

Episode 75

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Spend-A-Day Marina, Indian Lake, family business, marine industry, boat sales, overcoming obstacles, tornado recovery, three-generation business, learning to sell, customer relationships, OneWater Marine Group, business acquisition, Indian Lake Boat Show, work ethic, summer jobs

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Monica Hurst, Ethan DeLeon

M

Monica Hurst 00:00

And on Monday I'm gonna have a meeting with my whole staff just to remind them the tornado is not an excuse anymore. And we have to, to rally ourselves. Mm-hmm. And we have to rally what we've done and we have to go to work and we have to do the work for our customers and what we do, what we are spend today. We are spend today, Marina. Let's do this.

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 are excited to be talking to entrepreneur and general manager at Spend-A-Day Marina, Monica Hurst. Welcome, Monica.

M

Monica Hurst 00:57

Thank you, Monica.

J

Jason Duff 00:59

So excited. We were laughing coming in today to this episode because Monica and I share, um, a lot of a similar background growing up. We are lake rats through and through. We are proud Indian Lake Lakers. Um, Monica, going through school, was someone that I looked up to, uh, not only because, um, she was just a really good human— like, she was involved in sports, she was involved in music In fact, maybe we break down and do a little musical number later on.

M

Monica Hurst 01:28

Oh boy.

J**Jason Duff** 01:30

We shared some musicals together. But probably the thing that I really cherished about her the most is she grew up in a family business. You know, me, there weren't a lot of other people that had that kind of shared identity of like growing up with your parents and grandparents and working with them. And I just, Indian Lake, a big part of the reason why Indian Lake is what it is today is because of Monica's family. And what's pretty darn awesome and exciting today is to see how she is leading things up in that family business and taking it to a whole different level. So I'm just excited to have you on the show today. Thank you. Yeah, well, let's— can we talk a little bit about Spend the Day Marine, Indian Lake, Ohio? For people that maybe are new to Indian Lake, what does Indian Lake kind of mean to you, and what is— where is Indian Lake, Ohio?

M**Monica Hurst** 02:17

So Indian Lake is, I think, representative of not just a place to go boating not just a place that you vacation once a year, not just a place you grow up. It's a place that harbors all of this emotion and memory and feeling and excitement for generations. So like for me growing up, it was, I'm there with my family, I'm there helping other families experience what I lived day in and day out. And that was just this joy and connection, um, for— and developing a love for the water and developing, uh, some family ties that you just don't have an opportunity to, to have in many of our day-to-day lives. So it kind of spans just more than a place.

J**Jason Duff** 03:15

And about those experiences. So for those that are listening, Indian Lake is about 60 miles northwest of Columbus. It is 5,600 acres. Is that right?

M**Monica Hurst** 03:27

It's a, yeah, about 5,800. 5,800 acres. Depending on what, what the measurement is.

J**Jason Duff** 03:32

Yeah.

M**Monica Hurst** 03:32

Which document you're reading.

J**Jason Duff** 03:34

It's an inland lake in Ohio and it is surrounded by homes and restaurants. And it's a beautiful state park. It's one of the nicest state parks in Ohio. So a lot of people love to fish and you know, spend time on boats and it's an area that you can go away and recharge. And what's special about the connection with your family business is Spend-A-Day Marine was, has been around for a number of years. Can you tell us a little bit about how did Spend-A-Day get started?

M**Monica Hurst** 04:04

So my grandparents came to the Indian Lake area from the Lima area and my grandpa wanted to be able to offer somebody the opportunity to get out on the water and experience, you know, fishing, swimming with their families. So he started a rental facility in 1950, and that progressed into some small engine sales, that progressed into some boat sales, that progressed into moving the actual physical building that he started in to one of the locations that we currently are at now. It actually is our current service department, which is pretty cool. So that is how it began, and then it has evolved from there. Still currently, we rent a fleet of about 20 boats, and it is one of my most favorite things to do in the summer is to work that side of the business.

J**Jason Duff** 04:59

So it was your grandfather, Bill, and his wife, Marjorie. Marjorie. That took that risk to open the business in the '50s. And at the time, Indian Lake in the, you know, probably from the '20s to the late '60s, it was a destination as an amusement park. It had a roller coaster, it had dance pavilions, it had great, you know, resorts around the water that you could stay overnight or stay for the week. And being able to have a marina that rented boats, especially motorized boats, had to be pretty big and innovative at the time.

M**Monica Hurst** 05:40

Absolutely, yes. I remember at my grandfather's funeral, Reverend Ellington telling a story about his family coming to the lake and being able to experience the water. And they didn't have any money, but my grandpa made sure that they were able to get out on the water. And that's what it's about. Like, did it matter that they didn't have \$100 to throw at for a week, but they were able to figure out how to make it happen for his family. And that's important.

J**Jason Duff** 06:14

Can you walk us through for someone that maybe isn't familiar with a family business, because now you're into 3 generations, what do you think for your parents And you being the grandchild in that, what was that like? Kind of walk like, what's the day-to-day being in a family business like?

M**Monica Hurst** 06:33

So the day-to-day in a family business is it's all business. Everything you do revolves around the business at some level. That doesn't mean you don't participate in the other things, extracurriculars, the school events, the volunteering, all of those other opportunities. You still do all those, but it all, um, revolves around what is happening in the business in that day. And it, it means that you learn as a child. Many, many children don't get to hear the day-to-day, the struggles, the challenges, whether it be personnel, whether it be the economy, whether it be inventory, whether it be marketing. All of those different aspects that go into making the business run day-to-day are not often discussed at the family dinner table in all the families. So Jason and I are probably maybe lucky, I guess, that we were able to hear that and experience that and learn from that at a very young age.

