

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

**January 2025 – March 2025**

# 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



# STARS SERVIN' UP LOVE

Restoring confidence, supporting recovery, and reactivating Asheville's events economy with national reach

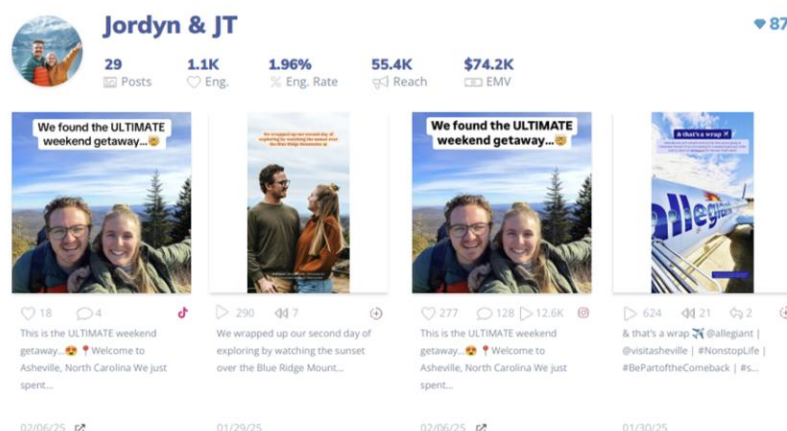
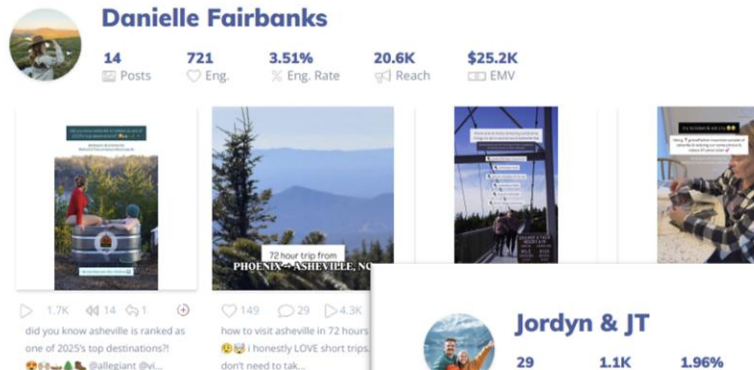
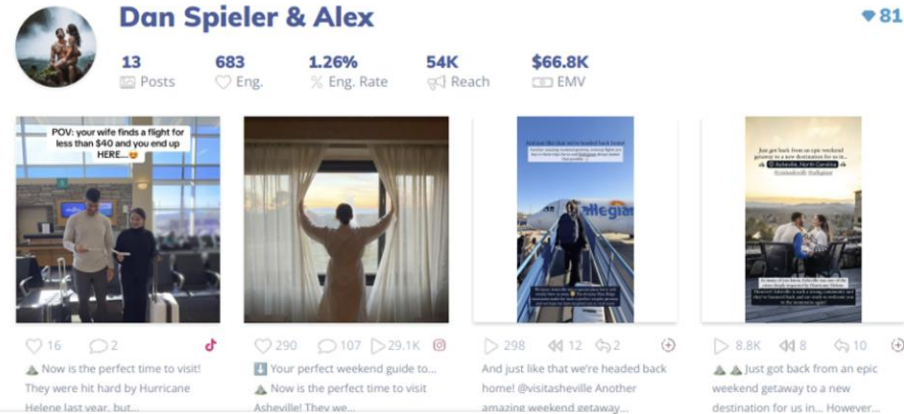
Explore Asheville stepped up as Presenting Sponsor of this nationally televised celebrity tennis benefit supporting post-Hurricane Helene relief.

- Event raised \$1M+ for Always Asheville Fund, United Way, Habitat for Humanity & Asheville Tennis Association.
- Held at **ExploreAsheville.com Arena**—first large-scale event post-storm at the venue.
- National broadcast on **Tennis Channel** + regional airing on **My40**.
- Featured tennis legends **Andre Agassi, Andy Roddick, Jessica Pegula & Emma Navarro**, plus Jeff Probst, Pete Wentz, Esai Morales, and more.
- Explore Asheville created **three custom video spots**, airing in-stadium and during national coverage.
  - Elevated Asheville's creative and hospitality sectors.
  - Reinforced community resilience and long-term impact.





# ALLEGiant AIRLINES INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIP



Explore Asheville partnered with Allegiant Airlines to promote direct flights to AVL Airport through a curated influencer campaign.

Three travel and lifestyle influencers were hosted in market, each showcasing the ease of travel to Asheville to audiences in Allegiant's key nonstop flight markets.

## Campaign Highlights:

- 3 influencers published 56 posts.
- Combined reach was 130k with 2.8M impressions.
- Each post got an average of 44.4k engagements at an engagement rate of 1.91%.
- The campaign generated \$166k earned media value.
- Strengthened awareness of Allegiant's nonstop routes to AVL from Phoenix and Miami.

