



January 31, 2017

To: BCTDA  
From: Stephanie Pace Brown  
Subject: President's Report of December Activities

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The year 2017 will not soon be forgotten! It was a monumental year of transition, but also a year of great success for the CVB and Asheville tourism partners. Hotel demand increased 3.4 percent, not quite absorbing a hotel room supply increase of 4.5 percent. Adding "hotel comparable" bookings on Airbnb, brings total room demand for the year to an increase of 9.1 percent.

### **MONTH AT A GLANCE**

- The winter advertising campaign launched on January 10 with the theme Cozy Up in Asheville.
- A "What's New in 2018" press push was distributed via PR Newswire and picked up 287 times, with a potential audience of 14.9 million.
- Sales activities included: AENC in Raleigh with a client event; Association Forum of Chicagoland's Annual Holiday Showcase; Southern Pearls Chinese FAM following Travel South International; and, National Tour Association Travel Exchange in San Antonio.
- The Explore Asheville Holiday Party welcomed more than 200 partners for an evening of merriment made possible by the Renaissance. Superstar Awards were presented to the Omni Grove Park Inn team, Chris Corl, DeWayne Barton and Tom Roberson.

### **DECEMBER METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS**

- During December, the sales team posted 950 personal contacts (down 2%). December sales activities generated 62 sales leads (up 7%) and 25 convention bookings (up 32%), representing 6,655 rooms (up 9%). Six months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 8 percent and room nights represented are up 7 percent.
- CVB leads generated 16 group events in December (up 33%), with revenue of \$232,229 (up 21%). The services team assisted 13 groups (static).
- The PR team landed 103 significant placements in December (up 49%), with 35 media touchpoints (down 22%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$541,182 with reach of over 8.6 million. Online placements added \$503,758 in value and reach of over 698 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 271,245 visits (down 3%), including 179,058 to the mobile site (up 2%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 2,220 (down 54%) and video views totaled 204,226 (up 153%).

- Online hotel reservations totaled 58 room nights (up 21%) with total room revenue of \$9,586 (up 58%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 12,104 visitors (down 3%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

### **HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$33,211,884 in November, an increase of 13.5 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 74.3 percent during November (up 2.3%). The average daily room rate was \$163.74 (up 4%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$121.59 (up 6.5%). Room demand increased 7.8 percent with 168,369 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 27 percent to total 91,656 in November.

### **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Advertising:** While the holiday campaign wound down, the launch of the winter campaign ramped up. Staff worked with the agency to finalize imagery, animation for the display ads, and a cinemograph built around the theme of Cozy Up in Asheville. A 15 second video short will also be delivered via streaming ads. A companion landing page on ExploreAsheville.com continues the ad theme and will be finalized the first week of January. Staff also developed a series of Facebook ads that will accompany the campaign and will run throughout the winter effort. The campaign is scheduled to be launched on January 10. The agency also prepared initial briefs for the spring campaign that are currently being tweaked. The first series of focus groups are scheduled to take place in mid-January and may pose a rationale for shifting print to full pages for spring advertising.

**Paid search efforts:** Compared to paid search efforts last year, sessions are up 32 percent and page views are up 48 percent, fueled in part by a slightly larger spend. However, cost per click is also lower which signals better performance. Paid search also generated more than 5,000 listing page views on the site in December (more than 37,200 fiscal year-to-date). Mobile viewers averaged nearly 2 minutes on the site. The brand tourism campaign continues to perform incredibly well - 63 email signups, 2 bookings, and 242 visitor guide requests generated in December alone.

**General Media Relations:** December was heavy with outreach in the form of a “What’s New in 2018” press push release and music-themed holiday media gift/pitch mailing. Media site visits included writers representing *Newsweek*, *Home by Design*, *domino*, *Desoto Magazine* and more. Additional touchpoints of note included *Budget Travel*, *Whisky Advocate*, *Zagat*, and *Our State*. In total, the team logged 35 touchpoints, initiated 280 targeted pitches, and hosted three media on the ground in Asheville. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *National Geographic Traveler* magazine and *Food Network*, among others.

