

# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Spring 2017

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## Mat-Su CVB launching new Alaska Grown in-state campaign

The Mat-Su CVB is launching a new in-state marketing campaign during the shoulder season, partnering with the popular Alaska Grown brand.

The campaign, which runs May 25-June 23, includes targeted advertising on television, radio, print and online, as well as a social media campaign on Facebook and YouTube, and a photo contest on Instagram.

"We're excited about this partnership with Alaska Grown, and highlighting things to see and do in the Mat-Su Valley that tie into the Alaska Grown brand," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "This all-new campaign is targeting Alaskans in the Southcentral region, and inspiring them to stay and play in the Valley."

Four itineraries will be developed and featured on our web site – the Palmer/Wasilla area, the upper Susitna area, Hatcher Pass and the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway.

All itineraries will include activities, a featured hike, and Alaska Grown component and a "stay another day" concept that includes accommodations and secondary activities.

For each itinerary, membership manager Justin Saunders has created a 30-45 second high-definition video that highlights the different destinations.

Members can be featured on the web page for \$100, which includes a link to their web site and mentions in the copy

"We're excited about this partnership with Alaska Grown, and highlighting things to see and do in the Mat-Su Valley that tie into the Alaska Grown Brand."

Casey Ressler,  
Mat-Su CVB

on the itinerary page of the Web site, [www.alaskavisit.com/alaskagrown](http://www.alaskavisit.com/alaskagrown). The microsite will go live on May 25.

For information on how to participate, interested members can e-mail [casey@alaskavisit.com](mailto:casey@alaskavisit.com).

Throughout the four-week run, the campaign is instructing visitors to post their photos on Instagram and Facebook with #YahooMatSu and #AlaskaGrown. Winners will be randomly selected and receive an Alaska Grown hoodie.

A new 30-second high definition television commercial will debut on KTUU Channel 2 during the campaign and Brilliant Media Strategies in Anchorage is coordinating the design of all new creative ads.

"It's a comprehensive marketing campaign that is highly targeted to reaching Southcentral residents and their visiting friends and relatives," Ressler said.



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*From the president's desk*

## Tourism marketing funding is important to the industry's future

This week is National Travel and Tourism Week, and it's a perfect time to announce our new in-state campaign that kicks off later this month. We are partnering with Alaska Grown to promote itineraries in the Valley that feature not only the many activities we love and enjoy, but also the agricultural community and restaurants that use Alaska Grown products.

This in-state campaign is a way for us to target local Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives, and showcase what kind of opportunities there are in their own back yard. We're excited about the campaign and the member response (see Page 1) has already been fantastic.

This campaign is the largest in-state state campaign we've launched, and that's for good reason – Alaska tourism marketing is facing a challenge, as is most of the state, due to a decline in the overall economy. Alaska tourism itself is doing great, but we can't sit back and believe visitors are going to continue to come without actively marketing to them. Other states have increased their tourism marketing budgets, making it harder for Alaska to compete in attracting visitors.

There currently is state legislation regarding tourism funding, and we are monitoring the capital appropriation debate, which contains funding for tourism marketing. We may ask for your support in the future in contacting your legislator and reiterating why it's important that Alaska has a strong and stable tourism marketing

budget. Tourism's importance to our economy can't be understated. To that end, we invite you to join us at the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge on Thursday, May 18 at 4 p.m. for a presentation by Sarah Leonard, president of ATIA, about TID legislation that will have an impact on many businesses and ensure continued funding. Light appetizers and a cash bar will follow during a reception.

With the state facing these challenges, it was encouraging to hear about the new products being developed locally at the Mat-Su CVB season kickoff barbecue on May 4 at Alaska's Harvest B&B. New developments help strengthen the visitor experience, which helps raise the overall profile of the Mat-Su Valley as a visitor destination.

