

Ep.52 - Michelle Grinnell

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Michelle Grinnell



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.



Ed Clemente 00:28

Welcome to the show, I'm your host, Ed Clemente. And today we're going to do some reverse engineering, my boss, I should mention too, Michelle Grinnell, she is the Senior Vice President for Marketing and Communications here at the MEDC. Welcome to the show Michelle.



Michelle Grinnell 00:43

Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be on the Michigan Opportunity podcast and flip the script and have you answer the questions. And, you know, I'm the daughter of a retired daily newspaper editor. So asking hard hitting questions, it's kind of in my blood in my DNA.



Ed Clemente 00:58

Don't ask my high school English grades, because my grammar is, plus my first language wasn't really English. So it's sort of I always get nervous about my grammar, too. But I know that for you know, congratulations, by the way, you've been in this position now not that long, right? About six months I think.



M

Michelle Grinnell 01:18

Yeah, a couple months. Following in the the big footsteps of Doug Kuiper, but it's I've been with MEDC for 11 years and so it's fun to take on this new role and have loved to see The Michigan Opportunity podcast kind of come to life. I know that you have a passion for economic development, in the state of Michigan that really has come together. And you, along with Otie, Kyle, Katie, Nick, as well as others on our team have really put a lot of heart into this. You guys have secured some incredible guests that tell a really great story about the state of Michigan. And so I think that it would be really interesting after you've done this for a year to hear from you, what, how do you describe this podcast in your own words? And is it the podcast you thought it would be when you started?

E

Ed Clemente 02:07

Yeah, and I should mention, it's exactly a year and you're, I think, our actual 52nd episode we've done. So thank you for agreeing to do this today.

M

Michelle Grinnell 02:18

It's a privilege.

E

Ed Clemente 02:19

Yeah, you know, it's kind of funny, because it's a lot like when I used to be a legislator, like people always go what do you do? What is it, you know, and something I discovered over a lot of years is probably the more cerebral something is, the sort of harder it is to describe to folks because it's just a little bit more complex. But to me, the podcast started out, along with conversations I had with Governor Whitmer. And she's sort of the one that her and I came up with this idea to do a podcast here at the state. And back then we were sort of at the peak of, you know, all the COVID stuff. And for me, you know, I kind of said, you know, it'd be better that we show like, not the state that had really high rates of COVID back then, but it was more about how we were building that path out of it. And so, actually, I think you get the credit for the name of the show a little bit, I think you're going to come up the word 'opportunity,' but I really think that that is sort of the foundation of the show is hope and opportunity. And it's sort of from a not only a macro and micro story, but it's just trying to highlight the really complex diversity of economic development. I think economic development is just hard to explain in general to anybody. I'm sure you've run into this, because you, and I think really, to give a nice compliment to the MarComm team, you guys are the lifeblood, everything has to kind of go through your filter at the end. So you probably see the 360 as much as maybe the you know, Quinton does or anyone else does. So, you already did this, but I'll do it a little bit more. I want to thank you know, Otie McKinley, who's like our, I said McKinney, not McKinley, but Otie is our producer and Kyle Gilmore is our technician. Katie Smith helps us with the webpage. And Nick Nerbonne really is the guy that kind of put it all together somewhat originally, in developing because you guys have never done a podcast before. [Correct] And and I mean, you might even want to I don't know if that's of interest later in your questions, but just the technology side of putting on a podcast I think is pretty interesting unto itself. But otherwise, yeah, so that's kind of what I tell people. It's just about trying to move forward and not think about the past and all the great diversity of the state.

M

Michelle Grinnell 04:36

Well, I think its interesting to see kind of your career path. You've done economic development with the Southern Wayne County Chamber of Commerce you you've been a public servant serving in the Michigan House of Representatives, on the Michigan Liquor Control Commission. You've served in higher education as a trustee with Wayne Community College District Trustees so, there's there's a lot of opportunity with someone who has as diverse of a background is that like. What? Why? Why would you want to host a podcast? What made you want to do this?

