



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

To: TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director
Caleb Sullivan, TDA Sales & Marketing Manager

Date: April 13, 2020

Subject: Updates for TDA Board

Executive Director Report – Nick Breedlove

Advertising and Public Relations

On March 14, after consulting with Rawle Murdy we cancelled all ads running across our platforms – Google Paid Search, Social Media, VisitNC/LGA Co-ops, and direct placements. Stopping these ads running allowed us to recover funds in many cases that we are reverting to fund balance to shift to recovery messaging.

Through proactive cuts and in partnership with Rawle Murdy, we were able to revert back / not spend \$53,359.94 through the end of this fiscal. We are very appreciative of our ad agency, Rawle Murdy, and their flexibility in working with us through the remainder of this fiscal year and altering our media plan.

We have \$4,000 left in our social media advertising budget through June 30, allowing us to get messaging out there for a tiered reopening campaign. While that seems minimal, it will enable us to remain top of mind when travelers begin planning trips. Later in my updates, you will find projections of when travelers are expected to start traveling again.

In PR related efforts, we also made budget revisions of \$10,703 and took on some of the work in house with the blog.

Budget

Realizing the need to save every available dollar for recovery efforts along with ensuring proper cash flow, I shifted focus in March to budget projections. I was able to identify \$137,951 in program cuts to our current FY budget, which will position us in a better fund balance situation to begin next fiscal.

The Executive Committee, along with Darlene, spent significant time on budgeted expenditures and revising our budget significantly to put us in the best position possible. The increases in budget expenditures are necessary to even out negative line items where we under projected expenditures. The Creative & Production line item was not truly overspent by \$12,334, but instead invoice items were misapplied to this line item causing the deficit instead of their respective category. These changes have been carefully examined by Executive and our Finance Officer and will be recommended by the Executive Committee for full board approval. We are making minor final changes to the budget amendment which will not affect line items greatly; a draft of Wednesday's budget amendment is [here \[Link\]](#). We will present the final budget amendment over the screen on Zoom Wednesday and read those changes aloud for approval.

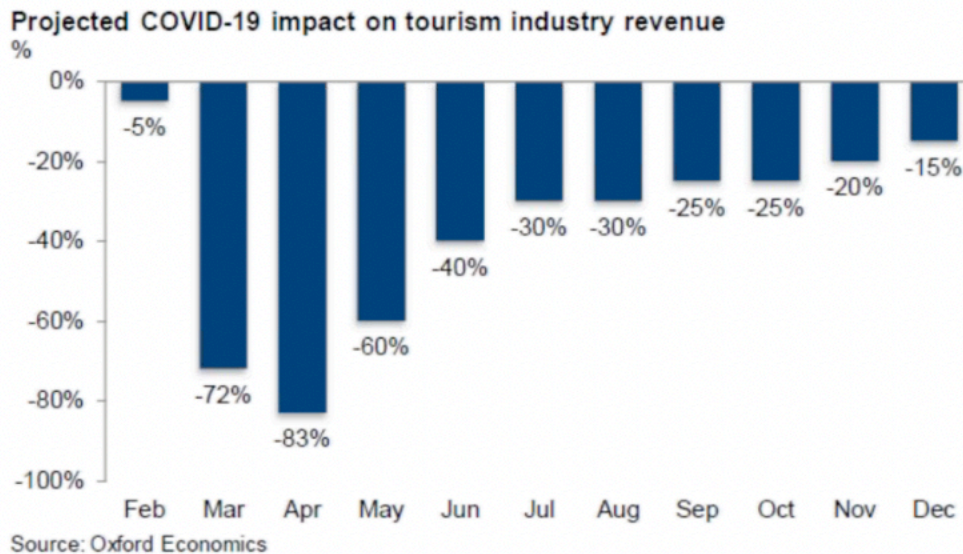
We should begin the next fiscal year with roughly \$211,159 in fund balance, which is separate from the 8-percent required by the state for stabilization. We will not be recommending any use of this fund balance next fiscal as it is needed for cash flow. While we usually have \$400,000 in investments, this \$211,159 estimate will represent the entirety of our investments and fund balance. According to a recent survey conducted by VisitNC, roughly 24-percent of DMOs in our state do not have any reserves, so we are better positioned than some, but not as well positioned as we would like to be for this coming fiscal year. We will make the most of our tax collections, research, and in doing so, formulate an aggressive recovery plan to drive revenue.

