

Episode 76

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Appalachian Ohio, economic development, University of Rio Grande, entrepreneurship, downtown revitalization, Jackson Ohio, coffee shop, The Spot on Main, site selection, shovel-ready sites, talent retention, Bob Evans, community college model, Appalachian Community Grant, brain drain

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Cole Massie, Ethan DeLeon

C Cole Massie 0:00:00

And the site selector looked me in the eyes and he said, "We don't do infrastructure. I need you to do that." And that was like, okay, there's the, you know, flags waving everywhere. Like, okay, infrastructure, very important. You know, they're not gonna take care of it themselves. You gotta have a truly shovel-ready site.

E Ethan DeLeon 0:00:20

Welcome to the Small Nation Podcast brought to you by Coverlink Insurance where people are more important than policies.

J Jason Duff 0:00:28

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.

E Ethan DeLeon 0:00:41

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 the director of economic development and Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Rio Grande and Rio Grande Entrepreneurship at the university— oh, at Rio Grande. How many times did I say it? I learned something today.

J Jason Duff 0:01:00

For a lot of people that first come to Bellefontaine for the first time, they call it Bellefontaine, or I mean, I've heard so many different pronunciations. So Rio Grande, like Ohio.

C Cole Massie 0:01:11

That's correct.

J**Jason Duff** 0:01:12

Rio Grande.

C**Cole Massie** 0:01:13

So we're sister cities like that, Rio Grande and Bellefontaine, because no one can get the pronunciation right.

J**Jason Duff** 0:01:19

But I want to go back to all of those different titles that you hold. So walk us through What Ethan just said 5 times fast.

C**Cole Massie** 0:01:28

Well, I always say it's the longest title in southeastern Ohio. Yes. So, so it's really interesting, the position that I'm in, Director of Economic Development, the Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Rio Grande and Rio Grande Community College. There's a full title. So really what it does is I do economic development on behalf of the university, and then I also have a contract with the Gallia County Commissioners where Rio Grande is. To do economic development on the county's behalf. We also at Rio have started a Center for Entrepreneurship. So that's a way that we get our students really knee-deep in the world of entrepreneurship and make sure that they have the skills that they need and the connections they need in the community to go chase down that entrepreneurial dream. So that's, you know, I couldn't tell you what my time split is. It changes every week, but it definitely keeps me busy, no doubt. And I also get the privilege of having the longest title.

J**Jason Duff** 0:02:22

I love it. And I had a chance. So I was really excited about this day to happen. And we had a chance to take Cole on a tour here in Bellefontaine. I asked him the question, have you been to Bellefontaine before? And he was like, no, this is my, my first time. But where we met and connected is Ohio University hosted kind of a state of the Appalachian region a few years ago, and I had a chance to hear Cole speak. He was a panelist and being asked some pretty tough questions about the region. How do we solve recruiting people to our area? How do we create housing for, for the region? And if you know anything about what's happening in the state over the last few years, the governor and his administration has been really recognizing that this is an incredible part of our state. That with resources can do even more amazing things. A lot of the work that Cole is doing and his team, not only at the university, but at the county level and at the regional level, I think in the next few years is going to be a model for the country. I'm excited, I'm going to ask you some questions about that today, but more just on a human level, I want to kind of hear, did you kind of wake up and say, I'm going to be an economic development director? Has that always been your goal?

C**Cole Massie** 0:03:42

It has not always been my goal. I think every economic development person who's ever been interviewed on any podcast has said the same line. I didn't dream of being an economic development director. Most people don't even know what it is. So I was talking to Nick about this on our tour. My dream was to be the next Bob Costas, Mike Tirico.

J**Jason Duff** 0:04:01

Yes.

C**Cole Massie** 0:04:01

I wanted to get into broadcast journalism.

J**Jason Duff** 0:04:03

Okay.

C**Cole Massie** 0:04:03

I'm a huge sports fan, grew up, you know, listening to the play-by-play as much as I was watching the actual game. And so, you know, when I was trying to figure out what I want to do with college, if you want to do broadcast journalism, you go to Syracuse University. So that's where I, you know, that was my first college tour. That's where I went.

J**Jason Duff** 0:04:21

The winters are great there.

C**Cole Massie** 0:04:22

They're extraordinary. I have a good story on that later about me underestimating the winters. Okay. So, you know, I wanted to do that. I went to a couple camps, tried to kind of get my feet wet and quickly realized that I did not want to do broadcast journalism. Number one, I don't have a great voice. You really need to be a great voice. And also it's just a really tough industry. Yeah. You know, if you, if you want to be successful in that, you've got to get really lucky. And then, you know, if you, if you don't get lucky, you have to work extremely hard for decades to get where you want to be. So I was thankfully talked out of that. Ended up doing a dual degree in public policy and public relations at Syracuse. So no, I did not dream of being an economic development director, but it is something that, you know, was always on my radar. My dad is a local business owner. He was the president of the board of the Jackson County Economic Development Partnership when I was a kid. I had no idea what that meant, but I kind of lucked my way into it. I owe a lot of it to Taylor Stepp, who, if you live in southeastern Ohio, you definitely know Taylor's name. Yep. So Taylor was someone that I knew. He also went to Jackson High School like me. Uh, he worked for my current boss Ryan Smith at the Ohio State House, uh, when Ryan was a, was a state rep. And I always kind of kept up with him, and it seemed like every time I got on LinkedIn, Taylor was like, we just announced 200 new jobs and \$100 million investment. And I'm like, that is awesome. So I always kept up with him.

J**Jason Duff** 0:05:47

Yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:05:48

And You know, when this job at RIO came open, it was kind of perfect timing. I was thinking about what are my next steps. I was at GE Aerospace at the time thinking about what do I want to do. The job came open. My first call was Taylor, and I said, okay, what, you know, what's the deal? And he walked me through it and kind of gave me kind of the backstory of why the position was created. And I just sat there and I was like, I'm going to kick myself forever if I don't at least apply for this job. I was one of these kids that didn't want to come back to southeastern Ohio. I thought, you know, maybe sometime way, way in the future. But that was a position that really appealed to me. And I have known Ryan for a long time. When he was first running for state rep, I actually job shadowed for him when I was in high school. I went to the Statehouse with him, which was a really great experience. I was like, to work for him, to work at the university, which has gone through just a dramatic transformation— I'll cover that later— and to do economic development, I was like, I was like, this is kind of the dream. So luckily I got the position and quickly dove into economic development and it's been a really great job. I truly love it. And I was talking to a gentleman I had lunch with yesterday and he, you know, kind of thanked me for the work I was doing. I was like, you don't have to thank me. This is what I would want to do if I were a billionaire who retired at my age. What I would do is come back to Southeastern Ohio and take all my money and put it in economic development projects because it's what the region needs. To thrive, really.

