

# Episode 92

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

residential real estate development, master-planned communities, housing crisis, Central Ohio growth, Jerome Village, Marysville development, utilities and infrastructure, land entitlements and zoning, new community authority, tax incremental financing, school funding and abatements, Union County, Intel and Honda impact, Bellefontaine housing, Nationwide Realty Investors

## SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Bart Barok, Ethan DeLeon

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**Bart Barok** 0:00:00

On the residential side, you need 3 things. You need a landowner willing to sell their ground. And, you know, some farmers are willing, they understand, some want to farm forever, which is perfectly fine. You need utilities. So there's major costs in infrastructure, roadways, utilities, and those sort of things. Those are the 2 determining factors for the most part. Then the other is you have to have a municipality, a township, a city, a village that is willing to want housing, to want development in that area. If you have those 3 things, then you're well on your way to being successful.

E

**Ethan DeLeon** 0:00:35

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 are excited to be hosting real estate developer Bart Barok on the show. Bart, welcome.

B

**Bart Barok** 0:01:07

Hey, I appreciate you, uh, invite me to be here.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:01:10

Yeah, absolutely. We have had mayors, we've had small business owners, we've had attorneys, architects, engineers. Uh, today I'm really excited to have Bart in the studio because when it comes to deal making and development and putting those pieces together, if you go to his LinkedIn profile, And I encourage you to do it because it is one of the most well descriptive in terms of his background of working with big national companies, working with cities and municipalities, working with other private developers. And now he's kind of going to unpack that today of all the different things that he has done and the things that he is doing. But I will be— I'm going to be kind of selfish. I'm excited to interview him to get what is in his head out in the room today because, you know, having someone that has had all that diverse experience, we are going to get as much in this episode that we possibly can. Yeah. So, Bart, where did you grow up as we just get into this episode here and what was your journey into the work that you're doing today?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:02:13

Well, I grew up in Pickaway County, so I grew up on a 200-acre farm my grandfather owned. We lived down there until I was probably about 8, moved into a trailer park. There were 4 of us and we were a handful. So we moved back to the farm. Okay. And I grew up there until I was 18 years old.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:02:31

Probably had a few jobs on the farm.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:02:33

Yeah. Yeah. You don't live on a farm and you don't work. So that's it. So when I was a junior, senior in high school, I went into fast food and I loved working at McDonald's, Wendy's, and those sort of things. But kind of the journey of how I got here, it's a strange journey. So I was an unenthused high school kid. I graduated high school. I went to Otterbein for one day. I made it one day. I told my sister, who was also at Otterbein, that I just can't do this for 4 years. The next day, my dad and my stepmom worked at Nationwide Insurance. They had me come down and the next day I was employed as a coderator at Nationwide.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:03:08

What is that job? What—

**B****Bart Barok** 0:03:10

at that time, essentially, underwriters would tell you how they want to insure a policy. I would go into a big rating manual, figure out what the premium was, and then code it on carbon spreadsheets. So you would write it down with a pen.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:03:23

Ethan, do you even know what that is? Yeah, barely. I've used them like twice in my life.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:03:27

And then somebody would put it into the computer because there was no computers on our desk in 1985. So unbeknownst to me, my, my, my dad got out of a \$125 per month child support payment the day I dropped out. But it set me on a path because I wasn't ready for college.

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

So some people, you know, I know in the '80s it became very popular that— and we're hearing a lot of it — the outcome of that is that you, you go to high school, get good grades, and then your whole goal is to get in and go to college. And I think what we've learned is that there's actually a lot of great career paths and options of pursuing other ways to, to learn about careers and jobs. So you're kind of an example of that.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:04:07

Yep. I did coding rating for 2 years, and I had a supervisor that felt that this young guy should not be doing this the rest of his life. So I had long permed hair. Yes, I used to sit in a chair and get it permed.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:04:19

Perms are back. My nephews are like all into perms right now. And on the football team, everyone's got perms. So they're back. They're back.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:04:26

So she convinced me that I had to do something else. So her husband was a military recruiter. So she convinced me to cut my hair, join the Air Force, go away. So I went to training for roughly 18 months of active duty. Came out of the Air Force into the Air National Guard. They paid 100% of my college tuition at Ohio State. You had to go to a public school, so I went to Ohio State. I graduated in 3 years. That military commitment gave me maturity. It gave me a sense and a purpose. So I graduated college in 3 years with finance and real estate, worked full-time through Nationwide during that period of time, and then went back. The first 10 years at Nationwide, I actually was on the insurance side. So I became an underwriter manager and that managed some of the service center entities and those sort of things. The second 10 years at Nationwide, I was there 36 years. So there's a couple of phases here, but the second 10 years was financial controllership and I ended up getting into corporate real estate where I was managing the entire real estate portfolio for the employee occupied. So all the agent claims offices all across the country, we had about 20 million square foot.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:05:31

And just someone to think about when you say owner occupied. So this was the agents that were working for Nationwide, the offices that they lease. Am I understanding that correctly?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:05:41

Everything, the towers in downtown Columbus. So the owned property, the leased property, most of it was claims. And when you get away from the headquarters, it was agent offices and claims offices all over the country where we do business. So we had a big group of people that went through that, but I managed that portfolio for about 5 years.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:06:01

And just to share that, that's actually harder than what you think. And let me share from my little small development world. When you go state by state and municipality by municipality, laws and rules are different. There are, you know, many different— prices are very different in terms of those markets. So there's no cookie-cutter template that works. So I imagine that also kind of shows a level of sophistication to be able to get to that role and do all of those things?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:06:31

Yeah, and there's more complexity to it because you got to think on where do insurance agents need to be and where do claims? It's where the people live. So in Bellefontaine, Ohio, here, we could come in as big bad Nationwide, and I appreciate Nationwide for 36 years. Everything I had in life came from that company. So, but big bad Nationwide comes in. We have a standard contract that was about 46 pages long, and we come to a mom and pop that owns a downtown Bellefontaine building, and we say, here's a 46-page legal document. You need to sign, we want to lease your space. That doesn't work. So you have to modify across every state, every city on what you're doing. So it becomes very challenging to lease with a corporate function behind you trying to protect all the risks. And there's good reasons why the lease is that way. But one of the first things I did when I was in charge is I told them I wanted a 25-page lease. So they had to figure out how to cut it down. And they managed to get it much less. But we still had those challenges. But it was a very interesting job. One of my favorite jobs at Nationwide was managing that portfolio, a great team of people, and we did it for 5 years. So when I transitioned from there, Nationwide decided to fund the Blue Jackets Stadium. There was a vote. They decided to fund the Blue Jackets Stadium privately. So Nationwide Realty Investors was created, NRI, and they started to build the Arena District. So about a year and a half into that, I decided if I ever want to go work for myself, I need to figure out how to do development. So I moved over across the street to the arena. Our office was there and started working for NRI. And from that standpoint, I started with office development. Then I managed our industrial portfolio, went into the multifamily. And then somewhere around 2008, there was a little bit of a crisis in this country that affected housing. Yeah. And Nationwide had invested in about 1,200 acres just north of Dublin in Union County. And it ultimately becomes Jerome Village that went into default by the original developer and Nationwide took it out of default, cured the mortgage and brought it to me and said, here, there's 1,200 acres in Union County, go get our money back. So that's what the creation of Jerome Village was. So for the next 15 years, one of my bigger projects was trying to figure out how to do residential development in Union County. And the good thing is the Dublin School was there. It's a great piece of ground. If you haven't been to that development, I think it's probably one of the best master-planned developments in Central Ohio in the last 35 years. And it's now closer to 2,000 acres. And when it's all done, it'll have, you know, 150 acres of retail development. Kroger's is down there now. And it'll have 3,000 houses that are done very, very well in a master-planned fashion.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:09:17