#### **What’s New in Asheville in 2018 Release**

In December, the PR team worked to pull final details together for the “What’s New in 2018” press release. This required significant research and outreach to partners and was pulled into themes, including a section focusing specifically on the Cozy winter destination news, in alignment with the larger seasonal marketing initiative. The release was distributed via PR Newswire and picked up 287 times, with a potential audience of 14.9 million. It was also

distributed via MailChimp to 211 subscribers and media friends of Explore Asheville. A major success for the PR team came when *CNN Travel* named Asheville as one of their “18 Best Places to Visit in 2018,” specifically using content from the What’s New press release. Moving forward, the release will see a more targeted pitch effort this year, repurposing themes/angle-specific content and researching potential media targets through past coverage using Trendkite.

### **Music Themed Holiday Media Gift:**

This year, the PR team worked together to send an Asheville percussion scene-themed gift to 67 Explore Asheville media contacts. The gift included a locally made Drum Circle candle and a holiday card featuring an image of Santa at the Drum Circle. The card included messaging around Asheville’s vibrant percussion scene.

### **M&C/Group PR Efforts**

Landis and Carli worked on an information request for *Smart Meetings Magazines*. The freelance writer is doing a story on what’s new and available for meeting planners and attendees in different North Carolina cities.

### **Significant Placements**

1. ABC News Go – “Trees, Lights, Holiday Magic: Christmas Events and Displays”
2. Citizen-Times – “Answer Man: Wayfinding Sign Mix-up? Missing Snowflakes?”
3. Divergent Travelers – “2017 Travel Review: 7 States, 7 Countries”
4. Fodor’s Travel – “10 Most Unusual Christmas Celebrations in the U.S.”
5. Group Tour Media – “North Carolina Itinerary: Wind Through Asheville’s Charming Art and Shopping Venues”
6. Jambase – “Winter Wonderland: Asheville Hosts Another Memorable Warren Haynes Christmas Jam”
7. Luxury Travel Guide – “What You Can’t Miss in Asheville in 2018”
8. MSN Lifestyle – “20 U.S. Towns Perfect for Relaxing by the Fire”
9. Naples Daily News – “Travel Holidays with Tradition”
10. Our State – “Best-Kept Secrets in Asheville: Moog Music”
11. Simply Southern Mom – “Winter Lights at the North Carolina Arboretum, Asheville, NC”
12. Sometimes Home – “Top Spots to Indulge in Asheville’s Brews and Art Views”
13. Uproxx – “Asheville’s Local Music Scene is Putting North Carolina on the Map in a Big Way”

**Content Development Projects:** The content team continued to focus on the holiday season in the month of December while also preparing for the upcoming winter campaign.

Holiday Season: Continuing the content team’s objective to capture fresh visual content from holiday attractions and events for both immediate and future use, Jason captured high-res photography, video and/or 360-degree imagery at Biltmore Village, Chimney Rock State Park, Lake Julian, and Biltmore. New photos were used on social channels to update existing website content, and videos. The new 360-degree imagery and live broadcasts were also showcased on the Visit Asheville social channels. Holiday-related videos posted in November and December received a combined 925,000 views. Additional 360-degree imagery posted this month reached 400,000+ users organically and were the most engaging posts of December.

Winter 2018: The month of December began with a five-location photo shoot to capture imagery and video for the “Cozy Up to Asheville” winter campaign, including artfully composed “sock selfies” at cozy locations around town. Cat worked with C2 Photography to shoot on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at Pillar rooftop bar, at Sourwood Inn, and in West Asheville. A shoot featuring downtown’s holiday lights also generated imagery for next year’s holiday efforts. Later in the

month, Cat worked with Erin Adams to capture more sock shots - this time at Biltmore, Omni Grove Park Inn, and Crooked Oak Mountain Inn. The team also brainstormed content opportunities to extend the cozy message across channels.

#### ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of December, seven new pieces of editorial content were added to the website: the New in 2018 press release/story, a blog post highlighting travel packages for the Steep Canyon Rangers album release show, a round-up of New Year's Eve events, an interview with a former gingerbread competition winner, and three "Things to Do This Weekend" posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 27,817 new page views, followed by 8 Places to See Holiday Lights in Asheville, which received 12,054 page views.

#### Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

*Visit Asheville page*

- December saw 2,220 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 267,704.
- There were 38 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of December.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a 360-degree image of the Winter Garden at Biltmore, decorated for the Christmas At Biltmore celebration. It has reached 324,985 people organically, generating 19,303 total reactions, and 1,444 comments. This was also the most engaging post of the month, engaging six percent of users reached.
- The most popular paid post this month was a share of the link to the Zagat accolade naming Asheville one of the most exciting food cities of 2017. It reached 31,527 users in total (24,553 of those organically), generating 605 total reactions, 28 comments and 479 shares.

