

October 30, 2019

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Stephanie Pace Brown

Subject: President's Report of September 2019 Activities

MONTH AT A GLANCE

The BCTDA Annual Meeting was generously hosted by the Omni Grove Park Inn on September 5. The meeting attracted an audience of 350 and highlights included an annual report, the debut of new spots with the tagline "Let Your Spirit Run Free," and a presentation of the William A.V. Cecil Leadership Award to Dick Trammel.

Asheville's new culinary event Chow Chow was presented September 12-15. The non-profit event sold more than 3,000 tickets in its first year and was able to provide \$53,000 to Manna through attendee contributions. The BCTDA provided a sponsorship of \$75,000.

Paid advertising delivered 76 million impressions between the August 1 launch and the end of September, generating 150,164 user sessions to ExploreAsheville.com, and increase of 25 percent. In response to softening destination performance, the team worked with 360i to rebalance the media buy to focus on our strongest markets. A campaign report will be presented at the September board meeting.

SEPTEMBER METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During September, the sales team posted 1,062 personal contacts (down 7%). September sales activities generated 88 sales leads (up 22%) and 39 convention bookings (down 33%), representing 6,768 rooms (flat). Three months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 31 percent and room nights represented are down 26 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 127 group events in September (up 4%), with revenue of \$7,076,114 (up 64%). The services team assisted 118 groups (down 9%).
- The PR team landed 25 significant placements in August (down 62%), with 52 media touchpoints (down 27%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$2,451,046 with reach of over 5.6 million. Online placements added \$24,558 in value and reach of over 48 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 573,240 visits (up 32%), including 425,448 to the mobile site (up 38%). Our Facebook fan base total is 292,991 (up 5%) and video views totaled 74,494 (down 67%).

- Online hotel reservations totaled 95 room nights (down 8%) with total room revenue of \$17,014 (up 1%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 21,628 visitors (up 13%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 1,011 visitors (up 44%).

LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$41,027,538 in August, an increase of three percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 77.6 percent during August (down 3%). The average daily room rate was \$164.22 (up 1%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$127.46 (down 3%). Room demand decreased 1.5 percent with 191,611 rooms sold.
- AIRDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 57.5 percent (up 1.9%), ADR of \$100.30 (up 4.4%), RevPAR of \$57.64 (up 6.3%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 27.7 percent to total 115,369 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 42 percent to total 152,056 in August.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- CVB staff members supported Chow Chow volunteering during the festival and attended the opening ceremony.
- Marla attended Asheville Downtown Issues committee meeting.
- Beth met with Asheville Outlets to discuss the group tour market.
- Beth attended the Blue Ridge Parkway Association meeting in Virginia to remain abreast of current and future Parkway initiatives.
- Sales team members and ABYSA met with a Bob Lewis Park representative about future collaborative opportunities to bring events to Asheville.
- Dianna attended ABRSC and Civic Center Commission monthly meetings.
- Stephanie provided a presentation on the Tourism Management & Investment Plan to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners.
- Stephanie met with representatives from Alleghany County Tourism and Tri City Council to provide an overview of the Asheville area's tourism story and answer questions.
- Stephanie attended the Haywood Streetscape Improvement Community meeting at the US Cellular Center.
- Stephanie shared remarks at the Official Chow Chow Opening Ceremony in Pack Square Park.
- Stephanie provided an Explore Asheville/BCTDA tourism overview to the Leadership Asheville Seniors' Growth & Development Class.
- Stephanie attended a discussion regarding the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium with staff from UNC Asheville and the City of Asheville.
- Stephanie met with several industry and municipal partners regarding TMIP, including city and county staff and members of Asheville City Council.
- Stephanie attended AIR and Chow Chow executive committee and board meetings throughout the month.

