

# E.2.19 - Dave Lorenz

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## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Dave Lorenz

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### A Announcer 00:02

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 very fortunate to have I think one of the more interesting jobs in the state of Michigan, but we have Dave Lorenz with us. Welcome to the show, Dave.

### D Dave Lorenz 00:40

Hey, Ed, good to be with you. I think you have one of one of the most interesting jobs because you get to talk to people all around the state find out what's happening at a really interesting time. [Wait, you do that too.] Well, I do, yeah but I mostly talk to travel and tourism folks almost exclusively, which is, of course, a huge part of the economy for Michigan. But it must be fun talking to everybody who are whose you know, part of the scene to bring Michigan to where it's going to be in the future. It's an exciting time to be in Michigan because our best times have not been seen yet. And we're about to really see some incredible sustainable growth, at least in the travel and tourism industry. And that, of course, leads to growth in every other sector of the economy. So it's an exciting time to be in Michigan after a very difficult time that we've all dealt with. Things are looking up.

### E Ed Clemente 01:33

I should have mentioned to you're the Vice President for Travel Michigan, at the MEDC. But I think you're you're pretty much you have your own radio station, what days your radio stations, usually too?

D

Dave Lorenz 01:45

WJR in Detroit 760 AM, quite often we do a show at 4pm, Sunday afternoons, all called Travel Michigan suspiciously. So. [Yeah, I catch it all the time.] But yeah, it's fun and you know, several other stations on the network, pick it up, too. And it really is nice, because just like you through this podcast, you stay up to tune on everything that's happening around the state. There are so many really neat people who are doing incredible things to be part of what we are becoming as a state. You know, this, this very welcoming place that I think is going to be even more welcoming as we get a hold of issues that the whole world, especially our country is dealing with. You know how to truly be welcoming to people of all races, of all cultures, of all ages and sexes, and, and you name it of all ability levels. That's a big part of what Travel and Tourism is talking about right now. The role that we play in making sure that everyone knows they're welcome to be part of the future of this state. And, of course, we're not perfect, we still have challenges, we still have knuckleheads out there who just are unwilling to accept people who aren't like themselves. But for the most part, this is a diverse state that celebrates its diversity of people and places. And I think we're on the cusp of truly being welcoming in every way. And that means with diversity comes, you know, new perspectives, new ideas, entrepreneurial spirit that that will blossom. I wish, Ed, I wish I was 30 years younger to watch what's going to happen the next 30 or 40 years. It's going to be interesting.

E

Ed Clemente 03:34

Yeah. You know, and and as people sort of, as we've seen, just because of say, the COVID bubble, let's call it that. I mean, we're gonna get down to maybe some specifics of why the tourism industry so big, but I can tell you as a former legislator that, you know, we always talked about manufacturing or agriculture, but tourism is always right up there, you know, for what are the biggest sort of tax bases as well as private sector just in, you know, wealth creation, right?

D

Dave Lorenz 04:06

Yeah. If you were to look at the economy in Michigan look at like a pie chart of some sort, you know, government, health care, things like that, that's always you know, the biggest employers, if you look at it that way. Then comes manufacturing and agriculture and then tourism is that other really big part of the economy and then everybody else falls into place in their, their sectors as well. We all are part of that, that big pie. And we all play our own roles, but travel and tourism, the folks who work in this industry, couple 100,000 people who directly work in the industry, and then hundreds of 1000s more who are impacted by the industry. So you have that that direct impact and you have the indirect and the induced impact as economists look at it, but it all starts with a visit. As people visit you need to have people ready to take them in from hoteliers and restaurants to attraction folks, you know, golf courses and ski resorts and then all the other support businesses that come into play to, to be able to make that visitor comfortable. You know, people who supply bedding and the the folks who work to

install carpeting and to, to build hotels and, and it goes on and on and on. But it wouldn't go anywhere unless people came here for both leisure and business travel. And I think sometimes we we don't value that enough, we don't value the travel and tourism industry enough because we are a state that thinks manufacturing, we're proud of our manufacturing heritage. And we're proud of the fact that we're the second most agriculturally diverse state in the country. But Travel and Tourism plays this big role of inviting people here to be part of the solution, to keeping people here to live work and play here in an environment that is like no other, this four season place in the middle of the Great Lakes. It's a pretty special place.

