

JOHNSTON  
COUNTY  
VISITORS • BUREAU  
**VISITOR  
INFORMATION**  
Johnstoncountyne.org

2015  
ANNUAL  
REPORT  
JOHNSTON COUNTY  
VISITORS BUREAU

# ON THE COVER!



Left to right, JCTA Board Member, Lynn Daniels, Executive Director of VisitNC, Wit Tuttel, JCVB President, Donna Bailey-Taylor, and Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site Manager, Donny Taylor.





DONNA BAILEY-TAYLOR

*"After nineteen years leading the JCVB team, I still love my job and know that the future for tourism development in Johnston County is very bright."*

## MESSAGE FROM THE



# DIRECTOR

**T**his year has been one of the most challenging and the most rewarding for the staff and Tourism Authority Board. As the largest 150th Civil War event was held in Johnston County this last March, hundreds of volunteer hours were dedicated to the organizing committee to market the event and welcome more than 65,000 to Bentonville Battlefield. The Harper House landed the cover of the *NC Travel Guide* and it truly felt like we had landed the cover of *Rolling Stone Magazine*. In our industry, the cover of the state's primary marketing piece is considered the "cherry on the top."

For the first time ever, revenues exceeded \$1 million and our destination led the I-95 corridor in revenue growth at 5.1%. With all these accolades, we were sad to lose two valued employees to other job opportunities. With loss come change and gains, as we welcomed Ashby Brame and Sarah Campbell to the staff. Read the following pages of our Annual Report to learn more about what we were up to in 2015! And hold on to your hats, as 2016 will bring new challenges and major projects for tourism in Johnston County!

*Donna*

## ABOUT JCVB

# HISTORY

**T**he Johnston County Visitors Bureau was created by local legislation in 1987 enabling a 3% county-wide room tax paid by visitors to area hotels. In 2007, the Towns of Benson, Kenly, Selma and Smithfield choose to enact an additional 2% tax that is dedicated to each town's tourism development and marketing projects.

Together these two taxes generate approximately \$1 million in revenues to promote the existing tourism product to visitors travelling through the county and those choosing our destinations for business, pleasure or personal reasons. A portion of the tax has

been dedicated to tourism development to build and improve the tourism infrastructure in the county. Capital Grant programs administered by the Tourism Authority have been making a difference for area nonprofits since 1987.

Residents of Johnston County may not know the extent and reach of tourism funds or the number of projects funded, but local citizens and visitors alike enjoy performances at Paul A. Johnston, The Clayton Center or W. J. Barefoot Auditorium, or visit area museums, walk along trails or watch youth sports....tourism dollars have made a difference! For a complete list of Capital Grant projects, visit our website, [johnstoncountync.org](http://johnstoncountync.org)

**“More than \$1m has been awarded to tourism-related capital projects in Johnston County since 1987.”**



## ABOUT THE JCVB

# TEAM



ASHBY BRAME

**MA**rketing and Public Relations Manager

Ashby Brame, joined the Bureau in February, 2015, amidst our one and only snow storm. Ashby manages all advertising placement, writes news releases for all relevant media outlets, crafts the content for all social media projects and composes the weekly JCVB Blog exposing the world to what is uniquely Johnston County with a medley of amazing adjectives.



SARAH CAMPBELL

**SP**orts and Leisure Sales Manager,

Sarah Campbell, joined the bureau team in March 2015. With work experience in the hotel industry, Sarah is uniquely equipped to work with the lodging industry to bring groups and leisure visitors to the county. Her enthusiasm and attention to detail are just a couple of her outstanding qualities -- just don't ask her to kill a spider in the office.



ERIC DEAN

**CO**munications Manager/Webmaster,

Eric Dean is the bureau's creative director and designer for advertising, publications, digital promotions, and he builds/maintains the bureau's multiple websites. Eric has worked for the Visitors Bureau since 2008, and he brings a wealth of agency and print experience, artistic talent, and humor to the bureau every day. We are so lucky to have him!



ANGEL PHILLIPS

**OF**ice and Visitor Center Manager

Angel Phillips, has literally kept the office running since December 2008. Angel maintains all financial records, pays all incoming invoices, manages all bureau meetings, greets visitors, mails out visitor inquiries and much, much more. We would be totally at a loss without Angel keeping us organized and where we need to be on a daily basis.

