

Ep.37 - Robin Terry

Tue, 11/16 8:47AM 28:39

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

motown, people, barry gordy, music, space, detroit, business, museum, foundation, grandmother, ed, michigan, motown music, important, board, esther, story, expansion, homes, house

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Robin Terry

- 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, my name is Ed Clemente. I'm your host today and I want to welcome everybody to the listeners, but this is one show I'm very excited about. It's part of my upbringing as well. But we have Robin Terry, Chairwoman and CEO of the Motown Museum. Welcome to the show, Robin.
- R** Robin Terry 00:45
Well thanks Ed, I'm excited to be here.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:47
Not as excited as I am. Well, I know that, you know, I do a lot and just warm it up a little bit. But I travel a lot around the world. And the two things that always get brought up when I say I'm from the Detroit areas is, you know, automotive and Motown Meum. And a little later during the show, I'll tell you a little story I heard about Motown when I traveled. But I think that everyone knows what the museum is. But why don't you sort of give us sort of what you tell people if they've never heard about the Motown Museum?
- R** Robin Terry 01:23
Sure. So you know, the Motown Museum, what you're describing about traveling around the world, and then people recognizing Detroit, it being synonymous with Motown. When you visit Motown Museum in

When people recognizing Detroit, it being synonymous with Motown. When you visit Motown Museum in Detroit, it's exactly what you see. You see people from all over the world who make the pilgrimage to this little house in Detroit on West Grand Boulevard, that Barry Gordy, the founder of Motown. This was where that young entrepreneur songwriter started, you know, what we know today as Motown what was known as the sound of young America. It's where musical greats like Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson, Temptations, Four Tops, Supremes, the Jackson Five, Marvin Gaye, so many others. It's the little house where they all got their start. And so this house is beloved by, you know, Motown fans and music fans and historians, music historians all over the world, and recognized for all the, you know, the joy and the positive energy that it's put in the world, you know, for well over 60 years.

E

Ed Clemente 02:34

Yeah, in fact, I'll get this out of the way, but I'm a Temptations person. And for me, it's a Ball of Confusion, because I was around that age when all was confusing to me, too. And you know that that really related to me a lot that song.

R

Robin Terry 02:50

Well Ed, I can't tell you at least six feet tall? [No.] You have to be that was the criteria to be a Temptation. You had to be at least six feet tall. Eddie Kendricks was six

E

Ed Clemente 03:02

Eddie Kendricks was six feet tall?

R

Robin Terry 03:04

Probably didn't look like it on the screen.

E

Ed Clemente 03:07

He didn't. Um, so anyway, I that's a good overview of kind of what it is. And, you know, and I do sometimes the slow rolls, you know, in Detroit, I know, whenever I take people from either other states or other parts of Michigan, to come, if I do a bike ride, or I do a drive around, I was stopped by there, we get pictures in the front and, you know, in the house is there. And it's just, it's just like a big part of the experience for anybody. I'm on a international board. And I bring international guests all the time to the Motown museum, you know, and we try to coordinate with the times but sometimes, but usually they just want to get a shot in front of the place a lot of times. So it's that kind of historical thing.

R

Robin Terry 03:51

That is very common. That's very common here. And I just want to let me just say this for for listeners who may not be familiar at all with the space. So, in addition to that little blue and white house, that's Hitsville USA, that house has the original Motown recording studio on it. So when you attach to it, so when you when you hear about you know why people come from all over the globe, they really want to stand in that

studio, and stand in the footsteps of that those musical greats, because there's nowhere else in the world. This is where Motown recorded all of their their greatest hits from 1959 to 1972. So when you think of all your Motown favorites, chances are they were they were recorded right in that studio. And you just mentioned it Ed, you know Motown is one of the greatest enterprise stories and and business startup stories that you know we have in American music history, because it starts in that one little blue and white house called Hitsville. And then when they outgrew it, Barry Gordy would buy the next available house on the block. And then the next and the next until you had this whole music enterprise made out of eight neighborhood homes in Detroit. And so that's the experience people come here to, to really witness its not only the music and what was the foundation of this music that just move the world, but also, you know, what is this inner prize that grew out of little houses? In Detroit?

