



From the Director's Desk

What Public Employees Can Learn from Ski Operations?

I spoke recently as a panelist at the Ski Area Management (SAM) Summer Ops Camp in Steamboat Springs at the invitation of our partners at Insights Collective and Sarah Jones, Director of Social Responsibility for Steamboat Ski & Resort sharing our Mountain Migration and upcoming Mountain Metrics projects.

Attending were operations managers from most ski areas in the U.S. not owned by a group beginning with an A or a V (exceptions were Alyeska (Alaska), Anekeesta (Gatlinburg) and Arapahoe Basin which were present), along with USFS employees and vendors pitching climbing walls, cool equipment to rent, and drone shows. These experts at managing winters focused this year on something I recognized our mountain towns are also struggling – “managing” for the dispersed interests of summer visitors, the volume, their dispersed activities and their coming and going. Adding summer recreation to the resort package is still new enough that ski areas have only had a decade or so to hone, compared to more than 50 years of experience getting skiers from their vehicles to rental shops to lift lines to restaurants to hotels, back and forth, rinse and repeat. It is also a major factor we don’t talk about when we talk about the factors that have shaped our current conditions in mountain communities that threaten to overwhelm us. Remember when we wanted more summer activities - back before we realized it would be quite different to manage than winter ski visitors.



The Monday kickoff speaker, Claire Humber of SE Group summed up the conference message most succinctly, “We are in the experience business,” and “(visitors) want a unique experience.” She drilled down into how few people are engaged in skiing since “only 3-5% of U.S. residents identify as skiers or riders.” She also touched on how employees, **especially happy employees with a stable footing in the work and community** are the key variable that can make or break that experience. Listening to speakers before our panel I was reminded that many of our resort towns preach the same principles to staff at every level – Remember it is about the visitor EXPERIENCE. This has been a mantra for many of our resort municipalities that dovetail with ski areas, highlighted by what has become apocryphal customer service stories in places like the Town of Vail where returning a lost wedding ring from the sewer becomes emblematic of that ethos.

While it may seem off of the public employee radar, the “experience of place” is something all public employees should be skilled in



recognizing, and enhancing. How often do we think of what we do from the “customer side?” I’m thinking of a town employee this summer who mowed and then aerated a large lawn area beside a pavilion for all of two hours during an important retreat with leadership from a nearby town which was going on inside of that space with open windows and no air conditioning. As he would pass every minute or so, it became nearly impossible to hear each other inside. For two hours we figured he was just about done. Surely, he was just doing his job, headphones-on driving a tractor in the hot sun. Were those the only hours on the only day he could mow that park? That pavilion sits empty most of the week. A lot full of cars at 10 a.m. on a weekday should have been enough of a sign to shift gears on his day’s work plan. That was at a retreat I facilitated earlier in the year.

Eric Lipton from SNOW Operating, a company specializing in designing customer experiences and new facilities, guided the room through a process mapping exercise, either utilizing LEAN or Six Sigma methodologies. He broke us into groups-- my group broke down a zip line tour in Juneau that originated from a cruise ship with two employees of that program. We then broke down the customer event cycle by identifying time segments of that activity from start to finish (disembarking to a shuttle) and labeling each with whether it was a Business Value Add (filling out safety waivers) or a Customer Value Add (actually zipping from platform to platform) or a Non-Value Add item (bathroom break). By dividing the minutes of CVA time from the total activity time one could measure the process cycle efficiency. More importantly was examining each increment of time for value. Then he had each group forget that baseline and do an idealized design exercise starting with identifying new or improved process segments that would enhance the activity and increase the CVA. While this exercise may seem more obvious for a private enterprise such as a ski resort to focus on maximizing customer value added time, it should be just as obvious to those of us in the public realm. I’m not the only one preaching this.

