



In the Good Ol' Summertime

By Sedona Callahan

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BUILDING CULTURAL TOURISM AS AN OFF-SEASON ECONOMIC BOOST

With snowflakes silently tumbling to rest on the well-groomed slopes outside, guests crowd around an enticing fire in the hotel lobby, sipping warm drinks. Hungry customers quickly fill the tables of the Deer Valley and Park City restaurants, while the ski-'til-you-drop weekend athletes head for

the warm, noisy mountainside pubs to relax and enjoy the après-ski scene. Boutiques and galleries graciously invite tired Main Street strollers in to peruse and finger the wares. Life is good. Business is too.

Summertime in the mountains presents a different economic picture, however. Local businesses face entrepreneurial challenges in spite of the

unique summer sports and cultural opportunities offered for visitors and residents alike. While Park City is a hiker's and mountain-biker's paradise in the summer months, the number of visitors drops dramatically from the wintertime crowds. Hotel, restaurant and shop owners find changes in seasonal business-as-usual as remarkable as the difference in climate. "Revenues to

the city drop significantly in the summer,” says Bill Malone, president of the Park City Chamber of Commerce and Visitor’s Bureau. “It’s about two-thirds [winter] to one-third [summer].”

Many winter sports-destination communities respond to this economic imbalance by focusing on a growing travel trend known as *cultural tourism*, which The White House Conference on Travel and Tourism defines as: “Travel directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage and special character of a place.” In other words, a montage of traditions, art forms, celebrations and experiences that portray a community and its people, reflecting the diversity and character of the region.

Telluride, Colorado, for example, a popular winter sports locale, has marketed itself during “shoulder” and summer seasons as a cultural and historical travel destination by promoting its National Historic Landmark designation, Victorian-era architecture, and cultural festivals, with events scheduled every weekend but one throughout the summer. Telluride’s summer visitors attend festivals devoted to bluegrass music, film, hang gliding, wine, jazz, ballet, chamber music, mushrooms, opera, authors and playwrights.

Members of Park City’s arts, culture and civic groups have also courted the cultural tourism market, by presenting activities that complement warm weather recreational pastimes. Their efforts have produced the Park City Cadillac Arts Festival, The Founders Title Company Folk and Bluegrass Festival, Fidelity Investments Park City International Jazz Festival, and The Summit Institute for the Arts and Humanities’ Westbound Festival. While these and other events boost summer tourism somewhat, the Park City community continues to search for

ways to enhance the current summer visitors’ experiences and entice newcomers, to give a much-needed boost to the local economy.

Bill Malone notes that cultural tourism represents a part of summer marketing, and that high-quality cultural amenities invite repeat visitation.

“Many organizations are eager to have a presence in Park City. The infrastructure is here.”

—Linda Bonar



He reports, though, that summer visitors are coming for recreational opportunities, and staying for a concert or art showing. “International visitors don’t come for the art, but they view the art while they’re here.” Malone says Park City has not, historically, been the ultimate destination point for the average summer vacationing family, but rather a stop along the way to larger recreational venues, such as Yellowstone National Park to the north, or Zion and Bryce National Parks to the south. Park City’s proximity to a major airport, an advantage to winter travelers, doesn’t provide an edge over other

mountain destinations in the summer. “People tend to drive in the summer.”

The challenge being undertaken by members of the local arts, government and civic community is to encourage the stopover guests to stay longer, or attract new summer visitors to the area. Malone suggests that extending the number of days of the Jazz Festival, for example, may result in more overnight stays in town. Lew Fine, who, together with his wife, Arlene, founded the local jazz festival, agrees, adding that tying a ribbon around the many cultural events already offered here in the summer time and marketing them as a package should boost visitor numbers. “We’d like to make the jazz festival [which draws 13,000 visitors] a cornerstone for events for the month of August, creating a cultural, arts and activity month. Out of that we could grow an entire summer of events,” Fine says.

Peg Bodell, Park City Council member, fine artist, and member of Park City Professional Artists Association, suggests the establishment of art residency programs in the spring, summer and fall months, where artists come to work on personal projects with professional staff. Referring to the already estab-

lished Banff Institute in Canada, Bodell says, “There, you can apply to work with mentors. There are visiting artists, dancers, and musicians.” Resident artists tend to stay at their retreat for weeks at a time. Bodell would also like to see increased promotion of Park City’s unique historical heritage. “The city has put money into restoring significant historical buildings. The next step in the program should be partnership between The Historical Society and lodging establishments for front-desk promotion of historical tours.”

Bruce Larrabee, wearer of many hats, including president of the Park