## 2015 HIGHLIGHTS

# DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

**“Big Ideas and Big Projects for Tourism Development was certainly the theme at JCVB for 2015.”**

**F**our major tourism-related projects dominated the year for the staff of JCVB: Bentonville Battlefield 150th Reenactment, the county-wide Parks & Recreation Master Plan, new Bike Routes and the Smithfield Wayfinding Study were time consuming projects with high return on investment for Johnston County tourism.

In addition to investment in tourism marketing projects, the board awarded seven capital improvement grants, with five agencies completing their projects in 2015: The Clayton Center received \$5,000 for improved stage lighting, Selma Parks & Recreation received \$5,000 for improvements to park facilities, Kenly Parks & Recreation received \$5,000 for help re-paving the

Kenly Walking Trail, Clayton Parks & Recreation received \$5,000 for improvement to the Bocce courts, and Howell Woods received \$10,000 for a new Fresh Water Aquarium at the Learning Center.

More than 65,000 people attended the largest 150th event in North Carolina, with an estimated economic impact of \$8 million to the local and surrounding communities. For approximately 18 months, JCVB staff served on the organizing committee and spear-headed the advertising and publicity for the event.

The county-wide Parks & Recreation Master Plan was a year-long project that will have impact for all 11 municipalities, rural communities and civic groups building recreation and sports

facilities in the county. Next steps involve moving forward on some of the recommendations from the study. The resident survey has identified what citizens seek for recreation and those facilities that would attract visitors and tournaments to the county. The Johnston County Sports Council will continue to work on projects like signs for the new Bike Routes, Boat Ramps along the Neuse River and seeking bids for tournaments that have tourism impact.

The Smithfield Wayfinding Study was completed in 2015 with a comprehensive sign plan for the town, identifying key visitor attractions to direct locals and visitors. Next steps include bidding, fabrication, and installation of Phase I signs for the town.



*Smithfield wayfinding conceptual designs*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

**EX**amples of key numbers to remember about 2015 are featured to the right. Not every year will we host the largest reenactment in the state, or tackle such large county-wide projects like the bike routes and master plan, but here's what's on tap for 2016:

- ▶ *Expanding the Johnston County Hospitality Association offering scholarships to members for education and seminars for staff development.*
- ▶ *Moving forward with Bike Route signs and development of boat ramps on the Neuse River for boating, canoeing and fishing.*
- ▶ *Smithfield Way Finding Phase I, fabrication and installing of the Monumental Gateway signs at I-95, US 70, and US 301.*
- ▶ *Expanding the 301 Endless Yard Sale to Cumberland and Robeson County, extending it from state line to state line.*
- ▶ *Conducting a residential tourism development survey to seek input from citizens on what facilities, attractions, commercial development Johnston County needs in the future.*
- ▶ *Continue to package hotels, shopping, dining, attractions and tours with Johnston County industry partners, like the new Beer, Wine, Shine & DINE Tour.*

# \$215 MILLION

### 2014 VISITOR SPENDING

*Visit North Carolina announced that domestic visitors to Johnston County spent \$214.94 million in 2014, an increase of 5.10 percent from 2013. Johnston County is ranked 21st in the state for visitor spending.*

# 65,000

### VISITORS AT THE BENTONVILLE BATTLEFIELD EVENT

*The largest 150th Bentonville Battlefield Civil War Commemorative event in the state of North Carolina, generating nearly \$8 million in economic impact for a four county area.*

# 2,500

### RESIDENTS SURVEYED

*More than 2,500 residents of Johnston County completed the Parks & Recreation Master Plan survey to help guide the future development of recreation facilities for years to come.*

# 4

### NEW BIKE ROUTES

*The Johnston County Sports Council developed four bike routes with help from the Johnston County Planning Department and NC DOT Bike and Ped Division. 50,000 Bike Route brochures have been printed for promotion of the routes.*

