February 24, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

McConnell Group Public Relations, Inc. is heavily involved in the tourism economy of Rutherford County, N.C. We represent Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority, Tryon International Equestrian Center, The Foundation Performing Arts & Conference Center, the Lake Lure Olympiad Sports Festival and even work with Defiant Whisky from time to time.

With confidence and data to support my claim, I can say that tourism in Rutherford County is vibrant and experiencing unprecedented growth. Small and large businesses are investing in Rutherford County for a variety of reasons, which certainly include the benefit of visitor traffic and quality of life opportunities.

While often overlooked for as an economic driver, tourism is a primary source of revenue in Rutherford County. Occupancy taxes have experienced record growth during the last year and a half. Collections have increased over the last fiscal year as follows:

- April: +17.6%
- May: +19.44%
- June: +18.09%
- July: +19.27%
- August: +9.24%
- Sept: +19.27%
- Oct: +10.3%
- Nov: +8.02
- Dec: +10.81

While growth is contributed to major entities like the Tryon International Equestrian Center, visitor traffic has not been due this single development. Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority (RCTDA) invests a significant amount of the occupancy tax dollar revenue into their marketing of the area. This year’s marketing budget is $308,000.

Visitor traffic at the Welcome Center in Lake Lure has increased from 2014 to 2015. Traffic in August was up 1,900 visitors to 8,187 from August the previous year and typically slower months like January saw 1,739 visitors, which was 554 visitors more than the previous year.
Because of the RCTDA’s efforts, awareness of all that Rutherford County has to offer is growing. A 2015 recent study by Magellan Strategy Group indicated that 78% of leisure travelers are familiar with Lake Lure & the Blue Ridge Foothills and 73% have a positive opinion of the destination.

However, when considering Tryon International Equestrian Center, several factors there will continue to increase visitor traffic to our area. Plans to enclose the covered arena will allow a year-round equestrian and event season at the center. The center’s ability to attract national and international level events will be further enhanced once the indoor arena is complete.

Tourism is strong, thriving and growing in Rutherford County. Real estate is also growing and we are adding residents on a regular basis. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further details on Rutherford County’s tourism economy.

Sincerely,

Michelle Yelton
Michelle Yelton
President, McConnell Group