



June 18, 2020 Transcript

*Kate Kennedy of Kane Area Development Center is interviewed by
Abbi Peters of PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc.*

Abbi: Hi, this is Abbi from the PA Wilds Center, bringing you another interview as part of the Wilds Are Working Series. I'm here today with Kate Kennedy from the Kane Area Development Center. And for those of you who've been watching this series, you'll know that Kate is a familiar face, as she's typically the one holding the interview as a PA Wilds ambassador. So today we're excited to switch up the roles just a little bit so that we can actually get to talking to her and hear her story. So welcome, Kate. We're glad to have you with us to share how you're pivoting in your community amid these uncharted times.

Kate: Thank you.

Abbi: You're welcome. So tell me a little bit about the Kane Area Development Center or KADC.

Kate: So, KADC is pretty much an umbrella organization that supports and promotes a couple of different organizations in town. So those three organizations that I am responsible for as the executive director are the Kane Chamber of Commerce, the revitalization organization called KARE, which is Kane Area Revitalization Enterprise, and industry development organization, which is the KADC.

Abbi: And so with these three coming together, what's kind of a goal of having them together under this umbrella?

Kate: I think it's really to make sure that we're maximizing our efforts for economic development here in community development. You know, so someone can call my office and I can say, oh, I think that this would be the best fit for this organization or all you really need to talk to so and so from this organization. So it's really a way to make sure the resources are being directed in the right way. Make sure we're not competing for resources and just really working together to promote the economic and community development of our town.

Abbi: That's a great positive way, again, to get people collaborating. So I know that you've got the KADC connecting these three organizations and that Kane, in general, is seeing a lot of revitalization and it's something that's really getting a lot of excitement throughout the region. And it appears that something like this is a very collaborative effort. So beyond the KADC, what else do you have going on in Kane and what other mechanisms help to connect other businesses and organizations and experts in the community?

Kate: Yeah. One of the things I just love about Kane is that collaboration. I think that it's a value that has been held for many, many decades here. And one of the newer efforts of collaboration is a Sparks group. And as this informal group of community leaders and organizations that comes together monthly to discuss short-term goals. So we have, you know, the three organizations I support, as well as government and borough leadership. We have our hospital or school districts, just representatives from different parts of our town that would have a vested interest in the economic development of Kane. And once a year, we have an annual meeting to talk about short-term goals. And so each group chooses a short-term goal to work on something that can be completed within one year so that we can see results. And so it's been really exciting to see some of the things that have come together. And again, an informal group. It's not anything that's very structured at all. It's just a monthly meeting to check in. And we just stay in touch with who is applying for what grants, what different types of projects are getting done across town. And that open communication has really led to some really great developments here.

Abbi: Yeah, that's a great idea. You know, we work across the region and I hear a lot of times communities say, you know, 'how can we do this? How can we get on the same page together?' Sometimes we'll think it through some big funding or some, you know, structure of having a chair and a co-chair and all these extra things. But really, it's just that you had you guys coming together and saying, let's talk.

Kate: Let's talk. Yeah, exactly. It's really, again, being open on the same page about who's doing what. So we're not stepping on each other's toes or competing for things so that we're supporting each other's efforts.

Abbi: That's great. That's a good way to really be able to carry the vision together. And then, as you said, you know, just identifying those small wins is, you know, like the small wins snowball into the bigger ones.

Kate: Yes. And that feels good. Like we accomplished something, so let's keep going.

Abbi: Yeah, it's great. So, within your collaborative efforts, how do you see the PA Wilds fit in and how do you use and utilize the PA Wilds brand to help your efforts?

