

## Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 47

### John Rolfe

Don and Ebony: [00:00:00] Welcome to another exciting edition at 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 checking us out. Today in the house, the one and only the myth, the man, the legend, John Rolfe from the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce.

How you doing my man?

John Rolfe: I'm doing great, Don. Thank you.

Don and Ebony: So excited to have you here, John. we've been so just thrilled to see your journey and you come back to Wichita and all the wonderful things that you're doing. So we would like to just take a moment for you to tell us a little bit about.

John Rolfe: Well, Ebony, Thank you very much. And, just to give you a little bit about myself, I am a native of Wichita, Kansas, so and proud to to be that native of Wichita.

Don and Ebony: High school?

John Rolfe: I went to southeast high school, Buffalo. That's for sure that is golden buffaloes and that's right. And, a graduate, of a Wichita State University, go Shocks. grew up here in the area, started my professional career in the banking industry. moved on. from the banking industry into the economic development world, in several capacities. But, also for quite a while at the Kansas Department of Commerce, in Topeka, Kansas.

and then from there spent a a number of years in the hospitality industry with, convention and visitors bureaus.

John Rolfe: And now back here, in Eco Devo, here, at the Chamber of Commerce. So glad to be back.

Don and Ebony: We're excited to have you, you know, you've worked in a number of capacities in economic development and growing our region and growing our city. I'm excited to see, you know, the things that you're going to do here in the Chamber. So the Chamber is dedicated to champion more than what we have 1400, 1500 businesses and

John Rolfe: that's correct. yeah.

1400, little over 1400 members.



Don and Ebony: is that's. That's wonderful. And so I am curious to understand what attracted you to the Chamber. You've had statewide influence. You've had regional outside of the state, but now Wichita,

John Rolfe: you know, really what attracted me here to the chamber is really its role and its role its impact and its importance to the business community.

The way I look at it. It really impacts everything that that we do. in a community, From the quality of jobs to education, to just the quality of life. And that economic impact is so important because impact and affect all of our daily lives. And so having being a part of the chamber and its impact on the business community is really what attracted me back to the chamber and to take on this role.

And I'm very excited.

Don and Ebony: Why are you so past. About seeing business thrive here in Wichita. I mean, what, what, what does it for you?

John Rolfe: Well, I think, you know, what it does for me is we have to have a strong business community, because without a strong business community, Wichita and its region just can't sustain a, and we can't sustain a strong, business community.

We can't sustain a strong education community, quality of life. All of those things are so key to what we do here in the community. And so for me, I'm passionate about that our business community, because it does impact our daily lives. And so that is why I'm so passionate about, the Chamber and what we do here in this community and in this region.

Don and Ebony: I want to go back to your, your history with the KDOC. Was that, Gary's.

John Rolfe: Right. It was under a governor, Bill Graves and Lieutenant governor Gary Shear, who also served as the Secretary of Commerce.

Don and Ebony: Right. That's right. I knew there was a connection there. I want to make sure we tied that up there.

Now that you here, what can members of the chamber expect from their fearless leader?

John Rolfe: Yeah, well, I think? What they can expect and what we have continued to do over the years and will continue to do it even stronger. is continue to be an. advocate, for small businesses, as well as all businesses [00:05:00] in this community and this region, we certainly will continue with our advocacy because we believe we have to have a very good advocacy program and initiatives that continue to drive a strong business climate.

Some of our other initiatives, and what individuals can expect from the Chamber is continuation of our diversity equity and inclusion initiatives. And not just. for Some businesses, but for all all businesses that are, that can be impacted. And that it will be beneficial because I believe certainly our DEI is very important and certainly impacted to this community as a whole,

A few other things, certainly our pride in, in place and we call this our, pride of this community, whether that's Looking and discussing the riverfront legacy master plan, which is key to this

community, but also, things such as our Wichita flag. How that does that play a part of our quality of life? And how do we continue to grow that pride in this community, for Wichita.

So those are just a few, a few of the initiatives that individuals can expect. But one other aspect of that of that, that I would add is the Talent and the workforce, piece. the talent is so key to this community, as well as the workforce. And there will be stronger emphasis on our young professionals that is extremely key to us that we can retain our young professionals here in our community. and there's some great initiatives taking place with that.

So that's a few of the areas in which individuals can expect us to continue on and, expect for me to continue to initiate and grow.

Don and Ebony: On the DEI. I know that's important. You just brought on a new director, D E I D. Correct.

