



October 25, 2017

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

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### **MONTH AT A GLANCE**

Somehow, the flurry of September seems to have already been overshadowed by October's focus on fall foliage promotion and an aggressive travel schedule for the sales team. But more on that in the next report.

The 2017 Fall Media Tour, September 17-22, took the Asheville message to Columbia, Charleston and Atlanta. Despite the impact of Hurricane Irma, the final schedule included 20 appointments including three broadcast interviews.

The early results of fall promotion efforts are very positive. The countdown content reached more than 300,000 Facebook users. The opt-in email grew the list of color report recipients by more than 25 percent. And in the final 10 days of September, the fall Facebook ads drove more than 10,000 clicks to ExploreAsheville.com. The campaign to gain recognition for Asheville as a top music town landed a spot on Expedia's "12 best lesser-known music destinations."

During September, sales travel included: Smart Meetings West National; made nine sales calls in New Jersey and attended MPI NJ Chapter; conducted 13 sales calls in Raleigh and attended MPI Central Carolinas Tradeshow.

We are recruiting for two positions – Director of Advertising and Business Intelligence Manager.

As previously reported, September community engagement included the Media Preview on September 6, the BCTDA Annual Meeting a week later, and the Open House on the final Wednesday of the month. Both partner events attracted more than 200 attendees. I also presented a Buncombe County Tourism Overview to Leadership Asheville Seniors, and attended the Tourism Leadership conference in Charlotte which included a meeting with State Representative Jason Saine, chair of the House Finance Committee. The Explore Asheville team was hosted for an afternoon of zipline teambuilding at Navitat on September 27.

The CVB issued a press release with the Sports Commission to announce Haute Route Asheville.

## **SEPTEMBER EACVB METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS**

- During September, the sales team posted 1,062 personal contacts (up 9%). September sales activities generated 54 sales leads (up 4%) and 52 convention bookings (up 58%), representing 6,543 rooms (up 9%). Three months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 4 percent and room nights represented are up 3 percent.
- CVB leads generated 56 group events in September (down 23%), with revenue of \$2,275,404 (up 22%). The services team assisted 54 groups (down 13%).
- The PR team landed 51 significant placements in September (down 16%), with 73 media touchpoints (down 20%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$197,281 with reach of over 12 million. Online placements added \$391,571 in value and reach of over 424 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 416,455 visits (up 0.2%), including 277,432 to the mobile site (up 0.4%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 2,690 (down 67%) and video views totaled 153,901 (down 83%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 93 room nights (up 86%) with total room revenue of \$15,211 (up 62%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 21,689 visitors (down 2%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 914 visitors (down 7%).

## **HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$34,973,379 in August, an increase of 9.2 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 78.1 percent during August (up 0.3%). The average daily room rate was \$156.41 (up 2.0%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$122.12 (up 2.3%). Room demand increased 4.5 percent with 180,985 rooms sold. August posted a 0.3 percent increase in occupancy with a 2 percent increase in ADR, a 4.5 percent increase in demand and a 2.3 percent increase in hotel revenue.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 17.7 percent to total 96,176 in August.

## **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Advertising:** The digital campaign ended September 30. As of September 22, the harvest season campaign has generated 83,162 clicks and more than 3.5 million video views. Of note, the last week of the Jacksonville buy was tabled due to the hurricane. Initial creative for the holiday campaign was developed and draft media plans were formulated. As part of the information gathering phase, the content team developed a survey sent to Explore Asheville's 120,000 e-news subscribers, which ultimately provided guidance and insights that shaped the holiday campaign. The first draft of the holiday landing page was built out. The full-page NC Travel Guide co-op ad was finalized.

National Geographic Travel is interested in developing a more expansive partnership with Asheville that would include TV exposure on the NGT cable channel. The marketing team is in the process of putting together a trip giveaway for the Harry Connick Jr. Show which will provide destination exposure.

An in-banner video campaign with Gannett is performing well. The added value (free) opportunity to run an in-market effort was launched at the beginning of October.