2.8M  
Impressions

44.4K  
Engagements

166.2K  
Earned  
Media Value



# HOTEL WEEKS & DATE NIGHTS WITH ASHEVILLE

Two promotional efforts drove overnight stays and showcased Asheville's romantic side

Date Nights With Asheville and Hotel Weeks promotional campaigns inspired winter travel through limited-time offers and curated content.

## Hotel Weeks

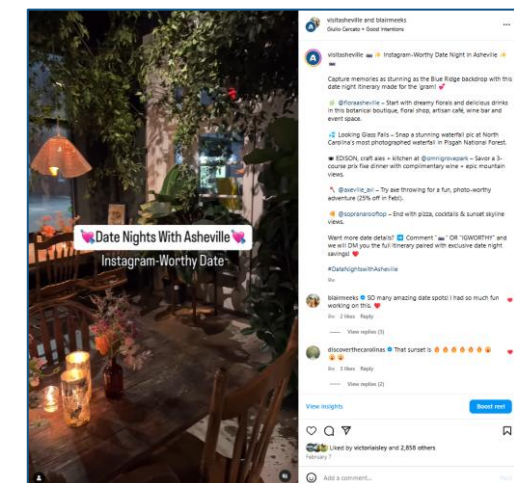
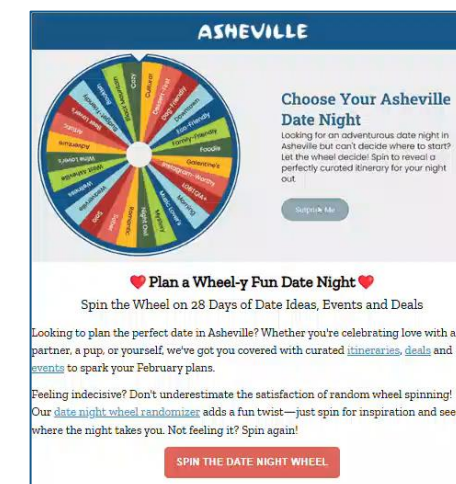
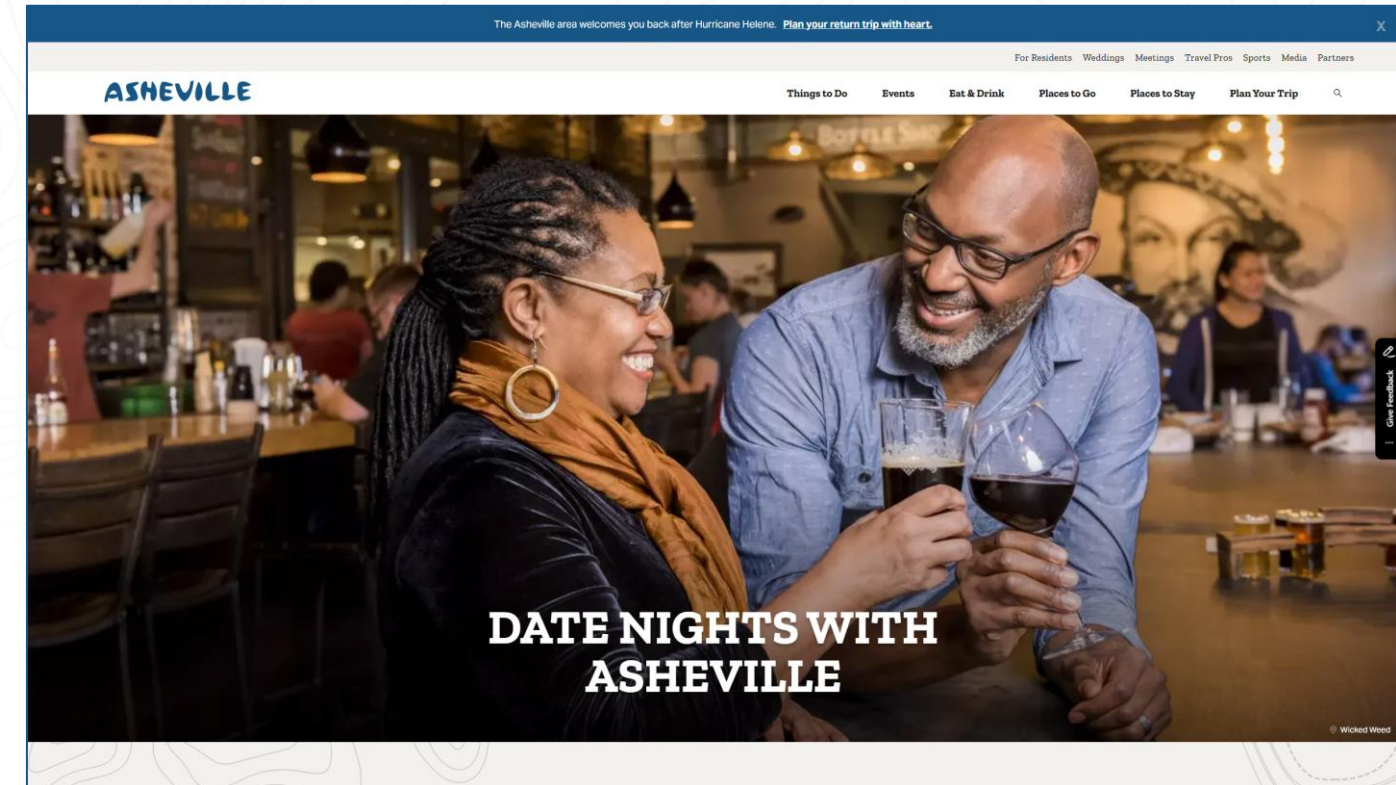
- Featured **44 lodging partners** offering 25%+ off in February.
- Custom landing page, PR, paid digital and social campaign.

