

## Something Extra- EP: 73 Jason Hall

**Lisa Nichols:** I am thrilled to have Jason Hall on the show today. Jason is the co-founder and CEO of Arch to Park.

Jason, I am so excited to have you here today. You have just become my good friend for the last couple years here.

**Jason Hall:** Well, thank you. It's great to be here this morning with you. And look forward to this conversation. I always get such positive energy from you. So I am just excited and we both love Saint Louis and entrepreneurship so much.

**Nichols:** So we have a lot to talk about. So you and I originally met because we're both on the Missouri Technology Corporation board and I want to talk a lot about that, but before we go into that, growing up, what was growing up like for you?

**Hall:** I was born and raised in the St. Louis metro. I was from the Illinois side of the metro in Granite City, Illinois. And Lovett is still my hometown. But St. Louis, as the metro, is my home. You know, I was lucky, as one of the very first of my family to graduate from high school and go on to earn a college degree. I went out East for a while to school, worked in New York for a bit, and law school - then ultimately had this big decision. You know, do you go back home or do you go to one of these bigger cities at the time on the coast? And I just really did a lot of deep thinking. And for me, it was so many people sacrificed for me to have those opportunities that they didn't have. And that's, you know, my parents, my family and teachers and the church I grew up in - all of that. And I just said, you know what? I want to go back and be a part of that. And I want to give back. I want to work. I need a career, but I want to give back to the place that is home. And I just have a deep sense of connection to this place that created who I am and my foundation and so, I came back







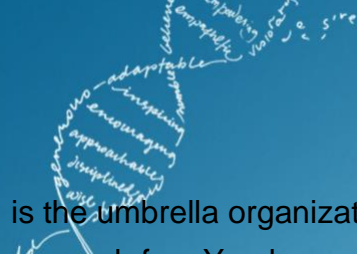
and being a part of the community, being humble that you don't know all the answers, but if you surround yourself with a diverse group of people in viewpoints, we can work through things. It requires a state of mind and a state of action.

**Nichols:** As I always tell people, hand-wringing is not a strategy either. So you got to do. But you've got to do together, as a community. Greg always says hope is not a strategy - you can't just hope things will get better. You know, you have to take some actions.

**Hall:** It means being comfortable being vulnerable. You know, you may not know all the answers. You may fail on attempt one. You're learn something and you get it right the next time. And so it's sort of like being an entrepreneur. You know, you've got a you got to have a little bit of appetite for risk. It gets a little more comfortable when you're not going at it completely alone. You'll make some mistakes. The question is, do you pick myself up? What you learn and how do you keep going forward? Because that's the only direction you can go.

**Nichols:** That's awesome advice. So let's go back to Jay Nixon. When he asked you to come to Jeff City. Did he ask you to come? Were you the director of economic development or the?

**Hall:** So it was interesting, you know, back in 2009, again. People forget that didn't live through it. Big global recession, hemorrhaging jobs. There was so much uncertainty. So economic development was everything. He had said, you know, we need to get really strategic about entrepreneurship, new technology, jobs, and make sure that's an important part of where our state is heading forward. He goes, we have this thing called the Missouri Technology Corporation. It's not really done much before. Let's figure it out and let's turn it into something special. And I had done a lot of technology work in my legal practice, and he said, let's figure it out. So we went down there and that was my first job. We figured out a get started strategy to make sure entrepreneurs were at the table and valued and supported in our state. And it was a bipartisan issue, really. And then from there, he actually appointed me to lead the Department of Economic Development, which



is the umbrella organization over that. So I was with him for the entire first term. It was so much fun. You know, we fought for families. You know, when I look up the road here in Wentzville, I can remember flying up to Detroit with the governor, you know, fighting for those auto manufacturing jobs. Those were families like I grew up with. You had to be smart, but you had to play like you wanted to win. You know, every time I drive through that area, you talk to somebody that works at a supplier to the Wentzville plant for General Motors. Part of the satisfaction you get from this job is knowing you helped make that happen. And those are the great rewards.

