

# Alex Horton Awarepreneurs Interview

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

business, work, people, alex, community, neighborhood, albuquerque, economic development, listeners, helped, space, navigator, put, resources, building, grow, printers, support, incubator, new mexico

## SPEAKERS

Alex Horton, Paul Zelizer



Paul Zelizer 00:03

Hi, this is Paul Zelizer, and welcome to the aware printers podcast. This podcast is all about the intersection of three things, conscious business, social impact, and awareness practices. Each episode I do a deep dive interview, the thought leader in this intersection, someone who has market tested experience is already transforming many lives. Before I introduce today's guests and our topic, I have one request. If you could go over to Apple podcasts or whatever app you're listening to this show, hit the subscribe button and do rating. It helps tremendously. It helps our guests get their message out there and people find out about this show and it takes you about 30 seconds. Thanks for considering it. Today, I'm thrilled to introduce you to Alex Horton. And our topic is economic development in a very diverse neighborhood. Alex is a native New Mexican, who formed the first Economic Development Center in Albuquerque New Mexico's international district. The Center's purpose is for the community to have access to the resources they need to develop businesses and grow the job base. Alex, welcome to the show. Oh, thank you for having me on. It's a pleasure, pleasure to be on your podcast, and being able to talk about an area that I'm deeply invested into and also deeply vested into. Absolutely, yeah. And in this case, I'm really thrilled to actually you have a bricks and mortar, like space, which we're going to talk about in the city that we both live in and doing work that you know, I'm so excited about so I can't wait to introduce your work and how you think about your work to our listeners. Before we get there. Alex, were called aware printers. And one of the ways we get to know somebody is to ask you about a wellness or an awareness

practice that you personally use to bring your best and most resilient self to Work Day after day.

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Alex Horton 02:00

Yeah, so you know, I have this I have this kind of nice routine where I wake up, I try to go I go to the gym or do some type of exercise activity, just getting me going and then either if my children are asleep or awake, I always give him a hug and a kiss and that's like my getting off to work. You know, it's like, you know, doing this thing for for not only myself and the community but also for my family. And then seeing this this path that I'm that I'm trying to lay the groundwork for. So that drives me every morning and that's kind of my my refresh before I get in, get into the day. Nice. I love it. I'm the same way. It's like, I've read a lot of research that says if you're up and moving by, like, you know, within an hour of getting out of bed, you're much more likely to stay on track with whatever your movement goals are, and whatever your wellness goals are. Then if you try to squeeze it in later in the day, so I totally hear you and there's a lot of things

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Paul Zelizer 03:00

Search for that. So we're going to talk about your work, Alex and how you got into it. But your place is called the International district economic development. It's like let's route this conversation in this particular place in this city that we both love complicated city and a great diversity. And also just like doing economic development in a very diverse neighborhood. That's our topic. give people some sense of like, what the heck is the international district of Albuquerque, New Mexico? Yeah, so the international district once was known as the Warzone. Right? And had a really bad rap of just, uh, you know, that was like the blighted area of the community of the city that everyone focused on which we looked at it as this was just our neighborhood, and we lived there day to day so you had this huge mix when a lot of foreigners came overseas or refugees were seeking asylum from from Vietnam, the Middle East.

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Alex Horton 04:00

Also Africa, they all came when they came in Mexico or Albuquerque. They're all in the, in this section of part of town southeast part of Albuquerque. So it was heavily populated with a diverse, diverse group of individuals. So you had all these different all these different cultures, all meshed in just a small part of town, which, which spans from about a 10 mile radius know about a five mile span in the southeast part of Albuquerque. And then on top of that, you also have people who've been in New Mexico for generations, as well as all the simplex of folks who have come from all over the world, right? Yes, I mean, you're

right, also right by the base, so and by the airport. And so it's like, then you have individuals that maybe have retired and they just move right outside of the base. And so you had like this, this huge mix of influence of housing. So you're absolutely right. It's the most diverse part of town where you had your native New Mexicans that that was the part of town, right? That was the main part of town, then you have this influx of all kinds of different cultures coming in. So you just created this huge melting pot

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Paul Zelizer 05:12

and your work doing economic development in very diverse situations like how did that come to be like, why is Alex passionate about that topic? And Have you always been passionate about that topic? Or like, how did it come to be that you said, This is what I'm going to do? At least with this space of your life? Yeah, you know, I was, like, talking about economic development. I first you know, at first it was more of just like wanting to help, you know, I was doing risk management and commercial insurance and so I had a lot of clients in that neighborhood. That it was either their, their restaurant, their salon, their, their manufacturing business, and, you know, we would just go through and just kind of go through their whole risk of their of their company, and there was a lot of planning and a lot of things

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Alex Horton 06:30

a How do I grow my job base? How do I put my hiring practices in and they're just all these little things that I felt like, Man, this company could easily go from four employees to 12 employees and and and actually hire within the community. And you know, it really started really started seeing like, man, there needs to be some supports. And so I was like, well, who's doing it and me, I was like, hey, maybe I could just be on the board of someone doing economic development in the neighborhood. And I could just they would have already skyrocketed into doing all kinds of other things which ultimately would have grown the job base would have would have ultimately hired corps hired more individuals in the neighborhood and then just been you know, staple in the in the area as a as an anchor business in the community. That wasn't a big box. You know, it was a mom and pop that grew. And so that's what really got me really thinking. How do we put this together?

