

February 26, 2020

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Stephanie Pace Brown

Subject: President's Report of January 2020 Activities

---

Marla, Dianna and I spent a day and a half meeting with Simpleview's owner and expert leadership team in Tucson, Arizona, to discuss a variety of high-level strategic topics across the marketing, website, sales and communications spectrums. There have been follow-up video conferences and we are collaborating on beta-testing some products that have been presented.

Phase III of the Tourism Management & Investment Plan process moved forward with staff working with the PGAV team. Meetings with local stakeholders and public officials were held in January. Community Leadership Council listening sessions and a Steering Committee meeting took place January 27–28.

I was invited to participate on a planning group to help develop the Thrive Asheville I2A Leadership Forum, a new initiative for Asheville and Buncombe County to engage in constructive dialogue across lines of difference. The goal is to enable meaningful engagement among a distinguished, diverse, multi-perspective group of local leaders who will learn about key issues and engage in frank and productive conversation. Ultimately, the forum will lead to new solutions and an action agenda on critical community issues.

The annual VisitNC 365 Conference, the state's premier travel industry event, will take place in Asheville, March 22-24. As the host city, the Explore Asheville team has been working with VisitNC on conference details and will be hosting the Sunday evening opening reception at the Asheville Art Museum.

The Explore Asheville team began working earnestly on the FY 21 BCTDA budget in January, which will be presented to the board in April; a month earlier than normal following an expedited timeline. Departmental retreats took place, a finance committee was appointed, and preliminary/overview meetings were held with staff and 360i.

As part of the African American Heritage Project community engagement phase, the project team conducted four in-person Listening Session Workshops. Sessions were attended by approximately 80 community members and a report summarizing the input will be forthcoming.

A personalized, comprehensive packet of information was mailed to 34 candidates and incumbents seeking public office. The packets included facts about the BCTDA and its history, occupancy tax guidelines, the Tourism Product Development Fund, and the Festivals and Cultural Events support fund.

## **JANUARY BY THE NUMBERS**

- During January, the sales team posted 873 personal contacts (down 21%). January sales activities generated 114 sales leads (down 7%) and 74 convention bookings (up 45%), representing 9,151 rooms (up 31%). Seven months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 7 percent and room nights represented are down 3 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 11 group events in January (up 10%), with revenue of \$275,028 (up 140%). The services team assisted 14 groups (up 27%).
- The PR team landed 19 significant placements in January (down 55%), with 77 media touchpoints (down 21%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$7,089,918 with reach of over 7.7 million. Online placements added \$234,469 in value and reach of over 99 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 419,359 visits (up 59%), including 298,226 to the mobile site (up 74%). Our Facebook fan base total is 296,662 (up 5%) and video views totaled 66,910 (up 108%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 98 room nights (up 128%) with total room revenue of \$13,399 (up 122%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 7,402 visitors (up 13%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

## **LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$39,433,976 in December (up 15%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 69.1 percent during December (flat). The average daily room rate was \$179.78 (up 6%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$124.23 (up 6%). Room demand increased 4 percent with 175,846 rooms sold.
- AIRDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 56.3 percent (up 10.2%), ADR of \$98.52 (down 3.9%), RevPAR of \$55.50 (up 5.9%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 34 percent to total 129,052 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 44 percent to total 141,343 in December.

## **IN THE COMMUNITY**

- Stephanie and Kathi attended the City of Asheville community listening session on the hotel moratorium with the Urban Land Institute.
- Stephanie met with Michael Dempsey of Lenoir-Rhyne and Aisha Adams of Equity Over Everything to discuss the development of the Lenoir-Rhyne Equity Academy.
- Stephanie gave a tourism presentation to the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission board.
- Stephanie attended a press conference at Asheville Regional Airport to announce four new Allegiant flights.
- Stephanie, Marla, Dianna, and Kathi attended the Thomas Wolfe Public Plan Unveiling presentation event at the US Cellular Center.
- Stephanie and Marla met with Lindsay Hearn and Elizabeth Brazas of the Community Foundation to discuss the Mel Chin Wake sculpture project.