So 2007, 2008, when you were faced with that challenge that the Nationwide bought that property or the — Nationwide Real Estate Partners, right?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:09:29

Nationwide Real Estate Investors.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:09:30

Investors bought that property. And I— and then the crisis hit. Everything kind of stopped, right? Like, you know, the— the beginning capital to fund your projects, you know, finding contractors. How did you feel at that point in time? Like, did you kind of see into the crystal ball and say, this is going to turn around? Or was there a lot more stress and anxiety about what to do with that project and property?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:09:57

In 2008, there was stress and anxiety across the whole world, especially from the, the residential and just real estate development. But there was one good thing, you know, Nationwide is a Fortune 100 money company. They have more money than God is what I like to say. So the capital was never an issue. And that's always been one of the best things about Nationwide Realty Investors is that you can get the money across the street with just a couple of signatures. So I wasn't worried about the capital, but I was worried about the market. But when I got into it, I realized The first piece of development, we had a piece of ground, the entitlements being the zoning needed to be finished. So we finished those, but then we needed to engineer it, get it planned and everything else. So when you start the engineering phase, that is easily a year, year and a half's worth of work before you can even build it. In that case, we had to bring utilities about 4.5 miles. The regional pump station to get it back to the Marysville Treatment Plant was \$20 million investment. So we had to do all that before we could build the first lot. So we knew there was 2.5 years worth of work before we could really start selling and recover the money that we had in the ground. So by the time our first builder showed up, it was 2011. Shotensteins Real Estate— or Shotensteins Homes was our first builder there, and we delivered them ground in, in 2011. So development's a long, long process, and that's what people don't realize.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:11:18

We've had other home developers on the show, and one thing that surprised me to learn is they were walking us through the economic metrics and the kind of the capital stack of the deal. And a big portion of that is the affordability of buying the lot. And especially if you want to keep a house with the way that inflation's gone up and construction costs have gone up. And there's a lot of communities right now really trying to attract developers like you to come plat out new developments. Just in you sharing about the utilities and the years that it takes for planning, Can you kind of share, give some advice for those that might be listening, what they should be working on to do to get their community ready for more, for to attract a developer like you?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:11:58

Yeah, I, I think there's— real estate is very, very simple. It's difficult to implement, but it's very simple. If you want, at least on the residential side, you need 3 things. You need a landowner willing to sell their ground, and, and, you know, some farmers are willing, they understand. Some want to farm forever, which is perfectly fine. You need utilities. So there's major costs in infrastructure, roadways, utilities, and those sort of things. Those are the two determining factors for the most part. Then the other is you have to have a municipality, a township, a city, a village that is willing to want housing, to want development in that area. If you have those three things, then you're well on your way to being successful. But there are hurdles with all three of those things. You know, residents, you know, they're— I've been in communities, Jerome Village was a perfect example. We had the support of the residents for the first 5, 6, 7, 8 years. And when you do master plans of 2,000 acres workers, you are looking 5, 10, 15 years. I was there for 15, 16 years on that project. I've been gone for 3 years and it's still moving forward. So, you know, a lot of residents can't see, and a lot of residents I say can't see the future because they're not even there. Some of the residents came 10 years after we started, and they may have a different opinion on what they think growth is doing and how it plays out, how it affects rules and those things, even though they just moved into the community. And we call them NIMBYs in the industry, and I'm sure you've heard that term.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:13:24

Well, we've talked about it, it's been on the show a few times. Not in my backyard. But that's right.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:13:28

That's correct. So you have to understand the changes in the market and the changes with that. And with that, you know, in Marysville, we've got a project that I'll talk about here in a little bit. We started that project in 2021, in late 2021, and Monday night we just got the first major piece of the residential approved. Now, That wasn't without strain because, you know, the first year and a half we were working with one city council and then automatically 3 of them disappear and we have 3 new people. And you have to start a little bit of that process back over, but you're incorporating more and more. But if you get those things and developers do it the right way, it's a collaborative effort between the engineer's office, the utilities, the residents, because you have to, you have to listen to their voice. And that's one of the things that I think we did well. At Jerome Village that I continue to do today. And we start, because we'll talk about my organization and my company here in a little bit, but I don't have a lot of time. So I can't afford to go into neighborhoods where it's gonna be a fight with lawyers. I have lawyers and they work for us all the time, but you won't see me take them to zoning meetings. You won't see me take them to city council meetings because it sets the wrong tone and stuff. And I've done this long enough that I understand some of the procedural stuff that they would object to, but you've gotta be a more collaborative thing. And I love lawyers, don't get me wrong, 'cause—

**J****Jason Duff** 0:14:49

Well, you need them at some point. No, absolutely. But I appreciate your approach 'cause I've attended a lot of hearings in communities, whether it is Planning Commission or maybe it's something going in front of the Zoning Board or Board of Zoning Appeals. There is definitely a different experience when you've got someone in a suit up there that's presenting versus a property owner, a business owner, or the developer themselves. Yeah. And our— actually, our previous episode, we spent a lot of time talking about going in front of, you know, your municipalities or your zoning boards, things like that, and understanding that a little bit more. But I'm kind of more interested while we have you there, and we just talked about those other things, to talk about like what the process is with utilities. Uh, we don't have to spend a long time on it, but like how does that process work? And then like, uh, finding landowners that, you know, or the right kind of landowners, you know, to, to get that process started. Those other two pillars you talked about.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:15:39

