

## Lowell resident brings her storytelling to Grand Rapids

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By Bill Lee, Contributing Writer, Lowell Ledger

Candice Smith has always loved storytelling. In the past, she had worked as a television producer, a reporter for National Public Radio in Grand Rapids, and an international public relations associate at Amway. In 2017, she began working for a tourism company and discovered she was actually quite good at it, and was even recognized as "[Tourism Ambassador of the Year](#)" in Kent County. Then, her company went out of business, abruptly, in the same year. So, being the positive person she is, instead of doing something else, in 2018 Smith decided to start her own company, [Tours Around Michigan](#). "I love tourism and sharing with people," said Smith. "It's all storytelling. It's really fun to share things with people and get people excited about things."



**Candice Smith.** (Photo from [Tours Around Michigan Website](#))

A Lowell resident, who has raised her family in town for over twenty years, Smith works out of her home in Lowell but conducts most of her public and private tours in Grand Rapids. Tours are around 90-minutes long and clients can choose from a unique slate of possible tours, including [Downtown Grand Rapids](#), [Art Museums](#), [Churches](#), [Ghost Tours](#), The [Riverfront](#) Area, [Brewery](#), [Wine](#), and [Distillery](#) Tours. Her clientele span from those visiting Grand Rapids for the very first time to those who have lived in the area their entire lives. "We have some people from other countries but also local people too who didn't know about some buildings in Grand Rapids even if they grew up here," said Smith. "It's fun to get people excited about an area that they grew up in."

After a couple of years getting established, [Tours Around Michigan](#) seemed to be hitting its stride, booking not only locals but groups from other states, as well. Then, of course, the global Covid pandemic hit, halting business for most people but especially those in the travel industry. Smith admits that it wasn't easy. "Anything related to tourism was hit by Covid, and I had a big year planned in 2020," said Smith. "I had to pivot. I did use the time to do some deeper work, make some changes; made a new website that just launched in 2021. Also, one of the first steps was that you could be outside with masks with less than 15 people so tours could do that. If people were itching to do something at that time, we were one of the few options. I restarted outdoor tours in July of 2020, where I could take groups outside. Everyone was required to wear a mask and keep social distance."

During that time, one of her tours, ironically, started becoming more popular: The [Ghost Tours](#). People seemed to want to do something fun during the difficult time and an outdoor walking ghost tour seemed to fill a void and helped to provide some creepy "live" entertainment for those who were couped up. In a way, Smith thinks The Ghost Tours may have even saved her business. She would take people to a few haunted buildings in Grand Rapids, particularly St. Cecilia's Music Center, a place that embraces their haunted history. "When I'm giving the tour, I'm usually across the street from it, and people have had experiences," said Smith. "There's one place, while we are standing there on other side of the street, where sometimes people will be touched. It's a very specific feeling, a woman's hand on their left side. There's one room in that building where people have felt that someone was hovering above their head, or felt pressure pushing down on their head, in one room in St. Cecilia's." Recently, to make the ghost tour even more memorable, she has started offering "[creepy dolls](#)" for people to carry while they are on the tour. She always strives to make things more fun for her patrons.

She also has worked hard to provide equal access to all of her clients with physical disabilities and is proud to be known as the [first tour company in the US to be endorsed by two disabilities associations](#). "I've always tried to do a little better in that area; it's really about what you should do," said Smith. "Why wouldn't I make sure that people in wheelchairs can do the tour? Or why wouldn't I work with a sign-language interpreter? With any of my clients, I try to help them connect to what we are sharing, and what they are seeing, and people connect in different ways. Unfortunately, most travel companies don't look at it the same way. I'm always trying to think of how things could be more accessible."

In the end, she does her best to provide some historical background and specific stories to every tour she provides, whether it is a walk through downtown Grand Rapids or a [Church tour](#), where she provides the history of some of the immigrants who founded each church. She loves what she does and even plans on expanding in the future. Smith plans on bringing in new people to her company, as business grows. Some of her future ventures include E-Bike tours in historic Ada, group tours in Holland, and starting tours in Traverse City. You can find out more about Tours Around Michigan at the website [ToursAroundMichigan.com](#)

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