

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 & Sustainable Growth</i>	<i>Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel</i>	<i>Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences</i>	<i>Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit</i>	<i>Running A Healthy & 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.



QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

July 2025 – September 2025

EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE

POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority



MARKETING, CONTENT & PR Q1 INITIATIVES

Dodie Stephens
Vice President of Marketing

**EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE**
POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

INSPIRE Harnessing and inspiring influential voices

ENGAGE Sparking conversations; amplified by partners/creators

CONVERT Strong calls to visit now



Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Delivering balanced & sustainable growth

EARNED & INFLUENCED COVERAGE

Q1: One-Year Milestone of Hurricane Helene



Western NC fall travel guide 2025: What's open one year after Hurricane Helene?

Discover which Western NC attractions are open post-Hurricane Helene and plan your 2025 fall foliage trip across...

 Charlotte Observer



EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

HELENE RECOVERY ASHEVILLE TOURISM ONE YEAR LATER





EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

ASHEVILLE COMMUNITIES ENCOURAGE VISITORS

Hurricane Helene One Year Later

WNCN 5:04

INTERNATIONAL: AID FLOTILLA BOUND FOR GAZA HIT BY DRONE ATTACK; GRETA THUNBERG ABOARD



READER'S DIGEST 2025 NICEST PLACES IN AMERICA

ASHEVILLE, NC



GUIDES

The ultimate Blue Ridge Parkway road trip guide

Andrew Collins

Rachel Craft also contributed to this story

Sept. 21, 2025 • 13 min read

THE POINTS GUY 



The Nicest Place in America 2025: Asheville, North Carolina

2.67B

Potential Media Reach

\$25.4M

Publicity Value

63

Site Visits

718

PR Team Placements



Reader's Digest

Southern Living GARDEN&GUN



ONE-YEAR HELENE MILESTONE: CONTENT

Celebrating progress and engaging visitors

Goal:

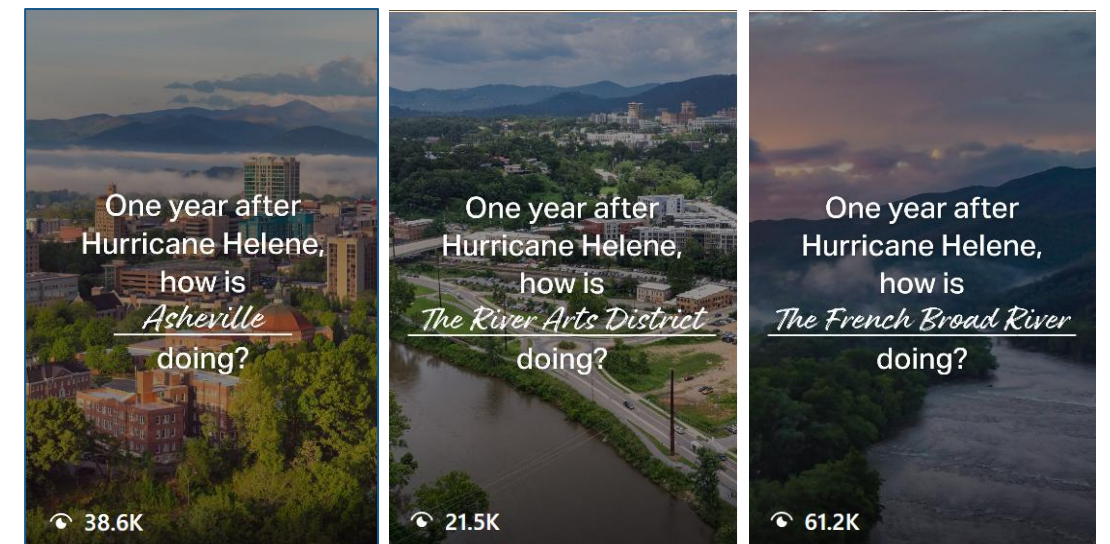
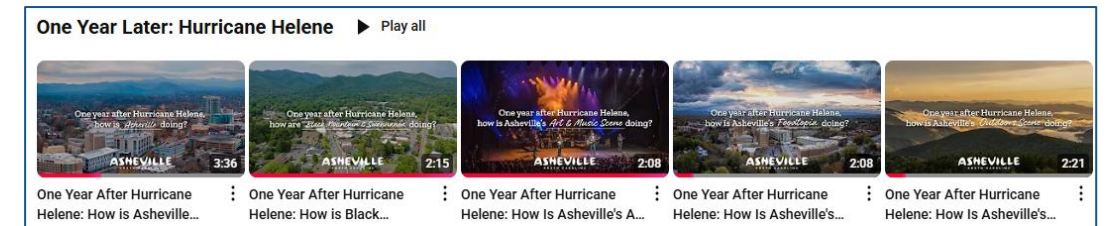
Recognize and share our community's story of progress while reinforcing visitor confidence and extending an open invitation to return this fall.

Highlights:

- **"One Year After Helene" landing page** – Shared stories of resilience and renewal across Western North Carolina, plus collated commemorative events.
- **Before-and-after visuals** – Showed recovery across key neighborhoods, including Downtown, the River Arts District, and Biltmore Village.
- **Video storytelling** – Local voices reflecting on recovery, progress and community pride. Video series received over 1 million video views across platforms.
- **Social media series** – Cross-channel strategy showcased milestone videos, event roundups, and before/after photos. Social series received over 178,000 likes, comments, shares, saves and post clicks across platforms.
- **Partner toolkit** – Equipped businesses with ready-to-share content to extend the milestone message and inspire fall travel.



Biltmore Village - September, 2024



BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY RE-OPENS

A cross-channel moment celebrating renewed access and fall adventure

Goal:

Showcase the reopening of the Blue Ridge Parkway post-Helene and reignite traveler excitement for Asheville’s signature scenic experiences during the fall season.

