

Frederick Factor - The Accessibility Factor Transcript

Sandy: Welcome to the Frederick Factor! Everyone who has lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick, Maryland, knows that there is something, well, special about this place. One of those things is the incredible, diverse community that continues to grow. Here, on this podcast, we will be bringing Frederick's underrepresented business owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders into the spotlight to share their stories with you and find out what's your Frederick factor. Our guest for this episode is Eric Jorgensen. Eric is the founder of Special Needs Navigator, a business that helps caregivers, families, and individuals navigate the maze of benefits, resources, and services for their children with special needs. Eric started his business after his own journey of being a father to a son with Autism. He wanted to help prevent other families from experiencing the same challenges that he lived through. If you'd like to be a better ally and advocate for those with disabilities or special needs, or you're a caregiver of a child with special needs, you'll get great value and insights from this episode.

Sandy: Okay, um, welcome, Eric Jorgensen. I'm thrilled to have you join us here on the Frederick Factor. I'm just gonna dive in a little bit here on this conversation. We were talking as, as prepping, you know, kept cutting ourselves off. Why don't we save that? Why don't we save that? Let's don't answer that question. Don't do that. First, I love to hear people's stories as to what brought them to Frederick County. What brought you to Maryland? Eric?

Eric: Sure, so I retired from the Navy back in 2012. I came to Maryland as my last stop for my career. Prior to that, I had been a geographical bachelor living in Virginia and Cuba for two years, my wife was in Connecticut, and we said, hey, you know, this five-year geographical bachelor stuff is gonna end, we're gonna come to Maryland, we'll do the last tour of duty in Maryland and move back to Connecticut. And the year I was supposed to retire, my wife passed away through a sudden illness. She'd had six strokes and spent a week in the ICU. I took up life support. My son's disabled and at the time, I didn't have the bandwidth or capacity to think about going back to Connecticut on my own. So, I just stayed in Maryland to school things were relatively stable, ended up keeping the house in Connecticut for about a year and we finally got rid of it. And renting in summer spring, owning a house and Connecticut and all the chaos there. Got through all of that, and then decided, hey, you know, he's finishing his senior year at John F. Kennedy High School, there's a program up in Frederick called Success that I've heard a lot of amazing things about very different from the learning from the PIMS program here in Kennedy. Not that there's anything wrong with it. I just really liked the model that Success had. Applied, and he was accepted as to Success. So, we moved up to Frederick and bought a house in Frederick. And I decided that's where we're going to stay. I really like Frederick much more than Montgomery County, because I like being close to the mountains and hiking and Frederick is

amazing, with the access to Catoctin in you know retired military, so I have access to the base right across the street. It's not very far from me. So, I get to do a lot of those things. And that's why I ended up in Frederick and my son loves it here now. You can take public transportation, he's got, you know, really quiet, comparatively, the streets are a little quieter than downtown Silver Spring would be, you know, when we're not in the mainstream of city of Frederick, so he likes it. But that's how I got from, you know, up into Frederick.

Sandy: Wow. Thank you for sharing that was a lot of information in 30 seconds! Oh, my gosh, I didn't, I didn't know that you'd lost your wife. I'm sorry to hear that. The geographic bachelor is a term I had not heard before, which makes me giggle. So yeah, for you and your son, I'm glad that you were able to find, create, and make a home for yourselves here in Frederick County, that's beautiful. You know, we are all here I think because of the access and the location and this beautiful blend of city life as we wanted as much as we want. And then, you know, the mountains and the streams and everything in such amazing proximity. So, um, so tell us about your business.

