



Q1 July–September 2025

Visit Knoxville Quarterly Report



Letter from the President

Our teams have been hard at work collaborating on a **new meetings video and corresponding website**, celebrating the profession that defines destination services with **National Celebrate Services Week**, hosting exciting sporting events like the **Visit Knoxville Collegiate** and the **Red Bull Championship Run**, and so much more.

The quarter closed with our **Creative Marketing Reveal Party**, where we hosted our new advertising partner, the Zimmerman Agency, and welcomed friends and partners from across Knoxville at Covenant Health Park to join us in the reveal of our upcoming marketing direction.

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 visually refreshed July 1 – September 30, 2025, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President, Visit Knoxville



The first quarter of FYE26 was a summer celebration of sports, meetings, and festivals, and wrapped with an exciting unveiling of a new marketing direction for Visit Knoxville.



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Q1 Highlights

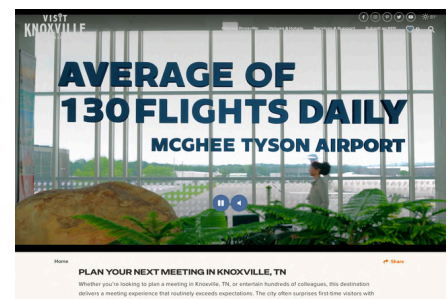
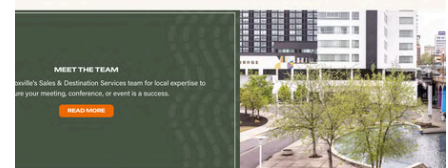
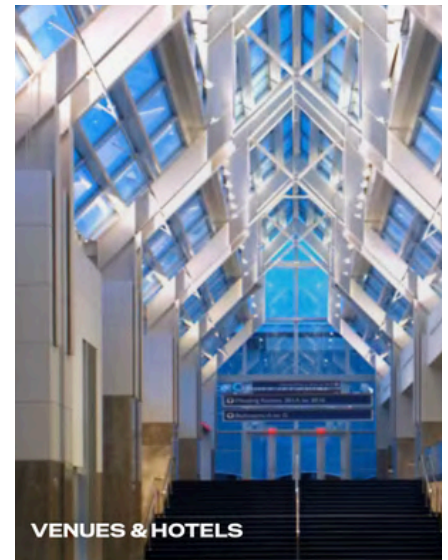
New Meetings Video & Website

Throughout the first quarter, VK's teams have been working collaboratively on a full refresh to the meetings portion of its website. VK is proud to unveil a dynamic new video and refreshed website content specifically designed to inspire and inform meeting planners. The video showcases the destination's unique blend of meeting spaces, local attractions, and professional services to offer planners a vivid look at why this destination is the ideal setting for conferences, conventions, sporting events, and gatherings of all sizes. The updated website complements the video by providing streamlined, easy-to-navigate information about venues, accommodations, itineraries, and support services. This collaborative project, which includes video support from Big Slate Media, demonstrates VK's ongoing commitment to supporting meetings of all types and sizes in Knoxville.

The Sales Team connects with countless meeting planners to provide insights and tailored solutions that make hosting events seamless and unforgettable. The team's long-standing relationships with meeting planners informed the video and webpage's content.

The Destination Services Team provided expert logistical support and concierge-level assistance to ensure every event runs smoothly from start to finish. The team's steadfast support of meetings guided the revision of the meetings homepage and the revamp of the Destination Services pages.

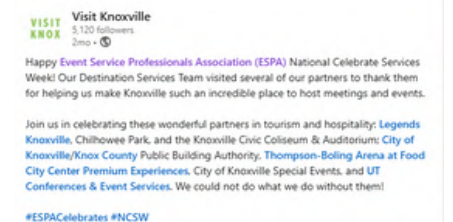
The Marketing Team, especially VK's webmaster, plays a key role in website management including revamping the meeting planner and services webpages by enhancing design, optimizing content, and ensuring a seamless user experience for meeting planners.



National Celebrate Services Week

As members of the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA), the Destination & Sports Services Team joined in celebrating National Celebrate Services Week, August 4–8. Each year, ESPA designates this week to honor the dedication it takes to bring events to life, celebrating the role of event service professionals, advocating for the profession, encouraging local networking, and inspiring community impact. It also underscores the importance of ESPA itself: an organization committed to equipping event service managers with professional development, resources, and solutions that drive career growth and strengthen success for hotels, venues, and convention and visitors bureaus.

The 2025 theme, *“Together We Create: Honoring the Art of Event Services,”* emphasized the creativity, collaboration, and care that define the profession.



