

Ep.42 - Chris MacInnes

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Chris MacInnes



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

Hello, I'm Ed Clemente, your host today and we're very fortunate to have Chris MacInnes, she is the President of Crystal Enterprises, Inc. And why don't you tell us exactly, and welcome to the show, Chris, first, once you tell us what that is.



Chris MacInnes 00:43

Okay, and Ed thank you so much for the opportunity to be here. And to tell you a little bit about our story tell you a little bit about Crystal Mountain. Just as background, Crystal Mountain's of family-owned four-season resort. We're about 28 miles southwest of Traverse City, and we're on a lot of land. We're at about 1500 contiguous acres. Over time, this kind of sleepy resort community has evolved. And they're now about 450 residences here. And about 50 families make Crystal their primary residence. So we're not only just a place to play and recreate, which is fantastic, but we're also a place to call home. And as they say, live where you love to play. A little bit of background a little bit more about Crystal, and I'm happy to share a little bit more about me if you're you know, in the in the context. But in terms of Crystal, we host about 300,000 visitors annually. And at any one time, we could have about 1000, several 1000 people on our campus, and the what are the things to do and that's really our hallmark. They're lots of facilities and activities. We started out focusing on downhill and cross country skiing, and that's still our major, our major activity. We have two beautiful championship golf courses, lodging, we can sleep up to about 1800 people, again, dining, some beautiful dining facility, shopping,

the Crystal Spa and Fitness Center is one of my favorite places to to relax. We have an alpine slide. One of the things that really transformed Crystal in terms of summer was building an outdoor water playground. We also have about a 33,000 foot conference center, and are very busy. COVID is sort of affected that of course, but we, again, got were busy this fall, hosting meetings and conferences, and we have a robust resort development operation. And we we're proud to be home of Michigan Legacy Art Park. So that's kind of the big the overview.

E

Ed Clemente 03:17

Right, and we'll get into some of those things in a few more questions. But I know that you even told me with COVID, or at least you had a good season. You know, it sounded like just last year, you know, not too long ago, right?

C

Chris MacInnes 03:34

You know, it was crazy, and we were so grateful. But we had a record season last year. And you know, we observed all the protocols, safety protocols, as did the entire the entire ski industry. Where we're all pretty aligned in what we did. And really our governor, Governor Whitmer, was terrific in terms of understanding that it was healthy for people, healthy and safe, for people to get outside and recreate to get fresh air. We did enforce masking in the lift lines, but we didn't enforce masking when you're actually coming down. What happened, which we hadn't anticipated, we had no idea this would happen. But we're grateful that it did. Because people were working remotely and learning remotely, families, you know, families could get out of the house, come up, the kids could still do their Zoom classes. And again, people could do whatever they needed to do workwise and they could either ski the morning or the afternoon or whatever. So not only were we busy on the weekends, but we were also busy midweek and we were busy with so many families. And I want to say that the families were so grateful to be able to come together in a safe environment and also a very healthy environment. So it was the best, it was a record season for us, which we never would have anticipated.

E

Ed Clemente 05:08

Yeah, it was a interesting year for everybody. And, and I think that's downplaying it somewhat, but you sort o,f you grew up in Benzie County, but, you know, I think you've got an interesting story because you've, you've lived on both the East Coast who went to school on the East Coast, right. And then you lived, you and your husband, lived on the West Coast, too. Right?

C

Chris MacInnes 05:30

Right, right. I've covered the East, West, and center. But yes, I'm originally from Michigan. I'm originally from Benzie County, which, I will say, is the smallest landmass county in Michigan. And my parents, you know, both my parents and my grandparents came to Northern Michigan, because of the lifestyle. My grandparents started orchards, this was in the early 1900s, and then my parents moved to Northern Michigan. My mother was raised here, my father was from Illinois. But again, they moved here because of the lifestyle. They wanted to raise their family in this beautiful environment. They wanted us to have the opportunity to enjoy the gorgeous

