

# STRATEGIC PILLARS: FOUNDATIONAL PROGRESS

**VIC ISLEY**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

*Presented March 25, 2022, at the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority's Annual Planning Session*





Explore **ASHEVILLE**





# EXPLORE ASHEVILLE'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Explore **ASHEVILLE**

BUNCOMBE COUNTY 2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN – COMMUNITY FOCUS AREAS				
<b>VIBRANT ECONOMY</b> <i>A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents</i>	<b>RESIDENT WELLBEING</b> <i>Our residents are safe, healthy and engaged in their community</i>	<b>ENVIRONMENTAL &amp; ENERGY STEWARDSHIP</b> <i>High quality air, water, farmland &amp; renewable energy for future generations</i>	<b>EDUCATED &amp; CAPABLE COMMUNITY</b> <i>A county where all residents thrive &amp; demonstrate resilience throughout their lives</i>	
ASHEVILLE CITY COUNCIL 2020 FOCUS AREAS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ A thriving local economy</li><li>▪ A financially resilient city</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Quality affordable housing</li><li>▪ Transportation and accessibility</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ A well-planned and livable community</li><li>▪ A clean and healthy environment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ An equitable and diverse community</li><li>▪ A connected and engaged community</li></ul>	
EXPLORE ASHEVILLE (BCTDA) STRATEGIC PILLARS				
 <b>DELIVER BALANCED RECOVERY &amp; SUSTAINABLE GROWTH</b> <i>Balance visitor and resident needs. Focus on the quality of each visit.</i>	 <b>ENCOURAGE SAFE &amp; RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL</b> <i>Encourage the care for and respect of natural, cultural and human resources. Grow our outdoor economy.</i>	 <b>ENGAGE &amp; INVITE MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES</b> <i>Extend a genuine invitation and make community connections for all to win.</i>	 <b>PROMOTE &amp; SUPPORT ASHEVILLE’S CREATIVE SPIRIT</b> <i>Share stories of creators and makers and support place making.</i>	
ASHEVILLE GREATER (CHAMBER OF COMMERCE) VISION				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Economic mobility and shared prosperity (grow the pie, block-by-block, child’s first years)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Growing up (land, transportation, housing, resources)</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ A place for all people (young families, retirees, people of color)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Leadership (shared vision, intergenerational leadership, regional, balanced scorecard)</li></ul>
UNC-ASHEVILLE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Increase fiscal capacity and resilience</li><li>▪ Deepen and broaden our public impact in the region</li></ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Evolve and innovate curriculum</li></ul>
DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST STRATEGIC PRIORITIES				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Jobs (bolster the infrastructure for a growing economy)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Health and wellness</li><li>▪ Affordable housing</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Education (early childhood, K-12, post-secondary)</li></ul>	
UNITED WAY OF ASHEVILLE AND BUNCOMBE COUNTY (UWABC) KEY DRIVERS FOR CHANGE				
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Commitment to students, families and the Community School</li><li>▪ Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ New players, new leadership</li></ul>
THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA (CFWNC) FOCUS AREAS				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ People in need (supporting marginalized populations)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Natural/cultural resources</li><li>▪ Food/farming (support sustainable local food)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Early childhood development</li></ul>	



# Explore ASHEVILLE

Convention & Visitors Bureau

## OUR STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES



Deliver Balanced Recovery &  
Sustainable Growth



Encourage Safe &  
Responsible Travel



Engage & Invite More  
Diverse Audiences



Promote & Support  
Asheville's Creative Spirit





## **Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth**

Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.

Focus on the quality of each visit to our community - balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.

# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Balance quality of life for residents & experience for visitors through project investments
- Collaborate with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth & alignment
- Protect and evolve Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations and inspire higher quality visits
- Improve quality of each visit by inspiring increased length of stay & dispersal
- Accelerate proactive sales efforts to increase net new business to the destination
- Drive revenue in need periods through updated group sales strategy
- Review and update Wayfinding pedestrian signage to increase dispersal out of the downtown core



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# TPDF FUND OPENING IN 2022

**\$11.6m**

TPDF fund balance available  
as of this meeting

**\$10.7m**

FY22 paid media budget

**\$15m**

TPDF fund balance projected  
to be available by FY end

**\$15.3m**

FY22 total marketing budget



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# ASHEVILLE BUSINESS EVENTS COUNCIL



- **18 community leaders participating**
- **Convening 3 times annually**
- **5 total events in the works – 2,840 roomnights**
- **2 events definite – 190 roomnights**
  - Client Informatics
    - 130 roomnights, April 2022
  - Airport Roundtable Series
    - 60 roomnights, September 2024



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## Nearby Towns & Neighborhoods

Experience the charm of local neighborhoods and the appeal of small town Appalachia by exploring one of the many communities surrounding Asheville. Here you'll discover artist havens, distinctive shopping districts, and historic neighborhoods tucked all around the region. Located within a quick scenic drive from downtown, these destinations make a perfect addition to your day trip itinerary.

