

Ep.3.05 - Ray Maczik

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Ray Maczik

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.

Ed Clemente 00:29

Hello, I'm your host today Ed Clemente. And we're fortunate to have Ray Maczik with us. Ray, welcome to the show.

Ray Maczik 00:37


Thank you, Ed.

Ed Clemente 00:39

And I should mention you're the founder, owner of The Standing Company, and I get your title, correct. The president as well?

Ray Maczik 00:47

I am the president, my brother, David, was the founder.



E

Ed Clemente 00:52

Okay. And so why don't you least give someone if you bump into him somewhere, what do you tell them The Standing Company is?

R

Ray Maczik 01:02

Well, that's a that's a good question. We manufacture standing wheelchairs, a standing wheelchair is different than a conventional wheelchair because it literally can allow a person with a spinal cord injury, a person with multiple sclerosis, a person with muscular dystrophy, or a survivor of a traumatic brain injury, can allow somebody who normally could not stand up to stand up. And standing versus a conventional or traditional wheelchair, having the ability to stand makes you healthier, and it makes you stronger. There's tons of medical research. And frankly, if you think about it, you go to big companies now, or big educational facilities or hospitals, and shoot, almost everybody has a standing workstation. Well, why is that? Well, it makes our employees healthier. Well okay, if it makes an ambulatory person healthier, what could it do for a person who is, with a spinal cord injury let's say, who's seated 17 hours a day, seven days a week the rest of their life?

E

Ed Clemente 02:26

And so, I mean, conventionally, because, obviously, this is, people can't see us, but what does it look like a normal wheelchair? Does it look like a motorized wheelchair? How does it look?

R

Ray Maczik 02:41

Well, that's a good question, Ed, and the beauty of our chairs is very simple. It does look like it acts and functions as a traditional wheelchair. So if you're seated, you could propel yourself manually from point A to point B. Or you can use a power module, a joystick, literally and push it. By the same token, you can also stand yourself up manually and or with power, depending on your diagnosis and the limitations of your body. So yeah, it is, it's just a regular wheelchair, except it does something different. It gets you forgive my English, not seated.

E

Ed Clemente 03:20

Sorry, my English is worse than yours. So it's kind of an unusual question, but how did your brother get started in this? Because it's not like people go into this unless they're in the medical field. And I know your background. You're in a different field than this prior.

R

Ray Maczik 03:39

Yes, yes. And that's another, gee, that's a good question to, boy. And I'm sure glad you asked Ed. My brother was a stockbroker. And he was on Wall Street back when you really had to be good to be on Wall Street. And then he decided to venture off into other things. He had a friend with multiple sclerosis. And she had been in a regular wheelchair for oh, I don't know, 20-plus years. And if you sit long enough, and you know, judging from what I see of you on the camera,

Ed, you're in decent shape. If you sit long enough, your body goes to heck, it's not your fault. It happens. It's the forces of nature and the forces of gravity that everything works against you when you're seated. So she kind of, grew into her wheelchair. And so one day, she was talking to her physician, and the physician said, gee, I got a great idea. Let's get your legs straightened out because again, she was just in a seated position all day long until she went to bed. And she thought that was wonderful until the doctor said, I'm just going to cut your hamstrings and your tendons and your heel cords in your body. Your legs will straighten out but that'll be it. You won't ever stand up again. Your legs will be straight. She didn't think that was such a hot idea. So my brother and she did some research and they found the prototype for our chair in Europe. They bought one that to fit her and she was a very petite young lady. And through the process of standing up slowly, and not standing all the way she worked her way up. So she would go up, oh, maybe 10% and do this repeatedly during the day, and then she could extend and move her muscles a little bit more for 20%. It took her over a year, but in a year, Ed, she could stand herself up completely. She got healthier, she got stronger. There was no surgery, there were no drugs, there were no pills, and he thought that was just probably the coolest thing he'd ever seen. So he started the company and we were a distributor for a foreign manufacturer. But they were made in Europe. We're Slovaks. We don't speak French real well. There's a five or six hour timezone difference. So the chair was altered enough to make it our chair.

E

Ed Clemente 06:08

And so, is there, I presume you have a patent or intellectual property on it? [Yes. Right.] And so I should also mention, too, that you're located in the Saginaw area. [Yes, sir.] And is that where you grew up as well? Is that your family's all from?

