

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2018

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Bill Geist headlines Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting on Nov. 2

Circle your calendar for Nov. 2, because you don't want to miss national speaker Bill Geist when he speaks at the Mat-Su CVB Annual Membership Meeting.

Geist is the "Chief Instigator" at DMOproz (aka Zeitgeist Consulting), a firm specializing in strategic planning, governance, marketing and legislative issues for convention and visitor bureaus, tourism-focused chambers of commerce, economic development organizations and communities. He is a dynamic speaker who has presented at some of the industry's largest conventions and meetings.

Often called the "conscience of the industry," he holds an MBA from the University of Wisconsin and an undergraduate degree in Political Science from Kenyon College. His new book "Destination Leadership," is a deeper and updated version of his first book "Destination Leadership for Boards." Geist is also a contributing author to "Tips from

See GEIST, Page 4



Bill Geist

Candidate forum set for Sept. 7

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting a Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mayor candidate forum on Sept. 7 at noon at Evangelo's. The luncheon kicks off the membership events for the fall season.

Candidates for the assembly seats in District 3, District 6 and District 7, along with candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Mayor seat have all been invited to attend and meet the membership, answer questions and give their viewpoints.

"Tourism and tourism marketing is very important to the Mat-Su Borough, and this is a great chance for our members to see where the candidates stand on issues that affect our industry," Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Bonnie Quill said.

Candidates also submitted responses to a survey mailed to them from the CVB earlier in August. Their responses can be found on Page 6.

In October, the membership luncheon moves to Palmer and Turkey Red. On Oct. 19, the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation will be talking about the foundation, and how they will be investing \$4 million into Mat-Su trails and parks in the next decade.

In November, the membership event is the annual meeting on Nov. 2, featuring Bill Geist (see story, above).

For more information about membership events, contact Justin Saunders at justin@alaskavisit.com.

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From the Board Chair's desk

Mat-Su Borough Assembly invests in the future of tourism marketing

I'd like to give a big "thank you" to the members of the Mat-Su Borough Assembly for their commitment to supporting the tourism industry and recognizing the importance of our industry to the overall economic development of the Valley.

This spring, the assembly passed the FY2019 borough budget, with full funding for the Mat-Su CVB. Additionally, in late June they approved a three-year grant

agreement, including a 65/35 percent bed tax formula, which is extremely good news. This gives us budget certainty and allows for more solid future planning. Previously, the CVB was operating on one-year agreements that made planning quite a challenge.

The relationship between the Mat-Su CVB and the Mat-Su Borough is a strong one, and this commitment by the assembly affirms that. The assembly recognizes the importance of not only the tourism industry as a whole, but also the role the CVB has in fostering growth in the industry and the promotion of our entire destination – from Lake Louise to Denali State Park.

That strong relationship isn't something to be taken for granted, however. It's important for us as an organization, and you as our members, to tell our story and show why destination marketing is important. The return on investment is something that benefits us all.

Competition is high for visitor

dollars, and having a strong and effective destination marketing plan is what has allowed the Mat-Su Valley's tourism industry to continue to grow. And as the tourism industry grows, those tourism dollars continue to circulate throughout our community, which is important – tourism truly is everyone's business.

Along those lines, I'd like to personally invite you to attend our first monthly

membership luncheon of the fall, which is our annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidate forum. It will be Friday, Sept. 7, noon at Evangelo's. This year, there are three assembly seats, along with the mayoral seat, up for election. This is a great time for you to meet the candidates and find out where they stand on local issues.

It's also a great time for the candidates to hear about why we are so passionate about the tourism industry,

what an important role it plays for the local economy and why they should continue to invest in destination marketing.

As the summer hours begin to shorten and we look toward autumn colors and winter snow, I hope this finds that your business has enjoyed a successful, vibrant summer season!

Cheryl Metiva (cherylm@catheatres.com) is the Director of Sales & Marketing at the Extreme Fun Center and The Valley Cinema.



Cheryl Metiva,
Mat-Su CVB Board Chair

Mat-Su CVB Borough Assembly & Mayor Candidate Forum

Friday, September 7 - Noon

Evangelo's - free to attend, lunch available for purchase

Ask candidates for assembly and mayor about issues facing the tourism industry at this moderated forum

From the President & CEO's desk

Mat-Su Visitor Foundation to advance tourism infrastructure

During 2016, when the Mat-Su CVB board was soliciting feedback on alternative funding solutions to complete the Gateway Visitor Center project, one suggestion gained unanimous support - setting up a 501(c)3 foundation to be eligible to apply for federal and charitable grants and receive tax-deductible contributions. A three-person board was appointed and began the application process with the IRS using a Foraker attorney. Articles of Incorporation and bylaws were drafted and submitted along with a narrative of purpose. The Mat-Su Visitor Foundation application was approved by the IRS in December 2017.

