



BCTDA 2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

TOURISM BUILDS COMMUNITY

Presented by the Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau



BUNCOMBE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Paula Wilber, Chair
Biltmore

Gary Froeba
The Omni Grove Park Inn

Jim Muth, Vice Chair
Beaufort House Inn

Himanshu Karvir
Holiday Inn Asheville - Biltmore West

Leah Wong Ashburn
Highland Brewing Company

John Lockett
Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville

Chip Craig
Greybeard Rentals

John McKibbon
McKibbon Hospitality

John Ellis
Diana Wortham Theatre

Councilwoman Julie Mayfield
Asheville City Council, Ex-Officio Member

Commissioner Joe Belcher
Buncombe County Commission, Ex-Officio Member

TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FUND COMMITTEE

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John Lockett
Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville

Jay Curwen
Nantahala Outdoor Center

David McCartney
Aloft Asheville Downtown

Mark Hemphill
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Ken Stamps
Navitat Canopy Adventures

Himanshu Karvir
Holiday Inn Asheville - Biltmore West

Ruth Summers
Grove Arcade

Fielding Lowe
Carolina Alliance Bank

BCTDA MISSION

To be a leader in the economic development of Buncombe County by attracting and servicing visitors, generating income, jobs and tax revenues which make the community a better place to live.





Dear Tourism Partners,

The BCTDA and the staff of the Asheville CVB are honored to represent more than 1,200 local tourism industry partners. Together, we attract visitors to experience the beauty, vibrancy and special spirit of the Asheville area.

Not long ago, visitors and residents experienced a different kind of Asheville; one where many businesses closed or reduced staff during off-season months. Today, Asheville is a year-round destination generating \$2.6 billion in economic impact annually. Tourism promotion has been a significant driver of economic growth in the community, helping to expand the customer base, increase employment, and build Asheville's reputation as a great place to live, work and visit.

During this past year, additional resources were implemented to expand our marketing reach into the Ohio Valley, the Washington DC area, and throughout Florida. A new campaign to establish Asheville as a Top Music Town was launched in the spring with advertising and media relations efforts to drive traffic to a new website that includes Explore Asheville Radio, a comprehensive music calendar, venue guide and videos.

Group sales strategies were developed to elevate Asheville's reputation as a destination for meetings, tour groups and weddings. Full-page advertisements in national magazines and high-profile sponsorships reached new audiences and helped to open doors for Asheville's hospitality sales force.

An Air Service Development Task Force was convened in collaboration with the Asheville Regional Airport and the Chamber of Commerce. Advertising in the Capital Region supported direct service from BWI. The route was extended, and direct service from Newark was announced.

The Tourism Product Development Fund awarded \$3.9 million to six community projects: The Collider, John B. Lewis Soccer Complex, Riverfront Redevelopment, Asheville Museum of Science, Western North Carolina Nature Center, and the North Carolina Glass Center. The BCTDA also implemented a new grant program, The Festivals & Cultural Events Fund.

The BCTDA and ACVB are committed to promoting the area with our industry partners' and community stakeholders' best interests at the forefront, helping to ensure the Asheville area remains a vibrant and appealing destination to visit and community in which to reside.

It is our great pleasure to be part of the Asheville tourism industry – working with you, serving our visitors and helping our community to thrive.



Paula Wilber, Chair
Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority
Biltmore



Stephanie Pace Brown, Executive Director
Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VISITOR SPENDING IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY



9.8 MILLION

VISITORS TO THE ASHEVILLE AREA IN 2014

3.3M
OVERNIGHT GUESTS

CENSUS REFERENCE:
BUNCOMBE COUNTY POPULATION
~ 250,539 ~

— VISITORS SPENT
\$1.7 BILLION

GENERATING
\$2.6 BILLION
IN ECONOMIC IMPACT

That's \$4.7 million daily

\$143.5 MILLION
GENERATED IN STATE AND LOCAL TAXES

\$1,232
PER HOUSEHOLD

24,856
JOBS SUPPORTED
That's 1-in-7



	HOTEL SALES*	% CHANGE	OCCUPANCY	% CHANGE	ROOMS SOLD	% CHANGE
FY 13-14	\$228M	11.4%	67.5	3.2%	1.66M	3.5%
FY 14-15	\$265M	16.3%	72.6	7.5%	1.77M	6.3%
FY 15-16	\$311M	17.6%	73.3	0.9%	1.84M	4.1%

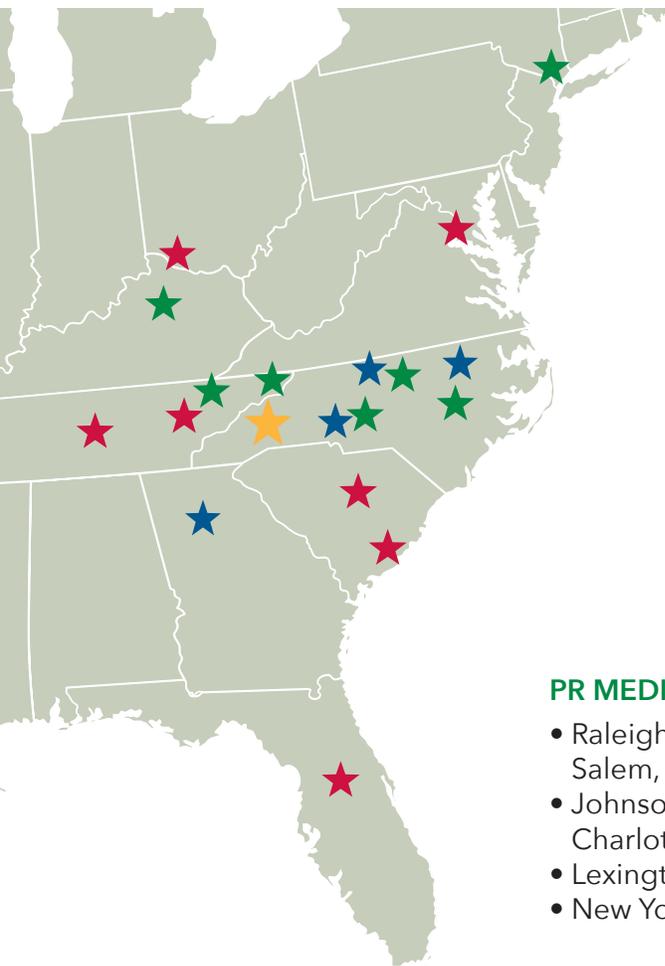
BUILDING BRAND AWARENESS

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

Each year the ACVB manages an extensive advertising plan designed to create awareness and inspire overnight visitation. In FY 15-16, the \$6 million media plan featured new broadcast, print and digital assets that were seen throughout the year by a target audience of more than 455 million.

PROACTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT

Advertising is complemented via a proactive media relations program that influences media coverage and generates national unpaid editorial coverage. The team had 792 significant media touchpoints and generated 746 targeted pitches (12 percent increase over last year). Additionally, the team hosted 204 media site visits in Asheville, including 115 media at the Beer Bloggers & Writers Conference.



TRADITIONAL CORE ADVERTISING MARKETS

- Atlanta
- Charlotte
- Greensboro
- Raleigh

EXPANDED CORE ADVERTISING MARKETS

- Charleston
- Cincinnati
- Columbia
- Knoxville
- Nashville
- Orlando
- Washington, DC

PR MEDIA TOURS

- Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Winston Salem, Greensboro, High Point (Fall)
- Johnson City, Kingsport, Bristol, Charlotte (Winter)
- Lexington, Louisville (Spring)
- New York City

