

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

July 2024 – September 2024

EXPLORE  
ASHEVILLE

POWERED BY

Buncombe County Tourism  
Development Authority

# EXPLORE ASHEVILLE & BCTDA'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) and Explore Asheville adopted strategic imperatives that are informing and guiding the direction of Explore Asheville's program of work and community investments going forward.

<i>Delivering Balanced &amp; Sustainable Growth</i>	<i>Encouraging Safe &amp; Responsible Travel</i>	<i>Engaging &amp; Inviting More Diverse Audiences</i>	<i>Promoting &amp; Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit</i>	<i>Running A Healthy &amp; Effective Organization</i>
<p>Balancing resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.</p> <p>Focusing on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.</p>	<p>Engaging residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.</p> <p>Collaborating with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.</p>	<p>Extending a genuine invitation to BIPOC travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses, and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.</p> <p>Supporting product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.</p>	<p>Sharing stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.</p> <p>Supporting product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.</p>	<p>Investing in people, policies, and practices to serve our community with integrity within the organization's legislative requirements.</p>

Explore Asheville staff generates quarterly reports on progress made toward these strategic imperatives and relevant initiatives that support them.







# MARKETING, CONTENT & PR Q1 INITIATIVES

**EXPLORE  
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# THE SOUNDS OF ALWAYS ASHEVILLE

Commercial spot showcases creative spirit and inspires quality visits

- Partnership with local film and production company History Boutique Films.
- Strategically used a "day-to-night and beyond" storyline to demonstrate and inspire quality visits from overnight visitors who spend more and stay longer.
- Featured area creators, artists, businesses and locals from professional dancers and musicians downtown to fiber arts in the River Arts District.
- Launched across Samsung + Amazon CTV garnering **569,196 total impressions with an average Video Completion Rate of 98.37%**
- HIGHLIGHT: Spots ran during the Olympics inclusive of the opening ceremony in Atlanta and D.C. **5,228,137 total impressions.**



*"The feeling of Asheville is hard to describe, even visually, so we thought we would score its beauty with the help of composer, Ben Lovett.*

*Inspired by the sounds of Asheville... the Blue Ridge Mountains, the French Broad River, the Biltmore, and city streets filled with music and creativity... the way these ancient mountains remind you to exhale. And the moments that take your breath away.*

*We captured the sounds of Asheville as a love song to our community, and welcoming guests to enjoy it during their stay."*

-Director Erin Derham, History Boutique Films



# BAL HARBOUR SHOPS X ASHEVILLE

Aligning with lifestyle brands for quality visits

Based in Miami, Bal Harbour Shops (BHS) draws customers from all over the country and internationally.

- A multi-spread fashion photoshoot, shot in Summer 2024, will introduce key areas and attributes of Asheville to readers of *Bal Harbour Magazine*.
- "Behind the Cover" editorial to run in Fall 2024 issue and a "3-2-1" travel editorial in the Holiday 2024 issue.
- Photos from the photo shoot will run across all BHS channels: Magazine, Website, E-News, Social Media.

## BHS Access: Asheville

Curated VIP events creating intimate and engaging conversations with customers.

- Explore Asheville to host VIP event in the Access Suite at BHS Miami spring 2025.

EXPLORE ASHEVILLE  
X  
BAL HARBOUR SHOPS

A Robust 360°  
Content  
Platform to  
Maximize  
Awareness,  
Engagement,  
and Action for  
Explore  
Asheville





## WEDDING INSPIRATION FEATURE

Editorial photoshoot showcases Asheville-area as a wedding destination

Weddings are the second largest group market segment booked by Explore Asheville, and Town & Country is committed to becoming the most coveted resource for brides looking to create a memorable event.

Explore Asheville partnered with Town & Country on a to Asheville for a photoshoot in September.

Imagery and venues from our area featured in the editorial Weddings section in the April 2025 Issue.

Further amplification includes digital, native, social promotion, high impact display units and custom content.





# CHAMPIONS OF CONSERVATION

Honoring sustainability with Garden & Gun

Garden & Gun's third annual Champions of Conservation – September 25 – celebrated the leaders and innovators in sustainability whose groundbreaking work and environmental projects are making waves across the globe.

- Collaborated with Land to Market's Covering Ground regenerative agriculture conference at Hickory Nut Gap September 26.
- Driving visitation through Cocktails & Conversation event promotion celebrating the 2024 Champions.

