



August 30, 2017

To: BCTDA
From: Stephanie Pace Brown
Subject: President's Report

July was another monumental month for the Explore Asheville team. Following a two-week extended stay with the Chamber and two weeks of displacement we moved into our new space at 27 College Place on July 28. We have had a front row seat to see the building come together and expect the project to be substantially complete by September 1.

I also attended the Destinations International Annual Meeting in Montreal where I was inducted as the chair of the Destinations International Foundation.

MONTH AT A GLANCE

- The last summer/early fall advertising campaign will run late-July through early October and will reach 205 million.
- The PR team logged 36 media touchpoints and hosted eight journalists in July.
- A second Faces of Tourism video is in production to debut at the BCTDA Annual Meeting.
- The sales team attended the Luxury Meetings Summit in Minneapolis and Spotlight on the Southeast. They hosted six site visits.
- A new tradeshow booth will be inaugurated at the ASAE Annual Meeting & Expo in Toronto this August.
- The BCTDA received significant recognition for its investment in the RADTIP.
- I participated in a panel discussion about growth in Asheville as part of Leadership Asheville's Buzz Breakfast series. Other panelists were Mayor Esther Manheimer, Commissioner Al Whitesides and Darin Waters with UNC Asheville.

JULY EACVB METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During July, the sales team posted 868 personal contacts (up 38%). July sales activities generated 42 sales leads (down 5%) and 29 convention bookings (up 7%), representing 6,451 rooms (down 15%).
- CVB leads generated 23 group events in July (down 36%), with revenue of \$539,596 (down 70%). The services team assisted 26 groups (down 33%).

- The PR team landed 61 significant placements in June (up 97%), with 35 media touchpoints (down 24%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$254,098 with reach of nearly 6.7 million. Online placements added \$453,066 in value and reach of nearly 678 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 397,671 visits (up 20%), including 259,914 to the mobile site (up 25%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 1,588 (down 74%) and video views totaled 89,829 (up 304%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 125 room nights (up 45%) with total room revenue of \$21,639 (up 38%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 27,092 visitors (up 3%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 1,524 visitors (up 36%).

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$33,897,584 in June, up 7.8 percent to end the fiscal year 13 percent ahead of the previous year.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 80.7 percent during June (down 1.2%). The average daily room rate was \$155.58 (up 3.8%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$125.58 (up 2.6%). Room demand increased 1.6 percent with 175,051 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 9.8 percent to total 91,847 in June.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising: The late summer/early fall campaign launched at the end of July and will run through the beginning of October. The campaign will have a reach of 205 million. Built on a segmented, targeted approach using Buxton data, the campaign includes a heavy emphasis on TV and incorporates online streaming video, radio, print, digital display, social advertising, and paid search. Total campaign reach will be approximately 205 million. The Matador Travel Network Asheville video paid partnership launched over a series of weeks in July with a total of four videos. The long form video using Sammy, an Asheville rescue dog, has garnered more than 400,000 views. Three video shorts collectively generated an additional 585,000 views: bellyaking with 253K views, the brew scene with 152k views, and a music video with 175K views. The marketing team is working with the agency on further development of several partnerships which will launch this spring. Planning will soon be underway for the holiday campaign.

Paid search efforts: Google-paid search click through continues to improve at 7.6 percent compared to 7.1 percent year-over-year. Paid search sessions are also up by 77 percent. In terms of performance, collectively, keyword phrases around the eclipse drove the most traffic to the web site over other paid search phrases. Bounce rates for both Google and Bing remained relatively stable, around 50 percent.

General Media Relations: The PR team logged 36 media touchpoints and supported eight journalist site visits in July, including *American Songwriter*, *Thrillist*, *Paste*, and a freelance contributor to *Organic Spa* and *Afar*. Story support also included *Beer Connoisseur*, *Good Grit*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *WhereTravel.com*, and *Fodor's Travel*. Asheville imagery and

assistance was provided to *AAA World*, (201) *Magazine* (USA TODAY Network), *Paste Magazine*, and *Business North Carolina*.

