

THE STORY GOES | JENNA SAUCEDO-HERRERA | SA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

MOLLY: (dramatic voice) Hello! It's Molly Cox with SA2020, and here with Kiran Kaur- Baines, also with SA2020, and this is a collaborative podcast with SA2020 and KLRN, your public television station, called The Story Goes. I did it in that voice just for you, Kiran.

KIRAN: Thank you, I appreciate it. (0:20)

MOLLY: Also, 'cause Jenna is here and silently laughing (MOLLY laughing) away from the mic.

JENNA: Oh goodness, I am indeed.

MOLLY: (loudly) Welcome! You're very, very professional and formal.

KIRAN: (sarcastically) Right, you cannot laugh out loud.

MOLLY: No, you have to silently giggle away from the microphone.

JENNA: Yes, my apologies. I'll get it together.

MOLLY: (laughs) Thank you, thank you. Yeah, The Story Goes. It is a collaborative podcast. It is an opportunity for us to tell stories about San Antonio, more *complete* stories about San Antonio, and we are tackling as many things as we possibly can, which is exactly why we brought Jenna into the studio today. Jenna Saucedo- Herrera is the President and CEO of the Economic Development Foundation—the *San Antonio* Economic Development Foundation. (1:04)

JENNA: That's right. It's the longest name and title in the land.

MOLLY: We just call it (reads as one word) "EDF."

(pause of silence, then JENNA and MOLLY laugh)

MOLLY: That's your new name, you're welcome. You can use it. We are going to talk most specifically about economic development in San Antonio, but we want to start at a macro-macro-level and talk more specifically about how we think about economic development in San Antonio, Texas, Bexar County and beyond. The idea really that we keep being told we have a jobs problem in San Antonio, and we know that's not necessarily a complete story. We have a workforce problem in San Antonio, Texas. And what does it look like to be *both* the community that is having college educated millennial growth bigger than most other cities *and* at the same time, one in six people live in poverty, one in five people can't afford their homes. We have such a dichotomy here in San Antonio, and the Economic Development Foundation has very specifically begun



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv

#TheStoryGoesSA

KLRN.org/thestorygoes

tackling that. I've just made that your mission. I hope that's your mission. I think it is based on the work that we've done together as a community. But I want to start at a macro-level because you, Jenna, as the person that leads the Economic Development Foundation, travel all over, not only in the United States but the world, recruiting—companies, people, things—am I right? [\(2:31\)](#)

JENNA: That's exactly right.

MOLLY: That's basically your job. I am glad that you're here in San Antonio today, and we didn't have to do this in like Tokyo or something.

JENNA: (laughs) That's next week.

MOLLY: Can you tell us based on your travels across the United States and abroad, when you're talking to companies and going on these fancy missions to recruit people, what are you hearing about our city? [\(2:55\)](#)

JENNA: So, the feedback varies. Based on different geographies, different industries, different types of people we are engaging with, but I'll tell you if you asked me that question five years ago, they weren't thinking anything. We weren't even on their radar. Today, that dynamic is changing quite a bit, which is incredible for us and what we are trying to do. But now, it's a matter of crafting the narrative, crafting their opinion of San Antonio towards a favorable opinion of what we are trying to do. So, the Spurs usually rises up to the top. We love our Spurs. The *Alamo*. You know, they're well aware of the history. The Alamo is an incredible asset that we have here, but what we are trying to do is broaden that narrative to talk more about the talent that we have here and the industries we are trying to grow here. [\(3:44\)](#)

MOLLY: I appreciate that you're bringing up this word, narrative. We've found, sort of, in our work at SA2020 crafting narratives, and then disrupting dominant narratives is incredibly important to doing the work that we do in our community.

KIRAN: Yeah, I actually, before we talk about narrative, I want to know is it the Spurs or is it just David Robinson? [\(4:03\)](#)

MOLLY: Kiran has a slight obsession with David Robinson.

KIRAN: Do people know the Spurs, or are they really just asking about this one person that is the most fantastic person to ever live in San Antonio? (MOLLY and JENNA laugh) The most beautiful human being in the universe.

