



# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Fall 2011

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Executive Director Bonnie Quill gives an update on the Gateway Visitor Center Project.

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Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates share their views on tourism-related issues.

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The Mat-Su CVB worked with several national travel writers in the past few months, generating positive coverage for the area.

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## Tourism revenue rebounds 4.7 percent in FY 2011

Bed tax revenue for the Mat-Su Borough increased 4.7 percent last year, a clear sign the tourism industry has rebounded from its dip in 2010.

In 2008 and 2009, the Mat-Su Borough collected more than \$1.037 million in bed tax revenue before seeing that number fall to \$942,891 in fiscal year 2010, among national economic concerns. This year, however, tourism rebounded quite nicely, and the borough collected \$987,675 from the 5-percent bed tax.

"We are very encouraged by the increase in bed tax revenues for the fiscal year," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "When we knew

*"We are very encouraged by the increase in bed tax revenues for the last year. When we knew we'd be facing a downturn, we weathered that storm better than other Alaska destinations."*

- Bonnie Quill,  
Mat-Su CVB Executive Director

we'd be facing a downturn, we weathered that storm better than other Alaska destinations. And now, one year later, we've already seen an increase."

In 2010, more cruise ship passengers entered Alaska, and while the Valley

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## CVB celebrates 25 years at Nov. 18 annual meeting

The Mat-Su CVB will celebrate 25 years of success at its annual meeting on Nov. 18 at Settlers Bay Lodge. The annual meeting and mini-convention is a great opportunity for members to network, provide feedback to the organization and attend an educational workshop.

This year's educational workshop will include a panel discussing South Denali development, with a look to the past and an eye to the future. Included on the panel will be representatives from the Alaska State Parks, the National Parks Service, the Mat-Su Borough and Princess Tours.

"South Denali provides an amazing opportunity to help grow tourism in the Valley," said Mat-Su CVB Executive Director Bonnie Quill. "This project benefits the entire tourism industry here, not just those in Denali. The future success

of this project will benefit us all."

The panel discussion runs from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., and will be followed by the annual "Voice of the Membership" meeting. The Mat-Su CVB board will discuss the past year's successes and challenges, and outline the upcoming year for members. Members are encouraged to come with questions and comments, to help guide the board on important decisions in the upcoming year.

"The Voice of the Membership meeting is important because it gives members the chance to tell us what is on their mind, and what we can do to improve," Quill said. "I encourage all members to attend and lend their voice to the future. This is our 25th anniversary, and the members have

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*Directors are seated each November, and serve a three-year term. Terms expiring during the upcoming board elections belong to Dee Dee Kay, Nicole Bendle and Dan McDonough.*



Mat-Su CVB Board President Dee Dee Kay is interviewed by KTUU Channel 2 at the Gateway Gathering on May 11.

*Executive Director's Corner*

## Gateway Visitor Center project moving forward

I want to give you a quick update on progress of the Mat-Su Gateway Visitor Center. Our "Gateway Gathering" event on May 11 was a big success at Matanuska Lake Recreation Area. (Check out the video link on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/yahoomatsu> Justin created) We had a great turnout and collected public comments on our site evaluations from the Preliminary Feasibility Study. The responses overwhelmingly selected the Homestead RV Park at Mile 36 on the Glenn Highway.

In late May the National Scenic Byways program announced a grant application period which we quickly adhered to and requested \$2.2 million for site acquisition and design. Unfortunately, we heard in late May our grant request was not awarded but we were encouraged to resubmit in 2012.

Since then we have been scheduling meetings with our Valley legislators communicating the economic benefits of developing the Gateway Visitor Center and requesting seed funds. The Borough Assembly has identified the Gateway Visitor Center in their legislative priorities

and also passed a resolution supporting the Preliminary Feasibility Study. You can download the entire study at [www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com](http://www.matsuvallyvisitorcenter.com)

We are currently in Year 3, Phase III: Project Action Plan which includes securing partnerships and local support, building the organization structure and raising capital. The timeline estimates the project would be completed in Year 6 or 7.

