

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2019

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## Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting focuses on winter, infrastructure

The Mat-Su CVB annual meeting will focus on winter tourism and tourism infrastructure in the Mat-Su Borough. The meeting is Nov. 7 at Evangelo's.

"Infrastructure projects are important because they not only enhance the visitor experience, they enhance the quality of life for residents as well," said Mat-Su CVB Bonnie Quill. "We want to find out what is most important to our members and be strong advocates for furthering tourism infrastructure in the Mat-Su Valley."

Prior to the annual meeting, the Mat-Su CVB is encouraging our partners to fill out an online survey that includes ranking infrastructure priorities. A link will be included in e-bulletins leading up to the annual meeting. The survey results will be discussed at the annual meeting. There will also be panel discussions about the opportunity and importance of infrastructure development.

Winter tourism will also be a focus. The Mat-Su CVB is inventorying winter products and services available for visitors

and in-state residents. A new winter promotion campaign is being designed by the Mat-Su CVB, and building the inventory is a key step.

"Winter is a growing season, and with new products and services, including the development of Skeetawk, Mat-Su CVB will be increasing winter promotion," Quill said.

The annual meeting begins at 9 a.m. at Evangelo's. After the morning workshop, the annual business meeting will take place. This is where the new members of the board of directors are seated, Mat-Su CVB staff report to the members and members have the opportunities to introduce resolutions or give feedback.

At noon, the Stars of the Industry awards luncheon takes place. We honor those who have gone above and beyond.

Tickets for the event are \$25 and are available by calling 746-5000. Sponsorship packages are also available. For more information about the annual meeting, e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).



Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation received the Northern Lights Award in 2018. The 2019 awards luncheon is Nov. 7 at Evangelo's.

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*From the Board Chair's desk*

## Let your voice be heard this fall for the future of the tourism industry

This year, there are three seats up for election on the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors, and I encourage you to consider running as a way to serve our industry and provide leadership and vision for the future.

Throughout my time on the board, I have met passionate and energetic people who are dedicated to not only their business, but also this great industry. I encourage those people to consider running for the board of directors, because it's a rewarding experience with a dynamic group of people all working for the greater good.

Serving on the board is a great way to not only serve the membership, but also help guide the direction of our organization. In my 10-plus years on the board, I've had the pleasure of serving with some talented individuals whom I greatly respect. I've seen them grow as leaders in the tourism industry, and I appreciate their willingness to lend their time and voice.

If you are interested in running for one of the board positions, we'd love to hear from you. If you know of someone who you think would make a good board member, reach out and nominate them.

Speaking of elections, I'd also like to invite you to the Mat-Su CVB's annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum on Oct. 18 at Evangelo's at noon.

This year, there are two seats on the

Mat-Su Borough Assembly (Districts 1 and 2) up for election, and in both races, the incumbents are terming out of their seats.

The forum is a great opportunity for you to learn what the candidates think about local issues that have an impact on our industry and the general public. Members will be able to submit questions for the candidates at the forum. In addition to learning more about the candidates

and where they stand, it's also a great opportunity to show them why the tourism industry is important to our local economy.

Also, please take a look at Page 6 of this newsletter – the assembly candidates responded to a survey about their views on tourism-related issues facing the Mat-Su Borough. Their responses will also be available at the candidate forum.

I hope you make a commitment to having your voice heard by voting in

both the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors elections.

No matter if you are a small business owner with one employee or a large company with hundreds of employees, your vote matters and is important.

*Cheryl Metiva ([cherylm@catheatres.com](mailto:cherylm@catheatres.com)) is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. She is the director of sales and marketing at the Extreme Fun Center.*



**Cheryl Metiva,  
Mat-Su CVB Board Chair**

## How to nominate for the board election

Nominations are being accepted for the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. Members will vote on the candidates in October, and new board members will be seated at the annual meeting on Nov. 7.

There are three board openings among the 10-person board. Each member serves a three-year term. Interested members may self nominate.

Candidates should declare their candidacy by e-mailing Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill at [bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com) by Sept. 30. Candidates must submit a 300-word statement, along with a photo, by Oct. 4. Ballots will then be mailed to members no later than Oct. 10, and due back no later than 5 p.m. Nov. 1.

