

Michael Eure Show Transcript

Special Guest - James Montague

Recorded 10/12/17

EURE: Hello this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to The Michael Eure Show featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube Channel.

EURE: Good afternoon, welcome to the Michael Eure Show. We're very pleased to welcome our guest, James Montague, President of F7 Development. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

MONTAGUE: Okay, my name is James Montague. Most people in Raleigh, in this area, call me Monte. I'm from Southeast Raleigh, born and raised here. One of the few people that are still here that were raised in Raleigh. Been doing real estate development for about 20 years. Maybe about 11 years ago I got into international business. And that's kind of where we are.

EURE: Well, let's start back to when you first started doing business, because I remember you telling me a story. You were a barber, and you started cutting hair when you were 14. Okay, tell us.

MONTAGUE: Yeah, I started cutting hair from the project area of Southgate. Started cutting hair when I was 14 years old. And got all my little friends to come. And that's when the Atari first came out. So they played video games at the house, and drank Kool-Aid, and we'd just make a day out of it. So I got that neighborhood, which is Southgate, and I got other neighborhoods, Biltmore Hills, there was Walnut Terrace, Chavis Heights. All my friends would come, and it was pretty much the party house, but you getting a haircut.

EURE: Right, and you were getting paid.

MONTAGUE: I was getting paid. It wasn't much, I was only charging \$0.50.

EURE: Okay.

MONTAGUE: But \$0.50 adds up.

EURE: And then you went and you opened your own shop.

MONTAGUE: Right.

EURE: Tell us about that.

MONTAGUE: I opened my own business. My first business, I think I opened it when I was 20 years old. I opened up my first salon, and then I went into cosmetology doing ladies' hair. So I was doing ladies' hair and guys' hair. And I did that for about five years total. And then I moved to Southgate Plaza and stayed there for a couple of years. And then I had a vision, moved into real estate development. Everything was opened up. God showed me a plot of land and I built this building. It wasn't easy, but I built my first commercial strip shopping center when I was 27.

EURE: Is that the statue side?

MONTAGUE: That's statue side.

EURE: Over by the Martin Luther King statue.

MONTAGUE: Mm-hm, yes.

EURE: Garden. Wonderful, and then you've done some projects in other cities.

MONTAGUE: Yeah, yeah, we've done projects in Greensborough, Biloxi. We've pretty much been in a lot of different places. We recently, about three years ago, four years now, did a project in Nigeria. We partnered with the Chinese government, got a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and we did a hospital project in Osogbo, Nigeria, a birthing hospital project. That was a very needed project. That was actually to me the best project that we've done because the need was so, so, so much.

EURE: And we're probably gonna run around in circles, but I want you to tell us a little bit about this Sister City program, and how did you get involved with that?

MONTAGUE: Let me see, we got involved with that because a mentor, friend of mine came in, Mr. John Way, very good friend of mine, came to me about 12 years ago. And told me that some of his friends in the Chinese government wanted to connect with Raleigh. They had heard a lot of positive things about Raleigh and how it was growing and was one of the next big boom places. And they wanted to see what the possibilities are for us to create a partnership, sister city relationship. Between Xiangfan at the time, but it's now Xiangyang. They changed the name about six years ago. But between Xiangyang and Raleigh.

EURE: And I know that you've taken some groups of young people,

MONTAGUE: Yes.

EURE: And I mean middle school, high school,

MONTAGUE: Yeah, middle, yeah.

EURE: To China. Tell us how was that experience?

MONTAGUE: That experience was great. As a matter of fact, we're taking another group in March. But that experience was great, just being able to show kids some of the things that when I was coming up, I wasn't able to see. Kids back in the days had show and tell, I wasn't able to show or tell anything. Because you're coming from the hood, you don't have anything to show and the stories that you could tell are not good stories. So now being able to give them that experience of saying show and tell. Look, I've been to China.

EURE: Right.

MONTAGUE: What did you go do on the weekend? We went to Myrtle Beach. No, we've been to China. So it's a little different, giving them a chance to see something outside of the norm. Maybe getting them to think outside the box.

EURE: Okay, now you have a relationship with Kenya, too.

MONTAGUE: Yes.

EURE: Nairobi, is that a sister city of Raleigh?

MONTAGUE: Nairobi, we traveled to Nairobi about five years ago and some of our partners here, Captain George Enjuey, Isaac Kuria, they are on the Raleigh Sister Cities Board. And I actually went and signed a deal between Nairobi, Kenya and Raleigh to become sister cities about five years ago as well.

