

All Up In Your Business | Episode 4

All Up In Your Business: Breakfast you'll be la Gladeleine about

Jay Socol: Welcome to another edition of All Up in Your Business. I'm Communications Director Jay Socol.

Natalie Ruiz: I'm Director of Economic Development Natalie Ruiz.

Jay Socol: You're back in the chair!

Natalie Ruiz: Back in a chair!

Jay Socol: It's so good to have you back because, you know, this is your show. What do you have to say about that?

Natalie Ruiz: We're in trouble. [laughs]

Jay Socol: Okay. Well then, let's get into some trouble because it's been a while since we've visited and there are new things on the ground, there are things in the process of being constructed and there are some things on the horizon that we have not talked about in some ways, so we've got a little bit of ground to cover.

Natalie Ruiz: Sure.

Jay Socol: Alright. So I'd like to start with Century Square because that seems to be one of the more dynamic areas of College Station that's developing.

Natalie Ruiz: Right.

Jay Socol: There's already a lot there, but there are additional phases coming. Can you talk about some of the things that are safe to announce, that are coming next to Century Square?

Natalie Ruiz: Yeah, so phase two, they're planning on breaking ground probably end of this year, early next year. The plan is to have spaces open fall of '20 for new restaurants, new retail. The initial thought was that there's a couple pad sites there on University Drive frontage; the initial thought was to have a two-story building. The leasing for the office was going so well that they were going to add some second-floor office to that. They've since decided not to and just go with the one story, primarily because they didn't want to block the view and the feel of the whole area by blocking it with a two-story building on University Drive.

The biggest announcement is ... I'm not sure how to pronounce it and you're asking the wrong person, but la Madeleine (long-i) or la Madeleine is coming to

town. They've been poking around for several years and finally signed a lease at Century Square. Hopefully by the time they open I'll figure out how to pronounce it correctly. [laughs]

Jay Socol: That's a big announcement though.

Natalie Ruiz: It is big. It is big. I know a lot of our residents have asked me for a la Madeleine before, and it's a very popular chain that we're excited about.

Jay Socol: So again, this phase will be sort of in the grassy area that is nearer the roadway of University Drive?

Natalie Ruiz: Right, near to University Drive between the ER — the urgent care — and Zoe's.

Jay Socol: How many pad sites are even available in that strip?

Natalie Ruiz: There's two pad sites that are available. So there'll be two strips that will be in there that'll have multi-tenant users. They're also talking to a Velvet Taco that has signed a lease. More of a trendy taco place that's going to open their doors in phase two as well as la Madeleine.

Jay Socol: So is Velvet Taco in other markets in Texas already?

Natalie Ruiz: Yes. Yes, it's a chain. And then there's a couple of other users that haven't quite signed just yet, but there's a lot of interest over there as well. So hopefully we'll make some more announcements later on this fall.

Jay Socol: Again, did I hear you say that the intent is to have those two at least open by a fall 2020?

Natalie Ruiz: That's the plan.

Jay Socol: Wow.

Natalie Ruiz: That's the plan.

Jay Socol: Alright. Keep University Drive completely open for me, okay? I don't want any of this outside lane closure for construction.

Natalie Ruiz: Right, exactly. Especially if there's a 12-inch waterline is blown. We'd like to call that a water feature.

Jay Socol: Like that happens...

Natalie Ruiz: It's in July.

Jay Socol: Okay, so that's great. Anything else that we can talk about at Century Square?

Natalie Ruiz: Not really at Century Square. They have had a few openings recently. The Grass Stains Boutique just opened and then Poke Works has announced that they're going in there as well — a new restaurant.

Jay Socol: Poke Works. Alright.

Natalie Ruiz: Poke Works, yeah. But also on University Drive you see Burger Mojo a little further east up University Drive closer to Embassy Suites.

Jay Socol: They're making progress.

Natalie Ruiz: They're making progress. The framing's up. They're doing a great job. That's currently under construction. And then a little bit further east at Chimney Hill where The Republic and Primrose Path is located, it was announced a while back that Drury Inn had a contract on the property for a new hotel. That has since closed and they are going to move forward with the hotel on that property.

Jay Socol: Good.

Natalie Ruiz: Now, a lot of the dirt work that you see out there currently is the Starbucks drive-thru that's under construction. We've also seen plans for a new commercial building about 10,000 square feet. It'll be a multi-tenant building. They have a couple of letters of interest, but nothing...no leases just yet, but a lot of interest from, again, more restaurants on University Drive.

