



The Bright Side Episode 20: Rural

Produced by
CEDAM

Underwritten by
MSHDA and MIplace

Jade Smith When you say “rural,” people think farming. But in the midst of all those farms, you have to have a downtown like this. They all started because there was a demand for it, because there was a population here. Well that population is still here, and we still need to fill that demand.

Dave Snyder The stock of these buildings downtown, they’re mostly from around the turn of the 19th, 20th century.

Miya Williamson Today we’re meeting to learn how to jump start economic development in our small towns and our rural towns and our main streets.

Rick Schmitt We are right on the shores of Lake Michigan, so we don’t get much business from the west. And it is a challenge to operate a business in a seasonal rural environment here.

Deborah Haak I’d never heard of Three Rivers. I didn’t know anything about it, but I just said, “Hey, why not?”

Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma And their lives have been profoundly shaped by this place and by the uniqueness that Three Rivers has to offer.

---Rural---

Huss Project
Three Rivers, MI

Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma Our organization was not very place-based. We had a PO box in Three Rivers but no physical location, no phone number, that sort of thing. We started thinking, well, what would it look like if our organization were committed to this place?

Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma We're at the Huss Project, which is a building that our organization *culture is not optional purchased in 2009 to turn into a community center and residential space.

Rob It was an elementary school built in 1919. It stopped functioning as an elementary school in the early 1980's. They sold it to a private individual and we purchased the building in 2009 from her. So we're at the very beginning of that process of turning the building into a community center. But as we walk through the interior space, I can tell you about some of our ideas for what this space will become.

So the main floor would be the space where most of the agencies and nonprofits would be housed in doing their work. And by sharing office space, we can all lower our overhead and use more of our resources for the actual programming that we're trying to do.

This room is slated to become a commercial kitchen. So one of our dream events someday when our facility is fully up and running is to harvest things from the garden, bring them in here, cook them, and then serve them in the performance room.

Kirstin We generally have been doing things with the building as is, not just wait for a fully renovated building to begin doing the things that we dream of doing. And one of the unique opportunities of having a building that's going to be fully renovated completely eventually is that we can paint anything we want on the walls.

If you look up close, it has these little shrinky-dink versions of local institutions that have become significant for our group, and we use this map as a way of beginning to talk with groups about where they are in our city. This is the Huss Project down here. And what it means that the city's really divided into four neighborhoods by the rivers, each with their own very distinct demographics.

Tom Lowry They are very active with the community, especially on that side of town, and so they have activities for the kids. They're doing community gardens, which just keeps getting larger and definitely more well used every year. So they're already making a difference in that area and in the city. So we're ecstatic that they're there.

Rob We've already done a storytelling series in here. We've also done concerts in this space as part of our annual Future Festival.

Pastor Tony Bennett Future Fest was the name of the one that they were putting on over here, and ours was just called the Back to School Celebration, and we put them together. And now it's just called Future Fest, but we do Back to School connected with it.

Matter of fact, after we got too big for New Jerusalem, it came here, but that's when this was owned by the school at that point. And then of course when the school sold it, we had to leave, and now we're back here again. I like this! [laughs]

Rob and Kirstin and them, they have games going on, and then we give away the backpacks to all the kids and it's not just for Three Rivers, but it's for the entire county.

Kirstin We do a summer lunch program in partnership with the local schools. We do the garden. We'd like to add a small farmers market here on site. And then we're also getting to a really good point of conversation with local woodworkers about turning a portion of the school into a woodshop.

Rob And you can see, it is also at the moment a very good storage facility for the picnic tables that CEDAM so generously provided a grant to build.

The vision for the upstairs here is for residential spaces of various kinds. They are basically three classrooms on either side of the hall. On the front three we're talking about building six apartments and doing things that would be more unique and imaginative than just a square box.

The two outside rooms will become dorms. We've hosted a number of service learning groups from various colleges in the region and they come for a week, and if we had our own residential space that they could stay in, that would be helpful.

Deborah Haak I got involved by going on a service learning trip. I had never heard of Three Rivers. I didn't know anything about it, but I just said, "Hey. Why not?" So I spent a week here meeting people and working at the Huss Project. That was my senior year of college, and so after graduation I moved down here for a summer internship and stayed here ever since.

