

Wes Rea (00:01):

I think sometimes the challenge with large DMOs, they overthink things way too much and it just takes too long. I mean, we can have an idea on a Wednesday and have it executed by Friday because sometimes we have to do that. For us, we have a culture here that we really want to take risks and really wanna experiment with things because we're Stockton and we're a little edgy and that's just how we roll. I love being able to do that and create a culture in our team that lets people take risks and do some exploration.

Bob Gilbert (00:27):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales. A podcast series that explores with travel and tourism leaders their take on key issues of the day. My name is Bob Gilbert, general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander, who are bringing you this podcast series. I've had the privilege to have worked with iconic global brands, including Disney Choice Hotels, Yosemite and Shenandoah National Parks, Kennedy Space Center Visitor Center, and Best Western International. Plus served on the boards of the US Travel Association National Tour Association, and an elected commissioner for Visit California. Looking forward, I will be chatting with those that are helping shape the travel and tourism industry, all with unique tales to share that I know you will find both interesting and educational. So, without further ado, let's get started. I am delighted to introduce Wes Rea, CEO of Visit Stockton, and Wes has led Destination Marketing in Stockton, California since 2005, Wes is best known for being an early adopter of neuro tourism tech and data and was recently recognized as the 2022 recipient of DMA West's, Brad Berlingame Spirit of Leadership Award. He also, this is an interesting fact, he also served in the military and was a tank commander. So number one, thank you for your service and number two tank commander to leading the destination marketing in Stockton, <laugh>. So please share with the audience here your, your journey so far.

Wes Rea (02:13):

Yeah, well some would probably think that there's a, probably a lot of parallels to a tank commander and being a destination marketing leader in Stockton, California, cuz sometimes, uh, it can be a battle. But yeah, I, uh, I'm born and raised in Stockton, so I'm very fortunate to be able to lead, uh, destination marketing in my own hometown, which I love very much. Um, but yes, I was in the army from right after the Gulf War to, I actually got out of the army about three weeks after 9/11 in 2001. So I guess I just kind of threaded the needle when it came to opportunities for active combat time. But I spent my last three years in the Army, uh, as a recruiter in Northern California up in a town called Auburn and the Grass Valley area. So I ended up coming home a lot cuz I had left town for, uh, nearly a decade, um, being in the Army.

Wes Rea (03:03):

And so I realized that my hometown wasn't nearly as bad as, uh, we all think it is when we're young and we wanna get out of town. So when I returned to Stockton, I actually started working at the, uh, Chamber of Commerce and around the leadership program there and an education program there. And concurrently our city was in the process of defunding tourism in Stockton in the early two thousands because of some political reasons and budgetary reasons with the city. They decided to take away the, I guess probably nearly a quarter of a million dollars they were funding the DMO with in the early two thousands. And, uh, they actually signed an agreement with the Chamber of Commerce to, uh, kind of

do some visitor service type activities. And so that was a \$97,000 contract in 2004 with the Chamber of Commerce to do destination marketing for our city of 300,000 people.

Wes Rea (03:58):

So being as a chamber, I said, You know what, I'd had a marketing background, uh, in a way of more of a volunteer side. I had done a lot of creative stuff and some marketing stuff in high school and college related to promoting different activities. And so I always had a passion for marketing. And so I kind of raised my hand with my chamber CEO and said, this is what I wanna do. And so that was 2005 and me and my \$97,000, I don't know really what I was gonna do with all that. Uh, first thing I realized is that we need more money. And so the second year I think we were able to get it up to 110,000 and we obviously went down that path of forming a tourism business improvement district and we were able to do that by 2007 and got our budget around 300,000 at the time.

Wes Rea (04:44):

And then we just worked hard to continue to increase our, um, marketing activities. And then in 2010, we were able to double our assessment and get our tbit up to a 4% assessment on our local lodging properties. And we also assumed the role of the Sports commission, which our organization had started back in the nineties, but again had folded. So we kind of re brought back our official Stockton Convention and Visitors Bureau at the time had a 4% assessment. And today, after 17 years of doing this, we are about 1.7 million budget. And so, uh, definitely a change from a team of one at \$97,000 to a team of nine now at 1.7 million. So, uh, yeah, I've definitely, uh, kept my teeth from doing everything on my own to leading this team. So it's quite a, an exciting opportunity for us. It

Bob Gilbert (05:36):

It quite, quite a growth, uh, within a relatively short period of time. And, and then covid <laugh>. So, you know, everybody thought everything was going great and unbeknownst there was a looming shadow and it, it impacted everybody. How did it impact you? Obviously you funded by hotel tax and nobody was traveling, hence nobody was staying in hotels. What impact did that have upon your office and, you know, how did you adapt?

