

Jeff Around Town – November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Jeff:** Time now for another edition of Jeff Around Town. Joining me right now, Matt Kalcevich, Director of Omaha Parks, Recreation, and Public Property, too. Good morning, Matt.

**Matt:** Good morning, Jeff, thanks for having me.

**Jeff:** Absolutely, thanks for being here. So, until I was asked to join the Omaha Arts Commission, I had kind of heard of it, but I didn't really know much about it, and now that I've been there for a while, it's really incredible, but it's under the auspices of Omaha Parks and Rec.

**Matt:** That's correct, we have the pleasure and privilege of working directly with that group that is really the overseer of all public art that's being brought into the community. And it's an incredible group, a diverse mix of artists representing all types of mediums and genres, and we're so glad to have you be involved now and be contributing the information you have to the process. And so, yeah, wonderful to be the lead on that, and just a privilege and a pleasure, like I said, to work with that group.

**Jeff:** And there are, how many members? I'm trying to count, eight, 10?

**Matt:** Nine, is where we try and live. And so, again, that's a board, a mayor's appointed commission, and so we're always looking for the right mix of voices, input to just help us really navigate what the charge is with bringing that public art and representing that to the community.

**Jeff:** And so, my impressions at first were, while we approve public works that are gonna be shown in public, of course, but it goes beyond that.

**Matt:** It is, it's definitely a place where we're bringing ideas in to provide feedback, to provide input to the arts community, artist community. We've got different touch points in terms of just all the places where we have public installations, whether it be through Parks and Recreation, the libraries, other city buildings and entities, and then just the public spaces that are available to the community in general. And it's a lot about just making sure that it's really the best, most viable product that's really gonna be the most engaging for people as well. So, there's a lot of different dynamics, but I think this group, again, really captures a lot of that very well.

**Jeff:** I love that you used the word engaging because it feels like the commission and members of the public and artists and those organizations that come in, pitching the next project, it's almost more of a conversation.

**Matt:** Absolutely, and I certainly want it to be a catalyst. And I know that the group that's there right now, and thank you again for the way you've championed this, is really trying to open the conversation, trying to bring new ideas, trying to bring more notoriety and exposure to the way that the arts community, the artists in the community, and this is a piece of that through the commission, is really trying to make people more aware, trying to bring more access. And so, I think there's a collective synergy that we're building. And I'm so glad that this commission is a part of that. And I really want people to know about the inspiration and

motivation of this group to be the one to help lead the charge or come alongside the arts community that's already doing that to be part of growing that faster and making it bigger.

**Jeff:** And members of the public are welcome to sit in.

**Matt:** Absolutely, yeah, please. We invite anybody to join us who wants to hear more about what's evolving, what's coming, what's being shared, the range and diversity of what we're dealing with, whether it be murals, statues, classic paintings, the things that are being put up and out in the community. We're trying to even get better and stronger. And I think you've seen part of this process, and it started a few years ago, just about providing tools to the community so they can go see the list of all the things that are available. And again, be more accessible, be more in touch, and educate people about these things that are just so special that we care about so much and just have it be something that's more in the public eye.

**Jeff:** So briefly, you're not originally from Omaha. You haven't even been here all that long, right?

**Matt:** Well, time flies. I'm coming up on my four-year anniversary. But yeah, originally from Orange County, California. Most of my family all still live out there, but I am a lover and supporter of the arts. I actually have my bachelor's degree in theater performance. I was a director performer for a long time. My wife is an accomplished trumpet player. My younger son is with the Youth Symphony here in town through UNO now, wonderful partnership. My older son is a drummer. So, we've really got plugged into the full scope of the arts community here and again, why I feel so passionate and so privileged to be part of the Arts Commission specifically.

**Jeff:** And it seems like things are really on the upswing in arts and culture. And I'm just asking from your perspective, someone who hasn't been here more than four years or so.

**Matt:** Oh yeah. I agree 100%. When I started, there were some conversations happening, but it's really taken off with the way that the Gene Leahy Mall and that project was able to incorporate such a prominent space in that park to be public art and the way that's gonna change. Just even recently with the Joslyn and the energy and excitement that's grown about that. But those are maybe some of the bigger pieces. To your point, we've got some projects and some tentacles reaching out into different pockets now of the community where people are gonna really be impacted, really be able to feel some of the input and the inspiration of the arts community, the artists. And we wanna be a part of that. And we're trying to make that be something that people are just that much more aware of. And it's that much easier for them to access and experience.

**Jeff:** Matt, can you tell folks how they can find out more about the Omaha Arts Commission?

**Matt:** Yeah, so again, our meetings are monthly. We post them on our website, [parks.cityofomaha.org](https://parks.cityofomaha.org). And we also have those on the mayor's site as well. It's one of the, again, many boards and commissions that are across the city. And we post that information publicly. So come visit with us, reach out. We're happy to help.

**Jeff:** Matt, thanks so very much for joining me. I'm Jeff Around Town.

**Matt:** My pleasure.

**Jeff:** All righty.