E

Ed Clemente 05:28

Yeah. And you mentioned Barry Gordy. And I should give full disclosure that he is your great uncle. Is that correct? [Yeah.] And your grandma, who I've met a few times, Esther, she, that's your direct lineage kind of with her too, right. Esther ran the museum right for quite a while.

R

Robin Terry 05:48

Absolutely. My grandmother founded the museum in 1985. And, you know, my short story is I lost my mother to breast cancer when she was 39. I was 15. And I had the, you know, within that sadness, I had the great fortune to then be raised by both my grandmother's and I lived with Esther Gordie Edwards, who I called her mama Esther, but that's who I lived with from age 15 on so she's, she's had tremendous, tremendous influence on my life.

E

Ed Clemente 06:25

Yeah. And I should mention also, but you were a tour guide at a young age too for the museum weren't you?

R

Robin Terry 06:30

You couldn't be my grandmother's grandchild without her putting you to work. That's the deal.

E

Ed Clemente 06:38

So you've got boots on the ground experience, at a pretty young age, I would imagine.

R

Robin Terry 06:45

Well, my grandmother was such a pioneer in the business space, even, you know, before her involvement with Motown. You know, with Motown, she was she was artist development. She got artists, music, Motown music played internationally, she ran all of the departments before there was somebody else there to do it. She even ran the art department for a period of time, and was legal guardian to a lot of the acts like Stevie

Wonder, and others who are under age. So at Motown, she played a really critical role in business. But she was able to do that because of all of her eight siblings, Barry Gordy included, she was the only one to go to college. And then she just was such a pioneer, the first African American Jury Commissioner, one of the first two women to serve on a national bank board. She was one of the owners of the Detroit Wheels. I don't know if you remember that sports team?

E Ed Clemente 07:47

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, they played up at the Silverdome, or did they play, I forget where they played.

R Robin Terry 07:52

And so I'm like, I can't tell you much more about them. But I can tell you my grandmother was a 4' 10" giant. And so being raised by her, she just required certain things of you. And, you know, being able to do every job from cleaning up floors to, you know, taking people on tours at the museum that just came with it that just came with it.

E Ed Clemente 08:18

Yeah, I grew up in a family restaurant. I know exactly the story.

R Robin Terry 08:21

Yeah. There's no job too big for family members.

E Ed Clemente 08:24

I had to clean toilets before I could go to high school, I know. So, you know, let's say you kind of dovetailed into this a little bit. But when you talk about the buildings, but you've got this fantastic master plan, and I just I think you're calling it Hitsville Next or am I wrong on that?

R Robin Terry 08:46

Hitsville Next is a component, of the Motown Museum expansion.

E Ed Clemente 08:50

Why don't you sort of give people the broad strokes of what this is?

R Robin Terry 08:53

So, thank you for that question. Because I couldn't be more excited about this, my grandmother, so I like to describe the Motown Museum expansion and Hitsville Next, and I'll explain what that is this way. You

know, from my grandmother, founding Motown Museum, was really about preserving that history, preserving its birthplace, which is that Hitsville, USA home, but more, more equally as important. She wanted to make sure that history books would always properly recognize the story of Motown and the contributions that those individuals who are part of Motown the contributions they made to the to music, to culture, to our society, she wanted to make sure that that foundation was there. So for her, it didn't really matter that, you know, that lived outside those four walls. She just wanted people to come there and witness and say, there's evidence that this did happen. So what we are doing with the expansion of Motown Museum is really building on the foundation that Esther Gordy Edwards set. And we're saying when people come to that home, and they witness that history that was made, how do we then activate their inspiration. So we don't want them to just come take a tour and go away inspired, even though that works? How do we give them a whole community to plug into and then elevate their own potential, right, so create change in the world, because not only are they inspired by Motown story, they have a community to activate, to activate that inspiration. And then they go out and do something that's kind of the premise. And so with the expansion, we have been able to not only secure several of those original Motown homes, that line West Grand Boulevard, but we've been able to acquire a half a block behind us. And so what the campus tells, the story the campus tells, is the humble beginnings of Motown through these homes, and yet, how enterprising that was, but then you have new construction that rises behind that, that says the story didn't end in those original homes. And so whether you are there for the authentic Hitsville tour that takes you back in time, or you you take classes, master classes, camps in Hitsville Next, that's the foundation of that space. Or you simply come to tour, the new expansion space, which is full of exhibits. And if you're a music lover, you can sit and just go deep dive on the Funk Brothers or the Dante's or Temptations. All of that you will have there, in addition to being able to, you know, enjoy a theater and a cafe with live music every night, showcasing local groups, it really is going to be a magical campus for the Motown fan in particular, but music fans, you know, just just as much.