J**Jason Duff** 0:07:15

For people that maybe aren't familiar with that region, can you kind of tell us a little bit about what makes it special or what's unique about it?

C**Cole Massie** 0:07:21

Yeah, so the Appalachian region of Ohio, it's kind of the southern, southeastern, eastern part of the state. It's technically 32 counties in Appalachia. Historically, these communities have relied on coal. Not me, the person. Coal. Coal resources. Yeah, coal resources. Substance, ironically. So it's a really heavy coal industry region, a lot of coal-fired power plants historically. Coal mining is really what the region was known for. You know, obviously economic factors have made that challenging to do. And so the region has for decades really fallen behind the rest of the state in terms of pretty much any demographic that you could think of, whether it's income level, whether it's educational attainment, pretty much anything. Health is a big factor in the Appalachian region. So that's a big motivator for me is we're way behind on the state, but we've got all the right people. We've got investments coming from the state level to help us kind of get up to that level. In terms of what makes it unique, you know, the first thing you'll notice is the topography. I know Bellefontaine, you guys have the Highest point.

J**Jason Duff** 0:08:36

Highest point. Yeah. But this is very deceiving if you've not spent much time. Have you been down there before to the Appalachian region? So it is, has real hills. Yeah. And like lush green, like everything. We're kind of pretty flat here.

C**Cole Massie** 0:08:49

You can't tell when you're here that it's the highest point. Right. That's exactly what I was going to say. Very deceiving. And so, you know, topographically it's, you know, big hills, dramatic kind of, you know, hillsides and green, really, really green, very green. Yeah. You know, you go down there and I think it's Vinton County, which is a neighbor to Gallia County, has the most trees of any county in Ohio, potentially in the United States. I'm not sure about that. But so that's good. The first thing you notice is the topography. The second thing you'll notice, it's a very relationship-driven area. It's a lot of people who, have historical ties, have lived there for generations. Like for example, my family goes back in Jackson, Ohio, where I'm originally from, 7 generations. Wow. I have a distant relative who was one of the founding members of Jackson, Ohio. So it's, you know, families like that that are just generations and generations deep. A lot of them immigrated from Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Especially in Jackson County and Gallia County, Welsh heritage is a big thing. So you got a lot of folks who came here and their families have never left. So there's a lot of those familial ties. You'll see a lot of people who are very proud of their towns. And it's kind of this mentality, again, because of those historical inequities, it's kind of a mentality of us against the world. And so, you know, when tragedy strikes and one of our Appalachian towns or a big win happens, it's everybody celebrates or everybody mourns. Yeah. So you've got those really close bonds and that's something that's really unique. I can remember when I was in high school and there was a guy I went to high school with who tragically passed away in a car accident. And it was like the next day, a huge, you know, celebration of life and candlelight service and, you know, all this stuff pulled together in absolutely no time. To support his family and support the community, support one another. So I think it's a great example of kind of culturally how we are in Appalachian Ohio.

J**Jason Duff** 0:11:01

And the name Bob Evans is kind of important to you guys.

C**Cole Massie** 0:11:04

That's, that's right. So I was going to say, if you know Rio Grande, it's probably because of Bob Evans. So the University of Rio Grande and Rio Grande Community College is literally the front entrance. It's right across the street from Bob's original home. It's called the Homestead. It's on the National Historic Register. It's When you hear Down on the Farm, the jingle, that's Down on the Farm. Wow. I pass it literally every day on the way to and from work. So it's kind of cool to have that history. Bob's family still has ties to the area. His son Steve still lives locally. And one of the cool experiences I had was going in the Homestead House with Steve, and it got turned into a museum. COVID shut it down, so it's not active right now. But walking around with Steve, and he's pointing at corners saying, I remember watching John Glenn go into outer space from that corner. And I remember when dad, dad being Bob Evans, would be in the kitchen early on a Saturday morning cooking us breakfast. So it was like, if you're from Gallia County, it's kind of an out-of-body experience to be in that house with Bob's son talking. As an Ohioan.

J**Jason Duff** 0:12:06

Yeah, well, and the more time that I spend over in that region, just like being in another college town with Muskingum and New Concord, like going to see John Glenn's home, like you start to see like Ohio history and how it connects. But then the people that lived there and created businesses or had dreams and those people, how they've changed our lives and our history.

C**Cole Massie** 0:12:30

Huge. Yeah, absolutely. Bob Evans is the prime example of it. Yeah. So growing up in Jackson, in that community, you know, culture and things like that and making the jump to go to Syracuse, out to New York, like that's pretty significant jump for a small-town guy. So what was that transition like for you? Yeah. So, you know, one of the struggles historically that Appalachia has had, and in my opinion, one of the reasons that we've historically struggled is because so much of, you know, the young talent that lives in the region, grows up in the region, is told go home or go away, you know, you are a good student, you get good grades, you're a hard worker, there's nothing for you here. Follow the opportunity. Follow the opportunity. And that's the story that I was told, you know, pretty much as soon as I got into high school was, Cole, there's nothing for you here, man. Just go. And so I totally bought into that story. You know, a lot of my classmates bought into that story. And it's a real problem throughout the region is, you know, people are proud of their hometown, but they also at the same time do this thing where they say, go. So, you know, Syracuse for me was a chance to almost do a reset. Yeah. You know, I looked at Ohio University, which was nearby Ohio State, had a lot of friends that went to both of those and kind of decided, you know, if I go to those places, I'm going to stick with those same people. That's what's comfortable. And I really knew that this was my chance to get out of my comfort zone. So again, you know, wanted to do broadcast journalism, visited Syracuse. It's an amazing campus. It actually, believe it or not, reminds me of southeastern Ohio. So it kind of felt a little bit like home in a much bigger city. It had, you know, the majors that I wanted. It was out of state, you know, 9 hours away from home. And I didn't know a single soul. So it really was that reset chance for me. And I wouldn't change it for the world. I think it was the absolute right decision to go out there. And it really forced me to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Which I think is really just a key to life, is having that mentality.

J**Jason Duff** 0:14:42

And you survived the winters.

