Matt Wagner:

Welcome to the Main Street Business Insight 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 a 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 Episode 7 of Season 2 of the Main Street Business Insight Podcast. In today's podcast finds me an Amarillo, Texas with Niki Fleetwood and McKinzie Hodges, owners of Scratch Made Bakery. This growing and scaling business, famous for its homemade Pop-tarts, yes, you heard me correctly, Pop-tarts, and co-owning winner of the Food Network Cupcake Wars, now also includes a new coffee shop and event space. Like most businesses highlighted on the podcast, this journey has a rather fascinating backstory to it.

My travels to Amarillo were actually the result of a call for nominations by Main Street directors of businesses they thought should be on the podcast. And Beth Duke from Center City Amarillo made a really compelling case that highlighted this really wonderful and special historical connection between one of Amarillo's most famous historical figures and the modern day contributions of Niki and McKinzie to Main Street's Progress.

You see, the story of Scratch Made Bakery lies on the foundation built by one of the United States' most successful female entrepreneurs and philanthropist. As we share the Scratch Made Bakery story, it's really important to know in this month of celebrating women's history, the story of one Ms. Melissa Dora Oliver-Eakle, often called the Duchess of Amarillo.

First arriving in Amarillo in the 1890s as a principal stockholder of the Mississippi Mills, which, at the time was the largest textile mill in the South. It was said that she had more money than all the local banks combined and used her personal wealth to aid many businesses throughout Amarillo. However, at that time, she had to do so under the moniker MD Oliver, so that beneficiaries didn't know she was a woman. In 1927, she financed and built the Oliver-Eakle Building, which became Amarillo's first skyscraper at 10 stories tall. Now, fast-forward and today that building serves as the restored Barfield Hotel and together with Scratch Made Bakery have been the spark behind downtown Amarillo's resurgence and redevelopment.

What becomes clear in my interview is that Ms. Oliver-Eakle's legacy truly lives on through Beth and Niki and McKinzie, Amarillo's downtown new visionaries. So, hope you enjoy this special conversation and, of course, we'll see you on the other side.

Welcome, Niki and McKinzie, to the show. It's so great to have you here.

Niki Fleetwood:

Thank you.

McKinzie Hodges:

Thank you for having us.

Matt Wagner:

In your place, of course.

So, we're coming from your business here at Scratch Made Bakery, Center City, Amarillo.

Niki Fleetwood:

Yes, sir.

Matt Wagner:

On sixth Street. Great connector to the historic Route 66, right?

Niki Fleetwood:

Absolutely.

Matt Wagner:

And before we begin, I have to do a shout-out to Beth Duke from Center City, right?

Niki Fleetwood:

Round of applause.

Matt Wagner:

Round of applause.

Niki Fleetwood:

Round of applause.

Matt Wagner:

Of course. What folks won't know on the podcast was that the reason why I'm here is Beth nominated you, I like to say, because of millions of applications out there.

Niki Fleetwood:

Of course, of course.

Matt Wagner:

Maybe just a little bit lower than that, but we ran a little bit of contest for our Main Street directors to select a business that they felt was someone that you would just make for a great podcast. You all won it. So there's a little bit of history of award-winning here. We'll get into that. Okay? But why don't we first start out, just tell us a little bit about your journey.

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure, sure. Well, at this point it's been quite the journey. So, it was a moonlit night and we were walking on the beach.

Matt Wagner:

This is storytelling.

McKinzie Hodges:

In Amarillo, Texas.

Niki Fleetwood:

In Amarillo, Texas. I don't know.

McKinzie Hodges:

No. So we both had baking experience in the past, and we just by happenstance, Niki ended up in Amarillo. We met each other through some mutual friends and both had a love of baking. And, Thanksgiving happened.

Niki Fleetwood:

Thanksgiving happened.

McKinzie Hodges:

Thanksgiving is what did it.

Niki Fleetwood:

Oh, yeah.

McKinzie Hodges:

I was baking from home. I had a very small kitchen. Niki had this space that she had opened, when she moved here, and so we figured if we combined forces, we can make more money and do more business, and we did it and we never stopped.

