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Channel Mastery Podcast, Episode #109: Leading The Next Generation of Gravel and Gravel's Expansion

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Kristin: Welcome back everyone to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. I'm very proud to introduce today Kristi Mohn, one of the original team members with the Dirty Kanza who's now leading business development and marketing for Life Time with Dirty Kanza, as well as co-race director of the Big Sugar gravel event, Gabbi Adams. Welcome both of you, it's great to have you here today!

Gabbi Adams: Thanks.

Kristi Mohn: Thank you.

Kristin: We have several goals around this interview, and I'm very excited to share both of you with the Channel Mastery audience, but we're here today to talk about community, and the evolution of that and it ties in, I think, so well with what our audience is always on the hunt for at Channel Mastery, which is engaging our target and consumer et cetera. But really we're going to talk a lot about how it feels for the consumer to join a community today, specifically around widening that community to make it very welcoming and inclusive for women.

So I think it's incredibly important, obviously Verde's a partner in the launch of the brand new Big Sugar event with Life Time down in Bentonville, and we're really, really proud of the women led organization and leadership of the event, and that's why I wanted to share you guys with the audience here today. So, with that, Kristi would you mind giving a bit of your background with DK, and talk about the evolution of how the Big Sugar came to be?

Kristi Mohn: Sure. I am a born and raised Emporia, Kansan, and upon returning to Emporia in 1996 with my husband, really started looking for ways to be involved more in the community, and to make Emporia a better place to live. When I graduated from Emporia high school, it was a few years ago, when I graduated from there I left and thought I would not come back to Emporia, and I'm pretty sure I was voted in my high school class as the least likely to live in Emporia, Kansas, but I found myself back here. And with that, was looking for ways to make this town better.

One of the things that came up was this bike race that my husband did in 2006 called the Dirty Kanza, and he and 33 other people towed the very first start line of Dirty Kanza, and watching that event happen, I thought that it was intriguing. I thought that the people that were racing that event were definitely from a different breed. They welcomed each other, and supported each other, and I just kind of thought that there would be an opportunity there, and that brought me to talking with the founders Jim Cummins and Joel Dyke shortly after the 2008 event to try and get involved with it and help grow the event from a community perspective. That journey's been going for obviously... We're in our 15th year, so it's been growing and I think most people know what Dirty Kanza is today.

Kristin: Can I ask a quick question? Can you paint us a picture of what was Emporia like. I mean you had a young family at that time, you obviously had moved back there. You guys wanted to put roots down, tell us what it was like.

Kristi: Yeah, of course. There wasn't anything to do. I mean that's literally when I grew up, we always would say there's nothing to do here, and that hadn't changed much. And we were doing stuff, we owned a music store at the time, and we were doing stuff there. We started a concert series called Live in a Lot. There was a bunch of stuff we were doing to kind of continually push the community to have activities, and have things to do that would bring everybody together. Have social space that we would share together. And this just happened to be another format of it, because now when you're in Emporia, I don't know who would ever say there's nothing to do in Emporia.

There's something going on here now every single weekend, and a lot of it is centered around cycling. But the synergy that came out of that in other aspects, the businesses that have developed and grown on Dirty Kanza's back, so to speak, has been impressive. It's funny to step back and look at it, because I think when you're doing that kind of work you put your nose down, you somewhat have blinders on and you're just getting it done. And when you stop and take a breath and look up, you're like, "Wow, we have Mulready's now, we have Radius now, we have a Casa Ramos." We have all these businesses that are all up and going and started because of Dirty Kanza, and that's pretty impactful to see that.

Kristin: It is. And I was actually just watching, and I'll put the links in the show notes, everybody, but I was watching the EF Education First Dirty Kanza short film that came out earlier this year, and basically I think it was three of their pro, world tour men's road cyclists did the event, and one of the things that was most memorable about that film, and by the way, it's just a great, entertaining piece of content, everybody should check it out, so I will put the link in there. But they interviewed a store owner from your, I guess you'd call it your Main Street, what is it called there?

Kristi Mohn: Main street.

Kristin: Okay, sweet. So they interviewed somebody-

Kristi Mohn: It's on Commercial Street, but we call it, it's our Main Street organization.

