

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

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## Mat-Su CVB hosting annual open house on May 15

The Mat-Su CVB is officially kicking off the summer season with its annual Visitor Information Center open house on May 15.

The annual open house is a chance for members to network and learn about new products, tours and activities in the Valley. Every member has the opportunity to talk for three minutes and give an overview of what they have to offer.

It also serves as a way to educate the VIC staff about members' businesses, so they can point visitors in the direction of members.

"The open house is a fun way to kick off the season, and to learn about what everyone has planned for their businesses this summer," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "It's a great way to build referrals and develop some relationships with other members

that leads to business."

This networking opportunity is open to all members, as well as the general public, and there is no cost to participate.

The open house starts at 4 p.m. and the grill will be fired up once again. Hot dogs and hamburgers are on the menu, and once again, VIC manager Lorraine Jallen and her staff will be serving up their "almost world famous" root beer floats.

"Come hungry for burgers and information," Saunders joked.

Members can also bring giveaways for door prizes, which will be awarded throughout the event.

The open house also opens the VIC for the summer season (see related story on Page 3). For more information about the open house, or to RSVP, interested members can e-mail Saunders at justin@alaskavisit.com.



In addition to the Mat-Su Visitor Information Center Open House, Mat-Su CVB members are invited to attend a Gateway Land Purchase Celebration on June 6, where we'll highlight the project's progress and meet with potential partners. For more information, please see related story on Page 3.

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*From the president's desk*

# Gateway Visitor Center taking a step forward

Nearly eight years ago, during a Mat-Su CVB board retreat in Talkeetna, the notion of a new Gateway Visitor Center was born. It's been a long eight years of hard work, team building and development since then, but I'm happy to report we're closer than ever to seeing our dream become a reality.

Throughout the years, Bonnie Quill, myself and a host of other volunteers have spent countless hours communicating the project, building relationships with potential partners and visiting with legislators and Mat-Su Borough Assemblymembers. This hard work is paying off, and last week, we received the latest good news regarding the project.

During last year's legislative session, \$1 million was included in the capital budget to purchase the property where the new center would be located, at Mile 36 Glenn Highway, the location of the old Homestead RV Park. That sale is closing in the next few weeks, if not sooner, completing the first step of the project.

Perhaps the best news was received just last week, however.

As the legislative session drew to a close, \$1.235 million was included in the House Finance Committee's version of this year's capital budget, giving the project a big boost. This was the result of the Mat-Su Borough Assembly elevating the Gateway Visitor Center project in their capital requests, and we owe the Assembly, Mayor and Borough Manager a big "thank you" for their efforts.

We couldn't have gotten this far without their continued support of the Gateway Visitor Center project, which will have a great economic impact on the Mat-Su Borough.

This money will allow for the design of the facility and preparation work on the

site. We're still not where we need to be for a complete build of the center, but we're getting closer every day.

There are a number of avenues we can take to secure additional funding in the year to come, including some exciting potential partnerships with community organizations, as well as grants and the potential sale of the current center, which the Assembly has agreed through supporting resolutions to roll back into the new center's budget for construction.

Your board of directors, staff and volunteers are working hard to make the new center come to fruition. This will have a positive economic impact on all our communities and our businesses, not just the tourism industry.

We foresee this new Gateway Visitor Center not as a stop on the road, but as a destination for visitors and residents alike. Not only will it serve our visitors better, allowing them the opportunity to stay longer, but also will serve as a community center for residents, something in which we can take pride.

We're excited about how far we've come in the last eight years, when relocating and building a new visitor center seemed like something so far out of reach. We're equally excited about these next few years, which are going to be crucial to the project's success.

Please join us on June 6 (see Bonnie Quill's Executive Director's report on Page 3 for more information) as we celebrate the road we've taken, and the one we're embarking down now.

*Craig Saunders (alaskavisit@alaska.com) owns Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours and is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.*



**Craig Saunders,  
Alaska Backcountry  
Adventure Tours**

## From the executive director

# Join us as we celebrate the next step in the Gateway project

Mark it on your calendars and plan to join the Mat-Su CVB board of directors, Mat-Su Assembly and our state legislative delegation on June 6 at 3 p.m. at a Gateway Land Purchase Celebration.

