

# MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

**April 2023**

EXPLORE  
ASHEVILLE

POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority

# MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS OVERVIEW

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) has charted a new course for tourism aligned with broader community priorities. This includes the adoption of [strategic imperatives](#) (outlined below) that are informing and guiding the direction of Explore Asheville's program of work and community investments going forward.

The [Monthly Highlights](#) report, released at the BCTDA Board meetings, provides a brief update of our progress toward these strategic imperatives. You can also find information from the discussions and presentations at [Buncombe County TDA meetings](#), in our [newsletters](#), at [partner events](#), and via other communication channels.



## Delivering Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth

Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.

Focus on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.



## Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.

Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.



## Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.

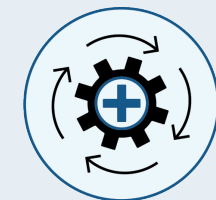
Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



## Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



## Running a Healthy & Effective Organization

Invest in people, policies and practices to serve our community with integrity within the organization's legislative requirements.



# DELIVERING BALANCED RECOVERY & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

## Balancing quality of life for residents & experience for visitors through project investments

- **Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF):**
  - **2023 Grant Cycle:** Opened Phase I applications on April 12 to close on May 17; held an information session on April 18; promoted the grant cycle in WLOS, Citizen Times, Mountain Xpress, AVL Today, The Urban News, Blue Ridge Public Radio, and 103.3FM
  - **Karen Cragnolin Park:** Participated in groundbreaking event held April 12 for Karen Cragnolin Park, which received 2022 TPDF investment ([Press release](#) mentioned TPDF)
  - **Wayfinding & Pedestrian Signage Program:** Completed the spring maintenance audit of wayfinding signage and expect installation in late June
- **Event Grants and Sponsorships:** Supported the following events through funding and cross-promotion
  - **{Re}HAPPENING 11:** Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center event held on April 8
  - **Walk Through History Series:** Swannanoa Valley Museum event series occurring April 12 – September 13
  - **Downtown After 5 Series:** Asheville Downtown Association event series occurring April 21 – September 15
  - **Maker Faire Asheville:** Asheville Makers Inc. event on April 22
  - **Our Turn to Play:** UNC Asheville event on April 25
  - **Voices: A Celebration of Community, Poetry, and Language:** Asheville FM (Friends of Community Radio, Inc.) event on April 28
  - **Peace Gardens and Market Annual Spring Fling Asheville:** Creative Arts event on April 29 – April 30

## Collaborating with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment

- **Sports Commission Assessment:** Received recommendations Huddle Up Group's independent review of Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission and will further evaluate with other founding members (city, county, and UNC Asheville) and stakeholders
- **Director of Sales Meeting:** Convened hotel sales directors to discuss various topics and provide updates from Business Development efforts

## Improving quality of each visit by inspiring increased length of stay & dispersal

- Press Coverage: Earned the following media mentions and accolades in April
  - **Travel + Leisure:** [11 Best Places to Travel in July](#) (result of Patricia Doherty's March visit)
  - **MSN:** [32 Best Winter Vacations in the US: Top Warm and Cold Destinations in the USA](#)

## Protecting and evolving Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations

- Press Coverage: Earned the following media mentions and accolades in April
  - **Travel + Leisure:** [This North Carolina City Is One of the Best Places to Travel in 2023 - and It's Getting a Chic New Hotel This Month](#) (reposted by [Yahoo!](#))
  - **World Bride:** [Getting Hitched in North Carolina](#) (result of Cari Wira Dineen's March visit)
  - **Corporate & Incentive Travel:** [Stepping Up - Second-Tier Destinations Work to Elevate Status](#)
- **Media Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists to secure future coverage
  - **Regner Hansen, Borsen (Denmark):** Toured the Biltmore and dined at Leo's House of Thirst, S&W Cafeteria, River Arts District and Asheville Art Museum
  - **Hannah Lee Leidy, The Local Palate:** Stayed at The Restoration and will include Asheville in a getaway feature and social media campaign, as well as fall road trips issue

