

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

October 2024 – December 2024

# 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 Q2 INITIATIVES

Dodie Stephens  
Vice President of Marketing

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



# INVITING VISITORS TO PLAN RETURN TRIP WITH HEART

Our brand new ExploreAsheville.com launched in Q2, offering centralized travel resources to help visitors easily access up-to-date information and inspiring stories to plan their trips with heart.

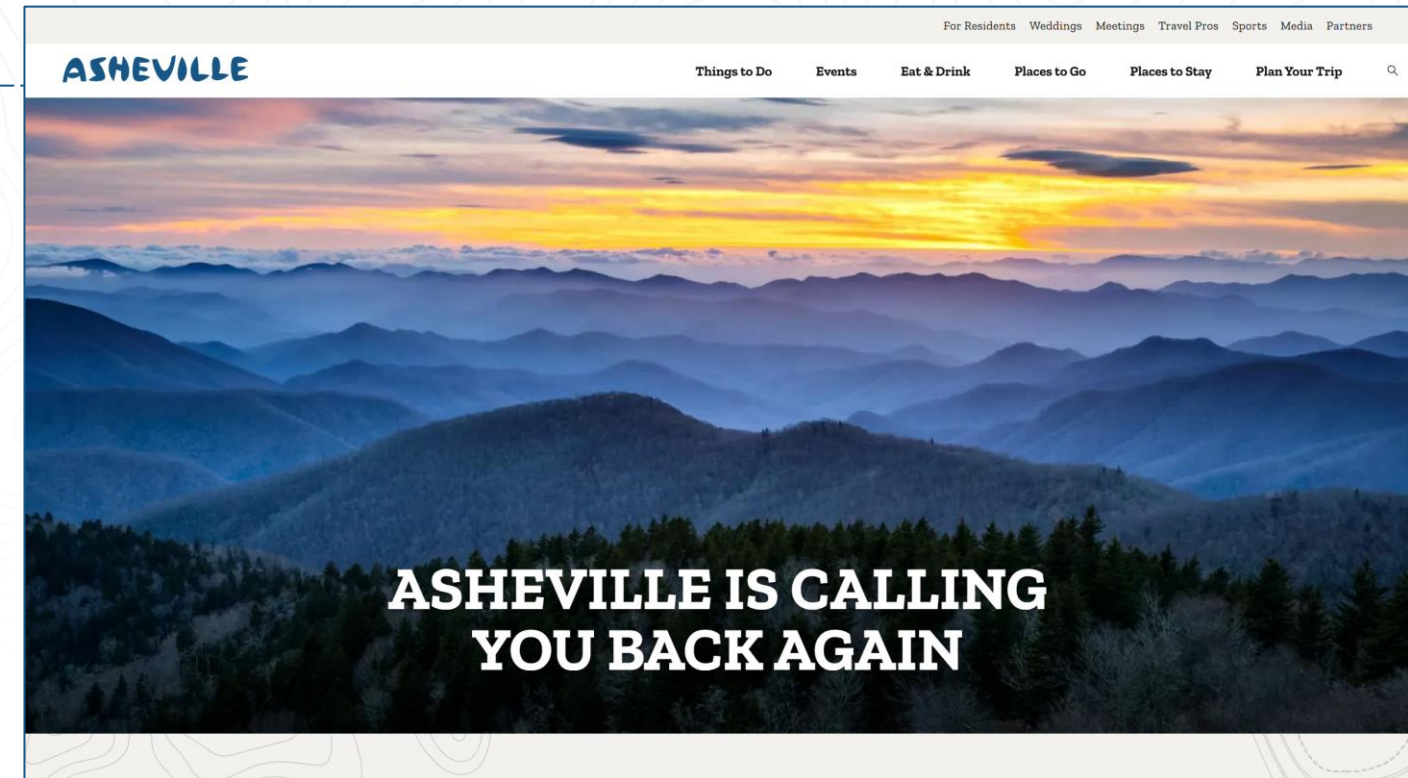
In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene, we reimagined our brand anthem and leveraged the new website to inspire visitors to plan their return trip with heart. This refreshed message emphasized resilience, connection, and the creative spirit of Asheville, encouraging travelers to support our recovery by planning their future visits.

## Message Evolution:

- Plan Your Return Trip with Heart.
- Be Part of the Comeback.
- Asheville is Calling You Back Again.

