

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Spring Edition

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### Contact us

**Casey Ressler**  
President & CEO  
863-4931

[casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com)

**Justin Saunders**  
Marketing & Communications Mgr.  
354-5032

[justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com)

**Katie Reeves**  
Membership Manager  
746-5001

[katie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:katie@alaskavisit.com)

**Tasha Belka**  
Administrative Manager  
746-5000

[info@alaskavisit.com](mailto:info@alaskavisit.com)

## New branding project under way

Mat-Su CVB is launching a comprehensive destination branding project this spring, which will create a unified voice, message and visual identity when completed late in 2024.

A destination's brand goes far beyond just a new logo and tagline, Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Casey Ressler said.

"Branding a destination is about developing a unique identity, establishing what we represent as a destination, and delivering on those promises to our visitors," Ressler said. "It is going to include a lot of research, interviews with stakeholders and input from members."

An RFP was issued in March, with proposals due by April 30. The project will kick off this summer and is scheduled for completion in early 2025.

During the research phase, the winning contractor will be surveying visitors,

Alaskans who do not live in the Mat-Su Borough and also Mat-Su Borough residents to get their sentiment about the destination. This phase is just as important as the creative phase.

"The truth is, you don't get to just pick your brand," Ressler said. "Your brand is what feelings people associate with your destination, and we must listen to them. We want to incorporate those sentiments into a visual identity."

In the project's creative portion, logos, color guides, style guides, typography and other visual assets will be designed to provide a comprehensive, cohesive tool kit to use in all marketing efforts, from web site design to printed and digital ads.

"The goal is to create an identity that people immediately recognize, engaging them to learn more about the Mat-Su Valley, and ultimately to visit," Ressler said.

## Summer kickoff barbecue May 9

Mat-Su CVB always kicks off the summer season with our annual member barbecue. This year it is on May 9 at Our Alaskan Dream B&B. This cozy lodging establishment has been part of Mat-Su CVB for many years. With Hatcher Pass only minutes further down the road, Our Alaskan Dream B&B is a prime location for visitors as well as community events like this one.

This free barbecue is the perfect opportunity to learn about new and continuing products and services that other members are offering. This is where members can network and form new partnerships with others in the industry. Come sign up to give a three-minute spotlight on your business. Bring your front-line employees so they can hear about what is going on around the Valley – the more the merrier.

"I enjoy the summer kickoff barbecue because it is the first chance for many businesses to see each other again since

last fall," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "We'll be grilling hamburgers and bringing fixings for pulled pork sandwiches. We'll have a fun time getting ready for the summer season."

The barbecue is from 4-6 p.m., so come hungry and ready to share what your company is doing this summer. For more information, e-mail [katie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:katie@alaskavisit.com).

### Summer Kickoff BBQ

Where: 4504 N Heaton Rd  
in Palmer

When: Thursday, May 9  
from 4-6 p.m.

Members and partners are invited to join us for good food and great networking

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

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

Kierre Childers  
Revel Treks & Tours  
Vice Chair  
(907) 903-1664  
[info@revelak.com](mailto:info@revelak.com)

Travis Taylor  
Premier Alaska Tours, Inc.  
Treasurer  
(907) 279-0001  
[travis@touralaska.net](mailto:travis@touralaska.net)

Mark Fleenor  
Sheep Mountain Lodge  
Secretary  
(907) 745-5121  
[info@sheepmountain.com](mailto:info@sheepmountain.com)

Roberta Warner  
Alaska Tour & Travel  
At-large Executive Committee Member  
(907) 550-0006  
[roberta@alaskatravel.com](mailto:roberta@alaskatravel.com)

Heather Dudick  
Alaska Railroad  
(907) 265-2622  
[dudickh@akrr.com](mailto:dudickh@akrr.com)

Sam Dinges  
Alaska Trails  
(907) 354-3321  
[sam.dinges@alaska-trails.org](mailto:sam.dinges@alaska-trails.org)

Mandy Garcia  
Salmon Berry Travel & Tours  
(907) 278-3572  
[mandy@salmonberrytours.com](mailto:mandy@salmonberrytours.com)

Jennifer Brandon-Hanks  
Alaska Glacier Lodge & Alaska  
Helicopter Tours  
(907) 272-7777  
[jenn@alaskahelicoptertours.com](mailto:jenn@alaskahelicoptertours.com)

Jeff Curtis  
Alaska State Fair  
(907) 745-4827  
[jeff@alaskastatefair.org](mailto:jeff@alaskastatefair.org)

## From the Board Chair's desk

# Help Valley visitors stay another day

With our first calf already born this year, all indications at the Musk Ox Farm say that summer is on schedule and good news across the tourism industry suggests we have a great summer visitor season ahead. Partners in passenger services report an uptick in advanced reservations over last year. Mat-Su CVB has heard similar reports from fellow member businesses across the spectrum.

