

Maureen and Mike

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The transcript with its associated audio recording was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the University of Montana COVID-19 Oral History Project.

**Oral History Number: 475-011**

**Interviewee: Taylor Rush**

**Interviewer: Michael Larmann**

**Date of Interview: June 18, 2020**

**Project: University of Montana COVID-19 Oral History Project**

Michael Larmann: Okay, and we are live. I am Michael Larmann. I am a doctoral student in the History Department at the University of Montana. Today is June 18, 2020. I am located in my apartment at the Lewis and Clark apartment complex in Missoula, Montana. Mr. Rush, could you introduce yourself and where you are?

Taylor Rush: I am Taylor Rush, director of marketing and public relations for the Missoula PaddleHeads, the minor league baseball affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks. I am currently located in my office at the MSO Hub about on the corner of Main Higgins in Missoula.<sup>1</sup>

ML: Excellent. Okay Mr. Rush, could you briefly tell me a little bit about the Missoula PaddleHeads if you had a minute or so and what exactly you do as the director of marketing and public relations?

TR: Absolutely. So, we are a rookie advanced affiliate of the Arizona Diamondback. Our main business is baseball, at least had the surface level. We get minor league baseball players that are all signed to professional contracts with Arizona Diamondbacks that are part of their farm system. Even more than that, we are an entertainment company. That's how we how we view ourselves. We provide our community a space to have a fun, open and safe environment where you can bring the whole family and everyone's welcome.

As the director of marketing and public relations, I get to do a lot more than that. I'll get to help out with some operations. I have a pretty large sales role as well. But my main job is to educate the community on who we are, especially as we've rebranded in the last seven months, you know, from a brand, the Osprey, that was around for 20 years. So, educating the community, this new brand, what we stand for what our core values are and what we provide to the community are kind of my main objectives.

ML: In a broad sense, what is it like working for a minor league baseball team?

TR: It's wild, I think, is the easiest way to put it. It's a lot of fun. No days are ever the same. You know, the beauty of being in a minor league baseball team, you know, our full-time staff is nine people. It used to be less than that and because of that, we have a full operation to run. You get to do a lot of different things and things pop up all the time. Where if I was with a major league

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<sup>1</sup> The MSO Hub serves as a giftshop with Montana souvenirs, University of Montana merchandise and Missoula PaddleHeads baseball Fan Gear. The Missoula PaddleHeads Box Office is also located at the MSO Hub and is located at 140 N. Higgins Ave, MT 59802.

organization, I would be doing one role all the time with three other people that were doing that one role. And it's, you know, the ability to have my fingers in everything from the development of promotions or initiatives that we're doing to creating signs to, you know, how the ballpark's going to look. It's a lot of fun and I'm so lucky to have the job.

ML: Awesome. How would you describe the sports culture in Missoula and/or the larger western Montana region?

TR: Absolutely. You know, sports culture is funny in Montana. I think the dominant aspect of our sports culture is outdoor sports recreation, you know, if you were to count any sort of recreation, outdoor recreation like hiking, you know, fishing, things of that nature, those tend to be the most popular sports, at least in the summer. You know, we have the University of Montana Grizzly Football, which is a obviously massive hit throughout the entire state, but outside of that, you know, we're the only professional sports show in town and, you know, baseball has been tough in Montana because Montana is one of two states in the country that does not have high school baseball and when, you know, you stop playing baseball at 12 years old, keeping that fandom and keeping, you know, attention to baseball can be a challenge for us and that's just the honest truth. So that's a big reason why we focus on entertainment, the things that we can control. We don't know who the Arizona Diamondbacks are going to send us. We don't know if we're going to have the number one overall draft pick this year. We might have a bunch of, you know, a bunch of schlubs and, you know, we need to treat every game as though we're going to lose by 10 runs and make sure that everyone has a great time and wants to stay because they're enjoying themselves so much.

ML: Awesome. Now we're going to take a turn to the COVID-19 related questions. When was the first time that you remember hearing about COVID-19 and when was the first time you felt that it directly impacted your life and/or your work? You can answer that however you'd like. I'll leave it open ended.

TR: Absolutely. So, the first time I remember hearing about COVID was through national news. When, you know, before we had really had any cases in the United States and it actually came up in a staff meeting in a conversation of, Okay, this is something that might not be contained and, you know, this could affect a different hemisphere of the country and stay that way, but it certainly seems like, you know, we might have to deal with this by the time we get closer to the season. You know, initial conversations. We really thought that it would be much later in the year, we didn't think it would affect Montana specifically, you know, so quickly. As of, was it the end of February, we're starting to get into conversations about shutdowns.