IMPACT

455 MILLION
TOTAL PAID ADVERTISING REACH

3.7 BILLION
TOTAL EDITORIAL REACH

PRINT, BROADCAST, & ONLINE

\$5.6 MILLION
TOTAL PR GENERATED PUBLICITY VALUE

2,419
TOTAL EARNED MEDIA PLACEMENTS

860
SIGNIFICANT PLACEMENTS

MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

NEW VIDEO ASSETS

The new video campaign, launched in late July, resulted in more than 6 million video views. While most of those views were driven by advertising efforts, nearly 200,000 views were the direct result of marketing team efforts, including placement on ExploreAsheville.com and the Visit Asheville Facebook page. A behind-the-scenes video featuring River Whyless was produced and distributed through social channels, garnering an additional 68,000 views. Of the total video views, the long-form Return Again video received more than 2 million views while the 15- and 30-second spots collectively received 3.9 million views.

REDESIGNED ExploreAsheville.com

The redesigned ExploreAsheville.com launched on September 30, 2015, as a new editorial-driven site to complement listings. It includes 120+ pieces of new content written by 30+ freelance writers, uploaded and set to appear dynamically on 100+ navigation pages. The site annually attracts more than 4 million user sessions and more than 72 percent of user sessions are new site visits, up 3.3 percent over the previous year.



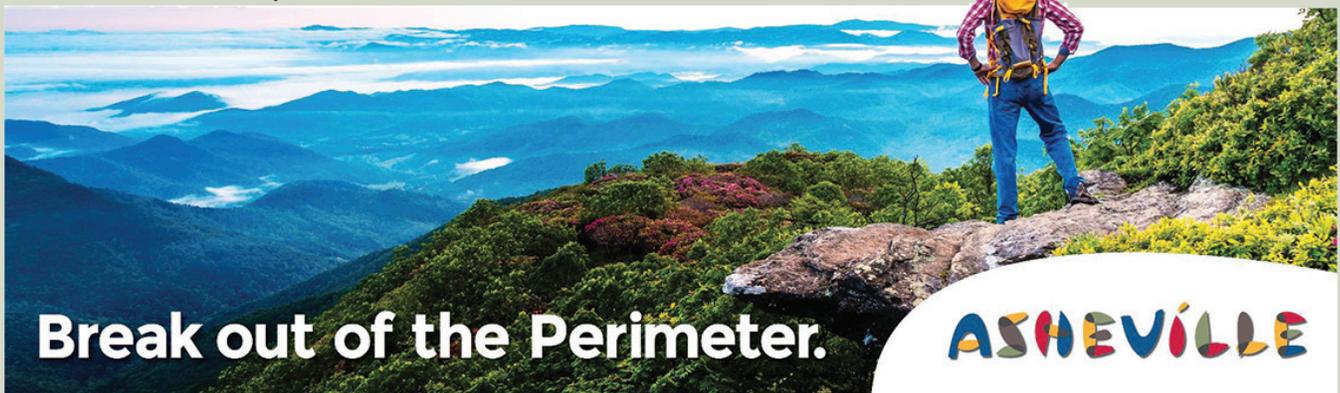
MUSIC INITIATIVE

A strategic plan was developed with the goal of elevating awareness of the Asheville area music scene and making it more easily accessible to visitors. A primary strategy was the development of a comprehensive music microsite that showcases music events, venues, video performances, experiences, history and artists. The site also showcases the newly created ExploreAsheville Radio, which features the work of local and Asheville-connected musicians individually and as part of curated playlists. More than 25 music videos and a dozen new music stories are also on the site. The site generated nearly 150,000 page views during the three-month, soft-launch phase. Additional promotional support in FY 16-17 will greatly increase microsite visits.

