

Talk CNY_S1E22_Transcript

Andrew Fish 0:06

Welcome to CenterState CEO's semi monthly podcast, Talk CNY, presented by NBT Bank.

Kate Hammer 0:11

On Talk CNY, you get an inside look at the people, projects and planning moving Central New York forward.

Andrew Fish 0:17

I'm Andrew Fish, Senior Vice President of Member and Business Experience at CenterState CEO, Central New York's leading business leadership and economic development organization.

Kate Hammer 0:26

And I'm Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. We are your hosts for Talk CNY. Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for new episodes every other Wednesday.

Alan Rottenberg 0:39

So we set out to really face the challenge of finding young people graduating their first career job, and what we found out was we were also helping the community attract and retain vital talent for their future.

Donna Gillespie 0:51

An interesting aspect of the program is that it keeps young professionals in the community which then builds a dynamic that future graduates will see themselves because there is this young professional network that that they can envision a life in our community. So that's been a big win for Kingston.

Andrew Fish 1:10

We've talked on our show before about how we're working to upskill local talent and attract talent to the region. On this episode, we will talk about how we as a community can retain talent.

Kate Hammer 1:19

Many people may not realize that this region is a major producer of college educated graduates. There are approximately 140,000 students who attend college here every year. In fact, one in every 10 residents of CNY is a college student. However, most of them leave after graduation.

Andrew Fish 1:37

One approach to address this is the Career Apprenticeship Initiative developed in Canada by our guests, Alan Rottenberg, founder of the Canadian career apprenticeship initiative. And Donna Gillespie, Chief Executive Officer of the Kingston Economic Development Corporation. Welcome Alan and Donna, really great to have you both here today.

Alan Rottenberg 1:56

Great to be here. Delighted to be here. Great.

Donna Gillespie 1:58

Thank you.

Andrew Fish 1:59

Yeah.

Kate Hammer 2:00

Both of your organizations are new to us, but have great impact here. So, could you both tell us a little bit about yourselves and your organizations.

Alan Rottenberg 2:08

I'm Alan Rottenberg. And I'm the founder of the Canadian Career Apprenticeship Initiative, which is established in 2018. And now is running in seven cities across Canada, with our universities, and are arriving now in Syracuse, which is exciting us very much.

Kate Hammer 2:25

Oh, wonderful.

Andrew Fish 2:26

Absolutely.

Donna Gillespie 2:27

And I'm Donna Gillespie, I'm with the Kingston Economic Development Corporation in Kingston, Ontario. And we were fortunate to be the first Canadian city to pilot the apprenticeship initiative in Canada.

Kate Hammer 2:39

So cool. Yeah.

Andrew Fish 2:40

So talk to us a little bit about the career apprenticeship initiative, Allen, and how does it work? Who gets the focus? What's the outcomes?

Alan Rottenberg 2:48

So we founded it based on an observation that there were a whole host of young, talented kids who are coming out of University of Arts and Humanities, and were failing to get their first career job. And this was a tragic and sad thing to observe, because their parents themselves, all had arrived at this beautiful moment, you got your out of school, go live your life, and they end up back in the basement of their parents house without a job or they'd have a job just didn't seem right. And so I propose the concept to folks in Kingston and Queen's University and we launched in 2018. And the first impact is we launch young graduates' careers, right when it's

supposed to happen when they graduate the screen. The second thing that we found out was the towns and cities where we are, and this will apply absolutely to Syracuse as well have a tremendous need to hang on to those graduates because they're short of talent. So attracting and retaining talent turned out to be as important to this program as the launching of the kids. And that's how it's happened.

Andrew Fish 3:47

We can definitely attest to that. It's an important thing.

Kate Hammer 3:50

Especially now, right? So how many students are involved in this program? Why Syracuse and what makes this program unique.