The foundation was formed to advance visitor infrastructure that would educate and increase visitor experiences and is focusing on completion of the Gateway Visitor Center as its first project. Below is the projected timeline for completion. The shovel-ready project has \$1.2 million dedicated to the final construction from the sale of the old visitor center which can be leveraged in pursuing grant



opportunities. Board members are: Mark Fleenor, Sheep Mountain Lodge, president; Cole Chambers, Rust's Flying Service & K2 Aviation, vice president; and Travis Taylor, Premier Alaska Tours, secretary-treasurer.

The board has met four times since January and has identified four short term priorities.

1. Identify pre-construction removal and demolition activity on the site.
2. Negotiate purchase or donation of last remaining parcel adjacent to the property.
3. Identify and pursue granting opportunities.
4. Organize a kick-off event to promote the foundation and recruit board

members.

In March the foundation applied for a Gateway Community Council revenue sharing grant to fund a professionally designed grant brochure and update the www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com web site. We recognized that these two requests would enhance and strengthen our future grant prospects in a very competitive field. The foundation was awarded \$8,000 and is currently on schedule to have the brochure and website update done by the end of September. With these new tools the foundation will be scheduling presentations and asking for letters of support to accompany grant applications.

Don't miss attending the annual meeting on Nov. 2 where the foundation board will update the membership on efforts and announce a kick-off event and how you can get involved in the foundation.

Bonnie Quill is the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.



Mat-Su CVB hosts two national travel writers

The Mat-Su CVB hosted two national travel writers on a week-long FAM (familiarization) trip, highlighting all corners of the Valley.

Susan Barnes and Christy Woodrow spent five days exploring, from Talkeetna to Hatcher Pass to Glacier View. The Mat-Su CVB invited them for the trip based on meetings at Alaska Media Road Show.

"They both contribute to a variety of publications, and Christy has a very successful travel blog and a huge social media presence," said Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB. "It was a great week, and I think it left a great impression on them."

Barnes operates the travel blog www.travlingirl.com and also had an assignment from AARP. Woodrow's blog, www.ordinarytraveler.com, has won national awards in the past.

The writers spent a day exploring Talkeetna on a flightseeing trip and a jet boat adventure. They also helicoptered to Knik Glacier, trekked on Matanuska Glacier and hiked around Hatcher Pass.



Christy Woodrow, left, and Susan Barnes spent a week in the Mat-Su Valley in July. Woodrow operates a popular travel blog, Ordinary Traveler, and Susan Barnes is a freelance writer who does work with several publications, including AARP.

Board nominations now accepted

The Mat-Su CVB is accepting nominations for the Board of Directors election, which takes place in October. New board members are seated at the annual meeting on Nov. 2.

This year, there are four openings on the 10-person board, each serving a three-year term. Last winter, Mat-Su CVB members approved a by-laws amendment enacting term limits. Karen Harris of Alaska Garden Gate B&B and Cottages, along with Craig Saunders of Iditarod Trailside Lodging, are terming off the board.

Two other board members, Mark Fleenor and Cheryl Metiva, are eligible to run for re-election.

"Serving on the board is a great way to help shape the future of our destination," Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill said. "It's a way to be a part of the leadership in the industry."

Interested members may self nominate. Candidates should declare their candidacy to Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) by Sept. 21. Candidates must submit a "letter to the membership" of no longer than 300 words, along with a photo, by Sept. 28. Ballots will then be mailed to members no later than Oct. 4, and due back no later than 5 p.m. Oct. 25.

For more information, interested members can call 746-5000.

PROMOTING MAT-SU AT IPW



The Mat-Su CVB met with more than 45 international tour operators during IPW in Denver in May. The Mat-Su CVB partnered with the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council and the Valdez Convention & Visitors Bureau.

GEIST: Mat-Su CVB annual meeting set for Nov. 2

Continued from Page 1

the T-List" by Jens Thraenhart and the Destinations International sponsored "Fundamentals in Destination Marketing." Geist has provided consulting services to over 200 destination marketing organizations since 1995 and is a popular speaker on marketing, trends and destination development across North America. The Mat-Su CVB is excited to host him for its annual meeting.

