

The Bureau Bulletin

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Spring 2021

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Contact us

Bonnie Quill
President & CEO

746-5001

bonnie@alaskavisit.com

Casey Ressler
Marketing & Communications Mgr.
863-4931

casey@alaskavisit.com

Justin Saunders
Membership Manager
354-5032

justin@alaskavisit.com

Neil Campbell
Administrative Manager
746-5000
info@alaskavisit.com



Vaccination efforts provide hope for economic recovery

Hope. Optimism. Normalcy. Excitement. Those are all feelings we have going into this summer's season, and they are made possible by one thing – vaccinations.

It's no secret that tourism was the hardest hit industry by the pandemic. The hospitality industry lost jobs at a record pace last summer, the phones were ringing with cancellations and refund requests and many wondered if they would still have their business. Vaccine development and deployment is the biggest single thing that will lead in the recovery effort, however.

As of the end of April, 50 percent of Alaskans 16 and older have received at least one dose of the vaccine, which is good. The bad news, however, is that the vaccination rate has slowed considerably, and is still not at a rate that helps eliminate Covid.

"It's heartbreaking working in the ER and seeing people come in with Covid, because now, Covid is a completely preventable disease," Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska Chief Medical Officer, said during a recent ECHO briefing. "We have the ability, through vaccinations, to prevent Covid."

Getting vaccinated and having your employees vaccinated not only provides a layer of safety, but it ensures you'll be open throughout the summer, and not risk having to close your doors during the short summer window.

"If your team is vaccinated, your business won't be disrupted due to contracting Covid or coming into contact with a positive person," Zink said on the briefing.

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**2020-2021
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors**

Mark Fleenor
Sheep Mountain Lodge
Chair

907-745-5121
info@sheepmountain.com

Roberta Warner
Alaska Tour & Travel
Vice Chair
550-0006

roberta@alaskatravel.com

Israel Mahay
Mahay's Jetboat Adventures
Secretary
733-2223

izzymahay@gmail.com

Travis Taylor
Premier Alaska Tours, Inc.
Treasurer
279-0001

travis@touralaska.net

Cole Chambers
Rust's Flying Service & K2 Aviation
At-large Executive Committee Member
243-1595

cole@flyrustsk2.com

Cheryl Metiva
The Valley & Kenai Cinemas and
Extreme Fun Centers
Past Chair

376-7223 ext. 810
cherylm@catheatres.com

Fernando Salvador
Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge
733-9501
fsalvador@alaskacollection.com

Rick Peterson,
Mt. McKinley Princess
Wilderness Lodge
230-8043

rpeterson@hagroup.com

Dan Wilcock
Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours
745-2505
danielwilcock56@gmail.com

Heather Dudick
Alaska Railroad
265-2622
dudickh@akrr.com

From the Board Chair's desk

'Listening Tour' includes discussion about cruise impacts to Mat-Su

On April 29, the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors met with Lt. Gov. Kevin Meyer as part of his "Listening Tour" to gather information about how the tourism industry has been impacted in communities around Alaska due to the pandemic.

A major discussion involved the loss of cruise visitors in both 2020 and 2021. I thank Lt. Gov. Meyer for sitting down with the board, because it gave us a chance to tell him that the loss of cruise visitors doesn't just affect Southeast Alaska, it affects everyone – including those of us in the Mat-Su Valley.

I operate Sheep Mountain Lodge, on the Glenn Highway in Glacier View. We are located nowhere near a cruise port, but in a normal summer, I have a lot of guests who have arrived in Alaska via a cruise, or are here on a tour and waiting to board for their return sailing south.

Last year, I think a lot of small business owners had a similar experience. We learned there are a lot of "disappearing cruisers" – cruisers who don't necessarily buy a standard land package from the cruise company, but rather opt to explore Alaska on their own. They may rent a car or motorhome, or do a small packaged tour with an Alaska operator. And we certainly learned that they are important to our businesses, and that their absence is noticeable.

