

February 27, 2019

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority
From: Stephanie Pace Brown
Subject: President's Report of January 2019 Activities

MONTH AT A GLANCE

- A contract was executed with 360i.
- Marketing staff executed a small advertising campaign to support winter visitation.
- The PR team attended TravMedia's International Media Marketplace and completed the Winter Media Tour in Greenville, SC, and Charlotte.
- Beth McKinney attended the American Bus Association Marketplace, where her booth won second-place "Best of Show" and she was recognized on the main stage for achieving her industry certification.
- Input sessions were held to receive input for inter-district wayfinding signs in the River Arts District.
- A roundtable group is being established for attractions partners to provide networking and education opportunities. The group will be co-chaired by Ken Stamps and Jeff Greiner.
- Stephanie was appointed to the North Carolina Travel & Tourism board by Speaker Tim Moore.

JANUARY METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During January, the sales team posted 1,099 personal contacts (down 5%). January sales activities generated 119 sales leads (up 70%) and 52 convention bookings (up 33%), representing 7,001 rooms (up 5%). Seven months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 37 percent and room nights represented are down 8 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 10 group events in January (up 67%), with revenue of \$114,815 (down 40%). The services team assisted 11 groups (up 120%).
- The PR team landed 99 significant placements in January (up 80%), with 98 media touchpoints (down 8%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$514,176 with reach of over 3 million. Online placements added \$335,479 in value and reach of over 413 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 263,407 visits (down 1%), including 171,445 to the mobile site (up 8%). Our Facebook fan base total is 282,508 (up 5%) and video views totaled 32,154 (down 70%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 43 room nights (down 36%) with total room revenue of \$6,032 (down 33%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 6,537 visitors (up 10%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$34,238,861 in December, an increase of 1.9 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 68.9 percent during December (down 3.4%). The average daily room rate was \$170.03 (up 0.5%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$117.23 (down 2.9%). Room demand decreased 1 percent with 169,812 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 25 percent to total 98,435 in December.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Stephanie participated in board meetings for AIR, Chow Chow, the Asheville Area Riverfront Redevelopment Commission, and the Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority.
- Stephanie presented a tourism overview to the Civic Center Commission and an update to the Asheville Lodging Association. She attended Rotary as a prospective member and the Chamber's Legislative Luncheon.
- Glenn attended the State of our Workforce for WNC meeting at WCU Biltmore Park campus.
- As Board Chair, Glenn attended the Black Mountain Center for the Arts Board Meeting. During the month of January, they began a process for replacing outgoing Executive Director Gale Jackson, who is retiring after 20 years in the position.
- Dodie continued to provide support to Chow Chow through her role on the branding and marketing committee. Elizabeth, Dodie and Cat began foundational work that will help Elizabeth build out a web site for Chow Chow on the ExploreAsheville.com platform.
- Marla attended the Asheville Downtown Association board retreat in January.
- Sales staff volunteered at Gala Gymnastics.
- Sales staff attended the grand opening of Twisted Laurel's Daphne Room.
- The Capital Club staff attended a weekly sales meeting and provided updates to the sales team.
- Dianna attended the monthly ABRSC meeting.
- As a participating member, Pat attended monthly meetings for the Local Living Economy sub-committee of the Downtown Commission and the Chamber Membership Council.
- Pat attended the African American Heritage Commission meeting.
- Pat attended the Chamber Legislative Luncheon.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising:

After the agency selection was finalized, the team immediately began the on-boarding and brand immersion process. The team also started discussions and initial planning for the Spring campaign.

The ongoing paid social efforts using existing "Cozy Winter" assets will run through early March. Preliminary results as of mid-February:

- Campaign has generated 15,791 sessions to ExploreAsheville.com.
- Campaign traffic is seeing an average bounce rate of 52 percent and 2.14 pages per session.
- 15,728 sessions were generated by two traffic campaigns, which have spent \$6,004 to date, or an average of \$0.38 per session.

- The third campaign is the leads ad, which has generated 1,469 travel guide requests to date. That campaign has spent \$1,539, or an average of \$1.05 per lead.
- Total ad impressions to date are 1.2 million.

