

The Melissa Norgard Story

Corporate Professional, Economic Development Director, Entrepreneur, and Mother

Sidney Entrepreneurship Stories

By David Iaquina, Ph.D. – February 11, 2024

About the Sidney Story...



For most Americans, Sidney is just one more rural community among thousands. Some may know of Sidney as the once home of ***Cabela's Outfitters***. But Sidney is a community worth a deeper look as it reinvests itself one more time by focusing on and investing in entrepreneurial development. This story is part of a larger collection of Sidney stories and analysis. In these stories lessons are to be learned!

Sidney Story Collection...

[Web Link](#)

[Sidney Landing Page](#)

[Background Papers](#)

1. Sidney Story Collection by Don Macke
2. Sidney Case Study Executive Summary by Don Macke
3. Sidney, Nebraska – Entrepreneurial Community Case Study by Don Macke
4. Cheyenne County and Sidney Development Opportunity Profiles by e2 and Don Macke
5. E3 Assessment by the Sidney E3 team by David Iaquina

[Stories](#)

6. What is a Community Champion? by David Iaquina
7. The Sarah Sinnett Story – Sidney Champion and E2 Lead by David Iaquina
8. The Cory Keen Story – E3 Champion by David Iaquina
9. The Paula Abbot and Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center Story by David Iaquina
10. The Melissa Norgard Story – Corporate Professional, Economic Development Director, Entrepreneur, and Mother by David Iaquina
11. Stop the Swap Story by David Iaquina
12. The eNavigator by David Iaquina
13. The Alisha Juelfs Story – Navigator by David Iaquina
14. The Amber Fields Entrepreneur Story with Jennifer Powell by David Iaquina
15. Jillana Saunder... Entrepreneur – Savor and Grace – Sidney, Nebraska by Don Macke

[Podcasts](#)

16. *Community Champions...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-ecosystem-champions-with-pam-abbot-and-sarah-sinnett.html>
17. *Entrepreneur Navigators...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-navigators-with-alisha-juelfs-and-rachael-barry.html>
18. *About E3...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/exploring-e3-in-nebraska.html>

Thanks David...



At e2 we want to acknowledge the remarkable work of Dr. David Iaquina in conducting interviews, site visits, and curating many of these stories. Our **Sidney Story** could not be possible without Dr. Iaquina's remarkable work. Dr. Iaquina is a 50-year veteran college and university professor recently retired from Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is an international expert in rural community economic development.

Listen to David's e2 **Pathways to Rural Prosperity** podcast from April 2022 focusing on "Community Resilience":

<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/episode-33.html>.

SMIF Acknowledgement...



e2 would like to recognize support from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation in hosting e2 and our **Sidney Story**. SMIF is a leader in community-centered entrepreneurship through its REV Initiative.

For more information:

<https://smifoundation.org/programs/economic-development-2/>

Why Stories Matter...

For nearly 50 years e2 has been gathering and curating stories about communities across rural North America. These stories serve to inspire and inform other communities as to what is possible with entrepreneur focused community economic development. Stories matter in that they are relatable to community builders across the continent. Sidney's stories are compelling and illustrate renewal after a massive socio-economic crisis. For more e2 stories check out...

<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/community-regional-case-studies/>

Questions and Additional Information

Don Macke – e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

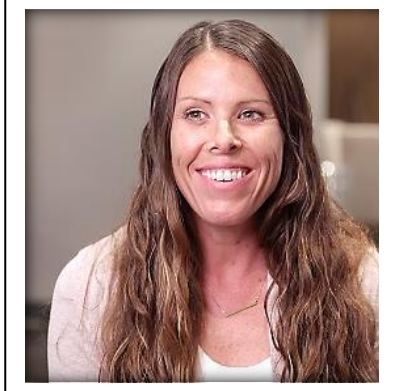
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By David Iaquina, Ph.D.



