

What's Up Transcript (Season 4, Ep. 18)

Grace Hollowell: My favorite part is the turtles. I love watching them swim by. Sometimes I'll bring a little bag of frozen peas to feed them. It is a great atmosphere out there.

Jeep Wentsch: We had a couple of snakes.

Grace Hollowell: This little boy—

Jeep Wentsch: I can confirm they stayed in the water, but they were swimming around even during the set. You could see them swimming in the moat; they were jamming out, too.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell, and today I'm joined once again by Jeep Wentsch, our Recreation Supervisor over Special Events from our Parks and Recreation Department. Hi, Jeep. How are you doing?

Jeep Wentsch: I'm doing well. Thanks for having me back.

Grace Hollowell: Welcome back. We are here today to talk about the Starlight Music Series. We already had our first event, and it was a blast. We have two more coming up this season. We are filming today on May 4th—Star Wars Day—so happy Star Wars Day. Speaking of Starlight—

Jeep Wentsch: Yes? May the Force be with you.

Grace Hollowell: May the Force be with you. Are you a Star Wars fan?

Jeep Wentsch: No.

Grace Hollowell: That's totally fine. Since we last had you on the show, tell us a little bit about how things have been going in Parks.

Jeep Wentsch: It's been a great time. I grew up with a passion for being "professionally fun." Our Parks Department emphasizes fun and safety, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate. We were planning many special events last time we spoke, both internal and external. Now, sitting on the other end of that, it's a blast to see the fruits of our labor come to fruition.

Grace Hollowell: What is one thing you wish more people knew about our Parks programs?

Jeep Wentsch: There is a little something for everyone. It may not seem obvious until you look for it, but once you check out our new Rec Guide, you'll see activities for everyone from youngsters to retirees. Just because a program didn't serve you in the past doesn't mean there isn't something of interest for you and your family now or in the future.

Grace Hollowell: What is your favorite thing about your job or your favorite memory since we last talked?

Jeep Wentsch: I love seeing the hard work pay off. Our most recent Starlight event on April 25th featured Mike Ryan and William Beckmann, and it was a stellar show. The weather was great, and everyone had a wonderful time. As someone working toward that, you really feed off that energy. You get immediate payback when people are cheering and singing along.

Grace Hollowell: Starlight is a unique annual event, but there is always something new to expect. How does what you do impact our community?

Jeep Wentsch: Plain and simple: we are all taxpayers. The Starlight Series uses those funds to provide a free, accessible live music event. We want to highlight our amazing amphitheater and beautiful park. People love walking their dogs or working out there, and transforming that space into a concert venue creates sweet memories. That is the cherry on top.

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Jeep Wentsch: I can confirm they stayed in the water, but they were swimming in the moat during the set. They were jamming!

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. What is your favorite summer celebration memory?

Jeep Wentsch: I grew up going to summer camps my whole life.

Grace Hollowell: Me too.

Jeep Wentsch: It was a big part of my childhood and led into my adulthood when I became a counselor. That was a celebration for me; it's what I looked forward to all year. To me, summer means getting together with friends, reconnecting, and being in a place where you can escape for a moment.

Grace Hollowell: Many of our summer camps offer educational aspects, like nature or science. That was always my favorite part—choosing a different theme to learn something new.

Jeep Wentsch: The variety in our summer camp programs offers something for everyone's interests.

Grace Hallowell: What is something most people don't know about Parks and Rec?

Jeep Wentsch: Many of our facilities and pavilions are rentable spaces. While our parks are generally first-come, first-served, you can guarantee a spot for a picnic or party by renting a pavilion. If you need AC and shade, we have rentable facilities such as the Southwood or the Meyer Center. If your house doesn't have enough space, we have those available for the public.

Grace Hallowell: They are beautiful facilities. It shows how much we have to offer the community. For listeners who may be new, what is the Starlight Music Series, and what makes it such a special tradition in College Station?

Jeep Wentsch: The Starlight Music Series has been going for over 20 years. While the format has shifted, it has remained a free concert experience for the community. We have three nights of music this year. We started with a country act, and on May 30th, we'll have our Classic Rock Tribute night. On June 13th, we will host our Tejano Music Series. The community looks forward to this because it's free and you can do it your own way—sit in the grass, bring a blanket, or use a chair. We welcome outside food and beverages, but we also have food trucks on-site.

Grace Hallowell: Even if a band or genre isn't necessarily your thing, live music is a quintessential summer experience.

Jeep Wentsch: I encourage people to check it out anyway. Since it's free, you have nothing to lose. That artist might become your new favorite.

Grace Hallowell: Why has the series remained so popular for 20 years?

Jeep Wentsch: People have fond memories there. Parents can take a breath while kids run around in a confined area. It's a chance to reconnect at an iconic venue with a beautiful sunset, turtles in the moat, and unbeatable acoustics. It's a keystone program that the city will continue to keep alive.

