Ep.30 - Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II

📅 Fri, 9/24 4:11PM   🕐 27:49

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, people, state, detroit, sharepoint, helping, support, chance, experience, build, microsoft, opportunity, internet access, college, computers, home, business, communities, interns, world

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II

A   **Announcer**   00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

E   **Ed Clemente**   00:28

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity brought to you by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Hello, my name is Ed Clemente. I'm your host today. And we're very fortunate and honored to have the Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II, right.

L   **Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II**   00:43

That's right Ed, good to be with you.

E   **Ed Clemente**   00:45

Okay, good. Welcome, welcome to the show. And I know you're a very busy person. But you know, I'm sure you you're very comfortable with podcasts. You might have even done some before, have ya?

L   **Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II**   00:57

I actually used to actually used to co-host a podcast. Back in 20. Oh, gosh, that would have been 2013. I co-hosted a podcast called the wind, the Win Report, it's called the Good Fight. We had a section called the Win Report. It was actually when I was working in politics at the time, and it was about kind of the, the fights in progressive politics

around the country and who won and who lost and our podcast what had the honor, frankly, it was it was awesome and unexpected. We were rated, we were voted one of Apple's best podcasts for 2013. It was pretty awesome.

Ed Clemente 01:35

So just like you and one other person hosted it or just you?

Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 01:39

Yeah, so me and a guy, a good friend of mine has Ben Wicker, who I worked with at the time, who actually now is back home in Wisconsin, but we were both in DC at the time. And it was it was a really, really fun experience.

Ed Clemente 01:52

Yeah, and you're obviously a native of Michigan, but a native Detroiter too, I believe, right? And I know, your your mom and dad, your mom worked at GM a long time correct.

Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 02:03

My mother so I am from Detroit, originally and then I spent the second half of my childhood in Farmington, Michigan, I went to Farmington High School class 2000. And my, my mother spent her entire career at General Motors. And my father bounced around a little bit and beginning of his career, but ultimately, when I was 10 months old, he got a job at the Department of Defense. And that's where he retired in 2016.

Ed Clemente 02:29

Did he work here in the Warren area, was he part of that?

Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 02:33

He started out he started out at the McNamara Building, which is at the corner, Cass and Michigan Avenue in downtown Detroit, and ultimately did transferred to what was then called TACOM. And that's where he finished his career at TACOM.

Ed Clemente 02:47

Yeah, we just interviewed recently the head of the Michigan Defense Center. Yes. And so we've had a lot of conversations about that. Um, the other thing that kind of really fascinates me because I know what I was like at 16. But I think you're much more mature than me. You went into a recreational center in Detroit and started a computer lab. Is that right? That I read your bio, right?

Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 03:10

Yeah, that happened. But I'll give you a little bit more foreground. So so my mom, my mom worked at General Motors, like I said, she was an accountant. And she ended up striking up a friendship with like the, the PC tech guy on her floor. And it turns out that he had a side business where he built computers, and like, sold them kind of custom builds. And so she convinced him to let me work for him. And I'm using work in air quotes because he didn't pay me. But I got a chance to go to this guy's place in Southfield. And he taught me how to build computers. And so the first five that I made, we then installed at a rec center on the west side of Detroit. And so, built their computer lab and then actually taught a class and taught people how to use those computers and the software. So that was my first job. And my first real, you know, professional experience. And it was, it was awesome. And I learned a lot that I still think about every single day in that. And you were in high school, right? At that time. Yeah, yeah, I was. I was a junior, I was a junior in high school.

E Ed Clemente   04:18

I was I wish I had that concentration at that point. But then went on to U of M. And I, you know, I know you've got at least one degree from U of M, or is there a, because it confused me, because I see, you could maybe help the listeners tell the difference, because there might be some budding kids out there wondering what programs to go into for their careers. But what's the difference between computer science and computer engineering?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   04:44

Very simple. So computer science is about software, and computer engineering combined software and hardware. And so I was a double engineering major at the University of Michigan. So in addition to learning how to become a software developer and write computer programs, I also learned how to manage and create, you know, microelectromechanical systems and actually program hardware as well. So I got I was double majors, I got degrees in both of those things. So the University of MIchigan College of Engineering,

E Ed Clemente   05:14

And and I think I read you also graduated with honors, which, once again was not what I graduated with.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   05:23

it's an honor to graduate from the University of Michigan.

