Ski industry targeting millennials

By John Kekis, AP

WILMINGTON, N.Y. — When Aaron Kellett peers out the window of his office at Whiteface Mountain, these days he's usually smiling.

"My office is right next to our beginner trail, and when I look out I see people on our beginner trail," said the 38-year-old Kellett, who's been the manager at Whiteface for four years. "That means we've got new people learning how to participate in our sport."

And that's a good thing. As baby boomers begin to pull back from the athletic endeavors of their youth, ski resorts are focusing on attracting new participants to the slopes. The idea is to get them there and keep them, and the millennial generation (those between the ages of 18 and 34 in 2015) tops the target list.

According to the latest demographics from the Colorado-based National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), baby boomers (aged 52-70 in 2016) and those 71 and older have steadily become a smaller share of the visitor base as they've aged. Combined, in the past decade they've declined from 36.2 percent of visitors to 21.3 percent.

Millennials, on the other hand, represent the largest group of snowboarders and skiers, but they also have the fewest number of days per season. The figures show that the industry will need to increase the frequency of the millennial participant to match that of the exiting baby boomer.

"That's a significant wakeup call for us. There's some challenges there," said Nate Fristoe, director of operations

at RRC Associates, which last year produced a report on the millennial generation. “We have this funny little dilemma. We’re trying to build participation. We know we have to grow participants, but we also know that on most of our weekend days we’re hitting capacity.

“It’s a fascinating conundrum,” Fristoe said. “Yes, we have a product offering that has appealed to an older generation for years. It also appeals to this generation in many ways, but there are ways in which we need to tweak it.”

To be sure, millennials are different. They embrace the environment, like to plan spontaneously, prefer to travel with friends and crave healthy food. They also relish sharing their adventures on social media.

“Millennials are harder to attract, for sure. It’s not as cut and dried as it was even 10 years ago,” Kellett said. “They want the best deals and they’ll do whatever it takes to get the best deal. They don’t mind spending money to do what they want. It’s the experience. It’s so much more than just skiing.”

Kellet says online ticket sales have been “huge” for Whiteface because of the savings they offer.

Whiteface, which has plenty of apres ski destinations in nearby Lake Placid, offers a Parallel from the Start program for beginners. It costs $169 and includes everything needed to start skiing, except the clothing – lesson, equipment rental, and three days of skiing. “It’s an awesome way to be introduced to the sport. It works,” Kellett said.

In neighboring Vermont, the cost is $129 for a Take 3 pass – three ski or snowboard lessons that includes rental equipment for the day plus a lesson and access to beginner terrain. The Green Mountain State also offers a $49 beginners package during January, national Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month nationwide.

“Cost can be a hurdle, so anytime we can lower that hurdle a little bit, especially for beginners, we see more people participate for a longer period of time,” said Sarah Wojcik, marketing director for Ski Vermont. “Getting new people to the slopes with incentives and then keeping them are two of the biggest goals nationwide.”

The granddaddy deal of them all might be the epic pass offered by Vail Resorts. It’s the most popular pass in the ski industry and features unlimited, unrestricted skiing at all of the company’s mountain resorts (Vail, Beaver Creek, Keystone and Breckenridge in Colorado; Park City in Utah; and Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood in Lake Tahoe). It also will include Whistler Blackcomb next winter season (2017-18), and offers five days at 30 resorts in Europe.

With the rise of social media and mobile phones, most ski resorts are trying to provide easy-to-navigate websites and free Wi-Fi so visitors can share their experiences digitally — think Snapchat. Excellent cellphone service is a must.

“Your website being mobile-friendly is kind of millennial-speak 101,” Wojcik said. “If you can’t look it up on your phone, it’s really difficult to get the message out there.”

At Taos Ski Valley in New Mexico, which was cited by NSAA for having the best overall marketing campaign for 2016, millennials aren’t separately targeted but the demographic is important.

“Millennials are big on experience, and Taos Ski Valley has long been known for delivering an authentic, unpretentious and culture-rich winter mountain experience,” marketing manager Dash Hegeman said. “That is something we work very hard to protect and cultivate.”

Squaw hosting FIS race this week

Squaw Valley will host the Elite FIS Astle Memorial on Jan. 17-20, 2017.

The FIS tech series is traditionally at Snowbird in honor of Bryce Astle, one of two U.S. Ski Team members who passed away in an avalanche in 2015. A field of nearly 100 men and 100 women will compete in two days of giant slalom and two days of slalom on the same course as the women's Audi FIS World Cup event that will be at Squaw Valley this March.

