

"Growing the Good": Milwaukee World Festival Uses this Intermission to Help Healthcare Workers and First Responders

DAVE CASPER: Welcome to Growing the Good. I'm Dave Casper, head of BMO's North American commercial banking business. We're working with our customers to help them through this incredibly volatile time. They're stepping up in so many ways, helping to keep commerce moving and keep people safe. I have the pleasure of speaking with a number of CEOs running businesses in a variety of industries, hearing their personal stories about the challenges they're facing, and some of the very innovative ways they've adapted, and in some ways, even thrived in these uncertain times. Today, I have the pleasure of speaking with Don Smiley, CEO of the Milwaukee World Festival, a nonprofit organization which manages and produces special events including summerfest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Summer Fest provides affordable entertainment as well as over 2000 employment opportunities for the local Milwaukee community. The festival has featured artists such as the Rolling Stones, Bruno Mars, Lady Gaga, and last year even had the Zac Brown band, and Jennifer Lopez, if you haven't been to the Milwaukee summerfest, you do not want to miss it. So Don, the Milwaukee World Festival has recently stepped up in a big way to help support the fight against COVID. Would you mind just speaking a little bit about some of the initiatives that the organization has done to kind of help provide some pandemic relief in Milwaukee?

DON SMILEY: Sure. It's our mission to participate in the community and to be a community player in everything that we do. This public health emergency that we all find ourselves in the middle of, it's no different than us being involved in the community on a day to day basis. So just a couple of examples, we seize the opportunity to do a partnership with a longtime vendor cousins subs. And what we did is we donated over 2100 subs, to four Aurora health care facilities for the frontline health care workers that seem to be working 24 hours around the clock and really don't have a chance for a break and something to eat. I'm sure they do. But we were thrilled to provide lunch for our community's heroes and show our gratitude to those brave men and women who are on the front line. In addition, summerfest donated 700 Tyvek suits, in 200 pairs of shoe coverings to the Milwaukee police department, they were really short on supplies. And as you know, they're making calls throughout the city. Whether it's COVID or not, they still need to be protected because of the threat of the disease. So these supplies were needed to protect them MPD personnel they do their work throughout the community. And MPD has been a great partner of ours for five generations. So it was our pleasure to support them in this way and be involved with MPD.

DAVE CASPER: That's a really a great story. If I can ask Don what inspires you and your team to do this, and to step up and help the way you did.

DON SMILEY: Thanks, Dave. We welcome over 1.2 million patrons a year 200 Myra festival park to celebrate music, culture, food and fun or natural host. We're In the hospitality business. We're in the people business. And we seek opportunities to connect with people in in in positive ways. Many people probably don't know this, but summerfest each and every year, contributes \$187 million in economic impact to our region, and \$226 million to the state of Wisconsin. So in 187, over five years, we're contributing almost a billion dollars of in direct and indirect economic impact. So we take this very seriously. It's just not a music festival. It's part of the fabric of certainly southeastern Wisconsin. This is a pretty big deal. When it comes to what it means to the economic impact in our region. When you put that on top of everything else that has either been canceled or postponed. It becomes a pretty serious situation for southeastern Wisconsin. And I have every confidence that you know this will all come back. I have every confidence in In science and technology, that therapeutics and in vaccines will become available. And I truly do believe this will pass. It's just I think it's just really a question of everyone playing by the rules at this point in time, until we get to that point where some of the smartest people in the world are working on on initiatives to help us get through this, and they help us put put this behind us.

DAVE CASPER: Well done. I couldn't agree with you more. I think on behalf of all the music lovers, absolutely hope that you're able to get back this year, and we know you'll do whatever is safe. The economic value of summerfest is not lost on us at all. So thank you. Thanks for taking the time today and sharing the great work that the marquee World Festival is doing to support the goal of flattening the curve. It's wonderful to hear all that you're doing. Good luck this season. Thanks so much.

DON SMILEY: Really nice talking to you. Thank you very much for including me.

DAVE CASPER: Thank you. Talk to you later. Okay. Bye now. Thanks for listening to growing the good. I hope you'll join me again for another conversation. Until then, stay safe.