that person who wants to make a difference and do something bigger. And so that's kind of how, you know, you're not only a cheerleader, but you're also kind of a convener and a conduit in the community. And that's kind of how I look or I view economic development. And, but my role currently, again, economic development director, Union County, Marysville. Been in this role for 21 years. You know, we are blessed in this area. Jason has referred to about Honda. Honda's been here since 1979 with the motorcycle plant, but so far they've invested over \$11 billion in the state of Ohio. I mean, that's the first Intel in Ohio. A lot of people aren't saying that enough, but Honda's and their impact is just insurmountable. The monies they have invested, the the taxes they've paid, the community involvement they've made, the monies they've donated, but on top of that, their associates they encouraged to participate and to volunteer has been remarkable. So Honda has been a win for all of us. The other thing, Union County's been blessed to have companies like Scotts Miracle-Gro. They've been here 154 years in Marysville, the world's largest lawn and garden consumer product company in the world. They employ about 1,200 in Marysville. We also have a Nestlé R&D facility. Coffee that's in North America has to go through research and development at Marysville for approval, which is kind of cool. And freeze-dried coffee was invented in Marysville, Ohio. That's cool. In the 1960s, people don't know that. And then you have Parker Hannafin, and you have a, you have a Continental facility, you have Select Sires. We now produce more bull semen than any other county in the world, which is—

J**Jason Duff** 06:02

I mean, that can be on a billboard, right?

E**Eric Phillips** 06:05

I guess. It's funny when you say that because, uh, the CEO or the president, Dave Thorburn, for Select Sires, you came to commissioners on multiple occasions and says, hey, look, instead of putting a car on all your road signs, I think you need a sperm on all your road signs. And, you know, I know we're doing a podcast and maybe inappropriate language, but still, it's part of life. And because they basically have bull semen, they produce bull semen on an annual basis, a ton of it. And they have bulls insured for \$7 million because that's how much semen they produce. And he said, why don't you put bull semen on every road sign? And so the commissioners laughed. They laughed it off. But then one year, the county commissioners, we had— they had one of their annual meetings and one of the commissioners presented one road sign that had bull semen on, you know, on the actual sign and presented it to the CEO for Select Sires.

J**Jason Duff** 06:55

Listen, we talk about trying to not be in the middling many and promote the same things. There's a unique thing to promote, right? That's embracing your weird, I guess. That's really cool. If you start thinking about that from an economic standpoint, how that, you know, what that does for the area, especially in Ohio, agriculture is huge here. So How did you get started in economic development with Union County Chamber? Like, what brought you to this?

E**Eric Phillips** 07:21

So I call myself a reformed planner. I went to undergrad, I thought I was going to be a teacher. I then discovered planning, which I knew nothing about because I grew up on a farm in the middle of nowhere in southern Ohio, in Scioto County, in Lucasville, actually. And but I learned more, the more I learned, the more I liked. And my uncle was a county commissioner for 16 years. He was a sheriff for 16 years prior to that. So I was always interested in public service and I was always interested in maps and how things worked and how to build things and all that. So that's really how I got involved. And I started as a planner actually in Village of Granville over in Licking County, and then I went on to Gahanna and then from there I went to the Dayton area, worked a couple of jobs and then came back for this position. But I call myself a reformed planner because I think planning is so important. And believe me, I do a lot of golfing and I'm the golf trip planner for 16 guys every year. On multiple occasions, but I call myself a reform planner in a sense where I like to tell people what they can do, not what they can't do. So I like to match people with people, and I want to tell people, yeah, you can do that, and this is how you do it, and this is how you can do something bigger.

J**Jason Duff** 08:32

Yeah, very cool. Takes a special personality for that. Um, so why is it important for local businesses to be active in their local chamber? And I mean, you, you kind of have access to both worlds here, so like What would you say for a business owner that's looking to get connected?

