

July 28, 2021

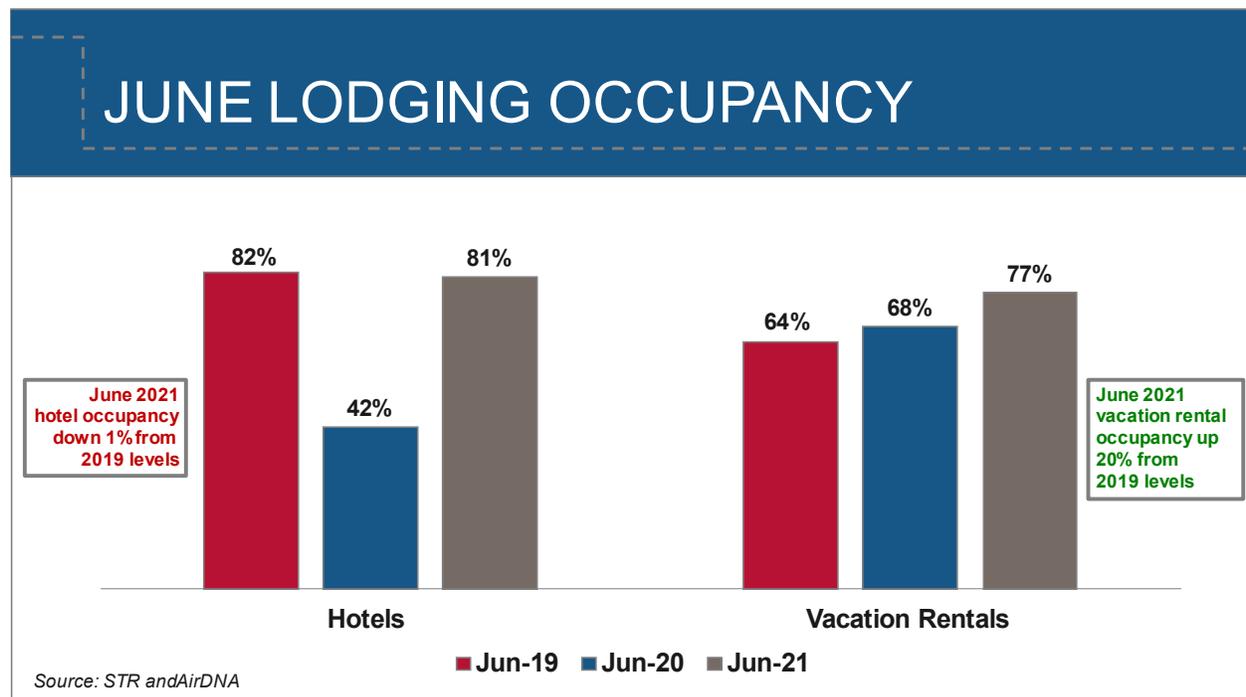
To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Vic Isley

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

Hotel occupancy for the month of June 2021 reached 81 percent, nearly double that of June 2020, and just 1% off June 2019 levels.

Short-term vacation rentals reached 77% in June 2021, up 20% from the benchmark year of 2019. This continues to be good news for local residents owning vacation rentals and earning more and benefiting from the return of visitors to our community. It marks the second month since the pandemic that hotel occupancy eclipsed vacation rental occupancy.



## **JUNE BY THE NUMBERS**

- During June, the sales team posted 1,047 personal contacts (up 122%). June sales activities generated 88 sales leads (up 203%) and 27 convention bookings (up 69%), representing 2,673 rooms (up 158%). Twelve months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 24 percent and room nights represented are down 32 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 24 group events in June (up 100%), with corresponding revenue of \$779,229 (up 1,781%). The services team assisted 27 groups (up 440%).
- The PR team landed 16 significant placements in June (flat), with 31 media touchpoints (down 33%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$1.3 million with reach of over 2.1 million (up 38%). Online placements added \$1.3 million in value and reach of more than 728 million (up 117%).
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 1,046,284 visits (up 221%), including 790,397 to the mobile site (up 266%). Our Facebook fan base total is 303,362 (up 2%) and video views totaled 46,223 (down 10%).
- In June 2021, there were 2,805 Asheville Visitor Guide requests compared to 2,180 the previous year. The fiscal year closed out with a total of 28,144 Visitor Guide requests (compared to 26,694 last fiscal).
- Paid search generated 31k site visits in June with average time on site of 1:20 and an average of 1.95 pageviews per visit; click through rate was 17.8 percent.
- Online hotel reservations totaled 53 room nights (down 34%) with total room revenue of \$12,239 (up 18%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 18,461 visitors (up 496%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion remains closed. The Black Mountain Visitor center welcomed 6,282 visitors (up 221%).