## Date Nights with Asheville

- **28 custom date night itineraries**
- Highlighted dining, shopping, arts, outdoor rec, and more.
- Cross-channel support via paid media, social, newsletter and organic content.

## Campaign Highlights

- Email series for **Date Nights with Asheville** reached **635,000+** inboxes, generating **218,000+** opens and **4,200+** clicks.
- Hotel Weeks landing page drove **16,000+** page views and over **4,800** offer clicks.
- Social campaign generated **16,000+** engagements and **370,000+** video views across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.
- Explore Asheville partnered with influencers Amy and Johnny McIntyre of *Love is Blind* Season 4 to spotlight our Date Nights + Hotel Weeks campaign—resulting in over **199,000 views** with an above benchmark engagement rate of **1.36%**.



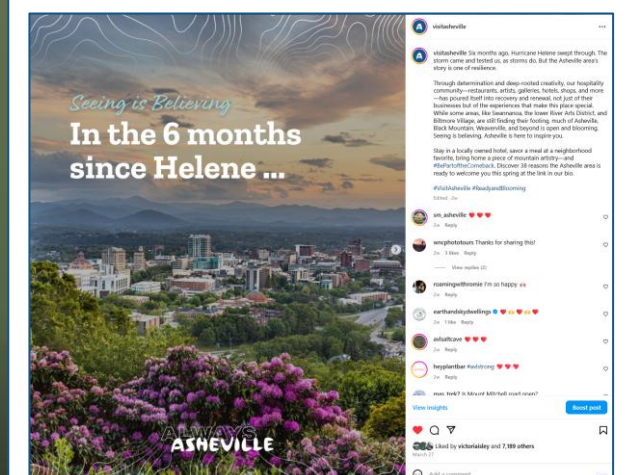


# PARTNER TOOLKITS & RESOURCES

New toolkits and assets created to help partners share progress, engage visitors, and support local businesses

Explore Asheville developed a suite of resources to help partners share their recovery stories, engage guests, and drive support for local businesses.

- [Six-Month Progress Toolkit](#) – Custom graphics, sample copy, and downloadable templates to help partners highlight progress since Helene.
- [Support Local One-Pager for Lodging Partners](#) – Printable in-room flyer designed for guests, featuring ways to support local makers, restaurants, and shops during their stay.
- [Shop Local Landing Page for Harrah's Event Attendees](#) – Curated landing page for Harrah's Cherokee Center event confirmation emails, encouraging local exploration before and after events.





Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

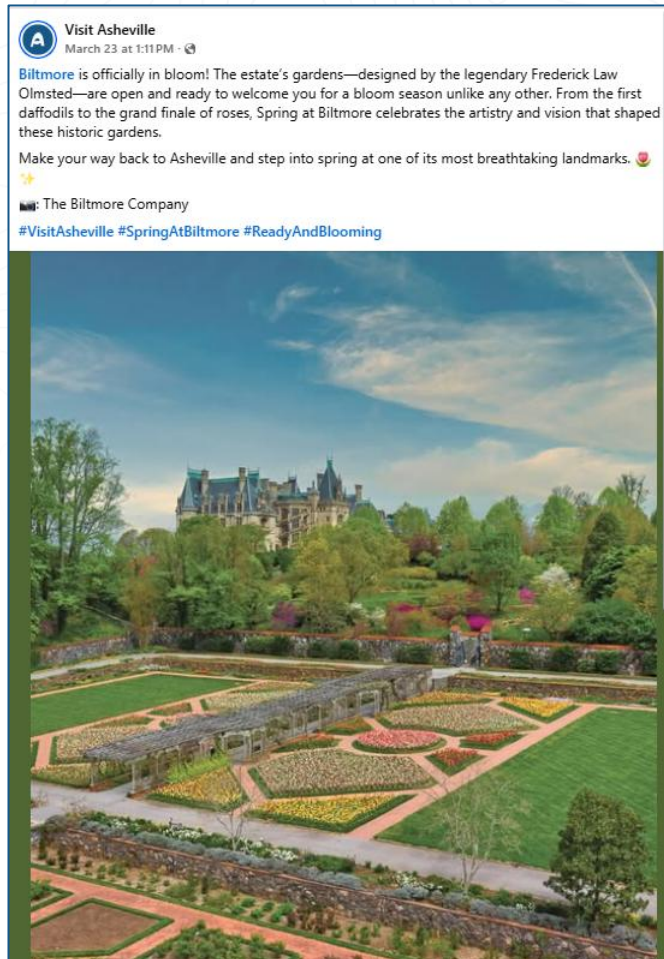
Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences

Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit

# TOP PERFORMING SOCIAL POSTS

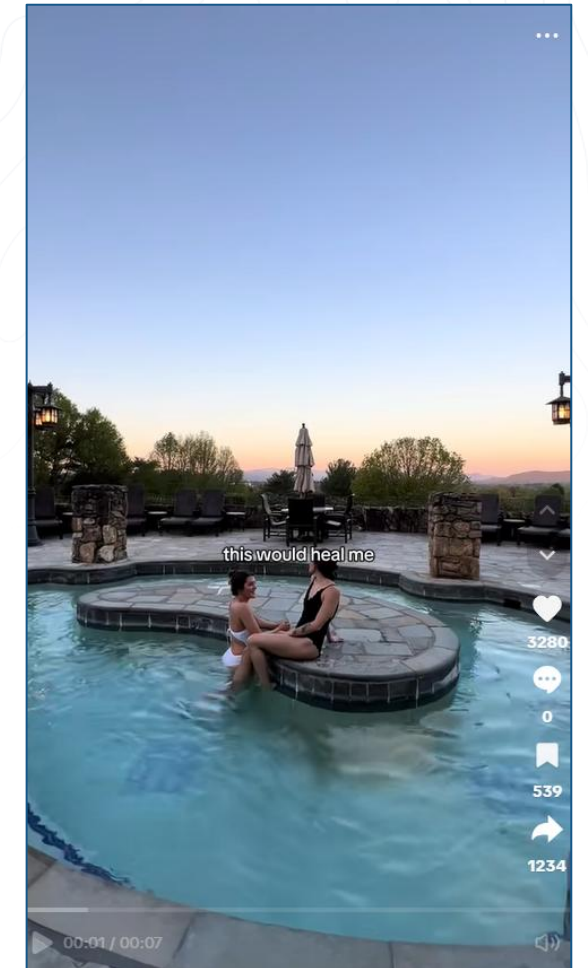
The most engagements in Q3 came from



**FACEBOOK**  
**Spring at Biltmore**  
12,809 Engagements



**INSTAGRAM**  
**Asheville Restaurants Are Open!**  
9,846 Engagements



**TIKTOK**  
**Omni Spa with Trending Audio**  
4,514 Engagements

Engagements = Likes, Comments, Saves, Shares



EXPLOREASHEVILLE.COM



# GOOD MORNING AMERICA'S "ASHEVILLE RISING"

*Good Morning America* returned to Asheville for the first time since the pandemic, partnering with Explore Asheville to create "Asheville Rising."

Main talent in Asheville, millions of viewers nationwide

- Robin Roberts, Sam Champion and Ginger Zee broadcast live from Highland Brewing's Event Center.
- GMA brought in more than 2.6 million viewers the week of March 24, 2025, which included the Asheville broadcast March 27.

Highlighting the need in Western North Carolina

- \$2.7 million in donations for entities and individuals raised by GMA and its sponsors.
- Purchased a national TV spot during the last hour of GMA.

The hope was to show the world that Asheville is open, and that visiting means more now than ever.

## Advertising During GMA

*We purchased a nationwide linear TV spot to air during the Asheville episode, ensuring our "open" message reached the audience watching in real time and reinforced that the Asheville area is ready to welcome visitors.*

**TV SPOT**  
**1.9M**  
**Impressions**





Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Delivering balanced & sustainable growth

# NOTEWORTHY NEWS CLIPS

Pitching stories that shine a spotlight on the Asheville area

7.4B

Earned Media Reach

\$56.2M

Publicity Value

9

Site Visits

63

Significant Team  
Placements

265

Total Placements

Southern Living

## The Best Things To Do In Black Mountain, North Carolina



The New York Times Style Magazine

## 5 Spring Break Destinations, for Every Type of Traveler



Asheville's Big  
Attraction, Its Food  
Scene, Tries to Hit Reset

The Atlanta  
Journal-Constitution

## Asheville after the flood

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Asheville is on the road to revival this spring.



AFAR

We Visited Asheville 4  
Months After Hurricane  
Helene. Here's What We  
Learned



Accolades



South's Best Cities 2025 –  
Southern Living



10 places where families  
should travel in 2025 –  
Asheville



Time's The World's  
Greatest Places of 2025 –  
The Radical

ASHEVILLE

# Asheville Anew: Resilience Meets Revival in 2025



ASHEVILLE BUSINESSES HURTING MONTHS AFTER HELENE

The Weather  
Channel



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



## CONFERENCE CONNECTIONS

Recruiting group and event business to our community

- Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA); 2800 attendees.
- ABA Marketplace; 700 tour operators, four partners, 54 appointments, 56 leads from 12 companies.
- Independent Planner Education Conference (IPEC); 90 meeting planners, 24 appointments, one definite lead.
- South Carolina Society of Association Executives (SCSAE); tradeshow, one tentative lead.
- Rendezvous South; 29 appointments, two tentative leads, one definite lead.
- Northstar Luxury and Wellness; 35 planners, 22 appointments.
- Conference Direct; 26 appointments, three tentative leads.
- \*NOTE : Relationship building at these events – average 3-4 years before landing a definite lead.





