

THE BUREAU BULLETIN

A publication of The Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Winter 2025

Inside this issue

Board Chair Mark Austin celebrates The Mat-Su CVB's momentum into 2026

Page 2

The Mat-Su CVB hires a new Visitor Services Manager

Page 3

The Mat-Su Visitor Guide is on its way in time for 2026

Page 5

Contact us

Casey Ressler
President & CEO
746-5037

casey@alaskavisit.com

Justin Saunders
Marketing & Communications
Manager
354-5032

justin@alaskavisit.com

Katie Reeves
Membership Manager
746-5001

katie@alaskavisit.com

Tasha Belka
Administrative Manager
746-5000

info@alaskavisit.com

CELEBRATING WINS AT THE ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The Mat-Su CVB held its annual Voice of the Membership meeting on November 14 at Everett's Restaurant. Newly elected board members were seated, and positive feedback was given by member businesses in attendance. This event also served as an opportunity to recognize individuals and organizations for their accomplishments and contributions to the travel industry in 2025.

The Mat-Su CVB's Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders presented the Northern Lights Award to the Glacier View community for excelling at enhancing the visitor experience in that region. From glacier treks to wedding venues, Glacier View's span of tourism services makes it a real asset to The Mat-Su.

Zach and Karianne Smith, the new owners of Bushes Bunches, received the Cheechako Award. In her presentation of the award, The Mat-Su CVB's Membership Manager Katie Reeves applauded the Smiths' efforts to ensure the success of the farmstand through the transition of ownership.

Derek Van Kampen of Adventures by True North presented the Independent Spirit Award to RVing to Alaska for building a thriving nationwide network of RV and independent travel enthusiasts.

The Tourism Angel Award was presented by the Musk Ox Farm's Mark Austin to Kierre Childers of Revel Treks & Tours. Outside of Childers' service on The Mat-Su CVB board, she has introduced a host of



Left to right, Gary and Stacey Quimby of RVing to Alaska receive the Independent Spirit Award from Derek Van Kampen of Adventures by True North.

new community-enriching events in The Mat-Su.

The Gold Star Award recognized the Alaska State Fair for its longstanding role as a cornerstone of The Mat-Su's tourism industry, drawing visitors from all over the world. In his presentation, The Mat-Su CVB President and CEO Casey Ressler shared memories of helping in his family's funnel cake stand at the fair for many years.

The Mat-Su CVB extends congratulations to these award recipients and to its many tourism partners who have done so much to make The Mat-Su such an incredible destination.

2025-2026
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors

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

Jeremy Sullivan
Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge
Vice Chair
(907) 733-9500
jesullivan@talkeetnaalaskanlodge.com

Jeff Curtis
Alaska State Fair
Treasurer
(907) 745-4827
jeff@alaskastatefair.org

Mandy Garcia
Salmon Berry Travel & Tours
Secretary
(907) 278-3572
mandy@salmonberrytours.com

Heather Dudick
Alaska Railroad
At Large Exec. Comm.
(907) 265-2622
dudickh@akrr.com

Travis Taylor
Premier Alaska Tours, Inc.
(907) 279-0001
travis@touralaska.net

Courtney Shaffer
Talkeetna Air Taxi
(907) 733-2218
courtney@talkeetnaair.com

Mark Fleenor
Sheep Mountain Lodge
(907) 745-5121
info@sheepmountain.com

Taylor Raftery
Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation
(907) 746-8757
traftery@matsutrails.org

Skye Hostetler
Outbound Heli Adventures
(907) 351-6736
marketing@outboundheli.com

From the Board Chair's desk

A BIG YEAR AHEAD FOR THE MAT-SU'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

It's fair to say that I'm more than just excited for our destination in the coming 2026 tourism season. This will be the year that The Mat-Su CVB's major projects, some of them going back over a decade, will finally coalesce into a positive and memorable impact for our local visitor industry.

The Mat-Su CVB has long been a force for growth and strength in our destination. The contributions of this organization, to both the local economy and quality of life for our communities, will enjoy unprecedented visibility in 2026.

Just ahead of the summer season, we'll be opening the doors to the new Gateway Visitor Center. We'll be serving a lot of visitors in that facility, but it's additional usefulness to residents, partner organizations, schools and more will magnify The Mat-Su CVB's longstanding value to this region.

The coming year will also see a comprehensive implementation of a new brand in The Mat-Su CVB's in-state and global marketing

collateral. Brand recognition across our advertising efforts will unite our communities as unique and integral parts of a destination nobody will want to miss during their Alaska vacation.