Niki Fleetwood:

So it's that hustle, I suppose, would be our connection.

Matt Wagner:

There was a capitalism connection here.

Niki Fleetwood:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Cash [inaudible 00:05:49]

Matt Wagner:

We can make more money.

Niki Fleetwood:

Yes, yes.

McKinzie Hodges:

That was all.

Niki Fleetwood:

Absolutely.

Matt Wagner:

That's awesome. You started Scratch Made Bakery in 2015. What was the initial vision? What was the thought behind that? What were you trying to accomplish with the bakery?

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure. Honestly, I think it goes back to that love of baking, and I think she and I are both hustlers. We had that competitive edge and we felt like that was the moment for us. It was almost ...

McKinzie Hodges:

Together we could do more.

Niki Fleetwood:

We could tackle more, we could approach more, we could do more, we could be more, and we're a good team. So I think that was the initial spark, I suppose.

Matt Wagner:

Every business has competition, and I wonder, as you think about the bakery business, what's your niche? What's your competitive advantage?

Niki Fleetwood:

Well, we're both adorable. No kidding.

Matt Wagner:

Of course.

Niki Fleetwood:

Kidding, kidding. In all honesty, I don't think she and I ever felt like we had anyone to compete with. It was more a competition with ourselves. That we both had goals and we both had dreams, and together we could do more. And I think that was our competitive edge, that it wasn't about anybody else. It was just about us.

McKinzie Hodges:

Well, and I think it started with we both had our own businesses separately. So Niki had her style and I had my style, and I guess in a way we could have been competition for each other, here in town, but instead of seeing it is that we took it on as you do something and I do something, and those combined, we can create a great product. So, I baked at home and I decorated and did the full process, but the baking part of it wasn't my favorite part. The decorating part was my favorite.

Niki Fleetwood:

It's my favorite part, and I don't want to decorate ever at all for any reason.

McKinzie Hodges:

No, she doesn't want to touch something that's decorated.

Niki Fleetwood:

I don't. I don't.

McKinzie Hodges:

So it really was, when we met, and it wasn't like, we weren't butting heads. She wasn't trying to do what I was doing. I wasn't trying to do what she was doing. We really both were just thinking, let's combine forces and make it a powerhouse of a team who can do baking and decorating. And then we took on new things. We tried new items that we had never baked before.

Niki Fleetwood:

That's how we fit. She's constantly pushing to be better, and I'm constantly pushing to be better, but we're also constantly pushing to be better for one another.

Matt Wagner:

This sounds a little bit like a business marriage.

McKinzie Hodges:

It is. Oh yeah. We're in it. This is a commitment.

Niki Fleetwood:

We are married. We are married. It's a wonderful, wonderful marriage thus far. Yes, it's been great.

Matt Wagner:

Excellent. Excellent.

McKinzie Hodges:

Hard. All the time. All the time. All the time.

Niki Fleetwood:

Oh yeah.

Matt Wagner:

I'm surprised that what didn't come up and what people will actually be able to see in the film component of the podcast is what's right behind me. And when we first started talking, probably two months ago, I think, I was so jazzed about Pop-tarts, okay? Growing up as a kid, in the Midwest, you had Pop-tarts, and then I lost touch with my inner Pop-tart self.

Niki Fleetwood:

Of course.

McKinzie Hodges:

Of course.

Matt Wagner:

And talk to me about how Pop-tarts came to be.

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure. So, first of all, they're a super, super fun treat. In all honesty, we were doing a wholesale account with a business in town called Palace Coffee. And if you get the opportunity to give them a try, they're awesome. Again, it goes back to not super worried about competition where there's constantly business for everyone and we want everyone to succeed. But within that wholesale account, one of their requests was that we provide them with a few baked goods because they didn't want to make them in-house. And so, one of those huge things was Pop-tarts, and this began quite the journey of making Pop-tarts, and they have just become super, super niche, super fun, super frivolous. You should see people's faces when they just see the term and they're like, "Oh my God, you guys have house-made Pop-tarts," and it's like, "We do, and we hand roll and we hand cut and we crimp and we press and we fill and we make all of the components from fillings to glaze." And as you can see, they're just a really fun piece of our childhood done really, really well.