- Stephanie, Marla and Dianna traveled to Tucson, Arizona, to meet with leadership at Simpleview, Explore Asheville's web site hosting and database partner.
- Stephanie spoke to A-B Tech students regarding "The Business of Tourism."
- Stephanie gave a tourism presentation at a Women in Construction meeting at Cornerstone Restaurant.
- Glenn attended the Black Mountain Center for the Arts board meeting.
- Stephanie, Marla and Kathi attended a presentation by the Urban Land Institute where recommendations on hotel development were shared.
- Stephanie attended AIR Executive Committee and Board meetings throughout the month.
- Stephanie attended Rotary Club of Asheville meetings every Thursday when she was available.
- As incoming chair for the PRSA Travel & Tourism conference, Dodie led the RFP process for the 2021 conference, including two 48-hour site visits to the finalist destinations. Dodie also conducted media outreach to top national editors to support media speakers at the 2020 PRSA conference.
- In her role on the Chow Chow marketing and programming committees, Dodie supported the RFP process for an integrated marketing firm to support the 2020 festival and participated in program ideation and community engagement efforts.
- Marla attended the Asheville Downtown Association retreat.
- The Sales team volunteered at Gala Gymnastics.
- As a follow-up to the 2019 AENC tradeshow, the sales team staff and participating industry partners packed over 50 health care kits for use by clients at WNC Rescue.
- Dianna attended the monthly Civic Center Commission meeting.
- Pat attended the Parking & Transportation Committee meeting, a sub-committee of the Downtown Commission.
- Pat attended the Local Living Committee, a sub-committee of the Downtown Commission.
- Pat attended an update on G.A.P., the Greenway Plan (G), ADA Transition Plan (A), and Pedestrian Plan (P), presented by the City of Asheville.
- Pat presented an update at the monthly RADBA (River Arts District Business Association) meeting on the development of the Wayfinding signage for RAD.
- Kathi represented Explore Asheville at the launch event of the Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville and welcomed Principal Chief Richard Sneed to Asheville on behalf of the BCTDA.
- Kathi represented Explore Asheville at the Asheville Food Fan awards.
- Kathi attended a meeting with United Way to discuss potential partnerships.
- Explore Asheville staff participated in a service day outing at the Haywood Street Congregation.

## **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Advertising:** The "Cozy Winter" campaign launched on January 6 and will run through February 23. This campaign consists of the following tactics: paid search, paid social (Facebook, Instagram & Pinterest), native, and radio, both broadcast and online. The 360i team shared a strategy to further enhance awareness during a cluttered ad environment due to the political season and a separate campaign to support non-stop flights in key markets. The tactical elements include use of cinema advertising as well as digital billboards with a remarketing element. The entire spring campaign which will launch in late February includes the following tactics:

- Broadcast television
- Broadcast radio
- Video streaming (Hulu)
- Online radio (Pandora + Spotify)

- Online display & video
- Retargeting
- Paid social (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest)
- Native/Sponsored Content
- Cinema
- Digital billboards
- Paid search
- Content partnerships (TrueX, Matador/REI)

**Paid Search:** Paid search drove 78k sessions to ExploreAsheville.com in January, an increase of 105 percent YOY. The bounce rate for January was at 41.9 percent, an improvement of 9.9 percent YOY. Improvements were also seen in average session duration and pages per session YOY, up 11.8 percent and 9.1 percent respectively.

	January 2019	January 2020	YoY
<b>Total spend</b>	\$28,037	\$44,262	58%
<b>Impressions</b>	630,149	1,264,294	101%
<b>Clicks</b>	35,880	78,697	119%
<b>CTR</b>	5.7%	6.2%	9.3%
<b>CPCs</b>	\$0.78	\$0.56	-28%

**General Media Relations:** The PR Team logged 77 media touchpoints, initiated 77 targeted pitches and hosted four media on the ground in Asheville in January. Touchpoint and pitch numbers are high due to Winter Media Tour and the International Media Marketplace. Supported site visits included media representing New York Lifestyles, Travel Noire, Our State and the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Story support included USA Today 10 Best, AAA Carolinas GO, The Points Guy and Smart Meetings. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to USA TODAY, Passport and Okra Magazine, among others.

