

VISIT KNOXVILLE

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**DESTINATION MARKETING &
EVENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT**
OCTOBER 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2024



January 15, 2025

The second quarter of FYE25 will be memorialized in history, as the **new Sunsphere Welcome Center opened** in November. This event marks the first buildout to Knoxville's iconic structure since its creation in 1982, and we could not be more thrilled to have played such a pivotal role that will impact visitors and locals alike for generations to come.

FILM FEST KNOX returned for its second edition at the Regal Riviera, welcoming filmmakers, critics, and panelists from across the country. This event, plus the **Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Cheer & Dance State Championship**, transformed downtown into a bustling environment from the Knoxville Convention Center to Gay Street and beyond.

It was our pleasure to once again present **Tour de Lights** in partnership with Bike Walk Knoxville, bringing merriment to all along the route and providing additional holiday activations at the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum's Mary Costa Plaza. This annual favorite continues to expand, delivering a festive experience that embraces the magic of the season.

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 October 1 – December 31, 2024, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President, Visit Knoxville

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Highlights Summary	<u>Page 3</u>
Sales Summary	<u>Page 7</u>
Convention & Sports Services Summary	<u>Page 9</u>
Marketing & Communications Summary	<u>Page 13</u>
Film Office Summary	<u>Page 18</u>
Visitor Services Summary	<u>Page 19</u>
K-Town Connect Summary	<u>Page 24</u>
The Sunsphere Summary	<u>Page 25</u>

HIGHLIGHTS SUMMARY

The following summary details select highlights for October 1 – December 31, 2024, the second 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).

- VK and the VK Film Office hosted the second annual **FILM FEST KNOX** at Regal Riviera in downtown Knoxville in partnership with Regal and Public Cinema. The four-day event kicked off on November 14 with the highly anticipated Elev8or Pitch Competition. The Top 8 winners of the competition screened their 8-minute proof-of-concept films followed by a 1-minute pitch on their feature idea and a Q&A session with a panel of industry professionals.

This year's festival showcased an impressive guest list of prominent figures in the independent film world, including Taylor Shung, Producer of Oscar-winning film *Nomadland* and Executive Producer of Oscar-nominated film *Past Lives*, served on the live judging panel during the Elev8or Pitch Live Pitch night; Scott Macauley, producer and founder of *Filmmaker Magazine*, was in attendance for the entirety of the festival and moderated a panel on New Directions in Regional Filmmaking; esteemed film critic, Mark Asch, attended and covered the festival for *Film Comment*, a leading trade publication for independent filmmakers and fans; screenwriter/producer, C. Mason Wells of film distributor MUBI, served as a Jury Member for the American Regional Cinema Competition; Independent Spirit Award Winning Producer, Kelly Williams, served as a Jury Member for the Elev8or Pitch and also screened his movie, *All That We Love*, as the opening night film.



In advance of the event, the Marketing Team targeted movie lovers across the country in a multi-channel advertising campaign to promote year two. In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD), VK used Strike Social's advertising services on social media and YouTube to reach filmmakers and movie-goers. Additionally, VK developed three types of social media ads in-house to gather data about what ad styles reaped the strongest engagement from target audiences. VK developed an extensive social media plan to promote the event in advance and during the festival via @filmfestknox on Instagram and Facebook.

The Convention Services Team implemented several logistical components, including partnering with Agile Ticketing Solutions to manage the event's extensive ticketing needs. Regularly scheduled planning calls and meetings were held to establish seating charts,

ticket levels, design and printing of tickets and credentials, communication for email confirmations, and how to manage an on-site box office.



To welcome guests, credentials and VIP bags were distributed at Regal Riviera's concierge desk, staffed to assist participants and answer questions. Attendees were welcomed with signage at the airport, Alpha-Lit letters at Regal Riviera and Five Thirty Lounge, and pole banners hung on Gay Street. Travel arrangements, hotel accommodations, and airport transfers were provided for filmmakers. FILM FEST KNOX once again partnered with the University of Tennessee Cinema Studies Program to provide an opportunity for students to attend the festival and make industry connections.

In addition to the film programming, FILM FEST KNOX was also comprised of several other events. A VIP Opening Night Cocktail Party was held at The Vault, a Filmmaker Luncheon was held at Otsu Dumpling, a VIP Opening Night Party was held at Five Thirty Lounge, and a Wrap Party was held at Scruffy City Hall.



The centerpiece of the festival was the American Regional Cinema Competition. Five films competed this year for the highly sought-after prize of an Oscar-qualifying theatrical release, courtesy of Regal. The competition included FILM FEST KNOX's first World Premiere and three Regional Premieres. Filmmakers from each film were in attendance and participated in Q&A sessions after their screenings. The 2024 winner was *To Kill a Wolf*, directed by Kelsey Taylor and filmed

in Oregon. The American Regional Cinema Competition awards were custom-designed and handmade by local Maker, Preston Farabow of Aespyre Metals. All award winners can be found at filmfestknox.com.

