

Water park is among great new improvements at Jay

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JANUARY 13, 2012 12:08 PM



The Pump House at Jay Peak Resort is roughly the size of a football field and several stories high, with capacity for 900 water lovers.

Photograph by: Jay Peak Resort, Jay Peak Resort

Heading to Jay Peak Resort? Pack your boots, boards – and bathing suit.

Bill Stenger, Jay's president and co-owner, has changed the game in ski area development by taking on Mother Nature. Having transformed a down-home, vintage area over the past two years into a snazzy snow and golf resort in the wilds of northern Vermont, Stenger wants more. He intends to guarantee a terrific holiday even if the slopes are bare or the fairways soggy.

With the opening this month of the Hotel Jay and Conference Centre and the Pump House Water Park last month, the resort has created a weatherproof vacation, complete with a tunnel that connects two hotels, shops, restaurants and a super-cool video arcade. Heading in one direction, kids and parents wrapped in bathrobes over bathing suits are flip-flopping to pools and surfing waves. Others bundled up in parkas and boots are trundling over to the slopes and snow parks.

Jay's main climate-

controlled feature is the dazzling Pump House, a \$25-million indoor recreation centre. Roughly the size of a football field and several stories high, the Pump House has a capacity for 900 water lovers. Adventurers can't get enough of the rollicking tube riding, powerful surfing waves and La Chute, a

series of thrilling loops for body sliding and chilling free-falls. If that is all too wild, the Pump House mellows out with wading pools, kids' play areas and the laid-back Big River for gentle cruising, all in soothing water temperatures of about 29C. There's also a Caribbean-inspired poolside scene with patio tables, private cabanas and The Drink, a bar where the specials are cherry sodas for youngsters and margaritas for grown-ups.

Hotel Jay and the Pump House are only two elements in Jay's sweeping,

\$240-million development. Within two years, the area has added slopeside condos; the deluxe Tram Haus Lodge with a spa and the stylish Alice's Table; the Ice Haus, an NHL-sized arena for year-round skating, ice shows and hockey; and a Nordic Centre. A golf course opened in 2006.

It all started more than 50 years ago with a mountain that cultivated some of the edgiest downhill terrain in the east.

The centrepiece of the new resort is Hotel Jay, a huge contemporary timber lodge, steps from the ski lifts and loaded with family features. The video arcade whirrs and jangles like a mini-Vegas for kids. The family room is a quieter play area with a crafts corner and televisions, and the daycare centre's busy schedule includes movies, educational games, reading and naps. Hotel Jay also is resurrecting the ski-ride week with nightly happenings: a welcome reception on Mondays, snow-groomer rides on Tuesdays, tours of a maple farm on Wednesdays and a party for the ski school graduates on Thursdays.

Hotel Jay's 172 studios and one-to-three-bedroom apartments can accommodate 800 guests, many times more than the capacity of the old resort. They're functional, bright and convenient, with minimalist contemporary decor, spacious balconies, inviting white duvets, Murphy bed and bunks for the kids and compact designer kitchens for "cooking in." Or, families on a modest budget can fuel up at Mountain Dick's Pizzeria. Inching upscale, the Foundry Pub & Grille serves hearty beef stew, burgers, flatbreads and après-ski cocktails like the Fever Toddy, a steaming brew of maple-

infused bourbon distilled in the mountains of Vermont.

The investment in the Pump House already has paid off. Even with a lamentable snowfall around Christmas-time, Jay's lodging increased by one-third over last year, due to the wildly popular water park. Still, the resort's roots are in snow sports and Stenger's plans include an overhaul of the skiers' chalet at Stateside next year and a new mountain face, the West Bowl, with 22 new trails, three lifts and another hotel, all by 2016.

In summer, Hotel Jay's guests will frolic in the new outdoor swimming pool. The Foundry will serve al fresco on café terraces and the Pump House's retractable roof will roll back for an open-air beach party, all depending on good weather. Even if Mother Nature doesn't co-operate, Bill Stenger will prevail.

If You Go

Jay, Vt., is a two-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 east to exit 90 and Route 243 to the U.S border past Highwater.

Hotel Jay and Conference Center & Jay Peak Resort: 800-451-4449, jaypeakresort.com, Route 242, Jay, Vt.

Prices:

(Valid until April 30, but fluctuate according to date and availability. Canadian dollars accepted at par, with cash only.)

Splash & Stay package: with Pump House, Ice Haus, daycare (reservations essential), starts at \$59 p.p., per night, quadruple occ., for four adults in a studio, or \$107 p.p., double occ. Ski & Splash & Stay: adds lifts and mid-week lessons for adults, starting at \$94 p.p., quadruple occ., or \$142 p.p. double occ. One-to-three-bedroom apartments also available. Depending on the package and how many people are in the unit, children 14 and under ski, stay and "splash" for free.

Pump House (without lodging): \$35 for ages 15 and over; \$25 for ages 4-14. Free for kids 3 and under. Splash-and-Ski, \$79 for adults and \$69 for juniors.

Ski-Snowboard: 385 acres plus 100 off-trail acres; 656-metre (2,153 ft.) vertical; three snowparks; tickets, \$75 (Can.) for adults. With a season pass to any North American area, an adult ticket costs \$47. With the new frequent-points 581 Card, adults pay \$50 and juniors (6-18), \$35.

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