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Humboldt in Time of Covid: Economic Disparities Interview with Chamber of Commerce and HPRC

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Bryan Willkomm Interview Transcript

- Interviewed by: Rebekah (Beks) Baur

1

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:00.630

Paid

2

00:00:03.810 --> 00:00:05.700

Beks Baur: Okay, nice.

3

00:00:08.069 --> 00:00:11.910

Bryan Willkomm: She brings about a lot of the Community networking, brings to

4

00:00:13.019 --> 00:00:17.880

Bryan Willkomm: all the housekeeping we task her out. You know, with actually running the Welcome Center.

5

00:00:19.680 --> 00:00:20.430

Bryan Willkomm: But she,

6

00:00:21.600 --> 00:00:21.870

Bryan Willkomm: is,

7

00:00:23.010 --> 00:00:26.760

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, she's on the Executive Board [Molly Steele (the original person who was to be interviewed)], I guess, but she's not like an officer of the board.

8

00:00:28.740 --> 00:00:29.220

Bryan Willkomm: She's the

9

00:00:30.420 --> 00:00:32.190

Bryan Willkomm: Executive Administrator/Director.

10

00:00:35.460 --> 00:00:40.770

Beks Baur: So do you think I'll get the same answers for me that I would get from her so

11

00:00:42.210 --> 00:00:48.150

Bryan Willkomm: She [Steele] should be similar. Yeah. And then she might know a little bit more details about certain numbers.

12

00:00:49.740 --> 00:00:55.320

Bryan Willkomm: Because you know her job is to account for those numbers like if you were to ask about membership increases or decreases.

13

00:00:57.120 --> 00:01:02.850

Bryan Willkomm: But we review these items at meetings that we have twice a month. She's doing it every day.

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00:01:03.990 --> 00:01:06.120

Bryan Willkomm: You know, so she has a lot of information too.

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00:01:08.670 --> 00:01:10.770

Beks Baur: I'm recording now so,

16

00:01:12.180 --> 00:01:15.390

Beks Baur: if you could repeat your name for the

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00:01:16.410 --> 00:01:16.950

Beks Baur: interview.

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00:01:17.550 --> 00:01:22.890

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah it's Brian Willkomm with Humboldt Patient Resource Center and also the Arcata Chamber of Commerce.

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00:01:23.910 --> 00:01:24.480

Beks Baur: Awesome.

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00:01:26.400 --> 00:01:30.780

Beks Baur: Um, so we're gonna start with the Chamber of Commerce first.

21

00:01:32.220 --> 00:01:32.850

Beks Baur: Um, could you,

22

00:01:32.910 --> 00:01:37.020

Beks Baur: tell me the role the Chamber of Commerce players in our local economy?

23

00:01:38.550 --> 00:01:46.800

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, the chamber is a support system and network for local businesses in addition to professional development services,

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00:01:47.850 --> 00:01:57.300

Bryan Willkomm: uh, labor services networking through larger chamber networks and also conducting annual events like the Fourth of July Jubilee,

25

00:01:58.020 --> 00:02:09.270

Bryan Willkomm: and assisting basically businesses being successful throughout the city of Arcata and also allowing networking with other businesses throughout Humboldt County through our mixers.

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00:02:09.930 --> 00:02:17.430

Bryan Willkomm: And also just board members and volunteers and the wide range of services and experiences that they have as members.

27

00:02:19.530 --> 00:02:29.010

Beks Baur: Okay, with the network with the other commerces, like the other commerces, with that specifically be like Eureka and McKinleyville or like all over Humboldt.

28

00:02:30.090 --> 00:02:33.660

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, so some of the services are accessed through the larger

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00:02:34.290 --> 00:02:43.290

Bryan Willkomm: Cal Chambers or National Chambers. We don't necessarily act as direct members, but we network through, get some of the services like even something like a labor poster board.

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00:02:43.860 --> 00:02:55.620

Bryan Willkomm: If a business needs to labor poster board if they're a chamber member we get them at discounted rates, keep them up to date on new changes that might be coming. Make them aware also like adaptations and technology.

31

00:02:57.030 --> 00:03:08.670

Bryan Willkomm: And, um, what I mean by networking is really a support system for each other and you can really see that when you go to mixers, and there's people that may not know the products and services that another local businesses offer.

32

00:03:09.420 --> 00:03:23.940

Bryan Willkomm: and so then they're able to access that business in that service without having to leave the area. And then, in doing so, all of the local community members benefit through that money being spent locally; helping with employment as well as tax revenue.

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00:03:25.140 --> 00:03:28.710

Beks Baur: So that direct relationship with

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00:03:31.290 --> 00:03:38.430

Beks Baur: the way that money is spent and everything. That's a relationship with the economic group growth and local business?

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00:03:39.330 --> 00:03:41.400

Beks Baur: Does it cause an economic growth, like that?

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00:03:42.270 --> 00:03:53.580

Bryan Willkomm: Well, that's the goal is that their local chamber acts sometimes on behalf of businesses to benefit them. Let's say you know a local downtown area business, uh.

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00:03:54.270 --> 00:03:56.190

Bryan Willkomm: could benefit from having events,

38

00:03:56.850 --> 00:04:10.950

Bryan Willkomm: occur that would draw tourism into the area. The Fourth of July Jubilee we hold, not as a direct benefit to the Chamber of Commerce to generate a bunch of revenue but so that the local businesses will benefit from having the influx of visitors to the area,

39

00:04:11.490 --> 00:04:15.960

Bryan Willkomm: and getting opportunities to expose their products and services to new groups of people too.

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00:04:17.250 --> 00:04:17.610

Beks Baur: Okay.

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00:04:20.220 --> 00:04:26.700

Beks Baur: So I remember when we were talking before [the recording started] I had asked you, because you were the former president of the Chamber,

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00:04:27.330 --> 00:04:28.950

Beks Baur: and you said that you,

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00:04:29.250 --> 00:04:42.360

Beks Baur: were a little bit involved with the COVID when it first, when it first hit, but you just change over before you really, uh, like did anything I guess to say but,

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00:04:43.710 --> 00:04:44.520

Beks Baur: I digress,

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00:04:46.560 --> 00:04:53.160

Beks Baur: did that affect your position because I know that you're on the Executive Board now. Did that change anything that you could have done?

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00:04:55.020 --> 00:05:02.400

Bryan Willkomm: Not necessarily. We work really well as a great group. There's not really a necessary authoritarian role amongst the board where president, um,

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00:05:02.760 --> 00:05:13.260

Bryan Willkomm: the will of the president is the way. It's a great group of people that build off of each other's ideas and thoughts and act on behalf of all community members. So that's what I think, um,

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00:05:13.830 --> 00:05:18.840

Bryan Willkomm: Katrina [the current president], has done a great job, given the circumstances of helping and transition the Chamber

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00:05:19.200 --> 00:05:29.250

Bryan Willkomm: to its self, have some sort of sense of normality, because we could not even gather in the traditional ways we used to where we would gather in person to have our meetings.

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00:05:29.970 --> 00:05:40.710

Bryan Willkomm: Now, we had to gather remotely and then she has the challenges of working with a new executive director. We had transitions and changes in employment, the actual individuals.

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00:05:41.310 --> 00:05:53.730

Bryan Willkomm: So she was involved in training, getting to know, and still being very supportive to all the businesses being accessible to them while still being remote through COVID and adapting, also to,

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00:05:54.630 --> 00:06:07.230

Bryan Willkomm: how to plan for the future given circumstances. So we have the annual dinner is an award that the local Chamber of Commerce puts on that recognizes local businesses in a wide range of

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00:06:07.650 --> 00:06:11.850

Bryan Willkomm: acknowledgments, including business of the year, new business, new chamber member of the year,

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00:06:12.240 --> 00:06:28.890

Bryan Willkomm: Green business of the year and some of these events are really a celebration, a party for the community itself. And that's also our biggest fundraiser. So how are we planning for that fundraiser in February of next year when we don't know what COVID numbers are going to be?