C**Cole Massie** 0:14:43

I just survived the winter. So I promised you a story earlier. Yeah, let's do it. I can remember finals my first semester, 65 degrees. I walked to finals in shorts in December in Syracuse. It had snowed like 2 days and it was just kind of, you know, a little dusting. And I was like, everyone's talking about how bad these winters are. Like, you know, You know, this is nothing. So quickly ate my words. Came back second semester, first day of class, -24 degrees, 2 feet of snow on the ground, ice, completely iced over. I'm wearing like 6 layers. I'm wearing boots. I'm wearing 2 hats, ski mask, the whole 9 yards. They do not cancel class.

J**Jason Duff** 0:15:23

You're going.

C**Cole Massie** 0:15:25

And so, you know, -24, okay, we'll see you at your 8:00 AM. So I quickly got my— This made you hardy. It did. And so I quickly learned to be adaptable to the weather. Weather. But kind of the cool thing about Syracuse is everyone suffers through the winter together. And it's almost like kind of that common enemy and everyone just kind of sticks together and makes it through. And then my favorite day of the year at Syracuse was always that weird day in March where it got up to about 68 and everyone skipped class, went out to the quad, had shorts on. Yeah, it was like a huge celebration. And then the next week it would start snowing again. Yeah, of course. So I did learn to respect the winner.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:05

Love that. So you went from one campus to another, and you also followed a mentor as that mentor was rethinking how to help that university innovate. And using words like entrepreneurship and education and innovation can be hard in traditional industries like higher education.

C**Cole Massie** 0:16:27

Sure.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:27

Tell us a little about— Rio Grande.

C**Cole Massie** 0:16:30

So if you were to ask people in Gallo County and in the village of Rio Grande 5, 10 years ago, where's the university going to be in the next 5 or 10 years, you would have had a lot of people say closed.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:44

Wow.

C**Cole Massie** 0:16:45

Wow. It was in very dire straits. And, you know, this opportunity came up for the university to hire Ryan Smith, and folks might recognize that name. He was Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives. He represented Jackson County, Gallia County, parts of Lawrence County, parts of Vinton County. They called him the redheaded Abraham Lincoln when he was in the statehouse. He's just a down-to-earth guy. He's pretty no-frills. You know, he doesn't have much tolerance for politicking and just wants to get good things done. And so when that opportunity came up at Rio, he left his position as a state representative, took over the university. 5 years in, I think that's where he's at, is 5 years in. Now we're saying in 5 to 10 years, where will the university be? And the opportunities are limitless. I mean, it has been a total 180. And he probably won't like that I give him a lot of the credit, but he really does deserve it. He lives, you know, 5 minutes away. He grew up in the area, he understands what the university means to the area. And I think that's part of the struggle that Rye always had, is it brought people in from the outside who tried to make it something that it really wasn't gonna be. It's the place that fills teaching, you know, holes in the local school systems with new teachers. It fills holes at Holzer Hospital, which is our largest employer, with nurses. You know, it's not gonna be a fancy arts school. It's not gonna be something that is unattainable for most students that rejects 95% of applicants. We accept everybody. It is true, it is truly a place where a student can get that education and completely change their lives. And the really unique thing about Rio Grande is it's America's only combined community college and private university.

J**Jason Duff** 0:18:35

So, which is a pretty compelling model because I think a lot of universities are trying to figure that out now, that the cost of education has proved very challenging for many families and some people don't want the traditional 4-year option. So that's, it's pretty awesome that they had, they had that model and they're now, you know, growing and seeing it be more successful.

C**Cole Massie** 0:18:58

Yeah, absolutely. And, and the great thing from, from the price standpoint is if I, as a Jackson County resident, were to go to Rio, would I, would get community college rates for the first 2 years, and then the last 2 years would be the private university tuition. So we have just as many students who graduate with an associate's degree, and that's all they need to get the job that they want. And they, you know, go through the community college and have that great rate as an in-state student, and they're able to go off and get their job. We have certificate programs, so short-term certificates. And then for students that want to go on and get that 4-year degree or even a master's degree, we have that available. So it kind of serves the full spectrum of different educational options. Yeah. So can you maybe fill in some gaps a little bit on, you know, your, your professional journey from college to getting to this point? Because I know you had some cool internship experiences and just some, you know, perspective shifts along on your path. So could you share that with our listeners? Sure. When, when I went to college, my goal was to get into politics. Didn't know exactly what, but I wanted to get into politics.

J**Jason Duff** 0:20:01

It's a great— a lot of great people there. Well, have you turned on the TV lately?

C**Cole Massie** 0:20:07

No, what's going on?

J**Jason Duff** 0:20:09

Not very good.

C**Cole Massie** 0:20:11

So I, you know, I wanted to do that. And a professor at Syracuse my freshman year is like, do you need an internship? I said, yeah, I can't. I'm having no luck. I'm a freshman. I have no experience. And he connected me with a graduate of his who worked for the Kelly Ayotte campaign. She was a senator from New Hampshire. She was up for reelection. So I went to Manchester, New Hampshire. And lived in basically a closet for like \$300 a month over the summer and worked on the data and analytics team. So I became like an Excel wizard. All right. Over the course of 10 weeks or whatever the internship was and realized, number one, I cannot do that for a living. I cannot sit in Excel even though it's a very useful skill and I highly recommend learning it. And then number two, to work on a political campaign, you got to be a different kind of cat. Yeah, I mean, it is a brutal, brutal work environment. And, you know, if your candidate drops out of a primary, you're scurrying to find, okay, what's the next opportunity? So on the Kelly Ayotte campaign, we had people who, you know, were on the Marco Rubio— this was in 2016— and Marco Rubio campaign who worked that, you know, came over people from pretty much everywhere who landed somehow in Manchester, New Hampshire, and devoted pretty much every waking hour to getting her reelected. She ended up losing by about 1,000 votes. Close race. It was a very close race. So that made me realize that I don't wanna do politics.

J**Jason Duff** 0:21:36

Okay.

C**Cole Massie** 0:21:37

So went back to school, and I think it was that summer, I was at a conference for the I Believe Foundation, which if folks don't know what that is, it's a foundation that was established probably about 10 years ago, and the goal was to send Appalachian students to a summer workshop through the Ohio Association of Student Councils. That is one of the most transformational things that ever happened to me was going to that camp. And it was through the I Believe Foundation. They paid for it and sent me to Wright State University for a week where I interacted with people that I'd never even dreamed could possibly exist. You know, Appalachia is somewhat homogenous in terms of the people that you run into. And so it was a really great experience for me.

