

October 26, 2016

To: BCTDA
From: Stephanie Pace Brown, Executive Director
Subject: Recap of September 2016 Staff Activities

MONTH AT A GLANCE

- The BCTDA Annual Meeting attracted 213 guests and collected 205 pairs of socks for Haywood Street Congregation. The elegant event was hosted by Biltmore.
- National Geographic Traveler sent an editorial team to Asheville for a week of content development resulting from our sponsorship. The marketing team facilitated connections with 60 local tourism partners. Two features have already resulted, with more in the works, to culminate with a six-page feature this spring.
- Extensive media relations and social media efforts rolled out. Proactive and incoming media touchpoints resulted in 76 pitches in September overall.
- The “Go Local” badge was added to qualifying website listings, and content was developed to make ExploreAsheville.com the official site for the Urban Trail.
- The Southern Conference announced their decision to keep the men’s and women’s basketball championships in Asheville.
- The sales team hosted the Airport Roundtable, a meeting that included route managers from Spirit, Southwest, Delta and Allegiant airlines.
- Asheville hosted the 2016 NC Society of Human Resource Management Conference in downtown, September 28-30, at the U.S. Cellular Center. More than 1,100 people attended, occupying more than 800 weekday rooms at five downtown properties.
- Sixty-three groups received conference support from the CVB.

SEPTEMBER CVB METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During September, the sales team posted 976 personal contacts (up 12%). September sales activities generated 52 sales leads (down 40%) and 34 convention bookings (down 11%), representing 6,019 rooms (up 25%). Three months into the new fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 4 percent and room nights represented are up 15 percent.
- CVB leads generated 73 group events in September (up 14%), with revenue of \$1,656,291 (up 151%). The services team assisted 62 groups (down 3%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 22,062 visitors (up 6%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 980 visitors (up 85%).

- The PR team landed 61 significant placements in September (down 19%), with 91 media touchpoints (up 54%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$181,433 with reach of over 7.6 million. Online placements added \$170,680 in value and reach of over 190 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 415,506 visits (down 5%), including 276,269 to the mobile site (up 17%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 8,067 (up 58%) and video views totaled 916,297 (up 2,680%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 50 room nights (down 59%) with total room revenue of \$9,414 (down 48%).

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$31,508,376 in August, up 9.3 percent. Two months into the fiscal year, YTD 2016-17 sales are up 13.5 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 77.8 percent during August (down 1.5%). The average daily room rate was \$153.12 (up 4.1%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$119.15 (up 2.6%). Room demand increased 6.9 percent with 174,547 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 6.7 percent to total 81,728 in August.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising: With some uncertainty about the fall season heading into October, the CVB shifted some of its savings from the late summer (Harvest) campaign into an early fall push. “Book Now” display ads that were delivered through both prospecting and retargeting display ads. Some additional emphasis on fall was also part of the paid search campaign and the CVB developed a series of Facebook ads using a 15-second edit of the fall time-lapse video. Cat Kessler also created a Facebook Canvas ad for mobile, which focused on the destination’s stunning natural beauty in fall. The video was also used in a custom unit already running on the Conde Nast Web site.

The broadcast flight was extended one additional week in Atlanta. Other key markets in NC and FL were not available due to political advertising.

A Facebook ad was developed to reach attendees of the Blue Ridge Pride Festival with content highlighting some of Asheville’s LGBTQ-friendly experiences. And landing pages were developed for advertising campaigns:

- Last Minute Getaway (<https://www.exploreasheville.com/last-minute-getaway/>) for a Labor Day weekend advertising campaign via Facebook.
- Fall Getaway (<https://www.exploreasheville.com/fall-getaway/>) for advertising campaigns.
- Holiday Getaway (<https://www.exploreasheville.com/holiday/>) for advertising campaigns.
- Asheville Pride Getaway (<https://www.exploreasheville.com/pride-getaway/>) for a Facebook campaign for Asheville Pride Festival.

The agency continued to work to optimize the digital campaign in September. The Peter Mayer team reports Trip Advisor, Adara, Rocketfuel and Quantcast all proved to be strong performers.

