## Lemmon Placemakers

## Season 1, Episode 4

[Intro music]

**Shasta Alexander:** Action just creates more action. When you see people doing it inspires you to do something more.

**Judy Larson:** Because we have a place for them here. Yeah. You know, if they're artists, there's a place for them. If they're, if they wanna be farmers or ranchers, there's a place for them. If they like welding, there's a place for them. Uh, whatever they're into, if they're a maker or doer, we are here to support them.

**Kara Harders:** Welcome to Home Starts Here, A podcast by the S D S U Extension Community Vitality Team. We seek out the individuals businesses and ideas that are sparking vibrant communities across South Dakota. We sit down with rural changemakers striving to understand their place in their local ecosystem.

**Joshua Hofer:** We all have laundry lists of the things that can make our communities better, but how do we get started and how does making that first step affect the ideas that come further down the list? A quote from the classic Chinese text, the Tao Ching says, A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Join us as we explore how the community of Lemon has found those first steps and how the simple act of getting started has multiplied their efforts in developing social capital trust and a sense of a shared future for the area.

**Kara Harders:** Hello everybody. My name is Kara Harders, and today I am joined by my colleague Joshua Hofer. And Judy Larson and Shasta Alexander with the Lemon Placemakers. Would you guys like to introduce, introduce yourselves?

**Judy Larson:** Sure. I'll, this is Judy and I'll go first. Um, I am part of Placemakers right now. Um, I'm on the Placemakers board and I live north of Lemon, so I'm technically a North Dakota resident, but, um, lemon is my hometown.

**Shasta Alexander:** I'm Shasta Alexander, and I am also part of the Placemakers group on the board. And I do live here in Lemon. Just moved here, I guess not just moved here about five years ago and that's when I joined the Placemaker Group.

**Joshua Hofer:** Yeah. And Judy, can you give us a little background, um, how long you've been in the area and what brought you back to Lemon or here To Lemon?

**Judy Larson:** Yeah. I'm originally from here as is my husband. Um, the place that we're on north of Lemon is his great-grandfather's place. So we have a lot of history in the area. I grew up 40 miles south of Lemon, still in the Lemon School District. It's a big empty space of, um, lots of land and, um, a few people. And, uh, so Lemon is actually our big town around here. so I went to high school in Lemon and moved away for college. Lived different places and then moved back, I guess before our children were born because we felt like we would like to live in a rural area and we'd like to be able to provide the same kind of childhood that we had.

Kara Harders 00:02:55 Awesome. That makes a a ton of sense. Um, and Shasta, have you lived here your whole life or did you move back?

**Shasta Alexander:** Grew. I grew up in Buffalo, South Dakota, which is a little bit west and south of here. And then I went off to school in Vermilion and um, lived in Iowa for about eight years. Moved home and moved here to Lemon about five years ago.

**Judy Larson:** Go Yotes. I was gonna say, sorry, I had to get that in there. I'm an University of South Dakota alumn.

**Joshua Hofer:** <laugh>, We love our sister institutions in South Dakota, but we might have to edit that out.

**Judy Larson:** <laugh>, South Dakota. I'm taking full advantage of the editing

**Joshua Hofer**: <laugh>.

**Kara Harders:** Uh, so like I kind of mentioned earlier, what brought us out here to talk to you guys was this really cool lemon placemakers group that you are a part of and have going on. So were, were you guys, has the group been around for a long time or were you here for the start of it? Can you tell me a little bit about how something like that gets started?

**Judy Larson:** Sure. it's, I think this is our fifth year actually, so about five years shasta moved to town and everything just started happening. <laugh>, I'm not really sure, were you involved with the first, like the, when we were making bath bombs at the house? That one short or was it just after, shortly after that? Yeah. Okay. Cuz we kind of organized after that. Um, it started out as something called Fail with Friends where we would just, uh, get together and try, you know, some like Pinterest failed sort of type thing. It's always better to fail with friends, right? <laugh>. So we did a lot of different, different things. We, we made those, um, beeswax wraps, you know, that you use instead of a plastic wrap. We tried that. It was kind of a big fail. Um, and just some other things like that that, you know, you're gonna get the supplies anyway.

