

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The Valdez Star

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Guest opinion:

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

By: Cynthia Torp, owner-president of Solid Light John Clark, President of The Port Valdez Company

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.

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. 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.

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 people of Valdez want to break out of the boom-

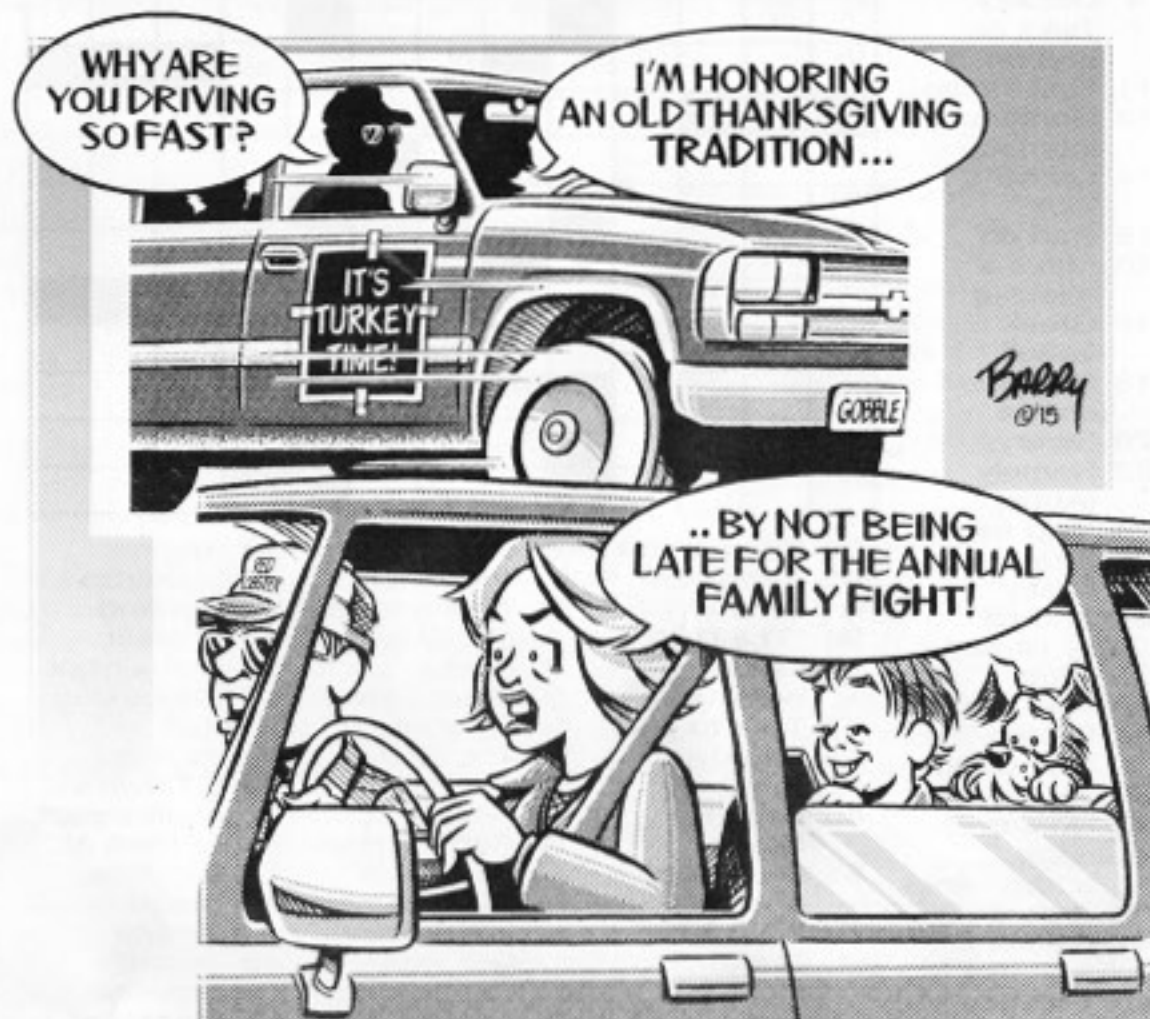
bust cycle that has defined its history, and build the vibrant quality of life that will consistently draw people here - for a few hours, a few days and even for a lifetime. Fortunately, Valdez has many assets to work with. It has a growing outdoor-adventure industry - river sports, ice climbing and 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.

Salmon horror story

From: Juneau Empire

You sit back in your cinema seat and grab your popcorn.

The lights go down and the show begins. A giant wooden door appears on the screen and slowly creaks open to reveal a figure of horror - the scaly, wide-eyed face of a salmon.

Alaskans scream in terror.

We take pride in our fish and their value to a healthy seafood industry, but Thursday's FDA approval of a genetically engineered salmon threatens that pride.

The AquaBounty AquAdvantage salmon - patent-

ed and trademarked - is an Atlantic salmon that incorporates a growth hormone gene from the Chinook salmon and a genetic switch from the ocean pout that keeps the gene producing growth hormones constantly instead of seasonally. As a result, the fish grows to market size in half the time of a wild fish.

The engineered fish are scheduled to be produced in Panama, from eggs raised in Canada.

The problem for Alaskans is that there may be no way for consumers to distinguish between wild salmon on store shelves and this engineered cousin. The federal government does not require the labeling of engineered food, and in fact the U.S. House has passed a bill that prohibits states from mandating such labeling. (The bill faces tougher opposition in the Senate).

Without proper labeling, the market for wild Alaska salmon is in real trouble.

A 2013 New York Times poll found three-quarters of Americans said they would not eat modified fish, and 93 percent said all food containing modified ingredients should be

labeled.

It's important to note that these concerns, while widespread, are groundless. Engineered plants have been widely used for decades, and you probably have engineered food in your pantry or fridge right now.

Groundless fear is still fear, however, and unless we ensure that consumers are informed, they will avoid what they fear. People avoiding engineered salmon will avoid all salmon, including that caught in Alaska, unless they can clearly differentiate. Even then, it will be a tall order for marketers, including the Alaska Salmon Marketing Institute, to spread word of the difference.

Engineered salmon aren't likely to land on store shelves soon - the Center for Food Safety and other organizations have promised a lawsuit - and so we hope Congress will have time to act and pass a firm labeling law before the first engineered scale touches water. Without that kind of law, the horror won't be on the screen. It'll be in the empty harbors of Alaska's seafood ports.