## **LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$48,966,052 in May (up 639%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 70.7 percent during May (up 210%). The average daily room rate was \$166.00 (up 104%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$117.44 (up 533%). Room demand increased 257 percent with 192,015 rooms sold.
- AirDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 66 percent (up 36%), ADR of \$112.21 (up 22%), and RevPAR of \$74.53 (up 66%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 92 percent to total 141,698 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 722 percent to total 124,151 in May.

## **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

### **Project Updates:**

- MMGY Global announced as new agency of record with agreement on term sheet preceding final contract.
- Spring/summer campaign continues with performance optimizations being made. Campaign extended through July and a final FY21 performance report is due in late July.
- Paid social campaign to drive awareness for nonstop flights has generated 40 billion impressions and reach of 8.8 million from May 1 – June 30. Campaign has been extended through July.
- Ad materials submitted for the 2022 Blue Ridge Parkway Travel Guide.
- To support Asheville's outdoor economy and responsible travel, signed on to sponsor two 22-minute episodes in the Park2Park Series highlighting the Blue Ridge Parkway. Production takes place in July with anticipated series launch this fall on Outside TV.
- Developed consumer survey to generate insights on Visitor Guide usage to guide strategy for the 2022 Guide.
- Published the following new content on EA.com
  - "5 Days of Adventures in the Asheville area" itinerary focused on extending length of stay.
  - "Celebrating Black-owned Businesses in Asheville" piece authored by local influencer Aisha Adams in coordination with Juneteenth celebrations.
  - "Your Essential Summer Guide to Asheville" itinerary authored focused around dispersal throughout Buncombe County.
- Captured b-roll footage of GRINDFest and Hola Asheville festivals to further build video asset library of diverse events.
- Conducted mid-point workshop with Destination Think as part of social media audit and content recommendation.
- Media Connections: Logged 31 media touchpoints, initiated 133 pitches, and supported 4 media on the ground in Asheville in June.
- Story Support: Included *Thrillist*, *Sherman's Travel*, *Style Blueprint*, *Sunseeker*, *Travel Bags with Annita* and *freelancers for Travel + Leisure*, *O Magazine* and *TripSavvy*. Photo assets curated for *Livability* and *Jet Linx Aviation's SOAR Magazine*.
- Media Outreach: Culinary news email pitch including what's new and Chow Chow mission driven events went to 130 media contacts via the Cision platform and had an open rate of 46%, messaging ladder up to Diversity and Creative Spirit pillars.
- Creative Spirit: Updated press sheets covering general Asheville travel news and food news. Team consulted on a press FAM with Cambria Hotel, aimed for August, and provided local insights and immersive activation ideas for out-of-town PR team.
- Engage Diverse Audiences: Worked with writers with an LGBTQ+ editorial focus for pitches and an upcoming story in *Thrillist*.
- Partner/Community Stakeholder Communications: Wrote and produced 5 community stakeholder/partner newsletters and alerts – a total of 8,558 emails delivered with the unique open rate as high as 38.3% and averaging 32%. These included the Tourism Community Update and alerts related to the strategic pillars "Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth" and "Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences."
- Local media: WLOS-TV | [Help wanted: Asheville area hotels struggle to fill positions](#); Mountain Xpress | [BCTDA plans \\$15M in marketing for 2021-22](#); Asheville Citizen Times | [Asheville hotel industry stays afloat amid pandemic; vacation rentals catch up with hotels](#); Asheville Citizen Times: [Mystery Buncombe hotel tax discussion? Commissioners pull 'policy' discussion](#); Asheville Citizen Times | [75% of Buncombe hotel tax goes to tourist ads; key Republican now says that should change](#); Asheville Business Inclusion Office Newsletter | [GRINDfest AVL](#) and [HOLA Asheville](#) (TDA/sponsor); Asheville Area Arts

Council Newsletter | [DEEP Conversations](#); AIR Newsletter | [Wear Wait Wash Campaign Refresh](#); Mountain Xpress | [Edwards flips on Buncombe occupancy tax reform](#); Mountain Xpress letter to editor | [The TDA's biggest-ever marketing spend](#); Mountain Xpress: [Downtown After 5 returns with all local lineup](#) (EA/sponsor); Mountain Xpress | [Public invited to provide input on Woodfin's Riverside Park and Whitewater Wave](#) (TDA/major funder); [Connect Beyond Festival Newsletter](#) (EA/sponsor); PGAV newsletter | [Asheville Tourism Recovery](#); Asheville Citizen Times | [Asheville Tourists seek millions for McCormick Field upgrades](#); Asheville Citizen Times | [Woodfin's Whitewater Wave seeks input, launches public survey](#); Business NC | BCTDA and lodging sales tax revenues "surging to record levels" (June edition, page 33); Mountain Xpress Letter to the Editor | [Will marketing make us 'Myrtle Beach of the Mountains'?](#); Mountain Xpress | [BCTDA approves \\$15.3 million for tourism marketing](#); Mountain Xpress (story on occupancy tax) | [More of the Pie](#) (see page 8-9); Asheville Citizen Times | [Buncombe TDA adopts \\$20M budget; \\$15M for marketing spurs calls for change](#); Asheville Citizen Times | [Asheville reparations: 'Most important part' of process starting now, city manager says](#); Mountain Xpress | [Asheville Lacrosse Classic returns for fifth year](#)