The Destination Services Team celebrated by hand-delivering custom appreciation gifts to key venues. Each package featured a personalized paint-by-numbers kit featuring a photo of their venue, local Knoxville treats, and art-inspired surprises—a colorful tribute to the creativity event professionals bring to Knoxville.

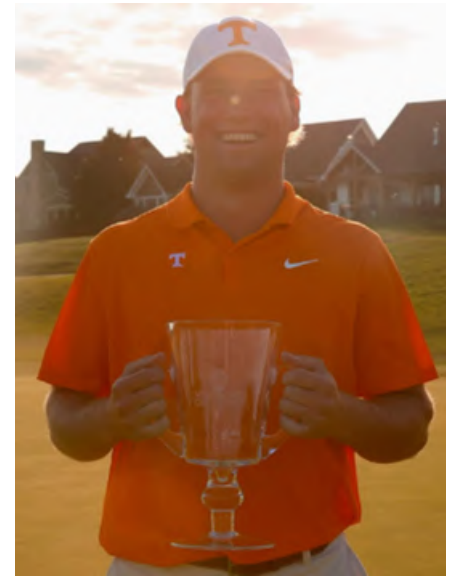
The Marketing Team complemented these efforts by sharing the celebration more broadly, creating an e-blast to industry partners and a dedicated social media post to highlight the initiative and extend its reach across the community.

“Thank you so much for the thoughtful goodies. I loved the theme and how creative and well thought out it was.”

– Kim Beets, Office Coordinator, Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum

Visit Knoxville Collegiate

The VKSC hosted the 2025 Visit Knoxville Collegiate Golf Tournament in partnership with the University of Tennessee (UT) Athletic Department from September 4–7 at the Tennessee National Golf Club. 16 NCAA Division I teams competed for the championship. The tournament, now in its third year, was played on the par-70, 7,280-yard course designed by Greg Norman. The 18-hole course, located along the Tennessee River, once again presented a long and challenging layout for participants.



The **VKSC Team** started this tournament in 2023 in partnership with the University of Tennessee Men's Golf Team to deliver a high-caliber collegiate golf tournament for an early-season event hosted locally.

The VKSC designed and provided trophies for the team and individual champions. In the lead-up to and during the tournament, the team managed planning and logistics, conducted pre-event calls, and completed site visits to ensure every detail was addressed. VKSC coordinated with All Occasions Party Rentals to place tents at prime viewing spots and placed custom signage throughout the course to welcome attendees and recognize event partners. VKSC secured host hotels for visiting teams, staff, and families, and provided digital visitor information to enhance their Knoxville experience. Special welcome gifts, including Oakley sunglasses, were provided to athletes and coaches.



The **Marketing Team** was onsite at the event, capturing photographs and video content across the golf course. They highlighted parts of the tournament in real time across VKSC social media channels, showcasing the competition atmosphere and community engagement to a wide audience.



Red Bull Championship Run

Knoxville welcomed the 2025 Red Bull Championship Run to Volunteer Landing on September 12. This bold, adrenaline-fueled event brought 160 competitors to race head-to-head up an inclined goalpost, cheered on by an energized crowd. Competitors battled for limited-edition Red Bull swag, with the top eight advancing to an elimination bracket to crown the overall champion and winner of a custom trophy.



The **VKSC Team** attended a Red Bull event in Chattanooga, seeking to bring that same world-class energy here. After years of building a strong relationship with the Red Bull team, VK was thrilled to finally welcome them to Knoxville this year. The event was a huge success, showcasing unbeatable spirit, venues, and community support.



VKSC assisted with venue coordination and served as a liaison between the ancillary venue and the planner. The Team assisted with securing permits and provided contacts for first responders and other safety entities and event equipment was provided. Hotel accommodations for staff and the media team were also sourced with VKSC's support.



VK's Marketing Team elevated event visibility by featuring stories and reels on VKSC social media channels to boost awareness and drive attendance. In addition to on-the-ground coverage, the team coordinated high-quality drone footage to showcase the full scope of the event and the scenic setting capturing the energy of the event.



The VK Film Office assisted with permitting needs for the event.

VK Reveals New Creative Direction

VK has launched a fresh branding initiative under the inquisitive tagline “Calling the Curious.” After years of alternating slogans—such as “Knoxville Will Surprise You” and more descriptive, tagline-heavy campaigns (“a-nature-loving-adventure-seeking-artsy-kind-a-town”)—the new direction embraces a more open, evocative invitation. Developed in collaboration with The Zimmerman Agency, the campaign frames Knoxville not by a list of attributes but as a place for exploration, wonder, and discovery. “Calling the Curious” is designed to flex across audience segments, from outdoor adventurers to music lovers to conference attendees, emphasizing adaptability and inclusiveness.