J**Jason Duff** 0:22:19

Yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:22:19

It was at that conference that I believe it was a fundraising dinner. And there was a gentleman who spoke and he had this quote that basically my family lives by now. And it's, "The grass isn't greener on the other side. The grass is green where you water it." And I look over at my mom and she's got tears in her eyes. And my mom is a very, very ambitious, driven, just will not stop once she sets her mind to something. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, what's she gonna do?" She's got something cooked up. And so I remember, it's coming back to me now, I remember I was packing up to leave New Hampshire and she goes, "So what do you think about the name The Spot on Main?" And I go, "For what?" She says, "Coffee shop." I go, "You were gonna start a coffee shop?" She goes, "No one else will." So I remember coming back home and we looked at buildings and then that following summer is when she opened the coffee shop. And I was looking at internships. She goes, she basically closed my computer and said, "I want you to work for me." So I thought that would be a really cool experience to start a business from the ground up and to do it with my mom would be even better. So hired 20 part-time employees to start out at The Spot, got all the processes established. If anybody out there is considering opening a coffee shop and thinks it's gonna be like a leisurely, you know, fun way to fill your time, I got news. It's a commitment. I got news for you.

J**Jason Duff** 0:23:46

And this was in Jackson?

C**Cole Massie** 0:23:47

This is in Jackson, yep. So I spent that summer working with her, and that's really what kickstarted this interest I had in downtown revitalization and economic development, because it was really her coffee shop, and then there was also a brewery, Sixth Sense Brewery, that started right around the same time on opposite ends of Main Street in Jackson. You go to downtown Jackson now and it is quickly approaching Bellefontaine status. Love that. So it's just been, you know, I saw the power of that third space, that place where people had to come, where people from out of state, even out of country, would stop at the Spot on Main and get a cup of coffee and something to eat. So it was just an unbelievable experience. Taught me how hard entrepreneurship is. And, you know, if you want to make it as an entrepreneur, you got to dedicate everything to it.

J**Jason Duff** 0:24:38

What were some of those big surprises that coming into it you thought this, but then after you went through it, you learned this?

C**Cole Massie** 0:24:46

I think just the— you've just really got to be— I don't know if durable is the right word, but you've got to have like some mental fortitude to make it through. Because, you know, when the Spot started, we were open 7 days a week. We were open 12 hours a day. And so when I— when, when my mom and I kind of got things off the ground, we worked 7 days a week, 12, actually more like 14 hours a day with open and close. I took 4 days off total that summer. I think my mom took 1. So that includes weekends. And that was, I mean, a real— I mean, eye-opener. Yeah. That's what it takes to be successful. And that's really helpful perspective for me when I talk to prospective businesses in Gallia County because it's, you know, a lot of times people think it's a good way to make a bunch of money really quickly or that it's this easy thing to do and you can run it 9 to 5 like it's your job and it just— it's not. Unfortunately, I wish it were that easy. So that was a big, a big eye-opener. And then the other thing was just like how desperate people were in Jackson to have a place like that. We would get compliments, I mean, every single day. And people, even people like welling up in tears looking at it and saying, I can't believe Jackson has something like this. So when you got comments like that, or you, you know, heard people talk about what a unique space it was, or even if you overheard a conversation, someone saying, I can't believe we found this in Jackson, Ohio, that made it worth it. So it really opened my eyes to, you know, you don't have to be a big city. Jackson's a town of 6,000 people and it's got this very vibrant downtown and it's because we've got entrepreneurs who just put their all into it. Yeah, I love that. And so you said the coffee shop and then there's a brewery that kind of started that trend, right? So what were some of those things that happened maybe after, maybe indirectly?

J**Jason Duff** 0:26:43

To get that momentum going. Yeah, yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:26:44

Yeah, so I think it was kind of a trigger to some other folks in town who, looked at that downtown and saw all these beautiful storefronts similar to what you guys have and said, you know, that building is not outrageously priced. You know, that could be a great investment for me to have retail on the bottom and fix up an apartment up above. And I think people seeing what my mom did with The Spot and then seeing what Sixth Sense did with their building kind of like opened their eyes a little bit and said, Oh, wow. You know, there's, there's things to do now in Jackson. People are going downtown. That makes it a more appealing investment for me. And these buildings are cheap. So, you know, you've got all kinds of different things. My brother is a downtown building owner now.

J**Jason Duff** 0:27:32

Okay, let's congratulate him.

C**Cole Massie** 0:27:33

He, he came back from Raleigh, North Carolina to Jackson and bought a downtown business. He has a tenant on the bottom and he lives up above. Nice.. And so, you know, there's, there's a good diversity of different businesses. There's, there's coffee and tea, there's the brewery, there's a couple different bars that are down there. Sixth Sense actually just opened kind of like a brewpub type concept, which is really cool. There's soap shops, there's antique stores, the Chamber of Commerce. So it's really kind of developed in this really nice way. And it has, it still has a long way to go, no doubt. But it's that You know, one win breeds a second win breeds a third win. And before you know it, it's totally revitalized the downtown. And Jackson just got a bunch of money through the Appalachian Community Grant Program to help improve that streetscape. And so, you know, when you go to Jackson, probably 3 years from now, kind of look even cooler. It's going to be really special. Yeah, that's really cool.

J**Jason Duff** 0:28:29

All right. At this time, we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. 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. Tired of gyms not being open when you want to work out? Then check out the region's best 24-hour fitness center, Anytime Fitness, in downtown Bellefontaine. They have all the equipment you need and the best trainers and coaches to help you get in the best shape of your life. It's truly your one-stop shop for for fitness.

C**Cole Massie** 0:29:03

Anytime Fitness is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Well, here at Small Nation, obviously we're passionate about historic building stock and renovating it and pairing that with, uh, successful business models.

J**Jason Duff** 0:29:15

So I'm curious, for you being in a position of economic development, a lot of times we here traditionally are going after big manufacturers, big employers, things like that. But why is it important after you've lived through that life experience to put that attention on, on downtown? And what value do you see in those efforts?

C**Cole Massie** 0:29:35

Great question. So a lot of what I do is that industrial recruitment, but all those companies, part of what they're looking for is not just do you have the site that fits my need with all the water and sewer and everything that I need to be successful in the workforce and all that, but is this a place where I can potentially make my existing employees want to go move? And is this a community that has a good quality of life that they can live in? And so having that vibrant downtown is just an absolutely critical tool in convincing those big companies to make that investment in your, in your downtown. You know, when, when you bring them in, the response is always, oh my gosh, you know, I can't believe you guys have this, because most people, you know, think of the region and the Appalachian, they think that, you know, somewhat desolate, and it's very far from the truth. So that downtown is just so critical to quality of life, and it's something that we sell on. You know, when you talk about the industrial employers, that's a big piece of it. But also, you know, Appalachia is slowly turning its eyes toward tourism as a really interesting, you know, potential business opportunity. You know, we don't have a bunch of flat land. I was salivating over your flat land, by the way. Like, that's my dream as an economic developer. We don't have very much in Gallia County.

