Matt Wagner:

Welcome to the Main Street Business Inside Podcast. I'm your host, Matt Wagner, Chief Program Officer at Main Street America, a nonprofit, leading a collaborative movement dedicated to strengthening communities through place-based economic development and community preservation.

Each week, join me as I travel the country and take a deep dive into the personal journeys of downtown and neighborhood entrepreneurs. The stories that far too often go unnoticed and unheard.

Whether you're a small business owner who wants to learn from your peers or community leader looking to better support your local business base Main Street Business Insights is here to provide you with the tools, strategies, and personal stories to help you and all of your Main Street businesses thrive.

So subscribe now and tune in every Wednesday to get inspired by the individuals driving our communities forward.

Welcome everyone to another episode of the Main Street Business Inside Podcast. Today actually finds me in Livingston, Montana, where I'm going to do a double header. I don't know that's a baseball reference, but that's what we're going to do today.

So first up is going to be Dale Sexton, owner of the world-famous Dan Bailey's Outdoor Company, and the original Dan Bailey's Fly Shop was actually established all the way back in 1938 folks and quickly became the number one store for all fishing needs, helping to popularize the sport in southwest Montana and frankly around the world.

And so it's really exciting to have Dale here, Dale's carrying on that legacy, and we're going to explore his journey to really taking ownership of this institutional business in downtown Livingston and really continuing to grow in the brand. And this what is really a hyper-competitive outdoor recreation industry that's experiencing massive shifts from consumer preference and certainly even distribution strategies overall.

So, excited to explore that with Dale and many other subjects we're going to take on this morning. And is many of main streets around the country have a robust outdoor strategy in many respects. And so I think we'll be able to pick up some of that in terms of the store's role with community as well. So welcome to the show, my new friend, Dale Sexton.

Dale Sexton:

Thanks, Matt.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, good to have you. And thanks for letting me come into the store this morning.

Dale Sexton:

Absolutely, welcome.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, we like to start with the journey-

Dale Sexton:

Sure.

Matt Wagner:

... as the audience knows. And so can you share a little bit more about taking over the ownership of this legacy brand and Dan Bailey's and what experience or influence really helped to shape your decision to go this route?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. Well, Dan Bailey's, I'm trying to come up with the abridged version here because actually it's, the long story is a couple of hours, but frankly, Dan Bailey's has been fundamental in my life way back to my youth actually. And my family was very engaged in the outdoors. My mother and the father drug me through the woods at a very young age, young and thankfully because it's brought me to where I am today. They were quite elderly relative to my peers.

My father and mother were retired by the time I was fully engaged, so to speak. But that gave us a lot of time together, primarily fishing, although I've got so many fond memories of hunting with my father as well. And yeah, so Dan Bailey's was it, and I bought my first fly from Dan Bailey, and Dan died in 1982, and his son had taken over the operations and Dan was active in the business up until his death, but his son took over operations on the management in the late 70s. And so I went to work for Dan's son John in 1983 when I was a senior in high school. And I hardly knew anything about fly-fishing, but what better place to learn in the hallowed halls of Dan Bailey's.

And I've got a lot of really great stories around that too, about my naivety around fly-fishing and getting to know the storied people that would be here on most days. The guides-

Matt Wagner:

The icons coming in.

Dale Sexton:

... Icons. Yeah, literally. And here I am just pushing a broom around the shop, kind of like a mouse in the corner listening.

Matt Wagner:

With stars in your eyes.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, yeah. So I worked here for about a year and a half early on, and then went to college and worked here my first summer out of college, and then met an outfitter in Alaska. Spent the next five years working in Alaska. And then when I got out of college, it was time to get a real job.

They offered me a position here at Dan Bailey's as retail manager, which I admitted it was time to get a real job. So I came to terms with that. It was when I got back from Alaska, it was like they interviewed me in October, and I'm like, "Well, bird hunting season, and then I've got ski season, I'm like, can I start in March?"