“I’m Not Made of Sugar, I Won’t Melt”

Melissa Norgard – Synopsis

The weather on the high plains of the western Nebraska panhandle can turn on a dime and that was the case as our first interview was wrapping up at the Western Nebraska Community College in Sidney in the summer of 2022. What started as a sudden summer thunderstorm in minutes whipped up into a freakishly fierce hailstorm. Soon the conference room where we were meeting reverberated with the sound of golf ball sized hail pounding the metal roof of the college like thousands of small cannons firing without stop. The cacophony was deafening. Listening to the tape of our conversation later, I was struck by the sheer ferocity of the storm which lasted for 45 minutes. Outside the building lay hail, a foot deep in places, and my car with thousands of dollars of damage. Surely this is a place that had tested the will of the people who live there from indigenous settlement to the present. It is against this backdrop that I came to appreciate the strength of Melissa Norgard. Ten minutes into the bombardment and with a business to run she said... *“I think I need to go now.”* When I asked her to stay a bit and wait it out, she simply replied... *“I’m not made of sugar. I won’t melt.”*

Here in a nutshell is the indomitable spirit of an economic development director turned entrepreneur. It illustrates the steely yet practical fiber of a strong women willing to face adversity head on knowing that this too will pass.

As the former Economic Development Director for Sidney and a former Cabela’s employee, Melissa and her husband, Stan, transitioned to full-time entrepreneurs as owners of the Sam and Louies Restaurant and Boss City Brewing Co. She has also brought her talents and drive to the local E3 group as a key leader. With Stan, as brewmaster they are now in the process of transitioning out of the restaurant trade and into full-time Brew Pub owners. [Sam and Louies closed on December 30, 2023.] They are currently remodeling a downtown building for the new operation that will open March 2024, providing more room and creative options as a third space in town.

She and her husband have benefited from the E3 peer-learning connections in Ogallala and Ord in the form of Richard Gibson and Caleb Pollard both of whom operate brew pubs in other E3 communities. While such connections might have arisen by serendipity, the e2/E3 model has guaranteed that they would have useful conversation partners that could assist as they undergo the transition to their new business model. Melissa is also in conversation with other entrepreneurs in the city as to how they might create some synergies between their businesses. The e2/E3 has facilitated these connections. This speaks to the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Sidney, a core principle of both e2 and E3.

Melissa's "Origin Story:" The Roots of a Champion

Melissa provides the essential facts of her journey leaving Sidney and then returning for good...

I was born and raised in Sidney and my husband [Stan] was born in Long Beach, raised in Orange County, then went to school at San Diego State University in San Diego. I moved out there after college and lived there for 10 years. ...[We] moved back here in 2012, and both took the job at Cabela's, ... that's when they were booming.

More importantly, Melissa helps us understand the perceptual gap between cosmopolitans and dwellers of the Nanopolitan world of Sidney. In doing so, she illustrates just what Sidney means to her and echoes the sentiments of other people in Sidney and similar communities. Aspects of her characterization fit well with what sociologists call *Gemeinschaft* places (Tönnies, 1957)¹. That said, Sidney is far more than Tönnies bucolic vision of rural life and as we have demonstrated elsewhere that communities like Sidney are better characterized as a *nanopolitan* places...

[Stan is] ... a California native. It's ... different here. I try to describe it to people and... It's just different. [I]t's like, "Oh, do you guys have bathrooms, running water?" And I'm like, "Actually yes we're doing really well." Most of my family still lives here. My mom and dad still live here. My two older sisters live here. My kids have lots of cousins, and I have cousins that still live here who have kids my kids age. It's just nice to know the moms who your kids are playing with and be able to trust them and know ... [they'll be okay]. My kids ride their bikes around the block, and I'm not too concerned that somebody's going to come snatch them up.

In this short passage we see the blend of positive attributes displayed against the darker perception of city life and its dangers as modulated through her generative concern for her children. Again, these are sentiments with broad cachet among people living in 'rural' places. The characterization is true as far as it goes, but it also leaves a great deal unsaid about both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* environments as depicted by Tönnies in his classic work. Tönnies formulation is what we call an *ideal type*, not in the evaluative sense of good or bad, but in the sense that the ideas are a kind of measuring stick against which we can assess actual communities on the ground.

