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Big Sky

**20
18**

**TOP
STORIES**



WARREN MILLER

Top Stories of 2018

Last year was ushered in with record snow and visitors to Big Sky, Montana. We saw thousands of new skiers coming here from all parts of the U.S., as Montana had some of the best snow conditions in the country, and Colorado and California endured paltry snowfall. The first month of 2018 also brought sad news to the ski industry, when Warren Miller died on Jan. 24 at the age of 93.

The legendary filmmaker inspired so many of us to follow our dreams of spending a lifetime in the mountains. He also had an outsized impact on the Big Sky community—the Yellowstone Club named its main lodge after Miller, since he was so instrumental in the early growth of the club. Our outstanding performing arts center also bears his moniker, and his legacy is stamped on the programming presented on its stage each winter.

While the year began with the ending of Miller's era, 2018 finished with a new era beginning. Ramcharger 8 opened at Big Sky Resort on Dec. 15 to massive fanfare and anticipation. Taylor Middleton, the resort's general manager, and Boyne Resorts President Stephen Kircher hosted a press conference at the base of the mountain in front of hundreds of skiers and snowboarders eagerly waiting to ride North America's first eight-seat D-line chairlift.

In the intervening months we experienced a smoldering wildfire just south of Big Sky, a \$10 million-plus federal grant to improve the area's transportation infrastructure and numerous other transformative events in this resort hamlet. In the following pages you'll find Explore Big Sky's top news stories of 2018. I encourage you to read and reminisce about the year that was. — *Tyler Allen*

Big Sky transportation projects awarded \$10M federal grant

In March, U.S. Sen. Steve Daines announced that Gallatin County had been awarded a \$10.3 million grant for ambitious improvements along Big Sky's Lone Mountain Trail, also known as Highway 64, and to fund the expansion of the Big Sky Transportation District's public transit services.

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant will be used for the construction of approximately seven left-turn lanes, a pedestrian tunnel beneath the highway, and nearly \$2.5 million for the Skyline bus system, which will include adding four buses and six vans to the existing public transport between Big Sky and the greater Bozeman area.

"Gallatin County is leading the state in economic growth," Daines said in a statement. "This grant will help the county meet the infrastructure demands of this rapid growth and continue creating good-paying jobs in the community."

The grant might also help the advancement of certain affordable housing projects in Big Sky, such as the Powder Light subdivision, which was stalled by a vote of Gallatin County commissioners who cited the lack of a turn lane on Lone Mountain Trail as a potential safety hazard.

Protected turn lanes are slated for the intersections at Ace Hardware—where the Powder Light housing entrance would be located—the Big Sky Medical Center, Roxy's Market, and the entrance to Big Sky Resort, among others that have seen numerous vehicle collisions in recent years.

"There are so many needs to address with the growth [in Big Sky]," said David Kack, coordinator for the Big Sky Transportation District and program manager for the Western Transportation Institute. "This is a great way to address many of the community's critical needs without finding a local funding source."

A 2017 transportation study commissioned by the Big Sky Chamber of Commerce, and written by the Western Transportation Institute, identified numerous hazards on the state highway, including high traffic volumes and unprotected turning lanes.

WTI wrote the proposal for the TIGER grant in conjunction with Bozeman engineering firm Sanderson Stewart, and it was submitted by Gallatin County on behalf of Big Sky in October 2017. Kack said the design process for roadwork could begin as early as this summer, with construction likely happening in two phases during the 2019 and 2020 construction seasons.



OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

The money for the transportation district is intended to address the issues of over-capacity in the area's transit system.

Big Sky Chamber of Commerce CEO Candace Carr Straus stressed the importance of the partnership among the various stakeholders in receiving the grant, entities that include WTI, Sanderson Stewart, the transportation district, the Big Sky Community Organization, the chamber of commerce, and both Gallatin and Madison counties for adopting the transportation study in their growth plans. She also pointed to the funding from the Big Sky Resort Area District tax board in making the initial study possible.

"We're honored that the Big Sky community trusts us to be the catalyst for tackling some of the major infrastructure-related challenges that we're facing with our growth here," she said.

The funding is available to Gallatin County until 2025, but Kack said they anticipate that the project will be completed as quickly as possible.

"This proposal was a big focus on rural economic development," Kack said. "We really played up that Lone Mountain Trail was the only public access to Big Sky, which is a big economic driver for Montana."

