



VISIT KNOXVILLE

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DESTINATION MARKETING & EVENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT

OCTOBER 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2023



January 15, 2024

The ending of fall and transition to the holiday season was both beautiful and busy in Knoxville. In November, the Visit Knoxville Film Office hosted its inaugural film festival, **FILM FEST KNOX**, in partnership with Regal and The Public Cinema. Its success has caught the attention of several industry publications, and we are eagerly awaiting next year's iteration.

Following quickly behind, Visit Knoxville began celebrating the holidays in multiple ways. Visit Knoxville partnered with Bike Walk Knox to take **Tour de Lights** to new heights with a new location complete with a Holiday Market hosted at Mary Costa Plaza at the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum. Additionally, the 4th Floor Observation Deck welcomed a very merry visitor for our first-ever **Santa at the Sunsphere**.

The Sunsphere itself was a source of celebration, as the **painting of the base to its original PANTONE® Classic Blue was completed**, while also marking a milestone – **welcoming over 100,000 visitors** since reopening in February 2022!

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

On behalf of Visit Knoxville, I proudly submit the October 1 – December 31, 2023 report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

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

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President, Visit Knoxville

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HIGHLIGHTS SUMMARY

The following summary details select highlights for October 1 – December 31, 2023, the second quarter of fiscal year 2023–2024. These highlights can be used as a quick reference when talking about the activity and progress of Visit Knoxville (VK).

- **Receiving the 2023 *SportsTravel* Best Professional Event of the Year**

– The Visit Knoxville Sports Commission (VKSC), alongside the team at B.A.S.S., was honored to have the 2023 Bassmaster Classic recognized as the 2023 *SportsTravel* Best Professional Event of the Year. This prestigious award speaks to the amazing partnership with B.A.S.S. and the overwhelming support of the sport of bass fishing in the Knoxville community. With a total attendance of 163,914, the 2023 Bassmaster Classic was the largest

Classic in the history of the event. This announcement follows previously announced accolades for this event including HospitalityTN’s 2023 Purple Iris Award for Special Event of the Year and Sports Destination Management’s 2023 Champions of Economic Impact in Sports Tourism Award (Mid Market). The announcement can be read [here](#).



- **Hosting “Taste & See: East Tennessee – an Unforgettably Fun Foodie FAM”**

– This FAM (familiarization tour) was hosted November 1–5 in partnership with Townsend, the Grains & Grits Festival, and the Tennessee Distillers Guild. The FAM had five attendees from around the country including Jacksonville, Richmond, and Denver. A lot of ground was covered in a few short days from visiting the East Tennessee History Center and the Tennessee Theatre to sampling Matt Robb’s biscuits and a taste of Cruze Farm ice cream. A few dining selections also included Vida, Bistro by the Tracks, and Curious Dog. They were able to see the opening day of the Knoxville Museum of Art’s Higher Ground exhibit, a look at Baker Creek Preserve during



AMBC’s Fall Fest, and even got a historic group photo in front of the Sunsphere where both blue and green can be seen. On Friday, the group caravanned over to Townsend so they could experience the “Peaceful Side of the Smokies” along with the Grains & Grits Festival over the weekend. Kathleen Walls has since had two articles published in *She Buys Travel*, and Ginger Warder has since had an article published in *Go Nomad*:

- [She Buys Travel – Things to Do in Knoxville](#)
- [She Buys Travel – Things to Do in Townsend](#)
- [Go Nomad – Back to the Future in Tennessee](#)

“Kristen put together a wide-ranging tour of downtown Knoxville that showcased the city's thriving foodie/craft brewery/whiskey distilling culture as well as attractions for outdoor enthusiasts. These were topped off with a sampling of music and visual arts.”

– Lynn Fuson, freelance writer

“I enjoyed experiencing the variety of activities Visit Knoxville arranged for our group. The accommodations were great and several of the restaurants, breweries, and bars were outstanding.”

– Carol Timblin, freelance writer

“I had a WONDERFUL time with you and completely fell in love with Knoxville. I can see why you have so much pride in your town and are its biggest cheerleader.”

– Rebecca Treon, freelance writer

- **Hosting the inaugural FILM FEST KNOX** – VK hosted its inaugural film festival, FILM FEST KNOX, at the Regal Riviera Theatre November 9–12 in partnership with Regal and The Public Cinema. The event was met with multiple accolades across major trade publications including Filmmaker Magazine, The Film Stage, and In Review Online.

Hundreds of cinema lovers flocked to Regal Riviera during the 4-day event to watch dozens of great independent films including shorts, features, and documentaries from all over the world and right here in Knoxville's backyard.

There were 6 feature films in the “American Regional Cinema” competition with the winner, *Peak Season*, receiving \$3,000 in prize money and an Oscar qualifying theatrical release, courtesy of Regal. There were also great films in the “Made in Tennessee” competition, including the Best Made in TN Film winner, *A Hard Problem*, which was filmed here in Knoxville. Audiences also enjoyed a variety of film block programming, including Revival, International Currents, the Elev8or Pitch live pitch competition, and workshops like “Filming in Tennessee” with Executive Director of the Tennessee Entertainment Commission, Bob Raines, and VK Film Office Director, Curt Willis, as well as “The Art of the Pitch” panel with guest presenter from Seed & Spark.



Audiences also enjoyed a variety of film block programming, including Revival, International Currents, the Elev8or Pitch live pitch competition, and workshops like “Filming in Tennessee” with Executive Director of the Tennessee Entertainment Commission, Bob Raines, and VK Film Office Director, Curt Willis, as well as “The Art of the Pitch” panel with guest presenter from Seed & Spark.

The Convention Services Team implemented several logistical components to assist with the overall first year operations of FILM FEST KNOX. Various ticketing software systems were researched, and Agile Ticketing Solutions was contracted to manage the extensive needs. Numerous training sessions were held to establish seating charts and ticket levels, design and print tickets and credentials, send email confirmations and communications, as

well as how to manage and run an on-site box office. Tickets were available in singles, 4 and 8 blocks, and full-festival passes. VK partnered with the University of Tennessee to offer complimentary passes to current Cinema Studies students.

A concierge desk was staffed at the Hyatt Place to distribute credentials and VIP bags to guests upon arrival. Custom FFK tote bags, lanyards, and t-shirts were designed to commemorate the first-year event. Filmmakers, Jurors, special guests, and festival goers were welcomed with signage at the airport, in the hotel lobby, at Regal Riviera and with pole banners hung on Gay Street. Travel arrangements, accommodations, and airport transfers were provided for filmmakers. Additionally, an opening VIP party was held at Five



Thirty Lounge giving attendees a spectacular view of the city and an opportunity to mingle with other film industry professionals. Awards were custom designed locally, with the American Regional Film Competition Award crafted by local Maker, Preston Farabow with Aespyre Metals.