E**Eric Phillips** 08:52

So, you know, in a community, um, you only really get out what you put in and, uh, you can be a successful business and do great things in your respective community, but you can also help your community out a lot in a lot of ways. So getting involved, um, with your local chamber, networking with other businesses can not only help you grow your business, but also benefits the community as a whole. And, um, you know, um, I, I wish more people in the community would give their time back to causes their respective game because that would make the community even better. We can sit back and complain about everything in the community or anything in the community, but until you get involved and engaged and really solve problems, I don't really think you make a difference in your life. And I think that community involvement and something that I value very much and I love volunteers and people who get engaged and involved. I just think it's so important if you really want a great community.

J**Jason Duff** 09:43

How do we teach that? You know, one thing I know that's changing is it used to be in every small town there was this culture about about the social service clubs. So Kiwanis and Rotary and Lions and of course, organizations like the United Way and the chamber. And it seems as I talk to a lot of communities, people are just busy today. And I don't know if it's— if they're busier today than what they were, you know, 20, 30 years ago. But those— that service, that act of participating, giving, contributing is so essential for small towns and communities. How can we encourage more people to get involved? Or maybe there are ways to innovate getting them involved to support their town.

E**Eric Phillips** 10:26

It's a great question. It's a difficult question. You know, emails were supposed to make our lives easier, right? However, they've doubled our workload, I believe, in a lot of ways. Whereas you had to wait for a phone call or you had to make a phone call back in the day or send a letter that might take a few weeks. So things have changed. So people are doing a lot more work. And furthermore, with the workforce shortages that we're currently experiencing, you're asked to do many different wear different many hats and that you weren't wearing 2 years ago even. So I think those are huge challenges. I'm a big believer, we have a leadership institute in our community, and I think that's a way, I think we need to look at youth leadership. We need to get students, and I challenge, you know, our school districts are doing great. We're blessed in Logan and Union County, have great school districts. But I think we should challenge ourselves a little bit more to get students involved and get them in touch with their local government or their local community organizations to give them real life experiences on what volunteerism is and how they can become involved as they get older and they come back to their small towns. I think that's a way of getting them more in tune or getting more people engaged and involved because I don't think that the animal clubs, I don't think a lot of those things are really as effective as they used to be. Now, the church is still strong, is a strong avenue of getting people engaged and involved as well. And we have a lot of churches in our small towns as well. But it's a challenge. It's not something that's easy.

J**Jason Duff** 11:50

So I was out in Iowa this last week and had a chance to visit Marshalltown, which is a community of 27,000 people, and they have been through some pretty serious adversity. They faced an EF3 tornado back in 2019, and then about 2 years later, a derecho that completely went right through their downtown. And, um, you know, what was interesting about Iowa is we were talking about how places like Ohio and Iowa are deemed the flyover states and that there's a lot of folks around the country, you know, maybe in those larger cities or the East Coast and West Coast that just don't understand what the heartbeat— it means to live in kind of Middle America. And, you know, you're someone that is not only working in Middle America, but you're also, you know, in some of the— one of the smallest towns. When you talk to other people around the country about Marysville and Union County, what are the things that you describe as the heartbeat and why a company should locate here?

