

Episode 78

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Mary Rutan Hospital, local healthcare, rural hospital, sole community hospital, healthcare CEO, physician recruiting, interventional cardiology, business law to healthcare, Look to Us First, buy local healthcare, hospital economic development, Cobblestone Hotel, strategic partnerships, community pillar, Logan County

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Chad Ross, Ethan DeLeon

C

Chad Ross 00:00

We're seeing great success in our recruiting and even physicians reaching out to us saying, "Hey, I hear some things are happening at Mary Rutan, and, you know, maybe we could talk." So that makes me excited to think that our mission of providing as many services at a high level in our communities that we serve is healthy.

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:31

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, break down development strategies, and do deep dives on small town success. Our goal is to provide value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon, and I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we're excited to be hosting the president and CEO of Mary Rutan Hospital, Chad Ross.

C

Chad Ross 00:59

Welcome, Chad. Thank you. It's really an honor to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

J

Jason Duff 01:03

Absolutely. Great to have you on the show. Chad has been someone that I have looked up to for many years. When I first began my entrepreneurial career, Chad worked at our local law firm and had the reputation to really help a lot of the startups figure out their legal entities and, you know, did negotiations for small businesses. And just that particular local law firm. And you don't really realize how important your local law firm is until you, you really need them. And we've had a lot of guests, you know, over, over the years from that firm. And that's part of Chad's DNA and his story. But even more important than that, we share a family connection. He happened to marry my cousin.

C

Chad Ross 01:48

Now, your best decision I've ever made. She'll love to hear that.

J

Jason Duff 01:51

And luckiest thing that ever happened to Yeah, well, in small towns, like, we're all connected somehow, right? And sometimes that's a family connection, other times it could be a mentorship or a business connection. But today, why I'm really excited to have you, Chad, is to talk about healthcare, the ways that we interact with our physicians and our doctors and our hospitals, and just how important that ecosystem is. So it is just a great honor to have you on the show. But to tell us a little bit about you, you know, growing up. Tell us about that journey and where was home and where is home today.

C

Chad Ross 02:28

Absolutely. Interestingly, they're the same.

J

Jason Duff 02:31

Yes, same.

C**Chad Ross** 02:31

Okay. It was a circuitous route to get there. I am from Logan County originally. When I was first born, I lived up at Indian Lake in the Lakeview area. But when I was 5, we moved out to where my mom still lives, which is between Bellefontaine and Lewistown. So Indian Lake kid, went to Indian Lake High School. And decided when I was, you know, kind of in that high school era what I wanted to do and decided that, hey, I'm going to go and become a corporate lawyer. And that was some suggestions that happened from family members talking with them. And it was something I decided, okay, I'm going to do that, but I probably am not going to be able to do that in Logan County. So I went away to college and law school and took me from, my Southern Ohio, Miami University, to Vanderbilt in Nashville. Got to see the big city in Nashville in a different state. But, and I started looking all over the country, to be honest with you. I had that opportunity from, from graduating from Vanderbilt to really go anywhere, from Los Angeles to New York. And I did look at some places, but Ohio has my heart. I'm a Midwestern guy. And honestly, when I left Logan County, I was not the type of person, I got to get out of here. It was really more of a function of me not maybe understanding that the opportunities to practice the type of law or be in the professional areas that I wanted to be existed in rural communities to the extent that I wanted to do it. And so when I decided, okay, I don't want to be in Albuquerque, New Mexico, New York City, Los Angeles, I want to be in Columbus, Ohio, I moved back to Columbus, Ohio, started my career. And through that, evolution, I lived in all the cities in Ohio, transitioning from some, you know, legal roles into business development roles in Cleveland and Cincinnati. And all the while I kept a connection with Logan County. It doesn't hurt that Jamie, my wife that you mentioned, is from Logan County as well. But we decided that, you know what, for us to really live the life that we want to live, we're probably, more going to be happier in a rural setting. Also, not coincident— somewhat coincidentally, I'd been keeping in touch with one of the people that was really a mentor in my life, a gentleman named Rob McDonald, who was in that firm that you mentioned. I had had the life-changing experience of meeting him after my first year of law school, and he gave me a summer job. So my first legal summer job after— in that, that first year of law school was working here in Bellefontaine for that firm. While I didn't think that there was a place for me probably long-term, uh, in the firm, we kept in touch. Rob was educating me about what they're doing, the opportunity and lo and behold, in 1999, everything aligned both with them and with me to move back and to practice business law, transactional law, some estate planning, and move back to Logan County, which—

J**Jason Duff** 05:24

which was that really different from your corporate experience? Like, what were some of the things of that transition from working from the big law firm in the city to the small town?

C**Chad Ross** 05:34

I like to say a lot of times it was the numbers. Involved, meaning they're smaller. So the same issues that occur in an asset transaction for a \$400 million transaction generally exist for a \$400,000 transaction or a \$4 million transaction. You know, they may not— the level of time, due diligence and so forth because of the risk not being maybe as large overall, but they're still relatively large to the people involved. The same issues exist, the same counsel, the same questions, the same level of scrutiny need to occur. And so while, yes, a lot of the folks that I represented in West Central Ohio here value maybe more brevity in contractual wording, things of that nature, the same level of complexity and of transaction details existed. There definitely was less of the corporate hierarchy. Many times you didn't have— not every time, but a lot of times there weren't a board of directors or stockholders, a lot less securities regulation involved, which I liked, frankly. It was nicer to not have to worry about blue sky analysis or things of that, that the securities laws would bring in. So Rob brought me back basically with the idea of taking an existing business law program that they had, growing it, enhancing it. And interestingly, the twist in the story is that one of the largest clients of that firm that gave me the comfort to make this significant transition, rather, from big city lifestyle and aspirations to back to my hometown, which I love dearly, um, was Mary Rattan Hospital, which was the largest client of the firm. Um, Rob, with the work I'd done with other healthcare entities, said, hey, I think we can do more on the regulatory side, even more of the contractual work that I'm not currently doing, bond transactions, things like that. And sure, and lo and behold, that, that's been the case. And I'm sure we'll talk about it, but led to a life-changing event down the line as well with that relationship. So that's how I ended up back in Logan County and I've been all the better for it. I can't quite imagine myself being anywhere else, to be honest with you.