The CVB also worked with National Geographic Traveler (NGT) on the planned paid advertising sponsorship. The contract provided for social sharing during the NGT's time in Asheville during the week of September 26, as well as additional editorial in the spring of 2017. Brooke and Dodie Stephens led the NGT editorial crew on a destination immersion experience. The NGT team included their director of editorial projects, a digital contributor/influencer and photographer. Staff executed a robust week-long itinerary as the NGT gathered information for a six-page editorial spread that will appear in National Geographic Traveler in the spring. The partnership also includes:

- Digital editorial content that will be posted on NationalGeographic.com, including:
 - four blogs posts
 - a photo feature to be published in March 2017
 - magazine feature adapted for Website
 - Top 10 feature with photo gallery
 - Mid-week travel itinerary
- Promotions on the new Asheville content that will be featured in other NGT digital assets.
- A social media program to include social posts on Facebook and Twitter, Instagram stories and an Instagram Takeover in the spring.
- A consumer event organized by National Geographic in the spring at the NGT headquarters for approximately 175 guests.
- Media relations efforts by NGT to highlight the effort.

Additionally, during the visit, a Facebook Live video of the Friday night drum circle was featured on the NGT Facebook page. This live video has generated 131K views and 1,779 shares, which is a record for NGT's Facebook live. The NGT Facebook channel has more the 3.7 million likes.

Paid search efforts: The PPC stats are still looking really great year-over-year, according to Simpleview, with a strong increase in sessions and page views. Bounce rate also decreased slightly. Sessions are up year-over-year 19 percent (58,708 vs. 49,542), while page views are up 13 percent (168,584 vs. 149,267). The recent addition of expanded text ads has resulted in a 77 percent increase in click-through rate year over year. The program generated more than 58,000 site visits.

General Media Relations: The convergence of fall PR efforts and a seasonal influx of media queries and site visit requests made for a busy month of media relations activities. The team hosted eight sight visits and engaged in 91 meaningful media touchpoints, which included 76 proactive pitches.

- CBS This Morning & National Geographic Traveler Facebook Live | Site visit for new editor-in-chief George Stone.
- Los Angeles Times | Jody Jaffe: Insight for an upcoming arts piece.

- New York 1 TV | Priceline.com segment on best fall foliage destinations, insight and b-roll provided.
- Wine Enthusiast | Kara Newman, Spirits Editor: A connection through Visit NC, PR team created a two-day Asheville itinerary for Kara.
- Meetings Today | Jeff Heilman: Carli Adams and Landis Taylor worked to pull info focusing on signature festivals and fairs and their event-hosting-prowess.
- Lonely Planet | The team is working with Lonely Planet's marketing and editorial team on a significant Asheville feature and a supporting content marketing campaign that will extend throughout 2017. Work includes editorial and production support, site visit logistics and a joint social media initiative including an Asheville getaway contest.
- Photo & Fact Check Support: *Conde Nast Traveler, Charlotte Observer, Lake Norman Magazine, Atlanta Parent, Southern Travel + Lifestyles, TravelWest + Life and Florida Travel + Lifestyles.*

Dodie Stephens was also busy securing appointments for the upcoming Society of American Travel Writers Media Marketplace. In addition to conference networking with roughly 80 top-tier travel media, Dodie will have 13 dedicated appointments with writers connected to *USA Today, New York Times, Washington Post, Conde Nast Traveler, Outside, FOX News, Dallas Morning News, BBC Travel, AFAR, Travel + Leisure, Hemispheres* and *National Geographic*.

SIGNIFICANT PLACEMENTS IN SEPTEMBER

- Bon Appetit - Chicken Butter
- Deep South Magazine - Travel Back in Time
- Destinations - Best of Attractions
- Elle Talk - 10 Days in Asheville
- Los Angeles Times - Country Road
- New York Post Online - 15 best places to live in the U.S.
- Only in Your State - Buxton Hall provisions
- Travel Pulse - 4 must-visit places in Appalachia
- The Kansas City Star - When Leaves Change
- Pure Wow - 14 most underrated cities in America

Fall Foliage Efforts: During the month of September, the Content and PR teams worked together to launch efforts for the fall color season. The annual fall foliage forecast was released on September 8 via PRNewswire, the Asheville Traveler E-Newsletter and the ACVB social media channels. The forecast story on ExploreAsheville.com has been viewed more than 33,000 times to date, and the accompanying Facebook post reached more than 300,000 users. The forecast release also included the development of two additional pieces of editorial, including a crowd-sourced "Top 10 Ways to Experience Fall" story (23,000 page views to date) and a round-up of fall-themed lodging packages (4,700 page views). To increase reach and engagement with the forecast messaging, Cat and Jason put together a Facebook Live broadcast at The Montford Rooftop Bar, which featured interviews with climate scientist Jake

