



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: December 13, 2019

Subject: Updates for TDA Board

Executive Director Report – Nick Breedlove

Important Reminder

Our December meeting only will be at Burrell Building (the new building with glass tower on SCC's campus) Room 102A. Please plan on arriving fifteen minutes early to allow for parking at one of SCC's parking lots. As a reminder a campus map is linked on the agenda and also **here [link]**. We will begin our meeting at 1 with a special presentation. Pineapple PR, Rawle Murdy and invited dignitaries will be present for this special event.

November Financials

We are up 1.51-percent over last year for November occupancy taxes for October stays; this is an impressive statistic given High Hampton Resort was closed. We are down for the fiscal year a conservative 4.78-percent, and if we can grow Winter Season Travel, we should fair well through the end of the fiscal year.

Lodging Specials

Our new lodging specials page is online **here [link]**. Since rolling it out we've had more than 475 pageviews and many actions taken on the page to click through to our lodging partner pages. Many of the specials will roll out starting January 1.

Tourism Academy

We sent an email to all of our partners (restaurants, lodging, small businesses, etc.) letting them know of a new online portal rolled out by VisitNC. This online portal allows them to learn best online marketing tactics and online presence management of Google, Yelp, etc. at their own pace, at no charge. Our Chambers are going to follow up and send a similar email as a reminder and also to some of their members that we do not have in our database.

NCDOT N.C. 107 Project R-5600

Staff attended an informational NC DOT meeting about the NC 107 project which will have an impact during construction phases on our visitors. Construction is expected to begin in 2022 and an online link to a one-page summary and complete maps is available online **here [link]** for our Board's reference.

Sustainability

As part of the JCTDA's continuing mission to be a sustainable organization in conjunction with our partners, we compiled a list of our sustainable efforts and highlighted many of them online **here [link]**. We recently were named in a letter to the editor **here [link]** asking us to do more for trash pickup; we will refer this article to the committee we are establishing on Sustainability. As one who has personally served on litter task forces in the past, I can say that it is a far larger issue than putting up billboards to solve a problem that every destination deals with. As a DMO our new Sustainability Committee will come up with some good ideas to add to our existing sustainability-related efforts to grow the positive impact we have on our environment.

New Video Creative

As part of our growing effort to expand our video library to encourage visitation based on inspiring video and photography, we captured Dillsboro Lights & Luminaries last weekend. **The clip [link]** turned out beautiful and is online here. We were able to receive the edited clip in time to promote the second weekend of luminaries and will be great to use next year and in future years to drive visitation to both weekends.

VA + VR + AI

There was an entire session at a recent conference dedicated solely to these abbreviations. They stand for Voice Automation, Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence. I am pleased to say that we have (and are) implementing all of these in our DMO.

Voice Automation: We now have an Alexa skill that is published worldwide. I will demonstrate it for the board next week. Visitors can learn exciting facts for their next trip to Jackson County, NC. I was able to create this skill for free and Amazon approved its publish. We hope to build on its knowledge of our area and integrate mentions of it on our website.

Virtual Reality: This week we trialed use of Virtual Reality headsets with 360-degree imagery and videos to use for a number of purposes: in our Visitor Centers; for tradeshow where we are selling to travel planners and need to show them our venues; for Media Missions Pineapple PR attends to present a more immersive experience.

Artificial Intelligence: After the better part of the year delving into research as to the best utility to integrate into our website, Rawle Murdy and I collectively settled on one that will enhance the user experience giving them the better curated information. While it appears as a chat tool on the surface, the tool will analyze search queries to help deliver a better online experience and let us tailor our content to information that may not be present on our website. This tool should roll out in Q1, 2020.

Proposal to DI

In partnership with Mary Vrba of Dutchess, NY's DMO, we collectively submitted a presentation to Destinations International called 'Learning to Think Differently' for their annual convention. An abstract appears below:

When one talks about diversity and inclusion with travel, one often overlooked aspect is accessibility. What has your destination done to highlight those assets that are genuinely accessible? Do you have a strategy for developing your destination accessibility or have you developed a guide? Two small DMOs – Dutchess County, New York, and Jackson County, North Carolina, talk about how they formulated a strategy and guide from the ground up to help those with varying mobility needs. They will discuss how to set a framework for developing an accessible strategy and guide to your destination and how to be inclusive. Both small DMOs led the charge in what can be an overwhelming undertaking and a challenge no matter the size of your DMO. Learn about how to get started, what to avoid, proper language, and general advice and guidance on Accessible Travel.

New Website Feature – Safety Page

We are building a dedicated page with information about waterfall, hiking safety, camping tips, Leave No Trace, and more, so that our visitors arrive with all the information they need to have a great (safe) trip to the North Carolina Mountains.

New Attraction/Business coming soon

I learned last week that Mystic Distillery will be coming to Jackson County. The Durham-based company plans to locate at the Old Mill site along U.S. 441 near Cherokee. Their plans are to break ground in March according to the partner that I spoke with by telephone last week. This attraction will be a nice addition to offerings for our visitors in Jackson County.

