



Q2 October–December 2025

# Visit Knoxville Quarterly Report



# Letter from the President

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Our teams have been hard at work bringing impactful groups, writers, and filmmakers to Knoxville. From back-to-back **national cross country meets**, to a multi-state **“Ville to Ville” FAM** collaboration hosting renowned journalists, to partnering with **9-1-1: Nashville**, this quarter has been non-stop promotion of Knoxville as the perfect destination for sporting events, leisure travelers, filmmakers, and more.

The quarter also included four of Visit Knoxville’s own events: a new **VK Block Party**, **FILM FEST KNOX**, and **Tour de Lights** (hosted in partnership with Bike Walk Knoxville), plus the return of **Santa at the Sunsphere**. The quarter closed with all the annual festive favorites that we enjoy sharing with visitors throughout the holiday season.

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

On behalf of Visit Knoxville, I proudly submit the October 1 – December 31, 2025, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP  
President, Visit Knoxville

The second quarter of FYE26 was full of festivals, film, and excitement of all kinds. We celebrate the success of the past three months and look ahead to the new year.



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# Q2 Highlights

## VK Block Party

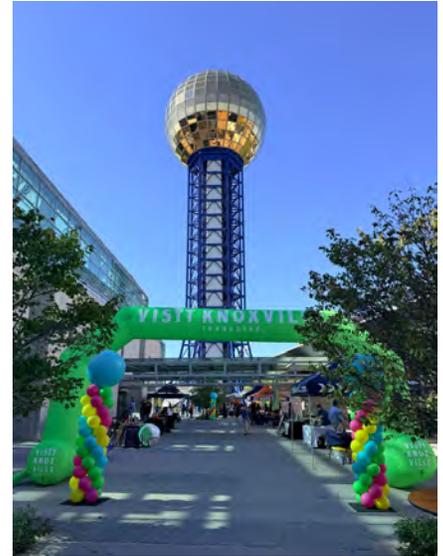
On October 16, VK hosted the first annual Visit Knoxville Block Party benefiting United Way of Greater Knoxville (UWGK). This event was conceived from an idea to expand VK's existing internal United Way campaign, and to celebrate the fantastic work that UWGK does in the local community. The Block Party was hosted outside of the Sunsphere Welcome Center on the Clinch Avenue pavilion of the Knoxville Convention Center. The community was invited to attend the party, where they could pay \$10 for a meal, provided by the Knoxville Smokies and Ham N' Goodys, with complimentary access to the Sunsphere Observation Deck. In addition to the food and attraction, other partners set up booths where they gave away merchandise, hosted games, and supplied information about their offerings. These partners included University of Tennessee Athletics, One Knoxville SC, Knoxville Ice Bears, DICK'S House of Sport, Knoxville Adventure Collective, Legacy Parks, YMCA, K-Town Connect, Arts & Culture Alliance, and Women's Basketball Hall of Fame. This event was able to generate a wonderful contribution to United Way's mission.

The **Employee Engagement Team** created and planned the event, managing all logistics and onsite needs.

The **Visitor Services Team** distributed lunches and welcomed visitors to the Sunsphere during the event.

The **Destination Services Team** hosted a booth to provide information on the upcoming FILM FEST KNOX.

The **Marketing Team** promoted the event via a press release and social media in collaboration with @unitedwayknox.



# FILM FEST KNOX

The third year of FILM FEST KNOX was held in November with the newly bestowed honor of being one of *Moviemaker Magazine's* "50 Festivals Worth the Entry Fee." The footprint expanded in 2025, with the closure of Gay Street in front of Regal Riviera to install a branded tent for VIP passholders to use throughout the weekend. Another addition was the presentation of the first annual "James Agee Prize." Named for the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, film critic, and journalist, it honors those who have made significant contributions to American regional cinema, which is the focus of FILM FEST KNOX. The first recipient was Sailor Bear Films, who have produced films like *Old Man and the Gun* (which was the opening night film this year). Co-Founder James M. Johnston was in attendance to accept the prize. FILM FEST KNOX saw another increase in ticket sales in 2025, and we look forward to next year's festival.

*"Now in its third year, FILM FEST KNOX continues to be a model for what a small regional festival should be,"*  
– Alex Fields in *In Review Online*

The VK Film Office prepares year-round for this event and works hand-in-hand with Marketing and Destination Services to host a successful festival in partnership with Regal and The Public Cinema.