And, you know, the first time it affected me personally, my birthday is in February. Same with my girlfriend. And so, we went and visited friends in Seattle, where I'm from originally, to celebrate our birthday and by mid-February, Seattle was already almost on red alert. We, you know, it was the first time I saw a majority of the public wearing masks. It was the first time I was a little nervous to fly in my life and was also the first time that I carried a bottle of hand

sanitizer with me everywhere I went. Then I would say the first time that it affected us professionally would have been two weeks after that trip. I chose to work at home just for the week I got back from Seattle to say, Hey, I'm going to be safe. I'm sure I'm fine, but let's make sure we're not doing anything silly here. And then the next week we started lockdown or not, I guess, lack of a better term, whatever we call it. [Phone ringing] I'm sorry. I'm going to mute my phone here really quick so we don't get that ring anymore. If I can figure out how the heck to do that. There you go. Do not disturb. So, I worked from home for that week and then the following week, the governor sent in the work from home order, shelter in place, and our team was basically, you know, all remote. We learned how to set up Google Hangouts and Zoom meetings and how to make the most of our time, how to be productive at home and it really ended up spurring a ton of creativity for the team figuring out, you know, how do we maximize a really tough situation for everybody? How do we make sure that we can help our community? And I'm really, really proud of how we executed that.

ML: So, if the other members of your team also went digital and worked from home, did you find this transition difficult? Helpful? You said it was creative in a way?

TR: Yeah, absolutely. So, it was, I think it was both difficult and helpful. You know, by the time it was all said and done, we worked from home for almost two months. About seven weeks I think was when we started kind of pushing that Hey, you know, let's work half a day from the office. We'll work in rotations, or, you know, half the day from the stadium. And the first three to four weeks, a ton of creativity, a ton of focus, but at the end of it, it was a lot harder. You know, people were bored and they were tired and you know you get tired of Zoom meetings and you start noticing that it's a lot, even personally, it's harder to pay attention. You know, it's harder to focus on, you know, what's important. How to be proactive in this time. But, you know, we were able to be really creative and have, you know, lack of better term, have fun with what we had. You know, when schools shut down one of the first things we did, and we're really proud of this, was we put together coloring, you know, PaddleHead-themed coloring pages and word searches and crossword puzzles and, you know, a page of baseball related math questions. And we were actually the first to roll that out and got to see, you know, locally got to see the University Montana follow suit with that, whether they directly saw us and, you know, copied or they were just a week late doesn't matter. It felt special for us to be able to be innovative in that and we ended up seeing, you know, everywhere from the Seattle Mariners to the Miami Marlins across the country, start to pick up and do very similar things, and so that level of creativity was a lot of fun.

When Easter came put together a virtual Easter egg hunt because we were actually planning on doing - There's an annual massive Easter egg hunt that Michael Burks and Fuel Fitness put on and we were going to do at the ballpark for the first time this year and were super excited about having, you know, 1,000 kids just running around like crazy.<sup>2</sup> It's, it's absolutely mayhem.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Burks is the owner of Fuel Fitness, a series of gyms throughout Montana with one currently located at the Holiday Shopping Center, 1934 Brooks St, Missoula, MT 59801.

It's one of my favorite things to see is a lineup around these squares of eggs everywhere. And they say go and all the kids rush in. We were really disappointed that didn't happen so we put together a virtual Easter egg hunt just on our shop website we hid Easter eggs in, you know, merchandise. If this t-shirt was up there might have been a little egg, you know, hiding here and so we hid about a dozen of those on the site and once you found all of them, you send in where you found the eggs to our social media platforms and we gave away some really cool Easter baskets.

ML: Cool. I like that. Awesome. You were talking a little bit before about the first few weeks were very innovative, creative thinking and then the boredom really started to really kick in. Perhaps in your case, like, what did you do with your time working from home? If you weren't working?

TR: Absolutely. You know, the tough thing when you're working from home, at least for me, personally, I mean, this has been a challenge forever for me is that I like to work and I like to go above and beyond and I like it when the ownership calls me and says wow, you're doing a great job. And a lot of times that's because I'm putting in an extra, you know, 10 to 20 hours a week and go home and do some more work. My biggest challenge was, you know, getting to, you know, 5:00, 5:30 and turning everything off. You know, my location didn't change, right? Usually you leave the office and you can unplug and you're not working anymore. So, one of my first challenges was to still make time for myself. When I started making that time, my girlfriend and I started making new food recipes. We know things, you know, things of that nature where it's like, Okay, what, you know, what can we do. Do you want to try and make bread tonight? or things of that nature. Watched a lot of Netflix. Caught up on a lot of house chores that I hadn't done. I re-stained my deck. Things of that nature and, you know, just really tried to make the most of it, recognizing that everyone's in a really tough situation and that we're going to be, you know, we don't know how long we're in this. So, let's just be as happy as possible.

ML: We're in it for the long haul.

