



Kelly Scanlon: Joining us on this episode of Banking on Kansas City is Chris Goode, the Founder and President of Ruby Jean's Juicery, a rapidly expanding Kansas City native. Welcome to the show today, Chris.

Chris Goode: Thank you for having me.

Kelly Scanlon: Rapidly expanding, my gosh, you just opened your fourth location?

Chris Goode: Yes.

Kelly Scanlon: Inside Whole Foods, over here by UMKC.

Chris Goode: Yep. Right at 51st Street.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, and I heard that that was a fantastic opening.

Chris Goode: It was, it was a amazingly blessed day. I was a little concerned because the weather was sketchy all week, rainy. And the predictions were 50% at the time of the grand opening. So I was a little nervous about it. But the weather cleared up, and the city came out in droves and supported us.

Kelly Scanlon: That's an understatement. I saw pictures of the opening, and I go to New York a lot. And the lines going into that place looked like people waiting in line for a Broadway show. I'm not exaggerating. You had great attendance, and I think that speaks a lot to how much the community supports you in what you're doing.

Chris Goode: Yep. It does. It does. I think that Kansas City has rallied around our purpose. And honestly being in that location, I've come to realize just how much more opportunity we have, because I've met so many people that have never heard of us. So yeah, it's a pretty cool feeling.

Kelly Scanlon: Well, let's back up a little bit then and talk about exactly what Ruby Jean's Juicery is. Because I know what it is, and a lot of people do. But as you said, you're still secret to a lot of Kansas Citians. What is Ruby Jean's Juicery?

Chris Goode: So, Ruby Jean was my late grandmother. And it's a juice bar that stems from the longing for wanting her to be around. She died at 61, from type 2 diabetes, when I was 14 years old. We just passed 20 years of her passing. So, it's really a honor to my grandmother. A way to show people how sweet and how meaningful she was to my life, and the impact she made on myself. But then also take her story and spread it, and make it beneficial to other people's lives. And create legacy from it, and help people live longer. That's it.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. So the name not only commemorates her memory, but it also helps to create an awareness about the health implications that... The results of a bad diet.

Chris Goode: Sure.

Kelly Scanlon: And so the juicery.... So, tell us what... you have the juicery. Tell us about the juices and also you have more though than just the juices. So tell us about that too.

Chris Goode: Sure, sure. Yeah and it does it... For us, it's utilizing my grandmother's story as our platform as a way to... Health can be very intimidating. So, it's a way to make it more approachable, more genuine, more purposeful. So, we galvanize people with that message and that authenticity. Then when you come in the doors, we want to do a lot of the thinking for you. We want you to know if you're having it from us, it's conscious in some way, and it's good for you. It has some health benefits to it.

Chris Goode: And so we have juices, smoothies, performance shakes. Our Troost location location is actually Ruby Jean's Kitchen and Juicery. So, we have a full sit down, fast casual healthy menu. And then we do healthy grab and go snacks at our other locations.

Kelly Scanlon: Now are all the locations the same? Or are some of them a little bit different in the concept? Talk to us about that.

Chris Goode: They are. So I would say Troost has quickly become our flagship, because it does have food. So it has a broader reach, whereas you might not want a smoothie that day, but you can get a turkey sandwich, or coffee, or tea, or something like that. So it's more evolved at Troost. And then downtown is more so our beverages, healthy snacks. And then we have a grab and go fridge for the quick moving, downtown, employee force down there.

Chris Goode: And then Whole Foods Is similar to downtown, but it's a little more streamlined because it is in a grocery store. So speed is always going to be one of our

focuses at all locations. But hopeful is we wanted to keep it more simple. We have some new offerings there that we're piloting, so to speak, that aren't on the menus at the other locations. So we're still kind of testing it out.

Kelly Scanlon: One of the things that I've noticed is it Ruby Jean's consistently ranks very, very high on Yelp, in terms of customer experience. What is it about the experience, in addition to the products, that keeps people coming back over and over?

