

Episode 68

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Tracie Sanchez, Ethan DeLeon

T

Tracie Sanchez 00:00

For such a long time, people, especially in Lima— now maybe this is everywhere, but here especially— we've talked about things forever.

J

Jason Duff 00:07

Yeah.

T

Tracie Sanchez 00:07

And it's really becoming doers. And I think once they started seeing that it was actually going to happen, it was just same with the Rhodes State College. Everybody thought, you know, for years, that'll never happen. The Bora Center will never— and when it did, people started believing.

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:29

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 provide value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon, and today we are in the Central District in downtown Lima, Ohio with the founder of CEO— founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we are thrilled to be hosting a conversation with local entrepreneur and developer Tracy Sanchez. Welcome, Tracy.

T

Tracie Sanchez 01:02

Thank you. Thank you for having me, Tracy.

J

Jason Duff 01:04

It's great to be here. As we were driving to Lima, Ohio today, it is a beautiful day. Yeah, number one, the sun is out. And driving into town, if you've not been to Lima, there are some very iconic special businesses here. Yep. And one of them happens to be Kewpie Hamburgers. Oh, come on.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 01:23

Amen.

J**Jason Duff** 01:23

If you have not had a Kewpie hamburger, And what heart— I want to get it right. What's the— the hamburger with a pickle on top makes the heart go flippity flop. So the Shutt family, for those of you that have never been, like, you drive into town and you do see this naked baby that says hamburgers underneath it. And then you walk inside and the people are so nice there. They smile at you. You feel welcome. And there's not a very— it's not fancy kiosk with. Right. Lots of computer systems. Old-time diner, white outfits with the hats.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 02:00

A lot of tenure employees.

J**Jason Duff** 02:02

Great. And, and, and, and I would, you know, not only is the food really good, but when you learn the story of the Schutt family and, you know, how they have given so many people in the community their first job opportunity, or like you said, tenure, some of their employees have been there for 30, 40, 50 years. And the other thing that I am always inspired by is meeting people like you, Tracy, and people like the Schutts. Is the way that they give back to the community. And, you know, the Schutts, for me, going to school at Ohio Northern, getting involved in the arts here in Lima, they would generously fund and create the ONU Holiday Spectacular, which is this amazing New York-style, think Rocket kind of show that happens here at the Civic Center in Lima. And that wouldn't have been possible if it wasn't for the Schutt family kind of coming together to do that.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 02:57

Absolutely. They're big, big supporters of the arts and music and those kind of things. So they're iconic, just beautiful people. Like you said, if you know that family, they're just very, very giving and they do burgers right.

J**Jason Duff** 03:11

Yeah, exactly. That's great. Yeah. Get a malt too, right? And the malt.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 03:15

Burger malt.

J**Jason Duff** 03:16

Well, that kind of leads to to you and, and your family. And, uh, you've got a lot of ties and history to the Lima area as well. Tell us a little bit about that.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 03:25

I do. I was born and raised in Lima, Ohio, went to Bath School, um, had a family business. My mother and father started a business. Um, I always wanted to be a schoolteacher, so, um, you know, went to school for that for a little bit, but the business started growing rather quickly. Left school, went back and worked for the family business, and have been at Lima Pallet for 42 years now, probably going on 43.

J**Jason Duff** 03:45

And when people think of pallets, you know, shipping and logistics all around the world, there's a darn good chance that a pallet is involved in that operation somewhere.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 03:55

Absolutely. So our pallets go all over the world. We have a little niche that a lot of pallet companies don't, and that's that we can heat treat what we do, which you hear about that ash borer bug going across state lines or into other countries. So we actually can treat for that. So we are government regulated. They come in, audit our books on a monthly basis, which a lot of people don't want to deal with. Yeah, right. But we do. And it's, it's well worth it. So that helps us. Export a lot of things, whether it's going to China or Australia or Mexico or Canada or wherever it may go.

J**Jason Duff** 04:26

Mm-hmm. Super cool. And your parents founded the company?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 04:29

They did. You know, it was, it was kind of odd. My dad was a salesman, my mom was a stay-at-home mom, and he had a friend that had worked at a warehouse, and they were having a few beers one night, and there was a need. You know, once again, it boils down to you have to find that need that a customer wants. Um, He didn't own his own business, he was a salesman, but he went, they grabbed a couple of these pallets, tore them apart. He says, well, how hard is that? He put a couple nails in it and fixed it. He's like, well, I'd be king, you know, if I can save my company a bunch of money. Right now we're throwing them in dumpsters, you know, when they're broke. If you could fix them, you know, we're buying these all new. If I could get even back at half price, I'm the king of the company, you know, I'm saving my company a ton of money. So really, that's how Land of Pallet was born. It started with one company, um To this day, we really don't have a salesman on the road. My son-in-law does internal sales. We'll throw him out on the road when we need to, but most of it's been by word of mouth that the company has built over all these years.

