

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 46

Troy Houtman

Don and Ebony: [00:00:00] Welcome to another edition of the WCBA powered of course, by Evergy first. Thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us, love us, share us. We truly appreciate you. Today. We are excited to have my man Troy Houtman from Wichita parks and recreation. And he's in the studio today to talk also talk about Leadership Wichita.

That's what's up.

Troy Houtman: Thanks for having me glad to be here.

Don and Ebony: Yeah, we're excited to hear from you. you know, a lot of us know who you are. I've heard your name, seeing you in the papers, seeing you in the community everywhere. Right? So tell us a little bit about who you are, your background. Where'd you grow up where you went to college or career, et cetera.

Troy Houtman: Well, I can take a while, but I'll make it pretty quick. So I grew up in New Mexico and I was born in Albuquerque and grew up in Santa Fe. After high school, I joined the army. I was active duty for four years, and then I went to school in Colorado, went to school at the University of Northern Colorado. Go bears.

And, after that, just started my career in parks and recreation actually got my degree in accounting. Because I was supposed to be a CPA. My dad's a CPA. My mom's a CPA. My brother's a CPA. I supposed to be a CPA, but I decided to become a parks and recreation professional

Don and Ebony: How do they feel about that?

Troy Houtman: And it's probably the best thing that's ever happened.

I I love working in parks and recreation. It's so much about working with the community and being part of the community and delivering services to the community. So I just worked my way up through the ranks and, notably I was in, in Austin, Texas for quite a long time, where I was in charge of all the parts.

on the park side of things, doing all the maintenance and operations for parks, it was is huge. It's a huge department. and then I had a chance to go to San Antonio for a little while, and I took care of, the Riverwalk and everything downtown and had impact on, economic development. I brought, a grocery store downtown.



Troy Houtman: I just did anything and everything that had to do with downtown but this opportunity to come here to Wichita really caught my eye. So my wife and I talked it over.

And there was a job opening in Derby, for an aquatics coordinator, which is what my wife does. She's an aquatic, she's an aquatics professional. So we both applied. We both got the jobs. We both started on the same day, and so it was meant to be, to come here to Wichita. And it's been seven years, actually yesterday, was my seventh year anniversary. It's been, been really good. Really enjoyed it.

Don and Ebony: Congrats.

Troy Houtman: Thank you.

Don and Ebony: And you talked about, you know, delivering services to community. But before I go into that, what year, were you in Leadership Wichita?

Troy Houtman: 2016, the best year, the best class ever.

Don and Ebony: Oh my gosh. Wow. Best class ever. All right. I love that enthusiasm. And I love as a trustee, how we make each of the classes feel as if they have the best year

Troy Houtman: Awesome. That's cool. But I'll tell you why we're the bit, the best if, if you want me to.

Don and Ebony: I'm interested.

Troy Houtman: My classmates and I, we, we still get together. We still spend time together. We still do business together. We find opportunities to support each other, we have our little Facebook group and we send information to each other. you know, it

You know, leadership, Wichita was the best thing that I ever did here in Wichita. It connected me with all the right people. And I learned so much beyond just the operations the city operations, with the city of Wichita, you know, that there's more than just government, that there is a lot more to it.

And, you know, I, I've developed some really great friendships through leadership, Wichita. it's just been amazing. So in fact, today, not necessarily from my group, but Wendy Johnson call me up and ask me, Hey, I need some helpful hints and some information she's trying to get a project done.

Boom. We get it done. We make it happen. Yup.

Don and Ebony: That's a beautiful thing. Now you, you shared what happened once you was in there, but what gave you the mindset to say, I need to apply for Leadership [00:05:00] Wichita?

Troy Houtman: I had no idea what Leadership Wichita was. Nobody even told me about it, was actually, Becky Tuttle. Who's currently a council member. she said, Hey, I'm gonna, I'm gonna ask you to apply for this. And, and, and I'll be your supporter for that. I said, sounds good to me.

tell me a little bit more about it. and once I learned more about it, I was like, yeah, I'm, I'm glad she did.

