

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 104

Joy Eakins

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Don and Ebony: [00:00:00] Welcome to another exciting edition of WCBA. Powered, of course, by Evergy. Don't forget to like us. Love us, share us. We truly appreciate you checking us out today in the house. Joy Eakins. Hello, joy. How's it going?

Joy Eakins: Hey, it's good to see you, you guys. A hundred episodes

Don and Ebony: know. Yes. I would've lost that bet.

Nobody would've thought that Ebony and I would be in the same place or a hundred episodes. Isn't that amazing? No, no, it is. It's amazing. It's stunned. So I would have lost.

Joy Eakins: it's amazing and it just keeps getting better and better. So

Don and Ebony: you. Thank you, joy

Joy Eakins: for sharing your, the stories of our small businesses and what's happening in this community. It's really inspiring.

Don and Ebony: it's fun. It's, I get giddy about it. Even working with Ebony, I

still

get giddy about small business. Oh yes. It's been wonderful. And a lot of you, as listeners will know that we've had Joy on here before, and that episode 21 is the one, she talked about her own small business, but today you're here for a very special episode as the chair of the Wichita Chamber in 2020.

Joy Eakins: That's right. I The mantle has fallen,

Don and Ebony: Fallen



Joy Eakins: upon my shoulders.

Don and Ebony: Okay, . And here, here you are in that capacity, all grown up? Yes,

Joy Eakins: I guess so.

Don and Ebony: so this is going to be a really exciting year, so just remind us if you will, you've been a member of the Chamber for how long?

Joy Eakins: We joined in 2011,

Don and Ebony: 2011, and you've seen many changes within the organization from 11 till now.

Joy Eakins: There have been a lot of things. I was thinking the other day that my first event at the Chamber was the CEO Roundtable.

It was in November, 2011. It was at High-Touch, and I strategically positioned myself to sit at the table with Wayne Chambers, who I had never met, but he was in the technology field, and so I wanted to meet him and the topic of the day was around retaining employees. That hasn't changed. . But what was funny to me was I didn't have any employees, so I was showing up to talk about that with other small business owners.

But it was great to meet Wayne. Wayne was one of the chairs, one of the past chairs of the chamber. And at the time I had no idea that's where he was going. So it was a great place to meet and start to network with people built community.

Don and Ebony: That's awesome. So it's interesting. I I, I am curious from that initial meeting with the Chamber, did you ever see yourself sitting as the chair?

Joy Eakins: No.

Don and Ebony: Would you have imagined that?

Joy Eakins: never. No, not at all.

Don and Ebony: said no.

Joy Eakins: was not a part of my strategic plan

Don and Ebony: was

Joy Eakins: for my life.

Don and Ebony: But here you are, right. And. , I'm interested, and you know, I'm, I'm sure other people might be interested in this as well, but why, why the chair?

What made you be interested in serving as opposed to just being a member?

Joy Eakins: Well, I think in some, somewhere along the way, Phyllis Robertson, who worked at the Chamber, asked me, Hey, Joy, you have some ideas, and they, they seem good. She said to me, so I wasn't sure about that, but she said, would you be willing to serve on our small business committee?

And I think that started the journey. I, I said, well, sure, I'll come and I'll sit and I'll listen. And and then I came and I talked instead of listening because. that was just what I did. And, I believe Scott Schweneman was the Vice-chair Small business at the time.

Don and Ebony: Schweneman.

Joy Eakins: Yeah. And we got to know each other and he invited me to an honors night, and the next day he called me and said I would like to ask you to serve on our board. And so I thought serve on the board of the Wichita Chamber that I can't do that. Mm that's too big for me. But knowing Scott and some of the other board members and that they were asking me to be a voice for small business, I thought, you know, this is a chance to represent the many, many men and women who serve.

Around our community, often [00:05:00] unseen, and their story's not told. So I consented and I went to the first meeting, and I don't think I opened my mouth once and afterwards Scott pulled me aside and he said, Joy, you didn't say anything during that meeting. And I said, Scott, I'm trying to like just ease in. And then he said, that's not why I put you on the board.