Kristin: Okay good. Okay. But anyway, she was saying that this weekend, the dk weekend is like their holiday. The way that we look at black Friday and cyber Monday, and kind of the run up to the end of the year, that's the way your business community on Commercial Street views Dirty Kanza.

Kristi Mohn: Oh, 100%. Yeah.

Kristin: That's incredibly powerful.

Kristi Mohn: Our vacancy is super low, and downtown shop owners refer to Dirty Kanza as their Christmas.

Kristin: That's awesome, and then I know that as one other thing before I jump into getting some of Gabbi's background here, but can you share a little bit about the economic impact study that just came out about DK and Emporia?

Kristi Mohn: I wish I was more versed on it than I am, but I know the impact was right around five and a half million dollars from this years event, and creating new jobs, and it's pretty mind blowing when you have a town of 26,000 people to see an event like this create such an impact. It's fun.

Kristin: It is, and it's all about community and so Gabbi I'd love to turn to you and ask, obviously, tell us in your involvement in cycling but also in DK. So give us a little bit of your background first in terms of who you are, and professionally what you do, and then we'll go into your experience on the single speed out there on the Flint hills.

Gabbi Adams: Yeah, sure. I'm from Stillwater, Oklahoma. Originally I grew up there. That's another area with a big gravel race, the Land Run, and a great cycling community as well, super centered on gravel and being inclusive. So I spent a lot of time there, and that's kind of where I fell in love with gravel riding, and that's kind of how I ended up falling into going to Dirty Kanza, and meeting Kristi, and the DK crew. So we became kind of personal friends through that. Moved to Bentonville, Arkansas back in March, and that's sort of whenever we moved here, about the time frame of whenever they were trying to start looking at moving the Big Sugar here, or starting a race here, and I just was the right place at the right time.

Kristin: You're quite humble. So Kristi, I'm going to let you speak to some accolades, but let's talk specifically about the bike, and was it the DKXL, or tell us about what Gabbi did there. What did she accomplish?

Kristi Mohn: Well, Gabbi is our first single speed women's champion for the DK 200, but 200

miles of Gabbi wasn't quite enough, so she did the DKXL, the 350 on a single speed as well. So got second place to Crystal Wintle, who is one of the co-owners of District Bikes, which is the Stillwater Land Run event, so. And I like to say in gravel, all roads lead to Emporia, and Bobby and Crystal Wintle are former Emporia residents before they moved down to Stillwater, and had been participating in Dirty Kanza as well. So it's kind of crazy to look at how that community's grown from one kind of seed. It's pretty cool.

Kristin: It is really cool, and I do want to talk about that more, but before we do that, Gabbi you're also a bike mechanic, correct?

Gabbi Adams: I do sales in a bike shop.

Kristin: Okay, I might have decided in my mind.

Gabbi Adams: I'm not super bike mechanically... Yeah.

Kristin: I think I decided in my mind that you were a bike mechanic.

Gabbi Adams: I can lube a chain, and change a tire, and that sort of thing.

Kristin: Sweet, that makes me a bike mechanic too.

Gabbi Adams: Yep. That's right.

Kristi Mohn: We're all bike mechanics on this call.

Kristin: Well, and I want to give you the opportunity, Gabbi, to talk about what it was like for you to become part of this family of gravel.

Gabbi Adams: Yeah, I mean as a racer it's always been a really inclusive environment. There's always a community surrounding a race. Pretty much any race we go to is one that we know a lot of people at, and go because it's basically a family reunion. I think a lot of people feel that way whenever they go to a gravel event. They're all kind of just big family reunions. So Kristi and Tim, and LeLan and all the DK crew are definitely part of that family, and have definitely made us a part of it too, and that's kind of how we get in the loop on Big Sugar and everything.

Kristin: Cool. Now Kristi, let's talk about the events of 2019. Obviously you guys had an ownership change. Can you walk our audience through what that was like for you in terms of being a steward for the gravel community, and the Dirty Kanza specifically.