Jay Socol: About Drury Inn, do you know any of the characteristics of what that structure is going to look like?

Natalie Ruiz: I know it's a four-story building, at least the schematics that we saw initially and it was around 170 rooms, somewhere around that ballpark. Don't quote me on that. But early on we were looking at some of the schematics. That's what they were looking at that location.

Jay Socol: Okay, that's good for Chimney Hill. Anything else in that general area?

Natalie Ruiz: I think that's all I've got for that particular area.

Jay Socol: Okay, then let's move down the road a little bit because you've told me a couple times in recent weeks about some changes in the old Dickey's Barbecue place over in front of the old Gander Mountain?

Natalie Ruiz: Right, in front of At Home.

Jay Socol: Yeah.

Natalie Ruiz: The Dickey's Barbecue that's located there recently closed, and the group that has Mas Fajitas out of Caldwell and Taylor in the Round Rock area purchased

that building. So soon they'll be looking at making some renovations to the building to have a new Mexican restaurant there, Mas Fajitas.

Jay Socol: So tell me how important is that, because it's sort of on its own from a restaurant standpoint, but how important is it to get that building filled up?

Natalie Ruiz: It's extremely important. At least when I drive by on Highway 6, at one time you'll remember we had the old Academy that had closed, we had Gander Mountain that was closed and you had Dickey's. So all of a sudden you get this stigma of, "Okay, what's going on over there? What's happening?" And when you show people those locations, their first thing, "Well, what happened across the street? What happened to Dickey's?"

And so once At Home moved in and got the lights back on over there and get some folks coming in and out, now that Dickey's is back up and running, to me it's more of an appearance issue as you're driving on Highway 6, one of our main arteries in the community and having active retail and restaurant activity.

Jay Socol: Any timeline for them? Do you know?

Natalie Ruiz: I don't have a timeline for them just yet. They're just closed just last month.

Jay Socol: Still good news.

Natalie Ruiz: Yeah, great news.

Jay Socol: Okay. We can go down the highway a little bit heading south because there's always something happening at CapRock and Tower Point. What's new over there?

Natalie Ruiz: Well, Cooper's BBQ is under construction about halfway down. They're moving very quickly. In fact, we were watching videos of them flying in with a helicopter, their smokers, their actual pits that they put into the building, had to drop them in with a helicopter. For nerdy planning geeks like me, it was a pretty exciting.

But yeah, going down to CapRock and Tower Point, we had the groundbreaking for Walk-Ons recently. I drove by there today. They've got framing up. They're moving along really quickly. I'm excited about them coming to our community. Tad's next to the Lowe's is under construction. They're working hard over there. Pie in the Sky just opened.

Jay Socol: I've heard about that.

Natalie Ruiz: The old Bush's Chicken. And then over at CapRock we've had a recent announcement, there's a new office building and they're going to have some restaurants on the bottom floor, one of which is Costa Vida. It's a fresh Mexican

concept that is a chain. That'll be located as part of that. All the King's Men will have a location at the CapRock area as well from downtown Bryan, they'll have a location here in College Station. And then Marble Slab and Great American Cookie Company recently opened for all the sugar junkies.

Jay Socol: That's great. That's a lot of good stuff. Now, we talked to you one time about ... was it a Spice World? Is that still ... because you and I saw a sign over there. Is that sign still up? Do you know anything about that you had?

Natalie Ruiz: I don't know. We need to go drive back out there and check it out. I know that at that time we reached out to them and they were working on a site plan. But to be honest with you, I don't know that I've seen it.

Jay Socol: Okay, just curious.

Natalie Ruiz: We'll have to do a road trip.

Jay Socol: So back to the office thing. It seems like at some point you had told me that we don't necessarily have enough good quality office space available, and so I assume that adding this kind of space is to our benefit.

Natalie Ruiz: Absolutely. When businesses are looking at coming to College Station or expanding, the first question is, "Okay, where are we going to locate physically, and then where's my family going to live?" Well, we have a ton of residents in south College Station that have offices or would like to have an office closer to where they live. So the office market in south College Station I think is something that's pretty hot right now.

Jay Socol: Oh, that's great.

Natalie Ruiz: Yeah.

Jay Socol: When you get some of that stuff on the ground does that encourage or invite others to do the same thing? Do you expect to see more office space evolve in that part of the city?

