

# Ep.46 - Quentin Messer Jr

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Quentin Messer, Jr.

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### A Announcer 00:01

Welcome to the Michigan opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

### E Ed Clemente 00:28

Hello, I'm your host Ed Clemente, and we're fortunate again to have a repeat performance here from Quentin Messer, Jr., he is the CEO for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Welcome back again, Quentin.

### Q Quentin Messer, Jr. 00:41

Happy New Year, my friend thanks for affording me the opportunity.

### E Ed Clemente 00:45

Yes, and I know that if anyone's just been observing you from 10,000 feet, they would know you probably haven't slept for six months I think since you started, but I think you're making a lot of traction. And this is you know a lot to be said for what you've done but you know what we kind of want to look at today is some of the successes from last year and then maybe what you think might be on the horizon or maybe even places you want to go you know that you don't know I haven't fleshed it out yet. So let's start out with what you were happy about what's happened so far since you've been here?

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 01:23

Well, you're too kind, look, I cannot be more ecstatic about the tremendous colleagues. I mean, you, shout out to Kyle Gilmore and Otie McKinley, who worked incredibly hard to to make the Michigan Opportunity behind the scenes and your work behind the microphone and I could I could name check, that's, that's a great thing, when you have a great set of colleagues a great team you can name check, just the countless hours of hard work, whether it's our legal team, you know, Linda Ascutto, Christin Armstrong, and Amy Lum, and with Josh Hundt and Stacy Bowerman, Christine Roeder, and Kathy Kleckner and Karl Dehn, on and on and on. But this has been a Team Michigan approach. And I guess I'm proudest about just, I've got just great colleagues. It's people, people, people are the stuff of life, that's what makes it worthwhile, right? It's are you having fun? And yeah, it's, there's been some there have been a lot of sleepless nights, probably the most sleepless nights in my career, actually, but it's worthwhile because I'm enjoying the journey with my colleagues. And, you know, I'm a huge sports fanatic, and I spent a lot of time, not as much as I used to, but I'm a Big 10. Love the two Michigan schools that compete in the Big 10. But I still study Nick Saban a lot. The guy at University of Alabama, and you've got to...

E

Ed Clemente 02:57

He used to be at Michigan State, don't forget.

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 03:02

Yes, yes, he used to be at Michigan State, indeed, that he became, you know, it's interesting. In many respects it's almost a metaphor in some respects for Michigan's gifts to the world. And we now need to capture more of the positive externalities. I mean, what Michigan just gives, gives gives, it gives innovation I gave the automobile, it gave Motown I gave Parke Davis Pharmaceutical, it gave Stryker and the office furniture industry and, and in Stock X and Rocket [Mortgage,] I mean, I could go on and on and on. The great thing, the snowboard, you know, shout out to the folks up north and in the UP. And we now have to begin to capture some of that inventiveness for ourselves. And understand that, this is titled The Michigan Opportunity. The Michigan Opportunity is to remind people yet again, Michigan is at the epicenter of innovation. The number one dominant conversation you can make the argument in the business world today, is about the acceleration of the transition from the internal combustion engine to EV. The fact that, you know, the market caps the relative market caps of automakers, those types of things dominate the business press. It dominates the popular press, and it's because of Michigan. We wouldn't be having these conversations, but for Michigan. And I think that the opportunity for us is, how do we in the 21st century, with the rules change, show that Michigan can play under the current rule environment, whether we like to follow the rules or not. We can adapt, adjust and when given the rules as the way we are, and I think that's what happened, excuse me with the bipartisan legislation that was passed, it was passed in a truly bipartisan way. I am not going to name check, because you get, but let's just say, a lot of positive discussion, even for those who did not ultimately support the legislation, came about that was an educational, informative and instructive for the future. And if people can't listen to the whole thing, I hope they know what happened in December is a beginning, a down

payment, on a broader effort to make sure that we have the fullest sense of economic mobility, economic development, competitive tools, programming and ideals to make Michigan the number one four season, cold weather state or province, between Mexico and the Arctic Circle.

E

Ed Clemente 06:21

It's a pretty big gap. But okay, I appreciate your...

