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SPEAKERS

Justin Angle, Sam Schultz, Christina Henderson



Christina Henderson 00:00

access to talent, I believe is and will be the number one driving force for economic development in our state for the foreseeable future.



Justin Angle 00:21

This is a new angle, and I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by first security bank, Blackfoot communications, and the University of Montana College of Business.



Justin Angle 00:33

Hey folks, welcome back. And thanks for tuning in. Christina Henderson is the executive director of the Montana High Tech Business Alliance. She's also a colleague here at the University of Montana College of Business. In today's conversation, we learn all about the important role the Alliance plays in economic development throughout Montana. We also discuss Montana's changing economy, the growth of the technology sector, the influx of remote workers, the need for more homegrown talent, and what to expect in the Jian forte administration. This is a great conversation for anyone thinking about how best to position themselves for success in the Montana economy. Christina is an important leader here. And I'm excited for you to learn more about her work right now. Right here today with Christina Henderson, Christina, thanks for coming on the podcast.

C Christina Henderson 01:26
Thank you for having me, Justin.

J Justin Angle 01:27
So first off, I'd love to know, just how are you doing? Like, we're in the midst of this pandemic. You know, we got a vaccine on the way not sure when any of us will get it. But yeah. Are you holding up?

C Christina Henderson 01:40
I'm holding up quite well. Yeah, the the tech industry has weathered COVID I think as well as any Yeah, the ability to work remotely go online. And the actually the pace at which use of technology is accelerating is beneficial to a lot of our member companies. So so I can't complain too much. We're doing we're doing pretty well, indeed.

J Justin Angle 02:09
I mean, that sort of draws out so much in that answer that we'll get into today. And you know, want to spend a little bit of time letting people know who you are. So, you know, give us the sort of quick like, how did you get to Montana? And why have you stayed?

C Christina Henderson 02:26
Yeah, well, I've been in Montana, almost 10 years, I grew up in rural Iowa, and attended the University of Iowa. And while I was there, I met my husband, Eric, who was a forester, okay. And so he got hired by the US Forest Service in Montana, for a job that started in January of 2011. So we moved out here from Michigan, where we were living at the time, and I landed at the University of Montana and the College of Business. I was the marketing director for three years for the Bureau of Business and Economic Research there and got my MBA while I was working in the college and got really into entrepreneurship, led the entrepreneurship club and, and through the MBA program, I met Greg Gianforte, who had founded Right Now Technologies, and he and a group of technology executives in Bozeman. Were starting a high tech Business Alliance. And so I found out about that, got hired to lead that organization. And I've been the executive director of the Alliance for almost seven years now.

J Justin Angle 03:38

Wow. So let's talk about the Alliance. What what what is it and maybe talk a little bit about the origin story as well. You mentioned that a little bit in your previous answer.



Christina Henderson 03:49

Yeah, well, so the, you know, Montana's high tech sector has been growing for a long time. For decades, we've had some great software companies, cloud cloud technology companies that have been in this space for a long time. But around 2012, Right Now Technologies in Bozeman sold to Oracle for \$1.8 billion. Was the biggest exit that we've had to date. And around that time, we really started to become this critical mass of, of growth in the industry. And so over in Bozeman, the city of Bozeman and Britt Fontno, and the economic developers over there, started to look at creating industry clusters. And they approached the high tech sector to see if they would want to start a group for high tech and the leader said yes, we'd like to, but we don't want it just to be Bozeman, we, it should be statewide. We're gonna raise some funds and hire an executive director. And so that was sort of how the organization got its start. We are a statewide association that represents high tech in advanced manufacturing. We started in 2014 with about 20 members and in a little over a year grew to more than 200 really quickly. And we have three main pieces to our mission. So we are there to serve our members. And the first thing that we do is connect companies and individuals within the high tech industry, pre pandemic, we would most frequently do that through in person events, we'd have about six or seven in person meetings per year, all around the state. But now we do a lot of virtual events and webinars and things online. The second piece to our mission is to give visibility to the industry. So we produce a lot of content write articles, we conduct an annual high tech industry survey with the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at UM. And work to educate people about the growth of the industry jobs that are available, the companies that we have, because a lot of people don't know how big the industry is, its last year was \$2.5 billion in revenue into the state, growing nine times the overall Montana economy pays twice the median wage. So it's a large and growing piece to Montana's economy. And then the last piece to what we do is try to remove barriers to growth for member companies. And what that's most often looked like for the last almost seven years has been addressing workforce. So we have a high tech jobs portal. We speak in classrooms, go to career fairs, and and try to get the word out about jobs in Montana.



