

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2017

## Inside this issue

Board President Cheryl Metiva urges members to take part in Mat-Su Borough Assembly, Mat-Su CVB Board elections  
**Page 2**

Mat-Su Assembly candidates respond to tourism survey  
**Page 4-5**

New user-generated content platform launched on Mat-Su CVB web site  
**Page 6**

Nominate a local business for the Stars of the Industry Awards  
**Page 9**

## Contact us

**Bonnie Quill**  
Executive Director  
746-5001

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

**Casey Ressler**  
Marketing & Communications Mgr.  
746-5037  
[dasey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:dasey@alaskavisit.com)

**Justin Saunders**  
Membership Manager  
746-5032  
[justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com)

**Neil Campbell**  
Administrative Manager  
746-5000  
[info@alaskavisit.com](mailto:info@alaskavisit.com)

## Tourism Summit set for Nov. 1

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting a Tourism Summit on Nov. 1, and members are encouraged to attend and find out what steps the Mat-Su Borough needs to take to elevate it as a visitor destination.

The summit comes on the heels of last year's DestinationNEXT survey, which identified how stakeholders, members and community leaders felt about the Valley as a visitor destination. DestinationNEXT Managing Director Paul Ouimet will be facilitating the summit.

"This is the next step in the process of further strengthening our destination," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "Paul is a leading expert in destination analysis, and we're fortunate enough to have him for a second year."

Also during the Tourism Summit, The McDowell Group will be presenting findings from a Mat-Su Tourism Economic Impact Analysis. The research is being conducted this fall, and a full report will be available at the Tourism Summit.

"This is an important piece of research that will quantify tourism's importance to the Mat-Su Borough," Quill said. "We know tourism has an enormous impact on the local economy, but this research



**Paul Ouimet of DestinationNEXT will facilitate the Tourism Summit on Nov. 1. Ouimet presented the findings of the DestinationNEXT survey to Mat-Su CVB stakeholders last fall.**

will put an exact dollar figure on just how much of an impact."

The summit is being held at the Government Peak Chalet at the base of Hatcher Pass. The summit begins at 8:30 a.m. and runs through noon. Light refreshments will be served.

To RSVP to the Tourism Summit, please e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

## CVB Annual Meeting slated for Nov. 9

The Mat-Su CVB's Annual Meeting and Stars of the Industry awards luncheon is set for Thursday, Nov. 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Evangelo's.

The annual meeting gives members an opportunity to hear about marketing and membership efforts from the last fiscal year, as well as what the next year holds. It's also the opportunity for members to bring up thoughts and concerns to the board of directors.

The annual business meeting is from 10 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., with the awards luncheon to follow. Prior to the business meeting, the board of directors will seat newly elected members.

"This is an important meeting because we want our members to be informed about what we are doing to market the Mat-Su Valley, and their businesses, throughout the year," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill.

At the annual meeting, the new 2018 Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide will be unveiled, and there will be a giveaway for complimentary display ad in the 2019 guide.

There is no cost to attend the annual business meeting, but there is a \$20 fee for the awards luncheon. For more information, interested members can e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

**2016-2017  
Mat-Su CVB  
Board of Directors**

Cheryl Metiva  
Grand View Inn & Suites  
President  
275-2109  
[cheryl.metiva@akgrandview.com](mailto:cheryl.metiva@akgrandview.com)

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

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

Roberta Caenepeel  
Explore Tours  
Secretary  
786-0192  
[roberta.caenepeel@exploretours.com](mailto:roberta.caenepeel@exploretours.com)

Craig Saunders  
Iditarod Trailside Lodging  
Past President  
733-2505  
[craigakrep@gmail.com](mailto:craigakrep@gmail.com)

Karen Harris  
Alaska Garden Gate Bed & Breakfast  
746-2333  
[info@gardengatebnb.com](mailto:info@gardengatebnb.com)

Israel Mahay  
Mahay's Jetboat Adventures  
841-1307  
[izzymahay@gmail.com](mailto:izzymahay@gmail.com)

Cole Ouellette  
Rust's Flying Service and K2 Aviation  
243-1595  
[cole@flyrustsk2.com](mailto:cole@flyrustsk2.com)

Fernando Salvador  
Talkeetna Alaska Lodge/  
Pursuit Collection  
733-9501  
[fsalvador@alaskacollection.com](mailto:fsalvador@alaskacollection.com)

Collette Hand  
Alaska's Harvest Bed & Breakfast  
745-4263  
[harvest@mtaonline.net](mailto:harvest@mtaonline.net)

*From the president's desk*

## Election season is an important time for the tourism industry

At this time of year, as the busy summer season comes winding to a close, another important "season" is upon us – election season. And just as the summer season is important to us all from an economic standpoint, so is election season, but in a different way.

