

Ep.2.35 - James McBryde Podcast

📅 Mon, Oct 03, 2022 8:51AM ⌚ 21:33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, big, area, work, economic development, mention, tribe, city, mount pleasant, isabella county, wood chippers, companies, employees, house, business, clair county, clair, ran, state, bought

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Jim McBryde

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 00:29
Hello, I'm your host today, Ed Clemente, and welcome to the show. And we're fortunate today to have a longtime friend of mine, James McBryde, but we all call him Jim. Welcome to the show, Jim.

J Jim McBryde 00:41
Thanks, Ed. It's great to be with you, good to see you, man.

E Ed Clemente 00:43
Yeah, and you're the President and CEO of Middle Michigan Development Corporation. I know it's a little longer, yes. And so you've been in that job a little while now, but let's, why don't you first tell people kind of what, you know, the responsibility of the organization does.

J Jim McBryde 01:04
Yeah, so it's a typical local economic development organization. We focus on business retention and growth with the local companies here in our area, business attraction, community

development, and more recently, increasingly taking a look at what we can do in the talent area. So I'd like to say that in the title, middle, we're right in the middle of the state and we have represent several counties in this area.

E Ed Clemente 01:33

And, you know, might as well start to plug that you're mentioning which counties you do have?

J Jim McBryde 01:40

Yeah, so well, we were started in Isabella County, which is Mount Pleasant and that was in 1981, and then in 1999, added Clair County to the north. And then just last month, Osceola County, which is west of Clair County, joined our organization. And we're in the final stages of negotiating with Gladwin County, so I can talk about it, they voted to join us. And we're just, you know, dotting the I's and crossing the T's right now on the final agreement, but that they will be joining us very shortly.

E Ed Clemente 02:15

Yeah, that's great. I mean, especially I know, I think you started there, what year again? You said 2020, 2015?

J Jim McBryde 02:23

Yeah, after being at the MEDC for 12 years. I came here in 2015, middle of the year, and just have had a wonderful time here. And, you know, looking forward to a few more years here definitely, before the big retirement.

E Ed Clemente 02:40

Well, hopefully never, I want you to work all the time. But let's say why you're there in the first place, because originally you're not from Michigan.

J Jim McBryde 02:52

Well, I was born in in Santa Monica, California, I moved to Michigan when I was 11. Live with my dad and grew up in East Grand Rapids went to Central in 1968 and graduated in '72 and stayed in the community ever since. And ran for office was a County Commissioner in the 80s and then I ran for State House in the 90s. I served eight years in the House, because I had one term grandfathered in before term limits was passed. And then after that, I worked in state government and as you know, I was at the MEDC for 12 years. That's how you and I got to know each other. And after you already knew my brothers, by the way. Well, you and I got to know each other became great friends when I was at MEDC and you were in the legislature.

E

Ed Clemente 03:42

Yeah, in fact that put a plug in for both your brothers. Brett and Danny. Yeah. Like I played rugby more with Dan. Brett was older, but ya know, it's nice to have a connection with rugby guys always.

J

Jim McBryde 03:59

Oh yea, they talk about you, they talk about you, especially Dan talks about you all the time.

E

Ed Clemente 04:05

And he lives in Canada half the time. [I know.] Um, so you know, with with what, you know, obviously you said you're a County Commissioner for Isabella, but, and this has grown to Clair, why don't you just point out just because, like, what are some of the big hubs I know obviously Mount Pleasant is probably the bigger one than Claire there is those as you see a lot of activity with?

J

Jim McBryde 04:28

So, you know, Mount Pleasant is the big hub here in Isabella County and then in Clair County, we basically have you know, the city of Claire and city of Harrison are the two largest communities. Harrison is the county seat and they're in the north. Clair, City of Clair's right on the south, right on the Isabella border. In fact, a little bit of Clair, City of Claire's actually in Isabella County. Over in Osceola, Reed City would be your bigger city. We actually have a Yoplait plant there with General Mills. And then we have Ventura in Ewart, which is your second biggest city and that's an automotive company with over 1000 employees. We got some, you know, we got some heavy hitters in the area. And then Gladwin, of course, has Saint Gobain, which is a French owned, plastics company, high tech company, which has been growing like gangbusters there in the City of Beaverton. So, now we've got some key companies in the area.

E

Ed Clemente 05:31

I hate to say this, I didn't know Yoplait the yogurts made in Michigan.