J**Jason Duff** 07:29

Yeah. Did you enjoy that experience or was that kind of a turnoff for you?

M**Monica Hurst** 07:33

I did enjoy the experience. And, you know, in my family now, my husband did not grow up in a family business. So we kind of have this conundrum sometimes about what we are going to talk about at the dinner table and what is— we'll call it quote unquote, quote appropriate conversation. But now that my kids are 9 and 11 and they're asking questions about business, they're asking questions about how things work. And I look back and I'm like, that is a good thing. All of those lessons are good because, you know, anytime you have the opportunity to teach and learn, it's always a good opportunity.

J**Jason Duff** 08:14

When I got into a serious relationship with my partner, um, he would come to some of our Christmases and I would go to his Thanksgiving. And that was kind of the first year. Like, after we got through a few years, he's like, can I talk to you about something? I was like, sure. He's like, your holidays with your family is like a board meeting. And like, it was that realization, like, actually, that's all I know. I thought that was normal. Like, because it was a time that you would talk strategy, you would celebrate what was working, you could actually vent in a comfortable way of like, can you believe this is going on or this is happening? And it is something that you kind of have to check yourself because you, especially as you, you know, find people that had a different family experience, you know, it's, it's talking about that. So I have to ask you, for like July 4th, a lot of families, you know, are typically doing a cookout and they're, they're celebrating the, the the holiday of the 4th. What is that like when you own a marina on a busy lake?

M**Monica Hurst** 09:12

In the marine industry on a very busy destination lake in Ohio, the 4th of July is just one of your busiest days. Actually, it's not just a day because people celebrate the 4th of July for the week. They celebrate it for— it's a multi-day event. So we prepare for that holiday. Not to plan our own cookouts. We plan how we're going to handle the influx of traffic and what we're going to do and what promotions we're going to run. Yeah. So the 4th of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day, all of those, they are not celebrated in the same fashion in the marine industry when you're on the water. There are stores that might be not on the water or, you know, on a highway and people are traveling to the lake. Well, we are the lake, so we got to be there when our people are there. And that's what is also hard when you jump from a— jump into a relationship with someone who hasn't experienced that. You have to be there when your people, when your customers are there. You have to be there to serve the public because that is what your business is. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 10:18

Wow. Well, I know we've heard some of Jason's experience in the podcast, so I appreciate you sharing yours. And it sounds like it makes me feel so normal.

M**Monica Hurst** 10:26

Yeah, we are normal. Yes, we are.

J**Jason Duff** 10:29

Only to each other, right? So you're now obviously working in the family business. Can you tell me what was the— what was your journey back into the family business like? Sure. And tell us about your dad and mom too, because I wouldn't want to miss them as well.

M**Monica Hurst** 10:44

Yeah. So my mom started working in the family business when I was very young on the accounting side. So she, she joined and she had that same, same drive, same work ethic because she also came from a family business. So it wasn't a paradigm shift for her. Yeah, there was no questioning of the level of commitment that it takes to make it go. She knew it. She grew up in it. Yeah. So jumping into this one was, was normal. Yeah. And I was fortunate to have that experience with them. So they, they ran the business. My grandpa moved to Florida, opened a new marina down there, and my dad and my mom took over the one up here. And the one in, we eventually had one in Kentucky as well. During that time, they of course grew the business in different aspects and I started working there in the rental department. So my boss was my parents, which was a challenge in and of itself, I'm sure. At various points. And then when I went to college and I graduated from college, I said, I am never ever coming back to Indian Lake to work in the family business. And I moved to New York City, and I did a few other, uh, career moves there. And then it came to the point where my dad and my mom and my grandparents were like, all right, what's the next move? What's our transition plan? And I thought, you know, everything that I've done so far does not give me that feeling in my gut to know that I am doing the right thing. Am I influencing other people's lives in a positive way? Right. What am I doing? And I was a pharmaceutical rep and I was a rep for Rubbermaid. So kind of various sales jobs. But they didn't give you that feeling of like, wow, you made an incredible impact in someone's life. And that's what I grew up hearing about. That's what I grew up wanting to make sure that my career would, would fulfill. Right. So I moved back. Yeah. And that's when I started on the sales floor at Spend-A-Day. And, you know, family business doesn't mean you just get tapped and you're like, oh, you're the manager. That's not how it is.

J**Jason Duff** 13:00

Especially in your family's culture.

M**Monica Hurst** 13:02

Correct.

J**Jason Duff** 13:02

And if I can just share a quick story. So one of the other things that the Reeds did for our community is they provided a lot of summer jobs, particularly to kids that are in high school and college. So they're at their marina. Not only do they have the sales lot, where they're selling new and used boats, but they also have an area where they're repairing boats, you know, to get them ready for the season or if they get damaged. But then they have a gas dock, so to actually fuel up you need gas. And it was a big deal to try to apply to get the really great summer job at the gas dock because it sounded like, oh, you could be outside, you can get a tan, you're gonna be— well, that was until you had a chance to learn from Roseanne Reed and and the process that Roseanne ran to make sure that gas dock ran very efficiently. Can you speak to some of those Roseanne-isms?

