VISIT KNOXVILLE TENNESSEE

Q1 July-September 2026

Visit Knoxville Quarterly Report



Letter from the President



The first quarter brought both smiles and sadness as we had many celebratory moments, yet lost one of East Tennessee's own, the beloved Dolly Parton.

In July, we teamed up with Knox County for the **250th Anniversary Celebration at the Cove**. This one-time commemorative event followed the City of Knoxville's annual Festival on the Fourth event to extend the recognition of America's 250th birthday.

Summer continued with more festivals, conferences, and events supported by our team. As football season approached, we were excited to see the **new traffic management plans implemented**.

The **Visit Knoxville & United Way Block Party** closed out the quarter as one of our proudest events we produce, connecting our community for major impact.

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 July 1 – September 30, 2026, report for Destination Marketing and Event Management Services for Knoxville and Knox County.

Sincerely,

Kim Bumpas, CDME, CMP
President, Visit Knoxville

We're happy to share that we ended the first quarter with a community-wide party; the perfect way to move into the new fiscal year with our tourism partners in FYE27.

We approach this new year with unceasing enthusiasm for our destination!

VISIT KNOXVILLE TENNESSEE

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Quarter Highlights

President's Projects

As President of Visit Knoxville, Kim Bumpas' role extends well beyond destination marketing. She works across tourism, economic development, sports, transportation, community partnerships, and organizational leadership—often serving as a convener between public- and private-sector partners to advance projects that benefit both visitors and the Knoxville community. Below are a few projects and initiatives that VK's President has focused on this quarter:

Traffic Management Feasibility Study and UT Game-Day Traffic

- Continued leading VK's role in the collaborative traffic-management initiative with the University of Tennessee (UT), City of Knoxville, and Knox County; focused on Neyland Stadium, Food City Center, and Covenant Health Park (CHP). The public/private partnership moved from feasibility study to real-world implementation, with strong results during the Tennessee–Texas game, when campus reportedly cleared in roughly 90 minutes despite the added complexity of a U.S. Presidential visit.

Knoxville Municipal Golf Course / Sports Complex Redevelopment

- Continued to play a key role in advancing the proposed redevelopment of the 156-acre Knoxville Municipal Golf Course property on Schaad Road. Following City Council approval of the Memorandum of Understanding in August, work continued with the Sports Authority, City and County on revisions to the Request for Proposal, including public engagement, financing, governance, golf access, and sports programming.

Covenant Health Park and Sports Authority

- Continued involvement with the Knoxville-Knox County Sports Authority and planning around CHP, including event calendars, field conversions, and opportunities to maximize the venue beyond baseball. A major milestone was the announcement of the first football game at CHP, Baylor vs. Knoxville Catholic, further demonstrating the venue's flexibility and sports-tourism potential.

Field and Sod Conversions / Multi-Use Sports Planning

- Worked with partners on the logistics of converting sports facilities for soccer, football, and other events, including sod, timing, costs, and partner responsibilities. This operational work supports the broader strategy of maximizing Knoxville's existing sports assets.

President's Projects Continued

Convention Sales Leadership and Team Development

- Led the search for a new VK Senior Director of Sales, hiring Kelcey Schenheit, who began September 1. The process was part of a broader restructuring that separated Convention Sales leadership from Sports Commission leadership. Work also continued to strengthen client continuity, transition key accounts, and sharpen the entire Sales Team's focus on converting active leads into definite business.

Sports Commission Leadership and Restructuring

- Following Parker Medley's departure, led the search for a new VK Senior Director of the Sports Commission and selected Ce'Nedra Dillard. The department was further strengthened through the promotion of Chris Fox to Sports Sales Director and the hiring of Sarah Short as Sports Manager, effectively rebuilding the Sports Commission's leadership structure while maintaining active events and sales efforts.

Tennessee Tourism Leadership

- Continued representing Knoxville through statewide tourism leadership, including work with the Tennessee Tourism Committee (TTC) and remaining its Chair of the Knowledge Driven Sub-Committee, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD), Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Association (TNHTA), and other destination leaders. This quarter, the TTC met at the Appalachian Clubhouse in Gatlinburg, TN on August 4. Commissioner Ezell and Governor Lee spoke to the committee about the economic impact of tourism in Tennessee. The Governor's Conference on Hospitality and Tourism in September provided another opportunity to strengthen relationships and ensure Knoxville remains part of key statewide tourism conversations. The TTC also met for its Annual Meeting prior to the Governor's Conference.

