

# VISIT KNOXVILLE

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VISIT KNOXVILLE, TN

**VISIT  
KNOX  
SPORTS**

**DESTINATION MARKETING &  
EVENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT  
JANUARY 1 - MARCH 31, 2025**



April 15, 2025

The third quarter of FYE25 kicked off with one of our favorite key projects – the **launch of our annual Visitors Guide!** We hosted our launch party at Visit Knoxville and welcomed all our friends and partners in tourism to join us in celebrating our nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kindatown.

The quarter was filled with a major sporting event announcement, a city-wide convention, and many other events and initiatives. We hosted our partners at B.A.S.S. to announce the **return of the Bassmaster Classic in 2026** at a press conference in February. In March, we welcomed back **Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®** for their **93rd South Eastern Regional Conference**, turning downtown into a sea of pink and green.

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 January 1 – March 31, 2025, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP  
President, Visit Knoxville

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## HIGHLIGHTS SUMMARY

The following summary details select highlights for January 1 – March 31, 2025, the third 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).

- **Hosting the Visitors Guide Launch Party** – After another year of hard work by the VK Marketing Team developing an Official Knoxville Visitor's Guide, VK celebrated with a Launch Party on January 23, at the Visit Knoxville offices. This annual event welcomed partners, recognized Team Knoxville Volunteers, and gave a sneak peek of the new guide and the new Knoxville sizzle reel, *Adventure Around Every Corner*. The party also served as an open house, allowing guests to tour the VK office space, mingle with staff, try out a 360-degree photo experience, and



enjoy sips and snacks provided by Dead End BBQ. The 2025 cover proudly encapsulates everything to love about Knoxville: a nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kind-of-town. VK's Marketing Team spearheaded a new image-rich direction with this year's guide. Since a picture is worth 1,000 words, the 2025 guide is filled with fresh photos from talented local photographers. It is like Instagram in print – designed to inspire travel from the first flip. The guide makes planning a breeze with detailed maps, attraction listings, hotel options, and loads of original



content to help make the most of an unforgettable Knoxville getaway. The annual Launch Party was a fitting celebration for a guide that the whole team is proud to share with visitors.

- **Announcing the Return of the 2026 Bassmaster Classic** – At a February 5 press

conference in the Visitors Center, VK enthusiastically announced the return of the Bassmaster Classic. Known widely as "the Super Bowl of Bass Fishing," the 2026 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Classic presented by Under Armour will return to Knoxville for the third time March 13–15, 2026. The press conference included speakers representing the B.A.S.S. Organization and VK, as well as elected officials, Mayor Kincannon and Mayor Jacobs. Also, local angler Robert Gee parked his well-sponsored truck and boat at the front curb outside to provide a fitting backdrop for post-conference interviews.



- **Partnering with TDTD on the Tennessee Songwriters Showcase** – In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD), VK again hosted one of the regional showcase concerts where 14 winners of qualifying events advanced to perform at the historic Bijou Theatre on February 24. Since its inception in 2019, more than 4,000 songwriters have shared their original songs on Tennessee stages during the annual celebration each February. Sarrenna Johnson was the Knoxville Showcase winner – read the [full press release](#) for more details. The goal of Tennessee Songwriters Week is to support music venues, to support songwriters with live performances in all genres of music, and to inspire travelers and locals alike to experience the state’s music stories, history, attractions, and venues.
- Approximately 4,500 members of **Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. ® (AKA)** attended the **93rd South Eastern Regional Conference (SERC)** March 13–16 at the Knoxville Convention Center (KCC), with attendees from Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.



The Destination Services Team worked closely with the SERC team to coordinate multiple pre-planning visits including handling flights, hotel accommodations, airport transportation, and tailored itineraries.

To ensure a strong city-wide welcome, VK provided partner referrals for motorcoach and VIP transportation, off-site venues, florals, balloons, illuminated letters,



DJ services, lighting, and more. VK submitted a pole banner request to the City of Knoxville Special Events Office and arranged for the Henley Street Bridge to be illuminated in AKA’s signature

pink and green. VK partnered with PrintEdge on event signage including pole banners, sidewalk clings, and two custom “O” pieces for the KNOX letters at the KCC and World’s Fair Exhibition Hall. Additional branding was placed at the host hotels – The Tennessean, Marriott, and Hilton – where window, door, and floor decals enhanced the welcome experience. VK coordinated with McGhee Tyson Airport to display welcome signage at baggage claim.



To enhance attendee experience and engage downtown businesses, VK distributed a Convention Alert in partnership with the Downtown Knoxville Alliance, informing businesses of the 93<sup>rd</sup> SERC, encouraging proper staffing, inviting them to offer specials, and to decorate in pink and green. VK provided all contracted city-wide hotels with AKA's Style Branding Guide and a VK-created handout "Tailored Tips for an Energized Stay."



amenities.

The VK Marketing Team supported PR efforts via coordinated press release distribution and welcomed the event on social media. Attendees were provided digital visitor materials including the Ultimate Attendee Checklist, the Discover Knox handout, and the Experience Knox Savings Pass through the event app. The group was also recognized with a custom message on the Visitors Center Reader Board and on the VK TV Network. During the Public Meeting, Mayor Kincannon and VK President officially welcomed the members.

