

December 21, 2016

To: BCTDA

From: Stephanie Pace Brown, Executive Director

Subject: Recap of November 2016 Staff Activities

NOVEMBER CVB METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During November, the sales team posted 913 personal contacts (up 4%). November sales activities generated 73 sales leads (up 49%) and 26 convention bookings (down 32%), representing 6,186 rooms (down 11%). Five months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up down 6 percent and room nights represented are up 6 percent.
- CVB leads generated 26 group events in November (up 4%), with revenue of \$492,435 (up 91%). The services team assisted 32 groups (up 33%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 15,058 visitors (up 11%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.
- The PR team landed 68 significant placements in November (up 2%), with 25 media touchpoints (up 19%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$498,869 with reach of over 26.4 million. Online placements added \$310,324 in value and reach of over 584 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 298,760 visits (up 23%), including 183,717 to the mobile site (up 32%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 6,837 (up 68%) and video views totaled 93,906 (up 312%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 40 room nights (down 36%) with total room revenue of \$5,712 (down 32%).

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$42,314,461 in October, up 18.8 percent. Four months into the fiscal year, YTD 2016-17 sales are up 17 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 84.8 percent during October (up 1.4%). The average daily room rate was \$188.32 (up 7.8%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$159.77 (up 9.3%). Room demand increased 8.6 percent with 190,308 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 12.3 percent to total 87,032 in October.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising:

Holiday Campaign: The holiday campaign generated 15 million impressions through December 2 with ads continuing through December 16 and retargeting through the end of the month.

Winter Campaign: Planning for the Q1 campaign included developing a media plan, creative brief, and asset development. Content was developed including: the Peak Perks offer, a landing page within the aRes online reservation system, and customized content delivery through the new Get Smart content platform. Additional video was shot and Andrew Evans, who wrote for the National Geographic Traveler partnership, was engaged to develop social content.

General Media Relations:

Planning for the Lonely Planet announcement included coordinating the details of the contest and collaboration on the editorial and video. A “What’s New” press release and consumer push supported the announcement; and, the team coordinated local media relations.

The contract with Google is moving forward to map existing trails and points of interest across the region. The program will launch in the spring.

The team logged 25 meaningful media connects for the month.

Notable Touchpoints:

- Maggie Blattel | Family Fun | Interview with Dodie for Asheville feature
- Jill Robinson | Hemispheres | SATW follow-up for Dodie involving in-depth background info for a possible wellness story.
- Kristy Tolley | New editor of AAA Carolinas GO Magazine | site visit
- Delicious Destinations with Andrew Zimmern | Filmed in Asheville at a number of restaurants after weeks of brainstorming with the CVB PR team.
- Marsha Dubrow | insight for “10 Top US Cities for Art Deco” for US News and MSN
- Anne Roderique Jones | Site visit for USA Today and Shermans beer stories **Arrived in Asheville days ahead of schedule due to the wildfires in TN.
- Shayla Martin | Holiday Gift Guide for *Wall Street Journal* | Brainstormed ideas for the publication’s “Vintage Christmas” theme
- Toronto Sun | Partner outreach, lining up details and creating an itinerary in advance of the site visit by Kevin Hann, deputy editor, for a planned barbecue-focused article via Visit NC. Sarah worked on itinerary and Landis and Dodie connected with him while he was on the ground.
- WBTV | Landis and Dodie facilitated a music destination story. Landis deftly pitched the piece and coordinated site visit elements, while Dodie served as spokesperson for Asheville music insight. Air date is TBD for this high-profile news station out of Charlotte.
- Upcoming Coverage | Photo Requests: The team fielded three photo requests in November, with Sarah rounding up imagery for an Asheville piece in the December issue of Points North Atlanta magazine (stemming from Associate Editor Colleen McNally’s site visit back in August for ABBA’s media day) and coverage in FamilyFun magazine (for inclusion in the

publication's Travel Awards story in its April 2017 issue, with Asheville highlighted in the "Best for Bargain Hunters" section). Landis also provided photos for a holiday piece in Your Sumner magazine (outside of Nashville).