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Paul Zelizer 08:00

Got it. So, so you're doing insurance and you're like asking the questions about, we might call it entrepreneurial ecosystem, right? What are the ecosystem? Who's doing this? And have you thought about that? And our listeners won't be surprised. But it's true share now,

but crickey you know, some neighborhoods give more access to resources than other neighborhoods. Is that fair to say, Alex? Oh, absolutely. I thought you might. Yes. Right. So this is, this is our local neighborhood in Albuquerque that, you know, oftentimes the most left out or one of the most left out it could you could, you know, also maybe include something like the South Valley or something like that. But even that I this may be the single most left out of economic development conversations in granular ways, like who actually gets invited to the meeting who actually says, Oh, we got a new pool of resources here. Let's make sure we bring in the folks who are in the ecosystem where the causal least likely to happen, you know, National district fair to say, absolutely fair to say that that's what really spurred it is when I was doing this risk management, I also did a lot of workshops for the South Valley Economic Development Center. And I, that's when I really started probing like, gosh, I see a lot of businesses getting started here and getting out actually this nice plethora of support. I mean, I'm doing a full risk management profile for a restaurant that's never even launched. And usually, I'm doing that two years after they've launched. And so I could just see that they were on a whole different trajectory, whether the business failed or succeeded. They have the resources knowing like, Oh, I knew that that's, that's, that can be a pitfall for me. But you know, I've already worked through that. I've already set a plan in place on how I'm going to tackle that. And that's what really got me saying, you know, how do we put something like this? Not necessarily the kitchen incubator, but how do we put an incubator program up here in the ID and that's and that's what really got me going on. If it could work in the south Valley, it could work up here. And knowing that there was a lot of people from the ID that would travel to the south Valley, really, really let me know there was a need and seeing from their survey responses on what zip codes they were living in 871 away is the zip code that I'm in. And I just knew, I said, we got to have something here. So that really helped me on not really necessarily having to reinvent the wheel. But I was able to attach myself to a structure that I knew that I can grow and really be an anchor, almost an anchor institution in the area. So before you got into starting your own organization and incubator, you work for the city and did some of this work as a liaison or contractor for the city of Albuquerque, what did you learn at that time? And in that role? Oh, yeah. So you know, while while I was doing the risk management, I got called to come in and say, Hey, can you help put some of this we want to deploy some resources to fill out entrepreneurs and I loved it. I said, Oh my gosh, this was great. And I got to kind of see the government role on how municipalities play a huge role in the business ecosystem when it comes to getting permits getting, going through planning, getting things approved, just how do you navigate through that. And so I said, I know how to do the business side. And so when I was able to go out and it was called a navigator, it was all about backpacking services to businesses. It was such a huge eye opener because I knew that there wasn't a place that after we gave the services to these businesses were who was going to pick up the baton after it was done. And usually with the city program, how it works is Hey, they have a pool of money.

They're going to pay out get some studies gets the ball rolling, and then after it runs out the probe that program usually dies, dries up and blows away, right dries up and blows away. And so, you know, it always leaves especially in our neighborhood. Everyone's here to do stuff for dollars, right? Like, oh, we have money, we're going to focus on the southeast part of Albuquerque because it's the poorest neighborhood in in the city. Verse saying, what can we do to start that can actually be sustainable. So when I was doing this navigator work, at the same time, I was working with the South Valley, and how do we get one of these going? And so then I knew me being part of this work of, of this of the Navigator will actually have a place to house this. So you know, we were able to get some wins, and I had to see if it was viable, like, Hey, is this is the support that I'm doing is even viable, right, like it are our advice or bringing in these tax specialists or a business attorney to read over the lease before they sign it. Like is that is that even valuable? Right? I had to I had to also make sure that is this viable and valuable. And what I'm doing it on the navigator and I seen how much of a value it was and how much of like, there's not enough of me to actually give this support service. That's where they really came to, I have to set up an organization because ultimately, I wish I could have just continued to do the navigator work on, Hey, I'll pick up the, the navigator with with with our organization and we're just going to keep we're going to keep that thing going. But I knew there had to be an anchor, there had to be a place where they can go and know like, oh, we're not waiting for Alex because he's at his house. We needed a place to meet, you know, yeah, they like meeting up their business. But some of them said, If I don't leave my business, I can actually do this because I'm going to be working I'm going to be trying to work on my business. So needed a place that they can kind of leave but still in the community and that was constantly being set on this navigator work with the city, and then also helped me know all of the city incentives packages, who to talk to really building up that relationship part with with the city because they do play a huge role in the overall ecosystem, because things can get slowed up. If there's actually initiative by local Hey, I'm gonna Working with 13 entrepreneurs, how do we get them involved in here? You know, they're working with this bigger ecosystem. And, you know, they're they're all worried about, you know, how do I get just the contract done and out? Not necessarily saying who who's been a first time vendor. Right. So that was a big key for me with trying to get this going is how do we still incorporate some of the city initiatives, but bring them to this part of town that that really no one gets these contracts or gives these opportunities? And when you say a place like you now literally have a place Tell us about that? Yes. Oh, you know, our neighborhood. We, we, I know the numbers and I'll have to get those over in a in a deck of what's the vacancy rate on commercial, but it's really high. And, you know, I was like, Well, let me find a space and I wanted to find a space that was vacant. So I reached out to a bunch of these owners. You know, a lot of them were in California. I sent letters. Hey, we're trying to start organization, you know, if we cleaned up your space, actually gotten a lot of the riffraff out and actually just made it look better. Could we operate it

