

August 28, 2019

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Stephanie Pace Brown

Subject: President's Report of July 2019 Activities

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A highlight of recent months has been our work with some of the people who pioneered the inception of the occupancy tax and creation of the BCTDA, including: Dick Trammel, Jim Ellis, Steve Miller, Doug Stafford, Charlie Price and John Winkenwerder. Marilyn Ball was retained to conduct interviews and produce written materials and a video that will debut at the BCTDA Annual Meeting. It has been very satisfying to understand their deeply held commitment to make this community a better place for the people who live here, and to carry on that responsibility.

Visit NC released the "2018 Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on North Carolina Counties" prepared by the U.S. Travel Association. This data provides a comparison of the economic impact by county. The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority also commissions an economic impact study produced by Tourism Economics, a division of Oxford Economics, that gives us more detail on induced and indirect impacts, jobs, wages and taxes.

Key insights include:

- Visitor spending increased in all North Carolina Counties, averaging 5.6 percent overall and ranging from 2.1 percent to 8 percent.
- Buncombe County ranks fourth in visitor spending, behind Mecklenburg, Wake and Guilford counties. Dare County ranks fifth and completes the list of counties that generate more than \$1 billion in visitor spending.
- Buncombe County visitor spending increased 6.2 percent, ranking 11th in growth among all counties, and first in growth among counties with more than \$1 billion in visitor spending.
- Ten counties had higher rates of growth than Buncombe County. Of those, four had total visitor spending under \$100 million, two were between \$100 and \$200 million, and four were between \$200 million and \$600 million.
- Employment increased 2.6 percent while payroll increased 5.7 percent demonstrating an increase in wages generated by more demand for workers. State and local tax receipts increased 5.2 percent and 5.5 percent respectively.

## **MONTH AT A GLANCE**

- New video creative was produced with the tagline, *“Let your spirit run free.”*
- The team also supported Chow Chow with website and social media content, including a dedicated email blast to 39,000 local subscribers of our newsletter.
- Twelve meeting planners attended the 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience held July 23-25.
- The Public Affairs team led a kick-off meeting for the African-American Heritage project.

## **JULY METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS**

- The PR team logged 39 media touchpoints, initiated 16 pitches and hosted seven journalists in Asheville. They also continued to coordinate VIP media attending Chow Chow.
- Seven new pieces of content were added to the website, which posted a 15 percent increase in user sessions.
- The Sales team reported 27 group bookings and 89 sales leads. The team logged 1,060 personal contacts. The year is off to a soft start and the team is evaluating strategies to increase conversion. The pipeline is strong.
- The Public Affairs team hosted nine new partners at a CVB 101 Orientation and onboarded 12 new partners.

## **HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$41,353,038 in June, an increase of five percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 81.5 percent during June (down 1%). The average daily room rate was \$162.52 (up 0.3%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$132.51 (down 1%). Room demand increased 0.2 percent with 194,826 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 46 percent to total 155,103 in June.

## **IN THE COMMUNITY**

- Stephanie and Marla attended Destination International’s Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, July 19-25. Stephanie also attended Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) classes.
- Marla and Stephanie met with PGAV in St. Louis to discuss TMIP plans at the conclusion of the Destinations International Annual Meeting.
- Stephanie attended AIR and Chow Chow executive committee and board meetings throughout the month.
- Stephanie gave a Tourism and TMIP presentation to the Asheville Civitan Club on July 16.
- Stephanie attended Rotary Club of Asheville meetings every Thursday when she was available.

- Marla attended the ADA issues committee meeting and helped with planning for the Urban Trail Guastavino replacement installation.
- Marla met with Grace Pless, head of the Urban Trail committee to provide insight and information on TPDF and the TMIP process.
- Cat attended a media preview event for the new Doner restaurant in West Asheville.
- Dianna and Tina attended the lunch with new SoCon Commissioner, Jim Schaus.
- Tina volunteered at the Asheville Open Tennis Tournament.
- Sales staff toured the Smith McDowell House, the Thomas Wolfe House, and Black Mountain College.
- Pat attended the Parking and Transportation meeting, which is a sub-committee of the Downtown Commission.
- As a member of the City's Public Art Committee, Glenn met in the RAD to discuss two art projects on July 9.
- Glenn and Marla met with Sharon Tabor, the new Executive Director of the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Chamber and Visitor Center, on July 11.
- Glenn led a group of lodging leaders on a visit to Asheville Buncombe County Christian Ministries' *Transformation Village*, a housing and human service project for women and children, on July 19.
- Glenn attended the "Smokies Stomp Barn Party," a fundraiser for Friends of the Smokies, on July 20.
- Glenn and Jonna attended the Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sport Commission's tour of the Spartan Race site in Black Mountain on July 26.
- Glenn attended the board meeting of the Black Mountain Center for the Arts on July 30.
- CVB staff members attended several SimpleView trainings during their three-day session in Asheville.
- Several CVB staff members attended the first of three of Leadership Asheville's "Breakfast Buzz" breakfasts: "What Are We Doing Now to Connect Community?"

## MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

**Advertising:** The tactical media plan for FY19-20 was finalized in early July. Staff worked with the agency throughout July to finalize the new video spots. The new logo with new tagline "Let your spirit run free" was also finalized and will roll out with the new campaign in early August. The new spots will launch in the late summer campaign on broadcast and streaming in early August. Locations were secured for two additional days of still photo shoots and will take place in August.

### Paid Search:

	July 2018	July 2019	YoY
<b>Total spend</b>	\$46,411.24	\$46,360.29	-0.1%
<b>Impressions</b>	1,425,926	1,144,437	-19.7%
<b>Clicks</b>	86,221	96,656	12.1%
<b>CTR</b>	6.00%	8.40%	39.7%
<b>CPCs</b>	\$0.54	\$0.48	-10.9%

**General Media Relations:** The PR team logged 39 media touchpoints, initiated 16 targeted pitches and hosted seven media on the ground in Asheville in July. Supported site visits included media representing *The Saturday Evening Post*, the Spanish versions of the *Miami*

*Herald* and American Airlines' in-flight magazine, *WRAL-TV*, *Under the Radar*, *Travel + Leisure* and *Departures*. Story support included *Good Grit*, *Jacksonville Magazine* and the new public television series "100 Days, Drinks, Dishes and Destinations." Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *USA TODAY*, *The Washington Post*, the *Travel Channel* website, *Buick Magazine* and *PureWow*, among others.

**M&C / Group PR Efforts:** At the end of July, Sarah Lowery and Carli Adams worked on drafting and sending out a release that was directly pitched to 16 editors of meetings publications regarding the Sales Team's just-launched "on-demand" webinar and *ElevateMyMeeting.com* initiative. This outreach opportunity was also used to share what's new in the destination for meeting planners and to get other Asheville offerings on their radar.

**Significant Placements:**

1. *Bon Appetit* | "I Didn't Know Collard Greens Could Taste Like This Until I Went to Buxton Hall"
2. *Garden & Gun* | "Tour de Parkway"
3. *Insider* | "20 underrated cities around the world you should visit in your lifetime"
4. *New York Times* | "16 Black Chefs Changing Food in America"
5. *Our State* | "56 Food Experiences You Can't Miss in NC"
6. *People* | "99 More Reasons to Love America"
7. *PureWow* | "The 50 Best Things to Do in Asheville"
8. *The Washington Post* | "Life's more than a beach. Four mountain towns to visit this summer"
9. *Thrillist* | "The 12 Essential Breweries in Asheville You Need to Visit"
10. *Travel + Leisure* | "The 15 Best Cities in the United States"
11. *USA Today* | "Find your best getaway from metro to micro"
12. *USA Today Travel Go Escape* | "Unexpected Inspiration"

**Chow Chow:** The Explore Asheville PR Team continued conversations with VIP media attending the September festival to secure their travel dates and share logistics information. The team also reached out to area hotels to secure media rates and room blocks for the media and participated in a call with the festival event director to review media pass requests.

The content team contributed a number of efforts, including creating an insider's guide-style article to demystify the festival process, running both organic and boosted Facebook posts aimed at driving ticket sales, and including festival details in the July and August e-newsletters, as well as sending a dedicated email blast. The dedicated email to 39,000 subscribers saw an open rate of 17% and 747 total clicks, and social media content through the end of July reached 104,000 users.

**Content Development Projects:** The content team's work during the month of July focused on some promotional efforts for the upcoming Chow Chow festival and planning for the year ahead.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of July, seven new pieces of content were added to *ExploreAsheville.com*: an insider's guide to the Chow Chow festival, a listicle of top rainy-day activities, and five new "things to do this weekend" blog posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 35,663 new pageviews, followed by the Fourth of July Fireworks events round-up, which received 10,222 pageviews.

