Description: This podcast provides a detailed description of Iowa State University's Economic Development and Industry Relations (EDIR). Our guest is David Spalding, the Raisbeck Endowed Dean of the Debbie and Jerry Ivy College of Business at Iowa State University. Dean Spalding is also serving as interim vice president for EDIR for Iowa State University. EDIR provides a wide range of services to Iowa businesses. Steve Adams serves as the host on this informative podcast describing the various business resources available at Iowa State University.

Transcript:

[music]

Steve Adams, host 0:05
Hello and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast. I’m Steve Adams, field specialist III at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach as part of the Community and Economic Development unit and your host for these podcasts. Today we are extremely privileged to have David Spalding, who's the Raisbeck Endowed Dean of the Debbie and Jerry Ivy College of Business at Iowa State University. He is the fifth dean of the college. Dean Spalding is also serving as interim vice president for Economic Development and Industry Relations for Iowa State University. The Office of Economic Development and Industry Relations (EDIR) provides a wide range of services to Iowa businesses. Welcome, David.

Dean David Spalding 0:52
Thank you, Steve. Glad to be with you today.

Steve Adams, host 0:55
Terrific, terrific. David, I wanted to start the conversation by just reading the About page from the EDIR website, which is an excellent lead into our discussion today. So that About page says the Office of Economic Development and Industry Relations, assists external stakeholders in accessing the unique capabilities and services of Iowa State University. EDIR is a single point of contact to streamline the process of making connections between industry and the university. EDIR connects companies and individuals with university capabilities and expertise in business and technical assistance, research and development facilities, including the ISU Research Park laboratories and equipment, and also working with Workforce Development. With all that said, David, what is the history of EDIR? And what has been the impact, in your opinion?

Dean David Spalding 1:54
And you know, Steve, economic development is actually deep in the DNA of Iowa State University. As a land grant university, the pillars of a land grant university are an accessible and
practical education, research—and research, though that's shared with the world shared with the community. And then thirdly, being engaged in bettering the lives of the people of the great state of Iowa. And so that really that pillar has really been a founding principle for Iowa State.

And so in our history, we've always been engaged in economic development activities. In 2014, there was a decision to restructure our economic development activities and bring them all together under one umbrella to make it easier for companies to access talent and access Iowa State University, but also easier for Iowa State to reach out to corporations, and hence the establishment of the Office of Economic Development and Industry Relations. The units that are a part of Economic Development and Industry Relations include: the Small Business Development Centers of the state of Iowa, an organization that really is spread throughout the state working with businesses in all 99 counties in the state; CIRAS, the Center for Industrial Research and Service, which is really a form of manufacturing extension. CIRAS is an operation that, again, is involved with companies across all 99 counties in the state of Iowa.

We then have our tech transfer organization which is involved in taking technology developed at Iowa State University, and licensing that technology, protecting that technology and licensing that technology out to the world. The Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship, which is actively engaged with entrepreneurs primarily here in central Iowa, very focused on working with students here at Iowa State. And then there's the Research Park, which is a very successful home of a number of startups who've gotten their beginnings here, coming out of Iowa State University.

We've had a strong impact here in the state. There was a study done last year, conducted by the Board of Regents, that showed that Iowa State added $3.4 billion a year to the economy of the great state of Iowa. That $3.4 billion dollar impact supports almost 43,000 jobs in the state of Iowa; more than 2% of the total jobs in the state of Iowa are supported by that effort. During the most recent five year period that we have data for, I mentioned that CIRAS and SBDC work across the state, they worked with more than 13,700 different companies in the 99 counties here in Iowa. So we've got a very consistent impact here in the state and a very deep impact on the economy here in the state of Iowa.

Steve Adams, host  5:10
Definitely sounds like a one-stop shop there, David. You know, and I know in some of my counterparts that I visit with at CIRAS, they said, even during this COVID-19 pandemic, they've been extremely busy. Would you echo that comment as well?

Dean David Spalding  5:25
Yeah, there's no question, you know, with with the work that especially CIRAS and SBDC do with businesses across the state, as businesses began to be impacted by the COVID virus, both of those organizations really jumped to and have been putting in very long days consistently to support businesses here in the state.

