

102. Karl Puljak: Brewing Collaboration

Gavin Kelly

Hey everybody, you're listening to Beyond 1894. This is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. I'm Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications. And this is the first episode in our Dean series. We're planning on sitting down with all five Dean's from all five colleges here at Louisiana Tech. And first up on our podcast is Karl Puljak, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Thanks for being here.

Karl Puljak

Thank you very much, Gavin.

Gavin Kelly

First things first, we try not to have a repeat and guests on this podcast, we we have a lot of, you know, Tech family members, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and we, we feel like we don't want to go back to the well too many times and just have the same person on over and over again. But you were one of the first episodes of this podcast, I think it might have been episode three, back when Amy Bell was the host, you're one of the first guests. So you are the first official named repeat guest. I don't maybe don't let it go to your head. But

Karl Puljak

I'm strangely simultaneously honored and puzzled by the whole thing.

Gavin Kelly

So it's all good. Well, a lot has changed. I mean, that was that would have been, I guess about four years ago, maybe a little bit more than that. And now you're a dean. And I think that's part of the biggest reason that we're having you back on because that's a big change. And it's something worth talking about. On top of that I introduce you let's let's clear the air here. We've had a lot of guests on who have named dropped you. Mostly for good reasons. You know, it's they've given you a little shout out there mentioned in coming up in the school design or whatever. We've talked about design build a lot. You've been named dropped on the podcast a lot. Okay. You've been named dropped. Often as Karl "Pool-Yak". Yeah. And I have been saying Karl "Pool-yahck". And I know you're about to tell me, Oh, it doesn't matter. It's fine either way, but go on record. And just let me know right now how that last name is pronounced.

Karl Puljak

I think how my parents pronounced it as "Pool-yachk" it goes. Yeah. So but I think growing up as a Yeah, as a young kid, you know, again, it's a name that you can easily poke fun at. And I think we it's made us strong as a family. We're willing to roll with how people pronounce the name. I believe the best was, I believe? When my wife Shannon started teaching elementary school. I think she was a

student, a student teacher. One of the kids called her Mrs. porkchop. So that's, well, that's not even close. Yeah, you know, it's like so it's good. We can we can roll. We

Gavin Kelly

it's not a very caption audible name. I don't know if that's a word, but like it. Software that sort of auto transcribes things when that name comes up. It's always something you know, that's what it's always like, carpool. Yak carpool. Yeah, carpool yacht because I say the, you know, the A, the different sounds. I've gotten that one. And just an interesting thing. What so what's kind of the, the origin of that name? It sounds sort of Eastern European.

Karl Puljak

It is so my guess it would be Croatian. Okay. My dad was born near what is what is Sarajevo as which is not part of Bosnia. But at that time, it was a little bit of a different time. So that was, you know, again, it was Yugoslavia. So I think that yeah, that's where the name came from. It's so

Gavin Kelly

not too far of generations back or you know, your family's parents,

Karl Puljak

right. They're both my both my parents are from from Europe. So my mom was born in now what is what is called Slovenia, but it was had a different name at that time. And it was a little little township in which it's like, it's very interesting. It's like, I think growing up, and even when I come home, to visit my mom, they live. I'm originally from St. Louis. But when I come visit, there's a lot of family members and actually, people from that region who emigrated at around that same time. It's a very interesting listening to my mom on the telephone talking to my aunts. It's, I don't, I think there's maybe about four people that really understand what's going on, because it's a very strange German dialect, but kind of, they've created kind of a language kind of with English. It's just it's just a wild ride, just kind of listening to it. And that's all I got. I don't know. It's a funny code. Sounds like Yeah.

Gavin Kelly

So you know, you mentioned being from St. Louis growing up there. I we'd like to talk to our guests who are you know, I would say, a good bit. I wouldn't say half maybe, but maybe of our guests on here are like from the area from Louisiana and but ones that aren't. It's interesting to sort of track their journey and figure out how they got here, and especially if they've been here for a while which you have walk us through kind of being in St. Louis, figuring out what you wanted to do as far as pursuing your education. Question. And then we'll go from there and kind of figure out how you got here.