Kristi Mohn: Well, I think we knew there were a couple pivotal moments in Dirty Kanza history. One was, I believe it was 2010, when it had grown to the point where we needed a full time paid director, which I was leaning heavily on Jim to do, and he had moved to Pennsylvania kind of in the course of Dirty Kanza's history and left me here in Emporia running the event. Obviously with his help, but I was kind of the boots on the ground here, and raising twins, owning a real

estate business, owning a music store, it was all too much at that point, and I had basically told Jim you either move back, or we kill this thing. And Jim made the commitment, and that was a big one, the commitment and sacrifice to move back, and that's also when we brought LeLan Dains into the fold as an employee first, and then as a part owner.

That was a monumental moment, and then in all honesty, after the 2017 event we were starting to feel some growing pains again, in the fact that it was really difficult to manage everything. All of the opportunities that kept coming Dirty Kanza's way, and the way we wanted to be a good steward of the event for the gravel community, but also good stewards of the event to the Emporia community, because the Emporia community has become so vested in this event. At that point, somewhere in there, I know Life Time had reached out to Jim. We'd had a couple other suitors come and talk to us, but we were really being picky. We wanted someone that understood the event, and respected the leadership, and the culture that was behind it, and after several, probably 18 months or so, of courtship basically, of kind of going back and forth, and going to Leadville and looking at some of their other events and then coming to Emporia, we felt like it was a good fit, and so that sale actually happened about a year ago, September of 2018, after the 2018 Dirty Kanza event.

And of course there were some growing pains, but I think we've done a very good job from both sides kind of working through those, and it's given us the opportunity. We always, or I can't say always, but we've had it on our radar for quite a while to start looking at other communities to potentially grow the gravel tribe in so to speak, and Bentonville was very much so on the short list from... We all three, LeLan, Jim, and I had kind of lists of communities that we all liked, and Bentonville had made all three of those lists. So with the backing of Life Time, it made those things more possible for us. Our expo has improved here in Emporia, but also now we have this Bentonville event and we're really excited about putting kind of some DK touches and some expertise back there to let Gabbi and Matt, Matt Ross, the co-director take this thing to the level we think it can go to.

Kristin:

And that's really, one thing I wanted to talk about that I think brings more context to this is how you've grown DK over the years, because I think that you were kind of the person, I don't want to say the black sheep, but you were the one who was willing to identify out loud the opportunities that you saw to bring more people in to the event. I mean, obviously you had this incredibly popular event that wasn't made for just everybody, but there were tons of people who wanted to feel part of the community.

Can you talk about how you would assess these opportunities and how you'd bring them online without diluting the core message, and the core meaning of that event in Dirty Kanza?

Kristi Mohn:

Well, it's interesting because it really boils back down to that community aspect. Originally the reason I thought about it was because going to mountain bike races, although they were super fun for my husband, they weren't really fun for

me as a spectator, nor for my kids. And I saw this gravel race that was. And so I was like this is an activity that families can do. Families can go and support their significant other at a checkpoint, at an aid station. They can help them with their planning and their ins and outs, and they can be part of the experience as well. And so that's kind of where it started, and then after that it was adding a 25 mile distance to the event, because I felt it was really important to start growing kind of our own cyclists. There's only so many crazy people that are going to line up to do 200 miles, and how do we help them get there?

How do we help them see that as an attainable goal, and it's by starting them on smaller distances, and giving them something to work for. So adding the 25, adding the 50, Jim was pretty adamant about the 200 distance being kind of... It is the marquee distance, but really when we first had 100 mile distance, the way I got it in was it was a 200 mile relay with two people. So technically, each person had to do 100 miles, so that's how we got the 100 mile in, and then eventually I think again with some astounding support from Salsa Cycles, Jim relinquished some of like okay, 100 mile distance can stand on its own. So then we did that. And then out of that came the whole 200 women, 200 miles campaign where we wanted to get a 20% female participation at the start line for the 200 mile distance and that was in 2016 or 17.

Kristin: And Let's talk about that moment.

Kristi Mohn: The registration was in 16, then. Yeah.

Kristin: Yeah, let's talk about that moment, because I-

Kristi Mohn: Which one?

Kristin: The moment where you actually opened registration for that. I want to know can you bring us to the expression on peoples faces on your team?