**Nichols:** But it's the supply chain underneath to there is a ripple effect, is there not, Jason? Because their suppliers that get affected when the auto manufacturers in that are doing well.

**Hall:** And really, Governor Nixon deserved a lot of credit for thinking through that strategy. He goes, you got to get the manufacturing plant, which we did, and brought the Chevy Colorado here, which has just been a tremendous vehicle for General Motors. They keep adding investment and lines out there. So that's been good. But then we said, what else can you get? And we went to fight for all those suppliers and made a real strategic effort, went to the Detroit Auto Show, started meeting with decision makers, that were putting those plants for the supplier. So, you know, you've got to be smart, strategic and just keep bringing more jobs and opportunities to this region. That's what makes for a great place to live.


**Nichols:** Absolutely. So let's talk about MTC, because, you know, some people may not really understand what the Missouri Technology Corporation, what's the mission? And then let's talk about the impact. What is it been, eleven years now?

**Hall:** Yeah. Two thousand nine.

**Nichols:** Right, so eleven years now. So it had tremendous impact. I would love for our listeners to understand a little bit more about MTC.

**Hall:** Well I always like to tell people young and a simple kid from Granite City, when you get into economic development, it's really about creating jobs. And there's really





to build up the infrastructure of places and mentor networks that allow entrepreneurs to be even more successful and don't impose anything from the state but work in partnership and help bring resources. As we look back over the last 10 years, you know, it's so interesting. They're like children to you. I think of companies like Benson Hill Biosystems, led by CEO Mack Chris. This is one of the fastest growing ag tech companies on the planet. They've been named a top 100 artificial intelligence company in the world. They are backed by Google. That is Google's first major venture capital investment off the coasts right here in the Midwest in St. Louis. They're not trying to move the company. They're building a new headquarters here and scaling up to 300 employees. MTC invested in that company early on with the bio generator, which supports local biotech and took some of those early risks. And it was just Matt and a couple of people moving here from North Carolina because we had opportunity and now we're reaping those long term benefits.

**Nichols:** Well, I want to dive more into this. We've got so much to talk about. And so we need to take a quick break and we'll be back with Jason Hall.

[Commercial break]

**Nichols:** So, Jason, talking about Benson Hill. Matt could have moved that company anywhere. And I know that you were involved in the recruitment of that to Saint Louis. You know, what ultimately was it that said, "Yeah, we're gonna put roots down here" and then we've got a lot of other stories about companies moving their headquarters here.

**Hall:** Communities as we were talking about. In some ways, they're just like businesses. You do have to find those areas of specialization where you can be better than everyone, global excellence. So Benson Hill is really part of a larger constellation of success stories that goes back

20 years. There were community leaders that still inspire me to this day. John McDonnell, Bill Danforth, for that 20 years ago looked around and said, you know, Saint Louis could be globally excellent in biotech and in particular agricultural technologies, which they saw as a big growth area. They brought the community



together in a positive way and really charted out a long term strategy that's still being implemented to this day under Bio STL. When you look at just over the last 12 months, Bensehill going gangbusters, just growing, St. Louis has just pulled off something it hasn't done in a long time.

A lot of people think, oh, we've shed Fortune 500 headquarters. No, we're gaining them. In fact, bungy, a Fortune 200 company is leaving New York and relocating its global headquarters just down the road here in St. Louis to be a part of our global ag tech scene. Just a few weeks ago, the Gates Foundation from Bill and Melinda Gates, one of the most notable philanthropists on the planet, made the bold decision to relocate their agricultural headquarters, which is focused on helping small farmers with drought resistant crops, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. They're relocating that whole headquarters and growing it in Saint Louis. You need those areas of excellence that attract those big ideas, the next generation. And that is just it goes back 20 years. But it shows when this community comes together and we say we have got the assets to be globally excellent. Let's put egos aside. Let's play the long game. We win and 20 years later. We are still putting big points on the scoreboard.