Yeah, well, the, the zoning process, you always start with the comp plan because I, I don't go in and tell them. A lot of developers will come in and they only have one product. If it's a home builder, if it's a multifamily, they come in, they'll look at a piece of ground, they'll grab it, and then they'll go try to force fit their thing. As a master planner, I get larger pieces of ground. I say, okay, what does the city want? What do the residents want? I talk to sometimes the neighbors and those sort of things, and some of it is, but I have 20+ builders and I will go find those products. And as, as I go through the entitlement and put the land in contract, I can do things that if I'm a single home builder that only has one product that they won't do. So they'll try to force fit. I don't have to do that because I'll go search out a particular builder that I need in a certain thing. Sure. So from a utility standpoint, there's really not anything you can do if that city is not already doing it. And, you know, there are cities that are very proactive in investing in infrastructure and we'll talk about that because Union County, Bellefontaine, this whole area all the way down the I-33 corridor, They have been investing in infrastructure for a long time. And it's not just water and sewer. I'm sure, you know, I know your background a little bit with Honda, etc. Honda, Dublin, Logan County, Union County, Marysville, all the way down to 33 Quartergork. 25 years ago, they started investing in bringing technology here and they put their money where their mouth is because they put all the fiber in the ground. 25 years ago, I'm not even sure. I think I was still using Cube to watch TV. Yeah, I date myself. You may not know what Cube is. Oh, I remember Cube. Yeah, but, but I mean, they're putting fiber in the ground, they've upgraded it, and, and that technology is, is its infrastructure, which will bring jobs and ultimately bring housing. But there are areas, and I'll use, you know, my forte is Union County. I probably built more, more homes and developments in Union County than anybody else in the last 30 years, um, even though I'm fairly young. Um, but they, in 2006, they put \$106 million in a new water treatment plant. — or I'm sorry, a sewer treatment plant on 33. You can see it. It's gorgeous. Um, but they didn't have anybody.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:17:45

You know, you appreciate someone complimenting. I was just gonna say gorgeous. I'm not sure. However, however, yeah, when it first went in, it was landscaped. There was a fence put around it. It was visible. There was signage and branding on it. And I think the thing that I picked up with what Bart was just saying, that there are certain communities that— when he said comp plan, that's kind of a comprehensive plan. You know, some communities will have— that's a really important document that looks at the physical assets, the parks, the, the housing, the demographics, and the nuts and bolts of what makes that community a community. It also has aspiring ideas of what it hopes to become the next 10, 15, 20-plus years. And then, you know, in addition to the comprehensive plan, some communities even go deeper to develop a strategic plan, or they can even go into neighborhoods or communities to look at a downtown development plan. And so it is very— it's if you, you survey the state, it's very clear the communities that are making those investments, working with engineers, consultants, designers to invest in that planning, and truthfully, the ones that are probably putting the most money and time into those initiatives are winning. In very big ways, because what Bart was saying as a developer, that gives kind of a roadmap for someone to come in with investment capital, business ideas, things to say, I see the gaps because this research and this work has been done. And then let me use my gifts and abilities of finding out what I think you're learning. This— the secrets of what Bart does to be successful. He does a lot more listening than he does talking. And I will tell you, I'm going to say in the development world, I meet a lot of developers. Very few of them are good listeners. Most of them come in the room and I'm going to be honest, they're wearing— they have a fancy watch, they're driving in their fancy car and they come out and they basically want— they want the red carpet rolled out and they're going to tell everyone what they're going to do. That's not his style and that's why he's successful.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:19:43

Yeah. And it takes a lot of political courage to make investments when you put \$106 million in the ground for a sewer treatment plant. 15 years before it's absolutely needed. Yeah. \$52 million in a water treatment plant. I mean, you've got roads and you've got other issues in the community, but it takes political courage from those, the engineer's office and the city council, township trustees to see that far ahead because they may not even be elected after the next term, but they're making investments in their communities. And, you know, I know you hang around Eric Phillips and Ben Vollrath and they quote a lot. I mean, there's only 12 counties in the state of Ohio counties in Ohio that are actually growing. The rest are either flat or they're declining. Well, try to go manage or develop in a, in a county that is detracting. Try to run a school district in a, where you're losing population because they're coming into Central Ohio. So there's a lot of people that don't like the growth in Central Ohio. Union County is one of the fastest growing, but it's only grown by about 2 to 2.5% per year, which is a manageable growth.. But if you don't like change at all, any change is, is something that you object to.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:20:53

So, um, this past week, um, I was in Knox County and there was a presentation that was organized by Jamie Greene and Planning Next, and I had a chance to serve on a panel. Uh, Kenny McDonald was also on that panel, and, and one thing that Kenny shared from One Columbus is that, uh, that he attended a farm— the meeting with Farm Bureau here in Ohio. And within the last few years, he had a statistic, and I may misquote quote it a little bit, but I want to— I'm going to kind of share what I remember— is about half a million acres here in the state of Ohio has been consumed from moving from farm ground to other types of zoning land uses. And his comment was that if we start to invest and work with our cities and our municipalities and counties and townships more by doing more planning, maybe that half a million or so acreage could be whittled down to \$150,000 of acres that's, you know, consumed less farm ground out of the matrix. How do you feel about that? Do you think that is that something that does help or not?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:21:58

Yeah, I always, I have this little saying that I share with landowners that density is a farmer's best friend. And it's for two reasons. If you're on the side that you want farm ground to be farm ground, et cetera, then go into the cities, go into the townships and request higher densities in the ground that gets developed because we will put more on less. In that situation and you can still do high density. I mean, look at Bridge Park and Bridge Park isn't going to come out into a rural area, etc. But that's an example that they took a little golf course, Bash Golf Course, and they have put a huge amount of housing and stuff and they've done it extremely well. But density is a farmer's best friend because one, it saves more farmland. If you want me to do 300 houses and I have to do them on one unit per acre, I'm taking 300 acres. If you give me two, I'm at 150. If you give me three units per acre, I'm at 100. So it extrapolates like that. Plus the affordability issue there. If I have to spread utilities over 300 acres, think of the cost of the roads, the sewers, the curbs, the water lines, the sewer, just the ground, because now each house has to buy more acreage or, you know, a portion of acreage than the higher density uses. And, you know, my mother always says I never want to live that close to somebody else. Well, Mom, you don't have to. And that's my comment. But these millennials, for 5, 6, 7 years. And we saw it firsthand because we built in the Arena District through Nationwide so many apartments. For 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 years, the millennials were coming out of OSU and they were moving into the apartments. And you had people leasing for 3, 4, 5, 6 years, which was unheard of. And I'm trying to develop Jerome Village, get millennials to start coming out and buying single-family houses, and they're not doing it. They're getting in their 30s, they haven't had kids, kids, right?

**J****Jason Duff** 0:23:41

They put that— everything is delayed.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:23:42

No, correct. So when they came out, they're coming out with \$150,000 to \$180,000 in gross income because they're 7 years into their work life. They're now having kids. They want to come to the suburbs because the downtown, you know, Columbus schools still need a lot of help and those sort of things. But it's not your normal condition. But when they come out, ten feet one millennials— and, and I don't mean to talk bad about millennials, I created two of these things, so you can blame me. So I created one Gen Z, so you will blame me for that too. Yeah, but when they come out, they value their time, so they don't want to mow their grass. And believe me, my kids didn't mow a lot of my grass, but, but they've also been living a 2x4 and 2 sheets of half-inch drywall away from all their neighbors by choice for the last 5, 6, 7 years. 10 feet between the houses is an eternity for these folks. So there's a huge difference between how they see things and how my mother, who grew up on a farm, sees things that's now on a 10-acre lot and still thinks it's too small. Yeah. So, but try buying a 10-acre lot anywhere close to a good school district. I mean, you're going to be paying, you know, a couple hundred thousand dollars for the lot and then you're, you know, going to build a, you know, a million-dollar house.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:24:51

