

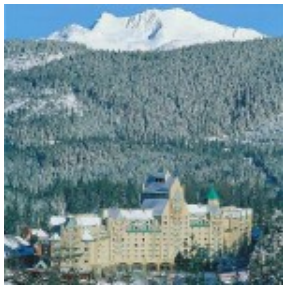
Fairmont Chateau Whistler – luxurious mountain lodging

By Susan Wood

WHISTLER, British Columbia – On first impression, second impression and lasting impression, the majestic nature of the Fairmont Chateau Whistler comes across as striking.

Outside the slopeside window, in particular from the 10th floor, the views invigorate and excite.

Opening the small, standing-room-only balcony door offers mountain breezes off the Wizard Express chairlift runs, which is just steps away from the resort.



Chateau
Fairmont
Whistler
Photo/Provided

Directly below, a hot tub and drink at the Mallard Lounge fire pits beckon the weary. There are even poolside cocktails from the lounge if going for a longer soak in hot water. Expect a crowd in late afternoon.

The hotel comes with the grand distinction of being the first with ski-in, ski-out access to Whistler Blackcomb.

The hotel's grandeur complements the mountain whose base it sits at. It is practically a village unto itself. One never

needs to leave the premise – it's like an inclusive resort without one bill. This isn't a resort just for skiers and snowboarders. Non-hotel guests can also enjoy the restaurants, shops and spa.

The management and staff have thought of everything in the world of hospitality. And their enthusiasm to please guests is evident in every level of staff. Listening to them interact with customers proved the importance they put on guest relations.

And now, the biggest international sporting event will be staged in their backyard. They're booked for the occasion. The Olympics are Feb. 12-28.

"We are welcoming the world during the 2010 Winter Games to Whistler – this incredible year-round destination. We will be looking to maximize how we can benefit from the exposure of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and being on the world stage," General Manager Roger Soane told *Lake Tahoe News*.

By most standards, the Fairmont Chateau Whistler is more than a hotel. It's an experience.

The lobby has that grand hotel, high-ceiling architectural style that gives the visitor a sense of arriving in luxury. Accents of art and antiques dot the common areas and deck the halls. One hallway leads to 28,000 square feet of conference- and meeting-room space – with a new 12,000-square-foot ballroom for events.

The hotel was last remodeled in 1997.

Being a four-season resort, the patio also features a lap pool with underwater music. Another swimming pool starts outside and spills indoors to the spa and workout area. Inclement weather and chilly Canadian temperatures have a way of bringing people in swimsuits inside to a balmy room where steam billows from the sauna and the inside hot tub. A full

fitness center and spa with a variety of treatments provide places to work the muscles then work out the kinks. (See more on that in a future *Lake Tahoe News* story.) Recommended: a hot stone massage can be just the answer for muscles wanting to succumb to heat and pressure.

Ideas abound for those who stay in for the day to eat, drink, be pampered, shop and wander to their heart's delight.

One hallway meanders past the Mallard Lounge and Terrace, with inside seating flanking a dual-sided wood fireplace with cushy chairs. Settling in by the fire on the cozy sofa is certainly an option if one is accustomed to eating at a coffee table. Recommended: the mountain burger with French fries and a razzle dazzle drink rarely mixed at home. (You won't be hungry the next morning until viewing the menus again.)

A full breakfast buffet including an omelet bar is set up in the Wildflower restaurant, which is transformed into a fine dining option for dinner. Fondue is served in the Wildflower entryway in mid-afternoon. Recommended: the seafood chowder is a perfect complement to the wild salmon with maple syrup glaze accompanied by local British Columbia wines.

Light meals can be picked up at the Portabello Market and Fresh Bakery downstairs.

On this level are also the ski valet, shops and galleries.

And aside from a comprehensive adults and kids in-room dining menu, even Fido can get food. The Fairmont is pet-friendly. All shapes, sizes and pedigrees can be found stepping in and out of elevators and rooms.

Along with a slew of amenities, views come standard in the 550 rooms at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler – of the Upper Whistler Village, valley and slopes.

The touches of creature comforts and convenience are important

here.

Spacious closets allow room for ski boots and extra clothing that comes with winter travel. A coffee and tea maker pulls out on a shelf from the television cabinet with a refreshment rack close by.

When lounging on the comfy bed or on the Internet at the work desk, use the fluffy bathrobe to live in and expect to be plenty warm.

Note: careful with the heating controls because you could be sweating by the time you wake up. The towels are a bit worn and should not be laundered with the standard hotel detergent that has a distinct chemical smell.

And bring your wallet. Rooms start at \$337 a night, and luxury goes up from there.

The Fairmont Chateau Whistler provides a la carte romance plans and multi-day skier packages. The resort can arrange activities designed to fill an outdoor enthusiast's day in winter and summer – including playing at the resort's 18-hole golf course and scheduling mountaintop barbecues and glacier picnics.

Other notables:

The hotel features a rooftop wedding chapel.

