

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2021

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Cultural tourism workshop in January features national speaker

The Mat-Su CVB is pleased to announce a Cultural Tourism Workshop on Jan. 18, 2022 at the Palmer Depot.

The workshop will feature Richard Peterson, President & CEO of the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Marketing Council and a member of the U.S. Travel Association Board of Directors, and include open dialogue about the importance of cultural and heritage tourism and how the Mat-Su Valley can grow.

"Richard is a national leader in the industry and is the leading expert on historical and cultural tourism, and we're honored to have him facilitate this important discussion," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

Prior to the January event, Peterson and Mat-Su CVB staff are coordinating a community stakeholder survey. The results will form the basis of the January discussion.

See WORKSHOP, Page 3



Richard Peterson is the President & CEO of the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Marketing Council.

Virtual 'Voice of the Membership,' annual meeting set for Nov. 12

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting its annual meeting virtually on Nov. 12, giving members the opportunity to learn about the last year's marketing and membership programs, as well as meet the newly elected Board of Directors.

The Voice of the Membership is an open forum that allows members to bring up any suggestions for the board, address concerns and offer input for the organization to consider during the planning retreat.

"With Covid case counts still very high, we felt the responsible thing to do was to hold it virtually once again this year," said

Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill. "The virtual platform still allows us to host the Voice of the Membership and present the newly elected board to the members."

We encourage all members to log into Zoom using this [link](#). It will also be e-mailed in member e-bulletins. One lucky member attending the virtual annual meeting will win a 1/8 page display ad in the 2023 Mat-Su Visitor Guide, including layout and design.

"This is your chance to address the

See MEETING, Page 3

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Board of Directors**

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From the Board Chair's desk

Make your vote count for tourism during November's election

The November 2 Mat-Su Borough election is one of the most important elections in over a decade for our industry. We have been fortunate to have had Vern Halter in a leadership role of our Borough Assembly for more than 12 years. He has been a huge supporter and advocate during his tenure for tourism marketing and infrastructure. Vern understands the economic impact and opportunities tourism brings to the borough. He is terming off the assembly after six years as mayor and six years representing District 7. Three of seven assembly seats are also on the ballot. I ask you to make your vote count!

Each year the Mat-Su CVB surveys assembly candidates on tourism issues and publishes their responses. In this issue you will find candidate answers to four questions concerning our industry priorities. Two candidates are running for borough mayor and eight candidates are seeking three assembly seats. Five assembly candidates did not submit responses after several requests which alarms me they don't place importance on borough tourism issues.

The Mat-Su CVB does not endorse candidates, but this survey is published to educate our members and stakeholders on candidate tourism opinions. I believe

the future success of tourism is at the ballot box this year. Our industry was disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and we have had to overcome nearly impossible challenges to survive the past two summers. Decisions made at the borough level on funding tourism promotion, construction of the Gateway

Visitor Center and support for trails and parks is vital to bringing more visitors to the Valley.

Recent elections in the Valley have been won by very close margins. That means your vote is more important in this election than ever before. Early and absentee in-person voting began on October 18 and will continue through November 1. You can find more information on voting at www.matsugov.us/elections.

One last request. November 16 will be

Vern's last assembly meeting as mayor. Send him a note or an email, or show up at the meeting during Audience Participation and thank him for his service, his respect and leadership, and his support for our tourism industry.

Mark Fleenor (info@sheepmountain.com) is the Chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. He owns and operates Sheep Mountain Lodge.



**Mark Fleenor,
Sheep Mountain Lodge,
Mat-Su CVB Board Chair**

Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors ballots sent electronically

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors election is taking place online for the first time, and members have received an electronic ballot. Voting is open until 5 p.m. November 4.

Each voting member's primary contact received a ballot via e-mail on October 8. If you did not receive a ballot, please e-mail neil@alaskavisit.com. Each voting member may only vote once per organization.

"We encourage every member to take a minute and read the candidates' statements

and cast their vote," Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill said.

This year, there are four seats open for election and five candidates running. Board members running for reelection include Heather Dudick of the Alaska Railroad, Mark Fleenor of Sheep Mountain Lodge and Dan Wilcock of Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours. The other two candidates are Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm and Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation.

From the President & CEO's desk

Tourism's recovery an optimistic sign

At last week's ATIA Summit "A Roadmap to Tourism Recovery," Adam Sacks from Tourism Economics reported optimism in the recovery of the travel and tourism industry in 2022. I also feel an increased amount of hope in conversations I have had with our members and stakeholders and the recent positive news we have received from our EDA grant application for completion of the Gateway Visitor Center.

