

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance offer some keen insight as to how they see themselves the most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, heads of major business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is W James Host, better known as Jim. He is the founder and chairman of Host Communications and he is the chairman of the Louisville Arena Authority. Going to read a little bit of his bio to you. it is quite diverse and eclectic. His host communications was founded in Lexington, Kentucky in 1972. The company became a subsidiary of Bull Run Corporation December '99. As a pitcher on the University of Kentucky's baseball team Jim Hosts had an earned run average of 1.66 and 0.444 batting average. Those statistics tell the story of the single mindedness, drive, and work ethic that after an injury which short circuited his career lead Host of virtually found an entire industry known as collegiate sports marketing by building a huge and successful business and most recently trying to help Governor Ernie Fletcher build an administration. However his backstory is quite eclectic between the sports, business, and political arenas. He was raised in Ashland, Kentucky. Beginning his career as a sportscaster in 1957 and was a play-by-play announcer at the University of Kentucky football and basketball for the Kentucky Central Sports Network and WVLKY radio. He is a 1961 graduate of the University of Kentucky where he majored in radio and television and was a varsity baseball pitcher and was awarded the first baseball scholarship ever by the university. He even played briefly in the Chicago White Sox system until an arm injury forced him to retire. He then joined Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati where he spent

several years in marketing and sales returning to Lexington in 1964 and was involved with his own real estate building and insurance companies until he entered politics in 1967. That same year at age 29 he became the youngest member of Kentucky Governor Louie Nun's cabinet as the commissioner of the Department of Public Information. Then in 1970 as commissioner of the Department of Parks where he worked to initiate the Kentucky Horse Park. In 1971 became the republican party's nominee for lieutenant governor but lost in the general election. This actually proved a brilliant twist of fate as it allowed Host to open Jim Host and Associates in 1972. Company, excuse me, Host first contract was with the Lexington Tourist and Convention Bureau which led to the formation of the Lexington Center Corporation and the building of Rupp Arena. The company began rapid development in 1974 with two contracts, a basketball and football radio agreement with the University of Kentucky athletic department and executive management relationship with the National Tour Association. The company was renamed Host Communications in 1982 becoming nationally known for the administration of sports marketing and association management for universities, high school, athletic conferences, associations and corporations. Universities contracted by Host include Boston College, Florida State, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi State, Purdue, Tennessee, and Texas with marketing agreements with the Metro Atlantic Athletic South Eastern and Southern Conferences. Wow. Today the company remains headquartered in Lexington and his vision of Host Communications role as a world leader in sports and affinity marketing has more than 500 employees located in 23 offices around the world. And it has been named one of the top five sports marketing companies in the world by Sports Business Journal in May 2000. Active in civic and charitable activities Host has chaired many campaigns. Has been associated with more than 40 organizations and boards. Host has received a number of honors for myriad interests. In 2000 he was named to the UK Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame in the state of Kentucky's Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2001 he received one of Kentucky's top civic awards known as Kentucky Know the Year by the Chandler Foundation. 2003 he received a lifetime achievement award from the University of Kentucky School of Journalism and Telecommunications. And if that's not enough that same year Governor

Fletcher named him Commerce Secretary of Kentucky. During his tenure as commerce secretary he's, excuse me, his hard work develop the Unbridled Spirit brand to market the Commonwealth worldwide. 2005 Host was a driving force in the Louisville Arena Task Force. After resigning his post as commerce secretary in 2005 he now serves as the chairman of the Louisville Arena Authority. And as chairman of the World Equestrian Games, excuse me, a Equestrian Games coming to the Kentucky Horse Park in 2010 and it appears his life has possibly come full circle as it is the same park that he helped bring to fruition in the 1970s as commission of the Department of Parks. So I guess the question begs what do you have planned in your next life Jim.? That's a heck of a bio and I thought you know you guys bio are so amazing and so intense and so deep and rich. I love reading those but there always have to catch my breath after I read them. So what drives you to do this? I mean...

