



Kelly Scanlon: On this episode of banking on Kansas City, Kathy Nelson, the president and CEO of the Kansas City Sports Commission joins us to talk about the role sports play in shaping Kansas City's reputation nationally and internationally. The impact of sports on the Kansas City economy and their role in building community and shaping opportunities for Kansas City youth. Welcome Kathy.

Kathy Nelson: Well, thank you so much.

Kelly Scanlon: Now the Kansas City Sports Commission's motto is making a better Kansas City through sports. It's right up there on the center of your homepage. And it's more than just a slogan no, it is something that your organization lives every day. And it's the basis of the three pillars that guide the organization. Tell us about those.

Kathy Nelson: Right. So we talk a lot in our office when we come to work, what we focus on, and we have a strategic plan and we have a strategic dashboard, but we really wanted to make it even more simple than that. So we know that the efforts we have, the efforts we work on in our office are to be able to provide people the opportunity to participate in sports. Whether that's running the Kansas City marathon or participating in a women's triathlon, sending your kids to our camp WIN to learn a sport. It's that participation from newbie, if you're bowling or botchy ball to all the way up again to completing your first ever marathon. So we focus on participating, we also focus on spectating. So Big 12 men's basketball is our Superbowl every year for Kansas City. We have gymnastics coming up. We want you to spectate and appreciate the power of sports and the beauty of sports and really encourage people to get out and cheer on an athlete.

Kathy Nelson: And then lastly, celebrate, right? We work in sports. We should have fun every day in our office, some days, not always, but most of the time we have a lot of fun. And really it's our opportunity to bring our city, our region, our community, and the country together to celebrate sports. And we do that in numerous ways. Probably one of our signature events was helping to plan the Kansas City Royals 2015 world series parade. Really it's celebrating sports. And so having those opportunities to spectate, participate and celebrate are a big deal.

Kelly Scanlon: Talk about what it takes to bring one of these events to Kansas City. I just can't imagine what's involved in that because you're primarily volunteers, right?

Kathy Nelson: We are. We're a small staff, we're a staff of 15 and we rely heavily on our few interns. But yes, we will use three to 4,000 volunteers a year. And that ranges, I mean when we go after an event, whether it be, we had the Paralympics botchy ball and we only needed a few volunteers to help check people in. Two, something like the NFL Draft where we'll need thousands of volunteers in our Kansas City marathon every year. Bringing in volunteers really help us solidify that event. So your question on how do we get those events, right? It's years and years in the making that United States gymnastics national championship that is happening here in August, we have spent five years putting that bid together and bringing in different elements of that bid. From the budget, to volunteers, safety and security, hotels, all of that feeds into a bid. But it takes many years for every event we work on.

Kelly Scanlon: All kinds of things going on behind the scenes. All we see is the great big end result of it that everybody is so excited about. But as you say, not just hours and hours, but years and years of planning go into all of these different things. Raising Kansas City's profile through some of the events is very important, Kansas City is on so many lists these days and basically on the map if you will. And that's great for the public exposure, for the national or international exposure that we get from these events. But I don't want to overlook the economic, the community building and some of the other benefits of what you do and what the sports bring to the city. Talk to us about some of those.

Kathy Nelson: Well, and you said it, that sports really help raise the image and the profile of Kansas City and that's part of our mission statement is to help raise Kansas City profiles through sport. But you're right, the economic, and I like to say activity, sometimes it's hard to judge that impact. There're economic impact calculators out there that numerous people, different organizations use, but there's not a very defined science of how we get to that number it's an estimated guess. But that activity around an event is millions and millions of dollars for a significant event like Big 12, NCWA championships and that's hard to really think about if you're like, okay, I bought a ticket, why does this equate to millions of dollars? Well, those fans and those student athletes are coming in. They're getting a hotel room maybe for four or five, six nights. They're using Uber and transportation, they're eating out two or three times a day. They're stopping out of the grocery store. I mean they're filling up their cars with gas. All of that stays right here in our community.