## Results + Metrics:

- Over 3.9M Linear Impressions
- Over 4.4M CTV Impressions





# BILTMORE & EXPLORE ASHEVILLE LINEAR TV & STREAMING TV

- **Intentional Market Amplification:** Charlotte, Raleigh-Durham, Greensboro, Atlanta, Greenville/Spartanburg, Knoxville, Nashville, Washington DC, Jacksonville (CTV), Orlando (CTV).
- **Timing:** Week of November 11th through December 22nd.
- **Programming Alignment:** NBC's 2024 Christmas in Rockefeller Center Holiday Special, NBC's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, CMAs on ABC, NFL Sunday Night Football and Monday Night Football, etc.
- **CTV Strategy:** United message encouraging visitation to the Asheville area via Hulu and Amazon Prime buys; Implement ACR/Automatic Content Recognition technology to retarget Linear, Hulu and Amazon Prime efforts with CTV.
- **Estimated Impressions:**
  - Over 3.9M Linear Impressions
  - Over 4.4M CTV Impressions



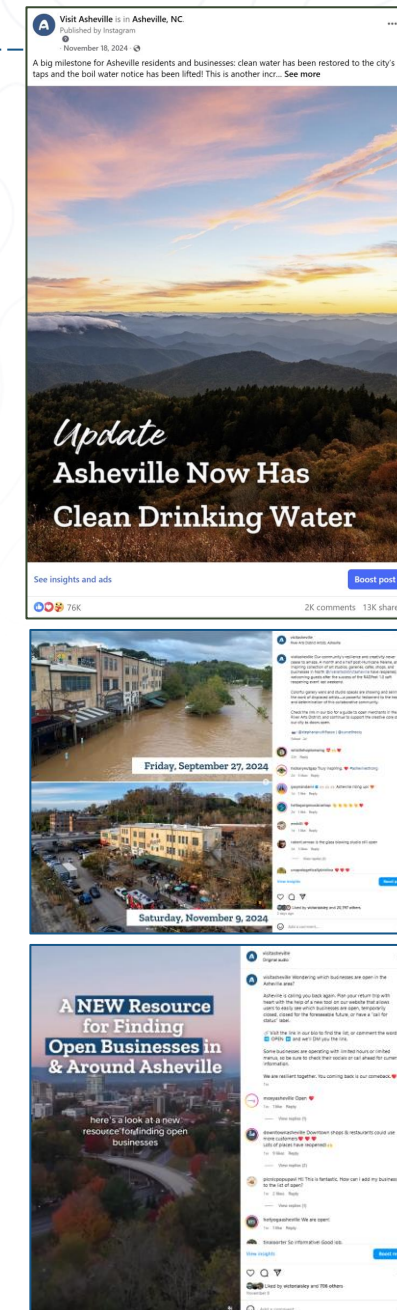


# "BE PART OF THE COMEBACK" MESSAGING

Amplifying reopening stories across every channel to fuel visitor confidence and momentum

Campaign amplifying reopening efforts through powerful, confidence-building content shared across social, web and email.

- **#BePartOfTheComeback Campaign:** Focused on amplifying partners' reopening messages across key categories and areas.
- **Content Themes:**
  - **Date-Stamped Posts:** Highlighting progress with before-and-after photos or updates with visible timestamps.
  - **Inspirational Reopening Messages:** Showcasing major attractions and businesses reopening.
  - **Practical Updates:** Sharing milestone updates (ex. water return), and other travel-related guidance.
- **Top Performing Content:**
  - Water Return Post – 210,764 likes, comments and shares on Facebook
  - Biltmore Tree Raising – 40,415 likes, comments and shares on Instagram
  - RAD Reopening Post – 58,125 likes, comments and shares on Instagram





Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

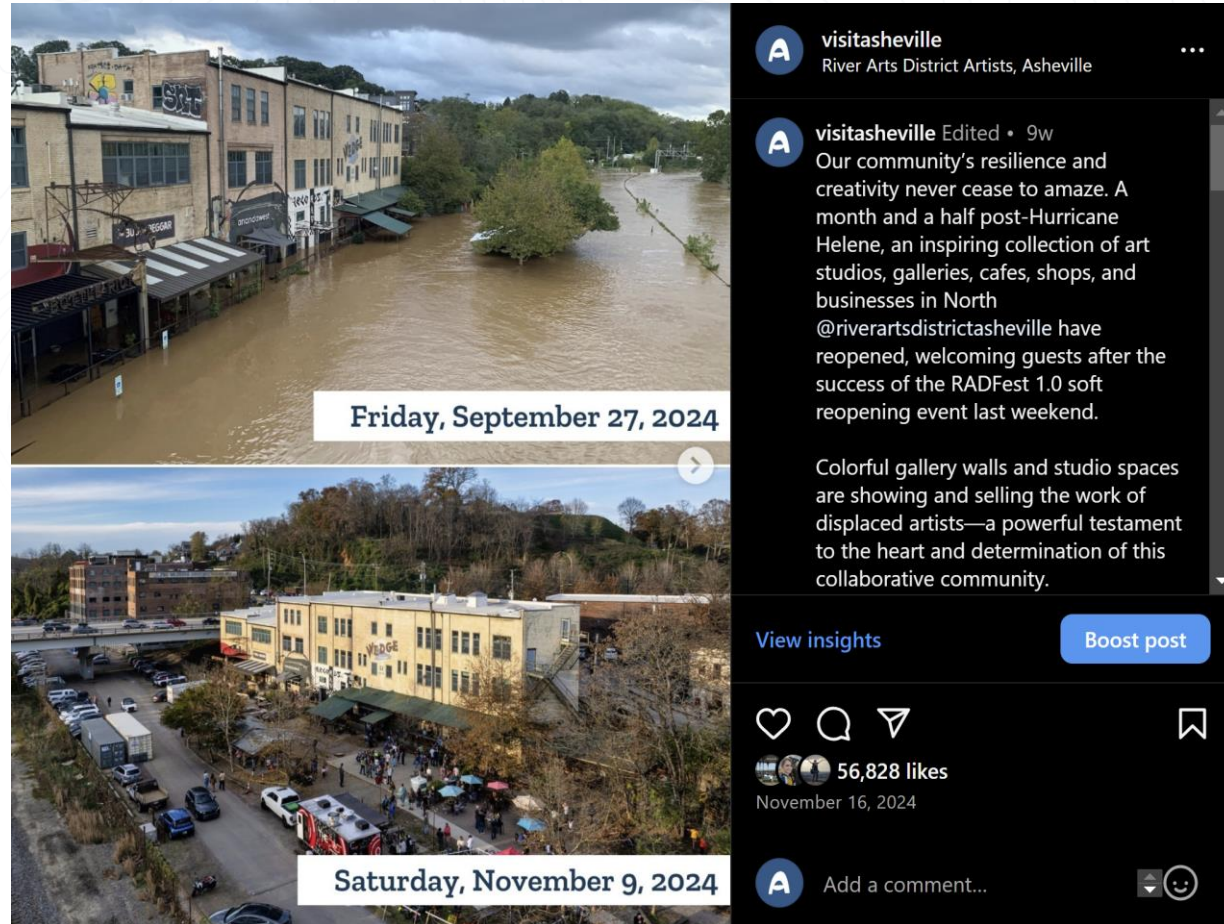
Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

# TOP PERFORMING SOCIAL POSTS

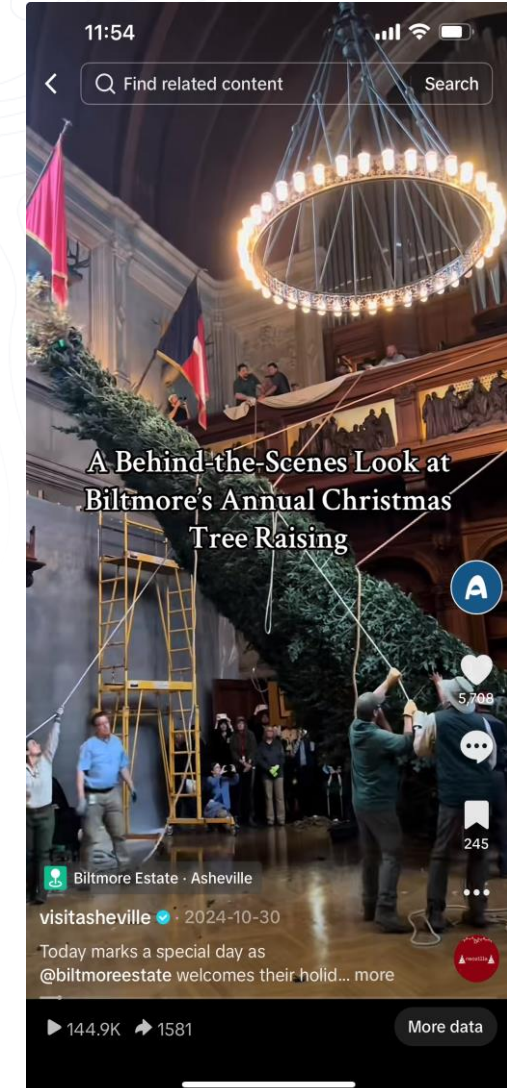
The most engagements in Q2 came from Hurricane Helene updates and behind the scenes at Biltmore's Christmas Tree Raising



