

Interviewee: Dan Olson

Interviewer: Andrew Beine

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Abstract:

Dan Olson was born and raised in Eau Claire, WI, and has been in the family theatre business since the early 2000s. Micon Cinemas, started by his parents, has multiple locations in the Chippewa Valley of Northwestern Wisconsin and has endured numerous closings since the beginning of 2020. During this interview, Dan discusses those closures and the effects they had, financially and otherwise, on the business. In addition to the company aspect, Dan also speaks to the challenges he has in raising two kids in a pandemic era, where he gets (or doesn't get) his news from, and the struggles of staying neutral in such polarizing, partisan times.

Dan Olson 0:02

Oh, yeah.

Andrew Beine 0:05

Yeah, perfect. All right. So it is Monday, November 29th, and the time is 1:42pm. As of today, current COV-COVID numbers in the United States, released by the CDC sit at: total number of cases 48,106,615. And total deaths 776,070. In Wisconsin, total cases according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, cases total 864,190, and total confirmed deaths in Wisconsin 8,964. Lastly, the current vaccination rate in the United States released by the CDC is 196.2 million fully vaccinated with 37.5 million having received a booster

[Pause]

AB 1:08

Alright. Dan. Hello!

DO 1:10

Hello, there.

AB 1:11

Thank you so much for, you know, taking some time out, and-

DO 1:17

Yes, absolutely.

AB 1:19

So to start out, if you just want to tell us a little bit about you. Your name, and if you wouldn't mind sharing some demographic info? Race, age, those kind of things?

DO 1:31

Sure. So my name is Dan Olson, I am, going to add this up, 36 now. White male. Lived most of my life in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, or in Wisconsin at some point. I've never lived outside of the state that I can remember. That's the long and short of it. What else? What else - info did you want?

AB 1:53

Well, as appropriate in your current, where you are currently residing [the movie theatre]? Do you want to give us just a general rundown of your job?

DO 2:03

Sure.

AB 2:04

-And the types of stuff you do?

DO 2:05

Yeah, absolutely. So I am in the family business. Second generation, my parents didn't start the type of business or in the movie theater industry. But, you know, my parents had been in it for a very long time and started their own, basically, location in 2004 in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. And then we took over the locations in Eau Claire in 2000-, in September of 2010. And I've basically been in that position, solid since 2010. I worked when I was younger, early on in early 2000s, as I was graduating college, and pretty much been here full time since that 2010 mark. So yeah, my responsibilities - Just general you know, general operations. You know, whether that's staffing or stocking, making sure to the movie runs, ticket sales, concession sales, budgets, revenues, expenses, all, you know, the typical business type endeavors.

AB 3:03

Sure. Alright, and we'll get more specific questions about the job in a little bit. Um, but now just kind of get the initial, I guess, COVID experience questions.

DO 3:16

Sure.

AB 3:18

So if we could go back to early 2020, when this kind of all started - what can you remember about those early few months of COVID? And what did you, what do you remember thinking about it initially?

DO 3:35

Yeah, it was amazing. I remember I was talking about this the other day, it was - I remember standing in the lobby of the theater, and I was on my phone, and I was getting either like a Facebook update or something. And, and one of the sports teams, I'm, you know, I follow a bunch of sports, and it was NBA or NHL or somebody else, and the message was, like, "season canceled". And I was like I, I can't believe it. I was like, ho-, you know, I could understand no, you know, they're backing down the fans and that sort of stuff. But I was like, unbelievable that they would cancel, you know, something like that. Maybe was even the NFL season

AB 4:06

Sure.

DO 4:07

Or something that is just like, it was just amazing that it would, it was already getting to that level you know, so quickly. You know what I mean? I remember, you know, what, last couple months of 2019 Maybe there was like, whispers or something was kind of coming and then yeah, it was just like, oh, I mean that quick how it turned and, and...so it was quite something. But I remember that's pretty much where I was when I was like, this is getting pretty serious like this is - and then as a business owner, I'm like, well, we're a venue that houses a lot of people in a confined space for multiple hours of time. And eespecially back when that first came out I mean, it was like don't touch it, you know, anything that you touch could have it in any you know, I mean, there was so many things that we just didn't know yet about it. And so yeah, it was quite the shock. I never thought you'd see anything quite like that where you know everything just literally kind of went to a standstill. It was quite something.

AB 5:04

Yeah, it's interesting, too - I think that, like you mentioned you were, you were watching some sports,

DO 5:12

Yeah.

AB 5:12

And that's how you first - it's one of those things that, like, in our generation, obviously, [the] September 11 attacks. It's one of those things that you kind of always remember where you first

DO 5:22

Yeah, right. Exactly.

AB 5:24

Kind of like, hit you.

DO 5:28

Yeah. Yeah.

AB 5:29

That's, that's interesting. So, let's jump into the job, because, as you mentioned,

DO 5:37

Sure.

AB 5:38

Movie theaters, kind of, by definition, are - get a bunch of people in together, you know. Before we get to the guests, I guess, specifically, how would you say COVID has affected your job in your workplace kind of, dynamic.

DO 6:01

That's a good question. You know, I mean, it's made it - I mean, we were always, you know, in any customer service industry, a lot of the things people, you know, will focus on the cleanliness. You know, whether that's in their auditorium in their seat or in the bathroom. I mean, obviously, now people are, especially in those early goings, I mean, hyper focused about it. And, you know, the time that had to be spent to, you know, make sure every surface was clean and sanitized. And just to get that, people comfortable, that's probably been our, maybe our biggest kind of balance is -

AB 6:33

Sure.

