

Ep.51 - Bobby Hopewell

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Bobby Hopewell

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 to have Bobby Hopewell with us. And he is the president and CEO of Mobile Health Resources, welcome to the show, Bobby.

B Bobby Hopewell 00:39

Thank you. It's good to be here.

E Ed Clemente 00:41

I'm actually excited. I know you've got this business you're going to talk to us about but you're also a former mayor and as someone who's done a lot with local government, I think that's the hardest job in politics, period. And we can talk more about that later. But that's where the rubber really hits the road, I think in America, are the mayors and township supervisors and... because it's a hard job, isn't it?

B Bobby Hopewell 01:05

Yeah, it is interesting, it's a labor of love. The most interesting thing, I think it's a job where you can have a lot of impact and in communities the size of Kalamazoo, which is the community I was mayor in, you get to see people when you're shopping, or when you're getting your haircut, and you get to hear about the real world things that are happening in their neighborhood, on their street, with their children and families; and you truly have an opportunity to do something that might impact their journey in your in your city. And you also hear some things that... ha, uh.

E

Ed Clemente 01:46

You don't want to hear. (laughing)

B

Bobby Hopewell 01:47

Yeah! Or occasionally someone doesn't like you, I remind all my elected friends that none of us one by 100% of the vote.

E

Ed Clemente 01:55

And one other thing I will say that you and I talked about this before, but I served with your predecessor, Robert Jones, who was the mayor prior to you, I don't know if there was something in between you two?

B

Bobby Hopewell 02:09

There was one year in between us Hannah McKinney, but I served with Mayor Jones on the City Commission, I was a commissioner just before he went off to work in the state at the state level as a state rep. And of course, he passed away and 2010. And interesting enough, I was asked to fill the seat he was running for, for state senate, to fill that election seat and I had a 15 day campaign. But you can't fill Bob Jones seat, feet or seat or shoes rather. He was an extraordinary man. Truly my mentor and my friend. I consider them my brother and I miss him every single day; extraordinary leader.

E

Ed Clemente 02:58

You know, not only that he was I got very insightful and a excellent listener.

B

Bobby Hopewell 03:04

Oh, my God - Yes. You, we had such great conversations. I received great advice. You know, when you become a mayor, you really seek out some mayor's to help guide and especially when you're new mayor, guide and and assist you in doing the job and he was always there.

And just such a kind man, just so kind, and he worked across the aisle to get the job done. And I think we don't see enough of that nowadays. And he was all about how do we figure out a path forward for Kalamazoo, every day all day.

E

Ed Clemente 03:40

And, let's get a little bit to your business now. So say you're at a party and I came up to you and I knew nothing about what you did, what would you tell people Mobile Health Resources is?

B

Bobby Hopewell 03:53

Yeah, we are a firm. I tell people that we support Emergency Medical Services agencies. So I'm a paramedic myself. I worked in the industry for about 15 years and then I was in the hospital administration round, so pre Hospital and hospital. And what we do we provide revenue cycle management for EMS agencies. So that's really the patient billing and helping them gain their revenue by billing, Medicare, Medicaid, BlueCross, all the third party insurers and of course patients as well. And then on the other side of our business, we provide patient experience serving and analytics and data for the emergency medical services industry as well. So we are the largest purveyor of Emergency Medical Services patients experiences. So we send out a survey 24 questions, as for EMS agencies all over the country. We're in about 26 states and we are all about bringing patient voice to the clinical experience that they have with EMS. And with all of what's goes on in our nation, whether now or, or in the past, we need paramedics every single day. And these responders are are fantastic. But it's important to give them feedback about that experience a patient has, and we're proud of that work. And we're proud to be the largest purveyor of that work.

E

Ed Clemente 05:27

Yeah, you know, and especially obviously, in the last few years, those really have been the frontline people, you know, that have had to deal with good and bad stuff as it happened in I have a lot of friends that are EMTs. And I got a lot of firemen friends to right, so they're used to those things. Um, but you also worked at two hospitals that I'm familiar with, I'm happy to say because my buddy lives in Kalamazoo, but Bronson and Borgess both, right?

