

Episode 50

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Ethan DeLeon

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:00

And we hope that it's been valuable, you know, for our listeners.

J

Jason Duff 00:03

And it's been valuable for me, right? And that's kind of the big surprise. It's like the real raw stories that people will open up, um, and, and probably my favorites is when people get choked up because like it is something that you have struck a chord that maybe they've not been able to discuss with someone else, but they'll feel comfortable doing it here. Um, and I think we want to build and grow upon that. So, uh, thanks for allowing us to to be able to do that and do more of that.

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 are excited to be recording the final episode of season 1. 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 others.

J

Jason Duff 01:04

Ethan, congratulations.

E

Ethan DeLeon 01:05

Congratulations to you. We made it. 50 episodes.

J

Jason Duff 01:09

It's, it's wild. Um, you know, I was coming into the studio this morning, like thinking, I, I would've never imagined that over the year we have had a chance to interview 50 different guests and a very diverse group of guests. Yeah. Back— different backgrounds, different communities from all around the state, even some folks from around the country. And it's— I just, I'm really thankful. I'm really thankful for you. I'm thankful for our listeners. I'm thankful for our guests. And I'm very energized to take what we've learned and take it to a new level.

E

Ethan DeLeon 01:43

Right. But we're not done yet, right?

J

Jason Duff 01:45

It's only going to get better from here.

E

Ethan DeLeon 01:46

Yes. So for our listeners, just so we can explain a little bit, you know, hitting 50 episodes is a big milestone for us. Getting the podcast started was a win. And as Jason said, we've had so many different guests. So if you haven't gone back and listened through all of them, we would highly encourage you to. We're going to be highlighting a few of our favorites here in a bit. It's hard to choose a favorite, so maybe just some good ones. But just so you know what to expect, we are going to be coming back. You know, we found that this is valuable for us and for listeners and just for just people in the community, you know. So I don't know, you have a couple of stories, I think, of people coming up to you and just saying how much the podcast has meant to them. So would you mind sharing some of those?

J**Jason Duff** 02:27

Yeah, well, I recently was down at the Rural Economic Development Forum at Ohio University, and this is a forum that annually people get together, uh, to discuss what's happening around the state. And a lot of mayors, a lot of folks that work in economic development, chambers of commerce— I mean, many of our listeners. And I was just— I just got registered, was heading up the escalator, and I heard someone screaming my name, Jason, Jason, like to get my attention. And She— I didn't know her, but she knew me, and she said, "I am a regular listener of the Small Nation Podcast, and thank you for what you do." And again, we then had a more meaningful conversation to learn about her community and her work, but she shared that some of those early episodes really were something that she was able to drop links to other folks that had similar challenges, and she said, listen to this episode because here's what you're going to learn, and you're not alone in that situation. And then just, just this last week, Nick Davis on our consulting team and I were down. We are doing work in Germantown, Ohio, which is this beautiful small town that is, uh, kind of in the Cincinnati area between Cincinnati and Dayton. And we, um, a number of folks that are in that room shared that they're regular listeners, and it was more than one person, and we didn't solicit, you know, to say, are you listening to the Small Nation podcast? It was pretty much forthcoming to say, uh, we're trying to work on our signage code, and we really found the, you know, the episode as you were talking about marketing and the early days of public-private partnerships, the interview with Mayor Stahler, hearing that sometimes you had to break some rules or do some experiments before that could actually become a change in law for the city itself. And, uh, I think that's again just a few examples. Another one, um, our leasing and property manager Kane Strickland spoke to the Rotary Club 2 weeks ago and, and he actually asked the Rotarians, how many of you are familiar or have listened to an episode of the Small Nation podcast? And more than half of the room raised their hand. And I think, I think that's the, the power and the reminder of why we as a company are taking time to invest in, um, not only the equipment, the studio, I mean, your time, my time. Um, it, it is continually surprised us how many listeners and how much feedback and how, how much this is really helping others.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 05:08

Yeah. And one of the things that comes to mind as you're explaining all that is I've had similar experiences of people coming up to me and just, you know, thanking me for, you know, work with the podcast. And it's been fun for me, obviously. But, uh, you know, some of those were local to Bellefontaine as well. So we always use Bellefontaine as a case study of how we can help other communities. But, uh, you know, business owners still trying to figure out where to get involved, you know, and some creative ways to come over challenges that, uh, you know, guess what, they're not the only one to go through those challenges. So to hear other entrepreneurs that they know on the show and how they overcame some of those challenges in the early days has been, has been cool for me to see as well.