The event will be held at Mile 36 Glenn Hwy., formerly known as the Homestead RV Park, which was purchased with a \$1 million appropriation from the legislature in 2013. The Final Purchase Agreement and sale were completed by the borough this month. The site was one of 12 locations identified and evaluated in the "Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center Preliminary Feasibility Study" in June 2010.

Through the public process the Homestead RV site was elevated and eventually selected for the new Gateway Visitor Center.

In November our annual meeting's theme and focus was on the economic impact opportunities the Gateway Visitor Center would provide. Staff produced a video of the history of the project and several draft design concepts were revealed.

You will discover when you visit and stand near the bluff of the property why we all feel this is a special place and a perfect location for our new home. The birch tree

forest leads to the edge of the property where the view opens up to magnificent panoramas of Pioneer Peak and Spring Creek below. Off to the west is the expansive Palmer Hay Flats Game Refuge. This site will give architects inspiring options when designing the building and footprint of the property.

From the very beginning the Gateway Visitor Center project has been envisioned as a partner-driven facility. Throughout the process of drafting the Feasibility Study we have identified numerous potential partners that will complement the center and bring value to visitors. During the event you will have a chance to meet and learn more in a partner showcase exhibit set up in the pioneer hall on the property.

The success of this project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting the recreation and visitor opportunities in the borough: Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Alaska State Parks, Alaska Dept. of

Fish & Game, Mat-Su Foundation, Matanuska Greenbelt Trails Association, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, Great Land Trust, and the Alaska Railroad. An existing rustic outdoor stage will be the location of the purchase celebration address.

An advantage to the new site is the increased accessibility it will provide visitors.

Currently the Glenn Highway between milepost 34 and 42 is in a redesign phase and we have the opportunity to influence increased access to the site and the adjacent State Parks land across the highway. We have met with the engineering consultants and communicated the project and our forecasts for

traffic.

We look forward to seeing you on June 6 to celebrate the land purchase and showcase the opportunities of the new Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center.

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



**Bonnie Quill**

## Visitor Information Center opens May 14 for summer

The Mat-Su Visitor Information Center will open for another year of assisting travelers on May 14, kicking off a busy summer season.

The VIC, located at Mile 35.5 Parks Hwy., in front of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, welcomes manager Lorraine Jallen back once again.

"Lorraine is such an asset, not only to us as the VIC manager, but also to our members," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "She and her staff connect visitors to our members every day."

All Mat-Su CVB members are entitled to one brochure placement in the VIC, and additional slots are available for just \$25 for the entire summer. Members can e-mail Justin Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) for more information on brochure placement opportunities.

Members who have new brochures for the 2014 summer season are encouraged to drop them off for placement in the center

during the first week the center is open, or during the annual VIC Open House event, scheduled for May 15 at 3 p.m. Jallen will be contacting members throughout the first part of the season to ensure she has the most current brochures.

The VIC will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. seven days a week, including holidays, from May 14 to Sept. 15. Members are encouraged to refer their guests to the center, where they can find a multitude of information about what there is to see and do in the Valley. The center also offers free coffee and free wi-fi to all its visitors.

The center is also the home of the annual Memorial Day celebration at the Veterans Wall of Honor, located adjacent to the center. Hundreds of people stop by the center the last Monday in May as part of the Memorial Day festivities.

For more information about the VIC, contact Lorraine Jallen at 746-5059 after May 10.



**Lorraine Jallen is returning for another year as the Mat-Su Visitor Information Center manager. She is excited about the center opening on May 14.**

# ExTRAVELganza event once again a success for CVB

The 2014 Mat-Su CVB Wine Tasting and Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza was another success, as the organization's largest fund-raiser of the year once again sold out.

The event, held on April 11 at Evangelo's, featured a wine tasting, jazz music from the Bill Tull Band and lots of great deals on auction items that ranged from a Caribbean cruise to golfing passes at Palmer Golf Course.

"A good time was had by all, and more importantly, it was a very successful event in terms of raising money," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "We couldn't put this event on without the graciousness of our

members and other businesses who donate fantastic auction items, and of course, our sponsors."