M**Monica Hurst** 13:56

Oh, the Roseanne-isms. I can. Man, she doesn't listen to podcasts, so I guess it's okay. Okay, that's good. So she is very Type A, and she likes things done only one way, and that is the Roseanne way. And that means double-checking and triple-checking and balancing to the penny on every single everything, every transaction that would happen. Wow. That also means that the daily schedule would be followed without question. That means that a recap of the day would happen without question. And it was a very, it still is a very by-the-book process, no matter what it is that she's doing. She doesn't work at the marina anymore. They are retired, but everything in her life is a very by-the-book process. Yeah. And she has taken those lessons and taught my children that as well. They know it's Nana's way. Yeah. Or no way at all.

J**Jason Duff** 14:50

And can I tell you that the leaders that are now out in the world today, and some of them have been on the podcast, is that that discipline and that work ethic prepared them for their future life.

M**Monica Hurst** 15:03

Absolutely. We hear about it. Actually, we still have people who have worked under my dad, my mom, even me in the rental department, and they come back to the marina just to say hi 20, 30 years later and let us know, wow, this job taught me so much. Like, this is not just a normal run-of-the-mill making a hamburger kind of job, right? This is a how do you learn about business? How do you learn about customer interactions? How do you learn about interdepartmental interactions? Like all— it's fully faceted.

J**Jason Duff** 15:41

Yeah, it's professional development and it probably helps people stick around longer. So you came back to sales. I did. And you're on the sales floor at Spend-A-Day Marine. How— what is your advice about how to learn to sell? Because it's one thing they don't teach at a college campus. It's not something you can easily pick up from a book. Like, how did you learn to sell? And what— do you have any tips around that?

M**Monica Hurst** 16:03

So that's actually— that's a good question. I'm interviewing two salespeople right now. So, so we are, we are well vested in teaching people how to sell and making sure they have the thing. You know, you can teach people skills, but an element of sales is beyond that. An element of sales is that, that feeling that I got in my belly about doing something right for someone else's family. That's part of it as well. But listening Listening and being a, a consistent voice for a customer with regards to follow-up and, and getting them the information that they need. If you listen to your customers and understand what they need, then you're going to be able to provide them the experience that they're looking for. And for us, it's a, it's not a transactional experience. It's not a, you know, buying a boat, renting a boat.

J**Jason Duff** 17:03

That's a big purchase, by the way.

M**Monica Hurst** 17:05

This is the second biggest purchase people make in their lives beside their homes. So it is, and it's purely discretionary income. So we don't have the luxury of, well, I need a car, right? I need, you know, they don't need a boat. Um, it's the want, and there's a lot of emotion involved in that. And if you don't appeal to that side of someone, then you aren't going to be successful.

J**Jason Duff** 17:29

Yeah. Wow. And I think it's how do we teach the next generation? Because I will share just having a lot of younger people, and maybe this is also with older people, too. But we're so used to our phones and our devices. It's like someone walks into the marina, ding, you hear the door. How do we teach people to get up and go have a conversation? Do you have any advice about that?

M**Monica Hurst** 17:54

So we recently installed a dinger. For starters. Because no one can say the excuse, I never heard it. You heard them walk in. Right. My office is still right in front of the door, so I'm usually— and I hear everything. Like, my ears are constantly going. And it is amazing. Even tenured people sometimes, because they've become so used to their devices and dependent on their devices, they don't hear it. Like, it is— it's not a fact of ignoring it. They just are tuned out to personal interaction and awareness of what's around you. So the dinger helps for sure. But teaching that, I think, is just having that consistent messaging and preaching that it is the relationship that you are building that is going to lead to not only their long-term success as a salesperson, but the business's long-term success as well. I mean, we've been there since 1950. We've been there a hot minute. And it isn't just because my sales guys and gals are getting the sales that walk in the door. It's because the people that walk in the door feel like they're part of the Spend-A-Day family, and then they talk to us, or they talk to their friends, and they talk to their family about it, and then they come in because they had such a good experience.

J**Jason Duff** 19:11

Do you run into people that are like, I don't know how to drive a boat, like that I want to buy a boat, like I've got this great vision, but it's like Every day. So for someone listening, like, how do you get over that? That's a big barrier. Like, I have the vision of what I could see my family out in the lake and enjoying time, but I have no idea or no confidence to drive a boat.

M**Monica Hurst** 19:33

And that's part of the communication that we need to continue to do and continue to improve on as a dealership and a marina is make people feel comfortable and let them know that we're here to be their partner. To feel comfortable. So for example, during COVID we had the biggest influx of new boaters into our industry than we have ever seen before. Wow. A huge number.

J**Jason Duff** 19:58

I bet sales were off the charts.

M**Monica Hurst** 20:00

Sales were very good. We couldn't get enough products, so we don't even really know what that could have been. But it brought a lot of new people to our industries. I mean, an amount that we couldn't even ever pay for with advertising. So it's awesome, but how do we keep those people in our industry? How do we keep them engaged, especially when all of the other noise from life has started back up again? So we need to just make sure that we are communicating, hosting events, hosting lessons. I used to do a women in boating class, and we got so busy that we couldn't do that anymore. But I have a young girl, Brittany Daniels, she's going to be, doing the women in boating class again. And it's that kind of engagement and that kind of communication with your customer base that is going to keep them feeling comfortable that they can do this.

J**Jason Duff** 20:53

Well, and one thing from the outside that Monica and her team at Spend the Day do well is with the events. So one of the big events that takes place at Indian Lake every year is called the Indian Lake Boat Show. And it's like been around for a long time. 60-plus years. 60-plus years. And it's known, isn't it? It's always the same weekend.

M**Monica Hurst** 21:11

Is it the First weekend in March, first full weekend in March. Remember that, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

J**Jason Duff** 21:17

And you go, and every year they have a different theme, but they set up tent after tent. There are food vendors. It's like a gigantic party.