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 06:25

Well, we want to win. I mean, we compete with with all the Mexican states, we compete with 49 other states, and we compete with the Canadian provinces. We should be the number one four season cold weather state or province, bar none.

E

Ed Clemente 06:49

No, I was just gonna say I just heard a podcast the other day talking about how a lot of companies are looking at Mexico now, right to leave China. [Yeah.] And there's great opportunity, I think for Michigan, there getting to your point. And with that landmark legislation. I know you were fortunate to get to, you know, usually a sort of people that aren't on the same page. A lot of people came on the same page for that legislation. Because I think everybody realizes how serious the stakes are too, right?

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 07:18

Absolutely right. And like I think we have leadership who are integris they care about Michigan news, whether you represent the UP, they represent Detroit, they represent Lansing, they represent Grand Rapids, they represent Muskegon, and all points in between. The people who hold themselves up for elected office, don't do it for glory or fame, but they do because they care, you know, that you formally served and thank you for your service. And you saw that in the leadership of our speaker, Jason Whitworth, the Senate Majority Leader, Senator Mike Shirkey, and other representatives who brought this legislation, who educated their colleagues. It's incredibly important. And they did it, we have to continue, we at MEDC, I particularly, have to continue to remain in dialogue with them, not just them, but their staffs who work incredibly hard, and are the true heroes and heroines behind something like this. So I'm incredibly gratified just to be a part of the team that continues to work. I mean, getting back to Saben, I know he's satisfied because they got boat raced and a fourth quarter. And he he had knowledge that, but the one thing that Saben always says, You can't ever be satisfied. You can use it but you've got to find a joy in that journey toward perfection. But you got to walk that fine line. You don't want people at the same point. Bryce Young threw that interception. Bryce young doesn't have a short leash. Coach Saban, Bryce Young, I knew I can still throw that next pass. And so I have to inculcate that with my colleagues. We have to make sure that we earn that from the legislators, legislators, who are working hard to make sure that hard working Michiganders get the best possible return for tax revenue.

**E****Ed Clemente 09:29**

And you know, and even though you were just you know, mentioning some of those legislators that played a role, you're sort of geographically covering the whole state too, because they represent every corner of the state. And I know, for example, quite a few of our guests that we've had for the podcast, have all said you visited them, like Marty Fittante up in the UP. He really likes you. He met you a couple times now. And, you know, I get that from a lot of guests, Lisa Lunsford, we just interviewed her recently and she said what a treasure was to meet with you. And you know, you took time to talk to her. And so I think a lot of it too, helps that you provide sort of a spark and an energy, as you said early on that, you know, it's time we'd start doing this more than realize what assets we do have in the state. And I think that's what you're kind of hinting at. You can pass this legislation because we know we can do it.

**Q****Quentin Messer, Jr. 10:23**

No, you're absolutely right. I mean, you know, shout out to Marty, he's a great friend. I'm gonna reveal a secret, my family nickname is Marty. So Marty had me at Marty because it's good to see a Marty and shout out to a fellow UPer, Jen Nelson who's back at the MEDC team, as our Chief Operating Officer already hit the ground running doing tremendous work and Lisa Lunsford, one of your guests, you know, a role model to so many who's really on the precipice of something phenomenal. I could go on, I have, like I said, I get my energy from learning and seeing really cool stuff. That, I mean, I get to see really cool stuff! I've gone all over this great state I, I'm gonna be back in the UP next month. I'm actually going to be UP in February, and I told him, Marty challenged me, he said, it's cool that you came up during the summer, but we'll know if you're real if you come up when it's cold, and so I'm gonna be up there for I think it's the UP 200. I'm going to be up there, I'm going to have about four or five layers on, because I've probably never experienced anything like that. But part of the one thing I want to say is, I'm blessed to have tremendous colleagues. And if there's the one thing they, my colleagues know far more about this state, in many cases, the intricacies of, of the tools and economic development. But what I, as someone who's been blessed to be in this role can give, is accessibility, availability, and energy. So it's not robbery for me to go visit. That's what I'm supposed to do. I don't want to get in people's way. I don't want to take time away. But people need to know they matter, that they're visible to you. And that can't happen. if I just sit in this office where I'm talking to you from in Lansing, that's not helping anybody. I got to see you. I gotta say it was worth my time and your time for me to come up. That's why I like to go see people where they are.