Paid Search: Paid search in January generated over 38,122 site visits from Google and Bing combined. Paid search also netted three hotel bookings in January, bringing our fiscal year to date total to 78 bookings and \$31,000. Other highlights:

- Click through rate has increased by 14 percent year over year
- Pages per visit was at 3.23 for January
- Average time on site was 2:46 in January
- 426 Visitor Guide Requests were generated by paid search in January

General Media Relations

The PR team logged 98 media touchpoints, initiated 68 targeted pitches and hosted two media on the ground in Asheville in January. The team supported site visits that included media representing *Hilton Head Magazine* and a variety of publications in Tennessee and Virginia. Story support included *NY Times Magazine*, *CNN Digital Travel*, *National Geographic*, *Parents Magazine*, *Passport Magazine* and *Edge Media Network*. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Matador Network*, *Trivago Magazine*, *Thrillist* and *Smart Meetings*, among others.

TravMedia IMM

Dodie represented Asheville at TravMedia's International Media Marketplace (IMM) where she connected with roughly 40 top editors and freelancers with *Lonely Planet*, *Travel + Leisure*, *National Geographic*, *Westways*, *Delta Sky* and *Budget Travel*. Dodie also filled an extra day with deskside appointments and media meetings include Bloomberg, Conde Nast Traveler and freelancers for SAVEUR, Afar and Travel Leisure.

Winter Media Tour

Sarah completed a quick Winter Media Tour in mid-January to the drive markets of Greenville, S.C., and Charlotte, promoting Asheville as an ideal winter destination and sharing what's new in the year ahead. Sarah secured television appointments in both markets and was able to meet with freelance writers and editors representing *TOWN Magazine*, *The Local Palate*, *Charlotte Parent Magazine* and more.

Press Materials & Systems Updates

With the assistance of Del Holston's PR contract work, the team updated all 10 press sheets for the destination with winter and "what's new in 2019" items. These assets were utilized for the Winter Media Tour and TravMedia Marketplace in NY in January. The meetings and conventions press sheet was also updated with 2019 news. New press sheets focusing on the wellness scene and music scene are also under development.

During January, Landis met with Elizabeth to plan a revamp of Explore Asheville's online news room that will incorporate strong visuals, update media intake features and provide key message-focused destination content, with a focus on trending news. A timeline was developed for the work that will be completed this spring.

The PR team connected with new support staff at TrendKite to generate better efficiencies regarding clip pulling and tagging, as well as developing and utilizing dashboards to target media. The team also crafted lists of "bullseye" spring clips and meetings and conventions/group travel clips for the TrendKite support team to use when creating these two new dashboards.

Significant Placements

1. *Bloomberg Businessweek* | "Want to Try the Most Exciting Food in America? Leave New York City"
2. *Budget Travel* | "5 Perfect U.S. Road Trips"
3. *Cincinnati Refined* | "Asheville is a Perfect Weekend Getaway Less Than 6 Hours from Cincy"
4. *Eater Charleston* | "3 New Asheville Places to Try This Winter"
5. *James Beard Foundation* | "Beyond the Family Meal - Where Katie Button Dines in Asheville"
6. *Lonely Planet* | "Why Asheville is America's next major music city"
7. *Meetings Today* | "3 Dream Drive-to Bleisure Destinations - Asheville, Valley Forge and Boise"
8. *Mommy Nearest* | "25 Kid-Friendly Things to Do in Asheville, NC"
9. *Thrillist* | "The Coolest New Things Coming to America This Year"
10. *Travel Pulse* | "25 Destinations Beer Lovers Should Travel to in 2019"
11. *TripAdvisor* | "20 of the Top Places to Visit in the US in 2019"
12. *Unique Homes Magazine* | "Top Destinations Across the World for a Nature Immersion Getaway"
13. *UPROXX* | "An Award-Winning Bartender Tells Us Where to Drink in Asheville, NC"
14. *USA TODAY* | "History, Art and Dogs get their Due at Museums Opening this Year"

Content Development Projects: The content team's projects during the month of January focused on moving forward several projects, including videos about South Slope, Black Mountain and the Asheville music scene, as well as expanding and optimizing existing content based to improve user experience.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of January, seven new pieces of editorial content were added to the website: a round-up of winter events, a round-up of Best Hikes on the Blue Ridge Parkway, updated and optimized content for the main Blue Ridge Parkway page, and four "things to do this weekend" posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 23,613 new page views, followed by What You Can't Miss in Asheville in 2019, which received 8,456 page views.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- January saw 1,565 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 282,508.
- There were 21 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of January.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was the share of the "What You Can't Miss in Asheville in 2019" blog post. It has reached 30,654 people organically, generating 456 total reactions, including 64 comments.
- The most popular paid Facebook post of the month was the share of a story from Lonely Planet about the Asheville music scene. It has reached 70,805 people (59,955 organically), generating 2,952 total reactions, including 179 comments and 349 shares.
- The most engaging post this month was the share of the Matador Network story about Asheville as a top breakfast destination. It engaged 7.3 percent of the 52,626 users reached.