E

Ed Clemente 06:17

Yeah, I would even say what's a little different too about tourism, and I throw recreation in there because I know you're avid hiker like I am, there's so many things that Generation Z and millennials do differently a little bit than previous generations. But I think the other thing that's really unique more so, I think about the industry you work with, is that there's so many sort of smaller moving parts than say manufacturing, right? And the other thing, I think that if you look at agriculture and manufacturing, there's sort of like a separation between them and the customer sometimes, right? You our customer, well, not you but the industry work with it, so like if a hotel starts getting kind of rundown, they better fix it up or they'll lose business, right? Its very customer driven.

D

Dave Lorenz 07:06

Yeah, I like to put it this way, I see us as as being in the front line of hospitality and of the welcome and encouraging people to be here, to continue to be here to work in all these other areas. If people don't feel comfortable in the environment that they're going to be in, they won't want to work there, they won't want to live there. So you need to make sure that the place, you know, atmospherically is what they would want to be a part of, and that the, the way that they're treated is is really a big part of that. But then you look at things like manufacturing and agriculture, travel and tourism is tied in directly with them as well. So for instance, look at wineries, well, that's agriculture, right? Well, it's also travel and tourism. How about farmer's markets? Same thing. How about those little, those little stands on the side of the road and Grand Traverse County and you know, summertime, and you see those, you know, those cherries or, or maybe other times, and you'll see asparagus or tomatoes, or, you know, all these things, that's part of the travel industry. On manufacturing, when you go to the Rouge plant in Dearborn, and you see the Ford F-150 being made right there in front of you. You're on a tour that starts with the Henry Ford and Greenfield Village, and then you take a tour over there. So we're even connected there. There are so many ways that travel and tourism is a part of our lives every day, that it truly makes sense for us, I think, to look at the people who work in these areas, in a much more substantially important position than we typically do. You think about it, when you go to a restaurant, somebody is going to literally, I know the meaning of that word, they're gonna literally serve you. And unfortunately, for years, we've looked at those jobs as being kind of the unimportant jobs. You know, it's, it's sad for me to recognize that, but after what we've gone through these last few years, and after we weren't able to go to our restaurants or go to our bowling alleys, or you know, the things that we love to do, I hope that people will look at the people who provide these experiences to us in a different way. And I hope that we will, we will honor them and recognize them as being so much more important to our lives than the way we have in the past.

**E****Ed Clemente 09:32**

Well, you know, it's funny, what, two things you triggered there, but recently, I do tours, like unofficial tours for international groups that come to Michigan quite ofte, it's a board I'm on. But we brought in 20 Pakistani teachers actually and I gave a tour at the Henry Ford Museum, but then they saw Ford Motor Company was like right next door and I don't think they really tied the two together and I'm gonna tell you right now, these guys all live like in Pakistan, Lahore mainly. And they were so excited about the F-150 and the new Lightning coming oput. Yeah, and that's like, you know, 8,000 miles away and that's sort of the global footprint. And then now that they see the tie into the museum, and the relationship they took that tour, that's a big imprint, because there's not many factory tours, I think in America, right?

**D****Dave Lorenz 10:26**

Not a lot because of security and safety and insurance issues and all that, so it's nice to be able to do that. Here's the other thing, you know, when I think about the the fact that we are still the state that put America on wheels, and still does that today, we're still the center of automotive engineering and design and mobility and an autonomous vehicle engineering and thought, it's all here. So as we look to the future, the same state that that created the travel and tourism industry as we know it today, by making the automobile affordable for everyone, so they could travel the country, which led to, you know, society as we know it today. Now, we're looking to the future of travel, of transportation and it's all centered right here. And again, as we look to the future, Michigan, Pure Michigan, is going to play this pivotal role in the future of transportation in totally different ways. And I think that's such a cool thing. And if I, again, Ed, if I was young, especially if I was a young person who wanted to get into engineering or something like that, this is the place I'd want to be, somewhere in Michigan, either working in a shop, or figuring out how to how to be part of all these new tech solutions for the future. It's such an exciting time. And I know, I know, people are still hurting from COVID, I understand that. And I understand that, you know, so many things have impacted us, challeng with with inflation, and whatever. But look to the future. And I think it should put a smile on our face because the future is here. It's starting here with these new young minds, and I can't wait to see what happens in the future.

