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Chad Chancellor: Welcome to this week's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast. This is Chad Chancellor, co-founder of Next Move Group. I'm glad to have JP DeBuque with us today, president of the St. Pete, Florida Area Economic Development Council. So, JP, thank you for being with us.

JP DeBuque: Thank you for having me. It's good to be here.

Chad Chancellor: Tell us a little bit about St. Pete, Florida.

JP DeBuque: Well, St. Pete, Florida is the fifth-largest city in the state and we're part of the Tampa-St. Pete-Clearwater Metro, which is the 18th largest metro in the country. We are a very, very unique community that is very international [in feel? 00:00:35.06], has lots of arts and culture and we've got a lot of businesses there as well. We're not really known for businesses that side of St. Pete, but that's why I have this job.

Chad Chancellor: Yes, but we've gotten to know each other a little bit and one of the things that I like about what you all are doing is you're not only pursuing large projects and certainly you'll take them, but it seems that the 10 and 15 job projects are just as important to you as anything and you're really trying to grow a community. So, talk about a) why that is your philosophy and b) why projects like that make sense in that area.

JP DeBuque: Well, I think the first thing is why that we're looking at doing that is that we have a very unique culture and character in our community. Some people call it a little bit of a funk, we're a little bit weird, we're a little bit off-center and I think that if we try to attract small businesses who want to be part of our community and want to contribute to our community, we're going to be in a better place. We're going to maintain and not kill the golden goose, so to speak.

Chad Chancellor: Right.

JP DeBuque: And we're going to be able to enhance our culture and character and not kill it. There have been so many other communities around the country who have got a unique culture and character and they've grown to the point where they don't have that unique culture and character anymore. We want to try and do that differently.

Chad Chancellor: Right. So, who are some of the largest employers there? What types of industries really make sense there?

JP DeBuque: So, we've got some large Fortune 500 companies; Raymond James is headquartered there, Jabil is headquartered there. Jabil is one of the largest manufacturers in the world, just made a-- recommitted to their headquarters operation and they are opening an R&D facility there.

Tech Data is another Fortune 500 company that's headquartered there. We also have Valpak, Home Shopping Network and then you kind of take some steps down. We've got lots of financial services, lots of data analytics companies and we're the only place outside of Baltimore, Maryland where you can have Johns Hopkins and they just opened up a huge research facility adjacent to a children's hospital there.

Chad Chancellor: Wow! And you have flights into St. Pete because we always hear Tampa-St. Pete and so I never know what's what. So, do you have flights straight into St. Pete?

JP DeBuque: So, there are three airports. There's a small non-commercial flight airport in downtown St. Pete. So, you can fly your private jet down there because I know you have three or four of them.

Chad Chancellor: Oh yes, yes, yes.

JP DeBuque: St. Pete-Clearwater Airport which has service from Allegiant and then just across Tampa Bay it's a short 25-minute ride from downtown St. Pete is Tampa International Airport, which is the main airport for our community.

Chad Chancellor: Right. We must-- because Allegiant is big in New Orleans and I don't know if I was here. I was somewhere the other day and they said they were flying to St. Pete and I said well, you mean Tampa and they said, no, no, I'm flying straight to St. Pete. I didn't know and that might have been here in New Orleans because that's the only-- we've got a little of that funky culture here in New Orleans, so I get it.

JP DeBuque: Yes, you do.

Chad Chancellor: A lot of people may not understand what you're saying, but I totally get it.

JP DeBuque: Yes, you do and I say there are a lot of similarities between our two communities; New Orleans and St. Petersburg when it comes to that. That arts and culture is really, really what has birthed our communities and a lot that comes out of our communities has that to build on.

Chad Chancellor: So, of our listeners, probably 75% are economic developers, are elected officials, people from that realm. About 25% are actually CEOs of companies or executives of

companies. So, to the companies out there, what would be your sales pitch for St. Pete? Why should they give you a look?

