



November 29, 2017

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

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### **MONTH AT A GLANCE**

The announcement of the 2017 TPDF Grants generated significant media coverage focused on the Riverfront Redevelopment Grant that was increased by \$4.6 million to total \$7.1 million. The announcement also drew the attention of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, an advocacy group based in Madison, Wisconsin.

Another year of Fall Color promotion has wrapped, showcasing new creative – including 360-degree photography – and achieving record-breaking performance. A new Director of Advertising has been hired with a January 2 start date, and a series of focus groups to evaluate advertising creative is being planned for January.

The music campaign has generated significant placements in prominent music-focused publications. In total, the PR team hosted six journalists in October, including *JamBase*, *Consequence of Sound*, *No Depression*, *Billboard*, *TravelChannel.com*, *domino* and *FoodNetwork.com*. They also assisted with the new release for Haute Route.

The Fall Color Report included fresh content captured by the Explore Asheville team, including 360-degree photography. The color report page garnered 65,000+ page views over the course of the season — a 27 percent increase over the previous year. The six 360-degree photos highlighted in the reports have received 67,000+ views to date. And, the Fall Color email series saw an average open rate of 40.1 percent and an average click-through rate of 15.9 percent — the highest in four years.

The Group Sales & Services team worked with the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission to land two major international events – Haute Route (May) and USTA's Fed Cup (February). They exhibited at IMEX America and attended the USA Softball Annual Meeting and Tradeshow. Staff hosted a client event in D.C. titled "Are You the Next Master Chef." Nineteen buyers attended.

A new wayfinding kiosk was installed in the River Arts District at 14 Riverside Drive.

The Explore Asheville Holiday Party will be a fitting celebration of a successful – and monumental – 2017. Hosted again by the Renaissance Asheville Hotel and US Foods, this year's party will be in the ballroom and will feature music by jazz combo, Swing Set.

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

- During October, the sales team posted 1,227 personal contacts (up 13%). October sales activities generated 78 sales leads (up 7%) and 27 convention bookings (down 13%), representing 6,109 rooms (down 2%). Four months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 1 percent and room nights represented are up 2 percent.
- CVB leads generated 46 group events in October (down 13%), with revenue of \$1,043,898 (up 123%). The services team assisted 51 groups (down 11%).
- The PR team landed 63 significant placements in October (up 17%), with 183 media touchpoints (up 49%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$89,156 with reach of over 3.2 million. Online placements added \$463,816 in value and reach of over 507 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 387,432 visits (up 3%), including 246,067 to the mobile site (up 5%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 2,490 (down 71%) and video views totaled 188,436 (down 81%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 61 room nights (down 3%) with total room revenue of \$12,473 (up 21%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 26,900 visitors (down 8%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 1,031 visitors (down 4%).

## **HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$36,204,597 in September, an increase of 14.9 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 79.7 percent during September (up 1.8%). The average daily room rate was \$164.22 (up 4.3%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$130.80 (up 6.2%). Room demand increased 6.1 percent with 178,687 rooms sold. September posted a 1.8 percent increase in occupancy with a 4.3 percent increase in ADR, a 6.1 percent increase in demand and a 14.9 percent increase in hotel revenue.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 2.6 percent to total 79,478 in September.

## **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Advertising:** After a few rounds of improvements to the holiday digital banners and native content developed by the Explore Asheville content team, the holiday campaign launched during the second half of October. The campaign targets a more concentrated geographic area which includes the core markets of Atlanta, Charlotte, Greensboro region and Raleigh and Durham, as well as other high familiarity, close-by DMAs: Knoxville, Columbia, and Charleston. To drive holiday site traffic further down the planning funnel to the booking stage, holiday retargeting ads will drive directly to a special booking page. Ad partners delivering the best conversions, thus far, include TripAdvisor, Sojern and Quantcast. The first two weeks of the campaign resulted in more than 12,000 clicks and 2,755 Web sessions on ExploreAsheville.com. The campaign continues to be monitored and will be optimized mid-November.

