



Jackson Gore is a full service base area

Although the 2005-2006 season had started big with natural snow, periods of rain and warm air soon followed. So for a mid-January ski trip I was looking for a resort that had withstood this historic “January thaw”. My mid-season trip was to Okemo, Vermont and it was memorable. With over 90 trails open the variety of terrain was truly impressive. Good base depth, an abundance of both groomed and un-groomed terrain, including magnificent soft man-made moguls on Sel’s Choice, this resort knows how to do it right. I was intent on learning a few secrets that would shed light on the Okemo philosophy.

Okemo draws its guests from Vermont and surrounding states. This is changing as the resort matures into a major destination of significant size. Every year since the Mueller family first purchased this sleepy prize in 1982, significant improvements have been made to the area. The family exudes “hands on energy” and Okemo exemplifies the possibilities that the sale of real estate allows beyond housing for a ski resort.

One can visually trace the Mountain’s development through its architecture. The older chalet

style base lodge with its low pitched roof and adjacent contemporary styled circa 1984 housing that marches up the rising slope now includes several individual developments north and east towards the area’s flagship and most recent accomplishment, Jackson Gore. The main porte cochere and Welcome Center, also constructed in 1984, adds modern European design with its white stucco walls and clock tower. At the top of the short base lift and along its east side are multiple wood sided living units built in the late eighties, in several simple building clusters. You can call these units and the majority of Okemo’s development, true ski in, ski out quarters.

Following Okemo Ridge Road, starting at The Loft, a local watering hole near the Welcome Center, north towards Jackson Gore we pass clusters of housing named L’Edgewood (1986), Kettlebrook (1988), then Winterplace (1990-92), and Solitude

Village (1995-98). Finally we find the anchor of the far side of the mountain, the multistorry, multicolored, multi-function, clapboard sided Jackson Gore Inn and Base Lodge complete with its Round House and covered pedestrian walkways.

Varied types of accommodations are available on the mountain, from 3 bedroom penthouse suites, one to five bedroom residences with close by restaurants, sun decks, sports centers and indoor outdoor pools, to simpler accommodations. They are all traditional in form, but modern in functionality, each with its own mountain style

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By Richard Butler

Okemo exemplifies the possibilities real estate allows for a ski resort

OKEMO

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OKEMO, Vermont

character built on sloping terrain, many with valley views.

With the recent completion of Phase I at Jackson Gore, itself a self-contained mountain community, (this new area is two and one-half miles from the original base lodge), Okemo is quickly becoming a major resort attraction with an average annual skier visit count of 600,000. The National

Ski Areas Association ranks Okemo second in New England and sixteenth in the nation in skier visits.

I asked Director of Planning and Real Estate Operations, Ted Reeves, and Director of Public Relations Bonnie MacPherson, the same question; what makes Okemo such a success story? They gave me three main reasons:

- First and foremost, a commitment to great snow making and grooming
- A strong focus on customer service
- A deep involvement with community service

The snow making and grooming are first rate. The night crews are masters of their trades, and they have exported their knowledge and skills west to Colorado showing that state a thing or two about providing what nature sometimes doesn't. "We've never made as much snow here at Okemo, as we have this [05-06] year," said Okemo Senior VP of Mountain Operations Barry Tucker. "We're becoming more efficient every year and are implementing new measures to do a better job in providing the highest quality snow surface around."

From the parking attendants and greeters, to the food service staff and the lift attendants you'll see smiling faces willing to help and give advice. It's that Mueller approach at work. Look close and you are apt to see Diane Mueller checking the cafeteria food displays, or talking to staff and guests alike. The family is truly hands on.

As a requirement of Act 250, Vermont's environmental permitting process, the Mueller's had to build affordable housing for employees. And the "Enterprise Fund" epitomizes Okemo's community service. The fund is a mechanism used to help offset the environmental impacts of the Jackson Gore Development. The program is, in part, mandated by the resort's Master Land Use Permit, under which Okemo operates. The Permit requires operational and ecological compliance on a daily basis. A portion of ticket sales has been appropriated to fund community projects such as an elementary school playground, a public safety building, and a day care center. The Muellers review applications on merit for participation in this program.

Phase II at Jackson Gore is well underway. It includes a grouping of over one hundred condos (named Adams, Bixby and Coolidge), in three separate areas, including quarter share and whole ownership units. Adams is pres-



ently under construction. A winter skating rink and a fitness and aquatic center are also under construction. The Center will contain a racquet ball court, dance floor, aerobics and workout room, kid's pool, two lane lap pool, and saunas. There will also be a year round track, a basketball court, and a tennis court for the warm months. A 25,000 square foot conference center with a 500 person capacity meeting room is included and is being heralded as the largest of its size in southern Vermont.

This is a place where you can escape from your vehicle. The Jackson Gore Inn provides valet parking in a heated enclosed garage. The Inn is truly a ski in/ski out development. Transportation between both base complexes and the Village of Ludlow is by shuttle bus, and from this new base area, you can ski or ride to all areas on the mountain. Employee transportation assistance, a real plus in a rural environment, is also provided.

Phase III of the Jackson Gore development, according to Reeves, has yet to be designed or bid for construction, but has been through master planning. It will include four buildings that will be condominiums or mixed-use buildings, plus a gondola.

For the other three seasons of the year, Okemo is intent on "growing golf" and making it a family sport. Plans include a 9-hole golf course containing par 3's and short par 4's, in addition to The Okemo Valley Golf Club and the Tater Hill course in the nearby town of Windham. Okemo's Head of Golf, Jim Remy, is now the Secretary of the PGA and he will eventually move up to be its President. This bodes well for the future of golf at Okemo.

As anyone with an architectural background can attest, it is extremely complicated to pursue large-scale development with all its expense, uncertainty, and regulation, and be successful. This can be especially true in Vermont. Ted Reeves says, "The family has a positive trait of listening to people who are experts in their respective fields and taking their advice." The Mueller's know the ropes. This combination of respect, persistence, thoroughness and a willingness to listen, has given this family a well-earned respect in the community of Ludlow, the surrounding area, and now the country. The results show everywhere on the mountain. I'm sure that the continuing development at Okemo will continue to evolve and impress. And the results will be enjoyed by everyone! ❄️