

What's Up, College Station Transcript

(Season 4, Ep. 25)

Grace Hollowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell, and today we have a very special episode of What's Up College Station. We have Jeep Wentsch and Jessica Scott here from our Parks and Recreation team to talk about the I Heart America celebration, as well as the Red, White and Splash celebration. Welcome back.

Jeep Wentsch: Thank you.

Grace Hollowell: We always love when our parks team is on the show. We talk about a lot of fun events. The I Heart America celebration is returning, and the Red, White and Splash event is a new one, which I'm very excited for. By now, you guys have both been on the show a couple of times, so we all know who you are and what you do. But what is your favorite part about your job now that we're into the summertime?

Jeep Wentsch: I'd have to say I think most people look forward to the summer, whether that means school is out or warmer weather to get out and do some outdoor activities. There's just this general vibe and excitement that comes with the summer season, and that always gets me amped up for whatever programming we have in store.

Grace Hollowell: Summer always feels like a big party.

Jeep Wentsch: Absolutely.

Grace Hollowell: Yes. What about you?

Jessica Scott: I love getting tan. No, I enjoy the atmosphere. I get to see returning kids to my swim teams or my swim lesson program. I have some staff that have come back to me every year since I've worked here—about four years now. It's really been fun to watch them all grow up. They start doing things, and I'm so excited. It's like going home again. And then, yeah, it's just busy. I go home and I'm like, next week's July 4th, summer's almost over.

Grace Hollowell: I know, it feels like it's been going super quick. So how does what you do in bringing these events impact our community, residents and visitors alike?

Jeep Wentsch: I think families are always looking for something to do, especially in the summer. Kids are out of school, so we need to find ways to get them active, moving, entertained, and occupied. Same goes for the visitors that are coming into the city. This is when people often have a lot more free time and want to take those vacation days, and that is where we're able to welcome everyone in. By having different types of programs, events,

and opportunities to fill in those gaps, I think that's what makes the summer season so special for both our locals here and the visitors that come into town.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. Growing up for July 4th, that was like a travel holiday for us. We would go visit family that didn't live in the same town, but we would go and do things out in that town we were visiting. I think that rings true to a lot of our residents here as well. For our listeners who may not be familiar with College Station and some of our programs and events, what is the I Heart America celebration?

Jeep Wentsch: The I Heart America celebration is an opportunity for the community to come together for a night under the stars and listen to some pretty awesome music at our most iconic venue here in town, Wolf Pen Creek Amphitheater. Gates open at 7:00, and we invite everyone to bring their picnic chairs and blankets and find a seat on the amphitheater grounds, where we will prepare for about an hour and a half of awesome music. This year, we've got the Josh Abbott Band, so we're very excited to have them. We will have some activities onsite as well. Food trucks will be there, and we have some free food while supplies last. It's really just a place to gather everyone, celebrate, and see some awesome fireworks.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, that is the part that I look forward to the most on Independence Day is the fireworks show. This year's celebration is part of the America 250 celebration. Why is that significant in an event like this?

Jeep Wentsch: I think all eyes are on this day. So many people have so much pride for our country and how far we've come from the very beginning. This is certainly an epic milestone for us to all get to be a part of together. I feel that this is the time where everyone wants to do something. It feels like a big thing because it is a big thing. So let's go big and let's have a fun time altogether. That is what I think is going to make this I Heart America in particular so special.

Grace Hollowell: Wear your red, white, and blue. Get your Old Navy flag shirt. I don't know if they still do those, but...

Jessica Scott: They do. Already got ours.

Grace Hollowell: Perfect. All right, so what can attendees expect when they arrive at the amphitheater for this event?

Jeep Wentsch: It's going to be open seating, so we invite everyone to bring whatever you'd like to sit on out to the amphitheater. Once you're there, we will have some watermelon and sausage on a stick that is free to all while supplies last, but we will also have food truck options available. We're going to have face painters, balloon twisters, and a couple of

activities like yard games on site. Everything really kicks off at around 7:30 with some opening remarks and our national anthem performance. Then 8 is when the big show starts; that's when the Josh Abbott Band will take the stage. Following their performance at 9:30, we'll have an amazing fireworks display as well. It will be a big, widespread environment for everyone to enjoy.

Grace Hollowell: Yes. And what can people bring to this event?

Jeep Wentsch: You can bring picnic chairs and blankets. You can also bring your own coolers with your own refreshments. Bring a smile, bring something fun. We just ask that there are no kegs, glass containers, or umbrellas — things that could obstruct someone's view.

Grace Hollowell: That is a good point to keep in mind. With the Josh Abbott Band headlining this year, that's a big deal. They are a huge artist, and this is a free event. How exciting is it to bring this nationally recognized act to College Station for free for our residents?

Jeep Wentsch: It's really exciting because we have such an awesome, iconic venue. Just the look of it...

Jessica Scott: The moat.

