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00:00:17.620 --> 00:00:31.960

Jeremy Bell: Welcome to RTAPgo, the National RTAP podcast that serves as the voice for rural and Tribal transit providers across the nation. I am your host, Jeremy Bell, with November being National American Heritage Month.

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00:00:32.000 --> 00:00:39.249

Jeremy Bell: We have invited two Tribal transit managers to join us on today's session to tell us about their journey into Tribal transportation.

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00:00:39.430 --> 00:00:50.869

Jeremy Bell: Today, we're excited to hear their first-hand stories as transit managers as they offer their experience, knowledge, inspiration, and guidance for the next generation of Tribal transit professionals.

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00:00:50.940 --> 00:01:01.050

Jeremy Bell: I would like to welcome Mr. Kevin Tafoya, from Cherokee Transit out of Cherokee, North Carolina, with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

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00:01:01.050 --> 00:01:12.839

Jeremy Bell: And Ms. Michelle Smith with Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Transit out of Nixon, Nevada, to the podcast, as they share their stories of their journey into Tribal transportation.

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00:01:14.070 --> 00:01:20.069

Jeremy Bell: Kevin, would you like to introduce yourself and just tell us a little something about you before we start off?

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00:01:20.680 --> 00:01:25.690

Kevin Tafoya: Sure, everybody, it's hello in Cherokee.

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00:01:26.270 --> 00:01:27.890

Kevin Tafoya: Kevin Tafoya.

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00:01:28.230 --> 00:01:32.529

Kevin Tafoya: I'm from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. This is where I'm enrolled, but I have some

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00:01:32.800 --> 00:01:37.899

Kevin Tafoya: Descent from other Tribes, so... Been working in transit a while.

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00:01:38.690 --> 00:01:39.880

Kevin Tafoya: Looking forward to talking about.

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00:01:40.260 --> 00:01:42.340

Kevin Tafoya: a share in my experience, I guess.

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00:01:43.880 --> 00:01:50.240

Jeremy Bell: Thank you, Kevin. And Ms. Michelle Smith, will you please give us a little information about yourself?

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00:01:50.240 --> 00:02:02.139

Michele Smith: Yeah, sure. Hi, everybody. My name is Michelle Smith, and I'm with the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Transit here in Nixon, Nevada, and

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00:02:02.300 --> 00:02:21.030

Michele Smith: I have been working with the Tribal Transit since 2016, is when I very first started out with Tribal Transit, and I'm looking forward to sharing experiences and being able to be a resource for other Tribal transit managers out there.

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00:02:21.030 --> 00:02:24.290

Michele Smith: And thank you for having me.

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00:02:25.900 --> 00:02:30.530

Jeremy Bell: Well, we're glad that you're here with us, and so, with that being said...

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00:02:30.790 --> 00:02:46.060

Jeremy Bell: We would like to go ahead and start off with the first question, and Ms. Michelle, I'll let you take the stage on this one. And what we want to know is, how did you begin your path in the transportation field, and what led you to become a Tribal transit manager?

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00:02:47.240 --> 00:02:55.260

Michele Smith: Okay, well, I started working with the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Transit in 2000.

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00:02:55.540 --> 00:03:12.359

Michele Smith: 16, officially. But, just to go back a little bit, in 2014, is when our Tribe received the FTA grant to start up a Tribal transit.

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00:03:12.490 --> 00:03:16.659

Michele Smith: And, so it was a brand new department within the Tribe.

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00:03:16.880 --> 00:03:26.800

Michele Smith: And the person that was selected to be the manager, had called me and asked if I would like to help him set up. So, I came in as a temp.

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00:03:26.950 --> 00:03:34.849

Michele Smith: Just to set the program up, you know, getting all the office supplies, and

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00:03:35.180 --> 00:03:41.329

Michele Smith: At this point, the manager didn't have an office yet, so...

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00:03:41.330 --> 00:03:59.860

Michele Smith: he was actually, working out of his truck, trying to get everything started, so I say, like, the very first transit office started in a pickup truck. But anyway, it, we got the... I was able to help him get the program started, and then, like I said, I was a temp.

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00:03:59.910 --> 00:04:10.959

Michele Smith: And then I had, moved away for a while. I lived in California for about a year, and then when I came back home, the position of the transit specialist.

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00:04:11.310 --> 00:04:25.159

Michele Smith: was open, so I applied, and then I was selected for that job, so I officially became a transit employee in 2016.

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00:04:25.320 --> 00:04:28.710

Michele Smith: And... So,

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00:04:28.790 --> 00:04:39.819

Michele Smith: from there, I just started learning everything about transit. I was a dispatcher at the time, and so I was basically assisting the manager,

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00:04:39.820 --> 00:04:52.110

Michele Smith: start this new program. It was still pretty new at the time. We were starting to get grants, and... and then, we became a subrecipient of the Nevada NDOT

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00:04:52.470 --> 00:04:53.710

Michele Smith: And...

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00:04:53.760 --> 00:05:10.270

Michele Smith: Long story short, my manager decided to fall in love and leave, and just gave me the baton to take over for Tribal Transit Manager, and he's like, I know, Michelle, you can do this job.

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00:05:10.270 --> 00:05:18.279

Michele Smith: You can do it. And... and the wonderful thing about that was he brought me in on everything transit.

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00:05:18.330 --> 00:05:23.289

Michele Smith: From budgets to grants.

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00:05:23.420 --> 00:05:30.980

Michele Smith: operations, dispatching, everything, so I had a very, very good teacher in that, and...

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00:05:31.180 --> 00:05:42.020

Michele Smith: And so, in 2019, I became the transit manager, and I've been doing that ever since, and just having a ball, you know? We were talking earlier about

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00:05:42.240 --> 00:05:55.750

Michele Smith: how intricate of a field it is, and it's probably one of the best jobs I've ever had, so I'm excited, and still excited to keep our program going.

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00:05:57.640 --> 00:05:58.840

Jeremy Bell: Wow, that was.

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00:05:59.170 --> 00:06:00.169

Michele Smith: introduction, huh?

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00:06:00.460 --> 00:06:08.949

Jeremy Bell: Oh, yeah, that's a pretty good introduction there, so... and there's gonna be a lot of transit managers that can actually relate

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00:06:09.090 --> 00:06:15.649

Jeremy Bell: I know, with you, it sounds like you had a really good transit manager, because he had set you up to prepare you for this.

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00:06:15.650 --> 00:06:18.079
Michele Smith: But I know across,

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00:06:18.220 --> 00:06:35.149
Jeremy Bell: Tribal transit agencies across the U.S, there are a lot that do not have that, option. They're basically just thrown into this, and they're like, okay, here you go, you've got to learn. And so that's why we wanted to talk to you and talk to Mr. Tafoya in a few minutes.

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00:06:35.150 --> 00:06:38.719
Jeremy Bell: About his transition into Tribal transit.

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00:06:38.760 --> 00:06:46.950
Jeremy Bell: And that, to let them know they're not alone, but that there are people out there who are willing to help them out if needed.

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00:06:47.130 --> 00:06:50.899
Jeremy Bell: I do have another question. It says, did you...

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00:06:51.280 --> 00:06:55.730
Jeremy Bell: Begin in another department, or what field were you working in before moving into transit?

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00:06:56.690 --> 00:07:14.710
Michele Smith: Before transit, the majority of my work that I did was, like, program assistant, administrative assistant type positions. I worked... actually worked for the state of Nevada, straight out of high school, and so I gained a lot of my professional,

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00:07:15.240 --> 00:07:23.059
Michele Smith: Employment in that... in that area. So, it was a lot of administrative-type work.

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00:07:23.980 --> 00:07:28.909
Jeremy Bell: You see that? It's amazing to hear that story, because, like, with my story.

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00:07:29.010 --> 00:07:33.710
Jeremy Bell: Prior to joining, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Choctaw Transit.

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00:07:33.740 --> 00:07:49.910
Jeremy Bell: I served as an employment officer for the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. So I did that for 5 years. And so,

when I left, I was handling business outreach and also doing, like, unemployment,

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00:07:51.410 --> 00:07:58.859

Jeremy Bell: Checks for people that were looking for work, or also making sure that they were getting unemployment checks.