Jim Host: I want to make a correction.

Kirt Jacobs: Yes sir. Go ahead

Jim Host: In the bio

Kirt Jacobs: Sure that's The bio I had one inaccuracy and

Jim Host: Had to do with me getting the first baseball scholarship.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Jim Host: In Kentucky. I in fact got one of the first two. Joe Dawson from Louisville actually got the first one and I was signed about a month later by coach Terry Lancaster. Joe remains a good friend of mine today so I want to make that correction.

Kirt Jacobs: That's good. I appreciate that.

Jim Host: In the bio.

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you

Jim Host: I appreciate being here Kirt.

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you sir. What drives you to do this? I mean it is

Jim Host: To do what?

Kirt Jacobs: To do what you're doing now. I mean. I mean here you are you've created this corporation. I would say extensively you could retire and call it a day. Rest on your laurels but what you're doing on the Arena Authority other endeavors. You come to Louisville a great deal I know. You live in Lexington. What drives you to do what you've done?

Jim Host: I love my state. And I have lived in Kentucky virtually all of my life. I was raised in Ashland and I went to University of Kentucky. I love the state. I think the state has more potential than any other state in the United States. Were located literally in the center of a population geographically. We've got more to offer than any other state in the United States with natural resources and and I just want to do everything I can to help lift it to the heights that I know it can be. Before while I'm able and that's what drives me with the Louisville Arena Task Force. And God's been good to me. Good golly. You know and I was able to found a business in this state with an education I got at the University of Kentucky with people I met while I was at University of Kentucky with a broadcasting career I started when I was at University Kentucky. And it took me all over the country. Who could ever have a life any better than mine. To be able to spend it all in college sports and tourism and then to be able to come back in the state government after I sold the company and be able to again be involved in those endeavors. And then to help foster the building of an arena in Louisville which it desperately needs. But I was also involved in the building of the arena in Lexington. So to be able to to help in those two endeavors and then to help bring to this state and to this country the largest equestrian event in the world. It'll be the only Olympic event between now and 2010 which is the World Equestrian Games are going to be the first Olympic approved event ever to have pari-equestrian handicap inside the games. We're going to completely reshape the horse park in order for it to happen

which will change the dynamics economically the horse market in future and cause a lot more jobs and economic development to happened. So that sort of thing excites me. To be able to know that you can work together with people to help accomplish those kinds of things.

Kirt Jacobs: And you helped create the horse park in the 70s.

Jim Host: Well John Gaines who had a major horse farm in Lexington Gaines Way Farm before he died sold it to Graham Beck from South Africa who called me a just out of the blue. The history of the horse park is that the commissioner of public information which had responsibility for tourism then. So I went to meet with the farm managers and one of the ideas that came out of it was to have a central place where tourists could come and from there go on a scheduled basis to farms. Because the farms were being closed. It was affecting a lot of tourism activity in Lexington and Kentucky. People came from all over the world to see the horse farms that used to be opened and now all at once they were closed. And so as a result of that meeting with farm managers John Gaines called me wanted to know if he could meet with me. And he did and we met in a restaurant in Frankfort for dinner and on a back of an envelope we sketched out the idea of what he wanted to be called a thoroughbred horse park. And I said it needed to be a horse park for all horses because we have more than just thoroughbreds in Kentucky. And from that the idea the horse park was born. It was his idea but I was fortunate enough to be able to sell it to enough people including the governor at that time, the speaker of the house, who was Julian Carroll who I ended up running against for lieutenant governor. We're good friends today and and the majority leader in the house who was Bill Kenton from Lexington who really took the mail and got it across the line and and then the governor signed it and that's how the horse park was started. And to see the dream of it 35 years later material to where we're going to have the top event in the world at that park

Kirt Jacobs: is amazing

Jim Host: We just got back from Aachen, Germany and there were

575 thousand tickets that were sold for that event in Aachen in over two weeks and another 150 thousand down on a cross-country course who. Who weren't charged and so how many tickets will we sell. I mean how will we do? you know they have contestants from 61 countries at Daddy Bat and. It's the most unbelievable event I've ever been to in my life. and I've been to Super Bowls and World Series and so on so. And so you know it's a big challenge to be ready for that.

