

May 26, 2021

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

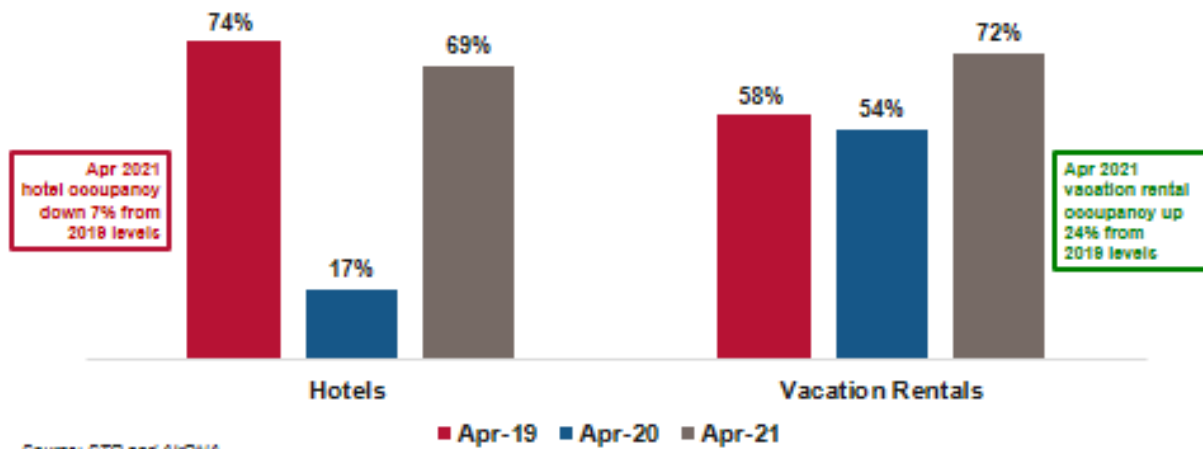
From: Vic Isley

Subject: President & CEO's Report of April 2021 Activities

Hotel occupancy for the month of April 2021 reached 69 percent, up significantly from the devastating low of 17% in April 2020, though still down 7% from April 2019 levels.

Short-term vacation rentals reached 72% in April 2021, up 24% from the benchmark year of 2019. This continues to be good news for local residents who own vacation rentals and are earning more and benefitting from the return of visitors to our community.

APR LODGING OCCUPANCY



APRIL BY THE NUMBERS

- During April, the sales team posted 732 personal contacts (up 7%). April sales activities generated 54 sales leads (up 39%) and 22 convention bookings (up 47%), representing 2,763 rooms (up 126%). Ten months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 36 percent and room nights represented are down 46 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 21 group events in April (up 100%), with corresponding revenue of \$575,666 (up 100%). The services team assisted 30 groups (up 329%).
- The PR team landed 29 significant placements in April (down 7%), with 54 media touchpoints (up 86%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$606k with reach of 2.7 million. Online placements added \$672k in value and reach of more than 372 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 633,701 visits (up 645%), including 475,873 to the mobile site (up 888%). Our Facebook fan base total is 300,297 (up 1%) and video views totaled 22,709 (down 80%).
- In April 2021, there were 3,263 Asheville Visitor Guide requests compared to 472 the previous year (up 591%).
- Paid search generated 86k site visits in April with average time on site of 1:32 and an average of 2.11 pageviews per visit; click through rate was 19.2 percent.
- Online hotel reservations totaled 58 room nights (up 1,067%) with total room revenue of \$9,695 (up 893%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 12,528 visitors (up 59%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion remains closed. The Black Mountain Visitor center welcomed 3,498 visitors (up 9,894%).

LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$36,198,090 in March (up 155%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 56.9 percent during March (up 51%). The average daily room rate was \$124.52 (flat), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$70.81 (up 50%). Room demand increased 59 percent with 152,824 rooms sold.
- AirDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 65 percent (up 57%), ADR of \$104.13 (up 15%), and RevPAR of \$67.15 (up 81%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 61 percent to total 123,735 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased percent to total 77,862 in March.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Project Updates:

- Throughout the month of April additional media partners launched as creative assets were finalized. April launches included the following partners/channels:
 - Pinterest
 - Amnet:
 - Programmatic connected tv
 - Programmatic display
 - Programmatic pre-roll
 - Native
 - YouTube
 - Captify parascroll unit (rich media)
 - Hulu
 - Sojern
 - Display
 - Pre-roll
- Finalized new video campaign creative. Six iterations were developed which include:
 - :30 Asheville generic
 - :15 Culinary
 - :15 Outdoors/wellness
 - :15 Creative Spirit
 - :06 Creative Spirit
 - :06 Culinary
- Launched content partnerships with Garden & Gun, Food & Wine, Travel + Leisure and AFAR.
- Planning for influencer video production with Matador. Shoot will take place in May and videos will roll out in July. As part of this partnership, REI will also be amplifying these videos via their owned channels.
- Created new blog post on the history of Black golf in Asheville in coordination with the PBS airing of “Muni” and PGA Masters opening tee-off recognition of former Skyview Tournament champion Lee Elder.
- Created content series around National Park Week (April 17-25), including messaging around Pledge for the Wild/Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation initiative, and partner highlights in concert with National Tea Day (April 21) and National Picnic Day (April 24).
- Developed mural trail as an addition to Asheville Downtown Trails hosted on EA.com.
- Assisted with new online ticketing system for Chow Chow website in preparation for festival’s 2021 ticket sale opening on April 15.
- Conducted photo shoots at Biltmore and Craggy Gardens for full moon yoga experience.
- Logged 54 media touchpoints, initiated 288 pitches, and supported 10 media on the ground in Asheville in April.
- Hosted Black Travel writer for a wellness-focused content project that will result in new editorial blog post on self-care experiences in Asheville along with new social media assets.
- Provided story support for *Fortune*, *Charleston Post & Courier*, *Departures*, *AARP*, *Budget Travel*, *Samantha Brown’s Places to Love*, *SHAPE* and *Food & Wine*. Photo support provided for *Smarter Travel*, *Passport*, *FOLIO* and *AFAR*.
- M&C / Group Travel Media: Worked with Sales to provide story support for *Mid-Atlantic Events Magazine*, *Going on Faith* and *ConventionSouth’s Event Planners’ Guide*.
- Production planning support for *Samantha Brown’s Places to Love* (PBS) including scouting trip facilitation, local connections, shoot logistic support, accommodations, b-roll/photo assets, and other details as needed. Crew on the ground in early May.

- Wellness round-up pitch sent to 286 media through the Cision platform. Responses were strong, including a SHAPE Magazine request for summer adventures for the July/August issue. The Asheville section will include items from the wellness round-up plus additional adventures shared by the team.
- The PR Team created a list of Black-owned businesses, entrepreneurs, and sites of interest to share for a recent site visit. The plan is for the list to evolve and grow to become a pitching tool and resource for media.
- Hired Marketing Specialist Holly Oakley.
- Distributed agency search RFP.
- Met with Tina on initial planning of nonstop flight promotion.
- Met with REI staff about opportunities for pairing experiences with lodging and promoting on earned channels.
- Presented marketing update to Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association.

Future Updates:

- Planning for upcoming site visits for *Places to Love* (shoot), *freelancers for Insider Weddings and Martha Stewart Weddings* and another working on a *Disney/National Geographic travel book* featuring Asheville's art/music/creative spirit and pitches for *Wall Street Journal*.
- Planning Explore Asheville participation in the Black Travel Alliance WAVELENGTH event.
- New video series focused on area trails/waterfalls told through the lens of local naturalists and outdoor tour guide with emphasis on sustainability/Leave No Trace.
- Creative asset testing underway in May.
- Work to begin with Destination Think! for comprehensive social media audit and strategy planning document.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Project Updates:

- Closer to Home Self Directed FAM initiative targeting the drive meeting market generated 61 requests for more information on visiting and generated 30 confirmed reservations and generating 3 leads so far with 325 total room nights. Project deemed a success.
- Had follow up meeting and training with Meetings Database Inc. regarding data analytics project to mine for group business.
- Attended ABA Virtual Marketplace with 9 one-on-one appointments with Tour Operators resulting already in one lead with 50 room nights with Funtastic Getaways.
- Co-hosted 4 local planners with local Terry Bemis of ConferenceDirect on a walking networking event highlighting The Arras, The Foundry and took 3 other planners to the AC, Cambria, and S&W Market.
- Site visit with GirlTime Getaways who confirmed their group at the Hyatt Place for Sept 2021.
- An automobile manufacturer had a week-long site with plans to bring 120 writers into Asheville for a two-night stay each so they could test drive their entire line of automobiles. The group could contract 435 rooms for late Oct or mid-Nov weekday.
- The department was able to tour several downtown event venues including the soon to open S&W Market.
- Worked further on the B-Corp List working through strategies.
- Had department Pillar Workshop to set ways to measure and execute objectives.
- Beth attended the meeting with Marla with REI's Local Adventures Division to discuss strategic partnerships.
- Two members volunteered with AB Tech to judge Capstone Projects for the Hospitality Department.