**INSTAGRAM**  
**North RAD Reopening**  
58,125 Engagements



**FACEBOOK**  
**Clean Drinking Water Update**  
210,764 Engagements



**TIKTOK**  
**Biltmore Christmas Tree Raising (BTS)**  
7,388 Engagements

Engagements = Likes, Comments, Saves, Shares



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM



# DRIVE MARKET EMAIL SERIES

Driving regional engagement through curated campaigns and itineraries

Targeted email campaigns and curated itineraries drive interest and engagement from key regional markets, supporting Asheville's open businesses.

## Key Efforts:

- **Targeted Email Campaigns:** Focus on inspiring regional visitation with curated Asheville itineraries and reopening messages.
- **Weekly Email Series:** Highlighting downtown itineraries to encourage travel from key regional markets.

## Regional Markets of Focus:

- Greenville
- Raleigh/Durham
- Charlotte Tri-Cities
- Greensboro/High Point
- Atlanta

## Performance Metrics:

- Emails Sent: 205,940
- Open Rate: 26.6% (54,560 opens)
- Click Rate: 0.82% (1,674 clicks)



## Asheville Is Open: Be Part of the Comeback

The spirit of holiday travel takes on a deeper meaning this year. In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Asheville area artists, makers, chefs, performers and shop owners are welcoming you to be part of the comeback.

What better time to return than to kick off your holiday season? An [open and festive downtown](#), [holiday markets and events](#), and new traditions of giving feature the resilient artists, makers and innovators of Appalachia.

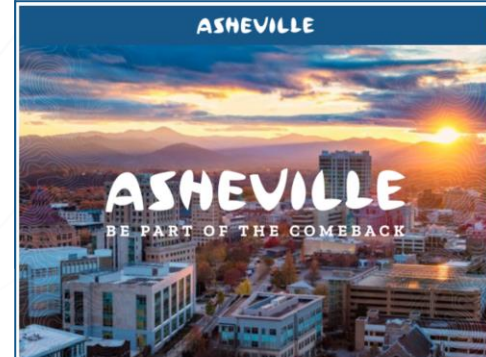
With dozens of beloved [downtown restaurants](#) open now and on Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 28), a wealth of local, handcrafted shopping options for Black Friday and beyond, and a vibrant creative arts scene, there are plenty of options to shop, sip and celebrate the season.

**Holiday Itinerary Inspiration:  
Warm Your Heart in Downtown Asheville**



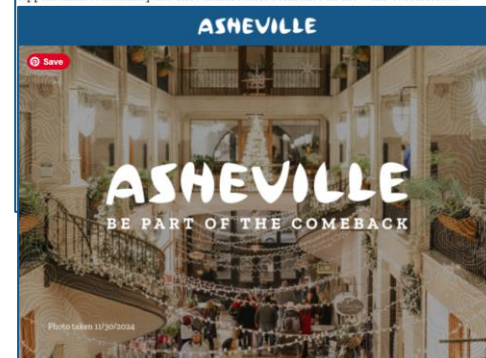
## Shop Downtown Asheville for Gifts that Give Back

A holiday shopping trip in downtown Asheville is more than an errand. It's an experience in and of itself—made especially meaningful this year as shops, restaurants



## Voluntourism: How to Help the Asheville Area During Your Visit

Plan a return trip with heart. With grit, gumption, and a shared sense of purpose, our Appalachian community has shown incredible resilience in the wake of Hurricane



## Asheville Shines Brighter This Season

The warm glow of a 35-foot Christmas tree at [Biltmore Estate](#). Dazzling winter lights at the [NC Arboretum](#). Dozens of holiday markets bustling with life, art, food and music. These are the daily reminders of Asheville's holiday sparkle, and tributes to our momentous comeback after Hurricane Helene.

From twinkling lights to lively festivals, explore Asheville's holiday highlights with a mix of seasonal celebrations and memorable outings:

🌲 [Christmas at Biltmore](#) • [A Stroll Through Antler Hill Village](#)  
**When:** Now – Jan. 5, 2025  
**Where:** [Biltmore Estate](#)

Begin your holiday adventure at America's Largest Home®. Marvel at the 35-foot Fraser fir inside the Biltmore House, then explore the twinkling lights and festive displays of Antler Hill Village. Don't miss the [Chihuly glass sculptures](#) still on display in Amherst at Deepark until February 2.

