



Kelly Scanlon:

Welcome to Banking on KC. I'm your host Kelly Scanlon. Thank you for joining us. With us is Joe Reardon, the President and CEO of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Welcome to the show today, Joe.

Joe Reardon:

Thanks so much, Kelly, good being with you.

Kelly Scanlon:

You have enjoyed a successful career as a lawyer, your more recent roles have been in public service as the Mayor of the Unified Government, the CEO of the Kansas City Transportation Authority, and now in your role as the President and CEO of the Greater Kansas City Chamber. So why are you so passionate about public service?

Joe Reardon:

Part of it is probably you would say is in my blood. My dad was Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas when I was a kid. My grandfather was County Commissioner in Wyandotte County prior to my being born. So there's a little bit of family going on there, but I will tell you that my dad passed away when he was 45, so he was fairly young and I was always the kid that had a lot of respect for what he did, but I never thought I would want to do it. And he never had the idea that I wanted to be in public service. So it was quite ironic and I'm sure he's somewhere laughing that I ended up following the exact same career path that he ultimately did and worked in the same office that he did in the city hall in Kansas City, Kansas, which is pretty remarkable, but some of it's in the blood, right? I will admit that.

Joe Reardon:

The other part of it is just it grows on you. As you get more engaged in your community, you see the potential and I just got more and more intrigued and more and more committed and the steps I've taken in my career have been somewhat varied after being mayor; as you noted, running the Area Transportation Authority and now at the chamber.

Joe Reardon:

I'm a big passionate believer in the Kansas City region. I just love our region and I think it's great and I think it has so much potential. I was mayor for eight years in my second term, prior to me deciding not

to run again. It really sort of hit me that the community that I represented in Kansas City, Kansas and Wyandotte County historically had not really been all that connected to the region for all kinds of reasons, good and bad, just wasn't the case.

Joe Reardon:

Yet all the things that I had had an opportunity to work on at the end of the day, relied on the region in order for them to be great. So to just give you a couple of examples, Kansas Speedway, which was coming up when I was on the council or commission there, if it was just Wyandotte County residents there, it wouldn't be races at the Kansas Speedway.

Joe Reardon:

Same as if you think about Sporting Park, right? I'm a season ticket holder for Sporting KC. I have been before the stadium was built, but I know when I go into that stadium that a majority of people that are in that stadium are not from Kansas City, Kansas, they're from all over the region and it's so exciting.

Joe Reardon:

Nebraska Furniture Mart, which I'm sure most listeners are familiar with; if it was just Kansas City, Kansas residents shopping there, they wouldn't have even opened their doors.

Joe Reardon:

So if you think about no matter where you call home in this great region, we rely on a thriving region for our own corner of Kansas City to be great. And that has just motivated me to sort of take steps like the Kansas City Transportation Authority, thinking about how you connect people in different modes of transit around Kansas City is so important.

Joe Reardon:

Then in my current role at the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, it truly is bi-state. So 60% of our members are businesses based on the Missouri side and 40% are based on the Kansas side and our members physically live all over. This region, the more we can do to connect it, the stronger we're all going to become. I'm just convinced to that.

Joe Reardon:

And it's motivated a lot of what I've in my career, I think.

Kelly Scanlon:

Well, it certainly has. And you definitely make a good point in that the greatness of our community lies not just in each of the individuals, suburbs or cities, our greatness truly lies in us being the sum of all of our parts. And you continue that regional collaboration in the initiatives that you are involved with currently with the Greater Kansas State Chamber of Commerce. Tell us about some of those initiatives, some of the programs that you're working on right now that require that regional collaboration that you just spoke of. And what do you see as being the outcome, the regional impact of those initiatives because of that collaboration.

Joe Reardon:

Our offices are in Union Station. I mean, it's just a magical place to work in. I've got to tell you the dynamic there is incredible, it's a great public space in Kansas City. But 20 some years ago, the building that I get to work in was falling apart, literally the ceiling was falling down and there weren't people inside of it that were just sort of all kinds of critters and animals and all the rest [crosstalk 00:04:55] So at the time the star had an architecture writer and I guess the conclusion ultimately of the writer was that maybe it's just time to tear down Union Station. I think Kansas City just didn't find that acceptable. And I'm really proud of the business community playing such a strong role in saying, "This is something we need to save." And we saved it by getting rid of all the lines and barriers. We passed a sales tax that wasn't just on one side of the state line, not just one city, not just one county, but it crossed all of those barriers and it passed overwhelmingly.