McKinzie Hodges:

And it's somewhat more of a hand pie situation. We fill it with our coconut cream pie filling. We do everything that we already did here, we incorporate into the Pop-tart pastries that we're making.

Niki Fleetwood:

That makes it uniquely ours.

McKinzie Hodges:

It is. It is.

Niki Fleetwood:

They're ours.

Matt Wagner:

You're own stamp.

Niki Fleetwood:

And we kept them online, just we keep them because they're wonderful and we're darn good at them, so we're just going to keep doing it and keep being creative with them and hopefully continue touching people's childhoods, I guess, if you will? It's a really nice feeling.

Matt Wagner:

Live testimonial. I just bit into a blueberry, Pop-tart. Delish.

Niki Fleetwood:

Good. Good. Good.

Matt Wagner:

Absolute delish.

It's not every day that I get to sit down, Niki, with a winner of the Food Network's Cupcake Wars.

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure, sure. Yes, yes.

Matt Wagner:

And I feel honored and ...

Niki Fleetwood:

Thank you.

Matt Wagner:

... there'll be autograph session afterwards.

Niki Fleetwood:

Oh yeah. Kissing babies, shaking hands.

Matt Wagner:

That's right. That's right. Tell us a little bit about what that experience was like.

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure. I was actually, I was in North Carolina at the time, so I grew up in Fort Worth. I moved to North Carolina when I was 20 years old, so that's how I applied. I reached out and that was a goal of mine. I had been baking for one year, and I literally just thought to myself, what can I do? What can I achieve? I've always been competitive by nature, and so I've always wanted to be the best and do the best that I possibly can and to challenge myself.

And I just Googled it, simple Google search. How do I get on the Cupcake Wars? One of them, one of the many sites that I saw to simply send in an email of inquiry. And thus began quite the journey. It was quite the application process. It was a multi process, written personal email, video, and that's how I got started. And so I was accepted to go on the show. I was invited to come onto the show. I was invited to come onto the Mary Poppins episode, and you want to talk about an experience of a lifetime. I don't know that I would, I say I'd never do it again. Again, I go back to being competitive, and if I have to do it again and we get to go do it, we will go and do that.

I would never have seen Los Angeles if it weren't for that opportunity, which, for me, was such a big part of that because it really changed the way that I saw down towns, and it changed the way that I saw the way that people communicate and focus and function in a town, city, if you will. Because New Bern, North Carolina, it was somewhat of a smaller town, if you will. And so the experience was a once in a lifetime experience. It was challenging without a doubt. I'm grateful that I did it, but I don't know that I rely on any of those experiences outside of what temporary life experience it was. I feel like I'm better now at what I do than I was then. I feel like I'm better equipped to manage those sorts of things now and that type of experience.

But I do get to say that I did one an episode of Cupcake Wars, hands down. It's a really cool thing that I did, but it's not something that we bring up in everyday conversation, and it's not something that we particularly rely on for business. So as awesome as it was, it's not.

Matt Wagner:

I think that's one of the things that struck me just coming in to the business this morning. I think a lot of people probably would've had some sort of banners all over the place and use it as a huge marketing thing. I'm interested in why you all made that decision, maybe not to run with that.

Niki Fleetwood:

First of all, I'm going to open with, if we have to tell people how good we are? We're probably not that good. We feel like our product speaks for itself. Our personalities speak for themselves. Our hard work speaks for itself. I don't know how I feel when I walk into a place and they are continuously boasting about the things that they've done 10, 12 years ago. To me, it's relevant mentally, and we do bring it up and it's super cool, but it's not something that we rely on. It was also a thing that I did in North Carolina before I moved here. It was before I had met McKinzie. And so when she and I partnered in business, it's this really cool thing that I did, but I don't feel like ... I want to be known for what we're doing now. And she and I have collected many awards together as well, and those are going to be more relevant. And as you see, they're not posted around either. And maybe one day we'll grow up and put in a really cool wall of our accomplishments.

