

Episode 62

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Anna Louden, Shannon Reese, Ethan DeLeon

A

Anna Louden 00:00

I mean, just get your community partners to buy in, the businesses to buy in and get involved with you. Involve the businesses, involve everyone you can in your event to get them involved and get people excited.

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:14

Welcome to the Small Nation Podcast, brought to you by CoverLink Insurance, where people are more important than policies. On this show, we unpack lessons from entrepreneurs to break down development strategies and do deep dives on small town success. Our goal is to value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we have two very special guests on the show. First is executive board member for the Logan County Chamber of Commerce, Indian Lake School Board member, and Small Nation superhero Shannon Reese. Also joining us on the show, director of the Logan County Visitors Bureau and small business owner Anna Loudon. Welcome, guys.

J

Jason Duff 00:59

Hello. Hey guys, welcome to the show today.

S

Shannon Reese 01:02

Thanks for having us.

J**Jason Duff** 01:04

Well, I'm excited to talk about tourism today, and you guys have something to do with that. I was coming into the episode and doing a little research about Ohio, and tourism is important to our state. You know, when people think of Ohio, they oftentimes think of farming and agriculture, and they oftentimes next maybe think of manufacturing.. But not far behind those business categories is tourism. And I learned that in 2022, the state had— the tourism industry in our state was worth \$38 billion. That's with a B. Wow. And we welcomed 201 million visitors, most of whom are within a day's drive. So 300 to 500 miles away. And then 34 million visitors stayed overnight in Ohio. And here is why those numbers are important. It really relates to those day trip visitors equates to about \$106 per person where the overnight visitors spend an estimated \$327 per person. It's almost 3 times. Yeah, for sure. Well, so if you really think about that, then it's what, what my head goes to is who are the people that are actually working in the tourism industry that are driving the success. And so that's kind of my question to you, maybe you, Anna, when you think of tourism and hospitality, like what are all of those different types of businesses and people that might be working in that industry?

A**Anna Louden** 02:38

I mean, I think of all the different visitors bureaus as a whole around the state of Ohio. I mean, every county for the most part has one and they're all connecting with each other to bring new ideas and collaborate with one another. And then on top of that, you have all the attractions in Ohio who are working with the CVBs to come up with new ideas to bring people here. So that's hundreds upon hundreds of people.

J**Jason Duff** 03:03

Yeah. And really probably thousands. So when you hear the word CVB, Shannon, what does CVB stand for?

S**Shannon Reese** 03:13

Your County Visitors Bureau.

J**Jason Duff** 03:14

Yeah. Convention Visitors Bureau, right? CVB. So for a lot of people that have ever heard that term, something new today, you know, a lot of people could have just played along. Well, a lot of people, a lot of people, that's a new term. I mean, even people that are with inside the industry. But I'm still learning new terms working here at Small Nation with all this. Well, and Anna mentioned like a lot of counties do have a focus because this is such a big industry on convention visitors bureau types of activities. But I imagine there's also a lot of towns that are listening that are saying, Well, my town is not like known for being Columbus or Cleveland or Cincinnati. And so we, we're, we're different from Cleveland, who has the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Like, what do you say from that, you know, being in, uh, Logan County, which is about 60 miles northwest of Columbus, and your office is kind of right here in the downtown in, in the county seat, which is Bellefontaine. What do you say for people that that maybe think that their town doesn't have something significant to see and do?

A**Anna Louden** 04:18

I mean, just think about Indian Lake, all the people that come visit there in the summer or just seasonally all year round. We have Ohio Caverns that draws in thousands of people all year round. I think they're only closed on what, Christmas Day and Thanksgiving and Easter maybe? That's pretty crazy to think about, all the people that go visit Ohio Caverns. We also have Piotr Castle Makachiek. That brings in tons of people. People normally make day trip out of the caverns and the castles. So those are huge draws to our area. But you have downtown Bellefontaine, shopping, restaurants. I mean, we have everything that people are looking for and things to do.

S**Shannon Reese** 05:00

I mean, tell me another place that has a mountain in their county. A mountain.

J**Jason Duff** 05:05

And Ohio is relatively flat, especially in Ohio.

A**Anna Louden** 05:08

Exactly.

J**Jason Duff** 05:09

But the thing that, you know, and we take advantage for people that grew up, I mean, I think the three of us— Ethan didn't, grew up in kind of Lima, which is a little north of here, but yeah, we're all Logan County natives, Anna, myself, and Shannon. And, uh, I think growing up here you kind of forget how special your area is, like to have Indian Lake, which is what, 5,600-acre lake, and there's not many inland lakes in Ohio, right? So this is a special place for boating and jet skiing and all kinds of recreational swimming and fishing. And then in the winter months, the Mad River Mountain, which is in, in Zanesfield, which is right outside of Bellefontaine, it is like a winter playland with tubing and skiing and snowboarding. You kind of don't feel like you're in Ohio when you go to Mad River Mountain. And so those are, those are attractions. But let's just say, let's take the attractions off the table and let's talk about the underrated things that to people that are from the outside and they come to town that are like, this is the coolest thing I've ever seen. Any things that come to mind when you think of that? I mean, I think in Bellefontaine, I mean, I live in Delaware, Ohio. Okay. For, for context, is one of the fastest growing counties and probably the fastest. I think it is the fastest growing in the state of Ohio. And they have a great rest— uh, downtown, great restaurant scene. But, um, even like when I have friends or my wife will come out here, like, it's— it is, uh, noticeable how much easier and, uh, walkable the shops are. There are things to do, different kinds of things. There's a little bit for everyone here in downtown Bellefontaine. Obviously working with Small Nation, like, I'm excited to show everybody everything. So like popping in and out of those stores, but that's something that a lot of downtowns don't have. Like, even if they do have a lot of their real estate feel build. Maybe some of those are just like— maybe it's just all restaurants. And my opinion, I feel like Delaware has a lot of that going on. But, um, yeah, so I think that's one thing, uh, downtown Bellefontaine specifically has to offer. So I love you, you mentioned that when people are walking around downtown, the big thing that has surprised me is that we have a street that there's a statue in front of, and Anna's office happens to be right across the street. Anna, what happens in front of that statue a lot?