Yeah. There's these folks in the community that are leaders in the community, and they want to make sure that those connections happen, that, that the movers and shakers, they can only do so much together or by themselves, but together there's so much that we can do in this community.

So, yeah.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. Shout out to my friend, Becky Tuttle. describe your overall experience. These shared it, but tell us more. I mean, it lasted 10 sessions for one to understand. Tell us your overall experience of it.

Troy Houtman: So 10, 10 meetings and it seemed really kind of intense and, and, we, my past experience starting with the army and, and going through and stuff, I I'm used to really intense situations. It's not that big of a deal to me, but I was like, You know, this is really, really deep. This is a really strong commitment and, and, and these people are meeting and working with and going to be teammates with We're going to be working together side by side.

And I was, I was really excited about that. Some of the highlights was just working for the non-profits and finding out what nonprofits are out there. And we had to go volunteer and spend a day working for that nonprofit. Then we found out a whole lot more about what Wichita's all about. I had to do a, a ride along with the police department.

Let me tell you something. After midnight, riding with a police officer and in the dark, you learn something about, your city that you probably never thought about, or even saw before. I would encourage everybody to do that. it's a different experience altogether. we had a chance to actually.

visit the jail and unfortunately, one of the people that we're bringing in, we were booking in. So I got to see how that whole process works. Yeah. it Just some of the things that were required throughout the whole, 10 meetings was just really, really kind of fun. I'm not going to spoil some of the other things I can't tell you about, but,I, I was, I became a better citizen for it and I became, a better employee for the city of Wichita from it.

Don and Ebony: I really appreciate you mentioning some of those experiences, because I think that's what sets Leadership Wichita apart from other leadership programs, right? It's that experiential learning and having the opportunity to actually turn up the heat on those conversations. You know, you said you were in the army and you had.

To intense things, but what people don't realize when you come into Leadership Wichita, you have people with some strong opposing views, right? And it's these experiential experiences or the opportunity to be exposed to these things that allows you to see different perspectives. So I'm curious from your time through leadership, Wichita, what was the most impactful, session that you think you went through?

Troy Houtman: I keep going back to time. That's really kind of memorable. I was working through,we did a session where we had to work for non-profit. Hmm. And I always talk about all

the different cogs and different wheels that makes the city work and, and make things happen. but It's truly the work of the nonprofits that fill up the gaps.

there's only so much that I can do in parks and recreation with my programs. There's only so much that a private business, whether it's a manufacturing company or a service company that they do.

but there's people that fall in between the gaps that you don't know about that you have had never even thought about?

Troy Houtman: one of them was in regards to a situation with, abused, wives that, that they needed a place to stay. And so there's a whole non-profit that supports that there was a whole nonprofit, that supports, children with autism. And, it, it was just amazing to learn. These people are getting these resources out of nothing.

And, but there's these gaps and people don't realize that these gaps get filled and there's people that really care and really go above and beyond to make that happen. so I take that back to my job. and, you

know, I, I got my basic core of programs and things going on and whatnot, but when these nonprofits reach out and say, Mr. Houtman, you know, can we, can we get the chance to use the park for free or can we, find a way to use one of your buildings for some meetings? is there a way that we can entertain, the children that are in this nonprofit on train rides over at OJ Watson? we make it happen and, and I wouldn't have had that perspective if I wouldn't have been in Leadership Wichita,

Don and Ebony: Well, I think that's huge. Right. and it is about the perspective and opening and challenging your, your thought of, of point of view. just because you, you mentioned specifically that people, there are people who fill these gaps, but there are people who don't even know that there are gaps. Right, right.

Troy Houtman: And that's the other part of it too, is [00:10:00] the exposure of the needs that are in this community. you go by about your day, you go to work, you drive to work, you'll grab a bite to eat. The corner pizza place, just down, over here in the street, which is very good by the way. Yes, And, and then you go home and you get to watch, the Kansas city chiefs win a great game and all is good in the world.

but there's a lot of other things that are happening in the city that we need to be aware of. And, and I think, that's, what's been really eyeopening and, and working with a lot of the folks from my class And that. In all seriousness. I, I know I joke around about being the best class, but it's the best program I think, for making these contacts.