Tom Lowry The city is actually one of the only ones in the county that gained population. Since the last census over 100 more people now actually live here – but most places have been shrinking a little bit each census.

Pastor Tony Bennett Because of the Huss School Project being here, I think this area is going to be a better area. They've built some new houses. I'm about community development. I'm about everything that's going to bring value to our city and so I believe that the Huss School Project brings more value and a sense of awareness on you know what? We can all get along and have fun.

Huss Project
Three Rivers, MI
HussProject.com

Rural Mini Grants
rural.cedam.info/communityawards

Small Town & Rural Development
Thompsonville, MI

Jessica AcMoody We are at Crystal Mountain in Thompsonville, Michigan for the 11th annual Small Town and Rural Development Conference. So the conference takes place over three days and we have a lot of sessions that deal with rural economic development, microenterprise, we talk about placemaking. We talk about financial empowerment, financial education, downtown development, and things like that.

Miya Williamson I've enjoyed that it's small. It's intimate. You can really get to talk to the people who are offering the resources like MSHDA, MEDC, and that really helps. When you're at a larger conference it's sort of hard to get to the speakers and really connect with them.

Bill Mrdeza The value, especially the value for me, is the opportunity to network. And so a conference like this is an opportunity for people that live in the rural areas to get together. We have distance issues, etcetera, so we don't always have the opportunity to run down the road to our neighbor.

Jessica AcMoody I think this conference really helps rural communities, for one communicate with each other and see the really interesting things going in other communities and take the ideas back with them.

Kenneth Corey The notion is bring in tourists, but tourists who can help pay for the development ultimately of the island and not to overwhelm the island's ecology.

Brad Garmon When they pack up and move, really high up here are parks, bike, and hiking trails. Slightly higher than good paying job opportunities.

Bill Mrdeza Also the speakers have great ideas. They come from a variety of backgrounds and are on the cutting edge in their particular area of expertise that they can share their ideas and the things that work in other communities that we can take back and use in ours.

Deb Brown Because the world is a small town. Local is the new global.

Jessica AcMoody What we try to do at this conference is use a lot of local businesses in our events, so the dinner is made of locally sourced food items. And then we also try to do a beer or wine pairing with a local brewery or winery. The one this year was St. Ambrose about five miles away. Last year we were able to do Stormcloud Brewery and they're in Frankfort.

We had an apple and a cherry butter that were made in Traverse City. Last year we gave away Michigan cookie cutters that were made by a local company who employs disabled individuals to make the cookie cutters so they can learn job skills on the job.

It's great for everyone to get together and kind of talk about what challenges they're facing, what obstacles they're facing, and how they can overcome those obstacles.

Small Town & Rural Development Conference

rural.cedam.info/conference

Stormcloud Brewing Company
Frankfort, MI

Rick Schmitt Welcome to Stormcloud Brewing Company located in downtown Frankfort. We're glad to have you here. We're in a beautiful part of the world and people travel from great lengths to get to where we are. And that happens year round, whether it's snowshoers or folks that want to surf the Great Lakes in November. And of course the beauty here in the summer is just unparalleled. So it is a challenge to operate a business in this rural seasonal community, but we're making the best of it and we think we're on the right path.

Stormcloud evolved with a building that has a history of hospitality, the Seven Spot. And so we repurposed this great spot that has a history of fun atmosphere, and we're here right now standing in the bar area of the pub itself. We've got sixteen beers on tap that we make all right here on site. We also serve mead and wine and the beer is as local as it gets. So when you come in and you want to drink a local

product, you can get it here at Stormcloud because we made it right on the other side of that wall.

Everything behind this wall is new construction for us here. And you've seen the movie Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, right? So when we go through the door here, don't eat the blueberries!

We have arrived in the brewing operation here at Stormcloud. We've got a nine barrel system here in the facility, which allows us to make about 18-20 kegs per batch, and we have a wall of fermenters located right over here. So once we make the beer, we put it in the fermenters and then the magic begins.

