

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Winter 2015

Inside this issue

Mat-Su CVB board president Cheryl Metiva wants member input on Gateway Visitor Center funding strategies

Page 2

The 2016 Mat-Su Visitor Guide is now available and being distributed

Page 3

Co-op marketing opportunities offered to members at three Alaska shows

Page 6

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'Stars of the Industry' honored

Six local tourism businesses and organizations were honored for their achievements during the Mat-Su CVB's annual "Stars of the Industry" awards luncheon at Evangelo's Nov. 13, held in conjunction with the annual Voice of the Membership meeting.

The Talkeetna Chamber of Commerce was awarded the Northern Lights Award, which honors a community or community organization for outstanding tourism promotion and development. Beth Valentine, the outgoing president of the chamber, accepted the award.

The Spirit of Tourism award was given to the Great Land Trust, for their efforts in raising money to purchase the 40-acre summit of the Butte, which it in turn donated to the Mat-Su Borough to be managed as public recreation land.

"We were humbled by the outpouring of community support," Mat-Su Program Director Kim Sollien said. "People have been so generous; it's obvious how much love there is for this special place and making sure it stays conserved for public use forever."

The Gold Star Award honors a business that has made a significant accomplishment in the tourism industry. This year, the award was given to K2 Aviation for their continued success in



AK on the Go author and television personality Erin Kirkland, left, presents Beth Valentine of the Talkeetna Chamber of Commerce with the Northern Lights Award at the annual "Stars of the Industry" luncheon.

Talkeetna. Owner Suzanne Rust accepted the award with one of her employees, Jennifer Birdsall.

The Tourism Angel award was given to Diana Lambernak of Evangelo's, for

See AWARDS, Page 4

New board seated at annual meeting

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors welcomed one new member at the annual Voice of the Membership meeting on Nov. 13, as Mark Fleenor of Sheep Mountain Lodge was elected by the membership.

Cheryl Metiva of Coming Attractions Theatre, Karen Harris of Alaska Garden Gate B&B and Craig Saunders of Iditarod Trailside Lodging all were reelected to serve three-year terms on the board.

"We're excited to have Mark join the board, and bring new ideas and a fresh perspective," Mat-Su CVB Executive

Director Bonnie Quill said.

Quill said this year's candidates for the board were the strongest she's seen.

"We had nine highly qualified candidates running for four seats," Quill said. "I can't thank the candidates enough for their willingness to run."

At a board meeting prior to the Voice of the Membership meeting, the board elected Metiva to serve a second term as president. Zack Steer of A2Z Consult

See BOARD, Page 4

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From the president's desk

Board seeking members' input on Gateway funding strategies

At our annual meeting in November, the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors brought forth to the membership a proposal that would increase the borough's bed tax 3 percent, in order to fully fund the construction and completion of the Gateway Visitor Center. The board of directors wants to hear from you, our membership, before fully supporting this proposal, and we recognize there are many opinions on this sensitive issue.

The Gateway Visitor Center has been a project the board has worked to develop for the last nine years, and we've come a long way – a feasibility study was completed, the property has been purchased and the design work is finishing up. State capital funding is no longer available. Funding strategies for the construction and completion of the facility have been explored extensively.

The center would increase visitation to all corners of the Mat-Su Valley, bringing extra dollars into our communities and providing a significant economic impact. More visitors staying more nights means more revenue for everyone.

A 3 percent increase in the bed tax is a strategy the board has identified as a way to make the center a reality. Visitors to our community pay the bed tax, so it wouldn't be a burden on local residents. It would also still keep the Mat-Su Valley's bed tax rate among the most competitive

in the entire state of Alaska – visitors are paying 10-12 percent bed taxes in other communities.

This strategy didn't happen without careful consideration among the board, and we certainly want the input of you, our membership. That's why we mailed an information sheet and survey to every voting member last week. Please take a minute to read about the facts about the



**Cheryl Metiva,
Mat-Su CVB Board President**

project and give us your opinion. The board of directors values each and every voice among the membership, and all will be considered and discussed before the board makes a decision. It's the first step in a very long process, but it's a step we only want to take with the support of the membership.

The board of directors is meeting Jan. 6-7 for its annual planning retreat at Alaska Garden Gate B&B, and we'll be evaluating all of the surveys (see box on Page 3). We'll also be having

a scheduled time for public comments and we highly encourage participation by our members. Please come and give us your thoughts on this issue and any concerns you might have.