A**Anna Louden** 07:40

A lot of photos in front of the arch.

J**Jason Duff** 07:43

So what does the arch say?

A**Anna Louden** 07:46

The oldest con— the first, the first concrete street in America.

J**Jason Duff** 07:52

So keep in mind, a lot of people, when you hear that, there's probably not a lot of listeners that are like, oh my gosh, let's drop everything and drive to Bellefontaine because I want to see the oldest concrete street in America or the first concrete street. But for people that maybe are engineers or people that are passionate, it is one of those weird, funky, creative things. And because the city and the county and leaders at the time decided to put this gigantic arch on it, pour a concrete statue that is of the man that invented and designed the mix that made this street— his name is George Bartholomew— then in 1891, he did this. But we're celebrating that fact. And I think that's the thing that I try to coach a lot of our towns and communities that we work with is you've got to identify what is unique or funky or creative or different about your town and you own it. And we have a few others. So Anna, down on West Columbus Avenue in the downtown Belfound, what else is somewhat unique about our community?

A**Anna Loudon** 08:58

We also have the shortest street.

J**Jason Duff** 09:01

Wait a minute, what did you just say?

A**Anna Loudon** 09:03

What? The shortest street in America.

J**Jason Duff** 09:06

You heard right. You heard.

S**Shannon Reese** 09:08

Ask her how she knows.

J**Jason Duff** 09:09

Yeah, how do you know, Anna?

A**Anna Loudon** 09:11

It is 17 feet long and there's a mural on it that you can go get your photo in front of. She hiked it.

J**Jason Duff** 09:18

So let me just say, let me just say again, the hiking— why was that? First off, if you would have visited Bellefontaine a year ago, was there a mural there? No. No. But what did we notice that people were doing when they found out the town has the shortest street?

A**Anna Loudon** 09:38

Going to find it.

J**Jason Duff** 09:40

But if you aren't really identifying it, making it clear and owning it, you're missing. It's a missed opportunity. So a big applaud to Anna's group with the Tourism Bureau of the City of Bellefontaine. You know, our team, we kind of constructed up ideas. And Shannon, you know, her role at Small Nation is she does a lot of marketing coordination. So there is a real estate team and then there's a marketing team. And what we do to help the real estate tenants and businesses be successful, we've got to help them effectively storytell. We have to effectively, you know, be able to come up with campaigns and projects. And I think one of those ideas that came out of that meeting is we have the first concrete street in America. We have the shortest street, I think, in the world or America. I know there's a dispute. America. America. I want to make sure. The shortest street in America. Because what community is it? Germany? There's another community that like stole the Guinness Book of World Records.

A**Anna Loudon** 10:38

16.2 or something.

J**Jason Duff** 10:39

We are going after them, by the way. We're going to win this eventually. Shorten the street even more. But it was owning those details and actually making it part of our marketing and our language. So I'd like to interject here a little bit. One of the things I like to do with the podcast is just educate people who are just listening to try to learn about how the space works. You know, we're pointing towards economic development and entrepreneurs and things like that, but especially in the world of economic development in small towns, it can look quite a bit different from place to place. So Anna, I'd like you to maybe explain what, you know, what is the visitors bureau? How is it different from, say, the Chamber of Commerce? Knowing that we had Ben Volrath on the podcast, I think it was episode 18. So if you are interested in learning how all of that works, I encourage you to go back and listen to that. But what is the Visitors Bureau? How do they collaborate with the chamber? And then Shannon, I'll have you speak to how, you know, Small Nation as a private partner works with them and how we can accomplish things all together.

A**Anna Loudon** 11:41

So the Visitors Bureau works out of the same office as the Logan County Chamber. It is a separate entity. So we like to say it's an umbrella of the chamber as we all kind of help each other out and collaborate on projects. But all in all, it is separate from the chamber. I'm the one-man band along with the council team that helps and meets once a month. But I'm the only one with the Visitors Bureau in the chamber office. I am in charge and lead all of the projects there. And again, I can collaborate and help with chamber stuff. The other chamber team members, there's 3 of us, they can collaborate and jump on and help when it's necessary for me. So we all are a team, but we have our separate umbrellas.

J**Jason Duff** 12:26

So sure, absolutely. And then, you know, Small Nation, we do a lot of economic development in the private sector, but that does not mean that, I mean, we can't just have our own lane there. We, they're by nature, you know, there's going to be overlap. So maybe if you can speak to, you know, what Small Nation does to, to kind of drive the economic development here in downtown?

S**Shannon Reese** 12:47

Yeah, sure. So as Anna said, as the council, you know, we meet every month and we sit around the table with the attractions, the restaurants, and other small businesses within, within the county as well. And with the attractions that we do have, we are pulling in so many people in each of the attractions. So with that, what can, what can we do with the people already here? We can teach and educate them where else they can go if they're at Indian Lake and it's, it's a rainy day, come to Bellefontaine, come see everything that we have to offer here, your food, your shops, axe throwing, putt-putt, you know, whatever it may be. But that's with all of the attractions. So it's collaborating and, and working with each of them, sharing ideas, um, what works, what doesn't work. Um, countywide branding has been very huge because in all honesty, what is good for Mad River Mountain is really, really good for West Liberty, and what is really good for West Liberty is really, really good for Indian Lake. And what is good for Indian Lake is really, really good for Ball Fountain. So it's a way that we can all just work together and collaborate.

J**Jason Duff** 13:44

Yeah. And all this collaboration translates into real dollars, right? And affecting these, the lives of these entrepreneurs, several of which we've had on the show. So I just wanted to kind of lay the groundwork for this episode by explaining how it works here in Logan County. And yeah, so And I'm kind of curious, how does one get into the work of working at a visitors bureau? What was your journey into that?

A**Anna Louden** 14:08

It was a pretty strange journey, definitely unexpected, but I graduated in May of 2022 from Kent State. I had a degree in broadcast journalism and a minor in public relations, but they're kind of, they go alongside each other. So I really wasn't sure which path I wanted to take. Did I want to take the reporting route? Did I want to take more of the public relations? Communications route. Well, it came down to the final day. I had a contract due to a news station in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and then I also had an interview for the visitors bureau position the same day.

S**Shannon Reese** 14:50

Wow.

