



February 28, 2018

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

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Significant demand growth was reported by Smith Travel Research in December and January, as we looked forward to a first quarter of exciting sports events including Fed Cup and SoCon followed by Haute Route this spring.

The Finance Committee met to begin the budget planning process and departmental retreats are being held in February. I had the pleasure of presenting tourism talking points for Leadership Asheville and we will host the Hospitality Outlook next week.

### **MONTH AT A GLANCE**

- The winter advertising campaign launched on January 10 and concludes at the end of February. Focus groups were held in Alexandria, Cincinnati and Atlanta to gain insights about effective advertising strategies and creative approaches.
- The PR team participated in TravMedia's International Media Marketplace. They traveled to New York for deskside appointments, and conducted a three-day media tour to Chattanooga, Knoxville and the Tri-Cities area.
- The American Bus Association Marketplace was in Charlotte. The Sales team executed a pre-FAM, a Happy Hour client event, a trade show exhibit and conducted 87 appointments.
- The Sales team made sales calls in Richmond and Atlanta and participated in the Event Service Professionals Association Annual Meeting and PCMA.
- Staff led industry partners on a AAA sales mission in Charleston, Columbia and Greenville, meeting with 40 agents.
- CVB team members supported the Gala Gymnastics, Fed Cup and SoCon.
- A Partner Forum, "Major Events in 2018," attracted 100 partners.

### **JANUARY METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS**

- During January, the sales team posted 1,161 personal contacts (up 17%). January sales activities generated 72 sales leads (flat) and 39 convention bookings (up 26%), representing 6,610 rooms (up 10%). Seven months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 10 percent and room nights represented are up 7 percent.
- CVB leads generated 6 group events in January (down 33%), with revenue of \$191,104 (down 64%). The services team assisted 5 groups (down 64%).

- The PR team landed 55 significant placements in January (down 63%), with 106 media touchpoints (up 80%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$839,032 with reach of over 30.4 million. Online placements added \$415,187 in value and reach of over 485 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 261,879 visits (down 5%), including 158,569 to the mobile site (down 3%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 1,672 (down 80%) and video views totaled 106,624 (down 94%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 67 room nights (down 46%) with total room revenue of \$9,025 (down 44%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 5,927 visitors (down 16%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

### **HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$33,513,988 in December, an increase of 13.2 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 71.3 percent during December (up 2.1%). The average daily room rate was \$168.79 (up 4.2%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$120 (up 6.4%). Room demand increased 9.5 percent with 170,033 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 18.9 percent to total 78,726 in December.

### **MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Advertising:** The winter campaign launched on January 10<sup>th</sup> and will wrap up at the end of February. While the winter campaign was in full swing, staff started development of the spring campaign. The concept, “The Magic of Spring,” was finalized and is consistent with last year’s “magic” messaging for a sense of continuity. The broadcast buys have been secured and staff is working on last steps to finalize other components of the media plan. Digital creative is currently in development with an emphasis on dynamic retargeting based on consumer behavior and interests. Materials for integrated partnerships with Travel Channel and The Local Palate/Southern Weekend were also finalized and will launch in the next few months. Focus groups were completed and all findings are being compiled for reporting in February. Additionally, staff traveled to New Orleans to meet with the Peter Mayer team and began discussions on planning for the next fiscal year.

**Paid search efforts:** The combined Google and Bing search campaign generated more than 800 requests for the Asheville Visitor Guide, a bump up from the last six months. Sessions resulting from paid search continue to be up double digits year-over-year resulting in just under 54,000 site visits. Of note, more than two thirds of those sessions are via mobile or tablet devices. Bounce rate remains about the same as last year at around 47 percent.

**Winter Marketing Effort:** The agency teams and ExploreAsheville continued executing the winter campaign including further development of the Cozy Asheville theme. Final touches were made both to the landing page, and the winter seasonal page. A paid search campaign was set up by Simpleview to support the digital display and retargeting buys placed by Peter Mayer.