MOLLY: This is the point in which we stop the podcast and say, anyone who can get Kiran to meet David Robinson—



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

JENNA: You've never met the admiral? (KIRAN gasps and MOLLY laughs) Oh, I can make that happen. He's wonderful. He and his son are involved in a lot of what we are doing in development.

MOLLY: She's literally going to die, right here in our closet, in our podcast closet.

JENNA: Well, this is wonderful. Also, for KLRN because I'll share the podcast with him as a means to broker an introduction. [\(4:47\)](#)

MOLLY: Oh, look at that. It's gonna happen. You're going to end up meeting David Robinson, and she's not going to speak. We are going to have to speak for her.

KIRAN: Yes, I am speechless.

MOLLY: She's obsessed! She loves him *so much*. She believes he's the best San Antonian to walk the Earth. Back to (laughs) We've just sidetracked completely into David Robinson. It's fine! Whatever. We are coming back economic development.

JENNA: Narratives!

MOLLY: Let's talk narratives. That is part of the challenge. The work that the Economic Development Foundation is doing is broaden the narrative of who San Antonio is and what we do. In fact, it's part of the work you're doing here in sort of disrupting the narrative of needing more of our homegrown talent to get the resources they need, which is why San Antonio Works now sits under the EDF. Can you give us a sort of overview of what EDF does? [\(5:42\)](#)

JENNA: I can, indeed. So, first off, you started this conversation by talking about the difference between a jobs challenge and a workforce challenge. So, I think we need to be very clear about perception versus reality in everything we say and how we continue to influence the narrative. It starts with awareness. Instead of just hearing what others are saying and moving—and by the way, that's a dynamic that we are dealing with across the country—the day and age of information being so readily available, sometimes folks aren't actually learning up on the opinions that their forming, which is fascinating, and we can digress in that regard as well. Um, but coming back to San Antonio I think we have almost been our own worst enemy because we believe—

MOLLY: Hang on, Jenna, I'm going to sort of interrupt you. So, Jenna, we are going to go back because it just came into my ears that the computer shut down, and it needs us to go back and do something. It's okay because we are going to edit it and fix it all. It's more fun to talk about



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

the fact that this could happen again is my favorite. This is why I enjoy the podcast because we are not exactly sure what's happening. It's fine. [\(6:50\)](#)

JENNA: It's kind of like life.

MOLLY: I like that everyone is silent laughing. I am *very* funny. There is just silent laughing happening! Okay, so I am going to go back and talk about shifting narrative, the idea around EDF's job is not only to talk to other businesses and cities, here and abroad, but also locally, what does it look like for EDF to be shifting the narrative, particularly, dominant narratives around jobs and workforce? So, if you can give an overview of what EDF does? [\(7:20\)](#)

JENNA: Definitely. So, EDF at the end of the day exists to produce jobs. So, that means recruiting new businesses to our market. It also means working with local businesses to grow here. Often times that can be boiled down into sales organizations. We are marketing San Antonio. We are generating leads. And then, we project manage and hopefully close on a lot of these deals. As an organization in recent years, I took over about three years ago and have an incredible team doing wonderful things, but as we contemplated our process of transacting different deals, we had to kind of stop and look inwards, look at the product we were selling—the product being the San Antonio region, not just San Antonio proper. But look at that product and figure out, one is our messaging working, two, our tactics, our outreach, are they working? But at the end of the day, is our product effective? Is our product working? That translates to development. So, we always say awareness is the first step. So, what we've been doing is taking a very, very objective look at our community to see what is happening and see what we can address as a community. So, you talked about crafting narrative, and you started the podcast by framing the conversation with the challenge: is it a jobs challenge or a workforce challenge? And as you dig deep, as you know into the numbers, it's a talent development challenge in the community. If we can continue to rally around education in our community, rally around the building up of quality of place, and that means transportation, infrastructure, and basically everything that SA2020 outlines and is challenging our community to focus on. If we can continue to think about community development, talent development, quality of place, at the end of the day our transacting, the deal making that the EDF does day in and day out will become much more effective. You cannot do one without the other. These are not mutually exclusive paths. We've got to bring them together, and we've got to focus on community development. [\(9:25\)](#)

MOLLY: This was ultimately why you sort of turning inward not only to San Antonio and looking sort of inward that way, but also inward to the Economic Development Foundation. When you took over three years ago, there was also a reshuffling. You ended up taking under the Economic Development Foundation, San Antonio Works, which is internships and externships. We've been a recipient of multiple high school students who have come into SA2020 as interns. Understanding that we were trying to help young people see the types of jobs available to them, I'm interested then, how EDF is helping disrupt the perception of how San Antonio exists



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv

#TheStoryGoesSA

KLRN.org/thestorygoes

externally, internally even?