## Program Elements:

- Editorial sponsorship of Champions 2024 Program.
- Multi-channel social media promotion across Facebook, Instagram and X.
- Digital article on GardenandGun.com including site promotion and 100% SOV article banners.
- Sponsored *Talk of the South* e-newsletter.



GARDEN@GUN



Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

# FOOD & WINE, TRAVEL + LEISURE

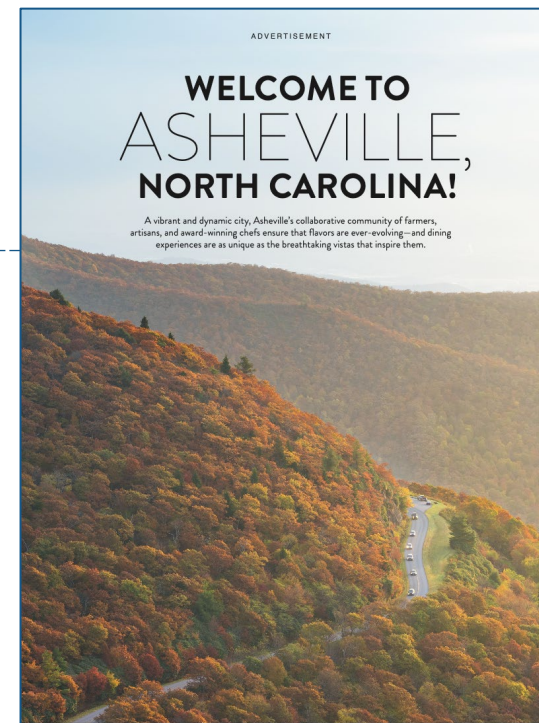
## Finding Foodtopia

Culinary-focused partnership with Dotdash Meredith anchored in editorial alignment around highly popular Best New Chefs issue, digging deeper into the Asheville area's culinary roots and current innovations.

Positions Asheville as Foodtopia through immersive and engaging content.

Includes digital, print, native and social amplification.

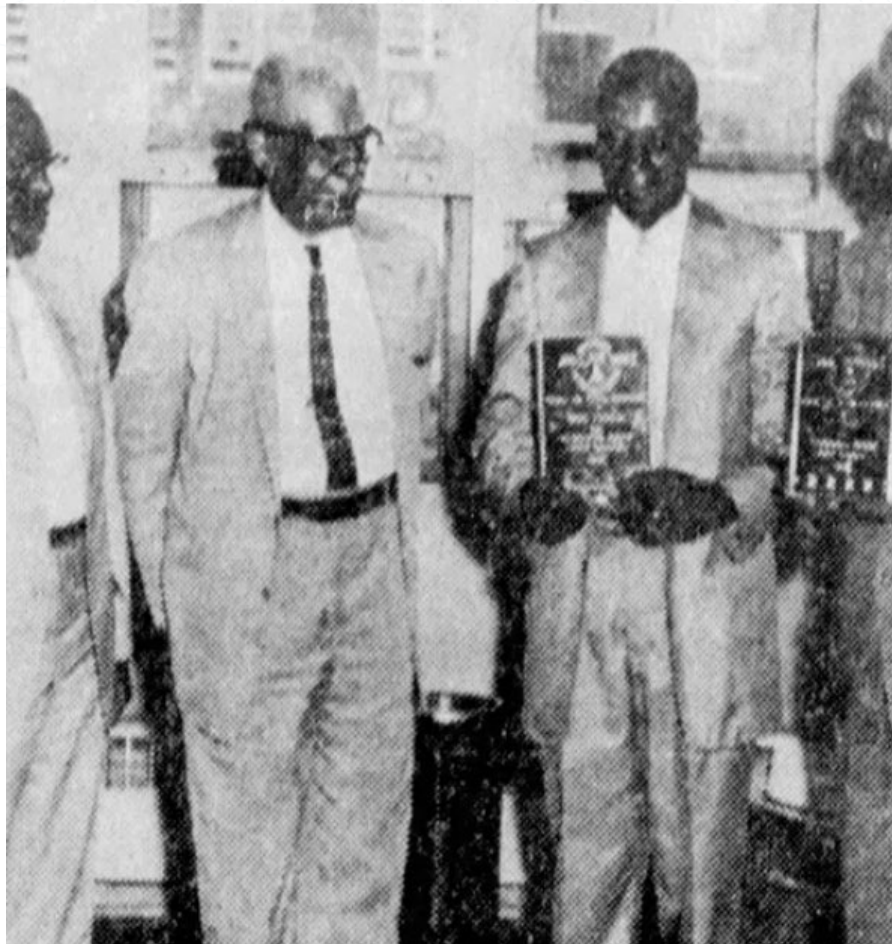
Additional brand ads in T+L's September Culinary Issue.