and all raise money to pay for everything? And then after that we can negotiate a long term lease, you know, I, I was like, gosh, if anyone ever approached me like I, I flipped it over as the business owner, if someone sent me a letter, and I had it tore down building, and they said they were going to fix it up, and they just wanted to operate out of it for a year, which has been vacant for five years. Man, I think that would have been a win for me. Right? I would have accepted it. No one took me up on. Like, not one person said, Oh, that sounds like a great idea. And half of those buildings are still vacant to the state. But that's another conversation. So So then I finally reached out to Nashville that lived here locally. And he used to run a school and he said, you know what Alex is like, I don't I don't want to operate. He's like, we don't Want to lease we're a little bit older in our life and we're just ready, we want to be out, you know. So we went looked at the building, it was in good shape, there wasn't a lot of broken windows, it wasn't like, tore up, it really just needed to get updated. And, and put together. And so, you know, that's where it really happened to me where I was like I had a, I had an opportunity to jump in feet first to say, if I'm really going to be saying I'm going to better the community. I'm going to put my first feet forward. So we went and refinance the building and personally took over this building, and said, this is where it's going to be the anchor for the area when it comes to starting a business, economic development, and actually bettering the community with the community. So this is where we're going to start, and we're gonna put, we're going to be the first ones to go forward on it. And you literally planted a flag so to speak. So now there's not quite 5000 square feet. Is that my memory? Yeah, it's like 4800 square feet. For 1400 square feet, and from all from a lot of the survey work I did with the navigator, it was like we needed small leasable space, home based businesses needed a place to go, we needed a conference room, I just needed a check in space. So the CO working model at the time was very viable of saying, okay, we don't need to break these up into office space, we really need to blow this up, make it open and open concept. So people could just kind of come and check in and use it as they need to have access to a printer, be able to meet, have a conference room and then be able to do workshops out of it. You know, I thought that was that was that's what the community needed. And so we were we just started saying, Okay, how do we put this together? We hadn't we had some funds to be able to start the renovation process. And it was once when we did that and we planted the flag, like you said, when all the support came and they said all right, these guy this this group is real, like who is this? Who's doing this? They're like, it's Alex and Yeah, he's formed a little bit of a board, but, and he has some support. But Wow, like, you're going forward. I said, you know, what if worst case scenario happen and, and we couldn't we couldn't keep this thing going, you know, my business would support this right and then I get to hire individuals. And I get to at least get to be part of the economic development of the of the ID and and try to better it as best as I can. And so, you know, just from that step forward, we just started in started in, you know, feet first arms forward and went in and started digging into a renovation project. And we'll ask, you know, obviously, listeners, you know,

we're recording this at the end of August 2020. COVID. Certainly had an effect on that. We'll ask about that in a second. But before we do, Alex, like, how? Well first of all, you're from Albuquerque. We didn't talk about that, but how they being from Albuquerque and living in or near the international district and like buying a building and saying like, we're here, we hear you community, we don't want to be just another one of those programs that gets some money, you know, does art bass for a year or two or three or whatever the grant cycle is and then goes away? Like, what was the? What's the conversation like in the international district as they were sort of, you know, kind of, like, scoping you out. Like, Is this for real? because something happened and you talked about all right, he's for real What? What was your best sense of the questions and the indicators that people from this very diverse community were what were they asking and what helped them say, yeah, this is real. all right now let's get to work and raise some money and kind of roll up our sleeves and help this thing succeed. Yeah, you know, what I think a big part was is everyone tries to come out from the community to solve it. I actually grew up in the international district. I went to Highland high school, I was in high school in the area, and from when I was growing up, till now, it was just The decline of just activity and things getting activated and more and more things were getting demolished more and more vacant lots. I mean, this is a metropolitan area with the highest vacant lot area in the metro area. And so things were just getting flatline. Not a lot of dollars were being kind of pumped in. And that's, that's when I was like, Okay, you know what, from the community, we're doing this and then community member said, Oh, you're from the community. But you know, they were like, well, well, yeah, I grew up right here on California street went to and so and then they then they knew that my dad was a coach at Heil, and they said, Oh, my gosh, we know your dad, and we, you know, and people were like, wow, okay, so he's really doing this one, then it's like, well, who's funding you? How are you getting this thing? How are you making this thing work? And I was like, you know, we're just really trying to work and help help businesses and once and we started helping a few businesses and actually getting them getting them kicked off and planted in the neighborhood. It was kind of a All right, here we go. He's really trying to do this with community folks. And that really helped catapult what we were trying to do a lot. Any any tips you'd have for somebody else who's you know, we have a lot of social entrepreneurs who are thinking about who's left out that, you know, not the different versions of who's left out, you know, each social entrepreneur in our audience has a different sense of their passion, their unique mission, but that sense of working with people left out a lot of our listeners feel, you know, resonance with that part of what you did. Any recommendations or suggestions, Alex to a listener, who's saying, you know, I want to help people who've been left out to and what did you learn and what might you pass on to a listener who's in that process right now? Yeah, you know, I think the biggest thing for me was there, especially in those in those communities. You have a lot of people getting pumping in a lot of dollars that are doing a lot of studies which studies are great, trust me. I took four or five studies that said that needed to be an

