

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2022

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## Annual meeting set for November 18

It's been three years since we last met for our annual meeting and awards luncheon and we are ready to celebrate in a fun and festive manner. Who doesn't like a pizza party! And Julia Child once said, "a party without cake is just a meeting."

Mark your calendars to attend the Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony November 18 at Evangelo's beginning at 10 a. m.

The theme and topic of our annual event is currently top secret and you will gradually learn the reasons you will not want to miss out.

It is also your chance to meet the newly elected Board of Directors, offer feedback to the organization, and learn about

membership and marketing programs during the "Voice of the Membership" program.

At noon, pizza and cake will be served as we celebrate the "Stars of the Industry" awards, honoring those who have gone above and beyond.

The annual meeting is a great place to meet other members, network and build connections. Mat-Su CVB will be giving away an 1/8 page ad in the 2024 Mat-Su Visitor Guide to one lucky attending member.

For more information and sponsorship opportunities, interested members can contact Justin Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com)

## Mat-Su CVB completes Sustainable Tourism Master Plan

The Mat-Su CVB recently developed a Sustainable Tourism Master Plan, which will provide a road map to sustainable growth in the tourism industry in the Mat-Su Borough.

The project was funded by an American Rescue Plan Act Nonprofit Recovery Fund grant, and McKinley Research led the project. The entire document can be viewed at <https://www.alaskavisit.com/masterplan>

"This master plan is an important part in the evolution of our region as a visitor destination," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill. "It identifies our

strengths, and provides strategies to improve on the challenges we face so that we can responsibly handle visitor volume while preserving and enhancing the way of life for our residents."

A leadership team of Quill, board members Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation and Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm and Kim Sollien of the Mat-Su Borough worked with McKinley research and Huddle AK on the project.

A resident survey was conducted in May and June and four community workshops were held throughout the Mat-Su



See PLAN, Page 3

**2021-2022  
Mat-Su CVB  
Board of Directors**

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*From the Board Chair's desk*

## Celebrating the successes of Mat-Su CVB, which benefit us all

For many of us, this summer has been frenetic, trying to juggle being short-staffed with giving our visitors a positive experience. It's been challenging, and I'm sure you all are ready for a little break. To say the summer was busy is an understatement.

At the CVB, this summer was filled with good news after good news. I encourage you to read through this newsletter to hear about some of the big accomplishments the CVB has made in the last few months. The staff has been working hard to promote the Mat-Su Valley as a premier destination, and those efforts are being recognized internationally.

Bonnie Quill, the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO, was honored by Destinations International with the Destination Organization Leadership Award. She was one of three recipients and becomes the first-ever Alaskan to win the award, which recognizes her contributions as a leader in our community.

On the heels of that accolade, Mat-Su CVB was recognized as one of three finalists for a Destiny Award, which is given out by the U.S. Travel Association, for the in-state marketing campaign. We were competing in a category for a marketing campaign of less than \$1 million. It is a true statement of our organization's creativity and efficiency that the other finalists' campaigns were almost \$1 million, yet our entire annual operating budget is less than \$1 million.

Awards and recognition are nice, but one of the most important things to happen was the awarding of a grant and subsequent completion of a Sustainable

Tourism Master Plan. I encourage you to come to the CVB luncheon on October 21 and hear about this, and to read the full report. This master plan has strategies and steps on how we can sustainably grow tourism while preserving and enhancing the quality way of life for our residents.

This will have a big impact on the future of our industry for years to come.

Another positive to report is the continual growth of our web site, which is our largest investment of marketing funds. This important tool benefits members in a big way, by inspiring potential visitors to come, and by giving us exposure through online listings. Through the end of August, visitor traffic to the site is up almost 17 percent from 2021. What is staggering, however, is that site traffic is up 159 percent from the

same time period in 2019, the last non-pandemic year.

Rest assured, we are not being complacent despite these successes. The Mat-Su CVB is continuing to maximize our marketing dollars in ways that benefit the entire Mat-Su Borough and bring visitors to our individual doors. I hope you'll join us on November 18 at Evangelo's at 10 a.m. for our annual meeting, where we will highlight our marketing and membership plans, as well as have an opportunity to hear from the members about what they feel is important for our organization.