Crouch and local expert Joanne O'Sullivan about the factors that contributed to a forecast for a longer-than-usual foliage season, as well as about favorite things to do around Asheville during the season. The fall forecast was also part of the conversation when Landis Taylor executed on the CVB's annual fall media tour (September 18-23), visiting Wilmington, Fayetteville, the Triangle, the Triad and Charlotte. The final itinerary included 36 appointments (12 broadcast). With the threat of a gas shortage at the beginning of the tour and the riots in Charlotte while the team was there, the tour was demanding but proved successful. Highlights included WRAL-TV in Raleigh, Our State, AAA GO Magazine, WBTV in Charlotte and freelancers working with Travel + Leisure, Southern Living, The Local Palate, Washington Post, USA Today and various inflight publications. Later in the month, Cat sent out a set of emails to engage e-newsletter subscribers in the upcoming fall color reports. An opt-in request was sent to 109,000 subscribers who had not previously indicated an interest in the reports, and the email's call-to-action resulted in an additional 1,400 subscribers requesting the weekly reports. Those already signed up for the weekly reports received a notice that their first report would arrive the following week.

The first official fall color report for 2016 was posted and sent out on September 29. The email was delivered to 8,938 subscribers and had a unique open rate above 31 percent. The next day, Jason traveled to Grandfather Mountain to kick-off a series of color updates via Facebook Live broadcasts. He interviewed two experts from Grandfather and also delivered a more general color update and some "best bets" for activities and events around the region. The broadcast attracted nearly 1,900 while it was live and has now been viewed almost 44,000 times.

Music Initiative: Work continues to bolster participation in Explore Asheville Radio, which now features tracks by 22 local artists. An introductory "Asheville Mixtape" playlist has been created, as well as a fall road trip-themed playlist that will be injected into the weekly fall color reports in October. Elizabeth is working on the development of a playlist widget that will allow users to easily browse and toggle among the various lists/channels.

Content Development Projects: Cat is working on SEO efforts within the content sections of ExploreAsheville.com as part of ongoing actions to enhance site visitation.

Video & Facebook Live:

Jason continued the schedule of Facebook Live broadcasts designed to complement the Harvest Campaign messaging of "Let the Magic Find You." He shot 10 Facebook Live broadcasts in September, including an interview with National Geographic Travel's George Stone, a musical performance at Isis Music Hall by The Midnight, dinner service in the kitchen at Rhubarb and The Nightbell restaurants, a ride on the Amazing Pubcycle, and a craft demonstration at the Village Potters. By far, the most popular broadcast was a live look at Abby the Spoon Lady and the Fly By Night Rounders busking on the streets of downtown Asheville. The video went "viral" and has been viewed 463,000 times.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of September, seven new stories or blog posts were added to ExploreAsheville.com. Topics included fall seasonal round-ups, a new exhibit announcement from Biltmore, and a city tour that highlights the voices of Asheville's African-American community.

- The most popular story content on the site this month was the 2016 fall color forecast, which received 28,862 page views in the month of September. The second most popular story was “Top 10 Ways to Experience Fall in Asheville,” which received 18,329 page views for the month.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- 8,067 daily new likes were added to Facebook for a total of 223,795.
- There were 74 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of September.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a Facebook Live broadcast. It has reached 1.2 million people organically, generating 50,196 total reactions, 9,811 comments and 12,914 shares. This post was also the month’s most engaging; it engaged 12 percent of the users reached.
- The most popular paid post this month was a link to the 2016 fall foliage forecast. It reached 303,375 users in total (185,460 of those organically), generating 11,754 total reactions, 927 comments and 2,503 shares.

Foodtopia page

- 586 daily new likes were added to the Foodtopia page for a total of 22,277 likes.
- There were 7 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of September.
- The most popular post—a link to a Bon Appetit’s coverage of Hole Doughnuts as the “best dessert of the year”—reached 6,207 people organically, generating 147 reactions and 29 comments.

Video:

- There were 43,716 new organic YouTube views in September. The most popular video by organic views this month was “Asheville: Discover aRts & Culture,” which received 9,456 non-paid views. The “Return Again” video came in second with 6,160 new views.
- Across all of our video platforms, there were 916,297 views, most came from Facebook.
- Asheville video content has received 1.5 million views since July 1, 2016 (fiscal YTD).