J**Jason Duff** 05:47

I've also heard from our guests that we've had on that it's been very helpful for them and their businesses too. You know, I really enjoyed interviewing Callie Lange from the Revival Design Studio. Callie is an architect. She's a building owner. She's a small town champion herself. But she explained in her segment what she does and how she helps developers and clients look at buildings to understand what, what is needed to renovate them, what code issues or challenges they may have, putting together design ideas and budgets for what it takes to renovate a project. She basically takes that episode that she recorded here on the Small Nation podcast and drops it in an email link to her clients to help them better understand ways that she and her team can help. And I guess that's exciting too because our guests do take a lot of energy and time to think about some of the questions that we sent over. It's always exciting to see people in the studio, but that's another way that a podcast can be used to grow your business and helping others as well. I mean, providing quality content.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 07:06

Right, and that trickles down into social media as well. So we hope that you, the listeners, have been enjoying some of the— social media content. If you're not following us at this point, I mean, I say it at the end of every episode, I don't know how else to say it, uh, follow our social media channels. But, um, yeah, Callie's a great example, you know. I know we've had, you know, uh, Chad Hoffman, you know, on as well from Richwood, um, you know. And, and just the opportunity to highlight some of these people who are already doing great things and making what we do here at Small Nation possible has truly been, you know, one of the greatest privileges of doing this podcast. So that's been great.

J**Jason Duff** 07:43

The other thing I'll just mention is I also, by having a podcast, have been invited to participate on other people's podcasts. And I think that's another strategy and way to, uh, not only get mentions from a whole different audience, but also it's opened me up to learn and study other hosts and other interview styles in terms of ways questions are asked or content's presented. So that's been another big surprise and a good thing for our brand and for me in my business.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 08:18

Absolutely. And it's cool to see— we've seen some other podcasts start around the same time as ours, and in smaller towns too, smaller communities. It's a great way to extend your reach and just engage more people in the conversation. So, uh, to our listeners, thank you for sticking with us. You know, all of this would not be possible or worth it without you. So Yeah, that's been awesome. You know, we want to kind of maybe go back through a few of our favorite episodes. I keep saying favorite. I shouldn't say favorite.

J**Jason Duff** 08:46

There are so many. I think it was hard. Like, you and I were just going through some of the highlights, I think is probably the best way to say it, of people that really pull together the entire season. And there's certain themes that came up. Many of these themes, as you would ask about the golden nugget or their favorite books or resources, we started noticing there were a few patterns.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 09:06

Oh yeah, for sure. So I know a few of my, um, you know, for me coming in and being a part of this team, it was really cool to hear, you know, from the beginning, you know, Brittany Saxton, Adam Rammel talking about 600 Downtown Pizzeria, which I mean, if you've ever been to Bellefontaine, I'm sure you've tried out the pizzeria or, uh, you know, Brew Fountain and then The Syndicate after and how that evolved and how that kind of drove a lot of the, you know, the work that's happening here with Small Nation.

J**Jason Duff** 09:32

We talk about, I mean, the base of the pyramid to get people coming back to town is you had to buy and invest in historic real estate. And the state of Bellefontaine when we first started, I mean, 80% of the storefronts were vacant and empty. And it was finding people that believed in a greater vision. And I think a lot of our guests highlight that no matter where you go, you have to sell yourself and you have to sell your vision. And I think that was a recurring theme. But when you hear Brittany and her origin story of her passion with pizza, or Adam, you know, using his marketing skills and prowess, but also his love of meeting and finding business partners that resonated around craft beer. And then, you know, people, uh, you kind of see it started to spider out in a good way from, from people like them. But hearing their original stories, it wasn't easy, right? It wasn't handed to them, and they really didn't have all the answers on day one.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 10:30

Yeah. For sure. It was just cool. I mean, that was the obvious starting point to tell that story of Small Nation and our partners who have now gone on to do great things. But then, like you said, kind of spider out and, and we were hitting real estate professionals too. Jesse Lear, you know, for me as a young professional who eventually wants to get into the real estate game, you know, it's just cool to hear some of the different strategies that are out there, you know, and with Epicurean Properties, that was, that was a really good one or engaging with our public partners, you know, uh, both Bens here and mayor.

J**Jason Duff** 11:02

There's no question the Chamber of Commerce, tourism, Main Street, uh, and just hearing from their perspective, you know, I'm so thankful for, for Ben and, and people like Eric Phillips, who's the Union County Chamber. I mean, I think the thing about having a privatized partner— their side— I love what Ben Volrath said. He said like when people call me and ask, like, is this Small Nation thing real? Not only is it real, but it's like having two Chambers of Commerce that can get double the work done. Um, that, that I'm just thankful to have a partner like that. So, uh, yeah, exactly.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 11:38

Yeah. And then just covering other, like, relevant topics, uh, you know, with the employee shortage, you know, throughout the country, you know, uh, we were able to talk to Mindy Wells about, you know, alternative sources of talent and how to find them and, you know, uh, contractors versus employees and things like that. I just think that was helpful information that we're able to syndicate better.

