

Episode 4: Not a Jonas Brother, but still a Rock Star

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Come join us, explore the impact of small business here in rural Arkansas.

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What challenges would you face? Who can help you meet those challenges?
How do you get in touch with others like you?

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This is Create Bridges Arkansas. And we invite you to come cross these
bridges with us.

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Welcome to another episode of the Arkansas Create Bridges podcast series,
Small Business Big Real Impact.

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This is Hazelle Whited hosting for you this episode titled Not a Jonas Brother,
but still a rock star.

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With me today is none other than Mayor Jonas Anderson, mayor of Cave
City, Arkansas,

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located on the southern end of Sharp County and a small part of
Independence County.

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Now, if you've never heard of Cave City, then you've missed out on some of the best watermelon around.

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But before we get to all that, Jonas,

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thank you for coming on the show to share with us your stories on the things you do as mayor to bring success to the tourism,

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small businesses and lifeblood of your community. [Jonas] Thank you so much.

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It is so exciting to be here. And I'm... It's a pleasure. Thank you.

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[Hazelle] So I did a little snooping online and you have a personal Facebook page, a mayor Facebook page,

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as well as manage the city Facebook and City Web site, which I understand didn't exist before you became mayor.

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So why all this city online presence? And why is it such an important investment?

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[Jonas] Yeah, well, when you said we didn't really have an online presence, per say when I became mayor,

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so that was one of the first things I decided to do, because as you know, especially during this Covid-19 time, communication is key.

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And so I just saw social media as a really good tool.

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I originally started to use it when I was running for city council.

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You know, I formed a Facebook group there just to kind of let people know, hey, this is why I'm running for city council.

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This these are some of the ideas that I think are important for Cave City.

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And so that's that's kind of where it started and just kind of taken off from there.

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Yeah. Like you said, I manage everything for the city and just try to use that as a tool to let people know what's going on.

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[Hazelle] So this helps Cave City as a small city. But, you know, what can businesses glean from what you're doing with social media?

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[Jonas] Yeah. That's one thing I've actually tried to talk to small business owners about is, you know,

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making sure that they do have some sort of presence, whether it's a website or social media or something like that,

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because just like the city, it just gives them another outlet to communicate with customers and let them know what's going on with the business.

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So hopefully, you know, we've kind of set the example from the city perspective for something that small business owners can use.

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[Hazelle] Well, great. So let's kind of go back and talk about your public life and your entry into public life.

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So I again, in the snooping, saw that in 2010 you were actually appointed as a Cave City council member.

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And then in 2017, your predecessor appointed you to Mayor and then you were actually elected in 2018.

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Right. So and then in 2020, you were named District One Vice President of the Arkansas Municipal League.

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And by the way, we are so proud of you on that.

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But, so I always think of the time constraints being involved in this way because you have a full time job, right?

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Yeah. And so. And you have a family. Yes. So, I mean, it is a lot of time.

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So why do you feel involvement in state leadership roles and other professional organizations and

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just being engaged outside of your normal life is important to you as the city mayor of Cave City?

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[Jonas] Yeah, Like I said, there's definitely a time constraints. But, you know, when I first joined the city council in 2010,

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one of the first things that someone recommended was that I get in touch with the Arkansas Municipal League.

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You know, we had had a couple of council members before that.

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It attended a few of their conferences and workshops but we didn't really have a huge presence there.

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And so a fellow council member and I decided that we were gonna go to the winter conference that year and really try to get involved.

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And it's just really taken off from there. I mean, the municipality as a whole has just become, you know, like I told someone just today,

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not only is it an organization that helps the city, but for me personally, it just became a group of friends and mentors.

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And it's just led to a lot of great things, whether it's, you know, their legal defense program or property insurance that we can take advantage of.

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It's it's really just a great tool for the city. So that's why it's important.

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It just gives even small towns like Cave City, you know, a literal seat at the table when a lot of these big important decisions are being made.

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[Hazelle] So having you as this you know, the district one vice president, I mean, that means a lot to us here in our community to have that voice.

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And so, you know, it is because, as you said, you know, without having that seat at the table, sometimes we get forgotten.

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And certainly our businesses, you know, can kind of be forgotten as well.

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So I always akin that type of activity as something business owners really

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should consider as part of their business plans.

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What do you think about, you know, kind of what you do for the city and how business owners take that to be involved in something,

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whether it's a chamber or a volunteer group? How important is it?

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[Jonas] Right.

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Yeah, well, it just, you know, with the Municipal League in my role there, again, it just shows the power that, you know, a small community can have.

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So you take that and apply to small business, you know, like you said, if your small business can get involved in the chamber

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or get involved in, you know, some sort of representative group for small businesses,

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whether it's in the local community or in the region or county or even at the state level.

