

Ep.2.27 - Natalie King

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Natalie King

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 welcome to the show. We're very fortunate to have our guest today Natalie King, she's Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Dunamis, which is the Clean Energy Partners. And I think you're gonna probably re-pronounce how I said it, but we will, we'll go from there, but thank you very much for being on the show today Natalie.

N Natalie King 00:52

Thank you. Thank you. Ed. Thank you so much. And Dunamis, Clean Energy Partners. But don't worry, you did much better than then some. Dunamis, etc, You know, it just it's just a unique name. So sometimes it takes a moment.

E Ed Clemente 01:10

Why don't you exactly say what the name/s from because I think that's going to clarify it?

N Natalie King 01:14

Yeah. Dunamis is the Greek word for power. And it means like a dynamic power, a power that is

limitless energy. In religious sects, it's known as a God power, so it's infinite power. And it really is something that I wanted to name the company based upon what I wanted the company to represent, which is like limitless power, we're not limited to anything that we can accomplish.

E Ed Clemente 01:43

It probably reflects your energy level, too, I would imagine as well, [I think so.] Looking at your bio, doesn't surprise me. So why don't you, because it's it's not you know, it's hard to say what just your title does, or your company. Why don't you explain to people when you meet them brand new with what you do, or what your company does.

N Natalie King 02:04

I tell people that we are an energy firm. You know, when I started Dunamis, we started it as a company that provided energy management services, energy auditing services for commercial and industrial properties. And we essentially go into your building and make it the most efficient, so that you can run your operations by being green and environmentally conscious, but also in reducing your operational costs and your bottom line by integrating energy efficiency solutions that cut your energy costs.

E Ed Clemente 02:40

And I mean, you've got a lot of like credentials thought to be in this field, too, because you've worked at several different places. And I mean, why don't you kind of explain a little bit because you've, let's just say, first of all, you're definitely a Detroit person. You are [Oh, yeah.] You grew up there. Yeah. And then you also got your law degree from there, but you went to U of M for undergrad, though, right?

N Natalie King 03:07

Yes. Go Blue. Go.

E Ed Clemente 03:11

You have a lot of the same pedigree, at least for the Southeast Michigan. And so why don't you kind of tell us your path a little bit out of even law school probably is where it really started.

N Natalie King 03:26

Really, it did it started, I went to law school at Wayne State and while I was in law school, I clerked at the US EPA for two summers. And so that really is where I began an interest on the environmental law side. And I thought that I would maybe go into practicing environmental law, but during those formative years during law school, and when I was trying to figure out where I was going to go on my career, a lot of the environmental law issues that I began researching

dealt with environmental justice issues. And so communities that were disproportionately impacted by carbon emissions, dumping, illegal dumping in their areas, burning tires, things of that nature, smokestacks in the communities, is really where I focused my attention. And it's interesting how things come full circle because I got at a firm and started practicing healthcare law. And actually, absolutely nothing to do with, with environmental, but that's the way that my career took me when I was practicing law. And then, you know, many, many years later, starting in 2007, I began, I co-founded a solar integration firm. And that really was my entryway into the green energy space. It was completely entrepreneurial. I was the general counsel for that company, I co-founded it, but I began researching again, with respect to you know, environmental impacts, what solar could do. I was representing a solar distribution company at the time, so that's what's sparked it. And from there with no engineering, you know, or technical background, I just developed a passion for it. And here we are in 2022.

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Ed Clemente 05:10

It sounds like yeah, what you did is rather than having to deal with problems, you figured out, let's not create them in the first place.

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Natalie King 05:17

Indeed, indeed. And you know, what's so interesting is that my law background really helped me to begin that thought proces. As lawyers, most times, we think, worst case scenario, and we reverse engineer to a solution. So understanding the problem from the beginning really helps you to avoid it. You know, before you even get started, and, and that really has been the foundation of the company. The principles of the company is to educate people and create and develop, you know, solutions for what we believe to be a really major, significant issue within our country and our world, which is, you know, climate change,

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Ed Clemente 05:59

Right, I mean, using basically deductive sort of mental engineering, as to with case studies, like, this is the way we don't want to go, this is the way we don't want to go. [Absolutely.] To get to the lowest common denominator of this is the path here, this is what we've got to do.

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Natalie King 06:17

Yup, that's energy management as a whole.

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Ed Clemente 06:20

Yeah, right? Well management is a whole different problem, but because you have quite a few employees too, right?

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Natalie King 06:27

 Natalie King 00:27

We do, we have 155 employees across southeastern Michigan now. And continuing to grow, you know, we're going to be launching Dunamis Charge soon, which is our electric vehicle charging manufacturing company. And so we'll be adding, you know, within the next few months, even, I would say probably by the time, we end 2022, we're going to be adding close to 30 employees at our Dunamis Charge Facility. And by the end of 2023, we're expecting that to like, quadruple in numbers, where we'll probably have about 120 or 130 employees working at the plant, so and that's an addition to the 155. So we're really anticipating some really great growth over the next year.