J**Jason Duff** 11:59

Or Jacob Schrader with, uh, you know, talking about everything finance, having advisors that are accountants, attorneys. And I know, you know, not only did Mindy Wells cover HR law and Jacob highlighted the importance of taxes and understanding your accounting system, But I remember we had Connor Kenzie on and discussing all the various ways that an attorney can help you set up your business, from entity formation to writing your first contract to being prepared if you're faced in a situation with a dispute. Like, I, I think that would be— those were all really helpful guests for listeners.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 12:38

100%. And, uh, you know, we tend to resonate with, you know, people who are doing development across the board. So real estate, some kind of business venture in addition to real estate, and they're engaging with those public partners as well. So a few of those that come to mind, you know, you know, we have, we have Luke Henry doing this thing up in Marion, doing a great job as Main Street Reimagined.

J**Jason Duff** 13:04

Right. Great stuff.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 13:05

Great to hear him and how he's taking a lot of the similar strategies, you know, that we're doing and implementing them up there. And then Chad and Brandy Lawson and Pikwa, you know, Chesley and Jeremy as they're starting up in the Akron area. And then even here recently, Amy Miller talking about kind of on the backside of that with Bryan, Ohio, some of the work that, you know, we're able to do there. And some of those guests were, you know, I think they kind of are in the same, same journey as we are just on different, different points. You know, I feel like we've been able to, to, give some of the information back to what we've been doing. But I know in a recent episode we talked about Small Nation, you know, consulting and small town success and things like that. But would you like to maybe highlight some of the services that Small Nation is doing in communities outside of Bellefontaine?

J**Jason Duff** 13:55

Well, we've used what we've learned here, and for many years people would say, can you help me duplicate what you've done in Bellefontaine in my town? And, uh, I, I needed to build a team of people, uh, and, and also establish a leadership trust with advisors and consultants that could, because it's not easy work. And a lot of what we share on the podcast, I love to give as much free away that we possibly can. We've got case studies on our website, we share our weekly Small Talk email, but there are many cases that people are like, I need help for you to do this work with me. What is the, the strategies, the ideas, the tools that we can use to get this done and get this, get this, these projects moving? And so we developed our Small Nation Consulting team, and people like Nick Davis and, and Donnelly and a number of our team members will step up to be coaches and consultants where we utilize our small town success formula, which is really multi-pronged in terms of Buying and investing historic buildings, actively recruiting businesses or tenants to be a part of the project or the movement, uh, getting access to capital — how can we raise money or find investment partners or stakeholders in a project? And really, that last piece is the ongoing marketing, um, coaching and support. We have to be good storytellers, and I, I'm really excited because we have had people on the podcast not only here in Ohio, which you mentioned Amy Miller and Bryan, Ohio, but we've also had folks on from Marshalltown, Iowa. Yeah, I mean, out of state, that has highlighted ways that we are working with them in their town. And so I think the podcast is a great tool to highlight those successful consulting stories of here's ways that we have— the problems that we identify in the town, and then the way we've, we've worked with a local team on site to, uh, create success.

E

Ethan DeLeon 16:05

Yeah, that's great. And just to share with our listeners of some of the direction that we're heading into, you know, obviously we have these— the podcasts and the emails that go out to try to provide that value and just give you maybe some of that basic starting information of where to look, you know. And, and we're learning stuff ourselves here on the podcast as far as some of those resources that are available for small businesses through state programs and otherwise. But, and, you know, obviously we have their consulting for people who are ready. We just need somebody to come in and tell us what to do, give us some creative ideas. And that's something 100% Small Nation has been doing. But we've been noticing there's kind of this gap in between, you know, you're not, you're not quite ready for the consulting services yet, but maybe you have either yourself or a small group of entrepreneurs who are ready to start making a difference in whether it be your community, your business. You know, so we wanted to make some, some, some resources available to those people. So I know I'm excited about, you know, building out some, some courses that we can, you know, syndicate out through in addition to the podcast. So I guess what I want to say is if you are— have been listening to the show and you resonated specifically with some of those episodes like Luke Henry, with Chad and Brandi Lawson, Chesley and Jeremy, Amy Miller, you know, some of those. If that development as a whole, you know, you have a dying underrated town and you have, you know, mixed-use property that you need some creative ideas for, or you're having trouble getting people behind you and supporting you, it is our intention over these next couple years, you know, as we're building this thing out, to create some, you know, resources for you that you can go specifically in your lane. And we, we've identified, you know, we have several different areas that need attention. You know, we have municipalities that need to hear how the best ways to collaborate with their private partners, right? We have small businesses who need just the opposite of that, um, that's right, how to engage with their, you know, municipalities and their community leaders. We also have restaurants, you know, how do we collaborate with each other rather than compete with each other, and investors and economic development. So we, I mean, and even here in Belfountain, we have a whole market. But we've identified these lanes, and our— I think it's our goal, and I'm going to try to help the best I can, uh, you know, to create those resources in our new studio, which we'll get to here in a second. Um, but to, to create those resources that will be available to kind of, you know, before you go into a consulting kind of relationship.

