Keystone MAGAZINE

2011–12

SHARING A CHAIR WITH PARK PRO JOSSI WELLS

ULTIMATE FOUR

The Perfect Learning Program

IN SEARCH OF KEYSTONE'S HISTORIC SOUL

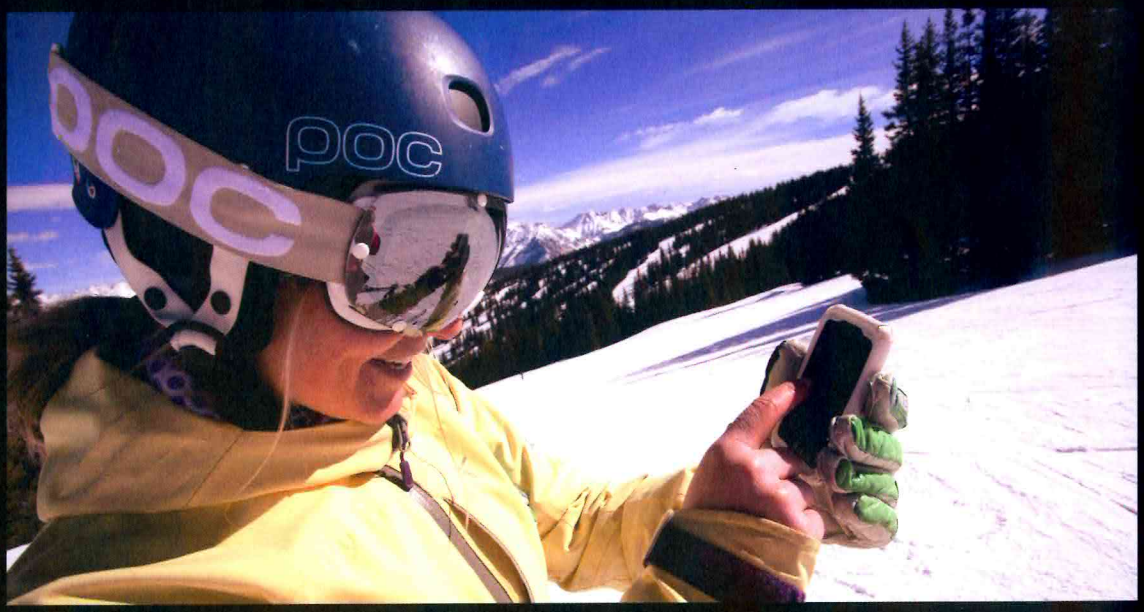
YOUR FAMILY VACATION MADE EASY

30+ Ways to Max Your Stay

THE EPIC (MIX) EXPERIENCE

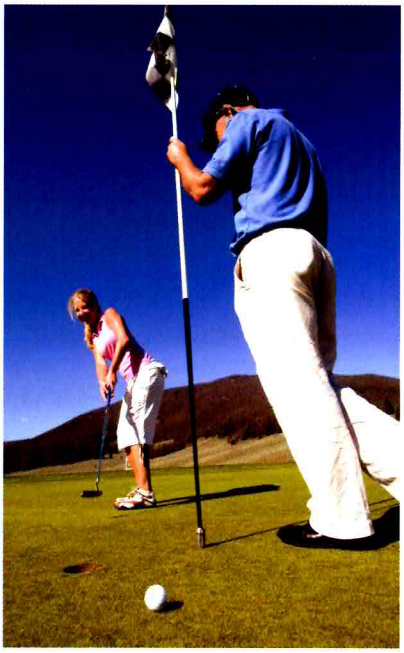
Social Media Revolutionizes Skiing & Riding at Keystone