***"Team Knoxville...You Rock!!!! I have heard NOTHING but POSITIVE expressions from our attendees and our social media is spreading the word that KNOXVILLE's hospitality was off the charts!!! Again, thank each of you for your hospitality service to our SERVICE TO ALL MANKIND organization! We (AKA) left our civic imprint on the City of Knoxville and look forward to another return!"***

***– Leslie Edwards, Conference Planning Liaison, South Eastern Region AKA***

***[Referring to VK's own Christina Clayton] "Christina's exceptional hospitality and meticulous planning support played a pivotal role in the success of the 93<sup>rd</sup> South Eastern Regional Conference of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®. From the warm welcome to the impeccable attention to detail, every aspect of our experience reflected her commitment to stellar customer service. Our members were embraced with true Southern hospitality, making Knoxville a city we will always cherish."***

***– Dr. Tracey Morant Adams, South Eastern Regional Director, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc®***



# SALES SUMMARY

The **Visit Knoxville Sports Commission** (VKSC) and **Convention Sales Team** recruits and partners with planners to book conferences and sporting events at city-owned venues including the Knoxville Convention Center (KCC), World's Fair Exhibition Hall (WFEH), the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum (KCAC), Chilhowee Park, and other venues throughout the county.

- **Trade Shows** – The VK Sales Team attended two trade shows:

- **Religious Conference Management Association (January 6–8)** – VK Sales Team along with representatives from the KCC and Aimbridge Hospitality attended



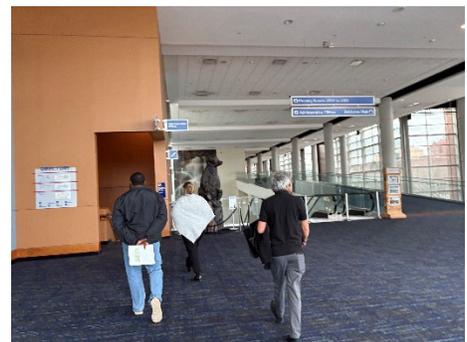
the Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) in Phoenix, AZ. VK met with 13 groups, including American Baptist Association and Fellowship of Christian Cheerleaders, about bringing their events to Knoxville.

- **Rendezvous South (February 24–27)** – VK Sales staff attended Rendezvous South in Panama City, FL. VK met with 27 groups, including Arrowhead Conferences and National Hispanic Corporate Council, about bringing their events to Knoxville.

VK tracks each sales activity and monitors results throughout the fiscal year. For FYE25, VK received two RFPs resulting from 3Q trade show attendance.

- **Site Visits** – The VK Sales Team hosted nine site visits:

- **Sporting Events Association of America** – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with representatives from the group. They are looking at Knoxville for their softball world series event for 2025 and future years.
- **University of Texas Department of Physics** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with a representative for the group. They toured the KCC, Marriott and the Hilton. They loved the walkability of downtown and are interested in Knoxville for their UNT/CAARI Conference.
- **Christian Community Development Association** – VK Sales Team hosted two representatives from their group. They toured the KCC, Cumberland House, Marriott, and the Hilton. They are interested in Knoxville for their conference in future years.
- **Cross Country Coaches Association** – VK Sales Team conducted a site with two



representatives from their group. They toured Victor Ashe Park and are interested in the venue for an event in November 2025.

- **Gymnastics Counts** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with a representative for the group. They toured the KCC and looked at World’s Fair Park for ideas for hosting their event in 2026.
- **Home Builders Association of Tennessee** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with the CEO, State President, and Local President for their group. They toured the Marriott, Hilton, and Crowne Plaza. They also toured Jackson Terminal and Knoxville Museum of Art. They are looking for a hotel and offsite venue for their 2025 Fall Meeting.
- **National Association of State Boating Law Administrators** – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with the CFO and a third-party planner from their group. They toured the WFEH, Marriott, and Hilton. They also took a driving tour of downtown, North Knoxville, and South Knoxville to explore local restaurants and breweries. They are interested in Knoxville for their 2026 Annual Summit.
- **Pagoda SL Group** – VK Sales Team conducted a site visit with a local representative from their group. They toured the Holiday Inn Knoxville West Cedar Bluff. They are interested in bringing the PagodaFest 2025 event to Knoxville.



- **Systems Improvements Inc** – VK Sales Team conducted a one-day site visit with the Director of Human Resources/Business Operations and the group’s Meeting Planner. They toured the KCC and multiple downtown properties. They are looking at Knoxville for the 2025 Global Taproot Summit.

- **Scouting Trip** – The VK Sales team performed one scouting trip:
  - **Bassmaster Classic** – VK Sales Team attended the 2025 Bassmaster Classic in Fort Worth, TX. VK is preparing to host the event in Knoxville in 2026.



- **Familiarization Tour (FAM)** – The VKSC Team hosted a FAM with other destinations in South Florida. The Braves Country FAM was comprised of 14 destinations that hosted 25–30 planners from across the country. VK attended two spring training games and other functions to build relationships and discuss bringing their sporting events to Knoxville.