Steve Adams, host  5:48
Well, we always discuss a continuum of business development where there is assistance for business concepts, newly opened businesses, and certainly ongoing technical assistance. Could you walk me through some of the programs that could help me, just you know, to say I’m a start up and where would I turn and what steps would be taken at that point?

Dean David Spalding  6:09
Yeah, so there really are a couple of paths where we can help people. So assuming it's a business that started up in a community around Iowa, somebody wants to start up a bakery, a cupcake shop in their town or ... they've developed a product, they want to develop a company around that in their hometown and eventually develop manufacturing capabilities. Often the Small Business Development Center would be a first stop for somebody like that. Our counselors in the SBDC are very experienced in helping businesses like that understand what their options are in terms of legal structure, what financing and grant opportunities might be available to them, and really helping them think through many of the business problems that those small companies, those startups, those early stage companies typically have. They offer one-on-one counseling, they also offer workshops that companies can take advantage of.

You know, another path is companies that are developed based on either our students here at Iowa State or technology developed here at Iowa State. And in those cases, very often, the work, the guidance comes from our Pappajohn Center. And the Pappajohn Center has a team of folks who work with students who may have an idea for the next great product to solve problems, but really then helping that student who's got that idea for a product, you know, how do you work your way through customer discovery to determine whether there really is demand for that product? How do you think through how you're going to start structure, a business? And we've got a variety of programs that Pappajohn Center offers. Again, there's some element of one-on-one counseling that happens, but they also have a mentor network that they can bring to bear to work with students startups.

They have programs they offer, like our Cystarters program. Our Cystarters program is designed to help students who have advanced their idea to a level where they're ready to take that next step from concept to beginning to move into really having a business created around that. But they need more time to focus on that. And so they compete by making presentations about their ideas, and are chosen to participate in a program where we actually pay students to spend the summer to essentially intern in their own business. And so they spend the summer hearing presentations from entrepreneurs and from a variety of service providers who work with startup businesses, they have desk space, they have computer and software support, they have web design support.

And very importantly, they have weekly accountability sessions where they have to actually stand up and say, here's what I said I was going to do this week. Here's what I actually did this week. And here’s what I’m going to do next week. And with that program helps make it clear to these students is that being an entrepreneur actually does take a lot of work to get that company started, actually does take real work, takes real dedication. This isn't something
where you just fall out of bed and you've got the the latest next top thing. It's something you've got to really work on.

Now as as the business gets farther along here in central Iowa as they make progress, our Research Park is then available as a place for them to take space. We've got a wide variety of flexible space at the Research Park, starting with a pretty inexpensive way to just lease one office on a short-term basis. And then we can flexibly grow with you as your business grows. And the Research Park has been home to a number of very successful startups over the years.

And then as you as you might move into into that next level, so your products fairly far along, you're really looking to confirm a commercialization effort. We have programs like our Regents Innovation Fund Commercialization Program, where we provide grants to a startup business here at Iowa State to work together with a company to really take that proof of concept farther along and really begin to launch a product. And then once you've launched, you're into manufacturing, then you get a chance to take advantage of CIRAS. You might look to protect your discovery. Again, if you're here at Iowa State, our tech transfer people would work with you. And so really there's there's a range of programs that we provide here at Iowa State to support those startup businesses. Look, small businesses at the end of the day are the job creation engines of this country, we want to do everything we can to help promote that effort to again, better the economy here in the state of Iowa.

Steve Adams, host  11:28
Well, I really appreciate those comments, especially those regarding students. I've had more than one employer tell me over the years that they really like hiring graduates from Iowa State University because they've got some real life experience under their belt. And they're not just coming out of a four year or six year degree and, you know, have no on the job experience. So I really appreciated that. And I also have used with various clients over the years the CIRAS people, even before I became an employee. So hats off. I really do appreciate it. David, there's another initiative that I'm really just not very familiar with. But I know that it has shown some great impact. And that's called the Startup Factory. Can you provide some detail on the program and how that works?

