

# BCTDA

Explore **ASHEVILLE**  
Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

## ANNUAL REPORT FY 2019-2020

2020

2025

2024

2023

2022

2021

2020



# BUNCOMBE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

## MISSION STATEMENT

To be a leader in the economic development of Buncombe County by attracting and servicing visitors, generating income, jobs and tax revenues, which make the community a better place to live.

## BCTDA BOARD MEMBERS, FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020

Established by state law to administer the occupancy tax paid by overnight visitors according to the enabling legislation, the BCTDA is a public authority with a public purpose to enhance the economic vitality of Buncombe County. It is led by 11 local volunteers who provide professional expertise to ensure the effective use of the tax to benefit our community and the people who live here.



**Gary Froeba**, Board Chair  
The Omni Grove Park Inn



**Himanshu Karvir**, Vice Chair  
Virtelle Hospitality



**Leah Ashburn**  
Highland Brewing Company



**Andrew Celwyn**  
Herbiary



**Chip Craig**  
Greybeard Realty



**John Luckett**  
Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville



**John McKibbin**  
McKibbin Hospitality



**Kathleen Mosher\***  
Biltmore

*\*Appointed to replace  
Thomas Ruff, Biltmore,  
upon his retirement in  
April 2020.*



**James Poole**  
The Foundry Hotel Asheville,  
Curio Collection By Hilton



**Commissioner Joe Belcher**  
Buncombe County Commission  
*Ex-Officio Member*



**Councilmember Julie Mayfield**  
Asheville City Council  
*Ex-Officio Member*

## A DETOUR & THE ROAD AHEAD

From July 2019 through part of March 2020, the Buncombe County TDA and our Explore Asheville team were well on the road to another remarkable year of proudly serving the people of Asheville and Buncombe County by bringing in visitors whose time here would contribute to our community's economic vitality.

Then, without warning, the world encountered a detour – a crisis that would impact lives and livelihoods in a way no one could have predicted.

But even a global pandemic is not stopping us from moving forward. For more than 35 years, the BCTDA as a public entity has invested occupancy tax revenue to provide customers for local businesses, jobs for residents, and tax revenue that helps to fund core services and social investments. We know from our own experience and track record that tourism promotion is effective at stimulating visitation and bringing money into the economy.

So, although this detour is filled with challenges and uncertainties, we remain confident about the road ahead. Asheville is well positioned to recover faster than other communities thanks to a spirit of resilience and years of marketing investment. Meanwhile, our commitment to partners, this beautiful region, and the health and safety of everyone who lives, works, and visits here is stronger than ever.



**Gary B. Froeba**  
BCTDA Board Chair, FY 2019-20



**Chris Cavanaugh**  
Explore Asheville Interim Executive



Gary Froeba



Chris Cavanaugh

## A NOTE OF GRATITUDE TO STEPHANIE BROWN

Effective June 30, 2020, Stephanie Brown resigned her position as Explore Asheville President & CEO, after eight years of significant accomplishments and unprecedented growth of the local economy.

While Stephanie's leadership during a monumentally challenging year are evident throughout this Annual Report, without question her greatest success was helping to establish the \$5 million Buncombe Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund to support local tourism businesses in safely reopening after COVID-related closures.

It was an extraordinary achievement that resulted in 394 businesses receiving grants and nearly 4,800 local people put back to work. You can read more about this initiative elsewhere in this document.

We are deeply indebted to Stephanie for her dedicated service and unwavering commitment to the people of Asheville and Buncombe County.



Stephanie Pace Brown

# DESTINATION PERFORMANCE



## LODGING SALES

Source: Buncombe  
County Finance



## HOTEL ROOMS SOLD

Source: STR, Inc.



## ENTIRE-PLACE SHORT-TERM RENTALS, NIGHTS BOOKED

Source: AirDNA



The mandate of the BCTDA is to attract overnight visitors as a means of economic development in Buncombe County. Lodging statistics provide the most current and available view of tourism performance.

FY 2019-20 was obviously very different from any prior year in many ways, and that difference is starkly depicted in the chart above. Lodging performance is separated into the pre-pandemic period (July 2019 through February 2020) and afterwards (March through June 2020).

Prior to the start of the shutdown due to the public health emergency, lodging sales were up 10% and on pace for a record year. Hotel room nights sold were up 2% and entire-place short-term rental nights booked were up 33%.

The strong pace of short-term rental bookings continued even after the start of the pandemic and into the summer, but hotel room nights sold declined more than 60% from year-ago levels.



# ECONOMIC IMPACT

## CALENDAR YEAR 2019

**\$3.3 BILLION**

TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT  
(TOTAL BUSINESS SALES)

**\$881 MILLION**

INCOME GENERATED  
BY VISITOR SPENDING

**\$2.2 BILLION**

SPENDING BY VISITORS  
AT LOCAL BUSINESSES

**27,938**

JOBS SUPPORTED  
BY VISITOR SPENDING

**\$392 MILLION**

TAX REVENUE GENERATED  
BY TOURISM

SOURCE  
*Tourism Economics*



# GLOBAL PANDEMIC

## EXPLORE ASHEVILLE JUMPS INTO ACTION

The “detour” better known as COVID-19 has had devastating impacts on the local tourism and hospitality industry. We witnessed dramatic losses in revenue and jobs due to the pandemic, especially by beloved small businesses dependent on customers from out of town – visitors who in calendar year 2019 spent \$2.2 billion with local businesses annually, generating \$881 million in income and \$392 million in tax revenues.

From the start of the public health emergency – even as early as February 28 when we forwarded information to partners from the Governor’s Coronavirus Task Force – Explore Asheville jumped into action to support the industry and our local community, as revealed throughout this report.

Assistance also included a contribution of \$50,000 to the One Buncombe Fund, designed to help local individuals and small businesses impacted by COVID-19.

The donation was made available through revenue earned from advertising on ExploreAsheville.com – discretionary income that typically funds grants and sponsorships for local festivals and cultural events.