E

Ed Clemente 05:06

Well, I think I was about 40 years old when my mom told me, I had ADD. I didn't know it up to that point, but I couldn't guess it. And I think I've always had something about intellectually curiosity of everything, right? But I think that's if you look at my career, I used to work with a guy at Liquor Control. And he used to call me the world's oldest millennial because I was a lot like the millennials, where I wanted a lot of jobs, I didn't want to stay too long to something, I wanted to travel, you know, and do all these things. My folks were both, you know, basically immigrants, right? And from Italy, and they really believed in civic service. And that's kind of what put me on this path. We had a bar or a restaurant, you know, and but they always did a lot of community stuff for Little League Baseball, Boy Scouts, in that kind of gets put me on the path. And that's why I've always believed public service is a very noble profession, even though we were in private sector. And I think getting to your point a little bit working at a chamber of commerce, you know, that sort of is the real equivalent of knowing your community. It's almost like a mini tourism group. I kind of delineated from your original pure question, but it you know, serving in the legislature, obviously, that, to me is the highest form of government, at least in the state of Michigan beyond the Governor. So anyway, so it's been an opportunity that I've had a chance to almost, this sounds dumb, but do you ever see the movie Slumdog Millionaire? [I haven't] Oh, it's a movie about a kid like from India that grew up in the slums. And he goes on this quiz show, and all of his answers are tied to some unique event in his life. And you would never see the invisible thread of all those weird things coming to any value until you see the game show, right? And he has to answer these tough questions. And he sort of had direct experience with them. And that's what I think a lot of the podcast is about. A lot of the guests I kind of know tangentially through other things. But go ahead. I gave you a long answer there.

M

Michelle Grinnell 07:15

No, no, that's great. I mean, I think it's really important because telling the Michigan story and telling stories about people in Michigan, and businesses in Michigan and communities in Michigan, it is really a focus of the work that we do at MEDC. We really get to serve as the marketing agency for the state of Michigan, which is a great, great gig, right? Um, so you know, the stories and experiences and insights from your guests on the podcast are contributing to that. And it would be interesting to hear, like, why you think, and what has made a podcast of really good medium to tell these stories, right, we've got a lot of ways to do storytelling, within the MEDC. But I think the podcast offers some unique opportunities. What have you found to be the case?

E

Ed Clemente 08:00

You know, I guess maybe a good example would be what is the difference between when you could load stuff sort of onto an mp3 player versus having to hear it on the radio? Like, on the radio, if your favorite song came up, like, oh, good, you know, and you might catch the last 30 seconds of it, then you might lose it. But when you were able to download music, or when you're able to now, you know, stream music to what you like, I think podcasts follow that vein. The strongest thing I think about audio podcasts, because there's both video ones, too, is that you can do something else while you're doing it. And I think I've mentioned this to you before, but I fell in love with podcasts because I ran a lot before and I would listen to podcasts while I ran, which is about as nerdy as anything you can get versus music. But I started really learning and I really think of podcasts is almost like a miniature sort of professor in my pocket teaching me something while I'm doing something physical, whether it's you know, running, washing clothes, you know, cooking, or whatever it is, it provides a medium I think everybody can identify with. And let me go a little further because I know a big chunk of this and I imagine you'll ask me about this little bit more but talent, you got to remember that millennials and Gen Z, especially Gen Z generation, they've only known the internet. So to them, podcasts are almost second nature, just like Tik Tok is or any of these other things. So it does, you know, for trying to focus on talent, retaining it in the state, I think a podcast is a good medium, maybe not the perfect medium, but I know it's a good way for them to learn stuff too about what goes on.

M

Michelle Grinnell 09:43

Well, I'm super excited we got a Tik Tok reference into this podcast. I feel like that shows that economic development is trendy and you know, you've had guests on from academia, business owners, entrepreneurs, futurists, what have you been surprised by and what are some of the themes that you've seen kind of rise to the forefront that speak to where we're at with economic development here in the state of Michigan?

