



October 31, 2018

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

The BCTDA Annual Meeting was held September 19 with the generous support of our host, the Omni Grove Park Inn. More than 200 tourism partners gathered for a presentation that included the Annual Report, sales and marketing highlights, and a keynote by Andrew Nelson representing National Geographic Travel.

Explore Asheville competed in the United Way's Lip Sync Battle. Our elaborate number was a mash up of four 80s songs with attire to match. The team was coordinated by Dianna with Jason as the creative director and the team also included Stephanie, Glenn, Marla, Jonna, Sarah Kilgore, Charlie, Justine, and Joe. We did not win, but we had fun and helped to support an important community charity.

The agency review continued with site visits to four agencies. Three have been invited to Asheville for final presentations in November.

The TPDF Committee met on September 27 and 28 for project presentations by eight applicants. Site visits were made on October 8 and 9 for seven projects with final deliberations on October 26.

The advertising campaign that ran from the start of August wrapped up on September 30. The campaign included broadcast video, streaming video, national TV, digital, print and radio. Additional digital advertising will run Mid-September through Mid-October.

The marketing team also coordinated communications regarding Hurricane Florence, messaging through our channels, coordinating tourism partners, and communicating with the state tourism office.

Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau is a *Smart Meetings* 2018 Platinum Choice Awards winner. The Platinum Choice Awards honor the hospitality industry's top-ranked hotels, venues and CVBs that display the highest standards of overall excellence in service and amenities. Explore Asheville will be featured in a national press release published over major newswires, recognized in the December issue of *Smart Meetings* print and digital magazines and featured in a dedicated online winner's article that garners national social media attention.

SEPTEMBER METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During September, the sales team posted 1,142 personal contacts (up 7.6%). September sales activities generated 72 sales leads (up 36%) and 58 convention bookings (up 12%), representing 6,747 rooms (up 3%). Three months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 29 percent and room nights represented are up 16 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 54 group events in September (down 2%), with revenue of \$2,104,968 (down 8%). The services team assisted 56 groups (up 30%).
- The PR team landed 65 significant placements in September (up 28%), with 71 media touchpoints (down 3%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$2,376,632 with reach of over 10 million. Online placements added \$229,333 in value and reach of over 345 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 435,967 visits (up 5%), including 308,207 to the mobile site (up 11%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 2,209 (down 18%) and video views totaled 222,859 (up 45%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 103 room nights (up 11%) with total room revenue of \$16,825 (up 11%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 19,085 visitors (down 12%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion welcomed 702 visitors (down 23%).

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$39,863,397 in August, an increase of 13.5 percent.
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 80.2 percent during August (up 2.6%). The average daily room rate was \$164.15 (up 4.8%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$131.60 (up 7.5%). Room demand increased 7.1 percent with 195,439 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 11.5 percent to total 107,218 in September.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Stephanie represented the BCTDA for the opening of the Black Mountain College Museum and Art Center and presented a symbolic TPDF check.
- Stephanie attended a luncheon hosted by Eliada, and met with Bill Murdoch for a tour of Eblin Charities.
- Stephanie presented an overview of tourism in Buncombe County to Leadership Asheville.
- Stephanie participated in the Airport Authority and AIR board meetings.
- Marla attended an Asheville Downtown Association (ADA) Issues Committee in September.
- Stephanie and Dodie participated as board members of the (name TBD) Asheville culinary festival, moving forward on selection of its executive director and branding agency.
- Dianna attended U.S. Cellular Civic Center Commission Meeting.
- Pat attended Creative Mornings at the Center for Craft, a Member Appreciation event at the Asheville Chamber, and the United Way Lip Sync Battle in support of the team.
- Pat helped to coordinate the production of the video promo, featuring Stephanie Brown, for “Sweet Dreams, Full Plates” at the Crown Plaza along with Jason Tarr, Tom O’Neil of Biltmore Farms, and Melissa Dean of Two Birds Marketing.

