

# Ep.31 - JoAnn Crary

Mon, 10/4 2:51PM 19:57

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, saginaw county, saginaw, economic development, business, people, state, city, area, board, county, companies, pretty, saginaw valley, future, hobby farm, hemlock, ed, career, diverse

## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, JoAnn Crary

---

- 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. Hello, my name is Ed Clemente. I'm your host today for the podcast and today we're fortunate to have JoAnn Crary. She's the president of Saginaw Future. Welcome to the show, Joanne.
- J** JoAnn Crary 00:44  
Thank you Ed. It's pleasure to be with you.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:46  
It's nice to catch up with you again. I worked with you a little bit when I think you're still at Saginaw Future then when I was in the Legislature, right?
- J** JoAnn Crary 00:54  
Yes, we're actually going to have our 30th anniversary next year. So it's been a few years, but it's glad to be with you.
- E** Ed Clemente 01:01

E Ed Clemente 01:01

Yeah. And, you know, even though it sounds obvious to the regular listener, I think you're a lot more than the City of Saginaw. So do you want to explain kind of what Saginaw Future is to somebody who doesn't know what it is?

J JoAnn Crary 01:14

Yeah, you know, really, there's, a lot of people don't understand what economic development is our organization is called Saginaw Future, we're a nonprofit economic development organization. We are county-wide so we do economic development in the City of Saginaw, but also in the suburbs, and the rural communities. And our mission is to advance the economic growth in Saginaw County. We do that by assisting businesses with expansions. We attract new businesses to the area and we support entrepreneurship. So we're very metrics focused, we work, our work is measured by the amount of new investment in the number of jobs created by the companies we assist.

E Ed Clemente 01:53

So I know you probably outlined it, but maybe you can go more detail about what is the geographic kind of boundaries you use.

J JoAnn Crary 02:01

So you know it. A number of counties in Michigan, we have one of them of Saginaw County is over 80 miles of property that includes urban, city, which is small, but it has the same kind of issues that all of our urban centers in Michigan have. We have suburban communities, and then we have rural Michigan, world communities in Saginaw County from, you know, Chesaning, to Frankenmuth, all the way up to Freeland, where MBS Airport is located so it's very diverse.

E Ed Clemente 02:35

And your your background, how did you how did you land here? I know you mentioned the organization's 30 years old but you came how was your path to get there?

J JoAnn Crary 02:47

So it's interesting. I came from a very large family and we lived in the city of Detroit and then we moved to Livonia and my father was transferred to Saginaw. So he bought a 10 acre hobby farm, out in the thumb. So growing up, I lived in an urban city, suburban community and rural Michigan. And I think that diverse background helped me prepare for my career and economic development. And when you know you think about Saginaw County, we have all those facets. We have the city, we have that ring of suburbs around the city, and over half of our county is farmland in fact, Saginaw ranked third in the state for corn and soybean production, forth in sugar beets and in the top 10 for wheat production. So but yeah, we're the we call ourselves the last urban area going north in Michigan. We provide health care for a quarter of our state and it's a destination for shopping and it has the most business professionals north of Flint so it's a pretty pretty important center for trade.

E Ed Clemente 03:48

Yeah, and pardon my ignorance but you said a hobby farm?

J JoAnn Crary 03:53

Yeah, well it means that we had we were kind of like Noah's Ark we had two of everything to cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys, ducks. Every year we would try something different so but we didn't sell it to other people. It was just for our family.

E Ed Clemente 04:10

I'm a city boy, that's my problem. I didn't know about that hobby farm.

J JoAnn Crary 04:14

[I'm a] city girl too. I lived in Detroit but I'm also a farm girl so I mean, I think that background really did help me prepare me for this career.

E Ed Clemente 04:24

Well, when I used to teach Michigan history, they always said the best soil in Michigan was all that area around like the where the thumb sort of comes around and wraps up there and I know there's great agriculture and always has been. You know, you and I share one other thing in common we both went to Ferris too. I'm sure that helps you with your career too. I presume.

J JoAnn Crary 04:48

it did. And it was a great being on the west side of the state as well and I also am a graduate of Central Michigan University. So have a great affinity for that organization. And also now I'm on the board of trustees at Saginaw Valley State University. So, you know, I've been around the state in that regard as well.

E Ed Clemente 05:07

Yeah, I was gonna mention that that's, it's pretty, it's pretty neat. you've, you've been on that a few years now, I assume?

J JoAnn Crary 05:15

I have, they are eight year terms on the board of trustees, and I'm in my fifth year.

E Ed Clemente 05:20

Wow, that's great. That's, that's got to be very interesting to be on that board. Um, the couple other things. You know, I know any of these economic development organizations that, you know, when we interview them, and probably the

best thing I think you said so far is, most people don't even know what economic development is kinda. So I think what when you describe that you really realize what a sort of a mosaic economic development is, like, Who are some of your, like board members, partners, stakeholders that you think, you know, help make your process to make it work?

