

The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Spring 2013

Inside this issue

Mat-Su CVB board president Craig Saunders is pleased the Legislature included \$1 million for the Gateway Visitor Center project

Page 2

Mat-Su CVB director Bonnie Quill says marketing travel and tourism is important to our economy

Page 3

The Mat-Su CVB wine tasting and travel auction ExTRAVELganza was a rousing success in April

Page 4

Contact us

Bonnie Quill

Executive Director
746-5001
bonnie@alaskavisit.com

Casey Ressler

Marketing & Communications
Manager
746-5037
casey@alaskavisit.com

Justin Saunders

Membership Manager
746-5032
justin@alaskavisit.com

Neil Campbell

Administrative Manager
746-5000
info@alaskavisit.com



The Mat-Su CVB Open House is a great way for members to network with other members, and inform them of their offerings for the upcoming season. The annual event is set for May 15 at 4 p.m. at the center, located in front of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center.

Summer season kicks off with May 15 open house

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting its annual open house on May 15 at 4 p.m., giving members the chance to meet one another and inform them about new products and offerings, just as the busy summer tourism season begins.

The open house coincides with the opening of the Mat-Su Visitor Information Center, kicking off the season in grand fashion. Staff members will be manning the grill and serving up burgers for members at the event.

“The open house is a great opportunity to network with other members, find out what other businesses are doing, and get ready for the summer season,” said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. “It’s good for generating referrals throughout the summer.”

Members are also encouraged to meet with the Visitor Information Center

staff during the open house to give them updated information about their businesses. Also, members can bring in their latest brochures for distribution at the center, which stays open until mid September.

“The VIC staff is the first link to the customer, so it’s important they are informed about your business,” Saunders said. “The more they know, the better they can assist visitors. And that means great referral business for our members.”

The open house begins at 4 p.m. with burgers and VIC manager Lorraine Jallen’s almost world-famous root beer floats. Members can sign up for three-minute spotlights on their business when they arrive.

For more information, interested members can call Saunders at 746-5032 or e-mail him at justin@alaskavisit.com.

**2012-2013
Mat-Su CVB
Board of Directors**

Craig Saunders
Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours
President
745-2505
alaskavisit@alaska.com

Cheryl Metiva
Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman
Vice President
275-2109
addirector@frontiersman.com

Steve Zadra
Princess Tours
Secretary
550-7778
szadra@hollandamerica-princess.com

Nicole Bendle
First National Bank Alaska
Treasurer
352-5900
nbendle@fnbalaska.com

Dee Dee Kay
Alaska Heritage Tours
Past President
777-2829
dkay@ciri.com

Karen Harris
Alaska Garden Gate Bed & Breakfast
746-2333
info@gardengatebnb.com

Ruth Rosewarne Kimerer
Alaska Railroad
265-2543
kimererr@akrr.com

Mark Austin
Musk Ox Farm
Executive Committee member
745-4151
mark@muskoxfarm.org

Darlene Hunter
Susitna River Lodging
733-0505
lodging@mtaonline.net

Mabel Wimmer
Mendeltna Creek Lodge
822-3346
mendeltnalodge@cvineternet.net

*The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors
is voted on by the general membership
every October.*

From the president's desk

Gateway Visitor Center included in capital budget

The Mat-Su CVB has long had a vision of a new Gateway Visitor Center, and that vision took a huge step toward becoming a reality recently.

The Legislature included \$1 million for the project in its capital budget, something we are very thankful and excited about. This funding is dedicated to land acquisition costs and design costs, two big hurdles in getting the project started. With this funding, the first steps can finally begin.

We've spent a lot of time and volunteer effort to make this center become a reality. We've worked with our local legislators, with the Mat-Su Borough Assembly, with local cities and even small community organizations to garner support for this project. We see it as a huge economic development opportunity for the tourism industry in the Mat-Su Valley.