Locally, there are two Mat-Su Borough Assembly seats up for grabs in the October election, and your participation at the voting booth is vitally important. The decisions the Mat-Su Borough Assembly makes throughout the year have great impact on not only our industry, but the entire Valley. Now more than ever, hard decisions have to be made in a challenging fiscal climate. Decisions made by the Assembly have far-reaching impacts on us as both residents and business owners.

I'd like to personally invite everyone to attend the Mat-Su CVB's annual Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum on Sept. 15 at Evangelo's at noon. This is a great time to meet the candidates and ask them questions you feel are important to our industry and the Mat-Su Borough as a whole. By attending, you'll be able to better educate yourself about what each candidate thinks, and where they stand on various issues. It'll give you an informed decision on election day. Also, please take a look at Page 4 of this newsletter – the candidates for the two seats (Districts 4 and 5), responded to a survey about their views on tourism-related issues facing the Mat-Su Borough. Their responses will also

be available at the candidate forum.

The Borough Assembly election is not the only election that has an impact on our local tourism industry, however. In October, you'll also be receiving in the mail a ballot for the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors. This year, we have three expiring seats up for election.

Serving on the board is a great way to not only serve the membership, but also help guide the direction of our industry. In my 10-plus years on the board, I've had the pleasure of serving with some talented individuals

whom I greatly respect. I've seen them grow as leaders in the tourism industry, and I appreciate their willingness to lend their time and voice.

If you are interested in running for one of the board positions, we'd love to hear from you. If you know of someone who you think would make a good board member, again, please contact us.

Every person has a voice, and I hope you make a commitment to having yours heard by voting in both the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors elections. No matter if you are a small business owner with one employee or a large company with hundreds of employees, your vote matters and is important.

Cheryl Metiva ([cheryl.metiva@akgrandview.com](mailto:cheryl.metiva@akgrandview.com)) is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors and is the new executive manager of the Grand View Inn & Suites in Wasilla.



Cheryl Metiva

**Don't miss the Sept. 15 membership luncheon!**

*Mat-Su Borough Assembly Candidate Forum*

— PLUS —

*NEW! Staff update on web site user-generated content*

*NEW! Update on member Extranet*

*Friday, Sept. 15    Evangelo's    Noon-1p.m.*

*RSVP to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com)*

## From the executive director

# Tourism Summit will map our destination's future

A top priority that came out of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors annual planning retreat last January was to organize a borough-wide Tourism Summit.

Using the results of the DestinationNEXT assessment completed last November, International Managing Director of DestinationNEXT Paul Ouimet will analyze and facilitate the discussion.

Paul has facilitated more than 300 destination planning retreats and led several major community consultation processes. The goal is to unite all stakeholders in a future strategic plan.

Two new reports will be presented at the Tourism Summit: a Tourism Economic Impact Analysis and an updated accommodations inventory. Along



Bonnie Quill

with the 2016 Alaska Visitors Statistics Program (AVSP), we will have all of the most up-to-date data to dive deep into the opportunities and challenges to compete as a Trailblazer tourism destination. The three key strategic challenges revealed in our 2016 DestinationNEXT assessment are:

1. Rallying the community to work together towards a realistic vision and strategy.
2. Building community recognition and acceptance that transformational change is needed.
3. Implementing the strategy with limited resources.

Paul's knowledge of key visitor expectations and trends will help participants identify strategies to

strengthen our destination brand. I think the most important discussion will be steps to unite all tourism stakeholders in a master plan for infrastructure and sustainable funding, which will allow us to deliver that experience to our future visitors.

I encourage you to make a commitment to attend this important tourism industry meeting at the Government Peak Chalet near Hatcher Pass on Wednesday, Nov. 1 from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

There is no cost to attend and we will provide some delicious refreshments. Hope to see you there!

For more information about the DestinationNEXT program, you can visit their web page at <https://destinationsinternational.org/destination-assessments-and-planning-dnext>

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

## Board candidates sought

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors is accepting nominations to fill three seats coming up for election in October. The board of directors typically meet 6-8 times a year, as well as a few special meetings as needed.

Ten members serve three-year terms and help shape the direction of the Mat-Su CVB.

"Serving on the board of directors is a way to help guide the entire tourism industry into the future," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "The board serves as the leadership of the industry."

Current members of the board of directors whose terms are up are Roberta Caenepeel of Explore Tours, Israel Mahay of Mahay's Jet Boat Adventures and Cole Chambers of Rust's Flying Service and K2 Aviation.

