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## Interview with Sandy Crow

Kelly McPharlin

Sandy Crow

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**Interviewer:** Kelly McPharlin

**Interviewee:** Sandy Crow

**Place:** Knox County Visitors and Convention Bureau, Mount Vernon.

**Duration:** 00:28:34, 28 minutes, 34 seconds

**Co-workers present:** none

**Kelly McPharlin:** So, my name is Kelly McPharlin and I am sitting here with Samantha...

**Sandy Crow:** Sandra.

**KM:** Sandra.

**SC:** Or Sandy.

**KM:** Sandy Crow, at the Knox County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the date is Friday, February 17. Could you please state your name and occupation?

**SC:** My name is Sandra Crow, and I work part-time at the Visitors Bureau, the Knox County Convention and Visitors Bureau. I'm also one of the directors of the Dan Emmett Music and Arts Festival. We're also working on the Woodward Opera House restoration, and we manage the black box theatre called The Place at the Woodward.

**KM:** Great. Can you tell me about how the Dan Emmett festival was started?

**SC:** Well, the Dan Emmett festival was originally a downtown, uh, sidewalk promotion. They had carnivals and different things, rides, going on with it. And a lot of the big, uh, JCPenny's and Sears, left the downtown. And so it kind of diminished, uh, in activity and size. A group of local people started wanting to change it to a music and arts festival. Pat and I came on the scene maybe 10 years after that change had taken place. The group that had been doing apparently had gone to the mayor and said that they just weren't able to do it anymore, they would like to do it every couple of years or make some changes to it. And the city, uh, came to the Visitors Bureau, came to Pat and I, and asked us if we would help keep it going. And this will be our fifteenth year. It used to be a Friday night, Saturday, and then Sunday afternoon, we have since with the help of many people, it has grown into a four-day event. So it's, and we have anywhere from 20,000 plus people come to it

**KM:** So when did it originally begin?

**SC:** Uh, the festival itself?

**KM:** Yeah.

**SC:** This will be the twenty-fifth year. So however many years ago... Our first year of attending the festival was the first year we did it. Because they, Knox County Convention and Visitors Bureau during that weekend was at the state fair with displays and a booth and everything. So we really had not attended the festival or participated at all.

**KM:** And then you helped run it in... 90...

**SC:** About '98.

**KM:** Okay. So how long have you lived in Mount Vernon?

**SC:** We live in Danville, so we've never lived in Mount Vernon.

**KM:** How long have you lived in Danville?

**SC:** We moved there in 1981, that's where my husband's from. We live in his home, we purchased the home from his parents and the business, cause we used to run a plumbing and contracting business.

**KM:** So when you took over the festival, what were your goals for the festival?

**SC:** To really make it more of a showcase for Mount Vernon, to bring people into the area, to promote music and the talent. Knox County has an overabundance of talent, not just in the singing or dancing or instruments, uh, the arts, the crafts. So that was uh, one of our, I guess you'd say kind of goal along with bringing people in. We have had Peter Noon of the Herman's Hermits, if you've ever heard of him. We had him one year on Saturday night and we were told the crowd estimate was roughly about 7,000 people on the square. And they came from England, Canada, Australia, and we talked from those areas. So I know they were here from that.

**KM:** So what do you think the original intention was of the festival, when it was started in the 80s?

**SC:** I think it was for the local artisans to perform. Have a place to showcase themselves and their talents. We have four different stages going, and we have local professional people as the stage managers, the emcees, and we work with each of the groups, the kids, the adults, to help them have the opportunity to perform on a professional stage with professional sound. It's really made a big difference. Some of the youth have actually gone on and are doing either acting or performing on the West Coast and in other parts of the United States. So it does make a difference if you give them the opportunity to perform

**KM:** Was it always held in the public square?

**SC:** I think so.

**KM:** Why the public square?

**SC:** It's a focal point. Everything happens in the public square. Did you know that Clement Vallandigham spoke on the public square?

**KM:** No.

**SC:** You need to go read the plaque over there. He was the reason we have free speech during war. And that took place during the Civil War, and President Lincoln ruled in his favor, basically. So you need to go read that.