**Judy Larson:** It's a fun thing to do together. We're from the Midwest, so we have to have like a purpose together, you know, we can't just hang out. Um, so it started with that and that grew and we had I 20 something people in, in my kitchen and like three people's dogs and everybody's kids and everything. And we were making bath bombs, so it was just filled with lavender scent and I mean, it was, it was just a crazy, crazy night. And after that we decided, I mean, my house is small and uh, we decided after that that we needed to, um, formalize what we were doing a little bit more and basically move it outta my kitchen <laugh>. It was just too much. And, um, but we, what we realized is there was a real hunger for gathering and doing things together and it was, uh, bringing together a lot of creatives, uh, makers and doers, I guess is what we always say we are. And, um, so Placemakers kind of grew out of that.

**Kara Harders:** Awesome.

**Joshua Hofer:** And was, so initially, was it a social, was it meant to be something like, Hey, we're going to get to come together and do something fun? Or were you already thinking of it then as a community kind of like advancement kind of tool or like, or was the creation in it in of itself, we're just gonna create something together?

**Judy Larson:** Hmm. Did it happen organically? Mm-hmm. <affirmative> there is the question. Yeah. Um, I think, you know, placemaking is something that I've personally been interested in for a number of years and um, you know, I've read the books and listened to the podcast and that kind of thing, so it wasn't like that wasn't on our radar. Uh, but I think it just, you know, we knew that things needed to start happening in our small town to make it a place that we all wanted to be, or in our community. And we have a lot of artists and we have a lot of makers and doers that maybe don't, um, aren't in the traditional leadership roles. Although I'd have to say now we've, you know, we've had different people that were on city council or that type of thing, but, but like, this is kind of more of a grassroots effort, not something that where they, the city council said, we can see that we need more community involvement, so therefore we are going to do this thing. Um, it was very much more, it's a lot more fun to hang out with people and do things together. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, a lot of it got its start, I would say with John Lopez on down on Main Street, it, John Llgitimized being an artist and making a living at it for our community. Um, and then made beautiful things happen and it was very inspiring and I think this is kind of, kind of rolled from there. Yeah.

**Shasta Alexander:** I would say, I don't know, when I kind of got into it, we, I was still at a kitchen table meeting at your house, but it was kind of the meeting to formalize mm-hmm. <affirmative> group and when it started it was a lot of lot more social gathering activities and we still do those, but, um, we've now kind of moved into more trying to better our community as a whole. In the beginning it was, let's have a paint night or let's learn how to do leather tooling or um mm-hmm. <affirmative>, whatever, whatever we could do just to get together and get people out and doing stuff in the community. When you live in a small middle of nowhere community, often it's just what high school sport is on mm-hmm. <affirmative> that there is to do and that's it. And there's a lot of us that have more of a hunger for art and craft and mm-hmm. <affirmative>, whatever.

**Judy Larson:** Oh, and I, I think that that too is kind of where we got to the point of asset-based community development, which has a name now, which we weren't really thinking about it as

**Shasta Alexander:** That. Right.

**Judy Larson:** <laugh> where we just kind of looked around the table because like Hawkeye did that car maintenance mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, and Ethan did that car maintenance,

**Shasta Alexander:** Um, yeah.

**Judy Larson:** Workshop. Just basic how to maintain your car cuz he's really mechanical and, um, had that to bring, you know, to the community and different things like that. I'm trying to think of,

**Shasta Alexander:** We've done the, every year we've done the bicycle tuneup where the kids can bring their bikes and we have several mechanical members who, you know, check brakes and oil chains mm-hmm. <affirmative> and air tires and fix tubes and whatever at the beginning of summer. So the kids have their bikes ready to go for summertime and mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we have smoke and ice every year. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> just kind of just a get together on the ice rink and a cookout after.

**Kara Harders:** Gotcha. So you mentioned that it, it started with bath bombs in your kitchen and now you guys are doing these really more community based for, for everybody type projects. And so was there a point or a project that kind of made that shift from like a more of like a lady's craft night or including men? I don't know what that originally group looked Like. <laugh>.

**Judy Larson:** There were men too.

**Kara Harders:** Yeah. Oh, okay. <laugh>. Awesome. Um, what, what made that transition?

**Shasta Alexander:** I think the bike tuneup would've been a, one of the very first more community based ones that we did. Mm-hmm.

