



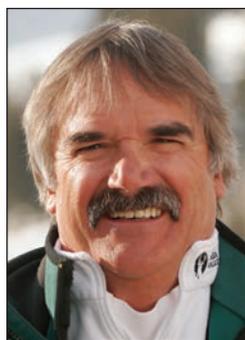
The Magic of Deer Valley

An Interview with Bob Wheaton,
President and General Manager, Deer Valley Resort



Family skiing at Deer Valley Resort (left)
Empire Canyon Lodge at Deer Valley Resort (right)

EDITORS' NOTE Bob Wheaton joined Deer Valley in 1981 and has held a variety of positions with the resort. He was appointed GM in 1988, Vice-President of Operations in 1989, and President in 1997. Wheaton is currently a member of the Executive Committee and two-time past President of the Utah Ski & Snowboard Association and has served on the board of governors for the Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and the Utah Symphony and Opera. He received the Outstanding Contribution Award from the Intermountain Ski Areas Association and was awarded Park City Rotary Club Professional Citizen of the Year. In 2011, Wheaton was inducted into the Utah Tourism Hall of Fame. As Deer Valley was a venue site for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, he worked closely with the Salt Lake Organizing Committee to ensure all facets of the events were carried out under the highest standards. Wheaton now serves on the Olympic Legacy Board. He is a graduate of Macomb College and has been a certified ski instructor since 1976.



Bob Wheaton

PROPERTY BRIEF Deer Valley Resort (www.deervalley.com) has revolutionized the ski industry by providing the kind of first-class service one would receive at a five-star hotel. The resort offers 21 chairlifts, 100 ski runs, six bowls, 11 restaurants, 300 annual inches of powder, three elegant day lodges, 2,026 acres of alpine skiing, hundreds of luxury accommodations, and a renowned Ski School and Children's Center.

What initially brought you to Deer Valley?

I started teaching skiing when I was 15 in Michigan, where my wife and I grew up. I entered the ski industry through ski school. My wife and I were married in 1978 and decided we wanted to do more in the destination end of the ski business – I was a ski school director in Michigan in a Metropolitan ski area.

We moved to Park City and taught skiing at Park City Mountain Resort for a year and Deer Valley opened the following year. I started here three months before we opened and I've been here ever since.

What makes Deer Valley so special? How do you focus your efforts in leading the resort?

It started with the vision of our founding general partner, Edgar Stern. He was involved in high-quality five-star hotels – that was his entrée into the hospitality industry and he hooked up with Jim Nassikas, who was our initial President at Deer Valley. Together, they started the Royal Orleans Hotel in New Orleans and the Stanford Court Hotel in San Francisco.

Edgar lived in Aspen and wanted to transfer that same level of service and vision to the ski industry that he saw in the hotel industry. So that is the

foundation Deer Valley was built upon 33 years ago, and we still have a number of efforts and processes in the back of the house in the ski area that are more indigenous to the hotel industry than the ski industry – how we treat our staff, how we supply the staff with the tools they need, training, uniforms, equipment, etc.

Is your target market the high-end niche or is it more broad?

It's a niche at the top end and we focus on and target our clientele. For instance, we're one of a handful of ski areas in the U.S. that offer "ski-only" mountains, so we restrict snowboards, and we do that based on feedback we get from our guests. We survey them a lot so we're always communicating with them and we take their feedback seriously; it's our guests that help redirect what we do.

Would you give an overview of the accommodations at Deer Valley?

We have three five-star hotels on the resort property: St. Regis Deer Valley, Montage Deer Valley, and Stein Eriksen Lodge, and we are the only ski resort in North America with three distinct five-star hotels on the resort. So accommodations are very much at the high end. We also offer affordable accommodations. There are a number of condominiums around the resort and we have a property management company and manage 600 properties.

Are your food and beverage offerings primarily through those hotels or are there stand-alone options?

We have three-day lodges that we operate as part of the ski resort and within those lodges, there are 13 different restaurants offering everything from à la carte sit-down, family-style dining to a fine-dining restaurant called the Mariposa that just won number one for food and service in Utah by *Zagat*.

What makes the skiing so great in Utah? Does the resort offer opportunities for all experience levels?

It's across the board. We have an excellent beginner area. We're also family focused, so there are a lot of kids in ski school – we have a separate area for them so they're in a more conducive learning environment.

Overall, the skiing gets the same attention to detail that we have given to the hospitality end of things, so our trails are laid out impeccably. One of the things that differentiates Utah is the quality of natural snow we get. Storms come in from the West and go across the West Desert and dry out, so the snow we get is fluffy, and to augment that, we have an outstanding snowmaking system. When we're up and going, we pump just over 7,000 gallons a minute of water to make snow.

How important has it been to attract and retain the talent?

We spend a lot of time up front on recruiting and we want to be sure we recruit and hire for attitude. Once we get people here, we work hard to retain them.

We perform on the old adage, treat your staff as your best guest, and I would like to think that's what we do.

The wages and benefits here are second-to-none in the ski industry and that helps with our retention, but even more than that, it's about the place to work and the people that our staff gets to work with, both on the staff and guest side.

In the early days, did you think this would be an industry where you would spend your whole career?

I feel pretty fortunate. I always hoped I would spend my career in the ski industry. I'm an engineer by training so I had insights into the ski industry from the operations end of things, but as far as doing what I'm doing today, whether or not I thought I would have had a shot at it 30 years ago, I didn't.

I was fortunate early on to meet the resort's founders Edgar Stern and Stein Eriksen and about four years after we started, Roger Penske – who recently won the NASCAR Sprint Cup – came in as a general partner. He has been influential as well. So I can't imagine anything better. ●