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



## *From the President & CEO's desk*

# Tourism infrastructure benefits visitors, residents

Last week I attended the ribbon cutting ceremony at the new 295-acre Settlers Bay Coastal Park. This project is a success story in infrastructure development. The Mat-Su Borough's newest park was a joint effort of many stakeholders led by the Great Land Trust (GLT). Through multiple funders and donors the GLT raised over \$1.4 million to purchase and improve the property.

In 2018 the property was donated to the Mat-Su Borough for public recreation use. New trails, bathrooms, signage, bear-proof trash bins and a parking lot have now been completed.

During the ceremony, Mat-Su Borough Assembly member Dan Mayfield referred to an Earth Economics 2015 study on the economic benefits of trails, parks, and open space in the Mat-Su Borough that found for every \$1 spent on public open space in the Mat-Su, there is a \$5.31 return on investment. Not only is that a great ROI, parks and trails improve our physical and mental health, boost our economy and strengthen our communities. And, "if you build a place where people want to visit, you'll build a place where people want to live."

In 2008 the borough released the "Matanuska-Susitna Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study" prepared by the McDowell Group. The study inventoried existing infrastructure including accommodations, meeting



**The ribbon cutting ceremony at the Settlers Bay Coastal Park illustrated how many organizations worked together on the project.**

facilities, sports facilities, parks, campgrounds, boat launches, trails and other transportation infrastructure. Potential infrastructure improvements and priorities were identified that would result in greater economic impact and increased visitor experience. Today, I would also add to this narrative, these infrastructure improvements would benefit residents and bring additional value to our quality of life in the borough.

This month the Mat-Su CVB organized two member events visiting the Glacier View area at Sheep Mountain Lodge and

Talkeetna, celebrating the new K2 office building. At these informal gatherings we asked members to provide feedback on future tourism infrastructure projects. We will be distributing a link to an online survey in October to all of our stakeholders and report the results at our November 7 annual meeting. A panel of speakers will also present opportunities for developing new and improved infrastructure projects.

*Bonnie Quill ([bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com)) is the president & CEO of the Mat-Su CVB.*

*Below is a sample list of infrastructure projects included on the survey distributed at the September member events*

Tourism infrastructure supports the efficient and safe movement of visitors, and assets that increase and enhance the visitor experience - and residents too!

Your feedback is important to us. Please **CIRCLE** the top three tourism infrastructure projects that you feel are most important to the visitor industry and residents.

### **New or Improved Tourism Infrastructure Projects**

Complete the Gateway Visitor Center  
(visitor support services)

Information kiosks

Wayfinding (navigation signage)

Improved trailheads/trails

Public restrooms

Viewpoints - highway  
enhancements

Tourism infrastructure master plan

Public-use cabins

Bike trails

Increased trail grooming

Conference/convention facility

Downhill/alpine ski area

Highway improvements  
(Denali Hwy., Willow-Fishhook Road,  
Petersville Road)

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Korea tour operators spend two days in Mat-Su

The Mat-Su CVB recently hosted a group of six Korean travel agents for two days as part of a statewide familiarization trip in conjunction with Visit Anchorage.

The agents, along with a representative from Delta Airlines based in Korea, spent time at Meier Lake Resort, as well as Knik River Lodge and the Musk Ox Farm.

"Typically, Korean travelers come to Alaska on larger group tours but these agents specialized in individual and family travel, so it was a great opportunity to have them," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said.

When discussing the Mat-Su Valley with the travel agents, the representative from Delta thanked the Mat-Su CVB and its partners for the experience. He said the agents were very impressed with the Mat-Su Valley because "it's the authentic Alaska they pictured in their minds before they came here."

They were particularly impressed with the Alaska Grown vegetables and cuisine. At Knik River Lodge, they had a dinner that was entirely locally sourced, and they found great interest in the local produce.

The group also visited Fairbanks, Anchorage and the Girdwood area before returning to Korea.



Korean tour operators visited the Musk Ox Farm during their two days in the Mat-Su Valley.