**25% increase in user sessions to the nearby towns & neighborhoods section year over year**

## Explore the Region









# 5 DAYS 5 WAYS: INCREASE LENGTH OF STAY



Catawba Falls

## 5 Days, 5 Ways

### YOUR GUIDE TO AN EXTENDED STAY IN ASHEVILLE

There's no one way to spend your time in Asheville, and with so much to see here, a jam-packed weekend getaway just isn't enough. Still, finding your path and plotting your stops is so worth it—and we're here to help. Here are five of our favorite itineraries that ensure everyone from intrepid travelers to gastronomy-loving guests make the most of their mountain adventure. Ready to explore? **Let's go!**



ExploreAsheville.com | 21

FOR THE

## culture & craft connoisseur

Take in the city's proclivity for creativity through everything from tours to meals to hands-on experiences.

**Day 1**

**MORNING:** Start your stay in Asheville with a top-notch introduction to the city's history and architecture through a guided walking tour by Asheville By Foot.

**NOON:** Watch records get pressed at Citizen Vinyl. Afterward, continue to scope out the city's creative scene by perusing downtown's myriad galleries.

**NIGHT:** Check out the newly revamped Asheville Art Museum, home to 20th- and 21st-century American art, innovative programming, fine handmade objects, and

the 15-foot architectural window known as "The Oculus" with views of Pack Square.

**Day 2**

**MORNING:** Try the seasonal (and beautiful) creations at Vortex Doughnuts for a quick bite before venturing down the walkable South Slope Mural Trail.

**NOON:** Grab a spot on one of Hood Huggins' guided tours, and learn about the roles Black Americans have played in Asheville's history, arts, entrepreneurship, and environmentalism.

**NIGHT:** Catch the likes of Sylvan Esso, Drive

By Truckers, and Leon Bridges at Rabbit Rabbit, Asheville's newest venue. Silent Disco and trivia nights fill in the gaps between live events.

**Day 3**

**MORNING:** Wake up with a freshly roasted coffee and pastries at Dripolator Coffeehouse in Black Mountain before studying up on the history of our region at Swannanoa Valley Museum.

**NOON:** Stick to the streets of Black Mountain to find charming shops and galleries around every corner. When hunger strikes, grab a table at Veranda Café, known for their splendid lunch specials.

**NIGHT:** Hop on over to Piegah Brewing (also in Black Mountain) for live music on the lawn, or venture into White Horse Black Mountain's intimate and eclectic listening room.

**Day 4**

**MORNING:** Fuel up with North Carolina-roasted coffee at Ultra Coffeebar in the heart of the River Arts District before setting out on a self-guided walking tour, awaits.

**Day 5**

**MORNING:** Head to Malaprops Bookstore/Café for espresso and a curated collection of books. You'll have to save the new read for later, though: The Urban Trail, which explores Asheville's quirky past through 30 sculptures along a self-guided walking tour, awaits.

Asheville Art Museum

Asheville Art Museum

**NOON:** Make your own unique piece of art at the North Carolina Glass Center's hot shop. Daily classes teach glassblowing to all levels.

**NIGHT:** Get a taste for the tropics at RosalBee's, known for their Hawaiian-inspired food and cocktails, before heading to The Magnetic Theatre, where emerging local playwrights present their latest creations.

**Day 5**

**MORNING:** Head to Malaprops Bookstore/Café for espresso and a curated collection of books. You'll have to save the new read for later, though: The Urban Trail, which explores Asheville's quirky past through 30 sculptures along a self-guided walking tour, awaits.

**NOON:** Thomas Wolfe's famous 29-room home still stands in the heart of downtown Asheville, welcoming visitors to see the storied site behind his famous novel *Look Homeward, Angel*. Nearby, the LEAF Global Arts Center is a must-visit for its culturally and creatively immersive programming.

**NIGHT:** Hop on the big purple LaZoom bus, and sing and laugh your way through your last evening in Asheville—for now.

LaZoom Tours



Citizen Vinyl

Looking Glass Falls

## ONE MORE DAY

Three of our favorite day trips in our region

**EVEN AFTER SPENDING A FULL FIVE DAYS HERE,** you may feel like you've just scratched the surface. And it's true. The natural beauty we've grown accustomed to in Asheville and Buncombe County expands throughout our region, and Asheville serves as the ideal home base for seeing it all.

→ **GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK,** less than an hour due west from Asheville, is known for abundant wildlife populations that call the expansive open spaces set against the backdrop of the ancient mountain range home. Many flock here to see the gorgeous elk—helping to make GSMNP the most-visited national park in the country.

→ Make the trip west along the **BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY TO HIGHWAY 276** for a more leisurely, scenic adventure. To learn how the science of forestry was founded in our region, head to the Cradle of Forestry in America, a historical gem with grounds and buildings dating back to 1898. A few miles farther south looms Looking Glass Falls, one of the most easily accessible yet visually stunning waterfalls in the state.

