

Frederick Factor Season 2 Episode 8: Wayne Dorsey of The Safe Ride Foundation

Ashleigh: Welcome to the Frederick Factor. My name is Ashleigh Kiggins and I'm the host of Season Two. Everyone who's lived in, worked in or visited Frederick, Maryland knows there's just something special about this place. One of those things is the incredible diverse community that continues to grow here. On this podcast, we bring 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? I am here today with our guest, Wayne Dorsey, from S.O.S. Safe Ride. Welcome!

Wayne: Welcome, welcome.

Ashleigh: <laugh>. Hey, you can welcome me here, too. I mean, I'm happy to be here.

Wayne: I do that every time. <laugh>. Thank you for having me.

Ashleigh: [That's like] when you're getting on a plane flight and they're like, "Have a good flight." You're like, "you too." And you're like, "well, you're not going anywhere." So don't worry about it. But welcome, thanks for coming today. So I know a lot of people probably don't know anything about you or S.O.S. Safe Ride. So let's talk about your background first, and then maybe how this all came about.

Wayne: It's funny you say that though, 'cause we've been around for almost a decade.

Ashleigh: Oh, they're learning now. I will tell you, they are learning now.

Wayne: <laugh>. All right. Well, having said that -- Hi, my name is Wayne. I am the president, founder, whatever you wanna call it, of the Safe Ride Foundation. We're the only nonprofit in all of Frederick County working to stop drunk driving. We do a number of different things, but I guess the number one thing we try to do is to -- drive home. <laugh> We are trying to eliminate excuses for drunk driving. There's already no excuse to drink and drive, but, we were trying to make it so you can't even think of one. We've been around for about seven years or so, and we've been pleased to now have prevented over almost 16,000 DUIs here in Frederick County.

Ashleigh: That's impressive. Now, I will tell you, I used to live in Fayetteville, North Carolina. And back in -- it was probably about 2008, 2009, we had a service in Fayetteville where they would come and pick you up and drive your car home. They used to drive little scooters and they would drive your car home. And I always thought that was the smartest concept and could not figure out why most people weren't doing that. And then when I learned about you guys, I was like -- yes, of course. Having that availability, having someone to come take your car home -- because I think that's a big thing that people say. Like, "Oh, well I need my car tomorrow. I can't leave it here. I don't wanna have to Uber back down here tomorrow to pick up my car." Um,

personally, I used to leave my car in downtown Frederick and I would actually force myself to run the three and a half miles from my house to downtown Frederick the next morning to pick up my car.

Wayne: There it is.

Ashleigh: <laugh>. So what inspired you to really start that?

Wayne: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So, a clear distinction here. So the name of our organization is the Safe Ride Foundation. What you're referring to is SOS. So there is a difference. But it's funny because that's what everybody knows us as. Everyone just calls me the SOS guy. So SOS, as you said, is our nonprofit program that will drive you home in your car when you have too much to drink. So, I don't have a compelling story for you as to why I started this. But I always share with people that when I was in college, I was an athlete, I was in a frat, and, for a lack of a better term, I was just surrounded by people that did really dumb things all the time. So, I don't have a DUI, I don't have any family members that passed away in a tragic accident. I very luckily don't have that story. But, because of my experience, I felt like I was surrounded by the problem in a way that a lot of people weren't. And my background's in computer engineering. So when I had the idea for the app, I figured that could save the community, that could impact people's lives. And on top of that, that'd be a really cool job. And now it's seven or eight years later and now it is my job.

Ashleigh: That's awesome. And you don't always need to have the story. I mean, you're preventing yourself from having that story and preventing other families from having that story. It's very cool. So I know you mentioned starting the app. So did you guys have the app as soon as you started the nonprofit?

Wayne: Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Ashleigh: Okay. So, we'll make sure that they add a link to the app too as well. So if anyone hasn't downloaded the app, it's very easy to use. I know personally I love the fact of giving back to a local nonprofit and using that as opposed to necessarily using one of the larger ones that don't, once again, get your car home. <laugh>. You just have to worry about getting your body home. And as we have seen a number of times downtown -- I think we just actually saw it this weekend of someone driving into a building after drinking and driving. So it's important to have that. So hopefully everybody will look at the links down here and download the app if you haven't. So, starting your nonprofit -- obviously you started it before 2020 and before a lot of attention was turned towards minority businesses -- were there any obstacles or anything that you faced when you were starting the nonprofit, whether it was related to being a minority business owner, or just even just starting a non-profit to begin with?

