

June 24, 2020

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority
From: Stephanie Pace Brown
Subject: President's Report of May 2020 Activities

With the beginning of Phase Two during May, the Explore Asheville team responded to another new and different set of challenges and focused on effort to help businesses safely reopen, communicate safety protocols to travelers, and support tourism partners with resources and grants.

On May 4th Governor Cooper signed the bill that included the Tourism Jobs Recovery Act and the BCTDA responded two days later to establish the Fund and hire a qualified administrator to distribute \$5 million to local businesses to help them reopen and to retain jobs for residents of Buncombe County.

The team also worked across departments to convene stakeholder groups to establish sanitation protocols. The Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge emerged from those discussions and was quickly implemented. The program was featured on a US Travel Association webinar and has been replicated across the country. The Pledge is a focus of messaging to travelers.

We hosted Town Hall Meetings in partnership with County health officials for attractions, lodging, and the weddings industry to help implement health regulations to comply with Phase Two orders.

And, of course, as always, our team continued to implement strategies and maintain relationships with journalists, meeting planners, and potential visitors. This report contains details about the development of the next phase of advertising, pr efforts, a meetings brand refresh, a website refresh, and so much more.

MAY BY THE NUMBERS

- During May, the sales team posted 927 personal contacts (down 20%). May sales activities generated 32 sales leads (down 61%) and 16 convention bookings (down 62%), representing 1,127 rooms (down 83%). Eleven months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 29 percent and room nights represented are down 28 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated zero group events in May (down 100%), with revenue of zero dollars (down 100%). The services team assisted 10 groups (down 81%).
- The PR team landed 19 significant placements in May (down 14%), with 18 media touchpoints (down 65%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$0

with reach of nearly 3.5 million. Online placements added \$461,838 in value and reach of over 245 million.

- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 198,119 visits (down 67%), including 127,042 to the mobile site (down 73%). Our Facebook fan base total is 297,395 (up 3%) and video views totaled 108,434 (down 66%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled -2 room nights (down 102%) with total room revenue of -\$1,130 (down 109%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 304 visitors (down 99%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion remains closed after the winter.

LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$2,343,176 in April (down 93%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 16.6 percent during April (down 78%). The average daily room rate was \$70.72 (down 52%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$11.75 (down 89%). Room demand decreased 82 percent with 32,285 rooms sold.
- AirDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 49.4 percent (down 3%), ADR of \$90.31 (down 8%), and RevPAR of \$44.65 (down 11%). Total demand for short term rentals decreased 31 percent to total 62,705 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport decreased 98 percent to total 2,368 in April.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Stephanie presented the Stay Safe Pledge on a webinar for the US Travel Association with a national audience of 650.
- Stephanie presented to Goodwill's Business Advisory Council on the state of tourism during COVID-19. Over 100 attended the presentation via Zoom.
- Stephanie participated in North Carolina Travel & Tourism Coalition and executive committee meetings via Zoom.
- Stephanie virtually attended the Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority monthly board meeting.
- Stephanie attended AIR executive committee and board meetings during the month.
- Stephanie and Kathi participated in regularly scheduled COVID-19 Response – Business Community calls with Buncombe County staff.
- Stephanie and the team attended and/or moderated Phase 2 transitional Town Hall meetings related to the tourism industry, some of which were facilitated by Explore Asheville and others by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Stephanie, Marla, Dianna, and Kathi led a Partner Forum outlining details of the Asheville Cares Pledge and how it can be utilized in various businesses and cities/towns.
- Stephanie and other members of the team attended local and industry COVID-19 related webinars.
- Marla attended a variety of community town halls, county meetings and roundtables regarding re-opening activities. She also attended the downtown issues committee meeting at the end of May.
- Sales team members attended an Area Director of Sales Zoom meeting.
- Sales team members attended the Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission Virtual monthly meeting.