# DESTINATION SERVICES SUMMARY

*This quarter, Convention Services has officially rebranded as **Destination Services**. Our Team believes this new name fits current industry trends and more accurately reflects the scope of what we offer our meeting planners. As local experts, our mission is to showcase the unique strengths of our destination and ensure planners know exactly why we're the top choice for their events.*

The **Visit Knoxville Destination 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 this report for additional details for each convention and meeting.

The Destination Services Team supported 59 events/meetings, six festivals, and provided a total of 27 partner referrals. All 27 partner referrals were related to the 65 events/meetings and festivals that were supported this quarter. Team Knoxville Volunteers began recruitment for one event beginning next quarter and shared six partner opportunities in the monthly e-newsletters this quarter.

## 3Q Goals:

- **Attend the ESPA 2025 Annual Conference in Louisville, KY for continuing education and networking opportunities** – The Destination Services Team traveled to Louisville, KY, for the annual Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) Conference, held



January 31–February 3. ESPA is an organization designed for event service professionals in CVBs, hotels, convention centers, and other event venues to receive continuing education and make valuable connections with other professionals in the industry. Members come to the annual conference from across the US and around the world to share tips, innovative ideas, and trending topics. This year's conference theme was

*The Winner's Circle, Delivering Championship Services.* In connection with the event destination, the conference kicked off with a Derby-themed welcome reception and had several off-site options, as well as sports and leadership tracks. The 2026 conference will be in Arlington, TX, January 25–27.

- **Recognize Team Knoxville Volunteers and honor the top Volunteer of the Year at the annual Visitors Guide Party**

– Recognized all Team Knoxville Volunteers with a year-end infographic displayed at the annual Visitors Guide Party. Honored the 2024 Top Volunteer with a gift basket containing local items from the Visitors Center.



- **Host 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual All Festival Meeting in conjunction with the Knoxville Police Department (KPD) for local festival planners/partners**

– Hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual All Festival Meeting on February 11 in conjunction with KPD, who provided Crisis Communication Training.

- **Attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual University of Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Career and Internship Expo**

– Attended the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual UT Hospitality and Tourism Career and Internship Expo at the Student Union on February 26 to make connections with potential part-time and internship candidates and future professionals in the industry.



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

- The **2025 Tennessee RiverLine Annual Summit** took place February 23–25 at the Marriott Knoxville Downtown, opening with a Welcome Reception at Sunsphere Events in partnership with VK. The Tennessee RiverLine connects communities across the Tennessee River Valley and recognizes communities and leaders for their work in shaping the future of the Tennessee River. This event was their 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit and brought nearly 200 partners and stakeholders together in celebration of 2024 award winners.



The VK Destination Services Team provided many assets to make this event a success. At the welcome reception in the Sunsphere, a VK banner featuring a kayaker on the Tennessee



River was displayed and Sunsphere stickers were handed out as a welcome gift to attendees. The new VK sizzle reel was displayed at the event and both physical and digital visitor materials were provided to highlight what



Knoxville has to offer. Additionally, a custom message was displayed on the Visitors Center Reader Board and the VK TV Network.

*“Visit Knoxville was incredibly helpful. They were very proactive in their communication and planning and provided information and materials to make our conference guests feel welcomed and prepared to enjoy their visit.”*

*– Lila Honaker, Communications and Marketing Director, Tennessee RiverLine*

- The **Violins of Hope: Strings of the Holocaust** exhibit was held from March 3 – April 9. To ensure a smooth experience for event planners, VK facilitated connections with local hoteliers to secure a courtesy room block on the nights of the concerts.



In addition to featuring the event on the Visitors Center Reader Board, Destination Services and the Marketing Team collaborated with the planner on collaborated social media posts. VK supplied the planner with Visitors Guides, Downtown Dining & Shopping Maps, important information regarding First Fridays, downtown street closures, and details about other cultural and music events happening during the exhibition period.

Additionally, VK connected the planner with Tomahawk Booking to help secure a violinist for the WDVX First Friday Live event at the Visitors Center. VK proudly served as the education partner of the concerts, held at the Tennessee Theatre.

- The **2025 VK2 AAU Volleyball Grand Prix** marked a successful inaugural tournament, welcoming 150 teams to the KCC from March 7–9. VKSC, in partnership with K2 Volleyball and the Amateur Athletic Union, played a key role in helping organize and execute the event. Building on the momentum of previous K2 Volleyball tournaments held earlier in the quarter—including the 2025 K2 Club Clash, 2025 K2 Wilderness Clash, 2025 K2 Madness Clash, and 2025 K2 Presidents’ Day Bash—this new tournament helped continue to elevate the competitive volleyball scene in Knoxville.