Kirt Jacobs: Whom do you credit most influential in your life? It could be one or two people. Professional or personal.

Jim Host: I would I think without question other than my parents who you've obviously got to give credit to because after them I would be here.

Kirt Jacobs: Right, right.

Jim Host: And without the strong discipline they gave me as a youth. My dad was a very very disciplined individual but without question my college baseball coach Harry Lancaster who was the assistant to coach Adolph Rupp had a greatest influence on my life. Because he was the toughest single individual I've ever been around. And he he would motivate by fear. Something that I don't think you could do today with a lot of young people. But it certainly worked with me because I think the harder he got on me, the harder I worked. And the harder I work the better I got. I ended up as a result of him pushing me as hard as he pushed me to sign a professional baseball contract but it also gave me discipline. And a work ethic that is followed by all of my life as a result of the work ethic that he really taught me when I was in college. And I've always been independent. Anyway when I was a kid. So the Independence plus the work ethic and the drive and the will to succeed. And and of being afraid to fail. You've got to be if you've got a drive to succeed and you've got to be afraid to fail.

Kirt Jacobs: I'm going to interject right here I've witnessed probably 80-90 percent of the Louisville Arena Task Force meetings. They've been open to the public arena authority meetings in and

subsequent to that. And I wouldn't say rule. That might be the strong choice of words but the way you conduct those meetings. It's it's I think it's had a major impact to get the arena to where it is today. I mean I've got a lot of personalities in there and I think it's just a phenomenal observation. If anyone gets an opportunity to sit there and witness the way you conduct those meetings. They're very efficient. They're very I mean there's no time wasted as well I remember

Jim Host: I've never.. I usually get up early morning between four and five o'clock. And I've never set an alarm clock in my life.

Kirt Jacobs: And I wish I could say that

Jim Host: I get up because I want to get up.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Jim Host: Up because of the challenge of the day. I get up because I feel like every day might be the last day of my life. And so I want to be able to achieve whatever I'm setting out to achieve that day. I want to say something about the first the governor's task force that was formed and then the Arena Authority that we have formed now. I've never worked with a more dedicated group of people. Every single one of the people involved are volunteers.

Kirt Jacobs: It's true

Jim Host: There isn't a solitary one of them that has ever turned an expense account in. And there's not a solitary one that's ever received a penny for what they're doing. And and by statute we could receive expenses and so on but nobody has. And the the dedication that everyone has show and I we have a wide variety of people that were on the task force as well as the Arena Authority. And we had strong debates. As you witnessed in these meetings but everything was in the public eye. We debated in front of the public eye. I think we did our homework well. And as a result of that where we have an arena. But I'm not... Anybody that gives me the credit for it is wrong because the credit belongs to all of those

people who were involved in the process.

Kirt Jacobs: Absolutely. What would you consider to be your biggest professional or personal regret? Do you have any? You have a pretty exceptional..

Jim Host: I have absolutely no regrets about anything I've done. In fact I look at everything that's happened as being happened for a reason. I ran for lieutenant governor it's the only time I ever ran for office when I was in my early 30s in 1971. I got my butt beat. And when it was over had a \$107 in my pocket. Didn't have a job and started this business from scratch. I never regretted that. Never regretted it because I wouldn't have build a business otherwise. I have an expression I use which is I can't sleep fast enough because I love every minute of every day. And people who don't love what they do or who are not passionate about what they do are not going to succeed. And so I don't I've you know people have asked me that question before when I say I don't have any regrets. They often say

Kirt Jacobs: I think it's an honest...