Mat-Su CVB will be scheduling presentations throughout the Valley this winter to help secure support and keep the project as a borough priority. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this regional facility that will serve both local residents and visitors and showcase the assets of our Valley.

A reminder to our friends in the visitor industry - the Homestead RV Park is open for business pending any purchase agreement. The Utechts have been an integral part of the process and support the idea of a Visitor Center on the site.

*Bonnie Quill is the executive director of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

## Mat-Su CVB membership survey provides valuable feedback

The Mat-Su CVB recently completed a membership survey, and the results will help the Membership Committee craft member benefits and provide direction.

Overall, Mat-Su CVB members indicated they were satisfied with the CVB, with 75 percent of survey respondents indicating they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their membership.

"While I'm happy to hear people are happy with their membership, it doesn't slow us down from looking forward and trying to give members more benefits each year," said Membership Manager Justin Saunders. "We try to always offer as many benefits as possible to our members."

This year, a new member benefit included visitor guide leads. When a consumer requests a guide through the Mat-Su CVB Web site, an auto-generated e-mail is dispersed to members that meet the consumer's interests.

"We heard from our members that they wanted to capture those leads in real-time, so they can follow up directly with consumers," Saunders said. "We worked with our Web site company to make that happen."

Members also stressed their interest in moving the Gateway Visitor Center project forward; indicated they like the networking opportunities their membership brings; want the CVB to market more effectively to tour operators; and focus on continued development of the Web site.

*"While I'm happy to hear people are happy with their membership, it doesn't slow us down from looking forward and trying to give members more benefits each year. We try to offer as many benefits as possible to our members."*

- Justin Saunders,  
Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager

Survey respondents also said they were happy to see member roundtables as part of the networking opportunities.

Last year, Saunders started community roundtables, with meetings already held in Wasilla, Talkeetna and Lake Louise. They took the place of the regularly scheduled luncheons, as a way to reach outlying communities.

"There are no set agendas, so it's a chance for members to just show up and get to know each other better, and also to meet with CVB board members and staff to offer their input," Saunders said. "It's been real successful and we're looking forward to hosting more of them in the future."

If members have questions regarding their membership, including questions about benefits, listings online and in the Visitor Guide or renewals, please contact Saunders at 746-5032 or justin@alaskavisit.com.

"We're always trying to recruit new members, but satisfaction among current members is just as important," Saunders said. "Give me a call if you have any questions - that's what we're here for."

## BED TAX

Continued from Page 1

obviously isn't a port of call, a number of those passengers take land tours that often include overnights in the Mat-Su Valley. In addition, border crossings increased, which is a good sign that independent travelers increased.

"Every indicator we look at increased, which is a very good thing," Quill said. "We saw increases among all sectors of travelers - international, cruisers and those who arrived via airplane."

Anecdotally, Quill said, the next fiscal year has started off strong.

"We're working to reach that \$1 million mark in bed tax revenue again," Quill said.

## MEETING

Continued from Page 1

played a big role in the success of the organization."

At noon, the annual meeting gives way to the Stars of the Industry luncheon, where Mat-Su CVB members will be honored for their exceptional service. Awards will be handed out (see the award nomination sheet included in this newsletter).

Tickets for the entire morning's worth of activities are \$25 and are available by calling Justin Saunders at 746-5032 or by e-mailing him at Justin@alaskavisit.com. Sponsorship opportunities are also available, and include tickets for the event.

## Board of directors nominations sought for upcoming election

The Mat-Su CVB is soliciting nominations for its board of directors. Elected directors serve three-year terms on the board, and help shape the policy and direction of the organization.

This year, three spots are open on the board. The top three vote-getters in the election will be seated on the board at the Mat-Su CVB annual meeting on Nov. 18.

Self-nominations are accepted, and all nominations are reviewed by the Nominations Committee prior to being placed on the official ballot.

