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## PRESS RELEASE

# Buncombe County TDA Announces Appointment of Nationally Recognized Executive To Lead County's Tourism Efforts

*Former North Carolina tourism professional Victoria Isley returns to the state as new president and CEO of Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau*

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority announces the selection of nationally recognized and former North Carolina tourism executive Victoria "Vic" Isley as president and CEO of Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau. Isley, who has worked diligently for diverse communities throughout her career, starts Dec. 1. Her appointment was approved today at a special meeting of the BCTDA board.

Isley succeeds Stephanie Pace Brown, who announced last April that beginning July she would be taking an out-of-state position in the private sector.



A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School, Isley began her career in tourism in the mid-1990s at the Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau as the director of marketing and communications. After nearly two decades that included senior executive positions at Tampa Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau and Destination DC in Washington, D.C., Isley was selected as chief operating officer at Destination Marketing Association International, representing 600 official destination marketing organizations worldwide, commanding \$2.5 billion in annual budgets. She also assumed the role of executive director for the organization's foundation.

Most recently Isley served as chief sales and marketing officer for Bermuda Tourism Authority for more than six years, where she was responsible for setting strategic direction, creating and managing the \$25 million annual budget, and overseeing the New York City office with a staff of 19 and all global marketing, sales, crisis communications, media relations, social media and promotions.

Isley is a highly sought-after public speaker, recognized for her knowledge, expertise and evolving perspective of destination marketing. She was named one of the "Top 25 Extraordinary Minds" in the travel industry by Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI).

Isley was selected for the top position at Explore Asheville among candidates from destination marketing organizations of all sizes throughout the country, in an exhaustive national search that began months ago by SearchWide Global, which specializes in recruiting for the travel, tourism, hospitality, and associated industries.

Led by BCTDA past chair and current vice chair Gary Froeba, managing director of The Omni Grove Park Inn, a local committee comprised of 10 tourism/business leaders and elected officials narrowed the field to 12; six candidates were then invited for in-person interviews. Three finalists were selected to return for a second interview, which included a presentation by each candidate on how tourism can lead the community's continued recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

"We're delighted that Vic is joining us here at Explore Asheville," said Froeba. "Her proven leadership skills and expertise, and her keen understanding of the business side of tourism will serve our community well in this critical role of bringing back customers for local businesses, jobs for residents, and tax revenue that helps to fund core services and social investments."

"I've dedicated my career to the destination marketing and management world because travel is so emotionally and economically beneficial – for people and for communities," said Isley. "I've long admired Asheville's natural beauty, creative culture and quirky character. I am honored and excited to play a part in

Buncombe County's tourism recovery and balanced growth."

With a staff of 26, Explore Asheville works under the oversight of the Buncombe County TDA to execute an extensive strategic marketing and sales program that inspires visitation and group meetings and travel while showcasing and providing free marketing opportunities to more than 1,300 local businesses and nonprofits, many of them small and micro-sized operations. More than 4 million overnight visitors contribute to annual tourism expenditures of \$2.2 billion in Buncombe County, generating \$881 million in income for nearly 28,000 jobs.

Since the start of the global pandemic, BCTDA has worked closely with leaders from the County, City and business community on pandemic recovery efforts that will continue to be a priority into 2021. Among the initiatives that also included collaboration with local and state elected officials was the establishment and disbursement of a \$5 million relief grant program to help nearly 400 local small businesses reopen, creating or restoring 4,800 tourism-related jobs.

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#### **ABOUT BUNCOMBE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY:**

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 appointed, local volunteers who provide professional expertise to ensure the effective use of the tax to benefit our community and the people who live here.

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