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts is now 4,233. Foodtopia accounts for 1,347 of those; Visit Asheville – 2,886.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 20,057 followers.

- There were 63 new posts in September. The most popular—a scenic shot of the downtown at dusk—received 1,516 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all of our accounts we have a total of 32,729 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 13,325 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 116,685 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs:
 - In September, we sent out our monthly e-newsletter to 116,805 subscribers. We had a unique open rate of 14.8 percent and a click-through rate of 4.3 percent.
 - Our Fall Color Report Opt-In request was sent to 109,076 subscribers, with a unique open rate of 10.5 percent and a click-through rate of 1.84 percent.
 - The Fall Color Report Alert message sent to segment subscribers was sent to 7,499 subscribers, with a unique open rate of 26.2 percent and a click-through rate of 6 percent.
 - The first Fall Color Report email was sent to 8,938 subscribers, with a unique open rate of 31.3 percent and a click-through rate of 12.6 percent.

Online Reservations: There were 27 orders for 50 room nights in September with a total of \$9,414 in booking revenue and \$352 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in September were: Ohio (11), Georgia (8), South Carolina (7), California (6), and North Carolina (5).

Sept 2016	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$9414	\$17949	-48%	\$37,056	\$62420	-41%
Commission	\$352	\$686	-49%	\$1521	\$2436	-38%
Orders	27	65	-58%	110	227	-52%
Room Nights	50	122	-59%	219	428	-49%

Travel Guide: There were 2,653 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in September, an 11 percent decrease from last September. Year to date, there are 5,165 travel guide requests, a 9 percent decrease from last year. The top 5 DMAs requesting guides for the month and year are:

Top 5 DMAs for July 2016	# of Guides Requested	FY 2016-2017 Top 5 DMAs	# of Guides Requested
New York	144	New York	332
Atlanta	111	Atlanta	305
Tampa, St. Pete	108	Tampa, St. Pete	300
Charlotte	101	Charlotte	269
Chicago	99	Chicago	265

Online Travel Guide Downloads: There were 220 unique browsers for the online travel guide, a 55 percent decrease from last September. There was a total of 4,004 page views, a 61 percent decrease from last September. The average time spent viewing was 2.21 minutes, a 27 percent decrease from last September. There were 23 clicks on links, a 90 percent decrease from last September.

July 2016	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual (Jan-Dec)	YTD Last Year (2015)	Variance YTD
Unique Browsers	220	486	-54.7%	2201	9057	-75.7%
Opens/Visits	237	529	-55.2%	2418	9759	-75.2%
Page Views	4,004	10295	-61.1%	48192	129371	-62.7%
Avg. Time Spent (Minutes)	2.21	3.01	26.6%	2.83	22	-87.2%
Avg. Page Views (Per Open)	16.89	19.46	13.2%	20.00	142	-85.9%
Clicks on Links	23	224	-89.7%	361	2,809	-87.1%

ExploreAsheville.com: As a follow-up to the SEO audit additional sessions with PaperStreet, the audit firm, were held to better understand key issues and develop a punch list of items that will help improve search engine referral traffic. Elizabeth continued to work on the list items throughout the month of September, including optimizations for increasing site speed, and fixes to technical issues. Other optimizations included changes to the navigational menu to reduce the number of links per page, in keeping with Google's best practices. Elizabeth worked with the content team to ensure some additional phrase changes, which have already generated some notable improvements in site ranking.

Elizabeth met with Cat, Brit and Jason to discuss improvements to the Calendar of Events on the website. Ideas that the team will implement include changing the way recurring events are displayed, making use of featured event tags, and organizing the events page so that it is easier to find events in a specific category. She also worked with Marla on edits to the Foodtopia section of the website, including cropping the header slideshow, changing the background color to white to fit better with the Foodtopia brand, adding a cookbook pop-out feature, and revising how the logo and title fit with the page.

