

Michael Eure Show Transcript

Special Guest Marquis Crews

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EURE: Hello this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to The Michael Eure Show featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube Channel.

EURE: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Michael Eure show. Today we're really happy we have Mr. Marquis Crews from the Golden LEAF Foundation. But before we get to Marquis, we're gonna have our student host today introduce herself and tell a little bit about her. And then we're gonna have our student money management coordinator tell a little bit about what she does. Go right ahead.

IBETO: Hi, hello, my name is Chisom Ibeto. I'm currently a student at Wake Tech, and I'm studying nursing, and I'm hoping to transfer to a nursing school. And I've been at Wake Tech for a year and a half, and I hope you guys enjoy this lecture.

PARSONS: Hi my name is LaTonya Parsons, and I am the student money management coordinator. And I just wanna start by saying happy financial literacy month. April is the month for national for national financial literacy. So I hope you're somewhere learning about how to manage your finances. And that's exactly what my role entails here in Wake Tech. I'll be working with students to get them to where they wanna be financially through one on one counseling sessions. Classroom presentations as well as workshops. So I look forward to working with the students here at Wake Tech.

EURE: And for any of you online that have any questions, feel free to ask. So now, Mr. Cruz. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

CRUZ: All right, my name is Marquis Cruz. I am from Henderson, North Carolina, and that's in Vance County, about an hour north of here in Raleigh. I come from a big family, and most or all of my family are from the area, so it's a really, really tight-knit community. And coming from there, in high school, I was pretty active. Actually, in all grades, I was pretty active. So in high school, I lettered in four sports. I was in the marching band; I was on the step team. So I was always very engaged in the school and the community. And then when I went off to college, I continued to do similar things and those things have kinda helped me out and get to where I am. So that's pretty much who I am, a country boy from North Carolina.

IBETO: Okay, you received your undergraduate degree from Fayetteville State University. And your masters in public administration from North Carolina Central University. Do you think the institution prepared you to succeed in your career?

CRUZ: Yes, both institutions have provided me with experiences and just a base level of knowledge, this that have really helped me be productive in my career. I chose those schools because they were smaller, had opportunities to actually get to know my professors. And I developed great relationships with my classmates. So those schools, both programs, the business program at Fayetteville State really gave me a base of how to kinda navigate. And I graduated right after 9/11. And then, when I was growing up in my twenties, we had the economic recession. So having, having just the base level of understanding how the economy works really helped me navigate through that. At North Carolina Central we had a lot of great practitioners as professors in their program. So I gained a lot of functional knowledge in that program. So the public administration department at North Carolina Central, that's been a great asset to me as a person.

PARSONS: So you have a wide range of experience in the workplace. But first can we talk a little bit about your role at North Carolina Department of Commerce, the Rural Economic Development Division?

CRUZ: Okay, well, as my role at Commerce, when I was with the Rural Economic Development Division that was my second stint at commerce. I started my first stint at commerce was as a temporary receptionist. And from that role I wound up having an opportunity to apply and get the job at North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. And then from the Rural Center transitioned back to Commerce, and then wound up at Golden LEAF. But at the Department of Commerce, my first stint, I worked in the CDBG department where I processed payment requests. And the CDBG program, they did a lot of community assistance to help with housing and infrastructure projects. So my job, the first stint was helping the communities manage their payments and do the proper paperwork, so that they can get paid. My second stint at commerce was come in front of the rule center. And when I came back there were a lot of programs and funds that transitioned from the Rural Center to the Department of Commerce. So my second stint at commerce, i was doing my projects that I had initially at the Rural Center, which were water sewer infrastructure projects and some community development projects. Then I wound up picking on a couple of other programs and helping usher them into the process of transitioning from the Rural Center to commerce. And it was very interesting when you work a certain set of programs for a few years and then you get thrust into a position to work and manage about three or four other different programs that were ran by people that you knew. But you didn't, I wasn't very familiar with them at first. So it was a real crash course on learning policy and learning and enacting administration and trying to usher those new programs for me into the new processes that were being set in place in commerce at the time.

PARSONS: So what can you tell us about your current organization and your role?

CUZ: My current organization, I am at the Golden LEAF Foundation. The Golden LEAF Foundation is a perpetual foundation that was founded, we're actually celebrating our twentieth anniversary this year. We were founded from the Tobacco

Master settlement back in the late '90s when the states sued the tobacco companies. And the states were granted billions of dollars, and it was split up between the states. The leaders in North Carolina, they took a different approach. And they set aside a portion of the funds to establish a foundation that would go about and help transition, transition tobacco dependent communities from being tobacco dependent. Help transition them. And the LEAF in Golden LEAF stands for Long-term Economic Advancement Foundation. At Golden LEAF I worked economic development projects. I mainly do water and sewer projects, but I also do some healthcare And agriculture projects as well. And our main thing is just really trying to make investments to really help communities take their economies to the next level.