**Winter Media Tour:** PR Manager Landis Taylor embarked on Explore Asheville’s Winter Media Tour in January, setting up and attending 13 appointments in Chattanooga and Nashville. Landis did two television broadcast interviews in Chattanooga, focusing on what makes Asheville a great winter destination, and met with writers and editors representing Style BluePrint, Nashville Lifestyles, Parade.com, Sophisticated Living Nashville and more.

**International Media Marketplace New York:** Dodie attended TravMedia’s IMM media marketplace in New York where she secured appointments and connected Asheville news with 33 top tier editors and freelance writers representing Travel + Leisure, Afar, SmarterTravel, Outside, Hemispheres, TripSavvy, New York Times and National Geographic.

**M&C / Group PR Efforts:** In January, Sarah Lowery and Carli Adams provided extensive information for an upcoming *Smart Meetings Magazine* feature on North Carolina, with a focus on nontraditional meeting spaces that are great for groups. Sarah also worked to update the press sheet for M&C media with fresh news, which Carli was able to use for the “What’s New for Meeting Planners in 2020” content on ExploreAsheville.com.

### **Significant Placements:**

1. *AARP | 5 Trips That Teenagers Will Love*
2. *Fodors | 10 Things to Eat and Drink in the Carolinas*
3. *Food & Wine | This is the Best Food City in America, According to Yelp*
4. *Forbes | Best Bites from an Epic Coast-to-Coast Road Trip*
5. *Napa Valley Register | Foodtopia found in the Blue Ridge Mountains*
6. *Pure Wander | A Guide to North Carolina: Asheville Breweries*
7. *Southern Living | Asheville is the Best Food City in America, According to Yelp*
8. *The Saturday Evening Post | Easygoing, Artsy Asheville*
9. *Travel + Leisure | 15 trips you need to take as soon as you retire*
10. *Travel Binger | 6 Reasons to visit Asheville, North Carolina*
11. *Travel Noire | The Cheapest Places to Travel Each Month in 2020*
12. *Trip Advisor | 8 Mouth-Watering Vegan Restaurants Across the US for The Plant-Based Traveler*
13. *USA Today | 10 Bucket-list sites to visit in the new decade*
14. *USA Today 10 Best | 10 of the best food and wine festivals the Southeast has to offer*
15. *Yelp | Yelp Names Top U.S. Foodie Destinations of 2020*

**Content Development Projects:** The month of January saw the completion and distribution of an online Cozy Quiz version of the hand-illustrated Cozy Winter Checklist. The quiz, developed internally in cooperation with the web team, gives each user a custom “Cozy Score,” which they are encouraged to share on Facebook. Also, this month, the social media manager completed and shared a video “Explore Biltmore Village in Asheville, NC,” which toured viewers through the village’s many partner businesses. The video was well received by potential visitors and partners and is part of a broader series of videos to showcase regions throughout the county and assist with visitation dispersal. The work to transition Explore Asheville Radio to be powered by Spotify playlists continued. The on-site song player and a roll-out strategy that highlights the music of local artists will be launched in early February.

### ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of January, eight pieces of content related to tours were updated on ExploreAsheville.com and a new story called “Top Spring Events in Asheville” was added. Updated tour stories included: “8 Great Asheville Tours for Spring,” “Voices from Past & Present,” “Biltmore Estate’s Vine to Wine Tour,” “Asheville Beer Scene Tours, Tastings & Tips,” “Asheville’s Top Wine Experiences: Tours, Tastings & Wine Bars,” and “5 Awesome Ways to Explore Asheville’s Rich History.” Four new “things to do this weekend” blog posts were also written.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was “50 Things to Do in Asheville,” which received 26,267 pageviews, followed by “5 Great Winter Hikes Near Asheville,” which received 13,892 new pageviews which both served as landing pages for paid social efforts.

### **Social Media Stats:**

Facebook: *Visit Asheville* page

- January saw 1,182 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 296,662.
- There were 22 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of January.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a link to a Today Show segment on Asheville’s inclusion in Travel and Leisure’s “World’s Best Places to Visit.” The post reached 78,236 people organically, generating 479 total reactions, and 86 comments.

- The most engaging post of the month was a link to a Saturday Evening Post story “Easygoing, Artsy Asheville;” it engaged seven percent of users reached.
- The most popular paid post was a post linking to the ExploreAsheville.com Cozy Checklist Quiz. The post reached 25,765 people and engaged 12 percent of users reached.

