

Transcript

On West Gray, Episode 20, Visit Norman W/Stefanie Brickman

Runtime: 20 minutes 17 Seconds

Tiffany Vrska 0:16

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, and we appreciate you tuning in. Today in the studio with us we have Stephanie Brickman, Director of Marketing and Communications at visit Norman, our Convention and Visitor's Bureau. She's here to talk about the organization, their mission and their fabulous work on behalf of the community. Stephanie, welcome to the show.

Stefanie Brickman 0:44

Glad to be here.

Tiffany Vrska 0:46

Absolutely. So, first thing is first, hopefully everyone has heard of visit Norman already. But maybe there's some listeners who aren't so familiar. So what do you guys do? And how long have you been with the organization?

Stefanie Brickman 1:00

I'm going to try and give the bullet points because it's a lot. There's a long answer. But I also want to make sure everyone understands those points in history. So back in 1981, the city council voted for a tax a hotel motel tax, and half of that collected money would go to promoting tourism to Norman, but the other half was split 25 and 25. Between the arts and the parks. That's when the money began to be collected. Tourism was actually took place within the depot. And it was part of the chamber. Then in 1993, the Norman Convention and Visitor's Bureau was incorporated actually in May of 1993. So 31 years ago, coming up this in two months.

Tiffany Vrska 1:54

Yes, I remember you all celebrated your 30th anniversary last year, I think. And that's around the time that you do your annual luncheon, which is very exciting. Yes,

Stefanie Brickman 2:04

yes. Every May we celebrate the national Travel and Tourism week, we celebrated that 30 year milestone last May. And it actually was also on May 9, which was the day that the normal citizens passed a measure to increase our funding from 5% to 8%. That extra 3% went to the establishment of the Norman Sports Commission to be able to promote a lot of the renovations and new additions through the norm and forward which was passed in 2015. So our beautiful, our beautifully renovated Soccer Complex, our newly opened young family Athletic Center, those are for our citizens. But during the times that they're not being used for regular soccer games or regular basketball games, there's an opportunity to bring in larger tournaments. And one thing we specialize at visit Norman is OPM bringing in other people's money. And so it's a tremendous opportunity to bring in out of towners for tournaments, to stay in our hotels and motels stay in Norman and spend more money in Norman because we like to have other people's money come in come in to our our city. And that's actually what we exist to do. We exist to bring people into Norman leisure travelers, group travelers to come and spend their money. You've recapped

Tiffany Vrska 3:38

a great history. I'm not sure that a lot of people make the connection between local government and visit Norman and how closely we work together the great partnership that we have some of those funds that you had mentioned that are voter approved and shared between various entities to include visit Norman. So that's a great history there. Can you also tell us a little bit about maybe how you came into tourism or how long you've been with visit Norman?

Stefanie Brickman 4:06

So I'm actually coming up in September, it will be 13 years. So I'm going to hope that it's a lucky 13. With all of the things that have been coming together since I started here in September of 2011. At the time, we didn't have Norman forward, that was something that was being discussed. So it took a good four years before that went in front of the voters to be passed. It is a huge opportunity, as we said to bring in other people's money, but it requires some so much collaboration between community stakeholders, organizations, private citizens, nobody can do it alone. And the cooperative nature of Norman in and of itself helps us to succeed.

Tiffany Vrska 4:50

Absolutely. Those quality of life. projects have been just life changing, I think for so much of Norman so how many folks are on your team they're at visit Norman, and I need you to maybe brag on how incredible they are. That's

Stefanie Brickman 5:06

easy to do. We now have a total of seven staff members. When we went from 5% to 8%, we were able to bring on some dedicated folks. Trent went from being a sales manager specializing in sports to being the director of the Norman Sports Commission. Along with that he has an event coordinator. So we've got Trent and Katie that are dedicated to Normand sports. We were also able to bring on a marketing manager. She specializes in social media, our social media channels for visit Norman and for the establishment of Norman sports. So the marketing communications division department includes myself and Maddie bass, who is a born and raised Norman hight. And then we've got Ryan Smith, who's been with us for about two and a half years. He is our digital media coordinator. He likes to call himself the videographer and photographer. So the three of us are the Markham department. And then he joined us last week, we have a new director of destination sales. His name is Mark, and he is tasked with bringing the group market to Norman Group being conferences, conventions events, has spent many years working in the hospitality industry working for a lot of hotels. So he's bringing that expertise over to to visit Norman. And then of course, Dan, the man, our AI president and CEO, Dan Sham is the is the one who heads up all of our efforts.