DO 6:34

Just to get the comfortability of the people back. Because if they're not [connection issues] coming, they're not going to. And, you know, not comfortable with to make them stop coming. You know, for example, that maybe they don't think they're ready yet to come back. So yeah, it was, staff-wise it was tough too, with them. I mean, just, you never know, when, especially in

those early parts, somebody would have it, and we could shut down for two weeks. And that did happen. It was, you know -

AB 7:01

Right.

DO 7:02

Early 2021. You know, we had a staff member, you know, there was a close contact with, we're a small family run company. So a lot of our staff works together. And, you know, we just had to shut down. And so it's...yeah it was an odd balance. It was just, it was kind of just unknown territory. It almost seemed like every couple of weeks, what you thought you knew about it changed and what you thought you needed to do changed. And, yeah, just to manage all those expectations, and those - and those little, little nuances were, were - it's, it was something just, you know, nobody, you could - you couldn't prepare for. I mean, really.

AB 7:37

Sure. Yeah. You mentioned the shutdown. Do you remember, like how long, kind of, total since COVID, started, you've been shut down.

DO 7:50

So we, I remember, in March of 2020, I believe was the, you know, more or less Wisconsin, or the National kind of, you know, [connection issues] about March 15, or 17, or something like that. With what happened politically in Wisconsin, we were actually allowed to reopen in June of 2020, which, in one regard, very fortunate that we were to reopen. Because, you know, obviously, a lot of cities and towns and states, you know, took well over a year to reopen. And so, you know, we kind of balanced that. Besides, besides that forced shutdown, we've had a few other, you know, oddball times when we, we've had a shutdown because of either lack of staff or couldn't get any staff, or we just knew it wasn't even financially feasible to open because there's no movies to play. You know, Hollywood's not putting on any new content. And so it's like, we're kind of already in this unknown territory. We're not creating any revenue. The last thing we need is more expense on top of that, you know, to - it's not gonna be, you know, financially feasible for us. And so there's been oddball ones, but yeah, for the most part, we were forced shut down, March, April, May, June, you know, three, four months, and then have been, for the most part reopened ever since I would say, within this last eight months, we've probably been full bore, seven days, no limiting seat occupancy - we had to do that for a while where we could only open to a certain, you know, 50% occupancy. We had to have, you know, six feet between people in our auditoriums and those sorts of things. So, I would say with the last eight months, we've been fully occupied, you know, to whoever wants to come in, you know, basically fully open kind of re-back to pre pandemic levels at this point now, and then I'm assuming

AB 9:46

Sure. And I'm assuming a big help for that is that Hollywood is starting to be more comfortable releasing-

DO 9:55

Yes, absolutely. Yeah, in our industry, I mean, like a lot of like, the one thing we don't control is the content, you know. I mean, we're, we're just a screen for, you know, somebody else's content. You know, so we're reliant upon that. And unfortunately, you know, the big studios, they hold all the cards when it comes to the movies they put out when they want to put them out. And we're just kind of along for the ride, you know. We are intermediary in the whole deal. And so yeah, for the longest time, there was no, I mean, I don't want to say no movies, but basically no movies. No movies people really wanted to see. And even now we are still seeing, you know, *Top Gun* was slated to release, I believe back in, you know, it probably was March of 20- I'd have to check - you know, March of 21. And then I got pushed back to Thanksgiving. And now it's pushed back to May, you know, of 2022. And so there's still those movies out there. And those studios that are pushing content back until they feel comfortable and honestly till, whether the second or the third wave or these variants, and really these bigger cities fully open, you know, they can withhold that content. And, and that makes it difficult when we need that content, that new content every, you know, couple of weeks to succeed.

AB 11:11

Sure. In specific, the *Top Gun* you mentioned, do you know if they delayed that specifically because of COVID.

DO 11:19

Um, I think it was - you get some of those movies in particular, where you know, Tom Cruise. And you get certain actors and directors, and they just, it's kind of whatever they want to do. And so I, if it's not because of COVID - I think it's all done. You know, the movies, they didn't necessar- they may have ran into, you know, production delays, obviously with COVID and filming and stuff. As far as I know, it's done. It's finished. I think they're just, they feel like they're waiting for a better time to do it. When there aren't - I don't want to say restrictions in the big towns, but when they, when they think maybe that comfortability that we talked about, when they, when they feel comfortable that everybody's comfortable going back to the movie theaters, you know, to see their movie, so. That's my guess, but they also pushed back his next *Mission Impossible* and something else he's in. So it could just be Tom Cruise being Tom Cruise too.

[Laughs]

AB 12:15

Those, those Hollywood, those Hollywood Elites.

DO 12:18

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

AB 12:22

So you mentioned releasing movies, kind of when there's a sense that the collective public is more comfortable. And you mentioned the - that that is one of the, one of the main goals in reopening or kind of getting back to normal is establishing that comfort.

DO 12:44

Yep.

AB 12:45

With the public and - I know you said that you did things earlier like limit occupancy, and those types of things. How, how have your customers reacted to that? Or have you, have you gotten any direct feedback, I guess, from customers, in terms of the policies you put in place? Whether they agree or disagree with them, or kind of getting a gauge on how comfortable they are?

DO 13:15

Yeah, I think, I think there's a couple you know, thoughts to it. I mean, there's some people that are movie theater diehards, right? They're not gonna, you know, sit in front of the TV and watch the movie. They could probably care less what policy is in place or not in place. The movie they want to see is in the theater, and that's what they're going to do. I think there's those people that maybe over time, and maybe COVID helped it, that are just gonna wait for it to come out on DVD, they feel more comfortable in their house. That may just be their - you know, that's probably not even our customer anymore. And then there's kind of that, kind of that person in between that... We've heard it both - we, you know, we we had our staff wear masks, and you'll get the people that'll walk in and say, "why are you wearing a mask", you know what I mean? And then you get the people that, you know, if you don't then it's like, "why aren't you"? I mean, it's kind of a, it's like customer service in general, you're in a no win situation. You either can't do enough or you're doing so much we're fools, we're following along with whatever their thought process is.