They grow herbs on-site.

Singer Seal gave an impromptu performance after his marriage proposal to model Heidi Klum.

The hotel was featured on the "The Bachelor".

Where to go:

The Fairmont Chateau Whistler is located on Chateau Boulevard at the base of Blackcomb Mountain in the Upper Village of

Whistler, about 90 miles north of Vancouver off the Sea to Sky Highway. The Chateau is part of the Fairmont's chain of luxury hotels situated on the beaches from Hawaii to Bermuda and the urban digs from New York to San Francisco.

Reservations:

Call 800.606.8244 or (604) 938.8000

Email chateauwhistler@fairmont.com

Website – www.fairmont.com/whistler

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Hull repairs knock Tahoe Queen out of service

By Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Queen is being dismantled. Sort of.

In order to comply with an anticipated visit by the U.S. Coast Guard in the fall, the paddle-wheeler will not churn the waters of Lake Tahoe until late April or early May. This is so workers can overhaul the interior of the hull.

The boat will remain docked at Ski Run Marina in South Lake Tahoe while crews do the work.



The Tahoe Queen will remain tied up through April.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

“This year our marine engineers came out and looked at the Tahoe Queen. They said we need to go into the bilge area where the inner hull is,” said Austin Sass, spokesman for Aramark, which owns the Queen and Dixie II on the South Shore. “In order to do that we need to disassemble all of the galley equipment in the lower part of the boat. The walk-in freezer and grill have to be disassembled. You can’t just move them.”

Water and electricity will be turned off. The equipment is likely to be temporarily moved to upper decks where guests would normally be.

Sass said the inspection in the fall happens every five years. How inspectors test it will not require disassembling the boat again.

“Inspectors use special devices to measure the hull and whatever else they inspect,” Sass said.

While the Queen is offline, divers will take off algae and other things that may have latched onto the outside of the hull.

Sass didn’t have a dollar figure for what the work will cost or what it might mean in terms of lost revenue. He does not

anticipate a rate increase for sightseers because of the work.

The Dixie is expected to pick up customers for the next few months with its offerings being expanded.

“I don’t anticipate visitors to Lake Tahoe will have less of an opportunity to go out on the lake and enjoy Emerald Bay and enjoy the experience of cruising,” Sass said.

The work is being done now in what is the slow season for cruising so when the summer crowds arrive both boats will be plying the water.

Even though the company released information about trips to Squaw Valley last month, those February and March excursions have been canceled.

Sass said the full Squaw boat trip schedule was originally cutback because work is being done at the Tahoe City Marina. Garwoods Restaurant could accommodate the paddle-wheeler, but he said it was tricky to dock there because of the low lake level and the buoy field.

The water level to-date has not posed a problem for the Queen or Dixie on the South Shore.

The Queen began operating on Lake Tahoe in 1983. In 2008, it received a half million dollar makeover that had to do mostly with cosmetic and interior improvements.

Nationals at stake in

adaptive race at Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Riding the same boardercross route that has enabled Joanie Anderson to become a world-class athlete did not deter or intimidate these riders. This particular group went up and over the rollers on Friday like they may follow in her footsteps.

The only difference is they will be doing it with prosthetics.



Mike Shea and Evan Strong are ready to tackle the boardercross at Sierra. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“It’s my first time to ride with other amputees. You learn from each other,” said Mike Shea, who lives in Castaic in Southern California. He comes to Lake Tahoe a few times a year to snowboard.

He was an able bodied snowboarder until a ski rope wrapped around his leg when he fell out of a boat severed his leg. Shea was back on the slopes a few months after the debilitating accident, but he admits he had to relearn the sport.

Brady Gunsch, who is a coach at Sierra-at-Tahoe, dispensed advice to the adaptive riders in advance of today's race. Adaptive boardercross is part of the USASA's list of events today at Sierra.

"They won't change the rollers, but they'll put a little more lip on it (for the race)," Gunsch told the handful of riders at the top of Smokey.

He told them they can rub against another rider, but pushing is not allowed.



Mike Shea, right, listens to Coach Brady Gunsch.

Evan Strong of Nevada City has been competing in skateboarding for years – even before his accident – so transitioning to snowboarding competitions has not been too difficult. This is his third winter on a board.

"I want to inspire abled and disabled to feel passionate about anything. To be alive," Strong said.

He wants to see how far he can go with snowboarding.

Strong is headed to Vancouver in March to be part of the Paralympic Games. He'll be in a skateboarding exhibition during the Opening Ceremonies in Vancouver. One day he'd like to compete for a medal in the Games.

All of these athletes came together because of Adaptive Action

Sports. This group was founded by Daniel Gale and Amy Purdy to encourage people living with permanent physical disabilities to get active.

“The goal is to get people to qualify for the USASA Nationals (in April),” Brent Kuemmerle, the organization’s winter program director, said of today’s event. “We picked Sierra because they have a long standing tradition of putting out Olympic athletes.”

