

VISIT 
KNOXVILLE
TENNESSEE

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024





TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

A MESSAGE FROM
OUR PRESIDENT

4

CONVENTION SALES &
SPORTS COMMISSION

6

CONVENTION &
SPORTS SERVICES

8

NOTABLE EVENTS &
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

10

MARKETING &
COMMUNICATIONS

12

MARKET
RESEARCH

13

FILM
OFFICE

14

VISITOR
SERVICES

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

This past fiscal year has been a phenomenal start to Visit Knoxville's next decade, having celebrated our 10th Anniversary last year as the Official Convention and Visitors Bureau for the City of Knoxville and Knox County. We hosted the Governor's Conference on Hospitality & Tourism, and during this event, it was announced that the 2022 Economic Impact of Travel on Tennessee report revealed **tourism in Knox County generated \$1.8 billion in domestic visitor spending**, a 14% increase from 2021. The data shows what we already know - that Knoxville is on the map as a premier destination for leisure travelers, meetings and conventions, film crews, sporting events, and more.

In addition to hosting the highest attended conference (breaking our own record when Knoxville hosted in 2014), we were honored to receive **several statewide awards** from HospitalityTN which recognize outstanding individuals and businesses within Tennessee's hospitality and tourism industry. The 2023 Bassmaster Classic received the Purple Iris Award for Special Event of the Year. Visit Knoxville received the Purple Iris Award for DMO (Destination Management Organization) of the Year - Large. Our own Director of Communications & Social Strategies received the Purple Iris Award for DMO Employee of the Year.

Our year was filled with **new events and installations**, including our inaugural FILM FEST KNOX, partnership with Bike Walk Knox to co-produce Tour de Lights, Santa at the Sunsphere, and an incredible finale with hosting the 2024 U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Diving in partnership with the University of Tennessee.

The Sunsphere has also been 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. The Sunsphere Welcome Center construction is currently underway, and we could not be more excited about this development and look forward to welcoming all visitors to our beloved icon in a reimagined way.

This year has been incredibly fulfilling for all of us. As you read this report filled with key activities like hotel bookings, trade shows, site visits, volunteer hours, FAMs (familiarization tours), website traffic, film productions, journalist visits and blog posts, know that it just scratches the surface. You can find detailed information on the past year, as well as previous ones in the quarterly highlights under MEDIA on our website. With all of this, it's no wonder that Knoxville continues to receive excellent press, such as being included in **CNN Travel's "2024 America's Best Towns to Visit!"**

On behalf of the entire Visit Knoxville team, thank you for the ongoing support and encouragement you provide. The incredible support of our board and stakeholders is what makes this nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kind-of-town all that it is for visitors and locals alike.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President
Visit Knoxville



VISIT
KNOX
VILLE
TENNESSEE

CONVENTION SALES & SPORTS COMMISSION

The Visit Knoxville Sales Team once again met several goals in another exciting year. Detailed information is listed below. These numbers include the activities of the Convention Sales Team and the Visit Knoxville Sports Commission (VKSC).



BOOKED EVENTS

227

(EXCEEDED GOAL OF 180)

Of the 227 events, 58% were new business. 55 events booked at the Knoxville Convention Center (KCC).

HOSTED

28

SITE VISITS

These included USA Sumo, Regal Cinemas, Gun Owners of America, Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) and Associated Luxury Hotels International.

PRODUCED OVER
\$161.9 MILLION
OF FUTURE ECONOMIC IMPACT

TOTAL LEADS

671

(EXCEEDED GOAL OF 500)

Of this, 41% (275) went to the Knoxville Convention Center.

EXECUTED

4

EVENT SCOUTING TRIPS

These included Korn Ferry Tour, Pro Wakeboard, AAU Cross Country Nationals and Bassmaster.

ATTENDED

17

TRADE SHOWS

Conducted 610 appointments/meetings by the Convention Sales Team, VKSC, and attending partners. Shows included Connect Marketplace, Connect Sports, TEAMS, Sports ETA Symposium, and Helms Briscoe.

384

VK CONCIERGE VISITS

VK Concierge is a way for our staff to engage with hotel partners, providing updated information through personal contact. Scheduled visits take place quarterly and ongoing contact is provided for additional needs and requests.



