

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Winter Edition

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Cultural, heritage tourism focus of January community workshop

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting a cultural and heritage tourism workshop on January 18, featuring Richard Peterson, President and CEO of the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Marketing Council.

The workshop is focused on creating stronger partnerships and themes to strengthen destination marketing efforts in the Mat-Su Valley.

"Cultural and heritage tourism is so important, and we wanted to host a workshop that brings everyone together to discuss how we better promote those aspects of our destination," said Bonnie Quill, President & CEO of Mat-Su CVB. "This is an opportunity for all stakeholders to come together and discuss what makes our destination unique and appealing."

Peterson joined small groups via Zoom in December as part of the program. A survey was also e-mailed before Christmas (click [HERE](#) to take the survey if you haven't yet), to give Peterson insights on the opportunities present in the Mat-Su Valley.

"Culture and heritage takes on many different meanings to different people. There's cultural aspects to your local food scene, hoteliers, museums and of course, indigenous people," Peterson



U.S. Cultural & Heritage
MARKETING COUNCIL

said. "Bringing it all together is what is important."

The event is at the Palmer Depot from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Turkey Red is catering lunch, which is available for \$20.

For more information or to RSVP, please call (907) 746-5000 or e-mail justin@alaskavisit.com.

Thank you to the sponsors of the cultural workshop

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From the Board Chair's desk

Looking forward to 2022 and beyond

It's hard to believe it's already the new year. This is a time to reflect, and also to look ahead.

I think everyone was pleasantly surprised by the 2021 season. Independent travelers returned in a big way, and even without cruisers, many of you had terrific seasons. It shows just how resilient our industry is, and it's something to be proud of. Looking ahead, 2022 looks to be strong already, and with the potential return of the cruise industry to Southcentral Alaska, I think we have a lot to be excited about. Of course, as we have found out, things can change quickly, but it's fair to be cautiously optimistic and enthused about how the recovery is taking shape.

One major challenge that arose last year will continue into this year is a labor shortage. This isn't just a Mat-Su or Alaska problem, it's a nationwide issue that we as an industry are facing. If you haven't already, I encourage you to listen to a webinar the Mat-Su CVB hosted in December (Page 4), which featured a panel of experts with great advice. From the US Travel Association to the Mat-Su CVB, national, state and local tourism organizations are focusing on this as a top priority.

Locally, the promotion of cultural and heritage tourism is another priority we're focusing on as an organization. Mat-Su CVB is working with Richard Peterson

of the U.S. Culture & Heritage Marketing Council (Page 1) on developing strategies that help build partnerships to better promote our culture. Richard and the CVB team hosted two round-table discussions with local leaders in November, and developed a survey that was e-mailed to members in late December. If you haven't taken the survey, I'd ask you to take a few minutes to complete it because it will help guide the conversation. On January 18 at the Palmer Depot, Richard will be leading a community workshop and I highly encourage you to attend. It's from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the members for reelecting me to the Board of Directors. I'm happy to serve again as president, and welcome two new board members – Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation and Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm. This is an important time for our industry as we face many challenges, and I'm happy we have dynamic leaders on the Board of Directors that will help guide the organization, our members and our industry into the future.

Best of luck on a successful 2022!

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



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

New board members elected

The Mat-Su CVB welcomed two new members to its board of directors, as well as two incumbents, following the October election by the membership.

Continuing on the board for three-year terms are Mark Fleenor of Sheep Mountain Lodge and Heather Dudick of the Alaska Railroad.

Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation and Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm were also elected to the board.

At the November board meeting, the new members were officially seated and

officers were selected for the upcoming year.

Fleenor continues as the board chair, while Roberta Warner of Alaska Tour & Travel will continue as the vice chair. Travis Taylor of Premier Alaska Tours serves as treasurer for another year, while Israel Mahay of Mahay's Jet Boat Adventures will serve as the secretary.

Rounding out the 10-person board is Cole Chambers of K2 Aviation, Fernando Salvador of Pursuit (Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge) and Rick Peterson of Mt. McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge.