M**Monica Hurst** 21:27

It is, it is considered opening weekend of the lake. So it is an event that everybody plays off of now, which is awesome, um, because it is the Indian Lake Boat Show. People come to the marina, they They look at all the boats. It's a, you know, a great sales weekend. It has a lot of excitement around that. And when there's excitement, that gets people spending money.

J**Jason Duff** 21:49

Yeah. And that's again, from the economic development standpoint, when your community has an attraction or maybe there's a destination business like a marina, it's how can you cluster up and build upon that? And you have other marinas in the area that you collaborate with. It's like, absolutely, we all win together. When we make the event bigger than just ourselves.

M**Monica Hurst** 22:11

Exactly. And that's, I think, what has been so important for the success of the Indian Lake Boat Show. Other, we're, well, I'm sure we'll talk about this, but with the part of the One More organization that we're in now, they reference the Indian Lake Boat Show to this 100+ dealer group and are trying to replicate the success that that show has had, not only from an attendance standpoint, but from a sales standpoint.

J**Jason Duff** 22:36

Wow.

M**Monica Hurst** 22:37

And it takes time, it takes effort, it takes consistency. And so it is really a kind of a remarkable event, like Jason said, it's something special.

J**Jason Duff** 22:49

Yeah, and you just kind of hinted at it, so I want to kind of take us there, but you're still working in the business obviously, but talk to us about the decision to sell the family business and what drove you to make that decision.

M**Monica Hurst** 23:01

So in 2018, my family, my parents are still working in the business at that point, my mom and my dad, and and me, so the 3 of us, we just sat down and had a heart-to-heart. What are the next steps? They wanted to retire. Did I want to buy it? In 2018, we were on a continuous upswing, like double-digit growth year after year. Wow. So taking that on by myself with a young family was a little daunting, frankly. And the environment has changed so much. That it didn't make sense for me to, to take it on all myself. Sure. So we were able to find OneWater Marine Group and they were in the process of acquiring businesses like ours, longtime family-owned, you know, well-run businesses that had things put together, not someplace they would have to go in and redo everything.

J**Jason Duff** 24:03

Yeah.

M**Monica Hurst** 24:04

So in 2018, we were acquired by OneWater Marine Group. When that happened, it allowed my parents the opportunity to transition out and I transitioned into the general manager position. But during that time, I mean, it doesn't just happen overnight, that type of acquisition. That was about a year and a half in the making prior. So there's, you know, reporting and, and showing what you've done over the years. And that includes a lot of marketing. There's, there is a lot of marketing initiatives that, you know, through my tenure as a salesperson, then sales manager and marketing manager, we'll call it, a lot of new things that had happened over the past 10 years, which had led to a lot of growth that we were able to see, to see up until the 2018 timeframe when we were acquired.

J**Jason Duff** 24:56

Yeah, and then, I mean, we've interviewed several guests on the podcast where it was maybe an exit of the business, and we like to celebrate those with entrepreneurs as well, but you decided to stay with the business. So talk to me about that decision and, uh, kind of your role now.

M**Monica Hurst** 25:11

So as the general manager, it, it was a kind of a natural progression for me. I had been training under my parents for, you know, the past— the 3 years prior to that, really, to, to understand all of the ins and outs of my two least favorite aspects of the business, HR and accounting.

J**Jason Duff** 25:30

Congratulations. I would agree with you on those two.

M**Monica Hurst** 25:35

So when we were acquired, that's kind of what the deal was. OneWater was going to take over the HR and the accounting. I was like, great, leave the marketing to me, leave the sales to me, service, I got the rest of this. I don't want to do all that other stuff. So really it made sense for us at that point in time.

J**Jason Duff** 25:56

Got it. I love it. And then you were telling me on our conversation before the podcast that you put a lot of effort into maintaining that family-owned feel and making sure the culture doesn't change too much, even though it's under new ownership. What kind of efforts are you deploying?

M**Monica Hurst** 26:14

So initially it was, you know, there was a little turbulence, longtime family business. Sold, that always has some questions around it. And so it took some time to let our staff know, hey, we're still Spend-A-Day, you still got me. We have an incredible management team that has been there 30 years.

J**Jason Duff** 26:33

Wow.

M**Monica Hurst** 26:34

And we're all still there. So we have this core group of people that didn't leave. So how could the feeling change if the core group of people have not left? Yes, my parents retired, but they deserve that over and over again. Yeah, very much so. So it took a— first and foremost was getting the staff to understand that, hey, we're still here for you. We are still here if you need something. We're still here to talk to. You don't have to call corporate for an HR question. You know, you could still go to me.

J**Jason Duff** 27:11

Yeah.

M**Monica Hurst** 27:11

So that took some time, but I think we're in an incredible position with that right now. Like I said, we still have a lot of employees that are tenured, 30 years, 20 years, a lot of tenure employees at this point as well.

J**Jason Duff** 27:27

What do you find is your leadership style? Like, how do you go about working and leading your organization?

M**Monica Hurst** 27:34

So my leadership style has changed. I have learned over the years because, I had to. Yeah. Um, I was a very— I still am direct, but my approach has changed to a more empowering approach. When it was my parents and myself leading, it was— we could count on the three of us, so we just did it. So if people had questions, okay, no problem, I'll do it, I'll take care of it for you. But as that changes and you have you know, at this point we have other people to report to. I want to continue to empower those team members to figure it out. How can I help you figure out? What kind of training do you need? Let me show you how I do this so you can learn how to do it next time. So I would probably say I was more of a micromanager before, and I would oversee everything and make sure everything was right. And now I'm trying to, allow people the opportunity to learn.