J**Jason Duff** 05:22

Wow. And growing up in this area, you know, Lima Pallet Company, like that's a very reputable name and, you know, it's been around for a long time. But you were telling me on our conversation before the show here, like some of the cool things that you've begun to implement with your time, you know, running the business. So can you tell us a little bit about some of that? Sure.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 05:42

You know, being that I always wanted to be a teacher, it was one of those things that we— our business is real close to the prison, Allen Corrections. And I had a friend that worked out there and they said, have you ever thought of hiring, you know, felons, people that are just about ready to get back into society? And at first I was like, I don't know about that. But it was kind of nice what I learned very, very quickly. They became the best employees that I could have because they never missed work. They wanted out. The bus would transport them there. They couldn't leave for lunch or for breaks. Never called in sick because they wanted out for that little bit of time. But what you— what I ended up finding out, that they became the best employees because you were willing to give them a second chance. And most of them, I always— when I go around and I speak, it's, you know, no one grows up saying, hey, I want to be a felon when I grow up. Yeah, right, right. You know, I could write a book about the stories that you hear about, you know, their childhood. And, you know, they were— while we were at school learning, you know, they were surviving.

J**Jason Duff** 06:36

They were—

T**Tracie Sanchez** 06:36

where's my next meal coming from or where my head's going to lay down? So when you get to know those people, and one of my biggest fears were a lot of them were from out of state. So you're thinking, "Wow, once they get out in one year, I've invested all this time and effort and money in them. They're gonna leave my company." Well, what you found out is no, they didn't wanna leave. They didn't wanna go back to those gangs or to the bad family issues that they had. They wanted to stay where they were because we treated them like family. So I really started investing in people. Yeah, you know, they're not a number. They were people. And it was rehabilitation. It was, you know, teaching them how to use a debit card and that, you know, cash is king and credit's important and all those things that once again we take for granted. And one of the things I found out, too, was that they couldn't get housing. You know, a lot of felons, you can't get an apartment.

J**Jason Duff** 07:24

A lot of times you get that rental application and that's usually one of the questions. And, you know, there's a lot of applications out there that that's a question that can disqualify you from things.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 07:35

Even from a job, I mean, if you've been a previous felon. So they became, once again, my biggest— yeah, you know, I was one of their biggest supporters. So, you know, I started buying up housing, paid cash for it. I don't charge them interest. We take it right out of their paycheck. But it was giving them pride, you know, making them feel a part of the community. Um, you know, that's kind of how, you know, that part of that teaching— and when you could make a, a person that's had a bad rap their whole life and you give them that second chance and they appreciate what you were doing and you can make a good citizen out of them. We started then a program that we would help them to give back. We would go work at the West Ohio Food Bank and we would hand out food boxes. Not always being on the receiving end, but the giving end then. That's what started, if you want to move into the Central District a little bit.

J**Jason Duff** 08:26

I was going to say real quick on that. As we were talking and I was hearing your story, the term social entrepreneurship came to mind. I went to college to study business and that we spent a lot of time talking about social entrepreneurship and this idea of, you know, solving these— I had a class called Wicked Problems, not wicked as in evil, but like very complicated, very human issues. And so I just appreciate the work that you're doing, you know, with that business specifically. And then, you know, I think there's an element of that even into, you know, the Central District and work that we're we're kind of here to talk about today. I think our audience will be very curious to hear more about Central District. Can you give a little lay of the land of what is the Central District, but then also some of the challenges that have, you know, as the economic cycles have changed in downtown Lima, some of the problems here?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 09:17

Yeah, sure. So to start with, in the Central District, just to give a little history of how this even developed, I was the president of Rotary and we had to build the Amphitheater. Rich Rudolph from Rudolph Foods was a classmate classmate of mine, so we were good friends. And he said, hey, you're going to be president this year. He says, we need to do something big in downtown Lima. We have Rhodes State College going downtown. He says, we need a green space downtown. So what started to be about a \$200,000 project when we started with Rotary, we started getting the arts involved and all these different people involved, and it grew to about a \$4 million project.

J**Jason Duff** 09:51

Wow.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 09:51

So we were raising a lot of money. Yeah, the state helped us out quite a bit. But during that whole adventure of trying to figure out where we were going to build this amphitheater, we picked the worst part of downtown Lima. So we had our square, and if you went to the north, you had some pretty nice restaurants and it was getting rebuilt. The east and the west was looking good, but the south quadrant of our downtown was nothing but rundown buildings, all boarded up, crime-ridden. People, you know, people just didn't want to come to this area. No one walked this area. It was just an ugly part of downtown Lima. So he said, This is where we're going to put it.

J**Jason Duff** 10:27

Which, by the way, took a lot of courage. It did. Can we just be honest?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 10:30

People thought we were crazy.

J**Jason Duff** 10:32

I was going to say, what was the reaction?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 10:33

Well, and even donors at first, you know, it was hard to like, you know, we're not going to invest, you know, why would we invest our money? There's no way that's going to fly. It was very, very negative. So, you know, we had a lot of obstacles.