Chris Goode: That is one thing I'm very, very proud of. Because in our electronic day and age, pleasing consumers can be pretty difficult at times. Because you're just really behind your phone. And so the truth is going to come out. And we've consistently been ranked number one in Kansas City, and were even ranked in 2016, one of the top 100 businesses on Yelp's platform period. And I think it all has to stem from just our passion and love for what we do.

Chris Goode: We don't have rare fruits and vegetables that nobody's ever tried in Kansas City. But what we have is a authentic approach. It's a vibe of feeling the energy. A touch that we have because it just comes from a real place. And people, it's relatable. So I always say that there's a Ruby Jean in everyone's family and that breaks down all barriers. In a very, very divisive time in our country, there is a Ruby Jean in all families.

Chris Goode: And it's my understanding that there's somebody in each of our families that doesn't live healthy, that has a poor diet. That is either cutting their lives short, or somebody's already lost someone because of how they ate, and how they treated their bodies. So it's my job, I've taken it as my life's work, to share my family story, boldly. And it's painful at times, because it's like a constant reminder of our truth. But through our truth, I want people, other people to find their purpose and live healthier.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. That's so true. I know some people might think it sounds silly, but I do believe, and I have experienced, that you can feel the love come through certain products, or a certain person who makes a meal. Makes it exact same way as somebody else makes it, but theirs tastes so much better and it's because you can feel their passion and love that they put into it while they were making it. So I get that, totally. We talked a little bit about your opening just a couple of weeks ago inside Whole Foods. How did that relationship come about?

Chris Goode: Almost a year ago, Whole Foods reached out to me and it was just a really quick email. It said, "We love what you guys are doing and we want to discuss partnership." And I mean, I threw my phone, I was driving, I probably almost wrecked it.

Kelly Scanlon: My big break.

Chris Goode: Yeah. Well not really in essence, it's just that if anybody, if you're in this culture, and really you don't even have to be in a healthy culture to understand the

prowess of Whole Foods. You've got a corporation that sitting at 500 locations. And you can't really say to a person, "Hey Whole Foods", and they not know that brand.

Kelly Scanlon:

Right.

Chris Goode:

And so for me, from building a brand myself, I respect what they've built, from a very meager place. John Mackey, way back in 79'. And I've really studied their story. I've been to Whole Foods around the country, just from a consumer standpoint.

Kelly Scanlon:

The whole conscious capitalism and all that.

Chris Goode:

Everything.

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah.

Chris Goode:

And so to get an email from them, from my vantage point is like, "Wait, what? What, how do you even know our email address?"

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah. Right. How'd that get on your radar? Right.

Chris Goode:

How do you even know we exist. So it was pretty cool.

Kelly Scanlon:

So how did they find out about you?

Chris Goode:

So they had been doing their research. Apparently when they opened that store, they knew about us, and they had kind of followed us and heard about us. And they potentially wanted us to be a part of their opening, but wanted to just get the store open and revisit. So they watched us for a couple of years, had been in every location, pretty sneaky. But they knew everything about us. And then it finally came, I guess the rubber met the road and they sent an email and said, "Hey, let's talk about it."

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah, you know, I was only half teasing when I was talking, when I said, "Oh my big break." Because so many small businesses, they get approached by a large corporation, and they wanted to partner with them. And it turns out to not be a good thing for them, because they can't meet the capacity, or they have to float the invoices for so long, or whatever. So what advice do you have for other business owners who may be listening to this episode of Banking on Kansas City, about what to look for in that kind of a larger relationship?

Chris Goode:

I think that it's important to stay true to why you do what you do, no matter what the corporation is that you may want to partner with, or may want to partner with you. I think if you can't maintain authenticity to why you exist, then it's probably not a good relationship. And don't jeopardize the entire brand, or entire business for one situation. Just understand your value and hold very close

to that. And if it doesn't work, at the end of the day, you still have your integrity, you have your purpose intact and I think it'll work out, as long as you stay close to that.