Wes Rea (06:04):

Well, as you know, right before Covid, every year was a record year, right? Every year was getting better and better and better then Covid came. You know, we actually weathered the storm rather well. So in two sides, number one, the Central Valley in California, while we are all hit and there was no travel, we actually saw some early recoveries soon as June and July. You know, one thing about the Central Valley in California is most of our destinations do not depend on airlift convention business or international travel. And so we are the largest city in California without a convention center. We don't depend on airlift and we don't do a lot of international travel, of course, um, you know, California does, but you know, we are not as dependent on that. And so definitely hit us hard. Our board took a people over programs approach and so they basically allowed us to maintain our staffing levels, which at the time were eight full-time employees.

Wes Rea (07:01):

And then again we did okay. I mean, of course it was devastating to our hotels, but one thing it's nice is when something like Covid happens, you know, if, if your hotels are down but nobody else is, then your hotels are throwing a fit, right? Yep. Well, of course everybody was down and so we all understood we

just had to get through this and the hotels were just struggling, but we, we, I think we were seeing 50% occupancy by that summer, maybe even in the high fifties. So we weathered it better than many others. And luckily we were able to keep our team because we ended up doing all these creative things, um, with the city's economic development department. So we actually did a couple projects, we did a healthy pledge program and we got a hundred thousand dollars in CARES Act dollars for that.

Wes Rea (07:46):

And then actually we oversaw these city's small business grant program for covid relief money. So they were \$3,000 grant that were available to small businesses. And we did all of that through our office cutting over \$3 million in checks to local small businesses because our chamber just didn't step up. A lot of chambers just don't have the ability to pivot like DMOs do. And so if we wouldn't have kept our people, we wouldn't have been able to support our community and our small business community. So it impacted us, but we recovered rather well. And I think we all know 2021 was just unreal for us in the valley here in California. So, uh, we got lucky I think, compared to some of our friends in the Bay Area. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and, uh, of course Sacramento with convention center business and international travel, still not back to normal.

Bob Gilbert (08:31):

Right. So one thing with your, with your site, your website, it is content rich, a lot of user generated content. Did you, in the heat of the battle with the pandemic, turn to your local community and explore things that perhaps assets that perhaps they had forgotten about or weren't familiar with?

Wes Rea (08:55):

We definitely took that approach during covid. We've always sort of been a destination marketing organization focused on engaging our locals. And I think a lot of that is built around the, the issue that we have with our own image. You know, Stockton has had an image challenge for decades. We don't tend to be very attraction rich and we've had some challenges with crime spikes. Of course we were hit very hard with the recession. We were ground zero for the housing collapse in many articles. And then of course, not too long after the recession, we were the largest city to file municipal bankruptcy before Detroit did. And so we just were constantly two steps forward, five steps back, uh, in Stockton. And so we always have believed that if our locals don't believe we're a place we're visiting, then how are we gonna convince the consumer externally?

Wes Rea (09:45):

And so we focus a lot on our locals with our restaurant week and Arts Week and Beer Week and a lot of activities that we've done. And a lot of our content is based on trying to get our locals to be champions for our city, but also explore our city. But during Covid we just definitely, uh, expanded upon a lot of that. And some of it was, you know, a little quirky, you know, we did movie locations or movies you can stream that were filmed in Stockton, um, because everybody was streaming and sitting at home. And so some of that content really got our locals involved. And then, you know, we had a big social justice movement during Covid of course in June and July. And so we did content around black own businesses. We created a whole directory around black own businesses and uh, tried to step up in that way. And then of course our healthy pledge program, I mean, that was all about working with our local small businesses to remind our residents that there are businesses who are taking safe measures to keep everybody healthy during the pandemic. So yeah, we, we love our locals. We have the largest events calendar in the region and we produce a lot of content and a lot of things that we do are about getting

our locals engaged in our community. So we've been thinking resident first probably before it was really cool to do that right

Bob Gilbert (10:55):

Before DI told everybody that, Hey,

Wes Rea (10:58):

<laugh> there. Yeah,

Bob Gilbert (10:59):

Right. Community shared values, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, so with that in mind, what kind of outreach do you have with your residents in, in terms of engagement, sentiment? You know, do you carry out surveys? What are the instruments that you use to gauge the sentiment of the residents?