Self-nominations are accepted, and nominations are reviewed by a committee prior to the ballots being issued. Interested members should submit a declaration of candidacy by e-mailing [bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com) no later than Sept. 22.

By Sept. 29, candidates should submit a 300-word statement and a color photograph, both of which will appear in the ballot packets mailed to all voting members no later than Oct. 6.

Ballots remain sealed at the Mat-Su CVB office until the election committee meets on Nov. 3 to open and count them.

The six board members whose terms are not up for election include Cheryl Metiva of the Grand View Inn & Suites, Karen Harris of Alaska Garden Gate B&B, Craig Saunders of Iditarod Trailside Lodging, Mark Flenor of Sheep Mountain Lodge, Mark Austin of the Musk Ox Farm, Collette Hand of Alaska's Harvest B&B and Fernando Salvador of the Alaska Collection.

For more information on running for the board of directors, interested members can contact Quill at 746-5000.

## State releases AVSP numbers

The 2016 Alaska Visitors Statistics Program (AVSP) report was published early this summer, and showed a record number of out-of-state summer visitors last summer.

An estimated 1.857 million visitors came to Alaska during the May-September timeframe, driving total annual visitation to more than 2 million for the first time ever. Of the summer visitors, 55 percent were cruise passengers, and 40 percent arrived by air.

According to The McDowell Group, who coordinated the survey, the 2016 summer visitor numbers represent a 4 percent increase over 2015. Visitors spent an average of \$1,054 per person while in Alaska, not counting transportation.

Locally, there were some interesting figures in the AVSP. An estimated 239,000 visitors stopped in Talkeetna, while 174,000 stopped in the Palmer/Wasilla area.

The report also concluded that a third of visitors to the Palmer/Wasilla area were visiting friends or relatives, the highest among any Southcentral community. Just 10 percent of visitors to Talkeetna were visiting friends or relatives.

In a positive sign for the local economy, visitors to Southcentral Alaska spent an average of \$1,465, far surpassing the statewide averages.

The AVSP is performed every five years and gives the industry an in-depth look at visitor planning strategies, demographics, transportation mode, purchasing patterns and much more. It is conducted by interviewing visitors in various communities throughout the summer, and also by having visitors take an online survey.

You can download the entire AVSP at <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/ded/DEV/TourismDevelopment/TourismResearch.aspx>

# Borough Assembly candidates respond to survey

Each fall, the Mat-Su CVB surveys candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly on tourism-related issues facing the industry. This year, four questions were asked of the candidates - Ted Leonard and Pat Hogan in District 4, and Dan Mayfield and Mokie Tew in District 5. Below are their responses.

## Question 1

As with most local and regional convention & visitors bureaus, the Mat-Su CVB receives monies collected by the Borough through a bed tax of 5 percent. This year the administration approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$715,000 for fiscal year 2018 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 60 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax) collection of \$1.2 million.

The assembly four years ago supported action to extend the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB for three years through FY16 with a 65 percent formula. Do you support renewing a 3-year grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB? Why or why not?

**Pat Hogan, District 4:** I am in support of renewing the 3-year grant agreement. This renewal benefits both the borough by 35 percent of the proceeds; and allows for the expansion and support of the Mat-Su CVB. It is important to continue to market our tourism as each dollar provided by a tourist supports the overall economy of our borough. This tax revenue does not require voter taxation and therefore is a win/win proposition for government, Mat-Su CVB and residents.

**Ted Leonard, District 4:** Favor. I would support renewing the agreement because it would allow the utilizing of revenue generated by a tourism industry to promote and grow the tourism segment of the Borough's economy. The tourism segment of our economy is one of the few bright spots in our current economic environment. We need to keep this segment of the economy healthy and growing in order to create more family wages jobs in the Valley.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** I am in favor of a three year grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB. In order to support sustainable growth in the tourism industry, the Mat-Su CVB needs to be able to project, with some certainty, their working capital. The current one year grant period somewhat limits the

ability to make plans for multi-year projects that build on the previous year's accomplishments.

**Mokie Tew, District 5:** Did not respond to survey.

## Question 2

Because of state and local budget worries, there is concern among tourism businesses that other groups and government will increasingly look at bed tax revenues as a funding source for non-tourism expenditures. Would you support the use of bed tax monies for non-tourism purposes? If yes, what?

**Pat Hogan, District 4:** It is true due to our fiscal crisis, everyone wants money without paying additional taxes. As it is not possible to dedicate any taxes, I see the bed tax as a sharing of revenue throughout the entire borough. I believe the CVB deserves the bulk of the revenue. However, without educated employees, safe roads, effective emergency services, we must share the revenue to benefit the entire population. Therefore, I do support the utilization of "bed tax" for the benefit of the community.