J**Jason Duff** 18:35

Well, I wish when I first started, I did scour the internet for anyone that was developing in small towns and I was coming up short. And, you know, today what's been amazing from the reachouts and the people that have contacted us, there's actually a really large market of people that want to take back, restore, and revitalize their small town. And so I'm so excited, and I appreciate, Ethan, the accountability, the coaching, the support that you have provided to say let's really work on these courses, because, uh, I really think that's another way that we can create a lot of value for our listeners and We recently did a survey and we got several hundred responses from that survey asking, you know, what are the critical challenges that you're running up against in, in the town? And many of the things that you mentioned there, Ethan, in terms of topics were feedback that people were mentioning in the survey. And, and, and that we know, um, and thank you for those that, that replied. We know that's an area that we need to focus.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 19:40

Right. And it's not just going to be limited to, you know, a paid course of some kind. We are trying to make this, you know, some of this information accessible on the podcast. Just, you know, one of the main goals of this podcast is to provide value to our listeners, as I say every week on this show. But, you know, we are also going to be taking deeper dives on topics, you know, such as filling empty buildings, how to handle resistance to change.

J**Jason Duff** 20:05

Big ones.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 20:05

That's a big one. Right. Balance between local business and larger franchises. Funding opportunities and raising capital, recruiting entrepreneurs, how to get leadership involved, getting business owners involved in the community, mixed-use development, advertising, downtown housing strategies. These are all— and this is honestly just a sample of the feedback from that survey and just hearing other things and our consulting and whatever else. We're going to try to do some deeper dives outside of, you know, guests being on the show. You know, we're still going to continue to do that stuff. We may change it up a little bit to take the show on the road occasionally. Yeah, I'm excited about that. Yeah, introduce some new, uh, show segments potentially. Uh, got a lot of fun ideas, um, as we're going to, uh, look at season 2. So definitely stay tuned if some of those things, uh, will be beneficial to you. And I just want to encourage you as well, like, we're not going to withhold that information for the courses or anything like that. We're going to try to make that accessible to you as we can. Uh, so looking forward to that. But, you know, as again, as we're kind of reflecting on, on season 1, uh, we had had a lot of great entrepreneurs on the show. So, uh, you know, one of our most listened to episodes was probably Matt Brown.

J**Jason Duff** 21:18

You know, he did not hold anything back, which— that's again, when you— the more authentic and real and raw you are, the more that message will really sink in.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 21:29

Yeah. So we're going to play a few of our, uh, you know, snapshots throughout, uh, season 1 of these entrepreneurs and just some of their power statements, if you will. Um, but Matt Brown, if you haven't listened to the episode, is a former, uh, employee of Small Nation and is now an entrepreneur doing a lot of crazy things. So here's just a quick highlight from his episode. Nice. Would you give someone who is going through their darkest time on a team— ask you?

J**Jason Duff** 21:58

Yeah, no, I gotta ask yourself why you're doing what you're doing.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 22:02

If you can't If it's about money, you ain't gonna win. Like, you're not.

J**Jason Duff** 22:11

You know, Matt, uh, you know, really discussed on the episode the highs of entrepreneurship and that rush of creativity when everything is new, establishing new business partnerships, but then also sharing the cost of entrepreneurship. And that's actually the title of that segment when he spoke, he, he highlighted that, um, you know, the cost that it took on him mentally, physically, emotionally, his— the damage it caused his family, friendships, but also highlighting how he found his why again. And when he did reconstitute his businesses with Iron City Sports Bar and Bobber's Pizzeria at the Lake and now his newest, uh, bar and restaurant, which is Skinny's Tavern in Kenton. You can see how that mind shift changed, and, and now he's winning, and he's winning big. And I, I just, uh, appreciated those reflections. And probably that's one of the, the episodes, as I'm out and about in the community, people comment on the most.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 23:20

Yeah, for sure. It was a good one, and it's just, uh, encouraging to hear that other entrepreneurs are going through some of those same mental challenges. You know, one of the biggest takeaways from season 1 is probably that entrepreneurship is not easy and it's lonely at times. And so I feel like we get a little bit of a taste of the reality of that and what that actually looks like in life if you, you know, let it, let it go, you know. So we, we appreciate him coming on the show and sharing that with us. But another one, you know, as we were talking about redevelopment of downtowns and just another great entrepreneur was Luke Henry.. So I'm going to play a quick clip from his episode here.