One new development in particular is very exciting – the completion of Phase 1 of South Denali development and the opening of the Kesugi Ken Campground in Denali State Park. This is part of a long-term project to build a world-class visitor center in Denali State Park. Ultimately, this is going to keep visitors in the Mat-Su Valley longer, which is a great thing for our local economy. The campground has a ranger station, three public use cabins, 32 RV sites, 10 campsites, new trails and the best view of Denali in all of Alaska. We are partnering with the Alaska State Parks to host a ribbon cutting ceremony at Mile 134.5 Parks Hwy. on May 26.

I wish you the best of luck this busy summer season!

*Cheryl Metiva is the president of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.*



Cheryl Metiva



The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors during the annual planning retreat.

## From the executive director

# Web site development is a continuing investment

It's been exactly a year since the launch of our new redesigned responsive web site, [www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com), with inspiring images, video, and expanded content. We were extremely honored the web site won a Silver Award in the tourism category in the W3 Awards, a national competition that recognizes creative excellence on the web last winter. And, with the huge shifts in consumer behavior on the web we continue to adapt and add new features to engage visitors on the site, and our membership too.

Destination Marketing Association of the West (DMA West) just released a year-long study on "The Impact of DMO (Destination Marketing Organizations) Websites." The research was funded by the DMA West Education & Research Foundation and conducted by Destination Analysts, Inc. The goal for the study was to examine travelers who use DMO web sites and measure the extent that a DMO web site converts to visit the destination.

The study revealed that DMO web sites remain a very important resource throughout the travelers' journeys – from the inspiration to take a trip to the essential details of their itineraries. In January 2017, well over one-third of

American leisure travelers reported having used a DMO web site in the past year to research and/or plan travel. It found destination sites are among the most trusted and valued resources of travelers in the destination decision process.

It was also noted that while DMO sites do not yet have the same rate of use as reviews web sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp, they are seen as having equal importance to these sites in travelers' paths to selecting the destination they will visit. This is reassuring news in the overwhelming amount of travel information and options on the web.

One of the biggest trends nationwide in DMO web site content is incorporating curated or user generated content to engage visitors and add value. In July we will be adding a powerful new platform to [alaskavisit.com](http://alaskavisit.com) by integrating social media posts on select pages.

We will be able to pull content from Facebook, Instagram and YouTube using relevant keywords, locations and hashtags. Photos and videos from real-time visitors will display on our site of adventures, scenery and culinary options linking back to their comments. This new feature will engage visitors to the site along with the

followers of the posts.

We're also continuing with ongoing search engine optimization efforts, as well as a highly targeted pay-per-click campaign that helps us reach visitors who are actively searching for content contained on our web site. Paid search marketing is constantly evolving, and we work closely with our contractor to ensure our campaign evolves accordingly.

On the member side of our site we are getting ready to launch an all new extranet 4.0. This is the part of the web site you log in with your username and password and update your listings and business information. This will have a whole new look and feel and be much more user friendly. We are even brainstorming on giving it a new name other than extranet, like Partnetnet, which describes more of the opportunities and benefits.

It will also be a resource for upcoming events and marketing opportunities and a forum for members to exchange and engage with each other. Membership Manager Justin Saunders will be organizing roundtable trainings during his visitor guide ad sales travels this summer to demonstrate the value of logging in to the site and reviewing your benefits of membership.

*Bonnie Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) is the Mat-Su CVB Executive Director.*



**Bonnie Quill**

## New summer fee structure announced for Independence Mine

There is a new fee structure at Independence Mine State Historical Area beginning this summer, in an effort to provide a positive visitor experience despite a budget challenge.

This year, visitors to Independence Mine will be charged \$3 per person, in addition to the \$5/car parking fee that has been in place in the past. The fee only applies to those who access the mine via the parking lot adjacent to the mine – visitors who use the lower Independence Bowl parking lot and walk up will not be charged the additional \$3 fee.

The fee increase will help the park to provide improved and more stable staffing, enhance the visitor experience, assist with maintenance and aid security

with the use of locally hired park staff instead of outside volunteers.

