

# Ep.3 - Fay Beydoun\_mixdown

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, chamber, businesses, commerce, people, state, detroit, community, ethnic, board, fay, chambers, helps, opportunity, arab, dinners, mentioned, members, global, arab americans

## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Fay Beydoun

**A** Announcer 00:01  
Welcome to the Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

**E** Ed Clemente 00:28  
Welcome to the Michigan Opportunity brought to you by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. My name is Ed Clemente, and today I'm hosting the show. And with that, I'm lucky to have my guest and friend, Fay Beydoun, Executive Director of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce, welcome Fay.

**F** Fay Beydoun 00:45  
Thank you, Ed, it's a pleasure to be here with you and to be part of this great show that you have going on.

**E** Ed Clemente 00:52

While we're trying to highlight Michigan and you were one of my big highlights, I wanted to make sure we got a chance to talk to you. And I think just for a regular sort of, to get it going, what sort of when you tell people what the American Arab Chamber is, but you sort of give them as your quick elevator speech.

F

Fay Beydoun 01:10

My elevator pitch for the chamber; So I'm the executive director of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce, it's been in existence for 28 years, I've been honored to lead it for the past 13. The chamber has approximately 1500 members 65% of our membership is located in Southeast Michigan, the remainder is statewide, nationally and internationally. Being a American Arab Chamber of Commerce, it's more of a niche chamber. And we have no geographical boundaries so we tend to do the same programming that all the local chambers would do from the golf outings to the annual dinners to the networking events, to providing cost savings for our customers, you know, to health insurance plans, and so forth and so on. What makes us as the American Chamber of Commerce a little bit more unique is a lot of our international work that we do. We're very connected with the MENA region, which is the Middle East North African countries, through their governments and their chambers of commerce and so forth. And we work very closely with them. I'm bringing delegations here, and also taking delegations from Michigan, to the to that part of the world. We like to open different opportunities for our businesses located in Michigan, and we want to make sure that Michigan could, you know, takes advantage of everything that it can to become more global and more competitive in the sub environment.

E

Ed Clemente 02:41

Yeah, and originall - I know, we maybe didn't know each other as well, But you originally got into this through the forum, the Economic Forum, wasn't it?

F

Fay Beydoun 02:51

That's right. So I was originally hired by our current chairman, Mr. Ahmad Chebbani to work on the US Arab Economic Forum, which the very first one took place back in 2003, in Detroit, and then after that, we did a second one in Houston, Texas; and then one in Washington D.C and the forum brought leaders together. C3 Leaders along with the CEOs of the bulitple auto industry, the oil companies, tech companies, all together talk about ways that there could be more bridging, more collaboration, and more work done between the two regions. In addition to that, and this included the entire nited States, not just Michigan; in addition to that, what were the obstacles and what programs can be put

in place to work with those obstacles.

E

Ed Clemente 03:41

Yeah, and you know, and I know, you and I knew each other a little bit when I ran the Chamber of Commerce, for the southern Wayne County one. But is you said your chamber is a little bit different, cuz you're global. But also, like, you still have, like all the regular Chamber of Commerce members, right? You have restaurants and Well, yeah, yeah, definitely, definitely. And I have to say that 70% of our membership is still our small businesses, who we take great pride in and do as much as we can't wait to help them, especially this past year. So that that is the majority of our membership. Our membership is also mixed. So we have I, again, I want to say 70% are Arab Americans, you know, 60 to 70%. But then the remaining 30 to 40% are from mainstream that want to do business with our with our community. So we have a very diverse chamber. That's got a little bit of everybody in it. Our board of directors has people representing some of the larger corporations like at&t Chase. We also have Comcast, we've got I'm trying to go down the list. I'm trying to work... Is Comerica on there too?

F

Fay Beydoun 04:49

No I'm sorry I'm sorry, Ed, I've not on this one.

E

Ed Clemente 04:52

I know they're on one of them, but I wasn't sure.

