

Kerry Ebersole-Singh

Mon, 8/22 3:20PM 21:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

state, michigan, ed, kerry, job, helped, pathway, governor, people, careers, programs, talent, lead, workforce, singh, bit, graduated, talk, friends, fortunate

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Kerry Ebersole-Singh

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 00:29

Hello, I'm your host, Ed Clemente and we're very fortunate to have Kerry Ebersole-Singh. She's the Chief Talent and Solutions and Engagement Officer here at the MEDC. Welcome to the show Kerry.

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 00:40

Thank you Ed, I'm happy to be here.

E Ed Clemente 00:42

You know, and Kerry, she sounds like she's smiling and she is because we've known each other a while. And it's a real pleasure to have you on. And I know that this job is, I wouldn't say you're new anymore, but it's still new-ish. And you have probably one of the more fascinating careers of a lot of our guests, because you remind me a little bit of myself too. But you've actually, I think even done more things. But I kind of get bored at jobs and I move on a lot. So but, I don't expect that here at the MEDC you're doing a great job here. So why don't you tell people, because that's a mouthful of a title, why don't you tell people what you do for the MEDC?

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 01:24

Yes, so leading the talent work here at MEDC, we're focused on essentially developing customized solutions across the workforce and talent spectrum of programs in the state to deliver a customized solution to these employers so they can meet their workforce needs. And that may also include some, you know, recruitment plans as well. Obviously, we're ultimately focused on attraction, and we want to help diversify and build our economy here in the state of Michigan. But that is what we are doing in the short term. And then in the longer term, we'd love to deepen specific pools of talent like engineers, even though we have a great footprint of engineers and engineering schools in the state, we want to go further. And also with computer science, so we'd love to be in a top five state for production of those four year degrees. As well as there's some K 12, or PK 12 really, system change that we look forward to partnering with the Michigan Department of Education to talk about how do we bring employers closer to their curriculum? And how can they help mentor kids and give them experiences to really ignite that passion for that child's future and how they may see making a living here in the great state of Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 02:53

And we should also say that you come with a lot of pedigree just in this field as well.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 02:58

It's amazing you didn't say baggage, Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 03:02

But right now it's pedigree. So no, but I mean, you came from LEO, Labor, Economic and Opportunity, right? And you created a couple of interesting programs, or you're responsible for a couple of programs why don't you touch on those because you're still doing one right, at least one?

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 03:18

Well, no, I always say I helped to lead because there was Doug Ross. was instrumental and helping create the Reconnect Program here in this state. And I know actually a relative of yours who was leading LEO at that time, Jeff Donofrio was also at the helm and that Reconnect legislation passed. But the other program that is housed in the 60X30 Office, which I helped to launch was the Futures For Frontliners Program where Governor Whitmer was able to utilize federal resources for a first in the nation, tuition free pathway for those frontline workers during the first period of the pandemic, to have a bit of support to continue to pursue their educational dreams. So those are the two programs marching towards that 60% post secondary goal that the Governor has set forth for the state.

E

Ed Clemente 04:10

E Ed Clemente 04:19

I'm going to put in two other plugs for you, but you so, I've only been at the MEDC, like a year and a half myself. And so I went to the new member, sort of it was video wise, but you did a really great presentation to the staff, even for them who don't really know because I remember you were in the room and I think that as many people raise their hands when you asked about certain programs that you just went through with me. Because I think that that's often the case is there's so many things going on it's hard for people to really grasp. I mean, I'm telling you that the tuition one I think is just huge. Yeah, and I think it's a great opportunity for a lot other people I know, you know, you will get into downriver a little bit here but a lot of people I know can take advantage of that program?

