

Frederick Factor Season 2, Episode 0

Passing the Torch - Meet the Host of Season Two of the Frederick Factor

Ashleigh: Welcome to Season 2 of the Frederick Factor, the podcast where we tell the stories of underrepresented business owners, entrepreneurs and community leaders in Frederick County. I am Ashleigh Kiggins and I am the Vice President at MacRo Commercial Real Estate here in Frederick County. In addition to my work in the commercial real estate side, I also really enjoy working with nonprofits. I am currently the president at the Mental Health Association, on the board of directors there, and then I'm also a trustee at Community Foundation, and I'm on the board at Frederick County Association of Realtors. Sleep is not really in my agenda. I probably should start setting myself little alarms to remind myself it's bedtime. <laughs> So today, I am very lucky to have Sandy Dubay with me -- and most of you probably recognize her voice when she speaks. She was the host of Season 1, and she's also the owner of Platinum PR. So Sandy, welcome.

Sandy: I'm so happy to be here to flip the tables a little bit.

Ashleigh: I was waiting for my torch. Is there not gonna be a torch involved?

Sandy: There's not a literal torch. I have said, "We're passing the torch" and that you will be the host of Season 2, but no, sorry. There's no literal torch.

Ashleigh: That's okay. If you wanna just pass me that lollipop, we can play off of that. So, I'm excited to be hosting Season 2. For those who don't know -- which I'm sure you do know because I'm sure everyone has listened to every single episode of Season 1 before heading into Season 2 -- but I was a guest on Season 1. And Sandy asked if I would be oh-so-willing to come and fill her shoes -- which, we'll see how it goes because those are big shoes to fill -- even though my feet are probably twice the size of yours. All right. Well, one of the questions that I think I didn't get to ask you, because you asked all the questions last season was: why did you start the Frederick Factor?

Sandy: So, it started as a conversation. I had a conversation with a colleague a couple of years ago, pre-pandemic, and we wanted to tell stories of Frederick. Somebody had said, "What is that Wow factor [of Frederick]?" I said, "Yeah, what is that Frederick Factor?" And you know when you have those moments and you're like, oh my gosh, I have to write that down. And so I wrote down "Frederick Factor" and I came back to the office and said, "What about the Frederick Factor? Could that be a thing? Could that be a website? Could we do some blogs?" And then we moved into this office space and I could create a podcast studio in it. And all of a sudden, what was once an idea and a possible website that told stories turned into a much more formalized podcast series.

Ashleigh: Well, this is quite the studio. <laughs> I've actually recorded all of mine in the studio because Sandy said, "Well you could do Zoom or you could do it in my beautiful soundproof

studio with microphones that make us feel like we're like radio people." I've always wanted to be a radio super rockstar.

Sandy: Super rockstars. It's fun, right?

Ashleigh: Do you feel like a rockstar? Do you feel like I'm the disc jockey?

Sandy: I do now. Actually. Did you see me sit up taller?

Ashleigh: Yes!

Sandy: Definitely. I mean, there's something about having a "legit" microphone in front of you. We've all stared into Zoom for a while. This is definitely different. But you've got the big mac-daddy microphone and I've got the guest microphone, which is fine -- I like my guest microphone.

Ashleigh: It's okay -- this is my torch.

Sandy: <laughs> That was your torch!

Ashleigh: The torch was my microphone. <laughs> So, looking back, what were some of your favorite memories of Season 1? I mean, you had some incredible guests. Incredible different backgrounds, nonprofits, for-profits, different community leaders, businesses that were just starting out, and established businesses. You really went across the board, which has made it very hard <laughs> to do in Season 2, but I can tell you, you went across the board. So what were some of the highlights of that?

Sandy: Well, honestly, I will never forget -- well, you were my first in-studio in-person interview.

Ashleigh: I'm dancing right now. <laugh>

Sandy: So there was that. And that was fun and awesome. And I had just bought a second microphone. We were starting to feel more comfortable getting back into the space. Sitting in a room -- do we mask on? Mask off? We were kind of having all those conversations and figuring out what the dynamics are gonna be like. So that was really special for me. Obviously my very first interview on Zoom, where I interviewed the father-daughter team from Puerto Rico Distillery was insanely special. And, taking a shot at the end of that one of some of their amazing Pitorro, was fabulous. Absolutely loved it. And then, honestly, to be able to interview a deaf business owner in a podcast and an audio format was next-level for me. To be able to work with the translators at iYellow was beautiful. And, obviously we recorded that on Zoom. So as we're talking about underrepresented business owners and leaders in the community, to have that deaf population as a part of Season 1 was really special. Obviously we were doing full written-out transcripts and in several cases, we had video. To be able to include all of those from an

accessibility perspective so that people could watch or listen or read the podcast transcription was really important and I just loved it. And that was how we capped off Season 1.