Stormcloud brews Belgian inspired ales, and so we really focus on the traditions that the brewers in Belgium have crafted over the centuries. And so we're known for a couple of things. One is the Rainmaker pale ale, which is a Belgian pale ale. It actually won the bronze medal at the Great American Beer Festival last October. So we're real proud about that. That's a big deal in the craft beer industry.

Starting a business in a rural environment and specifically here in Frankfort, it was imperative for us to get all stakeholders engaged in the process early on. And so we couldn't have been more pleased with how the city has embraced our business here, as well as the town council and the business community itself.

We've created over 40 jobs right here in Frankfort, and 20 of them are year round opportunities.

Stormcloud's available on tap right now, so we're not in a bottle or can. Hopefully that will be in the near future. But right now we're available in about 35 restaurants as far south as Muskegon. We go all the way up to the bridge and over to Alpena, largely centered around the Grand Traverse region.

It's been a fun ride in the last two years and the future's bright.

Stormcloud Brewing Company
Frankfort, MI
StormcloudBrewing.com

Farm to School
Olivet, MI

Karla Love Oh wow, we're so excited. Today we are kicking off our farm to school month at Fern Persons Elementary in Olivet, Michigan. And we have our local farmer, Duane Morelan, who is here to talk to the students about how he grows

vegetables. So as the students go through the line, they're going to have some fresh little cherry tomatoes on their trays, along with fresh watermelon. And as they go into the cafeteria, Mr. Morelan will be there to talk to them. So I think we're going to have some nice interaction.

Duane Morelan Hi, how are you? You ever seen one of these before? You know what it is?

Kid What?

Duane Morelan It's a snake gourd.

Kid Woah!

Duane Morelan Yeah.

It's interesting that a lot of kids don't know what certain vegetables are, and they ask a lot of neat questions. And then when you respond to them, and you see their eyes light up, I think that's the big connection right there. And hopefully they'll leave here today with some memories about our conversations.

Karla Love We are trying to introduce more colorful vegetables to students. We recognize that life doesn't live on corn alone, and so we're trying to encourage students to eat the orange vegetables and the red vegetables and the purple vegetables and the really dark green vegetables because that's where the nutrients are that they need.

Duane Morelan This is a red cabbage.

Children What is this?

Duane Morelan That's a crown of thorns. It's a gourd. That is an acorn squash. It's called a honey bear. They're very sweet. They're very yummy. Yeah, that's a big gourd. That's an eggplant.

I would like to work with more schools. I would hope that they would catch on with the interest level and then with the energy that Olivet has shown, it's catchy. And I think the schools are missing out by not being part of this.

Karla Love If you keep putting that product in front of the student time after time, eventually they'll eat it. They'll try it. And when they do, they're usually quite surprised. And sometimes even if they're not going to eat it as a first grader, suddenly as a third grader they tried it and their palates have changed and it's wonderful. So it's just a matter of continually putting it out there.

Duane Morelan That's a cherry tomato. That's a grape tomato.

Kid I don't like tomatoes.

Duane Morelan Try that yellow one. [kid tries it and smiles, likes it] Yeah. Those are good, aren't they? I grew those!

Karla Love I suggest just give it a try. Start with baby steps. And Duane and I have started with baby steps. You know, there will be times when we say we're going to serve this vegetable to 300 students. We try and communicate those things and work that out. And baby steps is just finding things for the salad bar, because people are going to the salad bar number one are the ones who are enthusiastic about having the fresh produce.

Michigan Farm to School
MiFarmToSchool.msu.edu

A Cultivate Michigan Tomato Tour

Shakara Tyler This is Jose Luis Vargas' farm. He is a farmer member of the only Hispanic cooperative here in Michigan called Farmers on the Move. And he is one of the fourteen farmers that is in the cooperative, and they have a variety of fruits and vegetables grown here.

Filiberto Villa Gomez We are learning about management. Increase the production is the big challenge now. Because the customers this morning say, "Hey, for next Sunday I need 100 pounds."

Cultivate Michigan helps institutions reach a goal of purchasing 20% of their food from Michigan.

Shakara Tyler My role in cultivate Michigan is to bring a voice of farmers to the table. Help them become aware and get involved in the Cultivate Michigan campaigns. And I know Filiberto and the farmers are really interested in selling to institutions because it can be more money and the volume orders can be larger.