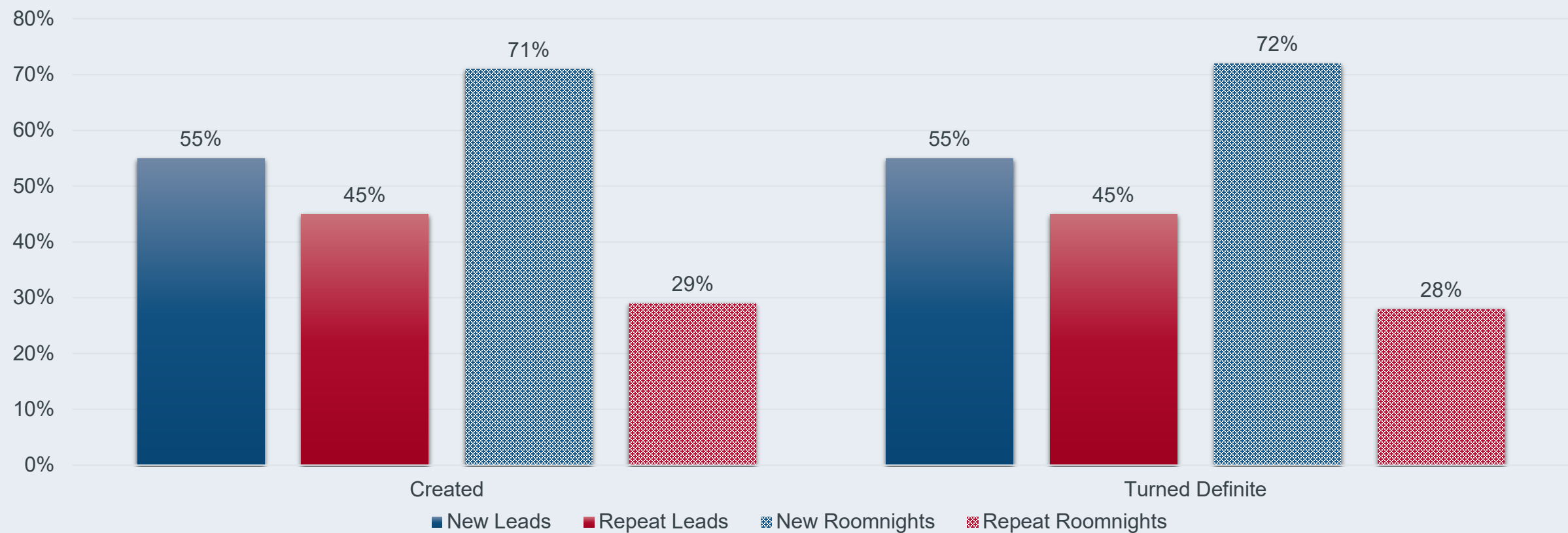
→ Surrounded by the Piegah National Forest and bisected by the Appalachian Trail, the tiny community of **HOT SPRINGS** is a distinct haven for natural adventure and rejuvenation. About 45 minutes northwest of the city, it offers white water rafting and even llama trekking opportunities, all a short distance from the charming village and healing hot mineral springs the small town is known for.



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# 2021-NEW AND REPEAT BUSINESS