J**Jason Duff** 10:45

And this is a, you know, very industrial part of the state. You know, you got a lot of railroads running through here, old steel mills and everything. And so a lot of blue-collar workers and just over time, just, you know, jobs were leaving and, and houses started to go vacant and population started going down, right? Yeah. And so, I mean, for listeners, if you've been listening for a while, you know that I'm originally from this area. And so like, I wasn't even allowed to really like be in, in South Lima like really at night, you know, growing up. Even if we were to visit a friend or something, like really, you know, my parents didn't really want me doing that there or doing anything down there when I was driving and things like that. So Yeah, that's— I can understand, you know, just for listeners, I guess, to understand the context of moving into the space. But today we are touring the Central District, which is very exciting, and congratulations on all the work that you've been doing so far. Super cool. But yeah, what— tell us a little bit about what this building is that we're recording in right now.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 11:44

Yeah, so, well, this whole block is part of the Central District, and what started out to be The reason that we even purchased this block, it started out with just myself and we purchased it on the pretense of we had this beautiful amphitheater going one block away and we didn't want these buildings to fall in the wrong hands. We had a ton of body shops and junkyards and early on, if you think about this about 2 years ago, this street was nothing but body shop cars and broken down. The streets were full of, I mean, once again, buildings were just ugly. So we bought this not even knowing what we were gonna do with it. But the one thing I did know is that back to Lima Pallet, you know, when I took care of those felons and I always say no one's going to retire from a pallet company. That's hard, brutal work. So it's like, what can we do to upskill, to give them an opportunity to even be more? 'Cause a lot of 'em wanted to go to college but couldn't afford college or didn't even know how to go there. Some of 'em didn't even have GEDs. So we've helped people get their GEDs. So the makerspace next door, which is now going to be called The Hub, was one of the first ideas that came to mind. It's like, wow, if we can do this at Lima Palette for 50-some employees, what could we do at a community level? And the biggest thing was to take it to the neighborhoods that needed it. So if we could get the gangs off the street, if we could get the kids that are going to drop out from the school, and if we could give them an opportunity to come and feel comfortable right in their neighborhood, that's when we started getting the investors in that building. So we got the Sinovases and the Nutrients and the Mercy Health. It's like, wow. Everybody has a workforce issue, right? What if we— and if we could take that to— and a lot of these don't have to have college degrees for some of these, and they're making six digits by controllers and things like that. They don't need— I mean, they do need engineers, they need certain people, but there was an opportunity for us to help with the workforce for them.

J**Jason Duff** 13:34

And I would say in the current landscape, you almost see a kind of a reversal shift here where it's like the higher paying jobs, like if you want job security, if you want high-paying jobs, you should really start looking at the trades. And you're seeing a lot of career centers, you know, become more popular and even public schools and things like that. So yeah, that's super cool. Do you have maybe like a testimonial or two of someone who went through a program?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 13:58

And I do. So one of our major tenets over there is steady does it mechanical. So Chris is a plumber by trade. He was part of the trades. Decided he wanted to open up his own business. He's also a teacher, so he's already ran his first program through there. He took a lot of disadvantaged, underserved children from the Lima City School system and brought them in. Probably 90% were African American. I think he had 15, maybe 18 students in there. They ran through a 10-week program, cost nothing, and he actually taught them plumbing. So how, how to become plumbers, how to hook up a sink, how to hook up a toilet, how to— they actually ran water in that building to a hot water heater that was downstairs. So he actually— and the parents were just thrilled. These kids would go to school during the day, come here in the evening, and he would actually run this program free of charge. He made nothing off of it. He got a couple of us to help sponsor. So we bought pizza and, you know, and things like that. But that was just the first program. He's already getting ready to launch a second and it's filled up with a waiting list. Wow. So, yeah. And some of these kids then in the summer of last year got to work with him. So he actually took them on the job. I think he's even got one that's graduated now that didn't want to go to college. He's actually working with him on a full-time basis.

J**Jason Duff** 15:13

So that's great.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 15:14

Just goes to show that if you could get the kids off the street, get them interested in the trades— are huge. Yeah, we need electricians and carpenters and so bad.

J**Jason Duff** 15:21

It's everywhere right now. Yeah. And if you think where we're at, like you said, Ethan, is here in Allen County, very strong industrial base. I mean, very large companies like the Lima Tank Plant, the Ford is here, and then also Procter Gamble. I mean, big names that are, that are international that, that need employees. And you're also in an area that the unemployment rate, not only here in Ohio but particularly in Northwest Ohio, is very, very low. So what, what I took away is how you identified a problem that everyone's saying, I can't find employees, is turning that into opportunity and giving people a second chance, right?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 16:00

So then it comes to this building.