Troy Houtman: And, and I, I still talk to these folks every day to see what is it we can do to lift up this community. And the fun thing is when I see something in the paper, you guys were teasing me about my name being in the paper, but there's there's so sometimes it's good, but the cool thing is when, when, you know, somebody in the paper, Aaron Bastian, for example, he was in our class. It's something that I go, he was in our class and he's in leadership Wichita and look what things he's doing. and every time I see a name that was associated with Leadership Wichita, there's so many of them and I, I.

Yeah, I joke around are better class being impactful in the community, but it's Leadership Wichita. You see all the, the graduates from leadership, Wichita, and they're doing things they're making things happen.

Don and Ebony: Yeah. And that's one of the key components, right. Is, challenging and empowering. And you can see the leaders who've gone through this program and the impact that they're making in our community. It's real. And I, I'm curious from your perspective, You know, you, you contribute greatly to our economic profile and, and to what Wichita looks like specifically from Leadership Wichita are there any things that you took from that class that has challenged you, to, to lead differently in your role?

Troy Houtman: So you mentioned, the economic impacts from our department and, that's one of the things that I've taken a different perspective as well.

Is Brian running the responsibilities or the operations of our department. So most recently we announced that we're building, what's called a pickle plex

pickleball, courts. And the idea is to bring people from other states to come here to Wichita. So I've been working a lot with Susie Santo over in visit Wichita, another, great supporter and community person, and. you know, this whole idea of parks and recreation, having an economic impact, whether it's bringing in teams for baseball, for soccer.

Troy Houtman: Now we're going to try to be doing the same thing with pickleball and, and So yeah, this idea of of just parks and recreation is just a, a green space, and a place to play some kickball or swim in gym. It's way. more than that. And starting in, in January, my department's going to get a little bit larger. So we're taking on a new division.

We're not new to it's new to us, but not to the city culturally. So our department's going to change names. It's going to be a cultural Arts parks and recreation and, the other part of that is really been something I've learned over the past seven years is the impact of art and what we need to do here in Wichita, in supporting our artists, and anything that deals with culture.

And so what we've been doing over here at NASCAR park has been doing a lot of different, Ethnic groups that come in to do different performances. just this last week. No, actually last night. We had, native American Indians, demonstrating their dances there at Naftzger Park. we've done a lot of things with the Hispanic community as well.

So it, I just. think the quality of that. That is developed from parks and recreation has just it's growing, but we're getting much better at our craft.

Don and Ebony: Yeah, I, I would agree. And I think so you're going to have that name change and the shift in the name, but these are some of the things that you've been doing, you know, throughout your, your, your life work, and this and cultural arts parks and recreation.

Troy Houtman: That's correct.

huh. And, and you got, I know that, there's been progress made throughout the city, like from clap park to the new Mac Adams and the pools and things like that.

Don and Ebony: What other types of, things have you guys been doing over there?

Troy Houtman: So special events, which is another economic impact. In my favorite one, it happens right out here on Douglas, where we close, Douglas for open streets. So, we took a hiatus for a year. we didn't have open streets last year due to COVID. this year we had had the open streets and we kind of streamlined it a little bit.

So we didn't do that. Entertainment and, and [00:15:00] special, activities going through the rest of the route. But it, we had about 20,000 people come this year and it just kind of, it was an event that a lot of folks really wanted back and we really thought it through. We were watching the a 14 day positivity rate.

What are we going to do to make sure that we're safe? the great thing is that we're outside and you kind of naturally social distancing. Douglas is wide it's big, So it worked out. Okay. But the idea of, we have to go to Kansas city for a special event, or do we have to go down to Oklahoma City for a concert? Right now with COVID things are a little bit slow, but working with my friends who are at the Wave, there's other folks that are putting on great, great music. now that we have a great stadium over here, we're gonna have some great things coming here to Wichita, and we don't need to leave to be entertained.