In early budget projections, we are eyeing an \$864,170 budget for next fiscal, down 27.47-percent from last fiscal year's Occupancy Tax collections of \$1,191,547.

In the attached projections from Darlene, you will see the methodology for projections. We are conservative in our estimations for July. We would rather be more conservative this coming fiscal and under-estimate collections than otherwise. If we do recognize increases, we can determine if, how, when, and where best to utilize them to generate a return.

I have prepared an early draft budget funding our programs within the proposed collections of \$864,170. However, we are going to wait until next month when we see how the industry is recovering before we recommend a draft budget and a final projected occupancy tax estimate for next fiscal year to the board.

The below infographic provided by renowned Oxford Economics similarly mirrors our projections. While based on a national scale it is relatively similar to what we are projecting. As a rural mountain destination, we will see travelers return sooner than cities.



Future Marketing Plans

We are eyeing a tiered messaging approach to marketing our destination when the time is right. We will look to federal and state guidance before announcing that we are open to visitors. Our State Tourism Office is looking at the Governor’s guidance on when to begin their marketing efforts. Right now, Gov. Cooper is basing all decisions on NC DHHS information, and at some point, in the future N.C. Commerce & VisitNC will be involved in the conversation, but right now, health and safety is the key focus.

Our recovery messaging on a county level will likely mirror that of the state, which will be phased. It will not come as a ‘we’re open now’ message. The pandemic will still be around until there is a vaccine, so we must be sensitive as our residents may not want us to promote visitation, but our businesses will desperately need visitation to drive the economy. In that light, we must be very sensitive in our approach to promotion and do it slowly and in a way that is harmonious with health and safety first.

I now serve on the State Tourism Recovery Working Group that’s part of Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. We hold weekly calls with N.C. Senators, VisitNC, EDPNC, and a number of key stakeholders in the state to strategize around recovery efforts and what that looks like in North Carolina. Along with advocating for the hospitality industry, we’re looking for solutions to bridge the gap between federal support being offered and what is needed by our small businesses.

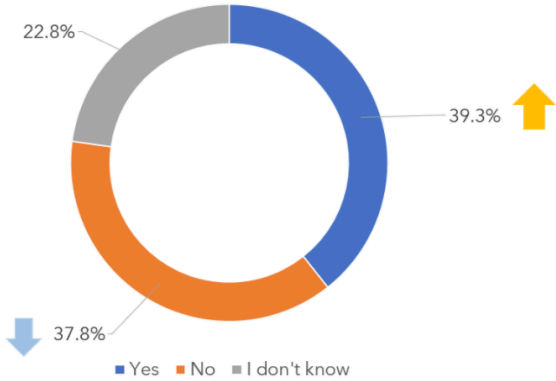
The state’s focus on recovery messaging is to promote recovery from the inside out – targeting North Carolina travelers within short drive markets to travel within the state, followed by contiguous states with high-affinity travelers. The previous traveler to North Carolina was focused on novel & new experiences, and the traveler will instead be seeking tried & true experiences, which we are perfectly positioned for.

We are working with both Pineapple PR and Rawle Murdy on recovery plans and what that looks like for Jackson County. The great news is we have tremendous momentum on our side.

As a rural destination, we are poised to bounce back far quicker from this pandemic than other destinations. The below infographic is new research from April 13 provided by national firm Destination Analysts and offers great insight into the traveler mind.

- It will not be a simple return to pre-pandemic sentiments and behaviors: Now, nearly 40 percent of American travelers say they will change the types of destinations they choose to visit when they begin traveling again —this is up nearly 10 percentage points from just one week ago.

