



NEWS RELEASE

Release: Immediate

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Date: February 21, 2017

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MITCHELL COUNTY EDC TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

(Mitchell County, NC - February 21, 2017) The Mitchell County Economic Development Commission (EDC) recently announced a three year strategic plan to recruit new business, encourage residential growth, and bolster the tourism industry. The Mitchell County EDC began the project with North Star Destination Strategies (North Star) in April 2016 to create a branding and marketing plan for the county. The announcement and presentation of the plan elements took place on February 3, 2017. The local committee will now begin work to implement the plan.

The EDC reviewed proposals from several marketing firms with the decision to hire North Star based on its experience and success branding hundreds of communities across the country. North Star is known as the leader in community branding, research, and planning throughout the United States. Another positive factor was that the firm had already spent nearly a year working with Toe River Arts Council, and the firm's familiarity and love of the county was important.

While the final presentation to community leaders largely consisted of concepts for the implementation of the brand, the project as a whole also consisted of an abundant amount of research and strategies for future use.

North Star conducted research to identify what differentiates Mitchell County from its competitors for the purposes of resident recruitment and retention, tourism development, and business attraction and support. It set out to learn the perceptions and beliefs of local stakeholders, residents, consumers, businesses and influencers, as well as understand the competitive situation with the surrounding counties and Western North Carolina.

North Star combined research with its expertise and skill to present ideas to the local committee throughout the project. One of the elements included in the plan was a logo, but the investment

in this plan was for much more than that. The final strategic plan is a nearly 400 page document that will guide tourism and economic development for the next three years.

As part of its community research, North Star conducted immense research and planning that involved reviewing existing community materials and vast efforts to gain input from local citizens. During North Star's visit to Mitchell County, the team traveled from the Blue Ridge Parkway to Roan Mountain, stopping at dozens of assets throughout the county. The team held in-person individual interviews, creative workshops, and community focus groups, in addition to phone interviews. North Star also carried out consumer awareness and perception studies through interviews about Mitchell County with external influencers and surveyed visitors and non-visitors to Mitchell County from within North Carolina to gain insight about external perceptions. North Star also analyzed competitive positioning.

Research data was analyzed for trending insights that hone in on the Mitchell County story. These insights were funneled into a strategic brand platform, which reads as follows: "For those who seek treasure in its purest form, Mitchell County, centered amongst the oldest and greatest mountains of Western North Carolina, is the source for both ancient inspiration and modern interpretation, providing clarity and perspective in a noisy world."

The brand narrative expands on the platform. An excerpt reads: "Along the winding Blue Ridge Parkway, yet off the beaten path, Mitchell County is a treasure trove where you'll uncover life's most sought after gems in all forms. Here, you'll find nature's welcoming sense of place that renews your connection to the things that matter most. And whether you discover gems you can hold in your hand or in your heart, all are worth the journey."

"Mitchell County... Seek + Find" was chosen as the strapline. Among many reasons, it was chosen because it creates a vibrant sense of adventure, has a layered meaning (one can find whatever you are seeking: peace and quiet, gems, adventure, culture, history, business opportunities, etc.), works for residential, tourism and economic development messaging, is short and memorable, and links to the hidden treasures in the area. Some of the advertising will utilize phrases around this tagline to highlight Mitchell County in a refreshing way, for example, Seek: Mountain Views, Find: New Perspective, or another example, Seek: an Escape, Find: an Oasis.

Mitchell County has a wonderful spirit of creativity and entrepreneurship, and the EDC will use this research to facilitate ways to enhance support and expansion efforts surrounding this culture and significant asset. An external influencer stated, "The creative environment is a critical element in industry recruitment, because companies need to recruit, and that talent desires an inspiring and interesting place to live. And, Mitchell County has it."

Keith Holtsclaw, Chair of the EDC Board of Directors and Mitchell County Commissioner, emphasizes the importance of the plan. "Over the past few years every individual who has been on the ballot for County Commissioner has indicated a strong desire for enhancing economic development. This is much easier said than done and requires a strategic plan that is doable and incorporates other facets including a marketing plan. After much work and local input, the "Mitchell Works" strategic plan was presented and endorsed by the County Commissioners, Municipalities, Economic Development, and Chamber of Commerce boards and is now being implemented. One part of the implementation was completion of a marketing plan that has now been finalized. We are now positioned to move forward with solid plans that will contribute to enhancing the economy of the county. As Winston Churchill said "those who fail to plan, plan to fail" and we certainly do not want to make that mistake."

The plan will assist the EDC in its work to strengthen and support existing businesses, encourage entrepreneurship, attract new businesses to the area, as well as people to visit, and maybe even relocate. Laura Verla recently began the role of Director of the EDC. She stated she is “excited to have this strategic marketing plan for the county, and look forward to using it as a valuable tool. Work on the implementation of the plan will begin immediately. The EDC will utilize North Star’s extensive research and strategy in striving to transform Mitchell County’s challenges into opportunities and work to develop untapped potential.”