Alaska State Parks said the gate will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., starting in June when the road to Independence Mine opens.

After Labor Day, when the gate at the Independence Mine parking lot typically closes for the season, no additional admission fee will be collected, Alaska State Parks announced.

Alaska State Parks also announced that Registered Commercial Guides and tours with Alaska State Parks will not be required to pay any new fees for 2017 due to the timing of the announcement, but will have their daily client fees raised in the future.

## Glacier Park announces 2017 access fees

This winter, there was some confusion regarding access fees at Matanuska Glacier, through the privately held Glacier Park. According to Bill Stevenson of Glacier Park, summer access will be the same as it has been in the past.

The summer rates for accessing Matanuska Glacier will be \$25 for Alaskans and \$30 for non-residents. Several operators in the Glacier View area offer guided treks, and the access fee is added to the cost of the tour.

Glacier Park is located at Mile 102 of the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway.

## Mat-Su CVB markets to Alaskans at outdoor shows

The Mat-Su CVB had a booth at four in-state consumer shows this spring, marketing the Mat-Su Valley to Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives.

At each show, the members took advantage of low-cost brochure distribution in the Mat-Su CVB booth. More than 1,000 visitor guides were also distributed.

“The in-state shows are a great way to reach Alaskans and show them why they should stay and play in the Mat-Su Valley,” marketing manager Casey Ressler said. “The timing is perfect too - everyone is ready for the summer and they are making their plans.”

The four shows were the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, the Alaska Summer Showcase (Anchorage), the Great Alaska Sportsman Show (Anchorage) and the Fairbanks Outdoors Show.

At the Summer Showcase, the Mat-Su CVB coordinated a Talkeetna prize package that included donations from Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge, Denali Zipline Tours and Denali Brewing Company.

“This was the second year in a row we’ve participated in the Summer Showcase, and it gets bigger and better every year,” Ressler said.

Ressler said the Fairbanks show is



Mat-Su CVB Marketing & Communications Manager Casey Ressler mans the booth at the Fairbanks Outdoors Show in late April.

also an important one because of the demographics.

“There is a strong military population in Fairbanks, and they are only in Alaska

for a short period of time. They are very interested in getting out and seeing all the state has to offer while they are stationed here,” Ressler said.

## Small retreats, meetings focus of April luncheon

### 20 planners attended to hear about Mat-Su meeting opportunities

The Mat-Su CVB hosted a successful meeting planner luncheon in April in Anchorage, bringing together members and planners from the Anchorage region.

The luncheon, held at Kinley’s Restaurant on April 13, highlighted various facilities around the Mat-Su Valley that are ideal for small retreats, conferences and larger events such as tradeshow and weddings.

“We want to change the way meeting planners think from, ‘why should I choose the Valley,’ to ‘why wouldn’t I choose the Valley?’” said Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler. “The facilities we have here – both big and small – provide a great location for meeting planners.”

Eight Mat-Su CVB members participated in the luncheon, giving five-minute presentations to the 20 meeting planners in attendance.

Mat-Su CVB also gave an overall presentation that touched on additional resources, facilities and locations that planners can utilize to make their meetings a success in the Mat-Su, and reiterated the opportunities for planners to add team-building activities to their meetings.

“The response has already been great, as we are working

“We want to change the way meeting planners think from, ‘why should I choose the Valley’ to ‘why wouldn’t I choose the Valley?’ The facilities we have here - both big and small - provide a great location for meeting planners.

Casey Ressler,  
Mat-Su CVB

with two meeting planners that want to bring overnight retreats to the Valley this fall,” Ressler said. “It is great to see that immediate return and newfound interest based on the luncheon.”

The planners attending represented organizations such as The Rasmuson Foundation, Logistics LLC, the Associated General Contractors of Alaska, Cook Inlet Tribal Council and The CIRI Foundation, among others.