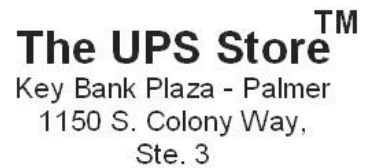
Once again, the MTA Luggage Tag raffle was a big hit. Tickets sold out for the raffle, and the winner of two round-trip tickets on Alaska Airlines was Mabel Wimmer, who owns Mendeltna Creek Lodge near Lake Louise.

Brown Jug, in cooperation with their distributors Odom, Specialty Imports and K&L Distributors and Turnagain Vines, donated all the wine for the event. The Grape Tap also had a station pouring wines donated by the Wasilla restaurant.

Saunders said the event's success is also attributable to the volunteers who work

behind the scenes to make everything run smoothly. Volunteers Ina Mueller, Kathi Kramer, Nancy Linley, Nancie Lamson and Katie Gittlein poured wine at the stations, while Linda Barcome and Paula Ahrens helped run the auction tables. Pam Meekin made sure every bidder was welcomed with a bidder paddle and a smile, and Tammy Bruce helped the live auction run smoothly. Erin Saunders, Penny Griffin and Marcie Benti also helped with the split-the-pot raffle.

"There are lots of moving parts and pieces that come together to make the event a success, from the donors to the volunteers to the wine pourers and more," Saunders said.



# Special thanks to all donors to the travel auction

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The Musk Ox Farm  
Town Square Art Gallery  
Trapper Creek Inn & RV Park  
Turkey Red  
Visit Anchorage  
White Pass & Yukon Route

## ABA, NTA events reach domestic tour operators

The Mat-Su CVB attended two travel trade conventions in January and February, meeting with group tour operators during qualified appointments.

The American Bus Association Marketplace in Nashville provided an opportunity to meet with more than 20 tour operators, and Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said he was impressed with the quality of the appointments once again this year.

"Almost every tour operator I met with said Alaska is looking great for them in 2014, and they are already excited about building out their 2015 packages," Ressler said. "That's great news for the local tourism industry."

The ABA Marketplace focuses on motorcoach tour operators primarily, while the National Tour Association Travel Exchange is a bit more broad in terms of operators. This year, it was held in February in Los Angeles.

"ABA and NTA, while both being travel trade conventions, definitely have different feels to them," Ressler said. "At NTA, we didn't have quite as many appointments in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality, it was excellent."

Both conventions schedule appointments using a complex software system that matches up tour operators and local destination marketing organizations such as the Mat-Su CVB.

"The result is appointments that are



Casey Ressler meets with a tour operator during the National Tour Association Travel Exchange in January in Los Angeles.

highly qualified, and lead to increased business for both parties," Ressler said.

At the NTA Travel Exchange, Alaska was well represented - longtime Iditarod musher Dee Dee Jonrowe appeared during an Alaska-sponsored lunch and wowed the crowd with a member of her team. At the awards banquet, Alaska was honored with the Shining Star Award by NTA.

In addition, Sen. Mark Begich was honored with the Pioneer Award for his efforts supporting the national tourism industry.

Leads from both shows are available to Mat-Su CVB members in an Excel spreadsheet format. For more information, interested members can contact Ressler at [casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com).

## International marketing efforts attracting more visitors

The Mat-Su CVB attended the Mid-Atlantic Seminar in Reykjavik, Iceland in early February, connecting with European tour operators and travel agents interested in growing their Alaska tour operations.

The CVB also partnered with the Valdez CVB and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council in attending International Pow Wow in Chicago in early April.

Both international efforts are important to the overall Mat-Su CVB marketing effort. The Iceland event targets European tour operators and travel agents, while IPW brings together operators from around the world.

This is the third year the Mat-Su CVB has participated in the Iceland event, in conjunction with Icelandair's non-stop service from Reykjavik to Anchorage. Each year, the event has grown and the relationships have gotten stronger, said

Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager.

"This is a great opportunity to connect with a large number of European tour operators in a very economical way. Icelandair subsidizes much of the cost, so for us, it's a win-win situation," Ressler said. "As the relationship matures, we're starting to see more and more interest in Alaska."

