

# NewsLink

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- \* Visit NC 365 gets rave reviews
- \* Winner's Circle welcomes four inductees
- \* Cycle NC Mountains to Coast Fall ride route

### Visit NC 365 gets rave reviews for sessions, hospitality

The 2016 Visit NC 365 Conference wrapped up yesterday (Tuesday) at Harrah's Cherokee Resort in Cherokee with rave reviews for the speakers, sessions and hospitality events, making it a big success for everyone involved.



*Mark Shore and Wit Tuttell presented the Visit NC update*

Tourism, business and government leaders from across the state gathered to hear Josh Linkler's keynote address fascinating insights on the risks that companies face when they rely on the past to determine the future; Doug Lansky's closing keynote on how to create a world-class destination; and Peter Yesawich's look at the Portrait of an American Traveler.

Participants attended breakout sessions on a range of subjects that included digital influencers, ad blocking, Millennials, creating destination-quality trails in rural N.C., customer service, and unconventional sports marketing along with a workshop on how to build a brand-aligned destination.

The 2016-17 partner co-op program was unveiled, with new opportunities in print, digital media, including programs for native content and digital influencers, VisitNC.com and public relations options for desk-side media visits and media lists as a new offering for partners. Full descriptions of the partner programs are available at [partners.visitnc.com](http://partners.visitnc.com). Those interested should contact [Brooks Luquire](#) and [Michelle Reino](#) at LGA at (704) 552-6565.

Results of the 2014 North Carolina Image & Advertising Accountability Research, a study by Longwoods International, which specializes in brand strategy and ROI research, were released at the annual tourism conference. Visit North Carolina's "Beauty Amplified" campaign yielded a 15-to-1 return on the investment in advertising the state to prospective travelers, according to research results. That's a return of \$15 in state and local taxes for every \$1 invested by the state in tourism advertising. The study also provided bottom-line impacts of the campaign in terms of incremental trips and spending by visitors. In all, the study showed that the campaign drew 1.4 million incremental visits to the state with those travelers spending \$213 million.

Visit NC also reviewed results from the 2015 "Vacation Big" target market campaign in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. The campaign generated an 83 percent growth in website traffic in the two markets, versus 23 percent growth in site traffic overall.

Longwoods measured the impact of that campaign as well, showing 20 percent growth in awareness of advertising in Atlanta compared to 2014, and 24 percent growth in D.C. To build on that success, Visit NC announced the 2016 campaign markets for TV, digital video and PR will be Cleveland, Nashville, Jacksonville, Columbia and Richmond.

The public relations team worked with partners in Asheville and Bryson City to host media guests before arriving in Cherokee. Once in Cherokee, media guests visited the Kituwah Mound, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and Mingo Falls before lunching on Indian specialties at Paul's Family Restaurant. On Monday night, the Nantahala Outdoor Center hosted media guests at the main campus in Bryson City. The conference PR program included two media roundtables as well as a pre-conference session that exceeded attendance expectations with more than 90 partners attending. Those who did not receive the Dennis Yu handouts from the session can download them [here](#) and [here](#).

The final day's luncheon was presented by the Greenville CVB, host of the 2017 Visit NC Conference in Greenville, March 19-21.

Presentations from the conference will be available next week on the 2016 [Visit NC 365 Conference website](#).

---

### Winner's Circle welcomes four inductees

Executive Director Wit Tuttell welcomed four new members to the Winner's Circle for their contributions to the growth and success of North Carolina's tourism industry. Alice Aumen, president of Cataloochee Ranch and Haywood County tourism leader; Stephen W. Woody, founder of the Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park; Dr. Houck Medford, documentary artist and CEO emeritus of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, and Mickey Gregory, retired executive director of the Lumberton VB. Gregory's award was presented to her in January during a retirement celebration.



*(l-r) Stephen Woody, Alice Aumen and Houck Medford*

---

### Cycle North Carolina announces Mountains to Coast ride route

Cycle North Carolina has announced the route for the 18th Annual [Mountains to Coast ride](#), Oct. 1-8; the announcement was made this past Sunday, on the opening day of the Visit NC 365 Conference in Cherokee. This year's route starts in Banner Elk with stops in Wilkesboro, Lexington, Burlington, Sanford, Clinton, and Jacksonville, and then finishes in Atlantic Beach. Last year's event included nearly 1,100 bicyclists from 40 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands and three Canadian provinces, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec.