Kristi Mohn: Well, it was so fun because when we were... I don't want so say I was fighting for it, because I work with this amazing team. But what I was asking for was spots reserved for women, and when we designated these 200 spots, at that time it was 20% of the 200 mile field, Jim and LeLan thought it would take three years to sell out. And that was the last year that we didn't have the lottery, that it was open reg, 8:00 AM have your finger on the button, and that event that year sold out in three minutes, which is just insane.

But the women's field that we were going to hold those spots back for two weeks, and then whatever of those 200 spots were left we were going to release to the general public. And the thought was it's going to take us three years to be able to grow this field to the 20% mark, and it took three hours. And it was so awesome, because I'm watching it going, God please ladies, show up. And they did. Selene Yeager picked up the story and ran with it in Bicycling Magazine, and it just was really cool to watch everyone rise to that challenge of the 200 miles. And it's grown all of our women's distances, not just the 200.

Kristin: I love that. Gabbi were you by chance part of that, or had you already been doing the DK for a while at that point?

Gabbi Adams: No, that was actually the first year that I had raced in DK, and that was the first year that we had a single speeds ladies category there.

Kristin: Checked all the boxes.

Gabbi Adams: That's right.

Kristi Mohn: Well, when I talk about getting women on bikes, I don't just mean with sitting on
a bike seat. Gabbi and some other women took the challenge, because they wanted to see a women's single speed field at DK and we didn't have one. And we gave them the challenge of building it, and if they built it, we would create it for them. And they built it, and brought the ladies to race it. So it was super cool to even see that empowerment go past what we were doing as a team, and into the cycling community and watch these women step up and create this challenge in and amongst themselves. And Gabbi was part of that.

Kristin: Right, and I love so many facets of this story, but one of the things I love the most is obviously what I've kind of grown up doing in this space, is journalism and then brand communications and watching in my journalism career women's sports and fitness, sports illustrated for women. Conde Nast had a title for women. They never sustained, they never continued and I know CyclingTips tried with Ella, and through the years you're seeing cycling teams, cycling media, and they never quite take hold and it's almost like they're being grafted onto a different approach, because there's habitually like the tracks are laid in the media that has existed for a long time in this space.

What you guys proved, single handedly, is when you do pass the baton back to the community there's actually plenty of people who want to read about and join things like that. I just think that it needed to happen from a place of freedom and not being constricted by what was possible in the past, or what quote advertisers would pay for. And now I feel like that was a major turning point in many ways, because not only did the community of cycling and active outdoor lifestyle rec notice that 200 women in three hours signed up to do a 200 mile, very difficult gravel event, and that goes against everything that their beliefs were at the time, but I think since then, there's been a catalyzation of basically gravel feels like it's by the people, for the people. And that I think is part of what's helped women feel part of it more so. And obviously we've seen a lot of events successfully further that.

Kristi Mohn: I think so, I mean yeah.

Kristin: Well, and where I was going to go from here is really talking about what Life Time equipped you guys to do in terms of resources, and in terms of making your vision come to life to bring more women into cycling. So let's talk about a couple of those initiatives. Obviously Big Sugar's a big part of that, and that's

why we have Gabbi on the line here, but can you talk first about Women Ride the World?

Kristi Mohn: Well, yeah. And that initiative has come out of the 200 women, 200 miles and it's really the focus that we're going to see with it is the 200 women, 200 miles campaign isn't going anywhere, but one thing that in my mind, and I kind of alluded to this a little bit earlier, but I understand that that's a huge commitment to make, and what the women ride the world initiative is really more about meeting women where they are in their life. And so if the 200 mile distance isn't going to be what is in the cards for you in that year, it's okay to do the 25, or the 50, or the 100. Or do the 25 with your kids, or whatever that looks like.

But to try to find a place that we can take this platform and use it. You were the one that taught me the term an ingredient brand. We want to be able to take Women Ride the World and use it at other events. So at Big Sugar, what does it mean down there? How are we going to motivate and inspire more women to take this commitment, and take some time for themselves and make their lives, and thus I believe, their family's lives better. So it's really it's morphing, and it's taking that 200 Women, 200 Miles concept and applying it on a broader spectrum, and allowing more people in where they can make it work for them at that point. I hope that makes sense.

