



Devin DeWulf
Krewe of Red Beans
New Orleans, LA

Date: September 2, 2020
Location: DeWulf's Residence
Interviewer: Justin Nystrom
Transcription: Diana Dombrowski
Length: Fifty three minutes
Project: COVID-19 & Foodways

[00:00:02.19]

Justin N.: Okay. Today is September 2, 2020. I am here in the backyard of Devin DeWulf, the founder of the Krewe of Red Beans. My name is Justin Nystrom. I teach at Loyola University New Orleans. I'm recording interviews for the Southern Foodways Alliance COVID-19 Oral History Project, and many of the interviewees that I've talked to—I say many, actually all of the interviewees I've talked to—have mentioned Devin's name as being somebody they look upon very favorably, as having helped them stay in business during this epidemic. Devin has been involved with both the raising of money and the organizing of food relief efforts for out-of-work people, but in a way that has also helped people whose businesses are also imperiled. So, Devin, thank you very much for joining me.

[00:01:06.16]

Devin D.: Yeah, my pleasure.

[00:01:09.09]

Justin N.: So, just tell me a little bit about yourself, kinda like a thumbnail, how you came to New Orleans and maybe a little bit about the start of the Krewe of Red Beans?

[00:01:21.18]

Devin D.: Sure. I came to New Orleans via Brazil and Mexico. I'm originally from Charleston, South Carolina. I ended up going to college in my hometown, the College of Charleston, and staying in my hometown kind of gave me a little angst to get out into the world. At

the time, I thought that learning Spanish and Portuguese would really maybe be a good thing to do, and I was kind of thinking about maybe immigration law or something in that realm, 'cause that's what I was studying in college, Latin American history. Basically ended up going to Brazil and living there for a year and falling in love with beans. Right after Brazil, I was gonna go to Mexico and go there for six months. That's when Katrina happened. So, coming home for two weeks, having nothing to do, thinking about Katrina and being somebody who grew up with hurricanes and kinda stuff like that, I was motivated to come to New Orleans to volunteer. Originally, I was here as a volunteer photographer to help document for non-profits and cultural groups, like what they were doing. I got really just completely head-over-heels in love with the city because of the culture and the way people are here. I kept coming back and I kept coming back, finally graduated college and just moved here because I was tired of driving from South Carolina. [Laughter] I became a resident here in the summer of 2007. Ended up becoming a schoolteacher and, along the way, because I have this love of beans and rice from my time in Brazil, for my first Halloween in New Orleans I made a bean and rice costume, a suit. Just the reaction of people was like I was a rock star or something. It was very noticeable. I was also spending a lot of time observing the Mardi Gras Indian traditions and going to second lines. All of that kinda swirled around in my head, and I decided, "Okay, the next Mardi Gras—"—After experiencing my first Mardi Gras, then I decided—"Okay, the next Mardi Gras, because there's not a lot of happening in the Marini where I was living at the time, Lundi Gras afternoon was very tired, so I just decided, I'm gonna start a parade." Started recruiting my small circle of friends, basically bribed them with dinner every Sunday at my house, and we would work on our bean

suits. I just taught everybody how to do it, and we paraded. The first year it was, I guess, Mardi Gras Carnival 2009. We had a really just wonderful time, twenty-five people and a brass band. No spectators at all. We just had the best time. So, then we decided, "All right, we'll do it again." So, that kinda was the Krewe of Red Beans, how it was born. For many years, it was very small, kind of a largely unknown neighborhood tradition that formed in the **Marini** and the Tremé, and over the years, it got a little bit bigger, a little bit bigger. I guess it's been twelve years. We Welcome everybody to the parade. It's a different type of experience than a lot of the other parades. I think that welcoming atmosphere is what kinda helps it grow. So, yeah, that's pretty much about me and the Krewe, how it started. Currently a stay-at-home dad, I've been doing that for the last five years after being a middle school teacher for a decade. I'm also a folk artist, a painter. Yeah, that's pretty much the life story. [Laughter]

[00:05:26.01]

Justin N.: Yeah, well, that's great. I know the COVID-19 isn't the first time you all have been involved in some kind of feeding people, right? So you've had some experience with feeding before, or . . . ?

[00:05:39.05]

Devin D.: Sort of. I mean, we basically—the Krewe is an entity. As the leader of the Krewe, I try to utilize it as a force for good whenever possible. I believe that it should give back to the city in whatever way we can. We're not like a well-heeled group, we don't have a bunch of powerful people in our organization or things like that, but we've always tried to give

back to community. Recently, that was in the form of a red beans and rice tournament that was kinda promoting restaurants and also creating an experience for New Orleanians to become judges of red beans, and that was our charity event for many years. [Phone rings] That's my guy, Travis, real quick. [Laughter]

[00:06:30.19]

Justin N.: Yeah.

