

# Episode 69

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Matthew Jennings, Ethan DeLeon

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M

**Matthew Jennings** 00:00

I felt like I didn't have a lot of money that I could invest, but I have time. And you know, sometimes to me that's more valuable than money because you're going to give, uh, you're going to give of yourself a lot, uh, for certain things. And, uh, and a lot of times it just takes someone to say, hey, I'll do it.

E

**Ethan DeLeon** 00:24

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 I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we're excited to be hosting the CEO of Quest Federal Credit Union, Matthew Jennings. Welcome, Matt.

M

**Matthew Jennings** 00:52

Hey, thank you very much.

J

**Jason Duff** 00:54

Matt, it's good to have you on the show today.

M

**Matthew Jennings** 00:55

Always great to see you, Jason.

**J****Jason Duff** 00:56

Well, I appreciate that, Matt. I will tell you, Hardin County, it's right north of us, is a very special place to me because for 4, actually let's strike that, 5 years, I went to Ohio Northern University in Ada. And it really is a place people say that the salt of the earth kind of people are there. Absolutely. Just, I think it's part of the DNA of generations of family farms and the grit of hardworking small business owners. And, you know, one of those businesses, we were talking earlier before the show, but we as a family would celebrate and go to Hardin County for our holidays to the Plaza Inn. Oh yes. So a restaurant that, you know, probably for what, 50 years, 60 years, maybe longer.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 01:48

The owner was just in my office today and he said 65 years.

**J****Jason Duff** 01:52

65 years. That's awesome. And, you know, I think it was a tradition that my great-grandparents started for our family where, you know, the food was wonderful. And they were also open during the holidays where a lot of places aren't. But their family recognized that by being open, it was a place for people to celebrate and, you know, enjoy the holidays together, eat good food. But I appreciate those kind of salt-of-the-earth businesses. And that particular family for many years had a car dealership on site, and there was an airstrip as well.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 02:24

Still there.

**J****Jason Duff** 02:25

And you're a private pilot. Yes, I am. So literally, you could fly. You could fly right in to enjoy Joy Food there.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 02:32

That's right. I thoroughly enjoy their fried chicken. It's one of my favorite things in the world. And but I can drive there in about 3 minutes. So it's better than, you know, jumping in an airplane.

**J****Jason Duff** 02:42

It takes a little bit longer. Well, on our podcast, we celebrate the success of small and independent businesses. And, you know, I think When it comes to Quest, I'd like you to tell us a little bit about your role at the bank and how you got started there.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 02:58

Yeah, absolutely. So I'm the CEO and it was really, I'm going to not say by chance, but sort of by chance. I moved back home at my wife's urging to raise a family in small schools and rural America. And when I left for college, it wasn't necessarily the path I was looking for. I was looking for the big city life, but she convinced me, being a big city girl, that where, you know, this part of the state especially was very attractive to her. So we moved back and I was helping my dad with a dairy farm. And I worked for a local agricultural lender. That was my day job. And lo and behold, a few of the people that were my clients there were also board members of Kenton Rockwell Standard Federal Credit Union, which was—

**J****Jason Duff** 03:45

Say that 5 times fast, right?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 03:47

Right, exactly. Quest Federal Credit Union, so much easier. But that was a challenge answering the phone back in the day. But they had an opening for a manager, and they hired me as their operations manager, sort of on a 1-year, let's see how this goes. If we like you and you like us, we'll promote you to CEO, and, uh, and we'll, and we'll grow from there. And that's exactly what happened 27 and a half years ago.

**J****Jason Duff** 04:12

Going from employee to CEO, uh, did you expect that that was ever in the cards?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 04:18

No, that, you know, I really didn't expect, um, ever really obtaining a role like that. I wanted to be successful. And of course, growing up as a dairy farmer, you know what endless hard work looks like. And I was willing to put forth whatever hard work I needed to, to be successful and to raise my family, take good care of wife and children and that kind of thing. And it just, you know, it was maybe it was happenstance, but all the stars aligned and it was the right time for me and it was the right time for the credit union. And it's been sort of magical.

**J****Jason Duff** 04:51

We, uh, all have some younger members of our audience that are always asking the question, like, how do I get to the next stage in my career? Or, you know, start with one business and maybe grow to a second. Like, as you reflect back kind of on that journey, like, what, what are some of the things that, that have popped that have really helped you get to where you are?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 05:12

So one, I think work ethic is, is supremely important. And whether you're self-employed or you work for someone else, you, you you deserve for yourself, but also for your employer or your business to work as hard as you possibly can to be successful. And I guess I tell school kids this all the time because I get invited to talk to schools about leadership or banking, all different kinds of things is never let an opportunity pass you by. Don't, do not be afraid if it's something that intrigues you or it looks like a step in the right direction, Jump. Wow. Go for it. Yeah. And, uh, and I think you'll find that every once in a while you may just fall flat on your face, but, but more oftentimes you're gonna, you're gonna succeed. You're gonna fly.