The Destination Services Team assisted with event logistics, including ticket sales, managing an in-person Box Office, and arranging offsite events such as the VIP Cocktail Party at The Vault, the Opening Night Party at Five Thirty Lounge, and the VIP Luncheon at Otsu. The Team also worked with the City of Knoxville for a Gay Street closure and arranging the new VIP tent in front of Regal Riviera.

The Marketing Team promoted the event via organic and paid social media, created the program and other collateral, arranged media interviews, and was onsite to capture photos and video for the handle @filmfestknox. Multiple press releases were released before and after the event, they can be read on [filmfestknox.com](http://filmfestknox.com).



# Back-to-Back Cross Country Events

The VKSC hosted the Cross Country Coaches National Youth Championships for the first time on November 22, and the AAU Cross Country Nationals for the fourth time in 10 years on December 6. Both of these events took place at Victor Ashe Park, and the AAU event alone saw over 1,800 runners representing 32 states plus Canada compete on a demanding course.

VK invested in over one mile of improved trails to the current Cross Country Course at Victor Ashe Park. This is an 8–10’ wide course with gravel about 3–4 inches deep. The trail will not only make for a better race for athletes, but also provide more opportunities for the VKSC to bring more national-level cross-country meets to Knoxville.

**The VKSC Team** kicked off the first meet by assisting with hotel sourcing and welcoming athletes with a custom message displayed on the Visitors Center Reader Board. The second event included expanded VKSC services support for event logistics and operations, including the setup and teardown of equipment, banners, and awards. The Team provided onsite staffing throughout the event and assisted with registration, attendee support, and overall event management. VKSC distributed both digital and printed visitor information to enhance the overall Knoxville experience for athletes, coaches, and families.

**The Marketing Team** was onsite at both events, capturing photographs and video content across Victor Ashe Park. They highlighted the meets in real time across VKSC social media channels, showcasing the competition atmosphere and community engagement to a wide audience. Additionally, a press release was issued by the Team, announcing VK’s investment into the improved trails at Victor Ashe Park.



# Community-wide Holiday Spirit

Knoxville offers a variety of ways to celebrate the holiday season, and VK plays a key role in promoting these activities while producing signature holiday programming of its own.

The Sunsphere and the VK Visitors Center served as featured stops on the Downtown **Peppermint Trail** and the **Elf on the Shelf® Scavenger Hunt**. Peppermint-themed merchandise was available, guests participated in an Observation Deck scavenger hunt, and resident elves Volley Knox and Sunny were fun finds for all ages.

**Santa at the Sunsphere** returned to the Observation Deck for the third year on December 5–7. Photo sessions were offered by reservation with two package options. More than 200 packages were sold, serving over 600 children. Proceeds from special events like this directly support the Sunsphere Fund.

**Tour de Lights** in partnership with Bike Walk Knoxville and supported by Downtown Knoxville brought cheer on December 13 at Mary Costa Plaza with nearly 2,600 festive participants. The celebration included a Holiday Market with local makers, Peppermint Village with festive activities, followed by the costume contest and bike ride.



The **Visitor Services Team** managed all logistical aspects of the Peppermint Trail, Elf on the Shelf Scavenger Hunt, and planned and executed a successful Santa at the Sunsphere.

The **Destination Services Team** led planning and onsite operations for Tour de Lights, overseeing event layout, décor, lighting, staging, and vendor logistics. The team supported safety coordination, volunteer staffing, and information services, delivering a festive and record-setting experience.

The **Marketing Team** promoted all of these activities via press releases, social media, e-newsletters, and media interviews.

# Sports & Convention Sales

## By the Numbers

**49**

Definites Booked

**10**

Definite KCC  
Bookings

**155**

Leads

**71,690**

Definite Delegate Days

**249,972**

Lead Delegate Days

**54**

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.

## Q2 GOALS

Confirm and finalize festival dates for the master list to be included in the 2026 Visitors Guide and visitknoxville.com event calendar.



Promote continuing education by attending the Endeavor Summit and completing at least one Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) webinar as a team.



Determine and electronically distribute Save the Date to partners for the 4th Annual Knoxville Festival Meeting.



Plan and execute all logistics for FILM FEST KNOX and its related events, including the How to Fest, Opening Party, Closing Party, Box Office operations, VIP Services, and VIP Hospitality Tent.