Those disappearing cruisers stop in for dinner at my restaurant, they do glacier treks on Matanuska Glacier, they visit small bed and breakfasts and other attractions and activities in the Mat-Su Valley. In Southeast Alaska, it's easy to see the impact – the ship comes to port, thousands of visitors spend a few hours

in town, and the ship leaves the port. But in Southcentral Alaska all the way to the Interior, we don't see those arrivals or departures – but we do see the visitors.

I think it was important for the lieutenant governor to hear from those of us beyond the coastlines of Alaska. We talked about how important the pre- or post-cruise land tours are to our small, family-run businesses. We told our stories about last summer, about how many of us barely survived a summer without visitors. We talked about our hopes for this summer, and how we plan to get through it by relying on independent travelers and a second season without cruisers.

We know this summer will be better than last summer. National travel sentiment research shows that people are ready to travel again, and Alaska is a safe and welcoming destination high on their lists. Many of you have

reported good bookings coming in from independent travelers, as well as Alaskans getting out and exploring their own backyards.

We're hopeful and optimistic that independent travelers coming to Alaska in 2021 will be the first step in the recovery of our industry. But that's only the beginning. A return of cruise passengers to Southcentral Alaska will be the next major step in getting us back to where we were in 2019.

I hope you all have a strong summer season, and I look forward to seeing you in person soon.

Mark Fleenor (info@sheepmountain.com) is the owner of Sheep Mountain Lodge, Sheep Mountain Air and AK Mountain Tours. He is the chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.



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

Missed an educational webinar? Catch up in the Member Resources section!
www.alaskavisit.com/members/member-resources/

From the President & CEO's desk

U.S. traveler sentiment trending positive

Every Tuesday morning at 7 a.m. since March 15, 2020, Mat-Su CVB staff has tuned in to Destination Analysts' weekly Coronavirus Travel Sentiment Index webinar to learn current insights in how the pandemic has changed the traveling consumer and the outlook for travel.

This information has guided our marketing decisions and messaging for the past year.

This week was good news. With the successful rollout of the vaccine in the U.S., travel sentiment has been steadily trending positive and this week it was reported over 90 percent of American travelers have trip plans right now, and 75 percent will take at least one leisure trip within the next three months alone. More than 70 percent are highly open to travel inspiration, with 35 percent reporting they researched travel ideas online in the last week, a pandemic-record.

The report goes deeper than just travel planning. It questions their feelings and this statement stood out today: "Many travelers report that the pandemic has changed them, leaving them more budget and safety conscious, and generally more on their guard. Even with the growing selection of cities as trip destinations, travelers report they are more into the

outdoors than ever."

The Mat-Su Valley has a great opportunity to capitalize on this sentiment. The state of Alaska and the Mat-Su CVB has stepped up to market our great outdoor experience. You will find in this newsletter the increased promotional efforts and campaigns we have already launched.



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

The governor has also recognized the significance of the visitor industry to our economy and the urgency to bring visitors back to Alaska by funding additional tourism marketing campaigns and dedicating \$10 million to a tourism promotion grant program for destination marketing organizations.

This week the Mat-Su CVB submitted a proposal

to the DCCED grant program that would increase our marketing efforts to independent travelers and create awareness the Mat-Su Valley is a safe travel destination. Stay tuned for an announcement soon of big tourism promotions to encourage travel to Alaska this summer.

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

Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors meets with lieutenant governor

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors met with Alaska Lt. Gov. Kevin Meyer April 29 to reinforce the impact the pandemic and cruise cancellations have had on Mat-Su businesses, as part of Meyer's "listening tour" with communities.

Meyer visited with communities around the state to get input from organizations and business owners for the Alaska Tourism Revitalization Plan proposed by Gov. Mike Dunleavy, as part of the American Rescue Plan federal stimulus package.

