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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Lizabeth Ardisana

- 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

Hello, I'm your host, Ed Clemente and welcome to the show today and we're very fortunate to have Lizabeth Ardisana. She is the chief executive officer for ASG Renaissance. Welcome to the show, Beth.
- L** Lizabeth Ardisana 00:42

Thanks, Ed. Glad to be here.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:44

I can call her Beth. She gave me permission, just so the audience knows. And we've known each other a while you might as well, right? Quite a while...
- L** Lizabeth Ardisana 00:52

We're not going to go into the number of years. Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 00:55

No, no, but I think we originally met at either Mackinaw Island or when I ran my chamber at some point. But you know, I want to thank you for being here and doing the show and why don't you at least tell people a little bit what ASG Renaissance is because you've been in that business a while too.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 01:12

Yeah, I have so ASG Renaissance in a sister company I have called PDW, basically, we're in the staffing business. So we like to think our goal is to find jobs, then careers for people across a lot of different industries. If we have a focus, and all of that it's probably auto industry, and environmental technology.

E

Ed Clemente 01:35

And I'm gonna want to come back to that a little bit further down in some of the questions but you also work in, you know, you've got quite a few fields that you guys really operate in. And plus, you're also kind of headquartered in a lot of different places. I mean, you got other locations, right?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 01:52

We do our favorite location, we like to think of as World Headquarters, is Dearborn, Michigan. But we also have locations as far as California, Las Vegas, Florida. You know, we are in Canada. So we're across the country. But I'm sitting here in Dearborn, Michigan today.

E

Ed Clemente 02:10

I also see on some here that you also have something either in Canada and I don't know which Cambridge you're in.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 02:16

That's Canada.

E

Ed Clemente 02:19

Okay, good. I wasn't sure if was England or Boston. So yeah, so you've got something you're international, actually as well. And I would imagine that's a good industry to be in, in Canada as well because, you know, there, you're probably placing people over there, they have the same challenges a lot that we do in the US, right?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 02:38

We do, you know, we're kind of in an interesting place these days, because we have challenges and just having talent available. But in addition to that, you know, our real biggest challenge is matching talent. Okay so a lot of that is really for us to understand how can we start people in these fields that we we think are really great, and how do we move them along in that? So it's not just jobs, it's careers. And when you look, you know, I like to think when I sit here in the, in Michigan, we're kind of the center of the universe for lots of new and exciting technologies. So really, our challenge is how do we engage people in that. And you know, as we sit here, there's, there's a lot of people who don't immediately have sort of the education or the training to get into some of these really high tech jobs. And by the way, when I say high tech, it can be high tech manufacturing, it can be high tech support, it can be engineering, I'm personally an engineer. There's lots of ways to engage in some of the new and exciting fields that we're looking at today. But you know, we have to figure out how we get people into those and how we continue to move people forward. So for me, that's meant, you know, I do that for a business, but you know, I also work in a lot of nonprofits that are working on that, too.

E

Ed Clemente 04:03

Yeah, you know, why don't you mention a little bit about the different fields, I know, you're quite spread out, but you're still defined in certain fields right for your placements or brokering for employees kind of thing.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 04:16

Yeah, so we we work in everything from auto to healthcare to defense, but if I, if I look across, like a theme to that, it's really technology. Okay, all of those fields now, no matter what they are, and we do a lot of work in marketing. So all of those fields are really based on new and different technologies. And like I said, I do think we're the center of the universe for technology development here. So there's great opportunities, but you know, I have positions everything from starting positions. We do test driving, for example, very little qualifications, you need to get a test driver job to start, but that's can lead to other work in manufacturing, it can lead to have an apprenticeship program for mechanics, all the way up to PhD engineers developing new auto technologies. So it's, it's really, if there's a theme and all that it's that we've all got to get better and smarter on technology.

E

Ed Clemente 05:22

Yeah, it's funny, I interviewed someone not too long ago who was doing a tech startup sort of smart zone place. And, you know, I said, "what's the difference between a tech startup and just a regular incubator?" And he said, "nothing". He said, Every job now has so much technology involved, that if you don't know some of it, you will be left behind basically, if you don't have that sort of basic foundation for technology anymore.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 05:50

Yeah, that's absolutely true. And never truer than here in Michigan.

