



**SEWARD
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
CONFERENCE & VISITORS BUREAU**

2009 ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION

To promote and support our members in maintaining a diversified economy and positive living environment in the greater Seward area.

OUR WORK

The Seward Chamber is a voluntary partnership of the business community, representing 336 member businesses and at least 1,600 employees. We represent and promote the area's business sector and encourage investment and economic development to broaden the tax base and provide employment opportunities. As a representative of and in partnership with our members, we advocate for legislation and practices that support the Seward business community and foster a strong local economy and positive business climate.

LEADERSHIP

Dan McDonald President	Kenai Fjords Tours	Tourism
Ron Long Vice President	Ron Long Marine Surveys	Marine Services
Susan Swiderski Treasurer	Orca Island Cabins, Once in A Blue Moose	Tourism, Retail Sales
Deborah Altermatt	Sailing, Inc.	Marine Sales
Ron Hewitt	Individual Member	Community At-Large
Linda-Rae Olsen	Integrity Realty	Realty
Nici Murawsky	UAF Seward Marine Center, Nick & Beulah's Place	Government, Education, Tourism
Mica VanBuskirk	Stormchasers, Inc.	Marine Services

PARTNERS

Businesses join the Chamber by investing a base amount annually, defined by the number of owner/employees associated with that business. The Chamber maintains a low basic investment by offering services and opportunities to generate revenue needed to sustain and grow our programs.

In addition to the basic member investment, the Chamber is proud to partner with 50 businesses who provide additional financial support to our programs, helping us keep the basic membership investment affordable for even the smallest businesses.

The investment of our 10 Economic Development Partners and 41 Contributing Partners ensure we maintain a capability to advocate for the business community in the Legislative and local arenas, a strong presence on regional advisory boards, the ability to attract media coverage, and year-round operations for Seward's Visitor Center.



Meet With Seattle-Based Businesses

In conjunction with City leadership, the Chamber met with marine transportation and cruise industry representatives in Seattle. These companies do business in Seward and have acknowledged the potential for growth. In 2010, we will be adding 2 new Seattle companies and an Anchorage visit (transportation, oil, National Park Service) to our schedule.

Pursue New Business Opportunities

Chamber staff provided support to entrepreneurs with new business ideas for Seward and coordinated closely with an already-established Alaska business seeking to relocate. Staff worked with the City of Seward to develop business incentives to encourage growth and investment.

Distribute Economic Development Information

The Chamber publishes Seward information pamphlets and distributed 57 packets to businesses prospects and families interested in relocating to Seward.

Support Development Initiatives

The Chamber sent letters of support for the Alaska Region Research Vessel, KP Small Business Development Center, Mary Lowell Center, Library-Museum Project, and Preserve America Community application. The Board also passed Resolution 2009-02 in support of a Hydroelectric Study.

Conduct Economic Development Study

Under contract to the City of Seward, the Chamber completed phase I of a multi-faceted economic development study. Staff administered the Harbor Survey to over 1,500 potential respondents and compiled the 300+ results into an Executive Study, a full report, and a report to the City's Port and Commerce Advisory Board.

Fund Fish Enhancement Programs

The Chamber supports Seward's economy with financial investment in programs that enhance our local fisheries, particularly our Coho stocks. In 2009, the Chamber released a report detailing revenue raised through the Seward Silver Salmon Derby® for fish enhancement and financial contributions to enhancement programs over the last five years. In 2010, the Chamber will seek additional programs through which we can help sustain healthy fisheries. We will continue to promote the Derby from this perspective—as a community-based event which encourages all participants to assist us in protecting the resource.

Exhibit at Industry Shows

The Chamber hosted a booth at Seattle's Pacific Marine Expo, an industry show targeting marine transportation and service providers, commercial and sport fishing businesses, and pleasure-boaters. In partnership with Seward Harbor and AVTEC, we publicized our marine support services, training opportunities, and our quality of life. The Chamber's Marine Service Providers publication is a valuable take-away resource for attendees at this show.

Partner With Related Organizations

We remain actively involved with the Alaska State Chamber, the Alaska Travel Industry Association, and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council. Our participation keeps us informed of emerging economic trends and provides access to cooperative promotional opportunities.

Award Scholarships

The Chamber's annual scholarship supports workforce development and encourages students to pursue study in fields important to Seward's economy.