Jeanne Hausler The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development supports farm to institution work in Michigan through participation on the statewide farm to school workgroup and also the farm to institution network. We also provide food safety information to farmers and institutional food buyers to make sure that the way they're serving their food is safe. And we help promote farm to institution and the Cultivate Michigan program through special events and also through our social media outlets.

Filiberto Villa Gomez Now it's working good. We hope the next year, next two years, will be a lot of production because we can extend in the same quality. You can taste this product. It's a good flavor.

Jeanne Hausler With farm to institution in Michigan, everybody profits. The institutions have the ability to serve healthy, local foods that are more nutritious and less travelled. And also the farmers benefit again with new market opportunities and being able to sell their products without having a lot of overhead costs or transportation costs. And finally, the consumers profit because it is a healthier diet. You can have more choices in the food that you're eating. You can have healthy, nutritious, locally grown food. And it's a boon to our economy overall because buying locally keeps that money circulating in our local economy.

Erik James I'm always reminded that the closer you are to your food, usually the healthier the food is, and I like that concept. I kind of like knowing where my food comes from and knowing that it's not been sitting on a truck or on a freight train or something for a few weeks before I get it, so I'm all for local farmers.

Shakara Tyler Filiberto is really working hard to get the Farmers on the Move name out there, so the more people that can come to the farm, the better it is for him and the farmers to make more money and to keep the land that they're growing preserved and to continue to provide locally grown food to the community.

www.cultivatemichigan.org

East Main Redevelopment
Milan, MI

Dave Snyder These buildings are more like 120, 130 years old. That's 170 years old. It was built in 1845 and so it has presented some of the special challenges of this project. When we're done, it's going to last for another 170 years.

What's going on behind us is a full restoration of the original façade of the building. And then essentially a gutting of the interior and rebuilding of the interior to fifteen upscale apartments as well as eight storefronts.

Jade Smith Milan is a small community. It's build on history, and we're really seeing a resurgence of energy in the downtown. Downtown now we've got the \$6 million renovation of a whole block. Other than that, we have zero vacancies in the downtown as far as the businesses go.

Dave Snyder I got involved in this because at the time I owned the bakery that's in this space here, and the buildings were up for foreclosure. I bought them. Eventually

decided that the bakery business was not the place to be, so I continued with this project even though there wasn't any longer a connection with one of the businesses here in town.

Jade Smith There's a true sense of pride in this city and with the energy going on in the downtown with the building, it's a great time to be here.

Dave Snyder Over on the left side, there was another room that stuck out only on the third story. Then this side of the building was built entirely of asbestos. So we got the asbestos out of there.

So there was floor to here, and there was walling out here and ceiling here and so we're back to this. And as a matter of fact, all of this stuff will be removed and it'll be filled with gravel. There will be a cement floor to all of this space.

So all of the storefronts will come out. All of the storefronts except one. This one actually, we took the leaded glass out of this space and it's going back in there once it's repaired. This space here, these ruffles are original. They will stay.

One of the things that has been a huge asset in our building as well as any work that goes on in the downtown area is that there's something like 1,500 historic photographs. Photographs from 1890 to 1950. It allows us to go back to that and create more of the original look.

One of the things that we found on the wall of this building: a map of Washtenaw County painted on the wall, on the plaster. And that map has probably been there for 75 years.

We found record books of a jewelry store that opened here in 1915 and operated until 1992. We found a World War II era rifle that had been walled in on all sides and wrapped in insulation, so lots of excitement.

Jade Smith Those people that want to traditionally shop and stay in a downtown like this and not travel, we want to make sure that those people stay in town to do whatever it is they need to do. Whether they need to go out to eat or they need flowers or they need a gift or they need to grab a coffee, that they can do all of that here in town. So we're trying to diversify some of the businesses that are downtown.

Dave Snyder We're looking at creating sort of a town square.

Jade Smith So the dream plan for right here is to create what's called Tullan Square. In a lot of downtowns you have a common gathering area, and in this city we don't actually have that, but we have the perfect opportunity to create that. So working with the Michigan Rural Council and working with the Michigan Main Street program, it's got our wheels turning and we see an opportunity here.