	2015	2014	2013	2012
<b>INCOME SOURCES</b>				
JOHNSTON COUNTY 3%	705,451.29	632,809.22	575,995.14	597,777.68
TOWN OF BENSON	9,480.79	7,117.97	8,271.48	9,286.27
TOWN OF KENLY	26,097.72	24,357.58	23,934.04	26,721.23
TOWN OF SELMA	94,754.07	86,773.35	83,005.81	94,918.04
TOWN OF SMITHFIELD	218,176.49	168,398.87	156,649.42	144,263.50
MISC. REV.	5,888.40	9,000.00	46.74	0.0
REIMBURSEMENTS	2,372.25	5,881.42	13,560.94	8,855.00
INVESTMENT INCOME	566.88	656.17	1,247.68	2,040.71
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>1,062,787.89</b>	<b>934,994.58</b>	<b>862,711.25</b>	<b>883,862.43</b>

	2015	2014	2013	2012
<b>HUMAN RESOURCES</b>				
SALARIES & WAGES	228,808.10	227,131.27	220,674.48	175,875.20
LONGEVITY PAY	1,500.00	1,500.00	600.00	600.00
TRAVEL - PER DIEM	5,100.00	5,100.00	5,100	5,100
FRINGE BENEFITS	67,353.08	70,055.06	66,452.15	54,961.77
<b>TOTAL HR</b>	<b>302,761.18</b>	<b>303,786.33</b>	<b>292,826.63</b>	<b>236,826.63</b>

	2015	2014	2013	2012
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>				
CONTRACT/PROF FEES	5,100	5,025	5,400	2,653
TELEPHONE	4,777.83	4,822.23	3,389.62	3,793.19
POSTAGE	10,152.23	12,853.13	9,195.91	18,075.52
PRINTING	43,285.76	44,475.88	39,937.80	30,293.37
UTILITIES	3,671.50	3,296.39	3,076.35	-0-
TRAVEL & TRADESHOW	17,260.50	16,729.44	17,790.48	16,954.32
EQUIP/BUILDING LEASE	35,317.67	34,752.04	33,086.13	37,487.59
JOCO/COOP ADVERTISING	146,212.84	133,608.58	127,940.06	133,094.56
OFFICE/DEPART SUPPLIES	2,695.55	3,256.13	2,133.29	8,293.95
SOFTWARE PURCHASES	4,129.00	-0-	6,618.24	644.21
CONTRACT SERVICES	-0-	-0-	10,815.00	12,600.00
BENSON MARKETING	5,836.47	5,567.89	4,670.69	8,037.10
KENLY MARKETING	19,245.93	21,204.67	21,176.95	23,995.59
SELMA MARKETING	58,195.02	53,016.09	66,826.86	81,474.40
SMITHFIELD MARKETING	162,729.22	148,676.60	121,945.30	114,213.65
DUES & SUBSRIPTIONS	16,999.00	15,365.50	5,070.00	5,362.00
INSURANCE	400.00	400.00	200.00	175.00
5% JOHNSTON FEE	35,051.73	28,301.65	28,769.60	27,130.28
MISC. EXPENSES	6,774.51	6,052.24	5,859.91	4,693.70
RESEARCH	25,000.00	25,000.00	8,000.00	-0-
GRANTS	43,951.79	35,750.00	34,250.00	14,150.00
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>				
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>956,220.69</b>	<b>910,506.61</b>	<b>855,993.16</b>	<b>784,563.72</b>
<b>NET +/-</b>	<b>106,567.20</b>	<b>24,487.97</b>	<b>6,718.09</b>	<b>99,298.71</b>



## 2015 EXPENDITURES

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**“2015 is the first year occupancy tax revenues have exceeded \$1 million”**

**GR**owth is coming to tourism in Johnston County in the way of commercial development, increases in occupancy tax collection, and investment in infrastructure by the Tourism Authority. In 2015, occupancy tax collection increased by 8.8% and in the first quarter of 2016, the trend continues with double digit increases.

Expenses held true to budget projections, and with greater than expected revenues, net gain for FY 2015 was \$106,567.20

### Tourism impact highlights for 2014:

Domestic visitors to Johnston County spent \$214.94 million in 2014, an increase of 5.10 percent from 2013.

The travel and tourism industry directly employs more than 1,700 in Johnston County.

Total payroll generated by the tourism industry in Johnston County was \$32.24 million.

State tax revenue generated in Johnston County totalled \$11.63 million through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes on personal and corporate income.