"We thank the Lt. Gov. for listening to how the Mat-Su tourism industry has been impacted by the cruise cancellations and the pandemic. This thoughtful discussion showed that while the Mat-Su Valley is not a cruise port, cruisers make up a big part of the visitor sector here," said Mat-Su

CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

The board talked about the direct impact the loss of the cruise industry has on their businesses, but also the ramifications it has on secondary businesses around the area. The board stressed how interconnected businesses are – hotels rely on local farmers for their restaurants for example, and tour companies spend money in the community on construction projects, insurance and a wide range of.

The board also talked about employment issues include retention of employees in an economic downturn and recruitment challenges.

"It was good for the Lt. Gov. to hear all of the challenges our members are facing, both directly and indirectly, from this," Quill said.

VACCINES

Continued from Page 1

Sleeves Up for the Summer is a new program being launched by the Alaska Division of Health and Human Services, trying to get more Alaskans vaccinated in the month of May. Clinics around the Valley, including a walk-in clinic at the old Sears building in Wasilla, provide daily vaccination opportunities. DHSS is also going to provide free vaccinations to those interested at community events such as Friday Flings in May, and possibly do door-to-door vaccinations for groups who want it.

DHSS officials, along with federal officials, stress that the vaccine is safe and effective, and while the vaccines were produced quickly, decades of research has gone into the development of mRNA vaccines.

"We're medical professionals but we're also Alaskans. We're your friends and neighbors. We want our friends and neighbors to stay safe and healthy, and that's why we are encouraging everyone to get vaccinated," Zink said.

During the ECHO briefings, medical professionals stated they have heard from young people that they don't want the vaccine because they aren't considered at-risk. That may be true, but people have to think bigger than just themselves.

"We're finding out that 'Long Covid' can be devastating and lead to joint pain, chronic fatigue, headaches and strokes from young patients and people who were asymptomatic," Dr. Joe McLaughlin, the state's epidemiologist, said. "You can't get Long Covid if you don't get Covid, and with the vaccines, it's preventable."

McLaughlin also stressed that young people with extremely high recovery rates can still pass the virus along to other high-risk individuals if they aren't vaccinated.

"Yes, young people's risk with Covid is very small. But its impact can be devastating if passed to someone who isn't young and healthy. By getting vaccinated, you are protecting not only yourself, but your community," he said.

For more information about the Sleeves Up for the Summer campaign or if you are interesting in DHSS offering your team of employees vaccinations, contact Casey Ressler at casey@alaskavisit.com.

Mat-Su CVB launches largest in-state marketing campaign

The Mat-Su CVB launched its largest in-state marketing campaign ever on May 1, targeting residents and their visiting friends and relatives through digital, radio, television, social media and print.

In 2020, when few out of state visitors were coming to Alaska, the Mat-Su CVB launched a significant in-state campaign. This year, the investment in the campaign was doubled.

"It's clear that we're going to have a rebound from 2020 thanks to independent travelers, but it's also clear just how important Alaskans are to our members, so we wanted to make that campaign as robust as we ever have," said Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler.

The campaign has three "trails" that are highlighted in all promotions – the Adventure Trail, Hiking Trail and Beer & Bites Trail. Within those three components, individual communities will be highlighted for the duration of the campaign.

The promotion runs May 1 through August 30 and includes more than 1 million digital ad impressions, 82 print ads in three publications, targeted social media and search ads, 120,000 streaming television commercials and radio throughout the region.

Members can take advantage of the campaign by submitting a special offer for Alaskans, which are being heavily promoted. Your special offer is free to place, and gives you additional exposure on the Mat-Su CVB web site.

"All of our digital ads point to the special offers page on the web site, so this is how members can leverage our investment to highlight their business," Ressler said.

Components of the Show Up for the Valley campaign include social media; radio; targeted search engine marketing; print in the Anchorage Daily News, Anchorage Press and Warriors (military) newspapers; targeted Google programmatic digital display ads; digital ads on Anchorage Press and Anchorage Daily News web sites; streaming television ads; Mat-Su Frontiersman e-newsletter ads; Alaska Travelgram spotlights; and TravelAlaska travel specials sponsorship.