**Nichols:** That is just so exciting. I just get so excited. But, you know, again, it was an intentionality of that. Bill and John and other community leaders came together and put a plan in place. That's right. And so, you know, if you didn't realize, you know, we're reaping the benefits of their planning, 20 years ago.

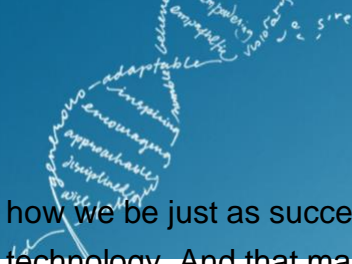
**Hall:** That's right. That's where we have to take the long view. You know, I say as much as we like to think it's not about us, it's about other people. And when you don't worry about credit, success is a sure lot easier to achieve.

**Nichols:** I could not agree with you more. I just read an HBR article yesterday written by Clayton Christensen and you know, his whole thing is, if you will put aside like personal achievement. It's not about that. It's how many people you make their lives better. That's really the yardstick that we should all be measuring ourselves by.

**Nichols:** I couldn't agree more. And quite frankly, it's just more fun. Who wants to win by themselves? Let's win as a team. I mean, it's the end of the day for the time we have







how we be just as successful as the generation before us in ag tech, in geospatial technology. And that makes sure Saint Louis is creating high paying jobs for our community for the future. Secondly, it makes sure that we stay at the forefront of technological innovation.

**Nichols:** Our people are being trained properly. That's part of it as well.

**Hall:** Yeah. When you get into the strategy, the community, you'll be rolling that out on March 24th. Actually, St. Louis University is part of a big global leadership event that we started last year. The community is excited to lay out their strategies. And I'll tell you one exciting part of this, and this has been new for economic development. We are really trying to make sure that we leave no member of this community behind. So we've embraced principles of racial equity from the start to make sure that every resident can participate in the gains and have access to the opportunities that we're talking about. Because if we don't do that as a community, particularly African-Americans in this community in North St. Louis, I think we fail. So I'm really excited about how the community has just brought that lens to this work. And I think no one knows all the answers, but it starts with intention. And it starts with recognizing you don't know all the answers. You've got to listen.

**Nichols:** Getting the right people together. And that's right. Like you said, we've proven that when we do that, we win. So I believe that the same will be true here.

**Hall:** And you can't win as a community if you leave members of the community behind you. So let's do this the right way.

**Nichols:** Right. How can we change the narrative? And I have said we've got to be talking. That's why I'm so excited about talking about these things that we can educate people so we can change the narrative. It's one person at a time. Do you know what's going on in North Saint Louis? I mean, this is so exciting for getting the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. The headquarters.



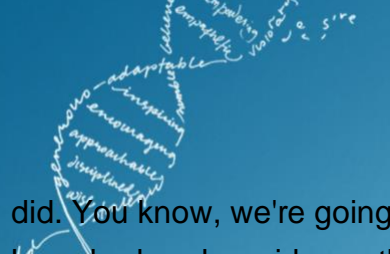
**Hall:** It's been a long time since the community invested in a narrative. And, you know, we you do have to create a set of tools for the commute because everybody's got day jobs. You don't have time to look at all what's happening. Just like everything. You know, we need help curating it. You know, I've been a part of a movement of a broad coalition of business and civic leaders that came together to say, you know what, this is a really special moment in time in Saint Louis. Our city, which certainly had a lot of challenges, historically, nine billion dollars of investment is happening. That is generationally significant. You've got these great centers of entrepreneurship at places like Cortex and Cortex and other example. When I moved back from college, it was 200 king industrial acres. It's now home to six thousand jobs and companies like Microsoft and Aon and others that have come in. You know, we're going through a period of transformation and we said we need to do a better job of telling our story because you can't grow and be the best kept secret you've got. Because you compete for talent, you do come for investment.