The series, which is being utilized as a test event for the World Cup, will feature men with FIS points as low as 18.03 and women with FIS points as low as 30.23, all 17 years of age and older. This elite field includes athletes from 18 countries as well as all three USSA regions across the United States. Forty of the athletes come from the Far West region, which includes athletes from the Tahoe basin, nine of whom are on the Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Ski Team.

In addition to the race, Squaw will host a free Know B4 You Go avalanche awareness presentation hosted by the Nickolay Dodov Foundation on Jan. 17 at 5pm. This free event will be at the Squaw Valley Conference Center (1901 Chamonix Place, Olympic Valley).

Input on Spooner Lake’s future being sought

Nevada State Parks is planning improvements for the Spooner unit of Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park.

The agency is seeking input on ways to improve the experience at Spooner, with particular emphasis on expanding educational and interpretive opportunities.

Input may be given via an **online survey** until Jan. 31. and invites input from the public.

Spooner Lake offers fishing, hiking, picnicking and a quick escape into nature. The Spooner Backcountry encompasses more than 12,000 acres of forested open space with 50 miles of hiking, equestrian and mountain biking trails.

Ski resorts trying to educate guests about laws

A group of North Lake Tahoe area resorts in collaboration with the Placer County Sheriff’s Office have created a campaign to educate skiers and snowboarders about the importance of making smart choices and avoiding behavior that is against the law.

The goal of Be Mountain Wise is to inform those who are unaware of the potential consequences of ignoring resort boundary lines and closed areas, or sharing lift tickets or a season pass.

“Most people simply aren’t aware that sharing lift ticket or

season pass products is considered theft of services, and that skiing or snowboarding in closed areas or beyond boundary lines is also illegal,” Dave Hunt, Placer County detective sergeant, said in a statement. “Both actions are misdemeanor offenses. While there are legal consequences that can be enforced, our goal is to work with the resorts to educate the public about these issues in a way that will encourage people to make smart choices.”

Both lift ticket/season pass fraud and guests skiing in closed areas are long-time issues throughout the ski industry.

Participating resorts are Homewood Mountain Resort, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows and Sugar Bowl.

Betting public beats books again in NFL playoffs

By Todd Dewey, Las Vegas Review-Journal

So much for the anticipated Super Bowl showdown between America’s Team and the team America loves to hate.

A potential Cowboys-Patriots matchup – which would’ve likely produced a record wagering handle in Nevada – was erased when the Packers outlasted Dallas in a 34-31 thriller Sunday that was the first upset of this year’s NFL playoffs.

The Packers, who paid plus-180 on the money line, were the first road team to cover this postseason after home favorites won and covered the first six games.

The Steelers, 2-point ’dogs, followed with a minor upset in a 18-16 win over the Chiefs on Sunday night, as Chris Boswell kicked a playoff-record six field goals.

The upsets didn’t prevent the betting public from enjoying another winning NFL weekend after it cashed in Saturday on the Falcons and over and the Patriots and over.

Read the whole story

The science behind snow

By NOAA

How are snowflakes formed?

A snowflake begins to form when an extremely cold water droplet freezes onto a pollen or dust particle in the sky. This creates an ice crystal. As the ice crystal falls to the ground, water vapor freezes onto the primary crystal, building new crystals – the six arms of the snowflake.

That’s the short answer.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Truckee digs out before

next big dump



Lake Tahoe has a couple days to recover before the next storms arrive. Photo/Denise Haerr

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Brian Santos felt conflicting currents of emotion Saturday after historic winter storms dumped a bounty of snow on the northern Sierra Nevada – a region dependent on winter tourism and also vulnerable to the heartache such storms can bring.

At the Truckee Donner Lodge, where Santos was working as day manager, the heat was back on. The massive frosty mound that had covered the parking lot was cleared. The place was filled with guests as Interstate 80 jammed with skiers flocking to mountain resorts for the three-day Martin Luther King Day weekend.

Yet Santos had just emerged from a few hellish days. His family was snowed in from Tuesday until Friday in their nearby Pla Vada Woodlands home. They went without electricity for four days, and trees throughout the neighborhood had toppled under the snowfall.

Now the Tahoe region is bracing for – and cautiously celebrating – more snow to come. A second significant storm system, called an "atmospheric river," is expected to hit late Tuesday. It stands to blanket the upper Sierra and Truckee-Lake Tahoe resorts under another 2 feet of snow while also creating new perils for residents and motorists.