J

JoAnn Crary 05:56

Yeah, so that's really good point. I think one of the things we know is that none of us can do this alone. We were formed in 1992 at a time when Michigan's economy was on a roller coaster. As long as the auto industry was strong, Saginaw was strong, but when a slowdown hit, people stopped buying cars, and our unemployment reached double digits. So you know, I talked about us being 30 years old. Well, it happened again, and then like early 1990s. And so at that time, I say the stars aligned, our city, government and county government leaders and our business community, through the Saginaw Chamber came together and made a decision to form Saginaw Future to do two things. One was to have a single vision for economic development. And second was to diversify our economy. So we still have contracts with the City County 15 local units to do economic development, but we work very closely with the Chamber of Commerce on projects. While we're hands on, they do the political things in the advocacy. So we have a lot of partners, but the chamber and the local governments are probably our strongest.

E

Ed Clemente 07:01

And I would imagine too that, you know, with these public private partnerships and things like that, that you probably have a few large employers, but, you know, you're probably your bread and butter too small small employers, or, you know, tier 2 supply chain kind of folks.

J

JoAnn Crary 07:19

Yeah, like many areas in Michigan, you know, we're very diverse, and there's a lot of strengths in every part of our state, but Saginaw County is really the home of advanced manufacturing businesses like Nexteer Automotive, they're in what we like to say, the center of the connected vehicle, because they do electronic power steering. Hemlock Semiconductor which you know of, because you helped work on some of the projects that we had a few years ago. They're a global leader in the production of the raw material that goes into 1/3 to 1/2 of every electronic device in the world. So think about that. I mean, that's a super important company. Morley Companies is multifaceted with business process, outsourcing meetings and incentives, exhibits and displays. So you take these three companies alone, and they have 1000s of jobs that they provide for our residents. But then we're also a top tourist destination with Frankenmuth and Birch Run. And again, I talked earlier about being the Regional Center for Healthcare. So we're very diverse in our county, but we have a lot of pretty major employers that provide employment for our entire region.

E

Ed Clemente 08:31

And just to give people just sort of a basic science thing, the Hemlock Semiconductor, obviously, that's hot news, right? Semiconductors. And I imagine they're going full guns, you know, with production issues, probably even now, right?

J

JoAnn Crary 08:48

Well, they really are, they just continue to grow. And the company supplies not only the semiconductor industry, but also the alternative energy industry, and specifically solar energy. Which, it was growing quite strong in the mid 2000s, and then there was a global oversupply, but today, it's, you know, growing great guns because most companies want to reduce their carbon footprint. And so they're moving into solar and wind.

E

Ed Clemente 09:21

Yeah, in fact, if you remember for a short time, I also ran the Energy Innovation Business Council and Hemlock was very involved with us on the solar panel side of things, as well as Dow and Dow, Dow Chemical Dow Corning, and they I know are a little further west of you, but I know you must work closely with the Midland and Bay City area as well because you're all next to each other kind of.

J

JoAnn Crary 09:46

We do, and I think what makes this area special is our relationships with our colleagues. We work very closely with Bay, Midlan, we actually call ourselves the Great Lakes Bay Region. We have an eight county region from Saginaw County to all the way over to Isabella, which is Mount Pleasant. And then up to Gladwin, and down to Gratiot County. We all meet monthly, we work together and collaborate on projects and we know that companies don't look at political boundaries, they look at their labor shed, where their customers and suppliers are coming from, and how they want us to all work together to help support each other and to support their businesses. And we do.

E

Ed Clemente 10:30

Yeah, and I know too that you know, lately the, you know, the job job issues and as we move further and further, you know, from the pandemic, you know, it's a whole new rule of how people are going to work too right I mean, and maybe I'm jumping into one of your next questions but you want to touch on with some future trends are you think that you notice up there?

J

JoAnn Crary 10:55

Sure you so we're always looking for opportunities to stay ahead of the curve, you know, the saying Wayne Gretzky, excuse me, Wayne Gretzky said, 'I skate where the puck is going, not where it's been.' So we have that same mantra. So, you know, first and foremost is mobility. The internal combustion engine, we just call it ICE, is being replaced by battery electric vehicles. So the OEMs are making decisions today on where they're going to be locating this new supply chain. So it's so important that Michigan moves quickly to assemble large sites like upwards of 500 to 1000 acres that are shovel ready to attract this development, it's going to happen in the next 18 months, you're gonna keep hearing more and more about their decisions. We also need to update our incentives in Michigan, to include a research and development credit. So we want our existing companies to continue to invest in Michigan, we need to encourage them to conduct their R&D here and then to conduct their manufacturing here. So I think we've talked a little bit about about climate change is another area that will continue to drive the reduction in our carbon footprint. As you may know, our utilities and others have also increased their move to alternative energy. In fact, we just completed an energy project where DTE is investing over \$100 million in one of our rural communities. And that provides much needed tax base. So those are just a couple of the future trends that offer incredible opportunities for jobs in the future.

A

Announcer 12:29

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](http://michiganbusiness.org/podcast).

E

Ed Clemente 12:45

You're also involved with another interesting group, the Economic Development Leaders for Michigan, right, am I close to the title.