**Ted Leonard, District 4:** Oppose.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** I support the current use of bed tax revenue. Revenue from the bed tax is currently expected to be \$1.2 million with \$715,000 going to the Mat-Su CVB. Another \$ 300,000 plus has been appropriated for tourism infrastructure and a small balance going to the General Fund. This mix allows us to support tourism, infrastructure and shift taxpayer burden to a small extent.

**Mokie Tew, District 5:** Did not respond to survey.

## Question 3

The 2008 Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study identified the Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center development as a top priority that would have a major economic impact for the Valley. After a National Scenic Byways grant-funded feasibility study in 2010, a site at Mile 36 Glenn Highway was identified (we encourage you to visit [www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com](http://www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com)). In FY14 the Mat-Su Borough received \$1 million from the Alaska legislature for site acquisition, and in FY15 received \$1.235 million for design and site work, through the efforts of the Mat-Su CVB which was completed in November 2016. The assembly had listed the project as one of

its top five legislative priorities. The sale of the current center of \$1.2 million is dedicated as a match for the \$5.8 million needed to complete the project.

Do you support the development of a new Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center? Why or why not?

**Pat Hogan, District 4:** I have reviewed the executive summary for the Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center. This summary provides excellent supportive information. It appears progress has stalled since 2013. I support the development of such a site. However, I have limited knowledge about the revenue development side of the equation. It is proposed to obtain revenue from various sources. However, almost 50 percent of the revenue is listed as government and partners. Upon review of the partnerships, the revenue could be very limited. Grants, charitable donations, government funding can be limited to capital projects, but provide little or no operational funding I have found through past experience.

**Ted Leonard, District 4:** I support the development of infrastructure projects such as the Visitor Center that will create jobs and diversify our economy. At the City of Wasilla, I was involved with financing the Menard Sports Center that is a successful addition for both business and recreational opportunities in the Valley and as AIDEA's CEO, I was involved with tax-exempt conduit bonds and other forms of financing that could be added to the monies already raised for the Visitor Center project so that this project could go forward even if further State funds are not available.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** I support the development of the Gateway Visitor Center. The completion of the Visitor Center will provide a central hub along the highway where visitors can learn more about the Mat-Su. It will enable us to better market our tourism opportunities and businesses to visitors. The availability of overnight RV spots and our marketing efforts means that visitors will stay longer in the Mat-Su which, in turn, means that we have a better potential to capture tourism dollars. In short, the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center means more family wage earning jobs for our Borough and a better economy.

**Mokie Tew, District 5:** Did not respond to survey.

See SURVEY, Page 5

# SURVEY: Candidates give their views on tourism topics

Continued from Page 4

## Question 4

On August 2, 2016 the assembly heard testimony during a public hearing on an ordinance to increase the borough bed tax from five to eight percent and submit the question to the voters on the October 4, 2016 ballot. The Mat-Su CVB board of directors had forwarded the proposal to consider after much feedback and discussions with the membership. The testimony was divided and the assembly voted 4-3 to oppose putting it on the ballot.

What is your opinion on raising the bed tax to support tourism infrastructure projects or the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center facility?

**Pat Hogan, District 4:** I believe the electorate should be allowed to vote on raising the bed tax on the October ballot. Unfortunately, active or super voters may

not be able to attend Assembly meetings. Therefore voters should be allowed to make decisions with assistance from the Assembly Members, rather than allow all decisions be made by the few.

**Ted Leonard, District 4:** I generally am very cautious about raising new taxes. However, I have supported the use of a dedicated tax with a sunset clause to assist in financing of the Menard Sports Center and the new Wasilla Library. Tax increases of limited duration with a specific goal and a sunset provision can be effective for the right project. With my experience in project financing, I believe that there are several ways to pay for needed tourism infrastructure that could include use of revenue bonds, P3 finance structures and concession agreements. I will bring my project financing experience to the Assembly so that the best ways to finance infrastructure can be examined and utilized.

**Dan Mayfield, District 5:** I was one of the votes in favor of putting the

question before the voters. My professional career called for me to travel extensively throughout the other 49 States. In doing so, I was often temporarily housed in hotels. While I am not entirely certain that Alaska has the lowest bed tax, I am completely certain that we have one of the very lowest in the nation. In my opinion, raising the bed tax to support tourism infrastructure or the completion of the Gateway Visitor Center would have had no impact on the frequency of visitation to the Mat-Su and would have provided us with the financial resources to recognize how very important tourism is to our economy and our livelihood. Regardless of your stance on this issue, I believe the voters had the right to weigh in on something that may have helped to support the industry and perhaps shift some of the local property taxpayer burden to those that visit our state.

