

Lake City, S.C.: A Living Laboratory for Entrepreneurship

Host:

Kasie Whitener, Clinical Assistant Professor, Management

Guest:

Mara Zepeda, Entrepreneur in Residence at the Faber Entrepreneurship Center

Nobody asks better questions than Mara Zepeda. After a decade of enterprise creation, Mara has come to believe that it isn't the organization but rather the interconnections and relationships between people that enact effective change and progress. (credit Jennifer Brandel's work on the Interstitium, <https://www.the-interstitium.com/>) Considering herself an "interstitial" not an organizational leader, Mara embarked on a journey of place-based projects to create, in the words of Margaret Wheatley, "islands of sanity."

Locally, Mara serves Cola Love and Made With Cola Love, an economic and community development network that is building from a place of love in Columbia, South Carolina. She is also an Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Darla Moore School of Business, building bridges between the institution and its legendary namesake.

Mara remains engaged with the organization she founded, Zebras Unite, as a board member. Zebras Unite was recently adopted as part of the economic strategy for the country of Japan, the third largest economy in the world.

In this episode, Mara and Kasie talk about the recently concluded first-ever domestic onsite Maymester through the Honors College, a class dedicated to examining the economic model in place in Lake City, South Carolina under the stewardship of philanthropist and business school namesake, Darla Moore.

Here are the topics for the conversation:

- Mara's background in a community of renaissance people - artist entrepreneurs (1:00)
- The Columbia entrepreneurial ecosystem and Mara's place in it (3:40)
- Cola Love - dreamed up with Mara, Nell Fuller, and Julie Tuttle; connecting the spaces, time, energy, and opportunities (5:40)
- Various pop-ups "The Liberation is Lit" bookstore on Rosewood; Spring Supper pop-up in the space next to Mr. Friendly's (6:20)
- Santa Fe Institute - studies complexity science; Darla Moore is on the board of the The Santa Fe Institute; SFI came and led a delegation to Lake City to observe what was happening in Lake City (8:50)
- Curious about reciprocity between DMSB and Lake City (10:00)
- The building of the Maymester class (11:05)
- The timing of Artfields - what we were able to see and hear (16:20)
- A small town living laboratory of complex systems (17:20)

- The history of Artfields - 12 Southeastern states, juried prizes, 500+ pieces of art; 9 days, visual art, displays are across the businesses in Lake City, using a lottery system, the businesses are able to choose the art (seen in a picture) they want to display (23:00)
- The art is *in* the businesses, so you enter the retail, services, spaces to view fine visual art (24:20)
- It's been 12 years and they want to brand themselves as a year-round art town to have sustained economic impact through art and artists (25:00)
- Lake City's assets (according to Darla Moore): 1) an entrepreneurial backbone, 2) proximity to Florence (a much bigger town), 3) "we are cute" - they had not demolished the Main Street buildings and the original architecture could be renovated to get the 1910's vibe of old-timey downtown spaces. (28:00)
- Market towns, agriculture, and seasonal "pops" of activity (29:00)
- Moore Farms and Botanical Gardens (31:00) testing plants for S.C. ecosystem
- Non-profits, foundations, and philanthropic work require revenue (33:30)
- Liberatory technology and local ecosystems - sustainability indicators "what can the local community provide for itself?" (35:00)
- The long term relationship between the Darla Moore School and the Lake City experiment (38:00)
- What does the 2025 Lake City Maymester class look like? (39:00)
- Takeaway: people have a desire for community, novelty, and momentum (41:45) and when pedagogy can create opportunities for those things, it's a quality experience.

Learn more about Artfields at [this link](#)

Learn more about the Moore School of Business at [this link](#)

Learn more about the South Carolina Honors College [here](#)