



North Main Financial - Joshua Dobi's Blog

Conversation with Justin Dionne from the Cain Center for the Arts

October 1, 2019 Joshua Dobi Cain Center for the Arts, Community, Cornelius, Davidson, donations, financial planning, giving, Huntersville, Lake Norman, North Main Financial, performing arts, WSIC

We've talked on several other shows about the importance of estate planning and how some people engage in charitable planning or strategies. We invited a special guest to the North Main Financial Show, and you will quickly see that what he does dovetails nicely into the idea of being engaged in the community relative to charitable giving and estate planning. We welcomed Justin Dionne, the executive director of the Cain Center for the Arts in Cornelius, NC. Justin has an extensive history in the arts field and on the charitable end of things relative to fundraising. He also has experience moving projects off the ground and into reality and he's engaged now with the Cain Center for the Arts. Have a quick read of our conversation.

Joshua: Justin, as I've mentioned, you've been engaged with this nearly your entire career at some level when we're talking about the arts community. Both as a performer and then leadership roles including your current position as executive director. Talk a little about how you came to the Cain Center for the Arts and some of your background.

Justin: All this started for me when I was younger of course. I always say, when I tell people about arts education and the importance of it, some of us are blessed in the means of sports and those types of things. When you're growing up you do sports and that's really where you find your avenue and some of us have talents in other fields. Although I did run cross country when I was younger, I also found a love for the arts and specifically for performing in a community theater aspect. I also grew up singing in church. My

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LOCAL WEATHER

Statesville
Last Updated on Nov 4 2019, 9:55 am EST
Weather by NOAA

Current Conditions: Fair

Temp: 50°F
Wind: North at 0mph
Humidity: 57%
Dewpoint: 35.6°F

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Mooresville & Davidson
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family used to travel around like the Von Trapp family and sing. The arts are a great opportunity to still develop all those same skill sets like team mentality, problem solving skills, empathy, that you can learn in sports as well.

I went to Catawba College in Salisbury and received my undergraduate degree in theater arts there and then for some of my summers I would perform in Summer Stock Theater. My first ever professional acting gig was "Horn in the West" in Boone, NC. After undergraduate college I spent a little bit of time in New York City and in Chicago. I did a little bit of acting and little bit of technical work and a lot of waiting tables and being a reception person at one point and doing some carpentry work over in the Yonkers area so basically just paying the bills.

I was able to move back to Salisbury and found the opportunity to work for Piedmont Players Theater there in Salisbury. They were building a new theater space called the Normal Theater and I was there as the technical director and eventually became the marketing director and that's where I got my first foray into fundraising. I'm so grateful for the transition and all the experiences that I had that led me up to that. When I was younger if you would have ever asked me if I wanted to get into the administrative realm and leadership realm of the arts, I would have told you no, I want to be a performer.

I say that because I think a lot of young artists and young people who have talent will say that - I want to go be on Broadway, I want to this, I want to that - and there is nothing wrong with that, we should all have our dreams. Now that I'm a parent, I have a young one year old, for those of us who are parents, and my parents used to tell me this, what about your backup plan and I'm sure the financial advisor here would also support that idea. I'm glad that although this may not have been an official backup plan, I'm glad that I went this route. I've come to understand the importance of the impact that can be made in the position that I've found myself in. From the ability to help connect communities to each other and to help connect artists to communities using the arts and along the way to tie into what you mentioned earlier, the non-profit realm. It really does provide a great opportunity for individuals in communities to be able to connect with the causes that are important to them and to really make a difference.

Joshua: Justin I know you are too modest to say it so I'll say it for you, you had a great amount of success during your time in Salisbury and frankly we needed to do some arm twisting and find some very powerful people to convince you to come down to us to the Cain Center for the Arts in Cornelius. Talk about where you are with the Cain Center for the Arts now and how you've been able to use that experience to be able to look at what is a very ambitious project there in Cornelius, certainly on the fundraising end of things, but on multiple levels is very ambitious. Talk about your experience.