Big Sky Resort opens 2018-2019 season with epic conditions

Thanksgiving weekend is traditionally a time to spend with family and friends, eat too much and watch football. If you were in Big Sky, Montana for the 2018-2019 opening weekend, however, you had the chance to ski powder until your legs ached. The resort set a new record for snow in November: 76 inches, eclipsing the previous record of 74 inches set in 1988.

Big Sky Resort opened Nov. 22, Thanksgiving Day, with 780 acres of open terrain and coverage that looked more like January than November. By the time the long weekend was over, the resort’s mountain operations teams had opened 1,152 acres and 60 trails. The ability to ski this much terrain on opening weekend is nearly unprecedented, and included much of the Challenger terrain, The Bowl from Powder Seeker, and Liberty Bowl off the Lone Peak Tram.

According to Taylor Middleton, general manager and president of Big Sky Resort, the mountain saw “the best opening day conditions in many years.”

The auspicious start to the season was only eclipsed by a snowstorm that began Friday night, Nov. 23, and dropped more than 12 inches of snow on the peak, according to Big Sky Ski Patrol. All told, as of press day on Jan. 2, Big Sky Resort has seen 140 inches of snow this season at mid-mountain.

Patrollers were also able to open Liberty Bowl for a couple of hours on Thanksgiving Day despite advertising scenic-only tram rides for the day. By Sunday, bluebird skies and deep powder on Liberty Bowl awaited skiers and snowboarders willing to tempt the early season conditions.

The following week, ski patrol worked hard to open as much terrain as



OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

they safely could, and more acreage opened daily, according to Stacie Mesuda, Big Sky Resort’s public relations manager. This is Mesuda’s first winter at Big Sky Resort after a stint working at Colorado’s Beaver Creek Resort, and she was floored by the conditions.

“The snow was amazing, and it was probably the best opening day of my four years in the ski industry,” she said. “We’ve just had so much snow and the coverage is great. The mountain operations teams have done a great job getting the mountain open.”

While the resort did not release skier-day numbers for the weekend, Mesuda said visitation numbers were record breaking over the holidays.

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Sholly appointed new YNP superintendent

In mid-June, Cameron “Cam” Sholly was appointed the new superintendent of Yellowstone National Park. He visited Big Sky on Nov. 15 and spoke at the Big Sky Real Estate Discovery Center in Town Center, sharing his perspective on budget issues and wildlife management and park visitation.

Structured as a dialogue between the new superintendent, area locals and business owners, the event organized by Visit Big Sky revealed how Sholly’s connections to Big Sky, and the region, run deep.

“This place is near and dear to my heart,” Sholly told the audience, adding that he first skied Big Sky Resort in 1985 as a junior at Gardiner High School.

Sholly worked in the resort’s conference center after four years in the military then spent his first season working in Yellowstone in 1990. He attended Montana State University, joining the U.S. Army Reserve unit in Bozeman, which was activated during Desert Shield. After a deployment in Desert Storm, Sholly worked another season in the park and then as a bellman at Big Sky Resort’s Shoshone Lodge in 1991.

Sholly’s father lives in Big Sky six months out of the year, so Sholly and his son visit annually. Sholly’s sister, Alex Tyson, is the executive director of Visit Billings.

A recurring question Sholly has heard is whether the park is considering visitation caps or other mechanisms to rein in visitor numbers.

“At this point, the answer to that is no,” he said. “Does that mean that at some point that couldn’t happen?”

If visitation rose significantly, he added, conversations about ways to reduce numbers would likely ensue, but that they would include Yellowstone’s gateway communities.

A theme he brought up throughout the conversation was his commitment to building and maintaining relationships with the communities that ring the park, acknowledging that the park’s decisions will heavily affect these communities. He shared his mantra, “Listen, learn and act,” explaining that he wants these neighboring communities to feel heard, even if the park’s decisions aren’t ideal for each individual town.

“There’s a danger if you listen and learn too much and you don’t actually take an action,” Sholly said.

He added that it’s a difficult topic of conversation, considering approximately \$4 million was spent with one of the most prominent marketing firms in the world, which grew system-wide parks visitation by 50 million in five years—yet a chief challenge Yellowstone faces is too many visitors.

In 2018, the park hosted 4,078,770 visits, according to a Nov. 14 press release, which is down 0.15 percent from the same period last year and down 3 percent from the park’s record visitation year in 2016, the year Yellowstone celebrated its 100th anniversary.



