

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

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Jurek Lipski of Sparkloft Media presents during last year's annual meeting. This November, the theme of the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting is "Grow Tourism."

Mat-Su CVB annual meeting, awards luncheon set for Nov. 13

The Mat-Su CVB's annual meeting and awards luncheon is set for Nov. 13 at Evangelos, with a full morning of informative sessions planned on how we can collectively "Grow Tourism."

Next year is the organization's 30th anniversary, and during the annual meeting, we'll focus on how far the CVB has come in the last 30 years, as well as identify future opportunities that will continue to grow tourism in the Mat-Su Valley.

"We plan on having a panel of local, state and national tourism experts, from a wide range of sectors, to talk about the amazing opportunities that exist here in the Mat-Su Valley, as we look forward to the next 30 years," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill.

The panel discussion begins at 9 a.m. and continues through 11 a.m., when the annual business meeting begins.

During the business meeting, the CVB staff will highlight accomplishments in the last year, and also talk about the future

marketing opportunities and strategies for the upcoming year. It's also a time when members can ask questions, submit resolutions and give the newly seated board of directors ideas, thoughts and concerns. The input is considered during the annual board of directors planning retreat in January.

"The annual meeting is important because it's a chance to show the membership what we've been doing on their behalf, and highlight why destination marketing is so important in today's market," Quill said.

Following the annual meeting, the annual "Stars of the Industry" luncheon takes place. Each year, nominations are solicited (see related story, Page 10) to honor those individuals and organizations that have made a difference in the tourism industry.

Tickets for the annual meeting, including the awards luncheon and all sessions, are \$25 each and are available by calling the Mat-Su CVB office at 746-5000.

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From the president's desk

Mat-Su CVB celebrating 30 years of marketing the Valley in 2016

Next year the Mat-Su CVB celebrates 30 years of marketing the Mat-Su Valley as a premier visitor destination. It's safe to say the organization has come a long way since it was first founded, and we're excited about what the next 30 years holds.

We share the same passion about tourism and its importance to the local economy as the founders did 30 years ago. And much like then, there are amazing developments – and opportunities – in the tourism industry now.

On Nov. 13, the Mat-Su CVB is hosting its annual meeting, and it's your chance to come hear about the marketing strategies and the opportunities for your business. There will also be a panel from local, state and national tourism leaders talking about the future, and potential growth. It'll be highly informative and I encourage you to attend. Stick around for lunch, as we'll honor the "Stars of the Industry."

Also moving forward is the Gateway Visitor Center project, something that has been in the plans for nearly 10 years, and many volunteers have given a lot of time and energy to this valuable project. I wanted to give the members an update on the current status.

The Mat-Su Borough completed an appraisal on the land and building of the current visitor center, and an offer has been received by a private company to purchase, for the purpose of building a much-needed extended care facility next to the hospital.

If the offer to purchase is accepted by the borough, the Mat-Su CVB will be looking for office space to rent in the interim.

Don't worry – the Mat-Su CVB will still be busy marketing the Mat-Su Valley in the same way it always has, the office will just be in a different, as of yet undetermined, location.

We are working through a number of scenarios, and you can be assured that we are as committed to marketing the entire

Mat-Su Valley, regardless of where the office is located.

The borough has also passed an ordinance to commit the monies from the sale of the current site to the future Gateway Visitor Center. In today's economic situation, this is important because it gives us matching funds to put toward the new building.

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors, as well as the many strategic partners on the project, are thinking creatively about how to pursue funding for the project, in light of the state's finances. We are committed to getting the Gateway Visitor Center built, because it will have broad and important impacts on the local economy.

I'd also like to take the time to invite you to our annual Mat-Su Borough candidate forum, which is Thursday, Sept. 17 at Evangelo's at noon. This is

your chance to visit with the candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and the Mayor positions, and ask them questions about tourism-related issues that affect us all. This question-and-answer forum is always a good way to get to know the candidates and their viewpoints. It's also a time when we can stress to the candidates just how important tourism is to our local economy.

As we look back on the last 30 years, we're happy of how far the Mat-Su CVB has come, and the great things we've accomplished in making the Mat-Su Valley a destination in which we can all take pride. But it doesn't stop there – we'll continually be looking for ways to promote our area, bring in more visitors, and grow our economy.

It's all part of our "Grow Tourism" mission, and that doesn't change in 30 years.

Cheryl Metiva (cherylm@catheatres.com) is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors and works at the new Extreme Fun Center.