Justin Angle 06:40

So what it I mean, let's just do a little bit of definition here, like what is the high tech industry? Like what do you have to do? What sort of business can be a member of your organization? Let's put it that way.



Christina Henderson 06:52

Yeah, we define high tech as companies that make or sell high technology products provide services related to tech, we include e commerce, and also advanced manufacturing. So anything that falls under that umbrella, we have a lot of sub sectors underneath it. So biotech is big software, and software as a service, professional services and technology, a wide variety of, of different sub industries as well.



Justin Angle 07:21

Okay. And let's talk about, you know, kind of the why Montana piece, I mean, Montana is such a entrepreneurial place. And you mentioned, you know, right now as well, like what, what is sort of been the arc of tech firms wanting to either start or locate here in Montana.



Christina Henderson 07:40

Well, we see this innovation economy growing in Montana is kind of the convergence of three trends. So one, social, one economic and one technological. So you can begin with the technological piece. In recent decades, the the barriers to being able to start and grow and scale a tech company in a state like Montana have been removed. So you've had the onset of the internet cloud based software that you can, you know, leverage those services to at scale, whatever size of your company. So the the cost and the technological advantages of starting something in the tech field has been equalized. the playing field is level for us, even though we're a relatively remote state, geographically. On the economic side, we've had a number of companies in Montana that have done quite well so right now technology is the biggest but there are dozens of companies that are creating jobs they're you know, they're selling their products globally, and have been able to scale and and after right now sold, one thing you saw was the a lot of the talent and the executives and the the skilled talent that had been part of right now then went off to start other ventures. We have other sectors that have done well like the photonics industry around Bozeman or biotech. So we just have a critical mass now of of tech companies that have cropped up that show it's possible. And those, those companies attract other talent and other entrepreneurs into the state. And then the third piece is the social factors. And this has been amplified by COVID. But for a long time now, knowledge workers like to be in urban centers, but there's also reached research that shows they like to be in college towns with access to outdoor amenities, national parks, public lands. And we have that in spades in Montana. So you have a lot of folks that were leaving cities and bringing their talent and their networks and their capital to the state. And that has also driven growth now with COVID. More and more people are working remotely, people are trying to get out of dense urban centers and have some space under quarantine. And so we're seeing the rise of zoom towns and remote work in the state has just completely taken off in 2020, as well.

J

Justin Angle 10:15

Yeah. Can you be a little bit more descriptive of that? Like, what do we know about you know, whether it's people who are have relocated to Montana, and to can you can continue their work firms outside of state or companies bringing their workforce here intentionally like, what what do we know about how COVID is accelerated, some of those, some of those may be pre existing trends?

C

Christina Henderson 10:38

Sure, Montana has always had a high percentage of people working remotely. So as long as I've been in this work, we've had a significant remote workforce, a lot of people who work for companies out of state, locally, and we've the stats that I've seen, we've about fourth in the nation, for number of remote workers per capita. And since COVID, we've definitely, you know, seen, especially in the real estate markets, there have been a number of, of stories, or the just the increase of of out of state interest in moving into Montana, has grown a lot. And certainly among our member companies, many of them went remote. In March, when the pandemic first started as many employees as could if they're doing manufacturing or something where you have to be in person, they're putting safety protocols in place, and, and continuing that work. But, but for many of our member tech companies, they've they've gone remote, and they're staying that way. And they'll, you know, if they've come back to the office, it's been in a limited capacity. And so more of them are willing to hire remote workers in other places. And also, you see folks that are coming back to Montana, and to Montana and bringing their jobs with them as well.

J

Justin Angle 12:00

And so, you know, when you're trying to sort of, I mean, I guess I would love to kind of get into the mechanics of understanding the role your organization plays in some of this development that's happening, whether it's, you know, helping get Montana on the map, as a place where, you know, companies considering starting, would make the choice to come here or facilitate, you mentioned, sort of removing barriers, like what's gone, typical ground work that your organization does?