Adventure
— TRAILS —
TALKEETNA

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

Alaskans-only Discounts at AlaskaVisit.com/Specials

SHOW UP MAT-SU Valley

The in-state campaign features ads highlighting different communities. This ad highlights Talkeetna.

New social media program focus of national promotion

The Mat-Su CVB is launching a national social media campaign targeting independent travelers and people who have previously cruised, to promote the Valley as a safe and inviting destination through a partnership with Sparkloft, an international social media marketing company.

The social media campaign will run throughout the summer and be highly targeted to potential visitors using research from both Destination Analysts and Sparkloft.

"This is a brand new project and we're excited about reaching people in ways that we haven't in the past," said Mat-Su CVB marketing manager Casey Ressler. "This is a time to look at new and innovative ways to market our destination post-pandemic."

The campaign features social media specific storytelling including video, animation and photography. Components include new "Instant Experiences," story ads on Facebook and Instagram, Instagram Guides development and the design of Giphy stickers that can be used in text messages and social posts.

"We want to tell a larger story to raise awareness among a broader audience for Mat-Su CVB," said Sparkloft founder and CEO Martin Stoll. "Using this content to tell an immersive story of the destination is key."

In addition to promoting the Mat-Su as a visitor destination, the campaign is also designed to build brand awareness across many platforms.



Sample Copy:

The Mat-Su Valley has hundreds of shades of blue waiting to be discovered. Find them all this summer.

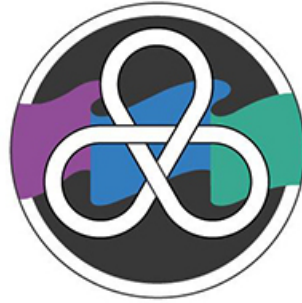
Mat-Su awarded 2024 Arctic Winter Games

The Mat-Su Borough was named the host community for the 2024 Arctic Winter Games, and work is under way toward organizing a host society and board of directors.

The Games welcome young athletes from around the circumpolar globe for a week of athletic competitions featuring traditional winter sports as well as cultural sports and cultural events. The Games are tentatively scheduled for March 2024.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we are beyond excited to be awarded the 2024 Arctic Winter Games," said Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler. "While the Games are only a weeklong, there is a tremendous amount of work that will take place the next three years to plan them."

The Mat-Su CVB is a primary partner with the Mat-Su Borough on the project and worked with the borough on the bid. Due to the pandemic, a virtual tour was held for the International Committee



Arctic Winter Games

rather than an in-person tour of the area and facilities.

"The virtual tour really wowed me. The enthusiasm from the community and partners was really felt through the entire tour," said John Flynn, president of the International Committee.

The Mat-Su CVB is developing the non-profit Host Society, which will oversee the Games. Recruitment is under way for

a Board of Directors, and those interested in serving on the Board can contact Ressler at casey@alaskavisit.com for more information and a board application.

"The board of directors needs people with expertise in a number of different areas, including marketing, the hospitality industry, facility management and much more. We want to build a team that is passionate and fully committed to making the 2024 Games a success."

Hosting the Games is a great opportunity to welcome visitors from around the world to the Mat-Su Valley in March. In addition to the athletes and the national delegations, family, media and spectators attend the Games.

"In addition to welcoming a large contingent of international visitors, hosting the Games also has positive long-term impact to our local community. Infrastructure will be developed for the Games that Valley residents will enjoy for a lifetime," Ressler said.

National campaigns include magazine, digital ads

Since January, the Mat-Su CVB has been promoting the Valley to potential travelers through national print advertisements, targeted social media campaigns, digital advertising and cooperative efforts with the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

National print advertising appeared in AARP Magazine, Travel & Leisure Magazine, Outside Magazine, Alaska Magazine and The Milepost.

"The AARP advertisement alone generated 3,000 visitor guide inquiries. These are high-potential visitors who are requesting more information about our area, based on an ad they saw in the magazine," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

On social media, ads in February and March were targeted to potential visitors in eight U.S. cities identified by research as being the best target markets.