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

From the executive director

Project: Time Off helps economy, workers' satisfaction

As you read this newsletter I will be in the air on my way to London and Scotland. It will be the first time I have ever taken a two-week vacation. The trip planning has been going on for over a year and our itinerary is well researched. The idea originated from a travel magazine. An article about the dedication of the new John Muir Way in Scotland, a 130-mile walk from coast to coast ending in his birthplace of Dunbar. John Muir is a hero of mine for his role in founding our National Parks. My parents met while working in Yellowstone Park after WWII and I have many fond childhood memories of return trips to Yellowstone and Glacier Park. So the trip was born to honor those memories and also celebrate in my own way the 100-year anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016.

So why am I sharing my personal vacation story with you in our newsletter? Because of a new U.S. Travel initiative titled Project: Time Off, an economic opportunity resulting in the research process of the "Travel Effect."

U.S. Travel reported that Americans are taking the least amount of vacation

in nearly 40 years. From 1976 to 2000, American workers used 20.3 days of vacation each year. Since then, the number has dropped precipitously, with workers reporting just 16.0 days used in 2013 – almost a full work-week less compared to pre-2000 levels. The research revealed that workers fail to use a total of 429 million days of paid time off (PTO) annually. The existing opportunity is using the 429 million days of time off would deliver a \$160 billion jolt to the U.S. economy, create 1.2 million new American jobs, and generate \$21 billion in federal, state and local revenues.

The benefits are not just economic. The research identifies taking time off is essential for strong relationships, a productive workforce and a fulfilled life. Employees reported that time off helps them recharge, increases their concentration and productivity, which gives them a greater satisfaction at work when they return. Most important 85 percent say it makes them happier and 79

percent report it strengthens bonds with their family and friends.

You may have seen the national television commercials sponsored by MasterCard with young children voicing "just one more day." The research reports encouraging workers to use just one more day each year would generate \$73 billion annually for our economy.

To kick off this national conversation, U.S. Travel is hosting an inaugural half-day forum titled "Upside of Downtime" Sept. 22.

The event will convene an exclusive audience of media and bloggers as well as human resource and business leaders discussing the value of vacation and the need to fight America's work martyr syndrome. This is a culture shift and huge economic opportunity for the travel industry. Mat-Su CVB is a partner with U.S. Travel and we will use the tools Project: Time Off to help bring them to our destination. So join the movement!



Bonnie Quill

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

Board candidates sought for Mat-Su CVB election

The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors is accepting nominations from the membership to fill four seats coming up for election in October.

The 10-person board of directors meets 4-6 times a year, as well as a few other special meetings. Elected directors serve three-year terms and helps shape the vision and direction of the Mat-Su CVB.

"Being on the board of directors is a way to provide leadership for the entire tourism industry," Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill said. "These leaders help chart the course for the future of not only the CVB, but also the entire industry."

Current members of the board of directors whose terms are up include Cheryl Metiva, Rick Peterson, Craig Saunders and Karen Harris. Self-nominations are accepted, and nominations are reviewed by a committee prior to the ballots being issued. Those interested should submit a declaration of candidacy by e-mailing bonnie@alaskavisit.com no later than Sept. 28. By Oct. 2, 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. 8. Ballots remained sealed until the election committee meets in early November to count them.

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

Highway Neighbors



This spring, the Mat-Su CVB hosted the annual Alaska Highway Neighbors Conference at the Government Peak Chalet in Hatcher Pass. More than 30 people from around Alaska attended the conference, which focuses on topics and issues pertaining to highway traffic and our visitors.

Tourism industry responds during Sockeye Fire

With temperatures sweltering in the 80s earlier this June, most Alaskans and our visitors were taking advantage by getting out and enjoying the great outdoors. All that would change in the matter of an instant, as the Sockeye Fire consumed acreage and the fears of local residents at an alarming rate.

With one route – the Parks Highway – leading north, the tourism industry braced for logistical challenges while the firefighters summoned more personnel to help save not only properties, but lives. In a time of organized chaos, however, resolve was born – and while the devastation of losing more than 7,000 acres and 55 homes was severe, no lives were lost, thanks to the amazing actions of emergency responders.

The fire began on June 14, near Little Willow Creek. Extreme conditions – dry, hot temperatures and gusting winds – spread it quickly throughout the Willow area, leading to evacuations and tremendous response from firefighters from not only the Mat-Su area, but also the Lower 48. Just like residents who had to be evacuated, visitors also were left stranded, creating challenges in the blink of an eye.