We encourage an honest and straightforward dialogue among our members on this issue. By working together, we can accomplish great things.

Cheryl Metiva (cherylm@catheatres.com) is the president of the board of directors.

Member surveys mailed

On Nov. 30, the Mat-Su CVB mailed a fact sheet and member survey, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope, to the primary contact of every Tourism Development member. These returned surveys will be considered by the Board of Directors at the January planning retreat.

A copy of the Gateway Visitor Center/Bed Tax Fact Sheet can be downloaded at www.alaskavisit.com/membersurvey. Additional comments can be e-mailed to info@alaskavisit.com.

We ask that all surveys be mailed by Dec. 21, in order to be compiled and reviewed prior to the planning retreat.

From the executive director

Meetings matter to the Mat-Su tourism industry

Next month our membership luncheon topic will be “Meetings Matter.” We have invited a representative from Logistics LLC, one of the top meeting planners in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, to share how the Mat-Su and Valley businesses can capitalize and benefit from the meetings market.

From small conventions to board meetings and retreats the Mat-Su has ideal facilities, but there is much more we can do to capture the meetings business, especially in the off season months. The Mat-Su CVB is launching a new marketing initiative to increase meetings and events by collecting leads from our residents who belong to professional or fraternal groups and hobby organizations. Staff will be presenting at upcoming local chamber meetings and collecting leads on future meeting opportunities and can follow-up by assisting in identifying appropriate meeting space. Offering optional functions and activities can also increase attendance and add to the success of the meeting.

In Logistics’ presentation they will outline details meeting planners ask for when choosing facilities. Mat-Su CVB has compiled an inventory and brochure of listings to promote meetings and each

spring hosts a meeting planner luncheon in Anchorage. Invited meeting planners to the luncheon have reacted with surprise and interest to the variety of experiences that have been added in recent years.

The addition of the Government Peak Chalet and the new Glenn Massey Theatre have increased interest in meeting planners and created awareness of meeting in Mat-Su. Alaska Garden Gate B&B recently expanded with a large meeting space and additional adjacent rooms recognizing the opportunity to cater to traveling sports teams and extended stay training sessions. Knik River Lodge is currently constructing a new lodge and additional cabins to accommodate groups and future meetings year-round. Weddings, family reunions and legacy celebrations are a perfect fit for Mat-Su facilities.

Local Rotary clubs in the Mat-Su won a bid to host the 2016 District 5010 convention May 12-15, 2016 in Talkeetna led by Mat-Su CVB president Cheryl Metiva. She creatively negotiated the Talkeetna Lodge to open early and the

200+ delegates will give an early season economic boost to local businesses. The Visit Anchorage convention department markets to state and national conventions. Promotions include Alaskan experiences groups can include in agendas to inspire and create team-building such as an organized snowshoe softball game or a visit to a dog musher’s kennel. Think of all the options the Mat-Su has to offer in the meetings market.

And finally, to keep with the theme of the Gateway Visitor Center in this issue, take a close look at the design slides included in the fact sheet. The Gateway Visitor Center includes a multipurpose room suitable for presentations and educational sessions. The open lobby and plaza with dramatic views of Pioneer Peak will be a popular location for receptions and events. The Gateway Visitor Center will be an asset to help attract more meetings.

And meetings mean business!

Bonnie Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) is the executive director of the Mat-Su CVB.



Bonnie Quill

2016 Visitor Guide published, being distributed

The 2016 Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide was published in early November and features four additional pages of content and new photography throughout the guide.

The Mat-Su CVB printed 100,000 copies of the guide, which features a summer photograph of Denali on the cover and a crisp new design that carries throughout the guide.

“We’re very happy with the look and feel of the guide, and the additional content should help visitors learn even more about our area,” said Casey Ressler, marketing and communications manager for the Mat-Su CVB. “We had a very successful photo shoot this summer, so the guide features almost entirely new images.”

The new content includes a “choose Mat-Su when you cruise” section that highlights the many opportunities the Valley has for those who arrive in Alaska on a cruise, as well additional information about visitor centers and resources throughout the area. An additional page is also in the Denali Country section that details the change in the mountain’s name and height.

Next week, the Mat-Su CVB is mailing 50,000 guides to high potential visitors, as identified through the state of Alaska’s leads program.

“The leads have been coming in strong this year,” said Kathy Dunn of the state of Alaska tourism office. “It demonstrates a very strong interest in visiting Alaska.”