Significant Placements in November:

- *Zagat* – the 26 Hottest Food Cities of 2016
- *Local Adventurer* – The Ultimate Asheville Bucket List (101 things to do in Asheville NC)
- *The Carolinas* – Falling in Love with Asheville Restaurants
- *AP* – Looking for some Christmas Sparkle and Fun
- *Cosmopolitan Online* – 20 Best Christmas Towns
- *Huffington Post Canada* – 5 Places Where You Haven't Missed the Fall Colors Yet
- *The New York Times* – Choosing the College Town Lifestyle in Retired Life
- *Thrillist* – Best Road Trips from Louisville KY
- *Travel + Leisure* – The 20 Quirkiest Towns in America
- *Visit South* -- 5 Southern Winter Vacays We Love
- *MSN Travel* – Take 9 Best Places to Travel
- *Yahoo* – 10 Top Art Deco U.S. Cities to Visit in 2017
- *Town* – Appalachian Taste
- *Our State* – Pursuit of the Perfect Nine
- *Dallas Morning News* – Go Whole Hog in the BBQ Debate in NC

Holiday Efforts:

The advertising campaign to promote the holidays was complemented by media relations efforts, new and updated content, social efforts and a new Pinterest campaign. Existing content was updated and new stories were created for the Winter Lights at the N.C. Arboretum and area holiday lights displays. Social coverage included the tree-raising festivities at Biltmore with Facebook Live broadcasts and a blog post and video package.

The Pinterest holiday project was refreshed by staff working with industry partners and local food blogger/photographer Sommer Collier to develop new recipe content. Eight new recipes from local chefs and inns were added to ExploreAsheville.com, accompanied by Pinterest-ready photos from Sommer. Those images were also pinned to the ACVB's Spice Up Your Holidays Pinterest boards where they have received 58k impressions, 120 clicks and 139 re-pins through paid and organic efforts. Re-pins on Pinterest provide additional backlinks to ExploreAsheville.com and are beneficial for search engine optimization. The new holiday recipes have been viewed nearly 1,000 times since they were posted in mid-November, with the most popular—both on ExploreAsheville.com and on Pinterest—being the recipe for sweet potato fritters with cranberry relish.

Music Initiative:

Following the release of the Backstage Asheville content on ExploreAsheville.com and press release on PR Newswire, the content team promoted Asheville's music scene, the Explore

Asheville Radio player and the Backstage Asheville contest on social media channels. During the four weeks of the promotion, the web content received nearly 6,000 page views, and the contest received more than 1,200 unique entries. Explore Asheville Radio saw more than 3,300 plays during the promotion, with total plays to date exceeding 8,500. Promotion of Asheville's music scene is ongoing in day-to-day content efforts, including a Facebook Live broadcast from the Asheville Guitar Bar, which has received 5,500 views to date.

Content Development Projects:

Several new photo shoots were completed in November, including a fall foliage family shot in a pumpkin patch at Hickory Nut Gap Farm, a group of friends celebrating the holidays and winter at the Omni Grove Park Inn, and a group of friends enjoying a cozy winter feast at Golden Fleece Restaurant.

Staff created an alert webpage to provide visitor information regarding the wildfires. Charlie Reed fielded phone calls and emails.

The marketing team implemented Get Smart Content, a content personalization platform which will allow the team to tailor the experience of ExploreAsheville.com to visitors based on many factors including location, advertising activity, and website behavior.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of November, five new stories and two new blog posts were added to ExploreAsheville.com, including the second in a series about Asheville's African-American culture, updated overviews of the Asheville Outlets and Winter Lights, a broader holiday lights round-up, coverage of the tree-raising at Biltmore and a photo tour of the National Gingerbread House Competition winners. Two articles created by writer Andrew Evans as a part of the ACVB's partnership with National Geographic were also added to the site, as was a landing page for the 2018 FEI Equestrian Games.
- The most popular story/blog content this month was "5 Crazy Reasons Why Asheville Should Top Your Holiday Travel List," which received 24,923 new page views through organic and paid channels. The second most popular story was "50 Things to do in Asheville," which received 8,915 new page views.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- November saw 6,837 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 237,900.
- There were 50 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of November.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a photo of the winning entry to the National Gingerbread House Competition. It has reached 145,974 people organically, generating 6,003 total reactions, 764 comments and 1,355 shares.
- The most popular paid post this month was a link to the final fall color report of the season. It reached 120,406 users in total (66,102 of those organically), generating 7,363 total reactions, 294 comments and 915 shares.
- The most engaging post this month was a Live broadcast from Chimney Rock State Park for the weekly color report. It engaged 9 percent of the 22,658 users reached.

