

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

(Season 4, Ep. 21)

Grace Hallowell: Where did you go to high school?

Katie Kamas: I was homeschooled, but I actually played on a team during high school. The Lincoln Rec Center was our home gym, so I spent a lot of my high school hours there. It has been really sweet to step back into the center.

Grace Hallowell: Yes, you are very familiar with the Lincoln Center. What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today I'm joined by our parks team from the Lincoln Recreation Center: Markeesha Watson and the newly appointed assistant supervisor, Katie Kamas. Welcome to the show.

Markeesha Watson: Thank you for having us.

Grace Hallowell: I'm excited you're both here. We love the Lincoln Center, and there's always something fun going on. Markeesha, we've chatted with you quite a few times, but this is Katie's first time, so welcome.

Katie Kamas: Thank you so much. It's good to be here.

Grace Hallowell: When did you start with the city?

Katie Kamas: I think I've been in my role for about two months now.

Grace Hallowell: Okay, so you are very fresh. How are you liking it so far?

Katie Kamas: I'm really enjoying it. It's been a fun, dynamic work environment to be in.

Grace Hallowell: Absolutely. I know no two days are the same. What drew you to this type of position?

Katie Kamas: I grew up in the area and moved away for a while, but I have always engaged with different community service organizations. When I moved back into the area this year and saw the opening, it seemed like a good fit for my experience.

Grace Hallowell: Absolutely. Where did you go to high school?

Katie Kamas: I was homeschooled, but I played on a team during high school. The Lincoln Rec Center was our home gym, and I spent a lot of my high school hours there. It's been really sweet to step back into the center.

Grace Hallowell: Yes, you are very familiar with the Lincoln Center. Markeesha, for those who might not be familiar, tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

Markeesha Watson: I am the center supervisor at the Lincoln Center. I've been part of the parks department for over 20 years, serving 12 years full-time this year. I've worked in various positions at the Lincoln Center. I am glad to have Katie as part of the team to help share some of the responsibilities. It has been an awesome experience working with Katie, seeing her in her light, and watching the way she interacts with the community, our kids, and our families. It's been awesome.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. It's very special, especially with your connection growing up at the Lincoln Center, and yours too, Markeesha. If there are any two people who have a passion for what they do, it's you two. What is your favorite thing about your jobs?

Markeesha Watson: For me, I would say it's doing something different every day and working with a diverse group of people of all ages. We go from senior programs to youth programs to adult programs. Having the ability to work with different types of people is what I love the most.

Grace Hollowell: What about you?

Katie Kamas: I feel very similar. I love that so many different people come in every day for us to interact with. Whether it's a formal program or someone just coming in to have a conversation, getting to hear a little bit of their story is really fun.

Grace Hollowell: How does what you do impact the community? I know that the Lincoln Center has been a part of our community for many years. How does it impact our residents?

Markeesha Watson: It's interesting you ask that. Summer camp ended yesterday, and at the end of every day, we have a debriefing with the staff. Yesterday, I was telling them how meaningful their jobs are and highlighting the things they are learning from and teaching the kids—whether it's working through a problem or teaching them to talk through their issues using their words. I feel like we have a lasting impact on shaping our youth by providing those opportunities and encouraging them to communicate. The staff needs to know that this is more than just coming in to work with kids; they are definitely making an impact. Because I've been there so long, I've gone through two generations of kids. Some of the kids there now are the children of members from when I first started. Hearing the personal impact from them and learning how I may have influenced their lives means more than anything else.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. I was a summer camp kid growing up. I actually met my husband through a summer camp, weirdly enough. I still remember the counselors and the people who worked at the camp who made a lasting impression on me. I'm still close with them, and they all have kids now. It's one of those things and moments that sticks with you.

You're right, it's more than just a job. What is something about the Lincoln Center that most people might not know?

Markeesha Watson: We provide a safe space and want people to know we're more than just a rec center—we're a family. We provide a safe environment for them to come, get out of the house, meet new people, and attend events they may have never experienced before.

Grace Hollowell: There's a variety of programs for kids, seniors, and other adults. It features both indoor and outdoor programming, which is especially nice during the summers here in Texas. Today, we are going to talk about some upcoming events related to Juneteenth, which is coming up soon. I can't believe how fast this year is going. How can people contact you if they have questions about what we discuss today?

Markeesha Watson: You can look at our website at cstx.gov/parks and navigate to the Lincoln Center page to see what we have going on. You can also give us a call at (979) 764-3779. Additionally, the summer guide is out, which is a great place to see what the Parks Department has planned for the season.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, this is the busy season for you all. Speaking of Juneteenth, why is it important for cities like ours and community centers like the Lincoln Center to host Juneteenth events?

Markeesha Watson: It brings families together and lets the community know how far we have come as a Black community in celebrating freedom. It keeps the tradition going, teaching future generations why it's important, how far we've come, and the milestones we've made along the way. Coming out to celebrate involves fun music, hanging out, meeting new people, and dancing. Our upcoming event will feature a lot of dancing and good music. If you like to line dance, please join us.

Grace Hollowell: Can you tell us about the two events you have celebrating Juneteenth this month?

