

Frederick Factor Season 2 Episode 11 Hannah King of SL Studio and Squadstyle Work & Wellness

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?

Hannah: Thank you. I'm very excited to be here.

Ashleigh: So tell us a little bit about you, about your background and how you ended up here in Frederick.

Hannah: I'm actually from Germany and I came here in 2015 as an au pair and I just wanted to perfect my English, but little did I know, it really just changed my entire life. <laugh>. And it really started with me being an athlete my whole life and in top shape and getting here, experiencing all the American food and the family-packed sizes and all that stuff. <laugh>. And I just had gained so much weight that I felt so uncomfortable in my own skin. I just really didn't like myself. I was very unhappy and I was like, I need to do something about this. And I took the advice from all the moms that I was surrounded by and they were like, "Oh yeah, you should do a 21-day fix. You should do this." And I was on all these fad diets and was losing some weight and gaining it right back. And it was just this rollercoaster, very unsustainable. And I'm like, this can't be it. <laugh>. And it dove me into the research of living a healthy lifestyle and realizing it's really about longevity. And that's kind of where my passion and start for Squadstyle came from -- just wanting to pass that on and teach others what it really means to live a healthy lifestyle.

Ashleigh: Now, what kept you here though, in the Frederick area?

Hannah: My husband. <laugh>. He grew up here. I was up in Potomac first and Jimmy and I moved in here in Frederick and I just fell in love with everything about it. Like one, that we have so many German roots here. I'm like, that must be so ironic. <laugh>. And I just love our community. I love how we have all these individual businesses. It's just been such a beautiful place to settle.

Ashleigh: Now did you guys meet while you were working in Potomac? Did you meet here in Frederick?

Hannah: We met while I was working in Potomac and he was opening the club Lifetime Athletics up in Gaithersburg. And, I was a member and I would just always walk by his office, <laugh> like, "hi Jimmy!" <laugh>. And eventually we made it out on our first date and the rest is history. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Well, it's awesome, especially to have someone who shares, obviously, your passion. And is it fun working with your spouse? I mean, having him there and really being able to bounce [ideas] off of. And I mean obviously his passion is fitness too, just like yours. So, what's that dynamic like?

Hannah: Yeah. Well in a relationship, it's everything I could dream about and ask [for] because it's just that accountability that you have and it's really just a way of life at this point. And Jimmy definitely has this entrepreneurship in him that pushes me too out of my comfort zone. My instinct is always more so my German roots of like, "I need to be safe. Everything needs to be planned out." <laugh>. "If it's not planned, it can't happen." And he really kind of just left that behind for me -- well, helped me in leaving that behind. And, running the business has been challenging. I mean, after a couple years of being together 24/7, you are ready for a little break. But now Jimmy is doing a lot of wellness consulting outside of the studio and that's been kind of nice to expand the Squadstyle mission.

Ashleigh: Is that under the same name or does that have its own separate entity? Because we can definitely -- we'll link that too. <laugh>.

Hannah: Yeah. It's his own business. Yeah. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: What's the name of that business?

Hannah: Right now it's "JK Industries" is what he runs it off. And yeah, it's just like a contractor going into businesses and consulting essentially about all things wellness, like whether that's teaching classes or running people through exercises or introducing podcasts. It's everything health and wellness.

Ashleigh: Awesome. So I know you guys were SL Studio when you first opened and now you're Squadstyle. So, what is the business?

Hannah: Yeah. Squadstyle Work & Wellness is a co-working space for productive work and healthy habits. So we have our co-working space, our semi-private gym, we have a wellness room and outdoor area, and we just invite remote workers, health enthusiasts, personal trainers to just come and explore their own definition of health and wellness. And our biggest focus really lies on the wellbeing of our members because we know that it really takes that first to then also have a thriving business, thriving relationships. And, we just need to remember that work is not everything. <laugh> And it's become such a special place to just watch people grow just by being in our space. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Well, your new outdoor area -- I saw pictures of it. It is gorgeous. And I've been inside your space before too, and it is a very comfortable work environment. And if I didn't have an office, I would definitely be working out of there. Now as far as, if somebody wanted to come and check you guys out, do you guys do offer like a once-a-month drop-in too as well?

Hannah: Yeah, we have our free co-work Fridays. That's always an open house to come explore, bring friends. And other than that, the best way is just to book a tour on our website and we just show you the whole space and you can stay afterwards and work for the rest of the day or work out.

