

Luxury lodge steps from Northstar skiing, biking



Relaxation is a dominant feature of staying at the Northstar Lodge. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

TRUCKEE – And a one, and a two and now three buildings are going up at the new Northstar Lodge across from the ski resort's village. This is a Welk Resorts timeshare property operated by the famous family.

Lawrence Welk had a penchant for fine things, and it shows in the latest 4-star mountain version of his resort cluster that started in Escondido and expanded into Palm Springs, Cabo San Lucas and Branson, Mo. – the country-western capital of the United States. Breckenridge, Colo., another Vail Resorts stronghold, is up next for the Welk group. It will launch in

18 months, then Poipu on the island of Kauai in 2019. The American musician and waltz king died in 1992. His grandson now runs the Welk properties, marking 50 years in business last year.

Each property has its own character. Branson is known as “a very big show town,” Northstar Lodge General Manager Michelle Morikawa told *Lake Tahoe News* on a recent visit. Escondido in San Diego County marks a historic journey that began as a trailer park. Palm Springs is elegant in appearance. Pictures of Cabo make one want to pack a swimsuit and grab an umbrella drink.

The Northstar Lodge, which started out in the first building as a Hyatt property, is structured as a timeshare property with mostly fractional owners and 11 whole owners who sublet their units. One can buy into a unit for 240,000 points equaling one week a year at a value of \$30,000.



A third building on the property is almost complete; and it, too, will have pool views.
Photo/Susan Wood

The Welks' core values are all about family, so the principle translates into its business.

"Our primary selling point focuses on quality time with family. (Having this) forces you to take a vacation," Morikawa said.

From the looks of the entire fourth floor of the second building dedicated as a sales preview center, prospective owners can dream big on how they plan to spend that quality

time. There's even a digital map of the world that indicates unit purchases at all Welk Resorts in real time. It's mesmerizing to follow. The company boasts more than 50,000 owners.

Accents and touches make the property unique. With the first structure called the Washoe building labeled "mountain traditional" and the second called the Fremont considered "mountain contemporary," they both offer something different and special. The third structure being built now will be called the Snowshoe building named after another famous Tahoe name – John "Snowshoe" Thompson, who delivered the mail from Placerville to Genoa carrying a 90-pound pack on 11-foot skinny skis with a balancing pole during the 1800s. The up-and-coming building now marked by a large crane one can watch from the swimming pool patio will have 32 units with 2-, 3- and 5-bedrooms with lock-offs.

Since this is the Tahoe-Truckee area, Morikawa reminded *LTN* that the LEED-certified property had to follow a master mountain association set of guidelines.

"We need to stay conducive to the setting," she added. The property blends into the mountainside and remains limited on how much it may expand in footprint.

Nonetheless, what it has runs big in terms of things mountain visitors seek. Having its own on-site underground parking structure at a resort known for challenging parking issues would be reason alone to buy.

This attention to detail in satisfying owners is so important to Morikawa that she hired snowboard instructor Casey Dowling to fill the role as concierge extraordinaire in fulfilling owners' and guests' requests for activities. One such popular activity is "ride with Casey" where one can get up-close-and-personal guidance from this snowboarding expert.

And talk about convenient. Just ask Jacquelyn Derian and Zach

Boebel. They were using her brother-in-law's unit and were so comfortable that they graced the property carrying their snowboards in their robes.

"We like the amenities," Derian Boebel said.



A full-size kitchen makes long stays comfortable with not having to eat out every night. Photo/Susan Wood

This nearly ski-in, ski-out property makes it easy to get up on the backside of Northstar for first turns with a ski and boot valet feet from accessing the 5-diamond Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe's Highlands Gondola. Afterward, one may partake in the après ski feel by walking through the village and having a cocktail in the cushy seating next to the ice rink or cozying up to the fire at TC's Pub with a brew and fiery chili.

Then again, the Northstar Lodge is comfy enough to find refuge for the night – holing up in a unit to watch the Super Bowl, watching a movie in a private theater complete with oversized chairs with cup holders, playing a game of billiards in the next-door recreation center, doing laps in the 25-meter pool, chilling in one of two hot tubs, consuming gooey s'mores by the fire pit on the Sierra Terrace or playing chess in the large community room in the Washoe building.

“People come up for winter, and not everybody skis,” Morikawa said.

For those who want to just relax in the unit, there are plenty of modern conveniences and considerations for the discerning tastes.

On the counter where it's easy for at least four people to belly up to the large kitchen's activities, a cocktail shaker, ice bucket and corkscrew await the owner. The tasteful cabinetry is stocked with all the modern conveniences. Stainless steel appliances create a welcoming look. There's no reason to go out, unless there's no desire to cook – especially with the rich sound of a Bose stereo system set up in the kitchen to keep the party going.

The units have a distinctively warm feel. All the fireplaces help with that. In the two-bedroom unit, a gas fireplace creates ambience and warmth in each room, along with another in the living room and yet a fourth on the patio.

The barn-wood adorning the walls plastered with upscale art make the place friendly. The fixtures are new. Welk Resorts set out its own brand of environmentally friendly toiletries labeled “Ecology.” Welk Resorts even conducted smell tests for the brand. Speaking of, the bathrooms are an experience all their own. Both bathrooms adjoining the bedrooms have oversized tubs and huge showers. And the soft bathrobes can keep one inside for the day.

The amenities don't end there. If one wants to venture out, there's a babysitting service for those with youngsters to look after.

Services expand into all seasons. Northstar is known for more than skiing. It has a world-class mountain bike park. With that in mind, the Lodge comes with bike storage.

When an owner runs out of ideas, Northstar Village has its own set of events. The minute a guest arrives, the front desk worker hands over a list of activities to launch the stay.

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Notes:

- Northstar Lodge is located across from the Northstar Village at the base of the Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort off Highway 267 in Truckee.
- Telephone: 530.562.3900.