## Accelerating proactive sales efforts to increase net new business to the destination

- **Connect Sports Spring Marketplace:** Attended trade show in Las Vegas, NV; conducted 38 one-on-one appointments with sports organizers
- **Southeast Tourism Society (STS) Domestic Showcase:** Attended two-day trade show in Huntsville, AL; had one-on-one appointments with group tour operators interested in or already traveling in the Southeast
- **Sponsored E-blasts:** Continued a targeted meetings and conventions campaign with Prevue with multiple e-blasts; recipient count was 100,012 with open rates as high as 77%.
- **Press Coverage:** Responded to a request from ConventionSouth's North Carolina Event Planners' Guide
- **Meetings & Conventions Web Traffic:** Increased meetings and conventions web pageviews with paid media efforts (banner ads, paid email, paid social, etc.), which resulted in 22,609 pageviews compared to 866 in April 2022
- **DigiDECK:** Onboarded with a cloud-based presentation platform to be used by sales team for bid and prospective client presentations



# ENCOURAGING SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

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## Influencing visitors to respect, protect and preserve natural, cultural and human resources

- **Spring/Summer Press Coverage:** Secured placements in [Johnson City Press](#) and [Mountain City Tomahawk](#) following spring/summer [press release](#), which emphasized the region's natural and cultural resources
- **Media Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists to secure future coverage
  - **Noah Lederman, Freelancer (Barron's Penta, VinePair, Popular Science):** Stayed with family in Elevation Lofts and enjoyed food and outdoor experiences
  - **Scott McConkey, MSN:** Focused on activities around Great Smoky Mountains; arranged lodging at Wrong Way River Lodge and Cabins
  - **Stratton Lawrence, Fodor's:** Stayed at The Restoration and toured Biltmore; developed an updated Asheville listing in Fodor's Smoky Mountains travel guide
- **Sustainable Shopping Guide:** Developed list of environmentally conscience experiences, services, and crafts in celebration of Earth Month

## Encouraging partners to embrace sustainable and responsible tourism practices

- **"Honor Earth Day, Every Day":** Suggested various sustainable and responsible tourism practices, including [voluntourism opportunities](#), in the [partner e-newsletter](#)





# ENGAGING & INVITING MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES

## Extending a genuine invitation to diverse audiences

- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in April
  - **Carolina Country:** [A Path for Everyone](#)
- **Spanish-language Content:** Translated another blog [10 Aventuras en la Naturaleza para Toda la Familia en Asheville y Alrededores](#) to further engage Latinx audiences
- **Media Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists to secure future coverage
  - **Candice Davie, Black Bride:** Stayed at Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins to cover unique wedding venues
  - **Nicole Gottesmann, Influencer:** Partnered with [influencer](#), LGBTQ+ couple and mom to teen son with autism; they stayed at Omni Grove Park Inn and experienced Skinny Beats, Asheville Wellness Tours and Citizen Vinyl (sample post [here](#))
  - **@naturallynella,** Influencer: Stayed at The Foundry Hotel, dined at Cúrate, and visited the Biltmore
  - **Matt Lardie, Eater:** Assigned to profile O.Henry's, the oldest gay bar in North Carolina; also dined at Neng Jr.'s and was provided other LGBTQ+ culinary recommendations

## Developing and investing in community projects that attract and engage diverse audiences

- **Black Cultural Heritage Trail:** Continued trail development efforts, and the content is in historical review phase with guidance and input from a working group of local historians guided by Dr. Darin Waters
- **Mural Project:** Connected with The Block Collaborative about working on a mural project at the corner of Biltmore Avenue and Sycamore Street to draw attention to The Block



# PROMOTING & SUPPORTING ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT

## Elevating Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits

- **Monocle Weekender:** Collaborated with editors on [two-day itinerary](#) of inspiring [speakers](#), outstanding meals, sociable drinks, and brisk hikes; 50 attended the events on April 28-30
  - **Monocle on Sunday:** Recorded special edition [radio program](#) from Citizen Vinyl; featured live interview with Vic Isley and others
- **Press Coverage:** Earned the following media mentions in April
  - **Boston Globe:** [Think bread is the enemy? That half-baked notion won't cut it in Asheville.](#) (result of Diane Bair's March visit)
  - **Travel + Leisure:** [This Small Town in North Carolina Has the Only Hot Springs in the State](#)
  - **Fox 46 Carolinas:** Featured Asheville as Queen City Hometown destination of the week, featuring [live interview](#) during morning newscast on Asheville's creative spirit, upcoming events, outdoor activities and craft beer scene; several additional segments were filmed in destination and aired during the evening news, e.g.,
    - [Asheville brewery highlights stories of Cherokee people](#)
    - ['Weird': The unofficial slogan of Asheville](#)
- **Media Visits:** Hosted and provided itineraries for journalists to secure future coverage
  - **Taryn White, Freelance, Nat Geo, CNTraveler:** Stayed with family and explored Appalachian and Andean food connection; published several posts on personal social media (samples [here](#) and [here](#))
  - **Kelly Gray, Living Luxe Magazine:** Developing two articles on Asheville as a pet-friendly destination and Asheville's downtown nightlife and social scene for features in fall issue
  - **Aaron Goldfarb, Freelance:** Visited Chemist Spirits and Wicked Weed and toured the Biltmore with family
- **ArtsAVL Connect Trolley:** Partnered with Gray Line, North Carolina Arts Council, ArtsAVL, and other sponsors to offer a free trolley service, running on second Saturdays April through December, that connects tourists and locals to Asheville's arts community

