

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 55

Tricia Wilson

Don and Ebony: [00:00:00] And welcome to another exciting 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 checking us out today. We are excited to have Icon Structures in the studio, and she's going to tell us great things. What's going on, E? That's what's up, Ms. Tricia Wilson is in the house. How's it going? It's going well. Well, I am so happy that you are here and I'm thrilled to hear your story. So tell us a little bit about yourself.

my name obviously is Tricia Wilson and, with Icon Structures, my husband, Brandon and I are the founders of icon. We started it in 2005. just a small, small venture him and I and our basement. Yeah, him in one corner, me in the other corner. So, we started out, yeah, just the two of us and, have just grown over the last 16, almost 17 years, to be quite honest.

Tricia Wilson: I don't think we even knew what we were in for. We were, we were young and not as experienced at that, at that point, and, Just, you know, did our best to take care of our clients, and, just kind of grew organically a little bit at a time.

Don and Ebony: Started in 2005 in your basement with just the two of you. How many employees do you have?

well we actually just, over the last year have merged with another firm out of Manhattan called Trinium Construction. And so now we have. Both the Wichita office and we have a Manhattan, Kansas office. So, you know, between the two companies, I think we have probably 70, 80 employees. So, you know, that was a, a strategic partnership to bring those companies together, And, you know we have a lot more resources. We can cover the state and surrounding states, a little bit easier and, It's been a great, great fit.

Tricia Wilson: We did keep the icon structure's name. Yes. So, and, during that we had leading Trinium is Korey Klingenberg. who's the CEO and has become the President of Icon Structures. And he came to us from, GE Johnson. Gosh, built a lot of projects for them.

Worked out in Denver and Wyoming headed up their Wyoming division and he, brings a lot of experience from, you know, project manager. originally and now, you know, he's grown into the leadership role, so.



Don and Ebony: That's great. that is a wonderful story. And congratulations on that merger. I mean, that's huge.

Tricia Wilson: Yeah. it was a big, big step for us, so

Don and Ebony: And it's a, a wonderful city and Man- happiness. so I support that. It has to come back the K-State.

Tricia Wilson: Oh, well, so my husband, Brandon and I are K- state graduates as well. And we have a son there right now, so.

Don and Ebony: Go cats. I take it. You went to the game or you saw,

Well, let's, let's talk about your story, but, so I w I'm curious to understand you and your husband one day just said, you know what, we're going to start a business. How did this, how did this happen?

Tricia Wilson: this is kind of a funny story. So when my husband and I met in middle school and that's when our relationship started and we were best friends and, you know, ended up getting married and everything,

We both had, parents, dads who were entrepreneurs. And so we grew up, you know, at the dinner table, talking about business and seeing the long hours. And we said to each other, before we got married, we made a pact. We're not going to start a business. Like, like, we're you, we don't want to be entrepreneurs.

We've seen how this plays out? It's too much work, right. But you know, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. For, I guess both of us, but more specifically, my husband, Brandon, he has a degree in construction science from K state and, worked for a commercial [00:05:00] contractor general contractor here in town for a number of years. also worked for an architecture firm and has a background and a little bit in architecture and design as well. And, When, you know, we just couldn't kind of suppress it anymore. It was in his blood. He always wanted to do his own thing. And, it just, that feeling kept getting stronger and stronger.

And we just knew That we had to make a leap. So.

Don and Ebony: That is that's great. You, you met him in middle school and you both had families who own businesses and were entrepreneurs, and you said, Hey, we're never going to do that. We're not going to be talking about the numbers at the dinner table. And now that's exactly what you're doing.

Tricia Wilson: And now that's what we do. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Is awesome. I love that story.

Thank you for sharing. Excellent.

So you shared a story, a cool story. And of course I love entrepreneurship, but this is about you talk about your culture at Icon. what do you try to achieve?

Tricia Wilson: Well, you know, since we started out small, it was, I don't know that Brandon and I, you know, had any formal plan for this but other than just, you know, we added employees kind of here and there, and it was more of a family culture for us.