#### Video:

- There were 10,249 new, organic YouTube views in January. The most popular video by organic views this month was “Experience Black Mountain, NC: America’s Prettiest Small Town,” which received 1,938 non-paid views. The new video “Explore Biltmore Village in Asheville, NC” came in second with 1,013 views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 66,910 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 385,969 views of Explore Asheville video content YTD (since July 1, 2019).

#### Pinterest:

- There were 166.59k organic impressions of pins linking to Explore Asheville content, down 11 percent over the previous month. There were also 9.04k engagements on these pins, down 12 percent over the previous month.
- 360i continued to boost a collection of nearly a dozen new Pinterest pins related to winter.

#### Instagram:

- Our Visit Asheville account has 71,547 followers.
- There were 8 new posts in January. The most popular photo post was a photo of The Omni Grove Park Inn at night. It received 3,071 engagements (likes and comments).

#### Twitter:

- Across all our accounts we have a total of 23,078 followers. \*Please note this number is decreased recently because our Foodtopia account was compromised and our follower count (and tweets) were erased.
- The most popular account (with current numbers available) is Visit Asheville, which has 8,303 followers.
- We are engaging in a process of re-populating our Foodtopia account posts, in addition to continuing to provide a mix of proactive response to travel inquiries and pushes of website and Instagram content.

#### Asheville Traveler E-newsletter:

- Subscribers: We have 128,205 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs:
  - In January, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 124,617 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 15.5 percent and a click-through rate of 2.2 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** Website user sessions in January increased 59 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was up 11 percent year-over-year in January. Paid search traffic was up 102 percent compared with last year. Referral traffic was down 10 percent year-over-year, while traffic from eNewsletter clicks was down 6 percent year-over-year in January. Social media traffic, excluding paid social, was up 32 percent compared with last year. Traffic from advertising campaigns, including paid social was up 656 percent in January compared to last year. Sessions to the booking engine increased 28 percent year over year in January and booking engine searches increased 36 percent.

**Website Improvements – SEO, QA & Accessibility:** In January, Explore Asheville content and web teams worked with a product called SiteImprove to assist with search engine optimization, quality assurance and accessibility efforts. Atlas Branding in Asheville is working with the team on a design refresh to modernize the site. The design and other structural improvements, including new navigation and a new events module will be fully implemented in May.

**Online Reservations:** There were 59 orders for 98 room nights in January with a total of \$13,399.43 in booking revenue and \$287.86 in commission. The top five states for room nights booked in January were Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Illinois.

<b>January 2020</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	\$13,399	\$6,032	122%	\$94,106	\$100,706	-7%
Commission	\$288	\$259	11%	\$2,112	\$4,696	-55%
Orders	59	25	136%	398	399	-0.3%
Room Nights	98	43	128%	597	628	-5%

**Visitor Guide:** The visitor guide was delivered, and an online leads generated campaign was launched. This contributed to the 3,753 *Official Asheville Visitor Guide* requests that were received in January.

## **GROUP SALES & SERVICES**

Group sales reported 74 definite group bookings in January, up 44 percent from the prior year (30 meetings/conventions, 11 weddings, 33 group tour). The combined total definite room nights were 9,151 room nights, up 31 percent from the previous year. One hundred fourteen leads (59 for meeting/conventions, 20 weddings and 35 for motorcoach) representing 39,603 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in January. Leads distributed were down eight percent and rooms represented were up 52 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$2,054,732 (up 66%). Actualized revenue this month was \$275,028 (up 140%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 873 contacts, down 21 percent. Indirect outreach totaled 13,239, down 10 percent.

Shawn Boone has accepted a position at Biltmore, creating a staff vacancy. Interviews are being held to fill the position.

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

- Dianna Pierce attended the 2020 American Bus Association (ABA) Annual Meeting & Marketplace, one of the premier industry events for group travel, held in Omaha, Nebraska. More than 3,500 tourism industry professionals attended the trade show. Dianna met one-on-one with 46 tour operators. Several RFPs were received and are being followed up on.
- An operator-only client event was hosted by the CVB at ABA with 40 people in attendance. Participating industry partners were Biltmore, Holiday Inn East and Biltmore Farms Hotels.
- Connie Holliday and Tina Porter attended PCMA Convening Leaders. This three-day educational conference attracted approximately 4,000 attendees with 2400 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.