Following approvals on the winter video and cinemagraph created by the Peter Mayer team, staff began repurposing the video for social media efforts and Facebook advertising. The content team also created new winter content to be used in native advertising, social media efforts, and on ExploreAsheville.com. This included development of a new story titled “7 Cozy Reasons Asheville is a Picture-Perfect Winter Destination,” which rounded up the best attributes of winter travel to the destination. The content is being extended through the creation of social media video content that will feature the list’s attributes in a countdown-style format. The same content will also be repurposed into shorter, “snackable” social media videos highlighting the winter cool-factor of local partners. These and other new assets—including winter sunsets and photos from the Asheville Fringe Festival—will be used to promote the winter season in 2019. Additionally, the PR team developed 28 customized pitches around the “cozy” theme. *Travel Pulse* picked up the pitch and ran “A Winter Weekend Getaway in Asheville, NC” to their over 700,000 unique monthly visitors.

**General Media Relations:** January was an extremely productive month for the PR team with TravMedia’s International Media Marketplace, deskside appointments in NY, a Winter Media Tour, and customized pitching utilizing both the What You Can’t Miss in 2018 press release and PR platform TrendKite. Media site visits included writers representing *Budget Travel*, *Whisky Advocate*, *Our State*, and *Leisure Group Travel*. Additional touchpoints of note included *Forbes Travel Guide*, *National Geographic*, *AP*, *USA Today*, *Travel Pulse*, and media working on Asheville coverage for television stations in Lexington, KY and Washington D.C. The team also crafted customized pitches based on the recently distributed “What You Can’t Miss in Asheville in 2018” press release. Themes of interest to media included the food and beverage scene, art scene, cozy winter news, and foodie hotels.

In total this month, the team logged 106 touchpoints, initiated 136 targeted pitches (including 64 derived from the release), and hosted three media on the ground in Asheville. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Best Health Magazine*, *MSN*, *Southbound Magazine*, *Carolina Parent*, and *Birmingham Magazine*, among others.

The team also finalized documents that standardize responses to media wishing to visit. These new documents help team members place media into tiers (significant opportunity, major opportunity, mid-level opportunity, etc.) to determine the level of support Explore Asheville can provide and how that information will be shared with media.

### **Media Tours**

Dodie Stephens conducted a New York City media tour where she held deskside visits and appointments with outlets including *USA Today*, *Food & Wine*, and freelancers from *New York Post*, *Fodor’s*, and *Travel & Leisure*. Dodie also represented Asheville at TravMedia’s International Media Marketplace (IMM) where she secured 24 appointments and networked with the 300 journalists in attendance, including contacts representing *BBC Travel*, *NBC*, *TripSavvy* (the new About.com), *National Geographic Traveler*, *Departures*, and Samantha Brown’s new show *Places to Love*.

The week before, Sarah Lowery executed on a three-day Winter Media Tour in mid-January to the drive markets of Chattanooga, Knoxville, and the Tri-Cities area, where she promoted Asheville as an ideal winter destination and shared what is new. She secured television appointments in all three markets and was able to meet with freelance writers and editors representing *Chatter Magazine*, the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, *Chattanooga Magazine*, *The Local Palate*, *Blue Ridge Country*, *West Knoxville Lifestyle*, *VIPSeen Magazine* and more.

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

Landis and Carli worked on an information request for Terri Hardin and Northstar Custom Media, gathering the current trends and news that would be of interest to meeting and event planners. Landis also worked with Beth on the *Leisure Group Travel* site visit. Landis secured accommodations, put together a custom itinerary and made local connections for both the publication's associate publisher and business development manager.

## **Significant Placements**

1. *Forbes Travel Guide* – “18 Top Destinations of 2018”
2. *National Geographic* – “Best Cities in the U.S.”
3. *The New Daily* – “Is this the US's Best-Kept Secret?”
4. *Travel Pulse* – “A Winter Weekend Getaway in Asheville, North Carolina”
5. *Travel + Leisure* – “Have an Outdoor Design Adventure in the Blue Ridge Mountains”
6. *USA Today* – “America's Annual Beer Festivals”
7. *Zagat* – “15 Badass Female Chefs and Restaurateurs You Need to Know Around the U.S.”

**Content Development Projects:** The content team continued to focus on the winter season and campaign in the month of January, as noted above, while also preparing for upcoming seasons and events.

Fed Cup: In preparation for Asheville hosting the first round of the 2018 Fed Cup, Jason captured fresh winter b-roll footage to provide to the Tennis Channel—and later this year to ESPN for coverage of the Southern Conference Basketball Tournament. The team also promoted Fed Cup announcements and ticket sales across social channels leading up to the event.

Summer of Glass: The Content team is providing support to the Summer of Glass artists and organizers through hosting the event's microsite and through other marketing channels. These efforts kicked off in January with the soft launch of the Summer of Glass microsite and will continue with building out our partner and event listings and additional editorial content.

## ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of January, eight new pieces of editorial content were added to the website: a round-up of “7 Cozy Reasons Asheville is a Picture-Perfect Winter Destination,” stories highlighting Asheville Restaurant Week and 2018 sporting events, and five “Things to Do This Weekend” posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 28,895 new page views, followed by What You Can't Miss in Asheville in 2018, which received 9,529 page views.

## **Social Media Stats:**

Facebook:

*Visit Asheville* page

- January saw 1,672 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 268,679.
- There were 31 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of January.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a photo by Jared Kay of the Super Blue Blood Moon. It has reached 40,219 people organically, generating 2,972 total

reactions, and 143 comments. It was also the most engaging post this month, engaging 7.4 percent of users reached.

- The most popular paid post this month was a share of the link to our story: “7 Cozy Reasons to Visit Asheville, N.C. this Winter.” It reached 70,419 users in total (30,065 of those organically), generating 2,396 total reactions, 97 comments and 222 shares.

#### *Foodtopia page*

- January saw 31 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,375 likes.
- There were 7 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of January.
- The most popular post — a share of the link to the Citizen Times story about great places to eat in January — reached 1,860 people, generating 49 reactions.

#### Video:

- There were 9,889 new, organic YouTube views in January. The most popular video by organic views this month was the Spirit of Asheville, which received 1,835 non-paid views. The Fall Foliage Time Lapse came in second with 1,408 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 106,624 views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 1,644,968 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2017).

#### Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,704. Foodtopia accounts for 1,384 of those; Explore Asheville – 3,320.

#### Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 43,477 followers.
- There were 16 new posts in January. The most popular was a picture of the Blue Blood Moon over the mountains. It received 3,116 engagements (likes and comments).

#### Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 30,076 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,921 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 119,512 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In January, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,902 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 18.2 percent and a click-through rate of 3.1 percent.

**ExploreAsheville.com:** In January, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com decreased 4.6 percent year-over-year, which includes a 3.4 percent increase in organic user sessions and a 40.2 percent increase in paid search user sessions. Mobile and tablet visits in January decreased by 6.3 percent year-over-year. Referral traffic from the monthly Asheville Traveler email newsletter increased by 52.1 percent year-over-year in January. Direct traffic to the site was flat as compared with last January. 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 monthly numbers through January as well as the YTD numbers for the remainder of the year.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO: In January, Simpleview continued its conversion rate optimization efforts on ExploreAsheville.com. The split test on the Home Page had a clear winner in the month of January. The variation which moved the booking widget above the fold on mobile had more engagement and booking searches, and therefore the variation has been implemented on the site. The Story/Blog split test also had a clear winner for link style as measured by engagement and was also implemented. Results of ongoing tests on the Things to Do page will be reviewed in February. The organic engagement continues to outperform the industry averages and was up 3 percent year-over-year in January.

- The Restaurant Week page performed well this year, with 7,186 organic sessions a bounce rate of 25 percent, 2.15 pages per session and an average session duration of 00:02:49.
- The 50 Things to Do in Asheville blog post was the second highest landing page for organic traffic with 16,976 visits, 2.83 pages per session and an average session duration of 0:03:35, up 146 percent year-over-year.
- The top event detail page was 23rd Bluegrass First Class Festival with 709 organic visits.
- The top listing detail page was SkyBAR with 1,222 organic visits.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 23 percent more total pages per visit, 34 percent longer visit duration, 29 percent more organic pages per visit, and 42 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to industry average in the month of January.

**Online Reservations:** There were 40 orders for 67 room nights in January with a total of \$9,024.75 in booking revenue and \$423.63 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in January were North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Iowa.

| January 2018       | Current Month | This Month Last Year | Variance Monthly | YTD Actual | YTD Last Year | Variance YTD |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Booking Rev</b> | \$9,024.75    | \$16,225.17          | -44.38%          | \$90,263   | \$71,482      | 26.27%       |
| <b>Commission</b>  | \$423.63      | \$739.59             | -42.72%          | \$4,095.56 | \$3,195.39    | 28.17%       |
| <b>Orders</b>      | 40            | 128                  | -68.75%          | 347        | 321           | 8.10%        |
| <b>Room Nights</b> | 67            | 125                  | -46.40%          | 544        | 454           | 19.82%       |

**Visitor Guide:** The 2018 Visitor Guides, both in-market and out-of-market, debuted in mid-January. In partnership with Hipps Pockets, a local distribution vendor, in-market guides have been delivered to local partners. Hipps will do ongoing deliveries monthly to partners who have requested to receive the guides regularly. As this is a new endeavor, Explore Asheville is working with its publisher, SagaCity Media, on troubleshooting any distribution issues. Explore Asheville staff conducted a post-mortem on the publishing process and a kick off planning meeting with SagaCity media is slated for early February.