CONDUCTED TWO SALES BLITZES, RESULTING IN

23

SALES APPOINTMENTS IN
NASHVILLE AND WASHINGTON D.C.

Notable appointments included American Gas Association, Federation of Tax Administrators, National Association of Counties, Tennessee PGA™, TSSAA, Tennessee Health Care Association, and Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police.

CONVENTION & SPORTS SERVICES

The Convention and Sports Services Team is tasked with enhancing the overall planner and attendee experience with a focus on services designed to add value, maximize attendance, and retain group business. Providing planners with a high level of customer service and visitors with enhanced experiences positively influence the opportunities for repeat business and visits. The VK Convention Services Team provides services such as partner referrals, itinerary suggestions, visitor information, and off-site special event assistance 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.

SUPPORTED
353

CONVENTIONS, SPORTING EVENTS, FESTIVALS & MEETINGS

PROVIDED
337

PARTNER REFERRALS

Partner Referrals are meeting planner requests for suppliers, products, vendors, and services in the community.

PARTICIPATED IN
15

EVENTS & WEBINARS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION



Team Knoxville supported a wide variety of opportunities throughout the entire community including sporting events, civic improvement projects, and more. Volunteers served as information table and registration assistants, greeters, attendance monitors, judges, and timekeepers.



TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,239

TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

292

PARTICIPATED IN

7

COMMUNITY CAREER FAIRS TO RECRUIT NEW VOLUNTEERS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

The Convention and Sports Services Team proudly participated in the **Event Service Professionals Association's (ESPA) National Celebrate Services Week**, held July 31 – August 4. The Team visited each of the key venues and presented them with packages, showing appreciation for ongoing partnership.



The VKSC hosted the **2023 Visit Knoxville Collegiate** the weekend of September 7 – 10. Held at the Tennessee National Golf Club, this inaugural tournament showcased 14 NCAA Division I collegiate teams, with the University of Tennessee taking home the title.



The VKSC welcomed the **2023 USA Diving Winter National Championships**, including the 2023 Winter Nationals Qualifier, November 28 – December 6. This competition served as an opportunity for divers to qualify for the U.S. Olympic Team Trials – Diving, which Knoxville hosted in June 2024. The Winter Nationals events also served as the qualification event for the World Aquatics Championships – Doha 2024.

On December 9, VK co-produced **Tour de Lights 2023** in collaboration with Bike Walk Knoxville. The festive, free, family-oriented holiday event took place at a new venue, starting and concluding at Mary Costa Plaza. Exciting additions in 2023 comprised of a pre-registration process, an enhanced stage with lighting, a Holiday Market & Expo, food trucks, hot chocolate and beer stations, a fire pit for marshmallow roasting, and a surprise visit from Santa.



The **2nd Annual All Festival Meeting** was held on March 5 with 12 local festivals/events represented as well as the City of Knoxville Special Events Office and Public Building Authority. Event safety, new processes for hiring off-duty officers, COK Special Events permitting, and VK assets (Placer.ai, Team Knoxville Volunteers, VK event calendar, and loaned assets) were discussed.



The **Plant Your Event in Knoxville, Where Meetings Bloom Familiarization (FAM) Tour** was held April 16 – 18 and the Convention Sales & Services Team hosted nine meeting planners and event organizers, focusing on an itinerary that delivered a “Wow, I had no idea” experience.

Knoxville proudly celebrated the 50th anniversary of the **National Street Rod Association's Street Rod Nationals South** at Chilhowee Park May 3 – 4.

Approximately 900 attendees participated in the **National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) 58th National Conference** June 28 – July 2 at the KCC. VK has been collaborating with the NATS planning team since 2019 to prepare for the 2020 conference, which was rescheduled to 2024.



NOTABLE EVENTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS



SUNSPHERE UPGRADES

The **Sunsphere** base was restored to its original **PANTONE® color Classic Blue 19-4052 TCX** in collaboration with CertaPro Painters® of East Tennessee, using over 315 gallons of paint. A timelapse by RBA Marketing documented the transformation, available on [sunspherecam.com](https://www.sunspherecam.com). Color restoration completed Phase I of the project, while Phase II will add a Welcome Center to the structure’s third level.