Matt Wagner:

You got to work around your outdoor schedule.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, exactly. So I started March and worked here for four or five years and then guided for a couple of years full time and then opened my own business, but always having a strong connection with Dan Bailey's because I would walk by here every day on the way to my other business, which I opened just down a block down the street, was a hike, bike ski store at Timber Trails.

Matt Wagner:

So that was really your first foray into entrepreneurship, opened up your own spot.

Dale Sexton:

Yep, exactly.

Matt Wagner:

Curious, did they see that as competition or what was that relationship you were working here?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. Well, it's interesting because a lot of people approached us, "Hey, let's put some flies in here. Let's sell a couple of fly rods."

But frankly, I left that ground to Dan Bailey's and the other fly shops in the region because we really complimented each other and I didn't want to compete with that. I wanted to send fishing business to them and thereby hoping, and they did, send hike bike ski business to us, so it was really a really neat symbiosis week.

Matt Wagner:

Exactly.

Dale Sexton:

So we kind of stayed out of that. But as a fly-fishing outfitter, I was still in the industry, so to speak. And so Dan Bailey's was still an important part, still played an important role in my life. I was good friends with a lot of staff members here who, many of which I hired before I left.

And yeah, this place doesn't really get out from underneath you, so to speak.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

And so then, I don't know, probably about 2016 or 2017 started having conversations with their sales manager at the time about the prospect of Dan Bailey's selling. And it was quite a roller coaster for three and a half years or so. It was kind of stop and start conversations and literally COVID happened, and that's when the rubber met the road and the day COVID happened, I had a partner, I have a partner actually, really good personal friend of mine, lives in Kansas City, and he had seen Dan Bailey's. We've been fishing together for about 25 years. We've got about 35 years of fishing history with his father. And his father asked me, "Hey, my son loves the outdoors. I want to bring him out to fish," which he did. And we established a really neat relationship.

So the day COVID happened, literally, I walked down here and John Bailey's sitting behind his desk and his eyes are this big, and my eyes are this big. We're like, this is kind of weird. I don't know what the hell's happening. And we've been making some pretty good progress, more than we'd had in the years since about conversation around purchasing Dan Bailey's. And I'm like, "If this is going to happen. Needs to happen now, or I need to go elsewhere."

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

And he's like, let's get the lawyers to draw up the papers. And we assumed ownership on April 15th. And it was crazy.

Matt Wagner:

Right in the heart of-

Dale Sexton:

Right in the heart of COVID.

Matt Wagner:

... oh my gosh.

Dale Sexton:

It was so crazy. But you know, I've got a say, "You don't know if you don't go." And we went and we went hard and fast, and we didn't know what it was going to be like transitioning. Dan Bailey's had fallen on some hard times. It wasn't the most vibrant environment in here, but the flame was still going. But it was more of an ember.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. You had been living on that legacy of flames.

Dale Sexton:

Exactly. And we weren't really sure what it was going to take to revitalize that. So you've got this patient that felt like it was kind of in the ICU and it was literally one rescue breath. It just went pow. It just took off. So yeah, it was pretty cool.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, at the time, I mean, I can certainly recall when people were, stay at home or businesses were shut, people wanted to be outside, so I can only imagine the craziness at which people were purchasing supplies and beer and I want to be outdoors or just flocking to this area because it was away from major cities or what have you.

Dale Sexton:

It was a little zany at the time. We didn't know you weren't going to be able to be in an indoor theater. We didn't know you weren't going to be able to go to the bowling alley. We didn't know you weren't going to be able to go to the basketball game, but by golly, you could go out and ride your bike.

Matt Wagner:

That's right.

Dale Sexton:

And you could go backpacking and you can learn how to fly fish. And that fell right in line with obviously what we specialize in. And we definitely getting the wheels on the bus. They weren't anywhere nearly on the bus, but the bus was rolling.

Matt Wagner:

Bus was moving, right?

