

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Mitchell County Chamber



ENDURANCE

The 2019-2020 year did not turn out like any of us would have expected.

At the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, we began the fiscal year with great plans for new programs and benefits for our members, a new 2019-2020 marketing plan to market our county and an excitement around our new workforce development project's launch.

But as we were barely into the new 2020 year, we were thrown for a loop. Regroup and adjust have become keywords not only for the Chamber but for many of our businesses. But to be honest, what we think of when we think of the past year and our businesses is endurance.

We worked tirelessly to be responsive to the changing times, to keep businesses informed and to provide programming that supports businesses' changing needs.

We were heartened but not surprised at the outpouring of support by our community for their neighbors, by businesses adapting to trying times and innovating to meet needs, and by those showing leadership on many fronts.

This community truly does endure. As we strive to overcome challenges and to affect change in the coming year, that enduring trait will serve us well.

Best Regards,
Patti Jensen
Executive Director



REMAINED COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE

Maintained our commitment to our membership outreach and service. Weekly e-newsletters, enhanced social media support for our members and partnering with community organizations for business development workshops and webinars for our members.

Served as the fiscal agent for community organizations/events including the Toe Jam Music Festival

During Stay at Home Stay Safe, developed and maintained a comprehensive Coronavirus Resource, a new dedicated website wearemittell.org, which went live in March 2020. Provided information and guidance for our members through more than 85 daily posts in addition to posts on social media and e-newsletters.

Kept in continued contact with elected officials and their representatives to provide a voice for business during the shutdown. Communicated with both state and federal legislators on behalf of local area businesses and worked in collaboration with them to provide the latest information for our businesses.



300+

number of member
businesses served

RESPONDED TO PANDEMIC.

Quickly responded to the Covid 19 shutdowns with a new Covid dedicated website and social media page established in March 2020 dedicated solely to supporting our local businesses with daily updates including Covid 19 executive orders, as well as local, state and federal resources. Over 85 daily posts were made which were viewed by thousands of visitors to the site. Additional posts to social media and weekly e-newsletters were also utilized to provide updates and resources. (wearemittchell.org)

Personal phone contact with Chamber members to determine how they were doing and any specific questions or needs they might have for their business.

Weekly updates of Covid resources for businesses in our weekly e-newsletters to members.

Advocated for expanded state and federal relief to help businesses and communities weather the crisis, including more PPP and Golden Leaf Emergency funding.

Created Shop Local campaigns that were promoted via the Chamber's websites, social media pages as well as paid advertising in local media outlets. The campaigns focused on the general need to Shop Local during the Covid crisis, but also more specific campaigns targeting restaurants for curbside pickup, as well as online shopping and gift card promotions. Attended online webinars, Zoom calls and forums with state and federal agencies to maintain current knowledge and information gathering for up to date resources, insights and research to best support our members.



85+

daily posts providing resources for our members during Covid shutdown

MARKETING & SPONSORSHIP

Served over 300 member businesses during 2019-2020 including several new members.

Increased visits to our website mitchellcountychamber.org by 17%.

Provided marketing opportunities to 300+ businesses through our Shop Local, Eat Local, Support Local campaigns engaging with members and non-members to provide their businesses during a critical time for our county's economy.

Co-sponsored the Bakersville 28705 Business Breakfast The Chamber, EDC and Small Business Center sponsored these monthly workshops to provide educational training in small business development, marketing and networking.

Held and attended ribbon cuttings of new businesses in Mitchell County until Covid restrictions limited the ability to host these events.

Launched the Chamber's Tourism Small Grant Program to help support tourism-oriented events and programs in Mitchell County. The first recipient of the grant was the NC Mountaineer Festival in Bakersville.

Hosted Member After Hours events to showcase and support local businesses and create networking opportunities among members until Covid restrictions limited the ability to host these events.

Awarded two scholarships to Mitchell High School students as the new Shirley Hise Memorial Scholarship was launched by the Chamber.



66+

attendance at Business Building Breakfasts and online seminars

SHOWCASED OUR COMMUNITY AND LOCAL BUSINESSES TO VISITORS

Communicated with the National Park Service during online calls to help create a safe strategy for keeping our Visitor Center open during the covid pandemic.

Lobbied the National Park Service to open the Blue Ridge Parkway exits in and around Little Switzerland and Gillespie Gap after they were initially closed due to Covid shutdowns. Although the Visitor Center facility was closed for nearly six months, the Chamber still welcomed thousands of visitors during the open days and continues to maintain a presence at the Visitor Center during the winter months when the NPS is not on site.

Created a new two-sided county tear off map featuring our communities as well as main thoroughfares to assist visitors traveling throughout the county.