[00:06:32.08]

Devin D.: Hey. I'm gonna come open the gate. I'll be right back.

[00:06:32.10]

Justin N.: No problem.

[00:06:36.20]

Devin D.: Is the sound okay for you?

[00:06:36.10]

Justin N.: It sounds great. I'm just gonna leave it rolling, and I can always chop this out.

[00:06:39.17]

Devin D.: Yeah, that's fine.

[00:06:41.29]

Justin N.: Okay.

[Pause in interview]

[00:06:41.13]

Justin N.: Well, cool. So, along comes—since the focus of our oral histories is the corona, as my six-year-old calls it—when did you kinda first become aware that there might be a role for you in all this?

[00:07:07.09]

Devin D.: Basically, my wife is an E.R. doctor. I got a very good window into the experience of the healthcare workers. Because we had just cancelled our restaurant-promoting charity event, I also had these contacts to all these local restaurants, and I know that many of them are super-nice people because they were willing to help out our tiny little parade organization with our charity event, and they didn't have to do that. To me, they're just nice people. I'm basically an idea person; I just come up with ideas. If I throw them out into the world, then I can say, "Great, I did my job." If they took, they took. If they don't take, they don't take. But at least I tried to get them out there. So, one of the first days of COVID, my wife was at the hospital working her butt off and coming home just super stressed out, very nervous, very kind of afraid because they didn't know how bad this was gonna be, but it had shown up real strong in New Orleans. So, she was seeing it. Every day that she went to work and every day that all of the nurses and doctors and security

and cleaning people in the hospitals, all the hospital employees that were in it, were basically risking their lives every day. Then they would come home and worry about spreading the germs to their families. Since nobody knew anything, it was just the most stressful thing that you had ever seen for them. That's what I was picking up on every day when my wife would come home. I think day four or so, she came home, and the first thing she told me about work was that a nurse had brought cookies and shared them with everybody. To me, that was an aha moment, because it's a no-brainer when you think about it. Every workplace is the same. If somebody brings delicious food, it's gonna make everybody happy. So, the world was starting to close. People were starting to quarantine. The city was starting to shut down. I just kinda knew that, if we throw the idea out there, "Hey, people, let's raise money so we can buy the healthcare workers some yummy food right now!" What I was really doing was trying to come up with a way where we could create a win-win situation, because I believe an idea is a good one if it's a win-win or if it accomplishes multiple things at once. So, in this case, we were providing food love to the healthcare workers, helping them sleep in a little bit, not have to worry about their food, not have to worry about going to the grocery store. 'Cause they work twelve hour shifts, and a twelve-hour shift is easily a sixteen-hour shift, you know? Especially in the middle of COVID. So, by doing that, I knew we could also support restaurants, and I knew that they were about to get really hammered and be threatened, like an existential threat to all the restaurants New Orleans. And what is our city if not a food city? That kinda was the motivation and the impetus for the idea. We placed a sixty-dollar order of food. Me and my wife brainstormed a hashtag to use, which was #feedthefrontline, and we put it out in a e-mail to the Krewe members and we put it on Instagram and basically said, "Here is

something we can do if anybody is interested in helping out, send donations, and we'll just do more of it." So, the first day, it was sixty dollars of food that my wife picked up and brought to her hospital on her way to work. Then, people started donating. So, Day 2, it was like \$200. Then it was like \$1,000 of food. Then every single day it would just grow. We had Krewe members who worked in other hospitals, and they started to say, "Hey, we'd love some of that, too." You know? "If it's possible." We kinda came up with this system on the fly where we could talk to the hospitals and identify how many staff members they had that would want food and we would identify exactly the best way to deliver to them. Also, the important thing to remember was, at the time, the hospitals were really not wanting people to show up there, so they were shut down to the outside world for their safety. And for the safety of everybody else. Random people would come and show up with cookies and things like that for hospital workers, and the hospitals were like, "No, thank you. We don't know who you are. We don't want that here. We don't know if it's safe." So, the way to get around that was, we coordinated with the hospital workers themselves and we were able to say, "Which door do we deliver to? What time should we deliver it? Who do we call when we're outside?" As it was growing, kind of brainstorming how the city is doing, we started identifying ways to make it even better. So, we started hiring musicians to do the deliveries because, obviously, they're outta work, there's no Jazz Fest, there's no French Quarter Fest. That also enabled us to create a more elaborate system. When you're hiring somebody and paying them to do a job, you have more control over the quality. So, we didn't make any mistakes with our deliveries. Our deliveries were on-time, they were consistent, and the musicians . . . for them, it was a really good lifeline. We were able to hire about thirty-five musicians. We ended up

