

Unknown Speaker 0:01

Okay, so the first question is just tell me a little bit about your business and what do you do? What does it normally look like in the absence of COVID?

Unknown Speaker 0:09

Okay, in the absence of COVID that's a that's going to cause me to dig back into memory bank. So I run coffee Park, coffee Park had two like locations prior to COVID. One is the coffee Park Airstream at 12 away from Miller road and Winston Salem. The other location is coffee Park arts, which is at the Milton road Center for the Arts on 251 more spruce Street. The drive thru location or the airstream location is the drive up walk up bike up location. We've been here for 14 years. So we've been captivating folks in Winston Salem for quite a while. Our original partner was Frankie's coffee which is downtown on 211 East Third Street and We kind of split ways. Only about seven years into the venture thing went more of a food route and we kind of wanted to stay with coffee and quick serve, quick serve delivery of coffee items. And coffee Park arts venture is about six years old. And that was truly to work with the Arts Council, the salt to school, school for visual arts, and just local artists. And again, provide them space by them an opportunity to have meetings and also just kind of connect into the organizational institutional art scene here in Winston Salem. So that's, that's basically the pre covered thing. We are a community, a community focused coffee shop. So we facilitate lots of meetings between different groups in town that revolve around race, class power and gender and privilege issues. We try to utilize the arts in order to stimulate that discussion. We've been doing that for several years as well.

Unknown Speaker 2:09

So that's kind of pre covered.

Unknown Speaker 2:13

Okay, awesome. So now we're going to try to kind of stick to a timeline. So take me through what you're thinking when COVID was first coming here in the United States like early March, that kind of area.

Unknown Speaker 2:25

I want to go back further than that, actually, because January 8, is when I saw the first Post article that was highlighting this novel virus that was showing up in, in China. And I was I was reading the article, I looked over to my my spouse, and I was like, I this is not going to be good. And basically, the reason that I knew that it wasn't going to be good is because I have a very full understanding of who's in charge of our country, and its political, political versus Public Health. And I, I hate that I had that very crushing kind of read on that first article that came out in the Washington Post. But fast forwarding through that I stayed on top of the Johns Hopkins site, when it first came out, just basically paying attention to everything that was going on across the globe, because I knew that it would eventually get here, if it was not already here at that point, which we're starting to uncover. The it kind of bothered me to, you know, talk to some of the folks that were around here in small business, some of the folks that I know that are in the medical field that really weren't taking this seriously at all. I have a neighbor who's been in EDI

for over 20 years. And we were talking sometime in late February, just out in our shared drive. Like, and he mentioned that he was going to Dominican Republic for his birthday anniversary. And I was like, I don't know if you're going to be going there or not. There's a god, what are you talking about? So I showed him the Johns Hopkins site, which he was unaware of. And I was like, let's just look at how many cases they have. At that point. They only had five cases. I was like, oh, winter trip, and he's like, sometime in May. I said, Well, they'll have a good few thousand cases by then. He came up to me a couple of weeks later, he's like, yeah, we're probably gonna have to cancel that trip.

Unknown Speaker 4:37

It

Unknown Speaker 4:39

I just don't think that folks could believe it. First off, they kind of thought it was fantastical. And as we got closer into March, and I shut down my first business, March 14, which was at the mountain road center, for the arts, we're still not open because that space primarily relies upon events in order to operate. And without any events, that means no people and with no people, I'm not going to be open. So we're still trying to figure out exactly what that path forward looks like there. However, on the flip side of that the airstream driver has been open every day this year. With the exception we did take July 4 off. And one of those reasons being is that we're kind of built for the pandemic, we have about a 35 second interaction time. We're not in your face at any point you're in your car, or you're you've walked up or backed up. So we don't have literally we don't have any time for transmission to occur.

Unknown Speaker 5:48

So we've, luckily,

Unknown Speaker 5:52

the first few weeks, whenever governor Cooper actually put the stayhome order into place, those were pretty difficult but we had some fantastic patrons that literally dropped us envelopes of money so that we can make payroll so that we could buy supplies so that we could pay our rent and and that was just a beautiful experience. But then once we got into about mid April, we kind of hit a stride again. So we, we, we've had business and we let's say we encourage mass squaring from our folks whenever the CDC who started the dial around that going man now office all Mayor Garcetti in LA when he bought the first mass order in for a major Metro in the US and I was like, okay, it's probably time for us to, you know, do the same thing. And we actually saw an increase in business, which was kind of phenomenal. So that's, that's kind of the timeline what the how things occur here.