## Alaska CVBs, businesses partner on ITB efforts

The Mat-Su CVB teamed up with six other destinations and businesses to have an Alaska presence at ITB Berlin, the world's largest tourism convention, in early March.

Due to budget cuts, the state of Alaska was not going to attend, but Visit Anchorage stepped in to organize the Alaska booth, and partners shared the costs of attending.

"ITB is an extremely valuable show in one of our largest international markets, and it's a great story that other destinations and businesses stepped in to keep the program alive," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "The international tour operators and media we meet with during the week in Berlin pays big dividends."

In addition to the Mat-Su CVB and Visit Anchorage, Valdez and Fairbanks were represented among the DMO partners.

From the private sector, the Alaska Railroad, Alaska Travel Connections and Go North attended. Pursuit Collection (Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge) and All Alaska Tours had individual booths at ITB as well.

"German-speaking Europe is a great fit for the Mat-Su Valley, as those travelers tend to be more independent, interested in outdoor activities such as hiking and soft adventures, and they tend to stay longer and spend more money," Ressler said. "I'm glad it worked out that Alaska had a presence at ITB."

The next international marketing effort for the Mat-Su CVB is IPW (formerly known as International Pow Wow) the first week of June in Washington D.C.

IPW is organized annually by the U.S. Travel Association and has more than 5,000 attendees, including both



The Mat-Su CVB joined with several other DMOs and private businesses to participate in ITB Berlin in the Alaska: Land and Sea booth. Mat-Su CVB met with international tour operators, agents and media during the event.

international and domestic buyers and international media.

The Mat-Su CVB partners with the

Valdez CVB and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council in a booth under the "Authentic Alaska" name.

## ABA, NTA bring together tour operators and suppliers

The Mat-Su CVB met with more than 40 tour operators at two national conventions earlier this year, highlighting properties in the Mat-Su Valley during prescheduled appointments.

The first national convention was the American Bus Association Marketplace event in Cleveland in mid-January. Following that was the National Tour Association in St. Louis in late February.

"NTA and ABA are important because they give us an opportunity to meet with tour operators who bring a lot of visitors to Alaska every year," marketing manager Casey Ressler said. "At both conventions,

the appointments are highly qualified and you meet directly with decision makers who plan itineraries."

At both conventions, Ressler distributed profile sheets of the Mat-Su Valley that highlighted new products, suggested itineraries, ideas on how to expand group tours in the Mat-Su and more.

Both conventions are focused solely on the group tour market, but the operators who attend are not the same for the most part.

"ABA focuses more on motorcoach tours, some of which begin in the Lower

48 and can be 30-45 days long," Ressler said. "At NTA, there are a lot of operators that feature cruise and land packages that include the Valley in their itineraries."

At the NTA Travel Exchange, the Mat-Su CVB participated in an Alaska "Dine Around" event. Several Alaska partners joined together to organize a small reception and dinner with a select group of tour operators who bring a large number of visitors to Alaska.

"It was a great chance to sit with these operators and talk further, in a casual setting, about what the Mat-Su Valley has to offer," Ressler said.

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## 2017 ExTRAVELganza auction another success

The 2017 Mat-Su CVB Beer and Wine Tasting Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza was a big success, with more than 125 attendees at Evangelo's on April 28.

The event featured local craft breweries, wine from The Grape Tap, appetizers, and live music from the Hannah Yoter Band, as well as four silent auction tables and an outcry auction.

"Each year, the auction is a highlight on the calendar, and we appreciate the support of not only all of those who attend, but also all of our sponsors and donors," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "The event would not be as successful without their support."

Bearpaw River Brewing Company, Arkose Brewery and Denali Brewing Company all contributed to the beer tasting portion of the event, while the The Grape Tap served five different wines.

"It's a great way to showcase the local breweries," Saunders said.

The auction also included the annual MTA/Alaska Airlines luggage tag raffle. This year's winner, Julie Nystrom, was in attendance at the auction. Tickets were sold throughout the spring, as well as at the event. For \$20, people were entered to win two round-trip tickets anywhere Alaska Airlines flies, and a luggage tag. The event also featured a Split The Pot raffle that raised more than \$600.