anchor institution that supported businesses in the neighborhood, and really took those and drove what we were doing as well. And so I would also say, you know, just do it piloted a Lean Startup it go out, you know, the navigator role for me, was the Lean Startup role, like, would even with the community respond to me? Would they like this? Do they need this right? Even though we see man if they can, if they have these resources, it could really help. But do they really need? Do they want it still? Do they? Do they want it? Is the community really going to want you did help them with that? Or do they want to figure it out and bootstrap themselves because there's tons of successful businesses that have bootstrap. So I look at it as as do it, you know, what's the smallest viable way that you can say, I want to, I want to try this. I want to do it and just go all in and do it because there's a lot of places that don't do the action. they'll write up the whole report and there's no action to it. Right. And then maybe you get a nice, you know, miracle you get a sidewalk, but then it's like, No, no, we're actually gonna do it and get it done and start that process and show people that we're doing the action. So I would say, you know, go out there and do it, you know, and get that feedback back back and don't take it as being critical. Take it as, hey, that's, that's helpful. I didn't know that there was a group that's doing tons of leather making, and they needed some support. So we need to bring in some people that know how to do leather making actually helping support them and and let them drive the ship, help let the community help drive it from there on what are the main industries and I'm still figuring that piece out, right? What's the main industry that we're going to say that's what we focus on right now we're broad, and really saying, Hey, how are we going to drive it into a niche, but it's not me saying, Oh, I'm going to put a food incubator over here, or I'm going to put a manufacturing incubator here. It's like, let's see what the community businesses are actually wanting to support and then we'll say there's our niche right like we're going to specialize exactly on this product or service. Love it. I'm known for having my spiritual highlighter. So listeners who've been on our you know, listen to our show for a while, I like to you know, highlight certain things and I can't agree more Alex of what you're saying about listening to the community and going beyond, you know, murals are great studies are great, but at a certain point, having a thing that you can like point to and a community, getting a sense of what's it like to roll up sleeves and get to work together is a very different thing than talking about the work that might need to happen in a community or studying the work that you know, it's, it's really easy to write a report, hey, here's what you guys should do. Thanks for the check by. Right. I mean, there is some good things that can come out of assessments and study. But when you're a community that you know has oftentimes been left Out of where the real economic engine is, you've seen that before, right? Or if you want to help a community, or entrepreneurs that have had that experience, they've seen it. People have seen that before. So a real concrete but minimal, I like to call it lovable product version of rolling up sleeves and getting to work together in some way with the resources you have is very, very different than another mural. Another study another here's what somebody else



should do. Goodbye. So yeah, I can't agree more. Thanks for that, Alex. No, you're right, Paul. And even with that, you know, we used the deca students from Highland, you know, we did a small, very, very small survey, but it was really just to get the students involved, right. So when I was first getting this kicked off, I said, if we're going to do a small survey, because everyone has survey fatigue, right? And I was like, I really just want to know, where do people go to start a business? That's all I wanted to get out of a survey. I didn't I didn't want to know income. We can pull all those statistics, right. I really wanted to know where do people go to start working business in the community and the deca students are its deca is a business is the business High School what what they do is there they actually try to launch a business and actually go to a competition. Highland High School actually won state last year for their their deca program and that's amongst all state so you have every high school from the state's going to compete at the Marriott. I was actually a panelist for it. I do a lot of work with with deca because I believe really solely that that these kids coming out of this neighborhood are actually going to come back and change the neighborhood with businesses that they kicked off. But they also have to be able to see it so when we incorporated them to say hey, this is before we have the building I said Look guys, we're gonna get something kicked off and I really want you guys to be a part of it. It was a Saturday. We got seven high school students come on a Saturday morning. No I your you know do a survey for a few hours. But now they know like, Oh, we helped kick this thing off. It's a whole different type of empowerment and, and them seeing, like, if I just put my mind to it, and I put a plan together, I can actually get it done. You know, and that part of it is where, you know, if you've never seen anything like that if you never seen someone being able to get a building you never seen being able to, to plan do an execute. It's like, um, wow. And, and that's where I know that, you know, we can we can keep this thing going and keep investing into into into the neighborhood. So I want to ask you about some of the specifics of the things you're working on Alex. But before we do that, just want to say thank you to our sponsors. Our printer is a little different than many podcasts. We don't have like a meal plan delivery service or website service. We're community supported podcast it's called the aware printers community. And what we do in the aware of printers, communities, we help people who have have impact oriented and people who are also thinking about awareness and self care those kinds of businesses, and we help in really specific ways. So let's say you need a website, and you have a certain budget who understands these kind of businesses and can build a website in a way that you know, would feel really good and align to you. And you don't have to explain what a social impact mean? Or why does wellness have something to do with growing a business or, let's say you want to learn how to use LinkedIn, we have two LinkedIn pods with 12 to 15 people and each one and again, all people with these kinds of businesses are giving feedback and liking and commenting and checking out your profile and making suggestions with people who understand what you're up to. So that's the key of the web printers community. You don't have to explain the kinds of issues that our listeners feel