Karl Puljak

Well, let's say so I spent via my, my entire Young Life in St. Louis all the way through high school. So I grew up there went to Lindbergh High School. After that, I think while I was in high school, it was a, it was a little bit of a decision about what to thinking about what to major in. I was, I, since I was a little kid, I studied cello. And that was something it's like, you know, kind of in high school, I was coming competitive, got involved with various festivals and you know, kind of orchestras that you have to try out to get into. So there were some success in that. So that was something I was kind of marginally

thinking about in terms of a major. But I think, you know, again, it was fairly early on that I was, architecture seemed very interesting to me, looked around for various universities to go to, and the one that really, out of all the ones I visited was one, not too far from, you know, from Missouri at Kansas State University. One of the perks about it was, because at that time, meant even still, I think, Missouri didn't have a public university that had architectures. So there was some kind of a reciprocal agreement that was made between the two states, so that if you were a Missouri, resident studying architecture, you could pay in state. So that was kind of something nice. But the other thing that was even more important, I met a man by the name of Warren Walker, he was the cello professor there. And I think he was the number one reason why I went to Kansas State, because it seemed like I had an opportunity to take lessons with him to get a scholarship for playing in the orchestra to I don't know, just to kind of evolve a little component of my life, that probably would have gone away it just because there wouldn't have been the opportunity or the time. But he was really instrumental in assuring me that there's there's certain you know, there's ways that we can go about doing it. He also said, it's like, you know, you'll probably be a better, I don't know, down the road, a better architect, and maybe you'll even meet potential clients, he knows, like, you never know, because then you're going to be working with a different group of people. We'll be right about that. I don't know about the clients, but but it was, it was a great experience and opportunity. And I got to, you know, the architecture program there. The undergraduate was five years. So I got to play in various ensembles, and even do a little bit of travel with with with the group over those five years, and it was hugely important. Yeah. And

Gavin Kelly

you still play here and there today, right?

Karl Puljak

I do. We don't have too many cello players in Lincoln hair. I'm not sure if I'm the best, but I gotta be one of the top two. Yeah, there's probably maybe two pieces.

Gavin Kelly

So picking your major, I guess, one thing, I'm curious because we've talked about, you know, your mom and dad growing up, did they sort of give you kind of free rein to like, pursue what you wanted. I know, sometimes parents have an influence on like pursuits of certain majors. But it sounds like you kind of were able to kind of do what you felt like you wanted to do. I was

Karl Puljak

I think, in a perfect world, I think I have a brother and a sister both younger than me. We were the the boys were supposed to be engineers. And I think my sister Linda was supposed to be a CPA, you know. So none of some of it kind of worked out. My brother ended up being he's an he is an engineer. So. But one of the things I think that in this came maybe with the music, you know, kind of decision for me to learn how to play a cello is my parents, especially my mother was, you're gonna be practicing this thing every day, for half an hour. Doesn't matter, you know, and, you know, it's like, you have to it's like this is, you know, you've made this decision. So we're, we're going to see, see to it, that you, you learn it. So. So I think, you know, I think even that, you know, that kind of discipline that probably wasn't in me originally, it was certainly driven into me, I think by those kinds of, you know, those kinds of decisions, at least in terms of our upbringing, all of us, became, I think that they entrusted me with kind

of the decisions in terms of what I wanted to pursue as a major. I think they really wanted, you know, in a perfect world, they wanted us all to stay in St. Louis, while pursuing our education, but there was something about just making that trip. About seven hours away. That was, seemed to be a good fit for me. Yeah.

