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The Alta Experience

Interview of:

VAN EDGETTE

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1 PROCEEDINGS

2 A. -- because otherwise I'm going to be --

3 Q. A lot of it also has to do with --

4 A. -- at classes.

5 Q. -- how, you know, Alta is -- I don't know.

6 It's a place where people are really tied to as far as,
7 you know, you've got local skiers here, that love Alta,
8 and people that have worked here for 35 years, and
9 families that come back year after year.

10 So it's -- it's kind of a special place.

11 A. It is special. It is a special place.

12 Q. And so, first, I'd like to --

13 Are we --

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yep.

15 Q. -- good to go?

16 First thing, say and spell your name so we
17 get that correctly.

18 A. My name is Van Edgette. V-A-N

19 E-D-G-E-T-T-E.

20 Q. And what's -- what's your position here at
21 Alta?

22 A. I'm the lift supervisor.

23 Q. In that capacity, Alta's kind of unique in
24 the ski industry, in that it's not -- you know, it's
25 not a real estate company. It's not in the business of

1 selling condos. The whole core operation is to get
2 people up the hill and to get them on the mountain.

3 Can you talk a little bit about, you know,
4 how that mission is served? And how you serve that
5 mission?

6 A. Well, like I was telling you before, our --
7 our job here is to --

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We need to stop. I
9 need to check your audio settings.

10 You sound funny.

11 Q. We're used to that. We get it.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All right. Sorry.
13 Just -- I was a little nervous there.

14 A. Yeah, me too.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'd rather have it --

16 Q. Scared us all.

17 We're never doing this again.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We're good.

19 Q. So we do have your name.

20 A. Yeah. Still the same.

21 Q. Talk a little bit about, you know, the -- I
22 guess the core mission of Alta is uphill -- you know,
23 get skiers uphill so they can come skiing downhill.

24 A. Right. Used to --

25 Well, you know, my job is to make sure that

1 people have a good time here, and, like I said, not get
2 in their way while they're trying to have a good time.

3 And if we can do that, if we can be
4 inconspicuous, and be helpful, and friendly, and, you
5 know, help them enjoy their stay, you know, it's --
6 it's a good thing for everybody.

7 You know, I mean, I -- I really love it up
8 here. The -- you know, to -- to be with people that
9 are just here to have a good time is great. You know,
10 it's not where you're around the prison, where people
11 aren't having a good time.

12 We're here to -- to party, and to exercise,
13 and --

14 You know, it's a -- it's a fit bunch of
15 people, usually. And -- and our mission is just to
16 help them have a good time, I think.

17 Q. Talk a little bit about -- you know, you've
18 been up here for 30, 35 years. Talk a little bit
19 about, you know, maybe how you got here, and why you
20 stay.

21 A. Well, back in the '70s I was part of the --
22 the hippie generation, and I -- I wound up in Salt Lake
23 back in the early '70s. And had a lot of friends here,
24 and still do.

25 But I was doing odd jobs. And I think what

1 really put me over the edge was I was hanging
2 insulation one summer, and I had a friend up here, and
3 he said, Hey, come on up here. It's -- it's easy.
4 All -- you don't have to do anything. And it's got a
5 warm place, and they feed you.

6 And I came up for the winter, and -- umm, it
7 wa -- you know, it wasn't too bad. I mean, had a room
8 and board. It was warm. I didn't ski very much, so I
9 did the jobs other people didn't want to do.

10 And so the next summer, since I was doing
11 the jobs no one wanted to do, they kind of put me on
12 for the summer. And I've been here ever since, so.

13 It worked out good that way.

14 Q. With that, talk a little bit about --
15 (inaudible) special place to you.

16 A. Well, the -- the company itself has been
17 really good to me. The people that have -- that I've
18 grown up here.

19 And the mountain is a special place to me.

20 You know, I -- my wife hates it, but I tell
21 her my job -- my job is better than your vacation, you
22 know, so.

23 Q. Actually, that deal was going through when
24 you said that, and I really like that quote.

25 So, you know, talk a little bit about that.

1 It's fun up here, and the fact, you know,
2 you're in the business of, I guess providing
3 entertainment. And, you know, people generally come up
4 here to have a good time, and so you're here to do
5 that, but.

6 A. Right.

7 Q. And then also in your job is kind of better
8 than most people's vacations.

9 A. Well, that's true.

10 I -- you know, like I said, we're here to --
11 to help people to have a good time. And there's a lot
12 of young kids here, and we're training them up, and we
13 grow our own here.

