

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2012

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National speaker highlights Mat-Su CVB annual meeting

The Mat-Su CVB's annual meeting and educational workshop this year features a nationally known speaker who is one of the country's top tourism experts.

Bill Geist will talk to members about the power of tourism marketing, and how they can benefit in today's economy, during the annual meeting and awards banquet, set for Nov. 9 at Evangelo's in Wasilla.

"Bill is widely regarded as one of the best speakers in the business, and we're very excited to have him here in the Mat-Su Valley," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "People will not want to miss what he has to say. He's super engaging, very funny and most importantly, extremely relevant for our members."

Geist spoke to a joint Mat-Su CVB/ Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce luncheon six years ago, and drew more than 150 people.

Those interested in attending should contact Justin Saunders, membership manager, at 746-5032 or via e-mail at Justin@alaskavisit.com.

The event starts at 9 a.m., and Geist will speak throughout the morning on several different topics. At noon, the annual "Stars of the Industry" awards luncheon takes place, and local businesses will be honored



Bill Geist

for their efforts in the tourism industry.

To nominate someone for one of the annual awards, please see page 11 for a nominations form. All nominations must be received no later than Oct. 15. A nominations committee reviews all submissions and selects the winners.

Mat-Su CVB annual meeting

Friday, Nov. 9, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m., Evangelo's

9 a.m. - 11 a.m. - Bill Geist speaks about the power of tourism marketing, and what you can do to stay ahead in this economy

11 a.m. - Annual business meeting

Noon - Stars of the Industry award luncheon

Tickets are \$25 and include all of the day's activities

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From the president's desk

This election, let your voice be heard by candidates

If you have turned on your television for a few seconds between cleaning rooms, answering the phones or checking in guests, I am sure that you are aware this is a big election year. It is a big election year for tourism as well.

The support of our local and state legislators is critical to the funding of our industry. As you see those signs along the road, remember that your candidates represent you. They want to hear from you!

What can you do to make sure the candidates hear your message?

Let them know that you are in their voting area and more importantly that tourism supports you and your family.

Make sure they know how many other families in your area are impacted by tourism, not only in the industry, but your suppliers as well.

Remember it is not only you that your business supports. It also supports others, including your staff and others whose products and services are purchased by you.

Ask them some tough questions:

1. Do they support the dollars requested by tourism from the budget?

2. Do they understand what these dollars are used for?

3. Do they know that most all tourism businesses in Alaska are small mom and pop businesses?

4. Do they know that one in 14 jobs in Southcentral Alaska is in tourism?

5. Do they know that tourism contributes \$138 million directly to state government through taxes, fees, permits and licenses?

Attending our candidate forum on Friday, Sept. 14 is the perfect opportunity to make your voice heard.

We should be very proud of what tourism does and brings to the economy of our state. From large contributions to our state budget all the way to those donations that all of us give to nonprofit organizations for auctions, etc. We are a very vital and growing industry in our borough and state.

We need to have people representing us in our state and local government that understand the importance of tourism.

Dee Dee Kay is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. She works for CIRI Alaska Tourism Corp.



Dee Dee Kay

An expert's take

Small business tips to partnering with medium to large tour companies

Partnering is another way of saying "cooperative sales and marketing." It is a good way to maximize your business exposure and boost the marketing awareness of your small business.

Partnering with a large tour operator or cruise company is even better because their reach, sales and marketing are extensive. However, there are some guidelines to approaching a larger business.

1. Research your potential new

partner. Consider the size and scope of their business and consider whether your product or service can match it. For example, a B&B with four rooms will not match a cruise land tour that handles 400 people.

2. Identify who to approach with your proposal. Typically, it's a tour product manager or director.

3. Recognize that large businesses don't get to be large without a profit

Executive director's report

FY12 a banner year for borough

In Fiscal Year 2012, the Mat-Su Borough saw record bed tax revenue numbers, a sign that we've turned the corner from the downturn in 2010 and are well on our way to a vibrant and healthy tourism industry.