Mark Fleenor ([info@sheepmountain.com](mailto:info@sheepmountain.com)) is the owner of Sheep Mountain Lodge and chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.



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

**Keep an eye on your e-mail inbox in October for your  
Board of Directors online ballot from Election Buddy**

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

# A special shout out of appreciation for our valued team members

*"Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgiving, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings."*

- William Arthur Ward

I want to dedicate this space to the staff at Mat-Su CVB. Casey, Justin and Neil are my work family. And I couldn't have asked for a better team to experience a 100-year, industry-shattering, event like a pandemic.

Looking back over these past two years I am thankful, grateful for their passion, dedication, empathy and talent. I witness it every day. They have all been with me nearly my entire 22 years at Mat-Su CVB.

They have lifted me up so many times. I am so proud of our team and the respect

they have earned from our members and partners.

Thank you Team Mat-Su CVB!

The summer season is winding down and I know many of you are exhausted and ready for a break.

This is just a soft reminder to recognize our teams who have carried us through this challenging period.

Employee appreciation is critical to employee retention. It goes a long way to ensure team members feel valued. Whether a handwritten thank you card, end of season party or bonus, it's time to say thank you for all they have done to ensure your success.



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

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

## Board of Directors nominations open

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. 18.

There are three board openings among the 10-person board. Each member serves a three-year term. Current board seats up for election are currently held by Travis Taylor (Premier Alaska Tours), Fernando Salvador (Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge/Pursuit) and Rick Peterson (Holland America/Princess, Mt. McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge).

"By serving on the board, you make valuable contributions to the future of the tourism industry," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

Interested members may self nominate. Candidates should declare their candidacy to Quill ([bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com)) by Sept. 30. Candidates must submit a "statement to the membership" of no longer than 300 words, along with a photo, by Oct. 5. Ballots will then be e-mailed to members no later than Oct. 7, and due back no later than 5 p.m. Nov. 3.

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

## PLAN: Strategies identified for sustainable growth

### Continued from Page 1

Borough to involve people both inside and outside the tourism industry. In addition, McKinley Research conducted 18 stakeholder interviews.

Some of the strengths identified in the master plan include the Mat-Su Borough's location and accessibility and the ability for visitors to have a "closer" Denali experience.

A diversity of experiences was also identified, as well as emerging trends such as agritourism, winter, cultural tourism and adventure tourism.

Challenges identified included lack of name recognition around the term "Mat-Su" and making the Mat-Su Borough the primary destination for visitors to Southcentral Alaska. The limited availability of lodging is also seen as a challenge.

Common themes cited through the interviews and surveys included a need for more resident engagement and

communication; infrastructure gaps and maintenance issues; concerns about sustainability; challenges with visitor volume in Talkeetna and its impact; and opportunities to provide benefits to the region including through the Gateway Visitor Center.

Respondents reported a very high quality of life and a high degree of support for the tourism industry.

There are concerns about tourism growth identified in the plan. Those concerns include inadequate capacity to absorb growth; a need for more planning and governance; traffic levels; issues with trails and trailheads; crime; protecting the environment; employee housing; workforce challenges; Talkeetna as a pinch point; and support for more independent tourism as opposed to "industrial" tourism.

To view the entire Sustainable Tourism Master Plan, go to <https://www.alaskavisit.com/masterplan>.

## STMP focus of Oct. 21 luncheon

Want to learn more about the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan developed by the Mat-Su CVB? Come to the Oct. 21 Mat-Su CVB luncheon at Evangelo's and find out.

Representatives from McKinley Research and their partners at Huddle AK will give an overview of the report, and discuss the key findings and strategies that can be implemented to strengthen our destination and visitor experiences.