F

Fay Beydoun 04:55

I'm sorry. Who was that?

E

Ed Clemente 04:56

Comerica?

F

Fay Beydoun 04:57

Yes, America is on there, So is Chase Bank of America, we do have a good portion of the banks that are on there. So we it's a very diverse board and that we also have representation from the small businesses in the community.



Ed Clemente 05:11

Yeah. And I think that's important for the MEDC because you brought, you represent such a broad spectrum of large, small and medium businesses. And just one I want to maybe plug a little bit for you but I think I've been to like five of now, your economic forms the state of the...I forgot what you call it exactly.



Fay Beydoun 05:29

It's called the Building Economic Bridges, Dinners,



Ed Clemente 05:30

yes.



Fay Beydoun 05:31

Yeah our building economic bridges dinners have become a staple annually for people to kind of attend, they attract a little bit over 1000 people that get to network, and we always have great speakers. And we usually give out two awards for Arab Americans that have exceeded within their industries. So those are great networking opportunity opportunities, and it's an opportunity for us to also highlight our accomplishments from the previous year.



Ed Clemente 06:00

Well, in fact, this year, I know yours was virtual, and we're gonna get to COVID a little bit, but you had a pretty good lineup this year on your virtual one. Why don't you mentioned some of the people that were on your show.



Fay Beydoun 06:10

We did, we did. We had Governor Whitmer, that gave us an outlook on the state and as far as COVID is concerned, and as how it's impacting businesses and what her challenges have been and moving forward. And how we plan to kind of work together and help our business community. Also for our awardees, we had a great lineup, we had **Chris Rizik as o** ne of our awardess and it just happened that he was introduced by former Governor Rick Snyder, which was really good to have him on. There **are other awardee, was Mr. Ahmed ed Boomrod who** is the CEO of GCSI, which is a publicly traded company, and does a lot as far as giving back into the community and helping others succeed. So we, **you know,**

take pride in that, and the people that we that we award, Mr. Rizik is as humble as they come and has a wonderful personality and as always very, very helpful. Yet for someone that has done so much within his venture group, to help so many businesses and to do so many things.

**E** Ed Clemente 06:10

Yeah, and the other one is your economic forecast.

**F** Fay Beydoun 07:23

Right here in December we bring in, umm..

**E** Ed Clemente 07:28

You don't have to give his name, but it's the Bank of America bank, isn't it? It is. So he's the chief economist for America. And we bring him in every year. And he provides a he talks about a little bit what happened, but he's, you know, been straight honest to what's going to happen in the future, the following year. And that has kind of generated a really good following. And just to mention, the one positive thing that's come out of COVID is that this past December, when we had our economic outlook for the United States, and for the state of Michigan, we had over 2700 people that logged in on social media to watch it. And I just want to say that also for our annual dinner, we had over 16,000 hits, so over 16,000 people that joined in at one point or another had watched part of the programming on that. So I think moving forward, the same as probably a lot of organizations are finding in addition to going back to doing which we all miss that interaction with other human beings in the same room. Well, we will also probably continue to do the virtual. Yeah. And I mean, obviously, would that's one of the advantages is that because it's posted, I'm sure you have people from around the world, especially in your organization that would like to see it at the time. That's not like three in the morning for them.

**F** Fay Beydoun 08:50

Right, right. Exactly. And this is what's nice about this is that it gives people an opportunity to go back, if you've missed it, you can go back look for it, and you'd be able to see it at any point in time.