Dean David Spalding  12:13
Yeah, so the Startup Factory is really designed for ... startups for people who have an idea, the concept's well developed, and they're ready to really roll into taking it to the point of going out to raise outside funding for the concept. It's a combination of an accelerator and an incubator. It's really a 12 month program, where for the first six months, companies are involved in a series of classroom opportunities where again, they go through different topic areas, have a chance to hear from experts in those topics. They begin with a customer discovery effort where they take that product they've developed, they've got to go out and call potential customers, and understand how those customers might look at that product, how that product could be improved, how they should think about their pitch for it.
They go through a sales academy, where they learn how to better sell their product. They go through a CEO academy, which considers all of the different things that one has to do when one is running your own business, from beginning to work around HR policies, to the various decisions you have to make about how you're going to produce your product, whether you're going to produce it yourself whether you're going to contract out. And then there's a fundraising academy, where you learn how to hone that investment pitch, and go out and raise money from outsiders. Now again, very much like the Cystarters program, there are weekly accountability sessions where the cohort comes together, talks about what they were going to do the prior week, what they actually did and what they're planning on doing for the next week. And so there's very much that is an important part of the program.

Second, six months is an opportunity to continue in the program to have a space here in the Research Park. And really, throughout the 12 months, there are a group of mentors who are experienced folks in industry, experienced folks with startups, who really are willing to dedicate some of their time to helping mentor and move these companies along. And so it's really an outstanding program and we've had great success with the companies in the program. In fact, the companies in the program, the eight cohorts have raised over $28 million dollars in external funding from both government grant programs and from angel investors and venture capital investors.

Steve Adams, host 15:04
So is any type of business a good candidate for applying? Is there a typical candidate, David, for the Startup Factory?

Dean David Spalding 15:11
Yeah, you know, it really needs to be a business that's a scalable business. So it's not designed really to help somebody who's looking to open up a one shop retail operation or a baking operation or restaurant operation. It's really designed for somebody who's looking to develop a much larger company over time. And really, one of the things that we like about the Startup Factory is that it really again gives us an opportunity to bring together the different pieces that we have in our office of Economic Development, and Industry Relations, to support those businesses.

You know, to give you an example, just to give you a better idea of the kinds of companies that really work well in this would be a company called Gross-Wen Technologies. And Gross-wen has developed a groundbreaking new product that involves using a revolving algae biofilm to take nitrogen and phosphorus out of wastewater. So it's a new way, a new very natural way to clean wastewater out. This was developed by a couple of scientists here at Iowa State University, and they've worked with a number of the different programs we have here at Iowa State. They came out of our Center for Crop Utilization and Research. They did some of their initial testing at our BioCentury Research Farm. They were a client of the SBDC office here in Ames. The Pappajohn Center worked with them at different stages. They were a Startup Factory member, participant, went through that program. They have had space at the Research Part. CIRAS has helped them as they've thought about their manufacturing approach.
And the Iowa State Research Foundation. Our tech transfer office was involved in helping them to patent the technology involved in this revolutionary program. We worked with them on a Regents Innovation Fund grant. I mentioned that commercialization grant program, they got a $50,000 grant out of that program. And since then they've drawn quite a bit of public money—or private money, sorry, not public money—private money from private investors to help grow their business. In 2018, they had their first sale to Slater, Iowa, for installing a system there and actually opened their headquarters in 2019 in Slater, Iowa. They were named the startup technology company the year at the 2019 Prometheus Awards. So I would say that's a fairly typical example of the kind of scalable business that works well in the Startup Factory, but also has benefitted from so many of the different programs that we offer here, through the Office of Economic Development and Industry Relations.

**Steve Adams, host 18:17**

Well I was just going to say, David, that it sounds like they took advantage of everything inside EDIR. Basically, it sounds like they hit every stop along the way, so that's terrific. You know, I know that Iowa State University has various expertise on campus and in many cases assisted businesses. You have any examples of how businesses have contacted EDIR and received technical assistance from either the faculty or from people on campus?

**Dean David Spalding 18:49**

Yeah, so, um, you know, I guess I talked a little bit about one of our closer relationships there which is the relationship with with Deere and Company. And Deere has reached out to Iowa State for technological help in a number of different areas, and through that outreach has established some deeper relationships with faculty here on campus who are very actively engaged in working with Deere around problems that they have. This actually led Deere to set up one of their six global technology centers here at Iowa State and they took space out at the Research Park, established this opportunity and really use that as a way to generally take advantage of technology developed by faculty here at Iowa State.