We just treated them like family. we knew what it was like to be an employee and we wanted them, you know, to feel like we wanted to treat him how we wanted to be treated when we were in those same shoes. So, You know, we really just had kind of a family and a team culture and it kind of came about pretty organically Brandon and I just, you know, tried to take care of them and give them opportunities to learn and opportunities to grow and stretch. And. you know, it, it worked out. So.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. And I love hearing your story about starting it in the basement. That's started several companies in the basement and yeah, this is, this is pretty cool. I love entrepreneurship. I con structures course. There's a ton of general contractors out there.

What makes yours different? What do you solve for customers?

Tricia Wilson: Okay. Well, you know, we are really big on the details, attention to detail, communicating with our clients, letting them know what's going on. Even if you know, something is delayed, which, you know, construction is not always an easy process. just communicating what's what's going on and, what the expectation is, has really what has been, you know, has set us apart.

as far as our clients, we've had a really loyal group of clients that we've worked for that have come back to us specifically, some developers. you know, we've worked with a lot of architects and built some strong relationships there and it's, you know, treating all those other team members And all those stakeholders and partners, you know, kind of our motto how we would want to be treated right.

Tricia Wilson: Communicating to him and then, you know, just going above and beyond to make their project. Right. You know, it's all fine in the details.

Don and Ebony: Nice. I'm giddy over here about entrepreneurship. get back to, how do you define success as an entrepreneur? You've been there doing this 16 years now. I believe.

Tricia Wilson: Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Are you there?

Tricia Wilson: Yeah. Oh, for sure. For sure. I mean, you know, people define success in so many different ways and for us. it, it, isn't necessarily about us. And what we've done, but just looking at the people around us our team and watching them grow.

we had like our first couple of employees that we hired back in 2008, they were in their twenties when they came to us.

you know, had some experience but not a lot and, you know, we feel like they're kind of like our brothers or our children to some degree, and no matter where we're at in life if we're with icon or we're, you know. have moved on to something else we're always going to feel like that their

family and it's, we've watched them, get married, have children, you know, grow in their careers also.

Tricia Wilson: And to me, that is what is so rewarding. You know, seeing those kinds of things are a success. and then of course the clients, when the clients are happy, that's, I mean, there's no better feeling than that. So.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. Now a little birdie told me that you won the Chamber small business award a couple of years ago.

Tricia Wilson: We did, we did.

Don and Ebony: How was that experience?

Tricia Wilson: Oh, that was a good experience.

Great experience.

we. you know, I initially kind of, we got nominated, so we learned a little bit more about it. And thought, well, gosh, what are the odds that we win? But somebody cared enough about us to, or thought enough about us to nominate us. So, you know, we out of respect, owe them, you know, to tell our story and to, you know, just to share it, and learn about our business and, to give back to them.

Tricia Wilson: So, we, by no means, thought we're in this to win it, [00:10:00] but went through the exercise and we knew that, you know, you have to write several essays and really kind of deep dive into your business and think about it a lot and then, you know, put that on paper and share your story on video. And, you know, I think what, at the end of the day, what they liked is just, you know, they asked authenticity, that Brandon and I have.

You know, we just work hard and, you know, treat our, our employees like family and those stories went out. So, I always, I always laugh thinking back to the beginning and the humble roots, which I know you appreciate that Don.

you know, Brandon and I started in our basement in an office and we literally had a \$5,000 saved up to our name and we gambled everything now, you know, at 46 I look back and think, oh gosh, was that the smartest thing to do? I wouldn't do that again at 46, but we were, you know, 29 and 30 of that point in time and we didn't have as much to lose, I guess. but you know, Sharing that story and just growing, you know, day by day it wasn't, you know, big leaps and bounds, but for us. We were pretty, pretty conscious about what we would take on and we grew well beyond what we ever imagined.

Tricia Wilson: I mean, like I said, we really didn't even know what we were getting into. So, we've been so fortunate for that and, you know, just, yeah.

Don and Ebony: Well, I think that's just awesome. Like, I love everything about that, but you, you mentioned a couple of things, so, when you start into your basement, remind us, so what did you do and what did your husband do? What were your roles? What were the separations of

.

Tricia Wilson: So Brandon obviously had the technical side. And, you know, project manager estimator, you know, and knew how to run the field as well. So he handled all of that.

And then he also had the contacts as far as, you know, people in. Construction industry people in the architecture industry. he'd met a lot of clients and developers along the way.

