

Pathway Leads Abby Carey to Northwest Favorites

portside.portofportland.online/2017/08/abby-carey-story/

August 31, 2017





Enjoy Portland International Airport food carts? Thank Abby Carey, who has one of the coolest jobs at PDX—ensuring our shops and restaurants reflect all the local flavors of Portland. Learn more about her work and what she’s up to away from the airport.

How would you describe your job to a first grader?

I get to find the best shops and restaurants in Portland and bring them to the airport for travelers to enjoy!

Lots of people have extra time at the airport after going through security, so we want to make sure they are happy and comfortable while they wait and get to experience one more taste of the Northwest before they board their plane. I do lots of outreach to local business owners, and if they feel inspired to open an airport location, I work on the legal and business aspects of the lease, and I help coordinate design and construction of the spaces before they open for customers.

What's the coolest part of your job?

I am a native Oregonian who is immensely proud of our regional culture and I love the fact that I get to help showcase the amazingly innovative products and flavors being created here. I think of the airport as a snapshot of the very best parts of Oregon, and I have a lot of fun influencing the way that experience looks and feels to those finding our region for the first time, and to those who call it home.

What's one thing about you that would surprise people?

I think a lot of my personal interests would surprise people, but one thing I've spent a lot of time with in the past couple of years is rock hounding! My husband and I and our Chihuahua have been traveling all over the Northwest collecting beautiful rocks and gems – primarily agate, jasper, and sunstone. We polish them using rock tumblers in our backyard, and we have found some incredible specimens, including a fist-sized banded Carnelian Agate and a 20 ct. red Oregon Sunstone – the official state gemstone. Earlier this year, we spent some time digging at a mine in a very remote part of the southeastern Oregon desert, where we stayed in a teepee.

What's your favorite PDX shop and restaurant?

I have to say that our three rotating food carts have a special place in my heart. First of all, food carts are quintessential Portland culture, telling the story of the city's diversity, imagination, and entrepreneurship. But most importantly, I love the food carts because of the opportunity they extend to very small businesses who might not have the ability to expand otherwise. There is very little upfront investment required, so business owners have an entry level open door into the fast-paced, high-volume airport environment. It is so rewarding to see these small businesses thrive in our airport community, and that is worth every bit of mentoring and support we offer along the way.

What should everyone know about PDX shops and restaurants?

There is a misconception that small- and medium-sized businesses can't get into the airport, or that they need to partner with another business to do so, which is how most airports around the country operate. The truth is, we take an entirely different approach at PDX. We lease spaces on an individual basis for the most part, and we love to work directly with business owners, big and small. While building in an airport is never inexpensive, we've designed our program to reduce hurdles to small businesses as much as possible. We are constantly meeting with local retail and restaurant owners to inform them of the possibilities for an airport location, and have engaged with hundreds of the region's most iconic brands – from global giants like Nike, to Portland mainstays like Powell's Books, to tiny food carts and everywhere in between. The result of all this effort is the true sense of place and authenticity one feels at PDX, and that sincerely resonates with our more than 18 million guests every year.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

Every aptitude test I ever took said I should be doing something in the realm of marketing/advertising/communications/media. My interests always did align with those areas, so I earned a BS in Communications from Portland State University, and began working for the Port's Public Affairs group 11 years ago. I have always trusted my gut when it comes to my career path, and after a few twists and turns, I basically have my dream job!