E Ed Clemente   05:27

Yes, yes. Um, so then it sounds like you went from there to Redmond, which is obviously the home of Microsoft. And, and I don't know exactly, but I know something about SharePoint. And I think you know, people in the business world kind of know what SharePoint is, but can you tell people what SharePoint is because you help create and write some of the software for it? Is that right?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   05:52

Sure. So I was working on a couple of early releases of SharePoint of what is now SharePoint. And when I was out at Microsoft, I interned there in college, and then I worked there full time for four years. And SharePoint, basically, is an

Microsoft, I interned there in college, and then I worked there full time for four years. And SharePoint, basically, is an office collaboration tool. So when you're at work, and people know this, now you're more in the, you know, remote working experience that we've had. But people need to share information and share documents and be able to chat with each other online and, and comment on and make edits to documents and lists and keep shared calendars. And SharePoint was a way to bring all those things together. And so I got a chance to work on that project early. I was an engineer that was working specifically for big organizations, who wanted to use SharePoint, so they can have the best performance. So I worked with, you know, again, huge deployments, US Army, Department of Defense, you know, Walmart, like the biggest companies and biggest organizations in the world, Shell Oil Company, who were using this software to manage, you know, their, their their work around the globe, and it was really great experience to be able to help grow that to the fastest growing business in the history of the company.

E Ed Clemente   07:01

And this more of a geek question, but did you get to meet Bill Gates, or was he retired by then or what?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   07:09

No, no, I got I actually got to meet Bill Gates. So this is something pretty cool. So one of the ways that Microsoft at that time used to really, you know, hook in interns to become full time employees, was that if you were graduating the following school year, they selected a group of interns from that class to be able to go to Bill Gates house. I called it the Bill G. barbecue. And so I was part of a small number of of interns who got to go to Bill Gates's house, which is like on an island just just off of downtown Seattle, and I got to meet him, I got to meet Steve Balmer, I got to meet all these all the leaders in Microsoft and we kind of got to ask him questions and stuff. It was a really remarkable experience and the barbecue was pretty good too.

E Ed Clemente   07:58

Speaking of Balmer, you probably, did he go to U of M? I forgot I know he's from Michigan or Detroit too

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   08:03

So Balmer's from yeah, he went to Detroit Country Day High School, and it's from suburban Detroitm a lot of love for Detroit, we're really proud that the Balmer Group has made significant philanthropic investments in the state of Michigan, and particularly in Metro Detroit. And a lot of those investments have been in areas that are, I think, really key to the state of Michigan's future. So we're really proud of that.

E Ed Clemente   08:25

Yeah, I have to admit, I'm jealous of all these guys you met so young, and how that helps you with your career, too.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   08:31

I've been incredibly, incredibly blessed and fortunate and lucky to be in the right place at the right time. I do not minimize the role that serendipity has played in my life. And I also can never minimize the role that people supporting me in having my back and making sure that I was able to complete my high school education and my

college education there. You know, when I think about what helps to make young people successful in higher ed, it's often the helpers, it's the the people who are there, and learning resource centers and helping people organize study groups, and those are staff people who often don't get recognized enough. But they are really critical to the fabric of any university environment. And I was very thankful to be well supported by programs, that what was then called the Minority Engineering Program Office at Michigan, which is now the Center for Engineering Diversity and Outreach in the College of Engineering and other programs. So I'm really thankful for that.

E Ed Clemente 09:29

You get to talk to the kids at the college?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 09:32

I do I do. It's been really awesome to be able to being able to maintain that relationship with the college. I also had relationships with the School of Information, actually was on staff at the School of Information, which has a close relationship with the College Engineering for about 8 months before I took office. And I got a chance to you know, when I was on staff be the commencement speaker for the School of Information actually in 2018. And so I got a chance to work with a lot of undergraduate and graduate students. In that role, as well as some great faculty and other staff members and so I am thankful to be able to maintain a relationship with the with the U of M community, and certainly, it continues to be a beacon of just really amazing achievement and potential for the state of Michigan,

E Ed Clemente 10:18

Not to paraphrase what you just said, but a lot of people forget where they came from, and who helped them get there. And you've done a good job of looking like you realize where your foundation started.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 10:29

Oh, without without question, I am not presumptuous enough to believe that these are things that I would have been able to accomplish on my own. And I don't think really anyone gets anywhere alone. There's always someone who's supporting and helping and creating a way, breaking down barriers. And I'm the poster child for that.