In FY12, the borough brought in \$1,083,683 in bed tax revenue, a whopping 13.2 percent increase over the FY11, and marking the first time we've eclipsed the \$1 million mark since 2009. This is a true sign that our marketing efforts are paying off with increased visitation.

We didn't get here without some hard work, however. Following two straight years of more than \$1 million in bed tax revenues in 2008 and 2009, we felt the downturn in the economy, like all of you. Out of those lean years, however, good things resulted – we took a hard look at what we do, how we do it, and what works. The result was an extremely focused marketing plan that hit our target audiences. This is something I'm proud of, and as members, you should be as well.

The fiscal year runs through the end of June, meaning everything from

July 1 will be represented in the FY13 numbers. I've talked with many members throughout the summer, and most of you have indicated that this summer is the best you've seen. That is extremely encouraging news.

This kind of success wouldn't



Bonnie Quill

be possible without the teamwork of many. When visitors have a positive experience, they tell their friends and families. By offering our visitors a world-class experience in the Mat-Su Valley – whether that be at a B&B, on a glacier trek or during a flightseeing trip, for example – it reflects positively on us all.

Just because the busiest part of Alaska's tourism season is behind us doesn't mean its time for us to

hibernate like the bears. Now is the time to continue those targeted marketing efforts, to build next summer's season into an even better one than 2012. We've set the bar high, but we're confident we can meet that goal.

Bonnie Quill is the Mat-Su CVB executive director. You can contact her bonnie@alaskavisit.com.

Candidates sought for Mat-Su CVB Board

The Mat-Su CVB is soliciting nominations for its board of directors. Elected directors serve three-year terms on the board, and help shape the policy and direction of the organization.

This year, four spots are open on the board.

The top four vote-getters in the election will be seated on the board at the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting on Nov. 9.

Self-nominations are accepted, and all nominations are reviewed by the Nominations Committee prior to being placed on the official ballot. Interested members should submit a declaration of candidacy no later than Oct. 1, by e-mailing Bonnie Quill at bonnie@alaskavisit.com. By Oct. 5, candidates should submit a 300-word statement and a color photograph/head shot that will be used on the ballots.

"Serving on the board of directors is a great way to help guide the CVB into the future," Quill said. "You are representing the membership, and providing guidance for the industry as a whole."

Candidates must be Mat-Su CVB Tourism Development members in good standing. Exchange and Tourism Support members are not eligible to serve on the board of directors.

Board members are expected to participate in 6-8 board meetings a year, as well as a few special meetings throughout the year.

After review of the candidates, the ballots will be mailed to members no later than Oct. 9. All ballots must be returned to the CVB no later than 5 p.m. Oct. 30. Ballots remained sealed until the elections committee meets on Nov. 1 to open the ballots and count them.

The four terms expiring belong to Karen Harris (Alaska Garden Gate B&B), Steve Zadra (Princess Tours), Craig Saunders (Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours) and Ruth Rosewarne (Alaska Railroad).

Continuing to serve on the board are Dee Dee Kay (CIRI Alaska Tourism Corp.), Mark Austin (Palmer Musk Ox Farm), Cheryl Metiva (Morris Alaska Communications), Darlene Hunter (Susitna River Lodge), Mabel Wimmer (Mendeltna Creek Lodge) and Nicole Bendle (First National Bank Alaska).

Expert: Do your research first

Continued from Page 2

structure. Part of that structure is earning commissions on third-party product (you). Be prepared to pay the commission required which usually starts at 20 percent.

4. How will your business help the potential partner sell more? Come prepared with a sales pitch as to why your product will enhance the tour operator's tour offerings (and it should go without saying that you will research what they already sell and how). Plus, be sure you offer enough liability insurance to meet the larger company's requirements.

5. Plan ahead. Large tour companies in Alaska must have their programs in place 12-24 months in advance, depending on the company. So, be prepared to offer pricing on your product

for a year or two in advance.

6. Be polite, respectful and courteous. Saying please and thank you will help build the relationship.

7. Be patient and follow up. Nobody likes to be badgered but a thank you card, a short e-mail, and intermittent phone call can go a long way in keeping your small business front-of-mind for a tour product manager.

