

More details are revealed about Vail's new gondola

Vail Resorts executives update Vail Homeowners Association

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VAIL — There's a Vail tradition over the Christmas holidays that may go unnoticed by many — the Vail Homeowners Association's annual meeting.

This year's meeting, held at Vail Town Hall, drew a brace of Vail Resorts executives, including company chairman and CEO Rob Katz, Vail Mountain chief operating officer Chris Jarnot, company co-president John Garnsey and Vail Mountain marketing chief Adam Sutner. Each gave a presentation about what's new in the corporation and its namesake mountain. Here are some highlights from those presentations:

New gondola

Jarnot may have had the biggest news, since he provided an update about plans for a new gondola, expected to be built in the summer along virtually the same path as the Vista Bahn lift.

First drawings for the new gondola are expected to be released next week, although Jarnot said a manufacturer hasn't yet been selected. That decision will determine whether the gondola cars seat eight or 10 people.

Regardless of the manufacturer, Jarnot said the new lift — which will be renamed "Lift 1," in honor of the original gondola — will help alleviate one of Vail Mountain's biggest customer-service problems: the morning lift lines out of the village.

"This won't eliminate the lines, but it'll get them back to a more palatable volume," Jarnot said.

i What's the Vail Homeowners Association?

It was started about 20 years ago as the East Village Homeowners Association for second-home owners, who can't vote in Vail, to have a lobbying presence in town affairs.

It was started by a group that included Bob Galvin, who died in October at age 89. The current president is Gail Ellis, Galvin's daughter.

Over time, the group expanded to include second-home owners from the entire town.

Vail resident Jim Lamont has been the group's executive director for virtually its entire existence.

Jarnot also answered questions about why the new gondola will just go to Mid-Vail instead of all the way to the top of the mountain.

Going all the way to the top "doesn't make sense," Jarnot said. The main reason, he said, is that the current lift out of Vail Village is mainly for getting people to other parts of the mountain accessed from Mid-Vail. A gondola is also a better solution in case skiers have to download from Mid-Vail to the Village.

The 'Vail brand'

Sutner, who gave his first presentation to the association during the financial meltdown of 2008, said Vail as a brand is stronger than it's ever been.

"We're among, if not at the top of, ski brands in North America and the world," Sutner said. That brand strength is being parlayed into international

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marketing, particularly to countries including Brazil and Australia.

And it's Australians, who are now starting their traditional summer break, who will fill the town in the first weeks of the new year, Sutner said, adding that occupancy numbers for the first part of the new year now rival those for the Christmas holidays.

Vail Resorts is also expecting more Brazil-

ian skiers than ever before this season.

Collaboration

In his presentation, Katz praised the collaboration over the past few years among the town, the resort company and the Vail Valley Foundation.

"There's no resort, anywhere in the world, that has the collaboration" on display in Vail, Katz said. "We're all incredibly fortunate."

"When we look out five, 10 or 20 years, Vail will be the shining star of what a resort can be," Katz said.