I’ve bragged on Denver Peak Academy before, and [Brian Elms](#) who spun off from that innovation hub now built into the City and County’s DNA. Elms blogged on LinkedIn recently, [Make it Easy to Do the Right Thing](#) in which he engaged with a group of firefighters to untangle their consternation over an confusingly litigious and complicated wildfire mitigation form which had clearly been drafted with no regard for the customer side of the experience. In short, “If you can make something simpler, you should.” Whether trained in LEAN or not, teams should sit down regularly to assess their processes to focus most on high value activities and reduce low value activities.



At the Reception Dinner, Rob Perlman, President and COO of Steamboat Ski & Resort spoke of planning for the \$250 million enhancements taking place right now on the mountain being an eye opening experience in which they decided to tear out a 6-year old mountain coaster after assessing it’s opportunity cost, and also “liberating the base area plaza” at the bottom of the mountain by “blowing up a building” which they did symbolically with fireworks for staff to understand that the organization was bent upon re-envisioning the visitor experience while increasing base area through-put on peak mornings from 6,800 visitors to 10,000. Like I said, towns can learn a lot from their partner resorts, like being courageous enough to blow up something new that isn’t working rather than waiting for it useful life to end. And as I emphasized as a panelist, resort operators could do well to focus on their role in the community and their employees who live there rather than waiting for contentious issues to bring them both to the table.

I recognize that most municipalities don't feel comfortable "blowing up" the base area. This may have to do with the fact that they often only own the public rights of way and park areas and not the bulk of private property that makes up their core areas. It sometimes has to do with suspicions about the intentions of dynamic developers. It also has to do with elected officials who are often fearful that major change may appear wasteful to some residents. It certainly has to do with a status quo bias by residents who fear change. Nonetheless, significant re-inventions of the central spaces that mark community identity have occurred recently in many of our member communities from Steamboat (riverfront) to Vail (New Dawn) to Snowmass Village (Base Area) to Glenwood Springs (Grand Avenue, Seventh Street), and Avon (Nottingham Park). So many of our communities have shown courage for major changes. The world is changing fast. We must adapt courageously and quickly too.

The other thing at Summer Ops Camp was there was ample time programmed in for managers to sample various new products and area improvements. In other words, it is important to remember that what we get to do and where we get to do it is really FUN. It should be that way for employees whose own enthusiasm will rub off on visitors as long as they are conscious of the importance of that interpersonal exchange being part of the experience of place.

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Photo Credit - SAM ops Facebook pages. Photo 1:

Susan Cross and David Gray from Snowmass and Claire Humber from SE Group chatting about the ideal summer guest experience.

Photo 2: Classroom session

NWCCOG Energy Program Empowers Communities Through Outreach and Expertise

Community Event Promotes Energy Efficiency in Eagle County

Eagle County, CO - The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) Energy Program's Outreach Department hosted a successful weatherization enrollment event at the Dotsero Mobile Home Park on August 26th. This community-focused event aimed to raise awareness about energy-saving programs while providing valuable services to residents.

The event drew a diverse group of community partners, including the Colorado Energy Office, The MIRA Bus (Mobil Intercultural Resource Alliance), The Community Market, Holy Cross Energy, Eagle County Government, and the Primavera Mexican Food Truck. This collaboration allowed for a holistic approach to addressing the energy needs of Eagle County residents.



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NWCCOG's Energy Program offered free weatherization services through their CARE (Colorado Affordable Residential Energy) and WAP (Weatherization Assistance Program) initiatives. Approximately 10% of the mobile home park's residents signed up for these services during the event. Holy Cross Energy distributed energy-efficient LED bulbs, contributing to energy conservation efforts. MIRA Bus contributed by giving away backpacks to students preparing to return to school. The Community Market set up a mini food market, ensuring that attendees had access to nutritious food. Primavera Mexican Food Truck added a tasty twist to the event by offering free burritos to those interested in learning more about the free energy services provided by NWCCOG's Energy Program. The long-term goal of NWCCOG's Energy Program is to enroll every home in the Dotsero Mobile Home Park for their free weatherization services. This initiative not only helps reduce energy consumption but also enhances health and safety while improving residents' overall quality of life. By transitioning homes from propane to Beneficial Electrification measures, NWCCOG's Energy Program takes a significant step toward creating a more sustainable and energy-efficient community.