There is no fee for the program, and a buffet lunch can be purchased through Evangelo's. The luncheon starts at noon. To RSVP, please e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

# Annual 'Stars of the Industry' awards are BACK!

After a three-year hiatus, the Stars of the Industry awards are back! Mat-Su CVB's annual awards luncheon honors businesses, organizations and individuals who have gone above and beyond. They were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, but this year, we're ready to celebrate the successes of the last few years.

"In a sense, every Mat-Su CVB member is worthy of recognition after the last two years. Our industry has faced immeasurable challenges, from the pandemic to supply issues to worker shortages," Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill said. "Our industry is extremely resilient."

If you know of someone who has made a difference in the industry, nominate them for an award using the submission form on this page. You can mail them to the Mat-Su CVB office (610 S. Bailey St. Ste. 201, Palmer) or e-mail them to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

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

The Northern Lights Award honors a community or organization that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. The Gold Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made significant accomplishments in the visitor industry.

The Tourism Angel 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. Finally, the Cheechako Award is given to a new business or organization that has shone entrepreneurial zeal and managed to not only survive, but thrive in its early years.

The awards luncheon is held in conjunction with the Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting on Nov. 18. The luncheon begins at noon at Evangelo's.

## 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. 21  
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)



# Bonnie Quill receives international leadership award

Bonnie Quill, President & CEO of the Mat-Su CVB, was recently honored by Destinations International with the Destination Organization Leadership Award, one of the most prestigious individual honors in the destination marketing industry.

Quill is the first Alaskan to ever receive the award, and one of only three recipients internationally in 2022. The Destination Organization Leadership Award recognizes outstanding individuals who, through their work and achievements, have made a significant impact on the destination marketing (DMO) industry as well as a profound difference in their communities.

"I am extremely honored to receive this award, but more important to share this recognition with my Alaska DMO partners. Alaska is a collaboration of leaders who partner together to strengthen our destination. I have to acknowledge the many opportunities and leadership experience Alaska tourism has blessed me with," Quill said.

Destinations International represents DMOs around the world and focuses on advocacy, leadership and education in the destination marketing industry. Quill received the award during the Destinations International Convention in Toronto in July.



Bonnie Quill was honored with the Destination Organization Leadership Award.

# In-state campaign finalist for national marketing award

Mat-Su CVB's in-state marketing campaign was recently named one of three national finalists for a Destiny Award by the U.S. Travel Association.

The Destiny Awards recognize U.S. destinations for excellence and creative accomplishment in destination marketing and promotion at the local and regional level. The Mat-Su CVB campaign joined Billings, Montana and Palm Beach, Florida as the three finalists in the "integrated marketing campaign, less than \$1 million" category.

"It's an honor to be named a finalist for such a prestigious award by the U.S. Travel Association, and to have our campaigns compared to DMOs with much larger budgets," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

The in-state campaign focuses on a "trails" theme and highlights individual communities within the Mat-Su Borough. A "hiking trails," "adventure trail" and "beer and bites trails" promotes outdoor recreation, our restaurants and breweries to in-state residents and their visiting friends and relatives.

"We highlight different destinations within the Mat-Su Valley,

to encourage Alaskans to play in their own backyard," Ressler said.

The multi-faceted campaign included print, radio, social media and digital ad placements.

A promotional graphic for "Hiking Trails - Mat-Su Valley". It features a green background with a photo of two hikers on a trail. The text "Hiking TRAILS" is in a large, white, cursive font, with "MAT-SU VALLEY" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. At the bottom, there is a green button that says "SPECIAL OFFERS JUST FOR ALASKANS CLICK HERE" and the "SHOW UP MAT-SU Valley" logo.

A promotional graphic for "Adventure Trails - Talkeetna". It features a dark red background with a photo of a jetboat on a lake with snow-capped mountains in the background. The text "Adventure TRAILS" is in a large, white, cursive font, with "TALKEETNA" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. Below the photo, it says "Talkeetna is the place to be for summer adventure! From flightseeing and jetboating to zip lining and biking, head to Talkeetna and take advantage of Alaskans-only discounts this summer". At the bottom, there is a QR code, the text "Alaskans-only Discounts at AlaskaVisit.com/Specials", and the "SHOW UP MAT-SU Valley" logo.