J**Jason Duff** 08:00

You know, relationships— we've heard from a lot of guests— are literally everything. The people that you know, the people that you interact with. But, you know, coming back to the local law firm and meeting a guy like Rob that later became a mentor, and, and, you know, to not only you but to a lot of people in the community— how— what advice do you have about earning someone's trust? Like, what, what is that process to get to work with the biggest client when you're a junior member of the legal team coming in?

C**Chad Ross** 08:27

Listen, you know, I think if you go in with a situation to try to prove yourself to the point of I need to interject or butt in or be the smartest person in the room, that you're going to alienate people, you're going to come on too strong. So certainly when I was the junior member to gain that trust and it just happened at the hospital as an example, the two CEOs ago when I first started working with them, them, and I would come in with Rob, and we'd be talking. Many times, I was going to be the lead on something, but I certainly wasn't going to come in and try to upstage my mentor and the person that had that relationship. I would listen, interject as needed. Of course, when it was my turn, you need to be ready to go to bat when it's time for you to answer a question or give your thoughts to that business leader, that person you're working with. And then just be hardworking and just do the best job you can. You know, for them. Be comfortable and confident in yourself so that you believe that what you're going to be communicating to them is something of value and that you're comfortable in being able to stand behind it.

J**Jason Duff** 09:34

There's a big difference between confidence and arrogance, and I think with young people sometimes those two things can be mistaken, or until you learn about, you know, why you do need to be confident with how you're communicating something or stand for something or believe in something. But if you go in the room like you said and pretend like you know it all, that's not going to get you very far.

C**Chad Ross** 09:57

Not— no, definitely not. And in fact, it'll probably alienate you. And someone may say, you know what, I can tell that person is really smart. They know what they're doing, but I don't think I can work with them. You know, they're just not my type of person.

J**Jason Duff** 10:10

Yeah. So I got to ask on your legal journey, why you said you landed on business law, why business law as opposed to, criminal or, you know, like litigation, that kind of thing?

C**Chad Ross** 10:20

Yeah, I, I was always good with numbers. In fact, to many people it's a surprise to know that I don't really, I don't really like to read. I don't read for enjoyment. You know, I did well in all the subjects in school, but definitely math and science were two of my stronger ones. So it was kind of funny that you would go into law, but I went into an accounting and finance double major in college. To set myself up to be more of that business advisor. I didn't feel that I was probably someone that would really enjoy being argumentative all the time, which I think probably more— it's probably more that case that you see on TV that attorneys are— have to stand up and argue. Yeah. Than in reality.

J**Jason Duff** 11:04

Yeah.

C**Chad Ross** 11:05

But that said, certainly it is a different adversarial relationship and I like the idea of bringing people together. And while, yeah, even in a business transaction or negotiation, you're not always going to see eye to eye. In fact, if it's a good deal, you're probably not going to love every aspect of it because both parties, you know, got to win in a good deal. Yeah, I liked the ideas of putting people together, handling that planning aspect, then dealing with the situation when it's fallen apart and now you're arguing over the, over the, over the matter. And that's an important role. And that's why it was always important to me to align myself with trusted partners who, A, could advise me if I needed to document something for my client to protect them if they get to that situation. And then if something did occur down the line in their business, to be able to then confidently hand it over to the person that does have to do that argument. But that, that was really it for me, is just the lifestyle as much as anything. And then also playing to my strengths for sure.

J**Jason Duff** 12:02

Yeah, no, that's cool. I think one thing that fascinated me, you know, from our previous conversation was just your journey into, you know, a CEO position. You know, how does one get there? And I feel like a lot of times it looks different from person to person. So I'm curious, you know, you got your move back to, you know, small town USA, kind of where you grew up, back to your roots a little bit, started working with Mary Rutan as a client, which you mentioned. But take us through the rest of that journey. And I'll just interject real quick because I remember very clearly why this was going on. Chad's very humble, but he was moving up in his law firm, was a partner, was, you know, on a path to really have a very independent, successful career. But you did a bold move of, of making a change. And so just kind of answering this question, but also like highlighting that that had to be some tough conversations.

C**Chad Ross** 12:52

Oh, yeah. It was probably— it was definitely the toughest business decision, professional decision I'd probably ever made, more so even than the decision to leave what is the comfortable decision of being in a big city where as long as you're competent, I was gonna fall out of bed and have a good lifestyle and do the things I wanted to do. That was a big decision to move back to Logan County and say, yeah, I really can achieve personal and professional goals and comfort in that setting. That was a big decision. It was even a more giant decision to make the transition from, the legal side to a client and not only in-house, but actually transition to business management, not just legal counsel in-house, which is a transition many people make. In fact, many, many times that's the segue from a large corporate firm and pick the big city. Many times if they leave that private practice environment, it's just to go be in-house as legal counsel. I look back at, and this is interesting 'cause I hate to get too philosophical about these things or cheesy, but it's almost like it felt like it was a calling at some point. And I, 'cause I look back and I can see it all in hindsight. I was always a person that wanted to be in, uh, in a leadership role. I wanted to be involved in the decision-making of potential outcomes and not just advising of the pros and cons of those decisions and/or here's the aftermath of that outcome. So even when I was in private legal practice, I felt like this is awesome, I'm learning so much advising entrepreneurs or advising people that had already been successful, but Man, I really kind of want to be with them when they're making that deal and not just coming to me saying, hey, we got this deal put together, but we need you to help us out with this or document it and that type of thing. So then I left a firm and went to do business development, which was putting those deals together on very large scale. And I got to do some financial transaction analysis and use more of that, my math and finance background and deal making with people. And not just attorney to attorney and developed there. And then over time I just felt that as I was moving in the firm, like you said, I couldn't have imagined myself not retiring from Thompson Dunlap and Heidner, which was my old firm here in town. And as I looked at the hospital though, who was my largest client, i.e., the firm's largest client as well, I would have anywhere from at the low end, maybe 10 to 20% of my work was hospital work too, if it was a significant amount. Amount of just things happening or a bond transaction happening, it might be 75% of my, my work at that for a few-month period or something. And I know we're going to talk about this, but in the volatility of healthcare, I didn't want to be the person that got the call, hey, something's happening with the hospital, whether it's a— the less likely in our scenario of a transaction involving control of the hospital, and this is your last deal that you'll be doing because now it's part of something else. Or more likely, hey, the CEO that you work with and is comfortable using you and the firm is retiring. The new CEO is from Timbuktu and they bring with them a firm that they're comfortable with. So this is— and I just didn't want that to happen.