DMAP Reaccreditation

- Led preparations for VK's Destinations International (DI) Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) reaccreditation, including extensive documentation across governance, finance, research, sales, marketing, destination development, accessibility, economic-impact measurement and organizational practices. DMAP serves as a visible industry distinction that defines quality and performance standards in destination marketing and management. DMAP reaccrediation work will continue into the following quarter, submitting to DI in mid-October.

25 Years of Service

- This quarter, Kim Bumpas celebrated 25 years of leading Visit Knoxville with vision, heart, and an unwavering commitment to Knoxville. VK congratulates her on this incredible achievement.

250th Celebration at the Cove

Presented by Visit Knoxville and Knox County, the **250th Celebration at the Cove** took place on July 11, with a daylong community celebration at Concord at the Cove. The free event brought together local history, community organizations, family activities, live entertainment, and spectacular lakeside fireworks.



The daytime celebration featured a community expo designed as a “living history” experience. Attendees could explore local historical exhibits, visit community organizations and artisans, enjoy food, and participate in hands-on crafts for children. Family activities continued through the afternoon, including a patriotic Little Stars Bike Parade. Stage programming featured historical storytelling, “Unfinished Revolution,” history trivia, a pie-eating contest, story time, a special visit from Zoo Knoxville, and other activities celebrating America’s heritage.



Guests were encouraged to bring a lawn chair and blankets and enjoy live music at a Concert at the Cove featuring special guest Carson Beyer. The evening concluded with a reading of the Declaration of Independence by Mayor Glenn Jacobs, followed by a fireworks display launched over the water, providing a memorable finale.





The Destination Services Team worked with Knox County for months to plan all activities and recruit community participants. On-site, the Team oversaw all logistics throughout the day including set up, managing vendors and stage activities, as well as the concert and fireworks display.

The Marketing Team designed all promotional materials and signage, including the landing page on VisitKnoxville.com. The Team also promoted the event via social media, a press release, and arranging media interviews.

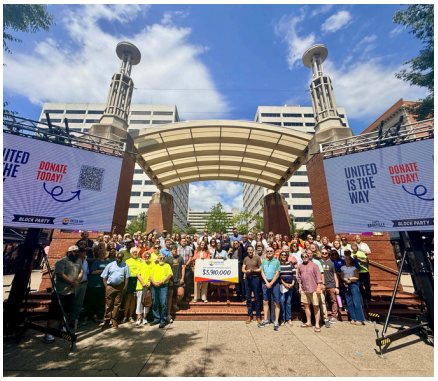
The Visitor Services Team staffed the VK information and activity booth throughout the day and sold commemorative 250th Celebration at the Cove reusable water bottles.

2026 VK & UWGK Block Party

Visit Knoxville was proud to host the **Visit Knoxville & United Way Block Party** on September 10. This was the second annual event, designed to be a way for Visit Knoxville to give back and support fellow nonprofits through the United Way of Greater Knoxville (UWGK). The event officially kicked off UWGK's 2026 fundraising campaign.



This year the Block Party was held on Market Square, which enhanced visibility to downtown workers, residents, and visitors. Multiple vendor partnerships were established to procure a donated hot dog lunch, drink, and cookie (food provided by Knoxville Smokies, Coca-Cola, and Ham 'N' Goodys), AV equipment, and decor. The entire VK Team was in complete support, serving lunch, accepting donations, and overseeing from setup to tear down.



The WDVX Blue Plate Special was hosted remotely on the Market Square stage to provide live music. Special guests were invited to draw excitement, including the University of Tennessee costumed Smokey mascot and Smokey XII, the newest bluetick coonhound in the university's tradition.

UWGK closed the event by awarding over $3.9 million to 105 area non-profits. By working together, we can make a difference in our community: "United is the Way."



The Destination Services Team and Employee Engagement Team supported the operations of the event, planning with UWGK. The event layout and logistics were coordinated, alongside arranging area non-profits and other supporting vendors to engage attendees.



The Marketing Team created designs and messaging used to invite community members and spark awareness on social media, alongside issuing a press release and arranging media interviews. The event was listed with full details on the VisitKnoxville.com event calendar.

Visitors Center IIDA Award

VK's newly renovated Visitors Center is officially award-winning. This quarter, VK traveled to Nashville on September 11 to accept the **"Best of Beauty on a Budget" Award** from the Tennessee Chapter of the International Interior Design Association (IIDA), honoring the Visitors Center renovation for its exceptional design, creativity, and thoughtful use of resources. Completed in partnership with McCarty Holsaple McCarty, the project was recognized among Tennessee's design community for delivering a high-impact transformation through smart, intentional investment.