J

Jim McBryde 05:34

Yeah. Yoplait Yogurt you've probably bought it. [Oh, yeah. I've eaten a ton.] Yea, it came from Reed City, man.

E

Ed Clemente 05:44

Yeah, well, you know, I went to Ferris. So I knew a lot of those communities when I was going to

Ferris and, and I forgot that the border is super close to [Yes.] And so a lot of people because like, what is it? 131 that goes through?

J Jim McBryde 06:01

Yeah, 131, yep. Goes right by Mecosta and Big Rapids, and then up and it just goes right through Reed City as well.

E Ed Clemente 06:11

And what's the famous hotel again and Claire?

J Jim McBryde 06:13

The Doherty. [Yeah, I've stayed there before, I forgot.] Oh, yeah multi-generations of the Doherty family. Dean Doherty is a good friend of mine, and he and his sister run that, run the hotel. And, you know, they're like, third generation, I think, or fourth even.

E Ed Clemente 06:32

Yeah, and let's, also you do a lot of work, we should mention, with the tribe too, which tribe do you work with?

J Jim McBryde 06:37

Yeah, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. They have a seat on my board. We work closely with them on all kinds of things. They actually, the main location of the tribe, is right here, right outside of Mount Pleasant. They have, as you know, a big operation for huge hotel conference center. They also have a waterpark hotel, which is across the Pickard Road from the main property. And then they also have, in Arenac County, in the Standish area, they also have a second part of the reservation there with a hotel and, and so on. So it's, they've been really, have had a tremendous, tremendously big impact on our local economy and, you know, we appreciate them.

E Ed Clemente 07:26

Is there, do they have their own separate tribe, right? Do they have a chief, or who runs it?

J Jim McBryde 07:31

They do, you know, some some tribes will call the tribal leader, the Tribal Chair, but in the Saginaw Chippewas was it'd be the Chief of the Tribe.

E Ed Clemente 07:41
And is that the person that serves on the board?

J Jim McBryde 07:44
No, its actually Ryan Smith, who is appointed. He's their economic development director guy, and so he sits on our board.

E Ed Clemente 07:52
So they actually even have their own economic development activities, obviously on the reservation too.

J Jim McBryde 07:57
They do, yeah. They work in coordination with us, but you know, but they do have their own economic development Magizi, its called Magizi Economic Development.

E Ed Clemente 08:06
Yeah, that's pretty interesting. Yeah, I mean, you know, I think a lot of times we take for granted, we just see some of the casinos are, there was an Eagle, what's just, I forgot the name of the official conference center for them.

J Jim McBryde 08:23
Oh, that's Soaring Eagle.

E Ed Clemente 08:25
Yeah, Soaring Eagle, sorry about that. Yeah. And so, I mean, you think about that, but they also I interviewed a different tribe in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, and, you know, they do a lot of stuff for their communities, their residents, and all those things, they're very active.

J Jim McBryde 08:39
They're very active and of course, they they've continued the 2%, you know, funding for local government and, and that really, you know, since this is really the biggest casino operation, tribal owned anyway, in the state, I mean, the 2% monies are extensive. And those go to local government, and, you know, have been very helpful over the years with, you know, the buying

new fire trucks and, and different types of things that the municipalities need to keep up to date. And and tribe has been very generous in donating, donating those. So they have a huge impact, like I say, and you know, they've really opened up a lot of other types of business. They have an industrial park that they've put together, right on tribal land there. So we're marketing that at this point. And, you know, one of the things that they're trying to do is, is to diversify a little bit away from the casino. That still is going to be a main driver, but, you know, to expand their business and get into some other areas, and we're trying to help them with that.

A

Announcer 09:47

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E

Ed Clemente 10:03

So also, is there any other companies in your area or any other projects you're sort of, like I always ask folks, when we do these is what do you think about the future trends or things you're trying to do more? Obviously, you mentioned the two new counties, but is there other things you're working on as well?

