



Next Move Group

We Are Jobs Podcast

with Special Guest: Mayor Harvey and Ron Reischl

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Chad Chancellor: Welcome to this week's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast focused on creating economic growth for small to medium-sized companies, communities, and organizations. I'm Chad Chancellor, the co-founder of Next Move Group.

I spent some time in June up in Omaha for the College World Series. My team is Mississippi State and we made the College World Series. We didn't get very far, but we did make it and while I was

up there I visited some communities in both Nebraska and Iowa. I just can't tell you how impressed I was with the community called Manning, Iowa which is a town of 1400 people.

I want to give a shout out to Shannon Landauer who's the economic developer for that whole county. She introduced us to several cities within her county and hosted us and I appreciate what she did. One of the towns we visited was Manning, Iowa; a town of 1400 people.

So, we're always looking to try to show best practices of what you can do in small towns and I've heard a lot of small towns this size say well, we're too small to do anything. So, Manning, Iowa proves you're not. These guys really inspired me when I visited their town. So, today we've got two guests Mayor Harvey Dales from Manning and Ron Reischi who's the chairman of the Main Street Manning Board both of which are highly, highly involved in development in Manning, Iowa. So, guys, I thank you for being here with us today and telling the Manning story.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Nice to be here.

Ron Reischi: Thank you. We enjoyed hosting you during your visit.

Chad Chancellor: Yes, wish my team would have played a little bit better baseball. I could have stayed longer with you than just one day. So, why doesn't one of you tell us about Manning and then tell us about the Betterment Foundation? I really would like for our listeners to hear about what your community is doing and how you are bettering Manning and basically how long you've been at this.

Ron Reischi: Well, thanks for the opportunity. We're very proud of our community. Within the state, we're considered to be a very progressive community all the way up to the Lieutenant Governor and Governor. In fact, the Governor just visited us last week because of the accomplishments that we achieved.

Recent accomplishments, we're a town of 1500 people. We not only have a hospital, we have a new hospital. It's three years old. We have a three-year-old assisted living center. We have a two and a half-year-old new hotel.

The hotel is an example of five people just got together and said we're going to make it happen and they went through the process to do that, get a marketing assessment, work with Iowa State,

and then had discussions with three hotels, picked one, and from our first investor meeting to having the hotel completed was less than one year.

That's an example of the forward-thinking of Manning and once we decide we're going to get something done, we go ahead and do it. We've been a mainstream community for about ten years, less than-- very important to us in getting downtown revitalization and a number of grants both directly through them, but outside them also. A key point of past accomplishments is the Betterment Foundation.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Yes, the Betterment Foundation was actually started nearly 40 years ago with 16 of the local people drawing some money together and buying ground. They started an industrial park and at that time it was a for-profit. After a few years of running that, they decided that it would be better for the community as a whole if they would just all donate and throw their money in and make it a non-profit foundation.

So, Betterment Foundation has proceeded on through the years buying properties that were needing repair, were in disrepair, either tearing down, fixing up, moving them forward. I can think of about ten properties pretty fast that's either been cleaned up, resold or developed to the point where we have rental properties, where we have an industry that is running in buildings that are owned by the Betterment Foundation and they rent or lease out according to whatever is needed for the community.

Chad Chancellor: I have to tell you I was very impressed with touring your new hotel. So, I know that's a new hotel. Think about this, listeners. 1400 people and they have a new hotel and there's a whiskey distillery in the town next door. This hotel is beautifully done with used barrels from it down in the restaurant and just a whole lot of character and charm in it.

It just struck me really as we saw that facility, here's a town of 1400 people that got this new hotel done within one year from when you all decided you wanted to do it. You had a hotel. So, what really is your secret sauce to being able to get things done?

Ron Reischi: Well, I'd go back to one thing I said before. We put our egos to the side and everybody really looks at the big picture and determines what's best for Manning. We also have a very progressive city manager and forward-thinking city manager. I will tell you the city as a whole

is we found outside organizations and companies tell us they're probably the easiest community to work with. We definitely in building the Boulders Inn & Suites Hotel, that's the first thing they said. The city also owns its own utilities. So, they all work very-- in a consolidated manner and all work together and we don't worry about who gets credit for something.

