



May 2, 2018

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

March is typically one of our busiest months as we implement fourth quarter strategies and finalize the budget for next year. This spring brought additional challenges and opportunities.

The marketing team launched the largest advertising campaign in the destination's history. A base budget of \$5.5 million was enhanced with funds moved from contingency and production. To expand capacity, a supplemental digital campaign was implemented by a new agency partner, Miles Partnership. This advertising investment will generate an estimated \$258 million in visitor spending at local businesses in the next few months, along with \$18 million in sales tax revenue. The team quickly turned around a variety of assets to execute the Tryon sponsorship. The PR team hosted a record number of journalists and attended a media mission in New York City.

The sales team is working to fill two vacant sales manager positions and has retained a former CVBer to work accounts. Despite a drop in contacts and sales leads for March, the team is on pace to make goal for the year.

The executive team has also had a heavy lift with the implementation of a new financial management system and benefits renewal. Jonna and Justine have worked extensively with county staff to learn the new system (which is definitely a work in progress) and provide training for the rest of the staff – while simultaneously managing payment, budgeting and payroll across two systems.

These efforts are translating into strong destination performance. Smith Travel Research reports an increase in hotel room demand of 8.4 percent in March – fully absorbing a 7.2 percent increase in supply and generating a 13 percent increase in revenue. Occupancy for the 28-day period ending April 21 was a positive .5 with RevPAR up 3.7 percent.

MONTH AT A GLANCE

- Site visits included media representing *Forbes Travel Guide*, *Backpacker Magazine*, *Outside*, and *The Travel Channel*. Additional touchpoints of note included *Zagat*, *Budget Travel*, *Women's Running*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Indianapolis Star*. In total, the team logged 69 touchpoints, initiated 80 targeted pitches and supported four media on the ground in Asheville.
- The CVB convened partners to create Summer of Glass, a companion to Biltmore's Chihuly exhibit. The CVB's support included, pr support, the Summer of Glass website and sponsorship funding.
- The sales team conducted calls in Chicago and attended Travel South Domestic Showcase. They hosted 10 buyers for The 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience March 20-23.
- The CVB provided extensive support for the Southern Conference Men's Basketball Championship Tournament.
- The Hospitality Outlook was held March 1 with 100 lodging partners in attendance. Elected leader turnout included Mayor Esther Manheimer, Councilman Vijay Kapoor, Commission Al Whitesides and State Representative Brian Turner.

MARCH METRICS: BY THE NUMBERS

- During March, the sales team posted 1,024 personal contacts (down 14%). March sales activities generated 59 sales leads (down 28%) and 47 convention bookings (down 11%), representing 6,494 rooms (up 6%). Nine months into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are up 9 percent and room nights represented are up 6 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 22 group events in March (down 8%), with revenue of \$503,922 (down 12%). The services team assisted 28 groups (flat).
- The PR team landed 33 significant placements in March (down 18%), with 69 media touchpoints (up 5%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$14,914 with reach of over 723 thousand. Online placements added \$349,978 in value and reach of over 453 million.
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 323,193 visits (down 5%), including 197,994 to the mobile site (down 3%). Our Facebook fan base grew by 1,453 (down 30%) and video views totaled 75,067 (down 38%).
- Online hotel reservations totaled 52 room nights (up 63%) with total room revenue of \$7,696 (up 41%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 12,295 visitors (down 11%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion is closed for the winter.

HOTEL & AIRPORT RESULTS

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$19,152,547 in February, an increase of 10.6 percent.

- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 54.8 percent during February (down 4.3%). The average daily room rate was \$120.92 (up 2.9%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$66.30 (down 1.5%). Room demand increased 2.6 percent with 119,014 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 22 percent to total 62,760 in February.

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advertising: The beginning of March brought the end of the "Cozy Asheville" winter campaign and a big ramp up on the development of the spring effort. The digital winter campaign, which served up 13 million paid impressions, generated 10,984 clicks leading to 7,999 sessions on ExploreAsheville.com.