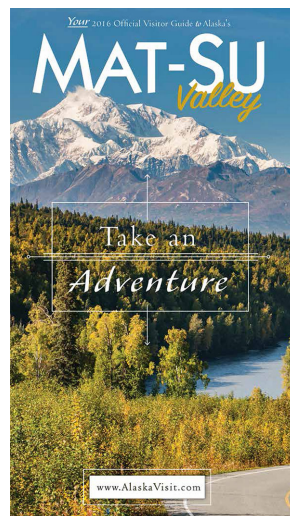
The guides will reach consumers who have requested information about Alaska, during their trip planning phase.

“The nice thing about the leads program is that we are able to use the state’s research to make sure the guides are getting into the hands of people who have the highest potential to visit,” Ressler said. “Our members will be seen by people who have already indicated they plan on traveling to Alaska within the next year.”

Copies of the visitor guide will also be used throughout the Mat-Su CVB marketing programs, including distribution through Web site requests, to tour operators and travel agents, and to travel media.

Copies of the 2016 guide will also be distributed throughout Alaska at high-traffic visitor areas such as airports and visitor centers.

Last year, the Mat-Su CVB introduced a digital version of the guide, and that program will continue in 2016. Members who purchased display advertisements in the guide will have those ads turned into links.



AWARDS: Local businesses honored

Continued from Page 1

her extraordinary efforts in helping a tour operator during the Sockeye Fire in June.

On virtually no advance notice, Lambernakis served a tour group of 100 seniors who were stopped by the road block established by the fire. She met with the tour director, who was impressed with the ability of Evangelo's to take in the group at the last minute.

Following the dinner, Lambernakis told the tour director to give her a call if he needed anything

He did just that, at 6:30 a.m. the following morning - his group had been stranded at the Houston Middle School shelter established by the American Red Cross, and they needed breakfast. Lambernakis again helped out - she bought breakfast items and drove out to the Houston Middle School to make sure his group was taken care of.

"Even though this was a very bad experience and we were stuck for hours and hours on the bus and had to overnight in a middle school shelter... the friendliness and willingness to help from Diana and the Red Cross in Houston was an extraordinary experience," Christoph Voelkel of TRIPS wrote in an e-mail. "I just wanted to share this with you what an outstanding person Diana is and also I think she is a great asset to the community."

The Cheechako Award, given to a business that thrives during its early years of operation, was given to Palmer City Alehouse.

A tongue-in-cheek award, It Happens, was given to Mount McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge for an event in August.



Rick Peterson of the Mount McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge presents owner Suzanne Rust, right, and Jennifer Birdsall of K2 Aviation the Gold Star Award during the Mat-Su CVB's "Stars of the Industry" luncheon.

With 460 rooms filled with nearly 1,000 guests, the entire facility lost power, shutting down food service, check-ins and everything else.

For the entire day, the staff turned lemons into lemonade by assembling a makeshift kitchen and serving up halibut, salmon and steaks, and giving their guests a memorable experience despite the trying situation.

BOARD

Continued from Page 1

will serve as the vice president for a second year, while Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours will serve as the treasurer. Mark Austin of the Palmer Musk Ox Farm will serve as secretary and be joined on the executive committee by Israel Mahay of Mahay's Jet Boat Adventures. Rounding out the board is Roberta Caenepeel of Explore Tours and Cole Ouellette of Rusts/K2 Aviation.

During the Voice of the Membership meeting, Metiva presented outgoing board member Rick Peterson of Mount McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge with a plaque for his service.

"Rick has been a valuable board member representing the cruise tour sector of our industry," Quill said.



Mark Fleanor of Sheep Mountain Lodge is the newest board member.

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Alaska Media Road Show draws top travel writers

The Mat-Su CVB recently attended Alaska Media Road Show in Santa Barbara, where Casey Ressler and Bonnie Quill met with more than 30 top travel journalists, pitching them stories about the Mat-Su Valley.

Each year, the investment in attending Road Show has paid off with coverage in such outlets as CNN Travel, Northwest Travel Magazine, the San Francisco Chronicle and more. This year's event attracted journalists from Yahoo Travel, Alaska Airlines Magazine, National Geographic Traveler and some of the top travel bloggers in the country.

"The quality of the journalists attending was amazing," explained Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "There are journalists from print, radio, television and online, and their outlets are far reaching. There are also a lot of editors who attend, and that's important because they are the people who are assigning stories and developing content calendars for large publications."