McKinzie Hodges:

[inaudible 00:14:40].

Niki Fleetwood:

We do. We do. Her mom is so awesome. She brings them and they're beautiful, and it's really spectacular. And we talk about having a wall of appreciation for ourselves one of these days, but for now, it's just hard work and determination.

Matt Wagner:

I think it's a good lesson for other business owners, though, just in the mere fact that you don't rely on the laurels or the past, that you always have to be shaping your reputation and your brand and you've got to stay with it.

McKinzie Hodges:

We do.

Niki Fleetwood:

We have to adapt all the time.

McKinzie Hodges:

And we're currently working on that, too. 'Cos it's just different now. After COVID and everything, there were just so many changes that we decided that we needed to make another adjustment to our logo and the entire look of the place. We really want to shift with the newer aesthetic of everything. We got stuck with what we started with because it's what we had to start with.

Niki Fleetwood:

It's what we had to work with.

McKinzie Hodges:

We didn't have an excess of money. We were pulling from our personal accounts and decorating as we could.

Niki Fleetwood:

Garage sale chic, if you will.

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes.

Niki Fleetwood:

We're growing up now, but ...

Matt Wagner:

Is that the new term?

Niki Fleetwood:

It's taken a while. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Here we are, guys. Garage sale chic. Yes, sir.

Matt Wagner:

That's great. One of the things that I discovered, and I'll shout out to Ken who's doing the filming right now, because he led me down this route as he does many routes, was around the history of Amarillo. And in particular, a lady by the name of MD Oliver, that from the early 19th century really built this incredible wealth as an entrepreneur and a financier of many of the projects in and around Center City here. In fact, the hotel that I stayed in last night was a result of her work. And as we go across the country and look at our main streets around the US, we are finding just this massive boom of women entrepreneurs. And I wonder how you think about your role as women and what you see around Center City. Do you feel a responsibility regarding that legacy here in Amarillo?

Niki Fleetwood:

You want to take that one?

McKinzie Hodges:

I don't know. I don't know. Yes, I want to say that we do. It is awesome being a woman-owned business. We utilize it as much as we can in the way of presenting our business and ourselves, and we really support all of our other women-owned businesses. But saying that, I don't know that it is as much of a big deal or that anybody acknowledges it necessarily here as much as it could be acknowledged here. I do think that we still go under the curtain, if you will, maybe. And a lot of people don't even know who owns what business here. It's hard. It's hard in Amarillo. Do you want to ...?

Niki Fleetwood:

I think, I'm going to be honest. I think it's fair to say that the idea of living in a man's world is not the same as even when we were kids and when we grew up. She and I didn't roll into owning a business thinking we are going to be strong, women-owned businesses.

McKinzie Hodges:

We were just trying ...

Niki Fleetwood:

We were just trying to get by, pay some bills. But we are a woman-owned business and we are a successful woman-owned business. Until recently, we had all women on staff. So, my son works with us, and then we've had a couple of men come in and out. But ultimately we're just two hardworking gals that are just trying to make a living doing what we love to do. Being that we're women is super interesting. Being downtown as a woman-owned business? I don't know that I can think of any off the top of my head around us that are a woman-owned business. Everything else is going to be owned by men outside of the restaurant across the street from us, woman-owned business.

McKinzie Hodges:

OHMS.

Niki Fleetwood:

Yep. OHMS is an excellent spot.

McKinzie Hodges:

And she's been there for years.

Niki Fleetwood:

But I can't think of anything else off the top of my head. So you know what? I guess we stand out in a crowd and we just haven't realized it. So here we are.

McKinzie Hodges:

We've never really been approached in a way that makes us feel special for being a woman-owned business. We just happen to have a business because that's what we were good at. And the only way to thrive in this industry is to have a bakery.