You need to be Joy and start talking. So I think that just, for me, it started as a labor of love just to represent the men and women around me who serve every day in this community, and then to try and ask good questions and help the chamber find the right direction to serve them and large businesses, because really we need all of our businesses in this region to do well, to be strong.

So

Don and Ebony: I'd love that insight. And, you know, I, when I see Schweneman I'm gonna thank him for pushing you and making you, you know feel comfortable enough to be yourself and to challenge things and ask questions.

Joy Eakins: Yeah. He and the other chairs since him have all been really supportive of me and over the years, reached out, encouraged me taking my questions and my thoughts seriously.

And I, I told someone, From Kansas Leadership Center. Not that long ago, I didn't have any authority. I just tried to exercise the leadership I had, what was the influence I had and, and see where that would go. And so it's been interesting because in 2018 I did a study for the Chamber on their membership breakout and talked to the board about how so many of the members of the board of the Chamber are small business that's over 80% have fewer than a hundred employees and.

During that meeting I asked, I broke each, I broke the employee structure down and asked people to stand based on the size of their business. And when we got down to the smaller businesses, there were only one or two. Of us in the room that were from small business. So at the border retreat in November, I did the same exact exercise and I said, everyone that is representing a business a hundred or fewer stand.

And it was about half of the room. And I think that's exciting because it says that our membership and our leadership are reflective of each other. We're making sure that we're listening to everyone that has a part to play in this ecosystem and trying to make sure that we meet the needs of those at the.

Don and Ebony: I love that that is a real testament to, the work that the board has done to make certain that it is reflective and that it is diverse on the board and getting the different types of business owners in the room to talk about what their business is going through.

Right.

Joy Eakins: Yeah. I mean, think that's been exciting. And during the pandemic it was really great to have everybody at the table trying to figure out how we help everyone.

Don and Ebony: So, you know, we just had the annual event. Right. And, you gave some really great words of encouragement in your, in your speech. I was there front and center watching you.

But, but, but it was, it was great. So, well, one, were you scared? You can tell us, were you scared to get on that big stage?

Joy Eakins: I was nervous the day before. In the morning of. because I realized I was too short to use the teleprompter

Don and Ebony: Oh no,

Joy Eakins: and I didn't wanna fool around with stepping on boxes and all of that. I'm too clumsy for that.

So I was nervous about getting the speech together. But, and, and to be frank, I've never

spoken to a thousand people. So, you know, sensing the moment and what was going on was interesting, but, . I also, when people started showing up, I felt like these were my friends. Like, you know, I went around, I saw so many people that I've known for years.

So many of the chairs, I mean, Scott and his wife were there, and Bill Wood and others. The berries were there. And so just to have those relationships in the room, you just start realizing, well, this is, these are my friends.

So they probably know what I'm gonna say, because I've talked about this my entire career, and so we're just gonna, I'm just gonna talk to them.

So I was excited. I, I really was blown away by Damon and Arthur Brooks and what they brought to the table. I thought that was exciting, and I think what we're gonna talk about this next year will build on that

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm. . Well, what, so thank you for, you know, segueing into that. What are we gonna talk about in 2023?

You have some pretty bold ideas, which you've been talking about since 2011, right? So, let's talk about how you see that vision coming forward in your, your reus chair.

Joy Eakins: Right. So I, what I'm really passionate about, and I think what we as a community are really great at is making faithful investments in people. Some people might call that mentoring or coaching, or whatever you wanna call it.

It's that thing that Wichita. Better than any other place I've ever lived. And just remember, I've lived in a dozen cities in four different states. I've never seen a community where so many people [00:10:00] from different backgrounds and different parts of the city will invest in other people the way Wichita does.

And it was apparent to me, so when I met my husband, he was investing in other people. He's a Wichita native. We lived in Colorado. He was picking up the elderly for church on Sunday morning and driving. women from China to English language classes in the evening, and I thought that was interesting and special.

and then I met his family and I realized they did those things. And then we moved here and I realized this is the D n A of this community. That's why they do those things because they're from here, and it inspired me to continue in that vein. So I think that's our secret sauce and we need to yell it from the mountaintops and lean in and do more of it.