Gavin Kelly

Okay. So, you're pursuing your degree, you're, you're in architecture. I guess as you're sort of finding your passion And because of you know, there's different aspects of every major and different routes you can take when you graduate. So are you in college figuring out you like certain aspects of architecture better than others? Or how is, you know, your career playing out in your head as you're, as you're being educated? Well,

Karl Puljak

one of the things was, I think I was interested in college in general, and, and, you know, probably too many aspects of college. And again, it's like, I think, you know, kind of in that first couple years, at least, probably, especially maybe in the second year is like, there were, I was, there were too many distractions. So it's like, I probably wasn't, I was a good student, but maybe in terms of the time that I spent in the studio maybe wasn't as much as I should have. And I think that that, you know, that Kosta, a correction. And so maybe at least in terms of in college, in terms of kind of finally beginning to understand it, that was a little bit of a late bloomer is probably into the third year, fourth year and fifth year, it's like, Okay, I think I think I have this, I need to kind of get serious about some of this stuff and ended. I think, all along the way, too. It's just like any student. In college, you find some, some professors that become really important in your life. And I've been fortunate to have a couple that have had been really important, and even even to this day, you know, kind of are serving as mentors to me. So nice. Shout out to Bob kondia.

Gavin Kelly

Shout out. You did you write it was it a five year program you're writing to get in, there

Karl Puljak

was a five year Bachelor of architecture. So that served as the perfect architecture, a little bit of a kind of a strange pathway to get to get a degree. So you need to earn a professional degree for the most part in order to get to pursue licensure and architecture. So at Kansas State at that time, it was a five year undergraduate bachelor architecture. Yeah. So

Gavin Kelly

what happened after K State?

Karl Puljak

After K State, I entered a job market that was not good. Right. I saw a hot start. That was a welcome. So I applied, I decided to move back to St. Louis. Tried to find work. Did not until I think, in November, so I graduated in May. So it's you know, and to be fair, I spent, you know, part of the summer, kind of the the graduation present was a backpacking trip with a friend of mine, through Europe, so that was okay. So I knew I was going to be I wasn't going to pursue too hard during that time. But yeah, finding a

job was very difficult. I did eventually find something. And I believe it was November. And I think in terms of what I had thought in my head about what that first job would be. It was not quite that. So I think I lasted that goes for less than six months, and decided somewhere at what I'd been thinking about a little bit, but decided, you know, one time at lunch, to go to a travel agent, think about maybe trying to find a career path, maybe outside of St. Louis. And I'd always been interested in working abroad, I enjoyed traveling. And so we had the as, as a student, and then also, actually with music, I had the opportunity to travel to Europe a few times. And that was something that was very interesting. So that was, yeah, that was a decision that kind of made over a lunch lunch time and break epiphany and then drop that one on my parents had dinner.

Gavin Kelly

Well, then what did that result in what kind of was the next move that resulted in

Karl Puljak

a trip to Austria and I got into work there for almost three years working in a couple architecture offices, kind of in construction, learned a little bit about what worked at a construction company as well, that did a lot of historic restoration projects. So it was just an opportunity. It was a change of venue. Yeah. And I knew that this wasn't going to be something that was going to be long term, but it was a little longer than I thought it would be. And then the plan was after that just to go go to graduate school. So you know, spent time when I was over there kind of planning what that next step would be. So ended up being graduate school and were with graduate school, in a place called Cranbrook Academy of Art. It's a small program that is primarily art and design. It's a very beautiful walled garden in in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, which is pretty close to Detroit. So I was there for a couple years.

Gavin Kelly

Do we have a sort of Cranbrook pipeline here because I know you're not the only faculty member

Karl Puljak

we have we have had over the years a number brah folks, so even on the current faculty, probably, honestly, we have Michael Williams, Robert Brooks, Joey slaughter, I think that might be it. But, uh, there's been others in the past that have come through as well.

Gavin Kelly

So why is that?

Karl Puljak

I don't know. I'm not really sure. I think it might be just, sometimes there is a little bit of a tie Joey slaughter for examples from this area. But the others that are that were all in architecture, I don't know, I think there was a period of time where our faculty and you know, the people that were leading the faculty were interested in the type of work that was coming out of that place. And so that's kind of what happens.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, because it's not exactly close. So somebody knows somebody or something, you know, cuz it's we they keep feeding them down here now.