“That first Sunday night, we were up until the early morning hours, monitoring the fire and communicating to our members what resources were available to them, where to find alternative lodging for their guests, and how we can assist them,” said Bonnie Quill, executive director of the Mat-Su CVB. “It was a very fluid situation, and for several days, we wanted our members to know the latest information and how they can work with their visitors.



Emergency crews respond to the Sockeye Fire in June. The disaster posed logistical challenges for the tourism industry, while the primary concern was for the safety of residents.

“The response from the tourism industry was amazing. While we were communicating with tour operators helping them with their logistics, local operators were working furiously behind the scenes to make sure not only our visitors were safe, but also our local residents,” Quill said.

Willow dog musher Vern Halter helped with the evacuation efforts, assisting mushers in moving their kennels to Big Lake musher Martin Buser’s house. He was a calming force for his neighbors, and through his role as a Mat-Su Borough Assemblyman representing the area, he provided continual updates for concerned residents. Road blocks were established near his home, and motorists were left stranded along the Parks. And not just locals, but motorcoaches carrying hundreds of visitors.

Two of those motorcoaches belonged to TRIPS. Christoph Voelkel is the director of

operations, and he had close to 100 seniors stuck in the road blocks, while headed from Seward to Talkeetna following a cruise. They waited for three hours before they turned around and headed south, where they stopped at Evangelo’s for dinner.

“I was very skeptical anyone outside of Anchorage within one hour could accommodate 100 people for dinner. Diana (Lamernakis, wife of owner Evangelo Lamernakis) said she could do it and we arrived 40 minutes later. I was pleasantly surprised and Diana welcomed me with a smile. We had all of our passengers coming into the restaurant and everything was ready. All of our passengers were very happy!” Voelkel wrote in an e-mail to the Mat-Su CVB.

The group had to overnight at a Red Cross shelter established at Houston

See SOCKEYE, Page 5

Tour operator thankful for ‘Alaskan Spirit’ during fire

Travis Taylor works for Premier Alaska Tours. Below is his account of how PAT faced the challenges.

More than 1,000 of our guests were affected by the fires between June 15 and June 19. Due to the hard work of the firefighters, most guests experienced only minor traffic delays while other guests had re-arrangements of their travel itinerary. The fire showed the Alaskan Spirit of “let’s do whatever it takes to get the job done.”

There are too many vendors to thank, but we were on the phone constantly with the Alaska Railroad, multiple hotels, K2 Aviation, Talkeetna Air Taxi, and Happy Trails Kennels. One day I looked at my call log and I had over 100 phone calls between

vendors and staff. During the fire, most of the luggage was transported by the rail as the train tracks remained open, when the highway was closed. Typically guest luggage travels on motor coaches or trucks so there was a lot of extra movement by lots of staff. We even had to fly one group’s luggage over the fire from Talkeetna to Anchorage – that was expensive! It was “all hands on deck.”

About 100 guests received an unexpected flight over the fire between Wasilla and Talkeetna. The fire occurred in peak season right before summer solstice, so every hotel and bed and breakfast was sold out between Talkeetna and Girdwood.

We called everyone looking for rooms, booking the last rooms at the Wasilla Grand View Inn & Suites. We were still

short rooms and had no other option than to fly 100 guests over the fire and continue by coach to Denali. We worked with K2 Aviation and Talkeetna Air Taxi to charter more than 10 bush plane flights for guests. Some guests didn’t end up making it to Denali until 2 a.m. the next day after getting off the ship in Seward at 7 a.m. Most guests appreciated the creative solution to the road closure. We called it “Problem solving on the fly.”

As a safety precaution, we ordered 1,000 respiratory masks for guests with difficulty breathing the smoky air this summer. We have used them not only during the Willow Sockeye fire, but also later in the summer during smoky days in Fairbanks, Tok, the Yukon, and even Denali.

Mat-Su CVB hosts travel writers on extended FAMs

The Mat-Su CVB hosted travel writer Lisa Halvorsen on a week-long familiarization trip in early June, centered around the 80th anniversary of the Colony project.

In addition to the Palmer areas, Halvorsen visited Talkeetna, Hatcher Pass and the Matanuska Glacier areas during her time in the Mat-Su Valley.

“Hosting travel writers is a great way to get exposure for our destination, both online and in print,” Casey Ressler said. “Lisa has great outlets, including the AAA publications on the East Coast, so having her here for a week was great.”

