

Episode 48

📅 Wed, Jun 28, 2023 9:00AM ● 55:04

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Small town success, Bryan Area Foundation, community foundation, Bryan Ohio, Spangler Candy Company, Dum Dum suckers, Etch A Sketch, Ohio Art Company, endowed funds, downtown revitalization, Community Impact Committee, proactive grantmaking, culture of giving, Williams County courthouse, raising a family in a small town, public-private partnerships

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Amy Miller, Ethan DeLeon

J Jason Duff 00:00
just ballpark, I mean, we're probably in the millions, would you say?

A Amy Miller 00:05
When you think about total investment happening in the downtown right now, absolutely. Yeah. Um, and that's not just us, so we were just the catalyst, the starters. And I was telling Nick a little bit earlier, we almost had a complaint yesterday because there are construction trucks everywhere. Like, they're all over our downtown right now, which is just a great problem to have because there's just so much happening.

E Ethan DeLeon 00:34
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 the president and CEO of the Bryan Area Foundation, Amy Miller, on the show with us. 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 create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire others.

J Jason Duff 01:00
Thank you, Ethan. Amy, welcome to the show.

A Amy Miller 01:03
Great to be here. Thank you for having me.

J**Jason Duff** 01:05

I, I think this is our first community foundation to ever be on the show. Yeah. And I'm excited for Amy to share more about her community of Bryan, Ohio, which is in northwest Ohio, Williams County. And Bryan happens to be the county seat of Williams County. And we also have on the show today Nick Davis. Nick! Yeah! This is Nick's first show. Nick's one of our team members here at Small Nation. He also works on the consulting side of what we do. And Nick and I have been working with Amy now over the past, I think, 2 and a half years and wanted him to be a part of our conversation today as well. I am no special guest today, but I am happy to be here and share about the work that we've done with with the Brian Area Foundation and you, Amy, and excited to be here.

A**Amy Miller** 01:52

Awesome.

J**Jason Duff** 01:53

Well, Amy, tell us about Bryan, Ohio. Now remind me, is that your hometown?

A**Amy Miller** 01:58

It is. I was born and raised in Bryan, Ohio and also married my high school sweetheart. So when we decided to have a family and of our own, it was time to move back to Bryan. So we've been back in Bryan with our family for about 15 years.

J**Jason Duff** 02:12

And tell us about that journey. So you grew up in Bryan, Ohio. What was that like? And you went off to school and maybe left the community for some time.

A**Amy Miller** 02:21

We did. So, yep. Growing up in Bryan was amazing. Literally, the town smells sweet in the mornings. I mean, we're not making that up. Spengler Candy Company.

J**Jason Duff** 02:30

And why is that?

A**Amy Miller** 02:31

Yeah. Spengler Candy Company. That is their home. So I had to bring you some Dum Dums.

J**Jason Duff** 02:37

We— anyone that brings like candy to our office, adult candy, which can be beer, wine, or of course, kids candy too. We are a big fan of.

A**Amy Miller** 02:46

So thank you.

J**Jason Duff** 02:46

And just to share, like, there probably isn't anyone listening that hasn't had a Dum Dum Sucker. And why is that? Where— why is Dum Dum Suckers kind of this cultural phenomenon?

A**Amy Miller** 02:58

Well, that I'm not sure I can explain as well as I'm sure that the Spangler Candy family could. But I will share that my experience has always been, you know, especially leaving our community when I went off to college, that was how I introduced myself. When people would say, where are you from? I wouldn't just say I was from Bryan, Ohio. I would say I was from Bryan, Ohio. It's the home of the Dum Dum Sucker and the Etch-a-Sketch because that all of a sudden was something that people could remember and it was unique. Um, and it was something I felt like I could be really proud of for the community I was coming from.

J**Jason Duff** 03:27

I, I love that. And you know, a lot of people ask you where you're from. It could be anchoring for the geographic location, but for me, Dum Dum Suckers are, I have this nostalgic memory of going with my grandparents to the bank and you going to the bank, I, as a young person, I kind of didn't understand exactly what they were doing there. But they would take, you know, their checks to get cashed. And always the staff at the bank would kind of lean over the counter and offer me a Dum Dum sucker. It's more exciting as a kid than as an adult. Well, that positive reinforcement was like, I want to go to the bank. That's why I would beg my parents to take me to the bank for some reason. And even, you know, walking into the branch, that was one thing. But even the drive-through window typically had And for those of the flavors, there is a very particular audience for certain flavors, right? So some of them are very popular and others you're like, oh, what's the mystery flavor? What's your favorite flavor? Right? You're never sure what you're going to get. But there's a thing about returning to those nostalgic memories, whether it's Dum Dum Suckers. And I know we also have, um, an exclusive here on the Small Nation Podcast. This is the rebranded look for a bit of honey candy. And I happened to see these as I was popping into a local business. We have a new, what I would say, vintage and also kind of all things sweet shop in town called Candy Craze. And I actually saw this, I'm like, oh my gosh, I know these people. But, um, this nostalgic kind of thing is, is coming back. Now you just mentioned something else, the Etch-A-Sketch.