E

Ed Clemente 10:08

Well, you know, it was, it's sort of interesting. It's kind of like jazz, right? You got standards, so you figured, in the beginning, we started out with Gerry Anderson, for example, President or Chairman of the Board, I think of DTE Energy. And he was mainly the guy, for example, that was very involved with the Governor's turnaround recovery program, as well as the Head of Business Leaders for Michigan. And we had that guest on later, as well as head of the Detroit Regional Partnership. So our very first guest was so connected and so many different levels. And he also does stuff with the Grand Rapids, West Michigan Business Leaders, I don't know what they're called for sure, the exact name, but he's very involved with the west side of the state as well. So we had probably the most connected person possible to start out with. And at that time, we were very focused on COVID. And I think one thing that's an interesting trend is almost we never talk about COVID anymore. And it wasn't like a systemically but one of our original questions was, you know, how have you been doing the turnaround? What has been your pivot, you know, and I think we're at the point where that's where I knew this was the new normal. Is that we knew that, we were going to just have to accept this and that act like we're going to go back to square one again, that we were going to have to figure out how to deal with this. And then you started seeing that matriculate, and all the different guests as well, where they weren't talking about it. And then all of a sudden, before you know it, we're sort of talking

about things that didn't involve COVID at all, and how it's really changed. And I would say the biggest thing, probably the most, the biggest thing I think of all the things that really became evident is talent. And we say talent, like we know it, but talent just for you folks listening really means it doesn't mean necessarily an age thing. But it does sort of skew toward people probably under 40 or so. But in general its people coming out of college and where they're going to go get jobs. And we start coming up with things I think we you know, we've had at least four or five different guests who have talked about because of the digitization of nomads and the ability for zoom, that people can now can work from almost anywhere they want. And I think that's really going to play well into Michigan's future.

A

Announcer 12:20

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M

Michelle Grinnell 12:37

What have you been hearing from guests on the podcast about what small businesses still need to grow and thrive here in Michigan?

E

Ed Clemente 12:44

Well, you know, it's interesting, because, you know, my background because of the small my family had a small business, right? I won't say illegally, what age I had to start working. And you know, how we got involved in the bar business is a whole nother story. But we small business is so on the margins, in general always has been, it's very difficult and I know that, say, for example, the MEDC, or different foundations are really trying to work on getting underserved populations in that space. I mean, you know as well as I do, I think it's more than 50% of all new businesses, especially small ones, are started by women. And, you know, in Michigan, we have a ton of diversity, not only like racially, but ethnically and you know, maybe not first-born American generation people. I mean, when I was at liquor control commission, I wouldn't doubt close to 40% of the people that owned small businesses, you know, they weren't born in America, and English wasn't their first language. So the small business is really changing in Michigan. And I think we don't really maybe see it as clearly, but I think that's been sort of highlighted in some of our shows, and I think any of your groups that you guys, you know, that the MEDC works with, really knows that. That is where all the entrepreneurship, how tech transfer is going to work with universities, you know, how we're really going to try to grow the state. Because, you know, it's you want to, you want to like, you know, I know you're gonna agree to this, but you know, the basic thing about economic development is, you know, attraction, retention. what's the third one, and expansion? So, so, yeah, so, if you can, you know, attraction is the hardest of those three. And to do retention is actually the hardest, you know, so the expansion is how do we get people to stay here that went to U of M, MSU, Ferris, Northern wherever, to stay in the state and start a business. And then how do they become, you know, maybe the next big tech company or or food company, or new fashion company, whatever it is. That's where I think the small business part can really grow for us. And I probably gave you more than you wanted again, sorry.

M

Michelle Grinnell 15:12

No such thing Ed, no such thing. This is this is your this is your moment to shine. And I, you know, we talked about talent a little bit and I know you've had a number of guests from higher education on, Wayne State University recently, you've had other folks, what is some advice that you think is important to share with with those folks that are coming up, you know, either getting ready to entry, enter or have recently entered Michigan's workforce.