"Bill is one of the top speakers in the tourism industry, and we are thrilled to be able to bring him to our annual meeting," Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill said. "He is engaging and his presentations are packed with current trends and success stories from other destinations."

The annual meeting begins at 9 a.m. at Evangelo's in Wasilla. Geist will give his presentation, and then from 11 a.m. to noon, the "Voice of the Membership" is the opportunity for members to hear about the CVB's accomplishments the last year as well as future plans, give feedback to the board of directors and have an

"Bill is one of the top speakers in the tourism industry, and we are thrilled to bring him up to our annual meeting. He is engaging and his presentations are packed with current trends and success stories from other destinations."

Bonnie Quill, Mat-Su CVB President & CEO

open forum for dialogue.

At noon, the Stars of the Industry luncheon takes place, also at Evangelo's. To nominate someone for an industry award, please see Page 9 of this newsletter for a form you can print out. Tickets for the annual meeting are \$25 each and include both the meeting and the awards luncheon. There are also sponsorship opportunities available that include tickets.

Travel agents, tour operators experience Mat-Su

This summer, Mat-Su CVB worked with Visit Anchorage and the Alaska Travel Industry Association to host travel agents and tour operators on several familiarization tours in the Valley.

Familiarization – or FAM – tours are important because they highlight what there is to see and do in the Mat-Su Valley to people who will in turn sell those products to their clients. By having them experience Alaska first hand, it gets them excited to sell more.

In late May, the Mat-Su CVB hosted a Visit Anchorage FAM for dinner at Albatross Grill at Settlers Bay Golf Course. The 12 agents attending were primarily from Italy and are looking to grow the Alaska itineraries of their business.

In June, the Mat-Su CVB assisted ATIA on two legs of a tour operator trip. The agents stopped at the Musk Ox Farm, Sheep Mountain Lodge and then several activities in the Talkeetna area on a return leg. The CVB also worked with Visit Anchorage and hosted a day filled with



Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler hosted a group of tour operators from Italy in late May.

Talkeetna activities and dinner in Wasilla for 12 travel agents from the Lower 48.

“There is no substitute for experiencing a destination first-hand,” said Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler. “These agents got to

spend time here and find out what makes it so special, and now they’ll have the knowledge and excitement to recommend it to their clients.”

FCC TO MUSK OX FARM

In early August, the Mat-Su CVB helped organize a one-day trip in the Palmer area for FCC Commissioner Scott Ball (in hat). Ball was touring Alaska to learn more about telecommunications issues. While in Palmer, he visited the Musk Ox Farm, the Tsunami Warning Center and had a boxed lunch from Turkey Red.



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Mat-Su Borough Assembly, Mayor candidates respond

Each fall, the Mat-Su CVB surveys candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mat-Su Borough Mayor on issues that impact the tourism industry.

This year there are three district seats up for election, along with the mayor. Below are the candidates' responses to the survey.

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 administration approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$747,500 for fiscal year 2019 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax) collection of \$1.15 million. The assembly also supported action to extend the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB for three years through FY21 with a 65/35 percent formula (35 percent dedicated to tourism infrastructure projects). Do you support our three-year grant agreement and current formula with the Mat-Su CVB. Why or why not?

Vern Halter, Mat-Su Borough Mayor candidate: Favor.

Bruce Walden Mat-Su Borough Mayor candidate: Did not respond to survey.

George McKee, District 3: Did not respond to survey.

Barb Doty, District 6: Favor.

Jesse Sumner, District 6: I oppose the current formula and would prefer to see the split skewed more toward tourism infrastructure with the caveat that I oppose wasting money on the Gateway Visitor Center.

Tamara Boeve, District 7: Favor. It is difficult for an organization to function with an uncertain annual budget. The three-year grant agreement allows Mat-Su CVB to operate and plan more effectively. I support dedicating 35 percent to the Borough for funding tourism infrastructure because these larger items benefit the community as a whole.

Additionally, this gives the public a chance to comment as part of the annual budget approval process.

Dennis (Dan) Dees, District 7: Favor. I would like it to stay the same until I have the opportunity to discuss this matter with all parties concerned in the distribution. In that way I can make a more informed answer to your question.

Walter Kloepfer, District 7: Favor. I agree because I presume the Mat-Su CVB agreed to it, although I would be interested to know more about the budget and where the money is spent. The three-year period is essential to ensure there is a plan in place and there is some consistency over the next few years so fund usage can be planned.

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?

Halter, mayor: Oppose.