Plan and oversee all aspects of Tour de Lights 2025, including pre-event logistics for the ride and Holiday Market, event design and layout, vendor collaboration and recruitment, and onsite operations.



## Q2 OUTCOMES

Dates were confirmed and submitted for the 2026 Visitors Guide and visitknoxville.com event calendar.

Endeavor Summit on October 2. A webinar was not completed this quarter due to a planning meeting commitment.

Sent invitation to all partners for 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival Meeting to be held on February 25, 2026.

All parties, box office operations, and VIP services were executed. The VIP Hospitality tent was implemented with successful reviews. See Q2 Highlights for details.

Tour de Lights was successfully planned with approximately 2,600 attendees. See Q2 highlights for details.

Supported **66** events and **11** festivals

## Key Services Provided\*

**61**

Reader Board  
Welcome Messages  
to Visiting Groups

**21**

VK Network  
Promotions

**31**

Venue  
Coordinations

**172**

Partner Referrals

**52**

Groups Received  
Visitor Materials

**19**

Social Media  
Welcome/Thank  
You posts

\*Terms defined in  
Additional Resources

# Event Highlights

VK was proud to host **Northstar Meetings Group** for their premier hosted-buyer event designed for small and boutique-sized meetings with the Marriott Knoxville Downtown October 12–14. The event brought together qualified meeting buyers with destinations, hotels, and other suppliers ready to welcome smaller events. Attendees heard from guest speakers, participated in one-on-one appointments, and were able to network with this exclusive group. The VK Sales Team welcomed

attendees with Sunsphere cookies, complimentary admission passes, and met with planners. The Destination Services Team hosted several networking opportunities including the Opening Reception at the Marriott; offsite tours at Zoo Knoxville, Volunteer Princess, and a Downtown Walking Tour; and a closing reception at Maple Hall. The VK Marketing Team promoted the event and led the Downtown Walking Tour.



The **US Trail Running Conference** returned for the second year on October 15–17 at the UT Conference Center, held in partnership with the American Trail Running Association and welcomes trail runners, race directors, and industry leaders. VK hosted the group’s networking event in the Visitors Center, providing décor and event equipment.

The **Tennessee Public Transportation Association (TPTA)** Annual Conference and Expo, hosted by Knoxville Area Transit, returned to Knoxville on October 21–24 at the KCC with the Marriott Knoxville Downtown and Hilton Knoxville as host hotels. TPTA is a nonprofit that serves Tennessee communities through their dedication to improving public transportation. VK coordinated with the planner to produce gift bags for the Rodeo judges, an industry competition that was held at Chilhowee Park.

“

*I want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to EVERYONE for making Small & Boutique Meetings in Knoxville such a tremendous success! We have received rave reviews from the attendees — and it’s all thanks to your collective efforts and an outstanding team to work with.*

– Rita Bergman, Manager, Events and Tradeshow, Northstar Meetings Group

”

Knoxville was the perfect location for our two year stay for the US Trail Running Conference. From the initial connection with the Visit Knoxville Sports Commission, to lodging, locations, trails and restaurants, everything for our national conference was managed professionally and with enthusiasm and care. Our final year here was the best Conference we have ever held, and the location and the support from all services was a major part of this. We highly recommend Knoxville for any organization looking to host a conference or event here. You will not be disappointed.

– Terry Chiplin, Event Director, U.S. Trail Running Conference

# Event Highlights continued...

The **2025 TSSAA Cheer & Dance State Championship** was held November 6–7 at the KCC, bringing thousands of talented athletes from across the state for a weekend of high-energy competition. VKSC partnered with the event to provide custom visitor information, including hotel options, parking details, and local activities, and created a custom magnet on the KNOX letters for a fun photo opportunity. The VK Marketing Team was onsite to capture and promote the event on social media.

Knoxville hosted the **2025 College Swimming Dual Meet Championship** November 21–23 at the Allan Jones Aquatic Center, bringing together collegiate programs including Arizona State University, the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan, and the University of Tennessee for a weekend of high-level competition. The VKSC Team provided vendor referrals for VIP experiences, sourced venues for receptions and ancillary events, welcomed teams with custom hotel and venue signage, and provided resources for media and local contacts to help promote the event. The VK Marketing Team was onsite to capture and promote the event on social media.