A**Amy Miller** 05:05

It's also the home of the Etch-A-Sketch. Um, and as I, I really wanted to share this story with you because I think it's a quintessential story for Bryan, Ohio, and that is that the Ohio Art Company was really kind of crowdfunded way back in the day. So it was actually a dentist, I believe he was actually from Archbold, Ohio, and he had started this kind of tin company where he was printing on metal, metal lithography, and he wanted to expand that. And he actually went out and basically crowdfunded so that he could start this manufacturing company, which then would bloom into The Ohio Art Company, which is the home of— was the creator of the Etch-a-Sketch. So when you tour the Ohio Art Company today, they still have the ledger hanging on the wall of everybody that contributed to that. And I think why I tie so much to that is that that is also the story of the Bryan Area Foundation where I am at. So the Bryan Area Foundation was founded in 1969, and that was a group of community members that came together. It was a presentation by Al Horn Jr. at the local Rotary Club who brought this idea for a community foundation. And Lem Hawk and John Dwyer went around the community, championed this idea, started a group of people meeting together frequently. And then finally one morning in December, G. Grant Brown stood up, threw down a \$50 bill and said, "Let's quit talking about this and then let's actually do something." That day they left, they had a \$200 deposit. That was the first deposit in the name of the Bryan Area Foundation. Foundation, and today it has over \$37 million in assets. We give back over \$1 million to our community each year in the form of grants and scholarships. And that's just quintessential Bryan. It's always been about working together for collective good. And so that's what gets me excited when I see that— I can— I see those stories at Ohio Arts, and those programs are still happening today. So there are a lot of projects that are still happening right now that are Basically, it's community members getting together to make it happen.

J**Jason Duff** 07:10

Impressive. \$37 million. That is a significant amount of money, especially for a small town. For some people that might be listening and new to what a foundation is, what is a community foundation? And you hear the story of how 50-plus years ago, your community people came together to do that. What is a community foundation?

A**Amy Miller** 07:34

So it's really, it's a grouping of funds that are endowed. So they're invested. So we endow the principal. So it's, we never spend it, we invest it, and then we just take a portion of those earnings and that's what we use to do all of our grantmaking and scholarships. And then we continue to reinvest all of that excess back into it. And that's how it just continues to compound and grow over time. So it's really the power of small gifts given over time and compounded.

J**Jason Duff** 08:02

Amy, how are you governed? Is there a board of directors? Are there committees that meet? Tell us a little about your structure.

A

Amy Miller 08:08

Yeah, so the board of the Bryan Area Foundation is really, and that's the story of it too, it's a group of community members. So the Bryan Area Foundation today, I think we have around 50 plus, around 50 members, and they're all by invite only. It's a great cross-section of people from different industries and different businesses. We have lawyers and doctors and teachers and superintendents and all kinds of different people that make up the Bryan Area Foundation, but then they serve on committees. So we have obviously investment committees and grantmaking committees and scholarship committees. And really the work that we've done with Small Nation came out of the development and creation of a new committee. So we now have the Community Impact Committee, and their whole focus is really revitalization of downtown.

J

Jason Duff 08:58

Community impact means a lot of things.

A

Amy Miller 09:00

Yes.

J

Jason Duff 09:00

And when you think of traditional foundations, uh, investing in things like marketing, investing in things like murals, parklets. When you first kind of recognized that there are other non-traditional ways to have community impact, was it a little uncomfortable and new for people as you were presenting some of these ideas?

A**Amy Miller** 09:25

It absolutely was. It was a huge shift, and for any community foundation out there, it is a huge shift. So actually, it was March of 2020, and the Bryan Area the foundation was going through strategic planning. So right before the world fell apart, everybody had gotten into a room and said, okay, what are we doing great and what else do we need to do? What maybe are we missing the boat on? And everyone agreed, you know, we've had a great impact on our community. We've participated in all these projects. You know, we can see things in the parks and in the facilities and just walking around town, you could see the impact of the work that we had contributed to. But those had all been projects and ideas from community members, nonprofits that were running those projects. They just came to us for funding. So it was really our— only our funding that was participating in it. And the Bryan Area Foundation members said, we want to shift strategically from being reactive in nature, waiting for people to come to us and ask for funding to go make a project happen. And instead, we're looking at our community and we see that there are programs and projects not being addressed And let's be proactive and let's use some of our resources to make a change. So that was really the birth of this idea for the Community Impact Committee. And we had to get really creative in how to find the funding for it as well. So we seeded a project fund, so not an endowed fund, but we took a portion of our retained earnings from our community unrestricted funds. And put that aside and said, this is the seed money for the work that we want to do in downtown Bryan. And with that, we started to seek out resources, and that's where we stumbled upon, upon Small Nation and, and all the work that we're doing today.

J**Jason Duff** 11:10

Well, I appreciate you mentioning there are differences between endowed funds and those unrestricted dollars. And I think for those of us that are giving in our organizations, it's important to know the distinct distinctions between the two. Can you just briefly share, and also why is it helpful for you at times to have donations that are unrestricted?

A**Amy Miller** 11:35

Well, this is a perfect example. So these unrestricted funds allow us to respond to these kinds of needs, to, to make a proactive approach. So many endowed funds, and most of the funds that we manage, have — the donor has an intention and a gift that they're making. And so we always honor the donor's wishes. That is number one, our top priority day after day is whoever established that endowed fund, whatever their wishes were and the, um, how they wanted that money to be used, we always follow. Um, but community funds create a lot more flexibility because they are unrestricted. So we utilize our community funds primarily for responsive grant making. So people that come to us with a grant application and respond to them. But like I said, we just took a, a small seed money and put it into this community impact project. Project fund. But then since that time, we started to look for individuals to gift to that, and we were very lucky to have an individual who left an estate to us that really seeded that more fully. So we were able to utilize it for the community impact work that we're doing.

J**Jason Duff** 12:39

I, I love it, and I think it's innovative. And, uh, for me, I've also learned a lot as you guys being the example in establishing a culture of giving in your community. There are often times that you go to communities, and I happen to feel that we here in Bellefontaine can learn from what Brian is doing because we don't have a community foundation. We have some really great organizations like the United Way. I could mention our YMCA. There's a lot of wonderful churches that are doing meaningful impact in our community, Um, but establishing an organization, kind of an overall group that, uh, if you want to put a bequest in your estate, if you want to, you know, you, you want to make a positive impact— I, I love that you guys have established that model. Um, so I, I just appreciate you sharing the behind the scenes of, of how it was set up and how it was structured and created. I'd like to move for you to tell us a little bit about Bryan, Ohio. Maybe pick us up from that point that you decided to come back home. Was that always part of your plan, or do you think, was there something that drew you back home to wanting to live, work, and plant your family in Bryan?