However, there is a more important point here. Like so many people we have interviewed in Nanopolitan places, the characterization is a story residents tell themselves partly to justify their choice of residence but also because they believe it to be true. Unfortunately, "*life happens*" and we are reminded that things aren't always what they seem. This is what happened in Sidney when Cabela's left town and the idyllic mental construct was shattered by reality. Residents had to respond intentionally and often without precedent to find a new way to frame their lives, molding their response to conditions on the ground while retaining the positives of their former construct.

Importantly, this needs to happen both at the individual level and the community level. Further, if people don't make active decisions, then the decisions will be made for them, and they will be swept along the currents of the social forces of doom and gloom. In psychological terms they will have to fight or flee, and as we see in Melissa's case she chose to innovate and stay. She was not sugar that would melt under adversity. Seeing the diversity of responses in her own community and engaging other

communities through the E3 peer-learning process, Melissa's agrees that it makes no sense to consider all small rural communities as a singular phenomenon and lump them together as 'rural'. They are just so different even though they share significant cultural elements in common. It is essential to recognize the individuality of communities and the need to foster local participatory-generated solutions to their challenges even while respecting and adapting the best practice lessons of from other communities. The ability to see the possible through the responses of another community is the beginning of innovation when tailored to the specific needs and capacities where one resides.

From Corporate Professional to Economic Development Director to Entrepreneur

Melissa's personal/professional journey and involvement in E3 gives her a unique perspective on entrepreneurial ecosystem building. In the following quotes she speaks knowledgeably and insightfully about the fundamental problems involved in the economic development agenda as it is conventionally executed while linking it to her personal experience as an entrepreneur.

Melissa and Stan returned to Sidney to work at Cabela's in well-paid professional positions. Here she describes how she came to work in economic development...

One of the biggest things when I was in economic development... Well, when I was working at Cabela's ... they were booming. When the whole buyout thing happened and the economic development job was open, and one of the councilmen had called me and said, "Have you ever thought about applying?" And I said, "No, I don't want to work for a local government, and I don't think I'm qualified to do that job." And he said, "You should apply. We just need somebody with passion about the community and somebody who knows this community to start leading it forward through a really tough time." I'm pretty thick skinned and so I applied for ... city manager. ... It was a hard job. I mean, I went in there not knowing what was gonna happen with all the employees at Cabela's, because the buyout was just getting finished and, you know, a couple of months later, most people were getting a buyout offer and a severance package to be able to leave and then there was just this mass exodus of people and we were thinking, "Well, what are we going to do?" So, then it automatically became, "Hey, how can we try to recruit other companies to come here to try to scoop up this talent before it's gone?" And nothing happens fast enough. ... [W]e tried, and we tried, and we tried to get businesses here.

Looking back Melissa is able to see that more than her own inexperience, it was **the strategy for economic development that was a problem...**

Now I think looking back – where I am today – what we maybe should have been concentrating more on, instead of trying to incentivize larger companies to come here and bring jobs here was maybe looking at more of the NexGens or more of the Highby Outdoors and getting them up off their feet and giving them money or gap financing or helping them, however.

No matter what your business is you need some money. I'd be hard pressed to say there aren't some people out there who have great ideas that just don't even know where to start. And we were lucky because we had a little bit of money that we were willing to say, "Well okay we will put it up because we know that eventually it will pay us back tenfold. But not everybody is that fortunate.

And her insight in this regard is supported by her own experience as an entrepreneur...

The biggest thing for us even at our restaurant was finding capital. We had our own money, but we wanted to buy the building because we knew that was one of the only ways the restaurant was going to work and make money is if we could buy the building. There are two residential apartments upstairs, so that helps make some income for us. Going to a bank and showing the last five years of financial statements from the previous owners and they showed a loss every year. I know they weren't losing money, but they were showing a loss on their financial statement. I couldn't get one single bank in town to loan me money.