The renovation has reimagined the Visitors Center as a vibrant and welcoming destination that reflects the character of Knoxville, elevates the visitor experience, and creates new opportunities to engage both travelers and the local community.



The IIDA is the Commercial Interior Design Association with a global reach. They support design professionals, industry affiliates, educators, students, firms, and their clients through their global network of members across 58 countries. They advocate for advancements in education, design excellence, legislation, leadership, accreditation, and community outreach to increase the value and understanding of Interior Design as a profession that enhances business value and positively impacts the health and well-being of people's lives every day.





The Visitor Services Team and Operations Team were heavily involved in the planning process and oversight of the renovation, and staff from the Team accepted the award in Nashville on VK's behalf.

East Tennessee Music Council

In September, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD), and the Tennessee Entertainment Commission (TEC) announced the **creation of the Tennessee Music Advisory Council (TMAC)**.

The council's mission is to build and sustain a community-led music advocacy organization that supports music professionals through economic opportunity, professional development, stronger networks, and accessible spaces while amplifying the region's unique musical heritage through stakeholder input, partnerships, and tourism initiatives. The TEC contracted Sound Diplomacy to survey the music infrastructure of East Tennessee. Through research gained by polls, roundtable discussions, and asset mapping, Sound Diplomacy developed a roadmap to grow the East Tennessee music landscape. Implementation of this roadmap will create more jobs and opportunities for aspiring music creators and industry professionals, as well as highlight the region's existing artists, venues, and music scenes.

Supporting this initiative for our region and beyond, **VK hosted the launch event for the East Tennessee Music Council**, a subset of TMAC, with representatives from TNECD and TEC announcing recommendations made by the Sound Diplomacy study. Attendees included members of the Arts and Culture Alliance, WDVX, and other local organizations. VK looks forward to further developing Knoxville as a place to see, hear, and create music.





The Employee Engagement Team supported this launch event logistically, functioning as host in the Visitors Center. VK's own Director of Operations & Employee Engagement, Austin McCarley, serves on the regional East Tennessee Music Council, as well as the statewide, Governor appointed, TMAC.

The Marketing Team supported by sharing this initiative on social media, and the press release can be read on VisitKnoxville.com.

Sports and Convention Sales Teams

By the Numbers

56
Definites Booked

8
Definite KCC Bookings

40,163
Definite Delegate Days

171
Leads

453,795
Lead Delegate Days

61
KCC Leads

- **VK had 167 open leads at the end of the quarter**
- **VK logged 1,473 communications (database of tracked calls, emails, meetings, etc.) with accounts**

Destination Services Team

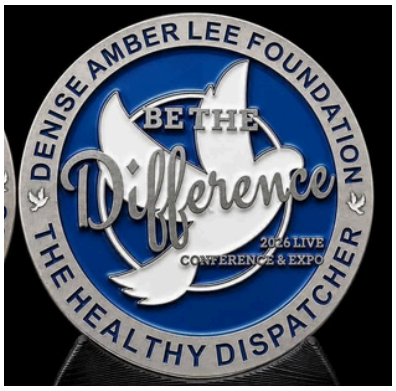
The **Destination Services Team** provides services for conventions, trade shows, sporting events, and festivals, utilizing a consultative approach based on the unique needs, specific goals, and attendee interests of each group. This enhances the overall planner and attendee experience with a focus on services designed to add value, maximize group efforts to grow attendance, and retain group business.

Q1 GOALS	Q1 OUTCOMES
Update Simpleview commitment listings to align with current services options.	Met as a team to finalize commitment categories and subcategories and updates were made to Simpleview.
Work in conjunction with Knox County to plan, organize, manage, and promote the 250th Celebration at the Cove on July 11.	Successfully planned and managed 250th Celebration at the Cove. See Highlights section for more details.
Complete an Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) webinar as a team for continuing education.	Participated in two ESPA webinars: • Beyond the Ballroom: Masterclass in Multi-Stakeholder Webinar on July 29 • Buy-in Different Minds, Better Experiences: Creating Neuroinclusive Events, Experiences & Destinations on September 23.
Participate in National Celebrate Services Week, “Rooted in Service” August 3–7 to celebrate the role of the event service professional, to advocate for the event services profession, and to provide a networking opportunity with fellow services peers.	Hosted a Celebrate Services Week Monday Morning Mingle on August 3, 2026. See Destination Services Event Highlights for more details.

