

## Beyond the Dais Podcast: Episode 35 – An Interview with the United States Air Force Academy

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**Scott Anderson:** Thank you for tuning into Beyond the Dais, a podcast about the stories taking place in and around El Paso County, Colorado. I'm your host, Scott Anderson, and I have an impressive panel of guests today. First is Crystal LaTier. She is the El Paso County Executive Director of Economic Development. I also have Command Chief Randy Kwiatkowski from the US Air Force Academy and Laurie Wilson, the local Community Outreach Chief for the US Air Force Academy. How's everyone doing today?

**Crystal LaTier:** Great. Thank you so much.

**Command Chief Randy Kwiatkowski:** Doing amazing.

**Scott:** Great. Did I get all of those names and titles right? That's the hardest part.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** You absolutely did.

**Laurie Wilson:** My mom would love it.

**Scott:** Oh, perfect. That's what I love to hear. So, before we get started, I wanted to add that if listeners are interested in more stories about people doing good in and around El Paso County, or hearing from county leadership about local government priorities and how they operate, you can find additional episodes of this podcast on your podcast platform of choice. But to go ahead and get into things, I wanted to have everyone give a little bit of introduction for yourselves and some background about how you came to be in the roles that you're in. Chief Kwiatkowski, how about we start with you.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Thank you so much for having us together on your show. We are absolutely honored to be here. Again, Randy Kwiatkowski, I grew up as a farm and ranch kid in South Central Nebraska. And I joined the Air Force in 1993. So, I'm coming up on 30 years in this business.

**Scott:** Congratulations.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Yeah, Thank you so much. You know, my primary job that I started off my career in was flight management, and that's similar to flight dispatch in the civilian sector. So, we took care of air crew training, flying hours, flight planning and have really

just been honored to have the opportunity to serve. Not just across the nation, but really around the world. My family and I started this journey in Oklahoma and from there we went to Belgium for four years, came back to the – came here to the Air Force Academy from 2005 to 2009. And then from here we went to New Mexico, over to Korea and then California, Arizona, The Pentagon, overseas again to Germany.

**Scott:** Wow.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** To Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. And then got the blessed opportunity to come back here to Colorado Springs. So, it's been an amazing journey.

**Scott:** Awesome. And I know, I know this reference is for the Navy, but no stops at Top Gun along the way?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** No stops. No stops at Top Gun. That's a no, sir.

**Scott:** All right, Laurie, how about you?

**Laurie:** How did I come to be here? It's interesting. I actually came from the FAA. Excuse me, FAA Academy in Oklahoma City, where I managed the production from a visual standpoint for the computer-based training for air traffic controller training there. So, I started here because I was brought in to be an animator in the brand studio which is our creative department across the Terrazzo and that is part of Public Affairs. When Public Affairs reorganized in 2015, they did some shifting and changing out with contracts and things. So, I was brought in to be the Public Affairs Officer for the air base wing here. And then that morphed into getting into community outreach. And we just now did another change. And then I stepped into the Local Outreach Director role. So, that's how I got there.

**Scott:** Very good. All right, Crystal, how about you?

**Crystal:** Yes. So, I've actually been part of the Colorado Springs community since first grade.

**Scott:** Oh wow.

**Crystal:** Grown up in the area, attended Mitchell High School as well as University of Colorado here in Colorado Springs. And then while I was at UCCS, I took a class that was called the Sociology of Urban Development. And at that time, we were working on a project in our community that many probably know as the North Nevada renovation. And so that was pre – that predates University Village and all of that great redevelopment area that happened. But I acted as a class representative and had a lot of interest, natural interest in community development, planning, how it impacts communities, the important aspects to look at. So, I graduated actually with a degree in Sociology, which probably seems far from kind of what I'm doing now, but I promise I make my way there. And when I graduated from UCCS, thought, well, I want to go back and go to graduate school. I always had a dream of maybe teaching at a university someday, and so I started substitute teaching, thinking that's a flexible way to earn income and go

to graduate school. But I substitute taught for just two weeks and was immediately offered kind of a long-term position. So, I did an alternative teaching license and I taught middle school here in D11 for three years. It was an incredible experience – have a lot of admiration and respect for our local educators. But also, when you're in education, you really see that there are things that impact families outside really the purview of our local public school system. And so, always had a lot of interest again in that community development piece. And so, there was a very entry level opportunity at El Paso County within economic development. And so, was fortunate enough to be offered that opportunity almost 13 years ago. And so, have worked for El Paso County for nearly thirteen years. All of that time within economic development and really learned all aspects of economic development from business incentives to housing community development and really learned along the way and offered some great opportunities and mentorship. And so, just four years ago was offered the opportunity to act as our Executive Director.