There's still so much to do before this upcoming busy visitor season. This just adds to how excited we are to welcome our summer visitors again. It's a good thing we're anticipating more visitors, too; with all our members hard at work the Valley has more to offer than ever before. Mat-Su CVB has seen record membership growth over the past year, as new lodging and activities join our thriving tourism industry.

Every visitor to Alaska has a bucket list of things they want to see and do, most of these adventures can be done right here in the Valley. From Denali views and glacier visits to salmon fishing and sled dog tours, our destination offers the perfect Alaska experience. The key is educating visitors so they know to plan to spend enough time here to enjoy all that we have to offer. Mat-Su CVB staff excels at reaching visitors and package tour operators ahead of the summer season to encourage them to spend extra time here when they arrive. I want to suggest something I think we as member businesses can also do to encourage longer visits to the Valley.

You know our home like no one else, make recommendations! You'll see a lot of guests and customers this summer, hopefully you won't be the last stop on their trip, either. Ask your customers what's left on that bucket list of theirs. What else are they hoping to see and do? You can help them opt to Stay Another Day by pointing out what they can accomplish right here in the Valley.

Recommend a fellow Mat-Su CVB member. Share your favorite Valley experiences. Your excitement and enthusiasm can convince visitors that everything they need is right here and they should Stay Another Day in the Mat-Su. The more our visitors experience in the Valley, the more stories they'll have of their own and the more they'll share about our home after they leave.

I've spent decades exploring the Valley; *anyone* could easily fill two weeks full of breathtaking sights and unforgettable adventures without ever leaving the Mat-

Su Valley. If we make the effort to connect visitors with fellow Valley businesses that can help fulfill their bucket lists, it will make a difference for all of us.

Such a collective effort can buoy a small business in their start-up years. It will certainly have a positive economic impact that will be felt by residents across our communities. Let's make local recommendations and encourage visitors to stay longer in the Valley this summer.

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



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

## Member benefit: spotlight videos

In addition to print and online listings, and a host of other excellent benefits, Mat-Su CVB shoots and produces spotlight videos for member businesses. From tour highlights to site walk-throughs, videos give an in-depth look at what members have to offer to prospective visitors.

"We put thoughtful consideration into these videos," said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders, "We aren't trying to keep up

with dedicated video professionals, but our spotlights do grab a lot of visitor attention."

Mat-Su CVB shares these spotlight videos on social media as well as member listings on AlaskaVisit.com, Saunders said. Members also get access to the finished video and raw footage for their own personal use.

To schedule a video spotlight of your business, email [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

*From the President & CEO's desk*

# Mat-Su Valley rallied for the 2024 Arctic Winter Games

Mat-Su welcomed the world with flying colors in March, as the Arctic Winter Games provided an amazing opportunity to showcase our destination to visitors internationally. The Games were inspiring, from the sharing of cultural customs to athletics on the fields of play.

Organizing such a massive international event took the lift of the entire community. As part of the Host Society Board of Directors, I was so encouraged to see community leaders, local businesses, private individuals and political leaders all work together.

More than 2,000 volunteers came together to make the week a success and give young adults from around the Arctic the experience of a lifetime.

Hosting the Arctic Winter Games was an amazing opportunity for the region.

In addition to the enormous economic impact it had, it was a chance to highlight our destination to visitors from around the world. We had more than 100 credentialed media attend the Games, in addition to five social media influencers and one travel writer Mat-Su CVB hosted during the week.



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

Coverage of the Mat-Su Valley came from as far away as France, and throughout Canada. While they were here to cover the Games, the media also took part in many of the winter tourism products that make our area unique, leading to coverage of not just the Arctic Winter

Games, but our destination as a whole. We had the focus of the entire Arctic for a week, and well beyond that through positive coverage in television, radio and print articles.

I was genuinely proud of our

community. We put differences aside and pulled together. People were eager to volunteer and help in any way. Many contingents mentioned to the Host Society how welcomed they felt by the Mat-Su Borough, and how friendly our residents were.

