

The Bureau Bulletin

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Spring 2018

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Contact us

Bonnie Quill

President & CEO
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

In-state campaign kicks off May 28

The Mat-Su CVB is launching its in-state campaign May 28-June 13 in conjunction with the Alaska Grown program, targeting Southcentral Alaska residents and their visiting friends and relatives.

The Alaska Grown campaign features four itineraries – the core area, Hatcher Pass, the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway and the Susitna Valley. The itineraries are designed for residents to find activities, lodging, featured hikes and an Alaska Grown component such as a farm tour or farm-to-table restaurants.

“We launched the Alaska Grown campaign last year for the first time and it was successful in driving people to the web site, along with improving awareness on social media,” Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler said.

The marketing campaign is multi-media and includes placement in the Anchorage Daily News, television on KTUU, digital ads, radio and social media buys on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

The campaign also includes a weekly giveaway of an Alaska Grown hoodie,



The in-state campaign features an Alaska Grown hoodie giveaway. This is one of last year’s winners.

selected from those who post on Instagram using the #yahoomatsu or #alaskagrown.

“We use the shoulder season in the spring and fall to market to residents and their visiting friends and relatives, because they help lengthen the busy summer season,” Ressler said.

The campaign is at www.alaskavisit.com/alaskagrown.

Marketing efforts include travel trade

The Mat-Su CVB met with more than 20 domestic tour operators during the American Bus Association Marketplace event, and will be meeting with more than 40 international tour operators during next week’s IPW event in Denver.

The ABA Marketplace is one of two national travel trade events the Mat-Su CVB attends every winter, along with the National Tour Association Travel Exchange convention, which was held in December.

“ABA is a great opportunity to reach large tour operators all in one place. The appointments are very focused and productive,” said Casey Ressler of the Mat-Su CVB. “It’s an opportunity to highlight

new products and existing tours that would fit into these national operators’ itineraries.”

At both NTA and ABA events, the CVB makes appointment requests through a computer system, as do tour operators. The scheduling system ensures that all appointments are highly qualified.

At next week’s IPW event, the Mat-Su CVB is partnering with the Valdez CVB and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council.

“It’s the country’s largest event for international tour operators and media, and we’re looking forward to showcasing the Valley,” Ressler said.

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cherylm@catheatres.com

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745-5121
info@sheepmountain.com

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mark@muskoxfarm.org

Roberta Warner
Explore Tours
Secretary
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roberta@exploretours.com

Craig Saunders
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733-2505
craigakrep@gmail.com

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

Israel Mahay
Mahay's Jetboat Adventures
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izzymahay@gmail.com

Cole Chambers
Rust's Flying Service and K2 Aviation
243-1595
cole@flyrustsk2.com

Fernando Salvador
Talkeetna Alaska Lodge/
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733-9501
fsalvador@alaskacollection.com

Collette Hand
Alaska's Harvest Bed & Breakfast
745-4263
harvest@mtaonline.net

From the Board Chair

Beyond marketing, advocacy is an important membership benefit

The Mat-Su CVB works hard to market the Valley as a premier visitor destination, in turn leading to economic development in our communities. While most are familiar with our marketing efforts and the result it has on our businesses, an often overlooked but vitally important aspect of the organization is advocacy.

Advocacy may not be the most visible membership benefit, but it is a big one, and one that should not be taken for granted. By representing more than 225 tourism businesses, the collective voice of the Mat-Su CVB has more impact than ours would individually.

Mat-Su CVB staff serve on state tourism subcommittees, the Alaska Travel Industry Association Board of Directors and have served on regional and national committees and boards. Their voice is your voice. They are continually monitoring tourism-related issues to make sure the industry is well represented.

One example of the advocacy effort is this year's king salmon restrictions. The board and staff heard from the membership, and were also in communication with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Palmer office, to monitor potential closures. We recognize the importance a strong sports fishery has, including bed and breakfasts, guide services, campgrounds and more. We also recognize the importance for managing that stock for sustainability years down the road. It's a delicate balancing act, but decisions made impact us all – that's why as an organization, we made sure the industry's voice was heard.

Also this spring, our members reached

out to us about confusion regarding the point of collection of the new Talkeetna Sewer and Water sales tax. We worked with our members, tour operators and the Mat-Su Borough to help establish an efficient and streamlined process that works for everyone involved.

