FARGO INC!

BUSINESS MAGAZINE
JULY 2025

+ WE SIT DOWN WITH **THARALDSON SR.** TO LEARN ABOUT THE LESSONS HE INSTILLED IN HIS SON.

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HOW **GARY THARALDSON II** IS TAKING ON THE NATIONAL TEMPERATURE MONITORING INDUSTRY


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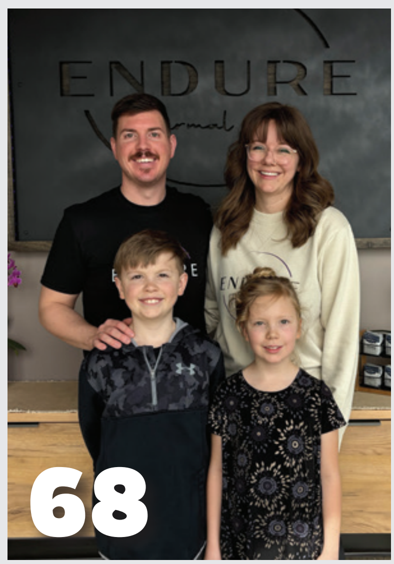

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Legacy in Motion: A Conversation with

Every community has its legacy names—the ones that evoke ambition, grit, and vision. In North Dakota, "Tharaldson" is one of those names. But what's even more compelling than the legacy itself is watching how it evolves from one generation to the next.

In sitting down with Gary Tharaldson II, it's clear that while the industries may shift, the entrepreneurial spirit remains constant. Tharaldson II isn't walking in his father's footsteps so much as forging his own trail—grounded in the same values, but with a sharp eye on what's next.

Meanwhile, Gary Sr. reflects on his own journey with characteristic humility and insight. There's pride in his voice when he speaks about his son, not just for what Tharaldson II is building, but for how he's doing it. It's not just about the deals or the numbers; it's about community, stewardship, and the long game.

the Tharaldsons

What emerged most from the interview was a discussion of shared values expressed through different lenses. It's a conversation about legacy—yes—but also about evolution, respect, and vision. And it left us with one thought: the Tharaldson story is far from finished. It's just moving into a new, exciting chapter.

Brady Drake

Brady Drake
Fargo INC! Editor

Brady Drake, *Fargo INC! Editor* fargoinc@spotlightmediafargo.com

JULY 2025
Volume 10 Issue 7

FARGO INC!

Fargo INC! is published 12 times a year and is available at area businesses and online at FargoInc.com.

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Future Farmer

Future Farmer is our farming publication which brings great tech-focused content to readers across North Dakota and Minnesota.

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GROWTH LEADERS

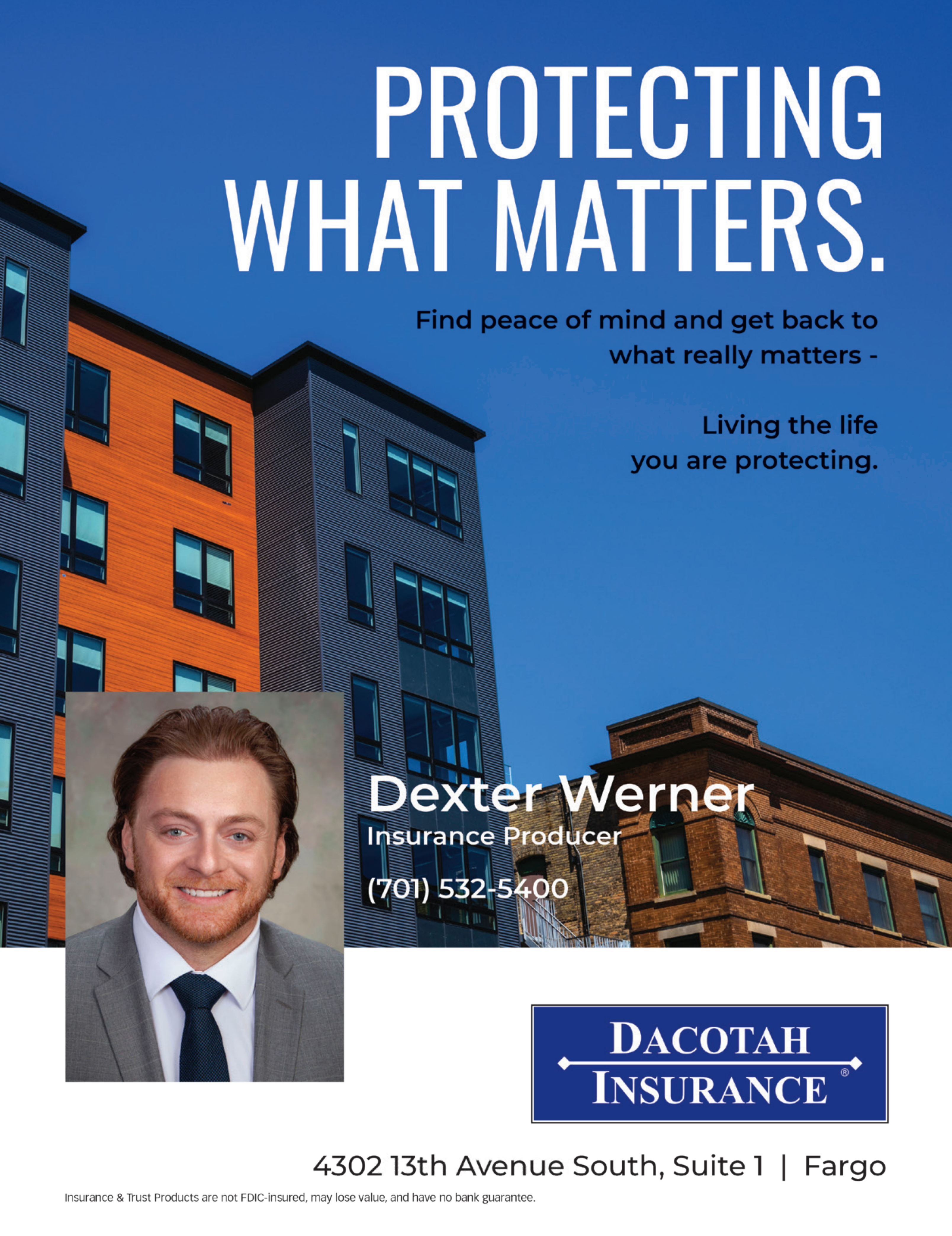
Growth Leaders is one of Spotlight's annual publications dedicated to showcasing our local companies and the services they bring to the Fargo-Moorhead area.

FACES

You may already be familiar with our Faces of Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo publication which we publish once per year in order to highlight the faces behind all of the great businesses in the community.

GREAT PLACES TO WORK

Are you in need of a new career? The Great Places to Work Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo Annual Career Guide highlights amazing businesses in the area that provide great growth opportunities, benefits, and more!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ASK THE EXPRET

Summer Sealcoating

Summer is the heart of sealcoating season, and timing is everything. The right conditions—warm, dry weather, and plenty of sunlight—make this the perfect window for protecting your asphalt. At Advanced Striping & Sealcoating, we help businesses schedule smart and get the best long-term results.

Why Timing is Everything

Sealcoat during optimal weather

Daytime temps above 50°F and dry forecasts are key. When applied in the right conditions, sealant cures properly and provides better long-term protection.

Have an expert check it out

Every lot wears differently depending on use, traffic, and weather. The best way to know if it's time to seal is to have a professional take a look. We can tell you what's needed—and just as importantly, what's not.

Don't wait until you see damage

Sealcoating is a preventative measure—not a fix. It's meant to protect what's underneath before the damage sets in.

Plan ahead for scheduling

Summer is our busiest season. Booking early gives you ideal timing and minimizes downtime.

Want a free lot assessment or help deciding if it's time to seal?
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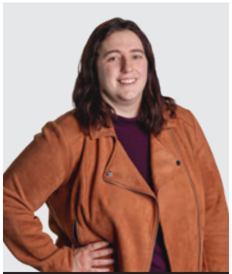
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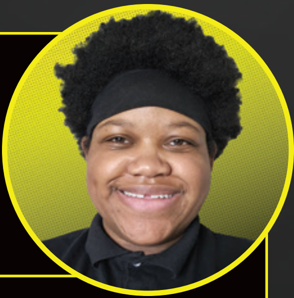
ASK THE EXPERT

By **Ashley Coleman**, Video Specialist, Livewire



EXPAND YOUR REACH:
ADDING LIVE STREAMING TO YOUR EVENTS

Want to connect with a wider audience? Live streaming can significantly boost your event's reach, allowing people to participate regardless of their location, even for traditional in-person events. A poorly executed live stream can be distracting and reflect negatively on your organization. Avoiding common mistakes is key to a successful online viewing experience, and that's where our team of specialists makes all the difference.

First, your event location needs a solid and reliable internet connection. A shaky connection is a primary cause of viewer frustration, leading to buffering and dropped streams. Investing in a stable, sufficient connection at your venue is essential, and a Livewire specialist ensures this foundation is robust. Likewise, we prioritize clear audio quality. Poor sound (background noise, echoes, or difficult-to-hear speakers) can quickly make viewers tune out. Using quality microphones and monitoring your audio levels is crucial.

This is where Livewire's expertise truly shines. Our audio engineers are invaluable; they conduct thorough sound checks, meticulously adjusting microphones and levels to suit your venue's acoustics, minimizing echoes and background noise. A Livewire audio professional also plays a critical role in running test streams, and preventing any form of "hot mic" incidents, maintaining your event's professionalism.

Beyond sound, the look and feel of your stream significantly impacts engagement. A single, static camera can make your event feel less interesting online, so Livewire's production team uses different camera angles—switching between wide shots and close-ups of speakers—to greatly enhance the viewing experience. Remote-controlled PTZ cameras offer flexibility without needing multiple operators.

Good lighting and clear visuals are also important; we ensure subjects are well-lit and backgrounds are presentable and reflect your organization's mission and message.

Adding professional graphics and your branding, like lower-third titles for speakers or your company logo, makes your stream look more polished and reinforces your brand identity.

Ultimately, a well-produced stream is essential, but ensuring people know about it is equally important! When promoted effectively across your channels, a quality live stream can dramatically increase your event's impact, letting those who can't attend in person still be part of the experience. This hybrid approach extends the life and reach of your event far beyond physical attendees.

Getting live streaming right requires careful planning and expertise to ensure a smooth, high-quality experience and a positive impression! At Livewire, we provide professional live streaming services, handling all the technical and production aspects, helping you connect effectively with your audience, both online and in person.

Contact Livewire today to elevate your event experience!

Livewire

Creative Mornings, Fargo, ND

North Dakota Tourism Conference, Bismarck, North Dakota


Livewire event, Fargo Civic Center

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LIVEWIRE

Ask THE EXPERT

Human Resources Outsourcing:
Is outsourcing right for your Business?

The Human Part

People are the power of any good business. People are also complicated. And workplace conflicts can jeopardize the success of your business. Our team has decades of experience working with leaders, teams, and individuals.

Get help coaching your team through communication differences, performance reviews, professional expectations, and more. Imagine this — HR training that people actually pay attention to. We've got that.

The Resources Part

Keeping track of every labor law is a recipe for alphabet soup. It's hard enough to stay up-to-date for an HR manager, much less a multi-tasking business leader. With PRO Resources, you get access to an entire team of specialists who offer expertise across dozens of industries and situations.

We'll help protect your business by complying with labor and employment laws, immigration laws, unemployment claims, DOL and EEOC claims, SUTA, Title VII, ADA, FMLA, PRWORA, and more.

The Solutions Part

As you search for HR solutions, you'll find options. You could hire and train an internal HR team. You could buy expensive HR software. You could use different vendors for each HR need.

No two businesses have the same HR needs. Which is why having a team of experts is another benefit of partnering with PRO Resources.

When you're facing a tough conversation with an employee, you don't want just another canned HR tutorial or video meeting. Sometimes, being face-to-face is what makes all the difference between a good meeting and a lawsuit.

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Ask THE EXPERT

Building a Strong Foundation in **Construction & Real Estate**

Q&A With Shareholder Amy Haagenson

As the Construction & Real Estate Practice Segment Lead at Brady Martz, Amy Haagenson, CPA, brings decades of industry insight and practical expertise to clients navigating the complexities of construction and real estate. We sat down with Amy to discuss how Brady Martz supports businesses in building not only the communities we live in and the roads we drive drive on — but lasting success.

Q: What makes running a construction or real estate business especially challenging today?

Amy Haagenson: The industry is incredibly dynamic. Contractors and developers are dealing with tight margins, labor shortages, supply chain fluctuations, and constant pressure on cash flow. These challenges demand not just technical know-how, but also smart strategy and sound financial guidance.

Q: How does Brady Martz tailor its services to meet the unique needs of this industry?

Amy: We don't believe in a one-size-fits-all approach. With nearly a century of experience working with general contractors, subcontractors, homebuilders, architects, engineers, and developers, we understand the full lifecycle of a construction or real estate business. Whether you're facing job costing complexities or planning an ownership transition, we're equipped to guide you every step of the way.

Q: What specific services do you offer that help clients strengthen their operations?

Amy: Our core services include audits, tax planning and mitigation, job cost analysis, strategic planning, and valuation services. We also help clients tap into energy incentives like 179D and 45L, explore ESOPs, and prepare for mergers and acquisitions. The goal is always the same — helping clients increase profitability and reduce risk.

Q: How does Brady Martz go beyond traditional accounting support?

Amy: We take a high-touch, proactive approach. That means on-site visits, tailored consulting, and direct involvement from senior team members. We want to help our clients grow by giving them tools to better understand their costs, improve efficiency, and manage their cash flow strategically.

Q: What's your ultimate goal for clients in this industry?

Amy: We want our clients to thrive — not just survive. Construction and real estate are foundational to our communities, and we're passionate about helping these businesses remain strong, resilient, and future-focused.

To learn more about how Brady Martz can support your construction or real estate business, connect with Amy at amy.haagenson@bradymartz.com or 701-795-7475.

Mobile Branding Power

By Ellie Johnson, Custom Graphics

How Vehicle Wraps Drive Unmatched Visibility

Imagine if a billboard could move – how many more eyes would see your message? That's exactly what a vehicle wrap delivers. Billboards are a tried-and-true marketing tool, ideal for creating a strong, fixed presence in high-traffic areas. They work well for targeting commuters along specific routes or building long-term brand recognition in one location. But with a vehicle wrap, your message doesn't stay in one place – it travels with you, turning every mile into a marketing opportunity. Whether parked or on the move, a wrapped vehicle puts your brand in front of diverse audiences throughout the day, multiplying visibility and maximizing impressions wherever business takes you.

Q: How many people actually see vehicle wraps?

A: Overall, you can expect anywhere from **3.65 to 7.3 million impressions per year**, which is nearly double the impressions compared to other common forms of advertisement. This is based on a metro population of approximately 280,000 people.

Q: What are some ways to maximize or get the most out of my vehicle wrap?

1. Use them as a recruiting tool.

According to LinkedIn and CareerBuilder studies, 75% of job seekers research companies they see actively promote themselves. Wraps can easily spark that initial interest.

- Incorporate call-to-action messaging such as ***"Join our team!"***
- Incorporate pictures of employees and say, ***"This could be you!"***
- Park the vehicle at sports events, job expos, community events, and hiring fairs, and the vehicle itself becomes a recruiting booth.

2. Incorporate trackable QR Codes into your vehicle wrap or fleet graphics to easily track leads.

3. Less is more when it comes to designing a successful vehicle wrap.

Keep the contact information and wording to a minimum to avoid clutter and confusion. You want something that can be seen from a distance and is quick to read.

Q: What happens when I'm ready to retire my wrapped vehicle?

A: It's important to wrap your vehicle in high-quality vinyl to ensure a smooth, damage-free removal when the time comes to update or remove your graphics. Low-quality materials can leave behind adhesive residue, damage the paint, or make removal costly and time-consuming.

The premium wraps we provide are designed not only for vibrant, long-lasting impact but also for easy, clean removal. When removed by professionals using the proper tools and techniques, our wraps come off seamlessly, leaving your original paint intact and looking great. Investing in quality upfront helps protect your vehicle's value and ensure flexibility for future rebranding or resale.

What Our Clients Say

"Our vans have been one of the most organic ways we've built local recognition. We're constantly hearing, 'I see your trucks everywhere,' and that visibility has turned into real conversations and real jobs. It's not in your face, but it's consistent. Over time, it has compounded and makes a real impact."

-Shawn Weyer (Weyer for Hire)

"We constantly get calls from people saying, "I saw you today"—and that's all thanks to Custom Graphics. Their team helped us create a look that really represents our brand. The quality and design have increased our visibility, and it's been great working with a team that truly understands how to bring a vision to life. It's the best advertising for our business."

- Jolene Hammer (Hammer Mobile Home Service)

When it comes to maximizing your marketing dollars, vehicle wraps offer a powerful combination of mobility, visibility, and cost-efficiency, especially in markets like the FM area and surrounding.

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Today, TrueNorth Steel is an employer of choice, supporting career growth, collaboration and a culture built on trust in one another. The Rommesmo legacy of treating every individual with integrity and care continues to inspire and shape the company's culture.

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> **"TrueNorth Steel supports my career growth in and out of the workplace. I've gained experience across multiple departments and have been encouraged to take the time necessary to serve my country and further develop leadership skills."**
>
> **MIKE PHANEUF, SHOP SUPERVISOR**

Every team member at TrueNorth Steel is a game changer. Through two-and four-day leadership courses, employees gain skills to lead with confidence, build trust, and foster personal accountability. To date, 576 team members have participated in our Game Changer program, with 127 earning the distinction of Master Grads.

OUR PURPOSE

TrueNorth Steel is building a meaningful legacy for its team members and communities. Learn more about who we are and waht drives us: **truenorthsteel.com**

STRUCTURAL + TANK + PIPE + BRIDGE + CONSTRUCTION SERVICES + LOGISTICS

COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS

We partner with clients to design, fabricate, and deliver innovative steel solutions to meet unique needs. Whether it's supporting large-scale airport expansions, enhancing public spaces, or creating state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, we bring the same focus on quality, precision, and customer satisfaction to every project. Over the years, TrueNorth Steel has contributed to iconic projects for clients like SCHEELS, Amazon, Google, Disney, and more.

NATIONAL EXPERTISE, REGIONAL FOCUS.

TrueNorth Steel's footprint west of the Mississippi and site in Lubbock, TX reflect a commitment to strategic growth and efficient operations.

- 11 Locations
- 850,000 SF of Manufacturing Space
- Serving clients nationwide & beyond

BEHIND THE BUILD

TrueNorth Steel®

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ACCOUNTING & FINANCIAL STRATEGY COMMENTARY WITH THE EXPERTS AT BRADY MARTZ

MEET THE EXPERTS

JASON STEFFENHAGEN, CPA, ABV, PFS
VTT Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

DAN MACINTOSH, CPA
Chief Growth Officer & Shareholder

AMY HAAGENSON, CPA
Construction and Real Estate Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

JASON STEFFENHAGEN, CPA, ABV, PFS
VTT Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: I'M NOT READY TO SELL MY BUSINESS YET, BUT I KNOW I NEED TO PLAN AHEAD. WHERE DO I START?

A: Great question—and you're not alone. Many business owners aren't ready to sell today, but they want to be prepared when the time comes. At Brady Martz, our Valuation, Transaction, & Transformation (VTT) team recommends starting at least three to five years ahead of a potential transition.

We begin with a professional business valuation to determine where your company stands now and then work with you to enhance its value over time by improving operations, strengthening finances, and building a self-sustaining team. That way, when you are ready, your business is in the best possible position—both financially and operationally.

DAN MACINTOSH, CPA
Chief Growth Officer & Shareholder

Q: WHAT SETS BRADY MARTZ APART WHEN IT COMES TO HELPING CLIENTS ACHIEVE FINANCIAL SUCCESS?

A: At Brady Martz, we're more than accountants—we're trusted advisors. Our goal is to truly understand our clients and their businesses so we can provide not just sound financial advice, but tailored strategies that help them meet their unique goals. We offer a full range of services, from accounting and tax planning to business advisory and wealth management, and we pride ourselves on delivering big-firm resources with a local, personalized touch.

CONTINUED

JASON STEFFENHAGEN, CPA, ABV, PFS
VTT Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I'M FINALLY READY TO SELL OR TRANSITION MY BUSINESS?

A: That's when our team really steps in to guide you through the complexities. Selling a business involves a lot more than just finding a buyer—there are negotiations, due diligence, legal documentation, and plenty of big decisions. Our experienced advisors help shape the transaction around your goals, whether that's protecting your team, preserving your legacy, or ensuring you receive fair value. We're with you every step of the way, helping reduce stress and making sure you understand the process clearly.

AMY HAAGENSON, CPA
Construction and Real Estate Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: WHAT CAN BUSINESS OWNERS DO NOW TO PREPARE FOR A FUTURE MERGER OR ACQUISITION?

A: Start with clean books and clear metrics. We work with clients to standardize financials using GAAP-compliant reporting, which buyers or investors will expect. From there, having regular valuations, succession plans, and a clear capitalization table for ownership can make your business more attractive and sale-ready. It's also about mindset. If you're three to five years out from a potential exit, we help position your business not just for sale, but for maximum value.

DAN MACINTOSH, CPA
Chief Growth Officer & Shareholder

Q: HOW DOES BRADY MARTZ SUPPORT BUSINESSES BEYOND TRADITIONAL ACCOUNTING SERVICES?