Interested members should submit a declaration of candidacy no later than Oct. 10, by e-mailing Bonnie Quill at bonnie@alaskavisit.com. By Oct. 14, candi-

dates should submit a 300-word statement and a color photograph.

"Serving on the board of directors is a great way to help guide the CVB into the future," Quill said. "You are representing the membership, and providing guidance for the industry as a whole."

Candidates must be Mat-Su CVB Tourism Development members in good standing. Exchange and Tourism Support members are not eligible to serve on the board of directors.

Board members are expected to participate in 5-7 board meetings a year (mostly during non-peak tourism season), as well as a few special meetings throughout the year.

After review of the candidates, the ballots will be mailed to members no later than Oct. 21. All ballots must be returned to the CVB no later than 5 p.m. Nov. 15. Ballots remained sealed until the elections committee meets on Nov. 16 to open the ballots and count them.

The three terms expiring belong to Dee Dee Kay, Nicole Bendle and Dan McDonough. McDonough has indicated he does not plan on running for reelection to the board.

Continuing to serve on the board are Steve Zadra, Karen Harris, Craig Saunders, Ruth Rosewarne-Kimerer, Jason Votruba, Mark Austin and Bethany Buckingham.

# Borough Assembly candidates share tourism views

Each year, the Mat-Su CVB polls Mat-Su Borough Assembly candidates about their views on tourism issues. This year, there are three candidates for two spots on the assembly - Darcie Salmon is running unopposed in District 5, while Pat Johnson and Steve Colligan are squaring off in District 4.

Below are the questions, and the candidates responses:

## QUESTION 1

*As with most local and regional convention & visitors bureaus, the Mat-Su CVB receives monies collected by the Borough through a bed tax of 5 percent. This year the assembly approved during budget deliberations an appropriation of \$585,000 for fiscal year 2012 in a grant agreement with the Mat-Su CVB. This equates to 65 percent of the projected transient accommodations tax (bed tax).*

*The board would like the assembly to solidify the formula with a 3-year grant agreement passed this winter. Would you consider the board recommendation of a 65/35 formula (of a 5 percent bed tax) between the Mat-Su CVB and the borough for long-term sustainable funding? Why or why not?*

**Darcie Salmon, District 5:** Favor. Yes I would favor 65/35. I remember when the bed tax first started. It was created to fund the MSCVB. Don't quote me, but I think at that time it was a 90/10 ration with only 10 percent going to the borough. Time has changed things and the borough has actually derived some monetary value as a result.

Again, I reiterate that I attempt to maintain balance and justice and win-win scenarios when negotiating regardless of what the negotiation entails. The MSCVB must be fed, and the bed tax was created to feed it.

**Pat Johnson, District 4:** Favor. We are approaching \$1 million in bed tax revenue, which is a boon for our community. I think that funding certainty is a good thing for both the borough and MSCVB. MSCVB has incentive for growing the tax revenue and the borough gets the jobs.

The 35 percent that goes to tourism infrastructure is really a plus for the Valley. The 65/35 sharing ratio has worked well. I know that MSCVB is interested in getting visitors to come, getting them to stay longer, which has a more positive effect on

our local economy.

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** Favor.

## QUESTION 2

*Because of state and local budget worries, there is concern among tourism businesses that other groups and government will increasingly look at bed tax revenues as a funding source for non-tourism expenditures. Would you support the use of bed tax monies for non-tourism purposes? If yes, what?*

**Darcie Salmon, District 5:** Oppose. As I stated above, the bed tax was created for the MSCVB to utilize. If the borough needs money for other purposes they should not disguise the need in this way. They should come to the people and say we are reducing the bed tax as MSCVB doesn't need as much anymore, but we need money for other issues. As such we will be coming to you, the people, requesting money for this that or the other thing, in other words request support from the people financially with full disclosure as to what the money is really needed for and devise a mechanism to get it. Oft times money can come from other user based fees to offset Borough expenses.

**Pat Johnson, District 4:** Oppose. This expenditure was meant for promoting tourism and should be used for that purpose, especially since there are good economic development opportunities in the tourism sector.