AB 14:25

Sure.

DO 14:26

I mean, it's, you know what I mean? It's one of those things - I've heard it where a lady the other day was still hoping we you know, did six six feet in between, uh, chairs and then you know, literally the two people behind them were like, "thank God you're open, we've been to three

movies this week. We love it we come to everything.” You know, so it's, it's one of those now where I don't know if we're far enough down in the process, not even just necessarily with movies, but with restaurants and bars and everything else that's opening, gyms and whatever if, if now enough people are just kind of over it and they're policied-out. You know, they're - so the policies we put in place, we try not to now put, put on our customers, more our staff, right? Because it's a little tough if we can do the right thing, is on the staff side that things with their policies and the people that are -and they see that and they're comfortable with that they're okay with that. And then - I'm not forcing necessarily any customer to do whatever the case. Now, I'm not saying that's the right decision or the wrong decision.

AB 15:37

Sure.

DO 15:38

You know, we don't right now have our customers, we don't require masks. Would I lose customers if I did? Maybe? I don't know. You know, what I mean? Is it better for you know, every industry as a whole? It definitely could be. I mean, we're playing that game every time. I mean, I don't even know if they do the contact tracing, but in those first early months, especially, I mean, I was hoping even with all the spacing, and the extra sanitizing - I mean, all it would have taken was, you know, you see those news or news articles and it was, “yep, there's an outbreak”. If you were at a theater from this time to this, you know - if you were at Micon Cinemas, from this time, it was just like, I mean, that's, you know, all you needed was, “well, can't go to a theater”. Look at how many people are getting it, look who, you know...So you kind of hope to avoid those things, and you hope you're doing the right things to, you know, avoid those types of situations. But yeah, it's, it's just one of those deals where you just, you probably don't pick the right, the right answer, because -

AB 16:38

Sure.

DO 18:39

Everything's so, now is so, so divided, you know. That there's just, there's no middle ground, really. With anybody. I mean, and you're just trying to stay alive. Like, I don't wanna, I'm not, I'm not picking a side, I'm not picking a party just come to a movie, you know -

AB 16:55

Right.

DO 16:56

Like, that's it, you know? It's bad enough, we get people that'll come after the movie and say, that's terrible, I want a refund. I say I had no control over what Ridley Scott just made, or Steven Spielberg made. Like, that's...okay. Here's your ref- you know, like, what am I gonna do? You know, am I gonna argue with you? So. Yeah, it's a never ending battle. But-

AB 17:16

Well, and I suppose no win situations are kind of the - that's customer service in a nutshell. I feel like

[Laughs]

DO 17:22

Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. 100%. Right.

AB 17:29

All right. Well, shifting away a little bit from sort of the business aspects.

DO 17:34

Sure.

AB 17:35

I guess more personal-

DO 17:38

Sure.

AB 17:39

In what ways, broader or specific, would you say that COVID has affected your family?

DO 17:48

Hmm. I was, uh, I would say not a [_____]... but I, when I - so I had COVID, but I was August of 2020. I was an early - when I had, when I was a positive test with COVID there was, I think, at the time, and you can probably check the numbers, but I thought there was less than 1000 in the city of Eau Claire, at the time, that [I] had it. This was when numbers were going up by, like, you know, the single digits and the 10s a day versus, you know, the 1,000s a day, you know, that sort of stuff. So, I was really early, and I remember, yeah, I was, you know, nobody knew. This was still when "everything" was contaminated. You know, so I literally, I mean I left and went up north for, for four or five days. And so, you know, me in the early terms, I mean, you know, just leaving my family for four or five days, you know. You know, I have two young kids and so firstly, that was tough just leaving. I think it's, it's more for us with our kids and with schooling.

They're at the grades where they, there were in the Eau Claire school district but they could still go four days a week because they were first and second grade. So, where everybody else was virtual, first and second grade still went four days a week. And so we were thankful they were still able to go four days a week. Virtual was extremely tough for us as I think it was a lot of parents. Was not easy. Our kids didn't, uh. [To someone off camera] Yeah, yeah, you can put that away. Our kids are - [disconnected]

[Pause]

AB 19:37

Um, it appears we got disconnected. So let me stop the recording here and I will bring it back when I get him back.

[Recording Stopped]

[Recording Resumed]

AB 19:52

All right, we are back. We could have just had like a commercial break there, I suppose.

DO 19:56

[Laughs] Right. Intermission! We get people that ask for intermissions all the time actually.

AB 20:00

Perfect! Ok-

DO 20:01

And with these movies now, uh, are so long that I would not be opposed to putting an intermission, to be quite honest. [Pause] Ah, we continue - you were talking personally

AB 20:10

Yeah, your kids I think you mentioned

DO 20:11

Oh, my God. Yes. So tough. I mean, it's just...they're, they're very personable, like myself. I, I was - I hated quarantines. I hated not seeing people. I'm a very personable person. I'm always one...I hate texting, I will answer any phone call. I love face to face conversations. So that was the hardest for me. It was just, you know, stuck, and you just couldn't do anything. Yeah, that was not my ideal situation. And, and I think my wife was the same way. And our kids were the same way. Like I said, luckily, they were, for whatever reason, first and second grade Eau Claire

school district still went four days out of the week - was a godsend for us because that was, that would have been the most difficult thing. So.

AB 20:57

Sure.

DO 20:59

Yeah.