We've been talking a lot about the urban donut and it is kind of around those major population cities and centers around the country. And here in Ohio, you've got the big three C's, which is Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati. But particularly in Columbus, as we look at what has been happening with Intel and of course all of the new investment that's coming to the Columbus region. And we've heard, whether it's BIA and John Malachy and others have said how much we've not been keeping up with the amount of houses that are needed. What is kind of, as you look at Union County and the work that you're doing, what is kind of the rosy outcome if things continue to progress with these cities and zoning? And then what are some of your big fears if we, we take a few steps back?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:25:40

So I'm not so sure I have a rosy outlook right now. I mean, the housing crisis in central Ohio is significant. I mean, prices are out of control. And part of that is just natural supply and demand. You know, the prices that some of these houses are selling for are not the replacement cost value and those sort of things. I was talking to somebody literally today that is considering selling a 1,000-square-foot house and, you know, she thinks she can get \$260,000, \$260 a square foot.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:26:06

Wow. I'm looking at houses in Columbus right now and yeah, easily. So Ethan lives in Delaware. Yeah. And yeah, I've been— just so you know, I've been graduated college 3, 4 years now, been married for 3 of those years, been renting all 3 years. And like, we have yet to like talk to a lender or anything, know where we're at realistically. But yeah, I'm like, I'm in between your Gen Z and millennial crowd here that like, it's, it's rough out there.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:26:32

But it's one of those things with the BIA. I was a BIA trustee for 9 years. I was on the Ohio Home Builders for a year. So when John Melligh, I can't do the presentations, I go fill in and I do a number of those. So, I mean, if you look, you know, there are signs out there that aren't rosy. And even if we would start to make major changes right now, it's not going to get rosier in central Ohio because there is so much growth. There's a million people. I also spend a lot of time with Kenny McDonald and all his presentations. There's a million people between now and, and 2050. And, and that growth started really 4 or 5 years ago. And, you know, Intel, it's a, it's a big deal. Its impact in Central Ohio will be major. But when you look at the first fab, it's only 3,000 people. Now, I say only, and, you know, I may be the only person that is a subscribed member to the Marysville Tribune and the Newark Advocate. Yeah, because that is kind of rare. But, um, we, we do some business in there, so, so I have those papers. And it was probably about 3 months afterwards that the Newark Advocate said, oh my God, 3,000 people, where are these people going to live? And, and this was just 2 years ago. But if you break Kenny's numbers down, and if there are a million people coming to Central Ohio in the next, you know, between now, 25, 30 years, that's about 89 people a day. So, you know, let's do easy math. Let's just say it's 100 people a day. With Intel's first fab, that's 30 days worth of this growth. That's it. Okay. That we now know where 30 days worth of a 30-year period of time's growth is going to work. Now, that could go to 10,000 with future fabs and those sort of things, but that is the impact. Now, Intel, I like to say it's the second landing of a UFO in central Ohio. The first one is literally about 5 miles down the road, which is Honda.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:28:18

Oh, yeah.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:28:19

Yeah, that's right. No offense to Nationwide.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:28:22

They've always been— We've made that comparison a lot on the show.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:28:24

Correct. So, but this growth is significant across the board. And if people are coming out of all the rest of the states, they're graduating OSU and those kids love it here so much they don't leave. Yeah. And that population is there. We have a housing crisis that has— it hasn't snuck up on us, but it hasn't been recognized by a lot of people until just recently. And it is getting press. Kenny now speaks about it every meeting. You go back 3 years when it was 2020 and they weren't talking about housing. They were talking about jobs and growth and all that sort of stuff, which is important, but they weren't talking about housing. We've done at most in Central Ohio, including single-family permits and multifamily permits, 11,000 to 12,000. If you go back prior to 2008, we were doing 19,000 to 20,000. We need to be doing 19,000 to 20,000 now. So we're falling behind about 7,000 to 8,000 units per year. And there are some estimates that we're already 25,000 behind. So the problem is one of John Malachy's most significant stats is the number of inventory, okay, not built, but zoned ready lots in central Ohio. This has traditionally been somewhere around 40 to 48 months. Of inventory that builders have built up in their portfolio. They haven't built the lots, but it's zoned and it's ground that utilities are near that you can just go implement. That number now is under 6 months. So any lot we sell today is not capable of being replaced. If I touch a piece of ground— so if those 3 factors, if I find a landowner willing to sell that has utilities within close proximity and a city that is willing to provide me density. If I touch that piece of ground, it is 18 months before I can actually start building the lots, which probably takes 6 more lot— 6 more months. And then it's going to take a builder 6 to 9 months to build a house. So you're really looking at almost a 2.5 to 3-year process to put more inventory on the ground. Now, one of the things that I do is master plan communities. Some people say it's swinging for the fences. Some people say it's a much more organized way to develop. Some of the problems in Central Ohio is we have gotten, being the housing industry, and we're not the only ones, we'd love to build twice as much. And we like to say that it's utility capacity and it's legislative environments and it's zoning because it's in townships and cities. But we also have this bad habit coming out of 2008 when a lot of people had land positions that they had to, you know, default on, give back, walk away from anything that they got could do. We do piecemeal development. So a developer likes to go find 50 to 100 acres. If they get 2 units an acre, 3 units an acre, they can do, you know, 150, 300 houses. That's 3 years, maybe 4 years worth of development after the 18 months to develop the lots. And that's all good. But because they know as soon as they extend those utilities across that parcel, their competitor is going to grab the next piece and do the exact same thing. So they protect those utilities and they'll only extend it into certain phases knowing that when utilities get there, 'cause somebody else is coming down the road. So when that happens and somebody comes down the road and grabs 100 acres beside them, they then say, "Oh, we want to be successful. So what do we do? Well, that company did this, this, and this. So I'm going to go ask for the exact same thing." So you get a very homogeneous product. There's 3 years on the first development, 4 or 5 to build it out. Then this person gets it, 18 months later they have the utilities. So this piecemeal development prohibits us from doing mass. So what I do and what we did at Jerome Village, and that's where I learned this trade, we do large master plan communities. We will grab acreage, we will extend utilities and infrastructure. We take it all through zoning once and we will zone 5, 6, 7, 8 different products in there and we extend utilities once to get it to 4 or 5 different housing products that don't compete with each other. Your, your first-time homebuyer doesn't compete with multifamily and your million-dollar, you know, custom homes don't

compete with somebody that wants a townhome or a patio home empty nester. So you extend utilities and you can get them to 3 or 4 or 5 different products all at the same time. And because I go find different builders, they all have their own capital requirements. They all get started. But we can put more lots on the ground. It's just— it is a long game. The master planning process, what we're doing in Marysville and some other areas It is a very long game. Like I said, we started 15 years— like, well, we started Marysville East, and we just Monday night got the first major 250 acres worth of residential approved. We started that in, in October, November of 2020 or 2021. Now, prior to that, we, we have 850 acres worth of industrial park that's in that master plan, because in Marysville there's a lot of focus on more housing. And they want jobs and housing at the same time. And that's what we're doing. And that 850-acre industrial park, we got that zoned in January and February, but we had to do that first. We had to put that in place to be able to afford the infrastructure, to be able to tell the schools and, you know, the municipality that we'll be able to handle this. And so we're bringing new employers, new jobs, and housing, retail, because everybody wants a good place to eat. We're bringing it all at the same time, but that's master planning. But any change, change of city council, change in residents, you know, attitudes toward growth, any of that financial interest rates, I mean, and since we started in 2021, I mean, they doubled and everything. So all of that stuff, when you're playing a long game to do master planning, to try to put more lots on the ground in a quicker standpoint, it's additional risk. And you also have to find the right landowners because I'm a real estate developer. I'm not a real estate investor. I can't afford to put our capital in the ground on a piece of ground that can be developed in 10 years. Can't do that because capital is too risky. When I was with Nationwide, we had the ability to do that.