*Foodtopia page*

- December saw 36 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,392 likes.
- There were 4 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of December.
- The most popular post — a share of the link to the Zagat page in which Asheville was named one of the most exciting food cities of 2017 — reached 1,765 people, generating 36 reactions.

Video:

- There were 9,889 new, organic YouTube views in December. The most popular video by organic views this month was the Spirit of Asheville, which received 1,357 non-paid views. O Little Town of Christmas Cats came in second with 1,075 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 204,226 views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 1,538,344 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2017).

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,699. Foodtopia accounts for 1,385 of those; Visit Asheville – 3,314.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 42,172 followers.
- There were 21 new posts in December. The most popular was a picture of a snowy day at Biltmore. It received 4,635 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 29,892 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,836 followers. 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 120,379 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In December, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,985 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 15.9 percent and a click-through rate of 2.2 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** In December, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com decreased 3.1 percent year-over-year, which includes a 9.2 percent increase in organic user sessions and a 51.7 percent increase in paid search user sessions. Mobile visits in December increased by 2.3 percent year-over-year. Social referral traffic dropped comparatively to last December due to two big accolades that generated social traffic in December 2016 (namely the Lonely Planet "Best Cities" accolade and Black Mountain "Prettiest Town" accolade). Direct traffic to the site was down 15.4 percent. Further investigation revealed that bot traffic from an advertiser in November 2016 that continued into January, accounted for approximately 25,000 unqualified sessions. Of note, this will be reflected in the 2016 monthly numbers through January as well as the YTD numbers for the remainder of the year.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO: In December, Simpleview continued its conversion rate optimization efforts on ExploreAsheville.com. The split test on the Home Page, Things to Do page and Story/Blog content continued in the month of December with a goal to improve conversions to Places to Stay page and to listing detail pages. Results will be reviewed by the marketing team in January. The organic engagement continues to outperform the industry averages and was up 9 percent year-over-year in December.

- The Things to Do page continues to be a top performing page, year-over-year, with 6,899 organic visits, 78 percent new users, a bounce rate of 25 percent, 4.49 pages per session and an average session duration of 00:04:21.
- The Events Calendar page had great engagement with 9,534 organic visits and a 00:04:21 average session duration.
- The top event detail was the 2017 National Gingerbread House Competition with 2,766 organic visits.
- The top blog post was the Photo Tour 2017 National Gingerbread House Winners with 3,486 organic visits.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 27 percent more total pages per visit, 40 percent longer visit duration, 33 percent more organic pages per visit, and 51 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to industry average in the month of December.

**Online Reservations:** There were 39 orders for 58 room nights in December with a total of \$9,585.85 in booking revenue and \$394.65 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in December were North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee.

December 2017	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
<b>Booking Rev</b>	\$9,586	\$6,054	58.35%	\$81,238	\$55,257	47.02%
<b>Commission</b>	\$394.65	\$276.28	42.84%	\$3,671.93	\$2,455.80	49.52%
<b>Orders</b>	39	24	62.50%	307	193	59.07%
<b>Room Nights</b>	58	48	20.83%	477	329	44.98%

**Visitor Guide:** December saw a flurry of activity with re-writes, final edits, and imagery adjustments before the guide went to print a few days before Christmas.

#### Visitor Guide Requests

There were 1,010 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in December, an 11.5 percent increase from last December. Year-to-date, there are 13,199 travel guide requests, a 16.7 percent increase from last year. The top 5 DMAs requesting guides for the month and year are:

Top 5 DMAs for December 2017	# of Guides Requested	FY 2017-2018 Top 5 DMAs	# of Guides Requested
Atlanta	41	New York	583
New York	37	Tampa – St Pete	526
Orlando	32	Atlanta	501
Washington, D.C.	31	Washington, DC	437
Philadelphia	30	Orlando	422

### **GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE**

Group sales reported 25 definite group bookings in December, up 31.6 percent from the prior year. Of these group bookings, 18 were for meetings & conventions, two were group tour, and five were weddings. The combined total definite room nights were 6,655, up 8.7 percent over the prior December. Sixty-two leads (51 for meeting/conventions, five for weddings and six for motorcoach) representing 18,012 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in December. Leads distributed were up 6.9 percent and rooms represented were up 51.5 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,341,870, a 31.6 percent increase over the prior year. Actualized revenue was \$232,229 a 21 percent increase over the prior year. Person-to-person outreach totaled 950 contacts, a 2.3 percent decrease from last year. Indirect outreach totaled 11,538, a 172 percent increase over the prior year.

**Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:**

- Molly Nelson and Carli Adams exhibited at the Association Executives of North Carolina's Annual Trade (AENC) Show in Raleigh. One hundred contacts were made. Participating industry partners included Biltmore, Crowne Plaza, Grand Bohemian, Biltmore Farms Hotels, and Renaissance Asheville Hotel. Sales calls were scheduled prior to the trade show.
- A client event hosted prior to the AENC Annual Trade Show at Oro Restaurant had 25 clients in attendance. Participating industry partners included Biltmore, Crowne Plaza, Grand Bohemian, and Biltmore Farms Hotels.
- Shawn Boone traveled to Chicago to exhibit at Association Forum of Chicagoland's Annual Holiday Showcase, partnering with The Omni Grove Park Inn. Leann Swims helped man the booth after her scheduled training was completed. Approximately 65 planners came by. Sales appointments were hosted in conjunction with this event. Staff attended SITE Chicago annual networking event. Four RFPs, totaling 1066 potential room nights, were received during the visit.
- Staff hosted the Southern Pearls Chinese FAM immediately following Travel South International. Total attendance was 18 and included 16 operators, an organizer from Travel South International, and one writer. While in Asheville, the group toured Biltmore, the North Carolina Arboretum, and stayed at the Crowne Plaza Resort. Joe Weber produced "Things Never to Do in China" to help guide everyone involved with hosting over any potential cultural hurdles. This is the first organized group of Chinese operators to ever visit Asheville. A Southern Pearls itinerary was in place and available to be sold at retail, which was the impetus for the FAM.
- Beth McKinney attended the National Tour Association Travel Exchange in San Antonio, TX, meeting with 30 operators during the trade show. In addition, Beth attended networking events as well as the DMO Exchange seminar, a group of like organizations sharing common issues and industry best practices. One immediate lead for 2018 was secured.

**Sponsorships:** In our continued efforts to place Asheville in a broader consideration set, Explore Asheville was a sponsor of Meetings & Conventions 2018 Destination Southeast held December 3-6, 2017 in Miami Beach, Florida. The breakfast sponsorship included a 15-minute speaking opportunity, full page advertisement in event directory, event registration, inclusion of print materials in registration bags, and a planner database. Attending the breakfast were 75 planners. A total of 21 one-on-one appointments were conducted during the event.

**Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:** The team hosted/assisted six visits in December, including 2018 International Business Development Corporation – 241 rooms, 2018 American Medical Writers Association – 46 rooms, 2020 Alabama Bankers Association – candidate for three future meetings, North Carolina League of Municipalities- three open RFP's totaling in 702 room nights, 2018 Coastal Alabama Chamber City Visit -135 room nights, 2019 Middle Eastern Province Council of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity- 515 room nights.

December bookings for this year and future years include:

- 2018 United States Tennis Association Fed Cup – 1,500 rooms
- 2018 Haute Route Asheville – 1,025 rooms
- 2018 For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology – 190 rooms
- 2018 Beer City Cup Adult – 600 rooms
- 2018 Victorians Institute – 130 rooms
- 2019 American Bar Association – 15 rooms
- 2019 & 2020 NC Society for Respiratory Care – 520 total rooms

- 2020 Society for Pediatric Dermatology – 450 rooms
- 2019 Southern Association of Forensic Scientists - 235 rooms

A total of 24 wedding guide requests were fulfilled this month. This is down from 31 requests in December 2016.

### **Significant Sports Activities for the Month:**

- The inaugural Mountain Invitational basketball tournament on December 17, featuring two men's games involving SoCon teams and Big South Conference schools. The event was held at the U.S. Cellular Center. Total attendance is estimated to have been 1,400 people
- Headlock on Hunger/Theraworx Protect Great Smoky Mountain Grapple held at the U.S. Cellular Center on December 22nd. Twelve high school teams (13 wrestlers each) and 84 junior varsity wrestlers registered in advance of the event. A youth wrestling tournament was also a part of the total event. One hundred and eight different wrestling clubs were represented with some from as far as South Georgia.