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It just, you know, it gives you that power and gives you a seat at the table. And it's not that, you know, someone forgets about Cave City on purpose.

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It's just that's just what happens, you know,

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when you have cities that are much bigger than you and you have businesses that are much bigger than you.

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It's just kind of a natural process to where if you're not, you know,

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at the table or your business name is not continually on the minds of these people making these decisions, you do just get left behind.

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And so it's a way to keep that from happening, hopefully.

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[Hazelle] I mean, I think of that similar to maybe their branding or I mean, that's a way of marketing you, right?

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I mean, if you're constantly out there and people are seeing you and hearing your name, then they remember you.

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But if you're out of sight, you get out of mind. And so, you know, your business can also, you know, kind of fall victim to that as well.

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So, you know, I'm glad to hear that you encourage your business owners to kind of be as active as they can.

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I'm sure you invite them to that to even come to city council meetings because, you know,

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to hear what's going on locally and throughout the state, you know, could impact their business.

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And they they should be a part of that process. [Jonas] Right. And that's one thing, actually, I'm glad you brought that up.

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You know, when I first became mayor, one of the things I did was reach out to all the small business owners.

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And I said, you know, we want to have kind of just like a roundtable discussion.

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You know, I had a lot of different ideas for things that we wanted to work on in Cave City.

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And so pretty quickly, I've tried to bring in, you know, kind of a roomful of of our small business owners.

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And I said, look, you know, here's the here's the thing that I think are important for Cave City.

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Here are the things that I think we should be doing. And then I wanted to hear from them, you know, what they felt about not only those ideas,

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but maybe bring some of their own ideas to the table and and see if we couldn't find kind of a common approach to take.

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And so that was really eye opening. And I'd like to do more of a much more.

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I wanted to do more of them. But, you know, like you said, the time constraints, so.

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But I do communicate with with our business owners a lot, and I try to keep in touch with them.

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[Hazelle] So our listeners tend to know that we talk about food on our podcast.

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So, of course, I am going to talk about something totally sweet. And it's a vegetable and a fruit, actually.

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So. But let's talk about Cave City Watermelon Festival. And so this is an annual festival.

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And this year would have been the.. I'm not really sure.. would have been the forty-first annual, something in that ballpark,

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but you actually had some difficult decisions this year or at least your committee did.

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And I know you supported them. Would you talk about that?

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What Covid did for the annual watermelon festival and kind of what you had to do as mayor to get your city through that?

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[Jonas] Yes, sure. So, you know, in a nutshell, it canceled it and, you know. The watermelon festival

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you know, it's managed by a committee of volunteers. And actually, you know, what

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a lot of people don't realize the city actually is totally independent of the festival and always has been.

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So, you know, I think a lot of people kind of feel like the city, you know, directs the festival or, you know, puts on the festival.

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But really, it's this it's this really dedicated group of volunteers that do that.

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And I was actually really lucky to to get to serve on that committee for two or three years.

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This is prior to becoming mayor. So, you know, they had to look at it this year and decide.

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I mean, you know, is it safe to I'm responsible to have a festival where, you know,

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you're going to bring 15000 people to town over a two or three day, four day period.

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And it was you know, it was really tough. But they ultimately they looked at it and they, you know,

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based on the facts that they had of the time, they made the absolute best decision they could.

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So I just try to use my role as mayor of whatever influence, you know,

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you might have there to basically just kind of get out after that announcement and just reassure people and say,

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look, you know, this they made the best decision they could.

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And now the only thing left to do is go and buy up all the watermelons you can and look forward to next year.

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And so I you know, I'm very happy to say that, you know, that's really what Cave City did.

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I mean, we just said, OK, you know, obviously we don't love the idea of no festival,

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but we understand it and we support the committee and we're going to carry on.

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And we had a great watermelon season and everybody was happy. [Hazelle]
I will tell you, we still got lots of calls up here up at Cherokee Village.

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I know Hardy and your others surrounding Sharp County communities really pitched in.

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I'm sure Batesville did, too, you know, and really kind of said, OK, we're going to the farmers are important to us, that retail part.

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And so, you know, we we tried to help take up the slack as much as it can.

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But you know what? Your farmers were busy. I was passing by their retail stores and the store fronts and

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I mean, you couldn't get parking in some of those places.

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I don't think they really needed our help too much [Jonas] I actually told one of our growers is that if it gets much busier,

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you're gonna have to put in a stoplight on the highway up there. But, yeah, it was great.

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I mean, it's you know, it's just like every year people love the watermelons.

They love the community aspect of it.

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Just getting to get out and meet people and talk to people, so. Yeah. It was great. [Hazelle] Yeah.

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And I loved, you know, your e-mail, Facebook post of you in a T-shirt.

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And talking about, you know, supporting the Cave City Watermelon Festival and at least, you know, supporting it with a T-shirt or something.