**J Jason Duff** 0:34:27  
Right.

**B Bart Barok** 0:34:27  
Yeah. But you've got to find a landowner that is willing to give you the 18 months because I will pay you more based on the entitlements that I can, I can get from the city. But you've got to wait and you've got to give me 18 months to get through the due diligence to prove the land's developable, to get through the zoning, the annexation, and even the engineering. So if you can wait 18 months, I'll, I'll pay you very well for the density that I get.

**J Jason Duff** 0:34:51  
Is the way to construct that— do you typically buy options on ground or what is the legal vehicles that you do to secure that property while you're doing that due diligence?

**B Bart Barok** 0:35:00  
We put a deposit down, but, but essentially, no, the landowner doesn't get anything.

**J Jason Duff** 0:35:03  
But if they want to sign a purchase contract, but you'll delay that closing and say we've got 18 months to do this pre-work and due diligence.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:35:11

And yeah, we break it down. So the first, the first 30 days we'll go through title because we'll do a title commitment, make sure that the title is clean. There's not easements, you know, or got a gas and oil lease. In Marysville, we found a gas and oil lease signed in 1903 by Warren G. Harding. Ooh, wow. 1920 or 1923, we became friends. Yeah. So, I mean, that's, that's some of the stuff that you find when you do it. But we make sure that the title was good in the first 30 days. The next 60 days after that, we're doing due diligence. We're making sure that the environmental is there. What are wetlands? You know, we'll do soil borings. Where's, where's, you know, where's the bedrock? Where's the glacier till? That sort of stuff to make sure it's there. So we clear these hurdles as we go. The next— after we do that and probably simultaneously, we're doing our development plans. We've got to go through sketch plan with the zoning commission. We got to go through through development plan with the zoning commission. And then ultimately they make a recommendation to city council or the township trustees, and then you're off. So our landowner is with us the whole time. We put a deposit down, but if we don't get any of that stuff, we have the right to terminate. So there's risk in the landowners, but at the same time, the end, if you consider that the ground was worth agricultural, right? And that's crazy right now because I mean, it's pretty high. I mean, it's, My grandfather used to pay \$3,000 cash. He knew he could make money off of that. And if you didn't take \$3,000, then he didn't buy that ground. But now it's \$6,000 to \$8,000. Some farmers are financing ground, you know, and if you already own the million-dollar combines and stuff like that, then it's incremental. You can pay a little bit more. But, you know, farm ground is \$6,000 to \$8,000.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:36:42

Here's a quick fact. So I just looked yesterday, the Farm Bureau did a study in about 10 counties here in West Western Ohio, looking at the average rate on cash rent in the productive farm ground. Any guess on what the average for cash rent per acre is today?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:37:02

Um, no, I haven't.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:37:03

It shocked me— \$220 per acre.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:37:05

Oh, okay. Yeah, when they're renting. Well, it's funny because I've had leases. Obviously, when we at Jerome Village, we had farmers that farmed our ground, and normally we charged them \$125 to \$175. But it was keeping it in a CAUB status and postponing the taxes that was more important to us and keeping the ground worked. Because if you don't work the ground, bad things can show up, being cattails, wetlands, other stuff. So you need farmers that actually know how to work development ground to make it valuable as you expect it to be in the future. But I've got some experience up here in Bellefontaine and your ground is a lot more rich up here. You guys get a little bit more than that average. So, but it's It's all broken down by soil types and productivity of the actual corn and stuff. But no, I wouldn't have known that even though I have been a Farm Bureau member since 1985. A lot of people don't know this. You know, fun fact is Nationwide was created by the Ohio Farm Bureau out of the need to insure. So farmers came together. So I have worked and the Ohio Farm Bureau no longer owns Nationwide. It's obviously a mutual company owned by its policyholders. Orders, but they— their headquarters has always been in Nationwide Tower downtown.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:38:14

That's awesome. Yeah, I didn't know that. All right. At this time, we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. If you are looking for a dynamic workspace in the heart of Bellefontaine, look no further. Build Coworking Space is your destination for creativity and collaboration with state-of-the-art facilities in a thriving community. This is where innovation happens. Join them today for as low as \$99 a month and build your success at Build Coworking Space. Big city dining in a small town, now that's The Syndicate. Join them for fresh steaks, pasta, or seafood for dinner, or stop in for Sunday brunch to experience one of their signature dishes such as chicken and waffles, and maybe even pair it with a mimosa flight. Located at 213 South Main Street in downtown Bellefontaine. The, uh, you know, I happen to live in Union County and I am in Jerome Township, so I've watched this, you know, I've only been there for the last 10 years, but last 10 years seen lots of positive development and growth. Growth also brings challenges. And so, you know, things like traffic. And there's also a number of conversations about how we fund streets, roads, police, fire. And then I know in Union County and particularly in Marysville, a really hot topic is how we fund our schools. When you see this growth How do we grow smart, smart and balance the criticisms of development?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:39:38