**Judy Larson:** <affirmative> Well, but I think that even was sort of, again, around the table we had people that were interested in, um, we have one person that was a former bike mechanic in a past life and so,

**Shasta Alexander:** And very into and yeah. Um, bicycling and mm-hmm. <affirmative> racing and mm-hmm. <affirmative> doing different rides and wanting to get that going in the community. So that was our way as a group of let's, let's start young and mm-hmm. <affirmative> kids interested and mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

**Judy Larson:** Well I

**Shasta Alexander:** Think and that's grown.

**Judy Larson:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think too, we, um, we support each other in our interests. Shas is an artist. I'm not, but, um, I think being in a small community you don't always find, you don't have another print maker in town. I mean, there might be mm-hmm. <affirmative>, maybe there is another print maker in town

**Shasta Alexander:** That I know of, but I'd love to meet them. Yeah.

**Judy Larson:** Yeah. <laugh>. So if you're out there, <laugh>, um, I'm listening <laugh>,

**Shasta Alexander:** Right.

**Judy Larson:** Uh, but everybody's just as willing to support Shasta in her printmaking as they are to support. Michael was really into smoked meats and that's why we had smoke and ice, you know, originally cuz he brought the smoked meat portion to the ice rink <laugh>, you know, and we we're here to support each other in our creative endeavors, I think is,

**Shasta Alexander:** I think that's really kind of the core of how it started. Cuz all the classes we did wore, as she said, as asset based. Somebody, somebody had a talent or a craft and then they were willing to share it. We've had coffee roasting mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we've had, um, beer making. Beer making. Yeah. Yeah. We've had all kinds of things just pulling from our group what people are interested in, letting them share their interests with anyone in the community that wants to come.

**Joshua Hofer:** I'm curious because I've always, at least in my experience, I've always seen Lemon as a, as an artistic or as a cultural place. Um, and I haven't been around that long, but I'm curious where that, you mentioned John Lopez, um, do you think that pre John Lopez, that fiber was already present in Lemon? Or is that something that was developed because of his, him working in the community or having a space in the community? I'm just trying to think through what the predecessors were towards that meeting and that meeting becoming something of an arts or a creative outlet

**Judy Larson:** And so forth. Yeah. Well, driving out here, I'm sure you notice that it's a little sparse mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, there, there are not, um, you know, there's not a seven 11 every mile or anything like that. Uh, and the people that moved out here in settler times when, when this was homesteaded out here, had to be able to be creative because they had to work with what they had. And that is, we are innately creative here. It's amazing when you talk to people, you find out that they make like inlaid stirrups for saddles or you know, everybody, if you talk to people, you find that everybody has that creativeness in them. And I think that's what started it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that's what started it. We come from people who have learned to think creatively and, uh, be creative about how we use our resources because we had to. But John legitimized all of that. I mean, there's nothing more inspiring than beauty beautiful spaces. Um, and, uh, we are also very, very practical. So making a living with art that elevates it also, because who would've thought you could actually make a living as an artist? <laugh>, you know, that seems so impractical. We're practical people and that's where our creatively creativity comes from because we've had to be creative. And also now we see that you can, it actually can make money. Yeah. And so the two of those together I think are what maybe elevated

**Shasta Alexander:** It in this community, I would say. Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. It's a lot more acceptable idea. <laugh> mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative> than even a, you know, a couple hundred miles away. Where I'm from, there's not, I mean, there are of course artists in that community, but nobody that's maybe as known as John or, um mm-hmm. <affirmative> known, you know, everyone has their side hobby and their side hustle. But yeah, it's inspiring to me as an artist to hopefully one day get, there's coming until my mother tells me I should wait till retirement. Like her <laugh> <laugh>, she opened a quilt store after she retired, which is her dream, so mm-hmm. <affirmative> true.

**Kara Harders:** And it is kind of a scary thing to, to leave the,te comfort of, I know this is my cha paycheck mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and I know my health insurance is here and I know all of these things. And so to me it's an incredibly brave thing to, to make that jump. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So I understand, I understand the desire to do it, but I also understand your mother <laugh>.

**Shasta Alexander:** Oh yeah, I do too. <laugh>. Yeah. That's why I, it's a full-time job. <laugh>.

**Joshua Hofer:** Is that something you'd like to develop and pursue?

**Shasta Alexander:** Oh, definitely. I would love to. Um, and I'm working on it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> slowly. I just like to have lots of irons in the fire, so it takes me a long time. <laugh>, I'm also renovating a house and, you know, raising a kid. So,

**Kara Harders:** Which in itself, renovating a house is in a way an arts project is Oh, as well,

**Shasta Alexander :** <laugh>. It very much is the biggest art project I've ever done. Also the most expensive

**Judy Larson:** <laugh>.

**Kara Harders:** Have you guys seen your community change in response to the Placemakers program in the last five years? Like, have you seen different growth or opinions around it or?

