

SNOW FEVER GOVERNMENT CAMP: TURNING CHIC?**By Terry Richard**

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SNOW FEVER GOVERNMENT CAMP: TURNING CHIC?

Summary: Mount Hood's ski town spruces up for coming seasons

Be prepared to look twice when you pass through Government Camp for your first winter ski or snowboard trip of the season.

The sleepy town at the foot of Mount Hood is on the verge of becoming chic.

Who would've thought?

A beehive of activity during the summer has given Government Camp, the village at the 4,000-foot level on Mount Hood's south side, the start of a much-needed facelift. The construction made the town look more like Portland's Pearl or South Waterfront districts than a place where village dogs could safely nap in the middle of the street.

Oh, the town core still has same three restaurants that it's had for the past quarter-century. And the only new retail shops are ones that have taken the place of others.

But new amenities should follow next year as condos continue to sprout in Mount Hood's only ski town.

Whirlwind of change

For most of this summer, Government Camp was the scene of more construction than at any time since the building of Timberline Lodge in the 1930s. Clackamas County's 10-year tax increment financing plan for the unincorporated town of 300 year-round residents bore fruit this year by helping fuel these improvements:

* Collins Lake Resort, an upscale condo development with units priced around \$275,000, opened its first units in the center of town late this summer. While privately owned, many of the two-bedroom condos will be available for nightly rental. The first 26 are ready now, 53 more will come on line this winter and 123 more next year.

* Mt. Hood Skibowl, stepchild to the classier Mt. Hood Meadows and Timberline ski areas, has covered the pale blue outside walls of its three-day lodges with cedar siding. The new rock-and-brick entry at Skibowl West will have visitors wondering whether they have driven to Colorado without stopping at Mount Hood.

* The central core of the downtown loop road has newly paved streets, brick paver sidewalks and gutters without curbs. Those improvements may soon be hidden beneath the snow, but visitors will surely notice the \$12,000 street lamps and new welcoming signs. One thing they won't notice is utility wires, which have been placed underground.

* Building facades, ash-gray brick sidewalks and fire-suppression sprinklers have been partially funded by the county's urban renewal district, so several building owners took the bait. The famous Cascadian-style rock work, born nearly a century ago at Crater Lake and Mount Rainier national parks, will be readily apparent on facades around town. A good place to notice is Huckleberry Inn, the closest thing to a town gathering spot.

* A half-dozen residences and smaller condos are under construction on the south side of U.S. 26, a short way from the central core. There's even speculation that a central building lot, vacated since a 1969 fire, is ripe for development.

More change coming

As the new condos fill with overnight guests, there will inevitably come a need for more restaurants, retail stores and entertainment options beyond skiing. That will be the push for next year, town boosters predict.

"We've seen quite a rush of improvements," said Lloyd Musser, curator of the Mount Hood Cultural Center and Museum. "It used to be that you could walk into the street and pick up chunks of blacktop. Not any more. It won't look like a dust bowl up here next summer."

The summer season, when Mount Hood is the only place with chairlift-skiing in North America, has become a boom time at Government Camp. Having two busy seasons, with relatively short spring and fall shoulder seasons in between, has helped drive the town's residential market.

As a result, an increasing number of drivers are bound to veer off onto Government Camp's loop road and explore the village's small core.

They still will find Mount Hood's busiest tubing hill at Summit Ski Area, the twin mountains at Skibowl, one gas station, the brew pub at the village entrance and the three old-time restaurants in the village core. Until this winter, most lodging has been handled by the Mount Hood Inn motel, Huckleberry Inn lodge, Falcon's Crest Inn bed and breakfast, plus an assortment of vacation rentals and condos available through property managers.

In the past, most winter visitors to Mount Hood spent their time downhill skiing at Timberline and Meadows, or cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling in the surrounding forest. When they headed home to the Portland area, they passed Government Camp without a second glance.

That scenario should begin to change this winter, if only for the curious who want to see how well the brick-paver sidewalks survive their first winter of battle with the state snow plows.

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IF YOU GO

Lodging: Collins Lake Resort, 1-800-234-6288, www.stayandplayhood.com; Mount Hood Inn, 1-800-443-7777, www.mthoodinn.com; Falcon's Crest Inn, 800-624-7384, www.falconscrest.com; Huckleberry Inn, 503-272-3325, www.huckleberry-inn.com; Mount Hood Info Center for more options, 1-888-622-4822, www.mthood.info. (As of October, Government Camp is no longer a long-distance call from Portland.)

Dining: Charlie's Mountain View Restaurant, Ratskeller Pizza Pub, Huckleberry Inn and Restaurant are staples in the village core; the Mt. Hood Brew Pub is at the west end of the town loop.

Winter sports: Downhill skiing at Mt. Hood Skibowl and Summit; tubing at Skibowl, Summit and Snow Bunny; cross-country skiing and snowshoeing at Glacier View, Summit, Crosstown Trail and Trillium Basin.

The new resort: The chalets at Collins Lake Resort are three-story buildings in a townhouse style. The lower level is a two-car garage (lengthwise, not side-by-side), with washer and dryer. Steps lead to the main level, with a half-bath; full kitchen with gas range; small dining area; gas fireplace; living room big enough for sofa, chair and love seat; and an outside patio. The third level (models vary) has a master bedroom (queen bed), with sliding-door closet and bathroom with tub and shower; a hall closet; a bathroom with shower; a small bonus room for either a library or child's bedroom; and a second bedroom with small walk-in closet. Living space is 1,300 square feet. Ownership begins at \$275,000, nightly rentals at \$200. Sleeping capacity is 10. Developers are Kirk Hanna, owner of Mt. Hood Skibowl, and Junki Yoshida, a Portland businessman.

ILLUSTRATION: 2 color photos by TERRY RICHARD - The Oregonian

Photo Caption: Summary: Mount Hood's ski town spruces up for coming seasons

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