

## Episode 5: Realtors – A Source of the Source

[Brandon] How are you feeling?

[Laura] I don't think I have much more to say.

[Brandon] oh, I don't know about that. Come join us, explore the impact of small business here in rural Arkansas. What challenges would you face if you opened a small business who can help you meet those challenges? How do you get in touch with others like you? This is Create Bridges Arkansas. And we invite you to come cross these bridges with us.

[Brandon] Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening to the Create Bridges podcast. I'm Brandon Mathews and in this episode I'm joined by Laura Sackett Clute, principal broker and owner of Ozark Gateway Realty. Laura and I sat down to talk about workforce and housing challenges that employers face when setting up a business in the region. Some considerations when it comes to owning and managing a vacation rental property and how realtors can be a trusted guide or, as Laura puts it, a source of the source. Thanks again for listening and I hope you enjoy. Well, hello, Laura. Thank you for joining us on the podcast. Great to have you.

[Laura] Thank you for having me.

[Brandon] Well, before we get started, I want you just share a little bit about your role, the business that you work with and kind of what you do in the area.

[Laura] I'm Laura Sackett Clute with Ozark Gateway Realty. I am the principal, broker and owner, but because we're in a small area, I still do a lot of selling as well as managing my company. We currently have. My company was started by my dad, which I was lucky to enough to inherit in 2005. He's still working in real estate and then we have two other licensed agents. So we do selling, listing. We do property management and therefore rentals in our in our company. And so we're involved in a lot in the community. We have to know where things are. People ask us where they should eat at, you know? And of course, things along the real estate process, inspector views things and bank to use things like that.

[Brandon] Yeah. I want to circle back just for a minute. You mentioned you have gotten into the rental market.

[Laura] Is that the Gold Star tenant program? Yeah. When we were when my dad started us managing rentals, that was about when the market crashed in 2008. We started doing rental property management and we did the Gold Star tenant program because it was run. The rental program was created to make more buyers. We want them to be able to own their property. It's that, it's the American dream own a home. And it's proven that people are more involved in the community if they own a home. It just it's better for everybody if you own a home. So the Gold Star Tenant program was created to help people take the steps for that. It's hard for people, especially now, to get their credit score up. So this just gave them to show a chance of a line of credit. If they've been regular payments and they took good care of the place, they could even take their deposit and put it towards their down payment or credit closing costs. And then that would help us, you know, show that there are programs available where they can do that without any money down with the banks. And so it would be us be if they're interested in mine, it would help them make that step to home ownership.

[Brandon] Well, seems like a terrific program. In what city are you in again? Our offices in Highland. Our PO Box is in Cherokee Village. Our phone number is Ash Flat. So pick which one you want us to be in. But we call it. Well, ironically, I think call it the Quad Cities because we're certainly not a city, but.

[Brandon] Well, great. Well, it sounds like you guys have been doing a great thing for the community. And it's just great to hear and see from someone who is, you know, doing great things, try to invest in people, not just sell homes, but trying to make the whole community better.

[Laura] Right.

[Brandon] And I think that ties great into the Create Bridges program and what we're trying to do with the podcasts and sharing business stories and highlights of whether it's successes or challenges or innovation that businesses have had. You know, we want to help support tourism, retail, accommodations and entertainment. And probably at first glance, people wouldn't think real estate is the first place you'd go to. But I actually think it makes a lot of sense to hear from your perspective, because businesses aren't getting into properties if they're not talking to real estate owners or property owners or somebody. So how do you think real estate ties into when we talk about tourism, entertainment and just those kind of quality life aspects of a community?

[Laura] Well, and first of all, this. As far as the tourism, that is one thing. What we do is we mean as nightly rentals. So those are a lot of people that have vacation rentals in our area. And sometimes they use them and sometimes they just use it for our nightly rental to pay cover their bills really is all they're able to do. But that's only a tourism. People will stay there. Just visit the area of maybe visit the family, go to a golf tournament, you know, and again, all of that goes back into the tourism industry. They go shopping, they go downtown, Hardy, and they may buy a place here. Not all the time, but lots of times it comes back and then they're investing in the community, which therefore then they can support other businesses. And then, like you said, of course, then they would most of time they're going to contact a real estate agent to be able to find a property. And they're going to want to know if they can make money. If they start a business here, we can help show them the economics of the area and give them resources to find that, to make sure that they can make it a profitable business.

[Brandon] You guys are doing a little bit of everything. So you mentioned you manage, you know, nightly rentals. Do people ask you, you know, how to get started in that area? Yes. What what do you tell people who think, hey, you know, I've got a great place, you know, riverfront view here in Ozark foothills. I want to make some cash on it. What what would be some general advice before getting into that?