When pressed on the point as to whether things have changed in Sidney today with regard to support for small entrepreneurs through conventional routes, Melissa voiced the frustration that is common to both entrepreneurs and the economic developers that work with them regarding the challenges of getting banks to finance new local ventures... *No! Financially, No! No, not that I know of anyway. Maybe there is one.*

Upon reflection Melissa adds an important tempering comment...

I don't want all small local rural banks to get a bad reputation. I have found success with a bank in town that did give us funding for our expansion, so noting there are no banks in town I think is a misrepresentation. I also think there were other startups in town that did possibly get funding through a local bank, so I also don't want banks to think no local banks support entrepreneurs.

What is important in this comment and reflection is just how fatiguing it is for entrepreneurs with an idea to confront repeated financing roadblocks to realizing their dream. That said, Melissa is able to suggest another source of support, the **donor advised community fund**, but goes on to detail how even that can be fraught with problems...

We have the donor advised fund now through the Community Foundation, but I think that takes a lot of steps and they ... can only fund philanthropic things. So that can't go directly to support one single business, which I understand. ... But that's one of my biggest frustrations and I expressed that very clearly when we first started meeting with [the E3] group. There are a couple of bankers in the group – and I said, “we gotta get money.” And there are some other entrepreneurs here who will say the exact same thing saying, “Yeah if you don't have a nest egg that you're sitting on...”

Melissa brings her thinking full circle as she references the substantial human capital residing in the former Cabela's employees with promising ideas but confronted with a system ill-suited to their needs...

I understand you have to put skin in the game, and we were ready to put skin in the game. But not having any additional gap ... [financing] ... help was just really hard. So that goes back to what I said earlier about ... incentivizing these larger companies to bring jobs here and going through a lot of our LB480 money that way. Maybe we should have focused a lot more on, “How can we help entrepreneurs who have a good idea?”, and “How can we really foster them and lead them in the right direction if they have a good idea?” Most of these people are smart and had 20 plus years of experience working at a multibillion-dollar worldwide company. They just needed some help. They didn't know how to write a business plan. They didn't know how to do a P&L. They didn't know how to do a cash flow. They didn't

know what a balance sheet was. And we did help some of those, but I think there's way more out there that left town, ... that have never come back.

Many of Melissa's points here underscore the value of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center developed by Paula Abbot at WNCC. In her interviews Paula used the example of NexGen, an online outfitting business. She described how she provided office space and resources for two years to the founders of NexGen as they developed their business plan and set the foundation for their now thriving business in Sidney. Thus, the I&E Center has functioned as an incubator and accelerator capitalizing on the existing human capital in Sidney, much of which was displaced by the sale of Cabela's.

Sidney and Sheridan County were early adopters of **LB480** legislation. Because of this they had little guidance as to how to build flexibility into its use over the long haul as other communities have since done. Melissa describes this problem demonstrating that political concerns took precedence over long term needs. Because any changes to the original formula would have to be made by referendum no one is anxious to make the needed changes in today's anti-tax climate. The net result is they have a fund that is ill-suited to today's needs and by a remediation process that is resistant to change...

We have LB480 here. Part of it is loan funds. ... We get \$300,000 a year. \$200,000 goes towards generalized job creation. Then \$50,000 goes to projects on the north side of town because I'm told that when they passed LB480 in 1997, they needed the voters from the north side of town who often times feel like the neglected lower income people in town. They needed those voters to vote yes. So, they said. "Okay, we'll ... [allocate] ... money that is for projects on the north side specifically. They use the money for things that are not ... related to economic development, which is very irritating. Then \$50,000 a year goes toward projects in the downtown corridor. That's where good things come in like rental assistance. So, if you're in the downtown corridor, you can apply and get up to \$500 a month in rental assistance for six months, and then if you're in business for two years, that's all forgiven. Some facade enhancement money [is also available]. So, if you want to update your windows and doors, paint, etc., then there's \$20,000 matching funds for that. And then if you put up a new sign, there's \$1,000 of funding for that. But then it also comes to if you run out of money in that, then ... [what]?