Wayne: I hear you. I always share with people that I started this business when I was very young, right. So I'm 31 now, and then when I started, I was about 23 or something like that. So I was young and because [I was] a minority and a young person, two things were happening.

One, people either weren't taking me seriously, or two, they couldn't say no to me. So basically, what I guess I decided to do, maybe subconsciously, is the advice that I would give to people, which is to use it as a superpower, right? When I was growing up, if I was in a room full of people that weren't people of color, that's kind of where I thrive. <laugh>, I hate to put it that way, but it's like --

Ashleigh: I get it. Yeah.

Wayne: Yeah. So having said that, it's like, okay, well, you know, if that's that's the situation I'm in, then I guess we'll just have to figure out how to deal with that. <laugh>. So Yeah.

Ashleigh: Well, you embrace what's different. My industry -- obviously commercial real estate is not the most diverse industry by any means. And so I got accustomed to being the only minority in the room or even the only woman in the room. Which I actually love. I agree with you. I think there's something about it where you're like, "okay, let's embrace it."

Wayne: [inaudible]

Ashleigh: And that's what makes you different. That's what makes you memorable. You're also very tall.

Wayne: Working on it. <laughs>.

Ashleigh: <laugh>. I mean, I like to consider myself tall at 5'11", but when I sit next to you, I do feel like I may be 5'5".

Wayne: You sound like my wife right now. <laugh>. She's 6'1".

Ashleigh: She's 6'1"?

Wayne: Yeah.

Ashleigh: Oh my gosh. I need to stand next to her. She and I need to go hang out more often. But yeah, it's kind of one of those things where you're like, well, I'm gonna make sure everyone remembers me. You're also one of the best dressed people in Frederick. Hands down. I mean, every time I see you. You are well dressed right now. We'll have to take a picture so people can see how well dressed you are sitting across from me right now. <laugh>.

Wayne: <laughs>.

Ashleigh: What are your future goals that you have for the nonprofit, for each side of it? What are you currently working on? What do you guys see yourself doing in the future?

Wayne: I hear you. Okay. So to give you an idea what we do. So we're the Safe Ride Foundation -- we stop drunk driving. Now, SOS is the thing that we're known for, but we have

three other programs as well. So things that I guess people don't know as much about -- Number one: We have our breathalyzer booth. At least that's what we call it. Every other Friday and Saturday Night on Market Street. If you're walking through the bars and stuff like that, you can just come up by the Gaggle and get a free breathalyzer test.

Ashleigh: Really?

Wayne: Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Ashleigh: I did not know that. <laugh>.

Wayne: Yeah. Right. <laugh>. So, it's a way to keep people aware and also just be like, "Look, young lady, you are 5'2", A buck 10 -- you're probably gonna feel a little weird after two drinks." Then, it's a nice way to also lead into, "Hey, by the way, we also offer this program that does this." Another thing we do is we have our -- I'll put it this way -- we can't catch everybody. So in the unlikely but not impossible event that someone loses their life or is affected by drunk driving, we have this Safe Ride Foundation Angel Fund, which is basically like our victim relief fund. And we provided over I think \$25,000 over the years to families that have been affected by drunk driving in Frederick County. And the last thing is -- We call it Steered Straight. You ever heard of Scared Straight?

Ashleigh: Yes.

Wayne: So, Steered Straight is our DUI offender rehabilitation program, turning bad drivers back into good drivers. So allowing people who get DUIs in Frederick County to basically see their offense from the other side. And be part of the solution, not the problem. So, yeah.

Ashleigh: <affirmative>. So where do you guys set those breathalyzer booths up on Market Street?

Wayne: Right in front of -- I was gonna say Taco Daddy, but <laugh> uh, in front of Blue Agave. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Got it. <laugh>. That's really good to know because I think people do have that misconception sometimes in thinking like, "oh, I've only had like two drinks" but there's so many factors that play into it. Your body fat, your weight, your height -- all of that can play into it. So two drinks for me may be different from two drinks from somebody else who's half my body weight or my size.

Wayne: mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Ashleigh: So, it's good to know that before you get behind the wheel because I think the big thing that's come out recently within the last 5, 10 years has been the "buzz driving." And buzz driving is drunk driving. And I think it's very easy to think like, "oh yeah, I'm not drunk, I feel

okay.” But if you can actually get that breathalyzer ahead of time, before you get it and get in trouble for getting it...”