14 And so, you know, you know everybody around
15 you. And it's a slowly evolving process of people you
16 know. And people come back from 30 years ago that you
17 knew, and --

18 And, like I said, I was at a convention
19 once, and we were talking about jobs. And the guy up
20 there was talking -- it was a lift convention. And all
21 of the liftees are there. And like to say, Well, our
22 job is better than your vacation, so. You know.

23 And then, I have to admit, this is a
24 wonderful job. I wouldn't trade it. This is a --
25 the -- the ideal job, I think. For me.

1 Q. Talk about kind of the nuts and bolts of --
2 you know, you've seen -- when you were first here, have
3 you always been on lifts? Have you been kind of --

4 A. I've always been on lifts.

5 Q. So when you came here, was the -- the
6 Collins chair still -- the original Collins chair still
7 here?

8 A. No. That was gone. We -- Wildcat used to
9 be a -- basically the same place. Collins was an
10 older. Yon -- Yon built most of our lifts back then,
11 and we still have a few of the Yon doublechairs.

12 So the fixed grips. The grip doesn't come
13 off the cable when it comes around.

14 And we had some really older generation
15 lifts, but the old Collins single chair was gone when I
16 got here. You know.

17 Q. So -- but then they had that -- that Collins
18 chair that was beyond, that went up and --

19 A. Halfway up there to where Watsons is sort
20 of.

21 And then the old Germania chair started out
22 there, and went to the top, and --

23 They've kind of made those two lifts into
24 one lift here now, so.

25 Q. When the -- the Germ lift used to go up

1 Fred's slot?

2 A. Well, Fred's slot's --

3 Maybe it did at one time, but that was
4 before I got here.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. That was another realignment.

7 There was a lot going on before I got here.
8 I got here the winter that they actually built the new
9 lift line, and put the new Germ lift in. And that was
10 a Yon double, which would be ancient now, but.

11 Q. Right.

12 And was Sugarloaf in at that time?

13 A. There was a Sugarloaf lift. It was an old
14 hall lift. It has those old ramps that you had to
15 sidestep up, and ski down the big wooden ramps.

16 And those are all gone.

17 Q. I guess the era of -- you know, we still see
18 it over on Wildcat and on Supreme, with the fixed
19 clip -- the fixed grip chair.

20 You have to have somebody that swings the
21 chair and alines it to get the -- the skier in it.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Talk a little bit about, you know, maybe as
24 some -- some -- maybe some of the funnier things you
25 see. Like either people coming through and not

1 understanding that this chair doesn't detach. You
2 know, they've been in a detachable --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. What's your --

5 A. It's funny for the first couple of times,
6 and then it's not that funny anymore, when they start
7 getting nailed and --

8 And, you know, they have a -- they think
9 it's going to come through slow, but it comes through
10 pretty quick.

11 And you get the double release, where
12 they -- both her their skis are sitting on the ramp,
13 and they're up the lift a little ways, or --

14 Yeah, I've seen -- I thought I saw every
15 situation, but there's always something new that you
16 haven't seen before. You know, the -- the lady that
17 wants to know why her ski brakes aren't slowing her
18 down, or stuff like that, but.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's the funniest
20 shit.

21 Q. How about, I guess one thing that I -- you
22 know, as I --

23 I'm kind of the opposite side. I'm the
24 public that comes up here and skis.

25 And talk a little bit about what it takes to

1 kind of get the machinery going in the morning. You
2 know?

3 A. Well, this morn -- or this winter we've come
4 out early a lot.

5 When it snows, the patrol wants to go out
6 and control the avalanches. And we have to start the
7 lifts for them early.

8 And anyway, we need to -- to do the
9 detachables, you need to go in there in the morning and
10 prove all of the switches. And there's a thousand
11 moving parts in there that you have to check.

12 This is just a lot more you've got to do in
13 the morning. So you've got to come in early. We'll
14 roll in about 6:30. Go out about 7:00. And then we'll
15 work until 9:00 to get the lifts ready for -- you know,
16 just mechanically, for the people.

17 And if you -- if you're looking for tires
18 that are flat, or belts that aren't right, or any --
19 any number of little things. Yeah.

20 Q. And would that -- I guess, is there a -- you
21 know, the lifts start running here at 9:15.

22 A. Mm-hmm.

23 Q. Is there any pressure, you know, like on a
24 big powder day? What's --

25 You know, talk a little bit about what it's

1 like down in -- maybe down in the lift line at -- at
2 like -- I always call it Germ. But down at Collins,
3 you know, on a big powder day, and the excitement,
4 and --

5 A. Yeah. What's the term these days? Agro?
6 I don't know. I was just kind of --

7 There's -- there's a lot of -- yes, fever
8 going on about that time. They want to go. You know,
9 they're ready to go. And they're just in line.
10 They'll be chanting, or, you know, pushing their --
11 pushing forward. And they're just ready to go, and
12 they're waiting for the patrol to open things up.