**Scott:** Excellent. Well, that all sounds very impressive, a lot more impressive than my resume. So, I'm not going to go over that here. So Crystal, I was wondering if you'd be able to give us an overview of the El Paso County Economic Development Department and talk about its purpose and mission specifically.

**Crystal:** Yeah, great question. Thanks so much, Scott. You know we say in El Paso County, we really take a holistic approach to economic development, and what we mean by that is that we focus on three main areas or three main disciplines: business incentives, affordable housing, as well as community development. A lot of times you'll see those disciplines kind of separated out, but I think it's great that we take a holistic approach to this at the county because really any public policy that you're making in one of those areas is impacting another. For instance, I would say, you know, pre five years ago when we were talking to large business prospects that we were trying to kind of recruit to our area, a lot of the conversation centered around business incentives and tax incentives and those types of things. But what you really hear and see now is this idea that what does the quality of life look like in your area? Because the number one thing we're hearing from businesses is what it will be, their ability to attract, recruit, retain workforce, right? And so, businesses also understand the importance of their team members, their employees' quality of life. And so, they're really looking at it from a holistic approach too. So, when we're able to talk about things that we're doing that positively impact our housing market or offer, you know, great opportunities as far as community development or schools go, that's very, you know, attractive to all. And so, businesses too are very committed to, you know, producing quality communities.

**Scott:** Yeah, very good. That sounds great. Thank you for that summary. Chief Kwiatkowski, would you be able to give a similar overview for the United States Air Force Academy and also discuss their mission?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Absolutely. We are blessed by so many things here in Colorado. The first thing that comes to mind is geography and climate. Colorado Springs is a great place to call home, but we're also blessed with the mission of building the future of our Air Force and our Space Force. And it really comes down to the people that we get to serve with, both inside the installation and across our local community. And that's what really makes this place so special. The fundamental purpose of the Air Force Academy is to develop leaders of character. And there's a lot to unpack in that statement. The foundation of character is really in our core values: integrity, service before self, excellence in all we do. And those are just words unless you put action behind them. So here at the Air Force Academy, we have the character development model, our leader of character development model, and that really is what we put behind our core values to add action to it. And I'll give you some examples.

**Scott:** Yeah, great.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** In that when we talk about integrity first, it's really, we achieve that by living honorably in every aspect of our lives. And that's what we try to influence, how we try to influence our cadets to become leaders of character or permanent party to follow that same model. When we talk about service before self, we believe we achieve those ends by constantly lifting others. So, we have a universal understanding that we don't serve for our own interest, we serve for the greater good of the organization, a very selfless interest in how we develop our teams and develop the people around us. And it's just getting fulfillment out of that, out of our journey, that you know all boats rise with the tide as we invest in all those around us to be their best self. Finally, when we think about excellence in all we do, that happens when we unite in our purpose and our cause and our beliefs to elevate performance. So that really is saying it's a habit forming in our mind that every day we want to be better than we were yesterday, and again, helping our teammates that to think in that same – that same aspect of, you know, I don't want to compete necessarily against the person next to me. I want to compete against my own best self every single day. And so, it is just absolutely woven into the fabric here at the Air Force Academy. Our cadets that we graduate to become lieutenants and officers in the Air Force. We understand that this is, we're not just trying to get them to graduation, we're trying to get them to think through the challenges we're going to face in the next 10 or 20 years. And prepare for that environment. So, it's a pretty special mission. And if we get the action arm of our core values right, we believe we can shape the outcomes of this Air Force Academy. It's really the superintendent's three main priorities. That first priority is developing leaders of character. And the second priority is focusing on the future fight. What is going to – what is going to happen? And be ready for 10 or 20 years from now. And really creating a culture and a climate that's fused with human dignity and respect.