## Skeetawk set to open as Valley's first lift-access ski area

For the first time ever, the Mat-Su Valley is home to a lift-access ski area in Hatcher Pass, as Skeetawk is tentatively scheduled to open this winter.

Skeetawk is the vision of the nonprofit group Hatcher Alpine Xperience, an organization that has been dedicated to making the decades-long idea of a lift-access ski area go from idea to reality.

Through grants, donations and other funding, the group managed to purchase a triple chair lift earlier this spring and is in the process of installing it. It will be the first of its kind in the Mat-Su Valley.

The base is at Mile 10.6 Hatcher Pass Road, and features approximately a 1,200 foot run with about 400 feet in elevation. It's in beginner and intermediate terrain, which is perfect for families. The opening is weather dependent.

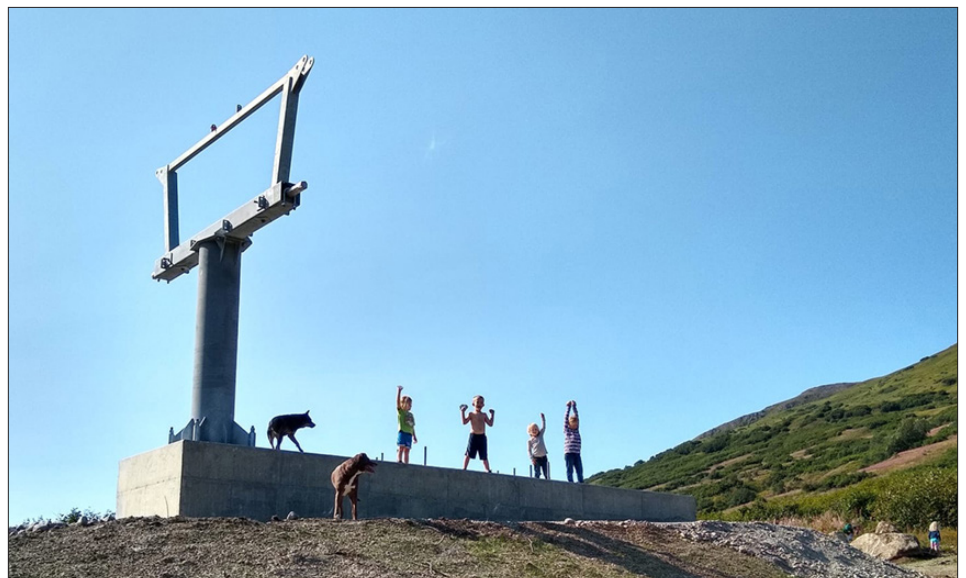
"We are hoping there will be enough snow to open the first weekend in December," HAX Executive Director Amy O'Connor said in an e-mail. "We'll be open weekends and all Mat-Su Borough School District vacation and in-service days during daylight hours."

Day tickets are \$39, and season passes are \$390. For more information, visit [www.skeetawk.com](http://www.skeetawk.com)

Skeetawk's opening is important in building a stronger winter tourism season, said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

"This is an example of how new

infrastructure can expand the visitor experience. This is a project that will lead to more winter visitors and increased winter visitor spending in the Mat-Su Valley," Quill said. "With Government Peak Recreation Area providing world-class Nordic skiing and now the opening of Skeetawk, winter is at its peak in the Valley!"



Construction is under way at Skeetawk, with the ski area hoping to be operating a triple lift by the first week of December.



# Travel writers highlight Mat-Su

The Mat-Su CVB hosted two travel writers on extended Mat-Su trips this August, highlighting all different regions of the Valley.

Kristen Pope, a freelance writer from Jackson Hole, Wyo., was in the Mat-Su Valley Aug. 5-9 and explored Hatcher Pass, Talkeetna and Matanuska Glacier. The Mat-Su CVB met Pope at Alaska Media Road Show and invited her on the familiarization tour.

"We participate in a lot of the state media fam tours, but we often only have the writers for a day. By hosting a writer on our own, we can show them more of the area and give them a better experience for their story," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "We try to host two travel writers a year on these extended fam trips."