J**Jason Duff** 24:00

Lois's famous sayings is that she says, uh, we're just the keepers of the keys of these old buildings, and that they've been here longer than we have, and they'll probably outlast all of us as well. And so, you know, we, we consider a privilege to, to keep the keys for this period of time and to bring these buildings back to what they once were, because it's a really good perspective. At one time they were unbelievably ornate and full of life and full of community and all these things that we want to bring back.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 24:31

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 24:31

So true and so powerful. I admire that he quoted Lois Fisher in Marion, and I highlighted on this episode that Lois was someone that also inspired me because she was investing in developing loft apartments in Marion. Before that was really even a thing. Uh, she was the pioneer and innovator, and she lived in her properties too, which being a part of the neighborhood as it was transitioning and making it better. And there's no better way to say that we are just a steward of the resources that were given. And, uh, I love the keeper of the keys. And I think that when you think about, um, the things that you've been blessed with or the things that you've been entrusted with, how you can pay that forward to the next generation.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 25:23

Love that. Yeah, another great, great episode. And then the last one I kind of want to highlight here is Sarah Kelsey. This is more of a recent one, um, great episode. She has a lot of spunk here on the show, so if you want to be entertained, go take a listen to that. But we appreciate her perspective, so here's a little clip from that episode.

J**Jason Duff** 25:41

I think a lot of people think, oh well, I can't do that because I'm in a small town, or I'm in, you know, shut up. Shut up, because you can. You can do it. In fact, I think you have— you have more advantages in a small town. Oh my gosh, yes. So because we're set up in a real life, you know, Hallmark town, um, we have the 4 Airbnbs. So our clients fly into Columbus International, and we—

E**Ethan DeLeon** 26:03

yeah, that's what I was gonna say. That's what makes it the whole weekend experience, because then you get, I'm sure, all kinds of groups who want to—

J**Jason Duff** 26:08

we do.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 26:08

Weekend, we do.

J**Jason Duff** 26:09

So we have our pageant girls who want to come in and design, and our brides who want to come in and design with their girlfriends And then we have just groups of gals who are just looking for a fun girls weekend. I love her and I love that energy. You can hear it in her voice. And I think that's another thing about this podcast is giving people the courage to like go out and change the world. And I, I think she highlights how she uses what some people would think would be a disadvantage to her advantage. And that is the power of small. The power of small is being nimble, is being creative, is being able to pivot, is being able to be responsive. Like, that is the why. It's the name of our company. That's why it's in the name of this podcast. Like, there is great power in being small.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 27:02

Yeah, I love that. And I love just some of those power statements. You know, you can't plan that stuff as far as the statements that they say and how it's just so consistent with the brand Small Nation. But it's really exciting to see and, uh, you know, encouraging that other people are out there doing great things. But yeah, so we just wanted to take, you know, a little bit of time and just kind of reflect on season 1. Um, we are, you know, proud of, of how it's been going so far, but we're also very excited for the future.

J**Jason Duff** 27:29

We've been using feedback, and that's the thing, like, I, I waited way too long to do a podcast. I had a lot of friends saying like, listen, You guys should create a reality television show. It's really because every day is all of these new highs and lows. And, um, when we started kind of breaking things down into nuggets and getting people comfortable of speaking, and us, I think, getting comfortable with speaking, it's like, we need to double down and do this more. And I think that's what I'm excited as we are taking things to a new level, um, is we want to be better at this.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 28:04

Yeah. Yeah, and so we are creating— I mean, part of that is you have to invest in that, right, in order for that.

J**Jason Duff** 28:09

This is an investment of time, right? It's an investment of equipment and resources. And I think by listening to our customers, we know, like, right now our studio looks pretty awesome, I think, on video.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 28:21

I mean, if you go back and watch episode 1 on YouTube— and if you haven't watched the episode, if you've only been listening, we appreciate the listens, but go check out on YouTube and just watch the transformation as it started from— it was a different color wall. I think it was like— it was, yeah, this the same color as this over here. And then I was like, Jason, we, we can do better.

J**Jason Duff** 28:39

Well, in, in all seriousness, we did this with a low budget. Yeah, being creative with your help. And we shoot right now — this studio is in the basement of the Main Street Marketplace in downtown Bellefontaine. We are set up on a conference room that is booked almost every hour of the day.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 29:00

So I know you have to book my setup time and my teardown time just to make sure we have enough time.

J**Jason Duff** 29:05

Meetings run over sometimes. I'm, you know, we're busy talking or busy producing. Yeah. And so it isn't always convenient. And I think now that we know that this is something we want to do and not only do we want to do it for ourselves, we've had a lot of people reach out that say, I would love to do a podcast. Can you help me with that? And we — that gave us kind of the confidence to invest in a more dedicated, beautiful studio.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 29:32

Yeah, 100%. So what we're talking about is that, you know, we have the Build Coworking Space here in downtown Bellefontaine. It's our own private brand of coworking. Um, and, and, you know, that's been full. It's been taking, you know, it's been doing its job quite well.