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So, I mean, the outpouring of our communities,

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I think that's one of the things that small business business owners and communities can find is that we take care of each other.

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You know, this is a theme that we have tried to stress to people who may not know what small rural communities are like. Bigger cities,

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I know they do. They try to do that, too. But because we're more intimately put together, we we do band together like family members.

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So it was really cool to see on your Facebook site. I know you talked about that a lot.

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And I have to say, you have this hashtag on your on a lot of posts, which I love, because this whole idea of being able to search Cave City.

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So it's #CaveCityArkansas. And I am curious, like so out of that,

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have you been able to generate like some out of like people from outside Cave City maybe just kind of said, hey, you know,

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I found you because of the search or I found you because of a watermelon or you know,

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00:11:43,570 --> 00:11:51,380

or just or who does does your social media presence, like has helped push people, you know, to Cave City?

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[Jonas] Yeah, I mean, I think so. You know, of course, you know, on the back side of Facebook, you know,

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you have all the analytics and things that you can look at and you can see where people are clicking on this and what you know,

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where they're coming from. And it's definitely in the last few years, you know,

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since we did launch the city Facebook page and now we're on Instagram and Twitter and things like that, too.

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But. But, yeah, it's definitely put us out there with a broader audience.

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And, you know, like I said, the #CaveCityArkansas is definitely something I try to include because, you know, that's just how it works.

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So so that's just one more, you know, tool that I can use to promote Cave City which is what this is all about.

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[Hazelle] And if you don't know what the purpose of that hashtag is, so if you type in the little number sign and CaveCityArkansas

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all one word after it, it will, and put it in a browser, it will actually look for all those pages and postings that have that included.

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So it's a neat and easy way for businesses, for example,

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for you to kind of get your name out there and then to promote that so the more people see it.

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Because I'm telling you that hashtag stuff works, Mayor, Right?

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[Jonas] I mean, I know that that's you know, I do encourage our businesses anything anything that we've posted, you know, business.

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I've always tried to tell them, you know, make sure and use a hashtag, you know, Cave City

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Arkansas or Cave City or Watermelon Festival, you know, anything you can use to hashtag

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your post is, like you said, it's just going to help tie it all together.

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So it's great. One of the posts that you had on Facebook also was on a donut shop.

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I guess they were some donut place in Little Rock was doing this for my sense of like coming out to park their trailer.

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[Jonas] Yes, there's donut. Food truck. Yeah, there was a huge thing. So some actually resident had clued me in on that.

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I didn't see it right away. But once I saw yeah. There I was.

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I mean, I sent a personal message and, you know, hashtagged them to death probably.

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But, you know, ultimately they still haven't brought their donut truck yet. But I'm still holding out.

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[Hazelle] Maybe they'll come during the next watermelon festival. So, you know, donuts and watermelons.

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Yeah. Just sounds like a great combination.

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00:13:44,880 --> 00:13:50,740

One of the other things you do, Mayor, that I've noticed is that you also include things like hashtag get hired, Cave City.

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So you are helping promote jobs that are within your community.

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And I love that because I think that mayors especially as active as you are on your Facebook site,

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00:13:59,620 --> 00:14:05,330

that you help encourage people and connect them to businesses that have job openings.

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[Jonas] Yeah, yeah. That did #HireCaveCity hashtag. So just a little interesting side note on that.

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Not long after I became mayor, we were sitting in the offices of city hall with our chief of police, actually, who is a good friend,

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going back to high school, actually.

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00:14:21,270 --> 00:14:26,770

And we were just talking about, you know, how can we, you know, promote small business and how can we kind of connect people,

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00:14:26,770 --> 00:14:31,690

you know, that need jobs with local employers and local businesses and stuff?

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And so we kind of started throwing things around like that, you know, and I said we need a hashtag of some kind.

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And so we just kind of came up with #GetHiredCaveCity. And so, yeah, since, you know, for the past two years, I've been using that.

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Every time I hear about a local businesses hiring, you know, either encourage them to use it or I just kind of take it upon myself and copy their

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job posting and repost it on the city side and always, you know, #GetHiredCaveCity.

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And honestly, that's that's been gaining a lot of traction.

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I've been noticing whenever we use that, it seems to get a lot of attention on Facebook and Instagram.

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[Hazelle] That's that is awesome, because I'm hearing that traditional methods that people used to use to post jobs are not necessarily working anymore.

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00:15:14,770 --> 00:15:18,530

And so I keep getting asked here at the Hub, you know, are there any job

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boards or are there any places that we can put an ad in the paper?

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And I refer them to Facebook sites that have job postings. But it's great to see that as the city mayor,

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you know that your city is active and trying to help promote that as well. I mean, obviously, a job for one of your employers helps.