Highlights:

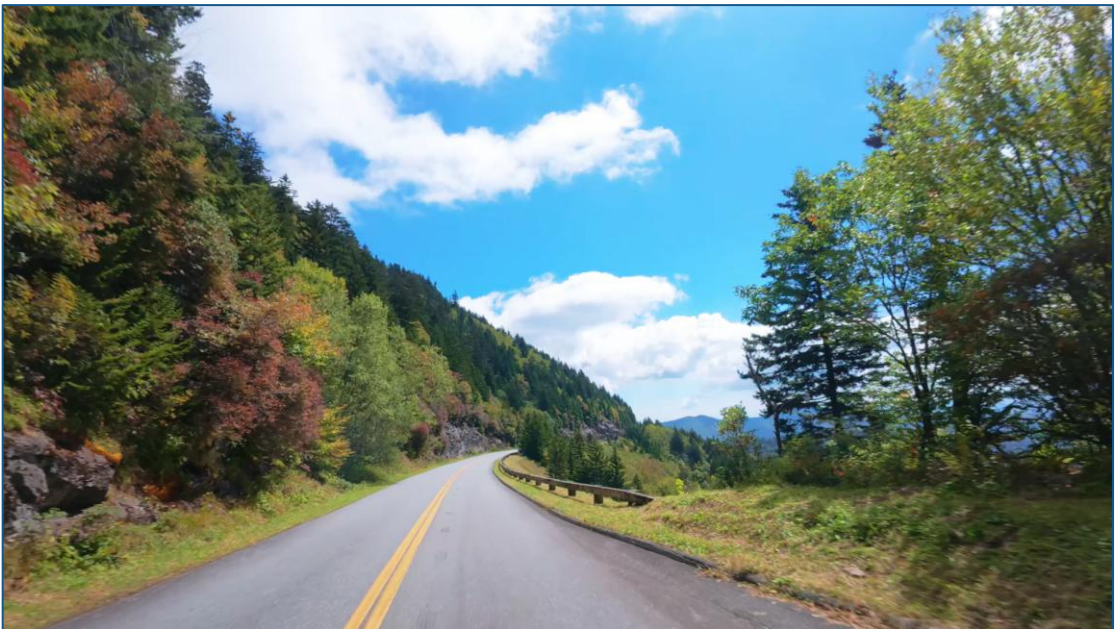
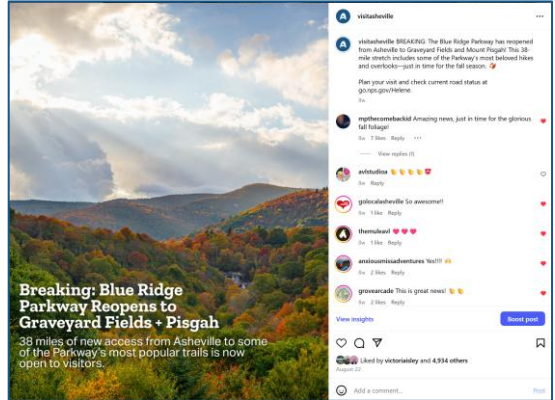
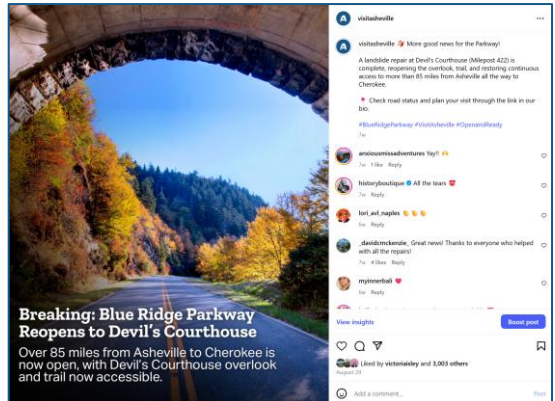
- **Feature article:** *“How to Enjoy the Blue Ridge Parkway Near Asheville Post-Helene”* acted as a dedicated guide to reopened sections, with maps, scenic stops, and updated travel info.
- **Real-time social posts:** Shared updates as new sections opened, pairing striking imagery with timely visitor information.
- **Leisure e-newsletter:** Full edition focused on Parkway re-openings was sent to our 158,114 email subscribers.
- **Video storytelling:** Filmed newly reopened sections for use in PR pitching and featured Leesa Brandon from the Blue Ridge Parkway in the *Open & Ready* video series, capturing the excitement of renewed access.
- **Public Relations Amplification:** Developed a targeted pitch with video assets for nearly 800 journalists, timed with a key Helene recovery milestone to shift the narrative from storm damage to recovery.

The good news keeps on coming as the Asheville area heads into a dazzling fall season!

A major section of the Blue Ridge Parkway reopened this week, allowing visitors to travel to iconic spots like [Craggy Gardens](#) and [Mount Mitchell](#) (the highest elevation point east of the Mississippi, if you didn't know) for the first time since Hurricane Helene.

With 114 miles now open — from Mount Mitchell to Cherokee through Asheville and Buncombe County — the Parkway has returned to full strength just in time for epic fall adventures.

[READ THE LATEST](#)



PATTIE GONIA

Pride weekend and momentum as Blue Ridge Parkway opens

Goal:

Drive awareness and extend stays with activations across the full Blue Ridge Pride weekend and the opening of the Blue Ridge Parkway, a key travel motivator for our audience.

Highlights: Events, Fundraising & Social Media Content

Save Her Show Attendance: Over 1,200

Show Fundraising: \$28,000+ for The Always Asheville Fund

Social: 3 IG Reels, 5 IG Stories

Engagement: 5.25%

Reach: Over 1M impressions garnered

Community Support:

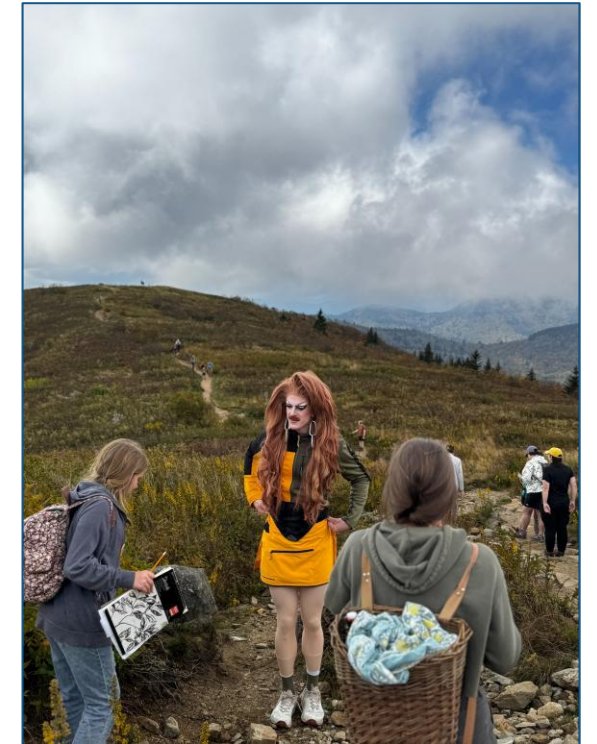
As part of our partnership, Pattie performed at Blue Ridge Pride and hosted a meet and greet at the festival.