J**Jason Duff** 29:47

A big credit to Beau and Jane and all of the members over there. I mean, to be honest with you, we did design a podcast studio in Build Bellefontaine., and they were so quick of leasing all of the dedicated office space, the podcast studio got turned into a dedicated office, right? So it, it kind of said we need to create more co-working spaces and offices here in our downtown. We also announced about the same time that we acquired a building in Marysville, Ohio, and we're renovating and developing Build Marysville. But I'm here to say that the Opera Suites by Build actually has moved a lot faster, um, with the construction team. And a big credit to the local building authority and folks just saying, we, we want to see this happen in a historic building. Um, that's probably going to be opening up in the next 30 days, the Opera Suites by Build. And Build Marysville is still coming, um, it's just we're working through, you know, welcome to the world of construction and, and permits and all that jazz too. But Um, we, uh, we're really excited to bring that online. And tell us a little bit within the Opera Suites by Build, because you've been very instrumental in the development. What are some of the capabilities and features of that space?

E**Ethan DeLeon** 31:02

Sure. I mean, obviously with the Build brand comes great Wi-Fi, you know, and co-working abilities. Um, you know, that is ideal for someone like me who's, you know, working remote a lot of the time, whether it's just editing and just need to get out of the house kind of thing. Coworking space is ideal. So to have obviously an extension of that, I think a lot of people are familiar with the coworking model now, but we're building out the studio over on the second floor on Court Street over there, you know, and part of my job here as well has been documenting that process. And so if you have not checked out the documentary series on the Small Nation YouTube channel of the historic Opera Block here in downtown Bellefontaine. It's been a passion project of mine, and it's, it's a lot. It's overwhelming at times to, to try to figure out how to tell the story of what's, what's being done here, but it truly is impactful, I think. And it's been a lot of fun to document that. I think we've dropped 4 or 5 episodes at this point with lots more to come. And then hopefully the idea is to put together a feature-length documentary, submit it to festivals and things like that in the end.

J**Jason Duff** 32:09

But, and I'll just make a comment about that, like, that is another thing that is just— it started here but is now moved up here. And you— a lot of the most common question we get is, how do I renovate a building in my town? And walking through show episode, um, by show episode, you hear different perspectives. Yeah. Uh, and you've posted that on YouTube, but it's also if you go to operablock.com, you'll see the whole listing of the docuseries there. And I've actually got a lot of people that have said that that was really helpful to hear that, because you, you hear from the building being in condemned status. Yeah. To, you know, the acquisition price was relatively low for literally two city box of real estate, but the effort that it's taken to replace the roof, to fix windows, to tuckpoint the masonry, to, you know, get the building safe. Like doing away with a boiler that was nearly 100 years old that was a major safety hazard, because if the boiler blew, like, people would get hurt. Like, um, and I, I think just hearing everyone's perspective and then seeing the transformation of the pictures. I mean, you can open up the Instagram page and scroll back to when the first post happened and visually see how it's changed and evolved today. And then just walking on that block in the street, like, you know, we were very lucky to have a great coffee shop like Sweet Aromas anchored on the end, but now it's a home to like at least 6 or 7 new businesses.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 33:52

Which wasn't there. I mean, like, there was not much. I mean, I remember my parents moved out to this area, you know, a few years ago, and I went in some of those businesses and I was, uh, well, yeah, well, and the sad part is it really sometimes wasn't the business's fault as much.

J**Jason Duff** 34:09

It was the landlord just refused to put any money in the building, right? And when things start to deteriorate to some point, like You can't operate in a business that doesn't have heat. You can't operate a business that doesn't have working plumbing. And it takes a lot of courage as a developer to, you know, take over an existing building that has all of those problems. But if no one steps up and does it, then you have these disastrous consequences for your community, for your downtown, because they could catch fire, they could, you know, fall apart in a, a windstorm that goes by. Like, I, I've seen so many of these situations play out because the community lacks the political will or the leader that will step up to say, like, let's work together to fix this.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 34:59

Right. And that hasn't always been easy here in Bellefontaine, and we know that's what other people are dealing with. So that's why we wanna create those resources. But, uh, yeah, super excited about the Opera Block overall. Um, I know Here at the end, we'll highlight a few of the, you know, the projects that are up and coming for Small Nation, and a lot of them have to do with the Opera Block. But, you know, we're— I mean, in my role, I'm especially excited for the studio space over at Opera Suites by Build there on the second floor. We'll have a more permanent setup there. It's being sound treated right now with a slat wall with, you know, sound treatment inside that, and then paper backdrops, you know, for, you know, photo and video use as well. So I'm sure you'll see that small nation channels, uh, being utilized.

J**Jason Duff** 35:43

But do those make us look skinny too?

E**Ethan DeLeon** 35:45

Yeah, yeah, for sure.

J**Jason Duff** 35:46

Jason always tells people I make people look skinny on camera, except I feel like this angle is not good for me, by the way.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 35:53

It always stresses me out because I'm like, I'm not making any promises here. Um, but yeah, that'll, that'll just be great, and we'll, we'll use that here for our show. But then our goal is to also make that available for Build members and non-Build members to and just local creatives to come and utilize that space, uh, rent it out for if they want to start a podcast or any photo video content.