Quill and Ressler had a full appointment schedule, meeting with 24 travel writers. During the two-day event, they also visited with other journalists with whom they didn't have appointments at the evening receptions.

"We work with the state of Alaska's public relations firm, Thompson and Company, on all the state media trips, but by going to Road Show, we have the opportunity to meet travel writers and



Mat-Su CVB's Bonnie Quill and Casey Ressler meet with a travel writer during Alaska Media Road Show in early November.

develop relationships that ultimately help us receive positive coverage," Ressler said. "We've invited two to three travel writers on Mat-Su specific trips in the last few years, and that was all because of our participation at the Alaska Media Road Show."

Ressler said one misconception about travel stories is that they are immediate

once a journalist visits an area.

"Often, the process is much, much longer. A year and even longer is not unusual," Ressler said. "But in the end, it's worth it because stories in national magazines, newspapers and online are worth the effort. It's a lengthy process from pitching the journalist a story to one actually appearing in print."

Responsive design Web site to launch in early spring

The Mat-Su CVB is in the middle of a complete redesign of its Web site, www.alaskavisit.com, with the new site scheduled to launch this spring.

The new site will be responsively designed, meaning it will scale depending on what type of device a visitor is using. This relatively new technology is vitally important in meeting the needs of visitors as the reliance on tablets and smartphones continues to increase.

"Three years ago, a responsive design site was nice to have. Now, it's almost mandatory to meet the demands and continue to attract visitors to your Web site," said marketing and communications manager Casey Ressler. "We're very excited about this project, and we're looking forward to launching the new site."

The current site is seven years old, which in Web-site terms makes it very old,

Ressler said. Technology changes in an instant, and keeping up with those changes is important.

"The Web site is our number one marketing investment, and you have to stay current with changing technologies to maximize your return on that investment," Ressler said. "With mobile consumption rates soaring, it was vital that we went to a responsive site."

A mobile-friendly Web site is a must these days, for a number of reasons. One of the biggest reasons is the way search engines work, meaning you'll lose organic traffic to your site if you are not mobile friendly.

"We've invested in search engine optimization and aggressive pay-per-click campaigns, and that will continue, but the time was right to launch the redesign project," Ressler said.

After an RFP process, Simpleview Inc. from Tucson, Ariz., was selected to lead the project. They have designed and maintained the Mat-Su CVB's current site, as well as the data management system, for more than 13 years.

In early September, a team of graphic designers from Simpleview traveled to the Valley to kick off the project and get a feel for what makes the Valley unique.

"They explored every corner of the Mat-Su Valley and that allows them to truly understand our destination before they start the design work," Ressler said. "It helps the graphic designers with color palettes, imagery and all the other items that make a Web site beautiful and appealing."

The site redesign is about halfway through the process and on time for a spring launch, Ressler said.

Outdoor shows target Alaskans and VFRs

The Mat-Su CVB will once again have a booth at three Alaska outdoor shows, marketing to residents and their visiting friends and relatives.

The shows – in Mat-Su, Anchorage and Fairbanks – are also an opportunity for members to have their brochures distributed in the Mat-Su CVB booth and reach this audience.

“The shows come at a time when everyone is starting to think about summer, and they are in the planning process,” said marketing manager Casey Ressler. “They are all well attended, and it’s a great chance to reach the people who are itching to get out and enjoy the Alaska outdoors.”

Members can have up to 100 brochures distributed at each show, for just \$25 per show. A registration form will be e-mailed to members in early January.

The first show is the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, which runs March 18-20 at the Menard Sports Center in Wasilla.

That’s followed by the popular Great Alaska Sportsman Show in the Sullivan Arena and Ben Boeke Arena in Anchorage on March 31-April 3.

The final show is the Fairbanks Outdoors Show on April 22-24 at the Carlson Center.

“The Fairbanks show is always a good one because of the military presence there,” Ressler said. “They are people who are new to Alaska, and they only have a certain amount of time to get out and explore. They are interested in experiencing as much of Alaska as possible during the time they are stationed here.”

Giveaways are also needed for all three shows. If your business is interested in donating a giveaway such as an overnight or a tour, the Mat-Su CVB will take your brochures to all three for free.

For more information about brochure distribution opportunities at the three in-state outdoor shows, interested members can call Ressler at 746-5037 or e-mail casey@alaskavisit.com.

ABA, NTA conventions feature appointments with operators

The Mat-Su CVB is marketing the Valley to tour operators at two national conventions in January.