E Ed Clemente 05:55

Yeah, you know, it's funny, you said that earlier, and I don't think you meant that as a metaphor. But Michigan is sort of, I always thought we were sort of the tip of the spear for America somewhat, because of the large manufacturing base. But then all the sort of, you know, more advanced jobs that are attached to manufacturing, engineering and design and all those. So whenever there was like, you know, economic slowdown America, in America, Michigan seemed like it always got hit worse first. And I think that really said that we were the forerunner of what was going to happen around the country, sometimes.

L Lizabeth Ardisana 06:30

You know, well we are and you know, I think that is we look at how we prevent that from happening to us over and over again, it's really staying on the forefront of technology. And for us, you know, what's unique about Michigan is we, we can think about it, we can invent it, and we can make it. Okay, so, you know, we have the capability to actually make things and do things in our manufacturing facilities and in the work that we do. But we also have this huge technology base and lots of engineers, you know, creating the new technology. So you know, it's, it's a blend of both of those that I think's really important to us.

E Ed Clemente 07:12

Yeah, there really is the future, right, is that balance between sort of, you know, all the company shortages there and vocational skills right now that didn't exist, you know, 10 years ago. And so what little bit about you, though, you're How did you get to this path? I know that there's a little bit of Chicago, Texas and Cuba and your background. Can you kind of show me how that path came to being here in Michigan a little bit?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 07:38

Yeah, sure. So I was fortunate enough, after I graduated from University of Texas spent all the money that I had and needed a job. I interviewed for a job, never been to Detroit and had never stepped foot in the state of Michigan, until I interviewed for a job at Ford Motor Company and changed my life. Okay, so I was lucky enough to get an engineering position at Ford many years ago. So we won't go into how many years but many years ago, and really loved the industry. Loved the technology, love the industry, and really loved the whole diversity and fun of living in Detroit and living in Michigan. You know, we have it all, from snow, to sun to technology to manufacturing plants.

E Ed Clemente 08:28

And I think I remember in our pre call a little bit you talked about you are sort of a cohort of people that came here or was that... You know, were you - did you like interview as a college student? Is that how you got up here originally?

student. Is that how you got up here originally?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 08:41

I did, well, I graduated from college, I needed a job and flew up here for a job interview and really didn't know anybody here. But you know, the great thing about moving to Detroit, is if you've got any kind of ethnic or cultural background, there's a group of them here. Okay, so you can find your people, because they're in Detroit, and it made it a very welcoming place for me.

A

Announcer 09:07

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E

Ed Clemente 09:23

So you know, you're also I should have mentioned this probably upfront, but you're on the MEDC executive committee. Correct. And you've and I know, that's a, you get to see a lot of these things firsthand, I'm sure in a lot of your operations there as well, Correct?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 09:39

Yeah, so being on the board of MEDC is just a rare and amazing experience. Because you really do get to see what the state is doing; what we're doing to attract other businesses, what those businesses look like, the number of people who want to be here. You know, there may be startups across the country, but if you want to make something happen, this is the place to do it. And being on the board of MEDC, you really get to see that, makes you proud to be in Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 10:07

Yeah, you know, it's, it's sort of interesting when you get to see the 360 of any job, but let alone a whole state of 10 million people. I know you get to see everything from the U.P. to you know, Southwest Detroit, or Southwest Michigan, to Detroit and all over the place. But I think you know, and just a couple of things to more about you in your background, you're on a lot of boards, and I could list off all your boards. But if you want to mention some of them that I know you serve on currently, did you want to hit some of those? Because I think they're pretty interesting.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 10:44

Sure. So if I look at it sort of this broad thing of boards that you can see what my interests are, I'm very fortunate to be on the board of Huntington Bank, and another company out in

California called Clean Energy. And both of those are publicly traded company. So that's very exciting to do. I'm also on the board of a series of nonprofits. And I do that, because then it really ties into both the work I do. And it ties into the things that are important to me. So if you look at that things like Focus Hope and the Children's Foundation, and the Mott Foundation, you know, those, those organizations are all about helping the people in the state of Michigan. And I think they do tremendous work in doing that. And it's really interesting and fulfilling to see what we can do as we volunteer to help others, and how much difference it makes to us personally, and how much difference it makes to the state of Michigan that we're able to do that.