- Pat coordinated a meeting for Stephanie Brown to meet with visitors from Asheville Sister City Saumur, France.
- On September 4, Glenn hosted the American Craft Week gathering.
- On September 7, Glenn attended the Board Meeting for the Piney Grove Cemetery in Swannanoa.
- On September 8, Glenn attended the ribbon cutting for Black Mountain College Museum + Art Center's new space on College Street that was partially funded with TPDF support.
- On September 13, Glenn traveled to Winston-Salem with Goodwill staff, on behalf of Explore Asheville, as Goodwill's FY18/19 Business Advisory Council's partner of the year.
- On September 25, as Board Chair of the Black Mountain Center for the Arts, Glenn attended the organization's Board Meeting.
- On September 27, Glenn attended the Chamber's Legislative Breakfast.
- On September 27, Glenn attended the Broadway Advisory Team meeting at the Center for Craft. Using Creative Placemaking tenants, the team is discussing ways to reimagine Carolina Lane, which runs parallel to Broadway behind the Center for Craft in addition to other businesses.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising: The late summer/early fall "Harvest" campaign launched at the beginning of August and wrapped up on September 30. The campaign included broadcast television, streaming video ads and a national TV buy. The campaign was complemented by a strong digital presence, print, and traditional and online radio. As of October 10, there have been 107,567,681 digital impressions served that have garnered 241,674 clicks.

A digital campaign to ensure demand for fall launched in mid-September and will run through mid-October. The two-pronged strategic approach aims to: 1) re-engage with those who have been exposed to Harvest advertising but have not booked yet, and 2) prospecting new audience by broadening our geographic footprint past those exposed to Harvest advertising.

Paid Search: Paid search in September generated over 89k site visits from Google and Bing combined. Sessions are up 46 percent year-over-year. Bounce rates have come down 11 percent year-over-year. Desktop time on the site was nearly 4:30. There were 773 visitor guide requests generated.

Agency Selection Process: The process to select a new agency moved to the next phase. After reviewing agency responses, four agencies were selected for site visits. Each agency addressed a variety of pre-arranged discussion items, presented case studies, outlined digital, analytical, and strategic capabilities and provided insight into their culture.

Hurricane Crisis Efforts: In the face of the threat of Hurricane Florence, the marketing team undertook a number of communications efforts aimed at evacuees, travelers, and industry partners. A travel alerts page and alert ribbon were added to ExploreAsheville.com to keep web visitors apprised of updates and to connect evacuees and others to available lodging inventory. Bound 360 technology was used to display information directly to people in affected areas of the Carolinas. Lodging availability information was gathered daily via a Google form and routed to both the alerts page and a list maintained by VisitNC for use in call centers and welcome centers. The team closely monitored closures and re-openings of attractions and roadways.

The PR team fielded local and national media inquiries highlighting the Travel Alert page and lodging capacity updates as available.

Following the storm, the team changed messaging to indicate that Asheville was untouched and open for business—in contrast to much national media painting all of N.C. as a disaster area. Jason also put together a blog post noting community efforts to support Eastern N.C.'s recovery. The PR Team crafted a post-storm update to fall messaging outlining the storm's minimal impacts on the fall color season. The updated messaging and round-up of fall news was distributed via MailChimp to 773 subscribers and media contacts. It was also pitched individually to 38 journalists who have covered fall destinations in the past in national and regional outlets. *Budget Travel* immediately published the updated messaging.

Fall Marketing Efforts: In preparation for the fall color season, the content team updated the Fall Color Report page to include 2018 messaging, as well as some fresh, evergreen content to support SEO efforts around fall keywords. At the end of the month, the team sent out a pair of emails—one alerting color report subscribers to expect the first report soon, and other to encourage new opt-ins. New opt-ins generated 20 percent growth in the fall color list year-over-year. Social media posts echoed a “get ready for fall” message promoting top seasonal content.