The Mat-Su CVB also hosted Chris Batin of TravelAge West magazine Aug. 24-Sept. 4. Batin covers Alaska for the magazine, which is focused on tour operators and travel agents. In addition to the Alaska State Fair, Batin traveled to every corner of the Mat-Su Valley for his story.

"Thank you to the members who helped out and helped us show Kristen and Chris why the Mat-Su Valley is such a special place," Ressler said. "They both were impressed with the diversity of attractions and the people they met while here."

In early August, Caroline Morse Teel of Smart Travel spent one day in the Mat-Su Valley as part of a statewide itinerary. Her article published Aug. 15 and featured several Mat-Su CVB members.

In March, the Mat-Su CVB worked



**The Mat-Su CVB hosted travel writer Jennifer Nalewicz in March, which resulted in a two-page spread in Alaska Beyond Magazine about the Musk Ox Farm.**

with the state of Alaska's tourism public relations firm, Thompson & Co., to host writer Jennifer Nalewicz for a day in Palmer.

Last month, travelers on Alaska Airlines saw the benefit of that brief time spent in the Mat-Su Valley – she wrote a feature story about the Musk Ox Farm that covers two pages in the Alaska Beyond magazine.

"We were excited to see the coverage in such a large publication," Ressler said. "It helps elevate our entire destination and generates interest from readers."

## Mat-Su CVB to attend Alaska Media Road Show

The Mat-Su CVB will be attending Alaska Media Road Show in Las Vegas in late October, meeting with travel writers as part of a statewide tourism promotion program.

Alaska Media Road Show is held every fall and attracts some of the top bloggers, travel writers and travel influencers. It is organized by Thompson & Co., the state of Alaska's tourism public relations agency and includes Alaska destinations, as well as individual companies.

"Road Show is invaluable because it brings together many of the top writers in one place, and you have their ear for two days," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "We wouldn't be able to reach that many members of the media on our own, so it is a productive opportunity."

Through participation in past Alaska Media Road Shows, the Mat-Su CVB has generated coverage in a variety of publications, including Alaska Beyond, Alaska Magazine, Northwest Travel & Life Magazine and several online outlets.

If you have any new products or services that would be of interest to travel writers, please e-mail it to casey@alaskavisit.com. In addition to working with travel writers, he also works with tour operators and travel agents and develops a "new products" sheet to be distributed at national conventions and conferences.

"It's important that we know what's new with your business, so we can help tell your story," Ressler said.

## Stay connected to tell our story!



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# Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates respond to survey

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 two district seats up for election. 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 assembly approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$747,500 for fiscal year 2020 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax) collection of \$1,150,000. In 2018 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 3-year grant agreement and current formula with the Mat-Su CVB? Why or why not?

**Bruce Bush, District 1** – Favor. I think it's a good formula.

**Brian Endle, District 1** – Full disclosure, my wife owns a vacation rental. The Mat-Su voters have chosen to implement the bed tax and I will honor their choice. In general, I am not in favor of extra taxes and specifically not in favor of an increased bed tax. Being fiscally conservative, I would want to ensure that the funds used benefit all the Mat-Su and that they are used most efficiently. I think there is still more information to be researched on the formula, especially what the Borough does with the extra 35 percent. I may be willing to work with the Mat-Su CVB in the future to aid in their ability to market the Mat-Su. I would also be interested at looking at all options to bring the new visitor center to completion.

**Tim Hale, District 1** – Favor. I support the 3-year grant agreement and funding formula for the Mat-Su CVB. Tourism is an integral aspect of the Borough, our economy and workforce. As such,

I support using this portion of the associated revenue that comes directly from tourism through the bed tax to support tourism and advertise to support this industry in the Borough.

**Ryan Miller, District 1** - I support the grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB. I am especially supportive of the 3-year extension given the difficulties in forward looking budgets with little outlook on funding with annual agreements. It is my experience in the Army, the biggest issue with appropriation of funding requests where dealing with annual fiscal year-end deadlines, and having to wait until a new budget is approved to make plans for the following year, which always left looking to the future for larger projects difficult at best.