Yeah, well, there's a, there's a couple of pieces there. I mean, there are good financial tools out there for the development. You know, TIFs right now are a hot issue in Union County and Marysville because, you know, schools are faced with growing populations there. It's not just growing if your school hasn't grown. Inflation has still caused massive, well, a massive cost increase in fuel and buses, everything other than salary, because salary is not keeping pace with inflation. But those pressures are real. So I understand the residents and the municipalities that have those pressures. But, you know, tax incremental financing is an option. There's usually not a lot of that available and used in residential. It's more of businesses. You can abate the ground and those sort of things. But there is a tool, and when, when I look at what residents say, first, they don't want to fund through their existing taxes future developments, which I understand that because, you know, it's not going to benefit them immediately. They also want the infrastructure to come first. Now that one's tough, but there are ways that you can kind of work with that to make the infrastructure come at the same time, some of the roadway improvements and those sort of things. And then, and then the third one is that, you know, they want support for their taxes and services and all that. So there is a tool that we use. The New Albany Company used it to develop the residential over in New Albany and then their business park. And we used it in Jerome Village. It's called a new community authority. So what it does is it creates a millage. It is a tax, but it is actually a charge and it overlays it over the landowners and the developer agree to put this this government tax over top of all the ground. And the developer then funds the infrastructure, but will be repaid by the businesses and the landowner, or the residents that buy the houses. So the people that benefited in the future are actually going to be the ones that pay the infrastructure back to the developer. You can issue bonds off of that, et cetera. Now, it used to be that you had to have a project, 1,000 acres or more to do that. And Jerome Village fit that.. And we've used that from day one. Nationwide's probably funded over more than \$126 million in infrastructure with it. The township, the county gave nothing. And not that they could at the time we were developing, they didn't have it. So, you know, and on the east side of Marysville, we are putting a community authority over the entire east side of Marysville on the development. And we can do that because there's 5 major landowners on Marysville East that control about 1,500 of the 1,900 acres that's available. So because we could group those together either through contractual obligations or partnerships, etc., we have the ability to do that because the risk of a community authority, if I put it on a 100-acre parcel, that another developer gets the 100 acres beside me and decides not to use it. Right. And then I have a competitive disadvantage where my people get taxed more. So you have to have scale or you have to have something bridge East Park has a Community Authority. You have to have something that people are willing to pay a little bit more for. But when you do that, that millage comes back and repays, and that's what the existing residents want. And, and I do think that entity in Marysville is why our project just got approved, that the residents are okay because they understand that they're not going to pay for this infrastructure, that the people and the jobs and the employers and the restaurants that come to the development will ultimately pay that, and we're not taking anything away from the schools. They're still going to get 100% of all their property taxes that they're obligated for and the levies, you know, give them. But the Community Authority is also a tool to help fund some of those services. It's not meant to replace a levy. I always say I work closely with the schools, but I always tell the schools, I'm not going to replace a levy. You still got to go to the voters to get them to agree as to what you're spending and how

much money. But there are startup costs related to, you know, needing a new elementary school. So at Jerome Village, we gave 43 acres to the city of Dublin, and that got funded through the community authority. Ultimately, Nationwide paid it, but they get reimbursed for that. But, you know, police and fire may need something, and it's those startup. And, you know, we're doing 70-foot buildings down in Marysville when we do the industrial part. We asked the fire chief, do you have a 70-foot ladder truck? And he said no. And we said, okay, well, we're going to have to buy you one. And that'll be reimbursed through the Community Authority, but it will be reimbursed from the people and the businesses that are actually there. So it properly places those expenses and reimbursements and doesn't ignite the schools and the existing residents as much as a TIF or an abatement would do.

J

**Jason Duff** 0:44:12

Yeah, that's a really cool, cool, really cool tool. I appreciate you sharing that. I want to talk a little bit about some of the people that you're partnered with that has helped you in this, because I mean, we just outlined, there's a lot going on here and it's a lot for one person to handle, but you're not handling it by yourself. But I mean, earlier we were painting a pretty bleak picture of the housing crisis, you know, but I know you've done some work with like Rockford Homes and probably others. I mean, other homebuilders. How are you guys working together to solve this bleak picture or, you know, try to make a dent in this problem?

B

**Bart Barok** 0:44:43

Yeah, well, when I decided— so coming out of COVID Nationwide offered some early retirements because a lot of people don't leave. You retire from Nationwide. They don't leave. But I always had a little bit of a desire to go out on my own. And when Nationwide offered early retirement packages, some of the executives, I took it. So it eliminates a little risk if Nationwide is willing to pay you for a year on that. And I've got a very nice pension. I push that out to when I'm 65. But I got to work for 10 more years now. So my own company, one, I do the consulting work. Which, you know, I can help landowners that want advice as to what to do with their land. I do some municipality, you know, and do some zoning entitlements and those, but that's a small piece. But Sox Real Estate is my company and it's Sox spelled S-O-X, red, not white. Lifetime Boston Red Sox fan. But so people always kind of ask me, where does Sox Real Estate come from? But, well, I didn't really expect to be a public company. It was just an LLC. I was going to fund all my stuff through.

J

**Jason Duff** 0:45:43

So are you a fan then? I think. Oh yeah.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:45:45

Okay. Yeah. So, but, um, so I do small developments on my own. So I've got 70 acres in Plain City. We're going to do large custom lots with well and septic. Um, and those will be million-dollar homes with the custom builders that you would expect down in that area. You know, I partnered with Pulte on a, uh, 350-acre parcel. I had 190, they added 165 to it, and we got through Jerome Township approved 700 Del Webb empty nester, highest quality type in amenities from the Del Webb project. But we got that through probably about 3, 4 months ago. So that was part of my personal development there. And then I've got 3 projects up here in Bellefontaine. A couple of years ago, I was in a meeting and I can't remember which meeting it was, but then Volrath mentioned that, you know, we'd love to have housing, but nobody will come here. And, you know, so I told him I'll come up and take a look with not really an intention of being the developer, but I ran into the godfather of excavating.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:46:42

Yes, Jeremy Levan, previous podcast. We've had him on the show too.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:46:46

And he was building lots and he was trying to solve it. He's got a lot of legacy history here, just like you and your family do. And he was trying to build lots, but he wasn't getting the builders. So, we kind of crossed paths on a piece of ground that I thought about buying that he ended up buying. And I heard this excavator. So I told Ben, I got to know the godfather. So, so we got together and we created a partnership. And at Maris Park, we've got two homebuilders that, you know, they're— we're going to do 180 lots here in the next couple of years.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:47:15

I just drove out there. There's lots of progress.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:47:17

And Ludlow Avenue. So they are Horton— D.R. Horton is going to get lots here literally at the end of November. And there's another 200 there. So So we're just at the infancy of bringing housing to here. But you asked me a little bit earlier about contrasting different land values and stuff like that. The best example is probably playing out right now. So for a 50-foot lot here in Belfountain, I'm able to deliver it to the home builder somewhere in the low \$60,000 range. And ideally it's about a 5-fold factor to house price if a home builder's buying that. They're hitting a \$295,000 to \$325,000 price point. In Marysville, that exact same 50-foot lot cost me \$95,000 to develop and to sell to the builder. And it's no surprise that their average price down there is closer to \$460,000 to \$500,000. If you go into Dublin, you go down to some of the other townships, Poway, Ohio, I mean, they have to buy lots at \$125,000, \$130,000. And so that's the cost to build the lots isn't any more expensive in any of these municipalities for the most part. But the land prices are different and the legislative environment and fee structures. Wow. The tap fees. And I love Marysville, Ohio, Marysville Utilities, but the tap fees there are \$14,000. Here they're \$2,200. So that is a huge factor when you start looking at some of these communities and And, you know, so did I hear there's also an incentive for new homebuilders right now?