In collaboration with All Convention & Expo Services, Northview Academy, and Heavy Haul LLC, VKSC managed the planning, setup, and teardown of 20 volleyball courts and net systems. VKSC also provided court numbers, score flip charts, and branded table covers for ticketing stations and tournament desks. Directional signage was strategically placed to guide participants throughout the venue. To create a welcoming experience, athletes and attendees were greeted with a personalized touch, including a magnet placed on the iconic KNOX letters, custom digital displays on the indoor and outdoor marquee screens, and a welcome message on the



Visitors Center Reader Board. VKSC further enhanced the visitor experience by offering comprehensive visitor information and local discounts through an onsite visitor information stand with QR code access. To ensure local businesses were prepared to welcome the influx of visitors, VKSC distributed a tournament notice to downtown restaurants and retailers, helping create a warm and efficient experience for athletes and attendees exploring the city. As part of its services, VKSC managed a block of official host hotels via the VK Housing System, providing a customized reservation site tailored to the tournament’s needs. Event staff’s hotel accommodations were also secured and managed for the tournament director’s convenience. To further support the event’s success, the Team promoted the tournament on VKSC social media channels and remained actively engaged throughout the weekend as needed, ensuring seamless execution and an outstanding experience for all.



- The **Tennessee Association of Museums (TAM)** hosted their **Annual Conference** on March 11–14, bringing museum professionals together for networking, education, and collaboration. To kick off the conference, a member of the VK Leadership Team welcomed attendees during their luncheon at the Crowne Plaza.



As part of the conference programming, VK’s President was asked to participate as a panelist for the Board of Directors Retreat – *Advancing Cultural Leadership in Tennessee*, joining other community leaders. Each panelist addressed a topic relevant to their organization and expertise. VK further partnered with TAM by providing custom-branded conference tote bags along with Visitors Guides, Downtown Dining & Shopping Maps, Discover Knox handouts, and Experience Knox Savings Passes.

As a highlight of the conference, the SunSphere Welcome Center served as the host site for the conference’s Museum Crawl, coordinating with the Visitor Services Team to secure



the Welcome Center for its first formal event in the new space. VK provided full logistical support, including event setup, catering coordination, décor, signage design and placement, staffing, and teardown. Petro’s was selected as the caterer as a nod to the 1982 World’s Fair,

and guests received SunSphere stickers as a takeaway. During the event, attendees enjoyed self-guided tours of the SunSphere Observation Deck, with a VK staff member on hand to answer questions. The Gift Shop remained open, allowing guests to purchase Knoxville and World’s Fair souvenirs. Last, the group was welcomed with a custom message on the



Visitors Center Reader Board and featured across various VK TV Network locations, ensuring a well-branded and engaging experience.

***“We appreciate Visit Knoxville's support. Y'all are the best!”***

***–Adam H. Alfrey, Local Arrangements Coordinator, Tennessee Association of Museums***

***“Christina – Thank you and Visit Knoxville for this generous support!”***

***– Debbie Shaw, State Coordinator, Tennessee Association of Museums***

### **Additional planner quotes from 3Q Meetings and Events:**

***“Thank you so much! I really appreciate you going the extra mile!”***

***–Kathryn Ferguson, Events Specialist, Quility representing Cook Master Agency***

***“Thank you very much! This is exactly what I was hoping for. I appreciate you sending the images as well as the visitors guide.”***

***– Tomi Ogunleye, Past-President, Southeast American Association of Physicists in Medicine***

### **Team Knoxville Volunteers**

Team Knox actively recruits volunteers as a no-cost, service-added benefit to local events and festivals. Team Knox began recruitment for one event beginning next quarter and shared six partner opportunities in the monthly e-newsletters this quarter.

In January, Team Knox conducted a Year-In-Review survey for all current and past volunteers in the program. Below are a few responses from the survey.

- Quotes in response to: “How do you feel about your volunteer experience? What do you like most? Least?”
  - ***“I greatly enjoy volunteering. It is fun to meet people and see what conventions come to town.”***
  - ***“The activities are quite well organized. I was very, very impressed with the leadership. They were a pleasure to work with and a lot of fun as well. I look forward to the next time and event I can work with them. I really don't have any kind of least favored experience. It is such a well-run engine.”***
- Quotes in response to: “What would you say to someone who might consider volunteering with Team Knoxville/Visit Knoxville?”
  - ***“It is fun. Great way to just talk and meet the visitors to the area. You feel like you are helping the city. The staff show appreciation for your efforts. It's only for***

*a couple of hours. You can learn and usually peruse the exhibitions for the companies' conventions.”*

- *“That they will get so much out of it, and they'll learn more about the organization and community of downtown and surrounding areas. We can't make things better unless we're involved, and we learn about different opportunities that are already going on. And I will let them know about this. It's about expanding our circle as well within the community. I enjoy meeting new people at these activities and developing new friends that way as well. Also, the events are a lot of fun.”*

Team Knoxville participated in the following activities:

- Honored all volunteers with an infographic at the Visitors Guide Launch Party and awarded the top volunteer of 2024 with a gift basket from the Visit Knoxville Gift Shop.
- Began recruitment for the National Frame Building Association Conference and Expo on April 2–4, 2025. Volunteers are needed to assist with badge checking and scanning.
  - 10 volunteers will be needed for a total of 42.5 hours
- Shared partner volunteer opportunities for current 3Q and upcoming quarters, including:
  - February 20 – Kirk Cameron
  - April 5 – Tennessee Science Olympiad
  - April 12–13 – Rossini Festival
  - April 25–27 – Dogwood Arts Festival
  - May 19–25 – Visit Knoxville Open
  - September 27–28 – HoLa Festival