TR: Yep.

ML: Okay. This next question is more of the big and loaded question and it has to deal with the Professional Baseball Agreement. So, I know that there's always speculation about what's going on so please feel free to correct me or add more because I'm sure you're more knowledgeable about this than I am. But just a brief summary because the current Professional Baseball Agreement between Major League Baseball and Minor League Baseball is set to end in September of this year. And unfortunately, in addition to that, the coronavirus has prevented teams at all levels in the United States from playing. Do you see the agreement negotiations in the pandemic as two separate issues or as part of the same issue?

TR: Absolutely. So, I'll start by saying, officially,

I essentially have, for lack of a better term, a gag order in terms of discussing much of the negotiations and that's just because, you know, for Minor League Baseball, there's 160 other voices that don't necessarily need to be getting into, another lack of better term thing here, getting in the way of Minor League Baseball and Major League Baseball committees negotiating this.

And so, to answer the question about do I see them as separate issues or one, I think that they definitely started as separate issues, but as time rolls on and as, frankly, the inevitability of the cancellation of our season and likely Major, I mean Minor League Baseball as a whole, Major League Baseball is still trying to figure this out. It sounds like it might be close to play this year. The further we get along the more they become one issue. You know, from just a personal opinion, you know, at first, I kind of hoped that maybe this pandemic would just extend the current agreement at hand and then we talk about it later. You know, we as in Minor League Baseball and Major League Baseball, you know, deal with in '21 or '22. As we get further and as all these teams, both Minor League and Major League Baseball are, you know, heavily financially affected, I think that it's very realistic that they're kind of turning into one large problem.

ML: Awesome. Perhaps you can talk more on a local level. How do you think the pandemic will affect the Pioneer Baseball League moving forward?

TR: You know, it's tough and we're incredibly lucky. We have a new ownership group as of last year that came in, who are both very emotionally and financially supportive. They've agreed to keep, at least for our staff, they've agreed to keep us all on throughout this entire year. And incredibly, incredibly thankful for that because I know a lot of teams don't have the same financial backing and, you know, to have an ownership group that really trusts in us and believes in us to, you know, turn lemons into lemonade, for lack of better term, we're blessed. But for the rest of the Pioneer League, you know, it's going to be a real case by case basis. There's not a tremendous amount of money for the most part in Minor League Baseball. You know, some teams are very successful. Some teams basically operate, year to year to break even and provide a great, you know, resource for their community and, you know, it's tough to speculate on how the rest of the teams in the league will make out of this. From friends that I have within the league, you know, they have mixed emotions. Some of them are confident things are going to be fine and their organizations are going to be fine and their jobs are secure and others, you know, start each week not knowing.

ML: I guess it is worth mentioning for the record that the season is supposed to begin tomorrow.

TR: I realized that earlier this week. I was like, Wow, Friday's opening day. That is crazy. And, you know, we're busy right now setting up our event schedule and running, you know, running non-baseball events at the ballpark, which is a lot of fun and we feel busy from that, but it does not compare at all to that feeling typically of opening day week we'd be - I wouldn't be sleeping.

ML: Awesome. While the Missoula PaddleHeads are in a very fortunate situation, as of now, from what you said and what I've found, no one in the front office has been laid off, which is great. Other teams in the Pioneer League, such as the Billings Mustangs have not been as fortunate. And you formally told me that it was for many employees, it was just a matter of changing work styles and working from home. Did the pandemic affect employees in the front office in any other way? Was it nerve racking? Was it stressful? Were there any difficult choices that management might have had to make?

TR: Absolutely. All of the above. About three weeks in to work from home and you realize, Wow, this isn't going away. It was a stressful time for all of us, you know, had a lot of one on one meetings with my staff, with my vice president [Matt Ellis] who I report directly to and, you know, every day we have check ins, just to say, Hey, how's everybody doing? You know, in terms of tough decisions, you know, we basically had to restructure our complete budget. You know, hey, how do we set up a season here where, you know, we're not going to bring in as much revenue so we can't spend as much, you know. How does this look? What things we have to cut? You know, I cut about two-thirds of my marketing budget. And, you know, our operations in signage budget was, you know, drastically cut as well, you know, we limited things that we were really excited about doing, which was hard.

Additionally, you know, we had to look at our hourly staff or what we call day of game staff. You know, typically we hire between 75 and 100 part-time employees for the season to help us, you know, run concessions, be ushers, things of that nature. And we, you know, basically had to look at what we had planned for the season and, you know, we were able to bring back about 30 of them, which we're thankful to do, but that's, you know, at least half if not less than half of what we would normally have to do and to not be able to bring in people that might rely on us as an extra source of income or just as, you know, something that they really love to do, because we're lucky to have a job that people enjoyed it to come be a part of this. That was, that was a really tough thing to go through.