Read the whole story

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4 U.S. women in top 16 downhill race

By USSA

ALTENMARKT-ZAUCHENSEE, Austria – Jackie Wiles (Aurora, Ore.) skied to her first career Audi FIS Ski World Cup podium, finishing third, in Sunday's much anticipated downhill.

After three days of weather delays, the women ran an early morning downhill training run Sunday, and then headed back to the start for the real deal. In Sunday's race, four Americans stacked into the top 16 with Wiles leading the way in third. Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) was 12th, Lindsey Vonn (Vail) 13th and Breezy Johnson (Victor, Idaho) was 16th. Stacey Cook (Mammoth Lakes) was 29th, Alice McKennis (New Castle, Colo.) was 34th and Leanne Smith (North Conway, N.H.) was 38th.

The track at Altenmarkt proved faster for the later starters as Austria's Christine Scheyer took her first career World Cup win coming from the 25th start position. Tina Weirather of Liechtenstein was second from the 17th start position. Wiles, whose previous career-best World Cup downhill result was 15th at Cortina d'Ampezzo in 2014, came from the 26th start position. For Wiles though, Sunday's podium came at just the right time ahead of three weeks of speed events leading into the World Championships next month in Switzerland.

"To come down in third is a dream come true," said Wiles, who took some time off over the holidays to recharge. "I've had a tough start to the season and seen so many expectations falling flat, so I really needed this and it couldn't have come at a better time.

"This is definitely going to help my confidence moving forward. Hopefully I'll have some good skiing coming," she added.

Following two injuries and 322 days since her last race, Vonn was stoked not only to be to back racing, but for her teammate Wiles, who is sponsored by the Lindsay Vonn Foundation.

"I'm really happy for Jackie," said Vonn. "I felt like I was skiing pretty well, just not quite on the limit yet. For me, it's not really a matter of the results, I'm just happy to be racing again. Of course I have higher expectations for myself, but considering the condition and the fact that we had a training run and a race in the same day, I think it was pretty good."

Switzerland's Lara Gut finished fourth to cut into Mikaela Shiffrin's overall World Cup lead. Shiffrin, who did not race Sunday, holds the lead with 1,008 points. Gut is second with 693, and Slovenia's Ilka Stuhec, who was fifth Sunday, is third overall with 584 points. Stuhec continues to lead the overall World Cup downhill standings with 345 points.

How to live the good life in a ski town

By Megan Michelson, Outside

Ski bumming is hardly a glamorous lifestyle. It means things like eating ramen for dinner, sleeping in your car, and taking an assortment of odd jobs. But the payoff can be worth it when you get an all-you-can-eat buffet of powder days. So how do you make life work in a ski town? We called some authentic ski bums to ask them how they've pulled it off.

There's a severe housing shortage in mountain towns right now, which means it can be tough to find affordable housing near ski hills. If you're working for a ski resort or another larger company, start by asking your employer (see the next tip on finding a job) if they offer workforce housing. Word of mouth rentals are likely your best bet: ask the coffee shop baristas and the ski tuners at your favorite shop, because they know everyone. For short-term solutions, look for caretaking gigs or ski leases, which are winter-only rentals.

"If you don't want to live in a van or a snow cave, and renting a room is too expensive, look into a ski lease," says Bevan Waite, 24, who lives in his van in Tahoe City, and works part-time for an architect and as an editor at SnowBrains.com. "People buy into a seasonal lease for a large house and split costs. Ski leases are often more popular with weekenders from the city but if you can weasel your way in as a full-time resident, you become the house caretaker and pay dirt cheap rent for living full-time in a fancy vacation house all winter long."

Read the whole story

USFS to lead tours at Heavenly ski resort

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's ski with a ranger at Heavenly Mountain Resort program begins Jan. 20. Tours begin at the top of the gondola every Monday and Friday at 1pm.

The tours last approximately one hour. The end April 7.

Participants must be intermediate level skiers/boarders or above and provide their own lift ticket. No reservations are required. Attendance is on a first-come first-served basis. Meet at the top of the Heavenly gondola.

This conservation education program offers the public an opportunity to learn about the mission and role of the Forest Service in ski area management, to improve public understanding of natural resource processes and issues, and to promote environmental literacy and stewardship. Programs are led by U.S. Forest Service staff and volunteers.

For more information, contact Reanna Suela at 530.543.2789 or rsuela@fs.fed.us.