From the President & CEO's desk

Destination marketing is a value to the community

This newsletter is chock-full of destination marketing efforts and resources the Mat-Su CVB has been actively engaged in to drive awareness to Visit Alaska's Mat-Su Valley. As a member of the Mat-Su CVB you recognize the value of these efforts in connecting potential visitors to your business. But what about the residents of the borough and elected officials? Do they understand and appreciate the benefits of tourism promotion that reach beyond a visit?

Our year-round targeted paid search, social media, print advertising, streaming video and public relations create positive messages of the Mat-Su Borough as a place to live, work, play and visit. As the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the borough, we also are the de facto economic development arm in promoting our community's quality of life features such as abundant outdoor recreation, vibrant community events, local cuisine and cultural experiences, which are all reasons people choose a place to relocate or start a business.

We have realized that most residents have little understanding or connection to the value of a DMO. Our promotional

campaigns are targeted to audiences outside the borough so they rarely see the messages and call to action. For a community to compete, people need to be made aware of that destination, they need to hear about it and they need to be able to find it when searching.

The staff at Mat-Su CVB took the month of December to review, discuss and implement strategies and actions from Destination International's new advocacy workbook "Becoming a Community Shared Value." We dove into each chapter, evaluating our current significance and challenges. One of our first priorities is to create a simple, short, creative video communicating the value of your DMO to our residents and communities. Stay tuned, we will be launching locally soon on our channels!

Here is a link to the "[Becoming a Community Shared Value](#)" workbook if you want to take a look.

We will be sharing more on the many values we embrace and contribute to our borough.



Bonnie Quill,
Mat-Su CVB
President & CEO

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

Mat-Su CVB to appear in national magazines in 2022

The Mat-Su CVB is promoting our destination in several national magazines in 2022, partnering with the Alaska Travel Industry Association's efforts.

Mat-Su CVB placed ads in the February 2022 edition of Travel+Leisure, the February/March 2022 edition of AARP Magazine and the March/April edition of Outside Magazine. Additionally, ads appear in three issues of Alaska Magazine (March, May and December) in 2022.

The AARP ad includes a reader reply card, for readers who want more information about the destination.

The 2021 ad placement resulted in 4,180 requests for Mat-Su Visitor Guides, which were mailed weekly throughout the first quarter.

"These publications have readers who have a high interest in visiting Alaska, and want to learn more about the Mat-Su Valley," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "The ad is the first 'touch point' with these potential visitors. From there, it generates visitor guide requests and e-newsletter subscriptions that allows us to continue promoting our destination to them."

The ad placements are offered through ATIA's cooperative marketing program.

"The co-op program allows destination marketing organizations and individual businesses reach more people collectively than we could do individually," Ressler said. "It's an opportunity to reach a national audience affordably and efficiently."



Marketing to tour operators at American Bus Association

As group travel begins to return, the Mat-Su CVB is working with tour operators to highlight new products and itineraries in the Valley.

Later this week, Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler is attending the American Bus Association Marketplace event in Grapevine, Texas, where he has prescheduled appointments with tour operators to discuss how Mat-Su fits into Alaska itineraries, talk about new products and highlight opportunities for group travel.



"After so many virtual shows, it will be nice to meet with the tour operators face-to-face, and talk about what a return of group travel looks like," Ressler said. "These operators felt an enormous impact from the pandemic as group travel was

a particularly hard hit sector. They are looking forward to coming back to Alaska this summer."

Last fall, Mat-Su CVB attended the U.S. Travel Association's IPW event in Las Vegas, meeting with international tour operators.

"With the return of in-person meetings and conventions, it gives us a chance to strengthen old relationships, and build new ones. That's important as we begin the recovery," Ressler said.