- Sales team members attended the Blue Ridge Parkway Virtual Annual Meeting.
- Pat attended Town Halls hosted by the Chamber and County for partner groups – Lodging, Retail, Arts/Entertainment/Recreation, Restaurants and Personal Services.
- Pat attended weekly virtual meetings of the Local Living Economy committee, as a member of this subcommittee of the Downtown Commission that includes representatives from the City of Asheville staff and council, Asheville Downtown Association, Asheville Grown Business Alliance, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association and the Downtown Commission. The committee increased frequency of meetings from monthly to weekly to discuss issues in the community around the pandemic.
- With team members, Kathi attended several virtual meetings with partners to help develop the Asheville Cares Pledge and Smart Restart Toolkit protocols.
- Kathi attended the virtual Leadership Asheville Buzz Breakfast, where the topic was Asheville's resilience after crises like the pandemic, with featured speakers that included tourism partners Kevan Frazier and John Winkenwerder.
- CVB staff members volunteered with MANNA Food Bank as a part of their COVID-19 Response Team focusing on building emergency food boxes, packaging bulk product and other necessary projects.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

COVID-19 Activities: Much of the work in May focused on the development of the Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge in collaboration with other Explore Asheville departments and community efforts. The role of marketing was to develop the Pledge, the graphic interpretation, and a landing page on ExploreAsheville.com to support the foundational work of others on this project team. Sarah Kilgore created a custom logo for the Asheville Cares pledge, and additional iterations for Biltmore Forest, Biltmore Village, Black Mountain, Montreat, Weaverville, Woodfin, and a generic version for use by communities outside of Buncombe County. Custom graphics were made for use as a flyer, small poster, large poster, and social graphics.

The team also worked in the days leading up to the Phase 2 transition, by readying ExploreAsheville.com, changing out content, updating the home page, repositioning *Together in Spirit* pages, and developing new content. The Pledge has a prominent place on the homepage and has been shared through social channels.

Additionally, the PR team sent a summer kickoff pitch to select NC print publications in advance of Memorial Day Weekend. Additional content and media pitch materials were developed to further support reopening phases through collaborative efforts between the content and PR teams. More detail is available below in those sections.

Advertising: In mid-May, paid search and paid social were turned back on to keep Asheville top of mind and communicate the *Together in Spirit* messaging while also creating awareness about the virtual hub. The advertising and agency teams worked together to begin developing strategies and messaging for the next phase of reopening and the return of leisure travel. In addition, the agency began a thorough analysis of target markets and audiences, as they develop a new approach for post phase III advertising to ensure minimal viral spread in our community.

Paid Search: Paid search was relaunched on May 14 having been cancelled in March due to COVID-19. With the relaunch, strategies shifted to focus more on driving awareness and engaged users by broadening terms (around general tourism and virtual visitation) and widening the audience to nationwide for branded terms and virtual visits, while keeping the general tourism terms localized to a 250 mile radius.

	May 2019	May 2020	YOY
Total spend	\$48,849	\$28,822	-41%
Impressions	1,153,262	212,305	-82%
Clicks	94,102	18,452	-80%
CTR	8.2%	8.7%	7%
CPCs	\$0.52	\$1.56	201%

General Media Relations: The PR Team logged 18 media touchpoints, initiated 71 targeted pitches and, due to COVID-19, hosted no media on the ground in Asheville in April. Pitch numbers were high due to a Summer Kickoff/Phase 2 press release that went to daily newspapers in North Carolina and close-by markets. Story support included *AAA Go Carolinas*, *Atlanta Magazine Custom Media*, *Columbia Living*, *Charleston Living* and *Wilmington Magazine*. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Best Cities* and *Savannah Magazine*, among others.

Summer Kickoff/Phase 2 Outreach: The PR Team created a press release to align with NC's Phase 2 of reopening and Memorial Day Weekend's kickoff to summer. The distribution list was specifically targeted to 71 contacts at daily newspapers in North Carolina and close-by markets in South Carolina and Tennessee. The release focused on open spaces in the Asheville area, hiking trails, picnic spots, scenic drives, and the new Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge. The release will be repurposed as part of a larger outreach effort to national media.

Road Trips & Open Spaces Pitch Development: During the month of May, the team worked to create a bank of themed summer and fall pitch ideas capitalizing on Asheville as a centrally located road trip destination on the East Coast. Using the theme of "wide open spaces" and safer travel to the Asheville area, news elements focused on lesser-known hiking trails, patio dining, breweries that offer lots of space, the adaptive food scene, unique lodging options, attractions opening back up with strict sanitation practices, scenic drives and why Asheville is an exceptional fall color destination. The Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge will be included in each themed pitch bucket, as well as news of the tourism jobs relief fund. The team also worked on a distribution strategy for June outreach.

