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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 and today, we've got Ryan Egly with us. Ryan is the president and CEO of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee and, Ryan, I think you guys, based on what I've heard are doing a tremendous job of getting information to your small businesses and resources.

So, one of the things we want to do in our show is really spotlight communities that are going above and beyond just waiting on the SBA to help their small businesses and you all are doing that. So, why don't we start out with you telling us a little bit about your organization and then transition to what you all are doing to help your small businesses?

Ryan Egly: Thank you for having me, Chad. So, our organization is a traditional chamber of commerce. So, we have the community development, networking, membership and events, and all the things chamber, but our organization has also been tasked with economic development, workforce development, and tourism marketing. From that perspective, that gives us multiple avenues into different industry sectors locally; think restaurants, parks, salons, manufacturing, and so on and so forth.

When all of this hit, we knew that this was going to not just hit one industry sector in particular, but it was going to hit all in some way and so for that reason, we sat down and we said what can we do to make sure that everyone knows-- we went from a chamber perspective that the chamber has pulled all the stops, do everything we could and also from an economic development perspective. How are we going to shift to support businesses in a time that really it's just unknown for everybody?

And so, we shifted our messaging for tourism, we shifted some dollars from economic development to more small business entrepreneurship, and then we shifted all of our chambers services; expanded those, broadened those, and really picked up more on the advocacy piece than I thought we ever would. We've been in weekly conversations whether it's state-level or congressional delegation, daily conversations with mayors, county commissioners, trying to make sure that there's a free flow of communication, but also that real service to our small business community as well.

Chad Chancellor: And part of what you all are doing are small grants. Isn't that right for certain types of businesses? So, talk about that program.

Ryan Egly: That's right. A lot of organizations out there specifically economic development organizations, we have a capital campaign to get private sector investment and involvement into our economic development practice where we had some travel scheduled for this summer and the spring.

Obviously, all that was thrown out the window and so we had some money sitting aside and we thought hey, let's see if we can put \$50,000 of real money out into the community into the hands of the small businesses and we've never done anything like that before. Usually, it's maybe incentives or maybe it's unbudgeted travel. We've never done anything-- putting money, cold hard cash into a business's hand, but that's what we were hearing from our businesses.

They needed rent relief, mortgage relief, utility bills needed paid and so we said hey, submit one of your bills to us and we'll pay it up to \$1,000. It was very well received by the community and in fact, other communities across the state of Tennessee looked at it and said we want to do the same thing. So, we've been working with those communities helping as well because that's where the rubber meets the road and, Chad, you know this.

When projects come to communities, the project is won at a local level. The company falls in love with the community and these small businesses, the mom-and-pops, the local amenities make your community unique and give your community that flavor and we knew that through this we could not lose our local flavor.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I like your idea. You're actually paying a bill for them. So, instead of just giving a business cash that may not flow back in the economy, you're actually paying a bill for them. So, talk about kind of I guess how you came up with that idea; the theory behind it because I think that's really smart.

Ryan Egly: The theory is no different than an incentive clawback, for example, when a business doesn't perform and no one likes doing that. However, it is the responsible thing to do for our stakeholders and investors. So, all we had to do was say hey, listen, send us your utility bill or your mortgage statement or your rent receipt from the month of March or April. They send it in. We see hey, they paid it in March or hey, this is upcoming in April. This is a real bill. It exists. It wasn't just going to be pocketed by somebody. They are not going to go on vacation. It was going to be used to keep the doors open and to date right now, we've received applications from businesses that support 150 jobs in our community.

Chad Chancellor: Wow!

Ryan Egly: That's game-changing and so I'll say that and say this too. You're a data guy I know. I'm a data guy. This is a good opportunity to find out the true impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your small business community. Get those revenue numbers. How down are they? How can you then communicate that to stakeholders at the state or federal level to say our community was really hit by this disaster? We knew that we wanted that data. We need that data moving forward, but also, we needed to get it responsibly and then get that money out there responsibly.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you, Ryan. We're going to take a quick break for a message for our listeners and we'll be back with a lot more with Ryan Egly right after this.