Another major example of advocacy leading to a better result was when Alaska State Parks limited hours at Independence Mine two years ago. The grassroots efforts of the membership, as well as positive relationships with both the Alaska State Parks and the Mat-Su Borough, ultimately led to a decision to keep the gate open longer hours, giving visitors

a more positive experience and spending more time – and thus, more money – in the Mat-Su Valley.

Other issues are also important. Sustainable tourism funding at both the local and state level, government policy issues and other topics are always discussed at board meetings, and the ramifications they have on our industry are always considered.

First and foremost, we are here to market the Mat-Su Valley, attract more visitors and help drive our local economy, which we do through a targeted and efficient marketing plan. Behind the scenes, however, know that the organization is also working hard to make sure your collective voices are heard and are contributing to the betterment of the tourism industry as a whole.

Cheryl Metiva (cherylm@catheatres.com) is the general manager of the Extreme Fun Center in Wasilla.



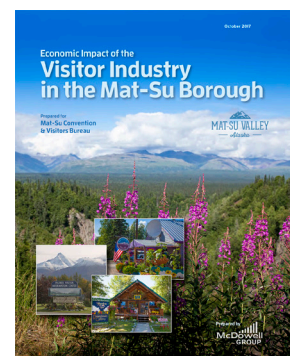
Cheryl Metiva

Important economic impact data

In 2016, out-of-state visitors contributed \$98 million in direct spending in the Mat-Su Valley

In 2016, out-of-state visitor spending contributed a \$133 million total economic output

Visitor spending is estimated to have resulted in direct employment of 1,350 jobs and \$34 million in labor income in 2016.



From the President & CEO

Mat-Su Borough approves full funding for Mat-Su CVB

The Mat-Su Borough Assembly passed the FY19 budget on May 3 with full funding for the Mat-Su CVB. The appropriation of \$747,500 is 65 percent of the projected \$1,150,000 bed tax collection for FY19. The next step is approval of a 3-year grant agreement on the June 5 assembly agenda. Because of some unexpected actions including vetoes from the governor in FY17 and assembly discussion of a sales tax proposal in FY18, Mat-Su CVB has operated on two consecutive 1-year extensions of our grant agreement.



Bonnie Quill

Renewal of a 3-year grant agreement with the borough is a high priority for the board of directors. The 1-year extensions have limited our ability to plan for future marketing opportunities. Similar to the school district argument in funding education, we also need the certainty to effectively draft our marketing plan. Some projects

including the launch of our new redesigned and responsive website need to be expensed over two budget years. A comprehensive Tourism Management Plan or a destination branding effort also would need to be

spread over two fiscal year revenues. I am pleased with the support of the mayor, assembly and borough administration of our partnership. They recognize the value of our destination marketing efforts and the benefits it brings to our Valley. Check out the results of the Economic Impact of the Visitor Industry in the Mat-Su Borough report published in October [HERE](#). And on the back page of this newsletter is a compelling illustration of the power of destination management and promotion.

Bonnie Quill (bonnie@alaskavisit.com) is the president and CEO of Mat-Su CVB.

Membership approves changes to by-laws

In early 2018, the Mat-Su CVB membership approved three by-laws amendments.

“I’d like to thank everyone who took the time to return their ballots and consider the by-laws amendments,” said Mat-Su CVB’s Bonnie Quill.

The first amendment approved by the membership changes the title of the executive director position to President and CEO, while also changing the Board of Directors president and vice president positions to Chair and Vice Chair.

The second amendment approved allows for electronic voting for the board of directors during the October elections.

The final amendment approved establishes a term limit of three three-year terms for members of the board of directors. Those who reach the term limit may run for the board of directors again after a one-year hiatus from serving. Previously, there was no limit on terms served by directors.

The three amendments were recommended by the By-Laws Committee, with input from the membership.

Summer kicks off at the Albatross and Settlers Bay

The Mat-Su CVB kicked off the summer tourism season with a networking event May 16 at Settlers Bay Golf Course and the Albatross Restaurant.

Members gave 60-second spotlights on their businesses to help generate referrals throughout the summer, enjoyed great food and entertainment and networked with one another.