**LaMarr Anderson, District 2** – Based on the visibility and effectiveness of the Mat-Su CVB, the value for this foundational supporting bed tax is clearly demonstrated. I do not have historical background as to the CVB's assessment of the adequacy of the current funding formula for desired budgets and CVB mission goals but I presume the current formula is considered effective and appropriate at this time. If in the future CVB leadership articulated a recommended formula change, I would be open to such deliberation and discussion.

**Liz Maxon, District 2** – In favor.

**Stephanie Nowers, District 2** - I favor the current agreement and formula. Tourism is a growth industry in the Mat-Su with hundreds of thousands of visitors coming here each year that spend millions on food, lodging, trips, gifts and more. Continuing to advertise to prospective visitors and improve tourism infrastructure needs to be a priority.

## Question 2

Because of state and local budget challenges, 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?

**Bruce Bush, District 1** – Oppose. Not at this time.

**Brian Endle, District 1** – Oppose. No I would not.

**Tim Hale, District 1** – Oppose. Specialty taxes, like the bed tax, are levied for a specific purpose. That purpose needs to be honored, if we want to restore trust in government.

**Ryan Miller, District 1** - This is a big problem within government these days, the bed tax is directly and solely related to the tourist industry. Any deviation of those funds outside of this industry is theft, just as the illegal reallocation of the PFD fund for our government's irresponsible overspending. We need to rein in our government and insure the people have what they voted for. As representatives of our constituents, it is our responsibility to ensure any and all taxes collected are used solely for what they were designed for.

**LaMarr Anderson, District 2** - It is in our best interest to maintain a reasonable, non-extortionary bed-tax rate. Bed taxes should be limited to tourism related uses. Increasing the tax rate for the sole purpose of generating additional revenue for general government spending is akin to pick-pocketing our visitors. I don't appreciate it when I feel like I'm being taken advantage of when I travel. Should bed-tax revenue exceed the amount needed for CVB and tourism needs, then the excess could be available to augment borough non-tourism related activities but I suspect this is not a likely scenario.

**Liz Maxon, District 2** – Opposed.

**Stephanie Nowers, District 2** - I would oppose using bed tax monies for non-tourism purposes. The bed tax was created for and supported by the tourism industry as a way to raise funds to support the industry in Mat-Su.

# CANDIDATES: Responses to Mat-Su CVB survey

Continued from Page 6

## 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 Highway with \$1 million FY14 state capital funds and completion of 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?

**Bruce Bush, District 1** – Yes. I think we need a first class visitor center to attract more tourism.

**Brian Endle – District 1** – Yes, it would be good to see this project come to completion to benefit the interests of all tourism in the Mat-Su.

**Tim Hale, District 1** – Yes. Visitor Centers are a key component of increasing interest and extending stays in any region. This project will support local tourism through both indoor and outdoor activities, while creating local jobs during construction and sustained job opportunities long-term.

**Ryan Miller, District 1** - I support the new Gateway Visitor Center because I believe that having modern technology in a new building gives us a competitive edge in tourism, in this industry, it takes money to make money and first impressions are always important. This project only shows that from the moment our guests enter the Gateway to the Valley, our tourists from around the world will have nothing but great things to share of our Alaskan hospitality. I look forward to giving my vote for this projects continued development in the near future.

**LaMarr Anderson, District 2** – Yes. The attractiveness of the design and multi-purpose functionality of the designed

Gateway Visitor Center will be a significant draw for visitors. The center will serve as a magnet for visitors to stop, learn, and explore, rather than just passing through. Without a current visitor center now, I'm certain many independent travelers are not attracted to stop and thus are not exposed to the many and varied attractions within our Borough. Therefore, they basically pass through without their activities and interests being expanded beyond original intentions and plans.

**Liz Maxon, District 2** – I currently do not support the building of the gateway visitors center. I do not believe the revenue it may potentially generate will be sufficient enough to warrant the cost with our current budget..

**Stephanie Nowers, District 2** - I support the development of the Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center as an asset to be used to promote tourism and interest in the Valley. As President of the Gateway Community Council, we approved funds to support this project in 2018.