A**Anna Louden** 14:51

And it came down to the hours. I went into the chamber, did the interview, a couple hours I got the call that they offered me the job.

S**Shannon Reese** 15:00

And I was like, a couple of hours I was in on this interview and I don't think, like, I remember us sitting around the table saying, I wonder if she's left yet because we could offer it to her now.

J**Jason Duff** 15:09

Right now.

A**Anna Louden** 15:11

Well, I got the call and I made the decision to take this route. I think I definitely made the right choice, but it was definitely a weird path to get here, but.

J**Jason Duff** 15:21

Yeah, but you're here.

A**Anna Louden** 15:23

Yes. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 15:23

You constantly, I imagine with your job is that you're always promoting. Is that a big piece of it? Like, people that are calling you that are, you know, learning about Logan County or the community for the first time, or people that walk into the chamber office, like, is every— is a big part of what you do promoting?

A**Anna Louden** 15:40

I would say for sure advertising and promotion and communication and outreach, I would say, are some of the big—

J**Jason Duff** 15:48

I imagine that broadcast degree is probably helping a little bit.

A**Anna Louden** 15:50

Yeah, I mean, I kind of like sorted it into two different paths, but they've kind of met in the middle.

J**Jason Duff** 15:57

Yeah, yeah, it's funny how that works. And then Shannon, what was your journey into finding Small Nation? And like, what, you know, drives you to be so active in the community, not only in your job, but, you know, on the boards you serve and things like that?

S**Shannon Reese** 16:10

So funny story, actually. Many, many moons ago, I was actually in Anna's position with the visitors bureau. All right, uh, and then I didn't even know that.

A**Anna Louden** 16:19

Yeah.

S**Shannon Reese** 16:19

Fun fact, right? Uh, and then, uh, joined the Small Nation team directly after that, which was very intimidating because I did not find myself to be cool. I was not an entrepreneur. I did not own a business. So I was like, nah, you don't want me. But, um, I think my, my love and drive and passion for like promoting not just small businesses but like the attractions in the county as a whole, I think really played a part into that. And then being on the Small Nation team, that has literally only grown and given me more experience.

A**Anna Louden** 16:54

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 16:54

And Shannon, I think you just celebrated 6 years, 5 years here.

S**Shannon Reese** 16:59

Yes, 5.

J**Jason Duff** 17:00

5 years.

S**Shannon Reese** 17:00

Glorious years.

J**Jason Duff** 17:01

Well, and a lot of things have changed in 5 years. The groundwork that we were laying about visioning that downtown Bellefontaine could be a destination, like Ethan, just appreciate you mentioning that about the, the eating and, you know, having the walkability of the shops. Like, that didn't exist 5 years ago, and it especially didn't exist 10 years ago. And so the evolution of that has been, how can we fill these vacant spaces? And that has started with finding community partners. So you mentioned the Logan County Chamber, the Logan County Visitors Bureau, Economic Development, you know, the city, the county, and, and many of the the guests on the podcast have been those kinds of people, right? But on the inside of it, you know, having many of our team members are volunteers. And I think the nature of a small community is that you — it is very tight-knit because you're working and you have your professional hats, but you also have your volunteer hats. And that could be things that you're doing, you know, like Shannon serving in the school board, or could be, you know, volunteering to, to be a mentor. Like, they could think you were doing a lunch.

S**Shannon Reese** 18:10

Oh, yeah, we both had lunch buddies today. We had lunch buddies. It's a program that the United Way puts on, and we go and have lunch with the first graders. Third. Third graders. Wow. At the area schools.

J**Jason Duff** 18:21

But I think that's a hallmark that getting involved in your community and identifying those community partners. And it's kind of a two-way street, like the learning that you have going in. I mean, you're very sometimes serving as a volunteer on a board, it can be a very new experience. And maybe speak a little bit, Shannon, particularly for you, um, being on the VB Council or serving on a school board, like, what, what have you learned as a new board member? And now you're a seasoned board member, you can no longer say that you're new, you've been on some of these organizations for a number of years.

S**Shannon Reese** 18:54

Yeah, so I mean, I joined the Visitors Bureau Council back 5 years ago when I started, and it was the same thing, a weekly meeting, that we just, we sat around and we talked about all of these ideas that we wanted to do and we would have, you know, people in and out. So from there, you know, that was very consistent. I didn't miss a meeting and I fell in love with that. Then I got obviously more involved in the downtown and with Small Nation and the chamber had reached out and asked if I would be a chamber board member. And I have been on the chamber board now for 6 years, which is crazy to even think about. But that was my first really interaction of being on a board and being with other community leaders, and, and I mean, I had so much to learn. So it was from the chamber board that I, I learned so much, and then I'm now— this is going into my third year with the, with the school board, and that in itself is totally different than a chamber board that I sit on, but equally an exciting and fun experience, but a whole new realm of rules and things that I needed to learn. So I really made the commitment for, for both of these boards because they were very important to me, and I looked at the people that were on these boards as mentors. So when I decided to make the commitment to do it, I was, I was all in. I was, I was going to commit to every ribbon cutting, any, everything that I could go to. And same with the, the school board. I, you know, attended classes and I attended the meetings even before I got sworn in so I could just learn and absorb. But the more that, for me specifically, that I like serve on these and volunteer, like, I just, I love it more and more.

J**Jason Duff** 20:39

Yeah. And I think your dedication to it shows. I mean, you're everywhere at every big event, and I think people recognize that, and people know that you're a person that can get things done, which is really cool. So, I mean, what would you give, what advice would you give to someone who's like,, you know, trying to get more involved, doesn't know where to start. Maybe, you know, they, they have something they believe that they can share with their community through serving on boards. Like, where do you even start getting involved?

S**Shannon Reese** 21:06

Like, I was that person. I truly was. Like, I wanted to be that, uh, how do I get involved in, in, in, into the know and, and figure out like what I can do? And I was, uh, equally putting so much pressure on myself when in fact all I needed to do was just just do it. And then once I went to a meeting or once I, you know, made a connection with someone and just asked questions and learned and absorbed and, you know, Jason, he's very good at teaching us this, but like each person that I am introduced to or I meet or sit down and talk with that I pull something from them and then they turn around and be a mentor, you know, to me that I equally hope that like someday I can give back in that manner as well. My— just, just do it.

