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Women of Impact

Jacki Becker

by Nick Spacek,
photo by Steven Hertzog

The **BOOTLENECK**



Setting aside graduate school to work in the music industry may not have been the original plan, but it led Jacki Becker to realize not only her passion for music but other passions, as well.

The story of Jacki Becker's life in Lawrence begins with music, an unsurprising fact for anyone who knows the owner and operator of the booking agency Up to Eleven Productions. Beginning with her time at the University of Kansas' student-run radio station, KJHK 90.7 FM, where she started a show devoted to local music called "Plow the Fields, Martha," in 1990, and continuing on through booking bands at The Bottleneck, tour-managing bands and on to managing her company for more than 20 years, music has been the throughline.

"I never thought I'd move here and stay," Becker explains over coffee at Sunflower Outdoor & Bike Shop. "That's just always the joke to me—that somehow I found Kansas more appealing than Wisconsin or anywhere else in the world—but apparently I did, and I'm glad that I have."

Becker originally assumed she was going to graduate school, looking at going to the University of North Carolina or Duke to do women's history or women's studies, something like that, but business owner Brett Mosiman offered her a job at the Bottleneck, to which she said yes.

"Told my mom and dad I wasn't going to grad school, and I was gonna book bands," Becker laughs. "And here I am."

While Becker doesn't want to come across as that old person spouting off about walking 20 miles in the snow uphill both ways, she does acknowledge that when she started in the business, the job was a bit different from the way it is now. She made the poster, she made the handbills, she ran the show, she did the ticketing, she settled with the band, and she

was the runner, while now multiple people do all those jobs.

However, in the process of running around town doing things for bands, Becker became more aware of other aspects of Lawrence outside of the music scene. When people are coming in and they're asking, "Where's a good place to get vegetarian food?", that makes you have to know more about the city you live in.

More Than Just Music

"Where we're sitting right now was a veggie place called Herbivores," Becker points out. "I think the live music industry probably kept that space alive, along with myself. I probably ate at Herbivores five days a week because it I don't need meat. It was the perfect place to go and eat."

Becker's veganism is very much an important part of who she is, and it informs some of the other things she does in the community, although she is quick to explain that she's "mostly vegan," but she's also from Wisconsin, and there's something about local cheese from sheep and cows that she still really likes.

"I've gotten great at making cashew cheese and things like that, but cashew cheese curds don't exist, and they probably wouldn't squeak," the promoter jokes. That being said, during the COVID lockdown, when there were no shows to be put on, Becker did the occasional vegan or veggie pop-up, working with what she refers to as "the wonderful family that I have at The Roost."

"If you keep challenging yourself, you can find new things to do," Becker explains. "Do I wanna open a vegan restaurant? No, but would I like to do a vegan pop-up every now and then, and make really good food from my

garden for people? Yes. Absolutely. It's an important piece of who I am and what I do in the community."

COVID saw Becker's career in music turn to activism as tours began canceling, and music venues started shutting down. Given their status as vectors for transmission, many venues were the first places to close in the towns and cities that had them, and were often the last places to reopen. Because of that, Becker partnered with Mike Logan, owner of downtown Lawrence venues The Bottleneck, Granada, and Lucia, to work with Save Our Stages, a "group of over 3,000 independent venues in 50 states and Washington D.C. that [were] banding together to ask Washington for targeted legislation to help [them] survive."

As COVID took hold in early 2020, Becker was constantly moving shows—more than 200, by her recollection—with some rescheduled three or four times apiece until the full shutdown became apparent.

"We were doing anything we could not realizing the damage of what this was doing to us," Becker recalls. "But then, watching a group of crazy independent humans go to D.C. and actually push for 'Save Our Stages' to happen? That's beautiful. What was accomplished, I don't think it'll ever happen again, but it just shows you that live music independent promoters are nuts, and we will commit to anything to the extreme level, to the nth degree, and it needed to happen."

As she points out, next to University of Kansas basketball, she thinks live music is consistently one of the most important things people have to do in this community. People can come to a space and see a show, and those people who come from out of town, they stay at a hotel or Airbnb, get coffee, get gas, eat food and go shopping in a space that's walkable.

An Uphill Battle

Being able to get about in a way that doesn't encourage using an automobile might be the other aspect of Becker's activism that most exemplifies her devotion to Lawrence. She rode up to the interview on her bike and can frequently be seen on it all over town and, during the years, has been part of a group that has advocated time and time again for bicycle accessibility in Lawrence. It just might be one of the more uphill battles Becker has had to fight. Live music and sustainable eating are things people can get up behind, but it seems as though folks have very strong emotional reactions to people on bikes.

"One of the first committees I joined

back, I don't even know when, was working on bicycle stuff with the City," she recalls. "We started picking away at and trying to figure it out. We got that little two-block area on Ninth Street. I rode it, I was like, 'Yeah, this is amazing, and we're gonna get made so much fun of, 'cause that's all we have, and it doesn't go anywhere, but we did it!'"

In addition to architect Mike Myers and Jessica Morton, with the City of Lawrence, Becker found a group that thought the same way she did, and they started writing grants and talking about safe biking, and now, she says, she can bike almost anywhere in the city.

"There's still lots of work to do," Becker says. "But we've got it started, and

we're making it accessible."

All of this—Save Our Stages, veggie pop-up kitchens, bike advocacy—comes from the way Becker hopes everyone can live their life.

"I believe in a life that hopefully allows you to give time to volunteer," Becker says, explaining that's something she got from her parents, and they've always been those people. "I've never lived my life to be incredibly wealthy," she explains. "I want to have enough money to live and spend my time—I guess you'd say 'solving problems,' but being a piece of a group of humans who are working to make sure that communities can be fed, have accessibility, can feel safe, secure and live. I like where I live, and I'd like others to enjoy it, too." ▲



Marci Francisco

Kansas State Senator

As a Kansas State Senator, Marci Francisco believes in doing – action – more than saying mere words. Many of those actions of directly had positive impacts on members of the Lawrence community, such as restored and affordable housing, wood-chip programs, even turn lanes on busy city streets. She reached the state senate from the ground up, serving in the late 1970s on local neighborhood associations and community advi-

“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

– Jane Goodall

sory boards before moving on to city commission. She believes in working for the community from a standpoint of responsibility, accountability and – there's that word again – action that always comes from a place of understanding and taking into account what the people of Lawrence need.

IN HER OWN WORDS: YOUR MENTOR/ROLE MODEL

Jessie Branson and Betty Jo Charlton, two of the members in the Kansas House of Representatives representing districts in Lawrence.

KNOW ABOUT YOU

I try to change things more through what I do than what I say. I take responsibility and actions while trying to understand and take account of what others need.

MAKING AN IMPACT

Being able to point to things in our community that were a result of my actions: restored and affordable housing, the city's wood chipping program, and the turning lane at 23rd Street that allows northbound traffic onto Massachusetts Street without stopping for a traffic signal. Also, it's helping others understand how they can have an impact.

I decided in 1977, as a member of the Oread Neighborhood Association, to volunteer for the Community Development Block Grant Advisory Board to help improve my neighborhood. Two years later I ran for City Commission hoping to help improve neighborhoods throughout Lawrence.

LIKE TO SEE CHANGE

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