Eric: Sure, so my company is called Special Needs Navigator. And it was founded because of my experiences, being a single dad with a son who has disabilities and trying to find support and just get answers for what I need to do when I need to do it to get him ready to be on his own as an adult. And I'm almost a reluctant business owner. You know, originally, I didn't want to own a business, I wanted to do it under somebody else's umbrella. So, from 2012 to last year, I would bounce from company to company trying to fit what my vision was with somebody with a different owner, founder and make my vision square with theirs. And that's not fair to them. That's not fair to me. And last year, I had cancer, so it was the *'Okay, dude, we've been a round peg square hole long enough. Let's just go ahead and either it fails, or it takes off. But you've got to do it just to stop beating your head into a wall.'* So, I did. I launched Special Needs Navigator Incorporated last year. And what I'm doing is I'm helping families, individuals, and professionals around the country navigate the maze of benefits, resources, and services within the disability world. And a lot of that is just connecting dots and making sure they know how the attorney works with the financial advisor or how the school transition services work with adult services. Because sometimes it just doesn't seem like anybody is really talking to each other. And it's up to the parent to make sure that they're asking for the right thing. But of course, nobody is giving the parent a guidebook and saying here's what you have to do. So, my vision is to make sure every family, every parent, every individual has that guidebook and there's no more guesswork.

Sandy: Yeah, that's amazing because you're right, we all learn this stuff by doing. And then most people don't have the capacity that you do or the energy to want to then share it with others and make your lessons learned applicable to others, which is really awesome. You know, it's not the same, but I always say like, why not work with a realtor or somebody that can help you navigate buying a house? Why try to do that on your own? Why not work with somebody who does this

over and over and over again, or work with the economic developer in the community that helps businesses start up and grow every day over and over and over again? Why not work with these different resources that are out there, kind of the same thing for you with the Special Needs Navigator? So, when you described your son, you said disability, but the company's name is Special Needs. Can you talk to me a little bit about your thoughts there?

Eric: Sure. So first, I want to say I think you had a really good analogy between the realtor and economic developer because, in a lot of ways, we're all doing the same thing. We're giving people much easier access and advice that we have developed through education and experience. So, somebody else doesn't have to reinvent the wheel. So, I think it's a really good analogy. The special needs and disability, especially it is almost a loaded phrase. There's a lot of self-advocates and individuals who are allies of the disability community who don't like the term special needs because it doesn't mean anything legally or what have you. I recently learned that it came about because it's a shortened or abbreviated version of special health care needs. And that was something I've learned. I use the word disability for my son or myself, I'm a disabled Vet, I use disability for that, or more specifically, I'll say my son's autistic, because that is his diagnosis. I don't think I've ever said he has special needs. But when I google things, as a parent, I'm looking for special needs resources. When you're talking to an attorney, it's a special needs trust. So, I put the word special needs in my title, Special Needs Navigator for my company because I want it to be easy for parents to understand to find me, right? If I type disability while on my physical disability, and my intellectual disability and my emotional disability, and that's just a lot of extra work sometimes. And parents are just like, I need help with special needs. I use them interchangeably but if I'm talking about an individual, I'm typically asking what their specific disability is. Does that help?

Sandy: Yeah, that helps a lot actually and okay, as a marketer, I get it. We need to put the hat on of our, you know, target audience and the people that are coming that oh my gosh, like just so desperately need help. And so yes, you're right, I could see them thinking in terms of, let me Google special needs services, special needs resources, how do I get started? What do I do for my child? And then drilling down from there to figure out if you or others like you have the specialty as it relates to my child's needs. Or, you know, my needs, even perhaps, you know, depending upon the position and the action that they're looking for? So, are there others? Are there others like you, are there other businesses? Have you found, you know, across the country, I know you do work across the country, and you work with different families and organizations everywhere? I think that there are so many questions I have along this line, like the different laws and the different programs per state. But I'm curious if there are other individuals, other businesses like you around the country,

Eric: I haven't found anybody else doing what I do, the way I do it. There are nonprofits that will help within certain communities. There are financial advisors who focus on people with

disabilities, but their focus is more on making sure you fund a special needs trust. To the best of my knowledge, I do not know of any other companies who have gone through and standardized every single state's Medicaid waiver process. So that in all 50 states, you get a standard checklist, and this is what you have to do if you're transitioning from high school. You know, and I did that out of frustration out of any great desire to do it. I have this inflated sense of justice like this is messed up, I'm not going to tolerate it. And then once you start pulling the string on that, maybe it's just me, but I'm like, okay, I can't just leave something half done. I've just got to do it.