water, to ski to, again, hike, bike, be on the rivers, and certainly that was a very important part of our life. Probably the piece that stuck the most with me was skiing. And that has been really a theme in terms of most that's, that's kind of continued throughout my life. It determined where I was going to go to college, it needed to be co-ed, it needed to have a ski team and there needed to be a training hill nearby. So I was fortunate to attend and graduate from St. Lawrence University. As part of my St. Lawrence experience, I was able to spend some time, actually spend a year in Austria, and I lived in Vienna, but I spent a lot of time in the Alps. So not only did I learn some German, but I also learned a lot about the Alps. And this really led me to want to want to be in the ski business, make this a career and I thought what better way to do it than to speak German, which of course, much of the ski business is that at that point was German, Germanic-based. And, you know, I could speak German and I also had this passion for skiing. Well, I got 50% of it, right. I was hired in the ski business, but it was for a Japanese ski company so I knew for used my German.

E Ed Clemente 07:52

You worked for Yamaha, right?

C Chris MacInnes 07:54

I worked for Yamaha International in the sporting goods division. It was, it was a it was a fantastic job. Just fantastic.

E Ed Clemente 08:05

Sounds like it. You were in the Midwest base back then. Or were you..

C Chris MacInnes 08:09

I started out in the Midwest and then they moved me to to the East Coast and I briefly lived in New York City. That was quite an experience. And then I moved up to North Jersey, which I very much enjoyed it. And then eventually, you know, eventually, I moved to the West Coast.

E Ed Clemente 08:34

Yeah, no, you've had you've lived around all of America. That's for sure. Did, now you and your husband both, but I know you specifically, you're on the MEDC Executive Committee too, right? [That's correct.] And you're I know you're on some other boards, like tourism boards, I'm sure. What else are you on? So, I think you're probably on a lot.

C Chris MacInnes 08:57

Well right, let's talk about right now because it's kind of fun. There are a couple a couple of boards that I'm really, really enjoyed and I think it ties nicely with some of the work that we do

on the the MEDC Executive Committee. One of the boards, and this is really an advisory council that I work on is is the Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council. And this kind of supports the Office of Outdoor Recreation industries, which is run by Brad Garmin. And the Office of Outdoor Recreation Industries is a terrific investment on the part of the state, to not only I think promote our tourism, outdoor recreation, the tourism piece, but also the maker piece. Michigan is a maker state and we have the opportunity to be a leader in making products for outdoor recreation, and in fact, we already are engaged. Two really good examples, one would be Shaggy's skis, which are, I'm not sure where Shaggy's skis are made, but they're certainly, you certainly see him all over, certainly all over North America. And another which is just down the road, so in Midland is SMI Snow Makers International, and they would be one of the largest makers of snowmaking equipment in the world. So the Office of Outdoor Recreation Industries is, you know, again to, to focus on outdoor recreation as an opportunity for economic development. And what I really like about this Office is is a partnership between MEDC and the economic development piece, and Department of Natural Resources, which, of course, is the stewardship and the land-use piece. So, Brad does a very, very nice job of not only connecting some of the different elements of outdoor recreation in Michigan, but also the leaders in outdoor recreation throughout the state, or excuse me, throughout the throughout the country. So I think this is, this is a cool, it's a cool factor piece and it's a good image for Michigan, as well as an opportunity for economic development. Another board that I serve on is called the Iron Belle Trail Foundation. And the goal of the Iron Belle, Ed I don't know if you're familiar with this, but it's it, you know, as we would say, it's a BHAG, big, hairy, audacious goal, developing you know, a trail from Iron Bell, from Belle Isle all the way to Ironwood. So it's 2000 miles, and that now is the spine. And what's happening is there are different trail systems throughout Michigan that are now being developed to link to that spine. And again, I think this speaks to Michigan, to its outdoor natural assets and it it also speaks to connecting Michigan. So that's, that's a board that I'm active on and excited about. And I also am serving on the Traverse City Tourism, the CVB, the Traverse City Tourism Board, which again does an exceptional job of telling our story regionally and is recognized as one of the top Convention and Visitor Bureaus in the United States. So hopefully that addresses a couple of them Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 12:50

Well, I think you were also President, weren't you chairperson for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce too, right?

