



THE PORT VALDEZ COMPANY, INC
VALDEZ, ALASKA

November 18, 2015

Lee Revis
THE VALDEZ STAR
P.O. Box 2949
Valdez, AK 99686

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Dear Lee:

Opinion Piece for Valdez Star

Are we there yet? Making our community a ‘destination’ for visitors

In 1999, Kentucky bourbon distillers had an idea. What if they began viewing their business not just as a product, which they ship and sell, but as a destination for their customers? It seemed ambitious, but why not? Why couldn't bourbon bring people to Kentucky, the way wine brings people to Napa Valley?

Today, almost a million people a year visit “The Kentucky Bourbon Trail,” in which distillers feature on-site, museum-style experiences where people can learn about the history and manufacturing of their favorite drink. These million visitors each spend an average of about \$800 in the surrounding communities. Boutique hotels, a bourbon tour company and restaurants—many serving bourbon-laced menus—have sprung up around our home state. (<http://kybourbontrail.com/>)

And it's not just Kentucky. Thirty years ago in Baltimore, the National Aquarium became an anchor attraction for the very successful Inner Harbor development project, which is now surrounded by retail space, restaurants, offices, and condominium development. (<http://baltimore.org/article/baltimore-inner-harbor>) And in Indianapolis, an area along the White River that was once filled with warehouses (many abandoned) is now a bustling entertainment and museum district that, thanks to public investment, attracts more than 2 million people a year. (<http://www.inwhiteriver.com/>)

What do these successful projects have to do with Valdez?

Like these other communities, Valdez is now asking transformative questions about how it can succeed in a rapidly changing world. The



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people of Valdez want to break out of the boom-bust cycle that has defined its history, and build the vibrant quality of life that will consistently draw people here—for a few hours, a few days and even for a lifetime. Fortunately, Valdez has many assets to work with. It has a growing outdoor-adventure industry—river sports, ice climbing and great fishing. It has a unique history. And it has a natural setting that “wows” all visitors.

Today, travelers and citizens also demand a “sense of place”—a grouping of attractions and amenities that feel organic and unique, but also offer comfort and convenience: a quaint shopping district, a restaurant with local food, a state-of-the-art virtual experience that takes you to a specific point of history.

Communities invest in museums, not just because we want to provide educational opportunities for our children and adults. (Though we do want that!) But because we know that museums can become the center of a more vibrant economic district. That’s what has happened in the Bourbon District, in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and in Indianapolis.

The Port Valdez Co. believes it can also happen here. That’s why the company is working with Solid Light, a company that designs and builds museum exhibits and experiences, to develop a vision and strategy for the best use of its "Meals Hill" property. We have made a proposal to the Community of Valdez through the board of directors of the Valdez Museum and recently have asked for support of the City of Valdez management and city council.

For 16 years, Solid Light, has worked with communities and businesses to create museums that anchor these kind of “destinations.” In every case, the historians, designers, and builders of Solid Light have been reminded that museums are not just places where we learn from the past. They are places where we plan our future, showcase our identity and drive our economy.

That’s the vision we share for Valdez—one in which a revamped, state-of-the-art, world class Valdez Museum tells this community’s unique and compelling story to the world, and anchors a vibrant commercial heart that will appeal to visitors and residents alike.

Cynthia Torp, owner-president of Solid Light <https://www.solidlight-inc.com/>

John Clark, President of The Port Valdez Company