



## Memorandum

To: Vail Town Council

From: Amanda Zinn, Supervisor  
Vail Welcome Centers

Date: May 2, 2017

Subject: Update on Vail Welcome Centers/Host Program Operations

### I. PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

The operational transition of the Vail Welcome Centers/Community Host Program was identified as one of the town's many strengths during a SWOT analysis at the Vail Town Council retreat on March 8, 2017. The town-run business model for these guest enhancement programs was initiated at the direction of the Town Council effective October 1, 2016. The purpose of today's discussion is to provide an overview of the transition at the 7-month mark and its overall impact – internally and externally.

### II. OPERATIONS - STAFFING

In assuming responsibility for in-house operation of the Vail Welcome Centers and Community Host Program on October 1, 2016, transitional staffing was provided using a combination of shifts filled by existing/recently retired Town of Vail employees under the direction of Mike Griffin, systems engineer, Information Technology Department. This temporary staffing arrangement continued while Human Resources designed a staffing model and recruitment process for new personnel totaling 4.5 FTEs. This staffing model provides for a dedicated full-time staff presence in each Welcome Center and enables the Welcome Center team to take a more active role in town initiatives and additional cross-training.

- Amanda Zinn, formerly with the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa, was hired as the full-time supervisor effective October 13, 2016, and worked with HR to build the team:
  - Mark Christie was retained in a full-time position
  - Chris Hartman was hired to fill the third full-time position
  - Drew Shatto, Lydia Routolo, Lance Reese, Meryl Jacobs and Tony Mauro were hired to fill part-time shifts with Pam Brandmeyer, Vi Brown, Annette Ramer and Rachel Nass helping out when needed.

With an operational budget of \$324,000 for 2017, compared to \$338,000 in contract expenses incurred in 2016, this new staffing model provides for staff breaks, benefits

and vacation time for employees as well as access to HR services, training and other professional growth opportunities offered by the Town. In addition, staff members are available to assist other departments with projects and assignments as appropriate. The previous staffing model consisted of a manager, 1 full-time staff member and 7-10 part-time staff members. There were no breaks, benefits, overtime or vacation time offered to employees.

### **III. OPERATIONS - COMMITMENT TO ELEVATING GUEST EXPERIENCE**

Under the Town's management, the Welcome Centers have become fully integrated into TOV's service delivery culture. Through staff trainings, development goals, resource sharing and best practices, a supportive and professional workplace environment has been created from which to elevate Vail's guest experience. Examples include:

- Welcome Center staff participates in TOV new employee orientation with focus on TOV values and vision.
- New employee orientation has been expanded to include waking tour of Vail Village and Lionshead for all new TOV employees led by Welcome Center staff.
- A comprehensive handbook for the Welcome Centers has been codified. This includes standard operating procedures along with guest service best practices.
- Welcome Center staff represented on cross-departmental teams to offer additional insights.
- Welcome Center staff receives CPR/AED training by Vail Fire.
- Welcome Center staff participates in TOV Rewards Program which included the nomination and recognition of 4 employees and 6 hosts during winter 2016-2017.
- Professional development opportunities have been enhanced:
  - Amanda Zinn to participate this May in Cornell's Essential Skills for Leadership in Hospitality at the Vail Centre.
  - Chris Hartman, FTE, completed a High Five Media Education Class. He can now assist IT in filming and other Welcome Center specific & other TOV projects, such as council meetings when High Five is unavailable. Also, he will film digital content to enhance the guest experience and aid in staff/host training.

In addition, the Welcome Center staff has a presence in ongoing guest service coordination discussions with the Town's partners as well as other initiatives:

- Participation in bi-weekly frontline meetings involving Transit, Parking, Police, Public Works, Communications and Vail Mountain Base Operations during 2016-2017 winter season. This is an operational meeting with all frontline managers to communicate current issues.
- The Welcome Centers also participated in regular Guest Services Coordination meetings with Vail Mountain senior staff to address host staffing, communication of pricing and activity information, projected volume levels and more.

- The Welcome Centers managed the @VailGov twitter account with daily real-time parking info during the 2016-2017 winter season using the hashtag #vailparking.
- Arrangements have been made for ECO Transit to share space in the Vail Village Welcome Center for the month May while their office is renovated next door.
- Ongoing coordination with Vail Chamber and Business Association regarding information dissemination and collection of spring and fall operating hours of Vail businesses.

Other areas of emphasis have included data collection and analysis. This was used to modernize walk-up lodging resources available to guests within the Welcome Centers. The centers now provide lodging assistance via information on iPads and promote use of the Vail App. These resources provide more comprehensive lodging options than what was offered previously. With this new resource, the VailInfo.org lodging referral system has been discontinued.

#### **IV. OPERATIONS - COMMUNITY HOST PROGRAM**

The Community Host Program was staffed by 47 volunteers during the 2016-2017 winter season, accounting for 42,411 guest interactions. Thirty-seven of these volunteers were returning hosts, many of whom have supported the Town's guest services efforts for 3 or more years. During the 2015-2016 season, the town increased the number of host positions to 65 to accommodate additional shifts during the Alpine World Ski Championships.