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00:07:59.350 --> 00:08:01.140

Jeremy Bell: In a timely manner.

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00:08:01.340 --> 00:08:05.649

Jeremy Bell: And during that time, it was pretty rough, because that's when we hit that recession, 2009.

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00:08:06.420 --> 00:08:16.199

Jeremy Bell: And so that was some tough times and some dark times, but we actually pulled through and got out of there, and then when I came to transportation, it was brand new. So I was just like, wow.

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00:08:16.980 --> 00:08:28.349

Jeremy Bell: But we want to say thank you, for all the work that you're doing, and I can see that you're really, really loving what you're doing right now, because I was the same way, too. When I got in transportation, I fell in love with it.

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00:08:28.350 --> 00:08:39.030

Michele Smith: it's a whole different baby. And then, after I worked for the state, I came to work for,

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00:08:39.039 --> 00:08:51.409

Michele Smith: a couple of different Tribes. I worked for the Reno Sparks Indian Colony, and still doing administrative-type work, and then came to work for, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe.

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00:08:52.000 --> 00:08:58.629

Michele Smith: So, yeah, there's nothing like working for your Tribal trend, organization, too, that's very rewarding.

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00:08:59.390 --> 00:09:03.340

Jeremy Bell: Oh yeah, definitely when you have the chance to get out there and help your own people.

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00:09:04.010 --> 00:09:13.280

Jeremy Bell: want to say thank you, and now I'm going to turn this over to Mr. Kevin DeFoya. Give us your insight, and just let us know how

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00:09:13.960 --> 00:09:18.040

Jeremy Bell: What led you... what began your path into the transportation field?

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00:09:18.280 --> 00:09:21.730

Jeremy Bell: And what led you into becoming a Tribal transit manager?

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00:09:22.590 --> 00:09:25.390

Kevin Tafoya: Oh, man. So,

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00:09:25.640 --> 00:09:30.849

Kevin Tafoya: Probably my mom. My mom was a driver for Cherokee Transit when I was a young man.

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00:09:31.420 --> 00:09:35.079

Kevin Tafoya: I did a lot of construction with my father.

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00:09:35.720 --> 00:09:37.389

Kevin Tafoya: Kinda just... got...

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00:09:37.510 --> 00:09:50.410

Kevin Tafoya: to learn the trade of masonry, became a full-blown mason, and then, like you said, I mean, I work... I think I worked part-time for transit as a driver, like a seasonal driver, I didn't get very much hours, and then I would just do that.

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00:09:51.060 --> 00:09:59.530

Kevin Tafoya: when I was younger, In between jobs, like, construction jobs. And then, like you said, the recession hit, and...

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00:09:59.870 --> 00:10:08.760

Kevin Tafoya: I had... I had just recently got married, I had a kid on the way, so I was looking for something more sustainable. So I started working with the,

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00:10:09.150 --> 00:10:17.110

Kevin Tafoya: the local youth center here, running the teen center, and when I seen there was a position open at transit again for the dispatcher.

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00:10:17.230 --> 00:10:23.810

Kevin Tafoya: So, I applied for that, and it was a more stable job. I was getting more hours than I was at the youth center.

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00:10:23.970 --> 00:10:33.499

Kevin Tafoya: And... kind of just grew from there. I like to... I like... people ask me how long I've been in transit. Like, I've been in transit probably close to 20 years.

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00:10:34.030 --> 00:10:45.100

Kevin Tafoya: But this is, like, my third time with Cherokee Transit, and so far, I've been here the third time. My son's gonna be 18, so about 19 years.

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00:10:46.430 --> 00:10:49.030

Kevin Tafoya: And just like, just like you said,

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00:10:49.400 --> 00:11:02.559

Kevin Tafoya: once I started, I really enjoy... I mean, even as a driver, like, just... they... the first time I drove, they handed me a radio and said, go to this address, pick this person up, and take them where they to wherever they needed to go, then.

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00:11:02.710 --> 00:11:16.359

Kevin Tafoya: And I didn't... I thought I knew all the roads in Cherokee, but of course, I didn't... I didn't have a clue. But I really enjoyed, like, talking to just the locals, the... all our Tribal members, the people that really needed our service, and...

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00:11:18.130 --> 00:11:30.359

Kevin Tafoya: how most of them were always, like, pleasantly pleased with how our service provided them trips wherever they needed to go. I think it was more senior-focused when I was younger, but we have a lot of different riders now.

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00:11:31.030 --> 00:11:37.880

Kevin Tafoya: And... I kind of just grew... kind of grew up here, you know? As a dispatcher.

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00:11:38.440 --> 00:11:44.389

Kevin Tafoya: I've worked with... I had a lot of individuals that were just willing to teach me.

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00:11:44.960 --> 00:11:48.469

Kevin Tafoya: their responsibilities, so, I mean, I learned how to be a supervisor from

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00:11:49.430 --> 00:11:59.650

Kevin Tafoya: Our safety guy, his name is Bruce Welch. He no longer works here. I learned about mobility, like, any MT, just everything. It kind of just soaked it up, you know?

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00:11:59.960 --> 00:12:06.049

Kevin Tafoya: Went back to school, went to school while I was working here, and then eventually...

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00:12:06.590 --> 00:12:15.229

Kevin Tafoya: You talked about Kathy Littlejohn. Kathy Littlejohn was a great mentor. She took care of all of us here. She... she would work late.

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00:12:15.390 --> 00:12:16.720

Kevin Tafoya: she would...

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00:12:17.040 --> 00:12:25.979

Kevin Tafoya: We used to think that she had, like, a bleeding heart, you know? Like, she was willing to help anybody, and we would make things happen for her.

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00:12:26.130 --> 00:12:36.229

Kevin Tafoya: And I think we kind of saw it, like, she's doing too much, but now, I mean, like, now that I've been in her shoes, like, I understand. I understand where she's coming from.

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00:12:36.620 --> 00:12:39.739

Kevin Tafoya: So, just her...

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00:12:40.370 --> 00:12:47.409

Kevin Tafoya: just her whole... her dedication to the Tribe and the people, like, that's something I like to carry on.

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00:12:48.040 --> 00:12:53.560

Kevin Tafoya: I became manager of... EBCI Transit in 2016.

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00:12:53.930 --> 00:12:58.509

Kevin Tafoya: And I did it through COVID, which was pretty tough.

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00:13:00.570 --> 00:13:10.400

Kevin Tafoya: And I decided I wanted to be more involved in operations, so I stepped down to the assistant manager after about 4 years, and...

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00:13:10.940 --> 00:13:14.620

Kevin Tafoya: They had a new manager, which you knew, Kristen Lane.

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00:13:14.740 --> 00:13:17.779

Kevin Tafoya: Unfortunately, we lost her this past year.

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00:13:18.020 --> 00:13:22.189

Kevin Tafoya: We both kind of grew up in transit, so...

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00:13:22.820 --> 00:13:41.129

Kevin Tafoya: I think everybody here just always worked as a good team, like, we would share responsibilities if some... we all drive, you know? Like, if somebody's out and we need a driver, we're just willing to get out there and get it done, make sure people get where they're going. There's always exceptions to the rules, you know?

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00:13:41.210 --> 00:13:43.440

Kevin Tafoya: If somebody needs a ride, I'm...

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00:13:44.140 --> 00:13:45.779

Kevin Tafoya: We'll try to make it happen.

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00:13:46.050 --> 00:13:49.599

Kevin Tafoya: We'll try to find a way, just trying to remove barriers, you know?

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00:13:49.960 --> 00:14:01.299

Kevin Tafoya: And, recently, we got a new manager, Mr. Barak Myers, and he has worked with the Department of Transportation on the highway side for...

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00:14:01.700 --> 00:14:13.069

Kevin Tafoya: quite a while, and now that he's in public transportation, he has some new ideas for us, and I'm just along for the ride, and here to support him in any way I can, and just, you know, support my people.