Disseminate Legislative Information

To help our members be more informed about proposed legislation and its potential impact to businesses, the Chamber published information about key issues and tracked various bills through the State Legislature. Staff also monitored proposed Ordinances and Resolutions at the City and Borough level. Staff researched legislation to assess whether proposed laws would create jobs or eliminate jobs, and coordinated with other Chambers statewide to analyze the potential effects of proposed legislation on our respective economies. The Chamber advised members of important public hearings or votes and encouraged the business community to participate in the legislative process.

Conduct Public Testimony

The Chamber publicly testified, or provided written testimony for a variety of Local, State, and Federal issues.. Specific issues included (Federal) Health Care Reform and the Employee Free Choice Act; (State) Investing tourism-based revenue into tourism marketing; and (Local) Development of the SMIC basin.

Host Annual Meet the Candidates Forum

The Chamber hosted the annual public forum, allowing Seward residents and businesses the opportunity to ask questions of those individuals who have filed the appropriate candidate declaration paperwork with the City and Borough.

Coordinate Legislative Updates

The Chamber invited State Senator Gary Stevens and State Representative Paul Seaton to be guest speakers at respective membership luncheons. The Alaska Cruise Association and the Alaska Legacy Plan also spoke on issues related to legislative issues under debate in Juneau.

Build www.sewardbusinessvoice.com

The Chamber is building an online Legislative Action Center to be launched in early 2010. Your Legislative Action Center will provide information about federal, state, and local issues, including related stories from state and national news sources . With daily updates, this web site will become a great resource for members interested in getting more involved in the legislative process. The site incorporates “Voter Voice”, a program to assist our members in speaking out for or against particular legislation. Following a one-time registration, participants email their testimony about any issue to the appropriate elected delegation with a single click.

Provide Small Business Support

Staff provided one-on-one support to over a dozen business members. Topics range from how to reach target customers, how to assess the effectiveness of a marketing campaign, and financial/grant resources available for projects. The Chamber also researched and provided data on the local community and business demographics. Staff led a site visit for a prospective business and supported out of state contractors with subcontractor referrals.

To better support the business community, the Chamber purchased the web url www.sewardforbusiness.com which will be populated with pertinent data and links specific to doing business in Seward.

Reinforce our Mission and Role

The Chamber participates in City Council and Port and Commerce Advisory Board meetings, in addition to numerous community action groups, at which staff reinforce the role of the business community in Seward, the Chamber’s role, and the connection between our programs and a strong economy.

Host Seward.com Web Site

The Chamber’s web site drives customers to member businesses. Members are offered a single category listing as part of their membership and can purchase additional listings on an annual basis. Listings are further customizable with a selection of service icons (year-round, wi-fi, pets, wheelchair accessible, shuttle) and unique business descriptions. Some businesses have opted to highlight themselves with individual web advertisements.

The Chamber maintains a Members Only section with Board Resolutions, reports, and the Cruise Ship Schedule. An online calendar informs members of business-related events and member announcements facilitate communication.

Program Membership Luncheons

The Chamber scheduled 17 membership luncheons in 2009. Guest speakers provided updates on the Alaska Region Research Vessel, Seward Mountain Haven, the Library-Museum project, Qutekcak’s Learning Center, and Kenai Watershed’s Culvert Program. Additional speakers addressed the cruise industry, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Seward’s Blue Ribbon School, Seward Code Changes, Alaska SeaLife Center programs, regional tourism marketing, fluoridation pros and cons, renewable energy, conference support, and education.

Distribute Reports on Issues/Programs

In 2009, the Chamber produced a Fish Enhancement report and a comprehensive Economic Development Proposal.

Publish Electronic Newsletter (E-News)

The Chamber produced 48 newsletters in 2009, providing members up-to-date information and announcements.

Offer Business Promotion Opportunities

“After Five” Events

The Chamber supported 8 member businesses that hosted After Five events in 2009. Spring Creek Correctional and the U.S. Post Office hosted their first events, along with Scenic Mountain Air and the Qutekcak Tribe. The Alaska SeaLife Center, Windsong Lodge, and the VanGilder hosted what have become annual events. Participating businesses highlight a new program or service, and attendees enjoy camaraderie beyond the office environment. Participants discover new potential business partnerships and the events encourage new members to join.

Membership Luncheon Sponsorship

Luncheon sponsorships help defray costs associated with the luncheon program. In exchange, the sponsor has the floor for 5 minutes to promote a service or program. The sponsor is invited to sit with and introduce the speaker, allowing them time to develop or strengthen an alliance or partnership.