**KM:** So where is the plaque?

**SC:** The plaque is right on the square in front of the High Restaurant.

**KM:** So do you think that the public square has always had an important role in Mount Vernon's history?

**SC:** I think it has. Over the years, when we moved here in the 1980s, some Sunday evenings they would have music on the square. A local community band would do an evening performance, um. You have the First Fridays you talked about earlier, it's on the square. It's a gathering point. It's a large enough area where everyone can meet, and talk and visit, or whatever the entertainment or education is going on. That's why they do the town halls, the Woodward opera house, that was a place of meeting, that was a place of learning, it wasn't just all singing or entertainment or plays. They would have lectures, all that, so it's a point of gathering and that's very important. I'm sure that happens on Kenyon campus, somewhere either along middle path, or somewhere you have a gathering point.

**KM:** Yeah, that's very true. So what else happens at the Dan Emmett Festival?

**SC:** We have a, Thursday night we have a large band and it's pretty much been Phil Dirt and the Dozers on the stage on the square. We also have a band before them, but on our south stage we have youth bands going on, we have a cheer competition going on. We block that, uh, South Main block is packed completely with people for the cheer competition that goes on for an hour and a half. We have at the Place at the Woodward, we have the chataquas going on. We also have food on the square, and we also have arts and crafts on South Main street. All day Friday we have the same thing going on, we have entertainment on a couple of the stages, and we also have a small stage on the square. The large stage is very big, and if it's a smaller group we like to have them down so it's more intimate where people can feel a part of it, and that seems to have worked really well. We have a report that we put together, I think in 2009, it covered five years. And 98 per cent of the performers were from Knox County, so it's definitely a community festival, um, I'm just trying to think... We have a car show on Sunday, we have a motorcycle show on Sunday also now. We have had a Civil War encampment for

several years, that's, last year we changed it to, we're developing dog shows. Then presentations and that type of thing.

**KM:** So, when is the Dan Emmett festival going to happen this year?

**SC:** August 9<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup>.

**KM:** And you've started working on it already?

**SC:** Some. We've been very busy on some other projects. In the past we've been closer to having our schedule done, but I just haven't had the time.

**KM:** So who goes to the festival?

**SC:** Everybody goes. Everybody goes. We have a lot of people that come with their families. And I have seen where they have been little kids and have grown up into high school. They spread their blanket out on the square, and they just kinda take up location. We have people that come back for family reunions, school, class reunions, church reunions. They schedule them during the festival so they have a place, other things to do and see. They get to see their friends. It's very safe. You can come and you can let your children go off and do something, and you can go listen to somebody else perform, or shop, or whatever, and you don't have to worry about it. We have security here. We have had, I've talked with people that have come from as far away as Texas for the whole week. They just take their vacation, and there's no connection with Knox County or even Ohio. They ran across whoever we had as headliner that year, for whatever reason, and every year they book it and come up and have their vacation here, cause there's things to see and do here and everybody's friendly.

**KM:** How would you describe the overall mood or feel of the festival?

**SC:** Fun. Family fun. Everything is family oriented, that's... As an example, if one of our vendors who sells comes in and they have something that is questionable for family or children, we ask them not to sell it, to take it off the festival and put it away.

**KM:** How many people would you say go to the festival every year?

**SC:** I would say, I think it's a total of, conservatively, I think it's a total of 20,000 over the four days.

**KM:** Do you think, and how many people live in Mount Vernon?

**SC:** Well, it's probably, if it's within the city limits is different than the surrounding because Mount Vernon extends beyond its city limits... I'd probably say 17,000, somewhere in there.

**KM:** So almost, like you said, almost everybody...

**SC:** On Thursdays we have what we call Senior Day, during the day. There's so many people here, it's hard for the elderly to get downtown. So we started having a senior day on Thursday afternoon, they can come in on the north side of the square, and we allow them to come in and park or come in on coaches from the senior centers, or whatever, to drop the people off so they can enjoy the fair festival food, have music, if they want to walk around, if they're able to, to come down and walk around. We generally have 12 to 15 or more little booths and tables set up dealing with senior difficulties. So if they have a problem they can go and talk to them, get information, do whatever, and then leave by 5. And before the rush and the pack of people come in, that way it gives them a chance to be out and enjoy themselves. How else are you gonna be young if you can't go out and do it?