EURE: All right, and I know we're broadcasting to our online students. If they were interested in being involved, they may wanna volunteer or they may wanna do an internship. Is there a way they could do that through communicating with you?

MONTAGUE: Absolutely, always trying to get people to volunteer, actually always trying to find people that are willing to take the baton and run with it. These opportunities that we're creating are not just for us. We're actually creating them for the next generation to come in and take it and kind of go with it, especially in today's time.

EURE: Well, have you had an opportunity to mentor? I know with your businesses, you brought in other people and they probably spun off and did their own barbershops.

MONTAGUE: Absolutely, yes.

EURE: Have you found that fulfilling?

MONTAGUE: Yeah, absolutely, and I encourage that. Sponge off of me. Take what I know and run with it. That's my major objective. That's what I wanna do.

EURE: Okay, yes, sir?

Q&A: We have a question from the audience.

MONTAGUE: Sure.

Q&A: Floriana Thompson wants to know if you have any other projects that are currently in development for the Southeast Raleigh area?

MONTAGUE: Yes, yes, we have two projects right now. And I can't talk about them right now because they're still in the planning process. But we are looking to do a phase two of our retirement home. We built a retirement home back in 2004 called Elder's Peak and we're looking to do a phase two on that project. As well as we own land across the street from one of my shopping centers, right on the corner of MLK and Rock Quarry. We're looking to do another shopping center right there. The one that we have now is 100% leased and we need more space in that area.

EURE: Now what advice would you give a student that's interested in going into business? What are some of the obstacles and some of the pitfalls to avoid, as well as some of the rewards?

MONTAGUE: The major obstacle is wasting your time. Don't waste your time. A lot of people don't understand how valuable time is. Me myself, I just had to kick the addiction of watching TV. I will watch, to be honest, I'll watch about three to four hours of TV every day. And I said, okay, now how much can I be doing in that three to four hours? If I just cut it down to 30 minutes, even an hour, I would gain three hours per day that I could be doing something to better my situation, to better the life of my family, to better my community. If we just each took an hour away from that screen every day and placed that time into something that could be more productive, how much more could we see in these communities?

EURE: That's true. Now what about networking? That's such a big buzz word, but it's a reality. Do you participate in networking, and what type of networking?

MONTAGUE: My networking is It's a little different. I do what's called as the stupid phone call. Once a week I just go through the phone book. I go on CNN or CSPAN or whatever, and I see somebody up there talking and I say you know what? I wanna meet that guy right there. I wanna meet that lady right there. And I will try to find them. If they have something that's valuable that I feel like I can learn from, I will make the stupid phone call. And I will call them and say, you know, my name is James you don't know who I am but such and such. And I will make a formal relationship and I will try to contact that person and make a connection. Because

there's a difference between communicating and making a connection. I'll actually try to make a connection with that person. So my networking is a little different.

EURE: Okay.

MONTAGUE: I reach out to folks. I'm not scared of rejection, and I'm not scared to get the no.

EURE: Right. Yeah, and I remember several years ago you hosted a rather I called it a nice network. So you have people from Greensboro, Winston Salem, and Raleigh and maybe even Charlotte, but you had an event and it seems like you used to do that periodically.

MONTAGUE: Right.

EURE: Was that you in collaboration with some other people? Or did they just want you because you were James? They wanted your face on the network picture.

MONTAGUE: Well, I do that every now and then. I really do. I try to stay kinda out there and be where people can actually reach out to me. I never feel like I'm, man, I'm doing this and doing this, I don't have time. Actually, you do have time for what you want to do. So, I still make time to network with people and kinda be there for people when they call.

EURE: And I know you've done a lot of philanthropic, you've done some things with Helping Hand. And I've seen you just walk up to folks in the hood. You didn't know these young people.

MONTAGUE: Right.

EURE: And you just give them some encouragement. Is that just part of your being who you are?

MONTAGUE: That's what we do. We see a need, just like when we did the Flint thing. We sent five trailer loads of water to Flint, Michigan at that time.

EURE: Right.

MONTAGUE: That was just something that I sat there and I was watching TV one day, and I saw that they were having problems with their water. And I said man, you know what? Somebody needs to do something. So then you check around, nobody's doing nothing. So guess what? That needs to be us. We need to be doing something.

EURE: Exactly.