Foodtopia page

- January saw 58 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,023 likes.

Video:

- There were 7,383 new, organic YouTube views in January. The most popular video by organic views this month was the fall time lapse, which received 964 non-paid views. Return Again came in second with 706 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 32,154 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 585,558 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2018).

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 5,181. Foodtopia accounts for 1,424 of those; Visit Asheville – 3,757.

Instagram:

- Our Visit Asheville account has 54,379 followers.
- There were 6 new posts in January. The most popular was a photo of two young women posing in front of the Love Asheville at 68 Haywood. It has received 2,411 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 30,690 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,643 followers. We continue to provide a mix of proactive responses to travel inquiries and pushes of website and Instagram content.

Asheville Traveler E-newsletter:

- Subscribers: We have 123,314 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In January, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 121,860 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 16 percent and a click-through rate of 2.9 percent.

ExploreAsheville.com: Website user sessions in January increased 0.58 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was up 5.94 percent year-over-year in January. Social media traffic was down 6.07 percent year-over-year in January. Referral traffic was up 7.04 percent YOY, and traffic from enewsletter clicks were up 0.31 percent YOY in January. Display ad traffic was down 91.81 percent, and paid search traffic was down 29.18 percent YOY in January.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 28 percent more total pages per visit, 35 percent longer visit duration, 26 percent more organic pages per visit, and 34 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to industry average in the month of January.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO: In January, Simpleview and Explore Asheville staff continued to work on efforts to improve site conversion rates based on established goals and KPIs. Several pages continue to perform particularly well in driving organic traffic, including Things to Do in Asheville This Weekend, 50 Things to Do in Asheville and the Event Calendar.

Online Reservations: There were 25 orders for 43 room nights in January with a total of \$6,031 in booking revenue and \$258 commission. The top five states for room nights booked in November were North Carolina, Illinois, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee.

January 2018	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Revenue	\$6,032	\$9,025	-33.16%	\$100,706	\$90,263	11.57%
Commission	\$258.90	\$423.63	-38.89%	\$4,695.63	\$4,095.56	14.65%
Orders	25	40	-37.50%	399	347	14.99%
Room Nights	43	67	-35.82%	628	544	15.44%

Visitor Guide: There were 4,896 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in January, a 213 percent increase over last year. Fiscal year-to-date, there have been 22,255 travel guide requests.

Top 5 DMAs for January	# of Guides Requested	FY 2018-2019 Top 5 DMAs	# of Guides Requested
NEW YORK	226	NEW YORK	1044
TAMPA-ST. PETE, SARASOTA	186	TAMPA-ST. PETE, SARASOTA	798
ATLANTA	173	ATLANTA	734
CHARLOTTE	173	WASHINGTON DC	652
WASHINGTON DC	168	Orlando	649

GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE

Group sales reported 52 definite group bookings in January, up 33 percent from the prior year (34 meetings/conventions, nine weddings, nine group tour). The combined total definite room nights were 7,021 room nights, up 6 percent from the previous year. One hundred twenty-four leads (81 for meeting/conventions, 20 weddings and 23 for motorcoach) representing 26,144 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in January. Leads distributed were up 72 percent and rooms represented were up 78 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,238,606 (down 5%). Actualized revenue this month was \$114,815 (down 40%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,099 contacts, down 5 percent. Indirect outreach totaled 14,667, up 326 percent.

Joseph Phelps moved to the Public Policy Department, creating a staff vacancy. Interviews are being held to fill the Group Sales Specialist position. We expect to fill the position by late February.

Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:

American Bus Association

Explore Asheville had a strong presence at the 2019 American Bus Association Annual Meeting & Marketplace, one of the premier industry events for group travel, held in Louisville, KY. More than 3,500 tourism industry professionals attended the trade show enjoying networking opportunities through scheduled, face-to-face business appointments, evening events,

dine-arounds, sightseeing tours, tradeshow exhibits and more. Beth McKinney was the registered delegate with Dianna Pierce on hand to support the client event and help staff the trade show booth.