E Ed Clemente 10:50

Yeah, no, your career is exemplified that, and it's an excellent way to put it too. You went on to become an entrepreneur right after this, so I don't know that's kind of fuzzy with me, but what did you leave then, the Microsoft?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 11:08

No, so actually, the first business I started, which was actually with a couple of guys who I've known since kindergarten, we started this while I was working in Microsoft, who was kind of a side business for me. It was called Detroit Inteern, and it was actually this this internship website. Where it would, the premise of it was if people could, if young people could find internships in the Metro Detroit area, then that would increase likelihood, they could probably find a job in the area. And if they could find a job in the area, then they would be less likely to relocate to

the west coast to be a software developer. It was like really premised upon my experience. And so we had myself with the with the software developer, one of my friends from kindergarten, who was an attorney, and another one of our friends for kindergarten, who was a graduate from the business school at Michigan, and we worked together on this. And launched it actually in December of 2006, for January 2000, excuse me, December, January, 2006, excuse me, and right after I was out there at Microsoft for about six or seven months. And that was my first software entrepreneurship experience.

E Ed Clemente 12:20

I know, Microsoft, and a lot of those. IT companies, they really encourage side hustles, too, don't they like they, they want you to have some time to be creative too, right, with those kinds of things.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 12:32

It's funny you say that, because I definitely didn't disclose anything. I didn't tell them, you know, it's like, it was successful and ended up we ended up being acquired by the Kellogg Foundation about six years later. But um, but no, I didn't tell them I was starting a business.

E Ed Clemente 12:55

I think now they strongly encourage it, I think a lot of them do, like 20% of your time is for you to be creative in your field or something like that.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 13:04

Well, Google certainly pioneer that notion of 20% time, they recognize that, that engineers need space to create. And that's where some of the best ideas come from. And if you look at all of Google's most profitable products, all of them have come from 20% of time, they have advertising products, Gmail, Google Maps, all those things have come from that those 20% of time projects. So it is important to give your your your professionals the opportunity to dream about how to do things differently, and to support that when it has potential. And and I certainly learned a tremendous amount from my entrepreneurial experience but with that one and with the second venture that I started with another group of friends when I lived in Washington, DC. And it certainly made me a better and stronger professional. And it has informed how I think about the world, I think about the economy, how I think about taking advantage of access to opportunity, and really wanting to make that more available for more people.

E Ed Clemente 13:57

It's always easier to see your path when you look back than ahead.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II 14:03

You know, that's that's true that that certainly is true. You know, I think as someone who's had a fairly, who had a very non-0traditional path to public service, though, what I have recognized is all of those seemingly disparate experiences, did actually provide a lot of preparation for public service, even though I was not planning to go into

public service. This wasn't something I considered at all when I was in college, or even in the early part of my professional career. But by the series my experiences have helped me, I think, be a better public servant because of it.

E   Ed Clemente   14:56

You actually get to you know, practice what you did, because you like I know one of the things I know you've worked a little bit with, I don't know if it's broadband or digital divide kind of issues. But could you expand on that? Because I don't think a lot of people understand the digital divide. That's a big deal for the MEDC to build out the broadband. And but do you want to elaborate a little bit about that?

L   Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   15:16

Yeah, I mean, so to put it succinctly, access to the internet, will be one of the it will be perhaps the key difference maker in terms of access to opportunity for people going forward. Economic opportunity, educational opportunity, getting better health outcomes, developing stronger and safer communities, like Internet access can be really critical to all of that. And unfortunately, everyone in Michigan does not ahve access to the internet today. Either the Internet has not been built to support where you live, or internet access is not affordable where you live, or everyone does not have the digital literacy and skill capacity to take full advantage of the internet that they do have access to. And so this is an issue that I've actually been working on, sort of bridging this, this internet access gap. Since I was a freshman at Michigan, I did a research project with a sociology professor actually surveying neighborhoods on the east side of Detroit, that incombant providers were not serving, and asking people how much they were willing to pay internet for access, what they would do if they had it in their household, things like that. And so this is very near and dear to my heart. And it's why I'm proud that state of Michigan, we launched our Michigan High Speed Internet Office earlier this year, to really better coordinate the state's efforts, we had, you know, definitely a lot of people thinking about how to expand access to the internet, working in different parts of state government. And so we wanted to unite and and better organize and frankly, streamline those efforts so that we could be focused on this common purpose of making Michigan the first state that will have every single one of his households connected to high speed internet. And to do so we need to take advantage of this once in a lifetime moment we are in right now, where we have more resources available. We'll have very soon to expand access to the internet, in the history of the internet. But since the internet was invented, we haven't had this much of an opportunity to get people online. And so we need to step up and meet this moment. And working with the high-speed internet office working with what's going to be ultimatley a bipartisan coalition of stakeholders, we know that we can get that done and mission will be in that can be a national leader in that route.

