

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2024

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Valley-wide engagement in Mat-Su CVB branding project

Mat-Su CVB has partnered with CivicBrand to research and form a comprehensive branding strategy for the Mat-Su Valley as a visitor destination. With two site visits, multiple interviews and a widely distributed survey, this effort has sought full inclusivity of every community across this diverse region.

In June, CivicBrand representatives came to the Valley for their first of two site visits. Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler took them to popular communities across the Valley from Talkeetna to Glacier View.

Under the “We Are Mat-Su” banner, CivicBrand distributed a thorough survey to Valley residents and business owners, as well as visitors to the Mat-Su. The survey delved into the varying individual perspectives of the Mat-Su Valley, what it means to each person and how they value it as a destination.

The data collected from the survey has a major influence on the direction of the project. It also pointed out additional topics of discussion to have with key community representatives during a second site visit in August. During

Annual meeting set for November 8

The Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting is November 8 at Everett’s Restaurant in Wasilla. It’s your chance to meet the new Board of Directors, offer feedback to the organization, and learn about membership and marketing programs.

The morning begins at 10 a.m. with a one-hour session focusing on Mat-Su CVB’s branding project in partnership with CivicBrand. This branding effort seeks to unite the Valley with a relevant identity everyone can take pride in and share.

“This has been one of the organization’s



that visit, CivicBrand met with more business owners, some of which had been mentioned by name among the survey responses.

“CivicBrand’s second visit was very insightful,” Ressler said. “After sitting down with more business owners and getting their feedback, I could see a clear vested interest in this project across the Valley.”

CivicBrand’s research efforts include work sessions with both the Mat-Su CVB board and the staff. Ressler said he is very pleased to see how thorough and inclusive the project has been, and he is looking forward to positive momentum under a new brand.

biggest undertakings,” said Mat-Su CVB’s President and CEO Casey Ressler. “It will be exciting to hear about CivicBrand’s findings at the annual meeting.”

The “Voice of the Membership” meeting starts at 11 a.m. The board of directors will be introduced to the membership, and there will be two presentations from the marketing and membership departments. Following, the floor is open for members to bring forth any resolutions or just provide input to the

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**2023-2024
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors**

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From the Board Chair's desk

Winter tourism in the Mat-Su Valley continues to grow

I think all of us in this industry are justified in seeing the close of summer as a sort of milestone or finish line. Summer visitation to Alaska is a full-tilt, nonstop marathon at a sprinter's pace all summer long! A sigh of relief in September (the old August) is a good sign that we've had a successful season.

Though we can all be grateful for a thriving summer, I hope we view this time of year as a transition more than a conclusion. Winter tourism in Alaska has grown increasingly more popular every year. Join me in the mantra, "there is no off season!"

Global interest in an Alaska winter experience has steadily risen every year. Existing winter tourism businesses in the Valley have expanded, new businesses have also sprung up, adding to the variety of adventures our visitors can enjoy here during the colder months. As a longtime Valley resident, I've personally seen this growth of winter tourism opportunities in our destination. Over 50 motorcoaches in March now!

In addition to our world class Government Peak cross country ski trails, the Skeetawk downhill ski area sprang into operation in recent years. This was a decades-long dream realized by an impressive grassroots effort. Aurora viewing and winter lodging packages have answered the rising interest in our breathtaking northern lights. Visitors can also explore glacial ice caves, a unique Valley experience so unbelievable that it made a 2023 cover of Conde Nast Traveler magazine with its global readership.

I've not even mentioned the ice fishing, guided snowshoeing, snow machine tours, dog sledding, ice climbing, heliskiing, and the popular winter and holiday celebrations across our communities. Oh, and let's not forget the world-famous official start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Willow.

Last winter we also hosted Arctic Winter Games 2024. Though the Games were certainly the focus for most of our

visitors at the time, thousands of athletes, coaches, trainers, parents, and support staff took advantage of their time here and graced our communities with their patronage. The Mat-Su Valley is certainly doing winter right.

From being showcased in Conde Nast Traveler to hosting a successful international winter sporting event, our



**Mark Austin,
Musk Ox Farm,
Mat-Su CVB Board Chair**

winter wonderland has enjoyed quite the spotlight lately. Let's work together to keep this momentum going into the coming winter.

Our summer visitors may be returning home with happy memories of their Alaska adventures, but there is a growing number of adventurous and enthusiastic visitors anxiously preparing to visit our region during what is arguably the most beautiful time of year. It's certainly the season of choice if you ask the woolly tenants

of the Musk Ox Farm.

Whether you offer accommodations, transportation, outdoor activities or other services during the winter, this is the time to network together and make the most of what we have to offer to our winter visitors. Stay in touch with Mat-Su CVB staff. Let them know if you're offering new products or hosting new events. Come to the membership luncheons scheduled monthly throughout the fall and winter to take full advantage of Mat-Su CVB's marketing efforts. Build new partnerships with fellow members.