AB 21:00

In terms of, in terms of-

DO 21:02

Luckily, personally, one more comment - it's very odd. I've been lucky that I've, I don't - I know people that have had it. I also, don't, I don't personally know anybody that's, the worst thing died from it, or got very sick. You know what I mean? So I've been, personally...not had a bad effect, if that makes sense. Business wise, yes. But, you know, obviously, some people have had, you know, family members, and you know what I mean? I mean, now you read off the Death number, those are family members of somebody. I mean, I feel myself very fortunate in that regard to have had it - my parents both had it, you know, recovered fine. But scary. Once you hear Dad's got it, you know, my dad's, you know, 68 years old and not in the best shape and you're just like... Yeah, I mean, you hear, you know, all the stories and so. But yeah, anyway.

AB 21:53

Um, in terms of, in terms of your kids, I always find fascinating - because I don't have kids, but is it one of those - How, I guess how do you explain such a weird situation to them? And do you think that they can kind of grasp? Or is it just kind of one of those things that's -

DO 22:12

Yeah

AB 22:13

That's kind of...

DO 22:14

Yeah, it's a good question they're around that age, they're eight and nine, right? So it's like, they're, you know, they're understanding more and more things every day. But every day, they're always like, what is, you know, this word mean? And what, you know what I mean? And what do you mean by this? And, and yeah, pandemic was one of those because it was also tough to explain, because it's not something I had ever lived through. So, you know, it wasn't like, oh,

well, when this happens, this, you know, it's gonna be this way. And this and, you know, that sort of thing. And so, in one way, it was very difficult because it was new to me, you know. They're like, "why do we gotta wear masks"? I'm like, you know, good question. I'm sure there's a reason for it. Like, I, let's find out, you know, like, there must be a reason. You know, so a lot of it was we were...you know, in one aspect, I mean, learning together. Because I didn't know, I was like, I don't, you know, let's - you know, people are - there's this virus, and they could understand that. And they've been sick, whether the flu or a cough or cold. And so they understood that, and...Yeah, you just try to, I guess just break it down in somewhat simpler terms, you know,

AB 23:16

Sure.

DO 23:17

But I think they could grasp it. I think the hard part for them, you know - in the early stages, especially, we tried to keep them - my wife, or my father in law, my wife's father is, you know, over 70. You know, used to be, you know, has all the, what do they call it, the comorbidities of a person that would, if they got COVID would probably not do well with it.

AB 23:44

Right.

DO 23:45

And so, that was a tough part. It's like, "no, you can't go see grandpa". "Well, why?"- You know, those were just the month's that were just like - "you can't see him because you might get them sick". You know, and it's like, God, you [laughs], you hate to say like, well you could be the reason

AB 23:59

[Laughs] Right.

DO 24:00

So yeah, that was kind of tough to, to grasp. And like, "you can't go see him because even though you feel fine", you know, you might have it and then they'll get sick. And so we just got to stay away from grandpa for awhile, you know, and-

AB 24:10

Sure.

DO 24:11

So yeah, that's - but I think they grasp it. Doing okay with it. They're both really resilient about it. They're way better on the masks than I, you know, ever was and stuff like that. Because again-

AB 24:21

Really?

DO 24:22

They're still in that, they listen really well, and they're still in that somewhat rule-following age. They're like you, you know, you need the mask. Okay, I need it. You know, and it's like my daughter, she's in dance and like, she wants to dance? You got to wear the mask. Okay. Yeah, like, you know, she hasn't on, and it's not a problem. So, yeah, it's - it was a weird one. It was the toughest part to explain something that I didn't have any experience in either. You know?

AB 24:44

Yeah.

DO 24:45

I don't know. I don't know.

AB 24:46

Yeah, that's that's a really interesting - interesting perspective. Because yeah, you're, you're kind of learning as they are.

DO 24:54

Yeah, right. Exactly. Yeah.

AB 24:56

So when your children go to you for answers...Yeah, that must be tough to -

DO 25:01

Yeah, they get the flu for the first time - [Drops phone] Oh, geez, that was me. I just straight up dropped my phone.

[Laughs]

DO 25:06

When, yeah you get the flu, and it's like, Okay, here's what's gonna happen, you're gonna, you know, have the fever, you're gonna have the chills. You're gonna be sick for a couple days. And now it's like, I don't know. I don't know how long this is gonna last. I don't know when you can do this. You know, there's no answers.

AB 25:20

Right?

DO 25:21

Yeah. So.

AB 25:24

Alright, um, I guess a little bit broader now than, than your specific family -

DO 25:33

Sure.

AB 25:34

Do you have any specific feelings on how your community in general has sort of responded? Like, have you been -

DO 25:43

Hmm...

AB 25:45

Content with the measures taken -

DO 25:46

Yeah...

AB 25:47

And the attitude of people? Or is there..

DO 25:49

It's a good question. It's always tough for me to separate, you know, my [connection interference]...my business owner feelings a little bit, you know what I mean? I think they've done as - right, I don't know, if any state, city, or town is in the same position, They don't know what's going on, you know, what I mean? And things changing so quickly. I can understand the decisions, you know, they probably had make. Obviously, as a business owner, I was like, this sucks. We can't even open the doors. How are, you know, what is considered vital? Or, or a [unintelligible] you know, some business could stay open. They were, they needed to stay open. And I get -

AB 26:41

Essential? Essential workers?