Wayne: Correct. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: If you can have that ahead of time to at least know, and then, you guys are right there to say, “Hey, look, we can take you home. We can drive you home.” So it’s really good. And I will say I know people of all ages that use this, whether they’re younger, older. One of my coworkers, her son, actually works with you too now.

Wayne: Who is it? <laugh>. Oh, sorry. <laugh>. No, I’m sorry. Every time someone says [that to] me I’m just like, “who is it?” Like, I probably know them.

Ashleigh: <laugh>. It’s Liz’s son. We’ve had these conversations about it and were talking about the importance of having something like that. Do you guys see yourself at some point expanding outside of Frederick County? Or would you like to keep it more [for the] county?

Wayne: Well, it’s a complicated answer just because when I think about the expansion process of SOS, obviously, it would be nice for it to be in adjacent counties, or everywhere, right?

Ashleigh Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Wayne: But as far as what our expansion plans look like, it’s more of expanding the nonprofit itself -- like, the entire organization. So whether that means basically spreading more awareness or whether it’s getting more funding or just setting up more programs or whatever here in Frederick County, it seems like it serves us best to be more local. However, I completely agree with everybody when they say, “This should be everywhere and there’s a reason why, actually. I could go into it, but I don’t have four hours.” <laugh>.

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Ashleigh: I'm surprised that other people have not taken the opportunity to see that as a problem and maybe it's a matter of kind of figuring out where do you start from this? How do you grow this and make this work?

Wayne: I'll give you a secret if you want. I'll give you a little peek into what's going on in our head. So there actually are two other safe rides in the country. One's in Atlanta and one is in Hawaii. Weird, right? So we actually know each other. We met each other over the years. Now what we've kind of come to the conclusion of is that, the reason why, I think in the last 20 years, there's probably been about 20 or so organizations that have tried to start and have all failed to do this exact thing. The reason why is labor.

Ashleigh: Yeah. I could see that.

Wayne: Which makes sense. Right? Yeah. So having said that, the way we've gotten around that is that we've actually found now over 85 volunteers here in Frederick County that are volunteering to come to our office at 9:00 at night to drive home drunk people at 2:00 in the morning. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Wow.

Wayne: Yeah. Frederick is amazing for that. And, we are 100% volunteer and we wouldn't be able to survive, if not for that. So, yeah, it's pretty cool.

Ashleigh: Now are you from Frederick County?

Wayne: I'm from Charlestown, so about 20 minutes from here.

Ashleigh: Okay. So what made you want to start this here in Frederick?

Wayne: Well, okay, so I noticed that one of the questions that you guys ask is always like, "what is your Frederick Factor?"

Ashleigh: Yes. That's what I'm leading into. So,

Wayne: <laugh>. Okay. Well, if I could answer that -- so, I would honestly argue that Frederick is probably one of the most charitable towns in America. I don't know if you knew this or not -- so we have more rotaries in one county than anywhere else on the planet.

Ashleigh: Yes, I did know that.

Wayne: Crazy <laugh>, right?

Ashleigh: I think there's five now.

Wayne: There's more than that. Yeah.

Ashleigh: Or maybe six, because I know New Market I think has one too. It's a lot!

Wayne: I think it's more than that actually too <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Probably is!

Wayne: <laugh>. Anyway, so there's that. As far as the different local foundations and municipal funding that you can get access to. Just the amount of registered 501(c)3's that are in the town. And of course the volunteerism. It is just crazy how giving this town is and how altruistic that the people in this community have been. And especially to us. So, if anything else, that's a big reason as to why I started this in Frederick. Frederick's a great place to start a business, but it's a phenomenal place to start a nonprofit.

Ashleigh: Yeah. So I was on the board at Federated Charities for a while --

Wayne: Say hi to [inaudible] <laughs>.

Ashleigh: And that was my first board that I joined in Frederick and my first time to have the opportunity to see how many nonprofits there actually were in Frederick. I think a lot of us know of the large nonprofits in the area. But to see how many of these smaller nonprofits -- because that's what we obviously were supporting at Federated Charities -- these small nonprofits in the area. And I've lived in a few towns and I have never lived in a town that had so many nonprofits.