# NOTEWORTHY NEWS CLIPS

Sampling of Q1 Earned Media Placements



Smithsonian  
MAGAZINE

HISTORY

This Little-Known Civil Rights Activist Refused to Give Up His Bus Seat Four Years Before Rosa Parks Did



Southern Living

The 10 Best Places For A Multigenerational Vacation, According To Our Readers



The New York Times

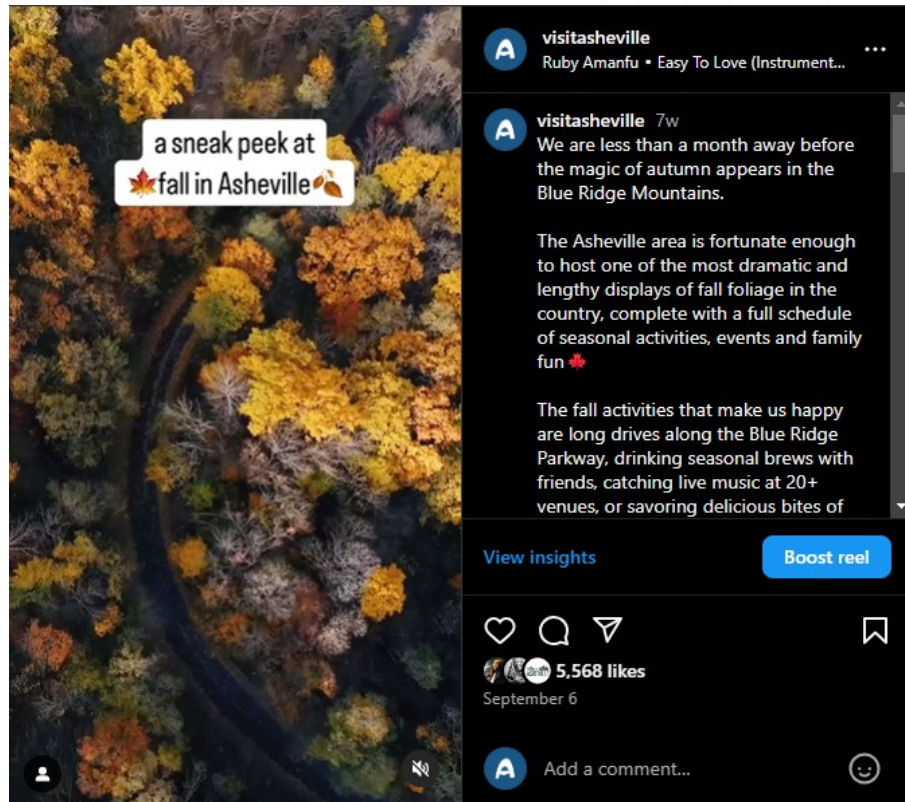
The Restaurant List

2024



# TOP PERFORMING POSTS

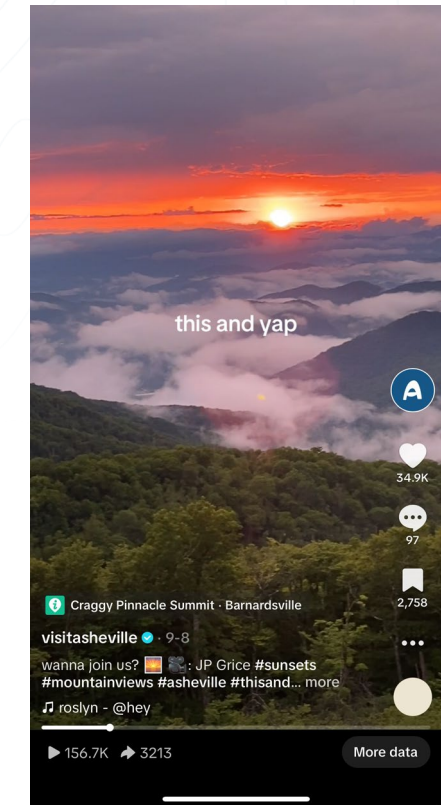
The most engagements in Q1 came from fall visuals, user-generated content with beautiful imagery and trends



