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**DESTINATION MARKETING &
EVENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT**
JULY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2024



October 15, 2024

The first quarter of FYE25 showcased Knoxville and our dedication to our partners and destination in a variety of unique ways. July featured a **Familiarization Tour (FAM)** designed for outdoor writers in partnership with our friends in Northeast Tennessee, showing Knoxville as an incredible place for nature and adventure enthusiasts to visit. This was followed later in the month by celebrating **Event Service Professionals Association's (ESPA) National Celebrate Services Week**, a way for us to thank our partner venues and event services professionals we work hand in hand with to host successful meetings, sporting events, festivals, and more in Knoxville.

Those venues hosted a variety of meetings and events this quarter, from the **Mayors Innovation Project's Summer Meeting** with approximately 90 mayors from across the country in attendance, to the **2024 Visit Knoxville Collegiate** golf tournament held in partnership with the University of Tennessee Athletics. The excitement continues for years to come, as this quarter it was announced that Knoxville will host the **TEAMS Conference & Expo** (one of the world's largest gathering of sports-events organizers) in 2030.

As always, we credit the above and all additional successes detailed in this report, to the strong relationships we maintain with our tourism partners.

On behalf of Visit Knoxville, I proudly submit the July 1 – September 30, 2024, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kim".

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President, Visit Knoxville

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HIGHLIGHTS SUMMARY

The following summary details select highlights for July 1 – September 30, 2024, the first quarter of fiscal year 2024–2025. These highlights can be used as a quick reference when talking about the activity and progress of Visit Knoxville (VK).

- The Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA) hosted their inaugural Field Fest in Johnson City July 7–11, followed by an **OWAA Post-Event Mini FAM** (familiarization tour) in Knoxville, July 11–14. The OWAA Field Fest was held in partnership with several destinations throughout Northeast Tennessee, including representation from the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD). The event allowed networking with a variety of journalists in the outdoors space, a media marketplace to connect with them on an individual basis, and a selection of workshops on various topics. Attendees included editors with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, *Blue Ridge Country*, *Covey Rise*, *Postindustrial*, and several freelance writers.

Following the Field Fest, three attendees caravanned to Knoxville, including Chez Chesak, the Executive Director of OWAA; Suzanne Downing, the Communications Manager and *Outdoors Unlimited* Publications Editor of OWAA; and Liz Mays, a freelance writer for *Get Lost in the USA*. Their custom itinerary showcased a wide variety of outdoor experiences, from a guided tour at Seven Islands State Birding Park to picnicking at the Knoxville Botanical Garden and Arboretum to a tour of Baker Creek Preserve in Knoxville’s Urban Wilderness with the President of the Appalachian Mountain Bike Club (AMBC). A guided hike at Ijams Nature Center showcased Knoxville’s quarrying past, while a stop at Fort Dickerson connected nature to Civil War history. The attendees were able to catch sunflowers in bloom at Forks of the River Wildlife Management Area, and a sunset paddling excursion was arranged with Knoxville Adventure Collective to conclude their memorable visit in Knoxville.

- Suzanne has since published an article in **OWAA Outdoors Unlimited**
- Suzanne has since published an article on **Action Hub**

“Absolutely fantastic! Super organized, thoughtfully curated and thorough!”

– Liz Mays, FAM Attendee



- The VK Convention & Sports Services Team proudly participated in the **Event Service Professionals Association's (ESPA) National Celebrate Services Week**, held July 29–August 2, with the theme, "Services Champions – Going the Extra Mile!" To align with this theme and the start of the Olympics in Paris, the team created festive gifts presented in trophies filled with a delightful assortment of treats, including Proper Popcorn, authentic local macaroons from Coffee & Chocolate, custom-designed Whimsy Cookies, and Olympic-themed candy plus a variety of croissants from Wild Love Bakehouse.



Adding to the festive spirit, VK included Olympic and American flags alongside gift tags that detailed ESPA's Celebrate Services Week, its mission, membership opportunities, and a save-the-date for the 2025 Annual ESPA Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

To coincide with the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games, the Team chose Friday, July 26 to personally deliver these appreciation gifts to key venues, symbolizing our gratitude for their partnership in promoting Knoxville as a premier destination for conventions, meetings, and sporting events.

"Thank you so much for visiting us last week and including us in your celebration. We always enjoy working with you and your team and we appreciate all you do!"

– Kristi Sowards, Director of Sales, Marketing, and Events, Knoxville Convention Center





o The University of Tennessee (UT) campus was “Neyland loud” for the **Morgan Wallen Concerts** on September 20 and 22 as part of his “One Night at a Time” tour with Hardy and Ernest. Nearly 160,000 fans embraced the hometown superstar, and Wallen is only the fourth artist to headline Neyland. For months leading up to these shows, VK was heavily involved in ensuring a successful partnership. VK created a landing page on

visitknoxville.com with regularly updated know-before-you-go information, including ticket purchasing links, clear bag and safety information for the venue, shuttle and parking details, and more. VK promoted the event on social media from announcing the initial concert to surprising fans with a second show. VK partnered with Olympus Car & Coach for transportation to Neyland Stadium. The event was covered in publications like [Rolling Stone](http://RollingStone.com), sharing Wallen’s surprise guests including Eric Church, Miranda Lambert, and Darius Rucker – all telling the story of visitors coming to Knoxville through the platform of music.



- o In a [press release](#) in September (and live at this year’s TEAMS Conference in Anaheim, CA), the **TEAMS Conference & Expo Announced Knoxville as host for 2030**. A few excerpts from the release: TEAMS Conference & Expo Announces Hosts for 2030, 2031. The Northstar Meetings Group event will head to Knoxville and Des Moines — both first-time hosts.

Northstar Meetings Group has announced two future sites for the TEAMS Conference & Expo, the world’s largest gathering of sports-event organizers, taking the annual event to a pair of markets that reflect the vitality of the sports-related travel market. Along with previously announced host cities, the conference has now announced its host locations through 2031.