**Judy Larson:** Well, we still have people that call us pacemakers, <laugh>, and I mean, you can use that in, in a creative way that, you know, we're, we're keeping the, keeping the heartbeat going and pace setters. I saw that on something the other day. So people know that we're out there, but I don't think that as a, a general for the entire citizenry, I don't think they necessarily understand why we do what we do and what it really means. You know, you can have events, you can be an events organization like a, um, like a chamber or something like that, and create these events for bringing business to town and, and, um, that's basically why they do it. You know, or, or, um, convention and visitors bureaus mm-hmm. <affirmative>, they're bringing that, those people to town for tourism or for, uh, they're having these events so that people will shop downtown.

**Judy Larson:** Uh, that kind of thing, which is the norm, I think, to be doing things just because it makes our community better. It makes our community more fun. It helps our people feel more, uh, like they're seen and heard. I think especially the arts community, I don't think people really quite get that right now, or the general public, I wouldn't say. I mean, I think they enjoy that we do what we do and they take part in, in some of those things. But when you talk placemaking, that's a pretty deep subject, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, it's, there's a lot, there's a lot to think about when you think about placemaking. It's not just, do we have an active business district or do we have, you know, there's some more touchy feely things, I guess <laugh> <laugh> that, that aren't, we don't really like to talk about 'em in the Midwest, so

Joshua Hofer 00:17:39 <laugh>. Well, and we've talked about it too, even just as a team, like the trick about using the word placemaking, it has a lot of different prisms and connotations. Like an architect, what an architect would think of mm-hmm. <affirmative> as a placemaking or a landscape. Um, someone that works in parks and lakes would think of pla of you use placemaking in a different form. So it's, it's almost something like you're not alone in using and feeling like finding that term and then trying to figure out how we piece it together. It's something of a nebulous concept, but it's also a valuable one in that it shows where a deep investment in place that hopefully raises the profile of a community.

**Kara Harders:** Does the, uh, does the Lemon Placemakers group, do you guys have a motto or a, a theme or anything that you guys like to, to tell people?

**Judy Larson:** Yeah, we have our mission statements. Okay. And we put everything through our mission statement. You know, if we take on anything new, we say, does this meet our mission statement? So I'm going to read it for you because I screw it up often, <laugh>. Um, and it's important. It's important that I get it right because there's a lot of content in that that does tell you who we are and why we do what we do. So placemakers create space for makers and doers to share ideas, collaborate, build relationships, and use their varied talents for the good of the group and the community. And that's who we are. So that's our mission statement.

**Kara Harders:** I really like that. It's very, it's very project inclusive. It's very person inclusive. It's very goal inclusive. Like I think you're, it's a, it's a well put motto. I can see why you wanted to read over

**Judy Larson:** <laugh>. I'm so proud. <laugh>.

**Shasta Alexander:** I can never remember it. <laugh>.

**Judy Larson:** I can't either. I need a tattoo or something. It's just not, but it's, it is good. Um, we've considered a lot in that.

**Joshua Hofer:** Is it the nonprofit? It's feels like there's a lot of the structures here of, of a nonprofit

**Judy Larson:** Until last year.

**Shasta Alexander:** Yeah. Sometime last year we finally got it set up for nonprofit. Up until then it was not. Yeah. Yeah. We're are now

**Judy Larson:** We're a 5 0 1 (c) 3Prior to that we were a get out your wallet,

**Shasta Alexander:** <laugh>, donate what you can

**Judy Larson:** donate what you can. If we make any money off of this, it'll go for our next event is just kind of how we made things happen. Yep.

**Kara Harders:** And that alone is a big step in legitimacy. So Congrat, congratulations on, on that feat. I've heard a lot of people who, who struggled through that with, with organizations.

**Joshua Hofer:** Do you have a regional, like as you said, lemon, you're something of the regional center, you're the regional hub mm-hmm. <affirmative> in the community. Do you feel like, do you pull a lot of folks from the area? Does it tend to be mostly folks living in Lemon? How does that Yeah. What kind of spread of folks are involved?