J**Jason Duff** 0:30:58

You can trade some of that.

C**Cole Massie** 0:30:59

Which is— I was going to say, it's very interesting here because around here people just complain how flat it is.

J**Jason Duff** 0:31:03

It's all flat.

C**Cole Massie** 0:31:03

Wish we had some dimension to it. It's like it's a dream if you want to go plop down a big factory. Sure. So it's— I wish we had more of it. But our, our regional economy and tourism is becoming a bigger and bigger thing. And I mentioned the Appalachian Community Grant Program. A lot of the investment from that program, that was a \$500 million investment that came out of the governor's office.. And a lot of it's going toward tourism and Ohio River recreation and trails. And people are starting to see that that's an interesting business model. And if you can get someone to go do your hiking trail or do your mountain biking trail, they want to go somewhere for a drink afterward, or they need to go get something to eat. And if we have this vibrant downtown and a place for them to stay, whether it's an Airbnb or whether it's a nice boutique down— downtown hotel, if you've got all that, you've got a lifelong customer right there, and they're going to make it an annual trip, and they're going to come back every year, and they're going to go to the same places, and they're going to learn to appreciate, and potentially, maybe one day they decide, hey, you know, this is a really cool spot. I can see myself living here. And before you know it, you can really kind of grow things really organically through those recreational assets.

J**Jason Duff** 0:32:16

It's interesting where the movement has been as we spend more time in technology and the speed of life and the busyness of life, how finding a place that's kind of off-grid is actually super attractive. So the, how the, the, the pendulum seems to be swinging, and I think it's a really big positive for the Appalachian region, is that people want to find a small town, a rural community. They want to kind of go off-road. And if their cell phone service isn't so great, maybe that's a good thing. And so I, I think it's like finding You've got to market something and being different. And I think what's so great about that part of the state is it's finding its voice and it's finding a way to communicate to other people why they should come visit and experience the area.

C**Cole Massie** 0:33:03

That's a huge attractor is exactly what you're talking about with it's, it's not very densely populated. I never have traffic on the way to work, which is a huge quality of life improvement. I think people underestimate that. You know, sometimes there is no cell service. Like you said, that can be a good thing. You can pretty much feel your blood pressure drop when you come into Appalachia. It's just, it's a little bit slower, it's a little bit calmer. So it's, you know, not frenetic. It's, you know, it's a low crime environment, it's more affordable. Things are just, you know, a little easier when you're in that small community and that rural lifestyle. And it really is, I think for a lot of people, a dramatic improvement in their quality of life. And I always say, if we can get them there, if we can get them to live there for a year and kind of integrate themselves into the community, you've got a lifer. You can keep them there.

J**Jason Duff** 0:33:58

Cole, can you, at the national level, we read a lot about the housing crisis and shortage. And I also know in the state, you know, in the Columbus region is one of the hottest real estate markets in the country right now. And as zoning gets more tight in some of those areas and the cost of construction goes up, regulations go up, people are looking, developers are looking to find places to build and also looking for examples of communities that have done creative things around housing. Can you speak a little bit to your area and region? And I know, I think even in Rio Grande, some things that have been happening around housing.

C**Cole Massie** 0:34:32

Yeah, so specifically in Rio Grande, there's a really amazing project. It's called Renew Rio, and it was literally hatched over a dinner one night. Love that. Between a couple of folks in Rio and they're looking around at, you know, what improvements can be made, what are some quick wins that the community could have. When you looked around, you saw dilapidated commercial properties, you saw trailers with weeds growing over them. When you think about a college student's parents dropping their kid off at college—

J**Jason Duff** 0:35:04

Yeah, it's not a good look, is it?

C**Cole Massie** 0:35:05

That is not the perception you want to have. And so they went and this Renew Rio group basically went and bought these properties, in some cases paid far more than what they were worth. And in their place, a lot of times what we're seeing is these kind of modern farmhouse-style homes that have been built on top of them. So Renew Rio has built right around 15 new homes in Rio Grande, which is the most developed. It doesn't sound like a lot, but that's the most development Rio Grande has seen in, I'm not joking, decades.

J**Jason Duff** 0:35:36

Give us a population number in Rio Grande ballpark with students from on campus and maybe not.

C**Cole Massie** 0:35:42

With students on campus, there's, there's, I want to say around 500 or 600 that live on campus. Yeah. So, you know, they're transient, obviously. I think permanent population in the village is maybe around 800.

J**Jason Duff** 0:35:52

So just think 15 homes in an 800-person community. That's incredible. New construction. Yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:35:59

And to your point earlier, is like people are looking for homes that are away from everything, you know, something with a little bit of land they can grow their family and things like that where it may not be available in other parts of the state. Yeah. And kind of what we've seen is those were new RIO houses. There was a small neighborhood on Linwood Avenue and they built these homes with the intention to sell them. And that's right around the time when interest rates went through the roof. Of course. Yeah. Those houses quickly became, you know, unattainable for a lot of people. So they said, okay, we'll pivot, we'll rent them out. They had a lot of people asking if they could rent them out. Those ran out at \$2,600 a month, 4-bedroom homes.

J**Jason Duff** 0:36:37

Wow.

C**Cole Massie** 0:36:37

\$2,600 a month, which is far above what you would typically find in Gallia County. So a lot of people were surprised that they were able to get those filled up, but they got them filled up very quickly. And it's a lot of people from outside of the region who are coming in and renting those. And when they look at a 4-bedroom house with a yard at \$2,600 a month, and they just— deal— they just came from New York or Boston where it's like \$2,600 gets me a 1-bedroom apartment in kind of a crappy part of town. So it's this dramatic change for them. And it's, you know, a quaint college town. There's, you know, the cool coffee shop and the pizza shop, or there's a Taco Bell if that's, you know, your jam. That's, that's cool too.

J

Jason Duff 0:37:19

Every college town needs a Taco Bell.

C

Cole Massie 0:37:21

Yeah, let's just be honest. You do need a Taco Bell. Yeah. So it has attracted in a kind of different type of person than we would traditionally find coming into Gallia County. A lot of those folks are related to Holzer Health System. I mentioned them before. They're the largest employer in the region, especially in Gallia County, largest employer by far. And they bring in, you know, they've got to recruit, you know, people to come in and, you know, fill their workforce holes, whether it's nurse practitioners, doctors, nurses. And when they have availability of a rental apartment, a lot of times these are students or people who've just graduated medical school. And, you know, they're making a good wage, but they also have a lot of student debt. And so they need to, build up some savings somehow. So rentals are great for them. They come in and they're like, this is great. This is exactly what I need. It's got a lot of space. I got the yard. And it's a great tool for recruitment for those doctors, which obviously lifts up overall our quality of life to have great medical care. Yeah, I love that. I want to kind of talk a little bit about the other part of your job and hear some of your perspective on the Center of Entrepreneurship.