## Question 4

On August 2, 2016 the assembly heard testimony during a public hearing on an ordinance to increase the borough bed tax from five to eight percent and submit the question to the voters on the October 4, 2016 ballot. In comparison other Alaska destination bed tax rates 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 on raising the bed tax to support tourism infrastructure projects or the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center facility?

**Bruce Bush, District 1** – I feel its best to leave it at the current rate. I'm not in favor of raising any taxes involving the tourism industry.

**Brian Endle, District 1** – I am against raising the bed tax. The competition in the

Valley for vacation rentals is substantial. Increasing the tax would cut into the profits of those owning rentals.

**Tim Hale, District 1** – Our local system is designed such that most tax proposals must go to the people for approval, and I would absolutely support letting voters decide whether an increase in bed tax is appropriate or not.

**Ryan Miller, District 1** - While I am generally not in favor of tax increases on residents, I am in favor of a bed tax increase to 8 percent as I am aware this tax is passed directly to the consumer, usually that being tourists. With our borough's growth in the tourist industry, including destinations such as Skeetawk in Hatcher Pass, coupled with great increases in the use of sites such as AirBnB, we need the CVB to be more active than ever. From general education for non-conventional vacation renters to increased promotion and development of tourism in the Mat-Su Valley and marketing our area to potential visitors from around the world. I look forward to voting in favor of a bed tax increase in 2020.

**LaMarr Anderson, District 2** - I would want to know if, and to what extent, there would be inverse proportions of impacts and fiscal impacts with specific tax rate hike proposals. If our rate is less than the "standard" rate expected/experienced by travelers throughout our area/country, then maybe we should consider a rate closely approximating that 'standard' rate. That said though, I repeat my answer to Question #2....I would not want to 'fleece' our guests.

**Liz Maxon, District 2** – I do support raises of the bed tax in order to be competitive with other markets (areas). I believe we could do more to let visitors know what the valley has to offer, which in turn supports businesses, etc...

**Stephanie Nowers, District 2** - With industry support, I would support raising the bed tax to be more in line with what other communities charge so that those additional funds could be spent to support tourism in Mat-Su.



## Mat-Su CVB hosts two community member events

The Mat-Su CVB was on the road earlier this month, holding member events in the Glacier View and Talkeetna areas that focused on tourism infrastructure and winter tourism.

Instead of hosting a monthly membership luncheon, the Mat-Su CVB team decided to go to some of the outlying communities to make it easier for members to participate. Both events are seen as a precursor to the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting in November, which will focus on winter and infrastructure.

"These two events were a chance to have conversations and get feedback from our members who may not be able to make it to our annual meeting or membership luncheons because of geography, but their voices are important to our industry," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

The first event was held at Sheep Mountain Lodge in Glacier View, and the Talkeetna event was held at the new K2 Aviation building.

Mat-Su CVB hosts monthly membership luncheons September through May each year.



Members from the Talkeetna area met on Sept. 18 at the new K2 Aviation building to discuss winter tourism, infrastructure and Mat-Su CVB marketing programs. A similar event was held at Sheep Mountain Lodge on Sept. 11 for Glacier View members.

## Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum set for Oct. 18

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting its annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum on Oct. 18 at Evangelo's in Wasilla, giving you the chance to hear from the candidates about tourism issues.

There are two districts up for election this year – District 1 and District 2. There is a full slate of candidates running, with seven total candidates running in both of the district races.

In District 1, Tim Hale, Brian Endle, Bruce Bush and Ryan Miller have all declared their candidacy. In District 2, Stephanie Nowers, LaMarr Anderson and Liz Maxson (Utter) are all running.

"The forum is a great way to show the candidates why the tourism industry is an important resource in the Mat-Su Valley, and the economic impact it generates in our community," Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill said.

On Page 6, you can find out how the candidates answered the Mat-Su CVB's annual candidate questionnaire that covered topics including tourism promotion funding, infrastructure projects

### Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum

Oct. 18, Noon

Evangelo's

Free to attend, lunch available for purchase

Open to the general public

and usage of the bed tax for nontourism purposes.