Visitor Guide Requests

There were 2,288 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in January, a 0.8 percent decrease from last January. Year-to-date, there are 15,487 travel guide requests, a 13.8 percent increase from last year.

## **GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE**

Group sales reported 39 definite group bookings in January, up 25.8 percent from the prior year (34 meetings/conventions, four weddings, one group tour). The combined total definite room nights were 6,610 room nights, up 10.1 percent from the previous year. Seventy-two leads (51 for meeting/conventions, 16 weddings, and five for motorcoach) representing 14,664 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in January. Leads distributed were flat and rooms represented were down 8.6 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,303,171 (down 25.8%). Actualized revenue this month was \$191,104 (down 63.9%). Revenue last year was uncharacteristically high (up 231% from 2016 for example). There were two large corporate groups, accounting for \$420,682, and a soccer tournament, with \$36,860 in revenue, both of which did not occur again this year. Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,161 contacts, up 17 percent. Indirect outreach totaled 3,444, down 29.4 percent.

Molly Nelson officially left employment with Explore Asheville. Ms. Brenda Taylor was contracted to fill in until a replacement can be found.

### **Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:**

#### **American Bus Association**

Explore Asheville played a significant role in the recent American Bus Association's Annual Meeting & Marketplace, one of the premier industry events for group travel, held in Charlotte, NC. More than 3,500 tourism industry professionals attended the trade show, enjoying networking opportunities through scheduled, face-to-face business appointments, evening events, dine-arounds, sightseeing tours, tradeshow exhibits and more. Specifically:

- **Pre-FAM:** Explore Asheville worked with Visit NC to organize a pre-familiarization tour with 13 coach companies in attendance. Titled "Mountain Views and Brews" the one night/day Asheville portion included stops at Biltmore, RAD, downtown Asheville, Buxton Hall Barbecue, and the Asheville Outlets. A mini-tradeshow featuring 12 Asheville industry partners was also held to allow industry partners not on the FAM itinerary to connect with operators.
- **ABA Event:** Explore Asheville sponsored a reception room at Charlotte's opening event at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Featured was Abby the Spoon Lady as entertainment. Local beers on draft were served. Approximately 500 attendees visited the reception room.
- **Asheville Happy Hour Client Event:** This operator-only event was held at the Westin (headquarters) Hotel and drew 36 attendees. Asheville beer, wine and bites was featured. Participating partners included the Asheville Outlets, Biltmore, Biltmore Farms Hotels, Blue Ridge Mountain Opry, Chimney Rock Park, Crest Mountain Dinner Show, Hampton Inn/Homewood Suites, and Holiday Inn Biltmore East.
- **Trade Show Booth:** Explore Asheville manned an art-themed booth throughout the four-day event. Featured were upcoming events including the Summer of Glass and Biltmore's Chihuly Nights.
- **Business Appointments:** Explore Asheville's two appointment taking delegates completed 87 appointments during ABA. Four RFPs representing 365 room nights were a direct result of ABA appointments.

### **Other Sales Missions/Calls/FAMS:**

- Carla McGlynn made sales calls in Richmond, VA, meeting with 13 client groups. Three immediate RFPs totaling 911 room nights were received.
- Shawn Boone traveled to Atlanta for sales calls, meeting with 13 client groups. Included was a presentation to five planners with Meeting Advice. Two immediate RFPs totaling 177 room nights were received.
- Carli Adams attended Event Service Professionals Association Annual Meeting in Nashville. Topics included best practices for convention and event services personnel and included networking events to connect with peers from across the nation.
- Dianna Pierce attended Professional Convention Management Association's (PCMA) Convening Leaders Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN. Considered the leading connection/educational conference in the U.S. for meeting planner/suppliers, she attended a variety of educational sessions addressing current and future meeting trends, leadership development and best practices across the industry. Nightly networking sessions were held allowing for more direct client connections.