Tiffany Vrska 6:37

Wonderful. So seven person strong, I think that it's safe to say you probably all of you do a little bit of everything. Absolutely love visiting you guys over at visit Norman, and you share the building with the Chamber of Commerce right there on Main Street. Yes,

Stefanie Brickman 6:54

the building is actually owned by Norman economic development coalition. And so they they're the owners of the building. And we have a lot of synergy because the normal Chamber of Commerce and visit Norman, all three entities are headquartered in the same building. So we have all worked together before we were co located. But it's much easier now that we're co located to just pop down the hall and talk to each other about something that's happening. And it's also been an incubator. So there are some businesses, we've now we've already outgrown. Basically, the building but some startups were in the building, and they're going to be taking enormous economic development coalition will be taking over the old Copeland's building for that to be an incubator.

Tiffany Vrska 7:42

So most recently, I have been hearing a lot about visit Norman launching, taking part in helping jump off the certified film friendly community process here in Norman. So can you catch us up on that and share a little bit about what that looked like for sure.

Stefanie Brickman 8:01

So a few years ago, the Oklahoma Film and Music Office. So if I, if I slip into using jargon, if I say oh FMO that is the Oklahoma Film and Music Office, they established some incentives to motivate the film

industry to come to Oklahoma, and produce films, streaming products TV series. And as part of that cities in Oklahoma municipal, municipalities, towns, counties can petition or apply through the FMO to be a film friendly, certified community. We've actually been working on this I started the application process more than two years ago. So it, I don't mean that it's super tedious. It's just trying to get all of the pieces to it lined up. We were very close. When the city our fabulous, fabulous friends of the city, were putting together a big initiative to go from paper social event permits, it was going online. And so we were trying to align our application in our final process through the film office to be film certified. lining that up with the city. One of the piece one of the requirements is a film permit. And so we finally are in the absolute last final stages of the film permit being certified and ordained by our city council. But you know, part of that that certification process is presenting the resources that we have those resources being filmed locations, if they're looking for a train station, pointing them to the depot or if they're looking for you know, they're wanting to shoot a a timepiece from the 1950s or the 1940s. The sooner theater looks like what theaters look like you know with the with the bar Sophos and the popcorn stand. So it's collecting and knowing what we have in our city that would be attractive to film crews, even without being film friendly certified even without the incentives through the state. We have had Hollywood productions shoot in Norman in years past going back many years. The Dennis bird story. He was a New York jet who was injured. And so some of the some of the football action sequences were shot at Owen field many years ago. Twister parts of twister were filmed here, Helen Hunt stayed in one at the Montfort in one of our beds and breakfasts. So it's happened. Without these incentives, it's happened without the film friendly certification, but that film friendly certification is going to make us more attractive. In fact, we've had, we've had a couple of film industry individuals who have shown an intention to shoot a couple of or create a couple of films in Norman in the next few months. And going back to that end, EDC incubator, you know, they are looking to locate their office, or have an office, physically located here in Norman, as they begin that process,

Tiffany Vrska 11:28

that's a wonderful and I think part of that process on the city's into will be able to not only streamline the process with involved agencies, partner agencies, but be able to give those filmmakers or film companies the support that they may need, when it comes to you know, if they need a street closed, or they need security for something or what have you, there's kind of that fluid process to get that done and get it done in a timely fashion.

Stefanie Brickman 11:57

Absolutely. And so, I actually am the film liaison only because the day I was putting together the application, and there needed to be a name and a contact. My, she's not my evil twin, because I'm the evil twin, Goodwin, with the city, Sara Kaplan, the two of us are going to be working on this together a lot. And she just didn't want to put her name without her knowing that that it was going to be there. But the two of us are going to be working in tandem a lot on this. So for instance, when we have a film coming, and they have filled out that special event permit, and they have they have indicated it to film, you know, she's the one who is going to bring together the fire department and the police department and streets or traffic and utilities. We're all going to and I'm pointing because it's a room that's here in

City Hall. But we will all be able to sit around a table and talk about how how this will affect this, that that will affect this that will affect this, everything we can to make sure that films want to come to Norman, we're going to be doing we want this to be a very hospitable environment in which they can produce a film. And everything we can do to make that easier. Now we're not involved in the final product, that fine arts product. We're very involved in the process and wanting to make sure that it's as easy as possible for there to be more and more films. Shot in Norman, why is that important? Again, goes back to that OPM, it's other people's money. So they are going to be staying in Norman during the duration, but they're going to be hiring makeup artists, they're going to be hiring carpenters, they're going to be acquiring furniture, they're going to be acquiring things that are going to be in that final product. So everyone can benefit from this. If you're if you're a business owner in Norman, you're probably going to have someone either a byproduct because they're staying here and they need it's gotten cold. They didn't realize it, they need a coat or they need an umbrella. It's going to be from that basic human need, all the way to they need something for the final product, Tulsa King, which was obviously based in Tulsa, but one of our local retailers, Mr. Roberts provided the furniture that were that was in the final product. Very cool, right. So we didn't know that we didn't know that until we started getting deeper and deeper into the talks about the film permit. So everyone can benefit from this.