As part of the partnership with The Local Palate, a segment on Asheville will be produced and included in The Southern Weekend show that will air on 63 Raycom stations throughout the

southeast. Planning for production began taking place in October and the Raycom crew was in town on November 2 to shoot interviews which will be complemented by b-roll from Explore Asheville.

Also in October, plans were drafted for focus group research to be conducted in January. Results will help shape messaging for the next round of brand creative with a shoot tentatively set for late May. Also, the hiring process for the director of advertising position is winding down and an offer will be extended shortly.

Paid search efforts: Both Google and Bing click-through rates are up for October compared to last year. CTR for Google is up 22 percent, and Bing is up 19 percent. All other metrics are up as well, and Simpleview reports that our paid search site engagement far outpaces other destinations. The Simpleview team indicated responsive Web sites usually see approximately 1:30 minutes on site via paid search while the Asheville paid search campaigns are averaging 3:07 (over 4:30 for desktop traffic alone!). Mobile time on site is 2:07, which is pretty rare for PPC campaigns. Simpleview credits engaging content for the site stickiness. Paid search also netted nine hotel bookings this month for about \$3,300 in revenue and 650+ visitor guide requests and email signups.

**General Media Relations:** October brought heavy activity for the PR team with four music writer site visits, the fall b-roll shoot and pitching, and a high volume of media engagement activities. The team assisted media representing *JamBase*, *Consequence of Sound*, *No Depression*, *Billboard*, *TravelChannel.com*, *domino* and *FoodNetwork.com*. In total, the team logged 183 touchpoints, initiated 159 targeted pitches, and hosted six media on the ground in Asheville. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Fodor's*, *Home by Design* magazine, *The Beer Necessities*, and *Naples Daily News*, among others.

**Fall Color Footage and Editorial Pitch:** Timed to optimize a “call to visit” message right as the fall leaf transition was picking up speed and heading into Asheville, the PR and content teams collaborated to execute a fall color b-roll shoot and editorial/content push. Fresh footage went out to 100 media contacts including television news desks and meteorologists in advertising markets, daily newspapers, and national television outlets like *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show* and *The Weather Channel*. Target media lists were developed, then the team called each station to offer/secure the footage through new desks and individual meteorologists. The footage and photo assets were repurposed by the content team and disseminated through Explore Asheville channels.

**Society of American Travel Writers Media Marketplace:** Explore Asheville had a strong representation at the Society of American Travel Writers media marketplace in Portland this October. Dodie secured 11 marketplace appointments and executed at least 28 Asheville pitches and story conversations with major freelance writers representing outlets including *USA Today*, *CNN*, *BBC Travel*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Lonely Planet* and more.

**Music Initiative:** October was by far the busiest month yet for music writers on the ground in Asheville. With support from Mason Jar Media, the PR team facilitated the research trips for *JamBase* Editor Scott Bernstein, *Consequence of Sound* Executive Editor Philip Cosores, *No Depression* Assistant Editor Stacy Chandler and *Billboard* Contributing Writer (a music media legend) Fred Bronson. These four site visits required coordination with almost 50 different music and hospitality partners. Highlights and key touchpoints from the visits include a Crossroads Studio tour led by Ty Gilpin (*No Depression*), an Avett Brothers concert (*Billboard*), the Gladys Knight and Friends concert plus a Gladys Knight interview (*Billboard*) and a music scene

discussion and studio time with Gar Ragland (*Billboard*). The team also began working on the coordination and details for *Uproxx* Music Editor Caitlin White's November visit. Lastly, a valuable new music media kit was finalized in October with the addition of a fresh story ideas sheet.

### **Haute Route Press Announcement:**

The PR team put together the press release for the official Explore Asheville and Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission joint announcement on landing a three-year contract to host Haute Route, the prestigious international cycling event expected to bring in riders from across the United States and Europe this spring (May 18-20). Asheville will be the first of three domestic locations to host a shorter, three-day format of the global cycling series. Explore Asheville and ABRSC staff will continue to collaborate on a promotional plan for the event. The release was sent to regional outlets.

