

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2024 Q3



OUR EVER EVOLVING
DOWNTOWN
WITH MASS STREET AT ITS HEART



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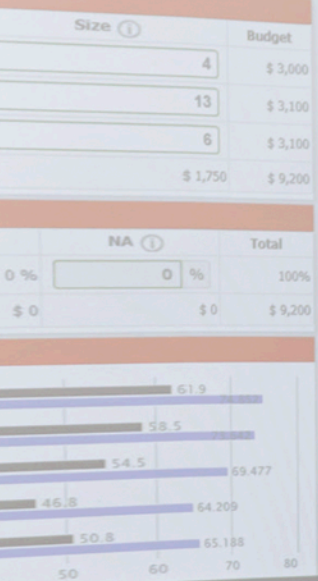
photo by
Steven Hertzog

KIM ANSPACH executive director **eXplore Lawrence**

What is your organization's most important priority?

eXplore Lawrence represents the travel and tourism industry for Lawrence and Douglas County. We are dedicated to creating economic development opportunities to benefit the local economy by attracting diverse visitors, groups and events to the city. Our organization is proud to partner with the many incredible community attractions, hotels, venues and others that make Lawrence vibrant.

eXplore Lawrence's values are to be friendly and inclusive, authentic and diverse, and proactive and collaborative. As an organization, eXplore Lawrence strives to increase hotel occupancy and visitor spending, increase visitation to Lawrence and market to other communities such as Chicago, Denver or Wichita to get new and returning visitors to our community. We strive to support and collaborate with community partners to increase tourism.



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What have been some of the most important aspects of your success?

The most critical part of our mission is increasing the economic impact of visitors for Douglas County. That includes transient guest tax collections from visitors staying in our hotels and earning new business through sporting tournaments and meetings, as well as leisure travelers who come for the day or spend the night but positively impact sales tax and food and beverage tax collections. We work on behalf of all tourism businesses in the county, including but not limited to hotels, restaurants, retail stores and museums. Our work is funded by visitors to Lawrence and is used to recruit more visitors to Lawrence.

How many people does eXplore Lawrence employ? Serve, interact with on a daily basis and are responsible to?

eXplore Lawrence has nine employees who are all tourism champions and experts in their field. We have three employees at our Visitors Center, 812 Massachusetts St., welcoming over 8,000 annual visitors into the space to share local information and recommendations, provide visitor resources and be a friendly, welcoming space for all in Downtown Lawrence.

How do you and your organization make a positive impact on the Lawrence community?

I think our annual report showcases so many of the things we do for this community. Those highlights include visitor spending increasing 13% from 2021 to 2022 and visitor activity supporting 30.5 million in state and local tax revenues in 2022. We also have seen significant growth on our website through our marketing campaigns. Our users and page views have almost doubled from 2022 to 2023, we have earned almost 13.5 million digital impressions annually, and we continue to increase awareness about our community and all of the tourism assets it offers. Our sales team has booked over 41 leads in the last year, which has led to over \$1.4 million in economic impact.

What do you see as your personal responsibility and your organization's responsibility to the community?

eXplore Lawrence takes pride in assisting in setting Douglas County up for long-term financial success. Our work increases the amount of visitor spending in the county, which leads to supporting our residents, local businesses and the success of our community. The success of the tourism economy affects every industry.

Personally, I take the responsibility of strategically reinvesting visitor dollars in marketing and sales efforts to support our diverse small businesses that comprise the visitor economy very seriously. Tourism in Lawrence relies on our small business community. I think of this work as the serious business of economic development disguised as fun.

What is the role and what is eXplore Lawrence doing to focus on Downtown Lawrence? What is the role of Downtown Lawrence to Lawrence in its entirety?

eXplore Lawrence and Downtown Lawrence Inc. (DLI) have a collaborative relationship. I serve in an ex officio role on the DLI Board of Directors, and DLI has an ex officio seat on our board. That ensures we are both working together and amplifying each other's work.

Downtown's role as the heart of the city is apparent in our marketing and sales efforts. We market Downtown Lawrence as a premier shopping, dining and events destination. We bring travel writers to Downtown Lawrence to increase the reach and showcase downtown to more visitors. We highlight Downtown Lawrence as a destination for events in our visitors guide, on our website at explorelawrence.com and to meeting planners looking to host events or give attendees free time to explore the community. We market downtown as a "can't miss" experience if you are in Lawrence. ▲

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