

AI Edits from KC1- Raw - 2024-08-07, 10.43 AM

[00:00:00] **Emily Craven:** Thank you so much, Will, for joining us today.

[00:00:05] **Will Gregory:** Thanks for having me.

[00:00:08] **Emily:** So it has been absolutely delightful learning about Kansas City from several wonderful people that we are going to be having on for the next two podcasts, everyone. Tune into the next one as well. If you want to hear the full story of Kansas City and how it's bringing in vibrancy at the moment.

[00:00:23] **Emily:** But, today we have the wonderful Will Gregory. He is the chair of the NTDF board here in Kansas City. and so Will, just to start, how was life for you growing up in Kansas City? Like I want to understand what is the biggest change that ~~you have~~ witnessed in the community?

[00:00:42] **Will Gregory:** Life growing up in Kansas City has, been pretty Great.

[00:00:46] **Will Gregory:** I went to school here in the state of Missouri, after high school and, came back to Kansas city eventually. But, Kansas city growing up was, you think of a typical Midwestern city. It [00:01:00] was like that. It was almost like a flyover city, but almost too. To our detriment to some extent, Kansas city, being in the middle of the country would see news stories from either coast and try to localize those stories.

[00:01:12] **Will Gregory:** When I feel like we had those stories to tell. We just weren't telling them. It was almost like a low self esteem at that point, 20, 25 years ago, but we've since flipped the script. I feel like we, become a nationally, internationally recognized city. not just a fly over anymore.

[00:01:32] **Will Gregory:** we've got a great mayor. We've got, incredible sports teams, which have actually helped us propel into that, national spotlight. We've got James Beard winning chefs. We've got incredible artists, incredible architects and designers. So all of that is here. We're just now preaching the gospel to the world about Kansas City.

[00:01:54] **Emily:** And I really do think that, that's very true because in the prior conversations that we had, [00:02:00] Kansas City is now doing these really

unique funding methodologies for bringing in vibrancy, helping citizens and the community to tell their stories and not only to tell their stories to locals, but to bring that to the tourists who then Visit Kansas City and then take that out to the world.

[00:02:19] **Emily:** And so one of the really unique ways that Kansas City is currently funding vibrancy, is through the NTDF fund for city vibrancy and revitalization. Can you share, what that acronym means? where did that system come from? How it works and how you maintain its stability as a city.

[00:02:40] **Will Gregory:** So the Neighborhood Tourism Development Fund was a mandate set up to, exactly as it sounds, promote attracting visitors to our neighborhoods. And it does that through a mechanism that also funds our visit Casey or our, visitors Bureau. a portion of [00:03:00] that peels off into this fund and that fund was specifically set up to launch events or sustain events that might not otherwise be funded or be considered for funding.

[00:03:10] **Will Gregory:** Because they aren't as high profile or they don't have as large of attendance, but they still have value to Kansas city and to the surrounding area, as well as tourists coming into the city. And so those events can apply for funding through NTDF, the neighborhood tourist development fund and receive funding for anything from advertising to temporary employees, to marketing dollars, anything that you might need to get an event of that size off the ground and then sustain that event going forward.

[00:03:43] **Tim Souza:** Emily and I really come from like a startup background and that sounds like an incubator for art.

[00:03:49] **Will Gregory:** It's angel funding from the city.

[00:03:52] **Tim Souza:** that's beautiful. And so what are. Maybe you can zoom me out.

[00:03:55] **Tim Souza:** What are some of that criteria and what do you guys look for as an organization, who [00:04:00] is looking to support these initiatives to get them up and off the ground?

[00:04:03] **Will Gregory:** So the two key tenants are, it's gotta be a chair, a charity event or have a charitable tie. So it's, it has to be submitted under the umbrella of a charity.

[00:04:13] **Will Gregory:** And then the other criteria is that it is the event takes place in Kansas city. So it's, it must meet those two criteria. And then after that. We as a board score, the submittal on, the viability of the event, the, the accessibility of the event, the sustainability of that organization to actually pull it off.

[00:04:38] **Will Gregory:** And then, going, doing a deeper dive, who is it going to attract? How many people is it going to attract? That's not the end all be all of what we're looking for, but we do want to know that it's more than. Just the immediate community that the event serves, if that makes sense.

[00:04:55] **Emily:** And so when you say events, is it like, are we talking [00:05:00] festivals? Does this extend to busking or patio seasons? Can you give us some examples of maybe the lower budget end to the higher budget end of what ends up being funded?

[00:05:10] **Will Gregory:** Yeah, it really runs the gamut. And just, as charitable organizations run the gamut, but it could be anything from, a neighborhood that has a foundation that wants to apply for candy to hand out on Halloween on a large scale to on the high end.