As we head into a busy summer tourism season, we need to embrace those same principles to give visitors the positive experiences they desire during their Alaska vacation. Coordinating countless logistics, being welcoming and friendly during stressful times and looking for solutions during challenging times will only enhance the visitor experience.

It takes the collective effort of everyone in the industry to provide the level of service our visitors expect. But by doing so, we give them an experience they'll tell their friends and family about, and help our industry continue to grow.

*Casey Ressler ([casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com)) is the President & CEO at the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

# Mat-Su CVB anticipates another successful travel auction

Mat-Su CVB's primary fundraiser is the Beer and Wine Tasting Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza. As the title suggests, attendees to this event enjoy a taste of locally brewed beers and fine wines while bidding on an impressive collection of travel-themed auction items. Golf passes, flightseeing tours, lodge getaways, and rail passes are just a few of the items that bidders anticipate seeing in this auction every year.

Mat-Su CVB promotes the event on

AlaskaVisit.com as well as through social media. The auction is also promoted at Mat-Su CVB's booth at all the in-state travel and outdoor shows they attend.

"A major part of this event is the Luggage Tag Raffle to win two round trip tickets on Alaska Airlines," said Membership Manager Katie Reeves. "Promoting that raffle at the travel shows has been an excellent way to spread the word about the auction."

This year's travel auction is right around

the corner, taking place on Friday May 3, from 6-9 p.m. at the Government Peak Chalet. "Event tickets and raffle tickets are already on sale," Reeves said, "We anticipate that they will sell out, so we're encouraging everyone to purchase their tickets in advance."

Reeves said tickets can be reserved by calling Mat-Su CVB's main office line, (907) 746-5000. People are also able to purchase their event tickets online at [EventBrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

## Hats off to our Travel Auction sponsors



## Mat-Su CVB a shared community value for members, residents alike

Some Valley businesses have been members of Mat-Su CVB since its inception. Such longstanding and loyal members are a good indicator that Mat-Su CVB's marketing efforts yield consistent benefits for tourism businesses in the Valley.

The organization has maintained a positive economic impact in the Mat-Su Borough. Investing in a healthy tourism industry spurs job growth as well as infrastructure development that benefit Valley residents year-round.

A key focus for Mat-Su CVB is communicating its worth to residents. Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler said the organization is a shared community value.

"Maintaining a strong tourism economy is ultimately for the benefit of our communities here in the Valley," Ressler said. "Mat-Su CVB is a big help for visitors, but our efforts also enhance life in the Valley for people who live here. That's the real prize."

Through Mat-Su CVB's community outreach efforts, the rate of membership growth continues to increase. Ressler said more Valley residents became aware



**Visitors may enjoy our trails and parks for a season, but Valley residents benefit from these features year round.**

of Mat-Su CVB's value through the organization's leadership and support during the 2024 Arctic Winter Games in March. Ressler said it is encouraging to have support from the community.

"We have a growing membership, continuing support from elected leaders, and our long-awaited new visitor center is about to become a reality. This is an excellent time to be a Mat-Su CVB member."

### Membership & Ad Renewal Schedule

#### May 17 - Renewal begins

Renewal invoices will be mailed out at this time. Members can request invoices prior to this date by emailing [Katie@AlaskaVisit.com](mailto:Katie@AlaskaVisit.com)

#### June 21 - early bird deadline

Submit your membership renewal by this date for a chance to win a free eighth page ad in the 2025 Mat-Su Valley Visitor Guide!

#### July 1 - membership deadline

Membership falls due on this first day of the new membership year.

#### October 1 - print deadline

Finalize your printed listing and advertising details on time to be included in the 2025 Mat-Su Valley Visitor Guide!

*It's going to be a busy summer, so make the goal to submit your renewal before the early bird deadline this year.*

## Networking events outside core area prove successful

Member networking is a major focus for Mat-Su CVB. Monthly membership luncheons in the Palmer/Wasilla core area have been an essential part of this effort for many years.

On April 18, Mat-Su CVB took its networking event to the community of Talkeetna. In a joint effort with the Talkeetna Chamber of Commerce, a membership luncheon was hosted at Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge.

"Because our region is so vast and our communities spread out, it remains a challenge for many members to attend our core area luncheons," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Katie Reeves. "That's the primary reason we took April's luncheon to Talkeetna."