Kate: Yeah, so the PA Wilds are a huge part of Kane. We have a great partnership with the PA Wilds, in addition to the support that we get just from being part of something bigger than our town, something more regional, and all of the access to things that we have because of the PA Wilds. We also are in the middle of helping to welcome the first brick-and-mortar building for the PA Wilds, here in Kane. So right across the street from my office, above the Laughing Owl Press, there is some work that's being done with the PA Wilds and the West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund to create a Media Lab. So that will be where some PA Wilds offices are, as well as some really great resources for the creative Wilds Cooperative. We're really excited to bring you guys to town here. And then next door, the West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund also

purchased that building and is doing some amazing energy work there. They have been approved for a Passive House standard, which is going to be one of the highest levels of energy efficiency. That will be very exciting to be in a Main Street, old historic building. So there's a lot of collaboration and partnership with PA Wilds and others to make sure that there's a strong presence here in Kane.

Abbi: Yeah, it's great. And it's wonderful to be able to have this kind of collaboration, because I know one of the goals on our side is to be able to serve as a model so that other communities can look to see how they can implement pieces like this in their downtown. We know that, you know, everyone has beautiful historic buildings and they're gorgeous. No one wants to see them get torn down. But at the same time, there's costs involved in having them and, you know, repurposing them. So I think that, you know, what West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund is doing will be a great example... You know, not everyone can go all the way to Passive House. I mean, it's a pretty intense process, but there are other ways that people can make those buildings energy efficient and have them being utilized instead of just being shells that kind of bring the town down.

Kate: Yeah, exactly. Yep. And to be a model is really, I think one of the things I've learned a lot from the PA Wilds is, you know, everything we do, we can think about how can this be replicated or made uniquely for a different town, but a similar starting point. And so I think that's a great way to put it as well.

Abbi: Yeah, and it's nice because we always look for, you know, sparks in a community. And Kane, no pun intended toward your Spark group, but in general, you know, a lot of your businesses are sparking around each other and just saw how the businesses and the people downtown said, 'hey, this is our town and we want this to be a place that our children either stay or want to come back to. You know, we want it to be fruitful.' And so everyone kind of said, 'OK. This is ours. How do we do it? Let's do it.' And then you guys did it. So it's getting really interesting. It's been fun to watch and, I think personally, an inspiration to other towns to be able to say, 'Hey, all they did was start talking to each other and start working towards goals. I think we can do that. Right?' Yes. You know, I think it's a model that most people can figure out how to incorporate.

Kate: Absolutely.

Abbi: Yeah. So now, obviously, we're ... currently in the Green Phase in our area, but we are so obviously dealing with the pandemic and how to go forward safely and coming out of how to deal with it. And so [what] are some of the ways that KADC pivoted amid COVID-19?

Kate: Yeah. So everyone was just trying to figure it out as this is the first time anyone in our generations have been dealing with something to this level. And I actually you know, you've talked about the great work that's been happening over the last couple of years in Kane... I actually just moved back. I'm from here; I moved back home a little over a year ago. So I just jumped into the great work already happening. And I'm so grateful I had a year under my belt before this hit because I at least had the relationships established and had somewhat of an idea of the resources that were available. So when the businesses shut down those first two weeks, I was like, 'OK, it's going to be a two week thing. But, you know, we'll be right back to it.' But really, I relied on different resources regionally to help me know the funding sources that were available to our businesses. So I really kind of changed the focus of my communication to be how do we support our local businesses? So whether that was connecting them to resources or we put together just like a guide of all of the

restaurants and how they were continuing to serve people and encouraging people to go and shop in and eat at the places that were still open. So really changing our communication. And then, you know, I wanted to do something kind of creative to let people know how our businesses were being impacted, whether they had to shut down completely or they had to modify the way they were doing business. And so one of my friends suggested doing a photo series because you know, how there were those front porch photographs that people were taking, the portraits of families. She was like we should do that for businesses. So Katie gave me that idea, and we just kind of ran with it. I worked with a local photographer, Renee Price, and we reached out to all of the Chamber businesses and just said, 'hey, can we come photograph you as you are now doing business? And then you answer some questions to let people know what you're doing to serve the community, as well as some of the reflections on how this has been impacting you and and what's ahead, what you think is ahead for you and pain.' And so we did this business spotlight, COVID-19 Business Spotlight, photojournalism series. I think there's about 30 businesses that participated. And it was through social media mainly, and then just tried to promote it and get the word out about what we were doing here in Kane.