J**Jason Duff** 28:44

You know, I see in different sizes organizations, like I think back to our family business, and it was very much like what Monica was describing with her parents, is that you kind of pick up, you find where the gaps are and you just make sure they get covered. You wish that people could do more, but at the end of the day, before the shift is over, before the night's done, you just get it done. Um, the other thing is, is the authoritative style. Used to be.

M**Monica Hurst** 29:09

That's a fair word.

J**Jason Duff** 29:10

I mean, it really is. It's like, you will be doing this or you will not be employed here. Yeah. And it's funny that, you know, my mom, who's been a guest on the podcast, she had a business, you know, 25+ years ago and then sold her business and has been out of the game. She's now getting back into the game. And it's really funny watching those old styles. I'm like, yeah, Mom, you know, she's like, well, everyone feels like I'm hurting their feelings.

M**Monica Hurst** 29:35

Oh, the feelings. You got to watch out for the feelings.

J**Jason Duff** 29:37

And she's like, this is— This is how I was taught. And so it's been, she's had to reset some of that. But I like how you have described in the term that I had learned reading a book called Think and Grow Rich is speaking from your life's experience, which in that book, it's called speaking from gestalt. And so instead of saying, well, this is what you should do, is it kind of speaking like what Monica was saying, well, from my experience, when I did this, this is how I did it. And you may have a different approach, but if this is helpful to you, take it and use it. But at the end of the day, you have to learn how to do this, and I'm here to support you with that journey. So, um, yeah, I, I, I— hopefully we don't trigger too many people by hearing our stuff.

M**Monica Hurst** 30:18

We were kind of talking about this earlier. There is a paradigm shift in the workforce.

J**Jason Duff** 30:22

There is.

M**Monica Hurst** 30:23

And as a leader, if you don't pivot and learn yourself— and we're not always going to get it right either. Like, there's going to be times when we do hurt people's feelings and we don't even realize it because we are focused and moving forward. And not everybody works like that. And we just have to continue to recognize what is important to people. And, you know, we do have to be cognizant, more cognizant of feelings than we have ever before.

J**Jason Duff** 30:52

Question for, I guess, the both of you is, how do you keep that in front of you, you know, when you are tempted to, to take the reins again or to jump in there, micromanage things like that? What do you do to remind yourself to, you know, trust your people? I try to think of the younger version of myself. It just happens to be that when I started working in the family business and taking on some probably more adult-oriented responsibilities, I was probably 12 or 13. So as a, as a professional, I am probably, you know, I'm 42 right now, but I'm probably closer to a 60-year-old in my life experience professionally. So I have to think about the lenses of who I'm interacting with and what kind of life experience they bring to the table. So there's two ways that I think people can learn lessons. You can either learn by listening or reading or hearing of, of, of a situation and accept that, or you have to go through it yourself. And some people just need to learn by doing. So I try to be careful to not take away people's lessons. Yeah, that's a good thought.

M**Monica Hurst** 32:01

I don't want to say let them fail, but let them fail. We have to be able to see it, what's happening from our position, and let it happen and be okay with letting it happen, knowing that, you know, as long as—

J**Jason Duff** 32:15

We can recover.

M**Monica Hurst** 32:15

Exactly, as long as it's not something that is going to be extremely detrimental. But if it is a lesson, like you're referring to, We have to be able to let it happen. I still struggle with that. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 32:26

Well, you just want to fix it. Like, you want to, but I think that that's the journey is, and it forces the leader to self-reflect. And where I have really awesome surprises is, and maybe hurts my ego a little bit, is if I take myself out of the situation, it gets handled so much better than I would have handled it.

M**Monica Hurst** 32:47

I mean, that is a good point because I think about that often. All right. Here, are they going to be okay? Can I, can I leave work for a day? For example, today I've been out of the office most of the day. I've maybe been in the office a couple hours just because of various meetings. You know what, the place is still functioning. Yeah, people are still, you know, doing what they're supposed to do. And that— but on the flip side, that should make you feel really good that whatever it is that you're doing, whatever lessons you have been implementing are at work, right?

J**Jason Duff** 33:18

They're actually taking root.

M**Monica Hurst** 33:19

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 33:20

No, well, thanks for sharing that. I just, you know, I have an opportunity here to kind of pick your brains a little bit, so I wanted to ask that question. But we were talking a little bit just how magical, you know, summers are at Indian Lake, and we've been talking a lot recently about tourism and drawing people to this part of the state. But before we kind of talk about some of the obstacles you've had to overcome the past few years, Can you tell us like, what does your busy season look like? Like, what does the business year, calendar year look like for you?

M**Monica Hurst** 33:49

So there is no busy season. It's just what are we doing in a particular season.

J**Jason Duff** 33:56

So, got it.

M**Monica Hurst** 33:57

Because we are as large as we are at this point, there is no downtime, there is no off-season. It is just a different busy season. So the way I tend to explain it, it's, we've got boat show season, which starts in January. And then we've got kind of your main selling season, which kicks off in March with the boat show and goes through July. And then we all change hats and we go through winterization season, which is our service department's big push to get thousands of boats winterized and stored. And that takes everybody. So when you're in a small family business, everybody puts up, hangs up their sales hat and puts on the service hat. Wow. And while sometimes those hats are the same hat, it does require a little different skill set. So you might be going out picking up a boat while it's sleeting outside and 40 degrees. But that's what has to be done to make it happen. And then we turn back around right after Christmas and we start boat show season again.

J**Jason Duff** 34:58

Wow.

