

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2014

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## Nov. 7 Mat-Su CVB annual meeting focused on 'telling our stories'

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting its annual meeting and a member workshop on Nov. 7 at Evangelo's, featuring a national speaker that will teach members how to better tell their stories.

Sparkloft Media is a leading tourism communications company. The Mat-Su CVB is bringing up Sparkloft Media to work with members during a 2-hour workshop prior to the annual meeting.

"We all have stories to tell – from what makes our tours and businesses authentic, to the impact of the tourism industry," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "Sparkloft are the experts at helping destinations get their stories out there, and we're excited about bringing them to the Mat-Su."

The workshop begins at 9 a.m.

Following the workshop, the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting and report to the members takes place. Staff members will outline the successes of 2014, and talk about the future marketing efforts of the bureau.

At noon, the annual Stars of the Industry awards luncheon takes place. Nominations for this year's awards can be found on page 10.

"Each year, we honor those who have gone above and beyond, not just for their individual business, but also for the tourism industry as a whole," Quill said.

Tickets for the workshop and luncheon are \$35 and are available by calling 746-5000. Sponsorship opportunities are available as well. For sponsorship information, contact Justin Saunders at 745-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com.

## FAM trip a-moose-ment



Mat-Su CVB marketing manager Casey Ressler joined representatives from Delta Airlines and Japanese tour operators during a familiarization trip in Talkeetna in June, including this stop on a Mahay's Riverboat trip. For more details about the many FAM trips the Mat-Su CVB participated in this summer, please see Page 7.

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Three seats on the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors will be open in the October elections. Former board member Nicole Bendle resigned her seat, which will be filled in October.

*From the president's desk*

# Get involved in the future of the tourism industry

Throughout this newsletter, you'll find updates on the many projects the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors and staff are working on to promote the Mat-Su Valley as a premier destination.

While some of these projects are more visible than others, behind the scenes the work continues to keep the Mat-Su Valley as a leader in the tourism industry.

This is an exciting time for the tourism industry in the Mat-Su Valley, thanks to two large infrastructure projects – the South Denali Visitor Center and the Gateway Visitor Center – currently in the planning and design phases. Last year, the Government Peak Recreation Area was developed by the Mat-Su Borough, and later this year the Mat-Su College Theater will be completed. These infrastructure projects are important in attracting more visitors to our area.

The South Denali and Gateway projects will have a profound impact on the industry here, and both are important to not only growing visitation, but also giving our visitors a better and more complete Mat-Su experience. These projects require a lot of teamwork, partnerships and leadership. This doesn't extend only to the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors – you, as members, have a vested interest in these projects and can help in ensuring their successes. By getting involved, you will not only help your business in the long run, you'll be working to grow the entire tourism industry and have a lasting effect on the economy of the Mat-Su Borough.

The South Denali Visitor Center project is very important and will help

keep visitors in the Susitna Valley longer by giving them a unique Denali experience within the borders of the Mat-Su Valley. This will also increase visitor spending.

Executive Director Bonnie Quill has been a champion on this project for years, and last month she helped organize a site inspection, in conjunction with Alaska State Parks, for the Alaska Travel Industry Association Marketing Committee and Board of Directors during their meetings in Talkeetna. This highlights our area to a statewide audience of influential decision makers in the tourism industry.

As you all know by now, the Mat-Su CVB is also the driving force in the Gateway Visitor Center project as well. For the last eight years, we've been working hard, building community

partnerships and gathering support from local leaders. We're proud of how far we've come, and excited about what the future holds. This project will benefit not only our members and those in the tourism industry, but every resident of the Mat-Su Valley, as well as our visitors.

As members of the tourism industry in the Mat-Su Valley, I encourage you to get involved and contribute to the long-term growth of the industry we all care so much about by becoming more aware of these projects and sharing your interest and enthusiasm with your friends, business associates, and your local legislators.

*Craig Saunders (alaskavisit@alaska.com) is the owner of Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours and the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.*



**Craig Saunders,  
Alaska Backcountry  
Adventure Tours**

## Let your voice be heard at the CVB annual meeting

Do you have an issue you'd like the membership of the Mat-Su CVB to consider acting on during the Nov. 7 annual meeting? Members may submit resolutions for consideration a week prior to the meeting.