Solar Eclipse Support: Efforts to capitalize on Asheville's proximity to the path of totality for the 2017 solar eclipse picked up this month on the media relations side. The PR team supported logistics and developing Asheville itineraries for media representing *McClatchy-Tribune Information Services*, *SmarterTravel.com*, *Sky and Telescope* and *Parents* (and all Meredith publications), as well as a freelancer who works with major outlets such as *Robb Report*, *NY Magazine*, *Tasting Table*, and *Food & Wine*. The content team expanded on the existing eclipse content to include a comprehensive list of local and regional eclipse events and an eclipse-specific lodging page for travelers seeking eclipse-weekend accommodations.

Music Campaign: In July, PR team hosted prolific Nashville music writer Brittney McKenna for some destination music immersion. McKenna is on staff at *American Songwriter Magazine* and freelances for *SPIN*, *The Bluegrass Situation*, *CMT*, *Mic*, and *MTV News*. Developed with support from Mason Jar Media, her itinerary hit a broad spectrum including a LaZoom's Band & Beer Tour, sound healing at Asheville Salt Cave, drum lessons at Skinny Beats, Shindig on the Green, and a tour of synthesizer company Make Noise. The team is also working with Mason Jar on development of a new music press kit.

Significant Placements:

1. *Better Homes & Gardens*: "Weekend Getaways"
2. *Bridal Guide Magazine*: "Your Honeymoon Destination Wedding"
3. *CNN Travel*: "America's Most Amazing Hotel Pools"
4. *Convention South*: "Event Planner's Guide to NC"
5. *Divergent Travelers*: "5 Adventures you Must Do in Asheville, North Carolina," and "4 Perfect Days and Our Favorite Things to do in Asheville"
6. *Food Network Magazine*: "Come, Sit, Stay."
7. *Garden & Gun*: "For the Love of Dahlias," "The South's Most Spectacular Pools," and "Jump Right In"
8. *Lifestyles After 50*: "Asheville: Mountains of Fun (and a solar eclipse too!)"
9. *Luxury Travel Magazine*: "10 New Travel Trends"
10. *MSN*: "The United States' Best Kid-Friendly Cities" "10 Best US States for Road Trips"
11. *Naples Illustrated*: "Road Trip, Asheville, Southern Free Spirit"
12. *Our State*: "Best-Kept Secrets in Asheville: No Taste Like Home Wild Food Adventures"
13. *Outside Magazine*: "A Perfect Summer Day, 24 Hours in Asheville"
14. *Oyster.com*: "The Most Stunning Mountain Destinations in the U.S."
15. *Paste*: "Hotel Intel Carolina Bed & Breakfast: A Curated Experience in Asheville, North Carolina"
16. *Reader's Digest*: "10 Dreamy Wedding Destinations Around the World"
17. *Southern Living*: "The Beauty of the French Broad"
18. *Sports Events Magazine*: "Top 12 Outdoor Adventure Sports Spots"
19. *Sun Chronicle*: "Asheville and the Vanderbilt Legacy"
20. *Taste of the South*: "New + Noteworthy"
21. *The Local Palate*: Expert Picks: Leah Wong Ashburn
22. *Travel + Leisure*: "The Top 15 Cities in the United States"
23. *Travel Channel*: "21 Lazy Rivers to Float on this Summer"
24. *Trip Advisor*: "Most Charming Southern Vacations in the US"
25. *Trip Advisor*: "15 Best Honeymoon Destinations in the US"

26. *US News*: “4 Unexpected Foodie Cities to Visit this Summer”
27. *US News*: “6 Places where you can Forage for your Food”
28. *WCNC*: “One tank trips across the Carolinas”
29. *WSJ*: “Bookstores’ ‘Blind Dates’ Link Books and Readers”

