



April 2, 2020

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Stephanie Pace Brown

Subject: President's Report of February 2020 Activities

In the midst of navigating through the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, which is having a devastating effect on tourism industry, it seems somewhat insignificant to share this report of activities and metrics from February, our last "normal" month before the world as we knew it completely changed.

Through the better part of March, the Explore Asheville team has been in crisis mode working non-stop on the Asheville/Buncombe tourism industry's behalf to collaborate, inform, advocate and develop ways to best serve affected people and businesses. We will continue to do this for as long as necessary and welcome your questions and suggestions.

Regular COVID-19 updates may be found here: <https://www.ashevillecvb.com/coronavirus-update-resources/>

FEBRUARY BY THE NUMBERS

- During February, the sales team posted 907 personal contacts (down 1%). February sales activities generated 107 sales leads (up 39%) and 51 convention bookings (up 28%), representing 7,436 rooms (up 47%). Eight months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down four percent and room nights represented are up two percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 18 group events in February (down 5%), with revenue of \$522,937 (down 29%). The services team assisted 18 groups (down 5%).
- The PR team landed 21 significant placements in February (down 13%), with 39 media touchpoints (up 5%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$2,184,627 with reach of over 2.7 million. Online placements added \$61,144 in value and reach of over 196 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 406,192 visits (up 65%), including 259,266 to the mobile site (up 64%). Our Facebook fan base total is 296,946 (up 5%) and video views totaled 46,710 (up 236%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 42 room nights (down 44%) with total room revenue of \$6,844 (down 46%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 8,325 visitors (up 15%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$25,485,136 in January (up 25%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 50.6 percent during January (up 3%). The average daily room rate was \$124.08 (up 9%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$63.13 (up 12%). Room demand increased 8 percent with 128,832 rooms sold.
- AIRDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 48.6 percent (up 34.3%), ADR of \$85.43 (down 9.8%), RevPAR of \$41.50 (up 21.1%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 76.9 percent to total 103,662 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 28 percent to total 112,660 in January.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Stephanie attended an Ideas to Action (I2A) planning meeting to discuss further development of the I2A Leadership Forum.
- Stephanie met with Rev. Tommy Brown from the William Black Lodge in Montreat regarding possible public rentals.
- Stephanie met with Garrett Artz and Doug Hattaway regarding the Woodfin Greenway and Blueway project.
- Stephanie attended the Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority monthly board meeting and an additional meeting with consultants working on the terminal expansion project.
- Stephanie was interviewed by Blaine Greenfield on his talk show, Blainesworld, regarding arts and culture in Asheville.
- Stephanie attended an Advocacy and Policy Committee meeting at the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Staff hosted and facilitated a Local Love Week event with the Asheville Grown Business Alliance.
- Stephanie, Pat, Marla, Kathi and other staff members attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for the LEAF Global Arts Project. Stephanie presented a big check and spoke about the investment from the Tourism Product Development Fund.
- Stephanie and Kathi attended a Haywood and Page Community Leader Focus Group meeting.
- Stephanie attended a Symphony Government Relations meeting.
- Stephanie provided a tourism overview to tourism classes at Appalachian State University.
- Glenn hosted and attended the monthly American Craft Week planning meeting.
- Glenn attended the Black Mountain Center for the Arts board meeting.
- Stephanie attended AIR executive committee and board meetings.
- Stephanie attended Rotary Club of Asheville meetings every Thursday when she was available.
- Several CVB team members attended a tour of the new Citizen Vinyl business, which is under construction.
- Marla attended the monthly ADA board meeting and ADA Issues meeting.
- Marla met with Stefanie Gerber and Tim Schaller regarding RAD projects and marketing efforts.
- Marla met with George Ivey, development director for the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and Leesa Brandon, public affairs director for the Blue Ridge Parkway. More details about a new initiative will be forthcoming.