J**Jason Duff** 16:02

Yeah.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 16:02

So that to get to that opportunity As I was fundraising for the Amplifitheater, I got to meet quite a few CEOs and general managers of big corporations as we were fundraising. And I was selling that whole story because I was very passionate about what we were doing. A lot of it came down to when you got to the Mercy Health, some of the docs and some of the CEOs, even at Ford Motor Company, that was the story that a lot of them didn't live in Lima, Ohio, because their families didn't want to be here. There was nothing to do. Yeah. So that's when the light bulb goes on. It's like, okay, we need to have people quit leaving Lima. We need them to move here and want to stay here. So once again, part of workforce development is, is you have to have things in a destination place that people want to come and stay. So that's where this building started. We started talking about it, and I partnered up with John Haffey. He had some ideas too. So he owned main, you know, part of Main Street. We had bought this city block, then he bought the, the column building that he's in now that he's doing a lot of work on. But it was almost to create an entertainment district so that people want to stay. So We call this a central district, but if you talk to our mayor, she's going to say this is the entertainment district. Yeah. Now they've passed. We've got the DORA in effect, so— and we've got two trolley cars that's through our RTA. Nice. That'll go around to all the different places. The entertainment district now, they just got passed last summer. So now we're part of an entertainment district. So we've got 14 or 15 more liquor licenses. Wow. At a very reasonable rate that we can use within the DORA or within the entertainment district area. So that's where all of— now we're working on the retail and the shop, you know, the shopping places, the courtyard out here where there's things to do, the amphitheater that they can come down, pedestrian walkways. Yeah. And one of my biggest wake-up calls about 2 months ago, it was pitch black and I wanted to see what the building— they finally got the lights up on the outside of this building. It's like, yes, I want to see what it looks like in the morning. So I was on my way to work at 6:00 in the morning and it's pitch black. And I pulled up in front and I'm just sitting there, wife watching. I watched two people jog down Spring Street. Now, two years ago, you'd have never seen two people jog down Spring Street. Yeah. And I watched them and they came in and they came up along the side of the side of the building and I saw them tug on the door because they thought Wynand's open. Well, this was like 6:15. Wynand's doesn't open till 6:30 in the morning. And I know they wanted a cup of coffee. So as they're coming back, you still couldn't tell because they had their hoods up. It was, you know, it was chilly. It was in the middle of winter. And, and I rolled down my window real quick. I said, hey, they'll be open in 15 minutes. Well, here it's two ladies jogging. They say, "Oh yeah, yeah, we'll be back, we'll be back." And they said, "No problem." I said, "Okay." I said, "15 minutes, we'll be open because you don't want to lose a customer." Right.

J**Jason Duff** 18:35

That's right.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 18:36

Sell coffee. Yeah. So I watch them and they go right past, you know, down Central, up Elm Street. Well, I'm just telling you, 2 years ago you would have never seen two women by themselves jogging at dark, you know, in this area. So, you know, once again, it's just you could see that the positivity and the things that are happening in Lima, Ohio, that that, that image, that, that narrative of being, you know, this crime-ridden and no one wants to be here. It's all changing now. You're seeing all the positive things coming.

J**Jason Duff** 19:04

It's got to be at least 15 years ago, but part of my connection and introduction to Tracy is I had a chance to come up and speak to your Rotary Club. And this, um, you know, was really when we were just getting started in downtown Bellefontaine. And many of the same reasons that Tracy decided to plant her flag and make these changes and investments were similar in our town. And, uh, you know, I— it was really— it's exciting to be back here because as we were driving in today, you do feel there's a sense of energy that's changing here. And, um, I mean, from the outside, when you— it's easy to pull into a parking lot that you have acquired and made nice and bought, and then you see this very large projecting sign that has Winans Chocolates and Coffee, which One of the best ways to restart a community, our neighborhood, is to have a great coffee shop. And then, you know, today walking inside of this beautiful historic building that has been completely redone, you know, we got to weave through and meet some of your tenants today. Do you mind kind of just sharing a little bit about what the, the heart and the people behind that are now in this building?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 20:10

Sure. So most of our tenants are brand new tenants, um, you know, other than Winans. You know, Winans is a staple. But as far as Nellie and the touch of Europe, so Nellie Metzger's from Bavaria. She's Bavarian.

J**Jason Duff** 20:24

Wonderful personality, by the way. Oh, that accent.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 20:27

Just love her accent.

J**Jason Duff** 20:28

I mean, part of buying something, not only this product, and by the way, our team member Nick, I say, of anything we came to life today, we are going home with some delicious bakery goods from her shop. But she greeted us, she told us her story, she was excited to to welcome us to her bakery. You can't replicate that in corporate America.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 20:49

No. And Nelly's story, you know, such a great story too. You know, she's been in her basement for 7 or 8 years. It was just baking out of her basement and she wanted brick and mortar. She really— she will tell you, I wanted to live the American dream. I came here, you know, I live here. I've lived here for a while now. I just wanted to own my own business someday. So her story is just the coolest story. And a lot of her ingredients come from overseas. She— her prices are a little bit it's, you know, more expensive, but people will pay for that.

J**Jason Duff** 21:17

Yes.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 21:18

For good quality, no preservatives. She adds zero sugar. If it doesn't already come with sugar in it, she doesn't put it in it. Wow. Most of her stuff is gluten-free. I mean, she just has something about what she does, and then her artistic ability. I mean, every single piece of whatever she makes— I can't even pronounce some of them— yeah, are made from her heart.

J**Jason Duff** 21:37

And putting that right by the entrance was a good move, by the way.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 21:40

Oh, and it smells when she's baking. Like I said, when she shuts down, 6:00 and then she bakes till 10:00 and she's stocking up fresh bread. You know, in Lima you can't go and buy a fresh loaf of bread every morning. So people will line up in the morning. You know, they try to get in here early because she sells out every single day. So she does a great job.

J**Jason Duff** 21:58

What else do you— what other tenants do you have?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 21:59

So then the Abderra Soap Shop. So that's Michael Thompson. You know, he's actually was just a pop-up shop. He has a full-time job. He's a chemical chemist. Chemical engineer at Charles River. So he's actually expanding. He's going to hire employees. Never wanted to have his own business, but he did so well at a pop-up that he ended up staying. So he's actually moving to a bigger spot on the second floor. iHeartRadio will be moving in soon, doing their own podcast shows here live and having a concert series in the summertime out in our courtyard. Modest Maven Boutique, brand new. She's worked at boutiques before, but always wanted to own her own business.