Content Development Projects: The content team continued to move several projects forward during the month of July. Cat Kessler and Jason Tarr—working closely with Marla and Pat Kappes—began planning for the second *Faces of Tourism* video, to be debuted at the Annual Meeting in September. This second video will take a slightly different angle, looking at stories of individuals in Asheville succeeding in the hospitality industry at all levels. We will highlight the personal and professional opportunities afforded by hospitality careers, considering the shifts in Asheville’s culture because of the tourism industry, and look toward the next generation of hospitality professionals and the benefits of building a strong future workforce. This month, the content team created, updated, and optimized summer-related content and editorial content supporting the rollout of the Matador videos, including articles in the pet-friendly and outdoor adventure sections of the website. Cat and Jason—along with Elizabeth White—also began the onboarding process for CrowdRiff, a new platform that will streamline and expand the team’s usage of user-generated content.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of July, 10 new pieces of editorial content were added to ExploreAsheville.com: two stories—about following in Sammy the dog’s “paw prints” and traveling to Asheville with a dog, to correspond with the release of the Matador video; seven blog posts—including an eclipse event roundup, the announcement of Biltmore’s Titanic exhibition; and five weekend events posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was “50 Things to do in Asheville”, which received 57,235 new page views, followed by the solar eclipse events blog post, which received 11,167 page views.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- July saw 1,549 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 257,387.
- There were 45 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of July.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a share of Divergent Travelers’ video showcasing five outdoor adventures in Asheville. It has reached 55,468 people organically, generating 1,248 total reactions, and 129 comments.
- The most popular paid post this month was also the announcement of Biltmore’s Titanic costumes exhibition. It reached 73,338 users in total (43,060 of those organically), generating 2,242 total reactions, 278 comments and 336 shares.
- The most engaging post this month was a picture of the sunflowers blooming at Biltmore. It engaged 7.1 percent of the 52,431 users reached.

Foodtopia page:

- July saw 84 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,478 likes.
- There was 1 new Facebook post added to the Foodtopia page in the month of July.
- That post — the updated list of the best patio dining in Asheville — reached 2,950 people, generating 49 reactions, 6 comments, and 12 shares.

Video:

- There were 14,581 new organic YouTube views in July. The most popular video by organic views this month was Spirit of Asheville, which received 2,260 non-paid views. Sammy Visits Asheville came in second with 2,064 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 89,829 views.

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,580. Foodtopia accounts for 1,374 of those; Visit Asheville – 3,206.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 35,347 followers.
- There were 27 new posts in July. The most popular was a Blue Ridge Parkway sunset with wildflowers in the foreground. It received 2,447 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all active accounts we have a total of 28,867 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,557 followers. We continue to provide a mix of proactive response to travel inquiries and pushes of website and Instagram content.

Asheville Traveler E-newsletter:

- Subscribers: We have 119,565 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In July, we sent out our monthly e-newsletter to 119,542 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 18.1 percent and a click-through rate of 4.3 percent.

Transition Communications: In preparation for the transition, Marla Tambellini and Dodie Stephens worked on a communications strategy that addresses the organizational change and the move.

ExploreAsheville.com: In July, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com increased 20.2 percent year-over-year, which includes a 13 percent increase in organic user sessions, a 60.2 percent increase in social referral sessions, and a 105.7 percent increase in paid search user sessions. Mobile visits in July increased by 25.2 percent year-over-year. Page views for the lodging pages increased 8.8 percent year-over-year in July.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO

In July, the CVB continued the Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) Engagement with Simpleview. The marketing team worked with Simpleview to carry out two split tests to improve conversions to the booking engine and the lodging pages. Results for the booking widget split test are in, and the variation to the booking widget improved click-to-submit conversions by 15.8 percent. Elizabeth and Cat also worked with Hannah Mullenbach, SEO Analyst, toward Search Engine Optimization improvements in the month of July.

