



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

To: Full TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Director 

Date: November 9, 2017

Subject: Updates for TDA Board Meeting

TDA Website Updates

-I established a new website address that takes users directly to TDA Board content, making it simple and easy to find agendas, minutes, financial documents and more. There's a wealth of information on our board site for both members and the public. The website address is www.JacksonCountyTDA.com. It is also linked from the bottom of our homepage; you can bookmark it for easy access.

-Our new user-generated content galleries are now live on the website. The initial curation of images was done by me, and RM formulated the page and graphics. The galleries can be accessed by clicking 'Visitor Galleries' at the top right of our website, by multiple links within the website, or by using this link directly: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/visitor-galleries/>. We are very pleased with the galleries and they will pair very well with our existing website imagery to round out the online visitor experience.

Most national and state DMO's are trending toward experiential travel, and in as much it is important to show what a visitor might experience while here, and who better to share that imagery than our own visitors. UGC content on websites has been shown to increase time-on-site and reduce the 'bounce' rate (users who visit, then leave).

-I asked RM to compile social media-related business-to-business guidance that we can share online with our community about how businesses can interact with us and share our news with their audiences in an effort to bring more visitation and spending to our county. The new B2B page is on our TDA site and a direct link is: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/b2b-resources/>

-I drafted an Occupancy Tax section for our website containing frequently asked questions about occupancy tax, when it is due, who is required to remit, and more information. This information has been proofed by our lawyer and has been sent to our finance department to proof, and will be live on our website and potentially the county's site as well.

-I asked finance to begin working to implement online payments for occupancy tax remitters. This feature has been requested many times since I came on board by tax remitters. Finance Director Darlene Fox indicated that this has been in the works for some time and they are moving forward with those plans now that the annual audit is complete. We will be one of the few counties in WNC other than Buncombe that allows this. My perspective on this is it enables people who own properties locally, but live out of state, to file a bit easier rather than having to

mail payments in. Speaking to Buncombe County's finance department, this has streamlined collections and saved time.

-I created a new content section on our website for 'Relaxation' which lets visitors know about the spa experience in Jackson County. I collected imagery and information from all spas in Jackson County and we got that new section live recently. It should provide another offering for visitors in the county to enjoy. The section can be viewed online here: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/attractions/relaxation/>

-We have an upcoming website project for mobile and UX (user experience) enhancements. As every destination is trending toward mobile-first (instead of mobile-friendly), we will continually review our mobile website to ensure it is compatible with all devices, has information within a few clicks and offers a great experience to those searching for information.

-In October we launched 'Trip Ideas' on our website, which is a place we post itineraries for visitors to enjoy. These trip ideas are for those who want a guided experience of what we have to offer. Current itineraries include: Outdoor Adventure, Eat Like a Local, Girlfriends' Getaway, Fishermen's Retreat, Artisan Shopper, Rainy Day and Winter wonderland. These itineraries were crafted by Pineapple over the past few months and they did an excellent job at being as inclusive as possible of businesses who are Chamber members (a requirement for inclusion). They look terrific and should serve as a great resource to visitors.

-We are evaluating the best way to combine trip ideas/itineraries, our UGC galleries, the visitor guide, and other content into a section for potential visitors with all the content in an easy to access menu item.

Recent Blog Posts

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/enchanted-christmas-starts-11-reasons-visit-choose-cut-tree-farm-n-c-mountains-jackson-county/>

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/roads-fall-color/>

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/hello-sylva-darlin-hollywood/>

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/jackson-countys-fall-2017-leaf-report-planning-leaf-seeking-adventure/>

Public Records request

Both Chamber Directors received a public record request from Cherokee County CVB Director Meridith Jorgensen for copies of their Chamber contracts with the JCTDA. As they are not governmental agencies, they are not required to supply those. However, when that request was then made of me and I fulfilled it as there is not an exemption protecting contracts. Cherokee County CVB is studying their contracts and is requesting agreements from around WNC Jorgensen stated.