Wayne: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Ashleigh: But to what you're saying, [there were] so many people who wanted to be a part of these nonprofits and who wanted to give them their time and volunteer their energy. And you know, when you're in larger cities, everyone's big thing is like, "oh, what do you do for work?" And that's kind of how they determine [your status]. And in Frederick, it's like, "who do you volunteer with? Who do you donate to?" That's the way to get status, which, it's such a positive thing to have. If you're gonna get status anyway, get it by volunteering.

Wayne: Absolutely. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: And not by your career. And so, that's awesome. Well, was there anything else that you wanted to add that you wanted people to know about you guys? Or, if you have anything that's coming up that you'd love for people to check out?

Wayne: Well, let me think for a second. So, for SOS specifically, one thing we're doing new is we're finally moving into the Happy Hour space. So, for a very long time, we had, kind of, our reasons as to why we only opened at 9:30 at night. So as of St. Patrick's Day, we now open at 8:00. So that's to serve this really, really fast growing craft brewery scene. We've had I don't know how many craft breweries open up over the past -- let's say three or four years, but it's a lot. <laugh>. So, we didn't forget about you guys. We're now open at 8:00. So there's that. Another thing too is we have this new guarantee, because we have so many volunteers, we basically say that as far as like the cost of our rides -- the average ride's about 20 bucks. Having said that, if you want it to be free, it's free. It's kind of like a non-profit hospital. Like there is a fee we expect you to pay, but if your leg is broken, you're getting your leg fixed. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Yeah. <laugh>

Wayne: <laugh>. So I do stand up comedy, so I was like, making up a joke. <laugh>. So, the last thing, as far as the guarantee goes -- if we're not there within 20 minutes, then it's half off. Okay. So it's our way of saying -- we're trying to make sure you get home safely more than anything else. So, it's not about the money, it's not about -- I guess that's really the only thing. It's not about the money <laugh>. We'll get you home and we'll get your car home too.

Ashleigh: Now don't think we're just gonna let that little remark that you just made about your own standup comedy kind of slide under the radar.

Wayne: Sure. By all means.

Ashleigh: So do you perform somewhere locally that people could come and see you?

Wayne: Yeah, sure. So, I perform all the way around the DC area and then, here in Frederick there's the Cellar Door. So every Tuesday, we have an open mic, which -- you're more than welcome to come down and also perform if you want to perform.

Ashleigh: I only do this.<laugh>.

Wayne: <laugh>. You seem really comfortable in the mic, so.

Ashleigh: Only here. <laugh>. There's no one looking at me. <laugh>.

Wayne: That's funny though, in terms of being comfortable in the mic. I public speak, and I do stuff like this. And as far as comedy, I don't think I'm funny, but people go, "You just seem so comfortable on stage and I wanna laugh at you." I'm like, okay, good. <laugh>. Okay, thank you. I appreciate it. Right. So there's that. And then also on the subject of comedy, our big fundraiser for Safe Ride actually is called the Over the Limit Comedy Fest. Get it? And it's right by right behind us at the Weinberg Center.

Ashleigh: So When is that typically?

Wayne: Usually in the fall. And we usually bring in like a Netflix comedian to basically the headliner. And we have Frederick comedians that will round out the cast. I usually host. It's a big old night where we sell out the Weinberg, we have fun and we raise money for drunk driving awareness.

Ashleigh:That's awesome. Well, and you said to look out for that in the fall time?

Wayne: Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Ashleigh: Now can people follow your Facebook page and that's how they can get more information? And then do you guys look for sponsors for that too from local businesses?

Wayne: Absolutely.

Ashleigh: Okay. So we'll make sure that there's a link to your Facebook page and your Instagram and all that so that people can follow that and see when that information comes out, tickets are available, and the sponsorships are available.

Wayne: Absolutely.

Ashleigh: Awesome. Well, I really appreciate you being here today and educating us. I mean, obviously we had fun, we had some laughs, but it's a very serious matter that you guys are really attacking head on. And I think I speak for the whole community when I say thank you for being the ones to take this on, because it is scary and being a parent, knowing that I have a teenager who's going to be driving soon -- Don't worry, I'll tell everybody what kind of car he drives so that everyone can stay far, far away from him. <laugh>. But it is nice to know that there is that caring factor out there that you guys are really giving and the safe factor of just making sure that everyone's getting home safe and there's nothing like going out, waking up the next morning and realizing your car is right there in your driveway. And so that is a really nice feeling when you've got places to be and things to do.

Wayne: Agreed.

Ashleigh: So, thanks so much.

Wayne: Hey, thank you.

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