Please see the Film Office Summary for additional details.

“If it isn’t already clear from this writer’s survey of Film Fest Knox, the loaded program on offer feels far closer to what one might expect to find from a prestigious screening series, not the first iteration of a small Appalachian city’s local festival. If future years maintain this pace and quality, Film Fest Knox stands to become one of the Southeast’s premiere cinephile destinations and celebrations.”

– ***In Review Online***

- **Painting of the base of the Sunsphere and marking a milestone of welcoming over 100,000 visitors since reopening in February 2022** – Visit Knoxville contracted managed the painting of the structure’s base to the original PANTONE® color Classic Blue 19-4052 TCX. CertaPro Painters® started this project on October 1, and finished on November 17, using over 315 gallons of paint. A timelapse of the entire painting transformation from green to blue was filmed in partnership with RBA Marketing and can be viewed on sunspherecam.com.



Additionally, VK was pleased to announce that over 100,000 visitors from around the world have visited the Sunsphere’s 4th Floor Observation Deck as of November 25, since reopening on February 22, 2022. Since reopening, the Sunsphere has welcomed visitors from all 50 states and 56 countries, including the US.

- **Hosting Tour de Lights 2023 in collaboration with Bike Walk Knoxville** – The festive, free, family-oriented holiday event took place on December 9, starting and concluding at Mary Costa Plaza. The plaza was adorned with Christmas trees, and the surrounding shrubs and trees were festively wrapped in lights, creating an ambiance for everyone to enjoy throughout the holiday season.



The VK Team took the lead in creatively enhancing the overall design and layout of the event, utilizing Socialtables diagramming software to facilitate the footprint vision. VK coordinated and executed on-site logistics, managing the site build and load-in process to ensure smooth traffic flow. Exciting additions in 2023 comprised an enhanced stage with lighting, a Holiday Market & Expo, food trucks, hot chocolate and beer stations, a fire pit for marshmallow roasting, a registration process through Eventbrite, and a surprise visit from Santa.



For the stage, VK collaborated with Alpha-Lit and Balloons by Lindsay, creating a stunning holiday display that served as the backdrop for the judges during the costume contest. The display also provided a delightful photo opportunity as winners were announced, with awards given for Most Creative Bike, Best Themed Group, and Best All Around. The Market & Expo provided a holiday shopping opportunity, with VK recruiting local artisans and organizations to participate.



To kick off the ride, riders gathered at the Start/Finish Line, which featured candy cane balloon structures showcasing the Tour de Lights logo, serving as a festive photo opportunity. Participants returned to Mary Costa Plaza after the ride for more festivities. The new registration process allowed communication with participants and entry into a drawing for prizes. Registered participants (nearly 1,200) received a post event email with a link to [event photos](#) and a save-the-date for December 14, 2024.



“I had a WONDERFUL time and did very well -- please sign me up for next year! I still can't believe it was your first season. I've been doing markets and festivals for years and it looked like you'd been doing it forever! Thank you so much and know I would LOVE to be included in next year's event!!”

– Rachell Coe, Jewelry Artisan, Treasure of Crows

SALES SUMMARY

- **Trade Shows** – The VK Sales Team attended three trade shows during 2Q:
 - **TEAMS (October 2–5)** – VKSC attended TEAMS in West Palm Beach, FL. VK had 33 appointments with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
 - **Connect DC (November 27–29)** – VK Convention Sales, along with KCC, attended Connect DC in Washington, D.C. VK had 57 appointments, across three tracts, with groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
 - **TNSAE Annual Lunch and Trade Show (December 6–7)** – VK Convention Sales, along with other local partners, attended the TNSAE Annual Lunch and Trade Show in Nashville, TN. VK met with 29 groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.



VK tracks each sales activity and monitors results throughout the fiscal year. For FYE24, VK received two RFPs resulting from 2Q trade show attendance.

- **Site Visits** – The VK Sales Team hosted ten site visits during 2Q:
 - **National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences** – VK conducted a one-day site visit with the Senior Conference Planner. She is looking at Knoxville for the 2026 NEAFCS Annual Session. The Marriott, Hilton, Cumberland House and KCC were toured. The Sunsphere, Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame, and Knoxville Museum of Art were visited.
 - **International Society for Nuclear Air Treatment Technologies** – VK hosted two representatives and toured both the Marriott and the Hilton. They are looking for dates in the fall of 2024.



- **Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development (TNECD)** – VK conducted a half day site visit with the Director of Communication and Marketing. They are looking at Knoxville for the 2024 TNECD Conference. The Hilton, Marriott, Cumberland House, and KCC were toured.
- **Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior** – VK partnered with a local doctor at UT to assist with bringing their event to Knoxville. A half day site visit was conducted with their Director of

Education and Events, touring the Marriott, Hilton, Cumberland House, and Crowne Plaza.

- **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)** – VK hosted Brandon Harrell, NJCAA’s Region 17 Women’s Director, in hopes of getting them to join in the 3v3 basketball tournament VKSC is hosting in Knoxville next April during Induction weekend.
- **National Cage Bird Show** – VK hosted 10 board members and the planner for the 2023 and 2024 events. The group has been at Chilhowee Park and is looking to move to KCC for more space. The KCC and the Marriott were toured.
- **Electromagnetic Nondestructive Evaluation (ENDE) International** – VK hosted the planner and toured the Crowne Plaza. He feels that it is a great fit for his group with the walkability to Market Square and Gay Street.
- **CrossFit® Games North America East Qualifier** – VK hosted event director Wilson Pak and toured the Knoxville Civic Coliseum and multiple hotels with hopes of hosting the event in 2024.
- **American Trail Running Association** – VK hosted Executive Director Nancy Hobbs for a two-day site visit in hopes of hosting the American Trail Running National Conference in 2024. The KCAC was toured for part of their event and additional time was spent showcasing Knoxville’s Urban Wilderness.
- **Gun Owners of America** – VK along with KCC hosted the planner for a site visit at KCC. They are hoping to have their event in August of 2024.
- **Sales Blitzes** – The VK Sales Team performed two sales blitzes during 2Q:
 - **Washington, D.C.** – VK visited and met with eight groups in the D.C. area including American Gas Association, National Association of Counties, and Federation of Tax Administrators.
 - **Nashville, TN** – VK visited and met with four groups in Nashville including Home Builders Association of Middle Tennessee and Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police.
- **Scouting Trips** – The VK Sales team performed two scouting trips during 2Q.
 - **Korn Ferry Tour Championship** – VK attended the Korn Ferry Tour Championship in Evansville, IN. VK is looking at best practices and improvements to make to the Visit Knoxville Open.
 - **AAU Cross Country National Championship** – VK attended the 2023 event in Tallahassee, FL. VK is looking to bring the event back to Knoxville in 2025.



