

Transcript of Interview

Joe Hayen (Interviewer)
Julie Shuttlesworth (Interviewee)

Date: October 27th, 2023

17:43:08

Alright, well good afternoon. So I am here with Julie Shuttlesworth, our Assistant Vice President for Student Life in the Division of Student Engagement and Success.

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And so we are here to have a conversation this afternoon about. experiences here at Texas A and M University Corpus Christi.

And rather more specifically about her legacy and traditions that she has helped create for us here at university for our students.

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So first of all, Julie, thank you for being here with me this afternoon and carving out some time to have a conversation with.

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Absolutely. I'm excited to join you.

Thank you. Okay, so let's start off first by telling us a little bit about your history, personally with the university. Were you a student here as well before, working here or if now, when did you start your university or kind of what's your background here?

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Sure. So, I came to Texas A and of Corpus Christi in November of 2000 as the Assistant athletic director for marketing of promotions for islander athletics and I had Dan Miola was the first athletic director for A and and Corpus Christi after, we started, sports.

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So he was actually tasked with starting islander athletics here at the university. He had been a associate athletic director at the University of Wyoming, which is where I did my undergrad degree at.

I knew of him, he did not know me because I was a little freshman. He left or an undergrad students.

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But he, He knew people that I worked with and I had interned at Wyoming and so that's kind of where the door opened to encourage me to apply for the role here.

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So. Islander athletics was very small back in the day. The job that I did then is done by about 5 or 6 people now.

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So thankfully they've gotten a much bigger staff. And so, you know, we were we were in on the ground level.

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So I came in on the second year of basketball. Ever here for Anna of Corpus Christi and we've come a long way of basketball, ever here for Anna of Corpus Christi and we've come a long ways.

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And I guess I, you know, my memories then. I office to classroom east which we literally just bulldoze this small I've been needed to have been bulldozed.

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20 years ago. There was a matching building, right beside it at the time when I first came to campus.

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At a blocked my mute to the ocean, but they bulldozed that one then because there was a It was a faculty offices and there was complaints about bold and ventilation and all that kind of stuff.

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And so they bulldozed it. And so that gave me a view out into the ocean. So, Yeah, so it's been 23 years here on campus.

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Very cool. And so when did you start with, the student engagement and success division within C's and that kind of brings me into the time that I started here.

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Of course you're already in that role, working on programming. But when did that transition now?

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Sure, so, I left the university, the first time, back in 2,004 and went to work here in Corpus Christi. With a nonprofit and then later with the private company.

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And I came back in the spring of 2015 and so I still knew people, obviously, that worked here and my good friend Stephanie Box who was working over housing at that time had posted to her Facebook page, that, this job, as a communication specialist for the Division of Student Engagement

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Success. And when I saw that, I wasn't looking. Was not actively pursuing anything but it came across my Facebook feed and as I read through it it was That's me, that's me, that's me.

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And when I got to interview and when I got the position. I remember thinking on those first couple of days back that it felt like coming home that had just been modeled a lot because university had grown a lot.

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In the years, 11 years in between, but it just it felt like home and it felt like where I wanted to be.

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So that was really great coming back. That's good. So. For the purposes of the project that I'm working on and some things that we're doing.

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I am really curious and interested in some of the student, programming and activities. More specifically for some of the big signature you guys so take me back if you can to, I guess from the beginning or your beginning, 2,000 area.

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What were some of the big signature events and then where have you guys seen over the years? Grow. As far as our student engagement.

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Yeah, so I think, one of the things when I got here in 2,000, I really kind of juggled back and forth and my brain was which came first the chicken or the egg on trying to drive attendance to islander.

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Athletic events. Basketball in particular. And so there was the concept of well if you get the community to show up the students will think it's a great place to be and the students will come or if you get the students to show up the community, I think it's a great place to be and they'll buy tickets.

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And I really, I had to do both, but my heart and my passion was that I was convinced that if we could get the students excited and the students to come to the games.

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That's what creates a college basketball environment. That's what creates a college baseball environment. And so if the students get excited and their schools pride in school spirit, then the rest of the community will hop in as well.