Kristin: It does make sense, and I feel like because you're so close to it, I'm not sure that you see that it's almost a sense of permission that we get, that I can do this too.

Kristi Mohn: Yeah.

Kristin: And that's actually really important from an emotional connection standpoint when it comes time to join anything.

Kristi Mohn: Yeah. In my head, we were doing that already. 200 Women, 200 Miles to me was bigger than just saying ride 200 miles. It was about watching our start line for the 25 mile distance now be 55% female. We are seeing it happen. Whether we ever get to 50-50 on the 200 start line, I don't know, and I don't really care. What I want is for women to find a place at our start line wherever they feel comfortable, and at whatever distance makes sense for where they are in their lives. That's more important to me than... at the same time, I want you to feel totally capable of taking on the 200 miles. If I can do it, if Gabbi can do it, if you can do it, anybody can do it. Yes, you're going to have to work, but you can do it, and definitely that permission is there.

Kristin: Well and Kristi, just again I want to get you to speak a little bit to the first time you actually completed the 200 miles because you've always been... I always picture you like the swan in the background who's gliding elegantly on the pond, but underneath your legs are just furiously paddling right. And you got the hall pass one year, and got to actually do the event. Tell us what that was like.

Kristi Mohn: I did. After the 2017 event that fall, Jim called and he said the teams been talking and you're the only one that hasn't completed the 200, do you want a crack at it? Which, yes was the answer. Of course, I was worried what that would look like, but we brought on a good friend of mine, Tina Khan, to help with the expo. We brought on Treva Worrel, who's now our athlete service manager to help with some of the stuff that DK was doing and kind of positioned it so that my roles DK weekend were fairly covered, and then I was able to race the event and I took that training so seriously. I didn't miss a single workout.

Kristin: That's awesome.

Kristi Mohn: It's insane. That's insane. I took it so seriously. I knew I had one shot at it, and Collin Earhart, who has been a great mechanic for lots of Dirty Kanza finishers, that's who I went to and I was like, "I want you to be my support person" and I met with him the night before, and it's funny to hear him tell that story because he goes, "You were just like a drill sergeant. You don't let me get off this bike." Because I just had to finish it, and Gabbi will tell you this too, your training only goes so far at Kanza. There's a ton of stuff that can happen that can end your race. And I controlled all the controllables as best I could, and then just really was just praying to the universe to let me have a good Kanza, and I did. So that was really... It was pretty awesome to come across that finish line, so.

Kristin: Well in that, you just teed up the exact place I wanted to go next. Let's talk about this finish line, because I feel like that is a key point in differentiation for what you've created in the experience of DK, and I think that it is going to definitely be something that becomes part of every gravel event you have your stamp on, am I right?

Kristi Mohn: Yeah. Well, I mean I hope so. We know that keying up and communities like that,

when we talked about it being as important as Christmas, important to take that DK finish line party seriously. There's 8 to 12,000 people down there throughout the course of the day to ring people in. And we stay down there until 3:00 AM. I mean the 3:00 AM finishers aren't coming in to 12,000 people. I don't want you to think that, but you are definitely coming into a crowd of people there to welcome you back, including the organizers of the event. Gabbi would probably be one to speak even more to it from the participant side. There's plenty of pictures of me hugging Gabbi at the finish line, with both of us in tears, so.

Kristin: Tell us this story, Gabbi. This is really important, because I really think this conveys a very important thing to the audience, in terms of just a capstone to the memory that this race creates for people.

Gabbi Adams: Oh yeah, for sure. I've experienced the day time finish line, and the 3:00 AM finish line, and you're right there's not 12,000 people there at 3:00 AM, but there's still a race organizer there ready to hug you, and that's really cool. But 2017, the year that I did it, did the 200 single speed I was coming in and I wasn't

sure, I was coming in right at sunset and there's a thing with Dirty Kanza, one of the big goals is to try to finish before the sun, and a lot of years it's pretty nasty and muddy and there's really not a good opportunity to do that. So it's not something that a ton of people get to do, but the year that I raced the 200, it was super great conditions and I was coming in really close, and I wasn't sure. I didn't think I was going to make it. I thought I'd be 20 minutes after it, or something like that. And I was coming into town, and you can hear the finish line from outside of town. It's insane, it is so loud.