- More work done on the Brainery lessons with several members taking and passing the exams this month.
- Group travel calendars have been updated and saved on the public drive.
- Great work done with Community Engagement on interdepartmental communications strategies.
- Virtually attended the following trade/industry meetings:
 - Civic Center Commission Meeting
 - Georgia BTA Chapter Meeting
 - Global Meetings Industry Day
 - Asheville Buzz Breakfast
 - Covid Town Hall
 - PCMA's Community Conversations on Independent Event Organizers
 - MPI Webinar on the Great Restart
 - PCMA Webinar on Education Program
 - UNCA Noontime with the Bulldogs
 - NC Sports Assn Member Meeting
 - State of the Industry – Sports Focus
 - Cvent webinar: Meeting & Event Trends
 - BCTDA Monthly meeting and Annual Planning Retreat
 - NorthStar webinar on Diversity Now: How to Plan a Truly Inclusive Meeting
- April bookings included (but are not limited to):
 - 2021 May – Aspire Community Capitol BOD – 25 rooms
 - 2022 Aug – Great Clips Leadership Retreat – 39 rooms
 - 2021 Nov – Annual Primitive Stitcher's Society Retreat – 255 rooms
 - 2022 May – Aerospace Sealing Committee Meetings - 219 rooms
 - 2021 June – ACL League Pro Shootout – 215 rooms
 - 2021 June – AVL Lacrosse Classic Boys – 500 rooms
 - 2021 July – ACHF Extreme - 173 rooms – 260 rooms
 - 2021 July – USSSA All-Star Weekend – 40 rooms
 - 2021 Sept – Ville to Ville Extreme Relay - 110 rooms
 - 2021 Nov – Halada Family Reunion – 60 rooms
 - 2021 Dec – Great Smoky Mtn Grapple – 150 rooms
 - 2022 – 1 Tour Groups – 75 rooms
 - 2021 and 2022 – 10 Weddings – 635 rooms
- The team responded to requests from *Mid-Atlantic Events Magazine* and *Going on Faith*.
- Sales managers on LinkedIn had 2 posts and received 2,164 views while our EA Meetings and Convention page received 549 impressions and is up to 332 followers.
- Created 4 microsites – USSSA All-League Baseball, American Corn Hole League, American's Cloggers Hall of Fame, and Ville to Ville Extreme Relay.

Future Updates:

- Progress on B-Corp Efforts.
- MDI to provide report writing opportunities from their research for solicitation.
- New outcomes of Sales and Community Relations efforts.
- Provide update on American Bus Association Virtual Event.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Project Updates:

- In April, 212 calendar event listings were processed, and 40 listings were updated including 20 Attractions, 2 Bed & Breakfasts, 4 Food & Drink, 7 Hotels/Motels, 6 Retail, and one Venue.
- Six new partners were added in April: Blue Ridge Wine Tours, Hummingbird Candle Company, Grata Pizzeria, Blue Ridge Horse Adventures, Inc., Holy Water Hard Seltzer Brew Pub and Sushi; and Rachel Meenan Photography.
- One partner account was cancelled: Asheville Explore Tours which closed and is for sale.
- Visitor Guide distribution included 3,263 Individual Out-of-Market requests fulfilled and 1,892 books or 43 cases of In-Market to 15 industry partners.
- Eight One-on-One Wednesday sessions were held: five with new partners/new staff for orientation, two with current partners for listing/extranet/general support, and one with a potential partner considering applying for a listing.
- Improvements to partner support benefit information and onboarding process on AshevilleCVB.com have been completed by the JB Media team; next step is addition of extranet training videos by Nicole.
- Hotel ownership audit has been completed and updated in the CRM. A list of potential accommodation partners who are not currently represented on ExploreAsheville.com but meet the listing criteria have been identified for outreach.
- Calendar submission form in the extranet has been updated with a more intuitive flow and helpful “teaser text”. Instructional text was also added to the calendar submission form on the frontend and some field types were updated to make the form more user-friendly. The flow of the form on the front end has been modified as much as it can based on SimpleView’s platform.
- CE team members attended community meetings and events including: RAD Leadership Roundtable, African American Business Association, Lunch & Leads, the Chamber’s Member Advisory Council, the Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association, AIGA Business Outreach Committee Meeting, RADTIP Virtual Grand Opening Event, Town Hall: Covid, Now What?, Asheville Chamber of Commerce: Acts of Conscious Inclusion, Downtown Commission Parking & Transportation, Block Community Collaborative meeting, South Slope Neighborhood Association meeting, and met with leadership from the Attractions Group.
- CE team worked with Black Wall Street group on event listings and promotion.
- Pat presented to Aisha Adam’s Entrepreneurial Accelerator attendees on how to engage with Explore Asheville; and met with County staff on coordinated Community Campaign around vaccinations and updating safety messaging.
- Sponsorship inquiries received from WNC Black Business Expo April 2022, GRINDfest June 2021, Asheville Symphony, and ADA’s events including Downtown After 5 and Fourth of July.
- CE team members conducted site visits to Estes-Winn Antique Car Museum, Masonic Temple, Asheville Art Museum, the S&W Cafeteria and McCormick Field with Brian DeWine.
- Wayfinding: Continued efforts for the kiosk content refresh project are in progress including updating localized maps to include walk times in the downtown area. An order to replenish the final inventory was placed with local artists. Met with Geograph for downtown site visit to discuss possible additions of pedestrian signage to direct visitors outside of downtown core to north of 240 on Broadway and received training on the new Wayfinding Inventory Management System.
- TPDF: The TPDF Committee presented a recommendation to the TDA board at the April meeting to approve \$45,000 in TPDF funding for The Wortham Center to install and train on

a new air ionization system; the TDA approved the funding request. Pat has been working with the YMI team on an upcoming presentation for the TDA.

- TPDF recognition for Riverfront Development Project: City hosted a virtual ribbon-cutting on April 23 to celebrate the completion of the RADTIP project and invited Vic to comment during recognition of funders.
- African American Heritage Trail: the research phase continues; the research contractor recommended by Dr. Waters is delving into local archives to inform possible story lines and themes to present during community input effort in late summer. The project team Pat attended Black Placemaking For the Culture Webinar hosted by Conservation Trust for North Carolina.
- Team members continue with Brainery and Lenoir Rhyne Equity, Diversity & Inclusion certification coursework; three of four team members have completed the EDI program and received certification.

Future Updates:

- Planning underway for the Tourism Summit 2021, a four-part virtual series of panel discussions on the four new pillars with partners and community partners to take place on May 10, 12, 17 and 19.
- A staff service day is in development to clean-up in the River Arts District on May 7 in coordination with GreenWorks, RAD and RADBA to assist with the RAD community's month-long grand opening celebrations.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Project Updates:

- Wrote and published six partner e-newsletters or e-alerts, including the *Tourism Community Update* on April 28 (overview of the BCTDA board meeting) and announcement about the appointment of Marshall Hilliard. In total in the month of April, nearly 12,500 emails were delivered among the six communications with an open rate as high as 40.42%, well exceeding industry averages.
- New and updated content written and published on AshevilleCVB.com included: Refreshed copywriting for BCTDA and Community Engagement/Partner Toolkit pages, Event pages for the four Tourism Summit webinars, announcement about the appointment of Marshall Hilliard, A North Carolina public health PSA on vaccinations featuring Asheville small-business owners; updates to COVID resource page; e-newsletters and alerts, including the *Tourism Community Update*.
- Social media communications included: *Tourism Community Update*; Tourism Summit 2021; opening of RAD and BCTDA connection; a North Carolina public health PSA on vaccinations featuring Asheville small-business owners + local Town Hall on vaccinations; announcement of new VP of Sales Marshall Hilliard (which also was shared by trade publications including Meeting Spotlight and Convention South); Dine In for Life (promotion for AIR and for WNCAP); Leadership Asheville Buzz Breakfast (CVB-sponsored, with Vic delivering remarks); Visitor Guides.
- Responded to several requests for interviews, quotes, or information, including:
 - Asheville Citizen Times: [New plan adds Amtrak rail service from Asheville to Salisbury](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [Asheville's new hotel system awards points for sustainable lodging](#)
 - Mountain Xpress: [Virtual tourism summit 2021 announced](#) [also appeared in MX daily e-newsletter]
 - Mountain Xpress: [Equinox Environmental selected as lead design contractor for the Woodfin Whitewater Wave and the Riverside Park expansion](#) (BCTDA mentioned as partner)