E**Eric Phillips** 12:58

Wow, that's a great question. And I do hate the words flyover. I hate the R-belt world too. I don't say that anymore, but that's a terrible name to give us and to tell us that. We in the Midwest, we know how to make things and grow things. And for a number of years, we got away from that. We got away from shop class in school. We got away from our ability to grow things and our ability to understand and engineer things. And we're getting back in that realm. But, you know, I think we're the smartest people in the country. I think we know how things work. And you can pretend that we don't, but we do. And, you know, I don't really ever want to live in New York, nor do I want to live in California. And I guess flyover country is a badge of honor in a lot of ways because we're down to earth. I mean, we know, and I think when I'm talking to a company, I always say salt of the earth. I say great work ethic, which we definitely have. And again, it's in our DNA to produce, produce or manufacture, to innovate. Ohio's a state of innovation as well. And we know how to grow things. I mean, look at the farmland that we have and we know how to do all those things. I think that goes a long way. But on top of that, if you look at the other values that we have or the other value propositions we have, such as great school districts, great career techs that are huge wins because workforce is so critical. You have lower taxes. And again, and we laugh at the taxes they pay in some of these other larger communities. That's a huge win. And, you know, I think people say hi to you here and they don't want to run over you as soon as they see you. They just say hi. They talk to you. They, you know, and so I think those are all Things that, that when companies, if I get a company to visit, I mean, that's a big challenge. You know, you submit proposals, but if they come and visit, I think we have a great chance of winning that company because they, they fall in love with the community in which they visit. And I think that's a huge advantage to us in a lot of ways.

J**Jason Duff** 14:56

Yeah, that's great. Uh, before we jumped on the microphone, you were telling us a little bit about the survey that was just conducted about people moving to Marysville or Union County, I should say. Um, can you share on the podcast some of that? Like why maybe people you found, people were moving to the area?

E**Eric Phillips** 15:12

Yeah. So, I mean, we built nearly 800 single-family homes last year in the county. We're second fastest growing county in the, in the state of Ohio. We're seeing a lot of— Marysville's approved 2,000 apartments in the last couple of years. And shockingly, we still have a housing crisis. We don't have enough housing. The apartments have a waiting list. They're completely filled up. So we have a huge challenge and we wanted to know really where, why people were moving to Union County and Marysville. So we put a survey together. We've had, I think, nearly 130 responses, which is a pretty good pool. And from that, what we've learned, you know, some things are surprising. What are the top 3 reasons why people are moving? One is to live in a better community, which, you know, after the last couple years with the pandemic and the other things that are going on, I We get that. The second was to be closer to family, that maybe that means they're moving back to where they grew up, which I think is a great thing to hear. And the third thing is the job, which I thought would have been maybe higher.

J**Jason Duff** 16:13

Yeah.

E**Eric Phillips** 16:13

And, and, but we're going to share that data. That's great data to have. We also ask people, the renters, why are you renting versus owning a home? One was affordability because it's not cheap to own a home and or to buy a home in Union County. You know, and that was the number one. The second one is accessibility. There's not availability of housing in the community, although I think that's going to change with the interest rates going up. We're going to have more supply than demand shortly. And then the third reason of why, you know, renters is flexibility. And I think that flexibility, the way that the question was played out here was that people really want to be able to move where they want to move, when they want to move, and they don't really want to be tied down with a home. So I think that's a growing segment in our market that people want more flexibility with housing. But some interesting data— we have more, we're still looking at the data and we'll know more, but we're going to have a presentation before the county commissioners and our city council to understand that a little bit better. But it's really cool stuff to look at that data.

J**Jason Duff** 17:15

Yeah, it just reminds me a lot of like what you were saying just about Ohio as a whole. I feel like that's a prime example of— I mean, Union County has— we were talking before, the industry making things and Scott's Lawn, you know, growing things and things like that. It's really cool. And I— it's like a prime example of that. But I'm excited that you're here, Eric, because I feel like you may be more in tune with, uh, just the current trends that are happening, um, whether that's, you know, in the greater Columbus area. Um, Marysville, which is the county seat of Union County, is located what, half hour out of Columbus downtown. Yes.

E**Eric Phillips** 17:51

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 17:52

So what are some of the trends that you see in central Ohio and what problems— I mean, you touched on the housing market and the— I know a lot of people are worried about economy and things like that right now. What are some of those trends that you're seeing? And yeah, let's just start with that. Yeah.