So we were really fortunate that. we, our very first project was a, let's see, quadplex over at Bradley fair called clubhouse villas. And so it's more of a. Kind of like a senior living, well, not senior living community, but, just, you know, kind of a condos type situation.

Anyway, so that was our very first project. Brandon was still working full-time for, at the architecture firm that he was at. and so he was doing this on the side, but that wasn't really anything new for us.

Brandon had always kind of had these side ventures of, you know, designing homes and, you know, doing different things for people. But, so he was just working his tail off day and night.

Tricia Wilson: I, had some experience. I worked for Kansas small business development center and was a consultant for them, for people starting and growing businesses. So I was aware of a lot of the resources that are available were available, in town and kind of made use of those connections. But the finance side ended up being kind of more my path and the risk management side. So I've handled all of the, you know, all of the financial side and just kind of grown with the business.

Don and Ebony: Sounds like you've handled the finances as well. you've grown and you have merged with another company, so that's awesome. Well done.

Tricia Wilson: Well, thank you. And like I said, it's not just us, it's the team.

Don and Ebony: The team. Yeah.

Tricia Wilson: People that we have.

Don and Ebony: And so you, you mentioned early on that you were, you know, conscious about the types of projects that you would take on early on. So your first thing was like a quad plex, right. And then how did you begin to grow? What was that, that pathway for you guys?

Tricia Wilson: Well, it, you know, it really became kind of about relationships. Brandon luckily, you know, had made other relationships. We had, gosh, I think, we worked with the Devlin's, and built a lodge out at Flint Hills, I guess, lodge out there and, just a lot of. You know, Ray, they own, you know, other entities and, real estate in town.

And so we did some other, a lot of tenant finishes is kind of where we got our start and then, you know, went into new construction and we were real careful along the way. I mean, we had some opportunities to take on some, you know, big projects that were like, say our annual volume at that time was 10 million.

I mean, we had opportunities to take on, you know, \$18 million projects and it was. Braden. And I had to kind of step back and say, you know, Is this the best move for the company. And, it was hard to say no to those. It really was, but we did it a few times. just because we knew, I mean, if

we're going to do something, we're going to do it well, and we don't want to put all our eggs in basket and put ourselves in that position.

I think we would have [00:15:00] done probably pretty well, but we just, tend to be a little bit more conservative with that approach.

Don and Ebony: No. Yeah. I like that a lot. So tell me now that you've been in the business for quite some time, what scares you?

Tricia Wilson: When the pandemic started. And the, we had a lot of things that I mean, we were going strong. We had a lot of things, in the pipeline and everybody was just, there was so much uncertainty and so many things, in our pipeline just started fizzling out. and you know, with construction, there's a long lead time.

You have things in the pipeline for a long time. The buildings have, you know, have to go from concept to design and then, you know, and then you get the boots on the ground And, start the building process. So. Not unusual for us to be working on projects a year ahead of time.

And, so that happened, but you know, what we've learned over the years, I mean, every time you know, uncertainty or whatnot, there's also opportunity. You know, those challenges definitely bring opportunity for you to stretch and grow and get creative. And we definitely would not be where we're at today. If we hadn't have had those, you know, I guess roadblocks in the, you know, stumbling blocks along the way, or road bumps, that's what I'll call them along the way. because they've pushed us to you know, think, and like I said, get creative and figure out and, you know, be solution makers. And that's really what business is. It's, you know, when, when you have an obstacle in your way, you don't stop right there. You figure out how to get around it over it, under it, through it.

Don and Ebony: I love that, you know, you grow be creative and become a solution maker. That's what it's all about.

Tricia Wilson: It is.

Don and Ebony: Well, thank you for that friends. It's time to hear a word from our sponsor. We'll be back.

Welcome back everyone. We are here with Tricia Wilson and Icon Structures, and we're hearing a little bit about their story. We just finished up hearing her talk about, you know, solution making and how she and her husband began this family business. I'm really interested to know Tricia if you'll share.

So if this is a family business, do you plan on your kids taking the business over?

Tricia Wilson: Well, we asked our kids, you know, if they had any interest in it, They're like, wow, no, this is too hard. So

Don and Ebony: Well kind of like you were as a kid.