Mat-Su CVB staff members first met Halvorsen during Alaska Media Road Show, which is held in Santa Barbara every fall. Top travel writers from around the country attend, and Alaska partners have 15-minute appointments with them to highlight your area and generate interest. Following Road Show, Mat-Su CVB “pitches” writers with stories and in some cases, hosts them for a week-long, Mat-Su specific FAM trip.

In late August, the Mat-Su CVB also hosted Adam Sawyer, a travel writer from Portland, on an extended weekend trip focused on outdoor activities and hiking. Sawyer writes for several outdoor publications, including Backpacker Magazine. He was another travel writer first contacted through the Mat-Su CVB’s participation in Alaska Media Road Show.



Travel writer Lisa Halvorsen, left, enjoys an Iditarod cart ride with Starre Szelag and Raymie Redington during June.

SOCKEYE: Tourism industry comes together

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Middle School, but the generosity from the tourism industry didn’t end with dinner.

“Diana knew about it and offered me help. The next morning I contacted her from the shelter at 6:30 a.m. I asked her if she could help get food supplies for me for the bus in case we got stuck again. She left right away and bought all the items I asked her for, and brought items in her car over to the middle school prior to our departure. She arrived with a big smile on her face and the first thing she asked was if there was anything else she could do. Even though people had bad experiences and

were stuck for hours on the bus and had to overnight in a middle school shelter, the friendliness and willingness to help from the locals and the Red Cross in Houston was an extraordinary experience,” he wrote.

“It shows the quality of our industry that people went so far above and beyond what is expected, during a time when the biggest concern was life and property,” Quill said. “Foremost, our thoughts and prayers were, and continue to be, with the local residents, but we also had a job to do, and I think the entire industry rose to the occasion.”

The Mat-Su CVB worked with

the state of Alaska tourism office on a familiarization trip that took place during the fire as well. With constant communication with the state office, the fam trip for five operators from Mexico went off without a hitch. “It involved a lot of communication, but we managed to showcase the Mat-Su Valley despite some trying conditions,” Quill said.

The rebuilding process has already begun, and fireweed is already starting to bloom in the area ravaged by flames just months ago.

The rising blooms are a sign that the area will recover quickly, much like the initial response to the disaster.

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Mat-Su Borough Assembly, Mayor candidates respond

Each fall, the Mat-Su CVB surveys the candidates for the open Mat-Su Borough Assembly (and mayor) positions. This year, there are nine candidates for three open seats, as well as the mayoral position. Below are their answers to the Mat-Su CVB questionnaire.

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 projected during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$715,000 for fiscal year 2016 for the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax) collection of \$1.1 million. The assembly two years ago supported action to extend the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB for three years through FY16 with the above formula. Do you support the existing grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB? Why or why not?

Larry Devilbiss, Mayor candidate: Favor. I have always used this tax and the borough's relationship with Mat-Su CVB as an example of how government and industry should work together. I was on the assembly or the planning commission when it was requested by the industry and have always supported it.

Vern Halter, Mayor candidate: Favor. I sponsored the three-year agreement and believe it should continue.

Rosemary Vavrin, Mayor candidate: Favor.

George McKee, District 3 candidate: Oppose. Given the state's financial circumstance it would be irresponsible to commit to any multi-year funding.

Maria Serrano, District 3 candidate: Did not respond.

Barb Doty, District 6 candidate: Yes. I favor maintaining the 65 percent share of the 5 percent bed tax with the Mat-Su CVB. The bed tax is designed to support the tourism industry for the Mat-Su Borough, arguably the top Mat-Su economic driver today with over 750,000 visitors. It makes sense to continue to utilize these dollars to promote tourism infrastructure development and effective marketing of our visitor opportunities.

Bob Doyle, District 6 candidate: Favor. I support the existing grant agreement with Mat-Su CVB. First,

I believe we must honor our past commitments even in tough financial times. Second, the bed tax supports a vibrant industry in our borough that creates numerous jobs in the summer months and throughout the year. The 5 percent bed tax has been proven to be a sustainable method to generate positive promotions about our beautiful Mat-Su Borough thereby increasing future tourism.

Doyle Holmes, District 7 candidate: Favor.

Randall Kowalke, District 7 candidate: Favor.

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?

Devilbiss, Mayor: Oppose. As a general principle a tax should always benefit the sector that is paying. When that gets skewed accountability is lost.

Halter, Mayor: Oppose. Absolutely not.

Vavrin, Mayor: Oppose.