being out, in six weeks' time, \$100,000 to them, which was great. That helped many of them kind of ride through the catastrophe. Some of them had a hard time collecting unemployment, as well, being independent contractors. That made our system better and it enabled us to literally deliver food every day to every single hospital in New Orleans, which is what we ended up growing to at the peak. So, you know, it started with a \$60 idea and it just kinda took off.

[00:13:39.05]

Justin N.: So, the first stakeholders were the Krewe members themselves?

[00:13:47.24]

Devin D.: Yeah.

[00:13:49.12]

Justin N.: Then I'm guessing you had people join in your effort. So, who might have been some of these earlier people? Did you reach out to—I know the restaurants are obviously on their backs by this point. Those have been the people that have been, you've been working with before, and now I know you have a close association with Camelia. Did they help out or . . . ?

[00:14:13.13]

Devin D.: They were kinda busy with their—they had other issues and they were kinda busy.

The restaurants we started with our **Bean Madness** restaurants, 'cause I have the owner's

cell phone number and I can just call 'em up real quick, "How ya doing? Are you open?" There's two things I'll answer. I'll get to your question, and then there's one thing to add about our system that's really important that I always like to explain.

[00:14:43.13]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:14:42.21]

Devin D.: So, there's three hundred and some-odd people in the Krewe. They were the initial funders. Then, because we were putting it on Instagram, we had five thousand, six thousand followers on Instagram, so those were the second people to step up and start donating. Then, after that, it was really like we were pretty much one of the only groups doing anything. I think, in New Orleans, that got people to say, "Oh, these guys are doing something. Support them, even if you've never heard of them before, they're doing something and every day, you can see on our Instagram, this is the food from this restaurant going to this place, and these are pictures of hospital workers getting their food." It was just every single day.

[00:15:36.06]

Justin N.: So, social media was crucial in getting the word out, Instagram in this case, I guess.

[00:15:41.11]

Devin D.: Mm-hm.

[00:15:43.28]

Justin N.: I also know there was a fair amount of press like in late March and early April about the efforts. I guess it took about a couple weeks and really it snowballed, right?

[00:15:50.19]

Devin D.: Yeah. I was very fortunate. We were fortunate because my across-the-stress neighbor is a website builder. So, he made a really nice website while he was quarantining as a donation.

[00:16:03.13]

Justin N.: Nice.

[00:16:04.27]

Devin D.: For the effort. That website raised a million dollars.

[00:16:08.24]

Justin N.: That's amazing.

[00:16:11.26]

Devin D.: It's crazy. 'Cause we could put videos on there, we could put pictures. We had an e-mail list, and it just grew. It definitely snowballed. The thing I was gonna say, though, is we started with this group of restaurants and each restaurant, I would have a conversation

with them that was a very difficult conversation. But the whole thing had to be guided by a moral principle, and the moral guiding principle was helping to support restaurants in New Orleans that were there for the community. So, I didn't want to save a restaurant that was there for the tourists, for example. Nobody would be sad if name your tourist restaurant that caters to tourists, if they were out of business. Like, what we needed to do was save the places that were neighborhood spots. We needed to try to help as many of them as possible. So, each owner of each restaurant would have a kind of intrinsic tendency to be greedy and get as much business as they possibly could to bring back as many employees as possible, but what we had to do is basically say, "What is the bare minimum that you need to survive? What is that number per month?" Then if we divide that number into four weeks, then we know how much money to send to your restaurant, like how many orders to place at your restaurant. The more we get closer to that number, then that frees up more money for us to then help another restaurant. So, this is how we're able to assist forty-nine different businesses in New Orleans. We also were very cognizant of where are they located, which neighborhoods are they in? Are they owned by minorities? Are they women-owned businesses? We tried to be cognizant of all of that because it's really easy to just not pay attention to that stuff, and then who are you supporting, what impacts are you really having? So, we were very careful about where we would spend our money. We also were very insistent that the food had to be amazing. We told the restaurants, "You don't really have a price point. You don't have to make a \$6 meal for us. You can just make a really good meal and bill it to us." You know? "If it's \$15 a plate, that's fine. If it's \$12 a plate, whatever. If it's \$8, that's great. It doesn't matter to me because we want the best possible food for our healthcare workers right now

because they need to feel the love." That was a very different way of operating than what you would see with, like, a World Central Kitchen or a city-run program or something like that.