**Scott:** And you mentioned serving the greater good of the organization and not just looking at oneself but at the at the broader picture. How does the Air Force Academy see that in conjunction with the community of Colorado Springs in El Paso County?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Absolutely. It just, you said it in your welcoming comments, Ms. Crystal LaTier did, and talked about the same challenges that we have with the workforce. In the civilian sector are the same challenges we face inside of our Air Force where we want to, we want to recruit the best people that we can possibly get, but we all want to retain that talent as well. And we do that really by taking care of our airmen, taking care of our families. And there's kind of a mantra that we've had for years that we recruit airmen, but we retain families, and we really invest all that we can into creating the best quality of life and quality of service. So, yes sir, that's where all of that kind of comes to its pinnacle.

**Scott:** And one of those community connections that you talk about in not just interacting with yourselves, the Air Force Academy, but out into the community, is something called the Honorary Commander Program. Laurie, I was wondering if you'd be able to talk to us about that and describe its purpose.

**Laurie:** Sure, I'd be happy to. The Honorary Commander Program is not unique to USAFA. It's actually an initiative that was implemented Air Force-wide at all of the installations around the world. We started our program here in 2018 and the intent of the program is two-fold. It's to educate key community leaders about the unit's mission or the installation's mission and to foster a supportive and collaborative relationship with the community that surrounds the gates of that installation. Now we're a unique bird here in what we do. And so, we specifically have a program targeted to build bridges into the community in different ways that have not yet been established. And so we began that in 2018. Each term is two years. So, we're on our third cohort of Honorary Commanders. They serve a two-year term. And we started with 14 in 2018, grew it to 22 in 2020, and in this latest, of which Ms. Crystal is an Honorary Commander to Chief Kwiatkowski, we have 22 as well. And we brought in a shift in the commanders that we pair them with. So, the idea behind the program is that from our office we make sure that seven immersion tours of our mission elements – that's the Dean of faculty, the athletics department, the prep school, the cadet wing, and the CCLD – that they all get a behind-the-scenes view so that we can explain our mission and people get a hands on or eyes on a view of what that mission is. And what I love about those tours for the Honorary Commanders is that the “aha” moments just pop right and left and I can just stand there and watch them. For instance, all of the patents that the Air Force Academy has that our Dean, General Letendre, made sure was put on a wall so that people would know that our cadets are so responsible for that many patents. So, I digress a little bit, but that these immersion tours are what my office does, then the Honorary Commanders are paired or matched up. Some of our Commanders will have two or three. And they develop individual relationships and hopefully those result in collaborations that strengthen the ties out into the community. And as we grow the program into deeper echelons of influencers, we look for persons who are not that familiar with the Air Force. And that's kind of hard in Colorado Springs where you have so many retired military; however, we look at it as are you an influencer and are you willing to be an advocate for the Academy if we show you what we're about and we've

had a great amount of success. There's been – I'm on several boards downtown and do other things and I know amongst – this is kind of a big, small town sometimes, and I know that people are getting very excited about wanting to participate in the program. So, as it grows we hope to see that happen.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Yeah. At the heart of this program is really connection and understanding. And for example, shortly after Miss Crystal and I were introduced, I had got the opportunity to attend the El Paso County Status of the Region update. And I got in-depth education on the challenges and the successes that were shared across the community. And I was then able to come back to the Air Force Academy and act as a liaison to our senior leaders and just sharing the insights, you know, between our installation and the local community that our senior leaders may not have been tracking at the time. So, as we try to do the same thing for our community partners by bringing them into the experiences we have inside the Air Force Academy, we're still trying to solidify the date, but Crystal may find herself skydiving with our cadets before her Honorary Command Chief experience is over.

**Laurie:** I'll make sure that happens.

**Scott:** Yeah. Well, no, that's incredible. And Crystal, I wanted to get your input on this, obviously, as someone who's participating in the program as well. What benefits have you seen from your side of it and why do you think that partnership specifically is important between the community and the Air Force Academy?