## BUNCOMBE TOURISM JOBS RECOVERY FUND

The most notable of these efforts was the creation of a \$5 million pandemic relief grant program using revenue from occupancy tax collections designated for tourism product development. (See more about the Tourism Product Development Fund on page 18.) The only initiative of its type in the state, the Buncombe Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund was signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper with support from Senator Chuck Edwards and our local delegation and members of the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association and the BCTDA.

In total, 394 local businesses that provide a visitor experience received grants to help them to safely and sustainably reopen, providing the support to reinstate or generate as many as 4,787 jobs. BCTDA contracted with the nonprofit agency Mountain BizWorks to administer the fund, enabling the critically needed assistance to be deployed quickly, fairly, and equitably.

### TOURISM JOBS RECOVERY FUND TIMELINE

- May 4:** Legislation to create fund signed into law
- May 15:** Application period opens
- May 31:** Applications from 444 businesses received
- June 19:** Award letters sent to 394 grantees
- June 24:** Public announcement of businesses awarded
- June 30:** Disbursement of \$5M completed

*“Our thanks to the Buncombe County TDA for the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund grant. This grant is allowing us to weather the pandemic with safety and grace and helping us stay resilient during these turbulent times by easing the financial burden of being a small business. Our brewery, Zebulon Artisan Ales, is a small mom and pop organization in Weaverville that runs on positive word of mouth from our loyal customers*

*as well as on our strong reputation for stellar quality beer. The TDA grant has not only enabled us to remain in business as we were before the pandemic, but it has also allowed us to branch out and get creative as to how we are presently, and will continue, doing business in the future. Without these funds it would have been a real struggle for us to remain a viable business. We hope to remain relevant and productive for many years to come.”*

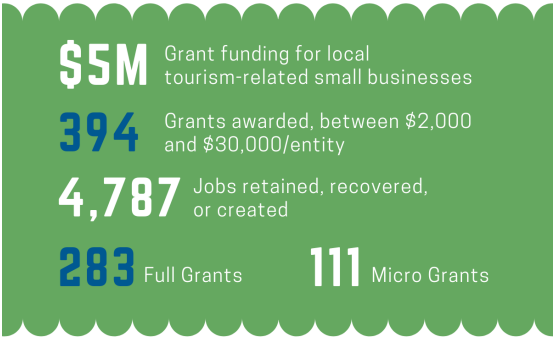
- Mike Karnowski & Gabe Pickard-Karnowski,  
Owners, Zebulon Artisan Ales, Weaverville