Karl Puljak

Sure. And again, it's like this is this mark here, 30 of me being in Ruston, which is don't think about to mind boggling, but I would, I would contend that the biggest culture shock for me, it was not moving from Austria to Michigan, but moving from veal Hills, Michigan, to rust. And I think at the time again, it was the city has transformed. And the community has transformed and the university has. But I think at first when I first got here, it was a little bit of yeah, just trying to kind of figure it out, you know,

Gavin Kelly

watch slowed down a little bit, adapt a little cope a little bit, but

Karl Puljak

there was no but it was it was it was good. It's like I I would have never thought at that time that, you know, I would be here as long as I have. It's like, I really thought I was gonna sound a little weird, but kind of likened it to maybe it's like a mission trip, I'll be here for a couple years, and then move on to what's next, I thought maybe going going back into practice with something was something I was interested in. But now it's like it kind of changed, you know, again, and there were some factors beyond the university that probably kept me here as well. So

Gavin Kelly

yeah, we'll get into those was your first your first job here was teaching? Yes. So what was it like kind of was that like a, I guess it was an intentional change in a way. But what made you decide to sort of shift from practice to, you know, the classroom, I

Karl Puljak

think is a thing that maybe relates a little bit to what we were talking about before, as I like being in college, I like it a lot. And I think the opportunity to come back in a different role was something I've always wanted to do. I just didn't realize it would come as quickly as it did. But yet it did. So I got a phone call in grad school, from Robbie Faye Coleman, who was a professor here for a long time, asking, you know, he, he had heard about me through that mentor of mine at Kansas State and said, Hey, would you like to come down for a year? You know, and you know, just be an opportunity to? To learn a little bit about teaching? I think we haven't we have a role. And we have a position here. That would be a one year gig. And, you know, and I had other opportunities to teach a little bit. And then, of course, I don't know, the other option was to move to the big move to New York or move somewhere that, you know, maybe I would have an opportunity to practice in some interesting places. But it's like, yeah, I'll give this a shot. You know, what could possibly go wrong? So, so one year became two years, and then you know, then there was a position, a tenure track position that opened up and applied for that. And then we just kind of kept rolling. Yeah.

Gavin Kelly

So staying here teaching, how many years were spent teaching up to, you know, being a director? And why did that director position was it something that appealed to you,

Karl Puljak

I'm trying to think I think I was on faculty, and then on a tenure track. I think that was about 898 years, something like that. And then we learned that the director of what was the School of Architecture, was going to retire. And there was there was kind of an internal discussion on the faculty about who might be interested. And I think most of the faculty that had any sense, and certainly the ones that were more senior than me, had absolutely no interest. And it's like, I thought it would be maybe a different opportunity. And I was game so so I, I applied and was given kind of an interim role for a period of time, and then that became a non interim role. And then a few years later, there was a discussion about putting back together. What was at the time the school of the School of Art Art and the school of architecture that used to be a single school, and then they split apart. Yeah. And they came came back together kind of dubbed in this school of design. And that also, how that evolved was simply that this the Director of the School of Art, Jonathan Donna, who also was intended to retire so and then the decision was made, where I was asked if I would be interested in kind of looking at kind of reuniting these two schools or did reunite them, but it's like, you know, to help, yeah, put them, put them down, unify them under

Gavin Kelly

the switch of the director role pull you completely out of the classroom? Or were you still finding time to teach here and there is

Karl Puljak

I did try to teach more than I probably do now. And I think that's the reason I wanted to enter this profession is because I liked that opportunity. I especially liked teaching the studios that design studios, and unfortunately, I think it just kind of given the time commitment. God bless the people who do this. It's like I just in the new roles, I just didn't feel like I had that time. And that was again, a personal decision. That's like, I tried a couple times, but it just felt like I wasn't giving enough. Yeah, to both things. It's like and things, you know, again, it's like, I already I think we all kind of at the university, and especially maybe in administrative roles, spent a lot of plates. And I just was was aware that some of the plates