J**Jason Duff** 16:11

It's a big risk. I mean, and it probably was a very real— or really, it could have happened. I mean, probably 50-50 chance that, you know, your biggest client, you could lose them.

C**Chad Ross** 16:22

And so that's the, that's like the professional reason for it. Yeah. Or, you know, I don't want to say reason, but professional factor in that decision. But also from a community standpoint, because this is my community, I love it and I'm proud of it and I want to make it better after I'm gone than what I found it. I wanted to be part of those decisions. I wanted to make sure that I was involved, not just from a legal advising standpoint. I wanted to be on the inside of what's going to happen. With local healthcare, with our local health system and the hospital. Luckily, I was working with Mandy Goble, who I'd had the pleasure to work with Butch Croffus, who had been CEO for multiple decades up and through the early 2000s and the early part of my Bellefontaine, my Logan County career, then with Mandy Goble for a number of years. And I started talking with Mandy about what it would look like to be in-house and taking on not just a legal advisor role but a business management role. And she had the courage—speaking of courage, she had the courage and had worked with me enough and felt comfortable that I could make that transition. It's not a natural transition per se. It's not impossible by any stretch. Obviously, if I can do it, it's not impossible. But she had that courage and vision. And so in 2013, after much deliberation on my part, talking with Jamie, because, you know, that impacts your family as well—what if I wasn't good? What if the plan didn't come together? And the other thing I told Mandy, as we were talking about, is I don't want to make the change from a, as you said, a very good robust situation with my own clients, with my firm relationship, a great group of guys that are still my brothers and sisters up there. I didn't want to make that change if it wasn't with the eye that I could grow to be the CEO. It wasn't handed to me. Yeah, it wasn't a foregone conclusion. If I didn't do the job, I wasn't going to get it. But I needed to know that this is something that's on the plate and that people are evaluating me towards for me to make that change.

J**Jason Duff** 18:24

And that took courage. Yeah, but obviously it's worked out well. And you've been in that role. I say you were vice president for a number of years and you've been now president and CEO or CEO of how long?

C**Chad Ross** 18:37

It'll be 3 years in August. Yeah. Yep. '21 was the the transition date, and I moved over in September, October of 2013, as you said, and VP of Operations, then Chief Operating Officer, and then transitioned to CEO when Mandy retired in '21.

J**Jason Duff** 18:54

Wow, that's really cool. What was it like? I mean, you're kind of transitioning domains here a little bit, learning the healthcare system for you. Like, talk to us about that.

C**Chad Ross** 19:03

And we talked a little bit about how that worked when you walk into a new client or the boardroom the first time and as the new guy. It was, it was a lot the same. One thing about, you know, I'd had the previous experience both in business, putting deals together, valuations, also the legal counsel. I had business accounting and finance training and acumen from that. And so when I came in, I— what I didn't have was day-to-day health care knowledge. Certainly I'm not clinical. So that was by far the biggest deficit. Sure. And so I came in, one thing about the legal training is it allows you to take in information, evaluate it, organize it, and then adapt to it in your planning and what your future decisions are. So I fully utilized that. I would come in and I would make sure I listened and I was not shy about if I didn't know the answer, or frankly, if I didn't even know the what a term meant or an acronym, healthcare acronyms everywhere.

J**Jason Duff** 20:08

Probably got really good at that.

C**Chad Ross** 20:09

And so I'd just be like, okay, you know, hey, help me out, let me know. And one of my favorite sayings is, you know, hey, I'm not, you know, I'm the slow guy in the room, so help me out with this. And it's true. People don't— I find this in everywhere. People don't understand what the term ignorant really means. It doesn't mean you're without intellect or the ability to understand or learn. It just means you haven't had exposure to it or you haven't encountered that. And yeah, so I'm not afraid to say that in a meeting. Hey, I'm ignorant of this situation, or can you tell me what you mean by that? So I did a lot of listening, but like I said, I have the ability that I feel confident in to, okay, I'm relatively quick study. If you help me out, educate me, and I have the ability to then make the decisions based on the input from others and getting all sides of that. That's the other thing I think that both maybe I have a predisposition to, but also definitely legal training allows you to understand the perspective of many different people who are involved. So you may not always agree with that perspective, but you need to understand it and you need to evaluate it because you may need to bridge that gap with someone, or you may need to explain to them, hey, here's why we can't do what your perspective is bringing to the table, or what the— here are the challenges that come with your perspective. That is something that, that I've been able to do in making that, that transition. You got to respect your team. You got to respect the people that have spent many years honing their craft. And then I need to make sure I make the decisions so that I can help them on the allocation of resources. I can help them apply, apply their craft well. And that's what I've tried to do in that transition.

