

# Ep.39 - Sue Tellier

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, supply chain management, defense, worked, packaging, ed, wid, programs, people, organization, defense industrial base, company, legislative branch, grand rapids, business, supply chain, small businesses, sue, federal, challenges

## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Sue Tellier

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- 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 00:26  
Hello, my name is Ed Clemente. I'm your host today. And we're fortunate to have Sue Tellier. She is the owner and president of Grand Rapids-based JetCo, Federal, a supply chain management and logistics company. Is that correct? Everything I said there, Sue?
- S** Sue Tellier 00:45  
That is correct. So far, and you have not messed anything up? So far, you've gotten off to a great start.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:50  
Thank you. Thank you. And I should also mention that we have known each other for a while, we worked together in the legislature. So the the friendliness has been long standing between us and so. But I just want to thank you very much Sue, seriously for doing this. And I know you're pretty busy, why don't you tell people real quick, sort of what JetCo is just in your own words?
- S** Sue Tellier 01:19  
Yeah, you bet. So JetCo, Federal started in 2007, as a kind of a wholesaler of primarily packaging supplies.

And it wasn't about what we were wholesaling, it was about where we were sending it into and what the sales process was. We only cared about working with government and we only cared about delivering to highly secured facilities, because we like the complexity of it. And because my English major background had nothing to do with packaging or supply chain management, we thought, well, this sounds like a great call. Fortunately, it worked. And we've morphed into a pretty complex supply chain management logistics firm that works primarily within the defense industrial base. So I'm working with the Defense Logistics Agency and the Army and the Navy, to either perform kitting or to do some more advanced supply chain management so that they have a single source for multiple items that would come from different manufacturers, and they know that they're all coming from small, highly qualified manufacturers through us. And then we also work with prime defense contractors to help them fulfill their government manufacturing orders, through sophisticated packaging, design, and kitting and labeling that we do at our location in Grand Rapids. It sounds really boring as I just described it, but I get to package some really interesting stuff. Things that go boom, come into our warehouse, and then we package them and keep them safe.

E

Ed Clemente 02:45

Now, you I would imagine there's some proprietary and you have to keep quiet some of the stuff I'm sure you're doing, right?

S

Sue Tellier 02:53

You betcha. You betcha.

E

Ed Clemente 02:56

Yeah. And I know because we had well, we've had Vicki Selva, on who I know you've worked with at the Michigan Defense Initiative. Is that correct?

S

Sue Tellier 03:06

The Michigan Defense Center is the organization she runs. She is. Yeah. And she is I'd have to, I have to swear to describe her well, and it's a really complimentary term. And you guys told me not to do that. So I'm not going to describe her the way I was going to, but she's amazing. She's great for the defense industry.

E

Ed Clemente 03:23

That's great. Yeah. And I know she's been doing it a long time, even under Sander Levin as a staff person. I know she's been involved.

S

Sue Tellier 03:30

That's right. I forgot about that. I think she worked for both Levins actually.

E

Ed Clemente 03:34

Yeah, I don't know. But I know, that's right, she worked Carl. That's right. Originally. That's right. Yeah. And so...

S

Sue Tellier 03:44

This is the Vicki Selva show that we're doing here on The Michigan Opportunity podcast today.

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Ed Clemente 03:49

Well, you know, I know you're sort of like, you know, being a little humorous, but you're also in some pretty interesting boards to your what is WIPP W. I. P. P.

S

Sue Tellier 04:02

It's it's a national advocacy organization for primarily women owned small businesses, WIPP stands for Women Impacting Public Policy. And so it's a very strong, well respected organization that's based in the Beltway, and they, they advocate for different policy pillars that women business owners experienced routinely. One of those that I care the most about is parity, and clarity and the federal contracting programs. The Federal set aside, programs have some differences and some nuances between the different set aside groups, and WIPP does a very effective job advocating for parody for women owned small businesses or WOSMs within that landscape. So that's a great organization. Right?

E

Ed Clemente 04:52

Right, it's not just defense though, right?