[Laura] Well, I would definitely look at the area because I've talked to people and they wanted to do it and riverfront lots of times. The riverfront, you can get pretty far out there. And I'm like, yeah, that place is really nice and probably would be really cute and private. But think about how long those people have to travel that gravel road to get there. I don't know if you're going to get return customers, and that's really important in that area. And you're yeah, you're going to want to look at not only the area, but, again, the neighbors and what amenities are going to be seen so that they can get good ratings. Everything goes off ratings. They need that rating and that feedback when they get a reservation. And so all of that's going to play into that. And they're going to want to make sure that they're going to even be wanting people to come here and they're going to want to know there's things for them to do in the area, too. So all of that would input come into play for them to be setting something up like that? We

get a lot. They do, of course, on the lakes in Cherokee Village. They'll get a nightly rental. But we've also got some down in Hardy, even in the old Spring Beach Club.

[Brandon] All right. So a lot to consider having them. Property is only one small piece of it, but location, how to get there, what to do once you. They're all really important factors. Thank you. I want to transition a little bit to the topic of workforce. That's one of the key components of what we're doing is, you know, how do we support the workforce in those industries in our area? What are ideas and topics of business owners and industry should be thinking about specifically? You know, when when a business or industry moves to an area, one of their top priorities is seeking a location for the business and making sure that it's obviously affordable for them, that there's a quality housing for their employees and affordable, too. How do you work with industries that are reaching out to move to the community and businesses that want to set up in our region to make sure that those needs are met? Well, and I think that really goes back to being the source of the source. You know, I might not have know the information about what property is right for them, but knowing to direct them to who can tell them how many cars go down the highway or other things that are going to be important about where they decide to build a commercial place. But then, of course, the housing. I definitely think that's important that they talk to real estate agents in the area because like. Right now, most people are like, oh, we can rent until we can find something to buy. But right now there's not any rentals. Even around here, we have people calling us daily for rentals. So I definitely think that's something that they should look into and make sure that the housing there is going to be housing available when they think about moving into the market.

[Brandon] Yeah. My family moved up here a little over two years ago. My wife accepted a job up in Mammoth Spring. And we thought, oh, we'll just get a place to rent and figure out if we want to buy, if we're gonna be in the community long, you know, make sure everything works out. And we couldn't find anything even two years ago that could meet our needs. And fortunately, we were able to work with a local bed and breakfast and we're able to rent that out kind of long term. But my wife started work in July and we were moving out of a house in Little Rock trying to sell a house or buy a house here in the area and then living in the bed and breakfast with a three month old. I tell you, it was a it was a transition that I don't wish on anybody.

[Laura] Right.

[Brandon] But it you know, that's a really good point that, you know, knowing what's available and being able to have a plan or to be able to reach out to realtors in the area about your needs is key. So what questions about housing? Should businesses be asking, you know, getting in some specifics when they're talking to a realtor?

[Laura] Well, as far as about housing, I would think something I would want to know. And a lot of this you can Google, I guess, but like the housing price range, what it would be the average house. And it's so hard to tell because we have lakefront, golffront. And then other homes with average prices going to be. But. So they know if people that they they know how much they're paying their employees. So they have an idea of what price changes are going to be looking in. And of course, you're going to have executives that are going to mean higher price range homes or something, you know, bigger and see if that market available. And they're also going to want to know the area amenities like most people that come here. How far away is the grocery store or how far away is the hardware store. Where are the churches, you know, things like that. And that is definitely something, again, that we can be the source

of that source and say, well, this is what's here. And there's here, too, you know. So all of that's important as well as finding a place to actually put the business.

[Brandon] When we were looking for housing online, when the realtor could share that with us, that was really important to know. I'm how far from the grocery store or. Oh, good. It's right in my backyard. And even, you know, I work from home a lot of times. Just the fact that if there is or isn't high speed Internet I'm at. That's key to whether or not we're going to move. And that actually played into some of our move as well. So having access to high speed broadband was key for us.

[Laura] And there are still some areas here that like there's not even hardly sometimes basic Internet. So when you get into the real rural areas. So, yeah, that that is definitely one that we hear a lot. What's the Internet like in this area?

[Brandon] So. I want to shift to the topic of small business and entrepreneurs. You know, when I moved up here about two years ago, specifically talking about Mammoth. But I saw it in a lot of towns area like Calico, Melbourne, Hardy, Ash flat, too, all the towns here. You know, there's some vacant storefront on the main streets. You know, there's some opportunity for businesses in there. And as a as somebody who works in real estate, what are some ways that we can connect people who want to start a business to maybe the owners of those buildings? You know, how do we get people into those businesses to try. You know, opening shops or what are some of those questions that you think people may need to answer before doing so?

[Brandon] Well? And one thing that to me is second nature is, like you said, getting in touch with those property owners. I can tell you who the owner is in a second and their mailing address. I may not have their phone number, but just to give them that access to that data and tell them where they can start and who they can talk to. And, you know. Oh, so and so. He knows everybody, you know, and get them in touch with somebody in the community that can get them started and maybe even somebody else that does something like they do in a neighboring community so that you can really get them in touch with the people. Like you said, like Hazelle was telling me it, you know, if you need to get your face out there and know people and realtors really get around, so we know people in the communities to get them in touch and we can get them in touch, they're going to need to talk to the city and say, OK, this is the regulations that you have to follow. And can you even do that type of business here? What are the state regulations? You know, and again, just be the source of the source and help them walk through all that process and like, oh, I didn't think about that, you know, as well as actually finding the property and seeing if the space works for what they want to do. I definitely would like to see less vacant properties on Hardy, on Main Street, any of the main streets. You know, people will come. We got a lot of people that come down there just to go down through Hardy and Main Street and see all those little shops they like all the different variety of stuff they have down there. So I think we've got some new places in recently. So I hope that they can continue to work through this difficult time.