Don and Ebony: I saw you on stage a few weeks ago and I was just proud, like a proud papa. Yeah. I mean, it was just I, and then I was reflecting back, where did we first meet? And correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe we, we met. At a chamber mixer at Chilton billiards, could that be

possible? Back in 2012 ish,

Joy Eakins: Could be. The first time I really remember talking with you was on city to city to Austin.

Don and Ebony: So apparently my first interaction was not memorable.

Got that. No, I have a

Joy Eakins: well, are you sure?

Don and Ebony: I, I think so. I thought we were, did you ever go to. At Chilton's?

Joy Eakins: I did, but I thought that was after city to city.

Don and Ebony: Oh, well that could be possible.

I got 'em flipped around. Okay. But

Joy Eakins: the point was, the point was we were playing pool.

Don and Ebony: yeah, we were playing pool at Austin. Yeah. Mm-hmm. against. Pickard Bill Pickert,

Joy Eakins: Bill Pickert. and johnson. And Joe Johnson.

that means you guys lost? No, I think we beat em. Like they stole something. I really didn't. There's no way. Didn't we beat him?

Joy Eakins: I think they let me win.

Don and Ebony: OK because Joe Johnson.

I know,

Joy Eakins: I know. I've, I felt so, and you know, that's a great example, Don, because I went on the city to city trip and I really didn't feel like I was gonna know anyone. Matt Jordan was on the trip. He was one of my clients, introduced me to Janetta. Mm-hmm. Everett. and then I knew Bill Pickert from B K D Now for us, because he was one of my clients and the two of them, and, and I sort of know J knew Joe because of my school board work.

And so the fact that people sort of came around me and invested in me even on that trip and helped me meet other people and. You know, I didn't know what I was gonna do during free

time, and all of a sudden I had four friends to go play pool with, which by the way, I'm not very good. So if they, if I won it was because somebody let me

Don and Ebony: Exactly.

So you said you didn't aspire to be a chamber press. I mean, I've been on a chamber before and I didn't aspire to be one either, but

Joy Eakins: when

Don and Ebony: they asked you, to do it.

Why did you say yes? You could have said, you know, time is not right. you know, building up cornerstone data. We just moved, we just merged with, I think your husband's company or whatever, or something like that.

Joy Eakins: Yeah. None of that had happened yet. So it was back in 2020. It was in the middle of the pandemic. Really? And they, what they do is they ambush you

Don and Ebony: Now we know what happens. Podcast, you get the raw,

Michael Monteferrante with, who was the chair, he was the past chair at the time in 2020, and Janetta was the chair. So we've done work with some work with Envision and Michael called me and asked me if I could come over and meet with him about a project. And I assumed he meant maybe that Envision would do some

Don and Ebony: You gotta watch Michael boy

Joy Eakins: Yes. So I show up at Envision. And I, and I wasn't doing a lot of in-person meetings because it's like June of the pandemic and he, so, but I agreed to come to the meeting if everyone wore a mask. And so I showed up and the person at the front desk told me that, well, Michael forgot we were having a meeting.

And I said, well, I can go away and come back another day. And she said, no, he wants you to hang on. So I, I sat downstairs and waited and Michael came and he got me and he said, well, we're gonna go to the floor. And so he heads, we head up to this room and I walk around the corner and sitting on couches are Janetta and Ben Hutton and Damon Young.

Oh wow. And I, I realized this was not a meeting about a project for Envision and so, in that moment as we talked about what they, what we were, what they were asking me, and I listened to their question and I was thinking, you know, that I couldn't do that. I'm, I, I didn't think I could do that, but I started asking them questions.

What were they wanting to do? What did they wanna accomplish? [00:15:00] What did being chair mean to them? And as they built out their vision about the year that they would lead and what they were going to emphasize. I realized that what I was passionate about fit right after what they were passionate about. So, you know, you've got Janetta talking about leveling up on our diversity and Ben talking about leading well. And you've got Damon talking about trusting and transforming building trust to transform.

And I thought what all of these things have in common is they require an investment in people. And that's what I'm passionate about. So it fits and it, and it builds on the next thing. And so, you know, I, I did not give an answer that moment because of course you have to go and think and talk to your family and make sure they're on board, but, and really Eric and I move in together and, use merging our data teams and putting some standards around.