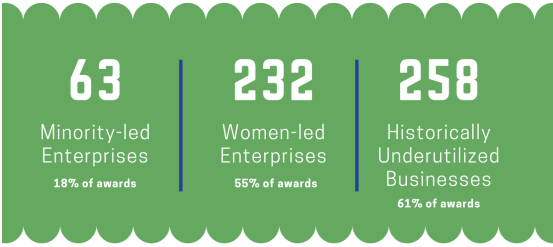
Manicomio • Razberry Threads • Reciprocity of WNC • Wine & Design Asheville • Lost and Found • lou lou • Yumavl Downtown INC • Skin Spa Asheville • K2 Studio Inc • Linden Consignment Boutique • A-Escape • ARTeries by Stina • Black Mountain Quilts • Uncommon Market Asheville • Asheville Wellness Tours • Southern Charm • L'optique • Nourishing Life • The Spice & Tea Exchange • Bagatelle Books • Peaberry • Posies For Lulu Vintage • Andy Herod Gallery • Asheville AV Club • Elements Real Food • Asheville Coffee Tours • Benjamin T Warner DJ & Musician • East West Vintage Rentals • Carolina Fatz II • Comic Envy • Walk With Me Tours Asheville • Blossom & Be Wellness • BREW-ed • Hummingbyrd Studio • Asheville Emporium • American Folk Art & Framing • Asheville Beverage • Traveling Chic Boutique • Asheville Photo Tours • Carrasco Catering • hey hey cupcake! • Frostbite Ice Cream • Maggie B's Wine & Specialty Store • Splurge • Majik Studios • Carolina Love Events • Olde London Road • TLF Biz Works • Blue Ridge Mountain Creamery • Baa'd Sheep Burritos • Skinny Beats Drums • PUSH Skateshop & Gallery • Asheville Film • Cask and Canter Mobile Bar • Red Fiddle Caristo Jewelry Designs • Crucible Glassworks • Bead Co. • Vinnie's Neighborhood Italian • Lakeview Putt and Play • Spice & Tea Merchants Bakery • Asheville Detours • Mitchell's Tuxedo's Bar • Attic Salt Theatre Company • embellish Studio • Ambrose West • Spiritex • Black Commerce • Mountain Me • Salvaterra Pottery Pubcycle • North Carolina Stage Company • Studio Collection • Copper Crown • Asheville Downtown Replacements • Smith-McDowell House Museum Swannanoa Valley Museum and History Center Records • Alley Cat Social Club • clarabell inc. • Rejuvenate • Silver River Center for Chair Caning Driven • Asheville Plays • Black Mountain Center Mountain College Museum + Arts Center • Gallery • Blue Ridge Event Staffing • Capital Club of Catawba Valley Brewing Company • Mountain Beauty Academy • Alexander & Lehnert Jewelry Made • Heyday Music • Liquefy • From Here Inspiration Apparel • Victory Blvd Tattoo • Shady Homewood • Sugar Britches • Foundation Asheville Brews Cruise • Wonderland • Trackside Charmed Asheville • Cakes By Gray • Sunnyside Entertainment • Moogseum • Weinhaus • Enter Flying Bike • Asheville Hiking Tours • The Whale Battlecat Coffee Bar • Paul Taylor Sandals • The Jewelry Ltd • Street Fair • Lazy Diamond • Serenity Desserts • French Broad Outfitters • Blue Ridge Bella Gallery • Odyssey Clayworks • VaVaVooom • Studio • Appalachian Craft Center and Appalachian Azteca #2 • Hunter Banks • Asheville Gallery of Art Brewing • C&Co. All Natural Body Goods • The • Krista Anne's • The Double Crown • Enka Youth Boutique • Montford Park Players • One World Gear • White Horse Black Mountain • Addison Brewing Company • Faithfully Elegant Events • Kilwins Chocolates, Fudge & Ice Cream • India • Common Housefly • Gypsy Queen Cuisine Deli & Mountain Brewing • Cheshire Japanese Cuisine • Grog Lounge • Grail Moviehouse • Hood Huggers Outfitters • El Charro Mexican Restaurante • Karen Axeville Throwing Club • Over Easy Café • Veranda Little Jumbo • Hillman Beer • Luella's Bar-B-Que • House • Open Oven • Asheville Music Hall & The South Asheville • Cocula • Dobra Tea • The Foot Sanctuary • Trailhead Restaurant & Bar • Ariel Carolina Arboretum Society • Zebulon Artisan Asheville Pizza & Brewing Co. • Hi-Wire Brewing • 67 Biltmore Downtown Eatery & Catering • Biscuit • Brasilia Churrasco Steakhouse • Red Ginger Center • Well-Played • Celine and Company Dining Innovations • Benjamin Walls NC • Sauna Club 1901 • The Blind Pig/Aux Bar • Green Sage Lookout Brewing Company • Adventure Center of Smallcakes Cupcakery & Creamery • Louise's Pinball Museum • Moonlight Makers • Ultimate Ice Zen Ink • Sovereign Remedies • Foggy Mountain Mountain Guides • Barley's Taproom & Pizzeria • Park Book Exchange and Champagne Bar • Center Carolina • Southern Highland Craft Guild/Folk Art Point Wellness • Button&Co Bagels • Cucina 24 Coffee • Curate • Lexington Glassworks • The Admiral • Zia Taqueria • Haywood Common • Urban Orchard Cider Company • Ichiban Restaurant • Rockys Hot Chicken Shack • Bone & Broth • Grey Eagle Music Hall and Pub • Oyster House Brewing • Isis Restaurant & Music Hall • The Doner • Trade and Lore • The Cantina @ Historic Biltmore Village • White Duck Taco Shop • Laughing Seed • All Souls Pizza • Chiesa • Mountain Madre Mexican Kitchen & Agave Bar • Asheville Yoga Center • Antidote and Chemist Spirits • table restaurant and The Imperial Life Cocktail Lounge • Wasabi Japanese Restaurant & Sushi Bar • Salsa's • Black Mountain Bistro • Asheville Tourists Baseball Club • Sunny Point Café • Corner Kitchen • Chai Pani • Buxton Hall Barbecue • Simple Cafe & Juice Bar • Benne on Eagle • The Crow & Quill • Archetype Brewing • Mexico Lindo Chapala • Wild Ginger • Chestnut • Nine Mile and Nine Mile West • Rhubarb and The Rhu • Blue Agave Mexican Restaurant • Asheville Art Museum • plant restaurant • The Bier Garden • The Market Place Restaurant • The Odditorium • Gray Line Trolley Tours of Asheville • Vivian • Modesto Trattoria • Mosaix Group • Wedge Brewing Company • Early Girl Eatery • French Broad Chocolates • Malaprop's Bookstore/Café • Zambra • En La Calle • Fig • LaZoom Tours • Limones • The Orange Peel Social Aid and Pleasure Club • 12 Bones • Wortham Center for the Performing Arts • The Venue • Posana • Pack's Tavern • Navitat Canopy Adventures • Foothills Farm & Butchery • Strada Italiano • Social Lounge

**Buncombe County**  
**Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund**  
**BY THE NUMBERS**



**BY SECTOR**

- 124** Restaurants & bars
- 102** Tours, attractions, outdoor recreation, agri-tourism, arts, entertainment
- 84** Retail
- 24** Bakeries, cafes, dessert-makers
- 24** Wedding & event businesses
- 22** Breweries, cideries, wineries, distilleries
- 14** Spas, wellness businesses



**BY COMPANY SIZE**



# MARKETING & PR

## ADVERTISING PIVOTS FROM NEW CAMPAIGN TO SAFETY STRATEGY

Explore Asheville manages a comprehensive advertising plan designed to create awareness and inspire overnight visitation. But in FY 2019-20, what began as a traditional campaign strategy turned into an exercise in managing the unexpected and shifting messages to put community safety at the forefront.

The year started with the launch of a new brand campaign and a series of video spots with the tagline, "Let Your Spirit Run Free." Months later, within days of the spring advertising launch, the global pandemic led to a statewide "Stay at Home" order. Explore Asheville and its agency, 360i, took quick and decisive action to suspend the campaign, recouping the entire investment despite contractual obligations and cancellation clauses.

The team then made a quick pivot to new marketing strategies to keep Asheville top of mind in the short term and set the stage for a longer-term recovery. A video with the theme, "Together in Spirit," playing off the original tagline, was created to inspire dreams of future travel.



As the landscape evolved, Explore Asheville shifted again with new creative that centered on safety and serenity, placing heavy emphasis on the newly developed Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge and the importance of wearing masks.

The team developed a well-researched and thoughtful, data-driven approach in selecting media markets using data from Johns Hopkins University to avoid advertising in counties shown to be COVID-19 hotspots. The strategy also incorporated a well-defined target audience using behavioral filters to identify visitors most likely to follow safety precautions.

In July 2020, analysis of the data resulted in a complete pullback in advertising and the use of other tactics to drive home a safety message aimed at visitors in-market.





# FROM VOICE-ACTIVATED SKILLS TO CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS, CONTENT TAKES CENTER STAGE

Before the pandemic, content and website development plans were centered on efforts to support visitor dispersal to nearby places like Black Mountain, things-to-do roundups to bolster search engine optimization, and creative pieces to invite winter visitors to get cozy in Asheville.