J**Jason Duff** 21:49

Yeah. Can you speak to the level of different types of care that is necessary in the health care continuum? Like, for a small town, you know, we are so lucky to have a locally owned and governed hospital. There's so many towns that are in that, you know, 20,000 people number that, that, you know, Mary Rutan's kind of one of the last small town hospitals left. And can you speak to what types of services and care and why Mary Rutan is unique?

C**Chad Ross** 22:23

Yeah, I can tell you why we're unique to start, and then maybe I want to ask a little bit on the types of care. As you note, um, you know, healthcare is a very difficult business. It's highly regulated. I've heard it described as the most highly regulated business outside of the nuclear energy.

J**Jason Duff** 22:40

It probably is.

C**Chad Ross** 22:41

And I, and I don't— I really don't challenge that. I'm sure that technically there may be something else in there that's a niche type business, but it's very highly regulated. So that— so everything you have in business principles Now add on a layer of regulation. So, for instance, transactions that we could do in another setting, almost any other setting, many times in healthcare you're not allowed to do it because it's an illegal kickback or it's a payment or gifts that you're giving to someone for their business that you're not allowed to do. So it just makes it very complex. And so with that complexity comes overhead. Of course, it's a very science and data-driven business, so there's lots of hardware expenditures, that type of thing, very capital-intensive business. And we're a people business, and we're— if there's a type of business or a type of trade, there's probably something in a health system, from environmental services to food and nutrition You know, we have people that are in maintenance that are very, you know, contractor skills and technology skills. I have IT. And then of course, we have the obvious. We have highly skilled people that are rad techs or surgeons and you name it. So, so all that combines to a very complex business and it's very hard in a smaller entity or organization to be able to keep up with all that and to do it efficiently. And so what you've seen in healthcare is you've seen consolidation. Where let's take this hospital and this hospital and this hospital, put them together. We'll share certain things in like the back office, like IT, some of those things that could be centralized. And sometimes, unfortunately, services get centralized. And the idea is to make it efficient. And it is a business principle. We all, you know, we know from business concepts that if you can centralize certain things— economies of scale, right? Amen. Economies of scale. Doesn't make it efficient. The problem is, is that we're talking about a customer service business as healthcare and people's lives and people's lives. That's what I mean, in the people's lives. And so sometimes what that lends itself to is that the services are no longer available locally because now they've been centralized to someplace down—

J**Jason Duff** 24:55

or they're not effective. Yeah, potentially how far away you might be.

C**Chad Ross** 24:58

Yeah. Yeah. And so we strive to— and we are unique and this this band of West Central Ohio is one of the bands, if you will, that still has a number of sole community hospitals and health systems. Because I think we live in an area that values that. We strive to make sure that we're still making healthcare decisions locally about what services are here, what services aren't here, trying to make them as cost-effective as we possibly can with the economies of scale that we have and the business decisions that we make. And just make sure that we're also employing as many people as we have here. That's another topic, a whole nother topic of how I view Maritans' role in our community, both as an economic development driver, but also a community supporter, you know, from sponsoring T-ball teams to investing in economic development with the chamber to being a supporter of downtown events, you name it. So all those things combined to make it a very difficult proposition to meet today's healthcare demands without having a giant scale of multiple hospitals in a very large geographic scope. Having said that, you know, my predecessors have done a good job setting Mary Tan up. Our communities have supported us to put us in a position where, you know, we're able to meet our own desires but also our board's mandate to continue to be independent and make those decisions locally. We work very hard to try to get the scale that we lack also with strategic partnerships. And so, um, uh, we— I like to say jokingly that we're Switzerland because we— there are large health systems in the Triangle around us all the way, Dayton, Lima, and Columbus. And our patients sometimes may say, hey, I want to go to this particular health system if the care isn't provided locally, or Maybe they want to go to a different geographic location, and we work with all of those different entities, not only for transitions of care, but we try to make strategic decisions that— and open decisions that were not tied to any one suitor— that if there's a transaction that makes sense for us to tap into that scale that we don't have, then we've been successful and we've had good partners to be able to do that as well, which is really a game changer if we don't have the pure numbers that we bring to the table. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 27:22

As you think back when you first took your new role and you're getting feedback for, you have limited time and limited resources, how you structure some of the strategic decisions, some of them probably for growth, some of them making some difficult decisions to discontinue some things. Like what are the things that you're most proud of, of changes that you've kind of led in the organization?

C**Chad Ross** 27:43

Well, the Maritain Health Center, I'm really proud of. That was, We wear a lot of hats at Marysville. That's another thing about a small community, a sole community hospital and health system, is that you don't have infinite number of people that— I only do real estate development. So as my opera— in my operations role, I was kind of overseeing, working with the architects and things on that. And that, that, that checked many boxes. Number one, of course, for the health system, first and foremost, it gave us a facility that allowed us to expand and numerous areas with our therapy services that had outgrown their previous facility. We brought our first urgent care to the community and the first for Mary Rutan Health, which was a big and needed thing. We gave ourselves area to expand and we recently have with our ortho and ENT and some consolidation there as well for efficiencies. But the other thing we did is we turned a pile of rubble that had been at 33 and 68 for a decade into this beautiful building that one of the first things, if I meet someone and I tell them, oh, you know, I work in Bellefontaine, Ohio, Logan County, they'll be like, oh, is that, is that, is that with Mary Tenn Health? And they're like, oh, is that your building that's out there? That's a beautiful building. I drive by it on the 33. Many times I get the question, is that the hospital? No, no, it's not the hospital. It's just around the corner. But it's a beautiful building. So that's one that's like a brick and mortar. And then the services there, of course, I'm proud of those. More recently, recently, um, you know, we started something that I— and this shows how, um, we can't be everything for everyone with our scale. We would never pretend to be. Obviously, there are tertiary care centers like in Ohio State Wexner, Riverside, and Columbus that exist because they are able to then take things, some things, to the next level of care. But, you know, as technology, as anything, uh, in, in our society evolves, more things can be done locally. And one of those that I, I would say even 10 to 15 years ago many people would have never dreamed would happen in, at Mary Rutan or Logan County is interventional cardiology, which is the ability to intervene with a patient who's having a heart attack essentially. And we had very good processes and outcomes in place for a person who was— came into our ER that was having a heart attack to get flown to a facility where they could, you know, go into those, uh, in, you know, into the heart and actually put stents into the arteries and so forth. And, uh, but now we do that here and we're saving lives here, right in, right here in Bellefontaine, Ohio, with full-time, uh, 24/7, 365 access to interventional cardiologists in an emergency situation, and then even diagnostic cath lab work. We're able to do here. So that's been— I'm really proud of that one. And that's a tough one. I mean, that's a very—

J**Jason Duff** 30:38

It's a big investment, right?