A: View your CPA as a strategic partner, not just a tax preparer. We want to be involved in your planning—not just reporting. Bring us into discussions about expansion, hiring, and capital investment. The earlier we're involved, the more opportunities we have to find tax efficiencies or prevent costly missteps.

It's also about rhythm. Businesses that meet with us quarterly or monthly tend to make better financial decisions. We review trends, talk through margin shifts, and prepare owners for what's coming—not just what's already happened.

JASON STEFFENHAGEN, CPA, ABV, PFS
VTT Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: I'VE HEARD TRANSITIONS CAN BE OVERWHELMING. CAN YOU REALLY MAKE IT EASIER?

A: Absolutely. We understand how much is at stake, and we're here to bring clarity and calm. Our VTT team has worked with businesses across North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Texas for over 90 years. We've helped countless owners step back with confidence, knowing their business can thrive without them. With personalized support and hands-on expertise, we help turn a potentially daunting process into a well-managed, successful transition.

AMY HAAGENSON, CPA
Construction and Real Estate Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: WHAT SHOULD CONSTRUCTION AND TRADES BUSINESSES BE DOING NOW TO IMPROVE PROFITABILITY?

A: Job costing is the #1 area where we see room for improvement. If your labor, materials, and overhead aren't tied to each specific project, you're flying blind. We help clients implement construction accounting software and interpret WIP (Work in Progress) reports to keep bids profitable and cash flow steady.

From a tax standpoint, make sure you are analyzing the various tax methods and elections that are available to you to ensure maximum tax deferral. In addition, accelerated depreciation options like Section 179 or bonus depreciation can provide huge value, especially for businesses investing in equipment. But it needs to be planned for, not discovered in hindsight.

DAN MACINTOSH, CPA
Chief Growth Officer & Shareholder

Q: HOW DOES COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FIT INTO THE FIRM'S PHILOSOPHY?

A: Community is at the heart of everything we do. Brady Martz has been around for nearly a century, and our strength has always come from being a community-based firm. We're proud to invest our time, talent, and resources in the places we live and work. That local connection drives our commitment to making a positive difference for both our clients and our communities.

JASON STEFFENHAGEN, CPA, ABV, PFS
VTT Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: HOW CAN SOMEONE GET STARTED WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM?

A: It's as simple as reaching out. Whether you're a business owner looking for a trusted advisor or an individual planning for the future, we're here to help. Let's start the conversation and see how we can support your journey to financial success.

AMY HAAGENSON, CPA
Construction and Real Estate Practice Segment Lead & Shareholder

Q: WHAT FINANCIAL REPORTS SHOULD EVERY BUSINESS OWNER LOOK AT MONTHLY?

A: It's all about the WIP. Detailed analysis of jobs in progress, budget variances, and estimates of costs to complete are essential to the success of a construction company. Additionally, at a minimum: Profit & Loss, Balance Sheet, and a Cash Flow Statement. But we take it further. Business owners should also review budget-to-actuals, margin trends, and key performance indicators specific to their industry.

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Jesse Hoorelbeke

BY BRADY DRAKE

CONTINUED »»

A CEO FINDS HIS FLAME

THE JOURNEY OF TEMPLINK CEO **GARY THARALDSON II**

AT just 28 years old, Gary Tharaldson II is navigating a complex space. As the son of one of the most successful hoteliers in the country, the Fargo-based entrepreneur has had a front-row seat to billion-dollar dealmaking since he was a kid, or at least one would think. But rather than slide into an executive chair at his father's storied company, he's choosing a more hands-on path so that he can develop himself and his own company TempLink.

ABOUT TEMPLINK

TempLink is a fast-growing temperature monitoring startup leveraging cutting-edge wireless sensor technology to transform how industries like senior living, food processing, and education ensure safety and compliance. Born from underutilized tech in a hydrogen fuel cell company Gary Tharaldson Sr. had invested in, TempLink was quietly launched in 2023 with a narrow product scope and a team of two. Less than a year later, it boasts a portfolio of next-gen IoT devices, a client list spanning school districts to meat locker plants, and an ambitious plan to disrupt a sector still reliant on clunky, unreliable Bluetooth tools.

And yet, for Tharaldson II, the journey hasn't just been about launching a company—it's been about becoming a leader. From learning the ins and outs of site scouting and renovation protocols to building a startup team, leading product development, and defining go-to-market strategy, he's been in the trenches from day one.

He's also faced the harsh realities of health scares, startup growing pains, and the pressure of carving out his identity under the shadow of a legendary name. What's emerged is a young entrepreneur with a uniquely balanced perspective—someone who deeply respects the empire he was born into but isn't afraid to do things differently.

Templink's monitoring solutions were able to save West Fargo Public Schools from losing over $100,000 worth of meat!

Josiah Kopp

NOTABLE TEMPLINK CLIENTS

- **West Fargo Public Schools**
- **Detroit Lakes Schools**
- **Various senior care providers and food manufacturing businesses across the Upper Midwest.**

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF A NORTH DAKOTA KID FROM VEGAS

Gary Tharaldson II didn't grow up like most kids in North Dakota. In fact, he didn't grow up in North Dakota at all—at least not full-time. Born in Fargo but raised in Las Vegas, Tharaldson II spent his formative years toggling between two drastically different worlds. During the school year, he lived in Summerlin, a suburb on the edge of the Vegas sprawl. But come summer, he'd return to Fargo, then out to the lake, where he'd split his time between basketball camps and wakeboarding sessions.

"It kind of felt like I was living a double life," he said. "I had my friends in Vegas and my friends in Fargo. During the summers, I was here. During the school year, I was there."

This dual existence shaped Tharaldson II's early identity. He was grounded by Fargo's tight-knit, familiar rhythms but also had his life in Las Vegas that was dominated by sports.

"I played three sports until high school," he said. "Football, soccer, basketball. But once I got older, I just stuck with basketball. I didn't want to cut my summers short."

Basketball, and later wakeboarding, became his passions. At the lake, he spent hours perfecting tricks—until a failed whirlybird led to a dislocated kneecap, a torn meniscus, and an eventual end to that chapter. It wasn't the only time injuries forced Gary to pivot.

A CHILDHOOD STEEPED IN BUSINESS CONVERSATIONS

Tharaldson II's father is one of North Dakota's most successful business figures. The billionaire hotelier whose name is synonymous with real estate and hospitality across the Midwest. But the family name wasn't a shortcut or a crutch—it was more like background music.

"I was always in the loop," Tharaldson II said. "He'd constantly be talking to me about deals. Not so much operations—he had people for that—but more high-level stuff, the financial side. My childhood was pretty normal, though. My dad didn't force the business on me. However, when someone is as passionate about work as my dad is, you do talk about the business."

During his sophomore basketball season, Tharaldson II sustained an elbow injury which required a procedure and caused him to miss a year of action. This slowed his progress and crushed his dreams of

TEMPLINK'S OFFERINGS

- **Standard Temperature Sensor**
- **Leak Detectors**
- **Waterproof Sensors**
- **Meat Cook-Cycle Probe: Monitors cooking cycles in meat plants to ensure USDA compliance.**
- **Hands-Free Food Line Probe (Coming Soon)**
- **Dishwasher Pucks (In Development)**

CONTINUED »»

"HUMILITY IS WHAT MY DAD TAUGHT ME—AND WHAT I SEE IN GARY."

-Gary Tharaldson Sr.

playing at the next level, the world of business started to open up as a real option.

"I didn't really know what I was going to do," Tharaldson II said. "Before then, I really didn't think too far ahead of sports. So, I figured I'd figure it out in college."

FROM SITE SCOUTING TO STARTING SOMETHING NEW

Tharaldson II's first taste of work came in the summer of 2016, right before he began college at NDSU. He started scouting sites for potential hotel builds for his father's company—learning the importance of location and understanding what made a property viable. Even then, it wasn't glamorous work. He didn't find a site that summer. But he did find purpose. "That summer taught me how big of a role location plays in success," he said. "If all the stars align—traffic, nearby amenities, the right zoning—it can be a great site. But it's harder than it sounds to find the right fit."

He briefly detoured from the family company, working for a moving business. Then, he came back and was tasked with inspecting hotels due for renovation—noticing cracks, warped wallpaper, HVAC drips—anything that might drag down guest satisfaction.

Eventually, Tharaldson II felt a strong need to set out on his own so he could develop as a businessperson and as a leader. That's when a dormant opportunity inside another company the family had invested in—BWR—presented itself.

"They had developed this temperature monitoring system as a side project to their hydrogen fuel cell work," Tharaldson Sr. said. "It was shelved because they didn't have the resources to focus on it."

What others overlooked, the Tharaldsons saw as ready-to-launch.

In late 2023, together with his father and his brother-in-law Nick Clark—the company's President—he rebranded the tech into a standalone company—TempLink—and got to work.

REBOOTING THE PRODUCT, REBUILDING THE BRAND

When TempLink officially launched in late 2023, it wasn't a blank slate—but it wasn't turnkey either. The tech had been partially developed under the brand Insight IoT. It worked, but it wasn't complete. And

GARY THARALDSON SR.'S RULES FOR BUILDING A BUSINESS

Wisdom from one of North Dakota's most successful entrepreneurs.

» **Treat people right.**
"It's not just customers—employees, too. They build the company for you."

» **Never stop learning.**
"Even at 80, I'm learning from every company I invest in."

» **Be humble.**
"The best leaders are the ones who stay grounded."

» **Share the wealth.**
"Profit-sharing pays back a hundredfold in loyalty and effort."

» **Whatever you do, be the best at it.**
"It doesn't matter if you're a teacher, pastor, or CEO."

Josiah Kopp

CONTINUED

I DIDN'T WANT TO JUST BE PART OF SOMETHING— I WANTED TO BUILD SOMETHING."

-Gary Tharaldson Jr.

NICK CLARK
President, Templink

it hadn't been scaled. "We had one core product at the start," Tharaldson II. said. "A standard temperature sensor and a gateway. That was it."

But Tharaldson II and his team saw potential beyond cold storage monitoring. They began iterating, adding new types of sensors to meet demand in specific industries.

Today, TempLink's portfolio includes waterproof sensors, a meat cook-cycle probe used in locker plants, and a soon-to-be-released, first-of-its-kind food line probe that operates independently of tablets or smartphones.

"No one else has anything like it," Tharaldson II said. "The food line probe doesn't require a device, which is huge in environments where hygiene matters. You just click the next item on the probe, and it sends data directly to the cloud."

FOCUSING TO SCALE: THE SENIOR LIVING PIVOT

One of the hardest early lessons for Tharaldson II came in the form of scattered sales. The product was flexible enough to serve many markets, but spreading too thin, too fast was stalling momentum.

"Every vertical has its own marketing strategy, its own regulatory requirements, its own culture," Tharaldson II said. "We were trying to sell to everyone. It didn't work."

The shift came after a few big wins in senior living. Their first customer in that space needed nearly 30 sensors for one facility—an eye-opener compared to smaller school installations.

"Castleton needed four sensors total. Senior living was like, boom, one building, 30 sensors," Tharaldson II said.

The numbers were compelling. With tens of thousands of senior care communities across the U.S., Tharaldson II made the call to focus in. Today, TempLink is heavily entrenched in both senior living and meat locker plants—its two largest verticals.

The result? Rapid growth. From just two employees under Insight IoT to twelve today, TempLink has evolved from a tech salvage operation into a high-growth startup with custom hardware, a direct sales approach, and national reach.

SHARED VALUES, SEPARATE PATHS

Tharaldson II's desire to prove himself wasn't born from pressure—but from respect. From an early age, he soaked in conversations about project financing and hotel construction costs from his father. But those moments weren't forced.

"I let him be," Tharaldson Sr. said. "He was probably 21 the first time I brought him to something serious, like a bank meeting. I wanted him to work for someone else first. Learn how a business really runs before jumping into anything with me."

That independence helped shape Tharaldson II's work ethic—and solidified the line between mentorship and micromanagement. While Tharaldson Sr. provides guidance when asked, he gives his son room to fail, adapt, and learn.

"If I were too involved, I'd be curtailing his leadership,"

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Tharaldson Sr. said. "And he didn't want that. He wanted to lead. That's the only way he'll really grow."

MENTORSHIP, LEGACY, AND THE FATHER-SON DYNAMIC

Through it all, Tharaldson II has drawn closer to his father. Their relationship—once framed around sports and updates from the family business—has deepened through shared professional experiences.

"I talk to him every day now," Tharaldson II said. "If I'm stuck, he always has a solution. He's incredibly sharp."

Working with a billionaire father might intimidate some. But for Gary, the lessons haven't come in lectures—they've come by example.

"He expects excellence, but he doesn't micromanage me," Tharaldson II said. "What I've picked up from him is the importance of having a sense of urgency. If something needs doing, he doesn't wait. He just does it. That's how he ends every day—with no to-do list."

THE FATHER'S VISION

Gary Tharaldson Sr. never set out to build an empire for his son to inherit. In fact, for much of his career, he assumed Tharaldson II might carve his own path entirely.

"He was a great athlete," Tharaldson Sr. said. "And I always said the children are the best part of my life. I enjoyed watching him grow up. If he ever wanted to enter business, I figured he'd find his place."

But when TempLink emerged as a potential opportunity—a shelved side project within a hydrogen fuel cell company Sr. had invested in—it offered something unique. Not just a viable business, but a blank canvas. Something Tharaldson II could grow and lead himself.

"At first, I didn't even think about involving Gary," Tharaldson Sr. said. "But once I saw the product and the potential, I brought it to him. He didn't want me to run it. He wanted to do it himself."

The result was exactly what a strong-willed father and an ambitious son both needed—a project that could be guided, but not controlled. "He loves being a leader. He loves building a company," Tharaldson Sr. said.

ND ROOTS, ENTREPRENEURIAL REACH

If there's one value Gary Sr. hopes his son carries into the future, it's humility.

"Humility is what my dad taught me," Tharaldson Sr. said. "And it's what I've seen in Gary. If you treat people right—especially your employees—they'll build the company for you."

It's a principle that echoes across Sr.'s own legacy: opening one hotel per month for 40 years, expanding into land, solar, and software. And even with his reach across industries and states, he never let business eclipse what matters most.

"When you run a business, it's important not to neglect the family," Tharaldson Sr. said. "Those become your memories."

And if anyone can balance ambition with that grounded philosophy, he believes it's his son.

"He's young. He's learning. But he's got it. I see it."

Jesse Hoorelbeke

GARY THARALDSON II'S BIGGEST LESSONS SO FAR

- **Focus wins.** *"Trying to serve everyone slowed us down. Once we focused on two main verticals, things clicked."*
- **Speed matters.** *"My dad taught me—if it needs to be done, don't wait. Just do it."*
- **You can't fake the grind.** *"Sales, operations, marketing—you have to know enough to steer the ship."*
- **Don't go it alone.** *"My brother-in-law Nick has been critical. He's in the weeds so I can stay above them."*

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MEET THE

2025 DAKOTA BUSINESS LENDING ENTREPRENEUR DISTRICT

The Entrepreneur District is opening a new door to small business success by offering an innovative, no-cost space where business owners can grow, collaborate, and transform. Designed for entrepreneurs who aim to scale their ventures or strengthen their existing businesses, the District provides more than just office space—it's a thriving ecosystem under one roof. Residents gain access to mentorship, capital, training, networking opportunities, and free or low-cost services, all tailored to support their unique goals. Inside this supportive hub, entrepreneurs collaborate, share ideas, solve problems together, and give back to their community. Ultimately, the Entrepreneur District isn't just about business growth—it's about personal evolution. Residents emerge with sharper instincts, fresh perspectives, and a deeper alignment with cultural values, fully equipped for sustainable success.

SHAMS JIWANI

Munger Vitality

ABOUT SHAMS JIWANI

Shams Jiwani is a seasoned Product Management leader with over 15 years of experience driving innovation and growth in the technology space. With a track record of building customer-centric enterprise SaaS solutions, he has successfully led high-impact teams at companies like CentralReach, Twin Health, Haven, and Evolent Health. Shams brings deep expertise in product strategy, team leadership, and market expansion, having helped grow ARR from $54M to $100M and expand total addressable markets by hundreds of millions.

Shams holds a Master's in industrial engineering from Georgia Tech and a Bachelor's in Computer Science from Georgia State University, where he graduated Summa Cum Laude. He thrives at the intersection of data, customer empathy, and business strategy.

Originally from Atlanta, Shams moved to Fargo four winters ago. Outside of work, he loves spending time with his son—whether it's coaching his sports teams, going on adventures, or cheering at games. He's an avid reader, volleyball enthusiast, fitness fan, and dedicated sports event-goer.

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: Munger Vitality is a full-cycle software development partner that helps enterprises, startups, and consulting firms transform ideas into scalable digital solutions. The team combines global talent to deliver strategy, design, engineering, and ongoing maintenance. Our agile process emphasizes problem discovery, rapid iteration, and measurable business outcomes. Whether it's launching a new product or modernizing existing systems, Munger Vitality is committed to building secure, elegant, and user-centered technology that drives growth.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: Munger Vitality helps organizations become more efficient and drive revenue growth by leveraging technology to streamline operations, optimize workflows, and create intelligent digital solutions tailored to their needs.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: Dakota Business Lending has created a supportive ecosystem that fosters growth and connection. Being part of such a community provides valuable resources—including mentorship, networking with community leaders, and problem-solving with like-minded entrepreneurs.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: A-W-E-S-O-M-E!!! From day one, the team offered not only space for collaboration but also genuine support and encouragement that made the journey of growing a business feel less overwhelming and far more collaborative.

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your company?

A: For me, it's about the smiles on our customers' faces and the enthusiastic recommendations they share with their friends and family. When we hear that someone is genuinely happy with what we've done, that's a win. And when they trust us enough to refer someone else our way, that speaks volumes. It tells us that we're building real relationships and making a positive impact.

Q: Is there any technology or innovation that you believe will significantly impact your industry in the next few years?

A: The excitement around AI innovation is electrifying, as it continues to redefine what's possible across every industry. From automating routine tasks to uncovering insights from massive data sets, AI is unlocking new levels of efficiency, creativity, and decision-making power. What's truly thrilling is how rapidly the technology is evolving, enabling greater personalization, predictive capabilities, and intelligent tools that were unimaginable just a few years ago.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: Take risks by thoughtfully weighing the potential upsides against the downsides, doing your homework, and then having the courage to make that leap. So, when that moment comes, and your gut and your research align, don't overthink it. Trust your preparation, embrace the uncertainty, and just do it! You might be surprised at what you're capable of achieving.

Munger Vitality

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CHALSEY FALK

Full Mood Studio

ABOUT CHALSEY FALK

Chelsey Falk grew up in Moorhead and left after high school, eager to escape the "tundra." So, Falk went to the University of Wisconsin-Stout for a degree in Graphic Design and a Minor in Spanish, studied abroad in Spain, and spent eight months backpacking through Europe. Falk later lived in Minneapolis, San Diego, and briefly in Mexico, gathering experiences that have shaped her values and perspective. After 13 years, she returned to Minnesota with a fresh outlook. She was shown the beauty of the river valley, grasslands, lakes, changing seasons, and the wide open spaces. Falk met with people who helped her see what's possible here. Now, she is genuinely grateful to be back and has enjoyed getting involved with local initiatives and celebrating our little slice of the country.

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: Full Mood Studio is a creative partner for brands ready to grow with intention. I offer strategy, branding, marketing, websites, and murals—all with the goal of helping business owners feel less overwhelmed and more confident. By taking time to truly understand each client's vision and challenges, I'm able to tailor my services to fit their unique needs at every stage. Empowering clients is at the heart of what I do, whether through thoughtful design, uncovering their strengths, or helping them communicate their purpose with clarity and elevated branding. I aim to create work that feels aligned, meaningful, and full of magic.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: My goal is to uplift businesses that reflect my values—collaboration, community, and purpose. I'm passionate about partnering with people in food, nature, art, and culture who care deeply about their impact. Through this work, I'm cultivating a creative ecosystem grounded in kindness and local connection, helping make Fargo not just a place to live, but a place to grow in community together.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: I started Full Mood Studio four years ago after working with agencies and large companies in Minneapolis and San Diego. I often felt a lack of real partnership and purpose, so I set out to build something more meaningful—a collaborative studio where creativity and strategy truly support the people behind the brands. My goal has always been to help business owners feel seen, supported, and empowered.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: I joined the cohort to be part of a professional space and experience the camaraderie of a team setting. I was hesitant at first—my home office is so comfortable and convenient, but each week has shown me how valuable this change can be. New opportunities, fresh perspectives, and meaningful connections keep unfolding. I'm so glad I took the leap—this has been a truly rewarding shift.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: I've really enjoyed being part of the cohort so far, especially the programming Michaela Schell has created for us. The monthly meetings and Big Table sessions offer great support on our entrepreneurial journeys. With access to so many valuable resources, we're gaining more momentum than we would working alone in our home offices. I'm excited to see where our businesses will be a year from now.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: Over the next five years, I plan to continue making an impact with local businesses that I care about. I want to continue developing long-term relationships with clients to support them with strategy, branding, marketing, websites, and murals.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: As a business owner, I've faced countless challenges—both in navigating business roadblocks and in personal growth. Owning a business forces you to question everything, pushing me to carve my own path toward what makes sense for me. One challenge I've encountered is consistently feeding my sales funnel. With my business model, building new relationships and nurturing existing ones is key. Being part of this cohort has provided valuable resources to track my leads and keep my sales funnel fueled. It's been incredibly rewarding to have a new system in place to track and build on my interactions.