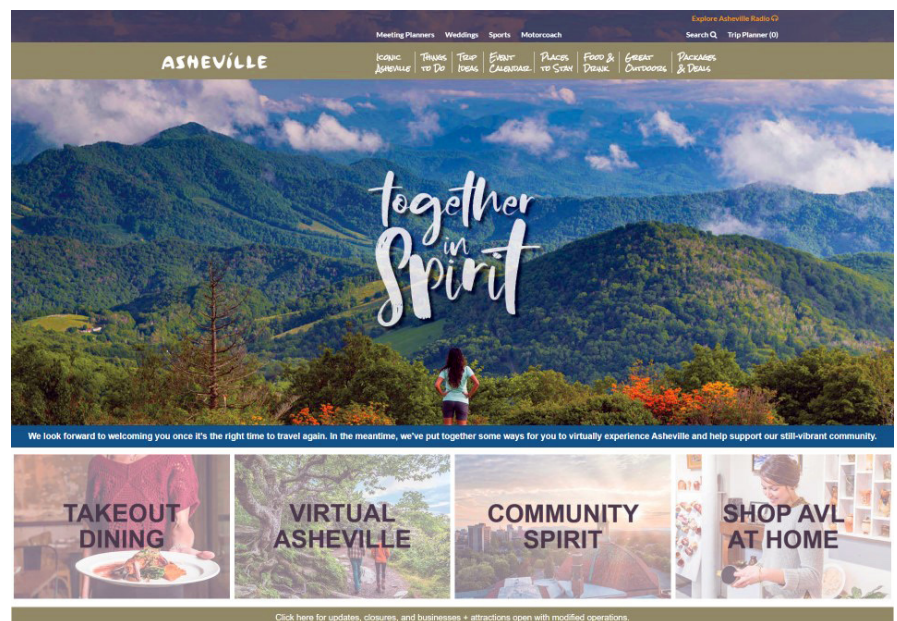
One notable project was the development of an online Asheville Hike Finder, allowing visitors to identify their ideal hike with filters for length, difficulty, and natural features, and adapting for use as a voice-enabled application by using "Alexa" and "Google Home."

The pandemic required an urgent shift in focus. Content on ExploreAsheville.com was developed to create an authoritative source for pandemic-related information.

An Asheville Cares micro-site gave locals and concerned out-of-town Asheville supporters powerful tools, such as restaurant takeout and delivery listings, contact information for partner businesses open with online sales, community spirit pages that offered ways for neighbors to support neighbors, and a "Virtual Asheville" page with an immersive grid of events and attractions remaining relevant online.

The Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge remains a feature of the website to convey the shared commitment to safety by local businesses as well as visitors. Content continues to be added with the aim of helping visitors find safe ways to experience the region while adhering to social distancing guidelines.

*"An arts and culture haven in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Asheville is sharing food, music, and outdoor activities you can experience in your home," said Smarter Travel in an article called, "32 Vacations You Can Take from Home."*



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM

## WEBSITE HITS RECORD-BREAKING 5 MILLION SESSIONS

Despite depressed travel and a third quarter that saw a sharp decline in website traffic, ExploreAsheville.com exceeded a record 5 million website user sessions during FY 2019-20. Additional advertising, curated content crafted around search keywords and the benefit of a new Google algorithm helped propel web visitation to a new high water mark.

In a year when online content swiftly transitioned from travel planning to travel warnings and back again, work continued on a full website refresh and the implementation of a more robust platform for partner information listings. Additional web development is underway, keeping pace with trends such as advanced mapping, increased usability and natural language processing, which is key to voice-activated searches. The refreshed site launches in FY 2020-21.

Improvements and increased website traffic translate to more visibility and, in turn, downstream traffic to tourism partners, a critical tool as part of a long-term recovery strategy.

# ELEVATING LOCAL FOOD & MAKERS THROUGH EARNED MEDIA

In September 2019, Asheville welcomed Chow Chow, a celebration of local makers and culinary creatives who contribute to the modern mountain table here in this community and across the region. The volunteer-driven, nonprofit festival explored Southern Appalachian roots from a variety of angles and influences.

More than 300 chefs and makers – farmers, artists, coffee roasters, flower growers, brewers, woodworkers, bakers – came together for immersive events that included Appalachian soul food and history tours, foraged feasts, immersive pottery and glass art dinners, vegan and vegetarian feasts, a grand tasting featuring a makers market and chef demos. Hands-on workshops and seminars explored local culture, history, arts and women in food.

Explore Asheville’s PR team helped maximize the storytelling potential of this community-wide event on the national level, working with partners to bring in 17 VIP media and influencers to experience the broader destination and participate in the festival. Media representation included *Bon Appetit*, *Food & Wine*, *Eater*, *Chowhound*, *Esquire*, *Food Network*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Vogue* and *Conde Nast Traveler*, with coverage that also included stories in *The New York Times*, *U.S. News & World Report* via Associated Press, *Southern Living*, *Charleston Post & Courier*, *Raleigh News & Observer*, *Garden & Gun*, *Local Palette*, *USA Today’s 10Best*, *Delta Sky* and *The State*.



## CHOW CHOW PUBLICITY BY THE NUMBERS

**8.7+M**

Editorial reach (out of market) of earned publicity for Chow Chow

**\$1.4M**

Total estimated publicity value

Chow Chow news stories reflected by above stats





## MAKING THE "BEST OF"

In 2020, *Travel + Leisure* named Asheville one of "The 50 Best Places to Travel" in the world, noting the area's scenic beauty, art news and fresh culinary experiences. The editors at *T+L* weren't the only national tastemakers to offer their endorsement – the region earns numerous superlatives and national features year after year.

How do these national accolades and headlines happen again and again? The key word is "earned."

Asheville businesses and makers are doing remarkable things worthy of national recognition, but it often takes a timely, behind-the-scenes push or connection made by media relations professionals to earn coverage.

National media brand consolidations have left editors with small staffs and little time to research stories. The support of destination PR teams is more important than ever to help provide information, visual assets, inspiration and local connections.