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00:06:30.120 --> 00:06:41.370

Bryan Willkomm: How are we going to respect the safety and health of our community, while also trying to give a positive outlook on our economic future too?

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00:06:42.120 --> 00:06:53.580

Bryan Willkomm: We don't want to scare tourists away, but do we really want to invite tourism through our events that can draw up to 10,000 people? These are tough questions during an unknown time.

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00:06:55.590 --> 00:07:07.740

Bryan Willkomm: And then also, how do we get accurate and proper information to our businesses regarding COVID? How do we not let misinformation confuse and impact the potential success of local businesses?

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00:07:08.340 --> 00:07:12.210

Bryan Willkomm: One example being, do you know how to manage your occupancy load?

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00:07:13.200 --> 00:07:19.080

Bryan Willkomm: What is your occupancy load? Here's how to calculate it. That's something that the chamber is having a discussion amongst the Executive Board,

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00:07:19.470 --> 00:07:32.130

Bryan Willkomm: and how, how to educate the businesses so that they can operate within a safe scope and in turn be successful. Because without businesses, we would not have the Chamber.

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00:07:34.470 --> 00:07:36.120

Beks Baur: Yeah, make sense.

62

00:07:42.810 --> 00:07:48.720

Beks Baur: What do you see is the main impact of covert on local businesses and our economy?

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00:07:49.710 --> 00:08:07.440

Bryan Willkomm: Tourism definitely, tourism, and a macro point of view. We do not have the same influx of individuals that we would have, say even for oyster fest, that can be apparent in just the occupancy load of hotels, which are restricted from who they can serve.

64

00:08:08.610 --> 00:08:22.140

Bryan Willkomm: Also efficiency in service-based businesses, so restaurants that used to be able to service individuals, both at tables with a larger staff and at their takeout areas are now limited to just take out,

65

00:08:22.890 --> 00:08:27.870

Bryan Willkomm: and that impacts the incomes of some of those waiters and waitresses the servers,

66

00:08:28.170 --> 00:08:39.750

Bryan Willkomm: the load on the kitchen. The timing of how to have that many orders come in because they used to have tabletop capacities to analyze. If you were full, now you have tickets coming into the phone and how to even managed to pick up the phone?

67

00:08:41.280 --> 00:08:45.360

Bryan Willkomm: You know there's times when I've called local businesses and you're getting up to a dozen

68

00:08:46.200 --> 00:08:50.310

Bryan Willkomm: busy signals before you're able to pick up. That's how busy they are and trying to adapt.

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00:08:50.850 --> 00:08:58.080

Bryan Willkomm: And so that's where part of the chamber, you know, has discussed in the past. How can we prepare businesses with technology?

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00:08:58.860 --> 00:09:07.050

Bryan Willkomm: We have connected and learned a lot from Humboldt State University. Some of the students there at the library, in particular, working with our executive board member Cyril,

71

00:09:07.710 --> 00:09:15.660

Bryan Willkomm: have really supported local businesses through app based technologies and amplification and better use of Google.

72

00:09:16.140 --> 00:09:32.010

Bryan Willkomm: And how to position Humboldt and Humboldt businesses to actually show up on a Google search and how to Geo-tag and really take advantage of technology that is already available, but maybe not utilized by some of our small businesses.

73

00:09:34.230 --> 00:09:42.390

Beks Baur: Yeah, I, I've recognized that cause I was supposed to interview, like a restaurant, and I wish that I could have interviewed them.

74

00:09:42.900 --> 00:09:51.720

Beks Baur: And they also they do struggle with having to do the takeout. And since my roommate works there he is vastly impacted by

75

00:09:52.170 --> 00:10:08.010

Beks Baur: just having to adapt to not having people dine in because a lot of people used to dine in and so he loses out on a tip that would have been bigger and with the second wave that's happening now they're worried that they're going to have to close.

76

00:10:09.990 --> 00:10:15.540

Bryan Willkomm: So there's a lot of unknowns and it's hard to plan and be successful in business when you have that many unknowns.

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00:10:15.870 --> 00:10:25.020

Bryan Willkomm: Especially when you're trying to step out, let's say employee people over this holiday season. And you don't even know if you're gonna be open in two weeks, and you're trying to put out a schedule so people can plan.

78

00:10:25.560 --> 00:10:29.670

Bryan Willkomm: Have their families taken care of. And then you have the new hurdles during COVID where

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00:10:29.970 --> 00:10:37.530

Bryan Willkomm: people have to take care of their children at home Schools are closing. Childcare is not as accessible. So how can they work those same shifts?

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00:10:37.920 --> 00:10:44.700

Bryan Willkomm: And then with early closures. There's also a lack of diversity of employable timeframes.

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00:10:45.000 --> 00:10:52.410

Bryan Willkomm: You know, someone may be could work late nights at a bar and make some money, you know, generate revenue with the bars closing or having to be shut down completely.

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00:10:52.740 --> 00:11:03.360

Bryan Willkomm: They're not able to work those same hours where they used to maybe have child care coverage at different times in the day. So it's a real challenge for even generating income for an individual.

83

00:11:04.680 --> 00:11:05.160

Beks Baur: Yeah.

84

00:11:07.140 --> 00:11:14.910

Beks Baur: You've given a lot of reasons why like the economy has been impacted. But is there anything that has been least impacted by COVID?

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00:11:16.800 --> 00:11:26.670

Bryan Willkomm: Well overall grocery stores are doing pretty well because people are eating at home. This is just from the reports we get here and committee members also, you know, with cannabis business is actually doing pretty well,

86

00:11:27.240 --> 00:11:39.210

Bryan Willkomm: because of people consuming an increasing amount of cannabis during the shelter in place. There's also dips in certain consumption product lines, though, because people are concerned about their lung health.

87

00:11:39.810 --> 00:11:48.330

Bryan Willkomm: And so that's just one industry that we have reporting from really, it's the service industry and restaurants that are most greatly impacted.

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00:11:49.200 --> 00:11:58.140

Bryan Willkomm: And places like the Minor Theater even, who is the longest operating, the oldest movie theater in the United States and an incredible asset

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00:11:58.530 --> 00:12:06.720

Bryan Willkomm: to Arcata, almost had to shutter its doors because they can't have people sitting and gathering for extended amount of time to watch a movie indoors

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00:12:07.440 --> 00:12:11.280

Bryan Willkomm: and those owners have pivoted very well, adapted it and put in HEPA filters in.

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00:12:11.640 --> 00:12:21.510

Bryan Willkomm: They've implemented new technologies where you can pick your seat early and it'll clear out a six-foot radius around you in certain seats. You can even rent the whole theater for a given rate.

92

00:12:22.470 --> 00:12:30.480

Bryan Willkomm: So really incredible adaptation and that's what a lot of businesses are doing. Pick up services, curbside services, delivery services.

93

00:12:31.920 --> 00:12:42.510

Bryan Willkomm: But then also, you know, it's funny because this also has a change and a shift in some of Arcata. The city of Arcata's environmental goals, you know? Now we're not using reusable

94

00:12:43.770 --> 00:12:48.480

Bryan Willkomm: serving utensils, plates, and cups, like we do in restaurants. We are using all takeout.

95

00:12:49.950 --> 00:13:03.750

Bryan Willkomm: We are creating more trash. You know? The amount of gloves that are being used for safety. The amount of masks being worn for safety and the increase of trash that COVID also creates by having a takeout consumption-based

96

00:13:05.070 --> 00:13:05.610

Bryan Willkomm: Economy.