**Crystal:** Yeah. Thank you so much for that question. I just am extremely grateful for the opportunity. It's been an incredible experience. I'm kind of early into my term. I was sworn in last October and we completed our first immersion tour. That immersion tour was really looking at the academics here at the Air Force Academy and boy was I impressed, right? I think after we had that tour, I sent an e-mail just kind of thanking for the opportunity, but I gave it, I think the highest stamp of endorsement you can give anything. And by that I said, it made me think, what if my son, who's currently a first grader, you know, had the opportunity to attend the Academy? I was just so impressed by their dedication to their mission. In addition to that, just seeing the opportunities that you have as an Air Force Academy student academically here and what that could look like and how they really look at things from, I believe, what they call an interdisciplinary lens. So, I was very impressed by that. For instance, we were touring some of the biology facility and some of those classes and talking about that, and they were talking about all of the great research opportunities that undergraduate students have here at the Air Force Academy. Immense opportunities that a lot of times you don't get access to those until you're kind of higher-level graduate work. But they really have immense research opportunities and there was a conversation about the topic of, kind of, biology and life and dying and how they looked at it from not only a biological standpoint but then also brought in kind of a philosophical standpoint and had conversations around, you know, death and those types of kind of heavy topics as well as really talking about the ethics and research and medical research and just because we can do something,

should we? And so, I was very impressed by the access to research opportunities and conversations as well, and that's just one example. I mean if we talk about their engineering programs and the foreign language lab that you all have, it was just very, very impressive. So, from an academic standpoint, obviously very impressed as a mother, very impressed. The opportunity has also allowed some professional and personal development for me as Laurie and Chief Kwiatkowski mentioned. Another component is that you are able to develop a relationship with your Command Chief that you're assigned to. So Chief Kwiatkowski and I have had the opportunity to have great conversations about servant leadership, books to share, topics to share, podcasts to discuss. And again, the opportunity that Chief Kwiatkowski mentioned where he was able to come to the State of the Region and learn about other things happening in local government and how we can make connections and solve problems together?

**Scott:** Wonderful. Well, thank you everyone for sharing. I appreciate that. And one of the incredible parts about hosting this podcast is being able to learn about all of the partnerships that exist within the El Paso County community. Before this job, I was not involved in government at all. I worked in the private sector my whole life and hadn't really concerned myself a whole lot with government outside of, you know, kind of the high, the high level, easy-to-pick fruit from the tree, right. And so, now getting involved in government and understanding all the connections that are there, it's really kind of overwhelming sometimes to see it in action and to try and understand, you know, how just someone who goes about their normal life, you know, living here in say Colorado Springs, just that how many points they're affected by the work that's done, not just by El Paso County or the city of Colorado Springs, but also all of those community partners. And with that being said, I was wondering if – and we can kind of go around the room here and each one takes it as we will – if we could talk about how the County partners with USAFA. And then Crystal, maybe some other organizations and talk about those benefits that come from those partnerships. Maybe Chief Kwiatkowski, we will start with you.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** For sure. In a major effort here at the Air Force Academy aligns with Air Power. And so, I want to share this, you know the Air Force Academy as a participant along with the El Paso County for the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governance, which is a voluntary organization of 16 counties and municipalities working together to find common solutions for various issues, and USAFA actually sits on the on the Board of Directors for that. Now two of the committees for USAFA focus on water quality management, military planning, where the ongoing joint land use study is housed. And these committees help us work collaboratively with other stakeholders to create best outcomes for issues including water management, environmental impacts to our land from surrounding development, wildfire mitigation and our shared airspace between Denver and Colorado Springs airports. Now when you operate the second-busiest airfield in the entire Air Force like we do here at the Air Force Academy, those relationships and partnerships are vital. Additionally, El Paso County approved bonds that help make the Falcon Stadium and the new Academy Visitor Center at the North

Gate possible. So that is just really an enormous part of the City for Champions initiative. And we're really ecstatic to have Commissioner Longinos Gonzalez, who's also a 1992 grad from the Air Force Academy, part of that process.