Explore Asheville's PR team leverages longstanding media relationships through a constant flow of proactive outreach, local news gathering and development, editorial landscape analysis, and thoughtful story support. The team uses marketplace and networking events to pitch media

one-on-one and facilitates immersive research trips for writers, photographers and influencers.

## STORY INSPIRATION EFFORT BY THE NUMBERS

Journalists hosted in the destination **63**

Local businesses featured in Explore Asheville press releases **243**

Media support conversations managed by the Explore Asheville PR team **614**

Media pitches made of Asheville stories **1,782**

## THE 50 BEST PLACES TO TRAVEL IN 2020

~ *Travel + Leisure*

*New marketing photography showcases the region's beauty while emphasizing safety and social distancing.*



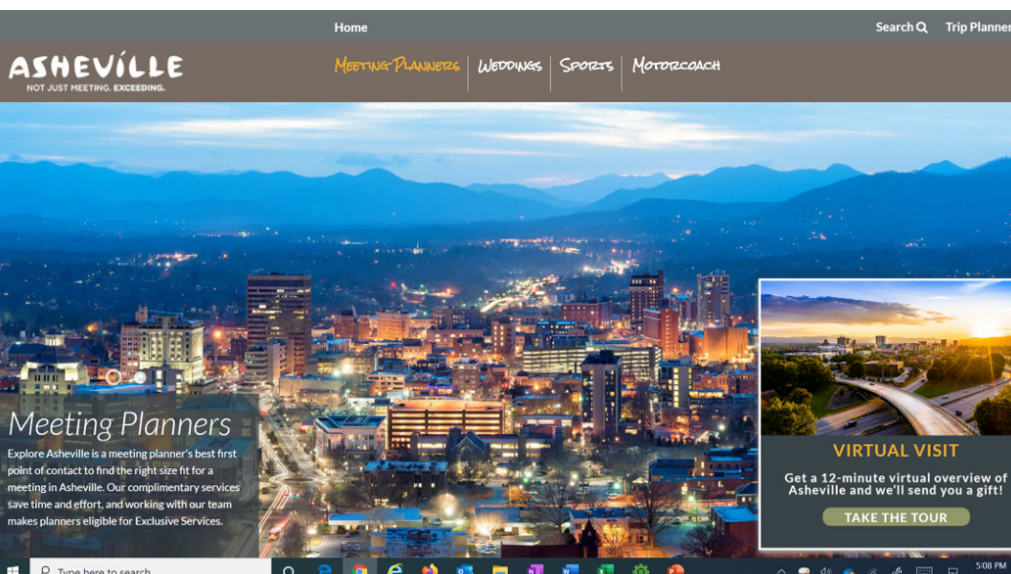
# GROUP SALES & SERVICE

## FROM IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL SALES & MORE

Explore Asheville develops and manages a comprehensive sales plan aimed at attracting group events that generate room nights, translating into a significant economic impact for local businesses. FY 2019-20 started as usual with the team employing traditional strategies used to achieve the objective of driving group room demand. This included a robust schedule of sales trips, trade shows, client events, and inbound familiarization tours for buyers covering all market segments.

In mid-March, COVID-19 forced a sudden change in the department's activities to managing and reimagining group sales during a period of cancellations, massive "lift and shift" of group events and extensive upheaval in the meeting/event markets. While the team remained focused on its core mission of generating room demand, strategies and tactics shifted dramatically.

## AHEAD OF THE VIRTUAL TOUR TREND



Shift from in-person to virtual: That's how you conduct sales during a global pandemic. Explore Asheville turned out to be ahead of what eventually became a virtual tour trend. In July 2019, the sales team produced and launched a 15-minute, on-demand video/webinar for the meetings market that highlighted new developments making Asheville the perfect fit for a future event. The video/webinar attracted more than 200 planner views - and became an even more valuable tool.

An updated version of the virtual visit launched in spring 2020 addressing how Asheville meets

the new destination criteria planners are seeking in a COVID recovery. An email campaign to a database of 38,000 professional planners promoted the tour, while *Meetings Today's* e-newsletter featured a link to a video message of support to planners from Explore Asheville's then-President & CEO Stephanie Brown.

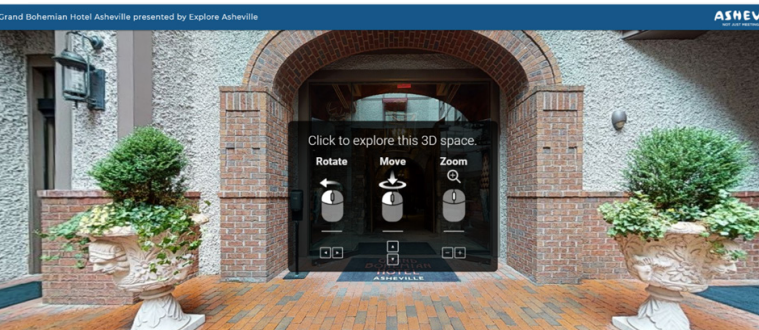
"GREAT PROMOTIONAL VIDEO.  
WILL DEFINITELY CONSIDER AS OPTION  
FOR FUTURE MEETINGS WHEN THINGS  
OPEN BACK UP."

-- E. J., Senior Director, Meetings & Programs

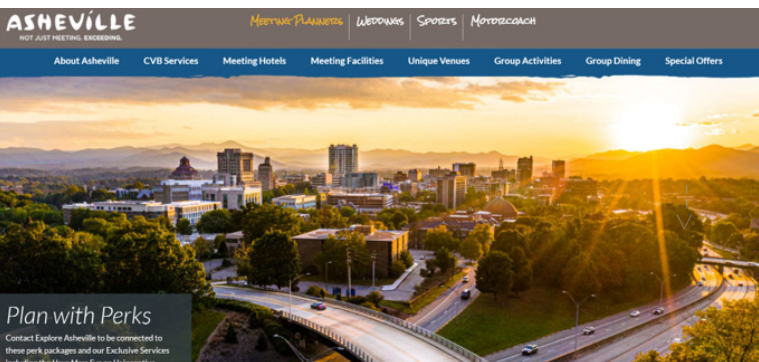


# ENHANCING VISIBILITY OF ASHEVILLE & LODGING PARTNERS

With the pandemic resulting in reductions in staffing and budget levels by local industry partners, the sales team took action to create ways to keep Asheville and local hotel partners visible in regional and national meetings markets. These collective efforts enable Explore Asheville to continue to promote the local area as the best meeting destination.