- Ritchie Rozzelle joined the City of Asheville's Greenway Committee and was voted on as Secretary. He is also now serving as Board Vice President of BikeWalkNC, a statewide organization promoting the growth of multi-modal transportation access, safety, and related economy.
- Dianna attended the monthly Civic Center Commission meeting.
- Daniel and Carli attended the SoCon Local Organizing Committee meetings.
- Sales staff met with Mosaix Group and conducted tours of Comfort Suites, Rendezvous, the Asheville Art Museum, and the Adventure Center of Asheville for product update purposes.
- Pat attended the "Culture Shift" panel discussion presented by AIR.
- Pat attended the Black Asheville History Project Update presented by the NC Room at Pack Library.
- Pat attended the February Chamber Membership Council meeting.
- Pat was invited to join the Center for Craft's Spring Craft Event Planning Committee and attended the kick-off meeting to discuss plans for a signature craft event in April.
- Kathi represented Explore Asheville at the inaugural Celtic Festival, which received support from the Festivals and Cultural Events fund.
- Kathi attended a lunch 'n' learn event with Homeward Bound, a nonprofit focused on solving homelessness for women.
- Kathi attended the annual Asheville Downtown Association's State of Downtown event.
- Kathi and Pat met with United Way representatives to discuss possible community service projects.
- Kathi attended an Asheville City Council work session on the hotel moratorium.
- Kathi coordinated and, with Stephanie, conducted meetings with the executive director of Blue Ridge Pride, the executive director of Mountain BizWorks, and the manager of the Outdoor Economy Conference.
- Several CVB staff members attended the February Leadership Asheville Buzz Breakfast.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising: The "Cozy Winter" campaign was wrapped on February 23. Initial data insights show the campaign impressions totaled 449,384,502 and generated 865,824 clicks at a clickthrough rate of .31 percent. Verizon digital ads and paid Facebook delivered the highest clickthrough. Throughout February, the team also worked with 360i to finalize creative components of the spring brand campaign in advance of launch (launch dates vary by tactic). In addition, further refinement was done around the supplemental campaign strategies (approved at the January board meeting) and non-stop flight support in key markets. The entire spring campaign, originally scheduled to launch in late February, consists of the following tactics:

- Broadcast television
- Broadcast radio
- Video streaming (Hulu)
- Online radio (Pandora + Spotify)
- Online display & video
- Retargeting
- Paid social (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest)
- Native/Sponsored Content
- Cinema
- Digital billboards
- Paid search
- Content partnerships (TrueX, Matador/REI)

Adjustments to paid media have since been made and will be reflected in the March recap.

Paid Search: Paid search drove 71k sessions to ExploreAsheville.com in February, an increase of 58.7 percent year-over-year. The bounce rate for February was at 41.7 percent, an improvement of 7.2 percent year-over-year. Improvements were also seen in average session duration and pages per session year-over-year, up 10.1 percent and 8.2 percent respectively.

	February 2019	February 2020	YoY
Total spend	\$29,803	\$36,779	23%
Impressions	717,207	1,121,956	56%
Clicks	42,356	68,240	61%
CTR	5.9%	6.1%	3.0%
CPCs	\$0.70	\$0.54	-23%

General Media Relations: The PR Team logged 39 media touchpoints, initiated 36 targeted pitches and hosted three media on the ground in Asheville in February. Supported site visits included media representing *Chatter Magazine*, *Style at Home (Canada)* and *JustLuxe*. Story support included *Saturday Evening Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Courier* and *The Group Travel Leader*. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Canadian Geographic*, *Our State* and *Food Network*, among others.

Spring Press Release: The PR Team crafted a Spring Press Release in February focusing on new or iconic tours in Asheville. It was distributed via PR Newswire and picked up 175 times, with a potential audience of 84 million. It was also sent out via Mailchimp to 701 subscribers and media friends of Explore Asheville. Work was then performed using TrendKite to pinpoint outlets and writers who have previously covered “top destinations” for spring travel, with this targeted outreach totaling about 30 pitches.

M&C / Group PR Efforts: In February, Sarah Lowery and Carli Adams provided insight for a *Courier Magazine* city spotlight on Asheville. They also had a phone interview with a writer for *The Group Travel Leader* who is working on an upcoming special section on the Carolinas featuring destinations that are group friendly.