**Laurie:** Yes, that's definitely part of it. We're also part of the Office of Emergency Management and we work collaboratively with the Office of Emergency Management to prepare for crises that may occur and disasters. A historic example for – I know that a lot of people have moved new into town and weren't here for the Waldo Canyon Fire or the Black Forest Fire, but that was an amazing effort with through the OEM of working with the County and resources and our fire department to protect not just the homes in Peregrine, but the land here at the Air Force Academy. It was – they built a, I don't know what you call it, like a fire break. That just was amazing. And then when the Black Forest Fire happened a year later, almost to the day, our fire department went out into Black Forest and helped hot shot. What is it? Hotshotting, hot shooting.

**Scott:** You probably know more about that than I do, honestly.

**Laurie:** And did a lot and did those kinds of things. That's just one example of a crisis. There's any number that they prepare for. We do active shooter preparations in collaboration with the County and exercises on a regular basis. So, it's really a joint effort to make sure that we are protecting both our installation and our community, because honestly, we live in the community too. So, we're all in it together. Another one of our partnerships that we have, it's a wonderful collaborative relationship, is the way we work with the El Paso County Sheriff's Office and department in that our first responders, our fire department, and our police department, they act as the first responders to accidents and incidents that might occur along the portion of I-25 that runs through our property borders. And what that does is help, it helps with the response time for the county and resources and availability, but it also helps get to critical crisis situations a lot sooner. So that's not just wrecks, but there was a brush fire not too long ago. We were able to get that out as well. So that's a really nice collaborative relationship that we have. And then lastly, and near and dear to my heart and many parents in the area, is our relationship with District 20 schools. Most people know that Air Academy High School does sit on our installation down there in the Doug Valley portion of our 18,000 acres, but we also host at the Clune Arena, which is the Cadet Field House, all of the District 20 high school graduation ceremonies.

**Scott:** Oh wow, very cool.

**Laurie:** That's a very neat thing that we do. We do really value the collaborative relationships that we have with the county. We're always looking for ways to collaborate and partner on things. So those are some of the, some of the relationships that we have.

**Scott:** Very good. Thank you for that. Appreciate it.



**Crystal:** And yes, I would say all of those examples are ones that some of which I've personally been able to witness to. And so, the Honorary Commander program we talked about, I think there's a lot of efforts underway regarding those joint planning and land use efforts that Chief Kwiatkowski mentioned. In regard to those two partnerships that maybe have some economic development components, Chief Kwiatkowski mentioned that El Paso County, at the recommendation of our economic development office, the Board of County Commissioners issued about \$55 million in private activity bonds to help with the football expansion, the football stadium expansion. And so that will really bring 1,000 new seats and visitors. I'm thinking tourism sales tax dollars. It's also important to point out when the county issues this financing mechanism known as private activity bonds there is no financial obligation to the County nor our taxpayers to pay that back. So, it is a mechanism in place that allows us to offer, think of it as like low-interest, tax-exempt financing for certain organizations to use to do community good, public good that will bring benefit to the community and that most definitely will. And as previously mentioned again, the county has participated in that City for Champions movement across our community and are very excited to see the new USAFA Visitor Center come to fruition.

**Scott:** Very good. And then –

**Laurie:** We are too.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Scott:** Very good. And so, I was wondering too, maybe you could give a little bit more background about those private activity bonds. I think when you mention that it's no cost to the taxpayer that, you know, makes people sit up in their seat a little bit more, right? It makes them think, "oh hey I like it. I like the sound of that," right? And I guess, how do those, how do those come about? How does that mechanism work? I mean, obviously, \$55 million just doesn't come out of thin air, because if it did, I'd want to learn how. But you know, when I am someone who, again am not super familiar with government still, I've only been working with the county for less than a year. I think it's important to help people understand how those types of things work, and I feel like you are one of the better people to ask for this thing specifically. So, can you talk a little bit about how those bonds exist even and then how those organizations are identified to receive those types of bonds?

