

# Heavenly makes epic changes for summer

By Kathryn Reed

Heavenly Mountain Resort is becoming a year-round economic driver.

With the opening of Epic Discovery this month, the South Shore resort is redefining itself – at least when it comes to summer activities.

For years the Broomfield-Colo.-based firm wanted to diversify, but U.S. Forest Service regulations prevented that from happening. The feds own much of the land where the ski resorts operate. Congress, though, in 2011 changed the rules, thus allowing resort operators to alter their business model.

Vail Resorts launched the multi-million dollar on-mountain expansion at Heavenly and Vail this year, with Breckenridge to be added in 2017. Resort officials did not release the exact cost of the improvements.

(At this time there are no plans to transform Northstar or Kirkwood. Northstar is still working on its master plan.)

“These kinds of options are highly likely to result in visitors planning extra days in our community because there’s more for them to do now. This of course translates to an improved economy, which means more job stability for people who work in tourism whether they work in lodging, restaurants, retail or other businesses who are impacted by the success of tourism,” B Gorman, CEO of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It takes manpower to operate the various recreation activities. Heavenly will be putting 200 people to work this

summer. Those are full-time jobs. Many of those employees work for the resort in the winter, so now they have year-round employment.

Epic Discovery features 12 activities including an alpine coaster, ziplines, ropes courses, canopy tours, rock climbing, tubing, 4 x 4 expedition tours, wildlife trail exploration and interactive learning stations.

“It’s got so many levels of impact on the destination, benefitting everyone from resident to visitor to our overall competitive differentiation,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The benefits Chaplin sees include:

- New year-round jobs.
- Mountain access for the summer visitor.
- Access for the visitor who may not otherwise have an opportunity or inclination to venture out.
- Experiential activities that provide education and foster stewardship.
- Recreational opportunities that appeal to a broad age range.
- The contribution by the Nature Conservancy.
- The potential to increase the average length of stay of visitors, providing additional economic impact.

Snow forced construction to be slow and delayed this spring. Plus, with it all being new, it took longer to get things in place for this inaugural season. Footings for some of the apparatus needed to be installed. That’s a one-time issue. For the pieces that will be taken down in winter it should be

easier to erect them next summer now that people have installed them at least once.

“I think it is important to recognize that these new activities on the mountain provide approachable access to the outdoors for visitors who might otherwise be intimidated to venture out into the wilderness,” Gorman said.

While Heavenly has been adding more to its summer offerings for the last few years, this is a more complete experience. The main thing missing from what’s on the drawing board is the bike park. That is still a couple years off.

“We want to optimize what we have now,” Pete Sonntag, COO of Heavenly, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There is so much new that we don’t want to take on too much.”

More hiking trails will also be added in the future.