“Knoxville is a destination that TEAMS attendees will love exploring,” said Jason Gewirtz, vice president of the Sports Division of Northstar Meetings Group. “Its long-standing reputation as a leading destination for sports events positions it perfectly as a home for the TEAMS Conference. The leadership in Knoxville has exceeded the bar when it comes to producing some of the world’s largest and most significant sports events and attendees will be impressed with everything the region has to offer.”

SALES SUMMARY

Trade Shows – The VK Sales Team attended six trade shows:

- **Connect Marketplace (August 27–29)** – VK Sales Team and KCC staff attended the Connect Spring Marketplace in Milwaukee, WI. VK had 94 appointments with groups across the Corporate, Specialty, and Association tracts about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
- **Connect Sports Marketplace (August 27–29)** – VKSC attended Connect Spring Sports Marketplace in Milwaukee, WI. VKSC had 49 appointments with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
- **Professional Fraternity Association (September 5–7)** – VK Sales Team, KCC staff, and a hotel partner attended Professional Fraternity Associations in Jacksonville, FL. VK had 11 appointments with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
- **HPN Global Partner Conference (September 16–19)** – VK Sales Team attended the HPN Global Partner Conference in Houston, TX. VK had 22 appointments with third-party planners about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
- **Small Market Meeting Conference (September 25–27)** – VK Sales Team attended Small Market Meeting Conference in St. George, UT. VK had 21 appointments with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
- **TEAMS Conference and Expo (September 23–26)** – VK Sales Team attended the TEAMS Conference and Expo in Anaheim, CA. VK had 30 appointments with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years. VK also announced Knoxville as the host for TEAMS 2030.



VK tracks each sales activity and monitors results throughout the fiscal year. For FYE25, VK received 18 RFPs resulting from 1Q trade show attendance.

• **Site Visits** – The VK Sales Team hosted seven site visits:

- **Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Working Group** – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with four representatives from the group and toured the KCC, Marriott, THE TENNESSEAN, and Hilton.
- **Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division** – VK Sales conducted a half-day site visit with a representative from the group and toured the KCC.
- **Colson Center** – VK Sales Team hosted representatives from their group and toured the Marriott, Hilton, THE TENNESSEAN, and KCC. They are interested in Knoxville for future years.
- **Cryogenic Engineering Conference and International Cryogenic Materials Conference** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with their Senior Planner and Site Selection Chair. They toured the Marriott, Hilton, and KCC. They also did a walking tour of downtown.
- **American Contract Bridge** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with two representatives from the group. They are looking at Knoxville for events in 2026 and future years.
- **SE Chapter American Association of Physicists in Medicine** – VK Sales staff



conducted a one-day site visit with the Strategic Meeting Manager and local incoming President. They toured Crowne Plaza, KCC, Marriott, and the Hilton. They also did a driving tour of downtown.

- **US Trade and Development Agency** – VK Sales staff conducted a half-day site visit with their CEO and Vice President. They toured the KCC, Marriott, and Hilton. They are interested in Knoxville for their 2024 workshop.

CONVENTION & SPORTS SERVICES SUMMARY

The **Visit Knoxville Convention & Sports Services Team** provides services for conventions, trade shows, sporting events, and festivals utilizing a consultative approach based on the unique needs, specific goals, and attendee interests of each group. This enhances the overall planner and attendee experience with a focus on services designed to add value, maximize group efforts to grow attendance, and retain group business. Refer to the Business Held & Services Provided Report included at the end of the report for additional details for each convention and meeting.

The Convention & Sports Services Team supported 60 events/meetings, 14 festivals, and provided a total of 67 partner referrals. All 67 partner referrals were related to the 74 events/meetings and festivals that were supported this quarter. Team Knoxville Volunteers shared and participated in seven events and opportunities this quarter; VK continues to recruit volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to local events.

1Q Goals:

- **Update Convention Services & Support page on visitknoxville.com** – The Team is continuing to make updates as needed to ensure information is current.
- **Participate in National Celebrate Services Week, “Services Champions – Going the Extra Mile” July 29 – August 4 to celebrate the role of the event service professional, to advocate for the event services profession, and to provide a networking opportunity with fellow services peers** – On July 26, the Convention & Sports Services Team visited all key venues and delivered treats as a Thank You. See Highlights Summary for details.
- **Attend Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) Webinar as a team for continuing education** – Attended ESPA’s *GenAI - Your New Favorite Intern, July 2024* – *Q&A With the Meeting Planners*.

Highlighted Events (additional items referenced in the Highlights Summary):

- **Tennessee Municipal League** returned to Knoxville July 20–23 with representatives from across the state. VK welcomed the planner and her team on a pre-planning visit



to determine final layout and needs. VK planned and executed all aspects of the Welcome City Host Reception held at the Maker Exchange at Marriott Knoxville Downtown. This included securing the venue, catering, equipment rental, décor, and entertainment. A list of local makers was also curated to provide spouse activities. Team Knoxville staffed a booth to provide information

during the conference and volunteers also assisted with registration and badge printing. The group was welcomed on the Visitors Center Reader Board and VK TV loop.

“Ms. Dorsey has always been very helpful in assisting with our needs when we plan our meetings in Knoxville. What a great person! Ms. Gibson goes beyond the call of duty when she is working with me in securing locations and has the best ideas for receptions, dinners, spouse programs, etc. In addition to the wonderful services, I cannot say enough "Thank Yous" to Ms. Kim Bumpas. She has an awesome TEAM. I have enjoyed working with her for several decades and is honored to have been in her presence. The experience in Knoxville was very good. I would highly recommend to a planner that downtown Knoxville is a fine location to host a meeting, conference or take a nice vacation.”

– Sylvia Harris, Senior Director of Conference & Meeting Planning, Tennessee Municipal League

- **Mayors Innovation Project** held their Summer Meeting 2024 August 8–10 at the Jackson Terminal and various other downtown locations with approximately 90 mayors from across the country in attendance. Hosted in partnership with the City of Knoxville and Mayor Indya Kincannon, the meeting focused on cutting-edge city policy in a relaxed setting.