# 48-HOUR FAMILIARIZATION TOURS

Resumed this initiative in Q3 after cancelling November

- “Fams” are one of our highest ROI initiatives – Historically, 75%+ of attendees book one or multiple events in Asheville.
- In March, hosted seven qualified US and Canadian professionals for a “test drive” of Asheville.
- Itinerary included a walking history tour with Asheville by Foot Tours, group dinner at Chai Pani, hotel site visits, afternoon at Biltmore, visit to River Arts District, spa afternoon at Omni Grove Park Inn, service project with Asheville Plays and dinners at Posana and Luminosa.

*"Asheville is 100% ready, willing, and able to host attendees for their meetings. Things are opening, things are ready to host you. Everything is back. The resilience of this community has been amazing to see."*

*"This place is a hidden gem, and more people need to know about it. There are several different properties here that can fit several different demographics and several different group types."*





## WEDDING INDUSTRY MIXER

Networked with vendors that provide group referrals

- Explore Asheville convened 40 community vendors on March 4<sup>th</sup> at The Flat Iron Hotel to further connections in the industry.
- Wedding groups are historically one of Asheville's top three strongest sources of business.
- Local vendors are our number one source for wedding leads.





# SOUTHERN CONFERENCE PARTNERSHIP

Explore Asheville expands relationship with SoCon



- Southern Conference Men and Women's Basketball Championships, hosted at the ExploreAsheville.com Arena, into which the TDA has invested \$7 million in capital improvements
- March 7 – 10
- Direct Spend: \$9,868,000
- Roomnights: 3,000
- Expanded partnership between Explore Asheville and SoCon included New Business Leader Forum and SoCon Symposium



- Southern Conference Wrestling Championship at UNC Asheville's Kimmel Arena
- March 7 – 8
- Direct Spend: \$388,000
- Roomnights: 180





## Q3 GROUP & EVENT DEVELOPMENT

Benefitted businesses in our community

**58**

GROUPS/EVENTS  
OCCURRED  
IN OUR COMMUNITY



**\$23.4 million direct spending**

16,800 roomnights

79% increase in roomnights over Q3 FY24

41% increase in number of events over Q3 FY24

**151**

GROUPS/EVENTS  
BOOKED  
FOR FUTURE VISITS



**\$17.5 million in direct spending**

26,500 roomnights

9% increase in number of groups over Q3 FY24

33% increase in roomnights over Q3 FY24

**326**

LEADS GENERATED  
FOR POTENTIAL  
GROUPS/EVENTS;  
87,200 ROOMNIGHTS



**3% decrease in leads over Q3 FY24**





# PARTNERSHIP & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT



## THE YEAR AHEAD

### Partner event honored 2025 Explore Asheville Superstars, featured panels focused on recovery and revival

- 350 community leaders and tourism industry partners gathered A-B Tech for the first partner event of 2025, The Year Ahead: The Road to Recovery and Revival, which underscored a pivotal theme: seizing this moment of recovery as an opportunity to build back stronger, more sustainable, and more resilient than before.
- Six Industry-Leading Entities and Efforts Honored with Explore Asheville Superstar Awards: Cooks for Carolina, Biltmore, Stars Servin Up Love, Hood Huggers, River Arts District Artists, and Soulshine.
- Sustainability and Resilience, Transportation, and Recovery and Revival Panelists Shared Local and National Perspectives on Pathways to Rebuild.

#### FEATURED PARTNERS:





*Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit*

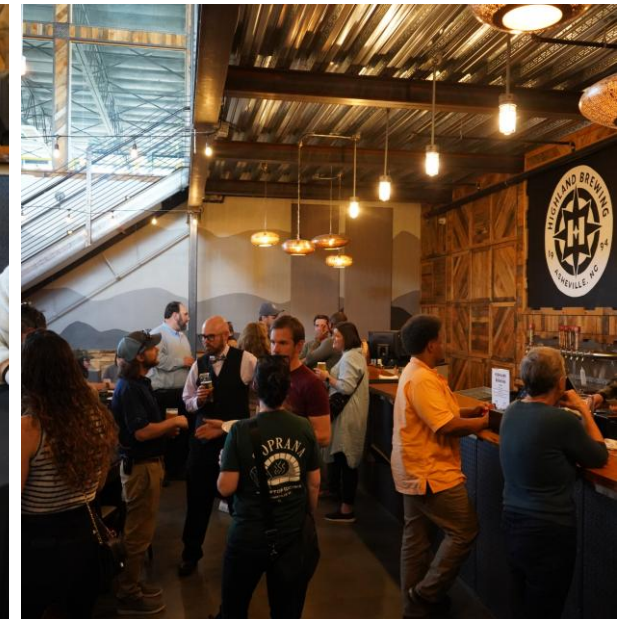
# TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY PIZZA AFTERNOON

200+ Industry Partners joined for afternoon of community

- As part of Stu Helm's inaugural WNC Pizza Week, and in collaboration with Highland Brewing and Horizon Food Service, Explore Asheville organized the Travel & Hospitality Industry Pizza Afternoon on March 11.
- 200+ partners stopped by for a fun afternoon recognizing travel, tourism, and hospitality workers who deliver spectacular experiences and service to customers every day.