Parkway Support:

Pattie hosted a group hike at Black Balsam where we filmed content to get the word out that 114 continuous miles were now open on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Pattie's 'Parkway is Open' in-feed post

- **Views:** 137K | **Engagements:** 10K (likes, shares, saves)
- **Engagement rate:** 7.37% engagement rate



INDIE RETAIL MONTH CAMPAIGN

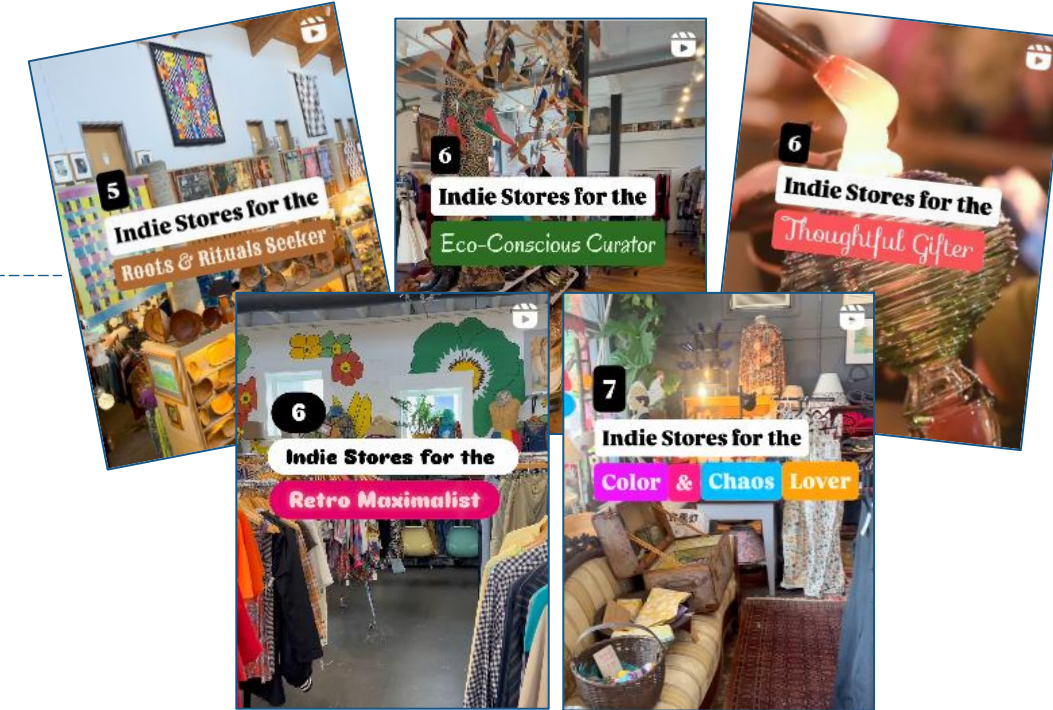
A collaborative campaign celebrating Asheville's indie shopping scene and driving local engagement

Overview:

Celebrate Asheville's independent retail community while driving both in-person and app-based exploration through creative, partner-driven storytelling.

Highlights:

- **"Shift 10" pledge** – Encouraged audiences to shift 10% of spending to local shops; supported by digital assets and partner toolkits.
- **"Shop by Vibe" guides** – Curated themed itinerary reels highlighting Asheville's shopping districts and local makers shared across social. **Video series received over 440k video views across platforms.**
- **App-based "Shop & Win Challenge"** – Gamified engagement with check-ins at independent retailers for prizes and local recognition.
- **Partner collaboration** – Coordinated with MODA, Go Local, and Asheville Downtown Association to amplify stories and shop participation.

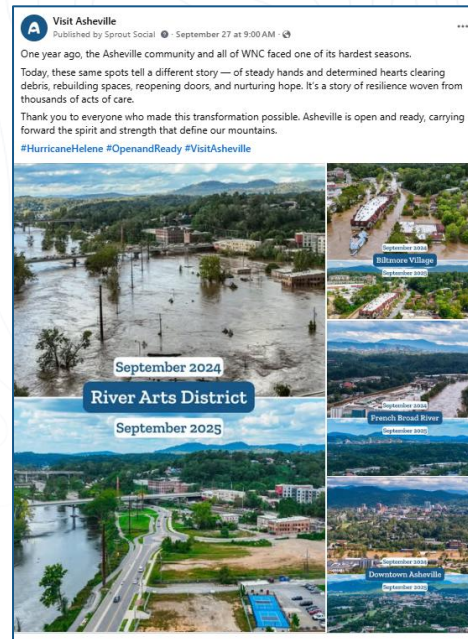


TOP PERFORMING SOCIAL POSTS

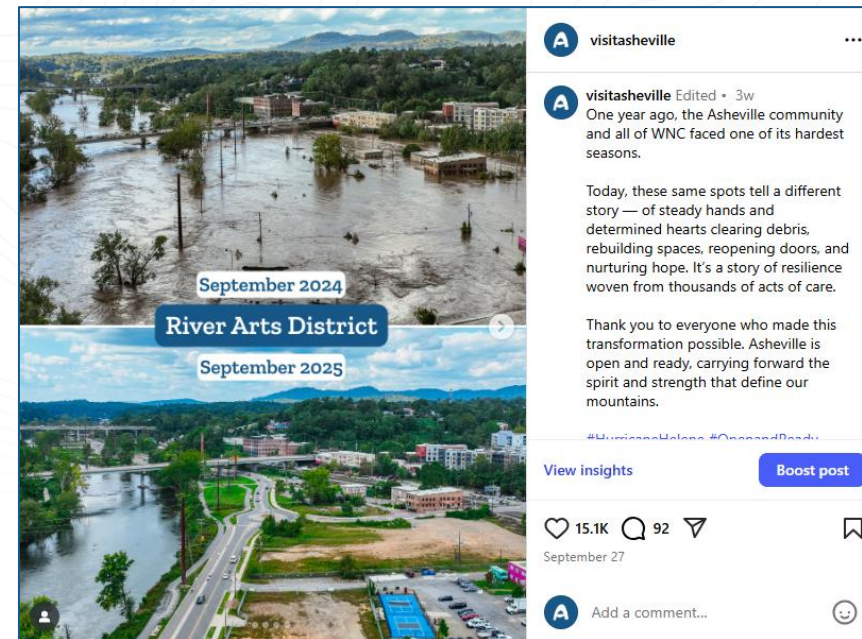
- **Competitive benchmarking:** Using our analytics platform, we track performance against 20 curated competitors per platform, including other DMOs and high-performing content channels.