Chad Chancellor: So, from a staffing perspective, I know you've got a very pro-business city manager and that means a lot to me. Next Move Group has actually gotten in the city manager executive search business and we search for pro-business city managers and I know you all have one. You actually gave me part of the idea and then I know Shannon Landauer, who I mentioned earlier, runs the Carroll Area Development Corporation and we think a lot of Shannon, but when it comes to the actual city of Manning, you don't have a city economic developer, right? You have the county economic developer then you have your city manager, but you don't have a paid economic developer for your 1400 person town.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Yes, this is all kind of voluntary. We do things on our own. City administrator and I work together and I've always told her that the city's main job should be to knock down barriers. If there's some type of a barrier that's in the way, our biggest job is to knock it down.

As Ron was saying with us owning all the utilities, kind of an example of what can happen is when we were building the new hospital-- I call it new, four years old, there was some landscaping being done and they hooked the gas line, the main feed going in to the hospital. Most places you would get shut down, you get a call, they start to come, whatever.

Well, for us we pooled all of our people; the city crew, the electric crew, the gas crew, brought them all out and from the time that the gas line was hit two hours later, there was 120 foot of new main installed and the gas was running. So, we are fast to react and whatever the job is, we will do it and we'll do it quickly and efficiently.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I'll tell you it really shows. So, on the utilities side, you own your own electric, water, sewer, internet. So, you own all the utilities and if I remember, you've even received some awards for that.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Yes, we were the first community under 5,000 to be designated as a connected community and we do have fiber to all the businesses and the industrial areas and have plans to get fiber to every home within the next two years. So, we are connected and available and ready to roll.

Chad Chancellor: And so I want our listeners to understand what your Betterment Foundation does and really the tools that it gives you to spur development. So, when I was in Manning, I actually toured a call center that you all showed me and it was actually a call center with a daycare underneath.

So, you had a call center, obviously, that created jobs. You had a daycare center that not only the call center employees could use but other people in town. I know that call center is now available. You did not lose the call center, but the folks are actually working from home now instead of working in the call center every day, but you still have the daycare there.

So, talk about how you did that deal, how you used the Betterment Foundation to build that building to suit them and really how that's benefited your community. You still have all those jobs plus the daycare center and now you've got an available space and maybe talk a little bit about that space that's available in case somebody hears and might have an interest in that.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Well, the building was put up originally they had to buy I think it was six different properties and raise all those properties, get things lined up. They then went USDA, got a loan, worked through NEFCO, Region 12, private dollars, and built the building as was required for the call center.

It was after the building was built that we decided the space in the basement was perfect for a childcare center and that has been filled and then also expanded and remodeled in the basement to make it bigger because it build up and it was too small.

Population I think is holding steady to growing in Manning and the needs upstairs we have all of the furniture and everything from the call center. So, it's all available. I'm trying to think what the cubic square footage is we're on.

Ron Reischi: I'm not sure, but it's move-in ready. They left the cubicles. They left the furniture and for someone who doesn't need that type of environment, it obviously can be moved out. So,

it's got an established well-maintained office environment and then part of the building also on the same floor is a warehouse. So, if somebody needed a combination of warehouse space and office space, it's perfect for it. And off the warehouse also is a very large room that was used as a classroom educational center. So, it's finished also. It really is a prime space.

Chad Chancellor: And so this is an example of business and asset and even a daycare center that is there because of the Betterment Foundation that you guys started 40 or 50 years ago. So, talk about some of the other businesses at Manning and some of the other things that are there because of the Betterment Foundation.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Huffman Manufacturing is a refrigeration rehabilitation type company. They sell refrigeration equipment for grocery stores and that type of thing and they actually sell overseas with us. So, it's kind of almost an international company. The industrial park that we started has developed into an area where we have an international vet associate. She runs bioengineering of genetics and that is also an international company that was built up on that property.

West Central Rural Water, the rural water association for west central Iowa is based in Manning. Again, it's in the industrial park. There's semi-repair shop that's built out there. The town Main Street-- one of the quarter buildings, main state buildings was empty. The Betterment Foundation bought it, brought back in a young entrepreneur from the city that was alumni, wanted to move back to Manning, start a business to bring her kids here so they could grow up in the atmosphere that she had grown up.

Through a process of working with Main Street, getting challenge grants, offering special deals through the Betterment Foundation for no payments [unintelligible 00:13:05.07] for a year, revolving loan funds through the city, we were able to get Jamie back to town with her family, set her up and she has a thriving business now that, Ron, you can probably even add to that.

Ron Reischi: Well, this business now was recently voted the best rural shopping destination in Iowa; a great accomplishment. I'd echo what Harvey said. This is an example, as I said earlier, of multiple organizations including the city working together. Jamie originally came to the Betterment Foundation and requested to lease the building. She wanted to make tens of thousands of dollars of improvements to meet the aesthetics and kind of the model that she wanted.