Dale Sexton:

Yep. It was for sure.

Matt Wagner:

Okay, let's talk a little bit about the brand of Dan Baileys. I mean, I have to imagine being a part of it for so long as a huge part of your life.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah.

Matt Wagner:

Is there a sort of weight that you feel as an entrepreneur, as a small business owner to carry that brand and its importance to this community and to people that love the outdoors? Is there sort of a pressure there? How do you deal with that?

Dale Sexton:

It's a really good observation that you mentioned that because it is weighty to carry on the legacy of Dan Baileys, but it's really cool to be in these walls and be responsible for carrying this history forward.

Sorry if I get a little emotional.

Matt Wagner:

You said it's an emotional thing.

Dale Sexton:

It's heavy, but it's not just me, it's my staff. We've got this incredible staff. You met Tom, our repair shop manager, Rob will be strolling through here shortly. And those guys do better, frankly, when I'm not here-

Matt Wagner:

I think my staff says the same thing.

Dale Sexton:

And it's also about the community because the community loves this place. It's really cool. I've got a neat little story.

My partner came to town after we bought it and everything was coming together, and him and his wife were at the sport having dinner, and he's very unassuming, doesn't fly the flag.

He is a very down-to-earth guy and they're having dinner. This is like three months after, not even that, probably a month and a half after we opened. And they're having a conversation with their waitress and, "Hey, what's new around town? How's it going? This is kind of crazy and calm." "Yeah, yeah, it's all crazy, but we're all doing the best that we can, but probably the coolest thing in town, Dan Bailey's is under new ownership and it's so amazing."

He's just like, as he describes it, made him feel really, really good. So knowing that he had put his faith behind, there was confidence, do a really cool brand as well as our team and whatnot. But it's really about the community. The community really loves Dan Bailey.

Matt Wagner:

Is there any challenge relative to, with all the changes that have to occur? I mean, I'm certain that from a consumer perspective sometimes there's maybe a reluctance to change, and sometimes that can be on the entrepreneurship side as well, we're going to hold it exactly, but the world changes. There's macro trends.

Is there a balance between how people perceive Dan Bailey's as it should be versus perhaps where you need to take the business to remain competitive?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, and I think that that forward-thinking is important, and we're engaged in that all the time and trying to figure it out because it is a competitive business. And unfortunately, Dan Bailey's did not navigate the worldwide web very well. And their foundation was a mail order catalog, which was industry leading. It was very unique. It was a beautiful expression of what they were trying to do here and what they did very, very successfully.

They say had an international wholesale sales force, sold their goods all around the world. It was very impressive. But when the internet came to be, they were just clunky and reactive. And I keep that in my mind because we're not infallible and trying to figure out the best way forward and the best path forward and how to stay true to ourselves, keep doing what we love to do, which is embracing ourselves, number one, and being here for the community, but making sure that we are here, not just today, but tomorrow and another decade from now. I have no idea what it's going to look like, but we are surrounded by really smart people, and we have these conversations all the time.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

And I wish I had all the answers. I wish I had this crystal ball that I could look into and say, oh, hey, the D2C model is going to kill us. It's not. It's very present for sure, and we're very aware of it, but at the same time, one, the landscape is rugged-

Matt Wagner:

Is ever shifting.

Dale Sexton:

... but we're prepared to navigate it.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, yeah, and you were just referencing sort of the D2C, which is direct-to-consumer, right?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah.

Matt Wagner:

For all the different acronyms out there, B2B, B2C, D2C, it's hard to keep up. The outdoor recreation industry specifically, I think is maybe the industry that's had the most profound shifts in a quick cycle. When you think from, pre-COVID and COVID and now four years out, basically. Talk to us a little bit about your reflections on how the outdoor rec world is changing, what trend lines you're specifically seeing?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, so I'll talk about our bike department for instance.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

I truly wonder if we'll have, and it's unusual to have a fly shop in a bike shop.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, kind of two different areas of adventure seeking.