We have learned a great amount about the resiliency of our industry since the start of the pandemic. Our partners have been challenged by workforce issues, a radical change in late bookings and implementing safe COVID practices. We have adapted to a loss of cruise visitors by marketing to our in-state residents and independent travelers. Here at Mat-Su CVB we are taking advantage of this pivotal opportunity to focus on collaboration to advance and develop strategies for long-term growth of the visitor industry in our borough.

We are engaging with a variety of community stakeholders to organize a Cultural & Heritage Workshop on January 18, an in-person event at the Palmer Depot (see story on page 1). We will kick it off by introducing U.S. Cultural & Heritage Marketing Council Executive Director Richard Peterson during our virtual Annual Meeting on November 12. Richard will share the opportunities in creating strategies to develop and promote cultural experiences and announce the distribution

of a survey that will provide community feedback on existing experiences and priorities. The results of the survey will help guide the workshop participants with a baseline to map strategies to develop partnerships and themes. We will be communicating much more about this event in the coming weeks.



**Bonnie Quill,
Mat-Su CVB
President & CEO**

The most powerful and impactful announcement on the horizon for tourism in over a decade is coming soon. The EDA informed the Mat-Su Borough and Mat-Su CVB on September 28 the grant application to complete the Gateway Visitor Center submitted in October 2020, has been reviewed for merit and selected for further consideration.

This encouraging news included a short list of requested supplemental information and required the borough to publish a public notice the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) is considering funding the project.

If the Gateway Visitor Center application is awarded, a groundbreaking and construction would provide a huge timely boost to our industry. As we develop and promote exceptional visitor experiences, the Gateway Visitor Center will be a world-class facility to showcase our destination. With the Arctic Winter Games coming to the borough in 2024 this couldn't be better timing.

Bonnie Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) is the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.

Denali National Park to have limited access for visitors in 2022

Denali National Park announced last week that approximately half of the 92-mile Denali Park Road will not be open for the 2022 summer season due to a landslide at Pretty Rocks.

Most of Denali National Park will remain open for visitors, and buses will continue to provide access to mile 43. The long-term solution is a permanent bridge over the slide area, originally proposed for 2023. In a press release, the National Park Service and the Federal Highways Administration said they are working

to identify funding and contracting opportunities to accelerate the overall project schedule into 2022 and complete the permanent bridge earlier than initially planned.

"We look forward to getting started on the long-term solution at Pretty Rocks. Meanwhile, Denali is ready for visitors in 2022. We will continue to have access to great wildlife viewing, views of Denali, front-country trails and backcountry hiking and camping," said Brooke Merrell, deputy superintendent."

WORKSHOP

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Peterson is a champion of sustainable tourism, representing the diversity of cultures, communities, art, historic places, heritage sites, museums and culinary connections.

"The living history we share today connects the stories of our past to the experiences we will discover anew tomorrow," Peterson said.

The U.S. Cultural and Heritage Marketing Council works with destinations and businesses to develop strategic plans, develop partnerships and connect community organizations through cultural and historical resources.

Their approach examines the cultural history of destinations and connects it with contemporary resources such as hotels, restaurants and museums, to provide an immersive visitor experience.

"Cultural tourism goes beyond just the history of the area, it includes the culinary scene, art, recreation, the outdoors and a wide range of experiences that help define your destination. Richard will be bringing all of our stakeholders together to have a discussion about how we can continue to grow as a destination by providing these cultural experiences to our visitors," Quill said.

Invitations for the January event will be mailed to members and included in e-bulletins.

Also, keep an eye out for an e-mailed survey in November, and take a minute to complete it and return it to Mat-Su CVB.

For more information, contact Quill at bonnie@alaskavisit.com or (907) 746-5000.

MEETING

Continued from Page 1

staff and board, and we look forward to hearing your input," Quill said. "

Typically, the Mat-Su CVB hosts an educational forum along with the annual meeting. This year, that workshop will take place in January and focus on the importance of cultural and heritage tourism (see story, Page 1).

For more information, e-mail casey@alaskavisit.com.

Mat-Su Borough elections set for November 2

The Mat-Su Borough election is Nov. 2, with three Mat-Su Borough Assembly seats and the Mat-Su Borough Mayor positions on the ballot, as well as school board positions.

Candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mayor were asked to submit answers to a questionnaire regarding tourism marketing and related tourism questions. Candidates were contacted

three times prior to publishing the results, and extended the deadline. Five Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates failed to respond to the survey regarding tourism topics. They are Ferdinand Kruger and Dee McKee in District 3, Richard Clippard and Jesse Sumner in District 6 and Ron Bernier in District 7.