E

Ed Clemente 15:40

What's funny is, you know, we sort of asked that question of every guest, and every guest answer is not like, incredibly, some of them are unique, and some aren't. But the one thing I think that pops up the most, is be open to anything. And that's the one thing I think I was fortunate about is being intellectually curious about everything. I think that, like we said before, the Gen Z has been with the internet. And when you don't know any other reference point, besides you can find anything within like five seconds, is such a huge advantage for them to be able to pivot faster too, right? So being open minded means have faith in yourself and don't be afraid to challenge yourself. I don't think there's ever been a generation that has that opportunity more so. And I think the internet can, you know, be good and bad. But at the same time, I think if you really are looking to do a business plan, or if you're looking at HR issues, or if you're looking at doing contracts, you know, all the small business stuff you got to worry about, insurance, liability, you know, all those things. The internet provides such an excellent sort of framework for you to find answers pretty quick without making, you know, big mistakes sometimes.

M

Michelle Grinnell 17:01

So you've got we've got the internet at our fingertips, you've got over 50 guests that you've talked to you this year. If you look into a crystal ball Ed, what are some of the future trends or disruptors that you see on the horizon, based, just an insight and the experiences of the guests that we've we've had on the Michigan Opportunity Podcast this year?

E

Ed Clemente 17:21

Well, I know I shouldn't do this, but probably my favorite guest was Dr. Parag Khanna, who's an author, and he was probably one of the more recent ones, but his book called Move, he really gets into how it's going to be pure competition globally, about how we attract, you know, up and coming talent. And, you know, with the idea of the digital nomad that you can maybe live anywhere, and is, I'm sure you and you know, senior leadership, what is going to be the new model for workforce, what's the hybrid? And what's all those things? And, you know, he just says it's going to be a bigger deal, that, how do you get people still to maybe, in our case, come to Michigan or come to America, from other countries? How are we going to attract that global talent to then build up the new, you know, let's say, Internet 3.0, you know, with things like blockchain? And with how you're going to have more and more supply chain logistics issues? Are we going to be doing more in-sourcing back to America, where we're going to do more manufacturing? Are we going to, are we going to have, you know, is Silicon Valley, the

same, you know, leader as it is globally, like it's been for like the last 40 years? I mean, I don't think you can make that claim as much as they used to. So how do we figure out to build that talent, not just in Michigan, but in America somewhat, too, because it's very, very transitory. It'll go just about anywhere, and it won't stay that long. If you don't have the right, in fact, getting to your disrupter, I think Michigan should really be double downing and this kind of fits in with Dave Lorenz and tourism a little bit, is making, you know, communities like quality of life to be a preeminent thing. That's the one thing I think you can tell both with Gen Z and millennials they want to live someplace that they enjoy being and they can raise kids in, you know, millennials more so. But we need to make sure that those what, makes Michigan different than other states. And Dr. Khanna actually talks about, he thinks that Michigan will be like the number, most attractive state in America by 2050. So how are we and is I will throw this back on your shoulders a little bit, but how do we strategically position ourselves 30 years out, you know, with political turnover, different jobs? I mean, we got to start thinking that way to make sure we get these next 20 years of talent. So what's your answer?

M

Michelle Grinnell 19:59

Yeah, well I mean, I think it was a good segue to my next question, but I also think it's the answer, right? It isn't just business development, or it isn't just tourism, or it isn't just housing, it is how do we tie all of those things together, and we use the words, we talked about Michigan as a place to live, work and play, but you really need to have that full package now. That is what people are looking for. They're looking for good jobs, they're looking to be able to make a living, but they want to do that in a place where they can get out and recreate and they can, you know, build a sense of community. And so I think there's a there's a huge opportunity for us in Michigan, and the collective team at MEDC is working really hard at doing a better job of kind of tying all of those things together. Um, but that raises my question for you Ed which is, what does if we're talking about sense of place and live, work and play? What does Pure Michigan mean to you?