The goal is to develop a partnership visitor center that is a destination in itself. Our current center, located in the log cabin in front of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, was a shining star with great visibility for years. But commercial development in the area during the last 5-10 years has made it a challenge for visitors, both in visibility and access. A new center would alleviate those problems, and also lead to increased visitation – and longer stays for our visitors. It will help direct those visitors to your businesses every day, which will have

a big impact on our local economy.

We've come a long way since the idea stage. A site evaluation study was conducted a few years ago, and the

property at the top of the list is the old Homestead RV Park site on the Glenn Highway. MEA bought the parcel for right-of-way for their new power plant, but we've had an open and honest dialogue with them and feel that we can develop a strong partnership that will help us move forward on the visitor center project. We've already signed an "option to purchase" agreement with MEA, another important step.

Thank you to all of you, our members, who have lent your support for this project, both by signing

letters of support, contacting legislators or attending planning meetings. This is a legacy project, and it's great to see the dedicated and continued support.

Thanks also to our local delegation in the Alaska House of Representatives and Senate.

Their support of the project is deeply important, and we're thrilled they share our vision and commitment to making the Gateway Visitor Center an important part of our community.

Craig Saunders owns Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours and is president of the Mat-Su CVB board of directors.



Craig Saunders

Save the date!

**Visitor Information Center Open House
May 15, 4-7 p.m.**

*Grab a burger, give an update on your business, meet
the VIC staff and get ready for a busy 2013 summer
tourism season!*

*From the executive director***Don't undervalue the power of travel promotion**

Yahoo! Mat-Su - a new creative travel promotion campaign in print, television, online and social media will soon launch. The theme and goal are unchanged (visit Mat-Su Valley's many recreation opportunities), but updated images and HD-quality video will certainly create awareness in the in-state market.

Alaska residents and their visiting friends and relatives account for 60 percent of visitor expenditures in the Mat-Su. Our new advertising campaign is aimed to lure Alaskan's to your door.

The state of Alaska's \$17 million tourism marketing campaign has been in full swing since last fall, creating awareness of travel to Alaska in all forms of media. The campaign included a \$5.7 million television buy, the largest ever for Alaska tourism promotion.

The campaign has created an increase in responses for travel planning information and indicates an increase in travel intentions. Just last month, more than 200,000 Alaska Travel Planners had to be printed to keep up with the additional responses.

We are ready and optimistic for a record-breaking visitor season.

Travel promotion feeds a virtuous cycle of economic benefits. Visitor spending supports new jobs and generates additional tax revenue that pays for the initial investment many times over. Travel and tourism is a cash-generating machine for state and local governments. A recent McDowell study reports annual visitors contribute more than \$208 million annually to state and local governments in taxes and fees.

Travel promotion dollars go toward much more than glossy brochures and ads in magazines; tourism bureaus research and execute marketing campaigns, represent the destination at domestic and international trade shows, engage and interact with key media and journalists, meet with group travel buyers and meeting planners and maintain an interactive

presence through websites, social media and other means to communicate daily with all stakeholders.

The ultimate goal, of course, is increasing visitors and increasing visitor spending.

As the Mat-Su Borough Assembly considers next year's budget, I urge our elected officials to take a hard look at the economic return of destination marketing. Across the nation, states and communities are reaping the benefits of increased travelers and tourists thanks

to travel promotion. We in the Mat-Su Valley enjoy those same benefits, which is why we support the dedication of bed tax dollars to tourism marketing and tourism infrastructure.

Bonnie Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) is the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau Executive Director.



Bonnie Quill

ABA, NTA events reach domestic tour operators

January was spent marketing the Mat-Su Valley to domestic tour operators, as the busy month included both the American Bus Association Marketplace and the National Tour Association Travel Exchange events.

Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB attended both events, meeting with operators who were interested in learning about what's new in the Valley, and how they can build out their Alaska packages.

"At both events, we had prescheduled appointments and made great connections with tour operators," Ressler said. "Every operator we met with were encouraged about their 2013 Alaska packages, and are already looking to add to their 2014 offerings."

The ABA event was held in Charlotte, while the NTA Travel Exchange was held in Orlando, just 10 days later.