J**Jason Duff** 36:14

And, you know, we heard a lot on the show about the importance of arts and being able to reinvent and revitalize a community, and I do think that's something with some of these studio spaces and art spaces we want to create more of in the downtown. So I'm excited about this new studio space and what businesses it may propel and grow. And Ethan, just like with the work that you're doing, like producing this, you have your own business. I mean, Ethan is hustling day and night, has built a really great business around doing wedding photography.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 36:51

Videography. I would make that clear difference.

J**Jason Duff** 36:54

You're capable of all the above, but wedding videography.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 36:57

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 36:57

And then helping other businesses launch their own podcasts. So just having this studio space will be another tool in your toolbox too.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 37:05

Yeah, appreciate that. It'll be, it's been fun to see other people, a guest that's been on this show, seeing them get up and running with their podcast setup and obviously just a great learning experience for me to be able to help other people. But yeah, we're excited for season 2. So expect us in that new space. We may be on the road for a few episodes. We may, I may sit out a few episodes Jason may sit out a few episodes.

J**Jason Duff** 37:29

Yeah, we're gonna have some surprise.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 37:30

Get more team members.

J**Jason Duff** 37:31

Yeah, actually, of course, if you wanna get people excited, you push them out of their comfort zone. So we're excited to introduce some new guest hosts.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 37:39

Yeah, so we would just encourage you to keep following along. We are gonna take a little bit of a break here so we can rebuild our library of episodes and just get all the scheduling, all the logistics, right? But as we are going into season 2, we strongly encourage you to just to follow along on social media, interact with those things. We know we may have an opportunity for—

J**Jason Duff** 38:01

we appreciate reviews too. Yes. Thank you for those of you that reviewed the podcast.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 38:05

Yeah. And if you haven't done so, that means a lot to us. You know, we're, we're a small town here trying to make a big difference. So any review just helps that word get out to more people. And we believe we're trying to lead with value here. So that's, that's going to be exciting stuff. But what else we have coming up?

J**Jason Duff** 38:25

Yeah, I mean, it's kind of slow here in our office. There's not much going on. Yeah.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 38:30

No, no one ever.

J**Jason Duff** 38:31

Yeah. Well, I think you highlighted the Opera Suites by Build. We have about 8 dedicated offices. 2 out of those 8 have been committed. One of them will be our podcast studio. But these are dedicated offices that have a beautiful kitchenette that's over there. Common space, access to all the same amenities that you get at Build Coworking Space and also Build Marysville. But it is located on the second floor of the historic Opera Block, and the views and the windows are gorgeous over there, right over at the courthouse. I mean, it is— I'm kind of jealous because I'd like my office to be over there. But, um, it really is that we're excited to wrap that up in the next 30 days, and then Build Marysville is also under construction, 129 North Main Street in Marysville. And the lobby in that space is so big and expansive. It — in this brand new storefront windows, they're going to be installed here very soon. But it's right across from another great coffee shop with Coffee Hall there. And then Union County, I mean, there's just so much energy and buzz. It's one of the fastest growing counties in the state. So just really excited to bring that location online. The other thing, as we have been surveying what is missing in a vibrant downtown, um, we are clear that we have plenty of really great hair salons, and the ladies give us a lot of great feedback of all the different cosmetology services that a number of our salons that provide pedicures and manicures and facials and all the good stuff for the ladies Guys are underserved. Yes, we deserve a great place to be pampered. And, um, that gap has come up a number of times. And so, uh, we here at the Small Nation team have identified some property that we think that a really high-class, um, old-school barbershop—

E**Ethan DeLeon** 40:31

that's good—

J**Jason Duff** 40:31

and, um, we've seen that be a very successful model in a number of towns similar to Bellefontaine. It's just, uh, we want to do it right. And so, um, we have a space that is— was an existing barber shop that, um, the, the property was kind of not being maintained, that we're excited to now, um, take control of and, and also make some important needed upgrades to. And we are going to be promoting that on the commercial for lease page on the Small Nation website. The other thing is we've seen success that not only having one hair salon does for the downtown, but having multiple ones and becoming a destination for hair salons. If that, that smaller concept works out well, I definitely think we have other properties in the Opera Block that would lend itself for a much larger, um, you know, barbershop kind of setup too. So just excited if, if you are someone listening that you know of a barber that's looking to expand or looking to relocate, um, please have, uh, that, that person reach out to us because we'd love to connect with them.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 41:38

Yep, for sure. And then a meeting space over there at all you want to talk about?

