

THE ASPEN TIMES

Summer in Snowmass: Carnival atmosphere or construction nightmare?

By Steve Benson
August 19, 2004



[Print Friendly](#)



[Email This Story](#)

Snowmass Village, typically a virtual ghost town once the snow melts, has turned into a summer hot spot this year with an increase in regional sporting events, festivals and daily activities.

Every weekend seems to bring another event, and the town's daily calendar is so chock-full it looks like a monthly one.

In August alone, Snowmass Mountain hosted national mountain bike and mountainboarding championship races on back-to-back weekends, drawing competitors and guests from all over the country. And a variety of new festivals and events, including the Chili Pepper and Brew Fest in early June, have complemented traditional activities like the free weekly concert series on Fanny Hill.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

This uptick in activity has been funded by a marketing and special events tax that generates about \$2.5 million a year, according to Aspen Skiing Co. Senior Vice President David Perry. And Susan Hamley, marketing director for the town of Snowmass Village, said the tactic appears to be working; sales tax revenues are up nearly 6 percent on the year.



The U.S. Mountain Boarding Series was one of many summer sporting events to hit Snowmass Village this year. Aspen Times photo/Devon Meyers.

[Click to Enlarge](#)

"We've only just started," she added.

But what will happen to the summer activity schedule when the long-awaited Base Village development begins construction? If the \$963,000-square-foot project wins approval from the Town Council in the next few weeks, it's expected to disrupt normal life in Snowmass Village from spring 2005 to at least 2011. Construction season seems to be on a collision course with Snowmass's new-and-improved events calendar.

"Construction during the summer season, when people have

their windows open, is going to be tremendously disruptive," said Jeff Tippett, a former Snowmass Village mayor and chairman of the anti-Base Village group Citizens for Responsible Growth. "Construction and summer resorts don't work too well together."

But Tippett wonders if construction will really affect tourism, since he feels the current summer events don't really draw a lot of overnight visitors. "A lot of the activities taking place aren't really putting heads on beds," he said. The Thursday night concerts, for example, are primarily a local attraction, he added, and they "don't drive room sales."

The events that do drive summer room sales - conferences - will be hit hardest, Tippett believes.

"If a meeting planner gets wind of construction, he will cancel," he said. "The problem with all of this is that the council has refused to open their eyes to it ... they continue to do fiscal impact analysis that assumes everything will go on as it has in the past."

Tippett claims that many local residents, including he and his wife, have considered leaving Snowmass Village if the project passes.

"Next summer when they're moving dirt out, Brush Creek Road will be untenable," he said. "And the next two summers, when they're moving concrete in, forget about it - people won't be able to move around."



Huge crowds showed up for the recent Blast The Mass bicycle races on Snowmass Mountain, but the parking lots used by many of the spectators will likely turn into construction sites in coming years. Aspen Times photo/Devon Meyers. [Click to Enlarge](#)

The Skico's Perry said his past experiences in resort towns have shown him that construction can actually have a positive impact.

"Guests see major construction and the sense of renewal is palpable," said Perry, who has been involved with village projects in Mt. Tremblant, Quebec, Mammoth Mountain, Calif., and Whistler, British Columbia, where he was a senior member of the marketing department for 15 years. "They get curious and excited."

Furthermore, Perry and officials from Intrawest - the Skico's partner on the project - claim that while there will be some growing pains, construction-phasing will minimize the disruption. Rather than spreading the construction activity across the base of the mountain, building will be concentrated in certain pockets at certain times. For example, two-thirds of the commercial space to anchor the village will be built in the first phase, expected to last about a year.

"I'm not going to sit here and tell you there isn't going to be an impact. This is a \$400 million construction project," said Michael O'Connor, Intrawest's vice president of development. "But we're doing everything we possibly can to minimize impacts - people will just have to pay attention."

John Wheatley, director of development for Intrawest, said there will be periodic traffic delays on Wood Road and Lower Carriage Way due to road construction, but they shouldn't be major.

"We'll always have alternative routes posted," Wheatley said. There will be weekly updates via e-

mail and local newspapers, as well as lighted road signs to tell people where and when the heaviest construction and road delays will be, O'Connor added.

The construction of the village itself will be self-contained and will not close current businesses or cause a cancellation of scheduled events, Wheatley said. The future site for most of Base Village is currently a dirt parking lot and a collection of maintenance sheds.

Most large events, including Thursday night concerts, take place higher up Fanny Hill near the Mall. Mountain bike and mountainboard races, which often start and finish at the bottom of Fanny hill, will have to be relocated uphill slightly, Perry said.

"People can play around that," he added.

But perhaps most important is that construction will be halted during the year's busiest times, including the Christmas holiday, Presidents Day weekend, and the Jazz Aspen Snowmass festival over Labor Day weekend.

"Construction will be suspended at selective times when it's busy and it's not productive to bring in construction workers," Wheatley said. "We're going to work with the town and the community to avoid situations with major delays."

The project's general contractor, Peter Kiewit Sons Co., has scheduled a community forum to address construction-related concerns at the Chapel in Snowmass Village on Sept. 1, from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

"It would really behoove people to attend if they want to understand the steps we're taking," O'Connor said.

Steve Benson's e-mail address is sbenson@aspentimes.com