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00:14:14.440 --> 00:14:16.129

Kevin Tafoya: That's about all I got.

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00:14:16.770 --> 00:14:21.230

Jeremy Bell: Well, it's amazing that you were saying that, because when I first...

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00:14:21.700 --> 00:14:26.009

Jeremy Bell: joined Choctaw Transit in 2012, it just...

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00:14:26.470 --> 00:14:33.060

Jeremy Bell: transportation field was just, like, wow. I was like, I did not know that... This is what...

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00:14:33.420 --> 00:14:42.090

Jeremy Bell: transportation entails. I always thought it was basically the wheels on the bus go round and round, drive everyone to their sites and all, but then... Yeah.

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00:14:42.090 --> 00:14:43.340

Kevin Tafoya: Once you...

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00:14:43.340 --> 00:15:03.079

Jeremy Bell: sit down with folks, and get to know your passengers, and you learn these routes, you realize how important these routes are to these people. It's their livelihood. It's basically, you know, you're taking them to medical, you're taking them to work, you're taking them to,

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00:15:03.500 --> 00:15:05.079

Jeremy Bell: Social activities, like.

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00:15:05.080 --> 00:15:06.759

Kevin Tafoya: Shopping and all. Yep.

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00:15:06.760 --> 00:15:10.949

Jeremy Bell: And, especially, like, education, too. You know, you...

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00:15:11.360 --> 00:15:20.000

Jeremy Bell: You take it for granted what you think, oh yeah, we'll just call the bus and we'll come get them, but then when you actually work in the field, you realize how important it is to

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00:15:20.380 --> 00:15:32.479

Jeremy Bell: keep our people going, because they rely on it, because they don't have the transportation for this. And I want to give another shout-out to Ms. Kathy Littlejohn. She did an excellent job

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00:15:32.680 --> 00:15:39.370

Jeremy Bell: Y'all had an excellent mentor, you and Kristen. I will tell y'all this, when I first started.

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00:15:39.400 --> 00:15:53.059

Jeremy Bell: I was learning from Kathy. She knew that I was brand new, she took me to... under her wing, and was like, yeah, if you do this, you can do this, you can do this. And I'm sitting there like, wow, and then I start... I met you two, you and Kristen, and I was like.

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00:15:53.460 --> 00:15:55.840

Jeremy Bell: Wow, they are on top of their game.

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00:15:56.720 --> 00:15:59.179

Jeremy Bell: And I was just like, I...

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00:15:59.300 --> 00:16:10.799

Jeremy Bell: I wanted to strive to become just like y'all. And so, I will tell you this right now. Okay, so whenever I get bored with a job, I would quit.

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00:16:11.660 --> 00:16:26.360

Jeremy Bell: And so, in the transportation field, even though I have left EBCI to take the new position with National RTAP, I'm still in the transportation field, so I'm going on almost 14 years in the transportation field.

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00:16:26.790 --> 00:16:35.700

Jeremy Bell: So there's never a dull moment when it comes to transportation, because you actually get out there and you help people. And with this, RTAPgo.

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00:16:35.910 --> 00:16:45.039

Jeremy Bell: We want to be able to go out there and help our transit managers who may feel like they have nowhere to turn to,

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00:16:45.440 --> 00:16:56.509

Jeremy Bell: What do we do? Who do we talk to? And this gives them an opportunity to say, hey, there's people out here who are willing to help you out. And so, thank y'all for sharing that with me. And so,

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00:16:56.660 --> 00:16:58.769

Jeremy Bell: One of the things I have to ask.

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00:16:59.030 --> 00:17:05.509

Jeremy Bell: Is that, just like with me, when I was a transit manager, we all had obstacles.

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00:17:05.819 --> 00:17:08.080

Jeremy Bell: I was, like, working in Tribal transit.

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00:17:08.270 --> 00:17:14.089

Jeremy Bell: Comes with unique responsibilities and hurdles that you face daily, and sometimes late at night.

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00:17:14.200 --> 00:17:32.589

Jeremy Bell: And into the early morning, and if you know what I mean, you get phone calls at 8, 9, 10 o'clock at night, 2, 3 o'clock in the morning. So, I just wanted to sit down and sit with y'all and see what y'all had to face in your respective transit agencies. So, Kevin, I'll go ahead and go with you first.

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00:17:32.700 --> 00:17:39.710

Jeremy Bell: Can you share some of the obstacles you face while working in transportation, whether operational, cultural, financial, or governmental?

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00:17:40.400 --> 00:17:46.130

Kevin Tafoya: Oh, definitely, I think... political?

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00:17:46.910 --> 00:17:47.920

Michele Smith: Yeah, you left that out.

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00:17:47.920 --> 00:18:11.680

Kevin Tafoya: Yeah. I mean, of course, we tell our drivers, though, don't talk about sports, don't talk about politics or religion, you know, those are not really good topics to talk about on the bus, but definitely, I mean, of course, like, we come from Native communities, and we have representation in each community, you know, and sometimes people need help, and they reach out, and then they'll reach out to us. I don't think we've ever had anything, like, completely

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00:18:11.680 --> 00:18:13.549

Kevin Tafoya: Completely out of the question, you know?

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00:18:13.550 --> 00:18:21.349

Kevin Tafoya: It's just, sometimes people don't talk to us first before they talk to somebody else. And,

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00:18:21.500 --> 00:18:32.949

Kevin Tafoya: It's never really been a complete obstacle. It's more like just helping people understand, like, there's certain ways that... to approach that are better, you know? And,

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00:18:33.340 --> 00:18:40.450

Kevin Tafoya: we don't try to, like... we don't try to let that affect what we do. We just try to keep going.

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00:18:41.350 --> 00:18:48.789

Kevin Tafoya: a lot of... I think another obstacle we face is...

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00:18:50.100 --> 00:18:52.869

Kevin Tafoya: People that are without homes now?

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00:18:53.690 --> 00:18:58.199

Kevin Tafoya: Just trying to provide transportation for a lot of people that are in recovery now.

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00:18:59.260 --> 00:19:09.889

Kevin Tafoya: We have a lot of success stories here. We have some pretty good programs. We have a program called Mother Town that takes people that are in recovery and helps them find

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00:19:10.540 --> 00:19:24.259

Kevin Tafoya: find their place in the Tribe, they do a lot of work for the elders, they do just... just whatever they can for the communities, you know? Like, they help out with the community gardens, they... they clear land, just a lot of stuff.

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00:19:24.510 --> 00:19:40.210

Kevin Tafoya: And, I think it gives purpose, and we always try to include them, like, when we have our rodeos or obstacle courses for our vehicles, like, we'll ask them to come out and be judges, and then we even had people come out of the programs that became drivers for us.

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00:19:40.540 --> 00:19:48.410

Kevin Tafoya: It's just really difficult to find a way to...

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00:19:49.170 --> 00:19:55.169

Kevin Tafoya: just have them in a consistent... consistent place to be able to ride, you know? Like,

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00:19:55.440 --> 00:20:13.349

Kevin Tafoya: we offer passes for people in recovery, but we like to have them for a certain spot. And then, I mean, of course, we always have people that try to kind of abuse our passes, and we don't want to set up so much barriers for them to get where they need to go for treatment.

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00:20:13.740 --> 00:20:24.969

Kevin Tafoya: that they just don't want to ride with us, so I think that's one big issue that we have right now, is just the amount of people that are in... looking for recovery.

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00:20:27.100 --> 00:20:28.959

Jeremy Bell: Can I add a little other obstacle?

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00:20:28.960 --> 00:20:30.670

Kevin Tafoya: Yes.

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00:20:31.960 --> 00:20:43.259

Jeremy Bell: Well, that too, but y'all got some weird weather up there, too. Y'all had the floods over there that wiped out your highways, and then y'all have the snow that comes in, and just...

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00:20:43.420 --> 00:20:49.989

Kevin Tafoya: We were lucky for Helene. Helene, like, decimated communities all around us, and...

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00:20:50.860 --> 00:20:54.070

Kevin Tafoya: Fortunately, we were able to...