Another advantage for Deere being here, and you know you mentioned earlier, the great students we have and companies who benefit from hiring students, Deere has also used this technology center as one of the hubs where they hire Iowa State students as interns. And the great thing for them doing that in their location here in the Research Park is they actually can keep those students engaged with them year round. You know, some companies find that they hire interns for the summer, those students may take on projects, but when the summer ends and they head back to school, the work that they were doing and that project has to go over to somebody else. And what Deere found by having having interns here in their Technology Center here in the Research Park was those interns remain engaged year round with them on projects.

And so in fact, Deere doesn't call them interns, Deere calls them employees and they've had an amazing success in hiring students who've come out of that program. But then they've you know, they've extended their work with faculty here, their partnership with faculty here, and that ultimately led them to build a building here in the Research Park, which we opened last
summer, opened in July of 2019. And this is a facility that really focuses around sensor technology that faculty here at Iowa State have developed, who can help with the whole smart agriculture approach of allowing the equipment to use artificial intelligence and make more and more decisions based on the information that's pulled from those sensors. And so, you know, we end up with a very broad working partnership with a player like Deere, so they own a facility at the park, they rent space from us at the park, they hire our students, they work with our faculty around research projects, and it's really a great relationship for both of us.

Steve Adams, host  21:43
Super segue there, David, I tell you that was my next question was to ask about the Research Park. Our unit, Community and Economic Development, is actually housed at the Research Park and I would say over the last decade, I've seen some tremendous growth out there, really over the last past few years especially, but how many businesses are in the park and you have any new additions? Or can you tell us about anybody that may be upcoming for an addition to the park?

Dean David Spalding  22:10
Yes. So the park was started in 1987. And there's really a feeling by folks at the university and the community here that we needed to have a space that would be available really to help startups that came out of Iowa State University based on technology developed at Iowa State.

So startups really is the way our Research Park was built. There are other research parks nationally that were built based on bringing large companies in and partnering with the institution, but we really started based on startups developed with Iowa State technology. A number of those startups were very successful and some of them went public and continued to operate on their own. Others ended up being sold actually to large companies and oftentimes what would happen is, a big company would buy an operation here in our Research Park and the plan would be to take the technology, maybe take a few of the people, but shut down that operation in Ames. What these companies found after they made the acquisition was that in fact, the ongoing success of the operation they bought was based on continuing partnership in collaboration with the with Iowa State University with faculty at Iowa State University, the ability to hire students from Iowa State University.

And so what that's really led to is over the last seven years or so, it's almost a doubling of the size of the Research Park, near doubling of the number of tenants that we have at the Research Park as larger companies opted to come in. So a company like Behringer Ingelheim, which is a large pharmaceutical company in Germany, bought a company here in the Research Park, ended up expanding that and eventually having their own building at the Research Park. We found that with other big players like Siemens, like BASF, who bought operations here in the park and ended up expanding those operations.

That then gave us an opportunity to begin to talk to companies here in Iowa, about what these other large companies were doing. And so a company like Vermeer, which is located over in Pella, Vermeer has always had close relationships with Iowa State, always hired a lot of our students, always had faculty working on projects for them. And again, just like Deere, what they
found was they bring those interns over to Pella, they'd have them for the summer but they'd really lose track of them once the summer was over. And so Vermeer, set up a small operation initially here in the park. Ultimately, they had partnered with us to build a building for Vermeer in the Research Park. Deere followed, Pella Corporation followed, Kent Corporation from Muscatine. Sukup Manufacturing followed.

And so we've got a number of Iowa based companies now that have established operations in the park and that's really driven growth at the park. But you know, it also drives growth for those companies. Companies located in the Research Park have operations in over 55 counties across the state of Iowa. And so really the kind of typically research and development work that's being done here at the Research Park, that collaboration with our students, is really building and creating jobs throughout the state of Iowa. One of the other things that's helped the growth in the park is we've brought more amenities there that are our tenants are looking for. So we've got a restaurant out there, we've got a childcare facility there, we've got a fitness facility there. McFarland Clinic has a medical clinic there. All of that makes it an even more inviting place for companies to come and locate. And I'll say we're always, even in the middle of the tough economic situation right now, we always have large companies who are in discussions with us about deepening their collaborations with Iowa State University. And those conversations very often involve conversations about locating in our Research Park

Steve Adams, host  30:38
I noticed that the core facility for EDR is is located on and appropriately named Collaboration Place Street. So are all the resources there? We know it's an exceptional facility.

