

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Winter 2019

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## Members honored during 'Stars of the Industry' luncheon

The Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau honored five local businesses during its annual "Stars of the Industry" awards luncheon Nov. 7 at Evangelo's.

"There are so many people in the tourism industry who deserve recognition for their efforts in not only growing their business, but also for giving back to the industry," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

At the awards luncheon, the Cheechako Award was given to Meier Lake Resort. The award honors a relatively new business that has thrived in its early years. Meier Lake underwent a four year renovation and now is a full-service resort sitting on 122 acres on Wasilla Fishhook Road. Steve Solari accepted the award.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community or organization that has distinguished itself for tourism promotion. This year's winner was the Talkeetna Historical Society for their many efforts in the upper Susitna Valley.

The Gold Star Award is given to a business that has made a significant accomplishment in the industry. This year's award winner was Knik River Lodge. The lodge has opened a full-service restaurant and is now opening in the evenings during winter for northern lights viewing.

This year's Tourism Angel Award was given to Mark Austin, executive director of the Musk Ox Farm. He has overseen a renovation project to restore a Colony barn and turn it into an educational center at the farm. He also finished serving his ninth year on the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.

The Spirit of Tourism Award was given to the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge and general manager Fernando Salvador for their efforts during the McKinley Fire in August near Talkeetna.



Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm accepts the Tourism Angel award from Cheryl Metiva during the November 7 awards luncheon.

With numerous motorcoaches stranded along the Parks Highway, the lodge assisted by donating food, helping with travel arrangements and providing other assistance to visitors stuck in the road closures.

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## *From the Board Chair's desk*

# Future is bright for tourism industry

As the incoming chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors, I'd like to start by first thanking Cheryl Metiva, who served as the chair for the last five years and has done an amazing job leading the organization and setting a vision for the future. Two years ago, our members voted to amend the organization's by-laws to include term limits to create more opportunity for new board members, and this year, Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm reached the end of his three-term service. I'm grateful to him for his dedication.

I'd also like to congratulate and welcome two new board members, Tony Spiroski of Salmon Berry Tours and Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours, along with re-elected board member Fernando Salvador of Pursuit. I look forward to working with them as we move into 2020 and beyond. We have a great group of board members who are passionate about the Mat-Su Valley and promoting our destination as a premier place to visit.

The Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting was held in November, and it was a successful event. The focus was on tourism infrastructure projects in the Mat-Su Borough, and we had presentations from a wide range of organizations – Alaska State Parks, Chickaloon Village Tribal Council, Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation, Alaska Trails Initiative, the Mat-Su Borough and the Gateway Visitor Center. These projects illustrated how infrastructure plays a major role in developing a destination's identity and contribute to the overall destination experience.

In early January, the Mat-Su CVB board

is hosting its annual planning retreat, and these projects will be discussed. In a sense, the organization is transitioning from a traditional DMO (destination marketing organization) to a DMMO, a "destination marketing and management organization." As a destination and as an organization,

we have the responsibility to not only promote our destination to visitors, but also to manage the destination through shared community values that benefit our residents as well.

Tourism infrastructure like trails, parks, ski areas, visitor centers, public bathrooms and improved signage improve the visitor experience in a destination. Those experiences leave them inspired about the region. However, tourism infrastructure development also helps communities

develop a sense of pride, and contributes to a better quality of life for its residents. It gets back to the saying that if you build a place where people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live.

I'm excited about the future, not only for the Mat-Su CVB but for our industry and our destination. We are continuing to grow, and managing that growth is going to be important to the visitor experience. Thank you to all the members who returned their ballots, and to those who attended our annual meeting. Together, we can not only make the Valley a great place to visit, but a great place to live.

Mark Fleenor ([info@sheepmountainlodge.com](mailto:info@sheepmountainlodge.com)) is the owner of Sheep Mountain Lodge and the new chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.



**Mark Fleenor,  
Sheep Mountain Lodge**

## Happy holidays from Mat-Su CVB!

**The Mat-Su CVB office will be closed for the holidays from Dec. 24 through Jan. 1. We will reopen at 8 a.m. Jan. 2. We hope you all enjoy a safe and joyous holiday season.**



## *From the President & CEO*

# Old Visitor Center removed, Gateway moving forward

On the night of November 7 the log Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center was silently and slowly removed from the old site by a building mover contractor hired by the Mat-Su Health Foundation who now owns the property.