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 05:10

Absolutely, I think it's important to realize when we think of increasing our post secondary credentials, okay, so this is towards an associate's degree at a community college or an in-demand certificate. And these are for adult learners, life gets busy, life happens, you're in one pursuit, things don't work out. But this is what's so amazing about these programs to offer this tuition-free pathway where you don't have to think twice about, you know, getting those tuition payments done, because the state is taking care of that. And it was a bipartisan effort. It's one of the beautiful things that unfortunately, is a rarity, sometimes in our state, when we talk about those bipartisan issues that, especially in the economic development realm, that we do see, that are exciting for our state.

E Ed Clemente 05:57

Well, as a former trustee for Wayne County Community College, I know that how important those things are for because our back then when I was trustee, you know, we had all of Detroit, as you know, most of Wayne County, and we had a lot of underserved populations that really could have used it, both financially, plus, a lot of those families didn't have a role model that would have told them to go to college. And so it's sort of a challenge, even in my own family, you know, like, it was a big deal for me. I didn't graduate from high school in my family. [You were a trouble maker, weren't you Ed.] So, you know, while there's, no my sisters, they kind of made it easier for me, they took a little longer to graduate. But, but I graduated on time. Anyway, the but I do think it's so critical, because, you know, I mentioned some of this is the stackable certifications too right, because can you just give a quick 30 seconds of what that is? Because I think that's the key to the future somewhat.

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 06:56

Yes. And you know, often our CEO Quenton Messer talks about having a state full of lifelong learners. And as we know, like, our parents who worked for the same businesses or companies for 30 years, or launch small businesses that they owned their entire lifetime. This generation is different. I'm a tail-end Gen X-er I was a bicentennial baby in case you're curious out there.

E Ed Clemente 07:22

I'm not asking any questions.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 07:24

As I age myself. But I think it's really important to, you know, think about what are the skills or functions, those passion areas that you want to pursue and get credentials that lead to a high-paying job. And then guess what, if you know interests change, or you're ready to go back and learn, take that education to the next level, that's where you're looking at those stackable and portable degrees, or certificates. So those are really what we want to support developing. And you know, a lot of the work at Labor and Economic Opportunity through many of the WIOA programs that are Michigan Works agencies across the state help implement and provide those pathways to folks. It's really just the beginning and I think it's really important that folks, you know, find something you have an interest in and then grow, give it a chance, do some job shadowing and, and put yourself out there to get that experience.

E

Ed Clemente 08:25

I served on SEMCO's workforce board for 10 years. And I know, you know, on the other thing to compound the challenge is that it's such a moving target of what private sector demands are, what the jobs are going to be because, you know, I don't think in my lifetime, I've seen careers have to shift or become obsolete so quick.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 08:45

Yeah. I want to add a plug for Labor Markets Initiatives. LMI, over how's that DTMB in the state of Michigan, they'll be issuing their Hot 50 Jobs that are in demand in the state, I believe next week, or later this week, forgive me, or sometime here in August. So at least why don't we say that? At any rate, those in demand, we have labor market information. I think this is one thing that's unique to MEDC as well. We want to ensure that we are needing Michigan employers needs which includes their workforce needs, but we also have to have an understanding of where industry is going. So when we talk about semiconductors and we talk about the auto industry, the emerging mobility and electrification that is happening in that industry, being 20% of our jobs in the state, how can we be partners to industry to ensure they're getting the talent that they need to be successful in this global economy?

A

Announcer 09:49

You're listening to The Michigan Opportunity, featuring candid conversations with Michigan business leaders on what makes Michigan a leading state to live, work and play. Listen to more episodes at michiganbusiness.org/podcast.

E

Ed Clemente 10:05

So we also I should mention too, we've met each other originally, when I when I was my first term in the legislature, and you were Chief of Staff for Barb Farah, our good friend. And that's how I first met you and I know that you had a career prior to that with, so you're gonna help me

out a little bit here, but I know Ed McNamara you said and Curtis Hertel senior?