Tourism is a low-impact, worker-intensive industry that builds our tax base and provides jobs for our community. Whether it's the Gateway Visitor Center or smaller projects like information boards, rest stops or other tourist-friendly improvements, they help bring continued visitor interest to our area.

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** Oppose.

## QUESTION 3

*On Aug. 3, 2010 the assembly adopted the Mat-Su Borough Economic Development Strategic Plan. Tourism is identified in the plan as an important opportunity for economic development and recommends increasing tourism marketing efforts. Along with other borough industries where do you rate the importance of tourism?*

**Darcie Salmon, District 5:** I rate tourism in the middle. Clearly it is not going to bring in as much money as business expansion and industry, but it is the main reason outsiders come to Alaska, which is to see the beauty. The tourism areas should remain separated from development areas to the degree it is possible.

**Pat Johnson, District 4:** I rate it very highly. The Borough Economic Development Plan is good and we need to support our best opportunities in the tourism sector – a real bright spot. I am pleased with MSCVB partnering with others to make this happen. Good tourism marketing benefits more than just the tourism industry.

We can expect potential employers in other sectors to see the benefits of relocating here. Medical and technical people are attracted by the same excellent "livability" that visitors and current residents experience.

Whether hunting, fishing, hiking or other outdoor activities, we need to support the kind of marketing that generates more jobs and income across the borough.

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** Tourism is one of the most important legs on the proverbial stool that is our local, overall economy. I support the efforts of the economic development plan, but it is now time to act and do.

I support the bed tax and its use for the continued reinvestment to grow the tourism sector of our economy. I encourage the involvement of experienced individuals from the industry guiding and directing the borough administration and assembly.

I will not support the use or dilution of funds collected to be diverted for other purposes. I fully support the industry driven approach where the Mat-Su Borough is the partner that facilitates the collection of the industry-specific tax.

## QUESTION 4

*The completed Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (June 2008) has identified projects that would increase the economic impact of tourism in the Valley. A top priority is development of a South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center. The Mat-Su*

See ANSWERS, Page 5

# Candidates: Where they stand on tourism issues

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*CVB received a National Scenic Byways grant to create a feasibility study for the new Visitor Center and recently completed the plan. Next step is to begin implementation. Do you support the development of a new South Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center?*

**Darcie Salmon, District 5:** Yes, as I believe it is part and parcel of any viable tourism industry. There must be a gathering point that is equipped with information and ideas for the tourists to best enhance their stay here in Alaska. I believe the Visitor Center should be their first stop in the Valley, and I believe it should be well appointed and well done with class, and it should look Alaskan to the core.

**Pat Johnson, District 4:** I support the new Gateway Visitor Center as a great way to get a more visible and accessible site with a great view. It will be a good way to attract additional visitors and show off our Valley as a desirable place to live, work and play. Our borough needs to push tourism. It generates money and income from the rural areas like Trapper Creek, Lake Louise, Willow, right into the core area. Valley tourism is probably the biggest jobs

producer we have and we need to keep nurturing it.

**Steve Colligan, District 4:** I think the new visitor center is a great idea. I believe that it would encourage more use of existing resources from in-state visitors as well as a resource and experience for out of state visitors to spend time in the Mat-Su rather than just pass through. I think it is appropriate for the borough and industry to partner together to establish and implement the next steps to secure funding and accomplish something.

As a board member of both Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife-Alaska and Safari Club International, Alaska's two premiere conservation groups in our state, I have been involved in partnering with sportsmen, subsistence and commercial interest to follow our state constitution and grow more resources so that we are not fighting over the last of anything.

As a business person and successful entrepreneur, I support the creation of new wealth in our economy both working together; government and industry. Economic development will not succeed if government and industry work independent and alone. Government can facilitate opportunity, but it takes individuals and businesses to turn opportunity into jobs. I have worked with

government and industry for 25 years. We need true business experience on our assembly right now to transition our local economy towards success and independent of our national problems.

