

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 118

Stan Shelden

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Don Sherman: [00:00:00] welcome to another exciting edition of the WCBA part, of course by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us. Love us share us, follow us. Truly appreciate you checking us [00:01:00] out in the house. E Shelden Architecture.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: That's right. We have Stan Shelden in the house.

Welcome,

sir there. doing?

Oh, we're wonderful. We're happy to have you here.

Stan Shelden: I'm really glad to be here. Yep. It's good.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: So let's talk a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Stan Shelden: Yeah, you bet. Well, again, I'm Stan Shelden. I'm the president and CEO of Shelden Architecture. We just celebrated our 20th year this past year and it's been a real of fun and exciting ride for sure. E ever since I was a little kid, I just love building stuff and I love designing stuff.

I love drawing. I just, I love painting. I loved all the design creative process of things as well as getting my hands dirty and actually making it happen. So I like building things as well. But my My upbringing, I think just lended itself to a broad range of things. Though my parents really got me involved in all kinds of things from Boy Scouts to all kinds of different activities and doing that just made me love everything.

I love music. [00:02:00] I, we played the piano. We all sang, we all did a bunch of stuff in our, we just had a blast growing up. As a result, I really felt like, I couldn't really say I had to do one thing. One thing I really found out though, with architecture and being a a designer that in the way that we do things, I touch all kinds of things, medical stuff, school stuff, housing all kinds of



different types of uses, performing art centers.

There's so many different facets of the kind of stuff we do. So, , I don't like just getting involved in only one type of thing. And being in architecture, I feel like I get to touch people's hearts. I get to touch the construction of the world. It's just a really It just feels very fun.

I just really like doing what I gonna do. But I think all the way through high school, I was involved in a lot of art classes. I love sciences and math and all of that, all that together. So the architecture, [00:03:00] art and technology coming together just seemed like a really great fit to me.

I did go to K State.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Yay.

Stan Shelden: know, I know it doesn't work for everybody, but I loved it. We had a great time. Yeah. I went to K State and graduated a long time ago and then went to Chicago for about seven or eight years. Did

Don Sherman: Did you grow up here?

Stan Shelden: I grew up here and went to North High School.

Don Sherman: That's okay too. It is what it is. I can't buy a vowel right now. So.

Stan Shelden: no, it's great.

Yeah, I enjoyed it. I had a great time at North High and learned a lot and then went to K State, but we had just a great experience there. But when I went to Chicago, I worked for a really large firm in downtown Chicago. We lived downtown and it was a great experience being in that intense urban environment and just a really amazing experience as a young architect. I was surrounded by some really great stuff all the time, all day long, and I really felt again, that I still loved all of it. I didn't want to just specialize in any one type. I really felt like all of these things are really important to a person.

And a [00:04:00] person, evolves, does a lot of different things. They go to school, they live in a, they live in their home. Different businesses. They have everything from factory type architecture buildings. They have clinics and hospitals and schools and all these different things, right?

And I wanted to be a part of all of it. So I've always thought of myself as a generalist and somebody that doesn't necessarily specialize. I want to really help people. That are wherever they're at. If it's a school project or if it's a house project, or if it's a medical clinic project, or if it's

a adaptive reuse of an old building in downtown, whatever it might be, or a brand new building for Fidelity, or for Martin Pringle or for whoever it might be that we can really enter into the shoes that my clients have and really walk alongside them and help them really determine what the building, what's needs to.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Yeah. So let's break this down a little bit. Okay. So you started 20 years ago. Yep. All right. And you started in Chicago.

Stan Shelden: Well, we [00:05:00] started, I started 35 years ago.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: 35 years, ago. In Chicago. Yeah.

Stan Shelden: And then we spent seven or eight years in Chicago. Then I moved back in the mid nineties into Wichita. And then I worked for another firm for seven years or so, and then started my firm.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: You hadn't, you did all your mistakes at those other firms. Wow. Wow.

Stan Shelden: Every day I wake up, there's something I should have done better.

Oh.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: No, that, that is awesome. So let's talk about, okay. What made you decide, I've worked for these other places.

I lived in these other amazing spaces, now I'm back in Wichita. What made you decide that you wanted to start your own firm?

Stan Shelden: Yeah. Well, really interesting. I was asked by K State to come up and do some critiques which means I actually get to be a professor of some college students for a day where I sit in on their studio classes and I get to sit there across from these students and say, So tell me a little bit about your project.