John Rolfe: We did. She's a rockstar. Ricki Ellison is our new director of diversity, equity and inclusion, and we are extremely excited to have her aboard.

Don and Ebony: Can I say that was a good poach. I look at Ebony cause I poached her. So I, I think I can say that.

Excellent. No, I think that is awesome, Don. I appreciate you, you know, going over those key pillars, being in economic development ourselves, we understand that there's no better way to nurture community than to supporting a small business and the chamber. So we appreciate that the work that you and your team are doing, and excited to see, Going to happen in the future.

So you mentioned a few key things, right? Talent, diversity, equity, and inclusion, pride in place, and advocacy. out of all those things, you've been in the job. How long? About a month

almost a month, almost a month.

Don and Ebony: Well, I'm interested to know what has surprised you the most?

John Rolfe: The business community's continuation to remain strong and to be very supportive. of other businesses, and to give advice and share their own experiences about the challenges that they faced and they continue to face to make other stronger, and to make them continue to be a strong business and their support for other businesses to make sure that they can remain successful and remain afloat even, after the pandemic has taken place.

Don and Ebony: And I love that because you know, a part of your commitment or your mantra as the Chamber is success for your members, right. And leadership for the community, prosperity for the region. Right. And I think, you know, and not too. Both, but I think this podcast right, is a new network for those community builders and then opportunity for these businesses to connect and engage and tell those stories that you were just speaking of so that when people hear one entrepreneur's story, they're like, wow, I went through that same thing and they overcame.

Maybe I can overcome. So we appreciate the opportunities to be able to, to connect with these small businesses and hear their stories. What can Wichita do to better support the business community? Are there some ideas that you have in mind?

John Rolfe: You know, that's a good question. Ebony, but I think, The thing that, Wichita can do to continue to better support the business communities is, to remain engaged and, certainly to remain involved, you know, and, and all areas, I think, you know, being supportive of our great educational institutions, other businesses, and, and quite frankly, even other organizations that are focused on growing, our small businesses our entrepreneurs. even our large businesses in this community, because they truly do, make us Wichita and this region our real success. And so I think that continuation of support among each other is probably the most critical piece that, individuals and other companies. can do, in this, in this community.

Don and Ebony: Right now. We're going to hear a word from our sponsors, but we'll be back to hear more from the new [00:10:00] Wichita Chamber President and CEO, John Rolfe.

Welcome back friends. We're here having a wonderful discussion with John Rolfe, our new Wichita Regional Chamber President and CEO. I'm curious to know, I know you're new in the role, but what scares you?

John Rolfe: know, that's a, that's a great question. Ebony, you know, I don't know if there's anything particular that scares me. I think there are things that certainly Captures my attention.

And I guess if I was just really thinking about what probably scares me or continues to capture, my attention, and concerns me it would be probably a few things, you know, are probably our civility this country. And certainly across the world, but also one other item that I think that concerns me is, you know, we seem to be moving. As a country, as a global society at rocket speed.

And, you know, I always want to be on the cutting edge. And so one of those things that concerns me is the ability to have those continuous challenges, to be able to respond quickly the world continues to turn no pun intended there, but certainly to keep up with all the many changes that. that occur. And there are many of those. So I think that's probably a couple of items that certainly capture my attention as we continue to, move at at rocket speed

Don and Ebony: And as we continue to move at rocket speed, I'm curious when I'm having conversations with people or having a coffee, what is it that you want people to think of when they think of the chamber?

John Rolfe: I want them to think of the chamber as a very pro-business organization. first and foremost as a resource for all businesses.

but also as a chamber that is going to continuously address, their, their needs and be very responsive to their needs and stay on the cutting edge of those initiatives and issues that impact the businesses of this community and of this region.

Don and Ebony: So I know that you, have so much spare time and you have all of these books that you read.

Tell me, where do you draw your inspiration from? Like who are the thought leaders that you admire?

John Rolfe: You know,

Don and Ebony: Not Don Sherman, someone else. I was sure that was not,

John Rolfe: well, after you and Don, you know, you know, there, there are several, I suppose, thought leaders come to mind. I, I w I have to say, you know, probably my family keeps me inspired specifically my wife on the inspiration part of that.

But I would also say that some of the thought leaders that inspire me or that I, that I. admire. like a Malcolm Gladwell, Jim Collins, and even to a certain degree Daniel Pink and some of his perspectives on various aspects, as it relate to business and life and things, just in general life, in general.

Don and Ebony: Your wife inspires all of us.

That's my anchor.