### **Significant Placements**

1. A Music Blog Yeah? — "4 Reasons I Fell in Love with Asheville"
2. AAA High Roads — "Asheville Getaway"
3. AFAR — "5 U.S. Cities with Booming Craft Beer Scenes"
4. Blushing Alpacas — "48 Hours in Asheville"
5. Conde Nast Traveler — "The Best Small Cities in the U.S."
6. Connect Magazine Faith — "North vs. South, Carolinas Edition"
7. Elite Daily — "Cheap, Romantic Vacations You should take with Your Boyfriend"
8. Elly Jane Blog — "Asheville the New Portland: Ten Culinary and Brew Experiences You Won't Want to Miss"
9. Expedia — "The 12 Best Music Towns in the Nation"
10. Huffington Post — "Cheap Weekend Getaways where You Can See Peak Foliage in Action" and "This is Our Haven: Meet the People of Asheville"
11. Jambase — "Exploring Asheville: 5 Days in a Musical Oasis"
12. Le Blog Mathilde — "Discovering Asheville"
13. Livability — "This is How You do a Beer Trail in Asheville, NC"
14. Love Wins Texas Weddings — "American Idyll"
15. MSN — "50 Affordable Trips to Take After You Turn 50"
16. Naples News — "The Allure of Asheville, North Carolina"
17. One Green Planet — "Our Top 5 Recommendations for Plant-Based Fare in Asheville, NC"
18. Orlando Date Night Guide — "Three Perfect Days in Asheville"
19. Our State — "Autumn Mountain Guide, "Best-Kept Secret in Asheville: The Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute," "7 Spooky Activities to Chill your Bones this Fall," and "Pumpkins, Pride of the Patch"
20. Shape — "2017 Shape Healthy Travel Awards"
21. Southern Living — "5 Things You Need to Know about Ingles," "Grumpy's Road Trip: Fall Color at Biltmore," and "The South's Best Ghost Tours"
22. The Beer Necessities — "Why is Everyone Obsessed with Asheville?"
23. The Daily Meal — "A Weekend in Asheville, North Carolina: Where to Stay and What to Eat" and "Interview: Chef Peter Pollay of Posana in Asheville, NC"
24. Travel Channel — "Our Favorite Asheville Eats"
25. TravelFREAK — "Where to Eat in Asheville, NC: 11 Tasty Restaurants for Every Occasion"
26. Trekaroo — "Asheville, North Carolina and the Blue Ridge Parkway"
27. USA Today — "50 States, 50 Cider Destinations" and "Think Your State has Suds? These have the Most Craft Beer Breweries"
28. WFMY News — "Check Out the Fall Leaves in Asheville"
29. WJHL News — "Fall Color Along the Blue Ridge Parkway"

**Content Development Projects:** Many of the content team's projects during the month of October centered on the fall foliage season, while also looking forward to the holidays.

Fall Foliage Season: The month of October was dominated by sharing fall color updates with visitors through new content on ExploreAsheville.com and with posts across social media channels. Each week beginning September 28, the team went out into the surrounding area to capture fresh photo, video, and 360-degree visual content featuring the changing colors. A new color report—detailing where the color was best and brightest, as well as highlighting several local activities and events—was written each Thursday for ExploreAsheville.com, then shared to social media and to an email list of 11,000+ subscribers. The color report page garnered 65,000+ page views over the course of the season—a 27 percent increase over the previous year. The six 360-degree photos highlighted in the reports have received 67,000+ views to date. And the Fall Color email series saw an average open rate of 40.1 percent and an average click-through rate of 15.9 percent—the highest in four years. The team also ran a series of Facebook ads highlighting top fall events, the local beer scene and the fall foliage. Those ads reached 342,000+ people and resulted in 26,117 clicks to the website, at an average cost of \$0.38 per click.