Plans for the Fall Media Tour (originally scheduled the last week in September) were shifted after Hurricane Florence. In September, Landis had coordinated and prepared a team of seven tourism partners for the trip. Due to damage across media tour target markets, the call was made to postpone until the first week of October, replacing Wilmington with Charlotte. Landis traveled on her own to ensure key fall messages were delivered with efficiency.

General Media Relations: The PR team logged 71 media touchpoints, initiated 130 targeted pitches and facilitated 7 media on the ground in Asheville in September. Pitch numbers were especially high due to SATW appointments, Fall Media Tour outreach, updated fall messaging in the wake of Hurricane Florence, and winter pitching. The supported site visits included media representing *FoodandWine.com*, *Johnny Jet*, *Oyster*, *Family Travel Magazine*, and *Bustle*. Story support also included *Matador*, *Sunseeker*, *Southern Living* and *Garden & Gun*. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *USA Today*, *The Boston Globe*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *Culture Trip*, among others.

Significant Placements:

1. *Travel + Leisure* - "The Best U.S. Cities to Visit this Fall for Foliage, Food and Fun"
2. *Food & Wine* - "Katie Button's Guide to Asheville, North Carolina"
3. *Forbes* - "The 6 Best Fall Travel Destinations for 2018"
4. *Garden & Gun* - "Where We're Excited to Eat This Fall"
5. *Reader's Digest* - "National Parks that Look Even More Beautiful in Fall"
6. *Reader's Digest* - "8 Super Cozy Inns to Book Right Now During Peak Fall Foliage Season"
7. *INSIDER* - "17 of the best places in the US to visit in the fall"
8. *SELF* - "10 of the Best Fall Hiking Tours in the U.S., According to Trip Advisor"
9. *Trip Advisor* - "15 of America's Best Fall Foliage Trips & So Much More (from Classics to Surprising Gems)"
10. *Narcity* - "25 Surreal Places in North Carolina You Won't Believe Really Exist"
11. *Phyrre* - "Five Haunted Cities to Visit This Fall"
12. *Travel Pulse* - "17 Southeast Destinations Perfect for Fall"
13. *Trips to Discover* - "Top 5 Walkable Towns in North Carolina"
14. *Trips to Discover* - "Top 8 Luxury Resorts for a Fall Getaway"
15. *Swirled* - "The Best Southern U.S. City For Your Next Weekend Trip"
16. *Foodie Travel USA* - "Best Teen Friendly Restaurants in Asheville, North Carolina"
17. *DuPont Registry* - "Asheville is a cool retreat from Florida's heat"
18. *Only In Your State* - "The World's Best Pie is Made Daily Inside This Humble Little North Carolina Bakery"

19. *Trip 101 - "Top 10 Breweries in Asheville, North Carolina"*
20. *MNN - "Your 2018 Fall Foliage Guide"*
21. *House Beautiful - "20 Cozy Country Inns to Visit This Christmas"*
22. *The Real Deal - "The Best Budget-Friendly U.S. Cities to Explore Solo"*
23. *Outdoor Project - "Great American Towns for Fall Foliage"*
24. *Savor - "Welcome to Savor (And Asheville)"*
25. *Budget Travel - "5 Secrets to Perfect Leaf Peeping"*
26. *RUBY - "Travel Guide: Exploring Asheville"*
27. *October Magazine (Online) - "Bring the Funk: Wild and Sour Beers Are Going Solo"*
28. *Destinations Magazine - "Elevate Expectations: Celebrate Blue Ridge Mountain Majesty in creatively cool Asheville, NC"*
29. *TrailBlazer Magazine - "13 Leisurely Drives for Lucky Leaf Peepers"*

Content Development Projects: The content team worked on several projects in the month of September, with much focus on crisis communications surrounding Hurricane Florence, fall color season messaging, and promoting the National Geographic special.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of September, 7 new pieces of editorial content were added to the website: a new hiking trail, a post promoting the National Geographic: Asheville by Design special, a post about community support following Hurricane Florence, and, four “things to do this weekend” posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 30,138 new pageviews, followed a post promoting the National Geographic special, which received 10,714 pageviews.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- September saw 2,209 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 278,166.
- There were 25 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of September.
- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a video of the new Wildcat Rock trail. It has reached 54,597 people organically, generating 1,023 total reactions, and 184 comments.
- The most popular paid Facebook post during the month of September was a video promoting the upcoming National Geographic documentary. The post has reached 318,163 people (282,171 organically), generating 7,884 reactions and 1,940 comments.
- The most engaging post this month was a CNN video about Biltmore Estate’s farm-to-table legacy. It engaged 20 percent of the 7,068 people reached.