This marks the first year the Mat-Su Borough elections are held in November,

previously they were held in October. City elections were held in early October.

In addition to regular polling locations, early and absentee voting is available. Any registered voter may request an absentee ballot prior to October 26 at the Mat-Su Borough web site, www.matsugov.us/elections. Early in-person voting began on Oct. 18 and continues through Monday, Nov. 1.

Assembly candidates share thoughts on tourism

Question 1

As with most local and regional convention & visitors bureaus, the Mat-Su CVB receives funding collected by the Borough through a bed tax of 5%. Historically the assembly approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$747,500 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65% 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% formula (35% dedicated to tourism infrastructure projects.) But in 2020 due to COVID, the assembly used the CARES Act grant from the state to fund the CVB for two years (\$1.5 million), recognizing the economic impact of the loss of visitors and bed tax collections and the need for recovery of the struggling tourism sector. The next budget cycle will be FY23. Do you support the historical funding formula? Why or why not?

Matthew Beck, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: Favor. We can also work together for appropriations for other projects and priorities to promote and build tourism.

Edna DeVries, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: Favor.

Mark Bailey, Assembly District 3: Favor. I am in favor of the traditional formula because the bed tax is an equitable way to ensure the money spent from tourists in the Mat-Su is distributed back into the industries that need it.

Ferdinand Kruger, Assembly District 3 – Did not respond.

Dee McKee, Assembly District 3 – Did not respond.

Kristi Short, Assembly District 6:

While I think it was wonderful that the CARES Act brought in funding, it would be great to see the funding in the \$1.5 million range or higher every year. The 5% bed tax should be raised, a minimal increase to be paid by visitors and not Borough residents. With the popularity of our area, the increase in population of 20 percent Borough wide in the last 10 years (a 60 percent increase in just the Hatcher Pass area), and the Arctic Winter Games coming in 2024, I would love to see a higher percentage dedicated to tourism infrastructure projects. Can you imagine working with the Fishhook Community Council to develop a Hatcher Pass Visitor Center? Or a CVB owned accommodations for tourism? Let's try thinking outside the box!

Richard Clipper, Assembly District 6 – Did not respond.

Jesse Sumner, Assembly District 6 – Did not respond.

Tam Boeve, Assembly District 7: Favor. I support the historical funding formula (with another 3-year commitment) because it is vital that the Mat-Su CVB has the fiscal security to effectively operate and promote tourism.

Ron Bernier, Assembly District 7 – Did not respond.

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?

Beck, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: Oppose

DeVries, Mat-Su Borough mayor: Did not respond.

Bailey, District 3: Oppose. I am opposed to using the bed tax for non-tourism expenditures because the bed tax is a user tax that should be spent on projects and priorities that affect and are affected by those users.

Kruger, District 3 – Did not respond.

McKee, District 3 – Did not respond.

Short, District 6: Tell them to go find their own dollars! Seriously though, would the funds be used to make sure new restroom facilities are built that tourists and residents use? That seems fair. Are the dollars being spent to upgrade the roof of a school? That doesn't seem right or fair. I would push for a greater percentage to be dedicated specifically for tourism projects. Is it to help the Phase 2 construction of the Skeetawk ski area? That seems passable since the ski area could potentially become a very popular tourist destination once it is fully built as we are seeing increasing numbers of folks from Anchorage already coming to use the single lift it currently has.

Clippard, District 6 – Did not respond.

Sumner, District 6 – Did not respond.

Boeve, District 7: Oppose. Tourism benefits Borough residents both economically and by providing world-class recreational opportunities.

Bernier, District 7 – Did not respond.

Question 3

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

See CANDIDATES, Page 5

CANDIDATES: Share their thoughts about tourism

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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 old center for \$1.2 million in 2016 is dedicated as a match for the \$8 million needed to complete the shovel-ready project. The borough currently has the project listed in its federal priorities and submitted an EDA ARPA grant application for completion. Do you support the development of a new Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center? Why or why not?

Beck, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: Yes! The center will be a hub of activity and learning for visitors and residents.

DeVries, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: I support the borough's actions.

Bailey, District 3: Absolutely, this project will serve as a great opportunity to create jobs in the near and long term and serve as a gateway for tourism in Mat-Su.

Kruger, District 3 – Did not respond.

McKee, District 3 – Did not respond.