**J****Jason Duff** 05:58

So everyone's got their comfort zone, and it's like, how do you get uncomfortable getting outside of your comfort zone?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 06:03

Yeah. Um, you know, I get— I guess again, I go back to growing up on the family farm, and of course my parents, uh, my mom's a registered nurse, my dad's a, a farmer, and, and certified real estate appraiser later on in life after the dairy farming. But, you know, I didn't want for much as a kid, but I also didn't have excess either. And so I sort of felt like leaving, leaving home to go to college and, you know, seek out an education and then a career was— I just have to do it. I have to go for it. And I can't let fear hold me back because I've got nothing to fall back on. You know, I've got the farm. That I can fall back on. But that, you know, with farming, and Ethan and I talked about this, it was either get really big or get out of dairy farming. And so there's a tremendous amount of risk and a lot of capital that you have to put forward. And I didn't have that as a 19, 20, 21-year-old kid to be able to do. And so that's maybe not a great answer to a really good question, but it's more just, you know, hey, if you want to take that shot, just take it, go for it.

**J****Jason Duff** 07:11

Well, we hear a lot about the need for capital, and more than ever today with just the way the economy is, getting access to revolving credit, whether it's credit cards or maybe you're needing to set up an account with a vendor, the ability to do that's getting a lot harder. And just like the ag industry, like the way you're explaining family farms is either you're going to grow or you're going to get out of it. Do you think that has propelled you to be in the role you are today and What are ways that you're actually helping people with that problem?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 07:44

Sure. And yes, absolutely. I would say that one, I felt like, you know, I needed to take the opportunities that presented themselves to me and run with it as best I possibly could. And now I happen to be, you know, very blessed really to be in a position where I can consult with people looking to start a business, young entrepreneurs, you know, people that, hey, how do I get my business banking started? What are you looking for if I come to you with a small business loan request? And that's a really great thing about Quest. And I think local banks and/or credit unions for that matter is that we're willing, we want to build those relationships. It's going to benefit us. It's going to benefit you. It's going to benefit the community. So more than happy to sit down and have those conversations.

**J****Jason Duff** 08:31

We spoke with Brittany Saxton. She is the owner of 600 Downtown on a previous podcast. And, you know, when Brittany took over her business, she was new to business banking, and she shared openly that, you know, Quest was really great to work with because she was originally from Kenton, right? And I think one of her family members might have been an original Charting member that went to work for Rockwell. And, you know, by banking with a credit union, can you kind of talk about some of the differences that you have compared to a community bank?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 09:02

Sure. And I always preface this that, you know, I maintain because of different community roles that I have great relationships with our community banking system. And I think that community banks are fantastic. I think community credit unions are fantastic. I'm a big champion of stay local. When times are good, it benefits local. When times aren't good, you can walk through that door and talk to your local business banker, your, you know, relationship— someone's going to care about your situation. And they care because it's, you know, it's our community, and it's you as a person, not just a business owner. But you know, it's Brittany's grandfather was a Rockwell retiree. And so she had probably been a member since she was a very young girl. And, and so it's great to be able to forge those relationships, because she comes to us. And we make it simple. We, we try to keep, we really don't have a fee structure for just a basic business account. You know, if you're starting out, you can't afford any extra fees. You can't afford all of the bells and whistles.

**J****Jason Duff** 10:09

And let me tell you from firsthand experience that that's not always common when you go to different— a lot of different banks have fees associated with small business accounts when you literally have \$0 in your account. Sure, right, you're just starting.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 10:20

Yeah, and as your business grows and you need more and more cash services, so we're ordering maybe in cash or coin, whatever the case may be, for you in particular. There's cost associated with that to us to keep our costs very low to our membership in total, which is a credit union staple, I would say, is the low to no fee environment. Well, then of course, yes. But, you know, now your business has become more established. You can afford a little bit more. But to just come in and be new to business and to be starting or trying to buy your first new business, like the example we're talking about, we're not going to do you any favors charging you a bunch of fees. So we try to keep it really simple. One stop, you call in, we tell you exactly what we need. Stop in, we get your account established. Really, other than maybe a box of checks that you may need to purchase, which I think now most businesses are either doing laser checks or ordering those online, but we still have that option. The rest of it can be all electronic. Like we can do ACHs, we can do payroll postings for you know, next to nothing. All different kinds of electronic services that we charge nothing or very, very little for. And so it's comfortable for that small business.

**J****Jason Duff** 11:35

And I think that's an important differentiator when, you know, like you said, the startup costs are low. Being a part and being a member of something. Yeah. Can you kind of speak to some of the member perks that exist out there?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 11:47

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, first of all, you could come and have a full line of, and we're talking personal accounts here at this point, but, you know, your savings, your checking, your money market, your online banking, your bill pay, your mobile app, your what we call P2P or person-to-person. It's kind of our version of Zelle or Venmo. Doesn't cost a thing. Wow. It's all free of charge. And the reason we can do that is, one, our tax structure is a little different, and that's by design by the federal government and the National Credit Union Administration or NCUA. It's our version of the FDIC. They insure us, they regulate us, and we have a contractual obligation, for lack of better words, with our federal regulator to serve the underserved. And so we make sure that we can offer those basic banking services at no cost, whether that's, you know, lower income or maybe a senior citizen on a fixed income that can't afford that extra stuff. And we're going to serve them regardless. Of what they have or don't have. And aside from that, then, you know, I would put our technology up against just about any regional bank or credit union around with—

**J****Jason Duff** 13:00

Which is a super important element.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 13:01

Yeah, anymore it's all, you know, your smart devices where you're doing a lot of your banking. So we've been blessed to have, you know, tremendous Brian Sprang in our IT department runs all of our technology, is fantastic. Our core processor is, top-notch. And it makes us, even though when you walk in our office, it feels very local, but if you look at our technology, it feels very national. It feels good.