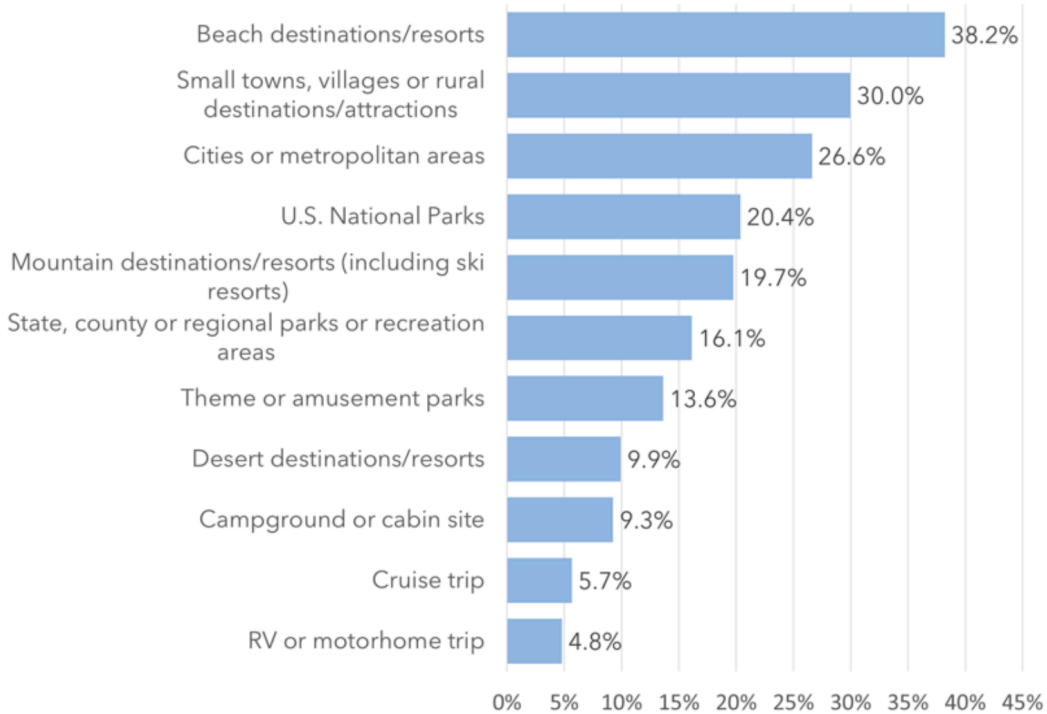
Changing the Types of Destinations They Choose to Visit



- American travelers increasingly say they will be avoiding crowds—including conferences/conventions—destinations hardest hit by coronavirus, and destinations slow to put social distancing measures in place. Also on a continual rise: the number agreeing they will take a staycation this summer (55.2%, up from 41.3% one month ago), and the number of younger travelers who say they will take more road trips to avoid airline travel (49.4% from 43.4% one month ago).
- When asked the place they will visit on their first post-pandemic trip, beach/resort destinations top the list (38.2%), followed by small towns/rural areas (30.0%) then cities (26.6%).

Source: Destination Analysts

Americans' First Trip Destination Post-Pandemic



Source: Destination Analysts

Four Phased Comms Roadmap to Recovery

Broken down into key traveler behavior periods.

COVID-19 COMMUNICATION ROADMAP				
	Wait	Recovery		Go
		Ready	Set	
Traveler Truths	Quarantined & social distancing	Social distancing reduction and potential financial impacts	New normal	Traveling at a normal cadence
Traveler Motivators	Creating a new daily normal way of living and seeking outlets for the now	Returning to normal daily routines with renewed caution and experimenting with future travel plan	Adapting and proactively seeking an escape	Resuming normal travel plans
Brand Roles	Acknowledgement of circumstances (national); Rallying around community (local)	Understanding safety and health precautions; getaway solutions to break 'cabin fever'	Encouraging travelers to get out and explore	Connecting travelers with reasons to travel
Purpose	Maintain top-of-mind awareness	Drive awareness, consideration and visitation	Increase consideration & visitation	Encourage visitation and bookings
Messaging Strategy	Inspirational and reuniting post-crisis; Support community stories; Book now travel later	Inspirational & informational (safety, rates, etc); Bookings	Full-funnel	Full-funnel
Desired Action	Stay connected	Planning ahead and positive connections between traveler and brand	Get excited and making initial travel plans	Booking travel

Source: MMGY

Industry Leadership

We, as a TDA are working harder and smarter collectively than ever before. We've mobilized every resource to leverage and assist our community during this great time of need. Utilizing the website I created – www.LoveJacksonNC.com and our e-mail communication platform, we've provided businesses and residents with critical information when they need it the most.