Paid search efforts: Sessions continue to trend upward and Simpleview reports site engagement on the ads is, in their words, phenomenal. Bounce rate is also down. The “things to do” campaign is generating the most clicks. On Google, the events campaign has the highest click through rate from the ads and the romance campaign has the lowest cost per click. The Asheville brand campaign ranks highest for the most clicks on Bing, with the Blue Ridge Parkway campaign generating the highest click through rate this month. More than half of the clicks are now coming from mobile devices.

**General Media Relations:** In addition to heavy logistics around fall outreach and music publicity efforts, the PR team supported 73 media touchpoints, initiated 58 targeted pitches and hosted five media on the ground in September. The team assisted with Asheville story research trips for media representing *Fodor’s Travel*, *Cycle Presse Magazine* in Canada, *The Daily Meal*, *Triallist* and *The Beer Necessities*. Asheville imagery and story support was also provided to *New York Post*, *McClatchy*, *USA TODAY*, *Jezebel*, *Trailblazer*, *Market Watch*, *American Art Collector*, *American Songwriter* and *Meetings Today*, among others.

**Fall Media Tour:** The PR team leveraged the first calendar days of fall to bring Asheville seasonal news to media outlets in the Columbia, Charleston and Atlanta markets on the 2017 Fall Media Tour (Sept. 17-22). Itinerary preparations were complicated by the impacts of Hurricane Irma, but the final schedule included 20 appointments including three broadcast interviews. Highlights included *Low Country Live* in Charleston, *Connect*, *The Local Palate*, *Garden & Gun*, *Forbes Travel Guide*, *HGTV.com*, *TravelChannel.com* and freelancers working with AAA publications, *Southern Living*, *SmarterTravel*, *Redbook*, *Vogue*, *Elle.com* and *Atlanta Magazine*. A new fall-focused press brief was developed ahead of the tour; it is designed to be an evergreen piece to support fall media inquiries and pitching year-round.

### **Significant Placements**

1. AARP – “Destinations for Foodies: Top Food Towns in the U.S.”
2. ABC News 4 – “Explore Asheville”
3. AFAR – “Best Things to do in Asheville, North Carolina”
4. Atlanta Magazine – “Deck the Halls: Mountain Manor meets Winter Wonderland at Asheville’s Biltmore”
5. AZ Central – “10 Great Breweries where the Scenery’s as good as the Beer”
6. Business North Carolina – “How the River Arts District accelerates Asheville’s Appeal”
7. Carrie on Travel – “Conquering Fears and Having Fun at the Adventure Center of Asheville”
8. Connect Magazine Faith – “North vs. South Carolinas Edition” and “Paris of the South”
9. Country Living Magazine – “27 of the most beautiful places in America”
10. Forbes – “23 Unforgettable Fall Escapes”
11. Gal Meets Glam – “5 Favorite Spots for Fall Foliage”
12. Garden & Gun – “Asheville, North Carolina: Weekend Dining Guide” and “The Southern Agenda: October/November 2017”
13. Huffington Post – “5 of the Best Places to Shop in Asheville,” “The 15 most instagrammable spots in Asheville NC” and “48 Hours in Asheville, NC”

14. Just Luxe – “What’s Trending for 2017”
15. Miami Herald – “Asheville’s Best Places to Chill out and Chow with your Dog”
16. MSN – “2017’s 20 Best American Foodie Towns”
17. New York Post – “Embrace the artsy side of Appalachia”
18. Orbitz – “7 Things you can only do in Asheville”
19. Our State Magazine – “Best-Kept Secrets in Asheville: Wai Mauna Standup Paddleboard Tours” and “Imagine Growing up in North Carolina’s Grandest Dollhouse”
20. Popsugar – “50 States of Unbelievable Tourist Attractions”
21. Princeton Alumni Weekly – “Alan Muskat ’90: The Philosophorager”
22. Reader’s Digest – “8 Super Cozy Inns to Book Right Now During Peak Fall Foliage Season”
23. Southern Living – “13 Great Father-Daughter Road Trips to Take This Fall”
24. Stuart Says – “8 Amazing States to see the Best Fall Foliage”
25. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution – “Best of the Southeast”
26. Trip Advisor Blog – “6 Must-see Spots for Fall Foliage”
27. Upscale Magazine – “Asheville, North Carolina”
28. USA Today – “Breweries with a View”
29. WACH Fox 57 – “Make Asheville, N.C. your season destination this fall”
30. WIS News 10 Middy – “What’s New in Asheville this Fall”