**Jason Duff** 13:31

Yeah. Yeah. Super cool. Well, talk us through the journey of Quest a little bit because I know we talked about Hardin County a little bit in the beginning, but how did you, I mean, I know you have an office here in Bellefontaine now, but can you take us kind of quickly through that journey?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 13:44

Yeah, absolutely. So credit unions are structured a little different. They're they're a financial cooperative. So a lot like your grain elevator or Logan County Electric Co-op, MidOhio Energy in Hardin County, we're all cooperatives. So member-owned. It doesn't matter if you have \$5 or \$500,000, you've got an equal vote with everyone else. And most credit unions were started by factories, school districts, parishes, that type of thing. You had a, what they called a select group. That could form a credit union. So when we talk about the one in Bellefontaine, that started out as IGA employees, you know, out on County Road 130, I think it is, or 117. There's split right there somewhere. But, and ours was Kenton Rockwell and Kenton Rockwell, of course, built truck axles from the '40s all the way up until the early 2000s and supplied places like International Harvester, which was just down the road in Springfield. So started out as Kenton Rockwell. With a bunch of men and women carrying around \$5 membership cards in their lunch pail, literally. Yeah, and that's how it started. And about 6 years later, they were primarily savings, was all they could do. About 6 years later, they offered their first \$250 Christmas loan program, and that was the launching point. In 1988, they purchased what was part of the old John Deere you know, kind of campus at the time. There was multiple buildings and they put in a bank trailer. Shortly thereafter, they built the credit union office that we have now. And when they hired me, that was part of that, you know, kind of one-year test phase was, hey, we know that we can't just stay married to Rockwell. We need to spread out and diversify, which was very, very wise. And of course, I'm a 26-year-old guy at that point and had no clue what they were talking about, but learned quickly. And so we start started adding other select employee groups. And so, you know, our local hospital, one of your family's competitors in Hensel Ready Mix, you know, those other really good employers in the communities could join the credit union. And all the while working on what's called a community charter where you can say, you know, you're Franklin County, you're Hardin County, you're Logan County. This is one big community and we want to serve anyone that lives, works, worships, or attends school within the boundaries of this community. So in 2001, we became Hardin Community Federal Credit Union, built our second office, which is on the east side of town, uh, Jacob Parrott Boulevard. And if you know Kenton, you go out past the hospital and there's a giant cemetery on the north side, and we're right there on the corner. Wasn't long after until we started working with IGA Credit Union, which had become Logan Community Credit Union, and we were helping them relocate. Into Bellefontaine and helping them adapt to the more modern computer system. Just to be frank, they were coming on board with our data processor and their board members just said, you know, why don't we do this together? And an interesting fact that I learned as we went through the process of chartering Logan County was that Hardin was Logan County in the early days. And then once Kenton grew enough to be its own population center, the state of Ohio split Hardin County off. So we were all— I had to do all this history lesson You know, but we got Logan County chartered as part of our community. And when you think about it, I mean, we share the Indian Lake Watershed, we share school districts, we used to share state highway patrol post that was just south of town here by Kroger. But a lot of things that bind us together, Hardin and Logan County. And we did that and merged the Logan Community Federal Credit Union into Hardin Community Federal Credit Union and then embarked on a really cool process of rebranding to Quest. And we just knew that, you know, Hardin County is not going to play well here in the name, and Logan County won't play well there. And sure, you know, and, and to get away from the Kenton Rockwell Standard Federal Credit, you know, we, we wanted to shorten it

down and have a name that was more, um, you know, limitless. So yeah, settled on Quest, and it was, and it's been great ever since.

J

**Jason Duff** 18:00

I love that. We've had other conversations with, uh, you know, banks, things like that, but kind of, um, talking about what, you know, common beliefs that may be wrong. I'll just say it that way. You know, with entrepreneurs, you know, they may need a loan for to get their business off the ground and they walk into a bank and, you know, find out that they may not be able to get that loan quite as easily as they thought. Can you maybe talk about some of those misnomers that may be out there about, you know, getting your first startup capital?

M

**Matthew Jennings** 18:34

Sure. I would, I would I guess, advise right off the bat is don't be afraid to walk in the door and ask those questions. You know, if you assume the answer is no, it's probably no. But if you walk in and you just sit down and talk with whether it's a banking professional or whether it's a lender, we can walk you through that process. And I believe most local community banks would do the exact same thing, which is bring your idea. You know, I'm not going to steal your idea from you and I'm not going to go, you know, open up that business that you thought was, you know, what you wanted to do with your career. What we're going to do is try to build a relationship with you and say, okay, how can we help you with this? And you know, sometimes we talk to first-time business owners, startup business owners, young business owners that they've got a little bit of capital. They've maybe got some, you know, and sometimes they don't even think about stuff like this. Like they've got some equity in their home.