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So That's a lot of where I focused my attention in those first few years. And with that, I got to partner with what was student affairs at the time.

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It wasn't student engagement success yet, but I got a partner with, individuals over there, particularly in the student activities office.

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And we were working on, you know, the early years and early versions of waves of welcome and so you know that welcome back week and all of the events and activities.

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We were on the very first homecoming committee. I think we started home coming. So it wasn't the first year I was here, so I think it was the fall of 2001.

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Okay. But to start working towards homecoming and you know, obviously we don't have football. You're at Texas and and Corpus Christi and so we made the decision to do that around a basketball game.

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You know, working, trying to get student involvement students, people there, alumni involvement through, what was the Tarpen Foundation and is now the, Islander.athletic foundation. So, you know, kind of some of those really big core ones that started.

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Even early on in the early 2,000 and and waves of welcome obviously is a huge tradition on our campus now.

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So, I think there were over 50 events. This last fall. Cross-campus cross divisions cross departments that are all working to welcome students back to campus.

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And then homecoming has been you know, tremendous, you know, just the excitement around, Islander basketball in general.

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But, you know, that transition of, hey, we're gonna do homecoming and it was really.

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I think that first year it was like kind of a barbecue inside. We were playing basketball at Memorial Coliseum.

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Back, yeah, court was bulldozed. I used to call the hunk of junk dome because spelled and it was cold and it was off.

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So, you know, just kind of. Some in between sorts of things. And now, you know, the first year that I was here, again, that I came back in.

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20, I guess it would have been 2016. We were still doing a homecoming parade. They brought a homework over the years.

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And there weren't very many people like watching the parade. There was a lot of people involved in being in the parade but nobody was really hurt.

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Watching the parade and so we kind of transitioned. So, 2,016 we did a parade and you know they had had a band that's the athletic department had gotten kind of on the street in front of American Bank Center.

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That next year, 2,017, we're like, let's do. Let's do something different.

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Let's try and do a block party. Let's do some food trucks. Let's do, you know.

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The students weren't into the parade. So, we probably broke a few rules on what trucks on the street that first year.

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And we were in the muddy field beside the bank center and then over those next like 6 or so years.

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That's really grown a lot, you know, we're in the parking lot behind the bank center.

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There's a lot of people, there's a really great vibe between both. Community and alumni coming back as well as a lot of our students there and involved and so I think that's been a fun tradition to watch grow over the years, as homecoming has kind of come into its own a little bit more.

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And then really the whole week's worth of. Activities that have blossomed. Out of, some of those ideas.

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So. That really feels like a tradition more now, just a something we're pushing students to. To do and take part in.

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So students are actively wanting to be involved, which I think is also our goal. The history going on for homecoming and my experience last year you're right it has grown it's tuned it's exciting and and I think that's a great point that I do see the incorporation of both our students and the community.

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Both. I mean, so it's a really neat thing. For other programs that we've seen, of course I was involved with, family weekend and our concert series, talk about those programs.

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Sure. So, family weekend, we started the planning of family weekend in the fall of 2019.

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To do a spring, event. Obviously we all know what happened in the world in the spring of 2020.

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So a lot of that kind of. Tapered off, we looked at trying to move it and do it in the fall of 2,020.

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That wasn't gonna work. Spring, 21 was still too much. And so, the first Islander family weekend happened in the fall of 21.

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And it was actually really led out of the academic affairs office. So, Harvard second was the lead on that.

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Very much a committee sort of involvement. And really creating something out of scratch. So we've we've done research and you know Texas A and Purpose Christie as a Hispanic serving institution and really just what college students.

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Generally across the country. Parental involvement is a really important piece of student success. And so as families are involved and as students feel supported by their families, you know, students do better.

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In their academics and so family weekend was really born as a way to help. Connect families to the student experience and so we always say that it's a opportunity for you to see campus through the eyes of your islander.

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And so That started that first year. And the first year we did it, it was really a, Friday program that it was pretty much most of the day Friday just a little bit on Saturday and obviously we got some feedback.

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From families that they were hoping to do more things on Saturdays and they could get there and be there.

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Easily on a weekend. And so the second year, 2022, we walked it to a primarily Saturday event and it's it's been a really great success.