Event Highlights

The **Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association (TMEPA)** Annual Meeting began with a golf tournament at Egwani Farms before taking root at the KCC July 15–17. A welcome reception was held at the Mill and Mine and concluded with a private concert. Keynote speakers included Tennesseans Rick Barnes, Tim Burchett, and Chuck Fleishmann. A spouses' event was hosted at the Sunsphere and included a private tour with Jack Neely and welcome gifts from the Sunsphere Gift Shop.

The **Denise Amber Lee Foundation** hosted its "Be the Difference" Conference July 20–22 at the KCC, welcoming more than 600 attendees. Founded in memory of Denise Amber Lee, who was tragically abducted and murdered in 2008 despite desperate calls to 9-1-1, the Foundation works to honor her legacy by improving emergency communications and public safety. Denise's story and the Foundation's work were recently featured on ABC's *20/20*. This was the Foundation's second conference in Knoxville, with future events under consideration through 2030.





The Destination & Sports Services Team kicked off **National Celebrate Services Week** on August 3 with a Monday Morning Mingle at the Visitors Center. Inspired by this year's "Rooted in Service" theme, the event brought Knoxville's event services community together for a morning of connection and recognition, featuring breakfast, handcrafted espresso beverages, and a DIY plant décor bar. This week recognizes the event service professionals and partnerships that help bring successful meetings and events to life.

> *"The Visit Knoxville team made my job easy, and their support took the weight off my shoulders during a time I could not be onsite to coordinate myself. I'm looking forward to working with the team again in March 2027!"*
>
> – Carrie Crawford
> Meeting & Membership Coordinator
> TMEPA

Prospect Wire hosted its annual All-American Weekend August 7–9 at Lindsey Nelson Stadium, bringing top youth and high school baseball talent for a weekend of competition with scouts and college recruiters onsite. Workshops, networking events, and a welcome reception at Covenant Health Park providing athletes with insight into opportunities in baseball.

The **Showdown at the Sunsphere** returned to the KCC and WFEH August 21–22, featuring 125 teams and 31 volleyball courts to begin the scholastic volleyball season.

Event Highlights



The **2026 Visit Knoxville Collegiate** was held August 31–September 1 at Fox Den Country Club, featuring 17 NCAA Division I teams, including several of the nation's top programs. The University of Tennessee captured the team championship, while UT Chattanooga's Evan Rogers claimed the individual title.

Crown Financial Ministries hosted their 50th Anniversary Celebration at the KCC September 10–12, with attendees from across the globe. Crown's impact has extended from large cities to remote villages teaching faith-fueled financial freedom. VK provided recommendations for local events occurring during the reunion, balloon vendors, event equipment, and private dining venues for an off-site meal.



The **National Association of State Boating Law Administrators** hosted its 2026 Annual Conference September 15–17 at the WFEH. The conference brought recreational boating safety professionals from across the country for training, industry updates, exhibits, and networking. A conference highlight was a staged boating collision and remotely operated vehicle demonstration on the Tennessee River, providing attendees with a firsthand look at boating incident response and investigation.



Knoxville welcomed the **Red Bull Championship Run** to Volunteer Landing on September 25, kicking off an adrenaline-fueled weekend before the University of Tennessee vs. University of Texas football game. Competitors tested their speed, balance, and determination as they went head-to-head in heats, sprinting up a greased goalpost to capture the flag before plunging into the Tennessee River.

> *""We are thankful for all the assistance in booking and seeing our Reunion event through to completion. Our guests from multiple countries loved Knoxville and want to return!"*
>
> – Tracey Fries
> Chief of Staff
> Crown Financial Ministries

The Knoxville Police Department again hosted the **Tri-City Police Leadership Academy** (PLA) September 28–October 2, partnering with Louisville Metro Police Department and Metropolitan Nashville Police Department. The three-week professional development course, with one week in each city, featured world-class speakers and subject matter experts. PLA included 45 law enforcement leaders from 15 agencies across the three regions. The class graduated at the Tennessee Theatre on October 2.

Team Knoxville Volunteers

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

The following events were supported, providing **9 hours of service by 3 volunteers**:

- Team Knox assisted with welcome bag preparation at the Shed Builder Expo, providing 9 hours of service by 3 volunteers on September 22.

Three partner opportunities were shared through monthly newsletters:

- Futures – July 29–August 1
- Home & Garden Show – August 15–16 and October 17–18
- HoLa Festival – October 10

Pre-Planning Visits

- Engagement Scholarship Consortium – July 10
- Knoxville Police Department Tri-City Police Leadership Academy – July 27
- Hold the Line K9 – August 28

Community Support

- VK participated in Kid A'Riffic Fun in the Park, presented by the City of Knoxville Special Events Office, at World's Fair Park on July 22. Activities and giveaways were centered around America 250.