**Music Initiative:** As part of phase II of the music effort, the PR team continues to host influential music outlets for destination immersion and story research. During September, the PR team (in partnership with Mason Jar Media) facilitated a site visit for music writer and *Fodor’s Travel* editor Rachael Roth. Roth will be creating a range of content around Asheville’s music culture, in addition to a “Stomping Grounds” artist/destination piece that features Amanda Platt of local band The Honeycutters (Organic Records). The team also worked on logistics and details for several October site visits from music writers and editors representing *Consequence of Sound*, *JamBase* and *No Depression*. Initial travel planning for Caitlin White, music editor of *Uproxx*, also began. The team also finalized copy for a new music press brief.

An updated proposal was sent to ACME for review to round out Explore Asheville Radio needs and to assist in collaborative efforts to further awareness of the music scene. Recently Expedia put Asheville on its list of 12 best lesser-known music destinations.

**Content Development Projects:** Many of the content team’s projects during the month of September centered on the beginning of the fall foliage season while also working on several video projects.

#### Fall Foliage Season:

The team launched the popular time of year across its channels in the following ways: posting a “countdown to fall” highlighting popular web content and some new content, such as a fall hiking trails quiz; broadcasting a live fall introduction and Q&A session on Facebook; auditing and optimizing existing fall content; sending out segmented emails to encourage opt-ins to weekly color reports; and developing a slate of Facebook ads to encourage travel during the fall season. The first fall color report was posted September 28<sup>th</sup> with a new format—one that features user-generated content and links to additional fall activities.

Early results from fall efforts have been very positive. The countdown content reached more than 300,000 Facebook users. The opt-in email grew the list of color report recipients by more than 25 percent. And in the final 10 days of September, the fall Facebook ads drove more than 10,000 clicks to ExploreAsheville.com.

Other Content Projects: Other projects this month included completion of the Faces of Tourism video for showing at the Annual Meeting and editing shorter cuts of both Faces videos for use in a local Gannett ad run. The team also shot new photography of the Steep Canyon Rangers as a part of the partnership with the band.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of September, nine new pieces of editorial content were added to ExploreAsheville.com: a restructured fall color report page and blog posts about a new trail at Chimney Rock State Park, celebrating in the spirit of Oktoberfest (a beer & events round up), a fall color quiz, the announcement of Biltmore's 2018 Chihuly exhibit, and four weekend events posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was the announcement of Biltmore's Chihuly exhibit, which received 41,022 new page views, followed by 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 36,806 page views.

**Social Media Stats:**

Facebook:

*Visit Asheville page*

- September saw 2,690 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 260,036.
- There were 44 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 video used to launch our "Countdown to Fall" series. It has reached 127,340 people organically, generating 5,719 total reactions, and 393 comments.
- The most popular boosted Facebook post during the month was the announcement of Chihuly at Biltmore. It reached 425,799 people (385,844 organically), generating 38,164 total reactions, and 5,785 comments. It was also this month's most engaging post—10.4 percent of users reached interacted with this post.

*Foodtopia page*

- September saw 30 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,472 likes.
- There were 10 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of September.
- The most popular unpaid post in September, a share of an article by the Local Adventurer about an Asheville food bucket list, reached 14,255 people, generating 516 reactions, 72 comments and 131 shares.

Video:

- There were 19,785 new organic YouTube views in September. The most popular video by organic views this month was The Asheville Promise, which received 5,928 non-paid views. The Fall Time Lapse came in second with 2,633 new views.
- Across all of our video platforms, there were 153,901 views. There have been 355,101 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2017).