Donna Gillespie 3:58

So in Kingston, Ontario, we are successful in having five cohorts under our belt, and we've been able to connect over 50 new graduates with meaningful first careers from the community. So that is significant. And we have at Kingston, a long standing partnership with Syracuse and the Center for Economic Opportunity. And our communities are very similar in terms of demographics, and population makeup and a large pool of talented young people who tend unfortunately to leave rather than to stay in our communities. So I was able to introduce Alan to the Center for Economic Opportunity to look at piloting the apprenticeship initiative in Syracuse. So it's exciting because this will be the very first American city to take part.

Andrew Fish 4:41

That's great. So in terms of the unique aspect of this program, there is a real matchmaking that kind of goes on in this process, right? Can you can you talk to us a little bit about what that looks like and, and you know, kind of, I mean, a lot of people talk about, you know, internships, apprenticeships and how that works. But what's kind of the without giving away too much if you can't, if you if you don't want to, but-

Kate Hammer 5:01

Trade secret!

Andrew Fish 5:03

-behind this apprenticeship program.

Alan Rottenberg 5:06

In fact, the terms of trade secrets, this is a model that we believe can be applied to other partnerships and other target audience. We're targeted arts and humanities graduate, we'd love for people to say, hey, this model works, we can use it for other groups that are coming out of university or other circumstances. So anything we do is transparent. Everything's available to everybody. Because the more young people get in there and launch their lives, the better and really a fundamentally is a partnership between the city through their economic development group, and the key, higher education institutions. And they both have key roles, one has to

attract and explain the program to the employers and say, Here's a young graduate doesn't have two years experience, like you always ask for, take that off the resume, please, let's have this young person give them a chance. The apprenticeship is funded. So to encourage the employer to say, Well, okay, I'll take this young person will invest in them. And I'll get a little compensation to for that, to mitigate that the extra cost. On the other side, the university has to not only make awareness of the possibilities, but prepare the kids. So they do well in the interview process, because it is a competition, only one person gets hired by each company. So after the interview process, there is a matching where each graduating student ranks the employers in terms of who they wish to be hired by. And the same thing for the employer side, and then we try to match, you know, top versus top to get as many matches as possible. So we have the most success going forward. Because success isn't getting hired, although it's a big moment, successes a year from now, they're still there, and they're going on to a career.

Andrew Fish 6:40

That's great. And you know, you mentioned the partnerships with the with the schools and universities, I know that here in our region, Syracuse University, Lemoyne College and SUNY Oswego are all stepping up and being a part of this process and looking at launching that, and this is the first community in the US that's launching this partnership. So we're, we're really grateful for that the longstanding partnership, obviously with with Kingston, and the economic development team there and, and CenterState CEO, and, and now this opportunity is great. So we're really, really grateful for that. What lessons have you learned there through the first five cohorts that you're looking to apply in kind of this, this first US partnership here?

Alan Rottenberg 7:16

Well, there's a lot of lessons in all positive, I think Donna will be able to speak more intimately about the employer, education and learning process they go through. I think, from the University point of view, one of the things they've learned is that not all graduating students are really ready and have the preparation required to step up to that interview process and have built the skills and understanding what it's going to take to be competitive. And so they're looking at their whole process and thinking may have made a start sooner with these kids. And maybe I have to do more, work with them to get them up to that line, starting line with a with a better chance to win, I think that would be the lesson. It's a great thing. The other thing is the awareness in the community that there's this talent base that they're not taking advantage of, is the two things that I would say were great lessons.

Donna Gillespie 8:04

And from my experience working with employers, there is that learning curve, because this is changing the way your HR recruitment functions, we're not asking for two to three years experience, you're getting someone right out of university. And now with post pandemic, here's some, some youth really haven't had a lot of opportunity to have after school jobs or summer jobs. So it's working with the employer to look at the job description to adjust it to go, okay, here are the basic skills we would like to bring in. And here's where we can create an onboarding program to provide that on the job training. So you might not have someone who has the experience working with certain systems or platforms, but the beauty is you can as an employer,

customize your training so that the youth is learning exactly the the platforms, whether it's your CRM or your website, the tools that you have, and you can bring them up to speed very quickly.