Marketing Opportunities

Members have the option to participate in marketing opportunities distinct from the Chamber’s collective efforts. Co-Operative ads in Alaska Magazine featured participants in collage of Seward businesses on a single page identified by an overall Seward banner, improving each ad’s “viewability”. Electronic ads are featured in the Chamber’s weekly E-News, and highlighted 44 promotions to 384 recipients. Hosting media writers and film crews offer another means of highlighting the features of a business.

Business Referrals

The Chamber regularly refers other businesses and individuals to member businesses.

Publish and Distribute Seward Information

The Destination Guide is Seward's primary means of providing printed information to requestors. 125,000 copies were distributed to Alaska Visitor Centers, Anchorage visitor sites, Canadian travel shows, and the cruise lines, in addition to all the consumer shows at which the Chamber hosts a booth. 14,191 were requested directly by consumers and another 8,785 viewers downloaded the electronic version. In 2009, the Chamber participated in a new program, sending 4,000 copies to travel agents who specifically requested information on Alaska. \$58,517 of ad sales revenue pays for design and printing of the Guide, making it a self-sustaining promotional product.

Publicize Seward.com Web Site

The website received 132,182 unique hits, with over a half million unique hits since inception in 2006. A high search engine ranking helps highlight our site. The last quarter of 2009 shows a 7.5% increase in traffic over the same period in 2008, suggesting an upwards trend for Seward tourism.

Exhibit at Consumer Shows

The Chamber hosted booths at consumer shows in the Mat-Su Valley, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. Partnering with other Chambers and participating in the National Park Service's Junior Ranger Program helped increase Seward's visibility.

Contract Marketing Services

The Chamber contracted with the Seward Highway All-American Road Partnership to create 4 electronic brochures highlighting features of the highway. The Chamber also contracted with the City of Seward to provide specific marketing services approved by City Council. The Chamber does not receive grant or appropriations from the City.

Support Media Requests and On-Location Activities

The Chamber assisted a PBS film crew, international tour sales teams and travel agents from Germany and Japan, and travel writers from throughout the U.S. interested in highlighting Seward. Additionally, staff provided photos and text support to the Weather Channel, for their Top 10 Scenic Drives and Seward Highway promotions. The Chamber also worked with TripAdvisor®, providing background information and resources which resulted in their selection of Seward as the Top U.S. destination for 2010.

Administer Signature Events***Military Appreciation Picnic***

The Chamber recognizes the sacrifices made by our veterans, active duty personnel, and the military families with a free picnic on Armed Services Day.

Halibut Tournament

Held during the month of June, the Tournament promotes early-season fishing for halibut. An estimated 2,003 anglers participated, vying for \$25,000 in cash and in-kind prizes.

Mount Marathon Race®

The race attracted 879 runners and an additional 449 applicants who were unsuccessful in the bib lottery.

Independence Day Fireworks

The Chamber celebrated the holiday with a fireworks display over the Bay.

Seward Silver Salmon Derby®

6,370 tickets were sold, with anglers turning in an estimated 12,624 pounds of Coho. Sales (processor and buy-backs) raised \$12,743 for local fish enhancement programs.

Operate Year-Round Visitor Center

Staff served 15,988 visitors, which represents a 17% drop over 2008. The decline reflects not only the statewide trend, but also a local trend towards more web-based pre-planning. 38 members participated in the Availability Calendar, which further encourages pre-planning by allowing web users to easily identify a member's annual availability, or pre-select properties and attractions with current availability (offered as a three-day window).

Welcome Arrivals At Cruise Ship Dock

The Chamber welcomed 86,458 cruise ship passengers and 34,076 crew, either at a welcome desk in the terminal, or directly onboard the ship upon request.

Assist Conference and Event Planners

The Chamber supported visiting conference groups with pre-planning (identifying resources and conducting site visits) and on-site needs (publicity, Seward welcome).

2010 AND BEYOND

The Chamber Board of Directors will lead the business community proactively, speaking as one voice for collective interests of employers and employees. The Chamber will modify and create programs to take advantage of developing trends, both technological and with respect to consumer behaviors. Partnering with regional resources and the local Job Center, we will improve access to small business resources. Finally, as the Chamber office serves as Seward's "front door", we will continue to improve the visual appeal of our office, which received new paint on the building trim, deck, and parking lot in 2009. Follow-on ideas for the upcoming year include landscaping, mural displays, and enhancements to our aging building.