DO 26:43

Essentials, yes. You know, the grocery stores, and the this... And then it was like, Oh, well, if you do sell shoes at your place, you're now essential because people need shoes. And then next thing you know, the entire mall is open, because you can find one essential thing that, you know, you can hang on to and open. And really that was all, you know, from a business standpoint, it's like we just want to be open. There's, there's probably some people that you know, were like "we don't care, we want to come to a movie". Just because I would have wanted [them] to come doesn't necessarily mean that I should have them come, you know what I mean? In one regard, it's like, it's kind of that twofold where I don't want to be - I don't have the answers, but I also don't want to be part of the problem, either. You know what I mean? It's like, I, I don't know. Should I have them, you know? Especially in the midst, right of it, numbers are higher than ever... And even look, now, I mean - I'm open. We're, we're having some good months, and people are coming back. Are we leading to, are we contributing to the rising numbers? You know, I, I don't know. I mean, now, are people just over it? And this is where it's gonna be, there's always gonna be rising numbers, there's always gonna be people, you know, COVID? So I think the town's done fine. I feel, you know, at the state level, I think it was tough. Because again, Wisconsin was one of those - I remember watching, I don't remember what it was, the *Today Show* or something. And it was like, Wisconsin was the wild wild west now of COVID, it's like anything goes. Because at the state level, you know, somebody makes a decision, somebody's not okay with it. You, you sue. And the next thing, you know, nothing happens. And it's like, well, now, there's just no plan in place, you know, like... You know, whether you, you have the right plan, or the wrong plan, at least there's some plan that people can follow to and know what's going on and know what's happening, so... I don't know what I would have done different, but that's why I'm not in politics, either. Because I just, I can, hopefully I can see it from both sides. And, you know, see what both sides are trying to do and what both sides want to accomplish and get out of it.

AB 28:53

Right.

DO 28:54

And I could, it would be difficult. It would be difficult for me to do that role. I think, you know, because I would - I'd like to have empathy for people. So I think in politics, at some point, you just got to stop [laughs] empathy for like, you know, some people. You just be like, here's what it is. And it's like -

AB 29:10

Yeah.

DO 29:11

Maybe that's the customer service role in me where, you know, anybody that even if you get the customer that is just straight up wrong, you know -

AB 29:19

Right.

DO 29:20

You can't tell them they're wrong. You can't tell them "it's your fault", right?

AB 29:24

Right. Wait, is this.. Is this breaking, is this breaking news that the customer is not always right?

DO 29:31

Can you believe it?

AB 29:32

Wow.

DO 29:33

Said it here first. [Laughs]

AB 29:33

Gotta make a note of that one.

DO 29:34

Mark the date and time.

[Laughs]

DO 29:38

And you just, you know...you can't -

AB 29:42

[Laughs]

DO 29:43

[_____?].At least our staff is really good. And we've had, you know, some of our staff long, for a long time. And we've seen a lot of the stuff. And at least at the end of the day, you can just kind of shake it off. You can kind of laugh about it You know you didn't do anything. You know, it's not like,

AB 30:00

Right.

DO 30:00

Oh, I just ruined this guy or girl, or person's experience, because I did whatever. I double sold their ticket, and then I had a kick somebody out there was like, that was, you know, completely my fault. But so, yeah, no, it's a battle. But yeah, overall, I think it did as good as they can. I, you know - I don't know if they make some change, are we had lower numbers now? I don't know. You know, I mean, maybe?

AB 30:25

Right.

DO 30:26

If, if they would have said, no policies in place. Does this wrap up, you know, quicker? Does everybody have it? I, I don't know. That's why I leave it up to the scientists. Something I didn't excel at at all. [Laughs]

AB 30:44

That's actually a good segue into my next kind of -

DO 30:47

Sure.

AB 30:48

Sort of group of questions. You mentioned the *Today Show* said that Wisconsin was the, the wild, the wild west of -

DO 30:57

Yeah.

AB 30:58

Whenever that currently was. How have you personally stayed informed during this whole thing? Like, where do you get the news and kind of the, the broader scope of, of the -

DO 31:15

Yeah, good question.

AB 31:16

Country...Kind of the state the country is in?

DO 31:21

I would guess it would be... [Pause] It's a good question. Um, I had to put a news outlet, I suppose the *Today Show* in the morning for like an hour, while I'm getting the kids ready for school. I mean, I mean, Facebook, but again, I take everything with just such a grain of salt. And be like, you know -

AB 31:41

Sure.

DO 31:42

Some of the people that are - especially if I'm friends with them, I know 'em, like, I don't know why they're doing like, I - their...This is probably gonna sound really mean to some of like my friends, but I'm like, they had - they would have no - it would just be like me commenting in that space too. Or spitting out something, I'm like, I don't know what I'm talking about. And I know THAT person doesn't know what they're talking about,

AB 31:59

[Laughs] Right.

DO 32:00

At least not enough to say, this is how it is, or this is what's happening. Or this is what's going on. Yeah, I don't know, I, I think in the first part of the pandemic, everybody was, I feel like news-wise, maybe a little more on the same page. COVID's coming. And now it's just so split that I don't even think either side, you know...whether it's *Today Show*, or Fox News, or - everybody's got some part of it wrong. Everybody's gonna try to fill their own agenda. I was listening to something the other day, and it was, it was - they were talking about those news, media outlets. And it was, you know, journalism years and years ago was literally to, you know, find the truth. And now it's to find viewers, you know? It's -

AB 32:48

Sure.

DO 32:49

They need people, you know, to tune into *Today Show*, into Fox News, and CNN, ABC, whatever. And if they're - if all the news stations are telling the truth, then what, you know, how are they going to get more viewers? Well, they gotta do whatever the case is.

AB 33:05

Right.

DO 33:05

So I stay away from news a lot. Yeah I just, I don't know. I mean, at the end of the day, I don't - what - how am I going to change it? If I don't agree with something...I suppose that's spoken like, I mean, you should be able to make a change. But at the end of the day, it's like, what am I gonna do?