Resolutions will be read and voted

on by the membership, if a quorum of members is present. If a quorum is not established, the resolutions will be referred to the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors for future considerations.

For more information, contact Bonnie Quill at [bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com).

## From the executive director

# Annual meeting focused on telling our stories better

Each year we try to choose a topic or theme for our annual meeting that is trending and will inspire our membership.

This year's "Storytelling" theme was chosen to tell our stories on many levels. First through our media assistance efforts with travel writers and editors, we will share the many stories generated by the Mat-Su CVB in print, radio, television and web. More powerful than advertising, our public relations outreach to journalists has resulted in an immeasurable amount of ad value in national and international publications.

Second, we will share our stories generated by you. Video that Membership Manager Justin has logged this past year as he visited with members throughout the Valley with camera in hand will be shown. Justin is in the process of editing that footage and sharing it through our media channels.

Finally, we have invited Sparkloft Media, an expert on the subject to speak

on the power and influence storytelling has on creating awareness and generating business.

Sparkloft Media's clients range from the city of Atlanta, Visit California, Germany Tourism Office, Keen and our own Alaska Airlines. They create engaging, relevant content in multi-platform award-winning campaigns. Our speaker will share the formula on how to post, tweet, pin, blog, etc. and retell and connect your story to a much larger audience.

Last September I attended a session at the Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus conference on Storytelling by Sparkloft President Martin Stoll. It was by far the best session of the conference. As a speaker, he is a storyteller. Although

he was teaching us how to engage our audience, he was captivating me with

examples of simple stories and how they quickly became viral. I learned how linking and retelling your story will extend the reach on your social media platforms. This session will not disappoint you.

It is our goal to bring to you a workshop session that will have a positive impact on your business. Don't miss this special event sponsored by Mat-Su CVB prior to our annual meeting and awards luncheon. You will learn how to tell your story in a much more engaging and connected way.



**Bonnie Quill**

*Bonnie Quill is the executive director at the Mat-Su CVB.*

## CVB Board of Directors nominations accepted

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors is accepting nominations for potential board candidates, prior to the October election. Elected directors serve three-year terms and help shape the policy and direction of the organization.

This year, the terms of Mabel Wimmer, Nicole Bendle and Dee Dee Kay are expiring.

"Serving on the board of directors is an opportunity to represent the tourism industry and help guide the future," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill.

Self-nominations are accepted, and all nominations are reviewed by a Nominations Committee prior to being placed on the ballot. Interested members should submit a declaration of candidacy no later than Sept. 24 by e-mailing Bonnie Quill at [bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com). By Oct. 7, candidates should submit a 300-word statement and a color photograph.

Board members are expected to participate in 4-6 board meetings a year, as well as a few special meetings.

After review of the candidates, the ballots are mailed to members by Oct. 9. Ballots must be returned to the CVB by 5 p.m. Oct. 30. Ballots remained sealed until the elections committee meets on Oct. 31 to open and count them.

Continuing on the board are Craig Saunders of Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours, Cheryl Metiva of the Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman, Karen Harris of Alaska Garden Gate B&B and Cottages, Rick Peterson of the McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge, Mark Austin of the Palmer Musk Ox Farm, Zack Steer of Sheep Mountain Lodge and Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours.

## Puppies steal the FAM show



**Two tour operators from India enjoy the smallest FAM trip participants at the Iditarod Trail Headquarters. Participants in the India FAM were interested in learning more about the race's history, and how it fits into potential tours their companies can offer in the future.**

# Gateway Land Purchase Celebration a success

The Mat-Su CVB hosted a successful Land Purchase Celebration on June 6, kicking off the Gateway Visitor Center project in style.

State Reps. Bill Stoltze and Shelley Hughes were on hand to address the crowd of more than 100, as were Mat-Su Borough Mayor Larry DeVilbiss and other elected officials.

All the local elected officials voiced their support for the project, and expressed excitement for what the future brings for the project, both for Valley residents and visitors.

"It's an honor to be part of something that will have a legacy for not just the economy of the Valley, but really what makes a statement of what the Valley has to offer," Stoltze told the gathering. "This is just the postage stamp right now. Wait until you see the whole letter we're going to deliver to our Alaskan neighbors."