**KM:** So when you first took over the festival, what was the initial reaction of the community?

**SC:** They were just glad that it was still taking place.

**KM:** And do you think that's changed at all, people's opinions of the festival?

**SC:** I'm not so sure from the standpoint of people's opinions, it's more that we've gotten to know more people, and more people have gotten to know us. And they've seen and know what the goals are, and the expectations. In working with people, when Pat and I the first year did it, we only had a few volunteers who stayed with, to help us do it. And now we probably have a core community of 30 to 40 people, and they each have their own committee groups. So we have probably anywhere from one to two hundred people that volunteer to do it. And everybody is a volunteer. Pat and I do not get paid to do it either.

**KM:** So would you say there's a big amount of support for the festival?

**SC:** There's a huge amount of support for the festival.

**KM:** Why do you think that is?

**SC:** Because the festival is a family, Knox County is a family. Why do you like it here? You've been here four years. Do you like it here?

**KM:** Yeah.

**SC:** Do you feel like it's home? That's why.

**KM:** How has the festival changed in the past 15 years.

**SC:** Well it used to be not quite a two day festival, and I think the budget was probably somewhere under \$20,000 when it, the last year, cause we were just given a few

documents. We basically built from scratch when we took it over. It's now roughly, about an \$80,000 festival. And we do not take admissions, we do not charge, it's all done by sponsorships and then the percentage of the food and the, of the selling of the booth spaces. But everybody that performs each, we have what we call a youth showcase and that's Thursday and Friday at noon, and then Saturday somewhere in the afternoon, anywhere from one to two hours. And that's basically set up for the younger kids that have never performed but really want to. So they come and perform. When they reach a point that they can do a 15, 20 minute show by themselves, then we try to schedule them on the stage, so that they can get more, a different level of experience and training. They then at that point receive \$50 for performing so that everybody will get some type of, if you wanna call it gas money or something, just to know that they've done something and it's not just volunteering to do a fun thing. This is, okay I'm getting paid, they're expecting something from me (laughs).

**KM:** So through the youth showcase, what are you trying to encourage or how did you come up with that idea?

**SC:** Young people's talents. I mean they can play the piano, they can play an instrument, they can sing, they can dance, whatever talent. We've even had them do readings. So it's to develop yourself, to develop a self-confidence to go on.

**KM:** How would you describe the festival in three words?

**SC:** I would say it's family fun.

**KM:** That's great. Does the location impact the mood of the festival, do you think? Having it on the square?

**SC:** Um, I'm not sure how you mean impact it. Everyone's drawn to the square, so everything goes there. It's a great opportunity to have it downtown, and for people, new people, to come into downtown, to see downtown, the shops, what is available here. The friendliness. We've had a lot of artisans and different people move here, into Knox County or into Mount Vernon because of the festival. They liked in so much that they eventually moved here when they retired, or moved their business or whatever.

**KM:** What is your favorite part of the festival?

**SC:** Well, one of my favorite parts we don't do anymore. We used to bring up the all-Ohio state band from the fair. When we first brought them up, there were 300 kids from all over the state that performed in the fair band, then they went down to like, oh probably 250. But the fair shortened their time and so by the time we have the festival, the fair is done and the kids are back home. So that was my favorite.

**KM:** Do you have any favorite memories?

**SC:** Oh, lots. Lots of them. Um, the biggest, uh, from that standpoint is working with all the people, all the great friends that we've made. We, when we get together and have our committee meetings, everybody shares. And that's, that's a great memory, is how everything just happens. Someone takes on a responsibility like the cheer competition, she just tells us what she needs, and that's it. It happens. It's great.

**KM:** What do you like about being involved in the festival, about the organization?

**SC:** The friends.

**KM:** Do you think that, um, if a new, someone who just moved to Knox County or Mount Vernon came to the festival, do you think it's a friendly place for them to meet new people?

**SC:** Oh, absolutely. We hear it all the time. People will stop and say something, people came for a specific entertainment, and start talking with somebody, and they'll say, "Oh great, well you gotta see this, or you gotta go there," and telling the history of the area, and they were just really, really impressed with it.

**KM:** How do you think people in the community view the public square in general?

**SC:** They would really miss it if it was gone. You know, you get into a routine of driving certain routes and you don't see it. If it was gone, everybody would see that it was gone. I think they would really miss it.

