

THE BUREAU BULLETIN

A publication of The Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2026

Inside this issue

Board Chair Mark Austin addresses new Gateway Visitor Center member benefits

Page 3

Meet the experts! Welcome the new Gateway Visitor Center staff

Page 4

Alaska Travel Industry Association awards Mat-Su CVB members

Page 5

Contact us

Casey Ressler
President & CEO
746-5037

casey@thematsualaska.com

Justin Saunders
Marketing & Communications
Manager
354-5032

justin@thematsualaska.com

Katie Reeves
Membership Manager
746-5001

katie@thematsualaska.com

Tasha Belka
Administrative Manager
746-5000
info@thematsualaska.com



THE GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER

The Mat-Su Borough Gateway Visitor Center officially opened its doors on June 19 and served over 3,000 visitors through August.

Multiple organizations have already rented meeting space in the center's Susitna Room for their own events.

The Mat-Su CVB has also hosted several events at the new center, including an evening open house complete with reindeer and sled dogs. The open house was co-hosted at the Gateway with partners from Visit Anchorage.

The CVB's Visitor Services Manager Dan McDonough said this summer was just a small taste of what he foresees for the Gateway.

"As we host more events, Mat-Su communities will feel greater ownership for this building. It's a hub for our communities just as much as a resource for our visitors," McDonough said.

The Gateway was designed by Wolf Architecture and built

by Steppers Construction, with overwhelming support from the Mat-Su Borough's administration and elected leaders.

The center has ample parking for even large motorcoaches. It features an outdoor walkway with picnic tables and signage, ample meeting space inside, and larger scale interpretive displays of all the unique features of The Mat-Su.

The programming does an inclusive job at conveying the multiplicity of histories and cultures in The Mat-Su. Facets of the region's story range from mining and mushing to fishing and farming. Alaska Native place names are shown prominently throughout the center, as well.

Opening the doors to this new, long-awaited facility was a surreal experience for Mat-Su CVB

See Gateway, Page 3

2025-2026
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors

Mark Austin,
Musk Ox Farm
Chair
(907) 745-4151
mark@muskoxfarm.org

Jeremy Sullivan
Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge
Vice Chair
(907) 733-9500
jesullivan@talkeetnaalaskan-lodge.com

Roberta Warner
Alaska Tour & Travel
Treasurer
(907) 245-0200
roberta@alaskatravel.com

Mandy Garcia
Salmon Berry Travel & Tours
Secretary
(907) 278-3572
mandy@salmonberrytours.com

Heather Dudick
Alaska Railroad
At Large Exec. Comm.
(907) 265-2622
dudickh@akrr.com

Travis Taylor
Premier Alaska Tours, Inc.
(907) 279-0001
travis@touralaska.net

Mark Fleenor
Sheep Mountain Lodge
(907) 745-5121
info@sheepmountain.com

Taylor Raftery
Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation
(907) 746-8757
traftery@matsutrails.org

Skye Hostetler
Outbound Heli Adventures
(907) 351-6736
marketing@outboundheli.com

Jillian Morrissey
Mat-Su Borough
Ex-officio
(907) 861-8634
jillian.morrissey@matsu.gov

From the Board Chair's desk

A GOOD TIME TO CHECK IN

When you work in the tourism industry, everything comes at you fast. There is a mountain of work to managing a musk ox farm, so I get it. With everything else on the agenda, finding time to connect with your Mat-Su CVB team can be difficult.

I'm thrilled that fall and winter

tourism has grown more popular in recent years – no off season! As we transition into autumn, I hope everyone's finding a moment to catch their breath. That said, I would like to issue a challenge. Call it an invitation, rather.

With all the great strides made by the Mat-Su CVB over this past year, there are so many new and amazing opportunities to take advantage of. For an entire summer, now, trained staff at the new Gateway Visitor Center have been helping thousands of visitors with their Mat-Su adventure plans. Have those staff members met you yet? Do they know the experiences you can provide for those visitors?

The new facility has a prominent brochure stand full of members' rack cards. Is yours included on it?

Did you know that you have an interactive listing displayed on three different touch screen kiosks at that new center? When is the last time you updated your online listing?

Looking for a meeting space to hold a strategy session or an end-of-season staff appreciation event?