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So you know there are the core pieces that there is a family lunch with the hosted by the president's office.

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We have either windjam which wind jam actually was born out of COVID so in jam started in the fall of 20 as a we still needed to have some events for our students that there are there were students kind of back on campus.

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That fall and that there needed to be something for them to do while still socially distanced and outside and so that was actually the the brainchild of our associate vice president and Gina students Lisa Perez.

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So we were we were thinking about what could you do outside and flying a kite. Sounds like you know you have to be spaced out.

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You can't right be right next to somebody and so that was such a popular event. It was hosted by our Student Government Association.

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That we wanted to wrap that in and bring that as part of Windjia or as part of Family Weekend as a kind of an outdoor fun sort of an event.

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And so, student government association posts that piece, and that's a really popular element to family weekend.

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And then in that first year, we got a laser show. And so we've got some really great nice building, big buildings and some open lawn space and having that something different that our students hadn't seen or had before has added a real nice piece to family weekend and so you know we get really great feedback from the families.

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They love coming and seeing campus. It's grown every year and so I think, you know, It's a big tradition at a lot of other institutions.

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And again, they wrap it around football. Which, you know, we've actually created something that's more of a blend between academics and student life and athletics when we can get those pieces in.

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A little bit better, not better, but I think it's better than a lot of other universities do because a lot of other universities it's Hey, come here's a brunch and then go to the football game and that's it for family weekend.

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And so there's a lot more interactive pieces for our students and their families. So. Do you have any interesting stories regarding family weekend or any experiences that you've had that, are memorable.

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I was thinking while you're sharing that, this is about daily weekend, but system that I have about the work that we do.

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And sometimes things don't go recording to plan. I don't remember when we have the 70 fifth within the 70 fifth.

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And we're trying to. Okay, I've heard, we're over down off the top of the, yeah, so I've another on, on a desktop.

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And trying to throw the can study down and then, It was actually a kind of a scary moment.

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Let go! Just let go. For the wind sort of thing. Yeah, and wrapped it, you know, when the wind took the thing, yeah, and wrapped it, you know, the whole banner, twisted it up and then.

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I can say, we're another thing up by road. And then one of the people I'm there was seeing.

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And I think that's right. Yeah, absolutely. So yeah, so I guess and that kind of lead those into the concert. Yeah, absolutely.

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So yeah, so I guess, and that kind of lead those into the concert. So yeah, as part of the 70 fifth anniversary, you know, was to have a big celebration and a big party here from campus.

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And so there was the, it's April, the first is the anniversary date for the university. And there was an event during the day which was you know community and alumni and press and all that sort of thing but we wanted to do something special for this students.

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We wanted to do a kickoff account down to the anniversary and we partnered with our health promotions program that already had a late night hypnotist coming in and so we figured you know hey let's do something kind of time square ball drop sort of count down to midnight for the 70 fifth anniversary and use that as the launching point to announce.

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What was our new spring concert is best, which started in its first year as the 70 fifth anniversary commemorative concert and food truck festival.

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And so we, yes, we did, we did all the things. We got this huge banner.

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I mean, it was like 40 feet long and 20 feet wide and it was And the concept was to drop it down the side of the university center, leave it displayed all year long.

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To commemorate the 70 fifth anniversary and really coming use it as that ball drop. Moment. We had asked about practicing.

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That's in advance and we had outside. Gonna be some ropes on the bottom and we were assured that it was good.

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Gestly plans. It did not. Thankfully IT was there and they had we've gotten a big giant screen and so we have the countdown the 19 8 on screen.

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On the side of the building big and bright and beautiful. And then we had the image of the banner and we have the concert announcement that could be displayed up there as well.

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And so yeah, we get to the countdown and that it hits one and they drop that banner and I could see and if you watch it back in the video where we place but synchronously we do have video replays but.

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You know, the one little corner it started and it unrolled. Perfectly all the way down, but then that one little corner the road came loose and the air caught behind that banner and it just started.

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Started requesting it and yanking it and So thankfully nobody got hurt. They did drop the rope and nobody got yanked off the top of the university center.