E

Ed Clemente 12:06

Yeah, I mean, the part that probably excites me the most is the recording ability for youth, right. And because, you know, I think that's what your uncle your great uncle saw was, there's a lot of kids singing on street corners back in the day. And he was able to capture that and sort of gave it a style, a uniform, and, you know, I remember reading about all the training they would do, to have these kids, actually who were streetwise have to learn how to act in front of large public audiences, and all those kinds of things.

R

Robin Terry 12:40

I was just with Smokey Robinson recently. And he tells the story often that there's talent in every community, there's no shortage of talent. What was unique about Motown was that they had Barry Gordy. And they had Hitsville. So there was a visionary there, but there was also a place. And that place was magnetic because if you wanted to be around music makers, or you wanted to be a music maker, you had a place to gravitate to. And what we are creating, recreating in this campus expansion and in Hitsville, next, in particular, is another one of those magnetic spaces, where not only music makers, but people young and old, who are interested in enterprise have a place to go to be around other people who are like minded.

E

Ed Clemente 13:40

Yeah, why don't you, I, you know, this is because we're the MEDC, why don't you explain it. I think that entrepreneurship angle, whether you're going to be you know, you don't have to actually be the artist, but

you might be the business side of it. You kind of want to explain a little bit of that. I think that that's critical to anyone who's thinking about a career like this.

R

Robin Terry 14:00

Absolutely. So everything that we do is really, it's driving people down one of two tracks. It's either artists development, or it's entrepreneurial development. And we talked about that, Motown is though, it's those two things, right? It was, as much as it was music, it was enterprise. And so it's important for us to lift that up, particularly for young people of color who need examples of what business excellence represents, what creating opportunity represents in the business space, and quite frankly, you know, one of the fastest dying professions and a good friend who is a very seasoned entrepreneur said this, he said, one of the fastest growing professions is the the entrepreneur, the black entrepreneur. And so, not that our programs our programs are like Motown music. They're for everybody. But it is important to us to lift up these stories so that, you know, young folks can see it and see what the possibilities are when given the opportunity. And so through our entrepreneurial workshops, camps, masterclasses, we not only connect students with folks in the entrepreneurial space, to help them develop their own ideas. But we also give them a physical space through Hitsville Next, to pop up their own businesses and experience what it's like to, to be in business for yourself. So it's an exciting journey that we're on, you know that the super sweet spot is if you're in music, and you're learning to be a business person, because that is Motown.

A

Announcer 15:54

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E

Ed Clemente 16:11

Well, I think you articulated that a little bit earlier, when you just mentioned your grandmother, and as well as your great uncle, about how a lot of the talent that was coming in had no consumer economics background, and they needed not just like a grandparent, but they needed a mentor, as well as a coach and a role model, like everything kind of rolled into one or two positions.

R

Robin Terry 16:34

Nope Ed, that is absolutely right. And we don't believe in you know, we create platforms for the emerging artist. And and so all of our programs are about that right there cultivating that artists, if it's not a purely entrepreneurial track, it's cultivating that artists and creating platforms to showcase their talent. We can't do that without also teaching the business of music. And quite frankly, the character, and the values and the philosophies, many of them which come straight out of Motown that help you sustain careers, because it's one thing I was asked, you know, even our youngest campers, I say, Do you want to be popular? Do you want to be iconic? What's the goal? Motown is made up of iconic music makers, and that takes a level of character, and, and and values system that allows you to achieve success, and then stay there. And so that's, you know, it's more than just music camps, or, you know, or entrepreneurial camps.