Q: What trends in your industry are you most excited about or concerned by?

A: Over the past decade, the way businesses approach branding, marketing, and websites has evolved. What began with Fiverr offering $5 logos has grown into AI tools like ChatGPT, putting design at your fingertips. While there are some societal concerns about these innovations, they ultimately empower business owners to be DIY—a process I support, having gone through it myself. Do it yourself until you're ready to get serious and invest in professional design. These tools can help you get started, but building a cohesive brand and quality marketing requires collaboration and expertise.

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your company?

A: As a business owner, it's important for me to redefine success in a way that aligns with my goals, vision, and future, without creating unnecessary anxiety or unwanted pressure. I measure success by focusing on my quarterly goals, which provide a clear framework and boundaries for my business, especially in a world where it's easy to feel like there's always more to do.

Q: What has been the most rewarding part of running your business?

A: I feel most rewarded by my business when I have the freedom to engage in community initiatives that align with my values. Being involved in organizations helps me stay connected to potential clients and referral partners, while also fulfilling my own sense of purpose.

Q: Is there any technology or innovation that you believe will significantly impact your industry in the next few years?

A: In addition to the advancements in technology, software, and AI tools, I believe the political climate will also have a profound impact. In the United States, we have long valued capitalism, individualism, and the monetization of nearly everything. The consequences of this mindset are evident in the rising levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation, and the rapid changes we're experiencing, both positive and negative. We're at a pivotal moment of reconsideration, where it's clear that we need to redefine what truly matters. My hope is that these shifts will inspire a return to community, where we genuinely support and uplift each other.

Full Mood Studio

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CHRISTY JACOBSON

DevelopHR Consulting

ABOUT CHRISTY JACOBSON

"I'm Christy Jacobson, the founder of DevelopHR Consulting. I'm curious by nature and love to learn and help others. I never really knew what I wanted to be when I grew up, but my brother had a career in HR, and the stories he would share made me think the world of HR was super exciting and a meaningful way to help people. While I may have been a little overly optimistic about the excitement level, it's absolutely given me the opportunities I craved to make an impact in people's lives."

"When I started in HR more than 15 years ago, I realized pretty early on that I didn't fit the typical HR mold, but I fell in love with the profession. Since then, I've been on a mission to change the perception of HR. We aren't all Toby Flenderson."

"Before starting DevelopHR, I held 24 different jobs (it's a long story, but a good one!)—everything from newspaper delivery to retail to nonprofits to corporate HR. Each role taught me something about people, leadership, and finding purpose in the work. Throughout my career journey, my faith in Christ has always been a steady guidepost. It shapes how I lead, how I serve, and how I stay grounded. I'm a work in progress, and I find comfort in knowing I don't have to do it all on my own—God is my source of strength."

"I'm also a wife to Mark, a mom of two teenagers, and someone who believes the good stuff in life usually shows up in the middle of the mess and the ordinary. That's actually the theme of a blog I write, Developing the Good Stuff, where I share stories about life, leadership, and the lessons that show up along the way."

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: At DevelopHR Consulting, we help small business owners take the stress out of managing people. Our HR solutions are tailored to fit the real-life needs of growing businesses—whether that means handling compliance, navigating tough employee issues, or building a leadership development plan that actually sticks.

We offer both project-based support and ongoing partnerships, so clients get exactly what they need, when they need it—without the overhead of a full-time HR hire. From customized training programs and onboarding support to strategic workforce planning and fractional HR leadership, our goal is to be a trusted partner that makes HR feel doable, not overwhelming.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: My mission with DevelopHR is to simplify HR for small businesses and help leaders feel confident in how they lead their teams. I want to be the go-to partner for business owners who care about doing right by their people but don't have time to Google every HR law or manage everything on their own.

I also believe deeply in developing leaders and building strong, healthy teams. Whether I'm helping a business create a career path for employees, coaching a new manager, or running a training to improve team dynamics, it all comes back to one goal: helping small businesses grow in a way that's sustainable, people-centered, and aligned with their long-term vision.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: In 2017, I wrote a LinkedIn article reflecting on my 19 jobs and counting, inspired by the children's book "A Place to Grow" by Stephanie Bloom. At the time, I was in a job I loved, with an organization I thought I'd stay with until retirement. That didn't turn out to be the case.

Fast forward to 2021. I was in an HR management role, again at a company I cared about deeply, but I began to feel that familiar itch. This time, it came with a deeper sense that something wasn't right. Through prayer, conversations with my husband, and a lot of reflection over the course of a year, I realized it was time to step away from that role.

During that process, something clicked. What I was passionate about and what I was good at didn't fully align with the jobs I had held up to that point. I looked back on the times I felt the most joy, confidence, and purpose in my work, and I knew I needed a reset.

To keep things moving, I accepted what I thought would be a short-term, six-month HR contract role. It was meant to give me space while I figured out my next step. But instead, that role became the catalyst. I quickly saw a real and growing need for HR services designed specifically for small businesses.

That's when the lesson from "A Place to Grow" came back to me: "I'm not like other seeds. I'm a floater, not a grower." My ability to connect with people quickly, assess their needs, offer perspective in an approachable way, and then move on to the next "field," so to speak, turned out to be exactly what I had been searching for all along.

And so, DevelopHR Consulting was born. (Technically, it started as Square Peg Consulting).

Today, DevelopHR allows me to do what I love most: help small business owners eliminate overwhelm, free up time, and grow their bottom line by simplifying HR. It turns out, I wasn't searching for a single place to grow—I was searching for a way to help others grow.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: Applying to and joining The Entrepreneur District was a stretch for me. I knew that stepping out of my home office and into a space with built-in accountability and opportunities for learning and collaboration would push me outside my routine and beyond "business as usual." But that's exactly what I needed and wanted to see where I could take my business next.

I had built a successful solopreneur business with real potential to scale, and the resources offered through The Entrepreneur District—such as development opportunities, mentorship, accountability, collaboration, and access to capital—aligned perfectly with the kind of support I was looking for to grow and reach the next level.

Beyond that, I believed I could bring value to the community. My strengths and personality naturally lean toward encouraging and supporting others, and I saw joining the DBL cohort as a chance not only to grow my own business but to help fellow entrepreneurs reach their goals as well.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: It's been a great experience so far! While my team—my three dogs—isn't exactly thrilled with me being gone more, having a dedicated workspace outside of the house has helped me use my time so much more efficiently.

The other entrepreneurs in the cohort are some of the most creative and passionate people I've met. It's been fascinating to learn about their businesses and the wide range of services being offered in such unique, inspiring ways.

I've also had the chance to connect with the Dakota Business Lending staff, who have provided thoughtful advice and insights as I navigate what it looks like to scale my business. The support, community, and learning have all been exactly what I hoped for—and more.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: This question always gives me butterflies. Not because I don't have goals for the future, but because I've learned that when I stay open and willing to try new things, opportunities tend to show up in ways I couldn't have predicted.

When I started DevelopHR, I honestly didn't know if I was good enough, smart enough, or just enough to sustain a business long term. And while 2.5 years isn't exactly "long-term," it's long enough for me to start thinking beyond just the next six months.

I know there's real potential to grow, and I want to see how far I can take this. Over the next five years, I'd like to scale DevelopHR in a way that stays true to my values while allowing me to support more small businesses that need trusted, people-first HR guidance. That includes growing a small team of consultants who share my approach, expanding our services, and refining our operations so we're running as efficiently and sustainably as possible.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: One of the biggest challenges I faced early on was realizing that the name I had originally chosen for my business, Square Peg Consulting, wasn't as unique as I thought. Shortly after launching my website, I decided to Google the name just for fun. What I found was anything but fun: eighteen other consulting businesses with the same or similar name, five of which were also in the HR space.

It quickly turned from curiosity to panic. Not only was my site buried in the search results, but I also started worrying about possible legal issues, like receiving a cease and desist letter. The next 36 hours were full of stress, overthinking, and a lot of second-guessing.

Thankfully, my husband, who is often the calm to my chaos, reminded me that mistakes happen, and the best thing I could do was fix it and move forward. So, I pivoted. I scrapped the original name, went back to the drawing board, and eventually landed on DevelopHR. It felt like the right fit from the beginning, and it didn't hurt that it showed up as the top result in a Google search.

What surprised me most was how personal the shift became. The old name had come from a place of not quite feeling like I fit in, like a square peg in a round hole. But DevelopHR came from a place of strength. According to StrengthsFinder®, one of my top five strengths is Developer, and that's exactly what I love most about HR: helping people and businesses grow, build confidence, and reach their goals.

Now, as I look back on that first year in business, I can laugh a little at the panic and also feel incredibly proud of the growth, both personally and professionally. That experience reminded me that setbacks are often just pivots in disguise.

Q: What trends in your industry are you most excited about or concerned by?

A: One of the trends I'm most excited about is how outsourced and fractional services have become more mainstream, especially in HR. Businesses no longer need 50 or 100 employees to access professional HR support. That shift has made it possible for smaller companies to get the help they need to grow intentionally and lead their teams with confidence.

It's a win for both business owners and employees. When HR is done well, it creates stronger communication, clearer expectations, and better support for everyone on the team. That leads to healthier workplaces and higher employee engagement across the board.

This trend reinforces what I've always believed: HR isn't just for large companies. It's a valuable tool that can make a real difference for businesses of any size.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: I saw a quote a while back that said, "Be brave enough to suck at something new." That really stuck with me. One of the biggest hurdles I've faced (and still face) is the desire to have all the answers. The truth is, I never will. But if I can stay humble, stay curious, and keep learning, I've found that the right opportunities tend to follow.

Also, hire a CPA on day one. Trust me on that one.

DevelopHR Consulting

develophr.co

@develophr_

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CHAD PLETTL

CP Financial Services

CP Financial Services

cpfinancialservicesll.com

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ABOUT CHAD PLETTL

"I'm Chad Plettl, founder of CP Financial Services. I've spent nearly 20 years working in accounting and finance, and I can honestly say numbers have always been my thing. Even as a kid, I was passionate about making wise financial decisions—and that eventually turned into a career helping others do the same."

"Outside of the office, I'm a big fan of the outdoors. I enjoy fishing, camping, and getting out on the golf course whenever I can. I'm married to my amazing wife, Cathleen, and we share life with our spirited dog, Cheyenne. You'll also catch me watching or attending just about any sports game—I'm always up for some good competition."

"Helping people find clarity and confidence in their finances is what drives me. It's not just about numbers; it's about freedom, peace of mind, and building something that lasts."

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: I started my business in 2017 as a side hustle under the name CC Bookkeeping, focusing on bookkeeping services for small to mid-size businesses. After a few years of steady growth and growing passion, I took the leap and went full-time in 2020.

As I worked with clients, I realized that many people needed more than just help with their business books—they needed guidance with their personal finances too. In 2022, I rebranded the business to CP Financial Services to reflect a broader focus on financial wellbeing. In December 2022, I became a Ramsey Solutions Preferred Financial Coach, adding financial coaching to my services to help individuals and families take control of their money and build stronger financial futures.

Today, I provide bookkeeping and financial coaching services, helping both business owners and individuals get organized, stay informed, and achieve their goals with confidence.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: My vision for CP Financial Services is to continue growing—not just in size, but in impact.

I want to build a team of like-minded professionals who are just as passionate about helping others achieve financial clarity and success. As the business grows, I plan to expand our offerings to include more financial products and tools that empower both business owners and individuals to make smarter financial decisions.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: Ever since college, I knew I wanted to start my own business—I just wasn't sure what kind of business it would be.

At the time I launched my business, I was working full-time in an office that was filled with gossip and politics. It drained my energy and left me feeling stuck. That's when I knew it was time for a change.

With my accounting background and interest in finances, the idea became clear: start a bookkeeping business. It was a natural fit, and it gave me the freedom to do work I enjoy while helping small business owners stay on top of their finances.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: I wanted to work with other business owners who are in similar situations as I am.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: The experience has been great. I've truly enjoyed connecting with other members, learning from their perspectives, and sharing ideas. It's been valuable not just for my business growth, but also for building strong relationships and gaining fresh insights.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: Over the next five years, I plan to expand CP Financial Services to offer even more value to my clients. That includes:

- Adding tax preparation services, so I can provide a full suite of financial solutions under one roof.
- Creating digital products, like templates, courses, and tools that empower business owners and individuals to manage their finances with more confidence and less stress.
- My goal is to become a one-stop financial resource—whether you're a small business owner trying to get organized, or an individual working toward financial freedom. By expanding my services and product offerings, I'll be able to help more people take control of their money and make smarter financial decisions every step of the way.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: One of the greatest challenges I've faced is helping both small business owners and individuals shift from reactive money habits to proactive financial planning. Many clients come in overwhelmed—books behind, cash flow uncertain, or finances causing stress in their personal relationships. For couples, it's often a communication issue. For business owners, it's a lack of clarity holding them back from growth.

I meet people where they are, not where they "should" be. My approach blends empathy with structure, creating a safe space where clients can be honest about their financial situation without shame or judgment. Through a combination of up-to-date bookkeeping, easy-to-understand reports, and personalized coaching, I prioritize education and accountability, equipping clients with the tools they need to make confident financial decisions and build stronger relationships in the process.

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your company?

A: Success for CP Financial Services will be based on the growth of the business, both in size and in impact.

As the business expands, I want to reach more individuals and small businesses, offering the financial tools, guidance, and support they need to thrive. Growth means hiring a strong team, launching new services, and continuously improving the value we provide to our clients. Ultimately, success is about building a business that helps others build theirs.

Q: Is there any technology or innovation that you believe will significantly impact your industry in the next few years?

A: With all the financial software available today, a lot of business owners think they can handle their own bookkeeping. And while the tools are great, they're just that—tools.

Many business owners don't realize that without an accounting background, it's easy to make costly mistakes. Misclassifying expenses, missing tax deductions, or misunderstanding cash flow can seriously hurt your business and, in some cases, cost you way more than hiring a professional ever would.

ERIK HILL

Immersion LLC

ABOUT ERIK HILL

"I'm married to my beautiful wife Jennifer, who has blessed me with two boys, Henry (6) and Arthur (4). I've been of the 461st Engineer Utilities Detachment since 2017, in total I have 13 years of service and currently still serving. CrossFit Fargo has kept me in top shape for the past six years, and the community they have built is amazing for Fargo. I love connecting with people and bringing the best out of them."

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: Immersion is heat and cold therapy through sauna and cold plunging. My sauna is Finnish style, which is water over rocks with a few essential oils. My cold plunge is commercial grade and self-regulates. So when a person hops in, it balances the temperature and PH levels.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: I'm trying to achieve people believing in themselves that they can do hard things consistently. Life in general is hard, so with this, it makes your day easier. Also, I'm trying to help with motivation in the sense of one's internal dialogue. That means putting yourself first so you can help someone else who may be struggling or looking to better themselves.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: It started in the winter of 2023. I was struggling with life after coming back from deployment and wanted to look for natural methods, hence I found heat and cold therapy. I had drastic results within the first week and knew there were more people out there.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: I decided to join to learn and grow my business knowledge in all aspects.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: The cohort has been extremely helpful with problems I have run into with business and connecting with other business owners.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: My five-year plan will be to have multiple locations to service the FM area.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: This past winter, my plunge broke down and flooded my room, so it had to get replaced. With quick action, I got it replaced within a few weeks.

Q: What trends in your industry are you most excited about or concerned by?

A: I'm excited for people to try a more natural route instead of relying on prescription drugs. I'm concerned about misinformation on what happens within the body related to cold plunging.

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your company?

A: My measure is asking how they are feeling, and I get smiles and excitement on them feeling better.

Q: What has been the most rewarding part of running your business?

A: Most rewarding would be all the connections I have made within the business.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: Master the boring days.

Immersion LLC

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"Immersion LLC"

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ASHLEY MIKKELSEN

Srta Spanish

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ABOUT ASHLEY MIKKELSEN

"I often say that I'm an 'accidental entrepreneur!' I'm a Spanish teacher on a break from classroom life while my kids are young, and I've been so surprised to find that many aspects I love about teaching are present in this role as a business owner, too! There's lots of space for creativity, problem-solving, and hard work, which are three things that bring me a lot of joy.

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: Srta Spanish is here to help Spanish teachers find time-saving activities to support language acquisition with research-backed methods without spending hours searching for the perfect source of comprehensible input for students.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: The goal of Srta Spanish is to support secondary Spanish teachers with ideas and resources to save them time and energy while they are lesson planning so they can achieve a healthy work-life balance, finding joy both in and out of their classrooms.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: Srta Spanish evolved from a social media feed into a blog into a full website of activities, ideas, and lesson plans to support secondary Spanish teachers.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: I try to adopt the attitude of, "You don't know what you don't know until you learn it!" throughout life. There's so much room for growth in all things, and this seemed like such a good opportunity to learn from others' expertise.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: It's been great—it's so cool to hear about everyone's business and their goals, because we're all so different. It's really nice to be able to bounce ideas off of each other and get new perspectives on things.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: Short and simple: continue focusing on the needs of teachers and creating what they need for their students! I am also working on building relationships with districts to support teachers as a vendor to minimize personal costs on a teacher's behalf.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: Well, it's a one-woman show, and I did not go to school for anything business-related! There are plenty of challenges that come with that, but I think the largest thing is learning how to balance and set boundaries. I love what I do, but it's not healthy for anyone to work all the time. A few things that have helped me with that are setting hours for myself to answer and respond to messages on email and social media, blocking off chunks of time to complete tasks throughout various timeframes, and recognizing that it's okay for some tasks to wait.

Q: What trends in your industry are you most excited about or concerned by?

A: I LOVE that there is such a push for reading in Spanish in our second language classrooms. There is so much research behind reading for language learning, and we're really seeing an explosion of novels written for learners from a variety of perspectives. It's so much easier to find a book for students to match their interests and their level!

Q: How do you measure success in your role and for your company?

A: From one perspective, it's looking at the feedback for a resource and seeing how it fulfilled the needs in a classroom, reading comments sent by teachers, and taking their experiences into consideration. With a more quantitative approach, I track pieces of data such as visitors, conversion, average order value, and more, to help me better identify which resources are being used in classrooms. I often compare that data on a year-over-year approach to determine if what I'm doing is successful in fostering growth in those areas.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: Don't buy everything, but also don't buy nothing—by which I mean, there are times where you're going to be tempted by an ad, a tool, or a sales pitch, and it sounds great, but you really don't need it. There will also be times when you really could use a tool or service, but you're in a penny-pinching stage and refuse to spend anything but the bare minimum. Be discerning in your investments, but don't be too afraid to put a little skin in the game to see that return!

HANNAH BETTENHAUSEN

654 Business Strategies

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ABOUT HANNAH BETTENHAUSEN

"I'm a business strategist and fractional COO with over a decade of experience helping business owners turn their ideas into thriving, sustainable companies. I've always been drawn to the puzzle of how things work—how to take a messy, overwhelming business and create systems that make it run smoothly. But beyond that, I'm also a mom of two, a lifelong learner, and someone who deeply believes that business should support your life, not consume it. My work is rooted in helping people grow without chaos, so they can feel confident in their leadership and proud of the businesses they're building."

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: I'm a business strategist and fractional COO with over a decade of experience helping business owners turn their ideas into thriving, sustainable companies. I've always been drawn to the puzzle of how things work—how to take a messy, overwhelming business and create systems that make it run smoothly. But beyond that, I'm also a mom of two, a lifelong learner, and someone who deeply believes that business should support your life, not consume it. My work is rooted in helping people grow without chaos, so they can feel confident in their leadership and proud of the businesses they're building.

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: 654 Business Strategies is where structure meets strategy. I started the company to help business owners bridge the gap between their big ideas and real execution—so they can grow with confidence, clarity, and purpose. Whether it's a solopreneur trying to scale, a growing team needing stronger systems, or a multi-entity organization navigating complex operations, we bring momentum to the mission and structure to the chaos. Through our tiered service levels, we meet businesses exactly where they are and help them build the systems, rhythms, and confidence needed to move forward. It's about creating a business that works for you—not one that runs you ragged.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: I want to revolutionize the way small to mid-sized businesses approach growth. My mission is to help founders stop spinning their wheels and start building businesses that scale with structure, not stress. Ultimately, I want to empower owners to lead confidently, delegate strategically, and drive results that last.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: After years in high-impact operational roles—including leading multi-business organizations through periods of intense growth—I realized there was a better way to support business owners. Too often, leaders are isolated, overwhelmed, and trying to hold it all together without a clear system. I created 654 Business Strategies to be the missing piece: a trusted partner that combines strategic thinking with operational execution.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: I joined the cohort because I believe in surrounding myself with other purpose-driven entrepreneurs and tapping into new opportunities for growth and impact. Being part of a community that shares ideas, resources, and connections has been incredibly energizing, and I'm always seeking ways to bring more value to my clients.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: It's been both validating and inspiring. Hearing the challenges and wins of other business owners reminds me that we're all navigating similar waters—but we don't have to do it alone. The resources, collaboration, and support have been instrumental in sharpening my vision and expanding what's possible for 654.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: Over the next five years, 654 Business Strategies will continue to deepen our impact in the region and expand our reach across the Midwest. We're focused on growing our three-tier service model to support more businesses at every stage of growth—from getting organized to scaling with systems. I plan to bring on a small team of trusted collaborators, launch a leadership development workshop series, and begin offering more on-demand tools and resources that clients can access between sessions. The goal is to build a business that delivers clarity and momentum for every client we serve—without losing the personal, high-touch support we're known for.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: Right now, we're seeing a wave of uncertainty across industries—businesses of all sizes are closing their doors, tightening their budgets, and trying to do more with less. One of the biggest challenges I've faced is helping business owners realize that this is exactly when strategic support matters most.