Reeves said that over 50 people attended the event, representing both the Talkeetna Chamber and Mat-Su CVB. Many CVB members came from outside of Talkeetna, traveling from as far away as Anchorage for the opportunity to network with Talkeetna partners. The attendees



**Businesses across the Valley gather at Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge to network with partners in Talkeetna.**

took the opportunity to share more about their businesses with the group and build new partnerships as the Valley prepares to enter another promising summer visitor season.

The success of the luncheon reinforced Mat-Su CVB's intention to include

more outlying community events to its networking schedule.

"Networking across communities will not only strengthen members," Reeves said, "it will enhance the visitor experience in the Mat-Su Valley."

## Another great consumer show circuit for Mat-Su CVB

A successful summer tourism season in the Mat-Su Valley is largely a result of connecting with future visitors in the first months of the year to help them complete their Alaska vacation plans.

Each year Mat-Su CVB hosts a booth at several popular in-state and domestic consumer shows. These events have proven to be some of the best opportunities to speak with prospective travelers about visiting the Valley.

Mat-Su CVB distributes hundreds of visitor guides at every show, as well as brochures from member businesses who purchase display space at the booths.

Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders attended the Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show in February, along with many other Alaska partners.

“Alaska representatives made up an entire aisle of that show,” Saunders said. “Attendees flocked to us for planning assistance and more information about all the sights and activities in Alaska.”

Saunders also represented the Mat-Su Valley at the Holland America/Princess Alaska Cruise and Travel Showcase in Seattle on March 16. This event grabs the



**Mat-Su CVB Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders mans the booth at the Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show.**

attention of thousands of cruise passengers anxious to explore Alaska’s mainland before or after their cruise.

To capture the in-state market, Mat-Su CVB also had a booth at three of Alaska’s outdoor themed consumer shows: the

Great Alaska Sportsman Show, the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, and the Fairbanks Outdoors Show. Saunders recalled that many attendees would eagerly grab a visitor guide, remarking that they have friends and family coming up this year.

## Travel writers, influencers flock to the Mat-Su Valley

Hosting writers in the Valley has long been an effective element in Mat-Su CVB’s marketing strategy. This effort, often in partnership with the Alaska Travel Industry Association, has yielded generous coverage of the Mat-Su in both national and international publications over the years. Lately, the Valley has enjoyed a healthy dose of winter attention on behalf of visiting travel writers as well as social media influencers.

“Alaska has a wealth of unbeatable winter experiences,” said Marketing & Communications Manager Justin Saunders. “One of the best ways to publicize this is by hosting professional writers who will share their winter adventures with the world.”

Alaska Glacier Lodge, Alaska Helicopter Tours, and Crown Mountain Guides hosted writer and influencer Katherine Parker-Magyar in early March for some epic Mat-Su Valley heliskiing. Parker-Magyar’s itinerary also included the ceremonial start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, aurora viewing, and snowmachining. She has visited all 50 states and identifies Alaska as a destination

worthy of return visits.

The 2024 Arctic Winter Games, hosted in the Valley in March, caught the eye of several in-state and national travel influencers. One prominent writer, Susan Barnes, had visited and written about the Valley before and was anxious to get a winter angle on our destination during the Games.

Saunders arranged for Barnes and her father to attend the opening ceremony and several Arctic and Dene Games events.

“Susan also visited the Musk Ox Farm and took a flight tour over Knik Glacier,” Saunders said. “We wanted her to have plenty to share with her audiences.” Saunders also recalled Barnes’ enthusiasm for the culture and comradery on display at the Games.

As Mat-Su CVB leans into the

approaching summer season, Saunders continues to coordinate travel writer itineraries that showcase the Mat-Su Valley.

“Travel writers are a big reason we try to stay informed on what member businesses offer,” Saunders said. “The more we know, the more we can enhance a travel writer’s experience and ensure quality coverage for the Mat-Su Valley.”