A**Amy Miller** 13:59

Certainly when I graduated from college, I probably didn't have that in mind. My soon-to-be husband, so we were engaged while we were in college, we moved to Toledo for about 15 years. And at that time, I took a job working for for, um, the Elder Beerman Corporation.

J**Jason Duff** 14:15

I remember Elder Beerman. I don't think they're old enough. I do.

A**Amy Miller** 14:19

I remember.

J**Jason Duff** 14:19

You do?

A**Amy Miller** 14:19

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 14:19

Okay. I know I make jokes on this podcast, but I remember that. I love them. I have no idea what you're talking about. You're older than me, Nick. Well, listen, there was Lazarus, it moved to Macy's, and then their competitor, which was— I think it was a Dayton-based corporation.

A**Amy Miller** 14:32

It was Dayton-based.

J**Jason Duff** 14:33

Yeah. Elder Beerman. I mean, they were a staple. Did you buy Guess jeans? Do you remember when Guess jeans—

A**Amy Miller** 14:39

of course I did.

J**Jason Duff** 14:40

Yeah. Again, they didn't know we're talking about, but That was the place to get Guess jeans.

A**Amy Miller** 14:45

So I joined their executive training program, and the idea was that I would go into store management. From there, I went on to work for J.Crew and Ann Taylor. Absolutely loved managing stores for those retailers. It was— I just absolutely loved it. I felt like I was playing every day. It didn't feel like work. But as I had a family, you know, we had our first son and then our second son came along, retail hours are not great for raising a family. And my husband had an opportunity— he's a banker— to move to a smaller bank in Bryan, and that was moving home. We would also have babysitters and help, and it was also an opportunity for me to be a stay-at-home mom, which at that point in time I actually thought I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. Sure, sure. So I tried that for about 2 years, and I discovered really quickly that I was not intended to be a stay-at-home mom. I love my children more than anything, but I am somebody who just has to produce and has to achieve, and I have to be able to check things off a list.

J**Jason Duff** 15:43

So I love lists.

A**Amy Miller** 15:44

Yeah, I was trying to be a stay-at-home mom, but I found myself all of a sudden, I was— I started running marathons, I took cake decorating classes, I was teaching aerobics at the Y just 2 days a week. Like, I just—

J**Jason Duff** 15:55

do you feel that energy? Wow. Yeah, like she's on it. So yeah, I love that.

A**Amy Miller** 15:59

So it wasn't long that it wasn't a natural fit, and so we needed to find some, some help, and I kind of went back to work, and it took me down this path to where I am today.

J**Jason Duff** 16:08

Well, let's talk about why do you think towns like Bryan are special? What, what is it that brought you back? And also maybe some of the problems that you've encountered too as a part of moving back.

A**Amy Miller** 16:21

Yeah, so what is really special is it is the absolutely the perfect place to raise a family. So my oldest son is 19, so he's gone off to Miami University.

J**Jason Duff** 16:31

Swimmer, right?

A**Amy Miller** 16:32

He's a swimmer. Yeah, he's not swimming at Miami, but he's a very good swimmer. That's awesome. Um, and my youngest is 15, so he's in high school right now. But being able to raise a family in a small town like ours has been absolutely phenomenal. I mean, my kids, I can let them be out on their bikes at night and I don't have to worry. They're across the street playing. You know, if they do anything, it comes back to you. You know, somebody lets you know.

J**Jason Duff** 17:00

You hear about it. Good and bad.

A**Amy Miller** 17:01

Small town. Yeah. I mean, some of my proudest mom moments come from things that people have said, oh, I saw your son do this, or I saw your I saw your son do that. That's— those are the things.

J**Jason Duff** 17:10

Mom has eyes everywhere.

A**Amy Miller** 17:12

Yeah, it's good and bad. And just, you know, there's nowhere you can go that there's not a friendly face, and everybody rallies around. We have so many events that come around annually, and everybody participates and looks forward to it. And then we've continued to add new things on. So we added on the Christkindlmarkt, which has been just absolutely fabulous for our community.

J**Jason Duff** 17:34

I just want to to share. So they're in Williams County, the courthouse. I mean, Nick, we have traveled around to a lot of court— I mean, how many? Probably at least half, if not more, courthouses in Ohio. I think Williams County is probably one of the most beautiful. Would you agree? Oh, absolutely. Every time we've got to go, it's always a treat because, uh, the square there in Bryan, it's this beautiful courthouse right in the middle of the square, and then all around it there's shops, restaurants, you name it. It makes me a little bit jealous because we, we have a great downtown here in downtown Bo Fountain, but I feel like some sides of the courthouse kind of are lacking or missing on some aspects. So to have a full 360 degrees of awesome things in downtown Bryan, it really is special.

A

Amy Miller 18:20

Have you been there at Christmas?

J

Jason Duff 18:21

Not yet.

A

Amy Miller 18:22

Okay, this year make the drive up because you have to see it at Christmas. I mean, tell us, anybody does it?

J

Jason Duff 18:27

Kendall Market.

A

Amy Miller 18:29

What is that? So the Christkindlmarkt, it's based off of what they do in Germany. So it's all these little, um, I'm going to call it a hut, but that's not what they call them. But they're these little chalets. That's the right word. Chalets. Chalets. So these cute little chalets. And then there are all these little shops that sell their wares on the courthouse square. And then this year they'll be adding some food and beverage options on the square in addition to, you know, hours and things that are happening around the perimeter. But they also bring out carolers. They have kids that come out and do their holiday dances. You know, people playing music. I mean, crafts for the kids. They've had reindeers. They've had ice carvers. I mean, just a lot of neat activities. My 15-year-old, the last time I took him up last year, he just said, "Mom, this looks and feels like those Hallmark movies that you watch." And it really does. I mean, it feels just like you see in the Hallmark movies.