JENNA: So, you talked about bringing SA Works into the portfolio of EDF. So, when I joined the organization, we were 100% focused on recruitment of new jobs. If you can imagine that dynamic, so we are out. We are recruiting, and further cannibalizing on—let’s use manufacturing as an example. We all know Toyota struggled for years and years to close the gap on, specifically Advanced Manufacture Technicians they were trying to hire. Meanwhile, we are out recruiting more companies and cannibalizing on that existing work force. And so, we step as an organization, we diversified our suite of services, so retention expansion became important. Entrepreneurship development became important. Workforce Development is the end all, be all in my opinion. In fact, I don’t think you can classify our organization as an economic development entity. We’ve got to be a workforce development entity because they are one in the same. (11:07) But you asked a specific question about disrupting the narrative, and I think it starts with differentiating perception and reality because we, in San Antonio, happen to be our own worst enemy. We continue to craft a narrative that is: 1. Anti-helpful and outside of market and 2. It’s anti-productive locally. If we truly want to understand the challenges that we have, we have got to look at the data. We’ve got to go back to the sources. Then, as a community, we’ve got to prioritize what will make a difference. We’ve got so many well-meaning organizations. We’ve got so many initiatives. What are the priorities? What should we be funding? That’s why I am such a fan of SA2020’s work because you helped us take such a complicated concept and boil it down to what mattered over the last decade. We’ve been executing that. We’ve got a lot of work still to do in the community, but at least we are rallying around the reality, instead of just skewed perceptions. (12:07)

MOLLY: I appreciate this idea of you saying, you used this word cannibalizing, so if Advanced Manufacturing or Toyota is saying, “Hey, we end up getting people in. We finally get the talent we need to make Toyota work here locally. And then, you’ve brought in ten more businesses who are taking the talent because we are not helping our homegrown workforce.” Over the course of the last, particularly I would say four or five years, we have seen a very specific market around target industries: Advanced Manufacturing, IT, Healthcare/Biosciences, even Green Industries, and helping our young people who are moving through high school and college see the types of jobs that are available, but then also on the opposite end, helping adults who are already in the workforce see types of jobs they could be moving towards with certificates or finalizing a college degree. So, it’s been an interesting sort of watch to see education and industry have very serious conversations. We’ve talked about talent, not in San Antonio, but perceptions across the board, the idea—Kiran and I were on the way over here talking about you are also talent. That’s it. You’re welcome. You are also a talent. (JENNA laughs) And how you came into this position three years ago and how that occurred and what happened from there? You came from CPS Energy. What was that transition like which ended up with you running this thing? (13:40)



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

JENNA: So, let's be clear. I wasn't remotely interested in the role early on. I was working at CPS Energy. At the time, I was a Vice President of Public Affairs and Brand. That basically meant I ran corporate communications, corporate philanthropy, and economic development. In that role, as an investor of the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation, I served on the Board, and we were as a community going through significant change, and we are going on that trajectory of transformative change and growth. The Board at the time led by USAA, Valero, and HEB and so many others, said we need a leader that cannot only take us into the next era of competitiveness for our San Antonio region, but a leader that understands our region and that can relate because we are a funky little town. We got a lot going on for us. (MOLLY laughs)

MOLLY: The fact that Funky Town just started playing in my brain.

JENNA: Can we do that? So, we not to digress too far. We will come back to my transition into the role. You know I don't like to talking about myself, but I will do it.

MOLLY: (goofy) You are on a podcast, and that is what we asked for.