Jeep Wentsch: It's something that when people go and see a show there, it's very memorable. You probably haven't been to a concert just like it. By having one of the best Texas country music groups grace our stage and singing awesome songs that lots of people are going to sing along to, I think it's going to help make this 250 celebration even more special. It adds that extra level of community because we all love this awesome Texas band.

Jessica Scott: So much. That was my first concert.

Grace Hollowell: Oh wow, that's so special.

Jessica Scott: Trust me, I was wondering how I could sneak over there and be in two places at once.

Grace Hollowell: Well, yes, it is definitely a big celebration. Like you said, we're doing it big and loud for America 250. How are the fireworks, and what makes that display so special?

Jeep Wentsch: We work really hard with our fireworks and pyrotechnic team to bring an awesome fireworks show to Wolf Pen Creek. Our area where we're located is a little bit unique, so we have to work with them to order specific fireworks that are big, loud, and showy, but also ensuring everyone at the amphitheater and the surrounding area can see

them. We're also going to have a patriotic playlist that accompanies the fireworks show, and we work alongside that fireworks group to sync those things up and create a seamless audio-visual experience for everyone.

Grace Hallowell: Awesome. When people arrive for this event and they want to get a good seat and a good spot for the fireworks and music, what part of Wolf Pen should they show up to? Since it's a large park, people who are unfamiliar might not know where to go.

Jeep Wentsch: I personally recommend being at the actual amphitheater site anywhere up along the hill to get some of the best vantage points. Because of where the fireworks shoot off, anyone on the amphitheater hill should be able to see them. Our fireworks area is going to be fenced off over at our festival site, so if you want to get a little bit closer, you can work your way over there. Free parking is available at the Post Oak Mall, and some people do prefer to just hang out at the mall and watch the fireworks performance from there. We will actually have Holleman Drive shut down for the festival, so we encourage you to plan your commute ahead of time. We will have food truck vendors and other activities out there as well, so if you just want to park and hang out near your car, you're still going to get an awesome view of the fireworks display.

Grace Hallowell: Absolutely. Now, Jessica, the Red, White and Splash event is a new event. Tell us a little bit about it and what inspired you to create it.

Jessica Scott: I've worked at many places on July 4th and we've always done some sort of event. The last couple of years I thought we should do something, but I never knew exactly what I wanted to do. Last year, I accidentally left something at the pool, so I swung by right around the time they were shooting off fireworks. I went over to see if I could see them, and I realized I could see them relatively well. Obviously not as well as if I was at Wolf Pen Creek, but they were really, really good. I talked to my boss, Louis, and said I really wanted to do this event. We called it Red, White and Splash so we're not totally copying I Heart America. I figured, what's better than July 4th, fireworks, and a pool?

Grace Hallowell: Pool parties are so synonymous with summer. I am one of those people where I love fireworks, but I love them from a distance because I am like a frightened little dog with loud noises. If I'm too close, my heart rate starts to jump a little bit, but they are so beautiful out there. Nowadays, the synchronicity with the music makes them so fun to watch. I think this event is something where I would prefer being a little bit farther away but still able to see. How does the atmosphere at Adamson Lagoon differ from Wolf Pen Creek?

Jessica Scott: Obviously, we have a pool, so kids will still be splashing around, going down the slide, and going across our lily pads. At Wolf Pen you get the live concert atmosphere. We'll still have good, patriotic, fun music going through our speakers, but ours will be very

kid-friendly with the slides and pool time going on. It will be a lot of fun. While Wolf Pen will be more of a concert fireworks show, ours will be pool time and a fireworks show over at Adamson.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome. What type of yard games or activities can families enjoy at the pool?

Jessica Scott: We have bowling and cup pong, and I think deep down in storage we've got some checkers. I also planned to see what yard games Jeep is not using and take those over to the pool. We've got a good plethora of yard games in our parks closet, so we can divvy them up a little bit. I also thought about doing a couple of fun game events at Adamson Lagoon where people can sign up and have some fun. We have some cool prizes coming, too.

Grace Hollowell: Yes. And the pools are open during the day for July 4th. What are those hours?

Jessica Scott: Both pools, Cindy Halloran and Adamson Lagoon, are open to the public from 12:00 to 6:00. Cindy Halloran will close at 6:00 for the day. At Adamson Lagoon, anybody who would like to exit is certainly welcome to, but anyone who wants to stay for the evening event can stay. They don't have to leave and come back.

Grace Hollowell: For those who are showing up just for the event in the evening, is there a ticket fee or anything they need to do to attend?

Jessica Scott: No, it's a free event. I will say our capacity is 450, so I have wristbands that people will get so the fire marshal and my lifeguards don't get overwhelmed. I would suggest getting there earlier if you want to stay for the event.

Grace Hollowell: What can people bring to the pool if they plan on attending Red, White and Splash?