E Ed Clemente 11:41

Yeah, and two other ones I think are pretty critical is the Skillman Foundation, which is nationally known and I don't know, is Kettering University, are you on that board still?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 11:52

Yeah, so I'm the Chair of the Board of Kettering University, which is an outstanding technical institution. So if you've, if you've heard me mention engineering about 10 times so far in this discussion, you can see I am an engineer, and Kettering is just an outstanding engineering school, it creates probably more CEOs, including Mary Barra than any other institution in the state.

E Ed Clemente 12:17

Yeah, GM used to send all their people through there one time, I think when it was still known as was a GMI?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 12:23

Yeah, so we try not to use the term GMI anymore; it's Kettering University.

E Ed Clemente 12:28

Well, the other thing, too, is you're on a, I presume you're still on the Wayne State University Physicians group too?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 12:35

I am. So years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer and I decided at that point that I needed to know more about healthcare. So I got involved with Oakwood hospital, eventually, Wayne State Medical School and the Wayne State Physician Group. It's been really fascinating that there's something that's even more complicated than engineering, it's the medical profession, you know, hospitals and doctors. Not that I have figured it out but there's just tremendous work

being done there and it's, that's been very exciting. Yeah, one other thing and that they like, totally, totally go into your biography. But what is the Clean Energy Fuels Corp. So Clean Energy is a company in California that I've worked with for many years, and I'm on the board of and we're the largest distributors of renewable natural gas. So one of the big things that we do, and this is really exciting, is that we take a manure from dairy farms, and we take the methane from that make that into an fuel, predominantly for for trucking, but it's one of the cleanest fuels out there. So it's, it's taking the byproduct of dairy farming, and making it into a clean fuel.

E

Ed Clemente 13:52

And I would imagine, with your job, that there's a lot of cross pollination, you know, with all these boards, you're on to, like you said, these nonprofits, they all have the same challenges.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 14:04

They do, you know if you look at, at across all the work that we do, is, if there's themes and all that we need to get healthy, and COVID has proven that to us, you know, we really need to work on education. And that's from K right up through university education. And, and we're making a lot of efforts to do that, you know, COVID has been difficult for that too. But so if you look at what I'm interested in health, because I was sick for a while, education, my whole life, everything I've gotten in my life, I've been able to do because I was given a great education. Between University of Texas University of Michigan and University of Detroit. All of that provided an education that let me do the things I do today. So education very, very important. And last but not least, my favorite thing is environmental issues. If we don't start really seriously addressing as as I think we are now, particularly here in Michigan, environmental concerns we have, we'll all be freezing. So those are kind of the themes of the both the for profit and nonprofit work I do.

E

Ed Clemente 15:12

Yeah. Is your Clean Fuels organization, Is it have anything to do with any of the Michigan, not that is a metaphor, but the manure production in Michigan?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 15:23

Yeah, so we're really big on manure production, both here in Michigan and across the Midwest. And I mentioned the manure part only because I, I'm enamored with dairy farms, but we also do landfill gas. And we do that here in Michigan, too.

E

Ed Clemente 15:38

Oh yeah. No, I'm familiar with that when I was in the legislature. We did some bills for those, yeah to convert them. So the other thing is that you're to be on Huntington Bank right now, you guys just merged didn't you?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 15:55
We did with words with TCF.

E Ed Clemente 15:57
Yeah, that was huge, were you on the board during that process?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 15:59
Yes. So I started on a bank board in Flint, Michigan, when I was on the Citizens Bank Board in Flint; we got purchased by First Merit out of Akron, Ohio, and I got on that board. And then Huntington bought First Merit and, and I stayed on the Huntington board. It's a fantastic board, the the merger with TCF has been really great. Okay, really increased our presence here in the, in the state of Michigan, and, and through all that, and you know, it's a great example of for profit and nonprofit coming together, is that as part of that merger, you know, we committed a significant amount of resource for this market to, you know, to help people in this market to increase access for for people in our community, and to do a lot of nonprofit work in the community. So it's been great.

E Ed Clemente 16:55
Man, you've been on some pretty, potentially changing America's and Michigan's economy and a lot of different boards. So I'm gonna... couple, this question is a little bit different but you can apply with think more to your profession, your business. But do you see anything on the horizon? Like trends or things that you're going you kind of touched a little bit with the technology? Is there anything else you think you see coming down the pipeline for your field?