J

Jason Duff 19:23

And you can't replicate that everywhere. And part of the reason why I love what you're doing and Brian and now building upon that is that We want to attract the next generation of people like you and your husband who maybe have moved off to school and are finding reasons to come back home. And a lot at Small Nation, we discuss those as hometown opportunities, and it's uncovering and unlocking and helping people realize that why the bright lights of the city— there's a lot of great opportunities and experiences there. A lot of your dreams can, you know, be lived out and, and even made even better back home.

A

Amy Miller 20:05

I totally agree, and we're starting to see and feel some of that, and it's really exciting to see and hear, you know, younger families moving back or trying to move back.

J**Jason Duff** 20:14

Well, thank you for, again, for sharing that, and I'd say the point that we met each other, let's talk about some of the challenges that when we first started that you and the community members of the community came together and identified that were either stuck or they were on that wish list that they wanted to accomplish, but there either wasn't the resources, the manpower, or the interest in moving something forward. Can you kind of paint a picture a few years ago coming right out of COVID some of those challenges?

A**Amy Miller** 20:49

Yeah. So we have relatively low vacancy rates on the perimeter block that we're talking around our courthouse. Square. However, many of the businesses were less than desirable. So we had an overabundance of tattoo parlors. Some of the storefronts are just being used by storage, basically, for people who like to collect lots of things. And it was an inexpensive building, so they purchased it and put all of their stuff in it.

J**Jason Duff** 21:19

We call those building hoarders. They are a real thing. Yeah, every community.

A**Amy Miller** 21:24

Yeah. So we just really said, this isn't what we want. We don't want this to be the impression of our town. There were some great, like, businesses that had already kind of planted their seed that were there and in existence, but we were concerned that they might leave as well if we didn't find a way to kind of revitalize who was really spending their time and money on those in that area. But the other big piece to that is the barrier to being able to revitalize those buildings was so high. Just the cost to renovate them is so much higher than being able to go into a strip mall or to be able to build from new somewhere else.

J**Jason Duff** 22:04

And tourism is a big part for any town, but particularly with companies like Spangler. And I know you've got a well-known brewer with Father John's. When COVID came, a lot of that got put on pause or closed. Absolutely. And so, um, coming in, you know, working to solve those problems in the community, you had to— leaders in the area had to get that engine going again. And we connected, and I think you had heard about our Small Town Success formula and how we were working here in Bellefontaine, and you invited us up to take a tour. And I think, Nick, as we were driving up, we had read and researched what you mentioned about Spangler and Ohio Arts. And I also want to share another 100-year-old-plus company that's doing like international level of engineering and manufacturing, and that is Bard.

A**Amy Miller** 23:01

Bard.

J**Jason Duff** 23:02

Amazing. Just quickly tell us about Bard.

A

Amy Miller 23:04

So Bard Manufacturing, they do HVAC, but they've been in our company, in our community, obviously, like you said, for over 100 years. They are the most giving philanthropic company as well. Just 2 weeks ago, they put on a big production at our local amphitheater. They brought in Mack Powell, world-renowned artist. Formerly of Third Day. Yeah, sure. So they packed the park and they foot the bill for the whole thing so that our community could, you know, participate in that. That's awesome. And that's just one of many ways that they can—

J

Jason Duff 23:34

And they employ hundreds of people.

A

Amy Miller 23:37

It's a really large employer within our community, and everybody from that family is so engaged in making sure that our community is successful as well.

J

Jason Duff 23:45

Well, and coming in from the outside as we were driving up and reading this, and then we arrive, and you guide us on a walking tour. And we got to walk into businesses that I would say are a point of pride in the community. One of my most memorable one was being able to get lunch in and experience Cora, which if you haven't been there, great lunch menu. I think they're doing dinner and there was a guitarist that was in there playing. So they've got coffee, they've got food, they've got entertainment. It was just a really eclectic vibe that I think every small town would love to have a business like that. And then we started kind of making it around the corner and popping into retail. And, you know, we— you talked about Elder Bearman's. I remember the old Almond's days and the Stage days. So for those listening, Almond's was like a major Northwest Ohio department store. We actually had one here in Bellefontaine. It was very nostalgic for me to walk in because it still felt— it was like a full-service department store.

A

Amy Miller 24:51

And that business is called Elianne's Men's Emporium. And now they've added a third component called Faith and Grace, which is baby and maternity, which is awesome. So it really is like a department store in there. They've done a phenomenal job bringing in, you know, women's apparel, men's apparel, shoes, home goods, and now baby.

J

Jason Duff 25:12

And now we could, we could talk probably for the rest of the podcast. There were so many other entrepreneurs and businesses. I think where, where there was a gap is how do we take all of what we're doing and try to get people on the same page from a marketing perspective of how we talk and communicate on who Bryan, Ohio is. And that's hard to do, to get everyone on board, right?

A

Amy Miller 25:38

Yeah, it is.

J**Jason Duff** 25:39

But I think the way we charted out is, um, the foundation recognized they needed to create this community impact fund, and we wanted to find some low-hanging fruit that was highly visible that started to get people thinking differently about downtown Bryan and Bryan, Ohio. Do you want to share a little bit some of those early projects that we started collaborating on?