Did you know members have a free use of the Gateway's spacious Susitna Room?

Lots of questions for you. How can we help you get answers?

Please come to the Mat-Su CVB's annual membership meeting at the Gateway Visitor Center on November 13. Don't forget to bring those rack cards! This is the perfect time to check in, catch-up with the team, and find out

how you can benefit from the new Gateway Visitor Center, the new web site, the new staff, and your new board of directors. You've worked hard. You deserve the benefits!

Mark Austin, Chair, the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.

mark@muskoxfarm.org



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

ATTEND THE MAT-SU CVB ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

When: November 13 @ 10 a.m.

Where: Gateway Visitor Center

- Presentation by the Mat-Su Borough
- Meet newly elected board members
- Stay for the awards luncheon

From the President & CEO's desk

A NEW VISITOR CENTER BENEFITS EVERYONE

On June 19, 2026, a long-held dream became a reality as we officially opened the doors to the Gateway Visitor Center, after nearly two decades of planning.

The Gateway Visitor Center is not just a rest stop for people passing through on their way to Denali. It's a piece of placemaking, a deliberate investment in the character and function of The Mat-Su that benefits the person driving through on a Tuesday in July and the person who's lived on Bodenburg Loop for 30 years.

The center tells our story to visitors and reminds residents why this region is so special. It's a gathering area built to celebrate the history and culture of The Mat-Su — Ahtna Dene heritage, the Matanuska Colony story, the

working farms and small towns that still define us. The Gateway will teach a visitor from Texas about who we are. It will also remind a lifelong resident why they love it here.

That's the deeper purpose of good placemaking. Trail access, clear signage, clean bathrooms, a real visitor center - these things aren't just for tourists. They raise the baseline of what The Mat-Su offers everyone. A community that invests in welcoming strangers well usually turns out to be a community that takes good care of itself too.

Since we've been open, it's been great to watch everyone walk through the doors for the first time as we say "welcome to The Mat-

Su." Whether they've lived here 40 years or they are just passing

through, I hope the Gateway Visitor Center gives every visitor a reason to stay a little longer, see a little more, and fall a little more in love with this area the way the rest of us already have.

I also want to acknowledge the patience it took to get here too, because it matters. We're open today because people who care about this place kept showing up to meetings, kept writing grant applications, kept believing that a visitor center wasn't a luxury, it was needed infrastructure that can serve as an economic driver. I can't thank the Mat-Su Borough enough for their support of not only this project, but also for 40 years of partnership with our organization and recognizing tourism as an important industry.

Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO casey@thematsualaska.com



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

GATEWAY: A HUB FOR MAT-SU COMMUNITIES

Continued from Page 1

employees who had participated in efforts that spanned over a decade to secure funding and complete construction. McDonough said the grand opening felt like crossing the finish line after an arduous marathon.

"I actually held a seat on the board of directors for the CVB when the need for this facility was first brought up," McDonough recalled. "Now we're here! Being a part of the Gateway's first season of operation has been very rewarding for me."

The Mat-Su CVB is focused on the perpetual success of the Gateway Visitor Center. Goals for the future of the center include the continued hosting of motorcoach tour groups, collaboration with Mat-Su communities on local events, and expanded use of the facilities indoor and outdoor spaces.



New member benefits include a listing on the Gateway Visitor Center's kiosks, and free display space on the brochure rack.

ANNUAL MEETING TO FOCUS ON NEXT STEPS

The Mat-Su CVB 2026 Annual Meeting is Friday, Nov. 13, starting at 10 a.m. in the Gateway Visitor Center. In addition to meeting the organization's newly elected board of directors, Mat-Su CVB members will learn about new recreational opportunities from representatives from the Mat-Su Borough and the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation.

"This is a good opportunity to learn about what the borough and other organizations are doing to strengthen recreational infrastructure and also to learn how members can take advantage of these developments," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.

The outdoor recreation workshop runs from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Following that, the annual Voice of the Membership session is when the new board gets seated, and the CVB staff give updates on the marketing and

membership programs. There is also time for members to give their feedback and offer direction to the board of directors. Member commentary given at the Voice of the Membership session helps inform board discussions at its annual planning retreat in late January.

"It's important we get input from our members and keep the organization evolving to meet those needs," Ressler said.