MONTAGUE: Don't always wait for somebody else to do something. If you see something needs to be done, jump in there and do it sometimes.

EURE: Okay.

MONTAGUE: So that's kind of what we do.

EURE: And since we're dealing with students again, and the community, and we like to think of ourselves as a community college, so we're in the community. Have you thought of any ways you might work with and students, or is that something you thought about, or have you done anything?

MONTAGUE: I'm open to it man. You just let me know we need to do and we can make it happen. I would really love to get a weight check involved with some of the initiatives of higher education in China. Because they're looking to bring students from here to our sister city to do exchange.

EURE: Okay.

MONTAGUE: And I think that'll be a good fit.

EURE: Well I'm interested in that because every summer there's a group of high school students from South Africa that we host in Raleigh for a week. And we have to get you in front of them if we haven't done so.

MONTAGUE: Sure.

EURE: But I would love to see maybe you meet with some of the people at and do the travel abroad, study abroad, and I'm thinking about even this kind of Adobe Connect situation, and maybe we can do some meeting online with the students.

MONTAGUE: I don't know what Adobe Connect is. I'm old school, so I don't know what that means.

EURE: That's what we're using right now.

MONTAGUE: Okay, all right, well I'm cool with that.

EURE: Adobe Connect.

MONTAGUE: All right.

EURE: Yeah. So I think that will be really interesting, and maybe we can get Roddenberry, who is really our producer. And he's with First in the World. Maybe we can work that into some of our classroom situations.

MONTAGUE: Sure, fantastic, I'd be honored.

EURE: All right, so did you have any words of wisdom that we haven't pulled out of you?

MONTAGUE: Never be afraid of the no. Don't be afraid of rejection. I mean that's just a part of life. It actually makes you stronger. Every now and then, I try to do something to get rejected. Of course, you wanna be successful every time, but that's not life. Life doesn't work like that.

EURE: And we talked about the exchanges with the other countries. And I know that sometimes in North Carolina, it's like Living into the other countries. If you live in Raleigh versus some rural areas. So do you get a chance to interact with folks in the rural areas or not really?

MONTAGUE: Not as of yet. We did when they had the flooding down the East Coast. We did something but it was more of a collecting water and supply the food with the mayor of Princeville. Yeah, so we did small little projects like that, but nothing really big yet. That's something we need to work on.

EURE: Okay, another question.

Q&A: Yeah, I got a question from Robert Rentani. Maybe you can start off by telling us a time you were rejected, how it made you feel. He wants to know what's some advice you would have. We're bouncing back in the face of rejection. Especially when it's maybe a big one and it's something important or it hurts especially bad.

MONTAGUE: Okay, well one time I've been rejected, actually more than one time when I did my first shopping center. I actually went to the bank and I went to 18 different banks to try to get financing for that one project. And each one of them told me no in a unique, individual way. There was no okay, well, no because this, no because that. It was always something that I never saw coming. So what I started learning how to do was taking those nos and taking the things they were looking for and crafting my package to make sure that next time I went to someone, that wasn't a problem, it was something else. And that was actually something that really put a lot of stress and strain on me, but when you are developing business, that's what is. Business is war and it's not like war with someone else, it's war within yourself. You actually have to not worry about anybody else and becoming anybody else. You have to become better than you were yesterday. That's what business is. And success, I've learned is, not just necessarily a destination. Success is the progressive realization of who you are meant to be. So you're not being successful like I'm sitting here today, I'm successful. I'm not successful cuz I've accomplished this. I'm successful because I know where I wanna go and I'm progressively getting to that point. So that's to me is what success is.

EURE: Okay.

MONTAGUE: So, I hope I answered it, the question.

Q&A: Yeah, wow, I had several people saying thank you, that's a powerful message.

MONTAGUE: Okay.

Q&A: And I'd like to ask a question following up on that.

MONTAGUE: Sure, sure.

Q&A: Where are you going next? What's the next step for you?

MONTAGUE: Well, right now what I want to do is, people see me as being in the lead. I don't wanna be in the lead anymore. I wanna be a leader and a leader creates other people that are leaders. So what I wanna do is take what I know and disseminate that information so that I can. Point to people and say, this person's successful right here because they did this. And start actually learning how to plant seeds to people, and showing them how to actually become leaders in their own communities. So that's what's next for me.

Q&A: Florianna Thompson has a follow up question.

MONTAGUE: Sure.