A**Amy Miller** 26:01

Sure. So one of the first things we identified, so after you came to Bryan and you came back to us with kind of here's the things that we see as great opportunities, one of the first ones we decided to like just kind of jump on was that marketing and branding campaign. It just made perfect sense because anybody who Googled Bryan, Ohio was not going to come up with much of anything. And we heard that from local employers. We heard them saying, so we've got this great potential employee, you know, he's a high-level executive. The wife Googled us online and she thinks there's nothing to do here. Right. And it's not that there's nothing to do here. It's a wonderful place. There's tons of stuff that actually is happening, but nowhere on— there wasn't one central place that you could go and see and learn about what's happening in Bryan, Ohio. So through Small Nation, you helped to facilitate, you brought in Leslie, who did a phenomenal job. And we got together a stakeholder group, spent a whole day together talking through, okay, so what is it that makes Bryan special? And so we really just kind of spit out all these words and ideas and the things that we enjoy about our community. And what really came out of that is this sense of it is just such a warm, inviting, family-oriented place. And the word that really kind of invoked that for all of us was the word sweet. And of course, we can't deny the fact that we're also well known for candy. That's right. So those two things together really spoke to this Live the Sweet Life campaign. So that really came out of the work that we did with Small Nation. They also helped us to create the website, a series of videos, and then after you did all the creation, then we went and we found Natural Design and Graphics. So an awesome local group that is doing all the marketing work for us ongoing. So they do social media, blog posts, and then sharing of all that content, keeping everything updated on the events, that kind of thing.

J**Jason Duff** 27:55

And that is just scratching the surface of all the things. So this morning in our daily huddle meeting, Nick was commenting, was excited to have you as a guest, but he said, have you been following Brian Ohio's social media channels? Why? What do you think, Nick? Yeah, yeah. So I'll say any consulting agency can come up with a, with a brand. People do it all the time. They come up with all sorts of things, but most of the time it doesn't always work. And what, what made our work with the Brian Airey Foundation and the branding and messaging campaign we did with you guys was we included the community. So one of the first things that we did when I first came on board was we went up there for the stakeholder meeting And it wasn't just Amy, it wasn't just the mayor who has her own way of wanting to do things. It wasn't just chamber. We brought everybody. So chamber people, the mayor, city council, building owners, business owners, everybody, young people, old people. Great cross-section. Yeah, it really was. And that, I'll give credit, part of that is is, you know, taking the charting orders of, hey, we're consultants, show us everything. Like, we want to see the good things in the community. We also see the warts, like what's not working. And I'll compliment you of really getting that crossover group of people. Yeah. But, you know, coming into, to, to doing that, that gave us the research and knowledge to bring in professionals that are architects, that are branding and, and website folks, and then to be able to produce a plan. And I think you and I spoke that there are a lot of folks out there that will produce plans and documents. We didn't want that to sit on the shelf. We want to give you those actionable, tangible items that you can go out and do. And let me just tell you folks, go to visitbrianohio.com, right? Visitbrianohio.com and you can see for yourself. And then click on the social media channels, follow, follow, sign up for the email list. Because they're not only just— they're taking action on those steps and you can see how the plan is being put into fruition. Yeah, that's what I was going to say. And they could probably, you know, give you an opportunity to speak about it. But like getting the right people in the room to hear first, you know, before you bring in the expert, quote Jason here, you know, you're never a prophet in your own town. So sometimes it just takes someone coming in. And obviously we have Bellefontaine as our case study. These partners that we're presenting are people that we trust because you've actually done business with them for our— they've been in the trenches. How many projects now? A lot. And we— and we— you make mistakes. I mean, yeah, that's how you get stronger, is you see what is working and what is getting traction. And that's why I like to put spotlights on communities that, that are in that action mode. Yeah, well, and it, and it wasn't even easy with, with Bryan. I mean, the word sweet— while we, we loved the word sweet, we thought it was a perfect representation for the community of Bryan— it It was a controversial, uh, thing to, to come up with at the time because people weren't really sure about it. Are we focusing too much on Spangler? What about these other companies? But it was really, uh, coming up with that comprehensive messaging as well. Bryan isn't just sweet because of Spangler Candy Company. It's a big part of it, but you know, it's, it's, it's more than just candy. It's like you said earlier, it's the perfect place to raise a family. They have the culture of giving. The events, the amphitheater, all the cute little shops. It's, it's a comprehensive way to explain to the, the targets that we identified in that stakeholder meeting, the late 20s, early mid-30s who are, you know, in their careers but just starting their families, wanting to have a nice safe place for their families to grow up. It's, it's a great thing to show them that Brian is— you're gonna live the sweet life here. And it's not just the words. I think that's part of it, the copy and the words that we write, because words are meaningful. It's the visual elements. And, you know, we had

photographers that were from the local region that as young people, they would go to a lot of these markets. They could capture that local perspective of what makes the Chris Kendall Market special. And then getting the drone footage, the video. But I think what's neat is once the plan was produced is seeing other community partners like make it even bigger. Like today, if we drive to Bryan, Ohio, which I encourage people to do, tell us about your water tower.

A

Amy Miller 32:31

Oh yeah, that happened too. We've had so many things that have happened since you were last in Bryan. So, um, the water tower has now been painted. It looks like dum-dum suckers on sticks.

J

Jason Duff 32:41

I mean, literally You see the bright, colorful Dum Dum Suckers. I mean, it feels like you're heading into a magic land, right? And that brands when you've got, you know, live the sweet life. That's another branding anchor.

A

Amy Miller 32:56

And they put a really cute little spot. So it's like an Instagrammable location. So you could stop and get your little selfie with it.

J

Jason Duff 33:02

A little selfie station. So on that, we were talking a little bit before. So as part of the report that we gave to you, one of the very important things that we, we tell our client communities is you want to be a destination, you want to be known for something. Um, what's the draw that's going to bring people to Bryan for that day trip, that weekend trip? And, um, so we, we put that out there as, okay, let's try and identify what that destination, what that big draw is going to be. And what were you telling me that it ended up becoming?

A

Amy Miller 33:34

Well, I really think it probably will be the Spangler Candy World, which is being put on the downtown square now. So Pre-COVID, Spangler Candy used to give tours of the factory, and they used to have tens of thousands of people that came in every year because there were school buses and senior citizens and just general people who would stop off the beaten path as they were driving through just to get these trolley tours. So that had, had to come to a close with COVID and now the Spangler Candy Company has invested in the downtown square. So it's like a double storefront. It's going to have an interactive theater, obviously candy for sale, a party room, just a lot of really neat things. So we're really looking forward to that opening sometime this year.

