

MORE THAN MUNICIPAL - Strategic Vision & Unique Attractions Improve Tourism & Quality of Life



Christina Hayes grew up next door to Great Bend in Claflin and still recalls the comforting hometown atmosphere in general and the memorable special events in particular.

She thinks of those fond memories as she creates and enhances local events in her job as the City of Great Bend Community Coordinator. She also serves as department head for the city's Convention & Visitors Bureau. "I still remember the street dances and other community gatherings in Claflin," she said. "I also remember coming here for Great Bend's Trail of Lights. This and other factors make me feel bonded to Great Bend.

"I hope people here will recall the good times at any number of our events," she added. "The overall goal is improving our quality of life; creating a few good memories for the future can be the fringe benefit."

When Hayes accepted the newly created coordinator position in 2011, her mind was probably swirling with ideas. But she knew that to get positive results she had to concentrate on a few basics. One of those basics is creating "something Great Bend can be proud of while focusing on family-friendly events," Hayes said.

Two of the more popular results are June Jaunt and Party in the Park; this will be the sixth year for the Jaunt and the fifth for the Party.

Hayes noted that a parade "with a different kind of twist" will be a new attraction at this year's Party in the Park. Details will be announced later.

"I discovered early on that while it is important to attract visitors to our community, we want to appeal to our local families first," Hayes said. "Compared to other towns of our size Great Bend is ahead of the game.

"For example, the city was willing to create this community-coordinator position, which is important to centralizing efforts to create and organize events," she noted. "We are trying to make a name for ourselves by rolling out the red carpet for local residents and visitors alike."

While Hayes' main focus always is organizing activities for the entire family, plans are in the works for events that will appeal to the 21-and-older set. "We are working on a margaritas-and-tacos event, as well as a pub crawl," she explained. "These will be geared to adults of all ages. We will know more details later on."

While the community as a whole is foremost in Hayes' mind, she also wants to do what she can to support the city's retailers. The Art & Wine Walk is one example of how she and her colleagues provide an avenue right into the stores. "The Art & Wine Walk, along with a variety of monthly shopping promotions, attract shoppers into local retail outlets," Hayes said. "Our Shop Great Bend promotions, such as Jumbo Monopoly, increase foot traffic because of the possibility of winning gift certificates and other prizes."

Since booking a variety of gatherings also is important to the community coordinator, the Great Bend Events Center has been a solid asset. It is currently undergoing a facelift and its significance will continue to grow in the months and years to come. "The Events Center is a popular destination for class and family reunions, weddings, school activities and one-day meetings," she said. "We want to put special emphasis on bringing natives back home to share a day or a weekend with family and friends, and maybe tend to some business at a meeting.

"In addition, we have made significant bids for more conventions. We anticipate this will result in more rented motel rooms Monday through Thursday. We are ready to play ball with our new and improved Events Center."

As Hayes tackles her job each day she thinks of the slogan "Explore Great Bend. Shop. Stay. Play." It helps her focus on the city's overall goals of unifying retailers, creating events, and supporting and promoting local attractions. The gratifying payoff occurs when she hears positive feedback from the community. "Knowing that people are enjoying themselves makes it all worth it," she commented. "Our city is invested in this whole quality-of-life thing; we take it seriously.

"If we do hear from naysayers, I always want them to know that I genuinely care about their comments," she added. "I am open to their suggestions and new ideas anytime."

While Hayes may be the go-to person when it comes to city-sponsored events, she is well aware she can't do any of this alone. She relies on many partners including: retailers and other businesses; the city council; Chamber of Commerce; city staff members; volunteers; food and other vendors; and, of course, those who attend all the activities.

"I cannot tell you how much I appreciate everyone in this great community who pitches in with time, money and talent," she said. "These partnerships are the reason for our many successes." —

City Events Slated in 2017

The number of city events will grow this year but five popular staples already are slated on the 2017 calendar. They are:

Art & Wine Walk May 11th

June Jaunt June 2-4

Outdoor Movie Dates TBA

Party in the Park August 12th

Zoo Boo October 28th

Home for the Holidays Festival & Parade November 25th

Follow the @ExploreGreatBend Facebook page for all the events details throughout the year! You can also follow them on Twitter.



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