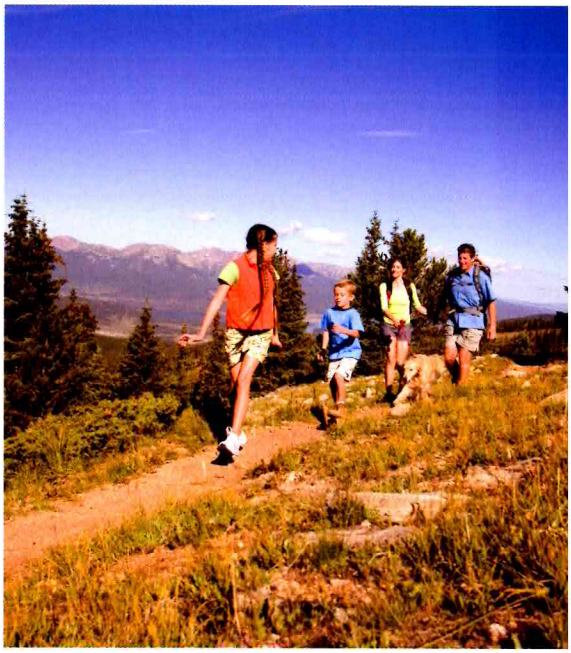
THE EPIC EXPERIENCE



There really is an app for everything these days – including one called EpicMix for sharing your ski experience with vertical feet tallied, mountains skied, and achievements (in the form of "pins") made. But beyond the social aspect, a slew of Keystone families is finding it a useful tool to shape their ski experiences.

: : BY KRISTIN LUNA





> SUMMER KIDTOPIA

There's no lack of family and kid entertainment come summertime. The Kidtopia Kidzfest at River Run's Events Plaza runs four select Saturdays in the summer from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The free family fun includes a petting zoo, train rides, caricature drawing, face painting, balloon artists, crafts, mascots, and much more. Also part of Summer Kidtopia are the free Kids Discovery Days, held every Tuesday in the Events Plaza from late June through August. The entertainer, which starts at 11 a.m., changes weekly and varies from circus acts to magic and puppet shows to children's music performances. It's followed by a face painter or balloon artists from 12 to 1:30 p.m.

> ADVENTURE CENTER

When you're looking for an active day but can't get everyone to agree on where to begin, head to the Adventure Center (keystoneresort.com, 970-496-7103) in the Lakeside Village. Rent a paddleboat, canoe, or kayak for puttering around on the five-acre Keystone Lake, or stay on dry land with bike rentals for the whole family. When lunch rolls around, grab a bite at the center's restaurant to catch your breath while enjoying views of the Continental Divide across the Dillon Reservoir. Afterward, let the kids rule the arcade. Other daily activities include nature hikes and bike clinics.

> KEYSTONE STABLES

Ride with real cowboys at the Keystone Ranch (keystoneresort.com, 800-354-4386; call Keystone Activities & Dining at 800-258-9553 to book) on the one- or two-hour guided horseback tours that weave through the Arapaho National Forest. An experienced wrangler shares the history of the area (the ranch used to be a lettuce farm) as he or she leads you around the trails with vistas of the Continental Divide. Riders are matched with horses appropriate to their riding experience, and children between the ages of 3 and 7 years old can take a 15-minute pony ride around the corral.