U.S. OLYMPIC TEAM TRIALS - DIVING

The road to Paris began in Knoxville as the VKSC hosted the **2024 U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Diving** at the Allan Jones Aquatic Center from June 17 - 23. This premier diving event featured America’s top divers competing for a spot at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. Promotional efforts were highlighted by the **“Rings on the Square”** event in Market Square on June 19, which featured a 20-foot display of the Olympic Rings and athlete profiles on big screens - a perfect photo opportunity for attendees from all over.



VISIT BARXVILLE

Welcome to Barxville, A Knoxville Dogumentary showcases Knoxville, Tennessee as a pet-friendly destination, highlighting a unique travel documentary tailored specifically for dogs. The film appeals to pets’ senses with specific colors and strategically placed sound effects to engage dogs. Featuring notable voices and showcasing Knoxville’s pet-friendly attractions, the campaign generated significant media impressions and PR value, contributing to substantial travel bookings and revenues.



GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON HOSPITALITY & TOURISM

Knoxville was proud to welcome our partners from across the state to the **2023 Governor’s Conference on Hospitality and Tourism, September 13 - 15** at the KCC. The conference hosted 540 attendees, marking the largest attendance since the event was last held in Knoxville in 2014. The conference concluded with the Stars of the Industry Purple Iris Awards where Visit Knoxville took home Destination Marketing Organization of the Year, Event of the Year, Bassmaster Classic, and DMO Employee of the Year, Kristen Combs.



FILM FEST KNOX

The inaugural **FILM FEST KNOX** at the Regal Riviera Theatre featured independent films from Knoxville and all around the world. Categories included “American Regional Cinema” and “Made in Tennessee,” with *Peak Season* winning \$3,000 in prize money and an Oscar-qualifying theatrical release. *A Hard Problem*, filmed in Knoxville, won Best Made in Tennessee film. The festival included film blocks, workshops, and competitions like the Elev8or Pitch. The event was acclaimed by trade publications and drew cinema enthusiasts worldwide.

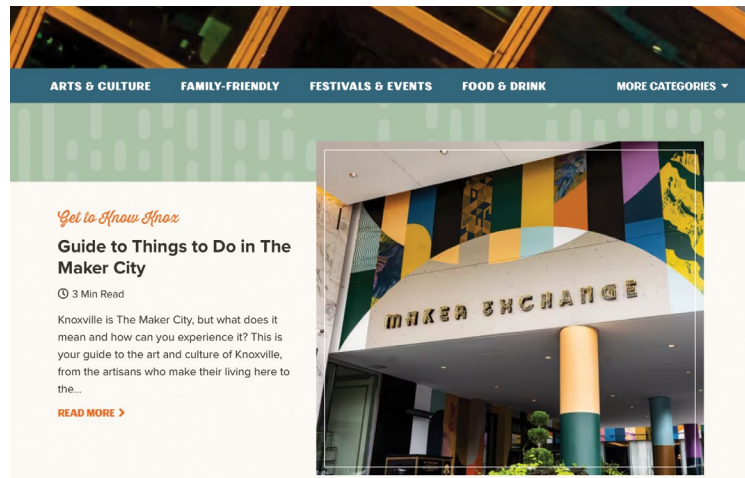
CrossFit®

The VKSC played host to the **2024 North America East CrossFit® Semifinal by Syndicate Crown** at the Knoxville Civic Coliseum May 31 - June 2. The top 40 men, 40 women, and 30 teams competed at this final qualifying stage for their spot at the 2024 CrossFit® Games. The Knoxville Semifinal was a welcome back to competition for six time CrossFit® Games champion, Tia-Clair Toomey, following maternity leave during the 2023 season.



MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Alongside marketing Knoxville as a nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kinda-town, we continued marketing Barxville, nature-loving-adventure-seeking-belly-scratching-kinda-town. The campaign launched February 2023, and has continued through FYE24. In FYE24 alone, the ads have generated 5,005 hotel bookings and 151 flight bookings, tracked by ADARA. Top markets include Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Indiana. As with all VK marketing campaigns, digital placement for Barxville directs to visitknoxville.com.



The Visit Knoxville website continues to perform at and above tourism industry standards thanks to fresh, updated content and images, social media links, and search optimization.

