

## Beyond the Dais Podcast: Episode 37 – Strategy Team Sessions: Volume 1

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**Scott Anderson:** Thank you for tuning into Beyond the Dais, a podcast about the stories taking place in and around El Paso County, Colorado. I'm your host, Scott Anderson, and today I'm gonna do something a little bit different. So, one of the cool things about working for El Paso County is being able to see the ridiculous number of things that the team I'm a part of is working on at any given time. Seriously, it's really quite astonishing. Because of that, I wanted to start a series of episodes I'm calling Strategy Team Sessions. I'm on the Strategy Team in the Communications Department. I thought it'd be pretty cool for us to talk about it once, maybe every quarter or so, focusing on the work that the El Paso County Strategy Team is doing to help inform residents of everything that we do to keep them in the loop. To that end, I have two of my coworkers joining me today. First off is AmyJo Fields, the Marketing Communications Manager here in El Paso County's Communications Department. And second is Mike Madsen, the Open Records Manager. How are you guys doing today?

**AmyJo Fields:** Excellent.

**Mike Madsen:** Doing well. Thank you.

**Scott:** I am so excited to have coworkers here talking to me today. It's just thrilling. I'm used to talking to people I've never met before, and I work with you guys every day. This is so fun.

**Mike:** This is pretty cool.

**AmyJo:** Yeah.

**Scott:** Tell me you're already having fun. Come on.

**AmyJo:** It is fun.

**Mike:** No, this is awesome that you've built this from the ground up, Scott. For us to be a part of, it's really cool.

**Scott:** I appreciate that. So, before we get started though, you guys can take another breath. I wanted to add that if listeners are interested in more stories about people doing good in and around El Paso County, or hearing from county leadership about local government priorities and how they operate, you can find additional episodes of this podcast on your podcast platform of choice. But gonna get started and we're gonna

have a little bit more of an unplugged feel this time around. Usually these interviews are really formal, which is great. You can get across a lot of great information. But let's be honest, we're not very formal people, right? I think that's safe to say.

**Mike:** I agree.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** AmyJo –

**Scott:** AmyJo is a little bit more hesitant to confirm that. But it's true.

**AmyJo:** It's true.

**Scott:** We're a little less formal, but that's fine. But I wanted to start off by having each of you introduce yourselves, give a little bit of background about how you came to be in the roles that you're in. Mike, you seem a little bit more relaxed, so let's start with you. Tell me about yourself.

**Mike:** So, my wife and I, we moved to Colorado Springs some about 20 years ago. And before that I was at San Diego State. So, go Aztecs. And I worked, my degree was in mathematics and with an emphasis on public education. And I was, and that's what brought us to Colorado Springs. I was fortunate to get a – my first teaching job and that was at Air Academy High School, and I taught there for 14 years. Taught mathematics there for 14 years and loved it and I miss it. I do. It was an amazing school. Amazing kiddos and it's something that, you know, I thought I was, I'd be doing the rest of my life. Unfortunately, during that time through 2008 and on, school districts were hit hard budget wise and, to no fault of leadership, that just – the funds weren't there, and it got to a point where I was no longer able to provide for my family. And that's my first number one priority, and so I had to start looking elsewhere. And a friend of mine mentioned that he worked, and still works, at the county. He mentioned about the county, what the county offers, and I checked it out and found some couple different positions that I looked into. And this one, the open records, at the time was an Open Records Specialist position. And I didn't think that I would be able to meet those qualifications. But as I got a little information on it, I found that the county, this was a new position, and the county knew at the time that they were likely going to have to train someone from the – hire and train internally. In other words, it was such a niche gig that it would be difficult to find someone with that experience, and so they opened it up to a broader option of candidates. And it worked out. I got the job and when I started, I don't know, there's a lot to say about when you start at going into the government sector. I mean teaching is in the government sector, but not like this. You know you get – you get a sense of what, I couldn't even, I didn't know the difference between city and county.

**Scott:** Sure.

**Mike:** You know what I mean? That kind of thing.

**Scott:** Yeah, no. I mean, look, I just started working for the county – it's less than a year ago. And completely, like, I had no idea the difference between City Council, county government, district this.

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** Who covers what roads. None of that stuff, right? It's nothing you really ever think about. And elections come up every so often and you're like, "oh, maybe I'll check it out. Like maybe I'll vote", right?

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** But until you're in it, you don't really have an idea of the scope of work that's done.

