



OneEastside Outlook Fireside Chat

Stronger Together:

We'll Build a Better Recovery When Everyone Has a Seat at the Table

Don Baker, Publisher of the Puget Sound Business Journal, moderated a fireside chat of business and nonprofit leaders on Friday, February 25, 2022, who had engaging conversations around the challenges and opportunities for the eastside's business and nonprofit community as the economy continues to recover. Panel members included Jane Broom, Senior Director, Microsoft Philanthropies; Ed Fries, General Partner, 1Up Ventures; Debbie Lacy, Founder and CEO, Eastside for All; E. Lewis Rudd, Co-founder and CEO of Ezell's Famous Chicken; and Matt Wilson, Director of Development, Meta Reality Labs Research.

Key Takeaways –

- Businesses large and small continue to face common obstacles, including supply chain challenges.
- Many eastside companies will continue offer workers the option to work hybrid or fully remote indefinitely. This will provide a competitive advantage to the companies that offer the option and compete for talent, will allow workers to live further away, may transform how offices are configured but also can be challenging at times for collaborative work.
- Priorities during the recovery should include more funding for the eastside's nonprofits that supported so many individuals and families during the pandemic and enhanced engagement with arts and culture events and activities to reengage people with their communities.
- Lack of funding for BIPOC owned businesses and higher employment for BIPOC job seekers remains a challenge for the eastside.
- Challenges remain providing more education and technical training opportunities and mentoring to increase opportunities for BIPOC students who aspire to be future tech professionals and creating opportunities for greater inclusion and equity on boards and organization leadership.



What surprised business and nonprofit leaders about the last year?

Lewis Rudd of Ezell's Famous Chicken responded, "I didn't anticipate that the pandemic would be extended as long as it was." Matt Wilson of Meta Reality Labs Research responded, "I think other surprises are really around the push for continued innovation." Ed Fries of 1Up Ventures reflected, "this whole situation pushed people in the game business to be even more creative about how we work, I think there was a feeling that everybody needed to be together in a room to be creative. It turns out, that isn't necessarily the case."

How are businesses reopening and what challenges do they face?



Jane Broom of Microsoft responded, “We are very excited to have announced the reopening of campus, on Monday, March 28th. This has been a great opportunity to really learn how the office space might change. People are being asked to be in the office about 50% of the time or more. There's a lot of excitement. But there's also a lot of anxiety about what it means to come back to the office. And safety remains our number one priority.”

Matt Wilson reflected, “I work in AR and VR hardware and software research. I think in some cases, it was difficult because we work with both hardware and software. And on the hardware side, it's very challenging because we can't move our labs to homes. And so that did require us to change how we work.”

How did you overcome the challenges of working virtually?

Ed Fries responded, “Our fund is different, we're really focused on building community among founders. And so, connecting founders together and creating a space where they can communicate with each other and spend time together and build trust with each other is essential. And we've had to do that virtually. There is a little company called Spry Fox, up on the top of Finn Hill, in the Juanita area. They've been doing remote work for a decade, and I certainly saw them step up and kind of teach the other guys how to do it.”



And for industries including restaurants, where working remotely was not a possibility, how were challenges overcome?

Lewis Rudd responded, “Fortunately, we're doing well. We partnered with a third-party delivery company. And we were already equipped with the packaging necessary for to go services.” However, Ezell's faced the supply chain issues many other small businesses have. “At the end of the year, we got just three weeks' notice that, “hey, we're not going to be able to supply your chicken”. And we had to move to another source. But things are starting to look better. And there's a lot of our resources out there that are geared towards helping those in the industry to survive and continue to grow.”

How has the pandemic been a tale of two recoveries and highlighted existing inequities?

Debbie Lacy of Eastside for All responded, “We know that times of crisis don't create the disparities, right? They highlight and exacerbate them. So, from a racial equity and social justice perspective, this is a tale of two recoveries, not just from the perspective of our tech sector versus non tech sectors, of course, but more about the very different experiences of our small businesses rooted in the racial and ethnic disparities.



Lewis Rudd reflected, “I'm really pleased with all the conversations, but I'll be more pleased with action. That creates positive impact. We talked about the investors, we know for a fact that there's less than 5% of the funds to private equity funds and others that goes into the black community and people of color to invest in their businesses. We face it firsthand, the redlining and the lack of access to capital. We currently have four restaurants on the east side, but there were landlords at one point that wouldn't accept an application or lease for their property.”

The eastside population is growing dramatically with individuals adopting the work-from-home model that allows them to live anywhere. What can our cities across the eastside do to engage residents to become more active in their communities?

Matt Wilson responded, “I support the nonprofit Northwest Arts Center in Duvall. They don't have the teachers they need and volunteers they need. They need people in the community to return to volunteering and supporting these vital programs. And it always starts with funding. But beyond funding, it involves having events in the community, bringing nonprofits out to get exposure and giving reasons for the community to get engaged, so the ecosystem can grow. Because without the teachers and without the volunteers, these nonprofits really aren't going to survive.”



“And I think it's an opportunity for all of us in the philanthropic community to really think about how we are providing funding to these organizations. How can we be less restrictive on how nonprofits utilize funding, so that they can build up their capacity to become more of a professional organization? Nonprofits are the ones that held our communities together. And I think it's something that we need to remember and to honor as we move forward.”

How can we create an eastside community that is more inclusive and welcoming?



Debbie Lacy responded, “I think that, in part, it's the honoring of the leadership, the expertise and wisdom that exists in all sectors of our community. And not only do we want to be at the tables, but we also want to help build the tables with all of you. So, I think whenever we can think from a perspective of bridge building, ask, who is most impacted by this situation happening? Who has the most potentially to lose? Then reach out and bring these people into the conversations and create agendas together so that we're not feeling like we're an afterthought or

have a minor role in something that impacts all our lives.”

How can both private and public sector be more intentional about efforts to improve our communities when it comes to things such as infrastructure, transportation, affordable housing?

Jane Broom responded, “We need to change who is at the table and make sure that as strategies and agendas are being built, that it has done so in a way that is inclusive of all the different geographies, demographics, races, and genders of the people that live in this community. I think that is critically important.”

How do we improve the livability of the east side for everyone?

Lewis Rudd said, “Make sure that we hear from more people than we typically hear from in the processes of community engagement. I would love for us to see more convening spaces, where it's cross sector, cross community engagement with one another about why we love this region so much, and what we want to stay here and how we can preserve that. So many of us struggle when we're thinking about our children or our grandchildren not being able to afford to live here.”

What are the opportunities and challenges for recruiting employees who can choose to live on the eastside or elsewhere?

Matt Wilson responded, “We are now able to get the best, no matter where they're located. Remote work and hybrid work is a competitive offer, just like what location you might look at.”

What is the impact of the gaming business on the eastside?

Ed Fries responded, "It is a \$200 billion business and continuing to grow. I think there's about 500 game companies in the local region. So, we live in kind of the Hollywood of the games business."

What makes you optimistic about the future of the eastside?

Jane Broom responded, "I think that for me, it's this whole conversation and the word that kept coming up for me is intentionality. And the notion that, you know, we need to be intentional about having all people represented at the table."