### **AAA Initiatives:**

Leann Swims coordinated/hosted two AAA webinars for employees located throughout the southeast. Attending clubs included: AAA Carolinas, AAA Alabama, AAA South, AAA Allied Group, AAA Mid-Atlantic, AAA Chicago, AAA Michigan, and AAA Wisconsin. Forty-eight AAA staff participated. The webinar highlighted Q1 activities and featured Biltmore, Hampton Inn/Homewood Suites, and the Conundrum.

### **Group Sales Communications:**

Planning began for updates to the Sports Market section of ExploreAsheville.com. An invitation for the Exclusive NC/SC Meeting Planner FAM that will be hosted by the CVB in June 2018 was developed.

### **Mass Communications:**

- An email was sent to 348 registered attendees of Holiday Showcase in advance of our attendance. Open rate: 30 percent; Click to Open ratio: 13 percent
- An email was sent to 194 registered attendees of the AENC Annual Trade Show in advance of our attendance. Open rate: 41 percent; Click to Open ratio: 18 percent
- A holiday message was sent to the entire meeting planner client data base totaling 10,962. Open rate: 17 percent; Click to Open Ratio: 22 percent

### **Convention Servicing Highlight:**

Staff supported planning meetings for the SoCon Basketball Championships, Fed Cup, and Haute Route. Microsites are in development for Asheville Lacrosse Classic and the USTA Fed Cup.

### **Other:**

A quarterly DOS meeting was held December 14th. Staff volunteered at Headlock on Hunger/Theraworx Protect Great Smoky Mountain Grapple, attended the Asheville Chamber's Women Up Event, and met with local industry partners on a variety of topics. Staff is actively engaged in the Local Organizing Committee's for SoCon, Fed Cup, and Haute Route. Leann Swims traveled to Chicago for the Simpleview hosted CRM training. This was an inaugural event with the goal to do a deeper dive relative to reporting and other key features of the system.



## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**Tourism Product Development Efforts:** The Enka Youth Sports Association received its first grant disbursement for \$666,667.00. The ballfields were completed in December; and the new concession is expected to complete in April 2018. The Center's first tournament, the USA Softball Super 80 show case, is scheduled for July 2018. A ribbon-cutting ceremony to recognize funders, including the BCTDA, will take place on Tuesday, February 20, at 4:00 p.m.

Staff is working through contract development and amendments with recent TPDF award recipients - City of Asheville Riverfront Redevelopment project, Buncombe County Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project, and the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center Expansion project.

The BCTDA received a challenge to the Haywood Street Congregation award for its fresco project. Contract development is on hold while under legal review with the TDA's attorney.

LEAF Community Arts is continuing to develop its proposal and will notify staff when it is ready to present its updated application to the TPDF Committee for consideration.

Stephanie, Marla, and Pat attended a Municipal Leadership Meeting at City Hall with City of Asheville and Buncombe County planning staff members to continue discussions on potential collaborations on product development projects. Discussions focused on the public parking needs in downtown and the opening of the new county garage on Coxe Avenue in February. The opening of the garage will free up a significant number of spaces in area surface lots that are currently being utilized for county staff. There was consensus that signage to the new parking assets would be helpful, and an agreement that the CVB would direct MERJE, the consultants currently reassessing the Wayfinding Sign Program, to address these needs in their December site visit. Pat is serving as CVB point person in developing a parking asset sign update for consideration.

### **Partner Engagement:**

#### **Explore Asheville CVB Holiday Party – December 6**

The holiday party was a great success with over 200 tourism industry partners in attendance. The Renaissance Asheville Hotel and US Foods generously provided the venue and menu for the occasion. Beverage sponsors included Biltmore, The Omni Grove Park Inn, and the Asheville Brewers Alliance. Stephanie presented the 5th Annual CVB SuperStar Awards to recognize and honor partners for outstanding contributions and support throughout the year. This year's SuperStars included Tom Roberson, Director of Visitor Services with the Asheville Chamber; DeWayne Barton, Owner of Hood Huggers Tours; Chris Corl, General Manager of U.S. Cellular Center; and the Banquet & Sales Teams at the Omni Grove Park Inn. TapSnap was on hand providing fun photo booth mementos for attendees, and Swing Step provided musical entertainment. Additionally, partners contributed to the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots toy drive, a program in its 9th year at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel.