Dave Snyder We worked with the Michigan Rural Council. We planned a visioning session that actually occurred on February 10th this year.

Jade Smith But the assessment overall was a very interactive process that we went through and they did a great job in bringing different sections and sectors of the city together to discuss the future of Milan and what we can do in the short term to make a change.

So the development across the street is great, but that's one element of it. That's just one piece. You've got to get the rest of the community to buy in on what you want to do. For instance, creating the Tullan Square, and having the \$6 million development, and redoing the streetscape, and involving all of these organizations to come together and say, "Look at our community now." And that's what it takes. So you've got to have the energy and you've got to have the right people in place.

Dave Snyder One of the things to do is to start with the state organizations that are built for the supportive projects like this. The two obvious places to start are with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The other organization would be the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and those two organizations have been very helpful to this project.

This particular project involved federal historic tax credits as well. Besides that, it takes some financial organizations too. So all in all we've got, with the developer, we've got seven entities involved in the building of this project. And Milan has been just terrific. They recognize the importance of this project to their downtown. That city administrator has been the most valuable player in the process. They're just critical to making something like this move ahead.

East Main Redevelopment
Milan, MI
EastMainMilan.com

Rural Community Assessments
rural.cedam.info/community-assessments

Michigan Main Street Center
MichiganMainStreetCenter.com

MSHDA
michigan.gov/MSHDA

MEDC
MichiganBusiness.org

MDARD
michigan.gov/MDARD

Jade Smith I think rural areas still play a significant role in the diversity of Michigan. Not everybody wants to live in urban areas.

Rick Schmitt So what happens in the summer, it's nuts. Everybody from one year old to ninety-six enjoying the time on the patio at Stormcloud.

Dave Snyder Whatever it takes in order to make this a place that people come to as opposed to drive through, that's what we're trying to do.

Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma We want people to walk into this space and think, "Wow, this is beautiful. And this is mine."

Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma We felt that it would be an opportunity to take on a property in a portion of our city that's really underserved by other institutions and get to know our neighbors, and grow food, and make music, and make art, and just see what happened.

Jade Smith Those people that want to traditionally shop in a downtown like this and not travel, they don't want to get in their car. They want to bike downtown. There's a resurgence of people that want to bike and walk and you can do that in these rural downtown areas.

Deborah Haak I think it's really the people who have kept me here. I really found a community here that I felt like I could belong to and be involved in.

BrightSideTV.com

Outtakes

Olivia Courant So what happens at that event?

Pastor Tony Bennett Oh, goodness. Children and people. [laughs]

Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma I always bring up Hogwarts with student groups especially. Part of the reason they love the idea is Hogwarts and this big castle where people go to live is that it's just... there's a new adventure around every turn. Well, in Hogwarts you never know when the staircase is going to move or whatever. But here we can do some interesting things with levels that people would find unexpected.

Jessica AcMoody Oh. Okay. Liv, go away!

Rob Vander Giessen-Reitsma Are you getting the Strawburbia sign? Because that's key.

Olivia Courant Yes, it's key.

Kenneth Corey If you haven't see a cod up close, that is the beauty. That is a cod.

Jessica AcMoody Rural micro... enterprising.. I can't.

Olivia Courant This is going to be the best outtake reel ever.

Jessica AcMoody Nooooo!!

---Credits---

Producer

CEDAM

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MSHDA MIplace

Music

Josh Woodward – “Morning Blue,” “California Lullabye,” “Learn to Fly,” “Bags of Water,” “Heritage Place” (joshwoodward.com)

Devon Elisabeth – “Like A Sigh”

Al Ryden – “Good Morning Country”

Bellevue – “Bohemia (Instrumental)”

Tyler Vander Maas – “The Bright Side Theme”

Huss Project

Still photos by Huss Project

Stormcloud Brewing Co.

Still photos by Stormcloud Brewing Co.

Farm to School in Olivet

Video produced by MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

A Cultivate Michigan Tomato Tour

Video produced by MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

East Main Redevelopment

Still photos from East Main Redevelopment

Historic photos: eastmainmilan.com

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