J

Jason Duff 34:18

So in addition to that, the Bryan Area Foundation themselves were inspired to purchase real estate in the downtown and become investors yourselves, right?

A**Amy Miller** 34:27

We have. So actually, we were very fortunate. We had great donors that came forward that actually helped us to purchase a building. And then using our own operating funds, we're renovating that building for our own use. So we had actually started to outgrow the little space that we were leasing. So it's just another way to be very much more visible in our community. And honestly, it's been a great experience to be on the other side. So we're trying to work with these entrepreneurs and we've created this forgivable loan program where we're helping them, building owners to renovate their buildings and bring in new businesses. So we're now going through it on our own. We're, we are, we're having to figure it out yourself. Well, yeah, by understanding, okay, this is what it takes to have the right architectural plans, to go through the state inspection and permitting process, to work with contractors, to understand what the expenses to renovate these historic buildings really is. So it's been great, not only because what the end result will be and where we'll be located, but it's been a great process for us. And as we continue to evaluate those businesses that we're giving those forgivable loans to. It's really a great way for us to be able to educate them and make sure as they're presenting their business plans, we understand if whether or not the costs and the things that they're projecting are really in alignment and if it's possible.

J**Jason Duff** 35:44

I will share, thank you for doing that. That's again very innovative and these business incentive funds, one of the criticisms of a lot of the public-run funds is all of the strings attached and all the loopholes make it so difficult to the point that's almost impossible for anyone to use them. And I think because you're going through this process on your own and you can speak from experience and show examples, that is going to be, um, very valuable both for those that are deciding on who to give money and also the lessons and teaching that can be routed to applicants. So that's super cool. And is that business incentive fund, is it for mostly businesses that are tenants, or could it also be a building owner or a landlord, or maybe both?

A**Amy Miller** 36:33

It, it's actually for the building owner or the building owner alongside the lessee or the tenant. Got it.

J**Jason Duff** 36:41

So it's kind of tied to the real estate itself.

A**Amy Miller** 36:44

And the reason for that, and I think it's important for anybody listening who's involved in this nonprofit space and with community foundations, so it kind explain how we were able to accomplish that. So as a community foundation, we can't grant any of our funding, regardless of whether or not it's restricted or unrestricted, to anything outside of a nonprofit organization. So what we did is we partnered with— there's a nonprofit organization in our community called the Bryan Development, and they are— their charitable intent is restoration of historic properties and economic development. So they're a perfect partner for this. So we don't ever actually give any money to individuals or businesses or building owners. We grant to the Bryan Development and they actually work with the individual business owners and provide these forgivable loans. So we work alongside to take their applications, review whether or not— and their criteria. And then we actually make the grant to Bryan Development, who then provides the forgivable loan to the end user.

J**Jason Duff** 37:43

Yeah.

A**Amy Miller** 37:44

So we had to get really creative with that because again, that's a great example. Restrictions as a community foundation, we knew we wanted to help building owners to be able to renovate their property and bring in a new business, but we couldn't just give them money directly. So we had to be really creative.

J**Jason Duff** 37:59

Yeah, I love that. I love that creativity too. And it's just encouraging for me to hear that other people are finding these creative ways to do it outside of turning to your, your, you know, traditional economic development. Funding and things like that. So, and it's not just Bellefontaine, it's not just Bryan. There's other things you can do in your community as well. It was— we were on an hour webinar this morning with the Economic Development Committee in Germantown, Ohio, and we were discussing two different incentive funds with them. One was the Business Incentive Fund, and you don't remember the name. They had another fund. They're working to actually help tenants. So I think just what you just shared, we need to get that clipped down to them because they're intellectually trying to figure out the same thing. It's like, how do we get the money to the people that need it with also being in compliance? So thanks for sharing that too. Well, the, the new museum store. So what I love about establishing a museum, if you make anything in your town, people are looking for the experience to know the behind-the-scenes stories. And that museum is, is not only for the tourists that are coming to town, By— but I imagine all of the hundreds of workers, it might even be thousands, you have a lot of workers at Spangler, but like the pride that that brings to show off the things that are actually built in town. That museum, I know part of our scope and our work was creating a rendering of what a group of buildings could look like.

A**Amy Miller** 39:30

That's right.

J**Jason Duff** 39:31

How do renderings in your mind help that visual element when you've got big investment dollars sitting on the sidelines to conceptually push it over the finish line?

A**Amy Miller** 39:42

We pretty much require anybody who's going to come through that forgivable loan program to go through that rendering process, to work with an architect or a designer to really— because they can tell us their vision, but without actually seeing it kind of on paper or electronically, it's really hard for anybody to understand or to feel confident that we know that what they're saying that they're going to create is in fact in alignment with what we're trying to achieve within downtown Bryan. So renderings are incredibly important.

J**Jason Duff** 40:13

It's pretty— I can't wait to come back and actually see, you know, what the museum and store will look like. But a big high five, and I'm saying that collectively for those that are listening that were part of the collaboration team working on this campaign, to actually see it done. So just high five on that, Amy.

A**Amy Miller** 40:29

Well, thank you. And I just want to put in a plug too. I think I shared earlier with Nick, to me, when I look back at the visit that Small Nation did to Bryan, one of the things that was most impactful was when you, Jason, would talk to these building and business owners. Every single time, you left them with something of value, and that was really, really important to me because we were bringing you in as a consultant. They didn't know you from anybody else. They didn't know whether or not they could trust you, and you from the get-go, you left them with something of value, something that they could implement in their businesses that day. And I think that helped to develop a level of trust so that when you came back and we had the stakeholder meeting, they felt like, okay, this, this gentleman, so Jason, has been in my business. He looked around and saw, he understands what I'm going through, and he's already been able to offer me advice. So that to me was really meaningful, and I really appreciate that about you and the whole Small Nation team. That's really something that we've always felt is that you've been overwhelmingly gracious with offering value.