ML: Either way, if you want to take a break at any point during this interview. We can also do that. Although we're doing great so far. You're doing great so far.

TR: Thank you.

ML: I'm just sitting here. Okay. Since at this point the baseball season this summer looks very unlikely, the Missoula PaddleHeads have planned alternative events in Ogren Park Alliance Field, including Trivia Tuesdays, Happy Hour Fridays, they've been looking to rent out office

space at the park, partnering up with the local Roxy Theater and Trail 103.3 radio station for Centerfield Cinema movie nights, just throwing a few out there. How are the PaddleHeads adapting and providing entertainment and services to the community without baseball?

TR: Absolutely and you did your homework lately, clearly, good job.

ML: [laugh]

TR: So, our goal when looking at events was a combination of two things. It's one, you know, the realization that we're probably not going to have a season. So, how do we limit the loss as much as possible to season, financially? The second and probably the most important thing as, you know, one of our core values is to, you know, really be a staple for our community and provide a safe, fun, welcoming environment. So, we felt it incredibly important to be able to provide anything for the community to come in, you know, forget, you know, the outside world for an hour or two. And so, our goal is to put together between 40 and 50, if not more, non-baseball events this summer.

And it started with the weekly events that you've mentioned. Our Trivia Tuesday, we had our first one on Tuesday. We had about 50 people, which was - we end up with 44 people and I told my boss if we got to 50 I do a dance because it's the first event we'd ever done like that and, you know, we had no idea how would be received and it was very successful. A lot of fun. Movie nights and Centerfield Cinema has been phenomenal. We got very close to selling out the all available tickets for *Purple Rain* last week. We sold out our on-field spots and had a few left for the seating bowl. We have *Goonies* tonight on-field seating has been sold out for two days on that. And, you know, we've announced the next three films and which are already selling tickets and we're going to have a total of at least 17 is what we're set up right now basically to the rest of the summer for that. And it's been a great thing for the community. I mean, people come in and just thank us for doing this. You know, we can't tell you how much we appreciate given us something to do. You know, tomorrow will be our first Friday happy hour for basically opening the park and act as a quasi-restaurant, you know, at a baseball field. If you want to play catch play catch and, you know, enjoy the field, follow our COVID-19 readiness guidelines, stay away from people that you didn't come with and, you know, we're going to just continue to try to do things like that throughout the summer and those will repeat weekly.

We're talking about doing a few golf events at the ballpark. Setting up like a top golf type scenario. We're going to do a large river cleanup because the Clark Fort Coalition, who we were going to partner with, essentially shut down their business. They're working, but they can't operate the way that they normally do and they usually do two very large river cleanups and, you know, we're very environmentally conscious and we're right on the river and we love Missoula for how clean and how beautiful it is. So, we're going to implement a really large river cleanup later this summer. We're going to have a pride week celebration for the LGBTQ+ community because we did our first ever pride game last year. It was very successful and we



discussed like, Hey, we're not playing. We're going to do this anyway because you know it's great for the community.

In addition to our indigenous celebration, we had last year for the first time as well, we're looking at hosting their annual powwow at the ballpark this year. There'll be a three-day event with a powwow, 5K run and some form of a banquet. And so, we're really excited about the prospect of those. We've talked about and looking at implementing a large BrewFest. There's been conversations, you know, Roots Fest, one of Missoula's favorite staples that 8,000 people gather on Main Street. They're not going to do that this year so we're trying to figure out ways that may - how can we maybe have a smaller Roots Festival in the ballpark in a socially distant, you know, safe environment? So, you know, we've got a lot on the books and a lot of things we're trying to do, and we're, you know, really just excited that we can provide a safe place for our community to come not stay at home all the time.

ML: It's very important. It really is. How did the PaddleHeads organization form relationships like with these businesses and organizations to make these events possible?

TR: A lot of it comes just from years of partnership and sponsorships. You know, we create a relationship with someone provides an outfield billboard who believes in us as a marketing tool and, you know, and we've developed relationships with them over time. And, you know, use Blackfoot Communications as an example. You know, they've renewed their party area sponsorship for us this year. And you know, when we talk about these additional events that we're going to do they're all on board. They said, Oh, you're doing a golf event? Sign us up. Our clients would love that. And so, a lot of it just comes from friendships and networking that you make throughout town. You have conversations about, you know, hey, we're trying to do - you know, we want to figure out how we can make a pride night happen without a baseball game. And so, you know, last year we put together a committee for our pride night that features, you know, local people throughout the community as well as people in charge of local LGBTQ+, you know, clubs and organizations and you know if the minds get together and figure out how to make the most of the situation we're in.

ML: How about the Roxy Theater, for example, that's just one example.