In February, VK hosted a pre-planning visit where the planners were able to see diverse options for unique urban meeting locations and tours. VK collaborated closely with the planners throughout their process to secure venues for both meetings and off-site receptions. The Jackson Terminal, the Emporium Center for the Arts, the Sunsphere, and the



Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame all hosted various functions. Assistance was also provided to determine catering and bartending needs.



To welcome the mayors to Knoxville, gifts were provided and tote bags filled with visitor information was given to all attendees. A VK information table was staffed at the Opening Reception at the Sunsphere, and extended hours were offered at the

Observation Deck for private tours. The group was welcomed on the Visitors Center Reader Board and VK TV loop.

“The Visit Knoxville team were all amazing, supportive, and so helpful when it came to planning our event! We got so many comments on the great spaces we were in. Mayors loved how walkable everything was, cool venues, amazing food! We could not have asked for a better event!!”

– Lindsey Hess, Events & Administrative Assistant, High Road Strategy Center

- The VKSC partnered with **K2 Volleyball** to welcome the 2024 K2 Munciana Volleyball Camp July 17–29, followed by the 2024 Showdown at the Sunsphere volleyball tournament August 23–24. Both volleyball events welcomed athletes, coaches, and spectators to the KCC, with VKSC providing 18 and 30 volleyball courts, respectively. VKSC partnered with Empire & Co. Labor, ACES, and Heavy Haul Trailers to build and tear down all courts. Event materials like table covers, court signs, scoreboards, and directional signage were also provided by VKSC. Upon arrival, athletes were greeted with a welcome message on the Visitors Center Reader Board and custom-designed digital welcome signs displayed on indoor and outdoor screens at the



KCC. A volleyball magnet was placed on the KNOX letters for athletes and families to enjoy a fun photo opportunity. VKSC promoted the event across social media and ensured participants had a wonderful experience by providing local attraction discounts and visitor information through an online link and QR code. VKSC coordinated with the tournament director on event planning, assisted with venue selection, and provided hotel recommendations for staff and teams.

“We run the largest volleyball camp in North America and the largest High School Volleyball Tournament in the state of Tennessee. None of this would be remotely possible without our partnership with Visit Knoxville. Their staff is always looking out for the little details on how we can make everything better for the visitor. We are truly thankful for the partnership.”

– Brent Carter, Director of Development, K2 Volleyball

- VKSC hosted the **2024 Visit Knoxville Collegiate** golf tournament in partnership with University of Tennessee Athletics from September 5–8 at Tennessee National Golf Club. Sixteen NCAA Division I teams competed, with the Louisiana State University Tigers taking home the coveted trophy which was designed and provided by VKSC. Leading up to and throughout the tournament, the VKSC team managed planning and logistics, held multiple pre-planning calls, and conducted site visits to confirm event needs and ensure no detail was overlooked. VKSC coordinated with All Occasions Party Rentals to design and set up tents at the first tee and 18th green and custom signage and feather banners were displayed throughout the course to welcome attendees and recognize event partners. VKSC provided



essential equipment including beverage coolers and radios for event staff. VKSC secured host hotels for out-of-town teams, staff, and families, and provided digital visitor information to enhance their experience visiting Knoxville. As a special welcome gift, VKSC coordinated with Oakley to provide sunglasses to athletes and coaches. To further welcome teams and spectators, a message was displayed on the Visitors Center Reader Board, and the event was listed on the visitknoxville.com event calendar. The tournament received media coverage on 99.1 *The Sports Animal* and was promoted across VKSC and UT Athletics' social media channels.

“The leadership and staff of Visit Knoxville has provided us with a world class partnership in their support of The Visit Knoxville Collegiate golf tournament. From preparation, planning, pre-event and onsite support during the event, the experience from VK has been invaluable.

– Brennan Web, Men’s Golf Coach, University of Tennessee

Additional planner quotes from 1Q Meetings and Events:

“Knoxville was everything we expected and more. 10! 10! 10! Thank you for all your



work on this project. Christina was on it!! She gave suggestions and proposed ideas of which I had not thought. She delivered maps, magazines, and chocolates to my hotel room for me to have them on hand to pack our goodie bags a few days prior to the start of our conference. Received a lovely

commitment to ensuring we had a great trip to Knoxville. Visit Knoxville also went above and beyond in extending buses to drive our guests from the KCC to the Knoxville Auditorium in the heat of the summer. It was much appreciated by the attendees. Visit Knoxville also provided a code to receive a free tour of the Sunsphere. I know I personally spoke to several people who took advantage of this offer. It looks like this conference will be an annual event for our department. I have learned from planning my first conference, one of the first things I will do is reach out to the local tourism group for planning assistance. I truly appreciate everything your team has done for ASM Global employees and vendors.”

– Diane Roberts, Administrative Assistant, ASM GLOBAL



“Kelli was outstanding in responding with information both before and during the conference. She was especially helpful in arranging a banquet speaker for us. If you are considering a reasonable city with outstanding restaurants and attractions, be sure to work with Visit Knoxville.”

–Ronald Bellamy, ISNATT President

Team Knoxville Volunteers

A total of 18 hours was provided by five volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to the following local event:

- July 20–22 – **Tennessee Municipal League Annual Meeting** – Team Knoxville assisted with registration printing badges for attendees and staffed the visitor information table for a total of 18 hours by five volunteers.

