Meghan: Welcome to the Northeastern Next Podcast, you channel for the latest alumni stories in Boston and beyond. In this show, we'll catch up with Northeastern alumni who are out there achieving what's next.

Meghan: Seema Brodie is a Northeastern Law School graduate turned entrepreneur, who is now revolutionizing city tours, party buses and group exercise. So, what do these things have in common? With her husband Eric, she founded the award-winning BikeBus, a spin class on a moving city bus outfitted with patented safety harnesses. Trust me, it's just as fun as it sounds.

Meghan: Welcome Seema to the Northeastern Next Podcast. We're happy to have you today.

Seema: Thanks Meghan, I'm happy to be here.

Meghan: So I'd really like to start off with...where did you come up with the idea of the BikeBus?

Seema: Well, in August of 2014 an idea was thrown out at the family dinner table, about creating a mobile fitness studio that allows you to safely work out while traveling on the open road, while commuting to and from work. And there it was, our mind-blowing aha moment. You might think that the summer heat had gone to our heads, or that we had just been practicing law for way too long, and we were going crazy. But that's where it originally started. The reason that idea was thrown out at the dinner table is because my husband, and business partner, was working with a lot of experience in the transportation industry. And I also had years of experience teaching mindfulness in the health industry.

Seema: So our family members were just trying to help us out, to see where we would be going next with a business venture idea. And that's what they came up with, and we decided to follow through. And in case anyone's wondering, we are still married. Eric Brodie and I are still husband and wife. After several years of
working on this business, it can be very challenging when I tell Eric what to do most of the time, and he will agree.

Meghan: Eric, your husband, has a link to transportation, the legal operational side of things, and you were in fitness instruction, mindfulness. So you received your JD from Northeastern in 2001. What made you do this career switch? I know you had a little background that helped you see the way through, but how did you know how to build a startup?

Seema: From 2001 to 2006 I was a prosecutor in the Appellate Division of the Suffolk County DA's Office, right after graduating from Northeastern School of Law. I handled murder, rape and drug cases, and had to argue before three to five judges regularly. I initially started with shaking at the podium, but I got really comfortable and grew more confident speaking in front of people and larger audiences of very educated people.

Seema: What I was speaking about, however, was very sad at times, of course. So I found myself not feeling very happy when I got home after work. So I decided to regroup, raise two incredible children for a little while, stayed at home, taught at their preschool and then started teaching mindfulness, which really was a wake-up call for me. I finally knew that whatever I did from now on was going to be encompassing mindfulness every day, because I was making people happy.

Seema: So once I decided to build the BikeBus with Eric, my law degree came in very handy. I presented this concept before the Department of Transportation with him, he's also a lawyer, so we both work together filing corporate documents with the Secretary of State. We researched the knowledge that was required behind following the pertinent rules and regulations, and filing the patent for the safety restraint system, which was huge. And we ultimately saved over $100,000 in legal fees doing this all ourselves.

Meghan: Wow.

Seema: And I do believe, even now, when I look back, that not many people could do what we did without that law degree coming in handy. Because we were able to act really, really fast, and the Department of Transportation took us very, very seriously, because we wanted to make something very safe. I mean working out while traveling is no easy feat, and we really, really needed to put our heads together to make it the safest possible workout and get the necessary approvals.

Meghan: So I was lucky enough to take a ride on the BikeBus a couple of years ago. And I love cycle classes, but this was very unique. So could you describe the class itself and what it's like to be on this bus?
Seema: Sure. It's a city tour, plus a party bus, plus a fun workout. All in one. There are three things that the BikeBus accomplishes for the rider. We allow people to stay healthy and complete an engaging group cycling workout with uplifting party music. No depressing stuff, okay? It's all happy, all of the time. While taking in the present moment with the mindfulness instruction. And you're getting outdoors in a changing and natural environment, so rather than being in a boring and mundane gym, you're actually traveling as you work out with your group.

Seema: And team building is really, really incredible, where we high five and there are towels swinging around, and people are just having a lot of fun, smiling as they work out. It's for small groups of fun and active people, and they're taking in fun facts about the city rather than sitting for long periods of time in an overcrowded tour, taking in fact after fact that they may not be able to remember. We only discuss fun facts of Boston, we keep it very short and concise and really, really interesting.