Sandy: It's interesting. So, are you focusing on that transition from high school like once public services stop or, you know, public education stops, and then they, you know, individuals are trying to get into the workforce, is that your focus, talk a little bit more about that?

Eric: My focus is between birth and death, you know because I can help families anywhere in this, in that range. What I'm doing specifically for families who are transitioning is, I'm publishing by state, a booklet of everything you have to do in your state to successfully transition from high school to adult services if your child has an intellectual developmental disability. I'm doing that, so people who maybe they can't afford to hire somebody on an hourly basis, or they don't need to because they have the bandwidth, they just need to be pointed in the right direction and let loose. You know, so these books are about 180 plus pages long on average, but it has everything you could conceivably think you need to do. And it starts with a checklist identifying in what order you should do it in. And on that checklist are links. So, it's really that part is for the transitioning youth. And I'm standardizing and putting on the website, so people don't have to come to me.

Sandy: I'm curious, is there any state that's doing it well?

Eric: Maryland's not doing bad. Maryland, Massachusetts, Arizona is pretty good. The top three states, you want to stay away from are Virginia, Connecticut. Um, those are the two worst ones that I can think of, and Illinois is up there as well.

Sandy: In that transitioning time period and ease of?

Eric: Ease of, funding, access to services, and then just how easy is it to understand what the state has on it and finding what you need to do using the state. Now Maryland could use some work there. A couple of states have one-stop-shop like Pennsylvania, you can go there and there's a one-stop-shop for everything you do to apply for services. I mean, as a marketer, I think you can see how advantageous that is, right?

Sandy: Well, and like we said, you know, a lot of people may have one, they might have two children, you know, I mean, they might have a couple of children that, you know, fall into this

category. But, you know, it's just survival, just trying to get this stuff done. And, you know, be that advocate for your child. And for you to have crossed over and transitioned in that capacity and then want to share because this is all very new for you. Right? I mean, didn't your son just graduate, and hasn't he just transitioned?

Eric: Yeah, he graduated this year, I've actually got a video of his speech on my YouTube channel because he gave a speech at his graduation, which I'm proud Papa bragged about. I've been researching this since my wife died because she was a full-time stay-at-home mom, she did everything, I had no clue. And when she died, and I lost, not to sound callous, but I lost her as a resource, not just as a spouse and best friend, I don't even know where to begin. And that was what started the journey of me finding resources. You know, I have a 156-page Google document that's like my database around the country. Because as you find these things you need to save them. You never know when you're gonna need to go back and it's hard enough finding them the first time, you don't want to have to do it again.

Sandy: Yeah, yeah. So, you're right, that one stop in each state. And my gosh, I would guess heaven forbid, somebody moves in the middle of that time in their life like you did and my golly, having to, for one son having to keep it straight in three different states. [*Laughter*]. There's a headache for you if I ever heard one. But that's awesome. Talk to me a little bit about, you know, employment. So, are you finding resources? Is it easy for people to, you know, I am a small business owner, it's not easy for me to figure out how to hire somebody, my gosh, it's hard enough to hire somebody who can you know, is taking the initiative and seeking out my website and doing things? Is there anything that we should be doing for those that are disabled or those you know, that could still get viable, productive work, out there?

Eric: It's a great question, Sandy. And there are a couple of things that I would like to see more people do. But first and foremost, is don't rely on resumes, and automated resume programs to review a resume and even interviewing. People with disabilities, what do you hear the most about is autism, that's not the only one that's out there, they may not show it that well during an interview. So, if you instead, we're willing to accept a video resume where somebody says, "Hey, I'm applying for this job, I have recorded a video of me doing this and let me show you" because that is going to give you a better indication, in my opinion. As somebody who's done interviews in the past, I would much rather get a video resume showing me that this person can do the job and somebody who's sitting across from me, sounds great, looks great on paper, and holy crap, they don't do anything when they get there. And then don't be concerned or overly worried about what reasonable accommodations mean by the ADA. I feel like sometimes people will say, when you don't know something, you tend to think the worst, right? Worst case scenario.