## **Social Media Stats:**

### Facebook:

#### *Visit Asheville page*

- July saw 1,930 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 290,495.
- There were 17 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of July.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was our guide to Fourth of July events in Asheville. The post reached 22,440 people organically, generating 359 total reactions, and 18 comments.
- The most engaging post this month was the share of the *Washington Post* story highlighting Asheville as one of the top places to visit this summer. It engaged 4.5% of the 18,112 users reached.

### Video:

- There were 11,297 new, organic YouTube views in July. The most popular video by organic views this month was our overview of Black Mountain, which received 2,726 non-paid views. The Spirit of Asheville came in second with 995 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 49,205 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook.

### Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 5,489. Foodtopia accounts for 1,458 of those. Explore Asheville – 4,031.

### Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 61,401 followers.
- There were 8 new posts in July. The most popular was a photo of a couple in front of the “Stay Weird” mural in the River Arts District. It received 2,321 engagements (likes and comments).

### Twitter:

- Across all our accounts we have a total of 30,941 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,533 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 120,185 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In July, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,762 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 19 percent and a click-through rate of 2.9 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** Website user sessions in July increased 15.1 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was up 8.65 percent year-over-year in July. Referral traffic was down 16.73 percent year-over-year, and traffic from eNewsletter clicks was down 4.36 percent year-over-year in July. Social media traffic, excluding Paid Social, was up 49.0 percent year-over-year in July. The biggest gains in traffic were from Paid Social, Paid Search and spring advertising campaign initiatives. Paid Search traffic in June improved 19.51 percent compared with last year. Traffic from advertising campaigns was up 267.07 percent in July compared to last year.

**Website Improvements – SEO, QA & Accessibility:** In July, Explore Asheville onboarded a new vendor, SiteImprove, to assist with search engine optimization, quality assurance and accessibility efforts. Elizabeth, Cat, Josh and Jason will work with SiteImprove dashboards to improve search engine rankings, content quality and site accessibility.

**Online Reservations:** There were 70 orders for 95 room nights in July with a total of \$14,752.97 in booking revenue and \$260.30 commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in July were Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Maryland.

<b>July 2019</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	\$14,753	\$18,492	-20.22%	\$14,753	\$18,492	-20.22%
Commission	\$260.30	\$928.88	-71.98%	\$260.30	\$928.88	-71.98%
Orders	70	80	-12.50%	70	80	-12.50%
Room Nights	95	109	-12.84%	95	109	-12.84%

**Visitor Guide:** There were 2,975 requests of the *Official Asheville Visitor Guide* in July. Fiscal year-to-date, there have been 2,975 visitor guide requests.

<b>Top 5 DMAs for July</b>	<b># of Guides Requested</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020 Top 5 DMAs</b>	<b># of Guides Requested</b>
Tampa-St. Pete, Sarasota	171	Tampa-St. Pete, Sarasota	171
Washington, DC	114	Washington, DC	114
New York	111	New York	111
Chicago	110	Chicago	110
Atlanta	92	Atlanta	92

## **GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE**

Group sales reported 27 definite group bookings in July representing a 25 percent decrease from the prior July. Of these group bookings, 15 were meetings & conventions and 12 were weddings. The combined total definite room nights in July were 4,761 room nights, a 28.7 percent decrease over the prior year. The estimated revenue for leads turned definite in July was \$1,169,445, representing a 23 percent decrease. Actualized revenue was \$1,636,665, or an increase of 225 percent from the prior year.

Eighty-nine sales leads (73 for meeting/conventions and 16 weddings) representing 22,160 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in July 2019. This represents a 3.5 percent increase in number of sales leads issued and a 23 percent increase in number of rooms represented in the leads. Estimated revenue associated with the leads is \$1,169,445, a decrease of 23 percent. Person-to-person outreach totaled 1060 contacts in July representing a 7.6 percent increase from the prior year. Indirect outreach totaled 7040 contacts a 592 percent increase from the previous July.

Kathryn Dewey began maternity leave in July. Ms. Brenda Taylor Redmond, a former CVB employee, has been contracted to work the North Carolina market during Kathryn's leave.

### **Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:**

- Connie Holliday attended Florida Society of Association Executives Annual Meeting. A total of 180 association executives were in attendance. Connie attended networking events, first time partners meet up and education sessions. The Asheville auction package drew a lot of interest.
- Beth McKinney attended Spotlight on the Southeast motorcoach show. Thirty-five planners specifically interested in southern product were in attendance. Sales calls to Nashville-based tour operators were incorporate into the visit.
- Shawn Boone hosted an Atlanta Braves client event in Atlanta with 12 Planners plus guests, totaling 20 people. Partners from Omni and Biltmore were also present. Additionally, Shawn conducted eight sales calls while in town. Five immediate RFP's resulted from the visit.