passionate about. You just get into learning how to use LinkedIn, learning how to use Instagram, finding somebody who can do Facebook ads, finding a great opportunity to Be on a podcast like Alex's today that can help get you the word out about what you're doing. That's what we do. If you could use a little more support for your kind of impact business, go check out the web printers community at aware printers.com forward slash community and thank you to everybody who sponsors this podcast. So Alex, let's talk let's put our entrepreneur glasses on and help us understand how the international district economic development works as an enterprise like one of the things you have as a space and we reference like anybody was a bricks and mortar space COVID-19 came in it, you know, made alternate plans for with your hands, right. So talk to us about just the 4800 square foot building and I've been there it's beautiful building and it's you know, just wonderfully arranged and you had a pivot a little bit with what you're thinking about the physical space. Talk to us about that part of things. Yeah, so you know what we're getting launched up. We we knew we had a huge demand for the CO working space. So we said, you know, we're our whole goal was to put how many seats? Could we fit in a square footage of the space? Right? And and how are we going to how is the design layout? How is it going to work where you can change stations, but, you know, the goal was to get 20 to 25 people in a space at once, right being able to work. And that was probably a big revenue model for us where it was going to at least sustain the space, right, you know, the programming, we can go out and bring in dollars in programming, but that was going to cover the overhead for the space. Right. And so, when that kind of changed, we were already working on doing all of our stuff online, and, and kind of pivoting that way. So we had to look at how did we bring in 20 \$200 a month that we were going as operating that we were going to bring in just from co working people signed up Now we saw it, some people sign up. But we, we took the route of just being on the safety side as like, Hey, we're a new organization, we really don't want no and catching COVID. Being that we have to, you know, wipe things down, we'd have to beef up our manpower. And for us, it was just better if we just kind of closed off that portion until, until things calm down just a little bit, a little bit more. So we then switch to online, Hey, how are we going to offer all these services online on a platform, very minimal cost, but when you're starting business things cost and so if you just say everything's free, you're you're not necessarily helping that entrepreneur out. Because as you as a lot of these listeners probably know, business is not free, right? And it takes a lot of work. So we're able to kind of pivot to put all of this online that we're still working to be able to launch and that's that's kind of how we've been able to continue to bring in but due to the The climate we've actually been doing a lot of outreach on. How do we bring in, you know, people want to actually be able to contribute to the international district of is diversity. Things like Black Lives Matter. And there's other movements that they're like, hey, how can we see who's reaching this community? And they're like, oh, Alex is reaching this community, because he's already been working with the communities already working with a very didn't grow up, they're up there. How can we

support you to be able to reach out and so that's really helped us give the platform to say, Hey, you know what, bringing in contracts of doing a corporate consulting on Hey, how do you how do you make it more diverse? How can we sponsor an entrepreneur? So we've actually put together an entrepreneur, entrepreneur sponsor program, where we know what the cost is for each entrepreneur to go through the program and we've actually been selling sponsorships for these entrepreneurs that would be them included for the space Right, even though we're not using it, but that's part of our overhead and as an organization, you know, you got to be able to cover that. So then you can continue to provide this and be here for a sustainable period of time. So you shifted online so the physical speed Now you also if I remember, you landed a couple of people who are like, literally brought their businesses to the space right? Isn't isn't that part of what happened there? Yeah. So one of the great part was is there was a company called neat that I was kind of working with a little bit and then they're like, we needed a space and I was like, ah, like I have a little bit of space. No one's using it. And we have a basement in New Mexico never does basements. No one builds basements in New Mexico unheard of right? We our basement the spot that I really didn't put any we didn't put any dollars into it, miss it. This is the space we need to actually kick off our business and we need to go through a program and we need some help. And it was kind of like Wow, so they were able to come in a lady that runs nesby it's the National Black Society of engineers. It's they she takes people from Sandia Labs and they teach these young kids on how to build robots. My son is actually involved in it. She's like, Alex, I need a place in the neighborhood. And I need to be able to do these camps. And I was like, Oh, I have I have an office suite, you can boom, so so she moved in, and, and then like, now we're like, okay, here, here we go, you know what we're starting to activate it. And that's probably the biggest thing that I want to do is to just activate the space to where commerce is happening. And it just detracts a lot of things that happen in a neighborhood. So you can have as many or you haven't yet figured out and I totally understand why have tons of people in and out and quite the way you want to do to COVID-19 but instead you're bringing in some values, online businesses and social enterprises. And they're like really excited to have the space in the neighborhood with this reputation that you all are growing. That's so cool, and so glad that's happening. Then you've got this online thing I didn't want to rush it online because like this building is really cool especially where it is. There's nothing like it listeners where Alex is located. This organization like it's just, it's a unicorn right in in a place that is really wanted and needed. So if you ever get to Albuquerque, New Mexico, Joe, check it out. It's a fabulous space. Then you brought some of the programming which you were really wanting to do in person and hope to get back to doing in person. You had a pivot, and you brought some of the incubation ideas online. Talk to us a little bit about the incubation part of what you're doing. Yeah, so we pretty much take every everyone from the idea stage into launching, you know, and everything that goes in through it. And and our goal as an organization is to get you to launch a store, either that's an e commerce