C**Chad Ross** 30:38

It's a very, very expensive proposition. And it's one of those things like in healthcare, when we deploy something in Logan County, you know, we need the community to utilize it. It's like anything. If you want a nice shiny thing in your backyard, you got to use it.

J**Jason Duff** 30:56

We always hear everyone says they want a new restaurant and then it's like, okay, are you supporting your local restaurants so that You know, they're doing well, then more will come in.

C**Chad Ross** 31:04

So Jason, I'm glad you brought that up because I have admired what you guys have done, of course. And I've been a fan of you and what Small Nation has done. And then of course the people that also doing the same thing here arm in arm with you that have been inspired by you on downtown revitalization, community revitalization. And I've taken some, I've been trying to in our marketing and our approach to, to bring healthcare into that. The idea that if we want these things to be here, we have to buy local. And certainly that means either eating at a local restaurant or buying a t-shirt or—

J**Jason Duff** 31:44

Yeah, local retail.

C**Chad Ross** 31:45

Yeah, exactly. It's the same in healthcare. Now, I know it's not the same because it's people's lives. Some things aren't available here. There's payer issues about whether it's in-network and not in-network. I know it's not that simple. However, we started a few years ago a marketing campaign, Look to Us First, and basically, hey, don't sleep on the local healthcare system. We, we are bringing great people to the community and healthcare providers and professionals to provide a very high level of care that I would stack up with entities of our types anywhere. And so don't sleep on that and the quality of that before you decide, oh, I got to go out of town. I saw that even in legal, my legal career. Oh, they can't be an expert if they live within 10 minutes of me, or they got to be 25 miles away to be an expert. I, I have a very firm belief, and I, I say this internally, I say it externally, that we will not provide a service and we won't have a provider providing care to this community if I wouldn't go there, if I wouldn't take my family there— my, my mom, my wife, my kids. And if, uh, and internally I tell our team, if there's a reason, particularly providers that might refer to another provider, if there's a reason that you have a concern referring to this service line or this individual, I need to know that because I don't want to be a hypocrite. I live here, I work here, I have to look the folks in the eye that I trust and care about. And that's, that's who we are and that's what we want to be. And that's the pledge we kind of make.

J**Jason Duff** 33:09

All right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. Brew Fountains voted best beer bar in Ohio. Come visit their award-winning team in downtown Bellefontaine for a fresh local craft beer, soups, salads, sandwiches, wine on tap, and handcrafted cocktails. And they're always available to cater your next event with their box lunches and platters. Cheers to Small Nation! Come check out 600 Downtown Pizzeria in downtown Bellefontaine, where they cherish the art of making the most authentic, unique, and delicious world-famous and award-winning pizzas. Their team hand spins each pizza the old-fashioned way and only uses the freshest of ingredients. Come see why they were featured on the Food Network. Yeah, you know, I admire that. Um, it's sometimes hard to solicit feedback if the feedback is, is, you know, negative. Um, but sometimes I think that can be your, your greatest strength. Like, how— what is your process as a leader to, like, you know, get, get that feedback for how, how your organization becomes better, whether it's, um, you know, the internal with your employees or could be your customers? How do you do that?

C**Chad Ross** 34:11

I try to make people comfortable in— we call it accountability, and it's not a dirty word. Accountability is not a dirty word. And I'm very big on team. And this goes back to the sports, just growing up playing sports and seeing how that team functioned. But it really cuts across all of life. And if the— if one person on the team isn't maybe meeting the team's expectation, the team isn't as good. But it doesn't mean you just throw that person out. You work with them. To get better, but you also can't shy away that, hey, Jimmy, Joe, Jenny, you're not doing what we need. Here's what we need. Let's work together to get there. So definitely try to make sure that we are open in our ability to bring things, and we do it in a professional manner. We do it in a constructive manner. We do welcome, and we have so many different ways and avenues of our customers, our patients, to provide us feedback. Whether it's— everyone probably tires of getting surveys, but it is important for us to hear and have that feedback. We have customer hotlines, we have actual call follow-ups as well. And I don't shy away from the fact that whether I'm at the grocery store or at a ballgame, you know, I'm probably going to get feedback as well. And you listen. And then I absolutely— you got to listen, you got to take it in, get it to the proper people. And as I said earlier, understand their perspective. And the issues involved and then make sure that we have the appropriate feedback. And sometimes it's like, yeah, sorry, we fell short of your expectation on that. Here, here are the things why. And other times it's more of an edu— it could be an education to say, oh, here's the explanation and here, here's what that meant. And again, sorry that there was a misunderstanding, but, you know, this is, this is the, this is the proper way to word this or document it, that type of thing. So really it's trying to meet people where they are and then work together to, to get a solution. And be open-minded, hopefully, on both sides of that discussion.