- Mountain Xpress: [Explore Asheville Appoints Veteran Hospitality Executive as VP of Sales](#)
- Mountain Xpress: [Buncombe County TDA to meet April 28](#)
- WLOS-TV: [Asheville TDA president optimistic tourism industry is rebounding](#)
- WLOS-TV: [Buncombe County TDA seeks new advertising agency](#)
- AVL Today: [Blurb in 04/06 newsletter](#) shared Mountain Xpress story from 03/31: [The better than normal: Tourism projects roaring year for Buncombe visitation](#)
- AVL Today: [Announcement about meeting of Buncombe County TDA](#)
- Meeting Spotlight: [Explore Asheville CVB Announces Marshall Hilliard as New VP of Sales](#)
- Convention South: [Marshall Hilliard joining Explore Asheville as vice president of sales](#)
- Exhibit City News: [Explore Asheville CVB Names Marshall Hillard VP of Sales](#)
- PCMA: [People on the Move](#) (Marshall Hilliard)
- Asheville Chamber Business Buzz: [Appointment of Marshall Hilliard](#)
- Buncombe Co. Recreation Services FB: [Promotion of Tourism Summit Panel #2 on safe and responsible travel.](#)
- Attended the grand opening of the WNC Outdoor Collective in Black Mountain, a co-op for local brands and makers in the outdoor industry.
- Attended a ScaleUp WNC event, where several tourism partners/entrepreneurs were selected to participate in the program intended to help their businesses grow.
- Responded to public requests, comments and concerns related to homelessness, the growth of tourism.

Future Updates:

- Integrate functions and responsibilities as a team member of the Marketing Department.

PRESIDENT & CEO + EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Project Updates:

- Executed the BCTDA's regular monthly board meeting virtually on April 28. Highlights of the meeting included: a sponsorship approval for the Skyview Golf Tournament, welcome to Explore Asheville's new VP of Sales, Marshall Hilliard, and approval of a TPDF grant to the Wortham Center for the Performing Arts.
- Staff participated in all-team and departmental workshops to further develop the four Strategic Pillars: **Deliver** Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth; **Encourage** Safe and Responsible Travel; **Engage & Invite** More Diverse Audiences; **Promote & Support** Asheville's Creative Spirit. A fifth/internal pillar was added related to fostering a healthy and effective organization.
- With the BCTDA as a sponsor, Vic provided the welcome at Leadership Asheville's virtual Buzz Breakfast event on April 15.
- Vic presented at the River Arts District Business Association (RADBA) monthly meeting.
- Vic virtually spoke to two WCU Hospitality and Tourism classes on the merits of tourism.
- Vic participated in a Land of Sky Regional Council COVID-19 response meeting.
- Worked to onboard two new staff members: Marshall Hilliard, VP of Sales, who joined the team on April 26, and Holly Oakley, Marketing and PR specialist, with a start date of May 3.
- At the March BCTDA meeting, the board set the FY 22 revenue objective at a 9% increase over FY 19 actuals.
- Finalized FY21 revenue and expense projections.
- Completed organization-wide proposed budgets for upcoming year and held a collaborative budget review meeting with department heads.

- Scheduled BCTDA members to meet individually with Vic in May to provide additional input on the strategic pillars currently in development. Vic continues to meet with tourism community members, elected officials, stakeholders, and strategic partners.
- Worked extensively with Insurance Services of Asheville to identify new medical plan options for FY 22.
- Prepared for staff to begin returning to the office following over a year of mostly working remotely, with two departments returning at a time on alternating weeks to allow for social distancing. The Sales and Executive Office teams return on May 3, followed by the Marketing & PR and Community Engagement teams on May 10. COVID Policies and Procedures were updated to include meeting room capacities and guidelines per NC's current indoor gathering specifications and shared with staff.

Future Updates:

- Prepare for and execute the BCTDA's May meeting, to be held virtually on May 26, 2021.
- Welcome and onboard new Marketing & PR Specialist Holly Oakley, who joins the team on May 3. Complete the onboarding process for both Marshall and Holly.
- Continue working with Craft HR Solutions on a compensation study for Explore Asheville.
- Continue to review and adjust COVID safety policies and protocols as staff returns to the office beginning on May 3.
- Present FY22 proposed budget to finance committee, followed by full BCTDA board.