**Site Visits/Bookings/Leads:** January was a very strong month for site visits with the team hosting 10 planners. Included were: 2019 Outlook Leadership Conference – 765 rooms; 2018 International Association of Wildland Fire – 285 rooms; 2018 National Federation of Grandmother Clubs of America – 128 rooms; 2020 Southern Orthopedics Association – 815 room nights; 2018 Linde LLC – 415 room nights; 2018 Shopping for Health – 120 room nights; 2018 Garden State Getaways – 90 rooms; 2018 Fullington Trainways – 25 room nights; 2018 Sun Tours; 2018 NC Economic Development Association – 95 rooms

January bookings included (among others):

- 2020 Petroleum and Convenience Marketers of Alabama – 312 room nights
- 2018 Wounded Warrior Project – 75 room nights
- 2018 Elite 80 Camp/Great Smoky Mountains Showcase – 600 room nights\*  
*\*First time booking for Enka Ball Field project*
- 2018 Southern Group of State Foresters – 80 room nights
- 2018 Encore Regional Dance Competition – 200 room nights
- 2019 Nat'l Assn. of Community Development Extension Professionals – 440 room nights
- 2018 NC Association for Property and Evidence – 210 room nights
- 2018 NC Association for Colleges and Teacher Educators – 35 room nights
- 2018 Zero to Three Conference – 965 room nights
- 2018 American Assn. of State Highway and Transportation Officials – 55 room nights

**AAA Initiatives:** A planned AAA I-26 training mission was executed, with the team visiting seven AAA branches in the Charleston/Columbia/Greenville areas, meeting with 40 agents to share the Asheville story. Participating industry partners were Conundrum/The Amazing Pubcycle, Hampton/Homewoods Suites by Hilton, Grandfather Mountain, Biltmore, and Wildwater/Adventure Center of Asheville.

## Group Sales Communications

### Media Coverage

- After CVB staff assisted the writer in December, *MeetingsToday* featured “Essentially Asheville” in the January issue and included “Hip Hoods: Asheville” an online exclusive.
- Staff responded to an interview request from *Smart Meetings* about Asheville’s meeting planning attributes
- A writer requested photos to accompany an article featuring libation destinations for an upcoming print issue of *Groups Today* magazine
- Staff responded to a request from a writer working on the February *SportsEvents* issue on North Carolina

### Mass Communications:

- An email was sent to 607 registered American Bus Association Annual Marketplace attendees announcing Asheville’s involvement and invitation to a client event. Open rate: 39 percent; Click to Open Ratio: 33 percent
- An email was sent to 1360 western state clients offering and RFP contest and other CVB service information. Open rate: 15 percent; Click to Open ratio: 16 percent
- An email was sent to 1479 mid-west state clients offering and RFP contest and other CVB service information. Open rate: 17 percent; Click to Open ratio: 23 percent

### Convention Service Highlights:

A welcome table was provided to The Gala gymnastics competition held at the U.S. Cellular Center. The CVB hosted a meeting of the Southern Conference Team Host Hotels. Carli Adams attended the Local Organizing Committee Meetings for the SoCon basketball championships as well as two planning meetings for the Fed Cup event. A planning dinner and site visit was hosted for The American College of Trust and Estate Counsel.

### Convention Servicing:

- The Gala gymnastics competition was hosted at the U.S. Cellular Center in early January. This marks the 7th annual event in Asheville and has been a great early January boost for visitor travel. CVB staff helped in set up for the event, had a welcome table, and volunteered during the competition.
- The CVB helped to host a meeting of the SoCon Staff and the team host hotels where plans were made to welcome SoCon teams and fans.
- Attended the LOC meetings for the SoCon basketball championships as well as planning meetings for the Fed Cup event.
- A planning dinner and post booking site visit was hosted for The American College of Trust and Estate Counsel

**Departmental Activities:** Staff coordinated site visits at Cambria, Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites, Fairfield Inn & Suites Tunnel Road, and Hyatt Hotel. Staff attended Explore Asheville’s Partner Forum, Asheville Chamber Visitor Center Volunteer Holiday Party, and assumed volunteer responsibilities for Gala Gymnastics along with a host of other scheduled meetings.

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE**

### **Tourism Product Development Efforts:**

The Enka Youth Sports Association received its first grant disbursement for \$666,667. 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. An open house including a check presentation ceremony will take place on Tuesday, February 20, at 3:00 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.