In 2024, FILM FEST KNOX took a big step forward in growth, as attendance nearly doubled from the previous year. Excitement continues to build on what the future holds, especially because the festival will serve as a strong recruiting tool for the VK Film Office.



“Vital regional film festivals have largely disappeared from the US landscape over the last decade. With its shrewd curation and warm communal spirit, Film Fest Knox is single-handedly working to reverse that trend. It’s a beacon.”

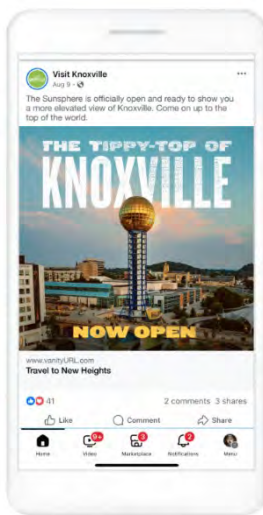
– C. Mason Wells, Director of Distribution, MUBI

- The **Sunsphere Welcome Center** opened on November 20 with a press conference and ribbon cutting. The “Coffee and Clydesdales” event drew a crowd, offering photo opportunities, a first look at the new Welcome Center, and free admission to the updated 4th Floor Observation Deck. Speakers included Kim Bumpas, VK President; Indya Kincanon, City of Knoxville Mayor; Bo Roberts, President of the 1982 World’s Fair; and Mark Ezell, TDTD Commissioner. The Budweiser Clydesdale horses made an appearance as a nod to the 1982 World’s Fair followed by a ribbon cutting at the new solar entry canopy.



The Welcome Center, made possible by the Sunsphere Fund, now acts as a hub for the attraction, establishing an official entrance to the Sunsphere. The Welcome Center offers a staffed experience where visitors can gather Knoxville maps/brochures, shop in the Sunsphere Gift Shop, and buy a ticket to the 4th Floor Observation Deck. With new improvements, VK can better tell the story of the Sunsphere and the 1982 World’s Fair. The solar array atop the entry canopy is a nod to the theme of the World’s Fair, “Energy Turns the World.” Approaching the Welcome Center, visitors will notice the surrounding walls of the Sunsphere are painted the color of the Rubik’s Cube, symbolizing the world’s original largest one gifted during the World’s Fair from Hungary, which now resides in the

Knoxville Convention Center (KCC). Other references to the World’s Fair and memorabilia reside on the Observation Deck. The interior of the Welcome Center features one of the largest skylights in the southeast, exclusive Sunsphere merchandise, and floor-to-ceiling glass overlooking World’s Fair Park. Visitors can experience the Welcome Center for free and can buy tickets to the Observation Deck for \$5-\$10 per person with \$1 off for veterans.



VK tasked ad agency VML with the development of a [Sunsphere sizzle reel](#) to highlight the structure’s history and future with the Welcome Center and renovated Observation Deck. The video is part of an active social media campaign to continue to draw attention to the Sunsphere as a major visitor attraction.

- VK once again hosted **Tour de Lights**, a free, family-friendly holiday event in partnership with Bike Walk Knoxville and the Downtown Knoxville Alliance. Held on December 14 at Mary Costa Plaza at the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum (KCAC), the event’s twinkling lights provided by Christmas Décor and More turned the plaza into a festive wonderland.



The VK Marketing Team promoted the event in advance via a press release, social media, and website to provide registration, contest, and bike safety details to thousands of #TDLKnox participants. The VK Convention Services Team planned the creative layout and design using Socialtables software and collaborated with All Occasion Party Rentals for logistics and equipment. Above the Rest Balloon & Event Design and Sound Revue brought the holiday theme to life with décor and lighting, creating a stunning stage backdrop for the costume contest. The Knoxville Community Band provided music while the ride was taking place. Alpha-Lit's illuminated letters and festive balloons enhanced photo opportunities.



New features for 2024 included a custom race arch; a redesigned Holiday Market with bistro lighting and chandeliers under one tent; a Peppermint Village offering activities including letters to Santa, professional photos with Santa, and a fire pit for marshmallow roasting. Event signage,

designed by VK's Marketing and Convention Services Teams, tied together the holiday theme with a cohesive aesthetic. A staffed bike valet provided secure storage for participants. B97.5 Morning Show hosts Ashley and Roger emceed, alongside celebrity judges for the costume contest.



The Knoxville Police Department ensured safety through detailed route planning, while VK supported vendor coordination and operations, including a staffed information tent and crosswalks to assist with multiple KCAC events occurring simultaneously. Participation reached 1,800 registered riders (up from 1,200 in 2023) thanks to streamlined

Eventbrite registration and a dedicated event website. As part of the registration process, the Appalachian Mountain Bike Club generously contributed a premium custom-fit mountain bike for a giveaway, adding extra excitement to the event.