J**Jason Duff** 22:37

Really stylish, by the way. And like her products very, you know, trendy and appealing. And she not only has clothing, she's got jewelry and accessories too.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 22:46

She does, and shoes, you name it. So she's coming along great. Frank Cage, great artistic, just marketing, computer, you know, web designs, things like that. So he does a lot of our marketing. So if you get on our social media page and follow us on Facebook, if you see the reels and you see a lot of the anything posted by Central District, that's usually Frank Cage.

J**Jason Duff** 23:09

So, well, and we just got to talk with him a little bit about the importance of branding and helping be able to tell people stories. And I do think as we travel around to other towns and communities that, you know, you can have great buildings and you can even have great tenants, but if we don't get the word out about who they are, the heart behind what they do— that's why having a person like Frank and his company in your in your projects and your buildings really makes a lot of sense.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 23:35

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. He's just a great asset and just brings a really neat vibe, you know, to our area. And then on the third floor right now, we have a— it's called the Infinity Hair Studio getting ready to go in. She hopes to be in by April 1st. So doing her build out, we have the Social House Lofts, which is a small space, up to about 60 people we could probably fit in there. And that's just for small— whether it's a wedding shower, a baby shower, small parties, birthday parties, gathering places for business meetings, you know, things like that. Lima really has a need for small spaces. We have a lot of big places that you can rent. So more inexpensive, a place like we could have a club or someone come in and just hang out.

J**Jason Duff** 24:20

Yeah. And then talk to us about what your plans are for the back patio area.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 24:24

Yeah. So in the back we have the new— it'll be called the Social House. It's a new restaurant bar, bourbon bar, outdoor patio area with a big courtyard. It will have 2 fire pits outside with bocce ball, cornhole, outdoor ping pong. It'll also have a small stage for local bands, you know, nothing large, just small local bands. It could be poetry, things like that. And then the big screen TV also, which will be really cool so we can watch baseball games or have things going on in the courtyard. One of the well-kept secrets that we haven't really released yet too is we do have a professional ice sculptor that will be coming on board.

J**Jason Duff** 25:02

So, wow, exclusive here on the podcast.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 25:04

Yeah, that's right. You guys are the first to hear. So, um, yeah, Shannon, he will be doing a lot of our ice sculpting in the wintertime. So we'll have a lot of photo ops outside in the courtyard. And then he's also a professional pumpkin carver. Wow. So in this fall, we're planning on a big pumpkin festival, which Lima's never had.

J**Jason Duff** 25:22

So Yeah, yeah, I was going to say, for maybe for if you're listening from a bigger city or something, or you're used to those kind of amenities, you know, some of that stuff may be easy to brush over, but for a smaller community who just hasn't had stuff like this, it's a, it's a big deal. So, well, and just looking up the street, you mentioned John Haffey, and he's another really big force of, um, just his entrepreneurship, his giving. But, uh, his project, and it's Fifth and Vine, what do I want to say, do you know what's his project called?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 25:50

Spring and Main.

J**Jason Duff** 25:51

Spring and Main, that's it. Spring and Main. I knew it was two words, Spring and Main. But, um, multiple restaurants are coming, and already right down the street from his project at Spring and Main is the Old City Prime, which is wonderful, beautiful sit-down restaurant. Um, I had the pleasure to eat there several times. And then right up the road, another great restaurant is The Met. Absolutely. So, uh, in his— yeah, another, another very inspiring entrepreneur entrepreneur. But if this, this new project is going to involve a lot of different restaurants that'll be in walking distance of the Central District.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 26:24

Absolutely. Yes. So yeah, he's got the old Casa Luau. He's resurrecting with that family. So that's really, really cool. A lot of people are looking forward to that. He's got Nonno's down in the basement, which is kind of an Italian vibe, really, really cool, more exclusive private areas in the basement of that facility. See, the second floor is the Pins or Pens duck bowling that he's going to have going on. I think he has a bar on that floor too. Then he's got the Vista Taco outdoor bar, which will be really, really cool rooftop bar and restaurant that, you know, is— it'll be neat in Lima. And then the top floor is Rudolph Foods research and development. So yeah, he is completely full. We're, you know, really looking forward to that. And the city of Lima has just really been great too. Like I said, we have a lot streetscape going in and new streets, new curbs, new sidewalks, landscape, new lighting. And we'll have the ability on Spring Street to be able to close that down to make it a pedestrian walkway so we can have artists and festivals and a safe place for people to be able to walk in between all the areas, especially when we have things going on at the Amphitheater.