C

Christina Henderson 12:33

Well, and making connections, a lot of the work that we do, is bringing together our members who are mostly in the private sector with partners and say, education, so we do a lot with the University of Montana and, and helping to talk about coursework that is

relevant to the needs of modern employers right now and have have had, you know, fortunately, a very receptive audience in that, or, you know, doing the same thing at at Montana Tech in Butte or MSU in Bozeman, so we do a lot of connecting to educational leaders or professors speaking in classrooms and, and helping to bridge that gap between, you know, academia and, and the private sector where we can, we're doing the same thing with local governments, and we bring in, you know, the, the managers of the airports to talk about air travel, we've brought in experts in child care, to highlight examples of how tech companies can address that, because that's a growing challenge. So we're looking at, really the whole community in which our tech companies are trying to operate. And we're looking to either educate or brainstorm solutions, implement new programs in connection with our members, so that, you know, we can create mutually beneficial dynamic between those stakeholders. We're also looking to fill in education gaps. So a lot of what we do is content driven and marketing driven and education driven. I actually started my career as an English teacher, so that kind of comes natural and have taught at the university in the College of Business. So, you know, we're out to reach students with to help them identify career pathways into technology. If you look at Montana, historically, the message has been or a lot of families have believed and, you know, decades ago, certainly rightly that, for a young person to graduate, they would need to leave the state to get a high paying job to have a good career. And with the advent of, of this industry of of the high paying high quality jobs that are now available in the tech industry, it's possible for more young people to stay in the state after graduation. And it's also possible for more expatriate Montanans to be able to come home. And to both have that good paying job and also to have an exciting job and an exciting career. So we're trying to spread that message, tell that new story of what's happening in Montana, highlight the companies that have cropped up here. Entrepreneurship is also a focus of our work. We, in 2017, published the first case study of entrepreneurship in Montana, we got funding from the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, because for four straight years, Montana was the number one state for startups per capita in the nation, according to the Kauffman index. And so we invited researchers from the foundation to come help us find out why. And we went around the state and interviewed more than 40 people, entrepreneurs in Missoula, and Bozeman and in rural communities, and we identified a lot of the natural assets and strengths that Montana's ecosystem has that support entrepreneurs. And now we continue to see the benefits of entrepreneurship and the state as as this tech sector continues to grow.



Justin Angle 16:19

And so as you're working kind of statewide, in this capacity, I mean, this this, this sort of influx, and sort of the the organic growth of the tech sector, in Montana, I mean, that brings with it kind of a change in how these local economies work. And some communities

it's brought change and how the city sort of looks and feels. What have been some sort of challenges with that piece. And you mentioned working with communities and local governments, if there, has there been resistance, have there been kind of like, Well, yeah, describe that work a little bit?

 Christina Henderson 16:53

Well, we, you know, for a long time, I think if you look at other tech hubs across the country, you see the dynamics where growth has not always been good, right. And they're in situations like, for example, economic inequality, and cities like in the Bay Area, that gets so expensive that teachers and firefighters and service workers can't afford to live in that community anymore. And the housing prices have been driven up to African astronomical levels. And so we're, we're constantly you know, with vigilance trying to train and keep an eye on ways that we can have smart growth and growth that contributes positively to Montana's economy and to our communities. And, and hopefully mitigate some of those challenges. Certainly, in our biggest tech hubs are Missoula, and Bozeman, the two big college towns, which is understandable, and I think that's where you see the the rise in housing costs, which I would say is one of the biggest challenges that we're facing as a state, rent is high housing is high. And now, post pandemic herunder, in the midst of the pandemic, you see a lot of influx of people that want to be a Montana who wouldn't want to be and so, so that's certainly leading to housing challenges. And, and so we're, you know, as a Association, I'm not sure what we can do, but we are trying to partner with communities and, and keep an eye on things that we might be able to do to address that problem. And also the childcare shortages. You know, a lot of workers in tech, skew young, and a lot of a lot of those workers are looking to have families or have young families and need childcare and, and we don't have enough, in Missoula or in Montana. So we again, we're partnering with with other organizations and local government to find ways that we can help support that or that, you know, encourage our tech companies and highlight examples of ways that they're standing up in house childcare, for example, are providing that kind of benefit to their employees to show ways that it's possible or ways we might be able to make it better. One great opportunity in this remote work revolution, though, I think, is to push the benefits of that growth and the talent attraction into other communities in Montana. So we kind of have pain points in Missoula and Bozeman as, as those are the places that so many people are coming. But we have other great cities, like Butte, Great Falls, Helena. And I'm seeing this trend of of people moving into those communities because they can afford the you know, the housing is more affordable and more available. And they can still get that great Montana lifestyle, that access to the outdoors, the cultural events, the friendly people, but it's not quite as tight a market and and so a lot of families are doing that and even into rural areas and I think this push for rural broadband is so important, because it allows any