It is Melissa's experience with **peer-learning through E3** that shows her there is another way to distribute LB480 money. Perhaps in time she will be part of a group bring change to the outdated formula used in Sidney. Not only are some of the funds directed at old style job creation and as a political sop to one segment of the community, but another part of the pie is still allocated to building a swimming pool which was completed years ago!

There is no dedicated [fund] like other communities do in Holt County and Ord. There are no dedicated micro loan funds specifically for entrepreneurs. Because it was... well back in the Cabela's heydays, I don't know what they ever used the money on, because they didn't need it for job creation. Cabela's was growing beside themselves.

Melissa shares **how job creation was conceptualized** in the period after Cabela's closed...

The previous city manager said that they had to make a certain wage per hour because he was only focused on these higher paying jobs to try to recruit companies that were for higher paying white-collar

jobs, that we were ... losing at Cabela's. He was trying to say, well, we need to focus on that piece of the puzzle when that's not where the focus probably should have been.

[T]hose companies don't need \$400,000 of LB480. ... A multibillion-dollar company ... does not need the money, and maybe would have come here without [it]. We don't know for sure ... but I think that [makes] the pot a little bit sweeter.

Entrepreneurs

Yeah, I mean, my number one thing is what I started off with. I think that it's very hard. If you are an entrepreneur and you actually have a solid business plan, whether it's a new business or transitioning business, you need to have an investment club like other communities have or a bank that will take a little bit more risk. I know that banks have rules to follow. They have to meet numbers and all of that stuff. At some point something is going to have to give, or the city is going to have to revamp their LB480 program. I mean, at some point you've got to give entrepreneurs a chance and give them some money to make things happen. Because if you keep having hands tied and people don't have the money, I mean, what are we even doing then? Still getting through people's heads that entrepreneurship and people who want to start their own business, people who are driven, people who are passionate about the community whose kids go to school here and giving them a reason if they go to college to come back here or ... [go to] ... a town like Sydney ... [matter for the community]. Getting people to understand that it is really all about entrepreneurship and the ecosystem that we're trying build. That's going to make our community great, keep it moving forward for decades, and keep it strong. So, let's talk about this. We have to move on from, "Oh, just get the new company to move in. Oh, who's going to fill the Cabela's building? Oh, there has to be something there." We have to move on from that.

Melissa shares her story on **business succession** that brought her and Stan into the restaurant business...

I mean, I think that goes to the business secession conversation. I can count four restaurants off the top of my head that the people are probably 55+ running them. What's going to happen in five years or 10 years when those people just don't want to do it anymore, and they just close the doors? Because it'll happen. That's exactly what was going to happen with Same and Louie's. The people wanted to retire, and they were just going to close the doors. He came into me as economic development and said, "Has anybody been in to talk to you about wanting to open a restaurant." My husband's background is in videography, but he also has a background in restaurant management from when we lived in San Diego. He started brewing in our garage when he was laid off from Cabela's, really tied on to it. He always said, "I just want to open a brewery." I never wanted to get back into the restaurant industry. I waited tables and managed bars in college. I don't like the late nights. I don't like the long hours. I don't want to work seven days a week.

Nonetheless, Melissa and Stan seized the opportunity for themselves and became owner/operators of Sam and Louies. The bigger question remains: who should initiate business transition conversations with business owners? Melissa says...

I think you have to have that person who is part ... [of the community], ... and maybe it's somebody from our group [E3]. You have to have that person who has a passion for the community and can come at it with those people who ... [will be looking to get out] ... in the next five or 10 years, I know we'll be looking to get out. You know, and maybe it's just a conversation of, "Have you thought about putting it out there that you might be interested in selling? Have you already been talking to people?" I have no idea maybe they have been talking to people and I don't know because they're not talking to me.