Q1 engagement highlights:

- **Facebook:** Total engagements: 88,965 vs. competitor average 31,000 (+206%)
Average per post: 2,281 vs. competitor average 410 (+266%)
- **Instagram:** Total engagements: 102,245 vs. competitor average 47,297 (+116%)
Average per post: 1,203 vs. competitor average 794 (+52%)



FACEBOOK
Before / After Photos
22,263 Engagements



INSTAGRAM
Before / After Photos
19,701 Engagements



TIKTOK
Pattie Gonia Announcement
15,162 Engagements

Facebook Public Engagements		Total	Public Engagements per Post
Your Average	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 88.965%;"></div></div>	88,965.00	2,281.15
Competitor Average	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 14.0878%;"></div></div>	14,087.80	156.53

Reactions Comments Shares

Instagram Public Engagements		Total	Public Engagements per Post
Your Average	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 102.245%;"></div></div>	102,245.00	1,202.88
Competitor Average	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 47.29685%;"></div></div>	47,296.85	794.24

Engagements = Likes, Comments, Saves, Shares



INSPIRE & CONVERT: PAID MEDIA

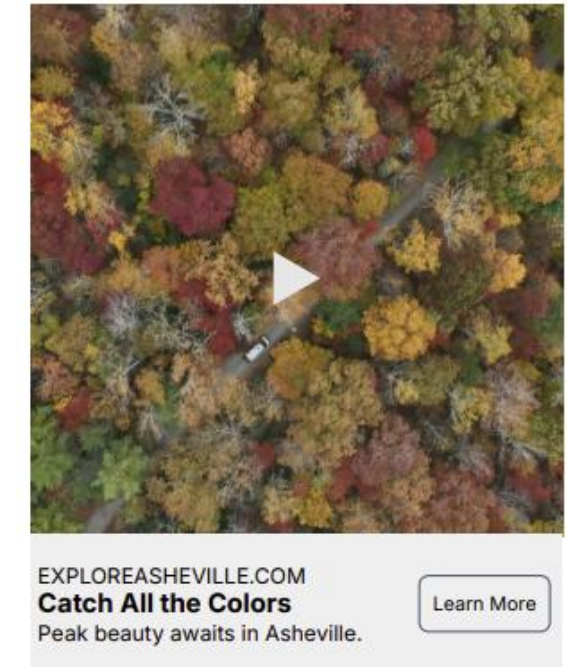
Strong calls to visit this fall across advertising

Major events as calls to plan a trip:

- Shifted regional paid social strategy from general "We're Open" messaging to event-led creative
- Launched event campaigns across paid search, paid social, and paid content
- Event-based display achieved nearly 2x benchmark CTR and **paid social for Thomas Dambo's Trolls** has already driven 24K+ clicks to our website.



Visit Asheville
Fall doesn't wait. Neither should you.
Check out the weekly fall color report to plan accordingly.



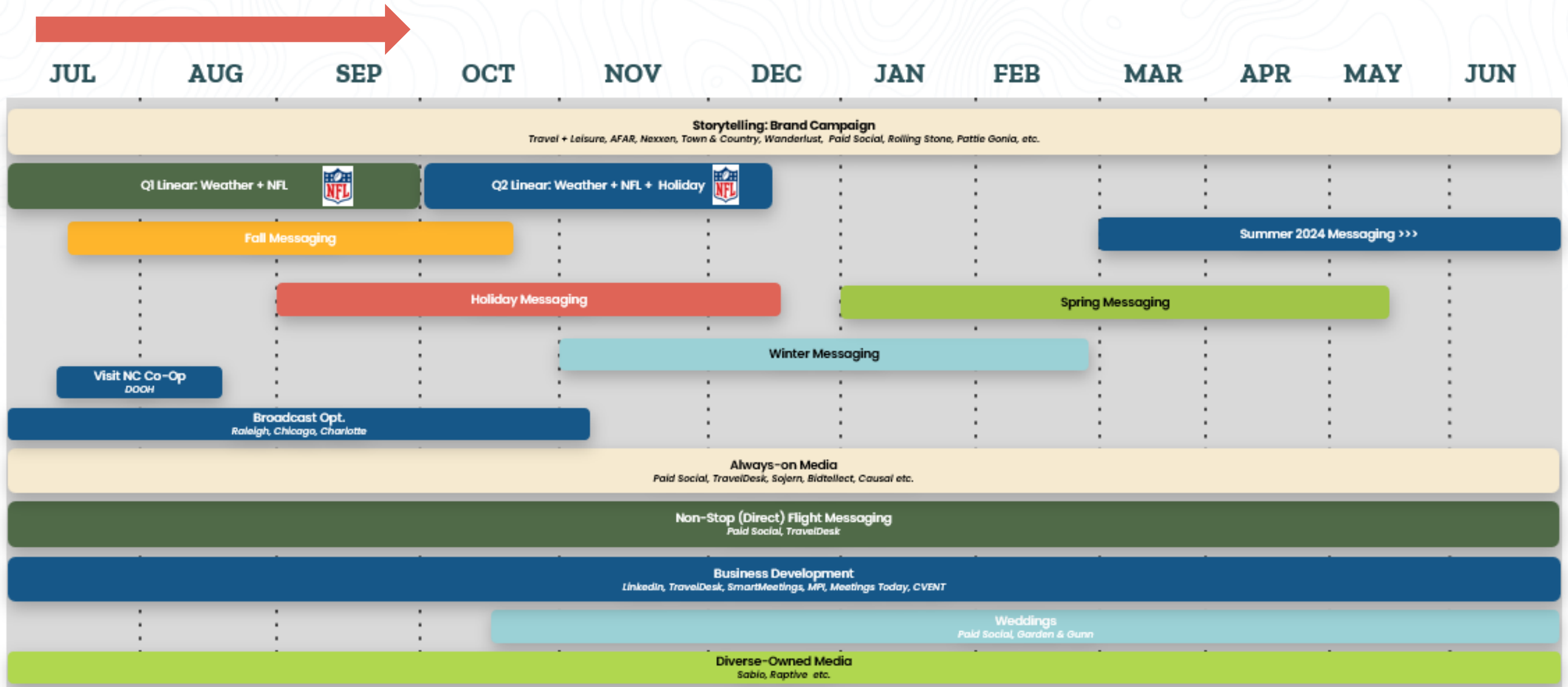
Q1 Paid Social

Impressions: 41.6M+
Engagement: 2M+
Inquiries: 6,831
CPE: \$.09

Q1 Paid Digital

Impressions: 47M+
Engagement: 5M+
Inquiries: 4,543
CPE: \$.07

FY26 PAID MEDIA OVERVIEW: FLOWCHART



Please note that the media chart above reflects current FY26 approvals and will be updated as planning progresses.