**Key Sectors:** Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Climate & Environment, Outdoor Products, Technology

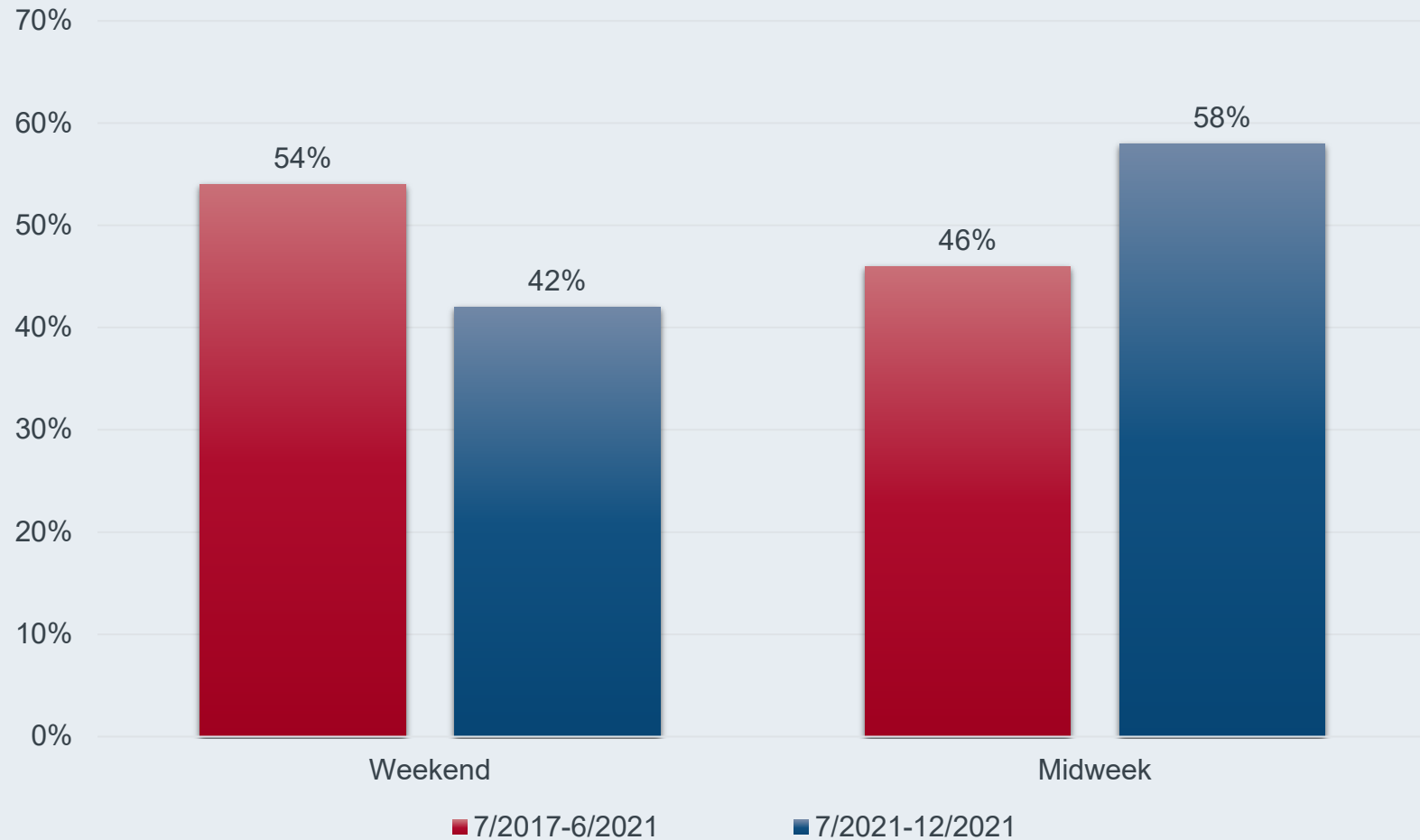
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2017-2021 Roomnights Created that Turned Definite  
Versus  
FY 21/22 Roomnights Created that Turned Definite

# WEEKEND / MIDWEEK



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# DISPERSAL THROUGH WAYFINDING

## Pedestrian Signage Audit

- Identify opportunities to improve the visitor experience
- Disperse visitors out of downtown core into South Slope and North of I-240





## **Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel**

Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.

Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.



# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Influence visitors to respect, protect and preserve natural, cultural and human resources
- Increase number of bookings that participate in community projects
- Identify, qualify and engage purpose-driven companies for purposes of holding meetings here
- Encourage partners to embrace sustainable and responsible tourism practices

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from the sidewalks to the trails  
**LOVE THIS PLACE**  
**LEAVE NO TRACE**  
#recreateresponsibly



Plan Ahead and Prepare



Stick to Trails and Sidewalks



Keep Wildlife Wild



Trash your Trash & Recycle



Be Careful with Fire



Be Considerate of Others



Leave it as you Find It

Learn about  
Leave No Trace  
to protect this  
beautiful place.