### **Additional 3Q Activity:**

- **Pre-planning Visits:**
  - **2025 Alpha Kappa Alpha South Eastern Regional Conference** – Hosted AKA's South Eastern Regional Director and planning committee January 16–19, with accommodations arranged and provided by VK.
- **Festival and partnership support** included Chocolatefest, Dogwood Arts House & Garden Show, Mardi Growl, Knoxville Shamrock Fest, Knox St. Patrick's Parade, and Big Ears Festival.
- **Conducted pre-planning calls and/or meetings** for US Trail Running Conference, Special Forces Berlin Reunion, Tennessee Association of Museums Conference, Big Ears Festival, Solution Tree, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, Regal GM Conference, Tennessee Miracle Spring Classic, Tennessee Miracle Classic, Tennessee Miracle National Championships, Syndicate Crown, USAG Regional (Gymnastics Counts), AAU Girls Basketball World Championships (2–11 Grade), Women's Equality Summit, Big Kahuna Wing Fest, Tour de Frights, FILM FEST KNOX, and Tour de Lights.
- **Additional Activities:** Participated in the Sports ETA Services Community webinar.

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SUMMARY

The **Visit Knoxville Marketing Team** produces, approves, and places regional, national, 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](http://visitknoxville.com). The Team also recruits and partners with journalists and influencers to share Knoxville's narratives.

## 3Q Goals:

- **Launch distribution of the 2025 Knoxville Visitors Guide** – Distribution of the 2025 Guide successfully launched at the start of the New Year and was celebrated via the annual Visitors Guide Party. View the [digital version](#) of the Official 2025 Knoxville Visitors Guide. See Highlights Summary for additional details.
- **Partner with the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development on the Knoxville Songwriters Showcase at the Bijou, part of Tennessee Songwriters Week** – In its seventh year, this annual event was preceded by 50 qualifying rounds that culminated in seven showcase events across the state, including the Knoxville Songwriters Showcase at Bijou Theatre on February 25, 2025. See Highlights Summary for additional details.
- **Begin web audit and redevelopment plans for Meetings segment of the VK website** – A multi-departmental effort to reimagine the Meetings portion of the VK website was launched. The initial audit included a review of the existing website and the resources offered, and the audit expanded to a reorganization plan that includes an altered look and new webpage widgets. VK's Marketing, Sales, and Services Teams are continuing to meet regularly and work independently to redevelop the Meetings segment in 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 2025 AKA SERC, the Visit Knoxville Open, and the Spring Sales FAM. See the Creative Folder for more.

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



- VK issues a quarterly **e-newsletter** that succinctly highlights some of the big events taking place in upcoming weeks and months. In late February, VK shared about upcoming spring events in March, April, and May. The quarterly newsletter strives to mention a wide range of events, such as the dog-friendly Mardi Growl in March, music-loving experiences like Big Ears Festival and Southern Skies, as well as family-centric festivals and markets.

*Current open rate for the Spring e-newsletter is 36.5%\**

*\*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 14 Community Corner newsletters were produced in 3Q with an open rate of 35%.
- 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 1.4 million pageviews in 3Q. Each quarter, VK creates new pages for the website and regularly updates content throughout. Additionally:
  - Average length of session was 1 minute 5 seconds
  - Pages per session was 3.
  - Number of clicks to partner sites from VK website was 90K.
  - Top three metros generating traffic were Atlanta, Nashville, and Chicago.
  - 2,069 pageviews to sign up for the e-newsletter.

The **VK Online Event Calendar** is managed by the Visitor Services Team. In 3Q, 72 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:

- [A Relaxing Getaway in Knoxville, Tennessee](#)
  - [How to Have a Girls' Weekend in Knoxville](#)
  - [A Taste of Europe in 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:

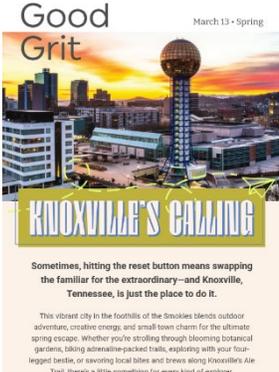
- Promoting various events, exhibits, and attractions including 2025 Festivals, Tennessee Songwriters Week at the Bijou Theatre, Black History Month, Knoxville's Urban Wilderness, and more.
- Instagram reels showcased Knoxville's Asian cuisine; several collaborations with @downtownknox on Knoxville Ice Bears games, Knoxville's Art District for *USAToday's 10Best*, and things to do in World's Fair Park; features of neighborhoods including Farragut and Uptown North; and more.



- **Additional Partner Promotion & Involvement** – VK continues to provide support to our tourism partners. Highlights include:
  - Partnering with WDVX on Tennessee Shines – a concert series at the Bijou Theatre highlighting up-and-coming artists and the magic of live radio from one of Knoxville's most historic and storied venues. The [February 2025 Tennessee Shines event](#) was another successful installment of this musical event.
  - Partnering on the Tennessee Theatre's Broadway season (including ad placement in Broadway playbills for theatregoers).
  - Partnering with the Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council (METTC) – VK continues to work closely with METTC through an appointed board member. The focus is on initiatives that include 9 Lakes of East Tennessee, the Long and Winding Road, the Tennessee River Valley Geotourism MapGuide and other initiatives to promote awareness of the 9 Lakes region including Knoxville materials.