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Sue Tellier 04:54

No, no its not, but I am also involved in Women in Defense (WID,) both nationally and in the Michigan chapter, another really stellar organization in that one, it's not necessarily an advocacy organization, it is a connectivity organization where there's a recognition that welcoming people to the defense industrial base that maybe have been underrepresented or not, not not brought along in, in, in the quantities that we would like to have them brought along. You know, it's a we advocate for, you know, STEM programs in the schools, and we really try to connect women with mentorship opportunities. And we just we just really encourage more women to get involved in the defense industrial base, generally, through WID. I've got WIPP and WID, do you want any more acronyms Ed?

E

Ed Clemente 05:42

Oh, I've got some coming up, don't worry. You're the Vice President, actually, of the Women in Defense for the Michigan chapter. Is that correct?

S

Sue Tellier 05:52

Yeah, and nationally, I've actually also on the National Council, and I'm the Vice Chair for WID National and the Vice President for WID Michigan. [Wow] I have a hard time saying no, apparently.

E

Ed Clemente 06:01

Yeah, well, that time management's very important, as you might know,

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Sue Tellier 06:06

I got to work on that.

E

Ed Clemente 06:09

So so um, I also know that you're also on the I think Executive Committee for a SBAM, the Small Businesses Association in Michigan.

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Sue Tellier 06:20

Yeah, I've been on the board for the Small Business Association of Michigan for, I don't know, a handful of years now. And I'm on the Executive Committee as their Second Vice Chair and SBAM, for anybody who doesn't know, is a the most the strongest and most well respected small business advocacy organization in the nation. It is just the what they do in Michigan. You know, there's 20,000 plus small business owners that are members and you can't join the organization unless you're a small business owner. So it's just a really special camaraderie where you can you know, there's ideas sharing, there's information sharing, there's failure sharing, and it's just a really powerful organization.

E

Ed Clemente 07:00

And you just got a new Executive Director there, right. Or president. I don't know what his title is.

S

Sue Tellier 07:06

We did, I don't know if you've heard this guy before this. This Brian Kally fellow, I don't know. He's been around in Michigan a couple of times. He's done some other in Michigan, I don't know. But he's, you know, the interesting thing about Brian Kally joining SBAM, he joined us. It feels like 1000 years ago as our president because he's he's always been such a good friend of small business, that having him join the organization from from, from a full time perspective seemed like such a natural and then with, with our longtime CEO Rob Fowler transitioning out at the end of this year, Brian stepping in to take both of those roles. So he'll be President and CEO as of January.

E

Ed Clemente 07:47

And that really sort of segues into how we met each other. You were working in the House Leadership Office, right? And then Lieutenant, he wasn't Lieutenant Governor then but he was Representative Kally back then when he we served I served with him in the house. We're on a couple of committees together, actually. So he was always pretty good.

S

Sue Tellier 08:14

Didn't you, you chaired something economic developmeny. He I mean, you your life is really always been centered on economic development, I know this isn't about you? But I mean, that's you didn't you had an esteemed career in the legislative branch. I mock you, but you know, your service was, you know, noticeable.

E

Ed Clemente 08:30

Well, I, this podcast is your podcast. I'm just the host or the amplifier for.

S

Sue Tellier 08:36

I'm just gonna go ahead and take over and start asking the question.

E

Ed Clemente 08:39

I think you already did since the beginning. [Sorry Ed] No, no, no, no, I'm gonna get back on track here. But you, we should mention one more. We're on the MEDC, but you're also on Michigan Strategic Fund. And why don't you talk a little bit about what that is, too, because you were appointed by the Governor for that, correct?

S

Sue Tellier 09:00

I was, I was that was a really big honor. About two years ago, I was appointed to a first term on the Michigan Strategic Fund Board. And this year, I was I was nominated for a second term. That'll be a four year term. And the Michigan Strategic Fund is kind of the appropriations arm of the MEDC. So projects through the, basically all of the different economic development programs in Michigan, some of them the MEDC operates under delegated authority.

E

Ed Clemente 09:27

I'm in a lot of those calls, just listening, but you guys really have some heavy issues to deal with. Especially because you've been on it since COVID, too right, through most of COVID as well. Yeah, and you guys had some challenges. Yeah, with funding distribution than things.