JP DeBuque: Well, the first thing is that as most communities in Florida, we've got a good financial story to tell. Relatively, we've got a cost advantage and I think that is what businesses are really looking for. The other thing is that we have an existing deep and broad workforce pool in our community, in our region and it's getting better every day. We have about 150 people a day that are moving to the Tampa-St. Pete-Clearwater region and we have found is that when businesses locate there even if they can't find them from the local workforce pool, when you tell folks that they can move to a state with no personal income tax and they could do business in paradise, it's normally an easy sell.

Chad Chancellor: Right. Right. I know there's the baseball team which is good this year; the Tampa Bay Rays. They're actually playing in St. Pete, right?

JP DeBuque: They do play in St. Petersburg and we're happy to have them. They're a great community partner and we hope that they'll be there for a long time to come.

Chad Chancellor: My team is Mississippi State and we made the bowl game I think it was-- I can't remember what it was called two-three years ago, we made the bowl game in St. Pete. We made that [back bowl? 00:05:28.01], but the folks I've talked to I think they enjoyed the St. Pete one better for whatever the reason. I don't know why, but we really had a good time. We were warmly received out there. So, I know that's-- I guess sports is funny. You always say Tampa is not called Tampa Bay, right? Tampa Bay is a bay, not the city, right?

JP DeBuque: Correct.

Chad Chancellor: So, all the team like the Tampa Bay Buccaneers that's-- they encompass the whole area.

JP DeBuque: You got it. Tampa Bay is the body of water and it is a great place; a great body of water, lots of fish, lots of boating and fun to be on. The city of Tampa, the city of St. Petersburg, and the city of Clearwater are the three biggest cities in the Tampa-St. Pete-Clearwater Metro that's commonly referred to as Tampa Bay.

Chad Chancellor: Sure. Sure. Well, for our economic development listeners out there, tell us how you got in this business and what's your story. I find very few of us grew up as a ten-year-old and wanted to be an economic developer. So, we ask all our guests what's your story of how you found your way into this?

JP DeBuque: So, I really fell into it. I did not even know what economic development was and I happened to go to a Tampa Bay Buccaneers game about eight years ago when we first moved to St. Pete for my wife's job and met a guy who was running the Tampa Hillsborough EDC and a month later, I was working for him and when he changed jobs I got the chance to fill in as the interim CEO at that organization. During that interim piece, the city of St. Petersburg and that community were starting their own EDC and if you've ever been to St. Pete you know why I went there.

Chad Chancellor: I have never been. We've got to change that.

JP DeBuque: You do have to change that.

Chad Chancellor: I have been all over. Alex and I talk about I've been all over this country. Whatever the reason, I've never been to Tampa-St. Pete. My team has played-- the Saints play there every year. [Miss High State's? 00:07:20.00] been there for bowl. I just for whatever reason I've never been. So, we've got to change that.

JP DeBuque: Yes, Sir.

Chad Chancellor: What have you learned then that somebody that got into the profession having done other stuff? What I guess surprised you with this profession? What was harder about it that you might have thought what maybe was easier about it that you might have found?

JP DeBuque: Well, I think one of the things that we battle on a daily basis is I love the community that I live in and I can't imagine that anybody else wouldn't love the community that I live in. And the fact of the matter is that we want to own who we are and unfortunately, we're not for everybody and no community is for everybody. We do not check every box for every project and I think that's a hard thing to learn. So, getting used to that and accepting that is something that we've done, but I do think we have to, as economic developers, own the community that we are. We've got to be who we are and stand up for that, not try to be something that we're not.

Chad Chancellor: Right. Now, I know that you guys are sort of taking the show on the road. You're ready to get your name out there. So, there's a Tampa Regional Group, but then there's also I guess you guys obviously, have your organization-- have built your organization. What role does it actually accomplish there?

JP DeBuque: So, we do not have a regional economic development entity. There is a regional group who works on advocacy issues that are economic-development-related and each community takes care of their own economic development. And we are working very hard to present and position St. Petersburg as a choice for certain types of companies.

Chad Chancellor: Right.

JP DeBuque: Primarily the financial services data analytics space. We do also have a lot of creative art and design type companies, life and marine science. We're actually the hub of marine science in the southeast and we love manufacturing and I don't know if there's a community out there that doesn't love manufacturing.

