



For economic sustainability, add authenticity and sense of place

Panelists address key elements of a successful resort town

By Lara Kirkner
Mammoth Times Staff Writer

One of Dave McCoy's favorite sayings is that Mammoth is about the people. Taking care of the people who live and play in this fabulous area was always his top priority, and as Mammoth delves into its next era of defining how it wants to be portrayed to the rest of the world, we need to keep that in mind.

On May 8, the Town of Mammoth Lakes and the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access group (MLTPA) hosted the "Resort Economic Development Panel Discussion" in Suite

Z. Three panel speakers gathered to address topics that included destination resort economics and character, partnering with development, and how hospitality and conference business can enhance economic sustainability.

The three speakers were Bill Lee, Executive Vice President of Economics Research Associates, Randy Martin of Martin and Associates, and Carl Ribaud, President of Strategic Marketing Group. A fourth speaker, Dave Renker, VP of Operations Management for Destination Hotels and Resorts was unable to make it because he was stuck at an airport.

All three panelists agreed on the key element of preserving destination authenticity. Mammoth should not make itself the same as every other resort, which is where focusing on the

people really comes into play.

A recent article in Urban Land magazine states, "As urbanization increases across the globe, travelers are seeking lower-density resorts to get a break from the pressures of everyday life."

If that's what visitors are looking for, and that's what the permanent community of Mammoth has been crying out for as new developments come online, then why can't that become Mammoth's gimmick? "Mammoth listens to what the people want."

Instead of worrying about how to fill the Town coffers Mammoth could start with this idea and stand out on its own, unafraid to remain a small, intimate resort.

Of course economic stability has to be woven in somehow, but that's where ideas like one that Lee presented come into play. Lee claimed one of the biggest problems Mammoth has at this time is its lack of walkable retail districts.

Having an area of town, such as Old Mammoth Road, where cars are discouraged and retail shops are loaded along the sidewalks is not only a great way to draw people in to shop thus producing more economic sustainability, but would also go along with the small town charm by which Mammoth could brand itself.



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It was all eyes and ears in Suite Z as a trio of experts presented key elements that make for a successful resort town.

Retail also needs to be planned cohesively throughout town, instead of bit by bit as each developer brings his or her project online. Strong leadership is needed in order to make retail work for the town, since retail is less profitable than lodging.

More important than retail, however, is

for Mammoth to develop a sense of place. Ribardo pointed out that people are not coming to Mammoth for the shopping or the architecture; they are coming for the natural surroundings so the town should really play upon what it already has. Again, this points

back to keeping development small in order to avoid blocking out the natural beauty that makes Mammoth unique.

Martin, who spoke about a cohesive trails system, was able to pinpoint one specific aspect that promotes the natural amenities

of Mammoth while also raising the value of developments and in turn creating economic feasibility.

Promoting smaller development is easy to preach, but for a developer coming to Mammoth, it may be hard to do as construction costs soar in what seems to be an uncontrollable skyward manner, so the Town does need to be aware that height and density of a project need to allow it to pencil.

The Urban Land magazine article points out that as more of the world gets built up, the public approval process is growing lengthier as communities try to preserve the open spaces they have left.

“At the same time, city governments are more open to construction of hotels and resorts, recognizing the substantial economic benefits they can bring to a community,” the magazine article goes on to say.

So everyone, government, community and developers, needs to work together in a flexible environment to allow Mammoth a sense of place that will keep it authentic, whether that means branding Mammoth with the idea that it is about people and keeping it small or something else. Resort projects naturally have the potential to benefit the community because features that would attract visitors would also be of interest to the public at large; they just have to be laid out with a master plan in mind in order to make Mammoth a place that people want to be.

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