Unknown Speaker 7:00

Okay, so it sounds like the airstream business is doing really well and survived almost seamlessly. So the other one going the art center one. For that one did you have to look into any sort of financial relief like government loans or grants or anything like that?

Unknown Speaker 7:18

I fortunately have a really good relationship with the Arts Council, they understand the

Unknown Speaker 7:25

necessity of remaining close right now.

Unknown Speaker 7:29

In fact, they didn't have anybody in the building for weeks. They've just now started to bring back bring back people. The softube School has started doing very limited classes. But they're so sporadic that it's still just not in our financial best interest open the doors because then we start to incur ran again and payroll, but they basically forgiven our rent through this period, which has been a godsend. So literally, the only thing I'm paying for that space right now is liability. insurance. And that's fairly negligible, considering so we're in good shape there. I haven't really had to make any major financial moves on that space. We'll see what happens as we go forward. One thing I will say is that I'd spent 14 years building my business and building my business credit. All my access to capital dried up, and it's still dried up. I don't have my traditional sources of capital.

Unknown Speaker 8:35

Okay, so in this time, were you finding yourself able to explore new routes in your business? Like you start doing things that you maybe thought you'd never would have done? Or did things pretty much stay the same with a few minor changes?

Unknown Speaker 8:51

I mean, literally, it was just a few tweaks.

Unknown Speaker 8:55

Like I said earlier, that, you know, we're kind of built for the pandemic. See unnecessarily coming to that but I kept thinking about like, wow, yeah, we're okay comparatively because I look at the number of folks that are especially local folks that are in our line of business and and coffee shops. Some of them still haven't come out and they're not going to. They haven't figured out a path forward. Luckily, this is a this is a drive up, it's a curbside. It kind of fits the entire model that's being used right now for delivery to customers. And being the only thing that really you know, that I changed was trying to give people an option to where they could go online and pre order some things bags of coffee, t shirts, we developed a relationship with how the rubber dam which is down on Hawthorne, and especially a commission based, they print our shirts, they deliver our shirts, which is revived the artwork. So, just tried to create some more intentional collaborations with folks again, that were kind of doing the same thing, you know, at home delivery, curbside, and that sort of thing. Okay,

Unknown Speaker 10:18

so to kind of switch to personality, um, since you've mentioned that the arts location is completely closed, whatever you had to do in terms of your employees that work there.

Unknown Speaker 10:30

The staff actually are the ones that some gave up shifts here so that some of the folks that at the arts location was half hours, and they just literally stepped up to help support each other. Another interesting thing you know, the sap related is that are typically pre COVID. Our tip rate was around 15% of daily sales, that increase increase to a daily of almost 28% And that still continues today. So folks have really started to put money in that tip call, they realized that most service workers they make very little now granted we pay we pay higher than most of the coffee shops in town. We don't pay the \$2 and 25 cents that we could pay folks because it's just it. To me it's should be illegal. First off, but there's no way for anybody to survive that way. But they really just kind of stepped in and like okay, I'll give a few hours so that you can have a few more and and basically treat it treat it like a no, we're a family and we always have been. We we actually have had some people that worked here for over 10 years, which normally you don't see that happen in the stock of environment. You see a high turnover. We don't have a high turnover. We'll have people that will come here for school. They'll stay here For five, six years. And that's just that's the beauty of a very close knit community. Like, they've done remarkably well and taking care of one another.

Unknown Speaker 12:13

Yeah, that 10 year marks crazy. I worked in food service for three years. And I was always like, the longest tenured person after two years, though. Oh, wow. Yeah. Well as pizza, so.

Unknown Speaker 12:26

Okay, that's okay. Gotcha.

Unknown Speaker 12:29

Yeah, that that's crazy. That's great to hear that you guys are really like a family looking out for each other through all this. So now kind of going to the community as a whole Did you find that you were able to draw closer to other people in the community or in similar professions as you?