**Left: Katherine Parker-Magyar heliskiing in the Valley, Right: Susan Barnes visiting Knik Glacier with her father.**

# GA4 to enhance engagement on AlaskaVisit.com

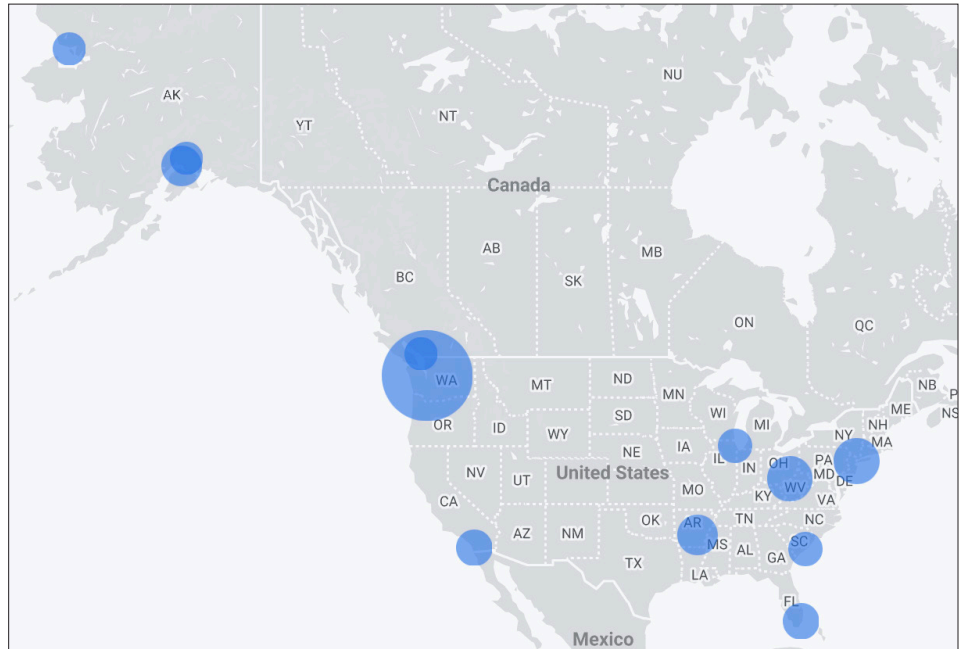
Last year Mat-Su CVB completed the transition from Universal Analytics to the new Google Analytics 4 (GA4) platform for their website analytics. With this switch comes a shift in focus when measuring the success of AlaskaVisit.com.

“Where the old Universal Analytics system primarily quantified user traffic and activity on our site,” said Marketing & Communications Manager Justin Saunders, “GA4 drills down on the quality of the user experience.”

The total number of sessions, or visits to the site, remain important and are still being tracked in GA4. This new system enhances this data, however, by prioritizing the engagement of those sessions.

“Engaged sessions tell us the site is useful to our prospective visitors. If a user on our site stays long enough, visits multiple pages, or clicks on a link within a page, GA4 qualifies that as an engaged session.” Saunders said.

With a focus on converting new site users into engaged sessions, GA4 helps Mat-Su CVB dial in on the effectiveness of the individual pages throughout AlaskaVisit.com. GA4’s insights help Mat-Su CVB fine tune page content and keep visitors more engaged on the site. Because

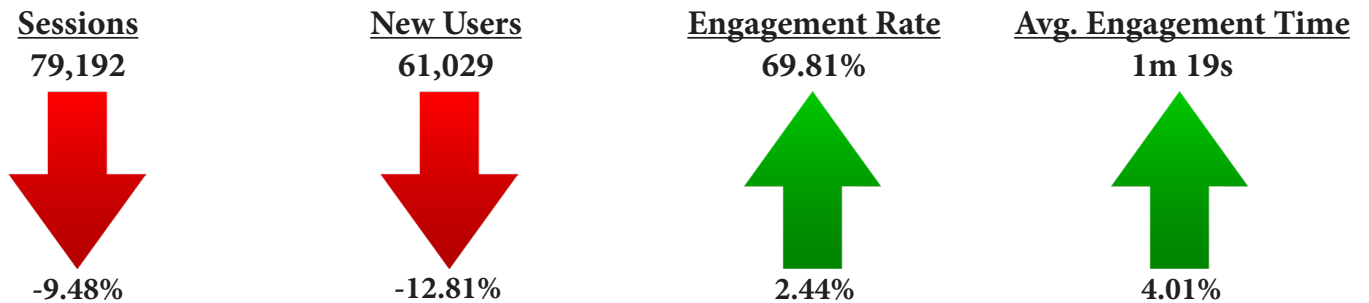


GA4 offers insights and qualitative site analytics like real time user mapping.

GA4 provides such meaningful data, Mat-Su CVB can provide more in-depth reporting on the success of the website. Saunders said a website always experiences the typical rise and fall of total sessions throughout a calendar year.