Foodtopia page

- August saw 25 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,137 likes.

Video:

- There were 16,711 new, organic YouTube views in September. The most popular video by organic views this month was the National Geographic, Asheville by Design teaser, which received 3,747 non-paid views. The Fall Time Lapse came in second with 2,412 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 222,859 non-advertising views, with the majority coming from Facebook.

Pinterest:

- The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 5,006. Foodtopia accounts for 1,403 of those. Visit Asheville – 3,603.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account surpassed 50k followers this month and now has a total of 50,362.
- There were 7 new posts in September. The most popular was a photo of Deep Gap Trail at Mount Mitchell State Park. It received 3,301 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 30,534 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,694 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 122,806 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In September, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 123,145 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 18.6 percent and a click-through rate of 4.2 percent. Our Fall Color Report Opt-In email was sent to 111,293 subscribers and had an open rate of 15.1 percent and click-through rate of 1.6 percent. The Fall Color Welcome email was sent to 11,760 subscribers who had previously opted-in to fall color messaging. It had an open rate of 36.8 percent and a click-through rate of 10.2 percent.

Google Partnership Program: The team moved forward with the Google DMO Partnership Program with Miles this month, first by reviewing the detailed results of a destination audit that identified opportunities for improvement of Asheville assets within the Google travel ecosystem. Later in the month, the team hosted Patrick Rodgers, content director with Miles, who spent several days in town capturing flat and 360-degree imagery of Asheville-area locations for upload to Google. Patrick also led a staff training session that covered asset uploading, Google listing edits, the Google Trusted Verifier program and operation of the new 360-degree camera.

ExploreAsheville.com: Website user sessions in September increased 4.69 percent compared to last year, although organic traffic was down 3.99 percent year-over-year in September. The loss can be accounted for in the Home Page, Events Calendar, and Things to Do pages because of algorithm changes that display Google destination panels and Google travel planner above the search results, bringing DMO content below the fold on mobile. Simpleview SEO team has seen this trend beginning in April across the board with all their clients. Display advertising traffic was up 55.16 percent year-over-year in September. Referral traffic was up 21.80 percent year-over-year while traffic from eNewsletter clicks was down 5.29 percent year-over-year in September. Social media traffic was down 58.82 percent year-over-year in September, due to the popularity of the Biltmore Chihuly announcement in September of 2017.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 25 percent more total pages per visit, 34 percent longer visit duration, 30 percent more organic pages per visit, and 39 percent longer organic visit duration compared to industry average in the month of September.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO: In September, Simpleview and Explore Asheville staff continue to work on efforts to improve site conversion rates based on established goals and KPIs. Several pages continue to perform particularly well in driving organic traffic.

Online Reservations: There were 65 orders for 103 room nights in September with a total of \$16,825.42 in booking revenue and \$737.55 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in September were Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina and South Carolina.

September 2018	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$16,825	\$15,211	10.62%	\$59,848	\$51,483	16.25%
Commission	\$737.55	\$689.15	7.02%	\$2,774.25	\$2,368.17	17.15%
Orders	65	55	18.18%	228	195	16.92%
Room Nights	103	93	10.75%	358	306	16.99%

Visitor Guide: The Explore Asheville team continues to work with SagaCity Media, the publishing partner, on the editorial content for the guide. A first draft of the guide will be delivered in late October. Advertising sales have exceeded \$400k and only a few advertising slots remain available.

There were 3,549 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in September, a 1.6 percent decrease over last year. Year-to-date, there have been 8,543 travel guide requests.