**Shasta Alexander:** I would say mostly Lemon. Occasionally we get people from the surrounding Heninger, bison area,

**Judy Larson:** I guess Marmont. No,

**Shasta Alexander:** It's hard to say. I mean events like, which we haven't even talked about. Judy's, Judy's pet event live at the Lake. Um, that one probably pulls the most that we don't even really know for sure. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because we have she every August.

**Judy Larson:** August,

**Shasta Alexander:** Yeah. Every Aug every Saturday in August, she has lined up for the past. Is it going to be five? I

**Judy Larson:** Think it's five years. Yeah, I think it

**Shasta Alexander:** Is. She's lined up live music on Saturday nights out at the, um, shade Hill campground out at the lake. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So people can come and listen to live music for free. They just have to have their park pass to get in mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So, um, that, you know, we don't really necessarily, you know, sell tickets to or have any demographic info. And it might just be people camping in the campground that aren't from who knows where, but mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Well, and I think that does pull from further mm-hmm. <affirmative> than some of our smaller events, but

**Kara Harders:** Well, and talk about an event like that. I think if I was, if I was camping and from another state and I was thinking, oh, maybe I'd move to South Dakota to somebody like that would be something that I think would make an impact on somebody. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. Like saying, you know, what about Lemon? We had such a good time there. I think, I think things like that are, are really neat to see in, in terms of not only retaining community populations, but also trying to lure, lure the new folks in

**Shasta Alexander:** Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

**Judy Larson:** <laugh>. I think you're right. Uh, and I also think that to that same point, sometimes it's easier for people from outside of the community to see what, what we're doing and how that impacts things. Someone said recently, it's so unique what you guys are doing up in Lemon. And I was like, we're just doing our thing <laugh>. You know, I mean like

**Shasta Alexander:** Yeah. But it is unique and it, especially in these small communities, everybody's head down doing their work and mm-hmm. <affirmative> this kind of stuff is, I don't know, kind of like art. It's just extra. It's, yeah. So people don't, they see it as exciting and new and I

**Judy Larson:** Don't know, extra and necessary at the same time. I

**Shasta Alexander:** Think, you know, oh, I, I see it as necessary for sure.

**Kara Harders:** Yeah. I think sometimes when, cause I mean you see that a lot. I think sometimes when people are used to, or they've, they've lived in a community long enough, they just believe that this is there and it's normal and then someone from somewhere else comes, they're like, no, this isn't normal. This is like the coolest new game that I never knew that I needed in my home kind of a thing. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so I think that a program like what you guys are having Yeah. Makes sense that maybe not everybody is understanding how unique and cool it is if it's always been kind of an underlying tone here.

Joshua Hofer 00:23:19 Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. And then there is a, there is the piece of not having, if you're 45 minutes away from Sioux Falls, you can find different cultural outlets or ways to come together and ways to, and in that way Lemon has, it strikes me to you have an advantage and a disadvantage mm-hmm. <affirmative>, however you wanna look at it, cuz you're not closer to an urban center. But then it also allows you to create a, an independence and answering the needs of the community in a really direct way, which I think is, is really neat and it kind of comes out of that independence or the, uh, self dependence that you were talking about earlier, Judy.

**Judy Larson:** Well, and I think we don't just watch a concert. Chances are we've had to show up early to help set up for the concert. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, they might be borrowing our trailer <laugh> or our sound equipment and our significant other might be helping with the meal that is happening there. And, you know, we are immersed in our, our arts culture. We're not just watching art happen, we're making art happen with what, what we do through Placemakers. So that's that, that I think differentiates us as well from an urban area where you might, you know, just kind of be looking online and, and see events that are happening. Like, oh, there's an Easter egg hunt. I'm gonna go to the Easter egg hunt and then I'll be home by, you know, 11. So I'm gonna go, it's starts at nine, I'll be home by 11. And you just go and take advantage of it. Like actually you're, you're consuming, you're a consumer. And here we're creators creating events. Like it's, it's not, it's rare when we just get to consume an events. Right.

**Shasta Alexander :** <laugh>. Yeah,

**Judy Larson**: That's true. And it's not that much fun really. I mean, it, it's okay, but it's, you don't have that same invested feeling and that same feeling of accomplishment maybe mm-hmmI don't know.