At the forum, written questions from the audience will be collected on topics relevant to the tourism industry.

The forum starts at noon and is free and open to the public. Lunch is available for purchase directly from Evangelo's.

For more information or to RSVP, interested members can e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) or call him at 746-5032.

## Visitor Guide to print in Nov.

The finishing touches are being put on the 2020 Mat-Su Visitor Guide, and it will print in mid-November. Members can expect to see the first copies in mid-December.

Brilliant Media Strategies designed the guide once again. The Mat-Su CVB is printing 100,000 copies of the guide. Of those, 56,000 are mailed to high-potential visitors identified by the Alaska Travel Industry Association; 3,000 are mailed to national travel agents; the rest are distributed throughout Alaska at visitors centers, as well as mailed to those who request them directly from the Mat-Su CVB web site.

The guide is packed with information, including suggested itineraries, destination highlights, local tips and member listings.

The new guides hit mailboxes at the peak of the Alaska travel planning time.



# 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. 18  
Mat-Su CVB; 610 S. Bailey St. Suite 201; Palmer, AK 99645;  
Fax (907) 746-2688 or e-mail to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto: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. 7 at Evangelo's. The luncheon starts at noon, following the morning program focusing on infrastructure and winter tourism (see story, Page 1).

The Northern Lights Award honors a community or organization in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. In 2018, the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation won the award.

The Gold Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made significant accomplishments in the tourism industry. In 2018, the Settlers Bay Golf Course and the Albatross Grill 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 2018 winner was Cole Chambers of K2 Aviation.

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 2018, Alaska Horse Adventures 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. In 2018, that went to Alaska Chinook Charters.

Last year, a special “Lifetime Achievement” award was given to Steve Mahay, who retired.

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](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com). The deadline for nominations is Oct. 18.

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

## News from the membership

**The Musk Ox Farm** is eagerly awaiting the call to move into their new education center. What began as a run to save a 1935 Colony Barn resulted in securing the funding to completely renovate the building. In the original hay loft the 85-year old Douglas fir has been restored to its former beautiful glory. Insulated, warm, and dry the hay loft offers inspiring space to create and learn. The rest of the building has joined the 21st century as well. Visitor reception, display, and museum space will help tell the story of 65 years working to bring the majestic musk ox into a geographically appropriate form of agricultural right here in Palmer. Staff will begin moving into the new building in mid-October, look for an open house around the beginning of November.

**Major Marine Tours** is expanding accommodation options in Seward with construction of the new Gateway Hotel. Set to open in June 2020, the hotel is being specifically designed to accommodate group travelers looking to explore Kenai Fjords National Park. The 74-room hotel will operate seasonally from mid-

May through mid-September and is conveniently located near the Seward Small Boat Harbor. The hotel features free breakfast, satellite TV, laundry, business center, and free wi-fi. Artwork depicting Kenai Fjords National Park will be featured throughout. Daily shuttle service will transport guests to and from the Alaska Railroad, cruise ship terminal, and Major Marine Tours check-in offices.

**Alaska Backcountry Cottages** is now open for business. We are a family owned and operated company. Rob and Linda (Mom and Dad) have lived in Alaska for almost 50 years. Matti (daughter) has lived in Alaska her whole life and Dan, who married into the family, is a transplant from the "Lower 48." We are excited to share our passion for the majestic state of Alaska with you. We decided to be part of the tourism industry just a few short years ago. We began by searching for the perfect plot of land to build our stand alone, full service, cottages. In 2016 we found "The Property" and began to plan our accommodations. We have a 270 degree view of the surrounding

mountains including iconic Pioneer Peak. Our mission is to provide a comfortable place to stay, with amazing views and many opportunities to explore Alaska just the way you like. Visit [www.alaskabackcountrycottages.com](http://www.alaskabackcountrycottages.com) for more.

**AK Sled Dog Tours** is offering several adventures this winter in Talkeetna. Owner Dallas Seavey has kennel tours, mush your own sled dog tours and custom mushing adventures. Visit [www.aksleddogtours.com](http://www.aksleddogtours.com) for more information.