**Mike:** Exactly.

**Scott:** And that's one, again, that's like one thing that's really cool about being able to do this specifically is really hearing about the vast number of things that people in the county do to help make it operate, right? So, I want to get back to a little bit more about what you do in just a second, but AmyJo, it's been a little while. Let's hear from you. Give us some of your background on how you came to be here at El Paso County.

**AmyJo:** Well, I officially started working for the county 20 years ago, if you want to say that, as the 2003 El Paso County Fair Queen.

**Mike:** Get it.

**AmyJo:** And...

**Scott:** I mean you should flower that up a bit more like – you really undersold that.

**AmyJo:** I loved my experience as Fair Queen and, fast forward 17 years later, that's when I was hired for El Paso County. But my background is very unique to come into, like, a public relations communications role. I have a degree in civil engineering. And I have spent the last, I spent an 18-year, almost 19-year career with professional rodeo. So, my family ranches, I have a passion for agriculture and the western way of life, and I really decided to pursue that over engineering. And then a position became available here in the Communications Department for supporting the El Paso County Fair, and so as Fair Queen 20 years ago, that was an experience that really changed and shaped my life, and so it's just a full-circle moment to come and do that for my full-time job now. It's a huge role that I have.

**Scott:** Yeah. And again, this is what's really fascinating about being here. You have your degree in mathematics, Mike. You have yours in civil engineering. Mine's in broadcast journalism. Like, what are we even doing here?

**Mike:** I don't even know.

**AmyJo:** Well, except for you, right?

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Scott:** Well, yeah. But it is definitely a little bit more communication centric. But definitely, government was not what I had in mind when I was getting my degree. So, no. It's just really interesting to see everyone's backgrounds and, when you end up in a place like local government, how you may not necessarily think, "oh, that's what I want to do with my life". You know, I'm going to school and that's what I'm going to do. But you end up here and you find a fit and you can kind of, in a way that I've seen at least, you can kind of make a position what you want it to be. Now there are certain things that we have to do, you know, that we're expected to do. But the way that we go about doing it, I think is, at least for us, left pretty well in our hands. What do you guys think?

**Mike:** As far as my role, of course I am, you might say, governed by statute. When I say I – the county, we are governed by statute. That certainly plays a significant role in my operations. But that being said, yes, when I look back over the last four years, I'm quite proud of what I've been able to build in terms of transparency and in terms of processes and you're right, our team, our leadership has – there's a certain level of trust in my opinion...

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** ...that they hire the right people, and they say this is what needs to be done. We trust you to figure it out.

**Scott:** Right. Right. And again, this guy's – you guys are really great at underselling yourself. You literally wrote the book on how to do this thing that you do. Talk about that.

**Mike:** Again, when I first took this position, this, it was a brand-new position, CORA requests were being handled largely by leader-, by our own supervisors and by department. And so, they knew it was a need for the benefit of, for the benefit of the county, but also for the citizens. And to, as these, to get these requests processed as efficiently as possible. And that's where, when I first started building it, I started out looking at, "okay, what has the county been – how has the process been moving forward, at least within our neck of the woods?" And, "okay, what things work and what are some things that work well? Awesome, okay cool. Let's keep those. Okay. Well, let's look at some other ideas. What does technology offer us? And maybe there's some technology that we can start implementing that will be cost-efficient and time efficient." And I found some of those items and then, and then, just other processes and that's really what you mentioned, the math, the different backgrounds. It might be hard to believe, but I found that my math background has served me well in this role in terms of well-defined concepts, well-defined principles and order to searching certain parameters on requests that makes sure that I'm finding what's being requested, but doing it in a way that's, like I said, efficient. And so, putting all that together myself, and as you guys know my, I don't know, I'd say assistant, but he works on our team with all of us, Johnny, he and I together try and share best practices.

**Scott:** Yeah. So, AmyJo, I mean, you talk about bringing in your passions into the workplace and being a part of the work that you do. You mentioned the El Paso County Fair. You're heavily involved in that. Like, what does that mean for you to be able to work on a thing that you're extremely passionate about? Cause I don't think a lot of people get to do that in their daily job.

**AmyJo:** No, I've been really blessed. I mean, this is, I really believe in this county. I'm a native of this county and I believe in agriculture and all these things, that are components I guess of the El Paso County Fair, which a huge part of that is a 4-H program. I was a 4-Her growing up, and you know, being a 4-Her fair queen, those things, like, fundamentally shaped who I am, and when I do things, I do them with purpose. I have a lot of passion projects, and the fair is one of them. I volunteer for the County Fair Queen program outside of my work role because I care about its success, its sustainability, and for the community to be aware that agriculture is alive and well in El Paso County. And if you look outside the city limits, it's a whole new world, right? And that is something you know, I could have gone and done engineering and pursued that. But I wanted to wake up feeling good about my contribution and really be making a difference. And for me, engineering was just kind of like, I'm a very processed person, like Mike. It was – this is the next step, get your degree. And I'm really proud of that. Something that no one can take away from me. But it wasn't where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. And all of those moments have led me to where I am today. And I'm really proud of the work that we do in El Paso County, and I'm really proud of the fair, and I love working on it.