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00:13:09.240 --> 00:13:16.770

Beks Baur: You think that definitely has environmental impacts right? Because like I order out from some businesses and,

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00:13:18.420 --> 00:13:31.830

Beks Baur: their, it's like plastic and stuff, but is utensils that you could give out that were like zero waste or biodegradable? That would be more beneficial, but I'm not aware of a lot of things like that.

99

00:13:32.940 --> 00:13:40.590

Bryan Willkomm: True, and then there's also the increased cost of the business to have PPE equipment, personal protective equipment, and that's

100

00:13:41.880 --> 00:13:45.750

Bryan Willkomm: an unknown cost to different businesses until it's measured over time.

101

00:13:46.680 --> 00:13:57.930

Bryan Willkomm: You know you don't realize it until you're starting to look at your spending and your expenses and realize, gosh, we are spending a lot on hand sanitizer masks and gloves, but it's required and it's for good reasons during COVID.

102

00:13:59.970 --> 00:14:00.600

Beks Baur: Yeah.

103

00:14:02.100 --> 00:14:11.820

Bryan Willkomm: But on the positive side, we are hopeful that through the discussions with chamber members, our staff and then the community there's going to be innovative opportunities.

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00:14:12.780 --> 00:14:23.100

Bryan Willkomm: And some of the restaurants that are closing down. Some of them are shifting into you know pickup orders and food trucks and, uh, pre-made meals.

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00:14:23.700 --> 00:14:30.570

Bryan Willkomm: Some of the local, uh, markets are coming up with really innovative products to go and new systems.

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00:14:31.140 --> 00:14:39.270

Bryan Willkomm: You know, the Co-op [grocery store] now has like a cashless little terminal that you can go to. I'm noticing a lot more changes in the way restaurants are going to be designed

107

00:14:39.660 --> 00:14:49.590

Bryan Willkomm: and even at a national level, you know, are paying attention to businesses like Chipotle that is doing an all pickup order business model in New York or they don't even have a dine-in anymore,

108

00:14:50.130 --> 00:15:01.200

Bryan Willkomm: and you order online and everything's cashless there's no cash on site. So these are interesting times to pay attention to and see how we can persevere. But thankfully in Humboldt County,

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00:15:02.280 --> 00:15:10.200

Bryan Willkomm: we are in a very unique community to our overall we're doing pretty well in COVID, you know, as from a health point of view.

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00:15:11.550 --> 00:15:27.060

Bryan Willkomm: Only recently, do we have a very large increase in COVID cases. And a lot of that due to just people getting probably a little more relaxed and fatigue, if you will, and also more people getting tested and getting return of information.

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00:15:28.200 --> 00:15:36.180

Bryan Willkomm: So hopefully we'll adapt together over the holiday season and businesses can find ways to still be successful.

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00:15:37.230 --> 00:15:52.020

Bryan Willkomm: Oh, you know, an example that we're working towards is potentially putting together even a local chamber member basket of goods that businesses can purchase and give to their employees in lieu of their company parties.

113

00:15:52.650 --> 00:15:56.340

Bryan Willkomm: You know, so usually have a company party, you have a great time, food,

114

00:15:57.120 --> 00:16:12.330

Bryan Willkomm: social event. We can't really have those, you know, right now. Maybe you take some of that investment and you can put it into local product lines that are offered them as a gift to your employees that are for their whole families that can be used at home, either food, you know, cosmetic, uh,

115

00:16:13.590 --> 00:16:17.010

Bryan Willkomm: gosh, we have so many diverse businesses that you could access in that basket.

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00:16:18.060 --> 00:16:26.460

Bryan Willkomm: Um, and you're benefiting the local community by reinvesting it because normally your party would be investing in the local community to and spending that money,

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00:16:27.540 --> 00:16:32.490

Bryan Willkomm: at the bowling alley, at the casino at the, you know, anywhere for the larger event space.

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00:16:33.630 --> 00:16:47.940

Bryan Willkomm: So you really, really do see how much we rely on each other over these unique times when you realize by not having the social gatherings, how much you were part of the community during the holiday times.

119

00:16:53.520 --> 00:16:54.240

Beks Baur: Yeah, um,

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00:16:56.370 --> 00:17:11.040

Beks Baur: So I want to bring it back to when you were talking about the chamber at the beginning and how they were having difficulties. Like for example having zoom meetings, instead of being able to actually meet in person or having to be remote.

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00:17:12.720 --> 00:17:21.270

Beks Baur: Um, has the work of the chamber been affected by other things, like, than just having to be remote or has the main difficulty?

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00:17:22.680 --> 00:17:35.850

Bryan Willkomm: Well, remote and then planning and then communication with members too and a lot of, again, the unknowns and trying to do our best to provide the answers, but there's a lot of changes rapidly.

123

00:17:37.980 --> 00:17:44.280

Bryan Willkomm: You know, I think that one. One question that we even had throughout COVID.

124

00:17:46.890 --> 00:17:48.570

Bryan Willkomm: There you go. Might have to my phone a little more.

125

00:17:49.710 --> 00:18:07.320

Bryan Willkomm: Throughout COVID, it is will we need to meet again in person for these meetings. You know, we really do enjoy the camaraderie and the smell of coffee, if you will. That's on that table and the communal experience that we have and I really do think it does add value.

126

00:18:08.460 --> 00:18:21.780

Bryan Willkomm: But from an economic standpoint, from an environmental standpoint. Do we all need to drive our cars in, you know, several dozen of miles to meet and have the same discussion are able to do over this phone?

127

00:18:23.070 --> 00:18:23.640

Bryan Willkomm: Maybe not.

128

00:18:24.840 --> 00:18:35.370

Bryan Willkomm: You know, do we need to have as much money being spent on restaurants in the future for dining areas when take out might be the new normal?

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00:18:36.330 --> 00:18:48.630

Bryan Willkomm: Maybe not, you know. Maybe outdoor seating becomes the new trend that people seek out. So with every challenge comes an opportunity to learn from it and have an adaptation period and

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00:18:49.140 --> 00:19:00.090

Bryan Willkomm: early success in the new normal. So that's what hopefully what we're going to see with a lot of these businesses, including the chamber Just like you're saying, it was it was definitely a change. It was challenging, but now we're wondering,

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00:19:00.540 --> 00:19:06.060

Bryan Willkomm: do we need to go back? In certain ways and help. How is this better,

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00:19:07.530 --> 00:19:08.070

Bryan Willkomm: in comparing?

133

00:19:09.540 --> 00:19:26.040

Beks Baur: I think it's clear that humans miss, like, the amount of social contact that they would get on a daily level. I've heard it from many people like friends, coworkers, whatever. And so it's created a fatigue in that way. So,

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00:19:27.600 --> 00:19:35.340

Beks Baur: I can understand why there's like, there's like a division of whether or not we need to

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00:19:37.140 --> 00:19:45.540

Beks Baur: we need to change, what, the way that we're doing now and go back to what was normal. Because I do understand that it has been definitely,

136

00:19:46.110 --> 00:20:01.050

Beks Baur: I don't want to say easier, because I know a lot of people don't like the technology format. And I don't know if people that you have to communicate has constant technology issues, but that's definitely a huge problem for other people.

137

00:20:02.880 --> 00:20:12.750

Bryan Willkomm: And it also creates equity issues as well because now if individual can't afford access, should they be discriminated from being able to attend?

138

00:20:13.230 --> 00:20:20.910

Bryan Willkomm: If their Wi Fi isn't fast enough, if they didn't pay enough from their plan, you know, these are those things that are really challenging, especially in education, too.