- VK hosted a table representing Team Knoxville Volunteers at the annual AmeriCorps Seniors 9/11 Day of Service at the Knoxville CAC Ross Building on September 11. This event provided a networking opportunity with current and future volunteers in the Retired Senior Volunteer Program.







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.

4 Jul Events

- Festival on the Fourth
- 250th Celebration at the Cove
- Grooves in the Garden
- Kuumba Festival



5 Aug Events

- Beck Cultural Exchange Center's Annual Jubilee
- Irish Fest on the Hill
- East Tennessee History Center History Festival
- German Fest
- Knox Asian Festival



5 Sep Events

- Big Kahuna Labor Day Festival
- Greek Fest
- Tennessee Valley Fair
- Sevier Day
- 865 Fest



By the Numbers

Supported **68** events and **14** festivals

Key Services Provided*

38
Event Marketing (Social Media, Promotional Photography/Videos, Advertising Assistance)

38
VK TV Loop Welcome Messages or Promotion

158
Partner Referrals

28
Venue Coordinations

72
Groups Received Visitor Materials

19
Housing System Services

*Terms defined in Additional Resources

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.

This quarter, the Team finalized an Old City Passport highlighting distinctive local experiences, spotlighted Barxville in four drive markets, and produced fresh photography and video capturing Knoxville's diverse experiences. Additionally, the Team continued to showcase Knoxville as a perfect SEC destination through Vol Network push notifications and VK's Visit the SEC partnership to reach college sports audiences.

Q1 GOALS	Q1 OUTCOMES
Host one influencer to Knoxville, TN.	The Marketing Team hosted Chris and Will of I Heart Radio's *What About Our Life?* podcast. See Media Coverage for more details.
Establish a media center within new digital asset manager.	VK developed a robust media center with assets organized into key categories and subcategories. All photo and video assets are labeled with photographer credit and metadata provided.
Complete mid-year update of digital version of the 2026 Knoxville Visitors Guide.	A successful mid-year update to the digital version of the 2026 Visitors Guide was executed to include business closures, new festival dates, and a date error.
Refresh the look and information of Visit Knoxville Sports Commission webpage(s).	The VKSC webpages have undergone an organizational revision and new widgets have been applied to better guide users navigating VisitKnoxville.com/Sports.

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



602k

Users

70.3k

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

60.6k

Engaged Sessions

VK promotes partners with a mix of contributors including VK staff. Read more and subscribe

Weekly Newsletter



11.7k

Subscribers

56%

Open Rate

*SimpleView reports an average open rate of 34.1% for the tourism industry during this time frame.

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

Quarterly Newsletter



54k

Subscribers

35.1%

Open Rate

Each quarter, VK distributes an e-newsletter highlighting upcoming big events and ideas for exploring Knoxville.

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.

Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn.

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.

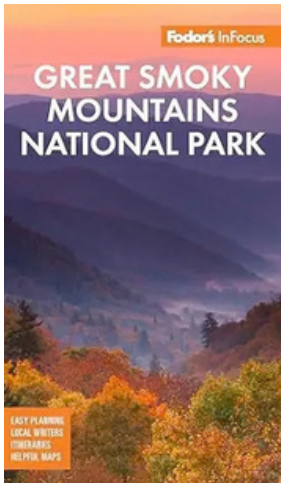
- VK assisted Chris and Will of **I Heart Radio**'s *What About our Life?* podcast. VK hosted them several years ago and they returned to Knoxville to discover some haunted spots and other iconic stops for a future episode, including the Bijou Theatre, Old Grey Cemetery, and more.

- VK hosted **Stratton Lawrence**, a freelance writer visiting Knoxville to update his contributions to the *Fodor's Great Smoky Mountains* book, as well as working on a new book, *Fodor's College Football Bucket List*, that includes chapters on the top 40 college football towns in the U.S.









Media Assistance Provided

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



In addition to providing regular content/arranging interviews with local outlets (WATE, WVLT, WBIR, *Knox News*, *Compass*, *Inside of Knoxville*, and *Blank News*), VK assisted TDTD, *Shelby County Newsmedia*, *USA Today*, *Parade*, *The Times & The Sunday Times*, *Southern Living*, ESPN *College Game Day*, *Convention South*, and various freelancers.