Mat-Su CVB has been documenting the process because it is such a huge part of our beginning in 1986 and it marks a new future as we look to complete the Gateway Visitor Center.

When the visitor center opened in 1989 there was a driveway leading up the hill from a 2-lane Parks Highway. With the Glenn/Parks interchange construction in 2003-2004 we lost our driveway and access. But we did negotiate a good deal on asphalt to pave our dirt parking area!

In 2005 local master gardener Jaime Rodriguez built a big beautiful raised garden with fruit trees and perennials.

Then Mat-Su Regional Medical Center opened in 2006 dwarfing our site and the Trunk Road two-lane roundabout further confused visitors trying to locate the visitor center.

On June 1, 2016 the Mat-Su CVB staff moved out of the building after the sale to Spring Creek to our temporary office space



Above, the site where the old Visitor Center sat is now vacant. At right, the center was first placed on wheels before the Nov. 7 move.

in downtown Palmer.

The Mat-Su Visitor Foundation is focused on fund-raising and applying for federal grants to complete the new Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center at Mile 36 Glenn Highway.

The Foundation hopes to share news of progress this spring.



## Membership elects 2 new board members, 1 incumbent

Mat-Su CVB members elected two new board members, and reelected an incumbent during the October election.

Joining the board of directors are Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours and Tony Spiroski of Salmon Berry Tours and Travel. Fernando Salvador of the Alaska Collection by Pursuit (Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge) was elected to serve another term.

"We're happy to have Tony and Travis on the board of directors. Travis served as a board member a few years ago, so he already brings a lot of knowledge to the board," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO Bonnie Quill.

Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm termed off the board after serving three three-year terms. Collette Hand of Alaska's Harvest B&B did not run for reelection after serving for three years on the board of directors.

"I can't thank Mark enough for his dedication and contributions to the Mat-Su CVB throughout his time on the board," Quill said.

At the Nov. 7 board meeting, new



Travis Taylor, left, of Premier Alaska Tours and Tony Spiroski of Salmon Berry Tours are two new Mat-Su CVB board members elected by the membership.

officers were installed as well. Taking over as board chair is Mark Fleenor of Sheep Mountain Lodge. Cheryl Metiva of the Extreme Fun Center/Valley Cinema is the past chair and remains on the board.

The new vice-chair is Roberta Warner of Alaska Tour & Travel. Israel Mahay is the new secretary, while Taylor will



take over as treasurer. Cole Chambers of K2 Aviation is the at-large executive committee member.

Rounding out the board are Dan Wilcock of Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours and Alaska Backcountry Cottages and Ina Mueller, formerly of the Mat-Su Resort.



# Mat-Su CVB meets with group tour operators at NTA

The Mat-Su CVB recently attended the National Tour Association's Travel Exchange convention in Fort Worth, meeting with tour operators from around the country to highlight the Mat-Su Valley.

At the convention, Marketing Manager Casey Ressler had 21 one-on-one appointments with operators, and also participated in the first-ever "DMO Sales Mission" alongside Alaska partners.

"NTA is a great opportunity to meet with tour operators who are currently selling Alaska product, or are looking to build new tours," Ressler said. "We are there to show them why they should include the Mat-Su Valley in their Alaska itineraries."

In addition to the regularly scheduled appointments, this year NTA introduced the "Sales Mission" concept for destination marketing organizations. Alongside the Alaska Travel Industry Association, Visit Anchorage and Explore Fairbanks, the Mat-Su CVB participated in two 20-minute trainings for operators.

"The new program worked out great and really showed the operators how all the Alaska destinations work together," Ressler said. "There was time for questions and answers following the presentations, which helped operators get a better idea of



Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler participates in the DMO Sales Mission at the National Tour Association Travel Exchange event in Fort Worth earlier this month. In addition to individual appointments, Alaska DMOs held two training workshops for operators.

how to plan an Alaska itinerary for their clients."

