
Smartphone help for Independence tourists – and others

By The Examiner staff

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The city of Independence is offering a new tool to help both visitors and residents more easily get around to see historic sites and other attractions.

“It is for everyone. ... It’s to get more (people) engaged,” the city’s tourism manager, Kristi Eckfeld, said Wednesday evening at a roll-out event on the Square.

Grab it for your phone by searching for “Find Your Independence” in the iTunes store or the Google Play Store. It’s free.

Call it up, and you’ll see four icons: tour, game, photobooth and time travel. Those are meant to be both helpful and playful. The game, for instance, is based on the Oregon Trail, which started here 175 years ago. The time travel part about the city’s past, starting in 1800, a quarter-century before the city was officially founded.

“It’s the most complete, succinct history of Independence,” said Allison Mincher, special projects coordinator for OnCell, which the city hired to develop the app.

And the app will ping you to get your attention as you pass near such historic sites as the 1859 Jail and Clinton’s Soda Fountain. A handful of those sites are loaded now, with more to be added over time. It also can cue you to help find a restaurant.

Mayor Eileen Weir said this is the sort of service people have come to expect when they travel and explore a new city. Fewer maps, pamphlets and planning, she said, and more spontaneity.

The City Council approved developing the app, and Weir said that among other things it helps show that “... we want to respect and celebrate our history, but we’re not a town of the past.”

The app roll-out was part of a busy week for the tourism office. City employees and volunteers will be busy starting today and all weekend with attractions along Main Street from Lexington to Kansas, all centered around an 1849 theme. It’s part of Santa-Cali-Gon Days, which starts at noon today. There are games, a one-room schoolhouse, a jail, quilting, rope-making and even panning for gold. It’s all free except for the popular photo booth.

“It’s going to be bigger and better than last year,” Eckfeld said.

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