R

Ray Maczik 06:24

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. My brother and I both are, or were Saginaw people. He's a U of M graduate. I'm a Michigan State graduate. So we kind of got both covered. Unfortunately, my brother passed away in 2019. But yes, yep, we're Michigan other than traveling around and jobs and working in other places. You know, this is our home. Yeah, absolutely.

E

Ed Clemente 06:49

And, I tell people, I mean, I know you're not a huge operation, but I think it's almost fascinating. Because like, the few times you and I have had calls, you personally deliver the chairs to people all around, right? Like, I know, recently, you said, you're down south somewhere, right? Delivering chairs?

R

Ray Maczik 07:09

Yes, sir. We build them. And to build them, we, because the chair is individually custom crafted, okay, so the chair that fits you won't fit me and my chair wouldn't fit, Otie, and so forth. So, we see the person ahead of time, we take measurements, we meet and we consider their diagnosis, their height and their weight, their real world environment, what's their world like? Do they work someplace? Or do they have a home that's kind of restrictive in nature, or

whatever, wherever they are on a farm or the in the city, you're trying to consider all those elements. So the chair functions and is as practical as can be. So after we do a fitting, and, then we make the chair, crafted right here in Saginaw, then we deliver it, because that's the only way to really make sure or ensure that it's going to work for that person. And we cover all, standard operating procedures, we try to make sure they're familiar with how the chair works. So in case there were difficulty, which is very rare, but it happens, they kind of have an idea of what's going on. So yeah, it's pretty much a complete or turnkey operation from the start to the end.

E

Ed Clemente 08:28

You got to imagine physically, you are talking to me, like maybe someone's taller, someone shorter, but then you also got to take in sort of like their disability as well. Because for different people, it's different problems, right?

R

Ray Maczik 08:44

Absolutely. Yeah, a person who has a spinal cord injury, who's a paraplegic can do a lot more things with their hands, and they have maybe better balance or better trunk control or more lateral movement, that's different than a person who's a quadriplegic, or a person with quadriplegia. So yeah, and the only way to make sure that the chair again, functions for them, is we've got to see him. What can you do? You know, once I know what you can do, then we kind of know what we can do to maybe help make it even better, or what we in some cases, what we can't do, and, then we have to stop right there.

E

Ed Clemente 09:24

Yeah, and a couple other sort of interesting things is that you have a decent relationship too with the veterans, right? And I know veterans probably are quite a few of your candidates. Like who do you work with through like the VA in Michigan or nationally? I don't know how it works.

R

Ray Maczik 09:40

Yes, sir. We are on what's called the Federal Supply Schedule, or in layman's terms, the government contract. So what that means is it makes it, being on that Federal Supply Schedule makes it easier for the VA medical centers to to order our wheelchair. So, we get a lot of support from the people in Michigan, we get a lot of support from people all throughout, maybe three-quarters of the country. We don't go out to California or beyond, I should say, west of the Rocky Mountains. But all along the way, we work with the VA hospitals, to try to help them help our veterans and many of those folks have the same desire and attitude and optimism about helping the veterans so we have a nice tool that their therapy people can make use of and not only, especially here in Michigan, not only is it a great product, it's made right in their home state. I mean, that's a real plus, veterans love that boy, they, you tell them that it's made in America, boy they're happy cats. And I get it, they're out there, potentially defending our country. So it's kind of neat, because a lot of the stuff in assistive technology, it's made across one of the oceans, or both oceans, I guess you could say either side. So it's kind of cool. They

like that. And again, the people in Michigan, that's a big deal, to help our veterans who are in Michigan with a Michigan made product, plus they liked the fact, gee the manufacturers, depending on where they're located in Michigan, unless you're in Iron Mountain, or Ironwood, Ironwood's right at the tip, I think, of Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 11:37

Yeah, they're by Wisconsin.

