



PROFILE:

# JACK SIBBACH

**Director of Sales, Marketing, and Public Relations at Sun Valley Resort**

A native of Pennsylvania, Jack Sibbach didn't learn to ski until his early 20s. But he took to it and decided to call Sun Valley home, moving here in 1978. He started his career with the Resort as a bartender at the Ram, but since then he has "worked in every department except retail." Sibbach remembers, "In the off-season, if you were willing to work, Sun Valley would find a place for you. I helped knock out old bathrooms and move rocks off the new golf course." And after a 35-year career with the Resort, Sibbach certainly understands the heart of what he's charged with selling through marketing and public relations. And to hear him tell it, it seems more like sharing a really cool secret with a friend than a sales job. "Sun Valley, the brand, is about quality. Whatever we do, we're going to do it well," Sibbach says.

**SVPN's Ryan Waterfield spoke with Sibbach after the Beaver Creek Fire to talk about the impact of the fire on the Resort, the Resort's plans for the winter, and the most pressing economic concerns for the valley.**

PHOTO: KRISTIN CHEATWOOD

**SVPN: How did Sun Valley Resort weather the Beaver Creek Fire?**

**Jack Sibbach:** Well, during the fire, we had some groups cancel their conferences and individuals cancel their reservations due to the fire. The fact that the Writers' Conference canceled directly impacted our occupancy. But the good news is, many of those conferences have rescheduled for September and the Writers' Conference has moved to earlier in the summer. Our brand is strong and people will keep coming back.

**SVPN: What had you learned from the Castle Rock Fire that you employed this time around?**

**JS:** That's when I learned the power of social media. We made sure to get the word out through social media that the Resort had not been damaged. Our website saw a significant increase in traffic during the fire so we made sure to keep the website updated. We usually see 3,500 visits a day—during the fire, traffic increased to around 8,000 visits a day.

**SVPN: Sun Valley has a strong and long-standing brand. Does the brand present you with any challenges?**

**JS:** Our major challenge is to stay relevant to a new generation. That's what our improvements at Dollar have been about. We stay true to our brand and history while changing with the times. Our terrain parks may not be the biggest, but they'll be high-quality—because that's what the Sun Valley brand promises.

73% of our winter guests are repeat visitors—this isn't an accident. We have a loyal customer base because we are committed to quality.

**SVPN: During the Beaver Creek Fire, the valley received some very good news—the addition of a direct United regional jet flight from San Francisco. What will this mean to the community?**

**JS:** That one-year contract with United is the result of good and hard work on the part of many in this community—the Resort working in concert with Fly Sun Valley Alliance and Visit Sun Valley among others. The Freidman Memorial Airport Authority has worked hard to implement a plan to become a regional jet-compliant airport. This new direct flight from SFO will bring more seats into the valley and more visitors. That's a good thing for the entire community. The success of this flight could open up other markets to us.

**SVPN: The 1% increase to the Local Option Tax (LOT) is on the ballot again this November. It passed in Sun Valley but failed (narrowly) to achieve the 60% support it needed to pass in Ketchum and Hailey. In order to be implemented, the increase needs to pass in all three communities. Why do we need to pass this 1% increase to the LOT?**

**JS:** The airline seats we lost since 2008 have directly impacted the local economy. We need to work together to increase airline service to the valley. In the 1980s

Sun Valley regularly beat Jackson Hole on skier days. Then Jackson instituted their air program—a program supported by all stakeholders: the resort as well as the wider the business community and the citizens. We used to log 50,000 more skier days than Jackson. Today, Jackson draws 100,000 more skier days than we do. That's a direct result of the community's support for an air-service program. This is the most important step our community can take to improve the economy.

**SVPN: What is the Resort's commitment to retaining and improving air service?**

**JS:** Airlines won't fly to markets like ours (small and seasonal) unless they are guaranteed a certain revenue level. They require Minimum Revenue Guarantees (MRGs) and you have to market in order to fill seats. Historically the Resort has carried the burden for these MRGs. But MRGs keep going up and our exposure keeps going up. We are still committed to continuing to pay 50 percent of all negotiations with airlines, 50% of the MRGs, and the marketing costs to support air service, but we can't continue with the amount of exposure we've had in the past without the support of the community. The Resort has been partnering with Fly Sun Valley Alliance and Visit Sun Valley and these partnerships have proven successful. We need to get the rest of the community invested in the success of the air program.

## THE 411 ON LOT



Two-thirds of visitors to the valley in the winter arrive here by air. More flights into the valley translates to more money for businesses in the valley. In November, voters will decide if they want to contribute to bringing more flights from more markets by voting on the 1% increase on the Local Option Tax.

According to Fly Sun Valley Alliance, our MRG expense currently runs about \$50 per visitor/2nd homeowner passenger, and each of those guests spend approximately \$1,700 with local businesses (lodging, shopping, dining, recreation, events, etc) during each visit—excluding expenditures on items such as real estate, construction, property mgmt, financial services, etc. A \$50 MRG investment per visitor air seat = \$1,700 in direct spending by each person per visit.

To pass the 1 percent increase on the LOT, 60 percent of voters have to vote Yes to Air, which only failed to pass in Ketchum and Hailey by a very narrow margin last year. Vote Yes to Air in November and do your share to improve the valley's economic outlook.