There was all in preparation for this year so that I could be in a place where my business would, would still do well while I'm doing this extra work.

Don and Ebony: Well, I think it's time to hear a word from our sponsors, and then when we come back, we'll have more from our 2023 chamber board chair.

Welcome back friends. We are here with Miss Joy Eakins and we're talking about the Chamber of Commerce. Your favorite subject, obviously, right? So Joy, I'm really excited about 2023. You and Don were talking about some of the past city to city trips, but I'd like, if you don't mind us to talk about. , the one we just came back from, right?

The one in Minneapolis. And there's some initiatives that typically every year when we go on these trips, we say, oh man, these are some things, some cool ideas that we can come back and implement in Wichita. And sometimes we do, and sometimes it takes smaller groups to make 'em happen. And they're successful.

And then sometimes we have all this energy and then we, you know, get back and then we are back to the daily grind, right? Mm-hmm. , . So we forget about it, . but one of the things that I'm really excited that came out of this past city to city trip is the potential for creating a dashboard for measurement and measuring our community's progress.

Can you talk to us a little bit about that and why it's important?

Joy Eakins: Sure. So one of the things that Minneapolis does is they have set up a dashboard to look at how they're making progress and some of their sticky issues like minority business ownership would be one.

And so one of the things that we came back with well before we went. Damon had, Damon knew the people who ran this organization and had worked with them, and so they did a presentation and talked with us to think about what that might look like if we did it in Wichita. So

there have been attempts before in other organizations, or even through things like Visioneering to create this type of dashboarding, and we've struggled.

Kind of the process and how to do that. And lots of different organizations are tracking much of the data we would want. So what we've decided to do when we came back is we've put together a pilot group and we're gonna pilot some dashboarding, and we're gonna make this an iterative approach. And it's one of the things, you know, we're.

It's kind of fun that I'm coming behind Damon because this is what we do for a living. One of the things we've found is really helpful for organizations is that they build these approaches to measurement in an iterative way, and they learn from the process and then they build on it. So we're working on a pilot program right now to put together some kind of a dashboard for the community that'll pick some of the items that we think are important to look at.

It will and these, and then we'll look at what are the metrics that tell us if we're gonna make progress on. Dashboard and then begin, and how would we measure those and where would those measurements come from? And then we're gonna see where it takes us and how much, you know, what, what can we get? But I think it's important to know if the changes you're making have impact.

But I also think, and I said this in my speech the other night, the kinds of problems that we're looking at measuring take a long time to see real impact in.

And so one of the things we have to be careful about is not measuring too soon and then thinking, oh, well it's not working and quitting too soon.

And so that's part of the difficulty of these dashboards is they, they do take decades sometimes to see the real change that you want. And so just any measurable progress at all is a win. And how do you celebrate that as a community?

Don and Ebony: Yeah. So will you guys be able to pick some of those items that we can see some, some changes, some, [00:20:00] some short-term changes, as well as the long-term changes on the dashboard?

Because if we're using it, and I'm just envisioning how I would, so I'm, I'm being a little selfish here, right? So how do we best as economic developers or justice community members, how do we best sell this city with the, these data points, right?

Joy Eakins: Yeah. I think the, this, so the, the dashboard kind of tells you this is where we were the last time we took a measurement. Right.

And most of the dashboard work that Minnesota has, it comes out every year. And because of the pandemic, It's not coming out this year. They don't have data and it's two years behind when

that data comes out. So one of the things we wanna look at is what are the metrics, the key metrics that tell you if you're making progress toward that end number in the dashboard.

And that's the harder part to understand. Okay. So if you say we wanna increase minority business owner, Then you maybe measure the number of businesses owned by minority businesses. That takes a long time to see that maybe change. So what are the metrics that tell you if you're heading the right way in that goal and ha and that maybe show up more often quarterly or annually so that you can get a better idea.

Or if you wanna. do some measurement around mental health. So what, so if you wanna see mental health getting better and more opportunity for people to get services, then what are the metrics along the way that you would think about that would make sure you're, you're heading in the right direction and the things you need.