A partnership with National Geographic that will result in a half-hour time slot on National Geographic Channel has been fleshed out. Shooting will take place in late May, and concepting with the team from influencer Zack King has also taken place. Shooting is slated for the end of April. Production dollars originally budgeted for this spring are being rededicated as net media to extend the spring campaign through June. Details will be provided at the BCTDA board meeting.

Spring Campaign: The spring campaign included a significant broadcast plan that also incorporated, for the first time, a national cable flight on Travel Channel, HGTV, and The Weather Channel. Print advertising will be utilized for inspirational messaging to a total circulation of 5.7 million people including publications such as *National Geographic Traveler*, *Travel + Leisure*, and *Atlanta Magazine*. The campaign will have a strong digital presence throughout the Southeast in display, retargeting, paid search, and social media advertising. Digital creative was finalized with a focus on messaging around "The Magic of Spring" in Asheville and includes display ads, paid social on Facebook (including canvas ads), native ads, in-banner video, and mobile ads. Radio has been layered in as the TV flight ends in early May.

Paid search efforts: Visits, pages per visit, time on site, and clicks are all up, while cost per click is down comparatively to last March. Desktop time on site has improved almost 30 percent: 4:21 vs. 3:25. The brand tourism campaign is the top performing campaign, followed by the outdoor adventures campaign. The combined Google and Bing search campaign generated more than 750 requests for the Asheville Visitor Guide, less than in January but more than the previous six months.

General Media Relations: March was filled with site visit planning for spring trips and a substantial amount of proactive pitching as both the Visit NC 365 Conference and Spring Media Tour occurred during the month. Site visits included media representing *Forbes Travel Guide*, *Backpacker Magazine*, *Outside*, and *The Travel Channel*. Additional touchpoints of note included *Zagat*, *Budget Travel*, *Women's Running*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Indianapolis Star*. In total, the team logged 69

touchpoints, initiated 80 targeted pitches and supported four media on the ground in Asheville. Asheville imagery and assistance were also provided to *Whisky Advocate*, *C-SPAN*, and *FoodNetwork.com*, among others.

Recent Media Outreach/Missions: The Explore Asheville PR team's presence at the Visit NC 365 Conference in Winston-Salem included participation in the media roundtable event where staff had the opportunity to pitch journalists representing *NC Weekend*, *Our State*, *CraftBeer.com*, *Travel and Leisure*, *CiderCraft*, *Recreation News*, *WRAL's Tar Heel Traveler*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*. As a direct result of a conference pitch, the producers of *NC Weekend* have already been in touch for upcoming coverage of Summer of Glass. On the media tour front, Biltmore joined Explore Asheville PR for a Spring Media Tour of the Ohio Valley in late March with stops in Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis. Highlights during the week-long trip included three broadcast television interviews; meetings with *The Indianapolis Star*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Indianapolis Monthly* in addition to appointments with freelancers representing *The Today Show online*, *USA Today*, *MSN*, *Legion Magazine* and *Home & Away*.

North Carolina Beer Month 2018: Following initial outreach and gathering in February, the PR team continued to pull together destination beer news, events and packages for a national outreach partnership through Visit North Carolina's month-long celebration in April. Content on *NCBeerMonth.com* was also refreshed and updated, as was the team's beer pitch sheet for Asheville.

M&C/Group PR Efforts: Following story leads on two Meetings & Conventions/Group editors (*Courier* and *ABA Destinations*) who received the "What's New" pitch in February, the *ABA Destinations* editor shared that she would be connecting staff with a writer for coverage on Summer of Glass and Explore Asheville's art-specific group itinerary. PR and sales worked together to provide more insight.

Significant Placements

1. Budget Travel – "*7 Things to Do in Asheville, NC*"
2. Charlotte Agenda – "*Travel Guide to 28 Best Things to Eat, Drink and Do in Asheville, NC*"
3. Going on Faith – "*Mountain Retreats*"
4. MSN – "*The Best Place to Stay in Every State Under \$100*"
5. Reader's Digest Best Health – "*Why North Carolina Beats South Carolina for Summer Travel*"
6. TripExpert – "*Asheville: Where City Life and Nature Converge*"
7. Trivago – "*Booze, BBQ, and Golf: Vacation Ideas for Dads Who Need a Timeout*"
8. WCPO 9 – "*Explore Asheville*"
9. WKRC Cincinnati – "*Asheville, NC and the Biltmore Could Be a Good Spring Getaway*"
10. WNYW-TV – "*Raw Travel*"

Content Development Projects: The content team embarked on another ambitious content plan in the month of March, including community initiatives and traffic-building efforts.