### **Future Updates:**

- Continue hiring process for research analyst, PR manager and PR coordinator.
- Onboarding new agency.
- Finalize media plan for August/September.
- Second & third videos for the Explore Asheville trails video series.
- Develop interactive map for EA.com homepage for the towns/neighborhoods' microsite project.
- Shoot and edit new profile video on River Arts District in July.
- Develop Leave No Trace landing page as part of VisitNC/OutdoorNC sponsorship in July.
- Work with Asheville Downtown Association to launch digital South Slope Murals Trails on EA.com.

## **GROUP SALES & SERVICES**

### **Project Updates:**

- Connie Holliday attended the Society of Incentive Travel Executives (SITE) Summer Kickoff in Atlanta.
- Kathryn Dewey worked with Marshall Hilliard to secure a sponsorship for the July Meeting Professionals International – Carolinas Chapter (MPI-CC) meeting in Asheville at Crowne Plaza.
- Connie Holliday and Beth McKinney hosted a successful dinner for 11 agents with Virtuoso Travel, the leading global network of travel agencies specializing in luxury and experiential travel, who were staying at The Foundry for an industry FAM.
- Tina Porter hosted a client event, an architectural boat tour, in Chicago on June 22 with four meeting planners and conducted two sales calls while in the area.
- Chopra Global Center was in Asheville for a site visit for a Silent Awakening event in September 2022 or 2023. The group has the potential to bring weekday business in the form of 1,700 room nights to Asheville.
- Beth McKinney delivered a sales presentation on Asheville in a Zoom presentation for group leaders (senior centers, OLLI groups) hosted by Friendship Tours.
- The sales team's new deployment incorporating industries was introduced to staff.
- June bookings include (but are not limited to):
  - North Carolina Homicide Investigators Association 2022 and 2023 – 325 rooms each
  - North Carolina Bar Association Family Law – 295 rooms

- Gammu Mu Annual Retreat – 195 rooms
- 2022 Society of Gilders Conference – 157 rooms
- 2021 Cranford / Cochran Wedding – 145 rooms
- Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership Quest 2021 - Inter City Leadership Visit – 130 rooms
- 2022 Davis / Anderson Wedding – 125 rooms
- Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina - Premier NC – 120 rooms
- Accounts in the meeting sales database can now be assigned to one of 29 Market Segments for improved industry prospecting and reporting aligned with organization goals.
- The team evaluated and finalized a new list of Source Codes for improved identification of the efforts that lead to the receipt of new sales leads and new accounts.
- Carli Adams met with the BOUND rep along with Whitney Smith from Marketing & PR to hear performance of meetings section fly-ins and for ideas for new strategies.
- Work continued with Miles Partnership on the online meeting planner guide refresh. Thirty-one meeting hotel partners were contacted to provide details for the guide.
- A Finalist Entry was submitted for the Northstar Meeting Group's Stella Awards in the Best CVB in the Southeast category. Winners will be announced in November.
- Organized a welcome amenity for Travel + Leadership Senior Leadership Team staying at the Omni Grove Park Inn.
- Visitor information, attendee giveaways, and welcome amenities were delivered to the Basenji Rescue and Transport 2021 Annual Convention at DoubleTree by Hilton Asheville – Biltmore.
- The sales team hosted its quarterly DOS meeting with all major hotels.
- Beth McKinney assembled and delivered "Wedding Season Survival Kits" to the top ten local wedding planners who refer Explore Asheville for wedding leads.
- Attended the ABRSC monthly board meeting.
- Staff toured Fairfield Inn & Suites Weaverville and the completed S&W Market.
- Work began to update the Partner Opportunities document for 2021-2022.