Community Spirit: In May, the team continued to track news around community resilience and covid-19 which took shape as an update of the lead article on the Community Spirit page. The team added news of the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Relief Fund, as well as a new round-up story featuring good work and philanthropy in the culinary community.

Significant Placements:

1. *AAA* | "An Inside Look at the Art and Artist of Asheville"
2. *Bon Appetit* | "Breakfast at Benne"
3. *Forbes* | "National Apple Pie Day: Try One Of These 12 Charming Recipes From The Country's Top Inns"
4. *Indy Week* | "Here are Some NC Ways to Celebrate International Museum Day"
5. *National Geographic* | "How urban foraging became the new way to explore a city"
6. *NBC News* | "Order these delicious artisanal Asian snacks for summer"
7. *Small Market Meetings* | "Scenic Settings in the Carolinas"
8. *The Points Guy* | "7 of our favorite 'secret' swimming holes in the US"

9. *Travel Noire* | “Best Fall Travel Destination To Avoid Post-Pandemic Crowds”
10. *Urban Matter* | “8 Secretly Magical Things To Do in Asheville”

Content Development Projects: Throughout early May, the Content team worked to support the Public Relations team to prepare for an extensive media release. This included then creation of two new content pieces for ExploreAsheville.com: Mountain Balds near Asheville, NC and Off the Beaten Path Hiking Trails near Asheville, NC. Both stories highlight areas where guests can enjoy wide-open spaces and more easily practice social distancing (given the new normal amid the Coronavirus pandemic). In addition, six other existing stories were updated – primarily fall content – to make sure the stories were ready for the release.

Content was also added in continued support of the Community Spirit microsite, highlighting the community efforts of Asheville’s culinary leaders.

In addition, the Weekend Events page was revived to provide ideas for guests who were traveling as hotels began to accept reservations again. The Weekend Events page showcases many outdoor experiences, while also making it clear that Asheville area retail shops, restaurants, attractions, and breweries are responsibly reopening with new safety measures in place.

On Social Media as state and local government entered new phases of reopening amid the Coronavirus pandemic, posts and replies to comments centered around travel safety and things to do safely while traveling to Asheville. Later in the month, as protests began across the nation after George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police, social media’s response focus shifted to a new round of questions – this time about the protests, the organization’s response, and how protests may affect the visitor experience.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of May, there were nine content pieces added to ExploreAsheville.com – included in these were stories to support a Press Release on off-the-beaten-path things to do in and around Asheville, such as hikes on mountain balds. Our Weekend Things To Do page returned. We also produced content pages in support of the Asheville Cares pledge.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to Do in Asheville, which received 11,914 pageviews, followed by 10 Falls You Want To Find Now with 3,406 pageviews.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- May saw 802 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 297,395.
- There were 32 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of May.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a link to Asheville-area waterfalls. The post reached 36,122 people organically, generating 2,866 Engagements, and 47 comments.

Video:

- There were 8,012 new, organic YouTube views in May. The most popular video by organic views this month “Asheville: Together in Spirit” which received 3,460 non-paid views. The video “Experience Black Mountain ‘America’s Prettiest Small Town’” came in second with 2,896 views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 108,434 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 691,716 views of Explore Asheville video content YTD (since July 1, 2019).

Pinterest:

- The total audience in March was 95,860. Impressions were up to 118,310 with 5,270 engagements.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 75,568 followers (through May 31).
- There were 16 new posts in May. The most popular photo post was a vista of downtown with blooming rhododendron in the foreground. It received 2,893 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all our accounts we have a total of 16,981 followers (as May 31). *Please note this number is significantly lower than it was prior October 2019 because our Foodtopia account was hacked and our follower count (and tweets) were erased.
- The most popular account is Visit Asheville, which has 8,459 followers (as of May 31).
- We continue to provide a mix of proactive response to travel inquiries and pushes of website and Instagram content.

Asheville Traveler E-newsletter:

- Subscribers: We have 128,146 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs:
 - In May, eTraveler had an 18.5 percent open rate (well above its 16.9% average) and a click rate of 2.7 percent.

Observations: In the newsletter, we featured the Together in Spirit video along with highlighting our virtual content and Community Spirit microsite. By featuring the Together in Spirit video, views of the video on YouTube jumped from 387 to well over 3,500 in a matter of days.