## Welcome these new members

Alaska Wildland Adventures  
Amy LaHaie  
(907) 783-2928  
<http://www.alaskawildland.com>

Snowhook Adventure Guides of Alaska  
Justin Savidis  
(907) 414-4547  
<http://www.snowhookadventures.com>

North Shore Cyclery  
Shawn Thelen  
(907) 733-9999  
<http://northshorecyclery.bike>

Shirley's Gourmet Ice Cream  
Shirley Inman  
(907) 315-8838

Grandma's Place  
Theresa Hicks  
(907) 746-6015

Talkeetna Inn  
Billy St. Pierre  
(907) 733-2323  
<http://www.talkeetnainn.com>

Harbor 360 Hotel  
Lindsey Middendorf  
(907) 274-7300  
<http://www.hotel360hotel.com>

Brewer's Fly Fishing Tours  
Mason Brewer  
<http://flyfishtalkeetna.com>

AK Sled Dog Tours  
Dallas Seavey  
(907) 947-4210  
<http://www.sleddogtours.com>

### TOUR OPERATORS HAVE AN A-MOOSING TIME IN TALKEETNA



In August, the Mat-Su CVB hosted three travel planners from Discover Holidays, which specializes in international inbound visitors. They enjoyed their time in Talkeetna, including their jet boat trip.



# Tourism industry calendar of events

October 5	PFD Travel Fair Mat-Su CVB will have a booth	Anchorage
October 7-11	Alaska Travel Industry Association Convention Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Juneau
October 18	Mat-Su CVB Assembly Candidate Forum	Noon, Evangelo's
October 27-29	Alaska Media Road Show Mat-Su CVB will take appointments with travel media	Las Vegas
November 5	Mat-Su Borough Election Day	
November 7	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting & Stars of the Industry Luncheon	Evangelo's
November 28-29	Mat-Su CVB office closed for Thanksgiving holiday	
December 8-12	National Tour Association Travel Exchange Mat-Su CVB will take appointments with tour operators	Fort Worth, Texas



Photographer Tom Bol shoots images from a helicopter near Matanuska Glacier.

## Annual photo shoot is successful

Thanks to incredible weather, the annual Mat-Su CVB photo shoot was very successful, with more than 350 images captured over the course of five days.

Each summer, Mat-Su CVB contracts photographer Tom Bol on the photo shoot. The images are used in all Mat-Su CVB collateral, including the visitor guide, the web site, print and digital ads and social media. Mat-Su CVB owns the usage rights to the images for three years.

This summer, the shoot took place the end of June and beginning of July, with temperatures in the 90s.

New images captured this year include spectacular Denali images from the Peters

Hills area, helicopters around Denali, aerial Matanuska Glacier images and peony farming.

"Despite the great weather, we were challenged by smoke from the many forest fires that were taking place at the time," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "But this year's shoot was one of the most successful we've ever had. The images are amazing."

Tom Bol has been shooting for Mat-Su CVB for more than 15 years and is widely regarded as one of the top outdoor recreation photographers in the country. Based in Fort Collins, Colo., Bol has written photography books and contributes to many magazines.

[www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com)

## Web site statistics

Jan. 1 - Aug. 31, 2019

### Users

81,137

Up 6.5 percent from 2018

### Sessions

102,710

Up 6.8 percent from 2018

### Page views

183,301

Up 3.6 percent from 2018

### Interesting note

Mobile traffic to [www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com) now represents 56 percent of overall traffic, an increase of 12.7 percent in 2018. To grasp how fast this trend has developed, consider that mobile visits to the site in 2017 only accounted for 34 percent of overall traffic.

Because of this, Mat-Su CVB designs pages with mobile viewing in mind. The web site is responsive, meaning it can scale to any device it is viewed on, from cell phones to tablets to desktop computer monitors, to give users the best experience.



Did you know peony farming is a growing industry in the Mat-Su Valley? The Mat-Su CVB annual photo shoot included a stop at Champion's Peony Farm near Hatcher Pass.

YAHOO!  
**Mat-Su**

610 S. Bailey St. Suite 201  
Palmer, AK 99645

(907) 746-5000  
[www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com)