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BSCO swaps land, purchases 3 acres in Town Center

According to the results of a 2017 community needs survey that informed Big Sky Community Organization's Parks and Open Spaces Plan, an indoor recreation facility was high on the wish list of local residents. BSCO now hopes to give the community what it wants.

The vision was put into action first in October, when BSCO announced plans to purchase 3.3 acres in Big Sky. The parcel, located in Town Center along Aspen Leaf Drive and between Ousel Falls Road and Simkins Drive, includes the current Town Center Park that houses the Music in the Mountains concert series and Big Sky Skating and Hockey Association's ice rink, along with the currently vacant gravel parking area to the east. By purchasing this property, according to an October statement from BSCO, the community is ensured a permanent place to gather outside and enjoy recreational and enrichment opportunities.

The purchase was made possible through a \$1.5 million grant from the Len Hill Charitable Trust, and in-kind support of the Simkins family and 15 additional donors, the statement said.

"To be able to anchor 3.3 acres of valuable real estate in the heart of our community for parkland and community facilities is a dream come true," said BSCO Executive Director Ciara Wolfe.

On the heels of the purchase, BSCO proposed swapping a parcel of land east of the Big Sky Community Park. In return, BSCO requested 40 SFEs—single-family equivalents—20 of which would be used for a recreation facility and park bathrooms on Town Center parcel. The Big Sky Community Organization requested the other 20 SFEs be set aside for an aquatic center, for which funds and land will eventually be procured.



RENDERING COURTESY OF BSCO

Aside from the school and the water and sewer district meeting room where the meeting was held, "there is not a single other location that is publicly available for use—owned by a public entity—in our community that has indoor space," Wolfe said. "And we have well over six months of winter."

Wolfe said the area's many nonprofits would use the facility, and that through sustainable building practices such as LEED, the center would be good way to showcase Big Sky's environmental ethics, sometimes overshadowed by the area's growth.

BSCO closed on the property in Town Center on Dec. 21. A groundbreaking date and construction schedule have not been set as the organization continues raising funds for the project.



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Warren Miller: A legend passes

It is impossible to overstate the impact that Warren Miller had on the ski industry, or on the millions of fans he encouraged to carve out an existence in the mountains and spend their lives chasing the perfect powder day.

Miller died Jan. 24 of natural causes at his home on Orcas Island, Washington, sending a wave of mourning around the world that swelled especially high in his winter home of Big Sky.

Born in 1924, in Hollywood, California, during the height of the Great Depression, Miller emerged from a hardscrabble youth to become the most important figure in action sports filmmaking. He purchased his first camera at age 12 for 39 cents, and a pair of skis and bamboo poles for \$2 when he was 15.

“When you come down the mountain from your first time on skis, you are a different person,” Miller wrote in his 2016 autobiography, “Freedom Found.” “I had just now experienced that feeling, if only for half a minute; it was step one in the direction I would follow the rest of my life.”

What he didn’t know at the time was there were countless others who would follow that very first step of his.

Inventing the quintessential ski bum lifestyle, Miller and his buddy Ward Baker lived in a teardrop trailer in the parking lots of ski areas around the West, shooting ducks and rabbits for dinner and filming their mountainside escapades on Miller’s 8-millimeter Bell and Howell motion camera. Those exploits appeared in his first feature film, “Deep and Light,” which premiered in the fall of 1950.

The decades that followed weren’t always the stuff of fairy tales professionally or personally, but his persistence, artistry and love for gravity made Miller a household name—drilling his distinctive voice and notorious wit into the memory of nearly everyone who has clicked into ski bindings or strapped on a snowboard.

When he and his wife, Laurie, took a chance on an upstart private ski community in Big Sky, the Yellowstone Club, Miller became the director of skiing and the club’s biggest advocate. The pair would spend the next two decades splitting their time between Montana and Orcas Island.

“I met Warren in 2005 and skied with him and my kids in March at the [Yellowstone] Club,” said Sam Byrne, co-founder of CrossHarbor Capital Partners, the principle owner of the Yellowstone Club. “I was just in awe. Being a kid that grew up in the ‘70s and ‘80s, I idolized his movies. They defined skiing for me.”

Byrne grew up skiing at the now-defunct Boston Hill in Andover, Massachusetts, as well as Maine’s Sugarloaf Mountain Resort, and said he always attends

the annual Warren Miller film tour—including 2017’s “Line of Descent” in November at the Cabot Theater in Beverly, Massachusetts.

