

# Vail Resorts to run Lakeland Village condos in SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Vail Resorts is about to have a greater presence in South Lake Tahoe as the company takes over the management and day-to-day operations of Lakeland Village on Oct. 1.

The lakefront condo development has been run by Aqua Aston Hospitality for the last nine years.

“Vail is a top notch company. It’s hard to compete with them. Their niche is mountain resort environments,” Ron Armijo, president of Lakeland Village home owners association board of directors, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “(Vail) is going to be part of the Lake Tahoe fabric for a long time. We want to be part of that. We meld very well with the goals and values that Vail has to offer.”

What all Vail will bring to the table has not been disclosed. What Armijo likes, though, is the potential for ski deals and summer adventures at Heavenly-Kirkwood-Northstar, all Vail properties, for Lakeland guests. He also cited the 67 mountain weddings at Heavenly last year, adding, “They need a place to put all those people.”



And while it was the recommendation of Lakeland’s Rental Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) to go with Vail as well, not all of the homeowners are happy with the decision.

Already gone is Jerry Bindel, who was general manager of the

property for 19 years. He resigned earlier this year after the board voted to go with Vail. He is now with Forest Suites.

"We always worried we would lose Jerry. He knows everything about all parts of Lakeland," Sheila Starcevich told *LTN*. She and husband Howie Friedman have lived full time at the property since 2002.

"Almost all the long-term employees are leaving," Friedman said. "Housekeeping is down to a skeletal crew."

Of the 260 units on the property that fronts Highway 50, about 165 are rented through Aston, another 30 or so use a different rental firm or do it themselves, and the rest are owner-occupied or second homes.

Aston is looking to have an off-site office where it would continue to manage condos for people who don't want to leave their company. No one from Aston's corporate headquarters in Hawaii returned calls. People on property would not talk on the record with *LTN*.

"My position is to maintain the strength of Lakeland Village in the community. To break it apart into multiple companies doesn't make a lot of sense, but it's up to the owners," Armijo said. "There is a lot to consider. It's not just the numbers; it's the amenities, the way we want the property to be managed and operated."

The management company is responsible for staffing the front desk and housekeeping, and maintaining the pools, hot tubs, and grounds.

Issues with Aston had more to do with people at corporate than with local staff. One issue was over site-wide internet, something the management company wouldn't pay for or install. An eleventh-hour addendum to Aston's offer once they go wind Vail was the preferred company came with a deal to install internet.

“It seemed to us that they were charging for things that either didn’t need to be done or that they were outright not doing – like the annual deep cleaning which costs a lot, but the units didn’t look that much cleaner,” Virginia Glenn told *Lake Tahoe News* of Aston. She and husband Norm have had rentals at Lakeland for a handful of years and he’s on the RMAC.

The entire management agreement process has not been smooth. It started more than a year ago with Aston and Vail the only to apply. According to the board president, bids go out every three years, with this being the first time there was competition.

Since then multiple emails and letters have been exchanged between owners, the board, board committee, and Aston – with some of them described as “nasty.”

Still, the majority is happy to have Aston gone, which is why the company was voted out. Even so, it was not a unanimous vote of the board to hire Vail.

Vail entered the local lodging market in 2010 when it bought Accommodation Station, which at the time was the third largest property management company on the South Shore. It was since been renamed Lake Tahoe Lodging Company. Last year Vail took over the property management of Zalanta, the condos across from Heavenly Village.

Vail was not forthcoming with how things will work at Lakeland. Employees and owners not on the board said the same thing about Vail, adding that workers have been told they will have to reapply for their jobs and that many of the long-time staff fear their salaries will be substantially reduced even if they have a job.

Kevin Cooper who runs the PR department locally for Vail Resorts merely told *LTN*, “Our teams are working closely with the Lakeland Village team, and we look forward to a smooth

transition of operational responsibilities.”

Lesli Carlson, manager for corporate communications for Vail, also didn't answer *Lake Tahoe News'* questions and responded with equal amount of fluff.

Here are *LTN's* unanswered questions for Vail Resorts:

- *Is it true Lake Tahoe Lodging Company will be running things?*
- *Will you bring the entire operation to Lakeland, keep it off-site or have two locations?*
- *Do you know how many units you will be operating at Lakeland? How many units do you have through LTLC?*
- *I understand Vail operates under a three-tiered level, renting out “gold” properties first. True? Can you explain how this works?*
- *Is there a certain criteria to be listed with Vail or can any Lakeland unit be in the rental mix?*
- *Will Vail keep the front desk?*
- *Will Vail keep the employees? Bring in new people? Do people have to reapply for their jobs? Will wages/benefits stay the same? How many employees will you have at Lakeland? Will you bring in a general manager?*
- *Why was Vail interested in running this lodging property?*