**INSTAGRAM**  
**Sneak Peek at Fall (Reel)**  
7,591 Engagements



**FACEBOOK**  
**Summer Sunrise (UGC Photo)**  
6,323 Engagements



**TIKTOK**  
**Sunset yapping (Trend Video)**  
38,202 Engagements

Engagements = Likes, Comments, Saves, Shares





# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Q1 INITIATIVES

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# TRADE SHOW EXHIBITING

Recruited group and event business to our community

- Represented Asheville and Buncombe County at 11 trade shows and conferences from July – September
- Made efforts to present Asheville’s creative community and resources; gave lodging partners opportunities to participate in prospecting efforts

## American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Annual Meeting & Expo

- ASAE was the largest trade show attended in Q1
- Total attendance of 5,000 with over 2,800 buyers/association meeting planners
- Held August 6-8th in Atlanta; 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of the event
- Five industry partners participated, including the Renaissance, The Foundry Hotel, Restoration, Doubletree/Embassy Suites and Virtelle Hospitality.
- Served mocktails with Devils Foot sodas in Asheville-branded Pirani souvenir cups; gave away ENO bags
- Secured eight solid leads to materialize in coming months from over 300 connections made during the show

### FEATURED LOCAL/SUSTAINABLE BRANDS AT ASAE BOOTH:



Booth won 3<sup>rd</sup> place best booth out of 400+ exhibitors



Above: Explore Asheville staff and partners at ASAE booth



## 48-HOUR FAMILIARIZATION TOUR

Hosted meeting professionals in a "test drive" of Asheville

"Fams" are one of our highest ROI initiatives - Historically, 75%+ of attendees book one or multiple events in Asheville

- In August, hosted 12 qualified meeting planners from North America
- Showcased potential venues and attendee experiences:
  - **TUESDAY** - Welcome reception at The Flat Iron Hotel, dinner at the Funkatorium, and Jason Isbell concert at Rabbit Rabbit.
  - **WEDNESDAY** – Breakfast and tour at Biltmore Estate, lunch and spa experience at the Omni Grove Park Inn and dinner at The Market Place.
  - **THURSDAY** – Tours of multiple area hotel properties, lunch at Chai Pani, Asheville Jeep Tours experience and closing dinner at Luminosa.





# ASHEVILLE BUSINESS EVENTS COUNCIL (ABEC)

Engaging local stakeholders for networking at lead generation

- Partnership with the Economic Development Coalition and local stakeholders, we are identifying conferences in targeted business sectors to bring to Asheville to help diversify our economy: Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Climate, Technology, Outdoor Products & Industries and Technology.
- Hosting meetings, conferences and events associated with these business sectors can strengthen industry-specific supplier/customer relationships for local businesses, attract EDC prospects and provide exposure for Asheville/Buncombe County to business decision makers.
- Meeting held on Thursday, September 5<sup>th</sup> at the Flat Iron Hotel
- Over 30 members attended
- Guest speaker was Dodie Stephens, Vice President of Marketing for Explore Asheville





# AIR ROUTE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Partnering with AVL to bring more flights to the regional airport

Co-hosted a national airport roundtable with Asheville Regional Airport in September.

Nine airlines were represented from the following airlines:



Attendance was record-breaking with 65 representatives involved.

On the heels of hosting, Delta Airlines announced it will begin flying nonstop from Boston to Asheville on Saturdays and Sundays beginning May 10, 2025.