Basically, we said how about if we sell it to you. If you lease it under the terms we are discussing, here's the financial data if we sell it to you. She was way ahead on that and as part of that, as Harvey mentioned, the first year was no interest, no payments. So, basically, it was a key to get a young entrepreneur with some major ideas and a large space to be successful in her first year.

Chad Chancellor: Talk about some of the things you're doing with neighborhood development. I know you drove me up on a hill where we kind of overlooked the city and overlooked some neighborhoods and it was beautiful. You guys are really on the cutting edge of doing neighborhood development and offering an incentive to people to move there. So, talk about that.

Ron Reischi: Well, we've got I guess several things. The city has-- if someone comes in and buys a lot from a private owner, the city has a tax abatement, but a lot of cities have that. Probably what's unique is we had a number of lots that were not selling. People viewed them as being too expensive and what the city did was purchase about 20 of those lots and then got a fairly good deal on that, but then actually turned back and are making these lots available for \$15,000 which is viewed as an excellent price. I think prior to that they were around \$25,000.

At closing, if the home is occupied-- it is closed and is owner-occupied, you actually get \$7500 back. So, you're only paying \$7500 for these lots. On those lots you don't get any tax abatements because the city views that they've already contributed to it. So, it's been a boon to at least interest in that particular part of town.

Chad Chancellor: And I want to remind our listeners, you're hearing from a town of 1400 people. You've heard about a new hospital, a new hotel, neighborhood development, recruiting population and incentivizing the housing, buying additional property; all from a town of 1400 people mostly volunteer workers, city manager, mayor, of course, but no full-time city economic developer.

So, Mayor, I want to ask you, how long have you been a mayor? I find in my travels most towns this size say we're too little to really do anything. Then I stumbled into Manning, Iowa, I hear all this and it's just amazing to me. So, you undoubtedly have had stable leadership over the years to be able to get this kind of stuff done. So, tell us your story. How long you've been a mayor and really what's your story?

Mayor Harvey Dales: Okay, my father was actually mayor back in '80 and then got on the city council and when he passed away in '95, I took his place on the city council and then run for mayor in 2000 and became mayor. I started doing things and moving a little too quick until six years later, they voted me out.

It was two years after that they wrote me back in and at that point, I took it as kind of a mandate that they were ready to roll. So, the community at that point has been very receptive to everything and all the key people have pretty well gone and progress has really come quickly and the utilities and everything so that we have now got ourselves set up. We're ready and willing to go any direction that we need to for progress.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I'll tell you, Mayor, you got beautiful land, beautiful rolling hills. I don't know why I pictured Iowa to be just totally flat across the board, but you guys really have some pretty land there. So now, let's transition over to Ron. So, Ron, I know you come out of corporate America. You had experience working for corporate America, a well-traveled guy. So really, talk about what motivates you having come out of that world to help your home town and participate there in Manning.

Ron Reischi: Well, I moved away when I graduated from high school like a number of my peers did. I worked for IBM-- I went to college, worked for IBM for 40 years and a combination of Omaha, Austin, Texas, St. Louis and then back to Austin and actually the last five to six years, I worked from home here in the Manning area.

So, I had a lot of personnel and project management experience and I just-- frankly, I don't know how it came on my heart, but I decided I wanted to help Manning in its efforts for economic development. I will tell you coming from Austin, Texas that there are a lot of communities in the Midwest that are dying and if one of them would have been my hometown, I would have never moved back.

The mere fact that Manning was progressive and a lot of things were going on gave me the encouragement to move back, but also encouraged me to get involved. So, I immediately became involved with the Main Street organization and same with the Betterment and some of the other community foundations here.

I have been able to land my corporate experience that I brought. I lend that to the local community and just very recently, a year ago, the governor [imported? 00:19:50.17] me to an empower rural Iowa taskforce. So, I've been able to bring my Manning experience to that, but also experience from that fact of Manning will make even further developments.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I know you guys have received some awards for your tourism as a destination place. So, why don't you talk a little bit about that?

Ron Reischi: Yes, I mentioned earlier that The Market Place has received the award for the best rural shopping destination in Iowa. We also have a tourist destination here that's received an award for the best rural tourist destination in Iowa. About 25 or 30 years ago, this is again, an example of this impromptu a number of residents got together and said we need to celebrate our German heritage. We need to bring in tourists. How do we do that? And they arranged for a house barn.