This quarter METTC had booths at the Indianapolis Boat, Sport, and Travel Show, the Cincinnati CORA Bike and Trails Expo, Southern Travelers Explore Conference in Oconee, SC, and the Pittsburgh AAA Travel Expo. Additionally, METTC placed ads in the Titans' *Season Yearbook*, the NASCAR *Fall Race Season*, and *Rider Magazine*. Explore TRV secured print and digital ad inserts in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

METTC hosted its annual Legislative Luncheon on March 7, where VK's President was an invited speaker to present a spotlight of the SunSphere, including improvements to the SunSphere and its new Welcome Center. Additionally, at the luncheon, VK and VKSC were recognized with an Excellence in Marketing and Public Relations award for work in planning and supporting the 2024 U.S. Olympic Team Trials – Diving.



- Partnering with Good Grit magazine – the magazine published a “Knoxville’s Calling” standalone e-newsletter to highlight Knoxville as an ideal destination in its Spring e-newsletter.
- Serving on the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC) – TTC met at via Microsoft TEAMS on February 14, to discuss the governor’s new budget for TDTD. TTC met via Microsoft TEAMS on April 7, to discuss legislation, advocacy, and culinary. The President of Visit Knoxville remains Chair of the Knowledge Driven Subcommittee 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 3Q contributed to 9,794 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in 3Q contributed to 4,460 hotel bookings.

VK continues to pull insights from our Arrivalist partnership: For 2025, 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 2 nights. \*

- |                     |                |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. Nashville        | 6. Greenville  |
| 2. Atlanta          | 7. Knoxville** |
| 3. Chattanooga      | 8. New York    |
| 4. Chicago          | 9. Memphis     |
| 5. Tri-Cities-TN-VA | 10. Dallas     |

*\*It is important to note that we are still inside the travel window, which means travelers exposed to ads in March 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 3Q VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the 3Q Highlights Report at the end of April on the VK website.*

VK's pet-friendly focused efforts in various outlets (digital placement, Visitors Guide, social media, etc.) continue to welcome dogs and their owners to Knoxville, as evidenced by this kind note from a four-legged traveler:

*“My humans and I just wanted to give a big thanks to Hank and the team at Visit Knoxville. We are Canadians traveling down to Florida for the winter and began looking for our stops along the way. We already knew Knoxville had been named one of the best towns to visit but when we saw Hank on the cover of Visit Knoxville magazine and read all of his recommendations, we knew we definitely had to visit.*



*I'm a 12-year-old Chihuahua who travels everywhere with my parents, so to know a town is dog friendly and have recommendations from a cute guy like Hank was important. We started out our day at Pete's, and with full tummies headed out on our walking tour of the downtown area with the handy map on page 64 and having read Hank's picks, we had a beautiful day! Thank you again Hank! Your Canadian friend, Roman 🍄🍄*

## **Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance:**

- VK hosted **Verena Wolff**, a freelance writer with *Deutsche PressAgentur*, the leading Germany press agency, in partnership with TDTD. Her state-wide trip emphasized Tennessee as a music-focused destination and following her visits to Memphis and Nashville, she ended her itinerary in Knoxville. VK arranged for lunch at Barley's Taproom for a taste of WDVX's Blue Plate Special, arranged tours at the Tennessee Theatre and Bijou Theatre, and provided a guided walking tour of downtown with an inclusion of the East Tennessee History Center and its exhibit on Knoxville's role in the history of country music.
- VK assisted **David Dickstein**, a freelance writer who contributes travel stories regularly to the *MediaNews Group* publications (14 major dailies in California, e.g., the *Orange County Register*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, and *Long Beach Press-Telegram*), in partnership with THE TENNESSEAN.

VK arranged several itinerary items including a downtown walking tour via the VoiceMap app, a visit to the Sunsphere, as well as dining at the Oliver Royale and Potchke, in addition to providing several other itinerary recommendations.

*“Thank you and your partners for amazing hospitality. Looking forward to my evening here in town, but so far my introductions to various aspects of your city have been well received.”*

– *David Dickstein*

- VK assisted **Veronica Meewes**, an Austin-based freelance writer who was able to add on a day visit to Knoxville following an event in Nashville, in partnership with TDTD. VK provided a variety of itinerary suggestions for her short visit.

## 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, Small Market Meetings, NEP Media Services/USL League One, Baton Rouge Business Report, Pride Journeys, Vascos Por El Mundo, Her View From Home, Inside of Knoxville, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement) include:

- *Small Market Meetings* – *Friendly and Affordable: These Southern Destinations Offer Extraordinary Value*
  - *USA Today 10 Best* – *Best Arts District (Knoxville)*
  - *USA Today 10 Best* – *Best Beer Festival (Kill the Lights)*
  - *USA Today 10 Best* – *Best Beer Label (Xul Beer Company’s “Don’t Answer the Phone”)*
  - *USA Today 10 Best* – *Best Art Festival (Dogwood Arts)*
  - *USA Today 10 Best* – *Best Zoo Exhibit (Zoo Knoxville’s Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Campus)*
- 
- **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 – 407
    - Total Publicity Value for Earned Media – \$567,100

## 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 third quarter, the Visit Knoxville Film Office assisted local production companies such as Jupiter Entertainment and Big Slate Media with various resources including location needs, film permits, and city services, and other resources needed on a variety of projects. Projects included crime reality television shows such as *Fatal Attraction* airing on TV One, *Snapped* airing on Oxygen, and *For My Man* airing on TV One, as well as content for marketing campaigns.