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 70 events/meetings, 14 festivals, and provided a total of 80 partner referrals. All 80 partner referrals were related to the 84 events/meetings and festivals that were supported this quarter. Team Knoxville shared and participated in eight events and opportunities this quarter, recruiting volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to local events.

2Q Goals:

- **Finalize master festival list with dates for 2024 Visitors Guide and *visitknoxville.com* event calendar** – Received final dates from festival planners to include in the 2024 Visitors Guide and to be added to the *visitknoxville.com* event calendar once information is released. Coordinated with the VK Marketing Team to ensure accurate dates are included.
- **Create an information sheet for planners outlining sports specific event services offered** – Created a document to distribute to sports event planners showcasing all event services, resources, and assets available to events within the sports market.
- **Utilize information gathered from the revised Additional Venues Guide to update accounts in Simpleview with amenities, contact information and correct tags** – Accounts have been updated in Simpleview with amenities, contact information and correct tags based on information gathered from the revised Additional Venues Guide.
- **Attend Endeavor Summit and complete an Event Service Professionals Association webinar as a team for continuing education** – Attended Endeavor Summit on October 19 and participated in Event Service Professionals Association Webinar – Learn from the Experts: Focus on Accessibility on November 16.
- **Communicate date for the 2nd Annual Knoxville Festival Meeting and update all festivals on assets that Visit Knoxville can offer their event** – Save the date was sent out to all festival partners for 2nd Annual Knoxville Festival Meeting to be held on February 27, 2024.

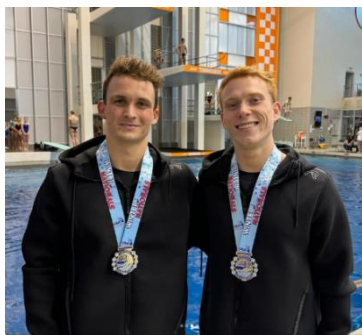
- **Create activities surrounding Tour de Lights and execute all logistics of the event –** Designed a Holiday Market & Expo, added food vendors and marshmallow roasting station, implemented all logistics and created festive décor and elements to enhance the event. See Highlights Summary for more details.

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

- The VKSC hosted the **2023 USA Diving Winter National Championships**, including the 2023 Winter Nationals Qualifier, **November 28 – December 6**. Held at the Allan Jones Aquatic Center at the University of Tennessee, this competition served as an opportunity for divers to qualify for the US Olympic Trials, which Knoxville will also host in June of 2024. The Winter National events also served as the qualification event for the World Aquatics Championships – Doha 2024, which is the final chance for countries to secure quota spots for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, France. The event saw over 225 athletes compete throughout the week. Leading up to the event, the VKSC Team participated in multiple pre-planning calls and visits with all involved entities, including USA Diving, the Allan Jones Aquatic Center, University of Tennessee Athletics, and Tennessee Aquatics to determine event needs.



The VKSC Team managed all event ticketing, including building a ticketing site, managing ticket presales, staffing the entrance gate, and handling onsite ticket sales and wrist banding. The Team assisted with communicating event logistics, such as parking, venue



policies, ticketing policies, and Knoxville visitor information to all ticket holders prior to the event. Team Knoxville assisted with volunteer recruitment and signups for 112 volunteer shifts to assist with registration, credential checking, hospitality, and other general event needs throughout the duration of the event. Digital visitor information was provided for all out-of-town attendees to ensure an exciting stay in Knoxville. The event was listed on the visitknoxville.com event calendar and was heavily promoted on VKSC social media channels, local news outlets, and digital billboards. The VKSC Team helped secure a host hotel for staff and set up multiple hotel options for athletes and spectators. To welcome teams and spectators, digital signage was displayed at McGhee Tyson Airport with a custom message, and a written welcome rotated on the Visitors Center Reader Board throughout the duration of the event.

“Working with Visit Knoxville has been a pleasure. With their support, we ran a very successful Winter National Championship. This is no small task when you consider that it was also our World Championship qualifier. Huge thanks to Team Visit Knoxville. We are looking forward to a very long and mutually beneficial partnership!”

– Lee Michaud, President, USA Diving

- Knoxville welcomed the **2023 Appalachian Regional Showcase**, part of the United Futsal Regional Showcase, December 9–10, 2023, marking the first United Futsal event in Knoxville. More than 450 athletes and their families made their way through the KCC over the course of this two-day co-ed youth tournament.



The VKSC worked directly with the tournament director on their event needs leading up to the tournament. VKSC assisted with venue sourcing and facilitated the setup and teardown of 6 futsal courts with help from partners Empire & Co. Labor, ACES forklift, and Heavy Haul Trailers. Event equipment, including tables and ice chests, was provided, and delivered by VKSC for event



use. To welcome the group to Knoxville, VKSC displayed a message on the Visitors Center Reader Board, provided links to digital visitor information and visitor materials, including Visitors Guides, the Family Friendly Sports Weekend Guide, downtown maps, downtown dining maps, the Experience Knoxville Savings Pass, and Sunsphere ticket information. VKSC assisted with hotel sourcing and contacts for out-of-town teams. VKSC also designed digital welcome signs for the group, which were displayed on indoor and outdoor screens at the KCC. Referrals for athletic trainers and local print shop options were provided at the request of the group. VKSC highlighted the event across social media channels and listed the event on the visitknoxville.com event calendar.

“The Appalachian Regional Showcase and Conference was United Futsal's first venture into the city of Knoxville, and we will definitely be back. The entire staff at Visit Knoxville and the Knoxville Convention Center are incredibly supportive, professional, responsive, quick to adapt when problems arise, and willing to help whenever possible. They truly are a dream team, and we look forward to building on this relationship for many more years to come!”

– Erin Thetford, Director of Business Development, United Futsal

Additional planner quotes from 2Q Meetings and Events:

“Christina, it was so wonderful meeting you this past weekend. Thank you for your hospitality and kindness. What a fabulous city. I'd never been to Knoxville before and truly enjoyed my visit. We look forward to working closely with you over the next couple of months.”

– Kelly Balmaceda, Director of Events and Programs, National Association of Teachers of Singing

“Thank you for all your support during our event – we loved our time in Knoxville, and I think a lot of our delegates were pleasantly surprised at how much they enjoyed discovering your city!”