Just like sportsmen, we need to turn our attention toward creating more and new opportunities in our community, rather than fighting over the last dollar. As a business person on the assembly, I will reach out to industry experts for the answers and direction and help direct the borough to take actions and establish regulations that are good for industry and the people of Mat-Su. I am a level-headed individual that has the skills and experience to have engaging conversations with opposing parties to establish common goals or identify areas of improvement. I support the current relationship between the Mat-Su Borough and the local tourism industry. I support industry guiding and partnering with the borough to set goals, priorities and timelines, and then achieving them as industry, thus growing the tourism industry, not growing government.

*For more information on each of the candidates, interested people can reach Darcie Salmon at [darkonia@gmail.com](mailto:darkonia@gmail.com); Pat Johnson at [patrick4matsu@gmail.com](mailto:patrick4matsu@gmail.com); and Steve Colligan at [steve@stevcolligan.com](mailto:steve@stevcolligan.com).*

## Mat-Su Borough election information

Two Assembly seats are up for election - District 4 and District 5

Two Mat-Su School Board seats are up for election

Various city councils and mayor elections are scheduled,  
as well as three ballot propositions

General election is Tuesday, Oct. 4 with official polling places  
located around the Mat-Su Valley

For polling places, sample ballots and more information, as well as a list of  
candidates appearing on the ballot, interested people can  
visit <http://www.matsugov.us/Clerk/elections>

## Japan market targeted during September mission

More than 200 tour operators, agents and media members attend in four cities

Mat-Su CVB Marketing and Communications Manager Casey Ressler recently returned from Alaska Travel Industry Association Japan Workshops, where he met with more than 200 tour operators and media members in four cities.

The workshops give Alaska destinations an opportunity to meet with leading tour operators in one of Alaska's most important international markets.

"Japanese tourists are very interested in Alaska, and the workshops are a great way to meet with the operators and showcase why they should include the Mat-Su Valley as part of their Alaska tour packages," Ressler said. "It's a very hectic schedule, but well worth it because you reach so many operators and travel agents in a short amount of time."

Ressler met with operators and agents in Hiroshima, Nagoya, Osaka and Tokyo. A media event was also held in Tokyo, with more than 50 media members attending. The event is coordinated by the ATIA marketing office in Japan each April. This year, due to the earthquake and tsunami disasters in March, the workshops were moved to September.



Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler worked with ATIA contractors (from left) Wataru Takaku, Tomoko Koyama and Naoya Asao during the September sales mission to Japan. Ressler met with more than 200 tour operators and media representatives in four cities.

This year, Japan Airlines will offer 13 charter flights from Japan directly to Alaska, and important step in attracting Japanese visitors to our area.

A charter flight from Tokyo to Anchorage is about as long as a direct flight from Chicago to Anchorage, for

example.

"Alaska has everything Japanese tourists want – natural beauty, the northern lights, a wilderness setting," Ressler said. "And with charter flights, Alaska is easily accessible to a large part of the Japanese market."

## Winter domestic marketing under way with NTA, ABA

The Mat-Su CVB will attend two leading national conventions this winter aimed at marketing to tour operators.

The National Tour Association's annual convention is the first week of December in Las Vegas, and the American Bus Association's annual "Marketplace" is set for the first week of January in Grapevine, Texas.

"NTA and ABA are great opportunities to reach national tour operators who offer Alaska packages to their clients," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing manager. "At both conventions, we make contacts that lead to future business opportunities for our members."

Both conventions offer prescheduled meetings with tour operators. Months prior to the actual event, Ressler researches each company attending the event and makes appointment requests through the online scheduling system employed by both conventions. Two weeks prior to the conventions, a computer-generated schedule is given to each attendee.

"The process is a good one because it ensures that we only have appointments with highly-qualified operators, and that those operators are interested in adding to their existing tour packages, or are interested in starting an Alaska tour package," Ressler said.