TR: That's a great one, and actually, this is a great example of how relationships happen so I'm on the advisory board of the Flagship Program, which is a after school program that's free of cost, completely self-funded through donations and fundraising that provides kids you know opportunities to, you know, have a safe place after school, basically. Feed them, give them, you know, math tutoring anywhere from, you know, very academic things to playing Dungeons and Dragons, you know. It's a, it's a great program that I love to be a part of and it's, you know, I've been on that board for four years now. And one of the other members of the board is Tammy Bodlovic and she is the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Roxy Theater. And when we were putting together movie nights and, you know, looking at our events for the season, we wanted to figure out a way to how we could obviously help the community, benefit ourselves,

but how do we also benefit other companies and businesses that are local that we have good relationships with that are struggling right now and the Roxy was a perfect fit for that so called Tammy up and I said, Hey, Tammy, get your executive director and I'm going to bring my vice president and we're going to have a conversation about working together. And, you know, we pitched a couple of ideas. Anywhere from you know them being a sponsor then helping out to complete full partnership and what we ended up settling on was a full partnership. We split expenses and we split revenues with the Roxy. So, it's been a really fun thing to put together and, you know, bring friends in throughout the community and, you know, leverage both of our marketing networks and, you know, help everybody out.

ML: Excellent. Do you foresee that the Missoula PaddleHeads organization will re-implement some of these events, possibly in the future? I know it's early in the summer and you've just started, but are there already plans?

TR: Oh yeah, absolutely. We recognize that we're trying to learn new things this year, right? Everything's new and different, but it's been already - We made it clear as a staff that whatever we find successful this year we're going to continue to do. And all it will do in the long run when we have a baseball season, outside of make us a lot busier, is improve our relationships with everyone community. It'll improve, you know, how we're viewed within the community. We like to like to think that it will. Obviously, to be determined, but we think that a lot, you know, creating a ballpark atmosphere that, you know, it's a true gathering place for our community outside of baseball is a real opportunity for us and, you know, we have 38 baseball games a year and yeah probably only five months where we can do things at the ballpark because of snow and, you know, our beautiful Montana weather in the winter, but we've got a lot more opportunity to capitalize on dates, where there's not baseball and use the ballpark as a place where the city can come and, you know, golf, watch movies, have a beer, do trivia, you know, bring different cultures in, bring different walks of life and get everyone together and just have a great time.

ML: Sounds perfect. Excellent. You mentioned a bit earlier that the ballpark has implemented some new COVID-19 safety protocols and I've had the pleasure of reading through the book [Missoula PaddleHeads COVID-19 Readiness Plan] so you don't have to give me specifics because you've already posted the guideline on the team website. But I'm just curious what the process was coming up with these guidelines going through the training staff and employees. Was it difficult? Was straightforward? Was it a learning process?

TR: Yes, it was difficult. It was straightforward. It was a learning process. It was all of those things. As we were developing this our COVID-19 readiness plan, we worked side by side with the health department and guidelines, [inaudible] upon us from the state. Additionally, we also used, you know, used our peers within Minor League Baseball or other organizations that we knew that were putting together plans and said, Hey, would you mind sharing with us? So, we, you know, picked and, you know, pulled from all sorts of different plans from different

businesses from different regions to put together the most comprehensive plan possible to make sure that we had a safe place that we could feel comfortable bringing people into.

ML: Excellent. And from what I've read, you've also got a large portion of your guidelines from the Event Safety Alliance, which is a nonprofit organization. I was just curious how and why you came to their guidelines.

TR: So, I believe that was recommended to us from, you know, a few of the different resources that we reached out to. They said, Hey, this would be a great place for you to kind of build your foundation. Look for examples, look for best practices. Things that, you know, not everything, you know, not everything that was on there was necessarily applicable to us, and there were certain things that should be applicable to us that, you know, maybe weren't referenced on there. So, it was a good foundation to kind of build off of as we continued to have these conversations with other event companies, other baseball teams and other organizations throughout the state.

ML: Did the PaddleHeads has received any guidance from Minor League or Major League Baseball when it came to COVID-19 related practices or was it more local municipal government and nonprofit organizations?

TR: Specifically, local and nonprofit organizations helped us the most. Minor League Baseball, you know, their main focus is baseball essentially. You know, they sent out a you know a handful of, Hey, here's some best practices to maybe look at, but for the most part, the development of our plan came from other Minor League Baseball teams, not necessarily Minor League Baseball as a whole. State guidelines and other event companies.

ML: Okay. I'd like to talk about the players. And I know that you're the director of marketing and public relations so I'm not sure what your relationship with the team specifically is -

TR: I got, I got great ones.

ML: Awesome. I mean, just in the grand sense, how has the pandemic affected the players themselves? What does it mean for them to have their summer season canceled?