I'm beyond pleased at how much winter tourism has grown in the Valley. We still need to expand accommodations, activities, and events that truly keep our visitors engaged. Imagine what you leave on the table by shutting your doors for the winter! As visitors continue to flock to a snow-covered Alaska looking for a seasonally unique experience, it is very clear that there is NO off season! Let's give them a winter vacation they'll never forget!

Mark Austin (mark@muskoxfarm.org) is the chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.

From the President & CEO's desk

Mat-Su CVB branding project seeks a distinct identity

What is our identity as a destination? As a destination marketing organization? What can we promise to our visitors as a destination?

Those are just a few of the questions we are tackling during the Mat-Su branding project (see page 1) currently under way. It is a project the board of directors has discussed for several years, so finally putting it into action is exciting.

Often, people think of branding as simply a new logo, perhaps a new name for the organization or a new tagline to a slogan. Yes, those are all parts of it. But they are very small parts in the overall scheme of the project.

The goal is to develop an identity that we can promote to our visitors that brings the Valley together as a single destination. It is an enormous challenge considering the diversity in geography,

distance and experiences spread across an area the size of West Virginia. Effective place branding looks beyond just logos and instead creates a comprehensive brand platform and brand architecture that serves a wide range of needs – pride among residents, attractiveness to visitors and community engagement.

So how do we get there? We are working with one of the leading regional destination branding companies in the country, CivicBrand. They have already visited the Mat-Su twice, to get a feel for the visitor experience. But behind the scenes is where important work is being done.

They are interviewing key stakeholders one-on-one, hosting focus groups, doing visitor and resident sentiment surveys and using visitor data to develop a comprehensive view of who we are, and what we are about. In

the coming months, they'll be doing an audit on Mat-Su CVB's marketing assets and developing a brand strategy moving forward.

It is an exciting project, but not a fast one, as every detail matters. We are hoping to have the new brand rolled out just after the first of the year, so stay tuned.

In the meantime, I'd like to invite you to attend the Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting on November 8 at Everett's. Ryan Short, Founder and CEO of CivicBrand, will be here in person talking about the process, the importance of the branding, and most importantly, how you can take advantage of it as members. It is going to be a very educational presentation, and one that will help you better market your business moving forward.

Casey Ressler (casey@alaskavisit.com) is the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.



**Casey Ressler,
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. 8.

There are five board openings among the 10-person board. Each member serves a three-year term. The terms of Mark Austin, Jeff Curtis, Mark Fleenor, Roberta Warner and Heather Dudick will be open for election this year. Both Fleenor and Warner are terming off of the board after serving the organization over the past nine years.

"By serving on the board, you make valuable contributions to the future of the tourism industry," said Mat-Su CVB

President and CEO Casey Ressler.

Interested members may also self-nominate. Candidates should notify Ressler (casey@alaskavisit.com) of their intention to run for the board before 5:00 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 27.

Candidates must submit a "letter to the membership" of no longer than 300 words, along with a photo, by the Sept. 27 deadline. Ballots will then be e-mailed to voting members no later than Oct. 4, and votes are due back no later than 5 p.m. Oct. 25.

For more information regarding elections, interested members can call (907) 746-5000.

Meeting: Awards

Continued from Page 1

board of directors.

At noon, the "Stars of the Industry" awards luncheon takes place, honoring those who have gone above and beyond this year.

The annual meeting is a great place to meet other members, network and build connections. Mat-Su CVB will be giving away a 1/8-page ad in the 2026 Visitor Guide to one lucky attending member.

Tickets for the event, including lunch, are \$25 each.

For more information, contact Katie Reeves at katie@alaskavisit.com.

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

Nominate a peer for the ‘Stars of the Industry’ awards

Join us as we celebrate the “Stars of the Industry” at the November 8 luncheon, held in conjunction with the annual meeting at Everett’s.

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 nominations to the Mat-Su CVB office (610 S. Bailey St. Ste. 201, Palmer) or e-mail them to Katie Reeves (katie@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. 8. The luncheon begins at noon at Everett’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. 18
Mat-Su CVB; 610 S. Bailey St. Suite 201; Palmer, AK 99645;
Fax (907) 746-2688 or e-mail to justin@alaskavisit.com

An unprecedented year for Mat-Su CVB photo shoots

For years, photographer Tom Bol has delivered high quality imagery for Mat-Su CVB. His spouse, Cree Bol, has offered her photography skills as well in recent years. Having been residents of the Mat-Su before, the Bols know how to capture the region's beauty and wonder.

Mat-Su CVB's summer photo shoot arguably took place during the sunniest week of the season, resulting in more photos than ever before. Several Mat-Su CVB members helped in the photo shoot, donating time and assets to help make this effort a huge success.