Why do you like your project? What are you doing about your project and so forth, and that experience with those kids? Again, I was, now I'd been out [00:06:00] about 10 years. I've been working, as an architect I was licensed and so forth. But when I saw the kids passion for the craft of what they were doing, I just sort of felt like, I want to see I want to be more about that in my own practice. and it sort of inspired me a along with just a, just an inside burning passion to be an entrepreneur. My my grandfathers on both sides of my family were both entrepreneurs.

Don Sherman: Oh, wow. Yeah.

Stan Shelden: So my, grandfather on my dad's side was he had a men's clothing store up by Kansas City, actually in Ottawa, and sold suits to professors at ku. and was really So, and in, in fact, he was one of the first when I first talked about opening a business, he said the first thing I should do is join the Chamber.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Oh, very nice.

Stan Shelden: Make sure you join the chamber.

Don Sherman: agree.

Stan Shelden: He was always a member. In fact, he was the president of the Chamber in Ottawa several times.

And just a real, really great man. And he had this little men's clothing [00:07:00] store for 40 years and just loved it every time I went there, the smell of it just, I just loved

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Did you have to work there?

Stan Shelden: No, I never worked there. Maybe I dusted a little bit, maybe as a little kid or something, but that's about it.

But we always had a great time.

Watching him run his business with his wife, who my grandma. That was just a really, it was inspiring watching them just live their life and do their thing. And then on my mom's side of the family, my grandfather on my mom's side was a farmer rancher and again, just an entrepreneur in his own own right and ran his farm and his ranch and, both of them were, it was just fun to watch them talk about business, talk about living life, being a really great member of their communities and enjoying life and providing for their families, but also for others that would work for them from time to time.

So I just love that whole aspect of, and I just got that bug.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Got the bug early, I know, that's good. Yeah. Because That always amazes me when I find people who are [00:08:00] willing to take that risk in knowing that now you have, your family, but also your work family that you have to make sure you're getting a right for each and every day. . And so how many employees did you start off with 20 years ago in.

Stan Shelden: Well, of course I was the first.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: You're the first. Yes.

Stan Shelden: then, yeah, within a few weeks I hired a bookkeeper and accountant type person that was my first hire. So right away I just knew I was going to need for invoicing and taking care of all the books and everything.

I didn't want to be doing that day to day. So that was my first hire right away. And then I quickly started hiring young architects and several of them became 40 under forties guys. Yeah. So we had a, I got a really great group of brand new young architects that worked for me.

It started off with just one quick hire and then two or three, then within a couple more months, and the, by the time we were two years old, we had six

wow.

of us. And then by 2008 we were to 10 2009. and 10 and [00:09:00] 11 and 12. And 13 were tough years for construction that, the recession

Don Sherman: Right, right, right,

Stan Shelden: And we had

that's right.

We had built our business primarily around other entrepreneurial adventures, whether they were doctors groups or developers or other people, a restaurateur or whatever. We had a bunch of small individual type of clients. Well, that recession really hit them super hard.

And they weren't building new shopping center stuff. We weren't building new restaurants in oh eight and oh nine and oh 10, so I, we had to diversify a whole bunch. But during those, that time period and go find different types of clients that were more institutional or government. So we did, we started doing a lot of work for U S D 2 59.

Okay. Okay. In the 2008 bond we. Remember that? Yep. That was a godsend for us. And we got about nine projects from the district during that bond. And so we did a bunch of school additions and school projects for the, for a few [00:10:00] years. And we expanded to some other institutional clients like the post office, believe it or not, and for McConnell Air Force Base where we started working with them as well.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: So now what is your specialty?

Stan Shelden: Yeah. So we're generalists,

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Okay.

Stan Shelden: Still generalist. Yeah. By design. Yeah. But again I'm a, I don't know that it, I think it's great to get really good at one thing. What I want to be great at getting really good at is people.

And not so much a building type.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Yeah. That's, well, that's deep. Yeah. So I, and. That's, you wanna, it really is, no, you wanna get really good at people and what the core of that is finding ways to collaborate, right. Collaboration.

Stan Shelden: That's a great word. Yeah. The ideal Team player is a great book that, that I really liked and humble, hungry and smart are the three categories that they talk about with people that they really honed in on as components of what makes a really good team player, but really a good person in general, that they're humble, that [00:11:00] they're hungry, that they want to work hard, and that they're smart about it. They can read the room, they can tell if people are getting them, are they being understood do they understand, what the issues are, what the right questions are.

And I think those are really important factors. So for us the idea that I want to be a specialist in.

Not so much a building type, because what we can do is, talk about it with, whether it's a little strip center that we're gonna have, a Starbucks in or whatever and, or it's gonna be a medical clinic that has that for eye exams or for dermatology or for whatever it might be.