– Sarah Whitehead, Event Director, CBRNe Convergence 2023

“Thanks so much for your materials. They were used by a bunch of our attendees. I really appreciate your efforts.”

– Pat Hardy, Executive Director, Tennessee City Management Association

Team Knoxville Volunteers

A total of 486 hours was provided by 121 volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to the following local events:

- October 2-4 – ETEBA Business Opportunities & Technical Conference
 - Team Knoxville prepared and handed out welcome bags at registration and greeted attendees ahead of sessions for a total of 18 hours by three volunteers.
- November 9-12 – FILM FEST KNOX
 - Team Knoxville scanned attendee tickets and badges ahead of each film showing for a total of 30 hours by six volunteers.
- November 27 – December 6 – USA Diving Winter National Championships
 - Team Knoxville assisted with registration, hospitality, and credential checking for a total of 438 hours by 112 volunteers.

Team Knoxville participated in the following additional activities:

- Recruited volunteers for the CBRNe Convergence November 7–9, which were subsequently released and replaced with paid staff.
- Shared partner volunteer opportunities, including:
 - October 6 – Elevation Nights
 - October 6–9 – Big Orange Brawl
 - October 20 – CAIN concert by Loop Events
 - December 9 – Tour de Lights

Additional 2Q Activity:

- **Pre-planning Visits:**
 - **National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS)** – October 19–21 – The committee conducted a series of strategic site visits to essential venues and hotel properties to deliberate on the preparations for the 2024 National Conference. While at the KCC, the committee participated in comprehensive discussions with the venue's staff, addressing catering arrangements, spatial layouts, and the optimal flow of attendees within the property. Following this, the committee toured the meeting spaces and hotel accommodations at the Marriott, Tennessean, and the Hilton, engaging in in-depth conversations about specific requirements and considerations relevant to these properties.
- **Festival and partnership support** included PrideFest, Greek Fest, Foothills Craft Guild Annual Fine Craft Show, Veterans Day Parade, Film Fest Knox, Christmas at Chilhowee, Fantasy of Trees, Holidays on Ice, Celebration of Lights, Light Up Lakeshore, City of Knoxville Christmas Parade, Tour de Lights, and New Year's Eve at the Sunsphere.
- **Conducted pre-planning calls and/or meetings** for Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA), USA Diving Winter Nationals, USA Diving Olympic Trials, FILM FEST KNOX, Tour de Lights, Tennessee Miracle, K2 Volleyball, Knox St. Patrick's Day Parade, Knoxville Salty Dog Seafood Festival, Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Induction Weekend, and Regal Annual GM Conference Meeting.
- **Participated in the following webinars and virtual events:**
 - Simpleview – Eventsforce: The True Hero for Conventions, Meetings & Events
 - Event Service Professionals Association – Learn from the Experts: Focus on Accessibility
 - VolunteerLocal – Live Group Demo Webinar

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.

2Q Goals:

- **Host a Fall Media FAM (familiarization tour) for editorial content** – VK hosted “Taste & See: East Tennessee – an Unforgettably Fun Foodie FAM” November 1–5. See Highlights Summary for additional details.
- **Plan and produce a film premiere event and full media plan for the Barxville Dogumentary** – VK recently received a boost during the final production of *Barxville; A Knoxville Dogumentary* with the addition of voice talent from Peyton Manning and Drew and Ellie Holcomb. The film is now set to premiere digitally on February 20, 2024. Online, audiences will see teasers as well as a produced trailer leading up to the release on National Love Your Pet Day. The full media plan includes a national press release with media kit and social media campaign executions. The timing is planned strategically to promote spring travel plans to Knoxville. Planning is underway for a spring viewing party for pets and humans. The Dogumentary is also promoted in the 2024 Knoxville Visitors Guide.
- **Execute a marketing/PR plan for 2023 FILM FEST KNOX** – The marketing/PR plan leading up to the highly successful four-day event included multiple press releases; local radio, online and billboard placement including placement in *MovieMaker Magazine*; social media, television interviews; and communication/coordination with film industry magazine writers.
- **Design and produce the 2024 Knoxville Visitors Guide** – The 2024 guide was sent to press on December 18 and is available to view online now at [Visit Knoxville | Visitors Guide](http://VisitKnoxville.com/VisitorsGuide). The guide celebrates Knoxville as a pet-friendly destination, with special commentary from Hank – the star of *Barxville; A Knoxville Dogumentary*. Additional



content includes stories on Knoxville’s music, maker and food scenes, neighborhoods, hotels, museums, attractions, and events. Printed guides will be available January 26 at the annual Visitors Guide launch party, taking place this year at Visit Knoxville.

- **Work with VK Visitor Services on the launch of a holiday Toy Catalog (print and digital) and retail items coordinated by Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD)** –Just in time for the holidays, TDTD produced and distributed a unique



toy catalog including Tennessee themed mini-building block kits to 100,000 households. Kits for The Sunsphere and Navitat represented Knoxville in the mix of 25 statewide options. The toys were custom designed by the attractions and Impact Photographics – The Mini Block Company.

The catalog also includes postcards, wrapping paper, luggage tag, stickers, and activity pages. Promotion surrounding the launch encouraged families to “Plan a family vacation to Tennessee’s top destinations and get a toy for the kids – at the same time.” The Playcation catalog can be viewed/requested [online](#) and was included in a [Forbes feature](#). The Sunsphere set is available for purchase at The Sunsphere and Visit Knoxville Visitors Center (refer to the Visitor Services section for image); the Navitat set is available for purchase at Ijams Nature Center.

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**. A highlight of this quarter included promotional materials for FILM FEST KNOX and Tour de Lights. Additional materials are 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.
 - **2Q E-newsletters**

Experience Fall in Knoxville – This edition promoted House Mountain, FILM FEST KNOX, House Mountain and other Knoxville trails and greenways, Navitat, the Grand Reopening of Higher Ground: A Century of



the Visual Arts in East Tennessee at the Knoxville Museum of Art, and the Full List of Calendar Events.

Holidays in Knoxville – This edition promoted Santa at Sunsphere, Seven Islands State Birding Park, Elf on the Shelf, Holidays on Ice, Tour de Lights, the Peppermint Trail, Light Up Lakeshore, Grinch Movie Night at Ancient Lore, and a link to the Full Calendar of Events.