**Mokie Tew, District 5:** Did not respond to survey.

## 2018 Visitor Guide available in November

The 2018 Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide will be printed in late October and be available for members at the annual meeting on Nov. 9.

This year, the guide is being designed by Brilliant Media Strategies, an Anchorage advertising agency that designed the state vacation planner for years. They won the highly competitive bid process in the spring.

“They have years of experience designing visitor guides, and they have the industry research and knowledge at their fingertips,” Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler said. “It’s been great working with them on the project.”

The cover features an image of Hatcher Pass, with two hikers on Reed Lakes Trail.

This year, 100,000 copies are being printed. Approximately 55,000 guides are distributed to highly qualified leads purchased from the Alaska Travel Industry Association. An additional 4,000 guides are mailed to travel agents in an ATIA co-op program.

Guides are also distributed throughout Alaska at visitor centers and other high-traffic locations, direct mailed to those who request from our web site and given out at national and statewide travel shows.

“Even in today’s digital world, there’s always a place for a printed visitor guide,” Ressler said. “There’s something about having a printed book that people still enjoy.”

Every member will receive a copy of the 2018 visitor guide, along with a copy of the FY2017 annual report, later this fall. If you’d like to receive more copies for distribution at your business, members can call 746-5000.

## First consumer show kicks off in late September

The first consumer show of the fall/winter season is the annual PFD Travel Fair on Sept. 23, and the Mat-Su CVB will have a booth at the popular one-day event.

The PFD Travel Fair is organized by Scott McMurren of the Alaska Travelgram and brings together destinations and businesses from around the state for a unique one-day event held at the Sheffield Depot at the Ted Stevens International Airport.

At the event, all of the attendees must get their passport stamped at every booth, and they are then entered to win prizes, which are donated by the vendors.

The “passport” set-up gives vendors such as the CVB plenty of time to interact with the attendees, and ensures that every attendee stops by every booth.

“Last year was our first year participating, and we were very impressed with the attendance and the level of interest from everyone,” said Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler. “All of the attendees are actively looking for information on things to do in Alaska.”

If you’d like to donate a prize to be given away at the PFD fair, please e-mail [casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com). You’ll receive an 8x10 display on the Mat-Su CVB’s table and a mention during all promotion of the event.

In February, the Mat-Su CVB will have its own booth at the LA Travel and Adventure Show in Los Angeles for the first time in three years.

This is one of the nation’s largest consumer travel shows, and there will be booth buy-in opportunities for members, as well as brochure distribution offered for a small fee. More details will follow.

## Alaska Grown campaign targets Southcentral residents

The Mat-Su CVB partnered with Alaska Grown for an all-new in-state campaign this spring, and the results exceeded expectations. A two-week continuation of the campaign took place in late August and early September.

Four itineraries – one in each region of the Valley – were developed, all with an Alaska Grown component. The campaign had its own “microsite” ([www.alaskavisit.com/alaskagrown](http://www.alaskavisit.com/alaskagrown)) and a highly targeted marketing campaign pointed people to that site.

“We ran the campaign for four weeks, from late May to mid June, and we were very happy with the results,” said Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler. “We saw a dramatic increase in web traffic, as well as a big increase in social media mentions, impressions and views.”

The Alaska Grown campaign included print ads in ADN, radio and television spots (KTUU) and an extensive online campaign including digital ads on Facebook, Instagram, the Audience X network, YouTube, KTUU.com and ADN.com. Outside of the social media channels, the ads had more than 2.5 million impressions in the Southcentral Alaska region. On YouTube, the campaign featured four videos highlighting the destinations, and they generated 47,000 views.

During the four-week spring campaign, web site traffic increased 82 percent year over year, generating 11,257 user sessions and 20,133 page views. Additionally, the campaign generated 51 new subscribers to our e-mail marketing campaign, and a 16 percent increase in Instagram followers.

Site visitors were encouraged to post their favorite photos in the Valley with #AlaskaGrown and #YahooMatSu, and weekly winners received an Alaska Grown hoodie.

“It was a really engaging campaign that had great reach,” Ressler said.



Instagram user [adventurer\\_anonymous](#) was one of the weekly winners of an Alaska Grown hoodie as part of the campaign.