JENNA: Then, that's what I'll do. You know, San Antonio is interesting. We got a parochial political environment. You know, I mentioned earlier, we are sometimes our own worst critic. You have to really be sticky to San Antonio. We are all moving a rock up a hill to transform our community. It's a lot of hard work. We all rolled up our sleeves and are in it for the long haul. Sometimes it gets challenging, right? If folks aren't sticky to San Antonio, if folks aren't sticky and thinking about the long-term trajectory of our community it's easy for talented people to find jobs outside of market, and all too often that happens. I am hopeful that we can reverse that negative trajectory. (15:32)

MOLLY: Well, also, again I know we are digressing, but you're talking about incremental change. The idea that we are not looking at changing something *tomorrow*, we are looking to put pieces into place that ultimately allow us to change the trajectory in the long-term and being able to celebrate that incremental progress, and also saying we still have work to do.

JENNA: Indeed. Being very real and very objective. It truly is a marathon, but every now and then we are getting into those sprints to get there. But okay, you asked me how I transitioned into the job. We were going through a transition in the organization, in the community, and I actually served on the search committee, believe it or not, to identify the successor for (MOLLY laughs)—

MOLLY: I'm sorry to giggle, but "I was on the search committee, and I was searching, and it's me."

JENNA: No, no, not at all! We actually interviewed wonderful candidates—best in class. Economic development professionals with all sorts of acronyms behind their names, you name it. And then at the end of the day when we were short listing and bringing in folks, the Board



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA

KLRN.org/thestorygoes

Chairman asked me if I would consider it, and I laughed just like you just did. I was in my office at CPS Energy, and he said, “I’m actually serious, and I’d like you to think about it. We aren’t looking for a traditional economic developer. We are not looking for just any leader. We are looking for a leader *right now* in San Antonio, where it is such a unique and pivotal point as a community, and we need that kind of leader to take us there.” And I figured why not just run out a ground ball. Again, still not interested, but after having conversations with folks in the interview process—Graham Weston, Henry Cisneros—and so many wonderful leaders here. I realized it wasn’t really an option. It was a duty, and I am humbled to have had the opportunity to lead the EDF and the wonderful team over the last three years. We have done some great work. We’ve talked about incremental progress. We’ve had two of the best performing years in our organization’s history based off of our KPIS. Now, we’re digging deeper, and saying “Okay, the headlines are great. We’ve recruited Penthade, EY, Victory Capital. But we really got to fox on the trendlines.” We want San Antonio to be successful in the long term. [\(17:51\)](#)

KIRAN: Jenna, there’s research that shows women, particularly women-of-color, will opt-out of job opportunities. I’m curious then, what you would say to your younger self about where you are now?

JENNA: Good question. So, I’m one to never turn down opportunities. In the decision making process, I think it’s easy for us to talk ourselves out of it without thinking we are saying no. When I was considering this role, I was basically explaining to myself and to others all the reasons *why* I wouldn’t be good at it. It’s a front facing position, very political. I’m actually not interested in any of that. I am a raging introvert. Molly know, being out, being the face exhausts me. I can do it. It just exhausts me. Behind the scenes making it happen. So, I was talking a lot about the political environment. There’s so many different stakeholders, so many different bosses. I remember having a conversation with the current CEO of CPS Energy, Paula Gold Williams. It was about midnight because they had given a 24 hour window. She said, you know what Jenna, I’m really going to need you – by the way, she was in the running for that top job at the time—and I think she was talking to herself when she was talking to me—

MOLLY: It’s important to say – quick I’m gonna come back—but Kiran’s love of David Robinson is my love of Paula Gold Williams. (KIRAN and JENNA laugh). I love her so much. [\(19:20\)](#)

JENNA: You’re going to love her even more. So, I am really thinking through this. I am on the phone with her talking myself out of it because I had a great gig, and this is a very different type of role. She said, “Jenna, really need you to stop trying to tell me how it’s not going to work. Tell me how you’re going to make it work because I know you can. Furthermore, tell me how I can help you make it work. Are we done here?” Again, I think she was talking to herself—

MOLLY: She was like, “are we done? I got to go.”