**Shasta Alexander:** <affirmative>, Yeah, no, I agree. We are very consumed in all of it and yeah, you're definitely your partner spouse, somebody, somebody you know, is the one planning it or helping mm-hmm. <affirmative> do whatever. But I will say that I come from an even smaller community, not that far away. And when I lived there I was constantly running off to Spearfish or Rapid just for something to do on the weekend. And since I've moved here, I think Lemon does a good job of having things. I mean, and I can't speak for the history cuz I've only been here five years, but mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I don't feel the need to run off to Bismarck or Dickinson or something just to have something to do here. So I think Placemakers and other groups in the community have done a really good job of, lemon is small, but there's stuff happening all the time. Yeah.

**Joshua Hofer:** Well, one thing we're interested in is the transition from an address to something that feels like home or feels like a place that we can take pride in. Do you feel like the, that moves the needle in some regards for you? Oh, having moved to Le moved

**Shasta Alexander:** To Lemmon. Yeah. I mean I was, of course it's a always nerve wracking to move to a new town, but it was good timing for me on my part I guess that this was just happening and that Judy Hap happened to invite my partner to one of her kitchen table events and he brought me along with, and it was right when I was, I don't even think I had quite moved here yet when that happened happened, but it was, they were very welcoming and they're quick to recognize your talents and put 'em to work <laugh> and, you know, just kind of wrap you up in the group and make you feel a part of it. And that, that was really helpful for me having this group, um, coming to a new town and really only knowing the people that my partner, you know, was friends with or whatever.

**Shasta Alexander:** This has given me kind of an outlet of my own. He has since kind of backed away from the Placemaker group. Not just because he has other, other, many other groups going on <laugh>. But, um, and this has kind of become my thing. Yeah. I think it was probably a lifesaver for me moving here to get wrapped up in the group right away, um, and have that opportunity. And, and it does feel very homey to me to have the arts community here. I love my home community, but there isn't a strong arts community there. It is very much sports mm-hmm. <affirmative> and that was never my thing really <laugh>. So, um, it's nice to have people with just that, like, to chat, chat about art and mm-hmm. <affirmative> and do that kind of stuff.

**Judy Larson:** I have a question. <laugh> <laugh>, I'm not supposed to be asking the questions. I have a question now. Um, and kind of along those lines, but thinking about the other groups that have started really in the last five years, right? Like the, like Legion Riders,

**Shasta Alexander:** Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

**Judy Larson:** Sal is the taken off sonsof the American Legion has just mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I mean they do a lot of things in for the community mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I wonder if, do those things go together, do you think, in any way as far as like, vibrancy in the community? Okay, so, so this ist necessarily a question for just Shasta. I I'm just asking a community vibrancy question. <laugh>. Okay. Um, like you kind of get something going and they're like, well if, if those pathetic people can actually get together and have fun, maybe we could make this thing happen. I don't know.

**Shasta Alexander:** I don't know. I mean, I guess I always, I don't, like I said, coming in, I don't know really what was here before. I always, I thought the Legion and the Sal was here all before that mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and I'm sure they were, but I know the rider did start up and that was, you know, guys that liked to ride motorcycles. Let's, we're already in the Legion mm-hmm. <affirmative> and the Sons of the American Legion. Why can't we have a chapter of the Legion rider too, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I don't know if that's, you know, because they saw us doing something or not,

**Judy Larson:** But, and I don't know if it's just, it's like us, but just like vibrancy builds vibrancy. That, that sort of thing. I mean it's, it was, it's inspiring to see the, for us to see the sal people doing like the community benefit dinners that they do and things like that. Having a benefit for the, the library, you know, and, and really caring about the community in that way. And so I think some of those other, watching other things happening in the community is inspiring and then

**Shasta Alexander:** It's kind of like a

**Judy Larson:** Snowball, it's kind of like a snowball. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So that kind of goes back to the how do you make this happen? Why did this happen? You kind of just gotta start the snowball.

**Kara Harders:** I kinda, I have a thought on that, and this is not really research based, so I'm apprehensive to say it, but I think sometimes we, when we look at turning maybe a social gathering into something that's a little bit more structured, that's, you know, could be called a group or a community event or something. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I think we go from it being us and our friends or us and people that we know we like, or that we maybe know we don't like, but have become accustomed and you just accept that they're there. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> or, and then when you, when you add structure to it, I think there's this almost underlying tone that there will be other new people and there's a little bit of fear around, around change. And I don't know exactly what it takes to put together this group and then this group will become more than just the people that I'm accustomed to being in it.