Kristin: That's awesome.

Gabbi Adams: Yeah, you're coming into Emporia and you can see the lights and everything, and once you hit, you hit campus pretty much first coming into town, and you can hear the crowd from there. And so you're pretty pumped by the time you hit that, and coming into town there's people even a mile away from the finish line, there's one little tiny hill and there's somebody out there ringing a cowbell that's super pumped for you. It's really cool. But yeah I mean you come through this finish line that... it feels so long, and it's just this huge tunnel of like... It's unbelievable how many people are there.

I had seen it before, and coming through it as a racer, it's still pretty unbelievable. And I think that's one of the coolest things about gravel, is that every single person is celebrated. From winner to last person, so I think that's one of the most special things about gravel races is that, really, every single person that finishes is special, and even people that don't finish are special. It's everybody. But yeah, and then that year I came in and wasn't sure what position I was in within my category, and wasn't sure if I'd beat the sun, and rolled in Kristi was there to tell me that I had beat the sun, and I had won my category.

Kristin: That's so proud.

Gabbi Adams: It was really cool.

Kristin: That's amazing. So let's talk about Big Sugar, because obviously Life Time coming in, investing in DK has given you, I think, a green light to really put the vision in motion, and you guys didn't waste any time. Can you talk a little bit about what that was like for you in terms of getting through DK 2019, obviously you had a big announcement, and then when did you decide, okay let's drop in on Bentonville? Let's get this done.

Kristi Mohn: I know it seems fast, but to me it seems like it took us forever to get there, because I think the DK team was just so stoked to be able to kind of to take the experience to the next level in different parts of the country, but I would definitely say... Gosh, Gabbi when were you down there, was that April or so?

Gabbi Adams: I think yeah, I think you guys came in like April or May, and then yeah. You guys came back.

Kristi Mohn:
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We were pretty close to knowing that it was going to be a full green light, but

hadn't gotten that all the way. They wanted the full plan, and rightly so. LeLan and I have worked together for how many years doing this stuff and we kind of know each other. He knows my thoughts, and I know his, and so we can pull stuff off like this. Our DK, the first time we did our first DK women's camp we launched it and had it fully registered within six weeks. So we're like, "Oh, we can do this." Because we know each others' rhythms and how to pull this stuff off. So I think we were feeling fairly comfortable with that about April, May. Went down there and explored the course options with Gabbi, and I think... Gosh, Gabbi can kind of tell the story of when we found the brewery, but when we left the brewery that we found on course, I looked at LeLan and I was like, "This is a slam dunk. This is going to be awesome."

Kristin:

Tell us what made you think that, because I was so fortunate to be able to ride with you on the day that we hosted media before the launch, and it was so great to just listen to your insights, and listen to just things that you were saying that you probably... You literally have this instinct that I think very few people have, and it goes back to kind of the founding roots of the sport. So I think it's really important to talk about what spoke to you and LeLan about this, and then also when you brought Gabbi in, because I also love the story about how you guys stitched the course together with a vision.

Kristi Mohn:

Well I think that's what it was, is that we knew for it to work it had to have a vision. It's not Dirty Kanza, it's Big Sugar, and it had to be that. It had to be a standalone event, a standalone course with its own personalities, with its own challenges. We felt really strongly about that, and when we were researching names too, I finally just got out a geographical map and was looking at hollows and looking at that word, and just saw Big Sugar on there and I just looked at LeLan and I was like, "It's Big Sugar. It's Big Sugar and Little Sugar." Those creeks are right there, it makes a ton of sense. And plus I just like the way it sounds.

But when you come across this brewery and you get to meet the people that run and own this brewery, they're from southern Missouri, northwest Arkansas, that's the flavor, and you get to see it and participate in it, and you get to experience that little piece of the world for a day.

Kristin:

Right.

Kristi Mohn:

And that to me is what these are about. We want to provide these life enriching experiences, and these communities that let you be part, and let you get a glimpse of what life is like there. And Gabbi did an excellent job filling in the blanks on that course. We just had from that weekend we had maybe 20 miles of it or so planned, or thought through, and then Gabbi and Thomas, her husband, worked hard to get that whole thing lined up, so I'm super proud of that course.