- Stephanie attended Rotary Club of Asheville meetings every Thursday when she was available.
- Glenn attended the Buncombe County Commissioner's meeting to discuss the County's strategic plan and its priorities.
- Glenn and Marla attended the Chamber's "AVL Greater Vision" event at Sierra Nevada.
- Glenn attended an HR seminar hosted by the Law Firm of Roberts & Stevens entitled, "Alphabet Soup: Employment Law and Agencies."
- Glenn attended the board meeting of the Black Mountain Center for the Arts.
- Pat attended the Chamber's monthly Membership Council meeting.
- Pat attended Creative Mornings at the Masonic Temple to hear a presentation by NC poet laureate Jaki Shelton Green.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Dodie attended the Public Relations Society of American Travel & Tourism Section strategic planning retreat in Spokane, WA. Dodie will be incoming chair for the 2021 conference. Cat attended Content Marketing World in Cleveland, Ohio.

Advertising: The late summer brand campaign broadcast TV ended in early October, while streaming television continues to the end of October.

For the period of 7/1/19 – 9/30/19 the brand campaign has delivered 76 million impressions and 150,164 total web user sessions have been generated by the brand campaign from 7/1/19-9/30/19 compared to 120,199 sessions from last year's paid advertising in the same time period. Paid social advertising (Facebook & Instagram) is driving the best click through rate at .52 percent. Paid social and Trip Advisor have the best engagement with 2.02 and 2.15 average pages per session respectively. The percentage of visitors who exited the site from the advertising landing page improved from 81 percent last year to 71 percent this year. Web pages per session from advertising sources improved from 1.34 last year to 1.87 pages per session this year.

In response to recent softening of demand, the agency will present a plan to BCTDA that addresses a shift in markets, adjustments to media channels and a timeline for seasonal messages from October through the winter months. Digital advertising will continue to run throughout the year along with retargeting ads. Seasonal messaging will be distributed through broadcast radio, native advertising and paid social (in rotation with the brand campaign creative).

Paid Search: In September, paid search optimizations were focused on improving relevancy of traffic as well as finding efficiencies in conversions that most indicate strong engagement with the site. This effort included expanding negative keywords to help drive relevant traffic to the desired lodging space. Further, bid adjustments were made to help improve efficiency and repetitive keywords were paused within the account to hone efforts to the more efficient terms. Finally, new creative was launched to align with the surprisingly unsurprising campaign.

The Paid Search September optimizations have helped deliver strong performance with a five percent decrease in cost per conversion compared to August, indicating stronger engagement with the site month over month. This helped drive a four percent increase in site visits, three percent increase in pages per visit, and a three percent reduction in bounce rate.

September was also a better month compared to the same time last year in terms of paid search traffic with a 14 percent decrease in CPCs and a 53 percent improvement in CTR year over year. In addition, paid search in September drove \$7,862.58 in accommodations bookings compared to \$3,744.88 last year.

	September 2018	September 2019	YoY
Total spend	\$48,857	\$46,395	-5.0%
Impressions	1,473,758	1,063,527	-27.8%
Clicks	84,546	93,256	10.3%
CTR	5.7%	8.8%	52.8%
CPCs	\$0.58	\$0.50	-13.9%

General Media Relations: The PR Team logged 52 media touchpoints, initiated 123 targeted pitches and hosted 21 media on the ground in Asheville in September. Media relations and outreach during the month were heavily focused around the inaugural Chow Chow culinary festival as the team hosted 17 VIP media and assisted with logistics for at least six other journalists. The month also included a Fall Forecast Release, early winter pitching and initial outreach for the Fall Media Tour. Supported site visits included media representing *Southern Living*, *Bon Appetit*, *Esquire*, *Eater*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Chowhound* and others. Story support included *Chicago Tribune*, *CincinnatiRefined.com*, *WRAL Out & About*, *Food & Wine* and *Connect Meetings*. Asheville imagery and assistance was also provided to *Food Network Online*, *TLC*, *American Art Collector Magazine* and *Simply Buckhead*, among others.

Fall Outreach: The Explore Asheville PR Team crafted a Fall Color Forecast Release that utilized the predictions from area biologists and fall color experts in early September. It was distributed via Mail Chimp to 604 subscribers with a 24.7 percent open rate (almost double the travel and tourism industry average). The forecast was also pitched in personalized emails to 50 media. PR Specialist Sarah Lowery sent out her initial communications to media in Birmingham and Atlanta to begin lining up appointments for the Fall Media Tour. The team's collection of press sheets was also updated during the month.