Seema: And then they get an adrenaline rush, because we're cycling on the highway, and we're cycling up the Zakim Bridge in a climb position on a stationary bike. So everyone's feeling pumped and positive by the end, and lots of jokes, lots of smiling as you work out. I mean, we never thought that this workout could be so much fun, but I definitely wanted that to be a key part of this experience.

Meghan: Yes. I mean it is a blast, I can attest to that.

Seema: Thank you.

Meghan: How has the Northeastern network itself shaped your business? I know you've kind of done a few events with us, and I actually took a graduate business class with a faculty member that you've worked with. So tell me a little bit more about that.

Seema: Yes. The Northeastern network has helped me tremendously. Without the IDEA Lab and all of my mentors there, including Bob Lentz, I would not have learned how to create a value proposition even, a profit and loss statement, a pitch deck, and actually pitching BikeBus to a large audience, they allowed me to have that opportunity as well. I’m currently applying for funding with IDEA, that funding will provide money for propelling our business forward through a gap fund that they help businesses with.

Seema: And I'm also a member of the Venture Mentor Network, which provides mentors to help you grow your business. So Chad O'Connor has been instrumental, and that's the professor you're referring to. He's been instrumental in continuing to connect me with people who may propel my business forward, motivate me, and offer advice at a moment's notice. Katie Dempsey is instrumental to the
operations at Venture Mentor Network, and a lot of people through IDEA as well, who I would spend about an hour mentioning right now, if I were to go down a list of everyone at IDEA Lab as well.

Meghan: Great. And like I mentioned, we hosted a few alumni events a couple of years ago. I know you came for homecoming, you've been involved with the Women Who Empower and various events, but ... I remember when we first talked a couple of years ago, your original vision was a commuting bus, and I know that's changed. So tell me about that, how you've had success with these city tours and special events, and what are some other groups that have enjoyed the BikeBus so far?

Seema: Birthdays, bachelorette parties... company team-building outings. We have really expanded, not only in the corporate wellness market, which we thought we were going to do first with the commuter rides as well. Where companies would hire us out to provide commuter rides going in all different directions within Boston. We need more buses for that, so a fleet of buses would definitely help us with that. And that is truly maximizing your time. Work out while you commute to and from work was definitely why we started this. And we hope to go there some day.

Seema: Boston's traffic patterns and commuting patterns are a little different than maybe a city in New York or California. We are looking at those states and cities within those states as better models for the commuter rides in the future. We did analysis of ZIP codes within companies as well, to see where people were commuting, and we don't have the amount of people yet that commute to one particular suburb, to justify getting a fleet of buses yet.

Seema: So we branched into the sightseeing transportation market with city tours, that was after Marriott had hired us out for several rides and said, "Hey, can you put in some fun facts about the city while you're working out?" And we said, "Sure." And then we actually became a Best City Tour of Boston, rated by the Boston A-List.

Meghan: Wow!

Seema: So that was an incredible achievement, so of course we're going to pursue city tours after that. So a lot of our users are tourists from out of town, but also a lot of locals who bring their friends and family who are visiting from out of town to ride with us. We're still growing that aspect in terms of advertising and getting the word out, but our company wellness rides are still continuing. There are lunchtime workouts, there are after work team building outings where we take people to a bar afterwards. They love that.
Seema: So that's been a lot of fun, and they book multiple rides back to back. And they fill the bus, so we're very, very happy with being able to take people away from sitting at their desks and sitting on a bus, and just getting people moving. And that was also the premise behind BikeBus, was to get people away from their sedentary lives of sitting so much, because sitting is the new smoking and it leads to chronic illness, and we wanted to do something about this, what turned out, after all our research, was a public health problem.

Meghan: Right. And that seems like the name of the game of innovation, where you think you're starting with one thing, but you're able to pivot and you see this other adjacent industry that is going to be really great for what the BikeBus is now. And there's always room to grow in the future and continue to advance that, and I think that's why it's been so successful.

Seema: Yeah, exactly. We just have so many avenues where people are sitting. And they want to get moving and healthy and active, and when we're on the BikeBus we have speakers on the outside of the bus, as well as inside. But outside, we actually engage with people where pedestrians are smiling.

Meghan: I remember that from the bus, I think they were jealous, like "What's going on on that bus?"

Seema: Yeah. And Boston police officers, we've seen them dancing and motivating us. UPS workers, construction workers, and just everyday folks, who are just like, "What is that?" And then they get it, but we still have a lot to do with the redesigning of the bus, to make people understand it immediately. But the speakers currently are helping with that.