J**Jason Duff** 27:32

Yeah, no, I love that. And you can just kind of see how all of that works together, you know, in a healthy ecosystem. And you talk about John Haffey, and, and, you know, I know you talk about Rich Rudolph and a few others. I know the Rotary Club played a pretty big role for you, so I was just going to ask you, like, what if you would maybe share your perspective of participating in groups like that and the value you see in it? And, uh, I don't know, just some advice to younger professionals.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 28:01

You know, it's all about network. You have to have a network of people. I mean, I'm sure you know I'm learning. I always say you could be the smartest person in the room and you could have the most degrees, but if you don't have the network of people, you're only as— I always say I'm only as successful as my team behind me. You have to build good teams. You build good people. You have to have people that are all moving in the same direction, that have the same visions that you have. And a lot of this is not just my vision. This is a lot of people. You know, there's input every single day. Things change every day. Do they go great every day? No.

J**Jason Duff** 28:36

We were just talking about that.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 28:37

We were just talking about that. Yeah, there's some rough days. There's days you don't sleep at night. There's days you toss and turn and, you know, how am I going to pay this bill tomorrow? And, you know, nothing's easy. It just takes a lot of work. But it's always having the right perspective, that network of people, you know, through Rotary, honestly, is— I would have never, ever probably even got to a project like this. I was happy at Lima Pallet doing my own little thing. What made you want to join the Rotary Club? Um, you know, it was a mentor of mine, uh, John Rockhold, had talked me into— he invited me, and honestly, I didn't even know what Rotary was back then. I was probably maybe 50 years old, 51 years old, before I even joined Rotary. Um, and he had talked me to— and you want to talk about an intimidating room, because anybody that's anybody is sitting in a Rotary room. And we have a big Rotary Club, and, um, it was very intimidating when I first went in. I wasn't real sure I I was going to join, but I think I probably went almost a month, probably 4 or so Mondays in a row, and had lunch and started networking. And then that's when the light bulb went on. It's like how important networking is, because when you put the right people in the right room, the things that you can get done or you can accomplish, whether it's local, whether it's your administration at the city level, yeah, then the state level, um, you know, I sit on Well, I think I'm down to 6 boards now. I was at 9. I keep dwindling those down as you— as I get older now. Older and wiser, you'd like to think. But it is those connections, you know, you have to know who to go to and, and how to navigate systems and all those different things. It's just Rotary was a big part in whether all of this that happened and all of the amphitheater that happened, none of that would have happened without the Rotary.

J**Jason Duff** 30:21

I mean, you're living proof right now. I mean, it started with the amphitheater, and that started that momentum that eventually led to this. And, um, doesn't sound like you guys are done yet. So, well, not, not— all right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. Brew Fountain's 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. Come check out 600 Downtown Pizzeria in downtown Bellefontaine, where they cherish the art of making the most authentic, unique, and delicious world-famous and award-winning pizzas. Their team hand spins each pizza the old-fashioned way and only uses the freshest of ingredients. Come see why they were featured on the Food Network. I appreciate you speaking about your younger self, and you know, the seasoning of life gives us perspective and gives us, you know, we get to look back a little bit for people that may be, you know, beginning their career or, you know, they now look up to you, Tracy, and what you've accomplished. Do you have any advice for your younger self as you think about that?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 31:30

Well, I always tell them, get involved, whether it's the Young Professionals, whether it's Allen Lima Leadership here in Lima, Ohio. There's different clubs even in school, but it's really starting that network. I have a son in college. Now and he wants to go to med school. And one of my biggest pieces of advice I gave him— I mean, he's a wrestler to boot, so Division I, he's wrestling. And, you know, going to med school, it's not even heard of when you're Division I because athletes don't get to do those kind of things. But I told him, it's all about who you know, it's not what you know. I said, so you study hard. And, and what he did and ended up doing is, you know, he had two donors that were huge donors for Oklahoma State University, and he got to know them, and they were both surgeons. Well, come to find out, they kind of took him— when they knew he wanted to go to med school, took him under his wing. He started shadowing, got to know them very, very well. And come to find out, they both sit on the medical board of review.

J**Jason Duff** 32:22

That helps, right?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 32:24

But, you know, it's those connections. So, um, you know, hopefully, you know, he hasn't been accepted yet, but I think he has an interview coming up here in April. So, you know, once again, it's— and med school is hard to get into, you know, that's not an easy thing to accomplish. But You know, once again, like I said, you could be the smartest person, but if you don't have a network or someone to go to or someone that can help push you or to navigate a system, it's just tough. So my goal for anyone young is to get involved in some kind of civic community. Somebody get a mentor, something that you're in, and you may not even know what you want to do. Yeah, but it's get involved.

J**Jason Duff** 32:59

Yeah. So this part of the state, I would say, to say it nicely, we tend to have some stubborn personalities. So really, are you sure about that? I mean, I know my family and extended family and things like that and friends in the area, but I was— I wanted to pose the question to you is how did you get so many stakeholders? I mean, I know some of it started with the Rotary, but like to get so many people on board with the vision first, maybe with the amphitheater, because I know once you started, you know, talking about it and what you're going to do, like other people wanted a part of it. And then, you know, again, that momentum started to pick up after that. But how did you get so many people to, like, stay glued to this vision?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 33:41

I think for, for such a long time, people, especially in Lima— now maybe this is everywhere, but here especially, we've talked about things forever.