DeVilbiss echoed those sentiments. He also said he and Janet Kincaid, who both served on the Matanuska Electric Association board of directors together, both felt the site would be ideal for the Gateway Visitor Center when MEA originally purchased the property.

"I really look forward to what is going to happen here," DeVilbiss said. "I'm glad to see it's happening."

The event was held to celebrate the acquisition and purchase of the site, located at Mile 36 Glenn Hwy., for a new Gateway Visitor Center.

In May 2013, the Alaska Legislature appropriated \$1 million to the Mat-



**The Overby Family Band provided live music for the Gateway Land Purchase Agreement Celebration on a gorgeous June afternoon. Reps. Bill Stoltze and Shelley Hughes were on hand to lend their support to the Gateway Visitor Center project.**

Su Borough to acquire the site from Matanuska Electric Association. MEA had purchased the site - the old Homestead RV Park - for right of way in conjunction with their new Eklutna power project.

Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill was thrilled with the turnout, and the excitement building with the project.

"This is going to be a visitor center the entire Mat-Su Valley can be proud of, and the celebration was the first of many steps we're taking to reach that goal," Quill said.

At the event, 10 community partners in the project had booths set up to talk about how a new Gateway Visitor Center would help their organizations. These included

Alaska State Parks, Great Land Trust, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Mat-Su Borough Parks and Recreation, Matanuska Greenbelt Trails, Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Association, Mat-Su Trails Foundation, Chickaloon Village Tribal Council and the Mat-Su Salmon Partnership/The Nature Conservancy.

The Overby Family Band provided live music before Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors President Craig Saunders read a letter from Gov. Sean Parnell about the project and introduced Stoltze and Hughes, who supported the project in the Legislature and were instrumental in getting the initial funding.

The project got another welcomed boost earlier this spring, when the Legislature appropriated \$1.235 million for site design and engineering. A Request for Proposals was issued by the Mat-Su Borough in late August, and a contractor is expected to be selected by the end of November, with work beginning this winter.

"We've got great momentum on the project, and it's because of the partnerships we've formed and the energy of everyone involved," Quill said. "But we've got to keep that momentum going, and that's what we intend to do."

For more information about the Gateway Visitor Center, people can contact Quill at 746-5000 or [bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com).

The project's Web site is [www.matsvalleyvisitorcenter.com](http://www.matsvalleyvisitorcenter.com).



**Kim Sollien of The Great Land Trust talks to an event attendee about how the Gateway Visitor Center project will create awareness and value for visitors and residents. The Great Land Trust was one of 10 partner organizations that participated in the June 6 event.**

# Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates answer survey

Each fall, the Mat-Su CVB surveys Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates in the weeks prior to the election. Candidates are asked for their views on relevant tourism topics, including marketing, support for infrastructure and more.

This year, there are three candidates for two Assembly seats in the October elections - District 4 and 5.

Here are the questions, and the candidates' responses:

## 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%. This year the administration projected during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$715,000 for fiscal year 2015 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65% of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax) collection of \$1.1 million. The assembly last year supported action to extend the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB for three years through FY16 with the above formula. Do you support the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB? Why or why not?

**Steve Colligan, District 4 Candidate:** I supported it as a seated assembly person because I think it is a good investment with measurable returns to create more opportunities.

**Bill Kendig, District 4 Candidate:** Yes I support it. The CVB is a great help with promoting tourism which in turn helps our small businesses and I see our small businesses as the backbone of the economy.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5 Candidate:** I support the existing grant agreement. The tourism industry fuels economic growth throughout the entire Borough. It provides a livelihood for many residents. We must promote tourism, invest in it and develop more infrastructure which supports the growth of the industry.

## 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?

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** Oppose.

**Bill Kendig, District 5:** I would oppose the use of the bed tax for anything else than tourism for the same reasons as the first question. Tourism is vital for the economic growth of our small business.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** Oppose. Proceeds derived from the Bed Tax should be reinvested to support the growth of tourism.

## Question 3

On August 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?