E

Eric Phillips 18:08

So, I mean, when we meet with companies and we did a retention visit today and we've done, I think, 5 or 6 in the last couple of weeks, just meeting with companies, see where things are, how they're doing. Really just a touch-up call. You know, workforce is the number one issue. And there are 10,000, over 10,000 jobs within a 20-mile radius of Marysville that are unfilled today. And that's a lot. And we don't have people to fill those positions. It's not to the point of worrying about the current population filling those positions. We just don't have enough people to fill them. And we need more people to live here, which creates the housing issue that we talked about earlier. So it's all tied together. If you want to locate industrial jobs, you got to have housing. They come on and— I mean, I hear a lot of people say we don't want any development. Well, you can't get no development. You need development to actually grow as a community. I mean, I grew up—

J

Jason Duff 19:00

even just to sustain. Yes. I mean, that's the thing that I don't think people realize is that, you know, to keep a company like Honda, they're not going to just stay still unless they're innovating too, right?

E

Eric Phillips 19:11

You have to have people and you have to have qualified people where our educational system comes in. I will say that our schools and our career techs are doing a much better job putting shop class back in our schools. And that's, that's very important to our future. And I think we have great— Ohio High Point does a great job. We share Ohio High Point. We have 3 career techs that service our county, but they're all doing great things, which is exciting. I mean, I think workforce is the number one issue. The impacts of Intel, of course, throughout central Ohio, I think is going to be heard for some time. And we're dealing with a couple of suppliers now that are looking at Marysville for a potential location.

J

Jason Duff 19:46

Real quick, can we, but for those who don't know, can we explain the Intel situation?

E

Eric Phillips 19:50

So Intel, you know, initially 3,000 jobs, a \$20 billion investment. It is the, you know, Honda was first and then Intel's coming, but it's going to make chips in New Albany area. And really it's going to be a massive campus and it's a huge win for Ohio. The average salary is about \$130,000 per person. Per job. You don't have to have a full college education, you know, 4-year degree. So that's good news as well. But the supplier network wants to be— some want to be located next to the facility, some want to be a good distance away so they don't compete with the workforce. And so I think there's going to be some benefits to some of the outlying counties, you know, as a result of Intel, much like Honda. I mean, Honda draws their workforce from 15 different counties. For example, and their supply networks throughout the entire state. So, I mean, majority of counties in Ohio have a, a Japanese supplier that supplies Honda. So, you know, Intel is going to have that same impact over a number of years, and I think they want to be up and operational in 2025. With that, those suppliers need to be up and operational by 2025 as well. So we're going to see some other announcements soon that are going to support the Intel development.

J**Jason Duff** 21:01

Yeah, well, have you seen any of that in the concrete industry? So there was a comment the, the CEO of Intel, um, said, and it was published, and I'm gonna butcher his quote a little bit, but he basically said he needs every concrete truck in Ohio on this job, which does create challenges. I mean, I, I'm, I'm with Eric, like, we are so excited for Ohio and seeing this massive investment and what it's going to mean.. But in the temporary short-term related to inflation of construction costs, access to contractors, access to construction materials, it is creating rippling effects in the Columbus, Ohio and Ohio market that, that is creating challenges because we have a limited number of all of these things. And so, you know, one thing that I think's real important of, of roles of economic development professionals is that, you know, oftentimes the work we do is we are translators. So we work with government officials, we work with entrepreneurs, we work with school officials, and you kind of have to massage those different contingencies and those groups so the community wins. And, you know, one thing that I'm curious, you know, part of your role is, of course, to recruit new investment, new jobs and economic development, housing you mentioned, but also how do you preserve the DNA of what the community is that makes it special? You know, how do you work with the attitude that we don't want to grow because of these reasons?