*Working with the Visit Knoxville Sports Commission has been a true partnership. Their support and expertise helped make our CSCAA event a success and ensured our teams and fans felt right at home in Knoxville. We hope to bring our event back to Knoxville with their support—there is no place better to host an event!*

– Samantha Barany, Executive Director

“TSSAA is thrilled to continue to partner with Visit Knoxville for our TSSAA Cheerleading and Dance State Championships. The Knoxville Convention Center is an incredible facility that has allowed this event to grow each year. Visit Knoxville has been very supportive of education-based athletics, and the city of Knoxville served as a welcome host to our student-athletes, coaches, and fans! This event would not be possible without the great team in Knoxville. Their support, leadership, professionalism, and dedicated planning contribute greatly to the championship experience and memories our TN students take back home.”

– Lauren Jones, Director of Eligibility, Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association

# Team Knoxville Volunteers

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

Volunteers participated in welcome bag preparation for the Energy, Technology, Environmental Business Association (ETEBA) Business Opportunities & Technical Conference on October 27, providing five hours of service by one volunteer.

The following partner opportunities were shared via monthly Team Knox newsletters:

- Project Inspire–October 3–5
- Brandon Lake Concert–October 16
- Crowder Concert–October 17
- DEKA Fit–October 18
- Tour de Lights–December 13

## Pre-Planning Visits

- Bassmaster Classic–October 25
- Tennessee Chapter American Public Works Association–November 14
- National Extension Association of Family & Consumer Sciences–December 1–3
- Savannah Bananas–December 4



“

*Can't thank you enough for providing volunteers for our event! This is close to our 20th year at the KCC. The staff and venue meet our needs perfectly and they just get us. Friendly, responsive, and always at the ready.”*

– Terri Reedy, Director of Operations,  
ETEBA

”



# Festivals & Events

Knoxville offers a vibrant calendar of festivals and events throughout the year. The Destination Services Team assists in a variety of ways, including event promotion, service provider referrals, recruiting volunteers, and more.

**1** Oct  
Event



- Foothills Craft Guild Fall Show



**7** Nov  
Events



- FILM FEST KNOX
- Veterans Day Parade
- Christmas at Chilhowee
- Fantasy of Trees
- Celebration of Lights
- Holidays on Ice
- Light Up Lakeshore



**3** Dec  
Events



- WIVK Christmas Parade
- Tour de Lights
- New Year's at the Sunsphere



# 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.

## Q2 GOALS

Finalize refresh of Meetings segment of the VK website.



Provide marketing and PR support for the 2025 FILM FEST KNOX events.



Implement a new creative direction for Visit Knoxville's tagline branding and advertising.



Design and produce the 2026 Knoxville Visitors Guide.



## Q2 OUTCOMES

In collaboration with Sales and Services, the meetings and services sections of VK's website has been fully refreshed with a new video, crisp content, new widgets, and revised organization: [VisitKnoxville.com/meetings](https://www.visitknoxville.com/meetings).

The team eagerly supported the third FILM FEST KNOX with billboards, radio, and social media ads. The Team also issued press releases, website updates, and program and banner graphic design. For examples of that design work, browse the Q2 creative materials.

At the end of September, VK announced a new creative direction: Calling the Curious. Immediately, the Marketing Team introduced Calling the Curious creative to target audiences through magazine ads, social media content, a new VK app, and robust digital advertising (in partnership with The Zimmerman Agency).

Throughout the year, the Marketing Team works to bring a new Visitors Guide to life. From concept to content, VK commits to the thoughtful process behind every issue and are pleased to share the digital [2026 Official Knoxville Visitors Guide](#).

# 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 Knox County. The following visuals, data points, and explanations aim to provide an overview of the Marketing Team's dedication to promoting Knoxville this quarter and year-round.

## Website



**496k**

Users

**94k**

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

**44k**

Engaged Sessions

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

## Weekly Newsletter



**1,273**

Subscribers

**36%**

Open Rate

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

## Quarterly Newsletter



**51.8k**

Subscribers

**29%**

Open Rate

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

\*SimpleView reports an average open rate of 34% for the tourism industry during this time frame.

