

# emerald SPORTS

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## Ski area brightens Bend economy

Sunrise.

At first glance, it's just the new name of a recent addition to the ski slopes of Mt. Bachelor in Central Oregon.

But to Bill Healy, president of Mt. Bachelor, Inc., the name means a whole lot more.

It signifies the dawning of a whole new era of expansion, not only for Mt. Bachelor but for much of the Bend-Redmond area in Central Oregon.

Healy is so confident of Mt. Bachelor's expansion plans that he claims the added ski runs and lodges will "take us to the top" of the national ski scene.

As this new sun of expansion inches over the horizon of Central Oregon, it will illuminate one of the fastest expanding ski areas in the United States.

Included in the plans are eight additional ski lifts, three more day lodges, an increased number of cross country trails, and the pinnacle of Healy's dream — a lift to the top of Mt. Bachelor's slopes, allowing year-round skiing.

All of that expansion will increase the number of skiers that can take to the slopes from the present 10,000 to 22,000, and more importantly for Central Oregonians, add 5,000 additional jobs by 1995.

All of this planned growth will be just that — planned. Healy believes the growth won't take away from what he feels is Mt. Bachelor's major selling point — a quality ski experience.

"We can control our own course of development and maintain that essential commitment to quality growth," Healy says.

Mt. Bachelor, located on the powder side of the Cascade Mountains, sits 22 miles from Bend. The 9,065 foot volcanic cone is dotted with nine chairlifts, three day lodges, and 22 kilometers of groomed cross country trails.

The ski area's management strongly identifies with the Bend-Redmond area, because visitors to Bachelor who want to fly to Central Oregon must land at the airport in Redmond, while overnight skiers must stay either in Bend or at one of the multitude of resorts that have sprung up between Bend and Bachelor.

"We're a little bit western, a little bit family, but with all the services necessary for a complete ski vacation," Healy says.

Bachelor began as a ski resort in 1958, when a few skiers — including Healy — decided to put together a ski area that was developed "by skiers for skiers," says Healy.

"Our guiding philosophy was to open up some good skiing — to hell with profit as long as the bills were paid — and that is still the way we like to think about it," Healy says.

"We don't intend to put as many people on the hill as possible, but rather to create a quality ski experience for our skiers."

"Our" is a key word when Healy talks about his resort. He and the rest of Bachelor's management feel their rapid growth in the last quarter-century is based on their treatment of the skiers who choose Bachelor's slopes.

And that is the crux of Bachelor's future growth — offering the skier a "quality ski experience," something which will distinguish Bachelor's

slopes from Sun Valley, Idaho or Aspen, Colorado.

"In these times of financial uncertainty, we must not submit to the tendency to sacrifice customer service or quality product development for the sake of immediate profit," Healy says.

"Experience shows in the long run, it will not pay off."

Healy's approach over the last 25 years has paid off. Under Healy's leadership, Bachelor has grown to become one of the top 15 ski resorts in the United States, according to the "Inter Ski Services White Book of Ski Areas."

Bachelor has been affected by the national boom in skiing that began to take off in the mid-1970s. Since 1975, attendance at Bachelor has increased 55 percent, to the point where last year 500,000 skiers used Bachelor's slopes. That pushed Bachelor to a number four ranking nationally in skier days.

An even more compelling statistic for Central Oregonians is the fact that 84 percent more skiers are coming from out of state to use Bachelor's slopes.

That is an important statistic for residents of the area surrounding Mt. Bachelor, because out-of-state visitors generally stay longer and have more money to spend.

Currently, the presence of Bachelor as a ski resort — and the various spin-offs it produces — pumps \$67 million into the Central Oregon economy. Approximately 16 percent of the area's work force — over 3,000 people — is tied directly to the ski industry.

And, according to an economic feasibility study of Bachelor's Master Plan for expansion, the growth in the

area's ski mecca could increase community income from winter recreation to as much as \$208 million annually.

But, cautions the report compiled by the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, the exact value of these increases depends on "the ability of Mt. Bachelor and the Bend community to continue to attract skiers and to provide the support services necessary for a vacation experience."

The support services are already in place. Skiers can find everything from a \$10 bunk to a \$100-a-night condominium. Mt. Bachelor offers a multitude of lift and lodging packages, which include accommodations at a number of surrounding hotels, condos and resorts.

And once the lift to the top of Bachelor's volcanic slopes is completed, Healy will be able to offer visitors year-round skiing. The new lift will permit 360 degree skiing and increase the vertical ski area from 1,700 to 3,000 feet.

The year-round lift will open next winter, and when the first skier tests the newly opened slopes, Central Oregon may never have to fear an economic sunset.

Story by John Healy

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