Foodtopia page

- November saw 720 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 23,543 likes.
- There were 8 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of November.
- The most popular post—a link to a Wall Street Journal article about Asheville’s wine culture—reached 4,112 people organically, generating 95 reactions, 2 comments and 29 shares.

Video:

- There were 9,982 new organic YouTube views in November. The most popular video by organic views this month was the Fall Time Lapse, which received 2,833 non-paid views. The “Spirit of Asheville” video came in second with 1,390 new views.
- Across all of our video platforms, there were 93,906 views, most from Facebook.
- Asheville video content has received 2.6 million views since July 1, 2016 (fiscal YTD).

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,326. Foodtopia accounts for 1,357 of those; Visit Asheville: 2,969.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 22,696 followers.
- There were 37 new posts in November. The most popular—a skyline shot with a message of gratitude for Thanksgiving Day—received 1,473 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all of our accounts we have a total of 33,333 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 13,697 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 116,485 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs:
 - In November, staff sent out our monthly e-newsletter to 116,902 subscribers. There was a unique open rate of 14.6 percent and a click-through rate of 2.6 percent.
 - Staff also sent two special emails:
 - An email was sent to our Arts interest segment promoting the Backstage Asheville content and contest. It was sent to 63,115 subscribers, and it had a unique open rate of 16.5 percent and a click-through rate of 1.4 percent.
 - A holiday blast email was also sent to the main subscriber list sharing upcoming holiday happenings and highlighting the new recipe content. It was sent to 116,535 subscribers, and had a unique open rate of 12.4 percent and a click-through rate of 2 percent.

ExploreAsheville.com:

SoCon and Asheville Restaurant Week websites were updated in November. The pages accounted for 48,000 user sessions in 2016.

The Wandering Asheville microsite project will include content sections for public art and 1920s architecture. The site will launch in December.

Online Reservations:

Online reservations have declined since the launch of the new website more than a year ago. Changes are being evaluated to increase bookings, without jeopardizing traffic to other priorities.

There were 25 orders for 40 room nights in November with a total of \$5,712 in booking revenue and \$237 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in November were North Carolina (14), Georgia (6), South Carolina (4), Florida (4), and Virginia (4).

October 2016	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$5,712	\$8,356	-32%	\$53,114	\$90,015	-41%
Commission	\$237	\$317	-25%	\$2180	\$3,567	-39%
Orders	25	30	-17%	169	315	-46%
Room Nights	40	62	-35%	322	626	-49%

Official Asheville Travel Guide:

The first box of the 2017 Official Asheville Travel Guide was delivered to the CVB at the beginning of December. The final boxes of the 2016 guide will be completely distributed by mid-to-late December and fulfillment will begin with the new guide.

The 2018 Travel Guide will be published by SagaCity, pending legal review of the contract. The quantity will increase from 300,000 to 400,000, and there will be two versions – one for in-market and one for pre-market. SagaCity will also provide delivery to hotels and other tourism locations.

There were 1,044 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in November, a 5 percent decrease from last November. Year-to-date, there are 10,400 travel guide requests, an 8 percent decrease from last year.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Group sales reported 26 definite group bookings in November (down 32%). Eighteen were for meetings and conventions, one was group tour and seven were weddings. Combined definite room nights totaled 6,186 room night (down 11%). Seventy-three leads (55 for meeting/conventions, 14 weddings and four motorcoach) representing 24,792 room nights, were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in November. Leads distributed were up 49 percent and rooms represented were up 115 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,543,245 (up 5%). Actualized revenue was \$492,435 (up 91%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 913 contacts (up 4%). Indirect outreach totaled 10,421 (up 88%).

Sales Calls/Missions:

- Tina Porter traveled to Texas to attend Smart Meetings and make sales calls. In total, 21 contacts were made.
- Carla McGlynn and Shawn Boone traveled to Washington, DC, to transition key accounts. In addition to 12 sales calls, a presentation was made to three Smith Bucklin staff. Smith Bucklin is a leading association management company.
- Molly Nelson traveled to Tennessee for sales calls and to exhibit at TN Society of Association Executives trade show. Collectively, 35 contacts were made. Exhibiting with the CVB were Crowne Plaza Resort, Renaissance Asheville Hotel and Biltmore Farms Hotels.
- Leann Swims attended AAA Superbowl of Knowledge in Concord, connecting with more than 200 agents during the tradeshow. Staff also attended agent and vendor trainings/events. Partnering with the CVB was Biltmore.