E

Ed Clemente 21:01

Well, I, I'm going to say, first, I'm going to give you guys you guys, MSF, let's say the Michigan Strategic Fund sort of a compliment. I listened to every one of those and some of the executive committee meetings, and it really shows the 360 of the state. It's hard for people to understand, you know, like, you learn this as a legislator that no one else thinks 360 like you have to, you know, and the MEDC really has to be sort of looking 360 because what are we doing to help out up north or the UP or Grand Rapids and Detroit, you know, all these places. But then to get to your point, a sense of place, and, you know, and also Pure Michigan, to me, this is more of a trend, disrupter thing, but I think the MEDC is sort of knows to do this, is really have all the infrastructure in place. How do we net together sort of a challenged communities like it's funny we just had not too long ago, Bobby Hopewell Mayor, Former Mayor of Kalamazoo, but how do we build the infrastructure in these more challenged communities because we don't want to rebuild new infrastructure. So how do we make sure that Flint and Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, Muskegon, you know, all these communities that are a little stressed right now? How do we make sure we make those attractive to talent, because not everyone's going to want to be in big cities. And if you can make a difference, say in Jackson, you know, in the middle of the state, and how can that be attractive to like 20 and 30 year olds to want to move there, you know, like tech hubs and, you know, whatever type of smart Hub

Zones you want to call them, you know, whatever we do, how are we doing that, and that's going to really save us money in the long run to as a state to not have to pay for new infrastructure to those communities.

M

Michelle Grinnell 22:52

So um, I think Ed I just want to wrap up, because we could talk about this for hours. And sometimes you and I do talk about this for hours. Um, but I do I do want to wrap up with one more question in terms of, we've made it through first year of the Michigan Opportunity Podcast stood this economic development podcast up from nothing to really something that has become a great storytelling vehicle, a great way to highlight some of the innovative and impressive and important things happening in the state of Michigan, but what can people expect to hear in year two of the Michigan Opportunity Podcast?

E

Ed Clemente 23:30

Well, if you let me I have about 100 more guests that are on my shortlist, but I also know there's logistic issues, but I really think that higher education will still be playing a role. I think that there's no other device in history of mankind is education, to like, raise all the boats, you know, to help the economy for small business. There's nothing better than like our, you know, four year institutions our community colleges. I think that we will look at more of those education, but we're gonna look at some more small business people. And in niches that could grow, people potentially, maybe they're on the cusp of growing, and maybe a nudge might help them. And I just believe that, you know, I also want to say, to compliment to Quentin Messer, too, because you know, you and I've said this before, but I really do, and I said this with a couple of other guests, but he really does provide a spark that helps because I think the spark comes from Him not actually living in Michigan, and moving here from a totally different region and only being here a couple times before, I think, but he really realizes our assets way better than we do. You know, we take them for granted. He doesn't. And I think he's infecting a bunch of us with that enthusiasm and his vernacular makes it even easier, because he sort of really looks at it and goes, 'What are we doing?' we got to save this stuff. Why aren't we appreciating this more, you know, and, and I think that gives enthusiasm to not just people at the MEDC, but I think legislators and all the businesses and you know, it's a good, positive, upbeat, I think for the state.

M

Michelle Grinnell 25:11

Yeah, Quentin always reminds us it's not bragging if it's true. And so I think that's, I think that's the beauty of the podcast and a lot of the work we're doing. It's something we can be incredibly proud of, but it is true, and we should be talking about it. So Ed, like this has been so fun. I have been involved behind the scenes on the podcast. The fact that I get to be on the podcast is icing on the cake. It's it's, I'm sure we'll continue these conversations offline as it were. But thank you so much for having me. And thank you for bringing this opportunity to MEDC and doing such a great job of helping tell our story and finding those interesting, compelling Michigan guests and outside of Michigan guests to help us continue to talk about the opportunity that we have here in our state.

E

Ed Clemente 26:05

Well, thank you, Michelle, and I hope I pass the audition. [With flying colors.] Make sure to join us next week our guest will be Allegra Baistrocchi, she's the Consul of Italy, which is the Consulate of Italy located in Detroit. Listen to her fascinating story of lifestyle, the International Council and her path to get here to Michigan.

A

Announcer 26:26

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