The rebrand is rooted in the economic significance of tourism, with Knoxville/Knox County contributing over \$2 billion in visitor spending. As the campaign rolls out in the coming months, VK aims to magnify Knoxville’s unique offerings, reinforce its identity, and attract more visitors through a narrative anchored in curiosity and authentic discovery.



A Creative Reveal Party was hosted at Covenant Health Park where community members and partners were invited to celebrate the announcement together.



The Destination Services Team coordinated the venue and menu with Covenant Health Park, decor with Above the Rest Balloon & Event Designs, and ordered branded tees for the team through Bacon & Co.

The Marketing Team spearheaded this creative initiative following a rigorous RFP process in FYE2025, resulting in The Zimmerman Agency becoming VK’s new agency of record. The rollout of creative will continue to be released into the fall and into early 2026.



Sports & Convention Sales

By the Numbers

52

Definites Booked

12

Definite KCC
Bookings

182

Leads

113,965

Definite Delegate Days

482,466

Lead Delegate Days

61

KCC Leads

Destination Services Team

The 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.

Q1 GOALS

Provide updated content for Meetings & Destination Services portion of *visitknoxville.com*.



Attend University of Tennessee Graduate School Community Fair on August 8 to recruit and connect with potential volunteers.



Complete an Event Service Professionals Association webinar as a team for continuing education



Participate in National Celebrate Services Week, “Together We Create: Honoring the Art of Event Services” August 4–8 to celebrate the role of the event service professional, to advocate for the event services profession, and to provide a networking opportunity to recognize local partners.



Q1 OUTCOMES

See Q1 Highlights for details.

Attended event and networked with many students and young professionals new to the area.

Attended Future-Proof Your Meetings: What Every Event Servicing Manager Must Know on August 20 and Beyond Accessibility: Creating Inclusive Events for Different Abled Communities on September 24.

See Q1 Highlights for details.

Supported **64** groups and **16** festivals

Key Services Provided*

54

Reader Board
Welcome Messages
to Visiting Groups

25

VK Network
Promotions

24

Venue
Coordinations

118

Partner Referrals

36

Groups Received
Visitor Materials

7

Promotional
Videos to
groups

**Terms defined in
Additional Resources*

Event Highlights

The **82nd Airborne Division Association** hosted their 2025 82nd Airborne 79th Annual Conference August 5–9 at the Crowne Plaza. The Association was organized in England prior to the Normandy invasion (1944). They have members who have served with the 11th, 13th, 17th, 82nd, 101st Airborne Divisions; 187th, 503rd, 508th Airborne Regimental Combat Teams; 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) as well as troopers from U.S. Special Forces, Airborne Rangers, Marine Corps Recon, Navy SEALs, Air Force Special Tactics personnel, and members of foreign Airborne Units. A highlighted VK service included a custom-created handout pinpointing veteran-owned and veteran-related restaurants.

Intoximeters, Inc. hosted its User Group Meeting at the Hilton Knoxville September 8–11. A global leader in breath alcohol testing, their instruments are used in over 90 countries by law enforcement and workplace testing organizations. An impactful moment was VK's coordination of local leadership, with Mayor Jacobs providing a welcome and KPD Deputy Chief Brian Evans addressing focus areas including crime, community, culture and career development, traffic enforcement, DUI prevention, and future planning. This involvement made the experience especially meaningful to attendees, given their line of work.

The **78th Tobacco Science Research Conference** was held September 14–17 at the KCC with the Marriott Knoxville Downtown and Hilton Knoxville as host hotels. VK provided various services, with a highlight being a curated VIP tour with ACE Tours Knox.

2025 served as the inaugural “**Shed Week**,” which included the Shed Sales Summit, National Shed Rental Association Conference, and Shed Builder Expo all in one place. These three conferences came to Knoxville as a result of the 2023 Shed Builder Expo at the KCC, and we look forward to having them return for two more years. VK worked with the Shed Builder Expo Team and their corresponding third-party planning teams on a signage plan, welcoming attendees, and recruiting volunteers and staff.

“

Thank you for being attentive, kind, and very helpful with this whole process.

– Chandra Galbraith,
Executive Secretary, 82nd
Airborne Division Association

”

“

Thank you for your excellent assistance with our guest speakers. Your insightful knowledge made a big impact on the success of our event. I am most grateful for everything you did for us— from making contact with the Chief of Police and the Knox County Mayor, to the swag giveaways, and the suggestions, reviews, and recommendations in between. The cherry on the cake was the rush delivery of new maps for our guests on the very day of our off-site event. Thank you, times a thousand!