**Delta to add nonstop flight between Asheville and Boston**

[msn.com](https://www.msn.com)



# Q1 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community

**138**  
GROUPS/EVENTS  
OCCURRED  
IN OUR COMMUNITY



**\$20.4M in direct spending**  
26,579 room nights

**126**  
GROUPS/EVENTS  
BOOKED  
FOR FUTURE VISITS



**\$26.3M in direct spending**  
29,161 room nights  
**42% increase over Q1 FY24**

**308**  
LEADS GENERATED  
FOR POTENTIAL  
GROUPS/EVENTS



**13.2% increase over Q1 FY24**  
101,315 room nights





# PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Q1 INITIATIVES

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# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP FRAMEWORK

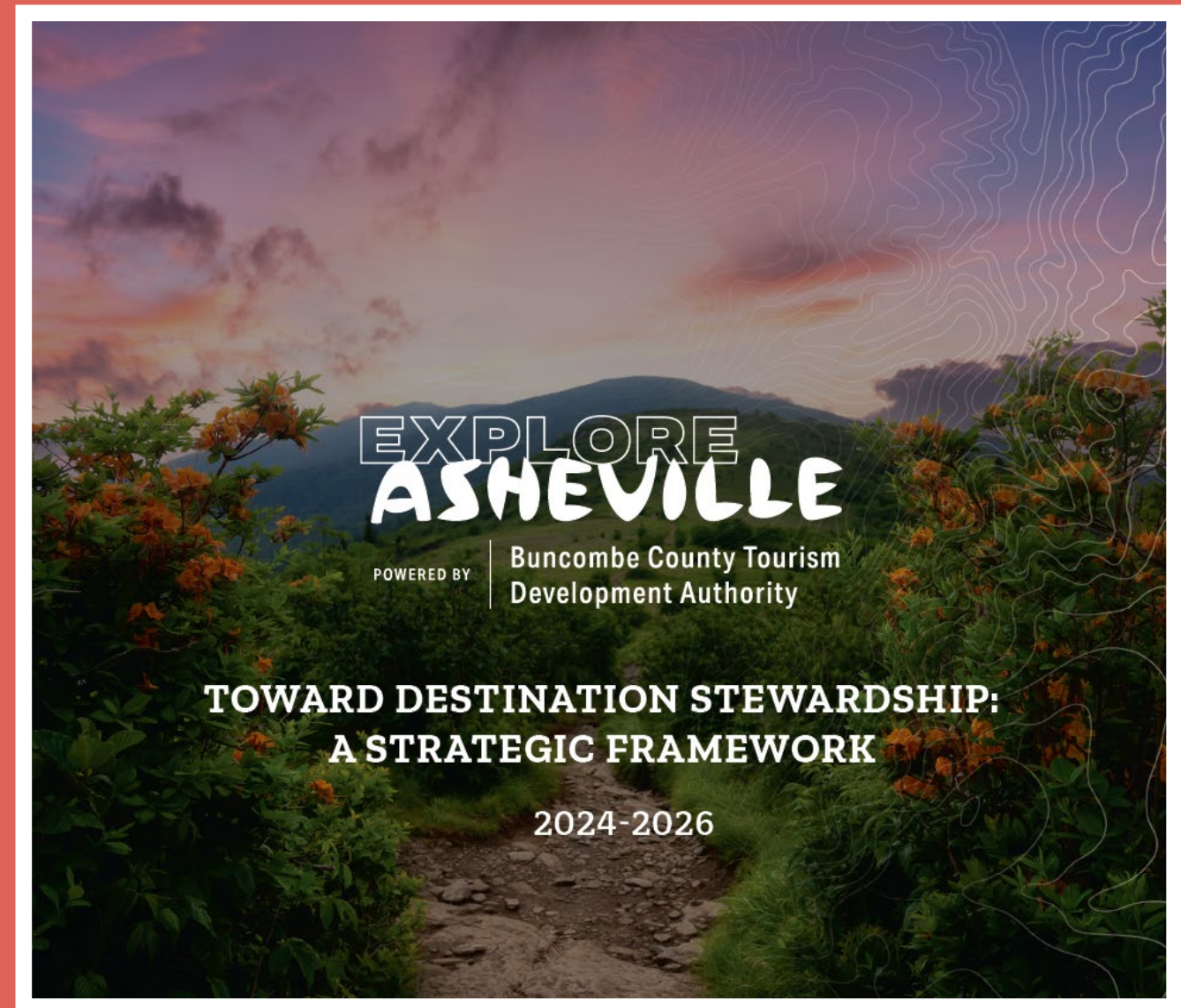
Aligning with and investing in broader community priorities through travel and hospitality

This framework aims to balance and harmonize the diverse needs of Asheville and Buncombe County through the lens of economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

It builds on the authority's **strategic imperatives**, cultivated from more than 100 hours of community listening and planning efforts, to balance visitor experiences and resident quality of life.

