

Statement from the Pauls Valley Tourism Board Regarding the Toy and Action Figure Museum

The Pauls Valley Tourism Board recognizes the Toy and Action Figure Museum as a unique attraction that has brought visitors to our community for more than twenty years. However, the recent statement issued by museum founder Kevin Stark does not present the complete picture of the relationship between the museum, the Tourism Board, and the City of Pauls Valley.

The claim that Pauls Valley has failed to support the museum is not supported by the facts. Over the years, more than \$270,000 in tourism funding has been provided for the Toy and Action Figure Museum. That represents a substantial and long standing commitment from this community.

This is also not the first time museum leadership has publicly questioned the community's support. In 2010, museum representatives publicly discussed moving the museum to Bricktown and seeking an investor to help finance the move. Pauls Valley responded through a community fundraising effort involving local citizens, businesses, merchants, and the City. News 9 reported that donations increased by twenty to thirty times their previous amount. The museum then announced that it would remain in Pauls Valley.

That history, combined with more than \$270,000 in tourism funding, does not support the claim that Pauls Valley has refused to support the museum.

It is also important to understand how tourism funding works. The money available to the Tourism Board does not come from the City's general sales tax revenue. It comes specifically from a lodging tax collected on overnight hotel stays within Pauls Valley. Revenue from restaurant meals, retail purchases, and fuel sales benefits the City through sales tax, but it does not replenish the lodging tax account used for tourism funding.

As lodging tax collections have declined, the amount available to support attractions and events has become increasingly limited. Clearer guidelines, firm deadlines, and greater accountability are necessary so the Tourism Director and Tourism Board can prepare a responsible annual budget and evaluate requests consistently.

The Tourism Board's funding guidelines align with State of Oklahoma tourism funding guidelines. Every organization requesting tourism funding must complete the required application and follow the same guidelines, deadlines, and accountability requirements.

Organizations that typically request assistance with recurring annual expenses were notified with sufficient time to complete and submit an application before the March 31 deadline. The deadline allowed anticipated annual requests to be considered during the budgeting process and was not created specifically for the Toy and Action Figure Museum.

The museum's billboard request was not left out because the Board considered the museum unworthy of support or preferred one day events over a year round attraction. It was not included because it was not submitted by the March 31 deadline established for recurring

annual funding requests. Making an exception after the deadline would be unfair to every organization required to follow the same process.

The same financial scrutiny has been applied to tourism events administered by the City. Event budgets and spending have been reduced, and grants and other sources of assistance have been pursued. With less lodging tax revenue available, everyone receiving tourism assistance is being asked to operate more efficiently and seek additional funding sources.

During the meeting in which the museum's billboard was discussed, a private donor offered to pay for it. Community members, City Council members, and representatives of other organizations have also offered to help museum leadership identify grants and pursue funding outside the limited lodging tax account. Those offers demonstrate that support for the museum continues to exist throughout Pauls Valley.

Successful tourism also requires cooperation among the City, businesses, events, organizations, and attractions. The Toy and Action Figure Museum has not consistently been open during major tourism events and promotions, including Okie Noodling, BrickFest, and Thursday evening Christmas in the Valley activities. When visitors are already downtown, these events provide the museum with valuable opportunities to welcome guests, support surrounding businesses, and demonstrate its role in Pauls Valley tourism.

The current Tourism Board and City Council cannot speak for every conversation or alleged comment involving former officials over the past twenty five years. We can speak for the decisions being made today. Those decisions are based on available lodging tax revenue, established guidelines, completed applications, firm deadlines, and the responsibility to evaluate requests consistently.

Tourism Board meetings are open to the public. Anyone with questions about funding decisions, the application process, or how lodging tax revenue is allocated is encouraged to attend a meeting and review the information firsthand.

The challenges facing the Toy and Action Figure Museum are not the result of a lack of support from Pauls Valley. Moving forward will require cooperation, participation in community tourism efforts, additional funding sources, and a sustainable plan that does not depend primarily on the limited lodging tax revenue administered by the Tourism Board.

Sources documenting the proposed 2010 move and Pauls Valley's response:

[The Journal Record: "Toy museum may be headed to Bricktown," March 31, 2010](#)

[News 9: "Toy and Action Figure Museum to Stay in Pauls Valley," September 8, 2010](#)