Community ski areas making a comeback

By Derek Taylor, GrindTV

Glen Plake, the famous South Lake Tahoe mohawked skier and sage of all things snow, once said that most skiing takes places at the end of a dirt road. He may have had Nevada's Elko Snobowl in mind.

The sign for this taxpayer-supported ski area is a rock on the ground painted with white paint and surrounded by spent shotgun shells. It has one chairlift, with chairs sponsored by local residents and businesses, and just a few hundred vertical feet. It's not easy to find, tucked several miles off the wrong side of the lonely stretch of highway connecting two of America's great ski centers: Lake Tahoe and Salt Lake City.

For the past few decades there has been a stigma attached to small, community ski hills like Snobowl. They're chastised by core skiers as "not very good," and presented as places to be avoided if you value your time on snow. But to the communities they serve, they are indispensable.

"This area is mostly miners, and they want something for their families to do," Roche Bush (pronounced Rocky, and yes, that's his real name), manager of the Elko Snobowl, told me during my visit in 2013. "Skiing is good, clean, outdoor fun."

For the ski and snowboard industry as a whole, community ski hills are even more important – if only the industry would just realize it.

"With the weekend average window ticket now over $93, and with baby boomers exiting faster than Gen X and Gen Y are entering skiing, the industry is cannibalizing itself," says Jamie Schectman, chief executive of the Mountain Riders Alliance, an

organization that aims to benefit small, independent ski areas. “Now more than ever, these smaller, feeder-breeder ski areas are important to the ecosystem.”

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