"It was a very busy month, but a very productive one," Ressler said. "Different operators attend each show, so it's important to be at both and represent the Mat-Su Valley."

For the first time, the Mat-Su CVB also



The Alaska delegation takes the stage at the National Tour Association Travel Exchange event in Orlando in January.

participated in the state of Alaska's travel agent mailing in January.

"The program targets 3,500 of the nation's top travel agents who sell Alaska. A packet is put together that includes information from destinations and

companies that participate, and mailed to the agents during January," Ressler explained.

The Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide was included in the mailing, including all member listings.

ExTRAVELganza event raises fun, funds for CVB

The Mat-Su CVB hosted its successful annual wine tasting and travel auction “ExTRAVELganza” on April 5 at Evangelo’s, and one lucky winner received two airline tickets on Alaska Airlines.

The auction is the largest fund-raiser for the CVB, and once again this year, the event was a success as a sellout crowd enjoyed wine donated by Brown Jug and bid on items ranging from Caribbean cruises to Alaska getaways and goods from local artists.

“Everyone has a good time, but more importantly, it helps raise money for our marketing projects and also community

awareness of the organization,” said membership manager Justin Saunders, who organizes the event each year. “This year’s event was one of our most successful we’ve ever had,” Saunders said.

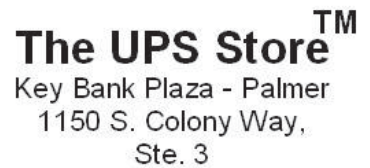
The luggage tag raffle, sponsored by MTA, was a hit once again, as the CVB sold out of the 300 luggage tag entries. At the end of the auction, one lucky winner was pulled by MTA’s Kristy Bernier – Wasilla’s Karen Davidson. She won two round-trip tickets anywhere Alaska Airlines flies.

The success of the auction wouldn’t be possible without a group effort, Saunders

said. A lot of work goes into ensuring the event’s success each year.

“Sponsors and donors are so key to us putting together a successful auction, and we couldn’t do it without them,” he said. “They all deserve a big thanks.”

The 2013 wine tasting and travel auction was sponsored by MTA, All I Saw Cookware, Alaska Denali Travel, Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours, Princess Cruises, Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman, MVFCU, The UPS Store Palmer, The Grape Tap, the Alaska Railroad, Brown Jug, Alaska Airlines and First National Bank Alaska.



Special thanks to all donors to the travel auction

AIE Inc	Mahay's Riverboat Service
Alaska Airlines	Major Marine Tours
Alaska Aviation Museum	Matanuska Electric Association
Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours	Matanuska Telephone Association
Alaska Center for Acupuncture	Mat-Su Miners Baseball
Alaska Dispatch	Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman
Alaska Magazine / The Milepost	MICA Guides
Alaska Railroad Corporation	Millennium Alaskan Hotel
Alaska Raptor Center	Museum of Alaska Transportation & Industry
Alaska SeaLife Center	NMS Lodging
Alaska Wildland Adventures	NOVA River Runners
Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center	Palmer Golf Course
Alaska Zoo	Palmer Historical Society
Anchorage Museum	Phillips Cruises & Tours
All I Saw Cookware	Premier Alaska Tours
Barrett's Carvings	Princess Cruises
BIONIC Chiropractic	Red Robin
Blueberry Pie Dolls	Ressler's Cake Pops
CIRI Alaska Tourism Corporation	Riverboat Discovery
Conoco Phillips Alaska, Inc.	River's Edge Resort
Denali ATV Adventures	Shane Lamb Studios
Deshka Landing Outdoor Association, LLC	Spenard Builders Supply
Diamond Airport Parking	St. Elias Alpine Guides, LLC.
Diamond M Ranch Resort	Stan Stephens Glacier & Wildlife Cruises
Healing Path Therapeutic Massage	Sunny Cove Sea Kayaking Company
Iditarod Trail Committee	Talkeetna Air Taxi
K2 Aviation	TEMSCO Helicopters, Inc.
Kenai River Drifter's Lodge	Town Square Art Gallery
Knik Glacier Tours	Turkey Red
Knik River Lodge	Visit Anchorage
Leonard's Landing Lodge	Woolly Bugger's Closet

Mat-Su CVB attends two national consumer shows

The Mat-Su CVB attended two national consumer shows – but one turned into a travel trade training mission as a result of Mother Nature.

