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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. Today, I've got Horton Hobbs with us. Horton is a VP of Economic Development in Springfield, Ohio with the Greater Springfield Chamber. Horton, I met you I think five years ago at an IEDC event in New Orleans and I kind of followed what you all have done and you've had an incredible run. So, tell these folks where Springfield is and some of the good stuff that's happened.

Horton Hobbs: Well, thanks, Chad. I appreciate it very much. Springfield, Ohio is one of just over 30 Springfield's in the United States, but this is the one we like to talk the most about obviously. We are in Ohio-- west-central Ohio right on I70 right between Dayton, Ohio and Columbus, Ohio. So, we have the best of both markets and easy access to a huge number of people or population and we've really tried to figure out how capitalize on that and tell our story. The brand of the-- the expand brand that we've done has been a part of that, but really, it's just about getting out there and this is a contact sport. You know it. We're sitting behind our desk we're not doing our jobs. So, we get out, tell our story, and work very closely with our existing business community and then try to grow some. We've been very fortunate to have some success recently.

Chad Chancellor: Yes. So, we're recording today at the MidAmerica Economic Development event in Chicago, so if you hear some beating and banging around the back, we're up early. It's 7:30 this morning. I don't know who Horton got me up this early to do a podcast.

Horton Hobbs: I know. My--

Chad Chancellor: Neither of our voices are working.

Horton Hobbs: Yes, I think our voices are a little shot, too much screaming last night.

Chad Chancellor: But that does show it's a contact sport and that's right. You guys have created over 6,000 direct jobs just in the last five or six years. I get your annual reports and stuff. So, talk about some of your wins and kind of what companies make sense in that part of Ohio.

Horton Hobbs: Yes, absolutely. The 6200 jobs a lot of people in our profession say well, how many jobs did you create? We all like to say we created jobs, but the reality is we don't create those jobs. The employers do and we just create the environment. We've done that with strong partnerships with a bunch of different organizations in our community from higher ed to our regular public education system and then the government's social service providers.

What that's done is it's presented this one voice forward and we've had some real success and grown our existing companies. For us, that's manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, automotive. We have a strong automotive cluster. It's food processing and anything logistics and distribution.

So, we've had some success and over the last couple of years, two hallmark wins for us. One is a Japanese based Honda supplier with offices in Cullman, Alabama, Smyrna, Tennessee and Canton, Mississippi and then we're looking for the first venture into Ohio to support Honda's growth and stumbled into our office and we're looking for 20,000 square feet today. Just two years later, there are almost 450,000 square feet, 400 jobs committed and it's a heavy stamping operation. So, those prices are in the ground and running. And then right on the heels of that really literally as we were wrapping up the first announcement, we got started on a project with a company called Silfex and they are a silicon-growing company. So, they grow the silicon crystal in support of their parent company, Lam Research and they grow and make the semi-conductors for as we all know the vastly growing technology field. So, what's great about that, Chad, is both of these jobs have really increased the wages in our community and particularly with Silfex have taken our manufacturing strength and taken it to a whole other level in terms of skill set.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I know if we didn't bring you on here to sell the state of Ohio, but I like how Ohio does their economic development. It's a public-private partnership or it was.

Horton Hobbs: It sure is now.

Chad Chancellor: You never know in election season. I can't remember which states have new governors.

Horton Hobbs: No, it didn't change. So, we're good.

Chad Chancellor: But why don't you tell these people who maybe are from Ohio kind of how that works because they are very good about following up. Any time they come to New Orleans like the work boat show or something, they'll see me while they are there and I'm very impressed with their teams. So, why don't you just-- even though that's certainly why we brought you on here, give these folks a brief on JobsOhio.

Horton Hobbs: That's all right. It's all part of the team. So, JobsOhio is great. They've been around I think since 2012 really a private non-profit, but their model is-- and what's really cool is they are funded by the liquor sales in the state of Ohio. So, when you are in Ohio--

Chad Chancellor: Every time I come through there I'll call.

Horton Hobbs: Yes, that's right. That's right. So unfortunately, we got to have one of these conferences in Ohio that seems to grow the pot hole. JobsOhio is great in that they've broken us up in six different regions across the state. So, there are 88 counties. They can't be everywhere, so what they've done is partnered with regional groups.

For us, it's the Dayton Development Coalition and that team supports us on the ground locally, but we are very well connected with JobsOhio. The thing about JobsOhio is with that stable source of funding, that does provide an opportunity for them to be proactive in areas of growth and proactive in areas of emerging technologies and emerging industry sectors in ways with flexibility and in ways that other states can't really compete.