Our hosts provide valuable assistance to guests, especially as it relates to navigating the pedestrian villages. During the winter season, hosts provided a daily presence in the villages from opening day to closing day with a minimum of 1 host in each village and up to 4-6 in each village on weekends. The summer season will coincide with the Vail Farmers' Market, mid-June through September on Saturdays and Sundays.

To become a host, volunteers must commit to 80 hours of service: (20) 4 hour walking shifts; 2 hours in each village in exchange for choice of (1) benefit: Epic Ski Pass, Blue Parking Pass, or \$700 dining vouchers at Vail Restaurants. Other benefits include complimentary use of the Host Ski Locker Room next to the Lionshead Welcome Center and complimentary parking for their volunteer shifts.

Program enhancements this year included:

- A new coat room located across from the Lionshead Welcome Center.
- A joint morning meeting with the Vail Resorts "red jacket" mountain hosts led by Jeff Wiles.
- Participation in the Town of Vail Random Acts of Kindness program. This is in addition to discretionary distribution of a Random Act of Kindness parking voucher which is used for guest recovery.
- Hosts also interacted with both Welcome Centers as they assisted the Welcome Center staff by covering for their breaks which provided beneficial cross-training.

- Hosts were recognized by the Town of Vail Rewards Program, which resulted in numerous nominations for exemplary guest service and employee-wide recognition.

Two thank you receptions were hosted during the season through the generosity of LaTour and Chef Barry Robinson. These gatherings served as a social outlet for the hosts to meet and interact with one another as well as members of the Town Council and staff.

## **V. 2016-2017 SKI SEASON RECAP**

Friday, Nov. 25, 2016 - Sunday, April 23, 2017

Total Guests: 30,628

- Lionshead: 14,960
- Vail Village: 15,668

Total Operating Hours: 2,858

See attachments

## **VI. LOOKING AHEAD - NEW INITIATIVES**

The following new initiatives are in various phases of research and implementation:

- Working strongly with the TOV environmental team and Walking Mountains Science Center in the messaging of becoming an Environmentally Sustainable Destination.
- Ski Dolly pilot program to be launched early ski season 2017.
- Furniture upgrades in Lionshead Welcome Center with expanded seating and charging stations.
- Vail App presence in the Welcome Centers and resource recommendations by staff.
- Social media emphasis.
- Virtual Welcome Center Live Chat research.
- Expanding use of Welcome Centers as after-hours event space via Donovan Pavilion Management.
- Integrated survey opportunities.
- Analysis of hourly guest visitation and budgetary impacts on modifying hours of operations.
- Retooling operations by relocating the staff or expansion of the host program to include outdoor evening hours, as suggested at the VEAC meeting on April 11.

## **VII. LOOKING AHEAD - OPTIONS FOR ADJUSTMENTS IN OPERATIONAL HOURS**

An analysis of hourly visitation reports in the Welcome Centers shows future opportunities to explore modifying operating hours to maximize efficiencies in both

locations due to a significant drop-off in the number of guest contacts at the end of the day. Several options were reviewed with the Vail Chamber and Business Association and the Vail Economic Advisory Council. One possibility is to consider decreasing operational hours in Lionshead during the winter season to match existing hours in Vail Village. This would cause a reduction of 2 hours each day in Lionshead. Another option is to reduce summer evening operational hours in both centers by 3 hours Sunday through Thursday and by 1 hour on Friday and Saturday. In exchange, increased staffing could be scheduled during the peak times of 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in winter and 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. in summer to better accommodate visitation patterns and have extended hours during peak weeks.

As these options were reviewed by the Vail Economic Advisory Council on April 11, this topic served as a catalyst for a discussion that challenged the Welcome Centers to consider a paradigm shift. Instead of relying on a brick-and-mortar approach in which guests must proactively find the Welcome Center storefront, VEAC members suggested exploring the possibility of retooling the Welcome Center operations to intersect where guests already are – on the streets and digitally. One suggestion was to staff hosts during the evenings from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. to help guests with wayfinding. This concept could potentially be tested by closing and relocating the staff outdoors for the evening.

Staff will research additional Welcome Center adaptations to expand its presence in the marketplace as suggested by VEAC to be reviewed during the 2018 Town of Vail budget process.

Current operating hours are:

Vail Village\*

- Winter 8:30am - 5pm
- Spring/Fall 9am - 5pm
- Summer 9am - 8pm

Lionshead\*

- Winter 8:30am - 7pm
- Spring/Fall 9am - 5pm
- Summer 9am - 8pm

\*public restrooms open 7am-10pm

The Vail Welcome Centers are open 365 days a year as follows:

Winter: Opening Day - Closing Day of Vail Mountain

Spring: Closing Day of Vail Mountain - 1st weekend in June

Summer: 1st weekend in June - Labor Day (extension of 1 week from 2016)

Fall: Labor Day - Opening Day of Vail Mountain

## **VIII. ATTACHMENTS**

- a) 2016-2017 Welcome Center Guest Data- (October 1st - April 23rd)
- b) Pie Charts of 2016-2017 Welcome Center Guest Data
- c) Graphs of 2016-2017 Welcome Center Guest Data