

THE BUREAU BULLETIN

A publication of The Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2025

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NEW BRAND UNIFIES REGION

After a yearlong brand research project conducted by CivicBrand, the path forward for The Mat-Su CVB is clearer than ever. CivicBrand delivered a comprehensive brand strategy and style guide in June, which includes more than just a sharp new logo.

The Mat-Su CVB now has a well-defined message and voice, a standardized palette of brand colors, and a full suite of digital assets to unify the region.

Officially promoting the destination as "The Mat-Su, Alaska,"

the new brand upholds the regional name widely accepted by its residents. Including "Alaska" in the destination's identity effectively signals to visitors what kind of experience they can anticipate when traveling to The Mat-Su.

The Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler said he was pleased that the destination brand seeks to incorporate the destination's communities under

See Brand, Page 3

BOARD ELECTIONS COMMENCE

Elections for The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors take place every fall season. Among the 10-person board, the three seats that were held by Kierre Childers, Jennifer Brandon-Hanks, and Sam Dinges are open for election this year.

"Kierre, Jennifer and Sam were invaluable on our board," said The Mat-Su CVB's President and CEO Casey Ressler. "Their active participation contributed to the success of major projects undertaken this past year."

Nominations for candidates were accepted up until September 26.

Ballots were e-mailed to designated representatives of voting member businesses on October 6. Members have until noon on October 24 to complete and submit their ballot.

Ressler encouraged members to vote in the board elections to help ensure strong dynamic representation of The Mat-Su's communities and tourism businesses.

"We always strive to represent all The Mat-Su's major regions on our board," Ressler said. "A strong voter turnout is key to making this happen."

2024-2025
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors

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From the Board Chair's desk

THE MAT-SU'S "GATEWAY" TO A STRONGER VISITOR INDUSTRY

As long as I've served on The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors, building a new visitor center for our region has been a big priority. The Mat-Su deserves a facility that can serve as an information hub for visitors and a community hub for residents.

Challenges have included funding shortfalls, acquisition hurdles, a global pandemic and more. After so many years of struggling to turn this shared vision into a reality, I almost have to pinch myself when I drive by the construction site of the Gateway Visitor Center on the Glenn Highway.

Not only is it finally being built, but we're rapidly approaching the completion of the new visitor center. When those doors open to greet residents and visitors in the spring of 2026, our tourism industry will see huge gains.

The Mat-Su CVB will have a highly visible, easily accessible roadside presence, ready to accommodate group tour buses and independent travelers alike. At the Gateway Visitor Center, visitors will learn

more about The Mat-Su's historic sites, natural wonders, cultural treasures and more. It's a large region, one that can be somewhat intimidating to someone visiting for the first time.

The expert guidance they'll find at the new visitor center will help everyone feel more empowered to explore our region. Visitors will see how much there is to do here, and they'll stay in The Mat-Su even longer.

Having a central hub for more industry networking events will also benefit The Mat-Su CVB's members. It goes without saying too, that members will enjoy a substantial increase in promotional

opportunities with this new facility.

I'm going to enjoy watching the work progress on the Gateway Visitor Center this winter. I know it'll mean big gains for The Mat-Su's tourism industry.

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



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

ANNUAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 14

The Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting is November 14 at Everett's Restaurant in Wasilla. Members can meet the new Board of Directors, offer feedback to the organization, and learn about the many marketing tools available to them.

A one-hour presentation beginning at 10 a.m. will focus on the new Gateway Visitor Center and the added value it delivers for members.

"We've all waited a long time for this," said Membership Manager Katie Reeves. "I'm anxious to see this facility shine a bright new spotlight on our members."

The "Voice of the Membership" meeting starts at 11 a.m. After the

board of directors is introduced, two presentations will review the organization's marketing and membership programs. The floor will then open for input or resolutions from members.

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

Admission is free and lunch can be ordered off a menu. The Mat-Su CVB will also draw a name from the attendees present to win \$500 in advertising value in the 2027 Visitor Guide.

For more information, Katie Reeves can be contacted via email at katie@alaskavisit.com.

From the President & CEO's desk

FORWARD MOMENTUM

There is no better way to describe the feeling of The Mat-Su CVB team than “forward momentum” right now, as we’ve successfully tackled major projects like a destination branding and a completely redesigned visitor guide – and there are even bigger projects on the horizon.

On the heels of the year-long destination branding project, we’re now taking on a complete redesign of the website. Along with that, construction is ongoing at the Gateway Visitor Center, with an expected opening in May.