*Town representatives hold signs for the Mountains to Coast route*

Visit North Carolina, under the previous mantle of the N.C. Division of Tourism, Film & Sports Development, is a founding sponsor of Cycle North Carolina's Fall Ride and Spring Ride. Cycle North Carolina offers one of the largest cross-state bicycle tours in the United States. The Fall and Spring rides, in addition to the Mountain Ride in August, are designed to promote North Carolina's scenic beauty while providing substantial economic impact to small towns across the state.



### **NCAA Tournament expected to generate millions for Raleigh's economy**

All eyes will soon be on Raleigh as tens of thousands of fans are expected to visit as the storied NCAA men's basketball tournament gets underway. This year marks the fourth time in 13 years that Raleigh has hosted the tournament. In 2014, the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance reports the tournament [attracted more than 17,000 visitors who pumped an estimated \\$4.2 million into the city](#). Tournament organizers say they expect the same impact, if not more, this time around.

### **STS Top 20 Events nominations for October-November-December deadline April 1**



The deadline for nominating events for Southeast Tourism Society's [Top 20 Events](#) for October-November-December is April 1. Nominated events must have an attendance of at least 1,000 and be in the third year of existence. Nominations for STS' Top 20 Events can now be submitted electronically using a downloadable .pdf. Top 20 Events strongly encourages entrants to support their nomination by providing supporting material such as photos, posters, brochures, press releases, news clippings and/or volunteer programs. There is a \$20 entry fee per event nomination and requirements include submitting two copies of the nomination form, in addition to supporting materials. Nominations are now accepted via email only.



### **Asheville sites, NC beers among faves**

*USA Today's* Travel Experience included the Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville among its ["9 hot tubs for soaking up the scenery."](#) Of the Omni Grove Park Inn, the article said, "The gorgeous oversized hot tub gazing out at the Blue Ridge Mountains is just one reason to don your bathing suit at the Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville. The hotel's sprawling 43,000-square-foot underground spa - with steaming waterfalls, aromatic steam rooms and more - is another. After you've soaked your bones, retire to one of the fireside lounge chairs on the terrace and bask in the views."

*USA Today's* enlisted the help of a panel of beer experts, which nominated 20 finalists in the categories of Best Beer Scene, Best Beer Bar and Best Beer Label, and three other categories. Now the 10Best Readers' Choice [Beer Winners](#) have been announced. Asheville was among the 10 Best Beer Scenes, Thirsty Monk in

Asheville was among Best Beer Bars, and Foothills Brewing in Winston-Salem was among the Best Beer Labels for its Sexual Chocolate Imperial Stout.

---

## Surveys, Industry, Marketing & Travel Trends

***From pacifiers to Picassos: Museums cater to a younger clientele*** - A whole lot of babies these days are getting introduced to museums before solid foods. New amenities geared toward these young visitors are making the introductions easier than ever. Take, for example, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, which unveiled "Wegmans Wonderplace" in December. The first exhibition on the Mall designed for children ages 0 to 6, it features stroller parking, changing tables and nursing pillows. Museums have even started inviting infants to exclusive events. At the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, its Art Babies, a monthly program that's so popular that participants have been known to sign up while still in utero. Newborn New Yorkers (up to 18 months old) can sneak into the Whitney Museum of Art on select Saturdays when it's closed to other visitors. It's no mystery why these changes are happening. "There's a growing interest in bringing in the next generation," says a representative for the Portland Art Museum. "Museums have to be relevant and tap into communities in a different way." Targeting the diaper set [potentially jump-starts habits that can last a lifetime](#).

