

# Letters to Vail

VAIL HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

## The Town Gets a New Manager and A PR Ploy From VR?

August 29, 2022

### A New Manager



**Incoming Vail Town Manager, Russ Forrest**

Congratulations to Russ Forrest on taking the helm as the new TOV Manager. He comes into the job with previous TOV experience, having served as the community development department director from 1992 to 2007. After that he served as Town Manager for Snowmass (2007-13), Assistant County Manager for Gunnison County (2013-16) and City Manager for Gunnison (2016 to the present). In Vail, he will have to deal with some thorny issues, ranging from a fractured relationship with VR to overcrowding and congestion that affect the quality of life in Vail, to a need for more affordable housing, to the impacts of climate change and to finding financing for and overseeing the development of a new civic center, among other issues. VHA wishes him nothing but success.



### **The PR Ploy From VR**

VR has announced that, in an effort to mitigate crowding on Vail Mountain, daily lift tickets sales will be limited every day this season at Vail. The same action is being taken at its other resorts. According to VR, it is doing this in “order to preserve the guest experience at each resort.” Really? Or is this a marketing ploy intended to pump up pass sales and divert attention from the overcrowding and skier safety? Let’s look at the facts.

The limitation only applies to daily ticket sales. There will be no restrictions on the number of pass holders who can access the mountain on any given day. It is believed that only a very small fraction of skiers on any given day use a daily ticket, and the limitation will be to only a fraction of those sales. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that only a hundred or so sales will be prevented. Compared to tens of thousands of skiers on the mountain, it will not come close to amounting to even a proverbial drop in the bucket. The exact numbers that will be eliminated is, of course, unknowable since VR steadfastly refuses to release any information or data about skier numbers, daily lift ticket sales or on-mountain injuries. As everyone knows, VR carefully monitors that data and could, with the push of a button, make it available for all to see. That it will not speaks volumes, especially now that people are no longer willing to take VR at its word or willing to trust its actions. If our estimate is incorrect, VHA invites VR to release the data to prove otherwise.

But more important, whatever that number is, it can and probably will be more than made up for by pass holders. Right now, VR is doing everything it can to have another record year of pass sales. Those sales amounted to 2.1 million last year, and at the last reporting period, this year's sales were running 9% ahead of last year. If that holds for the entire year, there will be an additional 200,000 passes for the 2022-23 season. All those skiers have to go somewhere, and there is good reason to believe that many will descend on Vail. So, on a net basis, notwithstanding the daily pass limitation, there could well be even more skiers on the mountain this year. So much for the guest experience.

That this was just a ploy to boost pass sales is strongly suggested by VR's actions because the very next day the VR marketing machine, under the moniker of the "Epic Pass Team," leaped into action to warn skiers that "lift tickets will be limited this season" and skiers are "strongly encouraged to purchase lift access in advance." The message went on to tout the benefits of buying epic passes now. It would be interesting to see the daily record of pass sales.

This also does not seem to be well thought out. That is because a limit on daily pass sales will hurt destination skiers and, potentially, could further undermine Vail's reputation. Local and mountain regulars will have passes, so they will not be affected. But destination skiers, the demographic that VR is trying to reach, who come to Vail thinking they can buy daily tickets, will be in for a huge surprise. When they can't get tickets, they are going to go away mad, dragging Vail's already poor reputation even lower. This will not only impact VR; it will also have a direct impact on the TOV which is dependent on tourism for its financial security.

This may be a calculated effort on VR's part to avoid having to deal with the Vail on-mountain skier limit of 19,900 and what seems to be a mounting number of on-mountain injuries. [As VHA has already explained](#), 19,900 skiers seems to be an overly generous perhaps excessive number of skiers. It is also a number that assumes the skiers are spread over the entire mountain, but as everyone knows, skiers tend to congregate in certain areas. Chairs 2, 4, 7 and 11, and chair 5 on snow days, get the bulk of the traffic. Viewed from a distance, skiers on the slopes around those chairs look like a swarm of ants coming down the hill. It is past time to revisit the number of skiers who can be safely accommodated on the mountain. That is the reason VHA has urged the TOV to request that the United States Forest Service (USFS) review that number. It is also the reason that VHA has called for a reevaluation of the TOV's relationship with VR that will address overcrowding in the community and on the mountain.

All this underscores that there is much to do if Vail is to realize it's slogan, "Like Nothing On Earth," a place that combines the best of alpine living with world-class skiing. Russ Forrest has his work cut out for him.

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VHA provides clear and concise discussions of matters affecting the Vail community in the belief that an informed citizenry will be an engaged citizenry. We intend to promote more citizen involvement and community discussions of issues facing the Town. If these are issues that concern you, please make your views known to [town officials](#). Public discussion of current issues

by concerned citizens creates an environment to further community initiatives. We heartily encourage your input in shaping the road ahead.

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