J

**Jason Duff** 19:27

Yeah.

M

**Matthew Jennings** 19:27

And okay, well, you've got this great idea and maybe you need a storefront and maybe you need some equipment to put in that storefront to get this business going. But you've got this equity over here in your home that we could leverage that. Or maybe you've got a 401 that we could advise you like, hey, you know, we're not investment advisors, but let's take a look at can you take a loan against something like that? So I mean, there's lots of different ways to tackle that. And I think that the big thing is, is don't be afraid to walk in the door and ask.

**J****Jason Duff** 19:57

Yeah. And I think, I mean, to your point earlier about, you know, banking local versus a bigger organization probably helps that case, right? I think Before we got on the microphones here, we're talking a little bit about trusting, you know, that individual because you know them in the community, you see what they're doing, things like that. So that's super cool. Well, I know one of the reasons we were excited — I mean, we appreciate the knowledge you've already shared with our listeners, but, you know, you are known in the area for being involved in the community. And so I think there— we want to kind of unpack that from a couple of different directions. But I guess I'll tee up the question: What does community involvement mean to you?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 20:33

Well, I believe that, you know, I've led a charmed life. You know, as a child, I have loving parents, grandparents that live just down the road. That's part of the beauty, I guess, of the family farm is that it's really family. And the wisdom that my wife showed many, many years ago to say, hey, the city's great and all, but it's really expensive. And can we afford, can we sustain this? Can we succeed here? And The answer was, yeah, probably so, and it's going to take a lot of time and hard work to get there. So when I came back home, uh, you know, it was really about— this place was great to me. I mean, I, I played Little League ball and I high school at Ridgemont and played football and baseball and all of those that helped with the, uh, with the, uh, uh, performances from the show choir that was like stagehand kind of person, but also you know, growing up doing 4-H and showing livestock at the fair and all of those things that I loved about growing up here, I wanted to make sure that my son got to enjoy that, that his friends, the, you know, my kids, my grandkids, everyone else's kids and grandkids get to enjoy that too. So I felt like I didn't have a lot of money that I could invest, but I have time. And, you know, sometimes to me that's more valuable than money because you're going to give you're going to give of yourself a lot for certain things. And, and a lot of times it just takes someone to say, hey, I'll do it. Yeah, I'll take that on and I'll run with it. And so that's to me, it was just putting myself out there and saying, hey, I want, I want a good life for everyone's kids and grandkids, and I'm willing to help.

**J****Jason Duff** 22:15

Yeah, I think that sometimes one of the misnomers is that, you know, to serve your community, you just have to write checks. And really, that is an important piece. It is. But the time, talent, and treasure, like in the beginning, if you don't have a lot of money, like what can you do to step up to serve? You know, be a volunteer, get involved in your local schools or your church or organizations that are in your community. For you, like you say, a charmed life. And I think that, you know, it is a circumstance of people before us that set up the institutions, the organizations, the schools. I mean, it is that kind of big, larger family of a community. And I hear when you speak, like, you want to see that continue on. Absolutely. You know, and there is a, there's a threat that a lot of people today talk about how busy they are. And I'm curious how you feel about that. Because there's— it's true. It's the truth. Like, you know, kids are probably more busier than they've ever been and all the different things. You know, right now there's a lot of pressure on with high inflation on working families being able to have the time and maybe they need to take a second or third job. Like, how do you think about like these societal challenges of being busy and how we overcome it?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 23:41

Yeah. And, you know, I would never tell anyone how to raise a child, but I was fortunate enough that You know, one time my wife and I had my son involved in soccer and baseball, spring soccer and baseball at the same time, and I just said never again. Um, and, and really just, I, I hated to be that dad, but I— you're gonna have to choose one or the other because we only had one. And I can't imagine how families with 2, 3, 4, or 5 kids, um, get around all of that stuff. And, and he chose baseball, but I mean, we we set boundaries with it. And then when he got a little bit older, you know, he opted not to do a winter sport just so he had a break. And but really from a community level, I guess I would tell you that I've been able to invest a lot of time. But even if you just invest an hour a week in your church, in your kids' youth sports program, whatever it is that you're passionate about, that 1 hour is huge to somebody and it's really huge to everyone that that organization benefits. And I guess I look at it like, could we all squeeze 1 hour out of our day or out of our week where we're not on our cell phones, where we're not scrolling on social media? I think we probably can.

**J****Jason Duff** 24:58

Yeah. You know, truth be told. And what's cool about that, I mean, this goes for monetary, you know, donations as well as like you do that little bit over a long extended period of time and then you look back and like, holy cow, I donated, or like whether it's your time or your money or whatever, like a decent amount. And like that's something to be proud of. And small sacrifice each week, you know, adds up to quite a bit, which is really cool. I know you've served on several boards throughout the years. What can you talk us through your mindset on serving on boards and the significance of it?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 25:26