Kathy Nelson: I have had one young lady tell me down at the Power & Light District that she pretty much plans out her year based off of Big 12 because of the tips she makes that week.

Kelly Scanlon: Interesting.

Kathy Nelson: Really help her understand how to budget her year and every time we bring a big event to Kansas City, she gets emotional because of that lift in her personal pocketbook. That's a big deal, right?

Kelly Scanlon: That's a huge deal.

Kathy Nelson: That's a big deal to us.

Kelly Scanlon: What are the criteria that Kansas City is judged on in order for you to bring an event here?

Kathy Nelson: So we compete against every other city you can imagine, a lot of people say, oh, you compete against St. Louis. Not exactly we do, but it's good for the state. So if we're not awarded it, we want St. Louis to get that event. But we compete against Nashville and Denver and Dallas and Seattle, I mean all those cities. So you really have to stand out. And what stands out the most, because we all have great venues, we all have airports, some are better than others right now.

Kelly Scanlon: We're getting there.

Kathy Nelson: Right? We're getting there. We all have hotels, but us, the way Kansas City is built now with Sprint Center and Power & Light District and being walkable, it's a really big deal. Because when you have, when you're hosting an event and those student athletes don't want to have to rent a car to get from the hotel out to their venue, they have the opportunity right here to stay here and walk here, go to a restaurant, all of that makes it easy. So that's a really big deal for our city that we normally stand out amongst other cities. Our volunteer base is a huge deal. We know we can activate thousands of volunteers and we know that we can trust them and they're trainable. The more events we host, the more we become known for having this great base of hospitable volunteers that know what they're doing.

Kathy Nelson: It's great to have a volunteer that's very friendly, but they really need to know if someone's hungry, where do I send them? Where do I send them to shop? Where do they get their dry cleaning done? We take care of laundry. I mean there's all of that that comes into play with the volunteer base and then being centrally located is critical. I was talking to my counterpart just the other day on the phone from Seattle and he said, I know not to bid on this because I know you'll beat me out. Because if I have athletes from Florida, they don't want to travel for a day to get here to compete. They can get to you in three hours and compete that day.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. We can't overlook that central location, that's for sure. One of the things that we are seeing, hearing as well in sports is the focus on women. I mean we all saw the wonderful victory by the women's soccer team just recently and there's still a huge buzz about that even a few months later now. But as a

woman yourself, what attracted you to this leadership role at the Kansas City Sports Commission?

Kathy Nelson: That is such a good question. I was not attracted at first and I actually turned it down a few times. I did not think I was capable and I had to lean on friends. I know we all have mentors, I like to call them truth tellers. So I leaned on a couple of my truth tellers and said, "Hey, there's an opportunity, what do you think?" And it was really someone else telling me to turn off the sign in my head that said I'm not capable.

Kelly Scanlon: Right. That impostor syndrome that so many women have to grapple with. Yeah.

Kathy Nelson: He looked at me and he said, I would work for you anytime any day. Why don't you see that? I thought that was interesting. So my background is a little odd and how I ended up here, I was chemistry major and ended up working as a disc jockey for radio station in college and got the bug and kept up that with radio and then into television. So outside of school I worked for 12 years at WDAF-TV in Kansas City. Had a great time there and then had the opportunity to help start an all sports television station called Metro Sports. So it was just getting off the ground, I knew the guys, I was working freelance sports and the television truck and they came and asked if I'd be interested in helping them figure this out and going from a couple hours a night to a 24 hour, seven day a week TV station. And I thought, I could figure that out, we could do this together.

Kathy Nelson: So I was a donor to the sports commission, I was a board member, I had been a committee chair. I had always been active with sports commission events as a collegiate athlete. I knew I wanted to stay involved somehow some way at least as a volunteer. So Kevin Gray was the president of the sports commission. I'd known him for quite a few years and he approached me and said, why don't you come work for us? And I had to look at my husband and I said, I think I'm going to take a pretty significant pay cut. And I think I might want to do this. So he stuck with me and I went to work for Kevin towards the end of 2010 and sadly, Kevin passed away about six months later.