Team Knoxville participated in the following additional activities:

- August 9 – UT Graduate School Community Resource and Engagement Fair
- September 12 – Participated in the UT Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management Open House and presented at the HTM 390 Leadership and Managing Corporate Culture class
- Shared partner volunteer opportunities, including:
 - Morgan Wallen Concert
 - HoLa Festival
- Began recruiting for the upcoming event, ETEBA Business Opportunities & Technical Conference
- Shared save the dates for upcoming needs, including:
 - FILM FEST KNOX
 - Tour de Lights



Additional 1Q Activity:

- **Pre-planning Visits:**
 - **2024 TSSAA Cheer & Dance State Championship** – September 8 – Hosted planners from TSSAA and CheerExpo to determine layout and logistics at KCC.
- **Festival and partnership support** included Festival on the Fourth, Knoxville Sunflower Celebration, Grooves in the Garden, Kuumba Festival, Eighth of August Jubilee, Irish Fest on the Hill, History Hootenanny, GermanFest, Big Kahuna Wing Festival, Tennessee Valley Fair, Knox Asian Festival, HoLa Festival, John Sevier Days Living History Weekend, and Greek Fest.
- **Conducted pre-planning calls and/or meetings** for FILM FEST KNOX, Alpha Kappa Alpha South Eastern Region Planning Committee Team, K2 Munciana Volleyball Camp, Visit Knoxville Collegiate, TSSAA Cheer & Dance State Championship, Tennessee Miracle Classic, Tennessee Miracle US Amateur Regionals, Tennessee Miracle US Amateur Girls National and Tennessee Miracle US Amateur Boys Regionals, ISNATT and Tour de Lights.
- **Participated in the following conferences, webinars, and virtual events:**
 - Meetings Today – *What an Event Attendee Wants through Meetings Today*
 - ESPA – *GenAI Your New Favorite Intern*
 - ESPA – *Q&A With the Meeting Planners*
 - Governor's Conference on Hospitality & Tourism 2024 in Chattanooga, Tennessee

- ESPA Leaders – C-Suite Insights: *How to Establish and Showcase Your Services ROI*

- **Additional Activities:**

- Sales and Services tour of Hotel Cleo
- Sales and Services visit with Zoo Knoxville Events team
- Partnered with Friendship Force Knoxville with the delegation from Poland who arrived on September 27 for one week. VK shared contacts for local organizations that align with their event mission and a list of events taking place during their stay. VK arranged a time for their group to utilize the Visitors Center as a short presentation space. Provided visitor materials for welcome bags.



MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SUMMARY

The **Visit Knoxville Marketing Team** produces, approves and places regional, national, and international advertising and social media promoting Knoxville to leisure travelers, conference and event planners, sports events planners and film and television production companies. Creative is based around the *nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kind-of-town* campaign directing to visitknoxville.com. The Team also recruits and partners with journalists and influencers to share Knoxville's narratives.

1Q Goals:

- **Host an ADA travel journalist to tell an accessible story of Knoxville** – VK hosted ADA travel journalist Cory Woodward of Curb Free with Cory Lee. See Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance for details.
- **Partner with the Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA) to host a Knoxville FAM** – VK partnered with OWAA to host a FAM in July. See Highlights Summary for details.
- **Complete mid-year update of digital version of 2024 Knoxville Visitors Guide** – The VK Marketing Team updated the digital version of the guide to reflect openings and closings as well as event dates not previously available at the time of printing. The guide can be viewed [here](#).
- **Partner to create and reveal new assets for the Visit Knoxville Film Office, including a refreshed logo (in celebration of 10 years), a new promotional video, and new marketing for FILM FEST KNOX 2024** –
The VK Film Office partnered with Bateman Designs to create a new logo, which will roll out beginning in 2Q. A new promotional video has been created in partnership with Edy Recendez, a local filmmaker. This video will be revealed at this year's FILM FEST KNOX. Additional marketing initiatives for FILM FEST KNOX include creating a YouTube and Meta advertising campaign in partnership with TDTD and executed by Strike Social, interviewing with Promo Mike on 103.5fm WIMZ, and placing new print and digital ads with *MovieMaker Magazine*.



Progress Notes (additional items may be referenced in the Highlights Summary):

- VK's Marketing Team continues to work closely with VK Sales and Services Teams to create customized **creative materials**. Highlights of this quarter included promotional materials for brochures carts at the KCC, collateral for the 2025 UT football season (including program advertising and text alerts), a KCC-branded KNOX letter magnet, and print advertising for Broadway at the Tennessee and SoKno Pride. Additional items may be referenced throughout this report.
- VK continues to utilize its **e-newsletter**, **Community Corner**, and **VK Network** messaging to communicate events and activities to visitors and the community. To stay in the loop, [sign up](#) for the e-newsletter and/or VK Blog.

- **4Q E-newsletters**

FAN-tastic Summer Fun Awaits – This edition promoted new restaurants and summer events including Festival on the Fourth, Fanboy Expo, the Tennessee Valley Fair ,and Big Kahuna Wing Festival.

*Current open rate for the e-newsletter is 29.7%**

**SimpleView reports an average open rate of 27.78% for the tourism industry.*

- The **Community Corner** is a newsletter that is produced and distributed weekly by the Visitor Services Team to help keep local partners and establishments aware of the upcoming events that may impact or encourage their business, as well as share information about local events and happenings. A total of 12 Community Corner newsletters were produced in 4Q with an open rate of 33%.
- VK continues to promote tourism partners via the **VK Network**, a loop of partner videos running in 20+ high-traffic areas throughout Knox County.
- The VK **website** continues to perform incredibly well, amassing a total of 1.9 million pageviews in 1Q. Each quarter, VK creates new pages for the website and regularly updates content throughout. Additionally:
 - Average length of session was 1 minute 07 seconds.
 - Pages per session was 3.42.
 - Number of clicks to partner sites from VK website was 99K.
 - Top three metros generating traffic were Atlanta, Nashville, and Chicago.
 - 1,581 pageviews to sign up for the e-newsletter.

The **VK Online Event Calendar** is managed by the Visitor Services Team. In 1Q, 56 events were added to the calendar.