Lastly, if your business isn't compatible with a large tour company, consider reaching out to similar size businesses for partnership. Swap rack cards, agree to recommend or sell each other's products, get to know your fellow tourism businesses. The benefits of partnerships exist at all levels and are worth exploring.

Ruth Rosewarne Kimerer works for the Alaska Railroad in passenger services.

Mat-Su Borough Assembly, mayor candidates respond

Each fall, the Mat-Su CVB distributes a survey to all candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly, as well as Mat-Su Borough Mayor candidates. The candidates are free to respond as they wish. Below are the questions and answers to the survey, as supplied by the candidates.

Borough candidates are also participating in an open forum to discuss tourism topics on Friday, Sept. 14 at Evangelo's in Wasilla at noon.

Question 1

As with most local and regional convention & visitors bureaus, the Mat-Su CVB receives monies collected by the Borough through a bed tax of 5 percent. This year the assembly approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$650,000 for fiscal year 2013 in a grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax). The board would like the assembly to solidify the formula with a 3-year grant agreement passed this winter. Would you consider the board recommendation of a 65/35 formula (of a 5 percent bed tax) between the Mat-Su CVB and the borough for long-term sustainable funding? Why or why not?

Larry Devilbiss, Mat-Su Borough Mayor candidate: Favor. I don't see a problem other than that an Assembly does not have the power to bind another Assembly so that might interfere with the three year concept.

Mark Masteller, Mat-Su Borough Mayor candidate: I favor this in a 3-year increment, as efforts by Mat-Su CVB to market the borough as a destination are extremely important to our overall economy. And, though the percentage would be fixed, the actual dollar number can grow with successful marketing – which is a good incentive. However, coupled with good marketing must be a “shared vision” to plan for growth and development and protect and enhance the things about our home that bring visitors from afar and from other parts of Alaska. I believe these two things – good marketing and vision - both affect “sustainable funding.”

Vern Halter, Mat-Su Borough District 7 candidate: Strongly favor.

Ron Arvin, Mat-Su Borough District 3 candidate: Favor, but can't bind future assemblies.

Michelle Church, Mat-Su Borough District 3 candidate: Providing a 3-year grant will enable longer term planning for the Mat-Su CVB. Long-term planning presents better opportunities for any organization.

Jim Colver, Mat-Su Borough District 6 candidate: Favor. I support the mission of Mat-Su CVB to market tourism to bring visitors to the Borough. I have supported the \$650,000 annual appropriation. I support continuing the funding. The Borough must also provide funding for tourism facilities and maintenance as well.

Question 2

Because of state and local budget worries, there is concern among tourism businesses that other groups and government will increasingly look at bed tax revenues as a funding source for non-tourism expenditures. Would you support the use of bed tax monies for non-tourism purposes? If yes, what?

Devilbiss: It depends if you consider trails as “non-tourism.” I have supported some bed tax money going to trail construction and maintenance.

Masteller: Oppose. I'm assuming we're talking about the 35 percent of funds not appropriated to Mat-Su CVB. Given that assumption, bed tax funds should be used to support activities that bring/keep visitors here. There are also some visitors who might not be what most people think of as “tourists” – for example, folks who are visiting for health care or even our prisons. I would support an open and all-stakeholder discussion of the use of some bed tax funds for projects that benefit these types of visitors (in addition to projects that benefit “traditional” visitors, of course, for fishing, hunting, hiking, skiing, farming, etc.).

Halter: Strong oppose.

Arvin: Oppose.

Church: Oppose.

Colver: Oppose.

Question 3

On Aug. 3, 2010 the assembly adopted the Mat-Su Borough Economic Development Strategic Plan. Tourism is identified in the plan as an important opportunity for economic development and recommends increasing tourism marketing efforts. Along with other borough industries where do you rate the importance of tourism?

Devilbiss: Tourism is second only to natural resource development which is our farms, fish, and minerals.