- **Trade Show Booth:** Explore Asheville's beer-themed booth captured tour operator's attention throughout the four-day event. Local beers were served on Saturday during a scheduled Networking Session. The Explore Asheville booth won second-place in the "Best of Show" for small inline booth exhibits—a first for us.
- **Asheville Dash In Dash Out Client Event:** This operator-only event held at one of the headquarter hotels drew 40 attendees. Participating partners included Asheville Outlets, Biltmore, Biltmore Farms Hotels, Hyatt Place and Blue Star Hospitality.
- **US Tours Gala:** Explore Asheville partnered with Biltmore to sponsor a table promoting US Tours trips. About 75 operators attended the event.
- **CTIS-Program Recognition:** Beth was recognized from the main stage during lunch for completing the necessary requirements to be named a Certified Travel Industry Specialist, a certification requiring approximately 68 hours of completed classwork.
- **Business Appointments:** Explore Asheville completed 52 appointments during ABA. As a direct result of attending Beth sent leads totaling 1,073 room nights. This included a 13-part series and two other leads.

Other Sales Missions/FAMS

- Dianna Pierce, Connie Holliday and Leann Swims attended PCMA Convening Leaders in Pittsburgh. This three-day educational conference attracted approximately 4,000 attendees with 2,400 being meeting planners. More than 100 educational sessions were held along with networking events. The team connected with meeting planners from across the U.S. throughout the conference.
- Kathryn Dewey traveled to Charlotte for sales calls, meeting with six organizations. In addition, she hosted a lunch and learn for BCD Travel with 11 corporate planners in attendance.
- Connie Holliday traveled to Columbia for sales calls and to exhibit at the SC Society of Association Executives Annual Tradeshow. About 80 attendees stopped by the Explore Asheville Booth, with many stating they could meet in North Carolina. Partnering with the CVB was Biltmore Farms Hotels, Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville and Biltmore. Two immediate leads came out of attending the event.
- Shawn Boone traveled to Atlanta for sales calls, meeting with seven clients.
- Shawn attended the Financial Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) Winter Symposium in Boston. Approximately 40 corporate planners from across the U.S. attended. A targeted email blast was sent in advance of the Symposium.
- Dianna Pierce represented Explore Asheville on a 30-minute webinar exclusive to HPN Global, a third-party planning organization. Twenty-five global representatives from across the U.S. attended, learning more about Asheville as a meeting destination.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: Four site visits were hosted by the team in January. Included were: 2023 NC Healthcare Engineers Association – 975 rooms; 2020 Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center – 30 rooms; 2019 North Carolina Environmental Health State of Practice Committee – 80 rooms and a 2019 confidential corporate group – 1,080 rooms.

January bookings included (among others):

- 2020 Holiday Vacation tour series – 175 rooms
- 2019 Haute Route Asheville 2019 – 592 rooms
- 2019 National Association of Manufacturers Plant Tour – 78 rooms
- 2019 Association of Governing Boards – 78 rooms
- 2019 US Foods – 94 rooms
- 2019 Barco – 250 rooms
- 2021 NC Sheriff's Association – 395 rooms
- 2019 NC Primary Care Conference – 407 rooms
- 2019 Southeastern Employment and Training Association – 40 rooms
- 2019 All Star Jam – 100 rooms
- 2019 WNCY Hula Invitational – 200 rooms
- 2020 Visit North Carolina 365 – 525 rooms
- 2019 Kepner President's Cup – 1,200 rooms
- 2019 NC Association of Electric Cooperatives – 26 rooms
- 2019 SEE Metering & Distribution Service Devices – 66 rooms

Thirty wedding guides were downloaded this month as compared to 64 in January 2018.

Group Sales Communications: Two new articles were published on the meeting planner website, "What's New for 2019" and "New Hotels in the Asheville Area" and were promoted in the January e-newsletter.

Media: The following articles were published in January.

- *Small Market Meetings* | CVBs Can Help with Marketing Your Meetings
 - Carli Adams was interviewed for the story
 - www.smallmarketmeetings.com/articles/cvbs-help-marketing-meetings/
- *Meetings Today* | Mountain Meetings Heaven: Asheville, NC is a multifaceted mountain meetings magnet where the arts abound
 - CVB providing information and was interviewed for the story
 - www.digital.meetingstoday.com/meetingstoday/january_2019?pg=98#pg98The
- *Meetings Today* | 3 Dream Drive-to Bleisure Destinations: Asheville, Valley Forge and Boise
 - CVB answered questions for the story
 - www.meetingstoday.com/magazines/article-details/articleid/33072/title/drive-to-bleisure-destinations-asheville-valley-forge-boise
- *Prevue Meetings + Incentives* | Where to Take Your Incentive Groups in 2019
 - Asheville is included in this article written by an Asheville 48-Hour Experience participant, Andrea Cannistraci
 - www.prevuemeetings.com/spark-blog/flip-the-script/take-incentive-groups-2019/
- *NTA Courier* | Don't stop 'til you've shopped
 - CVB staff provided information for this article
 - www.ntacourier.com/index.php/node/472