Grace Hallowell: When I first moved here, I lived near Wolf Pen Creek. I heard the music from my house, followed the sound, and stumbled upon Starlight. It was a great time.

Jeep Wentsch: It's like the Pied Piper! That natural discovery is part of the charm.

Grace Hallowell: What can attendees expect from this year's lineup?

Jeep Wentsch: Amazing music. I'm looking forward to the ZZ Top tribute, ZZ Nation, on the 30th. We're closing out the show with Infinite Journey. People constantly ask me to bring that Journey band back, so we added them to the roster. We'll have food trucks, open seating, and an outdoor atmosphere that screams summer.

Grace Hollowell: Walk us through a typical evening, from the time the gates open.

Jeep Wentsch: When the gates open, come in and find your spot. Lay down your blanket or chairs. I like to identify where the bathrooms are first! We will have artist merch booths, and Bryan Broadcasting will be on-site with giveaways. We also have a "Texas-sized selfie" station with props and printed photos.

Grace Hollowell: A printed photo is a great keepsake.

Jeep Wentsch: It's a real keepsake you can frame and put on your desk.

Grace Hollowell: What do you recommend for first-time attendees?

Jeep Wentsch: Bring something to sit on to improve your comfort. It doesn't hurt to bring water, although food trucks have drinks. It is picnic-style, so you are welcome to bring your own food. We just ask for no glass containers and no kegs.

Grace Hollowell: To clarify, is alcohol allowed if it's not in a glass bottle or a keg?

Jeep Wentsch: Yes, for those 21 and up. It's a family-friendly event, so no glass and no kegs.

Grace Hollowell: How do you manage the turnout to ensure a safe experience?

Jeep Wentsch: We have amazing support from our Fire, Police, and EMS departments. They ensure everyone is behaving and that fire lanes remain clear. Our Parks staff handles everything from trash to working with the artists and sound crews to ensure a smooth performance.

Grace Hollowell: Parking is always top of mind. Where can people park?

Jeep Wentsch: The lot at Wolf Pen Creek fills up quickly and is primarily for handicapped parking. I recommend parking at Post Oak Mall. There is a clear trail that leads straight to the back of the amphitheater. You can also park along Colgate Street near the Meyer Center, as long as there aren't "No Parking" signs.

Grace Hollowell: It's a short walk from the JCPenney side of the mall, but there is no shuttle. Why is it important to offer these free events?

Jeep Wentsch: It brings people together from all different backgrounds. You get a real sense of community when people from all walks of life celebrate music together.

Grace Hollowell: Can you walk us through the planning process?

Jeep Wentsch: We start by reaching out to our sound and lighting teams and searching for performers in the genres we want to showcase. Those tasks take the longest. We then

coordinate with PD and Fire to ensure citizen safety. We secure food trucks and vendors, and finally, we advertise. On the day of the event, we are on the ground checking trash cans and restrooms to ensure the most experience possible.

Grace Hollowell: Weather can be unpredictable. How do you prepare for that?

Jeep Wentsch: You can't control Mother Nature. If we expect serious weather, we may pivot to a different location to keep the show going. If unpredictable weather occurs during the event, we follow our lightning alert system. If lightning strikes within ten miles, an alarm sounds, and we recommend everyone take shelter. We then follow a 30-minute timer to reassess and hopefully get the show back on the road.

Grace Hollowell: Communication is key. The Parks and Recreation social media accounts are a great way to stay updated.

Jeep Wentsch: Social media provides that instant news feed. We post live updates about weather, artists, and event details.

Grace Hollowell: The brand-new edition of the Rec Connect guide is also available. What can people find there?

Jeep Wentsch: It lists all our special events throughout the summer, plus information on summer programs, birding events, summer camps, and aquatics. Our pools will be opening soon, and the guide has pricing, hours, and swim lesson info, as well as athletics and Senior Center activities.

Grace Hollowell: Any other events you are excited about?

Jeep Wentsch: The "I Heart America" celebration will be one to remember. It's the 250th anniversary of our nation. We'll have an amazing fireworks show and a larger crowd than ever. It's going to be bigger than "I Heart America" has ever been.

Grace Hollowell: Where else can people find information?

Jeep Wentsch: Check out cstx.gov/parks and our Facebook and Instagram pages.

Grace Hollowell: Let's do a quick lightning round. Lawn chair or blanket?

Jeep Wentsch: Lawn chair.

Grace Hollowell: Favorite music genre in the series?

Jeep Wentsch: Classic rock.

Grace Hollowell: Go-to concert snack?

Jeep Wentsch: Chocolate. I love Kit-Kats.

Grace Hollowell: Best spot at the amphitheater?

Jeep Wentsch: Backstage! I get a view unlike anyone else.

Grace Hollowell: One word to describe the Starlight Music Series?

Jeep Wentsch: Amazing.

Grace Hollowell: Thank you, Jeep. Where can people find out more one last time?

Jeep Wentsch: At [cstx.gov/parks](https://www.cstx.gov/parks), on Facebook and Instagram, or in our Rec Guide.