**E****Ed Clemente 12:19**

Wello you know, it's funny, I've got a good friend who lives in Hawaii, right. And so, you know, it's a whole different sort of tourism angle on that place. But I told her that during COVID, a little bit, I think it's almost like people, a lot of millennials, and Gen Z, and even the older people, I told her that kind of Michigan's like the Hawaii of the Midwest. I mean, because of all the water, we're almost an island, and we got great islands. But it's like people, like if they didn't even know it was here, and all of a sudden, you know, you've seen at the national parks, we just met with the US Parks guy member from DC, and he talked they're having such challenges in places that normally, Pictured Rocks and Sleeping Bear Dunes. I mean, talk, you know, why don't you mention a little bit about how far people are coming away to Michigan?

**D****Dave Lorenz 13:11**

Well, people, you know, it's interesting, because after COVID, like right now, as we've gone from the pandemic, into the endemic stage, and as we're looking at all these high costs right now, we didn't expect people would travel from very far distances to get here. So we've only marketed in the Great Lakes area, currently, but we'll be back out there nationally, again. Because travel is so important to people, they will go to the places that they put on their bucket list. Okay, I'm gonna go there. And Michigan, to your point, really is one of those bucket list locations. Because I can understand the Hawaii connection, I would say more like Alaska because we're this really big state, really diverse state when it comes to nature and such, and we don't have the big, you know, mountains but we do have mountains in a Porcupine Mountains and such out there in the western U.P. We have mountains of sand at the big lake shore communities along the West Michigan shoreline, especially, you know, Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore. We have four very distinct seasons, very cold winters and then really, really beautiful in a warm weather seasons as well. So we have these real connections and you think about all the wildlife in these couple of locations as well. So, you know, it's one of those bucket list places that when people learn what Michigan truly is, what Pure Michigan really is, they have to come. So they're coming from all over and, and I've already seen this year, a lot of people from places like Colorado and Oregon, kind of surprising because it's you know, far distances for road trips, but they're still taking those road trips, and they're still coming here. But we've seen over the last few years more and more people from Missouri and Kentucky and of course all the surrounding states. Now that you know, we're able to travel internationally comfortably again the Ontario folks will, will start to really come back to Michigan as they always have. And we have such a great relationship with Canada. People look at Ontario and Michigan as though we're sister states or sister provinces. So we have this great relationship, then we get back to manufacturing. Same thing there. You know, we have that connection with manufacturing with those two areas. With travel and leisure. It's, it truly is a special place. People, people like you Ed, as they say, I have the best job in the state. Here's the secret. I really do. Just don't tell anybody.

E

Ed Clemente 15:41

Well, you know, it's funny when you talk about Canada, I have a lot of good friends say like in New York, and New Jersey and Boston and you know, the best way to come to Michigan is you say you cut through Canada, remember? And Canada loved that, right? Because they were getting gas revenues and people stopping along their way. They literally still came to Michigan, even though it adds like another two to three hours to come here.

D

Dave Lorenz 16:05

Yeah, we've seen a lot of that. And, you know, once you build up a loyal audience, and once people come here, they will remember it for a while. But you also need to stay top of mind with your marketing efforts to make sure that people don't forget about you, because there are all those other places, all those other destinations around the world. It is a world economy, especially for travel. So you need to always be out there. So we're trying to make sure that people remember Pure Michigan through our marketing efforts, and then telling their stories and encouraging people to come. People are even now coming by cruise ships into the Great Lakes region, that industry is coming back. The future is strong.

A

Announcer 16:46

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E

Ed Clemente 17:03

You talked a little bit about the future. Can you really sort of predict what you, not predict, but at least look at the options of maybe what trends you're going to see develop more for tourism, you think?

D

Dave Lorenz 17:15

Yeah, I think, again, this is part of what's happened to us because of COVID. I think people better appreciate being with other people. I think people are going to be looking for the next few years at least, for places that they might be somewhat familiar with, but they want to go to new places, discover new diverse areas where they can see people who maybe appear to be different. And through that experience, understand that hey, we're all the same, we want a better life for our kids and grandkids, all that stuff. People are going to be looking for, kind of healthy experiences while they travel, that may not be the primary reason for that trip, but when they get there, they're going to be looking for places they can go running or maybe join a Pilates or a yoga class or whatever in the local community. People are going to be traveling maybe multi-generationally, again, to be closer with their family as well that they've missed this last few years. And I think people appreciate our ability to travel freely in our country more than ever. And that I think is a great thing that's going to lead to a better travel industry in the future, more jobs in the travel industry. And through that, more discovery of new and interesting places. And I'm hoping that people will then tell their stories once they travel, and that will encourage other people to travel and to experience places like Pure Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 18:45

Well, you know, recently I was up north, and I saw two cruise ships, like by Mackinac Island. And I know you and I have had this discussion before about, because I get a lot of travel feeds anyway just because I'm looking, but on some of these international like Gate One and some of these other big international companies, they're listing more and more Great Lakes tours, aren't they?