***Homewood Suites pilots meal kit service for better extended stay eating*** - One of the most defining features of extended stay properties is the full in-room kitchen, and Homewood Suites by Hilton is testing out a new food concept that will encourage guests to use that amenity during their stays. Now, guests staying at participating Homewood Suites in Atlanta and Dallas can order meal kits directly from Atlanta-based PeachDish at a 20-percent discount. The kits include pre-portioned ingredients and instructions for [cooking fresh meals that guests can prepare easily in their suite's kitchens](#). The pilot program, which takes place March 7 - June 9, will be tested out at a total of 22 properties. Homewood Suites says the decision to pursue this type of partnership was motivated by a desire to improve the extended stay guest experience. If the pilot proves successful, Homewood Suites says its team may consider other more regionally focused meal-kit services for other parts of the U.S., and thinks there's a good chance other extended stay brands will do similar partnerships

***Guests' smart tech features enjoyed at home continue to evolve at hotels*** - Today's travelers are changing the long-pervasive notions of what hotel customers desire in their guestrooms, according to hoteliers and hospitality tech experts. Many customers still seek the same "smart" amenities they experience at home, but sources indicated there's a marked difference in what those features are, as well as their varying levels of importance. The [biggest shift is the move beyond just automated in-room features](#) - such as custom climate control and lighting - which are becoming mature, fairly common features everywhere. Instead, the focus is now moving squarely to keyless entry, room-controlling mobile apps and amenities such as in-room entertainment, particularly streaming media, as guests increasingly attempt to bring their personalized media content on the road.

---



## Incorporating local agriculture at restaurants, hotels and attractions

Of the many reasons that visitors travel to North Carolina, natural beauty and scenic landscapes are among the most popular. One of the best opportunities visitors have to interact directly with the land is through local agriculture. Preserving and supporting local agriculture has many environmental benefits and is becoming an increasingly popular visitor activity. There are many opportunities to incorporate agriculture as part of an attraction or accommodation. Restaurants can complement dishes with local produce or meats. Hotels and B&Bs can partner with local farmers to offer farm tours or cooking classes with vegetables that guests can pick themselves. Historical sites can educate visitors about historical agriculture with small on-site gardens. The N.C. Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services offers a good deal of help through [NC Farm Fresh](#), which offers information on visiting a farm, farmer's market or garden center/nursery. NCDA&CS also has information on [agritourism](#), such as marketing, the Agritourism Networking Association (ANA), highway signage and various resources. For information on NC GreenTravel, contact [Tom Rhodes](#) at (919) 707-8140.



For the week of March 17 on [North Carolina Weekend](#), step back to a simpler time at R.A. Fountain General Store in Fountain. Consider judging a book by its cover at Scuppernon Books in Greensboro. Go airborne at Defy Gravity Trampoline Park in Durham. Enjoy the great outdoors at William B Umstead State Park in Raleigh. And the "House Special" samples the fare at Sam Jones BBQ in Winterville, which ought to be of particular interest to those who attended the Visit NC 365 Conference, as Jones cooked the BBQ served at the closing lunch on Tuesday. *(Please note: listings are subject to change.)* North Carolina Weekend is underwritten by Visit North Carolina. In addition, UNC-TV has made recent editions of *North Carolina Weekend* [available online](#).



Nearly nine in ten travelers interested in visiting North Carolina indicate relaxation is a motivation to vacation. Eighty percent of interested travelers agree that the memories they get from the vacation make the trip worthwhile. For more information on North Carolina visitors, click [here](#), or contact Tourism Research Director [Marlise Taylor](#) at (919) 447-7748.

## Upcoming Industry Meetings & Events

Through March 18 - [NC Main Street Conference](#), Goldsboro  
March 17-18 - MPC-CC Meeting, Spartanburg, S.C.  
March 24 - NC Sports Association Meeting, Pinehurst  
April 3-7 - NASC [Sports Event Symposium](#), Grand Rapids, Mich.  
April 4-6 - SETTRA, STS [Spring Symposium](#), Baton Rouge, La.  
April 7-9 - AFCI Locations Tradeshow, Los Angeles, Calif.  
April 21 - Visit NC's TRAC, Beech Mountain  
May 1-7 - [National Travel & Tourism Week](#), nationwide  
May 9-10 - MPC-CC Annual Meeting, Hilton Head, S.C.  
May 10 - NC Travel and Tourism Board Meeting, TBD



NewsLink is a publication of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina  
15000 Weston Parkway | Cary, NC 27513



[Share NewsLink](#) | [info@visitnc.com](mailto:info@visitnc.com)