Unknown Speaker 12:45

Hey, it's been kind of interesting. So you know, we were encouraged by the by the date to kind of limit where we went, how often we went and yeah, I kind of okay with that. I went to I do all my stuff. Shopping myself if it's not delivered, and I'd say that's about a 5050 split. So going into, specifically in the grocery stores was primarily where I shop for supplies. It was kind of odd then the first first few weeks and then it almost seemed as the, as the narrative would change nationally that I could almost pinpoint that folks were, they were gonna put on masks, and then all of a sudden there will be another narrative that will come out and you would see less masks less social distancing, more social distancing, it's kind of abdu flowed

Unknown Speaker 13:43

right now it's

Unknown Speaker 13:46

it's become such a political football. Now we have a president that says that wearing a mask is patriotic all kind of disingenuous, but it's I'm happy that he finally put that out there. So Maybe some folks that were anti mask will actually put one on. Because we do have data now that shows that transmission can be reduced. If we just offer one on the the community itself, what I found myself doing early on probably around the third week of March, was that I joined a group of folks called the virtual village. And what we did was that we put musicians on the back of a trailer and we would drive them through neighborhoods, because people were locked up in their houses and we sit down and have a 1520 minute concert, and then we move on to the next location. We did that for several weeks, every Saturday and Sunday. And that's actually getting ready to roll back out. Because again, there's a lot of folks that are still kind of at home and don't really go out except for the essential so templates, musicians have really taken it on the chin all music venues, all the musicians I don't see a way forward until maybe next spring. I mean, that's really what some of the venue owners are saying. So that actually allowed me to get out into the community more I have not stayed home one day, not even during the stay at home orders because I had a what was deemed an essential business. We've taken coffee to the

Unknown Speaker 15:27  
to novant health

Unknown Speaker 15:30  
to just kind of perk some folks up especially early on when we were reaching capacity in our ICU use. And between all of these kind of community oriented things. I found myself literally out every day, and then when George flow Floyd was killed, then I found myself out again. So I've just that the community has been This is not my hometown. I've been here since 1980. And I've been extremely involved in a lot of different initiatives around town. So it's just been, it's been interesting to watch the pivot from COVID to protests, and seeing how those things fit together. It's, it's a beautiful picture in the complexity.

Unknown Speaker 16:21  
So just to touch on the artists a little bit more, that's certainly like the lack of representation and the national dialogue about how codes affected people really hasn't focused on artists at all. Like I live in Nashville. So there's a huge independent musician and artist community here. Um, so how like, have you talked to any of those people and, like, heard what they're going through and like anything about what they're thinking?

Unknown Speaker 16:53  
I've talked to artists every single day

Unknown Speaker 16:57  
through this, and I've seen some phenomenal Art songs that were written around the COVID response. I've seen songs that were written around the protest response. The visual arts that had been been done. Again, COVID and protests related have just been nothing short of phenomenal. There was one piece that was done of john nevel. I don't know if you're familiar

with that case here in Winston Salem. JOHN novel was a African American male. It was picked up by Forsyth County Sheriff's Department and on December 2 of last year, and his death, which was precipitated by his incarceration, two days later, was kept buried and out of the public eye until June 26 of this year. So I just saw a piece that was done of John Nevel. It's going to be gifted to his to his kids. And it was it was a beautiful piece it was just done in black spray paint on a on a bedsheet but it just came out gorgeous. You can see you can see the piece on yes weekly if you go to their website. So between the music, visual arts, the I'm actually sitting across from a dramatist right now Haiku writer that he found his outlet in on zoom in various ways and having to run like he ran a monthly Haiku Haiku meetup, and he's now moved that to zoom. I think some of the biggest things that have happened are the the larger entities such as the the symphony and the LA and, and we've just kind of go down those traditional art settings. They don't really see a way forward. I mean, they've been trying to do some things There was a Winston Salem Symphony quartet that was put on top of the Winston Salem foundation building and then local drone operator that I know he filmed it and it was a beautiful shot.

Unknown Speaker 19:12

Probably about 2030 minutes of footage.