J

Jim McBryde 10:19

Yeah, well, you know, in some of our bigger businesses, I mean, we have two major wood chipper companies in Isabella County. And if you add the total amount of volume that they produce with these large wood chippers, it's about 60% of the total international production of wood chippers are done with these two companies in in Isabella County. So we're talking about really Morbark, Morbark and Banded Industries, they're both on the growth side. Banded, I'll just mention Banded Industries, they had about 300 employees Ed, when I first started here in 2015, and they're closing out the year here, with about 800 employees. [Wow.] And they are an ESOP, so it's an employee stock ownership program and 100% of the company has been made available in the ESOP, for employees to own a stock or share of the company. And so we love that because, you know, whenever, whenever some of these companies in the area, you know, if they get bought or sold, or you always wonder, are they going to be moved down south, you know, when, when when they're bought out, and when it's an ESOP, of course, that's not going to happen because the employees own it. So we're very happy about that. And their growth has been spectacular. Morbark is also doing very well. We also have two commercial kitchen equipment producers, we have Delfield, which is the larger the two and Unified Brands, again, between those two companies, probably looking at 900 to 1000 employees, between the two of them in a commercial kitchen equipment. So you're talking stainless steel, restaurant equipment, that kind of thing. And then we have an auto supplier, American MITSUBA, which is the is the headquarters for MITSUBA, Japan, and they do parts for Honda and other Japanese makes, but recently, you've taken on contract work for Ford and BMW as well. So that's just, you know, five to name. And I mentioned Saint Gobain and I mentioned General Mills over and Reed City and so on. So we've got some heavy players in the area. And, and a lot of these have

been home, we have, you know, General Mills, obviously not homegrown, or Ventra but, but the five, first five that I mentioned, you know, started here, or we're invested here from Japan. So we are very proud of the fact that a lot of these businesses are homegrown.

E

Ed Clemente 12:54

And I'm gonna ask a city question. But what do wood chippers do? Do they make like pressed wood or plywood I don't know what they do.

J

Jim McBryde 13:01

So what you can do with those is you can like the the bigger ones, a whole tree, you know, if you're if you're wanting to turn, you know, trees into chips, you could feed the whole tree and you know, smaller units might have to break it up into branches and feed it in, you know, to create woodchips. But they've but they've also been used, the city of Detroit bought some of these larger chippers when, you know, Mayor Duggan was doing all that demolition of all those old homes that were you know, not worth keeping. And and what he you know, they they bought some of these, these large units, which can actually separate some of the metals from the wood as you feed sections of the house of the chipper. So you can you can actually clear a lot much quicker when you've got one of those nearby, and you've already pre sorted some of the stuff. So it's really a pretty cool thing.

E

Ed Clemente 14:03

It sounds like you got a lot going on the horizon. [Yeah, great.] And I'm just gonna go backwards a little bit, but we should also mention, you know, when you were the Legislative Liaison, I was a State Rep. at that time. And that's where I got to know you, in fact, you were there I think all six years, I was in the legislature. And so but we were fortunate that we did a lot of the Governor Granholm's economic development bills, myself and Senator Jason Allen. I really think the real message in that was you had a Democratic governor, a Republican Senate, you know, house and the MEDC, and we were able to get through quite a few good packages.

J

Jim McBryde 14:43

Oh, we were. It was an amazing time, I think it was probably one of the most productive times because, you know, we tried very hard not to let economic development become a political football back then. And so you know, I think, to her credit, Governor Granholm at any reasonable request that came her way if it meant economically developing our state, she was on board. And then it was a matter of getting it through the House and the Senate. As you mentioned, Jason Allen, who was Chair of Economic Development Committee at the time, or Commerce Committee, I think they call it. You know, Jason was great, and you are great. And we were able to work together and get stuff through. And yeah, it was a great, it was a great time, kind of a gold era.

E

Ed Clemente 15:31

It was a good and bad time, because that was also 2008, you know, when the economy was really bad, but it actually, through that chaos, I think you create a lot of opportunities and new ways of thinking about trying to get projects done too. [Absolutely.] No, I enjoyed that era, too. We should also mention, I got a couple more serious questions before I get to a serious question. I should mention that you're also a movie star.

J Jim McBryde 15:59

Well, okay, if a blink and you miss it, extra scene in two movies, but the movies are pretty cool. It's Star Wars Episode Two, Attack of the Clones and Star Wars Episode Three, Revenge of the Sith.

E Ed Clemente 16:12

And you're in the restaurant in that one right?

J Jim McBryde 16:14

Yeah. I'm in the diner in episode two and I'm walking up the stairway in episode three, the Opera House scene and Anakin runs right up right up the stairway right next to me. And I don't know if you notice that at the end of the day that I needed to ride back to my hotel and actually shared a cab ride, not a cab ride but you know one of the host rides, with with with Hayden Christiansen, I played Anakin Skywalker. We were talking about, you know, some of his future plans and it was good. We had about a good 10 or 15 minutes and in the cab and it was good, good to get to know him.