(continued on next page)



80+

average number of visitors served per day at the Visitor Center during Covid

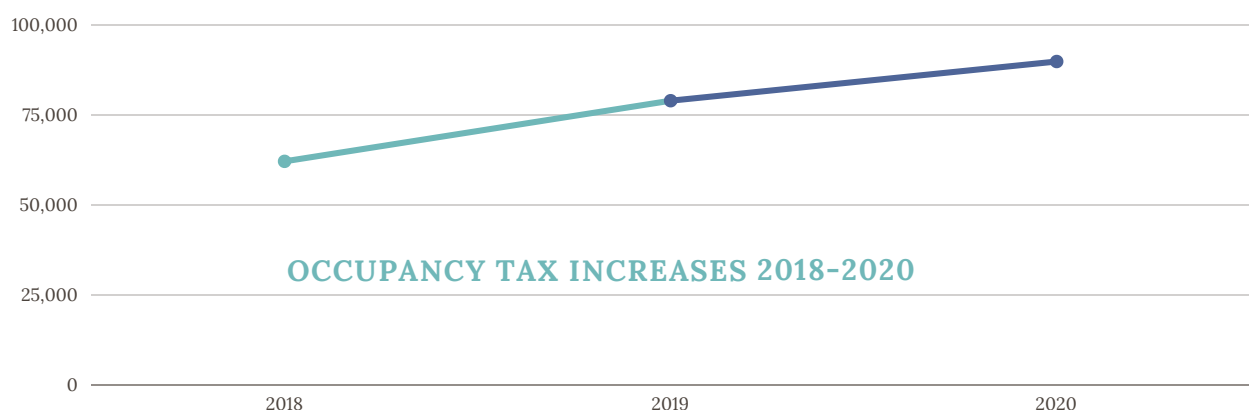
SHOWCASED OUR COMMUNITY AND LOCAL BUSINESSES TO VISITORS (CONT)

Re-organized the county's marketing campaign to respond to Covid travel research. These marketing measures included print ads, travel videos, social media campaigns, billboards, digital ads and more. In March of 2020, most tourism agencies in WNC were predicting a 30-40% decrease in travel to our areas. **Mitchell County saw a 13% increase in travel to our county and a 31% increase in traffic to our tourism website.**

The Chamber applied for and received two tourism marketing grants/credits. The first was a \$13,000 tourism recovery grant which served as reimbursement for some of our marketing funds expended, specifically those that were addressing covid. The second was a \$10,000 marketing credit which had to be used in December 2020 and coordinated with the state's marketing agency. We utilized the marketing credit for a social media campaign to promote Roan Mountain/Bakersville/holidays and the Trail of Lights through the entire county. The campaign had over 1.8 million impressions and 5,000 click throughs to our website.

The Chamber continued the Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights promotion in 2020. In its second year, the event proved to be a good covid-safe event to promote. During the first year the promotion resulted in a 46% increase in occupancy tax receipts for the month of December. In 2020, we saw a 25% increase over the 2019 December figures. **Since its beginning the promotion has resulted in a 59% increase in occupancy tax receipts for the month of December.**

Worked with Our State Magazine editors on a 10 page feature on Bakersville, Roan Mountain and the NC Rhododendron Festival (May 2020 issue) Publicity value of \$256,160



DELIVERED ADDITIONAL VALUE TO OUR MEMBERS.

Announced Chamber Health Insurance for Western North

Carolina: A partnership among Aetna, Mission Health Partners and 35 WNC Chambers to offer high quality and affordable health insurance to companies with 20 to 100 employees.

Announced new offering for our members and their employees, family/friends, a FREE DISCOUNT DRUG CARD. Providing savings of up to 75 percent at over 56,000 pharmacies across the country (savings average around 30 percent).

Crafted over 33 Local Video Spotlights, profiling member (and some non-member) businesses on our website, newsletter and social media. Saluted small businesses during Small Business Week and Small Business Saturday events. Increased social media presence with focus on spotlighting member businesses and providing relevant business news and resources.

Hosted three Candidates Forums (two in person, one virtual) providing an opportunity for local citizens and business owners to hear from candidates seeking local and state offices.



33+

member spotlights of
local businesses

LAUNCHED NEW INITIATIVES

Mitchell Works: Workforce Development

In response to our businesses concerns related to workforce in our county, the Chamber launched **Mitchell Works**, a workforce development project, geared towards our middle and high school students. The goal of this project is to engage and educate our students in Mitchell County schools about the opportunities for careers that they may not be aware of and to build and strengthen connections with our businesses and industries and our school system to create more opportunities for exposure, learning, internships, industry speakers bureaus. This is to also support what our schools and Mayland Community College are already doing and create new opportunities and pathways for our students to engage with our local businesses and industries.