Leads from the NTA Travel Exchange

will be available to members on Jan. 2. If you are interested in receiving these leads, please e-mail [casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com).

# Alaska Media Road Show targets travel writers, media

The Mat-Su CVB attended Alaska Media Road Show in Las Vegas in October, meeting with top travel writers to highlight the destination.

At the event, Mat-Su CVB had 15-minute appointments with 23 national writers and editors from publications including the Saturday Evening Post, The Daily Beast, National Geographic Traveler, Alaska Beyond (Alaska Airlines), the San Francisco Chronicle and other top travel outlets.

"Alaska Media Road Show is a great opportunity to meet with that many high quality writers in one place, and the focus is solely on Alaska," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "It allows us to tell our story and inspire the writers."

While working with travel writers is usually a long-term project, coverage of the Mat-Su Valley has already happened as a result of being at the event, with articles published in TravelAge West and Travel Weekly in the month following Alaska Media Road Show.

OnTravel Radio also did a 20-minute radio interview, which airs to 2.5 million listeners daily in 180 countries on Armed Forces Radio.

"Road Show is not only about meeting writers, it's about strengthening relationships with them that lead to positive coverage of our destination," Ressler said.

"One example is Alaska Beyond, the Alaska Airlines magazine," Ressler continued. "Because of our appointment with them in 2018, it generated interest and ultimately led to a two-



Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler and Bonnie Quill meet with a travel writer at Alaska Media Road Show in Las Vegas in October. Mat-Su CVB had appointments with 23 national travel journalists during the event.

page spread about the Musk Ox Farm in the August 2019 edition of the magazine."

The Mat-Su CVB sponsored the social media awards during Alaska Media Road Show, and supplied the writers with pocket-sized Field Notes notebooks.

## Brochure distribution offered at 5 consumer shows

The Mat-Su CVB is offering brochure distribution at five in-state and national travel shows as part of the cooperative marketing program.

Members can have up to 100 of their rack cards distributed at each show Mat-Su CVB attends for \$25, or opt for all five shows for \$100.

"Brochure distribution at the Alaska outdoor shows is great at reaching local Alaskans who are looking to plan their summer adventures," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

The Mat-Su CVB will be attending the Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show in February, and then a series of four in-state shows in March and April – the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, the Great Alaska Sportsman Show, the Alaska Summer Showcase and the Fairbanks Outdoors Show.

"The Los Angeles show attracts more than 38,000 attendees who are looking for information to plan their vacation, so it's a low-cost opportunity for members to reach high-potential visitors," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

Giveaways are also needed for the Mat-Su CVB booth. If your business would like to donate a trip or an experience, Mat-Su CVB will distribute your brochures for free at that show.

Here's a link to the form: [https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/mat-su/2020\\_Coop\\_flyer\\_571dfdfe-1d18-4b66-bb4a-114168e1f54f.pdf](https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/mat-su/2020_Coop_flyer_571dfdfe-1d18-4b66-bb4a-114168e1f54f.pdf)

### Co-op marketing opportunities

Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show  
Feb. 14-16, Los Angeles Convention Center

Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show  
March 27-29 Menard Center

Alaska Summer Showcase  
Date TBA, Alaska Native Heritage Center

Great Alaska Sportsman Show  
April 3-5, Sullivan Arena

Fairbanks Outdoors Show  
April 24-26, Carlson Center

*Brochure distribution is available at all consumer shows in 2020 for \$25 each, or \$100 for all five.*

## 2020 Visitor Guide published, copies available for members

The 2020 Mat-Su Visitor Guide is hot off the press and now available for members wanting extra copies for their guests.

The guide features a Denali photo on the cover and contains member listings and display ads, information about all regions of the Mat-Su Valley, local tips and trip planning advice for potential visitors.

"While digital advertising is continuing to grow, there is always a place for a printed guide for visitors," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "Visitors like having a hard copy they can use to plan their trip."

Brilliant Media Strategies, an advertising agency based in Anchorage, designed the guide for the

third consecutive year.