“Warren was an icon in the industry and lent tremendous credibility to the club in its early days,” Byrne said. “It would not have materialized without his stalwart support.”

Warren and Laurie had a slope-side home above the eponymous, 140,000-square-foot Warren Miller Lodge at the ski area, and by all accounts Miller was humbled by the gesture. The Yellowstone Club also honored his name with the Warren Miller Cup, a giant-salom relay race held annually in February, which now includes more than 100 participants of all abilities—just the way Miller liked it.

But his impact on this southwest Montana community stretched beyond the gated ski and golf resort, as he also lent his name to Big Sky’s Warren Miller Performing Arts Center, located in Lone Peak High School.

The capital campaign to build the theater began with the 2011 Strings Under the Big Sky annual fundraiser, sponsored by the nonprofit Friends of Big Sky Education. When Miller was asked to lend his name to the venue, he was thrilled—and, again, humbled.

It opened in March 2013, with Miller on the stage, and he subsequently performed at the MOTH event in February 2014. He told two stories instead of one, but no one dared cut him off, according to WMPAC Artistic Director John Zirkle.

“It’s really Warren’s name that enables us to take big risks, and big leaps into the unknown, knowing there’s greater beauty on the other side,” Zirkle said. “I think it’s like Warren is there, especially when we’re getting nervous about something that is scary, to think about him whispering, ‘Hey, if you don’t do it this year, you’ll be one year older when you do.’”

Scot

Schmidt was an extreme skiing pioneer, Warren Miller Entertainment film star and Montana native. He grew up racing at Bridger Bowl Ski Area, and when he was 18, his coach told him he had a shot to make it big, and should leave Montana for an elite program. Schmidt moved to Squaw Valley, California, in 1979 and competed for three seasons before the financial challenges of racing forced him to quit.

“I started freeskiing with a bunch of long-haired speed skiers, going big and fast on the 220s off of cliffs,” he said, referring to the 220-centimeter skis of the day.

In 1983, Miller sent a cameraman to Squaw named Gary Nate, who called Schmidt up to go ski Squaw’s biggest, gnarliest lines. The footage from that session would appear in Miller’s feature “Ski Time,” and a few weeks after the shoot, Schmidt received a personal letter from Miller that he still has to this day.

“Dear Scot,” it reads, “the footage of you leaping through space at Squaw Valley is probably the most spectacular footage to come into my office. Next time my crews go to a foreign country to film a segment for a feature film would you be interested?”

Schmidt agreed and ended up appearing in more than a dozen Warren Miller titles, including 1992’s “Extreme Skiing 3: The Scot Schmidt Story.” He managed to turn freeskiing into a profession and has been a North Face-sponsored athlete for 35 years.

“I’d never skied with him back in the ‘80s. It wasn’t until I got to Big Sky [that] I started to get to know the man,” Schmidt said. “It was such a pleasure working with him. He lived a very full life and should be proud of what he did and all the people’s lives, including mine, that he changed.”

Schmidt is now part of the team working on a feature-length documentary of the filmmaking legend’s life, narrated entirely by Miller himself. They hope to release it next fall and enter it into the 2019 Sundance Film Festival.

“A lot of us owe him a huge debt of gratitude for changing our lives, inspiring and encouraging us to find our freedom in the mountains,” Schmidt said. “Warren is the most successful ski bum in history. He basically created the lifestyle and culture.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARREN MILLER ENTERTAINMENT

Schmidt’s professional career came full circle when he started working at the Yellowstone Club in 2003, and then became the official ski ambassador in 2006. As Schmidt experienced through that first correspondence from Miller, he wasn’t just a brilliant artist, but a master salesman. Eric Ladd, the publisher of EBS, worked at the Yellowstone Club in its early days with Miller and founder Tim Blixseth, doing everything from ski guiding to real estate sales.

“Warren once told me that 90 percent of real estate sales are made on the hood of a car, 15 minutes before someone’s plane departs. Warren was the finest salesman I have ever met,” Ladd said. In 2002, Miller bought the hood of a car, had it turned into a desk and installed in Ladd’s office at the club.

Charlie Callander has worked at the Yellowstone Club since 2001 in a number of different roles, including vice president of sales and his current positions as a liaison for members and a board member of the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation.



PHOTO BY TRAVIS ANDERSEN

He fondly remembers his days skiing with Miller, who would schuss down the private slopes in his red one-piece until he was 86, when his health no longer allowed him to ski.