Niki Fleetwood:

And we've only ever been women, so to us it's just ...

Matt Wagner:

Natural.

Niki Fleetwood:

If you're going to work hard at something, at least work hard at what you love to do. And we've both been fortunate enough to do that. And we just happen to be women.

McKinzie Hodges:

But we did, I mean, we've won a Women of Distinction award.

Niki Fleetwood:

We sure did.

McKinzie Hodges:

Beth Duke has been fantastic.

Niki Fleetwood:

Governor signed off on it. That was a really cool experience.

McKinzie Hodges:

So we've had some really nice perks because of it.

Niki Fleetwood:

And we've done some work in the past with some, we work with the Girl Scouts every year. They have a luncheon for Girl Scouts and whatnot. We used to work with Patsy's Place, which is a home for previously incarcerated women. It's the Sharing Hope Ministries. And we would hire them on and they would come in and ...

McKinzie Hodges:

Work with us on Saturdays.

Niki Fleetwood:

And so we work with women in that way, too. But I don't know that that was ever intentional as much as it was just a natural progression towards, you need help. I need help. Let's work together as a team, which I think is how we've approached business from the very beginning.

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

Excellent. Excellent. And you were talking earlier on about some of the changes that you've been making. And we saw this again, another link to other trend lines across the country was post COVID, during COVID, post COVID, we call it that.

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes, yes.

Matt Wagner:

The businesses were having to make a lot of shifts out there. Talk to me about some of your strategies over the last few years and where you see the business going.

Niki Fleetwood:

Survival at its finest. Absolutely. COVID changed the way that we do a lot of things. It changed the way that we communicated with our customers. It changed the way that we provided our product to the public. It changed the way that we worked with our employees. It changed the way that you woke up every single day worrying about someone having a positive COVID test and having to worry about closing your business for two weeks at a time. And again, neither one of us come from a large amount of money and everything that we've had, we've had to work hard for and roll into the business.

Now, the changes that we made, McKinzie, we worked very well together, but she's probably the brains of the operation. She had really started pushing that to go order. And at the time that we were doing brunch, she would stand out there and hand deliver food to people so they wouldn't have to come in and she'd run out there and take payments so people wouldn't have to come in and they could be comfortable.

McKinzie Hodges:

Okay. But Niki was in the kitchen cooking the food.

Niki Fleetwood:

We are a very good, we are a very, very, even Steven team.

McKinzie Hodges:

It was a collective effort to continue to provide the baked goods for everyone, even though we couldn't really allow them in.

Niki Fleetwood:

We had to adapt and work together. And there were, on more than one occasion where an employee tested positive for COVID, and it was just the two of us stuck wearing masks, trying to get baked goods out and trying to get food to everybody. But we rolled through that together and we rolled through it with Grace, and we're so grateful that we came out looking at business different than we used to. It changed the way the communication was with the customers. And for us, it's a lot of our business and a lot of our business model is based off of those relationships because people that do business with us? Know us. They knew us all through COVID, and they're rooting for us. And I think that's how we were able to come out successfully, was that core being of, we're part of this community. People want us to be part of this community. And they continued to support us through COVID and we just ...

McKinzie Hodges:

We have to continue to ...

Niki Fleetwood:

We had to use our brains and hard work just to get us by.

Matt Wagner:

One of the outgrowths of that has been thinking about business in a different way. So you've got the bakery, but we're in a newer spot, something that's happening? You've got other plans. Could you talk a little bit about how the business is evolving?

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes.

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure.

McKinzie Hodges:

So we were presented with an awesome opportunity, a little over two years ago now, where just across the way from the bakery is the First Bank Southwest Tower. So the tallest building in Amarillo.

Niki Fleetwood:

You can see it from anywhere.

McKinzie Hodges:

In the lobby of that is a little coffee shop. And they've had it there for years. Years and years. But over the past maybe eight years, 10 years, they've just had a lot of turnaround. There's been a lot of in and outs and they can't keep someone in the space, but it truly caters to the building itself.

Niki Fleetwood:

It does.