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

JENNA: Yeah, I'm busy! I think she was talking to herself as she was thinking through that. So getting back to your question, I think we think ourselves out of opportunities more than we talk ourselves out of opportunities. For this specific role, I just dove in. It's been great. It hasn't been easy, but a hell of a lot of fun. Ooooh, I can't cuss. [\(20:11\)](#)

MOLLY: I think you're allowed to say "hella" (laughs) That's not a real cuss word I don't think. Prime time television.

JENNA: (enunciating) *Darn*.

MOLLY: It's been a whole darn lot of fun.

KIRAN: I actually heard you tell this story when I was with the City of San Antonio as the Chief Equity Officer. I remember hearing your transition story as someone who was the youngest, if not the youngest, Executive as Chief Equity Officer, so badly wanting to hear – we are both Rattlers, I think that's right—

JENNA: We are!

KIRAN: Go St. Mary's! So badly wanting you to speak to, so badly wanting to hear what it was like for you to pursue that position, I remember the time that you emphasized, very humbly I should say, that you were the best candidate for the job. You were able to see how your skills, knowledge and experience made the most sense for you to lead EDF. At the same time, I was wanting to hear more from you what it meant to be a woman, what it meant to be a millennial, what it meant to be a person of color, and and and I kept thinking, it is also so tiring to have to constantly be asked that or respond to that, especially when you are like, "I just want to get the job done, and I know that I am the best person to do it. I know that I am a competitive person to do it." What is it about it, what's a question around this area of your identity that you are tired of talking about? Or a question you don't ever feel gets asked about it? [\(21:43\)](#)

JENNA: So, let's talk about the headlines when I was selected. The headlines, by the way, that any woman, when any Latina, when any young person is selected for any role, and so let me give you a few. I think one of them was: "Young Millennial Selected for EDF Top Job." Another one was something about "Latina Executive From CPS Energy," nowhere in there was my name. Obviously, they talked about my pedigree. One lady's was "Jenna From The Block."

(ALL fall silent)

JENNA: There was one.

MOLLY: (shocked) Stop it right now.



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

JENNA: Yep. So, I was pissed when I started reading these headlines. I had seen the other candidates. They were wonderful. I humbly believed, and clearly the Board knew, I was the best for the job. I remember having a conversation – actually someone probably you’re equally as fascinated by Jennifer Cantu with Bank of America—so we were in LSA together, and we were at a reception when all of this was going down. She was so proud and happy again, in a very similar position. She asked me what I thought about the headlines, and I said, “You know, to be honest, they’re getting on my nerves. That’s all they’re talking about. They’re leading with I am young. The fact that I’m a woman. The fact that I’m a Latina.” I’m kind of tired of it because I am the best for the job, and I’m going to be the best for the job. I am going to do what I can to serve this community. She said in more words than this, that I needed to get over myself. Here’s what changed the way that I positioned that narrative going forward in all the chances that I am able to engage with young leaders and young females and students, across the board, she said, “you are in a position to influence so many lives in our community, whether you realize it or not, there are young Latinas looking at you as an example. You have the rare opportunity, and the rare platform, to influence if you do so effectively. So, stop complaining about the headlines and lean into it.” I had worked in a male dominated industry for so long—CPS Energy—where I was only wearing pant suits, always wearing black and brown, always had my hair in a low ponytail, rarely wore makeup, because that’s what you are trained to do, in essence to be a robot—and I was a damn good robot—I had worked my way up the leadership ranks, but being in this role, that conversation with Jennifer, with Paula, and so many other women in our community, including you, Molly, I have been able to accept that and embrace it and ideally influence others. It’s not necessarily something I signed on for, but it can move the needle and I am willing to do that. (24:48)

MOLLY: Yeah, there’s something about—I appreciate that a lot, I think it’s walking us through that space—there’s also something about being in Economic Development—the second we say that out loud there is something that conjures up dudes. What it looks like then to shift that completely. We’ve had multiple conversations without microphones in front of us, and I will say, there’s a component of you taking over three years ago, where you go we went sort of introspective—what are we doing as an organization, what are we supposed to be doing—there was a very significant shift when you took over. Yes, we are recruiting. Yes, we should be going out and bringing companies to our community. And this secondary shift that is, we also should make sure we have the people here who (A) can take those jobs and (B) what are we doing it? If economic development is not about education and infrastructure and transportation, then what is it about exactly? That I feel immediately brings, of course you were the best person for the job. You understood all the interrelated things and connectedness of – and that’s not just because you are sitting in this room – you would tell anyone that, and that I think is important. I think my question to you as we sort of wrap up is, as the person who is leading the Economic Development Foundation, as the person who understands the interrelatedness of transportation, education, and economic development, and housing, what is your call to