Summer of Glass: The team continued to work with local glass artists to develop the microsite for Summer of Glass, which will be launched in early April. The site includes interactive maps—thanks to Simpleview’s new Map Builder feature—pinpointing participating galleries and artists, details about special tours, and four new editorial articles about the history and experiences of glass in WNC.

Other Community Initiatives: The content team also developed a landing page for NC Beer Month and continues to optimize web and sponsorship content related to the World Equestrian Games in Tryon this September. The team provided written and visual assets for inclusion in the Destination Guide that will be distributed to ticketholders. Cat and Jason also began work to roll out the new 360-degree content captured last summer through the partnership with Google Trekker. The Trekker content—now available through Google Street View—will be embedded into strategic pages on the site and will also be announced through a blog post and social media video.

Web Traffic Efforts: In order to drive additional engaged traffic to ExploreAsheville.com, Cat, Jason, and Elizabeth worked together on the rollout of an 8-week contest titled the “Asheville Ultimate Top 8 Getaway Giveaway.” Each week for eight weeks, Explore Asheville provides a new category and ask fans to nominate their favorite Asheville experience in that category. There are weekly winners drawn, in addition to a grand prize winner. When the contest is complete, Jason will use the results of each week’s voting to create highly engaging new content pieces, such as “The Top 8 places to have a craft beer in Asheville.”

The team also worked toward deploying additional galleries featuring user-generated content across the site and optimizing content for better use on Pinterest.

ExploreAsheville.com Editorial Content:

- During the month of March, seven new pieces of editorial content were added to the website: stories about Sliding Rock and great places to take a walk (part of the Trekker project) an updated spring events round-up, the first of four stories related to Summer of Glass, and three “Things to Do This Weekend” posts.
- The most popular blog and story content this month was 50 Things to do in Asheville, which received 40,852 new page views, followed by What You Can’t Miss in Asheville in 2018, which received 9,485 page views.

Social Media Stats:

Facebook:

Visit Asheville page

- March saw 1,453 daily new likes to Facebook for a total of 269,667.
- There were 27 new Facebook posts added to the Visit Asheville page in the month of March.

- The most popular unpaid Facebook post during the month was a share of a link to our story on Biltmore Blooms. The post reached 50,364 people organically, generating 3,571 total reactions, and 270 comments.
- The most popular paid post this month was a share of a link to Week 2 of our Asheville Ultimate Top 8 Getaway Giveaway page. It reached 20,310 users in total (6,972 of those organically), generating 236 total reactions, 46 comments and 27 shares.
- The most engaging post this month was a photo share of snowcapped mountains as seen from Lake Tomahawk in Black Mountain. It engaged 6.5 percent of the 30,449 users reached.

Foodtopia page

- March saw 41 daily new likes to the Foodtopia page for a total of 25,310 likes.
- There were 7 new Facebook posts added to the Foodtopia page in the month of March.
- The most popular post — a share of the link announcing Katie Button as a James Beard Award finalist — reached 3,041 people, generating 171 reactions.

Video:

- There were 12,751 new, organic YouTube views in March. The most popular video by organic views this month was the Spirit of Asheville, which received 2,176 non-paid views. Sammy Visits Asheville came in second with 1,655 new views.
- Across all our video platforms, there were 75,067 views, with the majority coming from Facebook. There have been 1,820,610 views of Explore Asheville content YTD (since July 1, 2017).

Pinterest:

The combined fan total for our two accounts now totals 4,740. Foodtopia accounts for 1,385 of those. Explore Asheville – 3,355.

Instagram:

- Our VisitAsheville account has 45,563 followers.
- There were 17 new posts in March. The most popular was a picture of spring blooms along Biltmore Ave. in downtown Asheville. It received 2,539 engagements (likes and comments).