McKinzie Hodges:

And we were approached by one of the management offices there, and they just said, "We see you. We know you hustle. We know you girls work hard. Is there any way you would be willing to pop in here and start something and try to just cater to the building?" And that was just shortly after COVID and everything and we were trying to make brunch work for us and not have too much staff, but not too little staff and still be able to pay for everything. And we felt like that would be a good opportunity to stretch us a little bit further. People don't walk in downtown Amarillo like they do in other down towns.

Niki Fleetwood:

That's a huge ...

McKinzie Hodges:

That's a huge thing. I mean, they're not willing to park a block and walk a block to get somewhere. They want front row parking all the time. So we had to make those adjustments here, but we thought that maybe there with a built-in clientele, it would make it a little bit ...

Niki Fleetwood:

And it sure has.

McKinzie Hodges:

It has.

Niki Fleetwood:

It's been, I think it's uniquely suited for us to be successful. Just we have so many offerings over there that just allowed us to stretch our creative legs, if you will? Coffee is something that we both love, but never a game in which we thought that we would play. It just sort of naturally evolved into this, "Do you girls want to take over this space and see if y'all can make it work?" And we surely did. We figured it out, like we do everything else the hard way, but either way, it's ours.

McKinzie Hodges:

It's ours, it's awesome. It's called Roast and Toast. That was a really awesome opportunity for us, and we're still rocking and rolling with it, and we have an incredible staff over there. So that was one thing that took us to the next level. In the midst of us doing that, we decided that maybe brunch wasn't the best option for us. We were turning down decorated orders, which is what we started for. We started to bake baked goods, pastries, decorated cakes and cookies. And with brunch, there wasn't room. We have a small kitchen. We don't have a lot of decorating space. And after we realized that we were maybe putting ourselves out, putting a little bit too much into it, we worked seven days a week. We were exhausting ourselves, getting here extra early.

Niki Fleetwood:

And not doing what we love. Brunch was fun.

McKinzie Hodges:

We loved brunch.

Niki Fleetwood:

It was a fun adventure, but ...

McKinzie Hodges:

Loved it. We did for seven years. Seven years, we had a very successful brunch restaurant. But at that point it became, are we doing what we love or are we doing this because we started it to make money. That's the only reason we chose to do it. And then we got to a point where we didn't feel like it was turning enough of a profit with the cost of goods going up and employees and there just wasn't a way for us to make it what we wanted unless we went full brunchery and took a step back from baking. And we talked about ...

Niki Fleetwood:

It was not the answer.

McKinzie Hodges:

But it was not what we wanted.

Niki Fleetwood:

We didn't show up to cook brunch. We showed up to make baked goods.

McKinzie Hodges:

Baked goods.

Niki Fleetwood:

And now we finally reached that point in business where we could.

McKinzie Hodges:

We could. And it's missed. And it's missed by lots of people here in town. It's missed by our regulars. It's missed by us. We did really enjoy doing it, but it just came to a point where we couldn't continue that, and that was a massive turning point for our business.

Niki Fleetwood:

It was.

McKinzie Hodges:

And in that became, we have to rebrand. We can no longer have the brunchery to our name. It's confusing. It's still confusing for people coming downtown.

Niki Fleetwood:

It is. And once you put something online, you can never take it off. So there's people that come in and they're like, but you have brunch photos. And we're like, "From a year ago." It's no longer relevant.

Matt Wagner:

Always that transition.

Niki Fleetwood:

Transition is hard.

McKinzie Hodges:

And in the midst of the transition from that, we got one of our best girlfriends runs our social media, and she's fantastic. She has a beautiful eye for all things design in general.

Niki Fleetwood:

She's wonderful.

McKinzie Hodges:

And she has just taken our social media and ran with it. She's helping us rebrand. She's come up with everything.

Niki Fleetwood:

It's incredible.

McKinzie Hodges:

It's incredible.

Niki Fleetwood:

She's incredible.