*Current open rate for the e-newsletter is 40%**

**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 13 Community Corner newsletters were produced in 2Q with an open rate of 37%.
- 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 1.3 million pageviews in 2Q. 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 3.06
 - Number of clicks to partner sites from VK website was 89K
 - Top three metros generating traffic were Atlanta, Nashville, and Chicago
 - 1,255 pageviews to sign up for the e-newsletter

The **VK Online Event Calendar** is managed by the Visitor Services Team. In 2Q, 153 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:



- [Knoxville's Ongoing Festival of Film](#)
- [2023 Guide to Christmas in Knoxville](#)
- [Christmas at the Historic Homes of Knoxville](#)
- 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 various Halloween events at the Historic House Museums of Knoxville, FILM FEST KNOX, Christmas in the City, the Knoxville Ice Bears, Tour de Lights, and more.
 - Instagram reels including places to find books in Knoxville, Santa at the Sunsphere, a feature of the reimagined Higher Ground exhibit at the Knoxville Museum of Art, a timelapse of the Sunsphere painting process, a highlight of Maker items in the VK Gift Shop, the Elf on the Shelf® Adventure, the Downtown Peppermint Trail, and a guide to all things groovy in Knoxville.
- **Additional Partner Promotion & Involvement** – VK continues to provide support to our tourism partners. Highlights include:
 - In October, VK was pleased to participate alongside representatives from Memphis, Franklin, the Tennessee Distillers Guild and TDTD on the state's first media mission to New York City. The media mission provided the opportunity to connect with big names in the journalism community and expand our network of media contacts. The trip featured two key events: Tennessee Whiskey Notes Happy Hour and Flavors of the South. VK provided Knoxville Chocolate bars for all of the gift bags.

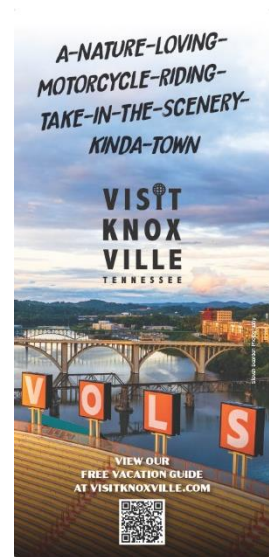


The Tennessee Whiskey Notes Happy Hour event took place on October 3 at Gary's Loft. Over 30 media attendees (staff/contributors for *Good Morning America*, *TODAY Show*, the *New York Times*, *AFAR*, and *VinePair* among many others),

Tennessee Distillers Guild (Greg Eidam of Sugarlands, Alex Castle of Old Dominick Distillery and Jeff Arnett of Company Distilling), Tennessee musician Damien Horne, Lodge Cast Iron chef Kris Stubblefield, and tourism representatives from around the state took part in the event.

On October 4, Flavors of the South – Tennessee Cast Iron Cooking Class & Lunch provided a hands-on cooking experience at the Institute of Culinary Education. Led by Lodge Cast Iron chef Kris Stubblefield, seven media and influencer attendees were paired with tourism representatives from around the state to prepare and enjoy Tennessee-inspired dishes and talk about their destinations.

- Placing creative in the 2024 Tennessee Vacation Guide (print and digital).
- Partnering with local artist Paris Woodhull to use exclusive artwork online and in the 2024 Knoxville Visitors Guide.
- Partnering with the Dirty Guv'nahs to utilize their music in VK's artsy-town ads/videos and other promotional pieces. Listen [HERE](#).
- Partnering with WDVX on Tennessee Shines – a concert series at the Bijou Theatre highlighting up-and-coming artists. The November 1 show featured Chris Knight, Darrell Scott, and Po' Ramblin' Boys.
- Partnering with the Tennessee RiverLine on "Paddle Tales." The episode aired a total of 103 times in 2023. VK's artsy town commercial has aired 208 times with 7.05M impressions and a media value of \$141,076 (metrics provided by Heliconia). The Paddles Tales episode on YouTube does not have the commercial but showcases Knoxville beautifully and has had 18k views to date.
- Partnering on the Tennessee Theatre's Broadway season (includes ad placement in playbills *Six* and *Jagged Little Pill*).
- Partnering with the Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council (METTC) for a booth with the Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council at the Travel South International Showcase in Memphis on December 4–6. VK provided Visitors Guides and was included in the Long and Winding Road brochure that showcased the region (Prime markets for distribution include OH, FL, GA, NC, SC, TN, IN, IL, MO, and stepping up is the I-81 corridor into western NY and PA.). The Travel South USA International Showcase is a boutique travel show sponsored in part by the Rhythms of the South Alliance and Brand USA. This event specifically targets International Buyers and US Receptive Tour Operators booking travel for international guests that want to visit the Southeast. The show features pre-scheduled appointments with buyers and operators in pod style format, allowing suppliers to group together to better promote their region.



VK also partnered with METTC to host a Welcome Center FAM for Bristol, Hartford, Jellico, and Chattanooga on December 13 at the Museum of Appalachia. Representatives from VK, 9 Lakes Region of East Tennessee, Oak Ridge, Roan Alliance, and the Adventure Alliance provided presentations and roundtable collaboration efforts. The event was featured in the TDTD [Holiday Newsletter](#).



- Serving on the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC). TTC did not meet this quarter; the last meeting was during the Governor's Conference on Hospitality and Tourism held in Knoxville in September. The President of Visit Knoxville remains Chair of the Research 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 2Q contributed to 3,369 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in 2Q contributed to 4,052 hotel bookings. VK continues to pull insights from our Arrivalist partnership: For 2023, the top ten origin Designated Market Areas (DMA) of overnight visitors for the period by volume are listed below. These markets stayed an average of two nights. *

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1. Nashville | 6. Greenville/Spartanburg/Asheville/Anderson |
| 2. Chattanooga | 7. Charlotte |
| 3. Tri-Cities-TN-VA | 8. Knoxville** |
| 4. Atlanta | 9. Lexington |
| 5. Memphis | 10. Washington D.C. |

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

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

Note: Stay-lift is currently being updated by Arrivalist to bring their data in line with new privacy guidelines.

The 2Q VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the 2Q Highlights Report on Friday, January 26 on the [VK website](#).

Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance:

- VK assisted **Michelle Cooke**, a family travel influencer of **@lifewithchelleb** on Instagram. She and her family made a quick stop in Knoxville in partnership with TDTD to promote the Toy Catalog and Tennessee Trip planning. Navitat was a focus as they are a part of the TDTD Toy Catalog program.

VK hosted representatives of **Voyageurs du Monde**, a French tour operator specializing in tailor-made itineraries in various markets, connected to VK by way of the French Travel South representative. During their visit to Knoxville, they visited the Knoxville Museum of Art, the East Tennessee History Center, and the Sunsphere. The French Market passed the authentic crêpe test.