J

Jason Duff 0:38:32

Why do you think that's going to be an impactful, like, project? Or what are you most excited for with that?

C

Cole Massie 0:38:37

When you look at Gallia County and you look at Appalachia as a whole, and we talked about an example earlier in Bob Evans, the, the growth and the successful companies that you have seen, uh, in Appalachia are traditionally entrepreneurship or entrepreneur-led companies. It's someone who started with just them or them and a partner, and they've grown it to be a 50-person company or 200-person company. And so really the goal of that Center for Entrepreneurship is to find those folks who are going to start that company and just slowly grow it over time. And before you know it, they become one of our, our county's leading employers. And what, what I've realized in that role is there's a big gap between students on campus or even students who commute in and the business owners in the community. And so we've been able to make some really cool connections between those students and those business owners who, you know, if we didn't focus on entrepreneurship, that connection wouldn't happen.

J

Jason Duff 0:39:42

How do you do that? Yeah, that's the brain type. I mean, just say a student and a successful entrepreneur, like what, what are the common like colliding types of things that you can do to make those connections work?

C

Cole Massie 0:39:55

So, from the student side, it's really being available and talking to students at every opportunity you can, especially in front of large groups. So, when the school year kicked off last August, we have a huge number of student athletes at Rio. That's kind of the driver behind the university is those athletes.

J

Jason Duff 0:40:14

Which, by the way, you're sporting the wear, right?

C

Cole Massie 0:40:15

That's right, the Red Storm.

J

Jason Duff 0:40:16

The Red Storm.

C

Cole Massie 0:40:17

Go Red Storm. Football's coming in 2025.

J

Jason Duff 0:40:20

Okay. Oh, wow.

C

Cole Massie 0:40:21

Are you D3? We are NAIA.

J

Jason Duff 0:40:24

NAIA, that's right.

C**Cole Massie** 0:40:25

So when they had this, you know, all athletes basically start of the year kind of, you know, going over the guidelines and here's the expectations with you student athletes. I went to the athletic director and said, hey, can I get like 3 minutes and go talk to the student athletes just about the Center for Entrepreneurship and let them know that this is a thing? And he was like, yeah, sure. So I went and I basically pitched the students on the Center for Entrepreneurship. I have office hours that I set up. We try to, we had a couple students start an entrepreneurship club. So that was a great thing that happened somewhat organically with those students. And so that's kind of how I've captured the students. And then, you know, another thing that we did was we did a student pitch competition. That's a really common thing at college campuses. It's a great way for the students to learn what, what that environment looks like, how to build the pitch, how to come up with a viable business model. We called it Storm Tank. Red Storm. I love that. So it was, it was successful beyond my wildest dreams. And we had 10 students pitch. There was a prize pool of \$3,000, not a whole lot, but it was enough to— To a college student, that is. It's enough to motivate the students to come out and pitch. So we, we did that and we had a panel of local business owners and folks with our local bank, folks with the hospital. Those connections, when you can put them in the same room, if you have a student who's ambitious enough to go do the student pitch competition, they're also going to be ambitious enough to go talk to those judges. And those judges, you know, the expectation was set with them of, hey, we're here to make those connections with students and for you to be a resource. And they're all for it. Love that. So we've got that. And then, you know, this is where the economic development ties in. So every economic developer does what's called business retention and expansion visits, BREs. And so through my BRE, I meet all kinds of entrepreneurs out in Gallia County in the business environment, and having that connection to Rio through me and my office is a great way where I can very easily put the entrepreneur in the to line and then the student on the CC line and say, meet, go have coffee, go have lunch. I'm happy to drive you there if that's what you need, you know, to the students. And it really has kind of spawned some, some neat relationships.

J**Jason Duff** 0:42:47

We talk a lot to both entrepreneurs and economic development professionals, but, you know, entrepreneurs tend to be very busy people. So how do you maybe, you know, make it appeal to your entrepreneurs who have very busy schedules? He's also being very polite. Entrepreneurs are also distracted and are busy, like, you know, constantly thinking of new ideas. So how do you— how do you catch their attention and keep their attention? It's probably Probably a better way.

C**Cole Massie** 0:43:15

Yeah, it's definitely not easy. When I started, it was a lot of in-person knock on the door visits and just introducing yourself and handing out cards. One of the really unique things that I found in Gallia County, and when I have people from the outside who come in and meet some of these same people, they always remark on it, that the entrepreneurs in our community are so pro-Gallia County. That they're willing to say, okay, yeah, I can put business on hold for 20 minutes and have a conversation with a student or have a conversation with this random guy that just showed up at my door because I know, or he, you know, he's saying things like, I want to help your business grow. I want to help the community grow. Those are things that all register with those entrepreneurs and it's what they need for their businesses to continue to thrive. And so that's kind of, you know, what it took. And we just have such a, strong entrepreneurship culture. And those entrepreneurs are so extraordinarily generous with their time that, you know, at this point it's— I pick up the phone and, you know, they'll either answer or I'll get a call back quickly just because of those relationships that I've built. And it's also helpful from my perspective that I'm from a small business family. And usually when I say, you know, my mom has the coffee shop up in Jackson and, you know, my dad works for Geiger Brothers, it's a mechanical contractor that is well known in the region. People recognize that I know what that entrepreneurship life is like. And so it immediately kind of connects me to them. And I, they know that I understand, you know, their busy schedules and that they don't have all the time in the world to meet with me. So I always try to be flexible. I always try to be respectful of their time. But again, it all goes back to we've just got extraordinarily generous people in Gallia County who will, you know, drop their schedule and make time for you.

J**Jason Duff** 0:45:03

What do you think with that work that you're doing and creating that ethic and belief in the values of entrepreneurship, just at a high level, what do you think is— how is your community changing for the better? What have you noticed in the last few years? You know, we're talking about this major investment from state government and all of the work that you and the university are doing. What's changed?