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00:20:54.220 --> 00:21:06.489

Kevin Tafoya: become a hub for, like, Western North Carolina. A lot of FEMA supplies come through here that we were able to just, like, help with the distribution to different counties and towns.

156

00:21:06.490 --> 00:21:07.250

Michele Smith: Oh, that's good.

157

00:21:07.690 --> 00:21:15.950

Kevin Tafoya: Our emergency management services did really well with that, and... yeah, it was devastating. It was devastating.

158

00:21:16.450 --> 00:21:18.469

Jeremy Bell: Oh, yeah, cause I know,

159

00:21:18.700 --> 00:21:23.799

Jeremy Bell: that time I went and took a tour after it happened, and I made that remark, I was like.

160

00:21:24.040 --> 00:21:33.629

Jeremy Bell: I see all this debris in there. I said, do you think they got everyone, all the bodies that were lost? And you told me, no. And I was like, whoa, that is...

161

00:21:34.070 --> 00:21:39.839

Jeremy Bell: that just really struck a nerve when I, you know, when you said that, because I was looking at spots, and...

162

00:21:40.440 --> 00:21:43.780

Jeremy Bell: I was like, wow, some of them didn't even get a chance to get back home.

163

00:21:44.300 --> 00:21:49.209

Jeremy Bell: But, yeah, I mean, I know you've had a lot of obstacles

164

00:21:49.660 --> 00:21:53.289

Jeremy Bell: that you've had to face, but I knew the environment was gonna be one.

165

00:21:53.670 --> 00:21:57.519

Kevin Tafoya: Yeah, definitely. We actually shut down

166

00:21:57.950 --> 00:22:01.420

Kevin Tafoya: We had to shut down, on,

167

00:22:01.420 --> 00:22:20.320

Kevin Tafoya: Let's see, it was the day before Veterans Day on the 10th. We had to shut down early that night, just because it started snowing midday. We were, you know, we tried to scramble to make sure that people that come to town, we're getting them back home, you know? So, and I think we ended up closing down at 7, so, like, I had... I had to kind of be...

168

00:22:20.320 --> 00:22:34.909

Kevin Tafoya: I was up probably about 5 that morning, and then still kind of halfway working around 7, trying to get Greg and the night shift settled down, and everybody home. It was a pretty crazy night. And that's just the start of winter, so...

169

00:22:35.190 --> 00:22:42.800

Kevin Tafoya: We're probably gonna get more of it, like, probably late December, early January, into February. It's just something we deal with every year.

170

00:22:44.040 --> 00:22:44.900

Jeremy Bell: It's kind of funny, man.

171

00:22:44.900 --> 00:22:47.269

Michele Smith: What transit vehicles do you guys have, Kevin?

172

00:22:47.270 --> 00:22:49.939

Kevin Tafoya: So we run probably about...

173

00:22:50.730 --> 00:22:55.670

Kevin Tafoya: We have about 9 LTVs, or cutaways, and then we have...

174

00:22:56.800 --> 00:23:04.680

Kevin Tafoya: We have probably 7 minivans up here on the main Tribal lands, because we have, like, a section of Tribal land in a different county.

175

00:23:04.730 --> 00:23:18.549

Kevin Tafoya: And it's probably about an hour away from the main... the main troubled land, and we have 3... 3 vans down there that just kind of stay in the area. Yeah, but on the road, typically we have... during the daytime hours, we probably have...

176

00:23:19.420 --> 00:23:21.219

Kevin Tafoya: Up to 12 vehicles running.

177

00:23:21.550 --> 00:23:22.480

Michele Smith: Good.

178

00:23:22.490 --> 00:23:33.080

Kevin Tafoya: LTVs and minivans, and the minivans is what we call our mobility service, which is just NEMT. They do a lot of trips outside of the Cherokee region, like, to...

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00:23:33.190 --> 00:23:41.219

Kevin Tafoya: Asheville, Winston-Salem. They do, like, long trips to specialists, so... we do a lot of Medicaid transportation.

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00:23:41.870 --> 00:23:45.069

Jeremy Bell: And this is, also for non-Tribal as well, correct?

181

00:23:45.070 --> 00:23:46.370

Michele Smith: Yeah. Yes.

182

00:23:46.390 --> 00:23:47.440

Jeremy Bell: Okay.

183

00:23:47.440 --> 00:23:53.250

Michele Smith: Yeah, we run the same way. We are public transportation, so we service everybody.

184

00:23:53.490 --> 00:23:57.390

Jeremy Bell: Definitely. But I will say something, you mentioned Greg.

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00:23:57.460 --> 00:24:07.170

Jeremy Bell: And every time I see a post coming up saying, Cherokee Transit will be closed, I always send them a text, like, y'all just don't want to work today, do y'all? They'll just start laughing.

186

00:24:07.170 --> 00:24:20.549

Jeremy Bell: But as I also know the situation y'all have up there, y'all have to keep your clients safe, because we're the same way, too. Because, like I said, we're in the new, what they call Dixie Alley, because of the tornadoes, and we also have the hurricanes here, so...

187

00:24:20.550 --> 00:24:28.520

Jeremy Bell: We try to... and just recently, we started getting snow and sleet, which is unheard of, until, you know, past 10 years or so.

188

00:24:28.580 --> 00:24:43.780

Jeremy Bell: But we know exactly what it feels like to try to make sure our passengers, our clients are safe, and also the number one people that we want to keep safe, and that's our staff. Oh, yeah. Alright, I'm gonna go to Ms. Michelle. I'm gonna ask you to...

189

00:24:44.030 --> 00:24:49.479

Jeremy Bell: What can you share about some of the obstacles you face while working on the transportation field?

190

00:24:49.710 --> 00:24:53.369

Jeremy Bell: In your region, can you just share with us what.

191

00:24:53.370 --> 00:24:54.420

Michele Smith: Sure, sure.

192

00:24:54.420 --> 00:24:55.250

Jeremy Bell: to face.

193

00:24:55.400 --> 00:25:03.350

Michele Smith: I was thinking about this, and I thought some... some of the obstacles and challenges that we face

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00:25:03.630 --> 00:25:11.130

Michele Smith: When working with the Tribal government, I think that it's challenging at times to be on the same page.

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00:25:11.210 --> 00:25:30.189

Michele Smith: Especially when, having the understanding and the importance of our reporting, as far, you know, as Tribal... as transit managers, we have to do federal reporting, whether it's our financial reporting or our milestone reports.

196

00:25:30.480 --> 00:25:34.860

Michele Smith: And, you know, we, like...

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00:25:35.010 --> 00:25:49.080

Michele Smith: like, for instance, I do the milestone reports as a transit manager, like our ridership and... and all the... all of that, but our finance, financial reports are coming from our Tribal finance department.

198

00:25:49.230 --> 00:25:53.910

Michele Smith: And... And there's a lot of times where,

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00:25:54.130 --> 00:25:59.510

Michele Smith: It's out of our control with whether it's,

200

00:26:00.250 --> 00:26:08.660

Michele Smith: Nobody in there to do the reports, or, just a change, change of personnel that happens.

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00:26:09.020 --> 00:26:19.909

Michele Smith: And I, just over the years, I see that that's kind of the... a given that happens when working with Tribes, is...

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00:26:20.050 --> 00:26:25.220

Michele Smith: Not everybody loves their jobs like they do at transit. You know, you get a lot of...

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00:26:25.760 --> 00:26:35.630

Michele Smith: people that don't stay in certain positions for very long. And then, of course, we have our change of government.

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00:26:35.780 --> 00:26:41.099

Michele Smith: with Tribal councils. You know, they're only then... for here, with the Pyramid Lake Tribe.

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00:26:41.580 --> 00:26:45.369

Michele Smith: The Council is only in there for 2 years.

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00:26:45.760 --> 00:26:55.119

Michele Smith: and then every year, it staggers, so you're getting in new people. So when, like, for instance, if I have to go to a Council.

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00:26:55.480 --> 00:26:58.919

Michele Smith: And asked for approval for a resolution.

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00:26:59.020 --> 00:27:05.379

Michele Smith: Or approval to apply for a grant, a competitive grant.