ALLEGIANT FLIGHT SUPPORT

As part of its support of the new Allegiant direct flight from the D.C. capitol region (BWI to AVL), the ACVB entered into a cooperative advertising partnership with Allegiant which allocated \$100,000 for net Allegiant messaging on the flight on regional radio stations and digital advertising in the D.C. Metro. The Allegiant campaign was complemented by an additional \$92,000 in destination brand advertising using regional NPR radio ads, Pandora audio and banners, HULU pre-roll and YouTube. The original flight was scheduled to run seasonally from May through August. The flight was extended, and service from Newark was announced.

Inspiration . . .





SOCIAL METRICS

The **Visit Asheville Facebook** page audience grew to more than 200,000 “likes,” a 32 percent increase over last year. Content on the Visit Asheville Facebook page – created to highlight ExploreAsheville.com content, destination media coverage and travel inspiration – reached more than 54,000 Facebook users a day.

Followers to the ACVB’s five **Twitter** accounts surpassed 30,000. About two-thirds of tweets from these channels are conversational, responding to questions and comments from other users – many of whom we are interacting with for the first time.

The **@VisitAsheville Instagram** channel has tripled its audience in the past year and currently has more than 14,000 followers. The response to the 84 images and videos posted this year included more than 23,000 likes and 1,100 comments.

E-NEWSLETTER

Nineteen editions of the Asheville Traveler e-newsletter were sent to 114,000+ subscribers. Monthly newsletters posted an average open rate of 13.5 percent – a 10 percent increase over the previous year.



PR CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHT

Asheville’s Honey Culture Goes National

Sweet Destination Adventures in “Bee City USA”

Asheville is known for its craft beer culture as “Beer City USA,” but it also has a sweeter side. The ACVB saw an opportunity to illuminate Asheville’s longstanding honey culture as the home of “Bee City USA,” an innovative, homegrown initiative to protect pollinators. With the Bee City USA movement going national, the ACVB pulled together partners and stories from across local culinary, retail and spa scenes to craft a “Sweet Destination” media relations and content initiative. The effort included more than 150 honey-themed media pitches, 16 immersive journalist site visits, a push around National Pollinator Protection Week, and a series of consumer-facing editorials across Explore Asheville channels.

99M	ONLINE IMPRESSIONS
5.7M	PRINT AND BROADCAST IMPRESSIONS
\$143K	TOTAL PUBLICITY VALUE
30+	LOCAL PARTNERS FEATURED IN MEDIA PLACEMENTS
35	NATIONAL & SIGNIFICANT REGIONAL MEDIA PLACEMENTS (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER, COOKING LIGHT, SUNSEEKER, NEW YORK TIMES, AJC, OUR STATE, PASSPORT)



ATTRACTING GROUP BUSINESS TO THE ASHEVILLE AREA

The sales and service team exceeded sales goals this year. The continued emphasis on building of the sales pipeline led to the success, and helped create a strong foundation to begin the year. The team increased its number of direct client connections, added tradeshows and marketplaces with a proven track record of attracting corporate and incentive buyers, hosted eight client events in key market cities, and brought more than 100 buyers crossing all market segments into Asheville to experience the destination firsthand. The team continued to build awareness of Asheville as a national-level meeting destination through well-placed sponsorships with regional and national organizations. Efforts in promoting the destination to the sports, group tour, wedding and AAA markets were equally successful. And, a well thought-out communication strategy kept planners connected to the ACVB throughout the year with e-newsletters, pre- and post-tradeshow contests, and more.



9,869	DIRECT CLIENT CONNECTIONS
55,893	INDIRECT CLIENT CONNECTIONS
59	INDEPENDENT CVB-HOSTED SITE VISITS
3	48-HOUR MEETING PLANNER EXPERIENCES HELD
20	PLANNERS PARTICIPATED IN 48-HOUR EXPERIENCES
8	CLIENT EVENTS HELD IN ATLANTA, DALLAS, COLUMBIA, TAMPA AND CHARLOTTE
90	BUYERS ATTENDED THESE EVENTS
15	MOTORCOACH BUYERS HOSTED FOR TRAVEL SOUTH FAM
10	INTERNATIONAL BUYERS HOSTED WITH NC ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
21	TRADESHOWS, MARKETPLACES AND MISSIONS
3,000	ATTRACTION VALUE CARDS DISTRIBUTED TO ATTENDEES
196	AAA STAFF PARTICIPATED IN 8 DESTINATION TRAININGS