E

Ed Clemente 17:42

Well look at the platform you and I are talking to each other on today, right? Podcasting. The advantage, I think of a lot of recording nowadays has really morphed into, you know, digitization, right, and the ability for someone to have tech transfer of what you might learn recording could also be designing websites, or could be designing, you know, Tic Tok or and everything else, right? It's there's a lot of other instrumentation and technology involved in all types of our industry nowadays.

R

Robin Terry 18:12

And understanding that those are also career pathways, right, that may also be connected to music, every young person or older person who you know, believes that they want to be a singer or singer songwriter or musician may not be that may not be their destiny, right? But there are hundreds of sustainable career pathways that exist in the music space that, you know, that we expose, and we want to expose them to in case that particular A plan doesn't work. You know, you may discover you have a gift for songwriting. But you can sell your music, again, enterprise being, you know, equally a part of the journey, you can sell those songs to a singer, somebody who is very successful in that space. So your journey doesn't end it's just a slightly different career pathway.

E

Ed Clemente 19:11

Right? And we're in the gig economy. So everybody's, you know, got a lot of hats to wear and what one you fall in love with, you don't always know. But it's good to have that variety to know the options. And that's what you're going to be building foundations for a lot of these, I say kids, but probably younger people in general, but you know, could even be mid career people that want to get into digitization of music, you never know what it's gonna be. [Exactly.] Yeah. So I know you also have a performing arts theater that's going to be in there too. Is that one of the goals as well?

R

Robin Terry 19:41

Yes, Ford Motor Company, actually named our theater and the theater will serve many purposes. It will, it will really be the space that during the day orients our visitors but in the evening turns into an intimate concert performance space. We can show films, do talks, it really becomes an asset for the community to take advantage of, in the, you know, in the evenings.

E

Ed Clemente 20:09

And then I know you did an announcement not too long ago for the plaza, as like the sort of welcoming space to the, like the old school in the front, and then the new school in the back kind of thing, right?

R

Robin Terry 20:22

I am probably I can't say I'm most excited about the plaza, because I get excited about every phase of this expansion, because with every phase, we're closer and closer to completion, but the plaza, you said it earlier, people gravitate to this house, whether it's two o'clock in the morning, you can come here and there people taking pictures outside, it was important to us that the community have a space, they don't

pay to come to that space, but a space, they can come and just revel in, you know, Motown Music, pop up performances, just have a space to commune and just hang out. That was equally as important to us like the it's kind of the big front porch of the entire development. So I'm excited to see that come on board.

E

Ed Clemente 21:12

And I'm going to come back to the project here in a few minutes. But I also want to give you this opportunity to maybe say, like, if you were if you could go back and talk to yourself when you're in high school, or maybe a kid today, or even someone that's mid career, what kind of career advice would you give people for, you know, if you could say back, and these are the three things I should have told myself and I would have done kind of thing,

R

Robin Terry 21:37

I would actually pass along some wisdom that my grandmother told me when I was very young, and she said, chase your passion, not dollars. If you chase your passion and not dollars, the dollars will come. And I just believe that, I tell that to my own children. You know, tap into what you would do if nobody gave you a dollar, and it will bear fruit for you.

E

Ed Clemente 22:12

Right? Look at all those Motown budding Motown people before the end, here was a Motown and they were singing on the corner, a lot of them. And they didn't know where it was. But that was their passion. But it also feeds your narrative, again, learning skills, if you're passionate about it, you know, and then that will develop into something else hopefully that will pay off, you know, for you in the long run.

