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World's Fare combines the topic of travel with culinary traditions around the globe. Globetrotting food and travel writers introduce readers to a broad range of destinations and food. The monthly package includes two destination features and three regular columns — Best Addresses, the Intrepid Gastronome and Snapshots. Moves with art.

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For release 10/01/07

(ATTENTION EDITORS: This column ends with the words "...visit www.skiwinterpark.com." If the column you see below concludes any other way, you have received an incomplete version. Please contact TMS customer service at 800-346-8798 for a retransmission.)

(PHOTOS: Six color photos accompany this story. PHOTO 1. CAPTION: Fresh powder and misty skies make for great skiing, Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-g.jpg. PHOTO 2. CAPTION: Heading down to the Village at the Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-h.jpg. PHOTO 3. CAPTION: Great views from atop the chairlift, Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-i.jpg. PHOTO 4. CAPTION: The Zephyr Mountain Lodge offers ski in/ski out accommodations, Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-j.jpg. PHOTO 5. CAPTION: Winter Park base area near the Zephyr Express lift, Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-k.jpg. PHOTO 6. CAPTION: Blues, blacks, or greens, so many choices, Winter Park Resort. CREDIT: Steve Haggerty ColorWorld. FILENAME: 20070101mswdf-l.jpg.)

WINTER PARK SKI RESORT: IT'S ALMOST FAMOUS

By Anne Z. Cooke

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WINTER PARK, CO - From the top of Winter Park Ski Resort's Parsenn Bowl, 12,060 feet, you can see forever.

On an icy February morning, with the thermometer hovering at 10 degrees above zero, Colorado's mighty Front Range glimmered across the valley, a ghostly image mantled with snow. Looking north, the Indian Peaks glowed a pale ivory, their winter coats tinted by 15 horizontal miles of atmosphere. "That's what I like to see," said Brian Conners, my partner on the chairlift, stamping his feet to keep the blood moving. "Even if I didn't ski, I'd be here for the view," he added, pulling out a mini-camera and snapping a picture.

The skiers unloading behind us felt the cutting edge of the wind and turned away, hastily heading downhill. But Conners lingered, lost in a private reverie.

"The first thing my daddy did when we moved here in 1947, from Dallas, was drive up to the mountains," he said later, as we shared a lunch table in the Lodge At Sunspot, at the top of the Zephyr Express lift. "He said they were as close as you could get to heaven and still be on earth. So here's where we spent our Sundays."

With a new chairlift adding more accessible terrain in Vasquez Cirque, bringing the total "skiable" acres to 3,060, the ski area has taken so many turns and twists that even Conners isn't sure where he's going. But that doesn't seem to matter.

"The main thing is that people are as friendly as ever," he said. "I can come in here by myself, and pretty soon I'm talking to someone, like I'm talking to you now. I just hope it stays that way."

Chances are, it will. The back-story at this ski resort has less to do with greed than with goodwill. In 1939, a group of Denver civic leaders, concerned that the city's teeming population was missing the joy of Colorado's outdoors, purchased nearby mountain land for a public park. The first year it opened, so many people paid \$1 apiece to be pulled uphill by a rope tow that the operators couldn't keep up. While other newcomers like Sun Valley built luxury lodges, hired buffed-out ski instructors and catered to celebrities, Winter Park built a playground. And it's been almost famous ever since.

Five years ago, the resort signed a 50-year lease with Intrawest, the ski resort real estate developer, hiring the company to manage the resort and build a village. So far, the project seems to be on track.

"Everybody's happy, said Joan Christensen, former Winter Park communications director, who followed the negotiations from the start. "It's a sweet deal. In fact, most people consider it a brilliant compromise."

What does Intrawest get? "They get the opportunity to develop the base area, build and sell condominiums and collect rents. The better job they do and the more skiers like to be here, the more money they'll make," she said.

And what does Denver get? A signing bonus of \$3 million, \$2 million more per year, for 10 years, and \$50 million for on-mountain improvements. For the ski resort, that translates to a sparkling new base area, ski-in-and-out condominiums, stylish shops, sports stores, first-class restaurants and



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offices. And when the lease ends, Denver will still own everything.

Where's the money been spent? Everywhere, answers Jennifer deBerge, a ski area spokesman. "If you haven't skied here in the last four years, you wouldn't recognize the place. It's a whole new experience."