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00:15:35,670 --> 00:15:39,950

It helps everybody. [Jonas] Oh yeah. I mean, even if it's just one job. I mean, that's. Yeah. [Hazelle] Absolutely.

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So anything that I might have missed? [Jonas] Let's see. Well, one thing I might pick up on this just a little bit, if you don't mind.

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So, you know, another connection that I made through the Arkansas Municipal League.

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They have "Be local. Be Heard." initiative. And really, in a nutshell, what that is, is just trying to stress to legislators and, you know,

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00:16:02,210 --> 00:16:11,870

other people involved in the decision making process that it's really important

for cities to have, you know, that local control.

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00:16:11,870 --> 00:16:15,560

And so, you know, if a city needs to make a decision, you know,

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00:16:15,560 --> 00:16:20,390

we want to make sure that we have the authority and the ability to actually make the decision.

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00:16:20,390 --> 00:16:26,210

So that's another thing that I've kind of taken on, is trying to help the Municipal League promote that because, you know,

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00:16:26,210 --> 00:16:35,870

that ties in directly to economic development and making sure that mayors and council members have the, not only the knowledge to make those decisions,

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00:16:35,870 --> 00:16:39,320

but also the, you know, the actual legal authority to to do that.

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00:16:39,320 --> 00:16:45,200

And without, you know, having to go through a state or a federal agency all the time, you know, there's there's a good place for that.

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00:16:45,200 --> 00:16:50,300

But there's also a good place for just allowing cities to decide, hey, this is what's best for us.

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00:16:50,300 --> 00:16:55,490

And so we're going to go with it because, as you know, time is of the essence on a lot of economic development projects.

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00:16:55,490 --> 00:16:59,810

So the Be Local. Be Heard. initiative is a is a big part of that.

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00:16:59,810 --> 00:17:08,180

And hopefully that'll keep gaining traction across the state. [Hazelle] So final words for your businesses or for any small business in rural communities?

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00:17:08,180 --> 00:17:13,240

[Jonas] Well, you know, the businesses is my community, you know. I mean, we have an open door at City Hall.

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00:17:13,240 --> 00:17:21,710

I'm 100 percent there to promote them, to help them do anything we can to make sure that they're successful.

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00:17:21,710 --> 00:17:25,790

And one thing I might point out, you know, it's kind of been interesting to me since I became mayor.

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00:17:25,790 --> 00:17:29,990

You know, you hear a lot of people posting on social media and things, you know,

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00:17:29,990 --> 00:17:36,770

talking about I wish the city would, you know, put in this business or I wish the city would do this or do that.

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00:17:36,770 --> 00:17:44,860

And so I think sometimes maybe there's a little bit of a misunderstanding about, you know, the relationship between a city and a business.

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00:17:44,860 --> 00:17:51,710

So by that, I mean with us, you know, it's not so much that we're creating a business or we're going to,

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00:17:51,710 --> 00:17:55,250

you know, just check a box or snap our fingers and there's a new business.

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00:17:55,250 --> 00:18:03,440

But what I'm really focused on is just trying to make Cave City an environment where businesses want to come.

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00:18:03,440 --> 00:18:09,220

You know, if there's if there's no incentive for a business to come to your community, well, then obviously they're not going to.

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00:18:09,220 --> 00:18:16,670

So really, with everything that we do, you know, myself and the city council and even our city employees,

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00:18:16,670 --> 00:18:23,830

you know, they've really taken this on to taking it to heart. We're just trying to make a place where where businesses want to come.

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00:18:23,830 --> 00:18:27,470

You know, where I think I said the other day, maybe paraphrasing a little bit,

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00:18:27,470 --> 00:18:36,170

that we want to make Cave City a place where people come to, you know, make a make a life and not just a living.

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00:18:36,170 --> 00:18:41,480

And so, you know, that goes into parks and the quality of life and streets and just everything.

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00:18:41,480 --> 00:18:50,200

So it really all just kind of ties it up together in a package and that hopefully we can run with and bring more businesses with them.

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00:18:50,200 --> 00:18:59,210

[Hazelle] Well, excellent. So if you haven't figured out yet why I refer to Mayor as a rock star, go check out their Facebook page.

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00:18:59,210 --> 00:19:04,100

The Cave City Facebook page. [Jonas] That's just Cave City, Arkansas, on Facebook.

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00:19:04,100 --> 00:19:08,090

[Hazelle OK. And also, you can #CaveCityArkansas. So, Mayor Anderson.

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00:19:08,090 --> 00:19:14,540

Thank you again for taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to join me today on this episode of Small Business Big Real Impact.

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00:19:14,540 --> 00:19:19,160

My name is Hazelle Whited and thank you for joining us.

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00:19:19,160 --> 00:19:29,120

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00:19:29,120 --> 00:19:35,870

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00:19:35,870 --> 00:19:39,740

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00:19:39,740 --> 00:19:56,016

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