139

00:20:22.620 --> 00:20:36.780

Bryan Willkomm: And so that's a that's a big question there too that the chamber has participated in. You know, are we technologically sound to make these pivots, while still having access and equity to all our community members.

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00:20:38.550 --> 00:20:38.910

Beks Baur: Yeah.

141

00:20:39.270 --> 00:20:52.350

Bryan Willkomm: You know, like, you know, you can attend the chamber member meetings. If you're just a community member, there open meetings and we appreciate our Chamber business members coming down then to the meetings. What if you

142

00:20:52.980 --> 00:21:03.750

Bryan Willkomm: could not access this on your phone, this meeting, but you could ride your bike or walk to the actual chamber building? You know, there's a perfect example that might create some sort of inequity issue.

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00:21:05.190 --> 00:21:08.340

Beks Baur: Do you think it's possible that there could be like a dual,

144

00:21:09.480 --> 00:21:20.970

Beks Baur: like a hybrid version of that. For, like, people that don't necessarily want to attend the meeting can attend it virtually and people that want to attend it physically could or would that just create too much of a problem?

145

00:21:21.480 --> 00:21:31.020

Bryan Willkomm: I agree. Yeah. And then the, you know, psychology background in me would ask, "Well, do we have changes then and our ability to communicate by not being able to read each other's body language in the same way?"

146

00:21:32.010 --> 00:21:40.740

Bryan Willkomm: Or even interact with people with our olfactory system and smell, you know, you can get really deep into human interaction.

147

00:21:41.940 --> 00:21:48.900

Bryan Willkomm: In the present in the physical and human interaction over technology and as their differences, something interesting Humboldt State can get into.

148

00:21:50.790 --> 00:21:51.180

Beks Baur: That is true.

149

00:21:52.200 --> 00:22:08.010

Beks Baur: And would you say that the Chamber's mission is changed with the COVID crisis because it's always about like wanting to help the community and like better it and have all these networks, but since Covid's happened like has its initial missed mission changed?

150

00:22:08.730 --> 00:22:18.450

Bryan Willkomm: I wouldn't say change, but just maybe a slight pivot to the current needs. Like, like I said, we really do enjoy the events.

151

00:22:18.870 --> 00:22:26.820

Bryan Willkomm: The bringing together of the community is something that chamber has done for decades. Gosh, I wish I knew the exact date, you know,

152

00:22:27.660 --> 00:22:46.080

Bryan Willkomm: through the Fourth of July Jubilee. And that is something we look forward to. So there's a pivot in that we are trying to still even conduct our monthly mixers, and we're doing those mixers now virtually and so it's really awesome.

153

00:22:47.790 --> 00:22:50.490

Bryan Willkomm: Um, I think that time will only tell,

154

00:22:51.660 --> 00:22:59.520

Bryan Willkomm: how COVID pans out over the next year, but we're going to continue to adapt. And what's really beautiful about the chamber is there are new members that are brought on all the time.

155

00:23:00.750 --> 00:23:12.600

Bryan Willkomm: And so it's, it is truly a unique opportunity to be able to continue to bring on fresh ideas and, uh, these new challenges and new opportunities we learned so much from each other.

156

00:23:15.690 --> 00:23:23.610

Bryan Willkomm: It's great hearing Molly, you know, come back and say, Hey, I just, we just did some research on a virtual mixer. I think it was North Dakota or Idaho.

157

00:23:23.970 --> 00:23:32.040

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, different states and different chambers. They attended virtually took such great notes and put together some awesome mixers for our Arcadia chamber.

158

00:23:33.300 --> 00:23:36.900

Bryan Willkomm: So trying to keep that sense of community going and social opportunities too.

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00:23:38.760 --> 00:23:39.210

Beks Baur: Yeah.

160

00:23:40.590 --> 00:23:41.310

Beks Baur: Um,

161

00:23:42.480 --> 00:23:50.550

Beks Baur: Could you share a story or two about our local economy or the businesses that you think best illustrate the challenges of COVID.

162

00:23:52.890 --> 00:23:54.240

Bryan Willkomm: I mean everybody,

163

00:23:55.800 --> 00:24:00.750

Bryan Willkomm: everybody. Yeah, there's not one business I feel like, who has not been impacted.

164

00:24:02.130 --> 00:24:18.150

Bryan Willkomm: From the small ice cream shop, you know, to the local banks to large manufacturers, to retailers, to grocery stores. Everybody has been impacted by limited occupancy issues. Employee Wellness checks, um.

165

00:24:19.590 --> 00:24:28.440

Bryan Willkomm: Their own human resource challenges of dealing with an emotional staff, managing quarantine periods.

166

00:24:29.970 --> 00:24:43.140

Bryan Willkomm: You know how some businesses have had to change their employee handbooks to adapt to unique needs of their employees that just weren't anticipated, you know.

167

00:24:44.130 --> 00:24:52.860

Bryan Willkomm: Their employees wanting to do the right thing by not know coming to work because someone was exposed at a party, but their COVID test doesn't come back for another four days.

168

00:24:53.880 --> 00:25:05.910

Bryan Willkomm: Is that employee going to be punished by not getting paid for that time? Do they get to use their vacation time? Do they run out of sick pay and then also companies trying to access payment protection plan money through the federal government.

169

00:25:06.930 --> 00:25:12.060

Bryan Willkomm: And the challenges of filling out the paperwork and waiting and not knowing what to do next.

170

00:25:13.230 --> 00:25:26.700

Bryan Willkomm: And then the restaurants, you've had to throw out their food multiple times. By purchasing large amounts of food and then being told they have to shut down or operate at a limited occupancy. It is challenging for everybody.

171

00:25:29.310 --> 00:25:30.780

Beks Baur: Do you think there any, uh,

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00:25:32.370 --> 00:25:48.900

Beks Baur: places that have illustrated a benefit of COVID because I may say they're all impacted, but there has been the benefit of the way that people communicate like for the economy or anything. But do you think that there's been any kind of benefit besides that?

173

00:25:49.290 --> 00:25:58.620

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, I think I've seen some businesses are definitely well technology and now they have all in ordering businesses have learned new efficiencies. Definitely.

174

00:26:00.120 --> 00:26:11.100

Bryan Willkomm: Um, also, I think it's brought up some questions just on employment wellbeing and happiness. That's a big question during these times, is do people want to work so much?

175

00:26:12.240 --> 00:26:24.150

Bryan Willkomm: That's a wild reflection. When you have a pandemic going on and then people are really stressed out from working so much that then they question do I really want to work so much?

176

00:26:24.870 --> 00:26:32.400

Bryan Willkomm: If I'm going to get sick and that's the ultimate end of my efforts. You know, it's hard to be inspired.

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00:26:33.000 --> 00:26:44.130

Bryan Willkomm: For some of those employees, to go above and beyond and expose themselves during pandemics times when there may not be a direct benefit like traditional times in being able to be promoted

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00:26:44.340 --> 00:26:50.400

Bryan Willkomm: or drive more economic opportunity through their extended effort. So that's a real challenge there.

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00:26:52.290 --> 00:26:55.470

Bryan Willkomm: I think though, technology. I think

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00:26:56.820 --> 00:27:07.950

Bryan Willkomm: in an opportunity to analyze cost of goods sold and your expenses during these times, you know, during tough times in business, you have to go back and look at your books and see if some of the decisions are the best decisions.

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00:27:08.460 --> 00:27:19.110

Bryan Willkomm: And then also, I think it's been amazing to see overall from what I hear is a very empathetic business culture that really is trying to care for employees in Arcata

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00:27:19.680 --> 00:27:31.890

Bryan Willkomm: You know, they're trying their best to provide in a an employment opportunity and I've seen some businesses in the city of eureka, I've seen some businesses shut down and reopen as new businesses with the same staff.