Our current website redesign project is also slated for completion ahead of the summer season. This will bring our new brand to bear for the thousands of Internet users planning their Mat-Su experience online.

In 2026, I think we'll see a surge of local pride in The Mat-Su CVB, as well as a boost in visitor interest. With a new front-line team at our Gateway Visitor Center and a strong suite of brand assets

that unite our diverse destination, we'll see visitors looking for more ways to lengthen their stay and dive deeper into the experiences that make our destination so unique and meaningful. It's going to be a big year. Wait and see!

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



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

NEW BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED

The Mat-Su CVB's elections concluded in October with strong voter participation. The board of directors met ahead of the annual Voice of the Membership meeting in November and seated three new members.

Mark Fleenor, owner of Sheep Mountain Lodge and Sheep Mountain Air, has been elected to the board once again. Fleenor has chaired the board in the past and been an essential part of key discussions that moved the Gateway Visitor Center project forward.

Taylor Raftery, Executive Director for the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation, is newly elected to

The Mat-Su CVB board. Raftery was a constructive voice during the organizations recent branding project and even appeared in The Mat-Su's destination brand video.

Skye Hostetler, Director of Marketing for Outbound Heli Adventures, is also newly elected to the board. Hostetler's marketing experience and passion for The Mat-Su promises new energy and fresh ideas during her time on the board.

The Mat-Su CVB board and staff are looking forward to working closely with these new board members in the upcoming 2026 tourism season and beyond.

From the President & CEO's desk

GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER NEARS COMPLETION

We are just months away from opening the doors of the Gateway Visitor Center, marking the culmination of a project that has been nearly 20 years in the making.

Construction has been going great on the facility, located near the Parks and Glenn interchange, and substantial completion is set for the end of January. Following that, the displays will be installed, with an anticipated opening date to the public of late May.

This week, we had an on-site visit and the progress is remarkable. The drywall is complete, the windows are installed, all mechanical and electrical is complete and we are starting on the finish work throughout the facility.

When it opens, the 9,400 square foot Gateway Visitor Center will welcome visitors from around the world – and drive them to your businesses. It will be the “first taste”

of The Mat-Su for road travelers, and will inspire them to dig a little deeper, explore further and experience all our area has to offer. Interactive trip planning kiosks will curate itineraries for visitors and send them to their phones, feature Mat-Su CVB members and allow visitors to learn more.

The displays in the interpretive area highlight our Indigenous cultures, our homesteading history, the geography and geology of the region and the various communities.

The facility construction is funded by a \$6.7 million

federal EDA grant, which required a 20-percent non-federal match. The “match money” was revenue from the sale of the previous center and property. The Mat-Su Borough will own the property and the building, but Mat-Su CVB will have its offices located there and run the facility.

Mat-Su CVB is already ramping up

in preparation of the center opening. A familiar face, Dan McDonough, was recently hired as the Visitor Services Manager, and he's been working on developing operating procedures, programming ideas and much more.

It's been an exciting summer watching first the land get cleared, then a foundation poured and framed. Day by day, month by month, it has been coming together nicely, but now that we've hit the homestretch, excitement is at an all-time high.

We look forward to highlighting our members and welcoming you all to the center when it opens to the public. This project would not have been possible without the continued support of our members, the Mat-Su Borough and stakeholders from around The Mat-Su, and for that, we are very grateful. Here's to the next chapter in growing our industry and sharing what makes The Mat-Su so special with visitors.

Casey Ressler (casey@alaskavisit.com) is the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.



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

THE MAT-SU'S NEW VISITOR SERVICES MANAGER

In preparation for the opening of the new Gateway Visitor Center, The Mat-Su CVB has once again expanded its staff. The additional services and functions that come with the new facility merit a dedicated position to oversee on-site operations.

Dan McDonough joined the team in early December in the capacity of Visitor Services Manager. McDonough is no stranger to The Mat-Su's tourism industry. He was a longstanding member of The Mat-Su CVB as the former owner of Lifetime Adventures. He also served on The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors from 2002–2011 and was the board chair from 2005–2006.

An avid outdoor enthusiast and photographer, McDonough's hobbies have benefited The Mat-Su CVB many times over the years. More than once, his aurora



Dan McDonough brings extensive tourism experience to The Mat-Su CVB team.

photography has drawn the attention of thousands to The Mat-Su's social media pages. Some of his images will even be featured in the Gateway Visitor Center.

McDonough has also been a guest blogger on The Mat-Su's blog, hosted on AlaskaVisit.com.