Once again this year, 100,000 copies were printed. Of those, 56,000 will be

mailed to high-potential leads who plan to visit Alaska, as identified by the Alaska Travel Industry Association research. An additional 3,500 will be mailed to national travel agents through an Alaska Travel Industry Association cooperative marketing program, while the rest will be distributed at travel shows, through direct requests on the web site and at high-traffic visitor spots in Alaska such as airports, the railroad depot and visitor centers.

Members received a copy of the guide in early December along with a FY19 Annual Report. If you'd like more copies, please call 746-5000.



## Mat-Su CVB increases e-mail marketing

Mat-Su CVB increased its e-mail marketing efforts this December through a cooperative marketing program with the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

Mat-Su CVB rented 10,000 e-mail leads from ATIA from consumers who indicated they are traveling to Alaska in 2020. The e-mail message sent to them highlights the Mat-Su CVB web site as an ideal trip planning tool, and has links for consumers to sign up for the monthly consumer e-newsletter and to request a printed guide.

"These are highly qualified leads, and by reaching out to them, we bring them to our web site and ultimately to our members' listings," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

Mat-Su CVB sends a monthly e-newsletter to consumers that contains information about events, destinations and activities in the Mat-Su Valley.



# 2020 luncheons begin with Google marketing workshop

The Mat-Su CVB monthly membership luncheons kick off 2020 with a workshop that will help you improve your online marketing efforts, thanks to a Google expert.

Melissa Moody, a Google-certified marketer, is presenting “How to Reach Customers Online Using Google Tools” on Jan. 9 at Evangelo’s at noon.

As mobile strategy lead for the travel industry, Moody consults with the largest travel advertisers across Google’s digital platforms. This involves analyzing consumer, product and market trends in the mobile space to deliver strategic insights and recommendations.

Moody previously worked as Industry Marketing Manager for travel, engaging with partners to plan and implement effective online strategy. She has worked in travel since joining Google in 2007. Moody has a master’s degree in education and earned her B.A. from Dartmouth College.

“This workshop is not only a great way to learn about how you can better market your business, but also to network with fellow members,” said Membership Manager Justin Saunders.

In February, the topic of the luncheon is how the cruise industry impacts local communities. That luncheon is set for Feb. 7 at Everett’s (Mat-Su Resort) at noon.

In March, the Mat-Su CVB hosts an evening networking event. Details on the event will be in future e-bulletins, so make sure to check your e-mail for the latest information.

There is no cost to attend the January workshop or February luncheon, and lunch is available for purchase from the restaurants. Feel free to bring a door prize to the luncheons to promote your business.

For more information about the luncheons or to RSVP to one of the member events, e-mail Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) or call 746-5032.



Melissa Moody is a Google-certified marketer and she will be presenting “How to Reach Customers Using Google Tools,” at the January Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon.

## Get more exposure by advertising on AlaskaVisit.com

Take advantage of Mat-Su CVB online marketing efforts by advertising on [www.AlaskaVisit.com](http://www.AlaskaVisit.com) through the Digital Travel Network (DTN).

DTN is a Mat-Su CVB partner and offers web site advertising on the organization’s behalf. It is an affordable option for digital advertising, and leverages the Mat-Su CVB marketing plan.

“We have a very strategic and robust digital marketing plan to bring high-potential visitors to our web site,” said Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler. “Members can take advantage of that by expanding their digital presence beyond just their member listings.”

DTN is a partner of Simpleview, the company that designed and hosts the Mat-Su CVB web site. Representatives from DTN handle all ad sales, design and implementation. Ads range from text “spotlight” ads to banners ads on both desktop and mobile platforms.

“DTN is essentially an extension of the CVB, and they have digital packages available a wide range of budgets,” Ressler said. “They can work with our members to determine the best option to generate exposure.”

Members who want more information can contact DTN directly at [advertising@DTNads.com](mailto:advertising@DTNads.com) or by contacting Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

By the end of the year, AlaskaVisit.com will generate more than 140,000 sessions and over a quarter million page views. The Mat-Su CVB promotes the web site through search engine optimization, content development, video, social media and paid search engine marketing through Google ads.

The web site is the largest marketing investment for the CVB, and members can piggy-back off of those efforts through DTN ads.