S

Sue Tellier 09:44

Sue Tellier 09:11

We really did. And, you know, there's just throwing this out there. You know, there was a there was a time where we allocated, it was early in COVID. And I remember how all of us felt when we allocated \$20 million to help small businesses in Michigan recover from COVID or survive COVID. And all of us all we could think was, we have to sprint. We have to pass this today. And we know it's imperfect. And we know we're going to hear complaints about this. But it's, it's paramount that we pass this fast. Nope, it's not enough money. Nope, it's not going to help everyone, and we're going to frustrate some people. But it's better than nothing. We can't let you know, perfect be the enemy of progress. And, and so we did have some really tough decisions to make early, especially early in the pandemic, where we knew how many companies in Michigan were hurting. And we knew how badly we wanted to help them. And, you know, there's no, there's only so much that you can do quickly. And there's, you know, some of those some of those programs were imperfect, but they were there.

E Ed Clemente 10:43

No, and I know, it's, you know, there was no blueprint or real path for any state to follow. And I mean, usually Michigan's biggest challenge is usually we're the tip of the sword for, you know, industrial challenges. So we have bigger unemployment usually, you know, we're more cyclical sometimes. So that was a bigger hit for us, I think, because you are working actually in the legislature or close to it when the last recession hit right, in 2008?

S Sue Tellier 11:11

It was just before it. It was just before it Ed. I was in the I was in the executive branch, actually, before I was in the legislative branch. And I think I had the best job in state government, because I worked for the Department of Management and Budget was just management budget at the time before the "T" was in there, the technology piece was incorporated in and my job was supplier diversity. So I got to train companies how to bid on and win state level contracts. And then in 2007, I switched over to the Legislative Branch, and I didn't quite make it a year. You drove me away Ed.

E Ed Clemente 11:43

I'm sure it was me, thank you. Um, the, but I mean, even from your resume, I think that you interacted with a ton of businesses, when you were in that position as well, right?

S Sue Tellier 11:56

I did, several that I'm still close with. Several of the companies that I worked with back in 2005 and 2006. Some of those business owners are friends of mine through SBAM, or, you know, we're still in contact because they're also defense contractors. There's a we're, I mean, Michigan has a really tight knit business community. I've never lived in another state, so I think we're unique in that way. But I sure other states think they're unique, too. They're just not as unique or cool.

E Ed Clemente 12:25

Well, um, the other thing too, is that you're, I believe you live in Grand Rapids now. But you're not a Grand Rapids person. Right? You didn't grow up there, did you?

kapias person. Right? You didn't grow up there, did you?

**S** Sue Tellier 12:36

I am, I am not a Grand Rapidian, I am clearly a metro Detroiter from from being raised. There's definitely a different edge.

**E** Ed Clemente 12:45

Yeah, no, no. But I mean, kind of tell us how you kind of got into defense. I didn't know what your background was with defense in the first place.

**S** Sue Tellier 12:53

Yeah, I married into it. That's basically how. You know when, when I say we, in reference to starting my company, I started the company with my husband, John. And he is, he's an Army Ranger Retired and Retired Lieutenant Colonel. And he had the understanding of the military industrial base, and I had the understanding of public procurement. And so we combined those two things together. And I mean, 13 years later, we're an overnight success.

**A** Announcer 13:20

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**E** Ed Clemente 13:37

So like, what are some of the unique, you know, certain nuances for defense? Because, I mean, potentially people are gonna listen to this podcast, say they wanted to get into that sort of business, or what do you, or the supply chain if they're manufacturers. What do you kind of tell people how to get involved even?

**S** Sue Tellier 13:56

Well, it's a great question, because you can really waste a lot of time thinking that it's something that it isn't. And I think the best favor that I can do to any small business owner, especially small business owner, is to help them maximize their time and focus their resources. The the the Department of Defense demands, the highest quality contractors, and they should, because there's a lot at stake. And so if you get into the defense industrial base and think that cybersecurity rules won't apply to you, you shouldn't bother. You know, there's there's a lot of things where we're a very rule following people and they're it's a it's it's heavily steeped in relationships, but there's got to be a strong infrastructure within the company in order for them to be successful. There's also amazing tools. The federal government has so much information, there's so much transparency on how money is spent. And that means that any company that's interested in getting involved or interested in selling to the government has the ability to do a lot of research that's, they can make evidence-based decisions that are sound. So you know going into it how

much they're spending within your, you know, your your NAICS code, the North American Industry Classification System code, you can find exactly how much they're spending within that code and which agencies are spending it, even with contracting officers. But the fact that there's so much information also means it's harder to get through it, it's harder to take that information and slice it and dice it to make sense. So, and actually, just going back to the Vicki Selva and Michigan Defense Center lovefest, that's one of the great things that the MEDC has programming in is helping small businesses understand how to get into that defense industrial base and do it the right way.