Dean David Spalding  30:52
Yeah, you know that was really a great vote of confidence we got from the state legislature back in 2013. When they appropriated $12 million to Iowa State for us to build one facility, the Core Facility, where we could bring together all of our Economic Development and Industry Relations units. And the fact that the state legislature recognized the tremendous impact that Iowa State makes from an economic standpoint to all 99 counties across the state was really great validation of our efforts here over the years, and you know, Collaboration is a perfect name for it.

It's a way we we certainly bring the units of Economic Development and Industry Relations together through that but, but more importantly, we bring the community through there and so we have programs we offer there, we bring the community in to learn more about entrepreneurial activities in particular, we bring companies in there and are able to have them meet with people from each one of the different units in EDIR to the extent those units are are relevant to help that company out, and so it's really been just a wonderful facility for us.

Steve Adams, host  32:07
David, it's time to change hats here for a moment. I hope it's okay, but let's transition a little bit to the academic side of the Ivy College of Business. I know that the Gerdin Business Building is
undergoing an expansion and I wonder, how’s that project going and when will the grand opening occur?

**Dean David Spalding  32:25**
Yeah, so we're very excited about this addition to the Gerdin Business Building. We've had this building now for 13 years and we've really outgrown it in that time, we've become a more and more popular choice for Iowans in particular who want to study business. And that's really been outstanding for us and so, the addition is going to add another 45% on to our structure. We once again got a great gift from the Gerdin family, a lead gift for that expansion. So we renamed the whole building name the Gerdin Business Building. That's going to give us classrooms that will enable us to bring all our business classes back into one building instead of being spread across campus. We're going to be able to bring our faculty back here, we've got faculty, we're spread in offices across campus.

And most importantly, we're going to have key collaboration spaces in that building as well. A large space where students can study and work on small team projects, we're going to have some team rooms in the building students can use, and then we're going to have a very innovative sales center where students will be able to do very practical exercises in honing their skills in the sales area as part of the new undergraduate sales certificate program we have, so we're excited about it. The building's moving ahead on schedule, it's moving ahead under budget, and we're looking forward to a grand opening of the expansion in November of this year.

**Steve Adams, host  34:02**
Terrific—under budget and on schedule, that's pretty rare in any construction project. And I'm sorry this degree didn't exist when I was going to college. But I wanted to also ask you about the entrepreneurship focus at the Ivy College of Business and specifically, David, if you could talk about the entrepreneurship degrees that are being offered by the Ivy College of Business.

**Dean David Spalding  34:26**
Yeah. So, you know, under President Wintersteen's leadership, Innovate at Iowa State has become a theme for us here on campus, and we're pleased to be a part of that program. In the fall of 2017, we launched an entrepreneurship major and we're the only one of the three Regents institutions who offer an undergraduate major in entrepreneurship. And that's our fastest growing major, we increased the number of majors 23%. In the last year, we've gone from eight students declaring that major in the fall of '17 to 100 students declaring that major in the spring semester of 2020. So there's a tremendous amount of student interest in the entrepreneurial field.

We also offer a PhD concentration in entrepreneurship. We're the only the eighth school of business or college of business across the country to offer a PhD concentration in the field of entrepreneurship. And we're working on new graduate programs that we will offer in that field as well. And we do offer workshops out of the Ivy College of Business because again, that Innovate at Iowa State theme, that entrepreneurial theme, always has been very much of a
core of what's going on here at Iowa State in our outreach to the state, and so it was very natural for us to develop programs like this in entrepreneurship.

**Steve Adams, host  36:00**
One of the things, David, we're hearing constantly from some of our guests is how they've had to pivot their business model due to the pandemic in COVID-19. I'm sure that's also the case with EDIR. Could you tell us how you've made your changes or how you kind of turn the EDIR business model around?

**Dean David Spalding  39:37**
Yeah. So you know, to start with how we, from an operational standpoint, mid March, we really went remote from a working standpoint in all of our operations except the Research Park, and obviously that team needed to remain on campus to help support the tenants in the facilities in the Park. But I think the more important thing is the way both SBDC and CIRAS in particular with the work they do with companies across the state shifted to helping companies work through the pandemic.