**J****Jason Duff** 0:48:51

I think it's either in the city or the county that their taxes are abated for 9 years, 11. It was some 12, 12 years.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:49:01

Yeah. Now, now, now be careful there.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:49:03

So that's amazing though.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:49:06

2.5 years ago when I first met Ben, he shared that there was a CRA up here that if you build more than 6 units in a year, that it is 100% abatement for 12 years. And I told him that is unheard of. That is incredible. But at the same time, there is deductions with that. So we are actually— we've got development started and you can't pull the rug out from underneath. But we're working with them and the schools because there are consequences to abating ground for that long. Really? For that long? Yeah. If, if you only do 5 or 6 houses, that's not— but that's not what we're doing. Residential development, one of the biggest attributes is that school district. So we try to protect the school districts as much as possible. Yeah, we try to get them as much money. We know we're sending kids to the school districts, and most school districts want to educate those kids. So it's just a matter of math to figure out, you know, because teachers want to teach kids, but they don't want to teach 30 at the same time. So we have to figure out that formula. And the state of Ohio is kind of in this too at the state house. They kind of, you know, Well, I'm going to skip on. So we can do—

**J****Jason Duff** 0:50:08

we could do a whole episode on that.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:50:10

So, yeah, but, but from that standpoint, you will find residential developers support the school like no other people because that is one of the reasons why people want to move to a community and in the community as a whole. So you've got to protect that. And abating the ground or the house value for 12 years, it is a significant investment. I will tell you, I give all the kudos to the city council and everybody that puts that in place. They wanted housing. And they put their money where their mouth is and they created a program.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:50:38

And you're here, you and the developers are here.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:50:40

But it does need to be modified moving forward because we can't do 400 houses. A school can't support somebody come in with a kindergarten that doesn't pay a tax for 12 years. And that will affect future levies. And but we recognize that even though we're just at the infancy of the number of new houses, we recognize that. And we're working with city council and the schools right now to address that. Not pulling the rug out from the people that are already committed, right? But you have the ability to, once you start getting progress, to adjust those things. And they should be adjusted. So it's challenging, but that's a very rare thing. And that tells you how much Bellefontaine wants. There's a lot of people that want to live in Bellefontaine, but, you know, they work at Honda, they work at East and West Liberty, but they have to go to Marysville. And Marysville's crisis on a housing standpoint is rough. So they may have to go further and they may end up in Richwood. But, you know, if you can't buy existing housing, where do you go and how do you get your employees? And sooner or later in central Ohio, if we can't address this housing, it's going to start impacting the employers and the jobs. Luckily, right now it's not. But that's why it's so critical that everybody comes together and figures out how to— how to solve it. Yeah, to solve it.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:51:49

You kind of were heading to wrap up the episode, but, you know, a lot of the work that Small Nation does is focused on density and we've talked about the importance of that. The other thing is, is really working in the historic downtown and really identifying how we fill empty storefronts, recruit new businesses, and preserve the history and the authentic nature of what that town is. How important to you with new developments is having a strong town center and having a vibrant downtown?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:52:19

Yeah, it's important. So I first met you and we didn't actually meet, I was at Economic 411, which is— I think it was at OSU that year. Yeah. And you did a presentation. I had no clue what Small Nation was, but there were 4 choices for that breakout session. That's the one I went to. And lo and behold, you know, I hadn't been to Bellefontaine since a high school ski trip up there, which, which another fun fact, Nationwide actually owned it. Yeah, they did. Yeah. Yeah. It went into default and it went into our real estate area because when they had the mortgage on it, it defaulted. And one of my old bosses, one of his fame or claims to fame was that he came up with the concept and Nationwide invested the million dollars to put the lights in to open it up, which made it viable for— from a financial standpoint, because skiing in Ohio, it's kind of a little different. A little different. Yeah. But it brings all the high schools in at night. So that was Nationwide that actually did that. They nursed it back to health and then they sold it. So I hadn't been to Bellefontaine in a long time. I saw your presentation. I'm like, okay, probably 4 or 5 months was the Ben Vollrath thing. And then I come up here and it's amazing. So when you talk about, you know, in Marysville is going through this transition, Jerome Township is going through this transition, when you talk about maintaining rural characteristics in those small town fields, etc., you're doing it. And I also know how hard it is to do historical buildings and with zoning codes and, you know, the way you talk about how you overcome it and how you do the marketing, it's amazing what you you do. I'm a member of Build Marysville, and I hang out up here every once in a while and, and stuff. But, um, no, it, it is important when you go into these towns that you recognize some of those things and you try to, uh, you try to figure out a way to, to play into that a little bit, and, and you figure out how to survive. So it's very important because once you get the housing, then they want the retail, then they want the restaurants, then they want that thing, the quality of life stuff, right? No. And one of the things that struck me funny in Marysville, and you don't think about this, but the high schoolers talk about how many times can we go to Walmart and hang out on a Friday or Saturday night, right? And I'm like, or Sheetz gas station. No, no, that's true. I love me a Sheetz. I was so happy when it came to Marysville. It's in my backyard. But, but no, you start thinking about where do the kids go? And, you know, there's a bowling alley there, but And if you're hanging out at Walmart, you know, you got to find something else to do. Now, you know, we used to put bonfires in the middle of cornfields, and there's probably a lot of liability with that. But we also used to— there was 4 of us in the family. One of us used to ride in the back window of the car, and it was a big, you know, fight to figure out who's laying in the back window of the car. So, yep.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:55:00

But, um, no, I appreciate you mentioning that. And I do think that's— for those of you that are listening, it's— we need the, the new development, the new construction, but we also need that vibrant downtown and working to preserve the historic character of whatever that community is. And equally, those two brain types need to— we talk about preservation, but we also talk about innovation. And I think where the conflicts come, and I live in Union County, and most of the debates and the arguments are because of those two brain types. They can't translate between each other. Correct. Yeah. Yeah, that's good. All right. Well, we're kind of coming to our time here, but I'll move us on to our next show segment, which is rapid fire Q&A. A. Ooh, here it goes. Um, so question number 1: are you left or right-handed?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:55:44

Uh, I am right-handed. I don't know how that works because my daughter and my wife are both left-handed.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:55:49

Oh, oh really?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:55:50

Yeah, so I'm right-handed.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:55:52

Gotcha. Can people read your handwriting? No. Okay, yeah, most developers like can't even read that. So yours is bad. Yeah, it's really bad. No, type everything, that's why. Um, second question is, what is—you live in Delaware County, correct? That's That's correct. All right.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:56:06

So real close to Union County. If they shove Union County a couple of miles north, I would be in Union County. Just take it to the river.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:56:13

Right. Yeah. But your favorite restaurant in Delaware County and then you can answer Union County too if you want.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:56:19

But Typhoon. Typhoon. Asian place downtown. Yeah.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:56:23

It's great appetizers.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:56:24

No, 100%. That's my favorite in Delaware County. Yeah. In Marysville or Union County, you will find me eating probably 2 or 3 times a week at either Benny's or Leon's. But my favorite is a small place on Industrial Parkway called the Red Ship. But you cannot eat barbecue.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:56:40

I've heard about it, not been there yet.

**B****Bart Barok** 0:56:41

I gotta go check it out. It's wonderful food and it's like a hidden gem because it's never full, but they have the best ribs. That's probably my favorite place is Red Shed. But like I said, I'd be 300 pounds if I eat ribs every day.