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 10:34

Yes, yes. So when I graduated from Michigan State I started working downtown Lansing for the Democratic caucus under Speaker Hertel at that period of time. And the one shout out I need to give is that it was really special to me to start under what we call the old guard, you know, prior to term limits. What was it like with policy makers shaping policy for our state and learning from them? And the other experience that you mentioned I left Lansing to go work for Wayne County and the abandoned property program. And just to further name drop for your show Ed is, you know now mayor, Mike Duggan was the deputy county executive at the time. This was before he became prosecutor and a slew of other individuals who have had incredible, impactful careers. And it was a very special time for me again, as a young person to be part of that McNamara family. And that's where I'd met Barb.

E

Ed Clemente 11:39

Yeah, and Barb at that time when I first met her she was a Councilwoman still in Southgate, right. And now her brother's a council person there too now. [I didn't know that.] Yeah. And so yeah, I think he's the retired policeman. And so anyway, yeah so there's a lot of us and one other thing I get in trouble if I didn't mention your husband, Sam Singh, we went through and MPLP Michigan Political Leadership Program, a fine program. And if you don't know about it, and you think you want to get into sort of state level government, it's a good program for you to apply to. But Sam and I became friends way back then, he's a lot younger than me. But we went to the program, he was a young guy in our group, I remember, but we were both Michigan State guys at that point. And so that's how we became friends. And he was also the Mayor of East Lansing. Yeah, forgot all that.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 12:32

And, and I gotta say, like, yes, my husband is lovely but if you've met my five year old son, Remington Ebersol-Singh, keep your eye out on him because he is going to make his mark in this in this community. And we've been fortunate, the three of us just as a family unit to enjoy a little bit of this summer, but also getting ready for Remy to start kindergarten this fall. And I you know, I kind of glossed over another point I wanted to make, but you're sort of also the I don't know if I want to use this term, but I know the utility player for the governor too, because you've probably had like four different positions already, right in her administration? Well, I, so I've known the governor for a while since she first ran for State House and when I actually was consulting at the time, and I was a little bit bored, sometimes I kicked myself for that back in 2019. But at that moment in time, I did a check-in with the administration said, Okay, what do y'all need, how can I be helpful, and that is when we embarked upon that 2020 census effort. So that was when I came back to state government in August of 2019. I helped to lead that effort, as well as our Census Committee, which had over 60 appointees and working across state government and beyond and with communities across the state. And, you know, we had a good self-response rate, which is the best thing you can control in the census. So we had our best self-response rate in two censuses. And considering it was when the pandemic happened, I'll take that as a decent badge there. Then that's, that's when I actually went over to work for

Donofrio over at LEO and to launch the 60X30 office. And then it was a quiet day. And I got a message from the Governor's scheduler saying the governor would like to speak with you. And I knew this wasn't good. But long story short, she asked me at that time to help on the Vaccine. [Oh, that's right. Yes, yeah.] Education and Awareness. So at that moment in time is when I was wearing two hats. I still kept my foot in the management role of the 60X30 team, but also, if you we had to manage their shortages of vaccine in the state to, you know, growing that vaccine uptake, worked with some amazing partners to launch a vaccine sweepstakes, which I don't know how many people you know, that have helped develop a lotto., I was one of those people. So I think this is why people think I can kind of plug in just about anywhere to you know, try to support the effort, support a mission to help our state. So that's, that's how I sleep well at night.

E Ed Clemente 15:32

Right, no, no, I mean, it's like I said, it was good pedigree. So you sort of answered a couple of my questions already. But this one's a little bit more geared toward you individually. And the kind of advice you would give yourself if you could talk to, where'd you go to high school? I don't even know.

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 15:53

I went to three high schools, but I graduated downriver Trenton.

E Ed Clemente 15:57

Oh, I didn't think I knew that was your last, oh.

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 16:00

I graduated from Trenton. So this I go way back with a Dingles, which is importantly, anyone from downriver, that's part of the part of the family, if you will, so. So yeah, I've moved around. I lived in Hastings, Michigan, I went to school there, and then Elkhart, Indiana, the RV capital of the world. Those were the three high schools I went to.