The people part of that connection is what really intrigues me. How does that,

that group of doctors want their patients to. When they walk into the building how do they want to feel treated by the way that the space is? Some people want it to feel very bougie and really fancy because they just,

They do that

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: he's bougie.

Stan Shelden: and other people want to go, no, [00:12:00] hey, listen, we want to communicate to our clients that we're frugal and that we're thoughtful about it.

We're not spending money unnecessarily. Right? Yes. , well, wow.

I think they both have their their place, but we don't really mind which one it is because it's more about what the client is actually asking for. So, we really, focus in on that. I do love certain categories.

I think higher education is such a great category here in Kansas. The small colleges in Kansas, I think are a super great place for kids to get educated and for us to keep our Kansas kids here, the friends, universities, the Hesston College, Sterling College, Bethel, all those different schools that are around here.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: And you've worked, you've done projects for all of those that you've named?

Stan Shelden: I did, yeah. Yeah, we have, and we're currently working for them right now. I just love that. My, my daughters, a couple of my daughters went to Friends University Kansas State too is great. We've done work for Kansas State.

We haven't done anything for ku.

Don Sherman: he looks at me. I [00:13:00] didn't go to Ku

Stan Shelden: don't know.

Well anyway.

So yeah, I just want to be able to, I, I think investing in our kids is a huge thing and wanting to keep 'em here in Kansas if they have good opportunities here. I think that's great.

So we like working in higher education. It's a cool fact, a cool thing. So many people talk about sustainability as a, as kind of a buzzword in the industry. And a big part of that for us is how do you.

Existing buildings. and instead of just tearing them all down and starting over I think that there's a lot of, we call it embedded potential.

That's a kind of a buzzword for it. There's all this structure that's in place that's already there that somebody spent a lot of money on. 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, maybe longer than that, it's there. It's part of our fabric already, but maybe it's a tired use. Maybe the reason it's there is not needed anymore, but the structure's still there.

So how can we reinvent? Repurpose that building? [00:14:00] And I've been able to talk to campus leaders about, well, they've got these old, some old buildings on campus, but they're not being utilized very well or the technology's way outta date and all this stuff. But the structure itself is still a good structure.

It's not the right the building's not the problem. It's how they're using it.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: absolutely

Stan Shelden: And I talk 'em through how do we reinvent that building and repurpose it and make it, fresh and again and alive again. And I love doing that too. That's another part of that that I see on, especially on these small college campuses.

They don't need more square footage necessarily. They just need better square footage,

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Yeah. Better use of what they have.

Stan Shelden: Yeah. And so, and I think that's a good selling point to their donors, to the people that fund these projects, is that we're, being a good steward of what you've already got.

And I love that sort of a message.

So we've also felt like those same sort of messages work for old buildings in a downtown Wichita.[00:15:00] For instance the Broadway Auto Park, which is was a 1948 parking garage that was very dilapidated and.

Put on the list for condemnation.

It was gonna be torn down. Mike Ramsey said,

Don Sherman: ah, mike.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Hey Mike,

Stan Shelden: I just don't wanna,

ah, well I don't want to do that. I don't want to tear it down. But everybody looked at it. There were developers, everybody. Said, Hey, let's, cuz they could buy it at a really good price cuz it was not worth very much to most people.

So, get a good value for it. But then what can we do to make it new again? Well, we got the original engineer. The original structural engineer was still alive.

That's wonderful.

And we worked with him to reinvent that building and put apartments where you can drive up, park in front of your apartment and walk in and so we took that old building in from a 19 48, 19 49 and completely reinvented it into something that's gonna be great for the next 50 years.

[00:16:00] Excellent.

so we love that kind of thing. That's a really fun thing to do. We're doing that kind of work with

Intrust Bank right now, and they're there for facilities where we're taking parts of their. Older buildings and reinventing new spaces inside of them as well. And I think that's just a great stewardship model to look at and you save a lot of money over tearing down and building brand new is to reuse what you've got, but just make it new again.

And I think that it does, it's not as it's not as fancy a feel as building brand new everybody. Oh, let's build brand new some, whatever it is. It's just fun to build something brand new. Really, when you think about the long term of it is it's still gonna, in 20 years, that's gonna be an old building again,

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: At some point it will be right same spot.

Stan Shelden: So why are we not thinking we can just reinvent what we've got? And I think that's a really, it's a fun thing for me to work on. So we like that kind of projects. We also build brand new I mean we do lots of brand new buildings as well. The IMA building, we just finished, this last couple years.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Which is a really dope space. So I [00:17:00] love that rooftop. Oh man. I'm out there. Yeah. I love that.

