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TOURISM OFFICIALS AWARD \$1.35 MILLION TO BUILD COMMUNITY PROJECTS

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (March 22, 2013) — The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) announced today that it is awarding \$1.35 million to three community projects through its Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF). New lighting for baseball and soccer fields, renovations at a regional public event venue, and a stage canopy all received funding for their ability to drive more overnight hotel stays and dollars into the local economy while enriching the community.

“The projects that received awards today will continue to enhance Buncombe County’s ability to compete with other destinations to attract more conferences, sporting events and leisure visitors, all of which have a positive economic impact on the entire area,” said BCTDA Chair Ronald Morin, vice president and general manager of The Grove Park Inn. “The TPDF dollars are an economic incentive tool to not only grow the hotel and tourism industry, but also build assets that promote quality of life and community resources.”

A total of fifteen project applications were received for the 2013 funding cycle. The submitted TPDF applications underwent an extensive review process and were evaluated against the criteria for funding including overall economic impact and number of new room nights generated based on the investment request, ability to measure out-of-market visitation, brand alignment, feasibility, and financial strength. Three projects were recommended for funding. Recipients of the 2013 funding cycle include:

- **Asheville Downtown Association** was awarded a grant of \$50,000 for a permanent canopy for the stage in Pack Square Park. The addition of a permanent stage covering will increase the use of the park as a venue for large music events and festivals by the association and other entertainment promoters, thus increasing additional out-of-market visitors to the area. Along with stage covering, the design includes a removable movie screen for outdoor movie events. The canopy is designed by Hoss Haley, who also designed the stage’s pergola, and manufactured by Red Sky Shelters, a local business specializing in distinctive shelters.
- **UNC Asheville Foundation** will receive a \$500,000 grant to install outdoor lighting at their Outdoor Sports Complex. Lighting will allow for evening game opportunities, increasing the

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usage of the facilities for baseball and soccer traveling teams and tournaments. The lighting plan is part of an overall \$7.8 million Outdoor Master Plan created by the university in 2005 with the goal of becoming a state-of-the-art outdoor facility. Because North Carolina state law prohibits the use of state funds for athletic programs or facility projects, private funding has been utilized to build the outdoor facility into a quality NCAA Division I facility for tournament and championship play while allowing for community usage.

- The **City of Asheville** was awarded \$800,000 to complete additional renovations to the newly enhanced ExploreAsheville.com Arena. The renovations, which haven't been updated since the initial construction of the arena 38 years ago, are necessary to increase the number of conferences, large meetings, and events at the U.S. Cellular Center. Last year, the U.S. Cellular Center attracted more than 260,000 patrons with the arena alone hosting more than 100,000 annually. Depending on the event, between 42 and 50 percent of those guests are from outside this area.

As guided in the enabling legislation, TPDF funding assists with the construction of tourism projects that will attract overnight visitors and, thus, drive additional dollars into the local economy. The 2013 cycle brings the award total to sixteen projects that have received \$15 million from the fund.

"Rather than look at current visitation and demand, the TPDF committee's role is to assess a project's ability to increase room nights and anticipated return on investment. We look at all aspects of the project application to determine whether the business or organization can successfully meet the room night projections provided in the application, from overall feasibility and financial viability of the project to operational structure and allocated marketing resources," said TPDF Committee Chair Jeff Covington, senior vice president and chief lending officer at Forest Commercial Bank.

"The tourism industry generates \$2.1 billion in economic impact to the region by attracting more than 3 million overnight guests annually," said Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) Executive Director Stephanie Brown. "The Asheville area destination brand has served us well in attracting new and repeat visitors to the area. Along with investing in advertising, building new product is critical to driving demand from leisure and group visitors. The \$15 million investment by the tourism industry over the past 12 years has attracted increased overnight visitors, motivated spending at our local businesses, and created new facilities that benefit our community."

In the late 90s, tourism partners and business leaders began discussions to increase the self-imposed room tax to provide a dedicated funding source for tourism projects that would help Buncombe County remain competitive as a vacation destination. With passage of legislation in 2001, the room tax collected from overnight visitors that stay in Buncombe County hotels, bed & breakfast inns and cabins

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increased from three to four percent with the additional cent allocated to capital projects.

Visitors also pay a seven percent state sales tax on their lodging. For profit and non-profit entities are eligible to apply for funding if they can successfully demonstrate that their bricks and mortar project will increase room nights and, ultimately, have a positive economic impact on the region.

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