



Downtown Little Rock Partnership

INNOVATION

Shadows at Sixth: An Elevated Halloween Drive Thru is unlike any event seen in Little Rock before. Held in a multi-level parking deck in downtown Little Rock, this drive-thru, family-friendly event was created to safely bring joy and fun to Central Arkansans in a time of uncertainty and isolation. With this project our goal was two-fold: to create a fun, family-friendly event that was safe to attend and to help support organizations that have been economically damaged by the shutdowns caused by COVID-19. One of our main challenges was where to hold this event. The answer was found in our own parking deck! We were able to close off the upper levels of our parking deck and create the event on the top three floors. This allowed the lower levels to remain in daily use. We focused on haunted folklore from Arkansas and wrote a script of these tales that was broadcast to cars on a continuous loop via an FM transmitter. We worked with the Little Rock Zoo and the Arkansas Repertory Theatre to create vignettes and design the upper decks to look like you were driving through the swamps and backwoods of Arkansas. In addition to our spooky installations, we had a lighting company build us an LED lit 'tree' that stretched through all six floors of the parking garage and soared 20 additional feet over the top with a 45-foot diameter reach over the deck. The tree could be seen for blocks around downtown.

OUTCOME

Shadows at Sixth ran for 24 consecutive days. All of our staff switched from working days to working nights. Over these 24 days, we had 5,703 cars come through the deck. We roughly estimated this at 22,756 people who attended the event, based on the average of about four people per car (albeit that was a low average as most cars were packed.) People came from all over the state, many who were not familiar with downtown Little Rock. We held three Bike Nights where people could ride their bicycles through the deck before any cars arrived. If anyone's vehicle was too tall to come into the deck, we had a golf cart standing by to take them through. We had sponsored school nights, where the school would receive 10% of the total revenue taken at the event that night. Discounts were given to our local colleges and hospitals. "Two for Tuesday" allowed families to go through twice in one evening (a big hit with our littlest visitors!).

With this event, we were able to support three non-profits directly, including our own, and an event design company, all of which had been negatively impacted by COVID-19. Shadows at Sixth was an event that was created out of a pandemic environment. It was stimuli in isolation, and this gave us a captive audience.

EXECUTION

In July of 2020, we opened discussions with the Little Rock Zoo, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, and CWP Productions. All of us were in the throes of event cancellations, and in some cases, employee furloughs. At these meetings, we created roles for each organization, making categorized lists of what inventory each company had on hand to add to this event and the overall theme we were going to present. Fundraising was important but challenging as all companies had few additional funds they could part with. However, we managed to gain 20 local sponsors for the event, which greatly offset our costs. The Little Rock Zoo came on as a partner and gave a majority of their Halloween supplies from their cancelled "Boo at the Zoo" event. The Arkansas Repertory Theatre and CWP agreed to come on as vendors, with The Rep designing vignettes including spooky trees, the Crescent Hotel and courthouse that lit up, costumes and figures, and CWP creating a spooky atmosphere through special-effect lighting, fog machines, and additional props. Each company alone is a true master of their craft but bringing them together allowed us to have some of the best creative minds in Little Rock.

REPRESENTATION

The main players of Shadows at Sixth were the Downtown Little Rock Partnership, Little Rock Zoo, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, and CWP Productions. Each organization brought invaluable skill and advice to the creation of Shadows. Knowing that traffic could be a problem, we worked directly with the city and the local police department to close off streets and help direct traffic. We contacted local businesses and residences to let them know about the event, especially since it was going on for so long.

People from a widely diverse set of backgrounds attended and volunteered for the event. From the beginning, we aimed to make this an event that was welcoming to everyone: all ages, races, socio-economic statuses, etc. We were proud of our inclusivity efforts and could tell they had paid off when seeing the wide range of people in each car that came through. This was perhaps the most diverse group of attendees we have ever had at an event in the ways described above, but also geographically. Occasionally we would ask people where they were from and we were surprised to hear many people drove lengthy distances from towns and cities outside Little Rock to visit Shadows at Sixth.

REPLICATION

We learned a lot from this project. However, what we really took in was that we could do this again. People enjoyed it, and it brought a little bit of joy into the lives of others. The event gave visibility to some businesses that have perhaps been forgotten underneath the turmoil of 2020, and also gave us the chance to partner with outside groups that we had not partnered with before. This project could be done in any town and scaled to fit any space. While the parking deck helped us to create a bit of intrigue and allowed us to separate the spaces in-between vignettes, the same impact could be created within a large parking lot or a long, open road. Emphasizing lighting to direct the viewer's eyes to see what is being presented gives you the ability to control the surroundings and helps in creating a sense of anticipation. The more the outside world can be blocked out the better the illusion can be.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

There was no shortage of challenges with this project. The complexity of safely organizing an event that required volunteers in the midst of a pandemic was the first obstacle to overcome. We were able to establish teams, build out the volunteer posts in a way where people were distanced, and went through plenty of sanitizer. Fundraising was another large obstacle to clear. Early on we were able to get a few folks interested, but if it had not been for a local bank stepping up in a big way, we would not have had the confidence to move forward. As a result of that partnership, we received our largest sponsorship to date for an event.

And finally, we had no idea if anyone would even show up and pay to see this when it would certainly not be your typical haunted house with things jumping out at you. Creative social media coupled with the fact that there wasn't much competition for attention, the first post announcing the event went wild. At that point, we knew we had something that was going to work.