Sponsorships:

The ACVB sponsored the luncheon at Smart Meetings-Texas, introducing 80 planners to Asheville as a meeting destination. The CVB secured podium time and showed the meetings video.

Explore Asheville: The 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience:

The second of four 48-Hour Experiences planned this fiscal year was held November 15–18, with seven third party/ independent planners coming. Attendees were from California, New York, Texas, and Florida. The planners were vetted using a qualifying questionnaire requiring a verifiable history of their ability to place meetings in the southeast. Planners experienced iconic Asheville attractions, enjoyed a customized experience, toured meeting properties and appreciated the food and beverage we have become noted for. Approximately \$1.5 million in baseline revenues from rooms, food & beverage, meeting rental/AV have been booked in Asheville as a direct result of the events. One RFP has already been received from the November attendees.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:

The team hosted/assisted in five area site visits this month. They included: 2017 Yamaha Motor Corporation – 1,415 room nights; 2017 American Tour Guide – 50 rooms; 2019 Control System Integrators Association – 1,430 rooms; 2017 Outdoor Adventure FIT program; 2018 Steel Founders' Society of America – 148 rooms.

A total of 29 wedding guide requests were fulfilled this month as compared to 28 in November 2015.

November bookings include (but not limited to):

- **2018 Associated General Contractors of America – 364 rooms****
- **2018 Association of Consulting Foresters – 485 rooms****
- 2017 Conference on Applied Climatology – 300 rooms
- 2017 Corporate Conference – 1,414 rooms
- 2017 Northwest Anesthesia Seminar – 325 rooms
- 2017 Kepner President's Cup – 1,300 Rooms

- 2017 College of American Pathologists – 120 rooms
- 2017 Corporate Aircraft Association – 85 rooms

****Indicates booking came as a result of a 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience**

Group Sales Communications:

New trade show collateral for the group market is in development. And, a consultant was hired to provide recommendations on the Group Sales communication plan, including SEO for group webpages and strategies to increase engagement.

Media Coverage:

- Assistance was provided to Bonnie Walsh, a well-known meetings industry expert, as she conducted research and gathered quotes from CVBs for an upcoming webinar, “Partnering with CVBs, DMOs, and Tourism Offices,” for *MeetingsToday* Webinars.
- November’s special Carolinas supplement in *MeetingsToday* featured content supplied by the CVB and quotes from Stephanie Brown in the story, “Rising Above: The Carolinas Stand Tall when it Comes to Group Business.” Additionally, Asheville was mentioned in the article, “On Location: The Carolinas are the Stars of the Show for many of Hollywood’s Top Films.” The CVB assisted the writer with information for this article, as well.

Mass Communications included:

- An e-newsletter was sent to 9,066 meetings clients. Open rate: 11 percent; Click-through rate: 15 percent
- An e-blast was sent to 1,366 clients in the Northeast states introducing Carla McGlynn. Open rate: 19 percent; Click-through Rate: seven percent

Convention Servicing:

A total of 18 groups that met in November were booked by the sales team and were assisted or contacted by the convention service manager during planning. Fourteen additional groups met in November and contacted the CVB directly for assistance. Services for meetings in the month included a hospitality table for the NC Academy for Family Physicians. Staff prepared travel guides and maps for pick-up for two meetings/weddings and four deliveries to hotel meeting sites to help welcome attendees in November.

Specific assistance for future events included additional work on the Southern Conference Championships landing page on ExploreAsheville.com at the request of the Conference staff. The CVB also sat in on a conference call with SoCon staff and schools regarding hotel accommodations. Microsites listing hotel rates were created for 2017 River Ruckus V and the 2017 Enka Triathlon at Biltmore Lake.

Departmental Activities:

A Q1 review was held with each staff member noting progress towards attainment of established personal performance objectives. Staff hosted two Extranet 4.0 trainings for industry partners. Staff attended the Hyatt Place grand opening, the Asheville Museum of Science TPDF check presentation, and the CVB partner forum. Regular meetings attended by staff included the Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission meetings.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Workforce Development for the Hospitality Sector:

The Workforce Development Steering Committee met on November 8 with Dr. Steve Morris and Steve Bridges with Western Carolina University. The committee and WCU are interested in strengthening the ties between Buncombe County's hotel industry and the students and graduates of WCU's Hospitality and Tourism program.