Gavin Kelly

were wobbling? Yeah. And you're not, you're not the first guests that we've talked to that kind of mentioned, once they get into an administrative role. And they were are used to being in it sort of Professor role in teaching that it starts to wane over time. And they kind of have to, like, wean off of being in the classroom. And they kind of mentioned it in a fond way where it's like, I wish I could have not that they really have any regrets. But like, I wish I could have kept teaching more consistently, because that's kind of it's always, you know, yeah,

Karl Puljak

and I think that's what got most everyone here. Yeah, I mean, that's, that's how it came. And I think that the connection, the direct connection with students is, and especially in a kind of a course, like a design studio, where it's not just you know, I don't know, a lecture and then everybody cuts out and an hour and a half or an hour and 15 minutes. It's, it's about really being with students in those rooms. It's a

very, I don't know, kind of a mentor ship, where in which we learn from each other as these projects develop. Yeah, I think it's a it's a very different relationship that we have with the students in those in those type of classes

Gavin Kelly

we have there, we don't have to go too in depth, because we have to at least full length episodes on the subject. But design build in architecture here is a very renowned thing. And you played a big role in sort of shaping that getting it off the ground. Is that right? Yeah,

Karl Puljak

I did. I was I was the, in as much as I served as the first instructor for the first four years, and we were trying to figure out how we can do this, how we can maybe create an experience for our students that is different than I don't know, sitting at the same desk is doing a different project, you know, a more complex project, a larger project. And, and the other thing that I think that tied a little bit to the education that I had at Cranbrook where there were opportunities to participate in building projects on campus. I just it seemed like there would be a really interesting opera opportunity to kind of work within the community kind of leave campus and offer something you know, and actually stretch the stretch our students. I

Gavin Kelly

guess it's cool now to see that it's still thriving and that that partnership with Kansas,

Karl Puljak

there's no doubt it's like there is I am, I think one of the best things that that happened in this is me not participating in an aurora be allowing people just the opportunity to participate in it because it offers just a different way into the projects that offers other community connections that our faculty have to think about some of the projects that we did way back when and seeing some of the work that comes that is coming now. It's an it's just astounding and I'm so I'm so proud of everybody that's been involved in this and there's there's a lot of people that have been a lot of the faculty have been involved in these projects. So it is

Gavin Kelly

very cool. If you if you're listening, please go back and listen to our episodes on designbuild because it is a very everyone who speaks about it speaks about it with passion and it's for a good reason. So you were Director of the School of Design up until you took on the Dean role. Is that right? Yep. So that was 2022

Karl Puljak

I I think so. Okay, so I'm gonna start this is concluding here too. So yeah, start your journey when

Gavin Kelly

the opportunity came, and you know, you're already in a director position, and like you said, spending a lot of plates. And the opportunity came to become Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Why was that

something that you thought would be worth pursuing? And, you know, taking on additional responsibility? And that sort of thing? Why was that something that you went after? Boy that's

Karl Puljak

like, multi there's, it's multifaceted. In some ways, I think there's some personal decisions that I made, I think in terms of an opportunity to kind of evolve myself. Okay. Yeah. I think I also saw colleagues in our college that I again, I, I appreciate and value. And I think that there's things I learned is, you know, kind of in, in maybe working with what was the school of architecture and the School of Art and trying to find ways to kind of weave it together a little bit. Again, it's more of an idea, I play it, I play a role, but I don't, I don't play the role, I play a role. But I thought, you know, what I what I saw within our, our college is maybe an opportunity to do something similar, maybe just frightened, to try to find ways to work together more, to find ways to kind of maybe lower some of the walls that, you know, again, inevitably, there's, we talk about terms like silos, you know, that are built up, but trying to find ways to provide a little bit of connectivity to some of these people. And, and not necessarily by, I don't know, imposing some kind of a grand idea. So it's about giving the faculty in the folks that work here agency in and allowing that to happen for themselves, for their departments. And I think, I don't know, I, I felt like maybe I had that interested, or at least, and maybe some ability to kind of bring some people together that I thought maybe should come together, you can kind of, you know, and again, these are projects that take a long time, it's like you can't I know that better than as much as anybody do. You can't just snap your fingers. And everybody's, you know, we're not all in Happy Land. It's like, you know, it takes a lot of work, and time and trials and successes and failures and all that stuff. But I don't know, I think I'm kind of patient, you know, for the most part, you have to be Yeah, you have to be right. I