## FEATURED PARTNERS:

DJ  
MOLLY  
PARTI





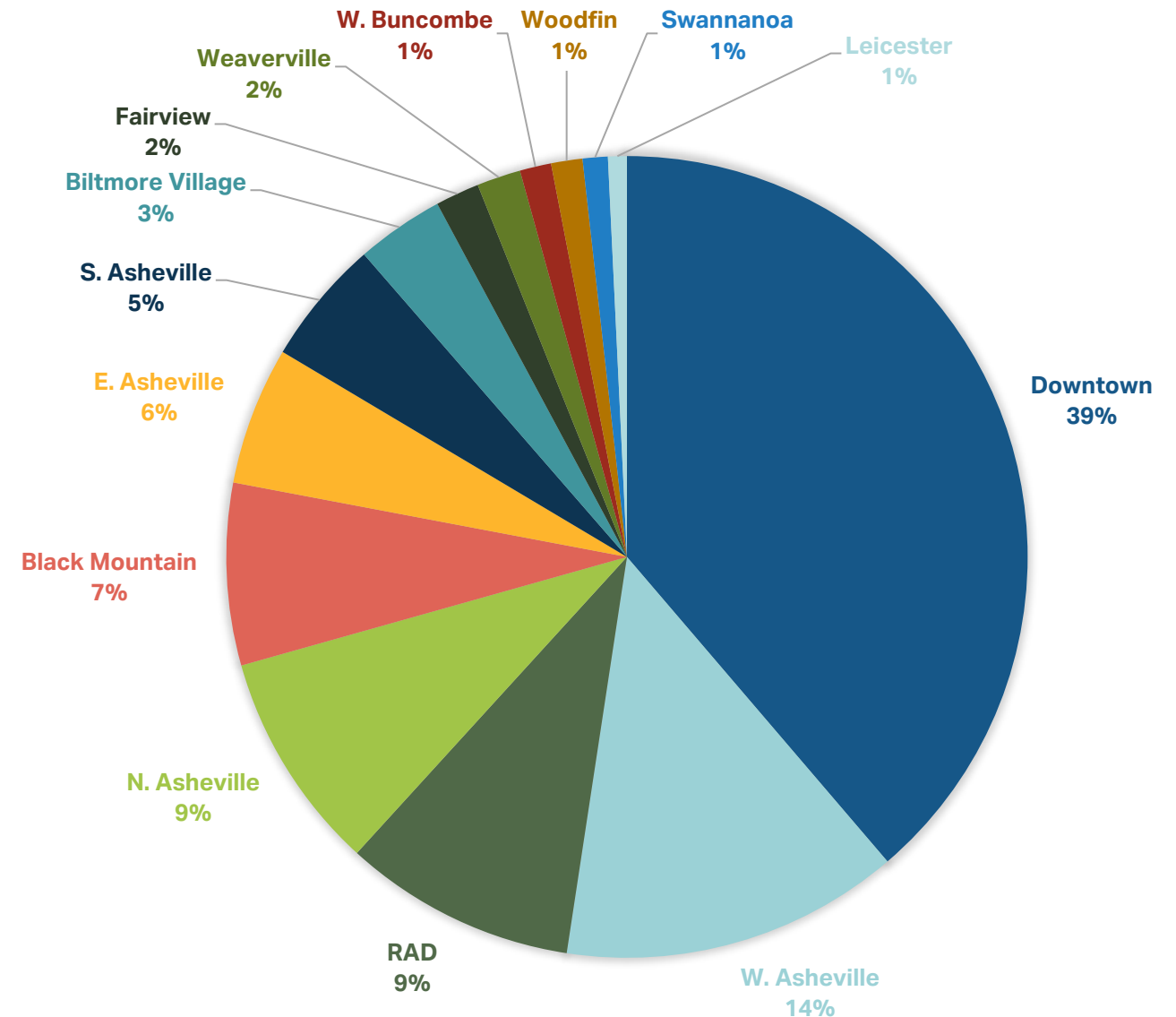
## ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND

Emergency grants for small independent businesses

# ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND

- In Q3, Explore Asheville surpassed the \$2 million mark of funds raised and awarded through the Always Asheville Fund to aid small local travel and hospitality businesses in their recovery from Hurricane Helene.
- All eligible applicants have been awarded, and we are now topping off new awards as additional funds are raised.
- To date, Explore Asheville has awarded \$2.15 million through 513 awards