Ashleigh: Now you guys kind of started this whole new concept. I mean, what encouraged you to combine the co-working with fitness as opposed to just opening a gym?

Hannah: Yeah, great question. <laugh>. It honestly started with my experience in corporate gyms and just honestly seeing how cruel the environment is. There's no collaborations. The pay is very unfair and it's just really not a good place to be and not a sustainable place to be. And that really made me do some research and want to open my own space for trainers where they can collaborate versus there's no non-competitives. And, just sharing the resources and supporting each other. And on that research we were kinda leading down the path of the co-working industry and seeing like, oh my goodness, everybody needs a place for work and wellness, and that's where the merging of the two industries comes from. Just bringing it in one space and making it inevitable for people to just elevate their lives just by being in our space.

Ashleigh: Well, and I think it's so cool too, I mean, obviously with Covid -- you had this concept well before Covid, but when Covid hit, everybody started going back to this work from home. A lot of companies released their office space because they were gonna have all their employees working from home. So have you guys seen kind of an uptick now with people kind of wanting to get out of their houses and wanting to have another space to work that doesn't always look like your basement?

Hannah: For sure.

Ashleigh: Or your dining room table.

Hannah: Definitely. It's fun working from home, but when you do that for a month, six months or a year, eventually you'll start craving the social aspect. You know, getting ready and actually leaving the house. And it doesn't have to be every day, but just having the option to socialize and be in a different environment, it's just become so important and it's what we're seeing that our members love most -- to just have the option to come to our space.

Ashleigh: Yeah. And collaborate a little bit. And see other faces that aren't your family.

Hannah: Exactly. <laugh> Or your parents. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: We've talked a lot about your passion for fitness, so I know you mentioned that you were an athlete. What sport did you play?

Hannah: I was a dancer actually. Competitive dancer. Yeah, my team and I, we won our, like state's, Germany's and Europe's championships multiple times.

Ashleigh: Oh wow. <laugh>.

Hannah: And it's like literally my biggest passion. Growing up everything was always about dance.

Ashleigh: So are you gonna start a Squadstyle dance team or...? <laugh>.

Hannah: <laugh>. You know, the thought is there, but...

Ashleigh: I could see a lot of adults in Frederick probably being like, "I'd love to be on an adult dance team." Now, I don't have a lot of rhythm, so, I would totally join if I don't have to have rhythm. And you can show me how to do it.

Hannah: For sure. <laugh>. We can make that happen. <laugh>.

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Ashleigh: Because you guys have such a new concept, when you were out looking for, not just spaces, but just kind of really pitching your concept out, what type of obstacles did you find that you guys came against?

Hannah: Yeah, I mean, running your own business, you'll always face obstacles. And, it's still a journey that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world because it's just so worth it in the end. And our biggest one was not having a bank loan to begin with. Everything kind of happened really fast and I was very nervous on how we can make it all happen and seeing all of the contractor quotes in the middle of the pandemic. Everything was shortages and whatsoever. It was way out of my budget. And that's when Jamie came back in. He's like, "No, like we're doing this." And he supported me on cashing out our family savings and doing the work ourselves. So it was a couple months of ripping down walls and painting the entire place and crying a lot, and laughing a lot. <laugh>. It was an emotional rollercoaster. But in the end, it's super worth it and we're so

proud to just have created this beautiful space for our community with our own hands and that we get to share it now. Yeah.

Ashleigh: Well I can tell you if your marriage survived. <laugh>.

Hannah: I know, it bonded us. I'm telling you!

Ashleigh: All of that. I don't know if there's anything else that you're gonna come up against. <laugh>. So it wasn't just building out a space and starting a business and basically diving headfirst into the deep end, but you also had a pandemic. I mean, all of those different factors that really kind of phased into there. I'm starting to wonder if I need to get a 23andme test cuz I feel like I may have some German in me because when you were talking about everything being hyper organized, being very safe and having everything scheduled, that is completely who I am. <laugh>. So, I've gotta have some German in there somewhere.

Hannah: I love that. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Now I know that you guys have really blasted into just the Frederick community as well. Can you talk about how your experience has been with Frederick and in the community?

Hannah: Yeah. Nothing but love and support. In the beginning, I always felt like: "I have to do this on my own, I'm in this by myself, I need to do all the work myself." And then being in this community has just been so eye-opening and soothing and grounding. We've been receiving endless amounts of support from other businesses, from people, from our friends. And it's just literally to me the best place that you could possibly live and have a business in.