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00:27:05.420 --> 00:27:16.399

Michele Smith: Then I try my best to educate the Council about what's going on with transit, and the importance of going after a certain grant.

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00:27:16.420 --> 00:27:26.169

Michele Smith: Or, you know, just enlighten them about our transit program and how well it's going. And I always have an open door

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00:27:26.250 --> 00:27:37.010

Michele Smith: policy for, especially with our council, to come on... come on over. Let's sit down. I'll let you know what's going on with... with... with transit. And,

212

00:27:37.250 --> 00:27:43.259

Michele Smith: Now they see, you know, our success as far as having their support.

213

00:27:43.670 --> 00:27:57.179

Michele Smith: with, approving, our app, you know, our wanting to apply for a certain grant or whatnot, because we're 100% grant funded. We aren't, we don't have any Tribal funds that are supporting

214

00:27:57.400 --> 00:28:16.260

Michele Smith: our program at this time. So I have to go and fish... fish for grants, and sometimes that's... that's a challenge. Because, like I said, sometimes we don't have a grant writer or an administrator in place, so then I have to put on that grant hat.

215

00:28:16.740 --> 00:28:29.900

Michele Smith: and work with my Tribal liaison at FTA. So, those are some of the things, I think, that are challenges for... and obstacles for me as... since I've been in here.

216

00:28:31.280 --> 00:28:33.760

Jeremy Bell: Well, one good thing about us Natives is that we're a really great

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00:28:33.790 --> 00:28:53.229

Jeremy Bell: fishermen, so we do pretty good when it comes to fishing. But, you hit a high point that I have been recommending to other Tribes whenever they come to me asking me for some advice, and one of them was talking about turnovers, talking about change in administration, change in council.

218

00:28:53.460 --> 00:29:09.310

Jeremy Bell: And you hit it right on the head when you said, I sit down with the councilman and discuss with them and let them know what we do, and this is how we operate, and this is the grants we go through. I had talked to one of the groups and told them, I said, what you need to do.

219

00:29:09.770 --> 00:29:17.429

Jeremy Bell: Sit down with your Councilman, who's brand new elect, come in and talk to them and let them know what you do, so they won't have any questions about

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00:29:19.140 --> 00:29:31.099

Jeremy Bell: What do you do? They will have some knowledge into your transportation system. Also, I said, if you can't do that, and if they're busy, create a packet, like, just...

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00:29:31.290 --> 00:29:39.280

Jeremy Bell: pertinent information about your transit agency that they can take a look at and view, so then, I always tell them, like, with us.

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00:29:39.280 --> 00:29:52.770

Jeremy Bell: We put our, continuous resolution we had that shows that we are allowed to go for grants that can actually help out our transit agency. So, it'll have a number on there saying, what, CH016709?

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00:29:52.830 --> 00:29:58.639

Jeremy Bell: Stating, like, this is what we are doing, this is the grants we're going for that falls into this resolution.

224

00:29:58.740 --> 00:30:00.460

Jeremy Bell: But educating.

225

00:30:02.860 --> 00:30:10.400

Jeremy Bell: The general public about your Tribal transit and also educating your own people about your Tribal transit is key.

226

00:30:10.560 --> 00:30:14.970

Jeremy Bell: When you're trying to run a successful transportation agency on the reservation.

227

00:30:15.430 --> 00:30:19.449

Jeremy Bell: And, we want to say thank you for giving us y'all's,

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00:30:20.380 --> 00:30:25.700

Jeremy Bell: Input into what are some of the obstacles y'all are facing, currently.

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00:30:26.200 --> 00:30:30.360

Jeremy Bell: Now, the number one part I love.

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00:30:30.860 --> 00:30:35.580

Jeremy Bell: about doing these sessions is I love hearing your success stories.

231

00:30:35.820 --> 00:30:38.309

Jeremy Bell: Because, even with obstacles.

232

00:30:38.710 --> 00:30:53.600

Jeremy Bell: Tribal transit agencies accomplish incredible things every day, and we would like to hear your stories. And so, Ms. Michelle, I'll let you start off. I said, can you share success stories, something you're especially proud of, that happened while working in Tribal transit field?

233

00:30:54.630 --> 00:31:02.409

Michele Smith: Yeah, I have a couple, as a matter of fact. I fit... I think the... the... the very,

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00:31:02.610 --> 00:31:10.400

Michele Smith: The biggest success story I can share at this time is that we are now,

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00:31:11.050 --> 00:31:15.049

Michele Smith: We are housed in a brand new transit facility.

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00:31:15.330 --> 00:31:33.370

Michele Smith: We moved in in January. The planning started in 2018, before I was even a manager. That was one of the last things that my previous transit manager handed the baton over to me, included.

237

00:31:33.470 --> 00:31:45.260

Michele Smith: the plans and the approval for... to build a transit facility. So that was a heavy load on my shoulder, and I wanted to make sure that it was a success.

238

00:31:45.460 --> 00:31:53.199

Michele Smith: And so, every time, before the building was even built, I would drive by.

239

00:31:53.790 --> 00:32:03.010

Michele Smith: and look at this empty spot and this land, and I would picture this beautiful building sitting where it is today.

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00:32:03.400 --> 00:32:06.189

Michele Smith: And I kept envisioning that, and...

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00:32:06.600 --> 00:32:18.230

Michele Smith: And that vision now is coming to fruition, and we now have a beautiful transit facility, and we're still in the,

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00:32:18.680 --> 00:32:23.329

Michele Smith: Construction phase for our bus shed.

243

00:32:23.330 --> 00:32:41.640

Michele Smith: which will house... house our five buses that we have. We... we don't have as big of a fleet as Kevin, but we have five, and they're all operating existing buses, so... we've been able to expand our routes to meet one of the communities that

244

00:32:41.900 --> 00:33:00.300

Michele Smith: needed a transit service, so we have 3 communities on a reservation, which are Wadsworth, Nixon, and Sutcliffe. So, each community has a bus service that is able to take our people wherever they need to go on and off of the reservation.

245

00:33:00.350 --> 00:33:07.519

Michele Smith: So that's a huge success story, and then one... I was thinking of another, personal

246

00:33:07.950 --> 00:33:18.750

Michele Smith: story that deeply affects my heart is... and I think that helps me be a better transit manager is I know what it's like not to have a vehicle.

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00:33:18.880 --> 00:33:26.950

Michele Smith: There was a time in my life where I didn't have a vehicle for a couple years, and I actually depended on transit to get to work.

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00:33:27.070 --> 00:33:33.050

Michele Smith: So, I'm very thankful for Pyramid Lake Transit.

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00:33:35.010 --> 00:33:50.070

Jeremy Bell: Well, thank you, thank you, thank you for sharing your success story. And, what I'm gonna do is, turn this over to Kevin and ask him the same question, and then I will share a success story with what we faced when we were at EBCI in Transit.

250

00:33:50.170 --> 00:33:59.420

Jeremy Bell: But, Kevin, what's the success story that you would like to share with our audience out there about something you're extremely proud of?

251

00:33:59.620 --> 00:34:01.530

Kevin Tafoya: Does it have to be, like.

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00:34:01.660 --> 00:34:05.290

Kevin Tafoya: a success story that involves me, I guess? I mean...

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00:34:05.290 --> 00:34:06.570

Jeremy Bell: They can be your father.

254

00:34:06.570 --> 00:34:25.019

Kevin Tafoya: I mean, like, we moved into the building we're in in 2012. I think I was probably a dispatcher then. I mean, it was, like, a big thing, like, I mean, I hear you talking about your new facility, for us to move into a new facility, and just, there were so many offices, there was so much commons areas, you know, like, we just...

255

00:34:25.040 --> 00:34:26.990

Kevin Tafoya: We felt,

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00:34:27.540 --> 00:34:41.210

Kevin Tafoya: a lot of self-worth, you know? Like, all the drivers just really felt appreciated that they had their own space, you know? It was really... it's... and I still look at this building like it's new, so it's... we've been here forever, but...

257

00:34:41.210 --> 00:34:42.070

Michele Smith: That's awesome.