TOTAL NUMBER OF WEBSITE VISITS

2.5M
SESSIONS

(UP 7.16% OVER FYE23)

TOP 10 LANDING PAGES

1. Things to Do
2. Events
3. Events this Weekend
4. Home
5. Concerts & Live Music
6. Pet-Friendly
7. Attractions
8. Free Things to Do
9. Restaurants
10. Downtown Dining

TOP 10 CITIES FOR WEBSITE TRAFFIC

1. Atlanta
2. Knoxville
3. Nashville
4. Chicago
5. Ashburn, VA
6. New York
7. Charlotte
8. Raleigh
9. Dallas
10. Indianapolis

ADDITIONAL WEBSITE UPDATES

2,306

NEW/UPDATED CALENDAR EVENTS

68

NEW PARTNER LISTINGS

82

BLOG POSTS

TOTAL NUMBER OF WEBSITE USERS

1.9M
USERS

(UP 9.7% OVER FYE23)

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Hosted “**Taste & See: East Tennessee - an Unforgettably Fun Foodie FAM**” 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. The group was able to experience Knoxville’s incredible food scene, then caravanned to Townsend. In addition to this unique FAM, 18 journalists/influencers were hosted or assisted on visits throughout the year, producing press in various outlets including *MSN*, *Southern Living*, *Forbes Travel*, and more.



Participated alongside representatives from Memphis, Franklin, the Tennessee Distillers Guild, and the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development on the **state’s first media mission to New York City**. The mission provided the opportunity to connect with big names in the journalism community and expand our network of media contacts.

Hosted our annual Visitors Guide Party at the Visitors Center, with a sneak peek of the **Welcome to Barxville, A Knoxville Dogumentary**. Hank, the lovable Golden and star of the show was even in attendance. This was followed in the spring by a community screening hosted at Yee-Haw Brewing Co., open to the public. This followed the pet-friendly ad campaign launched in February 2023, and the Dogumentary itself was launched February 2024. The Barxville marketing campaign also took home an Excellence in Tourism Award from the Middle East Tourism Council: 2023 Best Advertising/Marketing Campaign.

Published a **website revision** with a fresh new look that captures the essence of the brand. The color palette has been updated along with modern, visually appealing fonts that put the focus squarely on content. Illustrations by local artist Paris Woodhull have been integrated, alongside paw prints incorporated into listings for pet-friendly businesses and hotels, aligning with the Barxville messaging. Additionally, a dog-friendly-themed digital passport was created to provide “treats” for check-ins at stops listed on the pass to showcase Knoxville’s many pet-friendly offerings.



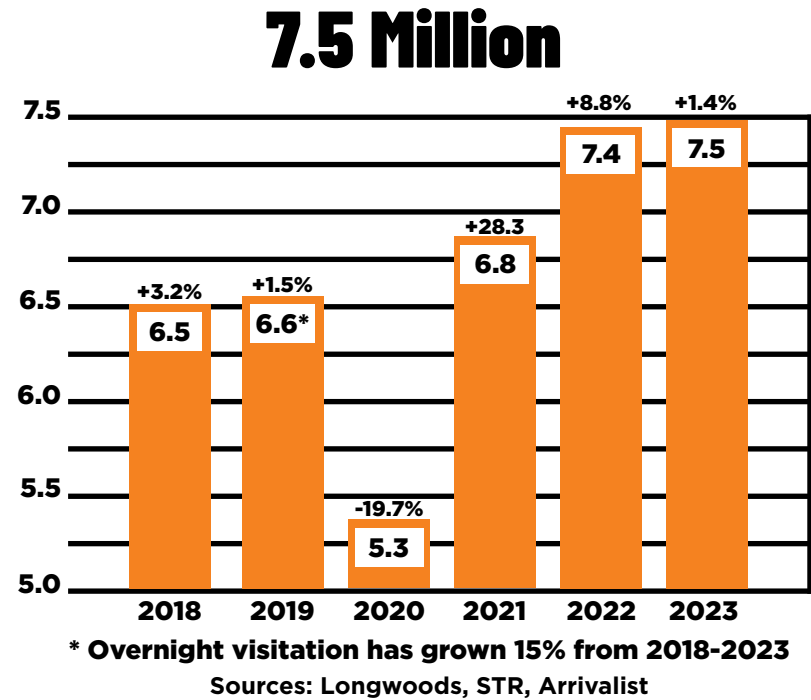
Promoted various **events, exhibits, and attractions** throughout the year via Visit Knoxville’s social media platforms, including Zoo Knoxville’s 75th Anniversary, Halloween and Christmas events at the Historic House Museums of Knoxville, the reimagined Higher Ground signature exhibit at the Knoxville Museum of Art, the East Tennessee History Center’s “They Sang What They Lived” exhibit, the Annual Street Rod Nationals South 50th Anniversary, and more.

