



Kelly Scanlon: Zach Moores, the founder of the popular Crows Coffee joins us on this episode of Banking on Kansas City to talk about his growing enterprise and how he's using his coffee shops to build community. Glad you could join us, Zach.

Zach Moores: Thanks Kelly. Thanks for having me.

Kelly Scanlon: You literally have coffee running through your veins. Your dad owned a coffee shop at one point too. And how did that factor into what you're doing now?

Zach Moores: Well, that actually is an interesting story. My dad only had a little tea and coffee shop in Waldo in the early 90s, and it was before the whole Starbucks craze and before the coffee shop craze was established. So it didn't do very well. However, my dad was on to something when it came to bringing people in and giving them a space to hang out. And so that stuck with me over the years. I traveled around for work for several years and being on the road most of the time, my only place that I could find that was home when I was gone was the local coffee shop. And I'd befriended the barista, I would get to know the locals and the shop and by the time my two or three or four weeks was up, I felt like I had some new friends and had a home in whatever city I was in.

Zach Moores: So that just always stuck with me. And so when I quit my job, it was the very first thing that I thought of when I wanted to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life – was coffee. And more importantly than coffee, and I tell people this all the time, I'm not a coffee connoisseur like you would see in some of the other specialty coffee shops.

Kelly Scanlon: You're not a barista.

Zach Moores: I'm not, I never had been in coffee before. I think my strength was communication and people and making friends. And I think what I found in these coffee shops was that I love the coffee shops. Coffee, while very important to the coffee shop, it was secondary to me. I think the experience of being in a coffee shop, meeting new people, befriending your customers or baristas is far more important than having the premium best coffee. Now I do

have really good coffee. I'm really proud to have messenger coffee as our roaster and we do a really good job of it. We pay attention to it. But I love the coffee shop. I'm a coffee shop connoisseur.

Kelly Scanlon: There are lots of coffee shops in Kansas City. And by the time you decided to jump in, unlike your dad, he was kind of a pioneer and the time wasn't quite right yet. Why did you think you could make it number one as yet another coffee shop, and what is setting you apart that is allowing you to be successful enough to have opened two additional locations?

Zach Moores: Because I felt like I was going to focus on something that a lot of other coffee shops weren't, which is the coffee shop itself and the community around it. While coffee again is important, I really felt that what I learned being on the road, meeting all these people, baristas, locals in these local coffee shops, was that it was a really comforting place to be. And that's what I wanted to recreate with my coffee shop. And now I'm not saying that other shops weren't doing that, but I feel most of the coffee shops were focusing on specialty coffee, providing the best coffee and that is your experience. And I wanted to meld the two of a great comfortable place, great coffee, excellent customer service. I love taking care of my guys so they take care of you guys. So I think that's really what I wanted to focus on.

Kelly Scanlon: You have three locations, as I mentioned, you have opened two additional ones. The first one was near UMKC [crosstalk 00:03:49] yeah, great place because you've got the college students.

Zach Moores: Yeah. And I got really, really lucky with that space too. Yeah, college students. You've got the trolley trail right there, you've got a great corridor with Brookside Boulevard to the Plaza downtown and now we've got Whole Foods across the street as well. So it's definitely just a great corridor.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. Location, location, location. You can't hear enough of that. But you've also since opened one in Waldo and one in Red Bridge. Talk to us more about that experience that you try to provide at each location. Because I know they're all just a little bit different. So talk to us about that.

Zach Moores: Well each one of my shops definitely absorbs the community that they're in. They each have a different flavor, they each have a different component of neighborhood and demographic. And it's really interesting. Me and my general manager and I talk about it all the time, how each one is so different, even though it's the same coffee shop, but it's the coffee shop that's doing its job. It's allowing those people to come in and have a place to congregate, talk, meet new friends and meet baristas. And so I really pay attention to the neighborhood that I'm going to, I'm not going to just Willy nilly find "Oh here's a building, let's put in a coffee shop." That doesn't work. You have to have a community around your coffee shop first.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. And there are some subtle differences. For example, well this is actually more than a subtle difference, but in Waldo you have a bakery in it. How do you decide to put a bakery in Waldo but not in Red Bridge? Not in UMKC?