Q&A: So have you ever considered hosting workshops or seminars for young people that may be in the position that you were when you were 16 and 17. Young and ambitious, but not knowing exactly what to do.

MONTAGUE: That is a fantastic idea. And as we're sitting here thinking, I'm thinking that's what we really need to do cuz kids need encouragement. And like I said, when I was coming up, the area that I was from, I was told no. When I told all my friends what I wanted to do with my life, They told me I was crazy and it couldn't be done. So the examples were not there. I didn't have anybody that I could go to and the things that I'm saying now. I didn't have anybody I could go to and hear what I'm telling you now. So that is a fantastic idea, and I think that's something that needs to be done. And since nobody's doing it, maybe we need to do it. What's her name, Florrie?

EURE: Floriana Thomas.

MONTAGUE: Maybe that's something that we need to work on. So I'll send my information with you guys and you can pass it to her.

Q&A: Yeah, that's great. Maybe Floriana, she says she's interested in getting on it, so who knows? Maybe you could do that.

MONTAGUE: All right, fantastic, I need my car.

EURE: And I know Floriana, I think. She works here, I believe, and she also works with early childhood education. So she does a lot with families. So she has a wide range of folks that access. And if I'm correct, I think, she is from Southeast Raleigh or she lives there, one.

MONTAGUE: Okay, well definitely, definitely, yes.

Q&A: Got another question from Marshall and Company.

MONTAGUE: Okay.

Q&A: Now earlier you mentioned Atari, which lets me know that you're not a spring chicken. You've been around for a while.

MONTAGUE: No, I'm 47, yeah.

Q&A: I'm 47, there you go. So we've both seen the world change. And to have a business, you can't stay, static.

MONTAGUE: No, no.

Q&A: So he wants to know, what kind of advice would you give to business owners in order to change with the times and how to recreate their business model? What's a good idea to you?

MONTAGUE: What I do personally, and it may not be the right thing, I look at, okay, what is it gonna be like ten years from now? What is it gonna be? You have to visualize, what is gonna happen ten years from now? Ten years ago, one of the biggest businesses, and I know because I used to rent a lot of movies, was Blockbuster. So you sit in Blockbuster and you remember what it was, used to the lines wrapped around this post and this post. Blockbuster was packed every Friday and Saturday, and you couldn't get a movie. That was ten years ago. So just look at it now, there is no Blockbuster. Circuit City, you spent all day in Circuit City ten years ago, what happened? There was a shift. And what we've got to do as business people, understand how not to get caught up in that shift and how to be in the forefront of the shift or create the change. So that's something that I try to do. I try to visualize what the work is gonna be like in ten years and how do I not get left behind.

EURE: Yeah, and that's make me wanna make sure that I mention that we are a future forward college, and we have a future forward program. And it is about preparing students for the jobs that do not exist yet.

MONTAGUE: Absolutely.

EURE: So we got to get you connected with the person, Benita Bud, that runs that and maybe you could come interact with those students-

MONTAGUE: Sure-

EURE: And faculty and staff.

MONTAGUE: Sure, absolutely.

EURE: Yeah, this has been a really great program, I've enjoyed it. And we might have to bring you back again.

MONTAGUE: No problem.

EURE: And I certainly wanna connect you with other Falcon staff that might like you to come to their classes or maybe speak.

MONTAGUE: All right, great.

EURE: That focus.

Q&A: Your focus groups.

EURE: My focus groups. Yes, I'm so glad he reminded me. Okay students, online students, we're gonna be having focus groups next Tuesday from 12 to 2 and from 5 to 7. You can come from 12 to 1, We want you to give us your candid opinions of what your experiences have been like and what you'd like to see improved about online experiences at Wake Tech classes, etc. We will be feeding you. You will get lunch or dinner, depending on which time you choose to come. And if you'd like to, please just get back with me at meure@waketech.edu or you can call me at 919-532-5917. Thank you, that is the student focus group for Wake Tech online.

Q&A: When is that, what day?

EURE: That is Tuesday, October 17th, next Tuesday. And they will be on the Northern Way campus in case you are in different locations, so both of them will be on Lewisburg Road. All right, so we'd like to thank you for coming, Monte. I call you Monte. I know you're James.

MONTAGUE: Right.

EURE: And I'd like to thank Dr. Rotenberry and Sarah's who's in the backdrop and all of you who joined us today. And we look forward to you next time. Meanwhile, have a great day.

MONTAGUE: All right.