Significant Placements:

1. *Birmingham Magazine* | *How to spend a romantic weekend in Asheville*
2. *Business Insider* | *The top 20 most popular travel destinations on Instagram*
3. *Canadian Geographic Travel* | *Beers, biking and bluegrass*
4. *Forbes* | *7 Affordable Valentine’s Day Getaways*
5. *Hemispheres Magazine* | *The Foundry Hotel Honors Asheville’s Black History*
6. *INSIDER* | *10 of the most underrated romantic destinations in the U.S.*
7. *Lonely Planet* | *How to road trip the Southeastern US on a budget*
8. *Matador Network* | *The Ultimate LGBTQ guide to Asheville*
9. *Parade* | *25 of the Best Inexpensive Family Vacation Ideas Your Whole Crew Will Enjoy*
10. *This is My South* | *Romantic Destinations in the South*
11. *YourTango.com* | *4 Best U.S. Vacation Destinations for Couples to Explore in 2020*

Content Development Projects: The month of February saw the completion of our Winter Cozy content and the interactive Cozy Quiz version of the hand-illustrated Cozy Winter Checklist. Key performance metrics met goals.

- Exceed pageviews to winter content (winter page + winter content) year-over-year
 - 26,278 organic pageviews (goal: 26,000), Jan. 1-Feb. 27
 - 12,056 pageviews from unpaid social (goal: 10,000), Jan. 1-Feb. 27
- Increase social engagement
 - Facebook (paid and organic): 8,264 engagements, 101,771 reach
 - Instagram (organic): 895 likes, 16 comments
 - Pinterest (organic): 2,744 impressions
- Grow social following on Instagram
 - IG followers increased 5.3 percent during campaign (69,000 to 72,678)

Also, in February, the Content Team worked in conjunction with the Communications Team to complement a press release promoting the many unique tour experiences available to Asheville visitors. The “New and Iconic Tours to Experience This Spring in Asheville” story on ExploreAsheville.com pulls together over 30 tour partners offering unique ways to view Asheville and Buncombe County.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of February, eight pieces of content were added to ExploreAsheville.com. New stories included “See Mel Chin's Larger-Than-Life Animatronic Sculpture in Asheville,” “2020 Connect Beyond Festival: Artists, Lineups, Tickets and Details,” and a spring PR piece “New and Iconic Tours to Experience This Spring in Asheville.” Four new “things to do this weekend” blog posts were also written.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was “50 Things to Do in Asheville”, which received 25,189 pageviews, followed by “5 Great Winter Hikes Near Asheville”, which received 12,071 new pageviews which both served as landing pages for paid social efforts.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- February saw 966 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 296,946.
- There were 23 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of February.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a post on Black Mountain’s inclusion on an O (Oprah) Magazine Top 10 Travel List. The post reached 39,078 people organically, generating 706 total reactions, and 63 comments.
- The most engaging post of the month was also the Black Mountain story; it engaged seven percent of users reached.
- The most popular paid post was a post linking to the ExploreAsheville.com Cozy Checklist Quiz. The post reached 11,863 people and engaged three percent of users reached.

Video:

- There were 11,639 new, organic YouTube views in February. The most popular video by organic views this month “Experience Black Mountain, NC: “America’s Prettiest Small Town,” which received 3,859 non-paid views. The new video “Asheville, NC, Return Again” came in second with 665 views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 46,710 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 432,679 views of Explore Asheville video content YTD (since July 1, 2019).

Pinterest:

- There were 172,920 organic impressions of pins linking to Explore Asheville content, up 7.9 percent over the previous month. There were also 9,270 engagements on these pins, up 7.6 percent over the previous month.
- 360i continued to boost a collection of nearly a dozen new Pinterest pins related to winter.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 72,829 followers.
- There were eight new posts in February. The most popular photo post was a drone photo of downtown Asheville. It received 2,094 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all our accounts we have a total of 16,910 followers. *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 8,354 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 127,759 active subscribers.
- **Opens/Click-throughs:**
 - In February, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 124,139 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 16 percent and a click-through rate of 2.3 percent.