Yeah, sure. So, you know, really, and you guys are all about economic development and for me in my home, You know, we didn't always pursue economic development, is I guess the right way to say it, when I was a young person. And because of that, I think we got a little stagnant. You know, we were a little bit stale. We were not growing jobs and small businesses. We were losing them. Case in point would be, you know, the Rockwell plant, which started the credit union there, their employees did. It was aging, obviously, but they did have one machine. It was a giant press that was like the only one like it in the world. And, you know, maybe we didn't as a community do enough to keep that here. And now it's just a giant parking lot. You know, it's a slab of concrete. And I think that there was a concerted effort by a big group of people from all different backgrounds that said, hey, we've got to grow, we've got to turn this around. And so I sort of looked at when we did some studies about what helps with economic development, it was things like strong school systems, you know, robust hospital and healthcare system, emergency services, green space and activities for families and kids. And okay, so, you know, I want to be involved. I want to help. I don't have a lot of money to give, but I have time and energy. Why don't I throw that time and energy at those things that I can help with that help drive and impact economic development? And so I've done that. And like I said, you know, off air, that was a giant team effort of a lot of different people and it continues every day. You've got to stay after it all the time. Yeah. But that was the significance to me was things that I was passionate about, but also things that I felt like would have a direct impact on that economic development piece.

**J****Jason Duff** 27:23

Yeah. And I mean, I know from our call that a big part of that was your employers or your coworkers, I should say, allowing you that space to be able to do that.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 27:33

Right?

**J****Jason Duff** 27:33

Right. So, Jason, I'm going to tee it kind of up to you as you have several team members who serve on a number of different boards. Why is that important to you that they're doing that? And like, why is that what we want rather than like you see it taking away from their time at Small Nation? Yeah, well, I think it's getting them exposed to people that have different ideas and opinions that are diverse. And sometimes when you are in a business, a for-profit business, you're kind of captain of your own ship and you can make decisions whether they're right or wrong. You're— you have the authority to do that. When you're in a board, you have to kind of put on a different hat. Like, I am a board member on this board and I have maybe a set of bylaws that govern me, and I have to work with 8, 10, 12, 15 other people to get consensus on making a decision. And so the opportunities that I've had to serve, it's forced me to think differently and take more time to process. And that exercise I have found has, I think, made me a better leader. How about you, Matt? How do you think about that?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 28:42

I would totally agree. I believe that, you know, I answer to a board of directors at the credit union, so I understand from their perspective and what their role is. And, you know, they're about vision and setting, you know, our goals for the future. And then I'm the one that has to go execute it. So then when I turn around and I serve on that board, I can see both sides of it where, hey, you know, I'm not here to tell you what to do every day. I'm here to set goals and have vision for what the future of this organization looks like. And then you as the employee or the director of that, you know, organization are going to have to go execute it. And I'll help you however I can. In whatever way I can, but I'll also stay out of your way. And I think that's an important part of leadership sometimes too, is saying, here you go. As long as you're ethical and you're honest and you're kind and you're compassionate and fair, go do it your way, and I'm here to help you.

**J****Jason Duff** 29:38

And I think you see that with leaders in general, is that people have different styles about how they go about to accomplish something. And I'd say it's one of the things that I've had to learn, and maybe take a step back with is that, you know, you come to a certain situation with your lenses and your body of evidence of experience, but, you know, some leaders, they have a different way to go about it. And I found that sometimes when I do step back and let people learn on their own, the outcome is probably far better than what I could have ever accomplished. It hurts your ego a little bit with that, but then like, that's the other neat thing, Ethan, that comes from getting exposed or being in different organizations or situations, you glean ideas from that. How to run a meeting. Yeah. How to structure creating an agenda, how to prepare and write minutes. Like all of those things as, as junior or newer team members have those experiences interacting with other professionals, your hope is, is they, they absorb that knowledge and bring that back to your organization.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 30:42

Yeah. And I would say, you know, now, and I'm very, very proud of this and we research it every other year, we're a volunteer-driven organization. Our board is not paid. The board and credit committee and supervisory or audit committee of Quest is not paid at all. So completely volunteer. And then they drive that down to the staff too. And on average, Quest employees will donate somewhere between 2,400 and 2,600 hours per year. To area organizations. And that's Hardin County, Logan County, Wyandotte County, which is another area that we serve. And it's— I'm like the proud papa when I see them, when I go to an event or something and I see a Quest person, as we call ourselves, Explorers. Explore the Possibilities is our tagline. So we call each other Explorers. When I go out and I see an Explorer volunteering their time, or I see their name on a program that they serve on this committee, or that— I'm like the proudest dad ever.

**J****Jason Duff** 31:37

Yeah, that's so cool. All right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. 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. If you are looking for a dynamic workspace in the heart of Bellefontaine, look no further. Build Coworking Space is your destination for creativity and collaboration with state-of-the-art facilities and a thriving community. This is where innovation happens. Join them today for as low as \$99 a month and build your success at Build Coworking Space. You know, you talked about starting off, you didn't have a lot of money to donate, and so then you started with your time. But since then, it's my understanding that you're— that Quest, I should say, has, has funded a lot of community things, whether it be a school team or, you know, a sponsorship for whatever comes across your desk. I mean, obviously not every single time, but like, can you talk to me why, you know, you think that's important and what, what return, I guess, to further the question, have you seen that for your business?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 32:48

Yeah. And I don't think I'm giving away the, the special sauce recipe here at all. But, you know, we look at it like, what better way to advertise quest than to invest in our community in such a way that it creates, whether that's a capital project, whether it's supporting a kid at the livestock sale at the Logan or Hardin County Fair, that then leads to their first automobile, which leads to their first part-time job or pays for their books in college. And we get something back, you know, one, the name recognition, obviously. Yeah. But it's not dollars spent on fancy mailings and, you know, different things like that that businesses of our type and size do. We would much rather invest locally and have our name in a gym, have our name on a building at the fairgrounds, have a kid running around the local pizza parlor with their Little League shirt on with Quest on the back of it. You know, what better advertising is that? And it's— and, and that's, I guess, we really look at it like it's not just a short-term investment in marketing. It's a long-term investment in the future of that kid, that family, that organization, our community.