At noon, the Stars of the Industry awards luncheon recognizes members who have gone above and beyond this year to overcome challenges, grow tourism, or benefit their communities.

The annual meeting is free to attend, but those who plan to stay and have lunch must purchase it in advance through the Mat-Su CVB's [FareHarbor](#) link. Lunch is \$25 and is catered by Turkey Red.

GATEWAY STAFF OF EXPERTS JOIN CVB TEAM

In the months leading up to the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center, the Mat-Su CVB team had already begun to grow. Shortly after Lynda Barcome was hired to assist with office administrative tasks, Dan McDonough was hired as the new Visitor Services Manager.

During the final weeks of construction, McDonough concluded his work assembling a team of local experts to staff the new facility. Diane Rose, Linda Allender, and Lisa Gowdy were onboarded before the center's official grand opening.

"There was a lot to do to be ready for visitors once the doors opened," McDonough said. "We even visited other local museums and visitor centers to learn how we might network together and refer visitors to those locations."

McDonough said he knew he'd hired the right people early on in their training and preparation. From day one, the team was enthusiastic about the new facility's potential to inspire more recreation in The Mat-Su. The new visitor center staff helped with numerous projects to ensure the facility's success when it opened. The center's interactive kiosks, for example, underwent meticulous fine-tuning and performance auditing that would have been far more time consuming without McDonough's team.

"Any extra thing that needed to be done to get ready, these ladies



Left to right: Diane Rose, Linda Allender, Dan McDonough, Lisa Gowdy, and Lynda Barcome.

were more than willing to do," McDonough said. "Landscaping and site clean-up wasn't necessarily in their job descriptions, but this team tackled odd jobs like that every day before we opened."

With the Gateway Visitor Center having operated a whole summer season, now, the Mat-Su CVB's newest teammates have successfully imparted a feeling of welcoming and friendship to the place.

"We went from a staff of four to

a team of nine in less than a year," said President and CEO Casey Ressler. "The remarkable thing is, we already feel like we've all been working together for several years."

Mat-Su residents and visitors alike are encouraged to stop by the Gateway Visitor Center, enjoy a free cup of coffee, and meet the Mat-Su CVB team.

MAT-SU CVB MEMBERS RECEIVE ATIA AWARDS

The Alaska Travel Industry Association held its annual membership convention in Fairbanks this year. At their awards banquet on October 15, the organization recognized multiple Mat-Su CVB member businesses for their growth and success as well as their significant roles in their communities and the tourism industry.

Sassan Mossanen, owner and proprietor of Denali Brewing Company, received the Spirit of Alaska Award. This award recognizes an individual or business that has demonstrated exceptional efforts to support a local community, charity, or other organization outside of the travel industry.

ATIA asked Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler to present the award. Ressler said that he felt honored to present the award to someone whom he also considers a good friend.

"From Denali Brewing Company's



Award recipient Sassan Mossanen of Denali Brewing Company (right) pauses for a photo with Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler.

earliest years, Sassan Mossanen has made community involvement part of his company's identity," Ressler said. He went on to detail Denali Brewing Company's key role in supporting local events in Talkeetna that benefited numerous nonprofit organizations like the Denali

Education Center.

Among the other awards given that night, the Stan Stephens Stewardship Award honors an individual or business that has worked nobly and passionately over time to protect an Alaskan place, resource, or just cause.

This year's recipient of that award was Howard Carbone, founder of Alaska Nature Guides. The company offers guided outdoor adventures that include trail tours within Denali State Park.

Tia Froehle, Director of Tourism Sales for Visit Anchorage, presented the award. Froehle said that even visitors who go on tour with Alaska Nature Guides always come away with a stronger sense of stewardship for the land.

Carbone endorsed ATIA's Adventure Green Alaska program as he accepted the award. He encouraging others to foster environmental stewardship.

THE MAT-SU CVB FINISHES WEB SITE REDESIGN

The Mat-Su CVB's web site redesign was completed in June, just ahead of the grand opening of the Gateway Visitor Center. The site bears an intuitive layout with an on-brand aesthetic.

Members offering a suite of visitor services that span across varying categories now have the capability of customizing a unique listing for each category.