Joe Reardon:

And the place that was falling apart, an icon, perhaps, that Kansas City's failure is now an icon. It is Kansas City's icon. It's like the Arch is to St. Louis, it's our identity. And think about this. We celebrated the Chief's victory in the Super Bowl and where did we do it? Right out in front of Union Station? What I call off the front yard of Kansas City. And we did that 2015 with the Royals. So I want to make sure that we're doing all we can as a business community, as individuals, how can we celebrate and coordinate in magical ways for Kansas City going forward? And some of them can be iconic, right? That doesn't always happen, but others are truly important, but maybe less glamorous.

Kelly Scanlon:

For example.

Joe Reardon:

Yeah, one of the areas that we're focused on using transportation and particularly public transportation, because it's an area that really has been defined by jurisdictional boundaries for far too long and we take for granted those of us that drive a car, we take for granted that we can drive across any part of Kansas City, we do it every day. We cross every kind of line. But in public transportation, thinking about going from one part of the community to the other has in the past been very difficult. So we're racing those jurisdictional lines and coordinating public transportation, which I got to play your role in for a little while in KCATA was really important. And now at the Chamber, transportation's one of our big five. And the reason is only 10% of people have access to their job by way of public transportation effectively. So to say it, another way only 10% of jobs are connected to people by way of public transportation. It's not where we want to be. We want to empower people to get to where they're going to work and we can do better at it.

Joe Reardon:

So our big five around transportation is let's think about, and then let's invest and let's design a system that gets people from their place where they live to where their job exists, which in many cases is not down the street or around the corner, but it's in [inaudible 00:07:27] part of Kansas City.

Kelly Scanlon:

So you're not talking about mere convenience here. You're talking about a system of transportation that, or lack of that has a major economic impact, when you say that only 10% of jobs are accessible through public transportation.

Joe Reardon:

That's correct. And that means somebody could get to that job in an hour or less one way. So it's not a very ambitious measurement and we still don't perform well. And you're right. It's an essential function for our economy. And by the way, it empowers people to be part of the economy. So we're in tough economic times right now. Having effective public transportation, particularly coming out of COVID-19 is going to be so important for people to be able to get back into this economy and to be self sufficient, which we want everyone to have an opportunity to do.

Joe Reardon:

This was important prior to COVID-19, but this is super important as we're looking at how we re-energize our economy as we come out of this crisis.

Kelly Scanlon:

And what are some of the specific actions that need to be taken to improve that 10% number?

Joe Reardon:

I think one of the good things that's happened is, is that we have the jurisdictions all working together under the umbrella of KCATA to design the system and to operate the system. For a long time, there were three or four separate transit companies operating a system, and it wasn't coordinated at all and in some cases you physically couldn't get from one part of Kansas City to the other without being stranded somewhere. So we have that regional coordination now, and you're seeing the KCATA redesigning its system and that redesign will be really important because it needs to focus on getting people to where the jobs are today, not where they were 20 years ago.

Kelly Scanlon:

One of the things that comes to mind as you talk about making transportation more accessible so that there's more accessibility to jobs is something else I've heard you talk about before, and that is inclusive prosperity. That goes hand in hand. Having the access goes hand in hand with the inclusive prosperity. Talk to us about what you mean by that.

Joe Reardon:

If you take a look at what was going on in Kansas City prior to COVID-19 and what will become even more apparent as we emerge from it, there's so many of us in Kansas City that get to benefit from it, interacting in an amazing environment and an economy, and yet we have thousands of Kansas Citians today that for all kinds of reasons, don't have access into that opportunity and the way that you and I do. And the more we can intentionally look at breaking down those barriers to allowing them to have access to the vibrancy of the economy we have, the more self sufficient they will be. I truly believe that it will lead to the potential for reduction in crime and violence. And it allows our economy to grow at a stronger and faster [inaudible 00:10:14]. The city's going forward as we move emerge from COVID-19. Those that try to bring along as many of their residents in getting back engaged into the economy, will be the ones that recover fastest in the most robust way.

Joe Reardon:

And it's going to take all of us in Kansas City to help make that happen because it's transportation, it's education. It's aligning people with skills that respond to the opportunities that are available in the

workforce. And if we don't do this, we're going to fall behind because we won't grow as fast as we can. Growth in the economy, even emerging from COVID-19, we'll be having people ready with the skills that they need to take the jobs that will be available. You can recruit people to Kansas City and we're doing better than ever. But if you're not growing your own, you're not going to grow the community and that's just the fact of the matter I think.