“These are people who are actively planning and looking for

**ALASKA TOUR & TRAVEL**  
Request your free Alaska Guide & Map  
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**ALASKATRAN.COM**  
[COMPARE & BOOK!](#)

**MAT-SU VALLEY SPOTLIGHT**  
ALASKATRAN.COM: COMPARE & BOOK!  
Online availability and info for the Alaska Rail, Private Domes & Motorcoach [Read More](#)  
**DINING**  
Choose from fine dining to down home cafes and everything in between. [Read More](#)  
**KNIK RIVER LODGE**  
Enjoy a stay off the beaten path in Alaska wilderness. Lodge with views, locally-sourced restaurant. [Read More](#)

**Things To Do in the Mat-Su**  
The views are grand, the lifestyle simple and there are no limits on your Alaskan adventure. Mat-Su, Alaska has it all for your Alaska vacation!

Convenient to both Anchorage and Denali National Park, easily reached by car or the Alaska Railroad, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley sprawls across 23,000 square miles of pure Alaska wilderness.

Towering mountains, huge glacier valleys, fish-filled rivers and lakes, abundant Alaska wildlife, glorious hiking country, scenic camping and quaint frontier communities at the Mat-Su is what Alaska visitors dream about.

Located approximately 45 miles north of Anchorage, the Mat-Su is ideally located for everything from day trips to your entire Alaska vacation.

A fertile farmland that was settled by families from the Midwest as part of the New Deal relief program in 1935. Tour [Palmer](#) to discover the history of the earliest “settlers” and discover the legendary, gigantic vegetables at the Alaska State fair in August.

Visitors can learn from the Iditarod champs what it takes to complete the “Last Great Race” at the area’s local dog kennels.

Further North in [Talkeetna](#) - known as the staging site for climbers as they begin their trip up Denali. Flight seeing tours of the mountain are a local specialty. On clear days, Denali State Park offers beautiful views of Denali, North America’s highest peak.

A 50 mile scenic loop between the George Parks and Glenn Highways takes you to Hatcher Pass and the Independence Mine State Historical Park. Visit the park’s interpretive center and equipment in the old gold mines.

**WHAT’S ON YOUR ALASKA MUST-SEE, MUST-DO LIST?**

Advertising options through DTN include featured listings, text ads in “Spotlights” and digital display ads like those above.

more information about the Mat-Su Valley. They have already taken the first step by visiting AlaskaVisit.com, and now they are looking for more ideas on their Alaska vacation. It’s as highly qualified as a lead could possibly be, because they are already at the site,” Ressler said. “For members, these are their customers, and they can reach them directly through DTN.”

## Alaska Magazine offering co-op ads

Mat-Su CVB members can take advantage of discounted advertising in Alaska Magazine in 2020 thanks to a cooperative marketing program, and the deadline for the first issue is fast approaching.

Mat-Su CVB has committed to advertising in three issues, beginning with the March issue, and in return Alaska Magazine offers discounted rates to CVB members for the cooperative advertising pages. Ad rates on the co-op pages are discounted up to 25 percent for Mat-Su CVB members.

All ad sales are handled directly by Alaska Magazine. In addition to the printed advertisements in the magazine, associate publisher Tom Marriage said there are digital advertising opportunities as part of the program, which target readers who indicated they are coming to Alaska in 2020 or 2021.

The deadline for the March 2020 issue (Iditarod issue) is coming up soon, but

given the holiday season, Alaska Magazine said it is flexible until January 8.

The other two issues are the May road trip issue and the December/January vacation planner issue.

"Alaska Magazine's readers are high-potential visitors who love Alaska. Discounted advertising is a great member benefit we're able to offer," said Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB.

According to research by Alaska Magazine, its readers spend more than \$4,000 on their Alaska vacations, and more than 60 percent of its readers plan to visit Alaska within the next three years.

Ninety percent of their readers live in the Lower 48, including 36 percent in the West, which is one of Alaska's biggest markets.

For more information or to schedule your ad, interested members can reach out to Alaska Magazine's Tom Marriage directly at [tom.marriage@alaskamagazine.com](mailto:tom.marriage@alaskamagazine.com).

Mat-Su CVB recently offered discounted ad rates in three 2020 editions of Alaska Beyond, through a partnership with Alaska Airlines. The deadline has passed to purchase advertising for that publication, however. The Mat-Su ads will run in February, April and May.