Workforce development a priority for U.S. Travel

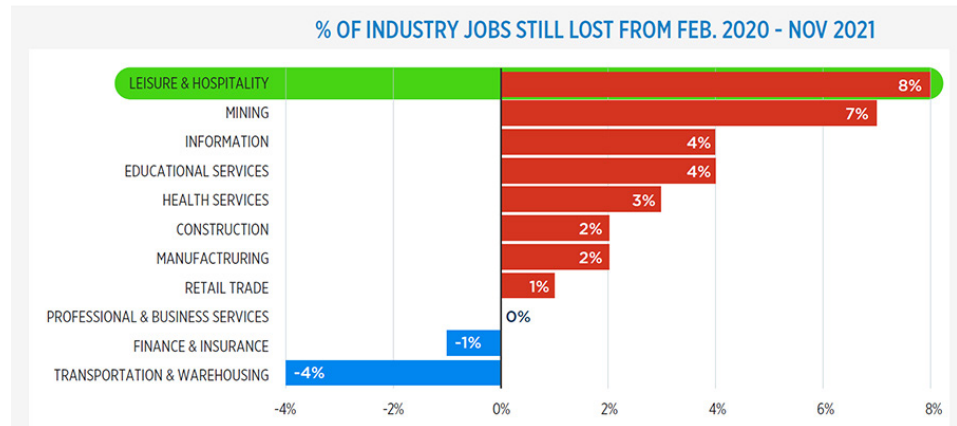
The loss of jobs due to the pandemic was more severe in the travel and tourism industry than any other in our economy, according to a new report from the U.S. Travel Association.

Travel and tourism supported jobs plummeted 34 percent between 2019 and 2020, when the pandemic began. And despite gains throughout 2021, leisure and hospitality still falls 8 percent below its pre-pandemic numbers and accounts for nearly one in six of the 11 million job openings as of October 2021.

“State of the American Workforce and its Impact on Travel,” released in December, paints a stark picture about the worker shortage facing the industry. Locally, many Mat-Su tourism businesses were impacted last summer by limited staffing and the inability to hire enough workers.

“The percent of Americans in the labor force has dramatically declined due to early retirements, working mothers leaving the workforce, an increase in self-employment and an influx of talent migration to different jobs and industries,” the report states. “There are many factors contributing to the shortage of labor, including childcare challenges, health and

ONE IN 12 LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY JOBS REMAIN LOST



safety concerns, a severe lack of temporary foreign workers and a reprioritization of employment motivations.”

Travel and tourism jobs have battled a reputation of low-paying jobs with long hours and limited upward mobility, but wages have actually increased by nearly 14 percent since 2019.

Incentives such as housing, seasonal bonuses and living allowances have also been introduced by employers, yet

filling positions remains a challenge for employers.

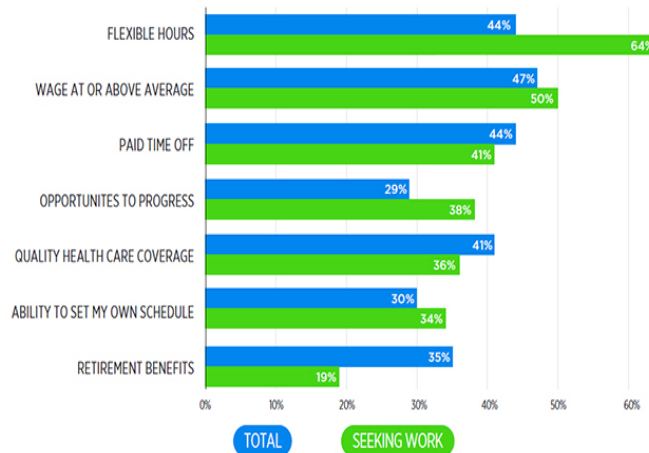
“The pandemic’s effect on the stability of a job in the travel industry has only exacerbated these vulnerabilities making it clear that a shift in thinking and strategy around rebuilding the travel workforce is critical – for now and far into the future,” the report concludes.

“For years, the industry has struggled with a public relations problem of long hours, low pay and demanding guests. Now those who work in the business have an even more tarnished image from the pandemic’s impacts,” said Peter Ricci, director of Florida Atlantic University’s hospitality program. “The industry needs more than just a PR campaign. It needs a full overhaul in its staffing levels, pay rates and employee treatment.”

The workforce is changing, and its time the industry changes too, said Mike Gamble, CEO of Searchwide.

