

Frederick Factor - The Friendship Factor Transcript

Sandy: Welcome to the Frederick Factor! My name is Sandy Dubay and I'm the Season One host. Everyone who has lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick County, Maryland, knows that there is something 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 their Frederick Factor. In today's episode, I'm excited to be interviewing Jose Bueso who is a well-known business owner here in Frederick County. For over 25 years he has been one of the owners of Dynamic Automotive. In this episode we talk about his journey from working on cars in his garage to owning five different Dynamic Automotive locations with over 40 employees. While Jose has faced fears and challenges along the way, he stayed relentlessly committed and determined to growing the thriving business he has today.

Sandy: Today, I am so excited to be speaking with Jose Bueso of Dynamic Automotive. I invited Jose because we have started working together as he is serving as a mentor with the Frederick County Office of Economic Development's EmPOWER mentor program that launched in the fall of 2021. As a local business owner with several locations here in Frederick, I want to learn more about Dynamic Automotive, Jose, and all that encompasses there, and I thought our listeners would too. So, Jose, welcome.

Jose: Thank you. Nice to be here.

Sandy: Thank you. I'm so excited to have you. What brought you to Frederick County, Maryland?

Jose: Well, I used to work down in Montgomery County years and years ago and we found a great community up here in Frederick County. Made the move back in 1979/1980. And I, like so many other people, drove down to Montgomery County for about 15 years. Did that drive on 270, making a living, and enjoying growing a family here in Frederick County and decided it was time to open up a business here in Frederick County.

Sandy: Awesome. So tell us about Dynamic Automotive.

Jose: So Dynamic Automotive is a multi-location repair and service facility. We have five locations currently: New Market, Libertytown, Urbana, Frederick, and now in Emmitsburg.

Sandy: First off, which was your first, which was your first location?

Jose: New Market in 1995.

Sandy: Okay, my gosh, the idea of franchising. And you know, expanding from there. What prompted that? How did you decide? Was it market demand? I mean, that has to be a huge thing to go from one to two, much less one to five.

Jose: Yeah, one to two. The second one is definitely the hardest. My partner and I always wanted to clone ourselves. We thought that if we could develop the proper standard operating procedures, teach others, mentor others, and bring them up, we could duplicate our processes. And we did. Like I said, that second location was really a test. It wasn't easy.

Sandy: Are they franchised? Are they owned by you? Are they owned independently? Talk to me a little bit about that.

Jose: Well, they are owned by us and I have two other partners: my first partner, co-founder, his name is Lee Forman, and then we have another partner who came on just a few years later, his name is Dwayne Myers. Dwayne Myers is currently the CEO and President of the organization. I'm the past President.

Sandy: Oh, okay. Okay. So you... each of you... and your two other partners, you each I'm assuming, have different roles and specialties, stuff like that. Is there a particular role or area of the business that you enjoy the most?

Jose: I enjoy the operations. Thoroughly enjoy that. And I get to work with our location leaders, develop the systems within each store so they're the same. And we have our meetings, we tackle our challenges, and I just have a lot of fun doing that.

Sandy: When did you start the business?

Jose: March 6, 1995. We opened up the doors at the New Market shop, which was a little two-base shop on Old National Pike in New Market, Maryland. And I'll tell you three days before we opened up the door, people were banging on the window with, "*Hey, are you guys open for business we need our cars worked on.*" And that was just a sign of what was to come and that first location just exploded. And we never looked back.

Sandy: Wow. Talk to me about that first conversation that you and your business partner had when you were trying to figure out, are we going to do this? Are we really gonna start this business? What was that like that? I know you know what my process was, what my story is. I'm anxious to hear yours.

Jose: Well, very scary. We actually started our business in my garage and we worked for four years on weekends in the evenings, we did a side business, we got cars in and out, we actually were drilling and educating ourselves how to operate. We sat down with the Small Business Administration, and they got us in contact with accountants, attorneys, and we learned the finer things of how we should go about opening this business now. He and I had very good jobs working for the dealerships. We made a very good living. We were both scared to death to take that next step. You know, it's like jumping off the side of a cliff and you hope that the parachute is gonna open up and carry you to a better place. And let me tell you, it was scary.