EURE: Golden LEAF is a major nonprofit organization. How are some ways that you feel nonprofit operates similarly to for profits and what are the ways that they're different in your opinion?

CRUZ: I would say the way we function that are similar to businesses is just the level of decision making. We don't like to throw money away. We're really conscious of the investments that we make. I guess the difference between us and a business, a for-profit business, would be our look is, do we set that community up for success in the future rather than looking for a short term profit. So our main thing is really, making investments that are gonna improve lives over a long term. And we don't have to make quick decisions for quick profits.

IBETO: Okay. What are some of the most challenging tasks you do as you move about the various rural communities you serve?

CRUZ: I would say one of the most challenging tasks I have is just trying to help the people figure out how I can help them the best. Because when you're dealing with a lot of rural communities, sometimes they don't know exactly what they need at the moment. So they may have an idea but that idea may not fit exactly what we can do. So you have to really take the time to talk to them. Talk to them, explain to them what we do and what we can do and what we can't do. But develop a relationship with them enough to where they really explain the why of why they want to do that. And then once you kinda get an idea of what their intentions are and what they're looking to accomplish then you can either point them to different avenues within our organization or help assist them get to other avenues of other organizations that may be able to help them out. So that's one of the most challenging things is to be patient with the communities and just take your time get to know them, let them get to know you so that you can provide a higher level of customer service. Because I mean we're dealing with people, it's not a widgets kind of thing. And I treat it as if lives are at stake, when we make a good grant it can help. It can help people, help a generation, they can literally help a generation of people so, we really take each grant seriously.

IBETO: Now I understand that Global Leaf has scholarships, are these available for two year and four-year college students and finally, how do individuals apply to scholarships?

CRUZ: Yes, we do have a very robust scholarship program, and it's offered through the college foundation, I can't remember the exact thing. But the college foundation that has all of those scholarships, I can't remember the exact name of it. But we do offer four-year scholarships for students coming from rural communities. And then they also have a community college transfer program for students who are coming out of a community college going into finishing up at a four-year school.

PARSONS: So do you work with other program officers or other individuals at the agency of special projects?

CRUZ: We do have some special projects one of our, I guess, one of our stakeholders. It's a special project as in it's not a standard thing, but it's a recurring thing. This is our community based grant making initiative, and it's a process to where we really tried to allow communities to pick and choose the projects that they want, and that they think is gonna service their communities. Other than our standard grant programs where you just apply, and we judge it off of the merits. The community based grant program is a set amount of funds for our region, and we do it by economic region. So we'll have a pot of funds, it'll encompass however many counties in that region. And then from those, the county, each county will be allowed I think, two applications, and then we will go through and measure, and it's very competitive. So we pick the best projects from that region to fund. And we're on our third iteration of that program. And each time we do a lot of, I guess, soul searching, honestly. Trying to figure out what, what happened that was good, what things can we improve so that the next go-around we can really try to be more effective than our grant-making so that we can really get good projects and fund good projects. And a lot of that entails helping communities understand what good projects, from our view, look like. And then helping them get to the point where they can present better applications.

EURE: Can you give a specific project? And economic development that you work with that comes to top of your mind, that's significant?

CRUZ: Well, I will say the project down at Fayetteville, Fayetteville Tech, They have a collision repair program that we help fund, and we have a board meeting yesterday, and they actually did a tour of it. And this was one of my first grants, and I think my first education grant. But it's a partnership with Fayetteville Tech, Golden Leaf, and then a lot of the collision repair industry. And they built a facility where they train the students. In collision auto repair. But they have a great setup, as far as getting the suitors in and training them. And Fayetteville's an interesting environment because you have a lot of military and a lot of adults coming out of the military. So you have people who, they're really hands on, so that type of industry, they can get a lot of good people there. But the way they have the program structured, as the

students go through, the industry is very involved. So as the students go through the program, they can literally get hired before they finish the program. And the industry, since industry is involved, and the industry, they have a real good say-so in the curriculum. If they see somebody that shows promise they will snatch them up and the people finished the program with a job and I think that's a great big program. Just something to think of top of my head but, is very encouraging when you're in school and you're going through a program and you literally are right face to face with your potential employers and it keeps you focused, and it's encouraging to know that I am not wasting my time.

EURE: Thank you for that. And I do wanna give a plug that Tech is getting a collision program on this campus.