“As an industry, we tend to put the words flexibility and work-life balance into

TOP EMPLOYMENT FACTORS



See REPORT, Page 5

Workforce development webinar recording available

One of the biggest challenges facing the industry is workforce development, and in early December, Mat-Su CVB hosted a webinar with experts who offered guidance and advice to business owners and employers.

The webinar panelists included Tracy Smith from Holland America/Princess, Matt Moore from CoolWorks.com, Derek Homme from the Department of Labor

Mat-Su Job Center; and Tay Clayton from the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

“Labor shortages and workforce development is an important issue, and we want our members to have as many resources available as possible to help,” said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders.

Smith spoke about the Work and Travel/Cultural Exchange program

(commonly referred to as the J-1 Visa program) and how businesses can take advantage of it.

If you missed the webinar, you can go back and watch it on demand on the Member Resource page [HERE](#). All Mat-Su CVB webinars are recorded and members can access them at any time on the web site.

Airport announces optimism for summer 2022

At a November luncheon in Anchorage, Ted Stevens International Airport Manager Jim Szczesniak gave a report and the outlook for the summer 2022 season is very positive for visitor traffic to Alaska.

Speaking at the Visit Anchorage luncheon, Szczesniak said the 2022 summer projections show an increase from this year.

"We'll be above last summer, and closer to what we saw in 2019 before the pandemic," Szczesniak said. "We performed within 10 percent of 2019 numbers this year."

He also pointed out that next summer, all regular carriers are expected back, with



more wide-body planes from Delta and American arriving in Anchorage.

Internationally, in addition to regular

carriers Condor, Icelandair and Air Canada, Eurowings will fly between Anchorage and Frankfurt.

"We announced the arrival of Eurowings a few years ago, but it never launched because of Covid. Now, they're ready to start that service," Szczesniak said.

A new airline, Northern Pacific Airways, from the owners of Ravn, will start operating in 2022. They are flying 757s and using the Icelandair model of a "stopover." They are connecting Asia to North America, with a stop in Anchorage. Travelers can then add an Alaska vacation to their international trip.

To view the recording, click [HERE](#).

2022 Visitor Guide printed

The 2022 Mat-Su Visitor Guide is printing this week, and members can look forward to receiving their copies in the mail in the next few weeks.

This year, 100,000 copies are being printed. The cover features a group hiking, with Knik Glacier in the background.

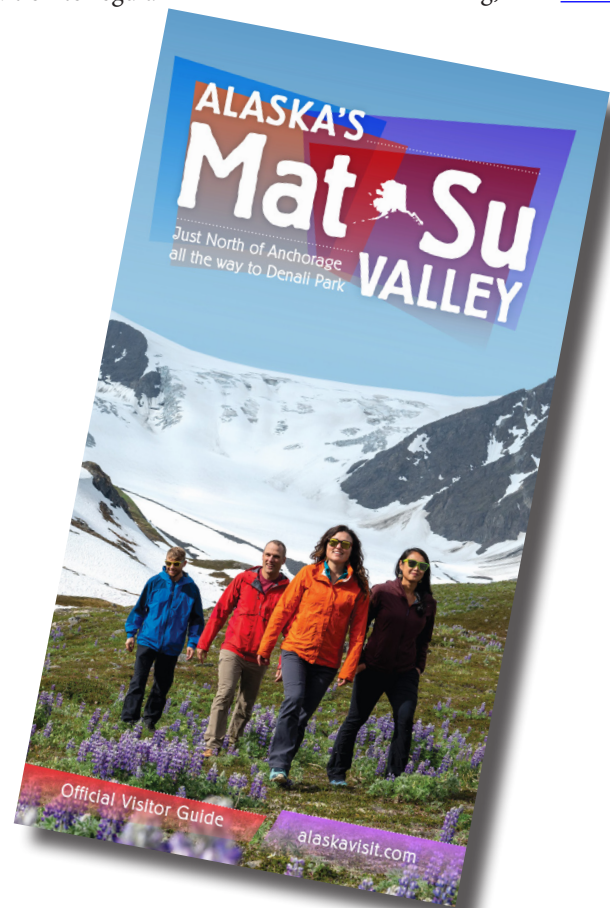
"The printed visitor guide is still an important marketing tool. Research has shown that even in this digital world, travelers still rely on a printed guide," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing manager.