> HIKING

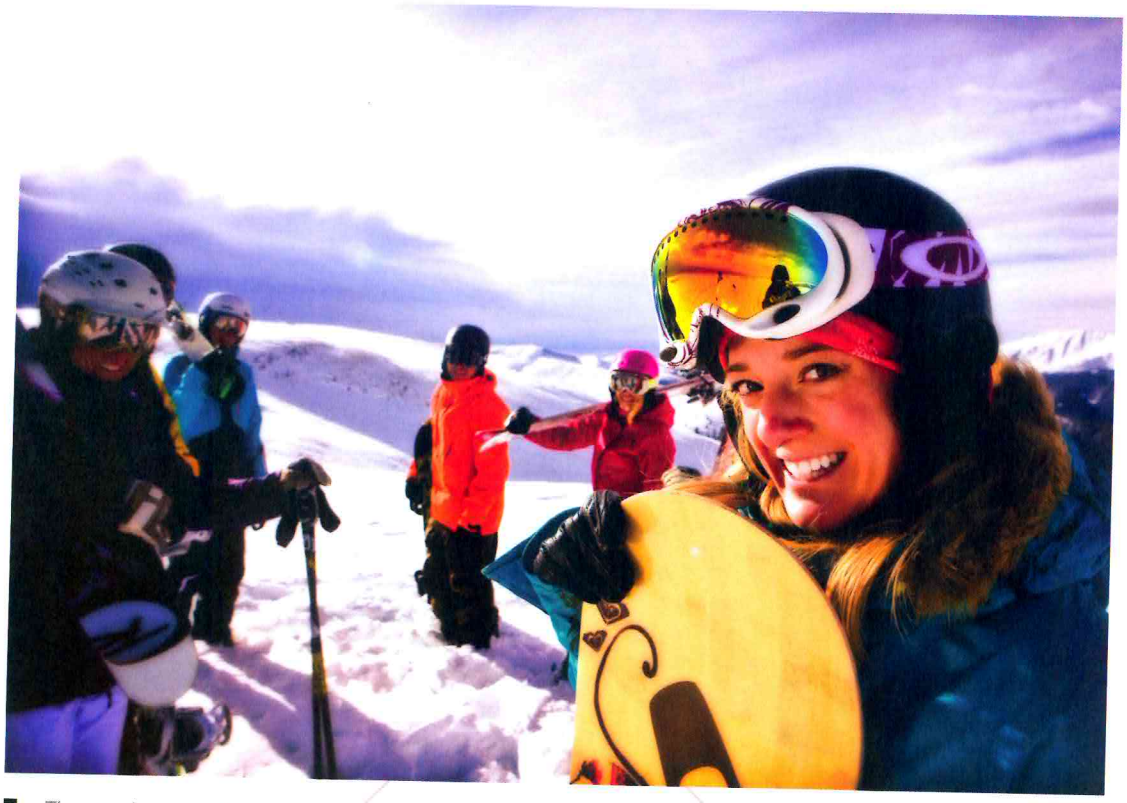
Keystone's high alpine environment near the Continental Divide is threaded with hiking trails. Take a Nordic hike (keystoneresort.com, 800-258-9553) using poles. Radical Hill in Montezuma is a six-mile hike with 1,500 feet of elevation gain suitable for families. Bring lots of water and your leg muscles on the Lenawee Trail, off Peru Creek Road in Keystone, which climbs 3,500 feet in just over three miles. You can also pick up the Colorado Trail off Clear Creek Road (coloradotrail.org) for a trek with a length of your choosing.

> KEYSTONE SCIENCE SCHOOL

Since 1975, kids have come from all over the world to the Keystone Science School (keystone.org/cfe/kss, 970-468-2098) – located by the Keystone Stables – to engage in hands-on science education and true Colorado adventure. Along with college and teen retreats, residential-style school trip programs, and community outreach events, there are also weeklong overnight camps, each with its own theme (like mammalogy and etymology). For kids who are only staying for a few days or who aren't quite ready for the overnight experience, there are also themed day camps, like Summit Safari and Medieval Musical Mayhem. Camp sessions run from Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

> DILLON RESERVOIR

Although this reservoir, five miles west of Keystone and at an elevation of 9,017 feet, doesn't allow swimming, there's no lack of water activities. The Dillon Marina (townofdillon.com, 970-468-5100), on the northern side of the reservoir, offers motorboat, pontoon, kayak, and sailboat rentals for two, three, four, and eight hours. The reservoir stretches to Frisco, and from the water, you're treated to views of Peak 1, the northernmost of the 10 peaks in the Ten Mile Range. ■



The question isn't what run or lift to hit next, but which pin you and your group might earn as a result; (opposite) checking your vertical feet and on-mountain achievements is as easy as pulling out your smartphone.

