

Transcript

On West Gray, Episode 7, Small Business Saturday w/Sara Kaplan & Scott Martin

Runtime: 12 minutes 15 seconds

Tiffany Vrska 0:18

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 and we appreciate you tuning in. Today in the studio we have with us Chief Business and Community Relations Officer Sara Kaplan, of the city of Norman, and Norman Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Scott Martin, who will be talking with us about a very special day of the year, Small Business Saturday. Sara, Scott, welcome to the show.

Sara Kaplan 0:49

Thanks for having us.

Scott Martin 0:50

Glad to be here.

Tiffany Vrska 0:51

All right, we are glad to have you. Now for some background information: Small Business Saturday is the day to celebrate and support small businesses and all they do for our community. The day was originally founded by American Express in 2010, and today is officially co sponsored by the US Small Business Administration. Local community partners, city governments, associations, chambers of commerce and CVBs come together each year to help promote this special day and share the importance of it, which is what we are about to delve into. So Sara, what is the date of Small Business Saturday this year? And what can people expect? How many shops or districts do we have participating?

Sara Kaplan 1:32

Well, so Small Business Saturday is always the Saturday after Thanksgiving, one of the biggest shopping days in the holiday season. And so we usually have Oh, several dozen, I think my list has about 100 small businesses on it. Now that doesn't mean everyone will be doing something special, but a lot of them will. And think beyond just shops. It's also restaurants and breweries and spas and fitness places all sorts of really fun stuff getting in on the action. And then we'll have them all over town. So downtown, Campus Corner, Brookhaven Village and all parts in between.

Tiffany Vrska 2:03

Very cool. And so I think that we did a little bit of history here. It started in about 2010. How long have you been involved with kind of trying to organizing coordinate the state?

Sara Kaplan 2:13

So the city of Norman has partnered with the Norman Chamber and with visit Norman since 2015. So I started at the city of Norman in 2014. So we didn't quite have time to pull it off that year. But the next year we did it, it was really a special, coming from a small business background with my family, it was a really important day that I thought the city should recognize. So we started. And of course, we have great partners that are always on board. And so yeah, we've been pretty consistent even through of course, you know, the COVID year was a little tougher, but we still did it. And more importantly, it really highlighted how important small businesses are in our community.

Tiffany Vrska 2:48

Awesome. And speaking of the importance of small business, I think that you have a really special and unique position. Not all municipalities have something like that. So for our listeners, could you tell us a little bit about your role as Chief Business and Community Relations Officer? The ways that you represent the city of Norman and collaborating and working with our local businesses?

Sara Kaplan 3:07

Yes, sure. So when my role first started, it had a different title. And the focus was really more on retail recruitment and development. And as I've you know, grown in the role and added things like Small Business Saturday, and like the sidewalk sale that we collaborate on as well, we really kind of expanded it to include other things. Also, I've, in the past couple of years, have been helping with special event permitting, which is another really fun way to work directly with our community organizers and our small businesses on you know, all the great events that happened in Norman.

Tiffany Vrska 3:40

All right. And Scott, the Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to advancing the vitality and prosperity of our business community. So how does Small Business Saturday play to that mission?

Scott Martin 3:52

Well, when you look at it, Tiffany, 99% of all businesses are considered small businesses. 60% of jobs created are by small businesses. So this particular holiday is just one day of the year where we will really highlight the importance of why we need to support small business.

Tiffany Vrska 4:13

And what are you looking forward to most on this Small Business Saturday?

Scott Martin 4:18

Well, the cool thing is in Norman, I'm sure this is like everywhere, but particularly in Norman, we have a ton of really uniquely, uniquely Norman businesses, things and places you can go to where you can only find one off gifts and items. And so it's really fun to get out and see the camaraderie, the community pride that's going on. But then I also hope to be able to find like the unique one off gift that for my wife or other family members, something that you can't get anywhere else, you know, and we have a lot of stores in Norman, that do have really special items that you can't find anywhere and so we want to encourage people to go take advantage of this opportunity. Hey, it's only one day out of the year, but we need to be supporting local 365.

Tiffany Vrska 5:07

Oh, yeah. And right before the Christmas holiday, so it's almost perfect timing. So representing the chamber, I mean, I'm sure that all you do is talk with business owners. So what kind of feedback you know, have you had on the organization and coordination of Small Business Saturday, the past couple of years?

Scott Martin 5:24

Well, they love it. And it's a great, it's a great opportunity, as Sara said, for us to partner together with the city, Visit Norman, we work with other media outlets to help spread the word. And then I think they really appreciate the fact that our local government, our business organizations, our tourism organizations, we make this a priority every year. And so just highlighting what they're doing, and maybe the offerings that they have, are really important. And a few more kinds of facts and data, that I think it's important for people to know, two thirds of every dollar spent in small business stays in the local community. So when you're buying something local, you're investing local, you're giving back and contributing to our community, on top of that, every dollar spent at small businesses creates an additional 50 cents in local business activity. So again, you invest locally, you just it just keeps turning over and over and over back into Norman.

