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Vail Establishes Itself as a Trendsetter... Again

One of the country's premier resort communities implements a comprehensive new civic wayfinding program

Traverse City, MI — Boasting world-class winter recreation opportunities, the largest free bus system in the nation, and the highest percentage of "open space" at any resort community, Vail, Colorado has once again positioned itself as a civic leader by implementing a community-wide vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding system. The new system of signs and village maps reflects Vail's uniquely European character and allows visitors and natives alike to effortlessly navigate the area. Corbin, a leader in the field of environmental graphic design based in Traverse City, Michigan, developed the program incorporated throughout the town over a two-year process.

"Society has a growing need for information, and if a town can help provide that, it's doing its job," said Jeffrey Corbin. "The clear access to information in any community helps create a positive experience for community members and visitors."

Down to the regulatory signs, the new wayfinding system was carefully crafted to reflect Vail's European character. Six villages were identified and assigned names and unique colors to indicate their locations from the Interstate highway that bisects the Gore River Valley. "Mountain portal" signage was developed to direct skiers who may take a lift up one slope only to ski down another and into a different village. The signage is also tailored to support the town's pedestrian focus, where visitors ride the free public transit system between villages before walking to their destinations in the heart of each village. One of the more unique wayfinding solutions was deciding to describe the location of a destination by the time it takes to get there rather than by the more traditional use of distance.

"We wanted Vail to offer visitors as seamless and effortless an experience as possible," said Suzanne Silverthorn, Vail's information officer. "Quality of life and quality of experience is very important in a town like Vail."

The new system has achieved success on several levels – it strengthens Vail's reputation as a world-class ski destination; delivers a higher quality or more memorable experience to visitors; projects the town's European character from the Interstate, through the gateways (off-ramps), and into the villages; reaffirms Vail's pedestrian focus; and expresses a new consistent information hierarchy. The new system also improves and expands on the system already in place; while adding color and interest to

the Vail experience; clarifying enforcement and regulatory issues; and using materials that are easy and inexpensive to maintain.

“By giving people more information, we’re giving them the ability to choose and make more informed decisions,” Silverthorn explained. “It adds a synergy to the other transportation choices.”

Town officials and residents have overwhelmingly embraced the new plan. Officials expect most of the new program to be implemented in time for the 2001 ski season.

“In today's economy, creating an inviting environment and an enjoyable experience for people is the key to assuring their satisfaction and encouraging their return,” Corbin noted.

Jeffrey Corbin’s vision of a changing civic landscape led him to found Corbin, an environmental graphic design firm based in Traverse City, Michigan, in 1976. Since then, the firm has completed hundreds of projects for governmental, medical, educational and business clients across the country. Corbin’s expanding scope of projects includes signage and wayfinding, interactive systems, Web sites, identity systems and print communications — all of them based on the philosophy that “access equals success.” A partial list of Corbin’s civic wayfinding programs includes Downtown Indianapolis; Madison, Wisconsin; Columbus, Indiana; Vail, Colorado; Tucson, Arizona; and Los Angeles, California. Other wayfinding clients include Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, Clarian Health in Indianapolis, University Health Network in Toronto, Milton S. Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI). Additional information about the firm can be found online at: www.corbindesign.com

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