



December 16, 2020

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority
From: Vic Isley
Subject: President & CEO's Report of November 2020 Activities

Due to the board meeting being scheduled earlier in the month of December, full November hotel performance figures are not available via the STR report.

The most current running 28-day performance (as of November 28, 2020) for the destination:

	Occupancy	Percentage Change
Weekday	53.5%	(23.7%)
Weekend	79.5%	(6.7%)
Total	60.9%	(18.1%)

Explore Asheville continues to monitor trends in coronavirus spread both regionally and locally. The ability to promote the destination through paid advertising has been restricted as we are still following the strategy outlined in late June to the BCTDA board of monitoring Johns Hopkins COVID-19 data to determine where and when to advertise within the drive market region. The recent increased spread of the virus will hinder further any plans for advertising in the immediate future. We continue to coordinate public relations efforts with various media to promote community partners, especially around holiday gift ideas. Search engine marketing ads direct web inquiries to our COVID-19 landing page for the most current information.

We were pleased to partner with the Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission to bring the Maui Invitational college basketball tournament to Asheville. The event was executed safely and successfully, and the destination was featured prominently during ESPN broadcast coverage of the event.

Explore Asheville continues to work on initiatives to encourage adherence to mandates and safety protocols among both partners and visitors, and is committed to keeping residents, employees, and visitors safe while maintaining commercial activity, jobs, and economic impact for the community.

NOVEMBER BY THE NUMBERS

- During November, the sales team posted 757 personal contacts (down 31%). November sales activities generated 25 sales leads (down 69%) and 30 convention bookings (down 29%), representing 4,214 rooms (down 38%). Five months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 44 percent and room nights represented are down 45 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 10 group events in November (down 76%), with corresponding revenue of \$550,448 (down 22%). The services team assisted 11 groups (down 69%).
- The PR team landed 31 significant placements in November (down 18%), with 37 media touchpoints (down 10%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$43,979 with reach of nearly 176 thousand. Online placements added \$1,443,514 in value and reach of nearly 768 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 405,147 visits (down 28%), including 284,159 to the mobile site (down 34%). Our Facebook fan base total is 299,114 (up 1%) and video views totaled 25,690 (down 43%).
- November 2020 there were 1,066 Asheville Visitor Guide requests compared to 2,031 the previous year.
- Paid search generated 56k site visits with average time on site of 2:34 and an average of 2.85 pageviews per visit; click through rate was 9.8 percent.
- Online hotel reservations totaled 39 room nights (down 42%) with total room revenue of \$5,941 (down 40%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 8,353 visitors (down 50%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion remains closed. The Black Mountain Visitor center welcomed 1,538 visitors (down 25%).

LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$53,083,361 in October (up 6%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 76.7 percent during October (down 7%). The average daily room rate was \$180.07 (down 8%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$138.17 (down 14%). Room demand was flat with 205,677 rooms sold.
- AirDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 79.8 percent (up 27%), ADR of \$109.84 (up 7%), and RevPAR of \$87.69 (up 36%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 18 percent to total 156,128 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport decreased 52 percent to total 78,416 in October.

Interim Executive/President and CEO Project Update

- Participated in the county's semi-weekly COVID conference calls and worked with representatives of the county to identify continued improvements in communication of safety mandates to visitors and residents.
- Prepared for the arrival of the new CEO.
- Collaborated on final details of the Maui Invitational sponsorship.
- Worked with Pat Kappes and the YMI Cultural Center on amendments to their TPDF project agreement and their presentation to the BCTDA board in November.

- Participated in regional destination marketing organization calls with VisitNC and other mountain DMOs.
- Met with representatives of 360i to review destination advertising plans for winter and spring.
- Prepared materials for the annual BCTDA audit.
- Began work on plans for additional promotional support of local businesses during the winter months, including marketing for Asheville Independent Restaurants and sponsorship of the Asheville Chamber's Restaurant Week.
- Worked with the Asheville Regional Airport on air service development activities.
- Provided BCTDA orientation to the two newest members of the board and newest Explore Asheville employees.
- Received briefing from Mountain BizWorks on minority business support activities.
- Met with representatives of KemperLesnik, the operators of the Maui Invitational event.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Project Updates:

- FY21 media plan remain paused. A separate plan to support the Holiday Gift Guide with paid social and SEM was launched with the aim of supporting local businesses.
- Maui Invitational Tournament generated significant media impressions through paid spots, bumpers, commentary, and social media. Metrics will be shared at board meeting.
 - Custom assets finalized and delivered to ESPN for video bumpers.
 - Prepped announcer Bill Walton regarding Asheville info/trivia.
 - Created additional creative assets for the sponsorship.
 - Supported tournament through owned media.
- Participation continued in VisitNC's marketing credit program funded by the federal CARES Act.
- Created Holiday Gift Guide promotional eblast and sent to 130,000+ email subscribers to drive traffic to Gift Guide webpage during key holiday shopping weekend encouraging subscribers to support local businesses; promoted products through Instagram Story weekly gift guide campaign.
- Created customized gift of travel certificate on ExploreAsheville.com to be used as part of holiday gift guide promotions and in conjunction with Let's Go There Phase II campaign.
- Added "Give the Gift of Travel" call to action to the Let's Go There creative to encourage future travel and align with national push. Video runs on connected TV through Dec. 23.
- Launched new outdoor dining webpage with support from Community Engagement to highlight outdoor dining options for the upcoming winter season.
- Logged 37 media touchpoint threads, initiated 32 targeted pitches, and supported four media on the ground in Asheville in November. Proactive outreach included follow-up from a VisitNC media event and an M&C update pitch to meetings media in support of the Mug Moments series and the Meet Safe Pledge.
- Provided story support for *The Today Show*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Hemispheres*, *ABC News*, *Thrillist*, *Meetings Today* and ABA's *Destinations*.

Future Updates:

- Support itinerary and interview facilitation for Titus & Tate college basketball influencer partnership as part of Explore Asheville's Maui Invitational sponsorship package.
- Organize a seasonal greeting for Explore Asheville journalists and media friends.
- Continue development of 2021 destination news pitch featuring travel news with a focus on the people and histories behind the news.
- Finalize media plan and creative messaging direction for 2H FY21

- Continue development of a new version of the Let's Go There video asset with a planning message for use in 2021.
- Finalize editorial content calendar for Q1 2021.
- Attend the first Black Travel Alliance WAVELENGTH virtual networking event for travel brands and Black content creators and influencers which will include a staffed destination booth and one-on-one appointments.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Project Updates:

- Attended the VisitNC virtual trade show where staff met one-on-one with 15 national level planners about future opportunities.
- Met with 24 meeting planners one-on-one during Smart Meetings trade show held in Nashville, TN. This is the first in person trade show we have attended since March 2020.
- Attended virtual National Tour Association Travel Exchange and conducted 17 one-to-one appointments, with one resulting in a five-part lead series worth 150 room nights.
- Hosted the second Mug Moments, a 20-minute conversation held between an Asheville hotelier and the CVB regarding how groups are meeting safely in our community. Sixty-three meeting planners attended.
- Cohosted a virtual sales mission presentation with three other North Carolina destinations which was attended by eight operators during the NTA Travel Exchange.
- Definite bookings for November include: 2020 Appalachian Athletic Conference Cross Country Championship – 80 rooms, 2023 SE Bloodhound Specialty Competition – 416 rooms, 2021 SoCon Winter Athletic Director's Meeting – 14 rooms, 2021 Spirit Solutions Spring Classic – 80 rooms, 2021 Riverside Spring Shootout Boys & Girls – 175 rooms each, 2020 Asheville Men's Basketball – 102 rooms, 2020 Maui Invitational Media – 402 rooms, 2020 UNCA Student Housing – 280 rooms, 2021 The Spa Buzz – 21 rooms, among others.
- Tentative bookings for November include: 2021 Acts 29 SE Retreat – 513 rooms, 2023 National Academic Advising Association – 500 rooms, 2021 Buyers Intelligence Group – 50 rooms, 2021 Southern Headache Society – 325 rooms, 2021 Quanta Services – 590 rooms, 2021 Institutional Investment Conference – 590 rooms, 2022 Holiday Vacations Series – Five Departs 150 rooms, 2021 Chem Station Owners – 224 rooms, 2021 SET Dealer Incentive – 781 rooms, among others.
- Deployed a meeting planner survey through Destination Analysts to get feedback on the brand refresh creative. More than 400 responses were received immediately with the full findings report to be received in December.
- Defined lead scoring rules in Act-On to track client's behavior and engagement allowing the sales team to identify top prospects more quickly and view marketing funnel reports.
- Finalized COVID-19 site visit protocols for the sales department to be implemented during future independent visits.
- Filmed Jeff Greiner, attractions roundtable group. for upcoming virtual fam tour.
- Filmed video at Sovereign Remedies in preparation for the holiday party.
- Downloaded seven wedding guides from the website as compared to 15 last November
- Prepared three microsites for upcoming inbound sports groups.
- Attended numerous webinars specific to meetings to stay current on trends affecting the various markets
- Met with Art Museum staff to collaborate on ways to provide more exposure to the museum
- Created ElevateMyMeeting.com landing page with registration details of the team's virtual familiarization event scheduled for January 2021
- Received 5597 views for November LinkedIn posts (various) by the sales team
- Received recognition by industry publications with the following awards:

- *Prevue* 2020 Visionary Awards – Best US Destination for Meetings & Convention, Small city – Silver award.
- 2020 *Smart Meetings* Platinum Choice Award – CVB category.
- 2020 *ConventionSouth* Readers’ Choice – CVB category.
- Responded to a request for an interview for American Bus Associations’ Destinations January/February 2021 feature story tentatively titled, “Put All Your Cares Away and Go Downtown”.
- Conducted a radio interview with Group Travel Voice on the magical towns of America for which Asheville was named a magical town for leisure groups.
- Sent an email invitation to view episode two of the Mug Moments conversation with the Renaissance Hotel’s Marshall Hilliard to three lists:
 - Internal database of 13,019 planners - Open Rate of 14 percent and Click-to-Open Rate of 9 percent.
 - *Meetings Today* sponsorship list of 293 planners - Open Rate of 22 percent and Click-to-Open Rate of 13 percent.
 - Renaissance Hotel list of 260 planners - Open Rate of 14 percent and Click-to-Open Rate of 8 percent.
- Sent an email invitation to attend the Northstar Meetings Group / VisitNC Digital Trade Show Series to 3,577 planners - Open Rate of 13 percent and Click-to-Open Rate of 3 percent.

Future Updates:

- Continue preparations towards hosting the Southeast Chapter of SITE coming in December. A total of 35 planners are expected.
- Schedule/host third Mug Moments about how meetings are happening safely at Asheville’s hotels.
- Finalize the meetings brand refresh project.
- Continue work on next iteration of destination virtual tour to launch in January 2021.
- Attend virtual trade shows as assigned.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Project Updates:

- In November, 43 partner records were updated – 22 attractions & retail, 4 lodging, 12 food & drink, and 5 venue/wedding services. There were 83 events for the calendar, and 1,066 Individual Visitor Guide requests processed.
- Four new partners were added in November: Sweeten Creek Coffee, Spicer Greene Jewelers, Evergreen Era Films LLC, and Chill Cereal Bar and Café.
- Nine partner accounts were cancelled in November: Majik Studios, Violet Owl Wellness, Inner Wild Yoga, Studio Zahiya, Devils in Dust music group, A Bed of Roses Bed and Breakfast, Crooked Oak Mountain Inn, World Coffee Café, and Crêperie & Café of Weaverville.
- A partner webinar “People First – Website Usability Best Practices” was presented on November 5 by Sarah Benoit of JB Media for 42 registrants. The video can be found on AshevilleCVB.com.
- The Community Engagement team launched One-on-One Wednesdays, a program where partners can sign up for 30-minute appointments to get personalized assistance. This is an alternative solution to the monthly orientations that have been suspended due to COVID. Three consultation calls were held in November.
- Pat has been invited to be a member of the Chamber’s Member Advisory Council and attended the first meeting.

- Pat continues to seek support in the research phase of the African American Heritage Trail project and hosted virtual meetings with River Front Development Group and representatives from UNC Asheville including Dr. Darin Waters.
- Safety messaging collateral, developed through the partnership with Explore Asheville, the City of Asheville, and Buncombe County, was produced for the Maui Invitational held at Harrah's Cherokee Center - Asheville.
- The Wayfinding kiosk content update project is in progress.
- TPDF disbursements were reviewed and processed for the YMI Cultural Center and for the NC Arboretum.
- The YMI Cultural Center presented a project update to the TDA at the November board meeting and requested a contract amendment to extend the project completion deadline from January 31, 2021 to December 31, 2022, and to request a second draw up to \$130,000 from the initial grant for structural repairs and the next stage of design development (not to exceed \$130,000). The TDA approved the request.