Mass Communications

- An e-newsletter was sent to 11,601 meeting planner clients in our database. Open rate: 11.7 percent, Click-throughs: 622
- An email was sent to 645 registered attendees of the ABA Marketplace encouraging attendees to come to the Asheville booth and attend a client event. Open Rate: 39 percent, Click-throughs: 80
- An email was sent to 119 South Carolina association meeting planners to promote Asheville's booth at the SCSAE trade show. Open Rate: 42 percent, Click-throughs: 13

- An email was sent to 1577 North Carolina contacts promoting an RFP contest. Open Rate: 23 percent, Click-throughs: 56
- An email was sent to 735 Texas-area planners promoting the new flight from Dallas/Ft. Worth to AVL. Open Rate: 17 percent, Click-throughs: 24

Convention Servicing Highlights: Explore Asheville hosted a two-day planning visit with the planners of the Destinations International CEO Summit coming to Asheville this April. An information table and gifts for coaches/judges were provided for The Gala gymnastics competition. A meeting with Southern Conference officials and the host hotels of the basketball championships was hosted at Explore Asheville. Staff helped hotels coordinate SoCon material orders and participation in the Hoops Against Hunger Hotel Challenge. The Convention Service Manager logged 211 communications with meeting planners regarding upcoming conferences.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts:

Contracts for the six projects awarded funding in the 2018 cycle are in development, and Pat has been meeting with the grantees to review contract terms. The grantees are Buncombe County Recreation Services, Center for Craft, Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation, LEAF Community Arts, North Carolina Arboretum Society, and River Front Development Group.

Pat has begun developing a process and timeline for the development of the African-American Heritage Trail and has started working on developing a stakeholder group.

The WNC Farmers Market received its first disbursement.

As required in the TPDF Agreement, all grantees in active contract submitted their Annual Report in January. Pat will provide a summary report to the BCTDA in February.

Partner Engagement and Events:

New Partners: Joe onboarded eight new partners in January: Asheville Augmented Reality Quests, Asheville Performing Arts Academy, Cloud 9 Relaxation, Daidala Ciders, Green Sage Café Merrimon, McSween Photography, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy Community Farm, and West Asheville Yoga Studio. Joe and Pat continue to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing as well as service the partners who request listings.

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The monthly orientations were suspended in January and will resume in February.

Community Input Sessions “Wayfinding Signage in the River Arts District”: The public affairs team coordinated two community input forums (morning and afternoon) on January 31 at 14 Riverside Drive. All partners located in the River Arts District were invited to provide input on wayfinding issues in the River Arts District to MERJE as they begin designing the Wayfinding system for the area. 33 community stakeholders were in attendance, including RAD representatives from NC Glass Center, CURVE Studios, NorthLight Studios, Eco Depot Market Place, Asheville Greenworks, Trackside Studios, Gallery Mugen, 310 Art, Urban3, The Village Potters, Historic Cotton Mill Studios, The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County, RADA, and RADBA. A follow-up community forum will be scheduled this summer for MERJE to present design recommendations to the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Administration: Brit Martin resigned her role as Data Specialist and Joe Phelps transferred into the position which was renamed Public Affairs Specialist.

Glenn managed recruitment for four vacancies: Group Sales & Services Specialist, Direct of Finance, Hospitality Coordinator, and Marketing Analyst.

Wayfinding Signage: Glenn and Pat spent many hours in January cross-referencing the Geograph Maintenance list with the system recommendations received from MERJE. Geograph submitted proofs of the final repairs and new signage for us to review and approve.

Glenn attended a Job Fair for Hospitality and Tourism Management students at Appalachian State University. He was there to recruit a summer intern.

Attractions Roundtable: On January 24, Glenn and Stephanie met with Ken Stamps (Navitat) and Jeff Greiner (Adventure center of Asheville) for an initial discussion on the purpose and structure for convening tourism partners under the Attractions banner. The first convening was set for April 9 with discussions led by Ken and Jeff.