Alaska has a strong presence at both conventions, with destination marketing organizations attending, including Anchorage CVB, Fairbanks CVB, Kenai Peninsula Tourism



AMERICAN BUS ASSOCIATION



Marketing Council, the Valdez CVB and the Alaska Travel Industry Association. Individual Alaska tourism businesses also attend the conventions each year. ATIA also sponsors two functions during the conventions, spreading Alaska's reach to every operator.

## National journalists visit Mat-Su Valley this summer

This fall, the Mat-Su CVB assisted three national writers on familiarization trips to the Mat-Su Valley, which has already generated coverage of the area.

Freelance writer and television producer Masada Siegel visited the Valley in early August. She trekked on Matanuska Glacier, visited the Palmer Musk Ox Farm and the Reindeer Farm, and lunched at Turkey Red in downtown Palmer.

"This has been one of the favorite parts of Alaska," Siegel said on her visit. "It's absolutely beautiful, and the people have been so friendly."

Siegel has a contract with Chinese television stations for English-speaking segments, and expects to produce a piece about the Mat-Su Valley in the near future.

Freelance writer Jenna Schneur visited Talkeetna during a two-month stay in Alaska. She is pitching a story about base camp on Denali, and visited with the two base camp managers of the last 20 years at Talkeetna Air Taxi. The Mat-Su CVB pitched the story to Schneur last year at Alaska Media Roadshow.

Finishing up a busy three weeks of media tours was Harriet Baskas, who writes for USA Today and MSNBC.com. The Mat-Su CVB hosted her for three days, including the Alaska State Fair, flightseeing in Talkeetna, a stay at Alaska Adventure Unlimited and a stay at the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge and tours of the Musk Ox Farm and the Colony House Museum.



Writer and television producer Masada Siegel interviews Mark Austin from the Palmer Musk Ox Farm during a press trip through the Mat-Su Valley in August. The Mat-Su CVB hosted three national journalists and assisted on two other press trips during August.

Within a week of her visit, the Mat-Su Valley received coverage on MSNBC.com, in a story about the giant cabbage weigh-off at the Alaska State Fair, as well as in a story at the same site about Denali National Park.

"Normally, media FAMs take a year

to see results, so we were excited to see coverage so soon," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB's marketing and communications manager. "It was great to showcase the Valley for national writers, which leads to outstanding coverage that helps attract visitors."

## Alaska Media Roadshow brings together writers, destinations

The Mat-Su CVB will attend the Alaska Media Roadshow in Santa Barbara, Calif., in late October, pitching news stories about the Valley to leading national writers, radio producers and television executives.

Roadshow, organized by the Alaska Travel Industry Association, is an important tool in generating positive coverage about the area. Up to 50 highly-qualified journalists attend the two-day event and leave with a wealth of information and story pitches.

"Roadshow has been very successful for us, although the results aren't immediate," said Casey Ressler, Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager. "A lot of stories take months, or even years, to flesh out, but that initial contact with journalists at Roadshow is the first step."

Media coverage is important to the

***"When you receive coverage in a national publication such as USA Today, or a national major newspaper, it lends validity to your destination."***

*- Casey Ressler,  
Mat-Su CVB Marketing  
& Communications Manager*

overall marketing efforts of the Mat-Su CVB, Ressler explained.

"When you receive coverage in a national publication such as USA Today, or a national major newspaper, it lends credibility to your destination," Ressler said. "People put more credence into a story they read instead of an advertisement."

In the last year, the Mat-Su Valley has been featured in such publications as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Post,

online at a variety of sites including USA Today and MSNBC.com and in many regional newspapers.

"A lot of that coverage wouldn't have happened if we hadn't planted a seed with the journalists at Roadshow," Ressler said. "I'm looking forward to making new contacts and renewing old relationships at Roadshow. It's a great tool for us to garner national attention – and the eyes of potential visitors."

At Roadshow, participants have prescheduled 15-minute appointments with journalists. The journalists are screened by Thompson and Company (ATIA's public relations firm) to ensure all appointments are highly qualified. Journalists represent a wide variety of media outlets, including trade publications, newspaper and radio.