AB 33:25

Right.

DO 33:26

I'm gonna try to do the best I can. A - you know, I try not to veer towards either side. Again, I, I think I find myself in the middle, you know, of - I can see angles from both sides. I have - and, that's just all we can do, you know. And really, as a business owner, too. I mean, we've had it where somebody wanted to, this was years ago... It was one of the two but it was, it was let's just say the Democratic party wanted to rent out one of my theaters to put on a watch party, a Democratic National Convention watch party. And I, you know, gave them a price to rent, and it wouldn't be but the next day, somebody from the Republican Party - and again, these could be flip flopped, I don't remember the specifics. But either way, the other side called and was pissed and said, "Oh, my God, I can't believe Micon [movie theatre] is such a Democratic... You know, I said, I'm just a business trying to rent out my theater for \$200. I, I don't care who comes in here.

AB 34:20

Wow.

DO 34:21

Oh, and there was literally another situation where I had a, you know - because, you know, we rent out the theaters to a church. We've had a church up at Chippewa every Sunday for 15 years. The theater has no affiliation, other than they pay rent, to rent out the space -

AB 34:40

Right.

DO 43:41

During its [_____?] time. We're not pushing church or religion or politics on anybody.

AB 34:46

Right.

DO 34:47

And so anyway, we had a church here in Eau Claire, and I remember they did press release, the church did, and of course started, you know, filming it. And of course you would see the theater. I mean, obviously they had their signs up, and right away the Facebook comments. "Oh my god, I'm never going there again, their so relig- you know,

AB 35:01

Wow.

DO 35:02

And it's like, we're just trying - a business just trying to make money. If anybody wants to come - we do it to a birthday party. Are you gonna be pissed at the people putting on their son's birthday party because, like...it was just...Again, it goes back to that, like, you just you try to do your best to make everybody happy. You're gonna somehow find yourself in a no win situation. It's just, it's too bad. Yeah, the other side's can't [_____] the other sides. But that's just getting too political. But anyway, my news outlet. I don't read the paper. If I had to put two spots, it's an hour of *Today Show* in the morning, and whatever Facebook thing pops up.

AB 35:37

Gotcha.

DO 35:38

I mean that literally, like, is probably the extent of it. And anything that does come up, you know - I, I have no stories of like, "oh, did you hear so and so got the vaccine and had a heart attack". But I haven't heard somebody you know - I, I don't - all those stories. I'm like, there's probably a million stories on both sides.

AB 35:58

Sure.

DO 35:59

You know, I...Yeah it's...I dunno. News is...something. I flip it to Sports Center. That's my news. I see who just got traded and - Demarcus Cousins -

AB 36:07

Well and it does -

DO 36:08

To the [Milwaukee] Bucks, by the way.

AB 36:08

It does affect sports, certainly.

DO 36:09

Yeah.

AB 36:10

What was that?

DO 36:11

Demarcus Cousins to the Bucks.

AB 36:13

Yeah, that's, that's peculiar. They need a, they need a big man.

DO 36:18

But yeah, maybe they just needed another big man to, to -

AB 36:21

With Lopez out, yeah

DO 36:22

So Giannis doesn't take so many - Yeah right. Exactly. So, anyway. But uh, its something.

AB 36:27

[Laughs] Alright yeah...It was interesting. You said kind of every, every side has their, kind of own interpretation. At least in my experience, it seems like COVID has been very politicized.

DO 36:43

Mhm. Absolutely, yeah.

AB 36:46

It's a - I guess it's a bit frustrating when you kind of look at other, some other countries. South Korea is one that I know - that they all kind of just collectively band together. And say, like -

DO 36:57

Right. Yeah.

AB 36:58

Okay, this is something that threatens everybody -

DO 37:00

Yeah,

AB 37:01

Let's, let's take measures, kind of in general, to protect everybody.

DO 37:06

Right.

AB 37:07

And it just seems like our country is so divided in every way.

DO 37:13

Yeah

AB 37:14

It's almost, it's almost I don't wanna say unacceptable. But - I guess that we [would] politicize something like this.

DO 37:20

Yeah, I mean, and I could have my country's wrong, but I thought it was like - like Australia just said, "you're, I mean, you're locked down". No, leaving. I don't know if you get fined if you do. And then I had heard like, they had no cases, because, weird, everyone went along with it and it happened to work. And then it was, on the other side, what was it Sweden, or..? There was another country that just said, everybody go about your business. And like, everybody got it, you know, or, you know, I mean, like -

AB 37:50

Right...

DO 37:51

They got the, whatever, the herd immunity or whatever they needed. And now they have like no cases. And it's like - I remember asking this question, probably a year ago, to [connection interference]...And I was like, I was like, let's everybody actually did - all stay in the houses for three weeks, would it then be gone? You know what I mean? Obviously, you're gonna have, you know, travelers coming in and stuff like that. But I was like, in theory, wouldn't that take care of it? If we all just said, let's just, you know, "nobody leave your house for three weeks". Whether it was like a you know, federally, you know, you're gonna get arrested if you leave your house. I was like, would that actually do it? And then I was like, would nobody really make that sacrifice just to be like, let's just do this. It's three weeks. It's terrible.

AB 38:31

Right.

DO 38:32

And then it's done. Versus, yeah, it's just constant...And now I think that's what in the theatre industry, and I think, again, you see in those bars and restaurants, and even in the sporting stadiums - people are just like, screw it. Like, I think there's now those - like myself, I'm just like, it's here. What are we going to do? If somebody, if I'm required to wear a mask I put it on. It doesn't bug me. I don't think my social liberties are being taken away.