Nearby bonus: Grab a bite and some cozy cocktails at Cedric's Tavern in Antler



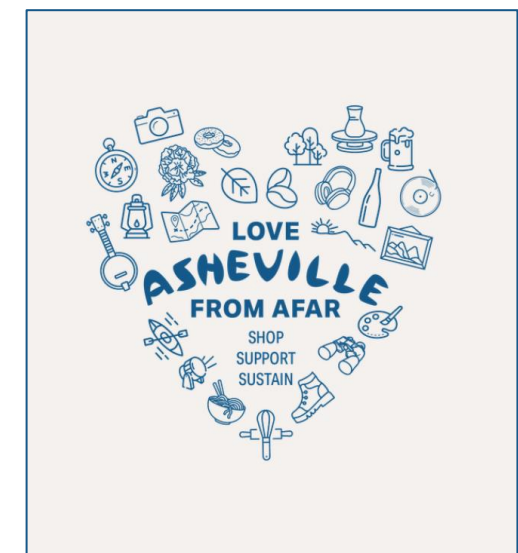
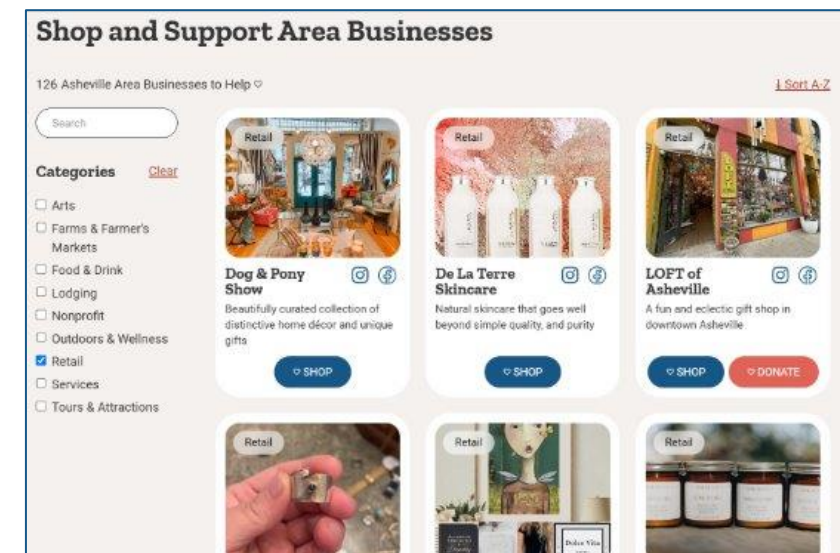
# LOVE ASHEVILLE FROM AFAR (LAFA)

Central Platform and a Pop-Up Showcasing Local Businesses E-Commerce and Direct Donation Options

Supporting Asheville's economy by connecting people to local businesses' online shopping and direct donation platforms right after the storm. Included an in-person pop-up gallery in Atlanta's Ponce City Market.