Masteller: Investing in tourism infrastructure is rightly listed as one the priorities for economic development, and a vibrant tourism economy can be a growing proportion of an increasingly diversified economic base. I am concerned, however, that with poor planning some types of development in the Valley will threaten our tourism industry in the longer term. This concern is captured in the Economic Plan that cites “the Borough lacks a common vision for growth and development,” and “the image to non-residents is negatively affected by the haphazard character of physical development patterns in the borough.” We need to work to implement this Economic Development Plan, as the vision statement is spot on: make the borough the premier destination for quality development and jobs in Alaska.

Halter: Near the top. Tourism affects all businesses positively.

Arvin: High. And we need to work with the state to solve our fish problem.

Church: I would rate tourism as a leading economic strategy. Issues and infrastructure that benefit tourism also benefit the overall community. A community that attracts visitors also attracts investors.

Colver: Very high. We have a large potential growth market here as the gateway to Denali and other attractions such as the Glenn Highway corridor. We need to get the South Denali Visitors Center built to create more destination opportunities for tourism. I would like to

Candidates: Mat-Su Borough races

See CANDIDATES, Page 5

see the demand double for all our local tourism-related businesses.

Question 4

The completed Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (June 2008) has identified projects that would increase the economic impact of tourism in the Valley. A top priority is development of a South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center. The Mat-Su CVB received a National Scenic Byways grant to create a feasibility study for the new Visitor Center and recently completed the plan. Next step is to begin implementation. Do you support development of a new South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center?

Devilbiss: I have supported this necessary piece of infrastructure and also see a need for a major hotel/convention center which I would like to see at our Hatcher Pass development.

Masteller: This is a great project that should move forward as soon as possible, and coordinated with the Glenn Highway upgrade so access to both sides of the

highway is considered. Also, to fit in with a larger goal (in the Economic Plan) of showcasing Mat-Su as a place that wants to encourage “clean tech,” the facility should Net Zero Energy. We have the technology, and NZE facilities become destinations in themselves (many examples – not enough space). Not only does NZE save money, it tells the world the Mat-Su CVB understands there is no trade off between economic and environmental goals in our beautiful borough.

Halter: Yes.

Arvin: Yes!

Church: Yes, I would strongly support a South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center. The bed tax creates a revenue stream available for tourism. Reinvesting those dollars in infrastructure, maintenance and operation of a Visitor Center that highlights the great “things just up the road” would be of benefit to the whole borough.

Colver: Absolutely! It will be a great addition to our marketing effort.

Election information

Election is Oct. 2, 2012 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Absentee voting begins Sept. 17 at the following locations:

Division of Elections Office in Wasilla
1700 E. Bogard Rd. (North Fork Professional Bldg. B, Suite 102)

September 17 – October 1

Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

All ballot types are available at this location.

Borough Gym in Palmer

350 E. Dahlia Avenue September 17 – October 2, 2012

Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

All ballot types are available at this location, except that city ballots (Houston, Palmer and Wasilla) will not be available on October 2.

Absentee in-person voting will also take place September 17 – October 1, 2012, during established business hours at City Hall in the cities of Houston, Palmer, and Wasilla, as well as the Talkeetna and Trapper Creek Public Libraries. Ballot types are limited and specific to the community in which the ballot is cast.

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Mat-Su CVB hosts international tour operator groups

The Mat-Su CVB worked with the state of Alaska's tourism office to host two international tour operator familiarization trips during the summer.

Tour operators from Australia and China stopped for lunch in Palmer, and enjoyed activities in downtown Talkeetna during the Mat-Su portion of their statewide FAM trip. Both groups were inspecting properties and looking for activities to include in future tour offerings.

"Australia is the top international market for Alaska right now, and it's only growing, so it was a great opportunity to meet the operators who are putting together Alaska packages for the Aussies," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager.

The Mat-Su CVB plans to participate in the Alaska Down Under sales mission, in conjunction with the state of Alaska, later this fall to further relationships with Aussie tour operators and their clients.

China is an emerging market for Alaska's tourism industry, and the operators who visited were impressed with Alaska's hospitality and wide range of activities they could potentially offer their clients.