- The organic traffic is up by 8 percent year-over-year.
- The Fourth of July blog brought in 1,257 visits.
- The event details pages are up by ~3,000 visits year-over-year. Much of the increase is due to the Google events carousel on mobile.
- Of the 73,202 “visit Website” clicks, 77 percent came from organic traffic users.
- Organic pages per visit (3.29) exceeded industry average by 28.3 percent.
- Organic average visit duration (0:03:50) exceeded industry average by 44.5 percent.

Online Reservations: There were 86 orders for 125 room nights in July with a total of \$21,639 in booking revenue and \$1,065 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in July were Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, and Ohio. *Note: there is not a way in aRes to pull accurate room night by State excluding tickets (inflated due to Peak Perks) and cancellations.

| July 2017 | Current Month | This Month Last Year | Variance Monthly | YTD Actual | YTD Last Year | Variance YTD |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| Booking Rev | \$21,639 | \$15,699 | 37.8% | \$21,639 | \$15,699 | 37.8% |
| Commission | \$1,065 | \$673 | 58.2% | \$1,065 | \$673 | 58.2% |
| Orders | 86 | 44 | 95.5% | 86 | 44 | 95.5% |
| Room Nights | 125 | 86 | 45.3% | 125 | 86 | 45.3% |

*Room Nights/Orders no longer reflect cancellations, as previously reported.

Visitor Guide: Early bird advertising rates ended July 28 and with over 2 months of selling left. We have \$350,000 sold with a sales goal of \$400,000. The response from accommodation partners to distribute the guides in room has been tremendous and over 90 partners have committed. Content development of the guide is underway.

Visitor Guide Requests

There were 2,477 requests for the Asheville Visitor Guide in July, a 6.4 percent increase from last July. There were 406 unique browsers for the online travel guide, a 92 percent increase from last July. There was a total of 6,526 page views, an 87 percent increase from last July.

| Top 5 DMAs for July | # of Guides | FY 17-18 Top 5 | # of Guides |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| New York | 116 | New York | 116 |
| Tampa, St. Pete | 115 | Tampa, St. Pete | 115 |
| Chicago | 87 | Chicago | 87 |
| Raleigh-Durham | 78 | Raleigh-Durham | 78 |
| Philadelphia | 71 | Philadelphia | 71 |

GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE

Group sales reported 29 definite group bookings in July, representing a 7.4 percent increase from the prior July. Of these group bookings, 22 were meetings & conventions, zero were group tours and seven were weddings. The combined total of definite room nights in July was 6,451 room nights, for a 14.9 percent decrease compared to the prior year. The estimated revenue for leads turned definite in July was \$1,358,632, representing a 2.4 percent decrease. Actualized revenue was \$539,596, a 70 percent decrease from the prior year. July 2016 was a banner month, however, with actualized revenue of \$1,823,896, which had been a 142 percent increase from 2015. There were six very large groups in July 2016 with \$97k, \$104k, \$188k, \$309k, \$344k and \$431k in revenue. This year there were only two groups with over \$100k in revenue. These groups had \$107k and \$117k.

Forty-two sales leads (29 for meeting/conventions, seven weddings and two for motorcoach), representing 14,633 room nights, were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in July 2017. This represents a decrease of 4.5 percent in number of sales leads issued and a 56.7 percent increase in room nights represented. Person-to-person outreach totaled 868

contacts in July, as compared to 627 the prior year, representing a 38.4 percent increase. Indirect outreach totaled 259 contacts, compared to zero in the prior July.

Sales Calls/Missions:

- Shawn Boone attended Luxury Meetings Summit in Minneapolis with one-on-one appointments conducted with 22 planners. In addition, sales calls were hosted, including a presentation to three planners for AIMIA, a market leader in the business-to-business loyalty sector.
- Dianna Pierce attended Spotlight on the Southeast, a trade event targeting motorcoach operators. She met with 38 buyers over the three-day event, participating in the trade show component, dine-around and all other scheduled functions.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: Six independent site visits were hosted in July with business for all future years: 2020 RES Seminars – 458 rooms; 2018 Employers Resource – 235 rooms; 2018 LeMans Corporation – 427 rooms (48-Hour FAM attendee); 2018 FarmHouse Foundation - 66 rooms; and 2018 AIA South Atlantic Region Conference – 1,100 room nights.

