



**Denali Chamber of Commerce**

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Letter from the Executive Director

4/9/2020

To the Communities of the Denali Borough,

When the first rumblings of Covid-19 appeared, I don't think we could have predicted the changes that would come or that they would come so quickly. In three weeks, the effect on our country, our state, and our local businesses community have been staggering.

With the spread of Covid-19, there is also a spread of misinformation, speculation, and uncertainty. It is my hope that this letter can serve to eliminate some of the first two and give an accurate view of what potentially lies ahead of us.

Locally we have received approximately 600,00 visitors annually. From the 2016 Alaska Visitor Industry Statistics Survey, approximately 51% of those visitors have either disembarked a cruise ship or will board one leaving Denali. The current limitations on cruise traffic through July 1<sup>st</sup>, with the closure of Canadian ports, will have an enormous effect on those visitation numbers.

Of the remaining visitors, 43% arrive by air and 6% arrive via highway (traditional or marine). With current quarantine mandates (14 days of isolation), the closing of Canada's borders, and the current status of the Alaska Marine Highway, both those means of travel are also significantly impacted. There is of course a possibility that this will change as mandates are issued or rescinded, and broader effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are understood. (Those visitors provide approximately 82% of the Denali Borough budget, estimated at \$3.85 million dollars for 2019. Nearly 72% of that income is reinvested in our local school district.)

There is also the unknown factor – what will the psychological impact be moving forward? *How* will people travel and *when* they will travel? No one can be sure. But I can tell you that the Alaska travel industry as a whole is studying current situations and the potential outcomes, and we are hoping for 30% of previously expected visitors.

While the Federal Government has passed the CARES Act for personal and business assistance at this time, it comes with challenges. The Small Business Administration is vastly understaffed to handle the millions of loan and grant applications that are being submitted. They are changing the applications, what the funds can be used for, and who is eligible and what they are eligible for, on a regular, sometimes daily, basis. This creates additional stress and work for the businesses who are already struggling to deal with cancelations, refunds, and complete operational disruption. They are faced with the decisions on when to open, at what level to open, or if they should open at all.

Nearly 35% of local overnight accommodation providers have seen cancellations for 2020 greater than 60%, as indicated in a survey that the Denali Chamber ended a week ago. The numbers have worsened since then. This does not consider the ripple effect through our local tour operators, restaurants, and retail operations. The money awarded in the CARES legislation may not be enough, and it may come too late to help many of our local businesses.

There have been rumors regarding the closure of Denali National Park. That is not confirmed at the time of writing of this letter. In a statement via webinar made by an official of the Office of Public Health (which functions as an internal health department for NPS) it was stated that at this time individual parks are making their own decisions based on local conditions, local resources, and immediate safety concerns.

If Denali National Park is to close to the public, for any period, it will be stated in an official press release. Please note that the closure of a park, and the closure of park services, are different. National Park Service employees are also practicing social distancing for the health and safety of themselves and of the public at this time.

So, where do we go from here? In partnership with the Denali Borough Mayor's office and members of the Borough Assembly we have formed the Denali Recovery Alliance\*; with the purpose of examining our current situation and how to progress forward as a community in a healthy financial way. Our intent is to determine a farsighted goal for the Denali Borough - then establish short, mid, and long-term actions to work toward that. This will combine efforts of private entities, non-profits, community members and the Denali Borough itself. If you have interest in participation, or thoughts to share, please email [recovery@denalichamber.com](mailto:recovery@denalichamber.com).

\*this alliance is advisory only, and holds no power of action, nor may appropriate any funds within the Denali Borough

So, what can you do?

1. Follow the State of Alaska mandates to prevent the spread of Covid-19 between communities and within communities.
2. Support our local small businesses. So many of them have supported our school programs, our sports teams, our non-profits, and our events. Buy a gift card, if you can, for use at a later date.
3. Make an anonymous donation through the mail. Order a meal to go. Let them know you're thinking of them – in this time of upheaval, a personal connection and offer of support can go a long way. If you need an idea, call me.
4. Support our local non-profits, through donations or volunteering, as they work to support our community.
5. Educate yourself. How does our local government work? Where do our finances come from, and how are they spent? What are the truths, and what are the misunderstandings in our community? [Denali Borough Budget](#)
6. Get engaged. Virtually attend a Borough Assembly meeting, a Chamber meeting, a school board meeting – find a way to support and affect positive change and reaction in your community.

The Denali Chamber of Commerce stands with its members at this time and will continue to serve them in whatever capacity is useful and appropriate as we move forward, while also working to support the overall wellness of the entire Denali Borough business community.

We also recognize recovery from the financial and emotional effects of this will not happen overnight. It will be an ongoing process which will require collaboration from industry, citizens, and government over time. A good beginning is a helpful hand, gratitude, and graciousness to each other as we move forward.

As always, please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Stay healthy and hopeful,

Vanessa Juszczak  
Executive Director



## MISSION

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TO GROW AND ENHANCE A VIBRANT BUSINESS  
COMMUNITY.

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## VISION

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TO EMPOWER BUSINESSES THROUGH  
COLLABORATION

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## GUIDING VALUES

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CREDIBILITY \* INCLUSIVENESS  
CONNECTION \* INTEGRITY \* RESPONSIBILITY

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