This year's photo shoot involved flights over Denali National Park and the Knik River Valley. The team also captured the Alaska Railroad at the Talkeetna Rail Station, staged RV photos over the summit road in Hatcher Pass, and paddled canoes to a public use cabin in the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area.

"At one point Tom actually waded into the lake up to his chest," said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders. "He knows what shots he wants and nothing's going to stop him."

As Bol has recently moved back to the Valley, Mat-Su CVB was able to utilize his skills again during the Alaska State Fair.

"It's been a huge advantage having both Tom and Cree nearby this year," Saunders said. "There are some exciting events and



Cree Bol, an invaluable partner in the annual photo shoot for the past several years, captures the stunning scenery at Reflections Lake on the Palmer Hay Flats.

activities that take place in the Valley year-round. We're excited that we can utilize Tom a little more often."

Saunders scheduled Bol's one-day photoshoot at the state fair to coincide with the giant cabbage weigh-off, a signature event in the Mat-Su Valley. Though Mat-Su CVB has previously filmed the weigh-off and written about it on AlaskaVisit.com's official blog, these are the first professional photos the

organization has captured of the event.

Mat-Su CVB has already set to work on implementing their new library of photos on their website AlaskaVisit.com as well as in the 2025 Mat-Su Valley Visitor Guide.

Bol's photography work sends him all over the globe, but he's often remarked to Mat-Su CVB staff that there's no place quite like the Valley. He is very glad to once again call the Mat-Su his home.

Mat-Su CVB sponsors 2024 TBEX Summit

Mat-Su CVB is sponsoring the Travel Blogger Exchange (TBEX) Summit, taking place in Anchorage Sept. 23-26. This conference brings together over 200 attendees, with its focus on content creation drawing travel bloggers and creators from around the globe. As a sponsor, Mat-Su CVB will meet face to face with summit attendees to show them how they're visit to the Valley could draw great attention for them as well as our destination.

"Connecting travel bloggers and content creators with member businesses is an important part of Mat-Su CVB's successful marketing strategy," Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders said. "This sponsorship is a chance to introduce multiple travel bloggers to the Valley this season, but the TBEX Summit is also a great opportunity to lay some groundwork for possible future coverage of our destination."

"Connecting travel bloggers and content creators with member businesses is an important part of Mat-Su CVB's successful marketing strategy."

*- Justin Saunders,
Mat-Su CVB Marketing &
Communications Manager*

As the host city of this conference, Visit Anchorage has coordinated a few day trip itineraries for travel bloggers who wish to pay for that experience. Though these itineraries involve some experiences in the Valley, not all the Mat-Su CVB businesses eager to network with summit attendees could be included.

Mat-Su CVB has leveraged their sponsorship to connect TBEX attendees with member businesses offering TBEX specials on tours and accommodations. Saunders created a microsite on AlaskaVisit.com, which speaks directly to

the travel bloggers at the summit. The site shares a list of those member businesses who are offering travel bloggers discounted or complimentary experiences in the Valley around the time of the summit.

"We learned that many attendees of this event will arrive early or extend their stay beyond the actual summit each year so they can experience the host destination," Saunders said.

The microsite encourages attendees to lengthen their stay and come experience the Valley. The site URL was shared with travel bloggers in official communications throughout the month preceding the summit. A QR code linking to the site will also be included in each attendee's gift bag at the event.

For information on how to include a TBEX offer from your business on Mat-Su CVB's microsite, please reach out to Justin Saunders (justin@alaskavisit.com).

2025 Mat-Su Visitor Guide to print in December

The 2025 Mat-Su Valley Visitor Guide will go to print later this year, with 75,000 copies ready to mail to high-potential visitors at the turn of the new year.

Advertising sales are ongoing until the end of September. There is still just enough time to purchase affordable display advertising before the September 25 deadline.

“Visitors are still requesting and picking up the printed visitor guide,” Mat-Su CVB’s Justin Saunders said. “It’s good to see our members valuing this along with our digital marketing.”

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.

Brilliant Media Strategies is designing the guide, with access to over 500 new images from Mat-Su CVB’s summer photo shoot.

Copies of the 2025 guide will be available to members in January.



The 2025 publication will feature photos like this one from Mat-Su CVB’s most recent summer photo shoot.

FAM tours benefit Mat-Su CVB staff and members

Valley tourism businesses have engaged Mat-Su CVB staff in a substantial number of familiarization tours (FAM’s) over the 2024 winter and summer seasons.

Inviting the Mat-Su CVB team to join a tour or take a walk-thru site tour is mutually beneficial to both the organization and the member business. Mat-Su CVB staffers gain firsthand knowledge of the quality experiences that member businesses are offering to guests and visitors.