community in Montana to capitalize on this trend. And if you have a small town that is able to attract in 10, or a dozen highly paid remote workers who bring their jobs, they bring their network and their, their jobs, their kids, they eat in local restaurants, they buy a house locally, then I think we'll have a more even distribution, hopefully of the benefits of this growth into Montana.

J

Justin Angle 20:36

A new angle is supported by first security bank, Blackfoot communications, and UM's College of Business. access to capital, broadband and education are three ingredients and a community needs for success.

S

Sam Schultz 20:49

This is Sam Schultz, and you're listening to a new angle.

J

Justin Angle 20:56

Yeah, you mentioned the, you know, the the remote work. I'm not quite how you phrased it, but you said like the remote work revolution. And it makes me wonder like, how are you thinking about, you know, as we kind of emerge from this pandemic, what work looks like, you know, what sort of some of the changes will probably fade away that we're experiencing now, but others might persist or morph in different way, like, what do you think works gonna look like on the other side of this?

C

Christina Henderson 21:26

Well, I do think we'll see more of what we have now, which is more people working from home more days. So maybe not full time, like many of us are now. But, you know, a few days a week, I think you'll see the offices, the the ways that we use offices change. So less office space may be a rotation of employees into an office and shared spaces, more use of offices for in person meetings and strategy, strategic planning sessions and things like that, and a lot of individual work maybe being done remotely from from home. But yeah, I think definitely, we'll see greater use of technology to connect with one another, and to share files and resources and all of that, I don't think we're gonna see a, I think we'll see a lot of the changes that have happened during the pandemic stick, yeah, in terms of adapt, you know, adaptive use of technology. For us, even as an association, we had minimal experience, or I guess, incentive to do remote events prior to the pandemic, we just didn't do it that much. we prioritize meeting in person. And what we saw in the first quarter, when we started doing remote events is we actually had a dramatic uptick in

participation and engagement around the state because there was a much lower bar for people to attend and participate, they could do so remotely. And so it kind of opened our eyes to what an opportunity we had in doing more events and meetings remotely. And so like for us as an association, those changes are going to stick I think we'll do much more hybrid events making in person events available through technology to people that might want to dial in remotely, or doing more entirely online events as well.

J

Justin Angle 23:24

Yeah, it just, you know, you think about like on a on a broader scale, like, how do different, you know, how does value and assets move around in a society, like you mentioned, you know, maybe reduction in formal office space. So does that represent a transfer of value in real estate from commercial to residential, we already see stress on the residential side, as you mentioned, event space as well, I mean, some of those similar dynamics there could persist as well, if you're doing in person. I mean, if you're doing more remote events than you are in person, some of those sort of demand on traditional meeting spaces, gathering spaces kind of goes down, it'll be interesting to see kind of how this plays out, and how it affects growth within communities and where communities sort of, you know, what sort of building is happening in these towns across Montana. Um, you know, I think of like classes like business travel, you know, what, how much business travel comes back? And how much just sort of goes away? You know, the consultant class, do they really need to fly out every week and be on site for the week? Or they can can they do it adequately, remotely and probably do it a lot cheaper, I'm not sure how that's gonna play out.

C

Christina Henderson 24:39

Yeah, I have heard from folks who do quite a bit of travel, I do think we're going to reassess how much travel is required, and when it's necessary to be there in person versus when you could handle things remotely. I do also sense though, that there's a pent up demand for in person events. So I think once we have vaccines widely distributed once we're free, free to move about the country. I do think that, you know, I know my members are really hungry for that in person connection. And so I don't I don't see us steering entirely clear of in person events or doing away without in any way. I think we've more appreciate what, you know, when, when in person, you know, there can't be substituted with virtual and when it can.