C

Chris MacInnes 12:56

Oh, that was a good you say that was once upon a time. But yes, I was it it was a great honor to to chair the chamber. I was actually the first woman to chair the chamber, Ed, And so so add that to that to that distinction. And I also chair the Michigan Travel Commission, and I went through it. Yes, yes. And I thoroughly thoroughly enjoyed doing so. And I think we did I think we did some good work.

E

Ed Clemente 13:28

Well, one thing I will help you out with Shaggy's is actually made in Boyne City. So it's not too far from you, have the crack research team at the MEDC pointed that out to me.

A**Announcer 13:41**

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E**Ed Clemente 13:58**

I want to talk a little bit about, and this ties into what you were just on the one board, but your Legacy Park where it's sort of art and nature combined.

C**Chris MacInnes 14:07**

Yes, absolutely. So this was founded by David Barr, so an internationally recognized Michigan artist and it was founded in 1995. And this was a dream of his to figure out how to put a sculpture and really construction in which sculpture, is in a very natural setting. We were extremely fortunate, I'm going to say it was serendipity, that kind of our Crystal Mountain and Michigan Legacy came together and we lease for \$1 a year 30 acres of really pristine land within right in the heart of Crystal Mountain. And there's a six kilometer trail system where the sculpture is located. And each sculpture, at this point there are 55 sculptures in the park and each one tells a story that connects Michigan's art, history and nature. When we talked about the park, I think it's a really, it's a great example of a of a not for profit and nonprofit, and a for profit organization coming together and sharing their resources. And it speaks to the same, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We very much wanted to have sculpture on our campus here at Crystal, but we needed to buy sewer pumps. And Art park wanted a home and not everybody wanted, you know, wanted to give them a home wanted to welcome them in, but the the stars align, and this was in 1995 and it continues to be something that is very precious for both of us.

E**Ed Clemente 16:14**

And you know, ever since you had talked to you about this. I've been telling everybody, they should go see it now. So, I'm excited when I get a chance to go up there and check it out myself. I also, you know, I think one thing too, is, you're really unique, I think in that you really are a four season resort. There's not a lot of those think that can you know, you know, not all of Michigan can do that. So you've really figured out how to that must have been a science just to figure that out too.

C**Chris MacInnes 16:47**

You know, it's interesting, we focus focused on that, that has been kind of a strategic goal of ours to round out and we actually have about the same number of employees in summer as we have in in winter. When we look at deploying capital, you can in the resort business, you kind of do it two ways you could say I'm going to buy we may invest in additional resorts, or you can say we're going to invest all our eggs, all our pretty scarce capital in one place, but try to

create a more diversified portfolio. And that's exactly what we've done. So, you know, again, our focus is winter sports skiing, downhill, nordic, and all the fun stuff that goes with winter. Summer, we're a summer playground a mecca and certainly golf is part of that, but all the watersports. Our goal here is again to be the base camp for enjoying the wonderful Northern Michigan playground. But then in spring and fall, again, we focus on our conference business. And we built a significant facility, the Crystal Center for specific to host meetings and conferences, and we did that strategically, because we wanted to round out the season. So we've been able to do so. So, you know, one other thing I would add there is Michigan Legacy Art Park is a wonderful asset and venue place to be in all seasons. And it's always different. It's different. The fall is different. The summer is different, the winter, and spring is even more glorious, but that's a good example.

E

Ed Clemente 18:36

Yeah, no, it's I find that really unique considering, you know, this is going to tie into your next question. And maybe I got one more after that. But what do you predict are some of the disruptors in sort of future things because Michigan is becoming more attractive year round, right? Okay. And so how do you think that's gonna be an opportunity or a disadvantage? Or disruptor? You think in the future?