McDonough's years of experience overseeing campground facilities, hosting bus tour operators and even guiding bus tours himself have already come in handy in his new role at The Mat-Su CVB. In these preparatory months before the opening of the Gateway Visitor Center, McDonough's insights have been essential in discussions about managing the center and hosting bus tour groups.

“Bringing Dan onto the team was not a difficult decision at all,” said President and CEO Casey Ressler. “He's been one of our most involved partners for so many years. Having his perspective on operations at the Gateway will be a huge boost to our success.”

THE MAT-SU BRAND THRIVING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The Mat-Su CVB has been hard at work implementing a new brand in its marketing strategy and communication channels. One facet of this implementation is the organization's social media pages.

One focus of the brand is to unite residents of The Mat-Su across its communities with an identity they can all be proud of. Circulating the brand's community and attraction badges amongst local businesses and residents is essential to that goal. Social media has proven to be a powerful tool in this regard.

"A large number of Alaska residents follow The Mat-Su on social media for special offers and event promotion," said President and CEO Casey Ressler. "Concentrating use of our brand assets on Facebook and Instagram has helped familiarize residents with the brand's look and feel."

Ressler also indicated that the reception of The Mat-Su CVB's new visuals has been overwhelmingly positive. Communities are already using the brand's badges to identify themselves as an integral part of The Mat-Su.

For a second year in a row, The Mat-Su CVB has participated in the [Alaska Seminar Series](#), hosted on YouTube by content creator Valerie Stimac Bailey. The series interviews representatives from different areas in Alaska about the visitor experience in their specific

THE MAT-SU CVB CONNECTS MEMBERS WITH INFLUENCERS, CONTENT CREATORS

Hosting content creators can yield effective coverage on blogs, podcasts, and social platforms with large followings. With such channels becoming a greater part of everyone's daily routine, it's no wonder why working with content creators is such a rising trend right now.

The Mat-Su CVB works with content creators every year as part of their marketing strategy. In fact, said Marketing and Communications manager Justin Saunders, the organization is contacted by far more content creators than it can engage.



The Palmer Museum & Visitor Center's slide presentation on the Alaska Seminar Series, given by Executive Director Dylainie Nathlich, exemplifies The Mat-Su's unified identity by showcasing its community and attraction badges.

destination. The Mat-Su CVB's video interview with Bailey was another great opportunity to share The Mat-Su's community and attraction badges with the rest of the world.

In addition to interviewing The Mat-Su CVB, Bailey scheduled a Talkeetna interview with the Talkeetna Chamber of Commerce Board President Marne Sheldon, and a Palmer interview with Palmer Museum and Visitor Center Executive Director Dylainie Nathlich. The Mat-Su CVB shared community badges with Sheldon and Nathlich to use in their presentations.

"Utilizing The Mat-Su community

badges in our promotions has helped us present a clear and unified identity to visitors," said Nathlich. "The badges show that our communities are part of a connected Mat-Su experience."

Several of The Mat-Su's badges and brand assets are available for businesses and partner organizations to use on their own social media pages and other promotional channels. Those interested in using these assets are encouraged to send an email to justin@alaskavisit.com or go to the following link to [download assets](#) directly.

"We work with creators who have a proven strong following," Saunders said. "Even so, we haven't sufficient time and resources to host every successful creator who reaches out."

Saunders added that this doesn't mean the destination itself can't host them. The Mat-Su CVB has had great success referring content creators to members. Member businesses can choose to partner with these professionals one on one, exchanging accommodations or tour services for coverage on their channels.

"I almost never have to say 'no' to a content creator," Saunders said.

"Even when we can't work with them directly, I know I can connect them with members who are ready and looking for that extra publicity."

Most recently, The Mat-Su CVB has been providing networking assistance for Rob Taylor of 2TravelDads.com, who is visiting Alaska in the final week of December. Members interested in hosting Taylor or future content creators can send an email to justin@alaskavisit.com.

WEBSITE REDESIGN MAKES STEADY PROGRESS

The Mat-Su CVB has been working closely with its partners at Madden Media since the start of their website redesign in the fall. Talks have been thorough in every step of the process thus far.

In November, CVB staff met with Madden Media's design and SEO teams to audit current pages and content on AlaskaVisit.com. The organization's vision for the structure and functionality of its redesigned site was discussed.

The Mat-Su CVB reviewed several tourism marketing and non-industry websites to help Madden Media zero in on the direction for both aesthetic and function in the redesigned site. The clear priority in these

discussions has been for the website to adopt The Mat-Su's guiding brand message that its visitors can come and explore Alaska on their terms.