**3D Virtual Site Visits:** Taking virtual tours to a whole new level during the summer of 2020, Explore Asheville partnered with licensed aerial drone and 3D imaging operator Destination Virtual Tours to produce stunning virtual site tours of Asheville’s primary meeting hotels (shown top left: Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville). The sales team is using the top-quality footage to engage with meeting planners, while also sharing the assets with local hotel sales teams to use in their direct sales efforts.



**PlanWithPerks.com:** The team launched a special promotional initiative targeting short-term business opportunities. Ten meeting properties opted in and created special Perks Packages. The initiative was promoted to meeting planners through Explore Asheville’s communication channels and in a *Smart Meetings* webinar sponsored by the CVB.

*Explore Asheville worked with 3D imaging operator Destination Virtual Tours to produce virtual site tours of Asheville’s primary meeting hotels.*



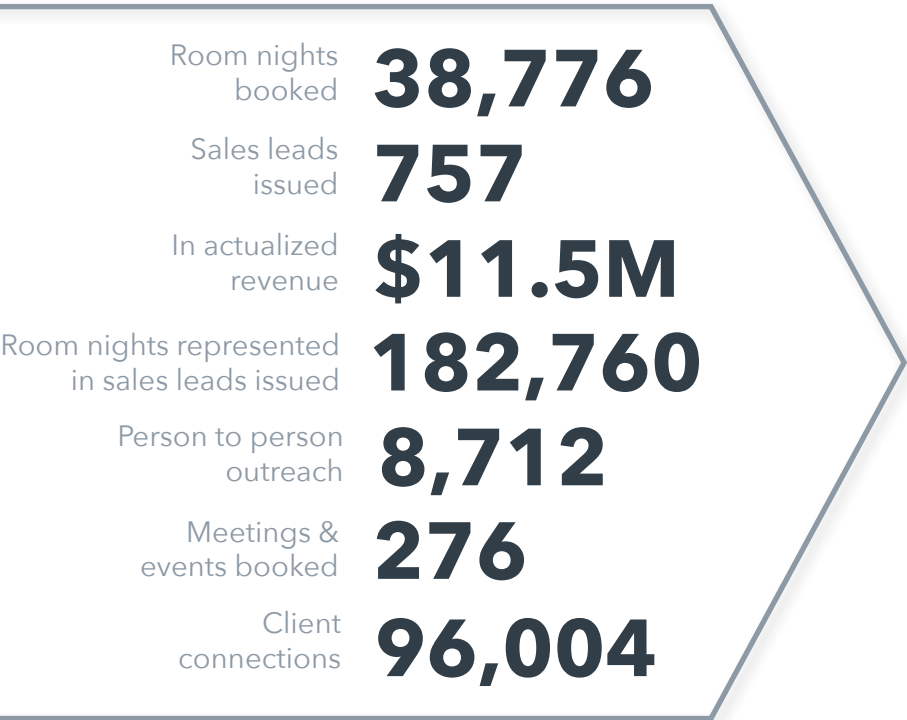
# STAYING FRONT & CENTER

Well-placed sponsorships and public relations coverage remain a strategic priority for the Explore Asheville sales team, particularly during the pandemic. Efforts to elevate awareness of Asheville as a group destination include webinar sponsorships; enhanced presence on social media; and attendance at virtual annual meetings, networking, and social events hosted by organizations such as Meeting Professionals International, American Society of Association Executives and Association Executives of North Carolina.

## GROUP SALES

(Pre-COVID: July 1, 2019 - March 13, 2020)

### BY THE NUMBERS



## REGIONAL & NATIONAL SPONSORSHIPS *(through March 2020)*

- American Society of Association Executives’  
Chuck Fazio Executive HeadShot Lounge
- Meeting & Conventions Interact Southeast Destinations
- Meeting Professionals International Sunshine Education Summit
- Meeting Professionals International Georgia Educational Conference
- Holiday Showcase’s Chuck Fazio Executive HeadShot Lounge
- Global Pharmaceutical & Medical Summit

# IN THE NEWS

## HEAD OUTDOORS IN THE CAROLINAS

- Group Travel Leader

## ‘SAN FRANCISCO OF THE SOUTH’ FEATURES OODLES OF UNIQUE MEETING SPACES

- Smart Meetings

## AMAZE ATTENDEES IN ASHEVILLE, APPALACHIA’S HIDDEN GEM

- Meetings Today

## SCENIC SETTINGS IN THE CAROLINAS

- Small Market Meetings

## ASHEVILLE: ADVENTURE MEETS ART

- National Tour Association’s Courier



## SIGNATURE SPORTING EVENTS

Three signature events took place pre-pandemic. The majority of sports events scheduled to occur after March 13, 2020 were cancelled for the remainder of the year.

### THE SPARTAN RACE 07/2019

The Spartan Race has been a welcome fixture on the Black Mountain calendar since 2015. More than 12,535 spectators/participants registered for the Asheville Super and Sprint Weekend, generating an estimated economic impact of \$5.6 million.



### THE GALA WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS 01/2020

What started in 2013 with 70 participants has evolved into a national event for women's gymnastics competition. More than 1,450 participated in the three-day event with approximately 5,118 spectators, generating an estimated economic impact of \$2.7 million.