store or it's a brick and mortar store or it's both now right? And and how do I get up to that point? How do I find out that much My product or my service is viable enough to get into that point. And so, you know, a lot of our programming was hosted on. We're going to be doing workshops, we're going to be doing a lot of one on one consulting. And we're like, well, how are we going to reach everyone in this time and be able to grow the base and get businesses into the core hort. So we were already looking at launching a virtual incubation program where, you know, you'd be able to subscribe, pick out, do a skills assessment, find the areas that you really need support in, and then be able to set up coaching calls, be able to go through the library list on how to actually do some of these these things, whether it's a cost analysis, being able to put a breakeven on a product, I mean, it's the certain resources that and tools that individuals are needing that they might not necessarily need your help to do, but if there was a formula that created a form, they can kind of go through and be able to set their margins, and so we're not putting that every We'd be doing in person is now all online. So we're in the process of doing 132 videos, it's gonna be really interesting, very short, though, you know, because it's very specific. So it's like, oh, I need to know how to do a cost analysis, boom, I can find this right now and, and the video is going to be anywhere from one to three minutes long on just how that actually works, you'll be able to rewatch it. It'll be in a format where you can watch on your phone, computer, tablet, whatever device you have, you'll be able to actually still get the resources and then still be able to schedule an appointment, one on one with a consultant, either in person or on the phone. So that's kind of a way that we've opened it up to a little bit broader. So a lot of businesses that are pivoting, you know, they'll be going through, how do I get everything launched on the e commerce side? I mean, we have a very older business demographic that didn't do nothing online. When I was first working there. I was like, why are you guys not online? How do we get anyone Over there, they're like, nope, we have our clientele. This is what we do. And there was just like, okay, that's your market. You found your market that works. But how am I now reaching that market online now, right. And so, now we've created thing on helping businesses be able to pivot. We paused a lot on the incubation because we were we were actually helping banks get our clients through PPP. So we did, I think we did a total of like 68 applications on PPP loans for businesses and so that kept us really busy just like getting all the docs in order, but was also an eye opening that how much on the business finance side that everyone really needed. So some supporting and just really needed its own specific program on like, when I get to cash management, I need a specific download on all this stuff. And so that that really helped us to shape this program. So we were kind of putting all of our learnings and findings into now this incubator where, for the whole first year, we didn't necessarily have a cohort business because we just really wanted to learn what they needed and what everyone would want to support in. It's really beautiful what you're doing and how much you're listening. Alex, I hear that as a theme, right. And you have ideas, and you know what other incubators and other centers and other co working

spaces too, but I really appreciate how much you're keep coming back to what is the community want? I think you probably have said that about 47 times in the 47 minutes that we've been talking. That's awesome. I know, you know, and that's because then, you know, we're, when you're trying to do stuff for the community, and then you're not listening. You could just miss out on something so huge, or something so simple that you could put together that really could have changed everything. And it's like, well, let's put together a financial literacy program, right? And then it's like, oh, well, they don't, they don't need it on trying to purchase a vehicle. You know. They like you just can miss a lot for saying, Man, all these businesses are having the same issue with this specific thing. Hey, if we had a program that went over this, would this be helpful? Yes. Would you use it? Yes. How could you implement it on a day to day bit basis? That's what we would need support and like, how do I then implement what we're going through in my day to day operations. And so listening is definitely a key right as well, you have two years. And it's like, I can talk a lot. But I'm hoping that I'm talking because it's something that they needed, right. And it's something that they wanted, or it was an area that they really needed that support in versus me just telling them. This is how you start a business, right? We're not here to do that. We're you're going to realize if your product or service is viable, not us, you know, we're just hopefully giving you the tools in place that you can be on the same playing field as someone else from another community is starting a business and that's a little bit about that. And I know from talking to you that so you've been doing a lot of this kind of one on one and listening and pivoting due to COVID-19. And in the midst of launched and then you've kind of landed on a virtual incubator cohort not first one is going to be in October, we'll get a link from you for that. So if anybody is local here in Albuquerque, they can check that out or if you're not local, go check it out and see what these great people are doing. Another thing that you've got going on and that's in the works Alex is an international district Media Center. Tell us a little bit about the media center. Yeah, so during our first you know that that was came out of our first first survey was and a little bit of the Navigator work is, man we wish we can get a nice commercial, some good product photos, right? It was going to be a very watered down Media Center, right and where it's like, Hey, we just need someone that could come in a can do a really Good commercial. They can kind of almost like an interview section where Tell us about your business. Why are you being in business that then we can put on our platforms to help market to bring other people into these areas like oh my gosh, we got to go eat at this place that makes these best empanadas. She uses the same bowl that her grandmother gave her right like there's these little stories that you actually get to connect with your with with with people that you wouldn't have that just come in. And so telling that story that's really was the piece that we were going to work through on the on the marketing side of the incubator program was, Hey, everyone coming through, we'll have a promo video we'll have pictures, professional pictures, even if it's just like a headshot, it's products of your services. If it's pictures that then we can put on your website, then helping create that that media