**Crystal:** Yeah, great question. So private activity bonds, they're a pretty complex financing mechanism, but the County actually is able to issue those in two ways, in two formats. First, is the way that we already have spoken about. And that is in regard to a non-profit entity coming in and accessing that financing. The other way, which is probably even more crucially important to our community, is we can issue bonds for development of multifamily purposes to help with affordable housing. So, issue those bonds and that helps with financing affordable housing developments, creating more housing choices and options throughout our community. So really one of those

programs is capped each year. So, for the housing program that we use, that is a federal program. And so based on population and things, we'll get a set allocation. And so, they'll say, you know, you have this amount of money to issue and bonds to help with housing purposes in your region. The non-profit piece where we're able to issue those bonds, really the County has the ability to act as a conduit finance or pass that financing on to nonprofits. But we're not capped at a certain limit per se, however, it does, you know, impact how the county operates. So, we always do that in conjunction with our finance office just to make sure that it won't impact bank quality or bond ratings in a certain way. So, there's some flexibility in one aspect of the program, but a little less in another. But it's a great way that a local government can offer a financing mechanism without creating additional tax liability, financial burden onto their local residents and really then what we get out of that are incredible community projects that bring in more visitors, bring in additional sales tax and things that really help us build better and bigger infrastructure for our community. It's a win-win situation.

**Scott:** And that second type you talked about for those nonprofits, is that, are those federal dollars as well that are coming in?

**Crystal:** That's correct.

**Scott:** Okay, very good. So changing gears here a little bit, I wanted to talk a little bit more about the economic benefits that we receive as a community for having military in the region. Of course, we have the Air Force here. We also have the Space Force and the Army. So, Crystal, let's start with you on this. What sort of benefits do we see from having military here in the region?

**Crystal:** Yeah, great, great question. As you all know, we have kind of a long history of having a military-rich presence within our community. And so that's also provided some incredible economic outputs and benefits. It's allowed us to grow some other sectors that we're kind of nationally known for as far as defense contractors, cybersecurity, having the National Cybersecurity Center. There's a lot of, kind of, Nexus and things that happens when we can build out that ecosystem. But additionally, what I think is probably even more important is that I believe that we truly have a community that understands, values, and supports our armed forces and the important work that they do for our great nation. And so really creating that ecosystem and that synergy and I'm assuming that's very apparent too to our military installations and it's very important to have that community support. That kind of values alongside your mission as well. Another great benefit that we hear is, you know, what I've heard, when you're stationed in Colorado, you don't want to leave or you want to quickly come back, right?

**Scott:** Chief Kwiatkowski, can you confirm?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Guilty as charged. Absolutely.

**Crystal:** And so, another great benefit of a lot of times when folks are transitioning or exiting from the military, separating, retiring, we can retain them. Great skill set. Great

workforce talent that we can retain in our region, and they want to be here, right, because of that quality of life that we've spoken about earlier. So having their incredible skill set and added to our labor market is really important. Another aspect of that that we maybe don't talk about as much, but is also equally important, are the spouses of our military professionals, right? They also provide extreme benefits to – great benefits to our community and our workforce, and likely come with some kind of built-in characteristics of being a military spouse, like resiliency and the ability to adapt and being committed, all things that would make you a great team member for a local business, government, nonprofit. And so, there's great benefits that come not only from the installations but the people that occupy them.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** We understand, like when I get orders to go somewhere else, I know exactly where my office is. I know the name and the title that's going to be on the door. And our spouses don't get that. Our spouses have to control, alt, delete, reset their life every time they move from one installation to another. So, the licensure reciprocity, I don't know what it's called, but yeah, that is a huge benefit to our families.

**Scott:** Yeah, very good, very good. I'm glad that you brought that up. And then so Chief Kwiatkowski, for you, what does it mean to have the Army also here in Colorado Springs and the Space Force also here in Colorado Springs? How does that help with the work that you're doing here with the Air Force?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** It helps tremendously, absolutely tremendously. And if we can rewind the clock back to our former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Goldfein, when he got into office, he really had three priorities that he wanted to get after and he called it his three big rocks. And the first big rock was squadron revitalization, like how do we bring quality of life and quality of service back into the organizations, really the mission arm of our Air Force. The second priority, or the second big rock, that he had was strengthening joint leaders and teams. And the third one was joint all domain command and control. So, in this education environment, we get to cull from an amazing pool of partners in the joint community. We can bring them to the Academy. We can have war fighter discussions with folks who see their mission through a different lens. And the more time that we get to spend in that environment, the more comfortable we are having a conversation about how do we think about air-mindedness or how do we think about, you know, subsurface operations with the Navy, or how do we think about ground operations with the Air Force, and how do we bridge all of that into cyber and space warfare. And this, again, geography we're blessed with, because we can pull from an entire community of joint partners to help educate and prepare ourselves for the challenges we're going to face throughout the next, you know, throughout the future.