258

00:34:42.070 --> 00:34:54.340

Kevin Tafoya: I think that's a major success story for us, and when you talk about 5 vehicles, like, I think back to when I heard about transit first starting, there were 3 employees, which was Kathy Littlejohn.

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00:34:54.580 --> 00:35:01.969

Kevin Tafoya: Curtis Thompson and Ed Thompson, and they had, like, a used Chrysler...

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00:35:02.310 --> 00:35:07.650

Kevin Tafoya: minivan that they started with, and they would haul seniors

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00:35:07.790 --> 00:35:12.890

Kevin Tafoya: From home to the senior center for a communal lunch, and...

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00:35:13.120 --> 00:35:20.919

Kevin Tafoya: Man, we grew to a staff of about 40 people, but COVID came, you know, and we had to kind of scale back.

263

00:35:21.270 --> 00:35:24.430
Kevin Tafoya: But, yeah, just,

264

00:35:25.040 --> 00:35:40.549
Kevin Tafoya: just the amount that we have grown, and the amount of Tribal members that work for us, I mean, they really... and we have people leave sometimes, but they come back, you know, and I think they really appreciate just working for our people, you know, and serving.

265

00:35:40.860 --> 00:35:41.180
Michele Smith: Right.

266

00:35:41.180 --> 00:35:44.170
Kevin Tafoya: And I think...

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00:35:45.160 --> 00:35:56.049
Kevin Tafoya: probably the success stories that really... I really appreciate. We had a few riders through the years that just really know how to use transit, you know?

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00:35:56.180 --> 00:35:59.479
Kevin Tafoya: Really have that need, and they really know how to...

269

00:36:00.520 --> 00:36:18.289
Kevin Tafoya: know how to ride, and we get familiar with them, we kind of know their stories of their family, you know, stuff like that. Maybe hardships they're going through sometimes, and then we see them, like, succeed, you know? Like, they ride with us for a while, and then they get a car, and then they're, like...

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00:36:18.480 --> 00:36:30.199
Kevin Tafoya: All of a sudden, they don't need us no more. And we'll see them in town, and they're always just, like, pleasant to us. I was talking to one of our other employees, she's been here nearly as long as I have.

271

00:36:30.480 --> 00:36:49.429
Kevin Tafoya: And she said she was in another town at a KFC, and she ran into this woman that we used to haul, and she was trying to remember her name. She, like, remembered her face and talked to her and everything, and she was like... she's like, do you remember that woman we used to haul? And I was like... I couldn't remember her name. I was like, yeah, yeah, she, like...

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00:36:49.620 --> 00:36:57.239

Kevin Tafoya: she would always give our employees discounts when she became manager at our local KFC, and she took care of us, you know?

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00:36:57.240 --> 00:36:57.750

Michele Smith: Nice!

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00:36:57.750 --> 00:37:11.119

Kevin Tafoya: And, she got her a truck, she became a manager, and now she's, like, managing this KFC in another town, but she still remembers this, and she... so, Shannon, I don't know if you met Shannon Bradley before,

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00:37:11.620 --> 00:37:23.100

Kevin Tafoya: Jeremy, but she was like, well, if you're ever over in that area, like, go talk to her. We remembered her name, her name is Melinda, and I was like, man, I might have to stop by there and see her, because I haven't seen her in years, you know?

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00:37:23.260 --> 00:37:26.219

Kevin Tafoya: But stories like that, I mean, we've had...

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00:37:27.150 --> 00:37:35.979

Kevin Tafoya: We had a teenager, he was probably, like, 15 or 16, and he used to ride with us out of Big Cove, and he did a lot of work.

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00:37:36.190 --> 00:37:38.680

Kevin Tafoya: In local restaurants to help his family.

279

00:37:38.850 --> 00:37:53.880

Kevin Tafoya: And just as... I mean, he rode with us till he was an adult, and then he got to where he had enough money just to be on his own, you know, and got him a car, didn't need us no more. I mean, it's... I guess it's bittersweet.

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00:37:53.880 --> 00:37:54.540

Michele Smith: Yeah.

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00:37:54.540 --> 00:38:00.190

Kevin Tafoya: Because we, I mean, because they're just, like, I mean, like, relatives by then. Yeah.

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00:38:00.190 --> 00:38:01.360

Michele Smith: Well, that's Indian Country.

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00:38:01.360 --> 00:38:01.780

Kevin Tafoya: Yeah.

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00:38:01.780 --> 00:38:07.430

Michele Smith: We all, you know, we all know who each other is, and sometimes the...

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00:38:07.540 --> 00:38:12.410

Michele Smith: There's... we're just there to help, you know? Yeah. Get to that next place.

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00:38:12.410 --> 00:38:18.440

Kevin Tafoya: Yeah, it's always good to see... to see that. It's always definitely heartwarming, you know?

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00:38:19.510 --> 00:38:27.330

Kevin Tafoya: that's... that's probably the things I appreciate the most. Yeah, just people, like, Having...

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00:38:27.730 --> 00:38:29.420

Kevin Tafoya: Having good things happen to them.

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00:38:29.420 --> 00:38:30.200

Michele Smith: Right.

290

00:38:30.200 --> 00:38:30.560

Kevin Tafoya: Hmm.

291

00:38:30.560 --> 00:38:31.230

Jeremy Bell: Yes.

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00:38:31.230 --> 00:38:34.179

Michele Smith: Can I share a little story? I have one more story.

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00:38:34.180 --> 00:38:35.229

Jeremy Bell: Sure, go ahead.

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00:38:35.230 --> 00:38:38.349

Michele Smith: He just reminded me, Kevin, about something that happened, and...

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00:38:38.670 --> 00:38:45.630

Michele Smith: A couple of years ago, there was an elder gentleman that was calling from Sacramento.

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00:38:45.950 --> 00:38:53.859

Michele Smith: And, he was non-native, but he had heard that Pyramid Lake had a public bus.

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00:38:54.180 --> 00:39:00.550

Michele Smith: That he could, that's in this area. And he was an elder gentleman.

298

00:39:00.720 --> 00:39:06.530

Michele Smith: And he was coming to Reno, and we have a Reno bus, we have a Reno route.

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00:39:07.070 --> 00:39:16.859

Michele Smith: And he said, my father passed away some years ago, but every year, I go and visit.

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00:39:17.210 --> 00:39:19.589

Michele Smith: At the cemetery on his birthday.

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00:39:19.960 --> 00:39:37.490

Michele Smith: And so, the cemetery that he goes to is located in Fernley, which is on our local route, on another bus. But we have our buses that can meet up together, and they can transfer from the Reno bus to the local bus.

302

00:39:38.010 --> 00:39:44.789

Michele Smith: But we so happened to have our Reno route that went directly to Fernley.

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00:39:45.170 --> 00:39:54.149

Michele Smith: at a certain time of the day. So, we operate a deviated fixed route, so, you know, we can make those deviations here and there.

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00:39:54.710 --> 00:40:01.799

Michele Smith: So... the elder, he was able to come from Sacramento, jump on our Reno bus.

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00:40:01.970 --> 00:40:09.570

Michele Smith: go to Fernley to visit his... his dad, who passed away some years ago at the Veterans Cemetery.

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00:40:10.160 --> 00:40:17.070

Michele Smith: And he was so thankful that we were able to deviate for him.

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00:40:17.460 --> 00:40:18.789

Michele Smith: Once a year.

308

00:40:19.010 --> 00:40:32.729

Michele Smith: So, he could come visit his dad on his dad's birthday. So, that was... I think that's one of our biggest success stories. You just reminded me of that, how personal it can be at times.

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00:40:33.000 --> 00:40:37.069

Michele Smith: You know, working in transit, and we can help people to get

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00:40:37.220 --> 00:40:49.530

Michele Smith: It may not be a big deal to a lot of people, but it is a big deal to certain people getting to a certain place that they want to go to. So,

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00:40:49.640 --> 00:40:55.890

Michele Smith: That was... that's another success story. You just reminded me of that, and it just to be a part of that.