J

Justin Angle 25:34

Yeah, I think that's really well said, and it makes me think about, like, there's certain parts of this pandemic that I feel, I'm really able to get creative work done kind of in isolation,

and I can really control my environment. And then in other instances, ie when the kids are home from school, or whatever it is, like no way I need to be in the same room with these people. I'm trying to do knowledge work with you just, I think you're right. Like, we have this great opportunity to really question some of the just the grooves in our operating mechanisms that just might not make as much sense. And that could be a really powerful force coming out of this whole experience. Absolutely. So let's talk about I mean, you mentioned before, yes, you are your affiliate member of our faculty of ta in our programs for a long time you, you've also completed your MBA with us. I mean, one of the big challenges, I'm sure, for companies looking at, you know, building or relocating in Montana, is, you know, talent, does this place, have a talented enough workforce to stay in the operation and take it to where it needs to be. We'll talk about the partnership with the universities in this day. And you know, how that's been successful in some dimensions, and then how maybe we can do better. I know, in our at our university, we can certainly do better. And I'd like to kind of talk about some of your ideas about how we can do that.



Christina Henderson 27:08

Yes. Well, talent, access to talent, I believe, is and will be the number one driving force for economic development in our state, for the foreseeable future. And it is across the country, if you look at why companies choose to locate offices in specific places, why entrepreneurs are able to start up in specific places, it's because they can get the skilled talent that they need to scale a business. And so and you can see as evidence, you know, our tech hubs in the state have sprung up around the universities because innovation and knowledge comes out of those universities and because the talent comes out of those universities. And so it's it's a vital relationship and partnership and has been for a long time. For the last six years that we've completed surveys of our high tech companies in Montana, the number one barrier to growth cited every single year, Well, number one barrier to doing business is access to talent finding enough skilled workers. And so it's, it's been important, our, you know, the universities producing enough graduates and enough graduates in the right fields with the right skills has only gotten, you know, the need has only increased in the time I've been doing this work. And honestly, the universities, in many ways, have been doing a phenomenal job and have been doing what they can to scale up the needed programs, you know, computer science, for example, is highly in demand. That's by far the number one skill set that our companies say they need and can't find enough of. And so it's been great to see those programs ramp up, and also to shift their efforts and change the types of programming and degrees that we're offering. One of the best ways for us to increase diversity in tech, which is sometimes a challenge, you know, it tends to be heavily white and male, many times and so one of the best ways to diversify is to expand how we define who's going to be good at computer science. So doing things like you know, emphasizing the ways that computer science can be used to solve

challenges for people. I've seen MSU offer like a Bachelor of Arts in computing, in addition to the Bachelor of Science and and these types of programs and classes open up the field to a broader range of personality types and, you know, people with different interests and all of that helps to expand the pool in the field and increase the number of people who see Computer Science and programming is an appealing opportunity.

J

Justin Angle 30:04

Indeed, yeah. And you mentioned within that you mentioned skills in particular, and that sort of this debate that that there may be it's false framing on a campus. But you know, there's this definitely this debate between like teaching students skills that they can refuse to get into a job, and then teaching them how to think and apply critical thinking and write and some of these more sort of persistent attributes that will serve them well throughout. What's hope, what we hope is a successful career how, you know, how do you and your constituents kind of think about those trade offs in education?

C

Christina Henderson 30:38

Yeah, I would say it's not either or it's both. And we need technical skills. And we need those social, emotional people skills as well, we need them both. Yeah, we, in our survey, last year, we asked our companies to tell us what are the top skills that you're looking for in new graduates and new employees coming into your company, and at the top of the list was programming and technical skills, but right underneath that was communication skills, soft skills, social skills, the ability to work in teams, the ability to problem solve, the ability to learn quickly, and a willingness to learn new things and adapt, tech is constantly evolving and changing. So if you get a technical degree, the half life of that technical education is half a decade, you know, so if you don't keep up and keep learning and keep growing, after college, you're not going to be as in demand in the field, you know, as you would be, if you kept up and and for those who are on the, you know, I have a liberal arts degree, I was an English major in my undergrad and then got an MBA, so I'm not a terribly technical person. But you know, folks like me, who are drawn more to, you know, verbal skills, or the or the liberal arts or, or to people are skills are in demand in tech, too, we need folks who can sell the products, I mean, that's a vital function. And in technology, we need folks who can help translate technology between the, you know, the highly technical engineers and the front end users, there's people who need to provide customer support and customer service marketing, accounting, we need a wide range of different skill sets. And, and so I think, you know, the, the field needs a wide variety of different people and personalities and talent, it's just helping individuals within the university to find the right career pathway into technology. We've for a long time now from the beginning had really strong recruiting relationships and partnerships with the colleges of Business at the