Kristin:

It is, it's absolutely beautiful and it literally is... You would not see anything

around that area in this way without doing the ride, period, the end. There's no better way to see it. So Gabbi, give us a little bit of insight in terms of how you completed that vision. That must've been a little daunting, and exciting all rolled into one right. That's a lot of pressure to come up with a course like that and know the caliber of expectation in that community.

Gabbi Adams: Oh for sure. Yeah. I hadn't been here very long whenever Kristi and LeLan had come, and so I hadn't had the chance to explore very much gravel here before they came and we started scouting things out and by car, really, and just to make sure that there's a lot of highway here, and there's a lot of gravel that's pretty disconnected. So really it was trying to make sure that it was possible to have a course that's 90% gravel, and not a ton of highway and that sort of thing. We wanted it to really be a gravel event, and there's a lot of events around here that are 40% pavement and that sort of thing, but that's not what we wanted. We want it to be a true gravel event, and it was really challenging to find gravel that's connected enough, or short enough where you're on a highway for less than a quarter of a mile just to turn back off to a gravel road sort of thing.

It took a lot riding and a lot of Google Maps. But there are enough gravel roads here that we did make a course that's over 90% gravel with very little highway, and has a lot of cool features that a lot of people are going to really enjoy. A lot of hidden gem-type things. The brewery that Kristi mentioned is definitely one of them. It's one of our checkpoints for the 100 mile course and it's really cool. It's definitely unique to this sort of event.

Kristin: And I'm just going to say as a person who was there, it is not a microbrewery. It almost feels like a third world brewery, you know what I mean. And there are pigs cruising around the property. We've got some great photos of Amity chasing the pig around that I'll add to the show notes. It just is a very unique experience, and I think that that was something that you guys thought kind of capped the whole thing off, because it really brings... You get to actually go into a residence, I mean it's a business, but it feels like somebody's house, number one.

Gabbi Adams: Oh yeah, it's their family farm. Yeah.

Kristin: Anyways, point being is it literally has a flavor that you will not find at any other event. And there's... this is a stout course, it's something that you can achieve, of course, but there's 9,000 feet of climbing in the 100. How much elevation is there in the 50?

Gabbi Adams: Definitely not as much. It's quite a bit flatter, which I'm really happy with, because I want people doing the 50 to have a really good time, and I want it to be a little more inclusive to people who are new to gravel. But probably if I were to guess, like 2,500 feet or so. So, it's still hilly.

Kristin: Yeah. And we'll obviously put some more links in the show notes page to kind of tie into some of the athlete feedback and social media that came out of the weekend that we did, I guess the recon/launch weekend, but I just also want to

say one thing I was struck with, and I heard several other people in the room say. So we basically launched this at a dinner with a group of media, and I looked around the room and the leadership in this entire event literally was women. You guys were running the whole program that night, and it was absolutely outstanding to see, and we had a table in the middle of the room with a bunch of just luminary gravel leadership.

I guess they're athletes, but they're also really important in the community in that they're influencers or athletes. But it just was a very special moment in my career in the outdoor lifestyle markets. I've been in this 25 years, and I'm used to being in rooms where it's all men and there's maybe one or two women, and this felt reversed. Not only because there were more than a handful of women there, but because the whole event was being, I think, shepherded and rolled out by women, and the vision of the women. And Gabbi, having you as a co-race leader, is super exciting and you're very humble, and I want to have Kristi talk about what that means to her coming from her background with the Dirty Kanza, and looking to the expansion and the amazing opportunity that Big Sugar brings to have you there as a leader. I would love to have Kristi speak to that, and then have you maybe finish up our talk here on what that means to you, in terms of carrying that forward.

Kristi Mohn: Well, I think, and before I go into why I love Gabbi Adams-

Kristin: Hashtag.

Gabbi Adams: We're going to get Kristi to cry.

Kristi Mohn: Yeah. I know, you are. Gabbi, you know me too well, but I do have to say like...

Gabbi Adams: She'll start crying.