183

00:27:32.850 --> 00:27:47.940

Bryan Willkomm: and make big pivots. You know, from a sushi shop to a sandwich shop, you know, these that's what needed to be done for that time and then business is doing well. Now, so, you know, so pivots. I think that's the key term there; everybody has to make pivots.

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00:27:50.340 --> 00:28:01.590

Beks Baur: Yeah, is there, the concern of the rate of unemployment spiking to a point where the businesses can't be held, because, as you said, if people are afraid that,

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00:28:02.370 --> 00:28:19.710

Beks Baur: it, like, they're working for no purpose that they're going to like get sick and not want to work like is there even a purpose? Because I do know people that, for example, haven't come back to work in the same area that I have, because they know that the unemployment will pay them better.

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00:28:21.000 --> 00:28:22.590

Bryan Willkomm: Well, that's a unique, um,

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00:28:24.900 --> 00:28:38.010

Bryan Willkomm: It's a unique time to try to analyze the economic impact of the stimulus check and what it has done to employment, because the stimulus checks have, in my understanding, the goal to keep

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00:28:38.460 --> 00:28:50.490

Bryan Willkomm: certain people home was the 1200 dollar stimulus check. To really allow people to meet the bare minimum during these tough times. So in that sense it accomplishes its goal.

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00:28:52.920 --> 00:28:59.580

Bryan Willkomm: Um, being a manager who does have to employ individuals. Yes, I have had those challenges of people saying that they can make more money.

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00:29:00.420 --> 00:29:08.700

Bryan Willkomm: on unemployment than working, but the benefits are not offered in the same way. The health, medical, dental, vision.

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00:29:09.150 --> 00:29:23.070

Bryan Willkomm: The tips income for some of the service-related and also the job security. What happens after COVID? You know, now you're going to be coming back into a workforce that may no longer need you. and so there are risks there as well.

192

00:29:24.180 --> 00:29:30.420

Bryan Willkomm: I think that what some individuals have done is they've shifted employment completely.

193

00:29:30.810 --> 00:29:38.670

Bryan Willkomm: In reflecting and how much they want to work. I, we've seen that, and it has been positive for me, a limited example, you know, just in the circles that I know.

194

00:29:39.000 --> 00:29:46.650

Bryan Willkomm: Some people have made big, big shifts in their employers and are doing well because of it. So it's not to say that they're losing their hope,

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00:29:47.190 --> 00:29:55.290

Bryan Willkomm: in the same sense as reflecting on, "do I want to continue to work in the same manner, in the same industry, when this might be an opportunity to reflect on this thing I've always wanted to do?"

196

00:29:55.740 --> 00:30:00.600

Bryan Willkomm: "I've always wanted to try this other job and taking those risks and making those changes during these times."

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00:30:02.520 --> 00:30:06.780

Beks Baur: Yeah, I agree with that wholly,

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00:30:07.890 --> 00:30:14.010

Beks Baur: but I think that's a nice segue to move towards the dispensary if you're ready?

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00:30:15.210 --> 00:30:17.820

Beks Baur: And so you're the

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00:30:18.930 --> 00:30:22.710

Beks Baur: manager of the Humboldt Patient Resource Center right?

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00:30:24.030 --> 00:30:29.730

Beks Baur: Yeah, I was told you were the right-hand man, so to speak, by Michael Kraft?

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00:30:31.920 --> 00:30:41.310

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, well, I act in a capacity under a director and we help manage the HPRC Arcata and HPRC Eureka, and the Connection Wellness Center.

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00:30:41.940 --> 00:30:47.940

Bryan Willkomm: And those are two retail cannabis dispensaries and one community wellness center.

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00:30:48.630 --> 00:31:09.600

Bryan Willkomm: And in addition to those we operate to gardens that provide us with product lines and a distribution center buys and can redistribute product and a processing operation that cultivate or a process cultivated process products packages and labels. So there's a lot of

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00:31:11.040 --> 00:31:23.880

Bryan Willkomm: moving parts in agricultural activity, in a highly regulated industry, and in a very competitive retail market. So there's a lot of

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00:31:24.990 --> 00:31:33.930

Bryan Willkomm: unique business opportunities amongst the dispensary's and during COVID all of those operations are amplified in challenges.

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00:31:36.540 --> 00:31:43.650

Beks Baur: Make sense. And so how is your dispensary's been doing in the context of this pandemic?

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00:31:44.520 --> 00:31:56.070

Bryan Willkomm: Managing well given all things. There was a large drop in business, immediately after covert hit the United States and the shelter in place took place.

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00:31:57.060 --> 00:32:06.930

Bryan Willkomm: And that was a good thing that people were not out and about as much. There was a very large uptick however in business spending right before due to the stimulus checks.

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00:32:08.400 --> 00:32:31.080

Bryan Willkomm: So over the course of COVID, the business has done, um, decently well given the circumstances and the dispensary, cannabis dispensary industry, here in Humboldt County, uh, right now in 2020 is in a unique time without COVID. The reason being is it's becoming a very competitive marketplace.

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00:32:32.340 --> 00:32:35.940

Bryan Willkomm: That normally would benefit greatly from tourism.

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00:32:39.600 --> 00:32:41.130

Bryan Willkomm: And so with COVID,

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00:32:42.660 --> 00:33:01.650

Bryan Willkomm: not only are you having the challenges like every business with restricted business operations for safety, the safety guidelines, but you're missing some key components that allow the retail dispensary businesses to be so successful, and that is visitors, large amounts of visitors.

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00:33:03.030 --> 00:33:07.320

Bryan Willkomm: We have events in the city of Arcadia that can draw 10,000 people in one day.

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00:33:08.670 --> 00:33:20.910

Bryan Willkomm: Even capturing 1% of that population is a massive opportunity, you know, for a local business and it is really challenging now to have limited access.

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00:33:21.870 --> 00:33:32.400

Bryan Willkomm: When you are already regulated for limited advertisements and you have a high taxation structure, including excise taxes of your product.

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00:33:33.270 --> 00:33:48.690

Bryan Willkomm: Excise taxes, you know, are used to deter the use of a product and to attacks, its use. And so it's a very interesting business challenge before you throw in all the, uh, pandemic factors.

218

00:33:53.280 --> 00:33:59.610

Beks Baur: That already does sound very challenging but like with COVID specifically because you said that,

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00:33:59.970 --> 00:34:12.180

Beks Baur: tourism is a huge, like, part of the income. So would you say there's definitely been a period where the costs to function have been too great for the volume of business that you've been having?

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00:34:14.280 --> 00:34:19.890

Bryan Willkomm: Cost of function being too great for the business, meaning that the business was not operating in a profitable manner?

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00:34:20.490 --> 00:34:32.670

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, I think that we have been very lucky to be a business that does not have currently very large debt to burden by being a business that's been established over 21 years.

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00:34:33.090 --> 00:34:41.100

Bryan Willkomm: It's not a startup business that has loans and investments that it must repay. So we have a very established business structure.

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00:34:41.520 --> 00:34:46.680

Bryan Willkomm: And understanding of the business, which allowed us to navigate these really tough times.

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00:34:47.130 --> 00:34:55.020

Bryan Willkomm: And also we were a business that had large amounts of community reinvestment as part of its business model being a not for profit mutual benefit corporation.

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00:34:55.710 --> 00:35:02.670

Bryan Willkomm: So as some of those community investments and services dwindle the cost of business also lowers.

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00:35:03.450 --> 00:35:14.970

Bryan Willkomm: And so it's not as expensive to do business when we're not offering our full scale services and then we would reinvest some of that money into our current employees that are working.

227

00:35:15.720 --> 00:35:22.560

Bryan Willkomm: So we pay hazard pay to all of our employees frontline employees are compensated for working with the public during COVID.