El Dorado County wines holding their own in recession

By Kathryn Reed

PLEASANT VALLEY – People are imbibing, but it’s not all about California.

Argentina, Chile and Australia are cutting into the Golden State’s wine sales. Last year was the first time in 16 years that California wine shipments dropped, according to the Bay Area’s Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates.

2009 was a mixed bag for El Dorado County wineries, according to an informal survey taken last weekend.



El Dorado
County
wineries are
surviving the
recession.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Teena Hildebrand, who with husband Frank owns Narrow Gate Vineyards, said their sales were about 1.5-2 percent higher in 2009 than in 2008. Narrow Gate is in its fifth year of operation in the Pleasant Valley area.

At nearby Sierra Vista, owner John MacCready said sales were off by 10 to 15 percent in 2009 compared to the previous year.

"They aren't buying as many cases as they used to," MacCready said. "A lot of people who came up here worked for the state and the state put people on furloughs. That made a difference in their visits to the foothills."

In the six years Busby Cellars has been open, 2007 was the best year. Sales dropped in 2008, but came back some in 2009.

"Foot traffic is the same," owner Elliot Murphy said.

His wife and co-owner Sherri Graham added, "We used to see more full cases sell. People are buying more bottles."



Sherrie Murphy is selling fewer cases at Busby.

At Latcham Vineyards in Fair Play, sales for the last three years have been consistent.

Owner Margaret Latcham said visits to the tasting room are tracking the same from year-to-year, but said people are watching what they spend.

People are looking for deals, according to winemakers in El Dorado. That matches the trend the more formal survey uncovered. On a statewide level, sales of bottles priced at \$20 or more were down between 20 and 30 percent. Wine costing \$6 or less increased by 5 percent.

At four El Dorado County wineries visited by *Lake Tahoe News* last weekend, no one was selling wine for \$6 or less.

"The consumer trend has been to buy two \$20 bottles instead of one \$40 bottle of wine, and many El Dorado wines hit that price point," said Jolaine Collins, spokeswoman for El Dorado Winery Association. "In the end, quality and value trump all."

Latcham's wholesale business has picked up, with the owner saying she has a hard time keeping up with Costco's needs.

Gold Rush Red, Latcham's red table wine, proves people are looking for deals. It was selling for \$7.89 a bottle during last weekend's Bring Out the Barrel event.

“There’s a huge demand for less expensive wines,” Latcham said.



Margaret Latcham, left, is not having a problem selling wine.

Usually 2,000 cases of Gold Rush Red are bottled a year. That number rose to 7,000 last year.

At Busby, their red table wine called Meyers Ranch, sells for \$9.50 a bottle. The owners have noticed people wanting to spend less. About 95 percent of their 2,000 cases are sold at the winery.

Nothing on Sierra Vista’s tasting sheet sold for less than \$15 a bottle.

Wines at Narrow Gate run \$18-\$32.

“You don’t come here to get a sale wine,” Teena Hildebrand said.

She credits paying attention to the whole package, right down to making sure the restroom is clean, as to why people keep frequenting Narrow Gate. She said quality of wine and quality of service are imperative.

Hildebrand goes back to her college days of learning about marketing – price, product, place and promotion. She’s added a fifth P – people.

“Constantly analyzing the numbers, adding more events, creating gimmicky wines, or planning your next deeply discounted wine promotion simply feeds a roller coaster business plan. Being excellent at the four P’s leads to a much more consistent, dependable, “we can sleep at night – business,” Hildebrand said. “When you love people, all your financial decisions, marketing efforts, creativity and execution is born out of this value. How many times I have heard how the person behind the tasting bar is the single most important asset to the business. That person needs to reflect the image, values and energy of the winery.”

Narrow Gate bottles 26 varietals in 5,000-7,000 cases a year.

But Hildebrand also credits the people who came before her.

“We have benefited much from the trailblazing of our neighbors – like Sierra Vista, who risked and invested everything back in the ’70s to move here, plant vines, and open a winery. Plus, Holly’s Hill – who did the same in 2002 and invested heavily in their property, winemaking, etc., while reinforcing the family and hospitable atmosphere people are drawn to here,” Hildebrand said. “Then, Miraflores came on the scene in 2006, probably spending as much money as all of us put together to create a high quality winery with excellent wines and a gorgeous facility.”

The Murphys at Busby look forward to the two other wineries that are slated to open near them soon. They believe it will make Grizzly Flat Road a little destination instead of people traveling to Somerset for just their wines.

Sierra Vista’s MacCready is also a proponent of competition and having neighbors. But he is hurting because he’s getting a smaller slice of the consumer pie.

“The number of people coming to El Dorado County has not increased like the number of wineries has,” MacCready said. “Traffic (to Sierra Vista) has decreased in the last three or

four years.”

The world keeps turning land into vineyards. California has 480,000 acres of wine grapes, with nearly 2,500 of those acres in El Dorado County. However, Argentina has 510,000 acres of grapes.

Although California produces 90 percent of the wine made in the United States, imports are gaining notoriety. Thirteen million cases were imported in 2009 – more than double from 2007.

Facts, figures, opinions delay SLT's plastic bag ban decision

By Kathryn Reed

Enough information about the merits and hazards of banning plastic bags was disseminated Wednesday that the commission tasked with making a recommendation to the South Lake Tahoe City Council deferred its decision for a month.

“The goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate one-time use plastic bags,” Chairwoman Kirstin Cattell said at the beginning of the meeting.

Assistant City Attorney Jacqueline Mittelstadt told the 40 people gathered at the city offices at Lake Tahoe Airport that a court ruling came down last week calling the prohibition of plastic bags in one city illegal because adequate environmental reports were not done.



Promoting
reusable bags
in South Lake
Tahoe.

Mittelstadt also enlightened everyone that in 2007 the state Legislature ruled cities couldn't impose a fee to use plastic bags. However, the state can. But two bills relating to that matter have died.

At the end of the meeting Cattell said she wants more details on the legalities of the issue before making up her mind.

Some of the people who spoke said waiting for the state to implement a fee is the right course.

Ellen Camacho spoke out in favor of a ban on plastic bags.

"We need to make it hurt to use plastic bags," she told the commissioners.

Ellen Nunes, who runs Clean Tahoe, rattled off a slew of statistics about the billions of plastic bags produced in the world each year. She said this as slides of trash scattered about Tahoe – in marshes, the street and meadows – filled the screen.

She said Clean Tahoe picked up 108 tons of trash in 2009 – that's just in South Lake Tahoe – and has nothing to do with normal trash service. How much of that was plastic bags she didn't know.

Nunes said her crews have found plastic particles in animal

scat.

Environmentally, that's one of the arguments to ban the bags – that they get loose and animals ingest the toxins. Also, as the bags slowly decompose they leach chemicals into the soil and waterways. It takes hundreds of years for ordinary plastic bags to decompose.

But Ryan Kenny with the American Chemistry Council said environmentally plastic bags are better than paper when it comes to the production process. Kenny said plastic produces less emissions, use less water, less energy and more can be transported at once compared to paper bags.

Mike Murphy, who owns Road Runner gas station, said he would need a warehouse to store paper bags, whereas plastic are so compact.

He said a big issue is with tourists who don't know what to do with their trash and who don't believe a garbage company sorts recyclables by hand, like South Tahoe Refuse does.

Jeff Tillman of the refuse company said about 45 percent of what comes on the conveyer belt is pulled off to recycle. That number is expected to jump when the new facility opens this spring.

Education was a big theme of the discussion.

It was noted that consumers don't recycle their plastic bags at grocery stores. Mike Schouten, owner of the local Grocery Outlet, said he estimates about 1 percent of the bags are recycled. They offer plastic bags and have reusable canvas bags for sale.

Schouten said he believes customers are speaking – they want the convenience of the plastic bags. He says this because only about 10 customers a day come in with reusable bags.

But that gets back to the education component – to make the

public aware of what it takes to create plastic and paper bags, and what happens to those bags at the end of their life. And plastic bags are said to average 12 minutes of use before becoming trash.

Sustainability Commissioner Do Lee said he would like a cost analysis regarding how a ban would affect small and large businesses. He also wants to know the financial impact to customers before he decides how to vote.

Former Mayor Margo Osti is adamantly in support of banning plastic bags. She said the commission needs to work with Clean Tahoe, tell the council to have a dedicated code enforcement officer for trash related issues and should seek grants that could possibly provide reusable bags to everyone in the city for free.

Others who spoke questioned the logic in having South Tahoe ban the bags at stores when tourists come here with bags and so many locals shop off the hill where plastic bags are the norm.

Minutes before the meeting, *Lake Tahoe News* received a phone call from Jim Coalwell, who runs the farmers market in South Tahoe each summer. He said his organization is willing to cooperate with whatever decision is made, but hopes any change would be phased in.

Some of the discussion centered on getting rid of Styrofoam as well.

Jeremy Bauer, purchasing manager for Sierra-at-Tahoe, said all of the products at the resort are recyclable, with many made from corn resin.

"Our consumers have told us they appreciate that," Bauer said.

David Hansen, director of engineering for Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe, said he agreed with just about everything that had

been said that afternoon, recognizing there are trade-offs with every decision.

Embassy doesn't use plastic or Styrofoam. With its composting program and recycling efforts, in 2009 STR picked up 45 percent less waste at the hotel.

Speaking on behalf of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, Hansen said, "We support your decision if it makes economic and environmental sense."

The Sustainability Commission is expected to make a recommendation at its March 3 4pm meeting.

Judge denies Lane extension in bankruptcy court

By Kathryn Reed

Developer Randy Lane was handed another setback Tuesday, though he is not calling it that.

As principal of Lake Tahoe Development Company, Lane has been trying to turn what South Shore residents call "the hole" into the region's most expensive redevelopment project. The problem is he doesn't have the money to build the \$400-plus-million convention center-retail-hotel complex that broke ground in 2006.

He never did. But, still, the city gave him the OK to begin construction without financing in place. The city approved the contract without a performance bond. Hal Cole and John Upton were the City Council members who negotiated the contract.



Snow is the only thing new at the would-be convention center near Stateline.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Development Company, which is based in Zephyr Cove, filed for bankruptcy in October.

On Feb. 2, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Thomas Holman in Sacramento denied Lane's request to extend the length of time he has to put together a plan. Lane wanted another 150 days.

The city and at least two creditors filed motions opposing Lane's request. He owes \$54 million to various people who sold him the 11-plus acres in South Lake Tahoe directly across the Nevada border.

After the hearing, Lane told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It's a legal thing that doesn't impact what we are trying to get accomplished. What we are trying to do is a very positive thing for the city."

Lane would not divulge whether he intends to be part of the project when the dust settles; nor would he elaborate about the negotiations he is having or with whom he is talking to.

In addressing the rumor that Vail Resorts is interested again in the project, Lane said, "I wish they would tell me that."

RockResorts, the real estate arm of the Vail-based company, was going to operate the two hotels that were slated for the complex. That agreement was mutually severed a couple years ago.

The last time Lane met with city officials was Jan. 15. They found out Jan. 28 about Lane's decision to ask for an extension and were not happy.

In the filing Feb. 1 to the court the city writes, "If Debtor does have an investor, the City is prepared to meet with them and re-negotiate the OPA (Owner Participation Agreement), but as of this date the City has not been contacted to even set a meeting, much less discuss the OPA."

On Feb. 9, the City Council plans to discuss the whole issue in closed session.

"They have performance measures in the contract. At this point we don't have any construction going on and there probably should be," said Gene Palazzo, South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency manager.

Palazzo said staff has not vetted all scenarios the City Council could contemplate.

The council must approve any changes to the contract or in ownership of the property.

"I think it will come to a conclusion this year," Councilman Bruce Grego said. "No one has a crystal ball, but it's possible the bankruptcy will fail."

Lane filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy, that means the court will have to approve a restructuring plan with the consent of creditors. Chapter 7 would have meant the sale of assets.

If Chapter 11 fails, it's unknown where this leaves creditors. Because a final parcel map was never approved by the city it's possible the land could return to the original owners. The

problem is rebar and concrete cover a good portion of the acreage.

What the city's liability in allowing construction to begin without the map being recorded is not known.

Right now the city is not financially at-risk other than losing projected revenue.

Originally, the project was supposed to be celebrating its one-year anniversary this summer. Developers anticipated the property to bring 180,000 visitors a year who would funnel \$78 million into the South Shore economy.

Steep, slick runs test non-Olympian's prowess

By Susan Wood

WHISTLER, British Columbia – Standing at the gate in a crouched position with my skis together, I heard the beeping of the warning clock signaling the start of my Olympic run.

The sound was in my head, no medals were at stake, but the run is the same one the Olympians will conquer this month.



Susan Wood

dreams of
gold.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

I was taken aback with the adrenaline rush as I launched off one of the many Whistler rollers on the Dave Murray Downhill run, the men's official 3.1km course for the 2010 Winter Games starting in 10 days. The men's and women's downhill runs, along with the super G and giant slalom courses on the lower ends, will be at Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort's Creekside area.

The run was named after local skier Dave Murray, who as a member of the "Crazy Canucks" was ranked third in the world in downhill racing in 1979. The following year, he placed 10th in the Olympic Games at Lake Placid, N.Y., before retiring two years later to run his home resort's ski school.

His 22-year-old daughter, Julia, will follow in her father's footsteps by competing in the women's skiercross during this year's Winter Games. She was almost 2 years old when he died of cancer in 1990.

"He's our resident hero," Whistler mountain host Evelyn Coggins told her tour group at the start of the downhill run.

The run was named in his honor two decades ago. A sign is near the top explaining who Murray was and a bit about how fast the Olympians are likely to fly down the route.

As Whistler realizes its 50-year dream to host the Winter Olympics, Murray's spirit lives on to grace the nerves of steel in the likes of Lake Tahoe's downhiller Marco Sullivan and U.S. veteran racer Bode Miller, among others.

As my Atomics scratched and scraped across the hard-packed slope on my recent visit to Whistler to preview the venues, I heard another sound. It was the voice of Tahoe orthopedic

surgeon Terry Orr, who is headed north to support the athletes of the U.S. Ski Team for the third time.

"It's a windy course, and fast – not one you can just look at from top to bottom," he warned, with a wink and a nod of good luck to Sullivan.

I discovered firsthand it's steep – like much of Whistler's "great-to-be-alive-if-you-love-to-ski" runs. The drops are certainly memorable. If I had a mirror attached to my ski helmet, my look of intensity may have scared me, but I was told later I was giddy as a child.

I thrive on the steeps, so I felt right at home in the terrain known for the longest elevation drop in North America – more than 5,000 feet. Only Zermatt's 8-mile run in Switzerland beats it.

The various pitches of the Dave Murray Downhill have names like the Weasel, Afterburner – which is more like a ledge, Lower Insanity, the recently widened Coaches Corner, the short Boyd's Bump, Murray's Jump aka Hot Air, and the infamous Toilet Bowl – where an abrupt rolling hill goes into a steep pitch in which racers will need to make a 90-degree left turn off what looks like a 45-degree drop.

Coggins' group stood staring at the run at the base of the turn in awe.

"How can they do that?" I heard a few times.

I can't wait to watch the Olympians pull it off while sitting in the comfort of my living room.

Coggins, a Halifax, Nova Scotia, native who labels what some call icy surfaces as "hard pack," said the Toilet Bowl got its name because that's where all the "crud collects because, yes, it rolls down hill."

Whistler Blackcomb kept the Dave Murray Downhill and the

women's downhill – located on Franz's run – open to the public until Jan. 25. Lower Dave Murray, even when groomed, remains a black run.

The BC trip was complete after whizzing down the two courses as if my last name were Mancuso and Sullivan of Squaw or Vonn of Vail. Well, it wasn't exactly at Olympic speed.

"People have been so excited. There is a buzz. Now you can sit and watch at home and say 'I skied that'," Coggins said on the tour. "It's amazing the speeds they go."

Think of a finely-tuned Porsche, and now throttle it.

Much of Coggins' focus of her tour involved doing different variations of the men's downhill run, which can be accessed via the Garbanzo Express chairlift or the Whistler Village Gondola to the mid-station. Skiers and boarders from the Creekside area may take the Creekside Gondola to the Big Red Express to Upper Whiskey Jack, a run named after a colorful and resourceful scavenger bird that hangs out at the lodges.

The women's downhill starts along the fall line of the Franz's chairlift. It's named after Franz Wilhelmsen, one of the founders of Garibaldi Lift Company and Whistler Mountain. Fast and furious is how best to describe skiing the women's downhill, which as Coggins put it, comes with its own set of technical challenges.

Lindsey Vonn's no-guts, no-glory style and Julia Mancuso's grace-under-pressure demeanor may thrive in this setting. The run is steep and the terrain fast. The best set of edges may prompt some skiers to slide.

With an average of 2 million skier visits under its belt, Whistler's record-setting 30-plus feet of snow this season bodes well for the host of this world event designed for spectator and participant. At least 90 percent of the dual-mountain terrain will be open for riders throughout the

Olympics.

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Concessionaire to provide year-round access to Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A nonprofit group has secured a contract for up to 10 years to be the concessionaire at Patton Landing in Carnelian Bay.

The year-round operation means free access to Lake Tahoe for non-motorized watercraft, a small sledding hill, plowed access to parking, and food vendors who will all have a connection to Tahoe.

“We’re keeping it as much Tahoe as we can,” Phil Caterino, executive director of Alpengroup, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It will also be opened as a place for community groups to do fund raisers.”



Patton Beach,
Carnelian Bay

Alpen Sierra Coffee, Tahoe House Bakery and Tahoe Candles are some of the businesses involved in Blue Warrior Caf , which

is slated to open in March at the site. The year-round facility will have hot drinks, food and environmental information.

The agreement with Alpengroup was approved by the California Tahoe Conservancy board on Jan. 29.

The state agency acquired 7.1 acres in Carnelian Bay between 1986-92 to give the public access to the lake. In 1999, \$1.8 million in improvements to the 2.2-acre Patton Landing site were completed — including 21 parking spaces, picnic facilities, rest rooms, patio, 723-square-foot structure and interpretive panels.

The problem has been finding a concessionaire who lives up to the full agreement. Alpengroup has been the interim concessionaire.

The agreement that was approved last month is estimated to save the CTC \$40,000 a year in utilities and maintenance.

“If we break even and cover our overhead, we have met our mission,” Caterino told the board.

The beach, located between Kings Beach and Tahoe City, is rocky. Caterino said he’s been surprised by how many people have been using the area this winter. But he said with the lot being paved, it draws people in.

“A lot of people are excited,” Caterino said of the fact the area will be open year-round with free access to the lake. Lack of parking for kayakers is a huge issue at Lake Tahoe, as is public access to the water.

His group sees this as an environmental and a business opportunity.

Part of Alpengroup’s mission statement is, “To build private and public partnerships to solve immediate problems with inventive and decisive intervention while recognizing

that only long term constructive planning and restoration will provide sustainable solutions for the future.â€”

Caterino said an underwater Webcam will be set up. Relationships with local lodging establishments are being worked on for kayakers-canoeists who want to paddle for more than a day or who want to use Patton Landing as a multi-day staging area.

The Lake Tahoe Water Trail Committee, which the CTC is part of, wants to create a lodge-to-lodge network for people who want to circumnavigate the 72 miles of Lake Tahoe.

For more information about Alpengroup, [click here](#).

Granlibakken embraces fun and relaxation

By Susan Wood

TAHOE CITY – Granlibakken means “hillside sheltered by fir trees: in Norwegian, but it should stand for recreation meets relaxation in English.

One of the Lake Tahoe Basin’s best kept secrets, the 74-acre resort nestled in a mountain valley a half mile south of Tahoe City is a kids’ paradise where the outdoors meets the outgoing. Children of all ages and seniors who are young at heart can appreciate the healthy blend of Tahoe-type activities and the history behind the resort.



Granlibakken's
ski and
sledding
hills.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

On one recent Saturday morning steps from the resort's main lodge, families seeking snow play covered the sledding and ski hill. A Poma lift and rope tow assist skiers and boarders; sledders must walk. The chatter and squeals made it clear how much fun can be had on a saucer, toboggan or skis.

Granlibakken Conference Center & Lodge employee Jason Works said this was a typical Saturday.

"Lots of families come out here," he said, adding it's also fun to work at the resort.

It seems to be an ideal spot for little ones learning how to ski. Its wide-open space and easy slope give beginners the security to learn the sport. According to Works, most spend hours going up and down the hill much like a Labrador retriever never tires of chasing a tennis ball.

An adult lift ticket runs \$21, children \$14.

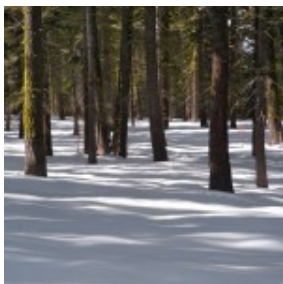


Susan Wood

If skiing the bunny hill or sliding isn't your thing, snowshoers and cross country skiers can spend the day above the lift. The resort's hill provides one free ride up to a vast web of groomed and ungroomed trails. A 3-mile round-trip jaunt can weave you through some of the most gorgeous U.S. Forest Service territory on the North Shore to Page Meadows. For the more ambitious, the Granite Chief Wilderness beckons with Scott Peak in the background. Due west, Ward Peak towers in the distance at 8,637 feet.

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association offers snowshoe tours to the meadow.

Kae and I elected to go up the Poma lift to tour a few miles of the snowcat-groomed trails on the ridge. The lift provided the most humbling experience because I had never been on a Pomo on cross country skis. I learned to ski via a Poma in Vermont at age 6 at the oldest ski area in the United States so I knew I could negotiate the spring-bound pole lift. But on Nordic skis the unloading was awkward. I survived unscathed, but had to pick myself up.



Pristine snow
is inches from

the groomed
trail.

Wide trails make it ideal for skate skiers and those who need to snowplow coming down.

Word to the wise: the topographical map is a little funky when it comes to directions to Page Meadows from the water tank. Don't head due west. Head slowly south, climbing the ridge before making a sharp northern turn before heading west.

After a day of fun, the resort provides lodging options ranging from studios and townhomes to an eight-bedroom forest lodge chalet and executive lodge suite. The latter is spacious and comfortable with a fireplace and a full kitchen that's suitable for gatherings. The complex has 45 guest rooms that start at \$310/night.

Ski and Stay packages run \$109 Sunday-Thursday and \$132 on Friday and Saturday.

Summertime comes alive for tennis buffs, as courts are steps away from most units.



Lodging
options.

A night's stay offers access to a heated pool, hot tub and sauna with a full, hot breakfast buffet the next morning. Executive Chef Ron Eber, who's logged more than a quarter century with the resort, brings out his signature homemade bread pudding to accompany eggs, pastries, pancakes, sausage,

coffee, juice and an assortment of fruit. It's difficult to imagine anyone going away hungry.

In addition to a 16,000-square-foot conference center, the resort features the Cedar House Pub in the main lodge. We didn't have a chance to eat there, but it looked like a perfect spot to unwind in front of the fire for appetizers or dinner.

Among the historic photos lining the hallways, the most telling for the resort is a large portrait of Kjell "Rusty" Rustad, who in 1947 leased the toboggan runs and undeveloped land from the Forest Service. He improved the ski jumping facilities and cleared timber for the downhill area.

I thought it was fitting that my brush with history as a child brought me decades later to check out the site of this country's first ski lift – a 600-foot tow rope. The 1932 Olympic ski-jumping trials were staged here, adding to the mystique of the secluded resort.

To this day, the resort still delves into the history of the Tahoe region. It hosted an Olympic Legends' dinner earlier this month, which featured the likes of 1960 Winter Games racer Joe Pete Wilson and cross country ski course groomer extraordinaire Chummy Broomhall.

Staff scurried to make its honorary guests comfortable. Resort Manager Kay Williams appeared quite tickled to hear the Olympic stories from the senior skiers and volunteers and sat with them over breakfast. And, General Manager Ron Parson described the evening in one word: "Incredible."

For more information, go to www.granlibakken.com.

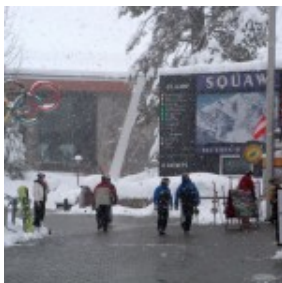
Troubled Intrawest sells Squaw Village to ski resort

By Kathryn Reed

Intrawest unloaded its third property in two months on Friday with the sale of the Village at Squaw Valley to Squaw Valley Ski Corp.

"It is something that has been ongoing for a while and is not related whatsoever to what our parent company is going through," Ian Galbraith, spokesman for Vancouver, British Columbia-based Intrawest, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Intrawest built the North Lake Tahoe village, with the first phase opening in February 2002 and the second phase opening in December 2003.



The Village at Squaw Valley was sold Jan. 29.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

This will be the first time in more than 30 years that the ski resort has owned a lodging facility. With the village come 285 one-, two- and three-bedroom condos, 20 retail shops, six restaurants and a spa. Click map to see the layout of the village.

No officials from the ski resort or the village returned calls Friday.

Nancy Cushing, CEO of the resort, said in a press release, "When we opened in 1949 we ran a small 50-room lodge that was occupied during the Olympics in 1960; it grew in size but our operation of this property ceased in 1979. And so, the acquisition of the Village represents an exciting and greatly anticipated opportunity."

None of the managers at various businesses at Squaw Village wanted to go on the record Friday.

On the Granite Chief Sport Shop website a post from Dec. 29 says, "We've been aware that the talks between Intrawest and Squaw started up again in October, but wholly smokes, this time the lid was kept on pretty tight. I've had my nose all over the valley trying to sniff out some details and I got nothing.

"As many of you know Granite Chief had been cleared to move to a better location in the village, then all of a sudden everything stopped. At first we all thought things with Intrawest had stalled because everyone was working on the Copper Mtn. deal, [Intrawest owned Copper sold to Powder Corp]. As it turned out the brakes were put on bringing all future plans for Village merchants to a screeching halt because Squaw Valley Ski Corp reopened negotiations to purchase the Intrawest Village. The word; it's a done deal. What isn't clear is when Squaw will take over operations. Some say February but the most recent scuttlebutt points to January.

"Well, we all knew it was going to happen, but the big surprise is that the talks hit the table so soon after last spring's negotiation fell apart.

"I think most merchants had a good relationship with the Intrawest team so on one hand we are sorry to see them go. On

the other hand we all want to be a part of a growing Squaw Valley. This could be a very good New Year!"

The store is not saying who posted the information.

Squaw Valley Ski Corp. has not always had a great reputation. Some merchants worry the village will begin to look like other buildings the resort owns – like Olympic House, Gold Coast, High Camp and the Cornice Cantina.

"I really don't see any good (in the sale). They aren't known for putting money into anything," one manager told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw Valley and Intrawest are privately held companies and therefore the dollar value of the transaction is not being disclosed.

Galbraith said the deal with Squaw is part of Intrawest's philosophy to own villages where it owns resorts. Intrawest owns eight ski resorts and a beach-golf resort in Florida.

Intrawest, owner of Whistler Village and Whistler Blackcomb the site of many of next month's Olympic alpine ski events as well as the luge-bobsled-skeleton events and Whistler Village, made headlines last week when it was revealed the company's assets will be auctioned off Feb. 19 if a deal with its lenders is not struck.

When news broke Intrawest issued a press release Jan. 20 saying it's "business as usual" at all of its resorts.

Galbraith restated that message on Friday, adding, there are a lot of rumors and speculation circulating that are not necessarily true. But he did not elaborate.

The fact remains that Intrawest is financially unstable.

Intrawest had to refinance a \$1.7 billion loan in October 2008. An extension was offered last October. The current

troubles for Intrawest involve missing a \$524 million loan payment.

“Refinancing discussions are still ongoing with lending groups,” Galbraith said.

Intrawest was founded in 1976.

“On October 26, 2006, private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC (NYSE:FIG) successfully completed the acquisition of Intrawest. The total value of the transaction, including the existing debt of Intrawest, was approximately US\$2.8 billion,” Intrawest’s website says. “Intrawest’s shares were de-listed from the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: IDR) and the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX: ITW) as a result of the acquisition and the subsequent privatization of the company. Currently, Intrawest is a portfolio company controlled primarily by private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC.”

This all transpired at the peak of the real estate market.

On Thursday, it was announced that Intrawest sold Panorama Mountain Village resort in British Columbia to Panorama Mountain Village Inc., a new company run by developer Rick Jensen. The price was not disclosed, but reports are that it was less than the \$100 million Powdr Corp. of Utah paid Intrawest for Copper Mountain in November.

“There are no other sales in the works that I’m aware of,” Intrawest’s Galbraith said.