Kristi Mohn: We were talking about the female leadership. I'm not, I'm good. We haven't mentioned Michelle Duffy who is head of the marketing department in the dirt scene behind Leadville, on Life Time's side, and works with Leadville and is the one that's really helping mastermind a lot of the marketing behind this rollout strategy along with Verde. Michelle's just awesome, and it's really fun working with her and watching her come into the space and figure it out. So I've got to give kudos to Michelle from that perspective.

But Gabbi, I never set out to be a mentor. My M-O is just you get shit done, and you ask people to come along and enjoy the journey, and you surround yourself with great humans and you just try to make your life better, and everybody else's life better around you, and that's just kind of what I do. And meeting Gabbi, however many years ago it was outside of district when she was folding T-shirts for Land Run, I don't know you can kind of identify when somebody's got something that's a little bit special, or a little bit more connected, and I think that definitely speaks to Gabbi's personality, and her open heart, and her caringness of people, and her mission to do better, and to do good.

She called me mama Kristi when we were down test riding the course. I don't necessarily think that sat super well with me, but I kind of look at her, and Gabbi and I share the same birthday, not the same birth year.

Kristin: Oh my gosh. That's actually really interesting.

Kristi Mohn: Isn't that interesting?

Kristin: Yeah.

Kristi Mohn: But I said something about I guess I am old enough to be your mom. And she said, "You're actually older than my mom." And I'm like, "Oh my god, the hits they just keep coming." I don't think of myself as any particular age. My body is definitely to the point where it's telling me, "Hey, you're not young anymore." But I can still kick Gabbi's ass on a bike, and as long as that happens

Gabbi Adams: That's true.

Kristi Mohn: But it's just super... I feel so grateful that my life has put me where I'm in this position to be able to look at somebody like Gabbi and be like, "Hey, you want a shot at this?" And I just never thought that, that would be the way it happened, or the way it's happening. But she's totally deserving, I didn't pick a loser. She's going to do a great job, not only because she's smart and capable, but because she also cares. So I'm excited to watch her take this to the next level, and her grow her own legion of... Her mentor in more women into this field.

Kristin: I love that, and Gabbi tell us about the opportunity. This is, I think, it's fair to say with where gravel is right now, it's a once in a Lifetime opportunity.

Gabbi Adams: It really is. It is a once in a Lifetime opportunity, and whenever Kristi and LeLan came to me with this, I mean it's amazing. I'm really lucky. I'm really grateful for that, and it's a lot of responsibility.

Kristin: You're going to do great, and I really was just so heartened and grateful that you guys were able to be on the podcast, because this is a really, really important story about the evolution of the Dirty Kanza. And I think it's important to lift up the work that Kristi Mohn has done at that event, and yes I'm talking about you in third person, even though you're here, and you can't punch me because we're not in the same office.

Kristi Mohn: Because I'm not in the same room.

Kristin: Right. And you need to know that you've actually, what you've done with Gabbi, you've also done for so many women, in terms of introducing cycling to them. And I think it was Selene Yeager, on a podcast I did with her a couple years ago. She said it so elegantly, "Give a woman a bike, and give her permission, and watch her life change." Okay. And that is a really, really powerful thing. It is

definitely my form of therapy. I know that applies to men and women equally. It's my community, it's my badge of honor to be part of it, and that's what you've brought to other people.

It is literally something that they have self-identified with that has given them confidence. If I can do this, I can do anything and being part of what Life Time's done at Leadville, and people know that who listen to my show I'm a lifetime card-carrying member of that event, because it's changed my life. And I just want you to know, in your humble way, as you've been head down, getting shit done you also have brought so much light to so many people through the bicycle, and I can't wait to see Gabbi further that. So thank you for all you do, and Gabbi we can't wait to see what you do next.

Gabbi Adams: Thank you Kristin.

Kristin: All right. Yeah, thank you and I think this is going to come out the week we open registration for the Big Sugar. So please hit the show notes and read up all about that, you can obviously find a lot about that on social media. We'll have tons of links for you in the show notes, but it was very important to me, personally, to share the story of Kristi Mohn, and of what Gabbi's going to be doing going forward. So, thank you very much to both of you, and thanks to the audience, and I can't wait to see how everything unfolds here.

Kristi Mohn: Thanks, Kristin. That's awesome.

Gabbi Adams: Thank you.