You get your world news from Twitter. You make dinner reservations based on Yelp reviews. You see pictures of your latest family reunion thanks to Facebook. It's 2011, and the world revolves around social media, so why shouldn't your ski day, too?

Praise the ski gods: It can. During the 2010–11 season, Vail Resorts (the umbrella company that owns Keystone) unveiled a custom web-based program called EpicMix. Like other social media outlets such as Gowalla or Facebook, this digital application is all about sharing a user's experience with others, but instead of revealing your favorite music or what you did last night, it's mountain specific – in the form of mountains visited, days on the mountain, or the amount of vertical feet cleared in one day. Just think of it like swapping ski tales during après over a beer with ski buds or hot cocoa with your family, but instead, it's online and accessible to more people than usual.

So how does it manage to track data? When a Vail Resorts season pass or PEAKS card – embedded with a radio frequency–enabled chip (a type of technology that detects guests' passes automatically) – is scanned, EpicMix captures the user's progress (there are no required check-ins, like other apps). The user (anyone with a pass can sign up for a free EpicMix account) can then log on to the application via a computer or smartphone to access data from each day on the mountain.

Much like Twitter, EpicMix is laid out in a feed, starting with your most recent activity. At the top of the page, there's a chart that tracks your vertical feet and total number of points (which are earned by gaining vertical feet). There are also boxes that share how many days you've spent on the mountain, pins earned (icons that automatically post to your page when you make a particular on-mountain achieve-

The Keystone Conquerors

In early March, three skiers – Dean Pierringer, 70, Mary Pollack, 64, and Bill Smith, 79 – set out to grab the ultimate bragging rights by earning the Keystone Conqueror pin, hitting all 20 lifts at Keystone, in record time. It involved mapping out the most effective route days before by talking to lift operators and mountain safety staff members. They even set group rules, like "Removing skis other than for food or bathroom breaks is unacceptable" and "The first person waits no longer than 30 seconds on any run for the last person in the group to arrive at the appointed lift." Harsh, eh? Well, it worked: They grabbed the record time of 2 hours and 22 minutes. Unfortunately, victory was only fleeting; a friend got wind of their route and completed it in 1 hour 56 minutes the very next day. But even short-lived glory is still glorious.

You're awarded the coveted Keystone Conqueror pin once you hit all 20 of Keystone's chairlifts; (opposite) the application tracks users' activities thanks to radio frequency technology at the base of lifts that scans their season passes, PEAKS cards, or hard cards.

ment), and resorts most visited. You can even check what's called "the leaderboard" (a page that showcases the top skiers and riders with the most points) to see how you rank against others, both at Keystone and across all of the five other participating Vail Resorts (Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Heavenly, and Northstar-at-Tahoe). Tallying 55 billion vertical feet last season, nearly 100,000 users activated EpicMix.

I was one of them. As a frequent traveler, a ski fanatic, and a social media addict (I've been on Facebook since its beta phase in 2004; I blog, I Tweet, I Flickr, I Tumble), I'm the kind of person for whom EpicMix was invented. I activated an account for my home mountain, Heavenly, the first week the program premiered. Then, in the spring, during a quick weekend vacation with my husband, I got to try it out at Keystone – a handy thing to have since I had never skied here before.

On that first day alone, EpicMix showed me that I rode Montezuma five times and earned the Lock N' Key pin (for my inaugural visit to the resort). I also received the North Peak pin (for riding every lift on the peak) when my husband didn't, giving me my first bragging rights. That really seems to be the beauty of these pins: Not only do they propel you to make certain on-hill achievements, but they act as digital pats on the back once you do reach those goals. But I'm not the only one glowing over Keystone's social media advances. It seems that families from all over the country – and from around the globe – are the ones reaping the lot of its varied benefits.