[00:05:28] **Will Gregory:** Large scale events like, citywide beer tasting or Irish festival, things like that, basketball tournaments we submitted, or we funded the parade of hearts, which is a citywide art initiative. It really depends. And there were 200 as you saw events that we funded. All kinds, all walks of life.

[00:05:50] **Emily:** And I think you mentioned that it was 3. 7 million of funding this year that you allocated.

[00:05:56] **Will Gregory:** So the NTDF like our [00:06:00] VisitKC depends on dollars from this hospitality tax. So essentially hotel rooms and events pay into this fund. So we were as a city blessed with, the NFL draft, the football draft that travels city to city every year, which was here for a week.

[00:06:18] **Will Gregory:** Of course the chiefs doing as well as they did, which meant multiple playoff games with dollars flowing in and people flowing into the city. And also Taylor Swift and Beyonce were here last year as well. So that didn't hurt.

[00:06:32] **Tim Souza:** I find it fascinating that your funding model seems to be, you support events that bring people in.

[00:06:37] **Tim Souza:** That then bring people in where you can make money to then support the next event. Do you find that those events as you are building this cycle? Do you support the same events kind of year after year or is it a Do they get their own legs and begin to run up run on their own at some point?

[00:06:55] **Tim Souza:** What does that look like as they get? Become a part of this funding [00:07:00] cycle

[00:07:00] **Emily:** Do they graduate or right?

[00:07:03] **Will Gregory:** So it's definitely a launch mechanism or like we discussed like an angel funding scenario and that is in many cases used to get an event off the ground. It also helps to sustain events that, year over year would probably not be able to continue without that.

[00:07:23] **Will Gregory:** But like you mentioned, there are certainly events that graduate, if you will, and get to the size and scope that it's no longer needed or just, rolls out of a charitable organization to be a for profit event.

[00:07:40] **Emily:** I think that one of the things that I like about this fund is that it doesn't just necessarily focus on downtown. It's about bringing or distributing. Tourists and those economic development dollars into diverse neighborhoods within this, like the city, right? As it were is that. Component of [00:08:00] things.

[00:08:01] **Emily:** Does that then generate the kind of community leaders that then go on to, to make waves in the city?

[00:08:08] **Will Gregory:** Yeah, I think what you're getting at is that it's not all consolidated into the downtown core, which is typically where a lot of events take place. Each city council person has a representative on the board.

[00:08:20] **Will Gregory:** So we do definitely take that into consideration when we are processing the applications. Are we touching all of the districts in Kansas City, not just the downtown core? Yes, we know there are going to be, a higher amount of events taking place in that area, but we want to spread the love around the city.

[00:08:41] **Will Gregory:** And so I do feel ~~like~~ we get representation, not just geographically, but also demographically in Kansas City.

[00:08:49] **Emily:** And I know that one of the criteria, as you said, is that it's meant to it's definitely meant to Have a tourism element to it, to qualify for this particular fund. [00:09:00] But I think that it also has this secondary component of it's, it feels in a local vibrancy need as well, right?

[00:09:08] **Emily:** Because you had those major events, you had the Beyonce and the Taylor Swift and, the chief game. So ~~you had~~ those major events and you'll have, FIFA in 2026, but the question around how do you then fill in those gaps between those large events in a way that feels relevant to the local ecosystem.

[00:09:24] **Emily:** This feels relevant, right? Where you're sponsoring little things and big things. And yes, they all contribute to tourism, but I think that they all contribute and speak beautifully to locals and local diversity.

[00:09:37] **Will Gregory:** And I think my interpretation of tourist and many folks on the board is that a tourist doesn't have to be from outside of the city.

[00:09:44] **Will Gregory:** It could be from one neighborhood to another or from one part of town to another. So it could be, just a municipal tourist, if you will, going from out South to North of the river in Kansas city. [00:10:00]

[00:10:00] **Tim Souza:** So really building that interconnected vibrancy of the whole list, the whole community

[00:10:05] **Will Gregory:** creating a, Tourists within the Kensey Metro that already exists in the Kensey Metro, but might not otherwise go to those areas or to those locations.

[00:10:16] **Emily:** Can you speak a little bit maybe to the sustainability that the fund is? is generating.

[00:10:24] **Will Gregory:** So as you mentioned, we did almost 4 million that was, elevated from previous years, but usually we're north of 2 million of what we're giving away on an annual basis. We also hold back a chunk of change, into perpetuity so that there's always going to be some kind of funding if necessary for, large scale events that come outside the, The parameters of our one or two times we meet a year example being the Kinsey chiefs, Superbowl parade.

[00:10:54] **Will Gregory:** So we're able to fund, um, our annual event cycle, but [00:11:00] then have some in the bank as things come up throughout the year.

