



P.J. Glisson/The Globe

HEADING DOWN the hill at Snowriver Mountain Resort's Jackson Creek Summit in Wakefield Township is Brad Welhouse of Green Bay, Wisconsin, as additional skiers join him at right after descending from the ski lift. The outdoor enthusiasts were enjoying the hill on Feb. 2 despite sub-zero wind chill.

Snowriver Mountain Resort owners making improvements

By P.J. GLISSON
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A flurry of changes have been taking place at Snowriver Mountain Resort — formerly Big Snow Resort — since Midwest Family Ski Resorts took over the site last summer.

They include a lot of remodeling, along with numerous modifications in names of sites, lodges, bars, stores and restaurants.

For instance, the former Indianhead Mountain in Wakefield Township is now Jackson Creek Summit, and the former Black-jack Mountain in Bessemer Township is now Black River Basin.

The Sugar Maple Chalet, which stands next to the ski hill summit, has been fully remodeled. Its main floor includes Jack's Bar & Grille, the Jackson Creek Mountain Shop, a service counter, and an open chalet area with picnic-type tables on one side and 4-person tables and chairs on the other side, next to a fireplace.

Upstairs is the Sugar Maple Café, and the basement offers a rental supplies area.

In the nearby hotel at a higher elevation is a sit-down restaurant called The Legacy, along with Dudley's Bar, which just reopened last weekend after its own remodeling.

The property also includes a health spa with a pool. At the bottom of the hill, accessible only by skis or snowboards, is the Creekside Café, which is open from Fridays through Sundays.

Although Black River Basin is the resort's smaller site, it also includes its own ski shop, bar and chalet area.

"It's going well," said Benjamin Bartz, general manager, who said that resort workers have been responding to guest feedback and refining processes accordingly.

"I think we're up to 150-175 now," he said of the employees.

As for continuing plans, Bartz said, "The chairlift is our major project for the

summer." He was referring to a new "six-pack" unit that will include 6-person seats and will provide a three and one-half minute ride from the bottom to the top of the hill at Jackson Summit. It already has been named the Voyageur Express.

"We're in the planning stages now," said Bartz regarding the chairlift, for which construction is expected to start in the spring. "It's a really massive project."

He said the "transformational" activity will take six or seven months, with Oct. 15 projected as the end date.

"We're also going to continue with revitalizations," said Bartz, who added that the work will include ongoing remodeling of lodging and main areas, as well as infrastructure updates.

One project not yet on the horizon — although Bartz concedes that "it's something that's been talked about for years" — is a tangible connection between the resort's two sites.

Before Charles Skinner of Minnesota purchased the property, there previously had been the dream of connecting Jackson Creek Summit and Black River Basin with a newly

constructed road.

Now, said Bartz, "Our preference would be an aerial lift" — something that he suggested could service warm weather tourism as well as fall color rides.

"It's something we're looking at," he said, but clarified that there are "no solidified plans."

He said that Snowriver will pursue those plans at a future point if increased traffic and interest demands.

For now, a bus shuttle passes between the sites every 45 minutes during the day and also operates by request in the evening.

Bartz anticipates that this summer and next summer will be consumed by continued remodeling, but he said that resort staff are considering the possibility of hosting a Mountaintop Music Festival in June.

Once broader revitalization is accomplished, he said the resort plans to promote additional summer activity, including summer weddings, conferences, art festivals and other "family-oriented" summer programming.

"We definitely recognize that we made a bit of a splash into the community," said Bartz of Snowriver. "We want to build on that to become a part of the community," he said, while adding that driving year-

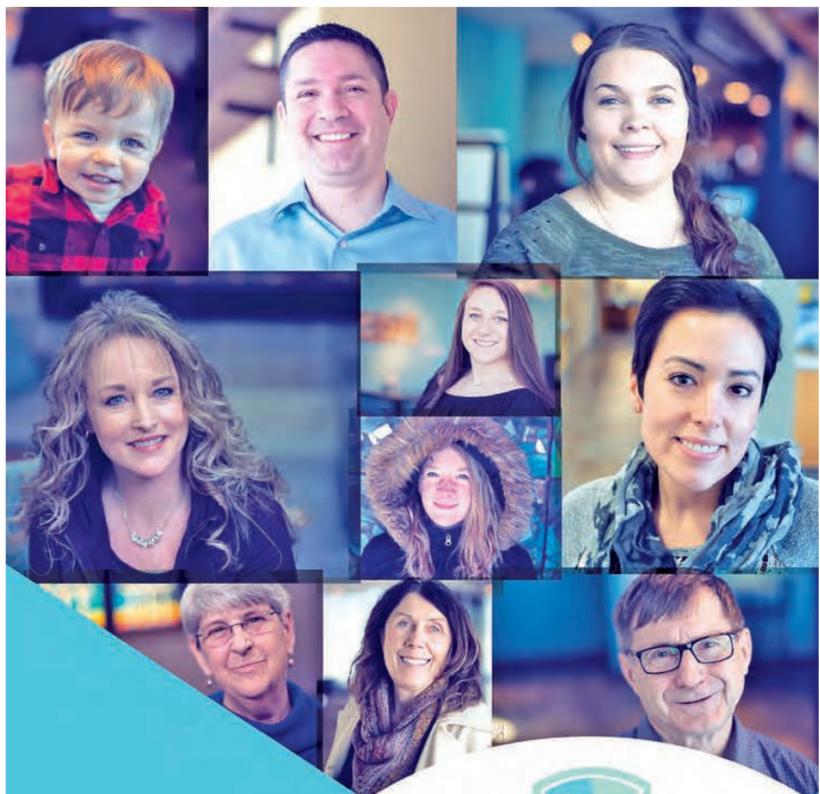
round tourism is part of that equation.

As for the resort's primary market, Bartz described it as "the Fox Valley of Wisconsin, down through Chicago and — to a

lesser extent — Minnesota, plus the local U.P. and upper Wisconsin."

Regarding clientele goals, he said, "We're hoping to bring back the multi-day stay visits."

Also under the umbrella of Midwest Family Ski Resorts is the Granite Peak Ski Area in Wausau, Wisconsin, and Lutsen Mountains Ski & Summer Resort in Lutsen, Minnesota.





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