J**Jason Duff** 41:33

Thank you. That's— that was the mission when we set out to do what we want to do, and we work hard to, to hit those targets and exceed them. I get excited. Another thing, I'll just give a shout out, um, we, we looked when we first visited a few years ago. Lodging is something that comes up a lot in our small towns, and sometimes the quality of our hotel chains are not great. Um, and in Bryan, Ohio, imagine this picturesque downtown, great place to get a craft beer, great place to shop, like a theater. You guys still have—

A**Amy Miller** 42:07

we have an awesome movie theater, and it's about to be something a lot more, and we're participating.

J

Jason Duff 42:12

Oh, all right, okay. Well, and I'm just saying that those are things that many towns would salivate over having. Yeah, but They, they were just launching that week when we were first there, I think, the first Airbnb in the downtown, which a few years ago was very experimental, right? A lot of people probably said, oh, no one's gonna pay \$200 a night or whatever that is. But I've been following the couple that started that first one, and it's my understanding they're growing their investment activities even more.

A

Amy Miller 42:42

Yep, they just opened a second one that's located right next to the amphitheater in Bryan. So it's off It's not in the square, but it's near many of our park assets. And there's another one that's opened up on the west side of town, which is like a few blocks off of the square as well. So they're starting to pop up and that, and they, I know that Cody and Audrey, so they're the owners, you know, Audrey has shared with me like some of the responses that they've gotten and some of the bookings that they've gotten. I mean, they're people from nowhere near us and they're just looking for that quintessential small town experience. Um, so it's amazing the people that you can pull in.

J**Jason Duff** 43:16

I love that. Okay. So I was just going to say, as we're talking about all these different— you pointed out very specific projects that, you know, was part of this, you know, consulting relationship and stuff. And we've started to figure out as all these different communities that we visit, this kind of formulas, I mean, is what we call it, but we're proving that it's repeatable and things like that. But Nick, while we have you here on the show, I'd like for you to maybe, uh, explain what the small town success formula is and like I mean, we just touched on several pieces of that, whether it's Airbnb, you know, outdoor dining, all these different things. Can you maybe share a little bit about what that is and how we try to implement that in our consulting? Absolutely. So of course, when, when Small Nation first started our work here in downtown Bellefontaine, 80% of the storefronts were vacant and boarded up, nearly 100% of the upper floors. It wasn't really a lot going on. And so over the last 12 years, we've been able to accomplish a lot of success in downtown Bellefontaine. And people ask us all the time, how did you do it? And so we developed our unique process, which is the Small Town Successful Formula, which is really for people like you and other communities to let Small Nation be your guide towards revitalization. So the basic idea, or what we call the formula fundamentals, are what we've heard probably a million times on the Small Nation podcast before, you know, the the buying and renovating historic buildings, actively recruiting and mentoring tenants, becoming equity partners, providing financing, um, and designing and promoting our tenant businesses once they actually get open. The work doesn't stop after they get their doors open, right? It continues after, because we understand that if our tenant businesses are successful, we're going to be successful. And, you know, a rising tide lifts all ships. So we want our tenant businesses to be successful in downtown town, other people's businesses will then be successful because of that, and we all, we all succeed because of it. So that's the basic idea of the Small Town Success formula, and how we help implement that formula in other communities is just what we did with, with you, Amy, with, with the Bryan community, the Bryan Area Foundation. And it really starts with bringing the folks, the, the community stakeholders to downtown by Fountain for that full day tour led by Jason. So So when you're here, you get to go into our tenant businesses, you get to meet with the business owners, you get to learn their stories, how they were able to open their business, grow their business, how they navigated zoning, how they navigated building codes, have lunch at 600 Downtown, which is our award-winning pizzeria, and really the catalyst for the downtown revitalization here. Right, they were the first project. Yep. And end it with a small nation roundtable with members of our team to answer any other questions. And when you're on the tour, we really encourage you to take photos. We are not competing directly with Brian. Brian's not competing with us, right? So we want Brian to learn from us, and on the flip side, we want to learn from Brian. We want to go to your town and learn from you and take ideas back. And that's what we do next after, after your time at Bellefontaine. We go to your town and spend the whole day with you. So just like Jason was talking about when we spent the day on the square in Bryan, going into your businesses, meeting with the business owners, going into vacant spaces, meeting with the building owners, and kind of dreaming of, okay, this is what could be here, and this is how you can navigate those building codes to make that happen. And then we provide that comprehensive downtown development report afterwards, which is, here's everything that you saw in Bellefontaine, all the stats and facts behind it, the case studies. Here is our assessment of current conditions in downtown Bryan, or wherever it may be. And then here's our list of tangible recommendations of items that you guys can go and implement

either right away. Low-hanging fruit, you know, oftentimes has a big impact on the community, the feel of the community. And there's other things like the community branding and messaging, like the parklet, like murals, that is going to take some more time afterwards. But because we've done it in Bellefontaine, we're able to help you implement it in Bryan. The parklets, the murals, the community branding, you know, Small Nation was the one who actually developed and still manages the downtown Bellefontaine branding. So, um, it— and as you, as you said, even after all that, we, we're still able to provide value to, to the clients. We're still able to provide value to your business owners, to your community members. Just by picking up that phone, having that phone call, sending that email, sending that text. It just doesn't end by providing that report. Like Jason said, we don't want to provide reports that a lot of consulting agencies do, that it, it's here in a binder, it sits on a shelf. Good luck. Yeah, yeah, good luck. We don't want to do that because that's not how communities grow, that's not how they become better. We want to be able to provide those tangible items. And it takes communities like Brian. I think exactly that's the thing that I was most excited to have you on the podcast is for, is you guys took those ideas and you did something with them, right? Like, it's that— then it doesn't get lost. It wasn't for nothing. It wasn't, you know, someone's coming in thinking he knows everything. No offense. I also say, and this is a big credit, again, why we're so excited to have you here, is that in terms of the return on investment, you know, there was capital that had to be committed to create this community fund. And because this was something very new People want to see that that investment returns something. Just ballpark, I mean, we're probably in the millions, would you say, when you think about total investment happening in the downtown right now?