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,620. Foodtopia accounts for 1,376 of those; Visit Asheville – 3,244.

#### Instagram:

- Our Visit Asheville account has 37,847 followers.
- There were 21 new posts in September. The most popular was a drone shot of The Omni Grove Park Inn. It received 2,139 engagements (likes and comments).

#### Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 29,488 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,742 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 120,265 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In September, we sent out the following emails:
  - Our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,939 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 18.1 percent and a click-through rate of 4 percent.
  - A holiday travel survey was sent to 120,144 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 16.8 percent and a click-through rate of 3.5 percent.
  - Our fall color report opt-in email was sent to 111,493 subscribers who had not previously opted in to receive weekly color emails. It had an overall open rate of 15.9 percent. More than 2,200 subscribers clicked to opt-in to the reports.
  - Our fall color welcome email was sent to 8,947 subscribers who had previously opted-in to receive color reports. It had an overall open rate of 36.4 percent and a click-through rate of 8.3 percent.
  - Finally, our first fall color report email was sent out 11,251 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 42 percent(!!!) and a click through rate of 18.4 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** In September, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com increased 0.2 percent year over year, which includes a 15.2 percent increase in organic user sessions, a 19.8 percent increase in email referral sessions, a 13.3 percent increase in paid search user sessions, and a 165.5 percent increase in social referral sessions. Mobile visits in September increased by 4 percent year over year.

#### Website Improvements – SEO and CRO

In September, Simpleview continued its conversion rate optimization efforts on ExploreAsheville.com and provided the marketing team with results for two conversion optimization tests. Simpleview recommended three additional tests for lower funnel conversions on Places to Stay, Things to Do and Home pages. The organic engagement continues to outperform the industry averages and is up 12 percent year-over-year.

- 50 Things to Do continues to be a top performing page with 21,953 organic visits.
- The Fall Forecast & Weekly Fall Color Report brought in 3,606 visits.
- Fall Foliage and Seasonal Fun > Fall pages resulted in 4,009 total visits.
- Organic visits to fall content grew, year over year, by about 3,500.
- ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 18 percent more total pages per visit, 28 percent longer visit duration, 28 percent more organic pages per visit and 43 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to industry average.

**Online Reservations:** There were 55 orders for 93 room nights in September with a total of \$15,211 in booking revenue and \$689.15 in commission.

<b>September 2017</b>	<b>Current Month</b>	<b>This Month Last Year</b>	<b>Variance Monthly</b>	<b>YTD Actual</b>	<b>YTD Last Year</b>	<b>Variance YTD</b>
Booking Rev	\$15,211	\$9,414	61.6%	\$29,845	\$37,056	-19.5%
Commission	\$689.15	\$352.48	95.5%	\$2,536.43	\$1,723.36	47.2%
Orders	55	27	103.7%	208	122	70.5%
Room Nights	93	50	86.0%	306	302	1.3%

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

**Visitor Guide:** Advertising is nearing an end and Saga City expects the sales goal to be met. The first draft of the guide was delivered in early October and the layout and design was impressive and well done.

Visitor Guide Requests

There were 3,606 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in September, a 35.9 percent increase from last September. Year-to-date, there are 8,543 travel guide requests, a 9.3 percent increase from last year.

<b>Top 5 DMAs for September</b>	<b># of Guides</b>	<b>FY 2017-2018</b>	<b># of Guides</b>
New York	175	Orlando	419
Orlando	145	New York	393
Washington, DC	127	Tampa, St. Pete	359
Tampa, St. Pete	115	Atlanta	304
Philadelphia	112	Washington, DC	302

**GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE**

Group sales reported 52 definite group bookings in September representing a 57.6 percent increase from the prior September. Of these group bookings, 26 were meetings & conventions and 17 were weddings, and nine were motorcoach. The combined total definite room nights in September were 6,543 room nights an 8.5 percent increase over the prior year. The estimated revenue for leads turned definite in September was \$1,203,563 representing a 29.4 percent decrease. Actualized revenue was \$2,275,404, a 22 percent increase from the prior year.