J**Jason Duff** 21:50

Just go out. A big part of life is just showing up, and sometimes that takes courage because, um, I mean, today was First Thursday's Coffee, and this is a big event that's kind of driven by our local Chamber of Commerce. But, um, it's a really great mix of people that show up, grab a cup of coffee, and everyone gets a chance to introduce themselves and give a shout out or share a different lead or referral that they're looking for or something that's going on in the business. But there's a lot of new faces that show up to that, and it's scary sometimes.

A**Anna Loudon** 22:28

There's probably— I mean, I'm sure it was part of their New Year's resolution to show up, but there are probably 10, 10 new people just there today.

J**Jason Duff** 22:38

Wow.

S**Shannon Reese** 22:39

But from that, like, what they gain from that is just going to be— I mean, not just what they— what the 2 or the 10 new people gained, but like what the original 40 people that go every time or the original 50 people, like what they gained from just the 10 new people that were there. So it's crazy how it snowballs and just, yeah, it's amazing.

J**Jason Duff** 22:58

Yeah, super cool. I'm going to kind of ask a little bit more about the kind of the setup here in Logan County, but you had mentioned that the VB is under the umbrella of the chamber. Is there, are there any other organizations? And I know there are, but for the listeners, like what else is under the umbrella of the chamber and how does that also play into everything that's happening here in Logan County?

A

Anna Louden 23:22

Well, currently this year for the 2023 year, we did have a downtown director that served as the director of the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership. Yep. So that was our other umbrella under the chamber this year. Things are kind of turning for 2024, so not sure about that, but we definitely like to gain that umbrella back this year or some part of that. Sure. But yeah, kind of serving with that and along with the Visitors Bureau, it's very important to me to be able to attend all of the other areas as well. So West Liberty has a West Liberty Business Association. Lakeview has Lakeview Business Association. So just being able to attend those and play a same part, even though I'm in Bellefontaine and it's really easy to give that more attention than the others, it's very important that I give equal attention to all of the different organizations in our area. So sure, even though that is another umbrella of the chamber, I still consider the other ones kind of a little bit too. Sure.

J

Jason Duff 24:23

Yeah, absolutely. And I think a lot of people, they just don't understand that structure. That's why I want to kind of talk about it on the podcast. So I appreciate you sharing that. But what kind of events— I mean, again, I'm familiar with Downtown Bellefontaine specifically, but what kind of things does, does that organization do And yeah, let's start with that and we'll go from there.

A

Anna Louden 24:42

So such as Lakeview and West Liberty. Lakeview does something similar to Bellefontaine with Four Thursdays. So I help kind of plan and give them ideas to help with that. I mean, even taking away things I learned from being involved with downtown Bellefontaine, I can take that to Lakeview Business Group and that could be something that could really evolve their events to make them better. West Liberty Business Association does just, I would say, monthly, especially in the summer, but they have some very unique ones. They have a Christmas tour of homes, so they have 6 houses in West Liberty that you can go walk through that are all decorated for Christmas. They do a summer garden tour, so getting to see different gardens around West— just more so unique events, which those are important to bring also to Bellefontaine or Lakeview. So that— those are some of like the cool things I get to see are the different planning of the events. I'm not overall the leader of those, but getting to play a piece in each of them.

J

Jason Duff 25:44

And just to share, we— events are so essential, uh, for economic development. And also, if your town is in that process of trying to bring, um, new energy and new life, you know, organizing a, a walking tour or, um, a— we— one project that we collaborated with the Visitors Bureau this past year was a loft and hidden spaces tour. And Small Nation worked to choose a date. We identified properties in the downtown that made sense and collaborated with Anna's group and also the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership to bring people to buy tickets to tour vacant, many of them were vacant, rundown, empty properties. And I know what you're thinking. Why would anyone pay money to look at a vacant, rundown, empty building?

S

Shannon Reese 26:36

I said that.

J**Jason Duff** 26:38

Okay, can we just call a spade a spade? Maybe someone in our office did say that. But what— and what we have done, and I encourage people, and we talk about this in the podcast, but rip and duplicate is really just good research and development. So we had seen other successful communities. I mean, I'll give Marianne, Ohio, a shout out. 20 years ago, I did a loft and hidden spaces tour and we looked at some empty spaces in Marianne, and then I saw some completed spaces. And that is really what gave me the courage and inspired me that we need to do loft apartments above the storefronts in downtown Bellefontaine, because Marianne— Lois Fisher, she owned and lived in one of these beautiful loft apartments and she opened it up for people to come see it. And that inspired me to say, I think this could work here. Mm-hmm. You had mentioned the first— I mean, here in Bellefontaine's First Fridays, or, you know, the— I've seen a lot of communities doing these events. So I guess my question is kind of to all three of you is how do you get businesses in the area involved? I know, like, you know, so like Small Nation will sponsor one of the events for like one of the months and other businesses do the same kind of thing. How are you guys staying so engaged with these businesses that they want to come out and do these events?

A**Anna Loudon** 27:58

I think the businesses are able to see how the event might not impact them the most, but over time, people seeing that, that business being involved, it's going to bring people back. Oh, I had a conversation with them at the First Fridays event. I'm going to go check that back out. Stuff like that, I think, is a big deal to these businesses, especially here in downtown. They might not be the focus of the event, but being able to get people to remember that business's name or learn more about what they do is a huge deal.

J**Jason Duff** 28:33

Yeah.

S**Shannon Reese** 28:34

I think one of the— it's a story I remember from Brewfest a couple years ago that it was a husband and wife that had come and they were having so much fun, but the husband stopped and talked to us. I don't know if you remember. And he was like, this is the most expensive event. I, I spend money on this ticket, but my wife and I walked out of here with \$600 worth of furniture, and we're like, what? So like, it was a couple that was not from Bellefontaine. I don't even think that they were from the county, and they came and did this event with us, and they were in and out of 21 different stores and shops in our downtown and then spent real actual money in the downtown as well for an event that, that was put on. And if they wouldn't have come, they wouldn't have known.