- Daniel Bradley and Glenn Ramey represented Explore Asheville at the 2020 annual Wedding Festivals event held at the WNC Ag Center. Sixty-seven people stopped by the Asheville booth to find out more information with 21 individuals requesting more information.
- Connie along with five partners participated in the SC Society of Association Executives Tradeshow (The Foundry, Crowne Plaza, Renaissance, Accents on Asheville and Biltmore Farms). Approximately 50 planners stopped by the booth.
- Kathryn Dewey traveled to Charlotte for sales calls, meeting with three organizations in advance of hosting a client event at Chef Alyssa's kitchen. One RFP was received as a result of the trip.
- Shawn Boone traveled to Atlanta for sales calls and to execute the MPI – Georgia Education Program and Annual Luncheon Sponsorship for the CVB. Eighty attendees were present. Sponsorship deliverables included podium talk time, playing of the meetings video and logo inclusion on all placards and website. Shawn also completed five sales calls during the visit. Two RFPs for 599 rooms were received.

**Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:** Two site visits were hosted by the team in January. Included were: 2020 Merck – 176 rooms and 2020 CNN – 120 rooms.

January bookings include but are not limited to:

- 2022 Public Defender and Investigator Conference – 280 rooms
- 2021-2022 Collette Vacation Series – 1,620 rooms
- 2021 Attorneys Information Exchange Group – 365 rooms
- 2021 Southeast Toyota – 259 rooms
- 2020 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation – 166 rooms
- 2020 State Farm Insurance Company – 200 rooms
- 2020 Burke High School Class of 1961 – 30 rooms
- 2020 SITE Southeast Educational Summit – 152 rooms
- 2020 Game On Sports (3 Dates) – 250 rooms each
- 2020 UL LLC – 64 rooms
- 2020 Chronos Underwriters – 94 rooms
- 2020 Maximum Cheer and Dance – 60 rooms
- 2020 Summit Church – 120 rooms
- 2020 Kepner President's Cup – 1000 rooms
- 2020 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials – 39 rooms
- 2020 Plastics Pipe Institute – 98 rooms
- 2020 USSSA Baseball – (two events - 250 rooms and 200 rooms respectively)
- 2020 NC Bar Association (three events – 280, 128 and 255 rooms respectively)
- 2020 Girl Time Getaway – 80 rooms
- 2020 Risk Insurance Management Society – 324 rooms
- 2020 Red Ventures – 250 rooms
- 2020 Clemson PRTM – 20 rooms
- 2020 NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services – 80 rooms

**Group Sales Communications:** A new testimonial video featuring participants of the 48-Hour Experience was completed.

### Media

- Staff provided information to a writer with *Smart Meetings* working on an annual story about North Carolina.
- A one-page spotlight on Asheville, "Hidden Mountain Marvel" was featured in the January edition of *Meetings Today*. Staff were interviewed for the feature.



## **Mass Communications**

- An invitation to a client event hosted by Explore Asheville and industry partners during the American Bus Association annual marketplace was sent to 207 registered attendees. Open rate: 30% Clicks: 20
- An email was sent to 191 attendees of December's Holiday Showcase trade show following up from Explore Asheville's attendance. Open rate: 22% Clicks: 13
- An email was sent to 248 South Carolina based clients in advance of the South Carolina Society for Association Executives trade show. Open rate: 29% Clicks: 18
- An e-newsletter was sent to 12,397 meeting planner clients. Open rate: 17% Clicks: 849

**Convention Service Highlights:** Explore Asheville along with Southern Conference and Sports Commission staff hosted a meeting of the SoCon Championships host hotels. Staff attended the SoCon LOC meeting, a planning meeting for the Visit NC 365 Conference and hosted a planning discussion with the American Association of University Women of North Carolina. Welcome gifts and a hospitality table was set up for The Gala gymnastics competition.

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

### **Tourism Product Development Efforts:**

LEAF is planning a ribbon-cutting ceremony and opening celebration on February 14. Pat toured the new center to advise on TPDF recognition signage.

TPDF grantees in active contract submitted Annual Reports on January 15 as required in the TPDF Agreement. Pat is compiling the information for the BCTDA's review.

