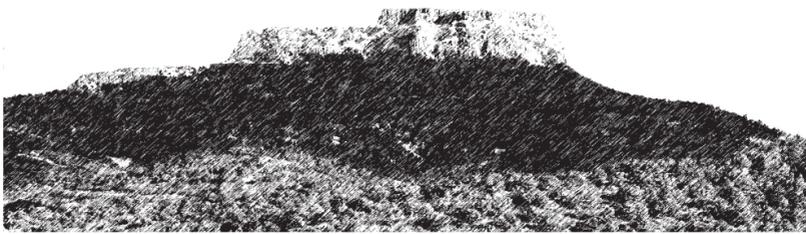


OVER THE PASS



"People need to come together and make peace. People are arguing too much, especially over the election. Too much fighting. People need to come together and be at peace."

— Janelle Romero, Trinidad



"As a country, if we're able to unite. There's a lot of division right now. On the news, it's all negative, no positive. If we're able to realize that other people have different beliefs than we do—but we get past that."

— Alec Petterson, TSJC baseball player, Brush, CO



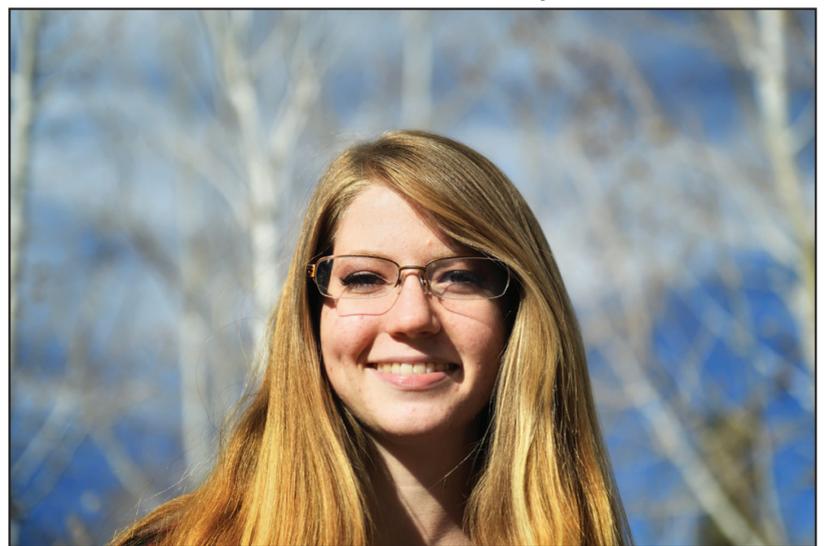
"If the Broncos won the Super Bowl. Their chances are not too good right now, probably a one-in-five chance of winning. I've been a fan ever since I was born."

— Kody Shoop, TSJC business student, Trinidad

TIM KELLER'S CONNECTIONS

"How could things get better next year?"

Photos by Tim Keller / The Chronicle-News



"I'm finishing school early. This year was just setting up all the pieces and next year they're all falling into place. I still live with my parents. My fiancé is not living here and we're getting married next year. I'll finally be on my own next year."

— Ila Segers, TSJC student, Trinidad

SEASONS

Ski industry skews big, so smaller resorts tout authenticity

Kristen Wyatt
Associated Press

Sunlight Mountain Resort says that in an era of increasing ski-industry consolidation, where a handful of companies control more and more winter sport terrain, scrappy independent resorts need all the help they can get to compete with amenity-laden megaresorts.

From baking fresh doughnuts for skiers to displaying local art to play up a sense of community, smaller, independent resorts say they have to rely on personality.

"It's the difference between Budweiser or a craft brew," said Troy Hawks, Sunlight's head of marketing and sales.

The ski industry used to be dominated by independent resorts, where downhill and cross-country skiers would drive to a local mountain, maybe get a fireside cup of hot chocolate in a lodge, then drive home. A ski area with an on-mountain hotel was a rarity; one with nighttime entertainment and white-tablecloth dining would be a true destination.

Starting in the 1980s, larger conglomerate companies started consolidating ski areas, investing heavily to make their mountains 12-month vacation destinations.

They made room for upstart snowboarders. Added spas and skiing lessons for kids. Built condominiums and larger hotels. Allowed guests to one buy one pass good at several mountain resorts.

Consolidation expanded in spurts. The trend hit a new milestone last October when Vail Resorts of Broomfield spent \$1.05 billion to buy Canada's Whistler Blackcomb Holdings Inc., North America's big-

gest and busiest ski resort. The purchase brought Vail Resorts to a dozen ski areas, all of them destination resorts that court overnight guests.

"We're seeing homogenization in the industry, no question," said David Norden, CEO of Taos Ski Valley Inc., an independently owned resort in New Mexico.

Mega ski operators like Vail can afford to advertise worldwide, and they grab headlines when they grow. But an industry association that tracks skier visits says that smaller, independent resorts are holding their own.

"There's the visible national destination resorts, but there's a whole other aspect of the industry made up of resorts that are closer to home, that they're easily accessible, affordable, and in many cases specialize in teaching people how to ski," said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association, based in Lakewood.

Just a fraction of the nation's 463 ski areas are owned by multi-mountain conglomerates, and no one counts how many of the 57 million or so annual skier visits are made to independently owned mountains, Berry said.

But he conceded that consolidation isn't going away, making it imperative that independent resorts keep locals coming back.

"The better they do, the more likely they are to be a target for acquisition. It's one of those ironic realities," Berry said.

Owners of the independent mountains say they're trying to buck the consolidation trend by competing with personality.

At Taos, resort owners are investing in local art to play up the region's ac-

claim for southwestern art, especially pottery and textiles.

"As with any business, it's important to try to come up with, 'What is your differentiating factor?'" Norden said.

One Colorado resort uses its lack of amenities as an attraction. Silverton Mountain in southwest Colorado has no terrain for beginners or intermediates. No ski school. No hotel. Just one lift and 1,800 acres of uncrowded terrain for expert skiers. No frills. Just thrills.

"We set ourselves apart by limiting the daily skier visits and making the experience the opposite of others," said Silverton Mountain co-founder Jen Brill, who happily boasts that her mountain sees as many skiers in a season as the megaresort Breckenridge Ski Resort sees in a busy winter weekend.

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