Approximately \$5.33 million in local taxes were generated from sales and property tax revenue from travel-generated and travel-supported businesses.

Without local and state taxes generated by tourism spending, local Johnston County households would pay \$280.00 more in taxes.

### VISITOR SPENDING DIRECTLY IMPACTS CITIZENS



JOHNSTON COUNTY  
NORTH-CAROLINA

no. 2014 Visitor Spending

Pay to the Order

Johnston County Household **\$280.00**

Two Hundred & Eighty Dollars & no/100

Signed: *Visitors to Johnston County*

Notes: \$16.96 million in state and local taxes divided by 60,700 households, saves residents of JoCo \$280 in taxes.

## MARKETING PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

# PROJECTS & OUTLOOK

**“JCVB believes in hands-on marketing through planning committees to create relevant tourism product and packages.”**

### GIRLFRIENDS GETAWAY PACKAGE GROWS



**T**he Girlfriends Getaway program message is aimed at bargain shoppers and getting girlfriends together for some quality shopping at Carolina Premium Outlets. The program is simple in nature, that visitors get extended discounts from hotel partners, and a girlfriends gift bag upon checking in at the front desk. The Visitors Bureau provides the marketing, recruits the partners, and prepares and delivers the girlfriends gift bags. Visitors get coupons from area restaurants, spas, wineries, breweries and attractions as well as a small gift from the bureau and chocolates for a sweet treat. Since the Visitors Bureau produces the Girlfriends gift bag, we can track the distribution to each hotel partner. Hotels that up-sale the package are averaging 10 per weekend, and others are averaging 2-3 per weekend. Room nights generated in the last 12 months estimated at approximately 748 with eight hotel partners.

### BIKE ROUTE BROCHURE



**T**he Johnston County Bike Routes tri-fold brochure folds out to show detailed maps of four new routes. It depicts greenways, water features, roads, highways, and interstates. This allows cyclists to quickly understand which type of road they will be travelling on or near to prepare for traffic conditions and take safety precautions. The brochure also includes summaries of the routes that describe the towns, attractions, landmarks, and restaurants that the routes encompass. The purpose is to provide an enjoyable and challenging route for cycling enthusiasts while still providing opportunities for cyclist to dismount, rest, and enjoy what Johnston County has to offer. To date over 16,900 brochures have gone out to interested visitors.

## 2015 VISITORS GUIDE

**T**his year's visitors guide maintained its magazine layout moving away from alphabetical phonebook-style listings. The hotels section was completely re-imaged with an easier-to-read format that includes property photos and amenities icons. Dining is now a thematic section on BBQ & Southern-style restaurants that speak to the culinary heritage of the county and table service restaurants with full ABC permits. Shopping now focuses more on antiques, outlets, local products and agritourism-related shops in the county. The main purpose of this brochure is to drive visitors to tourism-related businesses. Organizing the guide in this new way focuses on the unique offerings of the county allowing visitors to prioritize accommodations and activities based on their needs and personal interests.



