

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

Season 4, Episode 37

Grace Hallowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, joined today by Brian Piscacek, Assistant Director of Economic Development. Welcome to the show. Today we are going over the Shape College Station survey campaign launched a couple of weeks ago. It is going great online. To kick things off, remind us who you are and what you do.

Brian Piscacek: I've been with the city for over 14 years. My background is in public administration, and I worked in areas like the city manager's office before moving into economic development and tourism four years ago. As Assistant Director, I oversee business attraction, retention, expansion, strategy, and district work.

Grace Hallowell: What role does economic development play in local government?

Brian Piscacek: It creates conditions for businesses and people to succeed by bringing quality jobs, new investment, and opportunities for residents to live, work, and invest in College Station.

Grace Hallowell: What is your favorite part about your job and your time here with the city?

Brian Piscacek: Seeing the fruits of your labor. Public service gives you the opportunity to see what you put in return multiple times over. It has been an incredible place to grow professionally and give back to the community.

Grace Hallowell: How does your work impact residents, guests, and visitors to College Station?

Brian Piscacek: We work in business attraction—which requires external recruitment—and business retention and expansion to support local businesses. For Shape College Station, our primary focus is retail recruitment and quality of life amenities that contribute to making this an incredible place to live and visit.

Grace Hallowell: How does Shape College Station fit into your department's work?

Brian Piscacek: It provides an extra layer of data beyond market studies. Restaurants consider population minimums, household income, site availability, workforce, and market conditions. This survey provides insight into actual resident preferences—where people want to go and what options we are currently missing.

Grace Hallowell: It makes the data real. Layne's Chicken Fingers, an Aggie-founded business, recently expanded near the University of Pittsburgh. Having community

experience and data offers a valuable perspective. Can you walk us through the Shape College Station survey and what residents can submit?

Brian Piscacek: While conceived in Economic Development, Public Communications and IT were crucial in making this interactive, real-time tool. Users select a restaurant from a drop-down list or add a new entry, which updates a live data table. This gives us a top-ten list to share with our retail consultant to demonstrate demand. In just a few weeks, we received almost 3,000 responses covering nearly 150 restaurants. We plan to rotate the survey quarterly to cover retail, services, or entertainment, giving us longitudinal data to identify long-term trends.

Grace Hollowell: Since everyone loves going out to eat, I see why this survey is popular. To clarify, the top-voted option isn't guaranteed to come to College Station, correct?

Brian Piscacek: It guides our strategic recruitment and creates a baseline. Right now, Waffle House is first, followed by In-N-Out, and Hat Creek Burger Company is third. Hat Creek offers an entertainment concept with a playset for kids, which allows parents to relax while kids play.

Grace Hollowell: It brings back the McDonald's play place concept, but in a higher-end restaurant setting.

Brian Piscacek: It is about creating an experience rather than just a quick meal. The data shows residents want experiential businesses rather than standard fast food.

Grace Hollowell: Once someone submits a response, what happens to that information?

Brian Piscacek: Submissions go through a quality assurance check to correct spelling before the data updates on the website every 24 hours.

Grace Hollowell: Can you share an example of how resident feedback informs economic development or recruitment efforts?

Brian Piscacek: We work with a retail consultant, The Retail Coach, to identify destination retailers, restaurants, and entertainment options. This survey helps narrow our focus from broad demographics to specific businesses residents want, helping reduce retail leakage by keeping local spending within our community.

Grace Hollowell: When speaking with potential businesses, what information are they looking for from the city?

Brian Piscacek: We provide local context for their hard data. College Station is a growing market in the Texas triangle, making it an ideal emergent market. Businesses want to know about population, demographics, sites, and workforce. While our overall household

income statistics are distorted by students earning \$0, we explain the unique college-town market dynamics to developers to get our foot in the door and find viable sites.

Grace Hallowell: How does city growth affect the types of businesses and services needed?

Brian Piscacek: Growth brings larger national concepts, such as Bass Pro Shops, which serves as an economic engine and tourist destination. Other new additions include Costco, Sprouts, and Dave & Buster's. Growth also creates opportunities to backfill vacant retail space as commercial areas turn over.

Grace Hallowell: What are the biggest misconceptions residents have about business recruitment?

Brian Piscacek: That retail recruitment happens automatically. It requires proactive outreach to show businesses they are wanted and that suitable sites exist.

Grace Hallowell: How long does it take for a requested business to actually open?

Brian Piscacek: Economic development moves slowly. Conversations starting today lay the groundwork for openings two or more years down the line, as broader market conditions and timelines align.

Grace Hallowell: Why should residents take the time to complete the Shape College Station survey?

Brian Piscacek: Your feedback directly influences our recruitment targets and conversations at retail conferences. Getting community input is crucial to our work in public service.

Grace Hallowell: Where can people find the survey?

Brian Piscacek: On the Grow College Station website. You can navigate to the Shape College Station section under the drop-down menu.

Grace Hallowell: It is fun to watch the real-time ranking adjustments on the website graphs.

Brian Piscacek: Updating the entries every 24 hours gamifies the process and makes it interactive instead of feedback going into an abyss.

Grace Hallowell: Before we go, let's do a quick lightning round. Favorite place to relax in College Station?

Brian Piscacek: Century Square. It has a great green space for kids to run around, with outdoor seating to watch a game.

Grace Hallowell: Best place for a family outing in College Station?

Brian Piscacek: The George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. It is a unique historical asset, and the grounds are beautiful to walk around.

Grace Hallowell: Do you prefer Midnight Yell or Game Day?

Brian Piscacek: Game Day. Nothing beats a fall Saturday.

Grace Hallowell: What is one new restaurant concept you would love to see in College Station?

Brian Piscacek: An interactive eatertainment concept with good food, beverage, and activities for kids to hang out longer.

Grace Hallowell: Finally, one word to describe College Station's economic future?

Brian Piscacek: Opportunity. We are a growing, youthful community with exciting announcements on the horizon.

Grace Hallowell: Thank you for joining me today.

Brian Piscacek: Thank you.

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