This summer will mark the second year Icelandair has offered nonstop service. That flight is important in connecting Alaska to the rest of Europe, giving travelers a much easier time getting to Alaska than having to travel through the continental U.S.

"We're very happy with that flight because it has brought an increase in international visitors to Southcentral Alaska," Ressler said. "Last year, Mat-Su CVB participated in numerous

familiarization trips with the state of Alaska for European tour operators, in conjunction with that route, and they were highly successful."

The Mat-Su Valley was well represented at the Mid-Atlantic Seminar as several local businesses attended, including Knik River Lodge, K2 Aviation/Rust's Flying Service and Talkeetna Roadhouse.

At IPW, executive director Bonnie Quill participated in more than 45 appointments with top tour operators and international media.

"By partnering with KPTMC and Valdez, we stretch our marketing dollars and are able to reach a wider audience," Quill said. "We've developed strong relationships with our international tour operators through our continued participation in Pow Wow."

The organizational partnership is branded as "Authentic Alaska."

## 2015 Visitor Guide ad packets mailing soon

Advertising packets for the 2015 Mat-Su Visitor Guide will start appearing in members' mailboxes in the next few weeks. This is a great opportunity to reach 100,000 high-potential visitors with a low-cost display ad.

Ad sales will continue throughout the summer. The guide will be published in early November, just in time for visitors to receive while they are planning their trips to Alaska.

"Advertising in the guide is affordable, and the guide goes to visitors, travel agents, tour operators, the media and more," said membership manager Justin Saunders. "It's a great way to reach a wide audience."

All Mat-Su CVB members receive a complimentary listing in the guide, including the business name, address, phone number and e-mail address. For as little as \$50, you can add your Web site. Other options include a 125-word narrative to add to your listing. Display advertising starts at just \$170 for a directory ad.

The guide is used in all Mat-Su CVB marketing programs. More than 4,000 guides are distributed to travel agents throughout the United States who assist visitors in planning their trips as well, giving members exposure to many segments of the tourism industry.

New in 2015, the Mat-Su CVB will have an option on its Web site for visitors to download a virtual version of the visitor guide, to meet the demands of our mobile and digital users. The "page-turning" style guide will give users more options than ever before to get information about the Mat-Su Valley and plan their trips to Alaska.

"We're constantly trying to give our members the best marketing tools possible," Saunders said. "And we're always looking at ways we can evolve and offer our members excellent value."

The digital version will not replace the printed version, but rather be another option for visitors to gather information about the Mat-Su Valley and the member businesses.

For more information on advertising in the guide, interested members can contact Saunders at 746-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com.

### MEDIA FAM HIGHLIGHTS HATCHER PASS



Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler and Dan McDonough of Lifetime Adventures hosted travel blogger Juno Kim on a snowshoe trip around Independence Mine State Historical Park in late January. Kim also spent time in Talkeetna, including a pie making class at Talkeetna Roadhouse. She blogged about her experience on her Web site, [www.runawayjuno.com](http://www.runawayjuno.com).

## Mat-Su CVB partners with state at 2 national consumer shows

The Mat-Su CVB attended two national consumer shows in the state of Alaska's booths this winter, reaching high potential visitors in two key markets.

In January, Casey Ressler attended the Los Angeles Times Travel Expo. There, he met with people interested in learning more about Alaska, and distributed more than 600 Mat-Su Visitor Guides. The three-day show also included a travel trade and media component.

"Los Angeles, and the rest of the West Coast, is an important market, and the LA Times Travel Expo is a great way to reach them," Ressler said. "The show is very well attended. It's great to see people's faces light up when they get to the Alaska row of booths."

In February, Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill attended the Boston Globe Travel Show, where she also participated in the state of Alaska booth, distributing 600 Mat-Su guides and talking

about the area to visitors.

"At both of these shows, we see consumers who are highly engaged, and they are looking for specific information about Alaska. By being in the state of Alaska's booth, we have the opportunity to showcase our area to them, in a cost-effective manner" Quill said.

The Mat-Su CVB also is happy to announce the organization will have its own booth at the 2015 Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show in January, highlighting the Valley at one of the nation's largest attended travel consumer shows.