**Scott:** So, speaking about the things that you're proud of, I wanted to talk about some of the other things that we do. I mean, Mike, you're more than just a CORA Manager. You do a lot more than that. AmyJo, you're more than just working on the fair. What are some other projects that we work on?

**Mike:** Well, I don't want to get too far ahead. But what I found in this, in our role in communications, and even when I was teaching, but especially here, I can't emphasize enough how important it is for us to – our reading and writing skills. And of course, speaking, which I'm, you know, okay at best, but right reading and writing, making sure that we can articulate the message correctly. In a way that's clear. And be able to, and we read each other's work. In some cases, we will read each other's work three times over. That skill in and of itself. And so, I'm kind of going down this avenue – what was the question again?

**Scott:** Work that you do that you're proud of outside of just being CORA manager.

**Mike:** Right. Thank you. So, what this leads to is talking points and in some cases speeches or at least submitting drafts of speeches that might change. Things like that. We all play a significant role in that. I don't want to steal this one. I'm going to let AmyJo speak to this, but I am so proud for the work we've done on the Courier. I can't tell you

guys how proud I am of that, and I'm not going to – I don't want to steal the spotlight on that, because that is AmyJo's. Like, I don't know what like –

**Scott:** Well, let me swivel my chair over here so I can look at AmyJo directly for this. So, the Courier, what is the Courier and why is Mike so proud of it?

**Mike:** So proud of it.

**AmyJo:** The Courier is a monthly newsletter or magazine publication that the Communications Department produces on a monthly basis, which we started in January. So, January of 2023 was our very first issue, and we're featuring El Paso County and the work that we're doing in the community as a way to be more engaging and inviting for our residents and visitors to understand really the services that we provide. And I think what Mike is particularly so proud of is our efforts in accessibility. So, our May issue, which will be out by the time this podcast airs, is a feature on accessibility. And we partnered with the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind on the issue to feature their students and – El Paso County just does so many things that I'm proud of, and I love my clients in particular, because we all work for clients, and mine are Parks and – they have just done groundbreaking initiatives with the Trailability Program and providing people opportunities to get outdoors and experience nature in ways that were completely limiting before. And they have new opportunities with the VIP Trail and just a lot of new initiatives that are coming. So, something I'm really proud of with El Paso County is that status quo isn't good enough, right? And we're always looking for ways to really engage and provide quality services to our residents. And a way we communicate that is through the Courier.

**Scott:** Yeah. And to me, it's just another way to be transparent. And so again, I talk a little bit about how I wasn't in government before. This is my first job in government. And for me, government always seemed kind of cagey. It seemed sort of hard to, hard to get through and to get the answers you're really looking for. And, when I see on this side of the fence how, as the communications department, I mean it's our job to talk about what's going on in the county, right? It's our job to make sure that people know what resources exist, what the, you know, what the county's doing to help them with certain problems that they have. And just to share, just to share information in general. I mean again Mike, you can probably speak to this better than any of us can, but knowing how much our organization, El Paso County specifically, appreciates that transparency and really strives for it, right. And in everything that I've seen – and again, we are, I don't like using the word gatekeepers because it makes it sound like we're trying to hold people out, but really it is our job to see that information and share it in responsible ways and knowing that we are on the front lines of that, and it really makes me feel good about a lot of the work that we do because I do think it's important for government to be transparent and to let people know about resources that exist. I mean, it's not just about people thinking maybe they're keeping back information they don't want to share. I mean, we – I think we do that. I think we share all the information. And there are

avenues for them to request information if we're not being proactive in sharing something they think we should, right?

**Mike:** Correct.

**Scott:** And aside from that, it's letting people know, hey, we're here to help too, right? There's so many resources with the county that can help people who are looking for help. Whether that's through DHS, whether that's through public health. Whether it's through public works, right? And letting them know, "hey, there's a pothole on this road, like maybe you guys could take a look at it", or "hey, like this, you know, my roads impassable. Is there something you guys can do to help?"

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** Right? It's really kind of overwhelming the amount of things that the county does to benefit the residents here in El Paso County.