J**Jason Duff** 36:12

You mentioned that one of the things you're proud of, and I really do think this is something to double-click on, is the new Mary Rutan Health Center. And as you drive into the gateway of our community, and this is an issue in a lot of places, is that the first impression of that community is how it looks. And the area where the new health center now stands, you know, you had some innovation and thought that as we're growing, we're going to actually add an extra floor. I think it was— is it 3 floors or 4? It's 3. 3 floors. And the 3rd floor was empty because at the time, like, we want to make you— you were very conservative to say, let's make sure this business model is going to work. Right. But now today, you just mentioned that 3rd floor is now fully occupied. And even deeper, when the Gateway got improved, one of the things that was missing in the community is we lacked the number of high-quality lodging options. Can you kind of speak from the economic development hat what you did in working with the community to recruit a new hotel?

C**Chad Ross** 37:11

Yeah, absolutely. That's been a journey. That's, that's— but I actually, I, like you said, there's a lot of things I'm proud of that we accomplished, and this is another one. It isn't core to healthcare, and it definitely isn't something that we felt certainly jeopardized our ability to provide healthcare that is still first and foremost, but it does play into how important we feel economic development and community support is for the local health system to be involved and be a pillar of the community. So when we acquired the property up there, we knew we had more property than we would certainly need for the health center. And we, at that time, I had been Chamber of Commerce president. We probably have had, I don't know, 8, Chambers of Commerce presidents at Mayor Rutan over the years and from representatives. We always have someone on that board. And so we knew full well that we needed another lodging option that fit that particular niche in our lodging choices. And so we had some land, we actually laid out the land and the development there with an eye, okay, that this could be a place where a hotel could be, the lots are of that size. And then we looked at what could be some companion retail as well to bring in that, uh, with the idea to not be duplicative but maybe unique and bring something to the community if we could, to the extent we had that ability. For the hotel, we, um, originally partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to commission a hotel study that did a market analysis of, of the Logan County region and surrounding options and did, uh, pro forma projections on, uh, the size of hotel, the rates, and, uh, feasibility of it. And we work to try to market it. And one thing about, and I know you've run into this a million times, we've had this conversation, is that while there are definitely good opportunities in Logan County and rural markets, some of the big players, the Hiltons of the world and some of those things, even a good positive rate of return here in Bellefontaine is not gonna get their attention when they can get that double return on the outskirts of Las Vegas or the north side of Cincinnati. Pick those places that we nationally know are just exploding. And so we were having a hard time getting someone super excited about it. And we came close a couple of times and then COVID hit and I kind of put it on the side burner and like, this is not our core thing. COVID is—

J**Jason Duff** 39:37

Yeah, maybe, maybe adjust your lenses there.

C**Chad Ross** 39:39

COVID's here. So I don't have time to do this in addition to all the things that we need to happen, just even absent COVID in our healthcare system. And, you know, lo and behold, it, you know, other people though in the community continued to be involved and I continue to support it. Ben Volrath from the chamber said, "Hey, I want to quarterback this and I think I should be." I said, "Great, I'll be right there with you, but I appreciate you doing that." And he did. We then updated the study again with Maritan paying a portion of that with the chamber. And we then finally kind of, got the critical mass going with the current Cobblestone Hotel Group that specializes in rural markets. So they're not— they see the opportunity and they're not— their attention isn't diverted with Las Vegas and Northside and Cincinnati.

J**Jason Duff** 40:28

They want to be here.

C**Chad Ross** 40:29

They want to be here. And we got a local group of investors and the hospital for its part, because I know how, you know, I know how financing can be challenging. I know how raising equity, which is the most expensive form of financing you can get. Right. Can be. And so we contributed the real estate in exchange for ownership interest in the hotel through one of our subsidiaries, not the hospital itself, but a sister corp, this for-profit entity, because we knew that that would help on the capital raise and be less of a lift for the local investors that were coming. So we're super excited to see that going up.

J**Jason Duff** 41:05

You drive by, they are swinging hammers. The framing's already done. And windows went in. And it's pretty awesome to see not only this happening in Bellefontaine, but a similar investor group is also doing one at Indian Lake. So for the Logan County area, it took those partners to come around the table to get the deal done. And just goes to show, if you didn't have a local hospital that was focused on seeing the overall success of the community, that project probably wouldn't have happened. Yep.

C**Chad Ross** 41:34

Yeah, we were happy to be a part of it. And we were also very supportive of Indian Lake, even though we didn't have the land to contribute. So therefore we didn't have the direct investment incentives. The studies that we put together included that, and I was gung-ho to see that both of those are happening. So yeah, it's exciting, exciting changes.

J**Jason Duff** 41:55

Yeah. Well, between that, I mean, we've already talked about, you know, providing jobs and then that's a great example, but you also talked about sponsoring the local T-ball teams and, you know, signage, things like that around town. Why is that important? In your position and why do that? You know, community hospital, but we're talking to economic development professionals and entrepreneurs on this podcast. But what can you share some of your mindset when it comes to pouring into the community like that?

C**Chad Ross** 42:22

Yeah, absolutely. I think that a successful community, if you look at successful communities, there are certain pillars that are consistent in all of those. Schools is the one that I think everyone, you know, would think of. I think healthcare is one of those. There are several others, you know, I'm sure the, you know, EMS, things of that nature, but healthcare is a pillar. And so we want to be there to fulfill that core mission of health and wellness and being there in times of need and those areas of promotion. But I've seen what can happen if the healthcare system isn't thriving and isn't involved in the community, and I think the community Even if the healthcare system shrinks, I think the potential for the community to shrink is right there as well. So we feel very strongly about being out in the community, supporting it, lifting, what's the saying? A rising tide lifts all ships. So yeah, so we feel like number one, it's the right thing to do, but number two, we're going to get sustainability payback by having a strong community where people want to live and want to be involved and relocate. And of course they're going to then look to us for the core of our business, just like any business. Business is going to benefit from having more people that are, are in the community to spend that, to spend that money. I also, growing up here, saw how important that business support of the community was, and that doesn't just mean hospital business support but all businesses, from scholarships to the T-ball sponsorship and so forth. And, and Maritan is uniquely positioned to have a substantial budget. We can't say yes to everything, but we do have the ability to say yes to a lot of things. And we don't have shareholders. I don't answer to a foreign board of directors in some far-off city that wants to see the full bottom line and not just what impact we're making here on the ground. And so we have the ability to measure our financial success and also where those expenses that maybe, yeah, maybe we could have a greater margin if we didn't spend as much as we do in the community on community benefit activities, but that's not what we're about. We want to do that. And then of course we are a tax-exempt entity and—

J**Jason Duff** 44:42

That's a big tool too.