[00:11:06] **Emily:** Which makes a ton of sense there. What does the NTDF look like for Kansas City in the next five years as you are considering the fact that, something as large as FIFA is coming in?

[00:11:18] **Emily:** How are you looking at the applications for the next two years that capitalize on events like that?

[00:11:24] **Will Gregory:** I think NTDF, goes as the city goes and the city is going up. In profile and tourists. So those dollars, those tourism dollars will continue to flow. As ~~you mentioned~~ the world cup ~~coming~~, but, as our sports teams continue to do well, as we continue to attract high end performers and talent to Kansas city, those dollars will continue to flow into NTDF.

[00:11:47] **Will Gregory:** I see the dollars. maintaining, if not rising along with those events and those dollars coming into Kansas city ~~for~~ hotel rooms. But I also see us funding, even [00:12:00] more events. As NTDF is more well known, I still feel like folks on the charity side, I run into all the time that have yet to hear about it, which is crazy since it's free money just sitting there.

[00:12:12] **Will Gregory:** But I think we will continue to fund the events that we do and even more

[00:12:17] **Emily:** is there is it only events that end up being pitched or do people also pitch tourism related things like that kind of fill in those gaps between events, whether it's like artwork or those kind of things, or is there other elements of funding or components of funding within Kansas City that does those filling in of the gaps between events in terms of vibrancy.

[00:12:40] **Will Gregory:** NTDF funds events but we also, fund art installations and things of that nature. We don't do infrastructure, so we aren't going to build you a building. But we are open to all sorts of events. As long as there's a public accessibility.

[00:12:58] **Tim Souza:** If you were to take what [00:13:00] you know about in, in TDF after working with it for as many years as you have and offer advice to someone who's wanting to start something like it, what would you recommend that, in another, someone in another city who's wow, I love the traction that, you know Kansas city, who, as you've said, at the beginning of our call has, was

trying to find its footing over, 25 years ago and now is stepping out onto the global stage in a very unique way.

[00:13:24] **Tim Souza:** How would you recommend people maybe start in their own journey on that for their city? Oh, for

[00:13:29] **Will Gregory:** other cities?

[00:13:30] **Tim Souza:** Yeah. Yeah,

[00:13:31] **Will Gregory:** I think you look at the success we've had in Kansas City of creating creating a sense of place for all Kansas sitan and exposing Kansas Sitan to Kansas City, if you will.

[00:13:42] **Will Gregory:** Not visit kc. It's not, built on attracting out of state or out of country tourists. It's built on getting Kansas City and moving around the city. And I think in any city ~~that's~~ going to be helpful for folks to be exposed to other parts of the city that they might [00:14:00] not normally see, but also to be proud of the variety of events and things going on in their town.

[00:14:06] **Will Gregory:** As a board member, we board membership, we get to attend any and all of these 200 events, and it's really eyeopening once you start getting out and seeing all of the. Options on a weekly basis in Kansas City that quite frankly, I would not have known about having not been on this board.

[00:14:30] **Emily:** That's beautiful. I love that. I am very grateful for you coming on to the podcast today to talk about this. Let us flick to, Elliot Scott now to have a little bit of a chat about, sports and the role that sports plays in Kansas city,

[00:14:46] welcome Elliot to the podcast. Thank you for joining us.

[00:14:50] Thank you so much for having me. Really excited to talk with you guys.

[00:14:55] Us too.

[00:14:58] We are so excited to have you. [00:15:00] And I think to get us kicked off, I would love to help, ground your experience in in Kansas city.

[00:15:06] So I know, In our prior conversations, you said you've moved to Kansas City for college, and then you've obviously stayed, and I'm curious, over

that course what was it like to grow up, just outside of Kansas City and what you heard about the city versus having moved for college and now built a career in Kansas City?

[00:15:24] Give us a now versus then overview.

[00:15:26] So I grew up in Springfield, Missouri, which is about three hours southeast of Kansas city. And my family actually visited pretty frequently. My parents had both attended medical school in Kansas city. And then growing up, I remember coming to Kansas City for my sister's soccer tournaments.

[00:15:44] So even back then, soccer was, very much a Kansas City sport. And when I came to college, I was just immediately impressed with the kindness of the people, the opportunity, the culture and just [00:16:00] fell in love with it. I didn't expect to, if I'm being completely honest, I had envisioned going on the East coast, but definitely, I think there's a reason they call this the heartland.

[00:16:11] And I just I fell in love.

[00:16:14] Awesome. What was one of the biggest anchors that kept you, or has kept you in Kansas city versus, Any of the in other cities that you were looking at for a, for school and to move to, but b, that you visited? 'cause I know that you travel a lot. So what is the thing that keeps you excited in anchored in Kansas City?