E   Ed Clemente   17:33

I used to be a state rep and I had downriver had Ecourse, Rough, Lincoln Park Melvindale. I used to do my office hours in all of them. And I was shocked when I first wind to see how long the lines were just for like the community computers. Because you know, they would tell me that kids or even adults couldn't file an application without a

computer, you couldn't do it on a phone because of the truncated phone that they couldn't put other information on it. And that was a real eye opener for me to really try to even at that time to, support the digital divide, because it was new to me at the time too.

L
Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   18:07

Well, it's definitely something that we can't take for granted. And I mean to just to give you a current example. There are areas of Washtenaw County that just in the last 60 days have been lit up with with internet access from an incumbent provider, just in the last 60 days, in 2021. So there's still work to do and ground to cover to make sure that everyone and through what all do what all of us have experienced in the last year with the pandemic, we see the primacy and the importance of internet access for children to be able to learn, I don't think that the delivery of education and instruction will ever be quite the same. Because now we recognize that there may be a role to play for connected learning. But in order for that equitably experienced all kids have to have access.

E
Ed Clemente   18:51

Yeah, it's even more than just kids to we interviewed Connected Nation Michigan, and they talk about how a lot of telemedicine, health care, wearables are all going to play a big factor in the future. If you don't have connectivity at some level.

L
Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   19:10

Well 100%, I mean, imagine if you're a person who suffers from a chronic illness, and who lives far away from your specialists, if you have ALS and live in the Upper Peninsula, for example, there are no ALS treatment centers in the upper peninsula of Michigan. And so I'm needing to drive for hours and hours to be able to come and see your specialists. Well if you have access to a robust high fidelity, broadband, high speed internet access, you can perhaps work with your specialists. And instead of having to come down and see them seven times a year, you'll have to come twice because you're getting the support and services they're able to connect you with the resources and and and just infrastructure you need to be able to manage your condition. Imagine that they having strong internet access is an economic development boon for communities imagine smaller rural communities in Michigan, many of which have seen renewed interest during this pandemic, when people recognize that Michigan is a beautiful place to live that's relatively affordable compared to other parts of the country. And if you combine that with robust high speed internet access, it's available on every household in every home. That leads to placemaking opportunities in smaller communities, and perhaps they wouldn't have been available in the same way. And that will spur private investment to be able to deepen the infrastructure, the the amenities, and offerings, the communities across state in Michigan, it's a huge opportunity across the board. That's why we want to be so aggressive here to take advantage of this moment.

E
Ed Clemente   20:35

Well, I got a just a few more questions for you. I know your time is precious. But this has been fun. I'm gonna let you get a chance to put on your futuristic hat. So what do you think are the big disruptors beyond things you've already mentioned that because they know you're doing some stuff with cybersecurity and other issues? What do you think? What would you tell people to be cautious of in the future or how to adapt that kind of thing?