“I wanted to reach out and thank everyone involved for the amazing time my family and I had at TDL this year. I rode in (and won the costume contest at) the very first TDL two decades ago. We could not have had a better time! A highlight was riding the tandem with my daughter down Gay Street as people cheered and waved from both sidewalks which were packed with onlookers. My kids are already talking about how they want to decorate their bikes to do it again next year. Thank you for all the hard work that clearly went into making this event what it was. It was awesome to see so many different people all coming together to show that Knoxville is a bicycling town.”

– The Cooper Family

SALES SUMMARY

- **Trade Shows** – The VK Sales Team attended three trade shows:
 - **Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) National Convention (October 15–19)** – VK Sales Team attended the AAU National Convention in Orlando, FL. VK met with Diving, Cross Country, Wrestling, Volleyball, and Girls’ Basketball planners about bringing their national championships to Knoxville.
 - **Tennessee Society of Association Executives (TNSAE) Annual Lunch and Trade Show (November 12–14)** – VK Sales Team along with other local partners attended the TNSAE Annual Lunch and Trade Show in Chattanooga, TN. VK met with 16 groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.
 - **Meetings Today Live (November 17–20)** – VK Sales Team attended the Meetings Today Live 2024 in Orlando, FL. VK met with 18 groups about bringing their events to Knoxville in future years.



VK tracks each sales activity and monitors results throughout the fiscal year. For FYE25, VK received five RFPs resulting from 2Q trade show attendance.

- **Site Visits** – The VK Sales Team hosted 10 site visits:
 - **American Jet Sport Association** – VK Sales Team and Knox County Parks and Rec staff conducted a one-day site visit with two representatives from the group. They are looking at The Cove at Concord Park for an event in 2025.
 - **Barbershop Harmony Society** – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with the group’s Vice President of Events. They toured Knoxville Catholic High School about potentially hosting their event. They also toured Holiday Inn-Knoxville West, Courtyard Marriott-Knoxville West/Bearden, and Baymont Inn and Suites Knoxville-Cedar Bluff.
 - **Defense Strategies Institute Hypersonic Innovation Conference** – VK Sales Team hosted the Director of Programs and the Senior Partner of Defense Strategies Institute from their group. They toured the KCC and are interested in Knoxville for their 2025 Conference.
 - **International Cycling Safety Conference** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with a local organizer from their group. They toured the Women’s Basketball Hall



of Fame, Marriott, and the Hilton. They are considering Knoxville for their 2026 conference.

- **International Institute of Municipal Clerks** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with the group’s third-party planner and joined by a representative from the City of Knoxville. They toured the KCC, Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt Place. They also visited the Sunsphere and did a driving tour of downtown Knoxville. They are looking at Knoxville for their 2028 Annual Conference.



○ **Intoximeters**

User Group – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with the Special Agent/Forensic Scientist Supervisor for the State of Tennessee. They toured the Marriott and Hilton. They are looking at Knoxville for their 2025 conference.

- **Southeast Regional Folk Alliance** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with a representative from their group. They toured the

KCC Lecture Hall, UT Conferences, and Hilton.

- **Tennessee Chapter American Public Works Association** – VK Sales Team conducted a half-day site visit with the Tennessee Chapter Administrator and client representative. They toured the World’s Fair Exhibition Hall and the Marriott. They are looking at Knoxville for their 2027 Conference.
- **Tennessee Self Storage Association** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with the Executive Director. They toured the World’s Fair Exhibition Hall and the Marriott.
- **Thermoset Resin Formulators Association**- VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with the Executive Director. They had breakfast at the Marriott followed by a property tour and a driving tour of downtown Knoxville.



- **Scouting Trips** – The VK Sales team performed one scouting trip:
 - **AAU Cross Country National Championship** – VK Sales Team attended the 2024 event in Charlotte, NC in hopes 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 65 events/meetings, 12 festivals, and provided a total of 64 partner referrals. All 64 partner referrals were related to the 77 events/meetings and festivals that were supported this quarter. The Team recruits volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to support local events, and this quarter the Team Knoxville Volunteers participated in one event and shared three partner opportunities.

2Q Goals:

- **Finalize master festival list with dates for 2025 Visitors Guide and *visitknoxville.com* event calendar** – Received final dates from festival planners to include in the 2025 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.
- **Attend Endeavor Summit and complete an Event Service Professionals Association webinar as a team for continuing education** – Attended Endeavor Summit on October 3 and participated in Convention Sales Professionals International Town Hall: Sales & Event Services webinar on October 17.
- **Communicate date for the 3rd Annual Knoxville Festival Meeting** – Save the dates were sent out to all festival partners for the 3rd Annual Knoxville Festival Meeting to be held on February 11, 2025.
- **Support FILM FEST KNOX by planning and executing How to Fest Event, Opening Party, Closing Party, and all Box Office operations** – Successfully managed and staffed all box office operations and planned How to Fest event at The Square Room, Cocktail Hour at The Vault, Opening Party at Five Thirty Lounge, and Wrap Party at Scruffy City Hall. See Highlights Summary for more festival details.
- **Organize and implement all logistics of Tour de Lights** – Implemented all logistics and created festive décor and elements to enhance the event. See Highlights Summary for more details.