Walden, mayor: Did not respond to survey.

McKee, District 3: Did not respond to survey.

Doty, District 6: Oppose.

Sumner, District 6: If we continue to have a bed tax it should only be dedicated to tourism-related expenditures.

Boeve, District 7: Oppose.

Dees, District 7: Oppose. I believe this should be dedicated funding and not rerouted to help with budget deficiencies.

Kloepfer, District 7: Oppose. There is a reason for this tax and it should remain in effect. It is to enhance tourism, not for other purposes.

Question 3

Since 2008 the Mat-Su CVB has supported efforts to build a new Gateway

Visitor Center through completion of a Feasibility Study, purchase of the property at Mile 36 Glenn Hwy with \$1 million FY14 state capital funds and completion of the building and site design with \$1.2 million state capital funding in FY15. The sale of the current center for \$1.2 million in 2016 is dedicated as a match for the \$5.8 million needed to complete the shovel-ready project. The borough currently has the project listed in its federal priorities. Do you support the development of a new Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center? Why or why not?

Halter, mayor: Support.

Walden, mayor: Did not respond to survey.

McKee, District 3: Did not respond to survey.

Doty, District 6: I support completion of the Gateway Visitor Center, especially with the ongoing growth of Denali tourism and the appearance of an improvement in the overall Alaska economy. We have made sound investments in this project and completed the feasibility studies. With a clearer and more stable economy the ability to raise the remaining \$5.8 million will be much more feasible and the construction project and subsequent additional tourism operations would be an economic boost for the Mat-Su.

Sumner, District 6: No, this is a boondoggle the Gateway Visitor Center will never provide enough value to the borough commensurate with its cost. Few people went to the old visitor center and few would go to the new one. In our current day and age smart phones and information available to everyone at their fingertips no one goes to visitor centers they provide no extra tourism draw.

Boeve, District 7: Absolutely. Tourism is an important part of our local economy and the Gateway Visitor Center would be a wonderful resource for directing our guests to additional sites and activities. Personally, I do extensive research before I travel out of state, and I still visit the local tourist center for more information. The proposed Gateway Center is beautifully designed and would be a source of pride for our community.

CANDIDATES: Responses to Mat-Su CVB survey

Continued from Page 6

Dees, District 7: I favor this but I would also like to see an expanded tourism information center's presence throughout the Mat-Su Valley.

Kloepfer, District 7: Yes, I support a new Gateway Visitor Center because it currently is in a spot that does not appear overly accessible. I would suspect it does not get as many people stopping there as could be possible due to its current location. Hopefully, the new location will not require driving on a roundabout and zig-zagging off the main highway.

Question 4

On Aug. 2, 2016 the assembly heard testimony during a public hearing on an ordinance to increase the borough bed tax from 5 to 8 percent and submit the question to the voters on the Oct. 4, 2016 ballot. In comparison other Alaska destination bed taxes are: Anchorage, 12 percent; Fairbanks, 8 percent; Juneau, 7 percent; and Denali, 7 percent. The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors had forwarded the proposal to consider after much feedback and discussions with the membership. The testimony was divided and the assembly

voted 4-3 to oppose putting it on the ballot. What is your opinion of raising the bed tax to support tourism infrastructure projects or the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center facility?

Halter, mayor: Favor.

Walden, mayor: Did not respond to survey.

McKee, District 3: Did not respond to survey.

Doty, District 6: I believe that the uncertainty in Alaska's economy in 2016 made the possibility of success in passing any new tax, be it a bed tax or sales tax, unsavory to the Mat-Su voters and was unlikely to pass. In the coming few years, when there is more confidence in Alaska's economic future, it is reasonable to request from the voters a re-balancing of the bed tax rate in alignment to other Alaskan communities. A bed tax adjustment as a source of revenue to fund the Gateway Visitor Center would be much more palatable than funding through property taxes and would bolster the economy with construction jobs and long-term tourism revenue.

Sumner, District 6: I oppose any

increase in the bed tax the Mat-Su CVB provides little extra draw and the Gateway Visitor Center would provide even less. I'm sure that it could be arranged that any hotel owner that wished to pay more bed tax themselves would be allowed to.

Boeve, District 7: The bed tax is a sensitive subject in the northern valley. I would need more community input before supporting an increase in rates.

Dees, District 7: I don't have enough information to make an informed decision on this matter. I would like to hear the opinions of both sides of the matter. I do not favor increase of taxes in any matter. I believe we need to look at the whole picture and come up with possibly an outside of the box solution.