University isn't and computer science. And one thing that we've worked to do more in the last few years is to reach out into other departments across campus. So we're in talking to English majors or history majors, or physics and astronomy, trying to help connect those students more practically to careers within this field, because if they're not going into academia, it's important that they know what other companies are out there that might want to hire them. And especially for students who would like to stay in Montana. It's vital that they know who are the companies out there? What sorts of jobs do they have available? And you know, what, what might I want to study or what kind of internships Do I need to get in order to get those jobs, we definitely have a need to for more, more internships for more a greater number of students to participate in internships prior to graduation. And also for them to have more classroom experience that relates to what companies are doing are two real world applications. And the College of Business has some great examples of partnerships with say, ATG Cognizant or with Lumenad where they're in the classroom teaching the kinds of things that they need entry level employees to be able to do. And so the more that we can increase the connectivity between the workplace and the university think the better off we'll be on both sides.



Justin Angle 34:20

Yeah, flip that around for a moment. You know, what would you say to students about, you know, if you're talking to an undergraduate student that's coming to university, versity, Montana, and that student wants to stay here and wants to have one of those high paying jobs the organization is dedicated to creating, what would your advice be?



Christina Henderson 34:40

Well, I would suggest first that they explore a variety of career paths. So it's often important to be adaptable and flexible and try out different jobs or career opportunities or types of companies that you might not have thought of. So maybe if your dream was always to go into nonprofit work, there are technology companies in Montana that are building software for nonprofits. And so maybe here, you know, you shift slightly and you get into, into the tech field, but you're still serving that mission that you were always drawn to. Maybe you've never thought about a career in manufacturing, but there's a manufacturing company that's hiring. And you get into that field. And you realize, wow, this is fascinating. And I really love it. There are certain job titles that I think until you get into it or talk to somebody who does that job, what does a product manager do? What is what is user experience, you know, there are a lot of career and careers and positions within the tech field that are maybe opaque if you're a student, and you've never gotten out into the workplace. And so that's where bringing if we can bring professionals into the classroom to talk to students about their jobs, if we can get students out into internships,

so they can meet people out in the workforce and see how much they love their jobs, that will help them to identify those different career paths. And the second thing is to develop rare and useful skills. So could be technical skills. So learning to code, picking up a computer science minor, or taking some coding classes could be great. Or it might be, you know, if you're a more technical student, picking up, you know, opportunities to learn social skills, or to be a better writer to be a better public speaker, all those that, you know, hold more holistic view of your skills is important. It's not that you have to be a jack of all trades and do everything. But more and more companies expect emotional intelligence, good social skills, good people skills, good teamwork, even if you're in a technical role.



Justin Angle 36:50

Yeah, and I think there's so much wisdom in there about how to be an author of your own experience. I mean, it's so easy, at a young age and a big university just to kind of follow, you know, the path that sort of laid out in front of you, but you really need to be introspective about what is it you're trying to do? What are what is your best guest at any given moment? And then where are my strengths and weaknesses? And how do I sort of take advantage of this educational opportunity to seek out the experiences that will sort of develop those, you know, develop those weaknesses, and capitalize on those strengths? And then also, you know, you made a great point, Christina about trying new things. I mean, college is the time to do that, put yourself in new experiences, and, and with new people, and, you know, check things out, sort of drink it all up. And sometimes it's hard to get students to, to get over the hump of understanding that that they have a lot of choice in how they allocate their time while they're here.