[00:16:32] The word kindness comes to mind. People here are authentically kind and. And a coworker of mine who came from the Pacific Northwest says he's met a lot of people that are nice, but Kansas Citians are kind. And it's that small difference in that people are, I think, very authentic and grounded.

[00:16:54] There's a lot of humility, but also civic pride. And so it's just It's [00:17:00] a difficult combination of qualities that just make this a really special place to call home. I, like you mentioned, I love traveling and love visiting other cities, but I'm always excited to come home to Kansas city.

[00:17:15] That's beautiful.

[00:17:16] And I think that's a great segue for us to dive into, what's happening in the world of, sports and placemaking Kansas City to start with this culture. I think that one of the most fascinating parts of what I've heard from you is that this culture, how people are willing to try new things, do sporting events, support each other, that kindness that you were just mentioning.

[00:17:35] Can you speak to how, Sports and the culture of Kansas City create an amazing environment for A, you to do your job, B the kind of community that you guys have developed in Kansas City.

[00:17:49] One of the things I've noticed, especially recently is that as our society becomes increasingly polarized and divided in some spaces, sports has [00:18:00] become one of the few areas that brings people of very different backgrounds together.

[00:18:07] Sorry about that.

[00:18:09] Would you like to restart that?

[00:18:11] Yeah. Sports brings see my fault. Sports brings people together in a way that I think a lot of Guys, I'm so sorry.

[00:18:23] It's okay. We'll start from the question. Can you speak to how all of this culture around sports and around this kindness and this heart of the country creates an amazing hotbed for the kind of community that you have built in Kansas City?

[00:18:36] I think recently, in recent years, we've seen society becoming increasingly polarized and divided on controversial issues. And sports has become one of those last refuges where people can come together from very different backgrounds, with very different ideologies, and still exist in the same space with respect for each [00:19:00] other and camaraderie.

[00:19:02] And We talk a lot at the Sports Commission about sports in terms of economic impact, but community building is equally important. And when you look at Kansas City's success over the last decade, sports has been an integral part of that. Not just in the sense that we're excited and proud when we win national and international events, But it gives our residents something to come together around and to celebrate.

[00:19:29] Yeah. So national, international events, you've got, NCAAs, you've got FIFA coming. And so I think that it really, those are the results that speak to the foundation that you guys have been building in Kansas City. And it sounds like for a while now.

[00:19:45] Yeah, go for it. Yes. When Prior to our CEO, Kathy Nelson, starting at the sports commission, you can see that we were winning a few events here and there.

[00:19:55] We were winning some NCAA, maybe division two championships. We would [00:20:00] rarely host something on a large scale, but when she started it, it began this new era and we began winning more and more events to come to our city. And once you've done that, Momentum is progressive, right?

[00:20:16] And so as we continue to showcase, not only Kansas city, but that our team and the city can do really great activations and support these national or international. Conferences in a significant way. It has success yields more success. And I think that's what we've seen is each time we're successful, it opens new doors and opportunities for the city.

[00:20:43] I think the thing that I found really interesting in our previous conversations was that you talked about how The Kansas Cityans don't necessarily care what sport it is. They will come and visit any sport. Like they don't need to be [00:21:00] hardcore volleyball fans. If you guys win a volleyball event, they'll come just because they're like, Oh, it's sport.

[00:21:06] And I want to see what's going on. I find that a very interesting cultivation of does that contribute then to you being able to win bids. for big things like a FIFA, for example, to those collegious events.

[00:21:22] Without a doubt, we've shown that Kansas Cityans embrace these events, unlike other areas across the metro, or across the country, rather, and it's part of our culture, it's not a sports specific culture, rather, it's that celebration and embracing of sport itself.

[00:21:42] And when you think about that. That is part of our value proposition to these organizations coming. The big 12 basketball championships loves being in Kansas city because the entire city rallies around that tournament. If they were to go [00:22:00] to, perhaps a different market, I don't know if the city would activate around that event in the same way, especially when you look at larger metropolitan areas where it might be one thing of many going on, and it's just, a small blip in on the radar.

[00:22:17] So Kansas City. I think we are the perfect size market to rally around a variety of sports. at a variety of levels. We're just small enough to do that, which sounds maybe counterintuitive, but in some ways being a smaller Metro is a positive for us.

[00:22:37] Can you speak to maybe from a, like a higher programming lens or from like your sports commission lens, how do you emboldened and support that celebration mindset?

[00:22:46] If you say sports are approached within the city. So how does, how do you take that and obviously use it to, to win these bids, but what do you do for the people locally? Is there when you're holding that container, what do you guys do?

[00:22:59] I think it's [00:23:00] messaging around why it matters.