Gavin Kelly

know that there's, you know, there's always for every college for every department here, there's sort of a vision for the future. There's a strategic framework, that's another phrase that gets used. As we look to the future and improvements like GTM. Renovate, that's a big one, I know that. That's kind of like the hub, the building for the college. But also like, one thing that keeps being repeated is every student who comes here has to go into that building for one reason or another, usually it's taken classes freshman year. So things like that, that are sort of going to shape the college moving forward. What's kind of like, maybe your expectation, maybe your hope for the college in the short term. I

Karl Puljak

think in the short term, I really do think a re envision George T. Madison Hall is, it's more than a symbol. But I really think it's going to kind of enable some of these, you know, the lowering of walls and the opportunity for kind of collaborative work, collaborative research collaborative instruction to happen. It's like we're really trying to think about how we can if, for those of you who have had an opportunity to go into GTM, as a student, in the 70s, it has not changed very much it is you know, it's a it's a very efficient building. It's like a fairly narrow corridor that goes all the way around the doughnut of that building. And there's a courtyard in the middle. I think one of the things that we're really trying to do is trying to find ways in which we can begin to kind of wear down maybe the, you know, that almost brutal efficiency of that building, you know, to provide places for students to hang out. Yeah. One of the things that we certainly notice this is a building is a purely transactional space, meaning students go in there, they take their class and they get the heck out of there as soon as they can. Because there's really nothing

there is a there's a courtyard but I think beyond that, there's there's really not all there's no incentive to stick around. And

Gavin Kelly

the classrooms are all kind of set up. First of all, in a sort of copy and paste style, but it's like podium at the front. board at the front desks in a row facing the front. And you look at newer buildings on campus, like ISP, they were kind of built with the classrooms in mind to be more interactive and collaborative, like you mentioned. And I have to imagine that's part of the vision for GTM. Moving forward,

Karl Puljak

I think it has to be, I think we're really going to my hope, and again, we are, we're kind of trying to understand when maybe the start date of the reconstruction, which will involve a lot of demolition of that building. I think all those kind of unknowns provide a little bit of I don't know, anxiety isn't the right word, but anxiousness about really getting it started. But obviously, there is going to be a transition process. When all the faculty and all those classrooms have to have to vacate for a period of time, we've been working with a lot of the folks at the university to figure out maybe what a plan what a plan, like that would look like. And I'm confident that that'll happen. It'll be just like, if you're moving out of your house for a period of time to get your house renovated. Or, you know, it's like doing without the kitchen or, you know, you're gonna have to just make payments. But I think, you know, if we're, if we're patient, I think you're right, I think it'll be transformative. And it'll be a an incredibly important piece. Yes. of our university. So

Gavin Kelly

yeah, that's good. You mentioned you mentioned your wife, and the lovely Miss porkchop. Right. So go back a little bit talk about kind of, because you met her here in Reston, right, right. So when would that have been? That

Karl Puljak

would have been at the end of my first year here, so

Gavin Kelly

So you wasted no time,

Karl Puljak

I was introduced to her by what became a mutual friend. And we met at the peach festival

Gavin Kelly

in Reston, and

Karl Puljak

our first date was, I believe, the day after we went to the rodeo. And yeah, I don't know that kind of evolved. I didn't you know, I I then came to learn a little bit about her obviously, and and her family and you know, then I kind of realized that oh, boy, it's like I'm getting pretty deep into the the lore of Louisiana Tech. Yeah,

