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

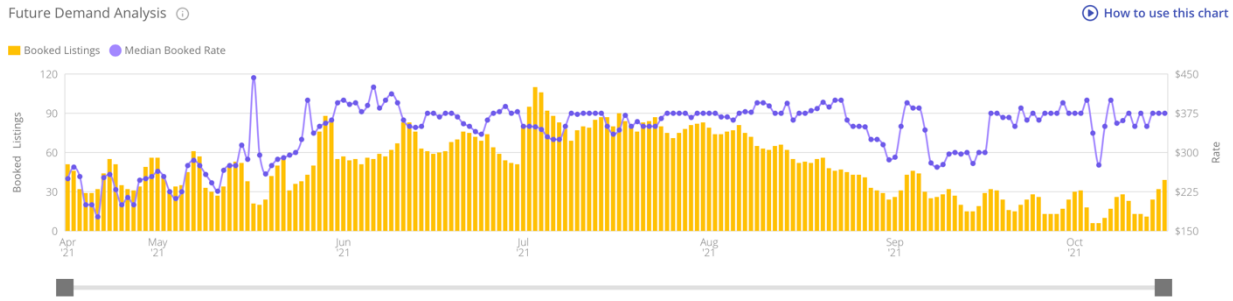
Date: April 15, 2021

Subject: Updates for TDA Board

Executive Director Report – Nick Breedlove

Occupancy
For the most recent month, we've been hovering around 60-percent occupancy, with the exception of this most recent week, where we saw 71-percent occupancy, which is a very positive sign.

Future Demand



The above graph shows future bookings for Airbnb and VRBOs in Cashiers. As you'll see future travel demand is high, hitting above 75% occupancy at peak in July. This data validates the pent-up travel demand.

Meetings
Our annual May meeting typically is a longer meeting as we approve contracts and review a high-level overview of annual marketing plans. My goal is to streamline the process so this year the meeting takes less time to accomplish tasks. Your review of materials before our meeting will greatly expedite this process.

As a reminder we will not have a July Full Board meeting. For our August 18 meeting, we will reconvene in person at the Village Green in Cashiers. We will allow for hybrid participation if you are not able to attend but are asking for participation so that we can again gather as a group, socially distanced.

Grant Application
The Grant Committee tasked with reviewing our grant application and guidelines has completed its review of the program and is offering recommendations to the full board to consider. The draft grant application is attached to the agenda. We want board members to have the next month to consider changes and in May we will consider feedback and potential adoption. This application was developed after review of several DMO grant programs throughout the country and in consultation with staff and committee members.

Key changes to the process include
-Changing wording from 'festivals/events' to 'Initiatives' to broaden projects supported.
-Allow For Profit entities to apply.
-Allow for partnerships with neighboring counties
-Preference given to public/private collaboration
-Grants considered on an on-going basis vs. once a year
-A detailed scoring rubric is provided to assist applicants in understanding what our board is looking to fund. This rubric also serves to help the committee evaluate applications.
-The funding cap of $1,750 was removed and it is suggested that we fund projects in the few thousand-dollar range, but do not limit ourselves to this amount. We are proposing $50,000 in grant funds for the draft FY21 budget.

The grant committee unanimously supports the changes and is recommending to the full board for their consideration.

<u>Contracts – Zartico & Key Data</u>
For ongoing data related to visitors, demand, and spending, we are working with two leading companies in the tourism data industry to receive timely data to make key marketing decisions. We began our Visitor Profile study in 2018 and completed it in 2019. While the 2018 data is a good basis for marketing, post-COVID-19, our entire demographic may shift and we need real time insights about who is visiting and what they're doing while here.

Zartico's platform is an annual investment of $50,000 and will allow us to fine tune marketing campaigns on the fly and understand visitor behavior real-time. The fee is a small investment compared to the benefits it will deliver to our entire marketing and communication program. It will provide great data to us as we maximize our ROAS (return on ad spend).
The deck of slides from Zartico is located **here**.