**Mike:** Can I jump in on that?

**Scott:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mike:** So, you sparked a reminder for me. You remember like back in the day when we were young.

**Scott:** It's hard to remember that long ago.

**Mike:** But can we just reminisce?

**Scott:** I'm going to wait and see what you have to say about when we were young...

**Mike:** Yes, this is going somewhere. So I, you know, I grew up in California and I remember having to get my driver's license and then when I bought a truck in Idaho, once I moved back to California I had to take it to the DMV. And you know, especially back then, this was like in the 90s, and I just remember those lines at the DMV and like, you see on, you know, like on the television shows and on movies, they are always like, you have these "I don't care" workers. And it's this line that can go on forever and no one really cares.

**Scott:** Unbearably long.

**Mike:** Right. The sloth. Joking.

**Scott:** Yeah. Yeah. In Zootopia.

**Mike:** Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**Scott:** So that was hilarious.

**Mike:** But. Right. And so all these, all these, you know, that's how I saw government.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** And they – it's just like, "whatever get it done", and I don't – and that's what's been so impressive about El Paso County is because that is not our style at all. Take the DMV for example. Clerk and Recorder Chuck Broerman – our previous Clerk and Recorder Chuck Broerman, he worked hard to get kiosks put out, put in all these different areas throughout the city, and I use those all the time to update my registration. This isn't just a pitch for CNR. I'm just telling you like, then they've implemented, you can, like, just as a citizen, as a private citizen, when I had to renew my, or when we get a new vehicle or anything like that, you can schedule your DMV appointment online.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** And you go there and it's so much more efficient and so much faster –

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** – than those old days in the 90s and so...

**Scott:** Well, and there's a lot you can even just do online, right? You don't even have to go into the DMV a lot of times, which yeah, I mean, I think it helps to make those places feel a lot less like chores, right?

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** Having to do it and – not that, not that it's going to the circus, right? Or doing something really fun. I guess I equate going to the circus with something that's really fun, which, that doesn't sound right in my head for some reason.

**Mike:** Well, no. And to continue with that too, I gotta say that, cuz I painted the California DMV workers is like, yeah...

**Scott:** No, no, no.

**Mike:** But like our DMV workers here. I've taken my daughter to get her driver's license, and everyone's been so helpful and so nice. And on that note too, the Assessor – I say Assessor, our now Clerk and Recorder, Steve Schleiker, they just put out the press release that they're working hard to make sure that fraud and when it comes to our homes and mortgages and the paperwork involved there is protected. So, things like that, that's not under state requirement. That's something they're doing voluntarily to make things better for us.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** So that's what I like about the county.

**Scott:** AmyJo, any more thoughts on transparency?

**AmyJo:** No, but I think something that our department brings to the table that's really unique, is that none of us really have a government background, like specifically. Like, we have this fresh perspective, we are really collaborative, we really get in a room and like, strategize and do all these things, and so it's not just about checking boxes for any



of us and we service clients throughout the county – Economic Development, Planning and Community Development. And so, we're able to bring that to the table. And I think that's what makes our department really unique and special.

**Scott:** Yeah. So, all of us have, I think it's safe to say, all of us have ended up here in myriad ways, taken a number of, let's call them windy roads to end up here.

**Mike:** You can say that.

**Scott:** Yeah. What advice would you guys give to your younger self? And this can be, you know, if you were considering going into this field, if it was just, you know, life in general, you know, how to kind of get through the hard times to make it to the good and the kind of thing. What sort of advice would you give to your younger self or maybe someone who's considering going into this type of field?

**Mike:** Oh boy.

**AmyJo:** Well, advice I'd give my younger self in general is to just do the dang thing. Like, so many times I can get so caught up in details and pros and cons and sometimes you just need to act. And other times you need to go through the process. Had I not been Fair Queen, Girl of the West, Miss Rodeo Colorado, I would have never had the audacity to apply for a communications role or the career that I spent really developing those skills. Those things laid a foundation for me, and I'm in the right place at the right time. However, had I known about the county and the benefits that were provided to me or you know that we have access to – our retirement, our health benefits – I mean it's just really great. I wish I would have started, you know, twenty years ago and done this sooner and realized that you know, county government isn't Zootopia DMV, right, that we provide really meaningful services that make a difference in people's lives. And when you can say that what I'm doing makes a difference in someone's quality of life, I think that carries a lot of weight. At least it does for me.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** It is. It's a tough question to answer because – so if I were to answer your second question, what advice would I give to someone wanting to come into this field?

**Scott:** Sure.

**Mike:** Yeah, I remember in college how there was sort of a running joke about majoring in communications was supposed to be this easy major or something like that and...