Kathy Nelson: So he was 51 years old at the time, and a beautiful family, four great daughters. And we all just talked about what's next. They did a national search and they had, we're down to some really good candidates. And the committee came to me and said, we think you should apply. And I said, oh no thank you. I said, I could never do that job, that wouldn't be something I'm capable of. And finally, it was a few people like Joe Close from Country Club Bank that said, you could do this. We think you're the one, we'll guide you, we'll be there for you and mentor you whenever it's needed. And I accepted in Thanksgiving Day of 2011.

Kelly Scanlon: Wow. And the rest is history. You're still shaping that history. One of the things that you have really got behind is always win. The women's inter-league sports.

Kathy Nelson: Women's Inter-sport Network.

Kelly Scanlon: Yes, the Women's Inter-sport Network. Tell us about why that has been your baby so to speak.

Kathy Nelson: So I have two daughters and when we hosted the women's final four here in Kansas City, I was working part-time for Raycom Sports and ESPN was just up and coming and got to know the people behind the WIN for KC movement. Into wind got off the ground in 1996 we hosted the women's final four in 1998 and got involved then. So really I've been around for almost 25 years of our, well, we are 25 years old now.

Kelly Scanlon: Yes, you are 25. Congratulations on that anniversary.

Kathy Nelson: Thank you. So seeing my daughters, again being an athlete myself and appreciating what sports had done for me and then having two daughters grow through WIN for KC, we started camp win and my daughter was involved in the very first year of camp WIN. And then my second daughter of course, became a camper and then a team captain and a volunteer, and then she's done the triathlon many years. For me, it's not about, what does this mean to the bottom line? We've got to raise money for the luncheon. It's about when I go home at night, I see how my daughters are successful in their lives now. And I know it's because the impact WIN for KC had on them.

Kelly Scanlon: You mentioned how this is the 25th anniversary of the organization. How did you get started? What was the Genesis for the organization?

Kathy Nelson: So when WIN for KC was actually developed 25 years ago, it was a unique situation. The women's sports foundation, which is a national organization based in New York, had gone out to bid to look to move their national headquarters and it came down to staying in New York or relocate to Kansas City. Well, they decided to stay in New York. So the group that was really that forefront and putting that bid together said, well my gosh, we're ready to go, let's just do this ourselves. So Susan True and Brenda Van Lang and Kevin Gray, my predecessor were all there together saying, we've got this, we need to do this for our girls in Kansas City. And that's really how it just grew in Boston. From there and then that women's final four got legs under it and we all thought, my gosh, we've got to make this something. So for 25 years impacting the lives of women and girls through sports, it's local, it's Kansas City, and there are other cities in the country that are trying to do what we do and no one's doing it to the level that we are.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah. And you're here to stay. Your focus is Kansas City.

Kathy Nelson: Right. Oh yes. Absolutely.

Kelly Scanlon: No aspirations to go national with this.

Kathy Nelson: No. I mean, again, there are cities that ask us constantly. I mean constantly, sometimes it's weekly. Tell me how you put on camp WIN, tell me about your woman's triathlon, tell me about the luncheon. What are you doing to advocate for title nine? We're doing a new program this fall for women in shift, your mind and body in motion and leadership opportunities and we do a youth group through our WIN for KC program. But Kansas City's unique and that we have such great women here as leaders and leaders through sport in Kansas City, that other cities have a hard time mimicking what we do. There's no one else that does a luncheon like we do, the largest luncheon in the country is here in Kansas City.

Kelly Scanlon: With some huge guest speakers too.

Kathy Nelson: This year we had Simone Biles, We've had Abby Wambach, we've had Jessica Mendoza a couple years ago, so those ladies know, hey, if I want to speak to a group that's passionate about women and girls in sports, I have to get to Kansas City and to be at that luncheon.

Kelly Scanlon: Obviously, Kansas City has enjoyed the benefits of everything that the Kansas City Sports Commission does, and that it's better for the Kansas City Sports Commission. Where do you see the Sports Commission going in the future and how it's going to impact Kansas City?