J

JoAnn Crary 12:53

Yeah, you did well, it's Economic Development Leaders for Michigan, we call it EDLM. And it's a group of senior leaders that have been in economic development for many years, that ranges from members from Grand Rapids to Detroit, to Saginaw and Lansing and Lake SHore. And I'll miss a few, Kalamazoo, but we meet weekly and we talk about how what we can do together to advance the Michigan economy. We're not political, we care about Michigan, where new investment is going and job creation for the future. So we have some pretty robust discussions and we feel like we're making an impact already. We were also meet monthly with Business Leaders for Michigan to make sure that we're on the same page to move Michigan forward and make it as competitive as it can be.

E


Ed Clemente 13:50

Yeah, and I know I've heard about it through several of the other guests you know, I know Maureen Krauss and, and I imagine Randy Thelen is meeting with you now too, the whole state is covered Marty Ferrante we've, we've interviewed him as well. Um, anyway, so a couple other things too that. You know, I obviously, I think you touched on this just a teeny bit. But, you know, I always like to ask guests, because you're really I'm sure you're on a workforce board too, that some somewhere Saginaw Valley probably is a good example of where you come in contact with a lot of talent. What advice would you tell yourself? Maybe a high school kid or a mid-career professional, and you could comment on each one, where do you think people should be going for, you know, work or opportunities for the future?

J

JoAnn Crary 14:44

Well, talent is the number one issue not just here, but if you looked at an annual survey that's done with CEOs they talk about what their top 25 factors are when they consider locating a business and the number one thing is access to talent. So we know that that's an issue, not just here, but all over our country, and actually all over the world. So we have a huge focus on talent. Yes, we serve on our workforce development board. Yes, they serve on our board. But more than serving on boards, we collaborate every day, not just with Michigan Works!, but with our Intermediate School District. And our we have a huge focus on STEM education. So, you know, you you talked about, like, what advice would I give to young people, you know, pursuing their future. And I guess I would say that I've been really blessed with strong family values and work ethic. So the advice I would give is probably pretty basic. It's to encourage them to find their passion and do something that they love. They need to give 100% every day, and pick a career that will allow them to make a difference. That seems like what most of our young staff here even what they want to make a difference. And what we try to tell them is you have to give back, it's not about yourself, it's about what you can contribute and how you can make this a better place.



E

Ed Clemente 16:09

And you know, your experience, I'm sure like I said it's Saginaw Valley is probably opened up a lot of things. Maybe that because I imagine Saginaw Valley now is, how many, how many kids go there? I'm not even sure. [About 8,000.] So it's pretty good size. Yeah. And so I imagine they have a lot of voc-ed programs, and they're probably pushing more in that area, too, as well.

J

JoAnn Crary 16:34

You know we have Delta Community College that does a lot of our career technical education,. We actually just passed a millage in Saginaw county for CTE. So our Intermediate School District is also about Saginaw Valley is four year institution, plus they have master's programs. And what I am very impressed with is how nimble they are for a university, to be able to respond to the demands of the marketplace. So in other words, they have started master's programs for i- demand jobs. And they've, you know, really been able to, well, of course, we all went virtual for a while, but how quickly they were able to respond to the pandemic has been very impressive. But yeah, we all work together, whether it's K-12, community college or higher education at SVSU and Central and Northwood and some of our other, we're pretty blessed in this area to have a lot of educational opportunities.

E

Ed Clemente 17:33

Yeah, you know, and we're down to just two questions. But this one you can elaborate a little bit on. But I know from your background, that you do a lot, maybe you could explain to folks real quick what the IEDC is, because you've been very involved with them. Through your career, it looks like.

J

JoAnn Crary 17:50

I have, and it was a great opportunity for me to be involved on the board of directors, the International Economic Development Council is over 5000 individual professionals in economic development. And in 2015, I was able to chair the organization. I think what I'm most proud of is that back in 2015, our focus and our platform was on diversity, equity and inclusion. And we've really made some progress there. So it's a great organization and I'm very proud to have been part of it.

E

Ed Clemente 18:25

Yeah, I know, I know, a lot of our guests are very familiar with the organization. And I know you did extensive work there based even on your resume. I don't know if it's resume or your bio, but it looks good. The last question's pretty simple, but it might not be because you might be parochial. Where's your favorite place in Michigan?

J

JoAnn Crary 18:48

Oh, wow, where's my favorite place, it's Frankenmuth, and it's where I live. And, you know, I think we have the most beautiful state in the country. I love all four seasons and our proximity to the Great Lakes. And I think what makes Michigan so special is our rich culture and diversity. So when you can choose to live anywhere, you choose Michigan, I think that's pretty special.

E

Ed Clemente 19:12

Well, I know that's always hard for people that live in a certain area to pick other places sometimes. But you're right, Michigan is a great state. And once again, our guest was JoAnn Crary. She's the president of Saginaw Future and been working with her for a while. And thanks again for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this. JoAnn.

J

JoAnn Crary 19:31

Thank you, Ed. It was a pleasure to be here and it was good to see you again.

E

Ed Clemente 19:34

Yeah, right, right. Well, I'm sure we'll catch up again soon.

A

Announcer 19:39

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](http://michiganbusiness.org/radio) to put your plans in motion.