The VK Film Office also had a busy quarter, assisting production companies from outside of Knoxville. Companies like October Films from London, SDLN Creative out of Miami, Florida; Law & Crime based in New York City, New York; Frontside Films from Loomis, California; and Vayner Sports from New York City, New York all filmed in Knoxville during Q3. The VK Film Office assisted with crew, locations, permits, city services and other needs to make sure production had everything needed for a successful shoot. The various projects assisted included two crime documentary series, a marketing campaign for a major hotel chain, and marketing campaigns involving two University of Tennessee basketball players.

In March, The VK Film Office successfully recruited the feature film, *The Best Thing About Christmas*, a faith-based Christmas musical produced by Tommy Blaze (*God's Not Dead*) starring Megan Alexander. The Film Office is assisting with hotel rooms, crew, locations, vendors, city services, and film incentives. The project is scheduled to begin filming in mid-April and will shoot for 18 days.



# 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.

## 3Q Goals:

- **Host three First Friday Sunsets at the Sunsphere** – The Sunsphere Observation Deck continued the second season of its First Friday event Sunset at the Sunsphere. This special event from November to March, coinciding with standard time, is popular for visitors and locals alike. The three sunsets hosted this quarter saw a cumulative of 106 people, with two of the three sunsets sold out.



- **Implement free local days at the Sunsphere – “Locals, elevate your view – Free Access Today!”** – On January 21, VK issued a press release announcing the first of a series of free local days at the Sunsphere. Coinciding with National Plan Your Vacation Day (January 28), Knox County residents could show their driver’s license to gain free admission to the attraction. Data captured 93 adults and 15 children who took advantage of this opportunity.

- **Attend University of Tennessee Retail Hospitality & Tourism Career and Internship**



**Expo** – The Sunsphere Director and Sr. Manager of Convention Services attended the UTK RHTM Career and Internship Expo on February 26. Flyers for part-time positions, internship packets, and volunteer information were supplied for students to grab. A QR code was displayed that directed to the VK website, aiding in telling VK’s mission, offerings, and information about the Sunsphere.

- **Be a participating venue (downtown visitors center) in the 2025 Big Ears Music Festival for performances and/or panel discussions** – Big Ears made its return to the VK Visitors Center, along with other venues throughout Downtown Knoxville, March 27–30. VK, in



partnership with WDVX, had regularly scheduled programming for the Blue Plate Special, in addition to a series of panel discussions. Panelists included: William Tyler, Jack Neely, Nate Chinen, Ashley Kahn, Ann Powers, Marcus J. Moore, Ian Lynch, Dawn Richards, Lonnie Holley, Grayson Currin, Victoria Shen, Terika Dean, Lance Ledbetter, The Gladson Family Band, Mabe Fratti, and Julia Holter.

- **Promote Visit Knoxville Gift Basket services and purchasing options** – VK gift basket service was added to the Visitor Services Flyer, which was included in the concierge materials this quarter, reaching hotels across Knox County. Pre-made baskets are available for purchase at the Visitors Center, and online shoppers can now add “gift wrap” to their cart to have a basket created for them, either for local pick-up or shipment.

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

- **Visitors Center Traffic** – Over 5,900 guests were greeted in person. Top 10 states (in addition to Tennessee) of visitors checking into the Visitors Center were:
  - Florida
  - North Carolina
  - Texas
  - California
  - Illinois
  - Virginia
  - Maryland
  - Massachusetts
  - Georgia
  - New Jersey
- **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 items from Zoo Knoxville, Knoxville Smokies, Dogwood Arts, and WDVX.



Visit Knoxville continues to offer gift basket wrapping services to all partners and visitors. There are gift baskets available for purchase in the Visitors Center for shopping ease, or the new online ordering feature allows the choice of shipment or local pickup. During 3Q, VK fulfilled 15+ private basket requests.

- **Special Events & Collaborations** – The Sr. Director of Visitor Services and Sr. Director of Finance attended TNHTA Day on the Hill alongside the Greater Knoxville Hospitality Association. Both attended appointments with Legislators: Gloria Johnson, Jason Zachary, Elaine Davis, Becky Massey, Jeremy Faison, Rick Scarbrough, Jessie Seal, Dave Wright, Richard Briggs, and Sam McKenzie. The agenda



for all appointments was to ask Legislators to support Senate Bill 629/House Bill 627, implementing a hotel occupancy tax cap of 8% across the state, and to support the governor's proposed budget for TDTD.

Also, during 3Q, VK partnered with Cumberland Avenue Merchants Association to attend the University of Tennessee Haslam Spring Career fair on February 12. The Sunsphere Director handed out part-time job descriptions, internship packets, and volunteer information aside Helen Morton with CAMA. This fair was interactive, giving feedback on interview tips and skills as students were graded via rubric provided by UTK.