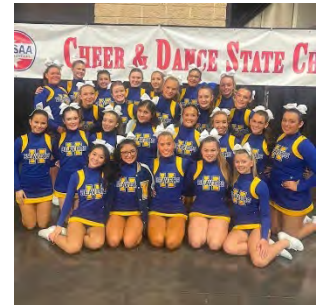
Highlighted Events (additional items referenced in the Highlights Summary):

- The **2024 Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) Cheer & Dance State Championship** took place November 15–16, followed by the **2024**



Premier Athletics Showcase on November 17, both hosted at the KCC. The championship highlighted Tennessee's most talented cheer and dance teams in a dynamic and competitive atmosphere, drawing record-breaking participation throughout the weekend. Over the first two competition days, 3,700 TSSAA athletes from 190 schools competed, with an additional 1,600 Premier athletes showcasing their skills on the final day.

VKSC partnered with the TSSAA and Premier teams to play a vital role in ensuring the event's success. Months of preparation included hosting multiple site visits and pre-planning calls to fine-tune every detail. Exceptional care was taken to accommodate event staff with assistance in securing their hotel block reservations. To enable seamless travel arrangements, a customized hotel flyer was created that featured special rates and booking instructions. Parking was simplified by securing special event parking with the 11th Street Parking Garage. Custom-designed parking maps and digital information were distributed, making navigation stress-free for visitors.



Onsite the warmup area was top-notch due to VKSC's work in facilitating the setup and teardown of two practice floors with partners Showcall, ACES, and Heavy Haul Trailers. A partnership established with All Occasions Party Rentals supplied a dance stage, further enhancing the experience and overall look of the competition. VKSC provided staffing support to assist with operations, ensuring the championship ran smoothly. The Visitors Center Reader Board welcomed participants and set the tone for an exciting weekend.

"TSSAA was thrilled to partner with Visit Knoxville for our TSSAA/TMSAA Cheerleading and Dance State Championships this past fall. Being able to utilize the Knoxville Convention Center allowed us to expand this championship to a 2-day event for the first time ever, which led to participation from over 3,700 students at 190 member schools. Visit Knoxville has been very supportive of education-based athletics, and the city of Knoxville served as a welcome host to our student-athletes!"

– Emily Crowell, Assistant Executive Director, TSSAA

- Knoxville proudly welcomed the return of the **2024 Battle in Rocky Top** from November 22–24. This annual postseason youth football tournament was hosted across 10 East Tennessee venues, including Knoxville’s John Tarleton Park, Tommy Schumpert Park, Knoxville Catholic High School, and the King’s Academy. 350 teams, hailing from 20 states and spanning multiple grades and skill levels, competed to the best of their abilities throughout the weekend, creating an exciting competition for athletes and families. The tournament’s registration and athlete weigh-ins were hosted at the Knoxville Expo Center, a location secured with VKSC’s assistance. VKSC offered logistical support,



loaned event equipment, and provided a range of resources including links to discounts at local attractions, a family-friendly weekend guide, maps, and other visitor information. Access to promotional Dollywood ticket rates via VK’s partnership was also distributed as an added experience for attendees. The tournament was highlighted on VKSC Instagram stories leading up to the weekend, ensuring strong visibility and engagement. Athletes and their families were

welcomed with a personalized message on the Visitors Center Reader Board.

Additional planner quotes from 2Q Meetings and Events:

“Thanks again for stopping by the Marriott to say hello. It was a pleasure to meet you. Everyone enjoyed Knoxville and I imagine we will be back in a couple of years.”

– Sheila Deringis, Director of Events, American Public Gas Association

“Knoxville has been a great location for the first visit for the US Trail Running Conference to Tennessee. We loved the warm, bright, and welcoming downtown area, the Courtyard Downtown as our host hotel, and the conveniently located Civic Auditorium. Everyone has been super friendly and helpful, and we are interested in returning.”

– Terry Chiplin, Event Director, US Trail Running Conference

Team Knoxville Volunteers

A total of 10 hours was provided by two volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to the following local event:

- October 28 – **ETEBA Business Opportunities & Technical Conference** – Team Knoxville prepared welcome bags for registration.