Apart from Zartico, we will also contract with Key Data. The contract is $8,500 and will allow us to monitor vacation rentals booked through rental agencies in the county in addition to Airbnb and VRBO. This expanded data feed will allow us to know future booking trends in real time to

gauge future demand. The Executive Committee and our Ad Agency have reviewed these two proposals

Key Data will feed into the Zartico platform, along with many other data sources we have including: AirDNA, UberMedia, Facebook Organic, Facebook Ads, Instagram Organic, Instagram Ads, Facebook Audience Insights, Google Analytics, Good Adwords, Google Campaign Manager, VisaVue, MailChimp, Pinterest, STR Monthly, STR Weekly, Sales Tax Data, Twitter, and Youtube Stats. Zartico will give an all-encompassing data of our destination at any moment and empower us to take this siloed data into one overview to help us make the most informed decisions.

We are very excited to receive this ongoing data for enhancing our knowledge of visitation and behavioral patterns once in destination.

Draft Budget

I've developed a draft budget for FY 21-22. We are projecting $1.375 million in tax collections and utilizing roughly $337,000 in fund balance for acceleration of our marketing programs at a time when people are beginning to travel again. The draft budget will be linked to the agenda as soon as it is ready from Finance.

Key budget changes compared to last fiscal year's budget appear below. We will present the draft budget ordinance next month, but in order to make the most efficient use of our Full Board's limited time during meetings, we are distributing key points this month:

-I'm proposing an increase in the salary for Mr. Sullivan as his role has expanded significantly and he will be assuming social media marketing duties that we currently contract with Rawle Murdy for. I'll share updates regarding this during our board meeting. The salary for the Executive Director is in line with the approved employment contract.

-We are proposing part time contract labor to assist with various tasks including some PR and social media along with other office duties. We do not have enough work to justify another full-time position at this time, however we are both at capacity with our current duties and need part time help.

- A contract is budgeted for Magellan Strategy (Chris Cavanaugh) to work with the Executive Committee to develop an incentive strategy for our positions as opposed to solely using performance reviews.

- Travel has increased a good amount due to having two employees attend many of the same conferences. As a reminder one of our core components of our strategic plan is to maintain the most skilled staff. Also budgeted are tradeshows for group sales and meetings

- Printing has increased due to the number of print projects we have and the popularity of our items

-Additional advertising dollars are recommended to be competitive with every destination in the U.S. is vying for the same travelers.

- We are bringing social media advertising in house, so there is a line item for social media spend. With a very competitive landscape to attract travelers this year, we increased this amount over last year.

- A $10,000 funding line item is for our Visitor Centers to prioritize new offerings, fixtures, technology, etc. in each visitor center; funds will be split evenly between the centers.

-$5,000 is budgeted to develop a video for group meetings and small conferences for our sales strategy.

-Funds have been added to the rent line item to account for a remodel of our existing office or to rent at a new building given our growing space needs.

-Memberships & Subscriptions has increased to include association memberships for group meetings and sales.

-We are budgeting $50,000 for Capital Projects and $50,000 in grant funds this year.

-We are increasing funds for sustainability endeavors this year.

New Visitor Guide released

Our new Visitor Guide has been received and is being distributed to all area businesses. It also goes out to 180 locations in WNC through a distribution contract we have. It is also in front of airport travelers at the Asheville Regional Airport. We reprinted our Hiking & Waterfall Map and the Cashiers Attractions, Adventures, & Waterfalls map. Next month we will reprint Town of Dillsboro Map.

Other items:

- I have meetings scheduled with our partners to work on plans for FY21-22 in the coming days.
- Discussed Jackson County Trails with Greenway and Trails Committee
- The Dillsboro Bridge has reopened, and I worked directly with Google and Apple to remove the 'closed/detour' routes and mark the road as open.
- Participated in Destinations International Small Destination Organizations Committee Meeting
- Authored endorsement for Caleb Sullivan Destinations International 30 Under 30 Application
- Participated in CREATE Bridges Forum
- Participated in JCTDA Steering Committees for: Product and Experience Development &
- Southeast Tourism Society Board of Directors Meeting
- Harris Regional Hospital Business Roundtable Presentation

- Discussion with reporter from Wall Street Journal about Shadow of the Bear, compiled resources
- Talked to reporter about arts in Jackson County
- Introduction with Mountain Man Caves Bee Farm in Glenville about events
- Participated in Destinations International CEO Conversations