The framework outlines **existing strategies** and **establishes benchmarks for measuring progress** toward destination stewardship.

By embracing destination stewardship, Explore Asheville is working towards a future where travel, hospitality, and the community can flourish together through sustainable growth that honors and conserves the authentic character of the Land of Sky region.





# SUMMER SOCIAL

Convened partners to celebrate the summer season

- Convened more than 300 partners for an evening of networking, celebration, and engagement at Eulogy and its rooftop bar, Visuals
- Guests explored a partner showcase, collecting stamps on their partner passports as they experienced each partner's products. They turned in completed passports for a chance to win a gift basket filled with local goodies.

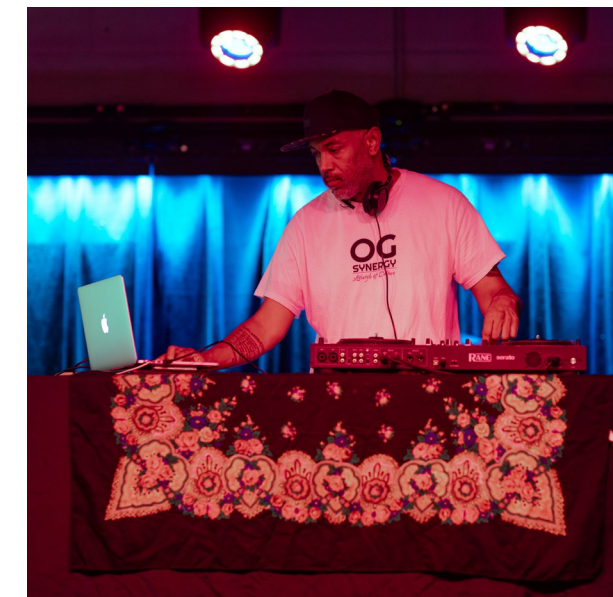
## FEATURED PARTNERS

- Partners enjoyed activations, live DJs, local food and drinks, and a rooftop view at Eulogy/Visuals.
- Talented event vendors included: Local DJs Nex Millen and DJ NHN, Good Hot Fish, Gypsy Queen Deli, Market, and Food Truck, ADORAtotherapy, Haywood Famous, and Folk Saints.



ADORAtherapy®

FOLK SAINTS  
Dulce de Leche



Above: Photos of partners and staff at Summer Social event



## BCTDA ANNUAL MEETING

Celebrated more than 40 years of investing in and building community

Nearly 300 local leaders, travel and hospitality partners, and community members attended the 2024 BCTDA Annual Meeting at the Crest Center and Pavilion.

- The Annual Meeting celebrated more than 40 years of the BCTDA driving economic development in the community and spotlighted transformative projects resulting from more than 20 years of strategic investment through the TPDF and the inaugural year of the LIFT Fund
- Rohit Bhargava provided a thoughtful keynote on people-centered strategies for shaping the future of travel and hospitality and attendees received limited advance copies of his upcoming book, *Non-Obvious Thinking*
- McKibbon Hospitality was honored as this year's recipient of the William A.V. Cecil Leadership Award. [A commemorative video](#) directed by Paul Bonesteel highlighted the team's community leadership through footage captured during the development of Hotel Arras and the Moxy Hotel

### FEATURED PARTNER

Trevor Darden, also known as Street Sinatra, opened and closed the meeting with performances, further highlighting the area's rich cultural offerings.



Above: Photos of 2024 BCTDA Annual Meeting program and networking reception



# FY24 ANNUAL REPORT

Captured our Destination and Organization's Collective Achievements Last Fiscal Year

The **FY24 Annual Report** comprehensively reflects the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and Explore Asheville's performance and achievements over the past year.

Highlights Include:

- A record \$2.97 Billion in Visitor Spending
- The launch of the Legacy Investment From Tourism Fund
- Four hundred and fifteen groups and events that directly spent \$50 Million in our community
- The unveiling of the Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail
- Explore Asheville app boosting digital visitor engagement
- New accessible and trail town resources
- 140 new partners joining our expansive partner network
- More than 1,000 attendees at our partner events





# MCCORMICK FIELD GROUNDBREAKING | TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY NIGHT

Celebrating the power of travel and hospitality at historic McCormick Field

The BCTDA committed \$23 million in multi-year funding for the McCormick Field Centennial Restoration & Capital Improvements Project.