CULTURE & BUSINESS AFFAIRS Q1 INITIATIVES

Jennifer Kass-Green

Vice President of Culture & Business Affairs



ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

New Team Member



Ed Silver

VP of Business Development



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Q1 INITIATIVES

Ed Silver

Vice President of Business Development

**EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE**
POWERED BY
Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Strengthening Brand Visibility, Generating Leads, and Advancing Storytelling Alignment

Attended Key Events:

- AENC Annual Meeting – Raleigh, July 20-22
- Destination Southeast – Palm Beach, August 3-5
- ASAE – Los Angeles, August 9-12
- NC Motorcoach – Winston-Salem, August 12-15
- Connect Marketplace Corporate – Miami August 25-27
- Outdoor Economy Conference – Cherokee September 15-18

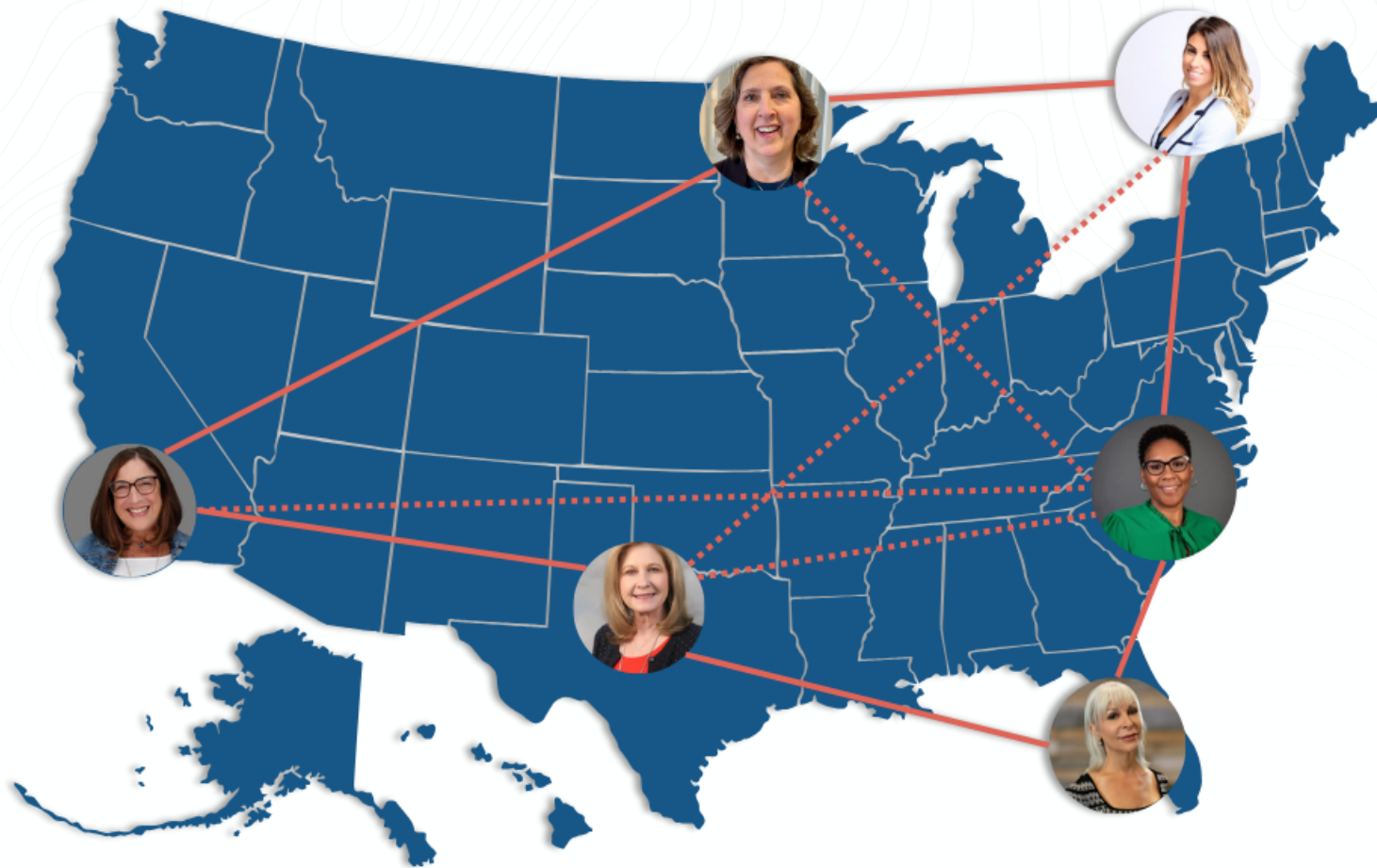


~440 Leads/70+ Appointments, strong buyer sentiment about Asheville (4.2/5)

Major wins: AENC 2027 Host City Secured; NC League of Municipalities 2028 Conference Booked

48-HOUR FAMILIARIZATION TOURS

August 12-15, 2025



Planners from Across North America, Representing Diverse Industries

Sonia Ciarlo	Anjou, Quebec	Tech/Global Corporate Meetings
Shawn Clary	Durham, North Carolina	Life Sciences/Regional Corporate
Stefanie Johnson-Berry	Tampa, Florida	Corporate/Tech Conferences
Michelle Scott	Fort Worth, Texas	Corporate/Manufacturing
Marilyn Atchue-Zuill	Rancho Santa Margarita, California	Associations/Corporations
Toni Brandt	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Incentive Travel/Automotive/Sales Recognition

Hosted 13 planners from around the country, representing Technology, Incentives, Corporate Manufacturing and Life Sciences segments.