CRUZ: Great, it's a booming industry. And I really love the community college system here in North Carolina. Because they're forward thinking on helping people pick up skills that help them get employed. So I really, really do support the community college system and we do a gold leaf as well.

IBETO: Okay, so are they similar organizations in other states or is the Golden LEAF foundation you need to know?

CRUZ: It's tough the same and there are other foundations in other states that do similar kinda work. But I think with Golden LEAF, we're unique as far as the way we were founded, pretty much founded specifically to help formerly tobacco dependent communities. So I think we're unique in that aspect, and I think that allows us to just really take into account what we're doing. Because we're not just trying to make grants and trying to get publicity but really trying to help transform and change the prospects of a whole generation of people.

EURE: And we're getting ready to getting some other areas. But before we do that, can you give the audience contact information if they want to reach you for the Golden Leaf Foundation we have a website or?

CRUZ: Yes, you can contact us at the Golden Leaf Foundation it's a goldenleaf.org. And you can check out our website it has our contact information and our number; I can't remember it off the top of my head. But if go to our website you can pull that up, just call the receptionist, ask for Marquis and I'll be glad to help anybody with any questions you might have with. I've been involved in economic development or anything that Golden Leaf may come.

PARSONS: Did you involve yourself in leadership and community service activities while you were in school at college?

CRUZ: Yes, that was something I fell into actually. When I started at Fayetteville State, I started in the band. So I'm a proud alumni, member of the marching Bronco Express. I marched in the band for my first two years, then my junior year I decided

not to be in the band. I wanted to get a job, I bought a car and trying to grow up too fast. But there were people in the students activities office that saw, I guess, potential in me, and they talked me into running for Mr. Homecoming in my junior year. So I wind up running and winning Mr. Homecoming. But I'll go in person, but I'm kind of a private person. So doing public things like that wasn't my forte. But if I get encouraged enough, sometimes I get the courage to do it. So after I won Mr. Homecoming my junior year, I was talked into running for Student Government. And I bit the bait, I ran and I won. So my senior year I was the Treasurer of Student Government Affairs of the State. And in that position, I was exposed to so many new avenues and so many different parts of business because I had to manage a budget. I'd never done that, I heard of it, you took classes on it, but then actually managing a budget. At the time it was the largest budget of a student government. And we were trying to figure out, well, one, I didn't want to do anything wrong with the money. But I learned that when it comes to budgeting, sometimes I guess in the public, you have to spend the money so that they can get the same amount of money the next year. So we're trying to figure out creative and good ways to spend the money. So we created a grant program for student activities of student organizations, so they can come and request funds, and we can help them out and do programs.

CRUZ: We established the speakers series, so that of course, establish a budget for speakers, so we can bring in a couple of speakers. And it was very interesting, and then also just going through the meetings, sharing the information with the student body. I was able to go to, what is it, the association of the student government. So we had regular meetings with all of the student government leaders of all of the UNC system. And then there was another grouping of all the student government leaders of all the HBCU's. And I've learned a lot in that position about business and being a treasurer, but then also networking with all the different officers from the different schools. That was a very eye opening experience for me and really help does come back the campus and share that information. Share the insight because we might have a gripe on our campus. But when you talk to somebody on another campus who has the symbol of gripe and they've actually done something about it, it helps you see that you can move forward and help make changes. And our administration, we helped spur on some changes at the university that the students now are benefiting from. As far as the food services, getting their ID cards that were more, I guess more functional. Purposefully working to improve student life while we're there. So that was really an important phase in my life. I learned a lot. Just by not being a student but being part of the leadership of the student body, not just floating around campus. But really thinking about how can I make this better for everybody else?

EURE: Do you currently find yourself involved in mentoring or providing outreach to the community? If so, what are some of the organization or volunteer programs that you're involved with.

CRUZ: Okay, well one, I'm a member of an organization called Groove Phi Groove Social Fellowship Incorporated. I joined that while I was at Fayetteville State. And

currently I'm the Regional Director. And I try to spend as much time as I can talking with our younger members, trying to help them achieve the goals that they're trying to achieve. I think the beauty of Groove and the reason why I joined it was they really just wanted you to be who you are and they supported you in that. And I liked that and that really help me grow into who I am. So I really, really purposefully try to still the same value into a lot of the young man that I meet and that I build relationships with. I'm also a part of an organization called Black Gerazulu it's a community organization based out of here in the triangle. That our goal is to protect the arts, so we try to encourage our young people in the arts and try to support the arts. It's related to hip hop as far as the youth, and I guess a common thing with a lot of us in our tastes. But we really span all avenues of the arts. And me not being an artist, I guess I'm more of a patron of the arts, and I really joined that organization because I liked the fact that they were really cool people. They were really smart. And they had great ideas and aspirations of what they wanted to do in the community. And I thought that my aspirations and what I wanted to do a lot of what they were trying to do, so I wanted to be a part of that team and we're a young organization. They were founded in 2011, so we're still in young organization and is still growing. But from the members that we have and the activities that we're implementing, I think that we're really have opportunity to make some moves and make some waves here and triangle and across the nation as far as spreading the arts in a positive way and helping the youth really grow and just be free to be who they are. And then finally, a friend of mine, a friend Anthony Barnes and myself, we're both from Henderson, North Carolina.