 Ed Clemente 07:14

Recently, I saw one of your posts where you already showed the beginnings of that, and it's pretty exciting, I'm sure for you at least to have something tangible to actually look or touch.

 Natalie King 07:24

Absolutely, we're very, very excited about Dunamis Charge really excited. We're the first black woman owned EV charger / manufacturer in the country, really on the globe, you know, at this point. And so bringing this new technology, you know, everyone's talking about electrification and the change in mobility for the automotive industry, for our cities and our states. And Dunamis, you know, we're excited to be a part of, again, that solution-oriented provider, while also creating jobs for our community. So it's a wonderful undertaking.

 Ed Clemente 07:59

Which also sort of fits into a little bit of your passion, because you, I'm not going to read them all, but you've either started or you've supported a lot of different nonprofits. I know there's a couple I don't know if you want to highlight a couple?

 Natalie King 08:14

Oh, absolutely. You know, I've served and still serve as the board chair for a organization called Abayomi Community Development Corporation. And that's a nonprofit on the northwest side of Detroit. It's been serving all of Detroit, in Oakland, Wayne County, for well over 25 years. And so we've done some wonderful things, housing, you know, foreclosure prevention, counseling, housing counseling for, you know, new home owners and youth programming. And I'm also a part of the board of a nonprofit called the Yunion, which does phenomenal youth development in the city of Detroit. The founder, just had a documentary done. Jason Wilson is the founder, they just had a documentary done that won at Tribeca Film Fest, for best documentary, and so is representing the city of Detroit well, and he's just doing some phenomenal work with inner city youth within that organization. So, so we're very community-oriented, even within Dunamis. You know, we make sure that we're always doing community engagement, always doing, you know, having opportunities to make sure that we're reaching back in the community with our workforce development. It's even an effort to ensure that we have the job creation

directly from the community, directly from low income communities that have historic unemployment rates. You know, we're making sure that in every element of our company that we're giving back to the community.

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Ed Clemente 09:44

Yeah, even like Detroit Red Carpet Backyard Barbecue?

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Natalie King 09:48

Backyard Barbeque, absolutely. Oh, that was a labor of love. I, we sponsored that event, and I actually was the event organizer for that for seven years. And each year, we have, each year up until 2017, or 18, I believe, we did we fed 5000 people, over 5000 people annually each year at the Detroit Red Carpet Backyard Barbecue. Lots of corporate sponsors that would come in and nonprofits and health service organizations would come in to feed the homeless and the needy in the city of Detroit. So, great endeavor, I'm looking forward to when we have a little more time to get back to that type of, you know, large event.

A

Announcer 09:48

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Ed Clemente 10:47

What is the Apple Impact Accelerator Program?

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Natalie King 10:50

Oh, Apple Impact Accelerator Program. We were one of 15 companies that Apple selected as its inaugural class to, it's a program that Apple developed for black and brown business owners that were in high growth sectors of the energy sector. And so they were usually companies that were not startups, they were you know, kind of mid-sized companies that were focused on sustainability, carbon reduction in our operations. So Dunamis fit very, very succinctly in their goals. And they wanted to focus on black and brown entrepreneurs, because they wanted to ensure that their sustainability efforts included economic parity, and economic equity in their operations. So the the program was geared toward best practices, helping companies like mine to develop and expand and with the ultimate goal at some point when opportunities develop, to become a part of Apple's supply chain.

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Ed Clemente 12:03

I mean, I didn't know what it was, but I'm glad you explained it, because it's a great program.

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Natalie King 12:08

Yes, it was a wonderful program. We've been in a lot of mentoring programs throughout the years, you know, as as Dunamis, was formed in 2012. We've been in multiple, you know, supplier diversity initiatives, and, you know, women owned business initiatives, Apple impact accelerator really set the bar high, they did a great job.

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Ed Clemente 12:27

Yeah. And I should also mention, too, that we were put together originally by Glenn Stevens, who speaks very highly of you and I imagine you're somewhat involved with MichAuto?

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Natalie King 12:37

Oh, yes, we are part of, our company as a part of one of eight that's a part of their cohort. For us, but you know, specifically focusing on new companies or companies that are, you know, growing in the sector of mobility and, and automotive. And so we're very, very happy to be a part of MichAuto, it's a great resource for any company that's in the automotive field where whether it's ancillary services, manufacturing, you know, design, tech, it's a really great organization.

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Ed Clemente 13:14

Is there any other partners or stakeholders that you'd like to mention?

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Natalie King 13:17

Well, you know, for stakeholders, MEDC has been extremely helpful to us and our growth, and I'm really looking forward to continuing to grow with MEDC. I met Quentin Messer, the head of MEDC, when we, when he first got here, when he first started and so extremely helpful. When I met Quentin, we were at a MMA, a Michigan Manufacturing Association lobbying day. And he introduced himself to me, you know, was very excited about we're doing what we're doing with the Dunamis Charge, our EV charging manufacturing plant. And I'm telling you, the next morning, he had put me in touch with so many people within MEDC to you know, to help facilitate meetings he came through with exactly what he said that he was going to assist us with. So I'm excited about the leadership and the direction within MEDC and working with, you know, future mobility and electrification within MEDC to help us to expand as as EVs are really taking off in the state.