**Scott:** Yeah, I got that a lot.

**Mike:** OK, so that's the thing. Like now that I'm in this with our team and when I see what we do and when I've looked at, you know, just all the people and backgrounds communications is so important, that major. But I would not give that advice to my younger self because I love mathematics. I still love mathematics, and I don't regret anything about saying – I studied got my bachelors at San Diego State and then I have

a masters in mathematics from UCCS and I don't regret any of that. You know as far as, and like you said, it's been a windy road to get here. I started with the county when I was, you know, about I don't know 42 or something like that, and that's an old age to start sort of a new career path. And so, in that regard, like it's been – I can get myself upset a little bit with myself, or just like disappointed in myself when you're 46 where are you, you know? And like, I have ambitions to work at the county and one day work in leadership and that and in those roles. But at the same time, I have such an amazing team now and we, you know, and I really enjoy what I do now. And you spoke to transparency. It's so vitally important to me that we live in a country where, as citizens, we get to say to our government, "Hold on. What's going on? You work for us," right? Like we get to say to our government, your job is to serve the people and we're going to hold you to that standard. And I get to play a role in that and I also get to play – I also have an appreciation for the balance. Because, again, we're statutorily obligated under CORA, Colorado Open Records Act, we're statutorily required to hold on to certain information. For one example, we're required to withhold addresses of our Sheriff's and police officers and our deputies. Good. Their personal home addresses are redacted. Good. They should be. Caseworkers with DHS. Their information is redacted. Good. It should be protected. And I would expect that most people would agree to that. So there is a balance of finding that right – it's about finding that right balance between transparency but also protecting the information that needs to be protected. So, but going back to, I kind of went off on a tangent there, but going back to what you're saying. I would say, you know, if you want to go into this type of work communications is definitely, as a major, is the way to go. And as far as advice of my younger self, I don't know. I don't know what I would tell them to change because I've – I don't regret it. Like, I cherished the time I had in education and teaching, and so I wouldn't I wouldn't change that. So, it's just that, you know, what advice would I give them? I don't know if I would really tell them any secrets. Stay out of debt. I have like credit cards.

**Scott:** Right.

**Mike:** But other than that, I just, I don't think I would tell my younger self much of anything and let that younger self figure it out.

**Scott:** Yeah. Invest in Amazon maybe.

**Mike:** Yeah. There you go. Yeah, that's right.

**Scott:** No, I think it brings up a really interesting point and kind of, AmyJo how you said it, you go through experiences, and they shape who you are, and they bring you to a place, right? And you know, it's why we're here. It's why any of us are anywhere, right? Like because we went through a thing, and it led us to another thing. And like now you're eventually in a spot that you know either you're satisfied with, or you're not satisfied with. And if you're not satisfied, then you know, you continue to move on. You continue to go through these different things that'll help shape who you are. And it's always, it's always interesting listening to people's responses to "what would you do

differently?” And, like, it's hard to imagine ever doing anything differently. Like, are there things in my past that sucked? Absolutely.

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** And like, would it have been, like, in retrospect, would it have been better if I didn't go through those? Yeah, maybe. But also if I didn't go through those, like, how many things in life would have changed, right? Who are the people I wouldn't have met? What are the opportunities I wouldn't have had? And yeah, I would have met other people, had other opportunities. But I think there's a lot to be said about really appreciating where you are today and respecting what you went through in the past to get to where you are today. It's a really interesting thing to talk about. Speaking about things that we're proud of, what are we proud of about working for El Paso County? I'll start this out, give you guys a little bit of time to think about it. So, everywhere that I've gone in my career, I've tried to tell stories. That's always what I've wanted to do. I got my degree in broadcast journalism. I wanted to work in the biz, if you will, and tell stories. That's what I always wanted to do. And so, when I came to a realization that that was not going to be in the cards for me, and I pivoted more into the private sector, I thought, “okay, like, that's fine, but how can I still do the thing I want to do”, which ultimately, again, is telling stories? And fortunately, at that point, podcasting was kind of becoming a thing. And so, at that point, I was like, let me grab on to this new way of talking to people and turn it into a way for the organization I'm working for to tell its story to its employees, or to tell its story outwardly to, you know, shareholders or you know people who will buy their products or whatever the case is, right? And so, I was then able to get the opportunity to continue to tell stories. Now, were they the stories I wanted to tell? Not all the time, but it's – a lot of life is what you make of it, right? And so, I still look at that as a win for me. Now coming to El Paso County, I was hired on to be primarily in charge of communications for ARPA, which is the American Rescue Plan Act, and to be the PIO for Public Works at the time, now I'm the PIO for Planning and Community Development. But for the ARPA side of things, it was really, much like your experience, Mike. It was a really newish position, right? It hadn't really been defined really what this role I'm in would do exactly other than, “well, you gotta find a way to talk about it”. I'm like, “okay. I can do anything? As long as I'm talking about it. I can do anything I want?” And I pretty much got the answer, “well, yeah”. So I mean, my eyes lit up. I was extremely excited because I thought, here's an opportunity for me to tell more stories, right? And so, this podcast that I started was really an answer to that. It's a way to tell the stories of ARPA initially, but now more so broadly about El Paso County, and in my way, like really more connect to the audience. If I'm talking from the point of view of a Fortune 500 company to people who, let's say, partake of their services, right? Whatever the company does, people who benefit from those services. It's, for me, it always felt a little bit hollow, right? Like it was, it was telling a story that I wasn't like super interested in, but you know, it was the job. So, I would get excited about it, and I would do it, but I didn't have a lot of that buy in. Whereas here, I'm telling stories about individuals doing things that they care about for people that they care about. And for me,