Tiffany Vrska 14:36

Well, that is that is very exciting. And I think that folks can look out for that in the next couple of weeks or couple months to come because we're really close to the finish line. So with warmer weather around the corner, I know there's a ton of community events that are coming up so can you tell us a little bit about the Norman must dues in the spring or summer you bet.

Stefanie Brickman 14:56

So obviously, now that the weather is starting to turn and it's a little bit easier to be predictably outside. We do at Norman is known as a city of festivals, we have a lot that will be happening between now and like Halloween when the weather again becomes unpredictably inhospitable for outdoor activities. But I'm going to talk about a few that are coming up because otherwise we would be on here for a really long time if I listed everything. But coming up March 23. Lloyd noble center will be hosting the big 12 Women's Gymnastics Championships. So obviously, the University of Oklahoma has quite a successful women's team. So you might want to look into purchasing some of those tickets. Then Easter weekend, march, march 30. Will be the return of the Norman chocolate festival. It will be it's presented by the Norman PTA Council it will be taking place at the noun hotel between 10 into April 5 through seventh will be everyone's favorite medieval fair taking place at Reeves Park. Oh, yes, yes. Then April 20. Will be the spring football game for the sooner football team. I believe Kickoff is at 1pm. The weekend following that is Norman music festival that takes place Thursday, Friday, Saturday, in downtown Norman. And there is a band called always it's spelled all vase if you're reading it, they were just nominated for a Grammy. So they they're apparently really catching fire and they were already booked for an organ music festival. And we may have actually more more people. It's typically about 100,000 people who are in Norman over those three days, we may have larger crowds this year. So if you're planning on it yet,

might want to come early and stick your spot may 3 through fifth we'll be northern Pride weekend. Typically that is a kickoff party on Friday night, a festival in Andrews Park on Saturday and a parade on Sunday night. May 18 and 19th. So the weekend before Memorial Day will be the Mayfair Arts Festival, which is now presented in campus corner, the students will have graduated the previous week. And so the campus corner will will be Norman's again. And then jazz in June is June 13 through 15th. So those are a couple of things that you need to go ahead and write on your calendar book out your space, I mean book out that, that that time on your calendar to make sure you don't miss it. And then just some standing events. Of course, we have second Friday Art Walk, which happens in the walker Arts District every second Friday. And Summer Breeze concert series is very popular with Norman knights, and that is on alternating Sunday nights starting May 19 at Lions Park. So there will be outdoor music every other Sunday starting May 19.

Tiffany Vrska 17:50

Wonderful. So we have a slew of events coming up all around the community. And if you need a reminder or refresh refresher, or if you want to check out anything else, you can always go to Norman calendar.com. And all of those community events are also listed there. So swing over there to Norman calendar.com. So we've learned an awful lot about what you have going on. Is there anything else on the horizon that you would like to share with listeners,

Stefanie Brickman 18:19

we're super excited about the prospects of the the young family Athletic Center and the tournaments that are going to hopefully be taking place over the next few months. That is a crown jewel, obviously of Norman, and we're so excited to show that off to some wider audiences. So it's, it's been a long time coming. It's open. It's beautiful. It's going to really be a piece that other communities are going to discuss. This is what we want in our community. Oh,

Tiffany Vrska 18:55

yeah, for sure. I think we're still coming off of the excitement from the grand opening that we had the other day. So we did all expectations. All right. Well, thank you so much for joining us, Stephanie. We appreciate you. We appreciate the hard work of of your entire team over at visit Norman, thank you.

Stefanie Brickman 19:13

I appreciate this opportunity to brag a little bit. And of course, gotta give a shout out to Tiffany and Sarah, with all of their patients with me. When I come up with crazy ideas.

Tiffany Vrska 19:23

We love your crazy ideas. Questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent into PublicAffairs@NormanOK.gov. Shoutouts to our producer and editor Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office. Visit Normanok.gov/news to enroll for E notifications on traffic advisories upcoming events, election notices and more from the city of Norman, follow us on social Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube @cityofNormanOK. Until next time, stay engaged. Stay informed and always remember to cast your ballot. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thank you for joining us On West Gray.

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