A CVB creative team of our newest employees developed collateral to support recruitment efforts. A trade show booth and postcard will be available to hotel partners.

Wayfinding Committee:

The Wayfinding Committee met on November 2 to discuss maintenance issues that have occurred since June and the addition of New Belgium Brewing (NBB) to additional signs leading drivers toward the River Arts District. The committee reported to the BCTDA at its November 22 meeting that NBB would be added to four signs, including one new sign and nine additional signs that required maintenance for a total cost of \$25,461, of which NBB will reimburse the BCTDA \$5,346 for a total expense to the BCTDA of \$20,115. This expense is within the Wayfinding Maintenance budget of \$41,910 approved by the BCTDA.

Transition:

The Fiduciary Task Force met on November 16 to discuss and make a recommendation to the BCTDA on the organizational status of the CVB as it transitions away from the Chamber. The committee recommended that the CVB transition as a controlled 501(c) 6 non-profit. This will allow the BCTDA appointees to serve as the Directors of the new non-profit and streamline the administrative connections, offering greater transparency in the community. On November 22, the BCTDA accepted the committee's recommendation.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

Tourism Product Development Efforts:

Contract development for the 2016 TPDF awards is currently in progress. Pat and Glenn have been meeting with the awardees and finalizing project scopes and contractual details.

Two projects from past TPDF cycles have completed construction. Final disbursements have been processed for both projects - Highland Brewing Company and the Asheville Museum of Science.

New Major Works Request

The Town of Woodfin has submitted a request to present a Major Works proposal to the BCTDA at the December 21 board meeting. The proposal for the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway projects will include approximately five miles of new greenway along Beaverdam Creek and the French Broad River. It will ultimately be linked to Asheville's emerging greenway system extending through the River Arts District, multiple new boating access sites into the French Broad River, a new Silverline Park on the river in the heart of Woodfin's river district, and a new Whitewater Wave feature in-stream near one of the parks.

Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

The City of Asheville has tentatively scheduled a ribbon-cutting for the trailhead at Craven Street and the new French Broad River Greenway section on the afternoon of January 5 as part of the Riverfront Destination Development Project awarded in 2014. Details are forthcoming.

Partner Engagement:

Partner Forum – November 16

The November Partner Forum was held at The Collider with 59 tourism industry partners in attendance. Steve Cohen of MMGY Global presented “Portrait of American Travelers,” an overview of the emerging travel habits, preferences and intentions of Americans, with a specific focus on how they apply to leisure travelers interested in visiting the Asheville area.

Holiday Party – December 6

The annual ACVB Holiday Party was held December 6. The party was generously sponsored by the Renaissance Asheville Hotel and US Foods. And, the Asheville Brewers Alliance, Biltmore, and The Omni Grove Park Inn provided beverages. The party attracted approximately 250 industry partners. The CVB also presented CVB Superstar Awards to four stand-out industry partners.

Projects:

Brit Martin managed a successful transition to the new Extranet 4.0 which launched on November 3. Partners had the opportunity to receive one-on-one assistance at one of two training sessions that were held on November 4 and 10. Pat, Brit and Leann conducted the trainings which were well-attended. Feedback on the new interface has been positive.

The AshevilleCVB.com website is in final stages of review and scheduled to launch after final approvals, anticipated by the end of the year.

Outreach:

Six new partner accounts were created in November, including one new music artist account. Brit and Pat continue to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing as well as service the partners who request listings.

A formalized effort to increase music venue participation in the event calendar has been developed, and will include a monthly email reminder to the venues along with outreach to venues not yet listed on the website.

Brit, Pat and Carli met to develop a strategy on increasing and enhancing partner lists on the Meeting Planner section of the website. Plans are underway to formalize outreach to educate partners about these different types of listings, and encourage them to respond with group-specific information.

Stephanie was the guest speaker for the Biltmore Rotary meeting on November 7.

VISITOR SERVICES UPDATE

The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 15,058 guests during the month of November 2016. The Pack Square Park Pavilion is closed for the season.

The volunteers attended a performance of “Curvy Widow” at NC Stage and “How I Learned to Drive” at Attic Salt Theatre (35 Below). UGOTours provided an info session on how to use their self-guided tours around Asheville. Future events include NC Stage and Asheville Community Theatre.

Training for the Volunteers continued with email updates along with “on the job” daily briefings from staff members.