– Katy Price, Senior Executive Assistant,
Intoximeters, Inc.

Team Knoxville Volunteers

Team Knox actively recruits volunteers to support local events and festivals, offering this as a no-cost, service-added benefit.

Five newsletters were sent to share the following opportunities:

- FanBoy Expo July-11-13
- Shed Builder Expo September 24-25
- HoLa Festival September 27-28
- Project Inspire October 3-5

Two Volunteer Fairs were attended to recruit new Team Knox Volunteers:

- UT Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Community Fair August 8
- UT Jones Center for Leadership & Service Volunteer Fair September 17

Pre-Planning Visits

- Colson Center – August 18-19
- 2026 Bassmaster Classic Sponsor – August 26-27



“

Absolute problem solvers that are happy to share good ideas and work with all shareholders to ensure a fantastic experience. A++.

– Carrie Zaklikowski, President, Creekwood Event Services

”



Festivals Assistance

Knoxville is a festive place to be with year-round festivals and events. The Destination Services Team assists in a variety of ways, including event promotion, service provider referrals, recruiting volunteers, and more.

3 July Events



- Festival on the Fourth
- Foodies Food & Culture Festival
- Grooves in the Garden



7 Aug Events



- Kuumba Festival
- CreepyCon
- Irish Fest on the Hill
- History Hootenanny
- Knox Asian Festival
- GermanFest
- Big Kahuna Labor Day Festival



6 Sept Events



- Tennessee Valley Fair
- 865 Fest
- John Sevier Days Living History Weekend
- International Food Festival
- Greek Fest
- HoLa Festival



Marketing & Communications Team

The Visit Knoxville **Marketing Team** leads local, national, and international advertising and social media marketing efforts to promote Knoxville to leisure travelers, conference and sporting event planners, and film and television production companies.

Q1 GOALS

Partner with The Zimmerman Agency (new advertising agency) to develop and reveal a new creative direction for digital and print ads.



Host a post-FAM for Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA).



Complete mid-year update of digital version of the 2025 Knoxville Visitors Guide.



Refresh the look and content of Knoxville destination information on key meeting and sports planner platforms.



Q1 OUTCOMES

Creative reveal took place on September 30, 2025. See highlights section for details.

Throughout the year, including Q1, the marketing team designs and produces many **creative materials** that support VK's advertising efforts or groups visiting Knoxville.

This FAM was canceled due to too few registrations. VK is working with TDTD on a replacement FAM.

As end-of-year festival dates and events were shared publicly, that information was updated in the 2025 digital Visitors Guide, along with relevant business openings and closings.

Content, logos, videos, and images fully updated on key platforms including CVENT and Sports Destination Management.

Reach

The Marketing Team oversees the VK **website, blog, newsletters, social media**, and many other marketing efforts. For example, VK promotes tourism partners through the **VK Network**, a loop of informational slides and videos appearing on 20+ TV screens throughout Knoxville/Knox County. The following visuals, data points, and explanations aim to provide an overview of the Marketing Team's dedication to promoting Knoxville during Q1 and year-round.

Website



473k

Users

100k

Partner Referrals

Visitknoxville.com is outperforming the travel industry in key metrics with organic sessions and an increase of time on site.

Blog



26

Posts

38k

Engaged Sessions

VK promotes partners with a mix of contributors including VK staff. Read [more](#) and [subscribe](#)

Weekly Newsletter



1,273

Subscribers

37%

Open Rate

*SimpleView reports an average open rate of 33.8% for the tourism industry.

Every Thursday, the Visitors Services Team sends out a Community Corner email summarizing events in Knoxville that weekend.

Quarterly Newsletter



49.2k

Subscribers

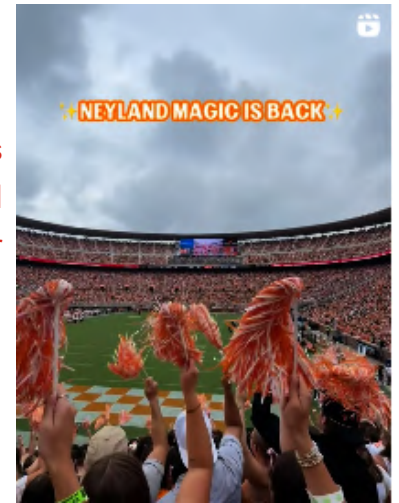
39%

Open Rate

Each quarter, VK distributes an e-newsletter that highlights big events and ideas for what to explore in Knoxville the upcoming months.

Social Media

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.



Media Coverage

Journalist & Influencer Visits and Assistance

VK hosts and assists traditional writers, content creators, and occasional Familiarization Tours (FAMs) to promote Knoxville in a variety of outlets.