## Web site now incorporates user-generated content

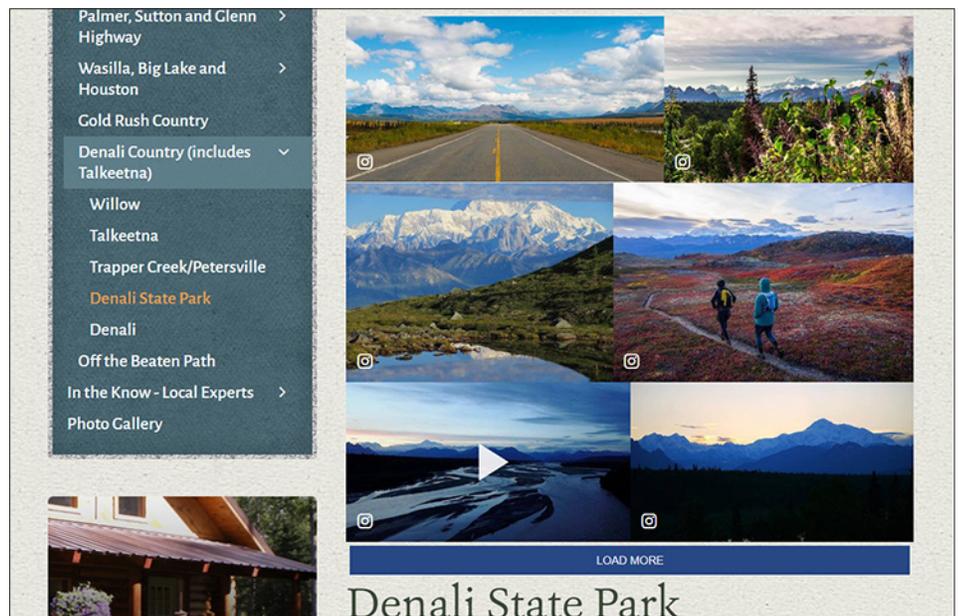
In August, the Mat-Su CVB started implementation of user-generated content on its web site, following a trend of destination marketing web sites nationwide.

User-generated content involves importing the images from public profiles on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter into galleries.

“Bringing user-generated content onto a web site is a way to increase time spent on the site and give site visitors visually stunning images,” Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler said. “It increases engagement and gives site visitors a better experience.”

The Mat-Su CVB chose to partner with Crowdriff, a company that specializes in working with destination marketing organizations.

Through the platform, the Mat-Su CVB can use highly targeted keywords and geo-locations from which to pull images. For example, using the search term “Hatcher Pass” will pull all images that were geo-coded as being taken in Hatcher Pass, as well as any image that uses that hashtag. By using specific terms, custom galleries can



be created across the entire web site.

Only images from public social media accounts are used – those social media users that have their profiles set to “private” aren’t accessible.

“Implementing user-generated content on your web site is a growing trend, not just among destination marketing organizations, but brands and industries worldwide,” Ressler said.



Patty Sullivan/Mat-Su Borough

On May 26, Alaska State Parks hosted a ribbon cutting event at the new campground.

## South Denali infrastructure development increases visitor experience

On May 26, Alaska State Parks officially opened the Kesugi Ken Campground in Denali State Park, completing Phase 1 in South Denali development.

The campground – with spectacular views of the Alaska Range – is part of a two-phase plan that includes the construction of a visitor information center in Denali State Park.

“We are excited and highly supportive of the campground and the long-range vision, because it greatly enhances the visitor experience and gives them a world-class Denali experience here in the Mat-Su Borough,” Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill said.

The Mat-Su CVB, Holland America/Princess and the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge all sponsored the grand opening.

The investment in Phase 1 has been more than \$22 million from state, federal and private grants. When funding permits, the second phase is expected to include the final design and construction of the South Denali Visitor Center, the access

road from the campground to the center, construction of a maintenance building and the expansion of the trails network. The cost of Phase 2 construction is estimated at \$22.4 million.

The campground, located at Mile 135.4 of the Parks Highway has already been well received. There are two separate loops, one with 32 RV sites (all with electric hook-ups), the other with 10 tent sites that include fire pits, picnic tables and bear-proof food lockers. The campground also has an interpretive pavilion with a dozen informational panels. Two public-use cabins are available, and during the winter, a third is available with full electricity.

Tourism infrastructure development in South Denali is important for the Mat-Su Borough, Quill said.

“It helps alleviate congestion in Denali National Park, and by giving visitors another site to visit in the Mat-Su Borough, it will lead to further economic development,” Quill said. “This project will have a major economic impact.”



The new Kesugi Ken Campground features a world class interpretive center.

## Mat-Su CVB hosts national writer

The Mat-Su CVB hosted travel writer Janice Nieder on a five-day trip earlier this summer, resulting in exceptional coverage in two online publications.