Justin: Salisbury is my hometown and is such a wonderful place with wonderful people and has a rich history of philanthropy. If you haven't been, please take a minute and go visit that downtown. You see family names that have been in that community for ages. I grew up going to these spaces and hearing these names and meeting these people. As I was older working in the theater industry there with Piedmont Players, and then transitioned to help start up Lee Street Theatre, and helped to lead the capital campaign there to renovate a historic warehouse into a performing arts center, I was then all of a sudden engaging with these names and these people of the buildings I used to visit when I was younger.

Here I am 10, 15 years later spending time with the Wallace's and the Stanback's and their families and getting to know them. When you get to know people like that, I think sometimes for those of us that go someplace large like the Blumenthal - I've never met the Blumenthal's - the Cain's are an example of this too, these people care about their communities. A lot of them will tell you they've worked hard but they've been blessed with an abundance of success or resources and want to give back, and they do. We were able to help create opportunities through the theater projects. And there are other wonderful products around Salisbury that had this happen too.

So, tying that into now and the Lake Norman region, one of the interesting things is the development that has happened here in such a short amount of time. When compared to Salisbury, which has been around since the 1700's and George Washington toured through there and the historic buildings, the Lake Norman Area, from what I understand, a lot of the development has really come in the last 15-25 years. So, you've got people here who maybe aren't as tied into the community yet but are starting to and maybe are starting to look for that opportunity to impact what they now know as their community. Maybe they moved here 10, 15 years ago, they settled their family here, had some kids, and now see this as their community and there are these wonderful opportunities that are starting to arise. Of course, I'm biased but the Cain Center being one of the most exciting projects to impact this whole region.

Joshua: I would agree with you, Justin. You raise a couple points that at North Main Financial we are having conversations about charitable giving with some regularity. You talk about Salisbury and other

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Dewpoint: 35.6°F

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Denver & Lincolnton

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Current Conditions: Fair



Temp: 52°F
Wind: North at 0mph
Humidity: 51%
Dewpoint: 34.3°F

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communities outside the Lake Norman region and they are much more established in terms of their history. While we do have a lot of history here, we've had an explosive amount of development that has resulted in this tidal wave of new residents. When you look at Cornelius for example, in 2000 the total population was 3,000 and here we are in 2019 with a population of 33,000 so you're talking about exponential moves. From a planning standpoint or philanthropic standpoint, that is absolutely one of the financial planning thoughts that we have and that we integrate into the process and certainly it's not for everybody.

Justin, if you would, understanding some of the places you've been, dig a little deeper and tell us more about the Cain Center for the Arts and the fundraising aspect. It's a huge project especially when we think about the Lake Norman region, to my understanding nothing to this scale has ever been done from a philanthropic standpoint in our region.

Justin: It's uncharted territory which is one of the great things. Just last week I was having coffee with someone who works in the development space in the region and I was talking about our project, my history and this has been an area which I've started to find my niche. They said, "Wow, you're a disruptor."

For a minute I went, "Huh, interesting," then me being the Gary Vaynerchuk guy that I am I went back online and started Googling disruptor. And wow, what an exciting thing to be! I thanked her in an email later. I think the reason that I say that is because this project is a disruptor in a good way. Disruptor is now used in a very positive way, because we're going to do something different and in a different way and there can be parts of it that seem scary and that's okay. It wouldn't be worth it if it wasn't a little bit, right?

With this project it's one of the larger campaigns that's come around this region. Especially in the arts, I think it's the largest with regards to the arts and cultural standpoint. It is based on the idea that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area and up past that area as well, the east Lincoln and west Cabarrus areas as well, has grown and the resources that we all have from community space, both from community gathering space to community arts spaces to community cultural spaces of a certain size are limited in these areas. Whether it's truth or people want to say it, traveling down to Charlotte for those things has become a bit of a barrier for folks.