Sandy: Did your family, you know, what did they think? Did they support? And yeah, that side hustle is interesting.

Jose: Yeah. You know I think our family, both of our families, were very supportive. Even the kids were very, very supportive, and, at that time, it was really such a big goal in all of our lives. We were destined to pursue it. And I'm happy to say so far destined to succeed. And that first location really was sort of a miracle because that location gave us the ability, the momentum to grow.

Sandy: What do you mean by that? Like, why that first location?

Jose: Location, location, location, and those people knocking on our door three days before we opened up, that was a sign of things to come. We were so busy. It was incredible, and we did a great business. And not only that, it wasn't about making money. It was more about making friends, and that's our catchphrase: *Dynamic Automotive, where customers become friends*. And we built so many relationships during those first five to ten years. It was just incredible. It really was.

Sandy: Yeah, it's so funny because I'm sitting here reflecting on the relationships that I've had over the years and everything from personal or business relationships and where I have been a client, and yeah, it is great to walk into a business and have people know your name the ... you know, the... the cheers adage, I guess.

Jose: Exactly! Yes!

Sandy: It is really, really nice.

Jose: So important. You know, I know that we worked on cars, we were problem solvers, but you know, meeting the people, getting to know them. We would have couples that just had their first baby, bring their newborn by the shop, and share this special experience with Lee and I. It was just amazing. So those are the kind of relationships we were able to foster.

Sandy: That's awesome, and now after, what has it been 25 plus years? You know, you've probably helped those newborns get in their first car, repair their first car, you know.

Jose: Yes.

Sandy: Help them to afford something.

Jose: It is so satisfying to see the second generation coming to us after mom and dad have been with us for so long. Now we're seeing them, and they're introducing us to their kids. It's amazing.

Sandy: So, as part of this podcast, what we're doing is sharing stories of underrepresented businesses, and the struggles or the challenges of the amazing opportunities that they have faced. And I'm curious if your business has faced any particular challenges as part of your growth?

Jose: Oh, yes. Lee and I really wanted to grow the business, and we were able to succeed by opening up that second location, and that second location really taught us a lot of lessons. We opened that location in Libertytown, a completely different type of area, more rural, and people weren't knocking down the doors to ask, *"Hey, can you repair my car?"* It wasn't so easy getting that location off the ground. Even though we were able to purchase that location, ground and all, that location took a lot longer to become profitable, to stand on its own. Which we thought, *"Oh, we're good. We can do this."* Well, it wasn't that easy. Then another opportunity occurred. We were offered a piece of property in Urbana, and Lee and I decided, okay, we're gonna do this. At first, I thought you're crazy, Lee, because he brought it to me. I thought, *"We're just getting the second location off the ground and now we're looking at a third location?"* And this third location was not going to be cheap. The second location, we got a good rate. The third location we were building from the ground up. When you build from the ground up, you're paying retail pricing for builders, for ground, for permits, for you name it. I mean, it was astronomical. It turned out to be a big, beautiful shop. A four-bay, quick lube facility with a nine-bay shop and a 60-foot soft cloth car wash. When we opened the doors, well, there wasn't a rush of people coming in. So we had to subsidize that location for a number of years. And I'll tell you, that's tough after you've been profitable for 10-12 years to realize, *"Oh, we're gonna lose money this year."* And hard times began; for the next two to three years, we struggled. And we were financed by a local bank that had been absorbed by a national bank. And that national bank said, *"You guys don't fit our criteria. You don't fit our mold."* And we went into a forbearance period. They did not renew our term with our purchase. And we fell into hard times. We had to meet legal struggles head to head with this big bank. And they threatened, *"Hey, we're gonna shut you down. We're gonna take your properties. We're going to take your homes."* So it was a very, very tough time, and I had to go find a very strong attorney, which I did, down in the Bethesda area. He was an ex-Israeli Tank Commander. Michael was his name. And Michael did a fantastic job, stopping this enormous financial institution in their tracks. We were able to get ourselves

refinanced by a local community bank, who really wondered why this was occurring. We found that we were victims of a predatory type of lending practice. You know, you learn lessons as you go down this road. And it's not always pretty, it's not always easy, but we were able to overcome, and the following year we resurfaced.