# 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 hosted a multi-state “Ville to Ville” FAM in partnership with Visit Greenville and Explore Asheville/The Biltmore, with three freelance writers: Lisa Beach, Adam Graham, and Renee Sklarew. VK coordinated all logistics for the FAM with representatives from those CVBs which included itinerary, accommodations, restaurant reservations, and a completely guided experience while in Knoxville. Lisa Beach has since had an article published on Glitterville in [Southern Living](#).
- VK hosted Georgia Walsh, the deputy showbiz editor for *The Irish Sun*, in partnership with TDTD. VK arranged her itinerary, accommodations, and provided a guided walking tour.
- VK hosted Antavia Lauren, an Atlanta-based content creator, in partnership with TDTD. VK arranged her itinerary, accommodations, and she has since posted in-feed and a [pinned story series](#) to her Instagram, [@antavialauren](#).
- VK assisted Tara and Curtis McCoy, Atlanta-based content creators, in partnership with The Oliver Hotel. VK assisted with itinerary suggestions and reservations. They have since posted in-feed to their Instagram, [@atlfoodgoals](#).
- VK hosted Jacqui Agate, a freelance UK journalist, in partnership with TDTD. VK arranged her itinerary, accommodations, and provided a guided tour. She has a confirmed assignment with *The Times UK*, expected to publish early 2026.



## Media Assistance Provided

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

In addition to providing regular content/arranging interviews with local outlets (WATE, WVLT, WBIR, Knoxville News, Compass, Inside of Knoxville, and Blank News), VK assisted Knoxville Ledger/Tennessee Ledger, Knox Brew Stories, The Local Palate, Everything Knoxville, Southern Living, Turner PR, and various freelancers.



Published pieces (both earned and paid placement included):

- Knoxville Ledger - [Knoxville Joins the Mayhem](#)
- Tennessee Ledger - ['9-1-1' will take show on road to film in Knoxville](#)
- The Local Palate - \*Special Issue\* [The Best Culinary Towns](#) (hardcopy only)
- HGTV - [Festive Holiday Markets in All 50 States](#)

## 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 Q2 contributed to 5,719 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in Q2 contributed to 3,529 hotel bookings.



**5,719**  
and  
**3,529**

The 2Q VK Tourism Dashboard will be available to view alongside the 2Q Highlights Report at the end of January 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 Earned Media Placements: **685**
- Total Publicity Value for Earned Media: **\$591,106**

# Community Partnerships

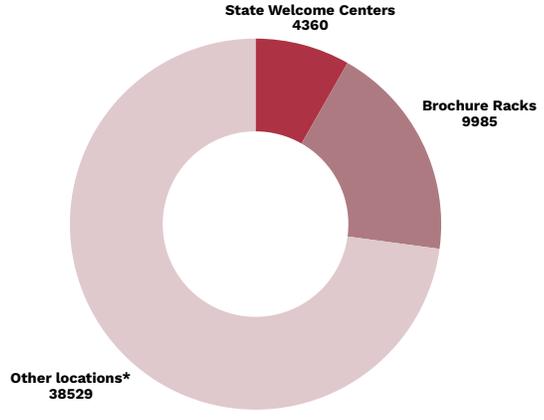
VK cultivates strategic partnerships that amplify the destination’s visibility and enhance the visitor experience. A few of these initiatives include the VK Concierge Program, annual Visitors Guide distribution, and partnerships with local organizations such as WDVX Radio, K-Town Connect, and the University 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).

## Q2 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 celebrated the holiday season during this quarter’s visits, providing their assigned properties with a bag of Ghirardelli Peppermint Bark Squares, and two each of the following: 2025 Holiday-At-A-Glance flyers, Knoxville Winter Calendar of Events flyers, Knoxville Christmas in the City/Holidays on Ice rack cards, Zoo Knoxville Smoky Night Lights rack cards, Tour De Lights flyers, Santa at the Sunsphere flyers, Knoxville Smokies Winter Wonderland Light Show flyers, Sunsets at the Sunsphere flyers, 1 box of Knoxville Ice Bears pocket schedules, and 25 Sunsphere rack cards.

**Bulk Visitors Guide Requests**  
52,874 Visitors Guides Distributed in Q2



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

1,417 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page  
1,827 printed guides distributed based on online/phone requests.

**Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:**

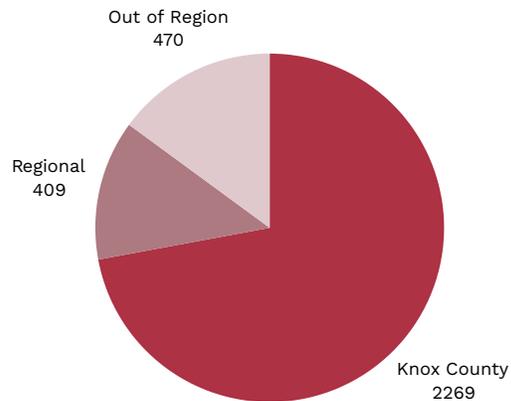


- Additional distribution materials include:**
- 4,879 Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
  - 5,740 UT Visitor Guides

# Q2 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).

Geographical Breakdown  
3,198 Q2 Attendees



- **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.
- **TDTD** – VK partnered with TDTD on the **MICHELIN Guide American South 2025** initiative to recognize outstanding dining destinations across the state.

The MICHELIN Guide American South 2025 included selected restaurants across Alabama, Atlanta, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. The Ceremony took place on November 3 in Greenville, South Carolina, with members of the VK Marketing team and TDTD in attendance.

Knoxville restaurants J.C. Holdway (Chef Joseph Lenn), Potchke (Chef Laurence Faber), and neighboring The Restaurant at RT Lodge in Maryville (Chef Trevor Stockton) all took home MICHELIN *Recommended* accolades.



- **TTC** – TTC did not meet this quarter. 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!**

**1,860**

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

**3,404**

Scooters Relocated to Safe Locations

**120,139**

Pieces of Litter Collected

**509**

Welfare Population Checks

**676**

Graffiti/Stickers/Bills Removed

**31**

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.

## Q2 GOALS

## Q2 OUTCOMES

Plan and produce Santa at the Sunsphere.



See Q2 Highlights for details.

Host First Friday Sunsphere Sunsets.



The Sunsphere Observation Deck began the third season of Sunset at the Sunsphere, offered November–March, coinciding with Daylight Standard Time. November’s viewing granted Observation Deck admission, mini pancake stacks by Pancake Daddy, and contact with highlighted Maker Carter Dunlap, creator of 3D-printed Sunsppheres.

Attend Smoky Mountain Gift Show.



Attended Smoky Mountain Gift Show on November 6 at the Gatlinburg Convention Center. Over 500 companies exhibited merchandise and wholesale products of tourism items. VK continues to partner with merchandisers on large quantity items outside of the local Maker market.

Host three off-site retail booths.



The VK Gift Shop had pop-up retail booths showcasing local Makers and event-specific merchandise at FILM FEST KNOX, Celebration of Lights, and Tour De Lights.

Participate in DKA initiatives: Wicked Cool, Peppermint Trail, Elf on the Shelf® Scavenger Hunt.



Both the Visitors Center and the Sunsphere participated in all three DKA initiatives. During Wicked Cool, the Observation Deck hosted a scavenger hunt with over 600 completions. A Halloween costume contest was also held, with participants receiving complimentary admission to the Observation Deck. The Visitors Center was decorated and staff handed out candy. See Q2 Highlights for Peppermint Trail and Elf on the Shelf® details.

# Special Events & Collaborations

VK plans to remodel the Visitors Center with construction scheduled to begin in January. During this quarter, the project advanced to the bidding phase in partnership with McCarty Holsaple McCarty, resulting in the selection of Holston Construction Services as the project contractor. Updates will be provided in the Q3 report.

Updates to the [Voicemap Audio Walking Tour](#) were made, which has been downloaded and utilized over 230 times. A Step-On Tour was also conducted this quarter for *Evelyn's Excursions*.

The Visitors Center extended hours to remain open for the downtown Knoxville Christmas Parade, and for an afterhours networking event for the U.S. Trail Running Conference this quarter.

**8** Sunsphere  
Tours



UT Counselor Advisory Board: The Sunsphere Welcome Center hosted its first breakfast for 35 guests. VK is proud to offer rentals for partners wanting intimate gatherings in the Welcome Center.



**80+** [Gift Shop](#)  
Maker Partnerships



VK supports Knoxville's Maker community. New products introduced this quarter include items from English Rose Farms, Smoky Outfitters, Gayla Seale, and more.