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** Tourism is one of the important pillars that is our local, overall economy. I support the efforts of the economic development plan, but it is now time to ACT and DO. I support the bed tax and its use for the continued reinvestment to grow the tourism sector of our economy. I encourage the involvement of experienced individuals from the industry guiding and directing the Borough administration and Assembly. I will not support the use or dilution of funds collected to be diverted for other purposes. I fully support the industry driven approach where the Mat-Su Borough is the partner that facilitates the collection of the industry specific tax.

**Bill Kendig, District 5:** I rate tourism at the top again for the same reasons. Tourism is vital to the economic growth of the Valley.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** A main focus of much of my community service over the past seven years has been dedicated to promoting Big Lake as a destination for visitors who enjoy both winter and summer time activities. Big Lake is the "Year Round Playground."

As founder and president of Big Lake Trails, Inc., Vice President of the Community Council and Board member of the Chamber of Commerce, it is easy to see the positive impact that tourism has

to our local economy. Tourism provides business growth opportunities for other supporting businesses, increases residency and allows the creation of family wage earning jobs.

In my opinion, tourism is the No. 1 industry.

## 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 partnership South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center. The Mat-Su CVB received a National Scenic Byways grant to complete a feasibility study for the new Gateway Visitor Center and in June 2010 completed the plan and identified a site (Mile 36 Glenn Highway). We urge you to review the study at [www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com](http://www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com) The assembly has listed the Gateway on its legislative priorities and the Mat-Su CVB board and members communicated the benefits to our legislators. The borough received \$1 million in the FY14 State Capital budget for site acquisition and \$1.235 for design and site work in FY15. This year the final request of \$5 million for construction has a \$2 million match (the sale of our current location). Do you support the development of a new South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center? Why or why not?

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** I think the new visitor's center is a great idea. I believe that it would encourage more use of existing resources from in state visitors as well as a resource and experience for out of state visitors to spend time in the Mat-Su rather than just pass through.

I think it is appropriate for the Borough and industry to partner together to establish and implement (DO) the next steps to secure funding and accomplish something.

As a board member of the Alaska and Safari Club International, Alaska the premiere conservation group in our state, I have been involved in partnering with sportsmen, subsistence and commercial interest to follow our state constitution and grown more resources so that we are not fighting over the last of anything.

As a business person and successful entrepreneur, I support the creation of new wealth in our economy by working

**See SURVEY, Page 6**

## Membership luncheons kick off with candidate forum

With the busy summer season winding down, the Mat-Su CVB will begin regular monthly membership luncheons, covering a wide variety of topics pertinent to the tourism industry.

The first monthly luncheon kicks off Sept. 12 at Evangelo's in Wasilla, and is the annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidate forum.

Candidates for Assembly seats will be on hand to answer questions from the audience and give their views on topics that impact the Valley. At the forum, the candidates will also answer questions from the audience about a wide range of topics impacting the Mat-Su Borough, and the tourism industry.

The event is free to attend, and lunch can be purchased directly from Evangelo's for \$15.

In October, the focus shifts to the new Mat-Su College theater, and the opportunities that exist with this new

infrastructure project. Matt Sale of Mat-Su College will give an overview of the project, and talk about how the new theater will be a great addition to the Valley.

The Mat-Su College theater presentation is at noon on Oct. 17 at Turkey Red in downtown Palmer. The meeting is free, and lunch can be purchased directly from Turkey Red for \$15.

November is the Mat-Su CVB Voice of the Membership annual meeting and workshop (see related story, Page 1). This half-day event also features the annual Stars of the Industry awards luncheon at Evangelo's. Tickets are \$35 for the event, and can be purchased by contacting Justin Saunders at 746-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com.

Membership luncheons are a great way to meet other members and offer networking opportunity.

### Upcoming member luncheons

#### Sept. 12 - Noon

Mat-Su Borough Assembly  
Candidate Forum  
Evangelo's

#### Oct. 17 - Noon

Mat-Su College Theater  
Turkey Red

#### Nov. 7 - 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting  
Workshops begin at 9 a.m.  
Annual meeting at 11 a.m.  
Awards luncheon at noon  
Evangelo's

### Mat-Su Borough Election information

Election Day is Oct. 7

Absentee voting in person begins Sept. 22 at State of Alaska Div. of Elections (1700 E. Bogard Road) and the Mat-Su Borough building (350 E. Dahlia)

Two Assembly seats up for election - Districts 4 and 5. Candidates are Steve Colligan, Bill Kendig and Dan Mayfield

Visit [www.matsugov.us](http://www.matsugov.us) or call the Mat-Su Borough Clerks Office at 861-8683

## SURVEY: Candidates respond

### Continued from Page 5

together; government and industry. Economic development will not succeed if government and industry work independent and alone. Government can facilitate opportunity, but it takes individuals and businesses to turn opportunity into jobs. I have worked with government and industry for 25 years. We need true business experience on our Assembly right now to transition our local economy toward success and independent of our national problems. Just like sportsmen, we need to turn our attention toward creating more and new opportunities in our community, rather than fighting over the last dollar.