John Rolfe: Thank you.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. You talked about the who. What inspires you? I mean, what makes you do what you do every day? I mean, is there something out there that, but not a person, but I thought, or thing, or what makes John Rolfe tick?

John Rolfe: You know, I think the thing for me, is I, I, you know, I'm always a highly energetic, motive. type of individuals.

So. I think seeing things happen, and cultivating things seeing them come to fruition. is one of those things that, really drives [00:15:00] me, you know, you know, I always try to look at things what they can be and not what they should be. So, you know, and I look at that and think, you know, how do we you know, you kind of look at the end and, and at The end result of goal and is like, how do we get there.

And so for me, it's you know, how quickly can we do it, realistically, optimistically and all of those good things, but I think for me, it's just being highly motivated and that's really what drives me to see great things happen. And so every day it's, you know, looking at things and how they really can be an and should be. but more importantly, how things can be.

and how we get there and make it happen. And So starting the day out looking at, Hey, what great things can happen. really is what drives me.

Don and Ebony: And I didn't think we had anything in common, but we do have in common about what scares you, the civility that that's, that scares me as well. back to Wichita though. What makes it so unique? I mean, what, what do you enjoy about Wichita that makes it unique?

John Rolfe: You know, I think there are probably What comes to mind for me are probably three things or two things specifically. I think it's our people, our people here in this region, in this city are really, make, they really make Wichita unique. the other aspect of that is the pride. It just seems like this city has always, from my days of being very young to currently, there is a pride, in. community and this region.

That is, you know, Second to none. and really the drive. I think about the drive of these individuals, of companies, and the individuals within these companies. It's just amazing. You know, I think back to our early days of aviation and what started that here and how it happened to some the other days that started some of the other entrepreneurial spirits and initiatives that have created some major companies across, across the world.

that's that's really, is what I think makes Wichita very unique.

Don and Ebony: Let me piggyback on that entrepreneurship where you feel. I mean, you've been here a long time. We've seen where Wichita had his entrepreneurial spirit at an all time high. Then for more, I said to Mike, we lost a little bit for awhile and I think we're back on, on uptick, but I would love your thoughts on where we are entrepreneurship wise.

John Rolfe: Yeah, well, I think we're definitely on this scaling up significantly in that area. I've even in the, within the last few weeks that I've been here at the chamber even prior to them, but certainly during my last three weeks, my beginning three weeks, if you will, here at the chamber. I have had the opportunity to meet with so many small business individuals who have started, you know, even as short as a year ago and longer that really are driving and growing their businesses. And I see more of our young individuals and not even more seasoned individuals who have really, are very interested in starting new concepts new ideas. And I think that is what's going to continue to drive some of the great Future companies here in the area and and quite frankly, our economic prosperity.

And so I think we're on an uptick, big time. with, with these, companies. you probably know this, but certainly, as we look at our small business community, 85% of our membership is represents small business. That's huge. And this isn't, you know, while that's less than a hundred employees, That's not necessarily all of those companies with, you know, 50 60 employees, they're individuals with two to five employees, and they're doing great things here in this community.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. And I'm expecting all 85% to roll through this podcast. I'm just saying it. I put it out there. I love it. You know, John, I love your vision and I love the things that you have cooking in the pot, but we can always count on the chamber, right. to connect our small businesses with valuable resources for education and things like that.

So I'm curious, what business resources do you recommend?

you know, we have, Ebony, a significant amount of resources that whether we assist ourselves or can connect the business community to those resources, there, are, there are many. workforce needs to certainly legislatively and advocacy needs. You know, there are a number of resources that we have within the Chamber that we continuously do every day, and work with other partners within our region that we can connect. our business community and individuals who are perhaps starting out or looking to start their own business that we see that we have.

John Rolfe: And so those types of resources are key [00:20:00] for us to have, and us to be able to connect our business community to

Don and Ebony: I love that. And I love the fact that, you know, one of your partners is our company. Every. I think we still are able to, we provide the size up, tool. It's a business intelligence tool that that's on your website that businesses can utilize.

And, it gives business intelligence and, market research to companies. so they can make better decisions. So, I appreciate, the opportunity to partner in that capacity as we continue to, to build capacity for small businesses and for new businesses to move here.

John Rolfe: And as always, we appreciate that as well as Evergy for all that they do. and I know that's just one of many things, so we appreciate that And I know our business community does as well.

Don and Ebony: So John, now we've talked a lot about the Chamber and the business side, but I want to know a little bit about you personally.

John Rolfe: Oh boy.