Other Content Projects: Other projects this month included preparations for the holiday season. The team conducted a holiday content audit to optimize existing content and contracted with a local freelance writer to create a seasonal piece about how Asheville “sparkles” for the holidays. The piece is being used in Nativo advertising and on ExploreAsheville.com, and also served as the basis for a media pitch. The team developed an ambitious content and coverage plan for the upcoming season, with an emphasis on capturing photo and video assets for future campaigns. The team also supported the public announcements of the 2018 Haute Route event and the TPDF grants.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of October, ten new pieces of editorial content were added to ExploreAsheville.com: a round-up of holiday happenings titled “8 Ways Asheville Sparkles for the Holidays,” four weekly color reports and five “Things to Do This Weekend” posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 36,548 new page views, followed by Top 10 Ways to Experience Fall in Asheville, which received 18,098 page views.

**Social Media Stats :**

Facebook:

*Visit Asheville page*

- October saw 2,490 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 261,816.
- There were 44 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of October.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a video of fall color at Linville Falls. It has reached 192,603 people organically, generating 8,963 total reactions, 428 comments and 1,196 shares. This was also the most engaging post this month; it engaged 6.2 percent of the users reached.
- There was only one paid Facebook post during the month of October. A post on the ticket giveaway for an evening with Gladys Knight reached 25,787 people (5,915 organically), generating 258 total reactions and 21 comments.

#### *Foodtopia page:*

- October saw 39 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,453 likes.
- There were 6 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of October.
- The most popular unpaid post in October, a share of an article by Travel Channel highlighting their favorite restaurants, reached 3,887 people, generating 76 reactions, 9 comments and 16 shares.

#### *Video:*

- There were 16,610 new organic YouTube views in October. The most popular video by organic views this month was the Fall Time Lapse, which received 3,507 non-paid views. The 2017 Fall Color Sneak Peek came in second with 2,770 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 188,436 views. There have been 543,537 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2017).

#### *Pinterest:*

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,655. Foodtopia accounts for 1,380 of those; Visit Asheville – 3,275.

#### *Instagram:*

- Our Visit Asheville account has 39,515 followers.
- There were 26 new posts in October. The most popular was a sunset at Biltmore. It received 2,934 engagements (likes and comments).

#### *Twitter:*

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 29,586 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,749 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 120,434 active subscribers.
- **Opens/Click-throughs:** In October, we sent out the following emails:
  - Our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,684 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 17.9 percent and a click-through rate of 3.9 percent.
  - The October 12 Fall Color Report was sent to 11,458 subscribers, with an open rate of 42.6 percent and a click-through rate of 17.1 percent.
  - The October 19 Fall Color Report was sent to 11,489 subscribers, with an open rate of 38.9 percent and a click-through rate of 15.2 percent.
  - The October 26 Fall Color Report was sent to 11,478 subscribers, with an open rate of 37 percent and a click-through rate of 12.9 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** In October, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com increased 3.3 percent year-over-year, which includes a 10.8 percent increase in organic user sessions, a 70 percent increase in email referral sessions, a 5.8 percent increase in paid search user sessions, and a 6 percent increase in social referral sessions. Mobile visits in October increased by 7.3 percent year-over-year.

#### Website Improvements – SEO and CRO:

In October, Simpleview continued its conversion rate optimization efforts on ExploreAsheville.com. The marketing team worked with Simpleview to implement three split tests on the Home Page, Things to Do page and Story/Blog content, with a goal to improve

conversions to Places to Stay page and to listing detail pages. The organic engagement continues to outperform the industry averages and is up 11 percent year-over-year.

- 50 Things to Do continues to be a top performing page with 23,499 organic visits.
- The Fall Forecast & Weekly Fall Color Report brought in 14,394 organic visits.
- Fall Foliage and Fall (under Trip Ideas) pages resulted in 3,295 total organic visits.
- The fall content grew year-over-year by about 11,500 organic visits.
- The Halloween content was also up 6 percent year-over-year.
- Top event detail page was LEAF Festival with 2,391, up nearly 2,000 visits year-over-year.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 23 percent more total pages per visit, 40 percent longer visit duration, 18 percent more organic pages per visit and 38 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to the industry average.

**Online Reservations:** There were 39 orders for 61 room nights in October with a total of \$12,473 in booking revenue and \$560.20 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in September were North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.