As a business person on the assembly I will reach out to industry experts for the answers and direction and help direct the Borough to take actions and establish regulations that are good for industry and the people of the Mat-Su. I am a level headed individual who has the skills and experience to have engaging conversations with opposing parties to establish common goals or identify areas of improvement.

I support the current relationship between the Mat-Su Borough government and the local tourism industry.

I support industry guiding and partnering with the borough to setting

goals, priorities and timelines; and then achieving them as industry; thus growing the Tourism industry, not growing government.

I have the business, personal and political skills to help move our Borough forward. I have supported MSCVB in my first term and I will continue to support MSCVB during my second term. Keep up the great work!

**Bill Kendig, District 5:** I strongly support this effort. It's worth every penny. We need to invest in our tourism to get a return.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** I support the development of the South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center.

When originally constructed, the location of the Mat-Su CVB may have been adequate, however, with the construction of the highway interchange and the hospital, the present location has too many limitations and is not well suited for visitor access.

The Visitor Center needs to be relocated in order to increase access, increase length of stay and to effectively educate visitors on opportunities.

Relocation, together with the exciting build out plans, will facilitate a better visitor experience and a stronger tourism industry.

## Mat-Su CVB hosts numerous travel trade FAM trips

The Mat-Su CVB showed off the Valley to a wide range of domestic and international tour operators during June, as nine different familiarization trips came through the Mat-Su as part of state-sponsored trips.

Tour operators from Australia, India, China, Japan, the United Kingdom and Korea all participated in the trips. While it was a busy month, it was one filled with great opportunity, said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager.

"Every day, we had new international tour operators coming through, participating in a wide range of activities from flightseeing to visiting the Musk Ox Farm and Matanuska Glacier," Ressler said. "It was a great opportunity to showcase the Valley to operators who expressed their desire to grow the Alaska market in their countries."

Sizes ranged from 16 to a single tour operator. Some of the operators already offer Alaska packages and were looking for products to add, while others are just in the initial stages of designing new Alaska tours.

"The India group in particular was a fantastic opportunity. The participants were very eager to start offering new Alaska packages, and they were blown away by the experience. They all left saying they knew Alaska would be a hit in that emerging market," Ressler said. "For many

of them, this was the first time they have had a first-hand Alaska experience."

The China group included leaders from some of China's top tour companies, giving Alaska great exposure.

Like India, China is one of the Alaska tourism industry's top emerging markets, with plenty of opportunity for future growth.

Australia, Alaska's top international market, had representatives from nine tour companies that do a lot of Alaska business already. Many of the operators were interested in growing their products beyond typical cruise vacations.

"The Mat-Su CVB has participated in the Down Under Sales Mission the last two years, and many of the operators on the FAM trip were familiar with Alaska because of those efforts," Ressler said. "We made the initial contact in Australia, and now those relationships are starting to grow and contribute to growth within that market."

In addition to the tour operators, the state's marketing contractors from both Australia and Japan were in the Valley, hosted by the Mat-Su CVB. Building relationships with the in-market state contractors is also an important part of the international marketing efforts.

"They are the first contact in those countries, so by showing them first-hand what we have to offer, we can keep the Mat-Su Valley top of mind," Ressler said.



Michael Pound from Destination America spent time with Vern Halter of Dream a Dream Dog Farm in June. Pound was in the Valley to experience activities he hopes to include in future tour packages.

## How do familiarization trips work? That all depends

Familiarization – or FAM – trips are a great way to introduce tour operators, members of the media and travel agents to everything a destination has to offer.

So, how do they work? There is no perfect answer. Often, it all depends on what type of FAM trip it is going to be, who is organizing it and the purpose.