### Awards by Location





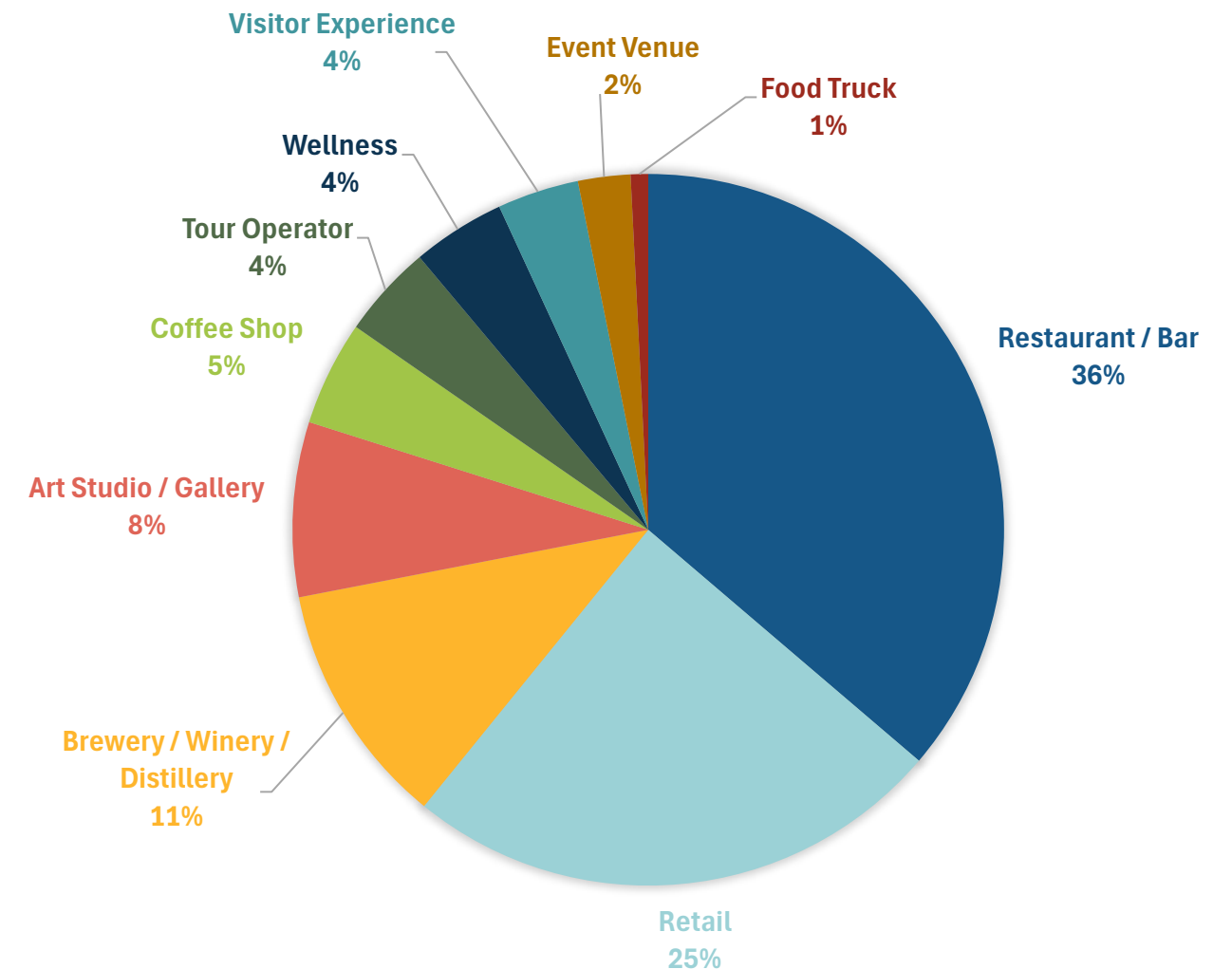
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### Awards by Business Category





# ALWAYS ASHEVILLE FUND RECIPIENT SENTIMENTS

Some words of gratitude from some of our AAF grant recipients

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"We were so incredibly grateful for the Explore Asheville funding that provided relief not only for us and our staff, but for so many local artists who have relied on our shop more than ever in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene."

**Justin Rabuck**  
Owner, Horse and Hero

*Downtown - Retailer*

"Explore Asheville was one of the first organizations we received money from – at a time when we truly didn't know if there was a future for us or not. Our AAF award was a lifeline for us in a very scary moment after Helene. We had trees fall on our kiln shed and this money served an immediate need to help clear the debris and trees for us get back into our studio."

**Sarah Vekasi**  
Owner, Sarah Sunshine Pottery

*Black Mountain - Maker*

"This grant came through as the first funding we received from anyone – and it came at the perfect time on a payroll week. This was a huge relief and made all the difference in our outlook on if we could make it the next few months. We were able to keep all our staff (including 2 Buncombe County School staff members) on payroll. Since then, March and April have proven two of our busiest birthday booking months in history and we have even been able to hire (2) additional part time staff since then."

**Leslie Blaylock**  
Owner, Lakeview Putt and Play

*Arden - Attraction*



# 2025 FESTIVALS & CULTURAL EVENTS INVESTMENTS

Awarded \$75,000 in grants to 21 local festivals & cultural events



## 2025 Festival & Cultural Event Support Fund Awards

- ASAP Farm Tour | \$5,000
- Asheville Bread Festival | \$1,500
- AVL Beer Week | \$2,500
- The Big Crafty | \$2,500
- Maker Faire Asheville | \$1,500
- Art in Bloom | \$3,000
- {Re}HAPPENING 13 | \$4,000
- Blue Ridge Pride Festival | \$5,000
- Burnpile Harvest Festival | \$5,000
- Diwali Mela | \$1,500
- Connect Beyond Festival | \$5,000
- Shindig on the Green | \$5,000
- LEAF Retreat | \$5,000
- Coda Music Festival | \$1,000
- Punch Bucket Literary Festival | \$2,500
- RADFest | \$5,000
- A Dicken's Christmas | \$2,500
- Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands | \$2,500
- "Juneteenth: A Celebration of Resilience and Persistence" | \$5,000
- Weaverville's Music on Main | \$5,000
- Goombay | \$5,000

\$75,000 invested in 21 events throughout Buncombe County

Launched in 2016, the support fund contributes to the financial viability and long-term sustainability of festivals and cultural events. The fund seeks to stimulate new events and expand on existing ones that are enjoyed by residents and visitors.