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Chad Chancellor: I want to thank LocationOne-- some folks know it as LOIS-- for sponsoring today's podcast. LocationOne has, in my opinion, the best buildings and sites database in the economic development industry. Now, that coronavirus is here and everything has been disrupted, I've been thinking a lot about it. If I were an economic developer still, what would I do during this time and I know without question I would transition to LOIS and get my buildings and sites as updated as I possibly could so that when we come out of this economic downturn, we're ready to go.

Let me tell you why I like LOIS. It is the most responsive mobile friendly buildings and sites database I have found. It's easy to use. It's just as easy to use on an iPad or iPhone as it is a computer. I was browsing around last week on a state economic development building and site database and the thing it just wouldn't work. It wouldn't work properly. You had to be an engineer to figure it out. It was too much. It had this circle you could draw to look at buildings. The circle wouldn't work when I backed out if I got what square footage I was looking for.

None of that happens with LOIS. This is the best buildings and sites database I have found. I've looked far and wide. It is the most easy to use from a site selection standpoint on any platform. I'm told it's just as easy to use for economic developers. It really walks you through inserting your information and putting it in so the prospects can use it. So, I really encourage you take a look at locationone.com. Use this time while we're down to update your buildings and sites. Transition them to LocationOne. You'll be really happy you did.

[Music]

Chad Chancellor: Tell these folks how big Lawrence County is and Lawrenceburg because 150 jobs that's a lot of jobs. So, we had Detroit on here and the reason I really wanted to get you is to show-- a lot of our listeners are small to mid-sized towns and they may think to themselves well, we can't do what Detroit did or New Orleans or somebody. So, I really admire what you all are doing. So, tell these folks about Lawrence County and Lawrenceburg.

Ryan Egly: Sure, yes. So, Lawrenceburg is the city seat, county seat if you will. It's roughly 15,000 people in population. It doubles in size during the day. We're just a small micropolitan area south of Nashville and north of Huntsville. Countywide, we have about 45,000 people and growing. We are benefiting a lot from that Nashville-Tennessee-Huntsville-Alabama growth, but again, we're just a small town and community. We're a manufacturing community, have been for many decades.

I'll say this. We really based our program off Washington, D.C.'s program. We thought that they had a good program and we just made it our own. That just goes to show it doesn't matter how big your community is, how small your community is. There are real needs and there are real solutions and you just have to be able to flex and shift and change your messaging and make it your own. We've found a lot of success with this.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I admire what you all are doing and how quickly you did it. The trouble with some of the SBA money is while eventually, people will get it, it may take eight weeks and this disaster is taking even longer than that. This thing started like March 10 or something. Here we sit April 28 and restaurants and I just think of the Lawrenceburg Square, for instance.

How are those businesses going to survive when people aren't going? So, any cash you can get to them quickly is going to help them immensely and Lawrence is a county of tremendous manufacturing. For a small to mid-sized town, where it's located, you've probably got what? 20 solid manufacturers there? I'm just guessing off the top of my head.

Ryan Egly: I know that we have 10, Chad, with more than 100 employees and our big three have 600 and 300 and 250, but then we have a lot of smaller manufacturing, too that we're really proud of. So, all in all, we have 53 manufacturing operations throughout the county. Now, that ranges in size from 5 to 625. We really are proud of our manufacturing base and those are the people that go

out and spend that money, but they have to have somewhere to spend the money at, right? So, that's why this program has been so important for us.

Chad Chancellor: And so I'm hearing from all my TVA friends that you were doing a great job in Lawrence County before COVID ever came along. So, talk about some of the other initiatives that you have. Let's not be all COVID and down and gloom. So, talk about some of the other stuff you're doing to really drive growth there.

Ryan Egly: Sure. So, as the community-- as you mentioned, we're a manufacturing community. That's one of our target markets. We are constantly looking for new product to sell. These plants coming back from China, they can't locate in your community unless you have land, available buildings, and whatever that may be or your target market.

So, we are actively marketing some greenfield sites. We're actively pursuing the development of new greenfield sites. We're about to start building a speculative building. Again, we just want to have that inventory because we need those companies to get to our communities. So, product development is always top of mind.

Also, part of the product is your workforce and so last year, we partnered as a chamber with the school system to hire a workforce development coordinator. Now, this person is actually a school system employee, but they are housed at the chamber and work under economic development. Her name is Hope. She is tasked with going to our businesses, learning what they need, and then translating that to our teachers to the curriculum so that we are producing the best product possible which is our people, for the jobs that are available today.