“We’re slowly thawing out from the winter and this event is a great way for members to meet each other, build relationships and get ready for the summer,” Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin Saunders said. “We’re all looking forward to a busy and productive season.”

The event is the final membership event of the spring. Membership luncheons will start back up in September with the annual Mat-Su Borough Candidate Forum.



Matti and Dan Wilcock of Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours give a 60-second spotlight on their business during the summer kick-off event at Settlers Bay Golf Course May 16.

Annual meeting planner luncheon held in Anchorage

The Mat-Su CVB hosted a meeting planner luncheon in Anchorage on April 24, bringing together planners from Southcentral Alaska and eight members who cater to the meetings market.

The annual event featured a new mini-tradeshow format where planners met individually with members before a brief lunch presentation.

“The luncheon was a very nicely done event,” Ginger Miles of the CIRI Foundation wrote in an e-mail. “We received approval from our board to find a retreat location in the Mat-Su Valley, for the November meeting, so this is timely.”

The event was held at the 49th State Brewery’s private meeting room and included planners from organizations ranging from Ducks Unlimited, Logistics LLC, the Rasmuson Foundation and small associations.

There were 18 planners from 15 different organizations who attended the meeting.

“We want these meeting planners to know that the Mat-Su Valley is a great place to host their board retreats, meetings and events, and that we have the facilities



Steve Solari of Meier Lake Conference Center talks to the planners in attendance at the Mat-Su CVB meeting planner luncheon April 24 at 49th State Brewery.

and infrastructure to make their events successful,” Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler said. “We had great

feedback from the planners who attended, and we’ve already started working with one planner on a board retreat this fall.”

Web site traffic continues to increase year-over-year

One of the top marketing tools for the Mat-Su CVB is the website, which helps steer visitors to member listings, the calendar of events and lots of information about what there is to see and do in the Mat-Su Valley.

From Jan. 1 through May 14, www.alaskavisit.com has attracted 33,095 users for 41,630 sessions, an increase of 27 percent over the same time period in 2017. So far in 2018, there have been 80,000 page views.

“The web site is our biggest marketing investment, and it’s a constantly evolving project,” said Casey Ressler. “Working with our contractor, Simpleview, we are always looking at ways we can make this tool even more powerful.”

The Mat-Su CVB uses Simpleview, the world’s largest DMO web site contractor, for search engine optimization, search engine marketing and overall web site maintenance.

A strong search engine optimization and search engine marketing campaign is a must in today’s digital world.

“We have a very focused and efficient pay-per-click strategy, and our search engine optimization efforts are ongoing to

“We have a very focused and efficient pay-per-click strategy and our search engine optimization efforts are ongoing to make sure the site attracts visitors looking for information.”

make sure the site attracts visitors looking for information,” Ressler said. “The web site is the best medium for telling our destination’s story.”

An interesting part of the web site analytics is the increase in mobile traffic to the site.

Much like national trends, mobile traffic to the site now represents 50 percent of all visitors, while desktop traffic has fallen to 38 percent, with tablet traffic making up the difference. More users are accessing the site using a smartphone than any other device.

“It’s interesting to see this trend evolve so quickly, because mobile users use the

AlaskaVisit.com

Jan. 1 - May 14

Total sessions

41,630

Up 27 percent vs. 2017

Total users

33,095

Up 26 percent vs. 2017

Pageviews

80,331 - flat from 2017

web site differently,” Ressler said. “When we develop new content and design pages, we take a mobile-first approach, because we realize that more than half of our site visitors are accessing it this way.”

LA Travel & Adventure Show has record attendance

For the second year in a row, the Mat-Su CVB had a booth at the Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show, the largest consumer show in the country. And this year, the show attracted more visitors than ever before.

The Mat-Su CVB was part of a strong Alaska contingent that included Visit Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council, the Alaska Marine Highway and several fishing lodges.

“California is one of our top domestic markets, and the people who attend the show are very eager to learn more, start planning their vacation and get information about specific destinations,” Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler said. “A lot of the people we met are actively planning an Alaska trip, so it was great to help them out with their trip planning and tell them about all there is to see and do in the Mat-Su.”

More than 750 visitor guides were distributed, and members who participated in the cooperative marketing program had their brochures distributed as well. More than 75 attendees signed up for the Mat-Su CVB e-newsletter campaign.

Having a booth at the Los Angeles show is important because of the attendees the show attracts.