"Before the redesign, a member maintained a single listing," said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders. "Now a member offering accommodations as well as various tours can create unique listings with a narrative and photos that complement each service they provide."

Members who purchase digital ad space on the site, now called TheMatSuAlaska.com, will see The Mat-Su brand treatment applied to their ad. Mirroring the site's branded layout supports the ad's relevance to adjacent related content on the page while also optimizing visibility.

Using the site's hosting platform, WordPress, The Mat-Su CVB is

polishing content and fine tuning new features to optimize the site's performance. Key performance indicators (KPI) include three central metrics that were also tracked prior to the redesign: visitor guide requests, newsletter subscriptions, and clicks through to member web sites.

The visitor guide request form

"Updating listings is the best way for members to benefit from the redesigned site."

*- Justin Saunders,
Marketing & Communications Mgr.
The Mat-Su CVB*

and the newsletter sign-up form have been streamlined into one user-responsive form. Users filling out the form to request a guide will also be encouraged to sign up for the newsletter. Additionally, they can request trip planning assistance from Gateway Visitor Center staff and other Mat-Su experts. Requesting help adds their contact information to the leads shared with Mat-Su CVB members.

Karsh Hagan Madden (KHM), the company that spearheaded the web site redesign, is continuing its partnership with The Mat-Su CVB in a search engine optimization (SEO) and site maintenance role.

"I'm grateful to continue working with KHM after the site's relaunch," Saunders said. "Their commitment to the ongoing success of the web site is the strongest indicator to me that we chose the right partners for the redesign."

Mat-Su CVB members are encouraged to explore the site and refresh their listings via The Mat-Su CVB's member portal. Quarterly site SEO audits measure the performance of member listings as a whole. KHM has indicated that member listings with fresh content tend to perform better.

"Updating listings is the best way for members to benefit from the redesigned site," Saunders said.

For assistance logging in and updating their web site listing, members can email Membership Manager Katie Reeves at katie@thematsualaska.com.

CO-OP MARKETING WITH THE MAT-SU CVB

The Mat-Su CVB attends a number of travel shows each year to meet in person with high potential visitors to Alaska and The Mat-Su. Hundreds of visitor guides are distributed at these shows, along with the brochures of member businesses participating in The Mat-Su CVB's co-op marketing program.

On this form, you can sign up to include your brochure or rack card in The Mat-Su Alaska booth at the in-state outdoor shows in The Mat-Su and Fairbanks, as well as out-of-state shows like the Los Angeles Travel

and Adventure Show and the Holland America/Princess Alaska Cruise & Travel Show in Seattle. These shows are attended by many of our highest potential visitors. For each show, select which co-op marketing package you'd like to purchase, basic or premium.

Booth share is available to two members at the LA Travel and Adventure Show for \$300 (travel cost not included). E-mail justin@thematsualaska.com for details.

2027 TRAVEL SHOWS (Two national shows, two in-state)	BASIC (100 Brochures)	PREMIUM (100 Brochures and 8.5" X 11" table display)
LA Travel & Adventure Show, Long Beach CA, March 7-8	☐ \$25	☐ \$75
Alaska Cruise & Travel Show, Seattle WA, March 13	☐ \$25	☐ \$75
Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, Wasilla AK, April 17-19	☐ \$25	☐ \$75
Fairbanks Outdoors Show, Fairbanks AK, April 24-26	☐ \$25	☐ \$75

Total the selected items above and provide payment information

Business: _____ Contact: _____

I authorize Mat-Su CVB to charge \$_____ to my Visa/MC/Amex

Card number: _____ Exp. _____ CVV _____

Authorized signature: _____

Or mail this form with a check to:

The Mat-Su CVB, 2764 S. East Matanuska Spur Road, Palmer, AK 99645

GIVEAWAY AND DOOR PRIZE RECOGNITION

The Mat-Su CVB also accepts prize giveaways for each of the in-state shows it attends. A giveaways helps attract attendees to the booth and shines an effective spotlight on the donor.

If you'd like to contribute a giveaway prize, please call Marketing & Communications Manager Justin Saunders at (907) 746-5032, or email justin@thematsualaska.com.

Other opportunities include door prize donations to events hosted by The Mat-Su CVB at the Gateway

Visitor Center. Membership luncheons, season kick-off events, product showcases and the annual membership meeting are all great opportunities to garner deserved recognition and build new partnerships with a door prize donation.