J**Jason Duff** 33:50

Yeah.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 33:51

And it's really becoming doers. And I think once they started seeing that it was actually going to happen, it was just same with the Rhodes State College. Everybody thought, you know, for years that'll never happen. The Bora Center will never. And when it did, people started believing. Well, it was the same with the amphitheater. You know, we fundraised and we kept saying, and, you know, I'd show visuals at Rotary and we talk about it on the news. And, you know, for years that was a 5-year project also. But as it started happening, so as people start seeing you do things, you start make, you know, people start believing in what you do. So that vision is a little bit easier to sell and it's to get that buy-in. But it's also making those relationships.

J**Jason Duff** 34:30

You know, people have to trust you and you have to trust people.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 34:33

People. And that's why I always say that relationships matter. So, but it is that trust. It's the truth. You know, just not everything's perfect. If you screw up, it's okay. And it's okay to say I screwed up or it's okay to say I'm not perfect, but don't hide something or don't, don't not tell me the truth. I mean, to me, you know, even working with the city administration, it's being honest and open. And, you know, people say, well, you don't want the building department, you know, no, I bring the building department in on the front end before, can I do this? Because this is how I want it to happen. Yeah, they appreciate that.

J**Jason Duff** 35:05

And you're just avoiding those conflicts down the road, right?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 35:07

Well, sure. You know, and, you know, everyone wants to be needed and wants to be helpful. So it's really just building that.

J**Jason Duff** 35:14

Yeah.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 35:14

Good team and moving, you know, rowing the boat and you have that vision and you bring all those visions together.

J**Jason Duff** 35:19

Tracy, what has been the biggest learning curve as you've kind of started off with this large investment and, you know, serving as a developer serving on the various roles of recruiting tenants and managing construction. And I know you mentioned the importance of the team, but for you personally, what has been— well, welcome to Lima. There's the train. There's the train. But for you, what's been the biggest learning curve to get over with this project?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 35:48

There's a lot of things I probably would have done different had I started over. So as we go to the next building, you just think that you keep You never stop learning. I guess that would be probably the biggest thing. You know, did I make mistakes in this? Absolutely. You know, did I do some of the things wrong? Absolutely. But it's just— you just have to have that forward vision that we're going to get there in the end. There's a lot of things I would have done different. You know, there's no doubt about that.

J**Jason Duff** 36:16

But you and I were talking about the cost of things. So when you design something on paper and then you work with architects and engineers and contractors, The idea of, hey, what is— we may create this, but what's it going to cost? That is hard to get to that number because like as business people, you kind of want to look at things that black and white. But with a historic building and doing something in Lima, Ohio that's completely uncharted, there's a lot of holding hands together.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 36:43

Oh my gosh, and all the unknowns, you know, things you start digging on the ground, it's like, don't dig too deep. Exactly. You don't know if there's a takedown there or something, you know, you're gonna fall, you know. Yeah. And I mean, this place was exactly that, you know. You didn't realize till we were trying to put the drive-through next door that there was a building there before. So they get down to the footers and there's like—

J**Jason Duff** 37:02

Surprise!

T**Tracie Sanchez** 37:03

Yeah, 8-foot concrete walls all the way through the bottom that they had to— I mean, it was just— it's crazy stuff. So you're right, you have this budget, so you think. Um, yeah, we blew that out of the water a long time ago. But it's just, you know, you keep trudging along and you keep seeing the vision and The end result is all good things will come to those. It's really just that honesty and giving the community what it needs and what it wants. That's really what it's all about, is figuring out what do we need, what does our community need, and it's all working together.

J**Jason Duff** 37:36

What do you think people are saying about the project now as you're out and about? What do people come up to you? Do you get complaints plus?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 37:43

We always get complaints.

J**Jason Duff** 37:45

Well, that's why I want people to know because when you— first off, you've accomplished an amazing feat here, and you're out in the grocery store. Give us this, uh, perspective of the good and the bad of the kind of things that you as a leader get to hear.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 38:00

Well, most people are amazed when they first walk in the building because it gives you that big city feel. So it's something that Lyman's never had before. So you walk in and you see the lighting and you see the big tall ceilings and the concrete floor, and it smells good, and you have all So people are surprised, and then you have these little places where they can sit, and we have high-speed internet. We made sure that we put the best internet service in here, and so they can get on and do their laptop. So I think I get a lot of compliments as to, "Wow, you know, Lima really needs that." I hear that quite often. "Lima really needed that." And then you get the complaints too, the parking and the construction, and especially if someone, like you're trying to get somebody from out of town to come in and you want them to, you know, they say, "Oh, I heard you got some space. I wanna see it." And they're like, "Wow." But look at the sidewalk and look at this area like, whoa, wait, you know, we have a streetscape coming in. The only reason we didn't put the sidewalks in because the city is going to do it for us. Yeah. So it's really a lot of times you have to sell that vision, you know. So I have a lot of paper that shows what it's going to look like when it's all completed.

J**Jason Duff** 38:57

Right. And renderings, things like that.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 38:59

Yeah, exactly.

J

Jason Duff 38:59

That's funny you bring up parking. I was thinking about adding a show segment with parking. There we go. I like it. In this season. So maybe we'll have Pull that out sometime. But cool. I want to kind of move us into a little bit of a show segment here, Real Estate Deep Dive. So there's a little soundboard jumping in here. I know there's kind of a cool story with how you actually acquired this building. And so I was hoping that maybe you could share some of that on the, on the show.