The American Bus Association’s Marketplace event, along with the National Tour Association’s Travel Exchange, are the two largest domestic tour operator conventions in the country. At both, the Mat-Su CVB will have prescheduled appointments with tour operators who sell Alaska packages.

“The appointments at ABA and NTA are very qualified, so you are meeting with buyers who are looking for Alaska products to include in their tours,” said Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager. “When I’m there, I’m talking about our members both big and small, and in all corners of the Mat-Su Borough.”

If your business has a new product, tour or special event that would fit with the packaged tour market, e-mail Ressler that information at casey@alaskavisit.com.

“One of the first things tour operators

ABA Marketplace
Jan. 9-12
Louisville, Kentucky

NTA Travel Exchange
Jan. 30-Feb. 3
Atlanta, Georgia

ask is, ‘What’s new?’ If you have a new product such as a renovation, a new tour or anything similar, let me know and I can include that in the appointments,” Ressler said.

ABA Marketplace is Jan. 9-12 in Louisville, Ky., and the NTA Travel Exchange takes place Jan. 30-Feb. 3 in Atlanta. Approximately two weeks after the event, tour operator leads will be compiled and available to Mat-Su CVB members. For more information about either event, or to receive leads, e-mail casey@alaskavisit.com.

CVB marketing winter community events

The Mat-Su CVB is once again marketing winter community events to residents in Southcentral Alaska as a way to bring visitors to the Valley.

Through print ads in the Alaska Dispatch News and radio advertising in Southcentral Alaska, the CVB is marketing Talkeetna Winterfest, Colony Christmas, Willow Winter Carnival and the Big Lake Winter Fest events. The events range from the beginning of December through mid-March.

“These are smaller, community-

based events that we can support through marketing and promotion opportunities, that they might not be able to do otherwise,” explained Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB’s marketing and communications manager. “Events help bring visitors from around Southcentral Alaska to our communities during the winter months, which gives everyone a boost.”

This winter marks the third year for of the Mat-Su CVB supporting community winter events through the marketing program.

Join a committee

Are you interested in helping shape the direction of the Mat-Su CVB and its many programs? Volunteer to be on a committee, and provide your input.

The Membership, Marketing and Internet committees are always looking for new members. The time commitment isn’t large - usually two to three meetings a year - but the impact you’ll have is.

If you are interested in serving on one of these committees, please e-mail casey@alaskavisit.com.

Committees will be discussed during the upcoming Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors retreat in January, and we’ll contact you to let you know about future committee meeting dates and times.

Meetings focus of next luncheon

After the busy holiday season, the Mat-Su CVB monthly luncheons will resume on Jan. 15 at Evangelo's.

The first luncheon of 2016 is "Meetings Matters," and will give members ideas on how they can work with meeting planners to increase business, particularly during the winter months. A representative from Logistics LLC, one of the top meeting planners in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, will give a presentation on how they work with community partners to make their events so successful.

"We're excited to have Logistics participating in this luncheon, because they are industry experts and can give our members first-hand tips and pointers," said Justin Saunders, the Mat-Su CVB membership manager. "There will be a lot of information for members from all types of businesses – lodging, activities and attractions – because the meetings market is so diverse."

The February membership luncheon is on Feb. 12 at Turkey Red in downtown Palmer, followed by the March luncheon on the 11th at Evangelo's. Both of those luncheons start at noon.

Luncheons are a great way to network with fellow business owners and develop relationships that ultimately lead to good partnerships. They are also a way to find out more about trends and topics that are important to the tourism industry. If you have a suggestions for an upcoming membership luncheon topic, please e-mail Justin@alaskavisit.com.

Save the date! April 29 is the ExTRAVELganza

The Mat-Su CVB's annual Wine Tasting and Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza is set for April 29.

The event includes a fun evening of live music, wine tastings, hors d'oeuvres and lots of deals on both silent and outcry auction items and is the largest fund-raiser of the year for the Mat-Su CVB.

Donation requests will be mailed to local businesses in the next few weeks. Donations are a great way to help promote your business, and support the fund-raising efforts of the Mat-Su CVB and the tourism industry in general.

"There is no item too large or too small – we greatly appreciate the support of all our donors to making the auction a success each year," said Mat-Su CVB membership manager Justin Saunders.

There is also opportunity to serve as a sponsor at the auction, and sponsors receive signage at the event, complimentary tickets and promotion through the event. Sponsorship packages start at just \$300.

Interested sponsors can contact Saunders at Justin@alaskavisit.com.