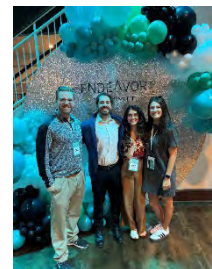
Team Knoxville participated in the following additional activities:

- October 14 – UT Jones Center for Leadership & Service Volunteer Fair
- Shared partner volunteer opportunities, including:
 - November 15 – TSSAA Cheer & Dance State Championship/24 Seven Competition
 - December 14 – Tour de Lights
 - April 5 – Tennessee Science Olympiad



Additional 2Q Activity:

- **Pre-planning Visits:**
 - **2025 Alpha Kappa Alpha South Eastern Regional Conference** – Hosted the South Eastern Region Regional Director of Alpha Kappa Alpha October 4–6, along with her Chief Administrator and two Conference Planning Liaisons. As part of our partnership, VK coordinated the pre-planning visit, arranging flights, hotel accommodations, and transportation. VK also collaborated closely with partners to facilitate tours of their contracted hotels and meeting spaces.
 - **Shed Builder Expo** – Hosted the event planner December 3–4 to tour additional space that will be utilized at KCC in 2025.
- **Festival and partnership support** included PrideFest, Foothills Craft Guild Annual Fine Craft Fair, Veterans Day Parade, Film Fest Knox, Christmas at Chilhowee, Fantasy of Trees, Holidays on Ice, Light up Lakeshore, WIVK Christmas Parade, Tour de Lights, and New Year's at the Sunsphere.
- **Conducted pre-planning calls and/or meetings** for FILM FEST KNOX, Tour de Lights, Alpha Kappa Alpha South Eastern Regional Conference, Tennessee Miracle Spring Classic, TSSAA Cheer & Dance State Championship, VK2 Grand Prix, and Knox St. Patrick's Day Parade.
- **Additional Activities:**
 - Attended 2024 Sports ETA 4S Summit
 - Attended UT Hotel and Tourism Management Networking Night



MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SUMMARY

The **Visit Knoxville Marketing Team** produces, approves, and places regional, national, and international advertising and social media content 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:

- **Develop shot list for new photography assets to add to VK library** – During 2Q, VK met with local photographers to establish (or further) mutually beneficial partnerships. Overall, area photographers revealed a willingness to share their digital assets to promote Knoxville; VK credits photographers (on social media posts and in our Visitors Guide, for example) to enhance the reputation and generosity of artists in our city. Throughout 2Q, photo assets were added to the VK digital library.
- **Host two journalists/influencers for editorial content development** – VK hosted three journalists. See Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance for details.
- **Produce a new commercial video for the Sunsphere Welcome Center** – A 30-second sizzle reel commercial was created by VML to accompany the grand opening of the Sunsphere's Welcome Center. The commercial is an ongoing part of VK's current social media advertising campaign.
- **Design and produce the 2025 Knoxville Visitors Guide** – To execute VK's new vision of "a picture is worth 1,000 words," the 2025 Visitors Guide has Instagram-like appeal with more visuals and shorter text blocks throughout. The guide was submitted to the printer and will enter digital and print circulation in January 2025.

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 design and produce customized **creative materials**. Highlights of this quarter included FILM FEST KNOX posters, pole banners, rack cards, attendee badges, and the official program booklet. VK also developed wall wraps and exhibit posters for the Sunsphere Observation Deck

- VK continues to utilize its **e-newsletter**, **Community Corner**, and **VK Network** messaging to communicate events and activities to visitors and the community.

- **E-newsletter**: Christmas in Knoxville – The 2Q e-newsletter was distributed in December and emphasized The Elf on the Shelf® Adventure and Peppermint Trail holiday events throughout Knoxville as well as mentions of February and March events on the horizon.

The current open rate for the e-newsletter is 24.8%. SimpleView reports an average open rate of 32.6% for the tourism industry. (2024)

- 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 2Q with an open rate of 32%.
 - 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 1.8 million pageviews in 2Q. Each quarter, VK creates new pages for the website and regularly updates content throughout. Additionally:
 - Average length of session was 58 seconds.
 - Pages per session was 3.07.
 - Number of clicks to partner sites from VK website was 87K.
 - Top three metros generating traffic were Atlanta, Nashville, and Chicago.
 - 1,371 pageviews to sign up for the e-newsletter.

The **VK Online Event Calendar** is managed by the Visitor Services Team. In 2Q, 80 events were added to the calendar.

- VK promotes partners in the **VK Blog** with a mix of contributors including 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 Restaurants Open on Thanksgiving](#)
 - [Guide to Christmas in Knoxville](#)
 - [Christmas at the Historic House Museums 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 Boo at the Zoo, Oktoberfest, UT Football, Wicked Cool in Downtown Knoxville, several neighborhood features, and more.



- Instagram reels included a collaboration with @dogwoodarts for the opening of KnoxWalls at Emory Place, @myvoicemap for a feature of Knoxville's Downtown Walking Tour via the Voice Map app, @sunsphereknox for Santa at the Sunsphere and Sunsets at the Sunsphere, a feature of the Get Out and Play Guide, a feature of Lime Scooters, and more.