Stephen Gerteisen, owner and brewmaster of Arkose Brewery, helps Casey Ressler auction off the "Brewer for a Day" which raised \$500 in the outcry auction at the Mat-Su CVB Beer & Wine Tasting ExTRAVELganza April 28.

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## Summer season kicks off with annual barbecue

The Mat-Su CVB kicked off the summer season with a barbecue on Thursday, May 4 at Alaska's Harvest Bed & Breakfast.

The event also included members giving updates about their businesses to fellow members, to help generate referrals throughout the season.

"The barbecue is a casual way for members to get to know each other, learn what other members are doing and build relationships," said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "It's a great way to get the season started."

Mat-Su CVB staff grilled up hamburgers and offered smoked pulled pork sandwiches, among other refreshments. Approximately 50 people attending, representing a wide range of members.

"We all know that from here on out, it's going to be a busy summer," Saunders said. "We kicked it off in style."



The annual Mat-Su CVB summer kickoff barbecue was hosted by Alaska's Harvest B&B on May 4. Members gave updates on their businesses and networked with fellow members.

## Mat-Su CVB, ATIA hosting TID presentation in Talkeetna May 18

The Mat-Su CVB and the Alaska Travel Industry Association are inviting members to join Sarah Leonard, ATIA President, for a discussion on sustainable tourism funding for Alaska on Thursday, May 18 at Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge.

Starting at 4 p.m., Leonard will be describing the Tourism Improvement District (TID) model and how it can be used to generate industry revenue for statewide tourism marketing.

A tourism improvement district or TID is similar to a business improvement district, including businesses that are assessed for the improvement of an outlined jurisdiction. TIDs are occurring around the country at local and regional levels and most recently in California at a statewide level to fund tourism promotion efforts.

The Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) Board of Directors and industry partners began discussing the idea of an Alaska statewide TID earlier this year. The discussions began as the legislature and Governor were challenged by a state fiscal environment and Alaska tourism marketing dollars were being cut from the state's operating budget.

Alaska's tourism marketing program was allocated \$1.5 million in 2017,

significantly reduced from previous levels of \$10-\$18 million.

A statewide or Alaska TID could be created by state statute and would identify a voluntary level of assessment or fee for industry businesses to pay into a fund for Alaska tourism marketing.

While Alaska's Constitution does not allow for dedicated funds, creating an industry self-assessment model through a TID allows the legislature and Governor a way to allocate an investment in tourism marketing.

She will have the most updated information from legislators on this concept as she recently returned from Juneau advocating for a partnership with the State and industry to ensure Alaska continues to have a competitive destination marketing program. For more information about TIDs visit <http://www.alaskatia.org/marketing/TID>.

The presentation will be followed by an informal reception with light appetizers and a cash bar.

RSVPs not required but are requested to ensure an accurate head count to the hosts.

To RSVP, please visit <http://members.alaskatia.org/event/TIDTalkeetna2017>

## Cannabis and the visitor industry

With the legalization of cannabis in Alaska, many in the travel industry have been asked numerous questions from visitors.

There are a number of different regulations regarding consumption, possession and transportation. Additionally, each community has different regulations and laws, so keeping visitors informed can be challenging.

The Alaska Travel Industry Association has produced an informational flyer for those interested in obtaining general information.

The flyer can be found at <http://www.alaskatia.org/member-tools/Marijuana%20Flyer%20ATIA%20Final.pdf> for posting in visitor traffic areas.

For more information, interested people can visit the state's web site for the Alcohol and Marijuana Control Office at <http://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/amco>



## 2018 Visitor Guide ad sales kits mailing in late May

The Mat-Su CVB recently awarded the contract for design and printing of the 2018 Visitor Guide to Brilliant Media Strategies in Anchorage, which is one of the state's largest ad agencies and previously designed the Alaska State Vacation Planner.