"We're starting to see more and more Chinese visitors to Alaska, and I think that's a trend we'll continue to see as the Chinese government makes it easier for its citizens to travel abroad," Ressler said.



Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler hosted five China tour operators this summer in Palmer.

European visitors to increase with Icelandair announcement

The Alaska tourism industry is thrilled to welcome Icelandair to Ted Stevens International Airport in 2013, giving Southcentral Alaska a summer's worth of new visitors.

Icelandair will start twice-weekly nonstop service to Anchorage from Reykjavik in May. The new flights open up more opportunities for European visitors and those from the United Kingdom to visit Alaska.

"This is great news for Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley and other Southcentral destinations," said Bonnie Quill, Mat-Su CVB's executive director. "International visitors tend to stay longer and spend more, and the increased flights from Europe is very encouraging."

Icelandair offers European visitors the opportunity to spend a weekend or more in Iceland, at no additional cost, when traveling to the United States. Because of this, many European visitors use the carrier to reach the U.S. with an additional holiday spent in Iceland.

In February, Mat-Su CVB Marketing and Communications Manager Casey Ressler was part of a group of Alaskans who traveled to Iceland for the Mid-Atlantic Trade Seminar, where he met with European tour operators who use the Iceland air

"This is great news for Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley and other Southcentral destinations. International visitors tend to stay longer and spend more, and the increased flights from Europe is very encouraging."

- Bonnie Quill

carrier. Officials from the state of Alaska met with Icelandair, and continued those discussions through the summer until an agreement was reached.

Mat-Su CVB is attending the 2013 Mid Atlantic Seminar in Reykjavik as well. Icelandair covers a majority of the costs, including lodging and airfare, for the seminar, making it an inexpensive way for Alaska destinations to reach potential tour operators from Europe and the United Kingdom.

Icelandair is a codeshare partner of Alaska Airlines, meaning Alaska Airlines frequent fliers can earn miles on trips to Iceland and Europe.

The first flights are scheduled for May 15, and will continue through mid-September. It is approximately a seven hour flight from Reykjavik to Anchorage.

Media FAMs generate radio, print and online coverage

The Mat-Su CVB hosted national travel writer Michelle Newman on a two-week familiarization trip around the Valley in late August, and coverage is already starting to be received on national radio outlets.

The CVB participates in numerous media FAM trips each year through Thompson and Co., the state of Alaska's public relations contractor. Once a year, however, the CVB brings up a national writer for a more in-depth look at the Mat-Su Valley.

"By hosting a travel writer on our own, we can give them more of a Mat-Su experience than the typical one or two days they get through the state's office," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager.

Newman writes for the San Antonio Express, the Houston Chronicle, AAA Magazine and freelances for other outlets. Less than a week after returning home from her trip, she highlighted the Mat-Su Valley in a nine-minute radio interview on a nationally syndicated radio show.

"Michelle was amazed at our area's diversity, and the amount of things to do for traveling families," Ressler said. "She left with notebooks filled with story ideas."

During her stay in the Mat-Su Valley, Newman visited Talkeetna, Wasilla and Palmer, including stops at the Iditarod, Musk Ox Farm, Reindeer Farm, the Alaska State Fair. She also spent time at the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge and other



Journalist Michelle Newman feeds Denali, a bull moose, at the Reindeer Farm in the Butte in late August. Newman was brought to the Mat-Su Valley by the Mat-Su CVB, and spent portions of two weeks exploring the many fun things to see and do.

Talkeetna properties, as well as around the core area, including stops at the Matanuska Creamery.

"Michelle isn't an outdoors writer, which we typically see, so it's great to get

our message to a new audience through her coverage," Ressler said. "She's very focused on cultural stories, as well as stories about food. Alaska Grown was perfect for her."

Mat-Su CVB participating in Alaska Media Roadshow

The Mat-Su CVB is attending the Alaska Media Roadshow in October in Santa Barbara, Calif., to meet with top travel writers and journalists from around the country.

The annual event has led to coverage of the Mat-Su Valley in numerous print, online and broadcast publications.