More than 15 Alaska businesses comprise an entire section of the show, and the Mat-Su CVB booth will be available for member co-op participation, including brochure distribution and booth share opportunities.

Details about the program will be announced later this summer and communicated to members.

## Targeted in-state marketing campaign begins May 5

The Mat-Su CVB is promoting the Mat-Su Valley as an ideal destination for residents, and their visiting friends and relatives, during a five-week campaign during the start of the summer season.

Last year, the in-state campaign won two statewide awards for design. This year, the same theme will continue – “Put the U in the Mat-Su” – with two new creative designs. The ads are designed by Solstice Advertising, a firm in Anchorage that also produced last year’s Mat-Su CVB Visitor Guide.

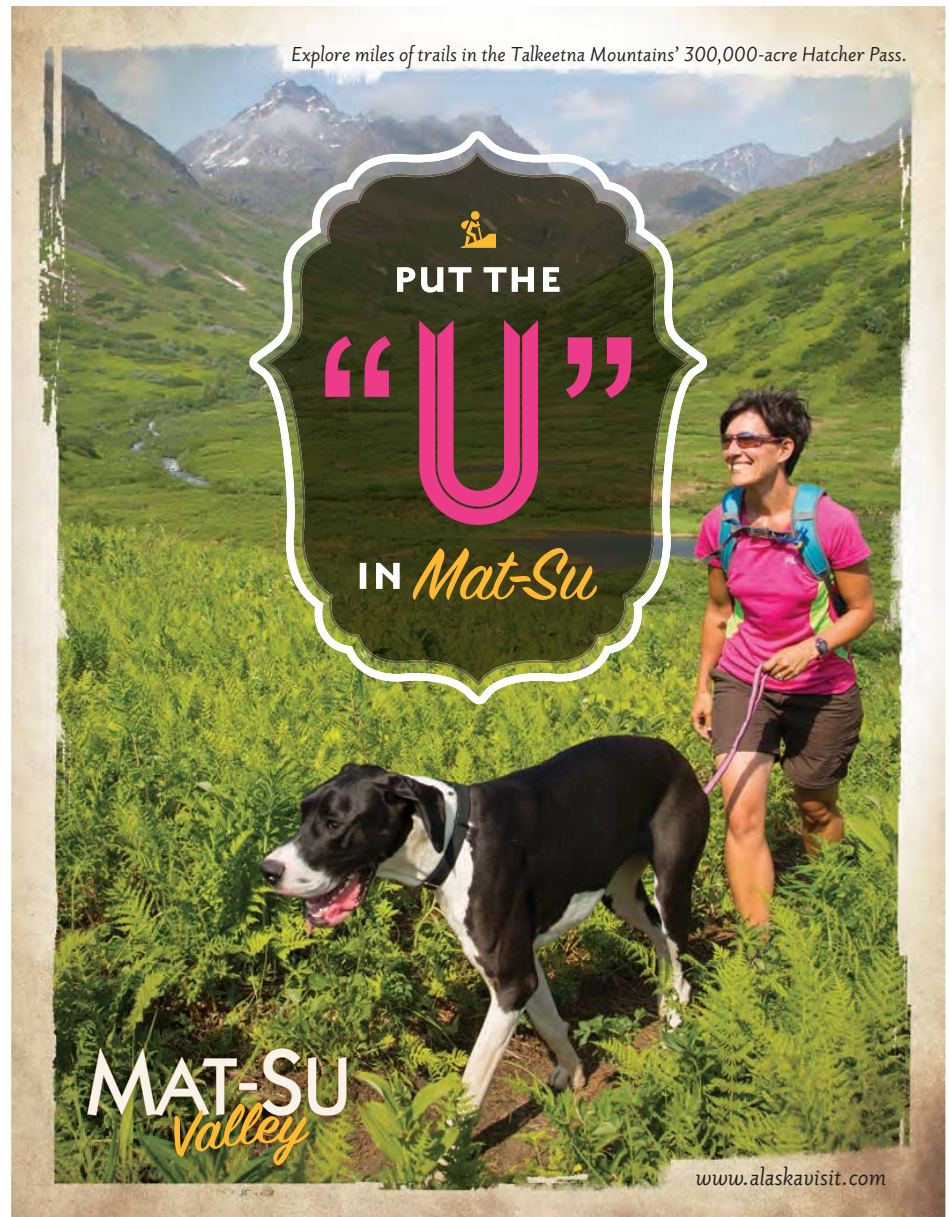
“The in-state market is a vital one for the Mat-Su Valley, so reaching them during the beginning of the year is important,” said Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB.