Kloepfer, District 7: I don't have an objection to the increase, provided the funds are used for the stated purpose. It would be the assembly's responsibility to ensure the funds are used for the announced reasons and should be written into the code in that manner if approved. Let the people either support or oppose it, after all, the assembly is their representatives and if the question can go to the people for their input, it should.

In-state campaign features Alaska Grown itineraries

In late May and early July, the Mat-Su CVB once again partnered with the Alaska Grown brand for an in-state marketing campaign. The late-summer run of that campaign began Aug. 17 and will finish this Friday.

The campaign features four itineraries designed around an Alaska Grown theme, and covers all corners of the Mat-Su Valley.

"We use these in-state campaigns as a way to reach Alaskans during the shoulder season and highlight the Mat-Su Valley as a place for a perfect getaway," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

During both campaigns, there was a social media component that included giving away an Alaska Grown hoodie each week to someone who posted a photo on Instagram or Facebook with #yahoomatsu and #alaskagrown.

The campaigns featured digital advertising placements with KTUU.com and ADN.com, as well as print placements in the Alaska Dispatch News. The digital



Instagram user @sheep_shape_alaska was one of the weekly photo contest winners with this beautiful shot of sunset on Denali in late May.

display ads also appeared on the Audience Extension network of web sites. Social media marketing took place on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. During the early summer campaign, television commercials

also ran on KTUU during the two-week run.

The special web site set up for the campaign generated 5,000 sessions during the campaign.

Make your listings shine by logging into the Extranet

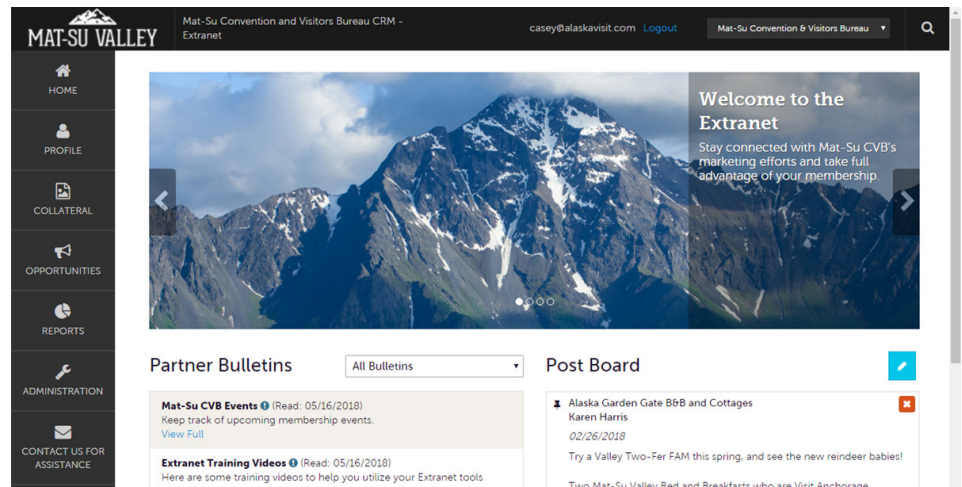
Want to stand out among your competition? Take advantage of your member benefits by logging into the Mat-Su CVB Extranet and beef up your online presence.

Members have the opportunity to add photographs, long narratives, amenities and links to TripAdvisor to their online listings, and best of all, it's all free with membership.

"You can really make your listings stand out, and it only takes a few minutes," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "Your listing on our web site is how many people will first see your business. Why not take advantage of your member benefits and make that first impression a great one?"

Members can access the Extranet by going to <https://mat-su.extranet.simpleviewcrm.com/login/> and signing in. If you don't know your log-in or password, e-mail Saunders at justin@alaskavisit.com or call 746-5032.

The Extranet is also where you go to



find Visitor Guide leads that are, again, free with membership. These are high-potential visitors who are requesting more information. You can sort and download them in batches.

If you are feeling intimidated logging in and changing your listings, fear not - Saunders has compiled a series of "how-

to" videos within the Extranet that show you how to fully maximize the marketing tools that come with membership. There are links to several different videos that explain things in great detail.

"From leads to managing your listings, the Extranet is a powerful tool that every member should be using," Saunders said.

Online advertising available through DTN partnership

The Mat-Su CVB offers affordable digital advertising to members on www.AlaskaVisit.com, through a partnership with Destination Travel Network (DTN). Options range from text ads and featured listings to banner display ads.