TR: It's very hard for these guys. You know, over time, you build relationships with people that come through and, you know, I actively try to let the players do their job and, you know, let me do mine and not become instant friends and want to go hang out. With that said, when you spend every day with someone for, you know, four months in the summer you build relationships and I've been able to build some great friendships from players that are others still in the Diamondbacks system, have been traded or, you know, are not in baseball anymore. You know, as I talked to those guys, they're bored and it's challenging because a lot of Minor League Baseball players, depending on their contract, you know, if they didn't have a large signing bonus when they were drafted or signed internationally, they don't have any source of

revenue until we play games. Depending on the organization, some teams have been giving stipends to players, but not all have. So, you know, they've been trying to figure out how to make it. And I feel for those guys. Additionally, the Arizona Diamondbacks in the last month released about 60 players from their Minor League System. So, there's a lot of guys that were, you know, were hoping to chase their dream and improve this season and improve their prospect ranking that might not get that chance again.

ML: Another interesting thing I found looking at the roster is that over half of the players on the team originate from foreign countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Cuba. In addition, none of the players on the team from the United States are from Montana. They're from other states. So, I'm just curious how its impacted them if they had to go home, or they still are the in the region?

TR: So, it's a case by case basis for a lot of those players. Some of them have, you know, they get apartments in places in Arizona because they're, you know, they're working at the spring training complex when they can. But some of them have to go home. You know, a good friend of mine that played for us a couple years ago from Brazil originally and I know that at least spent a majority of this time at home in Brazil. You know, they're all trying to train when they can. You know, either continue to hone their skills or just stay sharp as possible so that whenever baseball's back they're ready to play.

ML: Another question. I'm just curious. With the Black Lives Matter protest throughout the United States has the PaddleHeads organization rethought the recent diversity on its team, its staff and its local community in any way?

TR: Absolutely. So, you know, starting with the team. Specifically, we really don't have any control over who the Diamondbacks send us. So, that particular aspect, no matter what, it is not in our control. For the most part, there's always a tremendous amount of diversity. You know, our Latin American players all come from massive different backgrounds and, you know, even, you know, the players drafted from the United States there tends to be a strong amount of diversity on the team, which we're very thankful for. You know, as far as our organization and staff goes, we've always been an employer that is open to anyone non-discriminate. Doesn't matter your gender, your creed, where you come from and we're very proud of that. With that said, our, you know, our theme which always has been, is it doesn't matter, you know, who you are, how you look, what color your skin is, we're gonna if we're hiring someone, we're going to hire the best available people.

ML: Great. Let's see what which question next? The thing is you come in with a plan then you realize, oh, this can go different ways.

TR: Oh yeah. Always.

ML: Well, since we're talking about baseball, I guess we'll stick on that topic because who doesn't want to talk about baseball? Hopefully this is not conflict with the gag rule. But I'm just curious how the Arizona Diamondbacks and Major League Baseball in general has responded to the PaddleHeads's needs during the pandemic.

TR: I think this is probably fine said, but because of the gag order that we discussed and we don't have much conversation with them at all. You know, there's basically, you know, an occasional - I get transaction emails when players are signed or released. You know, I think my vice president had a few conversations here and there, but because we're in a landscape where, you know, Minor League Baseball doesn't want us politicking to Major League Baseball teams specifically and Major League Baseball doesn't want that for, you know, the big league clubs as well, so there hasn't been a ton of communication.

ML: Okay, I read a while back that - because you just mentioned that a few teams were trying to find ways to fund and help their Minor League affiliates. I heard that the Diamondbacks promised to pay their Minor League affiliate players through the end of June. First, I'm just wondering if that's correct and second, if you found this kind of aid sufficient, helpful or lacking.

TR: I think so, yes. As far as I know that's accurate. I haven't called, you know, and said, Hey, did you get paid this week? but it's as far as I know, Yes. They are doing that and I would say that it's very helpful. I think that it's incredibly important that the players are taken care of, especially in a time this tough and it's tough to say, you know, is it sufficient, is it lacking because yeah, you know, you don't notice where people come from and you don't know what expenses they have and what debts, they have. You know, what part of the world, or what part of the country they live in. You know, is there enough to survive in New York City? I have no idea. But I think the bottom line is, it was the right thing to do and I'm sure they looked at their budget and what they could afford and I would hope that it's the most of they could give.

ML: Great. Okay. In addition to this, because again, there's the COVID-19 side and then there was the pre-existing negotiations which we won't weigh too heavily on right now. But the PaddleHeads have been running their own grassroots campaign #SAVEMYTEAM to encourage Missoulians to voice their support for the team in their community and to their government representatives. What has it been like running this campaign? Has it been successful? I guess I will leave it at that.