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00:40:56.290 --> 00:41:03.959

Michele Smith: You know, is... it's just, it just does my heart good, too, knowing that we're doing what? We're doing a good thing.

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00:41:06.380 --> 00:41:20.439

Jeremy Bell: I want to say, y'all got some really great stories about your successes that y'all are facing in completing as Tribal transit managers. That was the one thing, when I was a Tribal transit manager, it was the ability to

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00:41:20.850 --> 00:41:29.299

Jeremy Bell: Help someone get to their medical appointment, or to an event as important to this gentleman to, you know, visit his father.

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00:41:29.570 --> 00:41:33.019

Jeremy Bell: And things like that is what we call the small successes.

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00:41:33.220 --> 00:41:40.220

Jeremy Bell: And as time goes on, it leads up to bigger successes, because the general public, the...

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00:41:40.520 --> 00:41:46.850

Jeremy Bell: Reservation, grow to love your transportation system, because that's their transportation system, that's...

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00:41:46.970 --> 00:42:04.479

Jeremy Bell: the ones who are getting them to and from, and they have so much love for it. I know ever since I transitioned to work for National RTAP, a lot of people were like, yeah, we remember when you were transit managers, like, it was great, you know, will you help me out here? And I had one that told me, he said, sir, he's like.

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00:42:04.810 --> 00:42:11.380

Jeremy Bell: When no one else would give me a chance for a job, you took a chance with me, and he says, you helped me get back on my feet, and...

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00:42:11.910 --> 00:42:27.120

Jeremy Bell: I want to say thank you. And I said, well, that's what we're here for. I was like, our past mistakes do not define who we are. So, we can rise above and continue forward. So now, he's actually working, you know, a decent job, making decent money for his family.

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00:42:27.190 --> 00:42:40.999

Jeremy Bell: Kevin, first of all, let me say, we're gonna run over there to that KFC when I come up to visit in December. And two, you are a success story, you're a legacy. Your mother was a driver, and...

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00:42:41.140 --> 00:42:46.430

Jeremy Bell: You moved up through the ranks, too. You came up through transportation, and your mother was a legacy.

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00:42:46.650 --> 00:42:47.440

Kevin Tafoya: Oh, yeah.

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00:42:47.590 --> 00:42:47.910

Jeremy Bell: Yeah.

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00:42:47.910 --> 00:42:48.600

Kevin Tafoya: So, my...

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00:42:48.600 --> 00:42:49.010

Jeremy Bell: our success.

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00:42:49.010 --> 00:42:56.449

Kevin Tafoya: Everybody knows my mom here, and as soon as I tell them their mom, oh, I didn't know that was your mom, she's so nice!

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00:42:57.230 --> 00:43:02.530

Kevin Tafoya: And, yeah, and I... I think I got,

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00:43:03.290 --> 00:43:08.210

Kevin Tafoya: I guess just her knowing everybody helps me.

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00:43:08.370 --> 00:43:13.600

Kevin Tafoya: Around here, so most people are really nice to me, just, I think, because of who my mom is, so...

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00:43:15.250 --> 00:43:20.789

Jeremy Bell: But I can't say another one. They look at me, they're just like, oh, your mom's so nice! They look at me like, what happened to you? I was just kidding.

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00:43:21.300 --> 00:43:22.450

Kevin Tafoya: Yeah.

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00:43:22.450 --> 00:43:23.380

Jeremy Bell: But,

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00:43:23.820 --> 00:43:31.099

Jeremy Bell: With us, a success story I remember was when COVID hit, the elderly Activity Center shut down.

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00:43:31.510 --> 00:43:38.340

Jeremy Bell: And so, we were already moving, taking meals to,

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00:43:38.880 --> 00:43:42.069

Jeremy Bell: Elders who could not... who were bedridden and couldn't get out.

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00:43:42.490 --> 00:43:45.309

Jeremy Bell: But when the Elder Activity Center shut down.

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00:43:45.490 --> 00:43:50.090

Jeremy Bell: There was, like, 60, 70 elders that... We're having to stay home.

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00:43:50.320 --> 00:43:56.029

Jeremy Bell: So, the Family Community Services asks, can y'all please.

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00:43:56.190 --> 00:44:04.130

Jeremy Bell: Take the food to them, to those 60s, 70s, so we'll say, yeah, we'll help you out as much as we can, because we had a shortage of drivers at the time.

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00:44:04.330 --> 00:44:12.540

Jeremy Bell: And so, what had happened was that our drivers were going out and delivering food to the elders, and they were like.

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00:44:13.020 --> 00:44:17.270

Jeremy Bell: Mr. Bell, can I talk to you? I'm like, sure. He's like, what's going on? He's like.

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00:44:17.410 --> 00:44:23.239

Jeremy Bell: I went to Miss Jane Doe's house, and when she was walking out to come get her plate.

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00:44:24.130 --> 00:44:29.540

Jeremy Bell: she was tiptoeing on the edge of her porch, and I was like, why? She's like.

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00:44:29.900 --> 00:44:37.400

Jeremy Bell: She told me that the porch had collapsed on the far left-hand side, so she has to stay on the right side to keep it from collapsing even more.

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00:44:37.870 --> 00:44:48.890

Jeremy Bell: And I was like, really? And is it really bad? She goes, yes, sir. She goes, you can see, well, one side collapsed already, and that whole porch looks like it's gonna go down some more. So..

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00:44:49.070 --> 00:44:57.439

Jeremy Bell: I was like, okay. I said, I don't know what to do but let me make a few calls. So, we started making calls to our

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00:44:57.870 --> 00:45:02.390

Jeremy Bell: My assistant director at the time, letting them know what the situation is, let me run it up.

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00:45:03.120 --> 00:45:05.420

Jeremy Bell: So, with

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00:45:05.740 --> 00:45:23.480

Jeremy Bell: All the departments were closed. Only ones that were going were the essentials. And, we reported it to our director, and he reported it to the chief. And the chief was like, how bad is it? And I said, let me go out there and take pictures. So, I took pictures, and he's like, wow, that is really bad. And he said, alright,

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00:45:23.530 --> 00:45:25.840

Jeremy Bell: Tell you what, he goes, we're gonna do this.

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00:45:25.960 --> 00:45:28.689

Jeremy Bell: He says, I'm gonna get in touch with,

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00:45:29.020 --> 00:45:31.760

Jeremy Bell: Construction management, and he said,

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00:45:32.660 --> 00:45:38.420

Jeremy Bell: I'ma see what they can do. So, what they ended up doing was sending construction management out to this place.

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00:45:38.640 --> 00:45:43.030

Jeremy Bell: And they rebuilt her porch, and rebuilt her,

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00:45:43.250 --> 00:45:45.810

Jeremy Bell: Stairway going on to make sure she was safe.

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00:45:46.160 --> 00:45:51.240

Jeremy Bell: Well, after that was completed, then the,

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00:45:52.310 --> 00:46:00.660

Jeremy Bell: I'm not gonna say order, but then our chief was like, look, if you see any more, if your drivers see any more of this right here, let us know, report it.

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00:46:00.870 --> 00:46:04.890

Jeremy Bell: And so, we started getting more and more, reports coming in.

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00:46:05.180 --> 00:46:09.430

Jeremy Bell: We had some that had, like,

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00:46:11.150 --> 00:46:15.019

Jeremy Bell: Wheelchair ramps were dilapidated, they were breaking apart.

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00:46:15.310 --> 00:46:20.340

Jeremy Bell: the construction management came in, fixed it, set it up. We had one gentleman,

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00:46:21.180 --> 00:46:28.870

Jeremy Bell: His wheelchair was too big for his house, and so he resorted to his family taking a sledgehammer and beating the sides.

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00:46:29.510 --> 00:46:32.179

Jeremy Bell: To where the door would not even shut.

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00:46:32.360 --> 00:46:36.599

Jeremy Bell: So, the only way he could... Lock his door.

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00:46:37.200 --> 00:46:41.519

Jeremy Bell: When he left, was to put a padlock on the outside, lock it with a padlock.