Kelly Scanlon: We talked about four locations, latest one in Whole Foods. You also talked about some of the different product offerings that you have from location to location, and that you're experimenting with some of the different concepts. So what goes into those decisions to expand to a new location, or to introduce a new product? Because I mean it all costs money, and it costs time that you could be spending on something else. So what factors into those decisions?

Chris Goode: The location component, I'm learning on the fly, which can be very costly. But we try to stay attached to our mission. We want to be in locations that makes sense for us. I have a heart for the community. And so for instance, our Troost location is really something that I thought was unnecessary. And I wasn't 100% sure that it would be supported. Because there's not like a ton of foot traffic, and that's a major key to a juice bar location. The visibility is good, but is it the right audience?

Chris Goode: So I follow my heart more than anything, because 30th and Troost would defy every single metric that some big juice bar owners, checklists would want to see. But I think that for Kansas City, I don't want to just do what's obvious. And so 30th and Troost was one of those things where it's like, man I went to daycare across the street as a low-income kid. And I know that this is a food desert. And I know that what we're about to do here has never happened in the history of our city.

Chris Goode: So that's what we want to be attached to. We want to be attached more to purpose, and we want the community to support that purpose more than anything. Support why we exist.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, let's stay with that for awhile. One of the perks of being a business owner is being able to use your influence, or as you've already mentioned, the things that are meaningful to you. And to create change, whether it's in your industry, whether it's in society at large, whether it's in Kansas City, specifically. So how is Ruby Jean's Kitchen and Juicery allowing you to use that influence?

Chris Goode: Oh man, Kelly, it's allowing me to show my heart. It's allowing me to have a platform for who I am as an individual. The love I have for my family, for my grandmother specifically. But it's a way to reach people, because there's commonality in what we do. And my goal, I think that the thing that we've done the best, if you had to ask me what have we done the best?

Chris Goode: And the biggest feather in our cap is not partnering with Whole Foods. The biggest feather came long before that. It's when we created something that generated the most diverse audience of people, surrounding something that's beneficial to their lives. That's what I feel we've done the best, and different

before than this city has ever seen. And so that's what it's allowing. It's allowing me to bring people together through a very authentic approach. And that's what I'm proud of.

Kelly Scanlon: What have you learned about yourself as a result of being a business owner?

Chris Goode: Sheesh.

Kelly Scanlon: Loaded question, huh?

Chris Goode: I've learned so much. In this process of being a business owner, I've become a father. And I've learned my new capacities. I've learned my breaking points. And I've learned more than anything why I'm on earth. I've learned the power that can be harnessed when you really tap into your purpose. And I think that's what was reflected on Saturday at that Whole Foods grand opening.

Chris Goode: I think we have really great products and really great smoothies and juice and snacks, but it's so much deeper than that. I don't think that people will stand in line around the block for a juice, or a smoothie. I think people will stand in line around the block for a chance to be a part of history, to be a part of purpose.

Kelly Scanlon: Oh, no [crosstalk 00:14:09] question.

Chris Goode: So that's what I've learned is my purpose and what kind of impact I can really have on Kansas City, my family, and just the greater society.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. What specific resources in Kansas City have been useful to you as you've grown Ruby Jean's?

Chris Goode: I would say the greater startup community as a whole. I know that's vague, but I've done things like the FastTrac GrowthVenture. I've done ScaleUP!. I've participated in different endeavors in our startup community that we have a very, very strong ecosystem of startup entrepreneurs that want to support each other, want to point you towards resources.

Chris Goode: AltCap instilled a little bit of faith in me, but we haven't done very much in the way of financial debt. And we're very lean, bootstrapped, scrappy, startup, Kansas City company. So, we're still kind of approaching that point.

Kelly Scanlon: What's the future hold for Ruby Jean's?

Chris Goode: I would love to see us expand in a few more areas in Kansas City. I would like for us to be, when you think juice, and you're anywhere near the borders of our state, that you instantly think of Ruby Jean's. I think that would be my primary focus is that we are woven into the true fabric of Kansas City. Where if you have a Aunt coming in town, or cousin, or whatever it is, that that is one of those stops that, "Okay, I have to take you here."