B

Bobby Hopewell 05:56

I did. I worked in communications area, I managed the communications center at Bronson and community relations. Part of what I love. And for Borgess, I was first part of my career there I was there nine years, I was Director of Hospitality Services, so a lot of the support services - food, nutrition, environmental services, that sort of thing. And then I left, when I left, I left as a Administrative Director for an outpatient center that we were building in Battle Creek. So a wide spectrum of support type services, and then clinical type services. The outpatient center would have had rehab, and radiology and all of those other unique clinical areas that patients need so much.

E

Ed Clemente 06:47

And I would imagine a lot that dovetails even to your current business, because community relations, you know, customer relations, you know, that's at the forefront for repeat business, and especially in today's tech world, people need instantaneous like, feedback, right?

B

Bobby Hopewell 07:03

Absolutely, absolutely. These, these dots are connective. And I love that I've sort of come back to my roots. So my career started in EMS, went into the hospital realm. So pre hospital hospital realm, and now back working with EMS agencies. And some people don't like to go back. This was an amazing journey that I've had all these years and to be able to arrive back and really contribute to the EMS industry. It's so interesting, we are, we're not always seen as essential even in all of what we've been going through. It's it's one of those things that is boggles my mind that we aren't propped up there and to that essential realm by so many, and the need for EMS in paramedics is so great right now in the state of Michigan, we need 1000 paramedics. And this has been a trend for years that this industry has just needed more and more individuals to go into the field. And it's been an interesting struggle for years. And hopefully, we'll continue to gain on that that struggle.

E

Ed Clemente 08:15

Well, let's say a little bit more about you. You literally are a Kalamazoo person, I think you grew up your whole life in Kalamazoo, didn't you?

B

Bobby Hopewell 08:23

Born and raise, yes. I am a proud Kalamazoo-an and my my mom still lives on the east side of Kalamazoo. I was raised by a single mom and five, or four brothers and sisters - My late sister passed a couple years ago, but she sorta held the four brothers together. And so now we're all battling with each other now, but yeah, it's been a great journey in Kalamazoo.

E

Ed Clemente 08:50

I bet you there was a lot of backyard scrapping going on with four boys.

B

Bobby Hopewell 08:55

Yeah, you know, I have to admit, I was probably the knucklehead of the bunch, but I am the most handsome one though.

E

Ed Clemente 09:06

And the scars you have you earned.

B

Bobby Hopewell 09:08

Right, and I don't have to prove anything, because there's no photos out there. So you'll have to take my word for it.

E

Ed Clemente 09:13

Yeah, well, you know, you went to Kalamazoo Central High School, is that correct?

B

Bobby Hopewell 09:18

I did, home of the home of the giants?

E

Ed Clemente 09:21

Yes and quite a few - You know, this is a dumb question to ask, but where did Derek Jeter go?

B

Bobby Hopewell 09:28

Oh, Derek Jeter attended Kalamazoo Central High School.

E

Ed Clemente 09:32

Did he really? I was just guessing, I didn't know that.

B

Bobby Hopewell 09:35

Yes, our world champion baseball player at MLB; and, of course, Greg Jennings NFL champion, Super Bowl champion. Man, he happened to go to Kalamazoo Central High School. So a couple good things happened coming out of our school - many good things. Those gentlemen are just prime representatives of, of great young people that went on to do amazing things, they're so much better than I am.

E

Ed Clemente 10:10

Well one fanboy question for me, did you ever get to meet Derek Jeter?

B

Bobby Hopewell 10:13

Yeah, I've met him a few times when he's come home, and he's still, he has a foundation that

he's involved; the Turn 2 foundation. So he's involved with the city. And as mayor, I met him through being the mayor, and yeah, and he and Greg, Greg comes home more often. His family, is there, his dad and mom. So yeah, it's really, really great to hang out with these guys.