“A lot of people at the club would use that 86 [year old] benchmark as, ‘I want to ski at least as long as Warren did,’” Callander said, adding that Miller wasn’t just an inspiration to members and guests, but the entire mountain staff. “He’d attend the ski instructors’ morning meetings three times a year, telling them how important it was to bring people the freedom of skiing,” he said. “You could hear a pin drop.”

Passionate about the sport of skiing perhaps beyond compare, Miller will not be forgotten.

“We loved him and he’ll be deeply missed by everybody in our community,” Byrne said. “But that voice will live on.”

If you’re one of the lucky ones to spend a season, decade, or a lifetime pursuing your perfect turn, take a moment to thank Warren Miller. His first step made the dream a reality for so many of us.



PHOTO BY TRAVIS ANDERSEN



Wildfires in southwest Montana

In a year when wildfires burned north of the Arctic Circle and one in which California saw its largest and most destructive wildfire on record, southwest Montana saw its share of blazes although the costs were significantly lower than the yearly average for the state.

In Madison County last August, the Wigwam Fire tore through more than 4,000 acres, while to the south the Monument Fire burned nearly 7,000 acres.

The Bacon Rind fire, 20 miles south of Big Sky, began on July 20 in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and moved into the west end of Yellowstone National Park, according to Big Sky Fire Chief William Farhat. Although suppression efforts were limited on the Bacon Rind fire, crews were given permission to battle the blaze before it reached Highway 191, Farhat said.

While the fire burned in an area untouched by wildfire in 150 years, the area was relatively light in fuel load, according to Inciweb, the national all-risk incident information network that the U.S. Forest Service utilizes to keep the public aware of wildfires, among other emergency incidents.

Fire crews closely monitored the fires and undertook preparatory measures—building firewalls, clearing brush, trees and other potential fuels—to stop or slow the fires were they to have come out of the mountains and into the valleys.

“This time of year, our goal is to get out there and keep fires from growing,” Farhat told EBS in mid-August. “So, if the fire does advance in this direction we are prepared.”

After rain and snow slowed the fire in early October, crews were demobilized from the incident and it was contained at approximately 5,200 acres.

The Bacon Rind Fire helped clean out dead and downed trees in the area, while restoring a healthy ecosystem that will be conducive to new growth and create great habitat for wildlife, according to Inciweb. The fire also helped reduce the potential for a future large fire in the location, the website said.

Wildfire suppression efforts cost Montana approximately \$6.7 million in 2018, far less than the annual average of \$20 million.

Addressing Big Sky’s growth: Water and sewer district unveils \$21M plant upgrade

The Big Sky Water and Sewer District unveiled an estimated \$21.7 million wastewater treatment plant upgrade on Nov. 27 that would meet the district’s growing flow and load demands and resolve failing equipment issues during a special meeting at the district office.

Arranged in two phases, the first would include upgrading the plant with a new filtration technology that would provide a higher DEQ classification of effluent, allowing effluent disposal options beyond irrigating area golf courses, according to project manager Scott Buecker of Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, which the district hired for the upgrade.

Based on preliminary numbers, district finance officer Terry Smith said the phase one upgrade would increase ratepayers’ annual sewer bills by approximately 45 percent once the plant came online.

The second phase of the upgrade would position the district to reach even higher levels of effluent quality and could usher in drinkable reuse options.

The district currently disposes of all its treated effluent through irrigation on local golf courses, pumping a significant amount to Spanish Peaks Mountain Resort and the Yellowstone Club. Through this system, the district operates without any direct discharge to the Gallatin River or its tributaries, which is extremely rare among water treatment facilities nationwide, Buecker said.

However, last winter set records for snowfall and visitation, and the district’s capacity to store water was maxed out last spring as they waited for the summer to begin irrigating, Water and Sewer District Board President Packy Cronin said.

Once irrigation season began, the district disposed of roughly 200 million gallons of effluent through irrigation, pumping more than half that volume up 2,000 feet in elevation through a 7.2-mile pipeline to the Yellowstone Club and Spanish Peaks, according to Grant Burroughs, the district’s wastewater superintendent.



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Two new hotels coming to Big Sky

Construction was cranking in Big Sky in 2018, and two hotels are among the buildings taking form: the Wilson Hotel in Town Center and Montage Big Sky in Spanish Peaks Mountain Club.