**KM:** How do you think of the public square?

**SC:** Oh, it's great. I love it. We were just up there, oh, about a half hour ago.

**KM:** What do you like to do on the square?

**SC:** Generally we are to or from an activity. But it's a nice place to just go and sit, and watch the water at the fountain. The fountain is very historic, along with the statue.

**KM:** Are there any changes in the festival that you would like to see?

**SC:** Not sure. That's yet to be determined because we make small changes every year. There's something different. You may not even realize it or notice it, but there are.

**KM:** Are you happy with the way it is now?

**SC:** Yeah.

**KM:** That's great. Do you think the creation of the festival has drawn more people to the square in general? Like, not even during the festival time?



**SC:** I think it's made people aware of the square especially if they're from outside the area or even the surrounding towns.

**KM:** So when the festival is happening, is there a big increase in commerce in the local stores?

**SC:** There's some, I know if you talk to the store, the shopowners, some will say a lot, some will say not very much. And it depends on what's happening that day, if people want to carry it, or walk it back to their car. I've seen and had people tell me, "Well, I saw it at the festival, I came back to get it after the festival." So there's a lot that happens, and I don't think people notice or even realize that, that people come back over the next week or two or three and do their shopping, because they saw it earlier.

**KM:** Have you noticed any other more informal gatherings that happen at the public square, such as rallies?

**SC:** They do, there's, I'm just trying to think, they have different awareness type weeks or days, and I've seen they've put posters up, or tables out. The farmers market is on there every Saturday when the weather's nice, and that's packed. You can't find any place nearby to park because there's so many people down here for that. So it's a very active square.

**KM:** Do you like to go to the farmers market?

**SC:** Yes, and I almost come away with too much (laughs)

**KM:** Why do you go to the farmers market?

**SC:** You go to the farmers market for lots of things, and it's not just for buying food. There's flower there, there's gardens there, but there's visiting there, and there's a lot of that. And on First Fridays you see a very lot of that, people are sitting around in chairs, visiting, you can see the little groups visiting and talking, and they'll get up and move to another group. The older people miss that, the younger people are learning that, I guess that's what you could say.

**KM:** Do you think the farmers market and First Fridays and the Dan Emmett are creating a revitalization of the public square?

**SC:** They are, yeah.

**KM:** Have you noticed changes because... I know the farmers market is fairly recent.

**SC:** It's been going on for quite awhile, it keeps growing in size and everything. Um, the city has done a lot with the square to make it compatible with these events. They've always maintained it beautifully. But like the canopy, the mayor raised the canopy, or cut down the bushes when they've gotten too large, or whatever. But it's always people-

friendly, which makes it really nice. And you know, maintaining the sidewalk around it. You see the fence, the wire designed fence around the statue. It's because kids were rollerblading up and on it.

**KM:** I heard about that.

**SC:** I'm sure you did. So the city put the fence around it to protect it. But it's still family friendly.

**KM:** Do you think that there could be other events...

**SC:** Oh there's always more that you could do, it's just a matter of time and interest. It's always gotta be fun, it has to have a happy draw, a fun draw, something that interests people.

**KM:** Do you think people go to the square informally, you know, on a daily basis to walk or spend time with friends there?

**SC:** They do, I've seen them. When the weather's really nice, you'll see people sitting out on the benches eating lunch.

**KM:** What do you like to do most on the public square?

**SC:** Probably just walk quietly through and around it. I've forgotten the walk of honor is there, it's nice to go and if there's family or someone you know there, to look at these things.

**KM:** So what do you think the greater benefits of the festival have been for the community?

**SC:** Well, economic development. It brings a lot of, I guess you would call it new money, into the community because people are coming in from outside the area. They're spending their money, staying a few nights or whatever it is, and then leaving without changing the infrastructure. Just making everyone aware of what's here so that they'll come back on a recurring basis. You know, come back to eat, come back to shop, that type of thing.

**KM:** Do you have any hopes for the future of the festival or the public square?

**SC:** Well, the festival, we just want it to keep going and growing. That's I think probably our biggest thing. And, like I said, we have a lot of people working towards it.

**KM:** That's great. Do you have anything else that I haven't mentioned or we haven't talked about that you think is important?

**SC:** Not that I can think of (laughs).