ExploreAsheville.com: Website user sessions in February increased 65 percent compared to last year. Organic traffic was up 13 percent year-over-year in February. Paid search traffic was up 57 percent compared with last year. Referral traffic was even year-over-year, while traffic from eNewsletter clicks was down 26 percent year-over-year in February. Social media traffic, excluding paid social, was up 33 percent compared with last year. Traffic from advertising campaigns, including paid social was up 1387 percent in February compared to last year. Sessions to the booking engine increased four percent year-over-year in February and booking engine searches increased 7 percent.

Website Improvements – SEO, QA & Accessibility: In February, Explore Asheville content and web teams worked with a product called SiteImprove to assist with search engine optimization, quality assurance and accessibility efforts. Atlas Branding in Asheville is working with the team on a design refresh to modernize the site. The design and other structural improvements, including new navigation and a new events module will be fully implemented in May.

Online Reservations: There were 33 orders for 42 room nights in February with a total of \$6,844.36 in booking revenue and \$178.17 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in February were Kentucky, North Carolina, Michigan, Tennessee and Pennsylvania.

February 2020	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$6,844	\$12,691	-46%	\$100,950	\$113,397	-11%
Commission	\$178	\$565	-68%	\$2,290	\$5,261	-56%
Orders	33	39	-15%	431	438	-2%
Room Nights	42	75	-44%	639	703	-9%

Visitor Guide: There were 3,073 requests of the *Official Asheville Visitor Guide* in February. Fiscal year-to-date, there have been 21,576 visitor guide requests.

GROUP SALES & SERVICES

Group sales reported 51 definite group bookings in February, up 24 percent from the prior year (33 meetings/conventions, eight weddings, 10 group tours). The combined total of definite room nights was 7,436, up 37 percent from the previous year. One hundred seven leads (72 for meeting/conventions, 14 for weddings, and 21 for motor coach), representing 24,538 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in February. Leads distributed were up 34 percent and rooms represented were up 12 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,778,044 (up 85%). Actualized revenue was \$522,937 (down 28%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 907 contacts, down one percent. Indirect outreach totaled 5,062, up 39 percent.

Beth McKinney returned to work after being out on maternity leave. Shawn Boone turned in his resignation to accept a position outside of the CVB.

Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:

- Connie Holliday made five sales calls in South Carolina in conjunction with attending the SC Society of Association Executives social in Columbia, SC.
- Shawn Boone exhibited at Destinations International's Destination Showcase in Washington, DC. More than 1,000 planners and suppliers attended. Thirty-five planners stopped by Explore Asheville's booth expressing interest in Asheville as a meeting destination.
- Shawn attended DI's Spirit of Hospitality Foundation event, which is the signature event of the Destinations International Foundation, to raise funds for education, advocacy, research and leadership development. A total of five sales calls were made on the same trip with two immediate RFP's were received totaling 208 rooms.
- Shawn hosted 30 attendees from the USDA Forest Service for a welcome reception during their Asheville based meeting.

Mini-FAM: In the continuing efforts to bring planners in to experience Asheville, Kathryn Dewey hosted a mini-FAM, a concentrated two-day event showcasing the Asheville area. The group enjoyed host accommodations at The Omni Grove Park Inn and visited/enjoyed downtown Asheville's restaurants and shops. Site visits were held at four meeting properties. Three corporate and association planners from North Carolina were in attendance.

Global Pharmaceutical & Medical Summit 2020: Tina Porter exhibited at Global Pharmaceutical & Medical Summit in Boston along with industry partners AC Hotel and The Foundry. In attendance were approximately 200 senior meeting planners. Explore Asheville was also a network break host and as such received a 25-word company overview in the event brochure, logo displayed on the event brochure cover, reciprocal website links, pre-conference email content, post-convention attendee contact list as well as other items.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: The team hosted four site visits in February, including 2020 NC Community Health Care Association – 100 rooms, 2020 HeXpo Conference – 500 rooms, 2021 Herff Jones International Sales Conference – 1949, M. Lamb (independent planner) – general site visit.