## Cultural tourism highlights September 16 luncheon

The Mat-Su CVB is kicking off its fall luncheon season with an important Cultural Tourism Roundtable on Sept. 16 at noon at Turkey Red.

In January, the Mat-Su CVB hosted a Cultural Tourism Summit, hosted by Richard Peterson, President & CEO of the U.S. Cultural Heritage Marketing Council. The September luncheon will continue those conversations.

"The panel will talk about strategies

and next steps we can take to honor and celebrate our culture and heritage to provide an authentic visitor experience," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

The roundtable features the following panelists: Kevin Toothaker and Marilyn Balluta from Knik Tribal Council; Amelia Alcantra and Angie Wade from Chicakloon Village Traditional Village; Sam Dinges of the Palmer Museum &

Visitor Center; Bethany Buckingham Follett from the Wasilla Museum & Visitor Center; and Mandy Garcia from Salmon Berry Travel and Tours.

The luncheon begins at noon. There is no cost to attend the program, and a buffet lunch is available for purchase from Turkey Red.

Please RSVP to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) so we have an accurate head count for Turkey Red.

## Planning under way for 2024 Arctic Winter Games

The 2024 Arctic Winter Games are being held in the Mat-Su Borough for the first time, and the CVB is a big partner with the Host Society to help make the Games a success.

Mat-Su CVB Marketing & Communications Manager Casey Ressler is on the Host Society board of directors and recently attended the Canada Games "Transfer of Knowledge" program along with Host Society President Amy Spargo, Vice President Leda Borys and General Manager Kerry Quade.

"Having representatives from the Host Society participate in the observer program, with four days of classroom work with organizers of similar Games, gave us great insight on what we need to do to make the Mat-Su Games the best ever," Ressler said.



Justin Saunders, Mat-Su CVB's membership manager, has also been working with the Host Society to help

build out an accommodations grid for use by spectators traveling to the Games in 2024.

"Hosting the Arctic Winter Games is a tremendous opportunity for our destination," Ressler said. "It will bring in visitors from around the world, and elevate our destination for years to come. We're looking forward to inviting the Arctic world to the Mat-Su Valley, and having those Games leave a lasting legacy in our community."

More than 2,000 volunteers will be needed to execute the Games, as well as financial support through individual donations and corporate sponsorships.

For more information on how to volunteer or to donate, visit <https://www.awg2024.org>.

## 2023 Mat-Su Visitor Guide to print in December

The 2023 Mat-Su Visitor Guide will go to print later this year, with 100,000 copies ready to mail to high-potential visitors at the turn of the new year.

Advertising sales are ongoing, and it's not too late to purchase affordable display advertising. The deadline for display advertising is Sept. 30.

"Digital marketing opportunities are obviously very important for members, but research has shown that travelers still request printed visitor guides for their trip planning," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said.

A digital version of the printed guide is also available for download on AlaskaVisit.com, giving advertisers exposure both in the printed and digital guide. The digital version is perfect for people wanting to take the guide with them on a tablet while traveling.

Brilliant Media Strategies is designing the guide, as they have the last two years. In June, a week-long photo shoot resulted in more than 400 new images from around the Valley.

"It was probably the most productive photo shoot we've ever had, with perfect weather the entire time," Ressler said. "We're looking forward to using new imagery throughout the guide."

Copies of the 2023 guide will be available to members in January. A copy will be mailed to every member, but if you need



The annual photo shoot resulted in 420 new images, including some of luxury camping on the Glenn Highway.

more copies for distribution to your guests or clients, please call Neil Campbell at (907) 746-5000 or e-mail him at [neil@alaskavisit.com](mailto:neil@alaskavisit.com).



January 1 - August 31, 2022 compared to 2021



## AlaskaVisit.com sees continued growth in web traffic

The Mat-Su CVB's largest marketing investment, AlaskaVisit.com, has continued to increase site traffic in 2022, far eclipsing even pre-pandemic sessions.