Ashleigh: Which is a really cool opportunity, especially with having such a strong deaf community here in Frederick. To be able to kind of cross that border and make it all-inclusive -- which is the whole reason behind your podcast (to make it all inclusive) -- it's pretty exciting and pretty cool. And if you haven't checked that out, all of the Season 1 episodes are on the website, so you can go back and take a listen, read the stories, read some of the bios, and learn more about some of the really awesome guests as well. So when you were thinking about the next season, what were your reasons behind deciding that you didn't want to host the season and saying, "I think I want to ask somebody else besides myself to come in to host the next season"?

Sandy: So when I first started, I said all I could commit to was 12 episodes. So I did the 12 interview episodes and then I did Episode 0, where I introduced myself to the audience. And then that could have been it. I could have just walked away from the whole thing, but it felt like there was something there. And as a business owner still very much working full-time in the business, there's a capacity of self. And, I have other projects that I want to develop and have in my head. But more than that, once it hit me and it hit me like a lightning bolt one day, to say that there is another lens. Somebody else has a lens and could ask different questions or bring in different guests because you have different connections in town or you are going to approach this idea of diversity in a different way. So when I came up with that idea, I don't remember all of the details, but I remember being so excited because it literally hit me like that lightning bolt and I knew it was you. I knew that, from our experiences together and your comfort in telling your own stories and getting others to tell their stories, and as a leader here in the Frederick community -- a professional commercial realtor in this Frederick market, having that business lens as a young Black woman, seemed like just the perfect of all ingredients. And for you to have said yes, was even more exciting. Because it's one thing, when you're like, oh my gosh, this is perfect [for me to think that]. But I needed your buy-in too. And I think you hesitated for maybe half of a half of a second. I don't even know if you hesitated.

Ashleigh: I probably sneezed and that was like, one second. <laughs>

Sandy: <laughs> Probably. Oh my goodness. Yeah, I mean you just jumped in with all the enthusiasm and then we worked out the details later, so that was fun.

Ashleigh: I appreciate that. And here I thought it was because we met on a somewhat of a blind date with each other.

Sandy: <laughs>

Ashleigh: So Sandy and I's friendship developed and has become 50% laughing and 50% actual serious conversation. But we actually met for the first time back in 2020 for the Frederick

County Dealmakers Awards and we met on a Zoom call because that was the only way to make friends back then.

Sandy: <laughs> Like how all beautiful relationships started in 2020.

Ashleigh: Yes, exactly. And we were on a Zoom happy hour call after the event. Everyone stayed on or a few people, the network and uh, I did not know anything about Sandy did not know her at all. And she had mentioned something about -- I think the words were, "I haven't had crabs this season." And so I said, "You know, let's go get some crabs -- I'll get crabs with you." And so then, we did our little blind date. And it was like, "Okay, are you gonna go?" "Okay, are you gonna go?" "Who's gonna order first?" "Okay, is she gonna drink a beer first?" "Okay, I'll drink a beer." And let me tell you -- all-you-can-eat crabs on a first date -- that is --

Sandy: It was next level!

Ashleigh: It was next level.

Sandy: Right.

Ashleigh: That is a lot of time because then you have to decide -- "Do I want my money's worth? Or, <laughs> do I wanna get out of here?"

Sandy: Right. How terrible is this scenario gonna be? <laughs>

Ashleigh: But there she was at the picnic table. <laughs> We did the little wave. We walked up in that awkward, like "Oh, hi." "Hey."

Sandy: Yeah. Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Ashleigh: And, it may have looked great because for those who don't know, I am 5'11"ish. Um, <laughs> and --

Sandy: Sandy is not. <laughs> I mean, I'm 5'5" -- I can hold my own, but you are definitely slightly taller.

Ashleigh: So it was just perfect. And we sat outside, we cracked our crabs. We didn't have to call our emergency "get us out of here" dates. So, it really worked out. But in all seriousness, I truly appreciate it. It was great. We had so much fun during the interview. It was the first time I had ever done a podcast and I remember you telling me -- it's like a conversation. Yeah. Just make it a conversation. And that is exactly what we have done. So now a question I have for you is: When you're thinking about the Frederick Factor, where do you see the future? Is it the Maryland Factor? Is that the next step?

Sandy: Oh my gosh, do I go to Leadership Maryland and get them to sponsor that? Or, we work with the Maryland Economic Development Association. There could be something there. There are some stories through that economic development lens that I will definitely be doing once this launches and I have some time to interview others. I will definitely be doing a different podcast -- an economic development place-based storytelling podcast -- in the future. That's what Platinum PR does on a daily basis -- we tell the stories of places reimagined. But, yeah, for the Frederick Factor, I would love for there to be a Season 3. I would love for you to pass the torch and to find somebody in the community that wants to continue telling stories through their lens.