February bookings include, but are not limited to:

- 2021 Generis Associates Meeting – 226 rooms
- 2020 Encore Regional Dance Competition – 100 rooms
- 2020 Adams and Reese Partners Meeting – 419 rooms
- 2022 English Setter Association of American – 456 rooms
- 2022 NC Nurse Practitioner Spring Symposium – 795 rooms
- 2022 Southeast Housing Officers Meeting – 1,100 rooms
- 2022 Southern Criminal Justice Association – 445 rooms
- 2020 xc USA Series – 69 rooms
- 2020 Penn State Presidential Leadership Academy – 62 rooms
- 2020 Eagle Rock Tour Series – 156 rooms (two dates)
- 2020 Emporia State Chi Omega Sorority Reunion – 54 rooms
- 2020 WPO Group Annual Reunion – 100 rooms
- 2020 Daniel's Discovery Tours – 87 rooms
- 2020 East Union Baptist Church – 40 rooms
- 2021 Rotary International District 7670 – 70 rooms
- 2020 United Way Planning Meeting – 355 rooms
- 2020 American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases – 58 rooms
- 2020 NC/SC Philosophical Societies – 70 rooms
- 2020 Strong Bonds AC-FY20 Program – 44 rooms
- 2020 River Ruckus CrossFit – 120 rooms
- 2020 CNN Annual Offsite – 110 rooms
- 2020 Bob Lewis Park - Turf Way Games 1,2,3 – 420 rooms
- 2020 MWG Study Group – 33 rooms
- 2020 Independent Insurance Agents of NC – 183 rooms
- 2020 Tennessee Credit Union League – 111 rooms
- 2020 Blue Ridge Classis of the Carolinas Show – 135 rooms
- 2020 WNCY Hula invitational – 120 rooms
- 2020 NCSU Extension & Knowledge Exchange – 200 rooms
- 2020 Bike Rumor – 54 rooms

Group Sales Communications: Work on the meetings brand refresh included finalizing the positioning statement with Miles Partnership and reviewing two design concepts.

Media

- Staff were interviewed for story for *The Group Travel Leader's* special section on the Carolinas looking at great destinations that are group friendly.
- Staff provided information for a writer working on a spotlight story on Asheville for March edition of *Courier*, a National Tour Association publication.

Mass Communications

- An invitation to the Explore Asheville familiarization trip for the Group Tour market, *Absolutely Asheville*, was sent to 1750 Group Tour Operators. Open rate: 30% Clicks: 174
- An email was sent to 2126 D.C. area clients in advance of the Destinations Showcase tradeshow. Open rate: 16% Clicks: 108

- An email was sent to 332 attendees of Wedding Festivals offering hotel booking service for wedding guests. Open rate: 2% Clicks: 0
- An email was sent to 347 people who registered for a *Meetings Today* educational webinar sponsored by Explore Asheville offering the opportunity to view our Asheville webinar. Open rate: 16% Clicks: 26
- An email was sent to 151 people who registered for a *Smart Meetings* educational webinar sponsored by Explore Asheville offering the opportunity to view our Asheville webinar. Open rate: 24% Clicks: 1

Social Media Channels

- A LinkedIn post of SC Society of Association Executives trade show received 2,246 views of which 98 were executive directors, event planners or third-party buyers.
- A LinkedIn content repost of an article on travel habits – 425 views
- A LinkedIn post of James Beard semi-finalists for Asheville – 234 views

Convention Service Highlights: Explore Asheville attended a planning meeting with Visit NC staff for the upcoming 365 Conference. Six microsites were prepared for inbound sports groups.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts:

LEAF hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony and opening celebration on February 14, and Stephanie presented a check in recognition of the TPDF award.

PGAV is in phase three of the Tourism Management & Investment Plan (TMIP). The team continues to collect additional project details to inform a common set of priorities.

Pat continues to follow up with grantees to submit their Annual TPDF Project Reports that were due in January.

The WNC Farmers Market's visitor information signage and rack for Visitor Guide distribution were installed; the narrative panel is in development.