that's very, very easy and very, very fun. So, I have somehow found myself in a position where I'm able to be proud of working for an organization that allows me to – and trusts me – and Mike, what you were talking about earlier, trust us to do the work that we've been given in the way that we feel is the best way of doing it. Now, of course, this was just my opinion, and I hope people appreciate, you know, how I've gone about doing this, but it really is great. So that's what I'm proud of about El Paso County, is allowing the rope, I guess you could say, to let its employees, at least the ones that I've seen, you know, of course I can't speak to everybody, but allow its employees to find out what works for them in their sphere and do that to help promote the county, to help do their job. Yeah. So, I mean, that's been great for me. Have you guys been able to pinpoint something yourself?

**AmyJo:** Yeah. I mean, I have a few things. I am really proud to be here and work on the Fair specifically. I keep talking about that. But when something really changes your life, changes the course of your life, and impacts you in a really positive way, like that causes you to act in, in different ways. And so, I applied for the job based on working and promoting the Fair. I mean that – I didn't care about any of the bullet points on the job description.

**Scott:** Right, right.

**AmyJo:** It's like, I'll figure it out, but that was really important to me because I knew I could do it. I could do it well. And, I wanted to be a part of that. And so, I'm proud of the work that we've done over the past three years to really bring awareness of the Fair and continue that legacy. Because to me, it's not just about one week in July that is fun with a carnival, 4-H kids and whatever. It's about honoring our heritage and giving kids opportunities to grow and learn through specific programs. And, I really appreciate our department specifically because again, I can't speak to, like you said, every other department is this going on, but we are, you know, there's a lot of talk about putting the right people in the right seat on the bus and that's what gets you moving forward. And I feel like we are at that stage where we have the right people in the right positions moving forward in really impactful ways. Like, we're doing the Courier, that's a new initiative. We have the Beyond the Dais podcast, Stories of El Paso County. And a lot of my role is marketing, not just for the Fair, but for you know, my other clients and for frankly the county as a whole and departments everywhere and I think to be most effective in that, and promoting our services, is to really connect the stories of that and bring about testimonies. Something that we're working on is the PACT Act, the stand-down clinics that our veterans service officers are putting on because of the new federal legislation about PACT Act. And veterans that were previously denied benefits now have the opportunity to realize those benefits, and it's life changing. And to hear testimonies of our citizens, our residents, meeting with our veteran service officers and saying what an impact that made on their life and how a face-to-face interaction, showing that someone cared. You know, I walked away so many times, and I walk away so many times from different events that we're at or different opportunities and being really

overwhelmed with emotion frankly with pride of what we do and what we accomplish. And we see that on a weekly basis, if not more frequently. You know, it's just really great to work with individuals that take their job seriously, take their role for transparency, the obligation to tell stories and where our funding is going in a serious way. And then have fun. And we all come from different perspectives and different positions in life. And when we can relay that back to people, it's really fun and exciting and we do really meaningful work. And I know that I'm the broken record on that, but it's cool and it overwhelms me sometimes.