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And, unfortunately it was a one time use banner because it did not get to be, displayed for the entire year because it basically just got shredded.

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But you know it was fun the students we had a dance party and cupcakes and We gotta announce the concert, which was a lot of fun.

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And so they had a great time, but yeah, sometimes. Your best laid plans and what you think is going to be awesome.

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Doesn't always boycott the way you want it to. Right, but at the same time they do make a really good, stories that, yeah, they're together in, other ways. Yeah.

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So we have the plain white teams. Yeah, so, you know, the concert, we had been talking about the concert for a while.

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So in the fall of 2019. Again, Dr. Lisa Pres and I and Susan Latori who was at the time the coordinator over our campus activities board. A few of our students had a meeting with Dr.

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Kelly Miller president and CEO of A and M Corpus Christi and talking about what are some of these big family tradition or some of these big campus traditions that we could build and one of the things that the students wanted to see and Dr.

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Miller was really excited about was a concert with a you know, a national recording artist. And so we started working through that process.

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We started talking to, Partners down at risk for straight and concrete street trying to figure out Where do you even start, you know, where to start on staging and contracting an artist and all of that sort of stuff.

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And as we were working towards it we were thinking okay well maybe we can do something spring of 2,000 again we all know where that went fall of 2,000 spring of 21 again and so in the fall late fall of 22 no i'm sorry 21 we started talking about the anniversary and we started talking about the 70 fifth anniversary and what we could do big in commemorative and the concert came back

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into hey we started down this path and we didn't get there let's see about trying to get this going.

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And so, Again, Lisa and, Susan and I kind of started working and partnering and, talking with a booking agency and trying to figure out dates and locations and times.

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And part of it was, well, where are we going to do this at? And what are you gonna do that makes it a big enough event that's really gonna attract the students and so that's where the concept of a like a more of a festival.

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Vibe came through. It's where we decided to do, food trucks who tricks are super popular, and with our students, and then trying to do it over on what we talked about doing it on was we talked about doing it on the momentum wreck fields because it's already prefessed and so you could have that security perimeter.

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You can park the few trucks right there in that parking lot directly adjacent to it and it would be Oh, all inclusive, you already have light, you had power, you had all the things you needed.

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When they started talking with the production company and we started figuring out the staging, there's 2 types of staging, which none of this we knew.

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We didn't know anything before in the first row. We were trying to figure this out. So there's 2 types of staging.

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There's a stick built staging where they come in. They put down the plywood. They build out a stage.

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Or there's the semi truck type of staging that is basically a big giant semi truck that is just like a transformer that it comes and it unfolds and it raises up on along big and gorgeous and beautiful stage.

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There is a significant price difference between having to have all of the people in all of the hands build out a stage for you versus having a truck pull up and transformer itself out into a state.

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And when I mentioned to Kevin Martin and who's our director of recreational sports and And, who is our associate vice president for student engagement success, that we were contemplating driving a semi truck onto the wreck sports fields.

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We got a resounding no. That was not gonna work. And that's when we pivoted and we need that big empty lot that as at the corner of Edith Doslin and Nile became home to his best.

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And so it was. A whole lot more on logistics that at that point than we had to bring in.

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Fencing and bring in additional porta potties and bring in power. But it allowed us to have a large enough scope and venue to be able to have that sort of a big event.

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It was a huge undertaking. It was a ton of. People across campus that were included in the event.

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The first year we have limited the tickets to 3,000 tickets. We weren't sure exactly what that would look like or how that would hold.

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And I very distinctly remember a conversation with Alan Gutierrez, our chief of police.

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During the concert that night standing up beside the stage and looking over at this field. And him going, hey, we can hold 3 or 4 times.

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That number in this field. So really setting the goals and the expectations big. But yeah, so we had the plain white piece the first year.

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Really popular. We had students, faculty, staff. A lot of people come and enjoy and really.

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They enjoyed the good trucks. Artist was great the weather was beautiful we had gorgeous sunset over the field right at the very end.

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And it was just kind of a very fun until. Islandery sort of live. You're 2 did not provide the same sort of a thing.

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So year 2 we already had plan right so we had this plan we pulled off this concert the year before we had more time in advance that we were planning.