Partner Engagement and Events:

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: Orientation was not held at the Explore Asheville offices in February.

New Partners: There were six new partners in February: Asheville Trails and Taps, Bargello, District 42, Mountain Home Thrift Store, Sarah Sunshine Pottery, and Your Perfect Ceremony by Reverend Jacqui.

Events Calendar: Charlie approved 392 events for the month of February. Joe continued to reach out to Music Venue partners regularly to ensure they are submitting their events to the Live Music Calendar.

February 12 – Love Local Business Resource Fair: In collaboration with the Asheville Grown Business Alliance and in support of Go Local Week, Explore Asheville hosted a business resource fair. Several community organizations that provide business support resources including the Asheville Downtown Association (ADA), Asheville Grown Business Alliance, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association (AIR), City of Asheville Business Inclusion Office

& Community Events, Explore Asheville, Just Economics, ASAP, and Mountain Bizworks tabled and presented short introductory presentations to approximately 80 attendees.

February 27 – Community Update: Wayfinding Signage in RAD: MERJE presented refined signage system designs that were developed as a result of the community feedback provided at sessions in January and August 2019 at a public meeting in February in the Boardroom. 19 partners from the River Arts District as well as City of Asheville staff were in attendance.

February 28 – Extranet One-on-One Training in Black Mountain: In coordination with the Black Mountain Chamber of Commerce, Pat and Joe hosted one-on-one Explore Asheville orientation trainings at the Visitor Center in Black Mountain in an effort to onboard and support more tourism industry partners in the area. Additionally, Terri Wells who has been contracted to assist in new partner outreach supported the effort in recruiting attendees. 17 appointments were scheduled, resulting in the onboarding of 12 new partners.

March 18 – Hospitality Outlook: Planning is underway for the annual Hospitality Outlook luncheon to be at the Holiday Inn – Biltmore West. Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group will present an economic outlook and Explore Asheville President & CEO Stephanie Brown will report on destination and lodging performance with a look ahead for the coming year.

Planning is underway for the following upcoming events:

March 25 – Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association Summit (assisting ABBA with agenda)

March 26 – “What’s New in 2020?” Partner Forum

April 30 & May 1 – Creative Sector Summit (assisting Asheville Area Arts Council with agenda)

May 5 – National Tourism Week Summit

Projects:

African American Heritage Project: Pat has focused on building & expanding relationships with community members and organizations to increase awareness of the project and build a supportive network interested in collaboration. As part of the Community Engagement phase, the project team conducted four in-person Listening Session Workshops on January 9, 10, and 11. Sessions were attended by approximately 80 community members and took place at the Friendship Center in Shiloh, at the Stephens-Lee Recreation Center and in the Explore Asheville boardroom. A final report summarizing feedback, themes, and a recommended plan for next phases will be available in coming weeks.

CRM Audit: The public affairs team continues to work on the auditing process for Explore Asheville’s customer relationship management (CRM) database and is coordinating efforts with Marketing team goals for ExploreAsheville.com following a website usability study.

Arts Portal: Plans are underway for dissolving the arts portal, AshevilleArtsAlive.com, a website featuring arts-only related content from ExploreAsheville.com that was created in partnership with and in support of the Asheville Area Arts Council. The website helped increase partner engagement with area artists and arts organizations. Given the change in the arts council’s strategic organizational priorities and the low usage rates, the arts portal website will go dark in March and individuals listed on the arts portal will be invited to request a listing on ExploreAsheville.com if they meet the listing criteria. Plans also include providing a feed of arts-only related events to the arts council for display on their website.

Wayfinding Signage for RAD: Pat continues to work with MERJE to refine the plans for the 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.

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PUBLIC INFORMATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Local Media / Public Information: Kathi responded to several media needs and requests this month, including two FOIA requests; one required researching 20 years of BCTDA annual reports for which Jonna, Glenn and Pat provided significant assistance. She pitched and achieved a half-hour radio interview for Stephanie on community station WPVM. With Marla, Kathi met with representatives from WLOS-TV to discuss marketing and advertising opportunities. She continued updating the packet of information that she originally developed for candidates and created a BCTDA fact booklet she has been distributing to groups and individuals across the county. Kathi also provided support for publicity and developed talking points related to the opening of TPDF recipient LEAF Global Arts Center. In addition, she continued work on strengthening content on the CVB website as a tool for better communicating to the public, took over writing and editing duties for the partner newsletter, and is managing the partner Facebook page.