Ashleigh: Well, I like it. And so, you mentioned Platinum PR. You know, Sandy doesn't just do a podcast...

Sandy: Or just dream up other podcasts.

Ashleigh: Yes. She actually has a full-time job. So why don't you tell us a little bit more about Platinum PR. You know, you're not hanging out in a really, really cool office space (which it is, if you ever get a chance to visit). But yeah, tell us a little bit more about Platinum PR.

Sandy: Thanks. So, yes, I started Platinum PR 21 years ago. I can't even believe it!

Ashleigh: You can drink now.

Sandy: I can, yes! We're entering into our 21st year and I started Platinum PR back in 2002. At that time, my background was in economic development, so I worked in a county in West Virginia and a county here in Frederick County, as a matter of fact, in Maryland, coincidentally enough. And I enjoyed the place-based marketing side of things -- helping businesses to grow, helping to diversify the economy, figuring out how people could live and work in their community, so that they were adding to the local tax base. And, helping all of the other support services that we all have grown to depend on, whether it's fire and rescue or public school systems. All of that gets funded through those business taxes or through residential taxes. Presumably, you want the business taxes to offset ours as residents. So I started the business 20 years ago and it was me and then one other friend/colleague, and now there are six of us. And we are here in Frederick and we work with places primarily here in the Mid-Atlantic, but we have a couple of fun random clients across the country that we get to work with. So, for a lot of county or city government type of organizations, we supplement and support their marketing efforts. Oftentimes, somebody can handle social media, but they have a hard time writing the blogs or doing some media outreach or managing digital advertising campaigns or redoing a website or something like that. So whatever it is in that marketing communications realm that somebody needs support in and telling the story of their place, that's what we get to help with.

Ashleigh: So you kind of bring in that extra creative "oomph."

Sandy: Yeah. Well oftentimes, they have all the creativity in their office, but it's like -- you have all these ideas, but you don't have the capacity to get it all done with your day-to-day tasks. So

sometimes you need to bring in a little outside support. We've got some great clients that already have the ideas and they'll come to us and say, "Oh my gosh, I wanna do a podcast, but I don't know what it's gonna be about. I don't know who's gonna be on it. I don't know what it's gonna be called. I don't have a brand for it, I don't have a website for it. I don't know how to promote it. I don't know how to edit it." So we break down all of those details to turn their ideas into reality. That's our goal. My goal is really to make the client look great. I want that economic development office or director or staff person to be able to breathe a little bit more in their day. And I want them to be able to see great results for their community and for their stakeholders.

Ashleigh: So if somebody wanted to get in touch with you after listening to this, what's the best way for them -- as far as a website, and obviously social media? What are the best ways for them to reach out to you?

Sandy: Yeah, PlatinumPR.com is the first. And from there, we're on many of the other platforms: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok --- if you want to see a ridiculous series of TikTok videos, you watch the Platinum PR TikToks.

Ashleigh: I have seen a few of those and I will highly recommend them. If it's a day you're just sitting around and you're like, "You know what? This day is really crappy and I really need a good laugh." I highly recommend going to Platinum PR's Tiktok or Instagram because they're on the Instagram as well.

Sandy: <laughs> Yes. We are on the Instagram. Yep. You can find us on the Instagram. So, yeah, we wanted to experiment and my gosh, I think it was over a year ago now that we did them, so they're old. But if you find them, you'll see that, yes, we don't take ourselves too seriously -- we wanted to do an experiment. I think we did a 10 TikTok series. We are talking about doing another little stint on TikTok this fall. So look for it. I realize that is not the way we would ever advise our clients to go all in and then stop... and then go all in and then stop. But that is exactly what we had the capacity to do.

Ashleigh: <laughs> So what you're saying is you may need someone to come in and do your TikTok for you.

Sandy: Actually, that's why it might happen this fall, because I have identified somebody that's going to come in and do those with us or for us. Cause we barely have enough time to waste our own hours of the day watching other people's TikToks, much less do it ourselves.

Ashleigh: <laughs> So. Well, one of the questions I have to ask you, because this is what we ask all the guests is: Sandy, what is your Frederick Factor?

Sandy: So funny. And I think every single person gave me the answer last year that I'm about to give you. <laughs> There are so many things. There are so many things. How many things can I name? For me it is this environment and I have thought about this for a year while leading up to and recording -- it's the people and the place and the combination of this small town with a

medium-sized city that has become home. I have only lived in Frederick for three years and I've done a lot of work in the area I was working here back in the late nineties. But it's this sense of home and community that embraces you if you let it. And I love walking around downtown, to the park or Carroll Creek, or the nightlife on a Saturday, or a Tuesday or whatever. There's this distinct sense of place. And in the business that we're in, that sense of place is really important. And there are organizations like the Frederick County Office of Economic Development, the city of Frederick Economic Development, the Downtown Frederick Partnership, as well as all the other main streets in the county that have done a really beautiful job of creating a sense of place. And I am fortunate to sit on the board for the Downtown Frederick Partnership now. And so to be a part of that team a little bit is really a beautiful thing. And I feel really fortunate to do that. So for me, all of those things become that sense of place. And I think Frederick has an identity that can't be summarized in one word, or at least not by me, but it can be home.