2018 Events

I compiled our 2018 events from both chambers and other sources and am in the process of updating our website and VisitNC listings. I've also shared these events with our social team for their content calendar and our PR team for short- and long-term pitching.

Business updates

I've updated our website and VisitNC with new restaurants and lodging members. As soon as our website database work is complete mid-November, I will synchronize information contained in both databases to ensure all are the most up-to-date for visitors.

October demand/revenue

We received our weekly report ending Oct. 28 from Smith Travel Research and October demand is down over the prior year. While I do not have the monthly report, I am able to see the first 28 days of October and with reporting hotels, demand is down 9 percent from last year and revenue is down 6.1 percent.

While these trends may seem worrisome, last year was a record growth year with double digit increases many months. The figures for 2017 are above 2015 trends for demand and revenue. Please keep in mind these figures are only for hotel stays which represent a portion of our occupancy tax collections. It will be December before we are able to see how we fared in October overall.

The downward trend in demand and revenue is not one that is isolated to Jackson County; Haywood, Swain and Western North Carolina as an entire region also experienced negative growth compared to last year in the hotel sector according to the October weekly report. It is likely that the hurricanes affected our feeder markets in Florida and warmer than usual temperatures and other factors played a role in the market trends we see.

Additionally, forecasts expect the market to stabilize soon from the constant growth we have experienced nationwide over the last 77 months.

Contract hours

When we begin visitor guide production in January, I have need for contract work for tasks associated with that production. I would ask the board to authorize me to pursue a contractor at an hourly rate to assist with production-related work; I do not anticipate a significant cost for this. We do have funds in contingency for this work.

Amendments to Bylaws/Appointments

Jackson County Commissioners October 10 approved our proposed bylaw changes which enabled us to reduce our board size to nine members.

At their November 6 meeting, Commissioners approved our request for Vick Patel to secede Chairman Robert Jumper in December. They also confirmed our new board appointment for Dale Collins, who serves as the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce appointment to our board in the tourism-related business category. We welcome Mr. Collins to our board and the great expertise he will offer.

Commissioners also extended the terms of Laura Bowers and Gareth Daley to expire in 2020 which allows for proper staggering of terms.

AirBNB Analytics

We now have analytics on the Airbnb market in Jackson County through a connection I made with AirDNA, who provides those analytics. While the data is scraped data from the AirBNB site, the data is useful for getting a pulse of the Airbnb market in Jackson County. Any board member interested in reviewing the data available through this report is welcome to contact me and I will arrange a live demo and review of historical trends.

AirBNB Report

There's a great report out now, compiled by Smith Travel Research on Airbnb performance in 13 key markets. It is an interesting look at whether Airbnb is diminishing hotel demand in those markets. The report can be viewed online [here](#) for those interested.

Facebook Lead Capture

I asked RM to explore collecting Visitor Guide requests through social media and that campaign has proven valuable. To date we have received around 195 visitor guide requests directly through Facebook. This allows people to request information without ever having to go to another page to fill out information. We continue to

offer the ability to request them through our website; my goal is to allow people to request information in whatever way is easiest for them.

Social Media

While in Cashiers working on FAM-trip related items, I stopped by Whitewater Falls to create a clip for social media. The 13-second clip has been viewed 348,000 times and had over 9,500 shares and now sits near top for most viewed and engaged with content that the TDA social media has published. We have a good workflow to allow for both original content, like this, and user-generated content. Link to view the clip:

<https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverJacksonNC/videos/913047092183124/>

Mailing list growth

We are experiencing tremendous growth in our e-news mailing list; we send our e-mail newsletters out every other month currently. We began the year with around 4,200 e-mail subscribers and with the addition of new leads from campaigns and marketing programs, we now have around 13,100 subscribers. We'll continue to optimize our efforts to drive this number higher.

Map Project

The Sylva map the JCTDA commissioned is nearly complete. We incorporated all final feedback from the map committee I established which includes myself, Chamber Director Julie Spiro and Town of Sylva Manager Paige Dowling. Once this map is finalized, we will distribute it digitally and once the Pinnacle Park map is complete, which will go on the reverse side of the map, we will print it. Following the Pinnacle Park map, we will create a Cashiers area waterfall and attractions map/listing. A Dillsboro map is also on the horizon once those projects complete and we have more details on proposed projects in Dillsboro so as to not have to redo the map within a short time frame of completing it.