Kathy Nelson: It's hard to imagine some days. I think when I see the Kansas City Sports Commission now on a national and international stage, I couldn't be more proud. And I think in our community sometimes where we go unknown, we're that behind the scenes' organization and that's okay. I would love for more people to know about what we do. No doubt. I would love that. I would love for more kids to understand how to sign up to do a youth clinic or run a kid's marathon or go to camp WIN. But I think for us the future is more and more of getting the story out of how great the city is and we can be that voice. We can be that voice if it's in Jefferson City testifying to the legislators or if it's that voice.

Kathy Nelson: I just was in Switzerland speaking at the Olympic international convention about what we're doing to change our city through sports. So I think my vision is maybe cloudy, but I know we're getting there. And events like the NFL Draft that will be here in 2023 we're working on bringing the Royal Cup to Kansas City. That will transform our city like none of us will ever understand and that's happening quickly, It's eight years down the road, in our world that's not very far away.

Kelly Scanlon: Yeah, it's an eye blink.

Kathy Nelson: Yes, and the NFL Draft is right around the corner and I think the future for us is just being more bold to know we can do this and that our city is right there tandem with us, no matter what step we need to take. The leadership of the

city, the leadership of great companies being there to say, yes, you can do this, we've got your back. That's what's next for us.

Kelly Scanlon: You've mentioned that you rely heavily on thousands of volunteers to do the work that you do here in Kansas City. If anyone who's listening is interested in getting involved as a volunteer, how do they get in touch with you and what kind of opportunities are available?

Kathy Nelson: It's actually very eye opening I think to someone that says, how can I help? And that answer can be very complicated. But if you're a fan of a certain sport or if you're a runner, we need volunteers. You can go to our website sportkc.org and from there you can find it. Do you know, how do I get involved in a volunteer? We have internship programs of course, for our college aged kids. But volunteering and the NFL Draft coming up, we'll need thousands of volunteers. So those signups for the draft are not up yet. However, you keep watching our website and you'll see more and more opportunities come up with different championships. Gymnastics championships in August and then from there we'll have other NCWA events. But your question on what does that look like? It's actually kind of crazy. If our Big 12 volunteers could be a team host, say they're the host for West Virginia, and you get to know the athletic director and the coaches and some of the players, and then they need their laundry done.

Kathy Nelson: They need to know where to go eat. I mean it's very hands on and then other times you could be helping us set out the mile marker flags for the marathon at 2:00 AM with the rest of our staff on race day. But it's funny you could be handing out water, you could be an aid station for a run. I mean there's just so many different things that, like our Thanksgiving Day run, we see families come out and volunteer and they might have four or they might have 40 and they volunteer and they dress up together and they're there to help park cars, to direct people. There's just numerous ways you could have a touch point on what we do.

Kelly Scanlon: Okay, great. So sportkc.org go out, find something that you are interested in and get involved in this great organization, the Kansas City Sports Commission that is helping to build and shape Kansas City. Kathy, thanks so much for the work you do Here in Kansas City and we appreciate you joining us for this episode of Banking on Kansas City.

Kathy Nelson: Thank you.

Joe Close: This is Joe close, president of Country Club Bank. The Kansas City Sports Commissions motto is making KC better through sport. It's a powerful message to make our hometown better through what you do no matter what it is you do. At Country Club Bank, we strive to make our city better for all, by focusing on banking with integrity because integrity is what matters, it's what sets us apart. Kathy is critical to Kansas City's ongoing success, not just in economic terms, but in public perception, both locally and nationally over the past 10 years. She's a fierce advocate for our city. Kathy brings that integrity to all that she touches,

those large-scale sporting events and conferences but perhaps more importantly, the lives of the kids she helps empower. She knows that one day they'll go forward and help lead due to the lessons they learned at camp WIN. We're all better off having champions like Kathy in our corner. I appreciate you joining us for this episode. We're banking on you, Kansas City.