

Transcript

On West Gray, Episode 2, The Juneteenth Festival w/Kendall Hendricks

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Tiffany Vrska, Chief Communications Officer 0:19

What's up, everybody? Welcome to on West Gray, the monthly podcast about all things local government in the City of Norman. I'm your host, Tiffany Vrska, Chief Communications Officer for the City of Norman. Thank you all for being with us. Today we have Mr. Kendall Hendricks with us, community volunteer, and he's joining us to talk about a really special community event and city collaboration here in Norman. We're so happy to have you with us, Kendall. Thank you for joining us.

Kendall Hendricks, Community Volunteer 0:44

Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure.

Tiffany Vrska 0:46

Absolutely. So we have a community festival coming up that you are helping to coordinate and manage on June 18. It's fairly new, but it's already gained quite the reputation for being a really incredible event for family and friends since its launch last year in 2021. So it's Norman's Juneteenth festival. And we were hoping that you could tell us a little bit more about the festival.

Kendall Hendricks 1:10

Yeah, I mean, like you said, it's our second year. First year we did it, we weren't, I'm gonna be honest, we weren't expecting, probably like, what, 200 people? We ended up having over 1500 people the first year. It was something that you had to sit back and just kind of like, wow, this is happening right now. Me and the guys, the other guys that have helped me help me out to do it, Kevin Woodfork, Sam Woodfork, Michael, TJ, Antoine, I mean, Larry, those guys have been wonderful helping us out, getting all this planned out, and just doing their part. Just planning on having fun with this and just bringing it to the community because I feel like it's a great thing for the community.

Tiffany Vrska 1:55

Yeah, absolutely. So you talked about some of the the key players there. So it's kind of it's really committee driven with volunteers just like yourself. So is there like a primary nonprofit behind it? Or is it just people from different facets of the community?

Kendall Hendricks 2:10

Well, we do have a nonprofit. It's called 2gether We Will. With that together we will, it's kind of saying together we will come together and build a better community, together we will help the kids in the community together. So as long as we're doing everything together, then there's no reason why our community can't grow. That's the main reason for the name. That's the main reason for the organization that we have set up is to continuously grow in the community and just come together with it with everything because you can build a better and stronger community together.

Tiffany Vrska 2:42

That's awesome. And I know that you had shared with me that you are a longtime Normanite. As far as the 2gether We Will nonprofit, when did that come to be? When did you start that organization?

Kendall Hendricks 2:54

That was actually Sam's idea. He called me, and we did that, what? We had the first conversation, I want to say, about two and a half, three years ago. We just talked about it. And he called me he's like, "Kendall, we got to do something in the community. We've been here for how long? And there hasn't been no real identity here." And he just knowing the person that I am, knowing that I'm the go-getter, and just kind of always in the community anyways, I was like, let's make it happen. And from there, it's grown into such a wonderful thing, being a part of the community and just touching people and just having these conversations with people in the city as well. So it's grown, and I'm so excited to be a part of it.

Tiffany Vrska 3:35

Yeah, it looks like you guys really took off running. So you started about two and a half, three years ago. Last year, we had this big community event that you helped make possible. So that's really great to hear. So tell me a little bit more about, kind of, what the festival may consist of this year. I know that we have some guest speakers lined up, some different amenities and cool activities going on.

Kendall Hendricks 3:57

Oh, yeah. So we got some guest speakers. JC Watts has taken time out of his busy schedule, which we gladly thank him, to come out and actually speak. So that's gonna be huge in regards to the community. The Hendersons, the first black teacher here at OU. I mean, he's an icon. I mean, that's why we're doing it as well because of his presence and how he's made a such a great impact on the City of Norman, and we can let him tell his story, but his story is such an amazing story.

Tiffany Vrska 4:30

And you're referring to Dr. George Henderson?

Kendall Hendricks 4:32

Yes, Dr. Henderson. So he's a pleasure. I mean, I'm so grateful and thankful that he's going to come out and share a few words, him and his wife. But we're going to have food trucks, we're going to have some games, we're going to have a little bit of everything. Vendors, arts and crafts people, people just bringing all their experiences and their contributions to the community as well. So it's going to be a good time. Music. Fireworks at the end.

Tiffany Vrska 4:59

I have to ask, I heard that there's some sort of dog show going on? I am a dog lover, so I need to hear about this.

Kendall Hendricks 5:06

Yeah, so actually the dog show was out there last year as well. There's this gentleman that came out last year. I think he told me his dogs are all placed 1, 2, 3, and 4 in the nation for what they do. So I am totally excited. Everyone loves dogs, right? But yeah, he's coming back. He's gonna do a little bit of frisbee things with his dogs, some tricks. Do some special little deals that dogs can do. Gotta show his dogs. So it's fun. Yes.

Tiffany Vrska 5:37

All right. So obviously there's going to be a lot of wonderful things going on, very family friendly. We'll have the DJ music for everybody as well. But I mean, getting more into the serious side of it, can you delve into the history of Juneteenth and what it means for the community to come together and commemorate this occasion?

