



DOMINIQUE TAYLOR | DTAYLOR@VAILDAILY.COM Vail CEO Rob Katz, right, addresses Vail residents and town officials about the resort company's goals for the coming year during the Vail Homeowners Association annual meeting on Monday at the Vail Town Council Chambers.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Building the value of a resort, without real estate

Melanie Wong

mwong@vaildaily.com

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VAIL — After the economy took a plummet in 2008, Vail Resorts officials looked to the company's immediate future and decided that it might include a lot less real estate than originally planned.

Instead, Vail CEO Rob Katz told Vail homeowners on Monday night, the company chose to invest in the guest experience and the Vail community.

"We made a conscious decision after the recession to build back the value of our company without real estate," said Katz. "Our focus now is resort guests — and the dirty little secret in the ski industry is that resort guests don't just want to ski. If you look at the successful ski towns out there, people come there for the community. Our focus has been on that entire effort to create a loyalty amongst guests."

That means quality events to attract guests, a strong sense of local community, excellent customer service and a safe, friendly environment, resort officials said.

In a packed room at the Vail Town Council Chambers, members of the Vail Homeowners Association met with town and resort officials like Katz to talk about local plans and goals for the upcoming year.

Katz talked about the company's acquisition of new resorts over the last few years, including a couple smaller, Midwest resorts. He said Vail Resorts aims to tap into the community benefits available at all those resorts and that Vail is leading the way in being a vibrant place where visitors want to spend.

Improving the town and mountain

Homeowners also got updates from Vail Mayor Andy Daly on projects that had started or been completed over the past year. Projects included plans to address the lack of commercial space, getting a mid-Vail underpass built near Simba Run and cleaning up Gore Creek.

Daly also talked about issues the town hoped to tackle, including parking on the Frontage Road, the future of the town's medical facilities and keeping quality in the town's ever growing array of special events.

On the mountain, Chris Jarnot, Vail Mountain chief operating officer, reported on improvements that ranged from new chairlifts to a more efficient snowmaking system.

Some homeowners expressed concern about safety and accidents on the slopes, a problem the resort has addressed with increased policing of high-traffic areas. You may have noticed an increased presence of safety patrollers, or yellow jackets, on the mountains — that's because there are up to 20 yellow jackets on the mountain at its busiest times, and Jarnot said they've already flagged down more speed offenders than ever before.

"We're using increased yellow jacket presence to get people to slow down in congested areas. Last season we had 120 contacts per week during the busiest time," he said, referring to people who were given warnings or had their pass pulled as a result of dangerous skiing and riding. "This year in the last few weeks, we've had 195 contacts and then 247 contacts."

Other major players in the community also reported on their contributions to the fabric of Vail, including the Vail Valley Foundation's Ceil Folz. The nonprofit's major campaign is the 2015 Alpine World Championships, and she said that Vail can expect to enjoy a very large and international event. The races will get at least 20 hours of domestic television coverage, as opposed to six hours when the town last had the event in 1999, and more than 70 countries are expected to compete.

And what about real estate?

Of course, real estate is still a concern of the community, said Harry Frampton, of East West Partners. He told homeowners that real estate prices in the Vail area have recovered with a 20 percent increase from their lowest point in 2009.

"We're clearly seeing a firming up," he said. "However, we have a lot of homes that need to be updated and a lot of competitors around the country are building up. I think we need to be reminded about the incredible competition we have. They're doing phenomenal things in places like Jackson Hole, Tahoe and a lot of warm weather resorts. We have to be aware that people who buy here do shop in other areas."

However, he urged the town and resort to continue working to improve the area.

"What worries me is that it's in the DNA of resorts to stop reinventing themselves. They stop doing new things, stop taking risks, stop reinvesting and stop collaborating. One great thing is that Vail hasn't done that yet. We care deeply about this place, and we're working hard to make it even better."

Assistant Managing Editor Melanie Wong can be reached at 970-748-2927 and mwong@vaildaily.com.