A couple of other key Web efforts made headway in September. The Go Local badge launched to partners. The "Heart AVL" icon is included on the listing of any partners that are Go Local program participants. And a partnership with the Urban Trail is adding new content and images to the site that will allow ExploreAsheville.com to serve as the official Urban Trail host. Elizabeth is designing the microsite and implementing key features that will allow the trail to be explored on desktop or navigated by mobile on the ground. The site will make use of the Google mapping widget and the slider feature already in use on ExploreAsheville.com. Elizabeth is also working with Brit on implementation of the 4.0 version of the Simpleview extranet.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Group sales reported 34 definite group bookings in September, a 10.5 percent decrease compared to the prior year. Of the 34 group bookings, 21 were meetings and conventions, six were weddings and seven were group tour. The combined total of definite room nights was 6,019, a 25 percent increase over the prior September. Fifty-two sales leads (41 for meetings and conventions, 8 for weddings, and 3 for motorcoach), representing 14,730 room nights, were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in September. Leads distributed were down 39.5 percent and rooms represented were down 44 percent compared to the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads turned definite was \$1,712,639, a 104 percent increase over the prior year. Actualized revenue was \$1,656,291, a 151 percent increase over the prior year. Person-to-person outreach totaled 976 contacts, which is a 12 percent increase over the prior year. A total of 4,997 indirect contacts were made, a 217 percent increase over the prior year.

Staff Update: Carla McGlynn, national sales manager, joined the team on September 7, 2016. Carla will spearhead efforts in the northeast and DC markets, focusing on corporate, incentive and associations. Carla most recently worked for the Greensboro CVB. Carla has resort and conference center experience, owned a meeting and event company and has worked as a corporate planner.

Molly Nelson was extended an offer mid-month and will join the Asheville CVB on October 1 as the senior sales manager for the Southeast region. Molly has 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry and holds a degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management from the University of South Carolina. Molly has worked in full service Marriott and Hilton properties ranging from resort, boutique and convention hotels to a downtown property. She has most recently worked for the Spartanburg Marriott Hotel.

Southern Conference 2017 Men's and Women's Basketball Championships: The Southern Conference announced that it will honor its 2016-17 commitments to championships scheduled in the state of North Carolina—including men's and women's basketball in Asheville. The announcement followed a community meeting hosted by the SoCon leadership and the Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission on September 20 for elected officials, city and county representatives, the CVB, local business owners and LGBTQ organizations. We are delighted with the positive outcome.

Airport Roundtable: As part of the long-term strategy to secure more local air service, the CVB partnered with Asheville Regional Airport to host the Airport Roundtable meeting. Approximately 48 airline industry personnel from across the U.S. attended, including scheduling staff for Delta, Allegiant, Spirit and Southwest. Stephanie presented an overview of the market to the group during their scheduled meeting. The CVB hosted a dinner at Catawba Brewery for the full group followed by a LaZoom Comedy Tour. This was a first time visit to Asheville for many of the group. A debriefing about the event is scheduled for October.

Sales Calls/Missions:

- Tina Porter traveled to Overland, KS, September 12-15, to attend the 2016 S.P.O.R.T.S. Conference for the first time, meeting with 17 sports event planners/rights holders. The scheduled appointments were part of a larger itinerary that included numerous networking events.

- Tina traveled to Atlantic City, NJ, for TEAMS '16, the world's leading conference and expo for the sports event industry. Seventeen appointments were conducted. Staff partnered with the NC Sports Association to host a networking client event with more than 30 sports event planners in attendance.
- Beth McKinney attended the NC Domestic Sales Mission along with 12 NC tourism partners and visited the offices of 12 motorcoach tour companies across Pennsylvania.
- Shawn Boone traveled to Minneapolis, MN, to attend Luxury Meetings Summit and had appointments with 19 prospective Midwest planners. Staff also made local sales calls and, as part of the trip, made a presentation to Aimia Proprietary Loyalty U.S. Inc., a top 25 meeting and incentive company whose top customer markets include automotive, pharmaceutical, and high-tech (four planners attended).
- Staff joined Financial & Insurance Conference Planners Association in preparation for northeast sales initiatives.
- Leann Swims held two AAA Webinars for four clubs (AAA Carolinas, AAA South, AAA Allied and AAA Alabama) with approximately 31 staff attending. The webinars focused on the fall/winter. Staff also traveled to Charlotte, visiting five AAA Carolina offices (30 agents) while there.
- A total of 44 wedding guides were distributed in September as compared to 50 guides in September 2015.

Groups: Asheville hosted the 2016 NC Society of Human Resource Management Conference in downtown, September 28-30, at the U.S. Cellular Center. More than 1,100 people attended, occupying more than 800 weekday rooms at five downtown properties.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: Staff hosted eight meeting planners for the first of four scheduled 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experiences to be held this FY. Planners experienced iconic Asheville attractions, enjoyed a customized experience, toured meeting properties and appreciated the food and beverage culture for which we have become known. More than \$1.2 million in baseline revenues from rooms, food & beverage, and meeting rental/AV have been booked in Asheville as a direct result of these events. A site visit was also hosted for two representatives from Kuoni Switzerland. Kuoni is expanding its product throughout the south and sited Asheville as part of a larger southern itinerary.