- Initial offerings on LoveJacksonNC.com focused on restaurants with takeout and their hours. We along with the Chambers of Commerce are updating those hours and offerings on a daily basis.
- New page: [Wi-Fi Information \[Link\]](#) around the county for those who need Internet access for school or business work.
- New page: We compiled [Funding and Business Resources \[Link\]](#) from dozens of websites, partner organizations, and email newsletters and consolidated them in one place for our businesses who do not have time to search for this information. The information includes business counseling services, funding opportunities, CARES act information, EIDL, PPP Information, and more.
- New page: [Virtual TipJar \[Link\]](#). Recognizing that 75-percent of our state's hospitality industry is out of work now, we wanted to find a way to support our restaurant and service industry workers.

Early talks with partners included a conversation about how to do a community-wide tip pool, but the logistics and financial management, along with equitable distribution, would prove that model to be impractical and near impossible to implement and oversee. Instead, we opted for a model Charleston and other major cities use throughout the country.

After getting approval from legal, we launched a form where workers enter their information and members of the public can go in and tip those workers using Venmo or PayPal. The JCTDA is not involved in the financial transaction. We've heard from many how much this means to them during this time of need. While some workers continue to have jobs and their establishments are open, they usually rely on a large amount of foot traffic and tips, which they're not seeing. As of today, over 80 people are registered with the [Virtual TipJar \[Link\]](#).

- New page: [Jobs \[Link\]](#). With the staggering, unprecedented unemployment, we put together a comprehensive listing of job resources for those displaced and affected by COVID-19. There was not a listing online of all the different places specific to Jackson County for people to look for a job. Now there's a detailed listing of all the places one can find employment.
- We created [Social Media graphics \[Link\]](#) (see next page) to promote spending during this time when our businesses and our economy needs it the most.
- To date our website has been visited over 3,500 by our local residents. We have been recognized by the State Tourism Office for our efforts.



In other industry leadership, I organized a regional bi-weekly call with our counterparts in Swain, Macon, Transylvania, and Haywood Counties. It’s valuable to understand what our partners are doing during this time and how we can benefit from what others are doing.

We have been communicating regularly with our partners about all of the Emergency Declarations issued by the State, County, and updating them on Funding Sources, Employment Opportunities, and more. We’ve sent a total of ten e-mails in the last month so our accommodation owners and key industry stakeholders are well informed. The e-mails have an open rate of almost 60-percent. We’ve received several emails thanking us for providing it in a clear, concise, and easy-to-understand manner.

I also worked with County and other leadership on a number of issues as a result of the declarations issued.

- Worked with Airbnb’s Public Policy office to send a copy of our restrictions to all hosts in the area. [Link](#).
- Assisted County in authoring Q&A related to vacation rentals, essential employees, Airbnb’s, the 14-day self-quarantine and other topics to distribute to the community.
- Worked with Duke Energy to address concerns at Pine’s Recreation Area about large groups gathering on the sandy swim beach. Subsequently the area was barricaded, and signage was posted.
- Worked with the U.S. Forest Service and Law Enforcement to address an individual online posting information on how to bypass Whiteside Mountain closure.

Media Interviews given for:

- WLOS
- Smoky Mountain News
- Blue Ridge Public Radio
- The Sylva Herald

Community

Worked with Rawle Murdy on the creation of ads that ran in Smoky Mountain News, The Sylva Herald and Crossroads Chronicle with an inspiration message for our community.

*Farther Apart,
but feeling as close as ever*

Nature's beauty is all around us, and there is reason for optimism as the mountain spring is happening. No one and nothing will take that away.
It's something we all can share no matter the distance between us.