**ASHEVILLE**



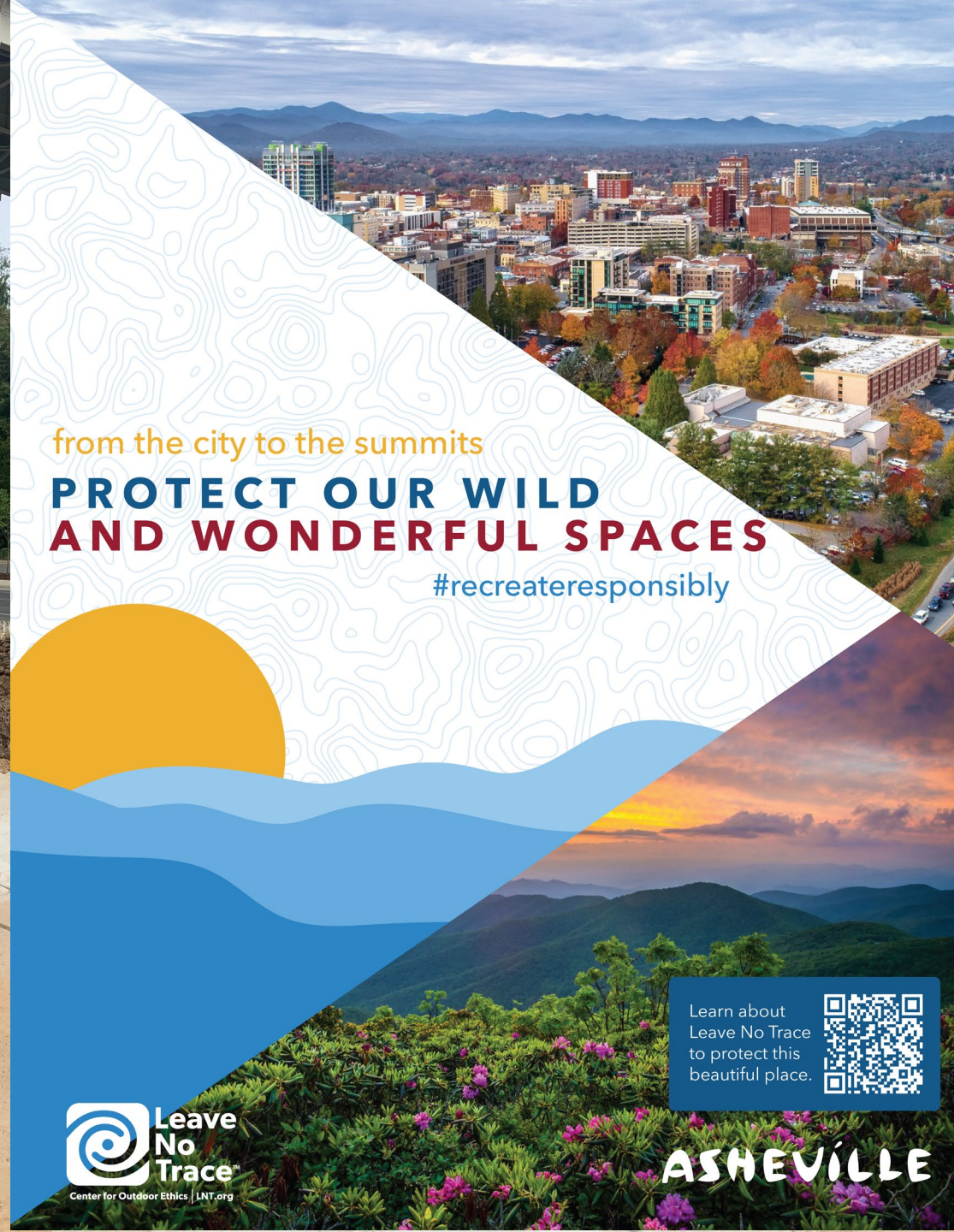
from the city to the summits  
**PROTECT OUR WILD  
AND WONDERFUL SPACES**  
#recreateresponsibly



Learn about  
Leave No Trace  
to protect this  
beautiful place.



**ASHEVILLE**





# AFAR ETHICAL TRAVELER EXCLUSIVE CONTENT PARTNERSHIP

## THE SPIRIT OF ASHEVILLE

ALL NEW!

### THE ETHICAL TRAVELER

*Delivering Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth*

In 2022, AFAR's editorial team will launch an all new column **The Ethical Traveler**. The column will be featured in each print issue and will tackle a different element of ethical travel, as it dovetails with the issue theme. Two columnists — [Latria Graham](#) and [Anu Taranath](#) will alternate writing for each issue. Each column will be expanded through a monthly article on [AFAR.com](#). As launch partner Explore Asheville will exclusively "own" **The Ethical Traveler** Column, providing premium brand positioning and establishing the destination as a thought leader in the category.

- Year-long (6 issues) print adjacency to *The Ethical Traveler* column in AFAR Magazine.
- 100% SOV of monthly digital article.
- Organic promotion in support of each column/article through:
  - AFAR.com homepage takeover & placement
  - Newsletter & Social Promotion

Commitment Required: \$150,000+ NET

FIRST EVER!

### THE ETHICAL TRAVELER: PODCAST/AUDIO SERIES

*Delivering Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth*

Inspired by **The Ethical Traveler** column, AFAR editors will launch the first-ever ethical traveler podcast/audio series with Explore Asheville as the exclusive sponsor. This custom series will bring forward the voices and stories of various ethical travelers to engage, inspire, and guide travelers to be better guests when they travel. The podcast will serve as a powerful audio experience while functioning as the ultimate resource for active travelers to learn and adopt practices of ethical travel.

- Custom podcast series — each episode featuring conversation between two Ethical Travelers.
- Explore Asheville integrated through dynamic host-read ads throughout and/or pre/post roll.
- Episodes will be translated to custom articles on AFAR.com for sharing and discoverability
- Content hosted in interactive content hub
- Explore Asheville to have 100% SOV of all content
- Promotion through direct email, Newsletter sponsorship & social promotion

Commitment Required: \$250,000+ NET\*

\*Length of series will be determined based on final commitment.

## A Locavore's Guide to Asheville

Support small businesses and help preserve culinary heritage when visiting this slow-food enclave, powered by seasonal ingredients from family farms, in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Regional comforts like fried chicken biscuits and catfish po'boys come locally sourced at **HomeGrown**. Local microbrews wash down seasonal takes on Southern classics at the **Blackbird**. Farm-to-table trailblazer **Market Place** has been serving up dishes crafted with ingredients from nearby farms and artisan producers since 1979. Book a stay at **Appelwood Manor** where you can arrange a cooking class in the chef's dream kitchen—and revel in the immersive experience.