When every dollar counts, it can feel risky to bring in outside help—but what I've seen time and time again is that the businesses who invest in clarity, structure, and support are the ones that weather the storm and come out stronger. I've helped clients stabilize their operations, build accountability across their teams, and make confident decisions that actually improve their bottom line.

We overcame this challenge by shifting the conversation—from cost to impact. I show business owners how working together isn't about adding something new to their plate—it's about finally organizing what's already there so they can stop spinning their wheels and start growing again. When the economy is uncertain, structure becomes a competitive advantage.

Q: Is there any technology or innovation that you believe will significantly impact your industry in the next few years?

A: AI and automation will continue to streamline administrative tasks, but the real impact will come from tools that help small teams operate like large ones—think strategic dashboards, collaborative planning platforms, and intelligent workflows. But tech can't replace human insight. The real innovation will be in how we pair automation with strategic thinking.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: Don't wait for the chaos to calm down—structure is what creates calm. Get support early. You don't need to have all the answers, but you do need a system that helps you find them. Build a business that works for you, not one that runs you into the ground.

MACKENZIE BRIMM

Brimm Marketing

Brimm Marketing

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mackenzie-brimm

ABOUT MACKENZIE BRIMM

"Hi, I'm Mackenzie Brimm—founder of Brimm Marketing, a community cheerleader, creative strategist, mom of two amazing boys, wife to my loving husband, Dustin, and someone who wholeheartedly believes in the power of storytelling and connection. I've always had a passion for leadership and creativity. Over the years, I've worked in sales, marketing, and advertising across industries, but small, locally owned businesses and nonprofits have always had my heart. I live for those aha moments—when a client sees their vision come to life—and I'm here for the hard stuff too. I'm fueled by purpose, family, and the belief that we rise by lifting others."

Q&A

Q: Can you please tell us about your company?

A: Brimm Marketing is a creative marketing and design studio built on strategy, storytelling, and community impact. We partner with small businesses to craft brands that not only look great but also deliver real results. From brand messaging and website development to social media campaigns, launch strategies, event planning, and client experience mapping—we bring creativity and clarity to the often chaotic world of entrepreneurship. Whether you're a new startup or a growing business ready to level up, Brimm is where smart strategy meets heart-led creativity.

Q: What are you trying to achieve with your company?

A: I'm building more than a marketing agency—I'm building a relationship agency. A place where small businesses don't have to feel small. My mission is to help entrepreneurs grow confident brands that connect deeply with their people, drive revenue, and make a lasting impact.

At Brimm Marketing, we combine innovative storytelling, smart digital strategies, and community-driven approaches to help businesses rise. We don't just market—we build meaningful connections that turn audiences into advocates and ideas into action.

Q: How did your company come to be?

A: Brimm Marketing was born on a moment's notice but built on over a decade of preparation. After learning my role was being eliminated at my former job, I had a choice: panic or pivot. I chose to bet on myself. Within hours, the idea for Brimm Marketing was born, and two days later, I booked my first client consultation. It felt wild at the time, but also undeniably right. The skills I had developed across industries became the foundation for a business that now supports business owners who simply need someone in their corner.

Q: Why did you join the Dakota Business Lending cohort?

A: Entrepreneurship can be lonely—but it doesn't have to be. I joined the Entrepreneur District to surround myself with ambitious, generous, real people who are also in the trenches. I'm here to grow, to give, and to be part of something bigger than myself. The resources, mentorship, and collaboration here are next-level—and exactly what I need to build a business that lasts.

Q: What has your experience been like with the cohort so far?

A: Even in these early days, the experience has been grounding. It's a space that embraces the real journey—not just the wins, but the learning curves and the messy middle too. There's something powerful about being in an environment where you're not expected to have it all figured out.

As one of the youngest businesses in the cohort, I've been soaking up every bit of wisdom from the "been there, done that" entrepreneurs around me. Learning from their experiences is truly a gift, and it's given me a deeper sense of clarity and confidence in my own path.

I've felt supported, challenged, and honestly, more productive than I've been in a long time. I think I might be the one here the most! While I'd love to say I'm great at working from home... I'd be lying. Having an office again and a soundboard has been such a game changer, and I've truly enjoyed every second of it.

Q: What is the five-year plan for your business?

A: In five years, Brimm Marketing will be a thriving creative collective made up of both in-house team members and a trusted network of independent collaborators—designers, writers, videographers, creatives, strategists, and specialists who share a passion for helping small businesses grow with intention.

At the heart of our growth is a shift away from the traditional agency model. Too often, small businesses are left feeling overwhelmed or under-served—caught between big-budget agencies that overpromise and fragmented freelancers who lack alignment. My goal is to build something different: a flexible, values-driven team that brings cohesive strategy, creativity, and execution under one roof—without losing the human touch.

Beyond marketing strategy and campaign execution, we'll offer resources, support, and workshops that make big-brand thinking feel accessible and doable. Ultimately, Brimm Marketing will be a home for bold, purpose-driven businesses—and the creative minds that support them. It's about meaningful collaboration, real relationships, and results that matter.

Q: Can you describe a challenge your company has faced, and how you overcame it?

A: Like many solopreneurs, my biggest challenge has been capacity. As demand grows, so does the need to scale without sacrificing quality or that personal touch. I've started collaborating with contractors to bring in fresh expertise while still guiding the client experience. I've also leaned into automation tools and AI to maximize time and efficiency, but never at the cost of human connection.

Q: What has been the most rewarding part of running your business?

A: The people. Hands down. Helping clients find their voice and seeing them light up when their vision becomes reality—that never gets old. Also, proving to myself that I can do this, even when it's hard. That's been healing in ways I didn't expect.

Q: Is there any technology or innovation that you believe will significantly impact your industry in the next few years?

A: AI, without a doubt. It's already changed how I work, helping me move faster, smarter, and more creatively. As my team grows, I plan to scale operations by weaving AI into everything from admin to analytics. But I'll never lose sight of the human side. AI is the tool; creativity and connection are the soul.

Q: What advice would you give to other business owners out there?

A: Outsource the things that drain your team's energy. Hire help earlier than you think. You don't need to do everything alone—especially the parts you dread. And remember, community is currency. Show up, give generously, and stay curious.

By **Brady Drake** | provided by Endure Thermal Spa

Personal Healing to Holistic Wellness

The Pendley Family.

Endure Thermal Spa isn't just a wellness facility offering infrared saunas, cold plunges, and lymphatic therapy—it's a lived-in philosophy, born from years of pain, perseverance, curiosity, and faith.

For the Pendleys, the decision to launch a business wasn't made in a moment of calm. It came during a season of stress and grief, a time when healing felt urgent.

Thermea Spa Village in Winnipeg is a must-visit. This spa offers saunas, cold baths, hot baths, massages, facials, dining experiences, and so much more!

From Struggle to Self-Discovery

Ethan Pendley remembers the turning point vividly.

"I was 248 pounds and miserable," he said. "Not just physically—I was angry, anxious, stuck. I wasn't proud of the person I was at home. Something had to change."

Years earlier, Ethan had torn nearly every ligament in his knee in a pair of freak accidents—first at a paintball tournament, then in a BMX crash. The full reconstruction left him with chronic pain and a deep fear of physical activity. By their early thirties, both Pendleys felt depleted—burned out, unhealthy, and distant from the lives they envisioned.

The couple's transformation didn't come through fad diets or overnight fixes. It came through research. Trial. Error. And a growing awareness that healing is cyclical, not linear.

"We discovered the thermal cycle in 2018 during a trip to Thermea in Winnipeg," Ethan said. "That experience was the first time I realized, 'I feel different after this. Calmer. Lighter. Better.' So we started digging into the science behind it."

They found that alternating between heat and cold had profound effects on their inflammation, sleep, and mood. And in the process, they began imagining what a space like that could look like closer to home.

In April 2024, they decided to go for it. With no prior experience owning a business, the Pendleys dove headfirst into an entrepreneurial journey marked by deep learning curves and deeper conviction.

Katie, a former cosmetologist turned homeschooling mother of two, leaned into a lifelong love of learning. "Homeschooling really taught me that you don't have to stop growing just because you're an adult," she said. That mindset spilled over into their business planning—hours of reading, consulting with doctors and researchers, studying protocols, and finding mentors through the SBDC (Small Business Development Center).

"I remember thinking, 'Write a business plan? Where do you even start?'" Katie said. "But people like Katie Andrew and Paul Smith at the SBDC walked us through it. They were incredible. That support was everything."

The Pendleys used a ROBS (Rollover for Business Startups) program to fund the launch—essentially converting Ethan's 401(k) from a previous job into a business investment. They partnered with Great States Construction, faced the chaos of build-outs and equipment logistics, and opened Endure in 2025.

What You'll Find at Endure

Endure isn't a massive, impersonal spa. It's intimate by design. The facility features a lymphatic roller—a self-guided therapy that helps stimulate the body's lymphatic

> ***Endurance isn't just physical. It's emotional. Spiritual. The name comes from Romans 5:3–4: 'Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.' We believe health isn't just about looking good—it's about withstanding life's storms and coming out stronger." — Ethan Pendley***

The thermal cycle setup.

Cold Plunge 101 with Endure

- **Target temp:** 55°F
- **Sweet spot:** 2–3 minutes
- **Beginner tip:** Even 30 seconds counts
- **Women:** Avoid plunges under 51°F during certain hormone cycles
- **Why it works:** Activates brown fat, spikes norepinephrine, supports hormone balance, and builds resilience to stress

system, reduce inflammation, and improve circulation. Think foam rolling, but automated and targeted. “If foam rolling is a manual toothbrush, the lymphatic roller is a Sonicare,” Katie said.

Then there’s the sauna—three private rooms, each with a two-person infrared sauna—and a cold plunge set precisely to 55 degrees. “We researched everything,” Ethan said. “For women, 51 to 60 degrees is the ideal window—cold enough to trigger the benefits without shocking the system. Men can plunge longer instead of colder.”

A fourth sauna—dubbed the Social Sauna—can hold up to 12 people comfortably. It’s the centerpiece of what the Pendleys hope will grow into a genuine wellness community. “Whether it’s a date, a small group gathering, or just friends supporting each other, we wanted a space that encourages connection,” Katie said.

Each session begins with hydrogen water, followed by the roller, then the sauna, then the plunge. “It’s a full-body reset,” Ethan said. “Not just physically, but mentally, and emotionally.”

Living the Brand

The Pendleys don’t just run Endure—they live it.

Katie has continued her own wellness journey, balancing homeschooling, motherhood, and entrepreneurship while diving deep into Pilates, nutrition, and circadian health. Ethan, meanwhile, maintains a full-time job in business management and still finds time for fitness, prayer, and family.

“It’s not balance—it’s integration,” Ethan said. “Work, faith, health, family—it’s all woven together. I wake up at 5 a.m. most days. Katie runs the facility during the day. I help close it down at night. We’ve sacrificed downtime to build something that matters.”

That “something” goes far beyond saunas and rollers.

“What we’re really offering is permission,” Katie said. “Permission to take time for yourself. To rest. To heal. To try something new. To believe that feeling good doesn’t have to be a luxury—it can be a lifestyle.”

The thermal cycle setup.

The group sauna.

The lymphatic roller.

Faith, Community, and the Long Game

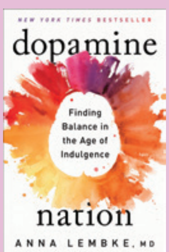
Faith underlines everything at Endure. From their name—symbolizing the biblical call to perseverance—to the color purple throughout the space (a blend of sacrifice and obedience, Katie explained), the spiritual layer of their mission is foundational.

"Endurance isn't just about surviving a cold plunge," Ethan said. "It's about surviving grief, stress, trauma—and coming out stronger."

That perspective took on new urgency when Ethan's brother suffered a cardiac arrest on a ski slope, walking alone to a clinic in the middle of the episode. "He survived against all odds," Ethan said. "That was a wake-up call. Life is fragile. Health is not guaranteed. But we can do something with the time we're given."

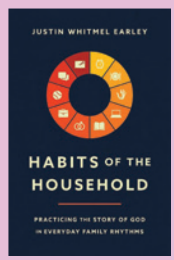
The Pendleys hope to expand Endure's reach through corporate wellness partnerships, working with schools and businesses to create

Katie and Ethan's Favorite Wellness Reads



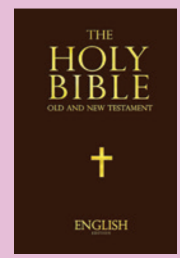
"Dopamine Nation" by Anna Lembke

"Unreasonable Hospitality" by Will Guidara



"Habits of the Household" by Justin Whitmel Earley

"Everything is Figure Outable" by Marie Forleo



"The Holy Bible"

spaces for stress relief and recovery. They've already partnered with Valley Christian Counseling and TrueMed to help clients use HSA and FSA funds to pay for services.

But their primary focus is still the individual who walks in overwhelmed and walks out re-centered.

"We want fewer sick days, more vacation days," Katie said. "Less anxiety, more clarity. We're not trying to be perfect health gurus. We're just people who got curious, started healing, and want to share that with others."

Ask Ethan or Katie what they've learned most in building Endure, and they'll say the same thing: Everything is figure-outable.

"There's no perfect time to start a business," Katie said. "But if it's the right thing, and you surround yourself with the right people, the timing becomes secondary."

And perhaps that's what makes Endure so compelling. It's not just a business. It's a daily practice. A family affair. A spiritual discipline. A defiant stand for health, rest, and self-awareness in a world that often demands the opposite.

"Confidence comes from yesterday," Ethan. "From what you did the day before. That's what we're building here—small, meaningful actions that help people show up better for their families, their work, their purpose."

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HOW **LANNY FALEIDE** MAPPED THE FUTURE OF FARMING FROM SPACE

THE AG SPY

By Brady Drake

Josiah Kopp

IN central North Dakota, where the horizon rolls out like a blanket of possibility, Lanny Faleide was never just watching the skies—he was reading them. Long before "ag tech" became a buzzword or satellite imagery became a staple in precision agriculture, Faleide was already fusing his love of flying with his intuition for the land, unknowingly laying the groundwork for a technology revolution. His path wasn't scripted in Silicon Valley boardrooms or venture-backed accelerator halls. It began in a tractor, in a cockpit, and eventually, in the quiet conviction that there had to be a better way to understand the soil beneath our feet.

In the 1980s, farming was unraveling. Interest rates climbed to 21%, land values plummeted, and the American Midwest felt like a region in retreat. Faleide, a farmer and licensed pilot, had already logged countless hours in the air—surveying his own fields and noting patterns in the way crops grew, struggled, or failed.

"Even in the '70s and '80s," he said, "I was taking pictures of my fields and noticing differences. That's when I realized the potential of satellite imagery." But seeing potential and realizing it are two very different things.

He and his wife made the difficult decision to leave the farm, return to school, and rebuild their lives from scratch. It was a painful but calculated risk—a pivot not away from agriculture, but toward its future.

That choice was the first of many that would define his next three decades. He went on to found a company focused on extracting and interpreting satellite-derived biomass signatures—imagery that could reveal with striking precision which parts of a field were productive and which were failing. His early clients weren't venture firms or multinational agribusinesses, but regional players like American Crystal Sugar.

"That first contract was for $92,000," he said. "And it changed everything."

THE BIRTH OF AN AG SPY

Lanny Faleide refers to himself as an "ag spy," a term that, at first sounds whimsical—maybe even self-deprecating. But that nickname reflects a career spent peering into the secrets of the earth, using satellite eyes to track, analyze, and decode the silent messages of farmland across continents.

That first job with American Crystal Sugar blossomed into nearly two decades of consulting work, covering over 500,000 acres of sugar beets across the U.S. and Canada. During that time, Faleide refined a data-driven system capable of rendering an intimate portrait of crop health at scale, helping growers make better decisions while preserving resources.

Along the way, he resisted the path many ag-tech companies followed—building sprawling teams of agronomists, launching consulting arms, and expanding for expansion's sake. Instead, he envisioned a lean, SaaS-based model where farmers or their advisors could subscribe to his platform, map their fields, and extract insights on their own. This DIY approach kept overhead low, empowered users, and established a scalable model well before "agile" and "cloud-native" became industry norms.

Even in the early days of broadband, he was distributing tools via physical media—CDs and DVDs—which gave way to cloud services as early as 2000. By the time SaaS became a corporate buzzword in the mid-2000s, Lanny's system was already mature. And NASA took notice—not once, but twice. The agency recognized Faleide's company in both 2000 and 2016 for its pioneering use of geospatial data in agriculture. At the time, many in the industry still struggled to pronounce "NDVI" (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index), let alone leverage it to inform field management decisions.

Faleide's company Satshot was recognized by NASA in both 2000 and 2016 for its pioneering use of geospatial data in agriculture.

"I didn't even realize the extent of what we were doing at the time," Faleide said. "It felt like a foreign language. But that's a little bit of my claim to fame."

In the tech world, the prevailing narrative often champions scale—raise capital, grow fast, dominate markets, exit big. But Lanny Faleide never subscribed to that doctrine.

Satellite dishes encased in white domes sit on the edge of Lanny's property, locking onto passing satellites for ten-minute bursts, capturing imagery of the United States and beyond.

From the start, he took a different path. His company didn't explode; it evolved. It wasn't defined by headcount or headlines, but by the quiet consistency of real innovation and real value delivered over time.

Early on, Faleide understood that the strength of his company would lie in the power of its technology and the simplicity of its delivery.

By 2000, long before the cloud dominated enterprise computing, they had already implemented the bones of a SaaS model. What others were still imagining, they were deploying. And when Amazon Web Services launched in 2006, the industry scrambled to catch up to what Lanny's team had already proven possible.

"I used to have 12 to 15 employees," he said, "but today, I don't hire anyone. I work with contractors. We built such a good core that I don't need a big team. I'm the CEO of myself. I don't want to work extremely hard anymore—and I don't have to."

He balances work with family, avoids meetings he doesn't need, and maintains full ownership of his company. No shareholders to appease. No quarterly earnings calls. Just freedom.It's not that he didn't have opportunities to cash out. In fact, at one point, he was one vote shy of joining an elite satellite investment group—a move that, by his own estimation, might have made him one of the wealthiest people in the region. "It didn't materialize," he said. "And honestly, I don't regret it. I might not even be alive today. I could've been thrown over the railing of my own yacht."

And yet, the work continues. From his home in North Dakota, Lanny runs a global business on a laptop. His systems live on the Google Cloud, and he can resolve a technical issue during a Bison game with a single text to a programmer. "It cost me $20," he said, "not $100,000 a year to have someone on-call."

His software holds more than approximately 800 terabytes (and growing) of geospatial data—comprising decades of spectral analysis, imagery, and field signatures.

"That system is like farmland," he said. "You invest in it, cultivate it, and eventually, it becomes incredibly valuable."

THE FARMER-TINKERER BEHIND A QUIET DATA EMPIRE

Lanny Faleide may operate one of the most advanced geospatial data systems in North America, but his roots and his rhythm are still rural.

From his farmstead—now essentially a makeshift space center—Lanny oversees a quiet technological powerhouse. Satellite dishes encased in white domes sit on the edge of his property, locking onto passing satellites for ten-minute bursts, capturing imagery of the United States and beyond.

"A lot of the satellite images you see on TV—North Korea, Gaza, Russia—they're coming through my farm," he said.

> **FAILURE WASN'T AN OPTION. THAT'S SOMETHING I LEARNED ON THE FARM."**
>
> *- Lanny Faleide*

His farm is still his sanctuary, even if it now doubles as a data relay hub for satellites orbiting hundreds of miles above.

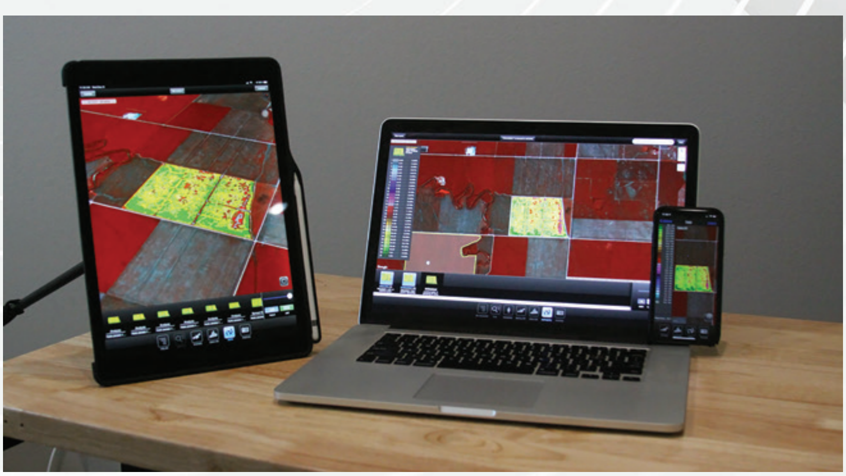
At one point, during a stretch from 2010 to 2019, Lanny and his company explored launching their own satellite.