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

action? A person who has been sitting here listening, what do you think, what can we do to get them compelled to participate in where we are going as a community? [\(26:36\)](#)

JENNA: Not to be intimidated by such a broad term like economic development. Often times, you hear that word and you go it's so complicated. When you dive in, we, every San Antonian, and broadly folks around the region, can influence our economic trajectory. We have to figure out how we influence. That can be building awareness for different career paths, degree paths, your own children. It might be getting out and telling your personal story more often than you liked to. It might just be educating yourself in what's happening in our community. At the end of the day, it all boils down to voting. If there's one lesson we've learned over the last couple of years, it's that we as a community, and we as a country, are driven a large part by those we elect into office. If we truly want to move the needle, we just have to get active. You figure out what your active means, but I think voting is the easiest way to get engaged and to make a difference.

MOLLY: Love. Of course, I'm never going to be like, "No! Don't vote." There's so many things. We will of course share all the resources on KLRN.org/thestorygoes. I think there are things particularly like jobs reports that are coming out from San Antonio Works saying here's where we are growing, here's where we are not, etc. I feel like there are so many things going on right now. EDF is currently leading a regional economic development strategy. What's an overview? What does it mean to lead a regional economic development strategy? [\(28:21\)](#)

JENNA: You mentioned that when I joined EDF we brought in a suite of services, also refined our areas of focus. We are target industry focused. We have our house in order. We are at a point where we can look beyond just San Antonio proper to truly position the broader region. We've brought together these stakeholders and allies to figure out what that strategy is. How can we actively position ourselves to win? Instead of having eight target industries because these are the ones growing organically, let's get serious about how we can compete. And then when we do that, how we can develop the talent so we can reach our goal? IF you look at top performing metros all over the country, all over the world actually, they're usually structured in more of a regional consortium of sorts. Even in the state of Texas, look at Houston, look at Dallas, look at Austin. San Antonio has a lot of work to do, but the good thing is we have the right leaders who are moving beyond their own egos and organizational relevancy, and are working specifically on what matters in our community. [\(29:30\)](#)

MOLLY: Ooof. Working beyond your ego.

KIRAN: I appreciated the picture that you painted for us, Jenna. Especially, your own personal story because it demonstrates what we talk about SA2020—we as individuals make up the systems we seek to change. So, hearing you saying don't get dissuaded or don't get discouraged by large and looming economic competitiveness or economic development, feels. You have



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes

shown us that we are capable of affecting change, whether we are a neighbor, or we lead a company, or we work within a company, there is possibility to move the needle on all the things we hope to do in order to reach our vision.

MOLLY: Yeah, I love the idea of not thinking yourself out of something. Yeah, let's just sit in that for a minute. Jenna, thank you for coming in to our closet and doing the podcast with us –

KIRAN: In the dark. (30:21)

MOLLY: I love it so much. We do this. We talk about people disrupting the things we do, either quietly or loudly. San Antonio is working. You know, I'm a fan. You're not David Robinson. I got you Kiran.

JENNA: Or Paula—

MOLLY: Paula Gold Williams.

KIRAN: I'll keep saying his name until he becomes a listener.

JENNA: Will he fit in the closet?

MOLLY: He will not fit in the closet. Maybe we can manifest him if we say David Robinson enough. Thank you for doing this. This is The Story Goes... a collaborative podcast between SA2020 and KLRN. You can get all the resources at klrn.org/thestorygoes, and don't think yourself out of stuff. Jump in.

KIRAN: (whispers) Jump in.

(JENNA and MOLLY laugh)

End. (31:16)



@SA2020 | @KLRNtv
#TheStoryGoesSA
KLRN.org/thestorygoes