Winter Outreach: The PR Team began pitching Asheville's winter news and the superlatives that make the destination a great winter getaway in September. A new winter press sheet and pitch with destination news was sent to 23 journalists representing outlets such as *Lonely Planet*, *Smarter Travel*, *Forbes*, *MSN*, *AFAR* and *USA Today*.

Local Media Efforts: In conjunction with the BCTDA annual meeting, staff worked with leadership on a press release and media advisory in support of messaging celebrating the benefits of the tourism economy, new advertising creative, the William A.V. Cecil Award for Dick Trammel and an update on TMIP. Several local media attended the event including Mountain Xpress, WPVM, BPR, WNC Magazine and WLOS. Staff coordinated interviews and information requests during and after the event resulting in several stories covering the event in ACT, MTX and WLOS.

Significant Placements:

1. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* | "8 Places to go leaf peeping in the mountains"
2. *Boston Globe* | "Visiting Asheville? It's like Brooklyn. But cooler."
3. *Garden & Gun* | "A Very Southern Hot Dog: Foothills Butcher Bar"
4. *The Group Travel Leader* | "Enjoy Art with the Artisans"
5. *Jetsetter* | "8 Romantic Fall Weekend Trips to Take with a Significant Other"
6. *Livability* | "6 Goodbye Summer Getaways You'll Want to Say Hello to"
7. *Lonely Planet* | *The bachelor and bachelorette party destinations you've never heard of*"

8. *The New York Times* | “Summer’s not over yet! Ways to Extend your Vacation”
9. *The New York Times* | “Long Misunderstood, Appalachian Food Finds the Spotlight”
10. *The New York Times* | “Searching for Fall Colors? Let Me Get the Llama for You”
11. *Our State* | “Our Favorite Fall Mountain Views”
12. *StyleBlueprint* | “48 Hours in Asheville, North Carolina”
13. *Travel Pulse* | “Asheville’s the Place for Colorful Leaf-Peeping”
14. *Thrillist* | “The 10 Best US Cities for Bar Hopping”

Chow Chow: In addition to helping lead the Chow Chow PR efforts, the team provided significant support for VIP media before, during and after the event (providing local insight and story inspiration, hotel accommodations, flights via partner VisitNC and connections for Chow Chow events). The team worked directly with six visiting media to create customized, multi-day Asheville itineraries that included restaurants, chef interviews, guided hikes, Biltmore activities and more. Logistic support was heavy with pre-event communications, transportation, welcome gifts and staffing for the VIP check-in area. The team spread out across strategic festival events to ensure there were touchpoints and networking opportunities with each visiting journalist.

PR Results: To date, earned media for Chow Chow was 97 million in total editorial reach (out of market). Earned coverage included *New York Times* (twice, both pitched/secured by Explore Asheville), *U.S. News & World Report* via Associated Press, *Southern Living*, *Charleston Post & Courier*, *Raleigh News & Observer*, *Nashville Scene*, *Garden & Gun*, *Local Palette*, *Greenville News*, *Imbibe*, *Delta Sky* and *The State*. Estimated publicity value is \$1.3 million across 46 placements. Three influencers brands were hosted as part of the event: @NoLeftovers, @JeaniusEats and @FoodLoversDiary. Total potential impressions for VIP media social content was 2.8 million across a potential audience of 561K followers.

@VisitAsheville Social Results: Explore Asheville team supported Chow Chow as members of the official festival social media team. Instagram posts during the event earned 65k impressions and 1,910 engagements. Instagram stories during the event earned 158k impressions. Overall, Chow Chow Facebook posts (both paid and organic since 4/1/19) earned 506k impressions, 16k engagements (likes, reactions, comments, etc.) and 419 shares. In addition, Cat and Jason also served on the official Chow Chow social media team, attending select events to capture photo and video and post it to the festival’s social media channels.