"We talked about it, but that path is for a whole different league of people—it takes millions of dollars and a very calculated, almost diabolical approach," he said.

That doesn't mean Faleide hasn't poured a lot of capital into his system. In fact, he estimates that he has poured nearly $10 million into it over the course of his career.

But, even with that big project, he has maintained his independence. He can spend time with his wife. He has helped his son take on more of the business. He plays guitar at bluegrass jams. He drives 200 miles between Fargo and his farmstead while brainstorming new ideas or catching up on calls. "That's where I do some of my best thinking," he said. "I enjoy the peace and quiet."

While agriculture remains his company's bread and butter, mining companies now tap his technology for environmental monitoring. "We're working with a major gold mining operation in Nevada," he said. "They have to monitor vegetation, erosion, and runoff, and we provide them with satellite data to do that. It's the same core



Lanny's commissioned work of the North Dakota landscape from space, hanging in New York's Guggenheim Museum in 2020 for "The Countryside Exhibition."

technology—just applied differently."

This crossover power has enabled Lanny's company to explore entirely new markets without having to build separate infrastructures for each. "Whether we're selling to farmers, consultants, or ag companies, the technology just connects," he said. From your iPad to a John Deere tractor, or from a satellite to a mine site—it just works."

The system's reach doesn't end with farming and mining. It has implications for wildfire tracking, infrastructure monitoring, and even national security. "We've looked at wildfire zones using near-infrared data," Lanny said. "We can pinpoint areas with dense vegetation—prime spots for fires to start or spread." And then there's the customer experience. Faleide still talks to users personally. Like the farmer from Nebraska who called him on a whim, frustrated with expensive consulting fees.

"He wanted to do things himself but didn't know how," Lanny said. "I told him, 'You can do this. You just need a little help.'"

In a world increasingly driven by data, Lanny's platform, with nearly 30 years of data already cataloged, offers a level of insight few systems can match.

Still, he's cautious. "We've had all kinds of offers over the years," he said. "Partnerships, expansions, investments. But I've learned to be careful. Not all growth is good."

THE NEW FRONTIER

Lanny Faleide is a man of fields, clouds, and code—but he's also a philosopher of consequence. Behind every satellite image and line of custom software lies a deeply rooted awareness: technology, no matter how elegant or efficient, has ripple effects far beyond its intended use. And in a world increasingly shaped by automation, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, Faleide's voice is a necessary counterweight—a reminder that innovation must walk hand in hand with ethics.

"AI is just scripts and bots, really," he said. "We've used things like that for years—we just didn't call it AI."

It's a theme that crops up often in conversation with Faleide. He has seen how data, once captured, doesn't disappear. "I've got approximately 800 terabytes (and growing) of imagery in my system. It's always there. Spinning on servers. Consuming energy. Staying accessible. Social media works the same way. My kids, my grandkids—they're growing up in a world where nothing is ever forgotten. You post something dumb at 20, and it can follow you for the rest of your life."

When he mentors younger entrepreneurs or advises his family, he's quick to caution that just because you can do something doesn't mean you should.

He extends that lens to the agricultural sector, where rapid automation and consolidation are reshaping rural America.

"Farms are getting bigger. Technology is making them more efficient. But what's happening to the small towns?" he asked. "The schools close. The churches empty. The communities disappear."

And yet, he believes in AI's promise. Not as a replacement for human intelligence, but as an augmentation. He talks about manually analyzing satellite images in the early days—hours of work for a single field. "Now, I can run thousands of fields in one batch. The system does the work. I just check the results."

When asked if he'd do it all over again, Faleide doesn't rush to answer. "Honestly, I don't know," he said. "It's been an incredible ride, but it's also been tremendously challenging."

I'M NOT THE CEO OF A COMPANY—I'M THE CEO OF MYSELF."

- Lanny Faleide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Artists Are Business Owners Too

Meet Bill Damon

By Brandi Malarkey
Owner, It's All Malarkey

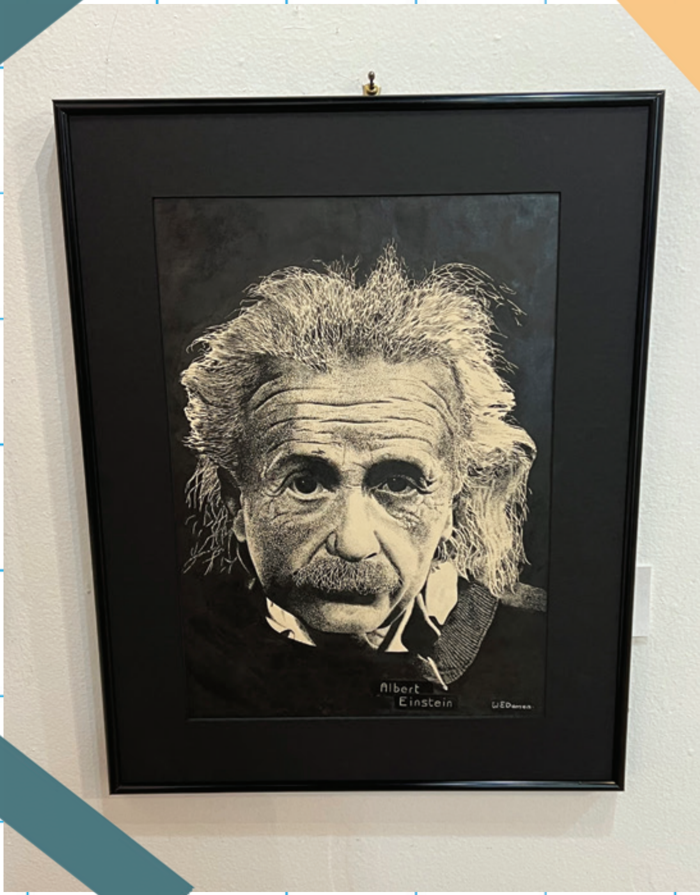
Brady Drake

Artist William Damon eagerly opens a large package that has just been delivered to Gallery 4, an artist-owned cooperative in downtown Fargo where he has been a member and displayed his work for 30 years.

"Growing up, my dad worked for a farmer that had horses, so horses were the first thing I ever started drawing. Ever since, I've had a love for horses. My parents were so encouraging of me. One time there was a magazine with a horse on the cover. Knowing I loved horses, my dad bought it for me just so I can have that horse."

His love of horses is still evident in his shining eyes as he carefully unwraps two new photo collages and sets them up for display. One in color, one in black and white, the images of wild horses from Medora are graceful and compelling. The pieces are typical of Bill's work, which focuses on the openness of the landscape in the upper Midwest and, as with the horses, the inhabitants of it.

"I grew up in Iowa, which is largely wooded and hilly. When I moved to North Dakota, the openness of the landscape expanded my horizons. The lakes of Minnesota, the mountains of Montana, the Glacier



National Park in Montana. I love the sense of space," Bill said. "The phrase I like to use is 'Where your spirit rides the wind.' Once I was camped out in the country by myself, and I was laying on my back looking up at the sky. I could hear the birds and the wind moving through the grasses, and I felt swept away. Peaceful. I want to share that with people."

Known for his sweeping photographic landscapes in luminescent colors and his quietly precise country vignettes rendered in watercolor, viewers can easily absorb that sense of peace and space in Bill's work. However, those are not the only two mediums Bill utilizes for his art.

"I have a pretty broad range," Bill said. "I do oil, conte crayon, pen, and ink. I swing in and out from different mediums. I think it helps my creativity, and that shows up in my photography and watercolor pieces."

For Bill, art is a way to share his experiences traveling by himself across the upper Midwest with other people.

"Some people think there is nothing out there. It's empty or boring. To me, the prairies are never boring. Even in the wintertime, there are shades of brown and yellow and tan in the landscape. There is an incredible beauty in the expanse."

Want to be swept away? Check out Bill's work at Gallery 4, located in downtown Fargo at 115 Roberts Street North.

Gallery 4

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Check Out More From Bill

TRANSFORMING THE TRADITIONS

President David Cook is Rewriting the Future of NDSU

By Brady Drake | provided by NDSU

When Dr. David Cook assumed the presidency of North Dakota State University just over three years ago, he entered the role with a unique blend of academic rigor, administrative expertise, and a forward-thinking mindset attuned to the evolving demands of higher education. Now, as NDSU navigates a pivotal moment in its history, President Cook's strategic direction is not only reshaping the university's academic infrastructure but also aligning it directly with the workforce needs of North Dakota and beyond.

At the heart of Cook's efforts is "NDSU Transform," an initiative aimed at reimagining how the university functions—from academic programming to student engagement, from research to real-world workforce integration.

President Cook inherited a university with a proud tradition but operating in a dramatically shifting landscape. Enrollment pressures, evolving workforce demands, disruptive technologies, and budget uncertainties were not unique to NDSU—but his approach to these realities has been.

Rather than reacting piecemeal, Cook set out to create an enduring strategy. "At a high level, what we really wanted to do is invest in student success," Cook said.

Grounded in the institution's land-grant mission, NDSU Transform focuses on enhancing student success, expanding groundbreaking research, and fostering innovative partnerships that drive economic growth and community impact.

Student Success: Rethinking the Entire Journey

In most strategic plans, "student success" is a buzzword. At NDSU, it is a full-blown redesign of the student lifecycle.

Recruitment is being sharpened with analytics and storytelling, positioning NDSU as both a practical and aspirational choice for students from across the state, region, and beyond. But once students arrive, the institution is reinventing how it supports them academically, socially, and emotionally.

One major initiative is focused on the first and second years, long recognized as make-or-break periods for retention. NDSU Transform is channeling resources toward advising, career mapping, and curriculum design that connects the dots between a student's major and their long-term goals. "We want to make sure they're taking the right kinds of classes to prepare them for success after they graduate," Cook said.

But success isn't just academic. The plan also includes enhanced mental health and a learning assistant program. The result is a learning environment where students can not only persist but flourish.

A Strategy Forged by Industry

Perhaps one of the most interesting parts of Cook's approach is how deeply industry voices have shaped academic strategy. The formation of an industry and workforce committee—comprising nearly two dozen leaders from sectors like healthcare, energy, and engineering—shows his belief that the future of higher ed must be co-authored by the people who will ultimately employ its graduates.

That committee, chaired by David Goodin (retired CEO of MDU Resources), was not a symbolic gesture. Its insights directly influenced institutional New Horizon's focus areas and are now part of an actionable roadmap. Although the committee's work is largely concluded, its legacy lives on through an industry relations team embedded within the university. This internal group is designed to act as NDSU's "front porch"—a welcoming, navigable space for industry partners to engage in curriculum design, internships, mentorships, and even guest lecturing. Cook wants to establish clear entry points where industry stakeholders can connect with the right people, explore collaborations, and see immediate value. Whether it's a healthcare system looking for interns, an engineering firm interested in applied research, or an agtech startup seeking AI expertise, the industry relations team functions as a concierge—making matches, sparking initiatives, and scaling ideas.

"What I've learned is that this is all about relationships," Cook said. "You've got to build the right kind of connections so that industry even knows what we have to offer." Beyond matchmaking, the university is focused on preparing students professionally—ensuring they are not only technically skilled, but also equipped with soft skills and professional expectations to excel in real-world settings.

"We want to move at the speed of business," Cook said.

?

What is a land grant institution?

A land-grant university is a college or university designated by a state to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which provided federal land or funding to establish institutions focused on agriculture, science, engineering, and practical education for the working class. The goal was to make higher education more accessible and aligned with the economic needs of the country. Many land-grant universities today are major public research institutions that also support extension programs and agricultural research.

Are you a business looking to collaborate with NDSU?

Reach out to Director of Industry Relation **Alyssa Teubner** at **alyssa.teubner@ndsufoundation.com** or Chief of Staff **Jace Beehler** at **jace.beehler.1@ndsu.edu**

The Role of Higher Learning

As NDSU accelerates into this next chapter, its land-grant mission remains central. With an Extension office in every North Dakota county and seven Research Extension Centers across the state, NDSU delivers research-based knowledge and practical solutions directly to communities. These centers host annual Field Day events that bring together producers, researchers, and students, inspiring innovation and collaboration.

Cook's presence at these events each year reflects his leadership style—personal, engaged, and grounded in listening. From connecting with energy executives in the Bakken to college partners in Williston, he's gathering insight and planting seeds for collaboration. It's during one of these tours that the idea for "Bison in the Bakken" emerged—an experiential learning program designed to immerse students in the realities of North Dakota's energy sector. It launched just a week before our conversation, sending nearly 40 students across the state to learn directly from industry leaders. "It's a huge economic driver for our state, and getting students out west… is pretty important," Cook said.

The statewide listening tours are real-time assessments of economic pulse points.They strengthen NDSU's position as a true land-grant institution.

The Power of Guest Lectures

Anonther one of Cook's effective strategies is encouraging **industry professionals to become educators**—as mentors, guest lecturers, or even adjunct instructors.

"Bringing in those voices is about showing students what success looks like in the real world," he said. It also gives students role models who aren't just successful academically, but who have navigated the complexities of professional life.

A President Among the People

President Cook makes efforts to have lunch with students in the dining center, attending a club meeting, or walking his dogs across campus while chatting with students.

"There's something powerful about those small moments," Cook said. "When a student says, 'Wait, you're the president?' and they see you at their event—it means something. They remember it."

NDSU, with around 12,000 students, is large enough to offer a full suite of programs, but small enough to foster personal relationships. Cook recognizes this advantage and uses it to build a **campus-wide sense of cohesion**. "It's the right size to create a real sense of community," he said.

Cook is particularly enthusiastic about **student organizations**—and with over 275 active groups on campus, NDSU is brimming with outlets for leadership, creativity, and collaboration. "These aren't just clubs," Cook said. "They're experiences where students learn just as much as they do in the classroom."

Some are career-aligned, like robotics clubs and agricultural leadership organizations. Others are centered around identity, service, or the arts. All of them play a role in shaping confident, engaged citizens.

He and his wife attend as many of these events as possible, from theater performances to athletic events.

One area Cook is especially vocal about is the **performing arts**. In a STEM-heavy institution like NDSU, it might be easy to overlook music, or theatre, as core components of student development. But Cook rejects that notion outright.

"We have a great School of Music—the Challey School of Music—and a strong theater program," he said with pride. "They give students a passion outside of their profession," Cook said. "And that's something we really want to celebrate."

Leadership, Legacy, and What Comes Next for David Cook and NDSU

Unlike many who find themselves in leadership through serendipity, Cook's path to the presidency was strategic and purpose-driven. A former faculty member who understood the teaching and scholarship, Cook advanced through a series of high-level administrative roles that gave him visibility into nearly every facet of university operations. A pivotal moment was his selection as a fellow in the American Council on Education (ACE) program, where he spent a year embedded at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, learning from seasoned presidents and provosts.

Later, he led a branch campus, gaining a CEO's perspective on institutional management. His role as right-hand to the chancellor at the University of Kansas further cemented his credentials.

These cumulative experiences gave him a panoramic view of the challenges and opportunities in higher education.

Still, nothing quite prepares a person for being the one "in the seat."

"You're the one making the decisions—the tough calls. You're the one setting the vision. That's what I'm trying to do," Cook said.

David Cook

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JIM VON MAUR

VON MAUR PRESIDENT & CEO

By Brady Drake | **Q&A has been edited for clarity and conciseness.*

For more than 150 years, Von Maur has built a reputation as a retail experience that brings elegance, exceptional service, and an intentional approach to growth. That intentionality is what makes the company's recent expansion into Fargo, North Dakota, especially noteworthy.

Historically, Von Maur has been selective, favoring metropolitan areas with populations in the range of 400,000 to 500,000—regions that can support the full scope of the Von Maur experience. On paper, Fargo might not meet that traditional threshold. But as you'll learn later in this interview, there are other factors at play that helped buck the traditional Von Maur trend.

At the center of this measured growth is Jim von Maur, the company's president and CEO—a fourth-generation steward of the family business—who we were lucky enough to speak with shortly after the opening of the Fargo store.

Q: Why Fargo?

A: Well, we initially had our reservations. Fargo itself is a mid-sized community, but we could really see all the growth that was happening, and just this general excitement within the community and the state overall. And then, of course, the West Acres Mall—we really liked it. It's well-leased, it's clean, and there's limited competition up there. We could see the mall was drawing from a very wide area—people coming in from all over the state, Minnesota, and even Canada. So, we felt confident that we weren't just serving Fargo, but this very large trade area.

Q: How does that process usually work for someone in your position? Like, how long are you thinking about it—wondering, 'Should we move into Fargo?' Are you touring the area? What does that decision-making process look like?

A: West Acres Mall is family-owned, and the family was very engaging. They stayed in touch with us for quite a while. I think they initially reached out about 15 years ago and they wanted us to take the original Sears building. I think we just deferred at the time. But as we kept visiting and getting to know the market, our confidence grew. And again, we could see all the great changes happening in the mall. We also opened one of our stores there called Dry Goods, and that store did extremely well when we launched it. So that gave us some additional confidence to move forward.

Q: I just find it particularly interesting, because in preparation for this article, I was reading something you were quoted in. It was from 2022, and it mentioned that Von Maur typically selects markets with a minimum population of 400,000 to 500,000. Is that accurate? Is that typically the case for you guys?

A: Yeah, anything smaller than that might not have the density to really support location.

Q: I think the reason I'm curious about that is—you're talking about how there are a lot of people to draw from across the state and even from Canada. But the Fargo metro itself is only around 250,000, so it doesn't quite meet that typical population threshold.

A: And again, that's where we could really see it—people were coming from all over: Grand Forks, parts of Minnesota, and Canada. At our grand opening, we even talked to people who had driven up from central Minnesota just for the event. So that shopping center really pulls from a wide area.

Q: So, it's my understanding—at least from reading other interviews you've done—that Von Maur places a really high importance on customer service and things like that. How do you make sure you maintain that as you continue expanding, adding one to two locations a year?

A: That balance is something I've always been very careful with. I've seen other stores grow way too quickly, and they didn't have the personnel or the attention from leadership to ensure the culture was really being transferred to the new location. And it takes a lot of effort to do that. There's a fine balance between wanting to grow and holding onto the very things that allow you to grow—the things that make you special—and not losing that in the process. That's part of the reason why we only open one to two stores a year. We want to make sure we have great people in place who can help us open each store on the right foot, continue to manage it, and ensure that when a customer walks in, they feel like they're walking into a Von Maur—not something less than that.

Q: Can you give me some insight on what that process looks like from a nuts-and-bolts perspective?

A: In terms of building out that culture and getting employees ready, you've got to make sure you have a strong leader who can head up the store. It's about identifying, almost 100% of the time, someone internally who can go in, hire the right people, train them, make sure they understand our values, what Von Maur excels at, and what makes us special, and then execute all of that. It takes a lot of work. It's not easy. That's why we promote from within—because we know we're going to get exactly what we need. I honestly can't think of a single example where we've hired a store manager from outside the company to open a new store—or even run an existing one. It's just too delicate.

Q: Are there any offerings that are unique to the Fargo store?

A: Each store gets a little more refined, a little better. In Fargo, we introduced a more updated look—it's definitely our newest concept. But we also try to make sure the store feels familiar to our existing customers. So we have the piano in the center court, the beautiful and spacious children's department, an accessible customer service area, elegant restrooms, a ladies' lounge, digital signage—all of those signature elements. We definitely put our best foot forward in Fargo.

Q: What sort of metrics are you looking at to determine the health and success of this new location?

A: Ultimately, it's sales. That's the main thing. That's the scoreboard. And I can tell you, our grand opening was through the roof—absolutely outstanding. Even in the days leading up to it, and certainly since then, we could tell we made a great decision. The business has been phenomenal.

Q: What are the biggest challenges you face when you have these expansions?

A: Typically, the biggest challenge is finding the right people to work there. And yeah, Fargo has been very challenging in that regard. We're looking for people who genuinely like helping others, who enjoy providing great service, who take pride in how they dress and present themselves, and who want to work in a clean, exciting environment like Von Maur. But with unemployment levels in Fargo being so low, it's been really difficult to find people. In a lot of markets, the challenge is getting our name out there—educating people on who we are, who Von Maur is. But in Fargo, it felt like people already knew us, thanks to our stores in Eden Prairie and Rosedale. So we had a bit more name recognition.

Generally, when we go into a new market, most people drive by, see the sign, and have no idea who we are. So it becomes about two things: finding the right people and educating potential customers. Because once we get them in the door, they're hooked—they love us. It's just a matter of making sure they know we're there and what we offer.

Q: How do you guys screen for those correct candidates?

A: First, we go through their application to make sure they have a solid work history and some experience. Though honestly, we'll even hire people without prior experience—we just want to make sure there's nothing that stands out as a red flag. Then it's the interview process—usually one or two interviews—and that's really how you get a feel for whether this is the right person, a good fit for the store.

Q: What are your earliest memories of the store?

A: We would go down there, and the department stores were known for their big events. So we'd drive down just to see those kinds of big events. It was a lot of fun, and I have a lot of vivid memories. We'd come in through the back alley to get into the store—my dad would take us that way. There was a little tea room restaurant down in the basement where we'd go to have lunch. So, yeah, a lot of fond memories. We also had a mechanical Christmas display window—with little animals playing hockey and things like that. The windows were very elaborate, really beautiful. The whole community would go down just to see them. It kind of had this Disneyland feel to it. So, yeah—it was good.