### SOCON BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS 03/2020

Asheville hosted the SoCon Basketball Championships for the eighth straight year, with attendance of 32,619 generating an estimated economic impact of \$6.4 million. *This was one of the last three major basketball championships held before the NCAA officially cancelled all remaining tournaments.*



Explore Asheville provided handouts reminding SoCon attendees of safety practices to avoid the spread of respiratory illness, such as COVID-19 and the flu.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS, SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Explore Asheville's Community Engagement team (previously known as Public Affairs) develops and manages a regular series of programs and events for partners, including forums and workshops, orientation and training sessions, and headliner events such as the Buncombe County TDA Annual Meeting.

The department also coordinates community service activities, volunteer opportunities, and networking events for partners like the summer social and the holiday party, both of which include charitable components. In addition, members of the Explore Asheville team build and strengthen community relations by serving on various boards and committees.

## LENDING A HELPING HAND

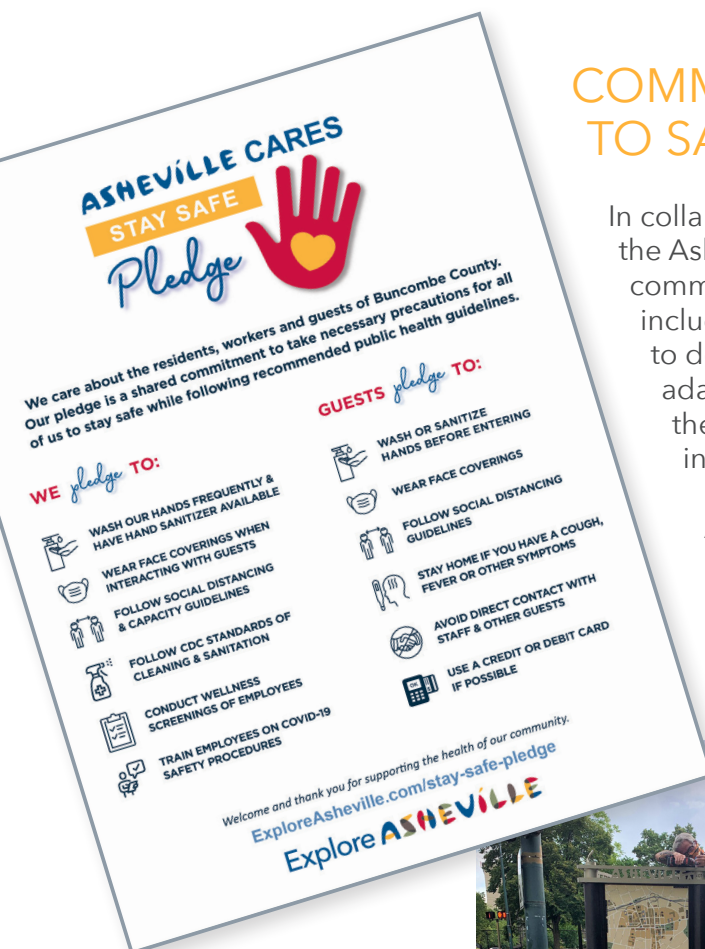
While COVID-19 halted many of the events managed by the Community Engagement department, it did not diminish a focus on serving partners. The team quickly modified operations and processes to adapt to partner needs, helping connect them with customers and offering support as they pivoted their own business operations, often with reduced staff.

Support also included a comprehensive coronavirus resource section of the AshevilleCVB.com industry website; ongoing communications via weekly and sometimes daily partner e-alerts; and a series of webinars, virtual partner forums, and community town halls. Several were hosted in partnership with Buncombe health officials, who shared guidance on safe re-opening for when restrictions were lifted.

## COMMUNICATING A COMMITMENT TO SAFETY

In collaboration with local industry partners, Explore Asheville developed the Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge, an initiative to help partners communicate a commitment to safety. With an online toolkit that included posters, social media assets, and a web badge for businesses to download, the Pledge received national recognition and was adapted by dozens of other destinations and organizations across the country. (See more about how the Pledge was incorporated into Explore Asheville's marketing initiatives on pages 8-9.)

As managers of Buncombe's wayfinding system, the Community Engagement team also partnered with county public health officials to make space available on nine Explore Asheville kiosks to convey the state's mandate to wear face coverings to protect community and personal health.





A LOOK BACK AT THE YEAR



Explore Asheville Summer Social



United Way School Supply Drive



360i Marketing Seminar



Design session for River Arts District wayfinding project



BCTDA Annual Meeting



TMIP Phase 1 Town Hall



Holiday Party + Toys for Tots Collection



2019 CVB Superstar Awards



Explore Asheville Staff Service Day, Haywood St. Congregation



Business Resource Fair with Asheville Grown Business Alliance



LEAF Global Arts Center, a Tourism Product Development Fund grantee



Onsite planning for River Arts District inter-district signage



# TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Community Engagement team manages Buncombe County TDA's Tourism Product Development Fund, which comes from 25% of the occupancy tax paid by people who stay overnight in commercial lodging establishments in the county. Since inception of the TPDF, 39 community projects have been awarded a total of \$44 million. In FY 2019-20, \$5 million of TPDF revenue was also used to create the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund. (See pages 6-7.)

## CREATING A WORLD-CLASS ARTS DESTINATION

Four major TPDF-funded projects were completed in FY 2019-20 that play a significant role in elevating Asheville to a world-class arts destination:

- **Wortham Center for Performing Arts**  
(\$700,000; completed 10/ 2019)
- **Asheville Art Museum**  
(\$1.5 million, completed 11/ 2019)
- **Center for Craft**  
(\$975,000, completed 11/ 2019)
- **LEAF Global Arts Center**  
(\$705,000, completed 02/ 2020)

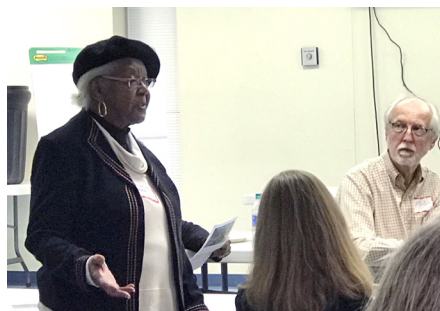
## WORKING WITH PARTNERS ON FUTURE INVESTMENT



The annual TPDF fund application process was paused previous to FY 2019-20 while the BCTDA with community stakeholders initiated a process to create a framework to guide the long-term investment of the fund. While considerable efforts have been put into the development of the Tourism Management & Investment Plan with municipal partners and input from the public, completion of TMIP was delayed due to the pandemic. It will be presented in FY 2020-21.