Chow Chow Website Hosted on ExploreAsheville.com: From launch 4/1/19 through 9/22/19

- Total pageviews: 218,044
- Total site sessions: 95,248
- Total users: 68,912
- Pages per sessions: 2.81 (7.3% higher than site average)
- Session duration: 3:00 minutes (25.9% higher than site average)

Content Development Projects: The month of September brought preparations for the upcoming fall season, including updates to existing fall content and the beginning of weekly fall color reporting. Although formal reports did not begin until the first week of September, Jason captured some beautiful wildflower photography to showcase the early “fall color” along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The content team also made progress behind the scenes on the Web Refresh Project, laying out strategic objectives and beginning to sort through the many decisions that will need to be made before changes can be rolled out in February 2020.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of September, eight new pieces of content were added to ExploreAsheville.com: a story highlighting surprising features of Biltmore, a round-up of places to eat ice cream, a hiking trail article on Skinny Dip Falls and five new “things to do this weekend” blog posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 29,097 new pageviews, followed by Top 10 Ways to Experience Fall in Asheville, which received 6,819 pageviews.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- 2,092 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 292,991.
- There were 30 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of September.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was the share of our Best Fall Hikes story. The post reached 57,909 people organically, generating 2,494 total reactions, and 251 comments.
- The most engaging post this month was share of the fall color forecast. It engaged 9 percent of the 48,269 users reached.

Video:

- There were 13,934 new, organic YouTube views in August. The most popular video by organic views this month was the scenic fall time lapse, which received 2,011 non-paid views. The Biltmore Estate video came in second with 1,447 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 74,494 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 92,214 views of Explore Asheville video content YTD (since July 1, 2019).

Pinterest:

- *Note:* Pinterest has changed some of the stats that they display within the platform—a change that appears to be in line with the platform’s shift away from a social media model and more toward a search engine model. Our reporting moving forward will reflect this change.
- There were 194k impressions of pins linking to Explore Asheville content, up 19 percent over the previous month. There were also 10k engagements on these pins, up 10 percent over the previous month.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 64,247 followers.
- There were 7 new posts in September. The most popular was a photo carousel of Jason’s photos from Fall 2018. It received 5,415 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all our accounts we have a total of 31,048 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,490 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 125,048 active subscribers.
- **Opens/Click-throughs:**
 - In September, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 125,007 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 18.8 percent—*topping last September’s record open rate!!*—and a click-through rate of 3.7 percent.
 - We also sent out emails preparing subscribers for the upcoming fall season. Our Fall Color Report Opt-In email went out to 111,079 subscribers and saw an open rate of 14.3 percent and click-through rate of 1.8 percent.
 - A later Fall Welcome Email went out to 15,940 subscribers who had previously opted-in to receive weekly color reports. This email highlighted our fall forecast and saw an open rate of 37.6 percent and a click-through rate of 11.5 percent.

ExploreAsheville.com: Website user sessions in September increased 30.7 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was up 26.4 percent year-over-year in September. Referral traffic was down 10.1 percent year-over-year, while traffic from eNewsletter clicks was up 21 percent year-over-year in September. Social media traffic, excluding Paid Social, was up 9.6 percent compared with last year. Paid Search traffic in September improved 16.3 percent compared with last year. Traffic from advertising campaigns, including Paid Social was up 58.9 percent in September compared to last year.

Website Improvements – SEO, QA & Accessibility: In September, 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: There were 52 orders for 95 room nights in September with a total of \$17,013. in booking revenue and \$262 in commission. The top five states for room nights booked in September were Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio and Tennessee.

September 2019	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$17,014	\$16,825	1%	\$46,905	\$59,848	-22%
Commission	\$262	\$738	-64%	\$912	\$2,774	-67%
Orders	52	65	-20%	176	228	-23%
Room Nights	95	103	-8%	283	358	-21%

Visitor Guide: First drafts of the design layout for the 2020 Visitor Guide will be ready in mid-October. Visitor Guide sales for 2020 are pacing nicely and total \$310,736 to date (more than half the ads have been sold).

There were 2,856 requests of the *Official Asheville Visitor Guide* in September. Fiscal year-to-date, there have been 8,583 visitor guide requests.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE

Group sales reported 39 definite group bookings in September representing a 33 percent decrease from the prior September. Of these group bookings, 26 were meetings and conventions, 12 were weddings, and one was a motor coach. The combined total definite room nights in September were 6,768 room nights, flat as compared to last year. The estimated

revenue for leads turned definite in September was \$1,605,815, representing a 12 percent increase. Actualized revenue was \$3,221,438, a 26.9 percent increase from the prior year.

