

The Break Room: Cori Niles, Event & Venue Coordinator, September 10, 2024

Narrator:

You've tuned in to another edition of the Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the city of St. Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the city of St. Augustine's communications director, Melissa Wissel, the break room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Welcome to the break room and thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine. Concerts in the plaza is about to wrap its regular season, which was actually extended by two weeks due to some rescheduling of rained out events. And we have an extended schedule beyond that celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. So to talk about concerts in the plaza and more of our special events, Cori Niles is with me. She's the city's events and venue coordinator. Cori, welcome back.

Cori Niles:

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

You've been here before. You are busy all year round. We've been a little busy. We just wrapped another celebration. Tell us a little bit about what you survived last week.

Cori Niles:

Yes, we had the hundredth celebration for our sister cities relationship. We did a press conference, luncheons, dinners and just entertaining a whole delegation of people. We did special concerts three nights out of the week and a marker unveiling on Sunday along with the Aviles Street Festival.

Melissa Wissel:

Fabulous big event, lots of activities. That's a wrap. And now we're about to wrap concerts in the plaza. Normally concerts in the plaza ends right before Labor Day.

Cori Niles:

Yes, always the Thursday before Labor Day.

Melissa Wissel:

But not this year.

Cori Niles:

No.

Melissa Wissel:

What happened? We had a lot of rain.

Cori Niles:

We did. We had four to five shows that were rained out. We were able to reschedule two and the other ones were rescheduled for next year as our opening act and then some acts throughout the year. So we will get to hear them and not miss out on that. And then we've extended as well to do some Spanish heritage month concerts on the 19th and 26th September as well.

Melissa Wissel:

Tell me about the Spanish heritage or the, excuse me, the Hispanic Heritage month. We kind of also saw that as an opportunity to extend our 100th anniversary. A lot of that Spanish heritage, of course. Who are the bands playing? And remind us the dates for those, if you would.

Cori Niles:

Okay. On September 19th, we will have carry the day with Edwin Barbosa, and he does mostly Spanish, sort of rock and jazz with the guitar, and we're really looking forward to his. And then on the 26th September, we have Zaza flamenca, where she does multiple languages. Actually, of different music. She does jazz and rock and everything that you could want. And we'll also have a flamenco dancer with her.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay, so she's got a little more of, I don't want to call it fancy. What's the word I'm looking for? She's got a little more flair. And Edwin Barbosa's single guitar player.

Cori Niles:

Yep. Now he may bring..

Cori Niles:

He's kind of working that out.

Melissa Wissel:

More chill. Okay, well, that's exciting to have two more performances for concerts in the plaza. I do want to remind folks, too, the reason why we don't extend into September like that. As a general rule, as we are pushing up against nights of lights. Of lights. I can't even believe we're talking about nights of lights.

Cori Niles:

Yes, this year it came up pretty quick. But yeah, our crews and angels in the architecture do take the month of September and October to start really putting the lights on the trees and trimming and just getting everything ready.

Melissa Wissel:

Getting ready. Yeah, it's a big production. But before we get to nights of lights, we also have something coming up that the community is pretty excited about, I think. And that. Sing out loud. Yes, we get involved with that. We are a sponsor.

Cori Niles:

We are. And this year, like last year, they are doing the showcase at Francis Field, which is a large concert. Last year was about 18,000 people. Huge production. They will be at Francis Field September 21st and 22nd. This year, which is Saturday, Sunday. Different from last year. We did a Friday Saturday. They've got some great headliners. Eric Church's Saturday, Noah Kahn, who is very popular, apparently is going to be Sunday. And then they have a lot of other acts that will fill all day long.

Melissa Wissel:

But how does that. So last year, I'm going to go back to that a little bit. You mentioned last year was Friday, Saturday. This year they moved it Saturday, Sunday. It was a little bit of a. I'll call it a hiccup last year because I don't want to get everybody upset again. But we did have to make some changes. We were using some of our staff for garbage pickup and things that impacted our solid waste. We did close the garage. How have we made some adjustments this year? Because I think it's going to be better for our residents.