So, that's something that we've been hyper laser-focused on. That's also part of the recruiting strategy with trying to get people into our community. The better quality schools you have, better output, better metrics, more people are going to come to your community which, of course, broadens your talent base. So, workforce, development, site development, but then also tourism.

People have always wondered where does tourism fall? Again, we're a united chamber which is unique, but tourism is that front door. If someone comes in and has a really good experience in your community, well, they may not come back and live, but they'll come and visit and spend money and that's also economic development, but guess what? If they say hey, I just heard there's

a big plant coming to Lawrenceburg or Lawrence County. I can move up there. I remember as a kid I had good memories and then again, there are on hook, too.

So, that's all part of the strategy and that's what we're pushing. We have been pushing it for I guess five years now as a united chamber with all those and we've seen success. We've announced more than 1,000 jobs since 2016 in our community. Those were eight different projects, but I'll say this, Chad. Things aren't always sunshine and rainbows and roses.

This coronavirus pandemic has hit our community hard. In fact, we have just learned that two plants will close permanently as a result of this. Some of it is just a financial speed bump. Hopefully, they can overcome that, but they do anticipate closing in May. The other one is a permanent closure as they reevaluate their entire supply chain. It's a primary supplier with China, right? So, again, there is opportunity with that, but the effects and impact economically and on our people are very real.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you, Ryan. We're going to take a quick break for a message for our listeners and we'll be back with a lot more with Ryan Egly right after this.

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Chad Chancellor: I'm excited to tell you that in mid-May, we're expanding our movement to create economic growth by building a community of like-minded economic developers that work to grow our profession and our economy all at once. As we bee-line towards 20% unemployment, America needs a community of economic developers right now more than we've ever needed it before to get us out of this mess economically when the COVID-19 subsides. So, be on the lookout for more information on this in the coming week.

[Music]

Chad Chancellor: Talk about what you're doing with the census efforts. I follow your social media and you're doing all kind of cool stuff with it and in small to mid-sized towns, they obviously need every person counted possible so that you get your fair share of grant money and all of that kind of stuff. So, talk about what you're doing with that.

Ryan Egly: That's exactly right. Again, economic development is a lot of data-driven metrics and the census provides us with that data and you know that with the most updated and accurate data, that may put us apart-- help us stand apart from other communities that we're competing with.

So, we put money behind the census campaign. We have deployed messages on billboards, social media, everything. It's You matter. Be counted. Help Lawrence County. We had commercials on at the movie theatre. One thing that we've really just ramped up now that movie theaters have been closed locally, we've had to move to social media and so we started weekly census trivia where we give away gift cards to businesses. Again, that's just another tangible way to get some sales to those businesses that have lost revenue, but it's also a great way-- social media, Chad, you just have to put some money at it and people share it, right?

And so we're doing giveaways. We're doing gift card giveaways, trivia. Something I think was really cool is there's a Lawrence and Giles County. Again, both of us are in Southern Mill, Tennessee. We had a historic high school football game called the Cowbell Game and it's been going on for decades and it recently kind of ended, but we revived it to see who can get the highest response rate by April 30. So, we're competing with the community on response rate as well.

So again, we've pulled out all the stops on the census and it is so important. It's not just about having your voice heard in our government. It's not just about those federal dollars, but it really is about economic development, even retail development and it tells the story of hey, your community is growing. I need to make investments there and that, again, is economic development.

Chad Chancellor: Well, as a Mississippi State fan, I like anything with cowbell in. So, I hope you win it and Ryan, your energy comes across. Anybody hearing this can hear it in your voice. Where do you get all your ideas? You got-- just the stuff you offer, really smart ideas and so are you just always looking for ideas and talking to people or do you have a source? If there are people out there going wow, those are some good ideas, what advice would you give other folks listening to our show?

Ryan Egly: Have a great team. We're a small staff of five people in our chamber. We drive all of this. It's a lot of collaboration with just good people; good solid people that get it. Your elected leadership; that's really important. They bring some ideas and some perspective to the table that's different as well, but more than anything, lean on your networks. We have, as I mentioned earlier,

we've been on Zoom calls with people from Nashville to Knoxville from Tupelo everywhere just to hear what everyone else is doing.