Craig and Caron Elston and their children, Joshua, 9, and Grace, 8, have been skiing at Keystone for four winters, ever since relocating to Colorado from London. Craig adopted the application into his skiing routine early in the season; his kids were able to jump on the bandwagon once EpicMix Kids (a version of the program designed for kids with unique pins only they can earn) premiered in March. And while it may have been the tail end of the season at that point, that didn't stop them from making the most of it.

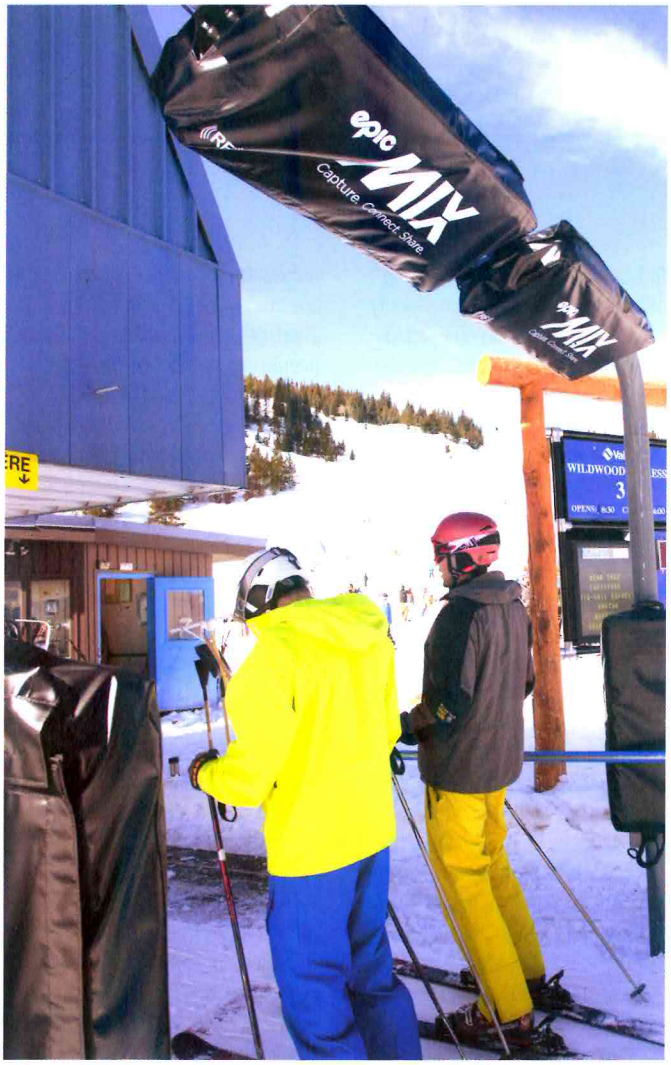
"It serves as a reminder of what you did and achieved and helps to bring different levels of ability together," says Craig. For the Elstons, it quickly sparked a friendly rivalry within the family, in which they would compete for particular pins or the most runs made or even the most challenging terrain

tackled. "Our son in particular very much saw it as a competition," says Craig, "but I guess, so did Caron," he adds.

It had the same effect on my husband and me. At night, we'd log on and compare our different accolades – pins earned, runs taken, etc. Sometimes, there would be a difference in our vertical feet of anywhere from 10 to 1,000 – he always held the most (which would only fuel me the next day). Craig agrees: "It challenged us to do more than we normally might, like trying to tackle all the lifts in a day or doing one more run to get to the next level in point terms."

And the best part is that families are doing it together. Decades ago, a roaring fire in the base lodge would be enough to draw families together for stories about their day on the slopes, but these days, family interaction is harder to come by with the young generations ever-so-busy updating their Facebook statuses or parking themselves in front of the TV. Ironically, the type of technology that seems to have isolated kids is now bringing them back into the fold.