September bookings included:

- 2020 American College of Trust and Estate Council – 1,675 room nights
- 2016 Big South Conference Men's & Women's Cross Country Championship – 125 room nights
- 2017 Penn State College of Medicine – 110 rooms
- 2016 IHG Finance Meeting – 340 room nights
- 2018 Clopay Building Products – 680 room nights
- 2017 Symposium for German Educators – 75 room nights

- 2017 Merchants Distributors – 620 room nights
- Among others

Group Sales Communications: Work with the team’s agency, Market Connections, included finalizing the new full-page ad design and the media buy for the fiscal year. Work on a refresh of the e-newsletter template for meeting sales began. Planning for new tradeshow banners for the Group Tour and weddings markets also began in September.

A destination profile was completed for the CVB’s presence on the meeting research site, EmpowerMINT. The team’s 2015 full-page ad was submitted for an HSMAI Adrian Award in the Group Sales Advertising Campaign category. A meeting planner was selected as a winner of the first quarterly RFP contest of the fiscal year, a promotion that will run all year.

Mass Communications

- An e-newsletter was sent to 1,912 Group Tour clients. Open rate: 18 percent; Unique clicks: 39
- An e-blast was sent to 645 sports planner clients in advance of the CVB’s attendance at the S.P.O.R.T.S. and TEAMS tradeshow. Open rate: 41 percent; Unique clicks: 13
- An e-blast announcing Asheville’s presence at the IMEX America tradeshow was sent to a selection of 2,651 corporate clients in the CVB’s database. Open rate: 23 percent; Unique clicks: 63

Media Coverage

- The CVB assisted a writer for the October issue of *Meetings Today* writing a piece focused on signature festivals and events in key meetings markets around North Carolina. This will jointly showcase happenings that provide ready tie-ins for groups in-town for meetings.
- The same writer was given Asheville information for the second annual *Meetings Carolinas* supplement planned for an upcoming edition of *Meetings Today*.

Convention Servicing: Sixty-three groups that met in September were assisted or contacted by the convention service manager during planning. Services for meetings in the month included a welcome presentation to the Carolinas Public Gas Association and registration assistance for NC Psychiatric Association. CVB services for the NC SHRM State Conference that occurred in September at the U.S. Cellar Center included planning assistance, a welcome from Stephanie Brown at the opening keynote session, a staffed hospitality table and welcome gifts for VIPs. Staff prepared travel guides and maps for pick-up for 13 meetings/weddings and four deliveries to hotel meeting sites in September.

Specific assistance for future meetings included promotional help for 2018 Clopay Leadership Conference, Embroiderers' Guild of America's 2017 National Seminar and GeoWoodstock 2017, planning help for the Summerville SC Chamber of Commerce Intercity visit, and planning and microsite building assistance for the 2017 MDI Expo. Several staff members also attended the SoCon Local Organizing Committee meeting.

Departmental Activities: Partner meetings initiated by the ACVB included preparations for IMEX America's tradeshow/hosted buyer breakfast. Meetings/sites attended by ACVB include: Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission; Civic Center Commission, SoCon LOC, Chamber Open House, BCTDA Annual Meeting and tour of Grovewood Gallery.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Workforce Development for the Hospitality Sector: The Workforce Development Steering Committee met on September 13 with Ritchie Rozzelle, Transportation Demand Coordinator with Land of Sky Regional Council. Discussion focused on a Van Pool Program with Enterprise Car Rental Company.

Wayfinding Program: Worked with Susanne Hackett of New Belgium Brewery to determine if NBB wants to add their name to signs in the Wayfinding System at their own cost. Ultimately, it was determined they would like to be on six signs, including one new sign that is missing, following construction in the River Arts District. Susanne is taking it to her management team for final approval of the required NBB expenditure.

Festivals and Cultural Events Grant Program: With BCTDA member Chip Craig as Chair, the committee met on September 15 to review submitted applications. Of 15 applications, the committee recommended funding be awarded to 14 applicants at the combined total of \$50,500. Chip brought the recommendation to the BCTDA meeting on September 28 where it was approved by a unanimous vote of the members.