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We used dayblow as our second artist. So, and we changed the name to his best as an ongoing, sort of a events but it decided to pour buckets.

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Like the most written we have had in like 3 years during the week prior to the concert. And the concert itself, the forecast was that that day was going to be nice, but like all the way up to it was going to be awful.

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And We tried really hard to have it out. I went out and drove my husband's one ton truck up onto the field and got it stuck and drove my husband's one ton truck up onto the field and got it stuck and I went, oh no, there's no way we're going to get a semi truck over this field.

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So we did a very last second pivot. And we pulled it into the parking lots adjacent to the parking garage.

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And it was great. I mean, it went. Tremendously well. I thought for sure the night before and the stage was going to tip over because the wind was so awful and strong that I remember.

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We had a beautiful day and we had day globe as the artist and the students loved it and so i think those 2 successes in a row have really cemented the concert into being an ongoing tradition so Yeah, yeah.

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Just aside now when we talked about the field. Tell me about the attention we had to give.

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So you said even the birds that. Yeah, or nesting, I guess. And then, yeah, that, cause those are added, that sometimes we wouldn't consider that we have to think about these things.

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Being in an island. 5 screens and, using these fields for concert. Yeah, absolutely.

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So, the field presented a lot of different, challenges that would not have been in like the parking lot in year 2 or in if we've been able to do it over on the Rec fields, but, ants.

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And bugs and fire ants which I think Joe you actually managed to step out of our our facilities team did a great job getting those treated so that it was a safe place but as part of that keeping the lawn good and finding the treatment.

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We have endangered birds that nest here on the coast of South Texas and one of the endangered little piper birds decided that she wanted to have a nest and a baby and some eggs.

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Right there where our parking was for the event. And so we literally just caution taped off around her and she had her own parking space so we parked the cars in around her but she had her own for the first year, but then in

the second year we had you know, gone out and put down some, bird scaring tapes and metal reflective Encourage.

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I think there's a lot of place in the area and encourage her and for friends to the nest anywhere she could have had a nest anywhere except where I was trying to put the semi truck.

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So we did just where that stage for the semi truck is we put some. Bird take to try to encourage her to go anywhere else.

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So, and we didn't have to deal with it because we moved it over to the parking lot but Yeah, that definitely adds a different degree of fun and challenge.

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How would you say just based on your experience in your time? Do you notice, I mean, yeah, let's go back to 2,000.

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And And until now, but. Do you notice a sense of? Growth and belonging like person with these types of events and inclusion I mean are you seeing like you know, more students out.

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Together interacting. I mean Okay, going back to 2,000 all the way to these most recent events.

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I think, absolutely. I do. So, you know, one of the things when I came to the island, I had come from different schools that had had really strong, student activity, student life, school spirit sorts of traditions.

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And I knew coming here to An and and Corpus that we weren't at that point yet, we were still kind of in the transition from being a commuter school that it was a lot of people that were just coming in and out on a daily basis and not really.

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This wasn't their first choice a lot of times. A and and Purpose Christie was not their first choice school.

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But what I think is awesome of where we where we've gone and where we've grown is that now you know in 2023 and even pretty much since I came back in 2,015 We're no longer a commuter school.

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We're no longer a second choice backup plan school. We're the first choice for a lot of our students and our students really want that.

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Traditional, involved campus experience and organizations that they can belong to and events and traditions that they can come to and attend and that connection.

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Amongst each other. And so I think it's awesome. Just the difference of how far we've come on students who want to be in a place that they belong and have found either activities or events or organizations or just their crew here on campus to belong and get involved with and come and attend these events with and so I think that's a lot of what Homecoming.

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The concerts, family weekends, Islander lights, a lot of those major events are really that.

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Traditional campus feel. Those traditions that you come back to. Even after you've graduated, and that you want to feel like you belong here on the island that, you know, the island has become home for you.

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And I think that's a huge step, just in the 23 years that I've been involved.

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And, and, and, to see how far we've come. That, you know, you see people wearing and I'm Corpus Christi attire, on campus, out in the community, like.

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You couldn't find it when I first got here. You couldn't even find shirts. And that's, we gave away a lot of t-shirts in those first few years to try and get people wearing.