Residents of Eagle County can look forward to more such events aimed at promoting energy efficiency and supporting their transition to cleaner, more cost-effective energy solutions.



NWCCOG Energy Program Enhances Expertise in Furnace and HVAC Repair

Denver, CO - The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) Energy Program continues its commitment to providing top-notch energy efficiency and weatherization solutions by investing in staff training and development. Recently, a team of 23 dedicated professionals from NWCCOG's Energy Program attended a two-day skills-upgrade class in Gas Furnace and HVAC Electrical Troubleshooting and Repair.

The training, held in Denver, featured a live fire lab and was approved by the National

Association for Technician Excellence (NATE). Participants included Energy Efficiency Technicians, Crew Leaders, Home Energy Auditors, HVAC Specialists, and Quality Inspectors from NWCCOG's field crew locations in Silverthorne, Gypsum, and Rifle.

Serving a vast 13-county region, from Walden to Salida to Bailey to Maybell, NWCCOG's Energy Program remains at the forefront of energy efficiency and weatherization services, often provided at no cost to income-qualified clients. This commitment to ongoing training ensures that the team is well-prepared to handle a wide range of energy-related challenges.

One key outcome of this training is an improved ability to assess when transitioning to heat pump technology is a more practical option, especially in cases where traditional furnace repair may not be the most viable choice. This proactive approach aligns with NWCCOG's mission to promote sustainable and efficient energy solutions throughout its service area.

By investing in the professional development of its staff, NWCCOG's Energy Program reaffirms its dedication to enhancing energy efficiency, reducing energy costs, and improving the overall quality of life for residents across its expansive coverage area.

For more information check out the [Energy Program on our website](#).

Photos Credits: NWCCOG



Glenwood Springs Secures \$600,000 Grant to Transform Urban Landscape

Glenwood Springs, CO – September 14, 2023

In a big win for Glenwood Springs, the Governor's Office of Economic Recovery has announced some truly green news: the city has been chosen as the proud recipient of a substantial \$600,000 USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Grant. This financial injection is part of the broader initiative of the Inflation Reduction Act, which aims to usher in a greener, healthier future for urban communities by fostering equitable access to the multiple benefits of trees and nature.

According to the [USDA Government website](#), the significance of this grant becomes abundantly clear. Trees and nature, it appears, are not mere adornments but powerful allies in the fight against climate change and its many repercussions. They help guard against extreme heat, save energy, provide soothing shade, act to absorb storm water, create wildlife havens, and help to purify air and water. But their influence doesn't stop there. The presence of a thriving urban tree canopy is also linked to an array of convincing outcomes, including better health, increased economic opportunities, job creation, and enhanced property values.

If any further convincing is needed, their website goes on to remind us; July 2023 sounded an alarm that cannot be ignored as it was officially recorded as the hottest month on record. With scientific evidence proving that a healthy tree canopy can reduce local temperatures by an impressive 11 to 19 degrees Fahrenheit when compared to canopy-less counterparts, the logic behind amplifying green coverage in all communities becomes irrefutable.

A total of \$1.5 billion in grants has been awarded to communities across the United States, with \$22 million dedicated to Colorado. In this age of environmental consciousness, Glenwood Springs has taken steps toward securing not just funds but the promise of a greener, cooler, and more prosperous future. Watch this space as Glenwood Springs turns over a new leaf, quite literally, to embrace a future defined by lush canopies and the many benefits they bring.



Next Board Meeting

Next Council Meeting - Thursday, October 26, 2023

Full Council Meeting, EDD Board Annual Planning Meeting

Location: On site TBD and ZOOM

Time: **Executive:** 9:00 AM **Council** 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM - **EDD** 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

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