Eighty-eight sales leads (68 for meeting/conventions, 12 weddings and eight for motorcoach) representing 13,827 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in September 2019. This represents a 22.2 percent increase in number of sales leads issued and a 15.1 percent decrease in room nights represented. Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,062 contacts in September, a 7.0 percent decrease over the prior year. Indirect outreach totaled 18,659 contacts, representing a 495.9 percent increase over the prior year.

Sales Calls/Missions:

- IMEX America 2019 – Shawn and Connie, along with industry partners (Accents on Asheville, Renaissance Asheville Hotel, The Foundry and Biltmore Estate) participated in IMEX America, the premier annual trade event for corporate, association and incentive planners. Approximately 116 came by the Explore Asheville booth, with 50 having a one-on-one scheduled appointment to discuss future meetings. Five immediate RFPs representing 1,031 rooms were received. More are expected.
- Staff hosted an IMEX America client event immediately following the close of Wednesday's marketplace with 30 planners in attendance.
- Beth attended the NCMA-VMA Regional Meeting in Winston-Salem where she had 15 one-on-one appointments with tour and charter companies from NC, VA, and SC. One RFP has been sent as a direct result of her attendance.
- Two planners were hosted during the Chow Chow Culinary Festival. The mini-FAM itinerary equally balanced group events and independent touring time. Site visits were incorporated into the itinerary. This is the first of several mini-FAMS to be held focusing on North Carolina planners.
- Brenda Taylor made sales calls in Raleigh to 11 accounts, many of which have pending decisions for Asheville. Additional opportunities for future business were also uncovered.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: Seven independent site visits were hosted in September with business for all future years: 2020 Brandt Group Planning – 460 rooms, 2020 Truckload Carriers Association – 83 rooms, 2020 TMS Global Gathering – 250 rooms, General site visit with Continuing Education Company for three future conferences, 2021 International Golfing Fellowship of Rotarians – 650 rooms, 2020 Golf Course Builders Association of America, 2020 Valkyrie Rides Cruisers Club – 920 rooms.

A sample of September confirmed bookings includes:

- 2019 American Distilling Workshop – 60 rooms (FAM ATTENDEE)
- 2020 Opal Group – 270 rooms
- 2020 DRI Roundtable – 100 rooms
- 2020 American Nephrology Nurses – 30 rooms
- 2020 American Sports Builders – 69 rooms
- 2021 Southern Association of Independent Schools (two conferences) – 64 and 312 rooms respectively
- 2021 International Golfing Fellowship of Rotarians – 650 rooms
- 2020 Thermo Fisher Scientific Southeast District & CB Meetings – 150 and 20 rooms respectively
- 2020 Valkyrie Riders Cruisers Club – 920 rooms
- 2020 24th Annual Jr. Hi Neighbor Tournament – 550 rooms
- 2019 Bob Lewis Park Tournaments (2) – 50 and 60 rooms respectively
- 2020 Golf Course Builders Association of America – 320 rooms
- 2020 SAE AMS Meeting – 219 rooms

- 2020 Kinder Morgan Meeting – 165 rooms
- 2019 NC Parks & Recreation – 96 rooms
- 2020 General Federation of Women’s Clubs – 226 rooms
- 2020 NC Chapter – IPMA – 225 rooms
- 2019 Sunrise Tours – 56 rooms
- 2019 McGill & Associates – 23 rooms
- 2021 Rotary District 7690 – 312 rooms
- 2021 AFFI Food & Beverage Environmental Conference – 200 rooms
- 2020 Clinical Staff Meeting – 120 rooms
- 2019 ASU Hayes School of Music – 97 rooms
- 2019 BI Asheville – 40 rooms
- 2020 SAE International – 219 rooms

A total of 17 wedding guide requests were fulfilled in September as compared to 13 last year.

Staff Update: Interviews for the Group Sales & Services Specialist position were conducted. An offer was made and accepted. Our new team member will start October 21st.