J**Jason Duff** 29:14

Yeah, well, and just to share some ideas with what we've learned with Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership, First Fridays Bellefontaine, it is really kind of planning out your schedules far in advance. And what I like about when you select a First Thursdays or First Fridays, it's the consistency of it. I wonder what day it's on. Well, and again, in the— in a busy world with families and with life, like everything, it's It's hard to schedule stuff. So that is kind of one thing that we always share in advice is provide consistency. The second thing would be is plan your calendar out as far in advance as possible, and that way in your marketing, when you're designing posters or a website or doing email blasts, it's the repetitiveness of people seeing that event many, many times over and cross-posting and cross-promoting through as many different websites and social platforms. So those are a big thing. And some of the biggest hits that I have seen in my, you know, 15, 20 years here in downtown Bellefontaine, some of the highlights that we've had of success is I would say one of the largest events is the Chocolate Walk, because who doesn't love chocolate? So being able to purchase a ticket, get an empty box, and then having individual chocolates and chocolate things to taste and eat or to pack up in your box to take home with you by the end of the night. If you have covered 20 or 25 or 30 different businesses, you actually get a really great value. Plus it's also a lot of fun. So I'll just highlight that event. Um, the Pumpkin Walk is another great event. It kind of started out as like, everyone wear your trick-or-treat costumes and walk downtown, and then involving the businesses in decorating, and then bringing the element of actually shutting the streets down and all the inflatables. Like, you've watched that event change. What are your— some of your favorites about that event?

S**Shannon Reese** 31:05

It's just like blown up into an event in itself. Like, it's not anymore just a trick-or-treat. Like, it is a full-blown, like, activity on 4 different streets, right? And I mean, you can come down and you can get your food, you can fill your kids' bellies, you can get trick-or-treat out of the way, you can get amazing pictures taken. Like, name me, show me another place where you can go in just one-stop shop for everything. And it's not just for the littles, and it's not just for the teenagers, and it may not even be for kids at all. Like, It is for everyone. Yeah, it's beautiful.

J**Jason Duff** 31:42

All right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. Tired of gyms not being open when you want to work out? Then check out the region's best 24-hour fitness center, Anytime Fitness, in downtown Bellefontaine. They have all the equipment you need and the best trainers and coaches to help you get in the best shape of your life. It's truly your one-stop shop for fitness. Anytime Fitness is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Brew Fountain is voted best beer bar in Ohio. Come visit their award-winning team in downtown Bellefontaine for fresh local craft beer, soups, salads, sandwiches, wine on tap, and handcrafted cocktails. And they're always available to cater your next event with their box lunches and platters. Cheers to Small Nation. I think the, the summer events too, the other thing that I've learned is it's really knowing kind of your audience. And I say a lot of our events are very family friendly here in town. But I want to applaud like volunteers and even people like Anna's office and the work that Shannon does. There was a suggestion brought up by the DBP, let's close the street down and let's put a zip line in the middle of downtown Bothell. So you imagine when our local leaders and folks in charge of safety heard that, was that an easy conversation, Anna?

A**Anna Louden** 32:56

I wasn't there for the original one. But I will say, every time I use that photo on marketing and people see it, they're like, there's a zipline downtown?

J**Jason Duff** 33:06

Powerful. And it's just that reminder that your community can do big and bold things. And I will share, Shannon and our team is doing a Christmas debrief procedure plan. What do you call your Christmas committee?

S**Shannon Reese** 33:21

Oh, the Christmas committee.

J**Jason Duff** 33:24

The Christmas committee. Here's the thing, we are creating binders, we're creating procedures, we're identifying where decorations get installed, when they get installed, and we're actually dreaming bigger in terms of planning next year. I mean, things that are coming around in conversations are, can we find a place to put that iceless skating rink in town? You know, what can we do to take, um, some of the events, you know, to make them bigger? And I just want to share two ideas that I am borrowing from other communities.

S**Shannon Reese** 33:55

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 33:55

Um, one, uh, big one is doing an ugly, ugly Christmas sweater bar crawl. Um, recently saw some marketing around this. Um, it was done in Bridge Park in Dublin. I happened to just show up on a random night. I did not have my ugly Christmas sweater on. He did.

S**Shannon Reese** 34:12

It was like what he wore to work that day.

J**Jason Duff** 34:14

I was really— he wasn't aware that it was ugly. I was really unprepared, but that kind of I took a lot of photos. I creeped people out because I was taking photos of them. They're like, who is this guy? But I'm known for that. Yeah, I take photos of everything. So, but we're putting that in our— we're putting that in our swipe file to prepare for next year. Another one that I want to give a shout out for is we hosted from Crooked Can Brewing. We hosted the owners, Rob, and I'm going blank right now. Why am I going blank? I want to say Megan. I don't know. Megan.

A**Anna Louden** 34:49

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 34:49

Okay. Rob and Megan from Crooked Can. They are awesome. They did this year a New Year's Eve. Yep. I think there was 1,000 kids that came to the brewery with their parents because they did a ball drop at noon, balloon drop with the kids, kids bingo, gave the kids sparkling grape juice and had their own New Year's Eve party at noon. Now, when you bring kids and families and your town has a great pizza shop, great ice cream shop, a toy store, what do you think that does from an economic development standpoint? Makes everything explode. And these are the kind of things that building a swipe file of working with your committee, working with volunteers. In the beginning, you may say, you might hear this, we don't have a tourism bureau. We don't have a full-time director like Anna. Or oversight with working with a council like Shannon. But here's where you can start. Start with one event. And I guess you guys hearing that, what would you share for people that just want to get started to put their town on the map or to host an event?

S**Shannon Reese** 36:01

I can appreciate in being able to share with other communities, whether it be West Liberty or Lakeview or even Indian Lake, or any other community, like we can share, rip and duplicate, R&D, the stuff that we have learned and the stuff that is happening here in Bellefontaine. Like, no, no, no, don't do that. We tried it and this was a total flop. But because we didn't, or because we did do that, you can do this and you will have like far better. So I think like being able to pull tips and tricks and just little things that we have already done and experienced ourselves and like sharing all of that information, especially with these other towns and communities within the county, is just huge and equally gives them the confidence to like do that. Like it's a big deal like trying to put on an event. Like West Liberty, like Anna said, is a prime example. Like they started their Spooktacular, you know, several years ago to be such a just an event within the downtown and now it has grown into something huge and with bigger dreams and plans to make it even bigger. So like same with Lakeview. You know, Brenda, she has worked tirelessly to start like this group and the way that they give back to like the school and the community itself. I mean, it's huge.