TR: Very much so and this Same My Team campaign with something we put together when negotiations started to look a lot more serious. At first, we were like, okay, this is a big splash in the beginning of a larger negotiation and they'll back off. After a while it was, you know, okay, they might not be backing off and we need to do something. And so, you know, we developed a plan where, you know, you guys, you know, I say you guys might Major League Baseball and baseball don't want us talking or politicking so let's have our fans do it. And the outpour of support was phenomenal. It was incredibly heartwarming. It was it was a huge job for me. It was basically what I did for a month. But, you know, getting people to send videos or come, you

know, and let me film them to give their testimonial about how important the team is to them, how important the team is the community meant so much. You know, we always like to believe that we provide a great thing for the community and we impact [inaudible] positively, but to have, you know, dozens of people say, you know, what the things that we believe previously and say it to our face and become emotional about it. It was incredibly heartwarming. It was tough. The Save My Team campaign was something that we launched pre-COVID that we wanted to continue to build on, but as, you know, things shut down and it was harder to reach people we kind of – we had to put a bit of a pin in it. It's not something that we are going to back off of because we're, you know, doing everything we can to not go anywhere and continue to provide baseball for Missoula for a long time to come.

ML: Great, let's change lanes for a moment, and then we'll come back to this. I was excited to see that in May, that the Missoula PaddleHeads worked with the Youth Women's Christian Association in the Strikeout Domestic Violence fundraiser campaign. I was just curious, like how, again, how this relationship with the YWCA was formed and also what it was like conducting a fundraiser in the midst of the pandemic.

TR: Yeah. So, you know, this YWCA Strike Out Domestic Violence campaign was really initiated by our ownership and Peter and Susan Crampton Davis. Susan specifically for, you know, numerous meetings in a row said we're not doing enough for the community right now. People need help and we're in a position that we can help them. So, we have relationships with a tremendous amount of nonprofits in Missoula. Obviously, there are a lot of them. And one of our core values is to support the youth and underserved. And in a time where people were forced to stay at home, we recognized that, you know, domestic abuse doesn't go away. And if you don't have another place to go and you're forced to be at a place where you're not safe it's a terrifying thought. And so, you know, we worked with YWCA to put together a program where we were going to match dollar for dollar any PaddleHeads merchandise sold on our website for this two-week period in addition to up to 20,000 dollars for direct donations to the YWCA. It was an interesting thing to put together in a time where, you know, I'm used to going to meet with people and have interviews and put together videos and work together and we couldn't really do that so we had to get creative. You know, utilizing, you know, testimonials and, you know, videos that people shot from home on their cell phone, we were able to put together some pieces of this campaign. And when all was said and done we surpassed our goal and raised almost 50,000 dollars for the YWCA.

ML: Were both of these sales digital as opposed to in person, given the pandemic, or was that a change?

TR: Our store was completely shut down and a good, you know, I want to say about 6 or 7,000 dollars of that was from merchandise sales, but a lot of it was just direct donations, which we were thrilled about. And you know, the YWCA put a lot of faith in us. Giving Tuesdays is a huge thing in Missoula. It's something that nonprofits rely on and a lot of them, that's their biggest fundraising week of the year. And our Missoula Gifts, which starts on Giving Tuesday is the

name of that and they decided to forgo their participation in the Missoula Gifts campaign this year because they believed in our program so much so there was a lot of pressure and I felt a lot of pressure personally as the marketing guys like wow, we got to make sure that, you know, we raise the necessary money for this. And when all is said and done, we reached the goal and I was incredibly proud of what was able to come and how supportive our community was in such a tough time.

ML: Awesome. Okay. Then we have a final few set of questions. So, I guess we'll dive in. Now, this kind of connects to the municipal government. So, what are your opinions on the municipal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Missoula or in the state in general?

TR: So, I think our state has was very smart. I think as hard as it is to say it, because I know how drastically our economy was affected, you know, most of my friends either lost jobs or were furloughed and it's a challenging thing, but for us to be so aggressive early on before cases were really rampant, I think it was the best thing for us and it's the reason why we, you know, we still have so few cases in the community. And I think that, you know, that our local government and the health department have been phenomenal. You know, they've been hard. They were hard on us when we put together a plan to reopen the ballpark. But I'd have it no other way because the safety of our whole community and, you know, to me personally, our staff is the most, you know, the utmost priority. And, you know, if we were to be, you know, loose about it and pretend like it wasn't a big problem, things could have been a lot worse.

ML: I've read that Mayor John Engen, I think that's how it's pronounced, Yes, he has forgiven the rent on the Ogren Park Alliance Field for the summer. Has the mayor cooperated with the PaddleHeads and other businesses in Missoula during the pandemic?