Group Sales Communications: A new full-page ad design was approved and the advertising schedule for FY 19-20 was finalized. There were 33 views of the Elevate campaign webinar in September.

Media: Asheville was included in “Tips for Creative After-Hours” in *Small Market Meetings* magazine as a result of an interview with staff.

Mass Communications

- An email was sent to 5,338 clients in advance of the IMEX trade show. Open Rate: 14 percent; Clicks: 319
- An email was sent to 418 new contacts following up from the ASAE tradeshow. Open Rate: 22 percent; Clicks: 38
- An email was sent to 85 new contacts following up from the IMEX trade show. Open rate: 56 percent; Clicks: 20
- An email was sent to 601 potential wedding market clients gathered from a Facebook ad. Open rate: 9 percent; Clicks: 3
- An e-newsletter was sent to 12,230 meeting planner clients. Open rate: 15 percent; Clicks: 568
- A LinkedIn post on Asheville becoming an economic success story got 1,069 views and 29 likes.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Fund Efforts:

TMIP: Planning is underway for the next public event, the Tourism Management Forum, to be held on October 23 at A-B Tech Community College’s Ferguson Auditorium. The project team will present their findings from the comprehensive assessment of the benefits and impacts of tourism in Asheville and Buncombe County, with a focus on authenticity, local economy, capacity and affordability, infrastructure and capital investment, and connectivity. The Forum will include findings from the Community Sentiment Survey and Public Input Workshops that took place in August – elements of Phase 1 of TMIP.

TPDF Project Updates:

- The Wortham Center for Performing Arts will recognize the BCTDA's support by naming the outdoor plaza the "Explore Asheville Plaza". A check presentation ceremony will take place at a donor recognition event on October 15.
- Pat continues to work on a plan for visitor information kiosk-type signage at the WNC Farmers Market and a ribbon-cutting event planned in coordination with other happenings at the Farmers Market this fall.

TPDF Contract Amendments: Pat presented the following three TPDF contract amendment requests to the BCTDA at the September board meeting:

- The City of Asheville requested an extension for the ExploreAsheville.com Theater Creation & Meeting Room Conversion project due to a delay in delivery of HVAC equipment. The BCTDA approved extending the completion deadline from November 2019 to January 2020.
- LEAF Community Arts requested a change to the disbursements for the LEAF Global Arts project due to a change in order of construction priorities. The BCTDA approved changing Phase I disbursement from 56 percent to 30 percent, and Phase II from 21 percent to 47 percent.
- The Center for Craft requested a scope change for the National Craft Innovation Hub project to remove the parklet due to additional time needed for completion. All other elements of the project are complete. The BCTDA approved removing the parklet from the scope and maintaining the same level of funding support since the parklet was not a significant room night generator.

Partner Engagement and Events:

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The public affairs team hosted a CVB 101 Orientation on September 11, which included 14 representatives from Asheville Fringe Arts Festival, Asheville House Inn, Asheville Makers, Asheville Outlets, Benjamin Walls Gallery, Ignite Fun Party Co., Jonas Gerard Fine Art, Radius Chiropractic, and Rowella Creative.

New Partners: There were seven new partners in September: TRKD, Bone and Broth, Beer City Scooters, Gallery 101, WNC Photo Tours, Shaka Street Tours, and Ignite Fun Party Co. Joe and Pat continue to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing as well as service the partners who request listings.

BCTDA Annual Meeting – September 5: The 2019 BCTDA Annual Meeting was held at the Omni Grove Park Inn. Explore Asheville presented the Annual Report, a status update on the Tourism Management & Investment Plan, and 360i unveiled the new advertising campaign. The program included a preview of key elements of the FY19-20 marketing & sales plan, a short film highlighting the early history of the lodging tax and creation of the BCTDA. 350 partners and community stakeholders registered for the event. Attendees were also treated to a preview and CD of a new track by Steep Canyon Rangers and Boyz to Men, compliments of the Asheville Symphony.