M**Monica Hurst** 34:59

So there's really no downtime. It's just a matter of, which part of the business is peaking, right?

J**Jason Duff** 35:05

Got it. All right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. 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 in 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. Big city dining in a small town, now that's The Syndicate. Join them for fresh steaks, pasta, or seafood for dinner, or stop in for Sunday brunch to experience one of their signature dishes such as chicken and waffles, and maybe even pair it with a mimosa flight. Located at 213 South Main Street in downtown Bellefontaine. Well, you know, as we interview entrepreneurs on the show, I think, uh, we all had an interesting experience that was, uh, COVID. We've talked a lot that a lot about that, and you talked about how, you know, sales actually went up for you guys with that. But what was— what changed for you that year, I guess?

M**Monica Hurst** 36:03

Everything. Everything changed that year. You went from, as many of us, we went from thinking we're going to be out of business to, oh my gosh, how are we going to handle all of this business? So it was, it was very challenging. It was awesome because sales were great, but it had its own set of challenges. And I think that's when we started to see the paradigm shift of the workforce and everybody's focus and their priorities shifted. Their priorities shifted in because, you know, imminent doom was blasted in everybody's faces, right, over and over and over again. And, you know, when that happens, they're going to self-reflect and they're going to say, all right, what's important in my life right now? My family, my personal time, you know, all of those things. Well, that doesn't bode well for us, for an industry going through exponential growth that's open 7 days a week.

J**Jason Duff** 37:03

Yeah. So it's really a business that cannot be from work from home or hybrid. Right. Yeah.

M**Monica Hurst** 37:09

It is not a hybrid opportunity.

J**Jason Duff** 37:11

Right.

M**Monica Hurst** 37:11

Yeah. And it's not a Monday through Friday job either. It is a weekend, focused business. So that, that part was challenging. That was kind of from the personnel side. And then of course from the supplier side, we had the inventory that we had, which was normal, we'll call it normal, and then all of a sudden it was nothing. We— my dad and I used to joke, wouldn't it be great to enter into September without any boats on the showroom floor and we wouldn't have, you know, the floor plan costs and all that. Well, that literally happened. Wow.

J

Jason Duff 37:43

So careful what you ask for.

M

Monica Hurst 37:45

Yeah, because that's not a good situation to be in either.

J

Jason Duff 37:48

Yeah, wow. And COVID really, I mean, I don't want to spend too much time talking about this, but that was really just kind of the first of several controversies for Indian Lake. But tell me a little bit, our listeners, more about the weed situation. Weeds, not weed.

M

Monica Hurst 38:04

Vegetation.

J

Jason Duff 38:05

Vegetation in the lake. Yeah, not the marijuana. Yeah, yeah, thank you for clarifying.

M

Monica Hurst 38:09

So right after COVID, Indian Lake experienced an invasive weed species, and we were not prepared for it. And it took a lot of grassroots campaigns to get things moving in the right direction for treatment. That particular invasive weed was treated successfully over the past 2 years. So boating has been wonderful. The lake has been healthy, and that— it— but it took 2 years. I mean, that's a lot of work with the state because, you know, Indian Lake is a state park and they own the water. It wasn't like Spend-A-Day could just go out and treat it. That wasn't— it's not like a group of local citizens could get together and go out and treat it. That was not a feasible option. So we had to work directly with the state. So between the, um, the local organizations and the state, the ODNR, they were able to get that invasive weed vegetation species under control.

J

Jason Duff 39:13

And this is something that a lot of other lakes around the Midwest, around the country, are dealing with. But where it hit especially hard for us is, like what Monica said, is that we were unprepared. And so you can see with the local economy, if people aren't driving their boat up or going out on their boat, they're not eating in the restaurants. They're not staying in the Airbnbs. And so when the tourism economy really took a dive, that's when like we, you know, and, and Monica and, and Spend the Day and their organization took a, a really big, important leadership role to say, we gotta do something about this. That's not just a short-term fix, but is a long-term fix. And I believe heading forward, this is something we'll always be working on.

M**Monica Hurst** 39:56

This is something we're gonna always be working on. And like you said, this is not unique to Indian Lake. We were just talking with Sarah Wickham from Ohio Tourism today and she, we were educating her about the fact as well that this is, this is a Midwest issue that is happening across all of our local small inland lakes. This is, this is not unique to the state of Ohio or Indian Lake, but as a state, we do need to make sure we are taking proactive steps, not waiting, because this is not going away. There's native vegetation that is still in the lake as well. And we have to be able to handle that promptly so we can continue to utilize Indian Lake for the tourism gem that it is.

J**Jason Duff** 40:42

Wow. Yeah. And then recently we just had Rob Underwood also. I'm just bringing out all the worst events here, but we were talking a lot about the recent tornado that obviously just hit. A wind event. Yeah, that's what the insurance companies would like to say is a wind event. But no, on March 14th, it's still all pretty fresh for us. An EF3 tornado came, started in Lakeview and went right through the islands where Monica and Spend the Day is located, and then ventured on more parts of Indian Lake. But at the point it was almost a half a mile wide, it has caused immense damage to the community. And I'd love to hear from your perspective when that happened, where were you? Like, what were your next few days like right after that happened?

M**Monica Hurst** 41:29

So I was at my house in Marysville and the tornado alarm went off and I thought, "Nah, we never get this, whatever. I'm going to ignore it." And then about 2 minutes later, my staff started calling me because I have staff that lives very close to the marina as well. And they're like, "We're having a tornado. The marina's gone." And I'm like, "What? No, what? You're exaggerating. Like, come on now." And for the next 2 hours, I was on the phone with someone from the marina or someone from our one-wheeler organization, letting them know what was going on because it sounded like things weren't going to be normal for a while. So that next morning, I drove to the lake, and I got stopped on 33, and I was like frantic. I'm like, "No, you don't understand. I have to get to Spend-A-Day Marina now." And he let me through. And I drove in and it was unlike anything you ever see on TV. The pictures don't do it justice. It was unreal.