DTN is a partner of Simpleview, the company who designed and hosts the Mat-Su CVB's web site. DTN representatives handle all the sales and design of ads, and the implementation on the site.

"Members may get a call or an e-mail from DTN about their marketing programs. DTN is essentially an extension of the CVB, and they have very affordable packages for members looking for exposure online," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders.

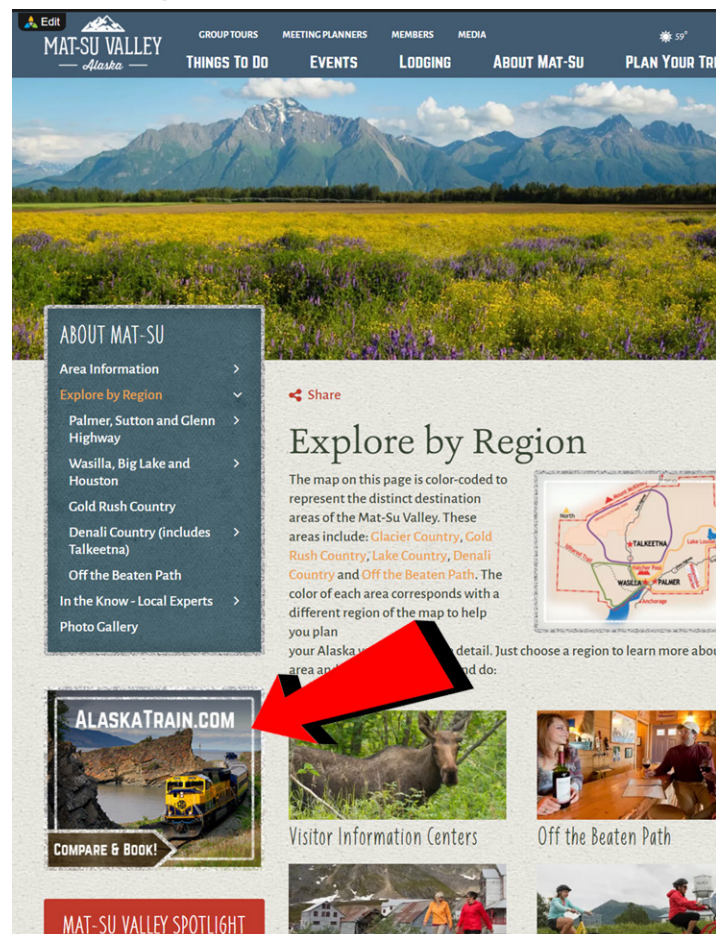
The web site represents the biggest marketing investment for the CVB, and members can take advantage of that by purchasing advertising. The Mat-Su CVB has an extensive paid search marketing campaign, and invests in search engine optimization efforts, along with social media marketing that points visitors to the site.

"That means a member's ad is going to show up and be in front of the people who are actively looking for information," Saunders said.

From Jan. 1 through Aug. 26, 74,000 users accessed the site, generating 93,750 sessions, which are increases of 43 percent from 2017. There have been over 172,000 pageviews so far in 2018, giving advertisers good exposure.

Members who want more information about opportunities with DTN can reach out to Francisco Saavedra at fssaavedra@destinationtravelnetwork.com.

Saunders can also answer any questions about DTN and can be reached at 745-5032.



Nominate your peers for a 'Stars of the Industry' award

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. 15
Mat-Su CVB; 610 S. Bailey St. Suite 201; Palmer, AK 99645;
Fax (907) 746-2688 or e-mail to justin@alaskavisit.com

If you know of someone who has made a difference in the tourism industry this year, nominate them for one of the Mat-Su CVB "Stars of the Industry" awards.

Nominations are being accepted for the awards, which are given out during the luncheon held in conjunction with the Mat-Su CVB Annual Membership Meeting, which is Nov. 2 at Evangelo's. The luncheon starts at noon, following a presentation by Bill Geist and the Voice of the Membership.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. In 2017, the Alpine Historical Society earned the award for their promotion of the Sutton and Chickaloon area.

The Gold Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made significant accomplishments in the tourism industry. In 2017, the Reindeer Farm was the honoree.

The Tourism Angel Award honors an individual who has supported and assisted Mat-Su CVB and has shown a true concern for the success and growth of the tourism industry. The 2017 winner was Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours.

The Cheechako Award is given to a new business or organization that has shown entrepreneurial zeal and managed to not only survive, but thrive in its early years. In 2017, Alaska Farm Tours was honored.

There are also a few awards that don't get handed out every year, which are given out on a case-by-case basis.