Published pieces (both earned and paid placement included):

- *AAA Mid Atlantic* – Road Trip: Greenville to Asheville to Knoxville
- @poorinaprivateplane – Instagram (carousel, reel) and TikTok (carousel, reel)
- @chicainthecity – Instagram two-part reel series on ONE TWO
- *AARP* – Hotel Hidden Spaces
- *Shelby County Reporter* – Touchdown Towns
- *Yondr.fr* – A Journey through Tennessee from Nashville to Knoxville

Impact

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

6,086
and
3,306

According to ADARA, digital marketing in Q1 contributed to 6,086 hotel bookings. These numbers will continue to increase up to 60 days post-campaign. Additionally, organic website traffic in Q1 contributed to 3,306 hotel bookings.

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-advertisting 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: **748**
- Total Publicity Value for Earned Media: **$1,349,648**

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 other statewide initiatives.

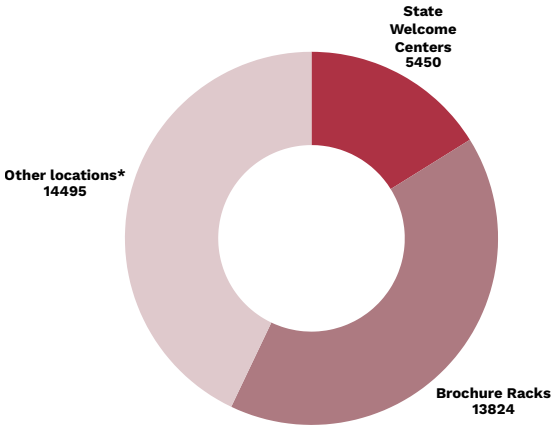
Highlights

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 staff provided their hotels with one box of UT Visitor Guides, a bag of Orange Mint Life Savers, a laminated UT Game Day Parking Map/UT Football Permit Parking Map, two 2026 July – December Festival Schedules, two UT Football Schedules, 25 Knoxville Area Brewery Association Ale Trail maps, and two FILM FEST KNOX flyers.

Bulk Visitors Guide Requests

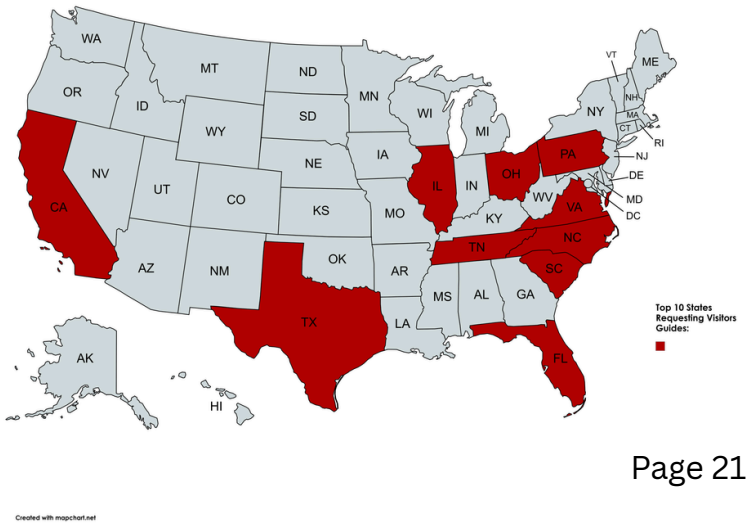
33,769 Visitors Guides Distributed in Q1



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

1,766 pageviews to the View Digital Visitors Guide page
1,977 printed guides distributed based on online/phone requests.

Top 10 states requesting Visitors Guides:

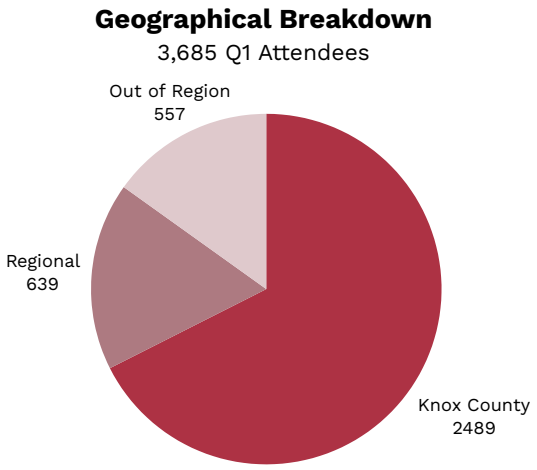


Additional distribution materials include:

- 7,165 Downtown & Dining Pad Maps
- 22,765 UT Visitor Guides

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). Additionally, WDVX broadcast live from Market Square during the VK & UWGK Block Party.