We can stay right here. And so that's, what's really exciting.

Don and Ebony: All right, friends, we're going to hear a word from our sponsor and we'll be back to hear more from Troy Houtman our director from the city of Wichita parks.

Welcome back friends. We're here having a conversation with Troy Houtman troy was a part of a great leadership Wichita class. As you've heard him say a couple of times. well, I know, but you know, we have to just be in reality at this point, but during that experience, I'm really curious to understand.

So you are new to Wichita, or new ish. You've been here a few years before going to the program. Did Leadership Wichita open your eyes and your perspectives to new networks of individuals?

Troy Houtman: Most definitely. And as I mentioned in our class? there was, folks from all Businesses and walks of life here in Wichita and what I was primarily really connecting with, being, being here two years, was. Within city hall. I was getting a really good relationship with the other department heads.

but it was all about the services that we provide as the city of Wichita. not really understanding how everything works. so. One of the things I always think about is a great city requires, four different legs. One of them is great business, great education, a great, religion and churches and great government.

Troy Houtman: You take one of those away. That chair kind of wobbles a little bit and you take two of those away. that chair falls down. So you need all four. And I hadn't had exposure to some of those other areas in Wichita. And as I mentioned before, It's really opened up a lot of doors, a lot of conversation. A good example is I'm working on a project right now for a community garden, evergreen. So, I'm working with Empower Evergreen. I'm working with the four H I'm working with the county extension. I'm working with the United Way. These are all groups that weren't necessarily in my circle before. so we're looking for a grant. That's going to finish this off, but this whole idea, this community garden is going to be in Evergreen. That's

going to be supporting the neighborhood with fresh food, fresh fruit. and they're going to be the ones they're going to be working on it, but it's going to be on Parkland. It's gonna be on city property. And when it paid for the water But there is five different groups that are going to be working together.

So the extension office is going to provide training. The four H is gonna provide seeds, empower is going to actually make the connections into the community to distribute the food. we're going to work together to bring in volunteers to, to actually work the garden. if this comes to fruition next spring, it's going to be really great.

So. are the things that happen when you work as a team.

Don and Ebony: Agreed. And that's a beautiful illustration of how leadership Wichita in my opinion, helps build community as an example in its truest sense, Don. Excellent. Why should a local businesses and organizations nominate their employees [00:20:00] for Leadership Wichita.

Troy Houtman: They're going to get so much out of it. You think about this, this curious situation I'm going to lose my employee for 10 days, That 10 days of production. What, how am I going to cover that You know, somebody's going to have to take care of that, that workload, but I tell you it's going to come back.

Not just twofold, not just tenfold, but a hundred fold. you can really get an employee that has a better understanding of Wichita, a better understanding of how. everything works. I was fortunate enough on, on there's certain sections that they talk about some of the government interactions. And so. Our finance director gave a great session for, it was about two and a half hours.

The city manager. My boss gave a session and of course I'm like, I better say it the right way. I'm watching them, right. But my colleagues and in my class, and this was the first experience that they ever had seeing or really hearing the city manager.

so This employee, no matter where they come from, they're going to get exposed to so much about Wichita.

Troy Houtman: Then they bring that back and then they can, leverage that with, with different activities, different connections. I pick up the phone and call any of my classmates or just even anybody who was ever been on leadership, which talk. And I say, Hey, I'm a Leadership Wichita grad in here's what I'm thinking. I'm going to, I'm going to get some traction. We're going to work together because they know the value

Don and Ebony: Excellent. Excellent. That's some kind of way I've not received the phone call from you then.

Troy Houtman: I've been waiting for you.

Don and Ebony: There you go. I love how you turned that Troy. Excellent. you have lived in places that I love. I love San Antonio. I love Austin. And of course I love Wichita been here all my life. What do you see as Wichita's greatest opportunity?