#### **Future Updates:**

- Tentative dates for the next four 48 Hour FAMs through November 2022 were set. The first, which will be the first FAM held since November 2019, is tentatively planned for November 16 – 19, 2021 pending the commitment of a host hotel.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

#### **Project Updates:**

- In June, 208 calendar event listings were processed, and 70 partner listings were updated in June including 22 Attractions, 2 Cabins/Vacation Rentals, 23 Food & Drink, 11 Hotels/Motels, 6 Retail, 4 Venue, and 2 Wedding Service.
- Thirteen new partners were added in June: Botanist and Barrel Tasting Bar + Bottle Shop, Down Dog Yoga Studio and Dog Bar, Ginger Huebner Art, Joseph Art, Joyride Slingshot Rentals, Just Be Tours, Mountain Metalworks Asheville, Round Mountain Creamery, Silverados, Sole82, Tasty Greens, The Grocery, Wilderness Connection.
- Four accounts were cancelled in June. Log Cabin Cooking has not been active since 2018. The Doner Kebabs & Falafels, Roanline, and AVL Tacos & Taps all closed due to complications from the pandemic.
- Eleven one-on-one sessions were held in June: 10 with existing partners and one with a potential partner.

- Visitor Guide distribution included 2,805 Individual Out-of-Market requests fulfilled; and 2,772 books or 63 cases of In-Market delivered to 15 industry partners; and 6,386 books or 146 cases of Out-of-Market delivered to 19 welcome centers/AAA offices/etc.
- CE team members attended community meetings and events including the African American Business Association, Small Business Technology & Development Center, Weaverville Business Association, River Arts Business District Association, the City's Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series, Block Community Collaborative, Local Living Economy Working Group, Chamber Annual Meeting, Riverfront Leadership Roundtable, LGBTQ+ Business Alliance Initiative with the Carolina's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce, and "Greening N.C. Tourism with Sustainable Hospitality" webinar hosted by ECU's Center for Sustainable Energy & Environmental Engineering.
- Equity-focused Business Support Working Group is in development; Pat hosted an initial meeting with City of Asheville diversity support staff and Buncombe County procurement staff.
- Bear Poster Refresh: An updated version of the bear-themed safety messaging posters was produced and distributed to partners.
- Earned Revenue: The Festivals & Cultural Events grant program and sponsorship opportunities are being updated to align with the new strategic pillars. The new process funding cycle will be announced in mid-July.
- Wayfinding: Ongoing kiosk content panel updates, final image review and securing rights. Geograph replaced all mask related kiosk panel graphics with the updated Bear graphic and updated RAD map legends.
- TPDF: The City of Asheville's request to waive the punch list requirements and receive balance of grant award to close out the RADTIP project was approved at the June Board meeting. And the YMI presented an update on the renovation project and a refined scope to the board.
- African American Heritage Trail: Met with project team advisors to hone project thesis, organize research and content themes, and continue planning for Community Engagement sessions with a goal of hosting next round in September. Continued discussions with potential contractors for design, public input session moderating, equity overview and advisory board development.

#### **Future Updates:**

- Partner virtual events/webinars in development include:
  - 'Partner Salon: How to Optimize Your Presence on ExploreAsheville.com' event on Wednesday, July 21 in the Explore Asheville Board Room.
  - Webinar: 'Responsible Travel & Sustainability in Tourism' on Tuesday, August 3 from 10-11:15am. Webinar to include a presentation by Tourism Cares, an update from Explore Asheville staff on related initiatives, and a panel of fellow tourism partners who are embracing sustainability measures in their businesses.
  - Summer Social & Sustainability Resource Fair: on Tuesday, August 3 from 4-6pm at Highland Brewing Company.

### **PRESIDENT & CEO + EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

#### **Project Updates:**

- Executed the BCTDA's regular monthly board meeting virtually on June 30, 2021.
- At the June meeting, the BCTDA approved an ordinance enacting FY22's operating, earned revenue, and TPDF admin budgets.
- Following two months of alternating half the staff working remotely/in the office every other week through May and June, all staff will return to the office full-time on July 6, 2021.

- In partnership with Craft HR Solutions, the recruitment of five positions has begun. There are three new positions: PR Manager, Research Analyst and Administrative Assistant. There are two existing/vacant positions: PR Coordinator and Sales & Services Coordinator.
- Following the final decisions on health benefits insurance plans offered for FY22, the details specific to each Team Member are reviewed and when necessary, corrected through ISA and the carrier. Final submissions for Medical FSA and HRA reimbursements were made with staff being assisted as needed.

**Future Updates:**

- Prepare for and execute the BCTDA's next meeting, to be held in person on July 28, 2021.
- Update Rules of Decorum and Processes & Protocols for in-person BCTDA meetings, as board meetings are no longer being held virtually.
- The hiring managers will begin vetting candidates submitted to them by Craft HR Solutions. If the in-person interview warrants, the candidates will take assessments to further allow hiring managers to better understand proficiencies.
- Review contracts and think through upcoming expenditures to see where changes can and should be made in order to align purchases with Explore Asheville's Strategic Imperatives.