Right Group, Right Time, Right Price

REGIONAL & NATIONAL SPONSORSHIPS

ASAE Foundation's Chuck Fazio Executive HeadShot LOUNGE



More than 600 industry professionals visited the Chuck Fazio HeadShot LOUNGE sponsored, in part, by the ACVB during the ASAE 2015 Annual Meeting. Planners were introduced to Asheville as a meetings destination through advance publicity, on-site marketing materials, video presentation, branded items, hosted receptions and more.

Professional Convention Management Association - SE Chapter



The ACVB sponsored the November PCMA SE Chapter meeting held in Atlanta. The ACVB staff had a presence in the pre-function area, presented the meetings video and provided a welcome to the group. Approximately 30 Atlanta-based planners attended.

Destination Management Association International's Annual Gala



More than 800 industry professionals attended the prestigious DC based event. The ACVB sponsored the registration and Base Camp areas, receiving video, logo and website placements for the sponsorship.

Smart Meetings



Approximately 50 corporate and independent meeting planners attended the Smart Meetings Texas luncheon sponsored by the ACVB. Staff provided a welcome to the group, introduced Asheville as a meetings destination, and shared the "Not Just Meeting. Exceeding." meeting video.

GROUP PR/ ADVERTISING



Full-page ads ran in three leading meeting publications throughout the year to generate awareness of Asheville.

Sixteen targeted pitches were made to a variety of publications, and approximately 10 articles were published.



IMPACT

782 SALES LEADS ISSUED

UP 8%

392 MEETINGS AND GROUPS BOOKED

UP 3%

64,965 ROOM NIGHTS BOOKED

UP 7%

\$14 M IN ESTIMATED REVENUE

UP 18%

409 GROUPS SERVICED BY ACVB

TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) is a designated funding source for capital development projects, and is funded with one and a half percentage points of the occupancy tax. The purpose is to provide financial assistance for the construction of projects that are expected to attract overnight visitors, and generate tax revenue, jobs, and spending at local businesses. The projects are also community assets that are enjoyed by Buncombe County citizens.

In 2015, HB347 was passed, increasing the occupancy tax two percent and bringing Buncombe County's occupancy rate in line with other top destinations in North Carolina. The bill preserved the 25 percent dedication of revenue for TPDF, and eliminated funding of for-profit projects to focus on local government and non-profit needs. Additionally, the BCTDA adopted significant changes to the TPDF program, including the Strategic Priority List and the Major Works Pathway. These new strategic tools enable the BCTDA to take a more proactive approach to filling strategic gaps in market, and encourages collaboration with development partners.

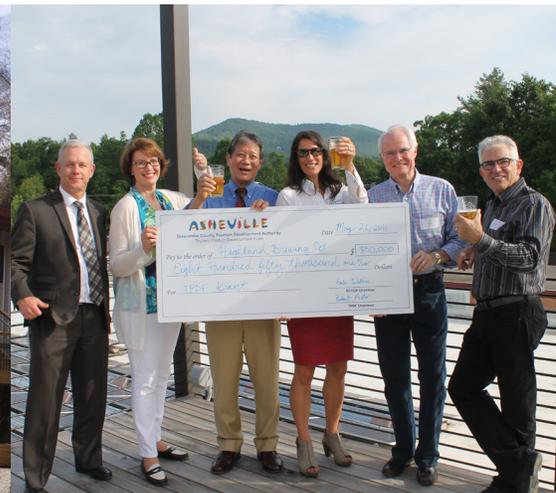
In the 2015 grant cycle, the BCTDA awarded six community projects \$3.9 million in TPDF funding, including \$3.1 million for projects owned by the City of Asheville. Greenways, soccer fields and the WNC Nature Center are among the City of Asheville-owned assets that collectively received 80 percent of the allocated funding.