J**Jason Duff** 37:15

Yeah. Can you speak to funding? So let's say someone that's listening in the beginning, they have no idea where and how to get money to fund some of these event ideas. What are different ways and revenue sources that you can get funding for events?

A**Anna Loudon** 37:32

I mean, being involved with your community partners is huge. Being able to express what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how it's going to be successful and help everyone is huge as well. So being able to share goals, plans, what you want it to be— I mean, just get your community partners to buy in, the businesses to buy in and get involved with you. Involve the businesses, involve everyone you can in your event to get them involved and get people excited.

J**Jason Duff** 38:00

So once they're involved, what is sponsorship? What does that kind of mean and how do you get sponsors?

S**Shannon Reese** 38:10

I mean, for us specifically at the Visitors Bureau, like we help fund and sponsor like a lot of the other smaller communities in the town. But with that, for, you know, for the Visitors Bureau to hand over, you know, a check or a certain amount of money, it is very easy for us to do that when we can see the return on what it does to that community because again, a win for West Liberty is a win for us and a win for us is a huge win for Indian Lake area. So to be able to sponsor, you know, these small businesses and these groups and see what it does to not just their community but the county as a whole, I think is honestly a no-brainer.

J**Jason Duff** 38:50

And I think, you know, we're going to talk about how the Logan County Visitors Bureau is funded,. But I think in the beginning, for those that may listen, sometimes it's just finding 4 or 5 people. I look, you know, one of our team members, Ann Donnelly in Ada, was kind of listening to the community, and there was not anywhere really in Ada or Hardin County to see fireworks. And so a lot of people were driving to Indian Lake or further to see fireworks. So she, you know, called around to 5 businesses and just made the ask. The ask was like, I'm trying to raise \$8,000 to bring the fireworks company here. I think she shared with me, she's very intimidated to make those calls. But then when people heard about what the idea was and how they could be a part of it, they were like, yes, I would love to fund this. That actually funding pot has really grown over the last few years, and Ada does have a fireworks show. But what's unique about once you get your organization, your committee, your structure together, can you speak, Anna, a little bit about how your organization is funded?

A**Anna Louden** 39:58

Yeah, so the visitors bureau is funded through county bed tax dollars. Currently, we have two hotels here in Logan County. So we have a Super 8 and a Comfort Inn, and we collect bed tax dollars from those hotels. So when a traveler comes in, they pay a bed tax that is later dispersed to the visitors bureau and the city of Bellefontaine. So that's kind of what helps fund the entire organization.

J**Jason Duff** 40:23

And can you give us some round numbers? What kind of money does that bring in annually?

A**Anna Louden** 40:27

So we have a little bit over a \$100,000 budget. So that goes countywide. So even though the two hotels are in Bellefontaine, those dollars are going to Indian Lake. They're going to West Liberty. They're coming to Bellefontaine, but those dollars are spent countywide.

J**Jason Duff** 40:47

Super cool. So you see how important, um, when people stay— and that kind of goes back to the, the driver of the tourism industry— when people stay, not only are they eating and, and, and seeing the attractions, spending money by shopping, but a part of their hotel bill is a tax. And the tax then funds more investment in tourism and economic development. And particularly here in Logan County, You're excited about some new news about the additional hotels. Do you want to share what's coming?

S**Shannon Reese** 41:18

Yes, two of them. So as an Indian Lake native, we've been hearing the hotel talk for—

J**Jason Duff** 41:24

Oh, a long time.

S**Shannon Reese** 41:25

I mean, I know I'm only 22 years old, but we've been hearing it for so long. And the elevator is in at Indian Lake now, and we've broke ground, you know, at Bellefontaine, a hotel over by the hospital. So to be able to like see, you know, all of the hard work that the community leaders, and I'm not just Bellefontaine, but throughout the entire county, it goes back to, you know, like sitting on the chamber board, you know, like we sit in these meetings monthly of people, community leaders throughout the entire county, and it's stuff that we talk about. Like, so to see these things come to fruition is just, I mean, it's huge.

J**Jason Duff** 42:02

So two new cobblestone hotels, and hopefully with those additional 100 or so plus beds, like that's going to generate more revenue. So that's really exciting. The other thing that's been trending is we hosted Jesse Lear on the podcast talking about Epicurean Properties and Airbnbs. And this is something that does generate some, some conversation about should we tax Airbnbs? And I know that's something that your organizations are working on now too. Do you want to share anything about that legislation?

A**Anna Loudon** 42:34

Yeah. So currently We are looking to possibly start a bed tax on one bedroom. So the current legislation is 5 bedrooms and up, which is why it includes the hotels. We would like the legislation to change to 1 bedrooms to include 180 Airbnbs in Logan County. That's the last time I checked. We have 180. Wow. Um, around Bull Fountain, West Liberty, Indian Lake, and just overall county. So it's pretty cool.

J**Jason Duff** 43:01

And some of the folks that I have spoke to, of course, when you hear the word tax like that can generate some people to be concerned. But I'll just share, I personally have talked to a lot of the Airbnb operators and investors and they're in favor of it because they want to see more investments made in growing and building tourism ecosystem here because they see that small amount of money that their guests would pay as being an investment in their business long term.

A**Anna Loudon** 43:28

Yeah, so it's kind of also, it's everyone else's model. We're kind of behind on this as Logan County that we aren't collecting this. It's completely normal. Places like Hawking County, they don't have very many hotels at all. So I've connected with them on this subject. And I mean, they've boomed from just having the short-term rental bed tax, which is insane. So that's kind of the model we're trying to reciprocate here and be able to be a true tourism destination in that way.

J**Jason Duff** 44:02

Why does history matter and how does that relate to tourism?