Wes Rea (11:17):

We actually did a resident sentiment survey in 2020 and 2021. So one, we had an ambassador program for many years and that was really focused on not just the hospitality industry, but getting our residents to be community volunteers and to educate them about the power of tourism in our region and, and why we do what we do. The resident sentiment survey was a project of a small strategic plan we did with Bill Geist and really it was about figuring out our path forward, number one, about recognition of our organization, Do people know who we were, what we did? Did they understand the power of tourism? And then we really got into figuring out what we should do next because this was really focused on the residents. It wasn't about the marketing side other than, you know, why, why people were aware of what we did.

Wes Rea (12:04):

But some of it was about destination development in some ways. We were trying to figure out, you know, we live in a community that we find ourselves asking our own organization, if not us, then who? And so when we talk about festivals and events, it was getting to the point where if we wanted to have a major festival, we needed to figure out how we create that ourselves. So we started asking these questions in our resident sentiment survey about what kind of events and festivals they would like to attend or see what do they do now when they have a visitor in town, what do they bring them to do? And then we asked a lot of questions about priorities on community based things and we didn't ask about crime or homelessness, cuz in Stockton those are no brainers, right? Um, but we did get a lot of written responses and so we actually worked with our local university here, the University of Pacific and a student's class in the marketing department to actually go through all of this with the qualitative and the quantitative data and they produce a beautiful report for us. It was a great relationship with the university, but now it's something we can activate on and we go to quite often to try to figure out what we wanna do next or kind of helping this in the decision making process with our new festival, those sort of things. So that was a big undertaking, but we were very happy we got over a thousand full completions of the survey, so that's down to zip coded demographic information. So we were, we were quite happy with that for sure.

Bob Gilbert (13:25):

So with those data inputs, you know, that's part of your, well, I guess two pieces. One is the, that's your discovery phase that you then get those results back that leads into the analysis or synthesize phase and

then you, that kind of then pushes you into the creative mode. And I know that there are things that you do that are very creative in terms of cross pollination and, and you have a brew fest that actually benefits your sports foundation. How did that come to be?

Wes Rea ([14:00](#)):

The sports foundation itself? So Brew Fest is something we've done for a while. We've done Beer Weekend Brew Fest, but we created the Sports Foundation about a year and a half before the pandemic. And you know, it was really predicated on the fact that we needed a fiscal tool, honestly, to do some fundraising, you know, and, and I think there's two parts of that. One, you know, there used to be a sports commission here that was very progressive on, you know, doing the fundraising side. And once you have a destination marketing organization that's funded by a a tbid, sometimes it's just easier to pull that funding and support your sporting events. But not all sporting events that are good for your community are good for hotels, right? Yeah. So you may have ones that have great media coverage that bring a lot of day travelers to the city, but your hotels may say, Well we don't wanna invest tbid money into this.

Wes Rea ([14:46](#)):

And so the, the reason for the Sports Foundation was to help supplement this effort and either to create new events and bring new events to the city or supplement the events that Visit Stockton may wanna support but may not in the financial way that sports need funding. So we decided in the third year or fourth year of Brew Fest that we should take the Pro Sheets and split those with the sports foundation because it, it's, you know, not only is it a good fiscal tool, someone wants to donate money to visit Stockton, whereas c6 and of course they can't get a tax write off, it's better they can write it to the C3 of the foundation. That was the first thing. But also just an another way to raise money to help support our overall efforts, um, in sports marketing and tourism. So it's, it's still a work in progress. You know, sports foundations or sports marketing is a very competitive business and there's a lot of money needed to be raised for that. So we're still trying to determine, uh, what direction all that goes. But part of me thinks we also should have a regular foundation for our destination when it comes to just some of the other activities we might be able to use that for outside of the marketing space. So we'll See. Yeah.

Bob Gilbert ([15:52](#)):

So as we all are in hopefully full recovery mode, <laugh>, the ARPA dollars certainly have helped. How have you managed the ARPA dollars for Stockton?