**J****Jason Duff** 34:01

And I would almost probably argue that it's more effective marketing than your local federal credit union, you know, marketing anyway, just like from a purely business perspective.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 34:11

Like, well, and we still do— I mean, we still do print in all our local newspapers, radio in all of our local radios. We also digitally market, which, you know, it's interesting. Brian Sprang, who's our CIO, and I mentioned him earlier, I stole him away from our board because he's an IT professional, but he's also got this like really cool creative side to him that he could take our, our content and turn it digital back when that was sort of the new thing of advertising on your smartphone and stuff. But then, you know, the more down-to-earth part of it is help you build that building at the fairgrounds or help with the Little League ball field. And there's a banner on a fence somewhere because we donated to the Dugout Project or whatever it was. It just feels good and it builds the community and again goes back to those things that when someone looks at our community for economic development, it's building that asset. Yeah.

**J****Jason Duff** 35:07

Can you speak to what you have seen in Hardin County maybe like in the last 20 years and then particularly in Kenton, some of the new energy and investments that are taking place there?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 35:20

Yeah, absolutely. So the first thing I think we we, you know, we can be proud of, uh, even though our community is not a part of small nation, although I'm a proponent of that. Um, I don't know that we have reversed the brain drain, as people label it, but I think we've stymied it and we're starting to turn the corner of bringing young people back. And, uh, you know, I, I did it a long time ago, but now it's far more routine. And we talked about, you know, working from home. Yeah, I think that's led to it a little bit as well. That's maybe one of the side benefits of working from home is people realize, well, it's a little cheaper to live in a rural part of the country than it is in the metropolitan part. So, yeah, and I can work from anywhere now. That's drawn some people back, but really excited to see, you know, that post-college or post-military service younger people coming back to our community. And that's to me, I mean, okay, now we have a future. Right. But the other things that have been exciting is, you know, our hospital is part of OhioHealth Systems. And, you know, we're all fortunate to have, you know, Mary Rutan Health System, Hardin Memorial Health System. I mean, that's— it's really almost incredible to have two really great hospital systems like that in small communities like ours. And I've served on Hardin Memorial board for 19 years and now I'm, you know, retired from that, but was on the OhioHealth board as part of Hardin Memorial. So to really understand hospitals and how that works. We're fortunate, very, very fortunate. Aside from that, you know, we, we have green space now. Our schools have all— Kenton's rounding out with a new middle school, high school now. But I think about Logan County too, with Bellefontaine's, you know, to me, brand new school. Ben Logan's beautiful campus that they have, Indian Lake, West Liberty, you know, Riverside. Hardin County has gone through that renewal with their school system. Systems. And because of that, we were able to compete against a community, I guess, in Georgia that was, uh, International Paper or Graphic Packaging was going to relocate or expand in one community or the other, and we were able to win that. And so Graphic Packaging, or GPI, which is right on the south edge of Kenton across from the grain elevator, several years ago doubled in size, and we got that. Now they've built a big warehouse out on the south edge of town by the airport. Of course, any community that's fortunate to have like Ohio Northern University in it, that's an incredible—

**J****Jason Duff** 37:52

a lot of people when we talk to other small towns, they are extremely jealous if your, your community has a college, right? Because there's just so much, whether it's research or access to students, and that, that's a huge benefit to, to Kenton and, and Hardin County with Ada.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 38:07

So yeah, and, and, and Owen used beautiful— Ada is beautiful. Um, and Ada's got a little hidden manufacturing side to it that not a lot of people know about, but Ada Technologies, which was very small when my wife worked there many years ago, is now very big part of Honda. But also one of the coolest things of Hardin County is that we have Wilson football, right? And Wilson football could have gone anywhere they wanted to go in the world, and or Ohio or Texas or whatever fit their fancy, and yet they rebuilt and expanded their factory in Ada, Ohio, and that's just awesome.