Hospitality Training: Developed a document outlining the steps to be taken for creating and implementing this program in FY17/18. A conceptual course outline and follow-up steps were drafted, as well.

Exempt vs. Non-Exempt Determinations: With changes to the non-exempt salary threshold taking effect December 1, 2016, all staff positions were reviewed to determine if they 1) met or exceeded the new salary threshold of \$47,476 and if the salary threshold was met, and 2) compare job descriptions to the "Duties Test." Ultimately, it was determined that eight staff now fall into the non-exempt category of qualifying for overtime.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

Tourism Product Development Efforts

The TPDF Committee received nine Phase II application submissions on August 31. Each applicant had the opportunity to present their project in a 30-minute presentation to the committee on September 19 and 20. Following the presentations, one applicant, the Center for Craft, Creativity and Design (CCCD), withdrew their application from consideration due to findings in a new structural analysis review which revealed the need for a \$300k+ structural retrofit to accommodate the conference facility. CCCD intends to concentrate its resources on developing a niche co-working facility for the creative sector and special event venue.

The TPDF Committee conducted site visits to the remaining eight projects in consideration for TPDF funding on September 30 and October 5. On October 18, the committee will meet for final project review to develop the funding recommendations for the 2016 cycle.

Per the BCTDA's recommendation in June, in response to the submission of the City of Asheville's \$20 million Major Works Pathway request for South Slope enhancements, city staff met with CVB staff and destination development consultant, Mike Konzen of PGAV, on September 8, to kick-off discussions on developing the concept.

Partner Engagement

Partner Forum/Community Update – September 6: The Asheville CVB hosted a Community Update meeting with our partners at the City of Asheville. Stephanie Monson Dahl, director of the Riverfront Redevelopment Office, provided a presentation on the improvements in the River Arts District. Monson Dahl explained construction is underway and will be ongoing for the next three years. Also, Kit Cramer and Mayor Manheimer talked about the bond referendums for the general election on November 8, 2016. She explained there will be three bond-related questions on the ballot and asked for volunteers to help encourage community members to vote yes on all three items.

BCTDA Annual Meeting – September 28: The BCTDA 2016 Annual Meeting was held on September 28 at Lioncrest at Biltmore, and was a great success, thanks to our generous sponsor, Biltmore. There were 213 in attendance. George Zimmermann's keynote address was well received; his case studies illuminated the positive impact that destination campaigns and visitation can have on a community's economic development. Stephanie Brown presented the BCTDA Annual Report. Marla Tambellini delivered a heart-felt introduction honoring the winner of the William A.V. Cecil Award, Gary Everhardt, past superintendent of Blue Ridge Parkway and the former director of the National Park Service.

The CVB Sock Drive was well-supported with the donation of 205 pairs of socks by attendees. Socks were delivered to the Haywood Congregation, who was very appreciative of the industry's efforts.

October CVB Partner Forum – October 20: The October CVB Partner Forum will provide an opportunity for partners to see a preview of the new Extranet 4.0, and hear an update on ExploreAsheville.com advertising opportunities by DTN ad sales representative, Lia Wik.

Projects

The Extranet 4.0 Rollout project is underway, and expected to launch on November 3. Partners will have the opportunity to preview the new interface at the October 20 Partner Forum. Additionally, partners can attend a training session to receive one-on-one assistance on November 4 and 10.

The BCTDA 2015-16 Annual Report and the BCTDA 2016-17 Sales & Marketing Plan were completed, and are available for download on the AshevilleCVB.com website.

The AshevilleCVB.com website is currently being redesigned, and is expected to launch October/November. The BCTDA.org website content will be incorporated into the new AshevilleCVB.com website.

VISITOR SERVICES UPDATE

The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 22,062 guests during the month of September 2016. The Pack Square Park Pavilion welcomed 980.

The volunteers attended a performance of “Asheville Aerial Arts” at Asheville Community Theatre, “Grounded” at NC Stage, and “When Jekyll Met Hyde” at Magnetic Theatre.

The volunteers toured Highland Brewing Company with Leah Wong Ashburn and Steve Hogan, Grovewood Gallery with Tom Anders, and The River Arts District with Asheville Art Studio Tours, led by John Almaguer. Future events include NC Stage, Asheville Community Theatre, Magnetic Theatre, Addison Farms Vineyard, and the Hilton Garden Inn.

Training for the volunteers continued with email updates along with “on the job” daily briefings from staff members.