Wes Rea ([16:06](#)):

So, uh, yeah, recovery is happening though we are soft this year, which is a, you know, I, I think we can't really put our finger on that if it's gas or inflation or people are just getting outta California now. But we were very fortunate, um, because we built a strong relationship with the city of Stockton during the pandemic and ran the small business grant program around the healthy pledge program. We did tons of PPE distribution for the city, just great partnership we had when the ARPA dollars came down through our city and our city got like \$78 million in ARPA dollars because we are, you know, the 11th largest city in California. So population drove a lot of those, um, calculations. So, you know, there's a ton of money going to homelessness and housing and economic development, but part of the thing that the city wanted to do is um, spur some downtown recovery and get people coming back to downtown Stockton.

Wes Rea ([17:00](#)):

And so they actually approached us and said, You know what? We have this ARPA dollars and we would like you to create a new signature event for Stockton. And so, you know, a lot of TMOs would run the other direction, right? When I first started getting into destination marketing, everybody was trying to get rid of events. And when you're in a city that's not very attraction rich, sometimes product development is events, right? That's how you get people into your community. So based on our resident sentiment survey, we knew there was a demand for more festivals and events activities. The city approached us because they really had the belief that we were the only organization that could pull this off in the community. Uh, and again, we had had that history. So they offered us just shy of a half a million dollars a year over three years to create an event that at the end of the three years would be self sustaining.

Wes Rea ([17:54](#)):

So we did decide to make that deal with the city. And so we did produce a festival this past May, uh, using those ARPA dollars and it was very successful and actually just won an award. So we were thrilled about that. But now the big issue is it's gotta be self-sustaining the next, uh, by 2025. And so that is obviously a big undertaking cuz events are very expensive and when you're talking about APRA dollars, there are some other components to it that the city has to be measured on, one of its equity. And so we have to make sure that the festival is accessible and affordable, all of that. And it's really focused on diversity too. So we'll see how we can make it sustainable. It's definitely, we got a big financial gap to make that happen. But again, if you're starting a new festival and those DMOs who have done that, I mean you have to start out small, right? You gotta work on your, you know, your whole vibe and theme and your first year is eh, and then your second year you grow a little and it's such a struggle. Yeah. When you get to really create the festival you want from day one because you have this financial backing, it makes a massive, uh, difference. So we feel pretty bullish that we'll be able to make it sustainable, but it's still an unknown at this point.

Bob Gilbert ([19:02](#)):

So that's a million and a half over the three years Yeah. That you have to invest. Yep. But you know, you know, journey starts with one single step and you've taken that back in May. Yeah. So where do you, where do you get your inspiration from? You are, you know, I see you in different events DI specifically and, but you are a very strong supporter of the Destination Marketing Association of the West. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, where does DI and DMA Destination Marketing Association of the West, how do they differ in the services that they provide you as a DMO?

Wes Rea ([19:39](#)):

Well, you know, you are right. I have been a big fan of DMA West and what I love about that organization is even though it covers 11 Western states and it has about 170 DMO members, it is a small family. And so it is a little bit more manageable on the ability just to make really close relationships with folks. And so, you know, a lot of my inspiration comes from my peers and like peers. And so, you know, they differ in a way that, of course I have my C DME through Destinations International and I'm continuing to be involved in the committee level there. But when it comes down to the education, sometimes it, it's so broad because of course they're trying to reach such a broader audience that DMA West for a lot of us in the west, especially destinations that are under the \$2 million budget area, it just has always been a, a great place to get quality content that's very affordable.

Wes Rea ([20:31](#)):

And that's one of the things that, you know, our text summit is super popular and you could go to that. Uh, we have great speakers from all over the tourism, marketing technology industry and you know, it's 500 bucks a person to go to and usually it's in a destination that's more affordable. And so we really try to make things, uh, affordable and, and I think that's why DMA West has been such an important part of, um, my life. But a, you know, a lot of our inspiration just comes from, like I said, my, our peers. But also I think one thing, it's the benefit of a small DMO is that we can take risks and we can be a little bolder and sometimes we fail. Um, but you know, I think sometimes the challenge with large DMOs, they overthink things way too much and it just takes too long. I mean, we can have an idea on a Wednesday and have it executed by Friday because sometimes we have to do that. And so for us, just the ability, we kind of have a culture here that we really wanna take risks and really wanna experiment with things because we're Stockton and we're a little edgy and that's just how we roll. So, Right. You know, I love being able to do that and create a culture in our team that lets people take risks and do some exploration

Bob Gilbert ([21:38](#)):