C

Chris MacInnes 19:03

Well, you know, it's a good question, and I kind of I've, I've sort of organized I've thought about these future trends a little bit. And what one of the one of the things that what are we doing right now? And what are we doing mid-term? And maybe where, what's what's the long term? Right now, we're very aware that the the earth is heating up, okay. And this means more severe rain events, and we're putting more pipe in the ground. Specifically, we're putting a 24 inch pipe that runs about a quarter of a mile to take water away from our core in our core area infrastructure. And, again, that's a project that that started yesterday and it's in a specific response to climate change, because the atmosphere is heating up, there's more, it retains more water. So when it rains, it rains harder. Mid-term, the trends were seeing, and we began to see that, you know, again with the pandemic, but we think that this is sustainable, is that there is more demand for safe, healthy outdoor recreation. People that hadn't been doing it, the surveys indicate that they're going to continue to do it. And also we're continuing to invest in our campus and growing that campus, we have some new developments on the board, on the drawing board right now, based on this demand. What else we're seeing, and I think this is very exciting, is clinically, there's a better understanding, we've kind of known it intuitively, but there's a better understanding of the health benefits of being outdoors, or being outdoors in nature of exercising outdoors in nature, and exercising with family and friends. Exercising, you know, it's so that it's a social, it's a social occasion, or a social experience. So we think that that's, that's certainly good for our business, because we've got the right we're the right place to do that. But we think it's also really good for society. Long term, we really believe that Michigan's in the sweet spot. You know what, as a Michigander, I think one of the things we tend to do is we tend to be pretty humble about what, what, where we stand in the world. But a study, Ed, I think you're familiar with this, a study that was done by the Grozier Group. And it was done, I think in about 2015, 2014, but it looked at what are the most sustainable cities and resilient cities in the world, not just in North America, but in the world. And the Grozier Group is one of the world's oldest and most respected property managers. But the three most

sustainable cities I think, and resilient cities are in Canada, go figure, but Detroit ranks number 15th in the world as the most resilient city. And I think it's important that and I'll just back up here. Number 14, is New York City. And number or excuse me, number, yeah, I think number 14 is New York City and number 16 is San Francisco. And I'm not sure that we as Michiganders understand how blessed we are. You know, we are surrounded by 20% of the world's freshwater, 50% of our landmass is covered by forests, which are becoming ever more precious. We have the second most diverse crop base in the United States. And I think that our growing seasons, thanks to global warming, are actually going to extend and then we have this incredible four season outdoor recreation, campus or playground, call it what you will. And this is an economic driver, as well as contributing to quality of life.

E

Ed Clemente 23:30

Yeah, especially with that four seasons, you actually have something for families that really dovetail into your whole plan that you can come up as adults with families as people progress throughout every stage of life. Yeah. So the last question, I'm afraid to hear your answer. But what's your favorite place in Michigan? I don't blame if you pick where I think.

C

Chris MacInnes 24:00

Yeah, I'm pretty precious about Crystal Mountain. I'm pretty precious, I'm gonna say about Benzie County. It starts out that it's home, but it hasn't always been home. You know, my husband and I moved back here from California in 1985. We chose to make this place our home as well as our destiny just as my parents did, and at some level so did my grandparents who moved here from Pennsylvania. We live in Beulah. We live on the bluff overlooking Crystal Lake. And every day we are so grateful for the beautiful place in which we live. Then we're also grateful for the wonderful people that are are our friends and family?

E

Ed Clemente 25:01

Yeah, obviously a lot of your employees that probably have been with you a long time too, I'm sure of it. And that's probably part of your sustainable plan as well, I would guess.

C

Chris MacInnes 25:11

Yes, indeed.

E

Ed Clemente 25:12

Well, that was a perfect answer. And I hope you keep thinking toward the future and stay in positions of leadership like you are. Once again, our guest was Chris MacInnes. She's the President of Crystal Enterprises, Inc. Thanks again, Chris, for taking time to do this today.

C

Chris MacInnes 25:20



CHRIS MACINNES 25:29

Well, Ed, thank you so much. It was fun chatting with you. And I hope we're going to take a walk in Michigan Legacy Art Park



Ed Clemente 25:35

Six kilometers. Yes.



Chris MacInnes 25:37

You can do it.



Ed Clemente 25:43

But anyway, thanks again. We appreciate you doing this, Chris.



Chris MacInnes 25:46

Thanks.



Announcer 25:47

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