McKee, District 3: Oppose.

Serrano, District 3: Did not respond.

Doty, District 6: I support using bed tax monies with a broader definition of "tourism" which includes tourism infrastructure development. This includes expenditures for roadside signage, bike pathways, trailhead access, scenic turnouts, parking pullouts, restroom facilities, critical road improvements, campgrounds, and new tourism opportunities such as a properly scaled alpine ski hill, a competitive Olympic-scaled pool, or a right-sized convention center. We should capitalize on the current low fuel rates that road improvements that support an influx of auto and motorhome traffic to Mat-Su and look for private and public partners to develop our yearround visitor options.

Doyle, District 6: No, I would not use bed tax monies for non-tourism purposes. We have a great opportunity at our Port MacKenzie that can be a win-win for our residents and businesses. When we quickly finish the rail line extension into the port, the new revenue will allow us to stop pitting one group against the other. We must develop our state's natural resources and our industrial tax base. By working

together we can develop the required infrastructure to support the needs of our growing population including better and safer roads, new tourist facilities along the Parks and Glenn highways, extend electrical power and natural gas as needed, and enhanced salmon escapement in Mat-Su rivers.

Holmes, District 7: Oppose in all cases except favor Mat-Su CVB needs to get involved in the Talkeetna water sewer problem and support bed tax money if needed.

Kowalke, District 7: Strongly oppose.

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). 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. The assembly has 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?

Devilbiss, Mayor: I have supported the Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center even when I was on the MEA board. MEA became the vehicle for transferring that property to the borough for the purpose of Mat-Su CVB use. I will continue to support and coordinate this project which is germane to our tourist infrastructure in the borough.

Halter, Mayor: Very much so! We need to build this new Visitor Center as soon as possible.

Vavrin, Mayor: Yes. And my reasons for all three answers are that the Mat-Su CVB is doing an excellent job and I want it to continue and draw even more visitors to the Mat-Su Valley, which is the Heart of Alaska. And, with a compliment comes a royal command: Keep up the good work! I have attended and participated

CANDIDATES

Continued from Page 6

in a number of your luncheons and annual meetings these last few years and I always learn more about how wonderful it is to live here.

McKee, District 3: Oppose for reasons previously stated. It might be prudent to keep the current facility.

Serrano, District 3: Did not respond.

Doty, District 6: I support a revised timeline with a phased-in approach for the Gateway Visitor Center in light of current fiscal realities. Local, state or federal public dollars for the proposed \$4.6 million required to implement the plan are not likely to be allocated in the current fiscal crisis. With the sale of the lands for the existing facility, it is important to have an interim plan so that the Mat-Su CVB can continue to have a visible presence and a successful positive impact. An active search for alternative funding will be critical. An interim Mat-Su CVB office should be developed.

Doyle, District 6: Yes, I support the development of the new Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center. We need a more accessible and visible center. I knew about this project as a board member of MEA when we purchased the site and then resold the site at cost to the borough. I have a good working relationship with our borough's legislative delegation, and will do whatever I can to help. We must support the continued development of our state's natural resources to help with our state's financial situation including tax credits for oil and gas exploration in Cook Inlet and the development of local LNG facilities by private enterprise.

Holmes, District 7: Yes.

Kowalke, District 7: I strongly support the Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center. I believe that this center, when completed, will become an integral part of the infrastructure needed to help our Borough to continue to grow our tourism opportunities, ultimately benefiting the Mat-Su Borough and all of Southcentral Alaska.

The Mat-Su Borough election is Oct. 6. To find out more about the local election, including polling places, visit www.matsugov.us or call the borough at 861-8683.



Work has begun on a complete Web redesign, which will utilize the latest technology.

Web site redesign project launched

The Mat-Su CVB Web site, which assists more than 80,000 unique visitors with information annually, is going to undergo a major redesign in the coming months, to keep up with the latest technology and trends.

The Web site, www.alaskavisit.com, is the CVB's number one marketing tool in reaching visitors from all facets of the tourism industry, and directs visitors to member listings, requests for visitor guides and information about the Mat-Su Valley.

"We're excited about the redesign because it will better assist visitors, which in turn drives traffic back to our members," Mat-Su CVB Marketing & Communications Manager Casey Ressler said. "The current site was last redesigned six years ago, so it's definitely time."

The new site will include responsive design, which is a way of designing Web sites that scales them from a desktop site to the best viewing options on a mobile device such as smartphones. What was a new trend just a few years ago has become the standard in Web site design today.