The popular luggage tag raffle will be offered once again, with \$20 getting you a luggage tag and a chance to win two round-trip tickets on Alaska Airlines. The last two years, the luggage tag raffle tickets have sold out prior to the event, so contact Saunders if you'd like to purchase a ticket prior to the auction. You need not be present to win the raffle.

Tickets for the auction are \$35 each or a reserved table of eight for \$265. Tickets – both for the event and for the raffle – will go on sale in the early spring and be announced in an e-bulletin.

For more information, or to sponsor the event, interested people can e-mail justin@alaskavisit.com.



The wine tasting/travel auction ExTRAVELganza is the largest fund-raiser of the year for the Mat-Su CVB.

International marketing efforts include ITB, Icelandair

The Mat-Su CVB is participating in two international marketing programs this winter, targeting European visitors and tour operators.

The Icelandair Mid-Atlantic Seminar is Feb. 4-7 in Reykjavik, Iceland, and executive director Bonnie Quill will attend. This convention brings together buyers from Europe and suppliers from Icelandair's North American hubs for prescheduled business meetings.

"Icelandair added a second direct flight to Anchorage last year, which is a great sign for international visitation," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager. "The opportunity to meet the tour operators who use that Icelandair route regularly is a

big opportunity."

The program features several Alaska CVBs, as well as private businesses. Icelandair subsidizes much of the cost of the program, making it one of the most cost efficient ways to reach European tour operators.

In early March, Ressler will attend ITB Berlin, the world's largest travel show.

Last year, Mat-Su CVB participated for the first time, and Ressler said he's been impressed with the return on investment, even after only one year attending the convention.

"Based on meetings we had with operators and media in Berlin last year, we've already seen increased visitation. We had one operator who made two

trips to the Mat-Su Valley, based on those springtime meetings. Often, it takes longer to establish those relationships," Ressler said. "In addition, we hosted a German writer we met at ITB last summer, and he's putting together an entire travel guide to Alaska."

At ITB, the Mat-Su CVB is in the state of Alaska's booth with 10 other Alaska partners.

The state schedules numerous business meetings, and representatives from each company has time with the operators. More than 30,000 people attend ITB, from all corners of the globe.

The state of Alaska's contractor in Germany is also in the booth, providing translation services if needed.

News from the membership

Alaska Garden Gate B&B is proud to announce our newest staff member. Please help us welcome Brenda Lelevier to Mat-Su. She joins us as our new full-time permanent manager at Alaska Garden Gate B&B. She is working on a degree in Hotel Management and recently received a Culinary Arts certificate from Monterey Peninsula Community College. She lived in Phoenix for 25 years prior to moving to Big Sur, Calif., and the Central Coast. There she worked as the reservations manager at the Ventana Inn and Spa and later as manager for Inns by the Sea in Carmel, Calif. Brenda moved to Palmer with her two children. With Brenda's help, we will be expanding our specials and packages, so be on the lookout for an upcoming Groupon deal, as well as Facebook specials.

Most of you probably already know that Craig Saunders sold his snowmachine and ATV tour business last spring. **Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours and Alaska Snow Safaris** is now under the direction of new owners Dan and Matti Wilcock. They completed a successful summer ATV tour season and are in full swing already for the great winter season we have been blessed with. All guided tours and unguided rentals need to be scheduled with the new owners. Their contact information is all the same as it has been – phone, (800) 478-2505 or

(907) 745-2505; e-mail reservations@alaska.global; and Web sites www.youralaskavacation.com and www.snowmobile-alaska.com. Saunders is still in the tourism business operating his lodging on the Iditarod Trail under his new business name, “**Iditarod Trailside Lodging**.” He will be hosting lodging and meals for the Wilcock's overnight and multi-day tours as well as his own fly-in customers for wilderness getaways. For fly-in lodging inquiries, contact Saunders at (907) 733-2505 or (907) 232-6773. We hope you are all enjoying a great winter season.

The 15th annual **Iditarod Trail Invitational** begins Feb. 28 at 2 p.m. at Knik Lake, with 70 competitors from 13 countries on the Iditarod Trail. In conjunction with the race, organizers are hosting a Fat Bike Expo and Big Fat Ride, a ride with more than 1,000 riders in Anchorage on Feb. 27, where they hope to set a Guinness World Record, where you can be a part of the world's largest gathering of fat bikers and world's first consumer fat bike expo. We are also offering \$15 raffle tickets in the Big Fat Raffle, with 2 fat bikes to win, Pen Air tickets, rims and tires and much more.