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

- 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 Atlanta December 2–4. VK provided visitor materials and was included in the Long and Winding Road brochure that showcased the region (prime distribution markets include OH, FL, GA, NC, SC, TN, IN, IL, MO). This showcase is a boutique travel show sponsored in part by the Rhythms of the South Alliance and Brand USA. This event targets International Buyers and US Receptive Tour Operators booking travel for international guests that want to visit the Southeast. The show features a pre-scheduled pod-style format, allowing suppliers to group together to better promote their region. A booth of visitor materials at the Gateway Outdoor Expo in St Charles, MO was an additional partnership. The theme was outdoor, camping, hiking, paddling, cycling, and conservation. Attendees came from greater St Louis and southern Illinois.

VK also partnered with METTC to host Morgan Lundsford, a content writer who is an avid hiker, biker, and fisherman. His East Tennessee familiarization (FAM) tour included a visit to Knoxville, where he was recommended to visit Fort Dickerson, Baker Creek Preserve, William Hastie Natural Area, and the Sunsphere.

- Providing visual content to @citiesofthesec monthly to promote collaboration among SEC towns on social media.

- 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. Andrew Marlin Stringband, Rachel Baiman, and Robinella took the stage on November 13.
- Serving on the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC) – TTC did not meet in 2Q. 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 2Q contributed to 1,623 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in 2Q contributed to 3,506 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. Memphis |
| 5. Chattanooga | 10. Los Angeles |

**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 2Q VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the 2Q Highlights Report at the end of January on the VK website.

Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance:

- VK hosted **Harald Staun**, Editor-in-Chief for **Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung**, one of the leading German Sunday newspapers, in partnership with TDTD. His visit through Tennessee included a short stop in Knoxville, where he enjoyed the WDVX Blue Place Special, a VK-guided downtown walking tour, and a tour of the Tennessee Theatre.
- VK hosted **Jan Ross**, freelance writer of **Epicurean Traveler**. Her visit included a tasting at PostModern Spirits, a lunch cruise aboard the Tennessee Riverboat, and several food-focused dining options.

- VK hosted **Aaron Thiesen**, Travel Editor of **BIKE Mag**, in partnership with TDTD. He rented a mountain bike from Bear Paw Bikes and was connected to members of the Appalachian Mountain Bike Club (AMBC) to explore Knoxville's Urban Wilderness.

“Thanks again for helping to put together such a successful and productive visit to Knoxville. Your extensive local recommendations (probably the most thorough I have ever received) combined with an enthusiastic bike community, made for one of the best itineraries I have ever had. And while we're adding on superlatives, Knoxville may be the most welcoming community I have ever visited for a story. Beyond the biking, y'all have something special there, and I am excited to share it with the BIKE Mag readership.”

– Aaron Thiesen



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: Knox News, TDTD/Turner PR, Voyageurs du Monde, The Local Palate, Moon Tennessee, Somewhere Fun Social, Covenant Health, Knox Focus, U.S. News & World Report, Greenspring Media/Meetings + Events, Alabama Media Group, Taste of the South, Forbes, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement) include:

- *The Adventurist* – *The Complete Guide to Knoxville, TN*
 - *Somm in the City* – *Glass Blowing Brews in Knoxville, TN*
 - *Southeast Meetings + Events* – *Behind the Scenes of Film Fest Knox*
 - *The Adventurist* – *The Best Restaurants in Knoxville, TN*
 - *AAA Explorer* – *Game-Day Getaways (print only)*
- **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 – 540
 - Total Publicity Value for Earned Media – \$2,140,390



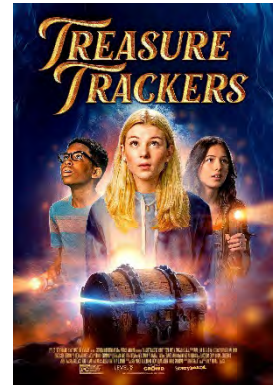
VISIT KNOXVILLE FILM OFFICE

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 VK Film Office provided several production companies with assistance, including our talented local production companies such as Jupiter Entertainment, Loch & Key, and PopFizz Productions. Projects included a documentary for the non-profit organization Revival Memphis, marketing videos, and crime reality television shows such as *Fatal Attraction* that airs on the TVOne network and *Snapped* that airs on Oxygen.

The VK Film Office also assisted several out-of-town production companies, including companies like Drone the News on *SEC Nation* airing on ESPN, Meateater Inc. on their *Meateater Tailgating Tour*, Mad Bear Productions on the unveiling of a Valspar mural in downtown Knoxville, Strong Productions out of Denmark on the adventure competition show *Race Across the World* airing on the BBC, and Sublime Media Group on a commercial for The Mint Gaming Hall.

In October, the feature film *Treasure Trackers*, a family adventure film, was released on most streaming platforms and on MAX in overseas markets. *Treasure Trackers* was recruited by the VK Film Office and shot in Knoxville.



Also in October, VK and the VK Film Office hosted a How to Fest event leading up to FILM FEST KNOX at the Square Room. The event provided an overview of the festival, serving as a guide to the 2024 lineup. Attendees were also shown how to use the Agile ticketing app to select film blocks during the festival. Additionally, the Top 8 winners of the Elev8or Pitch Competition were announced.