"You simply have to design for mobile first in today's world," Ressler said. "This year, there are more Google searches on a mobile device than on a desktop computer. We have to meet that demand with our site design."

In addition to ease of use, responsive design is also vitally important for another reason that isn't necessarily apparent when you view the site – search engine optimization.

"The search engines, Google in particular, put a massive emphasis on mobile compatibility, and if you aren't meeting that criteria, you are ranking lower and lower on searches every time they change their algorithms," Ressler said. "From a marketing standpoint, this means you are being seen by less and less people unless you design with mobile in mind."

After an RFP process, SimpleView Inc. of Tucson, Ariz., was selected by the Mat-Su CVB Internet Committee. Ressler said it was a great choice by the committee.

"We've had a very lengthy, and very positive relationship with SimpleView. They have designed the site the last two times, and we've been a client of theirs since 2002," Ressler said. "They know our area, they know our needs, and they know our site. We're looking forward to working with them."

Designing a Web site and adopting entirely new technology on the "back end" takes time.

"While we'd love to have the new site up and running immediately, it simply doesn't happen like that," Ressler explained. "We're going to be working with SimpleView throughout the winter on all phases of the project, from picking out images to some of the coding technologies that integrate our social media feeds and our database information. We're expecting to launch in the early spring of 2016."

For more information about the Web site and responsive design, contact Ressler at casey@alaskavisit.com.

Candidate forum kicks off upcoming luncheon schedule

The Mat-Su CVB luncheons return beginning Sept. 17 with the annual Mat-Su Borough Candidate Forum, and continue monthly through the spring.

Member luncheons are a great place to network with other members, find out about topics and issues that are relevant to the tourism industry and build business relationships.

The candidate forum is at noon at Evangelo's on Sept. 17 (note this is a Thursday, instead of the traditional Friday luncheons).

It's your chance to meet the candidates for the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and the Mat-Su Borough Mayor races, and submit questions for them during the forum. This year, there are three candidates running for the mayor position, and six candidates running for three open Assembly seats.

Each borough candidate will give a brief introduction, answer a question, and respond to the other candidates' answers, in a timed format.

Copies of the candidates' answers to a Mat-Su CVB survey can be seen on Page 6 of this newsletter, and will also be provided at the luncheon.

In October, the luncheon moves to Palmer on Oct. 19. The topic is "Mat-Su CVB 2.0," and is your chance to learn about all of the programs Mat-Su CVB offers, how we market the Valley to a wide range of audiences, and also to hear about future marketing efforts, including a brand new Web site redesign. If you've always wondered how we market the Mat-Su Valley to different potential visitors, this is the luncheon to attend.

As an added incentive, if you bring a potential new member to the October luncheon, you'll be entered to win a \$50 gift certificate to Turkey Red.

November's luncheon is held in conjunction with the annual meeting and awards. Tickets are \$25 each and are available by calling 746-5000.

In December, the Mat-Su CVB doesn't have a membership luncheon due to people leaving for the holiday break.

For information about membership luncheons or any member program, interested people can contact Justin Saunders at Justin@alaskavisit.com.



Lorraine Jallen and Carole Wegner man the Visitor Information Center front desk in August. The center will close for the season on Sept. 15.

Visitor Center closing Sept. 15

The Mat-Su Visitor Information Center closes its doors Sept. 15, ending another summer of assisting visitors with their travels.

Manager Lorraine Jallen said the center welcomed visitors from around the world this summer, and that her staff enjoyed every minute of meeting people from far-flung places.

"It's neat to find out where people are from and what they are doing on their

Alaska vacation," Jallen said. "We get people from all around the world. We love to show them the fun things to do in the Valley. They always appreciate us helping them out."

The Mat-Su VIC, located at Mile 35.5 Parks Highway in front of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, is open annually from mid-May through mid-September. The Mat-Su CVB office is open year-round in the lower level of the VIC.

2016 Visitor Guide available soon

The 2016 edition of the Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide will be available for members the second week of November, following the annual meeting.

The guide is being designed by Solstice Advertising in Anchorage, the same advertising agency that designed the last two guides.

This year, four additional pages were added to the guide, which gave the designers some flexibility to enhance the guide even more.

"By expanding the guide four pages, we were able to include more editorial, and give potential visitors even more reasons why they should choose the Mat-Su Valley," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager.