Ashleigh: How do we describe it besides describing it as the “Huggy Town,” because that is what this place is. Trust me, COVID really killed us because we couldn't hug each other. But you know, I describe it as like when you're going to a family event or to some place with your new significant other, and you're a little nervous because it seems like everybody knows each other and you kind of feel like you're the outsider. And then you get introduced into the family and everyone just welcomes you with open arms and then you're in, you're in. And that is exactly how it feels with Frederick because it's one of those places where you can kind of feel like everybody knows each other. Because the reality is you can walk down the street in the middle of the day and I think I almost got hit by a car one time saying hi to Sandy, because I saw her across the street and I decided I was gonna go run across the street and say hi.

Sandy: It was a pretty dramatic run-across-the street. Yeah. It was beautiful.

Ashleigh: Yes, even in my head, I was going in slow motion and going, “Saaaaaannnnnddyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!”

Sandy: Yes. I captured it in slow motion too. Yep. <laughs>

Ashleigh: It's one of those places where it can seem like when we have family that comes to visit, they're like, “Man, you guys know everybody!” And I'm like, “No, we're just a really tight-knit community.” And especially not being from here, it does make you feel like you're not an outsider. And to feel welcomed the way that we do. And it's a special thing about this area and about Frederick and people are slowly starting to discover it, which is why we're making our way on the map.

Sandy: Yep, yep. I agree. It's pretty cool.

Ashleigh: I truly appreciate the opportunity to host this. Fun fact about me: I am actually incredibly shy and I am very much of an introvert. Sometimes I have a very hard time stepping outside of my comfort zone. And this was stepping outside of my comfort zone -- interviewing some people who I knew, and some who I knew nothing about, hoping that they're going to say

yes when you ask them because they can very easily be like, Nope, don't wanna do it. So I appreciate the opportunity to step outside of my own comfort zone and talk on the big mic.

Sandy: <laughs> Well I applaud you for that. I think that that's awesome. Not everybody says yes. And for you to have said yes to sitting there behind the big mic is pretty cool. So thank you for doing that and thank you for letting the Frederick Factor live on.

Ashleigh: And it will continue to live on and on and on until next thing you know, it's "the United States Factor" and it's all over or she's going to start franchising it so there's a bunch of different factors all over the place.

Sandy: Sponsorships are available. Yes. <laughs>

Ashleigh: Do the plug, do the plug.

Sandy: I know -- I should; I should. Platinum PR is sponsoring it again right now. But yes, we're always looking for somebody to help us continue because this is not a free endeavor. It is something that Platinum PR is sponsoring at the moment. So if anybody else would like to sponsor, please let us know.

Ashleigh: Now where would they go to let you know?

Sandy: They could reach out to the Frederick Factor on the website. We can put something in the show notes too.

Ashleigh: Excellent. I highly stress that. And then maybe we'll start pushing sponsorship opportunities on social media. Maybe she'll do a TikTok about it.

Sandy: Oh my gosh, I dunno about a TikTok. Yeah, we've got the Frederick Factor on Instagram and Facebook. I think those are the only two. But yeah, I can't even imagine. Can you imagine doing a TikTok during these interviews too? That's pretty next level.

Ashleigh: As someone who has prided herself on never doing a TikTok in my entire life and will continue to pride myself on hopefully never doing a TikTok then No, I cannot imagine. <laughs>

Sandy: <laughs> Oh my God, that just sounded like a challenge. Did anybody else think that was a challenge to get Ashleigh on a TikTok? Yeah, I think so.

Ashleigh: After my nine-year-old became very into TikTok, I realized TikTok was not for me. So, yes I'm not even on it. Don't even have an account. I'm the lone wolf millennial that's not on TikTok.

Sandy: <laugh>. So it's a good thing everybody shares that on Instagram then.

Ashleigh: Absolutely. I love watching them. I just don't want to actually sign up for one. Well Sandy, thank you so much and thank you for being here. Thanks for being my kickoff guest to the new season and hopefully everyone enjoys what the new season is going to bring. We've got some pretty exciting guests on it as well -- some names that you'll definitely recognize and maybe some names that you won't recognize, but you'll be really happy to learn more about them. Thank you so much and this is Ashleigh Kiggans signing out for Season 2.

You've been listening to the Frederick Factor. Want to find out more about our diverse community that makes Frederick so special? Visit our website at www.frederickfactor.com. 'Til next time.