## BENTONVILLE BATTLEFIELD EVENT

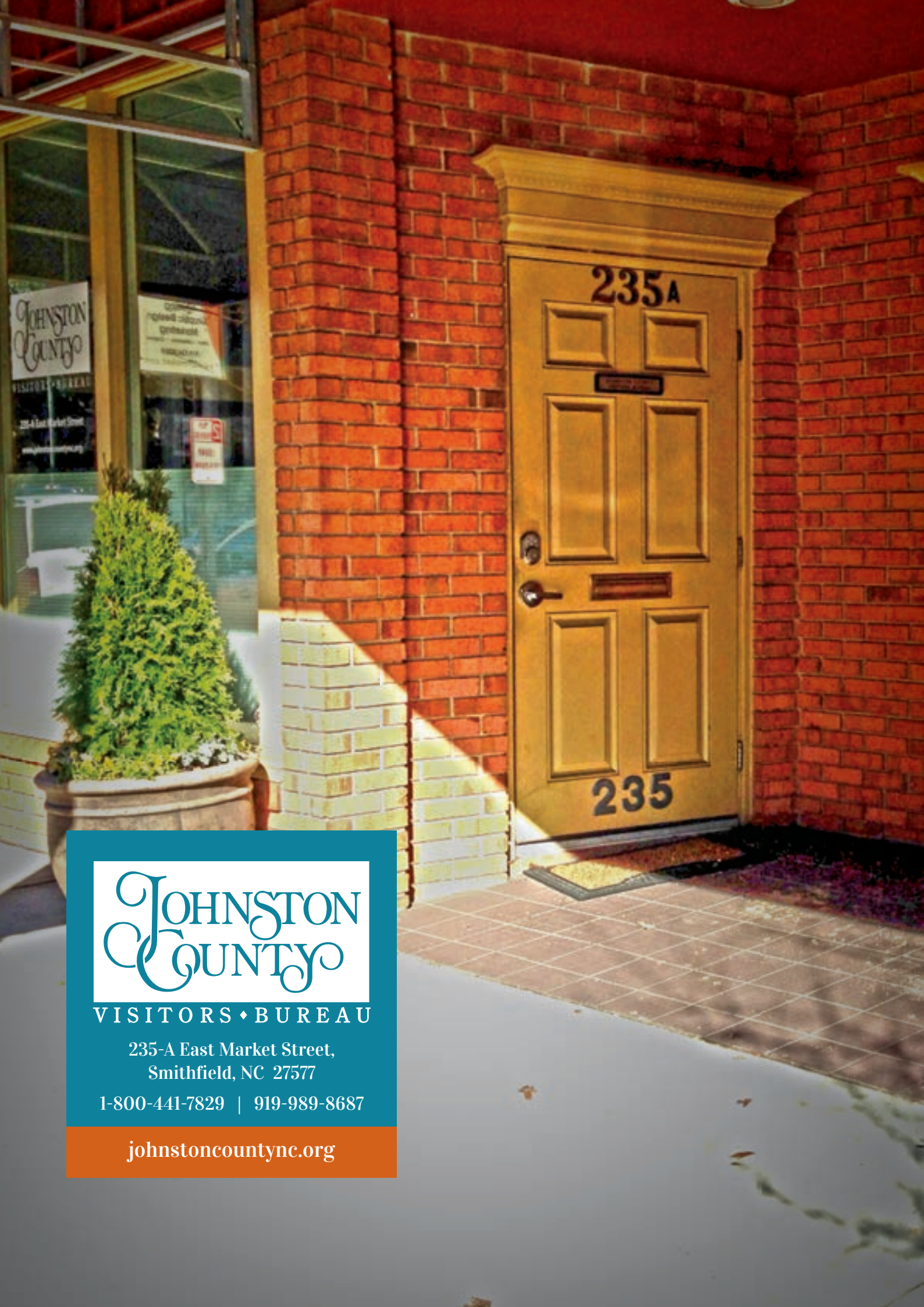


**T**he JCVB was responsible for most public relations activities surrounding the Bentonville reenactment and organizing Media Day. The press kit was created by the Bureau and hosted on our website for the months leading up to the event. Bureau staff were in charge of working the press booth at the event, signing in media, and distributing press passes. There were 1,977 click-backs from the Bentonville site to the JCVB site alone to view the press kit. Within the press kit material the video clips had 731 combined downloads, the 15 hi-res photos page had a combined 602 hits, and the 10 press releases amassed a combined 7,463 hits. The weekend of the reenactment there were close to 60 members of the press present and the Travel Channel's Trip Flip filmed parts of the reenactment which were included in an NC-featured episode.

## JCVB BLOG

**T**he Visitors Bureau blog is updated weekly with underlying themes to highlight the people who make-up the heart of the county's tourism-related businesses - farmers, brewers, chefs, distillers, artists, and historians. The message of the blog goes beyond what Johnston County has to offer visitors to draw a human and welcoming element out of the popular restaurants, museums, and sites in the county. Two popular series are entitled...JoCo Has Talent and Meet the Makers. The top blog posts of the year included the opening of Johnston County's first legal moonshine distillery, Broadslab Distillery, the opening of two new chef driven and farm-fresh restaurants Manning's and Simple Twist, the announcement that the 301 Endless Yard Sale is growing, and the story of a local girl, Abby Stevens, working to make it big with her music. In total, these four top-producing posts generated 18,787 views to our website.





# JOHNSTON COUNTY

VISITORS ♦ BUREAU

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