Executive Director Bonnie Quill attended the Boston Globe Travel Show in early February, which fell on the same weekend as the nasty winter storm hit the Northeast. The Alaska contingent didn't let some snow stop them, however.

"We set up a makeshift destination training session in the hotel when the show was cancelled on Saturday," Quill said. "The Alaskans at the show talked to representatives from JetBlue and travel agents about the destination, and it turned

"The Alaskans at the show talked to representatives from JetBlue and other airlines about the destination, and it turned out to be a very productive day despite the unforeseen cancellation."

- Bonnie Quill,
Mat-Su CVB Executive Director

out to be a very productive day despite the unforeseen cancellation."

The show continued on Sunday, and Quill said the response was great.

In late February, Casey Ressler attended the Los Angeles Times Travel Show, partnering with the state of Alaska in their booth. Attendees were excited to hear

about Alaska, and many already had their vacations booked.

"There was a great response, and a lot of interest in not only visiting Alaska, but also visiting the Mat-Su Valley," Ressler said. "We were the only partner in the state's booth, so it gave us a great opportunity to showcase the Valley to people who were interested in general Alaska information."

At both shows, Mat-Su CVB staff was in the state of Alaska's booth. By joining the cooperative marketing program, it significantly cuts down on the cost of attending the shows for the CVB, yet still gets our message and our visitor guides to high-potential visitors.

New direct flights make Alaska accessible to Europe

The Mat-Su CVB joined a strong Alaska contingent at the Mid-Atlantic Seminar in Reykjavik, Iceland in early February, meeting with travel agents and tour operators from Europe who are interested in building more Alaska packages.

The seminar is highly subsidized by Icelandair, who recently announced nonstop service from Reykjavik to Anchorage seasonally, starting May 15. The flights will make Alaska even more accessible for European travelers,

something that will benefit the entire state.

"It's a great low-cost opportunity to meet with agents and operators who are taking advantage of the new route, which opens up a lot of Europe for Alaska," Casey Ressler said. "Alaska had a big delegation, and definitely made a great impression."

Icelandair covers the cost of the flights from the Lower 48, as well as lodging and other expenses in Reykjavik. They offer the seminar every February so destinations and companies make connections with tour operators and agents – who ultimately will sell seats on the airlines. A screening process ensures only qualified agents and operators attend the seminar.

This year, Alaskans had prescheduled appointments during the seminar. The final night's dinner was sponsored by Visit Anchorage, and included music by the noted Alaska group Pamyua.

"The appointments were very good, and the final dinner really showcased Alaska and generated a great buzz about selling Alaska tours," Ressler said. "We're lucky to have such strong partnerships among all the Alaskans."

Ressler wasn't the only Mat-Su representative at the Mid-Atlantic Seminar, however. Trisha Costello of Talkeetna Roadhouse had a booth, as did Kristen Dixon of Within The Wild Adventures. Liz Johnson of CIRI Alaska Tourism also represented the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge at the event.

"It was great to not only have that many Alaskans there, but such a strong Mat-Su presence as well," Ressler said. "We definitely made a positive impression on the tour operators who attended."



Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB meets with a UK tour operator during the Mid-Atlantic Seminar, hosted by Icelandair in February. The airline is starting new routes from Reykjavik to Anchorage on May 15.

In-state market targeted during outdoor shows

The Mat-Su CVB participated in three in-state consumer shows this spring, with an emphasis on promoting the Valley to Alaska residents.

The spring marketing season is filled with outdoor shows that target Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives, and the Mat-Su and Anchorage shows both were successful in reaching that audience.