Over 600 Mitchell County students were surveyed at the start of this project. Industry partnered videos were created, a new website was developed along with supporting materials.

<https://www.mitchellworksnc.com/>

Launched New Outdoor Recreation Initiative

With the many benefits that outdoor recreation provides and its potential for economic development, the Mitchell County Chamber partnered with NCGrowth to map outdoor recreation assets and identify strategies to build the outdoor economy and boost tourism in the county. (completed May 2020). Since May 2020, the Chamber has established an Outdoor Rec taskforce and begun work on a county strategic plan for outdoor recreation with the Appalachian Regional Commission. Several projects have already begun in the county.



THE CHAMBER

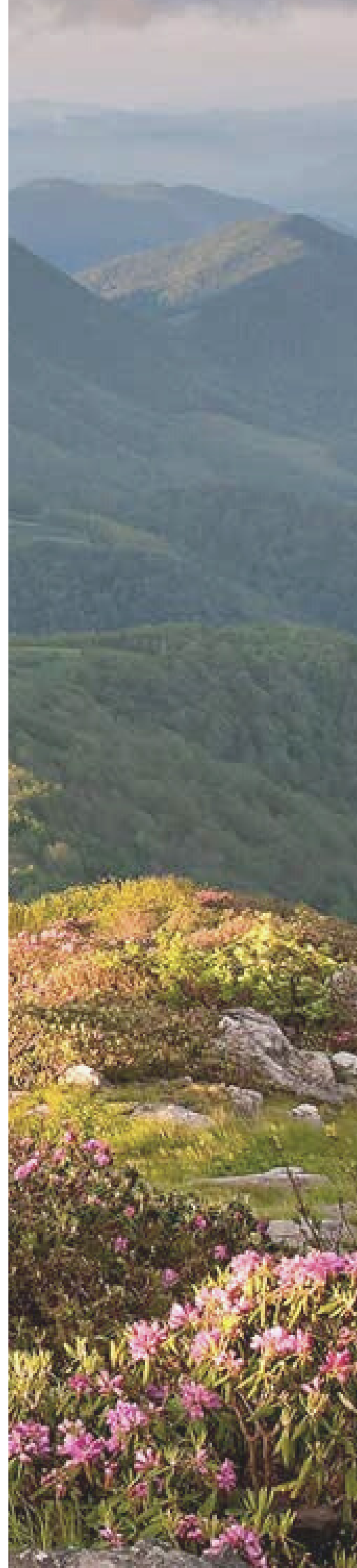
The Chamber is an active membership organization that serves the needs of businesses, non-profits and government agencies of all sizes in the greater Mitchell County area. There is no other organization that connects you to all of the areas of the region like the Mitchell County Chamber. Once you see what we do to support businesses here as well as how our work impacts the entire community, we believe you will understand why hundreds of your business neighbors invest in the Chamber.

Who We Are

The Chamber has been a part of the Mitchell County area for more than five decades. Businesses, non-profits, agencies and individuals who choose to be a part of the Chamber do so because we are a dedicated pro-active business leadership organization. We have proven through our many projects and initiatives that working with our community partners and business members results in an organization that benefits our members and our community. Contact us to learn how we support businesses and impact our entire community.

MISSION AND VISION

The Mitchell County Chamber is a member driven organization that serves its members by helping to create and sustain a healthy economic climate. Our mission is to support business and promote community.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President Kim Stephenson/State Employees Credit Union

Treasurer Ruthie Styles/Blue Ridge Partnership for Children

Elected and Appointed Directors

Joe Glenn/ Springmaid Mountain

Darlene Butler/Town of Spruce Pine

Chuck Shelton/ Mountain Community Health Partnership

Ciji Dellinger/ Hospice and Home Care of the Blue Ridge

Tara Garland/Blue Ridge Community Hospital/NC Rhododendron Festival

Ruthie Styles /Blue Ridge Partnership for Children

Bruce Ikard/WTOE

Bill Slagle, Jr. /EDPNC Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

Keith HoltsclawCommunity/EDPNC Board Member

Leanna Grindstaff/Tri-County Builders

Mickey Duvall/Mitchell County EDC

Jeff Harding/Mitchell County Commissioner

Staff:

Patti Jensen/Executive Director

Robin Townsend/Visitor Center Manager

Sandy Buchanan/Office Support

Contact

Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce

PO Box 858

11 Crystal Street

Spruce Pine, NC 28777

828-765-9033

pjensen@mitchellcountychamber.org

www.mitchellcountychamber.org

www.craftyouradventure.com

www.mitchellworksnc.com

www.amountainchristmastrailoflights.com

Find us on Facebook and Instagram