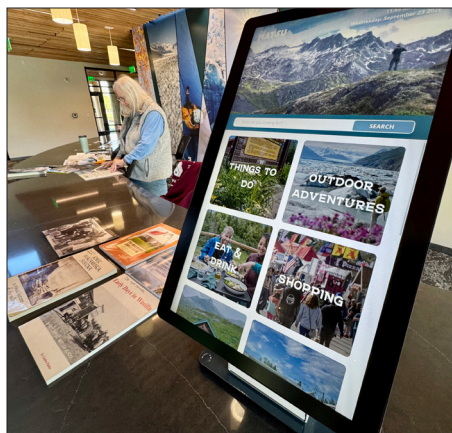
Door prizes can be donated to Membership Manager Katie Reeves. Members can either call (907) 746-5001, or email katie@thematsualaska.com.

NEW KIOSKS BENEFIT VISITORS, MEMBERS ALIKE

The new Gateway Visitor Center is up and running. Along with interpretive displays, visitors will find three illuminated touchscreen kiosks throughout the building. These are interactive tools to provide key details on any point of interest the user selects, like location, contact information, or directions.

The kiosks are more than just information centers, though. Users can select and arrange lodging and activities across all the communities they plan to visit. The kiosk will organize these selections into an itinerary, which users can email or text to themselves as a resource after they leave the visitor center.

"It's a clear benefit for anyone making Mat-Su plans," said Membership Manager Katie Reeves.



The visitor center kiosks include a photo booth letting visitors interact with visual content from The Mat-Su.

"What I'm just as excited about is the added benefit for our member

businesses."

Members already enjoy the benefit of a manageable listing on TheMatSuAlaska.com. They can login into The Mat-Su CVB's member portal, or Extranet, and update their listing narrative, add new images, or post special offers right to their listing. Member listings experience a boost in visibility now that the visitor center kiosks are up and running.

"The information on the kiosks comes from member listings," Reeves said. "Updates to listings are regularly refreshed to the kiosks."

Reeves added that like the digital ad space available on the web site, the kiosks could potentially display sponsored content for members looking to purchase more exposure with visitors.

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

November 4-6	Alaska Media Road Show The Mat-Su CVB will attend and take appointments	Las Vegas
November 13	The Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting, Award Luncheon Mat-Su Borough presentation, Voice of the Membership	Gateway Visitor Center, 10 a.m.
November 27-28	Happy Thanksgiving!	Mat-Su CVB office closed

WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Bearfoot Travel Guides/
Northcountry Communications
Linda Weld
(907) 320-1145
linda.ncountry@alaska.net

Alaska Native Heritage Center
Cambria Patz
(907) 213-9028
cpatz@alaskanative.net

Denali Southside River Guides
Shelis Jorgensen
(907) 355-0063
explore@denaliriverguides.com

Talkeetna Chalet
David Richvalsky
(808) 723-4546
info@talkeetnachalet.net

Denali Backcountry Adventure
Ben Redekopp
(587) 222-0903
bredekopp@pursuitcollection.com

Togo Aviation
Maggie Chiolo
(907) 315-9797
fly@togoaviation.com

Patriot Towing & Recovery
(907) 232-6670
info@ptralaska.com

Alaska Media Firm
PRNs Bay
(907) 250-4780
alaskamediafirm@gmail.com

Vanstock
Lindra Paradise
(907) 775-8220
info@vanstock.org

Blue River Aviation
Maggie Chiolo
(907) 315-9797
admin@blueriveraviation.com

Mountain View House
Paul Conti
(907) 207-9555
paul_conti@lksd.org

Moonstone Farm
Johnathan Church
(907) 727-8659
moonstonebeverage@gmail.com

Wild Raven Tours
Amanda Clayton
(907) 223-1665
wizard@wildravenalaska.com

National Association for Catering &
Events
Mickela Olson
(907) 529-6458
anchorage@nace.com

Home2 Suites Wasilla
Jessica Wardlaw
(208) 634-9545
Jessica.Wardlaw@Hilton.com

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



THE
MAT-SU
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The Mat-Su CVB
2764 S. East Matanuska Spur Road
Palmer, AK 99645