A house barn is exactly what it sounds like. It's a combination house combination barn built in the 1660s in Germany and the community arranged to have that taken down. It was given to them, taken down, moved by transport, by ship to Manning, actually brought over some of the German craftsmen to rebuild it.

It's actually rebuilt on a site where there is a historical farmstead that's on the national register and it's kind of deemed to be probably the best preserved intact farmstead in Iowa. There are a lot of cases where there are individual homes or barns and stuff that are in good shape. This is an entire farm that is in good shape. And they also brought in a trinity church.

So, those three elements; the trinity church, the house barn, the farmstead, and then locally people-- again, another example of local volunteers built a community center out there and so it's used for small retreats and weddings. In fact, that site has now become known for its wedding-- as a destination wedding place from around the Midwest but even further. They'll come here for the totally different environment and it really is a beautiful environment, obviously, rural to be married in.

Chad Chancellor: So, talk a little bit about where you are located so people can get a reference. In Iowa, you think about Omaha on the west over on the Nebraska border and Des Moines. So, talk about where Manning is located in reference to those areas.

Mayor Harvey Dales: We always say that we're-- it's far away from everything that you can get in western Iowa; 90 miles to Omaha, 90 miles to Sioux City, 90 miles to Des Moines. We are west-central Iowa right in the corner of Carroll County on highway 141. The four county seats that are around us are 20 miles, 21 miles, 21 miles, and 24 miles. We're kind of right in the middle of everything.

Ron Reischi: What's key to this from a quality of life perspective, again, I came from Austin Texas and absolutely love Austin. Coming back to a rural area, one of the things you miss is diversity; diversity in restaurants, in population, etc., etc. Well, as Harvey mentioned, we're geocentric between three cities and in an hour and twenty minutes, I can be downtown in any one of those cities and I can experience the concerts, I can experience the restaurants, I can experience the shopping.

Coming from a city, many people commute 30 minutes, 60 minutes, even longer and it's typically a white-knuckle drive. Our hour-and-twenty-minute drives to these communities are true pastoral settings and it really is beautiful and relaxing. So, that's why it is nothing as compared to what many city people experience on a daily basis.

Chad Chancellor: Guys, is there anything that you wish I would ask you about Manning that I haven't asked you yet?

Mayor Harvey Dales: You were here and you got a kind of a quick run-through on the town. Hopefully, we've covered everything that you need for your part.

Ron Reischi: I would say one thing. Our experience is that if we can get people here, they're sold on it. So, I would encourage your listeners to go to manningia.com and check us out and even more so come see us, come visit us and look the Mayor up.

Chad Chancellor: All right. So, that website is manningia.com and I do have one last question. So, we do consulting in a lot of small to mid-sized cities and people will ask us how should we set up an organization and what's optimum? So, I know in Carroll County there are four or five different cities and the county has an economic developer and she's actually the one that introduced me to you guys. So, I'm very grateful for her doing that.

So, talk about how it works there where you have multiple municipalities with a county economic developer and from a best practices standpoint how you guys have been able to participate in a multi-town county effort if that makes any sense.

Mayor Harvey Dales: Okay. CADC is what you talk about; Carroll Area Development Corporation. We actually have-- our city administrator is on the executive board of that. So, we have a real big connection to that and as they are doing their things around the county that keeps us in touch with any movement that may be happening or going on. She stays in contact with the council and with the economic developer here and the CADC works hand in hand with the local [CADC? 00:25:55.09]; local government agency. It's region 12 for us, that state agency and so [unintelligible 00:26:04.24] contacts to USDA, SPA, all those different areas, we have direct contact into them through that connection with the county. That saves us from not having our own economic development agency itself and as we volunteer it keeps everything more efficient.

Ron Reischi: The key is that none of those entities or the State Government are going to come in and save your small community. It has to come from within and what-- all of these are assets that we can use to help us. None of them are going to come in on a white horse and save us, but they are very valuable to us and bring different assets to the table that we can use.

Chad Chancellor: So, to our business listeners, these folks know how to do a deal. So, any of our business listeners if you have a location that you need in the Midwest area somewhere around Iowa, Nebraska type area, believe me., these folks know how to do a deal.

To our economic development listeners, let this be motivation that no town is too small to take control of its destiny and get things done. I just really appreciated you all for being with me today and a reminder, the web address is manningia.com, manningia.com. Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us.

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Chad Chancellor: A special thank you to Younger Associates for recording, editing, and publishing this podcast for us. I encourage you to visit their website at younger-associates.com.