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TOP STORY

Meet your Grand Canyon waitress Molly McKee

May 8, 2022

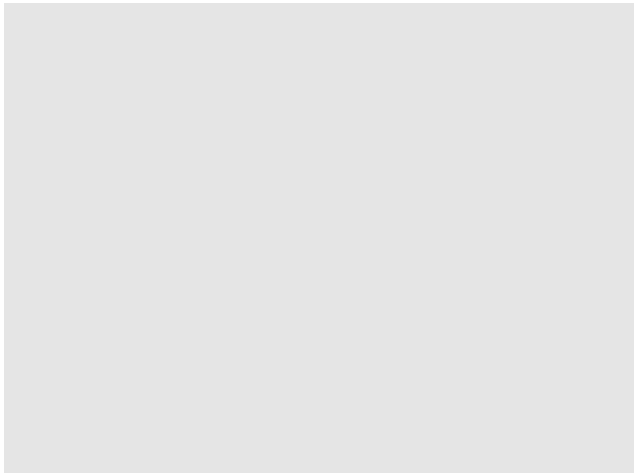


Molly McKee, a Frankfort native, is a tour guide in the Grand Canyon with her company Above and Beyond Grand Canyon Tours. (Photo submitted)

The COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of 2020 ended up being a time of reflection for many people. One person who did just that was Frankfort native Molly McKee.

A 2004 Frankfort High School graduate, McKee had been working for Grand Canyon tour companies in Arizona since January 2010. When the shutdown hit, she and her husband, Cory Lander, decided to take the time to start the process of starting their own business, Above and Beyond Grand Canyon Tours.

After high school, McKee attended Western Kentucky University and graduated in 2009 with a degree in geology and a minor in outdoor leadership studies. Before graduating, she spent a couple of summers working as a white water rafting guide in upper New York, on the Indian and Hudson rivers.



In 2010, she moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, to be a tour guide in the Grand Canyon. For the first two years she worked for Angel Gate Tours before switching to work for All Star Tours, where she still works a few times a week along with working for herself.

While she worked with Angel Gate Tours, she met Lander and they got married June 14, 2019. He has been a guide in the Grand Canyon for 15 years.

Molly McKee, a Frankfort native, and her husband, Cory Lander, are tour guides in the Grand Canyon with their company Above and Beyond Grand Canyon Tours. (Photo submitted)

During the shutdown, they lived at Lander's parents' home in California and began the discussion about starting their own business.

"We decided we had been doing this for so long and working for several different companies, that we could do this on our own," McKee said. "He (Lander) knew the business side of things. I did not."

McKee said she knew the customer service side of things, and is a great people-person, a skill she gained while working as a waitress throughout college.

"I'm kind of like your Grand Canyon waitress," she said. "I'm with you all day long. The Grand Canyon is so huge, it's nice to have someone show you around."

It took them a year to be able to purchase a company vehicle — a Ford Transit — because of the chip shortage that vehicle manufacturers were experiencing. They finally received it in February of this year and ran their first tour in March.

"We go rain or shine all year around, but not on Christmas or Thanksgiving," McKee said. "We're not busy in the winter. Peak time is spring break — March-April. At the end of April though May, we'll have down time, but on Memorial Day we get slammed."

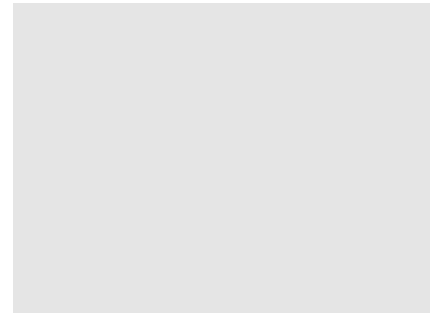
And, she expects to remain busy giving tours to families and groups all summer long.

During the tours, McKee said she and her husband interpret everything the guests are seeing.

"My degree is in geology, so that's the focus of my tour," McKee said. "My husband is a history buff, so he knows a lot of the Native American heritage."