Q&A WITH JIM VON MAUR

Q: Did you ever feel like you didn't want to work for the family business growing up?

A: I wouldn't say it was a foregone conclusion—retail and fashion weren't necessarily my passions as a kid. What really drew me to the company was seeing that it was growing. We were in the process of opening new stores, branching out, and I could see the potential and the excitement building around that. I really wanted to be a part of it. I could see where the company was headed, and thankfully, it's ended up exactly where I had envisioned it would be.

Q: What's it like working with family?

A: It's great. I mean, working alongside your father, your uncle—and for a while, some cousins and my brother in the business—that's really special. Especially having the opportunity to work with your father, to learn the business through him, and to carry on the way he believes it should be run. You can't beat that.

It's really just a matter of communication. When you're working with family, there's a lot of shared history from growing up together, and that can be both a good thing and a bad thing. The important part is to communicate how you're feeling. If you feel like you're not being listened to or you're being slighted, speak up. Have an open dialogue. And definitely don't force it. If it's not working out, if you're not getting along, then find something that makes you happy. Don't feel like just because your family is in a certain kind of business, you're obligated to do that and enjoy it. There might be something else out there that's a better fit—and that's perfectly okay. You shouldn't feel that kind of obligation.

Q: What are some important things you've learned in business lately?

A: There's nothing like having a strong balance sheet. In times of crisis—whether it's a recession, COVID, or any unexpected hit—being financially strong and not overextended is a great position to be in. It allows you to withstand the pressures of the economy and anything else that might come your way.

It sounds cliché, but the biggest lesson is this: if you have the right people in the right spots, you can do anything. Our opening in Fargo was just an incredible day. You couldn't have asked for a better store, a better launch, and it all came down to having great people come together to make it happen. That's the most gratifying part of business.

Another thing I've really learned over the past year is just how constantly retail is changing—and how important it is to adapt and evolve without getting too far ahead of yourself. Take e-commerce and social media, for example—things like BOPIS (Buy Online, Pick Up In Store). Implementing those kinds of services is crucial. But then you start asking: how important is it? How much money should you invest in e-commerce versus brick and mortar?

Retail has changed so much. Back in my day, you opened a store in a mall—that was the only way people shopped. Before that, folks would go downtown for goods. Then people started moving out to the suburbs, shopping malls popped up, and my dad and uncle realized they had to branch out from the downtown and be part of those shopping centers. If they hadn't made that move, we wouldn't be here today.

So there's always this fine balance between not chasing every quick trend and still understanding that people's shopping habits are evolving. Over the last year or two, the questions have become: How big should e-commerce be? How big should a store be? Because yes, people are buying more online, but they still want a brick-and-mortar experience—a true shopping experience.

That's what's becoming more and more important with the advancement of technology, marketing, and social media. Do you run traditional ads and billboards, or is it all about the message you're getting across online? Because that's where everyone seems to be getting their news and information now.

And then you have younger customers who want things a certain way—but you can't forget about your older customers who are used to a different kind of experience. So it's this constant process of adapting and changing, while still holding firm to your core values.

Q: What are you learning when it comes to that marketing aspect?

A: Traditional media is generally just a lot more expensive. Social media is more accessible, but it's also really noisy. Everyone's out there, so it's hard to stand out with so many influencers and content creators competing for attention. I think, overall, the world is definitely heading more toward the social media side of things. The power of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube—it's phenomenal.

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By Lisa Gulland-Nelson
Chief Communications Officer, Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation

provided by the Greater FargoMoorhead Economic Development Corporation

LOOMING WORKFORCE CRISIS REVEALS OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARGO MOORHEAD REGION

A GROWING LABOR SHORTAGE

With thousands of open jobs in the Fargo-Moorhead region and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, attracting talent often tops (or nearly tops) the list of challenges for regional companies. Simply put, the region doesn't have enough people to fill the available jobs. The lack of talent also becomes a barrier to growth for companies. For example, if a company doesn't have enough people to get the current workload done, the company can't take on additional work.

And the challenge is expected to get worse in the next decade. According to Lightcast, a leading labor market analytics firm, we are facing an upcoming acceleration of retirements, with fewer workers expected to enter the labor market. That along with other factors, highlights a critical need that will continue to grow.

"It's actually a global trend where there are fewer and fewer people to do critical work across industries like manufacturing, construction, skilled trades, and healthcare. Our research shows the U.S. is going to see an estimated shortage of 6.2 million workers by 2032," said Josh Wright, Head of Growth, Lightcast.

In addition to the increasing labor shortage, in Fargo-Moorhead, misperceptions of our region offer an additional challenge to recruitment. Often candidates are surprised at the amenities they can find here, including things like proximity to the many lakes in Minnesota, outdoor activities, or great restaurants.

"Attracting talent to our region is not always easy given the common views on weather, activities, and general stereotypes. Thankfully, the GFMEDC has tools and resources that showcase our vibrant community that we can use to help inform prospective team members about the wealth of opportunities for them both professionally and personally," said Andy Luikens, Lead Recruiting Program Manager, RDO Equipment Co.

RESPONDING TO THE WORKFORCE CHALLENGE

In answer to the workforce challenges facing our region, the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation (GFMEDC) has been supporting companies with their talent attraction efforts for more than 20 years.

Starting in 2023, thanks to a series of grants from the State of North Dakota, the GFMEDC launched a series of targeted talent attraction marketing campaigns. The organization has been showcasing the unique opportunities and quality of life in the Fargo-Moorhead region to individuals living in regions across the country where the data shows there is a surplus of candidates who could make more money by moving here (based on the differences in wages and cost of living).

The campaign goals are to change perceptions and attract talent to the region. By leveraging compelling storytelling, strategic digital marketing, and personalized engagement, the campaigns have been effectively highlighting the region's strong job market, vibrant community, and amenities. Along with changing perceptions, the campaign aims to make it easier for companies trying to attract talent to the region. The campaigns running through the GFMEDC can help educate those potential candidates about what the region offers, therefore supporting regional companies when they market their jobs.

CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE, GAINING ATTENTION

Overall, the campaigns have garnered 24 million impressions (exposures to ads), more than 135,000 users to the Live in FM Area website, and a database of 20K individuals who are interested in learning more about the region. The campaigns support brand building as the organization tells our region's story and works alongside regional companies to recruit talent to the region.

The results demonstrate that the campaigns have cut through the noise, connecting with the right audience. Fargo-Moorhead's appeal resonates with people in targeted markets, especially when showcasing the strong job opportunities and quality of life available in the region.

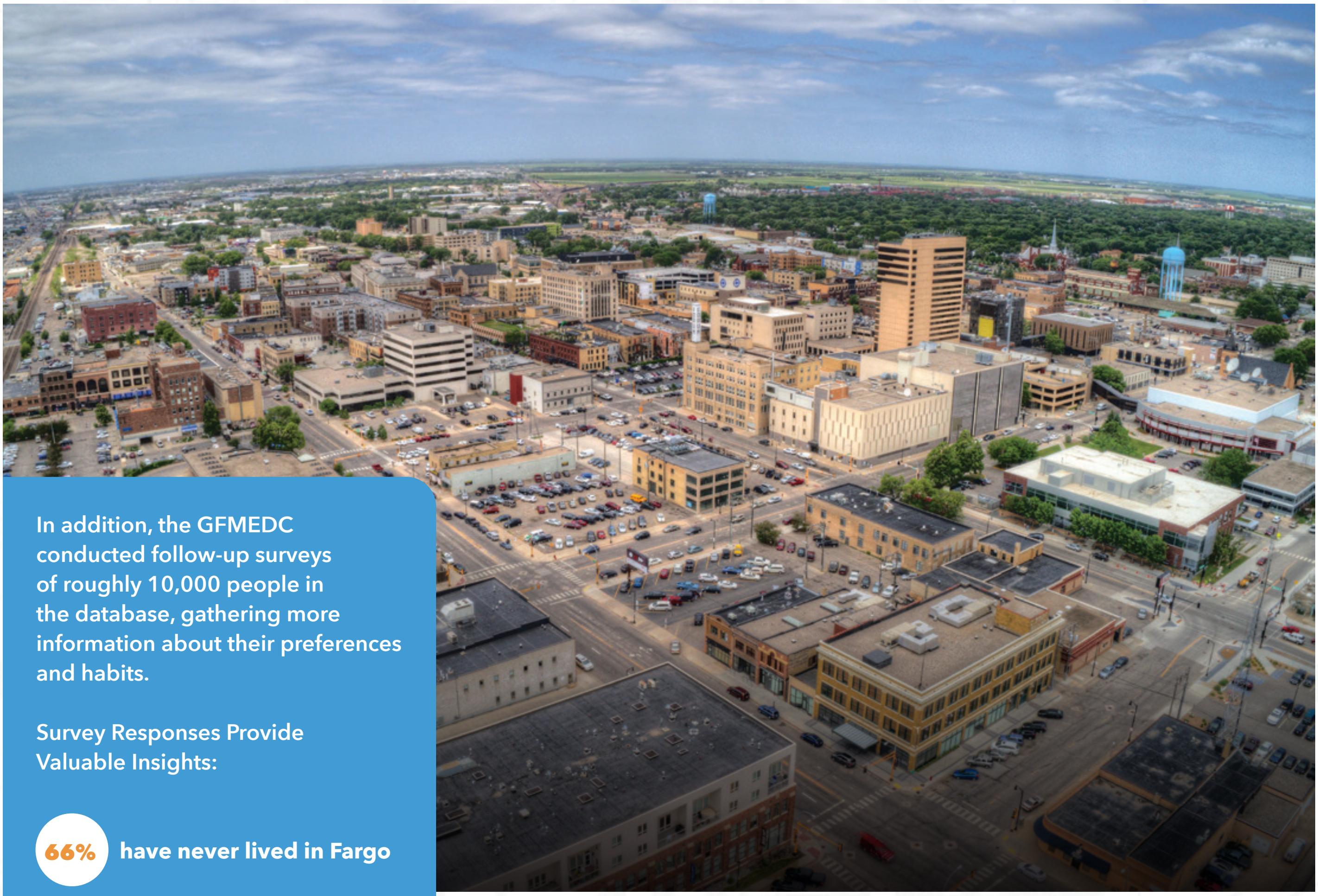
One of the campaigns garnered a lot of attention by offering two separate "FM Weekend Getaway" prize packages that provided a weekend of fun in Fargo-Moorhead.

The campaign, focused on attracting alumni back to the region, pulled in close to 20,000 visitors who signed up for a chance to win one of the prize packages.

"What an amazing giveaway- my husband and I are so excited to go back to Fargo for a weekend and visit all of our favorite spots from college together this summer. We graduated in 2020, so visiting the new Brewhalla will be our first stop. Thank you!"

-Claire D., Minneapolis.

CONTINUED ►



In addition, the GFMEDC conducted follow-up surveys of roughly 10,000 people in the database, gathering more information about their preferences and habits.

Survey Responses Provide Valuable Insights:

- **66%** have never lived in Fargo
- **58%** have some tie to the FM Region, either family, friends or both
- **83%** are either likely to consider moving to a different city or are already thinking about it

The top three features that would motivate respondents when considering relocation were:

- **74%** Quality of life
- **69%** Lower cost of living
- **67%** Job opportunities

The information will inform future campaigns and any communications.

"We're incredibly grateful for the chance to return to our hometown. This means more than just a trip—it's a journey back to our roots, our memories, our friends, our family, and the place that shaped who we are. Thank you for making this homecoming possible!"

- Kia L., Texas.

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

As the fight for talent intensifies, communities that can align to build a more attractive and engaging community and collaborate on efforts to attract, develop, and retain talent will be better positioned to win the talent war.

Evidence of collaboration is peppered across the Fargo-Moorhead region. The region boasts a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, solid education industry partnerships, and many engaging events that foster a stronger sense of community and belonging. Organizations and businesses are continuously partnering on events and programs that enhance the community. A great example is Folkways, an organization dedicated to creating experiences that support a stronger culture and increased belonging. Folkways regularly organizes and hosts events like the Red River Market and the Night Bazaar.

"Strong communities attract and keep great people. In Fargo-Moorhead, that's exactly what sets us apart. People are often surprised by the deep sense of connection here, thanks to a culture of collaboration and a network of partners working together to help everyone feel at home," said Tifanie Gelinske, Sr. VP Workforce Development, GFMEDC.

No better proof of that than a recent ranking by WalletHub which ranked Fargo as the number two least stressed city in the country. The study analyzed 182 cities based on stress factors like work, finances, family life, and health/safety, and Fargo stood out with one of the lowest overall stress scores in the nation.

While the region boasts many examples of collaboration, continued focus on enhancing the region to attract and retain talent will solidify long-term success.

"Alignment is so critical here, alignment around partners, alignment around key data to understand what the most in-demand roles are that we need to fill. You have a huge opportunity for this region to vault forward. If we look back to this moment in five ten years, you have an opportunity to say we went on a whole new trajectory; we're growing, we have a lot of opportunity and we seized that opportunity and really, really took this region out to a whole new level," said Josh Wright, Head of Growth, Lightcast.

As the increased labor shortages demand more innovative solutions from communities across the nation, the strength of the FM Region's collaborations and its ability to creatively solve the workforce challenges facing companies will mean success or failure as we face this looming crisis.

MIDWEST SUMMITS

Economic Outlook
(Quarter 1)

Matthew Finn, Chief Economist at I834, a division of Old National Bank, shares a positive outlook for North Dakota's economy while acknowledging concerns over potential state and national policy changes. February 2025.

Agriculture
(Quarter 2)

Josh Gackle, American Soybean Association and Krista Swanson, National Corn Growers Association, share their perspectives on the challenges within their industries and the importance of educational partnerships in supporting agriculture. June 2024.

Technology
(Quarter 3)

Richard Mendoza, Google, provides practical advice on navigating the resks associated with emerging technologies and how businesses can enhance their security posture.

Energy
(Quarter 4)

Tony Clark, Executive Director of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, provides insights into the future of electricity pricing and grid fortification. November 2024.

Each Midwest Summit features a keynote address, "Industry Insight" talks and presentations, and panel conversations with regional and national leaders and experts. Audience members also have the opportunity to engage with speakers throughout the morning by submitting questions directly to the speakers and moderators.

The Midwest Summit series is led by the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber and co-hosted by 32 chambers and associations across five states. Each co-hosting organization shares the Midwest Summit content and livestream to their communities and membership bases, all at no cost to the viewers.

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FROM INSTINCT TO INSIGHT:

HOW SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS CAN MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

By Del Carver
SCORE Mentor

The average adult makes between 33,000 and 35,000 decisions each day—what to eat, wear, say, and how to say it. Most of these happen automatically, driven by subconscious cues we've developed over time. In fact, Harvard professor Gerald Zaltman suggests that 95% of our thinking happens below the surface. It has to—our brains would short-circuit otherwise.

But for small business owners, the number of decisions is even higher—and the stakes are greater. From hiring to pricing, inventory to marketing, every choice can move your business forward or set it back. Unlike corporate leaders surrounded by analysts and advisors, small business owners make high-impact decisions daily with limited time, resources, and structure. And they feel the consequences up close—good or bad.

Unlike large companies with departments and safety nets, small business owners are the chief decision-makers, risk-takers, and problem-solvers, all in one. Every day brings a cascade of questions: Should I hire now or wait? Should I raise prices or risk losing customers? Should I expand into a new market or focus on what's working?

Decision fatigue is real and so is the cost of hesitation—or impulsiveness. So how can small business owners consistently make better choices?

USE PROVEN DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks help you sort through what matters most and avoid decision overload:

80/20 RULE

Focus on the 20% of decisions that generate 80% of your results. Not everything deserves equal attention. A small café owner might realize that 80% of sales come from just 20% of the menu items. Focusing marketing efforts and inventory planning around those top sellers leads to smarter resource allocation.

EISENHOWER MATRIX

Is it urgent or important? Urgent tasks scream for your attention, but important tasks drive long-term results.

Urgent + Important → Do first (customer crises, deadlines)

Important + Not Urgent → Schedule it (planning, training)

Urgent + Not Important → Delegate it (routine emails, meeting setups)

Neither → Eliminate (social media scrolling, redundant reports)

Frameworks help you sort through what matters most and avoid decision overload:

OPPORTUNITY COST THINKING

Every "yes" is also a "no" to something else. Be aware of what you're giving up when you commit. Saying "yes" to a new product launch might mean saying "no" to investing in employee development or a website redesign. Thinking in tradeoffs can help clarify priorities.

AVOID COMMON TRAPS

Even with solid frameworks, decision traps can creep in unnoticed.

- **Paralysis by Analysis** - Waiting for perfect information often leads to missed opportunities. Aim for just enough clarity to act with confidence. A retailer who spends months researching software options may miss a limited-time discount or a seasonal sales spike that justified acting sooner.
- **Confirmation Bias** - Don't just seek information that proves you right. Invite alternative views—even if they're uncomfortable. Ask a peer or mentor: "What am I not seeing?"
- **Sunk Cost Fallacy** - Throwing more time or money into something that's not working just because you've already invested? Let it go.

Whether it's an ad campaign or a contractor relationship, sometimes the best decision is to walk away. Remember Albert Einstein's famous quote, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

TOOLS TO SUPPORT SMARTER DECISIONS

- **SWOT Analysis:** Use it to quickly evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Before launching a new service line, a simple SWOT can reveal internal blind spots or market gaps..
- **Scenario Planning:** Ask, "What if it goes better than expected? What if it doesn't? What's my backup plan?" This encourages proactive thinking.
- **Pause Button:** When possible, give yourself a 24-hour window for major decisions. A good night's sleep can bring clarity and detachment.

DECISION-MAKING UNDER PRESSURE

Some decisions can't wait. When the pressure's on, clarity matters even more. Here are quick tactics to avoid knee-jerk mistakes:

- Step away for five minutes. A short break resets your mind.
- Use a checklist to evaluate the decision quickly: What's the risk? What's the upside? Who's impacted?
- Ask yourself: "Will this matter a year from now?" Urgency can be exaggerated in the moment.

SET CRITERIA IN ADVANCE

Define your criteria before you're "in the moment." What does success look like? What's the budget? What ROI is acceptable? How will you measure impact? Setting these benchmarks ahead of time helps eliminate emotion-driven decisions and brings objectivity.

For example: before launching a social media campaign, a business owner might define a budget cap, a minimum ROI goal, a required engagement rate, and a deadline for evaluation. These criteria serve as guideposts if things start to veer off track.

ALWAYS EVALUATE AND LEARN FROM THE OUTCOME

Whether the outcome is a win or a hard lesson, take time to reflect. Use a simple debrief:

- **What worked?**
- **What didn't?**
- **What would I do differently next time?**
- **What did I learn about myself or my business?**

Keeping a short journal or document of these reflections builds a personal decision-making playbook you can refer back to.

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT DECISION-MAKING

Myth: "Fast decisions are always better."
Truth: Speed is helpful, but not at the expense of clarity.

Myth: "Good leaders never doubt themselves."
Truth: Confidence is key, but thoughtful leaders question their assumptions.

Myth: "More data = better decisions."
Truth: Data is helpful, but too much can paralyze. Seek insight, not overload.

ADAPTABILITY IS A SUPERPOWER

Even experienced decision-makers get it wrong. The key is how quickly you recognize a misstep and adjust. Success isn't about never making mistakes—it's about responding to them with clarity and courage.

During the pandemic, many small businesses adapted quickly pivoting to curbside pickup, launching e-commerce, or shifting service models overnight. These weren't perfect decisions, they were brave, timely ones made under pressure.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Before You Decide, Ask Yourself...

- **Does this align with my long-term goals?**
- **What am I saying "no" to by saying "yes" to this?**
- **Have I gotten input from someone I trust?**
- **What's the worst-case scenario, and can I live with it?**
- **What will success look like?**

The best small business owners don't wait for perfect information. They build systems to make thoughtful decisions and surround themselves with trusted advisors. With practice, patience, and perspective, better decision-making becomes second nature—and a real competitive advantage.

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From Service to Startups: Dakota Veterans Navigate Transition Assistance and Mentorship Programs to Launch Small Businesses

By Michael Danielson, Veterans Business Outreach Specialist

Photo Courtesy of VBOC of the Dakotas

About the VBOC

The Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) program is designed to provide entrepreneurial development services such as business training, counseling, and resource partner referrals to transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and military spouses interested in starting or growing a small business. U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has 22 organizations participating in this cooperative agreement and serving as VBOCs.

IN the expansive plains and growing communities of North and South Dakota, a quiet but powerful transformation is underway. Across small towns, rural counties, and urban centers like Fargo, Bismarck, Sioux Falls, and Rapid City, military veterans are turning their skills, discipline, and leadership into entrepreneurial ventures. With the help of mentorship and transition assistance programs, especially those led by the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) of the Dakotas, these current

Michael Danielson. *Veterans Business Outreach Specialist*

and former service members are building small businesses that not only support their families but also strengthen the regional economy.

The journey from uniform to business owner often begins through the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which is designed to help active-duty personnel and recently separated veterans adjust to civilian life. Within this program, an increasingly popular option is entrepreneurship. Specifically, the Boots to Business (B2B) and Boots to Business Reboot (B2B Reboot) modules provide introductory training to military members, veterans, and their spouses on starting and growing a business. These two-day workshops are held regularly at military installations across the Dakotas, including Grand Forks Air Force Base, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and Minot Air Force Base. For those not located near a base, B2B Reboot provides the same core curriculum in off-base settings, making entrepreneurship training accessible to veterans in even the most rural regions.