**Scott:** Great.

**Laurie:** And if I can caveat on to that. From our mission and our mission perspective, we're the Academy for the Space Force and the Air Force, so we can fulfill our mission

and it's easier to train cadets when they're just going down to the Space Command, right, and back here. So that's just an additional caveat to what Chief had just said.

**Scott:** All right. Great. Thank you for that. So, before we close things out here, I wanna give everyone an opportunity to maybe add something that we haven't talked about yet that you think is important or reiterate something that we've already discussed that you think is a really important point to drive home. So Crystal, let's start with you on that. Anything else that you'd like to add before we close here?

**Crystal:** I think I would. My closing remarks would really just focus on this idea that I think both agencies and organizations truly value and that is public service, right? Serving the public, the idea of servant leadership and core values that we really share. And so just wanted to remind our great community of the core values that El Paso County has, and I'm sure likely part of USAFA's mission as well, and that is to be service-focused, right? We make a difference in our community by serving the residents of El Paso County. That we are accountable. We are responsive to community needs. We are good stewards of county resources. We are transparent, right? We are open, honest, and respectful in our work and communication. We take everything with a collaborative approach. We foster a county government that works for all. We inspire employees to passionately give their best while leveraging community partnerships for the meaningful benefit of our residents. We are trustworthy. We listen to our community and act with honesty and respect in our interactions with coworkers and those that we serve. We adhere to laws, policies, procedures, and professional standards. So really, I think both of these organizations are great examples of, two of many, in our community and our nation that are dedicated to public service.

**Scott:** Great. Thank you. And Laurie, how about you?

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Powerful. That was awesome.

**Scott:** Yeah, very nice. Laurie, how about you?

**Laurie:** Well, I would just like to add that from my perspective as a community engagement chief, I'm just, I greatly value the relationships that we have with the community and with influencers and rising leaders in our community and with El Paso County as a partner in several of the organizations that we're in. And I look forward to continuing to collaborate, grow the program. If there's somebody that hears this that's interested in possibly becoming an Honorary Commander reach out to me at the Academy. We can talk. I can always write a name down, but we are, we're very grateful for the services of El Paso County for both as a military installation, as I just alluded to, but also just as individual residents of this county who live outside the gates. Many of us, yeah, we're just grateful. Grateful's my word.

**Scott:** Very good.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Absolutely. That is a great word. And I just want to kind of weave into both of those perspectives by saying I think it's important to understand that we're

only limited by our imagination when it comes to these types of partnerships between an installation and the local community. When you look across Colorado Springs or when you look across this Academy, everything here, everything you see started with an idea. And it's just that universal truth. And as we continue to evolve this, these relationships and these partnerships that's really young in the fact that the Academy has only been here for a short period of time. There's just opportunities out there that we have yet to explore to strengthen the unity of across our City for Champions. Like you said that we are so grateful for the partnership with El Paso County. You guys do amazing things to just make this home for all of us. And we don't just feel like we're in a community. Like we really, truly, honestly feel like we're part of the community. And I just want to thank you for your time, Mr. Anderson. And it was a great experience with Ms. Crystal LaTier and Ms. Laurie Wilson. Thank you so much for all you do.

**Scott:** Well, I appreciate that. Thank you very much. And thank you everyone for being here today. I know it's hard to get three people in a room to talk about anything. So, thank you for sacrificing your time today for this. And I really appreciate all the work that everyone does here for El Paso County. So, thank you.

**Chief Kwiatkowski:** Absolutely.

**Laurie:** Thank you.

**Crystal:** Thank you.

**Scott:** And if you're interested in listening to additional episodes of Beyond the Dais, be sure to look for us on Spotify, Podbean, or wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.