<b>October 2017</b>	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$12,473	\$10,346	20.6%	\$41,318	\$47,402	-12.8%
Commission	\$560.20	\$421.39	32.9%	\$2,929.37	\$1,942.28	50.8%
Orders	39	34	14.7%	234	144	62.5%
Room Nights	61	63	-3.2%	306	302	1.3%

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

**Visitor Guide:** Work on finalizing and proofing the guide will continue through November. Staff is working to pull updated listings for the guide. Delivery of the guide is expected in January.

Visitor Guide Requests:

There were 2,448 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in October, a 59.2 percent increase from last October. Year-to-date, there are 10,991 travel guide requests, a 17.5 percent increase from last year.

<b>Top 5 DMAs for October 2017</b>	<b># of Guides Requested</b>	<b>FY 2017-2018 Top 5 DMAs</b>	<b># of Guides Requested</b>
Orlando	137	Orlando	549
New York	105	New York	498
Tampa, St. Pete	95	Tampa, St. Pete	454
Atlanta	85	Atlanta	389
Raleigh-Durham	79	Washington, DC	375

## **GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE**

Group sales reported 27 definite group bookings in October, a 13 percent decrease from the prior year. Of these group bookings, 20 were for meetings & conventions, one was group tour and six were weddings. The combined total definite room nights were 6,109 room nights, a two percent decrease from the prior October. Seventy-eight sales leads (51 for meeting/conventions, 15 for weddings and 12 for motorcoach), representing 13,767 room nights, were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in October. Leads distributed were up 7 percent while rooms represented were down 43 percent over the prior year. The average group size last year was 330 rooms while the average this year is 176 rooms. Last year, there were 11 large groups with rooms requested ranging from 700 to 1,430. This year, the largest group requested 690 rooms.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,303,357 (down 11%). Actualized revenue was \$1,043,898 (up 123%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,227 contacts (up 13%). Indirect outreach totaled 7,156 contacts (up 260%).

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

- IMEX America 2017 – Shawn Boone and Tina Porter, along with industry partners The Omni Grove Park Inn and Renaissance Asheville Hotel, participated in IMEX America, the premier annual trade event for corporate, association and incentive planners. Preparation efforts resulted in 64 prospective clients coming by the booth to discuss future meetings. Two immediate RFPs representing 500+ rooms were received. More are expected. Since 2015, the CVB has confirmed 2,262 room nights associated with IMEX, with an additional 600 rooms on tentative status (including the two RFPs noted above).
- Explore Asheville garnered great coverage while at IMEX America 2017. Staff was interviewed on the tradeshow floor by Meetings Focus Magazine. The digital interview will appear on the Meetings Focus website in January 2018. Further, Asheville received a full-color half-page feature article as part of IMEX American Show Daily. The article was titled Asheville, NC: Destination on the Rise.
- Staff hosted an IMEX America client event immediately following the close of Wednesday's show. Thirty-five planners attended the event.
- Staff hosted a client event in D.C. titled "Are You the Next Master Chef." Nineteen buyers attended. One immediate RFP for 415 rooms was received. Joining Carla McGlynn and Dianna Pierce were Michael Purcell, Crowne Plaza Tennis & Golf Resort. This event capped off a week of sales calls in DC.
- Tina Porter attended USA Softball Annual Meeting and Tradeshow, helping to showcase the soon-to-be-operating Enka Sports Complex.

### **Meetings & Conventions Webcast Sponsorship:**

Explore Asheville sponsored a webcast titled "Ask the Revenue Manager" on October 18. A total of 337 attendees heard the Asheville meetings message as presented by Dianna Pierce, who introduced the broadcast. EA received logo placement, branding on custom registration form and branding included on e-blasts. The pre-marketing of the webcast is estimated to have created 300,000 media impressions.

As part of the registration, staff included three customized questions, probing as to their familiarity with Asheville, NC, as a meeting destination, whether they currently met in the southeast and finally, interest in learning more about Asheville as a meeting destination.



Of the 287 respondents, 47 percent (134) had not heard of Asheville and, of those, 26 percent or 74 indicated they wanted to learn more.

**Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:** The team hosted/coordinated seven area site visits this month including 2018 Confidential Event – 715 room nights; 2018/2019 Kalmbach Publishing – 130 room nights; 2018 Zero to Three – 992 room nights; 2019 NC Sheriff's Association – 395 room nights; 2018 Northwest AHEC (two programs) – 825 room nights; 2017 Girl Scouts of America – 30 rooms; 2019 National Business Aviation Association – 335 room nights.

A sampling of significant leads this month include:

- 2018 Elite 80 Camp/Summer Showcase – 310 room nights (first lead issued for Enka Sports Complex)
- 2018 Travalco USA – 100 room nights
- 2018 Bureau of Digital LLS – 150 room nights (Smart Meetings West National)
- 2018 The Leadership Circle User's Conference – 450 room nights
- 2018 Siemens Medical Solutions – 66 room nights
- 2018 North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives – 245 rooms (two programs)
- 2018 North Carolina Association of Independent Schools – 22 room nights
- 2018 Southern Association of Forensic Scientists – 235 room nights
- 2019 American Board of Physical Medicine – 80 room nights
- 2019 USS John W. Weeks Association – 125 rooms
- 2019 National Business Aviation Association – 335 room nights
- 2019 American Board of Rehabilitation Psychology – 570 room nights
- 2019 NC Division of the International Association for Identification – 235 room nights
- 2019 Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail – 300 room nights
- 2019 & 2020 – NC City and County Managers Association – 325 room nights each
- 2018 Victorians Institute – 300 room nights.

A sampling of significant bookings this month include:

- 2019 SETA – 1243 room nights
- 2017 SETA Board Meeting – 45 room nights
- 2017 UCB Pharma – 40 room nights (48-Hour FAM participant)
- 2017 ABRSC Mountain Invitational Basketball – 45 room nights
- 2019 American Board of Physical Medicine – 212 room nights
- 2018 MaxPlay Turf Cup Girls – 400 room nights
- 2020 Florida Academy of Dental Practice Administration – 124 room nights
- 2018 Western Regional Education Service – 155 room nights
- 2018 NC Rheumatology association – 60 room nights
- 2020 Rotary Club District – 494 room nights

Seventeen wedding guide requests were fulfilled this month. This is down from the 22 requests received last October.

**Group Sales Communications:**

Asheville was included in Successful Meetings' "The Top Incentive Destinations in the World." This clip was leveraged by the sales team in many ways including LinkedIn, Twitter, prospecting emails, and email marketing.

### **Additional Media Coverage:**

- Dianna was featured in Smart Meetings' "CVB Selfie Contest" article
- Asheville was featured in Meetings Today's "Sound Tracks: North Carolina tunes in with an array of music venues for groups." Explore Asheville assisted the writer with information and images.
- Explore Asheville responded to a writer working on a story for the winter issue of *Going on Faith* magazine, the voice of faith-based travel for qualified travel planners for churches and religious organizations.
- Beth McKinney was featured in the October issue of *Courier* magazine, a publication of the National Tour Association, under the "Meet the Members" section.

### **Mass Communications:**

- An eblast to Molly Nelson's territory incentivizing RFP submission was sent to 1,999 clients and produced five RFPs totaling over 1,900 room nights. Open rate: 21 percent; Click to Open ratio: 15 percent
- An invitation to the Asheville 48-Hour Experience was sent to 877 clients in Molly's territory. Open rate: 22 percent; Click to Open ratio: 22 percent
- An eblast in advance to the TEAMS conference was sent to all 564 sport contacts. Open rate: 35 percent; Click to Open ratio: 9 percent
- An eblast to Carla McGlynn's territory incentivizing RFP submission was sent to 1,769 clients and produced three RFPs totaling over 900 room nights. Open rate: 14 percent; Click to Open ratio: 18 percent
- An eblast to Shawn Boone's Ohio territory incentivizing RFP submission was sent to 116 clients. Open rate: 14 percent; Click to Open ratio: 13 percent
- An eblast to Shawn Boone's remaining states incentivizing RFP submission was sent to 1,321 clients. Open rate: 11 percent; Click to Open ratio: 22 percent

**Convention Servicing Highlight:** A staffed information table was provided to the NCLGISA Annual Fall Conference hosted at the U.S. Cellular Center

**Departmental Activities:** Staff attended the SoCon Tip-Off at New Belgium Brewery, CVB Partner Forum, toured the new AC and Hampton Hotels and toured the renovated Holiday Inn Biltmore East. Staff hosted/attended numerous meetings with industry partners about upcoming tradeshows and events.