Nieder is a luxury travel writer based in San Francisco. She visited the Mat-Su in early June, and it resulted in an extensive story for JustLuxe.com, which receives 2 million readers a month, and StarkInsider.com, which receives 2 million readers a year.

“Janice’s stories were outstanding, and she really told our story well,” Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler said. “We had a fun time hosting her and showing her a grand adventure.”

During the five days here, Nieder explored three different glaciers, flew in helicopters and planes, rode in boats and visited every corner of the Valley. It was a whirlwind schedule, but it left a big impression on her.

In her story titled, “Glacier Hopping In Alaska’s Mat-Su Valley Should be on Your Bucket List,” Nieder writes, “On a recent visit, the focus of my itinerary was glacier hopping to three distinctly different glaciers found in Matanuska-Susitna Valley, aka Mat-Su, which is the soul of Alaska. For a luxury travel writer who thrives on creature comforts, I was having some serious doubts, however, I am now a convert to the joys of slightly rougher luxepierential travel.”



Travel writer Janice Nieder spent five days in the Mat-Su Valley in June, which resulted in two articles published about her experience.

## Important upcoming dates

Sept. 13-15	National Association of Career Travel Agents convention	Anchorage Mat-Su CVB will attend
Sept. 15	Mat-Su CVB Borough Assembly Candidate Forum	Evangelo's, Noon
Sept. 23	PFD Travel Fair Mat-Su CVB will have a booth	Noon-5 p.m., Sheffield Depot at the airport
Oct. 2-6	Alaska Travel Industry Association annual convention Mat-Su CVB staff will attend	Kodiak
Nov. 1	Mat-Su Tourism Summit	Government Peak Chalet, 8:30 a.m. to noon
Nov. 9	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting & Awards Luncheon	Evangelo's, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

## News from the membership

**Pursuit Collection** has announced that Fernando Salvador, former general manager of the company's Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge, has been promoted to Vice President and General Manager of the Alaska Collection. In addition to Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge, the Alaska Collection includes Denali Backcountry Lodge, Denali Backcountry Adventure, Denali Cabins, Seward Windsong Lodge, Kenai Fjords Wilderness Lodge and Kenai Fjords Tours. "Pursuit has collected the very best in adventure travel experiences and lodging in Alaska's most iconic destinations. I am honored to lead the team that brings these experiences to the thousands of guests that visit us each year," Salvador said.

**Rose Ridge Vacation Chalets** is changing hands. After 18 years sharing the Mat-Su Valley and Alaska with over 5,000 guests (first at Rose Ridge Bed & Breakfast and then Rose Ridge Vacation Chalets),

Diane and David Rose are moving on to pursue travel and adventures of their own. The new owners of Rose Ridge Vacation Chalets will take over the operation by mid-October. All contact information will remain the same. We have immensely enjoyed working with everyone in the Alaska tourism industry, thank you and keep up the good work.

**Sheep Mountain Lodge** is hosting the Big Stout Campout Sept. 22-24, partnering with Midnight Sun Brewing Company. There will be a beer dinner, campfire, craft time, cigars and much more. Reservations must be made for RV, tent or cabin. Call 745-5121 for more information.

**The Palmer Musk Ox Farm** is hosting the third annual OxToberFest on Oct. 7. There will be a beer garden featuring local breweries, all the German-themed food will be Alaska Grown, and there is a 12-piece brass "Oompah" band. Tickets

sell out early. Call 745-4151 for more information.

**Settlers Bay Golf Course** would like to take the opportunity to show its gratitude for helping them successfully run their business another year. With frequent visits from friends in the community, and referrals to play "Alaska's Best Greens," and "enjoy artisanal food with local brews and great views," we at Settlers Bay Golf Course thank you. We can't do it alone and we appreciate you choosing or recommending friends to do business with us. On Wednesday, Sept. 13 we are offering complimentary green fees to everyone who wishes to play Settlers Bay in an effort to show our appreciation. The Albatross will be serving brats during the round on the 10th tee. Mark your calendars and let us "Enhance Your Experience" on Wednesday, Sept. 13. Go to [settlersbay.com/tee-times](http://settlersbay.com/tee-times) or call 376-5466 to reserve your spot with your friends all on us.

## Stay connected to tell our story!



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



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



"yhoomatsu"  
Channel



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

# Nominate someone for the Stars of the Industry awards

Nominations are being accepted for the annual Mat-Su CVB Stars of the Industry awards luncheon on Nov. 9 for those who have made a positive difference in the tourism industry in the last year.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community that distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion or development. Last year, the Palmer Museum of History and Art was the honoree.