L Lizabeth Ardisana 17:25
So I think technology, period, is going to drive all of our behavior, whether that's automotive technology, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles. When you just look at the technology and the growth of technology, but I think it's also going to have a significant impact on how we live and what we do and how we do that more effectively. So as I see trends, you know, I think, you know, some of the last couple of years have changed the way we work, have changed the way we interact with people, some of that will go back, some of that will never change. So you know, how do we adjust to that and what does that look like in the future, I think is really critical. And for us to be able to compete in the world, particularly as new technologies come into play, it really goes back to the things that have always been important to me. Number one is education. I mean, we can't compete, if we don't have the talent to compete, and we're not going to have the talent to compete if we're not putting a continued emphasis on education. And I think we're doing that, you know, but it's up to each of us to begin to work in any way that we can to make sure that the entire population of the state of Michigan is educated and competitive.

E

Ed Clemente 18:51

Yeah, we've had previous speakers talk a little bit about building the broadband out because there are a lot of underserved areas that can't get to that technology sometimes. And I know that's probably been part of your mission as well to get as many people up to speed as we can with the digital divide kind of thing.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 19:08

Well so Ed, when we talk about... when we used to talk about infrastructure, we were talking about roads, okay, and don't get me wrong, we need to keep working on those roads. But now, when we talk about infrastructure, we're really talking about a broader version of infrastructure, including broadband. So, you know, infrastructure in the world we live in today is different than infrastructure was even five or 10 years ago. If we don't have broadband, and we don't have great systems, I mean, I like to think I'm a domestic immigrant, okay, I moved to Michigan as an immigrant to this state, and we can get lots more people to move here. We have a beautiful state, an absolutely phenomenal state with the best freshwater in the world and the best environment. We could get people to move here and remotely work somewhere else, if we have the right infrastructure to support them.

E

Ed Clemente 19:59

Well, you didn't the second to last question right there because I was gonna ask what you like best about Michigan. But you sort of already answered that one unless you have a specific spot you wanted to mention.

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 20:09

No, Michigan.. I love everything about Michigan, but if I had to say why I love it the most is that it's just the whole concept of diversity. We have four seasons, we have urban and we have parkland. You know, it's just you got a bit of everything here in the state of Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 20:27

And dairy farms. And you sort of answered this question, but you, I'll give you one more shot at it. But if you could go back maybe and talk to your high school self, or you're doing a little mini career commencement, what advice would you give to yourself or somebody today about career wise, beyond technology, anything else?

L

Lizabeth Ardisana 20:47

So I was lucky enough to have given a couple of commencement speeches. So I actually thought about this. And, you know, the advice I would give to myself again, and I'd give to anybody else is, do what you love to do, because you're going to be doing it at for a long time.

Okay, so do what you're passionate about. And nothing is too hard to do. Nothing is too hard to do. You just got to take a step towards it. Okay. And the good news is, as you take those steps toward whatever that goal is, you can veer off on a different path whenever you feel like it. You just got to start aiming towards whatever that Northstar is that you have. And every day, every day, you got to get up and take a couple more steps towards that goal.

E Ed Clemente 21:31

Yeah, and I think with all the technology as we're trying to get it out there, it's it's easier for people to find things that are easier to define, before it was a lot harder to find career options. And I think technology helps us kind of narrow that down nowadays.

L Lizabeth Ardisana 21:48

Yes, I think it's a bit of a challenge. Sometimes it narrows it down and maybe sometimes it gives you too many options. So sometimes you get paralyzed by the options. That's why I say just get started. Right. Get started. You can always change your mind.

E Ed Clemente 22:00

Yeah, yeah, I did a lot of times. Well, anyway, we're at the end. And I want to thank again, our guests, Elizabeth, or just Beth Ardisana. She's the Chief Executive Officer for ASG Renaissance. You were wonderful today. We really appreciate, Beth, you taking time to do this and keep up the good work and all your fields.

L Lizabeth Ardisana 22:21

So it was great to see you and great to have an opportunity to talk to you.

E Ed Clemente 22:24

Thank you. Join us next week. Our guest will be president and doctor, David Eisler Ferris State University, coming on two decades of leadership.

A Announcer 22:35

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