Short, District 6: I absolutely support the new facility! How cool will it be to have an area dedicated to teaching locals and visitors alike about Alaska Grown?! To teach them about all of the incredible

recreation opportunities, geography, cultural diversity, historic areas, how and where the hiking/biking/horse trails are, where to take your adult sled to play and where to take your kids sledding, how to get public transportation, how/where to go fishing, pick berries, watch the auroras? YES! Yes, to all of this!

Clippard, District 6 – Did not respond.

Sumner, District 6 – Did not respond.

Boeve, District 7: Favor. The new Gateway Visitor Center will improve the visitor experience by providing an overview of the many historical, cultural, recreational, and dining opportunities in the Mat-Su Valley.

Bernier, District 7 – Did not respond.

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%, Fairbanks 8%, Juneau 7% and Denali 7%. 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 marketing and tourism

infrastructure projects?

Beck, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: I believe it should be higher but believe it is up to the voters to decide. No one looks at the bed tax when planning a trip, especially to a place like ours. They simply pay what they have to and come.

DeVries, Mat-Su Borough Mayor: I support the assembly's action.

Bailey, District 3: I support raising the bed tax to 7 percent to remain competitive with neighboring communities. I believe the additional funds will be well spent on advertising and improvements that draw visitors and keep them here longer.

Kruger, District 3 – Did not respond.

McKee, District 3 – Did not respond.

Short, District 6: The Mat-Su CVB has done a tremendous job with the funds it has so far, but there is still so much more that needs to be done! A minimal increase would benefit our community greatly.

Clippard, District 6 – Did not respond.

Sumner, District 6 – Did not respond.

Boeve, District 7: Probably favor. The feedback I've received from the constituents in District 7 supports raising the bed tax to a level more consistent with other areas of the state. I would be open to placing this item on the ballot.

State grant leads to increased destination promotion

From New York to Los Angeles, the Mat-Su Valley was seen in more places than ever before thanks to a Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development grant the Mat-Su CVB received this summer.

Mat-Su CVB applied for and received a \$170,000 marketing grant from the state, which allowed extensive promotion in key national markets. The grant was part of a \$10 million statewide grant program to market Alaska as a safe destination.

The grant was limited to June-August campaigns.

"This grant allowed us to do things we've never done before, and promote the destination in new ways," said Mat-Su CVB Marketing & Communications Manager Casey Ressler.

- Streaming national television. A 30-second television commercial aired 915,000 times in six key nationwide cities, including during the Olympics, on streaming channels.
- National display advertising. Targeted digital display ads generated 2.4 million impressions in the same six markets.

- TripAdvisor. For the first time ever, the Mat-Su CVB advertised on TripAdvisor with digital ads and destination sponsorships. It generated 2.75 million impressions and 3,579 click-throughs.
- In-state television. A 30-second television commercial aired on KTUU Channel 2 in June, July and August 60 times, including during the Olympics.
- Targeted search engine marketing. Pay-per-click marketing resulted in 153,719 web site sessions and 250,000 page views from June 1 to August 30, a 263 percent increase from 2019.
- Travel influencers. Mat-Su CVB hosted two social media travel influencers in August who have a combined following of approximately 100,000. They produced posts on Facebook and Instagram, as well as a national blog post.

IPW targets international tour operators, media

The Mat-Su CVB met with more than 30 international tour operators and 20 international travel media during IPW in Las Vegas in September, the first tradeshow the organization has attended since the pandemic began.

IPW, hosted by the U.S. Travel Association, is the largest gathering of international operators in the country. The annual show was not held in 2020 due to the pandemic, however.

"It was great to being back to meeting face-to-face with international operators," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "We know the international sector is going to take some time to return, but they all were very optimistic and reported high interest in Alaska."

The one-on-one appointments were 15 minutes, giving ample time to discuss itineraries, new products and highlight future opportunities for the operators.

The Mat-Su CVB also participated in the Media Marketplace event, the only Alaska destination or organization to do so. Bonnie Quill, Mat-Su CVB President & CEO, had a full book of appointments with travel media.

"It was a great opportunity because we were the only Alaskans there. We were able to tell our story and generate excitement about the destination to writers, bloggers, influencers and podcasters from around the world," Quill said.

Other Alaska destinations and organizations participating in IPW included the Alaska Railroad, the Alaska Travel Industry Association, Explore Fairbanks, Visit Anchorage and All Alaska Tours.



Mat-Su CVB Marketing & Communications Manager Casey Ressler meets with an international tour operator at IPW in September.

Mat-Su CVB to participate in Media Road Show

The Mat-Su CVB will meet with top travel writers from around the country Oct. 24-26 during Alaska Media Road Show in Las Vegas.