Following this initial training, veterans can enroll in the B2B Revenue Readiness course, a more in-depth six-week virtual program that delves into the practical details of launching a business, from marketing and sales strategies to finance and operations. What sets these programs apart isn't just the content, they also provide personalized connections to seasoned business mentors who guide veterans through the startup process and well beyond.

At the heart of these efforts in North and South Dakota is the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) of the Dakotas. Based at the University of North Dakota's Center for Innovation in Grand Forks, the VBOC is funded through the SBA and staffed by a team of advisors who specialize in helping military-connected entrepreneurs. The VBOC offers free services that range from business plan development to market research, financial forecasting, branding, and navigating state or federal regulations. Importantly, the center also connects veterans to an extensive resource network, including the North and South Dakota Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), local SCORE chapters, Women's Business Centers, and APEX Accelerators.

These partnerships ensure that veterans are not only advised but actively mentored through every phase of business creation. SCORE, for example, offers free one-on-one mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs and retired executives. SBDCs provide more hands-on business development assistance and technical help. Women veterans, who are among the fastest-growing groups of veteran entrepreneurs, can access additional support through Women's Business Centers that specialize in addressing gender-specific challenges in entrepreneurship. For veterans looking to expand into government contracting, APEX Accelerators help entrepreneurs with no-cost guidance and support services, helping businesses succeed in the government marketplace. VBOC, SBDC, and APEX Accelerator advisors provide guidance on certifications such as Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) status, which can unlock access to set-aside contracts through the Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies. Programs like the SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program and Veteran Federal Procurement Entrepreneurship Training offer veterans the opportunity to scale their businesses with government clients in mind.

Veterans across the Dakotas are leveraging their military expertise in fields like contracting, hospitality, food service, auto and motorcycle repair, photography, cybersecurity, logistics, and drone technology. One National Guard member from Bismarck who had worked in cybersecurity during his deployments used his skills to start a consulting firm focused on helping local governments and small businesses secure their networks. He took advantage of the Revenue Readiness course, SBA-provided mentorship, and VBOC counseling to identify clients, pursue SDVOSB certification, and eventually secure government contracts. His firm now serves several county agencies and is exploring federal contracts through GSA schedules.

National entrepreneurship programs also complement local efforts. Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) hosts Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE), which provides women veterans with in-depth business education, leadership development, and mentoring. Though based in New York, the program is open to veterans nationwide, including those in the Dakotas who attend virtually or via regional hubs. Other programs like PuroVet, a franchising initiative backed by restoration company PuroClean, specifically aim to lower the barrier to entry for veterans interested in franchise ownership by offering fee discounts, business coaching, and mentorship by fellow veteran franchisees.

Financial access is another critical component of this ecosystem. Veterans launching small businesses often require startup capital, which can be hard to come by in rural communities. VBOC advisors help entrepreneurs navigate SBA-backed loan programs such as the 7(a) loan, 504 CDC loans for real estate and equipment, and microloan programs for working capital or inventory. Specialized options like the Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan (MREIDL) are also available for business owners whose operations are disrupted by Reserve or National Guard deployments.

Veterans in the Dakotas face unique challenges due to geography and population density. In rural areas, access to customers, broadband internet, and financing options can be limited. Seasonal business cycles, such as those in agriculture and tourism, also present hurdles. But this is precisely where the VBOC and its Small Business Administration partners shine.

They help veterans connect with local chambers of commerce, state economic development offices, and rural grant opportunities from the USDA. Advisors provide training on social media marketing, web presence, and e-commerce to help rural businesses expand their reach beyond immediate communities.

The results are increasingly visible. The SBA notes that veterans are about 45 percent more likely to start businesses than their civilian peers, and the VBOC of the Dakotas is seeing this trend reflected in its own programs. Each year, hundreds of veterans across the two states attend workshops, receive coaching, and participate in follow-up advising. Class sizes are growing, and requests for one-on-one counseling are on the rise.

For many veterans, the most valuable part of the transition to entrepreneurship is the mentorship. It's not just about writing a business plan, it's about having someone to call when a deal is on the line, a shipment is delayed, or a permit is held up. Mentors like those at SCORE or VBOC not only provide technical advice but also act as sounding boards and accountability partners. Some veterans, having successfully launched businesses, return to mentor others, creating a growing network of veteran entrepreneurs supporting one another.

What's happening in North and South Dakota is part of a national movement, but with a distinctly local character. Here, veterans bring the same commitment they gave their country to their communities. Whether they're opening a tech firm, running a construction company, or roasting coffee beans in a converted barn, they're proving that military service is not the end of leadership, it's the beginning of a new kind of mission.

In transforming their skills into sustainable, locally rooted businesses, Dakota veterans are not just launching companies, they're building legacies. Through the combined efforts of federal programs, state partnerships, community mentors, and tireless personal effort, they're turning the concept of "supporting our troops" into something more lasting: empowering them to lead the next generation of rural American enterprise.

VBOC of the Dakotas

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By **Mark Puppe**, Communications Specialist, Wordwork

Hillary Ehlen

CLEANUP WEEK: A TREASURE HUNT FOR EVERYONE.

IF anything proves that one person's trash is another person's treasure, it's Cleanup Week: the annual streetside something-for-nothing shopping extravaganza. Some people block traffic to dig through the piles, and others slow down to take a look. It's everyone's chance to get something for free.

If you want to deter people during Cleanup Week, piles of construction debris or buckets of toilet water should do the trick. However, some people do have the business intuition, scientific expertise, and entrepreneurial spirit for recognizing such waste as assets.

It's o.k. to not see value in waste, but everyone benefits from those who do. They drive an underestimated yet essential, universally relevant, and highly impactful enterprise: waste collection, disposal, and reuse.

SOLID WASTE: TAKE IT DO THE CURB? SOME TAKE IT TO THE BANK

Joel O'Neil owns a West Fargo-based waste disposal business, J-I Excavating & Roll-Off.

"Waste is part of everyday life and business," O'Neil said. "Modern practices have reduced the quantity and diversified the type of waste that is produced and, as a result, prompted businesses to use multiple streams of products that can be recycled and reduce the amount of trash going into the landfill."

"I viewed the roll-off (dumpster) business as a complementary service line to an excavating business. I started J-I as one I could grow while working for a large construction company," O'Neil said. "The business has grown, so I am now dedicated to it and my customers full-time."

J-I Excavating & Roll-Off serves a wide range of clients, and one is exceptionally distinct: Fargo National Cemetery. Waste disposal at a cemetery seems paradoxical. However, cemeteries do create waste such as the dirt excavated when digging graves, trash, and damage from ceremonies and continuous unscheduled activity.

To maintain the cemetery operations and ambience, waste disposal businesses must deliver highly attentive, respectful, adaptable, and flexible service.

I'll wager that few people consider those attributes when describing a waste disposal business. So, it was enlightening for me to attend the Fargo National Cemetery Memorial Day ceremony and hear a VA National Cemetery Administration representative thank, from the podium, J-I Excavating & Roll-Off for demonstrating in its service to the cemetery.

David Reid owns Radiant Creative Homes. He says the construction

ABOUT MARK PUPPE

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industry relies on waste disposal businesses year-round and that the services are essential to projects from start to finish.

"Debris and waste disposal services are vital to the construction industry and are services that a lot of contractors cannot provide themselves," Reid said. "Proper disposal keeps our job sites organized, clean, safe, and running efficiently."

Electricians, plumbers, and other trade professionals are also essential to the construction industry and typically work on-site until their respective tasks are complete. However, waste removal businesses support the same projects on and off-site and in more ways than driving trucks and moving dumpsters.

"They know what debris landfills will accept, reject, or redirect and have an in-depth understanding of the standards applied," Reid said. "This helps prevent overloading, mixing prohibited and permissible materials, and other issues that create preventable costs and undermine sustainable practices."

Although city waste departments maintain landfill operations and protocols, many also provide disposal services and resources directly to residents, and I'm glad they do.

When water wrecked my basement, it needed renovation, and I started doing the demo myself.

However, that black plastic container with a flip lid beside the garage was too small, and local waste disposal businesses didn't have any dumpsters available (construction contractors had rented them all). So, I called the Fargo City Solid Waste Department for advice.

"We have upwards of 45 scheduled weekly stops, but do have containers available for any call-ins for temporary or non-scheduled containers," Assistant Roll-Off Supervisor Roy Fick said. "These dumpsters are placed when a resident or local business calls our office and needs one for various projects."

Joel O'Neil, J-I Excavating & Roll-Off provided by Mark Puppe

"I'll take one!" I gleefully replied.

That day, Fick delivered a 20-yard roll-off dumpster to my house and positioned it right where I needed it. A few days later, it was full, the city hauled it away, and basement resurrection could move forward.

WASTEWATER: DOWN THE DRAIN? IT DEPENDS

The Regional Water Reclamation Facility (RWRF)—the campus of domes with a distinct, but tolerable aroma at the north end of Fargo—stimulates economic and environmental returns by functioning as much more than a wastewater collection and treatment facility.

"Historically, wastewater was just treated and then discharged into the Red River, but technology and strategic planning have enabled us to transform wastewater into a revenue resource for RWRF operations and the city of Fargo," said facility director Jim Hausauer.

Further, sending any water into the sewer system serving Fargo and neighboring Cass County communities improves water quality and facilitates economic growth across the board.

Government projects are often one-and-done isolated costs, whereas RWRF business partnerships are initiative-taking and long-term, and the water treatment processes are gainful and self-sustaining.

RWRF operations and its end product, reusable wastewater, require business partnerships and niche expertise. These are not one-and-done business relationships; they are ongoing and gainful for the businesses, water consumers, and, uniquely, the city.

Treating water at the RWRF also improves efficiency by ensuring that drinking water is not used for industrial purposes. The Fargo City Water Department operates a separate plant dedicated exclusively to drinking water.

RWRF's reclamation processes were cutting-edge when the facility took off during 2007 and partners such as PKG Contracting, JDP Electric, Moore Engineering, Apex Engineering, Advanced Engineering, and multiple

state agencies have been key to RWRF's evolution. In 2025, RWRF is a template for water treatment centers nationwide.

PKG Contacting focuses on enhancing water quality throughout the region and facilitating community access to reliable and sustainable water treatment solutions. During the past 30 years, it has constructed over 350 projects in the upper Midwest.

"Water reclamation is important because it helps reduce the strain and demand on natural freshwater, such as the Red River. In Fargo's case, the reclaimed wastewater is used as a primary source of water for the soybean and ethanol plants located in Casselton," PKG President and Owner Darin Pfingsten said. "Use of this effluent for industrial purposes also reduces the amount of wastewater discharged into the Red River, which helps decrease pollution and protect aquatic life."

Hauser explained that all water received by RWRF undergoes mechanical processing to remove sand, grit, rocks, rags, and other materials. Then, there are biological processes that reduce the strength of the wastewater to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, biochemical oxygen demand (strength of waste), total suspended solids, and ammonia, and other filtrations. There is also a disinfection process before discharge to the Red River.

Neither the city nor any of its partners has discretionary authority to determine the criteria for recycling wastewater or discharging water into the Red River.

Instead, the RWRF maintains a discharge permit issued by the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality, which sets and enforces testing and discharge parameters.

Additionally, the North Dakota Water Commission conducted an intense study to ensure that diverting water from the Red River would not harm downstream users (those north of Fargo, because the Red River flows north).

Continuous development of the RWRF campus and its operations has impacted the local economy through diversification and sustenance. RWRF business partners are North Dakota-based, so they have a multifaceted interest in the community as well as creating and executing strategies that maximize RWRF capacity and future projects.

"New improvement projects create jobs and opportunities for local businesses. Engineers, workforce, supply vendors, and added staff for operations are examples," Pfingsten said, and he would know. His business, PKG Contracting, employs over 200 people.

If you travel around the F-M Metro, you will not go far without seeing a JDP Electric vehicle because the business employs nearly 100 people to provide essential electrical services to commercial, residential, and industrial customers across the area.

On the other hand, as a business, JDP sees unbridled value in how recycling water prevents problems and opens doors of opportunity for the community.

"If the community were ever to go into a drought situation and forced to ration water, the community would definitely question industrial plants on their water usage," JDP Project Manager David Thingvold said.

"However, by recycling wastewater and using it for industrial purposes, you are not drawing the water away from the community," Thingvold said. "This makes the Cass County watershed less vulnerable to overconsumption by the many provided by Mark Puppe

industrial plants operating here. It also makes it attractive to industry to set up home in the community."

Tharaldson Ethanol and North Dakota Soybean Processors both have industrial facilities in Casselton and depend on RWRF to provide the water required to operate.

"During construction of these projects, we have been fortunate to have been involved in many local water reclamation projects," Thingvold said. "By having reliable water in Cass County, it has attracted valuable industrial partners who employ those who work at these plants."

Tharaldson Ethanol employs over 80 people and is among the largest ethanol manufacturing facilities in the United States. It also purchases immense amounts of recycled wastewater from RWRF and is, according to COO Ryan Carter, a happy customer.

Carter appreciates how the higher quality water provided by RWRF reduces maintenance costs, improves efficiency, and allows the plant to produce a higher quality product for its own customers.

The plant purchases treated wastewater from RWRF, uses it, sends the used wastewater to RWRF through a pipeline for treatment, and purchases the treated water from RWRF for reuse. These sales generate new nontax revenue that will perpetuate for as long as the plant purchases the water it needs to operate from RWRF.

Although revenue amounts vary and government entities do not exist to profit, the revenue that does result goes into an RWRF revenue fund, with a percentage going into the city's general fund. So, everyone benefits, directly and indirectly, because the returns result from self-sustaining operations that make wastewater an asset that isn't sitting idle or simply discharged into the Red River.

"The city benefits in many ways from the improvement and reclamation projects," Pfingsten said. "Treating and reusing wastewater decreases the amount of polluted water entering the Red River, creating a more resilient environment."

Everyone can be grateful "JDP is very fortunate to be able to partner with the city of Fargo and industrial plants in the conservation of water in the Red River Valley," Thingvold said.

In the big picture, everyone can consider themselves fortunate to benefit from solid waste and wastewater enterprises that seem unknown to most.

Once a year, Cleanup Week reveals to everyone that waste can have substantial value. It's my goal to highlight how waste disposal businesses, water reclamation facilities, and their partners stimulate and sustain economic activity nonstop.

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TIPS AND TRICKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL DISPLAY

BY WENDY KLUG
DEPUTY DISTRICT DIRECTOR, NORTH DAKOTA SBA

Street fairs, community events, and festivals, oh my! It's that time of year again when we can all get outside and enjoy the beautiful summer weather and the many outdoor events that pop up! As a small business owner, this may be an opportunity to explore a new market, offering a unique chance to connect directly with customers, build brand recognition, and make sales. Are you a small business owner on the verge of deciding whether to market your product or service at one of these events? Are you trying to determine if local farmers' markets, art festivals, or community events would be a good place to gain exposure for your business? If so, continue reading as we discuss how to identify your customers, choose the best events for your business, and learn tips and tricks for setting up a display that will attract customers and drive sales.

IDENTIFYING YOUR CUSTOMERS

Before you can analyze if an event is a good fit for your product or service, you first need to know who your key audience is. From defining your product's unique selling point to researching your competitors and analyzing demographic and psychographic data, many factors contribute to a well-executed market and competitive analysis. You need to understand your customers' needs, desires, and shopping habits! While it would be great to discuss how to complete this step, that would require an entire article itself! (Good news: if you do want to complete this step, you can always work with an SBA resource partner for a no-cost, in-depth market analysis!)

WHAT MARKET IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Before signing up for countless events, ask yourself this: "Does my product or service fit this event's overarching theme?" As a business owner, you need to analyze the event to better understand how your business may benefit from it. Before signing up for an event just because the registration is cheap or even free, you need to consider these market fit questions:

- **Does my product or service align with the event's overall theme and typical offerings?**
- **Who is the event's target audience, and does it align with my ideal customers?**
- **Is there sufficient demand for my product/service at this market?**
- **Am I looking for an opportunity to build brand awareness, or am I solely looking to sell products and turn a profit at this event?**

Next, ask yourself these logistical and operational questions:

- **What are the registration fees and other miscellaneous costs? From booth rental to hotel costs, it can get expensive quickly. Total all your expenses and ask, "Is this event worth my investment?" If you are looking to turn a profit, how much do you need to sell just to break even?**
- **What are the setup and teardown requirements, and how long will I need to staff the booth at this event? How far do you have to travel to get to the event?**
- **Is the event inside or outside? Outdoor displays will need to withstand the weather, while indoor booths will have more flexibility for tall standing displays. If the event is canceled due to weather, will they refund your registration fee or reschedule the event?**
- **What has the foot traffic been like in the past? Are there any other events in the area that may detract from this one?**

You're ready to take the leap and have identified a couple of events where you'd like to showcase your business. What do you do next? Whether you're a budding artist, a gourmet food producer, or a local nonprofit organization, creating your display is both an art and a science. A well-executed display not only showcases your business but also enhances the overall customer experience, leading to increased sales and brand recognition.

Here are some tips and tricks for setting up a successful booth:

PRODUCT DISPLAY

Your display should tell a story, guiding the customer through your product offerings in a logical and appealing way. A well-executed booth draws customers in!

- **Highlight Key Products:** Identify your best-sellers, new arrivals, and high-margin items. These should be prominently featured at eye level and in easily accessible locations. Is there an overall theme to this specific event that coincides with a product you sell? If so, highlight it!

- **Demonstration:** If possible, show how the product is made! From stating that the ice cream is made with fresh milk from a dairy farm to having a television display showing the actual printing of a 3D light, customers like to see the process. Showing a product in action through demos, videos, or real-life examples allows customers to grasp its function quickly and easily. Visual representations often communicate information more effectively than extensive explanations. Stories and relatable examples resonate more deeply with customers, creating an emotional connection that facilitates purchasing decisions.

- **Identify Product Functionality:** Don't just assume a customer knows what the product is used for. Our brains have a limited capacity to process information. By focusing on what a product does, you can reduce the mental effort required for customers to understand its value. Show examples, stories, or instructions to make it easier for the customer to visualize how they need your product or service. If you are selling a food product, offer a sample! If you are selling a handmade flowerpot, put a bouquet of flowers in it to show how nice it will look filled. The easier you can make it for a customer to experience rather than think, the better. Props, tutorials, and examples are always a great way to do this!

- **Categorize and Group:** Organize products logically and strategically. Create easy and intuitive browsing by organizing products logically, such as by type, function, or theme, which creates a streamlined shopping experience like a well-organized store. Grouping items in odd numbers (especially three) creates a more aesthetically pleasing and balanced look than even numbers. Clear categorization helps customers explore different product lines and potentially find items they didn't initially know they needed.

- **Create Visual Flow:** In a busy market, you have 3-5 seconds to capture someone's attention. Strong visual flow, achieved through brand-identifying graphics, strategic color palettes to set a mood, and clear focal points, acts as a magnet. If your booth is visually confusing or cluttered, customers will skip right over you. Design the display to draw the customer's eye from one product to the next. Use varying heights, depths, and angles to create visual interest and prevent monotony.

- **Traffic Flow:** Take a walk through your booth and see if you can navigate it without any obstacles. Imagine there are ten people in it; could you still walk through it? Good traffic flow ensures that visitors can easily enter, move through, and exit your stand without feeling crowded or overwhelmed. This ensures that visitors are greeted, engaged, and directed appropriately.

- **Bundle and Cross-Merchandise:** Suggest complementary products. If you sell coffee makers, display coffee beans, mugs, and stirrers alongside them. This not only increases average transaction value but also helps customers envision how products work together.

SIGNAGE

Signage is your silent salesperson. Your booth is your storefront. Invest in a professional, eye-catching display. Think about your branding—colors, logo, and overall aesthetic. Use attractive signage that clearly states your business name and what you offer. Make sure your booth displays the purpose of your product. It provides vital information and helps persuade customers to make a purchase.

- **Logo Placement:** Don't just have your logo on your table cover because most likely people visiting your booth can't see it due to customers blocking it. Make sure you have your logo and signage in several different places and at different eye levels so people can see it from different angles and distances. Also, be sure to include your social media handles so someone can follow your page right then.

- **Brand Story:** Use signage to tell your brand's story, highlight your values, or explain your unique selling propositions. Don't just assume that the customer knows what your product is for or how it will better their life. Customers are not necessarily experts on your product or its underlying use. Expecting them to understand the complex "why" behind your product can be counterproductive. When talking to them about your product, think about "What's in it for them!" Why would it better their life or make their life easier? This is the hook to get them interested. Once you have done so, if they want to know more about the intricacies of "how the product is made" or "how the business got started," this is the time to go into that detail.

- **QR Codes/Digital Integration:** They provide a convenient way for attendees to access digital content, such as product brochures, demos, or event schedules, without needing physical materials. QR codes also enable exhibitors to collect attendee information easily, track interactions, and extend engagement beyond the booth. When posting a QR code, make sure you identify "why" customers should scan it. Simply putting up a QR code with no description can make customers wary of scanning it. If you have a QR code that directs people to your webpage for more information, note next to the QR code, "Visit my website at:". Remember, the easier you can make it for them, the better.