E

Ed Clemente 09:01

Have you had any things you thought worked out well beyond that, during the era of pivoting for COVID? Have you have your members done things that you've been pretty impressed with that my you know... You know, just seen a lot of our members go more, you know, towards tech, utilizing the web more to sell their products, utilizing the web more to market their businesses. You know, I think the ones that suffered the most would have to be our restaurants. You know, but some some had a pickup in their delivery. Others just, you know, have just closed shop. They have not been able to sustain themselves and have had to shut down and don't see themselves coming back. They just don't have the financial funding to do it at this point in time. So COVID has hit our members to where some have done exceptionally well during COVID while others have kind of suffered tremendously during COVID, we've got a mix of everybody. I think every economy has that story. I just it's more pronounced now because we're sort of trapped in our houses so much we, we noticed it more - maybe. The... and I gotta say this properly, but TEJARA, am I saying it right? Yep, so TEJARA is the nonprofit arm of the American Chamber of Commerce. And that's what we do a lot of our international work through as far as doing the delegations or as far as doing our mayor's council or a woman's Council in different activities. So we do that under TEJARA because it provides us with different opportunities as the chamber we're a 501 c six, which limits us as far as funding is concerned, but under TEJARA. It's a 501 c three nonprofit, and it provides us with more accessibility. Yeah, and I know you're always, as you mentioned, what do you call MENA countries?

F

Fay Beydoun 10:55

Yes.

E

Ed Clemente 10:55

But I know you've historically always had great relationships and I think you've been involved with some - you've traveled a lot yourself, obviously. But you, you've done quite a bit of that. And I know you're always thinking of new ideas. And we'll get to that a little bit later about maybe what you see is on the horizon for you.

A

Announcer 10:57

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E

Ed Clemente 11:31

Once again, I just want to mention that our guest today is Fay Beydoun, She's the executive director of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce. You're in like, a lot of boards, obviously. But one of the ones I know you're pretty proud of is the and you might have even been involved with starting it was the Council of Ethnic Chambers of Commerce - Is that right? Yes - so I am one of the co-founders of that group. Actually it was the idea of Mr. Chebbani, our chairman and he you know, he had mentioned do this, and I kept thinking like, okay, it's just more work. But I want to do this and then woke up one day, in the middle of the night and I said "Oh, my God, this is so important, we got to do this." The council of ethnic chambers has approximately 13 chambers out of Michigan, underneath each umbrella. Each chamber maintains its own identity and still does everything that it does, we just kind of come together for best practices, we've recently come together to have to have calls with me DC and different people within the state of Michigan. so that they understand from the ethnic community perspectives, some of the ethnic businesses that also might be limited in English, and the things that they are kind of going through and what we need to do in order to help those businesses and those communities to thrive through COVID. So there's a lot of pros that have come out of the Council of ethnic chambers of commerce, it's got a lot of the ethnic chambers that are a part of it, including the Hispanic Chamber, the Chinese Business Association, the Indian chamber, the Taiwanese... I can just keep going on down the list; But it's a really good group of people. And when we ever have questions, we can just pick up the phone and ask each other and we're just there is a really good support. And that's kind of worked really well for us. Yeah, and I know, I imagine you have some relations to with the sort of counselor corps too, because you probably work with quite a few of them. I would imagine that you've also worked with the US Department of State, I believe I played a bet. We can we do a lot of work with the Department of Commerce, we also work with the Department of State, in addition to the Department of Commerce, we work with the international trade representative's office, that's really, really important for us. So we've had, you know, we've had a speaker from there. That's, you know, the head of the international trade unit under the department Commerce has come spoke at our events. So we strongly believe as as Americans Arab Chamber of Commerce, strongly believe in trade, and that that is what is going to sustain our Michigan economy moving forward. So that's one of our biggest goals. I should also mention to you, and you got me on the board. But we're both on the global ties, Detroit board. I don't want I hate to say I don't want to sound like I don't love my other boards. But I have to say Global Ties Detroit is my favorite board and I gotta say it out loud. So global ties, Detroit works directly with the State Department to where they bring emerging leaders from all over the world, to Michigan, and to meet with other leaders in Michigan and to kind of learn best practices. And through that you meet so many diverse group of people from all different countries, and you kind of tend to maintain some of them actually maintain those relationships and

they kind of, you know, start emailing you back and forth and you build really, really good relationships with them. Yeah, and I've been on a couple of those with you at your office. So, we're, um, I know we did an Iraqi one and a couple other ones just recently, but it helps you're fluent in Arabic, too.