E**Eric Phillips** 22:41

That's a huge challenge, especially in these days. And I think since the pandemic, I think the people that want to say no are louder as a result of the pandemic and the shutdowns that resulted thereof. And it's a huge challenge. You know, the Columbus region last year built fewer homes than they did in 2006. We were doing 17,000 in 2002. Last year we did over 10,000. Austin did 40,000 last year. We did one, one-fourth of what Austin did. And with this intel coming, they're tied together. They're, they, they, we have to think about housing and where these people are going to live, they're going to move here. On top of that, on the totem pole, when it comes to construction, commercial construction is at the top, housing construction is below that. So what's going to happen is you're going to have constraints on the housing labor that's actually building the construction workers, is building the houses. They're going to go to the commercial. That presents another problem as we go forward from a housing perspective. And so the NIMBYs and people who say we don't want any growth, I think that's unfair to say that. Because we got to grow. I grew up in Portsmouth and Lucasville in Scioto County, and the steel mill closed. And you go back there now, and it's not very pretty to see what's going on there. I mean, Portsmouth is a great community, but in a lot of ways, it's not— it's failing in a lot of ways because it doesn't have— they don't have the jobs, they don't have the investment that we're lucky to have here. And I think that you can't stay even-steven from a growth perspective. You got to go up. You can't go down. I mean, that's the only other option is to go down. And it's, it's, it, I hate to see something like that happen. And so we got to learn ways to grow together, to grow in a better way, more managed growth in a lot of ways. But we have to understand that growth is going to happen and we can't just say no to everything. And I think getting people around the table to talk about these issues, getting the schools to understand that the household size is going down, not up. And just because you build a house doesn't mean you're going to have 3 children in the school district. And I think we've got to have those discussions with the schools to understand that. And furthermore, your elected leaders need to look at the data and understand that we're building fewer homes than we ever have from a regional perspective over the last 20, 30 years. And so how do we grow more houses? And I've asked the BIA. John Malkai did a great presentation. John's great and supports the building industry here in central Ohio. And he said the reason why we slowed is because of government control. Zoning and those, those factors and the time, you know, timing. But the problem is the developments you approve today are 3 to 5 years out. So if you stop approving developments all of a sudden— as I hit the, as I hit the mic, sorry about it, I'm talking with my hands here, no one can see that. There is a camera over there.

J**Jason Duff** 25:28

Yeah, we just know how passionate you are about that issue.

E**Eric Phillips** 25:31

But, but, but if— but the, but the developments you approve today don't come online until 3 to 5 years out. So we got to continue to approve those developments. It's not that you're getting all this development all at once. It's timed out, and you got to think of it that way as time goes on.

J**Jason Duff** 25:45

Go ahead. Just saying, as a leader, um, you hear a lot of nos. Uh, how do you— and, and this is something I go into a lot of communities that unfortunately don't have a Chamber of Commerce or an economic development director. Um, sometimes it's just the mayor, uh, that's trying to make positive changes, or maybe it's a member of the community or a business owner. Um, how do you help when you hear a lot of nos? How do you help, you know, overcome that?

E**Eric Phillips** 26:15

I think data is your best, best information to provide the leaders to say, hey, look, here's, here's the situation. So, yes, I understand your position, but here's the data that says that this is not exactly what you think it is. And here's how you can— we can make something happen. And maybe there's a compromise. So always try to look for a compromise, I think, is key to all that. And if we don't assist with growth, and we're all going to lose in the long run. It's like going to a tax abatement. I have these discussions many times. People say it's corporate welfare. But honestly speaking, we all get a little of corporate welfare or personal welfare in this, in the country. We have what you call a CAUE, which is an agricultural tax abatement. You, we all get subsidies from the government in some manner, some way. And the way I look at a development or growth, like a business wants to grow, you have a base property tax and it's typically pennies because it's CAUV or, and it's not developed. And then you have the value of the land during the abatement, which is typically drastically higher than the amount that you're currently receiving. And then after the 10 years or whatever the time of the abatement, then you have the full amount of those taxes.. And you got to somehow allow people to see those numbers and hope they understand that, that, that you might consider it welfare, but you're, you're promoting growth. It's going to benefit everyone in the short term and definitely everyone in the long term. So it's not really a pain. It's actually a gain is how I look at it. A lot of people say, well, we want 100% of everything. Well, of course we all want to. I want 110%, actually, of everything.