Gavin Kelly

that's kind of that's what I was gonna get at as i i think it's funny, interesting, whatever that as a quote unquote, outsider who came here from somewhere else, that the term Tech family that we use to mean like our community of students, faculty, staff, alumni all over the world. For you tech families, is a literal term, you meet your wife here, your father in law is one of the the tech legends Leon borrow more. Your daughter's my cousin's Sophie and Ellie, and going into their senior year here now. Shout out, by the way, they work in our office, so we appreciate them. But having tech be at the core of your actual family. I think you mentioned being here for a long time. And that being part of the reason, but I think it's a it's a sort of natural thing. So I guess if there's a question here, it's does Tech family does that term kind of have a different meaning for you because of that,

Karl Puljak

literally, the, again, the family that I surround myself around, again, knock on wood, our, our daughter should graduate in May of this upcoming year, so 2025 I'll be the only person in the family in the immediate family without a degree from tech. So that my mother in law, my father in law, obviously, Shannon, and and the girls, so

Gavin Kelly

I mean, there's no it's never too late. Well, if he was, oh, maybe, maybe so maybe. So I don't know. Also the name of the way that your family kind of naturally integrates you deeper into Louisiana Tech, I think you have integrated yourself deeper into the community with things like utility utility Brewing Company, which if you're listening, you probably know if you know, if you've been arrested and you're in wrestling, you probably know what it is. But a pizza and beer restaurant that is very popular hear what kind of went into the decision and take because like to be a co owner that on top of having a full time job that is already, you know, against spinning plates. What's kind of what was the thought process behind that? It

Karl Puljak

was just one of those ways. It's like I think as I kind of we, I realized that I was probably going to be here for a while. And I think that's that has a lot to do with Shannon and my in laws. And again, it's like we had children and I don't know how well you know, my father in law, but there's no way these they're not going routers are going anywhere. So kind of understood that. And again, I think it's just basically was is a hobby with a friend Cassidy calm who actually was he both he and the other co owner, de Norton are our graduates of tech. Just kind of made sense as like, there's there's other ways to tell that story. But I think it was a hobby, it was an opportunity, it was a great location. It was a calculated risks to try something like this, it was a way to kind of connect to the community in a different way. In some ways you can, you can do it as a faculty member. But I think you can do it in other ways as well. And I think, you know, kind of, kind of operating a business like this was just kind of felt as comfortable. as comfortable as starting a business can be.

Gavin Kelly

I know that you also spend a good bit of time there, because it does it feel the hardest part is probably over, like you get to kind of sit back and let it be run instead of running it or is it still kind of taking up a lot of your time?

Karl Puljak

I think we have a great staff, and we have a great manager. And these are I mean, for the most part, they're all students or recent graduates of tech, so they're familiar with our, our community there, and they've they're important parts of, of our business, I think, you know, our, our maybe more direct role is oversight. I, to be honest with you, it's like i i sounds funny, but I don't like to go there a lot, you know, when the business is running, because I always just looking around to be sure everybody's okay, or, you know, or I see things that are not quite right, or, and I don't want to be a burden on our staff. And, but that's I don't know, that's just maybe a little bit about me, I'd say I'm usually get there early in the morning, every day. Come by on the weekends, when we're not, we're not operating, it's usually certain Sundays I brew, so it's like, yeah, get up super early. And, and, and, and do that. So that's still a role that I I'm not ready quite yet to give up or hire somebody else to do. It's, I get something I really like doing. And in some ways, it's different than working at Tech. Because it's like, I know if I do everything, okay, on that Sunday morning, I usually get there at about 430 in the morning, I can be done before noon, and it will be done. Yeah. And that's a little bit different than you know, oftentimes kind of the journeys in bureaucracy or working with lots of people, at a at a place like a university, it's like things, you usually can't crank things out and get them done in six, seven hours. So it just just doesn't work.

Gavin Kelly

And it also kind of it's not quite as I mean, like, operating a business is always ongoing too. But it feels like it's sort of broken up into more finite sort of goals and time segments. Whereas here, it's like a kind of gray area of, right. And

Karl Puljak

I think just things that just because of the scale, it's like things take just, they just simply take longer to place like, you know, like tech or like any institution, it's like, and we're in a small business like we have, we can change things relatively quickly. If we need to.