The ITI is the world's longest winter fat bike race with distances of 130, 350 and 1,000 miles. Alaskans have been riding bikes on the Iditarod Trail since 1987.

The Trail has been the ultimate proving ground for fat-tired bikes and related gear since their inception to where it is today with over 100 brands. Fat biking is now the fastest growing segment of the bike industry. The lodges along the Iditarod Trail are offering special fan and media packages and flights out to the lodges to watch the race come through.

Arkose Brewery is introducing two new holiday beers that are part of the brewery's new ¡Explosivo! Series, which are higher in alcohol than your typical beer.

The two beers include: ¡Explosivo! Barley Wine (available in limited quantity) and ¡Explosivo! Imperial Stout (tap night is Friday, Dec. 11 during Colony Christmas). In addition, a new food truck called JR ‘Smoken Chicken is going to have its grand opening at the brewery on Dec. 11 at 2 - 8 p.m. and on Dec. 12 at noon - 8 p.m. The brewery also has two events coming up: Dec. 12 at 2-4 p.m.: Beer Meets Canvas at Arkose Brewery. Sip. Relax. Create. Includes one beer and all art supplies for \$30. No experience required. This is not a painting class, but rather a paint-n-sip tasting event. On Dec. 18 at 6 p.m., Beer Meets Chocolate. Four artisan chocolates by JB Chocolatier paired with four artisan ales by Arkose Brewery. \$25 per person. For both events, you must reserve in advance by calling (907) 746-2337.

Submit your event at alaskavisit.com

Are you planning or hosting an event the community should know about? Make sure you submit it on the Mat-Su CVB's Web site, www.alaskavisit.com.

The calendar of events page is one of the most visited spots on the site, and it's absolutely free to submit your event. You don't have to be a Mat-Su CVB member to submit your event - we want the calendar to represent all the fun things going on in our community.

After you submit your event, it will appear on the site after an approval process. The event listings even include Google maps directions for site users.

We try to limit the events on the calendar to community or entertainment events that appeal to visitors and residents, rather than business meetings, for example.

For more information on how to submit your event for inclusion on the Web site, e-mail justin@alaskavisit.com.

Help welcome these new members to the Mat-Su CVB!

