



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: Full TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Director 

Date: September 15, 2017

Subject: Updates for TDA Board Meeting

Total Solar Eclipse

We had a wonderful Total Solar Eclipse in Jackson County. We had clear skies over Sylva and I understand a few clouds in Cashiers that parted just in time for a spectacular show. According to the N.C. DOT, 36,000 cars exited Jackson County following the Eclipse. Photos from the Eclipse are online at www.NCEclipse.com.

Occupancy Saturday, Aug. 19 was 94.4 percent, Sunday, Aug. 20 97.1 percent and Monday was 93.6 percent according to Smith Travel Research, who collects aggregated data from reporting hotel properties in Jackson County. Data from STR does not take into account non-reporting properties such as Airbnb or vacation rentals. Room tax revenues from August are due to finance mid-September and will be in October's financial report.

There were no major incidents or accidents reported in connection with the Eclipse. Our extensive planning with stakeholders paid off. Chamber Director Julie Spiro and I staffed the Bridge Park site in Sylva, and heard many compliments about how nice the town was and how friendly people were. We also heard from Board Member Ann Self the crowd in Cashiers expressed similar sentiments. We're hopeful that the good experience leads to repeat visits.

Capital Projects

The TDA board will provide input at our Sept. 20 meeting to begin crafting a Capital Projects policy. Magellan Strategy Group's Chris Cavanaugh will be on hand to guide the board in this process. A survey among then-board members in November 2016 indicated strong support for funding capital projects provided a sound policy was in place. We will discuss this process and best practices at our meeting.

Director Evaluation

The Personnel & Governance committee will make a recommendation to the board to approve an evaluation for the Director's position Sept. 20. The recommendation from the committee will be to perform the evaluation annually. A copy of the recommended evaluation is online [here](#).

FAM/Media/Social Trips

The JCTDA has a number of trips planned for media visiting

-Wendy Parsons is visiting North Carolina to research a travel story for the internationally syndicated paper *The Daily Star*, which is based out of London. The paper has a circulation of approximately 248,111 and reaches 600,000 readers. As part of her trip, she will be coming to Jackson County Friday, Sept. 22 and Saturday, Sept. 23. Pineapple PR and I worked on an itinerary and confirmations for her day in Jackson County and look forward to hosting her.

-Our Fall FAM Trip takes place Oct. 27-29, and itinerary development and recruitment is in progress

As part of our social media influencer campaigns:

-Matt Van Swol will be in Jackson County October 18-25. We'll be providing him with a list of options for a self-guided tour of the county. <https://www.instagram.com/mattvanswol/>

Matt is a landscape photographer living in Augusta, GA. When working with companies as an influencer, he typically spends a few days in each place creating 1-2 high-quality Instagram photos and captions, Facebook Drone Videos and articles for The Outbound Collective. He has around 500k unique visitors to his Instagram profile each week.

-Cator Sparks, Editor of *The Manual*, will be in Jackson County November 3-5. We've curated an itinerary for his visit and I worked on confirming all stops with restaurants and businesses. <https://www.themanual.com/>

His experiences and interviews will be featured on The Manual website, newsletter, social media and video segments. He has a total online reach of 456,238 (not including video views and newsletter reach).

We would not be able to do FAM trips without our accommodations, restaurants and outfitters. They provide complimentary meals, trips, and experiences. By hosting our writers and influencers, we can keep money in advertising – every \$1 spent on tourism advertising brings \$15 back into the community, research has shown.

Itineraries

As part of our website projects this fall, The JCTDA is deploying itineraries on its website. The process to create these was time intensive but well worth the investment. While many tourists love choosing their own adventure, some tourists enjoy a curated list, and we've made just that. Along the process, we developed guidelines and best practices for how we feature businesses and policy to ensure its done so fairly while providing the absolute best experiences.

The policy we came up with in consultation with Pineapple PR (who studied best itinerary practices) Chairman Robert Jumper and myself is:

- We'll mention as many businesses as possible in the itinerary without making it too lengthy.
- Required chamber membership for consideration
- If a business is not mentioned in one itinerary, it may appear in another itinerary.
- There is no possible way to mention every business in an itinerary. If a business is left out we can look at adding them.
- In every case where we mention a specific outfitter, restaurant, etc. we link back to the entire listing of those businesses on our website.

This fall we'll launch an initial six itineraries: Artisan Shopper, Eat Like a Local, Fishermen's Retreat, Girlfriends' Getaway, and Outdoor Adventure. We have three more in the works to launch later this year. They are Winter getaway, family friendly, and mid-week traveler.

Map project

Last month we approved the creation of new maps for Downtown Sylva, Pinnacle Park and a two-sided map of Cashiers Area attractions. The Downtown Sylva Map is the first that our cartographer is working on. I saw a proof this week and it looks terrific. The map committee for Sylva I've established includes Chamber Director Julie Spiro and Town Manager Paige Dowling. They reviewed the draft and provided feedback, which was well received. The process is moving forward at a steady pace and we should have completed maps in time for spring visitors.

User Generated Content

A number of website projects are under way. The largest of which is implementing user-generated content galleries on our website. We contracted with Crowdriff for this functionality. We are monitoring Instagram locations, Instagram and Twitter hashtags, and Facebook pages for new content posted while visitors are in Jackson County. The technology continually tracks the 450+ locations and keywords I've entered to monitor and fill our library with new content; all our restaurants and lodging partners social media accounts were entered in so we can also share their great posts. It would be time intensive and near impossible to manually check them all on a regular basis; this technology automates that. Currently we have around 122,000 assets in the searchable library that we can utilize for social media and our website. A preview is below of photos from Panthertown Valley posted by visitors who either tagged their photos Schoolhouse Falls, Panthertown Valley, #waterfall, #hiking, or #panthertownvalley. Blending actual trip images with our stock photography will really enable potential travelers to see what we have to offer and drive the Call to Action to book a trip here.



