

Heavenly's chief easing into new role

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Arizona and skiing? You, bet. Just ask Mike Goar.

Goar is settling into his new job as chief operating office for Heavenly Mountain Resort. The job responsibilities also come with overseeing Kirkwood Mountain Resort and Northstar.

His office has pictures on the wall of those resorts that were left from his predecessor. Right now the personal touches are missing. Decorating is a distant priority to figuring out who's who at the resorts and in the community.

This 59-year-old grew up skiing at Sunrise Ski Resort in the White Mountains of Arizona. It has a base elevation of about 9,000 feet. Goar started out as a patroller and groomer at his home mountain while he was in his teens. It was those early years that gave him the skiing bug and desire to have a career in the industry.

The bulk of his career – 27 years – was spent at Solitude in Utah.



Mike Goar is eager to be part of the Lake Tahoe community now that he is CCO of Heavenly ski resort. Photo/Kathryn Reed

His tenure with Vail Resort began in 2013 when the company bought Canyons in Utah. He had been general manager of that Utah resort for six years. (Canyons and Park City have since merged into one Vail-owned property.) Goar moved to Keystone in 2015 to be CCO of that Colorado resort.

One main difference from his last job is that it was just one resort; in Tahoe he has the responsibility of three, even though Heavenly is his hub.

Goar is taking over for **Pete Sonntag**, who left earlier this summer to run Whistler Blackcomb. Vail Resorts bought that ski area in 2016.

No big changes are planned for any of the Tahoe area resorts – at least not for the 2017-18 season. Goar plans to meet with local leadership teams and confer with corporate on setting priorities for future capital improvements.

Whatever future changes are made, he told *Lake Tahoe News* there is no desire by anyone to alter the vibe of each resort.

"They are going to be different for the right reasons," Goar said. "We are mindful of what each resort stands for."

Addressing guest concerns about lift lines and what can be done during times of wind hold are being worked on before the start of next ski season.

Goar has skied at all three of Vail's Tahoe resorts. Other Tahoe area resorts he's been to include Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows and Mount Rose.

With the finalization this week of the KSL-Aspen Skiing deal, Goar sees this as a good thing for the industry. He believes it will attract more people to skiing and snowboarding, which is good for all resorts.

While in many ways running a ski resort is the same no matter the location, Goar is cognizant each location has its own idiosyncrasies. He is looking forward to getting to understand the agencies that govern in the greater Lake Tahoe area, and the community members who call this place home.

Goar will be living here with his wife. They have three adult children and two grandchildren. He's already discovered housing is an issue.

Goar is well aware it's also an issue for his employees and others in the area. When he was in Keystone it was something he was involved in.

"While there is no project in the pipeline that we are talking about publicly, we are looking at partnerships on employee housing," Goar said.

Nothing is off the table. It could be new development, refurbishing an existing property or combining resources with other entities desirous of providing housing for workers.

Legalization of recreational marijuana was something he had to contend with in Colorado and will likely be an issue as California allows it starting in January. With the use being illegal on federal land, that makes it easy for the resort operator to just say no. Vail Resorts has a companywide policy banning marijuana use at all of its resorts. He anticipates it will take some education of riders to let them know the rules.

While Keystone has mountain biking in the summer, it does not have the Epic Discovery activities like Heavenly has at the top of the gondola. Goar has experienced a few of the amenities and expects to have tried all the ropes courses, zip lines and other attractions before summer is over.

Beyond work and skiing, Goar is passionate about baseball and is a devout Yankees fan. Hiking, mountain bike riding and golf are the sports he participates in when the snow is gone. He's looking forward to exploring the local trails.