LEADS GENERATED FROM PAST FAM ATTENDEES

FAM Attendees from March 2023 – August 2025

1. Women of Strength
2. Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA)
3. TIAA CTO Directs Offsite
4. TIAA LR&C Offsite - Team Urbina
5. Penrose All-Staff Offsite
6. APC Insurance Association 2025 Investment Seminar
7. Sew Magical Asheville 2024
8. Enterprise Compliance Offsite
9. Client Obsessed - Q3 Advice Strategy and Experience Offsite
10. Siemens Leadership
11. Incyte National Meeting
12. Johnstone Supplier Conference
13. 2024 Nuveen Services US Seminar
14. MEA Fall Executive Forum & Board Meeting
15. Incyte MidAtlantic Regional Meeting
16. American Fly-Fishing Trade Assn Fall Meeting 2025
17. Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association 2025 Annual Meeting
18. Low Voltage Products Service Team Event
19. Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association 2027
20. Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute
21. Rotary District 7710 District Conference 2027



August 2025 FAM Attendees ziplining at Navitat

Over the last 3 years, FAM Attendees have booked 21 Events in Asheville, generating 3,810 room nights, with direct spend of just under \$3M

Q1 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community



\$21 million direct spending
25,700 roomnights



↑ 33.7% year over year
Direct economic impact \$37M,
↑ ~34% year over year



5.6 % ↑ in roomnight leads
year over year



PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Q1 INITIATIVES

Tiffany Thacker

Vice President of Partnership & Destination Management



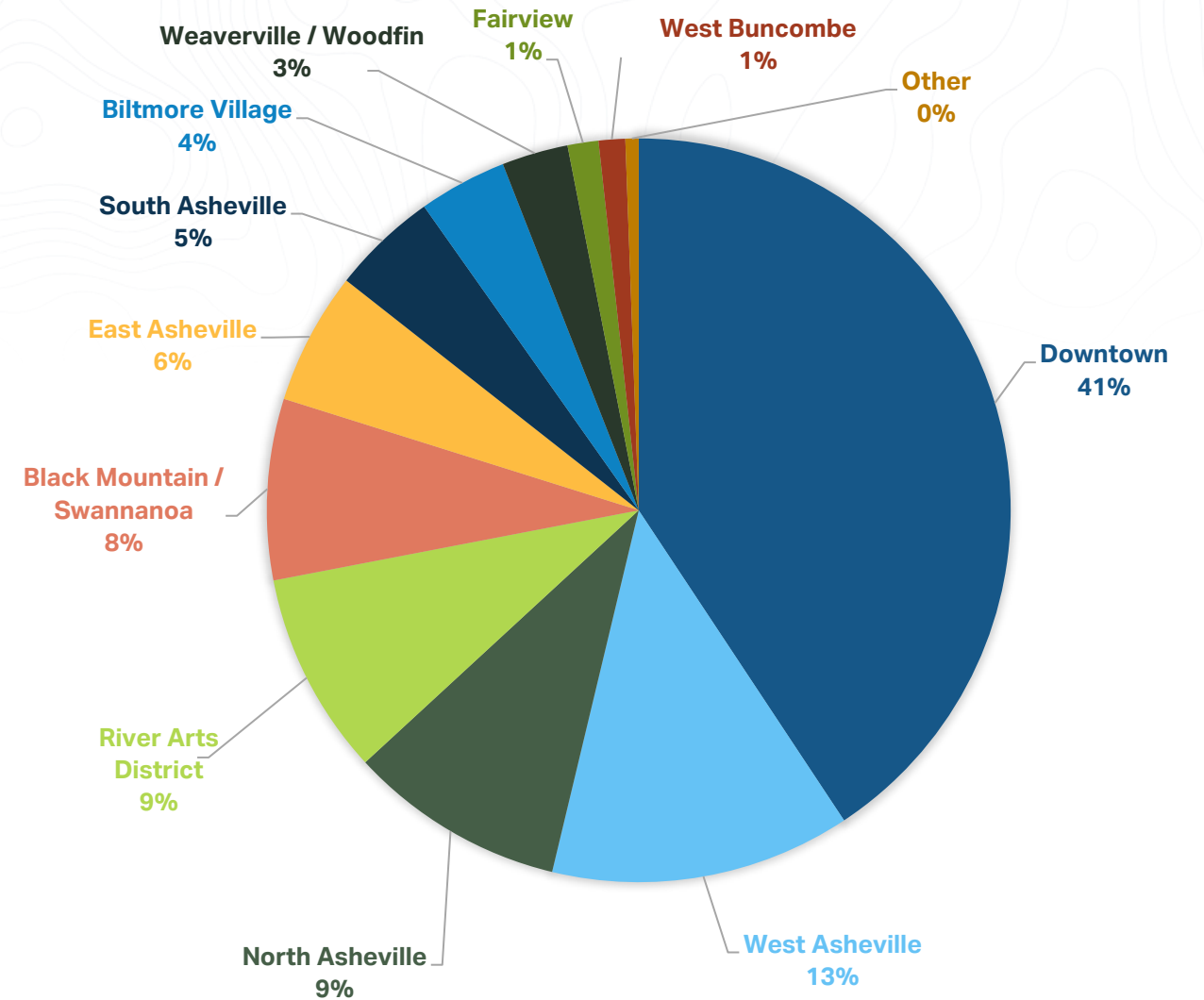
ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND

Emergency grants for small independent businesses



- Explore Asheville has continued to utilize the Always Asheville Fund to aid small local travel and hospitality businesses in their recovery from Hurricane Helene.
- To date, Explore Asheville has awarded \$2.18 million through 521 awards.
- All eligible applicants have been awarded, and we are continuing to award funds to grantees still in need as additional funds are raised.