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00:46:41.630 --> 00:46:51.010

Jeremy Bell: When he got home, he had another latch on the inside to lock it up, but you could actually see through the edges, because that was the only way he could get his wheelchair in there.

368

00:46:51.440 --> 00:47:05.970

Jeremy Bell: Our driver reported it, construction management came out there, they refitted the door, they made it bigger to where his wheelchair could go in, and they saw that his wheelchair ramp was damaged, so they went in there and they repaired that, too.

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00:47:06.120 --> 00:47:22.500

Jeremy Bell: So, to this day, they still do that. If there's any elders that report anything damaged in their house, they tell the bus driver, and the bus driver reports it up, and it's sent up, and then construction comes in and repairs it for them, just, you know, for our elders and our, also, disabled.

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00:47:22.500 --> 00:47:26.730

Jeremy Bell: So that was one of the success stories I can say, that came out of COVID, which...

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00:47:26.780 --> 00:47:29.950

Jeremy Bell: You know, at that time, we got hit really hard.

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00:47:30.160 --> 00:47:32.180

Jeremy Bell: During that time frame.

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00:47:32.280 --> 00:47:36.619

Jeremy Bell: But we were able to make something good out of something that was bad.

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00:47:37.570 --> 00:47:44.150

Jeremy Bell: So, as we move on, I know we have a bunch of new managers out there who are listening in.

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00:47:44.440 --> 00:47:46.899

Jeremy Bell: And so, I'm gonna

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00:47:47.250 --> 00:47:52.979

Jeremy Bell: I want y'all to tell me some advice that you would have for future Tribal transit leaders.

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00:47:53.160 --> 00:48:05.570

Jeremy Bell: As you would say guidance for new managers. So, we've got a lot of new upcoming transit managers that listen to this podcast, and they're looking for guidance, and as they learn the ropes in Tribal transit.

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00:48:05.680 --> 00:48:06.800

Jeremy Bell: So...

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00:48:07.050 --> 00:48:14.650

Jeremy Bell: Michelle, I'll go ahead and ask you, what advice would you give us, or would you give to new transit managers who are entering the Tribal transit field?

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00:48:14.850 --> 00:48:17.199

Jeremy Bell: Or building up their transit agencies.

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00:48:18.000 --> 00:48:37.690

Michele Smith: Okay, we've already have, these types of opportunities to meet with new transit managers in our area, and so, I welcome that. If

anybody ever wanted to come over and talk to us and sit down, we certainly would do our best to try to

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00:48:38.160 --> 00:48:40.669

Michele Smith: Give advice or help out, but...

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00:48:40.790 --> 00:48:49.160

Michele Smith: I think the number one foremost, advice that I could give a new Tribal transit manager is

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00:48:49.390 --> 00:48:58.070

Michele Smith: Get to know your Tribal liaison person at FTA, or if you work for the state.

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00:48:58.330 --> 00:49:12.719

Michele Smith: A lot of times, states have Tribal liaisons in their transportation departments. So, I think that's very important, so then you can open that communication, even if you have a small question.

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00:49:13.050 --> 00:49:25.009

Michele Smith: you know, then you're comfortable to give a ring, or get... send an email, because I think there's no dumb question. And when you're... when you're a transit manager.

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00:49:25.450 --> 00:49:37.019

Michele Smith: Ask as many questions as you need to, because you want your program to be successful, and how is that going to be successful is if you know

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00:49:37.260 --> 00:49:40.320

Michele Smith: You know your program, you know your grants.

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00:49:40.550 --> 00:49:44.269

Michele Smith: And you know what you need to do to keep in compliance.

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00:49:44.470 --> 00:49:50.930

Michele Smith: Get your policies in order, just having everything in order, and...

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00:49:51.360 --> 00:49:59.290

Michele Smith: I think that's the best, best advice that I could give, is to work closely with your, your FTA, people.

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00:50:00.180 --> 00:50:01.659
Jeremy Bell: Thank you, thank you.

393
00:50:02.010 --> 00:50:05.990
Jeremy Bell: Kevin, what advice would you give to new transit managers?

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00:50:06.910 --> 00:50:19.199
Kevin Tafoya: I would echo part of that, yeah, get to know your FTA person. Jeremy, I guess you know ours, it's Carrie in Region 4. And honestly, I could say, like, Carrie's been the best

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00:50:20.120 --> 00:50:22.980
Kevin Tafoya: liaison that I've ever had. Like, I've...

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00:50:23.320 --> 00:50:27.610
Kevin Tafoya: talked to her so many times, like, we went through COVID together, you know? So...

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00:50:27.800 --> 00:50:34.629
Kevin Tafoya: I haven't talked to her in a long time, because that's not really my role anymore, but definitely, yeah, you... I mean, having that...

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00:50:35.510 --> 00:50:42.869
Kevin Tafoya: Good communication with them is really helpful, and can help you find answers, and connect you with other people.

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00:50:44.420 --> 00:50:53.449
Kevin Tafoya: I guess another thing I would say for new managers is definitely tap into the knowledge of the people that are... that have been there, you know?

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00:50:53.560 --> 00:50:57.390
Kevin Tafoya: And don't be afraid to...

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00:50:57.880 --> 00:51:16.089
Kevin Tafoya: share that you're learning, and share the information you're learning with the people that don't know it, you know? Cross-train, because you never know what can happen. I mean, it happened to us this year. We lost our manager, you know? And a lot of the... a lot of the knowledge she had that I didn't have is just...

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00:51:16.090 --> 00:51:23.219
Kevin Tafoya: We have to rebuild, so... and we're trying to teach the people that were directly under her, like,

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00:51:23.530 --> 00:51:38.520

Kevin Tafoya: on the finance side, and dealing with our finance department, our grants department, that kind of just almost disappeared, and we're rebuilding it now, because she was so good at it, you know? She just had a knack for it. She was...

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00:51:38.700 --> 00:51:41.730

Kevin Tafoya: On her game all the time, and...

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00:51:42.310 --> 00:51:45.359

Kevin Tafoya: She didn't... she just didn't have the opportunity to get...

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00:51:45.790 --> 00:51:48.700

Kevin Tafoya: To teach the people that we're working for her, so...

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00:51:48.850 --> 00:51:59.510

Kevin Tafoya: And we lost a lot of knowledge there, so... I think sharing everything that you can with all your staff, because there's potential there, and...

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00:51:59.800 --> 00:52:08.160

Kevin Tafoya: We all kind of come from the same places, you know? So... and definitely we can figure it out. So, I think... I think that's a big part.

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00:52:09.090 --> 00:52:09.940

Kevin Tafoya: Just inclusion.

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00:52:09.940 --> 00:52:14.159

Jeremy Bell: So, we're running low on time here, but go ahead, Ms. Michelle.

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00:52:14.160 --> 00:52:27.069

Michele Smith: Oh, I'm sorry. And new managers, I would really encourage them to also to go to RTAP. There's so many awesome resources available on the National RTAP website, too.

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00:52:29.260 --> 00:52:44.510

Jeremy Bell: Well, we want to thank y'all for sharing your experiences, your wisdom, and your stories. Tribal transit is more than transportation, it's connection, opportunity, and community. The dedication of managers like you ensures that Tribal nations remain mobile.

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00:52:44.700 --> 00:52:52.949

Jeremy Bell: Empowered and growing. I want to thank you, Ms. Michelle and Mr. Kevin, for joining us on this podcast session.

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00:52:53.120 --> 00:52:59.530

Jeremy Bell: And we want to say thank you for all the knowledge you have instilled and given out to these Tribal transit managers.

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00:52:59.710 --> 00:53:15.360

Jeremy Bell: But at this moment, this is Jeremy Bell saying thank you for joining us on this episode. Be sure to subscribe and share with others in the transit community. Until next time, stay safe, stay connected, and we'll see you on the next episode.

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00:53:15.740 --> 00:53:17.059

Jeremy Bell: We'll see you then.

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00:53:17.060 --> 00:53:18.220

Michele Smith: Thank you, goodbye.

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00:53:18.220 --> 00:53:19.150

Kevin Tafoya: Thank you.