E Ed Clemente 16:22

And so what advice would you give your 17 year old self or to even if you're doing high school commencement like, like, what have you learned, you think now that you've had a child, you're married, you've had all these jobs? Is there any type of different advice you'd give yourself on what to do?

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 16:36

I think one of the pieces again, and all this reflective advice is easier said than done, when

you're 17, right? One, of course, would be calmer, you know. Don't be so anxious, around different decisions. I think, I think the other thing that I've been fortunate and this, my dad says this, and this comes I think this is kind of passed down from generation and, and I don't mean this to sound obnoxious, but I it's something that drives me and that is there's always room for someone good. And while it came more from a sports analogy, but if you hustle, you put on your best, and you become good at what you do, there's always going to be a seat, there's always going to be a pathway for you to explore new opportunities. So I've tried to hold dear to that and I think I've been fortunate enough to and I kind of fell into it is just by job experience. That, you know, when I started working in the legislature that really opens you up to a lot of different, you know, policy areas, different, you know, advocacy groups, nonprofits that are coming in, I think it's incredible exposure, and you get a lot of responsibility at a young age, and you learn to manage. And that all has set me up for no matter what issue area I go into, I bring that same set of tools that I've been utilizing across my lifetime.

E Ed Clemente 18:13

I don't know if you know, my first job was working in the Senate out of college. [Oh] yeah. And I worked in the Senate, but I'm not kidding you within a year and a half, I was in charge of prison overcrowding, I was like 21. And I had to do hospital bed reductions, because we had too many beds, excess beds. And they were just like, miserable committees to be involved with. But you know, other people see stuff in you that you don't always see in yourself. And I feel like my boss at that time, thought I can take it. I didn't think I could. But then you start to realize, I guess that's what responsibility is, i, there's not exactly a direct roadmap but if you got the right skills, and like your dad said, you know, if you're a good person, you'll figure it out.

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 18:57

Yes, yes.

E Ed Clemente 19:00

Your very last question is you've got a five year old, right? [Yes.] So where do you guys like to go? Either festivals or up north or whatever? What do you guys like doing?

K Kerry Ebersole-Singh 19:12

Yeah, we're a big he's a beach kid. Traverse City area is definitely a favorite of his and I must tell just two weeks ago, he made his when I'm calling his first unaffiliated friends on the beach. So he made friends with four kids that we had no connection to whatsoever. And again, we're building that momentum as he starts his kindergarten career. So he had a blast.

E Ed Clemente 19:40

Are they gonna put up lawn signs for him?

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 19:43

I gotta tell you that kid, you know, you can't say no to him, he'll tell you that he's spoiled by his parents so.

E

Ed Clemente 19:51

Anyway, I appreciate very much you doing the show today. I just wanted to also say thanks again for your service for the state and just different folks over time, and again, I was just going to mention that our guest today is Kerry Ebersole-Singh, and I'm struggling here. I missed your title again. I don't want to get it wrong, but why don't you say it again for me, so I don't have to dig it up here.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 20:14

Yeah, Chief of Talent Solutions and Engagement Officer.

E

Ed Clemente 20:17

Okay, sorry, I, I'm doing this off my phone, so I'm trying to look both at how far [No, it's okay. No worries.] But anyway, we want to thank you again, for all the it's a tough job and like we said, it's a moving target, but I'm sure you'll be up to it. And everybody likes the way you're doing things so far. So I appreciate you doing it. [Knock on wood Ed, knock on wood.] I don't want to jinx you sorry.

K

Kerry Ebersole-Singh 20:40

All right. Take care now.

E

Ed Clemente 20:41

Thanks again, Kerry. Join us next week where our guest will be Roderick Hardamon. He's the CEO and Chief Strategist of Urge Imprint, which brings fresh global perspectives to local and national public sector organizations.

A

Announcer 20:55

The Michigan Opportunity is brought to you by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Join us and make your mark where it matters. Visit michiganbusiness.org/radio to put your plans in motion.