**Scott:** Yeah.

**Mike:** Hit me with the question again, Scott, if you don't mind.

**Scott:** What does El Paso County do that you're proud of?

**Mike:** Thank you. So, we've spoken a lot about transparency and how that's important to us. I can vouch for our leadership and for our elected officials. Transparency is equally important to them as well. And in my role, I think I could speak to that better than a lot of people. They recognize that as well. And I don't want to put any words in anyone's mouths, but that's just been my experience and observations. I am, yeah, I have to, as AmyJo mentioned, they take care, you know, the county takes care of their people. Again, they work hard for – to make sure that they're giving us the most competitive and best benefits package that they're able to provide. And it's, that in and of itself has been such a blessing to our family. As far as, you know, I take pride in myself, again, we mentioned the Courier, and I just have to put another plug. If you haven't checked that out, please check out the May edition. It is amazing. It's absolutely amazing. That's a great one to, if anyone starts anywhere, start with that one. But aside from that too, what I like about our role and our team is that we have our fingers in a couple different pots, right? Like we're, you know, we're tested in a couple different areas.

**Scott:** Right.

**Mike:** We work sometimes, we're working with Parks sometimes we're working with Public Health, sometimes we're working with our Clerk and Recorder's office, sometimes we're working with the Sheriff's Office. And so we get to see all the amazing things that the county does and how hard everyone is working. Just for one example in terms of like, so I guess something that I would say I was proud of, even though it wasn't necessarily me, is when I was working with Public Health during COVID, there was a lot of questions that we were getting regularly from citizens and from press wanting to know what the current COVID numbers were at, and rightly so. That's the information I think that's important for the public. And so, I would get these requests and I'd reach out to Public Health, and they would certainly, they would find the numbers and they'd provide those to me and we'd send those on. Public Health knew that that system wasn't good enough and they worked diligently, and they worked hard to produce an online, to have that information available online. And I don't want to say in real time, but

in very efficient time and accurate. And so, any citizen at any given time could go directly to their website and they had put a process together and have that information constantly being updated online, that sort of thing. I thought that was, you know, just to see that happen. It was just another example where they knew that it wasn't quite – you know, that the process needed to be a little bit better that they need to get information out to our citizens and they did. Another example – so one of the first press releases I ever wrote. This is, this is, I got to tell you guys this story. So, when I first, you know, I saw other people doing press releases on the team and I was like, okay, you know what's going on with that? I got my first press release, and I'm still so proud of this. It was when they opened the pickleball courts up at Bear Creek, and it was my first press release. And I remember reaching out, I don't know if it was Todd Marts at the time or not, but in any case, I think it might have been Todd Marts. And I reached out and got all the information on all of the events that they were doing on those, getting the pickleball courts out for the people, and how popular that had become. And that was my first press release. I gotta tell you, like, I knocked it out of the park man, that was –

**Scott:** I mean, would there be any doubt?

**Mike:** No. That was like, that was hard hitting. That was hard-hitting news. But you know, things like that when you see like those little differences when you when you drive by a park now, and you know it's a county park, and you and you know the people who played a role in making that park that much better. My wife and I go to the Black Forest, to our county park up there on a weekly basis. And it just means something. You know when you, when you see it, that through the eyes of knowing how hard people have been working. In fact, I think they're putting in some new pickleball courts up there. There's a lot of construction in that area. You know that they're doing.

**Scott:** Very exciting.

**Mike:** Yeah, that kind of thing. You see that, you know, what's happening behind the scenes. It's a pretty cool thing to see it that way.

**Scott:** Yeah. And lastly, I just kind of want to say I'm proud of the people they hire.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Scott:** I haven't met all the employees of El Paso County, but I've met a lot, and they're all awesome.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Scott:** Like, I really feel like they are in those positions because they want to help their neighbor, essentially, like they want to make a difference in a positive way for the place that they live in, which is really cool. It's not something that I expected when I took this position. I mean, you know, I was obviously interviewed by specific people and I met some people initially, but I did not expect that it would be so widespread within the county that they're just really good people that want to help, which is awesome. That's

awesome to work for an organization like that. So, wrapping things up here. I know you guys are probably really sad to hear it, but we're wrapping things up here. Before we stop though, is there anything else that we have not addressed that you want to make sure that we talk about?

**Mike:** You know, I feel like you kind of, you miss- you swung and missed on one aspect of this interview, Scott.

**Scott:** Boy, super critical. All right. Let's go.

**Mike:** Yeah, I don't feel like there's been ample opportunity for the listeners to get to know the real AmyJo and Mike Madsen.

**Scott:** Yeah?

**Mike:** I think they know the County AmyJo and Mike Madsen.

**Scott:** Sure, yeah

**AmyJo:** Sure.

**Mike:** You know what I mean?

**Scott:** So, you know what? I'm gonna put you in my chair, see how you like it. What do you think is the most important question to ask somebody to get to know them?

**Mike:** So, it could be something along the line, and I'm just shooting from the hip here, something along the lines of how do you enjoy spending your time outside of work? Something along those lines. I'm saying.

