

UWO alumni help set the stage for Country USA 2013

by Alyssa Kadansky - Tuesday, June 18, 2013

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Oshkosh's well-known Country USA and Rock USA festivals would not exist without the work of University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus Steve Lenz '73, who takes center stage in helping organize and execute some of Wisconsin's greatest music events.

Country USA is scheduled to kick-off June 25 at Ford Festival Park in Oshkosh, with headliner Eric Church set to perform at 10:30 p.m. The festival runs through June 29 and also features stars like Sheryl Crow, Toby Keith, Dierks Bentley and more.

A UWO graduate with a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in sociology, Lenz's experience with organizing concerts and events began when he was a student. He was the founder and chair for what is now the Oshkosh Student Association (OSA) Concert Committee. His true passion was organizing the concerts and other events that took place on campus every couple weeks.

"I valued my time at UWO," Lenz said. "I started with concerts, it's what I've done my whole life."

While at UWO, Lenz also developed long-term relationships with his professors, especially Alex Belinfante, whom he later helped teach a class called Economics of Art, Entertainment and Leisure.

With experience during his undergraduate years in event organization, Lenz established a business relationship with Starshow Presents, the company predominantly responsible for organizing such events as Country USA and Rock USA. He works very closely with Dan Leibhauser, the booking agent for Starshow Presents.

"We worked together even before Country USA," Lenz said. "Dan was the booking agent and I brought the bands."

Lenz was in charge of taking care of the acts, travel, food, stage lighting and other technical aspects of the festivals. He now does the same with Country USA, one of Oshkosh's most popular and profitable events. His primary responsibilities during Country USA include managing contracts, recruiting bands and negotiating and executing riders, part of the booking contract that contains a list of what each artist requires to perform.

UW Oshkosh alumnus Jeff Potts, the Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau's marketing director, has known Lenz for nearly 10 years and calls him "the guy at Country USA."

"Steve really makes things happen out there," Potts said. "He is a great all-around guy and has been part of the entertainment industry for a long time."

Potts received his bachelor's degree in communication in 2007 from UW Oshkosh as a nontraditional

returning student. He said his early experiences at UW Oshkosh opened his eyes to different genres of music and the events that take place in Oshkosh. His experience in the radio industry, print media and nonprofit arts marketing and development led him to his current position at the Convention and Visitors Bureau where he helps market big events like Country USA.

“Country USA has experienced remarkable growth in the past decade and has been the foundation for other events,” Potts said.

Country USA is the first big event of the Oshkosh’s music and event season that also includes Lifest and Rock USA; the city anticipates welcoming up to 100,000 guests during the upcoming country music festival and nearly 1 million people throughout the summer’s events and concerts.

“We’re expecting it to be pretty good and to have strong ticket sales,” Lenz said. “We’re hoping it’ll be easy and smooth.”

Potts appreciates all that Country USA and Lenz do for marketing the Oshkosh event.

“Steve’s access and artists’ access is big for marketing—he makes it happen,” Potts said. “Country USA has provided a model for other great events. It has provided confidence for Lifest and, more recently, confidence for Rock USA. Steve makes it happen.”

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