Awards by Location



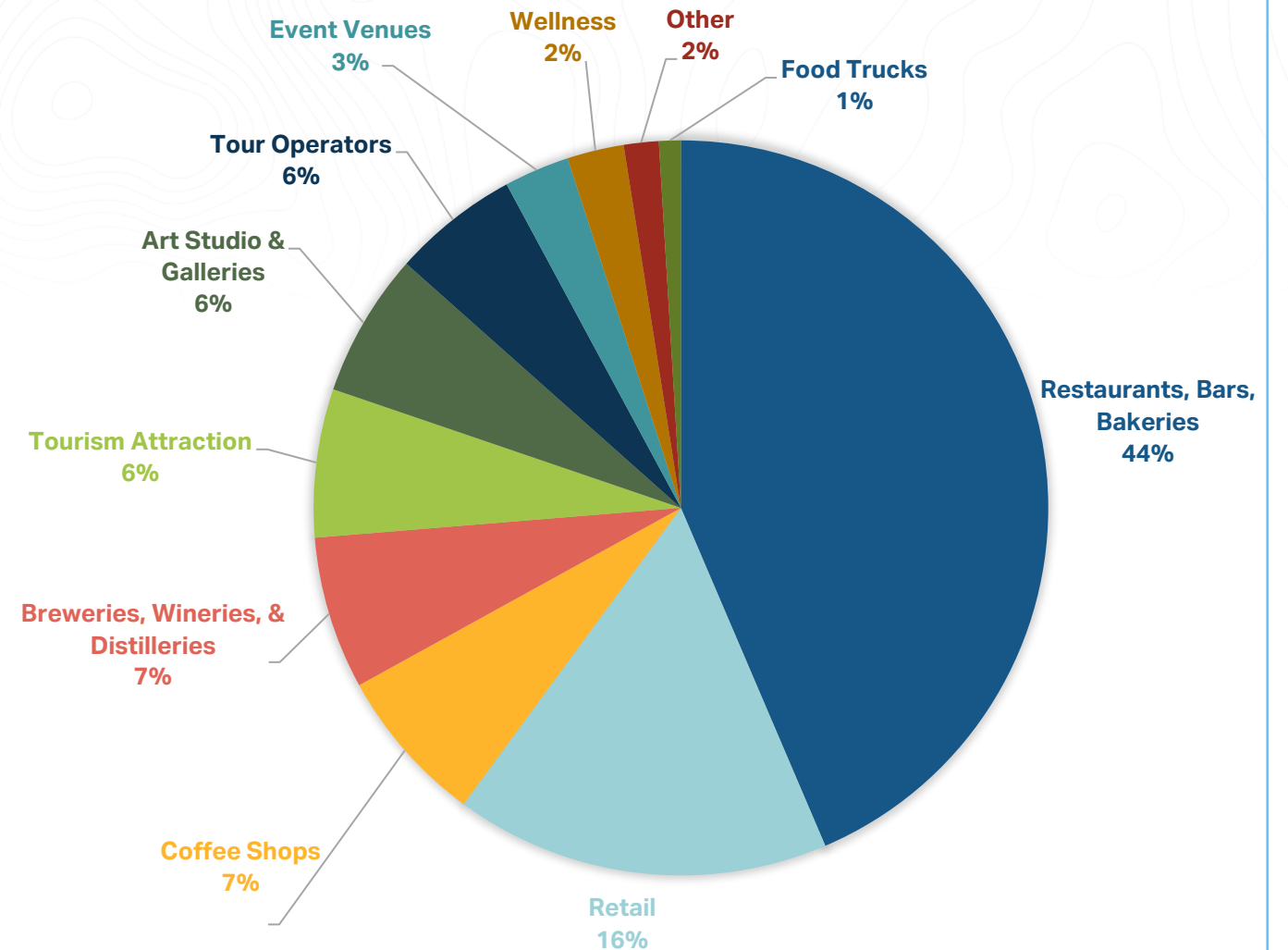
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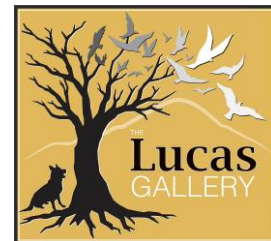
Awards by Business Category



NEW PARTNERSHIPS & OPERATIONAL STATUS UPDATE

Onboarded 54 local businesses as Explore Asheville partners in Q1

- Explore Asheville onboarded **54 local businesses** as new partners in Q1
- **Some Re-Openings to Celebrate:**
 - Corner Kitchen
 - Gardener's Cottage in Biltmore Village
 - Marquee
 - Design Driven Studio
 - and multiple sections and trails of the Blue Ridge Parkway
- **Operational Status Update:**
 - Open: 1,370 (89.5%)
 - Temporarily Closed: 27 (1.8%)
 - Status Unknown: 35 (2.3%)
 - Permanently Closed: 99 (6.5%)

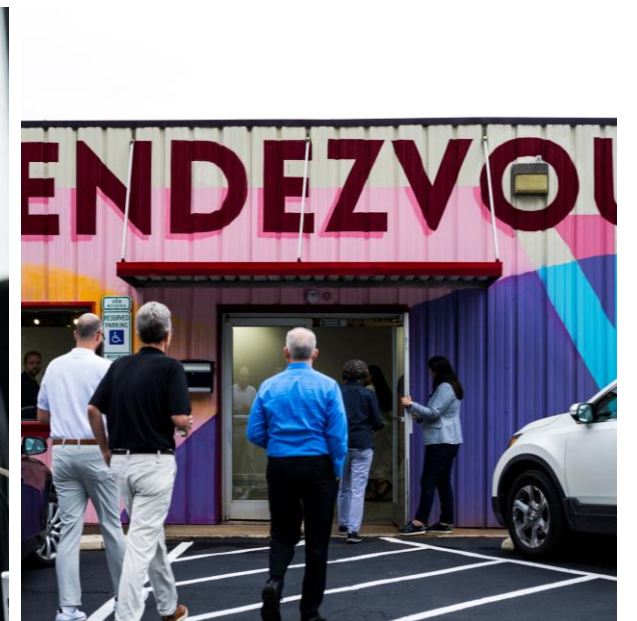
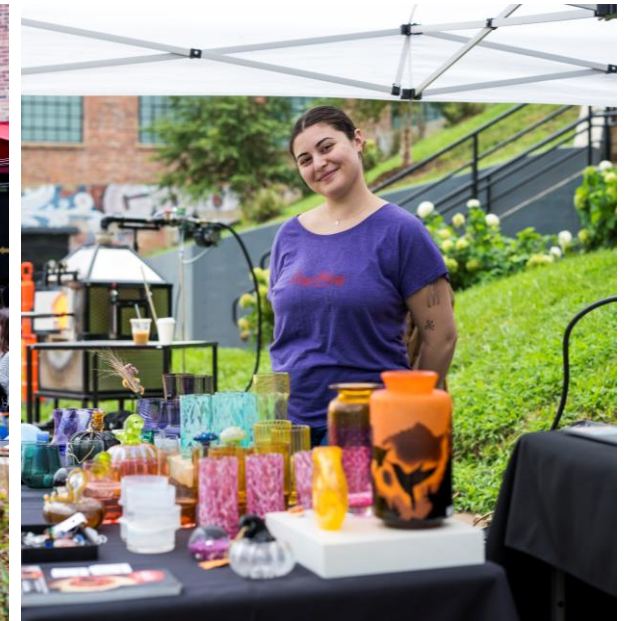


SUMMER SOCIAL

Parter event gathers 300 to celebrate revival of the RAD

The 2025 Summer Social brought together 300+ industry partners, community leaders, and colleagues for an afternoon to celebrate the renewal of the River Arts District at The Radical Hotel.

- Attendees got a sneak preview of the newly opened RAD Rendezvous artist space.
- Explore Asheville engaged DJ Lil Meow Meow, the North Carolina Glass Center, and Mitch Capp's the Doodle Dude to support local creatives to give attendees a taste of the RAD's creative spirit.
- Photographers Carol Spagnola and Aakash Karvir captured all the magic; photos can be found on Facebook.