So, there are under new leadership right now and J.P. Nauseef their CEO is a Dayton guy and just as is a huge friend to the entire state, very, very good at strategy, but most important, he's great about relationships. As we all know in this business, it's all about relationships. So, what he's bringing to his team and how he's rebuilding that team, it's really changing the face of the way Ohio does business.

We're really excited. We've got a great governor and a great lieutenant governor that are really focused on economic development, doing right things for families, and providing opportunities for folks. So, Ohio is in a great place. We're certainly right in the center of the United States for a whole host of reasons. There's a competitive advantage to that, but really I think what sets us apart now as a state is how we got a strategy that we're executing and moving forward and it's all about building that ecosystem of support and we certainly have that with the state, with JobsOhio and with our regional partner Dayton Development Coalition.

Chad Chancellor: You've had so much success. Talk about what you're doing to make sure you still have product on the real estate side because this way you don't become a victim of your own success.

Horton Hobbs: Well, that's right. That's an ever-growing challenge. The challenge has been even in spite of our success, in spite of that, oddly, we've had mostly new buildings that are being built recently. So, stock is an issue everywhere and particularly in legacy cities like Springfield where it's an older town. The industrial stock that's vacant or underutilized is in disrepair.

So, there's a host of ways we're dealing with that. We've built an industrial park. At a time when most communities were retrenching, we were building \$9 million industrial parks in Greenfields right across-- from the interstate. We also acquired a community-- now it's a community-owned technology and research park that really had been underutilized and still is quite frankly, but we've really tried to make those two assets really specifically available for growth.

We also have a really unique asset in that we have a municipal airport that's adjacent to a National Guard base. It's owned by the city and our city has really done a great job of leading efforts around the UAS; unmanned area systems, and in drone activity for lack of a better word. They've been at the forefront of that with AFRL; Air Force Research Lab. You know our business is all about acronyms.

Chad Chancellor: Oh, yes.

Horton Hobbs: So, if you take Nextedge, the tech part, you take Prime Ohio to the traditional light manufacturing industrial park and then you take Airpark Ohio right next to the guard base, those are three assets that we're utilizing to really help market availability.

Then what we're really doing more than anything else is we're focusing as I hope many of my colleagues that are listening to this are doing and that's around workforce development. So, we have a really strong set of robust programs to support a continuum of programming for students and adults in our community so we can fill those jobs and make sure they work. It's one thing to have a building, but if you don't have the people or vice versa, it's a challenge.

Chad Chancellor: Right. Well, I'm just curious to ask this because I've known you now I guess five years. Was there a moment where you felt the momentum? Because you all have had a lot of success and in following you, I've seen it. Was there one project or just all of a sudden you woke up one day and went hey, we're actually making progress? Sometimes it's slow. It's hard to see the ship turning.

Horton Hobbs: It is.

Chad Chancellor: So, can you remember I guess for the folks out there that might be getting close to that point that need some inspiration? What was the moment for you when you went we are making a real difference here?

Horton Hobbs: Well, certainly there are a couple of places for me. One, my boss and I-- Mike McDorman whom you know, we made a trip out to-- California is part of an IEDC conference and we made an excursion out to see headquarters in one of our local companies and it was just a thank you visit and out of that came a major project that was going to go somewhere else and we ended up getting it. This was right about the time you and I met.

For me as an economic developer, it was my first real project. It was the first one that we got to the finish line. We had overcome some things. So, from a professional perspective, that was the beginning for me. Like yes, I think I can figure this stuff out. From a momentum builder for our community which I think is most important because a lot of what we do in economic development, you don't see the fruit of that for a long time, but when you hit something that works, you can change the trajectory of a community and it's through the psyche.

So, this project with Topre America Corporation did that because what it did is it took an old brownfield site-- industrial site really in the urban core of our community and completely revitalized it. So, it was an International Harvester site. It's where International Harvester started. They left and then the site was cleaned up. They moved to another part of town. They're still growing, but that had sat vacant for almost 20 years. So, all those houses and all the neighborhood around it just felt like there was nothing going on and now, that whole area has completely come back.

It's really shown-- it's proven to ourselves that we've got a great program, but more importantly, we've got a great community and that has really turned the tides. So just my advice to my peers is these jobs are not easy and these projects are not easy. Our job is to kind of keep the politicians and the ones that put some pressure on us at times, keep them educated. Let them understand what this process is because once you hit one or two of those things, it makes a difference.