This year, a record 37,000 people attended the show, including 3,442



Casey Ressler mans the booth at the Los Angeles Travel and Adventure Show in late February.

members of the travel trade, 931 travel agents and 220 national travel writers. The demographics of the attendees align perfectly with the Alaska visitor

demographics.

“It’s a very busy and very successful show for the Mat-Su to participate in,” Ressler said.

In-state shows target VFRs

The Mat-Su CVB marketed to in-state residents and their visiting friends and relatives at four Alaska shows this spring.

More than 1,200 visitor guides were distributed, along with the brochures of members who opted to participate, at shows in Wasilla, Anchorage and Fairbanks.

“The outdoor shows are a great way to reach those folks who are already here, but are looking to get out and explore their own backyard,” marketing manager Casey Ressler said. “It’s an important segment for us.”

The four shows included the Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show, the Alaska Summer Showcase, the Great Alaska Sportsman Show and the Fairbanks Outdoors Show.

In addition to distributing visitor guides and member information, the Mat-Su CVB also was encouraging e-mail newsletter sign-ups from show attendees. More than 250 people signed up to receive the monthly e-newsletter.

“That allows us to remarket to them long after these shows, and that’s important,” Ressler said. “Every month, they’ll receive information about the Valley, from things to do to places to see. It keeps us top of mind.”

Visitor guides mailed to qualified leads

Throughout the winter, copies of the 2018 Mat-Su Visitor Guide were mailed to 54,000 high potential visitors in the Lower 48.

The Mat-Su CVB purchases these leads from the Alaska Travel Industry Association. Leads are generated when a potential visitor requests a state vacation planner through the ATIA web site or other advertising programs, so they are highly qualified.

“We know they are interested in coming to Alaska within the next three years, and they are actively looking for more information,” Casey Ressler said.

In addition to the ATIA leads, 3,500 guides were also mailed to travel agents around the country, along with other brochures and visitor guides from Alaska.

“For members, this is a great benefit because their information is being seen by visitors who are currently planning their vacation, as well as by travel agents who are developing itineraries for clients,” Ressler said.

Advertising sales for the 2019 guide are currently under way (see page 7).

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2018 ExTRAVELganza auction a successful fund-raiser

The 2018 Beer & Wine Tasting Travel Auction ExTRAVELganza was a big success, as more than 110 people attended and bid on auction items April 13 at Evangelos.

The travel auction is the largest fund-raiser of the year for the Mat-Su CVB, and money raised helps market the Mat-Su Valley.

“Every year, a lot of work goes into putting together the auction, and we couldn’t do it without the generosity of the sponsors and donors,” Justin Saunders

said. “It’s a fun event, but an important one.”

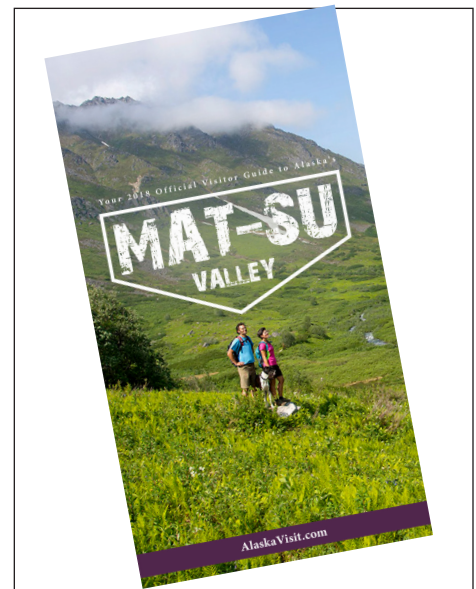
Auction items ranged from flightseeing and railroad trips to gift certificates to local businesses. There was a \$2,500 Princess Cruises gift certificate up for bid, as well as unique items like “brewer for a day” at Arkose Brewery.

At the conclusion of the event, the MTA/Alaska Airlines Luggage Tag Raffle winner was selected. Kathleen Himmelright of Wasilla won two tickets anywhere Alaska Airlines flies.