Markeesha Watson: On Thursday, June 18th, we'll start at 9 a.m. with our Freedom Walk. We'll take a walk through our community commemorating Juneteenth. The public is welcome, and we ask everyone to come out and join us. We'll return to the Lincoln Center for a short program featuring performances by our kids. We will also have a performance from Cedric Watson, a four-time Grammy-nominated violinist who plays about four different instruments. He will lead a sing-along with the kids and the community. Later that evening at 6 p.m., we'll have a party at the pavilion featuring line dancing, bounce houses, crafts for the kids, and light refreshments. Cedric Watson will perform again that night. He's originally from Texas but lives in Louisiana and is part of a Creole band, so he'll be playing

zydeco music. I'm excited to have him. It is a wonderful time for the community to get together, celebrate Juneteenth, keep that legacy going, and teach our kids about the resilience and milestones of our community.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. It sounds like these events have a good balance of celebration and education. Why is it so important to get the younger generations involved?

Markeesha Watson: It lets them know how far we've come. This hasn't always been a free state. Even though it happened many years ago in 1865, it is important to teach them their history, the significance of celebrating it, and the need to keep this tradition alive with their families, friends, and loved ones. If you're not celebrating it at home, we provide that space for you. Everyone is welcome to join our party at the pavilion at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 18th.

Grace Hollowell: I am so excited; it's always a fun time. What other events does the Lincoln Center have going on this year? I know you mentioned the summer camp, but it feels like there is something different happening every day.

Markeesha Watson: There is. This Friday, we have a Mother's and Father's Day event for our seniors from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Throughout the summer, we have our summer camp, Juneteenth events, the senior celebration, and then we will look forward to the after-school programs.

Grace Hollowell: That is another important program for the youth. As you mentioned, the Lincoln Center serves as a third place or a home away from home to gather and find community. You mentioned that you are like a family and have many returning guests, but what would you say to encourage someone who has never been to the Lincoln Center or participated in your programs to come out?

Markeesha Watson: I would suggest coming to the facility, taking a tour, and seeing what we have to offer. Pick up a parks guide, which contains a lot of information about the parks department in general. At the Lincoln Center, there is something for everyone. Whether you're looking for youth activities, fitness rooms, pickleball, or our senior program, we can find something for you to do regardless of your age.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. For those who are still thinking about their summer plans or what to do with their children, how can people register for the summer camp?

Markeesha Watson: For summer camp, you will need to come in and register in person. There is a weekly fee this summer, so stop by the office to pick up the registration packets and learn more. We are still enrolling.

Grace Hollowell: What sort of activities are involved in the summer camp? Would you like to answer that, Katie?

Katie Kamas: We group the kids by age so they can make new friends and reconnect with peers from previous years. They rotate through different spaces in our center, and the staff runs a wide variety of activities, including large group games, arts and crafts, and game room activities. We also offer optional offsite field trips each week. We have groups that visit Cindy Halloran and the Adamson Lagoon weekly, alongside other fun spots around College Station and the wider area. Additionally, we feature "camps within a camp" throughout the summer, such as speed and agility, basketball, balloon art, and baking camps. Families can sign their kids up for those as well. As you mentioned earlier, no two days are the same in our jobs, and summer camp reflects that same variety.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome. What is your favorite camp activity? Mine was always the free period in the gym where we could play whatever we wanted. What are your favorite things about camp?

Katie Kamas: While I might not get to participate directly, I'm really excited about the baking camp. I might have to volunteer as a taste tester that week.

Grace Hollowell: What about you, Markeesha?

Markeesha Watson: I would say the gym activities. I can still remember the games we used to play when I was in elementary school, so playing those gym games is probably my favorite.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. For the specialized camps like baking or sports, do the participants need prior experience or can beginners join?

Katie Kamas: You can just come in and learn as we go. We have staff members running each of those camps, and anyone is welcome to come and give it a try.

Grace Hollowell: Before we go, we have a fun lightning round of questions. Answer with the first thing that comes to mind. We'll start with Markeesha and then go to Katie. Indoor activities or outdoor celebrations?

Markeesha Watson: Outdoor celebrations.

Katie Kamas: Outdoor celebrations.

Grace Hollowell: I am an inside girl; I am still a northern girl at heart and don't like the Texas heat. What is your favorite summer treat at a community event?

Markeesha Watson: That's a hard question. It's hot right now, so I'm going to say ice cream or a snow cone.

Katie Kamas: If it's not one of those two, maybe kettle corn.

Grace Hollowell: That's a good one. Music that is soulful and slow, or upbeat and danceable?

Markeesha Watson: Upbeat and danceable.

Katie Kamas: I would say the same. I love to dance.

Grace Hollowell: Finally, give me one word to describe Juneteenth in College Station.

Markeesha Watson: Let freedom ring.

Katie Kamas: Celebration.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome words. Before we go, where can people find more information about the Lincoln Center?

Markeesha Watson: The Lincoln Center is located at 1000 Eleanor Street here in College Station. You can also give us a call at (979) 764-3779.

Grace Hollowell: And that's what's up.