## MOVING AHEAD ON THE AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

The development of another TPDF-supported project, the African American Heritage Trail, made major strides during this fiscal year. Phase 1, Community Engagement, consisted of a survey and a series of listening sessions and workshops, all meant to build relationships and inform the development of this community-driven initiative. With three phases to go, the final project will showcase, celebrate, and preserve the legacy and contributions of Asheville's Black history and culture.



*African American Heritage Trail workshops and listening sessions*



*Artist's renderings of the Heritage Trail*



# 1,300+ TOURISM INDUSTRY PARTNERS & FRIENDS

The occupancy tax paid by people who visit Asheville and Buncombe County and stay overnight in commercial lodging facilities provides 100% of the funding used to promote the destination. But attracting leisure and business travelers is just one way local businesses benefit.

Qualified tourism-related businesses have access to free marketing services provided by Explore Asheville's team of experts, such as educational forums and webinars, PR and promotional opportunities, networking events, and business listings on ExploreAsheville.com.

In addition, Explore Asheville's partner communication channels provide opportunities to share helpful information and resources, including e-newsletters, the AshevilleCVB.com website, and social media.

We proudly added 100 new qualifying tourism industry partners in FY 2019-20:

12 Bones Brewing  
Adventures Accessed  
Aloha Café  
Angel Dog  
Art Garden AVL  
Asheville Beauty Academy  
Asheville Free Walking Tours  
Asheville Trails and Taps  
Asheville World of Radio  
AVL Beer Bus, LLC  
AVL Party Pros  
AVL Ride  
Axeville Throwing Club  
Bargello  
Beauty Bin Day Spa  
Beer City Scooters  
Benjamin Walls Gallery  
Benne on Eagle  
Black Mountain Escape  
Black Mountain Yarn Shop  
Bone and Broth  
Brass Monkey Photography  
Cantina Louie  
Carolina Love Events  
Cask and Canter Mobile Bartending  
Chemist  
Coley K Photography  
Contemporaneo Asheville Gallery  
Courtyard by Marriott Asheville -  
Biltmore Village  
Crave Dessert Bar  
Creeside Taphouse  
Crocodile Wine  
Cultura  
Desiree DeMars

District 42  
Donna M. Gray Massage and Bodywork  
Early Girl Eatery - North  
Element Asheville Downtown  
Eliza Bell Photography  
Embassy Suites  
Asheville Downtown  
Food Experience Inc  
Food Fire + Knives  
Fresh Wood Fired Pizza and Pasta  
From Here and Far Gallery  
Gallery 101  
Gotta Have It Antiques  
Gray Rock Inn  
H&F Burger  
Haywood Street Fresco  
Herb Mountain Farm  
hey hey cupcake!  
Hidden Flower Tiny Farm  
High Climate Tea Company  
Hike Bike Kayak Asheville  
Hilton Garden Inn Asheville - South  
Himalayas Import  
Home2 Suites by Hilton Asheville Airport  
Home2 Suites by Hilton Asheville Biltmore  
Village  
Ignite Fun Party Co.  
Inner Light Journeys, LLC  
Jeff Pittman Art  
Jonas Gerard Fine Art - Riverview Station  
La Guinguette Crêperie  
LChenard Art  
LEAF Global Arts Center  
Merry Wine Market

Michele Mitchell Fine Art  
Moogseum  
Mountain Home Thrift Store: Cheryl's Place  
Mountain Me  
Nadine Charlsen Gallery  
Nan Davis Contemporary Art  
Noble Cider - The Greenhouse Restaurant  
Open Oven Brunch and Bakery  
Perspective Café  
Regenerative Massage and Bodywork  
RendezVous  
Rise Above Bakehouse  
Riverside Rhapsody Beer Company  
RosaBees  
Sarah Sunshine Pottery  
Shaka Street Tours  
Studio James Daniel  
Sunnyside Trading Co.  
Super 8 by Wyndham Asheville/Biltmore  
Table Wine Asheville  
Take A Hike Mountain Outfitters  
Tasty Beverage Co.  
Thai Pearl  
The Bull and Beggar  
The Cake Studio  
The Chop Shop Butchery  
The Funkatorium  
The Golden Pineapple  
The Old Depot Gallery  
TRKD  
Wicked Weed West  
WNC Photo Tours  
Your Perfect Ceremony by Rev. Jacqui  
Zillicoah Beer Company

# THE 50 BEST PLACES TO TRAVEL IN 2020

Travel + Leisure

## EASYGOING, ARTSY ASHEVILLE

Saturday Evening Post

## ASHEVILLE'S AMBITIOUS BREWERS ARE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF BEER

Food & Wine

## THE ULTIMATE LGBTQ GUIDE TO ASHEVILLE

Matador Network

## REASONS TO VISIT BLACK MOUNTAIN, A PICTURESQUE SMALL TOWN

Southern Living

## HOW TO ROAD TRIP THE SOUTHEASTERN U.S. ON A BUDGET

Lonely Planet

## 10 BUCKET-LIST SITES TO VISIT IN THIS DECADE

USA Today

## APPALACHIAN FOOD FINDS A SPOTLIGHT

The New York Times

## AN APPETITE FOR ASHEVILLE: NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWN'S FOOD REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

Chicago Tribune

## 4 BEST U.S. VACATION DESTINATIONS FOR COUPLES TO EXPLORE IN 2020

YourTango.com

## THE BEST SMALL CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2020

AFAR

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Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority