Vail taps young Midwest market to fill its bigger resorts

By Andrea Petersen, Wall Street Journal

Vail Resorts has come up with a novel way to combat the leveling off of skiing's popularity: buying up little Midwestern hills.

The goal is to hook families on the sport at spots close to home and groom them for vacations at the company's pricier Western mountains like Canyons Resort in Utah and Breckenridge Ski Resort in Colorado. Vail Resorts has already bought resorts in Minnesota and Michigan and spent $20 million to renovate and upgrade them.

It is a long-term strategy, says Rob Katz, Vail Resorts Inc.'s chief executive. "There are kids in those [Midwestern] markets whose parents may not ski – maybe they are 12. If we can make a connection with that kid, we have a great opportunity to keep him in our family as he gets older and begins making his own decisions about where he is going to travel," he says.

Skiing and snowboarding are looking to attract younger participants to replace aging baby boomers. The percentage of skiers and snowboarders ages 24 and younger fell to 22.8 percent in the 2012-13 ski season, down from 30.6 percent in 1997-98, according to a survey of visitors to 88 U.S. resorts by the National Ski Areas Association, a trade group. During the same stretch, the percentage of people ages 45 to 54 increased to 19.8 percent, up from 14 percent.

Read the whole story

Wildland fire near Incline quickly snuffed

By AP

INCLINE VILLAGE — Firefighters hiked an hour through nearly a mile of thick brush early Friday to snuff out a small wildland blaze near Lake Tahoe, where authorities are bracing for an early start to a potentially dangerous fire season in the Sierra.

No structures were threatened by the fire that broke out at about 2:30am on a mountainside near Incline Village, North Lake Tahoe Fires Protection District spokeswoman Tia Rancort said.

Crews hiked through the heavy brush and downed timber before they reached the flames on U.S. Forest Service land at an elevation of about 7,800 feet.

The flames put up so much smoke at one point that officials issued an alert for smoke-sensitive populations, urging them to stay indoors and keep windows closed.

Rancort said there was no early indication of the cause of the fire, which remained under investigation. Fire district officials reminded residents that the entire area covering the north shore of Lake Tahoe remains under a “no public burning” order.

“Our fire conditions are still very dry,” Rancort said.

Northern Nevada is entering its third year of drought. Snowpack in the Lake Tahoe Basin closed out 2013 at about 33 percent of average, and the Truckee River Basin was at 23

percent.

North Lake Tahoe District Fire Chief Mike Brown said it’s as dry as he has seen it.

“Normally in the area where we have this fire we have 5 to 10 feet of snow,” he told KRNV-TV. “We have no snow in the area.”

Fire officials just over the mountain in Reno also worry about the potential for a challenging season like the one two winters ago, when a pair of fires burning with the intensity usually seen only in the heat of summer destroyed more than 50 homes.

Similar conditions this winter have fire crews on edge.

“We’re already going to go into summer with a fuel type that will be taxing us early on with our resources,” said David French, battalion chief for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District.

“As far as fire fuel, right now I’d say it’s about the way it is in June,” he told KTVN-TV. “I’d say we’re looking at very high to very extreme possibilities this summer.”

Honest day’s work amounts to poverty

By Lynn Stuart Parramore, AlterNet

Why should people in the richest country on Earth toil long hours for wages that would make Charles Dickens recoil in horror? A lot of Americans have been wondering the same thing.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2012, 1.57 million Americans earned the minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. Millions more were just above that figure, and plenty actually ended up below it. Over 60 percent of the minimum wage earners in 2012 were in retail, or in leisure and hospitality, which includes hotels and restaurants.

If we raise the minimum wage, an estimated 28 million will get a direct or indirect benefit, because when the wage goes up bosses often raise the wages of workers hovering right above the new minimum. So one in five American workers will take more money home. It's not a silver bullet – employers will still try to avoid requirements by hiring contract workers and other tactics, and some workers will still end up exempt. But it's a start.

Read the whole story

No snow: USFS sites busier than usual

Publisher's note: ***This is one of a series of blurbs about how the lack of winter is impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin. If you have an idea, please email it to info@LakeTahoeNews.net.***

U.S. Forest Service officials are noticing more people using their facilities in the Lake Tahoe Basin now compared to most winters. It all has to do with the lack of snow.

People have been asking Jean Norman at the front desk in South Lake Tahoe about hiking. That's an unusual request for January. Most areas at lake level are clear, though icy spots exist because of the freezing temps overnight.

Bob Becker's staff has been monitoring litter at popular areas like the Tallac Site and Taylor Creek Visitors Center.

"Once it's closed and there are several feet of snow, they don't go out there because the use is not that much," Lisa Herron with the USFS told *Lake Tahoe News*. That's in a normal year.

"People should get out and enjoy it while they can. For those who don't ski or snowshoe it's a good opportunity to do some hiking and not worry about a bunch of snow," Herron said.

However, the other concern Forest Service officials have is for fire. Everything is dry. And while the agency doesn't usually issue fire danger reports this time of year, it could if precipitation does not come. While other agencies have implemented winter fire restrictions, the Forest Service has yet to do so.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. higher ed officials pledge to cooperate

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO – The leaders of California's three public higher education systems Wednesday pledged more cooperation, particularly in transferring students, while Gov. Jerry Brown urged them to develop more innovative collaborations.

In a rare gathering, University of California President Janet Napolitano, California State University Chancellor Timothy P. White and California Community Colleges Chancellor Brice W.

Harris said they want to break through some of the walls set up by the state's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which established different roles and student enrollment criteria for each sector. Yet they also said they want to maintain the plan's basic tenets.

Napolitano said she hoped the systems would create a "student-centered" website that could track the academic progress of community college students and keep them on course to transfer to UC or Cal State.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe gathering input on outdoor displays

South Lake Tahoe is hosting a community meeting to receive public input on outdoor displays in front of businesses.

The meeting is Jan. 30 from 5:30-7pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Item to be discusses include:

- Should additional commercial area be allowed in front of businesses? If so, how much?
- Should any types of commercial retail products be allowed?
- Should the products be related to the business or ancillary to the business?

Cook, Mancuso stay in top 10 in downhill

By USSA

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy – The U.S. Ski Team speed women continued to storm toward the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup podium Saturday as Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) finished fifth and Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) seventh in the second of two Cortina downhills.

With less than two weeks to the 2014 Olympic Winter Games, the pair has now finished inside the World Cup top 10 in three straight races with Cook also finishing fifth in Friday's downhill.

Tina Maze of Slovenia, last season's overall and downhill champion, took her first victory of the 2014 season.

Leanne Smith (N. Conway, N.H.) was 26th and World Cup rookie Jackie Wiles (Aurora, Ore.), who was 15th Friday, finished 29th.

The race was incredibly tight with the top 15 skiers separated by less than a second.

Women's Olympic racing opens in Sochi on Feb. 10 with super combined followed by the downhill on Feb. 12.

The race, orginally slated for Garmisch-Partenkirchen, was moved to Cortina due to lack of snow in Germany.

Clear blue skies allowed the downhill to be staged from the top start. Friday's race was run from the super G start.

Bowman, Wise win gold at X Games halfpipe skiing

By USSA

ASPEN -– Olympians David Wise (Reno) and Maddie Bowman (South Lake Tahoe) grabbed X Games gold at the halfpipe skiing final in Aspen on Friday night, just a few weeks before the historic halfpipe skiing debut at the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

It was Wise’s third-straight gold medal at X Games Aspen, while it was Bowman’s second straight.

France’s halfpipe hero Kevin Rolland took silver, while Alex Ferreira (Aspen) stomped his third and final run to earn bronze, his first X Games medal. Lyman Currier (Boulder, Colo.) and Gus Kenworthy (Telluride, Colo.) also qualified for the final, but couldn’t land clean runs and finished sixth and seventh.

Olympian Torin Yater-Wallace (Basalt, Colo.) also qualified for the final, but opted out of the competition.

Canadian Roz Groenewoud and France’s Marie Martinod, took silver and bronze, respectively.

U.S. Olympians Brita Sigourney (Carmel) and Angeli VanLaanen (Bellingham, Wash.) also advanced to the final where they finished fifth and seventh, respectively.

Miller 3rd, Ganong 7th at Hahnenkamm downhill

By USSA

KITZBUEHEL, Austria -– Victory at the famed Hahnenkamm downhill eluded Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.) yet again as the Olympic champion finished third in Kitzbuehel. Miller, who won the only training run, skied a tactically tight line for every ounce of speed but made a drastic mistake going into a flat section to drop 0.34 behind race winner Hannes Reichelt of Austria. It was Miller's career third podium on the legendary track after two previous second-place finishes.

Teammate Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) matched his career-best finish in seventh, with Norwegian Aksel Lund Svindal in second.

It was the final downhill of the U.S. Olympic selection period, and official team nominations will be announced immediately following Sunday's super combined World Cup.

Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) sneaked into the top 20 while Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) also finished within the points in 27th.

Due to warm temperatures, the traditional course was altered from its traditional finish pitch to go around the Hausberg jump and side hill traverse into the finish.

Upgrades taking root at Al Tahoe ball fields



This is a rendering by Design Workshop of what the Al Tahoe ball fields are likely to look like.

By Kathryn Reed

Work will be begin this spring on a multi-use softball and Little League field at the Al Tahoe complex in South Lake Tahoe.

Steve Noll, who is on the Fields Advisory Committee for the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority, explained Jan. 24 to the JPA board how the area will be reconfigured to allow more play to be going on at once.

The T-ball area will be moved almost due east of where it is now.

“The T-ball will be next to the play structures. I think it will be a better setting than where it was next to the road,” Noll told the board.

Multi-use turf will be laid there.

The new diamond will not have grass, which will allow for the dual use. Plus, it will have a removable pitching mound.

With all of the changes will also come a realignment of how the soccer field is configured. That is still going to be decided by AYSO officials. But what soccer aficionados get out of this is more warm-up areas.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District’s board approved the plans Jan. 14. The district owns the land where all of this is taking place.

Money for the project is coming from Measure R, the reworked Measure S recreation tax that property owners on the California side of the South Shore pay.

Without knowing what the bids will come in at, it’s possible not everything will get done. For example, it would be easy to remove a second set of bleachers and have that added when the pot of money is replenished.

There is about $276,000 in the bank for this project and that is what estimates have come in at to do the work.

Technically all of the work is three projects. One is the new field, the second is relocation of the T-ball fields and the third is upgrades to the existing two ball fields. The latter includes fencing on Rufus Allen Boulevard and bleachers. (Here is a PDF of the South Tahoe ball fields illustration.)

Bids for the project are likely to go out in April so

construction could begin in May. Completion is expected in the fall.

Work could be in phases so baseball season is not interrupted.

Initial work will include removing existing asphalt and running irrigation lines. The asphalt coming out is at the two rarely used basketball courts at the old Al Tahoe Elementary School. It was noted when South Tahoe Middle School renovations were done that new basketball standards were put in there.

Noll said with previous irrigation systems being pieced together, that after work is done this summer the water lines will all make sense and flow more smoothly.

In other news:

• Shay Navarro with the Bicycle Advisory Committee told the JPA board that the bridges over the Upper Truckee River and Trout Creek would be replaced this year.

• JPA board Chairwoman Norma Santiago said El Dorado County is looking into snow removal on bike trails.

• Bike advisory member Chuck Nelson suggested the board consider another parcel tax to up the amount collected from property owners in order to better fund recreation projects.

• Judy Clot, board member representing Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District, said at the July 25 meeting she will have a proposal for what that area needs to improve and will possibly ask for its $50,000 annual allocation to be increased.