Don't be afraid to take those ideas and make them your own. That's what chambers and economic development organizations have to do to survive and remain relevant. But truly, a lot of it is just being creative internally. It's listening to your businesses. What are those needs and then being creative with how you can meet those needs.

Again, steal the ideas, make the ideas, and also be willing to share those ideas. When those ideas come across and another community takes notice, be open and honest and tell them the pluses and the minuses and the shortfalls and everything that goes along with it because without doing that, we don't progress together. We are regional. We have to play regionally. Those ideas, again, they come from everywhere. I'll blame it a lot on coffee, sometimes it's bourbon, but either way, you have to act on them as well.

Chad Chancellor: So, Lawrence County is 45,000. Is that about right and you said you had announced eight new projects since 2016 and how many jobs was it?

Ryan Egly: More than 1,000.

Chad Chancellor: And most of those manufacturing?

Ryan Egly: Yes, Sir.

Chad Chancellor: It really is a manufacturer's dream. You've got the no-taxes of Tennessee. It's in a great location between Muscle Shoals and Nashville. Low cost of living and a lot of hard-working folks there. We have a few manufacturers that listen to this, so talk about maybe whatever the special spice there is, why you've had such success. What makes Lawrence County such a good place to do manufacturing?

Ryan Egly: From a quality of life perspective, it's just really our location. Our people have access to the professional sports of Nashville, all things in Huntsville as you mentioned the shoals as well. So, we're just a quick drive anywhere. Quick access to Nashville International Huntsville International Airports, so we're a hop and skip from wherever you want to be in the world, but again, we're in a smaller community with a lower cost of living.

Our wages have gone up, but they are still more manageable than other areas, but more than anything, it's our people. They know how to show up to work. They know how to work. They can read a tape measure, for example. It's just that common sense. It's that work ethic. It's that location. It's our partners with our utilities. We also have a united utility provider and Lawrenceburg Utility Systems they offer gas, water, sewer, electric. We also have broadband access pretty well throughout the county as well; Verena Telecom providing that for us. Again, we have everything that you could ever want in a big city. We're close enough to that big city. We can save you money on operational costs, but we're also going to do it better than anywhere else in the world. So, yes. Come see us.

Chad Chancellor: Well, the last time I drove through there it was obvious you all were growing. I saw new hotels and even new fast-food restaurants and all of those-- those don't happen unless you're growing economically; before COVID, of course. Now, we're all in this together.

Ryan Egly: That's right.

Chad Chancellor: It was obvious the town was growing and you all are really doing a great job and the good thing about Lawrenceburg is he is right. They have a whole team. So, your utilities, and you guys and your city and county all work very well together; better than a lot of places we see. So, if there are any prospects out there, they have a cohesive team that can help them. Well, Ryan, is there anything that you wish I would have asked you that I didn't that you would like to share with our guests?

Ryan Egly: Chad, I think we covered pretty well everything. I really do appreciate the cowbell comment with Mississippi State, but I really miss sports and I'm ready to get that going and hopefully, we can go and catch a game together soon.

Chad Chancellor: I hope so. I was at the SEC tournament in Nashville the night that all the sports were canceled, so it was kind of a shocking feeling. I may have watched the last game any of us will watch for a long time. I watched the last basket in a year maybe. Who knows. We'll see.

Well, thank you for being with us, Ryan. Again, I'm proud of the job you're doing. I've heard from a whole lot of folks what a great job you're doing. You're really one of the up-and-coming stars in

our profession and I think what you're doing for your small businesses and how quickly you all reacted to this just proves that. So, great job. Keep up the good work.

Ryan Egly: Thank you, Chad.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you.

[Music]

Chad Chancellor: If you want to join our movement, which is to create economic growth for small to mid-sized companies, communities, and non-profit organizations, please go to our website at thenextmovegroup.com. Browse around and you can see the different services we offer all designed to create that economic growth for the small to mid-sized companies, communities, and non-profit organizations. Most of our leads and growth has come from word of mouth referral. So, even if you don't need a service, we want you to know what we do so when friends and contacts of yours might need something, you know what we do and you can refer us. So, again, go to thenextmovegroup.com to learn more about the Next Move Group.

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