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00:35:23.130 --> 00:35:25.830

Bryan Willkomm: We've increased our coverage of healthcare coverage.

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00:35:26.340 --> 00:35:37.050

Bryan Willkomm: We've changed some of our employee handbooks during this year to make sure we can accommodate for unique times and annotations and quarantine periods and not punishing people for having to quarantine.

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00:35:37.800 --> 00:35:43.020

Bryan Willkomm: And, you know, no questions asked. If you're not feeling good. You do not try to work through your sicknesses.

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00:35:44.070 --> 00:35:48.000

Bryan Willkomm: You take care of yourself and taking care of yourself. You're taking care of your team and your community.

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00:35:49.050 --> 00:35:49.410

Bryan Willkomm: So,

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00:35:50.640 --> 00:35:51.090

Bryan Willkomm: it is.

234

00:35:52.260 --> 00:35:57.390

Bryan Willkomm: Overall though. I think we have been successful because COVID is a stressful time

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00:35:58.530 --> 00:36:05.250

Bryan Willkomm: and the cannabis industry benefits when people are obviously increasing their consumption

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00:36:06.180 --> 00:36:12.150

Bryan Willkomm: and there definitely has been increasing consumption in certain product lines with cannabis. But being that it is a drug.

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00:36:12.600 --> 00:36:24.480

Bryan Willkomm: and it has a unique interaction with each one of its customers. We've also had to increase the diversity of our product lines, given the unique times in the socio-economic environment.

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00:36:25.260 --> 00:36:32.490

Bryan Willkomm: With that, we have a lot of people requesting higher THC products. We have people requesting higher CBD products.

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00:36:33.120 --> 00:36:42.060

Bryan Willkomm: People have a unique approach to deal with anxiety and so being HPRC's focused on the long term medical cannabis use and its approach to wellness,

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00:36:42.450 --> 00:36:58.590

Bryan Willkomm: our cannabis consultant staff has a lot of information on how to use cannabis for anxiety and that changes and shifts many customer's opinions on their cannabis use. Some of which is a discussion on using less cannabis.

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00:37:00.240 --> 00:37:11.970

Bryan Willkomm: So it's a very interesting business in retail where we are trying to obviously sell a product to generate revenue but we're trying to provide the appropriate product and match it to what the customer actually needs.

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00:37:12.570 --> 00:37:30.750

Bryan Willkomm: And at times what the customer needs is to probably use less of our product or shift to a different product line so very unique times in the retail dispensary during COVID in what you are trying to do and your goals. In your business goals, but also in your community goals.

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00:37:32.010 --> 00:37:39.360

Beks Baur: So, is there like the consultation factor that you would get as being a customer walking into the store when you're looking for a product?

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00:37:40.170 --> 00:37:48.840

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, at HPRC all the staff members go through what's called a cannabis consulting curriculum and it's provided by the medical cannabis institution.

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00:37:49.230 --> 00:37:58.500

Bryan Willkomm: It's an online platform that creates a curriculum designed for nurses that will be working with patients who may use cannabis and cannabinoid therapy.

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00:37:59.370 --> 00:38:13.020

Bryan Willkomm: The curriculum is designed by the Society of Cannabis clinicians, which is a group of doctors who basically said, We cannot wait for the federal government to come up with a curriculum for nurses to work with patients with this medicine.

247

00:38:13.470 --> 00:38:19.440

Bryan Willkomm: We have to educate each other and and create a standardized approach for the benefit of patients.

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00:38:20.850 --> 00:38:34.710

Bryan Willkomm: So our business accessed great education seminars like patients at a time and we have worked with great doctors like Dr. Dustin Sulak with healer.com and a wide range of local doctors,

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00:38:36.030 --> 00:38:46.920

Bryan Willkomm: including Dr. Dickinson over the years and some of the great hospice workers like Dr. Fracking. We tried to gather real information to provide to our medical customers

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00:38:47.310 --> 00:38:52.560

Bryan Willkomm: to make the best decisions on their products. So we train our consultants as professionals.

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00:38:53.160 --> 00:39:05.820

Bryan Willkomm: So their curriculum. They go through is at the beginning of their training and then they have continuous education on all new product lines that come out and we're still looking for ways to improve their training with all the new information that comes out in the cannabis industry.

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00:39:08.070 --> 00:39:27.390

Beks Baur: So has COVID altered the way that you interact with your customers like especially for that consultation aspect because I am aware that there is like walk-ups. Now, or there's like I've seen even as I've driven past HPRC in Arcata that there's like

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00:39:28.620 --> 00:39:39.900

Beks Baur: a guard or security person of some kind that's outside and having people like maintain this like the safety protocols for social distancing and stuff like that.

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00:39:40.980 --> 00:39:51.570

Bryan Willkomm: Absolutely, yeah, we changed our occupancy. We've cut it down almost 25%. We also created outdoor menus. So that customers can see those menus before coming in or shop right there at the curb.

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00:39:52.230 --> 00:39:58.920

Bryan Willkomm: We've adapted to local city guidelines that allow us to do this action. So it's a adaptation time through COVID.

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00:40:00.330 --> 00:40:02.400

Bryan Willkomm: I'm going to need to get plugged in here.

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00:40:03.630 --> 00:40:04.800

Bryan Willkomm: I'm going to be running out of battery soon.

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00:40:05.910 --> 00:40:07.110

Bryan Willkomm: So there is,

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00:40:08.190 --> 00:40:23.100

Bryan Willkomm: again, more adapting that we've been doing. We also have great online ordering services. So we have a pickup window in the dispensary that people can come right up to and not have to stay inside the store for an extended amount of time. And I've also shut down, um,

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00:40:24.930 --> 00:40:31.620

Bryan Willkomm: the majority of the service windows. Um, over 50% of the service windows so that you can have ample distance between customers while they're shopping

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00:40:32.220 --> 00:40:42.150

Bryan Willkomm: There's also no more smelling of product, which used to be the way customers would qualify the flower choices that they would make. They would smell and use their

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00:40:42.870 --> 00:40:52.650

Bryan Willkomm: terpene profile, the essential oil aroma profile of the cannabis, to make decisions on their purchase. That is no longer done for their safety and my staff's safety.

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00:40:53.730 --> 00:41:01.380

Bryan Willkomm: So that then requires a stronger trust and better relationship with the cannabis consultant

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00:41:01.830 --> 00:41:09.630

Bryan Willkomm: to where if a customer is to come in and say, "You know, I'm looking for something higher eliminating more invigorating for daytime use, lower anxiety."

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00:41:09.900 --> 00:41:22.980

Bryan Willkomm: You know, does a budtender know how to match a profile to eliminate beta care from within a given cannabinoid range and also the length of knowledge they have interacting with that strain and its overall effects with its customer base.

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00:41:23.760 --> 00:41:40.710

Bryan Willkomm: So there's a lot of trust. There's a lot of feedback. There's obviously trial and error. But there's now much more trial and error in a focused scientific-based approach, which then builds a lot of trust with our staff and that's why we have a majority of our customers are returning customers.

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00:41:42.060 --> 00:41:54.120

Beks Baur: What's really interesting. I honestly didn't know that that's how people used to shop like that by smelling. But I guess it makes sense because if it smells good, then that means like you might like it more right?

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00:41:54.600 --> 00:42:04.530

Bryan Willkomm: Well, and also for some customers. There is a concept of a snapshot of an experience to where somebody had an adverse effect with a product line

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00:42:05.010 --> 00:42:12.960

Bryan Willkomm: and their body takes a snapshot of all of that, that moment, which includes the smell, the taste in the environment of that setting.