E Ed Clemente 16:52

I guarantee you, you just I'll try to put it in Star Wars into your headline, because that'll get us a big bump on downloads. Everyone still loves Star Wars? [I know.] And I'm sure you're a fan as well.

J Jim McBryde 17:04

Yeah, .it's more popular than ever. This new Andor series is great if you haven't checked it out.

E Ed Clemente 17:08

And Mandalorian yeah, it's good stuff. Yeah. Um, so couple serious questions here at the end though. What, if you could go back and talk to your East Grand Rapids high school self, what advice would you give yourself? Because I mean, I'm gonna tell you, as a former legislator, this wasn't my path but I somehow got on it. What would you tell yourself?

J Jim McBryde 17:32

Well, I would tell myself, get out of the science lab. I was hiding in the back, you know, think of Peter Parker that's kind of what I was like in high school. Before he got bitten by the spider, I was just shy, as all get out. Get out of the science lab, you're gonna be running for office someday, but first I would have freaked myself out and then and then study a little bit about what economic development is, because you're gonna end up doing that after that. So that's what I would tell myself to do.

E Ed Clemente 17:59

Yeah, and economic development, we should mention that you still have a ton of friends, including Jen Nelson here. [Yeah.] Michelle Grinnell. Yeah, I mean, you were here 15 years, there's still a lot of people I know that know, you when I talk to folks. And that's real helpful running an economic development organization, because hopefully, you know, there's a lot of issues, you can go to the source quite a bit. And you've always been a good supporter, you know, to try to move Michigan forward. So we do appreciate that always.

J Jim McBryde 18:25

Oh, yeah. You too Ed. I mean, you know, we don't, let's not undersell the role you played when you were in the House. I mean, you and Jason Allen, I mean, it's the combination of you two guys really moved things forward and people need to know that.

E Ed Clemente 18:39

Yeah, I never expect a plaque, but I feel like a lot of things that even I, you know, hear about here at the MEDC, you know, we're built with that foundation of how bad the economy was. And so we're able to take a lot of risks. And I think that opened the doors and you know, it's chaos. It's not always perfect, but it's better than, you know, not doing anything, right? So we did try to come up with some stimulating ideas. So the sort of last question is, obviously it's a little harder for you because you live in a nice area, but where is your favorite spot sort of in Michigan if you go on a family vacation or just a favorite festival, whatever you like?

J Jim McBryde 19:22

Yeah, well, you know, if I don't say Mount Pleasant is my favorite city, I get in trouble, but you know, it is. I mean, I've lived here a long time. But if I'm going on vacation, I would, you know, Kim and I, my wife Kim and I love Frankenmuth, and we also like downtown Detroit, especially to go down and see a Tiger game and maybe hang out at the Ren Cen or, you know, there's so many nice restaurants down there. We love to do that. And we also like to go down to Grand Rapids every once in a while as well. But I would say probably the number one tourist destination for me would be Frankenmuth because we have so much family history there. You know, taking the daughters there and you know, chicken dinners and all that stuff. So we love it.

E Ed Clemente 20:15
I should mention you have four daughters, right?

J Jim McBryde 20:17
I do ya, four daughters. Yes.

E Ed Clemente 20:20
It must been fun growing up. Yeah, by the way, I even know you do come to take your games because you've gone with your brother.

J Jim McBryde 20:27
Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. YYou know, baseball is our sport, we love baseball.

E Ed Clemente 20:32
Yeah. Well, anyway, that's it. I just want to thank you, Jim, again, for taking time to do this today. And just again, our guest today was Jim McBryde. He's president and CEO of the Middle Michigan Development Corporation and I just really want to thank you for doing this today, Jim. You're almost like a MEDC employee, but I know you can't say that to your board. [No, no.] 15 years. it's quite a, that's a long time for a lot of people at the MEDC. Now, we appreciate all the work you did for the state and what you're doing now for the MidMichigan and good luck and all your future endeavors too.

J Jim McBryde 21:10
And you to Ed you to let's let's talk again soon.

E Ed Clemente 21:13
Yeah, we'll catch up. [Okay, good.]

A Announcer 21:17
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