Christina Henderson 37:52

Absolutely. Well, and I, I encourage students to to realize that they can ask for help. Yeah, and ask questions. And one of the things that we have found in our research on entrepreneurship, was that was the what an asset Montana's network and social fabric is to entrepreneurs who start here. So you're literally maybe two degrees of separation away from any person that you would want to meet, you can know your elected leaders by name, you can know the founder of the biggest local company by name, you can reach out through LinkedIn to a company that you're dying to work for, and somebody will likely be willing to have coffee with you or help you out. So it's a and if you're a student, you have an extra layer of power, I think in your ability to have people to say yes to you, if you're asking for help or looking for information about something, there's something about being a student that people, you know, want to mentor you want to reach out. So I would encourage students to leverage that. Meet people, ask them about their jobs, ask them about their companies. And it's those personal connections that will get you the

internship or get you the job after graduation. And so I think more students should recognize the power that they have to access the network and the great businesses that we have in this state.

J

Justin Angle 39:19

Indeed, 100% Christina and our remaining time, I feel compelled to ask you, you know, we're sort of when this airs will be within the first 100 days of the new governor Gianforte's administration. How are you thinking about potential changes? I mean, as a candidate, Governor Gianforte ran as very pro business or relied on his huge success as an entrepreneur and building his candidacy and how do you sort of expect the business environment to either change or grow under under new leadership here?

C

Christina Henderson 39:52

Yeah, well, I would expect that what governor elect Gianforte has written into his Montana comeback plan. So the plan that he put out there during his campaign is going to closely align with what we'll see in the beginning of his administration. So definitely, as you mentioned, an emphasis on his business experience and that, and a very pro business dynamic, certainly coming into January, I believe there will be a lot of emphasis on addressing COVID-19 and helping to facilitate an economic recovery for Montana businesses and and then certainly other priorities will be reducing taxes, reducing regulations and barriers to companies starting or growing a business, a lot about workforce and expanding apprenticeships and, and trades education. So I think definitely, we'll see Gianforte's business background play into his priorities in the new administration.

J

Justin Angle 41:04

Well, that all makes sense as we sort of enter this new administration. How are you, Christina, thinking about the future of your organization? Like what are some of your sort of short and long term objectives for your organization to accomplish?

C

Christina Henderson 41:19

Sure, well, we we're focused on continuing to connect people together within our tech community. And one of their priorities for 2021 is to figure out how, you know, we'll still be working remotely, and dealing with the pandemic in the first months of 2021. So we're looking at ways that we can better connect people even through technology. So whether it's breakout rooms in zoom in smaller groups, so that people can really talk to one another and connect, whether it's, you know, facilitating affinity groups or things like that,

we're looking at ways that we can still have genuine connection, in spite of our inability to be physically present with one another, we'll definitely be continuing to address workforce, and finding more ways that we can connect job seekers to job opportunities, whether it's people that have maybe lost their jobs during COVID, and are looking to reinvent, how do we get them pulled into the tech industry? How do we reach the next batch of students who are going to be graduating in this coming year? How do we connect them to job opportunities as especially as companies, you know, our recovery begins and come and the and the growth really kicks into high gear again, which I anticipate it will? How do we fill those jobs? And also, how can we be smart about leveraging this new Zoom economy and our remote work opportunity, so finding ways to both mitigate some of the negatives of that growth and, and maybe, through expanding broadband into rural areas and, and increasing awareness of a variety of Montana communities that are great places to live and work, that we can spread the growth into the broader part of the state and, and help a large percentage of Montana communities leverage the opportunity that we have with remote work?

J

Justin Angle 43:28

Well, that sounds like a lot, Christina, and I can't thank you enough for the work you and your team are doing to kind of tackle some of these issues. I mean, they're great opportunities, but no doubt will bring challenges and we need to think deeply about them. Christina, thank you. Thanks for coming on the podcast and telling us a little bit about more about the high tech Business Alliance and best of luck in 2021.

C

Christina Henderson 43:52

Thank you, Justin. Thanks for having us.

J

Justin Angle 43:56

Thanks for listening to a new angle. We really appreciate it. We're coming to you from Studio 49 the generous gift of UM alumni Michelle and Lauren Hanson. A new angle is presented by first security bank, Blackfoot communications and the University of Montana College of Business with additional support from consolidated electrical distributors, and drum coffee. AJ Williams is our producer, VTO, Jeff Ement, and John Wicks made our music. And Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. If you have any questions, suggestions, comments, insults, whatever, please email me at anewangle@umontana.edu. If you liked what you heard, tell your friends about it. Thanks a lot. See you next time.