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00:42:13.410 --> 00:42:24.450

Bryan Willkomm: That can trigger that negative response again in a future use. So someone might smell a product line that they had this horrible experience within the past and they know from their human

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00:42:25.620 --> 00:42:29.580

Bryan Willkomm: experience or olfactory experience. Whoo. That's something I'm not interested in. No, thank you.

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00:42:31.050 --> 00:42:36.900

Bryan Willkomm: And it's hard to shop if you were just shopping based off of a product name or a brand versus a sniff.

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00:42:38.010 --> 00:42:51.240

Bryan Willkomm: And again, it's a product line that's an agricultural product at its base for flower product lines, not the manufactured items. So smelling the flowers, if you will. It's a pretty natural part of qualifying if you're going to like something.

274

00:42:52.770 --> 00:43:11.850

Beks Baur: Would you say that dealers and then take away from that aspect because they sell a product, but they don't necessarily give you a chance to smell or anything, they kind of just tell you, like a title of it, and whether or not the strain is

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00:43:15.270 --> 00:43:17.400

Beks Baur: um, whatever strain it is. I'm not quite sure.

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00:43:18.810 --> 00:43:24.780

Beks Baur: But would that take away from that aspect of like that shopping experience or does that make

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00:43:26.580 --> 00:43:29.520

Beks Baur: the experience similar to what

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00:43:30.690 --> 00:43:38.730

Beks Baur: customers have to go through now with COVID because they don't get to smell it and they kind of have to trust like who they're getting it from?

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00:43:39.480 --> 00:43:51.630

Bryan Willkomm: Well we you know we train our staff, actually, is they received product samples and they have a training and how to assess those samples is this gassy smell, fruity smell lavender smell, a high lemon.

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00:43:52.380 --> 00:43:58.950

Bryan Willkomm: You know, is this one more peppery, earthy, hoppy. So we have to standardize the way we describe it amongst each other.

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00:43:59.340 --> 00:44:10.530

Bryan Willkomm: So that cannabis consultant on Monday that you met with says that this has a hoppy undertone as the different consultant that you met with on Friday, would be able to say that same qualification.

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00:44:11.220 --> 00:44:14.040

Bryan Willkomm: And also add a little bit uniqueness of their own.

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00:44:14.910 --> 00:44:20.370

Bryan Willkomm: You know, in retail cannabis. It's funny because we're really just trying to match up your customer to their question and make sure you can inform them.

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00:44:20.670 --> 00:44:30.900

Bryan Willkomm: There's been times when I have had a customer say I'm looking for something that smells, almost like, you know, like Cheetos. Something cheesy. Oh, absolutely. I can match it to their product line. And I was so proud of the, like, consultant.

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00:44:31.950 --> 00:44:36.990

Bryan Willkomm: They were actually able to match up the exact aroma that was requested by the customer.

286

00:44:38.160 --> 00:44:49.860

Bryan Willkomm: You know, I'm looking for something rubbery gassy, almost like a basketball. Like, that doesn't sound very scientific, but there is chemical aroma markers that produce that smell. And so knowing the basic

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00:44:50.640 --> 00:45:00.900

Bryan Willkomm: terpenoid profile, some of those consultants are able to actually match up. Oh, are you describing something kind of like this, and then they come back the next day. That's exactly what I was looking for.

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00:45:01.530 --> 00:45:13.950

Bryan Willkomm: or no, that did not work out for me, you know, and that's again, a challenge of retail business is how do we manage retail where we're serving something that is a single-use consumption item? You can't return it. It can't go back on the shelf.

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00:45:14.670 --> 00:45:24.420

Bryan Willkomm: But we are trying to do what's best for you and match you up to the appropriate product. That's the way we've done business over 21 years. And so that's the way we want to continue to do business. During COVID to

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00:45:25.830 --> 00:45:30.570

Beks Baur: That's really cool. Sounds like a very interesting experience.

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00:45:33.480 --> 00:45:44.280

Beks Baur: So has the consequences of the safety protocols that you have to go through. Does that affects hiring and firing employees or like how many you can have?

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00:45:45.480 --> 00:45:57.990

Bryan Willkomm: Oh yeah, it actually in our situation and almost requires more employees, some of our employees work less during COVID is a very stressful environment and for safety and they want to work a little less and we want to do our best to accommodate.

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00:45:59.160 --> 00:46:02.400

Brian Willkomm: We also have challenges of customers not wanting to wear a mask. Some,

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00:46:02.730 --> 00:46:14.160

Bryan Willkomm: very, very few here in Humboldt, but when they do. We've provided outdoor service stations, because we do want to still accommodate, but we need to abide by the rules of our health department and also create a safe workplace for our staff.

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00:46:15.870 --> 00:46:22.350

Bryan Willkomm: I would say that the hardest challenge is just your, your overall personnel being stressed, you have a very, uh,

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00:46:23.670 --> 00:46:29.910

Bryan Willkomm: touch job. When you work in the service, especially at HPRC where services, one of our priorities.

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00:46:30.390 --> 00:46:37.950

Bryan Willkomm: And so no matter how stressed, you are in your day, no matter what you have going on. You watch too much news you know, you have, uh, you know your own

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00:46:38.460 --> 00:46:45.300

Bryan Willkomm: concerns about what's going on. We're asking that you deliver still an outstanding experience to each and every individual that comes in the door.

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00:46:46.230 --> 00:46:52.680

Bryan Willkomm: So that's very hard to do because we employ people, not machines, and humans are going to have challenging days.

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00:46:53.280 --> 00:47:02.580

Bryan Willkomm: You know having to go home to take care of your child because your child's school is closed right now. Well, that is a unique challenge, you know, and so we want to work together and do the best

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00:47:02.850 --> 00:47:17.550

Bryan Willkomm: and I am very lucky to employ people who believe in their job and do a lot for our business, which is a business. You know, it is a business. It's not a family, but it's great to be treated like family, if you know what I mean.

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00:47:18.270 --> 00:47:18.750

Beks Baur: Yeah.

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00:47:20.370 --> 00:47:27.780

Beks Baur: But, having the, by having like such a successful business, though. Like, even through COVID,

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00:47:28.890 --> 00:47:36.450

Beks Baur: with, wouldn't you would say there's no concern though for keeping the business open like it's going to stay open, no matter what? Right?

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00:47:37.110 --> 00:47:43.830

Bryan Willkomm: Well we continue to adapt and so I don't have that outlook of shutting the doors, but I'm not to say that that is not a real threat.

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00:47:44.310 --> 00:47:46.800

Bryan Willkomm: You know all businesses have that concern.

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00:47:47.220 --> 00:47:56.190

Bryan Willkomm: And again, we are a not for profit mutual benefit corporation. We have reinvested a lot of our money. We're not stacking it up for you know big mountains of money in the vaults, if you will,

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00:47:56.430 --> 00:48:10.050

Bryan Willkomm: for some big investment in the future. Right now we have our business model. We're trying to continue to provide increased product lines for our community members and appropriate growth, but we are, if you will, still a 'mom and pop' business.

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00:48:10.500 --> 00:48:16.800

Bryan Willkomm: You know, we're not a large corporation aspiring to grow outside of Humboldt County right now, at least at the given direction.

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00:48:17.880 --> 00:48:30.300

Bryan Willkomm: So as far as me being a manager of that goal, my goal is to provide employment with opportunities for growth amongst the employees and increased revenue allows for increased incomes. So we're always looking to grow,

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00:48:30.870 --> 00:48:37.140

Bryan Willkomm: but we're not necessarily trying to grow aggressively maybe like some other businesses are.

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00:48:38.760 --> 00:48:52.560

Beks Baur: Is the success that your business has been having does it at least provide security for the people that are currently hired that they'll like have a job and not have to worry necessarily about having to find a new one?