Chad Chancellor: And I have found momentum is real. As you know, we represent family-owned companies typically. You can feel a momentum in a community and you can also feel when a community is desperate and that turns you off and you think-- We've had some companies look at towns and we leave and they went I really love these people, but it's like they are looking for a savior and we don't want that much pressure on us, but then you go to some communities like

yours and even when you go to McDonald's or whatever, people are free. You just feel there's a momentum in the air.

Horton Hobbs: That's right.

Chad Chancellor: And so that always gives me encouragement to see. One thing I like to ask all our guests kind of how they got into this field. Hardly anybody grew up as a kid and said I want to be an economic developer. So, what's your story?

Horton Hobbs: I grew up wanting to be an evil planner actually. Actually, I was going to be a biologist and then organic chemistry killed that. I ended up taking a geography class at Wittenburg University and fell in love with planning and urban planning. So, that's really what I wanted to do. I did that for a number of years and then I think I burned out frankly.

All in my home town kind of got burned out and started working at a community foundation which I absolutely loved and my boss today, Mike, we were at a rotary and he likes to tell a story at rotary one day and my predecessor at the chamber had announced his departure; a really good guy, very, very accomplished economic developer and he said he had gotten out a wastebasket full of resumes and just none of them were fitting right.

So, that morning he threw away the resumes, went to rotary, saw me in the food line and he's like hey, Horton. It's like he hit me right in the head and hey, Horton, why don't you-- you got some time this afternoon and talk? So, we started talking through it. He knew my background. He was on my board when I run a downtown development group and we just kept talking. He said I think you should do this.

What I didn't realize at the time was he was sincerely giving me a job offer at the moment and so I let him sit on it for three weeks and he called me back and it's not like him to let anything grow under his feet, but he did. He said I was really serious.

I'll be honest with you. The first year almost two years of this job, I don't want to say I never have regrets, but I was questioning whether or not I made the right choice. Did I have the skillset and what I found over the years now almost nine years into this position or eight years into this position, this is all about your ability to follow through with what you say you're going to do, building good relationships and those are skills-- you can learn economic development. You're right.

Nobody goes into economic development, but if you've got good people skills, you got great follow-up and I'm an analytical guy and so we bring data and those kinds of things, I have found it to be my sweet spot and I'll tell you what, doing it in my home town that's just icing on the cake for me.

So, I love it. I can't imagine doing something different at this point in my life and it's great. The thing is it's an incredibly difficult job, but it's so rewarding especially when you see that one person at a grocery store or you talk to my colleague Amy who's working with somebody that she's helping find a job in one of the companies we're helping to grow. That's what this is all about.

Chad Chancellor: Right, right. Well, and I tell people to me, economic development especially in the small towns, not so much the big cities, but in small towns, it's like being a PGA golfer not a football coach. If you ever win the masters once, you've won it. You don't have to win every week.

Horton Hobbs: That's right. I love that analogy.

Chad Chancellor: If you win one or two tournaments a year, you're usually having a real good run.

Horton Hobbs: I love that. Well, you know what's the hall of fame batting average? Like 300, right? To fail two out of three times.

Chad Chancellor: That's exactly right.

Horton Hobbs: Well, for us, it's about 10%. So, you fail nine out of ten.

Chad Chancellor: Well, Horton, thank you for being with us and to people out there who are just wondering if going into events like where we're at today works, it does. We met I think five years ago at an IEDC event and along the way, I've had things at Ohio that didn't even pertain to Springfield, but I know I can call Horton. He can get me in the right direction. So, you just can't replace the old-fashioned networking of getting out there.

Horton Hobbs: That's right. That's right.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you for being with us. Anything else about Springfield you want our folks to know?

Horton Hobbs: No. It's a great place. Come-- don't be afraid to come visit and certainly, if you are passing through between Columbus and Indianapolis, stop on Exit 54 and come see us for sure.

Chad Chancellor: And give these folks your website because we do have some companies that listen. So, in case that area is interested.

Horton Hobbs: So, expandgreaterspringfield.com is our economic development website. So, expandgreaterspringfield.com that's all one word. Chad, I really appreciate the opportunity. I've enjoyed watching your company grow as well. You do great work and represent this industry extremely well. So, thank you.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you for being with us.

Horton Hobbs: Absolutely.

Chad Chancellor: All right.

[Music]