But their transition as entrepreneurs was not seamless due to **the pandemic**.

Well, it must be fate or God or something like telling us this is what we should do because otherwise we can't lose another restaurant, you know. That was January 2020. And then we closed on the whole deal at the end of January. We were closed for a month and then we reopened at the end of February. Then three weeks later, all of COVID started happening. And we were like, "What the hell did we just get ourselves into?" I mean, honestly, I think being in a smaller community helped us through COVID because there were so many people who wanted to support us and make sure that we were going to survive. We went from that March to early August with no dine-in customers. Then in early August we could have 50% capacity. ... That's where you have to become innovative, and we are creative at marketing stuff and doing specials. We had literally just opened, and we were flying by the seat of our pants on most things and most of it worked.

Melissa Norgard speaks about needing a new building, adapting to pandemic, and the cost of doing business...

I mean, part of it was when the governor said. "Oh, you can now do takeout drinks", alcoholic drinks. So, we started promoting okay. "What drink pairs well with pizza? What beer we were bringing in before we became a craft brewery?" because we just started craft brewing in January of 2021. We were bringing in craft beers from other Nebraska breweries and marketing ourselves as someplace in town where you could get Nebraska brewed beer. You can go the store and buy it, but there were not a lot of other restaurants where you could go and get Nebraska craft beer. Knowing that long term we wanted to become our own brewery, we wanted to start branding ourselves as the craft beer place to go. We started doing stuff like that and it just worked. We started doing family deals where you got wings and a pizza and a two-liter soda for \$40.

There have been a lot of troubles. I mean the cost of our goods has gone up tenfold. When we first opened in January 2020 a box of chicken wings cost \$37. I think it now costs \$100. So, people are, "Why are you raising your prices? Why is your food so expensive?" "Well, do you want me to be in business or not be in business. I'm not making any money." Very little. But then we became a craft brewery in January 2021. People would send out surveys of 'what's the town missing?' We would do these studies all the time it was, "We need a brewery. We need a brewery." And so, it's, "okay, can we recruit one that's already successful to come here? Well, no. We need to find somebody to open one here." So, then it just kind of worked out and we took the leap. I mean it was a significant investment into the equipment part of it, and we have a small system. But now we've literally outgrown our space. Our Space seats 49 people. and Stan brews the beer in the basement. Part of the piece we're missing is seeing the brewery, you know, the fermenters and the brew kettles and seeing the people brew the beer. That's part of what we're missing. So, we're gonna have to move to a different building because there's no space in our building for us to move that upstairs.

Moving was in their plan but not leaving downtown...

Yeah, we don't want to move. ...[T]he place out by the Hampton Inn across from Applebee's used to be a restaurant and so many people after that went out of business. "Oh, you guys should just move up there. You should." And I said, "[N]o, we're staying downtown." Yeah, we bought the building downtown to establish our roots downtown. We don't want to move out of downtown. There are a couple of buildings that would maybe be potential fits, but we're just not there yet.

But things change fast and not only has the picture changed for Melissa and Stan but their new building at 1200 Jackson Street will open in March and Melissa notes that, *"the building move is coming along nicely."* Score a victory for entrepreneurial perseverance!

Melissa does recognize that the **newcomers to Sidney**, mostly from the front range, are a potential asset in terms of contributing to the community and the ecosystem. However, E3 has not yet made it a priority to intentionally reach out to them...

I think those people definitely are here. I know that there are people even on our block that have moved here from the front range that are retired. I'll talk to them when I'm out walking around the block or whatever. I just don't think that they know. They're not out actively searching for stuff like that. But if asked by somebody... A lot of time all you have to do is just ask, and maybe they would raise their hand and say, "Sure I'll do that." I think a lot of those retirees moved to this town because they got a cheap house. They came here maybe one or two times before they bought their house, or maybe not at all, but they liked the community at least enough to move here. So, if you present it like, "This will only make the community better" then it automatically makes it a little more attractive.