For paid search marketing, after a year pause due to the

pandemic, the Mat-Su CVB restarted its pay-per-click campaigns that target people online searching for information about accommodations, attractions, travel information and more.

Digitally, the Mat-Su CVB generated more than 500,000 impressions of digital ads that were deployed to web users who had previously visited the Travel Alaska web site looking for more information, through a cooperative marketing effort from the Alaska Travel Industry Association. Other national marketing efforts include a monthly e-newsletter, sponsorship of the Travel Alaska e-newsletter and a video at the Anchorage airport.

"We've been active promoting the Mat-Su Valley using a variety of channels, and they all are very targeted so we're efficient and effective," Ressler said. "In the next few months, we'll also be doing a social media takeover of the Travel Alaska page and sponsoring a Mat-Su blog on the Travel Alaska web site."

Stay connected to tell our story!



www.facebook.com/visitmatsu

www.twitter.com/visitmatsu



YouTube
"yahoomatsu" channel

Instagram
[matsuvallleyak](https://www.instagram.com/matsuvallleyak)



Get ready for summer with weekly May member webinars

As the summer season draws closer, the Mat-Su CVB is offering a weekly series of webinars for membership development.

The webinars are Wednesdays at 11 a.m. through the end of the month, with each week featuring topics that you can pass along to guests this summer, including developments on parks and trails, and new opportunities in Hatcher Pass.

Use the links to register for the free, one-hour webinars and join us on Zoom to learn about what is going on in the Mat-Su Valley this summer.

Mat-Su Trails & Parks – May 12, 11 a.m. Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation will talk about trail

projects in the Mat-Su Valley, and Chris Beck will give an update on the Alaska Long Trail.

Highway Neighbors – May 19, 11 a.m. Hear from communities along the road system, from Valdez to Fairbanks, about community events and new tour products that you can recommend to your guests (or enjoy for yourself!).

Hatcher Pass Opportunities – May 26, 11 a.m. Mandy Garcia from Salmon Berry Tours will give an update on Independence Mine's summer operators plan, and we'll also hear from Skeetawk and the Government Peak Chalet about recreation opportunities this summer. We hope to see you on Zoom this May!

Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

Alaskan Husky Adventures

Liz Failor
(907) 744-8211
www.akhusky.dog

Bear Paw River Guides

Shane Foord
(907) 203-2684
www.bearpawriverguides.com

Highway 3 Angler

Ben Rowell
(907) 306-7851
www.highway3angler.com

Rise

Carrie Skinner
(907) 203-8299
riseballoonadventures.com

Listings Pro gives members more exposure online

In March, the Mat-Su CVB instituted a new listings layout on the web site to give members more exposure and visibility to site visitors.

The launch of Listings Pro streamlines the listings in an easy-to-navigate form and allows for more members to be visible on mobile devices.