We've done the market study and our business plan and our primary market space, which is a 20-mile diameter circle centered around downtown Cornelius, including those four counties I told you about, is approximately 300 to 350,000 people right now. That's a lot with very limited access to publicly accessible arts and community spaces of a certain size. So, with that we see this as an absolute need. When I tell people about our plans – a 400-seat theater, two educational spaces, an art gallery, an outdoor town green, an outdoor plaza – that's right there in downtown Cornelius for the whole region, when people hear that it isn't build it and they will come it's build it already. When people ask why it isn't already open, I tell them we have \$19.5M in private investment to raise.

The town of Cornelius showed major leadership, and the voters in Cornelius, with approving a \$4M bond package and then purchasing the land for \$1.5M so we're raising \$19.5M of private funds of which in a year we have secured just about \$9.5M. We've had some very, very generous donors and there are a lot of generous people in the area and we know there are more too. We're going to spend the next year to 14-16 months to continue to raise that other \$10M so that we can achieve the goal and provide this space for all the communities. I want my daughter to grow up going to the Cain Center for the Arts and then when she gets older saying, "Oh wow, I just met Mr. and Mrs. Cain who are so generous and down to earth." So, I was alluding to it earlier, this is the opportunity now for these communities to start to make that history that some of the other communities like Salisbury have done.

Joshua: At no other time in our Lake Norman history are we poised to do something like this. Just in our population explosion in the last 20 years. Twenty years ago, we probably didn't have enough population to substantiate something like this. The multi-generational aspect is a huge, huge part of this. Talk about the regionality of this and how important it is for each of our lake communities to be a part of this.

Justin: We absolutely have a goal for this to be, and will be, a regional serving center so as I mentioned that Lake Norman area that we consider north Mecklenburg, south Iredell, east Lincoln and west Cabarrus is just our primary market. Secondary you are going up to Statesville you're going even down into Charlotte, over into Salisbury, closer to Hickory as well, that is absolutely how we are planning this. And it is not from someone who has worked in the arts industry.

I went to Florida State University and I did not achieve my graduate degree because I left that for this job actually. While there I studied theater management so I know some people's minds are blown when they hear you can get a degree in theater management, you absolutely can. People do approach this as any

career discipline anywhere else. I can tell you that our business plan would not work, and we would not be serving what we need to serve, if all we served was just Cornelius, so we have a commitment to this region, and we started that last spring.

We did some educational outreach programs and we took Charlotte Ballet, Charlotte Symphony, and Children's Theater of Charlotte and partnered with them to distribute their programs into those areas and we served over 8,000 students ages K-12 in all those counties I mentioned. We went to Mooresville, Denver, Davidson, Huntersville, Cornelius, Concord, we went all over with those programs and are planning to do that again this year. With a project like this, and with any disruptor, you're always going to find some healthy skepticism and we're okay with that. We're just going to keep our heads down and keep working and convince people as we go and that's always kind of been my style, so I guess I am a disruptor at the end of the day.

Joshua: When you're talking about the things that are next-generation things you need folks who will lead. You need folks who are visionary. Folks who will be able to see things not as they are but as they can be to steal from Mr. Kennedy, one of my favorites. Justin, thank you for your time. Would you mind giving the website address and ways in which folks can contact you if they want to be involved with the Cain Center for the Arts, if they want to be contributors from a fundraising standpoint.

Justin: Cain Center for the Arts, people can visit us at <http://www.cainarts.org> or you can email me at jdionne@cainarts.org and you can also call us at 980.689.3101. We'd love to chat with everyone. We're looking for volunteers, for people who would like to get involved and support in any way possible and we hope that everyone in this Lake Norman region and surrounding area will join us.

Interested in hearing more about this topic? You can listen to the full episode of the North Main Financial radio show on WSIC by clicking here: [Cain Center Justin Dionne \(8/31/19\)](#).

If you have questions about your financial goals, or would like to talk with us further about our services, give us a call at (704) 987-1425 or visit us at www.northmainfinancial.com. If you wish to schedule an introductory meeting, we would be happy to meet with you at no cost or obligation to you.

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