- VK promotes local partners in the **VK Blog** with a mix of contributors in addition to VK staff. Current partner writers include Jack Neely of Knoxville History Project, The Maker City, Arts & Culture Alliance organizations, and Legacy Parks. Read [more](#) and [subscribe](#). [Post highlights include:](#)



- [Top Things to Know about WDVX's First Friday Live Radio Show](#)
- [Guide to Pet-friendly Things to Do in Knoxville](#)
- [Guide to Knoxville for Readers](#)

- VK's **social media channels** serve as key elements in VK's marketing mix, focused on directing traffic to blog posts and other sections of the VK website, sharing tourism partner information, and engaging with the community. Highlights include:

- Promoting various events, exhibits, and attractions including Knoxville Asian Festival, HoLa Festival, UT Football, Knox Walls at Emory Place, Morgan Wallen, the Market Square Farmers' Market, Negroni Week at Brother Wolf, a feature of Seven Islands State Park, and more.
- Instagram reels included a collaboration with @curbfreecorylee promoting wheelchair-accessible things to do, a collaboration with @innov865 sharing a sneak peek into the Sunsphere Welcome Center, local places to watch football games, fall getaway ideas, a South Knoxville neighborhood feature, and several foodie hotspots.



- **Additional Partner Promotion & Involvement** – VK continues to provide support to our tourism partners. Highlights include:

- Partnering with WDVX on Tennessee Shines – a concert series at the Bijou Theatre highlighting up-and-coming artists and the magic of live radio from one of Knoxville's most historic and storied venues. Dylan LeBlanc, Sarah Shook & the Disarmers, and Ismay took the stage on August 7.
- Partnering with Legacy Parks – This quarter, VK and Legacy Parks distributed thousands of Knoxville's Urban Wilderness maps, updated Get Out and Play Guide for distribution throughout Knox County, and continued to collaborate on [visitknoxville.com](#) outdoor listings and blog posts as needed. Additionally, Legacy Parks generated media coverage for the Mountain Commerce Challenge (activities

based in local parks, trails, greenways, and rivers) and the Angora Frog Farm and Dog Park in Powell.

- Serving on the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC) – TTC met at the Chattanooga Hotel on September 25, 2024, to discuss research and advocacy, Tennessee Welcome Centers, communications, sales, marketing, rural tourism, and outreach. They also heard from special guest speaker Fred Dixon, Brand USA President and CEO. The President of Visit Knoxville remains Chair of the Knowledge Driven Sub-Committee at the state level.



- VK continues to **track marketing efforts** that contribute to hotel bookings and website traffic via ADARA and Arrivalist. According to ADARA, digital marketing in 1Q contributed to 2,600 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in 1Q contributed to 5,359 hotel bookings.

VK continues to pull insights from our Arrivalist partnership: For 2024, the top ten origin Designated Market Areas (DMA) of overnight visitors for the period by volume are listed below. Visitors to these markets stayed an average of 1.9 nights. *

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Nashville | 6. Chicago |
| 2. Atlanta | 7. Charlotte |
| 3. Knoxville ** | 8. New York |
| 4. Tri-Cities-TN-VA | 9. Los Angeles |
| 5. Chattanooga | 10. Greenville/Spartanburg/Asheville/Anderson |

**It is important to note that we are still inside the travel window, which means travelers exposed to ads in June may not have traveled yet, which may influence the top markets.*

***The Knoxville DMA consists of 22 counties within East Tennessee and Southeast Kentucky.*

The 1Q VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the 1Q Highlights Report at the end of October on the VK website.

Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance:

- VK assisted **Laura Holmes**, freelance writer for **TravelLight**. Laura has been to Knoxville before as an avid mountain biker. This trip allowed more exploration of Knoxville's Urban Wilderness and Sharp's Ridge trails, as well as a conversation with AMBC's Executive Director. She has since published a blog post on *contentqueens.com*:

- [Mountain Bike Knox](#)



- VK hosted the **OWAA FAM**, see Highlights Summary for details.
- VK hosted **Cory Woodard** of **Curb Free with Cory Lee**. Cory is an award-winning travel writer who was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy. His platform is about accessible travel as a wheelchair user, and his Knoxville itinerary reflected an ADA-accessible focus. He has since published a blog post on his award-winning site, and multiple posts across Facebook, Instagram, and Instagram stories:

- [Blog Post – Curb Free with Cory Lee](#)

- [Facebook 1](#)

- [Facebook 2](#)

- [Facebook 3](#)

- [Facebook 4](#)

- [Facebook 5](#)

- [Facebook 6](#)

- [Facebook 7](#)

- [Instagram 1](#)

- [Instagram 2](#)

- [Instagram 3](#)

- [Instagram 4](#)

- [Instagram 5](#)

- [Instagram Stories](#)



“My trip in Knoxville, Tennessee was better than I could’ve ever expected and I’m now in love with the city. It’s a special place and tremendously underrated, but I can guarantee that if you decide to visit, you’ll enjoy it just as much as I did.”

– Cory Lee Woodard

- VK assisted **Rich Luna**, Senior Director of Content for **ALHI** (Associated Luxury Hotels International serves as the global sales and marketing extension to a carefully curated collection that features 250 independent, luxury hotels and 8 independent brands, cruise

lines and destination management companies), in partnership with THE TENNESSEAN. His quick visit encompassed some city highlights, including enjoying First Friday, and visits to the Sunsphere and the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame. His articles have since been published on *ALHI.com*:

- Four Destinations on the Rise
- Destination: Knoxville
- VK hosted **Ruby Escalona**, writer of **A Journey We Love**. She was accompanied by her husband and child on a family-friendly visit and was able to experience Zoo Knoxville, a Tennessee Vintage Base Ball game and tour at Historic Ramsey House, and stops on the Knoxville Ale Trail and Tennessee Whiskey Trail. She has since posted to her blog:
 - 8 Things to Do in Knoxville with Kids
 - What to Expect When Visiting Zoo Knoxville
- VK hosted **Ashley Locke**, Editor of **Good Grit**. Her visit supplemented the advertorial of several Knoxville restaurants in their fall Harvest edition, to capture content for their social media. She visited the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, the East Tennessee History Center, and attended a OneKnox soccer game during her visit.
- VK hosted two **freelance German writers** in partnership with TDTD, plus their German-speaking representative with **Lieb Management** as they toured East Tennessee. Their one-day visit was packed with a guided walking tour of downtown with stops at the Tennessee Theatre and the East Tennessee History Center, a driving tour through Knoxville, a guided hike at Ijams Nature Center, a visit to the Sunsphere, and ended with a beer tasting at Knox Brew Hub.