Kendall Hendricks 5:58

Well, yeah, I mean, slavery was was huge back in the past for us. I mean, Juneteenth, it was the emancipation of slavery. So the celebration, this holiday, is not just only for, it's just for celebration of all people. Being free in this country is a wonderful thing. That's why people come to this country, right? Because they are free, and just having us as a Black community, as a Hispanic community, as everyone in this community, being able to do everything together gonna be the best way that we can grow. And that's another form of why we are named as well, 2gether We Will. So it's more about bringing everyone from every walk of life together to celebrate something that we're going to all be doing together from

here on out, moving forward in order to make this a better place to live, to continue, and bringing our kids up. That's the main reason for the event, and for it to move forward.

Tiffany Vrska 6:57

Right. So Juneteenth was recognized as a federal holiday for the first time in our country, I believe, in 2021. But I think that a lot of people may not realize that this marks a day when the federal troops came in to Galveston, Texas to set free the slaves. And the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed already for two and a half years. So you think about those enslaved people just learning that they had freedom for two and a half years, and it wasn't recognized. So that's definitely something to commemorate, to study and learn and grow together as a community. So, the festival, everyone is very, very much looking forward to it, I think, on Saturday, but this is also, we talk about first times, you know, new commemoration by our nation, but also by our city. So we're known as the City of festivals, but there really wasn't a city sponsored or city co-sponsored Juneteenth festival before. So what does it mean kind of bringing that collaboration together to have city support and having it officially recognized?

Kendall Hendricks 8:10

I feel like it's a big deal. Because the fact that the city was so gracious to help us put on something, they saw the passion in it that we had, especially Sam. Sam is the most passionate guy you'll ever meet, once you get to talking to him. But just for someone, for the city to back us, and just keep moving this forward and keep having meetings with us is huge for us. And it's huge for the city, I believe. It's showing the people of the city that, hey, we're all here together, or it's going in the right step to do that. And that's how we're going to grow in general. I mean, look, we got OU down the street, and that brings in so many different cultures, so many different backgrounds. So showing people that are going to OU that, hey, all these people are here for you. We're going to have things that cater to almost every single person in the city. And so I feel like that's very important to bring awareness to and be a part of.

Tiffany Vrska 9:09

Yeah, absolutely. And coincidentally, it's right down the street from campus, right? It's like, bordering it practically, right? And so we can invite our University family over there as well. So do you think that this event has kind of fulfilled the vision that you have, or what do you hope for it in years to come?

Kendall Hendricks 9:29

I want it to grow every single year. Eventually, it would be beautiful if it was like a two day event. Because that's how I know a we got acts all day Saturday, and then Sunday we're gonna do it some more. Just celebrating the whole weekend where it's just a fun time, the whole weekend. And everyone's just having having a good time, listening to great music, great events, and then vendors coming out showing their products and everything like that and pretty much turn into where the whole

states here, because if the whole state is here then that means we did something great. And that means people were actually loving what they've seen. So that's kind of my vision for it to turn into like a two day event where it's a statewide event now.

Tiffany Vrska 10:12

Sure. Making it another staple festival of Norman, for sure. What do you hope that the people that come to the event on Saturday, what do you hope that they take away from it?

Kendall Hendricks 10:24

My main hope is, first, I want everyone to have a good time. That's the main reason. Everyone have a good time. Get some good food in your belly. Go support the vendors that come out. But then understand that the significance of the holiday is just for people coming together finally. Yes, Emancipation Proclamation. But I want them to understand that now that has been done. Now it's time for us to grow and figure out ways to continue the growth in making this place a better place for everyone to live, and just loving each other, coming together with each other. And that's my main reason is just coming together.

Tiffany Vrska 10:59

We could use a lot more of that these days. Loving each other, right? Well, is there anything else that you'd like to share with listeners about the upcoming event?

Kendall Hendricks 11:07

I mean, if you're free, come on out, enjoy some good food and enjoy the entertainment. It's gonna be a good time. I mean, we're gonna have plenty of stuff for people to do, the kids. Oh, we got bouncy houses for the kids as well. We're gonna have some face painting. So I mean, it's gonna be it's gonna be a joyous time for everyone to come out. So come out support City of Norman. Together we will, and we will go far.

Tiffany Vrska 11:30

All right. So everybody listening, that event is our Juneteenth festival. It starts at 5:30pm at Reaves Park this Saturday, June 18. And then we have the firework show about 9:30. So make sure you come for all of it. We're very excited. Kendall, we appreciate you being with us today. Thank you so much.

Folks are welcome to visit NormanOK.gov at any time to find out more information on community collaborations and city festivals. Next month, We will be visiting with City Attorney Kathryn Walker

about the upcoming special election in August regarding city charter amendments. Until then, here are a few events to keep on your radar.

- Save the date! The city wide garage sale will happen August 12 through August 14 here in Norman. More information about how to participate will be made available at NormanOK.gov in the weeks to come.
- Fourth Fest, celebrating our national independence day, complete with live music, fireworks, great eating, and more will take place July 4th at Andrews Park. We will have one of the largest fireworks displays in the state of Oklahoma beginning right before 10:00pm.
- Norman's Summer Sidewalk Sale, part of the Weekend of Local in Oklahoma, will be July 15th through the 17th. Businesses are welcome to sign up to participate through July 8th. Learn more about all the sizzling hot sales at NormanChamber.com.

Questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent to PublicAffairs@NormaOK.gov.

Shout-outs to our producer and editor, Mr. Bryce Holland of the City of Norman Communications Office.

Until next time, stay engaged, stay informed, and always remember to vote. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thanks for tuning in to On West Gray.