And so part of that is, you know, convening the right groups of people to help us understand some of those issues and make sure that we're measuring what we think we should, and then having curious people say, are there other things we should be measuring in that same space? And that's where analysts are so amazing and we have some really incredible wands across the city doing this work.

Don and Ebony: Well, I know if anyone can do it, it's, you know, you, you can bring this to fruition. Right? Someone who's a mathematician, computer scientist, data guru, it's you. I'm quite certain. So another one of your things I think is you get the pleasure of doing is revisiting the strategic plan. Is that correct?

Joy Eakins: That's right. So in 2019 we set a strategic plan.

The board did with some pillars that have been really important for us as an organization and a roadmap, and we've followed that, but, but now we're after the pandemic. We have new leadership in John Roth as c e o of the board, and we have. Some new challenges. And so my goal with the strategy is not just to say, okay, let's do everything better, but it's to say, what are the strategic things that we can do that will improve us as an organization over the next three to five years, and where are the places we should be putting investments in that help us get there?

So it's not just do more better, but what are the right things we do to make sure that we're meeting the needs of the business that we serve? So coming up

Don and Ebony: in about a month, we're gonna be at Intrust Bank Arena. We're there every year for the chairs lunch. Mm-hmm. , are you ready for an excited time?

Joy Eakins: Yeah, I, I'm excited about the chairs lunch.

So the challenge given to me by Ben Hutton was a year before, it's your time to do this. You

should have these things in place. So in essence, what he was saying is, at Damon's annual meeting, you should know who you want for your annual meeting. He said that to me in January of last year, and I thought, well, that probably means.

By Chairs Lunch of 2022. I should know what I want for my chairs. Lunch of 2023 and I have, been working on this. I'm very excited about it and very excited to be talking in more depth about this idea of faithful investment in people. So at the Chairs lunch, we're gonna have a panel of Wichita's that you may or may not know.

These are not the people that you see in the headlines every day, but they are people who serve in our community in impactful ways.

And the other part of their story is all of them had faithful investments made in their lives by other people in Wichita decades ago. And so we're gonna tie out this idea that we are good at faithful investments.

And when we do them well, this is the result that we have in our community. And I decided, For this Chair's lunch, I specifically didn't wanna go out of, outside of Wichita, bring in an expert because I think we are the experts in this.

Don and Ebony: Boom. That's it.

Joy Eakins: I think we are, I think we have organizations that are expert at this.

I think our people are good at it, and I think there's something for us to talk about ourselves. and so we'll, we'll look at that. We'll talk with them about what it would've looked like if people had measured too soon and decided, you know, this isn't working, so I'm gonna quit on this individual, what that would've looked like, and think about what that would've looked like for.

Today if these people weren't serving and hadn't been in the positions they were in in the last five, 10 years in their lives. So I, I think it'll be inspiring and I think it will [00:25:00] call us to that idea that we can't quit. It's really easy. post pandemic with the stress and the anxiety and trying to figure out what to do next in your business to feel like it's too hard to keep going.

And you know, I was thinking this morning, last night, I was. Totally binge watching Netflix, and something I've even seen before. I mean, it's ridiculous. And I thought, you know, that was, that's a moment where you, there's, there's a place for that. But there are moments where you need to get up off the couch and stop that and get back into life with other people.

And this is that moment for Wichita.

Don and Ebony: Excellent.

I love. Well said. Yeah. I love going to the. Event every year. It's just, and it's gonna be at Intra Bank Arena in case you wanna go. I hope you do. It's gonna be on February 8th. go to the Chamber website. To get more information and to register to attend e Well, that's it. I mean, I, I think that we have gained all the information that we can gain at, or insight that we can gain for 2023.

I look forward to a very successful year. and looking forward to the, to the chair's lunch, which, I'll see all of you there. I'm quite certain of it. It's the place to be if you're not there, you're square. Yeah. Is that it? Yeah.

Joy Eakins: You're missing out. But if you're a small business and you can't take off from your business, one of the things we've been doing over the years of the Chamber is recording those events so that our small businesses who have to be in their business during the day can try and watch them on the weekends.