- **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 August, METTC partners gathered to hear the Music Survey presentation from the Tennessee Entertainment Commission.

- **TDTD** – Several VK staff attended this year's Governor's Conference on Hospitality and Tourism in Gatlinburg. This event is hosted by TDTD in partnership with TNHTA and brings together representatives of the state's travel and tourism industry, VK President announced the return of the Governor's Conference to Knoxville in 2028.





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!**

2,691
Scooters Relocated to Safe Locations

2,794
People Assisted
(For example, directions provided to 302 people)

111,850
Pieces of Litter Collected

1,553
Welfare Population Checks

588
Graffiti/Stickers/Bills Removed

24
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
Launch the "Welcome" gift box in the retail space to enhance the visitor experience and showcase local products.	The "Welcome to Knoxville" Gift Box offers a curated collection of locally made and Knoxville-themed products. Available in-store and online, the box showcases local makers while giving visitors an easy way to take a piece of Knoxville home, retail price $49.95.
Partner with the East Tennessee History Center to host a "Little History Lesson" at the Sunsphere.	Partnered with the East Tennessee History Center to host a second "Little History Lesson" at the Sunsphere, themed "A Day at the 1982 World's Fair." Families explored what it was like to experience the Fair, from international pavilions and food to cultural experiences, attractions, and innovations. The program built momentum for future educational partnerships.
Enroll the Sunsphere in "Museums for All" program to expand community accessibility and inclusion.	The Sunsphere is now enrolled in Museums for All, expanding access for families who may face financial barriers. Eligible guests receive $3 adult admission, with children 12 and under free, creating more opportunities for local families to experience the Sunsphere and connect with Knoxville's history.
Host two community-focused events in the Visitors Center to increase local engagement and activation of the space.	Two community-focused activations brought local businesses into the newly renovated Visitors Center. The Plant Trolley hosted a pop-up shop on July 24, followed by a September 25 activation featuring complimentary samples from Paradise Chocolate Co. and LUSHDROP Bev Co. Both events drove foot traffic and strengthened the Visitors Center as a space for community connection.

Special Events & Collaborations

VK participated in Big Orange Hospitality Day, welcoming more than 150 high school students and teachers from across Tennessee to explore careers in hospitality and tourism. As part of the downtown industry tours, VK hosted students at the Visitors Center to learn about VK's role, while students at the Sunsphere gained firsthand insight into attraction management and operations. The experience helped showcase the diverse career paths available within Knoxville's tourism industry and connect the next generation of hospitality professionals with real-world experiences.



VK employees who are alumnae of the program participated by hosting these tours as well as presenting on a Mystery Career Game panel, and connecting with students during Networking Bingo.

5 Sunsphere Tours

- TMEPA
- Upward Bound at Virginia Tech
- UT Extension and National Extension Association for Family and Consumer Sciences
- Diamond Tours
- Big Orange Hospitality Day

VK offers rental agreements for partners wanting intimate gatherings in the Welcome Center in addition to private Observation Deck tours.



80+ Maker Partnerships

Gift Shop

VK supports Knoxville's Maker community.
New products introduced this quarter include items from Whoa Doggie, Paradis Chocolate, Austin Bradley, and more.



VK Online Event Calendar

126

Events added by VK

681

Events updated by VK



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 256,000 guests from all 50 states and 63 countries.









Community-focused promotions continued to give locals and visitors new reasons to experience the Sunsphere. Activations including 8/2 Day, Where's Waldo, Little History Lesson, Free for Locals Day, Christmas in July, and Sunsphere Sessions diversified programming and created meaningful opportunities to engage with the community throughout the quarter.

Strategic partnerships helped connect the Sunsphere with visitors already experiencing Knoxville. During the Knox Asian Festival, approximately 900 guests visited in just four operating hours, making it one of the quarter's busiest days. The TNTIX discount continued for the 2026 UT football season, generating over 50 discounted orders this season and extending the Sunsphere experience to Knoxville's game-day visitors.

Educational outreach grew this quarter with the creation of a new VK student workbook designed to make field trips more interactive and bring Knoxville's history to life for young visitors. The team also expanded outreach to schools across Knoxville and the surrounding region to grow awareness of field trip opportunities. Additionally, the Visitor Services Team refreshed the private tour experience with richer storytelling and new content centered on the 1982 World's Fair, the Sunsphere, and Knoxville.