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00:48:53.880 --> 00:49:05.820

Bryan Willkomm: We hope in the day to day that they don't feel like that. That's the job of our management team to worry about. We want to provide you know, again, a great workplace, but it is obviously a concern of every business right now.

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00:49:06.750 --> 00:49:12.990

Bryan Willkomm: Because while things are going great right now. What are the impacts of increase cases that result in a 100% lockdown?

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00:49:15.000 --> 00:49:27.000

Bryan Willkomm: What happens, what happens also if new information comes out that the use of cannabis might be, uh, increasing risk for COVID? That can impact your industry dramatically too.

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00:49:28.020 --> 00:49:38.520

Bryan Willkomm: We're actually finding the exact opposite that it may be protected, but again we're going to wait for the science to back up some of those statements before we try to use any of that approach in a business manner.

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00:49:40.170 --> 00:49:45.630

Beks Baur: But there is that fear and then it can be ripped away, especially since it's not a federally legal business?

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00:49:46.080 --> 00:49:53.940

Bryan Willkomm: At any given time, a change even in leadership could result in a complete shutdown of our business, you know, so,

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00:49:54.660 --> 00:50:06.900

Bryan Willkomm: it has been very interesting working over the years from proposition 215 and medical cannabis into the early times of regulation into full regulation and hopefully federally federal legalization in the future.

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00:50:07.860 --> 00:50:14.880

Bryan Willkomm: But it has been a very unique time seeing a lot of pioneers in the cannabis industry who really have done

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00:50:15.390 --> 00:50:25.410

Bryan Willkomm: a very large amount of personal sacrifices for medical cannabis patients and the freedom to use a product to benefit their wellbeing an end-of-life term.

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00:50:25.830 --> 00:50:33.240

Bryan Willkomm: was the original use that I saw that was really moving and increasing access in the sense of liberty.

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00:50:33.960 --> 00:50:49.980

Bryan Willkomm: And so it's very interesting in that you have an industry that right now is a rapid business scope on it. But before it had a very interesting sociological scope on it and what we were trying to do with an illegal product to provide it for medical patients.

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00:50:53.550 --> 00:51:10.860

Beks Baur: In that, what was that like aspect and scope. Do you think that, I know it's like not federally legal, so it must be difficult to even try to receive government aid, but is there any kind of government aid that you can receive to keep your business open that would be beneficial?

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00:51:11.730 --> 00:51:12.750

Bryan Willkomm: Um, well.

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00:51:14.580 --> 00:51:25.980

Bryan Willkomm: We did not pursue, so I can't speak on that. Yeah. We didn't pursue a protection plan money. We were able to offer employment, because we were labeled as an essential business by the state of California and that was I think the biggest,

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00:51:26.940 --> 00:51:38.250

Bryan Willkomm: positive outlook of COVID was to be labeled in essential business, really solidified that the risks that a lot of us took to be part of the cannabis industry were worth it.

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00:51:39.330 --> 00:51:46.500

Bryan Willkomm: Because we were identified by our local government for providing an essential business which truly was in the medical cannabis approach.

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00:51:48.360 --> 00:52:03.720

Beks Baur: Yeah, and it's been rumored since the pandemic began that dispensaries, as well as liquor stores, have done well because it's like a way for people to cope throughout the pandemic, especially when there was the strict lockdown, um,

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00:52:04.740 --> 00:52:14.010

Beks Baur: in the earlier months. And that demand has potentially even increased and you said that that's somewhat been your experience with your product lines.

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00:52:15.330 --> 00:52:17.520

Beks Baur: Has not been the case overall?

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00:52:18.600 --> 00:52:24.840

Bryan Willkomm: Yeah, average ring vascular rings or up people may shop less frequently. But they're purchasing a little more in their outing so

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00:52:25.260 --> 00:52:29.100

Bryan Willkomm: they can go out a little bit less. So that would be a good thing. That would be a positive thing.

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00:52:29.370 --> 00:52:36.390

Bryan Willkomm: The challenges with retail, they are making sure that we have all the product lines that customers are looking for on the given day that they're coming into town,

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00:52:36.810 --> 00:52:42.000

Bryan Willkomm: given all the challenges. Because during COVID there's other challenges that aren't even talked about here and that is an election year,

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00:52:42.990 --> 00:52:50.010

Bryan Willkomm: that is a Civil Rights Movement year and you know we had multiple businesses that were destroyed in riots.

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00:52:50.640 --> 00:53:02.460

Bryan Willkomm: We had deliveries that were delayed by obstruction of freeways and highways, but we had fires destroy some of the farms that we access. We had election turmoil.

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00:53:03.000 --> 00:53:21.390

Bryan Willkomm: That given businesses had to shut their doors for the unknowns of this, what was happening in the streets, all of that in COVID we are just happy to still be kicking butt, and uh, doing our best to keep the doors open and continue to be a pillar in the community.

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00:53:22.800 --> 00:53:25.260

Beks Baur: Yeah, it's interesting.

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00:53:26.610 --> 00:53:41.280

Beks Baur: Because I asked that question to the Papa and Barkley contact, Michael Kraft, and he actually said that he didn't think that the demand has increased, because of people's,

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00:53:42.840 --> 00:53:52.770

Beks Baur: because people being out of work they wouldn't have enough of an income. So they were losing money in that aspect of not being able to afford those luxuries.

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00:53:53.190 --> 00:53:56.280

Bryan Willkomm: Well the demand might change in what people are accessing?

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00:53:57.390 --> 00:54:06.330

Bryan Willkomm: And so there's a pressure to have more discount items. There's more requirement for retailers to be competitive and have sales.

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00:54:07.410 --> 00:54:23.730

Bryan Willkomm: And so that is a, uh, really tough challenge just have an efficient business and make sure everything goes smooth is the marketplace. You have to stay really connected to the marketplace and what customers are demanding. Because truly they're driving what products you are providing.

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00:54:25.350 --> 00:54:25.800

Beks Baur: Yeah.

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00:54:28.980 --> 00:54:39.810

Beks Baur: Is there anything else that you would want to tell me about the business, anything that you'd want people to know for the future if they were to research economic disparities.

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00:54:42.690 --> 00:54:43.320

Bryan Willkomm: Um

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00:54:45.780 --> 00:54:49.500

Bryan Willkomm: Not necessarily. I mean, I just think that,

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00:54:51.630 --> 00:54:59.280

Bryan Willkomm: everybody is doing their best to adapt, given the circumstances. And I do think that,

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00:54:59.940 --> 00:55:08.250

Bryan Willkomm: while the given moment, may be challenging for a lot of individuals and a lot of businesses the opportunity to experience this is going

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00:55:08.820 --> 00:55:21.720

Bryan Willkomm: to be beneficial, ultimately, in the end. I'm hoping for personal growth reasons, for a great adoptions in your business model for finding new efficiencies, or for finding new opportunities.

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00:55:22.740 --> 00:55:28.860

Bryan Willkomm: And I think that if you look at the given situation with that point of view.

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00:55:30.150 --> 00:55:40.560

Bryan Willkomm: The day to day management of your problems and challenges become much more successful. You can, you know, see instead of a gosh, not another,

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00:55:40.980 --> 00:55:46.800

Bryan Willkomm: challenge or how another new rule, this and that. It's like, well, let's adapt with it, figure out and let's learn from it.

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00:55:47.190 --> 00:55:56.130

Bryan Willkomm: And, you know, hey, look, this is actually a little better now because we had to make that change, hey, we have this new opportunity with this new relationship. Let's work on that.

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00:55:57.270 --> 00:56:05.010

Bryan Willkomm: That allows us to stay focused I feel like; and that focus then is hopefully going to continue to give us future success.

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00:56:07.590 --> 00:56:16.230

Beks Baur: Yeah. Well, thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview you as a member of the community as well as being my coach.