**Kara Harders:** And so I think there's a lot of things that maybe aren't firsthand nature to, to folks when are starting to build a group like this and seeing someone else in the community do it and do it successfully, I think builds a little bit more confidence in the people that are watching it happen and makes them think, well, you know, if they could do, like you said, if they can do it, we can do it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, if those people could figure it out, we can surely figure it out. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so I think especially, yeah, adding folks to different social groups, I think having the competence of watching it work somewhere else is big. And Josh, you can tell me if you disagree. Anybody can disagree with, with that answer, I'd love to chat about it, but that was kind of my take.

**Joshua Hofer:** The thought that does occur to me is that we're talking through a very interesting span of time as we all dealt with Covid to some degree here, 2021. And really since the beginning, you've crossed right through the, through 20 18, 20 17 mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, yeah. Through an interesting period. Do you feel like it's over the past year as we've all kind of had to figure out again how to have normal social gatherings and social lives, has it been, have you seen more of, of that wave continuing or was it something that you've seen throughout the past five years throughout?

**Judy Larson:** I think Covid was hard on us.

**Shasta Alexander:** Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

**Judy Larson:** I think that was, that was hard for us to get through.

**Shasta Alexander:** Yeah. It was, um, well I think we definitely decreased the amount of events mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, the smaller class workshop events that we had over that time and we kind of switched our focus mm-hmm. <affirmative> to bigger projects that we're going after now, um, than so many of the littler events. But I think we've maintained our core group pretty well throughout. Maybe took a hit on attracting new members over that time and Yeah. And since

**Kara Harders:** And what's more, Josh, when you put it in that perspective, you guys said this has been a program for about THR five years mm-hmm. <affirmative> and two and a half to three of those pretty core years were in the middle of Covid. And it's amazing that you have a 5 0 1 (c)3 already. And I think that that's, I don't know, I think that it's, it's amazing that you've gotten that far with this group in this span of time with everything that was going on in that time.

**Judy Larson:** See, but a pandemic is a terrible thing to waste <laugh>. That's how the 5 0 1 (c)3 came about. If we're not having lots of events, that leaves us more time for paperwork. Right.

**Kara Harders:** I wanna make that the title of this episode, <laugh> You Can't Waste a Pandemic or how did you say that -

**Judy Larson:** A Pandemic is a terrible thing to waste. We've used that. We actually, in talking about other organizations, I don't know why we didn't think of these, but kind of offshoots and a little bit under, not under our umbrella, but kind of offshoots I would say is like grand River Arts Council

**Shasta Alexander:** That Yeah. Well let's just say that Judy's got her hand in all of these, so maybe she's the common denominator, but Grand River Arts Council started after Placemakers. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And then there's of course, you know, one of our placemaker founders, Michael, he went off and started the Thunder Hawk White open gravel grinder by cre that's had its second year this past summer. And you know, we've,

**Joshua Hofer:** Okay, so tell us Grand River Arts Council and what are, what, what was the, we'll get to the second thing as well. It sounds interesting. What's the Grand River Arts Council?

**Judy Larson:** Grand River Arts Council is our regional arts council. Um, we crossed the border of North and South Dakota because we're right on the border of North and South Dakota. It's so dumb how funding works. You know, <laugh> like, like we could, we could go across the railroad tracks and hold one event and get funded for that, and then be on this side of the railroad tracks and get funded for a different event. You know, it's just this, it's just dumb. We have to deal with this false sense of division all the time as a border town. So we cover this region, we say, and, and we have worked with the North Dakota Council on the Arts and, and South Dakota Arts Council as well, and Arts South Dakota. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But I mean, look at it, we have makers and doers and place makers, but a lot of the makers are, I mean artists.

**Judy Larson:** Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, not all of them. Some, I mean, I guess we have makers that make things like those amazing cookers that we use all the time that are made out of like a big combine, part rim and Yeah. I don't know. <laugh>, I mean, some amazing welders around here in creatives. We really didn't have a way to, for our artists to seek funding when the pandemic came along with all the ARPA money and all the things that were going on. Well, we could do more if we did have access to funding. We needed an arts council. So then we created an arts council mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And then we found out as soon as we created the Arts Council, that there's a whole bunch of fiber artists up here. <laugh>, just like, it's nuts. There's a ton of fiber artists that didn't even know each other existed until Julie Gores started collecting up all of these fiber artists. And so now there's Grand River Fiber Arts, which is an offshoot of the Arts Council, and they have their own fiber arts group, and there's that. And then,