Fifty-two sales leads (41 for meeting/conventions, eight weddings and three for motorcoach), representing 14,636 room nights, were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in September 2017. This represents an increase of 3.8 percent in number of sales leads issued and a 13.4 percent decrease in room nights represented. Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,062 contacts in September as compared to 976 the prior year, representing an 8.8 percent increase. Indirect outreach totaled 12,866 contacts compared to 4,997, representing a 158 percent increase from the prior September.

The team welcomed back Beth McKinney, sales manager, from maternity leave. Beth handles the motorcoach and reunion markets and has formally been named our delegate to the Blue Ridge Parkway Association.

**Sales Calls/Missions:**

- Tina Porter attended Smart Meeting West National, conducting 25 one-on-one appointments. Additionally, she attended networking receptions, educational events and conducted sales calls aside from the event. In total, 103 planners attended. One immediate RFP resulted.
- Carla McGlynn made nine sales calls in New Jersey and attended Meeting Professionals International NJ Chapter meeting. EA was a sponsoring partner of this event. Twenty-five planners attended MPI-NJ. One sales call alone was to a corporation responsible for planning 400+ meeting per year, ranging from 20 to 1,500.
- Molly Nelson conducted 13 sales calls in the Raleigh area. Additionally, she attended the Meeting Professionals International of Central Carolinas Tradeshow. Two RFPs resulted from this visit. Fifty-two planners were in attendance.

**Meeting Professionals International – NJ Chapter:**

EA was a sponsor of this event, involving 25 planners. Sponsorship benefits included a video presentation, being showcased on group's Facebook page pre- and post-event, and signage throughout the event. A pre-event email was sent to 129 MPI New Jersey members as a part of promoting Asheville's attendance and sponsorship. Open rate: 22 percent Click through rate: 11 percent.

**Smart Meeting West National:** EA was a sponsor of the networking lunch. Sponsorship benefits included a video presentation during the lunch, logo placement on website and signage, and insertion of sales materials in registration packets. Approximately 103 planners were in attendance.

**Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:** Four independent site visits were hosted in September with business for all future years: 2018 San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art – 39 rooms; 2018-2020 Haute Route – 1,085 rooms per year; 2019 Delta Kappa Gamma – 880 rooms; 2019 American Academy of Psychotherapists – 600 rooms.

A sampling of bookings reported in September include:

- 2018 Gala Gymnastics Competition – 310 rooms (January)
- 2018 The Farm House Foundation – 72 rooms
- 2017 Lawpact – 72 rooms
- 2017 AIG – 36 rooms
- 2017 Association of Electrical Illuminating Companies – 60 rooms
- 2018 American College of Trust and Estate Councils – 150 rooms
- 2018 B Corp Champions – 220 rooms
- 2018 Collette Vacations (2) – 88 rooms
- 2018 Ferrington Yacht Club – 50 rooms
- 2018 San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art – 39 rooms
- 2018 ABYSA – NCYSA State Cup – 700 rooms
- 2018 MaxPlay Tuft Cup Boys – 450 rooms
- 2018 CACUBO – 42 rooms
- 2018 American Conifer Society – 76 rooms
- 2019 Appalachian Studies Association – 1,695 rooms

A total of 31 wedding guide requests were fulfilled in September as compared to 45 last year.

## **Explore Asheville 48-Hour Meeting Planners FAM**

Hurricane Irma forced the cancellation of the planned September FAM. Of the seven attendees, two rescheduled to come independently; three are being transferred to the planned March 2018 FAM and two are unable to reschedule at this time.

### **Media**

- A writer with *Meetings Today* requested images to accompany an annual NC feature themed around top music venues for groups for the October edition.
- Connect Faith published a story on Asheville, "Paris of the South," in the September edition. Explore Asheville planned the itinerary for the writer.