## Stars of the Industry honored at annual meeting luncheon

The Mat-Su CVB will honor the “Stars of the Industry” during the annual awards luncheon on Nov. 18 at Settlers Bay Lodge. Each November, in conjunction with the annual meeting, the CVB honors members who have shined during the last year.

Nominations are now being solicited for award winners. Members can use the facing page of this newsletter to submit their nominations.

The Cheechako award is given annually to a business that has not only survived, but prospered during its infancy. Starting a business is a challenge, but award winners in this category have overcome this hurdle and enjoyed success. Recent winners include the Flying Squirrel Bakery, Knik River Lodge and Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours.

The Tourism Angel Award is handed out to an individual who goes above and beyond expectations in promoting tourism in the Mat-Su Valley. Award winners in the past have contributed to Mat-Su CVB’s efforts to market the Mat-Su Valley, and have the entire tourism industry in mind in their promotional efforts. Recent winners include Bonnie Quill and Trisha Costello of Talkeetna Roadhouse.

The Gold Star Award is given to a business or organization that led the way in the tourism industry in the last year. Winners have been identified as leaders in the industry, and have helped other tourism businesses to succeed based on their efforts. Recent honorees include Deshka Landing Outdoor Association and the Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats.

The Northern Lights Award honors a community or organization that has developed and promoted tourism in the past year. Winners in recent years include the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce, Wasilla Chamber of Commerce and the



Trisha Costello of Talkeetna Roadhouse accepts the Tourism Angel Award during the 2009 Stars of the Industry luncheon.

Mat-Su Borough.

Other special awards are also considered. In the past, the CVB has given out the “It Happens” award to a business that has taken lemons and turned them into lemonade, and also the “Spirit of Tourism” award that honors an individual who has left a life-long mark on the industry.

After nominations are received, the Awards Committee meets to review them and choose award winners. For information on the award nomination process, interested people can contact Justin Saunders at 746-5032 or Justin@alaskavisit.com.

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### Showing off the Valley

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Harriet Baskas, a writer for MSNBC.com as well as several other independent blogs, enjoys a flightseeing trip around Denali during an August FAM trip to the Mat-Su Valley. Baskas was in the Mat-Su Valley for four days and produced copy on the Alaska State Fair, as well as did research for upcoming stories and a book she is writing. The Mat-Su CVB met Baskas initially at Alaska Media Roadshow and brought her to the Valley on the FAM trip. “Hosting FAM trips for both writers and tour operators is a great opportunity and a great member benefit,” said Casey Ressler, the Mat-Su CVB marketing and communications manager.



### Northern Lights Award

Honors a community in the Mat-Su Borough that has distinguished itself for outstanding tourism promotion and/or development.

I nominate:

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### Gold Star Award

This prestigious award recognizes a business or organization that has made a significant accomplishment in the tourism industry.

I nominate:

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### Tourism Angel Award

Awarded to an individual who has supported and assisted Mat-Su CVB and has shown true concern for the success and growth of all members in the Mat-Su Borough.

I nominate:

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### Cheechako Award

Awarded to a new tourism business, organization or entity showing entrepreneurial zeal and managing not only to survive, but to thrive in its early years.

I nominate:

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### ... It Happens Award

Awarded to an individual, business or organization that took a lemon and made lemonade. It is intended to laugh with, not at, others!

I nominate:

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**Special Awards:** If you feel someone deserves recognition but doesn't fit a category, tell us who they are and why they merit special commendation!

## October membership luncheon is going green

The October Mat-Su CVB luncheon is going green.

The Adventure Green Alaska organization is the speaker for the Oct. 14 luncheon at Evangelo's in Wasilla, and they'll share why being environmentally friendly isn't just good for the globe – it's good for your profit and loss statements as well.

Adventure Green Alaska is a certification program for tourism businesses in Alaska that meet specific

standards of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Several Valley tourism businesses have become certified in recent years.