With, As an innovator yourself, do you look to partner with other companies that are also innovators? You mentioned Bandwango. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> before, which I'm not sure if everybody who is listening knows who they are, uh, Mos company and you know, they, they basically deliver custom past programs whether they're re or they're paid from an attraction perspective. What was your premise to work with them? And I like what they do. So just to be fully transparent. Sure. Um,

Wes Rea ([22:08](#)):

We we're big fans of Bandwango. Um, we were actually one of the first 10 clients and that's one of the, you know, those risk things that we talk about on being a small DMO. And I'll also just have that techy side of me. Sometimes I just feel like I see a product and I have good feeling about it. And I also, it's about buying the person who develops it. Right? If you know Mo Pica, I mean he's, he's just a great guy and he is super smart and yep. Now they have over 200 clients. And so originally it was to create a savings pass for our community. And again, it was really not about a visitor focused thing, it was more about something to get our locals engaged in supporting small businesses, but also an opportunity for us to build relationships with small businesses in our communities. So we're just about to launch, I think our seventh uh, trail, a sweets trail. We've had great success with our taco trail and we have an arts trail and bucket list trail. So you know, just in general we try to be early adopters of a lot of one, I find it cheaper. I mean honestly, if you work with a tech vendor and you're one of their first 10 clients, you tend to get some legacy pricing that you really can't beat, you know?

Bob Gilbert ([23:11](#)):

Right. They're a little bit more flexible.

Wes Rea ([23:13](#)):

Righto. I was one of their first 15 clients. And so we tend to be those early adopters because I don't know, sometimes it's just a gut and it doesn't always work sometimes, you know, we've gone through the app world before and we've done all of those and sometimes they just don't work out for us. But we do love our vendor partners cuz some of 'em are just doing some amazing stuff that we can't possibly do internally that support our efforts. And we've had some great wins in those relationships. So I think that has to be being little. I think sometimes, you know, a large DMO when they wanna work with some of 'em Bandwango, it's gotta gotta go through 15 people and all these discussions and value propositions

and KPIs and sometimes you just gotta go, this is cool, let's see what we can do with this and just jump right in. And that's typically what we've done.

Bob Gilbert ([23:55](#)):

Plus they do deliver a lot of data that is your data, right. That you can remarket with. So with all the data that's floating around and you mentioned a couple of businesses mm-hmm <affirmative> that are data providers, where do you look for the data that is gonna help you and Stockton move forward?

Wes Rea ([24:14](#)):

You know, it's interesting, we're still having a lot of these conversations that I did mention. We do work witho and, and of course there's a lot of, you know, there's a lot of conversations about geolocation data and I think a lot of the conversations around geolocation data is the validity of it, especially after Apple did a lot of their privacy stuff. There's a lot of challenges in in that, but we tend to use it, it's interesting how we make our decisions with it. You know, a lot of it tends to be really determining who our core customers, right. And I think that is where we're trying to still determine which data provider we look at in the future. We're looking at some now that are a little more self-service cuz some of the platforms that are out there are very dashboard driven and very structured and we like a little more flexibility.

Wes Rea ([24:59](#)):

Sometimes we just wanna a data provider, we can answer a simple question. I can put a geo fence around a piece of property and say, okay, who is visiting this property? Where are they coming from? How long are they staying there? And what are they doing before or after they visit this property? And these technologies are out there now. So we're trying to do more and more of using that sort of information to answer questions cuz it's such a powerful thing. You know, I mean even our Google analytics are getting messed up by this iOS thing now because now you can't see where your visitors are visiting from now. They're aggregating all of this data into, you know, you, you may look at your, um, where visitors are coming from on your Google analytics and now it says all San Francisco and LA because all your iOS visits are being funneled through large hub cities.

Wes Rea ([25:42](#)):

And so I feel data is still a questionable thing. You know, there's a lot of people jumping into this game, which I think is great because I can tell you when I first started working with the likes of maybe Aara or Arrivalist or something like that years ago, some of those platforms are like six figures because, uh, there wasn't a lot of competition. Now there's a lot of folks in this geolocation data space and it's benefiting all of us because the prices are dropping drastically, but the product's just getting better and better. So we're trying to use it more, but it's hard because in our daily lives we're so darn busy. Um, we have to step back sometimes and really dive deep into this. Uh, and we tend to do a lot of that self-service because the data providers of the world, they're busy too and they can't analyze every single question you have. So you have to kind of do a lot of self teaching to figure out what nuggets of information work the best for you.