Four full-color quarter-page ads will rotate during a five week run in the Anchorage Daily News, as well as online advertising in ADN and the Alaska Dispatch. The ads feature popular activities such as flightseeing, fishing, ziplining and hiking in Hatcher Pass.

“The ads are very graphically oriented and appealing, and have a call to action,” Ressler said.

The ads will run from the beginning of May through the second week in June, and then again from mid-August through September.

The print and digital ads complement the radio ad campaign that runs on various Anchorage radio stations throughout the year, as well as a three-week television campaign on KTUU Channel 2. A similar Tourism Awareness campaign, promoting the importance of the industry to the Mat-Su Valley economy, is running with print ads in the Frontiersman and radio on two local outlets - Q99.7 and 100.5.



### Stay connected!



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“yahoomatsu” channel



# Availability site assists with last-minute bookings

This summer, Mat-Su CVB members can get last-minute bookings by keeping their listing on [www.matsuavailability.com](http://www.matsuavailability.com) current.

The Web site, a tool offered to all Mat-Su CVB members through a partnership with the Alaska's Mat-Su Bed & Breakfast Association, includes a list of current availability for lodging and activity partners.

"This is a valuable tool for filling those

last-minute openings," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "It only takes a few minutes to update the availability every few days."

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. After the initial set-up, it's quick and easy.

"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."

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

## Mark your calendars

### Visitor Information Center Open House

May 15, 4-7 p.m.

*Grab a burger, give an update on your business, meet the VIC staff, drop off rack cards and get ready for a busy 2014 summer tourism season!*

### Gateway Visitor Land Purchase Celebration

June 6, 3 p.m.

*Tour the new site, get updates on the project and hear from potential Gateway partners.  
Located at Mile 36 Glenn Hwy.*

## Mat-Su CVB participates in 3 outdoor shows

The Mat-Su CVB had booths at the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show and the Great Alaska Sportsmans Show in March to target the in-state market.

Both shows were well attended and the Mat-Su CVB distributed more than 1,000 visitor guides and member brochures during the two Southcentral Alaska shows.

"The shows happen at a time of year when everyone is ready to start making their plans for the summer, and they are eager to hear about all there is to see and do in the Valley," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler.

The Anchorage show is the largest in Alaska, with more than 10,000 attendees during the four days.

Mat-Su CVB distributed member brochures and rack cards through the coop marketing program, in which members pay \$25 to have their collateral in the Mat-Su CVB booth. It's a low-cost way to reach a lot of potential customers.

The Mat-Su CVB will also be attending the Fairbanks Outdoors Show later this week. The Fairbanks show has always been a successful trip north.

"At the Fairbanks show, we meet a lot of members of the military who are brand new to Alaska and they want to get out and explore the state while they are stationed here," Ressler said. "It's always been a very good show for us."

At all three shows, the Mat-Su CVB had prize giveaways, donated by members. Special thanks go to Lake Louise Lodge, Talkeetna Air Taxi, Kahiltna Birchworks and Hatcher Pass Bed and Breakfast.

For donating a giveaway, the Mat-Su CVB distributes brochures for free.

## Mat-Su CVB named finalist in video contest

The Mat-Su CVB was recently announced as one of three finalists in a national video contest sponsored by SimpleView Inc., the company that develops database management and Web site design.

The contest guidelines were to create a video, 90 seconds in length, that highlights the events, people and attractions in your area, and why they make your destination unique.

Membership Manager Justin Saunders grabbed the video camera and headed out on the trail for the restart of the Iditarod.

He shot the restart, and then people watching the race along the Yentna River, all the way to the Yentna checkpoint. From the announcement of the contest until the deadline, Saunders had six days to shoot the video, edit it and get it to SimpleView.