Visitor Guide

The draft of our Visitor Guide came early March and we held off on publishing to better understand COVID-19 and its impacts on travel sentiment. We had the opportunity to update all events, imagery, and verbiage to reflect the most appropriate language to our future travelers. Rather than talking about the Most Visited National Park we talk about it being a wide-open experience. Rather than print all 60,000 copies we are instead producing a smaller print run of 15,000. That allows us to be top of mind with updated information for when travel resumes, and people plan their trips. Additionally, a second reprint late summer would allow an opportunity to better understand what changes we need to make to our restaurant, accommodation and event listings in the guide.

Social Media & Virtual Tours

We created a two-part virtual tour of the N.C. Mountains where past and future visitors can see our mountains in 360-degrees. Our state travel office, VisitNC, is pitching these alongside our PR firm to media outlets. That way when travel restrictions ease and it's the appropriate time, people are inspired to check out the beauty of our outdoors.

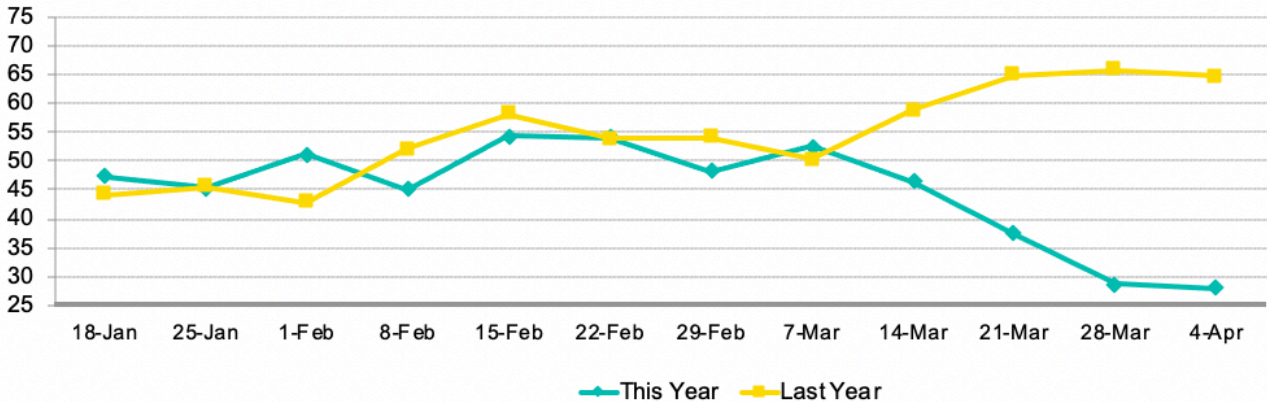
Tour Part One [link] / Part Two [link]

Caleb Sullivan authored a [Favorite Memories of the NC Mountains post \[link\]](#) to inspire people at a time they need it the most. On all social channels we are posting #StaySafeStayHome #WeCantWaittoSeeYouSoon to let people know it's not safe to visit now.

STR Performance

While we have projected \$0 in revenue for the next three months it is likely we will generate some revenue. Occupancy for the week of March 29, 2020 to April 04, 2020, we sat at 28.1-percent occupancy. This is due to construction and essential workers staying in our hotels. I expect an update for last week by our Wednesday Board Meeting.

Weekly Occ (%) - Jan 18, 2020 to Apr 04, 2020



Courtesy: STR (proprietary to TDA)

Miscellaneous Updates:

- Our automated Chatbot is now live on our website guiding people to the best information they're looking for. During the initial deployment phase, we will gather analytics as to what is being searched for and down the road provide a freeform spot for people to enter a question for a suggested answer.
- We are producing content when and where we're able to while recreating outdoors with simple imagery and video like waterfalls and rivers and people are enjoying seeing spring in the N.C. Mountains.
- I continue to serve on the Growing Outdoors Partnership Advisory Committee to create a brand for the WNC Outdoors. We expect to have an agency in place in the coming month or so to begin building the brand to promote the entire region along with the outdoor gear manufacturing.
- The TDA staff began working remotely on March 17, almost one month ago. Operations continue smoothly as we shift from promotion of Jackson County to Community focused operations.
- Staff has attended approximately two dozen webinars in the few weeks related to all facets of COVID-19. They've been put on by Destination Analysts, US Travel Association, Destinations International, Adara, Southeast Tourism Society, Smith Travel Research, VisitNC, the N.C. Rural Center, Destination Development Association, and others. We continue to stay up-to-date daily on the latest industry developments with a focus on recovery.
- Attending and providing updates weekly on the Cashiers Community Readiness call that Vision Cashiers coordinates.