Kelly Scanlon:

You mentioned education, you mentioned skills, you just said growing your own, which reminds me of a project that you're working on with Kauffman right now. I believe it's called the Real World Learning.

Joe Reardon:

Yeah, it's an exciting project and we saw it on one of our trips to Nashville in a different way. But the idea here is, is that as kids are going through high school, that when they graduate from high school, they have skills that are transferable to the workplace in an immediate way. And those skills that can be built upon as they go into other levels of education. So to give you an example of what this might look like, and we saw it in Nashville on one of our leadership trips is, in Nashville, in one of their high schools there are kids on a track where they're in their biology classes and in junior and senior year, not only are they going through what you and I went through in biology, but they're being taught the skills both academically and then physically the skills to get a CNA license.

Joe Reardon:

So for those kids, when they graduate in their senior year from high school, they'll get their high school diploma, but they also will be certified as a CNA, which means their options are really multifaceted. That's what Kauffman really is so exciting to see what they're doing. They're institutionalizing this and working with our school districts to understand how you can do that for every child across Kansas City. And it's going to take your businesses willing to get into those schools and give those experiences to those kids. The real experience. It's not just a day where you get to... but that they're actually participating in skills, learning by way of being in the workplace.

Kelly Scanlon:

I think it's important to point out that that regional collaboration isn't just necessary when times are good or for programs like the Real World Learning project or the Streetcar or preserving Union Station. It's sometimes even more important in times of crisis like this.

Kelly Scanlon:

So what was the Chamber's role in the response to the COVID crisis and how did that become a collaborative response?

Joe Reardon:

Absolutely. COVID-19 is a virus doesn't know any jurisdictional boundaries. We all are very aware of that and the consequences of the virus on Kansas Citians both in their health condition, but economic as well has been devastating for so many of us. To respond to something as complex like this is, really requires removing every boundary there isn't collaborating. And I think we saw a great example of that as the jurisdictions across the region work together to synchronize their stay-at-home orders as people ended up having to go home to be as safe as we possibly could and to bend that curve and there was great

success there. And the chamber certainly was behind the scenes working with all of those jurisdictions to make sure we were supportive of their efforts around that.

Joe Reardon:

But I also want to say that this was a great collaboration between business and state and local and federal government. When you look at the PPP program, the CARES Act, the congressional response to getting money out the door, to help small business particularly, keep folks on their payroll. That wasn't just something that you could just do with the stroke of a pen in Washington, D.C., it required particularly our banking and financial services community to make an extraordinary effort to get to as many of their clients and customers as possible and get them through a process that was being created at the same time as it was being used to get those monies to businesses across Kansas City.

Joe Reardon:

And I just want to applaud the banks and the financial institutions in Kansas City, I'm telling you, they worked 24/7 and in such an intense way to try to do all they could to pull forward those that needed the help and it's made a huge difference. But the last thing I'll mention is, and I'm really proud about this is that we worked with the chamber with KCADC and the civic council to come out with a guide to help businesses understand how to safely return to the workplace called The Safe Return to KC Guide. And we also worked with the Mid-America Regional Council on this.

Joe Reardon:

So this was collaboration at its highest level. So business community, the metropolitan planning agency, health department directors, the best knowledge we could get from anywhere to simplify or to at least give a good pathway to businesses, to safely bring their workers back to work and invite in their customers as well and thousands and thousands of businesses in Kansas City have access to. And I'm proud to say that the chamber played a role in that, but I'm more proud to say that it's just the collaborative spirit of Kansas City that showed through so much in that it's baked into our DNA in this city and I think that's really great.

Kelly Scanlon:

I'm so glad that you brought that up because if I remember right, that guide is now being used as a model in other areas of the country, is that correct?

Joe Reardon:

That's correct. We've had chambers and other cities that have accessed it and called in to us to ask about it and what we did. So it is something that is being used by other communities to help their businesses, particularly smaller businesses that don't have an internal staff that can really work through all this.

Kelly Scanlon:

You go outside of Kansas City a lot on different fact-finding trips, for various reasons you work outside of Kansas City. When you're out and about the country. What do you hear people saying about Kansas City and does that feedback that you get influence or shape your vision for Kansas City?