The "It Happens" award is given to an individual or organization that has taken lemons and turned them into lemonade. It is intended to laugh with, not at, the winners.

Last year, a special "Spirit of Tourism" award was given to Hatcher Alpine Xperience for their efforts to develop a downhill ski area in the Mat-Su Valley.

Nominations can be made by using the form at left.

Members can fax the form to 746-2688 or e-mail nominations to justin@alaskavisit.com. The deadline for nominations is Oct. 15.

A special awards committee made up of Mat-Su CVB members then reviews the nominations and selects the winners.

News from the membership

After more than three years of remodeling and expansion of our remote, off-the-grid lodging facility, **Iditarod Trailside Lodging** is excited to announce that we are open for business year round. We have three guest cabins that each sleep up to six adults. Enjoy awesome meals and great activities. No one goes away hungry at our place. Some of the activities we offer while you are here in the summer include salmon, trout and pike fishing; Denali flightseeing, team building activities, hiking, river drifting, swimming, canoeing and much more. In the winter we offer cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, team building activities, snowmachining, ice fishing, and more. We are located on the Iditarod Trail 23 miles up the Yentna River and 38 river miles from Deshka Landing in Willow. Contact us via our web site at www.iditarodlodging.com or call us at 907-232-6773.

Alaska Sunset View has been upgrading to more overnight stays. The Lakeview Retreat is a three bedroom rental with a six person hot tub on the deck. The Hideaway Apartment located on the first floor is fully contained with bedroom, kitchenette, living room and washer and dryer, for a romantic getaway for two. We are also adding back in our Cedar Chalet, a three bedroom home on Big Lake, for a total of 38 overnight guests we can accommodate. We also converted the restaurant into the "Boathouse Banquet Hall" where clients can rent the banquet hall. In addition to that they can rent the commercial kitchen and have the caterer of their choice. We also added a larger banquet space "Lakeview Banquet Hall" which is 60X60 for back-up in the

summer, and we can now handle events in the winter.

Alaska ATV Adventures is continuing operating through the fall. This summer, bears, salmon, and visitors from all over the world were at the trailhead for Alaska ATV Adventures. With 5- star reviews on social media sites and small group departures, Alaska ATV Adventures is guaranteed to offer a quality backcountry experience just 40 minutes south of Anchorage. This trip is an excellent add-on for guests heading south for cruises, looking for an option before flying out of Anchorage or just driving to the end of the highway. Alaska ATV Adventures will be operating the Girdwood/ Bird Creek 3-Hour ATV Adventure through the end of September at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily; should the weather allow, they will continue operating an abbreviated 2-hour tour in October. Live booking and availability online at www.alaskaatvadventures.com or call 907-320-0007.

Knik River Lodge is offering a special \$99 cabin rate to Alaska residents throughout the month of September. Located at the end of the scenic Knik River Road, the lodge and its 22 cabins are a perfect weekend getaway. The cabins overlook the Knik River Valley. Book online with the discount code Alaska49 to receive this offer. Please note an Alaskan ID will be required upon check-in.

The Musk Ox Farm and Alaska Farmland Trust present the 4th Annual Oxtoberfest Farm-to-Table Feast, Brew Fest, and Polka Bash on Saturday, October

6! Feast on local raised piggy in the brats, Palmer cabbage in the sauerkraut, Mat-Su grown potatoes in the German potato salad and chips, locally made mustard, and even Alaska Grown wheat in the buns! Sip locally crafted beer or German varietal wines! Enjoy it all while listening to a 12-Piece Oompah Band. Doors open at 5 p.m. Tickets and more information can be found at www.muskoxfarm.org. This fund-raising event sells out every year far in advance, so makes sure you get tickets early.

Phillips Cruises & Tours is operating their scenic trips from Whittier through Oct. 6 this year, giving you a chance to see Prince William Sound this fall. The 26 Glacier Cruise departs at 12:30 p.m. daily from Whittier. The five-hour trip explores Esther Passage, College Fjord and Harriman Fjord. As the fall colors turn, the trips get even more spectacular. For more information visit www.26glaciers.com.

Host your fall meetings at **Alaska Garden Gate B&B**. We would love to host your meetings, board retreats, small conferences, private or community gatherings, and events. Our large, comfortable hall seats up to 56 people for meals, 70 for classroom style presentations, or 110 for mingling. We offer full catering services with linen service and china. Our hall features Wi-fi internet, 66-inch TV/monitor for computer presentations, parking, restrooms and a peaceful setting on Trunk Road. Call Karen at 746-2333, for a tour or to schedule your next event at Alaska Garden Gate B&B. We are located at 950. S. Trunk Rd., Palmer, www.gardengatebnb.com/meetings-retreats

Are you GDPR compliant? What even is GDPR?