With James Beard Award-winners, breweries, and more, this hub of gastronomy brims with mom-and-pop purveyors and restaurants committed to sustainability in their quest for creative, top-tier dining. Eating seasonally and locally on a trip to Asheville helps celebrate its rich traditions and distinctive communities, contributes to the local economy, and nourishes your soul too.

### Find Dining

Among the best ways to taste Asheville's delicacies is foraging them yourself.

Go beyond merely filling your plate with locally sourced meals. Head out with area experts on expeditions that will take you into the wilds to forage ingredients and discover a deeper sense of place.

**No Taste Like Home** offers top-rated, guided Foraging Tours and Wild Food Strolls, suitable for all ages and capped off with appetizers using your foraged haul at one of Asheville's award-winning eateries.

**Graveyard Fields**, a favorite hiking trail, is an easy, 3.5-mile loop with waterfalls, rhododendrons, and blueberries in summer months when you can pick up to a gallon per day. Pro tip: go early in the day and in the season to maximize picking opportunities and lessen your impact.

ASHEVILLE  
ExploreAsheville.com

ADVERTISEMENT



Building on the legacy of Explore Asheville's Foodtopia campaign:

According to ASAP's annual surveys, in 2002, only 19 farms reported sourcing to restaurants and that number has increased to 215 in 2022.

WHERE  
TRAVEL CAN,  
AND  
MUST, GO



AFAR



# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Influence visitors to respect, protect and preserve natural, cultural and human resources
- Increase number of bookings that participate in community projects
- Identify, qualify and engage purpose-driven companies for purposes of holding meetings here
- Encourage partners to embrace sustainable and responsible tourism practices

# COMMUNITY PROJECTS



- Email marketing to all groups through August 2022 encouraging community projects.
  - 72% open rate and two definite responses
- 48-Hour Meeting Planner FAM included projects with Seed Programs International and hair hygiene kits for students of color at Asheville High School.

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# PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMPANIES



- Sales team education through Lenoir-Rhyne
- List of 250 B-Corp prospects created by the team for targeted marketing

**Certified**



**Corporation**

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# LEAVE NO TRACE PARTNER TOOLKIT



## The Leave No Trace Toolkit Includes:

- Leave No Trace logo download
- Explore Asheville Hike Finder Tool
- Hike finder icon
- Visit NC's #MakeItYourNature Giphy Stickers
- Exploring Asheville Recreate Responsibly video and instructions on how to embed it into a webpage
- Pledge For The Wild donation QR code and Text to Give code



# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



## ‘RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL & SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM’ PARTNER WEBINAR

Jessica Flores of **Tourism Cares** presented the keynote

Partner Panel Discussion:

- **Jessie Dean** - Asheville Tea Company
- **Shelton Steele** - Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins
- **J Smilanic** - WNC Photo Tours
- **Leah Ashburn** - Highland Brewing
- **Peter Pollay** - Mandara Hospitality Group (Posana, Bargello, and District 42)



# FACILITATING CONNECTIONS



## SUMMER SOCIAL & SUSTAINABILITY RESOURCE FAIR

Connecting tourism industry partners with local sustainability focused non-profit organizations:

- Asheville Greenworks
- Pisgah Area SORBA
- Conserving Carolina
- Friends of the Smokies
- Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
- Blue Horizons Project



## **Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences**

Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.

# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Extend a genuine invitation to diverse audiences
- Develop and invest in community projects that attract and engage diverse audiences
- Increase outreach in recruiting diverse meetings and events
- Promote minority owned businesses through group sales initiatives
- Increase diversity of partner network



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# \$1M Investment in Black-Owned Media & Creators

TravelDesk	Spotify	iHeart RADIO	NATIVO	theGrio	THE ROOT	f Instagram TikTok
Utilizing intent & behavior based data to engage diverse audiences with travel intent	Diverse network of podcasters to extend messaging in a unique and intimate way	Aligns brand with diverse voices driving today's culture	Non-invasive, native ads to drive to new and existing content across diverse owned publishers	Drives cross platform conversions to a diverse, tech savvy audience	Speak to Asheville as an ideal vacation destination to explore through the lens of Black America	Endorsement marketing with carefully vetted influencers across a variety of social platforms
Display, Video, Retargeting	Live-read and Recorded Podcast Audio Ads	Live-read and Recorded Podcast Audio Ads	Custom Articles, Native Drivers	Custom Article + Sponsorship	Branded Articles, High-impact Canvas, Newsletter & Podcast Sponsorship, Display, Video, Social Distribution	Branded Content, Extended Messaging

ASHEVILLE

ICONIC  
ASHEVILLE

THINGS  
TO DO

TRIP  
IDEAS

EVENT  
CALENDAR

PLACES  
TO STAY

FOOD &  
DRINK

GREAT  
OUTDOORS

PACKAGES  
& DEALS

# The Black Asheville Experience



Scroll





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# AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL





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# DEI MEETINGS AND EVENTS

- Engage with planners at Connect Diversity, Connect Sports Diversity and will co-host Compete Sports Diversity with ABRSC
- Attended 4 LGBTQ+ Meeting Planner Events
- Joined LGBTQ+ Meeting Planner's Association at a Premium Level
- Attended International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association annual meeting





# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Extend a genuine invitation to diverse audiences
- Develop and invest in community projects that attract and engage diverse audiences
- Increase outreach in recruiting diverse meetings and events
- Promote minority-owned businesses through group sales initiatives
- Increase diversity of partner network

# MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES



- 8 minority-owned businesses showcased as part of our 48-Hour Meeting Planner FAM



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# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



- Provided an Explore Asheville Orientation at Black Wall Street AVL member meeting
- Hosted a Social Mixer with the members of Black Wall Street AVL



- Sponsored the WNC Black Business Expo
- Will host an Explore Asheville table at the event



# UPCOMING PARTNER EVENTS

## Everyone Welcome LGBTQ Diverse Audience Training

- Presented by HospitableMe
- Wednesday, March 30, at Wortham Center for the Performing Arts



## Black Travelers Diversity Training

- Presented by Nomadness & Tourism Reset
- Wednesday, May 18, as part of Tourism Summit at The Omni Grove Park Inn





## **Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit**

Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.

# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Elevate Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits
- Actively promote creative community and resources to groups and events
- Create opportunities for partners to learn about and support creative spirit

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Clockwise from top left: An array of hand-crafted utensils by Spoon + Hook; a sunny day at Max Patch; chef Rakim Gaines; Capella on 9's light-flooded dining room; Anneliese Gormley of Spoon + Hook.



## Tale of Two Artists

A HOME-GROWN CHEF AND A WOODWORKING TRANSPLANT CHOOSE ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA AS THE BACKDROP FOR THEIR CREATIVE JOURNEYS

In Asheville, artistry can be found everywhere: In the vibrant crafts community, of course, but also in its evolving culinary scene, surrounding scenic beauty, walkable districts, and welcoming neighbors. The city has a magnetic pull, attracting scores of visual artists, budding performers, craft brewers, and more each year. For those who were born here, however, it's confirmation that the city is a worthy place to nurture creative dreams.

Chef Rakim Gaines is among the latter. A native of Asheville, he has a family tree with branches that extend way back in Western North Carolina. "Before my great-grandfather passed away, we took a five-generation photo," he says. His love of culinary arts also runs deep—he grew up watching his mother prepare soul food for family meals. "I'd sit right beside her as she cooked," he recalls. Gaines's culinary aspirations only grew from there, and he landed his first industry job at the age of nine, volunteering at a neighborhood hibachi restaurant. Today he's executive chef at Capella on 9, a position he's held since 2018.

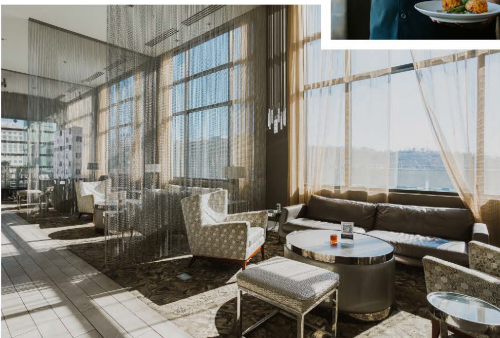
Capella on 9 boasts a Spanish tapas-style menu, but when Gaines isn't at work, he gravitates toward the cuisine he grew up with. "Pork chops, mac and cheese, collard greens—that's what I love most," he says. "In the end, I want to open my own soul food restaurant."

But Gaines is also inspired by Asheville's growing culinary scene. In a way, the city's evolution into a major food city happens alongside Gaines's own journey. He enrolled in the culinary program at A-B Tech but became a father before he completed his degree. This new responsibility meant taking on a full-time job, and at the seafood-focused Lobster Trap on Patton Avenue, he started out shucking oysters before working his way up to sous-chef. Gaines is now one of only a handful of Black executive chefs in Asheville. "I'm trying to build up my name in this city," he says. "I started out at the bottom, and everything I've done has come from me."

When imagining the future of the culinary scene, Gaines is encouraged by his peers. "We were going in such a good direction, with Chow Chow, Taste of Asheville, and the hamburger battles," he says of the city's momentum prior to the pandemic. As restaurants get back on their feet, these food-focused events will once again showcase the region's prime ingredients and dishes—and offer creative fuel to its food industry members. "It's great for different chefs to talk to one another," Gaines says. "We may be competing at times, but it's not really like that. Competition gives us a chance to see and respect each other's creativity."

While Gaines chose to build a career in his dynamic hometown, woodworker Anneliese Gormley represents another kind of creative: one who relocated to Asheville to launch her craft business. "There's something that brings all of us to this place," says the woodworker and Spoon + Hook founder. "It feels full of the opportunity to seek your own truth."

In 2008, the Lexington, Kentucky-based artist visited Asheville for the first time. It was autumn and the leaves were changing, and as she bought pastry from downtown's former Sisters McMullen bakery, she witnessed



a marriage proposal. At that moment, Gormley knew she wanted to make the city her home.