A

Announcer 10:42

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E

Ed Clemente 10:59

So let's talk a little bit to about two things. And I know, you're too humble to take too much credit for these but the Kalamazoo Promise, obviously, let's talk about that. First. I know a lot of people have heard about it nationally. But what, can you just give people a quick definition again, what it is.

B

Bobby Hopewell 11:15

Yeah, the Kalamazoo Promise is a residential scholarship program for young people that attend Kalamazoo Public Schools. So if you start in kindergarten and go all the way through 12th grade and graduate, you receive a scholarship to any university in the state of Michigan, almost every private or public university. And if, if you can get in - you got to be able to get into those those places. And so this is an anonymous gift, it's given about \$186 million since 2005, when it started. We don't know who gives us to us, but every year, a check gets written for the young people that graduate from our public school system. And we've had people when it first was announced move into Kalamazoo from every state in the union, plus a couple other countries. And it has spawned a promise movement throughout the nation where there's promise programs that are popping up, but almost none of them are as generous as the one in Kalamazoo.

E

Ed Clemente 12:21

So you actually have migrants come there just to go to the school?

B

Bobby Hopewell 12:23

We have. We used to be a school system that lost about 250 students every year. Since the promise we're up by, I don't know, 1500 or so students. We built new schools. It's been an amazing journey.

E

Ed Clemente 12:36

Wow

B

Bobby Hopewell 12:37

Yeah, it's incredible. And someone woke up one day and decided they wanted to do this for our children. I mean, who does this? And it's in perpetuity, it's not going anywhere.

E

Ed Clemente 12:48

That's such a great story. The other one is, and you turned me on to this one, on our pre call, but what is the Kalamazoo Foundation for Excellence?

B

Bobby Hopewell 12:57

Yeah, the Foundation for Excellence is a unique funding platform through philanthropy for the city of Kalamazoo. There's been a lot of disinvestments in cities and an urban cores have struggled. We were struggling with budgets and where we were gonna cut, it seemed like we were always talking about scarcity. Myself and the city manager, thought we talked to our philanthropic community to say, "hey, could we do something different, sort of like the Kalamazoo Promise." And now we have a foundation that supports the work of the cities, particularly, to deal with any budget challenges, to lower our taxes in the city. And for our aspirational goals, really, those goals that we want to work to improve prosperity in our in our city and all the other things that support the city's vision, which is called Imagine Kalamazoo, which was developed with our city, citizens and neighborhoods. And it's Imagine Kalamazoo 2025, and so all of that goes into support that that work. It's never been done before. And you know, there's always controversy about how do you, who, how and what and why's and should we, shouldn't we... and I'm always a guy that says hey, go, go big or go home and bring a little Will and Grace. You know, be bold, and have the Grace out there, and we need more Grace. To understand that we at times will learn from the blessings of failure but I think we have learned from the blessings of success with the Foundation for Excellence.

E

Ed Clemente 14:34

Yeah, I probably didn't mention this to you, but I used to be a city manager so I know that - I know some of the challenges. I was in probably in a urban core city but I was in small like inner ring cities for the suburbs of Detroit, but it's the same message I think - Kalamazoo; whatever city you're in there always seems like there's either people are getting underserved either an infrastructure, utilities, the digital divide - all those things.

B

Bobby Hopewell 15:02

All of those things...and we've had to deal with some of those things in neighborhoods and for individuals, and this is this is an investment. And again, just like with the Kalamazoo Promise, it will pay more down the road than it will now, we have so many opportunities and challenges in the urban core. And if we think that just turning this on is going to solve everything, it doesn't, but it's it's a longitudinal long journey that I'm so excited that we're going to be on, so yeah.

E**Ed Clemente 15:34**

Well, you actually use the term of a board used to be on, I didn't know about the Michigan Urban Core Mayor's Association...