**Shasta Alexander:** Oh, well the Thunder Hawk wide open was Michael, one of our placemakers, Jen Suder mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I'm trying to think who else all was involved in

**Judy Larson:** Travis Meyer.

**Shasta Alexander:** Travis Meyer, They are all very into bicycling, so they made it happen. They, they go to these different bike events all around and decided that we live in a beautiful place and there should be a race. So they've had two years now, I'm sure they're going on three mm-hmm. <affirmative>, where they invite people out to be in, what, three different levels of races. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you can either do the 25 mile, the 50 mile, or the a hundred and something mile, which is all around gravel roads all around here. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, and it's at a beautiful time of year, you know, when the sunflower fields are in bloom and it's mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So I think all those I agree. Action just creates more action when you see people doing it inspires you to do something more. And that, getting back to your home question, I think that just makes a community feel more home. Makes it, you know, people wanna gravitate to it and more kids staying here instead of going off mm-hmm.

**Judy Larson :<**affirmative> because we have a place for them here. Yeah. You know, if they're artists, there's a place for them. If they're, if they wanna be farmers or ranchers, there's a place for them. If they like welding, there's a place for them. Uh, whatever they're into, if they're a maker doer, we are here to support them.

**Kara Harders:** And all those things are arts. Yeah. I think anybody who doesn't think the welding is a well-refined art needs to pay a little closer to it. Attention to it. And it's just, yeah. It's a great thing to mention and include there.

**Joshua Hofer:** So, speaking to communities around the state that are looking to, they're small communities that are looking to create vibrant, uh, situations from Citon to Hill City to every community across the state. What would be your advice in starting to think of if they're inspired by your story, what would be your advice in getting things like this started?

**Judy Larson:** Well, first of all, I think Cton and Hill City are awesome <laugh>, so I just wanna put that out there. Us too. Us, I mean, there's so many great communities across South Dakota that we, uh, admire and have drawn inspiration from too. So we also don't have everything figured out. But one of the things that I think we do have figured out through our mission statement is that in order for some type of place making to work, in order for something, a group like this to work, again, we're looking around the table, we're using asset-based community development where we can't tell you how to do it because we don't know who's around your table. And it's, it's very important to consider those people. You can't do the same events that we're doing because you might not have people that are passionate about it. And we've had events that if nobody turns out to be passionate about it the next year we just drop them.

**Judy Larson:** You know? And I think that's, that's maybe a piece of advice. If something's not going well, and if you feel like it's the same 10 people, they're doing everything in your tone, then your problem isn't your events. Your problem is that you need to build your people that you need to look at how can you create a situation where these people feel empowered to do something? Not just say, how come it's always the same 10 people doing the same work and I, I'm one of 'em, and complain about it. Figure out how you can build, build the people in your community so that they feel comfortable in leadership roles.

**Kara Harders :** Absolutely. Is there anything else you guys would like to share about the Lemon Placemakers group or anything else? I know we've talked a lot today, so <laugh>,

**Shasta Alexander:** I, I can't think of anything at the moment. I mean, there's so many things over the five years that I'm sure we didn't talk about, but Yeah.

**Joshua Hofer:** And if folks are curious, where could they follow your work and, and connect? How could they connect with you?

**Shasta Alexander:** We have a website, which I try to keep updated. I'm the branding committee <laugh>. So <laugh> at the moment. It's placemakers co-op dot com.

**Judy Larson:** Yeah. With a hyphen in co-op. I have to look

**Shasta Alexander:** It up. Yeah,

**Kara Harders:** We will. Um, we'll include that in our episode description.

**Shasta Alexander:** Yeah. And then we're also on Facebook and Instagram. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> as placemakers co-op.

**Kara Harders:** Absolutely. Well, if anybody listening to this would like to see this group in action, feel free to come up and visit Lemon anytime. It's a very, very hospitable town and everybody's very nice. Um, and see what they've been working on. Thank you, Judy. Thank you Shasta, for joining us today. And we are doing this interview from the Lemon Library, um, getting to feel what it's like to be here. So thank you guys. Thanks

**Joshua Hofer:** Home Starts here is a podcast production by the South Dakota State University Extension Community Vitality team. We look forward to releasing future episodes for you. And if you wanna learn more about our programs, focusing on creating vibrant places, energizing leaders, and strengthening businesses, visit our website today at extension.sdstate.edu/community.

[Outro music]