## Mat-Su CVB sponsoring local job fair

The Mat-Su CVB is sponsoring the 2020 Mat-Su Employer Expo, and members who are recruiting for new employees are encouraged to participate.

The expo is on Wednesday, March 11 at Mat-Su College, and employers have free booth space to meet with potential employees and gain exposure for your business.

Hundreds of quality job seekers with broad qualifications attend the event each year. It's also an opportunity for businesses to educate local job seekers on what they are looking for in an employee, even if they are not hiring at the moment.

The event is organized by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development and is hosted by the Mat-Su Jobs Center. There will also be career counselors available to job seekers.

There is no cost to participate, either as an employer or a job seeker. For more information on how to have a booth, members can contact Derek Homme at (907) 352-2515 or [derek.homme@alaska.gov](mailto:derek.homme@alaska.gov).

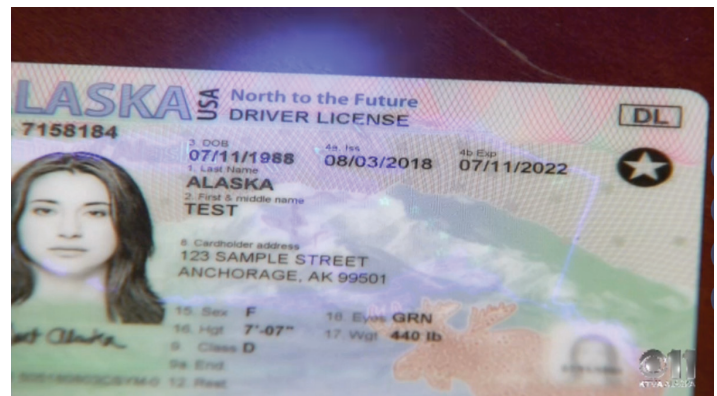
## Are you REAL ID compliant? The deadline is Oct. 1, 2020

Are you REAL ID ready? Starting Oct. 1, 2020, all Americans will need a REAL ID to pass airport security to board a flight in the United States, with Alaska being one of the final states to comply. A U.S. passport will still be accepted, however.

A REAL ID, marked with a star in the upper righthand corner, is different than a traditional driver's license and can be obtained at the local DMV.

If you do not have a REAL ID, there are other forms of identification accepted, such as a U.S. passport or passport card, enhanced driver's license or U.S. military ID.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, an estimated 99 million Americans (39 percent) do not have any form of identification (REAL ID-compliant driver's license, U.S. passport, U.S. military ID or an enhanced driver's license) that will be accepted after October 1, 2020. Furthermore, the majority of Americans (57 percent) are unaware of the October 1, 2020 deadline for enforcement. Air travel risks being seriously disrupted if millions of passengers are turned away on October 1, 2020 for not having the necessary documents to fly.



This sample Alaska REAL ID card shows the star in the upper right corner, which validates it.

For more information, visit [twa.gov/real-id](http://twa.gov/real-id). For a checklist of what you need to obtain an Alaska REAL ID, visit <https://online.dmv.alaska.gov/REALIDchecklist>



## News from the membership

**Alaska Backcountry Cottages** debuted this fall, bringing three one- and two-story accommodations to the Knik River area. The modern cottages are outfitted with multiple queen beds, full kitchen and dining facilities, and private bathrooms with showers. The two larger cabins also have a washer and dryer plus USB charging ports. Each cottage offers mountain views and convenient access to hiking trails, fishing options and several regional parks.

**Knik River Lodge** is open throughout the winter for aurora viewing, with limited food and beverage offerings from the Raven Perch restaurant. Winter aurora viewing is available from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. Learn how to take night photos, with hot beverages and snacks. Beer and wine available for purchase. A limited number of cabins are also available during the winter. [www.knikriverlodge.com](http://www.knikriverlodge.com).

**The Musk Ox Farm** recently completed a \$1.3 million renovation project that will allow the farm to offer tours in the winter. The Colony Barn project has been years in the making, and the finished project is nothing short of amazing. An expanded and updated gift shop highlights the entry. The barn was lifted and restored, providing more space for staff offices, an education center and an enclosed workshop upstairs. During the winter, the Musk Ox Farm will be open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, with scheduled tours at 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. [www.muskoxfarm.org](http://www.muskoxfarm.org).