After a year hiatus during the pandemic, Alaska Media Road Show returns, giving Alaska DMOs and businesses the opportunity to meet with travel media one-on-one.

"We've generated a lot of positive media coverage about the Mat-Su Valley through our participation in Road Show," said

Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager. "As much as being at Road Show is about generating coverage, it's also building relationships with the writers that prove beneficial throughout the year."

Media scheduled to attend this year's event write for publications such as the Washington Post, New York Times, Afar, National Geographic Traveler and Conde Nast, among other outlets. Many of the participants are freelancers who write for

multiple publications.

The Mat-Su CVB is also the social media sponsor at the event. The event is organized by Thompson & Co., the state's tourism public relations company based in Anchorage.

"Thompson & Co. does a great job every year of making sure the event attracts the highest quality travel media possible," Ressler said.

Visitor Guide to publish in December

Design and production of the 2022 Mat-Su Visitor Guide is finishing up, with the guide going to press in mid-December for distribution in early January.

The guide features trip planning advice, sample itineraries, a calendar of events and member listings. Every Mat-Su CVB member receives a complimentary line listing, as well the opportunity to purchase display advertising.

"Research has indicated that despite the obvious trend of everything being available on your smartphone, a printed visitor guide is still an important tool for consumers," said Mat-Su CVB's

Casey Ressler. "Travelers are still using printed visitor guides, both while they are planning and while they are in-market."

The guide is being designed by Brilliant Media Strategies in Anchorage and features new photography from earlier this summer. 100,000 guides will be printed and distributed to high-potential visitors, throughout Alaska at visitor centers, and at tradeshow and consumer shows Mat-Su CVB attends throughout the year.

A copy will be mailed to Mat-Su CVB members, but if you'd like additional copies in January, e-mail info@alaskavisit.com.

Give us a follow!

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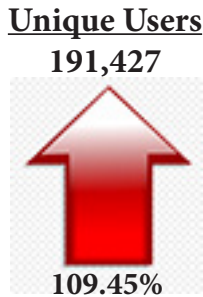
Facebook
Visit Alaska's Mat-Su Valley

Twitter
[@visitmatsu](https://twitter.com/visitmatsu)

YouTube
[@yahoomatsu](https://www.youtube.com/yahoomatsu)

AlaskaVisit.com sees large increase in web traffic

January 1 - October 14, 2021 compared to 2019 (non-pandemic year)



Planning under way for 2024 Arctic Winter Games

The Arctic Winter Games Host Society has been formed and the Board of Directors were recently seated, starting the work to host the Games in the Mat-Su Borough in March, 2024.

Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler is part of the executive committee and is the Host Society Director of Marketing and Public Relations. He said the Games pose a great opportunity for the Valley.

"Hosting the Arctic Winter Games here gives us a chance to welcome the world to the Mat-Su Valley for a week and show them why this is not only a great place to visit, but an even better place to live."

Approximately 2,000 athletes from the circumpolar world will gather to participate in 21 sports and a week-long

cultural exchange. An additional 2,000 volunteers are expected to help carry out the games, in addition to international media and visitors.

"The Host Society is at the very beginning of planning the Games, but volunteers will be needed for a wide variety of jobs. There is no job too small to volunteer for. From helping organize the Games and fund raising down to being a timer at a race the week of the Games, we will need dedicated volunteers to make it a success," Ressler said.

Committees will be forming in the next few weeks. If you are interested in serving on a committee or would like more information about the Games, e-mail Ressler at casey@alaskavisit.com.



Arctic Winter Games

Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

The UPS Store Palmer
Melissa Johnson
(907) 375-9777

www.theupsstore.com/3548.htm

Deshka Landing Charters & Lodge
Maria Staffieri
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Alaska Nature Guides
Noelle Carbone
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Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge
Traci Miller
(206) 336-5837
www.princesslodges.com

McKinley Chalet Resort
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Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation
Wes Hoskins
www.matsutrails.org

Once in a Blue Moose
Cher Jefford
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Rise Balloon Adventures
Carrie Skinner
(907) 203-8299
www.riseballoonadventures.com

Blue Mountain Chalet
Diana Zitmanis
(907) 315-8924
www.blue-mountain-chalet.business.site

Squid Acres Kennel
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Clearwater Mountain Lodge
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Alpine Creek Lodge
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Aurora Guesthouse
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Trapper John's Cabin & Cottages
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The Chophouse at Lake Lucille
Joshua Broda
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Trekkers take a selfie on Matanuska Glacier. This image was captured as part of the 2021 Mat-Su photo shoot.

YAHOO! **Mat-Su**

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