“We talk to travel agents, prospective visitors and tourism companies from all over the country,” Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders said. “When we suggest new Valley accommodations and activities for them, having the ability to speak from personal experience really helps sell it.”

With each FAM tour, Mat-Su CVB has successfully added to their digital photo and video assets. This digital media in turn boosts visibility for the members that host them.

“The highlight reels from these FAM trips always garner significant attention through our social media platforms,” Saunders said. “If we’re invited on a tour, we’ll definitely be snapping photos and recording footage.”

This year alone, Mat-Su CVB’s Membership Manager Katie Reeves coordinated staff FAM tours that have included flightseeing, glacier trekking, ice climbing, paddling, hiking, and site visits of B&Bs, lodges, and glamping



Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler boards a helicopter for a FAM tour over Matanuska Glacier.

establishments.

Reeves said another benefit to FAM tours is the stronger networking relationship member businesses can build with their Mat-Su CVB team.

As the 2024 summer season winds down, Mat-Su CVB welcomes the chance to learn more about its members who offer tours during the winter.

To arrange a Mat-Su CVB FAM, members can email katie@alaskavisit.com.

Travel writer casts line in the Mat-Su Valley

Mat-Su CVB welcomed travel writer Larry Larsen to the Valley in mid August. As a published writer who has been featured in “Game and Fish Magazine,” Larsen has shown a knack for portraying the joy of lake and stream fishing in the destinations he has visited.

In addition to wetting a line during his recent visit to the Valley, Larsen was interested in broadening his experience to include other popular activities in the Mat-Su. Alaska Glacier Lodge, Chinook Charters, and Mahay’s Jetboat Adventures are a few of the Mat-Su CVB members who accommodated Larsen during his time here.

“Having Larsen along on our tour was a great experience,” said Israel Mahay, owner of Mahay’s Jetboat Adventures. “We’ve definitely enjoyed effective publicity through Mat-Su CVB’s work with travel writers in the past.”

Accommodating travel writers has been an essential part of Mat-Su CVB’s marketing efforts. Recent successes include Susan Barnes’ piece covering her visit to the Valley during the 2024 Arctic Winter Games, which was prominently published in the June 2024 issue of “Hemispheres,” the official inflight magazine of United Airlines.

Mat-Su CVB looks forward to Larsen’s coverage of his recent trip.

October 11 is Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidate forum

Mark your calendars for Friday, October 11 and don't miss the Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum taking place at Everett's in Wasilla, starting at noon.

This forum is your chance to hear Assembly candidates give their perspectives on tourism-related issues and other topics impacting Mat-Su Borough residents.

This November, there are three Assembly districts up for election. In District 3, incumbent Dee McKee is being challenged by candidates Steve Ault and Luke Hyce. Running unopposed in District 6 is current Assemblyman Dmitri Fonov.

In District 7, Sheena Fort is running against incumbent Ron Bernier.

This year the mayoral seat is also up for election. Current Mayor Edna DeVries is being challenged by Hillary Palmer.

There is no cost to attend the candidate forum, and lunch is available for purchase off the menu at Everett's.

In November, the annual Stars of the Industry award luncheon, held in conjunction with the Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting, takes place Friday, Nov. 8, also at the Everett's.

For information about member events, e-mail katie@alaskavisit.com.

Upcoming member events

Assembly candidate forum

Friday, October 11
Everett's, Noon

Annual meeting and awards lunch

Friday, November 8
Everett's
10 a.m. - Presentation by CivicBrand
11 a.m. - Voice of the Membership
Noon - Awards luncheon

Industry calendar

September 25	Mat-Su CVB Membership renewal and 2025 visitor guide advertising deadline.	
October 11	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon Annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidate forum	Everett's, Noon
October 22-24	Alaska Travel Industry Association convention Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Juneau
November 3-5	Alaska Media Road Show Mat-Su CVB will attend and take appointments	Las Vegas
November 9	Holland America Princess Cruise and Travel Adventure Show	San Diego
November 8	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting, Award Luncheon CivicBrand presentation, Voice of the Membership	Everett's, 10 a.m.
November 23-24	Happy Thanksgiving!	Mat-Su CVB office closed

Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

Join us in welcoming these new Mat-Su CVB members who joined our team over this past summer!

Anchorage Museum
Kerry McCourt
(907) 929-9255
www.anchoragemuseum.org

Snowhook Lodge & Cabins
on Hatcher Pass
Justin Savidis
(907) 414-4547
www.snowhookadventures.com/snowhook-lodge/

Sheldon Air Service
Udo Cassee
(907) 227-7467
www.sheldonairservice.com/

Martin Buser's Happy Trails Kennel
Kathy Chapoton
(907) 315-4647
www.buserdog.com

Alaska HR
Rebecca Savidis
(907) 775-0101
www.alaskahr.com

Call (907) 746-5000
to become a Mat-Su CVB member today!



YAHOO!

Mat-Su

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