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Talkeetna Air Taxi
Talkeetna Roadhouse
The Grape Tap
The Lakefront Anchorage
The Musk Ox Farm
Tracy Ressler
Turkey Red
White Pass & Yukon Route



2019 Visitor Guide ad sales under way

Ad sales for the 2019 Mat-Su Visitor Guide began early this spring, and will continue throughout the summer. Membership Manager Justin Saunders will be on the road helping members fill out the forms and renew their listings.

Once again, advertising rates remained the same as 2018, giving members an affordable way to market their business to high potential visitors.

“Advertising in the visitor guide is a great value because it’s very targeted, we have a strong distribution plan and it’s very affordable,” Saunders said.

This year, 100,000 copies will be printed. They are distributed throughout Alaska at high visitor traffic areas, the CVB mails them to people who request guides on the web site, state leads are purchased for direct mail, and they are distributed to travel agents, tour operators and at consumer shows.

All members receive a free line listing in the guide. Display advertising begins at just \$170, and additional line listings are available.

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

News from the membership

Alaska Farm Tours is expanding this summer, adding the Talkeetna Farm and Food Tour June 11-Sept. 15. The tour will run daily except on Tuesday, starting at the Talkeetna Train Depot and traveling along Spur Rd. The tour is five hours and runs 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., including a farm-to-table lunch at Flying Squirrel Bakery and Cafe, tour of Birch Creek Ranch, delicious brew tasting at Denali. The cost is \$130 for adults, \$115 for seniors and \$95 for kids. The Palmer Rise and Shine Sunshine Tour runs June 11-Sept. 15 Monday through Wednesday, including three farms stops, a garden walk and a picnic lunch. The Palmer Farm and Brew Tour runs June 11-Sept. 15 Thursdays through Sundays, including two farm tours, a brewery tour and a flight of beer for tasting. For more information, visit www.alaskafarmtours.com.

Alaska Chinook Charters is offering several different trips this summer. For fishing, they are offering half-day and full-day trips. On the Little Susitna River, you can catch and retain king salmon Friday through Monday, with catch and release offered Tuesday through Thursday. On the Deshka, it's catch and release fishing for

king salmon only. Silver season – with retention – starts July 21, and fly fishing is offered on both rivers. Alaska Chinook Charters is also offering half-day Eco Tours on the Susitna River. A minimum of four guests is required, and the tour will focus on the flora and fauna of the area. Call Cilla at (907) 748-0065 to book or for more information.

Spring has sprung and **Settlers Bay Golf Course**, “Home to Alaska’s Best Putting Greens,” and The Albatross Restaurant where “Artisanal Food is Complimented with Local Brews, Spirits, & Great Views,” are now open. The Albatross is now a full-service liquor establishment, hosting concerts, golf tournaments, and special events throughout the summer. Keep updated at www.settlersbay.com or watch the events page at www.alaskavisit.com. Thank you for golfing Settlers Bay, we look forward to “Enhancing Your Experience.”

The Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum in Fairbanks returned to summer hours on May 13. The museum, featuring one of the country’s top collection of antique vehicles, is open Sunday –

Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Friday and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

MICA Guides is now offering helicopter tours of Matanuska Glacier, including packages that involve flightseeing as well as glacier treks. There are several tour options available, ranging from a 15-minute flight and glacier trek to a 30-minute flight only. The helicopter tours are operated by Matanuska Helicopter Tours and can be booked on the MICA Guides web site, www.micaguides.com. Also this summer, MICA will be offering, on a limited basis, full day photography tours that include glacier trekking with a professional guide and photographer.

Pike’s Waterfront Lodge remodeled it’s sleeping rooms in 2018, replacing bedding to convert to a white bed, changing lighting to LED, adding lighting to the bathroom, adding granite tops to the room desk, changing to a glass front lit refrigerator, upgrading the coffee/tea in room service, and adding a retro very cute phone. Outside, Pike’s added 13 fire pits, miniature mini golf, and a library in the free movie theatre.

March networking event brings together members

The Mat-Su CVB hosted an evening event on March 1 at The Gathering Place in Wasilla, bringing together members and business leaders from the community for an evening of good food and networking.

The evening event was organized by the Mat-Su CVB’s membership committee as a way to showcase a new local venue and provide information about CVB membership, advertising opportunities and events.

“It was the first time many people had an opportunity to see The Gathering Place, which is a great property for weddings, retreats or to just get away,” said Mat-Su CVB’s Justin Saunders. “We had well over 50 people attend.”