**Explore Asheville: The 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience:** A 48-Hour Experience was held July 23-25 with 12 direct buyers attending. Planners represented a mix of third party/independent and direct buyers and came from nine states including Arizona, Oregon, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Missouri, Colorado, New York, Texas and Chicago. Eight had not previously been to Asheville. Attendees were vetted using a qualifying questionnaire that requests a verifiable meetings history. The Crowne Plaza Tennis & Golf Resort was the host property.

**Site Visits/Leads:** Three independent site visits were hosted in July with business for all future years: 2020 Angel Launch – 300 rooms, 2020 CodeScience - 392 rooms and 2020 NC Psychiatric Association.

A sampling of July bookings includes:

- 2019 Monroe Shine Partner Retreat – 27 rooms
- 2020 American Packaging Corporation Annual – 232 rooms
- 2020 Episcopal Diocese of WNC – 325 rooms
- 2019 Berry Family Reunion – 50 rooms
- 2020 Freeman Company – 123 rooms
- 2020 ABYSA Riverside Spring Shootout Boys & Girls – 900 rooms
- 2021 Kentucky Bankers Association – 1175 rooms
- 2021 Metal Treating Institute – 317 rooms
- 2020 SCN Ministry Retreat – 169 rooms
- 2020 National Wild Turkey Federation Symposium – 290 rooms
- 2020 Sisters of Charity of Nazareth – 125 rooms
- 2020 Bayer Sales Advisory Council – 48 rooms

A total of nine wedding guide requests were fulfilled in July, as compared to 23 last year.

**Simpleview CRM Training:** Staff attended two days of on-site CRM training aimed towards introducing best practices and to review how to utilize the system best in day-to-day prospecting and record keeping.

**Group Sales Communications:** A new meeting sales campaign launched in July focusing on Asheville reaching new levels of growth in terms of conference space options and airlift. The project centered around a 15-minute educational webinar created in-house with an introduction provided by Stephanie Brown and a presentation about Asheville's meeting assets led by Dianna Pierce. A die-cut mail piece, designed by Market Connections, was also sent to 4,200 new meeting planning contacts with this messaging and to promote the webinar. A landing page with the URL ElevateMyMeeting.com was developed as a jumping off point to view the webinar or take other actions to learn more about Asheville as a meeting destination.

**Mass Communications:**

- The die-cut mailer was sent to 4201 people.
- An email was sent to 945 people who received the die-cut mailer offering the opportunity to view the webinar. Open Rate: 12% Clicks: 44
- An email was sent to 1853 third party meeting planners in the sales database regarding viewing the webinar. Open Rate: 20% Clicks: 147

**LinkedIn Communications:**

- Repost of Downton Abbey post – 316 views
- FSAE arrival and follow-up post – 345 views

**Convention Service Highlights:** A planning meeting with the planners of the North Carolina Local Government Information Systems Association Fall Conference was also held. A microsite was prepared for the Ville to Ville bike race.

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

The public affairs team is happy to report it has a new member. Information Specialist Charlie Reed has transferred to the team from the marketing department. She will build upon the work she was already doing to support the public affairs team and will continue to be a liaison with the marketing team.

**Tourism Product Development Efforts:**

TMIP: Led by PGAV, planning is underway for a survey and series of Public Workshops in August to provide the community with opportunities to provide input on the Tourism Management Plan.

Work has begun on the African-American Heritage project with a kick-off meeting in early July with the project team consisting of Explore Asheville staff and representatives from PGAV and River Front Development Group. Initial planning goals include the development of an information packet and community engagement workshops.

Pat continues to work on a plan for visitor information kiosk-type signage at the WNC Farmers Market and a ribbon-cutting event planned in coordination with other happenings at the Farmers Market this fall.

Pat met with staff at The Wortham Center for Performing Arts to review proposed sites in the outdoor plaza for BCTDA naming recognition. The grantee will drawings for consideration.

**Partner Engagement and Events:**

**Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation:** The public affairs team hosted a CVB 101 Orientation on July 10, which included nine representatives from AVL Beer Bus, Furman University, Hola Community Arts, Mad Genius Studios, Malaprop's Bookstore/Café, Sugar Britches, and WNC Agricultural Center.

**New Partners:** There were 12 new partners in July: 12 Bones Brewing, A World of Radio, AVL Beer Bus, Early Girl Eatery – North, Gotta Have It Antiques, Gray Rock Inn, High Climate Tea Company, Inner Light Journeys, Jonas Gerard Fine Art – Riverview Station, Michelle Mitchell Fine Art, Moogseum, Super 8 by Wyndham Asheville/Biltmore.