Abbi: So, you know, being able to see this moment in time, the story where people see them now, where the current housed?

Kate: They're still on that Kane Area Development Center Facebook page and in our photo albums. And one of the things that was also important, I thought, was to document this time in history. I love history. I love Kane history particularly. I'm very connected to the historic society here. And I thought, you know, in 100 years it'll be really cool to have these photos to look back on because in all of them people are wearing masks, the business owners are wearing masks. If their business was closed, they are standing out front so that you can see physically you couldn't go in, which had to represent, you know, in the photos artistically how they were adapting. And then we ended up both Renee and I were like, 'we need to do these in black and white.' Just they [were] really powerful and striking to see in black and white. So they're on our Facebook page there. Or, you know, if anybody wanted to reach out to the office directly, I could always send the link.

Abbi: I know that you have a passion for storytelling. So I have a feeling that this is not the first time you hit the streets of Kane to get some stories. So tell me about 100 days of Kane.

Kate: Yeah. Last summer -- I moved back in April of 2019 and, you know, just started jumping right in, so I thought I really wanted to make sure that as a community, we were feeling good about who we are and telling our story so that it wasn't being told to us as a rural town. Sometimes I think we get our story told to us and it's not always an accurate representation. So I thought, let's tell our own story and that will help us as a community feel more connected to one another, as well as people who maybe are thinking about visiting Kane or want to learn more about Kane, they can hear the stories from us to know what there is and why this is such a special place. So we decided to do what's called 100 Days of Kane PA. So every single day for one hundred consecutive days, I did a Facebook live interview with somebody who lives here and they told a story or multiple stories or their life story to really communicate why Kane is so special. So we had people, everyone from business owners talking about why they chose to open a business here to people who were born here. You know, we had a woman who was 98 and has never really left Kane; she would go on vacation. But really, Kane has always been her home. There wasn't even indoor plumbing when she first was born. She was born

in her home, to where you are now. Then stories about, you know, how at one point we had five different elementary schools, and so kind of hearing from people who had a lot of pride still in their elementary school. And it just was cool because everywhere we went for those hundred days, I ran into people who would share like, 'oh, I forgot about that,' or, 'oh, when that person shared that story. It made me think of this.' And so I really think it served its initial purpose of connecting us as a community. And then we've also since had people from outside the community share that they've seen it. And it's been something that they've been interested in as well.

Abbi: That's great, because I know that you have a very long talk about school pride to know that this is a very, very strong alumni community. You know, every year, quite the event when all of the alumni come back to celebrate Kane. So I'm sure they were all watching from wherever they are. Did you have any other unexpected results of how these stories were used?

Kate: Yes. So you mentioned our alumni. And so that's when we kicked it off, at alumni weekend, which is when everyone comes home and actually wrapped up on homecoming weekend. So it was like the perfect bookends. We had at the end of it, over 70000 views from 15 different countries. I think a lot of that does have to do with our alumni, [which] is widespread. So I think that had to do a lot with them. But, yeah, one of the things that surprised me afterward is that it's continued to have an impact. So one hundred days and that was no joke. I look back on it now, and I'm like, 'how did you do that?' But really it was just well received. I'm so grateful for that. But now I'm finding that it's being used almost as a tool for job promotion and bringing people in. And so a couple examples are we had a business that was looking to fill a position, a very specialized position, and they brought people in from out of state. And two of the people said to the owner, 'hey, I saw an interview that you did on 100 Days of Kane' when they were getting their interview for the job. And so that was kind of neat that they got to know the owner and his connection to our town and a little bit more about our town prior to even coming from that. Another one is there's a church that's looking to hire a pastor. So they decided to send the list, the entire list and links of all of the one hundred interviews. They highlighted their church members, but said 'you can watch any of these to kind of get a feel for who we are as a community.' And so it's just been interesting. And I'm so surprised, but really, really glad that this is something that's been living on to not just be entertaining, but also maybe draw people into our town to live here and start businesses or work here that might not otherwise know about it.