- VK assisted Skye Estroff, an Atlanta-based culinary and travel writer, podcaster, and broadcaster personality, in partnership with THE TENNESSEAN. She is planning to highlight the property in a Knoxville feature on her podcast, Skye's the Limit, as well as pitching for placement in several Atlanta-based outlets. VK provided recommendations for dining and off-property activities.
- VK hosted Hans-Jörg Zündorf and Dietmar Welle, two German writers with the magazine Urlaub für Unternehmer and NOWMedien GmbH (a publishing house which distributes German renowned regional newspapers), in partnership with TDTD. VK provided recommendations for dining and off-property activities.
- VK assisted Trisha Boyer, a Nashville-based writer for The Local Palate, in partnership with THE TENNESSEAN. She is planning to highlight the hotel and culinary experiences in Knoxville. VK connected her with several local chefs and restaurant owners so she could update her "Foodie Towns" article.

Media Assistance Provided

(Content, photography, quotes, interviews, partner referrals, etc.)

Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine, HGTV, Your Carolina/WSPA, Taste of the South Magazine, Seeing Southern, Explore the South, Meetings & Conventions Magazine, Everything Knoxville, Turner PR, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement included):

- WSPA TV Greenville - [Fall Trip Ideas 3 hours from Greenville](#)
- HGTV - [Must See Roadside Attractions in All 50 States](#)
- Forbes - [Birding as a Tourism Promotion is Taking Flight](#)
- Good Grit - [SEC Towns on a Bye Week](#)
- The Orange County Register - [7 Trips that Will Have You Zigging While Others Zag](#)

Impact

VK continues to track marketing efforts that contribute to hotel bookings and website traffic using ADARA and Arrivalist software tools.

According to ADARA, digital marketing in Q1 contributed to 4,831 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in Q1 contributed to 4,398 hotel bookings.



4,831
and
4,398

Note: The digital marketing bookings were affected by the onboarding of VK's new advertising agency, The Zimmerman Agency.

The Q1 VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the Q1 Highlights Report at the end of October on the VK website.

Earned media is publicity gained through non-advertising news stories such as stories written by VK-hosted travel writers. Values and advertising equivalency (\$) is determined using Cision software calculations.



- Total Number of Placements: **1,004**
- Total Publicity Value for Earned Media: **\$814,978**

Recognition

Human Animal Bond Institute (HABRI) Award

VK continues to see the impact from its ongoing pet-friendly Barxville campaign, as evidenced by receiving the 2025 HABRI Award in the Pet-Inclusive Culture Category. VK accepted the award at the SuperZoo Convention in Las Vegas, NV.



The nomination submitted to HABRI:

“Visit Knoxville celebrates the human-animal bond through “Barxville,” a charming and comprehensive dog-friendly tourism campaign led by Hank the Golden Retriever. [Also] a dedicated “DOGumentary” and mobile rewards pass, Barxville highlights pet-friendly hotels, restaurants, events, and attractions... With 72 dog-welcoming hotels, 53 pet-friendly restaurants, and annual traditions like Mardi Growl and Howl-o-ween, Knoxville has fully embraced its canine visitors and their people. Visit Knoxville sets a new standard for pet-inclusive travel... through the lens of the human-animal bond.”

Community Partnerships

VK cultivates strategic partnerships that amplify the destination’s visibility and enhance the visitor experience. A few of these initiatives include the VK Concierge Program, annual Visitors Guide distribution, and partnerships with local organizations such as WDVX Radio, K-Town Connect, and the University of Tennessee. Regionally, VK is an active member of the Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council (METTC), collaborates frequently with the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD) and statewide initiatives such as the Tennessee Whiskey Trail, and serves on the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC).

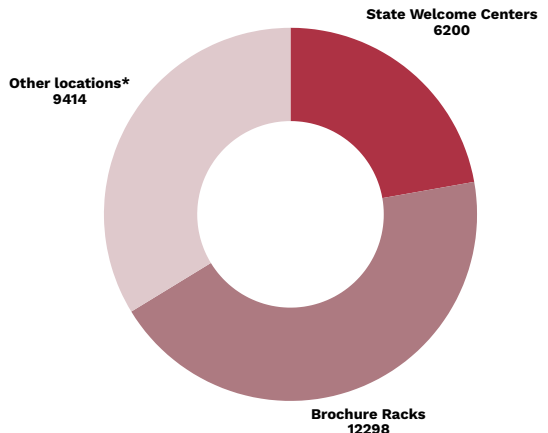
Q1 Highlights

The **VK Concierge Program** is a way for VK to engage our hotel properties, bring 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 request. VK receives positive feedback on this program and can see the return on efforts through increased participation and engagement from our industry partners.