Throughout the 90-second video, veteran Iditarod musher Zack Steer of Sheep Mountain Lodge narrates what

makes Iditarod such a fascinating race, and why people travel from around the world to come to Alaska and witness the Last Great Race.

All three finalists win a GoPro Hero video camera. At the SimpleView Summit next week, conference attendees will see all three finalists' videos and vote for the overall winner.

Second place receives a GoPro and a professional photo shoot, courtesy of SimpleView. The grand prize winner not only wins a GoPro camera, but also a professionally shot and edited destination video for use in all promotional materials, courtesy of SimpleView.

To see the video, check out the Mat-Su CVB's YouTube channel ([yahoوماتsu](http://yahoوماتsu)). The video is titled, "The Iditarod in the Mat-Su Valley."

Members are encouraged to link to the Mat-Su CVB YouTube account to include the videos in their Web sites.

## News from the membership

**The Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge** is pleased to welcome Cris Rosemond as its new Executive Chef. Chef Rosemond is responsible for the exquisite culinary experience at both the Foraker Restaurant featuring fine dining, the BaseCamp Bistro and all catered events including weddings, meetings and conferences. Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge has a long history of fine dining experience under several executive chefs and has won the Wine Spectator award every year since 1993. Rosemond's past experience suits him well to continue this leadership in Alaska cuisine experiences for Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge and we are pleased he has joined the team.

**Sheep Mountain Lodge** will open May 17 for the summer season. Chef Ward will be back to serve Alaskans and travelers their favorites - have you tried the salmon cakes or Alaskan antipasto? These were new items last year that have become local favorites. Sheep Mountain prides itself on scratch-baked goods including the best strawberry-rhubarb pie and sourdough rolls. Open daily 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. Premier cabins with kitchens are perfect for visiting friends and family. Hosts Zack and Anjanette Steer look forward to seeing you on the mountain soon.

The Old Harbor Native Corporation is investing more than \$1 million in improvements to its two Denali properties, **Grande Denali Lodge and Denali Bluffs Hotel**. These include themed décor changes aimed at imparting a cozy "wilderness cabin" atmosphere and adding special touches that will enhance the personal, small-property feel at Denali Bluffs. In addition, both the food and beverage outlets at the Bluffs are receiving creative improvements, and the Grande Denali Lodge will have a new banquet/conference space located just off the main

lobby. Improvements are also being carried out in the employee housing and dining facilities.

**The House of Seven Trees Hostel** will open for the summer on Talkeetna's Main Street on May 6. This will be the 10th year of serving climbers and hostellers from around the world. We are pleased that many visitors say that this is the first time they have stayed in a hostel and "It's just like home." Most hostels have private rooms and share the kitchen and common areas. It's a good introduction for the many future fun trips our guests will take using worldwide hostels.

**The Palmer Musk Ox Farm** will once again open for the season on Mother's Day, when you can come meet the new calves. Doors open at 10 a.m. on Sunday, May 11. There will be a barbecue at noon, live music and demonstrations by local fiber arts guild members. Admission is free for all mothers, everyone else through a donation to the farm.

**The Alaska Railroad** is hosting "Railroad Days," a family-friendly favorite, on Saturday, May 3. This annual community event features free train rides, railroad equipment, balloons, tattoos, giveaways and prizes. Climb aboard the stationary Alaska Travel Train for Railbelt community travel ideas/attractions. Hot dogs, snacks and beverages will be on sale, and the depot gift shop and rail ticket counter will be open. Take advantage of amazing deals on rail travel this summer.

**The Palmer Chamber of Commerce** is hosting Colony Days June 6-8 in downtown Palmer. There will be events throughout town all three days, including

the popular Bill Mitchell 5K run, the parade and kid's games. This family-friendly event is a highlight of the summer. Visit [www.palmerchamber.org](http://www.palmerchamber.org) for continued updates to the event schedules and more.