13 And hopefully everything works well, and
14 the --

15 And once you get them going, everything kind
16 of smooths out, but.

17 Yeah, they -- you know, you've got them --
18 penned them up in the lift lines, and people don't like
19 to be penned up.

20 Q. Well, everyone should be first. I know I
21 should be first.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. I should be first.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. How about the new -- the new ticket system?

1 How's that working out?

2 A. I think it's working pretty well. The
3 people I've -- most of the people that know how it
4 works have got it dialed in. And they think it works
5 great, because you don't -- you don't have to deal with
6 anybody. You just walk through, the gate opens, and
7 you go on in.

8 But if you're not used to it, and you need a
9 little education on how it works, you -- you have --
10 you know, if your ticket is next to another ticket, or
11 if it's in your wallet, or if it's near a cell phone,
12 it may not work. So somebody -- somebody's got to
13 educate you a little bit and get you through the gates,
14 but.

15 So I think it's going to be an ongoing
16 process forever, because there's always somebody that
17 hasn't seen it yet.

18 But once -- once you get used to it, it's
19 really smooth.

20 Q. What's the -- I guess, what is the -- what's
21 the most rewarding part of your job?

22 A. Well, being -- being up here, in the --
23 being outdoors. Working -- working outdoors, on the
24 mountain.

25 The people I've worked with for years and

1 years. I've got people here I've worked with for the
2 33 years I've been here.

3 And the company's really treated me well.
4 It's been like Mother Alta here.

5 When you've got a problem, it's everybody's
6 problem, and they help you out.

7 I just -- I don't know. I love it here.

8 Like I said, this is the ideal job. I
9 wouldn't trade it for anything.

10 Q. That's nice.

11 I guess only one more question I have is,
12 Alta -- there's something special about Alta. You
13 know, there's certain skiers that only ski here at
14 Alta.

15 Why do you think that there's that kind of
16 customer loyalty here?

17 A. I don't know. I'd like to think it's
18 because they know some of the people that have been
19 here a long time. It's all part of the -- the family.

20 They -- they like it -- I don't know, the
21 attitude here. It's kind of laid -- it's a little more
22 laid back. It's maybe not quite so corporate as some
23 other places.

24 Certainly the -- a lot of the attendants
25 change every year. And you're not going to see all of

1 the same faces, but a lot of the times you'll see some
2 faces you've known for a long time.

3 I -- I don't go to a whole lot of other
4 places, but it seems like our operation is pretty
5 tight. And I guess people have a good time, so they
6 come back.

7 Q. Nice.

8 Do you know -- do you know Andy Walker, and
9 his brother Tom?

10 They used to -- their parents ran Watsons
11 for a long time, and then they started the Alpine Glow.
12 But I think that was --

13 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

14 Q. -- back in the '60s.

15 A. Neff.

16 Q. Yeah, Neff.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Do you know his sons Andy and Thomas?

19 A. Ahh, you know, I knew Neff and Shirlee, but
20 I don't think I knew his sons.

21 Q. I guess -- do you know -- you know what, one
22 question I would like.

23 You worked with Chick, right?

24 A. Yeah. Yeah. He was the general manager
25 before Onno.

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1 Q. Let's talk a little bit about what a
2 character Chick Morton was.

3 A. Chick was -- he -- he was the guy you really
4 didn't want to go in and have to talk to. You know?
5 I mean, he was -- he was rough on the outside, but he
6 was golden on the inside. You know, but.

7 He could be pretty -- pretty rough on you
8 sometimes.

9 And Onno --

10 I don't know if Onno told you this or not.
11 Before -- before he'd ever go into Chick's office, he'd
12 throw his hat in there. And if the hat came flying
13 back out, he wouldn't go in.

14 Q. How about -- was Buck Sasaki was still
15 working up here?

16 A. Sasaki was --

17 Q. He worked --

18 A. He had my job when I first got here.

19 Q. And so you worked for him?

20 A. I worked for him for a long time.

21 Q. And he worked for -- I mean, he worked under
22 Fred Spire.

23 A. Fred Spire. I never knew Fred Spire.

24 Q. Yeah, Fred was way back in the day. And
25 he'd -- he finished here in I think 1960. And then

1 Chick took over from him.

2 But he was one of the -- he was one of the
3 few people that you'd meet that worked for Fred, Chick,
4 and Onno.

5 A. He's still around.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. And I talked to him a couple of weeks ago.
9 We haven't interviewed him yet. But he talked a little
10 bit about maybe how there is a -- kind of a continuum.
11 You know. Like you learned from Buck, and, you know,
12 there's probably people learning from you. And that
13 went back to Fred Spire, who ran the original lift.