E

Ed Clemente 15:40

And I would imagine you're already kind of led into this question, what challenges and opportunities do you see sort of around the horizon for you that, I know you mentioned cybersecurity is one, but what else do you see sort of, especially in your sector, you know, defense I'm sure you do DARPA stuff, too, I would guess, I don't know everything you do.

S

Sue Tellier 16:04

You know, I'm not you know, DARPA is amazing. I'm not at the the R&D capabilities that I have aren't quite at the DARPA level, we're looking we look more at some small business innovation, research cyber opportunities that have to do with sustainable packaging or alternatives to single-use packaging that the Army and the Defense Logistics Agency has put out. So there's a little bit of R&D in my world. I think when I look at challenges that are both obvious to us, and probably also around the corner, you know, cybersecurity is not one to be understated. The Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification Program has just undergone a lot of changes. We made a pretty strong commitment to compliance with CMMC early on and we've we we don't regret a single decision that we made in investing in that. We are, as a company, we are strong in that area. Around the corner, you know, when when President Biden first took office, one of his first one of his first executive orders really addressed resiliency and our domestic supply chain. I mean, you can't you can't pick up your phone or open your computer or pick up a newspaper without seeing something on the front page that has to do with supply chain challenges. So many of those are become are because of cargo coming in. Right. So when we really look at that resiliency, domestically, I think we'll see a lot more focus paid on on American manufacturing, and really identifying those sectors. It's not just about the chips going into cars, it's about you know, the the rest of the peripheral equipment that goes into making mortars or even the foam that's packaging mortars. I mean, we really, I think we have maybe two domestic manufacturers of fabric, you know, really looking into where where those investments need to be made and how we're using those companies. So I think the the, the, the expertise of supply chain professionals and logisticians is going to become increasingly relevant. So all of the people that went to my alma mater, Michigan State, and majored in supply chain management, I'm super jealous of them because I was an English major, and that like that, that expertise is profound. And they were probably there thinking I didn't pick a very sexy or glamorous major. But look, they totally did. We need those brains. It's a lot of interesting there,

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Ed Clemente 18:24

You might get a chance we interviewed Dr. Melnick, he's like Head of the Department for Supply Chain and Logistics.

E

Ed Clemente 18:33



S

Sue Tellier 18:32

I'm giving plugs to all your other guests. This is amazing.

E

Ed Clemente 18:35

It's an ecosystem we've created on our own. So the other thing too, is that, you know, as you do this, Michigan must also be a very fertile place. Because we have so much manufacturing, people are doing stuff and so it's just sort of a, maybe a technology transfer of some of the products that you can use for some of your clients too, right?

S

Sue Tellier 18:57

Absolutely, absolutely. And, and we you know, Michigan is you know, I just I really like to brag about the the defense industry here because it's so strong. I mean, pretty much any Joint Vehicle program has some kind of tentacle in Southeast Michigan because of the Ground Vehicle Center here and and and TACOM in Warren. I mean, we are we have such expertise and such respect nationally for what we do in the automotive industry, and that has transitioned into defense automotive too. So are you know, the I've already bragged about Women in Defense, but the National Defense Industrial Association's Michigan Chapter is one of the strongest in the country. The Association of the United States Army, same thing the Arsenal of Democracy chapter here in Michigan, really well regarded, because we have such interesting programs in Michigan, and that attracts some of the really large defense primes. You know, we have General Dynamics Land Systems here we have BAE systems here. We have, you know, AM General is here. We have great industries in Southeast Michigan because of the Department of Defense.

E

Ed Clemente 19:58

Yeah, I know our aerospace industry is growing too as sort of a byproduct to some of that too.

S

Sue Tellier 20:03

For sure, for sure, for sure. And we see that a lot in West Michigan, too. We see a lot of aerospace in West Michigan. I feel like I'm fangirling on the Detroit area, my roots are there, but I mean, Grand Rapids has some really interesting economic development initiatives and aerospace is really strong.