[00:23:02] Ultimately it means talking to our small business community and saying, this is an opportunity for you to introduce your product or service to a different audience. For our nonprofits, there are. charity activations that are possible because these, sporting institutions come to town. And so it's seeing the various stakeholder groups and showing them the value that these events bring.

[00:23:29] And that's where it's so important to talk beyond just large scale economic impact, but how this really impacts individual Kansas Cityans. Over time,

[00:23:40] I think that is something that a lot of people, when they hear the word placemaking, they don't necessarily attach sports to it.

[00:23:49] And I think that's a mistake because placemaking is anything that knits together the fabric of a city and it's citizens and makes them connect. So sometimes that is places. Sometimes [00:24:00] that is like events that people hang their hats on. Like Albuquerque has a balloon festival every year, like whatever that might be.

[00:24:06] But I think I find how you guys place make via sports and you do, you place make via sports you mentioned that it's more than just. Like tailgating parties for example. Can you speak more to that? I know that you'd spoke to us about a marathon that you run. So maybe a little bit into how you, you build that kind of sports placemaking into that fabric.

[00:24:31] So at the sports commission. Our mission is twofold. We attract these large sporting events that are often in venues like Arrowhead, T Mobile Center, Children's Mercy Park, but then we also produce our own events that are fundraisers that tie into sports, health and wellness. So you mentioned the Garmin Kansas City Marathon is one of those.

[00:24:53] And we have, we put a lot of intentionality behind that course because it is an incredible [00:25:00] opportunity to show someone. 26. 2 miles of the city. And so to your point, placemaking plays an incredible role in that making sure that we are showing not just maybe the top five locations people

think of in Kansas City, but also showing them various neighborhoods or Monuments that are maybe a little more out of the way, showing them a side of Kansas City that they might not have ever seen if they hadn't run that race.

[00:25:28] And so that's an event that's very special to me, not just because I'm a runner, but because I truly think it's a unique experience that showcases Kansas City, unlike anything else.

[00:25:42] Showcases Kansas City. You're in a world of pain. That's what my body tells me. No, that's beautiful. And I, I. I find it interesting and how that activates that space because I think the thing about a race.

[00:25:57] And sports in general is that it's not just about the [00:26:00] people participating in the activity, but it's the people who come to sticky beat to have a look at that. And I think that also does space activation as well. And I love the fact that the fundraiser. Because a lot of sporting commissions look externally and so they, they bring their things in which then brings X amount of economic impact into city blank.

[00:26:23] But I think that the thing that I really like about this is that like you, you're doing the fundraising, obviously to help them be able to fund the sporting commission in general, but it, that's not the reason why you do it. I think is the thing that I love that you are building sports internally and externally.

[00:26:41] And yes, when a big event comes to Kansas city, that's great. But you recognize that there are multiple ways to build that vibrancy with sports and it is as much domestic as it is international or state side.

[00:26:51] Yes. There are so many ways that we could fundraise, but we are we're very specific in the sense that we want to add value [00:27:00] back to our community and opportunities for participation.

[00:27:04] So it's not just, contribute because we're doing great things in the city, but it's let's create something special that brings our community closer together. That gives tourists and travelers a reason to visit Kansas city and ultimately helps reinforce that we're creating a culture.

[00:27:23] centered around health and wellness, which is maybe not what you would typically think of for Kansas City, right? That might be an ideology that feels more like Colorado or California. And so it's it's very reaffirming to me that we are trying to improve the lives and the quality of the lives of the people who participate in our events.

[00:27:53] That's fantastic. So I think in doing these events and in building these pieces, I think I want to take a [00:28:00] step back quickly and, highlight something I found that was unique and in the fact that you're the sports commission is a, as a nonprofit. It's not a, it's not a branch of the city.

[00:28:08] Can you walk us quickly through how that structure works and what that looks like for the Sports Commission in Kansas City versus some of the other cities that, we might encounter?

[00:28:18] We're, we are the exception to the rule. I think it's certainly easier for a Sports Commission to nest under a CVB in the city government.

[00:28:26] However, what we've shown is that not only do we eliminate a burden for taxpayers, But we can do it while creating additional opportunities for our community to be involved. And then I, part of the advantage is we are also not maybe as vulnerable to transitions and administrations or downturns in the economy where, we're a budget line for a municipality.

[00:28:57] And so it allows us to maintain this [00:29:00] consistent pace of operations. We're thinking not just one year, two years ahead. We're looking at 10 years ahead. And so having that consistency and being able to operate in that way has been a critical component of our success to date. And again, I think it's just incredible that it's more work without a doubt, right?

[00:29:22] It would be much easier to just not have to do this, those fundraisers and those health and wellness events. But then I think that would take away something from the city. It would, perhaps we wouldn't function in the same way to the potential detriment of Kansas citizens and people visiting Kansas City.