So we actually did a bunch of research. What do people care about and what are their emotional connections to St. Louis and where that all came out was. We're using the hashtag STL made. We should all tell our own stories, but just add that one extra element to say I'm the best Technology Partners, but I'm part of a community and I've got that pride. And so I still made Creasey our

priority to do that. But it's really the centering principles here as St. Louis is a place where you can startup stand out and stay. And those became things we're so proud of when you go ask this community entrepreneurship, our entrepreneurial history, our ability and our growth in startups. You know, last year we were number one in the United States for women founded startups. I know I'm leading the country and Saint Louisians, it turns out, are proud about that, whether you live in the city, the suburbs or any other dimension. We were all proud of our startup community. So that's critical.

**Nichols:** I think that's a something extra. I mean, to be number one in the country? It's Incredible.

**Hall:** We are leading in this area of diversity of women founded startups. And I think it's so extraordinary at times it's hard to believe, you know, did we really pull that off? We



did. You know, we're going to keep getting bigger. And then the idea that some markets have had such rapid growth, they become unaffordable for a lot of young people, a lot of families and singles. We have some of the most affordable places that you can live and really cool neighborhoods, whether you like suburbs or urban, there's so many choices here that are affordable. It's a place you can stay. You can put down roots and you know, the idea of standing out. This is a place where you can make a difference.


**Nichols:** I love that. Start up, stand out, and stay. I love that. Maybe we'll just start saying that.

**Hall:** And you'll hear. Yes. Of our elected officials and others say that. I mean, those are really what makes us special, creates a unique value proposition. And it's what this community cares about. And so we're gonna keep taking that message out, show our pride and allow others to be a part of this.

**Nichols:** I'm with you. OK. So tell me about something extra in somebody in your life.

**Hall:** I'll go back to, you know, my parents and, you know, the way we were starting this conversation, you know, very humble roots. And as I've been so privileged to be given opportunities that they didn't have and I get further in life, you really appreciate those humble sacrifices that they make. And parents may often against just really big struggles. You don't appreciate that as a child. But today in the further you get along in life. I just am so thankful. So I would encourage people to remember sometimes we've never walked a day in and people's shoes to be humble, to listen. And quite frankly, to be thankful for folks, especially your parents or your family, whatever its structure or whoever provided that leadership in your life to remember to say thank you to them. Don't get too big for the britches, as they say. And just remember, you're a big part of your own success, but you're only as successful as those people around you really allow you to be.

**Nichols:** And so when you had that support system, you know, make sure that you show them gratitude. Well, I just think about you, too, Jason, because I just see you giving a lot. But I do believe that it's probably those roots and you remembering where



you came from. That puts it fire in your belly to make sure that you are passing on to the next generation or helping our community. Really. I mean, that's how you were raised in your parents. That is so much of who you are today.

**Hall:** And I think it's just such a you know, I'm proud to be a Saint Lousian and I am proud to be an American. And I think this place, we are imperfect both as a city, metro and as a country. But as you know, as they say, you're only as good as the alternatives. And I just think, you know, that's what makes this place so special. I want to carry on that tradition. And, you know, economic development. It's not a theoretical exercise for me. Opportunity and jobs in a great home and community to be a part of. We have to fight for that. And every time we win, it has a ripple effect for people. Well, you know, we won't know 100 years from now who's running Technology Partners? You'll be affecting families and creating opportunities for a long period of time. And, you know, that's really what motivates me to do this and get back.

**Nichols:** I am so glad that you didn't end up on the East Coast or New York or stay in Nashville after law school. I'm so glad you're here because you're a pillar in the community. You truly are.

**Hall:** I appreciate that. And it's fun to work with you. And I, you know, again, as our shared passions in this area and I look forward to that for many years to come. Because there is a lot of upward momentum and a lot of upward potential. But we've got to keep fighting every single day to really allow Saint Louis to reach it's full potential.

**Nichols:** So tell me, is there anything coming up that you want tell the listeners about or how they can get involved or, you know?

**Hall:** I'll tell you one coming up around the narrative where we said, you know, we got to all do a better job of sharing our story. And reminding ourselves that we're part of a community. We should be proud of that. We launched this narrative project last year on 314 day. So was March 14th. Yeah, it was you know, we just kind of had a little party down Adventure Cafe Cortex. Over a thousand people from the community showed up