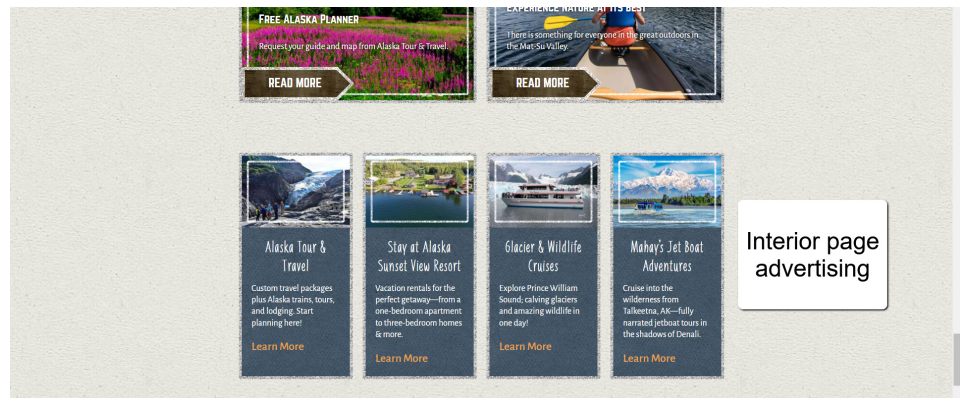
Through August 30, the site has seen a 16.75 percent increase in site traffic, with 257,000 sessions, over 2021 numbers. However, when comparing traffic to 2019, traffic is up 159 percent.

"We are continually investing in the web site, because it's our most important marketing tool," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "We have a very solid search engine optimization program that helps drive organic traffic, as well as a very efficient and targeted pay-per-click strategy that has been performing well ahead of industry standards."

During the summer, the Mat-Su CVB also invested in new trail map widget on the web site, which gives users detailed trail information.

"We're always looking to see how we can make the web site better for not only site users, but also how that in turn helps our members by getting increased exposure," Ressler said.

All members have a listing on the web



DTN allows members to purchase display advertising on AlaskaVisit.com

site that includes TripAdvisor reviews, unlimited photos and videos, descriptions and maps. Members can manage their online listings, add photos and videos, submit special offers and submit events.

You can access the Extranet at <https://mat-su.extranet.simpleviewcrm.com/login/>

For increased exposure, members can purchase display advertising on AlaskaVisit.com and leverage the CVB's investment. Through a partnership with Destination Travel Network (DTN),

members can have display ads integrated on the web site on specific pages.

"Online ads are a great way for members to be seen by people actively planning their visit to Alaska and the Mat-Su Valley," Ressler said. "It's a highly targeted advertising program that is affordable and delivers results."

For more information about advertising on AlaskaVisit.com, interested members can contact Justin Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

## Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

Join us in welcoming these eight new members to the Mat-Su CVB team! Connect with your fellow members to build referral business.

Willow Creek Resort  
Theresa Dean  
(907) 495-6343

<https://www.willowcreekresortalaska.com>

Grand View Café and RV Park  
Mark Parsons  
(907) 746-4480

<https://www.grandviewrv.com>

Go Hike Alaska  
Matthew Worden  
(907) 444-9008

<https://www.gohikealaska.com>

Homestead Kitchen  
Daniel Shir-King  
(587) 222-0903

<https://www.homesteadtalkeetna.com>

Lulu's Tents and Events  
Laura Wilson  
(603) 568-7849

<https://www.lulusalaskangetaway.com>

Say Yes Alaska  
Laura Wilson  
(603) 568-7849

<https://www.sayyesalaska.com>

Tangle Lakes Lodge  
Tawnia Butorac-McCombs  
(907) 822-4202

<https://www.facebook.com/tanglelakeslodge/>

Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum  
Karen Wilken  
(907) 458-6114

<https://www.fountainheadmuseum.com>



The 2022 photo shoot was one of the most productive shoots in recent memory, thanks to gorgeous weather! Stand-up paddleboarding at Knik Glacier was one of the highlights of the shoot.

**YAHOO!**  
**Mat-Su**

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