J**Jason Duff** 42:37

It's like a third world war zone.

M**Monica Hurst** 42:40

It was, yes. It's something that, you know, God forbid other counties and cities had to have experienced that. Since March 14th, it's been a crazy tornado season. You can't even be prepared. They told me it was bad, but it was very, very bad. And at that point, you're again like, man, we just had COVID. We defeated that. We got the invasive weed species under control. Maybe this year's going to be the normal year. And we had just had the boat show. So the tornado was March 14th, and the boat show had just wrapped up.

J**Jason Duff** 43:16

Mother Nature said, hold my beer.

M**Monica Hurst** 43:18

Yeah, yeah. They're like, man, yeah, how many more things can you handle? Right. And it was at that point where you're just like, okay, you can't just stop and cry. I don't even think I shed a tear for weeks because it's trauma.

J**Jason Duff** 43:34

You got to keep going.

M**Monica Hurst** 43:36

You got to keep going. And you have your entire team and your entire community looking, looking at you. Wow. And you have to be strong. Absolutely. There's no other way. So every day I would have this enormous list of things to do, whether it be at Orchard— on Orchard Island at Spend-A-Day, because we had to take care of what we needed to take care of. And then it was like, how can we help our neighbors? How can we help the community? And because our— every single facility that we have was damaged. My gas docks were knocked over. My rental apartment was— that building needs a new roof and new siding. Docks were ruined. My steel docks were all bent. All roofs were gone. So all of the boats were in, you know, turned over in those docks. Our entire resort home community/mobile home park was gone. We had trailers flipped over, like mobile home park trailers flipped over on top of the marina, the service department was, I mean, we were right in the middle of it. So every single facility that we have was directly impacted.

J**Jason Duff** 44:48

Yeah. Well, I'm obviously sorry that happened to you.

M**Monica Hurst** 44:51

That's okay. We're up and running. Right.

J**Jason Duff** 44:53

Well, yeah. And just to comment on that, we're now, I mean, it feels like it's been many months, but what happened is how the community came together. The law enforcement, the contractors, the number of dozers, the number of dump trucks, the volunteers, the amount of people, I don't think any of us were prepared of how people came together. And it just happened to be, and I look at Monica and there's many others that we all kind of went to school together. And what was amazing is you just knew Monica's back on the island, she's got it covered. I was over in Lakeview working with Brenda Moots, and let me tell you, I love her. We were all together. It's good old volunteer days in Key Club in high school. But like how everyone, there was this high level of trust. If you need something, tell me what you need. Be quick and specific about it. Cut the drama for most of us. Like, you know, it was figuring it out. Now we're a few months back and there is this really powerful visual of a drone footage shot right after the tornado of Spend-A-Day's campus and all of what Monica mentioned. And within probably a week and a half, how it was all cleaned up. And that big list that she and her team were driving, there is no doubt in my mind that that was a big piece of how that turned that around.

M**Monica Hurst** 46:14

Absolutely, it was. And I will give my team all kinds of kudos. They were amazing. They worked their tails off, and they didn't just work their tails off at our facility, on our campus. They spread their wings and, and their hearts, and they helped the entire community. But it was like the type of communication that Jason was just describing. Like, we're all like-minded people who were in these positions, and we could say, "Jason, I need a generator here." And it got, it showed up. Yes, and it was there, and it was really remarkable. But so if I can pivot on that for just a moment, kind of on the tourism side, we're 2 months in, there's still lots of things, lots of things that need to happen. We just got new gas pumps installed, so we're ready to rock and roll there. But I don't have windows. I have shrink wrap on my front windows with a big smiley face that says Indian Lake Strong. Am I going to get windows before our season starts with Memorial Day? Maybe. I don't know. I need a new roof, new siding. Like, there's a million things. But you know what? It doesn't matter because here we are at Indian Lake entering our 2024 tourism season. And I don't wanna say people don't care because people aren't callous, they just don't think about it. We're not top of mind anymore. And on Monday I'm gonna have a meeting with my whole staff just to remind them the tornado is not an excuse anymore. And we have to rally ourselves and we have to rally what we've done and we have to go to work and we have to do the work for our customers and what we do, what we are Spend-A-Day. We are Spend-A-Day Marina, let's do this. Yeah. And I'm going to have to remind everybody about that again. And I've mentioned it before, but like, we're there. And I know this because we have people coming in all the time over the past few weekends. They're like, oh, it doesn't look like you got hit by the tornado that bad. I'm like, we don't have windows, right? My ceiling is still falling down because the insurance hasn't approved anything yet. So, but people don't see that. They see that we're open and they're so happy that we're there for them. 'Cause guess what?

J**Jason Duff** 48:18

And that's what they need to see.

M**Monica Hurst** 48:19

That's what they need to see. And their place with us as part of the Spend-A-Day family, they're ready to go. And they're just happy we're there. So we kind of have to pivot. Like we got a lot of work to do, but we kind of have to do it behind the scenes.

J**Jason Duff** 48:32

Yeah, wow. And that's really powerful. I think you're seeing the effects of your being persistent to make sure you show up for your community. So that's really cool. You have anything else before I transition us here? Let's do it. All right, cool. Well, on a lighter-hearted note here— these are the tough questions.