Sandy: Is that when you opened your fourth location, the following year?

Jose: No, no, actually that occurred about four years after that. This was during the 2007-2008 timeframe. And during that time frame, actually, businesses in our industry became better, and it helped us over the hump. And we were able to fill those coffers back up and purchase that fourth location.

Sandy: Wow.

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Sandy: There have definitely been times in my business, there has been, you know...have been the ups and downs and I have been able to, you know, run kind of really lean income at times. And to hear you, you know, express that vulnerably and put yourself out there to say that "*It hasn't always been easy or perfect or you know this like textbook formula of what you can do*" is encouraging. Thank you for sharing that story.

Jose: Oh, my pleasure. Yeah, yeah. It's been a bit of a roller coaster ride. It's been a fun ride, though. It has.

Sandy: What's your specialty? You know, do you have a particular type of vehicle that you like to work on? As you mentioned, obviously, full service garage, you mentioned oil changes, and you mentioned car washes. Talk to me about the different services in general.

Jose: Well, of course doing services on these modern day vehicles means you have to be cutting edge and we sent all of our technicians to the very best education offered across this nation. So you'll see us at Vision, Automechanica, APEC SEMA, we'll take half a dozen of our guys and we'll fly them across the country to these training venues. And it's not just technical, it's also managerial. And we also take advantage of the courses in our community colleges. We send our apprentices to those courses, those programs that are available out there. As a matter of fact, we're heavily involved with apprenticeship programs here in Frederick County, with the Career

and Technology Center. And my partner Dwayne Myers, was the architect for the first registered apprenticeship program in Maryland. So we've got that going as well. After high school, our apprentices go on to community colleges, and they do two to three years either at Montgomery College or Gainesville Community College. These are the community colleges that offer technical training in our sector.

Sandy: I love it. I am a huge proponent of the apprenticeship programs, internships, co-ops, you know you name it! But that apprenticeship model is so important. Yeah, I've got some friends with the Maryland Department of Labor that have worked really actively on just promoting them and trying to expand it. So it's not just automotive, but it stretches over so many different industry sectors. It's truly an amazing program. I applaud you for sticking with that. That's great.

Jose: The Career and Technology Center in Frederick is probably one of the best-known educational jewels that we have. They offer 24 different vocational career-type training. And you see these kids going through this whole process in Frederick County and they are just shooting for the stars. Every May when I see these kids graduate it's amazing to see the amount of talent and brainpower our county generates.

Sandy: That's so cool. So recently we came together because you have agreed to help mentor other underrepresented entrepreneurs through this Office of Economic Development EmPOWER mentorship program. I'm curious why did you agree to help us? Why did you agree to help the program?

Jose: Oh, this is what I enjoy doing. And I'm so glad that you guys invited me out to lend a hand so to speak. And of course, I think that our team here that I've been introduced to will do an outstanding job and our mentees will get a whole lot of what we've got to offer.

Sandy: Did you have mentors throughout your career?

Jose: I did. Yes. My very best mentor was my father who taught me ethics, and how to work hard and appropriately, how to treat people appropriately. He was probably my very best mentor. But I've had other mentors in the business world and I'm very thankful that I had these people that I could lean on and draw their knowledge from, through these extraordinary times that I had to live through.

Sandy: Yeah, I've been fortunate to be in... kind of in... the same boat and had different individuals help out, remind me that I'm not alone. This isn't the first time. Mine also kind of started as a side hustle, I guess. I had a part-time job. I had changed my full-time job to part-time so I could start the business. And you know, figuring out how you're going to do that, how you're

not only going to be able to sustain yourself and you know, help your family then ultimately employ others and you know, help those families.

Jose: Yeah. It's important.

Sandy: Yeah. How many employees do you guys have now?

Jose: Currently, we have about 46. So we're getting ready to crest that 50.

Sandy: It causes me to like... it kind of takes my breath away a little bit. It's a big deal.

Jose: When you crest 50 then it's a different ballgame.

Sandy: Yeah.

Jose: Yeah, but it's gonna happen. And we have a pretty strong HR department so we're about ready. We've got good SOP down and even though they're growing pains and they'll continue to be growing pains, I think we'll be able to meet the challenge.