[00:29:41] Yeah, I think it's a delicate balance, right? It's and it's also saying like how As you say, like that momentum that gets built I think that more and more we're proving these days, particularly post pandemic, that it's local buy in. And a lot of tourism is local buy in. It is word [00:30:00] of mouth from local people and then those local people being welcoming and being excited that other people are there.

[00:30:06] And I think that It builds in that sustainability of a city in general and and so I do wonder like you attract all of these events to stadiums and you build up those kind of those local excitement around those events. I'm interested in. So that has a kind of a sustainability.

[00:30:24] On its own, the more events gets, more success begets more success. And sometimes that's a little bit scary because it means that like you're one CEO change away from like something going potentially wrong. And so I wonder like when you're thinking about that sustainability, that 10 years out that, that kind of that sustainable vibrancy, how are you making sure that like post.

[00:30:47] the exposure of these amazing events that you're bringing in that you can then leverage vibrancy for the long term.

[00:30:55] That's a great question. The first thing I think about when you talk about [00:31:00] being maybe one CEO change away from, a different direction is talent retention is key, not just for our organization, but I think many organizations across the country are dealing with this.

[00:31:13] And we have been especially lucky in building a culture that retains talent and institutional knowledge. So our, for example, our director of event operations, Josh Zabel has been here for over a decade. I think he is one of the best event operators, not just in Kansas City, but probably in the Midwest.

[00:31:34] And so it's creating a culture that values institutional knowledge and expertise. And we see that not just within our organization, but outside of our organization as well, where our partners, whether that's at the city or the Kansas City Area Development Council or the Chamber of Commerce.

[00:31:55] They all, there's a lot of mutual respect for our respective [00:32:00] expertise and that yields collaboration that feeds into the sustainability you're talking about. Because when we're all operating together as a team and collaborating in step, that's how we achieve these incredible things like being awarded You know, host city duties for a FIFA World Cup.

[00:32:20] And

[00:32:21] it's something that I feel lucky that we're able to talk to you because you are also part of the planning organization that is looking to build vibrancy around FIFA in 2026. And When you look at and so that organization was a nonprofit that was spun up specifically for that event, because that's gonna be massive.

[00:32:43] You know that it's gonna need its own kind of think tank at the start of it to really take advantage of that. And that think tank, I believe that you mentioned as well also helps you with the fact that Kansas City's on state lines.

And so there's a lot of politics that go into being mixed over state lines and those things.

[00:32:58] So that helps you keep everybody [00:33:00] together for a common goal. And so you talk about that retention of people within those organizations. And then when we compare that, to the temporary nature of those overarching nonprofits, They get spun up for an event across five years, and then they get spun down, and then they are no more.

[00:33:16] How do you lean into that retention component piece when you're dealing with something that's ultimately temporary but you're wanting to have a long lasting effect? I want to understand that kind of balance that you are seeing as that's being developed right now.

[00:33:31] KC2026, which is the non profit organization you're alluding to, is it has its own independent staff, right?

[00:33:40] And is currently in the process of growing, but they also are leveraging shared resources. And that's where I come in. As a employee of the sports commission, I'm also, I also have duties and deliverables tied specifically to that project. And so I think that is a really great way to ensure that [00:34:00] they do have people with institutional knowledge around these sporting events.

[00:34:04] And that they are assembling a team of people. That, might only be working on that project in the short term, but have credibility that precedes it and will continue after and I have no doubt that my Casey 2026 colleagues will be very much involved in Kansas City activations to come just because not only of the learning experience, but because of the value they're showcasing and how we're developing that project for the betterment of Kansas City.

[00:34:36] I think that really speaks to your collaboration, hard work and. Quite honestly, I think one of the words that came up in our last conversation was the word humility a lot of what that how that defines as tones to Kansas City of we're gonna work hard, we're gonna do, we're gonna put on this event, and then we're just gonna trust that our work showcases our abilities and showcases our knowledge.

[00:34:56] I think that. That piece of that collaborative that those [00:35:00] pieces that feed into that collaborative nature are really fascinating. And so when you're looking at, that, FIFA and that you've been planning for this for a while the ways that you want to take advantage of or that you're seeing?

[00:35:13] This Casey 2026 take advantage of the fact that you're bringing thousands of new bodies to to the city of Kansas City and here in a couple of years.

[00:35:22] This is without a doubt in my mind, a once in a generation opportunity to define how Kansas City is seen, not just on a national level, but on an international level.

[00:35:32] For many people, this is the first time they're going to hear the Kansas City story. And so there needs to be so much thought. thought behind not just the marketing and communications piece, but the experiential piece. What do we want them to take away? Whether they've been here once, whether they've never been here, whether they like to come every year.