[00:19:15.29]

Justin N.: So, World Central Kitchen, they obviously operate on a much larger scale, but so they tend to just—they've got tighter controls on what the kitchens cook and things like that?

[00:19:23.28]

Devin D.: Yeah. So, they'll give a set price per meal. Then what that really does is, it forces the restaurants to skimp as much as possible. Not to be too blamey, but the city-run meal program, I like, is like \$6 a meal for the restaurants to get, so the quality of food that you're gonna end up with is, like, very, very basic down there because they have to save that money so that they can make a profit. What we were doing was, we were telling the restaurants, "We want you to make a profit up to the amount of money that you need to survive." Basically. That frees them to use their skills and their passion to cook really good food to show the love to the healthcare workers. The healthcare workers at that point, in their most stressful moment ever, did not need crappy food for free.

[00:20:27.28]

Justin N.: Bologna sandwiches.

[00:20:31.09]

Devin D.: Yeah. They didn't need some grilled chicken and beans and rice every day going to work. What happened for the healthcare workers is, they would go to work and they would be, like, giddy with excitement because they didn't know which restaurant was coming today. Was it going to be Boucherie? Was it going to be Petit Kitchen? Was it gonna be Pizza Delicious? They never knew what exactly it would be, but they knew it would be delicious food. I think that was really—for me, very important, because we can then tell the community, "We are sending them really delicious food, and that is exactly the type of morale boost that they need right now." Because the stress level that they had was just, like, off the charts.

[00:21:14.26]

Justin N.: Yeah. I could also see where that have an effect for their suppliers, because their suppliers would—if they were all the sudden making bologna sandwiches, their suppliers would be giving them very different stuff rather than the seafood and all these different types of vegetables that come in are still being consumed by the restaurants, so that does have a multiplying effect, I guess.

[00:21:41.10]

Devin D.: Mm-hm. And it goes to local farmers. Like if you're **Cochon**, you're not using the Restaurant Depot food ingredients as much as you are using local farmers.

[00:21:59.10]

Justin N.: Right.

[00:22:00.23]

Devin D.: So, having the right price point helps sustain the chain. So, it gets back to the farmers, to the fishermen. That's kind of, in my opinion, the approach that we really need right now. We need to be super, super aware of how we're spending money or resources, and being very careful to think through the whole process.

[00:22:23.09]

Justin N.: Right. I read your letter to the editor to the Lens about the city's R.F.P. I do want to kind of . . . I guess, in addition to this sort of broadly, I want to ask you about governmental response to COVID-19, particularly in the context of food and has been your impression from your vantage point?

[00:22:52.13]

Devin D.: Well, I've become, honestly, more jaded. [Laughter] After this experience, because it's not just government, but it's systems that are set up to support a city are kind of antiquated. I think big foundations and the way that grants are normally done and the way that grants are normally awarding money is set up to not be flexible. In a moment of catastrophe, one of the best things you can have is flexibility to try out new ideas, and to . . . think about what is actually occurring and what's being . . . what impact is being made in the moment. While we were operating and buying food from restaurants so that they could have a profit, so that they could feed the healthcare workers, I was also hearing about groups that were asking restaurants to donate food to hospital workers and stuff

like that drove me crazy. It's like, "You're taxing the businesses that are mega-impacted right now." They do not need to donate any of their money or food or any of that stuff, and you're taking away potential business from this effort that is—if we get more customers or more hospital workers to feed, then that gives the effort more possibility. Our food to the hospital effort literally was the largest one in America, like by far. We were the only place doing a city-wide effort. It lasted for six weeks, and it was obviously way bigger than I ever thought it would be, but I wish it could've gone on, you know? We could have saved a lot of restaurants. I'm very critical of the city-run meal program, because in six weeks' time, we were working with one million dollars. We also tracked every penny, and we took zero pennies away as profit. There was no administrative, any costs. We were all just volunteers to try to help our city's food scene. To compare that with the city thing, it's like, they have eighteen million dollars to work with. The amount of restaurants that they're actually supporting with that much money is not really that big. We were helping forty-nine businesses. I think they're helping, like, seventy. I don't think it's being done very thoughtfully, where you're considering what types of places or where they're located, and pushing the price down, down, down to be economical is not very good for the whole food chain, supply chain of restaurants. To me, that's a really big wasted opportunity. In the newspaper today, there's a hospital group, L.C.M.C., that gave a million dollars to buy restaurant gift cards for their employees. Again, it's a huge wasted opportunity, because that is not likely to be orchestrated in an organized manner. So, if Restaurant A receives, like, \$30 more of business in the next month because somebody got a gift card, that's not gonna do anything for that place. Are those gift cards gonna go to Raising Canes or McDonald's? To me, it's just frustrating to see stuff like

