

Snap Judgment

WITH US

• • **Family Flex**
 Props to Sun Peaks for recognizing that not all families are two-parent/two-kid (dog optional) units, by offering a Single Parent Family Season Pass.



• • **Over Board**
 Lindsey Vonn told a national radio show that it would be "super great" if skiers and boarders could have "a little separation." Separate trails? Separate mountains? Unclear. But either way, we're not buying in.



• • **White Lies**
 And this is why we can't have nice things... Tiny Hogadon Ski Area in Wyoming rescinded its discounted first-timer season pass because it found out a large slice of applicants were lying in order to qualify. C'mon, people.

AGAINST US



First fulfilling work requirements of laptops and beer, Chris Helm (left) and Brendan Heberton get to work on their hobby of helping you find the fluffy stuff.

face shot

The Freshy Factor

Two software engineers—and self-proclaimed weather nerds—from Colorado go live to reboot the way you plan your powder days.

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

IT'S A POWDER DAY AT YOUR HOME RESORT AND THE snow report trumpets 16 inches of sweet fluff in the past 24 hours. Brilliant. But then you get there, wait in a Saturday-morning lifeline as thick as L.A. traffic, and discover all those face shots have vanished. What's up? The truth is, resort snow reports don't always offer up the fact that 14 of those 16 inches fell on Friday afternoon, while a few locals snatched up all the goods. And consequently, it's a, grrr, hardpack Saturday morning.

So two software engineers from Colorado set out to create a better way to determine how much snow you'll be dropping into on any given day. In 2012, Chris Helm and Brendan Heberton launched FreshyMap.com, a real-time map of every ski area in Colorado—since expanded to the U.S. and some international locations—that crunches numbers from all over the internet to calculate the live "Freshy Factor" at each resort.

"There were no real-time data feeds happening," says Helm. "We wanted to know what's happening on the mountain right now. We want the liftie's perspective: Is it dumping? When did it start? When you live in a ski town, you have access to that. But if you live in Denver or San Francisco, or away from the mountain that's a mystery."

To solve that problem, Helm, 35, and Heberton, 29, who met working at Colorado's National Renewable

FROM TOP: BAILEY LARUE; ISTOCKPHOTO/VISUALCOMMUNICATIONS; ADOBE STOCK/MAJIVECKA

Fresh

➤ Energy Laboratory, designed a search engine that scrapes data from hundreds of sites, including resorts, and local and national weather centers. They put that data through their own algorithm, which takes into account the 24-hour snowfall, five-day numbers, time of day, and day of the week (Saturday mornings get tracked out quicker than Tuesday afternoons).

They plot the numbers on a map, and presto: You can now identify the resorts with the highest possibility of having a real powder day. You can also access live webcams, forecasts, and the latest Instagram snaps from that location. “Think of FreshyMap as a big snow robot,” Heberton says.

Helm, a lifelong skier, set out to build the site for his own use, so he could plan ski trips more accurately from afar. “Originally, it was a selfish thing to do,” Helm says. “My friends and I like to travel and go skiing. But then it became more about: Wouldn’t it be cool if we did this and that?”

Heberton, for his part, isn’t much of a skier, but he is a total weather geek. “I’m one of these people who won’t sleep when there’s a big snowstorm coming,” says Heberton, who also runs a Denver weather blog. “I used to think I was alone in that, but I realize now that other people obsess about the weather too.”

Combined, they made the perfect pair. Both Helm and Heberton still maintain nine-to-five jobs and work on FreshyMap on the side. Now four years in, their site still doesn’t generate any revenue—there are no ads and all the information is free.

“We want FreshyMap to be our full-time job,” says Helm. “Maybe if we were better at business, it could be.” ●



EB-5 financing helped fund popular resort projects, such as the Pump House water-park at Vermont’s Jay Peak resort, which has become a successful four-season attraction.

trends

Can the EB-5 Program Be Saved?

Rich foreign investors helped fund Vermont skiing. But that might not be enough to keep the troubled, but often successful, initiative alive.

BY JOE CUTTS

NEAR MOUNT SNOW, VT., THERE’S A VERY large hole in the ground. Right now it looks like an ugly mess, but it’s the start of a transformational project at the resort. That hole will eventually hold enough water to supply a sixfold increase in Mount Snow’s snowmaking capacity. The resort also plans to build a new lodge at the base of its Carinthia Peaks area.

But last summer Mount Snow announced that construction had stopped. The problem: access to funds. The money for the project, \$52 million, had already been raised from foreign investors who hoped to become U.S. citizens through the controversial EB-5 Foreign Investment Act. All that remained was final approval from federal regulators, who held the funds in escrow pending determination that none of the money had been illegally gained. Mount Snow’s parent company, Peak Resorts, used \$12 million of its own funds to start the West Lake project. It expected to have its EB-5 capital in time to keep the project moving during the summer.

However, last spring, the landscape changed, and the EB-5 program, which once looked like a golden goose for ski resorts looking to finance major capital improvements, may not have a future. On April 13, more than a dozen investigators, including attorneys and forensic accountants from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, showed up unannounced at Jay Peak Resort. They were there to investigate allegations of stunning fraud in Jay Peak’s owner’s use of the EB-5 program.

Jay Peak and its owner, the Miami businessman Ariel Quiros, and its president, Bill Stenger, had long been held up as shining examples of EB-5’s success at creating jobs and stimulating economic development. Stenger, in particular, was the acknowledged master, and he became the face of the program in New England ski country. Vermont’s governor once called him “the Michelangelo of EB-5.” Traveling the globe, he had raised funds to fuel a massive redevelopment of Jay, along with the acquisition and redevelopment of