Jessica Scott: You're welcome to bring coolers, but we say no alcohol, no glass products, and nothing with a seed — so no watermelon, pumpkin seeds, or sunflower seeds, because they can get into our pump system and mess it up. A lot of people don't think of that, so I try to mention it. You're welcome to bring food, snacks, and any US Coast Guard-approved life jackets. Plastic floaties, inflatables, and personal noodles are not permitted, but we have life jackets on property, and we will have some noodles for patrons to utilize.

Grace Hollowell: In recent years, body glitter, temporary tattoos, and face paint have become very popular for the 4th of July. Is that permitted in the pool?

Jessica Scott: Absolutely. Some of my guards get very excited about this day because I always let them wear their patriotic gear appropriately. The boys love to put tattoos all over; it's the one day they really enjoy.

Grace Hallowell: Yes, I've seen a hair gel stick with glitter in it lately.

Jessica Scott: Mine gets delivered today, just saying.

Grace Hallowell: Last year's I Heart America celebration drew in a crowd of thousands of people. What does that level of community participation mean to you and your team?

Jeep Wentsch: It really means a lot. We put on free events all year long, but they don't really mean anything if our community doesn't show up to participate in them. When we get these big attendance numbers like we do for our I Heart America celebrations, it shows that our hard work pays off and that the community truly appreciates these things. It offers a "third space" area where families can bring their kids, loved ones, and people from out of town to celebrate together under the stars with great music. Being able to see all of that come to fruition feels really good.

Grace Hallowell: Yes. For people who might not be able to make it, whether they're homebound or just prefer to stay at home, can they watch the celebration? Is there still a chance for them to see the fireworks?

Jeep Wentsch: Yes. We've partnered with KAMU to stream the fireworks show, so you can watch that live and free with the PBS app, the KAMU website, your TV provider, or just your basic antenna. All information regarding the I Heart America celebration can be found at cstx.gov/iheartamerica.

Grace Hallowell: And again, it's just the fireworks streaming, not the music?

Jeep Wentsch: Correct. You have to come in person to see the music, but we've got a pretty large capacity at the venue, so we encourage everyone to come on by. If you prefer to stay home or can't make it, tune in online and you should be able to see a good fireworks display.

Grace Hallowell: What kind of memories do you hope families take away from both of these celebrations?

Jeep Wentsch: This being the 250th anniversary, I think it's going to be a memory for everyone. Everyone's going to remember where they were when America celebrated its 250th. To have the opportunity to play a part in that by providing great music, games, entertainment, and even free food activates all the senses. The sausage tastes good, the

sounds of the music, and the cheering and excitement will all help bring back a positive association with this amazing event. We're really excited to be a part of that.

Grace Hollowell: Yes.

Jessica Scott: I'm just hoping it's fun and safe, and that everybody leaves safely—maybe a little tired and a little sunburned, but with great memories. This is our first year doing this, so I personally hope it goes well so I can continue doing fun events.

Grace Hollowell: It makes me think of the movie *The Sandlot*, when they are having their night game with the fireworks going off in the background. I think people from the pool will be going down the slide, pausing, and looking at the fireworks. That community feel is exactly what we're going for. Absolutely. Before we wrap up, one more time, when is the celebration? We'll start with Jeep.

Jeep Wentsch: I Heart America is going to be on July 4th. Gates open at 7, so we encourage everyone to come on by, put your blankets or lawn chairs out, and get a spot. We will have opening remarks and the national anthem beginning around 7:30. The Josh Abbott Band will go on at 8:00, followed immediately by our fireworks display at 9:30 that night.

Grace Hollowell: Perfect.

Jessica Scott: And Red, White and Splash will be on Saturday, July 4th, starting at 7:30. If patrons are already swimming beforehand, they can stick around and enjoy some extra swim time.

Grace Hollowell: We have a fun lightning round before we wrap up, as always, all themed to the 4th of July and summer fun. Are y'all ready?

Jeep Wentsch: Yes! Let's do it.

Grace Hollowell: Okay. Concert or fireworks?

Jessica Scott: Both.

Jeep Wentsch: I'll have to go with fireworks.

Grace Hollowell: Okay. Watermelon or sausage on a stick?

Jessica Scott: Sausage on a stick.

Grace Hollowell: I would have said watermelon, but that's just me. Best place to watch the fireworks?

Jeep Wentsch: Wolf Pen Creek.

Jessica Scott: Adamson Lagoon.

Grace Hollowell: Favorite 4th of July tradition?

Jessica Scott: Wearing my Old Navy shirts. I have several from over the last few years.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome.

Jeep Wentsch: I agree — getting dressed up in red, white, and blue. It's fun to see everyone go all out, kids and adults alike.

Grace Hollowell: Yeah, there are only a few times a year you can go all out. Love seeing that. Finally, if you could describe I Heart America and Red, White and Splash in four words, what would they be?

Jeep Wentsch: Out of this world.

Jessica Scott: Chlorine, sunscreen, happy, splash.

Grace Hollowell: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for being here today. We will see you all on the fourth.

Jessica Scott: Yeah, see you then.

Jeep Wentsch: See you then.

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