Bob Gilbert ([26:30](#)):

So do you get the raw data that you manipulate or do they provide you with customized dashboards that make it it a little easier for your team to, Uh,

Wes Rea (26:39):

So they are customized dashboards, but again, I feel like a lot of times we, we have more questions than the customized dashboards can answer. And so we are looking at some other providers to possibly supplement some of that too. Because sometimes, you know, say for instance I have a, a large festival or an event that says I want visit Stockton and sponsor because we believe we bring in a lot of people into this community, there used to be a point in time where you just have to, you know, okay, I believe you, but now I can geo fence that event facility over that date range and I can see exactly where the people are coming from and, and those are those little questions that we love the ability to answer. But sometimes your regular data provider, it's just they can't answer every darn question cuz you'll just run 'em ragged. Right. And we don't have an in-house data person, like a large destination might. So I think for us, we're, the dashboards are great, but sometimes we just have more questions and uh, and sometimes questions just lead to more questions,

Bob Gilbert (27:31):

<laugh>. So tell me what are the, the road bumps for you as we are, you know, fully in recovery mode and you know, moving forward there's always gonna be challenges, obviously, you know, financial cost of gas, et cetera, but what are the road bumps that stop you getting the successes in achieving your recovery objectives?

Wes Rea (27:50):

That's a great question. Um, right now, staffing is not a challenge for me. So I'm very happy to say that because a lot of times finding and recruiting and retaining quality talent is a challenge. And right now I'm feeling very good. I should knock on something because, you know, it's not always the case to find good talent, uh, and build a good culture, especially in an office that we are pretty much, uh, in the office every day. Of course we spent 18 months like everybody else did, um, remote or partially remote, but now we are in the office every day. And I just, that's, I don't know if it's because I'm in my early fifties that I just believe that's the way it is or <laugh>. I also just feel like the energy that we create in our own office is so powerful that, you know, I think it's just better to be here.

Wes Rea (28:31):

And also the realities, if someone wants to work at home where they need to work at home, were obviously a lot more flexible than we would've been in 2019 to, to do that. And then, you know, our own community too. We just haven't built a new hotel in Stockton in 17 years almost. And that I, yeah, it's pretty incredible considering we are the 11th largest city in California, so we are actually opening our first hotel in 17 years in January, uh, Hampton. And so we're excited about that. So that's been a big hurdle for us.

Bob Gilbert (28:59):

I have a final question for you. S and it's not the barriers that prevent you from achieving the objectives that you've set, but what are you most excited for in 2023 and beyond for Stockton?

Wes Rea (29:12):

That's a great question. I think for us it really is, number one, our relationship with the city. You know, we have always tried to, not always, but probably in the last decade, really tried to show our value to our economic development department, our city manager, you know, our stakeholders. And I think that has continued to grow and I think the pandemic helped a lot of that because we really stepped up when

they needed us. And I think they see us as a valued partner. And I also think the conversation about economic development and tourism has also changed on the economic development side. I, you know, when you're going to economic development conferences, now they're starting to see more of the value of tourism. So for us, I think that is exciting that we are, I've built that strong relationship with the city and I, I see that as a growing opportunity to have that seat at the table in a more meaningful way other than just the tourism people.

Wes Rea ([30:01](#)):

So I think that is exciting for us. And then I think just this opportunity for data is just growing. And again, it used to not be something that a destination like Stockton could even touch. Yeah, you're Austin or San Francisco data was just something normal to you, but for us, so that's super exciting. And then again, you know, our festival, um, that is exciting for us, trying to figure out if we can make this, um, the signature festival we believe it can be. And we had great success in year one, but for me, uh, and our team we're very excited about what that means. For 2023, we proved, proved the concept, it was successful, it was safe, people had a great time. Now how do we continue that but lower our cost and increase our revenue and not have to depend on ARPA dollars, uh, beyond 2025. So for us, that's kind of my, my kind of top things there. I'm feeling pretty good about the future.

Bob Gilbert ([30:50](#)):

Wes, I wanna thank you for being on Tourism Heads and Their Tails today. You and wish you continued success with Stockton and the programs that you have and the ones that you're gonna produce.

Wes Rea ([31:01](#)):

Well, thank you for having me. I, I appreciate the opportunity to share the Stockton story and, and I appreciate that you were out there, uh, talking to tourism leaders and cuz I, we all learn from each other, right? We're always either stealing or borrowing or just, uh, asking our friends for, uh, help and assistance and, and this is a great tool to help continue to do that.

Bob Gilbert ([31:20](#)):

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