THIRD ANNUAL TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY NIGHT

Celebrating our industry partners at the Asheville Tourists Game

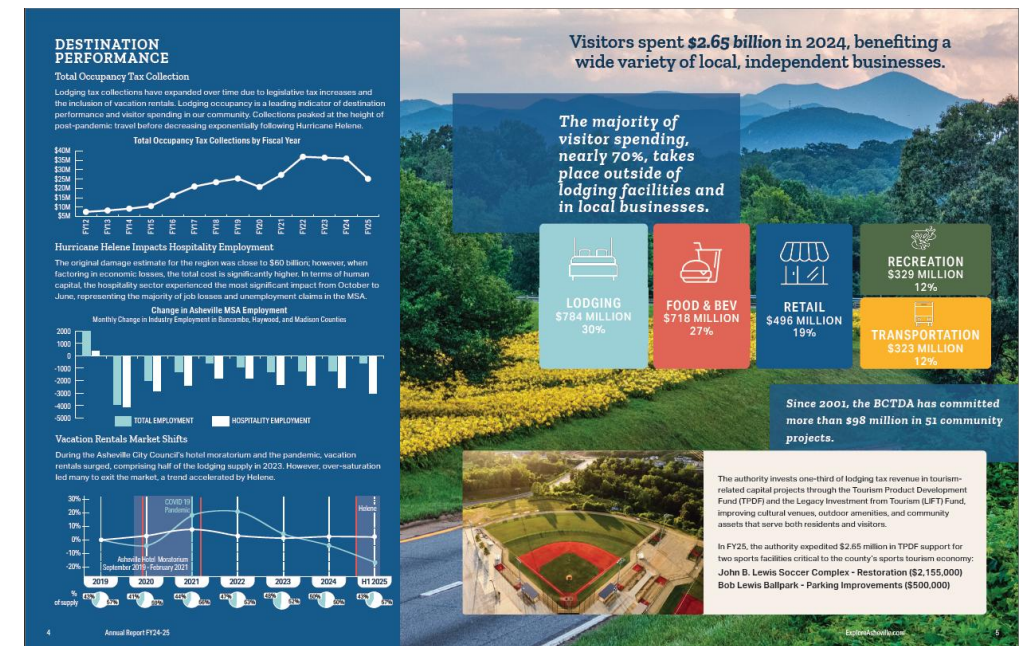
- On August 28, Explore Asheville hosted the third annual Travel and Hospitality Night at the Asheville Tourists game to celebrate our partners and industry workers.
- Discounted tickets were offered to our industry partners for the game.
- PSAs were given at the game recognizing Explore Asheville's 2025 Heroes of Hospitality, and the first pitch was delivered by one of the Heroes of Hospitality recipients – Elvira Sanchez.
- 488 discounted tickets were sold to our partners and their families who joined us at Travel and Hospitality night this year.



BCTDA ANNUAL MEETING

More than 250 partners and community leaders gathered at the Wortham Center for Performing Arts

- The Annual Meeting recognized efforts following Helene and previewed major cultural events coming to the Asheville area, supporting economic recovery through two in-depth panel discussions.
- The North American premier of Trolls: A Field Study at the North Carolina Arboretum, running Nov. 15 - Feb. 17.
- The Asheville Sessions: Celebrating 100 Years of Americana and Appalachia, running Nov. 6 - 9.
- Explore Asheville presented the 26th annual William A.V. Cecil Tourism Leadership Award to Luke Combs and Eric Church for their immediate response to Hurricane Helene recovery efforts through the Concert for Carolina.
- Bites by Catering by Corey, and warm tunes from Asheville Jazz Collective.
- We premiered the FY25 Annual Report, chronicling our recovery milestones from Hurricane Helene.



HELENE MILESTONE: DAY OF SERVICE AND HEROES OF HELENE

Three Non-profit partners hosted 60+ industry and community volunteers for a regional day of service

Helene 1-Year Milestone: Day of Service

Explore Asheville partnered with Asheville GreenWorks, RiverLink, and Food Connection for a Day of Service, offering the opportunity for partners and community members to volunteer and give back to our community.

Over 60 volunteers supported the following activities:

- Removed debris from the French Broad River from Pearson Bridge to Silverline Park with Asheville GreenWorks
- Packed meals for distribution with Food Connection; volunteers packed 600 meals
- Removed invasive, non-native plant species from Karen Cragolin Park with RiverLink

Heroes of Helene: Honoring Recovery & Resilience Together

On September 25, in collaboration with the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, the City of Asheville, and Buncombe County, more than 1,000 community members gathered at Highland Brewing for a free event to reflect, remember, and give thanks to all the Heroes of Helene. The event featured music, local food, and tributes.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: PILOT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Enriching the Life of Students Through Educational Opportunities

The Explore Asheville Tourism & Hospitality Internship launched in June 2025 with four interns from T. C. Roberson High School, Carolina Day School, Asheville School, and the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

As an introduction to the hospitality and tourism industry, interns spent approximately 120 hours learning about the role of a destination organization alongside exposure to partner offerings.

Interns developed a variety of transferable hard and soft skills including customer service, public speaking, and time management in the following sectors:

- Destination Marketing and Management
- Food and Beverage
- Accommodations
- Recreation, Parks, and Sports
- Arts and Culture

Weekly projects included: press release research, a marketing tagline workshop, and an overarching summer research project on travelers with disabilities, how to offer helpful accommodations, and the overall economic impact.



EVENT GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS

Support for local festivals & cultural events through grants and sponsorships

Explore Asheville / BCTDA supported the following events in FY26 Q1

- The Big Crafty
- Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands
- Black Mountain Art in Bloom
- Mountain Dance and Folk Festival / Shindig on the Green
- Goombay Festival
- Punch Bucket Literary Festival
- ASAP Farm Tour
- 2025 Blue Ridge Pride Festival
- Flacktastic: A Roberta Flack Tribute Concert
- Gran Fondo 2025
- Asheville Open Tennis Championship
- Groovin' on Grovemont
- 17th Annual Asheville Comedy Festival
- Sourwood Festival
- Asheville Quilt Show
- Come to Leicester Artists Studio Tour
- Boomtown Arts and Heritage FestAVL
- Beer City Cup Asheville XV
- En Vogue AVL
- Black Mountain Blues Festival
- Rising Appalachia

\$72k
Grants & Sponsorships



21
Events