## Key LAFA Achievements:

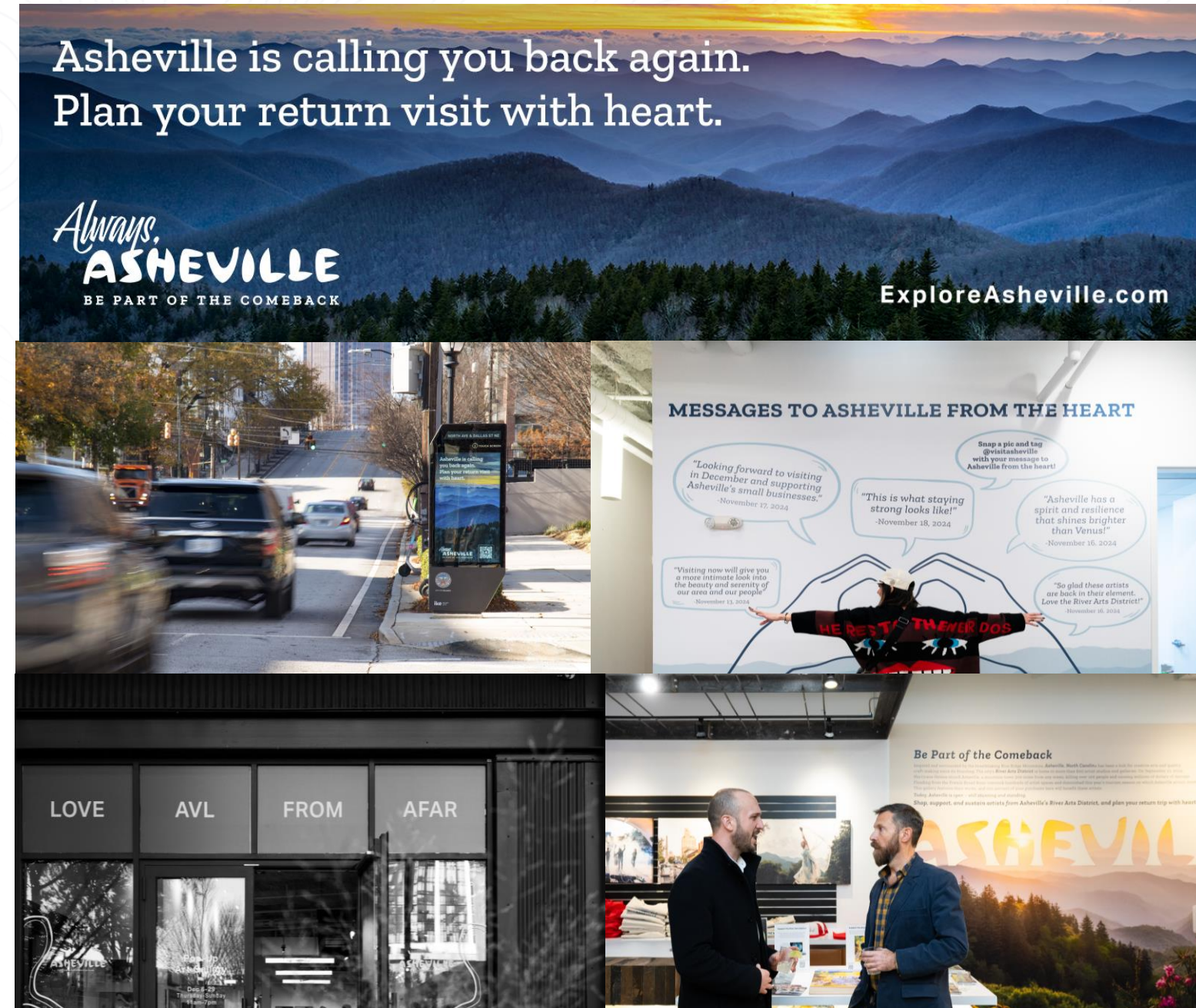
- Began with 320 participating businesses and expanded to feature 770 local businesses, makers, and artisans.
- Attracted over 113,000 active users
- Drove over 200,000 link clicks to LAFA partners, helping businesses sustain operations during recovery.
- Implemented **geofencing** and **out-of-home** advertising for Ponce City Market pop-up to maximize visibility and engagement, resulting in 15,111,976 Total impressions delivered.
- Successfully raised approximately \$20,000 to support RAD artists through the Ponce City outpost.





# LOVE ASHEVILLE FROM AFAR: PONCE CITY MARKET

- **Campaign Overview:** The 'Love Asheville from Afar' at Ponce City Market initiative successfully kept Asheville top-of-mind for a key regional audience, inspiring future travel while directly supporting our Asheville artist community.
- **Campaign Support:** We implemented **geofencing** around the event, delivering targeted digital ads to attendees and nearby audiences in real-time. Complemented by **out-of-home (OOH)** advertising. Together, these efforts maximized visibility and engagement, resulting in **15,111,976 Total impressions delivered**.
- **Artist Support:** This initiative successfully raised approximately **\$20,000** to support RAD artists,
- **Press Coverage:** this received prominent media coverage, including a feature in *Atlanta Magazine* celebrating Asheville's culture and resilience, a spotlight in *See Great Art*, and a story in *Creative Loafing Atlanta* emphasizing the initiative's support for RAD artists.





# FOODTOPIA CONTENT

Showcasing Asheville's Foodtopia through video storytelling

Videos capturing the spirit of Asheville's culinary community, driving awareness and encouraging visitors to explore the city's unique food offerings.

Videos published in Q2:

- [Silver locovozzi](#), chef and co-owner of Neng Jr's, and Food & Wine's Best New Chef of 2024. The video highlighted his creative fusion of Appalachian ingredients and Filipinx traditions.
- [Ashleigh Shanti](#) of Good Hot Fish, a James Beard Award-winning chef weaving Southern Appalachian flavors and Black food traditions into her dishes.