Gavin Kelly

We're I got I got one more question for you. We could, we're up to I guess 40 something minutes here, and we could talk all day. I mean, ever since I was a little kid coming to visit you guys go see Uncle Charles and and Shannon in the house and hang out and chat. But we're talking about utility talking about brewing. This is gonna be, again, something you could probably talk about all day. And it's going to be subjective. And maybe it depends on the day. And when I asked you but for you for your tastes. What makes a good beer?

Karl Puljak

Boy, I don't I like all sorts of styles. So I don't I don't know, it's like, I think one of the things I do like to do when we do travel a little bit, go to different breweries and just just try things that we have not yet tried, or try things that I'm very familiar with that we do, and see how they're different. And if the opportunity comes, it's like I have no I don't know if if I see somebody there who is you know, doing

work in the brewery of those of that restaurant or brew pub or brewery. I don't mind going in and asking questions. Because I've I've learned a lot. I think that that that community is also very willing to share information. And I think I've, you know, in those very strange, you know, oftentimes just don't have the kind of asking a random question to somebody who's working on a tank. You can learn a lot and there's a lot of things that I brought back through that process. I'm not really answering your question. If there's a beer I like probably my favorite style of beer are kind of Belgian style beers. It's like so beers like, say Zaanse or, or triples or, you know, blondes you know, kind of from that part of the world. Yeah, I think those are the things I probably liked the most. It's like, and one day, I need to make a make a trip over there. Yeah, I really think I'll go to the story, how they do?

Gavin Kelly

Have you have you tried anything that kind of was unique or surprising in that, like, it was some kind of brewing method or combination or ingredient that you were on paper? You'd be like, That's why but then it ended up tasting good or something like that. I'm

Karl Puljak

not sure there's a lot of beers that I've tried that have certain additives or like, ingredients added to it that I did not like, usually things Yeah, I don't know. It's like an that just kind of a personal thing. It's like I think of things like watermelon, and not necessarily my my cup of tea, it's like, but I think that, you know, again, there's there's some really good craft brewers in this state. And in the region, that there's a lot there's a lot to learn from, I don't really have anything I've been completely turned off by. There's a few beers that I've been really proud of to own. And then I pulled them out of the refrigerator, and I wanted to save them. And that was a mistake. So it's like, I think beer does have a shelf life. So I've I've learned that the hard way.

Gavin Kelly

Sometimes you just keep the can maybe you just got nice artwork on it or something. But it'd be so yeah, that was that was my, my mistake. I

Karl Puljak

thought that would I thought it would age a little better. But

Gavin Kelly

well, aging here and rest and over the years. How's that for a transition?

Karl Puljak

Yeah, I might have gotten a little sour over time. Well,

Gavin Kelly

I appreciate you. I tell this, everyone, but I appreciate you making time for us to come on to the podcast, because again, everyone's time is important here and everyone's busy even in the summer. We're going, I guess coming up on next week, our final orientation session of this ride. It's still a busy time, I can tell you it was an honor just to walk across the wildly tower parking lot to get over here. And it was nice to get out of the building and came along and say hello, maybe you know, if we have this

conversation in a couple of years time. Maybe it will be leaving that building over there. GTM will be it'll be a little bit harder to do because it'll be a nice week. We

Karl Puljak

could be we can see Yeah. suitemates Yeah.

Gavin Kelly

Well, again, thank you for coming on the podcast. Good luck as you continue to lead and grow the College of Liberal Arts. And again, if you're listening and you aren't already in the mood for utility in getting a slice of pizza and drinking some nice beer, you probably aren't now so check that out. Again. Thanks for being on and we'll see you around. Thanks, Gavin.

Gavin Kelly

Thank you for listening to beyond 1894. Please subscribe and rate us wherever you listen to podcasts. For more information about this episode, you can check out our show notes. Beyond 1894 is produced by Louisiana Tech University's Office of University Communications