PGAV is in phase three of the Tourism Management & Investment Plan (TMIP). A series of meetings were conducted by the project team with municipal stakeholders and the Community Leadership Council (CLC) to collect additional project details and help establish common priorities.

The WNC Farmers Market's visitor information signage and a rack for Visitor Guide distribution were installed; the narrative panel is in development.

### **Partner Engagement and Events:**

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The public affairs team hosted a CVB 101 Orientation on January 8, which included 11 attendees representing Asheville Free Walking Tours, AVL Ride, BroadMind Travel, Conundrum, FIRC Group, Herb Mountain Farm, Home2 Suites Asheville Airport, The Trolley Company, and Virtelle Hospitality.

New Partners: There were six new partners in January: AVL Ride, Cask and Canter Mobile Bartending, Crave Dessert Bar, Eliza Bell Photography, Herb Mountain Farm, and Hidden Flower Tiny Farm.

Events Calendar: Charlie approved 379 events for the month of January. Joe continued to reach out to Music Venue partners regularly to ensure they are submitting their events to the Live Music Calendar.

Partner Forum – January 23: Seventy partners attended a “Sales & Marketing Update” Partner Forum in the Boardroom on January 23. Marla Tambellini and Dianna Pierce presented the updates for their respective departments.

Service Day – January 30: The Explore Asheville team participated in a service day outing at Haywood Street Congregation in January. The team scrubbed, painted, washed windows, did carpentry work, organized, and enjoyed time together for a cause important to our community.

Planning is underway for the following upcoming events:

- RAD Wayfinding Signage Community Update - February 27
- One-On-One Extranet Training in Black Mountain - February 28
- Hospitality Outlook - March 18
- Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association Summit - March 25
- National Tourism Week Summit - May 5

### **Projects:**

African American Heritage Project: Pat has focused on building & expanding relationships with community members and organizations to increase awareness of the project and build a supportive network interested in collaboration. As part of the Community Engagement phase, the project team conducted four in-person Listening Session Workshops on January 9, 10, and 11. Sessions were attended by approximately 80 community members and took place at the Friendship Center in Shiloh, at the Stephens-Lee Recreation Center and in the Explore Asheville Board Room. A final report summarizing feedback, themes, and a recommended plan for next phases will be available in coming weeks.

2020 Go Local Week: Pat is collaborating with the Asheville Grown Business Alliance on promotion of the Go Local Week scheduled for February 8 – 15. Tentative plans include co-hosting a business resource event and creating a filter on ExploreAsheville.com featuring Local Love special events submitted by local businesses.

CRM Audit: The public affairs team continues to work on the auditing process for Explore Asheville’s customer relationship management (CRM) database and is coordinating efforts with Marketing team goals for ExploreAsheville.com following a website usability study.

Arts Portal: Plans are underway for dissolving the arts portal, AshevilleArtsAlive.com, a website featuring arts-only related content from ExploreAsheville.com that was created in partnership with and in support of the Asheville Area Arts Council. The website helped increase partner engagement with area artists and arts organizations. Given the change in the arts council’s strategic organizational priorities and the low usage rates, the arts portal website will go dark in March and individuals listed on the arts portal will be invited to request a listing on ExploreAsheville.com if they meet the listing criteria. Plans also include providing a feed of arts-only related events to the arts council for display on their website.

Wayfinding signage for RAD: MERJE is refining the signage system concepts that were developed as a result of the community feedback provided at sessions in January and August 2019. The updated design concepts will be presented at a public meeting in February.

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Local Media / Public Information: Kathi assisted with publicity and prepared talking points for Stephanie for the public announcement of the expansion of Allegiant nonstop flights at Asheville Regional Airport; responded to several media requests related to funding of the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium renovation proposal; wrote a press release on the enhanced advertising campaign approved by BCTDA and responded to numerous requests from media for interviews or more information; responded to media requests related to the recommendations of the Urban Land Institute with respect to the occupancy tax and hotel moratorium; continued publicity for the African American Heritage Trail listening sessions, to include assisting with two stories on WLOS-TV, and others on BPR Public Radio and in the Asheville Citizen Times; assisted with publicity for the Local Love Business Resource Fair, which Explore Asheville is hosting. Kathi also successfully pitched a story idea to WLOS-TV on the work Explore Asheville does to gain recognition for “best of” lists, then worked with Marla and the PR team to shoot the story. In addition, she continued work on strengthening the content on the CVB website as a tool for better communicating to the public.