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   21:00

Well, I think certainly as the world becomes increasingly connected, and as we have more people online, and more devices and infrastructure connected to one another online, we will need to be very mindful of the security and privacy implications of that reality. And that is why I'm very proud that the State of Michigan again, and there's a bipartisan consensus that has been present here in the state for a number of years now, that has sought to help have Michigan be a leader and training the cybersecurity workforce of today and tomorrow. We have, you know, nationally recognized programs at places like Wayne Community College District and Eastern Michigan University that are training some of the strongest professionals in cybersecurity in the world. And we've seen reports from like the federal government, for example, saying that they are 1000s of positions short as far as the number of cyber security professionals that we need for national defense and homeland security purposes, for example. And so Michigan has a chance to be a leader here. And I really want our state to lean in, we can build out and build upon things like the cybersecurity range, I've been able to meet students across Michigan who have been participating in cybersecurity exercises and competitions and awarding some of them from all over our state. So I'm really proud of that opportunity. I also think we have a chance to really, I think in the State of Michigan reimagine and expand frankly, who has access to entrepreneurship, and who has the chance to have their ideas be invested in. And so we have that that means that one ensuring that people know that their ideas have can have a chance to be successful here in Michigan, it means helping to expand our capital markets, a type of capital that's available to a broader range of people. So that Michigan can really I think be the state that leads the nation in new business starts coming out of the pandemic. And one of the opportunities from an equity perspective that presents is that, you know, studies have shown over the years that people of color are actually more likely to have a business idea that they want to start. And if we make those, we make more types of capital available to more types of people, that's going to lead to more opportunities for us to get those unicorns based here in Michigan, for our economy to grow exponentially. And so we're excited to invest in those opportunities. And then the last thing I'll leave with is that I think that we all now are more sensitive to the connection between public health and our economic well being. And so we need to make sure that we we invest in both of those simultaneously. And so I'm looking forward to being creative in how we do that, because healthy people are people who engage in commerce can then engage in commerce, who then can engage in research, who then can engage in supporting their communities and placemaking. So we need to connect these together and think about them as one in the same.

E Ed Clemente   23:51

All excellent points. And I'll tell Dr. Ivery I used to be a trustee for Wayne County Community College so he'll be glad to know you plug them.

L Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   23:59

Dr. Ivery has been a really great ally to this administration and to the state. Dr. ivery also is a member of the Michigan Coronavirus Taskforce on Racial Disparities which I chair and him there being representing community college education leadership, and they've been an important anchor in our state's COVID response and as well as in our state's both economic development strategy and workforce development strategy. So I applaud him and the whole Wayne County COmmunity College District.

E Ed Clemente   24:27

I got two books, but I can't reach him from here. He's written books too. But the last question, I think I'll ask you, it's a simple one. But you know, you've lived in Michigan, but you've also lived in other states now and read our districts. What do you like best about living in Michigan? Remember you'r the Lieutenant Governor, hang on, I don't want to get you in trouble.

L   Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   24:48

Look, I'm a Midwest kid at heart. Look, I've lived on both coasts. As you said, I lived I lived in Seattle, Washington, I lived in Washington, DC. It was on the West Coast for four years on the East Coast for five years. But ultimately, you know, I chose, my wife, my wife's from Southfield, and we chose to build our family and our future here in Michigan. We could live anywhere in the country anywhere in the world. And we made an affirmative decision, we didn't come home because we needed to, we came home because we wanted to. We brought our 10 month old twins, back home to Detroit, where we live, to raise them. This is a place that that born and bred and made me who I am. And it's because of the what is in the it's like it's in the dirt in Michigan, this notion that we are people who know that we can make real things and make things real, I'll tell you what that what that means. Make real things means that, you know, we have the ability to create what others think is impossible here in Michigan, whether it's the imagination that led to defining mobility for a century, to the to the imagination that led to creating Motown and electronic music, like we have the ability to make things that other people can't imagine. And then to make, to make things real means that we have the we have amazing, I think, storytellers and cultural leaders and culture shapers here in the state of Michigan and just being in that vicinity, I think helps to store the creativity that's within everyone. And so I think those two things put together mean that people who call Michigan home have more potential to change the world and to do anywhere else. And so I wanted my children to experience that and be infused with that as they came into their, their they came of age became themselves. And so that's why I think Michigan is the best place to be and always will be.

E   Ed Clemente   26:41

I don't think anyone else could say it the way you did, that was really great. And I don't even know how you had any time with three little kids at home probably, I would imagine that your time is very precious. But on the other hand, you get a great compass heading, keep your energy and your momentum. And once again, we had our guest on today Lieutenant Governor Gilchrist, Garland Gilchrist II. Appreciate you being here today and it's been a lot of fun talking with you.

L   Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   27:07

Thank you Ed and I want to thank especially all of the professionals at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. You do a great job of positioning Michigan for success. And I thank you for the leadership that you show for the services that you render, and for the impact that you have on our state.

E   Ed Clemente   27:25

Nice to meet you too. By the way, thank you.

L   Lt. Garlin Gilchrist II   27:28

Certainly, take care.

A   Announcer   27:31

The Michigan Opportunity is brought to you by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Join us and make your mark where it matters, visit michiganbusiness.org/radio to put your plans in motion