Jim Host: ...and they often say well how could you not have any regrets. Well I don't. I mean I look at everything and everything happens for a reason.

Kirt Jacobs: Says quite a bit.

Jim Host: Everything everything that's thrust upon you happens. I could walk out here tonight and something good happened to me

Kirt Jacobs: We talk about that.

Jim Host: And it and it and it and it's supposed to happen so. I don't I don't I don't look backward. I look forward. I have absolutely no regrets. If I had my life to live all over again I would hope I can live it same way.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. That's a good way to feel I would think.

On the flipside of that what's your biggest professional triumph? Do you have one? Is there more than one.

Jim Host: Oh gosh I think my proudest proudest. Proudest feeling is the 30 plus year relationship with the NCAA. When you think about the NCAA which is a composite of all universities in this United States and primarily Division One universities and to be able to work for them and build a business with them over a period of time is probably the thing I'm proudest about. Because it was built from scratch. But you can't do that without having a impeccable feeling of what's right, what's wrong. I always felt that if it's black or it's white. I know if it's black it's in their favor if it's white it's my favorite. If it's gray it's in their favor. And so I've always operated that way and if I had anything that I would that would stand out that I'm really proudest of it would be the long 30 plus year relationship my company had with the NCAA.

Kirt Jacobs: Can you define leadership in one word? It can be more than one.

Jim Host: I know it when I see it.

Kirt Jacobs: We never had that on this show.

Jim Host: I know it when I see it.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Jim Host: How do you define leadership? And everybody has a different style. I think I think the right kind of leadership is putting the other person up on a pedestal so he or she's got to pull you up there with them to succeed.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice

Jim Host: And but I've I can you know you can look in a crowd and you can spot a leader. You can you can spot a leader in a room. You can spot a leader at a board meeting and so on. And a leader is not necessarily the most boisterous or the one who tries to get

the most attention or the one who has the biggest ego or anything else. It's the person who is willing to give credit where credit is due and is willing to do everything he or she can to get a consensus of... I I have been in a room with a lot of corporate CEO's I'm sure a lot of others have and you can instantly tell whether this CEO, why this CEO is a CEO. And you can see at and other instances where CEO's are not going to make it because of the personality style they have or some of the some of the statements that they make. But I can't you know I know it when I see it.

Kirt Jacobs: That's a great answer. It's not a word. it's more a philosophy or a thought. If you could change one thing be it in your own life or in general do you have anything like that?

Jim Host: Gosh no. I wouldn't change one thing in life.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great.

Jim Host: I'm just being dead honest with you.

Kirt Jacobs: That's fine. That's what we want on this show..

Jim Host: I wouldn't change a thing. I thank God I live in Kentucky.

Kirt Jacobs: I agree.

Jim Host: Can you think about living in New York City or you think about living in some other place in this country other than here.

Kirt Jacobs: I've lived other places and I'm back.

Jim Host: People come from all over the world and when they see Kentucky. When they see the great majestic bluegrass. They see the mountains of eastern Kentucky. They see this terrific lakes a western Kentucky. And when they Louisville. And I want to tell you what Louisville is one of the great cities in this country.

Kirt Jacobs: Without question.

Jim Host: It is getting discovered big time. With the way the riverfront has been developed. With the with the what's happening in the action that is happening in downtown. And Louisville's a special place. I have really I'm from Ashland originally and I never was west of Louisville, west of Lexington in my life before I came to University of Kentucky. I mean we always want to Cincinnati from Ashland. And I used to go see the Reds play on a train. I never came to Louisville. I didn't have a reason to come. And so that's kind of historically the way it's always been. And never really spent a lot of time in Louisville until I started working on the arena project. Pat and I said the other day that if we could just pick up roots that we've got there have been almost our entire lives in Lexington. We would live here tomorrow. I'd live downtown tomorrow. I'd live in one of the new condominiums built downtown tomorrow. I think it's one of the most exciting times and I'm just delighted to be a small part of it even from the outside.