- VK hosted **Tim Wild**, a freelance travel writer based in the UK, in partnership with TDTD. His recent bylines include primarily mountain biking features with UK adventure and cycling publications such as *IMB Magazine*, *Wired for Adventure*, and *The Draft*. His visit to Knoxville was focused on mountain biking and was scheduled during AMBC's Fall Fest at Baker Creek Preserve. He plans to have several articles on this trip published in 2024.

- VK hosted **Sarah Gray** a creator of **@sarahsoda5** on TikTok, who did a "Sunup to Sundown in the Old City" concept to include coffee at Awaken/Old City Java, shopping at places like Rala/Bethie Lou's/Honeymouth, dining and Tennessee Whiskey Trail stops, and live music at the Jig & Reel. She also posts prank calls, acting as her alter-ego "Sue Dillon." VK worked with Pretentious Craft Co. to arrange. She has since posted to TikTok and Instagram, amassing 28.6K views and 57K views on the Old City TikTok and 57K views for the Pretentious TikTok. Her reel for the Old City amassed 85.6K views and 4.7K engagements (likes, comments, shares):

- [Old City Recap Tik Tok](#)
- [Pretentious Prank Call](#)
- [Old City Recap Reel](#)



- VK hosted **Alexis Dickie**, a Charlotte-based Instagram influencer of **@adventuresandales**. Her visit focused on exactly that – adventures and Knoxville's Ale Trail with a pet-friendly twist. She has since posted her road trip experience to Instagram and published a blog post:

- KY/TN Road Trip
- Adventures and Ales Blog Post
- VK hosted **Jeff Book**, a freelance writer on assignment for **East-West News Service**. He was focused on the Dixie Highway, the pioneering interstate route from Detroit to Miami with a highlight on the southern section where Knoxville was a main stop on the route from Cincinnati to Atlanta. His itinerary included UT Gardens, the Emporium Center, the Sunsphere, a tour at the Knoxville Museum of Art, and the Powell Airplane as a remnant of the old Dixie Highway.

Additional Marketing Activities:

- VK spoke to **Leadership Knoxville Scholars (LKS)** on October 13 at Visit Knoxville after they attended the WDVX Big Plate at Barley's and ventured off on a Downtown Walking Tour (each of the latter were suggestions from VK). The goal of the LKS excursions is to provide opportunities for the Scholars to connect with local non-profits, businesses, and individuals that impact the community to hear about the ways they do so.
- VK spoke to a representative from the **Rwanda Development Board** on October 24 at the request of the University of Tennessee's Center for Global Engagement and the Knoxville Chamber. The visiting group was here to cover a wide swath of traditional economic development ranging from tourism to conservation.
- VK was invited as a VIP Marketing Leader to attend **Connect Travel's eTourism Summit** in San Francisco on November 1–3. The event consisted of three education sessions (including navigating the AI Revolution), panel discussions and personalized appointments with esteemed travel industry suppliers.
- VK attended the **Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) Virtual Media Marketplace** on November 1. VK had 13 appointments with various freelancers, editors, and content creators. VK will work with them for future opportunities.

Publication Updates from Previous Visits:

- **Melissa Mahanes** had an article published in **Sophisticated Living Nashville**.
- **Eva Morreale** had an article published in **Forbes Travel**.

"I could truly gush and gush about Knoxville all day and it really was such a magical trip. I'm so thankful Kristen and Angie answered my cold emails and truly appreciate everything you both did to make the trip a beautiful one."

– Eva Morreale, Forbes Travel

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, AAA Living Magazine, The Local Palate, America's Best History, Pride Journeys, Philadelphia Magazine, UT Baker School, Tennessee Whiskey Trail, Southern Living, Knoxville Shopper News, The Daily Beacon, National Geographic, Palm Beach Illustrated, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement) include:

- *America's Best History* – *World's Fair Knoxville 1982*
 - *Pride Journeys* – *Celebrate Winter in Knoxville*
 - *PubClub.com* – *Tour de Lights Returns to Knoxville*
 - *The Family Vacationer* – *Knoxville, TN podcast episode*
 - *Style Blueprint* – *Christmas in Tennessee*
 - *Pride Journeys* – *What's New in Knoxville in 2024*
- **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 – 206
 - Total Publicity Value for Earned Media – \$370,512

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 second quarter, the Visit Knoxville Film Office assisted local production companies like Jupiter Entertainment, Big Slate Media, Double Vision Productions, Radio Systems Corporation, and Cirrus Aircraft with location scouting, permits, city services, and other needs required to ensure that filming went smoothly. Productions included crime reality shows such as *Payback*, *Snapped*, *Storms of Suspicion*, and *Fatal Attraction*, as well as marketing campaigns for PetSafe®, Casey's, TVA, Cirrus Aircraft, and others.



FILM FEST KNOX was the main focus of the quarter. In December 2022, VK announced its partnership with The Public Cinema to host a new film festival, following the dissolution of the Knoxville Film Festival. FILM FEST KNOX was created, and soon included a partnership with Regal to host the inaugural event at the downtown Regal Riviera. One of the goals of FILM FEST KNOX was and will continue to be is to create a recruiting opportunity for the Visit Knoxville Film Office to continue promoting Knoxville as an independent film hub. The event allowed networking connections

with producers and directors who make regional films with budgets under \$3 million, so they could consider Knoxville for future filming projects. This festival also offered the opportunity for festival goers to experience eclectic and powerful programming, carefully curated by Darren Hughes of The Public Cinema and Artistic Director for FILM FEST KNOX. Darren and his colleague Paul Harrill, both FILM FEST KNOX Co-Founders alongside Visit Knoxville, were integral to the success of this event.

As part of the overall programming, awards were given in the following categories: the American Regional Film Competition, the Made in Tennessee Competition, and the Elev8or Pitch competition. FILM FEST KNOX awarded a total of \$18,000 in cash prizes to the talented winners.



The American Regional Film Competition is a showcase of the diversity of personal and ambitious filmmaking happening outside of the traditional industry capitals of Los Angeles and New York City. This category featured the following six feature films: *Evening Song (for three voices)*, *Kick*

Me, Lousy Carter, Mountains, Peak Season, and Somewhere Quiet. The Best Film winner will receive an Oscar-qualifying theatrical run, courtesy of Regal.

The Made in Tennessee competition included three feature films and eight shorts. This category included the following feature films: *A Hard Problem, Country Brawlers, One More Week*; and the following shorts: *After, Life., Baseball with Dad, Black & White, Cart Return, Distant People, Fish, MK Ultra Violence, and Sword, Skill & Sorcery.*

The Elev8or Pitch competition included nineteen film submissions. This category included the following films: *Along Came, Catacombs, Field Call, Neon Shadows, Rock-A-Bye, Secret City, Solidarity, and Tenebris.* The top three winners will participate in a development lab with Paul Harrill and other industry professionals.