Networking

I attended the Travel and Tourism Research Association Marketing Outlook Forum in Baltimore, Md. last month and it was great to connect with those in research and see current marketing trends. Our VisitNC team was represented by Director of Tourism Research Marlise Taylor and Director of Tourism Marketing Mark Shore. Additionally our TDA consultant, Chris Cavanaugh was in attendance, as a sponsor of the MOF.

During the conference, I was able to dial in to a VisitNC listening session held in Sylva with State Tourism Director Wit Tuttel and the VisitNC team. Our Chair and others from the board participated in the roundtable discussion about current trends, opportunities and challenges. The session went very well.

In other engagement, I presented to the inaugural Jackson County Citizen's Academy Oct. 5 and gave a presentation to a senior level tourism class at Western Carolina University Nov. 7.

Transition Sessions

On Nov. 2 I held a transition session with current Chairman Robert Jumper and incoming Chairman Vick Patel. I am working to schedule an orientation session with incoming board member Collins.

Three Billboards Screening

I worked with Fox Searchlight for the last month to arrange for an advance screening of *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri* which filmed in Sylva in spring of last year. We secured a single screening for Nov. 14 at 7 p.m. at the Quin Theater in Sylva; it is likely the film will not be released until at least Nov. 22 in the Asheville area and Dec. 1 nationwide. The screening is invitation only; after media, town, county and state officials were accounted for on the invitation list, I offered all remaining tickets to the public by way of local media outlets to be most fair and allow everyone an equal chance to attend.

I distributed tickets to WRGC, The Sylva Herald, Crossroads Chronicle, Smoky Mountain News and WLOS.

We also partnered with Western Carolina University on their social media channel for a giveaway. In the giveaway terms, we asked entrants to like our Instagram page, which resulted in a 2-percent increase in followers. Apart from the increase in followers, it exposes the college community to the outdoor opportunities we have here and invites them to tag us in future posts they create.

Film Scouting

I put together a two-day film scouting itinerary for the VisitNC film office and secured contacts and tours of properties for a potential mini-series. The trip was productive and we did identify a few potential locations to share with production.

MST Proposal 2019

I worked with Chamber Director Julie Spiro on submitting a response to the Mountains to the Sea trail annual gathering in 2019. We are hopeful they will select Sylva for that gathering, which could bring a few hundred room nights to our community during a traditionally slow time. Many of the people who come to the meeting are from the eastern portion of the state, so we stand to potentially gain exposure to an in-state segment who may have not traveled here before.

Media visits

We hosted many media in Jackson County over the course of several trips. These trips, are essential to our PR goals in generating earned media for our county to drive visitation.

On the below trips, I worked with Pineapple and RawleMurdy on Itinerary development. I also worked on the initial bookings with partners, itinerary review with feedback, welcome bag assembly and delivery and pre-visit double confirmations.

-October 18-25 – Matt Van Swol / Outbound Collective – Pineapple PR Social Media Influencer Trip

We received great publicity already from this trip on social media and Matt has already published a blog recapping this trip: <https://www.theoutbound.com/mattvanswol/exploring-underrated-mountain-towns-in-jackson-county-nc>

-October 27-29 – Fall FAM trip – Jeff Barganier, Emily-Sarah Linebeck, and Taralynn McNitt – Pineapple FAM Trip

-November 3-5 – Cator Sparks / www.TheManual.com – RawleMurdy Social Media Influencer Trip

Our partners' contributions to these trips are invaluable and we could not do these trips without them sponsoring complimentary experiences, lodging and meals.

Reminder – December meeting

Our December meeting is **December 5** at WCU in our regular location as an organizational meeting following board structural changes and a majority of our board members rotating off. Please bring your calendar to the meeting as we will set meeting dates for 2018 and name a secretary & vice-chair.