In 2005, they installed a new high-speed, six-pack (six-seater) chairlift, the Super-Gauge Express in place of the old Summit lift to the top of Mary Jane. And in 2006, they improved access in Vasquez Cirque by thinning the trees in the Eagle Wind glade, cutting seven sassy new trails and installing the new "Eagle Wind" triple chair.

"The locals considered those glades their secret stash, but nobody complained," says deBerge. "In fact, most people said we'd made it better. You don't have to go down and back up on the Pioneer Lift anymore. You can get straight back up on the Eagle Wind chair."

New this year is the new Panoramic Express, another high-speed six-pack to the top of Parsenn Bowl, replacing the pokey old two-seater, the Timberline chair. And two new groomed intermediate trails descend from the summit, so intermediate and expert skiers can "do" the Bowl together.

Other projects, finished over the last four years, have included upgrades and remodels at nearly every restaurant. And the second and third condominium properties are scheduled to open at the base this December (2007), adding 194 rental units. A new three-level parking garage occupies part of the old day parking lot. The other half of the lot is reserved for the rest of the Village, to be finished for the 2008-2009 season.

Unchanged are the Ski School, the Children's Center (with ski school and child care), and the National Sports Center for the Disabled, the nation's leading handicapped ski program. Discovery Park, a separate beginners' area with groomed bunny slopes and two short lifts, and the Rail Yard, a terrain park for boarders and freestyle skiers, have been upgraded.

The real bounty, of course, is Winter Park's natural topography; its combination of peaks, valleys, meadows, vertical steeps and gentle run-outs, creating groomed and powder slopes for every level of skier. Advanced skiers head straight for Mary Jane's black diamond trails, and recreational skiers - beginning and intermediate - stick to Winter Park Mountain's classics.

The runs on Vasquez Ridge, popular with parents and grade-schoolers, include long "blue" intermediate trails that intersect with easy green trails. For the no-challenge-left-behind skier (anxious to cheat death), the glades on the Headwall and Alphabet Chutes are radical, steep, all powder and never groomed, best skied right after a new layer of dry powder.

After the first new condos were built at the base (the Zephyr Mountain Lodge), we rented a one-bedroom unit with two bathrooms, a living room, gas fireplace, private balcony and a dining area. The unit, streamlined but sleek, had an entrance hall with a coat and hat-rack, several shared outdoor hot tubs and a self-serve laundry on each floor.

The kitchen, with 15 feet of counter space, was equipped with dishes and cookware, which we used for breakfast and two dinners. We also had a dining area and private balcony. But it was the big windows and the view of the mountains, and the ski-in, ski-out access that made the place.

On previous ski trips, we'd stayed in two other rentals. The first was the Iron Horse, a comfortable property between the Winter Park base and the Mary Jane base. It had a small kitchen and a sitting area, and semi-ski-out access.

The other was in the town of Winter Park, at the 15-room Gasthaus Eichler, a cozy Swiss chalet with inviting hosts, old-world decor, feathery quilts and a hot tub by the river. Meeting the other guests, mostly regulars, was especially nice.

The next time we called, their rooms were sold out; an object lesson for the future. Winter Park is a 90-minute drive from Denver, easy to get to and the skiing gets better every year. As the lady said, "it's a whole new experience."

GETTING THERE: Fly to Denver International Airport and rent a car or take a shuttle to Winter Park Resort, 75 miles west of Denver International Airport. Door-to-door van transportation costs about \$48 per trip.

STAYING THERE: For lodging, activities, lift tickets and shuttle service, call Winter Park Central Reservations at 800-729-5813, or visit www.seewinterpark.com.

A one-bedroom condo at the Zephyr Mountain Lodge starts at \$171 per night for three nights with a fourth night free. The package includes two four-day discounted lift tickets. Book at 877-754-8400, or visit www.zephyrmountainlodge.com.

Rooms at the Gasthaus Eichler Inn, in town, start at \$139 per night, \$159 with breakfast and \$194 with breakfast and dinner. The dining room cuisine is continental; the Swiss cafe serves fondue and traditional dishes. Both restaurants are closed Monday and Tuesday. Call 970-726-5133, or visit www.gasthauseichler.com.

A studio at the Iron Horse starts at \$180 per night. Call 800-621-8190, or visit www.ironhorse-resort.com.

SKIING THERE: Two- or three-day lift tickets (adults, ages 13 and up) cost \$150. Four- or five-day tickets cost \$199. Four- or five-day tickets for kids 6 to 12 are \$112. Children who are five and under ski free.

For other Winter Park information, visit www.skiwinterpark.com.

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