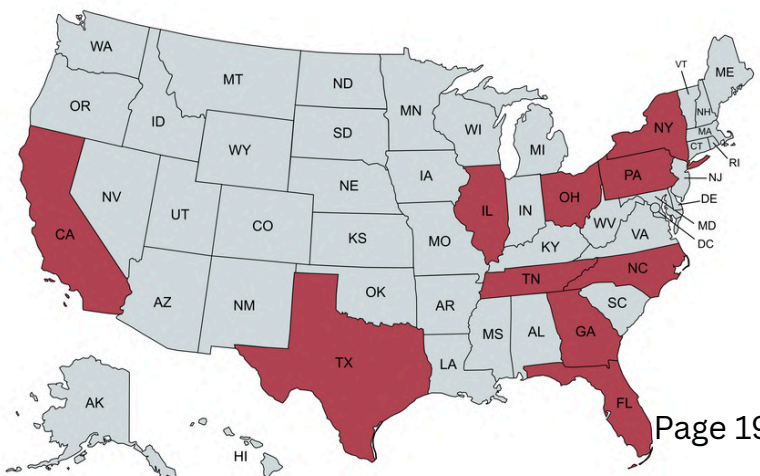
VK highlighted the brand-new UT Visitors Guide and the return of UT football during this quarter’s concierge visits with one box of UT Visitors Guides, a laminated UT Game Day Parking Map/UT Football Permit Parking Map, a bag of Orange Mint Life Savers, and two of each of the following: 2025 August–December Festival Schedules, UT Football Schedules, and 2025 FILM FEST KNOX flyers. VK also took Knoxville Ale Trail maps, Newts in Knoxville booklets, and a Connecting Knox tent card.

Bulk Visitors Guide Requests
27,912 Visitors Guides Distributed in Q1

2,289 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page
2,055 printed guides distributed based on online/phone requests.



Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:

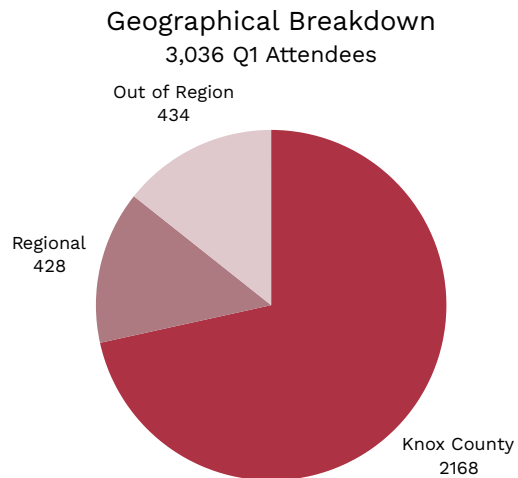


*Visitors Center, satellite centers, UT, and the airport

- Additional distribution materials include:**
- 6,545 Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
 - 59,255 UT Visitor Guides

Q1 Highlights

- **WDVX Radio** – VK partners with radio station WDVX (89.9fm), which broadcasts live from the WDVX Stage inside the Visitors Center. Live programs include Blue Plate Special, KidStuff Live, and First Friday Live (which features a “Maker Moment” where local Makers are interviewed on-air during the show and can sell merchandise).



- **METTC** – VK works 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. In July, METTC partners gathered with HMS 16, a UK-based marketing and branding team, for a hands-on workshop in Knoxville to shape the region’s UK marketing strategy. Building on insights from HMS 16’s recent FAM trip, the group collaborated to blend fresh perspectives from abroad with local passion for the 9 Lakes story. The direction developed in Knoxville will come together in a final brand proposition, unveiled by HMS 16 at the August partner meeting.
- **TDTD** – Several VK team members attended the Governor’s Conference on Hospitality & Tourism (Gov Con) in Kingsport in September. This annual event is hosted in partnership with the Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association and brings together tourism professionals to network, access continuing education, and hear TDTD representatives present on the economic impact of the industry.
- **TTC** – TTC met on September 17, during Gov Con at the Meadowview Marriott Conference Resort & Convention Center to discuss research, analytics and advocacy, marketing highlights, welcome centers, outreach and rural development, administration, and future steps. The President of Visit Knoxville remains Chair of the Knowledge Driven Sub-Committee at the state level.