Unknown Speaker 19:16

I know that the ram cat which is a local music venue has been holding weekly releases of local bands, doing a set just to try to generate some revenue for the bands and for the venue itself while I try to stay afloat. Special Events systems which is based here in Winston. They're a large supplier of rigging for big events such as we'll see. They were supposed to be doing a man trying remember what tour they were supposed to be on in mid March. I think it was actually a Rod Stewart show Respecting like 70 80,000 people with and labels in London, but they literally had to cut all of their hourly staff.

Unknown Speaker 20:10

They've had to

Unknown Speaker 20:13

basically take all the PVP that they can possibly get their hands on in order to keep their,

Unknown Speaker 20:19

their salaried staff employed.

Unknown Speaker 20:22

And what they did was that they took a big warehouse space, painted it outbreak, and they started bringing in musicians and bands to do a properly socially distant show. And they're releasing those each week. So I've done about eight or nine of those so far, and it's at least given an opportunity for people to hear live music, despite it being on a small screen. But it's tried to keep people active. But I one person that I know that's in the music biz, and he just had Another gig that was cancelled that's coming up and he's lost \$35,000 in revenue this year, just off of canceled events.

Unknown Speaker 21:08

But he continues to produce work.

Unknown Speaker 21:13

And I haven't come across many writers but I know there's been a lot of content has been written but has been mostly mostly in visual and in music.

Unknown Speaker 21:28

Okay, so moving forward. How do you see the rest of the pandemic playing out? And do you think there would be any circumstances under which we would have to revert back to a lockdown stay at home order type thing?

Unknown Speaker 21:44

Well, if our numbers start looking anything like our neighbors to the south, such as Georgia and Florida, and I do think that Cooper would finally lock us back down and I totally for that, I mean,

Unknown Speaker 22:00

Wait.

Unknown Speaker 22:02

We need to recognize that this is something we can get past and we've watched a lot of the of the globe really get past this. I mean, I wish I was in New Zealand right now. I mean, there is a zero case. They're they're doing it right. Some other countries have done it right as well. And we just seem to be continuing to politicize this thing, which is it's not political. I mean, it is what it is. One of the things that that concerns me is that a few weeks ago, one of the Wu who speakers mentioned the word endemic. I know what that means. I remember when HIV was first reported, and we're just now some 40 years later, getting to a point where it's not a complete death sentence. I'm hoping that this this specific virus is not Going to become endemic. But if we don't start taking the necessary steps and precautions, it will there won't be any way to deal with it because where we're number one right now, but in the wrong way,

Unknown Speaker 23:18

always number one in America.

Unknown Speaker 23:21

Oh, yeah. All right.

Unknown Speaker 23:24

So we actually ran through that pretty quickly. Are there any other thoughts or things you wanted to share about COVID?

Unknown Speaker 23:32

Or anything that you wanted to particularly come up with your oral history?

Unknown Speaker 23:36

Yeah. mean the, the only thing else I would like to share just about COVID and in particular, is that while I have seen remarkable humanity through this I find it extremely disconcerting that so many people have taken this to spew vitriol to To demean others to they've used it as a political and cultural and social cudgel. And I don't know if I'll ever get past that. It's, it's really kind of been a remarkable descent into the abyss of moral depravity. And I hope at some point, we can come to a reconciliation around this, but it really has kind of laid bare the systemic issues that we have in our nation, and also some of the

Unknown Speaker 24:38

social issues that we have in this nation. And

Unknown Speaker 24:44

I wouldn't wish this to happen in any other time. But it This may have been necessary at some point. For us to actually take a to have a bigger collective of citizens actually noticed that Oh, wait a minute. There's There's something really, really wrong here. Hopefully we can come back to a more humane approach to one another.

Unknown Speaker 25:10

But it's going to take a lot of work.

Unknown Speaker 25:14

And I would agree with you, it seems like we've needed something like this, not like the pandemic, but we've needed a chance to reflect and look at how our country operates. And I think this has allowed us to do that in a lot of ways.

Unknown Speaker 25:31

Now, yeah, What year are you?

Unknown Speaker 25:34

I'm a sophomore.

Unknown Speaker 25:35

Year sophomore. Yeah. What department

Unknown Speaker 25:39

mathematical economics and politics.

Unknown Speaker 25:43

Mathematical in politics,

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