Joe Reardon:

Kansas City's developing an identity that I don't think it necessarily had a decade ago of a progressive Midwestern city that has create sports, it could barbecue and something that piques their interest in they're intrigued by. We have a dynamic downtown area as well that we just didn't have for such a long time. And I know you've seen this Kelly, but when we travel outside of Kansas City, Kansas Citians are so proud that they wear the KC Heart t-shirts, the Chief stuff, it's all over the place. And it just speaks to, I think the energy that's out there and that's reflected in people that are not from here, the learning that I've taken from, I think an increased awareness in Kansas City and an excitement about it is that we just need to shoot higher. Our potential is greater than we probably know. We're Midwest proud and sometimes that means we don't want to brag on ourselves and we're modest in our nature and I don't mean to take away any of that.

Joe Reardon:

I think that's what makes us us, but we can shoot for the stars here. We can go as far as we want to go. And I think sometimes we don't think high and far enough, and I know if we really want to get high and far enough, it means we all got to start to work more and more collaboratively across the region. That's how we're going to win. And that's how we're going to be more competitive.

Kelly Scanlon:

What do you think is the biggest thing though, that Kansas City has going forward? Is it the collaborative spirit?

Joe Reardon:

Well, first of all, you couldn't have a better brand ambassador than Patrick Mahomes, right?

Kelly Scanlon:

No, no, you can't.

Joe Reardon:

[inaudible 00:17:53] incredible. And the fact that, and I'll tie this into your last question that Patrick Mahomes and other Chiefs players, Travis Kelce not only talk about pride in being a Kansas City Chief and what the team means, but that they talk about being residents of Kansas City with a sense of pride that speaks to the appeal of Kansas City, that we have young people that are at the peak of their career, that not only love what they're doing in our city, they love our city.

Joe Reardon:

Well, you can't beat that. And I think the secret to Kansas City, I think the thing that makes us great is really our people. And I think that there's something infectious about when you're here in Kansas City, that you feel like you belong and the people welcome you in and there's an energy and spirit that exists in Kansas Citians. Those that have been here a long time, and those that are newer to Kansas City, like Patrick Mahomes, that's I think what's great about us. It's really the people in this city that makes it what it is. And people that come here from other places, they'll say it in different ways, but they're shocked at what it feels like here. Not like what it feels like physically, because sometimes you're here and it's hot and humid or freezing cold, but it's what you feel.

Joe Reardon:

The spirit you feel in the city that is expressed by the people that you interact with.

Kelly Scanlon:

As I've said, as you've talked about, you've held so many different positions here in Kansas City. You've seen it from so many different angles. When you look back at your years in public service, you've had so many opportunities to impact and you have, what do you hope your legacy will be?

Joe Reardon:

Yeah. It's like the hardest question you could ask anyone. I honestly, I want to be remembered by my kids as a good dad at the end of the day. I mean, that's so important. It's just fundamental. But in saying that I hope we, at the same time, I think there'd be a measure of some success in my professional career.

Joe Reardon:

If my kids thought of Kansas City as a place that maybe they won't live in, I don't know, I hope they do, but, "God, that's a great place that I come from. There's great things that have gone on there," and that maybe, "My dad played a little role in some of that stuff." That's my benchmark kind of, I'm hopeful that over time, it's not just me, but so many other amazing people continue to build on that. That future generations see Kansas City as a place of opportunity for them too. It's so important.

Kelly Scanlon:

Well, you certainly are continuing on your father's legacy and creating your own. Joe, thank you so much. We appreciate you joining us today. And we also really appreciate all the work that you are doing on behalf of Kansas City.

Joe Reardon:

Thanks to you, Kelly, and thanks to Country Club Bank for doing this. I think it's so important to have opportunities like this, where we can share what's going on in the community. And this is such a great thing that Country Club Bank's doing on behalf of all of us here in the region. So thanks to you, Kelly.

Joe Close:

I'm Joe Close, President of Country Club Bank. Thank you to Joe Reardon and his family for their long history of service to the Greater Kansas City community. Our region is a better place, thanks to individuals and businesses who share the Reardon's philosophy of service and collaboration. When we all work together, we achieve greatness. It's a philosophy the Thompson family embraces too and encourages among associates at Country Club Bank. We are proud that Joe Reardon is a member of Country Club Bank's Northwest advisory board, working arm and arm with us to raise up the Kansas City community. We're banking on you, Kansas City, Country Club Bank, member FDIC.