[Brandon] When you've when you've traveled, in your experience, have you seen any examples of good, you know, a shared space or something where, you know, a business owner had an empty building front on Main? Or does that to be downtown or Main Street? But you just saw a building that wasn't being used and they turned it into a place for people to just try and see if they succeed or fail. Do you have any examples of those you can maybe share with our listeners? Well, the best one I can think of is the Chamber of Commerce. You know, we just moved. We made an agreement with Ruby's on Main. You know, they had their history museum and they let us open up a desk in there so that we can be able to

talk to tourists. You know, that that was not what they had designed until we met with them. And I think through the work of our president of the chamber efforts that we were able to work that out. You know, we figured we would have to rent our own space and that wasn't really feasible for us. And so that's really good for a lot of people that are starting out. They need that shared space that way they don't have to take on all that liability. And I think shared spaces a great idea if we can get people to work together.

[Brandon] Definitely. Yeah. I've heard of even in some other examples in the area of people who put in some sweat equity, you know, you know, doing maintenance and building some spaces for, you know, multi-year lease agreements, too. So definitely a lot of different opportunities to to bring some life back down to the some of the downtown area and really just bring back some vibrancy that we've had in years past.

[Brandon] Kind of reflecting on Create Bridges process and our work and strengthening and developing those four sectors. What changes do you see that are necessary maybe in the world of real estate to better support, you know, industry and small businesses? Are there any things that like, hey, if our profession changes or thinks to invest in this, we can really do a lot to support communities like ours?

[Laura] Well, the one thing that usually comes to mind is we've tried to pass it a couple times was natural gas. You know, a lot of commercial businesses say that they need that to be able to come to the area. And again, high speed internet. Both of those are things that businesses need to work. And then just like infrastructure that goes back to a lot of our systems are still on septic tanks and commercial businesses, they want that city sewer to be able to use that. And I don't even know if those cities that do have sewer, if they have the current infrastructure, that they could handle something new like that. But all of that, the utilities, I think, are all important. And I know that we have a lot of commercial space that is available for people to use if we just had the ability too. And I think that's part of our problem, too, is getting it out to the right people. And where are they looking, you know, to find that commercial space? It's different than how residential housing, you know, that they just go to realtor.com or Zillow. You know, it's it's there, but they don't necessarily look there. They probably look more in their industry for that search.

[Brandon] I mean, knowing where to search is important. I mean, if you're. I've seen a few lots in properties that could be business space listed on, you know, Zillow or something like that. But, yeah, those industries have their own specific. I mean, I think AEDC has a listing just for commercial law to have criteria telling you everything from square footage and acreage. And who knows how far is it from the highway? Four lane to lane, et cetera. Knowing where to look for that is really important. And again, like you highlighted, a realtor can help you figure that out. You all play a tremendous role that people sometimes maybe overlook because you're in more than the business of just, you know, selling homes. I mean, if you're in this because you believe in the community, too. Right. And so it's really important, I think, to bring you know, we think about the Create Bridges process. We've had lots of listening sessions, lots of opportunity to hear from business owners and employees and industry. But at the root of that is every voice matters.

[Laura] Oh, yeah, definitely.

[Brandon] And and even if you think somebody is crazy in the room, the crazy voice matters because always gives you a chance. Reflect on. Okay, what am I saying? Am I still being true?

[Laura] Or just think of outside the box. You know, they might think of something. You never would even cross your mind.

[Brandon] Well Laura, is there anything else you'd want to share with our listeners?

[Laura] Well, I think I can think of is that, you know, Arkansas tends to have a bad name. Sometimes (thought of) the redneck area. But this can. This area is so beautiful. There's so much land that's untouched. And, of course, we're talking about commercial and tourism. But tourism, obviously, there's so many state parks does beautiful areas that people can come to look and lots of people. That's what happened. They come and they tour it as just a vacation spot and they're like, oh, we need to stay here, you know? And that's all I'm saying is that this is a really nice area and low taxes, low crime rates. You know, there's just so many great things. And I think that a lot of people would really enjoy the area. They give them a chance. My guest today is Laura Sacket Clute, principal broker and owner of Ozark Gateway Realty. Laura, thank you so much for taking the time to visit with me today. I really enjoyed it.

[Laura] All right. Thanks for having me. For more information about this or any Create Bridges podcast, or more about Create Bridges Arkansas, visit [uaex.uada.edu/business-communities/strategic-planning/create-bridges](http://uaex.uada.edu/business-communities/strategic-planning/create-bridges). The Create Bridges Arkansas podcast is made possible by a Wal-Mart Grant to the University of Arkansas System, Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension, Community, Professional and Economic Development Unit. And with the cooperation of Spring River Innovation Hub and White River Now productions.