The Wilson is slated to finish at the end of May, according to Bayard Dominick, vice president of planning and development for Lone Mountain Land Company, while construction of the Montage is expected to be complete in 2021.

Co-branded as a Marriot Residence Inn, each of the Wilson’s 129 rooms will have its own kitchenette, accommodating guests who don’t want to eat out every night, such as skiers staying for extended visits.

The hotel will offer rooms ranging from standard kings and double queens, to one- and two-bedroom suites, some with lock-off options. Six units will overlook the pool toward Lone Mountain and another six, down the plaza.

The Wilson’s retail and restaurant space will border the plaza with a second entrance providing public restrooms to support plaza events like farmers markets, and the hotel will house a 5,800 square-foot restaurant space, which will have outdoor seating on the plaza.

LMLC is developing the Wilson in collaboration with the Simkins family, Town Center’s master developer.

“We believe that the Wilson Hotel will be a game-changer for the Town Center, the Meadow, and by extension the entire community,” said Ryan Hamilton, Town Center’s project manager.

The \$400 million Montage Big Sky will be constructed next to the Spanish Peaks Mountain Club clubhouse. At 520,000 square feet, the hotel will have 150 rooms, 39 branded residences and Big Sky’s first bowling alley. Four distinct



RENDERING COURTESY OF BECHTLE ARCHITECTS AND JIM COLLINS

restaurants and spa services will be available to the public, while hotel guests will have limited access to the Spanish Peaks golf course. Montage Big Sky at Spanish Peaks will be the first luxury hotel of this caliber in the state, said CrossHarbor managing director Matt Kidd at a Sept. 14 groundbreaking ceremony.

“It’s a huge benefit for this Gallatin and Madison county-based economy,” Kidd said, adding that the project will create 300 construction jobs a day for the next three years and provide more than 400 operational jobs once open.

Sam Byrne, managing partner and co-founder of CrossHarbor Capital Partners, said that between the three CrossHarbor-owned clubs—the Yellowstone Club, Spanish Peaks Mountain Club, and Moonlight Basin—it employs more than 1,500 people and “close to 3,000 people a day in high-paying construction jobs.

“Just this project alone will generate \$1.2 million dollars in resort taxes,” Byrne said, adding that projections for future projects they plan to implement are forecast to increase resort tax collections by approximately \$5 million over the next six years.



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PHOTO BY BAY STEPHENS

Big Sky Resort introduces state-of-the-art chairlift

A prototypical bluebird morning at Big Sky Resort found hundreds gathered on Dec. 15 to witness shockwaves ripple into the North American ski industry. A roar erupted from the crowd as Stephen Kircher, president of Boyne Resorts, and his son Everett, employed a giant pair of scissors to cut the ribbon on the most technologically advanced lift in the world.

The legions of skiers, snowboarders and journalists were on hand to see the Doppelmayr-built Ramcharger 8 spin with passengers for the first time, and to celebrate the much-anticipated season opening of Andesite Mountain. The eight-seat chairs are replete with heated seats, a massive Big Sky-blue wind bubble and padded back rests.

After the historic first chair loaded with Stephen and Everett Kircher, Big Sky Resort General Manager Taylor Middleton and Doppelmayr President Mark Bee, smiles flashed throughout the crowd as skiers were whisked up Andesite.

Stephen Kircher told EBS about the past, present and future of Boyne’s investment into Big Sky Resort and spoke first about the significance of this lift to this continent’s ski industry.

“This transforms technology in North America. No one else made the leap to the eight-place in North America,” Kircher said. “This is that step, and others are going to have to think about it.”

He put Ramcharger 8 in context of “Big Sky 2025,” the planned \$150-million investment that will be rolled out over a decade, transforming Big Sky Resort into “America’s Alp.” It began in earnest during the summer of 2016, when the resort installed the six-seat Doppelmayr Powder Seeker—a lift with heated seats and a wind bubble that cut the ride time to the top of The Bowl from 10 minutes to three—and a fixed-grip triple chairlift accessing the Challenger terrain, after the previous lift experienced mortal mechanical failure.

“Our plans are to execute a series of new lifts, with Powder Seeker, this [Ramcharger 8] lift and others in a sequence,” Kircher said. “So, we’re going to be able to, we think, leapfrog everyone else for a number of years. The comfort, the safety, the reliability—this new technology is pretty amazing.”