“THANK YOU for that absolutely wonderful Sunday in Knoxville!”

– Carola Kolmann, Senior PR & Marketing Manager, Lieb Management

Media:

- **Media Assistance Provided** – VK has standing appearances on WBIR and WATE. Additional assistance (content, photography, itinerary suggestions, quotes, interviews, partner referrals, etc.) was provided to the following: Knoxville News Sentinel, TDTD, Southern Living, AAA Explorer, Meetings Today, Vessel Magazine, Pride Journeys, Why: the Podcast, Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, The Adventurist Magazine, Meetings + Events, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement) include:

- *Roadside America* – *The Sunsphere*
- *Woodshed Magazine* – *Weird Appalachia (How the Simpsons Saved the Sunsphere)*
- *East West News Service* – *America's Dixie Highway*
- *Sarasota Magazine* – *Travel Guide: Knoxville, Tennessee*
- *The Tennessean* – *Pioneering spirit: Beyond Tennessee whiskey to a dizzying array of spirits*
- *The Tennessean* – *Curious about Tennessee whiskey? Here are 12 bars to try unique spirits statewide*
- *Pride Journeys* – *Fall in Love with Knoxville*
- *Why: the Podcast* – *Knoxville*
- *Southern Living* – *This Underrated Tennessee Destination is the Most Fun Fall Getway*
- *Thrillist* – *The Best College Towns in the U.S.*
- *Good Grit* – *Knoxville, Tennessee* (digital page, print article, and eblast)



- **Earned/Unpaid Media Report** – Earned media is publicity gained through non-advertising news stories. Stories written by VK-hosted travel writers are included. Values and advertising equivalency (\$) determined by Cision.
 - Total Number of Placements – 318
 - Total Publicity Value for Earned Media – \$372,525



VISIT KNOXVILLE FILM OFFICE

The Visit Knoxville Film Office actively promotes Knoxville and Knox County as a premiere filming location. Recruiting motion media companies through the marketing of locations, accommodations, services, crew, and talent fosters the creation of jobs in the area, stimulates business opportunities, and generates exposure. The VK Film Office also mediates the permitting process between federal, state, and local agencies and the film industry.

In the first quarter, the VK Film Office provided many different production companies with location scouting services, permit assistance, and served as a liaison between city and federal governments for a variety of productions. Companies requesting services included our talented local production companies such as Jupiter Entertainment and Big Slate Media, as well as the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation. Productions included commercials, social media campaigns, and crime reality television shows such as *Fatal Attraction* which airs on TVOne.

Other out-of-town production companies were assisted by the VK Film Office including Future Studios out of New York, Circus Dog Productions out of Los Angeles, and Arrow International Media out of London. Projects included a documentary titled *Born Different*, the lifestyle real estate television show *House Hunters*, which airs on HGTV, and *Pure Evil*, a crime reality show.

In September, the Sr. Director of the VK Film Office spoke to the Business of Cinema class at UT as part of a goal to provide outreach to budding film industry students. The discussion centered around the role of a film office, local and state film incentives, and local industry opportunities.

Also in September, the VK Film Office hosted a Premiere screening of the film *Treasure Trackers*, a family adventure film. The premiere red carpet event was held at Regal Riviera in downtown Knoxville and was attended by over 200 guests. *Treasure Trackers* was recruited by the VK Film Office and filmed entirely in the Knoxville area. As of October 1, the film will be available to rent on most streaming platforms and will be aired on MAX in foreign markets.



In 1Q, the VK Film Office, in partnership with The Public Cinema, continued its free film screening series. The series serves as a marketing strategy for FILM FEST KNOX, with the idea of keeping the festival in the minds of the public year-round. The 1Q films screened included an Italian film, *Kidnapped* (directed by Marco Bellocchio), *I Know Where I'm Going* (directed by Powell and Pressburger), and *Paris, Texas* (directed by Wim Wenders). All screenings were well attended.

VISITOR SERVICES SUMMARY

The **Visitor Services Team** serves as the face of Visit Knoxville welcoming and assisting visitors and locals at the Visit Knoxville Visitors Center located at 301 S. Gay Street and the 4th Floor Observation Deck of the Sunsphere at World's Fair Park. The Team works with more than 80 local artisans, known as Makers, to provide a variety of quality retail items in the Gift Shops at both locations. Additionally, they organize tours, monitor and maintain the Events Calendar & Weekly Newsletter, and develop maps and brochures to enhance visitor experiences in Knoxville.

1Q Goals:

- **Begin framing stages of the Sunsphere Welcome Center** – Framing stages of the Sunsphere are well underway. Roof and stormwater systems have gone in, HVAC is getting installed, and the large glass floor to ceiling windows are being fitted. Drastic progression is planned for the coming weeks, including lights and camera rough-ins, metal panel installation, and drywall enclosing the structure. Chroma Energy Group is reviewing plans for the solar array that will sit atop the steel formal entrance to the Sunsphere (level 3). Completion of the Sunsphere Welcome Center is slated for November 20, 2024. A press release with opening day festivities will be published mid-late October.
- **Host six Gotta Know Knoxville (GKK) tour sessions** – Each month during 1Q, two sessions were hosted, servicing over 40 participants. GKK continues partnership with a few staple businesses along the tour where the group will pop in for a quick overview of each place. Partners include The Emporium, Maple Hall, the Tennessee Theatre, and Blount Mansion. Two private tours were conducted this quarter for the Tellico Villagers and K-Town Connect.