E

Ed Clemente 20:17

Yeah, no, I'm sure you're there for a reason. That's good. Beyond jobs.

S

Sue Tellier 20:21

Again, I married into it. I'm married into it.

E

Ed Clemente 20:24

So the last couple questions are, if you could maybe give anyone some career advice, and you just started did actually, with your Michigan State and supply chain, but what would you tell people to get into? If you could go back and talk to yourself, which you sorta just did, wanting to change your English major. But what else would you suggest for anybody that's, you know, either mid-career or just going to college, whatever you think.

S

Sue Tellier 20:52

I would also say, and, again, I really only know Michigan as a comparison, I've never lived anywhere else, and I don't want to, but find a mentor. Because the mentorship the people willing to mentor young, rising professionals or emerging leaders. I mean, I see it within the defense industry, but I also see it within the supply chain management industry. There's there's a lot of interest in taking some of those those emerging leaders and really helping them identify their career path, We have, at JetCo, we have a fair number of younger employees, we really encourage them to get involved in those in those initiatives. Each one of our employees has a professional development plan that we're trying to nurture, you know, the if you're in college, you you own, nobody else owns your career development. And so really looking at that embracing it, writing down a plan and finding somebody to hold you accountable for that plan is really, really powerful. I would I would also I I mean, sorry for all the English majors out there. That is a regret. I mean, I can write well in any in any field and, and having an area of expertise and being I mean, seriously learn how to write oh my gosh, there's so many bad writers in the world. I cringe when I get emails, sometimes not from you Ed, your emails are sound. You've done? Well. I don't judge you. I don't judge you when I when I get email.

E

Ed Clemente 22:14

Thank you for that. My mom will be happy the Catholic schools paid off. [You're welcome.] Right. So the last question I have for you is what is your favorite thing in Michigan to do or to visit? Or, you know, what do you like best about living in the state? You're a big proponent for it.

S

Sue Tellier 22:31

It is absolutely Lake Michigan. I can't imagine not having access to Lake Michigan. That thing is amazing. Those waves Ah, come on. If you're having a bad day on Lake Michigan, you're not trying?

E

Ed Clemente 22:42

Well, I think that you should talk to some folks about getting some more promotions.

S

Sue Tellier 22:50

I have a story for you Ed. And I'm sure you're cringing right now. But it was I think it was 2019 or 2020. We were on the Inc 5000 list. JetCo Federal was only on the list of the fastestest 5000 growing companies privately held, I just totally hacked that, but you get what I'm saying. And it was a big deal. I mean, the growth that we had was the fact that we managed it. Oh, my gosh, it was it was a big deal. And actually, the MEDC came in and did a little video segment with us about Why Michigan, why Michigan is our home.

And that really forced me to think quite a bit not just about why I like it here in terms of like, cool, I get to go to a lake. I mean, you get anywhere in Michigan, you can drive two hours and be on a lake, right? Well, you can be at a lake don't drive into the lake, that wasn't my recommendation. There's just there's such a strong network here, across the board, you know, I can pick up the phone and call business owners who are going to who are going to guide me against a failure, or I've got resources through the Small Business Development Centers or to the PTAC, or to the Michigan Defense Center, or say the MEDC. There are so many organizations that care about the success of our business climate. And there might be arguments that we're not doing it perfectly at every step. But there can't be the argument that we're not trying passionately to support the business climate. I just think we're we're very lucky here. And that video really made me reflect on that.

E

Ed Clemente 24:14

Well, once again, I can see why you're on so many boards. And why it's hard for you to say no, because you really bring a lot of energy, I'm sure to these boards. And I do, I mean that seriously. I know I've known you a while but I know you're really being successful over there. And I really wish you the best of luck. Once again, it's Sue Tellier, Owner and President of JetCo Federal. Thanks again for doing the show today Sue.

S

Sue Tellier 24:40

It was super fun and you did a great job.

E

Ed Clemente 24:42

Thank you. And don't forget to tune in next week when we have Olga Stella, Executive Director of Design Core Detroit, Vice President of Strategy and Communications for the College of Creative Studies. Olga will talk a lot about how we get into creative discussion on design, form and function, art, business, their international footprint and a long learning history.

A

Announcer 25:06

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