[00:35:51] It is a defining moment for our city. And as scary as that is to say, also incredibly exciting because not everyone gets [00:36:00] the opportunity to define their own narrative in that way. And so the Casey 2026 team is very much thinking about not only how do we put on a world class event?

[00:36:12] That meets all of our deliverables to FIFA and it makes them, very happy that they chose Kansas city. But how are we changing the trajectory of the city in a positive way? ~~What are~~ the opportunities there? Of course, there are challenges with that. That's not something we take on lightly, but one of the added values of doing an event of this size and scope.

[00:36:35] So what are some of those things that the Casey 2026 thinking about. Transportation, housing, where are these people gonna stay? What kind of things are you? You say that, you're really taking a step back and looking at how going to really provide you opportunity to tell your story and then people are gonna need to land somewhere.

[00:36:52] What are those things that you guys are thinking about that the average person may Think about when they think about FIFA. I think about my favorite team. I think about who [00:37:00] I want to cheer for. But what are you guys thinking about that we may not have a lens to?

[00:37:04] So transportation is such a big piece of this.

[00:37:08] We are different than some other Metro host cities in the sense that our public ~~transit system~~ is not on the scale of say a New York or a Los Angeles potentially. So we have to devise a way in which we are getting a large amount

of people, not only from the airport to the downtown corridor, but also to wherever the FanFest site location is out to the venue.

[00:37:33] And then making sure that regionally. People can easily access the city. And one of the opportunities I think is showcasing to how easy ~~it is~~ to maneuver around Kansas city. Something we heard when FIFA was evaluating various host cities was they were impressed with how quickly they could get to the stadium from downtown to the various train potential training facilities.

[00:37:59] Kansas [00:38:00] city by car is an extremely easy place to get. You can get almost anywhere in 20 to 25 minutes. So there's an opportunity there, but it also begs the question, what is the future of transit in Kansas City look like? As the city continues to develop, where do we need to invest in additional infrastructure?

[00:38:18] And I think when you look at the Kansas City streetcar, that's a great example of, they tested a relatively small stretch of it and saw that it was very impactful and successful. And we've seen how that drives opportunity to businesses along the corridor and also changes just how people move about in the city.

[00:38:39] And so using the FIFA world cup as a lever for responsible development is definitely something that we have to continue thinking about. And I think transit is one of the biggest opportunities.

[00:38:56] I am really glad that is something that [00:39:00] is such a key focus. And I know that ~~it's~~ a key focus for Mayor Quinton Lucas as well.

[00:39:05] It's something that he's very proud of. And because essentially it's the like Olympics ghost town issue, right? Like, how do you make sure that you do not have. Ghost town infrastructure that is not useful poster and event. And this feels like a very organic and I'm sure you have urban planners that are on the board and whatnot that are all considering what is that long term point of that?

[00:39:30] One thing that I did want to, throw into the mix here is that a lot of times when you think sport, you think male centric sports, but Kansas City is one of those places that has made global news as the first women's with the first women's soccer games hosted in the KC current stadium.

[00:39:51] And so I just really I wanted to, get an understanding for how you are bringing that equity lens into sporting [00:40:00] in general.

[00:40:01] You're completely right in the sense that sports has typically been dominated by the male athletes and divisions in conversation, not just when you look at revenue and ticket sales, but also media exposure.

[00:40:16] And so it is important to understand how revolutionary the Kansas city current is. Not only in building CPKC stadium, which is the first one in the world, purpose built for women's sports, but also just, I think showing how communities do rally around women's sports when given the opportunity. That to me is the biggest thing.

[00:40:38] And an example I will give is when I was at a bar watching it was the women's final for a few years ago, and they initially did not have. The game on the screen. So we politely requested it. And when they put it on, you could see a noticeable shift that people started paying attention to [00:41:00] that over what was on the other screens in that bar, because people saw how competitive it is, how exciting the sport is.

[00:41:10] And so part of it is just exposing people to the, the athleticism And how compelling women's sports are in general. One of the things that I'm really happy that the big 12 conference did this year was they decided to move the women's tournament to T Mobile center. And so for the first time that the women were playing in the same venue as the men and getting the same amount of exposure and activation and that's a big deal but it takes belief.

[00:41:44] investment and a willingness, to, to expand how we look at sports in general. And I'm so excited and proud that Kansas City continues to lean into women's sports, because this is a way we [00:42:00] continue to innovate and, I think a lot of times, the respective east and west coasts dominate the conversations when it comes to innovation and kind of progressive policymaking.

[00:42:10] But Kansas City is really making a name for ourselves in the women's sports space. And the Kansas City current, without a doubt, has been an integral part of that process.