Natalie Ruiz: I do, and part of that is because we also have our two business centers at that location; the existing College Station Business Center, and then the new Midtown Business Center that will open as part of that, that will offer places for folks to work ... new offices.

Jay Socol: So while you're talking about business parks, do you want to talk about a recent transaction that's happened over at the College Station Business Park?

Natalie Ruiz: Yeah, the College Station Business Park, there's approximately 35 acres that's left, so a 30-acre tract and a five-acre tract. The 30-acre tract we've had for about 20 years and have offered it up in different deals. Cognizant at one time

was looking for an expansion and that ended up not working out. So what we worked with council on was carving that property up into smaller pieces, five- to seven-acre tracts and market those to businesses looking to come to town.

So we just took a contract last night to city council for seven acres of that 30 that a new FedEx ground facility will be constructed there in our business park, right off of Highway 6. They're moving their location from Longmire. They've outgrown that location. This is going to be almost triple the size of that facility, and the amount of trucks that can come in and out, and serve south College Station. So we're excited about.

Jay Socol: So great, we can keep that in town.

Natalie Ruiz: We can keep it in town, and we're selling a piece of property ... having another national name in our business park in terms of FedEx.

Jay Socol: Nice work. You're taking credit for that, correct?

Natalie Ruiz: If it goes well, yes. *When* it goes well.

Jay Socol: So while we're talking business parks, any kind of update that we need to know about Midtown?

Natalie Ruiz: We're working on the marketing currently for that. Now, the tract along Highway 6 is more of a retail/destination type/restaurant facility that we're looking to partner with someone on developing that more comprehensively because it's such a large piece. We do have tracts available, designated as more light industrial office on Lakeway that are in the 10-to-15 acre range that we're currently putting on the market for new businesses, new corporate headquarters, light manufacturing facilities that would like to expand or locate in College Station.

Jay Socol: Okay. Anything else you want to hit before we jump to an email that we got?

Natalie Ruiz: I don't think so.

Jay Socol: Okay. So our one listener...

Natalie Ruiz: Thank you by the way.

Jay Socol: ... emailed us a few weeks ago and we just haven't been able to sit down since then to record. It was a very well thought out email. It's printed, it's four pages and it's I think 15 paragraphs. And so I'm not going to read the whole thing obviously. But you and I talked about it and, wow, it was so nice for somebody to put this much thought and effort into it.

Natalie Ruiz: Absolutely.

Jay Socol: This is from somebody who has lived here in this community almost nonstop since 1985, attended Texas A&M and Blinn College, and even Sam Houston at various times. And there were a lot of points made in here and the person has loved this community, has had some concern with how much we have grown. And people who've lived here a long time share that sentiment.

Natalie Ruiz: Right.

Jay Socol: This individual's not alone. But there's one little sentence in here that I will read and then get you to talk about it. He writes that ... Let me see. Let me see. "While it's always exciting for some new business or chain restaurant to open its doors here, I believe there needs to be some consideration given to the cost of constant expansion. And while I respect the jobs that you both do and the care with which you approach your work, I have to say that I think you may be losing sight of the forest for the thrill of planting new trees."

So you kind of get the sentiment and, again, he's certainly not alone in that regard, but you want to talk about that a little bit?

Natalie Ruiz: I come from a planning background, so I spent a lot of time in planning and development and zoning and looking at land use, and I agree with what he's saying. I think there are times where we lose sight of the forest for the trees. You get focused in on some very specific projects and uses and you may lose sight of the bigger picture. I disagree from the standpoint that I think what he's trying to convey is more of a growing pains as a city, right?

There's so many folks that are moving to Texas in general and in College Station. We've reached the point in our population just over 120,000, that if you look at our rate of growth over the last five years, we're adding about 4,000 new residents every single year. So we're growing at a much faster pace and we're facing the growing pains just like a lot of other Texas cities are facing. How do you deal with traffic? How do you deal with housing an additional 4,000 folks per year because they're not all students? There's families that are moving in. So how do you handle it? I think it's bigger than just getting excited about a new business.

Also I want to share that from an economic development standpoint, the retail side of things is a small part of what we do, but it's what folks ask us about the most. We go out and do a ton of recruitment. I feel passionate about from an economic development standpoint that if you want to have a positive impact on the community, it's really from a job's standpoint. Getting jobs in here, folks that are making well above the county wage to try to bring everyone up to an acceptable level to where they can afford to buy a home, to have disposable income and even open new businesses in our community.