that, 'cause it could've been more thoughtful. In the press release, it's like, "We want to thank the community for doing this thing and they fed us all the time." We were sort of the ones to do that, and never really got any support from the government or local government or the hospital groups. Nobody big really supported our effort. That's why it ended after six weeks, because we were spending \$30,000 a day. Hard to keep that up. I'm a little bit pessimistic on what will actually happen with the restaurants in New Orleans. I think many of them will close. I think we could've saved a lot more of them, had we been a little bit smarter about it. I'm kind of . . . more jaded after the experience of dealing with the press and dealing with all these people that don't actually care. Like they're not really there to help. There's a lot of that. So, it was a whirlwind, to be frank about it.

[00:28:04.08]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah. It seems like, in your experience, you got a real education in policy and where policy doesn't work. You used the phrase in your letter to the editor, something about glorious inefficiencies or something along those lines.

[00:28:19.08]

Devin D.: Yeah. We need that right now, I believe. When you streamline everything to make it, like, really cost-effective, you're sometimes shooting yourself in the foot and not having a bigger impact because you're not creating jobs for people. Right now, we need to create as many jobs as possible. To go back to the musicians that we hired, we created thirty-five jobs every day for musicians. I could have tried to use volunteers to do that to save some money, but in the grand scheme of things, we need to help as many people in our

community get work as possible right now. So, that's an inefficiency financially that I could have not had, but it was really important to do that to create those jobs. We were over-paying people, quite frankly, to do the deliveries. They would make \$75 per delivery, they would do two per day. \$150 a day. I could have paid them a lot less and still had the workforce, but we have to support people, so you have to give people a living wage and not try to skimp it too much. When you think about something like eighteen million dollars in government money, that should create a lot of jobs, but how many jobs is that really creating? Not that anybody knows for sure. But it's probably creating a few jobs in a Revolution Foods warehouse somewhere where they're packaging food, and they're using a lot of volunteers, and then you have a couple skeleton crews and a couple restaurants. I'm like, "I don't think that that's actually a good use of money." Unless you're really creating a lot of jobs. 'Cause eighteen million dollars is a lot of money.

[00:30:25.20]

Justin N.: You might be feeding people, but in the end, it's not really creating an impact to sustain the system.

[00:30:30.21]

Devin D.: Yeah. If your goal is to save local restaurants, then that should be your goal, and that should be your motivator. If that's not really your goal, then don't say that that's your goal. You know?

[00:30:45.22]

Justin N.: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Interesting. So, now the #feedthefrontline ran its course.

Now you have #feedthesecondline. How is that going?

[00:31:02.16]

Devin D.: So, the idea was kind of to do them both, hopefully, together, because again, I'm just an idea person and I just throw an idea out there and see what happens. The whole time that COVID was happening, because we're a parade group, every single year, we parade with the Tremé Brass Band. The leader of the Tremé, Mr. Benny Jones, is like, the nicest human you've ever met, and culturally very important for the city, 'cause he's educating younger musicians. He's always been really good about that. I had, like, a cousin from Europe randomly who's a guitar player come to New Orleans once, and he let him sit in with them as they performed a D.B.A.

[00:31:48.20]

Justin N.: Nice.

[00:31:48.20]

Devin D.: I mean, that's pretty cool for somebody you don't know who you've never seen play.

[00:31:53.07]

Justin N.: But I've heard that about New Orleans, like the music scene in New Orleans. It's not like New York, where it's kinda cutthroat. New Orleans musicians tend to be welcoming. Not all of them, but many of them. Yeah.

[00:32:06.13]

Devin D.: Yeah. That's what I've heard, too, but I mean, I've just, like, seen it with somebody like Mr. Benny.

[00:32:13.21]

Justin N.: Totally, yeah.

[00:32:11.21]

Devin D.: Because COVID is impacting African Americans worse and elderly and men worse, it's like, these are people in our community that are treasures. Yesterday, Sylvester Frances died. He's a treasure; a cultural treasure.

[00:32:28.21]

Justin N.: For the recording, this is the founder of the Backstreet Cultural Museum.