14 A. I would like to think so. You know, I'd
15 like to think I learned a lot from those guys.

16 Just maybe the work ethic, and just -- you
17 know, we wouldn't go out and buy anything new.

18 You'd have to fabricate it in the shop, and
19 make it go again, and --

20 And maybe some of that's carrying over, but
21 some of the new lift guys, the maintenance guys want to
22 buy everything new, and it's -- I'm -- I'm kind of in
23 the middle of that.

24 But, yeah. I think the work ethic is -- I
25 got from those guys has been good.

1 Hans Brogel was the old German assistant
2 lift manager, and Buck Sasaki. The axis powers.

3 Q. And then I guess Hans, he just -- he just
4 died --

5 A. He died a couple years ago, yeah.
6 He was a really great guy.

7 Q. And I know -- do you know Kenny Louie?

8 A. Oh, yeah. He's here every day.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Goll.

11 Q. Because he's Buck's -- he's Buck's nephew.

12 A. Oh, yeah. There's a whole clan there,
13 that --

14 Joe Okamora used to run Wildcat forever.

15 He's --

16 Les Fuller, all those guys.

17 Q. Well, it was really funny, when we were
18 talking with Neff's son Andy yesterday, he was talking
19 about Joe Wildcat.

20 A. Yeah, that was Joe Okamora. Yeah.

21 Q. And so, you know, they'd get the -- they'd
22 had the phone crank system, and call you up on the --
23 you know, with one -- he said that their call was one
24 long -- one short, one long, or whatever it turned out
25 to be. And they had been partying in Watsons all

1 night.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. And they'd get the call.

4 A. Three rings, Neff's on his way.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 Can you talk -- can you recount any of that
7 at all?

8 A. I remember that, yeah. I remember Neff,
9 and --

10 I remember the old crank phones we used to
11 have. And there was a -- there was a code.

12 You know, you didn't use it too much, but,
13 yeah, if you wanted to warn those guys that Neff was
14 coming up, or you wanted to order a burger or something
15 like that, they had a code for all of that stuff.

16 If those guys wanted to come up early, come
17 out early in the morning and get first runs, they'd
18 bring you -- you know, they'd come out and bring you
19 some hamburgers and french fries, and come down and hop
20 on the lift early, and --

21 They used to go ski the chutes almost every
22 night. Just hike up, but.

23 Q. Because I remember seeing tracks in the
24 morning sometimes, and wondering, who the -- who put
25 those in?

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1 A. Yeah. You --

2 Q. Because they haven't been opened for --

3 A. Yeah. You know who did it.

4 Q. Did you do it?

5 A. Nah, too lazy. Take the lift up. That's
6 what lifts are for.

7 Q. So, over the years, I guess your skiing's
8 probably progressed a little bit, huh?

9 A. Yeah. I never skied when I came here, so --
10 I ski quite a bit now, and that's one of the
11 things that really holds me here. I really love to
12 ski.

13 Q. Well, nice. I --

14 Any -- any special ar -- unsung hero,
15 Alta-type character that you know of?

16 A. Well, we were talking about Hans Brogel.
17 And he was a character that really had a -- he had an
18 affect on me.

19 I mean, I came up here in '73, '74, and --
20 and I said -- and I'd never met him before. But when I
21 did, you know, he had a thick German accent. And he'd
22 been in the Hitler Youth Corps, and he came over here,
23 and he worked in the ski industry forever.

24 And I said, Hans, you've got to give me a
25 job so I don't go on welfare. And that -- that did it.

1 He had to -- he had to hire me after that,
2 because he couldn't see -- stand to see anybody not
3 working, and be on welfare, or anything like that.

4 And -- and he -- you know, his -- his wife
5 was the lifts, and on the weekends he'd be up on the
6 top of Wildcat fixing something.

7 And he's -- he's just a special guy to me.
8 I'm sorry to see him go, but --

9 I remember him fondly.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. And, I don't know, if you could dig up a
12 little more dirt about him, he -- he's a really
13 interesting guy.

14 Q. Yeah. I -- I've only read a little bit
15 about him. That's in that Dick Duane Shrons book.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Not too much. You know, there's just like a
18 little mention of him. Not a whole lot.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. I think I've got everything.

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. But --

23 (Whereupon, the recording
24 was concluded.)

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