Zach Moores: This one was a little bit of a good opportunity plus a little luck. So my Waldo location was Coffee Girls prior to me purchasing it, and Lindsey Patterson, the owner prior to me had a kitchen in there and she made food, salad, sandwiches, all these things. And my concept was much simpler than that. I just wanted to serve coffee, but we also have to buy as a coffee shop, all these pastries from other bakers we have to wholesale them out and it's really expensive. And it's a kind of a loss leader because you don't make a lot of money on it.

Kelly Scanlon: Right. But people come in and want to have a roll with their coffee.

Zach Moores: We were using Scratch Bakery prior to that. McLain's bakery as well, which is really great. Everybody knows McLain's. And unfortunately, the margins on those were very slim. And so I saw the opportunity to take this little space and I had a couple employees that were working for Coffee Girls that really just wanted to bake, because they did do some baking in there. And so I gutted that kitchen out, put a bakery in there. I've got three and a half, three full time and one part-time baker, employees in there. And so now we provide, we make all of our pastries, burritos, everything that you eat in our shop we're making in our Waldo location.

Kelly Scanlon: I have a burning question. Crows coffee. I have been scratching my head trying to figure out why you would name a coffee shop Crows. What do crows have to do with coffee? It's not your last name.

Zach Moores: No, it's not my last name. But there was family involved. So my cousin and I really liked this record store in California called Boo Boo Records, and we both bought these shirts and it had this rooster on the shirt. And so when I told him a name that I had for the shop, he just said, "No, you're not going to name it that. That's a really horrible name." And I'm not going to repeat the name. But he said, "Let's do this, let's do some research." I have to give my cousin credit for this. My cousin is the one who came up with the name.

Zach Moores: So he calls me back. He says, "I got the name. It's Crows Coffee. And initially I think I had the same reaction a lot of people do, it's like, why do we want to call it Crows Coffee? It doesn't make any sense. We're not a goth coffee shop or [crosstalk 00:07:37] anything, but we started talking about it, but crows are really intelligent, incredibly social and very vocal. They're local to the area, dark like coffee, and that silhouette of a crow is really iconic and recognizable. And so it just felt right. It was a good brand. You know, you say Crows Coffee, it's easy to spell, easy to say. It just started feeling right.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, it fits right in with your mission, your goal of trying to create community. They're very social animals and yeah. Now that you explain it, that makes

perfect sense. I think most business owners realize most of them anyway, that if you build it, they will come mentality that that's not enough to bring customers through the doors.

Kelly Scanlon: You've built these coffee shops and you opened your doors and said, you know I want to I want to create community here, but you had to do more than that. What have you been doing to encourage community? What have you actively been doing?

Zach Moores: Well, I think what I do with a lot of the organizations around the neighborhoods that I'm in, I do a lot of donations. I do my best to bring people in for special events. So we have open mic nights for instance, at my Waldo location and to see all the different faces that you don't see in there, it brings in the neighborhood. We do trivia some nights and being able to do these extra things and give people a space to hang out. I want this to be your third space, your living room as well.

Zach Moores: Outside of that, I love being part of the neighborhoods I'm in. I love sponsoring the Waldo Fall Fest. I love giving back to the community. I am really easy when it comes to nonprofits or schools or anybody that wants any sort of donation. We're always actively doing that kind of stuff. It's important to support the other organizations in your neighborhood and to be a good neighbor to your other business neighbors as well, including the neighboring coffee shops in Waldo or around South Plaza or Red Bridge.

Zach Moores: I think that's really important too. I never think of another coffee shop as competition. We're all in this together. We're all family and it's just really being open to every single person that wants to come into my shops.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, a rising tide lifts all boats. [crosstalk 00:10:10] When you were talking about bringing these people in, you immediately by doing that, you immediately created an Ambassador Club essentially. The word of mouth gets out through them. They go and they carry your message and it all comes back to you. [crosstalk 00:10:26].