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**Tourism Product Development Efforts:** The TPDF Committee conducted site visits on October 10, and had its final meeting of the 2017 grant cycle on October 19 to determine funding recommendations. The following recommendations were presented to the BCTDA at the October 25 board meeting:

### **Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center on Pack Square Project**

Recommended Amount: \$200,000

The Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center project is a relocation and expansion from two small gallery spaces on Broadway in downtown Asheville to a new space at 120 College Street on Pack Square Park. The new space will include 2,500 square feet of flexible exhibition/event space, a permanent Black Mountain College history and research center, an expanded library, on-site storage for the permanent collection and a larger retail bookshop. This project will help solidify the

museum as a strong and vital international art center, and further cement Asheville as a major cultural destination.

#### Haywood Street Congregation Fresco Project

Recommended Amount: \$72,500

The Haywood Street Congregation is planning to artfully portray its vision of community through a masterpiece artwork in the fresco medium covering the central wall of its sanctuary located at 297 Haywood Street in downtown Asheville. Fresco, best known as the technique used by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, is a process where the mixed pigments are absorbed by the plaster, becoming part of the wall. Asheville artist Christopher Holt, commissioned by Haywood to create the fresco, has worked on other frescoes in the region with renowned artist Ben Long. These frescoes have become tourist attractions in other parts of Western North Carolina as stops along the Blue Ridge National Heritage Trail. Once completed, the Haywood fresco will become part of the trail, helping to strengthen cultural and heritage tourism in the region.

#### Increase for City of Asheville Riverfront Destination Development Projects

Recommended Amount: \$4,600,000

The committee recommended an increase in support for the City of Asheville's Riverfront Destination Development projects. The projects have been vetted to meet the TPDF funding criteria. The BCTDA's current grant for the projects totals \$2,525,000. Additionally, \$975,000 has been awarded for the Beaucatcher Greenway. This additional \$4,600,000 will bring total BCTDA funding for the City of Asheville's River Arts District development to \$7,125,000. The enhanced TPDF grant will facilitate the completion of the southern section of the River Arts District Transportation Improvement Project (RADTIP), including roadway improvements, sidewalks, street trees, a protected bike lane, on-street parking, public art, and storm water improvements.

#### LEAF Cultural Arts Center Project

The committee determined it needed additional information before making a final recommendation. The requested amount pending further consideration is \$937,000.

LEAF Community Arts, known for its signature events LEAF Festival and LEAF Downtown, is developing the LEAF Cultural Arts Center, a year-round cultural arts education institute, event center and creative hub on the edge of downtown Asheville. The new center will include a 3,000 square-foot, multi-functional facility designed to connect cultures and create community through music and arts programming, creating a global arts engagement destination.

The BCTDA voted to adopt the committee's recommendations, awarding \$200,000 for the relocation and expansion of the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center; \$72,500 to the Haywood Street Congregation for its fresco project; and \$4.6 million to the City of Asheville for the Riverfront Destination Development projects.

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 the project.

As a follow-up to the meeting in September with staff members of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County to discuss the possibility of collaborating on product development projects, a larger group was convened in October. Additional staff members from each team, plus Vice Mayor Gwen Wisler and Commission Chair Brownie Newman, gathered to share general information on city and county project planning and status. There was consensus the group would continue

discussions on the possibility of coordinating joint priorities and project priorities, and planned to meet again in December.