[00:32:35.21]

Devin D.: Um-hm. Before that, we lost a Mardi Gras Indian Queen, Queen Kim Bouttee of the Fi Yi Yi. There are all these people in our city that are like that, that are culturally very important. What's kinda magical about New Orleans's cultural is largely made by regular

people. A lot of people who make the culture don't get paid for it. The vast majority of Mardi Gras Indian practitioners are just doing it out of passion and love. So, we're in an economic crisis. It is very risky, if you're elderly, to go to the grocery store or to be out and about, period. So, the whole time that we were doing this hospital effort, we were also making sure that Mr. Benny didn't have to go to the grocery store or our Grand Marshal, Al "Carnival Time" Johnson, we would check in. "How you doin'?" "Do you need groceries?" One of our krewe members would go and take care of the groceries. After a couple of months of doing this, it was a realization of, why don't we try to make this a thing? We've already got #feedthefrontline, we've got a reputation. We've reached out to many people who've donated money to us, so let's just throw the idea out there and say, "What if we do another system where we're taking care of the elders, helping them not have to leave their house to go buy groceries?" And also, in the worst economic moment ever in any of our lives, let's cover their groceries so that they can save their money so that they can pay their rent. Stuff like that. If you're not spending your money on food, which you have to buy anyway, you can save the money. So, we started that up. It took a little while to figure out exactly the way to do it, but after a couple months, we've really perfected the system. Every Tuesday right now, we have a team of eight musicians who go to the grocery store, buy food that has been pre-selected by the elder, that the elders get a shopping list, basically, that they can choose what they want. It's not random stuff in a box. It's, "What would you like to have?" Because we're being respectful to them.

[00:34:52.19]

Justin N.: Can of water chestnuts and a box of Lucky Charms.

[00:34:56.27]

Devin D.: Yeah, nothing like that. We want to show them love. Just like with the hospital workers, they were getting delicious food. With the elders, it's like, "You've actually enriched our city for decades by being a Big Chief or a Spy Boy or a Baby Doll." Thank you. What would you like from the grocery store? We'll take care of it for you. We've created this sort of system where volunteers go to the grocery store, pick up the groceries that has been shopped by the musicians, and they deliver it to the house of the elder so we can safely put it on the porch. It creates kind of a magical moment, because the volunteer gets to—I mean, when would you get to go to the house of the Big Chief, you know? It's kinda cool. For that person, for the Big Chief, it's like, some random person in the community cares about me, and that's awesome, that's a feel-good. Many of these people are heavily isolated right now. It's nice to have a visitor. It's nice to have somebody check up on you. "How are you doing, do you need groceries?" So, it's kind of accomplishing multiple things at once. So far, in the last couple months, we've covered fifty thousand dollars' worth of groceries, which is pretty cool. It could be a lot bigger; like if we had more funding, we could do more. We could expand it, create more jobs for more musicians. What we're trying to do is create a base of donors who just become monthly donors and basically, like, "Okay. Every month, I'm just gonna support the folks who make the culture." I'm hoping that, because it's such a tangible connection, like, "Did I go to Super Sunday last year? Do I love to see stuff like that?" If the answer is yes, here's \$10 every month to support the people who made that possible. Because there's actually

no other way to do that. We have enough money for a couple more months of it. I would love it to grow, but it's to be determined.

[00:37:18.08]

Justin N.: Do you think there's a fatigue in this sort of granular philanthropy? I know you said that, like the foundations, of course, they're too . . . move too slowly. I've certainly written foundation grants before; I know what's involved what that. You're trying to accomplish something in a timely fashion, and I realize that, but have any foundations been like, you know . . . foundations, particularly some of the more tightly-controlled ones, can come across with money in a fairly timely fashion. Have you had anybody reach out to you? Or . . . ?

[00:37:55.14]

Devin D.: We've gotten some support from, there's a foundation in Minnesota and one in San Francisco that heard about it. They each gave \$25,000, which was kind of wonderful seed money. The Benson Foundation in Minnesota and the one in San Francisco is escaping my name for the moment, which is embarrassing—Westridge—that was really awesome and great. But when that happens, it's kind of out of the blue. What I believe the best way to do it would be to take the population of New Orleans and then the people who come here every year for Jazz Fest and Carnival and just build a base of support. Right now, we have ninety-one people who are monthly donors. Twenty-five bucks here, fifty bucks here, ten bucks here or five bucks there. Instead of ninety-one people, if we had eight hundred people, we could just do this all the time. COVID or no COVID.

[00:39:00.10]

Justin N.: Right. Right.

That's my goal, because that would be a very tangible way to actually give back to the people who make the culture here, or much of the culture. I think that would make a more equitable city; a more equitable carnival. You know, how many times has these images been used in a tourism campaign or something like that? It's . . . a big part of the identity of the city.