Other projects to receive awards in 2015 were The Collider, the Asheville Museum of Science, and the North Carolina Glass Center.

A \$700,000 grant was awarded to the City of Asheville in early 2016 for the French Broad River Greenway West Bank Connector as part of the newly adopted Strategic Priority List.

**\$23 MILLION
AWARDED TO
27 COMMUNITY
PROJECTS
SINCE 2001**

Pictured below (left to right): The Collider, Smoky Mountain Adventure Center and Highland Brewing Company



"The TPDF process is thoughtful, collaborative community building at its best. This granting mechanism not only offers these exciting, impactful projects a critical infusion of funding, but it clears the way for local institutions and municipalities to greenlight other important initiatives."

~ Robert Foster, TPDF Chair, Biltmore Farms Hotels

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

The Asheville CVB is honored to serve 1,200 local businesses as tourism industry partners. The Asheville CVB offers a series of monthly Partner Forums and headliner events that provide partners with promotional, sales, and networking opportunities throughout the year. This year, 13 events were held including the BCTDA Annual Meeting, the Hospitality Outlook, the ACVB Summer Social and Holiday Party, and nine Partner Forums such as "Destination Weddings in Asheville," "Meet Your Match: Creating Packages 101," and "Asheville Destination Campaign Launch."

The ACVB also offers tourism partner orientation to help connect local businesses with the free marketing services provided by the BCTDA. A monthly newsletter, Facebook page, and the AshevilleCVB.com website also provide resources to the Buncombe County tourism industry.



Asheville CVB

The Asheville CVB launched a new CVB Service Day program for staff to volunteer in service of community organizations. Staff participated in the first event by assisting with lunch service for the needy at Haywood Street Congregation as part of Haywood's "Welcome Table" program.

1,200
TOURISM INDUSTRY
PARTNERS &
COMMUNITY
STAKEHOLDERS

13
PARTNER FORUMS
AND HEADLINER
EVENTS
HOSTED

1,284
ATTENDEES
THROUGHOUT
FY 15-16

48,165
PARTNER EMAIL
COMMUNICATIONS
SENT

36% OPEN RATE

Accolades & Awards

Travel + Leisure featured Asheville at #10 on its 2015 list of the "World's Best Cities" for the United States & Canada (July 2015)

Readers of **Condé Nast Traveler** voted Asheville #9 among "The 30 Best Small Cities in America" and #7 among "The 2015 Friendliest Cities in the U.S." (August 2015)

Asheville was once again included on **TripAdvisor.com**'s list of the "Top 10 Fall-Foliage Destinations in the U.S." (September 2015)

SmarterTravel.com chose Asheville among its "10 Best Outdoor Towns in America" (October 2015)

Budget Travel named Asheville among its "Where to Go in 2016" destinations (January 2016)

U.S. News & World Report put Asheville on its round-up of the "Best Foodie Destinations in the USA" (February 2016)

Asheville was considered one of the "Best Cities to Visit While Vacationing Solo" by **AFAR** deputy editor Jennifer Flowers during an appearance on **CBS This Morning: Saturday** (March 2016)

Fortune ranked Asheville among its "Best New Cities for Beer Lovers" after a survey of those in the industry (March 2016)

THRILLIST named Asheville one of its "25 Best U.S. Cities to Spend a Weekend" (March 2016)

Asheville made **Condé Nast Traveler**'s round-up of "Where to Find the Best Beer in the World" (April 2016)

Asheville topped the list of "The 12 Best Places to Retire in the U.S." by **Condé Nast Traveler** (May 2016)

TEAM ASHEVILLE IS 1,200 PARTNERS STRONG



PRESENTED BY
Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau
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