We've got several user-generated content galleries planned - Waterfalls, Mountain Views, Hiking, Fly Fishing,

Weddings, and a seasonal gallery. The web team is currently working on implementation plans.

Panorama Galleries

Our Panorama galleries on the website are near completion and will be live to the public soon. This came from an idea I had to give the potential tourist a more immersive look at our destination and be able to place themselves on a top of a mountain or along the parkway, taking in our views. We worked with local photographers on this and the RM team did a great job implementing my vision for this. The galleries are best viewed on a desktop computer. The link to preview the new feature is here: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/favorite-views>

Favorite Views

YOU KNOW, SOME VIEWS REALLY ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS.

From sunsets overlooking an Appalachian mountain range to your favorite spot along our Ale Trail, Jackson County has a little bit of everything. Now all you have to do is come see for yourself.

Note: Click to open each panoramic image; once open, click and drag left or right to view the full image.



Cowee Overlook
Blue Ridge Parkway



Thunderstruck Overlook
Blue Ridge Parkway



Cowee Overlook
Blue Ridge Parkway



High Falls/Cullowhee Falls



Pinnacle Park



Cowee Mountain
Blue Ridge Parkway



Schoolhouse Falls
Panthertown Valley



Schoolhouse Falls
Panthertown Valley



Shadow of the Bear



Whiteside Mountain

Board reduction & Succession planning

Jackson County Commissioners placed our request for a board size reduction from 15 to 9 board members on their Sept. 18 agenda. Following that meeting, a public hearing will be scheduled for comment on the proposed change. The public hearing and a decision on the board size reduction will likely occur at Commissioners' Oct. 16 meeting.

Chinese Delegation

The Chinese delegation did not get approval for their trip from the government so we will not be hosting them for a cultural tourism exchange.

Blog

New Blog posts this month include:

Four Ways to Experience Fall in Western North Carolina

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/four-ways-experience-fall-western-north-carolina/>

10 Reasons to Visit Jackson County This Labor Day

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/10-reasons-visit-jackson-county-labor-day/>

Sylva's Destination Library

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/sylvas-destination-library/>

For the love of the craft: six fall festivals where Appalachian art shines

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/love-craft-six-fall-festivals-appalachian-art-shines/>

iExplore Ad campaign

Our sponsored content promotion with iExplore is now live on our site. Writer Corrine Edmiston visited Jackson County Aug. 23-25 for the articles and she had a great time. We provided an itinerary and she authored the following great pieces:

Meet the Place Called the "Yosemite of the East"

<http://www.iexplore.com/destinations/north-carolina/jackson-county-yosemite-of-the-east>

5 Places You Can Only Find in Jackson County, North Carolina

<http://www.iexplore.com/experiences/weird-wacky/hidden-gems-in-jackson-county-north-carolina>

Hurricane Irma

My office tracked lodging availability countywide beginning Thursday through Sunday for available rooms in Jackson County for Hurricane Irma evacuees. We polled every lodging member in our database and I shared that data with both Chambers along with the State Tourism Office, who answered calls from evacuees looking for places to relocate. We did suffer storm damage from the remnants of Hurricane Irma in both Sylva and Cashiers.

Video

-B-roll video re-cuts from our shoot last year will soon be deployed on social media for promotion.

-I requested RM put together quotes for shooting video and photo our major. We will need to choose our top festivals in Jackson County and prioritize them, based on what footage will help us drive occupancy and visitation. The project is too large to undertake this fiscal year as an unbudgeted project, but early planning has already taken place to consider in next year's budget. I will talk with the board early next year to get input on this project.

-I worked with Western Carolina University to get outdoor footage their video office has captured and I've delivered that to the RM social team for use on our channels.

Donations

The JCTDA recently, as part of the approved budget, donated \$500 to local outdoor groups. We sent out the following news brief to local media:

This week, The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority made two \$500 donations to local environment groups, Pinnacle Park Foundation and Friends of Panthertown Valley, to support trail maintenance. "The Tourism Development Authority recognizes the importance of contributing to the maintenance of these great natural resources that bring additional tourism to our area," said Executive Director Nick Breedlove. "The more well-kept our area's natural resources, the more residents and visitors to the county can enjoy these offerings."

Movie Promotion

Our social media team will work to promote *Three Billboards* prior to its Nov. 10 release. We'll be leveraging photo assets *The Sylva Herald* shared with us of production. The state tourism office is working with Fox Searchlight to bring a screener of the film to Sylva the week before its release.

I am working with the state tourism office on potential locations for another film.

Contests

This month we're running a contest on social media to promote fall travel. We partnered with High Hampton Inn to giveaway a two-night stay in October. The promotion, running on Facebook, requires people sign up to receive our e-newsletter to enter to win the trip. The promotion of a free fall getaway has given us 836 newsletter sign-ups and 20 visitor guide downloads. Current e-news subscribers stand at 6,845. When we began the e-newsletter program subscribers were at 4,300. This promotion has substantially increased our e-news database.

Future meetings

As a reminder, we do not have an October meeting; we altered our meeting schedule this year taking into account October is busy month for our accommodation partners. November is our last scheduled meeting of the year; however, I would like to schedule a December transition meeting.

For board members that do not rotate off in December, please bring your calendars to our Sept. 20 meeting. I would like to schedule a short transition meeting in December so we can name new officers, and let the new Chairperson set committee appointments along with set our 2018 meeting schedule.