### **Partner Engagement:**

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

A Special Partner Forum on Major Events in 2018, presented in conjunction with the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, was held on January 24. One hundred attendees learned about several exciting upcoming events in the region, including 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 also provided 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. This special event for lodging partners will present a detailed report on market performance and forecast for the coming year. Chad Church, Vice President of Client Services for STR, Inc., will share expert insights and data that combines hotel and short-term rental data for Buncombe County. The meeting will be held over lunch at the Holiday Inn Biltmore West, and will be geared for lodging owners, general managers, assistant managers, sales directors, and elected officials.

### **Projects:**

Pat is working closely with MERJE and members of city and county staff to develop Wayfinding signage for municipally owned and managed surface parking lots in downtown. The CVB will produce the signage for the parking assets which will 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 held a couple discovery meetings with CVB leadership and lodging partners.

Brit began post-production work on the 2018 Visitor Guide by updating partner accounts in the CRM with updated data and removing closed businesses from ExploreAsheville.com. Brit, as the liaison for Buncombe County tourism listings on VisitNC.com, is assisting with listing updates in preparation for the redesign of VisitNC.com's website.

**Partner Outreach:** Brit created six new partner accounts in January – Purple Crayon, embellish asheville, Oak & Grist Distilling Company, Craft Centric Taproom and Bottleshop, Longleaf Vineyard, and Peaceful Hollow.

The Public Affairs team hosted the monthly Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation. Six partners attended including staff from Omni Grove Park Inn, Majik Studios, The Princess Anne Hotel, Biltmore Farms Hotels, Heirloom HG, and the Explore Asheville CVB Intern, Shelly Painter. 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. Charlie Reed has provided support in managing the ExploreAsheville.com events calendar.

**Community Outreach:** Pat is working with the Summer of Glass organizing committee to provide CVB support to the partners planning events and activities around the Chihuly exhibit at Biltmore later this year.

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

**Building:** The building checklist was the focus in January, with projects as large as burying the powerlines at the back of the building or as small as paint touch-ups, installing floor molding, and balancing the temperature throughout the workplace.

**Administration:** In January a new process for onboarding staff was implemented for Sarah Kilgore, new Director of Advertising, and Shelly Painter, new Intern from Western Carolina University.

Stephanie and Glenn met for the final time with HR Mavens 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 final version, ready for presentation to the BCTDA, will be completed in February.

Closed out applications for the Business Intelligence Manager and compiled hardcopies of viable candidates for both Stephanie's and Marla's review.

Completed the termination checklist for Molly Nelson who resigned her position as Sales Manager – Southeast effective January 25.

Began processing the questionnaire for the end of the calendar year census for the BCTDA 401K plan.

**Grant Programs:**

Determined that earned revenue from advertising on ExploreAsheville.com had reached \$160,000 in January, already \$30,000 above what had been estimated for the fiscal year. Eight new Sponsorship Grants were awarded.

|                                                     |                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban 3 Speaker Series                              | \$ 5,000        |
| Creative Sector Summit                              | \$ 5,000        |
| NC Glass Center fiscal agent for Summer of Glass    | \$ 2,500        |
| Organic Growers School, 2018 Spring Conference      | \$ 2,500        |
| Xpand Fest in the South Slope                       | \$ 2,500        |
| The Collider, ClimateCon 2018                       | \$ 5,000        |
| Asheville Music Professionals, AMP Rocks Asheville! | \$ 1,000        |
| Media Arts Project, photo + sphere                  | \$ 1,000        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                        | <b>\$24,500</b> |

Glenn met with Chris Joyell, Executive Director of the Asheville Design Center, to discuss his application under the Festivals and Cultural Events Grant Program. More detailed and extensive information and data on his event was requested before the committee would agree to review their application again.

**Workforce Development:**

Glenn met with Brent Baily, Director of the Buncombe County Re-Entry Council, on January 11 to discuss process for connecting individuals in his program with the hotel community actively recruiting new employees. The program was well received by the GMs and HR Directors. Dialogue will continue between Mr. Baily and the hotel community.

Hosted a Strive meeting in CVB Meeting Room. Strive is led by Ritchie Rozzelle from Land of Sky Regional Council of Governments. The focus is on alternative transportation models and, of particular interest to the hotel community, making new and expanded connections from the residential centers to the employment centers, including key areas of hotel concentration.