Generated more than \$78,736,828 in earned/unpaid media via PR efforts (*The U.S. Olympic Trials - Diving ran over its timeslot and ran up to two minutes into the primetime television programs, resulting in an earned media value of nearly \$58.8 million.*)

MARKET RESEARCH

Visit Knoxville collects and analyzes data from sources including Longwoods International, Smith Travel Research (STR), ADARA, and Arrivalist to compile information related to Knoxville’s travel market. A quarterly Tourism Dashboard is available under Public Notices in the Media section of [visitknoxville.com](https://www.visitknoxville.com).

TOTAL OVERNIGHT VISITORS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2023



HOTEL DATA

TOTAL ROOM NIGHTS
JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024
2,372,250
(DOWN 3% OVER FY23)

Occupancy **Down 4.6%**
ADR **Up 4.7%**
Room Revenues **Up 1.5%**

Source: STR

BOOKING DATA

Visit Knoxville uses Adara to track hotel business generated from our digital ad placement and website visitation. Below is a summary of those findings.

HOTEL BUSINESS GENERATED BY WEBSITE VISITORS

Bookings	21,796
Room Nights	51,004
Average Rate	\$145.07
Hotel Revenue	\$7,399,186

HOTEL BUSINESS GENERATED BY DIGITAL AD PLACEMENT EXPOSURE

Bookings	22,198
Room Nights	44,969
Average Rate	\$140.79
Hotel Revenue	\$6,331,412

ADARA tracks a 60-day booking window. The booking data above is current as of 7-17-24.

TOP 10 BOOKING MARKETS

Atlanta • Charlotte • Chattanooga • Chicago • Greenville
Knoxville* • Nashville • New York • San Francisco • Washington, D.C.

*The Knoxville DMA (Designated Market Area) consists of 22 counties within East Tennessee and Southeast Kentucky

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 addition to supporting local and out-of-town production companies with filming needs and its recruitment of film projects, the Film Office:

Continued to showcase Knoxville and Knox County through film, as previous successfully recruited films such as the movie *Love in the Great Smoky Mountains: A National Park Romance* was released on the Hallmark Channel, and *Last Night on Earth* was released on most streaming platforms.



Launched the inaugural **FILM FEST KNOX**, a new film festival concept. The festival took place over 4 days at Regal Riviera Theater in downtown Knoxville. Hundreds of movie lovers flocked to the festival during the event to enjoy dozens of great independent films including shorts, features, and documentaries from all over the world as well as those filmed right here in Knoxville. The American Regional Film Competition was the centerpiece of the festival where six films competed for the prestigious prize of an Oscar-qualifying theatrical release, courtesy of our partners at Regal. FILM FEST KNOX received rave reviews from respected industry trade magazines such as *Filmmaker Magazine*, *In Review Online*, and *The Film Stage*. *In Review Online* stated, “If future years maintain this pace and quality, FILM FEST KNOX stands to become one of the Southeast’s premiere cineophile destinations and celebrations.”

Partnered with Public Cinema to start a **free monthly film screening series** as part of FILM FEST KNOX. The goals of the series are to extend programming throughout the year and to create community-building opportunities for Knoxville’s film fans and film workers.

Announced that Knoxville was once again honored by *Moviemaker Magazine* by being placed on their list of “**Best Cities to Live and Work in as a Moviemaker**”. This marks the fourth time Knoxville has made the list, coming in at #6 for 2024.