Tiffany Vrska 6:28

Absolutely. That's especially important in Oklahoma, as far as how we are funded is so dependent on sales tax, right. So tell me how can folks learn more, I hear that we might have some pretty cool videos in the works.

Sara Kaplan 6:43

Yes. So I mean, the most important resource is the list of small businesses that are participating. So that will be on the Visit Norman app. And we'll also have a landing page on the Norman Chamber of Commerce. Those aren't up yet, because our list isn't complete. But it will be, so the week before we'll make sure to get that spread out everywhere in the community. And we'll also be doing some videos. And a few years ago, we started this really kind of obscure video series based on a fictitious version of Abner Norman. So Abner Norman is, you know, the namesake of the town. We have this statue at her front here of City Hall. And a few years ago, we were sitting around a conference table at the Chamber building with a committee and talking about Small Business Saturday, and someone said, "Let's have like a mascot." And we're like, okay, and so it became Abner. And so this will be the sixth year that we've had this Abner film series. It's very silly. And really fun. It's fun. Yeah. And so each year, the pretty much the previous Abner's, and we've had several, pick the new Abner and we've kind of picked this person who someone is who loves Norman, is a champion of small business. And so I can't wait for you guys to see who this year's Abner is.

Tiffany Vrska 7:59

All right.

Scott Martin 8:00

It's a little bit on the Where's Waldo theme. So Abner will go all over town and highlight different districts and different businesses. And again, as Sarah said, it's just it's goofy. It's fun. It's just Norman. So it's just, you know, relax and have a good time with the videos. We have fantastic community leaders who have stepped up to be added during the past and this year will be just the same.

Tiffany Vrska 8:25

And remind me, so folks can catch those videos on social media platforms and on the web pages?

Sara Kaplan 8:33

Yeah, I think that all the the old Abner videos, I believe are on the Norman Chamber's YouTube channel. But you can also find them on social media.

Scott Martin 8:40

Yeah, and so download the Visit Norman app. It's great to utilize for Small Business Saturday, but again, really all year round. They highlight a lot of local festivals activities are happening, places shop, eat, stay, and recommend that your friends or family that may be coming in from out of town. And then our website is NormanChamber.com. And we'll be listing all the participants whether you are a member the chamber or not on that website, so please make sure you bookmark our website and download the Visit Norman app.

Tiffany Vrska 9:15

All right, and if folks want to be listed or make sure that they're listed, is there a way to do that?

Sara Kaplan 9:21

Yeah, absolutely. They can just shoot me an email or get in touch with Scott, either way. Either entity is happy to add you to the list, but my email is just my name Sara.Kaplan@NormanOK.gov.

Tiffany Vrska 9:32

Okay, and that will be listed on you know, some of the informational items that are on various websites and on the city's social media as well. So, okay, you guys are making it pretty easy, and I'm really stoked to see these videos. So is there anything else that either of you would like to share with our listeners about Small Business Saturday?

Scott Martin 9:52

I'd say just don't let this be the only day get out and support small business, okay. We're a community that supports each other, we stick up for each other, and so 365 we need to be shopping local shop in Norman year round, but get out and make a point of it certainly on Small Business Saturday.

Sara Kaplan 10:11

I will echo that. And then just add that, you know, our small businesses who have had the most challenging past couple of years, and so anything that we can do to support them, not just on this day, but every day. Our small businesses are where we had our first dates. My husband and I had our first date at Othellos. it's where we celebrate our milestones, our anniversaries, our birthdays. So just think about what Norman would be without those businesses.

Tiffany Vrska 10:34

Well, and you know, you mentioned that they've had tough two years, and they never stopped stepping up to the plate, they are still so supportive of the community and you see them sponsoring items and events. And it's pretty mind blowing what they're able to still accomplish. And so kudos to them, and everybody needs to get out and support them. Well, folks, you heard it, round up the Christmas wish list and get out and shop local on Saturday, November 26. Check out the lineup of sales deals and special events happening at NormanChamber.com. Or through the Visit Norman app. We're looking forward to a proclamation as well, which will recognize this special day by Mayor Larry Heikkila here at City Hall on November 22. And we'd be delighted for all of our local business owners to come out for that. So Sara, Scott, we certainly appreciate your time with us here on the show.

Sara Kaplan 11:26

Yeah, thanks so much.

Scott Martin 11:27

Thank you.

Tiffany Vrska 11:28

Questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent into PublicAffairs@NormanOK.gov. Shoutout to our producer and editor, Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office. Visit Normanok.gov/norman-news to enroll in email notifications for city PSAs, traffic advisories, and more. Until next time, stay engaged. Stay informed and always remember to vote. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thank you for tuning in to On West Gray.

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