In the case of CIRAS, again, they work with manufacturers all across the state. And so they worked with many of those companies on what sort of protocols they ought to be following and dealing with the virus within their own businesses. But importantly, they worked with a number of them who saw an immediate decline in demand for their core products to help them pivot to in particular making more personal protection equipment, and worked with companies who had for example, never made face shields to manufacturing face shields, and got involved in delivering those face shields here in the state. As a result of their work with local manufacturers, for example, they created thousands of face shields that were delivered to Mary Greeley Medical Center.

And then CIRAS continued to work with hospitals, nursing homes and other agencies across the state in helping them get PPE, personal protection equipment, that was so scarce there when this crisis began for us all, in mid March. The SBDC has been involved long, long hours of working with businesses across the state on the various financial programs that the government's developed to help small business and SBDC has been advising clients throughout the state. And in fact, we took some of our employees in other parts of EDIR and had them work on doing triage for SBDC and helping out those small businesses. Got some of our student workers involved in that as well.

But we had a great story early on in the crisis. Here at Iowa State we also have a veterinary medicine hospital and the veterinarian hospital was running low on hand sanitizer. And so the dean of the vet med college reached out to the other deans here on campus, can you help out with hand sanitizer, and so I put him in touch with the SBDC. And the SBDC at that point, again, this was very early in the crisis, one of their clients was a distillery, located up in Bancroft, Iowa, S&B Farms Distillery, and S&B was shifting some of their capacity to actually manufacturing a hand sanitizer. And so, Lisa Shimkat who's the state director for the SBDC made that connection. The S&B folks made 30 gallons of hand sanitizer just for the vet med college.
Lisa went up and picked it up at the distillery, brought it back to her home in Fort Dodge that she was working out of, and somebody from the vet med college came up and picked up that hand sanitizer and that hand sanitizer alone enabled them to bridge a time over a couple of months where they were having trouble sourcing that from their usual sources. The fellow from the vet med college, vet med hospital told Lisa that next time he'd be happy to go up to the distillery himself all the way to Bancroft pick it up. We think he had ulterior motives. [laughter]

But but they continue to keep that connection to help the hospitals, so really appreciate the work that both SBDC and CIRAS have done very directly with companies to help them out through this pandemic. Pappajohn Center developed a new set of workshops that they took online, again to help startups think about how to deal with this environment. And then as I mentioned, the Research Park staff continued to come into the office, maintaining appropriate distancing, to make sure that they were supporting the 95 different tenants that we have in the Research Park. So it's really been very much an all hands on deck set of activities for EDIR since this pandemic hit the United States.

**Steve Adams, host 44:12**
Some great anecdotal comments there, David. So this is it, your last chance -- anything you'd like to add?

**Dean David Spalding 44:12**
Well, you know we also had to have a big shift here on campus, and so the Ivy College of Business was a part of that. We had to, here at Iowa State University on two weeks' notice, tell our faculty and tell our students that we were going to shift the remainder of our spring semester online. That meant taking over 6,000 classes that we were offering had to be shifted online, taught by almost 2,000 faculty, with almost 33,000 students taking those classes. So this was a major undertaking for us. But we successfully completed the spring semester. Based on feedback we've gotten from surveys to students and surveys to faculty, people felt it worked well with the transition to online. But everybody wants to be back in Ames here for the fall. So we're working hard right now to make sure we can find a way to safely bring our students back here and get them back in the classroom where they want to be, engaging with the outstanding faculty we have here at Iowa State University.

**Steve Adams, host**
Challenging times, that's for sure. Well, our guest today has been David Spalding, and I want to personally thank you for joining us and sharing all this information, it's been terrific. Also your insights into the business development at Iowa State University. So David, if someone is interested in contacting EDIR for additional assistance, what would be the best route for them to go?

**Dean David Spalding**
You know, the best way to be in touch with us is through the EDIR website, which you can find at www.econdev.iastate.edu.

**Steve Adams, host**
OK, one more time for us, David, if you don't mind.

**Dean David Spalding**
www.econdev.iastate.edu

**Steve Adams, host**
Terrific, thanks so much, I do appreciate that contact information. If you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me, Steve Adams, at stadams@iastate.edu. And thank you for listening.

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See y'all next time! [music]