[00:39:35.08]

Justin N.: Your . . . we can pause.

[00:39:37.22]

Devin D.: Okay.

[Pause in recording]

[00:39:37.22]

Justin N.: Do you find that there's a certain amount of fatigue amongst donations? Are they trickling off? People in general, I think about that 1970 Baby Huey song, "Hard Times." I think about it in my mind. These are hard times, and lots of people are being affected. Is that affecting charitable contributions, or . . . ?

[00:40:00.22]

Devin D.: Yeah. I mean, #feedthefrontlines hit this moment where, in the first week of April, second week of April, where we had gotten press coverage and the Popeye's people donated a very sizeable donation to us. We were also getting \$20,000 in small donors every single day. That moment, I really thought, "Oh, this is gonna go for a while." Then the small donors just completely tailed off. It literally just nosedived. We were spending so much money every day that it was just like, "Well, we've got three more days, and then that's it. So, good job, everybody." At least that occurred in May—I mean, we made it from mid-March to May 3. So, starting with a \$60 order, I can't complain it at all, but I wish it would've gone on. So, with #feedthesecondline, that's a big motivator and learned lesson, is really we need to do stuff that keeps people engaged. One of the ways that we've been doing that is making a lot of artwork and selling t-shirts and selling posters and doing things that just kinda keep people interested. And also, with that message of, "If you like this thing, just throw a few bucks and support it every month, and then it can keep going." It's super hard times, but it's . . . pocket-marked hard times, too. Some households haven't actually lost anything economically, like mine. My wife goes to work. She works in a hospital. She's a doctor. She is very secure in her job. We haven't taken a pay cut. I'm a stay-at-home dad. I have not been laid off from that job, you know?

[Laughter]

[00:42:13.12]

Justin N.: You're not on furlough.

[00:42:11.23]

Devin D.: I'm not on furlough. I'm still changing diapers every day.

[00:42:16.23]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:42:18.16]

Devin D.: We feel just . . . it's almost like survivor's guilt, where you feel so lucky. So many people lost their job or got laid off. So, for those of us who did not lose our job or get laid off, I think it's a really good time to just donate extra. You know, try to be cognizant of that and try to help our neighbors as best we can. But yeah, we'll see. We'll see how long we can do it. #feedthesecondline is very adjustable. #feedthefrontline literally is spending \$30,000 every day on food. Not very sustainable. Very hard to adjust that. I wouldn't want to get in a position where I was like, "Sorry, E.R.! We are not feeding you today 'cause we chose that it was your day off to save money." I didn't want to do that. But #feedthesecondline, you know, because we have the monthly donors, if we need to stop and take a break for a week to save money, we can do that without killing it. So, it's a lot more flexible, which is good. But it's all to be determined. I don't know what will happen and we'll just see. Time will tell.

[00:43:44.26]

Justin N.: What was your biggest surprise in all of this?

[00:43:50.23]

Devin D.: My biggest surprise in all of this was . . . just probably have to go back to just being jaded. [Laughter] There's a lot of people who, like, don't really care. I had to spend so many hours of my time talking to people to see if maybe they would become a donor, and a lot of times, they would just want to know stuff and ask questions and have you explain what you're doing. If you do that for forty-five minutes on the phone, it's exhausting, and then if you do it ten times a day on the phone, then at the end of the day, you're like, "Man, what did I accomplish today? Nothing. Some of these people are not gonna donate money, they're just curious." I ended up speaking up to, quote unquote, a few "city leaders," and it's like, are you here to help or are you just wasting my time? I'd much prefer to spend my time helping the people of New Orleans or helping the restaurants here or . . . you know what I mean?

[00:45:09.07]

Justin N.: They weren't listening to you with their checkbook on the desk blotter, ready to, pen hovering over the line?

[00:45:14.12]

Devin D.: No, no. It's just, how are you doing this? Why? It's . . . you know. You can support it or not, that's up to you. But let's not waste time here. That occurred from journalists, too. National journalists. They don't care about your city at all. They . . . it's just mind-blowing. So many people. [Laughter] So, I'm more jaded. [Laughter]

[00:45:51.03]

Justin N.: Yeah. It sounds like you gained some real, tangible policy insights into feeding and this question of what to do for our restaurants. I'm going to ask you a little bit about Jose Andres** World Central Kitchen. What is your impression of what they're doing? Are they closer to what the city is doing or are they somewhere in between? I know that some of the people that I've talked to are cooking for them, as well.