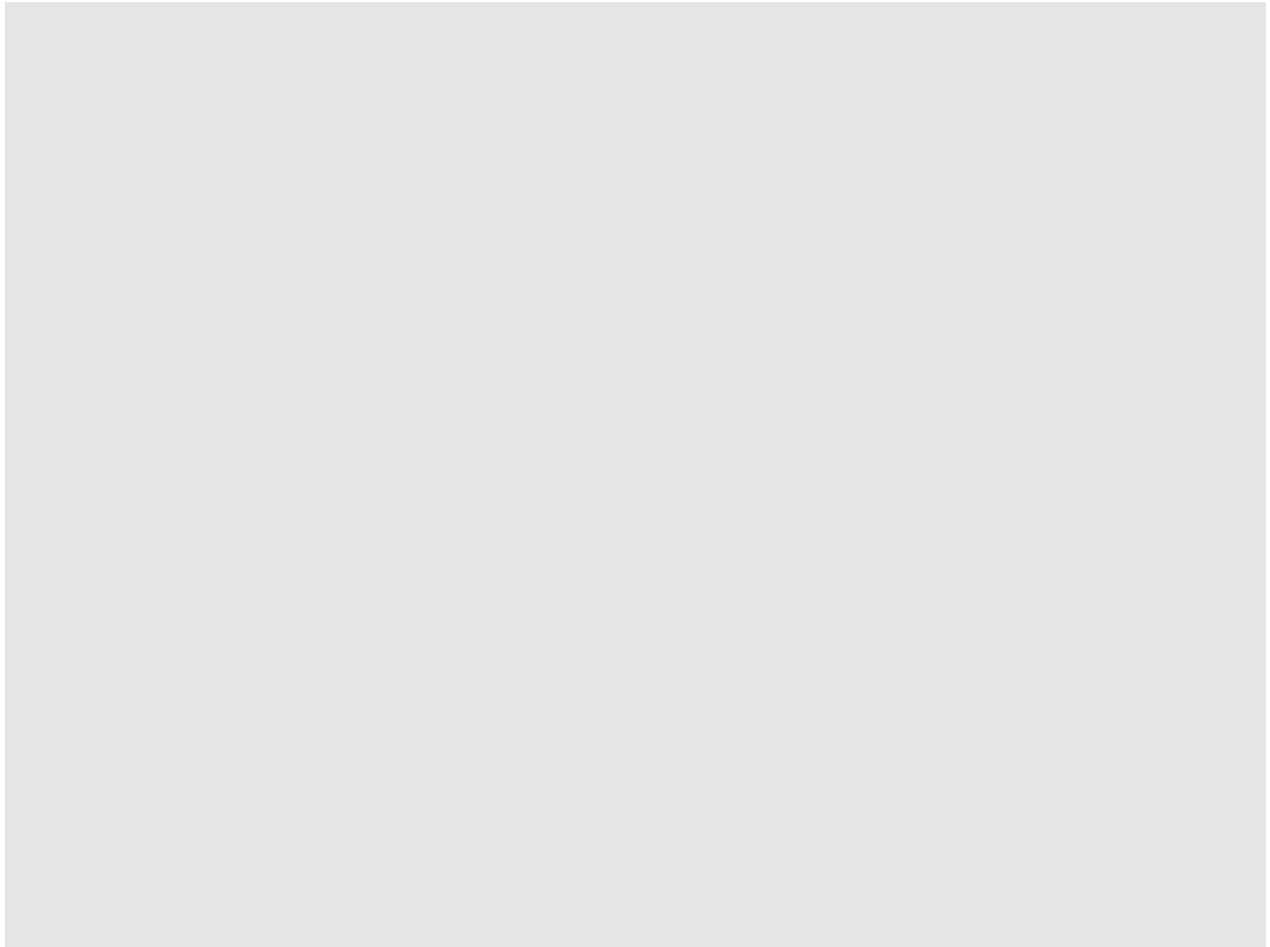
McKee and Lander offer sunset tours, which are McKee's favorite to do. They take guests to Lipan Point, which has the "most expansive view of the Grand Canyon," she said.

The tours are daylong and include a lunch at a lodge that was built in 1905. There are also stops at a Navajo reservation and roadside stands. The tours are for all ages and all abilities and can be customized to meet each customer's needs.



A rainbow arches over the Grand Canyon. (Photo by Henk Ruiter)

Henk Ruiter



A watchtower looks over the Grand Canyon. (Photo by Henk Ruiter)

McKee said their biggest goal is to make it a care-free day for their clients.

"They don't have to think of where to go and where to park. We try to avoid crowded areas and take people to our favorite spots."

McKee said the Grand Canyon is something people need to see with their own eyes.

"Pictures don't offer the same vibe," she said. "You need to see the depth of it with your eyes. You really don't see the Grand Canyon until you're on the rim. It is a jaw dropper the first time you see it.

"We just want to blow people's minds."

McKee is the daughter of Cindy McKee — who operated the Montessori School of Frankfort for 30 years — and Miller McKee. She has a sister, Callie Shane, who lives in New Jersey, and two other sisters, Sayward McKee Stamper and Esmee McKee Elliott, who operate Hazel Field Farm in northern Kentucky.

If you're traveling to Arizona and want to schedule a tour of the Grand Canyon with McKee, call her at 928-766-7597, email her at aboveandbeyondgrandcanyontours@gmail.com or visit www.aboveandbeyondgrandcanyontours.com.

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