## Creating opportunities for partners to learn about and support creative spirit

- **New Partner Spotlights:** Highlighted recently added partners in monthly e-newsletter to expose partners to other tourism-related businesses in our community, April's features included [AVL City Shuttle](#), [Different Wrld](#), [Farm Burger](#), [Get Hypnotized Live on Stage in Asheville](#), [Hoffer Art and Design](#), [Locals Only Gifts and Goods](#), [Marked Tree Asheville](#), [Nantahala Outdoor Center French Broad Rafting](#), [Purl's Yarn Emporium](#), [RIVETER](#), [Torched AVL](#), and [Weaving Rainbows](#)



# RUNNING A HEALTHY & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

## Demonstrating organizational commitment to local, diverse creators, makers & vendors

- **Visitor Guide Distribution:** Received and fulfilled 2,637 individual requests and 45 out-of-market orders, totaling 147 cases, or 7,350 guides; 21 local partners ordered 56 cases of visitor guides, or 2,800 guides
- **ExploreAsheville.com**
  - **New Partner Outreach:** Sent emails to 20 businesses
  - **Partner Meetings:** Held 10 partner sessions/site visits, plus The Restoration's opening
  - **Partner Listings:** Created 5 new free partner listings and updated 77 partner listings
  - **Partner One-on-Ones:** Held 9 partner support meetings
  - **Event Calendar:** Created or reviewed and approved 415 events for our online calendar
  - **Package & Deals:** Added 6 package and deals
- **Asheville Tours and Attractions Collaboration:** Presented information on partnership opportunities, PR, and tips for engagement during group's meetup at Well Played

## Increasing team performance and effectiveness

- **New Employee:** Welcomed Ali Wainright, Group Sales Coordinator
- **Data Utilization:** Spoke to partners at Zartico about [using data in community conversations](#)

## Prioritizing individual professional development, trainings and team benefits

- **Simpleview Summit:** Provided eight cross-departmental staff members an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the organization's CRM and CMS system during a three-day conference in Houston
- **Fired Up! Culture:** Continued facilitated workplace culture and team engagement sessions with staff; received recognition as a [2023 Fired Up! Culture Achievement Award](#) winner

## Focusing on events and communications strategy to increase community engagement

- **E-Newsletters, E-Alerts:** Engaged partners through two press releases, five partner alerts, and two newsletters; partner communications in April resulted in 400 more opens than those in March
- **Local News & BCTDA / Explore Asheville Coverage:**
  - **General**
    - Mountain Xpress: [BCTDA forecasts higher net income stream in 2024, to the benefit of county coffers](#)
    - Citizen Times: [Looking to get out during April? Here are 5 free WNC spots for afternoon fun](#)
    - WNC Business: [Intentional tourism marketing through telling Asheville's story](#)
    - Citizen Times: [Asheville Airbnbs charge 40% in fees, taxes, Forbes study finds](#)
    - Citizen Times: [Answer Man: Can Asheville and Buncombe County residents rent a room in a local hotel?](#)
  - **Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF)**
    - Mountain Xpress: [BCTDA applications for 2023 TPDF grants open April 12](#)
    - WLOS: [Buncombe County TDA taking applications from groups with tourism-related projects](#)
    - Mountain Xpress: [BCTDA applications for 2023 TPDF grants open April 12](#)
  - **McCormick Field**
    - Citizen Times: ['Ready to play ball': McCormick funding plan meets MLB deadline; TDA, state money pending](#)
    - WLOS: [MLB gets formal financial commitment letter from McCormick Field upgrades](#)
    - WLOS: [\\$2 million pedestrian improvement grant diverted to McCormick Field upgrades](#)
  - **Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission**
    - WLOS: [Study recommends moving sports commission employees to Asheville tourism department](#)
    - Citizen Times: [Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission should be part of county TDA, consultants say](#)