[00:46:15.21]

Devin D.: Um-hm. When I first heard about World Central Kitchen, I thought it was the greatest thing, 'cause it's actually a really good marketing campaign. It's a really good story. The reality of it, I don't know. I mean, when they started here in New Orleans, my only interaction with them came the end of April. At that point, the situation here was, you had this little rinky-dink neighborhood parade group that had suddenly created the largest hospital food program in the country. Instead of it being a collaboration, it was a very weird interaction with them. I was like, "Okay . . ." I don't know how to explain it. I heard that there was frozen food being shipped to New Orleans from Houston, Texas, and that infuriated me, because that's a wasted opportunity. I think that they gradually changed their model to working with local restaurants and paying local restaurants to do the feeding, but . . . I don't know. I just think we . . . in the scheme of stuff, a group like that will suck up all the oxygen. They'll suck up all the donations. They'll be the only group that people end up hearing about. If you have another idea that's growing or sprouting in a different city and you don't give the sprout any water or oxygen to grow,

then what are you doing? In the big picture? This is where I have to be critical of our city government, because we were doing a lot of good and doing it in a thoughtful way and doing it by locals, and there was a choice at a moment to engage or not engage with that or to go with a known name, like a brand name. You know.

[00:48:36.25]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[00:48:39.13]

Devin D.: I'll never know the full details of that, but . . .

[00:48:41.17]

Justin N.: Does anyone?

[00:48:41.18]

Devin D.: Yeah, does anybody. All I know is the conversations I had with them. I was not very impressed with what they were—their . . . how they carry themselves in the conversation and stuff.

[00:48:57.17]

Justin N.: So Jose Andres didn't come over for some red beans and . . .

[00:49:03.07]

Devin D.: [Laughter] No. It's not like I ever talked with him. I mean, I was probably talking to some low-level person, you know.

[00:49:08.02]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:49:10.12]

Devin D.: It's probably a very big organization.

[00:49:11.22]

Justin N.: You get that sense, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[00:49:15.17]

Devin D.: Part of me, it's good that they have the means to go and pop up and feed people right now in southwest Louisiana, but they have the means because they sucked up all the oxygen. Would it be better to have all the oxygen sucked up by a national organization, or would it maybe be better to have it more local? There's a group, Frontline Foods, they started in San Francisco basically the same day that I started in New Orleans. We both were doing the same thing. They allied themselves with World Central Kitchen and became, like, part of the behemoth and started taking all of the donations all over America. Their website had a little, "Do you want to support New Orleans? Donate here." And that sucks up the oxygen. Then, if a celebrity wants to donate New Orleans, they

don't know who else to turn to, so the oxygen has been sucked up. It is what it is, but I wish it weren't that way. [Laughter]

[00:50:25.07]

Justin N.: Yeah, yeah. That's very interesting. So, my hope is to talk to you again in a few months, December or January. What's your hope for what we see happen in that time?

[00:50:43.29]

Devin D.: It's really hard to say because this thing changes so quickly. Every week. I mean, last week, Louisiana was facing a Category 4 hurricane. The pandemic ebbs and flows. So, I really, honestly try not to think very far in advance right now. I just try to think about the next couple days. In my heart, I'm a parade organizer, so I do kinda have to contemplate Mardi Gras. I don't know if we'll have Mardi Gras or not. That'll be very difficult. If we do have Mardi Gras, I don't think we should invite any tourists this year. Keep it to ourselves. Keep it safe. That will never happen.

[00:51:33.04]

Justin N.: It sounds lovely, actually.

[00:51:36.14]

Devin D.: It does, doesn't it? Yeah, so, we'll see. I don't know. I have no idea. It's been—2020's been a real rollercoaster.

[00:51:46.07]

Justin N.: [Laughter] Understatement of the interview. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:51:46.16]

Devin D.: Yeah, so we'll see. [Laughter]

[00:51:50.11]

Justin N.: Yeah, well, that's great. I usually ask my interviewees if there's anything they'd like to append at the end of this. Guess I'll give you that opportunity now.

[00:51:58.15]

Devin D.: I'd just apologize for anybody that I pissed off during this interview. [Laughter] I can be very opinionated and I'm honest to a fault. Like if I go to a restaurant and they're like, "How was the food?" I will tell them if the food was bad. That's just how I am. So, I probably say things are that critical of people. I'm sure I'll get myself in trouble one day. [Laughter]

[00:52:28.08]

Justin N.: I can identify with that. Okay. Well, very good. That was an interview here with Devin DeWulf, and I am going to touch the stop button.

[*End of interview*]