Half a decade later, Gormley took up spoon carving as she healed from a difficult breakup. The woodworker was inspired by a simple wooden spoon, given to her by her grandmother, that could be traced back several generations. Rooted in sentiment, it was a craft to which she quickly felt connected. "It makes so much sense to me," she explains, though she didn't immediately identify as an artist. "At first, joining a maker community felt intimidating," she says. But she soon learned that many of Asheville's artists are grounded in heritage, and, for many, "it's not so much about being one type of artist—it's a lifestyle. And it's so open and accepting." Today her line encompasses a range of carefully carved serve-ware, as well as pieces cast with dried florals.

With Spoon + Hook (a runner-up in *Garden & Gun*'s 2021 Made in the South Awards), Gormley marries practicality and aesthetics, though the business is also focused on sustainability. Most of the wood Gormley uses is scrap from salvage or lumber yards. "There is no piece that's too small to work with," she says. To avoid mineral oil, which is derived from petroleum, Gormley finishes her pieces with beeswax from Honey & the Hive in Weaverville and walnut oil from Asheville Nuttery. Her products are then packaged in recyclable materials. With each considered step, Gormley aims to make the sort of pieces that will become family treasures. "I always hope that someone can hold a piece and feel that it's perfectly imperfect," she says.

Despite differences in their crafts, both Gaines and Gormley draw from traditions of the past while looking to the future—a perspective that's vital to Asheville's creative community. Like so many of the city's makers, the two are adding something new to the story of this place, one spoonful at a time.

For more ways to experience the city's artistry, visit [ExploreAsheville.com](#)



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EXPLORE ASHEVILLE



**An Artist's View of Asheville**  
Where do hardworking creatives go to play? Western North Carolina serves up a heady array of opportunities to imbibe, indulge, and explore

**Quick Bites**  
"I always rave about the Vault," Gaines says of Rankin Vault Cocktail Lounge. Gormley likes Contrada, opened by chef Brian Campelli. "It feels like you're in Italy for a second. It's sweet, fast, and always consistent."

**Dinner**  
"I'm a diehard for Nine Mile," Gormley says of the Caribbean-inspired restaurant with three Asheville locations. She's also quick to name Forestry Camp and its Appalachian-influenced menu. Gaines recommends the Bull and Beggar and the Admiral.

**Drinks**  
Leo's House of Thirst has an enviable wine list (as well as a excellent zero-proof sips). "They've created such a special place," Gormley says. She also recommends Burial Beer Co., where her husband, Tim Gormley, is the head brewer and a co-owner. For drinks, Gaines enjoys the Times Bar in the historic SAW Cafeteria.

**Shopping**  
Gormley snags vintage pieces and locally made creations at Atomic Furnishing & Design (where she's also a vendor). She also loves Harvest Records, where, "for music fans, which hopefully is everybody, you can't go wrong." Gaines shops for culinary ingredients at Mother Ocean Seafood Market, as well as East Asheville's Foreign Affairs Oriental Market. "I'm like a kid at Toys'R Us t here," he says, laughing.

**Live Music**  
Gormley seeks out intimate spaces such as the Grey Eagle but also enjoys Asheville's all-outdoor venue Rabbit Rabbit. Gaines heads to Asheville Music Hall for its popular Funk Jam and cocktail bar Imperial for its DJ sets.

**Outdoors**  
Gaines likes to hike around Graveyard Fields and takes his family to Lake Powhatan Recreation Area & Campground for fishing. Gormley's favorite hiking spots? Max Patch, which she says "feels like church."



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With a rich creative history and a thriving community of artisans, Asheville, North Carolina, is a worthy place to turn for show stopping gifts. Check out this year's gift guide, courtesy of Visit Asheville: <https://bit.ly/3d1fWY8>



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# Year-long partnership includes relocating the Made in the South awards from Charleston to Asheville in November 2022

# TOPLINE OBJECTIVES

- Elevate Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits
- Actively promote creative community and resources to groups and events
- Create opportunities for partners to learn about and support creative spirit



# CREATIVE COMMUNITY AND RESOURCES

- Local creators and innovators featured in meeting client newsletters and social channels
- 48-hour Meeting Planner  
FAMs featured 20 local creator / innovator activities and products



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# SHOWCASING PARTNERS AT EVENTS

## BCTDA Annual Meeting

- Inspirational Song by Virtuous
- Poetry Station by Ryan Ashley the Poet
- DJ by Nex Millen



## Explore Asheville Holiday Party

- Activity/Craft Stations by LEAF Global Arts Center, Sew & Co. + Asheville Art Museum
- Shopping Inspiration by Noir Collective + WNC Farmers Market



# SUPPORTING CREATIVE SPIRIT

## Through Festivals & Cultural Events Fund

Realigned the funding criteria to support the strategic imperatives:

- Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund - \$110,000
- Sponsorships - \$50,000







# EXPLORE ASHEVILLE'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Explore **ASHEVILLE**