B**Bobby Hopewell 15:40**

Yeah, we have Urban Core Mayor's that I used the chair. And actually, they've let me stay involved with them, which I'm blessed for that. But it's the 13 urban cores in the state of Michigan, everywhere from Dearborn and Grand Rapids, Battle Creek, Jackson. And we're working together on issues and challenges of the urban core. And now we're working with the business community. So the segwaying into economic development, the business, we have a number of business collaboratives that we're working with, as well. And it's it's been fun, and I think it's going to be impactful. So I look forward to all the work that has come and will come and - yeah.

E**Ed Clemente 16:19**

Well, I served on SEMCOG's executive committee for quite a while, like 10 years. So I'm familiar with some of the cities, I think that were involved with it back then even. But one thing I forgot to mention, too, is that you're on the MEDC executive committee too and I know you probably get to see the 360 of the state on that board too, right?

B**Bobby Hopewell 16:38**

Absolutely. I am just blessed to have been appointed by the governor to serve on the MEDC. But we have had such an amazing leader in Quinten Messer, he is just outstanding and challenges us to look at ourselves differently. You know, sometimes I think Michigan has had trouble believing in ourselves, because of all of the things that we've faced. And I'll remind everyone, we will continue to face challenges and, and we have to find ways to continue to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, because that's the only place where great things come from, it doesn't come from comfort. So if you use that with all of what we've faced, and all of the things that people have said about Michigan, which most are not true. Let's use that to catapult us to the next level. And I think, with being on this board with these individuals, and with this leader, and all the things before us, man, oh, man, we have a pathway forward.

E**Ed Clemente 17:52**

Yet we just had Quentin on not too long ago and one of the podcasts, but the two things I think he really delivers, at least for me, I've been dealing with economic development, my whole career, not only just in the legislature, I used to run a chamber of commerce and all these things, but the two things I think he does, he brings a spark that was much needed that was not, I'm not saying any of the predecessors didn't, but it was just a spark that wasn't there. But I think the spark comes not just with his personality, but because he's an outsider who doesn't really... he sees the forest, you know, while we see the trees, right?

B**Bobby Hopewell 18:29**

Yeah, you have hit it on the head. Bringing him in from I believe Louisiana, if I remember, right. And New Orleans, if I remember, right. It was so needed for us to understand that we are as good as this amazing state is. And what I mean by that is, you look at the assets and resources we have, whether it's the water, whether it's the climate, whether it's the you know, we are the what the third largest agricultural or second largest after California, something like that. There are so many amazing pieces and parts to the puzzle of success in the state of Michigan. Our manufacturing, we are the ones that dreamed up the manufacturing to be what it is today. And we have to remember who we are and he helps us every single day and every single way to remember the greatness of the state of Michigan. And that was as part of what he brought.

E**Ed Clemente 19:35**

Yeah, it's hard to tell where you're going if you can't remember where you came from.

B**Bobby Hopewell 19:39**

Exactly.

E**Ed Clemente 19:39**

Yeah. So a couple of last questions. I know this went by fast. So um, one is do you see any challenges for your business side if you want on the horizon - disruptors? Like where do you think your industry's going? Just a couple of things.

B**Bobby Hopewell 19:56**

Yeah. We have, we are wrestling with whether we're transportation or healthcare, I'm talking EMS not necessarily serving industry. And that's one of the things I think we're working through. I believe we're healthcare, but the federal government still sees us as transportation. It's an interesting construct. If you knew what paramedics did in the field, you would know it's healthcare. Absolutely. I think that's it. And then the challenges of recruitment and retention - that is huge.

E**Ed Clemente 20:29**

Yeah. And the last couple questions, or, if you could maybe go back and talk to that central high school kid, what would you tell yourself this time? Or maybe a commencement speech? What do you think you would tell somebody to do for career wise?

B**Bobby Hopewell 20:44**

B Bobby Hopewell 20:44

Yeah, I guess what I would say, because I've done a couple of commencement speeches is one, I always told myself, I wish I had read more as a kid. Not just as an elementary or high school guy, but I think this exposing yourself through literature and gaining different sorts of perspectives - I wish I had done more of that. Two - I want to talk specifically to young African Americans that may not have a great role model in their lives. And certainly, I would love for there to be, and there are, more role model models that look like me, there are tons of us. But I want to make sure you take advantage of anyone and everyone that would want to help you move, no matter what they look like. Take advantage when you... grab a hold of your coaches and find that great teacher, no matter what they look like, everyone has something that they can fill your tank with. And you utilize that filling of the tank to get you down the road. So everyone can be a mentor, everyone can be a guide. And then my last thing I always say to young people is show me your friends, and I'll show you your future; and choose them wisely. There are people that don't deserve to be in your life, if they're not helping you advance yourself while you're helping them. And if they aren't filling that tank, that bucket, that moment, the moments that you need. I'm not sure that that's a great choice. So show me your friends, I show you your future. And if you keep that in mind, and and I'm always about, you know, we have to be uncomfortable with being; be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Put yourself in those situations that bring some comfort. And you'll find some great things that come out of it.

E Ed Clemente 22:40

That's why I like to ask that question I always have all the guests is because you give way better advice as like an older person that has been experienced a lot of things versus say someone that just came out of college, right and was given advice to someone in high school.

B Bobby Hopewell 22:55

Yeah, a lot of blessings along the way. And I want to remind folks that I was... I'm the son of a single mom with a high school diploma. And, you know, we weren't the richest we weren't the poorest - we were okay. And, you know, I had challenges in the neighborhood and all kinds of other things. Things that saved me were sports, and I'm an Eagle Scout, scouting saved me. And so all of those things, just just dive in, find those things - experiment. Go, go go and you'll be okay. Don't be afraid to wander into spaces, I mean, safe spaces that are uniquely different than something you're used to because man Oh, man, you just don't know what that moment what moment or what opportunity is going to change your trajectory. Just go.

E Ed Clemente 23:47

The Eagle Scout thing is a big deal for me. I used to give a lot of awards to them when I was in the legislature and that's all these upstanding young adults always. Um, the other thing the last thing is, do you have a favorite spot in Michigan... It could be Kalamazoo. But do you have anything else you like about the state that you like going to visit or festival or whatever?

B Bobby Hopewell 24:09

I'm a beach guy. I our beaches, so Saugatuck and South Haven. Amazing places. I worked at a summer camp called Pretty Lake camp in Kalamazoo, a camp for underprivileged kids. It's about 105 years old and kids come for free. I was a camper there myself, worked there for 13-14 summers and was on the board of directors. That's my fortress of solitude. So I wander into that space and just enjoy it. Yeah, I'm I'm a comic book fan.

E Ed Clemente 24:39

I was gonna say Superman's in there, I know.

B Bobby Hopewell 24:42

Yeah. Michigan is incredible. The places I've been able to see going up north and Pere Marquette. I love kayaking and canoeing, the Pere Marquette was one of the experiences. I just remember that wasn't even scouting that was something else. I don't even remember what it was, and camping and it's just we are an incredible place and just go out and enjoy it. Oh my gosh, go enjoy it.

E Ed Clemente 25:11

Well, once again, our guest was Bobby Hopewell, I should say former mayor too, of Kalamazoo, but he's the president and CEO of Bobile Health Resources. Thanks again, Bobby for doing this, you were awesome.

B Bobby Hopewell 25:22

Pleasure was mine. Thank you so much.

E Ed Clemente 25:24

Hey folks, make sure you tune in next week where I'll be being interviewed by Michelle Grinnell, she's the Senior Vice President for Marketing and Communications here at the MEDC because we are going to be doing a one-year anniversary of the show and let's see how I do on the other side of the mic.

A Announcer 25:36

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