AMERICAN REGIONAL FILM COMPETITION

First Place – *Peak Season* (Dir. Steven Kanter and Henry Loevner)

Best Director – *An Evening Song (for three voices)* (Dir. Graham Swon)

Jury Prize – *Mountains* (Dir. Monica Sorelle)

“We’re so grateful to FILM FEST KNOX and Visit Knoxville for honoring our film Peak Season with this award! An Oscar-qualifying theatrical run at Regal is truly a game changer for a small film like ours. We were humbled to screen alongside some extraordinary movies in the American Regional Film Competition. In its inaugural year, FILM FEST KNOX has already put itself on the map as a world-class festival and a must-visit destination for independent filmmakers. We can’t wait to return to Knoxville with another film very soon.”
– Henry Loevner, Co-Director of *Peak Season*



MADE IN TENNESSEE COMPETITION

Best Film – *A Hard Problem* (Dir. hazart)

Jury Prize – *Country Brawlers* (Dir. Curren Sheldon)

THE ELEV8OR PITCH COMPETITION

First Place – *Catacombs* (Dir. Chad Cunningham)

Second Place – *Solidarity* (Dir. Asya Mounger)

Third Place – *Tenebris* (Dir. Kelly Burke)

2024 FILM FEST KNOX is confirmed for November, with specific dates yet to be announced. Follow [FILMFESTKNOX.com](https://www.filmfestknox.com) and [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for future announcements.

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 Makers to provide a variety of quality retail items in the Gift Shops at both locations.

The second quarter brought a new hue to the Knoxville Skyline with the Sunsphere being restored back to its original blue (Phase I). Beloved holiday traditions like Elf on the Shelf and the Peppermint Trail were celebrated, however a lot of firsts were introduced during 2Q. The Big Man himself, Santa Claus, made his debut on the Observation Deck, in addition to another special event, the first ever Sunset at the Sunsphere. The VK Gift Shops completed over \$70,000 in sales, welcoming new vendors, and curated Knoxville products.

2Q Goals:

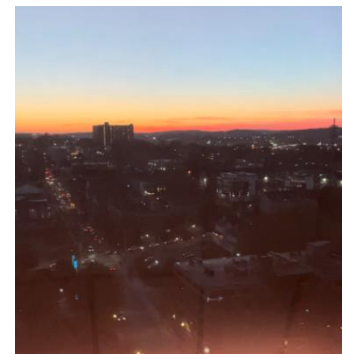
- **Paint the Sunsphere back to the Original Blue** – The Sunsphere base has been painted back to its original blue color, completing Phase I of this project. See the Highlights Summary for details.



purchased, servicing over 500 children and generating close to \$5,000 for the Sunsphere Fund.

- **Launch Santa at the Sunsphere** – Santa made his debut at the Sunsphere from December 7–9. Photo reservations were booked in advance with two packages available for purchase. Both package A & B included: all digital photos with Santa, candy canes, stickers, and cookies for up to three children. Package B also included a wrapped gift from Santa – a collectible Knoxville snow globe. Over 300 photo packages were

- **Host two off-site retail booths** – VK conducted three off-site retail booths this quarter at FILM FEST KNOX, Regal Celebration of Lights, and Tour De Lights. These three booths grossed over \$2,500 in sales.
- **Launch Sunsets at the Sunsphere** – The Sunsphere Observation Deck hosted the first Sunset viewing (\$10/person)



on First Friday, November 3. Admission included access to the Deck for sunset viewing, charcuterie boxes and sparkling cider from Above and Beyond Catering, and a meet-and-greet with highlighted local Maker Art of Matthew Kent.

- **Recruit New Products for the Visitors Center/Sunsphere Gift Shops** – During 2Q, six



new vendors were introduced to the Gift Shops: CarveBright (Sunsphere blue tumbler), Volunteer Traditions (hats and socks), Impact Photographics (Sunsphere block set), CatStudio (glass set and zipper pouch), Andrew & Autumn Osakue (*Three Little Buses* book), and Jane Jolley (*Oliver, Olivia, and the Otters* book). Existing partnerships continued to grow, bringing in over 30 new items this quarter.

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

- **Visitors Center Traffic** – Over 7,500 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 | ○ Pennsylvania |
| ○ Illinois | ○ New York |
| ○ Michigan | ○ Georgia |

- **Visit Knoxville Gift Shops** – VK's Visitors Center and Sunsphere Gift Shops completed over \$70,000 in sales during 2Q, averaging around \$750 for daily sales. VK continues to support Knoxville's Maker community and artists with over 80 existing partnerships. To continue to contend with other gift shops, the Visitor Services Team attended the Smoky Mountain Gift Show this quarter, observing trends and sourcing new products. A few additions introduced this quarter include Watercolor Magnet & Notecard Set (Natty Michelle Paperie), A Knoxville Christmas: 2nd Edition (Knox History Project), and Holiday Earrings (TN Clay).

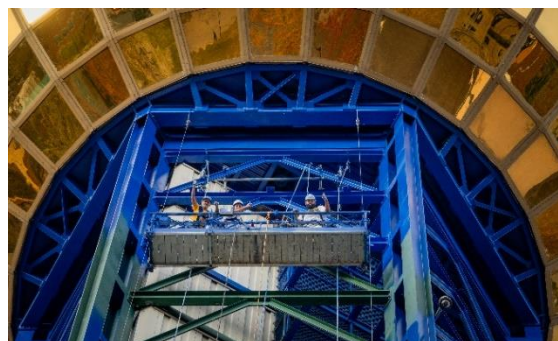


THE SUNSPHERE OBSERVATION DECK



The Sunsphere is a paid historic attraction that was built for the 1982 World's Fair. In 2022, Visit Knoxville reopened the 4th Floor 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 104,000 guests from all 50 states and 56 countries, including Sweden, Germany, and Mexico. VK is thrilled to celebrate the 100k visitor milestone in less than two years of being open as a paid attraction.

As mentioned in the Highlights Summary, the Sunsphere was restored back to the original PANTONE® blue during 2Q. Progression photos, a timelapse video, and Phase II (Sunsphere Welcome Center) renovation plans are available to view at sunspherecam.com. Projects like these would not be possible without the Sunsphere Fund.