"It's a great opportunity to meet with all of the top journalists in one setting, maximizing our media relations efforts," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager. "It's been very successful for us in the past, and we're looking forward to it again this year."

During the two-day event, Mat-Su CVB has 25 prescheduled appointments with journalists who have been through an extensive vetting process. Only highly

qualified journalists with an interest in Alaska are invited to attend the event. Mat-Su CVB, along with 30 other Alaska destinations and companies, make story pitches to the journalists during the appointments.

"I research the journalists to find out what their angle is, or what niche market they serve, so we have the best appointment possible," Ressler said. "You only have 15 minutes with each journalist, so you have to be prepared and ready to pitch appropriate stories."

In the past, the Mat-Su CVB's attendance at the event has generated coverage in the New York Post, the Wall Street Journal, the Today show and various online publications, including nbcnews.com and the Huffington Post.

Journalists represent a wide variety

"It's a great opportunity to meet with all of the top journalists in one setting, maximizing our media relations efforts. It's been very successful for us in the past, and we're looking forward to it again this year."

- Casey Ressler,
Mat-Su CVB

of media outlets, including radio shows, online bloggers, magazine writers and television editors. A handful of journalists work on a freelance basis, while others have specific story assignments and attend Alaska Media Roadshow to augment those assignments and get new ideas on Alaska travel stories.

The event is organized by Thompson & Co PR in Anchorage, the state tourism office's public relations contractor.

Member success story

MICA Guides helping promote Glacier View destination

Guests were zipping with excitement at one of Alaska's newest thrilling attractions – a zip line in Glacier View, near Matanuska Glacier, that MICA Guides opened earlier this summer. It was part of an extremely busy summer for the ice trekking and glacier adventure company.

Owner Don Wray said the zip line attracted a lot of local Alaskans, boosting business not only for his company, but also for the other attractions and restaurants in the area.

"It was a huge hit. The thing we didn't expect was the response from locals. We had over 800 Alaskans come out and zip," Wray said. "So many of them would look around and say how beautiful it is, and that they hadn't been out this way for 15 years.

"After coming out to zip, they'd stick around for lunch or dinner, or to trek on the ice," Wray continued. "We started seeing more RVs making it a weekend, or people coming out to stay."

Wray is part of a group of Mat-Su CVB members and business owners in the Glacier View area who are committed to making the area a unique destination. He helped erect an informational kiosk along the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway that helps visitors find businesses in the area.

"I saw a lot of people stop at the kiosk, and we got a couple of calls from people who were at the kiosk and saw the information," Wray said.

MICA Guides also partnered with the Mat-Su CVB on a number of media familiarization trips, photo shoots and tour operator familiarization trips throughout the summer.

"Matanuska Glacier is one of the most spectacular places in Alaska, and MICA Guides showed just how beautiful the place is to national writers, and tour operators," Mat-Su CVB Marketing and Communications Manager Casey Ressler said. "From the zip line to river adventures to ice trekking, MICA Guides has shown off the area to visitors for years, and that reflects positively on the entire region."

Wray said this summer was one of the busiest ever for MICA Guides.

"River conditions were great, and the zip was a huge hit. We even did a wedding out on the glacier," Wray said.

For information about MICA Guides, members can visit the company's Web site at www.micaguides.com.



MICA Guides lead ice treks on Matanuska Glacier, as well as offer zip lining and river adventures.

Mat-Su CVB pays respect to former board member, friend

The Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau lost a longtime board member and friend with the passing of Craig Seibert earlier this summer.

Seibert, along with his wife Susie, owned Gate Creek Cabins in Petersville and was integral as a member of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. His dedication to winter tourism helped shape many Mat-Su CVB programs.

"The Mat-Su Valley lost a great friend in Craig," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "He was passionate about everything Alaska offered, and that passion showed in every facet of his life."

Seibert came to Alaska in 1977 to work with the Yellow Pages. From there, his love affair with Alaska only strengthened. He and Susie opened Susie's Lakeview B&B on Campbell Lake in Anchorage, and through the endeavor, Craig took an interest in maintaining the garden.