There are 100,000 copies of the guide distributed each year. The Mat-Su CVB fulfills 10,000 guides through requests on the Web site, and also distributes 50,000 guides through the state of Alaska's leads program. Guides are also distributed throughout Alaska in highly visible locations such as visitor centers, airports and hotels.

"It's a great tool, and a great way for members to have their businesses seen by 100,000 potential customers," Ressler said. "It's a piece we're proud of. Even in today's increasingly digital world, there will always be a place for a printed guide."

The guide will also be available for download through the Mat-Su CVB's Web site.

News from the membership

Arkose Brewery announces plans to bottle their four flagship beers in 22-ounce bottles - Bitter Earth ESB, No. 5 Boxcar Porter, High Ridge Double Red and Steed Rye IPA will be available on retail shelves in the fall of this year. The four flagships are currently distributed on tap all over Alaska by Specialty Imports. "We chose 22-ounce bottles because it is the best way for an independent craft brewery like ours to get a variety of beers out to customers" said cofounder and head brewer Stephen Gerteisen. "The next step will be to put our most popular beers in cans." For more information, visit www.arkosebrewery.com or call (907) 746-2337.

Alaska Garden Gate's new Inn building is a great location for a group event, whether a meeting or overnight stay for a retreat, or lodging for teams. The five Inn rooms have bunk beds to sleep up to 30 people, with additional spots in our cottages and apartments, for a total of up to 60 people. Special discounted per-person rates apply to groups to keep costs low for multi-night stays. The 1,200-square foot Breakfast Hall seats up to 56 at round tables, and catering is available onsite for lunches, dinners or snacks. The hall is also available for quilting groups or other meetings needing a large room. In the Breakfast Hall, there's a 66" TV which is compatible for digital presentations. It's handicap accessible with a ramp and large bathroom, and several of the sleeping rooms have roll-in showers, too. There is parking for 30 vehicles. Alaska Garden Gate B&B and Cottages is open year-round. Call Karen at 746-2333 to schedule your meeting, group or team event.

Sheep Mountain Lodge has new owners after longtime owners Zack and Anjanette Steer turned over the business to couples Mark and Ruthann Fleenor and Ryan and Rachel Cote. The lodge is planning to stay open all winter long, the restaurant open on weekends only. The 13 kilometers of cross country ski trails on the property — which connect to the Eureka Lodge and Long Lake trails — will be groomed this winter.

"In every job that must be done there is an element of fun."
Mary Poppins

Find big mountains and big ideas when you meet in the Mat-Su Valley.
Just 35 miles north of Anchorage. www.alaskavisit.com

MAT-SU
Valley

This ad appeared in *Alaska Business Monthly*, targeting meeting planners. The Mat-Su CVB advertises in a number of different publication, with targeted messages.

Targeted advertising in print, online important to marketing efforts

In addition to working with tour operators, travel media and reaching consumers through the Web site, the Mat-Su CVB also uses targeted advertising as part of its overall marketing plan.

In 2015, more than 30 different publications, radio stations, online outlets and television stations were used to get our message out through a number of campaigns.

The in-state market was reached through television, radio and print; outside consumers were reached through visitor guides and vacation planners; local awareness was accomplished through print; and even event promotion and the meetings market were accomplished.

"Online, print, radio, television - they all have an impact in reaching our desired audiences," said Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager.

Online

ADN.com

Summer Visitor Guide banner ad

Facebook

KTUU.com

Alaska Travelgram

ADN.com

Shoulder season, in-state

On television

KTUU Channel 2 summer campaign

Statewide channels

Tourism awareness campaign

In print

Coast Magazine

Iron Dog guide

Alaska Dispatch News -event ads

Talkeetna Winterfest

Colony Christmas

Willow Winter Carnival

Big Lake Winter Fest

Alaska Dispatch News – in-state campaign

Fairbanks CVB Visitor Guide

Visit Anchorage Visitor Guide

State of Alaska Vacation Planner

The Milepost

Bell's Travel Guide

Frontiersman Winter Recreation Guide

Frontiersman Summer Visitor Guide

Frontiersman

Tourism awareness campaign

Alaska Magazine

Alaska Business Monthly

On radio

KMBQ

Country Legends

Local awareness

Country Legends

Summer fishing report

Local awareness

KBBO Anchorage

KRMB Anchorage

Nominations sought for ‘Stars of the Industry’ awards

Nominations are now being solicited for businesses and individuals who have made a positive difference in the tourism industry in the last year. The Mat-Su CVB “Stars of the Industry” award luncheon will honor their contributions on Nov. 13, held in conjunction with the annual meeting.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development. Last year, the Mat-Su Borough took the award.