“Now, with GA4, we are able to show that the engagement rate or quality of sessions on site is still trending upward even during times when the total sessions are slightly down compared to the previous year.”

January 1 - April 24, 2024 compared to 2023



## Stay connected and tell our story!



[www.facebook.com/visitmatsu](http://www.facebook.com/visitmatsu)

Instagram  
matsuvallyak



YouTube  
“yahoomatsu” channel

# Highlights of Mat-Su CVB attendance at ABA

Mat-Su CVB accompanied the Alaska delegation at the 2024 American Bus Association (ABA) conference in Nashville. There were 3,500 tour operations, motorcoach companies, and destination marketing organizations in attendance at the event.

This was an excellent opportunity for Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders to collaborate with cruise and tour packaging companies from across the nation. Some of these companies have been networking with Mat-Su CVB for many years.

“Our organization has participated in this event several times before,” Saunders said, “This was my first time personally attending the conference and I really enjoyed the experience.”

Saunders had the opportunity to meet with 25 companies at the convention and discuss their plans to incorporate the Mat-Su Valley into their future travel itineraries. Many of these companies utilize well-known Alaska tour receptives like Holland America Princess or Premier Alaska Tours. Both operations maintain active Mat-Su CVB memberships and



incorporate Valley destinations in almost all their itineraries.

Saunders said it was motivating to see so many people recognize the Mat-Su Valley and express excitement to plan more visits to the region. One individual was ecstatic when Saunders helped her remember the name of a certain

charismatic farmer who hosted tours out in the Butte area.

“I never would have guessed I’d be exchanging fun stories about Ted Pyrah in an ABA appointment all the way across the country,” Saunders said. “Thanks to that, though, it’s almost certain that particular ABA delegate will always remember Mat-Su CVB.”

Saunders said the most common interest voiced in these appointments was for more agricultural tour options. Multiple people wanted help planning fall itineraries that incorporated farm tours, harvest festivals, farm-to-table dining, and the Alaska State Fair. Other interests included the Glenn Highway Scenic Byway and the Matanuska Glacier, Saunders said.

Shortly after the conclusion of the convention, Saunders dedicated time to follow up with each of the delegates with whom he had met. “Several of them are already working with in-state receptives on future tours and they are very appreciative to have our assistance on planning the Valley portion of these itineraries,” Saunders said.

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

Big Lake Boat Rental  
Kim Dooley  
(907) 947-5676

[www.biglakeboatrental.com](http://www.biglakeboatrental.com)

Big Lake Adventure Cabins  
Kim Dooley  
(907) 947-5676

[www.biglakeboatrental.com](http://www.biglakeboatrental.com)

Lakeside Scandinavian Farmhouse  
Susan Derrera  
(907) 351-8649

[www.airbnb.com/h/grebehouse](http://www.airbnb.com/h/grebehouse)

Legacy Clocktower LLC  
Tyan Payne  
(907) 373-8726

[www.facebook.com/Clocktower907/](http://www.facebook.com/Clocktower907/)

Alaska Joy Mountain Getaway  
Sommer Nielsen  
(907) 748-4163

[Find us on AirBnB.com](http://Find us on AirBnB.com)

All Alaska Tours  
Daniela Cole  
(907) 272-8687

[www.allalaskatours.com](http://www.allalaskatours.com)

The Abelar - A Private Lakeside Haven  
Shuree Cerda  
(907) 947-6186

[Find us on AirBnB.com](http://Find us on AirBnB.com)

Alaska Vacation Rentals & Cabins  
Avonlea Guthrie  
(907) 313-0103

[www.akvacationrentals.com](http://www.akvacationrentals.com)

Roaming Moose Getaway B&B  
Verna Beiler  
(717) 585-9465

Susitna Air Service LLC  
Ron White  
(907) 301-4399

[www.susitnaair.com](http://www.susitnaair.com)

Tippecanoe  
Nicole Thompson  
(907) 355-6687

[www.tippecanoealaska.com](http://www.tippecanoealaska.com)

Alaska Adventure Cabins  
Evelyn Harden  
(907) 715-2745

[www.alaskaadventurecabins.com](http://www.alaskaadventurecabins.com)



Summer is so close! Mat-Su CVB wishes all of our members and partners a successful season full of many happy visitors.

YAHOO!

# Mat-Su

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