space. So there's almost like this media slash digital section of the program was really going to encumber all those areas then. Hey, we hopefully have to launch a full rounded business that then you can take this video, and go and promote it. And hey, um, and he doesn't know about our business, watch this video. And then people are gonna say, Oh my gosh, Wow, it's so cool. And so the marketing of it just a different flow, right? Why are you getting into to business and we wanted to make sure that we can, we could portray that in house. One of my favorite things is helping businesses and entrepreneurs figure out how to tell their stories. And when people realize that storytelling really is an effective way to grow a business. And if you can connect up with your values and get that into the story, as opposed to like, I'm going to be used cars man try to like sell you this car that you don't really want as a piece of junk. Now's not what we're talking about here. Right? But to really intentionally, you know, let somebody take a deep breath and like why did you start this thing just like we're doing with you today, like so many businesses don't do that. And then, like they suffer from people, not really connecting when if they would only take the time and explain their why and how they came up with their concept and why this product or service? And why are they excited about serving this particular group of humans, you can get people to tell that story. Oh my gosh, the good things happen. So to hear you baking it into the DNA, what you're offering, it's really, really exciting. So when you think about where you're going, so you got this thing going, it's better, you know, interesting launch doing it in the midst of these particular times, you've had some surprises you've adapted and pivoted. Like when you look forward a year from now or five years from now, what do you want? The International district economic development to be? Yeah, so you know, I think our our whole five year plan is like, we want it to be a place where people know where they can start their business, grow their business, and then stay in the neighborhood where we don't want to just kick off about businesses and then they're like, well, we found this great space in the, in the west side, and we're going to move over there. It's like the whole goal, you know, the broader goal is doing economic development through empowerment of individuals taking control of their own future. And, and with that being said, as people are starting businesses in the neighborhood, that are actually become sustainable, and actually able to plant it, you know, it could change a lot of the trajectory in the neighborhood. And that's our goal, verse verse, just, you know, hey, going through the program, and then yeah, wherever you've seen fit to launch, it's like, you know, our goal. The core hoard is like, hey, there's a unactivated strip center, and we knew we had a flower shop, a gym, a restaurant, and maybe a small retailer, that boom, we can actually have them fill up the whole thing and they, they're prepped, they're ready. And then we can get the whole community they come in and say look at this new strip center, that is all of local. So there's local and then there's ID local people, right? Like, hey, they live two blocks down, they actually walk to work, they're already here, the community is going to support that 10 times more go out of their way just to support that, because of where it is. And so the goal that I would like to see is that we activated all these mini

vacant buildings into actual thriving commercial centers for local small businesses, right? solopreneurs micro printers, big printers that grow big right like those are that's what we want to do in the neighborhood. That's that's where I see us being able to continue to grow this this part of the city. So people who live in the neighborhood and customers and clients live in the neighborhood and when they're ready to hire, hire people from the neighborhood and take this neighborhood or help support this neighborhood which is struggled economically historically and really kind of help grow and thrive sufferers? Exactly. They're doing it. They're doing it for themselves, right? Like, it's they're not waiting for a big industry to come in and start hiring everyone. Everyone's taking seizing charge and taking advantage of their opportunities to actually make this thing happen. So when you think of economic development in these times, Alex, I mean, these are, you know, pretty wild times, right? I've heard it described, I was saying three crises. And somebody recently said, Yeah, well, you can add in climate change as the West is on fire right now. We're dealing a lot of smoke in Albuquerque in the past few days, right. So like, we have the crisis of COVID-19 and everything that that's meant and all the changes the economic crisis that came out of COVID-19 and needing to stay at home orders and all the ripple effects economically of that we've got the protests and the social unrest and concern and upset rightfully so of Black Lives Matters, protests and all the changes that that's brought. And the economic I'm sorry and the climate, you know, crisis of like, like I said, the West is on fire a lot of our listeners in California, some of them have been evacuated. Others are dealing with really, really bad smoke issues. We've had really bad smoke in Albuquerque and in throughout New Mexico. What's your thinking about how do we effectively do economic development in an environment where there's so much change and uncertainty? Yeah, you know, that's, that's, that's like the big that's like the big question, you know, everyone's saying, What's its uncertainty? How do I these times are just so shaky? How do I get this thing going? And it's like, this right now is the best time to just to flip a lot of skills, right, where, you know, everyone, there's a lot of people that were on the client on hedging of, Hey, we need to change our The way that we're taking care of the earth and, and all this stuff to where now, you know, a things have been on fire, a lot of natural disasters have happened where, you know, people are awareness like when the I'll never forget when the Amazon was on fire and, you know, people were raising money for that. And they were actually, you know, videotaped like take recording of these things on fire like I think that brought a lot of weirdness I even know for me that brought a lot of weird if it made me change a lot of stuff that we were that we were doing just in our household. So I look at the same thing. I'm like, hey, the the protests, Black Lives Matters like that. That's where it can flip things, especially if we're talking on the economics equality. You know, it's just bright in in it put a lot of spotlight on it. And now it's like, you have to seize these moments and take advantage of these moments to better push the scales and, and really just begin to everything's been flipped over from the pandemic, to the protests to global global climate change. It's just change. It just given us an

