

Northstar upgrades resort with lift, trails and lodge

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – New lift, new lodge, new terrain – it's what Vail Resorts has done to Northstar with an infusion of \$30 million since it bought the North Shore resort a year ago.

With a projected opening date of Nov. 18, the resort will have the Promised Land Express chairlift running, with the Zephyr Lodge expected to open a month later, and the additional 170 acres of ski area ready when Mother Nature cooperates.

The resort even has a new name. Gone is the "at-Tahoe" part of Northstar. The formal name is Northstar California – with the idea that it's more than a mountain. The logo is changed and font is slightly different. The tagline is – The Way It Should Be.

The new detachable quad provides more access to the Backside – doubling the lift capacity to that area. Castle Peak run lines up so intermediate skiers are schussing toward that mountain in the far distance. Islands is so named because it has 22 trees – essentially providing islands – for skiers to skirt around.

Snowmaking guns will make sure they are covered with white stuff; plus Drifter now has snowmaking.

COO Bill Rock said so many lines exist off Islands trail that people may never want to leave it.

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COO**

For the more advanced rider, the long-awaited access to Sawtooth Ridge is happening this season. Called sidecountry terrain, this area in the past was accessed by hearty hikers carrying their gear up in order to ride down. Now Northstar will use snowcats to transport people to the area when conditions permit. Guided tours will be available there as well as to White Rabbit. One day the resort hopes to put Sawtooth inside the boundaries.



The additional 170 acres in the 2011-12 expansion don't include Sawtooth. The boundaries have been extended to the skier's left of the Prosser trail on Lookout Mountain. This adds about 1,000 vertical feet of terrain for new Lookout Glade, which is accessed from Martis Camp Express. Another 800 vertical feet is on the Sawmill Glade (off Vista Express) which is to the skier's right of Logger's Loop.

That's all advanced terrain.

The additional runs bring the skiable acres at Northstar to

3,170.

While Northstar, especially with the addition of the mid-mountain Ritz-Carlton two years ago, would like to be a year-round resort, Rock acknowledged, "Our bread and butter is winter. We are a winter business."

Thus the reason for millions of dollars being spent on winter guests.

Gold is also coming to the resort in the form of Shaun White – two-time Olympic gold medalist. He chose Northstar to be his training ground this season. The 22-foot halfpipe that will be built for his needs will be open to aspiring Olympians.

Dining with a view

Riding the Zephyr Express from the mid-mountain lodge it looks more like a construction zone at the top than a ski resort. At the top to the left is a structure that will be for the ski patrol. Their yurt to the skiers' right was dismantled to make way for the Zephyr Lodge.



Glass panels will provide views to the Pacific Crest from the Zephyr Lodge. Photos/Kathryn Reed

While it's modeled after the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly Mountain Resort (also owned by Vail Resorts), this is built out of steel instead of wood. SMC Contracting is also putting this facility in the ground.

The signature difference is the deck.

"As you can see, there are spectacular views of the whole Pacific Crest," Rock said as the pounding of nails and other construction equipment reverberated through the partially completed lodge.

Trudging through snow even in October to get to the lodge – it was a winter scene in early fall with the distant peaks covered in white. Bear prints are visible from the deck so critters are having fun in the snow. Glass is still needed to prevent people from falling over the edge.

Besides incredible views, the location was picked because it's accessible for most skier abilities.

Kelly Rodriguez, director of food and beverage at Northstar, is tasked with ensuring people's stomachs are full and satisfied while dining anywhere on the mountain – but the Zephyr Lodge allows for the chefs to be a bit more creative. Yes, the Vail Resorts' signature Epic Burger will be on the menu, but so, too, will be a burger unique to Northstar, and a veggie burger made from scratch – not cardboard.

"We have the ability to serve healthy items to consumers in a food court setting," Rodriguez said.

Gourmet pizzas (using their own dough), a grill, Asian station and salad bar are all planned.

Whenever possible the resort will buy local products – which is defined by a 100-mile radius.

It won't all be healthy – French fries and homemade onion rings will be available. Breakfast won't be served, unless a

bloody Mary counts. It will be Northstar's first on-mountain sit-down bar.

In keeping with Vail Resorts' Lunch for Less program, this will probably be offered this season at the Big Springs Lodge.

Besides the food, what resort officials hope people will notice is less congestion at the dining venues throughout the mountain. Zephyr adds 500 indoor seats and about 250 outdoor to the mountain.

Sampling some of what will be offered this season at Zephyr, the gourmet grilled cheese with its three types of cheese and side of tomato soup is yummy. Chef Steve Anderson came up with this combo.

Chef Deb Finn designed the s'mores that come with a variety of choices – such as coconut covered marshmallows, chocolate filled with caramel or mint, and graham crackers beyond the normal variety. The gas fire pits in the village toast up the marshmallows just as plump as any wood fire.

And a Dirty Snowman goes good with everything – just ask the bartender.

More information about Northstar California is available online.

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