AB 38:57

Right

DO 38:59

I'm just trying to be kind to somebody that said, put a mask on. It's like, you wipe your feet when you walk into somebody's house. It's not that hard to do. You just, you do it. Or you take your shoes off. Like, are you being ostracized that you got to take your shoes off when you walk into somebody's house? You're just being a nice person. Just take your shoes off. Just - if the mask is that big of a deal, like...

AB 39:19

Yeah.

DO 39:20

Just put it in those terms.

AB 39:22

Yeah, that's a, that's a, actually very solid analogy. It's just common decency.

DO 39:26

It's common decency. You walk into somebody's house, you take your shoes off. Somebody just says, "hey, we required masks. Okay, great. I'll put one on. Like. It's not that hard to do. I don't know. Anyway. [Laughs]

AB 39:38

Yeah, that's definitely, definitely frustrating. I share that with you.

DO 39:41

Yeah.

AB 39:43

Um, so you, you mentioned you got COVID.

DO 39:47

Yep.

AB 39:48

And some of your family did. If you wouldn't mind sharing, did you choose to get vaccinated?

DO 39:54

I did get vaccinated, my wife's vaccinated. Both my kids have been vaccinated. And I am scheduled, as well as my wife to get the booster. We have not received it yet, but we are - She's got it scheduled next week or something like that. So yes, I - if I, you know, if somebody were to ask me and my pro vaccine or not. Um, for myself, I chose to, yes. If I have friends that have not, okay, that's, you know what I mean? I don't try to push it one way or another on somebody. If somebody makes that choice not to? Great. Somebody wants to? Great. So, yes, I did get it. [Pause] Boy, I'd have to look up even when..April? March? March. Does that sound right? March of 21? April maybe?

AB 40:47

Yeah, yeah, I think it - because I got it, I got it -

DO 40:49

We were around the same time.

AB 40:51

Yeah. Just a little bit after, after you.

DO 40:53

Yeah. Yep. I, like I said, I have friends that don't...Again, they, you know, I mean, it's a lot of younger friends. So they think they - "oh, I'm young and healthy". I get all that. I think I'm, you know, young and healthy too. But again, I'm just like, they deemed it safe. I don't see the harm in it. But if you choose not to, okay, fine. You know, like, everybody had their chance. And that's kind of my thought too, with going out and you know, doing things and being part of public. It's like, everybody now has chosen their path. Like you have the opportunity -

AB 41:28

Right.

DO 41:29

To do it or not. But, you know, now the risk is in, you know, your own hands. You know what I mean? Like, if you feel -

AB 41:37

Yeah.

DO 41:38

It's, you know - if you strongly, feel strongly enough that you don't need it, you're young enough, healthy enough, and it's not gonna affect you. Great, then go about your business. If you, you know, feel safer with it. That's great, too. You know, it's...yeah, it's - I don't see the harm in it. But anyway.

AB 41:53

Sure. So on that point, did you have any concerns before you got the vaccine, about it?

DO 42:00

About getting it? Um -

AB 42:02

Or just the vaccine in general? Because I know that that was, that - especially when it was starting to be distributed, you know, sort of widely. You know, you would hear all kinds of stuff about

DO 42:13

Yeah

AB 42:13

What it could cause, and what it - did you have any of those feelings?

DO 42:17

No, I don't think I did. If I did, I - at the time, it was not something that's sticking out of my mind now. You know.

AB 42:24

Sure.

DO 42:25

I don't remember if, you know - so I had the Johnson and Johnson...I don't know if the, the cases or the whatever was going on in Europe, blood clots. I feel like that was probably after I got it -

AB 42:36

Mhm.

DO 42:37

Was my guess. And again, I probably went into it thinking, I consider myself a healthy male, you know, adult. And so I'm, like, you know, if something were to happen, I'm probably not, I probably don't fall in that range that it would affect, if that makes sense. So I don't think I had any, I don't think any problems about it. No, I really didn't. I mean, I didn't know enough - there was three of them. I'm like, what are the differences? Does it really matter which one? Some people like "oh, you got to get this one, you got to get that one". Oh then this one shows - and I'm like, just, you know, I'll take whatever. You know, if it's available, great. You know, like, I'm not going to put up a fight over, I need this one. Or this one is shown to do more of this, or this one, or, you know, whatever the case is. So no, I don't think I had any problems that I know of.

AB 43:27

Do you know, do you know anybody that was? Or do you know anybody that is hesitant to take it?

DO 43:34

Um, I don't know anybody hesitant to take it for fear of, of a bad reaction to it.

AB 43:44

Sure.

DO 43:45

So I know people that don't want to take it. Because again, I think they feel like - I would say the majority of them have had COVID and now are like, "oh, I've had it, I'm naturally immune. I don't I don't need the vaccine". That's kind of more of their thought process.

AB 44:04

Okay.

DO 44:05

Versus "I don't want to take it because I'm gonna then have heart failure". Or "I'm gonna have whatever the, whatever the, whatever the people say of why you shouldn't take it". I don't know anybody, that is in that camp. That is like, if you take it, you're gonna die. You know, most of my friends that don't are like, I've had it. I should be fine. Or I, especially the ones that have had it and had very little symptoms or no symptoms, you know, then it's very difficult for them to be like, "oh yeah, I better - well, I was totally fine. Why would I need it"? You know, that's kind of their thought process, if that makes sense. So -

AB 44:42

Sure. Did you, did you have an adverse effect when you got it?