Don and Ebony: What, what's, what's on your playlist? What do you listen to? What,

John Rolfe: You know, I listened to a, a genre of music. you know, sometimes they call it the old school, music, that I like, you know, and that could be anything from, you know, Rita Franklin or perhaps, you know, I that's one the Whitney Houston.

some of the other. Types of music. I could go back a little further. And always joke and say us because I have much older siblings

John Rolfe: But the rate, but the Roberta Flack, some of that quiet, soothing music. but also, love, you know, a little bit of, you know, Luke Bryan country western, you know, I enjoy a little bit of hip hop, so it just kinda depends on my mood and you know, what's on the radio or just on the podcast or whatever I'm listening to. So I enjoy it all.

Don and Ebony: I love that. So you diverse out

John Rolfe: That's right.

Don and Ebony: I'm also curious to know, what's the best advice you've ever received and implemented.

Ebony, the best advice that, you know, someone gave me an, I think I always implement is always get people who are smarter than you to work with. And you know, that is my philosophy is always have people who are smarter than you to be around you and to surround yourself with. I think that is so key because one person doesn't know at all, and everyone has their strengths and with those utilizing those strengths really can make progress happen at X at a significant. level. And so that to me is probably one of the most important pieces of advice that I've received over the years.

Don and Ebony: I liked that one. I liked that. And Don obviously does too, because he brought me along.

John Rolfe: That's right. That's right.

Don and Ebony: No argument, zero argument on that. I was going to say it if you didn't see. So honestly that is a great piece of advice. and last question that I want to ask you, How do you balance work community and family? That's what I want you to know, because you are super busy and your family is busy as well, right?

You're oh my gosh.

John Rolfe: It it, You know, I don't know what balance is anymore No, what's balanced. Balancing. What do you mean? But, and also sincerity it is, that's always a challenge and that's probably personally one of the challenges that I face on a regular basis. but It's one of those things where I I don't know if there's any magic to it, but I do take the time. Whether it's work. Whether it's family. Whether it's other personal things to really give my focus to, at that time whatever I'm doing to give my complete focus when I'm there. Whether I'm at work, whether I'm with my family, friends, et cetera. And it is an ongoing balancing act because there are so many great things that are happening. and I enjoy it all I enjoy my family. I certainly enjoy my work. And I enjoy being with friends. So you know, I I try and make the best of all of those things and enjoy and give my full attention when I'm there.

Don and Ebony: It's time to have some fun. You've been, you've been dealing with Ebony and her questions and probing and all this.

Now it's time for some fun word association. I give you one word to give me one word back. It's not wrong. Cause it's your word.

John Rolfe: Okay. All right.

Don and Ebony: grimaces.

John Rolfe: Okay.

Don and Ebony: Here we go.

John Rolfe: you, you Give me one word.

and I give you one word back. Does it, are they supposed to be related or

Don and Ebony: Hey, it's your word. We don't judge. Well, Ebony judge. I don't judge. So here we go, leader.

John Rolfe: Don Sherman.

Don and Ebony: Oh, I told you, she judges say, okay, here we go.

John Rolfe: well, No, we can. Can that one over me one word.

Don and Ebony: that's actually pretty funny, even though it's at my expense. college

John Rolfe: Wichita State University.

Don and Ebony: am not going to ask you high school entrepreneur.

John Rolfe: Wichita, [00:25:00] Kansas.

Don and Ebony: Nice. Hero.

John Rolfe: My parents

vacation,

San Diego, California.

Don and Ebony: Chamber.

John Rolfe: Awesome.

Don and Ebony: I was ready for that one. Family.

John Rolfe: I'm trying to think of one word. it I was more than one

I was going to say my all, but anyway. No, no,

Don and Ebony: What did you say, John?

John Rolfe: Well, I sent my all, but,Family. Home.

Don and Ebony: Okay. Fun.

John Rolfe: Everyday.

Don and Ebony: Failure.

John Rolfe: Success.

Don and Ebony: Beverage

John Rolfe: Water.

Oh,

Don and Ebony: Thank you for coming through my man. We appreciate you friends. We've come to the end of our podcast session with Mr. John Ralph, our new regional chamber president and CEO. John. Thank you for being here.

John Rolfe: Thank you all for having me. It's been great. It's always a fun to be with the two of you and I've really enjoyed it.

So thank you. very much.

Don and Ebony: Absolutely. All right, friends make certain that you like us and do me a favor. If you've enjoyed listening to this podcast, please share this with someone who you think would benefit from this. All right. Till next time.