- **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 3Q, over a dozen gift basket donation requests were fulfilled, including the American Museum of Science & Energy, LIFE East TN, CASA, 4H Fundraiser, and 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 3Q, **55** custom welcome messages and highlighted events were featured.
- **VK loaned assets** (e.g., radios, coolers, ice chests, tables, tents, etc.) in 3Q to The Barbershop Harmony Society and the St. Patrick's Day Parade.
- **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 Valentine's Day as well as the release of the 2025 Knoxville Visitors Guide during this quarter's concierge visits. Each member of the concierge team provided their assigned properties with a bag of Valentine's Day themed chocolate candy, and two each of the following materials: tabbed 2025 Knoxville Visitor Guides, a box (40) of 2025 Knoxville Visitor Guides, 2025 Knoxville Calendar of Events flyers, and flyers highlighting VK Visitor Services and the Sunsphere Welcome Center and Observation Deck. 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 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, WFEH, KCAC, Farragut Community Center, and Bear Paw Bikes. During 3Q, new branded racks were purchased and placed at the WFEH and KCAC.



- **Brochure additions** allow the Visitors Center to stay up to date with available attractions and activities. This quarter seven new brochures were added: Knoxville Museum of Art, Call For Quits, Harvey Family Farm, Walk Run Pedal Jamz, Knoxville: A Walking Music Guide, Historic Westwood, and Big Ears Festival.
- **Visitors Guide Distribution** is a key focus. Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:
  - Tennessee
  - Illinois
  - Florida
  - North Carolina
  - Ohio
  - Indiana
  - Georgia
  - California
  - New York
  - Michigan

During this quarter, there were 3,296 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page. VK distributed 4,286 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 3Q, a total of 36,696 Visitors Guides were distributed via outlets including the following:

- 5,440 through State Welcome Centers
- 10,780 through brochure racks within the region, including attractions and hotels.
- 20,476 distributed through other locations including the Visitors Center, satellite centers, UT, and airport.
- Additional **distribution materials** include:
  - **5,506** Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
  - **4,125** UT Visitor Guides

## Ongoing Partner Projects & Special Initiatives:

- **Employee Engagement** – VK believes in the power of community, teamwork, and individual growth. It is the goal of VK to provide opportunities for its employees to further enrich their lives, both personal and professional, through employee engagement and wellness initiatives. This quarter, VK employees participated in:
  - A "Lunch & Learn" to utilize employee benefits to promote healthy lifestyles.
  - A celebration of Valentine's Day by receiving personalized poems.
  - An outing to Maple Hall to learn about one of VK's tourism partners and engage in some friendly competition.
  - An opportunity to donate 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 2,906 people attended these events. Of those polled, the geographical attendance breakdown was as follows:
  - 1,765 Knox County
  - 477 Regional
  - 664 Out of Region – International guests included those from Germany, Canada, England, France, Spain and more.

**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. 3Q Makers include:

- **January** – Jason Payne (Smoky Mountain Spice Factory)
- **February** – Emily Gallardo (EJ Clay Company)
- **March** – Violins of Hope



# 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 1,959 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 1,076 items.
- Litter collection: Teamwork makes the dream work. Ambassadors assisted with picking up 22,533 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 602 individuals were approached to ensure their well-being.
- Directions Provided: Ambassadors helped 402 people get where they needed to be.
- Scooter relocation: Ambassadors moved 1,156 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 86 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 164,000 guests from all 50 states and 61 countries.



During 3Q, CertaPro® Painters of East Tennessee painted the second level of the Sunsphere core the Rubik's Cube colors to match the third level. This update gives more of a cohesive look to the base of the attraction and adds a fun pop of color. Apex Window Cleaning completed an overhaul of the globe windows (inside and out), in addition to cleaning the Welcome Center panoramic windows and skylight feature. The Christman Company continues to work with McCarty Holsaple McCarty on punch-list items deemed after the completion of construction project.

The new Welcome Center hosted its first reception for the Tennessee Association of Museums on March 13. VK's Destination Services Team coordinated the event in the Welcome Center while the Sunsphere Team staffed retail and offered a private tour of the Observation Deck. Another notable group that visited this quarter was Leadership Tennessee on March 23. Organizers presented about Knoxville and its offerings to class members in the Welcome Center and later toured the Observation Deck. Other private groups this month included: Lenoir City High School, Tusculum University, and Tennessee School for the Deaf.



Annual passes to the Sunsphere Observation Deck were introduced during 3Q, at the price of \$40 for an individual and \$120 for a family up to 5 people. These passes are active for a standard calendar year and can only be redeemed in person.



A new educational feature was added to the Observation Deck via wall-wrap and podium magnet, displaying the list of countries that participated in the 1982 World's Fair. A map of the fairgrounds is available on the Elo touchscreen, or physical copies can be viewed at the welcome podium.

Also, during 3Q, Spanish TV's travel segment, *Vascos Por El Mundo*, came to film at the Sunsphere as part of promoting their full program about the State of Tennessee. Filming for the segment was completed on February 22 and is slated to air June 2025.