R

Ray Maczik 11:39

Yeah, so is Iron Mountain, now that I think of it. But you know, you're no more than, six, seven hours away at the worst, so it really has a lot of value. I mean, we're so proud of our Michigan connection. We're so proud of our Michigan veterans, we're so proud of the Michigan therapists and seating people at the Michigan VAs that really tried to help work hard to help our veterans enjoy a healthier lifestyle. Because again, if you're standing up and down, instead of being seated, you can eliminate bladder infections, or reduce or eliminate bladder infections, you make your bones stronger, you breathe better, your bowels work better. You get pressure relief, meaning your skin integrity is better - everything. Everything is just simply better if a person who is seated in a conventional wheelchair can stand up, it makes them healthier and stronger. Again, no pills, no drugs. So it's it's really a sweet deal for the right people.

A

Announcer 12:41

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E

Ed Clemente 12:58

On a side note, I want to mention something else you brought up. But the reason I even heard about your company was through Natalie Chmiko, who you probably don't know her directly, but she works here at the MEDC. And she recommended your organization to me because of something they connected you with some steel made Michigan too, right? Can you tell a little bit about that steel story?

R

Ray Maczik 13:20

Yes, again, we're a small, a small Michigan business. And as you know, small businesses are still kind of, they're the backbone of our country. But boy, it's harder and harder to make small businesses work and be successful. And we had a problem last fall with a certain kind of steel that used in parts of our chair, and we placed an order for the steel in, I'm kind of ballparking, it was early summer like June. And then the order was supposed to be here in July or August. And then in August, it didn't show up. And they said well, maybe in the fall. And then when the fall came along in October, they said, well, no, it's going to be next year. Well, holy cow. You know,

that's a difference of seven, eight, nine months. And for a small company like us, that puts us in a pickle. Now, I know I'm not the smartest guy in the world. And we have an awful good contact with Saginaw Future. And the lady's name is Delena Spates-Allen, and she's what they call the PTAC. She works for PTAC, the Procurement Technical Assistance Center. So I called Delena, and she probably gets sick of me calling her all the time asking for help. But that's what they're there for, these kinds of organizations like Saginaw Future, and Delena said let me check around. So Delena, through a convoluted way I guess got a hold of I think it was Brenda Flory at MEDC, I believe, and then Brenda talked to Joe Tyler and Joe called us, and I think Joe was at MEDC too. [Correct, yes.] And Joe called. And we gave him the specs of what we were kind of looking for. And within, I don't know, a day or two, it wasn't very long at all, Ed, Joe sent us a list of maybe 12 or 14 potential suppliers that might be able to help us. And they're all in Michigan. So we thought, gee whiz, we thought we had done our research, and we couldn't find anybody. And here's Joe, he's got 12 or 14. So we pick up the phone, my colleague, Don, Deborah, and I, and we picked up the phone and we started calling. And next thing we know, we're in touch with a fellow, Mike Desmond, who's a vice president at Boyer Steel, which I think is in Warren, Michigan. And Mike could help us and he did help us. So, oh my gosh, it was like a blast from above. I mean, it was wonderful. He came through, we got the stuff right away, it was a very fair price. And everybody's happy. And you know, had we not called Delena, had Delena not gotten a hold of Brenda, had Brenda not gotten a hold of Joe, had Joe not done his research and got a hold of us, I mean, they really saved us. It was wonderful.

E

Ed Clemente 16:15

You know, and I really, want to compliment, not just because I work at the MEDC, but that Pure Business Connect, they're trying to connect Michigan companies, is a very good program. And I'm so glad you're a good example of that. And just in the last sort of couple of questions for you too, is there anything in your industry, you see that's going to be changing? Or is your industry pretty consistent? You think you, is there anything on the horizon that might be changing or improving?

R

Ray Maczik 16:47

Well, there's always technology, new and improved technology, seems to always be kind of coming down the road. You know, probably the one thing that affects it the most is kind of a negative, though, Ed, and that's funding seems to be getting harder and harder to access, our clients are telling us that, they're paying more for insurance, and they're kind of getting less for it. And I don't mean to knock the insurance industry. So it's harder to get these funded. And what makes that again, so ironic is that if a person can stand up and they become healthier and stronger, they're going to cost their insurance less money.

E

Ed Clemente 17:31

Yeah, no, no, no. It's like a wellness plan.

R

Ray Maczik 17:35

Yes, yes, yes, your customers are being proactive about their health, as are many employers

Yes, yes, yes, your customers are being proactive about their health, as are many employers who tell their employees to stand up at a workstation because I want you to be healthier and stronger and being proactive.