Dale Sexton:

For sure. And a lot of people are, we got some stodgy fly fishermen come in here. "I don't want to be in a fly shop where there's a bike shop and they also sell skate gear. What the hell going on here?"

Matt Wagner:

What's happening to my place.

Dale Sexton:

But there's also, and we're okay with that, we accept that, but that is who we are. And we also have people coming in saying, "Hey, this is pretty amazing." But to the D2C point, I really wonder if we're going to have bikes on the floor in five years because that's changing so quickly and so fast. And we have so many people wheeling their bike in here, "Oh, hey, I just bought this Canyon Mountain bike off the web and having a hard time getting it together correctly. Can you guys help me out?" Well, we're here for that. We're glad that we get that part of their business.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, so the whole Service element.

Dale Sexton:

But we would've loved to have sold them that bike. But when they can buy that bike for a thousand dollars less direct, it's kind of like, ah. Yeah, that's my opener.

Matt Wagner:

Do I, just out of curiosity, because there's also that big debate, direct consumer in the auto industry, but there are some strong association at the wholesale level or direct to retail, or sorry, from the wholesaler to the consumer that is preventing some of that.

Does the bike industry from a retailing perspective have that same sort of control or bargaining power with the manufacturers?

Dale Sexton:

That's a good question. I do know that they do have some, but only so much. Unfortunately, manufacturing doesn't happen here in the US for bikes. It's all in Asia.

Matt Wagner:

Even Trek has moved a lot out of Wisconsin.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, exactly. There's some boutique frame builders and whatnot, but on a mass scale, there's no manufacturing happening here in the US, at least not right now. I'd love to see that return. So the bike companies are pretty much beholden to the manufacturers and the prices have gone up. I mean, it's disconcerting to us, [inaudible 00:18:53] is a very blue collar community, and we love taking care of our families. And we don't have a kids' bike, or, I shouldn't say we don't have a kids' bike. We don't have a pre-teen bike on the floor-

Matt Wagner:

Okay.

Dale Sexton:

... for less than $500.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. Even the entry level has gone up in price.

Dale Sexton:

Pre-COVID we had a $399, $449 bike, and now it's $599. It's just, oh, that's a lot.

Matt Wagner:

Is that inflationary or that manufacturing hasn't kept up with demand?

Dale Sexton:

Both.

Matt Wagner:

Okay.

Dale Sexton:

Both. Yeah. And manufacturing is catching up, but there's this inflation blanket that just took every price that elevated it. So it's beyond my control, your control, beyond the control of one person in the office. It's global.

Matt Wagner:

Is the part of the challenge then, as you're thinking about the elasticity of pricing, how far can you stretch between what consumer or your consumer can do and what the manufacturing costs are to you?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, it's concerning. And also the price changes are so, they fluctuate so much through COVID. We went through, we had a lot of bikes, then we had no bikes, and then all of a sudden we had every bike that you could ever imagine. The pipeline just contracted, and then it completely opened up. And now it's to the point where we just want a playing field that's level.

Matt Wagner:

You're trying to create a new norm situation basically, right?

Dale Sexton:

For sure. And I think we are moving in that direction just little bit. There's little bit, there's a pain here and a pain there, but it's like we have a person looking at a $2,500 e-bike. We have it priced on the floor, but if we haven't checked that price in the last three or four days before we sell that bike to the customer, we do them the favor of checking the online price because we don't feel right about selling a customer a bike for $2,500, for instance, if they could go online to buy for $2,100.

Matt Wagner:

Got it. Okay.

Dale Sexton:

You might make less money, but again, it's about that relationship that you're building with the customer. Well, I would like to have make that extra $400, but this is the price online. I'm in Italia bike's $2,100 online. So that's the price that we're going to sell it to.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

Even though, you know that I bought it at cost. In order to make my margin, I should be selling it at $2,500.