## EVENT GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS

Support for local festival & cultural events through grants and sponsorships

Explore Asheville/BCTDA supported the following events in FY25 Q3:

- MLK Prayer Breakfast
- ASAP Business of Farming Conference
- Asheville Mardi Gras Parade
- DIY Tourism Conference
- WNC Hospitality Pizza Afternoon



**\$11.5k**

Grants &  
Sponsorships



**5**

Events





Above: Explore Asheville Concierge Working Group tour The Foundry Hotel Asheville with Explore Asheville Board Member, Larry Crosby.



# NEW PARTNERSHIPS & OPERATIONAL STATUS UPDATE

Onboarded 36 local businesses as Explore Asheville partners

- Explore Asheville onboarded 36 local businesses as new partners in Q3, ranging from art studios and wedding vendors to wellness experiences and restaurants.
- Operational Status Update:**
  - Open: 1,188 (82.2%)
  - Temporarily Closed: 116 (8.0%)
  - Call for Status: 61 (4.2%)
  - Permanently Closed: 81 (5.6%)

## WHAT & WHERE

### Regions of new businesses:

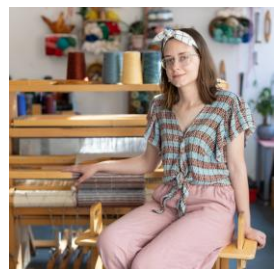
- Black Mountain
- Downtown
- East Asheville
- Leicester
- North Asheville
- River Arts District
- Weaverville
- West Asheville

### Types of new businesses:

- Food & Drink
- Food Adventures
- Transportation
- Attractions
- Arts/Cultural
- Event Venues
- Photographers
- Tours
- Lodging
- Retail
- Wellness
- Event Planners
- Wedding Services



LIGHT SHIFTER STUDIOS







# CULTURE & BUSINESS AFFAIRS Q3 INITIATIVES

**Jennifer Kass-Green**  
Vice President of Culture & Business Affairs

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



## ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

### New Team Members

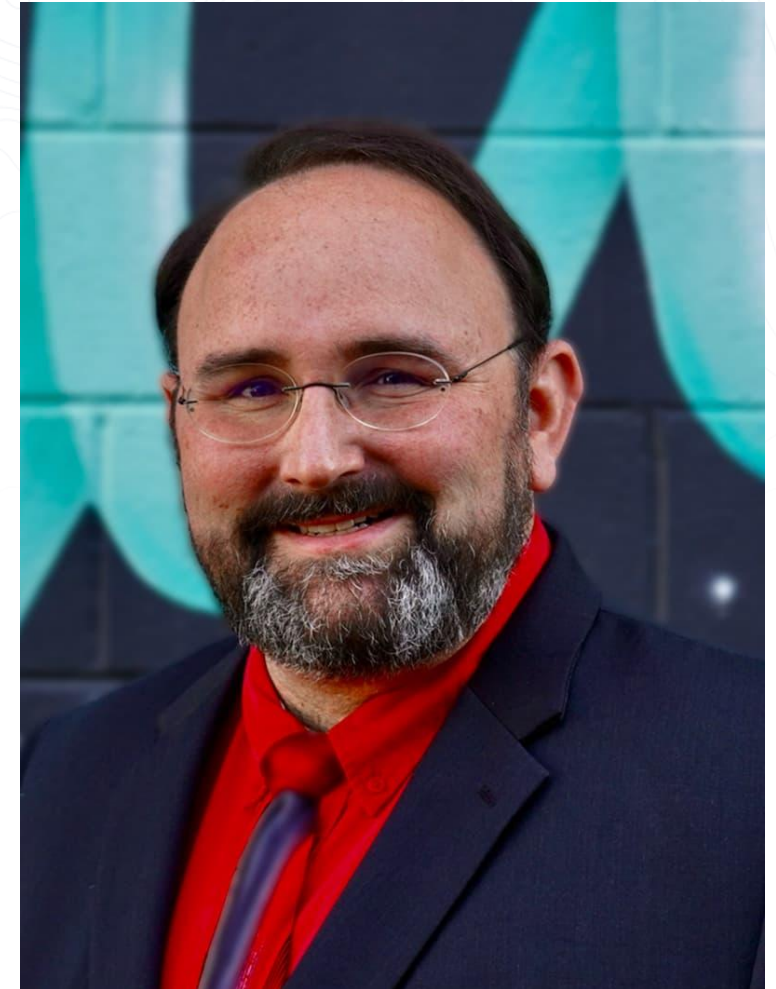
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**Allison Bashford**  
Grants Manager



**Payton Byrnes**  
PR Coordinator



**Kyle McCurry**  
Director of PR