M**Monica Hurst** 48:52

Oh no, are these on the agenda?

J**Jason Duff** 48:55

No, no, these are the ones that we withhold. No, I'm just going to move us into a fun segment called Rapid Fire Q&A. Ooh. So my first question to you, especially after all that, is how do you rest/recharge when needed?

M**Monica Hurst** 49:09

Oh, is that a thing? Um, I, I do like to travel and read.

J**Jason Duff** 49:13

Okay. Yeah.

M**Monica Hurst** 49:14

Any space?

J**Jason Duff** 49:15

Do you have a favorite adult beverage?

M**Monica Hurst** 49:17

My favorite current adult beverage is a gin and tonic.

J**Jason Duff** 49:21

Oh, I like that.

M**Monica Hurst** 49:22

It's kind of like an old school adult.

J**Jason Duff** 49:24

Yeah, it is, it is.

M **Monica Hurst** 49:25

Okay.

J **Jason Duff** 49:25

And just travel anywhere, or you have a favorite place?

M **Monica Hurst** 49:28

So I've always liked traveling internationally. Um, that with kids sometimes that becomes more difficult, but probably my, my favorite place is St. Martin.

J **Jason Duff** 49:39

Caribbean. Very cool. Next question is, uh, favorite activity at or around the lake?

M **Monica Hurst** 49:45

Ah, favorite activity. I mean, it's boating.

J **Jason Duff** 49:48

Boating. Be more specific. Do you like tubing? Do you just like just being out in the water?

M **Monica Hurst** 49:51

Like just being out in the water. Okay. My kids like to go tubing. I never want to actually drive the boat. I just want somebody to drive me around on the boat.

J **Jason Duff** 50:00

Just soak up the sunshine. Yes. Awesome. And then if you weren't in your current career, what would you be doing?

M **Monica Hurst** 50:05

I would be a cosmetologist.

J **Jason Duff** 50:07

Wow, she had that one ready to go. Hair, makeup, and nails are a certain thing that you'd want to focus on?

M **Monica Hurst** 50:14

Hair and makeup.

J **Jason Duff** 50:15

I don't think I knew that about you.

M **Monica Hurst** 50:16

I know, I love that.

J**Jason Duff** 50:19

I could see this. Just always intrigued you, or always? Always. Yeah, no, very cool. Most of our guests are like, oh, I honestly have no idea. You had that one ready to go.

M**Monica Hurst** 50:27

I get asked that. My kids have asked me that recently, so that's probably— wow.

J**Jason Duff** 50:32

Did that ever come up earlier, like in, in when you were younger, like thinking about that?

M**Monica Hurst** 50:36

Absolutely. Do you— my, my mom was I'm not all about that.

J**Jason Duff** 50:39

No, so you like the polar opposite. Yeah. Love it. Oh, cool. Okay, cool. Well, a couple closing questions here for you. And the first one is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

M**Monica Hurst** 50:52

The Marine Trades Association has a week-long training session with various speakers in various aspects of business that's been going on for a long time. I actually don't even know how long. Once I started going to those, it was eye-opening because it was like, you're not the only marina. There's other marina owners like you and your family. And it was an amazing way to collaborate and learn together. So I think those have been the most impactful.

J**Jason Duff** 51:25

Yeah, that's a really good one. I think a lot of times we talk about that entrepreneurship and owning your own business can be lonely, and especially in such a niche industry like that. So getting around other people that have the same experience. Are there many of female executives in the marina industry?

M**Monica Hurst** 51:40

There are not a lot.

J**Jason Duff** 51:42

I wondered.

M**Monica Hurst** 51:43

There are more than there used to be. I have seen, because I've been going to that meeting, it's called Dealer Week, for a number of years, and I have seen an increase in female attendance. Awesome. And in female ownership, actually, of the marinas. Great.

J**Jason Duff** 52:02

That's awesome. Awesome. And last one here is just where can people follow you and your business to keep up with the work that you're doing?

M**Monica Hurst** 52:08

Oh, that's a great question. So of course our Spend a Day website, spendaday.com, and then we have the Spend a Day Facebook page and we have a Spend a Day Instagram page and we also have a Spend a Day YouTube channel.

J**Jason Duff** 52:22

All right, I am hoping that with all the people and personalities, if you've not yet experienced Indian Lake, that someday we'll be a part of a reality television show.

M**Monica Hurst** 52:31

You know, we've talked about that many times. It would be so Bend-It-A-Day Marina reality TV.

J**Jason Duff** 52:37

Okay, I love that. Keep an eye out for that. Well, uh, thank you for sharing today. It is, um, time does not slow down, it only speeds up. But the thing that, uh, just in hearing your family story, it has been inspiring to me. And I've had a chance to know your grandparents and your parents and also with you, but, uh, we often talk about legacy a lot. And I think what what your family has done has enriched the life of so many people at Indian Lake, mine too. And just seeing how you and your vision, um, is so much larger and greater than, um, than, than what it began is pretty darn testament you guys are doing something right. So I think people that are listening today, if maybe you're a first-generation family business owner or a second, or maybe you've thought about starting a small business, the rippling impacts that that can have in teaching and preparing the next generation, making your community better, employing people, and then getting through a crisis and building back better, this is a great, a great story and episode to follow. And if you want to come by a boat, find Monica and her team at Spend the Day Marina.

M**Monica Hurst** 53:52

Thanks, Jason.

J**Jason Duff** 53:53

Thanks for coming on the show.

M**Monica Hurst** 53:54

Thank you.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 53:55

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

E**Ethan DeLeon** 53:58

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