Since kids and teens tend to be more technologically savvy than adults, EpicMix helps that knowledge flow. During a family vacation



Put a Pin on It

Shape your ski day by pursuing these Keystone-specific pins.

Lock N' Key

Your first visit to Keystone.

Key Summit

Rode the Outback Express two times.

Outback

Rode the Outback Express five times in one day.

North Peak

Tackled every lift on North Peak.

Dercum

Spent 50 days in one season at Keystone.

Key Pow

Hit Keystone when the resort had a six-inch snow check-in.

Lock Smith

Spent 10 days in one season at Keystone.

Skeleton Key

Spent 25 days in one season at Keystone.

Go Figure

Stats from EpicMix's inaugural 2010–11 season.

1,389

Number of cumulative ski days spent at Keystone by the top 10 ranking users on the leaderboard.

epic MIX™

107,475

Vertical feet accumulated in one day at Keystone by the top male skier (on March 2nd). The top female grabbed 76,011 vertical feet only a few days later on March 6th.

100,000

Number of users who activated the app.

9,889,673,248

Vertical feet racked up by Keystone skiers and riders – not bad for its first year.

to Keystone last season, Lesley Sauls of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, learned how to use the program with the help of her two daughters (Carly, 8, and Maggie, 10). "In the daytime, I taught my kids how to use the mountain, and in the evening, they taught me how to track our progress."

Calling EpicMix "this century's conversation catalyst" for kids and parents, Sauls says EpicMix enhances the traditional joy of the skiing experience by allowing people to bond over the day. She adds that the application not only brought her closer to her daughters, but also prompted her to improve her own skiing, encouraging her to try new runs and check out different spots on the hill.

I found the same to be true. I've always been a more conservative skier, sticking to the advanced blues, but never really pushing my limits – that is, not willingly venturing into black terrain all that often. But once I started using EpicMix religiously, I was tired of seeing the same old lifts appear on my dashboard – at Keystone, it was primarily Montezuma, which covers much of the front side of the mountain. As a result, I'd take Mozart, a long, sloping blue trail, and head for the back side, comprised of mostly blacks, to ride the Santiago Express, Wayback, Outpost Gondola, and Ruby Express to pick up the North Peak pin. I challenged myself, had a rip-roaring good time doing so, and diversified my dashboard – all in one afternoon.

And, now, there are more ways to orient your days thanks to new upgrades with this season's premier of EpicMix 2.0, the biggest one being photo capabilities. Professional EpicMix photographers (look for them in the green EpicMix jackets) are on hand all around the resort – like in the villages, Ski & Ride School, and the snow fort at the top of Dercum, among other places – for snapping family photos, and scanning an EpicMix user's pass to automatically upload the images to the guest's account. The low-resolution versions are available for free for digital distribution and social posting on Facebook or Twitter, while high-resolution images can be purchased.

Users are also able to use their iPhone or Droid to take pictures and upload them directly to their accounts. They can also use their photos to create something called a "Remix" collage, basically a handful of their favorite mountain photos combined with digital achievements (i.e. particular pins and vertical feet tallied) in one singular snapshot or collage. Think of it as summarizing your vacation in one quick photo.

Other features that were rolled out this winter include some redesigning of the site and internal applications, archiving of all the previous year's data, and new pins across all mountains (including some specifically for families and kids). There are also advances in the way people can connect on the site (for example: friends and families can send messages to one another) and integration with other social media sites, allowing guests to share their pins and stats through updates on Twitter and Facebook.

My short-lived time in Colorado was only enough to give me a taste of Keystone via my quick EpicMix tour. I didn't even come close to conquering the 20 lifts and 135 trails or collecting as many pins as I would have liked. (Next season, I'm going for the Keystone Conqueror pin, riding every lift in one day.) I did, however, manage to tackle a whole lot of the dining territory in River Run and Lakeside villages at the end of each tiring day on the mountain. Now if only there were points and pins for that – I would most definitely hover around the top of *that* leaderboard. ■