Sandy: Definitely. You're right. You're right. That would be a phrase I, you know, I don't even know where to begin. So let me just not go there. Yeah.

Eric: Right. Right. And if you're in a wheelchair, if you're hiring a wheelchair user, yes, your place of business has to be accessible, which means you have wider doorways, you have a ramp, wider passageways, things like that, there are certain things. But in other cases, accessibility could mean you dim your lights, or you allow somebody to wear noise-canceling headphones, or you let people take more frequent breaks because they get overstimulated or it's overwhelming. There are other ways you can make reasonable accommodations and you don't have to make a big deal about it. Think about pre-COVID how often people would go up, get a coffee, shoot the breeze with somebody in another cubicle, or what have you. That is really no different than giving somebody the opportunity to take a 10-minute break every hour. In calling it an accommodation. We just have to change the way we think about things.

Sandy: That's awesome. Well, it's so funny, because I often say that, well, I have to take accommodations for myself because I get my creativity when I'm out on a walk. And you know, I don't get it, staring at a computer with the cursor blinking. And I don't think anybody does. But there'll be often times I'm like, hey, I've been sitting here staring at y'all all day, who hasn't gone outside today? You know, it's gorgeous out, go for a walk, you know, go catch it before five o'clock. This is ridiculous. So, you know, take a 10-minute walk around the block. And you're right. I think that there is a challenge with that accessibility. And some of these, you know, downtown historic buildings I'm fortunate, to not be, I'm in a new building downtown, in Frederick, which is great. But yeah, those reasonable accommodations, thank you for kind of simplifying those. We do have dimmer switches on our lights here in the office, which, you know, so yeah, some of those little things that we do for ourselves, it's just probably a matter of communication, which is great.

Eric: And people with disabilities may be hesitant, speak up.

Sandy: Yeah.

Eric: They may be hesitant to disclose that they have a disability, they may be hesitant to say these are the accommodations we need because it was so hard to get the job, to begin with. Virtual work can very often be very helpful for people with disabilities because they can focus on their job and not and all the other things that are going on around them. And it's not when I say focus, I don't want to give people the idea that they're distracted. And they're like, oh, let me go look at this, let me get that, no. Imagine, when you're talking to somebody, you have to put energy into looking at their face and decoding what their facial expression is telling you. You have to put an equal amount of energy into listening to the tone of their voice to hear what their tone of voice is telling you. And then you have to put energy into ignoring all the other

background noises or activities that are going on. So right there, that's three times the amount of energy that you and I, Sandy, are expending, because that kind of just happens in our background.

Sandy: Yeah, you're right, you're right. Well, I'm quirky as heck. So, I can't even imagine somebody trying to like, decode and figure out, but I also talk a lot so as long as they, you know, were receptive to, you know, to verbal communications, you know, then that would generally be easier for me to not have to, you know, make accommodations. But yeah, we talked about learning styles here in the office, and that, and we are all different, every single one of us has different ways that we like to receive and communicate information. And we learn and process differently. So, I think it just all kind of falls into that same category

Eric: That was brought home for me because my son and I used to not communicate very much at all. And then he discovered texting, and holy crap, you know, he's really open up. And that's how I came to think about what it must be like for somebody on the other end. You know, I tend to talk fast, I tend to use my hands when I'm talking. So that's a lot going on. Right? And I'm loud, so.

Sandy: You and I really do have all the things going on here. Oh, my goodness, no, that's cool. You know, it's so funny that you say the video resume. Because honestly, if I were to get a video resume from somebody, I'd be blown away. I would be so impressed with something like that. They would definitely stand out in you know, in any capacity to illustrate what it is that they could do. I think that that would be really cool. But yes, you're right and, you know, we're a small enough team, that I'm not using a fancy resume review system looking for keywords. We're not that big yet, but, you know, let's figure out what and we will never be. I don't want to take the human side out of it. But let's figure out what we can do to be more accessible, I think is the key there.

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Sandy: What else should potential employers know, you know, is there anything else I mean, you shared a lot in terms of the reasonable accommodations and things like that which I think about in terms of a potential employer is there anything you'd like for people to hear to, you know, in that advocating for either your son or others. When we're thinking about employment.