C**Cole Massie** 0:45:26

It's a great question. I think, um, well, first of all, on the investment, Gallia County got \$21.9 million through the Appalachian Community Grant Program. We're really proud of it. We got money for a downtown streetscape revamp, a riverfront revamp. Holzer got \$7.4 million for a child care center. That's a huge need in our community. We got 2 school-based healthcare clinics at South Gallia High School and at Gallier Academy High School. So that investment is coming in. And, you know, I think from my perspective, um, what's kind of changed is I am very, very visible to those people, and I am constantly checking in. And, you know, if I only hit you once a year for a meeting, then I'm probably not doing my job right. And so I think for a lot of people, it's just knowing that, hey, there's this guy that helps people out for a living, helps business owners out. That's what he does. And so I always like to think that I'm one of the first calls if they ever have a question. And we've really, as a community, renewed our focus on economic development. You know, my position was created at the university to kind of help fill a void in Gallia County where, you know, we didn't have someone doing full-time economic development for a decent stretch, which in a small community is just that's a really good recipe for disaster when you don't have someone actively pursuing business growth or new companies. And so my position kind of came in and helped fill the void. And it's not possible for me to do that without the partnerships that we've built. So I mentioned it before, I have a contract with the Gallia County Commissioners where they trusted this, you know, young guy who came into their commissioners meeting and said, I want to represent Gallia County Economic Development. On your behalf. And, you know, they, they trusted in me to do that. We've got a Community Improvement Corporation who, you know, that was one of my first stops when I became, you know, came into this role. And there I have a weekly meeting with the CIC president. It's a great partnership. I work closely with our chamber. I work closely with our CVB, with our land bank. So there's a lot of folks who have kind of come together and supported that position. And that support enables me to then go work closely with those business owners. And we've been able to, you know, through JobsOhio, they have really, really awesome grant programs, especially for small businesses. So in 2023, we were able to support River City Leather, which is a fantastic company. Oh yeah, actually I'm familiar with that. Do you have a wallet? I have a River City Leather wallet. Well, I was into leatherworking for a while and actually it might be business idea kind of down the road. But yeah, I was not expecting to hear that name. So they're a great entrepreneurship success story. We were able to help them out and get a \$50,000 grant for them to invest in a new piece of equipment. They do incredible work.

J**Jason Duff** 0:48:22

It's very— they bid on projects for Nike and Beyoncé, and I had to look them up. This sounds really cool. Yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:48:27

Yeah. So, so that's an example of a business that we've been able to help out through these JobsOhio programs. Again, that's that entrepreneurship connections where I'm able to call up Erin and Aaron Buckley, they're a husband and wife duo that own River City Leather and, you know, connect them with students and go in for these business visits and really learn about their business and connect them to these different resources. We were able to help out High Road Towing and Truck Repair with a grant last year. We were able to help out Tri-State Smart Home Solutions who was moving in doing commercial building inspections. So, You know, I think that's a long-winded way of answering the question is we've got great partnerships now, and that enables me to go do the work that needs to be done and help these small businesses find access to the resources they need to continue to grow, continue to hire locally, and really kind of build up that entrepreneurial ecosystem. Awesome. Well, thanks for— I feel like we were giving questions left and right there, but I appreciate it.

J**Jason Duff** 0:49:27

It was pretty good. Rapid fire.

C**Cole Massie** 0:49:28

Yeah, I know you did really well there.

J**Jason Duff** 0:49:29

Let's test him next.

C**Cole Massie** 0:49:30

We got some more right now. Yeah, so I'm going to just move us into more of a fun show segment here. Sure. This is called Tour Takeaways.

J**Jason Duff** 0:49:38

Ooh, ooh. I always love your sound. Yeah, it's fun.

C**Cole Massie** 0:49:44

So before the show, you went on tour and visited several stops here in downtown Bellefontaine.

J**Jason Duff** 0:49:49

And this is your first time visiting, right?

C**Cole Massie** 0:49:50

It is. All right. So what is one takeaway from your experience today? Well, first of all, I want to compliment you guys on the work that you've done. This is like downtown redevelopment dream world here. And so, you know, the big takeaway for me is really the model that you use. And, you know, Nick and I, you know, met for coffee and we were talking about this. But I think the model where you guys are more than a landlord, it's we help, you know, we recruit the businesses, we find the right fits for the community. And identify what does the community actually need and try to fill those holes that are complementary to the other businesses and then are supportive of them. You do private financing for them. That's completely unheard of. And, you know, you're helping them be successful. And it's not just, you know, okay, we helped you, you know, get it off the ground. Good luck. It's, it's, you know, it was clear when we were walking around, you know, every store owner And you knew the stories and, you know, what you were telling me about 600, where you know how to make a pizza.

J**Jason Duff** 0:51:01

Yeah, I'm slow, but I can make a pizza.

C**Cole Massie** 0:51:04

That's like a totally mind-blowing concept. And so I think that business model is, is really, really cool and something that in Gallia County, I think we have an opportunity to replicate and find, you know, either a nonprofit or kind of a social enterprise like you guys who can take some of those downtown buildings that maybe aren't being used for the most, you know, the highest and best purpose and be willing to sit for a little bit and maybe eat a little bit of money, but in the long run will make a lot more money because you find the right tenant and they can be successful over the long term. So I think the biggest takeaway is just that business model. I think every small town needs to be looking at that exact thing because it enables you to kind of build that complementary ecosystem that you and I were talking about on the tour.

J**Jason Duff** 0:51:54

Yeah, thanks. Yeah. Well, and it's, it's hard to do this and it takes time. And I think your whole comment about grit and courage, but we've been in the trenches now for 20 years and we've made plenty of mistakes. But why I appreciate just your noticing those things, I believe they can be ripped and duplicated. And that's our whole hope is to see this model come, borrow some of these ideas and take them back home.

C**Cole Massie** 0:52:23

Yeah, that's my hope to do it. We've got a beautiful downtown in Gallup, Elise. You know, it's getting that riverfront investment, \$9 million. It's going to help a lot of existing businesses, but there's so much room to grow down there. And it's, you know, I look at what you guys have done and I just can't help but, dream about what downtown Gallup Police and the Village of Rio Grande as well could become. Yeah, absolutely. Well, a couple of 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? I hate to be the guy that gives like the standard answer of network. It's— I mean, so I worked at GE Aerospace previous to coming to this job. And I admittedly was not a good networker. It was like, show up to work. And I knew the people who were on the communications team. That's what I did there. But outside of that, I did not do a good job of networking. Coming into this role, network is everything in economic development. And I was at the State of the Region conference earlier this week, and I looked around the room and was kind of remarking to myself about the number of people that I know. And it's, you know, people from ODOT and economic developers from my neighboring counties and people who work for law firms. And you really have to be intentional, specifically to an economic development professional, you have to be intentional about building that network and knowing who's the right person to call for the right situation. So I would highly encourage anybody who's getting into the economic development field Network is your biggest, biggest asset, and calling people up and just asking for a coffee or a lunch— everyone in this profession is extraordinarily generous with their time and willing to share ideas, and that's been hugely helpful from a professional development standpoint. The other thing I would also recommend from a networking standpoint is get to know your utility providers. I know more about sewer lines than an average person should know.