**A****Announcer 12:42**

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**E****Ed Clemente 12:59**

Something came out recently with the Brookings Institute for how we work on place-based, you know, policy is economic development. I don't know if you have much of a spin on that and what it meant I didn't see the report, but I know it's pretty critical.

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 13:15

Now that's a great thing. But before I do that, I want to shout out all the members of the CDC and Economic Development Leaders for Michigan, tremendous group of folks. You mentioned a number of them Marty, James O'Brien, what a human being. I can't wait to see him in his new Corvette. He's preordered one. Maureen Krauss what a dynamo. Randy Thelen, talk about somebody that pushes your thinking and forces you to get better every day. And that's what that's what greatness is, about pushing each other to the next state. So you mentioned about Brookings, the unique advantage of Michigan, that I think we undersell, because it's hard to have perspective if you've been blessed to be in it all the time i,s what a remarkable place Michigan is. If you just sit back and look at the scenic beauty of the state, the just diversity of geographies and environments. You've got everything from ski jumps up north and in UP to beaches in West Michigan, to one of the most incredible iconic cities in Southeastern Michigan and underrated arts and cultural things. And so the Brookings piece really underscores the fact that ultimately, particularly as we live through and come through a pandemic, and now live in an endemic, people are much more conscious of place. And so if you think about transforming economic development, reimagining economic development, economic development only matters to the extent that people matter. Only to the extent that you are transforming the lives of people. And people don't live just in a theoretical sphere or dimension, they live in a place. So the great downtown's throughout this great state, we at MEDC shout out to Michele Wildman and all the folks on her team, including the State Historical Preservation Office. The folks who work with the art scene here, there's so many people who contribute day and night, off times, without getting the fame or glory to making Michigan that place that people say, Man, I wish I had discovered this 10, 15 years ago. There's so many great testimonies about the power of Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 16:05

Yeah, is there anything else too, you might even know, we've been focusing kind of on the big piece of legislation in the Brookings, but is there any other sort of interesting stories or things you thought were successful in your first year? And then how you think that might help carry us through? You sort of touched on it, I think, you know, we have a great infrastructure with our older sort of communities, how that's going to be improving. But, you know, does the things like you know, you kind of touched on almost like digital nomads, why people might want to come here, because of the new working situations with hybrid working and things like that. Is there something else sort of you want to touch on?

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 16:44

Oh, man, there's tons else. So you gotta you gotta keep inviting me back as I go on and on. But let me just highlight really three things. One, I think we need to continue to give honor and respect to Mark Burton and this team who, and my colleagues, who rolled out 23 small business funds in the height of the pandemic, in 2020 and early 2021, because that allowed us to get back in touch with the customer. And began to really have intensive conversations about what's going to be required for Michigan to be competitive. So that should never be forgotten. The second thing is, I really think that we got closer to our regional partners, we began to really

develop some, that's why I mentioned CDC, the Economic Development Leaders from Michigan, our utility partners, shout out to all our utility partners, because we realize that it's going to take a team. You've got to win at the local the regional, state, utility, you've got to win on all those dimensions. And I think you really think about an area like food processing. So having a win, like Republic Foods is critically important. I think having the the ribbon-cutting for KLA in Ann Arbor, a tremendous story of a successful entrepreneur, Rick Wallace, who could have been anywhere in the world, but he went to the University of Michigan, loves University of Michigan, and said, I am now in a place where I can decide where to invest time, treasure and capital. And I want it to be in Ann Arbor. And not because I'm some sort of, I don't run a not for profit, he runs a very successful for profit, publicly traded company. But we because I know that Michigan can be competitive for us. And I think that's those type of victories are critically important. And it gives us momentum for 2022. They give us the proof points to be able to go out in the market and say, we listen to the customer, we're going to be responsive. The political leaders of Lansing can get things done and can get things done big, quickly and prudently in the interests of all Michiganders, and I don't want us to ever forget the Office of Rural Development. I think that was a significant development. We have the second most diversified agricultural economy among the US states behind California. That's not insignificant. Technology will continue to change. Agriculture precision agriculture. I was just on a in dialogue with Director McDowell, shout at them what a great human being, tremendous friend who has helped school me and, and taught me so much about the wonderful agricultural sector here. But we have to begin to celebrate the process and the journey. The announcements are great, whether they are a ribbon cutting or economic development, or you see a community qualify to be a development ready community, or you see a Main Street Grant given to some of our small towns. That's important, but we have to celebrate the process that led to that. What are those stepping stones and going back to the football again, it's you practice the way you play. And the great thing about Michiganders is that integrity, that lunch pail, bring the hard hat, we're just going to go after it every day, leave it and my colleagues and the whole team is going and it truly is a Team Michigan approach, it gives me tremendous optimism for the future.