### **Mass Communications:**

- A pre-trade show email was sent to 225 clients who previously attended IMEX to promote booth attendance at the 2017 show. Open rate: 29 percent; Click through rate: 17 percent.
- A database-wide e-newsletter was sent to 9654 meeting planner clients. Open rate: 11 percent; Click through rate: 34 percent
- An invitation to a cocktail reception hosted by staff during the IMEX America show was sent to 223 clients. Open rate: 39 percent; Click through rate: 15 percent
- A pre-event email was sent to 129 MPI New Jersey members as a part of promoting Asheville's attendance and sponsorship. Open rate: 22 percent; Click through rate: 11 percent
- A second invitation email was sent to 777 D.C. area clients inviting them to a client event to be held in October. Open rate: 21 percent; Click through rate: 26 percent

### **Group Sales Communications**

- A new email invitation design was finalized for the rebranded 2018 Asheville 48-Hour Experiences.
- The HB2 Response content was updated in the Meeting Planner section of ExploreAsheville.com.
- A video compiling testimonials of past Asheville 48-Hour Experience attendees was finalized and will be used to promote the 2018 dates.

**IMEX Communications:** Using the IMEX internal portal, the following emails were sent by EA to solicit for IMEX scheduled appointments. Exhibitors are allowed one eblast per week, four in total:

- Eblast 1 – 1,428 buyers received our messaging
- Eblast 2 – 2,323 buyers received our messaging
- Eblast 3 – 1,016 buyers received our messaging

### **Convention Servicing Highlights:**

A staffed information table was provided to Overland Expo East hosted at Biltmore.

### **Departmental Activities:**

- Named Beth McKinney as our official delegate to the Blue Ridge Parkway Association.
- DOS Quarterly meeting held with six properties present.
- Held meeting with Asheville Area Arts Council leadership to pursue idea of inviting artists to bring their professional association meetings to Asheville.
- Leann Swims, along with three industry partners, conducted on-site training for the I-26 Welcome Center.

- Planning meeting was held between ABRSC and EA sales and marketing to identify future sales and marketing strategies/tactics.
- Sales participated in BCTDA Annual Meeting, New Office Media Preview and Open House, and Civic Center Commission.
- Participated in numerous planning meetings with partners, attended the AC's grand opening and met independently with various managers and sales partners.

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**Tourism Product Development Efforts:** The three organizations participating in Phase II – Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, Leaf Cultural Arts, and Haywood Street Congregation – presented their projects to the TPDF Committee on September 28. Site visits will take place on October 10, followed by a final committee meeting on October 19 to determine funding recommendations. The recommendations will be presented to the BCTDA at the October board meeting.

Staff is awaiting updated scope and finalized schedule details from the City of Asheville regarding the Riverfront Redevelopment project to finalize the contract amendments as approved by the BCTDA at the June 28 board meeting. The contract for the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway Major Works Project is currently in review with Buncombe County government, who will act as the sole fiscal agent for project.

Pat and Stephanie met with staff members of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County to discuss the possibility of collaborating on product development projects. Discussions resulted in the planning of a follow-up meeting which will take place in October to include additional members from each team and the opportunity for the group to learn from each other about processes and upcoming projects.

### **Partner Engagement:**

#### **Media Preview Event**

A special event to invite members of the media and key stakeholders for a preview of the new Explore Asheville offices was held on September 6. Community partners Asheville Independent Restaurant Association (AIR), Buncombe County Regional Sports Commission, Asheville Symphony, Asheville Downtown Association, Asheville Music Professionals, River Arts District Artists and friends helped celebrate the occasion with a toast. Media (WLOS, Mountain Xpress and Asheville.com) were also in attendance. Lunch was served prior to the announcements and tour.