E

Ed Clemente 17:48

Well, that's a side note even that a lot of these people, like obviously with the ADA, and things like that, they can actually be fully employed again, with being able to stand, like you said in the beginning, at their desk. [Yes.] And just as a side note to sort of tie into that, is that if you go to your website is at standing chair, right?

R

Ray Maczik 18:11

Well, it's The Standing Company.

E

Ed Clemente 18:13

Sorry, The Standing Company. And but but there's some really great, unique stories, I recommend anyone to go look at it, because it's across the board and diversity of people that you've done these chairs for. I mean, not only across the country, but even off different fields, and, male, female, everything, it's just amazing how many people you've helped out. But I mean, even people who like to hunt, and sort of like that surprised me, too, when I started thinking, oh, yeah, people could bow hunter, or whatever they were gonna do. And it just surprised me. All the different aspects of it.

R

Ray Maczik 18:45

You've really touched on something crucial, Ed, to what is the embodiment of our chair, if you want to go back to work, it used to be, and this was many years ago, the counselors would say, Well, you're in a wheelchair. So you have to be a greeter at a store. Well, not with our chair, I can work on your car under the car hood, I can work in the shop, I can work in the lab, I can stand up and do these things. And so many of our people, when they stand up, it's so emotional. You know, I fit a veteran last week in Waveland, Mississippi, it's way down south near the Gulf of Mexico. And his wife started crying. She said My God, I forgot you were that tall, you know? [Yeah.] And boy, if you don't think that makes people feel better, and you know it Ed, if you feel better mentally, you're gonna feel a lot better physically, also, and your whole outlook changes. The physical advantages are, or the physiological advantages, I should say, are tremendous and well-documented. It makes you healthier, makes you stronger. You can't deny it. But the emotional and psychological edge it can provide to people, wow, that can be as big as anything, it really can't like, oh, I can do that again. And you're right. Can you bow hunt from the seated position? Sure you can. Can you maybe do it better if you can stand up? Oh, absolutely. You know, it's just in what our veterans tell me Ed, I can stand up for the national anthem again. [Oh, wow.] How important is that to a guy or a gal who served our country and now they're in a wheelchair. And now I can stand up when they play my national anthem. It's a big deal.

E

Ed Clemente 20:31

Oh, yeah. No, no, no. I'm gonna end on a little different note for us here. But you've lived in Michigan your whole life. What do you like doing in Michigan? What do you like best about the state, like any festival?

R

Ray Maczik 20:44

Oh, as I travel, and I travel about 70,000 miles a year. And I go all over the country again, this side of the Rockies, so I see lots of places and the more I go places, and I come back and I realize, we got four seasons and I really enjoy four seasons. I'm not a winter enthusiast, by no stretch of the imagination, but what the heck, it's kind of cool. And I think it makes us healthier. And I just like coming back home where we've got a lot of stuff. You want to go up north you can go up north. You want to do outdoor stuff. I used to play golf a lot. So God, you love the golf in Michigan. Now the season's a little shorter. I will admit I'm envious of the people down south that could play golf nine or 12 months of the year. But be that as it may, there's just so much to do here. There really is. And it's just up to the person to find that out and enjoy it.

E

Ed Clemente 21:40

Yeah, you're in a good location, Saginaw, you can travel around the state pretty well. Up north. [Yes, sir.] Anything you can get anywhere from Saginaw.

R

Ray Maczik 21:48

Yes sir. Yeah, we are in a good spot. It's easy to get around from here. And we're only minutes from up north. And we're only minutes from Lansing and Ann Arbor and Detroit and Grand Rapids is not that bad either. So yeah.

E

Ed Clemente 22:00

All right. Well, I want to just thank you again, Ray for doing the show today. Once again, our guest Ray Maczik with The Standing Company and you did a great job, Ray. Thank you very much. And we really appreciate the good work you're doing at your company, as well as representing the state. And thanks a lot for taking time to do this today.

R

Ray Maczik 22:26

It was our pleasure. And it's an honor to be recognized like that. And we'll just keep plugging away and like we say, don't just sit there. Let's get standing.

E

Ed Clemente 22:39

Join us next week, where guests will be Mujeeb Ijaz. He's the founder and chief executive officer

of ONE, Our Next Energy, a battery company on the go.



Announcer 22:51

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