It’s not coincidental these major projects are taking place, in the order they are. It’s strategic, designed to elevate our destination,

attract more visitors and drive economic development throughout The Mat-Su.



**Casey Ressler,
Mat-Su CVB
President & CEO**

First, we needed a cohesive identity, and that was accomplished through the work of CivicBrand and you, our stakeholders and members. Exhaustive research went into the project, and we’re elated at the end result.

Then, we had to put it into motion. The implementation plan includes a new visual identity conveyed through all our collateral, including a redesigned visitor guide that’s foundation is strong photography and aesthetics that captures attention.

Carrying that visual identity and new voice to the website was the

logical next step, and that project will culminate in May. It will give members even more visibility, and build on the latest technological trends to not only be visually appealing, but more importantly, highly functional for site users.

Having all that in place when we open the doors to the Gateway Visitor Center was intentional, and is part of that forward momentum leading up to the grand opening.

I’m proud of the way our staff has met the moment on each of these major projects, while still carrying out an effective and efficient marketing program. As an industry and as an organization, we have a lot of momentum that we’re excited to carry forward to grow and benefit our members and our community.

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

BRAND: PLACES MATTER

Continued from Page 1

one unifying banner.

“A key takeaway from the research is that our unique places in The Mat-Su are what makes our destination memorable,” said Ressler. “Even visitors who are unfamiliar with the term ‘Mat-Su’ can still recognize names like Talkeetna or Matanuska Glacier.”

An essential focus of The Mat-Su’s new brand strategy is to lean into this existing place name recognition by visitors. The brand messaging elevates these well-known communities and attractions to help visitors comprehend the full scope of The Mat-Su experience.

An equally important goal is to

give communities in The Mat-Su a greater sense of ownership and pride in the new brand.

“A brand that residents and businesses love will thrive.” said Ressler. “A thriving brand can ensure continued support for The Mat-Su CVB and growing economic success through tourism.”

Reception of the new brand by residents, businesses, and visitors has been overwhelmingly positive. For a closer look at The Mat-Su CVB’s brand style guide and assets, [visit this link](#).



Badges like this one help visitors associate popular communities and attractions with the destination as a whole.

Board of Directors online ballot and candidate profiles have been emailed to voting members from Election Buddy.

Be sure to vote by October 24 at noon.

NOMINATE A PEER FOR AN ANNUAL AWARD

Join us as we celebrate the “Stars of the Industry” at the November 14 luncheon, held in conjunction with the annual meeting at Everett’s.

If you know someone who has made a difference in the industry, nominate them for an award using the form on this page. You can mail your nominations to the Mat-Su CVB office (4641 E Frontier Plz Dr, Suite 210, Wasilla, AK 99654) 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 North Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made significant accomplishments

in the visitor industry.

The Tourism Angel honors someone who has supported and aided The Mat-Su CVB and shows true concern for the success and growth of tourism.

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.

The Independent Spirit recognizes an individual or tourism business that has charted a new course, developed a new product, or found success doing things differently.

The awards luncheon is held in conjunction with the Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting on Nov. 14. 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:

NORTH 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:

INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AWARD

Awarded to an individual or tourism business that has charted a new course, developed a new product, or found success doing things differently. 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! I nominate: Honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. I nominate:

Submit nominations to Mat-Su CVB by Oct. 24
The Mat-Su CVB; 4641 E Frontier Plz Dr, Suite 210; Wasilla, AK 99654;
Fax (907) 746-2688 or e-mail to katie@alaskavisit.com

"GROWING" WRITER INTEREST IN THE MAT-SU

The Mat-Su CVB's Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders assisted in three separate travel writer visits to The Mat-Su in August.

Hosting travel writers is a staple of The Mat-Su CVB's strategy to raise global awareness of the destination and generate visitor interest. Lately, writers have tightened their focus on a few key features in The Mat-Su.

First, it will be the Alaska State Fair's 90th anniversary in 2026. This was a primary interest for the three travel writers who came to The Mat-Su during the weeks of the event this year.

Second, farming and agritourism continue to gain national interest. Award winning travel writer Kit Bernardi (kittravels.com) visited The Mat-Su and the Alaska State Fair festivities with the goal to dive deep into the farming history and culture of the region. Her focus took her well beyond the celebrations at the fairgrounds.