Cori Niles:

It is. So we should have no issues with our solid waste pickups. Nothing should be interrupted. The amphitheater is providing much more staff as far as cleaning up and solid waste removal. So we should be good there. Now we will close the garage. Down again. But it will be open till end of business on Friday and will reopen Monday morning. It'll just be closed Saturday and Sunday. Last year it did put a lot of people out to close the garage, but it was also very helpful with the traffic because we did not have that gridlock of traffic coming in and out. Yeah, it actually did help with it.

Melissa Wissel:

And with that, though, we do offer the alternative solution of park and rides. So it's not like we're going to cut you off the garage and then say you don't have anywhere to park.

Cori Niles:

Nope. And the star circulator will still run. Our park and ride shuttles are still running. The amphitheater has multiple shuttles from different locations for people coming to the concert. So somebody just coming downtown may not be impacted as much because there is other parking options for the concert goers that are a little further out. That way the amp can bring them in.

Melissa Wissel:

So that. And that's September 21st and 22nd.

Cori Niles:

Yep. September 21st, 22nd. And sing out loud goes on the entire month of September with a ton of free shows at different venues. But that's their big showcase. Live Wildly showcase. Big showcase of field, Francis Field.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, if you're just now tuning in, you are listening to the break room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director, and I have Cori Niles in studio with us this week. She is the city's events and venue coordinator. And we're talking about all things events and venue coordinating in addition to. We were just talking about the Spanish 100th anniversary sing out loud. Let's go back. We don't know yet about who's doing light up night because we haven't gotten that announcement yet from the mayor but give us a peek at what nights of lights looks like. You mentioned that we do a lot of that setup. Let's talk a little bit about your part in that. You really make all of that happen. I'm going to give you that huge shout out. You pull all of that together. In addition to 4 July. They're both kind of the. I don't want to say they're the same because they're different, but it is a lot of that coordinating of things for the public.

Cori Niles:

It is. And it is the coordination of the little things. So I have a huge group between our streets and grounds, our angels in the architecture, all of our police and fire that are boots on the ground and do so much.

Melissa Wissel:

Huge team. Huge team.

Cori Niles:

But part of my job is the logistics, the small logistics, making sure that we have barricades where they need to be making sure that we have portable toilets where they need to be making sure that, you know, our podium is in place for light up night. We have an interpreter for light up night. Just stuff like that. Even something as simple as getting walkie talkies to the gentleman that set off the fireworks before they get on the boat to go to the barge. That's all. Just small logistics that all that little stuff need to be handled. And so I'm not that handling person for that.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a big task. And you do have regular meetings. If you wanted to have an event yourself on Francis Field, Cori is the person you would call. Tell me a little bit about that in terms of your job with what happens on Francis Field. I know a lot of times people will call us asking for information. Those are not our events. We do fireworks, light up night, concerts in the plaza.

Cori Niles:

Yes. Those are our city events. Any other event is privately run, such as anything on Francis Field. Your Latin music fest, your nineties festival, anything. They're all private promoters that basically rent the field. We become the landlord. Events such as the regatta of Lights is also a private event that the yacht club puts on. Now, we assist them. They come and they meet with our committee so that we can gear them and show them what the best option for the events are, what they can do, what they can't do. Make sure they're following the ordinances, laws, and everything that we need them to do.

Melissa Wissel:

Police, trash, sound systems, whatever.

Cori Niles:

We make sure that they're following the noise ordinance, that they are representing trash and recycling on the field, which is part of our ordinance. You know that their stage is safe. Our code enforcement goes out and inspects the stage. We have our people that inspect the food trucks, our fire department.

Melissa Wissel:

Francis Field is a big space, and it gets beat up.

Cori Niles:

It does.

Melissa Wissel:

But all of that's part of renting the space. And It's a pretty affordable rate.

Cori Niles:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

What is it to rent?

Cori Niles:

So if the event is 2000 people or more, it's \$1,000 a day. And if it's 2000 people or less, it's \$500 a day.

Melissa Wissel:

So not very expensive.

Cori Niles:

No.

Melissa Wissel:

You get a setup day. Shoulder days.

Cori Niles:

You get shoulder days. You get a setup day before and a cleanup day after. You do have to pay for solid waste separately. If there is alcohol being served on the field, you do have to have off duty police officers from the city of St. Augustine, which is another cost. The promoters are responsible for any of the tents that they rent, the portable toilets they have to rent. We don't have public ... Any type of, If they want overnight security, anything like that is all on the cost of the promoters.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, the events down and we don't have. I will say we don't have. Whether you want it good or bad, the Florida man games got really big. It was a big success. I think we were all a little nervous. I think even Pete was a little nervous, but it went really well.