ExploreAsheville.com: Website user sessions in May decreased 67.4 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was down 35 percent year-over-year in May. Paid search traffic was down 81.3 percent compared with last year (due to paid search being suspended for the first half of the month.) Referral traffic was down 51.4 percent year-over-year, while traffic from eNewsletter clicks was down 65.7 percent year-over-year in May. Social media traffic, excluding paid social, was down 88.4 percent over last year. Traffic from advertising campaigns, including paid social was down 96.5 percent in May compared to last year. Sessions to the booking engine decreased 47.6 percent year over year in May and booking engine searches decreased 75.7 percent.

Website Improvements – SEO, QA & Accessibility: In May, new website development was largely focused on pages to support the Asheville Cares Pledge and listings of businesses re-opening during Phase II. The majority of development attention shifted to a focus on implementing a website refresh, integrating Act-On (a mass email and marketing automation tool, replacing Distribion and MailChimp), and the stylings for new Listings and Events-Pro partner content engines. Explore Asheville content and web teams worked with a product called SiteImprove to assist with search engine optimization, quality assurance and accessibility efforts.

Online Reservations: Due to two cancellations, reservations were negative for May 2019. Important reference: for much of the month site pop-ups to promote reservations were turned off. Pop-ups are turned on in June.

May 2020	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$-1,130	\$11,755	-961%	\$103,094	\$148,856	-31%
Commission	-5	\$521	-105%	\$3,278	\$6,324	-48%
Orders	-2	83	-241%	630	943	-33%
Room Nights	-2	83	-241%	419	281	49%

Visitor Guide: There were 1,314 requests of the *Official Asheville Visitor Guide* in May. Fiscal year-to-date, there have been 25,022 visitor guide requests.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Group sales reported 16 definite group bookings in May, down 64 percent from the prior year (six meetings/conventions, 10 weddings and zero group tour). Of these definite bookings, four (two sporting events, one wedding, one reunion) represented groups who cancelled events due to COVID-19 and rescheduled with significant contractual changes (new contracted property, meeting configuration changes, room rate(s), or a combination of the three). These four bookings represented 240 room nights. The combined total definite room nights were 1,127 room nights, down 84 percent from the previous year. Thirty-two leads (24 meetings/conventions, eight weddings, and zero tours) representing 7,383 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in May. Leads distributed were down 62 percent and rooms represented were down 66 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$212,273, down 89 percent. Person to person outreach totaled 927 contacts, down 20 percent from last year. Indirect outreach totaled 12,458 contacts, up 149 percent from the prior year. Actualized revenue was \$0 (down 100 percent). All group bookings for the month of May were cancelled due to COVID-19. Cumulative COVID-19 related cancellations as of May 31st were 80 groups representing 16,038 total contracted room nights and \$3,711,862 total estimated revenue.

Sales Activities:

- Connie Holliday participated in PlanetIMEX, a virtual island of education offerings and networking opportunities. She attended virtual meetings, the Georgia Society of Association Executives Happy Hour and Cvent insight webinar among others.
- Staff continued to attend numerous industry sponsored webinars specific to COVID-19 to understand best practices in sales and communications moving forward.
- Staff attended numerous online webinars/events sponsored by planner organizations (PCMA SE Chapter, Florida MPI, Georgia MPI Virtual Chat, MPI Carolinas Chapter Networking, HPN Global) to stay connected and in front of planners.
- Dianna provided foundational assistance in crafting Asheville Cares Safety Pledge for the hotel/motel and attractions segments. Further, she co-presented during the industry partners online meeting.

- A survey was sent to 86 Helms Briscoe representatives to engage them about Asheville as a future meeting destination and help inform the CVB on the most important information needed when selecting a destination.
- Seven wedding guides were downloaded this month as compared to six guides in May 2019.
- Staff formulated the basis for the Event Impact Calculator's (EIC) full integration into the CRM and accompanying industry roll out scheduled for implementation July 1. A calculation will be completed for each secured event thus allowing a more comprehensive overview of the economic importance of events to our community.
- Staff followed up with planners who attended past Connect Tradeshows (2018 & 2019).
- Kathryn Dewey created a test Loom email (embedded video messaging) and sent the message to 30 planners. Forty three percent opened the message.
- Final edits made to a virtual site visit for Asheville. Eblast date is June 14.
- Final edits were made to thetouroperator.com an international and domestic tour operator resource and training tool.