"Many travelers pick their destinations based on certain niches, and 'green' tourism has been on the rise in the recent past," said Bonnie Quill, executive director of the Mat-Su CVB.

Adventure Green Alaska certification is administered by an independent, nonprofit corporation, and there are three levels of

qualification – gold, silver and bronze.

"AGA encourages tourism businesses to evaluate their operations and determine what they use – or could be using – best management practices," the AGA Web site states.

Deborah Hansen will lead the presentation.

The Oct. 14 program is free, and lunch is available through Evangelo's for \$15. To RSVP for the luncheon, please e-mail Justin@alaskavisit.com or call 746-5032.

## Welcome to these new CVB members

The Mat-Su CVB is pleased to welcome these new members since the spring. Welcome to the organization, and remember, Yahoo, Mat-Su!

Kahiltna Birchworks  
Dulce Ben-East  
www.alaskawildharvest.com  
dulce@alaskabirchsyrop.com

Mr. Kab & Shuttle  
Sheila Taranto  
mrkabtaxi.com  
sheila.taranto@yahoo.com

Butte's Bethel B&B  
Carey Hejl  
www.buttessbethel.com  
info@buttessbethel.com

Havemeister Dairy Farm  
Jeanne Havemeister  
havemeister@gci.net

Reindeer Farm  
Denise Hardy  
www.reindeerfarm.com  
reindeer@mtaonline.net

Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center  
Ethan Tyler  
www.biggamealaska.com  
biggame@alaska.net

Denali Overlook Inn  
Mabel Quilliam  
www.denalioverlookinn.com  
info@denalioverlookinn.com

Tara Dells Bed & Breakfast  
Donel Dowling  
www.taradells.com  
stay@taradells.com

Pyrah's Pioneer Peak Farm  
Janet Pyrah  
www.pppfarm.net  
info@pppfarm.net

Mt. View RV Park  
Shawn Starr  
www.mtviewrvpark.com  
starr1@mtaonline.net

Talkeetna Chalet and Bed & Breakfast  
Andi Manning  
www.talkeetna chalet.net  
info@talkeetna chalet.net

### South Denali Autumn



Fall colors abound on Curry Ridge in late September. Last week, Casey Ressler toured the area with Alaska State Parks and National Park Service officials. A proposed visitor center would sit on Curry Ridge with spectacular views of Denali. According to an economic impact study, the proposed center would generate \$18 million in direct spending for the Borough.

## Tourism calendar of events

Oct. 4-8	Alaska Travel Industry Association Convention Bonnie Quill, Casey Ressler, Justin Saunders will attend	Juneau
Oct. 14	October Membership Luncheon Adventure Green Alaska is the presentation Presentation is free, lunch is \$15 (Payable to Evangelo's)	Evangelo's
Oct. 23-25	Alaska Media Roadshow Bonnie Quill and Casey Ressler will attend Prescheduled meetings with journalists	Santa Barbara, Calif.
Nov. 18	Mat-Su CVB Annual Meeting/Awards Luncheon Tickets are \$25 each, includes seminars and luncheon	Settlers Bay Lodge
Dec. 5-9	National Tour Association National Convention Casey Ressler will attend Prescheduled appointments with tour operators	Las Vegas
Jan. 6-12	American Bus Association Marketplace Casey Ressler will attend Prescheduled appointments with tour operators	Grapevine, Texas
Jan. 14-15	Los Angeles Adventure in Travel Expo Casey Ressler will attend Consumer travel show in a top market for Alaska	Long Beach, Calif.

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7744 E. Visitors View Ct.  
Palmer, AK 99645

# Tourism

Good for the whole Valley.

*“If you ask, I’ll tell you I’m a graphic designer, but quite honestly, I’m in the visitor industry. Like a lot of professionals in the Valley, my success follows the folks who come here for a visit. You don’t have to convince me that tourism is good for the whole Valley.”*



CHRIS WHITTINGTON-EVANS  
PALMER