Cori Niles:

It went really well. I was down there in the beginning of the morning just to make sure that they didn't have any hiccups and that they were following the rules. And it was super

successful. People that really loved it. Really loved it, and it was great. He has moved it same weekend but has moved it to the fairgrounds this year.

Melissa Wissel:

And that's great.

Cori Niles:

From the advertisements I'm seeing there.

Melissa Wissel:

Looks like it's going to be good and it's a better venue for them because there's a lot more room.

Cori Niles:

It is. And they can do a lot more of the obstacle course type things and kind of those fun competitions.

Melissa Wissel:

Interactive?

Cori Niles:

Yeah, interactive. Fun competitions out there.

Melissa Wissel:

That's great. Well, with all of the events, whether they're Francis field in the plaza, the stuff that you are responsible for, I know you also do permitting for weddings at city hall. So, yes, everything kind of goes through you and you keep everybody in order.

Cori Niles:

That's the plan.

Melissa Wissel:

Do a very good job of it. Great job with the 100th. And for me personally, thank you. You were my right-hand gal.

Cori Niles:

You're welcome.

Melissa Wissel:

With Maria Lopes in the clerk's office. So thank you so much. What you did to help us make that such a success, we couldn't have done it without you. Our next event, though, I do want to circle back real quick. Light up night, the Saturday before Thanksgiving. I can't remember off the top of my head the date, but it's Saturday before Thanksgiving. And I'm also going to remind folks it ends this year, nights of lights, the last Sunday in January. So just to make sure nobody missed out on that memo last Sunday in January. But tell me about light up night. I mentioned, we don't know who the honorees will be yet for flipping the switch, but what else happens on light up night? Because it's not just about the lights.

Cori Niles:

Yes, light up night is like you said, always that Saturday before Thanksgiving. This year it's November 23, and so we have different shows that we put on leading up to us turning the lights on. Showtime is one of our favorites. They've been performing for almost 30 years with us. And they perform from 04:00 p.m. to 05:00 p.m. in front of city hall. They always put on a very colorful, very wonderful, some Christmas and some not Christmas style dance show. Dance show. And it's all children, all ages from three to 18. It's a fun show. It really, it's a nice afternoon. It gets you going. It's a nice start to the evening.

Melissa Wissel:

You can find a place to park at that time of day, too.

Cori Niles:

You absolutely can come down at three, grab some food, watch them at four. It's fantastic.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Cori Niles:

And then after that, we go down to the plaza and all-star orchestra, which has also played for 28 years with us, will do all of your holiday music that everybody loves to hear to kind of get you into that holiday, you know, spirit. And they will be there six to eight. They will stop for a little intermission in between so that we can light the town and the plaza and everything, but, but they will play...

Melissa Wissel:

It's a magical night. It really is. If you can stand getting down there and dealing with the crowds, I would say it hasn't been as bad in the last couple of years. It's kind of, it's crowded, it's busy. You get that holiday feel, but it's not terrible.

Cori Niles:

No, it's not unmanageable. The last two years have not been unmanageable. And traffic's really easy to get out. A lot of people stay after to go to dinner, which helps.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a fun, family friendly downtown.

Cori Niles:

Absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

And the advantage of if you're a local is that if you do want to wait till after the holidays, we do keep the lights on, like I said, to the end of January.

Cori Niles:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

So we'll look for light up night on Saturday before Thanksgiving, and we'll look for you to be working hard with your team and thank you for everything that you do to make all of our events successful and safe.

Cori Niles:

Thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks for coming down to the break room.

Cori Niles:

Thanks.

Melissa Wissel:

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complete listing of our podcasting platforms also at citystaugradio.com. We want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city. And most importantly, that you hear it, hear from the people doing the work and making it happen every day. Follow us on our social channels. You'll find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @citystaug. Until next time, thanks for tuning in.

Narrator:

You've been listening to the Break Room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the City of St. Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director, Melissa Wissel, has in depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another edition of the break room.