Matt Wagner:

Exactly. Exactly.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. So that's a little frustrating.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, it's almost like short-term/long-term given the service element or maybe accessories or whatever. If I can keep this customer for the long run, maybe I can make that up.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. Yep. Yeah, yeah. At the end of the day, it's only money.

Matt Wagner:

Well, I mean, that's an interesting thing, right? Yes. But there's a mission, and I get from having some conversations with you that there's some principle, there's some values that you hold internally as an owner, as an individual that kind of sets the tone for the store.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I said that it's only money, obviously, we need money to survive.

Matt Wagner:

We call that no money, no mission in the nonprofit world.

Dale Sexton:

We're not a nonprofit although it feels like it sometimes.

Matt Wagner:

Yes. Maybe you want to coin that here too, right?

Dale Sexton:

I'm kidding. But yeah, the better we can do here from a profitability perspective the more we can give back to our community, the more we can focus on that. And that's really where we find our soul.

We love what we do here. The customers that we get to, they're somewhat monochromatic. They all come in more in Patagonia. They're all college educated. They all want to go on a super cool hike. They're great to have a conversation with. There's so much in common with them.

Matt Wagner:

We call that a psychographic Dale. There's a certain psychographic that is present here.

Dale Sexton:

But I'll tell you what, a guy used to wrench for us. He went back to Wisconsin, and the owner of the bike shop where we works, at the library and the bike shop, get the most interesting collection of characters. And we see it, and it's beautiful.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. It's like a convergence of-

Dale Sexton:

Different-

Matt Wagner:

... social society.

Dale Sexton:

But yeah, community activism for us, I don't even know what to call it, frankly, but just giving back in a meaningful way is important to us. It's part of our mission. And yeah, we do some really cool things. You don't just give money because we've got limited capacity in that regard. But we do some really neat programs. Do bike rodeos all the time.

We have a film fest coming up. It's a month out. Yikes.

Matt Wagner:

Oh my.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. That's one of our biggest fundraisers of the year. We raise money for our local soup kitchen, Loaves and Fishes.

Matt Wagner:

That's wonderful.

Dale Sexton:

And this will be our 16th annual, and last year we raised 35,000 bucks for-

Matt Wagner:

That's amazing.

Dale Sexton:

... our soup kitchen, it's a big part of their budget. And as the community, the community has just embraced this event in such a powerful way. We always never dreaded on having it on a Friday because like, oh, there's too much going on a weekend and now this is the event.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, the event.

Dale Sexton:

So now we have it on a Thursday and a Friday.

Matt Wagner:

Oh, wow.

Dale Sexton:

And it's really, really cool. And in the fact this year for the first time, we curated our own films. So we have our own film festival now. It's called the Cold Snap Film Festival.

Matt Wagner:

Love it.

Dale Sexton:

So that's the energy around it and the creativity and the beauty of it. But at the end of the day, it's about raising money for our soup kitchen.

Matt Wagner:

Excellent. Wonderful. Wonderful. As you look ahead in, you think about the store, the local community, but also just again, sort of these macro trends within the industry. Where's your focus at? How do you continue to innovate and stay sort of in front of these big trend lines out there?

Dale Sexton:

Well, I guess again, that's the challenge, right? And frankly, I'm a bit of a dinosaur. I struggle to navigate my iPhone, thankfully, I've got these younger skill sets.

Matt Wagner:

Know your strengths.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, totally. But yeah, it's just paying attention. One thing that really, the thing that keeps me awake at night is climate change, because that's so fundamental to our resource here. And the Yellowstone River is the heart of Southwest Montana, and it's challenged. We can see-

Matt Wagner:

Warming waters or

Dale Sexton:

Warming waters-

Matt Wagner:

... not having enough snowmelt.

Dale Sexton:

... or lower flows, and how do I solve that? That's a big one, right?

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, you're right.

Dale Sexton:

I can't, but we're talking about establishing a, [inaudible 00:26:26] as a B Corp.