#### **Special Partner Forum – Major Events in 2018 – January 24**

Planning is underway for a Special Partner Forum on Major Events in 2018, presented in conjunction with the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. Attendees will learn about several exciting upcoming events in the region: Sharon Decker will share information about the World Equestrian Games in Tryon, an event expected to attract close to 500,000 to the region later

this year; the Chihuly exhibit at Biltmore, a world-class glass art experience attracting art lovers; ClimateCon at The Collider, a premiere conference designed to bring together the science and business community; and a round-up of other major event news. Explore Asheville staff will also provide a 30-minute training session on how to best promote events through Explore Asheville channels.

### **Hospitality Outlook – March 1**

Planning is underway for the annual Hospitality Outlook. The meeting will be held over lunch at the Holiday Inn Asheville - Biltmore West, and will be geared for lodging owners, general managers, assistant managers, directors of sales, and elected officials. Details are in development.

### **Projects:**

Pat provided a tour of new development areas for the consulting team from MERJE during their December visit as they collect information for Wayfinding system update recommendations. She also arranged for meeting with City of Asheville staff Steph Monson for detailed River Arts District planning information, and directed the team to focus on parking assets expected to be available to the public in February with the opening of the country garage on Coxe Avenue.

The public affairs team continues to review and assess the current lodging listing policy, and is preparing for discovery meetings with CVB leadership and lodging partners.

The team also dedicated significant resources to assisting the marketing team on final edits and proofing of the 2018 Visitor Guide.

**Partner Outreach:** Brit created two new partner accounts in December – WAXON Batik and Dye Studio and Artist Cleaster Cotton. The public affairs team hosted the monthly Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation. Two new partners attended including WAXON Batik and Dye Studio and Artist Cleaster Cotton. Brit continues to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing, to respond to partner extranet issues, and to monitor listing updates and event submissions in the CRM.

**Community Outreach:** Pat coordinated a follow up meeting with several area glass artists, organizations, and attractions at the Explore Asheville office. This included Biltmore staff, giving an opportunity to discuss the Chihuly exhibit at Biltmore in 2018 and learn about the Summer of Glass, along with other associated events and visitor offerings being created around the topic.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES**

**Building:** Edwards Equipment continued work on completing both the secure card readers and the internal and external security cameras. If working late, all staff will have the ability to view cameras pointing at the periphery of the building, including all entrances, and the broader parking lot. Panic buttons were installed in four strategic locations on the 2nd floor. The "buttons" communicate with a security company who will contact the police when alerted.

A long checklist has been established for, and shared with, the building owner, Martin Lewis. These are items that were not completed during construction, or completed in error, in addition aesthetic tasks such as paint, floor molding, etc. TransAmerica Financial Group moved into their space on the first floor the final week of 2017. Currently, they have a staff of ten who spend a great deal of their time in the field. The Symphony's space should be completed in

early February, but they have decided not to relocate until March due to a heavy February schedule.

**Administration:** All 401K material was reviewed to be certain all newly eligible staff were enrolled in the restructured Safe Harbor 401K plan and that staff who were not meeting the new 3% investment threshold clearly understood the ramifications on their retirement strategy. The Executive Team continues to review and edit a new BCTDA Employee Handbook, replacing the Chamber handbook used by Explore Asheville staff prior to the July 1, 2017 separation. A new Director of Advertising and a Graduate Intern will begin work at Explore Asheville on January 2, 2018. Both were supplied with all on-boarding materials requiring their completion and respective signatures. The external job postings on LinkedIn and AshevilleCVB.com for the Business Intelligence Manager were closed. The position received over 125 applications.

**Wayfinding:**

On December 18, MERJE staff were in town to discuss the system-wide review of the Wayfinding System. Initial focus is being placed on parking signage in preparation of the new County garage opening on Coxe Avenue. The replacement of an incorrect Wayfinding Sign on Exit 8 off I-240 was completed. Geograph installed the wrong sign and agreed to fabricate a replacement sign at their expense, which was shipped to Asheville Public Works for installation.

**Workforce Development:**

On December 5, Eliada Homes hosted a meeting for their ESTA Program where a program update was provided. The program is designed to prepare students for a career in the hotel industry. The *Mountain Xpress* highlighted Explore Asheville and participating hoteliers in an article on innovative programs.