S**Shannon Reese** 44:07

Oh well, because there are a lot of people in this world that are like you that just thrive off of history and want to know more and learn more. And it goes back to one of the earlier things that you said, that, um, there's something in your town that is weird or unique, and it's being able to pinpoint what that is. And that is a driver. And it's just that. It's just unique because that one unique thing that we have here is not going to be anywhere else in the US. It's unique to here. As far as history goes, I mean, history was made, and here we are making it again.

J**Jason Duff** 44:41

So you on our team, we started with the idea of doing a better job of storytelling. Each individual property that had been revitalized and why that property was significant. Tell us about the project that you pulled together with our marketing team at Small Nation and then how we involved more community partners in that.

S**Shannon Reese** 45:00

Yeah, so the historic walking tour, you know, we create, we already had, you know, the history was already here, the building stock was already here. So why not pull out of those? If the walls could speak, this was a really good chance for them to do that. So we created this historic walking tour. There's maybe 11, 15 different buildings. For now. For now. Yeah. Phase 2 to come. But 11, 15 buildings that you can walk to and recognize this beautiful, like, bronze plaque that is so heavy. But you can read the history on what the building used to be and then what it— obviously you can see what it is now. But that is an activity that people can do and come from all over. To see if we're waiting for a table at Brew Fountain or a table at 600. Like, this is an activity that people can do while they wait and then learn about the history and what the buildings were, the people that were here, the building of the plane of the— at 600, the Wright Brothers, right?

J**Jason Duff** 45:58

Yeah. Like, what?

A**Anna Loudon** 46:00

Who would have known? Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 46:01

There's all these, like, connections. And the historic walking tour was recognized this year, or so this past year in 2022, as the best placemaking project by Heritage Ohio., which is one of our state's premier preservation organizations. And again, that just shows you these examples of working together when you have people in town. What are the ideas and things that you can encourage them to do? We have a beautiful historic history museum at the Logan County Museum and the Orr Mansion, and it's actually got a transportation focus. So, you know, random cool things about Bellefontaine is if you're a Ghostbusters fan, the Miller Meteor Hurst Company, um, was actually based here. So the Ekno One was, uh, built here in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Nerd. I know. Like, and again, you seeing some of that history and tie it together, and then Honda with its building its automotive manufacturing here, you get to see in this beautiful roundhouse the history of the railroad, how airplanes, you know, were a big part of our town's history, and then, uh, Hearst to all the advanced motorcycles and vehicles that Honda make today. And that is something that people will drive hours to come see and experience and do.

S**Shannon Reese** 47:17

And they totally should because it is amazing.

A**Anna Louden** 47:21

Yeah.

S**Shannon Reese** 47:21

It's one of a kind. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 47:22

Well, I mean, I appreciate all three of you kind of sharing, you know, to our listeners, if you don't walk away from this episode with any ideas, that's on you. I mean, like, I, you know, I think Logan County is doing a lot of really cool things and I'm glad you guys took the time to share some of those. So I hope you're able to pull from that, but then also just learn that common practice of looking to other communities for R&D, right? Rip and duplicate for your research and development. You know, we shared ideas around funding and the history and, you know, a lot of events that we're doing here. And you see a lot of other communities doing cool things as well. Like, I don't want to make it sound like we're the only ones doing cool things, but we do— like, a lot of people are looking to us because things are working here. Like, that's why we mentioned it. That's why we have a podcast talking about this stuff. But, and I know you have a few other like projects that you're excited about outside of events and things like that that you were able to accomplish in your role. Maybe share some of those ideas that have gone well for Logan County.

A**Anna Louden** 48:18

Well, our most recent project that we finished up with collaboration from the Small Nation team and DBP in the city, we did a kiosk project that shows all of the different unique and places to go in the community. So we placed 2 in Bellefontaine, 2 at Indian Lake and 2 in West Liberty, um, and those feature the specific places in that area. And then on the flip side of them, it features countywide things, so countywide attractions, countywide events, and just— it's the perfect piece for a tourist to go up to and find everything they need to know about.

J**Jason Duff** 48:55

They look great, just to share.

S**Shannon Reese** 48:56

They are beautiful.

J**Jason Duff** 48:57

And, and every community should have something like this. Um, I was inspired a few years ago with Matt Stogler when he was the director of tourism down at Darke County. And I'll be honest, we kind of ripped and duplicated some of the things that they were doing well down here, and it just made them a lot better and a lot cooler.

A**Anna Louden** 49:15

Yeah. We already had another CVB reach out and ask us for more details. So yeah, it's another rip and duplicate somewhere else.

S**Shannon Reese** 49:22

I mean, how often do you remember when people would go to malls and like you would have to like, you are here, pinpoint, and then you wanted to like—

J**Jason Duff** 49:29

Or airports, like people are trained to do it. Yeah.

S**Shannon Reese** 49:32

Kings Island, Cedar Point, wherever you go, like, you go to that kiosk and you're like, look, like, okay, I'm here, what else can I do? Like, this was the perfect thing.

J**Jason Duff** 49:40

Yeah, great job with that. What else?

A

Anna Louden 49:42

Some of our most unique things are our trails. So currently we do the Ice Cream Trail, which featured 13 stops. That runs over the summer. It featured 13 stops around the entire county. So families, couples, friends went around to all 13 shops in Logan County, got their ice cream cone, went to the next one, and then they turned that passport back into a prize. But that was really cool to get to see the families come in and get their prize and see that they, they're like, "I've never heard of this place. It was my favorite." And just getting people to go outside of their favorite ice cream place or getting them to see what else Indian Lake has or what West Liberty has. So That was a really good one. And then currently we're running the Logan County Coffee Trail. So that features our 6 coffee shops around Logan County. And it's the same ideas, really just trying to get people even in our area to learn what all Logan County has. And it obviously brings people in to check out our unique shops.

S

Shannon Reese 50:44

I promise you though that our council meetings every month, we do more than just talk about food.

J

Jason Duff 50:50

I promise you. Sure. Yeah, I believe you. Well, and I just want to double down on the passport idea. So for those of you that might be new to that, like actually giving a physical thing that they can have a punch card and then turn it in at the end and get something or be recognized for something. I mean, every downtown event that they do those passports, they work. They work. So if you're kind of new to that concept, Try it out. I really think it's a smart investment.

A

Anna Louden 51:21

I think it's also great because I know there's also the digital option or the paper option. I vote paper option.