- In August 2024, major renovations began at McCormick Field. Some upgrades include creating a new front entrance and merchandise store, adding an outfield video board/scoreboard, improving the home team clubhouse, and making traffic and parking improvements.
- The ceremonial groundbreaking fittingly occurred on August 28, marking the first of many 828 Day celebrations for Asheville and Buncombe County.

After the McCormick Field Groundbreaking Ceremony, more than 600 travel and hospitality industry professionals at the second annual Travel and Hospitality Night, where the Asheville Tourists took on the Hickory Crawdads.

- Commemorative Travel & Hospitality game day jerseys were auctioned off for a fundraiser benefitting the Asheville Independent Restaurant Association's (AIR) Financial Empowerment program.
- At the ball game, we celebrated the power of travel and hospitality with our partners who champion the Asheville area and Buncombe County every day.
- Marco Gaspar, chef de partie at The Lobster Trap, has been indispensable to the restaurant's excellence, serving for over 18 years. Earlier this year, he was recognized as a Hero of Hospitality. He helped us kick off Travel and Hospitality night off by throwing the first pitch.





# CONCIERGE WORKING GROUP

Connecting partners within the travel and hospitality community

## MEETING & FOOD TOUR

- On August 21, Explore Asheville sponsored fourteen concierges for a sold-out food tour with Stu Helm from Asheville Food Tours.
- From **2 pm to 5 pm participants** (Duke Hospitality, River Row Flats, Princess Anne Hotel, Oakland Cottage B&B, The Restoration Hotel, Towneplace Suites By Marriott, Grand Bohemian, The Flat Iron, The Foundry, and the Hotel Arras) **visited eight different restaurants around downtown** (The Rhu, La Bodega, S&W, Chocolate Fetish, The Flat Iron rooftop, Market Place, and Cultivated Cocktails).

## WORKING GROUP GOALS

- To connect frontline staff from our Buncombe County hotels quarterly.
- To talk about upcoming events in the area and potential partnerships.
- To provide educational opportunities on unique tours and attractions in the area.





## EVENT GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS

Support for local festival & cultural events through grants and sponsorships

### Explore Asheville/BCTDA supported the following events in FY25 Q1:

- Shindig on the Green
- Mountain Dance and Folk Festival
- Big Ivy's Independence Day Celebration
- Asheville Open Tennis Championships
- Skyview Golf Tournament
- Groovin On Grovemont
- Black Mountain Blues
- Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands
- AVL Fest
- The 16th Annual Asheville Comedy Festival
- Bite Me AVL
- Come To Leicester Artists Studio Tour
- Transfigurations IV
- 5th Annual Asheville FM Record Fair
- Punch Bucket Literary Asheville Festival
- Eliada Homes Fall Festival and Corn Maze
- ASAP Farm Tour
- Sow & Grow Fest
- The Big SPEAK: Aspire Higher
- Blue Ridge Pride Festival

**\$119k**

Grants &  
Sponsorships



**19**  
Events



# NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Onboarded 41 local businesses as partners

- Explore Asheville has partnered with 41 new local business between July and October, ranging from Bed and Breakfasts to walking tours to private chef experiences.
- Through these partnerships, Explore Asheville staff can connect incoming visitors and group travelers to the variety of experiences in Asheville and Buncombe county.



## WHAT & WHERE

- Regions of new businesses:
  - Black Mountain
  - East Asheville
  - Fairview
  - Downtown
  - River Arts District
  - South Asheville
  - West Asheville
  - Weaverville
  - Woodfin
- Types of new businesses:
  - Wellness
  - The Arts- Galleries/Studios
  - Food & Drink
  - Retail
  - Venues
  - Lodging
  - Tours & Attractions
  - Outfitters
  - Performing arts





# CULTURE & BUSINESS AFFAIRS Q1 INITIATIVES

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# ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

## New Team Member

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### New Team Member:



**Jay Curwen**

Director of Sports, Film & Entertainment



## **CRM TRAINING**

### **On-site annual training from Simpleview**

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- Training was provided on-site by Simpleview representatives on August 6 & 7
- Staff met to further their knowledge of the CRM and deepen their understanding of best practices
- Sessions covered the partner information and sales leads databases (Member/Partner and Meeting Sales user groups), extranet (a.k.a. Partner Portal), system administration, and more