So you should be there if there's any way possible, it's gonna be a moment you don't wanna miss, but if you can't, we will find a way to have your back. Small businesses.

Don and Ebony: Love that. Excellent. I didn't know that you, we recorded it and had it on there. So it's on the website. Will they be able to,

Joy Eakins: behind the membership login, which is another great reason to join the Chamber.

Don and Ebony: Yes. Look at

Joy Eakins: We have lots of opportunities and it's just something we noticed a long time ago. If a small business owner has to leave their business to come to a chamber event, it can cost them a third of their revenue that day. And so if we can find a way to support them, we will.

Don and Ebony: Wow. Perfect. Don, ready for some word association? Yeah. We have some new words

Joy Eakins: Oh, and

Don and Ebony: hopefully this.

Joy Eakins: and I didn't see the list ahead,

Don and Ebony: oh no. Anyone know? There's no list ahead. What

that

takes to out. Let's hope you remember this interaction with me. since you don't remember the

first one, but I get it. I'm one of those forgettable guys.

Joy Eakins: Don.

Don and Ebony: Here we go. I'll give you one word. You gimme one word back. It's not wrong cuz it's your word. Word association. Can I throw some words? No. Okay. Yeah, you always do. I dunno why you are like you're pretending to ask . Okay. Excellent Leader.

Joy Eakins: Servant.

Don and Ebony: Success.

Joy Eakins: Faithfulness.

Don and Ebony: College.

Joy Eakins: university of Southern Mississippi. Okay.

Don and Ebony: You didn't say K State, so that's good. Wow.

Joy Eakins: Well, should I mention that I'm fourth generation Alabama fan, Whoa. tough right now.

that.

I know.

Don and Ebony: going down. Know

Joy Eakins: We might we'll see I've heard a lot of talk this week from my fellow K

Don and Ebony: You know it. Okay,

Joy Eakins: see what happens on the field.

Don and Ebony: That's good. You. Wow, cats. Let's do it. Can you cut

Joy Eakins: married to, Jayhawk though. I'll, I will say that.

Don and Ebony: Bye. Skin deep in here, but it's basketball, so it's, it's coming up.

Failure.

Joy Eakins: Get back up.

Don and Ebony: Nice. Entrepreneur.

Joy Eakins: Just one word. That's hard. These are my favorite people .

Don and Ebony: You're the chair.

You can do what you want.

Joy Eakins: Oh, well, in that

Don and Ebony: Yeah.

Joy Eakins: entrepreneur is, I would just say my favorite people.

Don and Ebony: Okay. Wichita.

Joy Eakins: Home.

Don and Ebony: Vacation.

Joy Eakins: Anywhere near a beach.

Don and Ebony: Hero.

Joy Eakins: My husband.

Don and Ebony: Chamber. Wichita Chamber.

Joy Eakins: Oh, I'm glad you said that. Wichita Chamber.

Don and Ebony: Yeah.

Joy Eakins: friends.

Don and Ebony: family.

Joy Eakins: So important.

Don and Ebony: Fun.

Joy Eakins: Football.

Don and Ebony: Okay. ? Yes. We'll see if fun anymore. ? last but not least, and you have to tell the truth about it.

Beverage.

Joy Eakins: Oh, I'm Diet Coke girl.

Don and Ebony: Was that the truth? Oh.

Joy Eakins: It's right. I've got one right here.

Don and Ebony: take here We'll take it. We'll take it and run. Take it and run. Thanks for coming through. Joy. Always good to see you.

Joy Eakins: It's great to be here. Thanks for what you guys do for our businesses in Wichita. It's really important.

It's fun. It is. It really is.

Don and Ebony: We appreciate the opportunity to help share some of the stories and highlight it. So thank you for being our guest again. And thank you for, accepting Don's invite to come here, . Cause you know, , sometimes people wanna run away when see his email. So again, thank you so very much, so much. we look forward to supporting your 2023 year end [00:30:00] initiatives.

Joy Eakins: All right, thanks.

Don and Ebony: All right, friends, if you would please like and share this with whomever you think would find value if you would also let us know who you wanna hear from next till next time, peace.