Early stages of Phase II began during 2Q as The Christman Company took the Welcome Center plans to bid. Review of bids and overall budget will take place during 3Q to establish a construction plan and timeline. The Welcome Center will be constructed on the 3rd level of the Sunsphere. This enclosed area will enhance the visitors' experience, and will include an expanded retail space, additional brochures and visitor information, and provide a clear view of World's Fair Park.



With Phase II renovation plans on the horizon, marketing support of the Sunsphere Fund continues to be a priority. Getting the local community involved with special activations like Santa at the Sunsphere, Sunsets at the Sunsphere, and private proposals have proven to be popular. In addition to the Observation Deck and special event tickets sales, the Sunsphere Fund received a donation from the Big Kahuna Wings Festival during 2Q.

The private tour season slows in the cooler months, however; during 2Q, three private tours were conducted with over 90 attendees. Groups hosted include Farragut High School, Knoxville Jewish Day School, and Canterbury School.



- **Special Events & Collaborations** – This holiday season, the VK Visitors Center, along with Mast General Store, were the two locations to hand out Elf on the Shelf® Adventure Passports (North Pole Passes) and Stamps. This made VK’s resident Elf, Volly Knox, a very popular Elf. The Visitors Center was also a participating location for the Peppermint Trail, offering white chocolate peppermint toffee from Towns Toffee, peppermint dream snowflake soaps from English Rose Farms, and a custom Peppermint Trail candle designed by 865 Candle Co. Both programs ran November 27 – January 7.



During 2Q, the Visitor Services Team attended the Greater Knoxville Hospitality Association Housekeeping Games. VK helped source questions and hosted *Are You Smarter Than a Tourist?* Teams worked together to answer questions surrounding Knoxville and Tourism in the area.

The Visitor Services Team also attended the Carter Middle School Career Fair, servicing over 600 students. Tourism information and resources were handed out, while students asked questions surrounding VK’s mission and future career opportunities.

The Visitors Center had a celebrity guest appearance during 2Q – local musician Emily Ann Roberts. The Knoxville News Sentinel was highlighting her in an upcoming story and requested a photoshoot at a place that was special to her. Emily chose the Visitors Center as she grew up attending the WDVX Blue Plate Special and even performed on it at the beginning of her career, after starring on season nine of TV show *The Voice*.



- **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 2Q, over a dozen gift basket donation requests were fulfilled, including WIVK Anniversary Celebration, Barley’s St. Patrick’s Day 5k Run, Beardsley Farm Snow Day, and many more.

- The **Visitors Center Reader Board** located on the face of the building provides messages which are procured and maintained monthly. This includes welcomes for visiting groups, local announcements, and upcoming events. During 2Q, 52 custom welcome messages and highlighted events were featured.
- **VK loaned assets** (e.g., radios, coolers, ice chests, tables, tents, etc.) to AAC Collegiate Cross Country, National Youth Football, Hot to Trot 5k, Scruffy City Bonspiel, and United Futsal.
- **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, all 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.

VK celebrated the holidays during this quarter's concierge visits. Each member of the concierge team provided their assigned properties with a bag of Ghirardelli Peppermint Bark Squares, and two each of the 2023 Holiday-at-A-Glance flyers, Knoxville Christmas in the City/Holidays on Ice rack cards, Knoxville Winter Calendar of Events flyers, and Tour De Lights Flyers. VK continues to receive wonderful feedback on this program and can see the return on our efforts through increased participation and engagement from our industry partners.



- **Visitor Information Centers** located within attractions, shops, and restaurants throughout Knoxville are supplied with 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 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.
- **Brochure additions** allow the Visitors Center to stay up to date with available attractions and activities. This quarter over a dozen new brochures were added. A few include:
 - Norris Lake Trail System
 - Explore Bristol
 - Lady Vols Basketball Schedule
 - Jonesborough Visitors Guide



- Marble Alley Lofts
 - ART Downtown
 - Soake in Roane
 - Anderson County Adventure Awaits
 - Cherohala Skyway
 - Knoxville Holidays/FILM FEST KNOX/Housekeeping Olympics (Seasonal)
- **Visitors Guide Distribution** is a key focus. Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:
 - Tennessee
 - Florida
 - North Carolina
 - Illinois
 - Ohio
 - California
 - Pennsylvania
 - Texas
 - South Carolina
 - New York

During this quarter, there were 1,972 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page. VK distributed 1,326 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 2Q, a total of 63,216 Visitors Guides were distributed via outlets including the following:

- 9,100 through State Welcome Centers
 - 10,332 through brochure racks within the region, including attractions and hotels.
 - 43,784 distributed through other locations including the Visitors Center, satellite centers, UT, and airport.
- Additional **distribution materials** include:
 - **4,735** Downtown Pad Maps
 - **1,765** Dining/Trolley Maps
 - **7,995** UT Visitor Guides

Ongoing Partner Projects & Special Initiatives:

- **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's Taps N Tunes. This quarter a total of 2,832 people attended these events. Of those polled, the geographical attendance breakdown was as follows:
 - 2,281 Knox County
 - 270 Regional
 - 281 Out of Region – International guests included those from Germany, Canada, the Philippines, United Kingdom, Norway, and Italy.

Taps N Tunes – 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 given the opportunity to sell merchandise. 2Q Makers include:

- **October** – Beth Lanios with Triple Wrap Bracelets
- **November** – Rescheduled due to illness
- **December** – Danielle Robinson of DKR Jewelry



- **K-Town Connect** – The K-Town Connect Ambassadors have applied best practices to enhance growth and development in downtown Knoxville. Ambassadors are dedicated daily to the mission of making Knoxville a great place to live and visit.

This quarter, the Ambassador Program experienced significant growth and success. On October 3, the program expanded to Cumberland Avenue, welcoming six new ambassadors to the team. Operating hours for Cumberland Avenue were extended, allowing for enhanced support and accessibility in the community. The ambassadors diligently carried out their daily tasks, which includes hospitality, outreach, and graffiti or litter removal, ensuring a cleaner and more welcoming environment.

In addition to the expansion, the Downtown Ambassadors celebrated their second winter downtown. Their unwavering commitment to assisting the unhoused population continued, providing support in finding clothing, food, and local shelter. Their dedication and compassion played a vital role in helping those in need during the challenging winter season.

Also during the quarter, the ambassadors actively engaged with the public during the busy nightlife hours downtown. By creating a visible presence, they promoted safety, helped with directions, and fostered a positive atmosphere to enhance the overall experience of visitors and residents.

The combined efforts of the entire Ambassador Program throughout the quarter have proven instrumental in building relationships with community members, expanding to new areas, and providing crucial support to those in need. The program's success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the ambassadors.