Bookings reported in July include:

- 2017 ABYSA's Riverside Summer Shootout – Girls and Boys Weekends – combined 2,650 room nights
- 2017 NC Response to Human Trafficking – 200 room nights
- 2017 Great Smoky Mountain Grapple – 350 room nights
- 2017 CTAA SUN Conference – 170 room nights
- 2018 Classic Carl Club of America – 225 room nights
- 2018 Pursuant – 145 room nights
- 2018 FCC Services – 120 room nights
- 2018 NC Seedmen's Association – 149 room nights
- 2019 Construction Professionals Network of NC – 108 room nights
- 2020 Exhibition Services and Contractors Association – 658 room nights
- Among others

A total of 41 wedding guide requests were fulfilled in July as compared to 41 in July 2016.

Group Sales Communications

- A new tradeshow display was finalized for the meetings and conventions market and will first be used at August's ASAE Annual Meeting & Expo in Toronto.
- A new e-news template for meeting planner clients was finalized.
- The advertising schedule and communications schedule for the new fiscal year was finalized.

Media

- Staff provided a sample Group Tour Itinerary at the request of an associate editor with Group Tour Media for placement in the December issue of *Group Tour Southeastern* magazine.

Mass Communications:

- An e-mail to encourage clients to vote for Asheville as the Best CVB in the Southeast Region was sent to 226 clients who have recently hosted or booked a future meeting through Explore Asheville. Open Rate: 26 percent; Click Through Rate: 32 percent

Convention Servicing Highlights: Explore Asheville staff met with Southern Conference officials to discuss a kick-off event in October or November to encourage excitement and ticket sales for the 2018 Championships. A welcome presentation was provided to a group of spouses with the SE Pupil Transportation Conference hosted at Crowne Plaza.

Departmental Activities:

- Attended Spartan Race lunch and reception at Grove Stone Quarry in advance of the Spartan Race and Leadership Asheville breakfast
- Staff toured Omni, AC Hotel, and Crowne Plaza Resort as part of the effort to stay current on hotel product available
- Staff toured Masonic Temple, Altamont Theatre, On Broadway, Crest Center, and Claxton Farms to stay current on outside venue opportunities for groups
- Staff met with local individuals, industry partners and clients based in Asheville as requested/needed
- Relocated offices to 27 College Street

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts: Applicants are currently working on their Phase II submissions, which are due on August 30. The Organic Growers School, one of the four applicants that was selected by the TPDF Committee to participate in Phase II, has declined the invitation, and expressed interest in applying again in a future cycle when their project details are further developed. There are three remaining projects participating in Phase II: the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, the Leaf Cultural Arts Center in downtown Asheville, and a Haywood Street Fresco at the Haywood Street Congregation. Further evaluation, presentations of the projects and visits to the sites will take place by the TPDF committee this fall, prior to making final recommendations to the BCTDA in October.

Staff is awaiting updated scope and finalized schedule details from the City of Asheville regarding the Riverfront Redevelopment project to move forward with the contract amendment as was approved by the BCTDA at the June 28 board meeting.

Staff is also awaiting a final and comprehensive project scope for the Major Works Project, the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway, to move into contract as was approved by the BCTDA at the June 28 board meeting.

TPDF Project Ceremony

The City of Asheville hosted a grand opening at the new 14 Riverside Drive Arts & Culture Center on July 21. Mayor Manheimer recognized the BCTDA's TPDF support in her presentation. Stephanie Brown was in attendance and had an opportunity to make comments during the program.

Partner Engagement:

Media Preview Event

Planning is underway for a special event to invite members of the media and key stakeholders to a preview of the new Explore Asheville offices. Details are in development.