J**Jason Duff** 27:54

Yeah.

E**Eric Phillips** 27:54

But you can't have that if you really want to to work. This is a partnership. When you have a business that wants to locate in your community, it's a partnership. They're looking for you to be a partner with them to make something happen. And that's key to this. And I think we have to look at it in that way. And I know that the elected report to the citizenry and to the electorate, but in the same light, we got to simplify how we explain this to the electorate.

J**Jason Duff** 28:17

When you think back for the projects and things that you've worked on in Marysville, what are you most proud of?

E**Eric Phillips** 28:24

Wow. You know, I think a number of different projects come to mind when I think about Marysville and Union County. One is the 33 Innovation Park, of course, that we were— it's a 200-acre industrial park. We have our first building. We have a second building going to be going up there. We have quite a few users that are looking at it now that hopefully we can sell the land sooner rather than later. But we're moving that pretty fast. I think that's one definitely on the top or one of the top items. The other is collaboration. I can't say enough about Union County, Marysville, and the different jurisdictions. We really work together well and we do have issues and we have disagreements, but it's typically behind closed doors. It's not aired in public and we try to work through those issues. So I think the collaborative spirit and something being part of that, I think we have a joint economic development agreement, or we have one with Mill Creek Township and Jerome Township with the city and the county involved. Those are big wins when you can get the city and the township and the county all to agree on a vision. That's a huge challenge. And to get them to do that, I think that's a huge win as well. You know, and I also think being conservative on how we look at tax abatements, because, you know, my view of tax abatements, I wish we didn't have to do any. Incentives. But we live in a competitive marketplace and that's the playground that we're in and that's what we're given. And for us to compete, you know, internationally, which we do on a regular basis, we need to be aggressive in how we look at tax abatements. But we've been very conservative in our community respective to other communities. A lot of communities do a 15-year, 100% tax abatement. We don't do those in Unicam. We do 75%, you know, 75%, 10 years is typically our max in a lot of increases. And so we're very conservative. And, and I say that, I mean, I'd love to be more aggressive, but in the same light, I value that because we are giving more monies to the schools and to the social service agencies. And I think that's important as well because they do good work as well, and they need monies to support the programs and the services that they provide. And so that's something else. But we've done a good job of bringing— we have an economic incentive policy that all our school districts, and I think I don't know if there's another example in the state of Ohio or maybe in the nation where you have 4 school districts, you have 4 townships, you have the city of Marysville, village of Plain City, village of Richwood, and the county have all signed a document saying, here's the incentive agreements that we agree to and here are the formula that we're going to do. And it's kind of a unique thing. So that was a big win for us to have that and put that together as well. I gave you a lot of examples.

J**Jason Duff** 31:00

Sorry.

E**Eric Phillips** 31:00

No, those are great examples. I can talk all day about it. But so—

J**Jason Duff** 31:03

When you think of a community, maybe some someone that is just starting out in your profession, what advice would you have for them?

E**Eric Phillips** 31:11

I would first tell them to try to understand, maybe look at the planning documents, the comprehensive plan, their economic development strategy. I mean, every community should have an economic development strategy. Every community should have a comprehensive— I'm a big— I'm still a planner, you know, but planning is so important. Thinking about the future, how things work together, understand your community a little bit better and get engaged and get involved. You know, why is that going on that corner? This is going on that corner. And why is that subdivision going there? There's always a method to the madness. And sometimes people think that government officials or people working for the government or people doing economic development planning don't really know what they're doing. And, you know, sometimes we're surprised with some comments that come up. Generally speaking, there's a reason why certain things are happening and the reason why things are developed. Just don't be so quick to judge. And in today's world, I think we're so quick to judge, but sit back and try to understand. And we're all guilty of that. I'm guilty of that as well. But I think— but getting engaged, understanding your community would be— is there a leadership institute, some type of organization where you can get engaged and get involved? Again, you only get out what you put in, and that's just not cutting your grass every day. That's important, but it's also going and volunteering hours to a local cause. Is so key to the future, and I, and I would encourage anyone, um, starting out to, to do that.