The event was sponsored by The Noisy Goose Café. They also provided desserts, while attendees brought their favorite dishes to share.

“Events like this help members network, find out more about other businesses and build relationships,” Saunders said.



More than 50 members and business leaders attended a March networking event at The Gathering Place in Wasilla, hosted by Mat-Su CVB.

Extranet gives members leads, listings and more

Want to super charge your online presence? Or access the latest leads from the Mat-Su CVB? It's all in your hands with the Extranet, the member portal that is a valuable marketing tool.

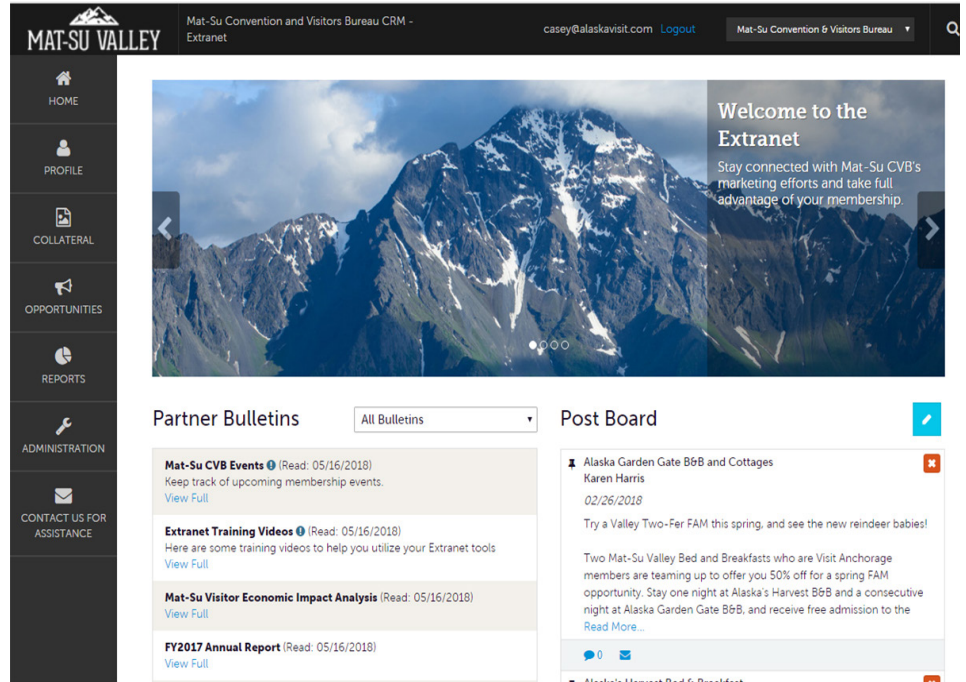
The Extranet was launched last winter and is available to all members. It's a virtual tool box for all things Mat-Su CVB, including partner bulletins, newsletters, industry research and leads. You can access it at <https://mat-su.extranet.simpleviewcrm.com>

"It really is a one-stop shop for everything a member needs, and all they have to do is log on and take advantage of it," Membership Manager Justin Saunders said. "All of the e-mail leads that used to clog people's in-boxes are now organized in one place, and you can download them in batches and sort them by date. Members also have the opportunity to update all of their information and any new contacts."

The Extranet is also useful for members who want to enhance their free online listing.

Members can upload pictures, update their amenities and provide detailed descriptions to make their listings stand out among the rest.

Members can also submit special offers which then appear on their listings (after an approval process), as well as post on



a community bulletin board for other members.

Members also can submit events they are hosting through the Extranet, which then appear on the calendar of events page on www.alaskavisit.com.

Saunders has developed a series of training videos for those interested in

learning more about how to access the Extranet, and how to take advantage of its many features.

For more information about the Extranet or for assistance in logging into the system, contact him at 746-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com.

Welcome to these new members

Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce
Debbie Rinckey
(907) 694-4702
www.cer.org

Alaska Chinook Charters
Dan Suprak
(907) 748-0095
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The Role of Destination Organizations

If you build a place people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live.

And if you build a place where business has to be, you'll build a place where people have to visit.



If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people want to work.

If you build a place where people want to work, you'll build a place where business needs to be.

YAHOO!
Mat-Su

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

(907) 746-5000
www.alaskavisit.com