- **Attend Destinations International Visitor Services Summit for continuing education** – The Sr. Director of Visitor Services attended the Destinations International Visitor Services Summit in Tampa, Florida. Sessions attended include *Addressing Key Challenges in Visitor Services and Experience Development, Data Driven Destinations, Inclusive Hospitality, and Leveraging Your Visitor Center to Enhance Brand Awareness.*

- **Recruit New Products for the Visitors Center/Sunsphere Gift Shops** – During 1Q, three new vendors were introduced to the gift shops: Amber Rountree (Sunsphere Scents Perfumes), Cluster Funk Studios (Tennessee Horizon Card), and Pro Lion Bricks & Puzzles (Neyland Stadium 3D Puzzle). Existing partnerships continued to grow, bringing in over 15 new items this quarter.

Progress Notes (additional items may be referenced in the Highlights Summary):

- **Visitors Center Traffic** – Over 78,400 guests were greeted in person. Top 10 states (in addition to Tennessee) of visitors checking into the Visitors Center were:

○ Florida	○ North Carolina
○ California	○ Ohio
○ Texas	○ South Carolina
○ New York	○ Virginia
○ Illinois	○ Colorado
- **Visit Knoxville Gift Shops** – VK continues to support Knoxville’s Maker community and artists with over 80 existing partnerships. A few local/regional additions introduced this quarter include Knoxville Stacked Logo Chocolate Bars (Bradley’s Chocolates); Knoxville inspired perfumes featuring places like Candoro Marble, House Mountain, and Sunsphere Sunset (Amber Rountree); Smoky Mountain Prints (Art of Matthew Kent), seasonal teas (Wendi Love). VK offers gift basket wrapping services to all partners and visitors. There are gift baskets available for purchase in the Visitors Center for shopping ease, or orders can be placed online for pickup by selecting the “gift box” option. During 1Q, VK fulfilled over 10 private basket requests.



THE SUNSPHERE OBSERVATION DECK



The **Sunsphere Observation Deck**, managed by Visit Knoxville, is a historic attraction that was built for the 1982 World's Fair. In 2022, Visit Knoxville reopened the Observation Deck as a paid attraction and established the **Sunsphere Fund**, a fund created to enhance the structure for the enjoyment of generations to come. Since reopening, the Sunsphere Observation Deck has welcomed over 145,000 guests from all 50 states and 61 countries.

As referenced in the Visitor Services goals, the Sunsphere Welcome Center framing is close to completion. Once drywall is finalized, the millwork provider will move in, flooring will be laid, and the glass for the skylight will be installed. Due to the size of the space, a minimalist approach is being taken regarding finishes and furniture. VK has worked closely with the architects at MHM on the design aspects of the Welcome Center.

Beginning on November 6, the Sunsphere Observation Deck will close to the public to complete renovations within a two-week period, with the Sunsphere Welcome Center and Observation Deck grand opening on November 20. The Deck will feature more exhibits surrounding the history of the 1982 World's Fair, a video wall, interactive touchscreens, and more. Wonderful partners have stepped forward to provide historic information and artifacts from the 1982 World's Fair including Petros Chili & Chips, Sweet P's BBQ, and Coca-Cola. The Welcome Center will now be home to brochures and information in addition to a small retail shop for visitors to enjoy. Having a constant presence at the 3rd level will transform the operation and benefit the attraction for years to come.

This project would not be possible without the partnership and support from the City of Knoxville, Knox County, Public Building Authority, The Christman Company, McCarty Holsaple McCarty, East Tennessee Design Center, and Chroma Energy Group.

Promoting the Sunsphere Fund to continue Sunsphere improvements remains a focus. VK has partnered with Steven Bearden Photography and is working with VK's marketing agency VML to debut a Sunsphere commercial this November.

Private tours of the Observation Deck exceeded over 300 people during 1Q, including tours for Coker University, DC Trails, Diamond Tours, White Pine Middle School Beta Club, and the City of Knoxville Ambassador Program.



- **Special Events & Collaborations** – During 1Q, the Visitor Services Team set up booths and/or gave presentations at the UT Graduate School Fair, UT Part Time Job Fair, UT Retail Hospitality Tourism Management Open House, Hardin Valley Academy, Youth Leadership Knoxville, and Intro Knox.

During the month of July, VK was a participating location for the 7th Annual Where's Waldo Scavenger Hunt, in partnership with Downtown Knoxville Alliance. Visitors could pick up their Waldo Passports at the Visitors Center and receive a stamp to kick off their adventure to dozens of downtown businesses. VK donated a Sunsphere-centric gift basket as one of the many prizes passport completers could register to win.

- **Local Donations** – VK's Visitors Center Gift Shop promotes its Makers and supports the Knoxville community by creating personalized gift bags and baskets showcasing locally-made merchandise for philanthropic fundraisers, special events, and non-profit organizations. During 1Q, over a dozen gift basket donation requests were fulfilled, including Knoxville Area Rescue Ministry, 2 Bikes, Irish Fest, and more.
- The **Visitors Center Reader Board**, located on the face of the building, provides messages that are procured and maintained monthly to welcome visiting groups, make local announcements, and share upcoming events. During 1Q, **59** custom welcome messages and highlighted events were featured.
- VK **loaned assets** (e.g., radios, coolers, ice chests, tables, tents, etc.) to the City of Knoxville, Bike Walk Knox, Fanboy Expo, Personal Best Racing and Hola Fest during 1Q.
- **VK Concierge Program** is a way for VK to engage our hotel properties, bring any new or updated information, and provide additional awareness of VK and its offerings, through personal direct contact with a VK staff member. While the visits are planned quarterly, each VK Concierge relationship varies in the frequency of additional visits, based on need/request from our industry partners.

During this quarter's concierge visits, VK highlighted the brand-new UT Visitor Guide. Each member of the concierge team provided their assigned hotels with one box of UT Visitor Guides, a bag of Orange Mint Life Savers, a flyer highlighting upcoming festivals, the UT Football Schedule and Scorekeeping flyer, a FILM FEST KNOX flyer, and a laminated UT Game Day Parking Map/UT Football Permit Parking Map.