"We want the website to continue to inspire prospective visitors and empower them to plan their perfect visit to The Mat-Su," said Marketing and Communications Manager Justin Saunders. "If people can easily navigate the redesigned site in any way they choose, they can start experiencing our 'on your terms' mantra before they even arrive here."

The Mat-Su CVB and Madden Media have already begun collaborations on a new sitemap for AlaskaVisit.com. This is the stage

where successful pages can be given optimum placement in the website's navigation. The sitemap will also determine where new content can be housed.

Saunders said Madden Media's focus on the site's organization of content has been reassuring. The aim to keep navigational menus brief and to cross link more content in the body of the pages will enhance the mobile user experience.

Next steps in the redesign include a review of wireframes that dictate page layouts, as well as preparing current site content for migration. The expected launch date of the updated website is May of 2026.

2026 VISITOR GUIDE ARRIVING SOON

This year, 75,000 copies of The Mat-Su Alaska Visitor Guide were printed in early December. Distribution of the fully redesigned publication will begin in January. The Mat-Su CVB will also mail a copy to each of its member businesses.

The Mat-Su CVB team is looking forward to distributing a substantial volume of these guides from the new Gateway Visitor Center anticipated to open in May of 2026.

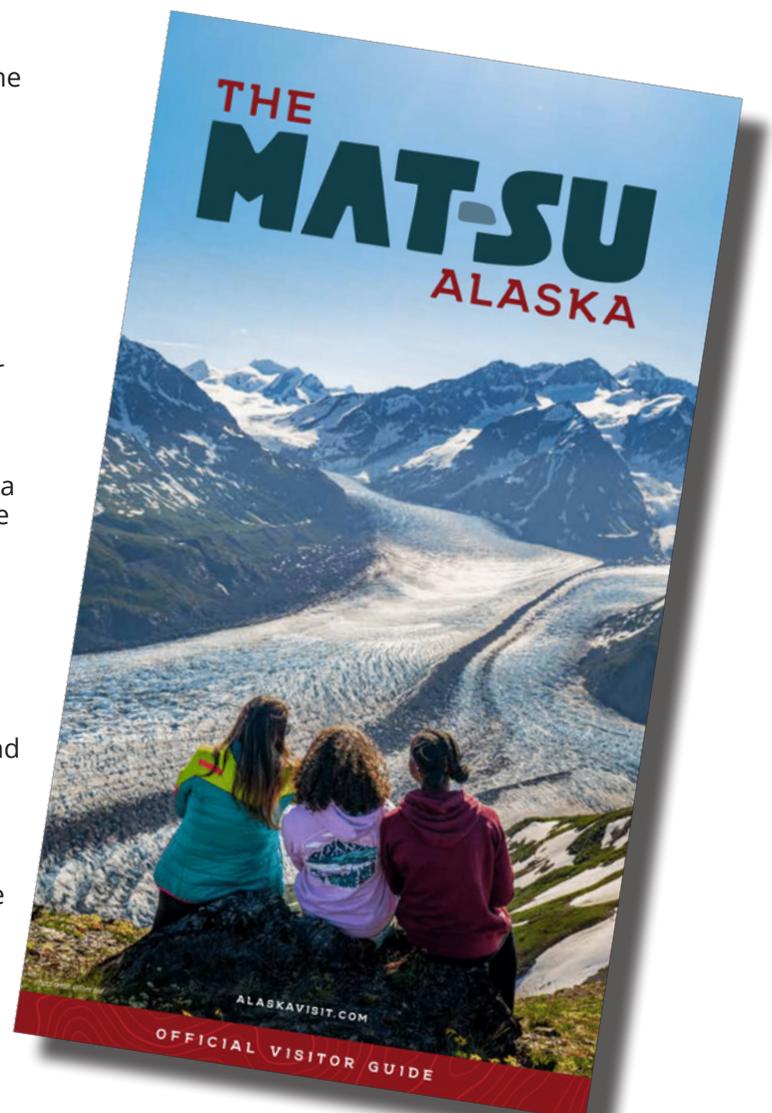
"Knowing that the 2026 visitor guide would have a prominent place in that new facility, it was important to us that it be a very eye-catching piece," said Justin Saunders, Marketing and Communications Manager for The Mat-Su CVB.

The cover of the new visitor guide certainly does pull one in. It features a photo of three hikers overlooking the glacial ice in the upper Knik River Valley. This is just a taste of the image-heavy content readers will find inside the guide.