Ashleigh: Yeah, I concur. All of those things that you're saying. Now being a woman-owned business too as well, when you guys were going out to the banks, I know you mentioned with the banks and having those issues -- did you find that maybe that was part of the issue, that it was a woman-owned business? Was it just that it was new? Have felt like you've come up against any sort of adversity through that?

Hannah: I do feel like it came first from that little burden of coming from Germany and not really being established in the business world here. Like all my business connections and help came later on. And the same thing goes to things like accounting and taxes and all these things. Like, I always tried to do things myself or tried to find help and I just didn't have the right resources in the first place that could have set me up to be eligible for these things. So that really puts it back into my business now where I just am so passionate about helping other business owners, like literally executing on their dreams and just sharing their resources so they don't have to go through that alone. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Well, and I can tell you, I know you guys were talking about how you opened up your studio to trainers and you actually opened up to one of my clients, which is Straight Shot Training with Jonny and Chris. And while they were going through the process of trying to find a

space and Covid and all of that, I know how grateful they were to be able to have people like you who've already gone through that process -- to really be able to lean on and talk to and to have a space to start their business. I mean, how awesome is it that you can go into someone else's gym as a trainer and with your own business, and for them to be open-arms to you coming in there and supporting and allowing.

I mean, that's something you really don't see. I started my career in working in corporate gyms and in Virginia. And I can tell you it was nothing like that. It was more like what you were describing of a very cold sort of environment, which is very shocking when you think about fitness because fitness is happy. It makes you feel good. It's all of those positive things. So, it's really awesome that you guys have been willing to do that.

Now, I know we talked about a little bit of what Frederick means to you. So what would you consider is your Frederick Factor? What makes Frederick Frederick to you?

Hannah: I feel like Frederick is really special to me because of the wellness. Just seeing the community being so invested in being well and being the best versions of themselves. And I find that people are very open to stepping outside of their comfort zone, trying new things, trying new foods, trying new classes, and then also on the other side to have the support from all of the businesses to offer those resources. And it's just such a diverse wellness community. And I do feel like that's really what makes Frederick special to me -- the efforts that we're putting in as a community into our wellness.

Ashleigh: Absolutely. I mean this is one of those places where, as soon as the weather breaks 60 degrees and sunny, Baker Park is packed.

Hannah: Yeah, exactly.

Ashleigh: People are out playing tennis, they're going for walks downtown. You can never find parking. It's all of those things. I mean, if we had to rank us, I feel like if they did a ranking for healthiest cities, I feel like we've gotta be on that list. And at least for Maryland.

Hannah: It's actually something that Jimmy and I are looking into and really would like to explore more. It's called Blue Zones. So these can be Certified Blue Zones and it just means that they're addressing all aspects of health and are a healthy community.

Ashleigh: Oh, awesome.

Hannah: And it's something we aspire to explore more and lead Frederick into. So that's funny that you're bringing that up. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Well, that's really exciting. I always see it with the big cities. They talk about DC and New York and all those other areas, but I'm like, we've got, I feel, a very healthy town. We have a lot of fitness-minded things, a lot of new concepts like yours.

Hannah: One hundred percent. And all the young people that are just being driven to Frederick right now. We've got a great community. <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Absolutely. Now, if somebody wanted to come and let's say they wanted to first come find you guys, where are you located? Would they just walk in? Do they schedule an appointment?

Hannah: Scheduling an appointment is always best. We are right off of Thomas Johnson Drive on Byte Court. Dynamic Automotive are our next door neighbors. <laugh> And also online, Worknwellness.com. N is the letter.

Ashleigh: And then if they wanna come for the Friday drop-in coworking, is that a registration or do you just show up and drop in? Both?

Hannah: You can register beforehand so we can tour you throughout the space, but you can also just come, walk in, have a good time.

Ashleigh: Perfect. Awesome. Well, thank you so much for being here today. I really appreciate it. And, anything that we can do to help you push along the wellness factor, I am a huge fan of that, so hopefully a lot of people will start going and checking you guys out too if they haven't been out there. Like I said, I've seen the space. It is a very warm environment -- not just warm because of the way that it's been built out, but warm too, from the people. Everybody seems very friendly, like they have a really good time.

Hannah: Yeah. I appreciate that <laugh>.

Ashleigh: Which you don't really see sometimes in the workplace. And what's better, you literally have no excuse not to work out when there is a gym like six feet away from you. You have no excuse not to work out. Even if it's just for 10 minutes. But, yeah, thank you so much for being here.

Hannah: Thanks for having me.

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.