May bookings include:

- 2020 Grand Fondo National Championship (rescheduled) – 70 rooms
- 2020 USSSA Mountain Sports Baseball Fall State – 110 rooms
- 2020 King of the Mountain Championship - 120 rooms
- 2020 Biltmore Bash Classic - 80 rooms
- 2021 23rd Annual First Cousins Reunion (rescheduled) – 30 rooms
- 2022 National Organization of Coaches Association Directors – 168 rooms

Group Sales Communications: The team discussed the content of the still in-development Fact Sheet collateral with Miles Partnership. A landing page, PlanWithPerks.com, was finalized and lists participating meeting hotel's planner perk packages for future meetings. The page will be promoted to meeting planners through Explore Asheville channels and in an upcoming sponsored webinar through *Smart Meetings*. The page received 239 pageviews after an e-blast in May.

A new Explore Asheville Group Sales value proposition statement was finalized providing a foundation for communicating the benefits of the team's services for meeting planners. A new virtual site visit video with details on the destination's accessibility, meeting hotel properties, cultural resources, and Explore Asheville services was completed in May. The video's introductory messaging addressed the current pause on travel and the Explore Asheville team's ability to assist meeting planners -particularly in difficult times. Promotion of the video was planned for June and as an alternative when in-person planner site visits are not possible.

Media: The May 14th *MeetingsToday* e-newsletter featured a link to a video message from Stephanie Brown offering support from Explore Asheville to meeting planners during the pandemic crisis.

Mass Communications: An email to all meeting planner clients with Plan With Perks information was sent to 12,470 clients. Open rate:18% Clicks: 717

Convention Service Highlights: The team engaged in convention service outreach to meetings booked by Explore Asheville scheduled to be held in December 2020 through May 2021. Microsites were completed for sporting events: USSA Baseball (1) and USSSA Mountain Sports Baseball "Fall State".

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts: Staff has been working closely with PGAV on the final report of the Tourism Management & Investment Plan (TMIP) which is expected to wrap up in July.

The Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Act was signed into law on May 6, enabling the BCTDA to establish a \$5 million fund for emergency grants, available for local businesses that provide a direct visitor experience, including restaurants, retail establishments, studios and galleries, attractions, tours and activities, entertainment and event venues, and breweries, wineries, cideries and distilleries, among others. The grant program is being managed by Mountain BizWorks and the application period was open May 15 – 31. Grant award announcements are expected in mid-June.

Buncombe County submitted a TPDF disbursement request for the lighting at the Bob Lewis Ballfields as part of the Enka Recreation Destination project. The engineering review is in progress.

Partner Engagement and Events: The public affairs team continues to receive and respond to partner business and event updates as needs of tourism partners are changing quickly and frequently. While partners have the option to make the changes themselves via the extranet, many are choosing to have our team make the updates for them. Additionally, the Food + Drink page is being updated manually at least twice a day to make the takeout/delivery list as comprehensive and up to date as possible. Our updates are being shared with AIR and the City/County food resource webpage.

Partner Database Engagement Stats: Joe updated 159 records in May to generate content for the Together in Spirit microsite on ExploreAsheville.com - 87 attractions/retail businesses and 72 food & drink businesses. Charlie processed 179 events for the ExploreAsheville.com calendar, the majority of which were generated due to Charlie's significant outreach efforts to help populate the website and educate partners on our new virtual offerings.

Partner Communications: A combination of news alert emails, CVB website updates and drop-in visits to industry partners occurred to promote the use of the Asheville Cares – Stay Safe Pledge. Pat assisted in the development and promotion of the Asheville Pledge by working to align CVB efforts with the County, Chamber, partners, and business association groups.

New Partners: There were seven new partners in May: Adventures Accessed, Creekside Taphouse, Desiree DeMars, Himalayas Import, Nan Davis Contemporary Art, Perspective Café, and Thai Pearl.

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The monthly orientation was canceled due to the office being closed. The public affairs team is managing partner inquiries and extranet support questions via email and calls.

Projects:

African American Heritage Projects: The Community Engagement Phase I Report summarizing feedback, themes, and a recommended plan for next steps in the development of the heritage walking trail is in final stages. Additionally, Pat has been participating in discussions with the grantees, River Front Development Group, city staff representing the Parks Department, the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association and the East End Valley Neighborhood Association in an effort to finalize the MOU for the museum space at Stephens-Lee Recreation Center project.