**360i Marketing Seminar – August 6:** Planning is underway for a full-day session on marketing provided by 360i. The event will be offered for free to tourism partners as well as nonprofit organizations in the community and will be held at the US Cellular Center Banquet Room.

**BCTDA Annual Meeting – September 5:** Planning has begun for the 2019 BCTDA Annual Meeting to be held at the Omni Grove Park Inn.

**Projects:** Pat and Glenn continue to manage the process of maintaining and updating the Wayfinding system signage. Additionally, Pat is working with MERJE on their conceptual designs to be presented at the next Public Input Session for Wayfinding in the River Arts District which will be held on August 19.

**CRM Audit & Visitor Guide:** Pat and Joe continue to work on the auditing process for Explore Asheville's customer relationship management (CRM) database and refine approach as new listing category structure issues arise. They are reviewing best practices and support options with SimpleView and have received a preliminary assessment to help guide next steps. The audit also supports other major projects such as the Visitor Guide listings and the marketing team's website usability updates.

**AshevilleCVB.com Industry Website Redesign:** Joe redesigned the industry website, ExploreAshevilleCVB.com, due to issues with the website's theme and improved the navigation and user interface in the process. The new website launched in July.

## **EXECUTIVE OFFICE/ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES**

Year-end evaluations for staff members were completed by supervisors and shared in one-on-one meetings. Team and Personal Performance Objectives (PPOs) were established for FY 2019-20 and shared during the evaluation process.

Administration: Glenn worked with Gary Hannah of Hilliard-Lyons to onboard both Kathryn Dewey and Connie Holliday into the BCTDA 401K Plan.

On July 16, Glenn organized and attended a new Team Member orientation for the five most recent additions to the team. Stephanie provided each with an overview of the history and responsibilities of and the economic impact made by the BCTDA.

Glenn and Jonna coordinated the hiring process for a new Sales & Services Specialist for the Group Sales & Services Department. Multiple phone interviews were conducted, and two candidates were brought in for in-person interviews and to take a series of skill tests.

Glenn worked with Kathryn Dewey to finalize her use of paid vacation and sick leave and to determine her financial responsibilities related to her benefits while she is out on unpaid leave following the birth of her first child.

Glenn continued to make final edits to the updated Team Member Handbook, which will be rolled-out to Explore Asheville team members on August 1.

Glenn began pulling together required Team Member data for the annual Worker's Comp Audit, which covers FY 2019-19. Glenn will work with Jenn Kass-Green to compare Explore Asheville salary figures with those on the four Form 941s, Employer's Quarterly Federal Tax Return.

Building: Stephanie and Glenn met with Chris Kopp and Bob Cooke of *Lockdown International* to discuss the physical security of the building for Team Members and visitors. Following a meeting to understand our needs and desired outcomes, the two walked through the building, talked with random staff and met with Asheville Symphony representatives before leaving. The deliverable is a Security Survey Report, which was delivered on July 29 via email.

Grants Utilizing Earned Revenue: In July, the BCTDA provided a \$1,000 Sponsorship to the *East End Valley Street Heritage Festival "Unity in the Community"* scheduled for August 23 – 25 in Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The third and final sponsorship check was provided to *Chow Chow Asheville Food Festival*.

Wayfinding Signage: Glenn revised the Wayfinding "interlocal agreement" developed in 2008 and shared it with Marla and Pat before bringing it to Stephanie for a final staff review. Before it is taken to the partners for execution, it will be reviewed legal counsel.

Archiving BCTDA Historic Documents and Materials: Will Morgan, a student at UNC-A who is completing his master's in public history and who is associated with WNC Archives, continues archive and organize 30-years of BCTDA files in our off-site storage. He has archived over 75% of the materials in the storage rooms.

BCTDA Annual Meeting: Jonna ordered awards to be given out at the BCTDA Annual Meeting scheduled September 5. She also located email addresses for past board members to receive an invitation to attend the Annual Meeting, since a video highlighting the establishment of Buncombe County's occupancy tax and the BCTDA will be presented.

IT Security: Jonna worked with Explore Asheville's IT partner, Saturn Networks, to develop a plan to increase security for all Office 365 accounts utilizing Multi-Factor Authentication. This will be presented to staff on August 1 and implemented immediately thereafter and will ensure that if an Office/email account is hacked, it cannot be signed into from an unknown computer without being authenticated by the user.