Eric: I guess the biggest drum I want to beat; is don't let the fact that somebody has a disability make you think that they can't do something, or that you have to do it for them. I think human nature is to be kind, for most of us. And sometimes that shows up by saying, well, let me help you. And while they may not need your help, they might just be doing things a little slower, doesn't mean it's not going to get done, you know, respect people's space the same way, you wouldn't necessarily walk up and grab somebody. So don't walk up and grab somebody's chair. For me, I was gonna say common sense. But that's not fair because common sense is based on personal experience. So just try to put yourself in their shoes, and how would you want to be treated in that situation. And then, the last thing I would say because I remind myself about this because of my son is, be patient. I'm not always the most patient. There are times when you need things done quickly but that is not very often, right? So, I guess moderate your expectations, you know, somebody can produce very quality work, even if it takes a little bit longer. And for people that have disabilities, and they're thinking about employment, you can work and still keep your health insurance in the form of Medicaid. That's a big concern a lot of people have, or employers might have, or parents might go to an employer and say, "Hey, we really have to keep Jimmy or James hours down, so we don't lose SSI because we don't want to lose Medicaid. Well, you know, there's a whole group of people out there called benefits counselors who will help you get work full time and still be able to stay on Medicaid if that's your primary concern. Like I would never want to see somebody stay on SSI, just to keep their health insurance and to keep the support they would get from the state. And if they can do that, well, while working a part-time or full-time job, and all of the things for your sense of self that that does. I mean, not even financially, just the things that that does for your sense of self, then let's do that, you know what I mean?

Sandy: I totally agree. And that, that sense of pride, and in a job done well and being able to use a different part of our mind, or our heart or our hands and what you know, whatever capacity that means to have created something. You know, in my world, it's, you know, creating a blog, creating a video, creating a social media post. But it could be creating a widget, it could be creating a pen, it could be creating anything, and you're right, you know, being a part of society in that way. I also think there's an element of being a part of a team. And the virtual piece, I think we've all gotten a lot better at having this be how we communicate, you know, through zoom, or, you know, other platforms, we don't have to only feel a part of a team when we see each other and are able to like rub elbows. I do think that the pandemic opened that up because that's my concern is that then you still feel so isolated. I think we've all done a better job of not feeling as isolated, still feeling a part of the team, collaborating with others through online platforms?

Eric: Absolutely. I mean, I think you said it really well they're being part of a team and being seen for who you are not a disability you happen to have, or I mean since we're on a disability thing, but it goes for anybody, right?

Sandy: Yeah.

Eric: You don't want to be, oh, that's Sandy, you know, she's a great podcaster, that's not your identity. Right? Maybe you like to snowboard, maybe, you know, there are other things that you do. You're not Sandy the podcaster I mean, you're also...

Sandy: A tennis and kombucha influencer! That's what! No, I'm just kidding. I'm not a good tennis player. I've just been joking. I've won my last two matches and so I'm like, got a pretty big head at the moment, but I just started playing again in November so I'm like, I'm terrible. But you asked me about kombucha, and we could talk all day about it.

Eric: I don't even know what that is.

Sandy: Oh, Eric. Oh, oh, Eric. Oh my, Golly. Okay. It's a fermented tea. It's delicious. But yes, you're right. You know, we want to be more than just known for that thing. Whether it's a physical or mental disability or it's my job or, you know, we want to be known for the whole human and all that we have to share and contribute.

Eric: Yeah, and if I can give a plug for this company that I think is just amazing. They're not in Frederick, but I would love to get a model like them in Frederick. The company is called Teaching the Autism Community Trades in southern Colorado. And Danny comes as the founder, he's a dad and it's shortened to TACT, t-a-c-t. What they're doing is they're teaching autistic individuals how to do things like welding, plumbing, electrician, auto mechanics, I mean, all of these, the jobs are never going to go away. There's always a demand. And historically, these have been jobs that, oh, you have a disability, you can't do this? Well, if you're colorblind, no, you probably can't be an electrician, okay. But you know, that's more of a function of, you need to be able to tell the difference between a yellow wire and a green wire or whatever. But if you know, if you have another disability, there's no reason that you can't be an electrician or plumber. I mean, in fact, you would probably do very well on those because they have certain laws of physics that they follow. When you do something in plumbing, you know what result you're gonna get. So, it becomes very easy for individuals who need structure to do well. And I'm a bit of a tangent, but I really would love to see something like that in Frederick County, where we have this ability to give people with disabilities an apprenticeship program pipeline.