Elections: Kathi developed a comprehensive packet of information for candidates that included facts about the BCTDA and its history, the occupancy tax and guidelines for its use, community benefits of tourism, the Tourism Product Development Fund and grant recipients, the Festivals and Cultural Events support fund, etc. In total, she assembled and mailed 34 packets that also included personalized letters to the candidates and incumbents.

Community Engagement: Kathi continued coordinating personal meetings with various community stakeholders and influencers, as well as local media and tourism partners; this process also always includes preparing handouts and presentations. Also, Kathi supported Stephanie for a presentation she was doing at the January Partners Forum by conducting extensive research on history and milestones in the local tourist industry over the past 30 years.

## **EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

### **Staff/Administrative Updates:**

Human Resources: On January 7, Matt Bradley with ISA was in for the initial discussions on medical benefits for FY 21. Along with traditional benefit quotes, Matt was instructed to provide us with information on Direct Primary Care and Health Reimbursement Accounts. To meet budget timelines, Matt will have first plan options and cost estimates to us in late February.

Personnel: January 6 was Ritchie Rozzelle’s first day as Director of Content. He was onboarded into Workday and attended orientations with Stephanie and department heads. Glenn Ramey was onboarded into her benefits selections prior to her 90<sup>th</sup> day on January 18.

Craft HR Solutions: On January 16, Glenn met with Andrew Pollick to continue discussions on improving the HR system and procedures used by Explore Asheville. The onboarding document Glenn developed was reviewed and determined to be complete and very effective for its purpose. A discussion was had to look at formatting the document as an interactive form and away from Excel.

Event Grants: The Fringe Festival, the first event sponsored by the BCTDA for the 2020 calendar season, occurred the week of January 20. The BCTDA was recognized at the opening event and throughout the week with a banner at The Magnetic Theater. The back cover of Fringe’s guide was used for an ad promoting the WelcometoAVL app.

Hotel/Motel General Manager Convening: On January 8, the first convening of hotel/motel GMs took place. This meeting is designed to connect the business of Explore Asheville directly with the GMs. This first meeting provided an overview of Explore Asheville and the work of both the Marketing and the Sales Teams.

Building: On January 17, Lockdown International led two sessions at Explore Asheville. The first addressed an Active Assault and what Team Members should do in such an instance. The training received would serve those in the room in any situation, whether at work, home, church or other public location. The second session, called Tabletop Scenarios, addressed our building specifically and discussed how we, as an organized team, should announce and handle such a threat. Following this session, a procedural plan was begun that would be integrated into the Team Member Handbook.

Wayfinding: Glenn and Pat worked with Merje to finalize the Criteria for Inclusion for the Wayfinding Program. This represents the final document development, along with a rewritten Interlocal Agreement, that will be sent to the participating Governing Entities for their approval and signatures.

Tourism Management & Investment Plan: Stephanie continued working with PGAV and Chris Cavanaugh to further advance the TMIP process. Meetings with local stakeholders and public officials were held in January. Community Leadership Council listening sessions and a Steering Committee meeting took place January 27–28.

BCTDA FY 21 Budget: The Explore Asheville team began working earnestly on the FY 21 BCTDA budget, which will be presented to the board in April; a month earlier than normal. Departmental retreats took place, an expedited timeline was followed, a finance committee was appointed, and preliminary/overview meetings were held with staff and 360i. Stephanie attended the budget retreats for the Marketing & PR, Group Sales, and Executive Office departments.

Ideas to Action (I2A) Leadership Forum: Stephanie was invited to participate on the planning group to help develop the I2A Leadership Forum, a new initiative for Asheville and Buncombe County to engage in constructive dialogue across lines of difference. The goal is to enable meaningful engagement among a distinguished, diverse, multi-perspective group of local leaders who will learn about key issues and engage in frank and productive conversation. Ultimately, the forum will lead to new solutions and an action agenda on critical community issues. Invitations are being sent to a carefully selected group of individuals in February and five meetings will take place in 2020.