

# The corporatization of Tahoe's ski resorts



Squaw Valley is now part of the KSL group after being owned by the Cushing family for years.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink**

Ski communities seem to have an especially strong inclination for nostalgia. I grew up with my parents' tales of my home mountain during the '80s when the powder stayed fresh for days and getting duct-taped to the local bar was a common occurrence. Lift tickets were less than \$50, and almost every resort was independently owned and operated, giving them all a unique flavor. Some might say the golden age of ski culture has long passed, while others claim that the new cheap season passes and resort collective deals have saved skiing, but the simple fact is that these aren't your parents' ski resorts any more.

"If you were to take a pic from 30,000 feet looking down, it hasn't changed a hell of a lot, but on the ground, it is a

different world than it was pre-1990, and it is constantly in transition,” said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA).

“Back then, nobody owned two resorts. Every single resort around the lake was privately owned, and it was independently owned,” said Tim Cohee, owner of China Peak Mountain Resorts in Lakeshore and ski business and resort management program director at Sierra Nevada College. “What everyone has seen is a business that has become largely dominated by corporations. It’s probably at least 40 percent of the national skier attendance that is being seen by probably five or six companies.”

Here in Tahoe the change began about 15 years ago, when Vail purchased Heavenly Mountain Resort and proved just how lucrative the business of skiing can be.

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