S

Shannon Reese 51:28

All day long.

J

Jason Duff 51:29

To have that in your hand.

A

Anna Louden 51:30

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 51:30

Cool. Well, again, thank you for sharing all those ideas. And I really hope someone walks away and starts to implement those things. And I would say, too, the thing you notice is it's not any one of these people sitting here. It's them all working together. So for those who are feeling alone or feeling that they're just starting out don't know where to go, find, find your Shannon, find your Anna, you know, and double down, partner with your businesses and make something happen. Right. Kind of like the point you were doing. You just kind of have to go out and have the initiative and do it, which is super cool. So yeah, thank you for just sharing all of those things that you have done. I'm going to move and move us into just like kind of a quick fun show segment here. Just rapid fire Q&A. You guys are both obviously very well known in the, in the community. So I think this would be kind of fun, but Anna, I'll start with you. What would you be doing if you weren't doing the work you were doing today?

A**Anna Loudon** 52:23

I would be sewing up dog bandanas and making my dog an influencer.

J**Jason Duff** 52:29

Mm. So funny you should mention that. Quick pause on that. So I just want to give a big shout out. Anna is also a small business owner. Yes. And we celebrate entrepreneurs and small business owners. But Nana's Bandanas, tell us about that business.

A**Anna Loudon** 52:43

So it started during COVID when I was sent home from college. My grandma and I and my dog, we were sewing these up and I was like, I think we could sell these. I immediately got a no from my grandma. And I was like, no, I'm making the account right now. And it just kind of blew up.

J**Jason Duff** 53:02

I mean, Instagram's where you started, right?

A**Anna Loudon** 53:04

Yes. I mean, I still am just on Instagram and Facebook and I, my main audience is a service dog organization that trains and places service dogs with people in need. And there's a lot of college students involved in that program. So that's kind of where I got my start because I was involved with that program. So yeah, it's kind of taken off. And now that I'm here, more people from here are learning about it and I'm kind of growing my audience outside of the college, the college situation. So it's been pretty cool.

J**Jason Duff** 53:34

Yeah. Congratulations. Thank you. Yeah. Next question is, what is your favorite hobby outside of sewing?

A**Anna Loudon** 53:41

My favorite hobby is probably taking pictures and walking with my dog Andy. Oh, and taking her to dog-friendly places like Joann's to get material for the bandanas.

J

Jason Duff 53:56

Wow. Yeah. And then, uh, last question is, what is your favorite place to vacation?

A

Anna Louden 54:01

Oh, my favorite place to vacation— somewhere I've never been before, so a new warm. Yeah, most likely a place that I have never been where I get to experience somewhere else.

J

Jason Duff 54:15

Cool. Awesome. Thank you. All right, Shannon, your turn. What would you be doing if you weren't doing the work that you're doing today?

S

Shannon Reese 54:20

You mean to tell me these are the same questions?

J

Jason Duff 54:22

I could have been like, yeah, that's actually why I teed you up second. I figured you would appreciate hearing the question.

S

Shannon Reese 54:28

Well, I wasn't prepared.

J

Jason Duff 54:31

She loves rapid fire questions.

A

Anna Louden 54:32

Yeah.

S

Shannon Reese 54:32

What's the question?

J

Jason Duff 54:33

What would you be doing if you weren't doing your, like, current job?

S

Shannon Reese 54:36

Oh, um, so I've recently just dabbled into the world of politics, and I'm strangely enough falling in love with it. So, um, but maybe something political, I don't know.

J

Jason Duff 54:48

Yeah, yeah, super cool. Uh, what is your favorite hobby? How do you de-stress from work?

S

Shannon Reese 54:54

That's allowed.

J**Jason Duff** 54:55

That's allowed. We're always working.

A**Anna Louden** 54:58

Um, hanging out with me.

S**Shannon Reese** 55:00

It is. I, I love quality time with Anna Banana. I have two very active boys, so obviously my hobbies consist of whatever they are doing at that time.

J**Jason Duff** 55:11

Yeah, very cool. And then what is your favorite place to vacation?

S**Shannon Reese** 55:15

Oh, not that I want to take Anna's because I'm going to, because it was a really good answer. Like someplace I've never been, but give me a beach and give me a cocktail.

J**Jason Duff** 55:23

Yep, yep.

S**Shannon Reese** 55:24

One vacation and a Busch Light and I'm set.

J**Jason Duff** 55:27

I love her definition of a cocktail, by the way. Yeah, it doesn't ask for much there. Very cool. Well, thank you guys for, you know, coming on the show and sharing what you have to offer. And appreciate the work that you do in, you know, every week. And I feel like sometimes it doesn't, doesn't get seen all the time. So we wanted to kind of highlight the work that you guys are doing. So just to wrap up, we over the last 2 weeks have been doing a debrief on 2022, and this has been an all-time record year for most of our small business owners. When it comes to their retail sales and also for our restaurants. Yeah. And a lot of that would not be possible without the work and the efforts of the planning the events and bringing other outside visitors to come shop and eat and spend money here. So a big celebrate to you. And on that note, I am giving you some gifts and we're debuting this on the Small Nation podcast. This is our Small Nation wine that happens to be produced and bottled by a local winery. Which is Ravenhurst Champagne Cellars. They're in Mount Victory, Ohio. Great— not sponsored— Ohio winery. Yeah, great Ohio winery. But I love this, this line, and this is something I want to share with everyone listening. With this bottle— I mean this for you guys too— with this bottle, we celebrate you, the planner, the dreamer, the community leader, the hardworking small business entrepreneur. Your continued drive and determination are why small towns across the country are rising and transforming. As one region gains strength, others will follow. Together, we can change the nation one small town at a time. So celebrate. Cheers to you.

A

Anna Louden 57:08

So you can take that to Old Field Beach.

E

Ethan DeLeon 57:10

Yes. Score. Thanks for tuning in on this episode of the Small Nation Podcast.

E

Ethan DeLeon 57:14

We hope that conversation proved valuable to you, and if you enjoyed it, be sure to share the episode and follow the show on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or your favorite podcasting platform. You can also subscribe to the Small Nation YouTube channel if you prefer to watch your episodes. Follow Small Nation on social media, and we'll see you in the next episode.