Frequently, it's the state of Alaska's tourism office that puts together statewide itineraries. In this case, the state identifies the particular market – what countries they are from, what tour operators, etc. – and then puts together a rough itinerary, based on transportation arrangements. Once the dates are lined up, the state then reaches out to local CVBs to line up activities and dining to best showcase that area.

As an example, let's say the state has a group of tour operators interested in building their products with soft

adventure. The state has them coming south from Fairbanks on the Alaska Railroad and spending a night in Talkeetna. Then, the state contacts the Mat-Su CVB to find appropriate lodging and activities, within the timeframe of the itinerary. The Mat-Su CVB then reaches out to members who fit that particular interest and asks the members if they can comp or discount the activities. On these types of FAM trips, the schedule and locations can be quite rigid.

On media trips, we try to pair journalists up with their particular area of expertise – an adventure sports writer is going to be much more interested in trekking on Matanuska Glacier as opposed to a food writer, for example.

The Mat-Su CVB also works with the state's public relations company to assist writers and other travel journalists with individual requests. This may include farm

tours, RV trips and more. These types of FAM trips are often much more flexible both in terms of time and itinerary.

Twice a year, the Mat-Su CVB conducts its own media FAM, inviting one writer in the summer and winter to visit the Valley for five days. On these types of FAM, we have control over their itinerary and because it spans a week, there is greater opportunity to highlight many more activities and properties.

FAM trips are an investment in the future, whether it be selling future tours to operators you hosted, or generating media coverage. It isn't instant gratification, however – sometimes it takes years to see the work of FAM trips pay off.

If you have any questions about FAM trips, how they work or the planning process, give Casey Ressler a call at 746-5037 or e-mail him at [casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com).

## Event highlights the Valley to meeting planners

The Mat-Su CVB hosted a successful meeting planner luncheon in late June, bringing together 19 meeting planners with participating members at Turkey Red in Palmer.

At the event, participating members highlighted their properties, and talked about how they work with meeting planners organizing retreats, conferences and meetings.

"It's been several years since we hosted a meeting planner luncheon, so we were very happy with the response from the planners, and the members," said Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler. "The meeting planners I talked with following the luncheon said they learned a lot about what the Mat-Su Valley has to offer."

Meeting planners represented a wide variety of organizations, from the Alaska Bar Association to telecommunications companies.

Members who participated included accommodations, activities and facilities, including the new Mat-Su College theater and the Government Peak chalet in Hatcher Pass.



Mat-Su CVB marketing manager Casey Ressler addresses the meeting planners and participating members at the June 25 meeting planner luncheon. Nineteen meeting planners from around Southcentral Alaska attended.

"Now is an exciting time for the meetings market because of new infrastructure. By showcasing some of these new properties to meeting planners, we are making it easier and easier to bring corporate retreats, larger meetings and conferences to the Valley," Ressler said.

The Mat-Su CVB plans to host a meeting planner luncheon each spring following the success of the event.

"This year's event was very successful, but we also learned a few things to make next year's event even better for our members," Ressler said.

### Member success story

## Knik River Lodge expands tour options at Knik Glacier

Tucked away in the Knik River Valley, big things are happening at Knik River Lodge this summer, and in the future.

Owner Peter Schadee enjoyed a booming summer season, thanks to an increase in helicopter flights to the glacier and partnerships with other industry businesses.

"The tours really took off this year, we more than doubled our flights," Schadee said. "The dog sled tour is by far the most popular tour, with the glacier landings second."

Schadee is also working with Rust's Flying Service to get visitors to the Knik Glacier area, which has been successful.

Schadee also said the lodge is offering a kayak tour at Lake George, where visitors get to paddle between giant icebergs on the lake. Overall, the variety



Knik River Lodge is located at the end of Knik River Road.

of tours offered through Knik River Lodge has helped Schadee grow his business and offer guests a number of different options as to how they can experience the beauty of the area and the glacier trips.

The lodge offers the helicopter trips to the public – they don't necessarily have to be staying the night at the

lodge.

"The great thing about our helicopter flights is that we can grow the business by focusing on people that have a day to spend in the Anchorage/Mat-Su area, they don't have to stay here," Schadee explained. "This is the first year where we have more people just coming for a flight than we have for

overnight accommodations, so that opens a whole new growth avenue."