Last Frontier Magazine

Cecil Sanders
(907) 775-0816

info@lastfrontiermagazine.com

Majestic Heli Ski

Njord Rota
(907) 315-0584

info@majesticheliski.com

Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation

Kim Ryals
(907)746-8757
matsutrails@gmail.com

A2Z Consult

Zack Steer
(907) 414-7441
zsteer@gmail.com

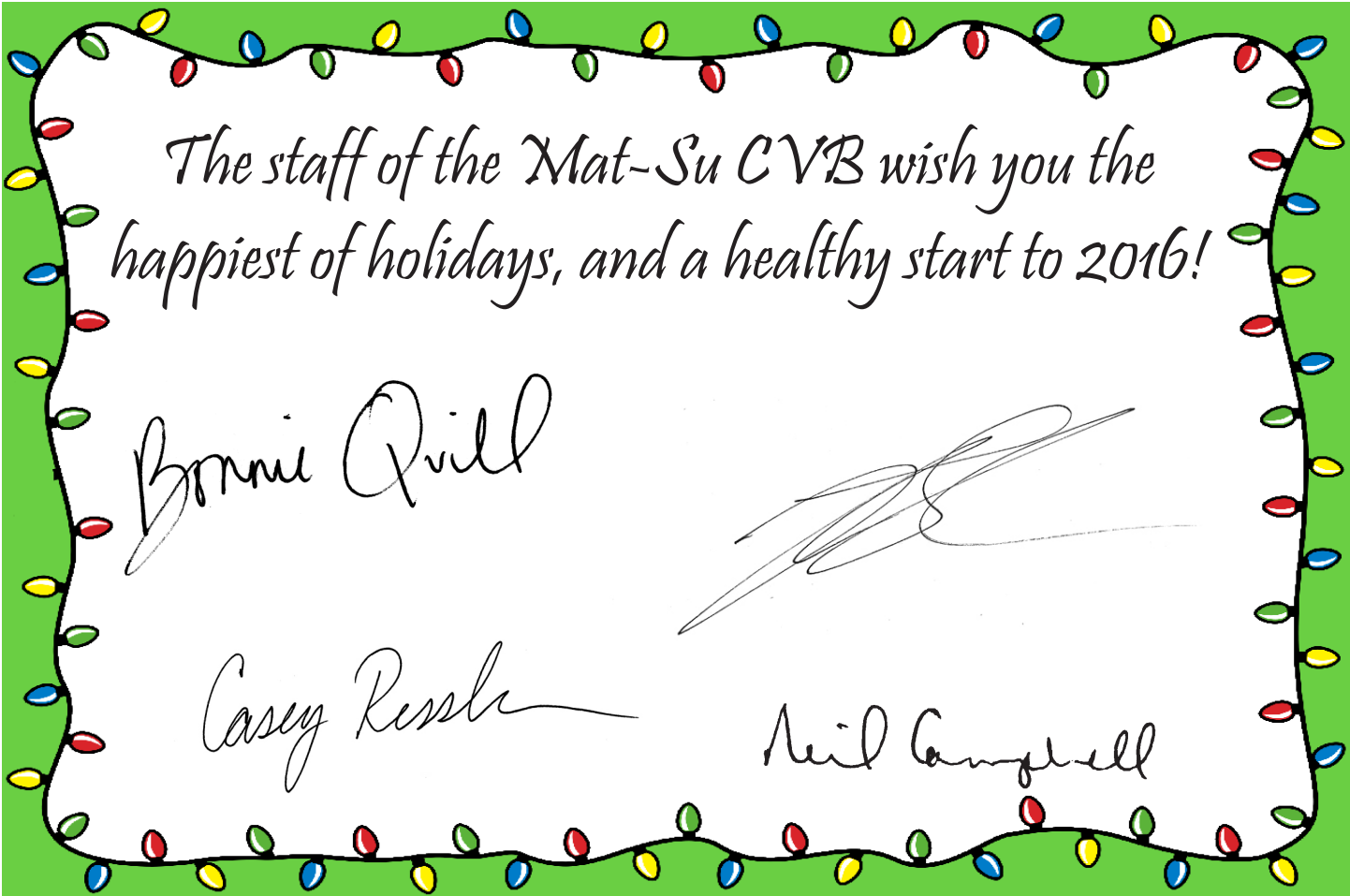
Tourism industry calendar of events

Dec. 24-Jan. 3	Mat-Su CVB offices closed for the holidays	
Jan. 6-7	Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors Planning Retreat	Alaska's Garden Gate B&B
Jan. 9-12	American Bus Association Marketplace 2016 Casey Ressler will attend	Louisville, KY
Jan. 15	Mat-Su CVB Monthly Luncheon "Meetings Matter"	Evangelos's
Jan. 30-Feb. 3	National Tour Association Travel Exchange Casey Ressler will attend	Atlanta
Feb. 4-7	Icelandair Mid-Atlantic Seminar Bonnie Quill will attend	Reykjavik, Iceland
Feb. 12	Mat-Su CVB Monthly Luncheon Topic to be determined	Turkey Red
March 7-11	ITB Berlin Casey Ressler will attend in State of Alaska's booth	Berlin, Germany
March 11	Mat-Su CVB Monthly Luncheon Topic to be determined	Evangelos's
March 19-21	Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show Mat-Su CVB will have a booth	Menard Center, Wasilla
March 31-April 3	Great Alaska Sportsman Show Mat-Su CVB will have a booth	Sullivan Arena, Anchorage
April 22-24	Fairbanks Outdoors Show Mat-Su CVB will have a booth	Carlson Center, Fairbanks
April 29	Mat-Su CVB Wine Tasting and Travel Auction	Evangelos's

Denali's Wintery Glow

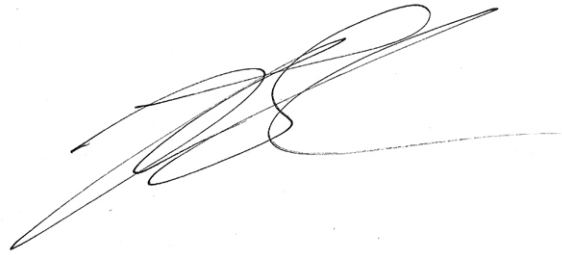


Denali put on a dazzling display during a FAM tour in mid-November. This view was from the Alaska Railroad, just south of Talkeetna.



*The staff of the Mat-Su CVB wish you the
happiest of holidays, and a healthy start to 2016!*

Bonnie Quill



Casey Ressler

Neil Campbell

YAHOO!
Mat-Su

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