**J****Jason Duff** 0:56:54

Great recommendation though. That's a new one. I have to check it out. And then if you weren't doing this kind of work, what would you be doing?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:57:01

That's, that's a good question. So if I had things to do over again, I would have probably stayed in the military for 20 years. Really? So yeah, I would have made it a career. So, you know, I was 18 months active duty, then I went to the Ohio National Guard and went to weekends and drills. And that is a great program, is still available for everybody. They'll pay 100% of your school. Both my boys went through that same program, but I would have probably stayed active duty for the 20 years and then came out and obviously, you know, you're retiring when before 40. But I would have probably went into poli sci or the political environment. I think we have a huge deficit of qualified candidates in this country, and that on both sides, and we've, we've got to figure that out. And, you know, I read something that the population of the House and the Senate, there is less than 5% of people with veteran military experience in there. Now, obviously, if you go back to the '70s and '80s, there was a draft. So it was closer to, you know, 60 percent and those sort of things. But I think service, whether it's military or whether it's in your township trustees, zoning boards, city councils, and that sort of stuff, I think it's extremely important to move this country forward, not only from a housing industry, but for so many. Just leadership in general. Yeah. And I just, I just see some of the candidates that get put forth, and I just think we, we could do better. As a developer, you're never going to get on city council. You're never going to get— so until I decide to stop doing what I'm doing, any political aspirations, they have to go, you know.

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

My favorite line is, as a developer, you can fire clients, but as a politician, you cannot fire voters. So very different world. So yeah, well, great answer to that question. Um, and then just a couple closing questions we ask everyone. The first one is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

**B****Bart Barok** 0:58:51

I go back to when I was 19, 20 years old. I had a mentor that said, this isn't what you want to do. For some reason, everybody else in life I wasn't listening to, but she had, she had a voice, she had a way to get to me. So professional development, look for mentors. If you're in high school, look for mentors. If you're an adult and you have things to share, look to mentor people. You know, I was at a recent, you know, the military experience. I don't consider my military experience. Great. I, I didn't go to war. I didn't do those things. I worked the ejection systems on an A-7D fighter and those sort of things. But everybody has a story to tell, and, and they're having such a hard time recruiting that they're trying to find people to mentor people, not only to the service but in general. And, and I think the mentorship— you've got to find somebody that you trust and, and that can help guide you. And it can be an uncle or relative, or it can be a family friend, or, or or somebody else. But the mentorship that I had at that point in time and continued on a number— when I took over Jerome Village, I had two builders. One of them happened to be Bob Yoakam of Rockford Homes. Now he passed, and I'm partnering with his son who owns Rockford Homes now. But he helped me understand residential development. He didn't have to, you know, he could have bought ground from me, you know, at a discounted price and took it, but he didn't. He wanted to make sure that he was successful. So So mentorship, I'm a big fan of that.

**J****Jason Duff** 1:00:12

Yeah, yeah. Well, appreciate you sharing that. And the last one is, if someone were listening today and wanted to learn more about your work and your businesses, where can they go?

**B****Bart Barok** 1:00:21

If you want to get in this business, I would suggest, if again, starting in high school, I would suggest that you look at vocational schools. There's such a need for trades right now. In 2008, every mom-and-pop plumber and HVAC electrical contractor their kids had to go work somewhere else and they never came back. So we have an aging population on the skilled trades. And, you know, they're 55. My brother kicks carpet for a living and, you know, he's 54 years old and he can't— he's not going to do it into his 60s. But we need skilled trade. And if you go to a vocational school and I know in the suburbs it's not in vogue to do that, you kind of mentioned that before. But, but if you go there and you do the apprenticeship and you learn the skills, then you take a few business classes at Columbus State or online. Yeah. And then you're just, you know, a period of time from starting your own company. And once you understand the skilled trades, then you understand excavating, you understand some homebuilding. I mean, you could become a homebuilder, you could become a developer really, really easy if you're— if you want, you know, additional education right out of high school. Columbus State has a great construction management program. It's, it's well beyond what you would expect at Columbus State being just a community college. And then if you, you know, you want to go to college engineering, OSU's got a great engineering program. They've got a construction management program too that you can start at the 2-year degree and then you move up. But the other piece is you can go work for a homebuilder. You learn so much working for a homebuilder or a developer. I mean, there's a lot. Get a finance degree. You're skilled. I mean, I had a finance degree with a minor in real estate.. But it took me probably 20 years to actually use the real estate side because I focused on the finance side. So there's all kinds of resources in Central Ohio. But, you know, I, I'm a huge fan of the vocational school. And another fun fact I can give you— this is the last fun fact I'll give you— is Todd Hoadley moved from Dublin to Towles down there in Jonathan Alder School District, and they support that whole area down there. When he got there, he had a population of 600 kids. I talked to him the other day because they were at Marysville and they were doing a career fair thing. He's at 1,500. So bringing people into it is, it is huge. And I think he's only been there probably 5, 6, maybe 7 years. But so many people are now focusing and it's, it's, it's acceptable to go to vocational school and we've got to encourage that.

**J****Jason Duff** 1:02:47

If a listener today is curious about your consulting business, and they needed help or advice or maybe want to partner up with you on a project, how do they find you? What is the best way for them to reach out?

**B****Bart Barok** 1:02:58

Well, there's not too many Barracks in the world. So if you put Barracks into Google, you'll get all my zoning history. You'll get the good videos that, you know, of the challenges and those sort of things. My LinkedIn is there, but my phone number is out there. You can find it anywhere.

**J****Jason Duff** 1:03:12

Great. I'll try to link some of that stuff in the show notes too, for anyone that's curious. Listen, I— we've now— on this episode 92, 92, Bart, you have in this hour segment, I think, given more content than any other guest that we've had. And it's a big compliment to you because of your life experience. But, you know, it ties together some of the big crises that we have on the national level, here in our state, and then also in the Columbus area. And I use the word crisis lightly because how I think developers and entrepreneurs and leaders and communities can think about that. This is opportunity. This is opportunity to plan for the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years. And I want to keep Honda strong. I want more spaceships to land here in Ohio. But if we're going to do that, we have to keep our community safe. We have to keep housing affordable, and we have to be smart in planning our growth.. And so just thank you for being a leader in this. And I'm excited to share this episode with as many people as possible. And I encourage you to do that in your towns, in your communities, because I think there's a smart way to grow and there's— they're good developers. That's my key. There is a lot of nimbyism about developers are evil, greedy. But I think you even heard today there are tax abatements and programs, but Bart understands the consequences that some of those need to be changed here. Yeah, we need to support our schools and all that. —too. Just thank— thanks for being a guest on the show today.

**B****Bart Barok** 1:04:41

Oh no, I appreciate the invite. I, I enjoy— I have not watched all 92, but I've watched a handful of them.

**J****Jason Duff** 1:04:47

Well, you have plenty to listen to. We'll send you homework on the way home. So great, thanks, Bart.

**B****Bart Barok** 1:04:51

Appreciate it. Thank you.

**E****Ethan DeLeon** 1:04:53

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

**E****Ethan DeLeon** 1:04:55

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