The Gold Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made significant accomplishments in the tourism industry. In 2016, the winner was the Musk Ox Farm for its continued growth and commitment to community events.

The Tourism Angel Award honors an individual who has supported and assisted Mat-Su CVB and has shown a true concern for the success and growth of the tourism industry. The 2016 award winners were

Zack and Anjanette Steer.

The Cheechako Award is given to a new business or organization that has shown entrepreneurial zeal and managed to not only survive, but thrive in its early years. In 2016 Alaska Travel Connections and the Extreme Fun Center shared the award.

E-mail nominations to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com). The deadline to submit nominations is Oct. 9. Click <http://bit.ly/2xe3GY1> for a nominations form.

## Northern Lights Award

Honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. I nominate:

## Gold Star Award

This prestigious award recognizes a business or organization that has made a significant accomplishment in the tourism industry. I nominate:

## Tourism Angel Award

Awarded to an individual who has supported and assisted Mat-Su CVB and has shown true concern for the success and growth of all members in the Mat-Su Borough. I nominate:

## Cheechako Award

Awarded to a new tourism business, organization or entity showing entrepreneurial zeal and managing not only to survive, but to thrive in its early years. I nominate:

## ... It Happens Award

Awarded to an individual, business or organization that took a lemon and made lemonade. It is intended to laugh with, not at, others! I nominate:

Special Awards: If you feel someone deserves recognition but doesn't fit a category, tell us who they are and why they merit special commendation! Submit nominations to Mat-Su CVB by Oct. 9. Mat-Su CVB; 610 S. Bailey St., Suite 201.; Palmer, AK 99645; Fax (907) 746-2688 or e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

# Welcome these new Mat-Su CVB members

Mat-Su Resort  
Tammy Gongliwski  
[tammyg@mat-suresort.com](mailto:tammyg@mat-suresort.com)  
[www.mat-suresort.com](http://www.mat-suresort.com)

Alaska Bush Float Plane Service  
Jason Sturgis  
[akbush@mtaonline.net](mailto:akbush@mtaonline.net)  
[www.alaskabush.net](http://www.alaskabush.net)

Matanuska Lodge  
Brenda Goldberg  
[nuskal@mac.com](mailto:nuskal@mac.com)  
[www.matanuskalodge.com](http://www.matanuskalodge.com)

Mostly Moose Gift Shop  
Jenny Krepel  
[tkagifts@mtaonline.net](mailto:tkagifts@mtaonline.net)

Heritage Alaska Gift Shop  
Jenny Krepel  
[tkagifts@mtaonline.net](mailto:tkagifts@mtaonline.net)

Bears & Beyond Gift Shop  
Jenny Krepel  
[tkagifts@mtaonline.net](mailto:tkagifts@mtaonline.net)

The Mountain Gift Shop  
Jenny Krepel  
[tkagifts@mtaonline.net](mailto:tkagifts@mtaonline.net)

Creekside Lodge  
Kathy Glines  
[glines@alaskasunsetviewresort.com](mailto:glines@alaskasunsetviewresort.com)  
[www.sunsetcreekside.com](http://www.sunsetcreekside.com)

Grandview Cafe & RV Park  
Colleen Dietrich  
[info@tundrarosecabins.com](mailto:info@tundrarosecabins.com)  
[www.grandviewrv.com](http://www.grandviewrv.com)

Susitna RV Park & Campground  
Marilyn Rouswell  
[susitnalanding2015@gmail.com](mailto:susitnalanding2015@gmail.com)  
[www.susitnalanding.net](http://www.susitnalanding.net)

Alaska Backcountry Cottages  
Linda Cox  
[reservations@alaska.global](mailto:reservations@alaska.global)  
[www.youralaskavacation.com](http://www.youralaskavacation.com)

Everrett's Fine Dining, Bar & Bistro  
Tammy Gongliwski  
[tammyg@mat-suresort.com](mailto:tammyg@mat-suresort.com)  
[www.mat-suresort.com](http://www.mat-suresort.com)

Denali Air  
Dan McGregor  
[flightseeing@denali-air.com](mailto:flightseeing@denali-air.com)  
[www.denali-air.com](http://www.denali-air.com)

Willow Creek Resort  
Theresa Dean  
[theresadean@yahoo.com](mailto:theresadean@yahoo.com)  
[www.willowcreekresort.com](http://www.willowcreekresort.com)



This view of Denali is part of the Moose Flats Trail at the new Kesugi Ken Campground in Denali State Park. For more about the campground, which opened this spring, please see the accompanying article on Page 7.

# YAHOO! Mat-Su

610 S. Bailey St., Suite 201  
Palmer, AK 99645

(907) 746-5000  
[www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com)