Zach Moores: That's what I originally fell in love with in the coffee shops was going in here and meeting all these locals and these other cities that I was in and feeling like I was at home. And that's exactly what I want to do. It's not always necessarily me actively being out in the community doing something. It's just letting the community be the community, giving them the place to foster.

Zach Moores: My Red Bridge location for instance, there was no hub for that neighborhood, and since we've opened, we saw the Red Bridge shopping mall go from absolutely no cars into the parking lot. What we did, we put in a coffee shop and now all these other restaurants have come in. The neighborhoods thriving again. All these people that you just didn't see, now have a hub, a place to go. And that's the community that I'm trying to create. And I'm not alone. We also

have some great restaurants over in Red Bridge too that are bringing people out too. But it's just really nice to give people a place to go.

Kelly Scanlon: Sometimes it really doesn't take much of a catalyst, it just takes one person to start leading the parade and everybody falls in line behind. You know? It's kind of one of those sorts of deals. Let's talk about your three locations. From a business perspective, what criteria do you use to decide when it's time to expand? Again, I've seen so many business owners be very successful with one location, especially on the retail side, and then they decide that they want to open another location and they can't replicate the experience or they've overextended themselves. How have you made it work?

Zach Moores: Well, it's a complex question, but I think I have a simple answer. The success of my first shop, I really got to understand what made it great and it was the people in the neighborhood. It was the people that were coming in every day, the regulars. And that made me understand that it's not the shop itself. I mean it is the shop, but more than that, it's the people around it. And so when Coffee Girls came up as potential for me to expand, I of course questioned it because one, it was really quick. I opened my first one in 2014, this was 2016 when the potential for Coffee Girls came up.

Zach Moores: But I really had to think, is this a place I want to go? Because it wasn't doing as great as it could have, but why? But I think in order for me to make a decision on opening up a space, it's really got to be a rock-solid neighborhood. It's got to be surrounded by people, community. And I say that a lot and it gets a little old saying community [crosstalk 00:13:05].

Kelly Scanlon: No, but you have to be able to walk or bike there. Obviously you welcome people from everywhere, but you're not looking for a location where people have to drive five miles, actually get in their car [crosstalk 00:13:16] and go.

Zach Moores: I really say every time I get approached by landlords or realtors and I really say, can you bring strollers and dogs and people. Can they walk there? You think of places like Town Center, where if you're in the middle of that parking lot, there's just no way you're going to get that. And so it's really important for me that people can have this space and get there easily and just walk down the street to their local coffee shop and it's really important.

Kelly Scanlon: And I talked about sometimes it's the consistency of the experience that trips up a business owner who tries to replicate the concept. How have you been able to keep that experience consistent from location to location?

Zach Moores: I think simplicity is a big thing. I think a lot of places really try too hard to fit every person's need. And if you look at our menu, if you look at what we serve and the equipment that we have, everything's really simple and easy. And not just for my employees but for the customers as well. We want them to come in

and just clearly see, oh, that's the menu, this is their pastries. And it's simple. There's not a lot of decision making need to happen.

Zach Moores: We will provide you with the basics. We know what you want. We know you want coffee and a pastry and so we're going to give those things to you in a really easy, simple manner and do it so it is efficient and fast. I do, I listen to my crew, I make sure I buy them the equipment they want to buy and I listen to their suggestions and I take it, because I'm not working behind the bar anymore. My guys are. In fact they don't even like me behind the bar of course. So I try to avoid that.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. Well I'm hearing you say something too. If you're listening to the people behind the bar, your staff, then that also means that you have hired good people and that you trust those people and the relationship that you have is good with them.

Zach Moores: No, I'm glad you said that because I would not have been able to do this if it wasn't for my general manager, Alice Nelson, and there's a good story behind that. When I was building out my first Crows, it was probably about a month before I was open and I had bought coffee from Alice at another local coffee shop for a year, so we knew each other and she wasn't working there anymore, but she walked in, saw how much work I had to do, and she told me that I'm hiring her, so she said, "Zach, you're hiring me and I'm going to go home, I'm going to change clothes and I'm grabbing paint brushes and I'm coming back."