## Themes

- Showcased how Asheville chefs blend heritage, creativity, and local ingredients to define the region's food culture.
- Emphasized reopening celebrations and opportunities to revisit iconic favorites or try new culinary experiences.

## Performance Metrics:

- Q2 Video Views: 50,403 views





# LEVERAGING IN-KIND AND EARNED MEDIA COVERAGE

Visibility with long-term media partners enabled us to maintain Asheville's visibility during a critical recovery period.

## PR TEAM COVERAGE & SUPPORT

Supported site visits: New York Times, CNN, CBS Sunday, Monocle, Southern Living, Travel + Leisure, Passport and Huffington Post



The Washington Post

By The Way

How to help Asheville recover from Hurricane Helene



AFAR

TIPS + NEWS > TRENDING NEWS

By Tyhesha Spivey Burton • December 10, 2024

Asheville Is on Its Way Back and Needs Visitors Now More Than Ever

The North Carolina mountain town is recovering after Hurricane Helene brought record-breaking floods in late September. Here's how travelers can support the destination and surrounding areas through tourism this winter and beyond.



In Asheville, gingerbread houses reflect community spirit



yahoo!life

'Asheville is open! Find updated info with Explore Asheville's new tool.'



Chattanooga Times Free Press

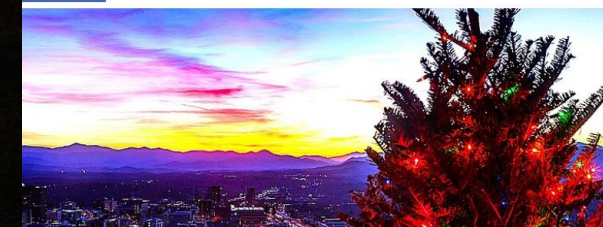
Asheville, North Carolina, looks to put Hurricane Helene in the rearview with 'Winter in Downtown' promotion

November 30, 2024 at 12:00 p.m. | Updated December 2, 2024 at 4:16 p.m.

by Anne Braly



Follow











# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Q2 INITIATIVES

**Michael Kryzanek**  
Vice President of Business Development

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Development Authority



# TRADE SHOW EXHIBITING

## Recruited group and event business to our community

Represented Asheville and Buncombe County at 11 trade shows and conferences from October – December  
Made efforts to present Asheville's creative community and products; included lodging partners in prospecting efforts

### Worldwide Exhibition for Inclusive Travel, Meetings and Events (IMEX)

- Largest trade show in North America for the global meetings, events and incentive industry, more than 14,000 attendees from over 60 countries
- Met over 300 attendees; partnered with Renaissance Asheville Hotel, Parks Hospitality, and Mosaix Group.
- Hosted reception for SITE Southeast Chapter members

### National Tour Association

- 700 attendees from 30+ countries, 38 one-on-one appointments
- Partnered with Biltmore Estate and Asheville Hotel Group
- Sponsored an afternoon session that allowed additional exposure to over 200 attendees – served Biltmore Wine, Poppy Popcorn, Legally Addictive crackers and pretzels from Asheville Pretzel Company. Sponsorship landed Asheville a feature in the daily newsletter, distributed to all attendees and emailed to the entire membership database (2,500 members).

### Travel South International

- 400+ attendees
- Partnered with Biltmore Estate
- Promoted logo and QR code at final all-delegate luncheon to promote Love Asheville from Afar, Travel South CEO asked attendees to complete holiday shopping and support Asheville
- 40 one-on-one appointments, two immediate definite leads



## FEATURED LOCAL BRANDS and PARTNERS:





## Q2 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community

**116** GROUPS EXPECTED  
**79** GROUPS CANCELLED  
(8,228 roomnights)  
**37** GROUPS/EVENTS  
OCCURRED



**71.4 % increase in roomnights  
over Q2 FY24**

17,812 roomnights

**70**  
GROUPS/EVENTS  
BOOKED  
FOR FUTURE VISITS



**\$11.7 M in direct spending**  
35,191 roomnights

**167**  
LEADS GENERATED  
FOR POTENTIAL  
GROUPS/EVENTS



**49.5% increase in roomnights  
over Q2 FY24**

96,652 roomnights





# PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Q2 INITIATIVES

Tiffany Thacker

Vice President of Partnership & Destination Management

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# ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND

Emergency grants for small independent businesses

# ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND

**\$1.53M**

Total Amount  
Awarded

**395**

Number of  
Grants Awarded

**94%**

Grant Awards  
Disbursed

**95%**

Eligible Applications  
Awarded

- Explore Asheville established the Always Asheville Fund in October 2024 to help our County's small independent travel and hospitality businesses reopen Hurricane Helene.
- Explore Asheville seeded the fund with \$300,000 from earned revenue and then raised an additional \$1,232,500 through an online donation campaign and strategic partnerships, including the SOULSHINE Concert, Cooks for Carolina, and Public Interest Projects.
- \$1,532,500 has been awarded to date through 395 grants to small businesses.
- Approximately 94% of disbursements have been made to date.