“The outdoor shows come at a great time – when Alaskans are ready to get out and start planning their summer trips,” said Casey Ressler, marketing manager. “After a long winter, everyone is ready for summer.”

The Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show was held March 22-24 at the Menard Sports Center. Each year, the show is the first of its kind in Alaska, and Valley residents flock to the Menard to find out the latest information from guides, outfitters and more.

The largest Alaska consumer show of the year is the Great Alaska Sportsman Show, which was held March 28-April 31 at the Sullivan Arena.

“The Anchorage show is an important one because it has such a huge attendance,” Ressler said. “A lot of people picked up visitor guides and member brochures for



Casey Ressler mans the Mat-Su CVB booth at the Fairbanks Outdoors Show in mid-April.

their visiting friends and relatives. It's a long show, but very productive for us to attend.”

On April 19-21 the Mat-Su CVB had a booth at the Fairbanks Outdoors Show at the Carlson Center. With a heavy military population, the Fairbanks market is an important one.

“We see a lot of military members who are only going to be in Alaska for a few years, and they want to see and experience everything the state has to offer,” Ressler said.

The Fairbanks show set a record for attendance this year, according to event organizers.

Visitor Guide advertising packets mailing in May

While the 2013 summer season is just starting, the Mat-Su CVB is already looking to 2014, as advertising packets for the 2014 Visitor Guide are going in the mail later this month. Look for your packet that details how you can stand out in the guide.

The guide is the primary printed marketing collateral for the CVB, and every member gets a free basic listing as part of their membership. This includes your business name, address, phone number and Web address. Additional lines can be purchased, as well as display advertising at a very reasonable rate.

“Each year, we make a commitment to keep the rates as low as possible – and they are as low as any advertising opportunity you'll find,” said membership manager Justin Saunders. “When you consider how far these guides reach, it's a very economical way to market your business.”

Display advertising rates start at just \$170 - a value when compared to other visitor guides published in Alaska.

Once again this year, 100,000 guides

will be printed in late October/early November. The guides are distributed throughout Alaska, at two national consumer shows, internationally during sales missions and mailed to direct requests. More than 3,000 guides are mailed to the highest producing travel agents around the country, and 50,000 guides are direct mailed to high potential visitors interested in learning more about Alaska, as identified by the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