The Gold Star Award recognizes a business or organization that has made

significant accomplishments in the tourism industry. In 2014, the honoree was Salmon Berry Tours for their contributions to not only tourism in general, but winter tourism specifically.

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. Last year, former Mat-Su Borough assemblyman and current state representative Jim Colver was honored.

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. Arkose Brewery was last year’s honoree.

There are also a few awards that don’t get handed out every year. The “It Happens” award is given to an individual or organization that has taken lemons and turned them into lemonade. It is intended to laugh with, not at, the winners.

Nominations can be made by using the form below. Members can fax the form to 746-2688 or e-mail nominations to Justin@alaskavisit.com.

The deadline for nominations is Oct. 15.

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. 15. Mat-Su CVB; 7744 E. Visitors View Ct.; Palmer, AK 99645; Fax (907) 746-2688

Tourism industry calendar of events

Sept. 17	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon Mat-Su Borough Candidate Forum	Noon, Evangelo's
Sept. 23-25	Destination Marketing Associations West Annual Convention <i>Bonnie Quill will attend</i>	Ogden, Utah
Oct. 5-8	Alaska Travel Industry Association Annual Convention <i>Mat-Su CVB staff will attend</i>	Juneau
Oct. 16	Mat-Su CVB Membership Luncheon "Mat-Su CVB 2.0" presented by Casey Ressler and Justin Saunders	Noon, Turkey Red (Palmer)
Nov. 1-3	Alaska Media Road Show <i>Mat-Su CVB staff will attend</i>	Santa Barbara, Calif.
Nov. 13	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting "Grow Tourism" Workshops begin at 9 a.m., annual business meeting starts at 11 a.m.	Evangelo's
Nov. 13	"Stars of the Industry" luncheon Awards banquet held in conjunction with the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting	Evangelo's, noon
Nov. 26-27	Mat-Su CVB offices closed for Thanksgiving holiday	

Welcome to the newest Mat-Su CVB members

Please help us welcoming these businesses as the newest Mat-Su CVB members.

Windbreak Cafe, Bar & Hotel Markie Andres (907) 376-4484	Sleeping Inn Alaska Cec Matlock (907) 354-4504 sleepinginnalaska@gmail.com	Wickersham Trading Post Debra Hartman (907) 746-1122 dhartman@yahoo.com
Alyeska Resort & Hotel Eric Fullerton (907) 754-1111 efullerton@alyskaresort.com	Palmer Golf Course George Collum (907) 745-4653 eaglegolf@mtaonline.net	Settlers Bay Golf Course Amos Stephens (907) 376-5466 Amos@settlersbay.com
Glacier Park Bill Stevenson (907) 745-2534	Palmer City Alehouse Matt Tomter (907) 622-7113 tomtermatt@yahoo.com	McKinley Chalet Resort Courtney Massey (206) 336-5921 cmassey@hollandamerica-princesstours.com
Turner's Corner Jim Turner (907) 745-6161 lotinc@mtaonline.net	Alaska's Country Charm Brendarae Coor (907) 862-7123 alaskascountrycharm@gmail.com	Ehmann Outdoors Jehnifer Ehmann (907) 982-4971 EhmannOutdoors@gmail.com
Eklutna Historical Park Mikel Bock (907) 688-6026 mbock1@gci.net	A Mooseberry Inn B&B Maggie Brooks (907) 388-5525 info@amooseberryinn.com	Alaska Edge Wilderness Tours Fred Nugent (907) 733-7774 fred@alaskaedge.com
Alaska Bush Float Plane Service Jason Sturgis (907) 733-1693 akbush@mtaonline.net	Bear Mountain Air Joe Huston (907) 373-3347 bearmountainair@mtaonline.net	North Star Bakery Donna Young (907) 357-2579 donna@northstarbakery.com
Extreme Fun Center & The Valley Cinema Cheryl Metiva (907) 770-7223 cherylm@catheatres.com	Iditarod Trailside Lodging Craig Saunders (907) 733-2505 craigakrep@gmail.com	A Lazy Acres Helen Munoz (907) 745-6340



The sun sets behind Denali around 1 a.m. last June 16. This was the scene four tour operators from Mexico were treated to on a FAM trip hosted by the Mat-Su CVB earlier this summer.

YAHOO!

Mat-Su

7744 E. Visitors View Ct.
Palmer, AK 99645

(907) 746-5000
www.alaskavisit.com