Tricia Wilson: Yeah. you know, they see some of the daily stressors that go on and so it caused Brandon and I to stop and scratch our heads and say, okay, well maybe we shouldn't be sharing everything at the family dinner table.

So, but now we have along the way, entrepreneurs. Tend to be going in a lot of different directions. I call it. Brandon. My husband is really kind of the visionary of our duo and he is just generating, you know, 25 ideas a day. And, you know, sometimes I have to kind of pull his head out of the clouds because, but he's pretty creative that way. And so we've got some other ventures that we have invested in some real estate. You know, doing some commercial developments around town, so we'll continue doing some of that. And our oldest son banks, who's at K state now seems to be kind of interested in the real estate path. our younger son, Blake is still in high school, a junior, so he's still kind of determining what path he'll go down.

But

Don and Ebony: They'll be back,

Tricia Wilson: Like we talked about.

Don and Ebony: They

Tricia Wilson: They go off and do their own thing and then eventually come back. And so, you know, there's other, other businesses that we have invested in kind of silently and really kind of mentored and coached some other people that had wanted to start businesses and, kind of helped them along.

And so that's kind of where my passion [00:20:00] is, you know, helping other people with their ideas and getting it from, you know, that idea in their head to, you know, down on paper to figure out the plan to making it a reality.

Don and Ebony: That's awesome. I love that. That's something both you and Don both have in common, you know, mentoring others and helping them with entrepreneurship. Right? How do you get that concept to become a reality? So thank you for doing that in your mentorship and your work that has, it's really got a little incubator system going.

Tricia Wilson: Well, you know

Don and Ebony: Little businesses here. there, all of a sudden they're going to pop up and they started with Icon. Started at K state. Oh, you know what I think is my turn to talk.

Tricia Wilson: Yes, but we love our Wichita State.

Don and Ebony: Okay.

Tricia Wilson: and even K U K U to anything from.

Don and Ebony: I'm not pushing that. I'll go with the WSU, but trying to get her to do a K U thing that's you as she says, I can't, oh my, who do you take your inspiration from?

I take it. You feed off each other, you and Brandon, but outside of you and Brandon. And who do you take inspiration from?

Tricia Wilson: You know, gosh, so many different places. I mean, the world is such a different place now than it was, you know, 20 years ago. I mean, you had to go to a formal course or seminar, you know, things like that now with the internet and all of the social media and YouTube, we just are constantly trying to push ourselves to learn.

So like in the morning when we're getting ready, Brandon often has you know, some kind of, while we listened to audible a lot or even Blinkist, that kind of gives you the summary of, of different books and things like that.

and a lot of people on YouTube, different podcasts. So we're just constantly trying to, to learn that way, you know, and learning from, you know, other business owners along the way, we've made a lot of friends, bouncing ideas off of them, but, you know, as far as different, People that I could recommend.

Tricia Wilson: I mean, we did, we've listened to like John Maxwell's 21 irrefutable laws of leadership. I don't even know how many times when we're in, when we're in the car, traveling, you know, real listening to things, usually like that. Napoleon hill, he's kind of an oldie, but goodie kind of talks a little bit more about business and about life.

Even Tony Robbins, Jay Shetty, even Dave Ramsey with the entre leadership. Gosh, there's too many to name, but I think that, you know, as entrepreneurs you're just constantly trying to grow and, learn just it's that never ending quest to, to do more and be more and

Don and Ebony: Excellent. So. You've been here 16 years, this as an entrepreneur. What's your thoughts about a Wichita ecosystem?

Tricia Wilson: Wichita has always had really strong entrepreneurial roots. and, you know, we consider ourselves pretty fortunate to live here.

And, You know, we've had people that have mentored us along the way, that we've met with. And, you know, I think about, well, you know, like the Fran Jabaras and the George Ablahs and just so many different, you know, you've got your carnies and your, your Kochs and, you know, so many great inspirations there.

I'm excited to see some of the things that have been developing over the last you know, five, 10 years. in Wichita. And I mean, we just have to keep growing on that and, you know, continuing on that. path to be, you know, definitely just set some goals, and continue to develop that.

I mean, we've got to develop that ecosystem where we have, you know, a central place that is, you know, has experts and seasoned entrepreneur ship veterans, if you will. And then those people starting businesses really need to be surrounded by other people starting businesses.