In addition to the Gateway Visitor Center, the guide will be distributed to potential visitors who request a copy on AlaskaVisit.com, to tour operators and travel agents at industry events, and throughout Alaska at high-traffic areas for visitors. Leads are also purchased from the Alaska Travel Industry Association. These are people who have requested a state vacation planner and more information about visiting Alaska.

The guide was created by Spawn Ideas in Anchorage and will also be available in digital form with clickable links for each of the display ads. Mat-Su CVB members have 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 2026 guide, please e-mail info@alaskavisit.com and we can make sure you receive enough guides for your guests.



THE MAT-SU CVB'S 2026 BROCHURE CO-OP

The Mat-Su CVB is attending the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show and the Fairbanks Outdoors Show in April. They will also have a booth at out-of-state shows like the Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show and the Holland America/Princess Alaska Cruise & Travel Show in Seattle.

Member businesses can opt to have their rack cards on display at each of these shows. The Mat-Su CVB is also offering a booth share opportunity to two members per show. For \$300 a member can help man The Mat-Su CVB booth at one of the national shows.

"The booth share is a fantastic deal for the out-of-state shows," said Marketing & Communications

Manager Justin Saunders. "If a member can cover their own travel expenses, our booth gives them in-person exposure to thousands of high-potential visitors for just a fraction of the total booth cost."

Members interested in a booth share at any of the shows may reach out to justin@alaskavisit.com for more details.

This year, the co-op program includes an additional fifth travel show. Although members can pay per show to participate, they can sign up for all five shows at a discounted rate. Basic rack card space is \$25 per show or \$100 for all five. Rack card space plus a tabletop display is \$75 per show or \$300 for all five.

To participate in The Mat-Su CVB's brochure co-op program, fill out the form below. Indicate which shows you would like your rack cards in and provide payment information. You can email the form to justin@alaskavisit.com or mail it to the address listed at the bottom.

SHOW NAME	BASIC 100 brochures \$25 per show	PREMIUM 100 brochures + 8.5x11 flyer display \$75 per show
Seattle Travel & Adventure Show, January 10-11	\$25	\$75
LA Travel & Adventure Show, March 7-8	\$25	\$75
Holland America/Princess Alaska Cruise & Travel Show, March 21, Seattle	\$25	\$75
Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, April 17-19	\$25	\$75
Fairbanks Outdoors Show, April 24-26	\$25	\$75
FIVE-SHOW SPECIAL Sign up for all five shows at the following discounted rates: \$100 at the Basic level, or \$300 at the Premium level	5 SHOWS \$100	5 SHOWS \$300

Business name: _____ Contact: _____

I authorize Mat-Su CVB to charge \$_____ to my Visa/MC/Amex

Card number: _____ Exp. _____ CVV _____

Authorized signature: _____

Or mail a check to: The Mat-Su CVB, 4641 E Frontier Plz Dr, Suite 210, Wasilla, AK 99654

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

Dec 24 – Jan 1	Mat-Su CVB office closed for the holidays	
January 10–11	American Bus Association Marketplace <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Reno, NV
January 10–11	Seattle Travel & Adventure Show <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Seattle, WA
January 16	The Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon	Turkey Red, Palmer
January 22–23	The Mat-Su CVB Board Retreat	Talkeetna
February 13	The Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon	Turkey Red, Palmer
March 7-8	LA Travel & Adventure Show <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Los Angeles, CA
March 13	The Mat-Su CVB membership luncheon	Turkey Red, Palmer
March 21	Holland America – Princess Cruise and Travel Show <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Seattle, WA
April 17–19	Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Menard Ctr., Wasilla
April 24–26	Fairbanks Outdoors Show <i>The Mat-Su CVB will attend</i>	Carlson Ctr., Fairbanks
May 1	Beer & Wine Tasting Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza <i>Join The Mat-Su CVB at this annual fundraiser</i>	Everett's, Wasilla

WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Join us in welcoming these new members who have recently joined The Mat-Su CVB team!

Turning Heads Kennel
Elise Cevetello
(907) 362-4354
turningheadskennel.com

Alaska Highland Hugs
Carmelo Panucci
(908) 841-2634
airbnb.com/experiences/2611752

Alaska Wild Guides
Amanda Clayton
(907) 223-1665
alaskawildguides.com

Call (907) 746-5000 to become a Mat-Su CVB member today!



THE
MAT-SU
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The Mat-Su CVB
4641 E Frontier Plz Dr, Suite 210
Wasilla, AK 99654