He also touched on the near future of the “America’s Alp” execution, which includes a complete remodel of the Mountain Mall next summer, and a new gondola to be built in two stages. That project, he said, should begin construction next summer or the following.

“We’ve been in this for the long-term, since 1976, and this is just another chapter in that long-term commitment to this community and southwest Montana,” he said. “Momentum is picking up, not slowing down. [We’re] building on that heritage and transforming it into something that’s really going to be truly international in flavor.”

Meadowview subdivision to help address workforce housing

Over the course of 2018, a group of individuals vested in identifying more affordable housing options in Big Sky made monumental strides in making it easier for workers to live in the area, an issue that has plagued this resort community for decades.

On April 24, Gallatin County commissioners unanimously approved a preliminary plat for the Meadowview Condominiums subdivision, a 52-unit affordable housing project north of the Big Sky Community Park off Little Coyote Drive.

The planned units include 14 duplexes and 12 freestanding units with a smaller garage apartment unit, and have studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom options.

On Aug. 22, the Human Resource and Development Council signed a purchase agreement for the Meadowview property.

In November, Laura Seyfang, the newly appointed program director of the HRDC's Big Sky Community Housing Trust said the first units will be completed by April, despite construction delays. Phase one of the project will include three studios and 15 two-bedroom units, each with its own single-car garage.

Arranged as duplexes, the two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom units will be 1,001 square feet, while the studios will be 350 square feet, according to Big Sky Resort's Director of Real Estate and Development Brian Wheeler, who is also on the advisory council of the housing trust.

Seyfang said that 32 individuals were interested in purchasing Meadowview units and looked like they would qualify, after first participating in eight hours of home-buyer assistance classes and a homeowner counseling session with the HRDC. Both the down payment assistance program and Meadowview applications require these steps.

The second phase of the Meadowview construction likely won't be completed until the end of 2019.

Last February, findings were released from a housing survey distributed in 2017 with 1,112 responses from Big Sky residents and others who commute here for work from elsewhere. A housing action plan drawing on these findings was released in June, which outlines steps to provide approximately 300 community housing units within five years, target a range of housing needs the market doesn't currently meet, and to provide community housing in step with job growth.



PHOTO BY BAY STEPHENS

The Meadowview property is meant to address year-round Big Sky workers looking to buy homes but can't afford the inflated prices of a resort market. The Big Sky Resort Area District tax board bankrolled a \$1.75 million sum to subsidize the project, stipulating that the units be deed-restricted to ensure the housing stays affordable through multiple owners.

"If you only subsidize the first family then they'd get a big windfall when they sold and then we wouldn't have anything more for future families," said Britt Ide, a housing trust council member and executive director of the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation.

"This is a huge investment in our community, and it makes sense because the resort tax is paid a lot by tourists, and the people that are housed here are supporting the tourist economy," Ide said, referring to BSRAD's \$1.75 million of funding. "We can't have a town without people living here."

Creighton Block
GALLERY

Traditional and Contemporary Western Art



Top Social Media Posts of 2018

EBS has been publishing a “Top Stories of the Year” section for nearly a decade. Over that span the media world has shifted in dramatic ways and many of our stories are increasingly sourced through social media. Here are the Top Social Media posts for 2018 based on analytics and user engagement. And they include some amazing photography.



July 27: Five minutes to showtime!! The first round of wool riders will be riding tonight. Always a crowd favorite, don’t miss mutton bustin’! PHOTO BY CARIE BIRKMEIER



June 11: Seasonal confusion? Green grass blankets Andesite Mountain today, while 4 inches of snow was recorded midway up the peak and more fell up high. #January PHOTO BY JENNINGS BARMORE



Nov. 20: @Big Sky Resort Ski Patrol’s avalanche dogs posed Nov. 10 for their team photo in between trainings for the upcoming winter season. These obedient and highly specialized canines are trained to find humans that have been buried beneath the snow, aiding in avalanche rescue. PHOTO BY CODY WHITMER



April 28: Fifth-grader Grady Towle has ridden his fat bike to Ophir Elementary School every day that he has attended school this year. “The coldest days were not that bad. It’s the days with fresh snow when it is hard to get traction that are tough.” The school board recognized Grady as the “toughest kid at Ophir” and awarded him a gift certificate for a free tune-up at Gallatin Alpine Sports. PHOTO BY DOUG HARE



April 29: Some kayakers enjoying the higher river flows and warm weather today at Ousel Falls. PHOTO BY DANIEL BULLOCK