Meghan: One of the funniest questions I received after my ride was, "So, do you actually power the bus with the cycling?" Well, I don't know if they could picture what this BikeBus actually was, but do you see that as a possibility of sustainable energy? Down the road?

Seema: Yes, absolutely. Eric actually practiced law as an environmental lawyer for a little bit.

Meghan: Ah.

Seema: So we are definitely a green, forward thinking company. We just need the money.

Seema: So if there are any investors out there... Calling all investors. We're currently working on creating a dynamo that will attach to the bikes in order to harness the energy of the riders and power up cellphones directly at every stationary bike. So we are thinking about it aggressively and trying to do something about
that. We are a bus that fits nine people, so in order to go on the highway and climb the bridges of Boston, it won't power the entire bus, because we're not a city pedal-powered trolley.

Meghan: That would be a lot of pressure for that workout class.

Seema: Yeah.

Meghan: No breaks allowed.

Seema: Yeah, right. So but we definitely want to harness the energy of the riders.

Meghan: So looking back at this phenomenal growth of BikeBus, from concept to now, do you have a proudest moment?

Seema: Yes. My proudest moment is being able to take a group of blind riders on a tour. That was the most rewarding, because they're not able to bike outside with all the safety hazards in play, obviously. And just providing music, uplifting music, and really detailing everything we're passing by. The landmarks, describing the colors, the lights, to these blind riders was the most rewarding experience to me as an entrepreneur, but also a fitness instructor, a motivator. And just making these people truly, truly happy and empowered, that they could do this. They could cycle on the streets of Boston now and take in a city tour at the same time.

Meghan: Wow, that's very special. Gave me chills a little bit!

Seema: Thank you. Oh, that's great!

Meghan: And so this is the Northeastern Next Podcast, so we like to ask what's next for you?

Seema: We'd like to keep growing BikeBus in Boston, obviously, and eventually to other cities. This concept can be applicable to any city in the United States, and the world. So we have gotten calls from people in Europe, people in China, India, and locally as well in New York City, California, San Francisco. You can't cross the bay bridge with your regular bike. So that's another option, is just to put trainers on the BikeBus and have people put their actual bikes in the trainer, and have a spin class that way. So we're looking at many options to expand.

Meghan: I look forward to seeing it all over the world!

Seema: Thank you.
Meghan: And to finish up, I know you’ve had really great press coverage. Boston Globe, Huffington Post, Chronicle, People, I’m probably forgetting some. Won various awards. Where could people find more and connect with the BikeBus? Plug away, anywhere people can learn more.

Seema: Sure. Well, the first place is bikebus.com. I wish I had a little singing jingle to go along with that, but not yet.

Meghan: Also to come.

Seema: Yes, also to come. You can book tickets, individual tickets for our Boston city tours, and also group reservations, if you have a group of eight people or more. If you want multiple sessions, we can book your reservation, we can customize it for you, where we pick you up from wherever you are within the Boston area, 25 mile radius within. And we’re all over social media. We are @BikeBusBoston, our handle. We have a TripAdvisor page, @BikeBusBoston is on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. LinkedIn is Seema Brodie, and there’s also a BikeBus page. And Google Plus, you got to take advantage of Google Plus–

Meghan: Of course.

Seema: ... even though nobody does. But Google Plus, if we post on there, Google will spread the message about BikeBus as well. BikeBus is written as one word, B-I-K-E-B-U-S. If you type it in as two separate words, you might get a lot of different bike buses out there, but we are bikebus.com, so we got the name. Yes.

Meghan: That’s perfect. Well, great. I think that’s all I have for questions for you today. I really appreciate your time, and I’m sure a lot of people are going to be looking up the BikeBus and booking rides in the future.

Seema: Looking forward to saying, "Go Huskies on board!"

Meghan: Exactly.

Seema: Yeah. That’s another thing. With company team building and university team building, we actually have speakers on the outside of the bus. So we can advertise you guys too.

Meghan: Perfect. Advertising space.

Seema: And we can say, "Northeastern's the best place to study. Come on board!"

Meghan: That’s amazing. Thanks so much Seema.
Seema: Thank you Meghan.

Meghan: That was episode 2 of Northeastern Next. For show notes and to learn more about Seema, visit alumni.northeastern.edu/next. If you like what you hear please subscribe, rate, review, and share. Episodes are released every other Tuesday. This is Meghan Brisson from the Office of Alumni Relations. We’ll see you next time.