PRICING

Clearly display your prices. No one likes to ask how much something is. If it doesn't have a price on it, chances are they will just walk away. Use clear, easy-to-read price tags. If possible, offer a mix of price points to attract different customers. You also need to ensure you allow customers to pay by offering a multitude of payment options. In today's cashless society, having a Square reader, PayPal, or other mobile payment systems is essential. Don't miss out on sales because you can only accept cash or check.

STAFFING

Your team is your greatest asset. Staff your booth with friendly, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable individuals who are passionate about your business. A welcoming smile and a genuine conversation are more attractive than a fancy display. Train your staff to answer questions, make recommendations, and engage with customers in a positive way. When customers are walking by, stand up and be available to answer questions. If you are interested in selling your product or service and show interest in doing so, why would you expect potential customers to do the same? Make sure staff are there to assist customers from the beginning to the end.

FOLLOW-UP

Don't let valuable leads walk away. Have a sign-up sheet for your email list to inform customers about future events, new products, or special offers. Offer a small incentive for signing up, like a discount on their next purchase. Encourage social media follows by prominently displaying your handles. This extends the customer relationship beyond the immediate transaction. When someone makes a purchase, be sure to include a business card or marketing material in their bag so they can contact you for more information. Even a QR code attached to every price tag would allow them to easily find your business again.

MAINTAIN AND ADAPT CONSTANTLY

Displays cannot be a set-it-and-forget-it type of situation. They require ongoing attention and evolution. If your booth display remains static, it looks outdated and can result in losing customers before they even walk over to check out your business. Once you have set up a booth display, take some time to think about what worked and what didn't. Write down suggestions you may have for moving items or creating better traffic flow. Was there something that worked extremely well? Document it so you can remember for next time. A journal or spreadsheet with this information can be a great way to keep a running document for reference at the next event. The marketplace is constantly evolving.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all booth setup that will work best for every business. And what works at one market may not be the best setup for the next booth display. While these are some suggestions, you may find ten other items that are just as important to track and keep on top of. In today's competitive marketplace, a business display is more than just a place to put products. It's a powerful marketing tool and a critical touchpoint for customer engagement. By strategically implementing these strategies, your business booth will transform into a powerful marketing asset that resonates with your customers, drives sales, and solidifies your brand's presence in the market.

BY LIAM S. WAUGH

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WRONGED?

The Law Has a Remedy

IN situations when someone doesn't follow through on their promise, they harm your property, or they simply take what doesn't belong to them, you may be wondering, 'What can I do about this?' The good news is the law offers remedies, and they're designed to make things right.

WHAT ARE REMEDIES?

If you've suffered a harm or loss because of the unlawful actions (or omissions) of another, Courts use Remedies to ensure justice is served. Remedies aim to restore you to your original position (the position they would have been in had that harm not occurred), or by providing relief appropriate under the circumstances. Remedies generally fall into three categories:

- **Compensatory Remedies:** Usually money to compensate for a harm or loss.
- **Restitution:** Recovering money or property that someone unfairly gained at your expense.
- **Equitable Remedies:** A court order requiring someone to do (or stop doing) something specific, when money can't provide adequate compensation.

COMMON REMEDIES THAT MIGHT APPLY TO YOUR CASE

Whether the circumstances involve a contract, personal injury, or wrongfully taken property, there's likely a remedy that fits. Here are a few that apply:

1. COMPENSATORY DAMAGES

These are the most common and are meant to provide financial compensation for a loss. The loss might be financial, like property damage or medical bills, but it can also include pain and suffering or the loss of future employment opportunities. These include:

- **Property Damage:** Financial compensation for damage to physical property, like your home. This is typically calculated as the lesser of the fair market value at the time the property was damaged or the reasonable cost to repair.

- **Medical Bills, Loss of Wages and Future Earnings:** Financial compensation for past and future medical expenses that result from an injury, lost income from an inability to work, and reduced earning capacity if the injury impacts long-term employment potential.

- **Pain and Suffering:** Financial compensation for physical pain, emotional distress, and diminished quality of life caused by an injury, even if the losses don't have a specific dollar amount.

For example: If someone crashes into your car, you may be entitled to more than just the repair bill; you could potentially receive financial compensation for medical expenses, lost wages, or pain and suffering.

2. RESTITUTION FOR UNJUST ENRICHMENT

If someone stole your money, used your property, or breached a contract in a way that unfairly benefited them, you may be entitled to restitution. This means a court will order the person who unfairly benefited at your expense to return that benefit (or its value) to you.

- **Constructive Trust:** A court orders someone who unfairly holds a property interest to return that interest to the person it rightfully belongs to. This allows someone to recover their original property and any profits traceable from the property.

- **Equitable Lien:** When your money is used to improve someone else's property, and equity requires repayment, courts can place a lien on the property to secure your right to the proceeds if the property is sold.

- **Equitable Subrogation:** If you pay someone else's loan or debt to protect yourself (like paying off a mortgage to stop foreclosure on property you have a financial interest in), you can get the loan transferred to you. This gives you the same right the original lender had, making sure you're paid back and not unfairly penalized for stepping in to protect your interest.

For example: Someone misuses your money and remodels their home, you may be able to get an equitable lien on that home, which provides security against insolvency and enforceability in bankruptcy.

3. INJUNCTIONS

When money is an inadequate form of compensation, courts can order someone to do something (i.e. perform a contract) or stop doing something (i.e. stop trespassing). Injunctions mainly involve preventing actual irreparable harm.

- **Temporary Restraining Orders:** A court order meant to immediately stop harmful activity that is serious and imminent (emergencies) before a court can fully review the situation.

- **Preliminary Injunctions:** Pauses harmful activity during a case so the situation doesn't become worse or harder to fix before the court can decide who wins the case.

- **Permanent Injunctions:** Final court orders requiring someone to permanently do (or stop doing) something because money is an inadequate form of compensation.

For example: A company's CEO was just fired and threatens to immediately post the company's trade secrets online. Because trade secrets lose protection forever if they're posted online, the court may grant the company a temporary restraining order to stop the CEO from posting the trade secrets.

4. SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE

When someone breaches their contract and money cannot replace what will be lost, this is a type of injunction that orders a party to fulfill their contractual obligations. Courts may order someone to complete their contract involving special/unique property, like:

- **Sale of Real Estate**

- **Sale of Rare or One-of-a-Kind Items**

CONTINUED

For example: Under a contract you buy a rare item or piece of land, and the seller backs out, the court can order the seller to uphold their end of the contract because money cannot buy that exact rare item or piece of land.

5. RECISSION AND REFORMATION

When a contract should have never been entered into due to issues at the time it was made, courts can cancel (rescission) or rewrite (reformation) the contract to reflect what was fair and intended. Issues that may allow courts to rescind or reform a contract include:

- **Fraud or Misrepresentation**
- **Mistake**
- **Duress or Undue Influence**
- **Lack of Capacity**

For example: A seller lies that a painting is the original, and you buy it, but later find out it's not the original. Courts can cancel (rescind) the contract so you get your money back.

WHY LEGAL REMEDIES ARE COMPLICATED

Knowing what you're entitled to isn't always simple. For courts to award a remedy, first you have to prove you win the underlying case, then you need to show additional factors to support the remedy you're seeking, like:

- **Causation and foreseeability**
- **Certainty of loss**
- **Efforts to mitigate harm**
- **Whether equitable relief is possible or fair**
- **Balancing hardships**

IN CONCLUSION

Choosing the right remedy is critical and often complex, not only because it affects the outcome of your case, but because it shapes how your case is argued, determines what evidence you'll need, and can mean the difference between securing meaningful compensation or walking away with nothing. Whether you're seeking compensation, enforcement of a contract, or protection of your rights, it's important to have an experienced attorney who understands the specific remedies available in those areas of the law.

If you've been harmed and are seeking a remedy, please call us today at SW&L Attorneys.

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WOMEN YOU SHOULD KNOW

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Ladyboss LIFESTYLE

Amber Blomberg

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, CARING FOUNDATION

By Jordan Woods | *Provided by Jordan Woods*

Amber Blomberg, recently honored as a YWCA Woman of the Year, is emerging as a dynamic community leader. As Executive Director of Community Engagement and the Caring Foundation at Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota (BCBSND), Amber is redefining what it means to lead with purpose.

Raised in Starbuck, MN, Amber's roots are grounded in community. "In a town of 1,500, connection isn't optional—it's a way of life," she said. That early exposure to deep, personal relationships now fuels her mission to build healthier, more connected communities across North Dakota.

Amber's professional journey began in the fashion industry, but it was her passion for storytelling and human connection that ultimately led her to BCBSND. Starting in corporate communications, she quickly found herself drawn to the work of the Caring Foundation—a role she stepped into without prior nonprofit experience, but with an unshakable belief in her ability to learn and lead. "I didn't have all the answers," she said. "But I had the drive, the work ethic, and the heart to figure it out."

Leading with Purpose, Not Prestige

Today, Amber oversees the Foundation's statewide grantmaking initiatives focused on behavioral health, social drivers of health, health promotion, and disease prevention. Under her leadership, the Caring Foundation has become a catalyst for upstream solutions—addressing root causes before they become crises. Amber's approach is grounded in humility and impact. "This work isn't about recognition," she said. "It's about listening, showing up, and investing in initiatives that allow communities to flourish."

Through strategic partnerships with organizations like BIO Girls, Folkways, and The Village Family Service Center, the Caring Foundation supports initiatives and programs that reduce barriers and gaps to good health and promote long-term well-being. Whether it's funding school-based mental health initiatives in rural North Dakota or supporting food accessibility through farmers market programs, Amber's focus is to meet communities where they are and help them thrive. "We don't just wait for applications to come in," she said. "We seek out organizations doing meaningful work and ask how we can help amplify their impact."

A Legacy of Leadership

Amber's leadership is defined not by titles, but by transformation. She sees health as more than a clinical outcome—it's a reflection of whether people have access to food, transportation, education, housing, and opportunity. Her advice to aspiring changemakers? Don't wait for the perfect plan. "You don't need to have it all figured out. You just need to care deeply, ask good questions, and be willing to grow."

Looking Ahead

Amber isn't chasing accolades—she's building a legacy. A quote from Margaret Mead hangs in her office: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."* That belief drives her every day.

"I want to be remembered for leaving things better than I found them—for investing in sustainable and innovative efforts and helping others lead with purpose."

Rooted in Community

Amber lives in North Fargo with her husband and three daughters. Life outside of work consists of a good balance of staying active and relaxing, weekends at the lake, and volunteering in the community. Whether she's advocating for mental health funding or cheering from the sidelines at her kids' extracurricular activities, Amber Blomberg is a leader who shows up—with heart, with vision, and with an unwavering commitment to community.

10 Questions
WITH JOHN MACHACEK

John Machacek, Chief Innovation Officer for the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation, has worked with countless startups throughout our community over the years. He knows their ups, and their downs, but most of all, he knows the questions to ask them. Here are John Machacek's 10 questions for **Alex Warner, Founder & CEO, Work Odyssey.**

By **John Machacek**
Photo provided by **Alex Warner**

01

Will you please tell me your Work Odyssey elevator pitch?

Work Odyssey believes people are not their resumes—and that careers deserve more than bullet points. Resumes are frustrating. They're shallow, hard to write, and—dare I say it—a little demeaning. They reduce years of growth, skill, and hard-won experience into soundbites. I like to say that you might be able to build a time machine for Elon Musk, but if you are terrible at writing resumes, you are going to get passed over. And that's insane. Let's stop that nonsense.

What Work Odyssey is focused on is giving career professionals AI tools to tell their full story—from first job to final promotion—capturing the experiences, potential, and human depth that resumes never do.

Just as importantly, we also give employers the AI tools to finally see these stories—something that simply wasn't possible until now. This isn't a job board. It's a smart career engine—like a personal AI sports agent for your career. We help people manage their work like a brand, with AI tools for daily tasks, smart work-journaling, opportunity discovery, strategic direction, and effective self-promotion.

02

In a nutshell, how does the platform make the job descriptions or resumes interactive?

One of our key applications is what we call Interactive Job Descriptions, or IJDs, for employers and Living Bios for career professionals. These are dynamic, conversational tools that let both sides engage through a smart avatar—think more human-like AI, with interaction that feels natural.

For job seekers, IJDs let you "talk" to a job posting and get real answers to the questions you have on demand. That matters—national HR surveys show that 65% of applicants want more upfront info before applying. We make that possible. Our avatars can even conduct light screening interviews, asking insightful, context-aware questions of candidates.

Imagine sending a job email blast to many hundreds of potential candidates. One click takes them straight into an IJD that answers their questions and screens them on the spot and qualifies them fast, and for that matter, the candidates qualifying you. There is strong value there. Or let's say you're posting, not direct sourcing; you could advertise on a job board listing that all applicants get all their questions answered upfront! On demand. Driving more potential applicant traffic to your careers page because they know they can quickly find out about the job, so they click on your listing to do it instead of scrolling by.

On the flip side, Living Bios are like AI-powered, dynamic LinkedIn profiles that talk back. Visitors can see a rich evolving view of someone's career, and if the candidate allows, have a real-time conversation with an avatar that knows the person's story. It stays "Living" through relevant data you give it as well as data pulled from our AI work journaling and our other applications, becoming a dynamic ongoing record, not a static profile you update twice a year.

03

As applicants engage with an application to better learn about the job and company, are there things that the employer has incorporated into the platform to aid in their initial screening and assessment from the applicant's activities?

Yeah, so one of our flagship tools is an AI-powered evaluation system that helps hiring managers quickly spot strong candidates. It turns any job description into a personalized scoring system—a matching algorithm you control, even if you're not technical. The AI reads applicant data for meaning and context, not just keywords like today's tech does. It works really well with regular resumes, but it's most powerful when candidates use our Context Enhanced Resume tech.

This is one of our key value propositions. The Context-Enhanced Resume is a complete replacement for the traditional resume. There's no rigid format, no two-page rule, and no guessing what the employer wants. Candidates can fully explain what they did, why it mattered, and how it connects to the job—and yes, they can even make a spelling mistake or two. They can write as much as they want, and our AI helps them shape it, but they are in total control. They can start from scratch or build off an existing resume.

04

For employers, it's like getting a personal career memoir, with AI surfacing the most relevant parts based on the scoring you define. For job seekers, it's the first time they've ever been able to say everything that matters and know it's actually being read with context.

For the employers, then, I imagine that your platform is not only helping them find better matches, but it is also saving them a bunch of time and work. Am I correct in that assumption?

100%. The costs to fill a job today are in the thousands to the many tens of thousands, depending on the role and experience. This doesn't include the costs associated with the occasional new hire that doesn't work out. One of the most important metrics for employers is time to fill. The longer a role stays open, the more expensive it becomes; not just in cost, but also in missed opportunities from a position unfilled. By enabling a deeper, context-rich exchange between applicant and employer, powered by AI, we're improving both speed and quality. Traditionally, those two were trade-offs: you could have one, but not the other. Now, you can get both. Our AI is designed to deliver faster hiring without sacrificing the quality of the talent, unlocking performance gains in talent acquisition that weren't possible before.

We are also delivering this in turnkey solutions—Package A, B, and C—that don't require large capital budgets or replacing existing HR systems. They're designed to plug in easily and deliver immediate value without disruption, paying month to month or annually.

05

It sounds like the employer-side ROI is apparent, but what would you say is the best way, or ways, it will help the job seekers?

First off, I think it is a bit of an injustice that the job market rarely acknowledges how much time and effort it takes for job seekers to find and apply for roles. And it should be because their time is just as valuable as anyone else's, and if they are out of work, it's arguably more so. So, we're building tools to change that. Firstly, job seekers can use our AI tools to instantly evaluate the company they are looking at and whether the job they are looking at matches them and their own goals. If it doesn't, move on. If it does, our system helps you apply fast, with tools that turn your raw work experience into something compelling and context-rich to help land an interview.

Beyond job hunting, we're focused

on helping people tell their full story. Inspired by the idea of a "brag bag journaling", which is a quick way to log your daily wins and accomplishments so you don't forget them, our AI-powered journaling feature takes that idea and puts it on steroids, helping users track and organize progress, reflect on accomplishments, and build a dynamic record of their career over time. For example, a marketer might log notes on their weekly campaign performance, which, in turn, informs their living bio. A student could capture moments like acing a chemistry test—even if they don't have formal work experience yet, they're still building real skills, our tools are helping to capture and market those skills more effectively with everyday examples.

All of it adds context and depth to their Living Bio profile, this flexible, ongoing record and story of your work life that is helping you not only find jobs but also promote yourself and help manage your career.

06

How are you beta testing, piloting, or rolling this out?

We're currently beginning the beta and pilot phase, gathering valuable feedback from early testers, both local and remote. After some time in stealth, we've begun a soft launch to increase visibility, especially among small to mid-sized businesses. I'm also becoming more publicly active through interviews, social posts, and content to build awareness. The goal is to land first customers, generate early revenue then shift toward funding and scaling. We've assembled a small team focused on transforming our early prototypes into a robust, production-ready platform. Our first wave of customers will help us shape the products and ideally become champions for us as we grow.

07

With targeting the B2B SMB side first, am I correct then that your early job seeker users will start organically arriving because they are engaging with the job posting from the employers utilizing Work Odyssey?

Absolutely. That's one of our core go-to-market strategies. When a company signs up with us and creates and posts a job, the first time a candidate applies, their resume is automatically evaluated by our system with our AI tools, giving a high-quality assessment instantly. But right after submission, the applicant lands on a page that explains who we are, what we do, and how we can help improve their chances of getting an interview if they sign up with us

Once they sign up, they're guided to an interactive view of their resume and introduced to the idea of a Context-Enhanced Resume that I mentioned previously. The system encourages them to write more about their career and life experiences and why they're a great fit for the role, with AI assisting them in adding targeted, meaningful context. Once they submit the enhanced version, they're re-evaluated, giving the employer an even deeper, clearer picture and giving the applicant a better shot at standing out and landing them an interview.

It's a win-win. At this stage, job seekers want interviews; we increase their chances. Employers want well-qualified applicants; we help surface the best ones faster. It's free for the applicant and introduces them to the rest of our tools naturally.

That said, we'll still run direct marketing campaigns for job seekers. But this approach creates an organic growth loop that benefits both sides while putting Work Odyssey in front of exactly the right audience.

08

You founded the tech startup Pedigree Technologies over 20 years ago. How does your current experience of founding a new tech startup compare to your time back then?

Before Pedigree, I had already worked at two startups, helped launch a non-tech business, and spent time in big tech for a number of years. So, I wasn't new to the tech industry at all. But Pedigree gave me 15+ years of founder-level experience, starting with a blank sheet of paper in my basement and growing into full-scale operations. I wore both the CEO and Chairman hats and touched everything from product development to fundraising to governance. You come out of that with hard-earned wisdom and experience, both from your wins and the scars from your misses.

The biggest difference I see today is how much better the ecosystem is for startups. There's more infrastructure, more support to get something off the ground and scale an organization. Things are light years ahead from when I started Pedigree. As an example, just in product development, I recently prototyped some software myself using AI, something that would've taken a whole team years ago. Now, I can move fast, iterate quickly, and wear multiple hats more effectively.

What hasn't changed is my love for working on cutting-edge tech. Breakthrough innovation can be harder to commercialize. You're not improving the mousetrap; you're eliminating the mice. With Pedigree, no one knew what IoT was yet. Now with AI, it's the same pattern: huge buzz, but still a steep curve when it comes to helping people truly understand what's possible besides the news stories they read. I'm lucky, though, research says the most consistently successful startups are often started by founders in their 40s and 50s. So, it looks grandpa is going to get out his Palm Pilot, hitch up the oxen, and once again take the old wagon into startup town.

09

If you could go back in time to talk to Alex from years ago, what kind of hindsight advice would you give yourself?

Buy Apple stock. Buy Bitcoin. Meet Elon before his success and ask him if he needs a cofounder for anything. But honestly? I've been in tech for 25+ years, mostly in startups, and you learn a lot, and some of it is hard to transfer. I think I would travel back to simply reinforce that tenacity and resiliency really do matter more than anything. The road will change. You'll get knocked around. Keep going. There is this famous scene from the movie The Matrix where Neo, the protagonist, watches a kid bend a spoon with his mind. Neo asks how he's doing it, and the kid says, "Don't try to bend the spoon—that's impossible. Instead, try to realize the truth... There is no spoon. Then you'll see that it's not the spoon that bends, it's only yourself." To me, that's entrepreneurship. You can't control the market. You can't force the market to buy your shiny new invention. But you can adapt and keep going. Those founders who can read the tea leaves and bend with the market are the ones who win.

10

To wrap up, what can we do as a community to help you and Work Odyssey succeed?

I appreciate you asking. Right now, the simplest way to help is if you are interested in what we are doing, reach out. The more the merrier, and if we come knocking, give us a hearing. Sometimes we are even known to bring Starbucks gift cards for everyone.

Work Odyssey

workodyssey.io

/work-odyssey

About John

John Machacek has been helping local startups with the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation since prior to his position with the GFMEDC. Before joining the team, Machacek was the VP of Finance & Operations at United Way of Cass-Clay and a business banker at U.S. Bank.


ERIK RAMSTAD MIDDLE SCHOOL NEW BUILD


MINOT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL FIELD/TRACK/GRANDSTAND/CIVIL SITE

ERIK RAMSTAD MIDDLE SCHOOL TRACK/FIELD/CIVIL SITE


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