A

Amy Miller 48:55

Absolutely. Yeah. And that's not just us. So we were just the catalyst, the starters. And I was telling Nick a little bit earlier, we almost had a complaint yesterday because there are construction trucks everywhere. Like, they're all over our downtown right now, which is just a great problem to have because there's just so much happening. I mean, it's not just the work that we're involved in. It hasn't— it has spurred others to say, okay, there's this other stuff happening, so it now makes sense for me to invest in my building, which is just awesome. So yeah, people will complain about—

J

Jason Duff 49:28

people complain about everything. But I'll say, every time that Jason and I go into a small town like Bryan I love seeing the bucket trucks working on the buildings, the construction crews, um, replacing windows, adding streetscaping to the downtown. People complain about construction all day, but when you think about it, those are great things to see in a community. That means progress is happening and the community is getting better. We love it.

A

Amy Miller 49:56

Yeah.

J

Jason Duff 49:56

Did you know the, uh, the orange traffic cone is actually Ohio State's, uh, State flower. Progress.

A

Amy Miller 50:03

Money.

J

Jason Duff 50:04

Progress. Well, and, and I think that's a great way to end on a, on a high note for this podcast is tying together. In the beginning, it's figuring out how to get those stakeholders aligned around giving and what are the funding sources, and then who are the partners that I want to bring in in this process. We need local folks that are, um, you know, championing this But then having that outside set of eyes to recognize, wow, you have— and again, I sing Bryan Ohio's praises— three 100-year-old companies that are part of the DNA and the history. And then seeing it now, you're telling your story and you've got confidence now with a visual identity of a logo, with the right words to tie together who we are and why that matters. And now we can see the physical elements of this work coming together that's spurring entrepreneurship, that's spurring new energy and new life, and people that want to move and live to experience the sweet life in Bryan, Ohio. And Amy, you know, I am— I applaud you as a leader, the courage, the grit, and the hard work that it took to do this. But I think for those that are listening, It can be done, right?

A

Amy Miller 51:20

Absolutely. In fact, I wanted to share a quote, and that's why I kind of had grabbed my phone. So we say this quote a lot, and this comes from Margaret Mead, and it's, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." And we say that one a lot because we just, we really feel like that embodies the change.

J

Jason Duff 51:38

That's awesome. That's huge. Yeah, that's a great quote. Thank you so much. You have one professional development resource that was impactful for you, uh, anything that stands out to you that we can drop for our listeners here?

A

Amy Miller 51:51

Gosh, I love this area, so I could drop a whole bunch, but I'll try to keep it concise. Probably my favorite of all time that you guys— this is really going to date me and make me old as well, but Zig Ziglar, Born to Win. I used to listen to the audio CDs on repeat in my car. Nobody does it like Zig, and I just love, like, I think the thing that I learned from him that I use every day and that I constantly try to instill in my kids is that you can have anything you want in life if you're just willing to help other people get what they want. So it's all just about service to others. It's changing from your mirrors, all mirrors, into windows and looking at others and what do they need and service. So that's really what it's all about.

J

Jason Duff 52:37

That's awesome. And then where can people follow, follow you and keep up with what's happening with Brian?

A**Amy Miller** 52:42

Sure. So for Brian, for sure, Brian Ohio, visit brianohio.com. And the Brian Area Foundation is brianareafoundation.org. So I definitely invite you to look at both. You can find my information on the Brian Area Foundation website as well. So especially for any community foundations that are out there and might have some and, you know, interest in learning more about the work that we're doing, we'd be happy to share.

J**Jason Duff** 53:06

Perfect. Yeah, and for all those community leaders out there who are inspired by you, Amy, and maybe go and visit Bryan, Ohio and see the work that's being done there, or go to visitbryanohio.com and see the work that we've been able to do, um, I just got to give a plug for our Small Town Success. Good work. So, uh, Zig would be proud of you, by the way. Zig would be proud of you. I love that. But, um, everything I'm saying isn't a secret.

A**Amy Miller** 53:30

It's—

J**Jason Duff** 53:30

you can go to smallnationstrong.com/success and click the Small Town Success Formula information and learn everything that I was talking about today. And for those community leaders who either feel inspired to get something started or already started but don't know where to go, business owners who need some training and coaching, don't know how to navigate different codes, stuff like that, I would definitely recommend reaching out. We love giving these tours. The reason that field trips are so exciting for kids is you get out of the normal everyday, and they're exciting for adults as well. So we would love to bring any community who is trying to consider next steps, what to do next, reach out to us. We'll bring you to Bellefontaine for the day. We'll go to your community, and if you're inspired by Brian, let's do this. Let's replicate it all around the country. Yeah, as Jason always says, Rip and duplicate R&D. Exactly. All right. Well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 54:29

thank you everyone for tuning in and checking out the Small Nation Podcast. You can find us anywhere that you listen to your podcasts, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and even the Small Nation YouTube channel. I hope you're able to pull some value from that conversation, and we hope to see you in the next one. If you enjoyed it, be sure to leave a like, comment, or a 5-star review to help more people to discover this podcast and stay tuned to Small Nation on social media to keep up with all the projects that are happening here. Until next time, this is Ethan with the Small Nation Podcast signing off.

A**Amy Miller** 54:55

Thanks everyone.