VK Online  
Event Calendar



**113**

Events added by VK

**626**

Events updated by VK



# By the Numbers

**7,975**

Visit Knoxville  
Visitors Center  
Visitation

**232**

Assisted Phone Calls

**38**

Reader Board  
Messages

**13,482**

Sunsphere Visitation

**6**

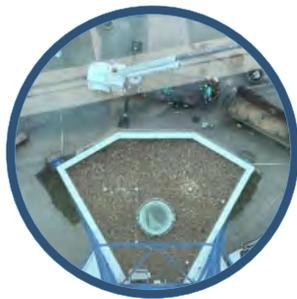
Gift Basket &  
Sunsphere Ticket  
Donations

**5**

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 211,000 guests from all 50 states and 61 countries.



This quarter, the Sunsphere concluded the final “Free for Locals Day” for the calendar year on October 2 and launched the Sunset at the Sunsphere First Friday series on November 7. See the Visitor Services Goals for more information on this event.

Two special activation days were held in October through community partnerships. From October 8–10, the Sunsphere partnered with the 2025 TSCA Fall Conference at the KCC for free admission to conference attendees. On October 16, the Sunsphere participated in the VK United Way Block Party, donating all ticket proceeds from the day to United Way of Greater Knoxville.

Private guided tours remained in high demand, serving a mix of out-of-town tour groups, student organizations, and local nonprofits, including Knox Service Dogs and OneKnox + Project Inspire.

In November, maintenance and site improvements were completed with minimal impact to operations. New directional ground clings were installed in World's Fair Park, and rooftop gravel was added to the Welcome Center to improve drainage and aesthetics. Guests responded positively, particularly to viewing the work from the Observation Deck during operating hours.

Additional highlights included the Sunsphere being nominated for an Orchid Award—new architecture, newly donated 1982 World's Fair artifacts for Observation Deck Museum, and offering discounted ticket admission during the UT home football games for game ticketholders (\$1 off).

The Sunsphere introduced two new custom products this quarter: the Sunsphere Official Plush, now available for purchase, and a newly designed Sunsphere rack card. Rack card were distributed through the VK Concierge Program, mailed to all 16 Tennessee State Welcome Centers, and placed in die cut 3D-printed Sunsphere display racks at select downtown Knoxville hotels.

# 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.

## Q2 Highlights

The VK Film Office assisted many local production companies such as Jupiter Entertainment, Loch & Key Productions, Big Slate Media, and Keller Creative with resources like locations, permitting, city services and other production needs. Projects assisted included a Y12 Federal Credit Union commercial, a Grayson Hyundai brand video, marketing content for Visit Knoxville, and true crime shows like *Fatal Attraction* and *For My Man*.

Several out-of-town production companies were also assisted by the VK Film Office this quarter. The Film Office provided help with locations, permits, city services, and other resources to companies like Lenzworks out of Utah on an episode of *Relative Race*, a reality competition series. Assistance was also provided to Circus Town Productions out of Los Angeles on an episode of *House Hunters* airing on HGTV, and Hyvion on drone content for *SEC Nation* airing on ESPN.

In October, the hit television show, *9-1-1: Nashville*, came to Knoxville for 3 days to film part of an episode of the ABC primetime show. Two main cast members and a large crew descended on Knoxville, filming in locations such as the Downtown Marriott, World's Fair Park and the Sunsphere, Gay Street, Five Thirty Lounge at Hyatt Place, and Zoo Knoxville. The pilot episode of the show aired on October 9 and amassed 3.75 million live and same day viewers and 19.29 million cross-platform viewers 35 days out, to make it the #1 show in the highly sought after 18-49 demographic. Knoxville will appear in Episode 12 and the show airs in primetime Thursday nights on ABC.

In November, the VK Film Office and Visit Knoxville produced year three of FILM FEST KNOX. See Q2 Highlights for details.

# 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.
- Employees participate in Mental Health Half Days, a 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" like a trip to the bookstore or a hike. VK encourages the care of employees' mental health as much as their physical well-being.
- VK hosts an annual Halloween Party, where employees participate in a costume contest and compete in a spooky rendition of team trivia.
- VK hosts an annual Thanksgiving potluck, taking an opportunity to reflect on the blessings of the past year.



## The Pulse

VK strives to take its culture into the community.

- VK hosted an inaugural Block Party in October, see Q2 Highlights for more details.
- The News Sentinel Charities Empty Stocking Fund provides food annually for families in need during the holidays. VK employees volunteered to help load boxes of food and create Christmas cards for the recipient families.
- VK hosts an annual holiday party, which was held at Covenant Health Park this year. Employees crafted, participated in batting practice, played trivia, and engaged in the notorious annual white elephant gift exchange.