T

Tracie Sanchez 39:26

Yeah. So when I acquired this, once again, it went back to the amphitheater. So the people that we bought the— this actually was one of the sites we looked at for the amphitheater.

J

Jason Duff 39:33

Okay.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 39:34

But we decided not to put it here because of the trains that you just heard go by. I thought, wow, right in the middle of a concert. Can you imagine? And the train blows its whistle and now you've got, you know, 15 minutes as the train rolls by. So, but the people that we bought the— it's Esther and Chester Carey who own a lot of downtown Lima at the time and probably still do. They— we— that's where we bought the amphitheater part of that property from them anyway. And the lady, she was in her late 80s, probably early 90s, and she just took a liking to me. And we just had a lot of frank conversations about where we wanted to put this amphitheater. And when it was all said and done, she came to me and she says, "Hey, I want to see you in my office." I'm like, "Okay, Esther, I'll come see you in your office." I go and she says, "I want you to buy the city block that you guys were looking at." I'm like, "Esther, I own a limo pallet company. I don't need— I'm not a developer. I don't need any other buildings." And she's like, "No, no, no, I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse." You know, one of those. It's like, "Okay." Okay. But she did make me an offer I couldn't refuse. I mean, it was just, it was dirt cheap. She just wanted to get rid of them. She knew what that vision with the amphitheater was gonna be. She knew that she didn't have the time, you know, in her life that she wanted to do it. She had no family members that really wanted it. And I really didn't know what I was gonna do with it. My biggest concern was I just didn't want it to fall in the wrong hands. We had this beautiful amphitheater. We had momentum with the Rhode State College. So I thought, well, at least if I purchase them, I could sit on them. We know that there's no more junkyards or body shops or things that are going to go downtown. And once again, that's where that kind of vision started. It was really pulling the right people. I went to the Chamber of Commerce and talked to Jed Metzger, and it's like, look, you know, I got these buildings, what should we do with them? And then that's when we started pulling the right team together, pulling people together to say what that vision could be. I knew once again at the makerspace, you know, kind of what I wanted to do. At a community level. So that kind of sparked some interest and, you know, then it just really kept growing. And as we did the fundraising, you know, that's the destination places that Lima needed. And, you know, then John Haffey got on board and he's like, well, she's got that block, you know, I can do this. Yeah, I can do this part. And then everybody just started partnering together and, you know, the mayor got involved and, you know, we have really good administration and it was really just everybody rowing the boat in the same direction.

J**Jason Duff** 41:50

And yeah, I love about your story is that you didn't do any of this alone, like you invited a bunch of people in. Let it be all of our success. And I think that is probably why you're seeing the ability to actually take action on some of these things. And you have— you followed through on it and people are noticing, and that invites other investment, which is super cool. So I'm going to kind of move us into some more closing questions, but I appreciate all the lessons that you've kind of dropped and sprinkled in through this episode so far. But what is one professional development resource outside of the Rotary Club that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 42:27

Well, JobsOhio. So I knew Chase Eichelberry from a long time ago. She works for RGP now, but I— so I sit on the board for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation. I've done that, I think, almost 11 or 12 years now and got to know Chase very well at the state level. So some of that came from the Vibrancy Grant, you know, that we— that really helped us get through this project. If it would not have been for that help, this project may have never helped either, you know, or happened either. So, um, you know, at the state level, I think just those connections that I had really helped spark some of the things that we were doing.

J**Jason Duff** 43:05

Yeah, it's cool to hear that. I mean, we've done a lot of ours without grants and things like that, so it's cool to hear when those programs are working well for people. And then my last question here is, where can people follow you and your business to keep up with the that you're doing?

T**Tracie Sanchez** 43:18

So we do have Central District Lima Facebook page. I believe we have Instagram. Not an Instagram person here. Old people. And Frank Cage is working on our web page now. We do have a web page, but eventually you'll be able to actually get on there, hit a button, go into each of our tenants. That'll take you right to their website. So if you want to go to Modish Maven and actually shop, you can shop online. Winans will have the same thing so that you can order online. And I think it gets shipped out of Pickle or wherever they ship from. So eventually we're getting there, we're getting real close, but they definitely can follow us, uh, social media. Facebook's probably the best place right now.

J**Jason Duff** 43:53

Or take a day trip and come to the Central District in Lima, Ohio.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 43:58

Come see us. That's right.

J**Jason Duff** 43:59

Yeah, very cool. Jason, if you have a recap for us. I am inspired by the second chances that you give people and, uh, you know, just sharing how you took a problem. And I think that's kind of a great theme is how you take problems and turn them into opportunities. But just coming and you opening up the doors here and the people that we've met today, there's a tremendous amount of heart here in Lima, and that's something that you can't replicate. Um, when you feel that, that's— it's authentic, it's real, it's special to Lima, Ohio. Um, and I, and I think what, uh, this is a town you need to keep on your map. Yep. Because it's, it's moving and going places. So thanks again for being a guest on our show today, and excited to continue to follow your success.

T**Tracie Sanchez** 44:42

Thanks, Jason. And thank Ethan. Thank you guys for having me today. Absolutely.

E

Ethan DeLeon 44:46

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

E

Ethan DeLeon 44:48

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