Don Sherman: You mentioned humble, hungry, and smart. I'm trying to figure out which two are Ebony.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Oh, wow. All three. I'm all three .

Don Sherman: But you had mentioned about repurposing, and we'll go to break here in a minute. I'm just gonna go self-serving here for a second. All right.

Evergy Connect. We just repurposed a building that used to be a, from what I understand, a dry cleaners, and now it's we've turned it into a customer facing location where we help out customers.

But just going, being part of that process and going over, looking at old diagrams and things, it was amazing what that building used to be. And now we've made it into a.

Dope. That a word?

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Yes. It's pretty hip. It's a vibe, I tell you that.

Don Sherman: Yeah. It's a vibe. So, yeah. So with that, we'll roll into break.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: All right. Well, friends, we're gonna hear a word from our sponsors, and then we'll be back to hear from Stan Shelden and Shelden Architecture.

[00:18:00]

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Welcome back friends. We're here with Stan and we're talking a little bit about all of the wonderful projects that he's been working on. So Stan, you decided to come back to Wichita and you decided to open up this firm and make an impact in our region with all of these beautiful buildings and all these wonderful designs.

. What makes Wichita unique?

Stan Shelden: It's had such a tradition of entrepreneurial new starts of all kinds here. I think there's a really friendly, overall friendly atmosphere for companies to come and start something new and so I [00:19:00] think that's a really unique aspect of the overall community here.

I think there's a lot of folks that are, again, just how can we do that better? They ask that question pretty often around here, I think. I think there's, been such a transition with Wichita over the last 50 years. Really. I remember when Macy's was downtown.

and that's a long time ago. We just reinvented the Macy's building Yes. Into the DO school. which was, would it be cool to have Macy's downtown? Well, I suppose so, but it's really cool to have school downtown.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Agreed.

Stan Shelden: I think that use of that building is a phenomenally great use for that building.

It's in a great location. It's very easy to get to for everybody. . But I think the opportunity for Wichita right now is so ripe. I feel like there's still lots of really good things in front of us as far as how to improve our downtown. All the stuff that we're thinking about with Century two and all this space here and our kind of entertainment and museum District and all that.[00:20:00]

It's very interesting and very fascinating to me. I think all the stuff that's happened in Delano in terms of making it a really fun place to be old Town has been renovated for now 20 years and is just a fabulous place to, have both good places to eat and good places live and good places to work.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: With all of that, what in our ecosystem, our business ecosystem, would you change?

Don Sherman: Good question.

Stan Shelden: Yeah I think it, it's a little bit of a push because I feel very strongly about private property rights and about people's individual rights to make decisions about their space, their buildings their stuff.

Sometimes I wished we thought a little longer term at times. We make decisions sometimes that feel very, maybe a little shortsighted. An example might be how do we develop, whether it's a riverfront area or whether it's how we redevelop Douglass and those sort of things, I think we could do better.

I think that's,

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: been talking about the [00:21:00] riverfront for my entire life.

Stan Shelden: I know.

Don Sherman: My entire life.

Stan Shelden: Right now we're on the cusp. River Vista got built. It's.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: That was was amazing.

Stan Shelden: They did a lot of good stuff

Don Sherman: yeah, that's tight.

Stan Shelden: They've done good stuff here at the jury on the backside of the river as well.

There's more opportunity for that as well. But I would say that sometimes we, we want a little bit quicker return than I wished we would think. A little think that's the key, right? Right. The return. You want it quick when sometimes it takes a little bit

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: And, development, that's what it.

Stan Shelden: I want people to have complete freedom in making choices that they feel that they want to make.

So I think that's great. But sometimes I wish we'd think a little more long term with projects that we've got to do.

Don Sherman: Excellent. What kinda, you've been around for a while, you're successful, what kind of culture you got rolling over there at.

Stan Shelden: Well, I'll tell you what, I'm learning stuff every day, so I feel like I've still got more to learn than I, I wished I had all the answers for how to

Oh, you do

I really try to get a lot of coaching from a whole [00:22:00] bunch of different people from, everybody from like a Dave Ramsey. Types of stuff to my own board of advisors, to good friends of mine that have been at Koch, or at Intrust or at Equity Bank or at ima, and and just listening to a lot of good friends of mine that just, have done it for a long time as well.

Whether it's more on the HR space, on, on how to really develop a culture that people feel like they're really being taken care of and they've really got the opportunities that they want to have both professionally in their career, but also that they can take care of their families. You know that they've got the healthcare that they want and they've got all the benefits they want they get enough time off and all those sort of things .