opportunity and everyone being at home everyone seeing and they're like, well, gosh, things aren't right, we got to make a change. And so as we are navigating through a pandemic, and uncertainty, this is the time that you should go out and not be afraid to try to take advantage of the area that you're pushing and trying to make it right where, hey, we work a lot with minorities, and we know that it's a struggle to get things going, they can't necessarily reach out to family and friends All the time to be able to fund some of their, their ideas. Now, it's like, oh, we need to make sure that you have access to capital, you know, we need to make sure that you you actually have the same playing field to get this thing kicked off. Right. And so, to me, I look at it as how do we how do we show what we're doing of making everything a little more equal for everyone to be involved in and that's probably how I see it is equalling the playing field and bringing awareness to everything. Beautiful. And I'll just put a plug in here. There's some local entrepreneurs and investors and entrepreneurial ecosystem leaders here in New Mexico, we've started an initiative called financing change exactly for the reason you were just talking about Alex, like, you, you know, in the entrepreneur world, often the first round of funding in someplace like Silicon Valley is called friends and family round, right? Well, that assumes your friends and family can give you you know, good deal of money to get up and running. And so obviously, the inequality in the way resources haven't always flown equally in the assumptions in the entrepreneurial world. We need to change some of that. So we're talking about that here locally, first, kind of piloting in in New Mexico. So we're going to be we're going to do an event it got disrupted due to COVID-19. We're now doing a speaker series. Alex is going to be our first speaker. I will put a link to the financing change speaker series, then you can get a sense of what we're trying to do in New Mexico in a kind of ecosystem way, in addition to supporting what you're up to Alex, and I want to talk to you about how I and we can help you with that. But anyway, I'll put a link to the financing change initiative and get a sense of what we're doing here in New Mexico to try to help some things. So Alex, I could hang out and talk to you all day, but I don't want to do that to you or to her audience. If there was something you were hoping we were going to get to on this topic of economic development in very diverse neighborhoods, or that we haven't yet gotten to, or something you want to leave our listeners with. What would that be? I thank you for that poem. Again. Thank you for having me on. This has been a pleasure to be able to speak with you. And I think one of the one of the things if you're interested in like, how do I make a change in area that maybe I'm not even a part of, maybe it's like, hey, I want to help make a change in an area. Go and go to the community and hang out there for a little bit, find a group that you could just set up an office in. Because there you know, the other part is, is don't make it feel like it's charity work. Because because we have a lot to gain from everyone has a lot to gain from each other. So if you're going into some of this thing, like hey, how can I actually go and help but I don't want to make it seem like it's charity, right? It's like, Hey, you know what, go set up somewhere a local coffee shop. Now I know we can't be inside. But if you're outside



coffee shop or just hang out with an organization that's doing work in that community and seeing like, how can you get involved and really making it a grassroots effort? That term always gets thrown around, but when you're really when you're talking about financing talking about we're here to change the community that always is a is a bad pushback. First. What do you guys what are most people in the community want to do? And how can they do it here in the community and it really then slips over to the The listening game and, and going into the communities and just listening. And then being able to come up with a plan with the interviews like, Hey, we're doing this what you guys think like yeah, oh, I could take advantage of that or I can and really doing it from the standpoint of we don't have a program already solidified and we're dumping it in. It's, we're going to form a program, how do we put it with everyone in So that would be my my two cents. But But please get involved. Um, however you can. I mean, there's there's so much resources that everyone can learn from. So. Alex, thank you so much for your work and for being on the show and talking to us about it. No, thank you, Paul. Thank you. So that's all the time we have for today's episode, I'll put links to the center to some of the different initiatives to financing change to everything else, I can find links for that Alex mentioned. Good Checkout, and I want to Because if you can hire somebody in an entrepreneurial ecosystem who may be traditionally got left out, like I was making note to myself, I need some new headshots. And I'm going to talk to you, Alex, like, Can your organization help me get them, right? So, go pay somebody money who lives in an echo system or works in an echo system that traditionally hasn't gotten hired. And you know, that's a fabulous thing, you can do this. So, thank you so much for listening. I do want to say we are now able to do two episodes a week. So we try to tell great stories about impactful entrepreneurs on topics that maybe you know, could use a little more attention. If you've got an idea for an episode or a guest, go to the aware printers website and go to our contact page. And we'd love listener, suggested ideas. So we now do an episode every Tuesday and Thursday and let us know your thoughts. And I just want to say for now, thank you for listening Please, please take really good care on these points in time. And thank you for the positive impact that you're having.