Wayfinding Management: Pat continues to work with MERJE to refine the plans for the RAD signage system package with a goal to fabricate and install later this year in coordination with completion of RADTIP construction by the City of Asheville. Pat and Glenn have worked with the maintenance vendor to assess options for an online inventory management system for the signage program that currently includes close to 400 signs and is ready to move forward in the coming fiscal year with integration.

ACT-On Integration: Pat is working with the team to integrate the new Act-On emailing management platform to replace Distribution, the current system used to manage partner email communications.

PUBLIC INFORMATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund: In May, Kathi spent considerable time developing and executing a communication plan with Mountain BizWorks to promote and publicize the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, signed into law on May 4 by Gov. Roy Cooper, with the application period May 15 - 31. She has responded to numerous media requests; developed and made media pitches; coordinated interviews; written FAQs, social media posts, and website content; and is continuing to promote the Fund through a variety of local communication channels.

Asheville Cares – Stay Safe Pledge: In collaboration with other team members and partners, Kathi helped spearhead a campaign and toolkit for the Asheville Cares – Stay Safe Pledge, launched May 22, which included developing content for the AshevilleCVB.com website, writing and disseminating a press release and making media pitches, and developing communications for partners, social media, and so on. This also included working with Dianna and Marla on a virtual webinar for partners, which the three of them presented on May 27, with attendance by more than 75 partners. The Pledge is being used elsewhere in North Carolina and even by DMOs across the country, thanks to publicity gained when Stephanie spoke about the pledge at a US Travel Association webinar.

Smart Restart Task Force & Toolkit: Kathi served on a regional ad hoc task force led by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, with representatives from business and public health organizations from across WNC, to create content for a “Smart Restart” toolkit designed to help businesses of all types reopen safely. As a member of the group, Kathi was able to incorporate the safety protocols developed by hotel and attractions partners who were convened by Dianna and Glenn. She was also able to include the Asheville Care – Stay Safe Pledge (with a generic version, “We Care”) in the toolkit, which was launched on May 22. In addition, Kathi helped orchestrate and promote two virtual Town Halls on May 22 with Buncombe County officials and partners from entertainment venues, attractions, and lodging.

Local Media / Public Information / Engagement: In addition to responding to numerous media requests regarding the BCTDA and CVB’s COVID-19 response, Kathi continued to spend considerable time writing, posting, and managing content on the Coronavirus Resources pages of the AshevilleCVB.com website. In May she wrote content for nine partner newsletters. She also continues to respond to Freedom of Information Act requests, and with the team has worked closely with PGAV as the TMIP process continues.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Staff and Administrative Updates:

Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund: At a special meeting of the BCTDA on May 8, the board approved hiring Mountain BizWorks to administer the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Act. Applications were received May 15-31 and awards will be announced in mid-June. This fund, possible by legislation proposed by Senator Chuck Edwards, will provide \$5 million in TPDF funds to be used to help the local community by directly benefiting local non-lodging, tourism businesses with costs associated with reopening following the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

Human Resources: Glenn and Stephanie worked with Insurance Service of Asheville to decide on the final medical benefits plans the BCTDA will offer Team Members in FY20/21. Significant options were added to the coming year's benefits. A \$1,000 per Team Member Health Reimbursement Account is being provided that will assist in the expenses associated with the rising level of deductibles. For the first time, a Direct Primary Care provider was offered to staff. Vickery Family Medicine was selected.

Personnel: Josh Jones was enrolled in the 401K plan.

Tourism Management & Investment Plan: The Explore Asheville team continued working on the TMIP process in May with PGAV. Progress was made and discussed via several virtual meetings during the month. The plan is currently in its final stages and will be presented to the BCTDA in July.

BCTDA Budget: At the April and May BCTDA meetings, details of the proposed FY 21 budget were presented to the board. Pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. 166A-19.24 (e), a virtual public budget hearing began on May 27, 2020, and the public was invited to submit comments on the proposed FY 21 budget via email to Reply@ExploreAsheville.com through Tuesday, June 23, at 4:00 p.m. The budget ordinance was posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

Remote Operations: The office building has remained in total lockdown since the week of March 24. The Explore Asheville team continued to work remotely from home during the month of May to comply with Buncombe County's Stay Home/Stay Safe order. Jonna continued to coordinate and communicate all technical logistics related to hosting online BCTDA meetings, Town Halls and Partner Forums, with significant assistance from Daniel Bradley.