The Mat-Su CVB arranged a comprehensive research itinerary for Bernardi, which included visits to working flower farms, U-Pick farms, and homestead farms. Saunders also took her to Kahiltna Birchworks in Talkeetna for an in-depth look at the sustainable harvesting of The Mat-Su's natural resources. By the end of her visit, Bernardi had taken pages of notes from interviews with farmers as well as representatives of the Alaska State Fair and the Alaska Farmland Trust.

"Travel writer work is like farming, actually," said Saunders. "In hosting a writer you're sort of planting a seed and hoping for successful journal coverage to pop out of the ground later. In this case, I think we have a lot to look forward to."

Saunders said that Bernardi's visit gave her much more material than even she had hoped for. He is eager to see what she may publish in the future.



Travel writer Kit Bernardi interviews participants in the Giant Cabbage Weigh-off at the Alaska State Fair.

REDESIGN INITIATED FOR ALASKAVISIT.COM

The Mat-Su CVB has partnered with Madden Media to redesign their website AlaskaVisit.com. The organization's goals in this undertaking are to keep pace with ever-evolving Internet user trends, and to align the site with the CVB's newly implemented brand aesthetic and messaging.

The website houses an active blog, an especially popular calendar of events, optimally placed member listings and display ads, and a visitor guide request page that generates a high volume of leads. These and many other features have helped to maintain a user engagement rate that generally stays above the industry average.

Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders said quality user engagement depends largely

on how quickly a visitor to the site can find the information they're looking for.

"With the technology in our pockets always improving, and AI now delivering information at a record-breaking speed, this redesign has become a top priority for The Mat-Su CVB," Saunders said.

The redesign of AlaskaVisit.com will prioritize optimization of user pathways through the site to relevant information as quickly as possible. An equally important focus of this project will be the inclusion of more engaging content throughout the site.

Features like the calendar of events and clickable maps with image galleries can maintain visitor interest on the site and increase engagement.

"There are over 150 pages of information on the site," said Saunders. "A redesign focused on interactive content will ultimately encourage our visitors to explore more of The Mat-Su."

Over the summer, The Mat-Su CVB's new brand has grown increasingly popular among member businesses, residents, and community leaders. The implementation of the brand's logo, badges, color palette and messaging in the redesign will help broadcast the destination's identity to the rest of the world.

The Mat-Su CVB and Madden Media held a project kick-off meeting in early October. Madden's team is eager to take on the redesign, the completion of which is slated for spring/summer 2026.

A NEW LOOK FOR THE MAT-SU'S VISITOR GUIDE

With a completely new look, a finely honed destination identity and a new visitor center nearing completion, The Mat-Su CVB chose to take on a comprehensive redesign of The Mat-Su Alaska Visitor Guide for 2026.

The new design will incorporate the color palette and visual assets of the CVB's new brand, as well as freshly focused voice and message. The 2026 publication also includes the logoed badges that represent the destination's communities and attractions.

The Mat-Su Visitor Guide will serve as the primary information piece in the new Gateway Visitor Center, scheduled to open in time for the summer of 2026.

"The new design will have significant visual gravitas," said The Mat-Su CVB's Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders. "The goal is for every page to showcase incredible imagery from well-known places all over our destination."

Along with the 75,000 copies due to print in December, a digital version of the visitor guide will be made available for download on AlaskaVisit.com. This boost's the guide's accessibility for more visitors, but it also gives the publication's advertisers greater exposure. The digital guide will link every display ad directly to the advertiser's website.



Breathtaking photography and graphic elements, as seen above, will set this visitor guide apart from past prints.

Spawn Ideas, the firm designing the 2026 guide, is taking full advantage of The Mat-Su CVB's robust asset library, utilizing images from past photo shoots, shared social media content, and assets contributed by generous member businesses.

Copies of 2026 visitor guide will be available to members in January.

FAMS THRIVE DUE TO MEMBERS

Travel agents are an essential asset in The Mat-Su CVB's marketing efforts. Familiarizing agents with The Mat-Su encourages them to plan and offer more itineraries to their substantial client bases.

Every year The Mat-Su CVB participates in hosting travel agents on familiarization tours, or FAMS. The success of these FAM tours greatly depends on the willingness of member businesses to contribute their time and services to the cause.

During the summer of 2025 The Mat-Su CVB collaborated with the Alaska Travel Industry Association on the CANUSA, Brand USA and India FAM tours. There were a lot of moving parts to these itineraries, said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders.

"Members are the real champions of these FAMS," Saunders said. "They block out valuable time to give complimentary tours during the height of summer tourism."