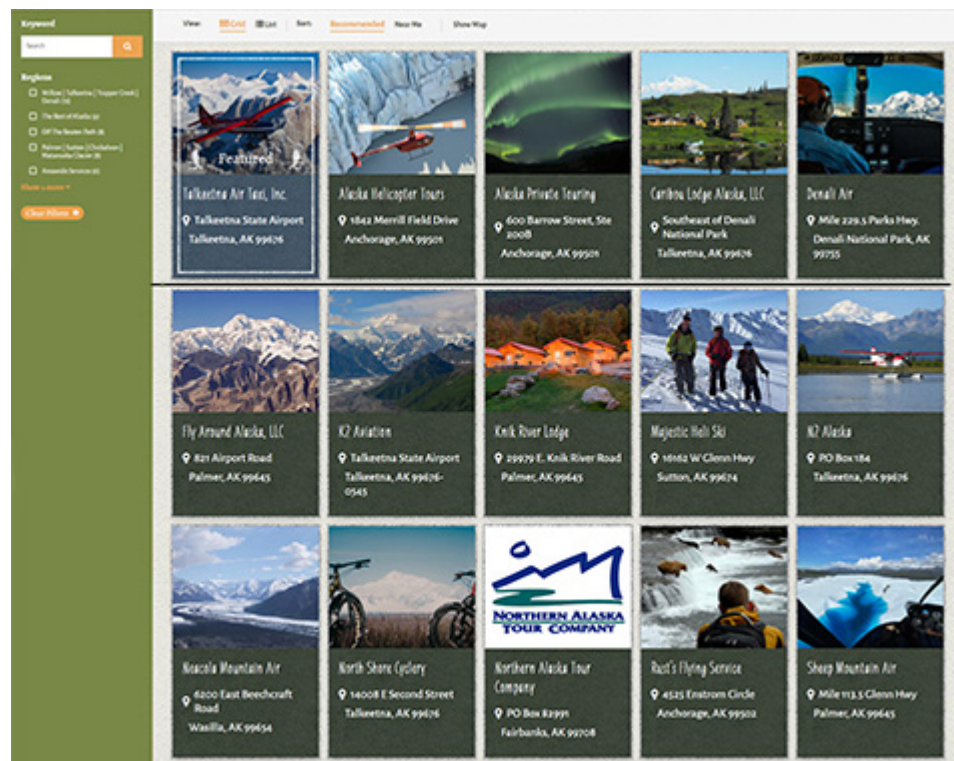
"Listings Pro helps visitors to the site find what they're looking for with better navigation, and for members, it gives them more opportunity to be seen and to showcase what they have to offer," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders.

Members have ability to add keywords that are searchable, upload photos and YouTube links to their members listings, as well as add narratives and a list of amenities, including extra safety measures they are taking.

Making your listings stand out is easy, and beneficial in directing site visitors to book with you.

"As people plan their trip, your member listing is the first introduction you have to them, so making it robust and attractive is important," Saunders said. "You want to show them why they should book with you, and you can do that through great photography, showing them video of the tours and keeping your listings up to date."

Members can log in to the Extranet to update their listings and add photos and video on their own, or Saunders can give you a hand. Call him at 354-5032 or e-mail him at justin@alaskavisit.com



Listings Pro, a new layout for member listings on AlaskaVisit.com, has a grid layout that gives members more exposure online, and allows site visitors to sort and filter listings much more efficiently.

Members can also add special offers, which includes their listing on an additional page, generating even more exposure. The special offers page (www.alaskavisit.com/specials) is being promoted in advertising throughout the summer, so adding a special offer is

another chance to be seen by potential visitors. If you are hosting community events, you can also submit those online to be included in the calendar of events.

"There are a lot of tools available, you just have to use them," Saunders said. "I'm here to show you how."

Member announcements

Bear Paw River Guides is a veteran owned and operated guide service with over 12 years experience, we are truly dedicated to providing a fishing trip of a lifetime. Our goal is to offer world class fly fishing on waters off the beaten path in the wilderness of Alaska. We bring a fun and professional atmosphere for our clients whether they are on a float trip or a walk in excursion. From the expertise of our guides, to the unparalleled services we provide every step of the way, Bear Paw River Guides is here to ensure that the memories you have while fishing with us will last a lifetime. www.bearpawriverguides.com.

The Musk Ox Farm in Palmer is open to the public this summer, by reservation only. This year the farm will be open to tours and experiences but only through reservations. Reservations can be made by calling the farm at (907) 745-4151. The farm is also taking preorders for "Luna's Big OXcident," a children's book inspired by Luna, a musk ox on the farm who lost her leg after breaking it. After a year of intense rehab and recovery, it was decided that her story needed to be told! So, the farm reached out to two local talents to help bring Luna's story to life to celebrate her, and celebrate how beautiful being different can be. Written by P.T. Custard, with whimsical illustrations by Amanda Rose Warren, Luna's Big OXcident is a gentle tale about differences, acceptance, and inclusion, with an important lesson for readers of all ages. www.muskoxfarm.org