[00:42:21] And I think that really speaks to cities acting as an incubator for cultural change, right? Where a city You acknowledge that Kansas city is a sports city, not a football city, not a soccer city, not a, it is a sports city, right?

[00:42:37] And so you guys recognize the. the power that you have to shine that light. And I think that's what the current stadium really showcases to me is that you recognize you have a sporting city. And if you can show the great

enthusiasm that people will turn out to all sporting events, including women's sporting events, then you act [00:43:00] as a beacon and a showcase and an innovation where other people look at that and they're like, Oh maybe we could try that.

[00:43:06] here. And I think that is a wonderful thing that has really come out of all of our conversations with Kansas City is that you guys are willing to be that incubating pad

[00:43:17] without a doubt. And something I think about a lot is generational change and how this is impacting future generations of girls and women, not just in sports, but in life in general, because.

[00:43:30] When we evolve and innovate as the current is doing, as others in the city are doing, it's a tangible example to someone, a young person to say, I never considered this and maybe I don't need to be a professional women's soccer player, but I can see that They have a place in the conversation and that it is incredibly important.

[00:43:53] So outside of, international headlines and all the hype and excitement, [00:44:00] it's making a real noticeable difference in the lives of the young people growing up in Kansas city and around the region. And that's what I just, I find so exciting. is that we're truly, making a change that will impact future generations in a very profound way.

[00:44:19] And what, ~~uh~~, there's not a better place for that to start than in, in the heart of the heartland, right? Of the country. And I think that you, the culture that you guys have built, the intentionality that you're bringing into it is really to take that vision and that experience that you're seeing in those young women in Kansas city and truly provide that to the rest of the country.

[00:44:36] And hopefully as a As you guys talked about a lighthouse. And so in looking at, that future mindset, where do you see, or where would you hope to see, Kansas city in the next five years when it comes to sports and activation and that community building aspect that we've been chatting about?

[00:44:54] I want to see continued investment in women's sports, not just on a major scale, [00:45:00] like what Chris and Angie long have done By funding the team and building CP Casey stadium. But I wouldn't see grassroots investment and I want to see smaller businesses activating around women's sports. They already are, but there's so much more work to be done.

[00:45:16] And on, on a broader level, I really want. Kansas city to continue. And we talked about this in our previous conversation, but I want us to maintain that mix of humility and hustle. I want us to stay intensely proud and excited about our future, but I also want us to keep that kind of humbleness, that kindness in our hearts that we're not doing this because of ego.

[00:45:44] We're doing this because We believe in our collective future together and we see a brighter path forward.

[00:45:52] Yeah I feel that, that describes what we have come to understand of Kansas City in a nutshell, that it was bonkers to me that [00:46:00] this could be a city on state lines and people just consider themselves Kansas City and they don't separate themselves on state lines or this side of Kansas City versus that side of Kansas City.

[00:46:08] Everyone comes together, they are from Kansas City and that is who they are and I think that there's no better testament to that. Then the things that you are building. And I really wanted to thank you for joining us today to look at this from this sporting event lens. I'm learning more and more that Kansas City is this This whole landscape of events from little events to, to big ones.

[00:46:30] And so been an absolute pleasure to have on the podcast. I always like to close out this podcast with a small kind of personal reflection. I would love to hear from you. I know that you're an avid reader, and I'm curious as to what book you would be most likely to give as a gift.

[00:46:50] Yes, Born to Run by Christopher McDougall is without a doubt one of my favorite books. favorite all time. it is the [00:47:00] perfect combination of storytelling and anthropology. I love that it ties running back into our evolution as humans. And as a runner, it just, it reaffirms how special that activity can be and how spiritual it can be.

[00:47:18] That it's not just about the fitness component. I always say I run because of mental health. And Born to Run, I think, is the perfect book to get people inspired to run. I love that. I also just read The Comfort Crisis, which is about how insulated we are in this modern age, how we can choose comfort over almost all adversity and how being uncomfortable and experiencing difficult things is actually.

[00:47:47] needed. It's hardwired into our DNA. And both are excellent. And I would highly recommend.

[00:47:56] Awesome. So I'm assuming you've got a trip to the Andes plans soon to run [00:48:00] up some ancient steps and test your endurance.

[00:48:03] I am doing a 50 mile race later in the year, but that will be on the country roads of Kansas.

[00:48:11] So not quite as exciting, not quite as exotic, but hopefully, just reaffirming and impactful.

[00:48:20] Awesome. We look forward to hearing about it. And thank you so very much for joining us on our Vibrant Spaces podcast today.

[00:48:26] Thank you. Thank you guys so much. And, thank you for telling Kansas City's story.

[00:48:30] It's it's a privilege. I don't take for granted because it's what I try to do every day. I'm just, I'm so appreciative that you guys took the time to, to shine a light on our city. So thank you.