#### **2017 BCTDA Annual Meeting – September 13**

Industry partners gathered at the Country Club at The Omni Grove Park Inn on September 13 to attend the BCTDA Annual Meeting featuring a keynote presentation by Explore Asheville CVB leadership focusing on the previous fiscal year's marketing and sales strategies. The William A.V. Cecil Award was presented to former Managing Director of the Diana Wortham Theatre, John Ellis. Immediate past chair, Paula Wilber, was also recognized for her leadership of the BCTDA board and presented with a memorial keepsake. A "Faces of Tourism" video was unveiled, highlighting the fulfilling careers and opportunities in the tourism industry. More than 200 industry partners were in attendance, and the event was generously hosted by The Omni Grove Park Inn. Attendees received a copy of the BCTDA Annual Report. Presentations and reports from the event can be found on AshevilleCVB.com in the past events section.

### Explore Asheville Open House – September 20

Industry partners and community stakeholders attended an Open House Party at the new Explore Asheville offices on September 20. Members and friends of our neighbor organizations, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association, the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission, and the Asheville Symphony, were also in attendance. Attendees toured the office and networked throughout the party, enjoying food and beverage thanks to our generous sponsors Bouchon Asheville, Biltmore, and Sovereign Remedies. Attendees were also given a bottle of a special label beer from Asheville Brewing commemorating the establishment of the independent organization to take home with them.

Planning is underway for a Partner Forum on November 16, featuring a Sales & Marketing Update, and the CVB Holiday Party at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel on December 6.

**Projects:** The public affairs team finalized the content, design and production of the BCTDA 2016-17 Annual Report and the 2017-2018 Sales & Marketing Plan.

Brit began developing a partner engagement strategy that incorporates a contest to encourage partners to improve their listing profiles; details are being finalized and is expected to roll out early 2018.

**Partner Outreach:** Brit created two new partner accounts in September – The Barn at Honeysuckle Hill, and Momentum Gallery. Additional account requests were received; however, accounts are pending the implementation of the ExploreAsheville.com reciprocal link.

The public affairs team hosted the first Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation since moving to the new location. Seven attended including staff from Cambria Hotel & Suites Downtown Asheville, Holiday Inn Biltmore East, Asheville Wellness Tours, De La Terre Skincare, and Vacation in Asheville/Oakland Cottage. The public affairs team also met one-on-one with industry partner Adam Mundy from New Belgium Brewing.

**Community Outreach:** Pat attended the Chamber Member Appreciation event, Creative Mornings at CCCD, and presented information on engaging with Explore Asheville at the West Asheville Business Association (WABA) Quarterly Member Meeting.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES**

### **Organizational and Administrative Transitioning:**

**Building:** September saw the long-awaited receipt of a Certificate of Occupancy for Explore Asheville's office space at 27 College Place. With the case built cabinets being installed, staff began the chore of filing and storing away all the materials brought over from the chamber. The access cards for our doors were installed and Glenn was trained by Edwards Equipment on how to use the system and program cards for staff.

**Administration:** Stephanie and Glenn met with CPA Rufus Dollar on our Federal Filing with the IRS as a new non-profit. Rufus took information provided by Stephanie and Glenn and created a draft document for final review.

Stephanie and Glenn met with Gary Hannah, our 401K plan's administrator, to seek a change in the program to comply with IRS Safe Harbor Rules. Gary will provide us with an outline of the changes and their impact, which will be presented to the BCTDA Finance Committee for review and if approved, recommendation to the BCTDA at the October meeting.

Stephanie, Jonna and Glenn continued meeting with HR Mavens. The current focus is on developing an Employee Handbook that better reflects the work and culture of Explore Asheville. A great deal of the work was completed with a draft for senior staff review anticipated in October.

**Workforce Development:**

Glenn and Stephanie attended an advanced screening of *Mountain Careers* at the Doubletree. These are a series of videos created by Amplified Media, under contract with the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, highlighting career opportunities in the hospitality industry. The videos included careers in lodging, destinations, restaurants, and retail.

**Festivals and Cultural Events Grant Program:**

The Festivals and Cultural Events Committee met on September 25 to make funding decisions on 16 applications and 17 events. Ultimately, 13 events were selected for funding at a total of \$51,500. These recommendations were made to the BCTDA at its September 27 meeting where the members unanimously approved them.