The **Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge** is opening in March again in 2020. The lodge will be open from March 5-23, 2020. It's a perfect time to visit Talkeetna following the start of the Iditarod, during the Oosik Ski Race or just for a getaway. There are events at the lodge, including cooking classes with the chef, throughout the month. The lodge will open for the summer on May 15, 2020. [www.talkeetnalodge.com](http://www.talkeetnalodge.com).

### SANTA ENJOYS MAT-SU VISIT



Santa has been spotted around the Mat-Su Valley, as he prepares his list and checks it twice. From mountain biking in Hatcher Pass and Knik Glacier to climbing the Butte, it appears Santa has had a great time in the Mat-Su Valley. He was even seen on the top of the Butte by Dan McDonough of Lifetime Adventures. Make sure you round out your 2019 on the "Nice" list and not the "Naughty" list.

## Save the date! ExTRAVELganza is right around the corner

Mark your calendars now for the annual Mat-Su CVB Beer and Wine Tasting Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza.

The 2020 travel auction is set for Friday, April 10 at Evangelo's. Tickets for the event will go on sale after the new year.

Donation forms will be mailed to members after Jan. 2. The travel auction is the largest fund-raiser of the year for the Mat-Su CVB, so consider donating a tour, overnight or gift certificate.

## Stay connected to tell our story!



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



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



"yahoomatsu"  
Channel



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



# Important upcoming dates

Dec. 24-Jan. 1	Mat-Su CVB office closed for the holidays	
Jan. 7-8	Mat-Su Board of Directors retreat	Meier Lake Resort
Jan. 10	Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon <i>"How to Reach Customers Online Using Google Tools," by Melissa Moody</i>	Noon, Evangelo's
Feb. 7	Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon <i>"The Cruise Industry and its Impact on Communities"</i>	Noon, Everett's (Mat-Su Resort)
Feb. 14-16	Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show <i>Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Los Angeles
March 4-8	ITB Berlin <i>Mat-Su CVB is participating with the Alaska Travel Industry Association</i>	Berlin, Germany
Late March	Alaska Summer Showcase <i>Date TBA; Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Anchorage
March 27-29	Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show <i>Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Menard Center, Wasilla
April 3-5	Great Alaska Sportsman Show <i>Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Anchorage
April 10	Mat-Su CVB Beer & Wine Tasting ExTRAVELganza <i>More information will be available as the date nears</i>	6:30 p.m., Evangelo's
April 24-26	Fairbanks Outdoors Show <i>Mat-Su CVB will have a booth</i>	Fairbanks

## AlaskaVisit.com statistics (Jan. 1 - Dec. 15, 2019)

**Users**  
106,902  
Up 8.4 percent from 2018

**Sessions**  
135,200  
Up 7.15 percent from 2018

**Page views**  
240,507  
Up 5.5 percent from 2018

### Interesting note

Mobile traffic to [www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com) now represents 57 percent of overall traffic, an increase of 14 percent from 2018. To grasp how fast this trend has developed, consider that mobile visits to the site in 2017 only accounted for

34 percent of overall traffic. The Mat-Su CVB designs new pages with mobile users in mind.

The web site is responsive, meaning it can scale to any device it is viewed on, from cell phones to tablets to desktop computer monitors, to give users the best experience.

The Mat-Su CVB has a targeted web marketing strategy that includes search engine marketing, on-site search engine optimization and social media. That means your member listings are being marketed to high-potential visitors throughout the year.

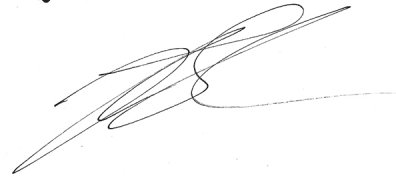


*From the staff of the Mat-Su CVB, we wish  
you all a very safe and happy holiday  
season. Yahoo, Mat-Su!*

*Bonnie Quill*

*Neil Campbell*

*Casey Russell*



*YAHOO!*  
**Mat-Su**

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