C**Chad Ross** 44:44

Yeah. And we're tax-exempt because we provide healthcare services. Again, first and foremost, that's our mission that needs As B just said, no question. But I also view it because we are a tax-exempt charitable entity, we also need to be functioning in these other areas as well. So I guess because it is my hometown, I feel even more strongly about that. It might be more difficult if I was the CEO of a system that, you know, had 100 different hometowns.

J**Jason Duff** 45:13

Yeah.

C**Chad Ross** 45:13

And how do you allocate those to the local T-ball teams in all those places? To use our metaphor there. So yeah, that's philosophically what I inherited from the hospital. And I think from just a personal standpoint, I feel really strongly about it as well.

J**Jason Duff** 45:28

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks for sharing that. And finally here, what are you kind of excited for as you think about the future of MaryRuthAnn?

C**Chad Ross** 45:36

I'm very excited about the team that I get to work with. There's been a number of transitional steps there. And we've got some just great people. You know, any good leader needs to surround themselves with people that are, you know, stronger than they are, frankly. Yeah, in my opinion. And then you help them to do what they do best and try to stay out of their way and also provide the guidance. So I feel really strongly about our team. We've got a great team and excited about that. I'm excited about where I see us going with the things like the cath lab, which was probably something that, you know, rural health systems didn't do that type of thing 15 years ago. Now we're doing it. Wound clinic was something that we instituted that people were having to leave the community for. We have a very strong medical staff. I guess I'll just mention this just because she's going to do a testimonial about it, but my wife just had back surgery at Mary Rutan. Unfortunately, she went from kind of being bedridden, debilitated from a bulging disc, to being able to walk within, you know, 24 hours of that procedure and getting around. And people don't think about the level of care that we can provide and provide at a very high level. So I'm really excited about seeing the evolution of the medical staff. We're seeing great success in our recruiting and even physicians reaching out to us. Saying, hey, here's some things that are happening at Mary Rutan and, you know, maybe we could talk. So that makes me excited to think that our mission of providing as many services at a high level in our communities that we serve is healthy. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 47:22

Yeah, I love that. Very cool. Well, I'm going to move us into kind of a more lighthearted, fun segment. These are the good questions here. So this is our rapid fire. Q&A. Uh, question number 1 is, what is your favorite restaurant in the area?

C**Chad Ross** 47:36

You know, I saw this on a previous— it's a trick, and I swore I wasn't going to answer this one. I, I like a lot of restaurants in Logan County because I guarantee you, if I picked one, I'm gonna be in trouble. Somebody—

J**Jason Duff** 47:48

I've got favorite menu items. Let's— what's some of the favorite menu items?

C**Chad Ross** 47:51

I, I love, uh, look, Rob Underwood nailed it. He said Brew Fountain because, you know, I love, uh, the food items, but I also like their, their, their, their beer choices and so forth. A good friend of mine has a Buckeye at the Lake at Indian Lake. You know, I like to, like to go there, but there's so many good places at Indian Lake. I love Flying Pepper, you know, 600, the Stallwarts downtown Belfountain are all great. And then, but then we, you know, we're lucky to have like Iron City down the street. That's a good place. I don't, I don't want for anything when it comes to food in Logan County. I rarely go to the big city, quote unquote, anymore. I feel like we've got it almost all.

J**Jason Duff** 48:29

You don't kind of realize that till you go to other small towns. It's probably what you, you know, other people say about Maritain. It's like when you have— it's part of educating all the people about all the things that we do have here.

C**Chad Ross** 48:40

Oh, amen. Yeah, I know this is supposed to be rapid fire, but no, you're good. So years ago, I was on a— I was in a conference in Orlando and was close to Disney. And so Amy flew down with me and we made a long weekend of it. And one of the days we did something that when we had taken our kids there, we said, this would be really fun to do as adults. And we did Epcot as adults and we ate and we drank in every, every, every country. And we call it the day of 20,000 calories. But you know what? You can do that in Bellefontaine. Yeah, you can do that in Bellefontaine. I agree. A little bit of a, you know, go around, especially desserts.

J**Jason Duff** 49:16

Now we've got, we've got some of the best dessert places around. Yeah.

C**Chad Ross** 49:18

I mean, you name it, you can have multiple, multiple types of food and multiple cool beverages to wash it down. So it's, it's great.

J**Jason Duff** 49:26

Yeah, good point. And chocolate, I think, is good for your health. We need to ask some of the dietitians out here. If you weren't in your current role, what would you be doing?

C**Chad Ross** 49:35

Oh, I'd still be practicing law.

J**Jason Duff** 49:36

Okay. Absolutely.

C **Chad Ross** 49:37

Yeah.

J **Jason Duff** 49:37

Oh yeah. Any, anything more specific than that, or just anywhere?

C **Chad Ross** 49:41

Uh, no, I was— I, I thought I had reached my final destination, uh, when I was a partner at the law firm and advising great clients that I miss, uh, now in this new, new role that I'm 100% dedicated to. But that's what I'd be doing if I wasn't doing this. I'd be in Logan County practicing law.

J **Jason Duff** 49:58

Chad, what do you do to recharge? What's your kind of hobby or like, this is something that when I'm not working, I can turn off and actually I just really enjoy doing?