J**Jason Duff** 0:54:30

It rolls down. They'll do more than just write checks. Some people— and we need them to write checks too, because they fund a lot of economic development. But you are so right that having that infrastructure and knowing that if that big project or something that you're planning and dreaming about, you want it to happen, you need them at the table.

C**Cole Massie** 0:54:46

You literally can't get a project done if you don't have the right people at the table. A great example, we had a project on the line in Gallia County. We were a finalist for a big manufacturing, food manufacturing company. It ended up not choosing anywhere just due to macro conditions. But when they came in, the site selectors— we have a great piece of property that we are actively trying to sell. Dan Adams Industrial Park, go look it up. Good shameless plug.

J**Jason Duff** 0:55:12

Good promoter.

C**Cole Massie** 0:55:13

And it did not have a sewer line on the property. It was about 500 feet away from the actual property line. And the site selector looked me in the eyes and he said, We don't do infrastructure. I need you to do that. And that was like, okay, there's the, you know, flags waving everywhere. Like, okay, infrastructure, very important. You know, they're not going to take care of it themselves. You got to have a truly shovel-ready site. So we have a sewer line that's, that's going in at the industrial park to solve that.

J**Jason Duff** 0:55:39

Congratulations.

C**Cole Massie** 0:55:40

Thank you. Yeah, we haven't dug dirt yet. We're still in the permitting stages, but I hope to have it, have it done. But you don't have infrastructure, you don't have anything.

J**Jason Duff** 0:55:48

Yeah.

C**Cole Massie** 0:55:49

Wow. Well, thanks for sharing that tidbit on networking. It's a good reminder for all of us.

J**Jason Duff** 0:55:54

But my last question here is where can people follow you and your work down in Southeast Ohio? If they want to stalk you because they just loved everything that you shared in this episode. Yeah, or network with you. Yes.

C**Cole Massie** 0:56:04

You are more than welcome to network with me. You can find me on LinkedIn. It's just Cole Massey. You can follow Gallia County Economic Development. We're on Facebook, Grow Gallia is what we brand ourselves as. Website growgallia.com. We also have a quality of life website that we've started to help kind of market the amenities and try to recruit full-time residents. That's liveingallia.com. We have a jobs board specific to Gallia County, galliacountyjobs.com. So we're— all these properties are interlaced, by the way. So you can, if you find one, you can find them all. Yeah. But yeah, Facebook, LinkedIn, feel free to reach out to me. And, you know, from an outsider perspective, you mentioned it before on the housing, we are an extraordinarily friendly place for developers because we don't have any of the hassle of big city permitting. And I can get into it more in detail with a developer, but that's a huge draw.

J**Jason Duff** 0:57:02

That's really big.

C**Cole Massie** 0:57:03

Yeah, for a developer looking for an opportunity.

J**Jason Duff** 0:57:05

And that's kind of the reminder, if you're beating your head up against the wall to just try to get one project done, but you could get 20 projects done in a community, you know, like, like Galápolis or others, like, talk, talk to Cole, right?

C**Cole Massie** 0:57:18

Yeah. Love it. Jason, you have a recap for us?

J**Jason Duff** 0:57:21

Yeah. Well, just thanks for being on the show today. Here's what I find refreshing is that you have the background of being in family business, which we've interviewed a number of folks about the show, which those learnings and those war wounds from the highs and lows of that You also fit the model in the mold of you grew up in a town, you left, but then you came back home. We have interviewed and covered that topic a lot. And then the other interesting thing is, let's add on to the idea that you and your mom were an entrepreneur in opening up a brick-and-mortar coffee shop, and you have those lenses and that life experience. We've had a lot of entrepreneurs on our show. And then the other thing is we add in that you are an economic development professional and and working in higher education. Yeah. I feel like, Cole, you are the guest that ties everything of this show together.

C**Cole Massie** 0:58:12

It was a matter of time before we had you on the show.

J**Jason Duff** 0:58:14

I think it's perfect timing. But I think listeners need to come and see the model of what your town is doing, because there's no question we need institutions of higher education. But that model is turned upside down right now. And so we don't want to see it go away. We want to see it innovate. And so the model of innovating education and the way we deliver it in the types of schools, I think you've got a great track record and it is now a place that people can travel for tourism. So my hope is that listeners look up those resources, jump in a car, take the trip, go, go see what, what I've had a chance to see. And others have a chance to see. It's a real exciting time for your region, and I'm just excited to follow your continued success too.

C**Cole Massie** 0:59:03

Well, I appreciate the opportunity to come on the show. I mentioned it to you guys before. I listened to the show before we even met. That's cool. And so— Love it. It's cool to be on the show. And I do have— speaking of institutions of higher education, I do have a gift for you guys, and I got to take my headphones off to give it to you.

J**Jason Duff** 0:59:18

Okay. Yeah.

C **Cole Massie** 0:59:18

All right.

J **Jason Duff** 0:59:19

Love that. This is a first. Oh, I'm excited about this. We're unveiling it. Oh my gosh.

C **Cole Massie** 0:59:30

Oh, all right.

J **Jason Duff** 0:59:32

Okay.

C **Cole Massie** 0:59:33

So I mentioned, I mentioned that the University of Rio Grande is starting a football team.

J **Jason Duff** 0:59:39

Yeah.

C **Cole Massie** 0:59:40

The last time we had a football team was 75 years ago. We've been undefeated for 75 years. And so we are starting it back up in fall 2025. And so I brought you guys some shirts. Yeah, let's go. Red Storm Football 2025. Show the cameras here. Cameras can see it. Love that. So you guys have the shirts and you are hereby officially invited to the inaugural game of the Red Storm. The first game in 75 years. It'll be at Jackson High School in fall 2025. And I'd love to have you guys down for a tailgate and to see Jackson and see Gallia County and to cheer on the Red Storm.

J **Jason Duff** 1:00:15

Love it, man.

C **Cole Massie** 1:00:16

Thank you so much.

J **Jason Duff** 1:00:16

You're very welcome. Put it on the calendar.

E **Ethan DeLeon** 1:00:17

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

C **Cole Massie** 1:00:30

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Jason Duff 1:00:34

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