Twitter:

- Across all three accounts we have a total of 30,270 followers. The most popular account continues to be Foodtopia, which has 14,937 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 119,753 active subscribers.
- Opens/Click-throughs: In March, our monthly Asheville Traveler e-newsletter went out to 120,204 subscribers. It had an overall open rate of 15.7 percent and a click-

through rate of 2.4 percent. In mid-March, the DestinationNEXT survey was sent to the subscriber list, seeing an open rate of 16.9 percent and a click-through rate of 2 percent. An email announcing the Top 8 promotion also went out in March, seeing an open rate of 17.1 percent and a click-through rate of 1.9 percent.

ExploreAsheville.com: In March, website user sessions for ExploreAsheville.com decreased 4.6 percent year-over-year, which includes an 11.2 percent increase in organic user sessions and a 4.4 percent increase in paid search user sessions. Referral traffic from the monthly Asheville Traveler email newsletter increased by 25.5 percent year-over-year in March. Direct traffic to the site was up 24.6 percent year-over-year in March. The overall drop in March was due to fewer user sessions from social and advertising channels. The variance in social sessions was primarily due to last year's success of click throughs to the site from a popular blog post on Biltmore Concert Series shared in March last year.

Website Improvements – SEO and CRO: In March, Simpleview continued its conversion rate optimization efforts on ExploreAsheville.com and worked with staff on a variety of split tests to increase site engagement, conversions and booking engine. Also, of note:

- The Outdoor Adventures section was up 42 percent for March with 12,342 organic visits.
- The Hiking page was the 5th highest landing page with 5,513 visits, 6.97 average pages per visit and 0:06:03 average session duration.
- The 50 Things to Do in Asheville blog post was the second highest landing page for organic traffic with 25,743 visits, 3.30 pages per session and an average session duration of 0:04:03, up 63 percent year-over-year.

ExploreAsheville.com continues to outperform industry averages with 29 percent more total pages per visit, 41 percent longer visit duration, 39 percent more organic pages per visit, and 52 percent longer organic visit duration as compared to industry average in the month of March.

Online Reservations: There were 51 orders for 85 room nights in March with a total of \$11,146 in booking revenue and \$584 in commission. The top 5 states for room nights booked in March were North Carolina, Virginia, Indiana, Florida, and Pennsylvania.

March 2018	Current Month	This Month Last Year	Variance Monthly	YTD Actual	YTD Last Year	Variance YTD
Booking Rev	\$11,146	\$18,039	-38.21%	\$110,841	\$108,352	2.30%
Commission	\$584	\$856	-31.75%	\$5,129	\$4,872	5.27%
Orders	51	77	-33.77%	444	508	-12.60%
Room Nights	85	129	-34.11%	700	720	-2.78%

Visitor Guide Requests

There were 2,598 requests for the Official Asheville Travel Guide in March, a 12.6 percent increase from last March. Year-to-date, there are 20,063 travel guide requests, a 5.8 percent increase from last year. The top 5 DMAs requesting guides for the month and year are:

Top 5 DMAs for March 2018	# of Guides Requested	FY 2017-2018 Top 5 DMAs	# of Guides Requested
CINCINNATI	154	New York	882
NEW YORK	104	Cincinnati	786
CHICAGO	87	Tampa-St. Pete, Sarasota	695
ATLANTA	86	Atlanta	693
WASHINGTON, DC	83	Washington, DC	615

GROUP SALES & SERVICES UPDATE

Group sales reported 47 definite group bookings in March, down 11.3 percent from the prior year (31 meetings/conventions, 13 weddings, and three group tour). The combined total definite room nights were 6,494 room nights, up 6 percent from the previous year. Fifty-nine leads (46 for meeting/conventions, nine for weddings, and four for motorcoach) representing 10,177 room nights were distributed to Buncombe County accommodations in March. Leads distributed were down 28 percent and rooms represented were down 40.3 percent over the prior year.