Another exciting development for Knik River Lodge has to do with access. Knik River Road is now paved all the way to lodge, making it easier for visitors to get there. Throughout the summer, Department of Transportation workers have been improving drainages, widening, grading and paving the road. Last week, hydroseeding was completed to finish the project.

Schadee is planning to add seven more rooms to the lodge in the near future, bringing the total to 22, making it one of the larger lodges in the area, yet still retaining a small and personal feeling.

For more information about Knik River Lodge, visit [www.knikriverlodge.com](http://www.knikriverlodge.com).



## Mat-Su VIC closing Sept. 14 after busy summer season

The Mat-Su Visitor Information Center will close Sept. 14, bringing an end to another busy summer of assisting visitors with information about the Valley.

VIC Manager Lorraine Jallen said each year, her staff looks forward to meeting the travelers who stop in, and pointing them in the right direction.

“We get a lot of pride out of telling visitors about things they may not know about, and a lot of times they come back and thank us because it was a highlight of their trip,” Jallen said.

The world map in the VIC is peppered with pins from faraway countries, representing visitors who call those areas home.

“We get people from all around the world – Europe, Australia, everywhere in the Lower 48,” Jallen said.

The Mat-Su CVB offices remain open yearround in the basement of the VIC. The Mat-Su CVB offices can be reached by calling 746-5000.



Mat-Su VIC Manager Lorraine Jallen assists a visitor earlier this summer. The VIC will close for the winter season on Sept. 14.

## New destination video to be available in September

A film crew from Arizona-based Commotion Studios was in the Valley in August, shooting high-definition video from Talkeetna to Matanuska Glacier for a new destination video for the Mat-Su CVB.

The new video project was part of a grand prize won by the Mat-Su CVB in April. Membership Manager Justin Saunders' video featuring the Iditarod was chosen to be the best among destinations from around the country in a contest hosted by SimpleView, the company that handles Web site development for CVBs around the country. The prize was a

destination video, including all shooting, editing and the finished product.

“We could have spent weeks filming here. You have an amazing destination,” Matt George, owner of Commotion Studios, said.

The two-man crew was in the Valley for three days, but they made the most of their time by visiting numerous areas, and participating in a range of activities.

“The scenery is absolutely amazing, and the activities you have are great, but the thing that stands out to me is how friendly the people are here,” George said.

The new video should be available

following the editing process later this month. When the finished product is available, the Mat-Su CVB will post it on its YouTube account and provide a link for members wanting to include it on their Web sites.

Saunders has also been shooting video throughout the summer during the Visitor Guide ad sales calls, and will be compiling individual videos for the YouTube channel in the near future.

“Video is something we focused on this year, and we’re building up quite a library of high quality, high-definition video,” Ressler said.

## Stay connected!



[www.facebook.com/  
visitmatsu](http://www.facebook.com/visitmatsu)



[www.twitter.com/  
visitmatsu](http://www.twitter.com/visitmatsu)



YouTube  
“yahoomatsu” channel

# Stars of the Industry award nominations accepted

## 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!

Submit nominations to Mat-Su CVB by Oct. 17.

Mat-Su CVB; 7744 E. Visitors View Ct.; Palmer, AK 99645; Fax (907) 746-2688; E-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com)

## Tourism industry calendar of events

Sept. 12	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon – Candidate Forum	Evangelos's, noon
Sept. 14	Mat-Su Visitor Information Center closes for the winter season	
Sept. 17-19	Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus annual convention Bonnie Quill and Casey Ressler will attend	Albuquerque
Oct. 6-10	Alaska Travel Industry Association state convention Bonnie Quill, Casey Ressler, Justin Saunders will attend	Fairbanks
Oct. 17	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon – Mat-Su College Theater	Turkey Red, noon
Oct. 26-27	Alaska Media Road Show Bonnie Quill and Casey Ressler will attend	Santa Barbara
Nov. 7	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting/Stars of the Industry luncheon	Evangelos's, noon
Nov. 27-28	Mat-Su CVB offices closed for Thanksgiving holiday	
Dec. 2-4	ATIA Board Retreat Bonnie Quill will attend	Ketchikan
Jan. 5-6	Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors Strategic Planning Retreat	Palmer

## Welcome these new Mat-Su CVB members

The Mat-Su CVB welcomed seven new members during the summer season, representing a wide range of businesses, from boat rentals to restaurants to customized and escorted RV tours. All members who signed up before Aug. 31 received a complimentary listing in the 2015 Mat-Su Visitor Guide as part of their member benefits.