FAM tours effectively boost visibility for participating members on an international level. Travel agents often reach out to The Mat-Su CVB after these tours for more



Susitna Sled Dog Adventures' Rohn Buser (right) gives a complimentary kennel tour to travel agents on ATIA's India FAM last June.

information and imagery that they can use to help sell new itineraries to clients.

Members of The Mat-Su CVB who assisted in FAM tours this year included Denali Brewing Company, K2 Aviation, Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge, Susitna Sled Dog Adventures, Snowhook Adventure Guides of Alaska, Turkey Red, and Alaska Husky Adventures.

A FAMILIAR FACE JOINS CVB STAFF

The Mat-Su CVB is now a staff of five. In late September, the team welcomed Lynda Barcome into their ranks in anticipation of growing operations when the new Gateway Visitor Center opens.

Barcome is no stranger to the organization, either. Not only has she worked with numerous member businesses over the years, but Barcome has always been a faithful volunteer at The Mat-Su CVB's annual Beer and Wine Tasting Travel Auction fundraiser.

"Lynda's role at that event goes back to before I even started here," said President and CEO Casey Ressler. "She's always been invaluable to this team. I couldn't be more thrilled to work with her."

Barcome's capacity will include myriad office clerical duties, but fellow staffers are also looking forward to her insights and assistance with things like event planning and facility management.

SNAPSEA: LINKING DIGITAL MEDIA TO MEMBERS

The Mat-Su CVB partnered with SnapSea last August for a solution to hosting and managing its marketing assets online.

SnapSea's digital asset management platform (DAM) not only houses the entirety of The Mat-Su CVB's proprietary digital assets, but it also integrates any user generated content (UGC) for which the CVB has acquired usage rights through social media and other channels.

"Asset management and UGC curation had previously fallen under the purview of two separate

contracts," said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders. "Having everything under one roof means we can more easily utilize either media type for all of our marketing efforts."

In addition to online galleries, SnapSea offers a new map feature that couples imagery with routes or points of interest that people will be able to interact with on the website. The increase in user engagement from features like this will improve analytics for AlaskaVisit.com and help more website users find the member services they're seeking.

SnapSea galleries and maps can link digital media to relevant businesses' listings and websites. This poses huge advantages to members who share their imagery directly with The Mat-Su CVB.

"We've already received decent volumes of images from generous members authorizing us to use them in our marketing," said Saunders. "Sharing images will translate into major benefits for them."

For questions about sharing media with The Mat-Su CVB, please reach out to Justin Saunders (justin@alaskavisit.com).

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------------------------|
| October 17 | The Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon "The Mat-Su Alaska; your new destination brand" | Turkey Red, Noon |
| October 21-24 | Alaska Travel Industry Association convention The Mat-Su CVB staff will attend | Anchorage |
| November 1-4 | Alaska Media Road Show The Mat-Su CVB will attend and take appointments | Las Vegas |
| November 14 | The Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting, Award Luncheon Gateway Visitor Center presentation, Voice of the Membership | Everett's, 10 a.m. |
| November 27-28 | Happy Thanksgiving! | Mat-Su CVB office closed |

WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Join us in welcoming these new members who have recently joined The Mat-Su CVB team!

Alaska Tour Depot
Stacey Quimby
(907) 203-8017
alaskatourdepot.com

Crown Mountain Guides
Eli High
(855) 754-2796
crownmountainguides.com

Live Local AK - Stillwater Cottages
Megan Miks
(907) 414-5653
livelocalak.com

Alaska's Gold Buckle Tours
Dallas Sears
(907) 232-5177
alaskasgoldbuckle.com

Foraker Restaurant
Daniel Shir-King
(907) 733-9500
alaskacollection.com/lodging/talkeetna-alaskan-lodge/dining/

Onward & Upward
Louisa Branchflower
(907) 745-6687
onwardandupward.org

Aurora Dora Photography
Dora Redman
(907) 841-5620
auroradora.com

Gems of the Earth and More
Lacey Hamrick
(907) 715-4704
gemsoftheearthandmore.com

Reindeer Farm
Denise Hardy
(907) 745-4000
reindeerfarm.com

Bushes Bunches
Karianne Smith
(231) 920-4865
bushesbunches.com

Historic Chulitna River Lodge
Mike Oliver
(907) 210-8112
truealaska.org

Rock On Racing Sled Dog Tours
Casey Randall
(907) 632-4537
rockonracing.com

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



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