VK also took information about the Knoxville Ale Trail, the new KAT Reimagined Bus System Routes, Greater Knoxville Area Parks and Greenways, and the GKK program. VK



continues to receive very positive feedback on this program and can see the return on efforts through increased participation and engagement from industry partners.

- **Visitor Information Centers** located within attractions, shops, and restaurants throughout Knoxville are supplied with visitor materials such as Visitors Guides, maps, and attraction brochures. VK connects with these partners monthly to gather input about resource needs and requests. VK provides and maintains visitor materials for displays at the Sunsphere,



Knoxville Museum of Art, THE TENNESSEAN Hotel, KCC, Tommy Trent's, Outdoor Knoxville, The Pinnacle at Turkey Creek, Tennessee Theatre, Knox Brew Hub, UT Visitors Center, World's Fair Park Security Office, Farragut Community Center, and Bear Paw Bikes.

The KCC is one of VK's busiest satellite center locations, hosting thousands of visitors annually. During 1Q VK invested in two EZ-Carts to place at the Clinch and Cumberland Avenue entrances to offer a range of materials and QR codes to visitors.

- **Brochure additions** allow the Visitors Center to stay up to date with available attractions and activities. This quarter 10 new brochures were added, including the KAT Bus Map, Pellissippi Blueway, Historic House Museums, Tennessee Theatre Broadway schedule, Knoxville Jazz Orchestra schedule, Help Plant a Dogwood in Every Yard, Ocoee Horse Ride, KnoxWalls, Tennessee Valley Fair, and Lilienthal Gallery Street.
- **Visitors Guide Distribution** is a key focus. Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:
 - Tennessee
 - Ohio
 - Florida
 - South Carolina
 - Illinois
 - California
 - North Carolina
 - New York
 - Texas
 - Georgia

During this quarter, there were 2,747 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page. VK distributed 2,178 printed guides based on online/phone requests.

Bulk Visitors Guide requests come from a multitude of places (e.g., events, local groups, weddings, state welcome centers, regional distribution, etc.). In 1Q, a total of 35,360 Visitors Guides were distributed via outlets including the following:

- 8,700 through State Welcome Centers
- 11,816 through brochure racks within the region, including attractions and hotels.
- 14,844 distributed through other locations including the Visitors Center, satellite centers, UT, and airport.

- Additional **distribution materials** include:
 - 5,855 Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
 - 200 Trolley & Interstate Maps
 - 47,375 UT Visitor Guides

Ongoing Partner Projects & Special Initiatives:

- **Employee Engagement** – VK believes in the power of community, teamwork, and individual growth. It is the goal of VK to provide opportunities for its employees to further enrich their lives, both personal and professional, through employee engagement and wellness initiatives. This quarter, VK employees participated in:
 - A Team meeting at Suttree Landing Park, celebrating FYE 24.
 - “Back 2 School Day,” where employees connected over past school experiences.
 - An outing to Kerns Food Hall to experience a new venue in Knoxville.
 - Attending a Smokies Baseball game to highlight the final games in Kodak.
 - Opportunities to give blood with MEDIC Regional Blood Center.
 - Wellness initiatives to encourage healthy lifestyles in and outside the office.



- **WDVX Radio** – VK partners with radio station WDVX (89.9fm) which broadcasts live from the Visitors Center. Programs include Blue Plate Special, KidStuff Live, and First Friday Live. This quarter a total of 3,137 people attended these events. Of those polled, the geographical attendance breakdown was as follows:
 - 2,242 Knox County
 - 440 Regional
 - 455 Out of Region – International guests included those from Canada, Australia, Turkey, England, Ireland, France, Chile, Spain, Germany and Wales.

First Friday Live – First Friday Live is a live radio show featuring artists from around the region or nationally touring acts. In addition to live music, First Fridays at the Visitors Center feature a “Maker Moment.” Local Makers are interviewed on-air during the show and allowed to sell merchandise. 1Q Makers included:



- **July** – Kristen Combs (author of *100 Things To Do In Knoxville Before You Die*)
 - **August** – One Knox SC Pop-Up
 - **September** – Amber Rountree (Sunsphere Scents)
- **K-Town Connect** – The K-Town Connect Ambassadors have applied best practices to enhance growth and development in downtown Knoxville and the University of Tennessee. Ambassadors are dedicated daily to making Knoxville a cleaner, safer, and friendly place for all locals and visitors to enjoy. In 1Q, Ambassadors achieved the following:
- Hospitality assistance: This includes but is not limited to helping others use parking meters, suggesting places to eat or shop, and answering questions about events, etc. Assisted 3,545 people.
 - Graffiti/Sticker/Bill Removal: Graffiti, stickers, or bills on a public fixture do not remain up for long. Ambassadors removed 1,728 of these.
 - Litter collection: Teamwork makes the dream work. Ambassadors assisted with picking up 28,802 pieces of litter around downtown and UT.
 - Welfare check: Ambassadors build relationships with the unhoused street population, conduct welfare checks, and provide referrals to local resources specializing in assisting homeless individuals. Rain or shine, the Ambassador program checks on vulnerable populations throughout the day. Over 1,209 individuals were approached to ensure their well-being.
 - Directions Provided: Ambassadors helped 885 people get where they needed to be.
 - Scooter relocation: Ambassadors have moved 853 scooters to a safe location.
 - Outreach: Helping those in need is one of the biggest priorities. Over the last three months, Ambassadors have referred over 126 people to local outreach services. Ambassadors are now trained in Narcan administration and can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. No events required a response this quarter.



The K-Town Connect team is a fantastic source of information and assistance in the downtown and UT footprint. When you see the friendly team, feel free to ask for directions on where to park, eat, and have fun. The K-Town Connect Ambassador Program in Downtown Knoxville operates from 7 AM to 3:30 PM Sunday through Saturday with extended hours of 3:30 PM to 11:30 PM Tuesday through Saturday. The UT extension operates from 11 AM to 7:30 PM on Sundays, 7 AM to 3:30 PM Monday through Saturday with extended hours of 3:30 PM to 11:30 PM Wednesday through Saturday.