



NEWS RELEASE

Dept. of Commerce: Jennifer Payne, (907) 269-4568
October 05, 2006

Rural Tourism Mentorship Program Kickoff

(Juneau) – In its efforts to support rural tourism business, the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development—Office of Economic Development (OED) is starting a Rural Tourism Mentorship Program to partner successful visitor industry businesses with emerging rural enterprises.

Mentoring will include essential tools for tourism businesses such as business planning, best practices, budget management, website development, capitalization and funding strategies, tour packaging, marketing, and other requested areas of emphasis. The call for interested mentors and potential rural partners will officially begin during the state's Alaska Travel Industry Association Conference October 9-12 in Valdez.

Mentors and entrepreneurs also have the opportunity to participate in a unique cross-community exchange - visiting and observing operations at each other's business or potential business site. These excursions will help foster a greater understanding of the challenges tourism business owners confront in rural Alaska and provide entrepreneurs with the hands-on experience and networking necessary for the final steps of launching a business.

Director of the Office of Economic Development Bill Allen said many economically distressed regions of Alaska possess immense potential for future cultural, ecotourism, and recreational opportunities. "There's still a lot of untapped potential for rural Alaska to develop their visitor product - a mentorship program is a win-win for the industry," said Allen. "Working together, we can ensure visitors have a good experience at every destination so they'll take their positive stories back home and entice friends and relatives to visit later."

OED is launching this new program with the support of a Rural Business Enterprise Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture—Rural Development Agency. While this program will focus on specific rural businesses, it will also create new opportunities in the community and region as a whole. Entrepreneurs have the potential to become mentors and create a continuous cycle for cultivating new businesses.

The business mentorship program aims to build upon the achievements of OED's Developing Alaska Rural Tourism (D.A.R.T) program co-funded with the Economic Development Administration. The DART program focuses on the goal of assisting Alaska's rural regions in the development of the local visitor industry through targeted technical training and workshops. The program serves a number of Alaska's rural community members who were interested and committed to developing the visitor industry in their regions.

For additional information regarding OED's Rural Tourism Mentorship Program, please contact Dru Garson, Tourism Development Specialist, at (907) 465-2162. Dru_garson@commerce.state.ak.us

#

