

Deer Valley remains champion

Readers pick Park City resorts among top four in N. America

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For the third time in a row, and the fifth time in a decade, Deer Valley Resort was voted the No. 1 ski resort in North America by readers of SKI Magazine.

Rising from fifth place, Park City Mountain Resort (PCMR) was voted No. 4 overall. All three resorts were in the top 20, and The Canyons ranked highly in accessibility, on-mountain dining and lodging.

Deer Valley president and general manager Bob Wheaton said taking care of the needs of his staff this past winter was key in helping them perform their best on the job.

In a press release, Wheaton said, "In an effort to support and retain the heart and soul of our organization during this tough economic time, last season we made the decision to invest in the Resort's greatest asset: our staff."

In an interview Wednesday, Wheaton said there was no single thing or "silver bullet" he could point to that would explain his resort's success, but that he wants Deer Valley to be a fun place to work.

"We make a consistent commitment to treat everyone on staff as you would your finest guest," he said. "That's not easily done."

SKI Magazine editor, Greg Ditrinco, said the largest resort companies in North America did massive lay offs last winter, and he thinks it's commendable Wheaton chose a different strategy.

"It was a pretty smart tactical move by them," Ditrinco said.

Wheaton said people who enjoy their job treat guests better.

"We get comments from guests: 'Everyone here is so happy,'" he said.

In addition to his staff, Wheaton also attributed the resort's success to support from the community.

"We really appreciate the support of all our guests and especially the people in town. There's no way we could be where we are without that support we see in season-pass sales and coupon books," he said.

Krista Parry, director of marketing and communications for PCMR, said the resort has placed fifth for three of the past four years. Going up to fourth makes them very pleased.

Parry also said the community deserves credit for the recognition.

"We're ranked most accessible ski resort in America," she said. "I think it's our connection to Main Street."

Parry believes PCMR to be the only resort in America with ski-in and ski-out access to a Main Street. That contributed to it also being No. 5 for après ski options.

"And only a few resorts in the country have an actual, authentic town predating the resort," she said.

Ditrinco said Main Street has been a game changer.

"Your downtown is as good as it gets in ski country," he said.

Parry also bragged that her resort was ninth in family programs. That has been a particular focus of the staff, she explained.

Awards benefit the whole community

More people than just ski resort managers rejoice when Park City's resorts are highly rated. The fame it brings the community benefits many related industries.

Lincoln Calder, president of the Park City Board of Realtors, said the proximity to world-class resorts is one of the reasons people look at second homes in Park City and at Deer Valley specifically.

"A place that people want to visit is also a place people want to have a home," he explained.

Paul Christensen, president of the Park City Area Lodging Association said everything good that happens in town benefits the whole town. All three resorts getting high rankings was definitely a factor in people choosing Park City for their winter vacation last year, he said.

The close proximity of the resorts means skiers have a variety of options for lodging, which benefits them as well as the local industry.

Bill Marolt, president and CEO of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association, said the community is blessed to have three world-class resorts in town.

"Deer Valley's consistent top ranking is a tribute to its staff and the leadership of Bob Wheaton. We have seen that firsthand as Deer Valley has established itself as the premier competition venue for the annual FIS World Cup and the upcoming 2011 Freestyle World Championships," he said.

About 4,000 to 6,000 readers responded to the survey. Ditrinco said that in his experience the readers don't just judge the snow, but the entire winter resort experience. Deer Valley has pleased guests across the board and that's why they rank it so highly, he said.