D

Dave Lorenz 19:09

Yeah, they are. And you know, we've had about four or five cruise ship companies in the Great Lakes for the last few years, they all took a pause during COVID. But the Viking Cruise Lines is now in the Great Lakes region making several Michigan stops. There are some really, really beautiful ships being built right now. I think we'll see on average of maybe two new ships coming into the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Region in the next couple of years. So maybe two next year maybe two the following year. That then will bring more competition, the prices

will go down. They'll go to new and different ports along their way, new excursion opportunities, and people will tell those stories. They will then help to sell that travel experience which will bring even more people by ship and then those people who come by ship will say, boy, this is an easy place to drive. I'll come back and drive around next time, spend more time at these places. So it's all it's all coming together Ed, I'm really excited.

E

Ed Clemente 20:09

Yeah, and I think you also mentioned a future point where it's becoming more and more critical with knowledge jobs, for example, that people really live the quality of life they want. I mean, I'm not gonna mention any states, but certain states who never lost populations are losing populations, just shown in the last census tracts, and I do believe people are moving with their feet more, because they want that lifestyle to complement, you know, what they think is important for their jobs, too.

D

Dave Lorenz 20:38

Yep, you can work from wherever these days in so many jobs. So people are coming back to Michigan, and many of them are deciding to stay here because to your point Ed, why not stay in a place that's beautiful, and interesting, with friendly people who will accept you and welcome you., and that accommodates you for your needs, whatever they are. You'll find that because we're so diverse, you'll find a community that will fit your needs, and you're going to be able to do your work. Boy, it's it's such an interesting time.

E

Ed Clemente 21:08

Well, your last question, you're not going to be able to answer. Do you want to tell us your favorite spot in Michigan?

D

Dave Lorenz 21:16

I used to always say my home because I'm seldom there, but the interesting thing that happened during COVID is I was there too much. My wife says Go Go Go out and do your work. So I have so many places. It really does, it matters about you know my mood, the time of the year because I'm a big winter lover and I love winter love it. I'm but I'm as you know, I'm a runner. So I like to go to any places that offer really beautiful running experiences. You know, like, I'll just say one, Old Mission Peninsula is beautiful. And when you when you're on the half marathon or the marathon the34re its just awesome. But you name it Detroit, I love it. Marquette, I love it. Grant haven where I live, Muskegon area, I love it. I love Kalamazoo, Battle Creek. I really, to your point, it really can't answer.

E

Ed Clemente 22:06

But I will say one thing on your behalf too, I think there's been an explosion of trails in Michigan that weren't there when I was growing up that I think is really attracting millennials and Gen Z's more than we realize

more than we realize.

**D** Dave Lorenz 22:21

Yeah, people love trails and we've been investing in them as a state for a long time. We are the Trails State, we have more trail mileage than any other state in any kind of trail you can think of for hiking, for mountain biking, a blue water trails, which was what we call rivers now. So you can get out there in kayaks and canoes as well.

**E** Ed Clemente 22:40

As you know, I'm from Down River and you've spent a lot of time down here lately with the I forgot the author.

**D** Dave Lorenz 22:47

The Under The Radar guy [Under teh Radar Guys] Yeah, yeah, we've had a great time.

**E** Ed Clemente 22:50

Down River has a lot of blue trails. Yeah,

**D** Dave Lorenz 22:52

I love that Down River area and I had never really been there very much. But you know, yeah, Wyandotte, you name it, all all those places in that area, very, very cool. And it's like, you know, minutes away from downtown Detroit, take in a ballgame, you know, whatever. And then, you know, head to that area as well.

**E** Ed Clemente 23:09

That's why I live here. Well, as we guessed, we're gonna go pretty fast, Dave. But I want to thank again our guest today Dave Lorenz, Vice President travel Michigan with the MEDC welcome again for doing the show today. And thanks again for being here today.

**D** Dave Lorenz 23:25

Always great to be with you Ed, and I do need to remind you that your trip begins at michigan.org.

**A** Announcer 23:33



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