Kate Hammer 9:00

Oh, yeah, that's actually a great point. Because, you know, otherwise, you might just be in a position of retraining or, yeah, I mean, so when you think about success in the context of Central New York, what would that look like?

Donna Gillespie 9:12

I think it would be the same with all the communities that the program has rolled out to, we want to see young people who are having a first meaningful career so that they're, they're getting the support from their employer, they're getting to work in a team environment with their colleagues, you're gaining skills. And ideally, at the end of the first year, there's a job offer a growth within the company, for that youth and I know in Kingston one big metric of success I see is when young people three or four years after their first apprenticeship, whether they're with the original company or they're with a different company in Kingston, perhaps they found a partner, perhaps they've gotten married, or have an example of someone buying their first house. So they're really setting down roots in the community, which is a long term investment in our city.

Andrew Fish 10:01

I would love to see that kind of success replicated here. And I think that's our collective hope for the future this program here. Alan, I want to ask you a question. And, you know, being the founder of this initiative, what kind of, I know you kind of talked about the seeing those young people not getting that opportunity and having that certificate in that degree, and then realizing that it wasn't the ticket that they thought it was. But what drove you? What motivated you to really want to, to create this initiative and find partners and communities and universities and employers to make this work?

Alan Rottenberg 10:34

Well it was really personal because I have two sons, and they have arts degrees, and they had a little bit of advantage, because I could help them find jobs, or they could go out and find a job and they got themselves going. But some of their friends just never got off the starting line and made me a combination of sad and angry and seems ridiculous that they're all good kids. They're, you know, got their degrees, they're smart, they're fun. Why are they struggling? The parents are struggling to the whole dynamic as they get them. And I just thought of this idea. And I thought, this is something we should try. And I was fortunate to run into someone I knew from previous life who was head of advancement at the time. And Paul, by the time he was at Queen's University, he introduced me to Queens. And Barbara Crowe, the Dean and Donna Gillespie, the head of CEO of economic filament said, Yes, and boom, we were launched. So it's a combination of talent, and team and energy that got us to where we are today. And then, of course, the introduction to Dave Mankiewicz, from Donna open this door. So like many journeys in life, they're fun and filled with wonderful surprises.

Andrew Fish 11:37

You know, it's it's, it's interesting to hear because, you know, Donna can speak to this. But philosophically, there's so much alignment between what you brought to the table and what's been happening in Kingston with Queens and what we've done here in Syracuse, and then it's why we have the partnership that you know, that we've that we've developed there. But it's just, you know, it's really exciting. And I guess, one question I would ask is, you know, we know kind of what the success would look like here. But do you do you have collectively either of you, a kind of long term goal for this program? Like, what what, what would you like to see? Where would you want this to be five years from now, when Syracuse has gone through five cohorts and maybe other communities?

Donna Gillespie 12:19

I definitely think a long term vision and we're starting to see uptake traction already after five years, is that perhaps we don't need to provide an incentive to the employers, that it becomes such a common part of their HR recruitment, that they have onboarding programs in place for new graduates that they they see the value of hiring someone right out of school, and they're making that a regular part of their their recruitment process. So not to obsolete the program. But it becomes such a commonplace, and we're starting to see that with employers who want to be part of the program to tap into the talented students to put their job postings forward. But they don't actually need or require the incentive on the job subsidy.

Andrew Fish 13:03

Yeah. I mean, sometimes the point of an intervention is to have it work so well, that you do make it obsolete. Right?

Alan Rottenberg 13:09

I think that's exactly right.

Kate Hammer 13:10

Yeah!

Alan Rottenberg 13:11

You want over time, to be, the investment to be in new locations to get them going, rather than in locations that are proven and successful have a whole set of proof, both on the employer and the young graduates, that this works, you know, so you have now opened a new opportunity for the city and for the young person to launch their lives and, and careers and close up the resource gap. So I think that's exactly where we have to go for logical reasons. And then, of course, financial reasons. At some point, numbers get a little.

Andrew Fish 13:46

Sure, absolutely.