Sandy: Does your team rotate among offices?

Jose: Sometimes they do and sometimes what they'll do, they'll mentor each other. So we have weekly meetings and if there's a need at a location, if that location has a special challenge, we'll have other location leaders who generously give up their time and they'll leave their location and go help out at the location in need. So we have a very strong team approach and they just do a fantastic job taking care of each other. So the core group is very strong.

Sandy: Well, and the importance of your, you know, the operation side of things and making sure that each facility is unique, but also the same, and so somebody can weave in and out somewhat seamlessly, is really important.

Jose: Really important. Yeah. And you know, when it comes to the technical aspect of our business. If we've got an automotive challenge going on, we have the strength from our network that we have a lot of different brains that are capable of handling that problem, thinking that problem through, and that's another strength we have. The technicians really do communicate very well with each other, and they're happy to take on a new challenge.

Sandy: I love it. That is awesome. So, I'm curious; what would you like to see in Frederick County that would make it more supportive of your business growth? Is there anything that comes to mind?

Jose: You know, after building a few locations, after going through the process of permitting and having that whole process move along smoothly, I would like to see the department down in Frederick working more seamlessly with businesses, especially when it comes to challenging issues when it comes to building a new site. And if you have a challenging issue -- and it could be a number of things -- I think that we should have a better process in place to make that whole system work better for the business.

Sandy: How many of your locations out of your five have you built from the ground up?

Jose: So we've built, actually one from the ground up. Let's see here, it was actually 2002. And then...

Sandy: That was the Urbana location?

Jose: That was the Urbana location. That took a year and a half. Then we built a new New Market location back in 2020.

Sandy: Oh, okay.

Jose: Yeah.

Sandy: I'm curious if there's any advice or thoughts that you would share with aspiring entrepreneurs?

Jose: Get to know your Chamber of Commerce, get to know your Department of Economic Development, look into the programs that are available to you. You've got a lot of people downtown that are ready and willing to help; their programs, some of their programs are just amazing. And the resources are there. So yeah, just make the phone calls and reach out, look for those mentors, and seek help. Help is out there waiting for you.

Sandy: Yeah, it's interesting, the thought that came to mind is kind of like a realtor, you know, a realtor has worked with many different transactions. You might have done one or two in real estate, so you know, you align with somebody who's done many, just like economic development, and Small Business Development Center. I've worked with many, many, many businesses in that startup mode. So use their memory bank of resources.

Jose: Absolutely. Use their knowledge. We were lucky enough through these entities. We were lucky enough to come in contact with those commercial real estate people we needed to be in contact with...with attorneys who specialize in dealing with developers or dealing with the county when it comes to permitting—those kinds of people who have those specialties that you

really need. Well, if you don't know them, give the Chamber, give the Department of Economic Development a call they can point you in the right direction.

Sandy: So we had this great conversation. What else would you like to add? When you came in here today were you thinking, oh my goodness, I hope Sandy asks me this because I want to tell her this. Is there anything that you'd like to add?

Jose: Well, I think when it comes to Frederick County, we're very blessed to have been able to build the business here because we have the proper environment for any fledgling business to succeed. We have all the right ingredients, the right attitudes, we have the space, and we have the growing population at this time to really make your business the possibility of your business becoming successful. So this is a great incubator, if you will, to develop and grow the business. It certainly has been fantastic for us.

Sandy: That's awesome, Jose. Thank you. So, as I wrap up every one of my podcast interviews for this the Frederick Factor, I'm going to ask you, what is your Frederick Factor?

Jose: Relationships here in Frederick. Definitely. That's the Frederick Factor. Frederick is about getting to know your next friend. Your next business contact will become a relationship that will probably blossom into a great friendship, one that will last for years and years and years. Yes. The Frederick Factor here is becoming friends with the people that you come in contact with in business. That's my Frederick Factor.

Sandy: That's awesome. Thank you! I'm so glad that our paths crossed. And I look forward to working with you throughout this EmPOWER mentorship program, and I now have a new friend, and I thank you.

Jose: Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Sandy: Awesome. With that, I'm going to wrap up this episode of The Frederick Factor. Tune in next time to hear the next story of our amazing business community. Until next time!

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!