The guide is distributed to potential visitors who request a copy on the Mat-Su CVB web site, to tour operators and travel agents at industry events, as well as throughout Alaska at a high-traffic areas for visitors. The Mat-Su CVB also purchases leads from the Alaska Travel Industry Association of people who have requested a state vacation planner and more information about visiting.

The guide was designed by Brilliant Media Strategies in Anchorage.

All Mat-Su CVB members receive a complimentary listing in the guide, as well as the opportunity to purchase display ads and narratives.

If you would like more copies of the 2022 guide, please e-mail info@alaskavisit.com and we can make sure you receive enough guides for your guests.



REPORT: U.S. Travel Association focuses on shortages

Continued from Page 4

the bucket of 'not willing to work hard.' Remote work seems to go into that same bucket. This could not be further from the truth," Gamble said. "The workforce of tomorrow wants to find work that blends well with their life. Just ask your next Uber driver why they joined that gig workforce."

International visa challenges also made it hard to find seasonal employees.

The U.S. Travel Association is working

with Congress for pressing for a higher cap on H-2B and J-1 visas, as well as advocating for faster visa processing times for low-risk applicants. Further travel restrictions, however, could hamper the process.

In the report, the U.S. Travel Association issued several recommendations for employers to highlight the unique benefits and value of employment in the travel industry.

Travel jobs are accessible – the travel

industry is a supportive bridge for those looking to reenter the workforce.

Travel jobs are flexible – part-time positions and flexible hours suit many looking for work.

Travel jobs are diverse.

Travel jobs provide training that can lead to long-term positions.

Travel jobs foster entrepreneurship and expands small business.

To read the entire report, click [HERE](#).

AlaskaVisit.com sees large increase in web traffic

Traffic to AlaskaVisit.com soared in 2021, increasing 115 percent over 2020 and 98 percent over 2019 numbers.

The Mat-Su CVB invests in search engine optimization and paid search marketing to attract visitors to the site, and ultimately to our members.

"I think it's an indication that our online marketing efforts are working well, and also people are eager to return to travel and the web site is a top way they can plan their trip," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said.

During the 2021 summer, the Mat-Su CVB received a grant from the Alaska Department of Commerce and Community Development that allowed the organization to expand its online marketing efforts through enhanced paid search marketing, which helped drive traffic. But the biggest gains were seen in organic traffic, with a 105 increase over 2019.

"Throughout the pandemic, it's been a focus to develop engaging content on the site through frequent blog posts, new pages and updated information, and a rise in organic traffic is proof that our search engine optimization is working well," Ressler said.

Increasing traffic to the site is important because it brings potential visitors to members' digital "front door," their online listings.

"By getting potential visitors to our site, we also give our members exposure. Getting customers to our members is a priority," Ressler said. "It also allows us to remarket to them throughout the year via e-newsletter subscriptions."



AlaskaVisit.com traffic, 2021 compared to 2020



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Increase your online exposure through DTN advertising