DO 44:50

When I had COVID itself, uh, I did. I had the, the high fever. I had the you know - it's freezing cold, super tired and lethargic. And after the vaccine, that night, about six, eight hours afterwards I had similar - but it didn't last for as long. But yeah, I was really tired, freezing, body aches, you know. And then after that it was, it was nothing. So, mild reactions on both times, but again...I don't, yeah I don't - people put up such a fuss over getting it or not getting it. [Laughs]

AB 45:29

Right. And yeah, cause I got, I got hit pretty hard after I got the second shot,

DO 45:35

Sure.

AB 45:36

But then I was just thinking some people, get COVID - and if they're not vaccinated, it's 10 times worse than that, probably.

DO 45:45

Yeah. Yeah, I would imagine. I mean, my, my dad was vaccinated before he got it. So he was a -

AB 45:53

Oh,

DO 45:54

A, you know, a breakthrough case I guess, you know what I mean. Actually, I knew quite a few breakthrough cases around the same time. So, my dad had been vaccinated. And then maybe like, three, four months afterwards, got it. And even after vaccination, he was not hospitalized, but it really knocked him, you know, down for a couple of weeks, you know. Really tired, you know, just had a cough that would not go away, and you know, everything else. And so then yeah, I'm sort of thinking I'm like, Yeah, you know, if that's, if the one thing about the vaccine is true, is if it keeps you out of the hospital, it probably for sure did for my for my dad, you know,

AB 46:32

Wow, yeah.

DO 46:34

There's no reason he -

[Connection interference]

DO 46:45

...He doesn't eat great, you know. Drinks. Smokes. All these factors. You know what I mean? And so, yeah. I'm glad - he was probably one of those that goes "oh, I don't need it. I'm fine". You know, he goes gets his health checkup, and he's okay. That's probably a different story if he doesn't have a vaccine, you know, three, four months before he gets, gets COVID. More than likely. So. Yeah.

AB 47:05

Absolutely. Well, um, we are - yeah, we're hitting right around 2:30 [pm]. Any - is there anything else you wanted to kind of add, that we maybe didn't get to? Or just kind of wanted to -

DO 47:21

No, I don't think so. You know - Yeah, you know, vaccine-wise, like we were talking about - a no win. I mean, never would I - it'd be difficult for me to put on the back marquee, like, "go get vaccinated". Not that I would not want to, but it's just like you said, where everything is so politicized with COVID-19. And now the vaccines - and it's like, seems never to be farther apart. And -

AB 47:48

Right.

DO 47:50

And as a business owner, I mean, it's, it's tough. I mean, you see these, some of these businesses take these strong stances, and kudos to them for walking that line. But I'm like, you know, it's, it's a dangerous line, you know, to walk -

AB 48:04

Sure.

DO 48:05

When you're in that, when you're in that business. When you're telling a lot of people - not that you don't want their business, but...yeah, it's...I dunno.

AB 48:12

Sure.

DO 48:13

I try to be level headed with a lot of stuff. But yeah, it's been, it's been interesting, staff wise. I mean, we've, for a while, we had a lot of our staff that weren't even in the vaccine, vaccination age. Or, I'm sorry, you know, they were under 18. And so -

AB 48:28

Right.

DO 48:30

That was interesting to navigate. Because we needed staff, we're hiring younger kids, you know, we've hired our first 14 year old, that we've ever, you know. Or at least in a very long time. Staff was tough to get. And, yeah, for a while their staff could not - their age, there was not, you know, a vaccine for them yet. And you know, anybody under 18. And so, that was difficult, because you know, all of a sudden, you'd get a call and be like, "yeah, my buddy just tested positive", and then they'd go back to that staffing thing. Like, you know, the shutdowns, and it was just like, "alright, who were they by"? You know, and, you know, so...And again, you never want anything to happen to any of your staff or your customers or -

AB 49:10

Of course.

DO 49:11

You know. So...Just trying to do your best out there. [Laughs]

AB 49:15

Right. Yeah, that's, uh, yeah, that's, that's really, really some - some good information there. Especially -

DO 49:23

Yeah, never, never thought -

AB 49:24

From the business, business perspective, I think is...

DO 49:25

Yeah. It's interesting, it really is. You know, it's, it's, it's similar to what you said with the kids. I mean, we're learning every day. You know, what -

AB 49:35

Right.

DO 49:36

Now what our customers want, what they expect. Their expectations have changed. Their needs have changed. You know, I look, we're right across from Festival [grocery store], and I'm like, I mean, every day their grocery pickup line is packed. I'm like, that's probably a model that has changed forever.

AB 49:50

Yeah.

DO 49:51

There, there are people that will never set foot in a grocery store again. Not because they're scared to go, but just because there's a whole new convenience factor that is now new to them. You know, there is I thought I had heard - was it the Burger King, or Starbucks, or both, that are building all new stores with no indoor seating. Because the drive thru now is - everybody's doing it. And so they focus on that. Make that big, you know - models are changing. And so for our business it's odd, because we're essentially the same industry we've been for over 100 years. You know, I mean, obviously, there's Netflix, and there's, you know, different ways to get your content, but -

AB 50:29

Right.

DO 50:30

Going into a theater has really never changed, you know. You walk into a theater and we hope to, to be able to continue that for sure. And hope they don't - you know, you go back to how the states have done...As a business owner, I hope the states don't mandate, um - you know, I think it's in California or New York where like - or maybe even in Europe, I know Europe for sure, like, you have to be, vaccination card to go do - really things you want to do. And that's my point where now it's like, can I [_____] long enough? People understand the risk if they're not.

AB 51:10

Sure.

DO 51:10

And, you know, let them decide if they want to go to that, you know, place or not, basically. But so. We'll see.

AB 51:20

Yes, we will. Alright, I think that is all I have for you.

DO 51:26

Okay, good.

AB 51:27

Thank you so much for your time.

DO 51:29

Not a problem. Thank you.

AB 51:31

Thank you.