### **Partner Engagement:**

#### **Sales & Marketing Update Partner Forum – November 16**

Planning is underway for the November Partner Forum. The Marketing and PR team will present the holiday marketing plan and top line results from the recent late summer and early fall campaign. The Group Sales and Services team will share key FY 17-18 initiatives and an overview of PR efforts directed towards the meetings market, plus new collateral supporting the initiatives. Recent successes and new strategies will be highlighted, as well as partner engagement opportunities. Also, a representative from DTN will be on hand to outline advertising opportunities on ExploreAsheville.com.

#### **Explore Asheville CVB Holiday Party – December 6**

Planning is underway for the annual holiday party. Generous sponsors, Renaissance Asheville Hotel, and US Foods, are providing an incredible venue and menu for the occasion, along with beverages from Biltmore, the Omni Grove Park Inn, and the Asheville Brewers Alliance. Staff will be presenting our 5th Annual CVB SuperStar Awards to recognize and honor partners for outstanding contributions and support throughout the year. Party guests are encouraged to help support the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program in its 9th year at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel.

### **Projects:**

The public affairs team focused on new projects, including an assessment of the lodging listing policy, and an audit of out-of-county listings represented on ExploreAsheville.com. Research included tracking how other core and competitive markets handle and display short term rentals on their destination websites.

The team also focused on coordinating the 2018 Visitor Guide data export and proofing process along with other key staff.

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

Pat worked with Glenn and Marla to coordinate the design and installation of a Wayfinding kiosk in the River Arts District near the 14 Riverside Drive building, with the aim of having it in place prior to the November Studio Stroll event.

Brit, Pat, Jason, and Cat met concerning the ExploreAsheville.com Event Calendar and how efforts from both the Public Affairs and Content teams could be combined to ensure all notable events in Asheville are regularly submitted and appear on the ExploreAsheville.com calendar in a timely manner. This will help ensure partners are aware of the promotional efforts that are being made involving their businesses and events.

**Partner Outreach:** Brit created three new partner accounts in October: Copper Crown, Pillar Kitchen, and Doc Brown's BBQ. The public affairs team hosted the monthly Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation. Three attended including staff from Clarion Inn Asheville Airport, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, and The Prestigious Mark. Brit continues to reach out to qualified partners

to submit information for a listing, to respond to partner extranet issues, and to monitor listing updates and event submissions in the CRM.

**Community Outreach:** Pat presented an update on the Wayfinding system and the River Arts District at the monthly Leadership Roundtable on Riverfront Redevelopment meeting. Stephanie provided an update to RAD artists and businesses at the monthly RADBA meeting. Pat coordinated a meeting with marketing staff at Biltmore to discuss convening industry partners to learn about the Chihuly exhibit at Biltmore in 2018.

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

**Building:** Card readers were installed on specific doors in the new building. These readers provide a better sense of security and the means for monitoring the comings and goings in the building.

**Administration:** Stephanie and Glenn held a conference call with CPA Rufus Dollar on the BCTDA's Federal Filing with the IRS as a new non-profit. The conversation addressed changes suggested by Attorney Anna Mills to the draft document provided by Mr. Dollar. Mr. Dollar accepted the changes as suggested and developed the final application for the BCTDA to submit to the IRS.

Glenn arranged the schedule for nine candidates for the Director of Advertising position. Phone interviews by Marla Tambellini were held on October 18, 20 and 23.

### **Festivals and Cultural Events Grant Program:**

Glenn met with Lee Warren, Executive Director of the Organic Growers School, to discuss why the Festivals and Cultural Events Committee decided to refer their application to the Sponsorship Grant Program. Glenn is developing a plan to expand the scope of the Sponsorship Grant Program while maintaining the legislative mandate placed on the BCTDA to attract out-of-market visitors.

### **Wayfinding:**

On October 3, Pat and Glenn met with Dan Baechtold, Stephanie Monson Dahl and Dana Frankel from the City of Asheville to discuss the Wayfinding system plans for the overview the BCTDA has contracted MERJE to complete. Initial discussion focused on a new kiosk for the River Arts District, which was being built by Geograph for installation the first week of November.