In 2000, the Seiberts became the owners of Gate Creek Cabins, offering snowmachine tours of Petersville and hosting countless weddings. Craig tended to the immaculate gardens and provided visitors with memorable experiences throughout the years. He was quick with a story or to lend a helping hand to his

"The Mat-Su Valley lost a great friend in Craig. He was passionate about everything Alaska offered, and that passion showed in every facet of his life."

- Bonnie Quill,
Mat-Su CVB Executive Director

friends and neighbors.

A celebration of life was held in Anchorage on July 13, and everyone had a favorite Craig story to tell.

"That's the thing about Craig – he always made you feel like a friend, whether he knew you for years or he just met you," Quill said.

Important tourism industry dates to remember

Sept. 9	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon <i>Mat-Su Borough Candidate Forum</i>	Evangelo's, noon
Oct. 5-7	Oxygen & Octane Expo <i>Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Dena'ina Center (Anchorage)
Oct. 9-11	Alaska Travel Industry Association Convention <i>Mat-Su CVB staff will attend</i>	Anchorage
Oct. 12	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon <i>Update on Hatcher Pass development</i>	Evangelo's, noon
Oct. 21-22	Alaska Media Roadshow <i>Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Santa Barbara, Calif.
Nov. 9	Mat-Su CVB annual meeting/workshop	Evangelo's, 10 a.m.
Nov. 9	Mat-Su CVB Stars of the Industry Awards luncheon	Evangelo's, noon
Nov. 22-23	Mat-Su CVB office closed for Thanksgiving holiday	

Welcome new Mat-Su CVB members

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alpinroseinn@gci.net
www.alpinroseinn.com

Northern Susitna Institute

(907) 733-7111

info@northernsusitnainstitute.org
www.northernsusitnainstitute.org

Out of the Wild Guesthouse Talkeetna

(907) 733-2701
talkeetnapro@yahoo.com
www.talkeetnapro.com

Skwentna Roadhouse

(907) 733-2726
adventures@skwentnaroadhouse.com
www.skwentnaroadhouse.com

The Alaska Boathouse

(907) 892-8595
dinner@akboathouse.com
www.akboathouse.com

Burkeshore Marina

(907) 892-6300
info@burkeshore.com
www.burkeshore.com

Denali Cabins

(907) 376-1992
info@denali-cabins.com
www.denali-cabins.com

Denali Backcountry Adventure

(907) 376-1992
info@denalilodges.com
www.denalibackcountryadventure.com

Fountainhead Hotels In Fairbanks

(907) 456-3642
hotels@fdifairbanks.com
www.fountainheadhotels.com

The Dream A Dream Dog Farm

(907) 495-1197
vhalter@mtaonline.net
www.vernhalter.com

Tundra Rose Guest Cottages

(907) 745-5865
info@tundrarosecabins.com
www.tundrarosecabins.com

Sheep Mountain Homestead Cabins

(907) 250-7470
shibori@gci.net
www.vrbo.com/419807

Locals Pub & Pizza

(907) 357-3100
grandview@ak.net
www.localspizzapub.com

Talkeetna Denali Visitor Center

(800) 660-2688
info@talkeetnadenali.com
www.talkeetnadenali.com

Grace And Bill's Freedom Hills B & B

(907) 733-2455
gmgermain@att.net
www.gbffreedomhillsbb.com

Denali Southside River Guides

(907) 733-7238
info@denaliriverguides.com
www.denaliriverguides.com

Aurora Heli-Expeditions

(907) 723-5097
rickcasillo@yahoo.com
www.auroraheliexpeditions.com

Kodiak Island CVB

(907) 486-4782
visit@kodiak.org
www.kodiak.org

Flavors West LLC.

lindalong@gmail.com
www.Qdoba.com



The Mat-Su CVB Web site, www.alaskavisit.com, has many features to assist visitors in researching their vacation. New features are currently in the development process, including TripAdvisor integration.

Web site gets additional features to assist site visitors, members

The only constant with the Mat-Su CVB's Web site is that there is no constant – the site is always evolving and adding key features for members.