J**Jason Duff** 32:36

That's cool. Um, going a little bit back to the, you know, different trends and things that you're seeing, um, what are— what is Union County doing to kind of prepare for these changes with Intel, with just any of these, you know, current trends that we're seeing right now? What are you guys doing just for the benefit of anyone listening, I guess.

E**Eric Phillips** 33:00

Yeah, I mean, I think community preparedness is so important. And when I say that, it means a lot of different things. But from an economic development standpoint, it means getting sites that have all the utilities there, that have the resources that the schools and the workforce development where you can present a story to a company and to be prepared. You know, our challenge is we're running out of industrial land. You think of all that vacant land between Honda and Dublin that, hey, it's just there and it can be developed. It can't be because it doesn't have the utilities, it doesn't have the necessary items that it needs. And I think our big challenge is making certain we have more sites that are readily available. And that's a huge, huge thing that we're currently working on and trying to understand how we can make these sites better or ready for future development. I think constant communication with your school districts and what they're doing to make certain that businesses are tied to the school districts. You know, Marysville Schools now I think has over 60 companies participating in internship program. Tolls does a great job. High Point does a great job. I think in the county as a whole, we have, I think we're nearing like 200 internships for high school. I wish I had a high school internship. That would be awesome. We need more of that. We need our schools more at the table. And we have a monthly call with our educational leaders. And if you're not doing that in economic development, you need to be doing that. You need to have outreach. Because building that foundation is so important. We got to get to the parents. We got to get to the students and show them the value of a technical degree. You don't need a 4-year degree anymore. You can do a lot with a 2-year associate's degree or with a credential. And that's another thing that we need to continue to talk. We got to get to the moms. Moms, I think, influence decisions 70% of the time for their children. And I think the moms, you know, my dad was a mason and he was a contractor. He would always say that, you know, I wanted to send you to school because I don't want you to have these calluses on your hand like I have on mine. And that's what he would always say. And that's why they sent me to college. And it was a great experience for me. But, and that's what I did. But again, we got to get to students and we got to get more engaged with the school districts and continue to do that. That's another, I think, a trend that we need to continue to work on.

J**Jason Duff** 35:11

How do you work on your professional growth? Um, you know, I know you belong to some associations. Uh, one association you introduced me to was the National Rural Economic Development Association, which are other economic developers in smaller markets around the country. And had a chance to go down to their annual meeting in Covington, Kentucky, and just was so inspired by that group. I mean, So many people that are just very passionate about smaller towns and smaller markets. But where, where else do you grow professionally with your skills and your abilities?