Donna Gillespie 13:47

I think there's also for university towns for young people who are graduating they often see all of their their friends or schoolmates have perhaps returned to their homes or large urban centers.

So programs like this that can help a small medium sized community, develop its young professional workforce and build that demographic creates an existing base so that when you're graduating, you can see yourself as a young professional working in that community. And you have the dating and mating pool of young people around and that's important at that stage in people's life. So to be able to create the the demographic and the vibe, that a young professional cohort presents, but also to have the career opportunities that are geared at a new graduate are important.

Alan Rottenberg 14:36

Yeah, that's like, the more they stay the more they stay.

Alan Rottenberg 14:40

Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah.

Kate Hammer 14:42

We will be back to continue our conversation and talk more about this program and how employers can get involved. But first, here's a note from NBT Bank, Talk CNY's presenting sponsor.

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Kate Hammer 15:25

There must have been a time when you realized, "oh, yeah, like we figured something out. This is going to be a success. We need to proceed forward." Can you tell us some stories share this some stories about times where you saw an employer or a student have incredible success?

Alan Rottenberg 15:43

Yes, I there's two things here one, for very first year, we had an event where the apprentice and employers are we get to celebrate the see every smiling faces in the room. And so one of the young men who got a job came to me and thanked me and said, "Thank you, Mr. Rottenberg, it's really been a difference maker for me. You know, I've spent the last six months worrying about getting a job and now I have a job and I'm saying Kingston where I wanted to stay. And this is awesome. I'm going home to Mississauga (where he lives outside of Toronto). I'm going to talk to my parents, and to see my parents and you know what, I have friends coming back, and they're coming back to be in their parents basement, and I'm got a job." That was all the reward that you need to see a young man just alive and thinking, "I'm on my way." I have another story about a young woman that he was mentoring. And she and after four months, call

me up, because we've talked regularly said, "they've increased my responsibilities and I think I should ask for a raise."

Alan Rottenberg 16:43

So I said, "I think you know this a little early, you should wait a little." So she waited several months later, but month nine, she calls me up. She said, "I got more responsibilities and asked for a raise, and I got it." So you see the growth in these people. These young people as they grow in the conference, as they see they can do the job, but she went on to be a manager at this company. So those are the things that you know, you're just put down, cell phone and go, "Life's good."

Andrew Fish 17:16

It's amazing.

Kate Hammer 17:17

Yeah.

Donna Gillespie 17:17

And from an employer perspective, I've I always enjoy when the the new graduates they take their first position in May. And more often than not all had the employer bring their apprentice within the first week of work into my office. And they're so excited to to introduce an almost show off the new graduate that that they've hired as part of their team. And it's nice. Kingston is a small community, much like Syracuse, where you stay in touch with people throughout the year and to see the progression of the new hires. And at the end of the year, the number of return offers that are presented, because after one year, the apprentice has made themselves a key part of the company. And they're part of the corporate culture and part of the team and indispensable in many ways. So that's always nice to hear those stories.

Kate Hammer 18:09

Yeah, that is such a cool tradition and love that just celebrating right at the onset.

Andrew Fish 18:13

And you know, I think the enthusiasm from the employers goes back to the conversation around, employers are looking for talent. And this is a way to help inform them and get them to think differently about it and solve their problems in a more unique way while also trying to retain some of the great talent that we have coming out of our institutions and universities. Ellen, Donna, thank you so much for joining us today. outstanding program. Thank you for partnering with us and bringing it here to Syracuse. We share your enthusiasm and your optimism that this program will change the way employers are thinking about these apprenticeships and have them go out and do them on their own even without the financial incentive, because they know it's a way to help solve their talent problems and keep our young people in the community. Thank you for being here.

Kate Hammer 18:55

Thank you, Andrew and Kate. This was awesome.

Donna Gillespie 18:57

Thank you.

Andrew Fish 18:58

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Kate Hammer 19:06

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Andrew Fish 19:18

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Kate Hammer 19:24

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Andrew Fish 19:30

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