Melissa's Secret Sauce as an Employer

As in other communities, many business owners express the challenge they face getting and retaining good help. Melissa does not...

And we've been fortunate. Applebee's here [was closed] Mondays and Tuesdays [for quite a while] because they [didn't] have enough staff. ...I think that was a partly a management issue because there were times where we had staffing issues, but my husband and I have worked our butts off to create the staff that we've been able to create. ... We found good kids who I knew probably have good friends. They were involved in a lot of sports and a lot of activities, but I was willing to work around their schedules. I got them in there and showed them it's a good place to work and then they went and told their friends that it's a good place to work. ... I think we've been fortunate, but I also feel like I pay my employees a little bit more, and I also try to treat them really well to make sure that they won't go anywhere else.

Nonetheless there are still hitches. For example, Melissa talked about one of her employees, a mom who worked part-time as a server, made such good money in tips that it was impossible to offer her advancement as a manager...

She's working maybe 30 hours a week. ... Her mom lives here and watches her kids at night while she comes to work. I would make her the general manager if I could afford to pay her ... [more]. She said,

“Well I don’t want to be the manager because then I’ll take a pay cut.” Which is true. But she’s one of a kind. [And Melissa is a special kind of entrepreneur.]

Melissa believes that **E3 is an important part of Sidney’s solution** going forward, but similar to Sarah Sinnett she has had to balance her views on the effectiveness of local government officials with the proper course for E3 in order to be effective. She is also mindful of the **time crunch** experienced by E3 participants who have businesses to run and spend inordinate hours doing so...

I just think that's something ...[to keep in mind]...as we continue this journey as our E3 group and bringing more people into the fold like a Liz Borgman, Mckailie Conger, the old Chamber president who quit to be a full time photographer and do her own thing, and people like me who had a full time job making \$72,000 a year and quit to work full time at our business. I think once we keep getting all of these people more engaged, it will become more clear to the city leadership that this is a big deal.

And Melissa illustrates entrepreneurs’ lack of time with her own situation. Because the city manager has not hired a new economic development director, she is back part time consulting with the city...

So now I’m helping out again part time consulting for the city getting paid, but I don't have a lot of extra time. I work 70 hours a week, and I have two small kids who are in sports and swimming lessons and all this other stuff that are important to her.

Melissa **sums up the E3 approach in town** and her critique of the economic development response to Cabela’s leaving...

And I think that’s why we are trying to tread lightly with our E3 group here because we don’t want to get that defensive reaction from the City Council or the County Commissioners or the Chamber Board. We’re saying, “We’re just trying to help the community. We all have a strong drive to make the community better through entrepreneurship and people’s good ideas.” There’s never going to be a Cabela’s that comes and fills the two buildings out there ever again. When the buyout happened people automatically went to, “Well you gotta get somebody else in to give 2000 jobs right away.” That’s just not the way. People want to put a band-aid on it and not look for the long-term solution.

When we went to Holt County, and we went to Handlebend ... I just got so invigorated because these two guys had this idea, and now they have this great event space. ... I would love if we could not have an event space, but our space is so small. ... Graduation weekend is a perfect example. We have a handful of restaurants here. Applebee's didn't have enough staff to be open during lunch. Graduation was on a Saturday at 11 am. You have all of the big groups of people who wanted to go have lunch somewhere if they didn't have a party right afterwards and their party was later or their party was the night before or the day after. We had all these groups. “Oh, can you seat 12? Can you seat 15? Can you seat 20?” And I told them all, “No!” No, because our restaurant was already full with other people. I had to turn hundreds of dollars of business away because my space is too small. But I'm also not there yet, ready to grow.

But as Meissa points out...

...we are there now and will not have this issue with graduation this year. Our new space will seat 150 people. Our current space is 1500 square feet including the kitchen, our new space will be 8000 square feet.

That's not an entrepreneurial boast. That's entrepreneurial pride in accomplishment and someone proud to fill a need in the community.

ⁱ Tönnies, F. (1957). Community & society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft). Transaction Publishers.