Sandy: That's awesome. Yeah, I think, you know, obviously, the apprenticeship program in the state of Maryland is huge. I don't know what the connectivity is, um, with other programs. So how do you fill the pipeline of potential apprentices reaching those and connecting those, you know, from the disabled community? I don't know. You know, you and I connected through the Scott Key Center, um, and that piece, is that something, I don't know if they do anything with different apprentices? Do you know?

Eric: I don't know because I mean, I'm focused at the state level.

Sandy: Yeah.

Eric: Because I mean, you know, I'm working all 50 states, I don't have the bandwidth to get into individual counties.

Sandy: Yep.

Eric: But I think that's probably a good place to start. And hopefully, they're listening to this. And somebody will take it and run with it. But I think it's like anything else, Sandy, where somebody has to be the first person to say, have you tried this? I think we get comfortable with this is how we've always done things. Somebody has to be that first, you know, you have to overcome inertia in the other way, right? You know, what's working, you sometimes don't want to rock the boat. But sometimes you have to.

Sandy: Yeah, yeah, no, that's awesome. I, uh I appreciate that. That's like, a great idea to figure out how we can connect some of those dots. And there might be something that's going on. But is it enough? You know, we could be doing more, we could be doing other things? So...

Eric: We're getting it visibility? I mean, if it's going on, and we don't know about it, who's helping?

Sandy: Right. You're right. Oh, my goodness. So, you know, I love that. And that kind of leads into my next question of, you know, what would you like to see? Is there anything, you know, here in Frederick, that could help boost your business? I know that you think of yourself as this, you know, geographic, nomad, you know, living and working anywhere, you know, working because you're trying to work across the country. But is there anything that we can be doing here in Frederick, that would make it easier or better for you to do what you do?

Eric: I appreciate that, Sandy. I think raising awareness so that parents who have children with disabilities don't feel like they're alone. And, you know, just sending them to my website, because from my website, they can get to my YouTube channel, to my podcast, ABCs of disability planning. And I have a lot of free resources. So, you know, when you're referring a family to the website, you shouldn't feel like you're sending them to be sold to. You know, it's really meant to be, here let's open the door to what is out there for you and your child. And, you know, sure, you can certainly work with me, but that shouldn't be the automatic assumption that you need to work with me. I mean, I really want you to see what else is out there and understand

what you can do for yourself. When I was first a single dad, that was the biggest thing I was looking for. I want somebody to tell me what is out there. I don't want you to wait for me to come to you and say I would like X, Y, or Z because I don't know how to ask for X, Y, or Z. That's a bit of a soapbox. But...

Sandy: Yeah, no, but you're right, that's the key, is that we don't know, what we don't know. And, you know, if you're just trying to make it through the day, you'd have no idea that these resources are there. You know, you might just know these major milestones, but what can, or should you be doing leading up to it? And that idea of losing insurance if my child has a full-time job, or I have or get a full-time or part-time job. Oh my gosh, what a huge barrier. Yeah, like learn the real laws, like learn what you can do, but if you've heard something and it's just been ingrained in your head, then you might not fight that battle yet. So, figuring out when is the time. What about getting other underrepresented entrepreneurs, you know, somebody who's thinking about, somebody who's aspiring to be an entrepreneur? What advice would you give them? Aside from don't do it, run, run, run, just get a job now? No, I'm just kidding.