Top 5 DMAs for September	# of Guides Requested	FY 2018-2019 Top 5 DMAs	# of Guides Requested
ATLANTA	111	ATLANTA	335
RALEIGH-DURHAM	71	CINCINNATI	209
CHARLOTTE	67	RALEIGH-DURHAM	209
CINCINNATI	67	CHARLOTTE	192
NASHVILLE	51	NASHVILLE	123

GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE

Group sales reported 58 definite group bookings in September representing a 11.5 percent increase from the prior September. Of these group bookings, 37 were meetings & conventions and 13 were weddings, and eight were motor coach. The combined total definite room nights in September were 6,747 room nights an 3.1 percent increase over the prior year. The estimated revenue for leads turned definite in September was \$1,447,065 representing a 20.2 percent increase. Actualized revenue was \$2,513,861 an 9.8 percent increase from the prior year

Seventy-two sales leads (51 for meeting/conventions, 15 weddings and six for motorcoach) representing 16,173 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in September 2018. This represents an increase of 35.8 percent in number of sales leads issued and a 25.4 percent increase in room nights represented. Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,142 contacts in September as compared to 1,061 the prior year, representing a 7.6 percent increase. Indirect outreach totaled 3,131 contacts compared to 12,866 representing a 75.7 percent decrease from the prior September due to a system-wide email blast which occurred this month last year and did not occur this year.

Sales Calls/Missions:

- Tina Porter attended Smart Meeting West National, conducting 12 one-on-one appointments. Additionally, she attended networking receptions, educational events and conducted five sales calls aside from the event. In total, 45 planners attended.
- Kathryn Dewey made sales calls in Charlotte, calling on six corporate and planning companies, as well as making five local meeting connections
- Connie Holliday attended 2018 Destination Southeast, conducting 23 one-on-one appointments. The planners she met with were from across the U.S. and host more than 1,040 meetings per year. In addition, Connie attended networking events and educational trainings with the planners. This was a very lucrative event with Connie securing three RFP's in hand.

Sponsorships: In a continued effort to place Asheville in a broader consideration set, Explore Asheville was a sponsor of Northstar Meeting Group's Interact Southeast held September 5-8, 2018 in West Palm Beach, Florida. Connie introduced the 70 attending planners to Asheville as a meeting destination at lunch, showing the meetings video and offering prepared remarks. The sponsorship also included a full-page advertisement in event directory, event registration, inclusion of print materials in registration bags, and a planner database.

Explore Asheville was sponsored Smart Meetings West National event. Sponsorship benefits included a video presentation during the breakfast, logo placement on website and signage, and insertion of sales materials in registration packets. Approximately 45 planners were in attendance.

Site Visits/Bookings/Leads: Four independent site visits were hosted in September with business for all future years: 2019 NCLGA Winter Meeting – 210 rooms (48-Hour FAM attendee), 2019 International Motorcoach Group Focus 25 meeting – 195 rooms, 2020 Mutual Drug – 500 rooms; 2020 Tops Software TopsFest – 393 rooms

A sampling of September bookings includes:

- 2019 Gala Gymnastics Competition – 370 rooms (January)
- 2019 NACE International Board of Directors Meeting – 164 rooms
- 2018 Big South Athletic Conference Volleyball championship – 320 rooms
- 2018 Cintas Corporation – 106 rooms
- 2019 OSEGA Gymnastics Miles Avery Challenge – 350 rooms
- 2020 American Bus Association Fall Board Meeting – 135 rooms
- 2020 Environmental Council of the States – 450 rooms
- 2019 Glassroots Trade Show – 316 rooms
- 2019 Swedish Match Summer Meeting – 405 rooms (FAM ATTENDEE)
- 2019 SETA Spring Conference Overflow – 40 rooms
- 2019 NC Metro Mayors Coalition Fall Retreat – 85 rooms
- 2019 MO Summit – 90 rooms
- 2019 GH Tours – 150 rooms
- 2018 Miller Transportation – Holiday Series – 69 rooms
- 2019 American Medical Spa Association - 120 rooms
- 2018 Beyond Limits Dance Convention – 135 rooms
- 2019 SC Neurological Association – 50 rooms
- 2020 Primitive Stitcher's Society Retreat – 120 rooms
- 2019 Oak Ridge Laboratory – 75 rooms
- 2020 Alabama Road Builders Association – 186 rooms
- 2018 Duke Energy Storm – 350 rooms