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. **When you see the friendly Ambassadors, feel free to ask for information and assistance!**

1,888

People Assisted
(For example, directions provided to 281 people)

2,809

Scooters Relocated to Safe Locations

84,371

Pieces of Litter Collected

810

Welfare Population Checks

1,094

Graffiti/Stickers/Bills Removed

91

Outreach Referrals

Visitor Services & Sunsphere Team

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 (including the Welcome Center and 4th Floor Observation Deck). The Team collaborates with over 80 local Makers to offer a diverse range of high-quality retail products in both [Gift Shops](#). The Team organizes tours, maintains the [Events Calendar](#) and Weekly Newsletter, and procures maps and brochures to enhance visitor experiences in Knoxville.

Q1 GOALS

Q1 OUTCOMES

Host six Gotta Know Knoxville tour sessions.



Each month during Q1, two sessions were hosted, servicing over 15 participants, as well as participating in Big Orange Hospitality Day, hosted by the UT's Retail Hospitality & Tourism Management (RHTM) Department.

Attend DI Visitor Services Summit & Annual Convention for continuing education.



The Sr. Director of Visitor Services attended two professional development events hosted by Destinations International (DI) on July 8–11. Key topics included destination accessibility, the integration of artificial intelligence into visitor engagement strategies, staff training and development, and more. Additionally, Monica Armstrong has been accepted into DI's Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) program—the industry's highest level of professional education.

Partner with L+ARC Lighting Design to begin Sunsphere illumination research.



VK has partnered with L+ARC Lighting Design to research, price, and conceptually design a new architectural lighting system for the Sunsphere attraction. This collaboration will enhance the Sunsphere's visual impact in Knoxville's skyline, while incorporating modern, energy-efficient lighting technology that supports dynamic programming and special event customization. The lighting design concepts and pricing are anticipated during Q2 for consideration.

Begin conceptual design process for the Downtown Visitors Center.



VK has partnered with McCarty Holsaple McCarty Architects on conceptual designs and pricing for a remodel of the Downtown Visitors Center. The goal is to modernize the space, enhance visitor flow, and better reflect Knoxville's vibrant identity through updated aesthetics, improved accessibility, and interactive features. This initial phase will help determine the scope and schedule of the renovation.

Special Events & Collaborations

This quarter introduced a significant responsibility in overseeing the Sunsphere attraction. VK assumed the day-to-day oversight of the Sunsphere lease agreement to enhance the overall visitor experience. The Sunsphere continues to be a signature attraction, welcoming thousands of visitors annually. This transition reflects a commitment to optimizing its potential as a “destination within a destination.” VK remains in partnership with the Public Building Authority for maintenance.

The Downtown Visitors Center and Sunsphere Welcome Center were participating locations for the Where’s Waldo Scavenger Hunt (July 1-31). This is the first year the Sunsphere has been able to participate, hiding Waldo in the free-to-visit 3rd Floor Welcome Center.

Visitor Services attended two job fairs:

- UT Graduate School and Postdoctoral Student Community Fair (8/8)
- UT RHTM Part-Time Job Fair (8/26).

6 Gotta Know Knoxville Tour Sessions



Big Orange Hospitality Day: over 100 high school students and their teachers gathered for a look at the many paths the hospitality industry offers, touring places like the Sunsphere Welcome Center.



80+ [Gift Shop](#)
Maker Partnerships



VK supports Knoxville’s Maker community. New products introduced this quarter include items from Paris Woodhull Illustrations, Carter Dunlap 3D Printing, and Bacon & Co.



VK Online Event Calendar



178

Events added by VK

646

Events updated by VK



By the Numbers

7,171

Visitors Center
Visitation

228

Assisted Phone Calls

75

Total Reader Board
Messages
(including groups)

15,725

Sunsphere Visitation

18

Groups Received Gift
Basket & Sunsphere
Ticket Donations

7

Loaned
Assets*

The Sunsphere

The Sunsphere Observation Deck, managed by Visit Knoxville, is a paid historic attraction that was built for the 1982 World's Fair. In 2022, Visit Knoxville reopened the Observation Deck as a paid attraction and established the Sunsphere Fund, a fund created to enhance the structure for the enjoyment of generations to come. Since reopening in 2022, the Sunsphere Observation Deck has welcomed over 197,000 guests from all 50 states and 61 countries.



The Sunsphere celebrated “Born in '82 Day” on August 2 (8/2), offering free admission to anyone with a birthday in 1982. Other special discounted days this quarter included First Friday Free for Locals Days, \$1 off admission for Tennessee Football ticketholders, and \$1 off admission for first responders.

Another special activation included a partnership with the East Tennessee Historical Society to bring their popular Little History Lessons offsite and to the Sunsphere. Admission included free access to the Observation Deck during the event, a children's craft, a history lesson about the 1982 World's Fair, a book reading by local Author Danielle Asher, and a goodie bag that included a complimentary Petro coupon.