J**Jason Duff** 41:43

Yeah, we know that the community is also underserved for places for events, and we set out a few years ago of looking at our former Elks Club to redevelop it for a new wedding and events venue. And that project, a lot of people said, are you abandoning that? And the answer is no. But you can imagine with the economic conditions, the way interest rates are, the lack of labor, just our ability to get construction trades, we, we put that in a holding pattern. And that has allowed us to say, can we do something smaller in another location to test the market, to give us confidence to spend and invest in the capital to do something larger? So we are still really excited to look within the downtown and work on more event space options. So that's, uh, going to be a big theme as well. And I'd say the last front, the, the budding retail scene. Um, we have great shopping. I mean, once you get great food and you get great shopping, um, we still have one remaining storefront in Rainbow Row, and there have been a lot of people kick the tires on it. Um, a new, uh, beautiful tattoo studio, uh, just opened up in Rainbow Row, um, this last week. Called the Salty Swan, and she is from North Carolina, just this really talented artist. Nikki is doing great things over there, but, you know, we want— we really would find— love to find some kind of very eclectic, fun, creative retail business that finishes out that block because it's pretty cool and we just want to make it cooler.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 43:25

Sure, 100%. So that's some of the exciting things. Thank you for sharing all this, Jason, but that's what's happening here. Globally at Small Nation. Some of the things, you know, changes we've talked about some of them already, but that's gonna be happening here on the podcast. New show segments, different types of episodes, but also we're gonna be inviting, you know, sponsorship onto the show. So we have— we're gonna— I'm gonna link a couple resources down in the show notes as far as, you know, if you're interested in coming on the show or if you would like to, you know, have some ads on the show. We have a couple— we're creating a couple different lanes for that. Don't worry, we're not going to saturate the whole show with ads.

J**Jason Duff** 44:04

We really want to find sponsors and advertisers that are adding value, right? And that is something that we're going to be pretty focused on. But you also— the amount of listeners, I think— did we find that we're over 10,000?

E**Ethan DeLeon** 44:17

Yeah, 10,000 listens across YouTube.

J**Jason Duff** 44:19

Thank you guys. That's huge. And so I think we've seen exponential growth when we first started this in terms of subscribers. In terms of listeners, and we want to grow it even more. But really finding that title sponsor that we can give a shout out, we can mention, that would help us fund this educational tool for our small business audience. The other thing that you mentioned is not only having that title sponsor, but having episode sponsors. Yeah. So each segment being able to give a shout out to who that person is that's helping us provide the content. For that day, and then maybe rotating an ad spot in there too. Like, because I love— I mean, a big part of our business is advertising and marketing. So if we can highlight something cool that you're doing in your business that a listener would benefit to have your service or your product, we will have some of those as well. And the last one is our studio rental.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 45:14

Yeah, 100%. So that, like I said, will be available not only to Build members but also non-Build members, uh, any creative. I have a couple ideas of of how we're going to be posting it so that is accessible, and we'll make sure that is up and running. Like I said, with some, some nice paper backdrops for, you know, seamless photo and video work, and then, uh, podcast space. You know, a lot of our guests even on the show have expressed interest in, in starting their own podcast, but obviously, uh, you know, equipment can be intimidating and a barrier of entry, so we want to kind of eliminate that as much as we can. So if you are interested in any of those things Uh, you know, those will be coming soon.

J**Jason Duff** 45:50

And does Small Nation water come with that? I actually get questions about that. Yeah, yeah, maybe sitting on the shelf, that right, very fine.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 45:57

That's what keeps the, uh, Small Nation podcast going is the Small Nation water.

J**Jason Duff** 46:02

So it's the good stuff.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 46:04

Well, I think that's, that's been, you know, a good recap of episode— of season 1. Thank you so much for the listeners. Thank you, Jason, for, you know, allowing us to do this and making all possible and sharing your wisdom with everybody. Um, and we hope that it's been valuable, you know, for our listeners.

J**Jason Duff** 46:19

And it's been valuable for me, right? And that's kind of the big surprise. It's like the real raw stories that people will open up. Um, and, and probably my favorites is when people get choked up because like it is something that you have struck a chord that maybe they've not been able to discuss with someone else, but they'll feel comfortable doing it here. Um, and I think we want to build and grow upon that. So, uh, thanks for allowing us to, to be able to do that and do more of that.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 46:47

Yeah, for sure. And for me, I know as a younger guy just coming in here and being— having the opportunity to sit in the room and listen to all those conversations has been invaluable for me. But, uh, yeah, more, more to come, and we are going to try to continue to improve and just innovate on this show. And I mean, everything everything we're doing. So, but that's it. So I'm going to outro us here for the last time, and hopefully when we intro and outro for season 2, it'll be prerecorded so I can stop fumbling over my words.

J**Jason Duff** 47:16

We enjoy your realness. Thanks for being authentic.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 47:20

All right. Well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 47:20

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 were able to pull some value from that conversation. 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, to discover this podcast. Stay tuned to Small Nation on social media to keep up with all the cool projects that are happening here. Until next time, this is Ethan with the Small Nation Podcast signing off.



Jason Duff 47:46

Yeah!