Troy Houtman: It's really untapped. There's a potential here that, people don't even realize, yeah, I've seen Wichita grow in the seven years. I've been here. And when I was in Austin, I was at a time in Austin just exploded.

And it was not necessarily planned or, or controlled and, and, you know, there's problems with that as well.

But here in Wichita there's folks that are bringing new ideas to Wichita and, it's it's, I call it the, the slow cooker. Wichita is that slow cooker that, you know, you get, you get that idea. Yup. Yup. You get that idea and it doesn't necessarily always explode. It gets a little warm and a little juicy, and then people start to think about it and talk about it.

And, and, and then I start seeing things happen. it kind of moves a little bit slow, but I think that it might be a, an advantage of that. And so that's something that's really different here in Wichita. And I see that.

Don and Ebony: I think that's, that's interesting. The slow cooker.

I'm going to take that one away and I will always remember it.

Troy Houtman: You can use it as much as you want.

Don and Ebony: I'm curious, you know, as we begin to wrap up Troy, you've dropped a lot of, nuggets of wisdom on us, but tell me, who do you draw inspiration from?

Troy Houtman: When I first got into the professional approximate recreation, my first boss, his name is Chuck Mayville in Colorado Springs. And he, a. He was a little bit different. He's really kind of a fun guy. He loves Disney and I'd walk into his office, and there's just all kinds of Disney things on his, on his wall.

But the thing that really made it very clear was how much he cared about his employees and how much he cared about the community. And to me, that that's been one of the key things and, and, to gain people's trust and to. reciprocate that with a caring attitude. And so he's the one that kind of really set the stage from the night before that you have to remember, I was in the army, I was all rough and tough and you know, that let's go get him. And I still have that energy and still have that, passion. But, it's, I think it's tempered with this idea that you know, if I could spend a little bit of time. showing somebody that I really care, it's really going to be impactful. And he taught me that and, and that's what I use. Most daily and, and he's, he's been great.

So I've gone through my career. I moved around, Florida, Texas, and here, and he, he calls me and checks up on me still. So

Don and Ebony: Now it's time for some fun

Troy Houtman: Yes,

Don and Ebony: Dealt with Ebony for a long time. I know it felt like it would never end. Right. But, now it's time for word association.

Give you one word, you give me one back. It's not wrong because it's your word. You ready?

Troy Houtman: I'm ready?

Don and Ebony: Leader

Troy Houtman: The president,

Don and Ebony: College

Troy Houtman: Opportunity,

Don and Ebony: Wichita

Troy Houtman: untapped opportunities. That was two words.[00:25:00]

Don and Ebony: Hero

Troy Houtman: it's gotta be Superman. He's just cool.

Don and Ebony: Kansas, right?

Troy Houtman: And that, that too.

Don and Ebony: Okay. Chamber.

Troy Houtman: The various statuesque building on the corner here on Douglas. I drive by here every day and I go, there's the chamber. They, there you go. They're going to do something good,

Don and Ebony: fun

Troy Houtman: oh, parks and recreation

Don and Ebony: family

Troy Houtman: in Mexico. City

Don and Ebony: vacation

Troy Houtman: Oh, Mexico city family in Mexico city. Yeah, exactly.

Don and Ebony: last but not least beverage.

Troy Houtman: A cherry Limeade from Sonic with, with the, with the ice. Yeah. And there's that little cherry in there.

Don and Ebony: Yeah. There you go. Route 44?

Troy Houtman: I usually don't get the really big one. I usually just get, get a small one.

Don and Ebony: That's just me. Easy on the ice. I want it all.

Oh my gosh. Excellent. Thank you, Troy. Thank you for being here. Troy was quite delightful.

Troy Houtman: I enjoyed it. Thank you.

Absolutely. Well friends we've come to the end of the road, the end of this session. Thank you for tuning in and listening to us this week. Hey, and if you enjoy listening to this podcast, please share it with someone you think would find value in this till next time.