Chad Chancellor: So, as far as your right on the water, is there port infrastructure? Is that on the other side of the bay from you? What kind of infrastructure you got there?

JP DeBuque: We do have a port, but it's not a commercial port. We have Port Tampa Bay, which is on the Hillsborough County side of the bay. It is very good. We also have Port Manatee. Both of those ports are on Tampa Bay and then we've got rail access throughout the communities all around Tampa Bay. As I said, we've got-- we claim three airports if you expand into the other communities. On the other side of the bay, you've got a lot more. So, we've got a good bit of infrastructure to support just about any business type.

Chad Chancellor: Right and of all your travels and things you go to, if you're thinking about other economic developers out there that listen to this, have you been to any particular training institute or conference that you really recommend and say hey, if you really want to meet folks and network and learn go to this? Since you've been in the business now less than 10 years, so how have you gotten yourself so connected? A lot of our people are just getting into business and they'll ask me hey, what should I go to? Where should I-- there are all these choices. I don't know which ones

really provide value or not. So, if you had to kind of list off a couple of things that you would recommend, what might it be?

JP DeBuque: Well, I think it really depends on which role you play in economic development. Our organization is a small organization that is focused mainly on business attraction and when it comes to business attraction, going to the traditional economic development conferences and training classes don't frankly help very much--

Chad Chancellor: Because you usually know the economic developer not prospects.

JP DeBuque: Meeting the head of economic development from your home town in Mississippi is not going to help me land a business to my community. So, what we try to do is we try to go to conferences where we're going to meet company leaders in the spaces that we think we can win on. So, we head to a South by Southwest. We go to the Inc. 5000 Conference. We go to financial services and data conferences and we present ourselves to those business leaders at those places.

So, I'm probably not the one to ask as far as which conference is good to learn and truthfully, I'm a salesman. I am not a certified economic developer. I don't claim to be. Those folks go through a lot of training and have a lot of skill sets and knowledge that I don't have, but what I can do is I can tell the story of my community.

Chad Chancellor: We have an executive search part of our business and we hire a lot of folks who are not certified economic developers. We like salespeople I can assure you. Is there anything about St. Pete you wish I had asked you that you would like to tell these folks that I haven't gotten round to?

JP DeBuque: So, one of the great things in St. Pete that I think makes us unique is all of the government and economic-development-related organizations are part of a community development strategy called the grow smarter strategy and what we're trying to do is bring equity into the conversation about economic prosperity and all of the organizations are aligned; the Chamber, the EDC, the city, our downtown partnership, our innovation district, all the groups are using this strategy as the backbone and roadmap to lead us through our conversations and through our strategies. And I think the fact that we all collaborate is something that is extremely unique, at least based upon what I have seen from other communities.

Chad Chancellor: Well thank you for being with us today. Give these folks your contact information or your website in case they want to learn more about your organization at St. Pete.

JP DeBuque: So, the website address is www.stpeteedc.com and you can reach me at jpdebuque@stpeteedc.com. We're not trying to be really creative on those addresses.

Chad Chancellor: Well, thank you. I know you're a man that loves New Orleans. We got to talk a little bit about that yesterday. So, as a person who moved here-- not from here, but has totally fallen in love with it, I appreciate people like you. I meet people. New Orleans kind of has very few people that don't have [an opinion? 00:13:39.17] and when I'm out traveling I meet people; about three-quarters say I love it, about a quarter say I hate it. And I'll talk to the ones that hate it. Most likely they've only been to Bourbon Street.

JP DeBuque: There you go. There you go.

Chad Chancellor: They really haven't seen the real New Orleans. So, I love to run into people like you that have an appreciation for it and enjoy a visit to the city. So, I appreciate that.

JP DeBuque: I love this city. It is my second favorite city. Obviously, St. Pete is my first favorite, but New Orleans is a fantastic city that I try to come to as much as I can.

Chad Chancellor: Well, thank you. Appreciate you being with us today.

JP DeBuque: Thank you.

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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.