In the next few months, more features will be added, including the integration of TripAdvisor in member listings, giving site visitors access to reviews without having to leave www.alaskavisit.com.

“The Web site is our top marketing tool, and we are always looking to make it even more useful to site visitors,” said Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager. “With Internet marketing and Web site development, there is always something new on the horizon, and we take pride in bringing a lot of those new things to our members.”

In the next month, the TripAdvisor integration will go live on the member listings section of the CVB's Web site. A new tab will be incorporated, and the exact reviews from TripAdvisor will be posted.

This development will help the site's “usability,” Ressler said.

“Research has shown that an overwhelming majority of travelers use TripAdvisor to make purchasing

decisions regarding travel,” Ressler said. “By bringing those reviews on to our site, we don't lose those users. They can do their research and make purchasing decisions in one easy place.”

Another development that went live in the fall is a new blog module that allows CVB staff to post current content, photos and more. Having a blog on the site is important because it greatly aids search engine optimization efforts, and keeps the site dynamic and constantly evolving.

In the next few months, the home page will get a minor change as well. Social media integration is planned, with Facebook feeds, blog posts, Twitter mentions and YouTube videos feeding into the home page.

“Social media is so important, and we'll be able to bring all our social media efforts into one hub, giving visitors access to the most current information possible,” Ressler said. “Social media marketing is an important part of our overall marketing philosophy.”

The Mat-Su CVB also partnered with the Alaska App to give members a free listing on the popular smartphone application designed by the Alaska Channel.

Award nominations sought

The Mat-Su CVB will honor the “Stars of the Industry” during the annual awards luncheon on Nov. 9 at Evangelo's. Each November, in conjunction with the annual meeting, the CVB honors members who have shined during the last year.

Nominations are now being solicited for award winners. Members can use Page 11 of this newsletter to submit their nominations.

The Cheechako award is given annually to a business that has not only survived, but prospered during its infancy. Starting a business is a challenge, but award winners have overcome this hurdle and enjoyed success. Recent winners include Turkey Red and Flying Squirrel Bakery.

The Tourism Angel Award is handed out to an individual who goes above and beyond expectations in promoting tourism in the Mat-Su Valley. Award winners in the past have contributed to Mat-Su CVB's efforts to market the Mat-Su Valley, and have the entire tourism industry in mind in their promotional efforts. Recent winners Cindy Bettine and Wes Tegeler.

The Gold Star Award is given to a business or organization that led the way in the tourism industry in the last year. Winners have been identified as leaders in the industry, and have helped other tourism businesses to succeed based on their efforts. Recent honorees include the Mat-Su Health Foundation and Deshka Landing Outdoor Association.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community or organization that has developed and promoted tourism in the past year. Winners in recent years include Chickaloon Village and the Palmer Chamber.

Other special awards are also considered. In the past, the CVB has given out the “It Happens” award to a business that has taken lemons and turned them into lemonade, and also the “Spirit of Tourism” award that honors an individual who has left a life-long mark on the industry.

After nominations are received, the Awards Committee meets to review them and choose award winners. For information on the award nomination process, interested people can contact Justin Saunders at 746-5032 or Justin@alaskavisit.com.

Nomination form for ‘Stars of the Industry’ awards

Northern Lights Award

Honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development.
I nominate:

Gold Star Award

This prestigious award recognizes a business or organization that has made a significant accomplishment in the tourism industry.
I nominate:

Tourism Angel Award

Awarded to an individual who has supported and assisted Mat-Su CVB and has shown true concern for the success and growth of all members in the Mat-Su Borough.
I nominate:

Cheechako Award

Awarded to a new tourism business, organization or entity showing entrepreneurial zeal and managing not only to survive, but to thrive in its early years.
I nominate:

... It Happens Award

Awarded to an individual, business or organization that took a lemon and made lemonade. It is intended to laugh with, not at, others!
I nominate:

Special Awards

If you feel someone deserves recognition but doesn't fit a category, tell us who they are and why they merit special commendation!

come North to Adventure

- Experience Denali
- Walk on Glaciers
- Explore Hatcher Pass



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Mat-Su!

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