New media and marketing efforts expanded exposure for the Sunsphere. International Spanish television program *Valencians al Món* filmed throughout the Sunsphere and World's Fair Park, showcasing the attraction to an international audience, while Big Slate captured new marketing footage highlighting the Sunsphere and Visitors Center experience. An expanded social media strategy further strengthened the Sunsphere's digital presence and provided more opportunities to showcase the attraction year-round.

By the Numbers

10,671
Visit Knoxville Visitors Center Visitation

384
Assisted Phone Calls*

18,940
Sunsphere Visitation

284
Free for Locals Admissions*

9
Gift Basket & Sunsphere Ticket Partnerships

3
Loaned Assets*

*Terms defined in Additional Resources

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.

Highlights

The VK Film Office had a busy quarter assisting several local productions filming in the area, with a variety of services including locations, crew, lodging, permits, and more. These included Jupiter Entertainment on crime reality shows such as *Fatal Attraction* (TV One), *Killer Moms* (Oxygen Channel), *Snapped* (Oxygen Channel), *Homicide for the Holidays* (Oxygen Channel) & *I'd Kill to be You* (TV ONE); Pop Fizz on a marketing campaign for EV Fleet; Big Slate Media on a marketing campaign for the revamped VK Visitor's Center; and Denim Jacket Productions on a music video for local artist, Matthew Whitaker. Assistance was provided to several narrative projects, including the vertical feature with Jupiter Entertainment, *Pop Star Clones*, and short films, *We Were Giants* and *Universe City*, from Fisher Films and Graham Pictures, LLC, respectively.

Several out-of-town production companies came through Knoxville, including, Milotxa TV, out of Spain, filming for the television show, *Valencians Around the World*. Exit Four Media out of New York City filmed an episode of the TLC Network show, *My Strange Addiction*. New York City based Jarret Creative filmed an episode of *Killer Grannies*, airing on the Oxygen Channel. J4D Digital, based in Seoul, South Korea, was in town for a photoshoot with Hyundai.

FILM FEST KNOX continued its Free Film Screening Series at Regal Riviera in downtown Knoxville. In July, the film, *Mary Oliver: Saved by the Beauty of the World*, screened to a full theater. In August, the 4K restoration of the 1994 Michael Almareyeda film, *Nadja*, was shown. In September, in celebration of the 80th anniversary of its theatrical release, *The Best Years of our Lives*, was screened to a very appreciative audience. *The Best Years of our Lives* won 7 Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director.

FILM FEST KNOX announced its lineup of Made in Tennessee films as well as the highly anticipated lineup for the American Regional Cinema (ARC) competition. The winning ARC film receives an Oscar-qualifying theatrical release, courtesy of our great producing partner, Regal Theaters. VIP and Full Festival passes are currently on sale.

Employee Engagement

VK believes in the power of community, teamwork, and individual growth. VK provides 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.
- This quarter, VK held its annual **End of Fiscal Year Celebration** at Top Golf for food and fun.
- The Employee Engagement Committee hosted the annual **Back 2 School** event, where staff is encouraged to wear school colors, eat a cafeteria-style lunch, and take "yearbook" photos.
- VK kicked off its annual **fantasy football league** this quarter, welcoming employees new and old to the friendly competition.





The Pulse

VK strives to take its culture into the community.

- VK staff were invited to tour and learn about the **Volunteer Ministry Center** this quarter. Staff also toured the **Tennessee Theatre's 612 Building**.
- This quarter, staff traveled to the UT's campus to participate in the legendary tradition of **painting the Rock**.
- Lastly, VK was "all hands on deck" for the annual **Block Party**. Every VK employee participated in some capacity to bring the event to life. See the Highlights section for more details.

Additional Resources

- Assisted Phone Calls – The Visitor Services Team assists with a wide variety of telephone inquiries daily to the Visitors Center. Assistance examples include providing directions and parking information, suggestions on attractions and things to do, Visitors Guides and map requests, and more.
- Free for Locals Admissions – Complimentary tickets distributed during the July–September First Friday promotions, supporting local engagement and community accessibility.
- Loaned Assets – Includes radios, coolers, ice chests, tables, tents, etc.
- Partner Referrals – VK connects an event planner with suppliers, products, vendors, and services in the community.
- Reader Board – A digital sign on the front exterior of the Visit Knoxville Visitors Center that can display changeable messages.
- Venue Coordination – The process of helping meeting planners, event organizers, or groups find, secure, and manage the most suitable venues for their events within the destination.
- Visitor Materials – Includes the Visitors Guide, Downtown Map, Knoxville Savings Pass, and Shopping & Dining Map.
- VK Network – A loop of informational slides and videos appearing on 20+ TV screens throughout Knox County.