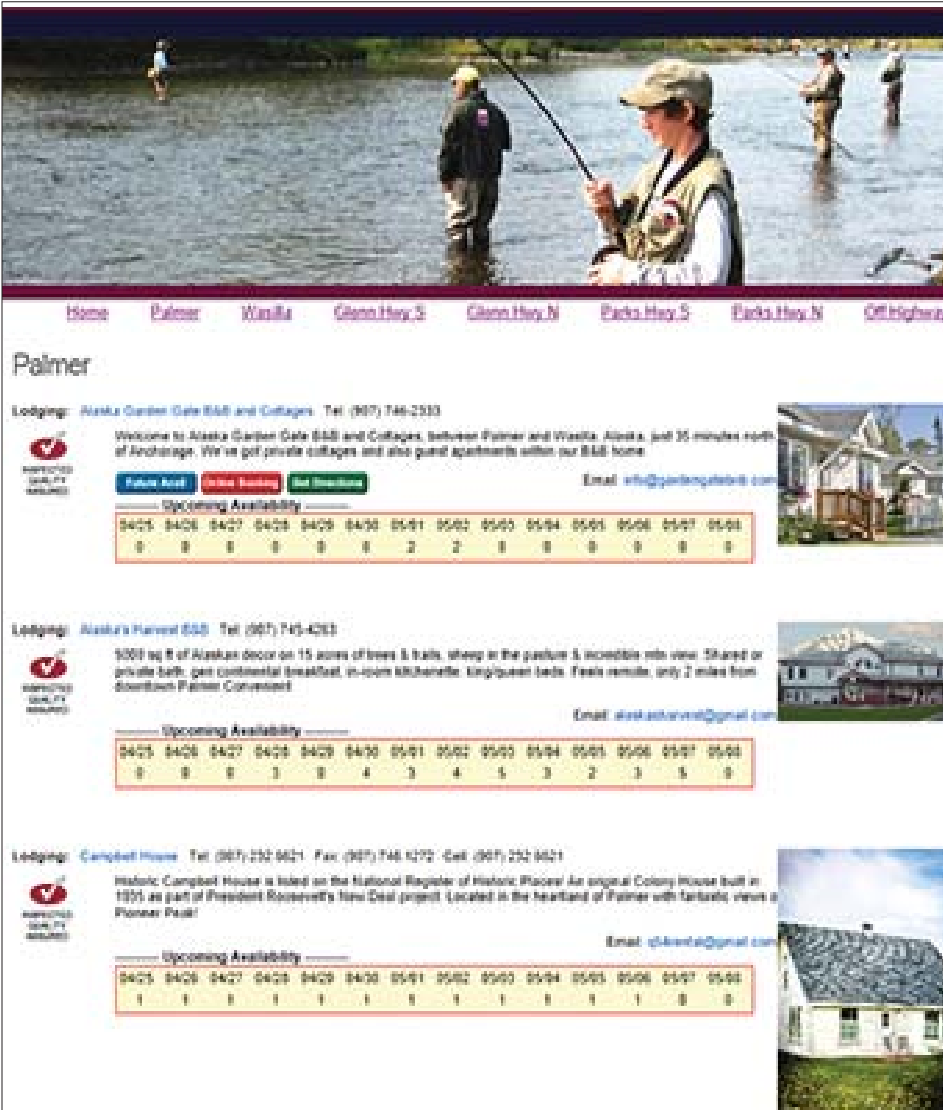
“By being in the guide, you are reaching a wide variety of potential visitors – travel trade, independent travelers, agents, international visitors and more,” Saunders said.

This year, Solstice Advertising in Anchorage is doing the layout and graphics work, with direction from longtime designer Chris Whittington-Evans of Palmer.

For more information about the Visitor Guide, interested members can call Saunders at 746-5032 or e-mail him at justin@alaskavisit.com.



CVB partners with B&B owners on availability system



The Mat-Su CVB has partnered with the local bed and breakfast association to offer a new availability Web site to members, geared to generating last-minute bookings.

The new site, www.matsuavailability.com, lists open beds or tour seats for up to 14 days. There is no cost for Mat-Su CVB members to participate and have their availability on the site.

“This system has been available in the past, but the Alaska’s Mat-Su Bed & Breakfast Association, as well as the CVB, have invested in making it even more robust this year,” said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. “It’s not limited to just lodging properties – we see it as a valuable tool for all our members.”

Members must log in to the system and update their availability to appear on the site. If, after 14 days there is no member activity, they are “deactivated” and don’t appear. Taking a minute or two every couple of days is important in making the site work for businesses.

“It’s a great way to generate referrals,” Saunders said. “If a B&B has a guest looking for something to do, they can go on to the site and see what is available for that day.”

The system is also valuable to attractions. They can access the system and print out the current availability, giving their guests more options to choose, which can extend their stay in the Valley, and benefit others in the tourism industry.

For more information about the system, or to have your business listed, interested people can contact Saunders at justin@alaskavisit.com.

Mat-Su CVB members can have their availabilities listed on www.matsuavailability.com for free, as an added membership benefit. The newly redesigned site lists occupancy for the upcoming 14 days.

Stay connected!



www.facebook.com/visitmatsu



www.twitter.com/visitmatsu



YouTube
“yahoomatsu” channel

Mat-Su CVB remembers two Visitor Center friends

The Mat-Su CVB team lost two dear friends this winter, as Margaret Heaven and Louise Kuehn passed away following battles with cancer.

Both women worked in the Visitor Information Center for more than a decade, each and both will be sorely missed this summer. Their vibrant personalities were a hit with visitors to the center, and with their fellow staff members.

“Louise and Margaret were not only great members of our staff, but our friends and great ambassadors for the community,” said Bonnie Quill, executive director. “They will be missed.”