E**Eric Phillips** 35:47

Yeah, you know, I've been involved with NRDA since I started my position, but they've been a great resource from a small town. And it's that can-do spirit when you go to those meetings and people, how they want to make a difference in their small towns. It's actually really, really addicting to go and listen to the passion you have from small-town people. You know, I was on the One Columbus or Columbus 2020 board for 9 years, and I just went off here a couple years ago. You know, that's something where you sit around a table with a lot of leaders in Columbus, business leaders as well as government leaders, and talk about how we want to grow the region. That's— I've been on the MORPC board, past chair of MORPC. That's another resource that I've used. They're a great resource to keep up on my profession. That's about planning, about transportation. I also have been involved with IEDC. I was involved in the host committee bringing IEDC, which is the International Economic Development Council, and bringing them to Columbus back in 2010 when they did their annual conference. I've been involved there as well, you know, and I do— and since the shutdowns, the COVID I haven't been traveling as much, but we do a lot of trade missions and I learn a lot from that. And I'll tell you a story which which I told a few days ago, I remember going out to Silicon Valley, I don't know, 15 years ago, and we had a meeting with Google, and I was with Jobs Ohio and Columbus 2020 at the time. So it was probably 10 years ago now, and we had a meeting with Google, and we went in their facility, and we had a meeting with someone. They were late coming in, and the meeting was very fast. It was like Why are you here? Kind of meeting, like, whatever. What are you doing here? You know, kind of like, what's going on here? And now fast forward, of course, Google has a presence in New Albany. We get— AWS is here. Facebook is here. Intel just made their announcement. Now we're on radar, complete radar, full-blown radar at this point with Intel and all that. I tell you that story because, you know, something else we've worked on is a smart mobility corridor called the Beta District.. It's basically a playground for autonomous and connected vehicles that we've invested over \$100 million. When I say we, it's the state of Ohio, it's Ohio State, it's the Transportation Research Center, it's Honda, it's Marysville, it's Dublin, it's Union County. We've all worked on that. And I remember going to Detroit and in 2019 I was in Detroit 9 times visiting with companies. I remember a short time previous that we couldn't even get in any of those companies. Now they want to talk to us. Because we have something to sell. We have an infrastructure that we've actually built, something special that we can now market. And I tell you that because I think you as a community, what is your niche? What do you want to be? Build infrastructure. I mean, look here at Bellefontaine. My gosh, Jason, the work you've done here, this downtown is electrifying. And to come to it now versus a short time ago is amazing. And you've created a niche for Bellefontaine. And I think that's going to pay dividends in the future. And I think each community is small or even large. You need to find your niche. What is it? What do you want to attract? What do you want to be when you grow up? And I say that in a fun way. What do you want to be? And I think that's a challenge. And the Smart Mobility Corridor was a challenge, but we made it an opportunity and we all worked together and we all collaborated and we all worked together to make a bigger thing happen. And that's exciting.

J**Jason Duff** 39:07

That's really cool. And I'm starting to see doors open because of that work. It's really cool. Anything else? Listen, I, um, I think I'm going to share what the golden nugget is. All right, hit us with it. Um, yeah, I think Eric said it really well, is that you, you know, the story about, um, The Ohio Group going to Google is oftentimes, you know, if you, you may be ahead of the curve with the ideas, the strategies, and what you know in your local market, And sometimes that will fall on deaf ears, but being able to show up and just, you know, just to— that's it, showing up. Today you look at, you know, Marysville's had this deep background and history with automotive manufacturing, and you a few years ago saw the articles that electric vehicles are growing and massively growing. And so for community leaders to come together, and I think that's the other thing with Eric's planning background is knowing that you can't put your head in the sand. You have to anticipate these changes and prepare your community for what is to come. So having the smart mobility corridor is going to be a game changer for 33. And you have intel on one side of it over in Newark, and you've got, you know, Logan County, Union County on the other side of that. We are perfectly positioned.. But that doesn't mean to set back and just expect it to come, right? Right. We have to work hard. You've got to put your head down. You've got to hustle. And, uh, I think that's the message for anyone listening today. Very cool. Well, thank you for sharing.

E**Eric Phillips** 40:42

Absolutely. So we all have our plans or strategies. This is just something that— and I have to have a football analogy in this discussion because I love football. But, but it's something that we all have plans, we all come up with. But the key to those plans is always pick the low-hanging fruit that you can focus on in one year and do it. Because sometimes we're more worried about the, about the, the film instead of playing the game. And you got to play the game. And don't— the film is important, no question about that. Plan is so important. But don't forget about playing the game. You got to play the game and do your best. And failure is always going to be part of that game. But, but don't focus too much on plan. The plan is there as a document, a planning document, but don't always set yourself to it all the time.

J**Jason Duff** 41:26

Yeah, that's really good. Thank you for sharing that. Great. All right, well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 41:30

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