McKinzie Hodges:

It's really made a huge difference in how we see our business because we're so set with the logo that we started with. So now it's a bigger turning point, and we're remodeling the space and rebranding and trying to up it. We want to be the space that you want to come and hang out, not just a downtown spot that you maybe want to drive to.

Niki Fleetwood:

We're growing up.

Matt Wagner:

You're growing up.

Niki Fleetwood:

We're growing up.

McKinzie Hodges:

Eight years later.

Niki Fleetwood:

Here we are.

Matt Wagner:

Awesome. Well, it's a journey.

McKinzie Hodges:

It is a journey.

Niki Fleetwood:

Evolution takes time.

Matt Wagner:

One of the things that you hit on, and there's been a lot of thread lines, I think of great advice to small business owners. One is, sometimes you just have to take a step back, evaluate your business. Don't just keep doing the same things because historically that's what you did, when it doesn't make sense any longer for the business. And so I applaud you for making that decision because those are tough, really tough small business decisions to make.

Let's talk a little bit about the community. You already mentioned a lot of things where the business is engaged with other civic groups or nonprofit organizations, but you could have been in lots of different spaces around Amarillo. And I wonder if you could talk about why here? Why downtown? Why Center City?

Niki Fleetwood:

Okay, so that's going to go back to ...

McKinzie Hodges:

10 years ago.

Niki Fleetwood:

10 years ago. 10 years ago, I moved here from North Carolina. And in North Carolina I had just won that episode of Cupcake Wars, and I was ready to take my business to the next level. I was married to a Marine, and he was selected to go recruiting duty. And that means that you pack up your whole family and you move to a place that you've probably never been to. And I didn't want to leave. I was so, so afraid that if I left that I was giving up the biggest pieces of myself that I had worked so hard to achieve and that I personally identified with. And so I felt like being removed from the location in which I had worked so hard at and worked at farmer's markets and won that huge awesome episode of Cupcake Wars. I had to move and I made the decision to move with my family.

So six months after I won that episode of Cupcake Wars, I moved to Amarillo and I had sort of resigned that I was going to be successful no matter what, no matter where I went. And no matter how I was going to do it, I was absolutely going to do it the way in which I wanted to do it. Now, my first step was to come downtown because, to me, that was the life force of every city that I've ever been to was this bustling hub of arts and socials and community in a downtown. And when I moved here and I drove through downtown, I remember just crying, crying that there wasn't what I was looking for, crying that there wasn't that.

And so over the course of ... I did it. I did it regardless. I did it "knowing better" if you will. But I happened to meet Joe Bob McCart, and he owned the building at the time, and he has passed since...

McKinzie Hodges:

Due to COVID.

Niki Fleetwood:

... due to COVID. But I met a person that believed in me and believed in what I was doing, and he helped me find a cool location, and that happened to be downtown, and we stayed downtown together.

McKinzie Hodges:

Well, Niki had the space, and the space was great. It was just the one portion of it, at that time, where the kitchen is. And she had everything. I mean, the equipment ...

Niki Fleetwood:

We were ready to go.

McKinzie Hodges:

Everything was here already. It didn't make sense to look elsewhere at that point.

Niki Fleetwood:

To spend more money on a location that could have been better suited. And we, believe us, we've looked, I mean, we've legitimately considered not closing this space, but opening a second location possibly ...

McKinzie Hodges:

In a busier part of town.

Niki Fleetwood:

... in a busier part of town. Amarillo is, one, I'm grateful to be back in the state of Texas again, just because I grew up in Texas and the people in Texas are just, they're just different. I don't know if anybody's realized that, but it's my home state. So being back home and being able to bring what I love to do in a home in which I've created, because Amarillo isn't my hometown, if you will? But it is my home. I've raised my kids here. But she and I chose to stay downtown, and we choose to stay downtown because we do see it changing. It is changing every single day. I remember the Barfield across the street was a home for homeless people, vagrants and foxes ...

McKinzie Hodges:

For years.

Niki Fleetwood:

Years. And it was just this dilapidated old building, and there was always rumors of an uprising and everybody coming in and putting their money into downtown.