**J****Jason Duff** 38:41

Well, and I don't know, I don't believe that was just by chance. I mean, I think the example of what you said when the opportunity with Rockwell to save them with that special press, I think that's a really important reminder to not just set back with expecting that the great companies that you have will always be great and they'll always be there. That's right. And, you know, I look at our region. We here in the region manufacture cars, and you cannot not not turn on TV and see how that industry is drastically changing right now. And I think that in our role as local leaders, it is keeping the pulse on our factories and the needs that they have and how we keep preparing our employees that work in those factories for all the changes that are coming, right? How do you kind of think about that regionally, like keeping our region strong?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 39:37

Well, I think that one, we have to— and it pains me sometimes to say, but we have to have good local representation, whether that's county commissioners, whether that's city council members, whether that's township trustees. Now, those are all, again, salt of the earth, great people. But I mean that clear up through the state of Ohio. And we have to have people that are focused on maintaining the employers that we have and growing new employers and/or enhancing the ones that we have. So I think that, you know, unfortunately politics plays a role in that. But I also think that something that, you know, I see a lot happening in Hardin County, and I happen to be a school board member at Ridgemont, which is my alma mater, but they have, you know, world-renowned Future Farmers of America program, is workforce development. And I think that's something that we can all take part in, you know, whether that's helping out our local schools, whether that's mentoring students at our local schools on small business or you know, maybe a kid that's more interested in working with their hands, making sure they have programs available through High Point or through their school where they can learn to weld, they can learn to work on automobiles, learn to cut hair, you know, whatever, right? Whatever that is, because it's all valuable and it's all future workforce development.

**J****Jason Duff** 40:50

Love that. Yeah, that's really great. Well, I'm going to kind of transition us here into a little bit of a fun segment. It's our rapid-fire Q&A.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 41:00

Okay.

**J****Jason Duff** 41:00

Okay, round one. Uh, first question here is Coke or Pepsi? Cherry Coke. Cherry Coke.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 41:06

All right, really, it's unsweet iced tea, but if I'm gonna have— wow, yeah, if I'm gonna drink a soda, which is a couple times a year, it's gonna be Cherry Coke.

**J****Jason Duff** 41:14

Yeah. All right, good choice. Yeah, that's a good choice. Uh, second question is, what does your ideal vacation look like?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 41:20

Right now, it's any time that I get to spend with my only son who's in the military, and I don't get to see him or talk to him very often, so I don't care. It could be in Siberia. If I'm with my wife, it's cool.

**J****Jason Duff** 41:31

Yeah, that's awesome. Yeah. Another great answer. This is maybe one that takes a little bit more thought, but if you weren't in your current career path, what type of work would you be doing?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 41:42

Interesting. You know, my high school guidance counselor told me military, but really, I'm now of the age where I would be retired from the military. Yeah. So I would love to think— I'm a huge Cleveland Browns fan, season ticket holder. I would love I would love to do something in their front office.

**J****Jason Duff** 41:58

Wow. Okay. That's cool. I like that idea. That's a good one. So you've hung on with the Browns like—

**M****Matthew Jennings** 42:04

Oh my gosh, Jason.

**J****Jason Duff** 42:06

The look on your face. You're still, they're still there with them.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 42:10

Diehard.

**J****Jason Duff** 42:10

Okay. Yeah. That's a whole nother podcast though.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 42:13

Go every Sunday that they're home.

**J****Jason Duff** 42:15

I love that.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 42:16

I love it.

**J****Jason Duff** 42:17

And then the next one here is what's next for Quest Federal Credit Union as you're looking at the horizon?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 42:21

Yeah. You know, we recently expanded to Russell's Point, which was a commitment that we made a long time ago. To the board of the IGA Credit Union Logan Community when they moved into Bellefontaine and decided to merge with us or partner with us, because really it was a partnership and not really a merger. They always wanted to have a location at the lake. And so we committed to that. Now, we were building in Ada at the time, and then we had the opportunity to expand to Wyandotte County, Upper Sandusky. And so we're in Upper Sandusky, and it got put on the back burner a couple times only to have COVID spoil our groundbreaking. So we waited for a year after COVID and broke ground. And so we're just now past that expansion. And our thought process is every 5 to 7 years to expand. And I guess we look at it like if we do that routinely, one, we continue to grow, we, you know, we spread our wings and diversify out through other communities. But also the expense of a building 20 years ago is falling off the balance sheet. So, you know, it's a little bit of a numbers game that we play now. Of course, building that building at Indian Lake's way different than building one 20 years ago. Yeah, it was a little more of an investment. But so really it's just kind of continue to lay down roots where we're at. I don't know that we have another expansion really planned or even talked about for that matter. But we believe and we know that we're in some great communities. When you talk about Upper Sandusky is awesome. Kenton, very cool. Ada, now Russell's Point, Bellefontaine. We've got a lot of growing to do just right there. And so I think we just want to double down on the footprint that we have. We want to invest in small business. We want to encourage agriculture, small business. We want to, you know, make sure that we're there serving those dual income families that you talked about and just making sure that, you know, mom's got a good minivan or SUV to run the kids around in and dad's got a decent work truck and everyone's got a nice home. And so that's, you know, that's our goal for now.

**J****Jason Duff** 44:20

Yeah, no, I like that vision too. And I feel like in an age where You know, it's harder probably for community banks. I think that trajectory of growth is exciting to hear. And before I kind of move into closing questions here, I did want to mention that you also have a podcast, the Exploration Podcast. Is that right? That is.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 44:40

It's called Exploration.