Partner Forum - November 20: Planning is underway for a partner meeting featuring "Build the Perfect Listing & ExploreAsheville.com Advertising Opportunities". CVB staff will announce upcoming changes to the website events module and Meredith Sasser with DTN will present tips on improving listings as well as advertising opportunities on ExploreAsheville.com.

Explore Asheville Holiday Party - December 10: Save-the-date for the 7th annual holiday party taking place at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Projects:

African American Heritage Project: The project team is focused on preparing for a series of listening sessions and community engagement workshops including researching stakeholders to engage in the process and other related projects in the community. Additionally, members of the team plan to attend and participate in the upcoming African Americans in Western North Carolina and Appalachian conference at UNC Asheville where a panel session “Black Lens on Tourism” is being held. Pat also coordinated a follow up meeting with the project team, the Asheville Chamber, and the program director of the Civil War Trails to discuss the existing trail markers in Asheville that reference African American history.

CRM Audit & Visitor Guide: Pat and Joe continue to work on the auditing process for Explore Asheville’s customer relationship management (CRM) database. They are reviewing best practices and support options with SimpleView and have met with the marketing team to assess and prioritize recommendations. The public affairs team is also providing support in reviewing, preparing data, and proofing data for the Visitor Guide listings.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE/ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

New Position: Kathi Petersen was hired to fill the new Director of Public Information and Community Engagement position that was recently approved by the BCTDA. Her first day on the job was September 30. Glenn and Jonna worked behind-the scenes on Kathi’s onboarding process. This position will serve as the official liaison for the public and local media to receive information about tourism and the programs of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, among other responsibilities as outlined in the job description.

Grants Utilizing Earned Revenue: The application and program guidelines were posted on AshevilleCVB.com and through a media release for the 2020 funding round for Festivals & Cultural Events and Major Events. September 30 was the deadline to apply.

Archiving BCTDA Historic Documents and Materials: Will Morgan, a student at UNC-A who is completing his master’s in public history and is associated with WNC Archives, continues to archive and organize 30-years of BCTDA files in our off-site storage.

Wayfinding: The Interlocal Agreement was submitted to attorney Sabrina Rockoff for final legal vetting. Glenn and Sabrina had a phone conversation to go over the suggested edits and to clarify sections for her specific and contextual understanding. Legal edits to the Agreement were completed and submitted to Stephanie for final review.

Workforce Development: On September 25, Glenn hosted a Workforce Development Committee meeting with three presenters who requested the opportunity to address the hoteliers: 1) Paul D’Angelo, Housing Development Specialist, City of Asheville: Paul shared low-interest loan opportunities for qualified applicants for Down Payment Assistance and Homeownership. 2) Richard Caro, Director of Philanthropy, Verner Center for Early Learning and Amy Barry, Executive Director, Buncombe Partnership for Children. They are seeking to connect the lodging industry to the work they do supporting children and families and the impact that early learning has on the service/hospitality workforce. 3) Dr. Sonya DiPalma, Associate Professor & Director of the Mass Communication Internship Program, University of North Carolina – Asheville. She provided context on how her students apply their multimedia and mass communication skills for prospective internship providers

Tourism Management & Investment Plan: Stephanie provided formal TMIP updates to the Buncombe County Commissioners at their September 3 meeting, and to three Asheville City Council members on September 24. She also met with city and county staff, and Councilmembers Brian Haynes and Sheneika Smith in smaller meetings.

BCTDA Annual Meeting Awards & Pioneer Dinner: At the BCTDA's Annual Meeting at The Omni Grove Park Inn on September 5, the William A.V. Cecil Leadership award was given to Dick Trammell, a tourism pioneer who led the process to get Buncombe County's occupancy tax legislation created and passed in the early 1980s. NCRLA's executive director Lynn Minges introduced Mr. Trammell and presented the award. A video sharing the history how the BCTDA began, as remembered by other pioneers of the time, was unveiled. An award was given to outgoing BCTDA Chairman Jim Muth, and he was recognized for his six years of service on the BCTDA, including two as vice chair and two as chair. A Tourism Pioneer Appreciation Dinner took place at following the Annual Meeting to express gratitude to those who were instrumental in establishing Buncombe County's occupancy tax and the BCTDA back in 1983.