McKinzie Hodges:

And it never happened.

Niki Fleetwood:

It never happened. And so over the course of 10 years, we've watched it take place. Beth Duke has done a number on this downtown.

I can't tell you how amazing it is to drive downtown every single day and see the evolution in business and evolution in youth and livelihood and arts. And you can come downtown now and have a nice night out with your significant other, or take the girls out and have fun. And now we own two businesses downtown. And so this is, we do it because nobody else is doing it. Nobody else is willing to do it. And so we're the only bakery downtown, and that's how it works for us.

Matt Wagner:

Let's talk about the future of the business. As you look out a few years, where are you going from here?

Niki Fleetwood:

Sure. She and I are sitting on a beach. We're drinking coconut ...

McKinzie Hodges:

And relaxing.

Niki Fleetwood:

... water straight from coconuts.

Matt Wagner:

Maybe not that far ahead.

McKinzie Hodges:

[inaudible 00:32:41] a few days a week.

Niki Fleetwood:

I think that she and I, we've got some goals.

McKinzie Hodges:

We definitely have goals with the business. First and foremost I think it's making it what we really want it to be. I think at this point ...

Speaker 4:

I'm sorry, both cameras shut down. Back a little bit.

McKinzie Hodges:

You're good.

Speaker 4:

Sorry, Matt.

Matt Wagner:

It's okay.

I like to think that you're, in some ways, you're building that connective tissue between, you're an anchor point here in the financial district to connect to that experience on Route 66.

Niki Fleetwood:

We would love to be.

McKinzie Hodges:

That would be ...

Niki Fleetwood:

That's it. That's the goal.

Matt Wagner:

Well, congratulations for everything that you've accomplished up to this point, but I know you're going to accomplish so much more.

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

Thanks so much for being on the show, of course.

Niki Fleetwood:

Thank you for having us.

McKinzie Hodges:

Yes, thank you so much. It's been great.

Matt Wagner:

And now I'm going to eat this big pile of Pop-tarts behind me. I just got to be for real here.

McKinzie Hodges:

That's okay.

Niki Fleetwood:

I'm going to get you a glass of milk. Is milk okay? Almond?

Matt Wagner:

Bring me back to my childhood. Thanks so much. Appreciate it.

Niki Fleetwood:

Thanks for having us.

Matt Wagner:

So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Niki Fleetwood and McKinzie Hodges, owners of Scratch Made Bakery in Amarillo, Texas. Of special note, I finally recovered from my sugar coma post homemade Pop-tart and coconut cream pie mass consumption event. And as I reflected beyond that on our discussion, there were numerous lessons and insights throughout. But my big takeaway is really that I suspect so many other small business owners struggles with this particular issue. How to stop doing something that isn't essentially moving the needle on your business. I think electing to stop the brunch service, a part of their business that so many customers enjoyed and in fact was part of their original business name, had to be so difficult. But the reality was, while it was doing okay, there were valuable opportunity costs in not having more time to focus on their baking and building that aspect of the business out, which was really their true passion, the reason behind the business and the value add to the business.

I think an important takeaway from all of this is that not all growth has the same value. So always be sure that your value proposition is intrinsically linked to your brand identity and unique competitive advantages.

So 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, solution and inspiration. And as consumers, please continue to support your local small businesses and tell their stories. They're so important to our local and national economies, and most importantly, they provide and promote quality of living to all the places we all call home.

That's going to do it for this week's episode. Please remember to check out a new film version of this podcast on our Main Street America YouTube channel. Thanks for listening. Please rate and review us, and as always, be sure to subscribe and tell your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues so you can catch me on the next episode when I'll be in Emporia, Kansas, chatting with a name that's probably very familiar to our Main Street Network listeners, Casey Woods, who's the Executive Director of the Emporia Main Street Program. We'll be focusing in on Casey's work in establishing Main Street as a social venture with unique revenue models through product and service offerings that further position Main Street as central to the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Don't miss it. We'll see you then, and thanks for all the support.