TR: So specifically, my relationship with the mayor isn't as much as say my vice president [Matt Ellis] who deals with them directly and, you know, the forgiveness of the lease for this year was massive for us. You know, we set a budget that is large, a lot of expenses and, you know, with hopes to at least have that much in revenue back right? And, you know, when we lose 38 games we're going to have, you know, at least 1,500 people in the ballpark each night buying tickets, buying merchandise, fine hot dogs, you know, it would make it a tremendous amount harder to afford our lease. And so, we're very appreciative of the support of the community to make sure that we can stay.

ML: Awesome. I've also read that a few representatives in Montana, including Senator Steve Daines, Senator Jon Tester Representative Greg Gianforte, and Governor Steve Bullock have been very supportive of Minor League Baseball in the state. Have they been cooperative with the PaddleHeads and/or the Pioneer League to any extent these past few months?

TR: Absolutely. Actually, before the shutdown, we were going to have all those representatives as well as Major League Baseball officials come to the ballpark to do a tour, plead our case about how important Minor League Baseball is in our community. Obviously, that couldn't

happen because the pandemic happened and travel was tough. And we were at a, you know, stay at home order, that's something that we're looking to still reschedule and we're hoping to have that happen in the next month or so.

ML: Great. Okay. And again, being mindful of the gag rule. I'm just curious. What is it like currently working for a Minor League Team that's on the chopping block among them was the 42 baseball teams that could, hopefully not, but possibly lose affiliation in the near future?

TR: I'd be lying if I said it wasn't stressful because it is. You know, I graduated college and my last year of school I got an internship here. I planned on leaving our community and, you know, going home to Seattle or picking up a job somewhere else. My internship is when I fell in love with our community and I fell in love with our staff and you know what our goal to provide this community is and, you know, now it's been eight seasons and I spent my entire career here and the thought of potentially not having something which we're confident that, you know, our ownership has said matter what there will be professional baseball in some form, going forward. And so, you know, as a staff we've really taken that to heart and just focus on controlling what we can. Make the organization the best we can. Make any improvements that we might need to continue to have a relationship with Minor League and Major League Baseball. And, you know, stay the course, stay confident because, you know, obviously when this looks, you know, look serious the easy thing to do would be to try to jump ship right and go somewhere that feel safer with some more security, but our whole team is bought in and we're really lucky to have a family of a staff here where we all care about each other, you know, these are my co-workers, but they're also my best friends. And so, we're in this together. We're working through the best we can.

ML: What can the community do to support Minor League Baseball teams, such as the Missoula PaddleHeads during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing negotiations? In what way can they show support, whether that be personal, financial, or other?

TR: Absolutely. There's the simplest thing is supporting them financially. If you need a new t-shirt or you need a new ball cap keep the sun out of your eyes for the summer. You know, go buy it from a Minor League Baseball team. You know, do some research and figure out what 42 teams are on the chopping block. You know, I would say just go shop from us, but everyone needs support this point. You know, additionally, you know, now that we have events come to events at the ballparks or movie nights, which help both us and the Roxy Theater. You know, additionally, you know, make your voice. Social media is a crazy thing. You can send out a tweet and tag Major League Baseball and there's a good chance a lot of people are going to see it. And so, you know, it's important that everyone knows, you know, how important Minor League Baseball is to small communities. You know, annually with a conservative multiplier, our economic impact is over 10 million dollars and that's set very conservatively. So, you know, not only do we provide something of a form of entertainment and escape for our community, but financially, you know, we help keep things rolling as well. So, you know, support through



merchandise. Support through coming to events. I mean, simple things, even if you can't afford it, sharing events and things that are going on on your social media platforms or telling your friends about it. You know, everything helps.

ML: Excellent. And, as I think I've told you before, this interview, this is a dual internship. So, I'm doing part of it through the University of Montana history department and the other half through the Missoula Downtown Partnership. And one question that the partnership has is how can the, I guess I'll read for question. How can the Missoula Downtown Partnership help the Missoula PaddleHeads? Do they have any resources or information that the organization could find helpful?

TR: I think the Downtown Partnership and, you know, a lot of what they already do is continue to, you know, help market and spread the word of things that are going on within the community. Additionally, you know, thinking of ways that they can, you know, use and leverage different businesses together that maybe we haven't. You know, if there's a relationship that makes sense and event that they are planning or, you know, an initiative that they know, a particular organization doing in town that, you know, we might be able to partner with, use the stadium for an event, things of that nature. I think continuing to be a resource that brings our community together and, you know, I think that the saying of, you know, stronger together is very true. And, you know, we are all independent we're only going to be as good as we can be, but if we work together, we can really continue to grow as a community.

ML: Awesome. Okay. I may have one more question. Let's see. I think we're actually approaching the hour point. So, this is almost perfect. Okay. No, I think that about does it. So, I'm going to stop the recording just going to pause it.

[End of Interview]