Chris Goode: So I think that is for the foreseeable future, my primary goal is to just remain authenticity. Be methodical in how we grow, and then just let God do the rest.

Kelly Scanlon: Listening to you talk about Ruby Jean's, it sounds almost like a perfect candidate for franchising, in many respects. On the other hand, if that were an avenue you were going to pursue, how would you maintain that authenticity? How would you recreate the purpose and the persona that you have created here in Kansas City?

Chris Goode: Sure. So we actually do have a licensee location in Springfield, Missouri that we don't operate. We have a conversation going on in Atlanta, Georgia, currently. And for me, when these conversations come about, I think more important than me hovering over the business day in and day out, in a whole nother city, is going to be the relationship that's built with the partner. And why they want to be involved.

Chris Goode: If it's just a, "Oh, you have a popular brand, juice is trending, let's do it." Then it's probably not the right relationship for us. But if it's, "I have a story similar to yours. I believe in what you do. I've been following what you guys have done. I truly relate to it, and I see a void in our city for this very need, and I think that your story will relate and resonate with our community here." Then, okay, let's move on to the next level.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, you can replicate processes and systems all day long, but trying to find that partner is a much more organic kind of endeavor. What excites Chris Goode about Kansas City? What kind of potential do you see? What progress do you see? Talk to us about that.

Chris Goode: A lot excites me about this city. And I knew it was a place that I wanted to anchor in as an adult. When I decided to start Ruby Jean's, I actually living in Inglewood, in California. So I decided to bring the concept home, because I felt like it needed to be at home. But our city is growing so rapidly, in so many different sectors of the city. And the exciting part, and where I feel Ruby Jean's can come into play, is that I like to call us the conscience of Kansas City.

Kelly Scanlon: Mm, love that.

Chris Goode: So we can grow rapidly, and we can build commerce, and build distribution through a new airport, and all these different components. And so much mixed use popping up. But I think that the most important thing that I feel like we have an opportunity to assist with, is allowing Kansas City to maintain its soul and its heart. And that's what excites me. Is that I see our city growing, but I also see our city staying who we are at our core. And that's a place that it's just good old Midwest, soulful, friendly. A really, really good place. And I think that that's what excites me the most, is that we'll become a bigger city but we'll also still be who we are.

Kelly Scanlon: Tied to our roots.

Chris Goode: Sure.

Kelly Scanlon: Those strong roots. What's one message that you'd like to leave our listeners with and why?

Chris Goode: I think that when people think about Ruby Jean's, I really have kind of dwindled our brand down to one line. And it's, we make juice for a reason. And for us, that reason is to bring people together, to spread our love for health, through a very, very truthful story to my family. But I want that reason to be inspiring for them to find their reason. I know why I do what I do, but I feel like if we all tap into what our reason is, authentically, everything, every experience we have as Americans, as just people, will be better.

Kelly Scanlon: What a message that we all need to hear these days. Chris, thanks for being with us on this episode of Banking on Kansas City. We appreciate all you're doing and we wish you much continued success.

Joe Close: This is Joe close, President of Country Club Bank. When I hear Chris talk about his grandmother, Ruby Jean, it brings me back to Country Club Banks, Byron Thompson. Like Ruby Jean, he was a person of integrity that inspired others and helped chart a course for something bigger than himself. They're authentic. They're local heroes.

Joe Close: Authenticity isn't something you can create or manufacturer. It's something you're born with. And something you nurture and protect as you grow, adapt, and change. It's something to be proud of, and something to be admired. Local businesses like Ruby Jean's, are what gives Kansas City that authenticity. It's what makes KC like no other place in the Midwest. It's what helped drive our hometown pride to new highs.

Joe Close: So let's continue to act as champions for our local businesses. Let's continue to champion our sources of authenticity. It's what would make our local heroes like Ruby Jean, and Byron proud. Thanks for tuning into this first episode. We look forward to sharing more conversations with our local makers, innovators, and community leaders. We're banking on you, Kansas City.