Estimated revenue for leads issued was \$1,342,737 (down 8.3%). Actualized revenue was \$503,922 (down 11.8%). Person-to-person outreach totaled 1,024 contacts, down 14.3 percent. Indirect outreach totaled 5,160, down 79.7 percent.

Sales Calls/Missions/FAMS:

- Shawn Boone conducted sales calls in Chicago, meeting with 17 corporate, independent, and association planners. He also attended PCMA Education and Networking events and a MPI-Chicago Chapter Membership Committee meeting. Three immediate RFPs totaling 507 room nights were received.
- Tina Porter attended Visit NC 365 Conference and NC Sports Association Meeting, both held in Winston-Salem.
- Beth McKinney attended Travel South Domestic Showcase in Mississippi, meeting with 54 coach planners and journalists in partnership with Biltmore and Asheville Outlets.
- Thirty wedding guides were downloaded this month as compared to 27 guides last March.

Site Visits/Leads: The team hosted two site visits in March including: 2019 Tangle U – 450 rooms and 2018 Our Place Tours – 60 rooms

A sample of March bookings includes (but is not limited to):

- 2018 Diamond Duel Tournament – Bob Lewis Park – 350 rooms
- 2018 The Nature Conservancy – 405 rooms
- 2019 Nuclear Electric Insurance Limited – 210 rooms
- 2018 Bookwalter Binge Grand Fondo – 100 rooms
- 2018 NCLGISA – 505 rooms
- 2018 NC SHRM Leadership Meeting – 75 rooms
- 2018 Micromass Communications – 50 rooms
- 2018 WineStyles-Tasting Station Convention – 25 rooms
- 2018 Coastal Alabama City Visit – 45 rooms
- 2018 Women Leaders in College Sports – 30 rooms
- 2018 15th International Wildland Fire Safety Summit – 150 rooms
- 2018-2022 NCLGISA Overflow – 800 rooms
- 2018 Nexus – 80 rooms
- 2018 Coats North America Spring Meeting – 20 rooms
- 2018 Peace Corps 38 Reunion – 45 rooms
- 2018 Trips Unlimited – 45 rooms
- 2018 Trips by Patty – 45 rooms

Explore Asheville: The 48-Hour Meeting Planner Experience: A 48-Hour Experience was held March 20-23, with 10 direct buyers attending. Attending planners came from California, Virginia, DC, Tennessee, Texas, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Utah. Of those present, one had been to Asheville within the last four years. Attendees were vetted using a qualifying questionnaire, requiring a verifiable history of their ability to place a meeting in the southeast. The AC Hotel was the host for this event.

ClimateCon Sponsorship: Staff sponsored a hosted coffee break/breakfast for participants of the 2018 ClimateCon, an international conference devoted to the emerging “climate solutions” industry. Explore Asheville received logo inclusion on both the website and marketing materials as well as a looped video during the sponsored break. Staff were present, connecting with other potential meetings groups.

Southern Conference Men’s Basketball Tournaments: In addition to placing overnight rooms, the staff played a significant supportive role throughout the tournament. Explore Asheville provided welcome gifts for VIPs including SoCon Staff, School Chancellors, Coaches, Faculty Athletic Reps, Athletic Directors, and Woman Administrators. Staff helped coordinate a welcoming atmosphere for the teams and fans at SoCon host properties. Banners, balloons, and other personal touches helped create an exciting and memorable atmosphere for the Championships. Explore Asheville volunteered on-site throughout the Championships, staffing the Hospitality & Media Lounges, volunteer registration assistance, and a welcome table.

Group Sales Communications

Efforts included broadening the reach of the sales team's message in several ways. The team's advertising package with *Meetings Today* offered three eMedia Campaign opportunities to contact *Meetings Today* subscribers. Market Connections completed two emails and the first was sent in March by Meetings Today. Also, a blog post written by CVB staff, "8 Reasons to Work with CVBS in 2018", was included in Cvent's March e-newsletter sent to all subscribers. The article highlights Explore Asheville's services and incentive program.

Media Coverage

- Staff responded to a request from a writer with the American Bus Association's publication *Destinations Magazine* that will feature what's new in group travel in a summer issue.
- Staff assisted a writer with *Groups Today* writing a feature on libation destinations for an upcoming issue.