Kirt Jacobs: Do you think there's a difference in today's leaders than in past generations?

Jim Host: Sure there is. First of all good golly I can't you know I can turn a computer on. I can. I can you know I know how to operate a Blackberry. But I don't have the computer skills or the real understanding of technology that young people have day. Young people are better educated than I was. And that's not that's no discredit to the education I had it's a fact.

Kirt Jacobs: It's just the way society was.

Jim Host: There are so many more tools today. And education is so much more important today than growing up. One percent of the nation's population had college educations when World War II ended. Today 21 percent of the nation's population have college educations. And think about growth and think of what's happening but it's a worldwide thing. I mean when we were growing up we never thought about going overseas. I mean that was a distant distant thing. Today the world is so close together because the Internet and gosh how the Internet has changed things. So yes today's leaders are different because they got access to more education,

more facts, more everything else. But it also causes there to be a lot more.. I mean. Good golly back in my younger days politics was easy compared to today. Why because there are much more information out there for people to see and grab a hold up. People are more active today than they were back... and that's good because we'll all be a better society as a result of it.

Kirt Jacobs: This is kind of a surprise question and it's going to be interesting to see what your answer is. If you were granted two weeks right today no obligations, no commitments. Do anything you want. Kind of a mini-vacation from life would you take one? and what would you do?

Jim Host: Well I've never really taken a real vacation in my life. Honest to God.

Kirt Jacobs: I had a sense you might say that

Jim Host: I I love what I do. I love every minute of every day. People say well is that a chore going to Louisville?. No it's not a chore going to Louisville because I know what I'm going to try to get done when I go. And I love the people. I've never been turned down. Been able to see anybody here that I want to see. To talk about the arena or anything else. So I guess if I had anything that I would like to do in two weeks is to extend the hours of the day.

Kirt Jacobs: There you go. There you go.

Jim Host: If I could have... If I could have two or three more hours of the day. And be able to use that for that's kind of what I'd like to do. Pat and I have a really nice place in Florida that we lived together in for 16 years now or 17 years. And so rather than go on away overseas or anything if anything I like to go there. I love to play golf. And if I could play golf I'd played every day. Except my back won't let me. My shoulders won't let me. But I could play every day because I love.. I love the competitive nature of golf. But I think if I had two weeks to do anything I wanted I probably do more of the same.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. I love your honest answers. That's awesome. I just like that. He's just very forthright. Well this question we asked our guest and you can of touched upon earlier in our conversation. When the great day comes how do you want to be remembered? Like you said if you walked out of here, God forbid, something happened.

Jim Host: He did everything he could to make things better for others. He he he gave 100 percent of his ability everyday of his life. I've told my kids, I have two children. I have five grandchildren. I've got a grandson who's nine going on 20 and another one that's six going on six. and I try to tell them both... They both live in Lexington. My other three grandchild live in Washington but. Those two I try to tell that you know give everything you've got every day. Whatever you do give 100 percent effort. How many times do you see people who have great ability but give about 50 or 60 percent of their ability. And you know it and it kills you. And that's why I've loved these arena task force and the Arena Authority because these people give 100 percent.

Kirt Jacobs: That's why I recommend people observe those meetings. It's phenomenal

Jim Host: They they focused. There is no Mickey Mouse. You don't see anybody looking at cell phones or playing with Blackberries. They are giving 100 percent

Kirt Jacobs: They are. They are.

Jim Host: all the time. And so I guess if it's anything like to be remembered for is that he gave 100 percent. He gave one hundred percent effort every day everything to anything he ever got involved in. Don't get involved if you're not prepared to give the effort.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a great note to end on Mr. Host. It's truly an honor having you on Leadership Landscape.

Jim Host: Thank you sir. Thank you.

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you sir for giving us your time

Jim Host: Appreciate the opportunity

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com