Matt Wagner:

Okay.

Dale Sexton:

Just-

Matt Wagner:

Love it.

Dale Sexton:

... setting that up as a nod to, "Hey, well, we can't solve that, but there's these little elements that we can incorporate to our business that help us acknowledge these important issues, how we can actually contribute in an albeit small, but at the end of the day, a meaningful way."

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. Does that mean that in some cases, maybe there are inventory shifts or things that you promote more? Because I know there are ski areas that it's difficult to add skiing, so now they're doing more mountain biking or that kind of thing and their seasonality to, or shorter seasons or elongated seasons.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, for sure. I mean, right now we're nearing the end of October and Sunday it was in the mid-seventies. It's almost unheard of. And it's been like that for about the last five weeks. I want to be out. We're still fishing pretty heavily.

Matt Wagner:

Okay.

Dale Sexton:

We're still focusing on that. So yeah, we're still promoting that. But it's hard to want to encourage people from afar to come to Southwest Montana to fly fish in late October, because last year at this time, we had 10 degrees. So it's unpredictable and it's hard to be rely on it.

Matt Wagner:

Especially when a big part of your customer base is sort of like a tourism customer base because of the guiding.

Dale Sexton:

Yes, exactly. And so what do we do? We go fishing and we take advantage of it because there's not very many people.

Matt Wagner:

I have a T-shirt.

Dale Sexton:

It is like that. Well, our founder, Dan Bailey, he said, when the times are tough-

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

He'd go fishing. Not just for him, for just anybody. Just pack it up and go fishing. Just reflect out on the stream and commune a little bit with nature and get a fresh breath.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, wonderful. Talk to me a little bit about, you were sort of hinting at the lines, but I'm going to press you a little bit on it. What's your thoughts around, obviously technology is coming into play and so much business, there's a lot of bricks and clicks strategy happening. With Dan Bailey's how do you think about reaching customers on a more regular basis with social media, e-commerce, how does that play into your business forecast?

Dale Sexton:

It's integral and it's critical. And we have a social media rock star. Yeah. Jake McLaughlin does all of our media here, thankfully. And the print app, I got a degree in marketing and a minor in economics. So I'm a believer in advertising at it's core, and I love print advertising, and I can't break that. I love seeing a beautifully designed ad, especially in Montana Quarterly, for instance, or Big Sky Journal.

So I probably overspend there-

Matt Wagner:

Okay.

Dale Sexton:

... or I have to-

Matt Wagner:

It's core to you. Yes.

Dale Sexton:

But yeah, no social media where our ad buy in our local newspaper, which almost doesn't exist sadly anymore. Used to be this, but now it's this, because everybody gets their information right here.

Matt Wagner:

Totally.

Dale Sexton:

And it's troubling to me because the amount of information, that's not necessarily accurate that they get off of this, but what they get from Dan Bailey's I feel really good about.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

So it's critical. And I really like engaging with it too. It's really fun.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

How it turns so quickly. But yesterday, today's news just, it's so fleeting.

Matt Wagner:

Exactly. It's a very short term, and you don't have a lot of time to capture the consumer because the flow of information is so much.

Have you seen a change in evolution overall in the business in terms of the percent that's more online through digital sales? Are you thinking, how do I handle fulfillment? Or is it still primarily in store?

Dale Sexton:

It's primarily in store, but we're strategizing on how to build our online presence.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

And that's an important aspect for us that we're dedicating more resources to. But it's also difficult because online, we're just another fly shop.

Matt Wagner:

Yes. It's hard to have this experience.