C **Chad Ross** 50:07

I don't know if I can ever turn off, but I enjoy a lot of different things. Of course, I love the opportunity to, you know, go home and spend time with my family, my two daughters and my wife to say, hey, how was your day? Hear from them. There's a lot of time spent attending their activities as they've been growing up. I love the outdoors, so I love golf. I'm a hunter, so I enjoy, you know, hunting and taking trips. And then my happy place is Northern Michigan. I love to go— we have a cabin in a place called Bear Lake up by kind of Traverse City area. And I just love to go up there. And if I'm— if I ever unplug, which is never, That's the closest I come is there.

J **Jason Duff** 50:49

Sure. Awesome. Yeah. Thanks for sharing that. A couple of closing questions here. And the first one is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

C**Chad Ross** 50:58

This is another one you gave me a heads up on. And I, again, I said I'm not a big reader. I am more of an observer and I pick up things more from observing behaviors, whether it's just a behavior even of a conversation that I'm not even a part of, but just watching TV, interviews, things of that nature. And of course, mentors that I've had. So I think observing and being open-minded is very important. Picking up the things that you see, that was an effective way, even, even that's an effective way to say that and filing that away. Something as simple as that. And then of course, surrounding yourself with those mentors that are going to, are going to give you opportunities and feed you. And be both, I said, accountable, you know, but they're going to give you the goods and the bads for professional development. On the level of books, I did have one book that has really made an impact on me, but it wasn't as much— I guess you could say it's, it's more personal, but it does play into people that are building their professional development and of course, then the financial resources that come with it. And it was called *The Millionaire Next Door*. Read that in the late '90s, right about the time when I was starting my career. And it was of interest because it kind of showed how many times the people that did not accumulate wealth were doctors and lawyers, and those that did were people that lived more within their means, maybe didn't even spend a decade in school, that type of thing. And why? What were the traits and decisions that those people made? And again, I, the, um, The title makes it sound like you're worshipping money, and that's— it wasn't really that. It was about having the financial security to provide for your family, to do the things you wanted to do, not just to, oh, I only care about becoming a millionaire, quote unquote. It was about traits that allowed you to be frugal, to invest early and often and consistently. And it was— I, I've often said in talks that I've given to either high school kids or other places that if there was a required reading for seniors coming out, that's a book I would recommend because it does let them learn everything from all the things I've said, including the time value of money and investing.

J**Jason Duff** 53:13

So yeah, let's go. I got one before you wrap this up. Sure. So you spoke a lot about Rob McDonald and just such a great man and mentor. Do you have a favorite Rob-ism that has stuck with you over the years of something that you learned that maybe you have incorporated in your life?

C**Chad Ross** 53:30

Oh man, there's so many. You know, we actually, we created a whole list of things. People were doing, sharing those and creating that list. And then we had emails going back and forth. One that I'm using a lot more now that I used to joke with him about is, "Stop me if I've told you this before." Because many times, yes, he had in fact told that story before, and now he's going to tell it again. And now I finally I find myself doing it because I've told that story before, or I forgot that I told somebody that story. So I find myself leading with that. But I mean, gosh, Jason, there's so many. He was great. I've had, you know, of course my dad had an uncle Howard Holsbury. That was my dad, Chuck Ross. My uncle Howard Holsbury was a dentist in Lakeview that really did a lot for me and taught me a lot. And then on non-family, you know, Rob was right there. He's like top 5 in the people that have made an impact on me.

J**Jason Duff** 54:33

Yeah, very cool. Last question here is, where can people follow you and Mary Ruthann to keep up the work that you guys are doing?

C**Chad Ross** 54:39

Sure, so maryruthann.org is our website, and we try to have it as user-friendly as it can be and also have all of our information. We're always updating that, and we'll be updating that even, even in the upcoming project. And then we're on Facebook and Instagram, or I guess the Gram.

J**Jason Duff** 55:00

The Gram. There you go.

C**Chad Ross** 55:01

Now that— and that's about the extent. I don't know. I'm not aware of us being on TikTok or anything at this point, although, you know, again, we may be behind the times on some of that. So, but yeah, you can find us on all those places. And, you know, as far as contacting me, you know, email, and I try to get back with people that leave me voicemail messages, you name it. I have an open door policy with staff and with our customers. Our community members, my neighbors.

J**Jason Duff** 55:25

Yeah, I love it. Thank you. Yeah, Chad, I think you put a new definition on the terms CEO, you know, instead of the chief executive officer, which you do that so well. The key about being the chief engagement officer, like actually getting deep with your team members, listening in your community. And I just remember, you know, we had this crazy event in our community and EF F3 tornado came through on March 14th, and Chad and MaryRuthAnn responded in a really big way in a lot of ways that they've not shared. But I remember being over in Lakeview that very next day, and Chad and the MaryRuthAnn truck pulls into Lakeview that just went through an incredible amount of devastation, and it is loaded up with resources and generators and water and supplies. And we are getting them out as quick that we possibly could. But if it wasn't for You know, Chad doesn't sit behind a desk, like he's engaged and in the community. And I think that's a big lesson for all of us. And I love how you spoke today about part of what the hospital does is the overall economic health of the community, the jobs that you create, the investments that you're making, the ways that you're giving back. And, uh, for the, for those people that are listening, you know, find a way to support your local health system, get engaged in that process to keep your hospital strong. We need the community banks. We need the local pharmacists. We need those local systems to stay strong, to do all the things that you're able to do. So thanks for being a guest on the show today.

C**Chad Ross** 56:57

Thank you. It's really, really been an honor and a privilege to be here. I appreciate it. It's been enjoyable. So thank you very much.

E

Ethan DeLeon 57:04

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

E

Ethan DeLeon 57:06

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, your favorite podcasting platform. You can also subscribe to the Small Nation YouTube channel if you prefer to watch your episodes. Follow Small Nation on social media, and we'll see you in the next episode.