**J****Jason Duff** 44:41

Tell us a little bit about that.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 44:42

Yeah. So what, you know, we were not bored during COVID but we were a little bit bored. And what we decided was, is that it's a really cool medium And yeah, you know, I'm thrilled and honored, to be honest with you, that you both asked me to join. And of course, you know, Jason Duff and Small Nation, everybody knows who that is. So it's really neat to be a guest on a podcast. But Brian Sprang and I came up with the idea that, you know, maybe this is a good way to talk to the community. And you mentioned your dad and his commute, you know, like give people something to listen to that, you know, educates them about Quest and/or something that's on their mind. So we started out with just the first 4 or 5 as What is a credit union? You know, how is it different than a bank? Yeah. What's Quest's story? You know, what's our board of directors look like and how do they function? You know, that type of thing. And then we drill down into how do I set my— reset my online banking password on a Sunday afternoon when we're not open? Right. How do I get my first car loan? How do I build a credit score? How do I get— how do I help my kid apply for a student loan? So it's just an entire library of stuff like that that and, you know, most people may find it really dull, but that one episode that matters to that person will be pretty cool. And it's fun to listen to. And we keep it light and we laugh and it's just a good time. And so there's 25+ episodes out there, just all things credit union related, all things banking related.

**J****Jason Duff** 46:05

Great. So if you're interested in learning more specifics either about Quest or just some of those general topics too, you said student loans, and things like that. I think that's a great idea, you know, to just have a — let's have a conversation about it and make the barrier of entry or intimidation factor way less, you know.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 46:21

Right.

**J****Jason Duff** 46:21

Anyone can turn on a podcast and listen to that. So super cool. And I wanted to encourage listeners to go check that out if they're interested in learning more. A couple of closing questions here for you. What is one professional development resource that was impactful for you on your journey?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 46:34

The leadership program that we talked about, and it's a program of OSU Extension, and I know that Logan County has their version of it, Hardin County theirs. It was just an opportunity opportunity to learn how our government operates, you know, local government, a little more deeply, to network with some young professionals at the time. So to me, just to be able to get in a room with other like-minded people of different ages and backgrounds and businesses was, was very, very valuable.

**J****Jason Duff** 47:00

Yeah, yeah, 100%. That's a great resource. And then, you know, what is, what is the website for Quest? And, you know, on, on social media and things like that, you They're on Facebook and everything, right?

**M****Matthew Jennings** 47:11

Facebook, X, Instagram, just about anything you want. You know, we're @QuestFCU, and that's properly spelled Q-U-E-S-T, and then F like federal, C like credit, U like union. So if you just look up Quest FCU on any of the social media platforms, you're going to find us. [www.questfcu.com](http://www.questfcu.com), obviously, for our website. And then, of course, in your podcast store, if you search Quest Exploration,, you'll find us.

**J****Jason Duff** 47:36

Great. And I'll link the podcast and the website at minimum in the, in the show notes there. So you can check that out. Thank you for being a steward of service. And I think for listeners today, just hearing your story of moving from employee to becoming the CEO of the organization, how you did it, and then also just the ways that you plug in and give back with your time, your talent, and your treasure. And I think that allocating time to think about your thinking and being surrounded by other leaders continues to not only help you, but you're, you're taking all that wisdom and helping and teach other leaders to do good things in their community too, including me. And so just, I appreciate you being a sounding board and being an advisor. And, and what's happening in Kenton is, is not by chance, it's by intention. And if Those listeners, if you haven't been following, there's been a lot of really awesome positive news that about some work that's happening in the state representatives right now and the state budget. We're excited for the Senate to act on that legislation too. Right. But bringing back more of that money to taxpayers that already paid that money and actually see it go for infrastructure, things like, you know, improving our water lines and our sewer lines and our streets and our sidewalks. Because when you get you get a really good foundation that then gives business owners confidence to invest capital and start new businesses. And, uh, Kenton is one of those communities. It's like where Bellefontaine was a few years ago. And for those investors that are listening, if you haven't been there recently, you need to go take the trip because there are still buildings that can be purchased. Absolutely. And there is a guy on this podcast that you've heard him talk about that he is wanting you, he's asking to walk in the door of Quest Federal Credit Union and start talking about financing that may be available.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 49:36

Absolutely, happy to help. And yeah, it's the work that's getting done right now. They just closed the street earlier this week. It's not going to be sexy, but it's going to— it's very, very important because it's all, you know, underground infrastructure related. And it's a perfect launch site for a small business.

**J****Jason Duff** 49:53

And I will double down on that. It really is at a opportunity that once these investments and these improvements are made, um, it, that, that those infrastructure, that's good for 100 years. And so it really is the time to be that first mover. Um, you know, just like we were in Bellefontaine 15 years ago, it's scary, it's lonely. Um, but I do think, uh, with finding the, you know, people like you, um, and the city is also willing to help out in a lot of different ways. That's right. Yeah.

**M****Matthew Jennings** 50:22

And the Chamber and Business Alliance, Hardin County Chamber and Business Alliance, which is a, uh, you know, the merger of multiple organizations into one that's just got a great mission and they're, you know, one-stop shop, all things economic development, rolling out small grant programs, small loan programs to help with storefront renovation. I mean, there's lots of, lots of opportunity there.

**J****Jason Duff** 50:44

Kenton, Ohio, put it on the map. Thank you, Matt.



**Matthew Jennings** 50:46

Thank you. Thanks.



**Ethan DeLeon** 50:48

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



**Ethan DeLeon** 50:50

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.