“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*

VISITOR SERVICES

The Visitor Services Team serves as the face of Visit Knoxville welcoming and assisting visitors. They operate from two locations: the Visit Knoxville Visitors Center at 301 S. Gay Street and the 4th Floor Observation Deck of the [Sunsphere at World's Fair Park](#). The Team collaborates with over 80 local artisans, known as Makers, to offer a diverse range of high-quality retail products in both [Gift Shop](#) locations. Additionally, they organize tours, monitor and maintain the [Events Calendar](#) and Weekly Newsletter, and develop maps and brochures to enhance visitor experiences in Knoxville.

VISITORS CENTER GUESTS

30,000+

1. Tennessee

2. Florida

3. New York

4. California

5. Texas
6. Illinois

7. Ohio

8. North Carolina

9. Michigan

10. Georgia

VISITORS GUIDES

195,000+

1. Tennessee

2. North Carolina

3. Florida

4. Ohio

5. Illinois
6. Georgia

7. Indiana

8. Kentucky

9. South Carolina

10. Texas



SUNSPHERE GUESTS

SINCE FEBRUARY 2022

130,000+

Top Visiting Countries for
July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

1. Canada

2. United Kingdom

3. Germany

4. Brazil

5. Australia
6. Mexico

7. France

8. Sweden

9. Italy

10. Japan

RETAIL PARTNERSHIPS

100+

Curating Knoxville inspired products.
A few notable partnerships include:

Paris Woodhull Illustrations
Abby Ryan Design
Honeymouth Leather
Jackson Avenue Tea Company
Impact Photographics
Bradley's Chocolate

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

The inaugural holiday experience **Santa at the Sunsphere** was launched, selling over 300 photo packages and servicing 500+ attendees. Additional experiences included First Friday **Sunsphere Sunsets**, an iSpy interactive game, the annual 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, partner receptions, and participation in the Read City Explorer Pass organized by the Knox County Public Library. The Sunsphere Observation deck hosted 22 private tours servicing 600+ attendees during FYE24.



Media Coverage for the Sunsphere included: Ingles Open Road, PBS East Tennessee, Pop Fizz, ESPN2 Portraits Series, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development Toy Catalog (Sunsphere Building Block Set), and WBIR's Affordable Things to Do. Visit Knoxville issued a press release in March highlighting Phase II of the Sunsphere project, the Sunsphere Welcome Center.

Keep Knoxville Beautiful awarded the Sunsphere the **Spruce Up Orchid Award**, recognizing maintenance and extra caretaking of existing buildings and structures. The Sunsphere was also approved for a **Historic Overlay Status** which focuses on preservation of historic facilities.



As referenced in the highlights, the Sunsphere was restored back to the original PANTONE® Color Classic Blue 19-4052 TCX. Demolition of the existing roof on the 3rd level of the Sunsphere has been completed, and steelwork and framing stages have begun for the new **Sunsphere Welcome Center**. A labeled temporary entrance with large flags, in addition to street clings, lead visitors through the ongoing construction site while the Observation Deck has and will continue to stay open through this project.

The Weekly Community Corner was upgraded to a **Weekend Events Newsletter**, highlighting significantly more events taking place in Knoxville each weekend. It is now open to public subscription. In addition to the Newsletter, the Visitor Services Team manages the Visit Knoxville Events Calendar, adding **547 events** this year.

Gotta Know Knoxville continues partnership with local businesses to enhance the two-hour walking tour of Downtown Knoxville. GKK hosted over **112 participants** this year.

First Friday Live was launched in the Visitors Center, introducing a new host and talent booking agent. Other ways the Blue Plate stage was activated this year included the Rossini Festival Kickoff, Big Ears Panels, and a photoshoot by local musician Emily Ann Roberts.

The Visitors Center recruited **70+ brochures** highlighting things to do in the Knoxville area. Some additions include:

- Blount Mansion

• Bike TN

• Clarence Brown Theatre

• Vol Shop Vol Guide

• Yoga Central

• McClung Museum

• ART Downtown Knoxville

• TN Valley Fair Guide

• KAT Bus Maps

• Lilienthal Gallery

• Addison's Tea Bar

• Tennessee RiverLine Planning Guide



The Official Destination Marketing Organization for
the City of Knoxville and Knox County, Tennessee

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