With the abundance of festivals in World's Fair Park, the Sunsphere works to highlight any ties to special events. This quarter included a temporary exhibit on the Observation Deck for the Knox Asian Festival. The pop-up display included a flyer with information on the participating Asian countries at the 1982 World's Fair, pamphlets from a variety of pavilions, and photos of performances. Additionally, a Pac-Man gaming machine was placed by the table, which was introduced at the World's Fair, helping lead to Japan's growing leadership in electronic entertainment.

Private tours of the Observation Deck remain a popular offering with nine conducted during Q1: London Travel Agency, Tennessee Fuel and Convenience Store Association, Jet Ski Racing Summer Series, UT Alumni Association for Career Advancement, Oak Ridge High School Foreign Exchange Program, Big Orange Hospitality Day, ESPN Gameday, IREM, UT Language Learning Institute. New stickers for visiting groups and field trips were designed this quarter, one showcasing love for the Sunsphere, and the other offering a line to write your own memory.

The Welcome Center offers a unique venue for internal events and VK partnerships. During Q1, the space was used for Regal's Hospitality & Concessions Budget Meeting.

VK 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.

Q1 Highlights

The VK Film Office supported several local production companies with resources like locations, permitting assistance, and other needs. Companies included Jupiter Entertainment, Wildtree Productions, and Big Slate Media. Projects included true crime television shows, a music video, and a social media campaign. The television shows aired on TV One and Oxygen.

Several out-of-town production companies were also assisted by the VK Film Office. TackleBox Films out of Nashville filmed the Sunsphere with a special camera utilized to capture time-lapse footage that will be used at the Las Vegas Sphere during Kenny Chesney's residency there next year. The Film Office assisted with locations, permits, and city services on the project. Pietown Productions out of Los Angeles filmed an episode of *House Hunters*, which airs on HGTV and ESPN. Both productions were assisted by the Film Office with location and permitting needs.

In September, the feature film, *My Mayfly*, a fly fishing-themed movie, began filming in the Knoxville area. The film stars Adelaide Clemens (*Rectify*, *Justified-City Primeval*), Melanie Hutsell (*Bridesmaids*, *Saturday Night Live*), and Kellan Rhude (*Law & Order*, *Blue Bloods*) and was directed by Paula Kay Hornick. The production was here for several days of pre-production work and filmed for seven of their 20 days in Knox County. Several days were shot in Townsend to take advantage of mountain stream locations there. *My Mayfly* is now in post-production. The Film Office successfully recruited this project to Knoxville and assisted with hotel rooms, crew, locations, vendors, city services, and film incentives.

The Film Office and FILM FEST KNOX continued its partnership on a free film screening series at Regal Riviera in downtown Knoxville. The series is designed to keep the film festival front of mind to the public year-round. Films screened during the quarter included *No Sleep Till*, directed by Alexandra Simpson, and *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, directed by Robert Bresson.

Employee Engagement

VK believes in the power of community, teamwork, and individual growth. It is VK's goal to provide opportunities for employees to further enrich their lives, both personal and professional, through employee engagement, community involvement, and wellness initiatives. VK inspires employees to be ambassadors of goodwill and service in the community, and recognizes that, beyond business, people always come first.

The Rhythm

VK has culture-enhancing programs in place to foster a welcoming and healthy environment.

- VK encourages employees to participate in a quarterly Wellness Program where they are incentivized to meet certain goals, such as reducing screen time or being more mindful of sleep habits.
- Every fall, VK staff compete in an internal Fantasy Football League. While the stakes are low, the competition level is high, and all participants enjoy the friendly matchups.
- This quarter, VK established Mental Health Half Days, a new policy aimed at proactive care of employees' mental health. Once a quarter, employees may leave after a half day in the office to pursue activities that "lift their spirit." This may be a trip to the bookstore or a hike. VK encourages the care of employees' mental health just as much as their physical well-being.

The Pulse

VK strives to take its culture into the community.

- At the beginning of each fiscal year, VK hosts an off-site party to celebrate the accomplishments of the previous year. This July, the outing was hosted at Ancient Lore Village, where staff were given an overview of the grounds, amenities, activities, and catering options.
- Employees spent time with West Town Mall's Director of Marketing and Business Development before spending time browsing the vast selection of shops.
- Employees visited the annual Greek Fest at St. George Greek Orthodox Church. Upon arrival, they were greeted by Greek Fest's team and taught about the history of the festival.

VK regularly hosts internal events to "jump-start" employee morale and to keep communication channels open and engaged.

- VK hosts an annual "Back 2 School" event in August, where a school lunch is provided and employees are encouraged to dress in their school colors. Conversation usually revolves around yearbook photos, high school extracurriculars, and hometowns.