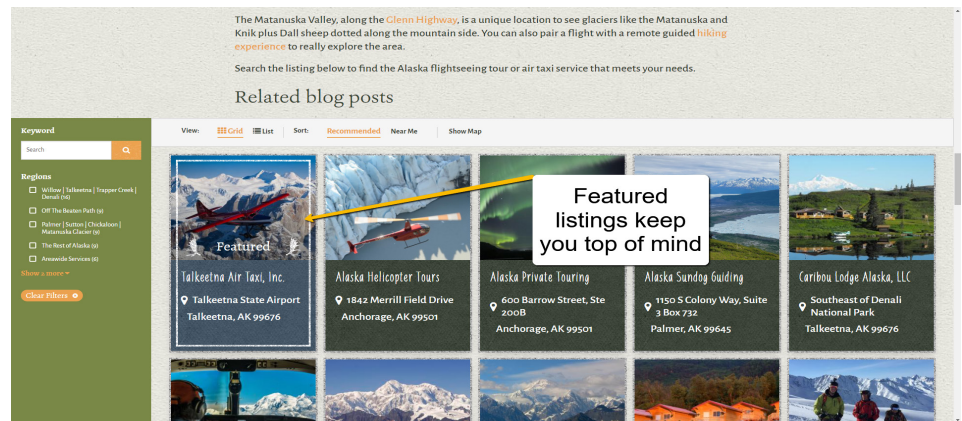
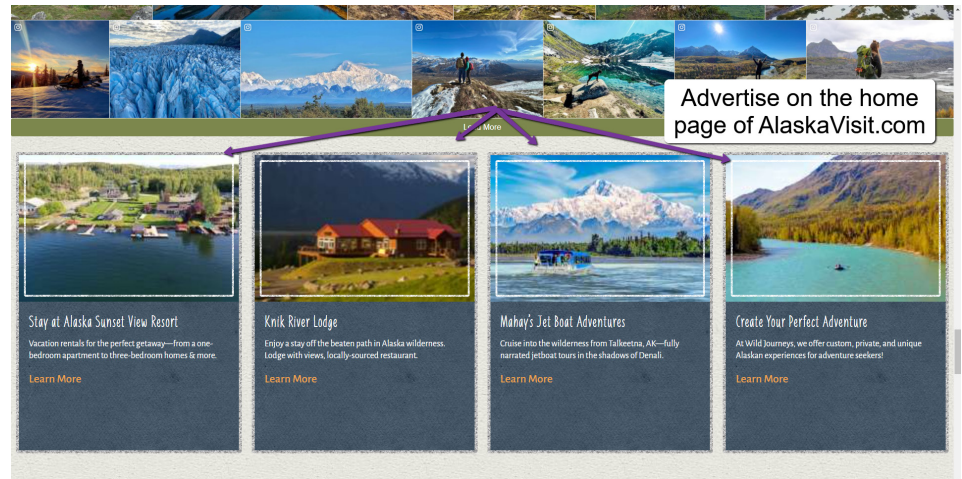
Want to boost your online presence and leverage Mat-Su CVB marketing efforts? Consider advertising on the Mat-Su CVB website, AlaskaVisit.com. There are a number of packages available for every budget range.

The Mat-Su CVB partners with a company called Destination Travel Network for online advertising. DTN handles all the sales, design and delivery of ads on the website, and DTN employees typically reach out to members on Mat-Su CVB's behalf.

Packages include page sponsorships, featured listings, run-of-site ads and mobile ads. Every member has a complimentary listing online, and DTN ads only amplify your presence on the site.

Advertising on the website is a great way to take advantage of Mat-Su CVB's online marketing campaigns. The CVB has robust paid search engine marketing and search engine optimization programs, so by placing a digital ad on the site, you reap additional benefits.

If you are interested in learning more about online advertising opportunities, contact Justin Saunders at justin@alaskavisit.com.



ATIA hosting hybrid convention January 18-20

The Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) is hosting its annual convention in mid-January, and interested members can still register. The convention, typically held in October, has both in-person and hybrid options.

The dates were moved to January following high Covid numbers in the fall. The convention is a great way to connect with industry peers, learn about trends

during educational sessions and hear about ATIA's marketing efforts, including cooperative programs for members.

ATIA is planning breakout sessions, a virtual and in-person trade show, and new this year, a virtual job fair.

The convention is scheduled for Jan. 18-20 in Anchorage. For more information, contact membership@alaskatia.org.



Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

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www.sunderlandranch.com

Alaska Zipline Adventure Park
Katie Sunderland
(907) 745-4100
www.akzipline.com

Join us for a Cultural & Heritage Tourism Workshop

Help shape the future of destination marketing in the Mat-Su Valley

Mat-Su CVB is hosting a cultural and tourism workshop, featuring Richard Peterson, President & CEO of the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Marketing Council.

We invite you to participate and help create strong partnerships and themes to help strengthen destination marketing efforts in the Mat-Su Valley



Tuesday,
January 18

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Palmer Depot

Please **RSVP** by
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