E

Ed Clemente 20:56

One other thing too, I think you did recently or at least the state has done with the Governor is creating that talent position to and how critical that's probably going to be for something you know, we've talked about and we've done some things where were you going to seem like you're gonna put more emphasis on it, correct?

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 21:13

Oh, absolutely. Thanks for mentioning. So there are really two positions that we created at the senior executive. And they're not just in title. These happen to be two women incredibly dynamic leaders, our Chief Talent Solution Engagement officer Kerry Ebersole Singh and this shows, this shows teamwork. She was a senior vital member of LEO, and Director Susan Corbin unselfishly said, Hey, I think there's an opportunity for her to come and help you implement one of the strategic focus areas on high wage skill growth. We know companies talk about talent, we know that your competitive economic development organizations, state economic development organizations have that talent component. Hey, you know, let's let's continue to figure out ways to partner. Similarly, Terri Fitzpatrick came back to MEDC, she's our Chief Real Estate Development and Engagement Officer, she's going to be doing work with our sovereign

nations to continue to make sure that the things that they care about are reflected in our work. Shout out to them, we the corporate side, MEDC receives the tribal gaming dollars, we need to be relevant for them. And so we need to be respectful those sovereign nations, Terri's gonna help us do that. But she's also going to take us to a new dimension in our site selection and our overall real estate work taking advantage of the work that she did in the private sector for so many years. Sites matter. So we need to have and be prepared to compete on sites. They're critically important across a number of different industries, from food processing, to battery and EVS to semiconductor to medical devices. And so Terri is going to help us out. But I'm very excited about what Kerry and Terri are both doing.

E

Ed Clemente 23:15

Yeah, you and you know, I know you've really put together a good team, the team, you've just, you had a lot of good players here. And you just kind of like fine tuned it a little bit and now it looks like you've got a lot to do. And so we're sort of at the end, but I wanted to know, you're always invited to come back. [Thank you.] technically, you're my boss. But I also think that you might have other success stories you might want to share, you might want to use this platform for other things. But we do appreciate the spark you've given Michigan, I've lived in the state my whole life. And I think that energy and that spark is really helping us, you know, in tough times, and I think it's actually going to be I'm very confident that we're going to do better in this state too. But thanks to your leadership, and the governor's and many other players in the legislature, we do appreciate all of that. Anything else you want to catch up on before we sign off here, sir?

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 24:10

Well, I just want to say thank you. I mean, this is important, I think the opportunity to sort of chat to bring the the work that we do because sometimes it's difficult to envision. So what does economic development really mean? Well, how is it relevant in my life, the life of my friends and neighbors? And as simply put, this is about dinner tables. It's about making sure that there are more people who are having dinner every day in a state of Michigan and is making sure that those who are having dinner in the state of Michigan are able to eat all the fullness of Michigan and that their children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews and loved ones can realize the economic destinies and journeys right here in this great state.

E

Ed Clemente 24:52

Well, I guess in that case I will say thanks again to our guest Quentin Messer Jr, CEO for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Let's get it.

Q

Quentin Messer, Jr. 25:01

Let's get it indeed.

E

Ed Clemente 25:04



#### UP NEXT

Join us next week as we chat with Dr. Parag Khanna, Founder and Managing Partner of Future Map. He's a global strategy advisor or world traveler, a best selling author, and he'll tell us why he thinks Michigan will be the place to be in 2015.



#### Announcer 25:20

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