Mass Communications

- An invitation to the November Asheville 48-Hour Experience was sent to 5,163 meeting planner clients. Open rate: 15 percent; Clicks: 237; Click to Open ratio: 30 percent
- An invitation email to the 48-Hour Experience was also sent by *Meetings Today* to 3,067 meeting planner contacts as a part of the CVB's eMedia Campaign partnership with the publication. Open rate: 10 percent; Click to Open ratio: 16

Convention Service Highlights: A staffed hospitality table was provided to the NC National Guard Association meeting at Crowne Plaza. A welcome presentation was provided for a spouse group here for a meeting of the NC Association of Athletic Directors.

Departmental Activities:

- Prepared/presented at BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat
- Assisted Asheville Art Museum's Event Focus Group Lunch/Discussion
- Attended Hospitality Outlook
- Hosted Quarterly DOS meeting
- Toured Zebulon Vance Birthplace, The Cove, and Chapel of the Prodigal Son to better understand area group tour opportunities
- Met with WNC Agricultural Center and Young Transportation
- Toured Monte Vista Hotel and Courtyard Asheville Airport
- Attended Explore Asheville Community Block Gathering
- Participated in training for the new Workday cloud-based finance and HR application
- Participated in Community Service Project at MANNA Food
- Attended Asheville Buncombe Sports Commission and SoCon Local Organizing Committee meetings

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tourism Product Development Efforts:

With the announcement of the 2018 grant cycle, Pat has been responding to inquiries from prospective applicants. An Information Session on the application process is scheduled for April 11.

Pat is working through contract development and amendments with recent TPDF award recipients - City of Asheville Riverfront Redevelopment project and Buncombe County Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project.

Funds for the JBL Soccer Complex Project were disbursed in full. While the award was for \$1.1 million, costs for the project came in under budget, and therefore, the grant recipient ABYSA requested a reduced disbursement.

Partner Engagement:

Hospitality Outlook – March 1: The 6th annual Hospitality Outlook was held on March 1 at the Holiday Inn Biltmore West. Chad Church, Vice President of Client Services for STR, Inc., presented a detailed report on market performance and forecast for the coming year, and included expert insights on short-term rental data for Buncombe County. Just over 100 industry partners attended the informative lunch meeting, including lodging leaders, sales staff, elected officials, and CVB staff.

National Tourism Week Summit – May 3: Planning is underway for the second annual National Tourism Week Summit to be held on May 3 at the Asheville Renaissance Hotel. The luncheon program will feature a keynote presentation by Paul Ouimet of Destinations International who will share the outcome of the recent Destination Assessment Survey and provide insights from his strategic assessment work in over 290 other destinations. Attendees will have the opportunity to choose a follow-up breakout session designed to provide marketing and sales tactics you can put to use right away. Additionally, the Summit will conclude with an Industry Resource Expo and networking happy hour. Additionally, Paul will lead a workshop for invited participants to discuss the results of the assessment and prioritize strategies for the future.

Explore Asheville CVB 101 Orientation: The March CVB 101 Orientation was cancelled due to inclement weather; however, Brit conducted one-on-one extranet trainings with four partners, including High Rock Rentals, Earth Magick, Purple Crayon, and Open Hearts Arts Center, assisting them with updating listings, submitting events to the event calendar, and uploading packages and deals.

New Partners: Brit created eleven new partner accounts in March – Foothills Butcher Bar and Kitchen: West Asheville, Violet Owl Wellness, Bliss Farm and Retreat, Polanco

Restaurant, Que Sera Restaurant, Earth Magick, Gan Shan West, AUX Bar, Better Than Unicorns (VR Arena and Immersive Studio), Susanna Euston Photography, and Rustic Grape.

Projects & Community Outreach: Pat worked closely with MERJE and members of city and county staff to develop Wayfinding signage for municipally owned and managed surface parking lots in downtown. Ten surface lots were identified to receive the signage; and a signage plan for the new Coxe Avenue garage is in development. County-owned surface lots received new Wayfinding signs in conjunction with the opening of the new county garage on Coxe Avenue. Additionally, Pat continues to work with MERJE on the assessment of the county-wide Wayfinding Program to identify gaps in the system and planning for new assets.