CRUZ: We started a nonprofit called Reach One, Teach One and what we're trying to do and this is new, we just started last year. What we're trying to do is provide exposure to different things for youth from our home county in Vance County, I think it's North Carolina. Last year, I think we did three major activities. When the Black Panther movie came out, we got a movie theater and brought a bunch of kids in, so that they could go and watch the movie. And had a speaker come in and speak to them afterwards, and give them a real good motivational speech. In the summer, we got a busload of kids and took them up to the African American History and Culture Museum in DC and gave them a tour of that museum. That was fun. It was a really good to see a lot of those kids go to DC for the first time and be able to experience so much history and so much, to be honest, for the first time in here in a conversation there and listen to the expectations on the way there and then. Following up with them on the way back and just kind of get in their perception of what they saw. That was really interesting and then we did another event where we had a lunch for some young men and had a, I think a slate of three speakers just give them some different stories just of different paths in life. Because, again, when you're in a smaller community, you really live within the folks that you're around. I mean, of course, we have the internet now. But even the kids know a lot of stuff on the internet, Facebook or whatever, a lot of that is fake. What's real to them is the people that are in their Facebook and the things they see people do on a day-to-day basis. So we try to provide an option. Well, try to provide speakers that can give them a couple of different life paths. And just to really let them know that as long as

you keep trying, as long as you keep pushing, as long as you try to do good for yourself and work hard, you'll succeed, and I think the young men really perceived that. So that's how I kind of do in the community. I really try to just keep pushing. I mean, just doing something. I don't like to talk about things a lot. I don't like to talk a lot, but I will break my leg doing stuff for people.

EURE: Well, you answered a lot of questions I had when you did that. Well, we're winding down a little bit. So I'm gonna have my co-host ask you any questions they might, because we only have a few minutes left.

PARSONS: Okay, so-

EURE: Anything you want.

PARSONS: Out of all the experiences that you had whether it was undergrad, your grad program or the different organizations he worked for, what was the most impactful thing that's happened, that led you to where you are today?

EURE: Most impactful thing led me to where I am today. That's a good question, wow.

EURE: Do you think going to HBCU helped you or has it impacted you?

CRUZ: No, that's exactly where I was going. Honestly, the most impactful thing for me was the environments that I was fortunate to come out of coming from Henderson in Southern Vance High School, I had a phenomenal counseling. She really pushed us and she didn't allow us to take less. I mean, she really pushed us to do more bag, great coaches. My wrestling coach, Coach Cokely back in high school. He made my schedules. He set me up to take as many difficult classes as I could get in and would laugh at me, because he knew I had to pass them, because he knew my parents. So for me, it's not really an experience that changed me. I'm fortunate, because I was around great people that saw something in me and they pushed me and they wouldn't let me sell for less. I've been going to HBCU, I set myself up to be in that same position that I came out of from home, and hospital, and college to where. At first, you're just a person. But after you've go around and after you interact, people see something in you. They see that you have a good heart and good spirit and they're whispering ear, a little idea here or suggest there. And then if they see you slacking, they'll come by. And at first, they'll pat you in the butt and tell you to go. They might come by and dropkick you upside the head and tell you to keep pushing forward, but they understood you and you understood them and it meant something when they made those comments. And if you let them down or the thought of letting them down would motivate you to keep trying to go. So I've been fortunate in my life to be around great people and that's been my biggest thing to keep pushing, and that's what I wanna provide to other people. I wanna pay that forward. I wanna be the good person for somebody else. I wanna be the person that gives somebody that piece of advice that helps them out, because I

really benefited from that. More than any class, I've been fortunate enough to be around great people.

EURE: Well, we have run out of time and I think that you've been very interesting and I would've asked you to give your contact information. But I would say to the audience, go back to YouTube and you can find it. And I think people are participating and they talk about the African American culture celebration of which you are on the plan for work, but you're also the stage staircase host.

CRUZ: Yes.

EURE: So you've got a lot going on, so we can talk then about anything and help for our students. If you're interested in a career in nonprofit organizations, get in touch with this man and we're gonna try to bring him back. So can we give him a great round of applause.

CRUZ: Thank you.