Eric: Well, I mean, first of all, if you are working someplace, don't burn your bridges. Yes, start a company, but don't leave the place you're at if you have stable employment until you just can't sustain both anymore. It takes time to get a business off the ground for anybody. And I typically tell people, a reasonable length of the runway could be three to five years. That doesn't mean you won't be profitable. But I mean, before you really figure things out as a business owner, you know, and you've got systems and processes in place, give yourself time, and the best way to do that is making sure you have money coming in. So, you're not stressing or freaking out or quitting before you hit critical mass. Right? I mean, I don't want to see somebody quit because they run out of savings. And they have to go and take a job that they don't want or just say I failed. Maybe you just didn't have the right idea, or you didn't have the right application yet. I mean, I'm speaking for myself, with Special Needs Navigator. I went through a couple of iterations before I finally launched it into what it is now. If you saw the website I had back in 2017.... [it had] little. I love the idea of people being entrepreneurs and starting businesses. I think the biggest problem I find people doing whether they have disabilities or not, is they have a solution and they run out looking for problems, instead of seeing the problem and then trying to find a solution.

Sandy: Yeah, I'm gonna sit on that one. That one was a good one. Great advice. I was in the same category actually, 19 years ago, I started Platinum PR, but for the first couple of years, I was still working full time. Actually, no, I was working part-time, I wasn't working full time, I was working part-time doing economic development here in Frederick County. So, I needed that transition time for myself to figure out if this was going to take if I was going to be able to make a living doing this. And then yeah, two to three years in I said, I think I could do this. I think this is gonna work. So got that, you know, that big client, and was able to cut the strings, cut the ties,

but obviously have stayed in economic development and stayed connected forever. So, it's in my bones, which is good. So, my final question, actually, before I asked my final question, Eric, is there anything else that you'd like to add, anything that you'd like to share with the audience today that, you know, has popped into your head or something?

Eric: No, no Sandy, you've asked some phenomenal questions. I really, I really appreciate the light, you're shining on the capabilities of people with disabilities to find employment, and they are underrepresented for the number of people out there. I think the last study I read said, "one in six or one in five adults in the United States have a disability". So, when you think about that, how much of a workforce could you be losing out on? And I just really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to get on my soapbox and share.

Sandy: Well, you are so passionate about it, I just, I have so much respect for you and what you're trying to do to help other families out there across the country to share this. And I don't know if your son appreciates you yet, but he may day-to-day. But I'm sure that there are certainly other families out there that you know, will appreciate the resource in the work that you've put into this and that you're, you know, are willing to share. So, thank you for seeing that problem and being a good solution for it. Thank you.

Eric: Thanks.

Sandy: So, my final question is, as you know, this podcast is called the Frederick Factor. And so, we're trying to figure out, yeah, what is what is your Frederick Factor? What is the thing? Why that why Frederick? So, Eric, I'm gonna ask you what, what is your Frederick factor?

Eric: So why Frederick is, as I shared in the beginning, is I love the location. It fits everything I like to do in my personal life. I'm not a big city guy. I mean, I went to the Dueling Pianos that you had down, down in, OH MY GOSH, it was awesome! And, I mean, that's my speed right where I can sit outside and listen to Dueling Pianos along the creek and I'd ride my bike a lot and just ride around here, it's very bike-friendly. I mean, it's just for me, it's the pace that I want, and I need, where it's just people who are down to earth, right? They're real. And there's so many small businesses around here that it is easy to support local businesses. And because there's literally something for everybody. I mean, a personal favorite of mine is Dragon Distillery. But you know...

Sandy: Yes, yes, I was out of town for the Dueling Pianos. Oh, but I, oh my gosh, I just love that type of activity. So much fun to see a couple of individuals showcasing their talent in that fun, competitive, sparring creative way. Awesome. Well, Eric, with that, and I'm going to thank you for joining us here on the Frederick Factor and look forward to certainly seeing more great success for you and your business and the connectivity of those individuals that you are helping

to support and their families. And, you know, seeing more opportunity for great employment throughout the country. Thank you for joining me here today.

Eric: Thank you, Sandy. It's been awesome.

Sandy: You've been listening to the Frederick Factor. Want to find out more about our diverse community and what makes Frederick so special? Visit our website at www.FrederickFactor.com. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Facebook. 'Til next time!