Specialty Leads

The TDA office began fulfilling specialty leads through our website this month. As a reminder, our Visitor Centers are able to accept lead requests through their website and fulfill those directly. Our website previously allowed a visitor to only request a visitor guide. Staff is now handling the processing of 'specialty' requests, wherein a visitor to our site can now receive an Ale Trail map and a WNC Fly Fishing Trail® map in addition to our Visitor Guide. Many are opting for these new materials which should drive interest and convert interested travelers into visitors to the area.

New Visitor Information Kiosks

Following on the success that the Cashiers Area Chamber and Visitor Center had last year with deploying seven kiosks throughout the Cashiers Area with Visitor Information, I ordered four kiosk boxes for the Sylva/Dillsboro area. These will be placed at heavy foot traffic areas initially and monitored for success and optimal placement. We think this will meet the visitor where they are providing them the best local information.

Visitor Center Social Media Engagement

We installed social media counters this last week at our Visitor Center in Sylva as a trial to hopefully increase engagement with our Instagram and Facebook social media channels. Much like stock tickers, the counters update live when someone follows one of our pages.



Upcoming Projects

Visitor Guide Production – January 2020

Presentation of Draft Sales and Group Marketing Plan to Board – February 2020

Marketing and Communication Planning Meetings with Staff and Partners – February 2020

Sales and Marketing Report – Caleb Sullivan

Social Media Status Report Update

Cross Channel Report November 1 - 30 vs. Oct 1- 31

- Total Followers grew by 0.5% MOM
- Total Impressions decreased by 25.1% MOM.
 - Twitter Impressions increased 107%

- Instagram Impressions did increase by 0.8%
- Total Engagement decreased by 25.1% MOM
 - Twitter Engagements increased by 413%
- The decrease in impressions and engagement is likely due to November marking the end of the leaf season and the overall success of October's social media efforts. Additionally, MOM, there was a 30.5% decrease in cross-network paid ads which could correlate with the decrease in overall impressions and engagement.
 - Comparing to the previous year Nov 1-30, 2018 vs. Oct 1-31, 2018 we see the same negative trend. Engagements decreased 35.9% while Impressions decreased by 25.9%.

Google Post/Event Platform

- October 36,444 Impressions
- November 40,755
- 11.8% impression increase MOM

Instagram Stories

- Blue Ridge Parkway Takeover Story had a total viewership of 5,989
- Choose-and-Cut Story had a total viewership of 2,223
- Lights and Luminaires Story had a total viewership 831

Highlights

- Blue Ridge Parkway Takeover
 - November 5th saw 65,149 total impressions across all channels as well as 4,285 total impressions
 - Twitter Impressions were a record high 6,289 impressions
- We've placed Counters in our Sylva Visitor Center to increase real-time engagement among visitors. These counters will inspire visitors to like and follow our social media channels.

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Top Performing Posts for November

Facebook Top Messages

Review your top messages published during the selected time period, based on the message's lifetime performance.

By Lifetime Engagements

Post Title	Date	Total Engagements	Reactions	Comments	Shares	Message Clicks
Experience the magic as Dillsboro, NC is transformed into a winter wonderland during the Lights and Luminaries festival.	Fri 11/8/2019 12:40 pm PST	4,080	2,227	92	207	1,554
Glenville mornings are magical. ☺️ 🌟 Temps are cooling down but the beauty never fades. Lake Glenville offers...	Sun 11/10/2019 10:04 am PST	3,666	2,028	72	157	1,409
Have you 'herd' about the Elk in Cherokee? 🐃🐃 These majestic creatures are a photographer's dream!	Sun 11/24/2019 10:01 am PST	3,190	1,317	108	194	1,571

Instagram Top Messages

Review your top messages published during the selected time period, based on the message's lifetime performance.

By Lifetime Engagements

Post Title	Date	Total Engagements	Likes	Comments	Saves
@blueridgepns will be answering YOUR questions tomorrow! 🌲 Directly from our Instagram Story, ask anything to	Mon 11/4/2019 12:01 pm PST	913	877	6	30
⚠️ CAUTION 🚧 Bear sightings have been occurring on Highway 64 around 5:30 pm on sunny days. 🐻 The Shade...	Sat 11/9/2019 6:08 am PST	747	718	9	20
If chasin' waterfalls is your thing, then the NC Mountains are the place for you. 🌲🌲 Make sure to check out these 3	Mon 11/18/2019 9:20 am PST	726	671	5	50

Conferences, Networking & Training

- Attended the Georgia Sales Symposium in Sandy Springs, GA, November 13 – 14
- Attended DIY Tourism Workshop in Asheville, NC, November 18 – 19
- Attended SM Host Meeting in Cherokee, NC, November 5th
- Attended Sprout 2020 Trend Prediction Webinar on November 11th

Ongoing Projects

- Currently creating Strategic Sales Plan. Final version should be complete and ready for board approval by Early 2020.