Kuehn and Heaven were the two anchors among the Visitor Information Center staff, said VIC Manager Lorraine Jallen.

Margaret and her late husband, LeRoi, were integral parts of the Wasilla community. They were very active in the local historical society, and regularly hosted school groups at their Wasilla-area homestead, known affectionately as “Heaven’s Hayfield.” They shared a passion for the Mat-Su Valley, and it was evident in all of their endeavors.

“Margaret and LeRoi were icons in the Mat-Su Valley,” Quill said. “They gave back to their community every chance they



had.”

Louise was active in a number of community organizations, including Sacred Heart Church and the American Legion women’s auxiliary. Her and her husband, Gary, lived in Wasilla since 1989, and they have lived in Alaska since 1972.

In addition to supporting various community organizations, Louise was also an accomplished jewelry maker and sold her silver jewelry in the VIC throughout the summer.



Visitor Center manager Louise Jallen, above left, jokes with Margaret Heaven during the 2009 summer. At left, Louise Kuehn was a visitor center staple for more than a decade. Both will be missed by the Mat-Su CVB staff this summer.

Palmer’s history comes alive on national television

The history of the Valley is set to play on television screens around the country this spring.

Alaska Far Away, a documentary about the Matanuska Colonists project, has been picked up by more than 50 public television stations around the country, giving the Valley a big national audience this year.

“The film was released in 2008, and it was shown in Anchorage on KAKM in 2010. Since then, we’ve been on seven stations, but this announcement was great for us,” said filmmaker Joanie Juster. “This January, 53 stations signed on to air the movie, starting in May.”

Juster and her business partner worked on the film for 19 years, chronicling the plight of Colonists who were relocated to the Palmer area from the Midwest. It’s been a labor of love for her, and it’s finally coming to fruition.

“It really was a community project in that so many people helped with

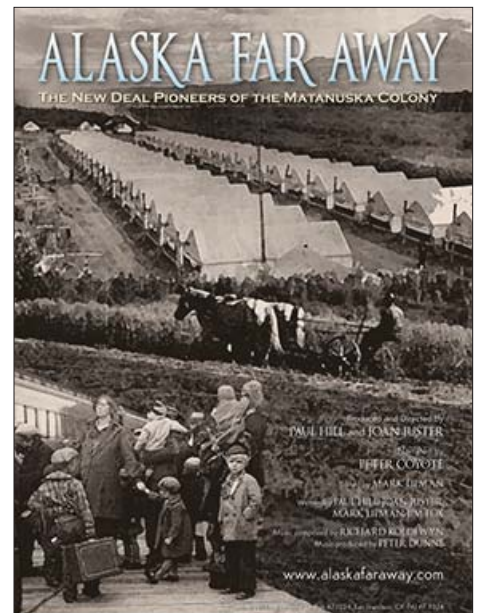
information, with funding, with support,” Juster said. “We couldn’t have finished it without funding from the Rasmuson Foundation.

“It’s finally going to have a wide audience, and I hope that it spurs people around the country to want to come to Palmer and see what makes the area so special,” Juster said.

Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB said it’s great the Palmer area will be visible on a national stage.

“There are so many reality TV shows that highlight Alaska’s beauty, but this is the first time that I know of where the historical aspect is going to be highlighted,” Ressler said. “We’re thrilled Palmer will be the center of attention on national public television stations.”

For more information about the movie project or for a list of stations airing the film (with more added each week), interested people can visit www.alaskafarawaythemovie.com.



Alaska Far Away, a documentary about the Colonist project, will be shown on more than 50 national public broadcasting channels.

Just 35 miles north of Anchorage... **Adventure Begins**

Walk on Glaciers



Flightseeing Denali



MAT-SU

CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
Mile 35.5 Parks Hwy 3, Trunk Rd. Exit



www.alaskavisit.com

YAHOO!
Mat-Su

7744 E. Visitors View Ct.
Palmer, AK 99645

(907) 746-5000
www.alaskavisit.com