**F** Fay Beydoun 15:10  
It helps.

**E** Ed Clemente 15:10  
Yeah, it does a lot I could tell.

**F** Fay Beydoun 15:12  
Yeah, I like it when I go into the room, and they don't know I'm fluent in Arabic, and they start talking, and then I just kind of listened. So that's, that's interesting, too.

**E** Ed Clemente 15:20  
Yeah, yeah. And I know, you've helped with a lot of other groups beyond just Middle East countries with the global ties, folks, is there any of your partners beyond, like you've mentioned a few of them, but I think you have some pretty good relationships with a couple of them that you've done some unique programs with, is there any other ones you'd like to highlight some of your bigger partners? Well, you know, I was appointed by Governor Whitmer to also serve on the MEDC board. And I, I greatly appreciate it, that's been very eye opening for me. But it's also allowed me an opportunity to remind everybody that we do have to do more in the international arena, and that there should be more focus on that. In addition to that, also, you know, bringing the voice of that ethnic communities and ethnic businesses to the table has been very important. Because of all the work that we do, the other strong relationship we have is with our commercial services that's located in the state of Michigan. So I was also appointed by the US Secretary of Commerce to be the chairwoman for the East Michigan district Export Council, to where the console works with the commercial services in order to increase the number of exports from businesses located in the state of Michigan. And for those that have never reached out to the commercial services, I have to tell you, they are a dedicated, great group of people that work for the commercial services in the state of Michigan, whether it's the ones located in Grand Rapids, or Detroit or throughout the state, but they do such a wonderful job of helping businesses that are interested in just don't know what to do in helping them to start to export. We even have we even support up a few of the export one



on one programs. We've done some programming with the city of Detroit in some other areas, also, to where a person can come and do a two three week course. And that gives them more insight and get them better equipped to do the exporting of their product. We just a couple of last questions for you. If you're I got a lot more, but I think I'm gonna just narrow down to a couple more. But what do you think is going to be on the horizon either for yourself or the American Arab chamber? Or just the you know, anything else you want to highlight for future trends? You might think? I think I think manufacturing is going to be a really big focus moving forward, I'd like to see more of the ethnic communities get into the manufacturing and help them and opening doors to that. I think that there's lots of opportunities there. I think that the state of Michigan has, we've, you know, we've got the auto industry, we've got mobility, we've got the defense, but there's also so much more that it offers, it's very diverse, and agriculture is really big. And there's so many opportunities for us that I think as a chamber for us, we need to make sure that we have programs that are not only helps the small mom and pop shops around the corner, but also helps our other service providers and our other businesses that can do more and that are in that kind of position. We just want to be you know, the ones that opened the doors for them in order for them and introduce them to different things that they're able to do. And my last question for you is what do you like best about living in Michigan or even if you can put it in if you want put it in a business context, or personally, it's fine. I love the Four Seasons of Michigan. I just wish the winter was like a little shorter and summer a longer. I traveled a lot. And I think Michigan has great people. And I think that sometimes we overlook all the friends that we have around in Michigan, even from a professional standpoint from within our business communities. I'm fascinated and I'm appreciative of all the organizations that work together, the foundations, the banks, the corporations, the government entities, and how they all kind of come together to help and to work together in order to have a thriving business community in the state of Michigan, including the universities. So I think I think the the dynamics of Michigan is not one that you find everywhere. I know that it's got it's got its own set of uniqueness to it that that's what makes Michigan, Michigan Well, I want to thank, Fay Beydoun, my friend again the executive director for the American Arab Chamber of Commerce. Thanks for taking time. I know you're very busy. I know every time I try to reach you, I know you're on some zoom call or conference call. So thanks time for doing this today.



Fay Beydoun 20:06

Thank you and it's been a pleasure and I wish you the best of luck on the show.



Ed Clemente 20:09

Thank you.



**Announcer 20:11**

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