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You know, the islander logo, the Texan and Corpus Christi name. And so I just think that Yeah, we've come a long way in the last place.

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Very cool. I don't want to follow up things here in the last few minutes. Why would you say our

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You know, from your personal experience, your first call perspective, what other things that you value the most about.

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Working here, or being a part of this university of this campus, what, what do you value the most about Texas A and M.

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So what I still loved and have always loved is that. I love the small campus field and we're no longer a small campus, you know, where 1112,000 students on a regular basis that's a mid-level college campus across the country.

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But because we're on the island. That helps I think keep that that proximity of services that proximity of classes the proximity of the events that everything is just right there and close and accessible and I think that helps increase that.

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Sense of belonging because you walk across campus. And you see 27 people you know, you know, and it's it helps build that community, I think.

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And I do feel like, I feel like people want to be at A and M corpus that whether it's the faculty, the staff, the students.

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It is a place that they want to be and that that really also helps. In that sense of belonging and that sense of pride.

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And spirit. And I've seen a lot of growth even. More recently, you know, in the 8 years.

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That I have been in student engagement and success. A lot of growth of that identity, you know, student government in that time started the Blues Day Tuesday tradition and they put up the home of the islander sign on the side of the CI science over walk.

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And there's a lot of those sorts of tradition pieces. So beach bash, which we didn't even have a chance to talk about, but is the.

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Kind of culmination of waves of welcome and that kick off to the gear with fireworks and fun and hosted by the president's office.

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I mean that's a huge huge piece too. So I think all of those elements that we've really strived to build tradition in the last 20 plus years.

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And that the students themselves are now, you know, student government taking over and working to build additional traditions.

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And so I think that that's a it says a lot for how far the universities come.

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Boss question for you. What would you say is your legacy here? What is your, I guess if we were to look back, They think that this is a historical.

18:19:29

Project and I, talk about the history of things. If your name was in the textbook of Texas A and I, Corpus Christi, what does it say? What does it talk about?

18:19:40

What is your You're a historical impact in your legacy on this campus.

18:19:46

You know, I think, I would hope that it says something about building island or bright. So you know, those very first days walking on, to campus in 2,000 and.

18:20:10

Sheets because they were the cheapest thing we could find and we would paint them. With copper pay saying game today sort of stuff.

18:20:17

And we did a lot of kind of gorilla marketing to get them involved and to attend things. And I think that a lot of the work that I've done in those early days in athletics and then throughout my time with student engagement success of helping to build traditions, helping to communicate with and market those traditions to students helping to have them identify with these major events in these school pride initiatives in these school traditions

18:20:45

and that I would hope that people see that I've helped. Contribute to the increase of school spirit in Islander bread.

18:20:55

How about that? I, I agree. I think that's something hard. One of things I, Learn from you and and observe from you too is that is branding.

18:21:06

And make sure that things work nice, work for a question. I'm here that way because that's a high level and when when we have a high level of branding and presence, that adds to right and adds to the spirit.

18:21:23

And so I definitely. Yeah, I do see that. I agree with that. I think, yeah, along those lines, it would probably have a little abstract decided that I was the any color but blue grinch.

18:21:39

When it came to t-shirts that we were handing out and giving away. I was passionate about nope I don't care it's it's passionate about nope I don't care it's blue but out blue it has to be blue or green occasionally but Yeah, so.

18:21:50

You're right that just trying to instill some of those things that are just. Intuitive.

18:21:58

I'll have other universities with hundreds and hundreds of years of tradition. Those aren't intuitive yet at an in purpose.

18:22:10

They're starting to become intuitive that you don't wear orish t-shirts.

18:22:13

Those sorts of things I think are. Hopefully things that I hope contribute to. Thank you so much for your time.

18:22:24

And being a part of this brief. A historical and, and review. From your perspective, I know that we can continue on for hours and hours and maybe I'll create, Texas A and M, Corpus Christi historical podcast. I love that.

18:22:45

Yeah, all these different episodes and different people. I think it would be a great time, you know, contribution.

18:22:52

So. So thank you so much. I'm gonna let you get back!