# COOKS FOR CAROLINA

**\$100,000 in Grants Awarded to 10 Small, Independent Restaurants**

- Over 20 esteemed New Orleans chefs organized 13 curated dinners to raise funds to support local restaurants impacted by Hurricane Helene
- Organizers partnered with Explore Asheville to distribute \$100,000 in essential recovery grants to 10 small, independent restaurants
- The series highlighted the connection between the two Southern culinary destinations, featuring collaborations between New Orleans chefs and North Carolina culinary talents Jacob Sessoms, Peyton Barrell, Brian Canipelli, Trevor Payne, and Matt Dawes.
- **\$10,000 grants were awarded to** local participating restaurants including The Bull and Beggar, Baby Bull, Gourmand, Cucina24, Table, All Day Darling, Tall Johns, and Good Hot Fish, in addition to The Bush Farmhouse in Black Mountain and Zella's Deli in Swannanoa for their hardship.





# BLACK CULTURAL HERITAGE TRAIL PHASE II

Exploring the rich heritage of Black communities in Asheville

## Background

- The Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail continues with Phase II; public art to highlight the stories told along the trail and to serve as wayfinding.
- Once complete, there will be three murals, one for each section of the trail (Downtown, Southside, and River Area).
- The Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail Phase II Working Group, a smaller group formed from larger advisory group, aided in the artist call for qualifications, review, and selection.

## Public art draws additional attention to the Trail

- Artist Tommy Lee McGee with Sir Tom Foolery Art/Design was selected to lead the project based on his proposal and qualifications.
- All three murals will be similar for the wayfinding component but have subtle differences highlighting the particular sections.
- The first mural began in the Southside at 21 Buxton Avenue in November 2024.
- Painting will resume as weather permits. Currently paused due to low temperatures.

**EACH ONE REACH ONE  
TEACH ONE**





# CONCIERGE WORKING GROUP

Connecting partners within the travel and hospitality community

## CONCIERGE WORKING GROUP GOALS

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

## NOVERMBER MEETING & VENUE TOUR

- The Concierge Working Group convened for the third time on November 20 at the Flat Iron Co-Working Space to share how area hotels managed during and in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene.
- Hotels in Attendance: DoubleTree Downtown, Embassy Suites, DoubleTree Biltmore Village, The Radical, and Zelda Dearest.
- Each convening includes educational components are including with all meetings based on concierge interests and requests. Following the meeting, the group met with Emily White of Spicer Greene Jewelers to tour the space, learn about their capacity for hosting events, jewelry repair, and gave coupons to share with guests.



Above: Explore Asheville Concierge Working Group from Food Tour



# NEW PARTNERSHIPS & OPERATIONAL STATUS UPDATES

## Onboarded 27 local businesses as partners

- Explore Asheville has partnered with 27 new local business between October and December, ranging from retail and restaurants to wedding venues and private chef experiences.
- PDM team continued to keep partner listing operational statuses up to date. Below is a summary of the current operational statuses of our partner listings:
  - Open: 1,084
  - Call For Status: 175
  - Temporarily Closed: 163
  - Permanently Closed: 82

## WHAT & WHERE

### Regions of new businesses

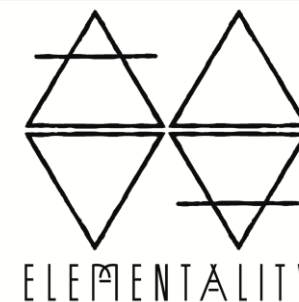
- Black Mountain
- Downtown
- East Asheville
- River Arts District
- South Asheville
- West Asheville

### Types of new businesses

- Wellness
- The Arts - Galleries/Studios
- Food & Drink
- Retail
- Venues
- Lodging
- Tours & Attractions



PAIGE HOUGHTON ART



Of The Earth Nourishments







# CULTURE & BUSINESS AFFAIRS Q1 INITIATIVES

Jennifer Kass-Green  
Vice President of Culture & Business Affairs





# ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

## New Team Members



**Cristina Fernandez**  
Office Assistant



**Sarah Myers**  
Manager, Executive & Strategy