Abbi: You know, you started off saying that you wanted to share your story of Kane and not someone else's perception, so it's really great to see how organically it's turned into a recruitment tool, which, you know, makes sense. And how in one case, you know, the applicants found it without even being told, and then in the other case, you know, the employer said, 'hey, this is a tool.' And so, you know that a lot of communities struggle with these great recruitment tools that can help really, honestly tell the story that people are looking for when they're going to choose to relocate, because it's a big choice to move to, you know, anywhere but let alone a rural area that you might not know about. So, you know, I know a lot of communities talk about wanting to share the story, but they kind of feel like there might be barriers to the tech to be able to do it or the cost, so can you talk a little bit about that part of it, you know, how you were able to get it going so quick. As you said, you had just started.

Kate: Yeah. Right. So, you know, I have an iPhone, so I just did everything through my iPhone. You know, the Facebook Live was just easy to do. So there was no cost to that. Then I would download it to YouTube and

then I'd put it on our website. So, I mean, that was something that was no cost to us that we already had available to us. There was a cost of time for sure. You know, every single day I had to do that. And then the people who are being interviewed had the time to do that. And then it took time to do the tech side afterwards. And we put it on our website, which our website for me is not my strength, but I used my network to find people that were able to volunteer their services and their talents with the website to help me come up with a logo and come up with how to put it on and featured on our website. So really just utilizing the network we already had, so there was no cost there as well. It really was a pretty low budget thing. And really the biggest cost, I would say, is time. And I would definitely say that it was worth that cost.

Abbi: Yeah. And it sounds like within that time, and obviously being organized so that you could make the best of the time, but also having so many people engaged in it would also really contribute to the success?

Kate: Oh, my gosh. I was when I started doing this, I was like, 'this is going to be either really, really great or terrible. Who cares that I'm doing this? What if nobody watches? What if nobody wants to be involved?' But, yeah, people got excited and started volunteering stories or nominating people to share their stories. And so it really was a great way for everyone to connect with each other. And that, again, that was a free resource was just those natural connections.

Abbi: So you had two examples so far. One was very COVID related. And then the other story example is pre-COVID, but both are things that communities can be doing to be able to, you know, positively move through this process. Do you have any other suggestions for responses that you've been utilizing that you think can benefit other communities?

Kate: Yes. So I think that for me personally, our county economic development director was really helpful in helping me sift through the legitimate sources of funding versus the ones that might not be so legitimate. So that was huge. You know, you got for PA Wilds to help amplify stories has been a really big resource for us here in Kane. We've had a lot of businesses locally take advantage of the series. We've just had I think mostly just these more regional places to get support from. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has been a huge support, as well as North Central, Clarion and Small Business Development Center. So I think everyone really took time to reach out and make sure that our businesses here in Kane are being supported. And then I also felt comfortable reaching out to say, 'hey, on behalf of our businesses, what is it that we need to know so that I can make sure that we're not missing out on something.'

Abbi: Because there was a lot of information, a lot of information.

Kate: It was a lot. And a lot of it was being sent from different places. So it was just a lot to sort through. And, you know, I was having my own feelings about what was going on in the world and staying home and being isolated. So it was just a lot. But I did feel very supported throughout it all.

Abbi: Are there any adjustments that you've made in ways of doing business through this pandemic that you think will kind of stick and you might carry on going forward?