AAA Webinars

Two webinars featuring Biltmore, Biltmore Farms and NC Stage were hosted for 67 AAA agents and NC Welcome Center staff. The purpose is to acquaint new AAA travel staff/NC Welcome Center personnel with Asheville as a travel destination and showcase new product to returning participants. Four AAA Clubs attended in addition to NC Welcome Center personnel from across the state.

A total of 13 wedding guide requests were fulfilled in September as compared to 31 last year.

Group Sales Communications

- An update of the online Meeting Planner Guide was finalized, and three new banners were designed for trade events.

Media Coverage

- It was announced in September that Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau is a *Smart Meetings* 2018 Platinum Choice Awards winner. The Platinum Choice Awards honor the hospitality industry's top-ranked hotels, venues and CVBs that display the highest standards of overall excellence in service and amenities. Explore Asheville will be featured in a national press release published over major newswires, recognized in the December issue of *Smart Meetings* print and digital magazines and featured in a dedicated online winner's article that garners national social media attention.

Mass Communications

- An email was sent to 2,691 corporate clients and past IMEX attendees in our database to announce Asheville's attendance at IMEX America 2018 with links to make an appointment. Open rate: 18 percent; Click to Open Ratio: 25 percent.
- An invitation was sent to 260 previous IMEX attendees to a client event/cocktail reception in Las Vegas during IMEX America. Open rate: 35 percent; Click to Open Ratio: 35 percent.

Group Sales Communications

Staff met with Market Connections to begin working on a campaign to increase the number of meeting planners that would add Asheville to their destination consideration list and to educate planners on key points that overcome barriers to considering Asheville as a meeting destination.

IMEX Communications: Using the IMEX internal portal, the following emails were sent by Explore Asheville to solidify IMEX scheduled appointments. Exhibitors are allowed one eblast weekly, four in total:

- Eblast 1 – 1,344 buyers received our messaging
- Eblast 2 – 1,261 buyers received our messaging

Convention Servicing Highlights:

Staff attended Southern Forest Service Retirees Reunion's breakfast and closing ceremony, being recognized as an instrumental part of the event's success. A staffed information table was also provided.

Departmental Activities:

- A LinkedIn post promoting the National Geographic premier netted 1,366 views with 37 likes and three comments.
- Q1 Personal Performance Objectives reviews held with staff.
- Attended BCTDA Annual Meeting.
- Hosted American Bus Association 2019 planning meeting with attending industry partners.

- Staff met with Young Transportation and UNC Asheville representatives about future collaborative opportunities to bring more association/academic conferences to Asheville.
- Staff met with industry partners attending AENC's December trade show (six partner attending).
- Held quarterly DOS meeting with 12 in attendance.
- Planning meeting was held between ABRSC and EA sales and marketing to identify future sales and marketing strategies/tactics.
- Staff met with BMW Performance Center to collaborate on future groups.
- Staff is working diligently to develop dashboards tracking various elements of the sales' departments activities to help drive data driven decisions.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts:

Phase II applications, submitted on August 29, are in review with the TPDF Committee; and applicants presented their projects to the committee on September 27 and 28. The committee is scheduled to tour the project sites with the applicants on October 8 and 9. The Sidewalk Coconut Collective withdrew its application. There are eight projects remaining: Asheville Museum of Science, Buncombe County Recreation Services, Center for Craft, Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation, LEAF Community Arts, North Carolina Arboretum Society, River Front Development Group, and Wild Food Foundation.

The Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center project has completed, and funds were disbursed. The BCTDA's contribution was recognized during a celebratory event held at the new location on College Street in September.

As part of the standard fund disbursement process, an engineering firm is contracted to review the TPDF Agreement and ensure the grantee has fulfilled the terms of the project scope and contractual obligations prior to release of funds. Staff conferred with BCTDA attorney to conduct a review of the agreement with the engineering firm; the attorney advised the terms are appropriate and sufficient for the purpose of the work scope.

Partner Engagement:

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The public affairs team hosted the September CVB 101 orientation with four industry partners in attendance including staff from Hilton Garden Inn Downtown, Asheville Rooftop Bar Tours, Biltmore Farms Hotels, and FIRC Group.

BCTDA 2018 Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting was held on September 19, from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. at The Omni Grove Park Inn's new Sealy Pavilion. The leadership team presented the CVB's annual report of destination sales and marketing initiatives, program highlights and strategic insights from the past year. The keynote was provided by Andrew Nelson of National Geographic Traveler who shared a preview of the "Asheville by Design" show that aired on NatGeo Channel the following day. The community support element of the event included a drive for socks to be donated to charity.

Upcoming Events: Planning is underway for a series of Partner Educational Forums in October and November focusing on helping businesses improve their listings on Google platforms. A service day is being planned for October at the community garden in Black Mountain. Additionally, the annual Explore Asheville CVB Holiday Party is being planned for December 6.

New Partners: Brit created 10 new partner accounts in September – Appalachian Mural Trail, Bella Gallery, Best Wester Glo, Celine and Company Catering, Farm at Green Heron Pond Weddings and Events, French Broad River Brewery, Namaste in Nature, Spice it Up, The

Foundry Hotel Asheville, Curio Collection by Hilton, and Vaso de Vino Wine Market. The public affairs team continues to reach out to qualified partners to submit information for a listing as well as service the partners who request listings. And Brit maintains regularly scheduled communications to music venue partners to ensure they are submitting their events to the Live Music Calendar.

Projects & Community Outreach: Pat is wrapping up the Wayfinding Assessment project with MERJE. Additionally, Pat coordinated a meeting and met with Glenn Cox, Greg Fruediger of Geograph, and County staff partners to discuss plans for the Coxe Avenue and College Street garage signage. The group walked both sites and surrounding areas to develop a recommended and comprehensive signage package and Pat is preparing cost estimates.

Brit continues working with SagaCity, preparing partner listing content for the 2019 Official Asheville Visitor Guide and organizing a proofing process with marketing staff.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Building: Victory over our leaking roof was cautiously declared after the two days of Hurricane Florence rains resulted in no drips or wet ceiling tiles.

Administration: On September 6, Glenn began scheduled bi-weekly meetings with Drew Pollick of Craft HR Solutions. The intent of these meetings is to develop and fine tune a highly professional HR Department for Explore Asheville. On September 14, Glenn met with Connie Holliday to finalize her benefits selections and onboard her with the selected providers. September 17 was Audrey Wells' first day of employment as Marketing and PR Assistant. Glenn began collecting the necessary information and completing personnel and payroll forms for her. September 16 was Kathryn Dewey's 90th day of employment, which qualified her for employee benefits.

Wayfinding Signage: On September 20, Glenn and Pat Kappes met with Greg Freudiger of Geograph, and County officials at the County's Coxe Avenue garage to finalize the material, location, and wording for signs related to this and the College Street garage. Later that same day, Glenn and Pat drove the Wayfinding System in Asheville with Greg Freudiger to address fading sign faces, missing signs and the pending need to change the wording on existing faces to remove some attractions and add new ones. The latter discussion is directed by the project assigned to Merje.

2019 Festivals and Cultural Events Grant Program: The F&CE Committee met on September 12. The committee recommended \$50,000 in grants for 15 events occurring in 2019. On September 26, the BCTDA voted to approve these recommendations. These grants are made possible from discretionary earned revenue generated by paid advertising on the ExploreAsheville.com website.