Join Phillips Cruises and Tours on a new 5-hour Kenai Fjords Cruise to see more of Kenai Fjords National Park in less time on their high-speed catamaran, M/V Bravest. Cruise in luxurious comfort and first-class style as the Captain shares the history and highlights of this spectacular place! Departing from the Seward Cruise Ship terminal, Phillips offers free parking, a complimentary hot meal with coffee, tea, and ice water. Every guest is seated in our safe, clean, and spacious heated passenger decks equipped with USB charging stations at every table. <https://kenaifjordscruise.com>

Three brand new exhibitions are on view at the **Anchorage Museum**. The exhibitions range from a comprehensive look at Black history and excellence in Alaska, a photography exhibition challenging gender norms and stereotypes

in the state, and a new look at Denali National Park using a beautiful and unusual photography method. Whether it's been a while since your last visit, or you were just here, we're excited to share these new experiences. Black Lives in Alaska: Journey, Justice, Joy; Rowan Renee: Dead Reckoning; and Charles Mason: Denali through Collodion. www.anchoragemuseum.org

Palmer Alehouse is hosting a series of outdoor concerts this summer every Friday and Saturday night. With acts like Hobo Jim, the Ken Peltier Band, H3, Nervis Rex and more, spend the weekends listening to live music at the Palmer Alehouse. www.palmeralehouse.com

Sheep Mountain Air is offering helicopter tours of the Matanuska Glacier area this summer. Based out of Sheep Mountain Lodge, flights depart daily in the R44 Raven II helicopter. They are offering three types of tours, as well as private and fully customizable options. www.sheepmountain.com

Sheep Mountain Air, MICA Guides and Alpenglow Luxury Camping are teaming up to offer luxury camping on Matanuska Glacier this summer. The package includes a helicopter flight onto the glacier, tents with queen-size bed with linens, blankets, down comforter, and pillows, chairs, screened in doors and windows, a firepit with glacier and valley views, battery packs to charge phones and small electronics, appetizers, dinner, drinks, and breakfast provided. Glacier trekking is available in the customized packages for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. www.alpenglowluxurycamping.com

Alaska Helicopter Tours is offering summer glacier dogsledding adventures featuring Dallas Seavey's **AK Dog Sled Tours** this summer. Helicopter tours begin at Knik River Lodge with a flight over glaciers and icebergs. Then, you'll drive your champion Iditarod-winning sled-dog team on snow in the middle of summer surrounded by amazing scenery. We often see moose, black bears, Dall sheep, and mountain goats. Three different tour options are available, as are transfers to Knik River Lodge. www.alaskahelicoptertours.com.



Casey Ressler joins other Alaska DMOs and companies on a recent Zoom presentation to travel advisors.

Live from Alaska!

The Mat-Su CVB went Live from Alaska in April, connecting with travel advisors and travel media during a new program offered by the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

Live from Alaskan was a one-day virtual tradeshow featuring 40 Alaska destinations and businesses that each had a "booth" and met with operators and media.

The Mat-Su CVB also participated in the Destination Training component of the program, with a presentation for travel agents and travel advisors. Several Alaska destinations participated, creating a virtual road trip through the state for attendees.

"Live from Alaska was successful in allowing us to meet with travel advisors and talk to them about how to best plan Alaska vacations for their clients without the cruise component," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "Many of the travel advisors had clients who had cancelled cruises, but they still wanted to come to Alaska, and this was an opportunity to show them how to do that."

In September, Alaska Media Road Show is scheduled to be held in person in Las Vegas, where Alaska partners will meet with leading travel journalists over the course of two days. In the past, the event has led to coverage of the Mat-Su Valley in national magazines and newspapers, as well as leading travel blogs.

"Virtual meetings and conventions have been great to stay connected and keep advisors and the media updated, but nothing can replace meeting face to face and building those relationships that are so important," Ressler said.



Look for these digital ads promoting the Mat-Su Valley as part of the Show Up For the Valley in-state promotion this summer!

YAHOO!
Mat-Su

Mat-Su CVB
610 S. Bailey St., Suite 201
Palmer, AK 99645