R

Robin Terry 22:35

And it may even lead you down another path where you discover more, you know, I certainly discovered many new things about myself on this journey. But you couldn't stay committed to a project like this one, if you weren't passionate about it. And I think that people ask all the time, like, how are you doing it? How are you? And it's because I believe so deeply in it and what it's going to mean to the next generation and the generation after that. And I believe it's critical to have this sort of symbolism of Motown and what it represents, even in the way that it unites people and has united people who are very different, of all colors and races and religious backgrounds. We need that. And I know that's important, you know, to our cultural landscape. And so I fight for that

E

Ed Clemente 23:33

Last couple things um, I know the project, I think you're trying to raise \$55 million. And I know you're getting there, but and I know it's going to be an expansion of 50,000 feet is what you're looking at. But you know, I know those things change, because I've been excited that you guys have always hoping something like this would happen to Detroit, but also for Michigan, you know, this is a Michigan podcast. And I think we're so fortunate that Motown's in our state period. Yeah. But secondly, I think it's good for America too I mean, to me, everywhere I travel, even in the US, I was gonna tell you the one story when I was in, I think I

was in Ecuador. And this kid was from Mexico City, he came up to me. And he was like only 11 years old. It's only a couple years ago, maybe even nine. All he wanted to talk to me. It was about every Motown artist. And he did all his homework just online. I mean, he was just fixated on Marvin Gaye and like, whoever it was, Stevie Wonder, the Supremes or whatever, you know, and it just blew me away that a nine year old boy was so fixated on something it was like 70 or 60 years ago whenever it was, maybe 40 years ago, but but it just, I think that that's sort of the impact. So where can people go to donate? You know, I know that you're trying to do a I don't think it's called a Kickstarter but I know you're trying to raise the funds, but what website or something you would direct people to if they want to be a chunk of this.

R

Robin Terry 25:06

So Ed, it's really easy. Listeners can go to motownmuseum.org, which is our website, and they can donate there, they can also become members there. What I would also encourage your listeners to do is if they are, you know, if they're interested in, you know, being among the builders of this project, the the lead donors, we have been really fortunate to have some really wonderful partners who believe in the mission of the organization.

E

Ed Clemente 25:44

Why don't you mention them real quick, some of your bigger ones if you like.

R

Robin Terry 25:46

Oh my God, the list goes on and on, to name a few of them just because I do think it's so important. I've already mentioned like Ford Motor Company, and UAW Ford, who really, and I would also put the Davidson Foundation in that grouping, because they were the very first to come on board. And that meant everything to us. And since then, we've had wonderful, you know, other partners who have joined us significantly, the Balmer Group, you know, came on board in the midst of a pandemic, the Kellogg Foundation, Kresge Foundation, the Herb Foundation, that just so many, Fisher Foundation invested in our programs. Out of Chicago, we have John Rogers with Ariel Investments who came on board, Barry Gordy, our largest individual donor and Universal Music Group, Motown Records, Dr. Bill Picard, entrepreneurs.

E

Ed Clemente 26:50

I've interviewed him on the podcast, I know Bill.

R

Robin Terry 26:52

He's just incredible. I mean, there's just been so much the Dressner Foundation, and I know I said, I wouldn't go on and on and on. But we are so grateful for our partners because they have made the difference. A project like this in a lot of ways. It reminds me of Motown, it's like the thing that wasn't supposed to happen. But it did.

E

Ed Clemente 27:14

Yeah, well, we should just do a podcast someday on all your foundations, all the people that helped make this possible. But I know you got a ways to go. And the very last question for you, Robin, is, what's your favorite spot or thing to do in Michigan.

R

Robin Terry 27:28

So other than hang out in Motown, I am a huge, huge fan of the west side of the state. And I spend a lot of time on the west side of the state and enjoying our lakes and taking in our, fall is my favorite season. So watching the the leaves change color like that is absolutely my favorite thing about this state.

E

Ed Clemente 27:53

Well, you know, once again, it's been a pleasure Robin Terry, Chairwoman and CEO of Motown Museum. You sound like you're in an excellent path, and you've got enough enthusiasm. I think you'll get this done no problem. And I look forward to seeing a bit once again. Thank you again, Robin, for being a guest today.

R

Robin Terry 28:11

Thank you for having me Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 28:13

Oh, its been my pleasure. Trust me. I know it has. So anyway, well, thank you again.

A

Announcer 28:21

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