In November, the second annual FILM FEST KNOX took place at Regal Riviera in downtown Knoxville. See Highlights Summary for details.

VISITOR SERVICES SUMMARY

The **Visitor Services Team** functions as the face of Visit Knoxville by welcoming and assisting visitors. They operate from two locations: the Visit Knoxville Visitors Center at 301 S. Gay Street and the Sunsphere Welcome Center and 4th Floor Observation Deck. The Team collaborates with over 80 local artisans, known as Makers, to offer a diverse range of high-quality retail products in both Gift Shops. The Team organizes tours, monitors and maintains the Events Calendar and Weekly Newsletter, and procures maps and brochures to enhance visitor experiences in Knoxville.

2Q Goals:

- **Complete construction of the Sunsphere Welcome Center** – The Sunsphere Welcome Center opened to the public on November 20, 2024. See Highlights Summary for details.
- **Plan and produce Santa at the Sunsphere** – Santa made his second appearance on the Sunsphere Observation Deck December 6–8. See the Sunsphere page for details.
- **Host Sunsphere Sunsets** – The Sunsphere Observation Deck began the second season of its First Friday event called Sunset at the Sunsphere. See the Sunsphere page for details.
- **Attend Smoky Mountain Gift Show** – VK attended Smoky Mountain Gift Show November 6 at the Gatlinburg Convention Center. Over 500 companies exhibited merchandise and wholesale products of innovative tourism items and resort gift lines. VK continues to partner with a handful of large-quantity items (i.e., snow globe, pewters, etc.) outside of the local Maker market.
- **Host three off-site retail booths** – The VK Gift Shop hosted booths at FILM FEST KNOX on November 13–17, Celebration of Lights on November 29, and Tour De Lights on December 14.
- **Recruit New Products for the Visitors Center/Sunsphere Gift Shops** – Five new vendors were introduced to the Gift Shops: Maggie Lyons Chocolatier (Holiday Pretzel Sets), Wes Bennett (*The Kitty of Knoxville*), Blue Ridge Mountain Gifts (Skyline Slate Coasters & Cutting Board), Dave Conklin (Collegiate Canes), and Canvas Style Jewelry (Tennessee Volunteer Jewelry). Existing partnerships continued to grow, bringing in over 20 new items.



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

- **Visitors Center Traffic** – Over 7,700 guests were greeted in person. Top 10 states (in addition to Tennessee) of visitors checking into the Visitors Center were:
 - Florida
 - California
 - Texas
 - Georgia
 - North Carolina
 - Illinois
 - Massachusetts
 - Virginia
 - Indiana
 - Arizona
- **Gift Shop** – VK continues to support Knoxville’s Maker community and artists with over 80 existing partnerships. A few local/regional additions introduced this quarter include Giant Peppermint Patties (Bradley’s Chocolates), World’s Fair Park T-Shirt, Tote Bag and Postcard (Paris Woodhull Illustrations), Orange VOLS Keychain and Rocks Glasses (Honeymouth Leather), Firewater Hot Sauce (Tennessee’s Best), and more.

Visit Knoxville continues to offer gift basket wrapping services to all partners and visitors. Gift baskets are available for purchase in the Visitors Center for shopping ease or order can be placed online for pickup selecting the “gift box” option. During 2Q, VK fulfilled 10+ private basket requests.

- **Special Events & Collaborations** – During 2Q, the Visitor Services Team hosted a familiarization tour for Tennessee’s 16 State Welcome Centers. A guided walking tour of Downtown Knoxville was conducted, as well as a sneak peek of the new Sunsphere Welcome Center before its grand opening. Representatives from all Welcome Center locations were present, making this a great opportunity to showcase Knoxville and give visitor recommendations. Knoxville maps and other collateral were given out, in addition to a collectable Knoxville snow globe to display at their locations. The event was featured in TDTD’s December [Industry Newsletter](#).



The Visitors Center and Sunsphere Welcome Center both participated in The Elf on the Shelf® Adventure, with resident elf Volley and new elf Sunny. The Visitors Center was a destination for passports, stamps, and holiday information about the scavenger hunt, in addition to a stop on the Peppermint Trail, offering peppermint sweet treats and a specialized candle in partnership with 865 Candle Co.

- **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 the Rotary Club, GKHA Housekeeping Games, Sertoma Club, Race to Erase MS, and more.
- The **Visitors Center Reader Board** located on the face of the building provides messages that are procured and maintained monthly. This includes welcomes for visiting groups, local announcements, and upcoming events. During 2Q, 60 custom welcome messages and highlighted events were featured.
- **VK loaned assets** (e.g., radios, coolers, ice chests, tables, tents, etc.) to Bike Walk Knox, AAC Collegiate Cross Country, Appalachian Mountain Bike Club, Fleet Feet Hot to Trot, and Scruffy City Bonspiel.
- **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.