The public affairs team continues to work 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. A special orientation and extranet training meeting was held for participating Summer of Glass contacts.

Pat, along with members of the marketing team, met with downtown gallery partners to discuss their request to increase presence of downtown galleries on ExploreAsheville.com.

The public affairs team assisted with and attended the SoCon VIP Reception. Pat attended the West Asheville Business Association quarterly meeting, as well as the Asheville Downtown Association's "Building Our City Speaker Series" at the Masonic Temple.

Service Day: The entire Explore Asheville team participated in a Service Day activity at MANNA Food Bank. The team sorted 2,500 pounds of jalapeno peppers and enjoyed learning about the many ways the organization serves our community.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

Building: Continued to meet with Martin Lewis to trim down the building checklist. Biggest success, from the staff's point-of-view, was the installation of a water filter on the faucet in the kitchen. With that, both kitchen faucets have filters as do the ice makers and coffee makers. As the warmer season approaches, exterior painting should resume.

Administration: March began the budget preparation process. A good deal of time was spent organizing the items into relevancy by eliminating most financial ties to the Chamber and costs association with relocation and reorganization.

Revisions were made to the processing of retirement plan contributions to exclude reimbursements and benefit payments from the qualified income to be matched by the

BCTDA. Adjustments were necessary because the County's processing was inconsistent with the plan document. Adjustments were made and a plan audit was completed with no findings to report.

Stephanie and Glenn held a first meeting with Drew Pollick of Craft HR Solutions, a local consulting group specializing in establishing and organizing HR departments in small and mid-sized organizations. Drew submitted a proposal for FY18/19 that would provide leadership assessments, compensation analysis, and a monthly retainer for HR and recruitment services.

Workforce Development: On March 15, Glenn met with Nathan Ramsey of the MAWDB, Robert Foster, David McCartney, and Brenda Durden to discuss the possibility of obtaining an H&T Outreach Coordinator through funds administered by MAWDB. The position would visit area schools, workforce providers and job fairs representing the H&T industry with the purpose of recruiting new workers.

On March 26, Glenn and several representatives from the lodging industry attended a presentation at T.C. Roberson High School on the ProStart Kitchen. ProStart is a national model providing students with the training and experience to work in a professional kitchen.

Transition to Workday

On April 1 Buncombe County transitioned to an all-new accounting, payroll and expense platform called Workday. Since Buncombe County is the fiscal agent for the BCTDA, the CVB was established as a company under the new Workday system. There are significant changes in the way Workday functions operationally and Jonna Reiff has led the effort to work with Jennifer Durrett and others at Buncombe County to prepare and transition successfully.

A full day of training for all CVB staff by Buncombe County was held on March 27, in addition to other internal and drop-in training sessions. The operations team of Jonna and Justine Tullos continues to work with Buncombe County to develop processes, effectively use the system, work through glitches, and train CVB staff on the various functions and reporting options. All functions related to timekeeping, payroll, accounts payable, expense management, and credit card allocations will go through this new system. In this transition to Workday, there is more accountability on each staff member, and the system provides an effective means of approving transactions. The CVB's budget codes have been mapped to Workday strings and staff continues to work to effectively understand and use the new system.

Budget Process

Jonna continues to manage the budget process for the CVB staff, coordinating internal meetings and keeping staff on track to enter numbers in advance of presenting the draft budget to the finance committee on May 11. She also coordinated the BCTDA's annual

planning retreat and March meeting with the team at The Omni Grove Park Inn, which provides a foundation for budget planning.

Office Management

The operations team continues to troubleshoot/handle IT issues as they arise internally and in cooperation with Saturn Networks when appropriate. They reviewed computer needs and purchased new equipment for staff and the boardroom in March. Jonna and Justine also regularly handle ongoing requests for meeting space usage by AIR, ABRSC, the Symphony, and tourism partners, and are finalizing instructions/guidelines related to that usage to be shared internally and externally in the near future.