

Town, Related WestPac commit to environment

By Steve Alldredge
Sun Staff Writer

“We can be leaders for Colorado and our nation,” said Snowmass Village Town Councilman John Wilkinson Thursday at a luncheon where the town and developer Related WestPac announced a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute to pursue innovative environmental solutions toward creating a cleaner, greener Snowmass Village.

Guests at the lunch included the former New York Governor George Pataki, the U.S. Green Building Council’s President and CEO Rick Fedrizzi and the Rocky Mountain Institute’s (RMI) CEO Michael Potts. Pat Smith, president of Related WestPac and Jeff Blau, president of the Related Companies, announced the partnership and town-wide joint effort.

“The initiatives we announce today will be just the beginning of our long-term commitment to create a new model of community living anchored in sustainability,” said Blau as he spoke from a lectern under an open tent outside the Silvertree Hotel on Fanny Hill. Under a bluebird, sunny sky, with the expanse of Snowmass Village and distant mountains in the background, more than one speaker noted the beautiful environment in which we live.

For many, talk about sustainable, green building in Snowmass Village with the beginning buildings of a 1-million-square-foot development rising out of the ground at the bottom of Fanny Hill borders on heresy. In their minds, hearing about green building practices at Base Village is “greenwashing” and “eco-porn.”



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Developers Pat Smith and Jeff Blau have hired former New York Governor George Pataki (center) to bring green development sensibilities to their Snowmass projects.

RMI's Michael Potts is well aware of the fact that there are companies who wish to trade on RMI's acclaimed expertise and good name. Before RMI agreed to be a partner with Related WestPac in their three developments in Snowmass Village, they needed to be convinced that Related WestPac will do what they say they are doing in the area of green building. According to Potts, they were convinced about Related WestPac's commitment which is why they were part of last week's announcement. As construction goes forward RMI has a keen interest in seeing that Related WestPac's sustainable building practices are as green as possible and they hope to help in that effort. If those commitments are not kept, then Potts pointed out that RMI will be among the first to publicly express their concerns.

"We are moving forward with the Rocky Mountain Institute and committing the dollars and moving forward to accomplish our goals," said Pat Smith.

At the lunch, Smith and Blau detailed the first stage of the company's sustainable initiatives in Snowmass Village. In addition to the partnership with RMI, the company announced other signature elements. They include:

- Participation in the new LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for Neighborhood Development Pilot Program;
- LEED certification for all buildings going forward;
- Go for LEED silver certification for the Base Village hotel site, in line with a commitment from the Kor Hotel Group;
- Siting of new carbon-free renewable energy sources;
- Cleaner construction practices and traffic reduction initiatives that will improve air quality and minimize environ-

mental impacts;

- Appointment of a sustainability specialist to ensure sustainable design;
- Formation of a sustainable stewardship committee led by the Town of Snowmass Village in partnership with all present and future stakeholders including Related WestPac and the Aspen Skiing Co.

Auden Schendler, director of environmental affairs for the Aspen Skiing Co. is also a consultant on Related WestPac's green building commitments. Schendler has promoted green building practices across the nation and throughout the ski industry. He has also appeared before the U.S. Congress to promote sustainable building and fight across greenhouse gas emissions that many feel lead to climate change.

Schendler has also been critical of the LEED certification program in the past, publishing a study with Randy Udall of CORE (Community Office for Resource Efficiency) that suggested the LEED certification program needs tinkering because of the way points are allocated in that process. While Schendler is a strong proponent for sustainable building practices, he has questioned whether or not the money allocated for attaining LEED certification might be better spent on green building practices instead.

After last week's lunch, Rick Fedrizzi of the U.S. Green Building Council, the council responsible for developing the LEED certification program, was asked whether or not the money used in attained LEED could be better spent.

"I think you can do both," said Fedrizzi. "You need some third party to give an honest assessment of what's being done. That's what the LEED certification program does. And Related WestPac is getting that honest third-party assessment here in Snowmass."

When asked about those that will apply the term "greenwashing" to the large developments in Snowmass Village, Schendler said he takes issue with that. He makes several points about why that is an incorrect term in this case. He points out that what Related WestPac has done is make a commitment and announce a partnership. Fulfilling that commitment will not only cost the company a great deal of money, but it will make the environment cleaner and the buildings more green. To those that question how any large development project could be considered "green," Schendler noted that building a core to Snowmass Village, cuts down on the original sprawl design for town and immensely more sustainable than what has been here the last 30 years.

The Sun will be spending more time with Schendler in the next few weeks as we look at his participation in creating the first hydroelectric plant at a ski area.

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