Coronavirus: Kathi responded to media requests regarding COVID-19 and with other team members produced the first edition of an e-alert for partners providing coronavirus information and resources.

Community Engagement: Kathi continued coordinating personal meetings with various community stakeholders and influencers, as well as local media and tourism partners. She attended two forums for city council candidates: one sponsored by Mountain Xpress and the other by the Council of Independent Business Owners. Others that she planned to attend featuring county commission candidates were postponed due to inclement weather.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Staff/Administrative Updates:

Human Resources: On February 7, Glenn met with NaTosha Crooks with Insurance Service of Asheville (ISA) to discuss ISA's benefits platform called Employee Navigator. On February 14, the position of Sales Manager for Chicago, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. was posted on AshevilleCVB.com and Indeed. On February 21, the first phone interview was held.

Personnel: On February 4, Daniel Bradley was enrolled into the BCTDA 401K Plan effective March 1, following one year of employment with Explore Asheville. On February 5, Beth McKinney returned to work after a 90-day maternity leave. Shawn Boone was terminated from Explore Asheville effective February 14.

Event Grants: The inaugural Asheville Celtic Festival, sponsored by the BCTDA with \$1,000, was held at the WNC Ag Center on February 15. The ticketed festival was attended by over 3,000 attendees. The media and event organizers all deemed it a great success. On February 23, with a \$1,000 sponsorship from the BCTDA, Asheville Mardi Gras took their parade all through the South Slope. The front of the parade had a large banner with the BCTDA logo prominently displayed.

Attraction Partners Collaborative (APC) Convening: On February 3, the APC convened to discuss how they can better market their industry sector and their individual attractions. The prevailing agreement was to educate each other on what they each do. This would offer new partnership opportunities.

Building: Policies and Procedures were developed around Team Member safety in relation to the workspace.

Wayfinding: Glenn and Pat had a conference call with Geograph Industries and a rep from SignAgent to discuss the implementation of a sign management system. With the Wayfinding System now incorporating over 400 signs, this platform will help manage the maintenance history of signs and the cost to maintain the System in one package with sign details, photographs and maps.

Destination Marketing Accreditation Program: Staff continued working on the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program reaccreditation application, from Destinations International. The deadline to file the application is March 31, 2020. This will be the third time CVB staff will submit a full application, required to be completed every four years, meeting 92 rigorous required standards. Jonna Sampson is leading the reaccreditation process for the team.

Tourism Management & Investment Plan: The Explore Asheville team continued working with PGAV and Chris Cavanaugh to further advance the TMIP process in February. A steering committee meeting took place on February 17, and staff met with Chris Cavanaugh on February 26. PGAV will be in Asheville on March 12 and will participate in meetings with staff and the steering committee.

BCTDA FY 21 Budget: The Explore Asheville team continued to work earnestly on the FY 21 BCTDA budget in February, which will be presented to the board in April; a month earlier than normal. A finance committee meeting took place and departmental staff worked on establishing overarching program of work plans. High-level marketing, advertising and sales strategies were presented to the board at the February 26 BCTDA meeting. A revenue objective of 1 percent on which to establish the FY 21 budget was approved, which will total \$19,900,000.

Ideas to Action (I2A) Leadership Forum: In February, Stephanie continued participating in planning group meetings to help develop the I2A Leadership Forum, a new initiative for Asheville and Buncombe County to engage in constructive dialogue across lines of difference. The goal is to enable meaningful engagement among a distinguished, diverse, multi-perspective group of local leaders who will learn about key issues and engage in frank and productive conversation. Ultimately, the forum will lead to new solutions and an action agenda on critical community issues. Invitations were sent to a carefully selected group of individuals in February and five meetings will take place in 2020.