Zach Moores: And she hired herself and I had then when after the first Crows opened and I was working on the second one, I made her manager of the first one. And then after the second one, the Waldo shop got open. She took over that one and then the Red Bridge one came and then I just made her my general manager of all three locations. And so I lean on her very heavily and I give her what she wants to do her job. And that is also a part of how you can keep these things consistent, is not micromanaging your guys. She knew a lot more about coffee shops than I did at the time. And so it's just letting your guys be them, and it makes your employees happy, which makes your customers happy.

Kelly Scanlon: To be successful as a business owner, however you define success, not only takes a great internal team like you've just described, but it takes others in the community. They always say to surround yourself with a good professional services team, accountant, banker, a lawyer, and to do it before you need it. So do you have people that you put in place early on that have been instrumental to your success?

Zach Moores: Well, I knew my strengths and weaknesses right away. So when it comes to the accounting stuff and the numbers and a lot of that stuff, I never once tried to do that myself. So I had an accountant right away, a bookkeeper right away. Obviously if you go back to the very first shop, I wouldn't have been able to do this without my bank. Country Club Bank was so great. I had been turned down by another bank and so I was a little demoralized, but when I came to Country

Club, they really helped me through the whole process of getting the loans and they were really great.

Zach Moores: But moving forward, now that I'm three shops in, I've got somebody helping with marketing. I definitely have advisors that I talk to on occasion. They're more friends that I take advice from. Former coffee shop owners. I don't know if you know Oliver Burnette, who used to own Muddy's coffee shop on 51st street. He's a good friend. So I always reach out to some mentors and ask questions and listen. And I think it's really important, but everywhere I can utilize help from somewhere else I do. And that allows me to really take a step back and look at my shops. I go to all three shops every single day. I check in with all my guys and I couldn't do that if I was running the day to day or not enlisting help from the great people around me. So all those things are incredibly important to running this business.

Kelly Scanlon: Last question, not trying to stump you here, but if money were no object and success were guaranteed, what would you see yourself doing in the next five years or in five years?

Zach Moores: Well, I think it's a great question. I definitely would still be in the coffee business because I love this, but if you know me, you know I like riding bikes. And so if money were no object and success was guaranteed, I think owning a bicycle shop, which is very similar to a coffee shop in the community that creates riding is a very social thing. And it goes well with coffee too as a matter of fact. But I would like to see myself owning a bike shop and allowing myself to create more community around yet another thing which is cycling, and it's healthy and it brings people together.

Zach Moores: And if that means having multiple bike shops or being able to incorporate that within the coffee shop, that's great. But I don't strive for huge things. I think keeping things simple is great and creating community is great. I just think cycling, creating bike shops would be another great thing.

Kelly Scanlon: Sometimes the greatest moments in community are over simple things. So I think you're on to something there. The secret of that. Zach, thanks so much for joining us on this episode of Banking on Kansas City. It was great talking with you today.

Zach Moores: Great talking with you as well.

Joe Close: This is Joe Close, President of Country Club Bank. I have to tell you, all of us at Country Club Bank are proud of Zach and what he's built at Crows Coffee. If there's one thing that Zach understands its community, he gets it. It permeates Crows culture. When you walk through the doors of one of his locations, you can pick up on a vibe of camaraderie. That's important, not just for business, but for a neighborhood. Crows Coffee's vision, acting as a second home for its

patrons, a hub of connectedness just down the street from their own home is admirable.

Joe Close:

That community provides a sense of belonging and mutual support. That sense of community is powerful. It makes us Kansas City. Part of being a member of a community is understanding the importance of being a good neighbor. All of KCs businesses, whether in competition or not, are on the same team. Together we create community and work together to make our hometown better for all. Thanks for tuning in this week. We're banking on you, Kansas City. Country Club Bank, Member FDIC.