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: You hear that Don? Time off. Do you hear that?

Don Sherman: I don't need this shade right now.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: You need to give people time off. But I do hear that you guys have free lunch Fridays.

Let's, because I'm gonna start coming up tonight. Yeah, I saw

that on Friday. She'll be like, is that Ebony here?

Stan Shelden: it's really good food too. We don't skimp on those Fridays. They're good.

It's good food. But, I [00:23:00] think

Don Sherman: where are you located again? I'm just asking for a friend.

Stan Shelden: Yeah. No, that's why

800 east first Street.

Yes.

But anyway, we really I try to make sure that people feel that they're professionals. I don't, we don't have a time clock kind of mentality. If you need to be, if you need to be some place that morning with your family or a friend or do doing something else, and you have to be in late.

Fine. That's okay. I expect you to get your work done whenever it needs to get done. And you need to coordinate with your team and make sure that you're a good team player, that you're humble, hungry, and smart. So if you do those things we're not a time clock, driven type thing. We we do track our hours, weekly.

We, we pay attention to that, but at the same time, it's get your work done, be a professional. Communicate with your team and you be, be a person, be free to do what you need to do. And and also there's some companies that said, Hey we'll let you take whatever time off that you want that.

And I think for vacation there, there's a few firms or companies in town that have said, [00:24:00] Hey, take as much time off as you want. And what ends up happening is it's a reverse psychology. People feel a little guilty if they go past two or three weeks of vacation. They go.

I don't know if I should take that.

I feel, I know he says I can, but I don't know if I can. Well, I force you to and I, and you get a lot of vacation time with us. So if you spend, three or four or five years with us, you get a fair amount of vacation and I want you to use it. Get outta here. Go do something.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Are you guys looking for new associates?

Don Sherman: Ebony wouldn't work well

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: over there.

My drawing skills are increasingly,

Don Sherman: She would test your vacation policy.

So I'm just saying.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Well, I think it's time for some fun. Don, you ready?

Don Sherman: Yeah. We're gonna do some word association. You've dealt with Ebony long enough, so I'll give you one word back. I'm sorry. Let's try this again. I'll give you one word. You give me one word back. That's not wrong cuz it's your word. All right.

Are you ready?

Stan Shelden: I'll try.

Don Sherman: Leader.

Stan Shelden: humble.

Don Sherman: [00:25:00] Success.

Stan Shelden: Family.

Don Sherman: College.

Stan Shelden: is there any other

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Exactly. That's right. Let 'em know. Go.

Don Sherman: Say the word

Stan Shelden: so I'll say friends, but, okay. K State too.

Don Sherman: Oh. Oh. You had to throw it in there.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: You had to throw it in there. I love that. love that.

Stan Shelden: And wsu, we've had 'em all. All,

Okay.

Don Sherman: That's good. Failure.

Stan Shelden: It's gonna happen. Sorry.

Don Sherman: No, that was good.

An entrepreneur. is that the word? Yeah. Oh, entrepreneur is

Stan Shelden: Flexible.

Don Sherman: Okay. Wichita.

Stan Shelden: Family again? I just, yeah.

Don Sherman: Vacation.

Stan Shelden: Don't know what those are.

personally.

Don Sherman: hero.

Stan Shelden: Oh boy.

Lot of different levels on that one. Jesus.

Don Sherman: Okay. [00:26:00]

Wichita Chamber. I know.

Stan Shelden: Great friend. I know I'm not giving one

Don Sherman: No. And I gave you two words, so we're both messing up here. Family.

Stan Shelden: I have a unique situation there. I can't just say one word. I lived with six women.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: That is wonderful. You're a better person. . .

Don Sherman: Yeah. Fun.

Stan Shelden: Work.

Don Sherman: Last but not least, you gotta tell truth. This ought to be good beverage.

Stan Shelden: Coffee.

Don Sherman: Okay. We'll go with coffee for now. . Excellent. Thank you for showing up, dealing with Ebony. We truly appreciate it's tough gig, but it is what it is. Thanks for coming in.

Stan Shelden: You guys are great.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: It's been wonderful.

Stan Shelden: what you do.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: Thank you for being here.

Stan Shelden: Glad to do it.

Ebony Clemons Ajibolade: All right, friends, we've come to the end of today's segment. We heard from Stan Shelden and Shelden Architecture. Please make certain that you share this with your friends and your circle of influence or [00:27:00] anyone who might be considering to be an architect in the future. Until next time.

Don Sherman: Peace.