**Mat-Su College** is hosting the Fourth Annual Machetanz Arts Festival on June 7. The festival is full of exciting art classes of various mediums at Mat-Su College. This event is named in honor and memory of Fred and Sara Machetanz who are closely associated with the early years of the institution. Both local and nationally recognized artists hold workshops available to all ages of the public. Don't miss this opportunity to create, have fun and inspire others! Stay up-to-date with the latest news by "liking" our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/Machetanz](http://www.facebook.com/Machetanz).

**Arkose Brewery** in Palmer offers free brewery tours every Tuesday night at 6 p.m. Meet the brewers and find out more about one of Alaska's newest breweries. On May 10, the next "Beer Meets Canvas" event is scheduled - for \$30, you get a pint or a taster flight, as well as all art supplies to paint with. No prior experience necessary. Visit [www.arkosebrewery.com](http://www.arkosebrewery.com) for more information, as well as a list of upcoming events.

**Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge and Denali Brewing Company** are teaming up on a fantastic menu for the Spring 2014 Beer Dinner at the lodge. On Friday, May 30, enjoy pairings of Denali Brewing Company beers with gourmet courses such as seared duck medallions, elk shoulder and Alaska scallops, prepared by Chef Rosemond. Overnight packages are available at [www.talkeetnalodge.com](http://www.talkeetnalodge.com)/activities.

## Welcome these new Mat-Su CVB members

Alaskan Events & Catering  
(907) 746-4181  
[www.catalaska.com](http://www.catalaska.com)

Alaska Travel Connections  
(907) 315-3026  
[www.alaskatravelconnections.com](http://www.alaskatravelconnections.com)

CruiseOne  
(907) 341-4445  
[www.swright.cruiseone.com](http://www.swright.cruiseone.com)

*Member success story*

# Musk Ox Farm turns corner, on road to success

As recently as five years ago, the iconic Palmer Musk Ox Farm was facing a serious dilemma – how do we keep the doors open? Facing financial uncertainty, it was a very real possibility that the farm, which traces its roots back to 1954, wouldn't be open for visitors to see these prehistoric animals and buy their valuable qiviut.

Then, four years ago, longtime Palmer businessman Mark Austin returned to the area and took over as general manager of the nonprofit. He brought on a dedicated staff, and things started turning around. Now, the farm is thriving once again.

“The herd is the healthiest it’s ever been, and we have more musk oxen than we’ve had in the last 25 years,” Austin said. “The future was bleak, but we’ve turned it around. I think people like to hear good news.”

The herd is now at 77 strong – although that number will be growing in the next few weeks. Calves are going to be born once again this spring, bringing lots of excitement – and visitors – to the farm. The traditional Mother’s Day opening is all set for May 11th, and Austin is looking forward to another exciting summer.

“In the 2000s, there were a lot of financial challenges, but there was an upwelling of ‘Save The Farm’ efforts, and we’ve made it work,” Austin said. “It’s been a great run.”

He also points to a calf natality rate of 100 percent, qiviut production three times what it was just four years ago, and a doubling of income as signs the farm is back on track.

The farm currently has four permanent staff, with four interns as well. During the summer, an additional 5-7 employees roam the farm, tending to the herd and assisting visitors.



Visitors to the Palmer Musk Ox Farm take a moment with one of the farm’s “residents.” In the last four years, the farm has enjoyed a renewed growth and the herd is healthier than it’s ever been, said Mark Austin, the farm’s executive director.

And while it’s a popular tourism attraction, the farm’s mission is much deeper.

The farm is dedicated to domesticating

musk ox over a long-term period in order to provide economic opportunities for Native communities through the musk oxen’s valuable qiviut.

## Snapshot of [www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com)

January - March 2014, compared to same period in 2013

Unique visitors  
19,281 in 2014  
10,294 in 2013  
87% increase

Page views  
59,000 in 2014  
30,800 in 2013  
91% increase

Bounce rate  
53% in 2014  
60% in 2013  
8% decrease

Mobile users  
992 in 2014  
404 in 2013  
145% increase

*Note: The Mat-Su CVB substantially increased its search engine marketing efforts in late December 2013, resulting in a large increase in site traffic. This increase has led to not only more traffic, but also lowered the bounce rate and increased traffic from mobile devices.*

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](http://www.alaskavisit.com)

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