Kate: Yeah, there's a couple of things I'm thinking might stick after we get back to normal. One of them is, I did spend a lot of time working from home and I was able to really focus and get things completed without interruption. My job, just by nature right now, it's just me that works here in the office. So people walk in and I will tend to them or the phone rings at the answer. And I love that part of my job. However, there are things in my job that need a lot of focus, such as grant writing or any kind of communications. And so that oftentimes gets interrupted, but I don't want to leave the doors locked here. And so I think that I'm going to try to figure out a way to prioritize what needs to be focused on and still try to do that from home and then come in and ... be available also for certain hours. But maybe kind of split it up a little bit more. The other thing that I'm hoping will stick is, I really felt like in Kane, but also from just talking to people throughout the Wilds doing these interviews, that there was this desire to shop local and support local so that we would not lose any of our businesses. And I really think that's a trend that's going to continue. I think people now have realized how valuable our small businesses and our local businesses are. And I think that they're going to be more intentional, ongoing about supporting the local businesses.

Abbi: Yeah, I agree with you. And I think that that's one of the -- if there was to be lemonade out of these lemons, I think that people having time to really reflect on, you know, what's valuable to them and their community and really think about the connection we do all have with each other. I think that to me is something that I do really hope continues on because, you know, it's so easy, when we kind of got pulled back from being in the rat race.

Kate: Yeah. Remember, these are our neighbors. Like they count on us and we count on them. So this is a very personal thing now.

Abbi: So do you have any final thoughts or some moments of inspiration you'd like to share?

Kate: Yeah, I was thinking a lot about this one and I came up with two. So one of them was people were looking to really donate money to the best place possible. And one of the impacts that I saw that really helped our businesses, I thought was really creative was, we have what we call Kane Gift Certificates. So basically they're checks that people can purchase and then use in any of our local Chamber businesses. And then the businesses can just deposit them as a check. And we know that it stays right here in Kane. And so I had two examples. One business bought \$50 worth of Kane Gift Certificates for each graduating senior.

Abbi: Oh, that's great.

Kate: Yeah. Because, you know, they wanted to support the seniors but they also wanted to support the town. And then we had someone donate money to the food pantry to buy gift certificates so that in addition to the food they were receiving, these gift certificates that they could use for extra groceries or gasoline or different services in the community that they might need. So in all between just those two things that was close to \$7,000 that we know is going to stay right here.

Kate: And we've been doing it about a year now and we have about \$14,000 that have been purchased in these gift certificates. And so to see people step up in the midst of this, like, pandemic where everyone's feeling kind of unsure. I thought it was really special and inspiring to see that our businesses were going to be so supported through these gift certificates. And the other thing is just again, the collaboration. It goes on, you know, at the government level and the economic development level, but also between businesses, it's pretty strong here in Kane. So, you know, CJ's made hand sanitizer from their distillery and they gave it to the first responders or they sent them out to the businesses to sell there. And Keystone Cafe, which is a local natural store here in Kane, opened up her space for RadioShack, who had to shut down, to sell some of those essentials like batteries and light bulbs, things like that, that people would need and not have to go out of town to get. So, again, these businesses were finding ways to work together, especially the kind of maybe seemingly unconnected businesses.

Abbi: Yeah. Cafes and RadioShack, you don't typically think of, but a wonderful thing. And that's true neighborly community spirit.

Kate: Yeah. And so it was just kind of inspiring to see just people wanting to pitch in and in all the ways that they could.

Abbi: Oh. Those are some great final thoughts. Thank you for sharing. And thank you for sitting in the other seat today and being interviewed. It's always a pleasure to hear what you're up to and what's happening in Kane. So thank you for all the wonderful work. And to everybody out there, if you're watching this and you'd like more information on how to support small businesses and the PA Wilds, make sure to visit WildsCoPA.org. There you'll find all of the Wilds Are Working interviews that have been held in the series so far. You can also, as you're on YouTube, you can just subscribe to our channel so that you won't miss a beat and see all of the other interviews that are yet to come. And also, if you would like to share your story as a small business owner in the PA Wilds, again head over to WildsCoPA.org where you can apply. So thanks again everybody for watching and have a great day.

Kate: Bye!

Abbi: Bye!