Social Media Status Report – Caleb Sullivan

Cross Channel Report March 1 – 31 vs. February 1 - 29

- Total Audience Growth increased by 0.3% MOM (764) (214,873 total)
 - Total Instagram Followers (15,522)
 - Total Facebook Page Likes (197,315)
- Total Impressions decreased by 41% MOM. (1,441,776)
- Total Engagement decreased by 45% MOM (77,511)

Google Post/Event Platform

- March 12,237 Impressions
- February 36,313 Impressions
- 34% Decrease MOM
 - Frequency for March has been reduced due to COVID-19.







Instagram Stories

- Instagram Story Impressions totaled 2,779 for March.

Social Media Updates

- Due to COVID-19, Social Media posting has decreased across all platforms. Paid Boosting has ceased which has contributed to lower than usual Impressions and Engagements.
- Followers across all platforms continue to increase steadily.
- Native posts are performing exceptionally well and positioning us to be top of mind when travel restrictions are lifted.

Top Performing Posts for March

<p>discoverjacksonnc Wed 3/4/2020 8:51 am PST</p> <p>Sunsets end the day in a perfect way! 🌄👉 The NC Mountains always put on a show. 🍷💛💜 Find your</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>525</td></tr> <tr><td>Likes</td><td>508</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>Saves</td><td>17</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	525	Likes	508	Comments	0	Saves	17	<p>discoverjacksonnc Sat 3/21/2020 2:05 pm PDT</p> <p>Layers of natural beauty along the Blue Ridge Parkway. 🌄👉👉👉 @adventurephotographerin828...</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>517</td></tr> <tr><td>Likes</td><td>500</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>Saves</td><td>13</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	517	Likes	500	Comments	4	Saves	13	<p>discoverjacksonnc Sat 3/28/2020 1:51 pm PDT</p> <p>We hope you've enjoyed these ways to embrace social distancing.👉👉👉. Day 5: Enjoy the little things.🔍👉👉.</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>459</td></tr> <tr><td>Likes</td><td>445</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>Saves</td><td>13</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	459	Likes	445	Comments	1	Saves	13												
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<p>North Carolina Mount... Sat 3/21/2020 8:17 am PDT</p> <p>Enjoy this beautiful distraction from everything else going on in the world right now. 📧 @natebowery</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>8,078</td></tr> <tr><td>Reactions</td><td>4,965</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>374</td></tr> <tr><td>Shares</td><td>734</td></tr> <tr><td>Post Link Clicks</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>Other Post Clicks</td><td>2,005</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	8,078	Reactions	4,965	Comments	374	Shares	734	Post Link Clicks	-	Other Post Clicks	2,005	<p>North Carolina Mount... Tue 3/31/2020 7:44 am PDT</p> <p>"Keep your face always towards the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you." -Walt Whitman 📧 @</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>3,497</td></tr> <tr><td>Reactions</td><td>2,116</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>124</td></tr> <tr><td>Shares</td><td>373</td></tr> <tr><td>Post Link Clicks</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>Other Post Clicks</td><td>884</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	3,497	Reactions	2,116	Comments	124	Shares	373	Post Link Clicks	-	Other Post Clicks	884	<p>North Carolina Mount... Fri 3/6/2020 2:35 pm PST</p> <p>The best way to end a mountain day! 👉👉👉 The Blue Ridge Parkway offers some of the most spectacular views👉</p>  <table border="1"> <tr><td>Total Engagements</td><td>3,161</td></tr> <tr><td>Reactions</td><td>1,810</td></tr> <tr><td>Comments</td><td>116</td></tr> <tr><td>Shares</td><td>270</td></tr> <tr><td>Post Link Clicks</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Other Post Clicks</td><td>933</td></tr> </table>	Total Engagements	3,161	Reactions	1,810	Comments	116	Shares	270	Post Link Clicks	32	Other Post Clicks	933
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