2017 BCTDA Annual Meeting – Wednesday, September 13

Plans for the annual meeting are underway. The event, generously hosted by the Omni Grove Park Inn, will be held in Omni's Country Club from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m., and will include a report of the past year, a look ahead as a new independent organization, followed by a networking social.

Explore Asheville – Wednesday, September 20

Staff is developing a celebratory event at the new office to invite all industry partners, as well as community stakeholders, to tour our new home and celebrate the establishment of the independent organization. Details are in development; please save the date.

Projects: The public affairs team worked with the marketing team to develop a plan for gathering partner listing data for the 2018 Visitor Guide and coordinating the proofing process. Brit also provided training for CAYLA intern Kaitlyn Srey and Charlie Reed to verify database information in anticipation of the data exports.

Pat worked with Cat and Jason on the planning of the next "Faces of Tourism" video.

Pat and Brit collaborated on updating the CVB 101 PowerPoint presentation.

Partner Outreach: Brit created six new partner accounts in July: JuneBug Retro Resort, Haiku I Do, Hillman Beer, Archetype Brewing, Imperial Auto Rental, and Ginger's Revenge. Brit and Pat continue to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing, as well as service partners who request listings.

The monthly CVB 101 Open Door sessions were canceled during the office relocation and will resume in September.

Community Outreach: Pat coordinated details for a hospitality industry school supply drive to support the United Way's wider effort. The drive ran from July 24 to August 4. Partners were encouraged to drop off donations at the Explore Asheville office or make an online donation. As part of the CVB Service Day efforts, staff will be holding a Backpack Packing event on Thursday, August 17, at 3:00 p.m. where we hope to break last year's record and help 2,000 students walk into their first day of school fully prepared.

Pat continues to attend community meetings for the South Slope Neighborhood Association to assist with their branding efforts, and meets monthly with City of Asheville's Dana Frankel. She also attended the City of Asheville's public space management stakeholder meeting regarding the busking pilot, and the Craft City VIP launch party at CCCD.

Pat assisted the organization, Farm Sanctuary from Los Angeles, as they planned a live painting event of life-sized pigs around the city to promote veganism, and connected them to various partners including LEAF downtown.

Pat also attended Leadership Asheville's Breakfast Buzz meeting focused on the public sector's response to Asheville's growth. Stephanie Brown participated in the panel discussion representing the BCTDA and tourism industry alongside Mayor Manheimer, Commissioner Al Whitesides, and Darin Waters, Special Assistant to the Chancellor at UNC Asheville.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Organizational and Administrative Transitioning: July was a very busy month focusing on relocating into the new space. Throughout the month, Glenn met with Jamie Langford (General Contractor), Martin Lewis (Landlord), and relevant vendors to discuss the pace and status of various projects necessary to be completed prior to staff moving in. Appliances were delivered and temporary cabinetry was installed to make the kitchen and restrooms as usable as possible. Local artists were commissioned to build a table for the breakroom. The County's IT Department and Saturn Networks provided a morning training on Office 365 and the new telephones. WNC Archives picked-up an extensive collection of older documents and other materials relevant to the early years of the BCTDA. **On July 28, Explore Asheville staff moved into our new space at 27 College Place!**

Hotels and MANNA Food Bank Partnership: The DoubleTree hosted two meetings focused on growing a new partnership between MANNA Food Bank and the hospitality industry. Thirty-one hotels signed onto the program, which offers guests the opportunity to forego a room cleaning in exchange for the hotel giving a donation equal to five individual meals. The program will run during the month of September, which is National Hunger Awareness Month.

Workforce Development: Glenn participated on multiple conference calls planning for the Hospitality Industry's first job fair outside of Buncombe County, in Marshall County. Ultimately, the job fair was a great success. Many applicants attended with the hotels already looking to hire over a dozen. Conversations related to new and innovative transportation opportunities for hotel staff continued. The Enterprise Van Program is still the number one option being considered.