Social Media & Blog Status Report – Caleb Sullivan

Cross Channel Report March 1-31, 2021 vs. February 1 – 28, 2021

- Total Audience Growth increased by .2 % MOM (581) (232,523 total)
    - Total Instagram Followers (22,912)
    - Total Facebook Page Likes (209,611) – Organic Increase of 624
- Total Impressions decreased by 23% MOM. (1,691,512)
- Total Engagement decreased by 32.5% MOM (81,255)
- Facebook Post Link Clicks decreased by 5.5% (9,837)

Note: Many destinations are seeing similar decrease in impressions/engagement during this same timeframe.

Google Post/Event Platform

- Total Impressions for March totaled 78,627
- Total Engagements for March totaled 3,010

Pinterest

- Total Impressions for March totaled 50,989. (10% Increase MOM)
- Total Engagements for March totaled 1,160.

Updates

- Selected as a finalist for Southwestern Community College Distinguished Alumni Award
- Selected for Destinations International 30 Under 30 Program. This program selects 30 individuals worldwide that are recognized as up-and-coming leaders in the industry.
- Created content for new “group meetings” webpage, currently under development with RawleMurdy.
- Deployed Castle Dream Wedding video contest.
- Continuing to research tradeshows to attend and organizations to join to secure group travel for Jackson County.

Top Performing Posts for March

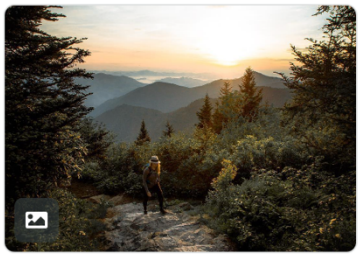
discoverjacksonnc
Wed 3/24/2021 5:09 pm PDT

Spring is here! 😍🌻🌺 To celebrate, we created a list of the 'Top Spring Hikes in the Mountains.' Check em' out on our

Total Engagements	**1,034**
Likes	968
Comments	12
Saves	54

discoverjacksonnc
Mon 3/8/2021 6:01 am PST

The forecast is looking great this week! 🌞 Who's ready to get out and explore? 🙋 . 📷 @daltonmperry



Total Engagements	**1,020**
Likes	949
Comments	15
Saves	56

discoverjacksonnc
Sun 3/28/2021 7:45 am PDT

Soco Falls roaring in the rain! ⛰️ Located in Cherokee, make sure to check out this double waterfall on your next trip! Find

Total Engagements	**905**
Likes	845
Comments	9
Saves	51

North Carolina Mountain T...
Sat 3/20/2021 7:28 am PDT

We made it y'all! 🌻🌷 Happy First Day Of Spring! Who's ready to get out and enjoy some hikes and sunsets?! 🙋 📷

Total Engagements	**11,518**
Reactions	8,018
Comments	538
Shares	1,014
Post Link Clicks	-
Other Post Clicks	1,948

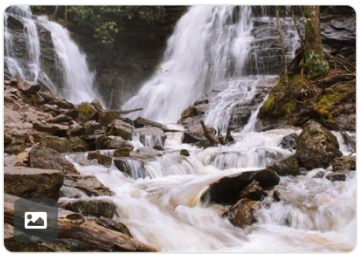
North Carolina Mountain T...
Sat 3/27/2021 7:28 am PDT

There's beauty in a storm. 🌩️ 📷 **@shavnore**

Total Engagements	**6,285**
Reactions	4,427
Comments	230
Shares	691
Post Link Clicks	-
Other Post Clicks	937

North Carolina Mountain T...
Sun 3/28/2021 5:05 pm PDT

Soco Falls roaring in the rain! ⛰️ 😍 Located in Cherokee, don't miss this double waterfall on your next trip. Find



Total Engagements	**4,359**
Reactions	2,696
Comments	177
Shares	448
Post Link Clicks	248
Other Post Clicks	790

Blogs

Authored two blogs in March:

Enjoy a Staycation in the North Carolina Mountains – 3/8/2021

Best Spring Hikes in the NC Mountains – 3/24/2021

E-News

Authored e-Newsletter for March. Deployed on 3/9/2020:

March Into Spring!