There's just so much you can learn from the people that have done it in the past. And you know, people that are going through it at the same time as you.

It's not always easy, you know, you need to be able to have people that are, you know, Same frame of mind and can bounce ideas off of them and say, this is a really great idea. Think, you know, you should continue with that. Nope.

That's not going to work, which sometimes you'll listen to as an entrepreneur. And sometimes you don't because, you know, like I said, the barriers. you just kind of blow right through them a lot of times.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. You've already merged once. What's next on the frontier?

Tricia Wilson: Well, I can, will, you know, continue to, to grow and do projects and take care of their clients.

And I guess nothing fancy, but that's what we do. So just, you know, continue on what we've as a team have built on over the last 16 years and [00:25:00] make it stronger.

Don and Ebony: Like you're not ruling out another merger, if it makes sense.

Tricia Wilson: You know, it's, you have to be looking pretty far ahead.

When you're an entrepreneur and you never, you just never know what might hold. Do we have anything on the horizon right. now for that? Not necessarily, but,

Don and Ebony: Well, that's cool that you're you already statewide from the basement. Yeah, that's fine. Going to K state. That's pretty good.

Tricia Wilson: Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Well, you know, I'm just really thankful that you are here with us today, tricia. Thank you for sharing your story. It's been quite lovely to have the conversation with you.

Tricia Wilson: Thank you for having me.

Don and Ebony: Very last question that I have for you is what can Wichita do for you? What can we do to help support your business and your growth?

Tricia Wilson: You know, gosh, that's a tough one. it's always about just working together, meeting new people, learning their stories. You know, Brandon and I have always kind of adopted the philosophy that, you know, it's not about making ourselves successful. It's about making the people around us successful.

And I think that, you know, surrounding yourself and continuing to, you know, have different forums and events, to meet people and bounce ideas off of, and work together. And that is really, I think, where the success is.

Don and Ebony: Wonderful. Thank you so very much.

Tricia Wilson: Thank you.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. Well, you've dealt with Ebony. You've made it through now. The fun time we're going to do word association. I gave you one word. Her eyes got big.

I give you one word. Oh, good. I'll give you one word. You give me one word back. It's not wrong because it's your word. You ready? Excellent.

Leader.

Tricia Wilson: Oh, Well. I think gosh, one word.

Don, this is kind of tough.

Don and Ebony: Most people use the word Ebony. Oh, wow.

Tricia Wilson: Yes, I like it.

Don and Ebony: That's called an icebreaker. If you will.

Tricia Wilson: Leader.

No, geez. I'm terrible. At this game. It sounded, leader, you know, I can't put things into one word,

Don and Ebony: What's your name?

Tricia Wilson: Tricia.

Don and Ebony: There you go. Here we go. Success.

Tricia Wilson: Success.

It's gotta be two words. for me, Don. Daily grind,

Don and Ebony: You go. Okay. entrepreneur

Tricia Wilson: Resilience.

Don and Ebony: Wichita.

Tricia Wilson: It's the biggest small town.

Don and Ebony: Okay. Hero.

Tricia Wilson: Everyone.

Don and Ebony: Failure.

Tricia Wilson: Learning.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. The Chamber

Tricia Wilson: Resources.

Don and Ebony: Family.

Tricia Wilson: Love.

Fun.

Necessity

Don and Ebony: Excellent vacation.

Tricia Wilson: Oh gosh. Rest rejuvenation

Don and Ebony: Last, but not least. You have to tell the truth on this one. Okay. Beverage

Tricia Wilson: Oh, well you gotta tell the truth. Okay. Well,

I am, I'm not a beer person, but my drink of choice is.

Is Malibu and just soda club soda.

I'm a simpleton. I like to pretend I'm, you know, somewhere warm and sunny.

Don and Ebony: There you go.

Thank you for sharing and thank you. Yes. Thank you so very much friends. You've heard it here today. We've just heard the story of icon structures with Tricia Wilson. So thank you for being.

Tricia Wilson: Thank you.

Don and Ebony: We're here at that time that we are ending our segment, but please make certain that you, like us and share us and make sure you share it with your circle of friends.

And please let us know who you'd like to hear from next. Thank you for listening and tuning in until next time.