The RFP process was very competitive, with six firms submitting bids. The 14-member marketing committee evaluated every proposal and invited two firms back for oral interviews.

"The quality of all the proposals was outstanding, and the marketing committee did a great job in selecting an industry leader to head up the project," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said. "We're excited to see what Brilliant Media Strategies can do for us on the project."

One key factor in the committee selecting Brilliant Media

Strategies was their vast knowledge in the visitor industry.

"They have designed the state's planner for years, and are the advertising agency for the state tourism marketing program. That institutional knowledge will be a big benefit for us," Ressler said.

Advertising packets will be mailed out to members for the 2018 guide around Memorial Day. Membership Manager Justin Saunders will be coordinating member visits to help fill out the paperwork and go over advertising options. Each member receives a complimentary line listing in the guide, and the opportunity to purchase affordable display advertising that reaches 100,000 readers from around the world.

For more information about advertising opportunities, contact Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) or 746-5032.

## News from the membership

**Alaska Garden Gate B&B and Cottages**, near Palmer, is proud to introduce four new cottages, which are now open for guests. They are the largest ones built to date at the bed and breakfast, lodging up to 5 guests each, with 730 square feet per cottage. Each cottage offers a master suite with king bed and ensuite bathroom, and a second bedroom with queen bed and ensuite bathroom. The living room has a very comfortable pullout couch bed, fireplace and smart TV which can stream media content, and a full kitchen with dining table. The new cottages have mountain and forest views. These new additions bring the number of units for guests up to a total of 20, with a variety of cottages, guest apartments and bedrooms with private bathrooms. A spring preview will be held on May 11 from 6-9 p.m., with tours of the new cottages, and wine and appetizers on the deck at the Inn. For more information, call (907) 746-2333.

**Phillips Cruises & Tours** has completed a full renovation of the M/V Klondike Express with new carpeting, tables and

modern comfortable upholstered seats. We installed USB ports to make it easy for guests to recharge during the cruise and capture more photos of the beauty of Prince William Sound. The 26 Glacier Cruise runs May 5 – Sept. 30 from 12:30-5:30 p.m. on the M/V Klondike Express with narration provided by a Chugach Forest Service Ranger, a hot meal included, and our exclusive "No Seasickness Guarantee." The M/V Klondike Express is ADA Accessible. The Glacier Quest Cruise will run May 13-Sept. 10 from 1-4:45 p.m. on the M/V Glacier Quest, and the Sunset Glacier Cruise runs Friday-Sunday, June 16-Aug. 16 at 7:15-9:45 aboard the M/V Klondike Express.

**Arkose Brewery** in Palmer recently underwent a rebranding, and the results were impressive. Arkose won a gold medal in the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals (AMCP), Hermes Creative Awards, an international competition for creative professionals involved in the concept, writing and design of marketing and communication

programs that use visual, print and audio materials. The award was for packaging design which includes the new logo, the emblem and the hand-drawn imagery on the series of five bottled brands Arkose produces.

**Alaska's Harvest B&B** is proud to announce a new authentic luxury log cabin "in the woods." The new cabin is 1,200 square feet featuring Alaskan decor throughout with beautiful mountain view. There are three bedrooms, 2.5 bath, 2 kings, 1 queen bed, blackout shades and it sleeps 8. There is a full kitchen, breakfast area and living room. A "First breakfast" pancake mix is provided in the cabin.

**Knik River Lodge** now has 22 cabins on site, and the Raven's Perch restaurant has opened for the summer season. In addition, the tours offered through the lodge have been expanded to include heli-hiking, dog sled tours on the glacier, iceberg tours and glamping (glamour camping), as well as a fully guided helicopter photography tour.

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Hatcher Pass provides breathtaking vistas and great photographic opportunities. Photographer Justin Bilancieri visited Hatcher Pass on assignment from the Matador Network last September.

# YAHOO! Mat-Su

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