**Scott:** Interesting. Yeah.

**Mike:** Something that lets them get to know that-

**AmyJo:** We're people.

**Scott:** Let me make some notes here.

**Mike:** Yeah, go ahead. Add that.

**Scott:** Be sure to humanize the guests. All right, I've put that in. Now in response to that, AmyJo, I guess we'll start with you, cuz he was kind of looking at you when he said that.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Scott:** What do you think? What do you got for us? Humanize yourself.

**Mike:** Humanize yourself should be a shirt.

**Scott:** Well, yeah, we'll get some branded humanize yourself shirts later on, but what do you think? What do people need to know about you outside of work? ... I mean, maybe nothing, Mike.

**Mike:** Right?

**Scott:** AmyJo could be very mysterious.

**AmyJo:** I prefer that.

**Scott:** She prefers mystery. And you know what, that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. See, this is why I don't ask that question, Mike Madsen.

**Mike:** Well, I OK.

**Scott:** Mike I'm getting an eye – a look here. We better quickly transition over to you to answer this question.

**Mike:** OK, but I'm telling you, they're missing out on-

**Scott:** Maybe next time. Let's not push it too far here.

**Mike:** That's fair. That's fair. So as far as, so I'm assuming the question is what are some things I enjoy doing outside of work.

**Scott:** Man, you can take this anywhere you want now. I feel like we got off the rails a little bit.

**Mike:** I'm just saying like, so...

**AmyJo:** Cut this out.

**Mike:** Yeah, probably. But so, as you both know, I quite enjoy playing chess and I'm involved in what I would call the chess community here in Colorado Springs. And it's a fun bunch and it's something that like I said, I enjoy spending my time doing outside of work. And playing, you know, playing competitively so I have, you know, a chess rating and playing tournaments and I've lost many games to 10- and 11-year-olds that, you know, are much stronger players than I am. And then the other side of that, so like I balance that. So, you've heard about the math and playing chess, and I also really enjoy, you know, different types of sports and boxing and mixed martial arts. Not participating in mixed martial arts. That's above my skill set. I'd say I'm a fan, but I do enjoy boxing and other sports like that. I used to play a lot of basketball, but those days are gone with the knees.

**Scott:** Yeah. You know when you roll out of bed and you're already sore, I think that's kind of the point in time where, yeah, it lets you know, hey, maybe pull back a little bit on some of that, right?



**Mike:** No, that's yes. That's been my experience. And, since you in your own words, said that I was a host, that you turned the chair, that you allowed me to sit in the host chair.

**Scott:** Clearly a mistake, but let's see where this goes.

**Mike:** You did, and it's on the tape. Scott, how do you spend your time outside of work?

**Scott:** It's work and family. That's what it is for me. I really appreciate how this is I guess another thing that I can be proud of with El Paso County. They actually appreciate the work-life balance thing.

**Mike:** Right.

**Scott:** I think everywhere you go you'll hear work-life balance, work-life balance, right? But this is one of the few places I've seen it actually put into action. So, they respect my time, and I use that time outside of work to spend time with my family. And the specifics of my family we'll leave for another day. But no, like it's just great to be able to know that I can come to work and do my work and then I can go home and do home. And you know that we have certain responsibilities as part of the communications team where, you know, sometimes we're doing some stuff outside of the office. But I mean ultimately that doesn't feel like extra work or a chore. I mean, it's just life, right? And it's just part of what it is. So no, like, that's what it is for me. And one great thing about being the host, and Mike, if you host your own podcast someday, you'll learn this, you don't have to talk about yourself very much because there are more interesting people across from you that get to talk about themselves. So, thank you guys. This was fun. Did you have fun, AmyJo? I'm trying to weigh whether or not you actually had fun or not... Boy, that's a really long pause. Okay, we'll move on. Mike, did you have fun today?

**Mike:** I had a blast and I'm just going to finish by saying, what makes El Paso County so great are the people that we get to work with. Because coming to work with people that you enjoy being around and genuinely just enjoy their company, that's a really cool thing.

**Scott:** Yeah

**AmyJo:** I'd agree with that.

**Scott:** Absolutely. Well, thank you guys for the work that you guys do here in El Paso County. People who don't even know you, I know appreciate the work that you guys do. So, rock on, guys. Really nice job.

**AmyJo:** Rock on.

**Mike:** Thank you for having us, Scott.

**Scott:** Absolutely. And if you guys are interested in listening to additional episodes of Beyond the Dais, be sure to look for us on Podbean, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.