Future Updates:

- Partner virtual events and webinars are in development including the Explore Asheville's [Virtual] Holiday + Welcoming Party for New President & CEO on December 9, and two webinars presented by JB Media including "Reinvent Your Path to Success – How to Promote New Experiences" on January 13 and "Cost-Effective Ways to Increase Reach and Website Traffic" on February 10.
- The Community Engagement team is supporting the Marketing team's efforts to promote tourism partners offering winter outdoor dining and small group experiences by researching business offerings and conducting outreach to maintain up-to-date listing information.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Project Updates:

- In addition to supporting the BCTDA chair with the November Board Meeting prep, managed public information announcements and website updates before and after the meeting. These included responding to a public records and media requests.
- In advance of Buncombe Commissioners meeting, prepared a Late Payment of Occupancy Tax Penalty Waiver fact sheet and distributed to media.
- Fully transitioned to Explore Asheville's new platform, Act-On, which included downloading/archiving all that were produced on the former platform and posting the PDFs on AshevilleCVB.com – in total, 64 e-newsletters and alerts in 2020 (through November) and 45 from as far back as 2015. In November, wrote and published 4 partner e-alerts on the new platform with open rates as high as 36.2%.
- Wrote and published New and updated content on AshevilleCVB.com that included information on Gov. Cooper's latest executive orders.
- Included promotion of partner webinar, Maui Invitational, the 3 W's Bear campaign, MURR, updates to COVID resources on AshevilleCVB.com, Explore Asheville Partner Connect Facebook page, partner/community news such as the Go Local card.
- Responded to several requests for interviews on fall/holiday tourism and assisted reporters in connecting with partners. This included the request for a thought leader article for Capital at Play magazine on the benefits of tourism in WNC, written by Interim Executive Chris Cavanaugh.
- Prepared talking points on Asheville's tourism economy and holiday tourism at the request of Rep. Susan Fisher in advance of her interview on Spectrum One News.
- Attended the daylong virtual Advocacy Summit hosted by Destinations International; also attended Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce's Legislative Wrap-Up.

Future Updates:

- Assist in introducing Vic to the community, to include media.
- Continue to manage all aspects of content and production/ publication of e-newsletters and alerts as we further refine the use of the new Act-On platform; continue to make updates / improvements to AshevilleCVB.com.
- Prepare to provide information on the work of BCTDA/Explore Asheville to newly elected officials, to include new appointees to the BCTDA board.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE**Project Updates:**

- Executed the monthly BCTDA's regular monthly board meeting virtually on November 18. Highlights of the meeting included a Maui Invitational update and a YMI Cultural Center project update and TPDF contract amendment. Additionally, outgoing ex-officio board members Asheville City Councilwoman Julie Mayfield and Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher were recognized for their years of service in the community and on the BCTDA. Chris Cavanaugh was also recognized for his contributions during his time as interim executive, serving in his role from June through November.
- The Director of Finance's three-month leave began on October 1, 2020, and Executive Office staff members continued to cover her job responsibilities related to payroll, supplier maintenance, deposits, financial inquiries, and invoice processing.
- Assisted the Community Engagement department with technical and logistical assistance related to a virtual Partner Forum focusing on website usability on November 5.
- Interim Executive Chris Cavanaugh provided a virtual BCTDA and Explore Asheville Orientation/Overview to staff on November 16.
- Onboarded new Director of Content Whitney Smith and provided new employee administrative training. All onboarding tasks tied to Federal security, IRS forms and automatic pay-check deposits were completed. Furthermore, she was briefed on our policies outlined in the Team Member Handbook and an initial meeting to review her benefits options took place.
- Prepared for the transition of leadership from Interim Executive Chris Cavanaugh to President & CEO Victoria Isley, effective December 1. Communicated with Vic throughout November and provided key administrative documents, set up email and calendar, and scheduled meetings with board, staff, and other stakeholders to take place during her first two weeks on the job.

Future Updates:

- Welcome, onboard and support new President & CEO Victoria Isley, who starts in her position on December 1.
- Prepare for and execute the virtual BCTDA monthly meeting scheduled on December 16, 2020.
- Communicate with city and county clerks regarding the appointments of an Asheville City Councilmember and Buncombe County Commissioner as ex-officio members of the BCTDA board and schedule orientation meetings.
- Work with Buncombe County Finance and CliftonLarsonAllen LLP to finalize the BCTDA's FY 20 audit, to be presented to the board at the December 16 meeting.
- Start working on establishing the FY 22 budget timeline and process.