Dale Sexton:

It is. Yeah, for sure. As opposed to when we have somebody coming in the store like, "Wow, my dad brought me here 35 years ago, and now I'm revisiting Southwest Montana on a trip to Yellowstone and a little fly-fishing on the side." It's really neat to have those conversations.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

This is really the heart of it, and it's hard to move away from that. And we're not going to move away from that. If we double down on that, I think by our product selection and are inviting this to our customer base and our product knowledge, and we love our customers-

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Dale Sexton:

... and we love sharing with them what we have to offer, not just in the way of product, but what Livingston has to offer in our area and how you can have a special experience in one of our national forests, we have to offer-

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, you're right, it's not only the store, but the surrounding community and the feel that you get by just walking through the downtown and then into the store. And it's more holistic, I guess you could say.

Dale Sexton:

Pretty much, yeah.

Matt Wagner:

And that experience, I think, yeah, it is a challenge. I think of so many small business owners where you've got this in-store vibrancy that is experienced. It's sort of memory driven, and how do you take that into a digital realm, I think continues to be a challenge.

Dale Sexton:

Well, I've got two young daughters, not as young as I like to think anymore. One of them just started at Montana State University. But it drives me crazy when we have a conversation because for one, I'm not really a shopper, but I will go spending time with my daughters. That's job one for me. That's so fulfilling. And anything that we do, and I can appreciate that they don't always want to go for a bike ride or want to be fishing, and they love to go to lululemon, and I love going there with them.

Matt Wagner:

In downtown Bozeman.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, basically. Or wherever. Whenever we go to a city, we like to go to cities every now and then, we always make a stop at a lululemon store, but then we'd have a conversation like they'd rather buy the stuff online. And I'm like, ah, drives me crazy.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. It's the challenge we hold. I want to close a little bit with, you've had a long time as a business owner and as someone that contributes to community. Share a little bit about some of your advice. If I was an aspiring business owner or I'm in business right now, what sort of the truths that you hold?

Dale Sexton:

Yeah. Boy, I guess that if you feel that you have that drive and that passion, then follow it. Have that dream and make it come true. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't let the business become your life. Keep focused on what's important.

Matt Wagner:

So important.

Dale Sexton:

Don't forget that family and your friends. Make sure you have something that drives you outside of your work. And yeah, make sure you're giving back. Give back to your community and give them back to others.

Matt Wagner:

Really important. Dale, I just want to thank you so much for letting me come into the store today and.

Dale Sexton:

It's been a pleasure.

Matt Wagner:

... share that experience with you and the legacy of Dan Bailey's.

Dale Sexton:

Yeah, man.

Matt Wagner:

All right.

Dale Sexton:

Really appreciate your time.

Matt Wagner:

Thanks, Dale.

Dale Sexton:

Yep. You bet.

Matt Wagner:

We often distinguish Main Street businesses based on factors like store scale perhaps, or independent ownership. Experiential versus transactional shopping is another common one, and even customer service. But what stands out most to me is the human element that transcends these other characteristics and no more personified than through my conversation with Dale. The true sincerity to which he supports his employees. Really the weight he bears to carry a legacy brand. And that meaning it holds for the community's identity. It's why we do this for, I think without the Dan Bailey's of the world, we're left with communities and experiences and frankly, a nation void. It's economic soul.

So it as always, if you're a business owner, and likewise to my place, professional colleagues, I hope this episode has provided plenty of new insights, solutions, and inspiration. And as consumers, please continue to support your local small businesses and of course, tell their stories.

They're so important to our local and national economies, and most importantly, they promote and provide quality living to the places we all call home.

That's going to do it for this week's episode. Remember to check out our growing library of podcast recordings and other related films of the podcast on your Main Street America YouTube channel. Thanks for listening. And if you don't mind my continued soap box.

If you would rather hear these stories and not the constant and singular drum beat of stories of only global business leaders, please hit the subscribe button, rate and review us, comment, and always be sure to subscribe and tell your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues so you can all catch the next episode when I'm pulling a double in Livingston, Montana, joining James Langbo of Tru North Cafe, chatting about the ups and downs of being a newcomer to a community, workplace challenges and the joys of instilling your authentic self through your business's identity.

So don't miss it. We'll see you then, and thanks for all the support.