Welcome to the Mat-Su CVB membership!

Alaska's Fresh Tracks  
(907) 354-8989  
www.alaskafreshtracks.com  
freshtracks@mtaonline.net

Windflower Bed and Breakfast  
(907) 982-5609  
www.windflowerbnb.com  
barry.dorman@yahoo.com

Northshore Ale & Steakhouse  
(907) 631-0913  
northshorealehouse@gmail.com

Great Land Trust  
(907) 746-6406  
www.greatlandtrust.org  
ksollien@greatlandtrust.org

Little Bear Lodges  
(907) 775-1746  
littlebearlodges@gmail.com

Big Lake Boat Rental  
(907) 947-9601  
www.biglakeboatrental.com  
pkenterprise@mtaonline.net

Sheep Creek Lodge  
(907) 495-6227  
www.sheepcreeklodge.com  
info@sheepcreeklodgeak.com

For information on membership, member benefits or to refer a new business to the Mat-Su CVB, contact membership manager Justin Saunders at 746-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com. Members who refer a new member to the Mat-Su CVB receive a free year of upgraded Web listings.

## Snapshot of www.alaskavisit.com

*May - August 2014, compared to same period in 2013*

Unique visitors  
33,025 in 2014  
31,398 in 2013  
5% increase

Bounce rate  
54.5% in 2014  
61.5% in 2013  
7% decrease

Mobile/tablet users  
3,811 in 2014  
916 in 2013  
337% increase

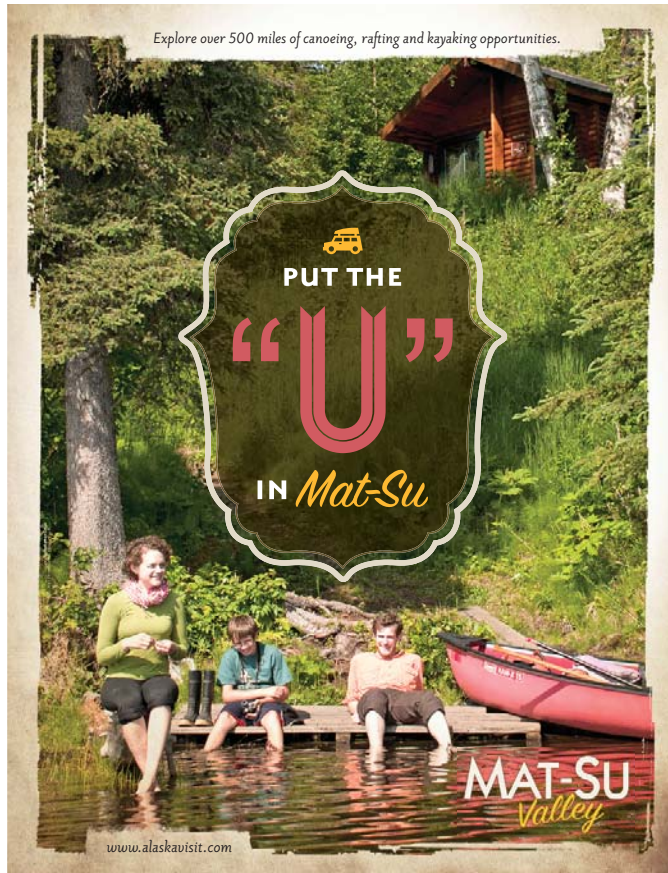
Page views  
83,736 in 2014  
70,766 in 2013  
18% increase

Online Visitor Guide requests  
614 in 2014  
178 in 2013  
245% increase

Soar around Denali, a top-rated Alaska experience.



Explore over 500 miles of canoeing, rafting and kayaking opportunities.



YAHOO!

# Mat-Su

7744 E. Visitors View Ct.  
Palmer, AK 99645

(907) 746-5000  
www.alaskavisit.com