Throughout the summer, you may have noticed receiving a lot of e-mails from companies regarding updated privacy policies. That is in response to GDPR, and it could have an impact on your business.

GDPR stands for General Data Protection Regulations, and it was enacted by the European Union in late May that established a framework for how data is collected on EU residents, as well as how that data can be used. It sets stiff penalties – upward of \$20 million – for habitual offenders.

So what does that mean to you as a small business? You probably don't have to

worry about that huge fine, but you should be aware of these new regulations.

If you collect data such as e-mail addresses for a newsletter or other personally-identifying information, you should take a look at your privacy policy and update it if necessary. If you are sending multiple newsletters to residents of the EU, you may want to have them "opt in" to receiving the correspondence again, since GDPR took effect.

The Mat-Su CVB updated its web site privacy policy with clear wording that cookies are being collected only for statistical analysis, and our visitor guide

and e-newsletter sign-up forms now include a second "opt in" layer to ensure those who sign up are clearly signing up. The privacy policy also includes information on how site users can opt out and have all their data erased from all records.

"A smaller business may not ever have an issue with GDPR noncompliance, but it's still a good idea to make sure you have examined how you are collecting data and how you are safeguarding that information," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said.

Tourism industry calendar of events

Sept. 7	Mat-Su CVB Candidate Forum Candidates for Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mat-Su Borough Mayor will participate	Noon, Evangelo's
Oct. 8-12	ATIA Annual Convention Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Fairbanks
Oct. 19	October Membership Luncheon Kim Sollien with the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation will be presenting.	Noon, Turkey Red
Oct. 28-30	Alaska Media Road Show Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Henderson, NV
Nov. 2	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting/Awards Luncheon	9 a.m., Evangelo's
Nov. 4-8	National Tour Association Travel Exchange Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Milwaukee
Nov. 22-23	Mat-Su CVB office closed for Thanksgiving	

Welcome to the newest CVB members

Pyrarh's Pioneer Peak Farm
Janet Dinwiddie
(907) 745-4511
www.pppfarm.net

Paradise Alaska RV Park
Yvonne Marty
(907) 775-6360
www.paradisealaska.com/rvpark

Talkeetna Historical Society Museum
Sue Deyoe
(907) 733-2487
www.talkeetnahistoricalsociety.org

Canoe Lake Chalet
Gerri McCann
(907) 715-7891
www.canoelakechalet.com

Palmer Golf Course
George Collum
(907) 745-4653
www.palmergolfcourse.com

Slide Mountain Cabins & RV Park
Anna Stark
(907) 822-3883
www.slidemountaincabins.net

Wickersham Trading Post
Bill Stevenson
(907) 745-2534
www.bestglacier.com

Alaska Off-Road Adventures
Ken Schauert
(907) 360-2651
www.alaskaoff-roadadventures.com

Majestic Heli Ski
Njord Rota
(907) 366-6600
www.majesticheliski.com

N2 Alaska
David Hicks
(907) 616-1010
www.n2alaska.com

Alaska Knotty Pine Bed & Breakfast
Moses Hale
(907) 982-3278
www.alaskaknottypine.com

North of Normal ATV Tours LLC
Rae Arno
(907) 305-0833
www.northofnormalalak.com

AK Toy Rental
Israel Hale
(907) 775-1880
www.aktorental.com

Matanuska Brewing Company
Matt Tomter
(907) 745-2337
www.matanuskabrewing.com

The Cozy Nest
Israel Hale
(907) 232-0316
www.airbnb.com/rooms/17794833

Anchorage Trolley Tours
Cyrus Aldeman
(907) 276-5603
www.anchoragetrolley.com

Web site statistics

Jan. 1 - Aug. 27, 2018

Users
74,643
Up 43.25% from 2017

Sessions
94,310
Up 45.5% from 2017

Page views
173,438
Up 24% from 2017

Interesting fact
Mobile traffic to the Mat-Su CVB's web site has increased by 127% over the same time period in 2017. So far in 2018, there have been 40,043 mobile visitors to the site, which represents 53.5% of all site traffic.



Denali put on quite a show for a travel agent familiarization trip in June. This view is from inside a Mahay's Jet Boat.

YAHOO! **Mat-Su**

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