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Ed Clemente 14:23

Quinton has a lot of Dunamis, too.

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Natalie King 14:25

Oh, he does? He certainly does. He's got a lot of that energy.

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Ed Clemente 14:30

I know I mentioned you'd be on the show, so he was glad to hear it. Yeah. And so what future trends do you see beyond what you've mentioned already, but how its either going to impact you or disrupt you or accelerate.

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Natalie King 14:46

I see acceleration here. You know, now trends, I think that you know, currently, everyone is dealing with supply chain, you know, issues so that might you know, I wouldn't call it derailing or maybe disrupting but not derailing us, with respect to you know, supply chain lead times for electrical components as we're building out our AV charging stations. But for the most part, we've had some really great innovative partners, Stellantis has been a wonderful partner in helping us to navigate through those supply chain issues and really providing all types of resources to us. And that and I think that that we have a great deal of future growth, you know, before us. I believe that one thing that we can look to for acceleration is induction technology, which is wireless technology moving forward in the EV charging, or EV infrastructure space. That is something that our engineers are consistently doing R&D on as we move forward with the matriculation and growth of our product line that we're currently offering. And so I believe that's one area of focus that is going to be very, very, very big over the next few years. And so you know, right now we're, we're manufacturing our level two chargers for residential and commercial applications. And then, of course, in 2023, we're going to add on our DC fast charger units for manufacturing in our Detroit-base plant. So I think we're right on time with the industry and our growth.

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Ed Clemente 16:26

Timing means a lot. [Timing is everything.] So you, because you do mentoring, what would you obviously ask this question, I guess. But like, if you can talk to your 17 year old self, or even you talk to a commencement speech, what would you tell people to do differently, maybe than you did?

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Natalie King 16:51

Trust yourself. That's what I would tell them, I would tell that 17 year old person that's about to graduate from high school, whatever you feel, that it's like, in your gut, that you know about you follow that first voice. 99% of the time, it's right. Trust yourself. I would have saved myself from a whole lot of life lessons, you know, academically, personally, financially, business-wise, you know, professionally, if I had have listened to that first voice, and just innately I believe that we all have the ability to just know, I think that we're born equipped, but you know, life kind of sometimes sends us lessons that makes us believe otherwise, but trust yourself.

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Ed Clemente 17:41

Yeah, you know, it's funny that you say that too because I think a lot of times, I'm sure you've had mentors or people that have seen stuff in you that you didn't see in yourself, right?

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Natalie King 17:50

Oh absolutely, absolutely. I heard it so many times. Oh, you're so brilliant. You're so bright. You know, you you can do anything. And I'm like, I don't know about that.

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Ed Clemente 18:03

It's a big leap of faith, right?

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Natalie King 18:05

It is. It is absolutely, absolutely. But I but and I would also say get a mentor. It's so important to have someone there that can kind of help take you by the hand, don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask someone. Most of us, if I have a young adult that comes to me and says, you know, I really would like to learn from yo, I will take the time, you know and in in take that person by the hand as much as I possibly can to assist them. Don't Don't be afraid to ask.

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Ed Clemente 18:37

A quick question. Do you have any historical sort of leadership qualities you like in anybody historically that you admired?

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Natalie King 18:46

Yeah, I do. I have I have for a number of people. I always talk about Oprah Winfrey, she is one I've never met her, I would love to meet her, I believe that at some point I will meet her in life at some point. Her story is so very, very just inspirational, coming from humble beginnings and really utilizing what I believe to be universal laws to manifest the life that she absolutely wanted to live and to lead and you know, from the spiritual aspects, from the empowerment aspects, from you know, just the womanhood aspects and the giving aspects and understanding that as you give give give universal law is it's gonna come right back to you. And so she has been, and to see her you know, as a black woman, you know, with these this you know, huge media empire and still doing good for others, you know, in the community. I have loved the model of her life.

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Ed Clemente 19:52

Good Karma is hard to beat.

N Natalie King 19:54
It is. It's unbeatable and bad karma too!

E Ed Clemente 20:00
You're right, everything comes back and I care for. The last question is, obviously you live here in Michigan, what do you like best about the state? You know, something you find that keeps you here, you really wish you would have known about it more before, you just had a chance to discover it?

N Natalie King 20:18
I love the seasons. I love the beauty of Michigan. I love the and I love the resilience of its people. I love our state. Yeah, for sure.

E Ed Clemente 20:30
It's a good way to end it. And I want to thank you again, Natalie King was our guest today very much for doing the show you were wonderful.

N Natalie King 20:38
Thank you Ed, thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you so much for having me.

E Ed Clemente 20:43
Join us next week where our guest will be Thomas Glasmacher. He's the Director for the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, also called the F-RIB laboratory at Michigan State University.

A Announcer 20:56
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