So you and I we'll rah-rah about new businesses, and it is exciting those new businesses coming to town, but they are in areas that have been designated as

areas that are appropriate for new businesses, whether it's manufacturing, commercial, restaurant.

One of the things he mentions in his email that I totally agree with is quality of life, and I think we all define that in different ways. From a job standpoint when you're recruiting a company to come to town or let's say we're recruiting a professor of practice over at Texas A&M, or one of our five-star research folks that we're reaching out to, we also have to recruit -- there's a trailing spouse or a family. One of the things that we hear all the time as when we're riding around is, "Well, where are my areas that I like to shop or eat," based on their personal preferences.

We heard that a lot when Century Square was being developed through the university was that we needed a place that was a little bit different, that was more for families and more for young professionals that want to stay here and be close to the university and have a different experience.

So I agree with what he's saying from the growth perspective and overall growth of our community, but we get really excited about the la Madeleines and Velvet Tacos and the Costcos of the world, just personally, but also we're planning those in areas where it's appropriate for commercial uses. If that makes sense.

Jay Socol:

Then talk about how you spend a lot of your time and planning, because I know in the coming months you're not necessarily focused on some of the retail stuff. You're out there looking at a much different kind of job scenario.

Natalie Ruiz:

Right. Right. We have a program that we call Target Industries where we're looking at businesses that want to expand and locate here in College Station, and in particular industries where that makes sense. That may have a partnership with the university, maybe in the energy sector, maybe in the financial sector, things that makes sense here in College Station.

So the next five months we have a really aggressive outreach program. It just so happened that there's a couple of site selectors conferences that we attend on a regular basis to meet with site selectors that are looking for locations to land in Texas and elsewhere. Two of the biggest organizations actually have their conferences in Texas this year. So we've got five big events that are going on between now and the end of the year where we're actually meeting with site selectors that are looking for small-to-medium-size projects, looking at companies that are wanting to move to our location that bring jobs with them as well.

So that's where we really spend a ton of our time in terms of recruiting and reaching out to site selectors and directly to corporations that would make sense here. So yeah, we spend a ton of our time doing that.

And I talk about a team a lot. I talk about what we do from a department standpoint. We're a department of two, so I just want to be clear that we're out there working hard, but we're not spending as much time I think as the gentleman had said in his email. It seems like we spend a ton of time on retail. That's just the fun stuff. So we talk about it a lot more.

Jay Socol: Right. Right. And I know this stuff is important to our citizens because it showed up in our citizen survey that people want good quality jobs coming here.

Natalie Ruiz: That's right.

Jay Socol: It's not just, I'd like some more places to shop. They actually want some good employment options.

Natalie Ruiz: Right. And I think it all plays into that quality of life and whatever that means to you personally or your family, jobs is at the top of it.

Jay Socol: So if we happen to pick up another listener along the way and you would like to fire a question or a comment at us, please do. You can email me at jsocol@cstx.gov. That's the letter J, S-O-C-O-L @ cstx.gov. And maybe we'll address your question or comment on a future episode. Did we hit everything? Did we do okay?

Natalie Ruiz: I think so.

Jay Socol: Yeah, we're all right?

Natalie Ruiz: Yeah. We always just wing these, so it's always fun.

Jay Socol: Yeah, and this is just rehearsal anyway. We're not really recording.

Natalie Ruiz: Right, we're not recording.

Jay Socol: Okay, that'll do it for this time. And want to remind folks that we are available on Apple Podcast, Google Play, Spotify, Stitcher, Podbean, and YouTube. So we encourage you whatever way you prefer, subscribe, rate, review, recommend, and we really appreciate it if you've invested some time to listen to the soothing sounds and the smart insight from Natalie Ruiz.

So Natalie, thanks a lot.

Natalie Ruiz: Thank you.

Jay Socol: [different recording and audio quality, piggy-backed to the end of the show] Hey, podcast listeners, we messed up. Okay, we left something out. As soon as we finished recording the other day, Natalie let me know that she forgot to mention something pretty important, something you'd be interested in. So

another business coming to town fairly soon is called Another Broken Egg Cafe. Some of you may know about it, it's in other markets, obviously, but that is coming to Jones Crossing. I asked her when construction would begin, when it's set to be completed. We don't know those details yet, but wanted to make sure you knew Another Broken Egg Cafe is coming to Jones Crossing. That's exciting. Now you know. And thanks again for listening.