VK celebrated the holidays and highlighted upcoming events 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 following materials: 2024 Holiday-At-A-Glance flyers, Christmas in the City/Holidays on Ice rack cards, Knoxville Winter Calendar of Events flyers, Tour De Lights Flyers, FILM FEST KNOX flyers, flyers advertising the grand opening of the Sunsphere Welcome Center, Sunsphere/VK Visitor Services flyers, and the newly redesigned Get Out and Play guides. VK continues to receive great feedback on this program and can see the return on these efforts through increased participation and engagement from our hotel 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.

- **Brochure additions** allow the Visitors Center to stay up to date with available attractions and activities. This quarter **7** new brochures were added:
 - Foothills Craft Guild
 - FILM FEST KNOX
 - Sevierville Brick Walking Tour
 - Visit Farragut Holiday Guide
 - America's TN River Valley
 - Explore More
 - Holidays On Ice
- **Visitors Guide Distribution** is a key focus. Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:

○ Tennessee	○ Georgia
○ Florida	○ South Carolina
○ North Carolina	○ Michigan
○ Illinois	○ New York
○ California	○ Ohio

During this quarter, there were 1,754 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page, and VK distributed 1,172 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 42,161 Visitors Guides were distributed via outlets including the following:

- 3,650 through State Welcome Centers
 - 8,936 through brochure racks within the region, including attractions and hotels.
 - 29,575 distributed through other locations including the Visitors Center, satellite centers, UT, and Knoxville's airport.
- Additional **distribution materials** include:
 - **3,095** Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
 - **6,645** 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:
 - An outing to Zoo Knoxville to explore one of our valued partner's properties.
 - VK's annual United Way Campaign, where employees can pledge funds to UW or one of their supported organizations.
 - A visit to Sunshine Services and Sunshine Industries to learn about nonprofit organizations in Knoxville.
 - VK's Thanksgiving Potluck and Holiday Meeting to celebrate the year as a team.
 - 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 3,202 people attended these events. Of those polled, the geographical attendance breakdown was as follows:
 - 2,382 Knox County
 - 462 Regional
 - 358 Out of Region – International guests included attendees from Australia, Germany, England, Canada, Mexico, and Spain.
- **First Friday Live** – 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** – Hannah Doss (Mountain Mama’s Art & Adventure)
 - **November** – Dan Wilson (The DW Designs)
 - **December** – Tracy Sowders (Oil & Watercolor Art)



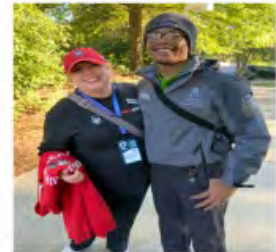
K-TOWN CONNECT



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. This quarter, Ambassadors achieved the following:

- Hospitality assistance to 1,987 people: This includes but is not limited to helping others use parking meters, suggesting places to eat or shop, and answering questions about events, etc.
- Graffiti/Sticker/Bill Removal: Graffiti, stickers, or bills on a public fixture do not remain up for long. Ambassadors removed 1,177 items.
- Litter collection: Teamwork makes the dream work. Ambassadors assisted with picking up 24,942 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 546 individuals were approached to ensure their well-being.
- Directions Provided: Ambassadors helped 547 people get where they needed to be.
- Scooter relocation: Ambassadors moved 1,296 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 55 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.



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. In 2024, VK completed construction of the third floor Welcome Center, establishing an official entrance to the attraction and hub for the structure. Since reopening in 2022, the Sunsphere Observation Deck has welcomed over 155,000 guests from all 50 states and 61 countries, including Colombia, Japan, Poland, and more.

In addition to the construction and official opening of the Welcome Center, the Sunsphere Observation Deck underwent creative renovation. The two alcoves on the deck have been updated with new exhibits, highlighting moments from the 1982 World's Fair, donated memorabilia, and a mural painted by local artist Paris Woodhull paying tribute to the "Wigsphere" episode of *The Simpsons*. Interactive technology from TrueOmni, Elo® Touch Solutions, and Chroma Energy Group also have space highlighting real-time solar energy use from the entry canopy, VK marketing videos/highlighted events, and touchscreens showcasing Knoxville visitor offerings, and an upgraded photo booth.



The Sunsphere Observation Deck began the second season of its First Friday event "**Sunset at the Sunsphere,**" which takes place November–March. November's sunset viewing (\$15/person) granted admission to the Observation Deck, refreshments of coffee and doughnuts from Status Dough, and contact with highlighted local Maker Amber Rountree, owner of Sunsphere Scents.



Santa made his second appearance on the Sunsphere Observation Deck December 6–8 for "**Santa at the Sunsphere.**" Photo reservations were booked in advance with two packages available for purchase. Both package A & B included all high-resolution digital photos with Santa, candy canes, stickers, and cookies for up to three children. Package B also included a Sunsphere building block set as a wrapped gift from Santa. Over 400 photo packages were purchased, making memories for over 900 children.