

Interview with Marsha (McCombs) Shields

Why does your family love southern Colorado so much?

We used to go there all of the time back when I was young. I think that the initial attraction was, of course, the incredible natural beauty of the state. And the people, at that point, were engaging. It was just a fun place to work and do business, as well as relax and spend time with the family.

Why does your father feel determined to bring a first-class ski development to that area?

He loves that area, and he's convinced that it will be a good thing – a very positive thing – for the people who live around there. I think that, overall, most of the locals are supportive of the project. They see that it could provide a great opportunity for jobs and economic development in their area. It would not only help existing businesses in the region but also create new jobs that would allow the next generation to stay. There aren't enough jobs around there right now. This would be a quick and permanent solution to that problem.

What sort of opposition has your father encountered?

My dad is portrayed as this horrible person by outsiders who aren't even personally involved in the local community. Somehow, these outside groups have managed to spread tainted information claiming that the project would be bad for the environment and the quality of life in that area overall. So far, we have been unable to overcome those false rumors and effectively communicate the truth.

The media always describes my dad as a “billionaire” – like that is a bad thing. But if people really followed the money, they would find a lot of it inside these groups that are fighting against our project. They're out there raising money to fight us, and they're not raising it locally. This is a job for them. They have actually said that if they were to lose in court, they would be out of a job, because they wouldn't be able to raise any more money. So they're really just fighting to hold onto their jobs.

How do you feel about the issues that critics of the proposed development have raised?

Hey, I am all for doing things the right way, as far as environmental concerns go. I can't see why they would be opposed to the land exchange, though. We will be trading very sensitive areas, including wetlands, for land without the same kind of environmental concerns. And we have prepared a development plan that's extremely protective of the environment. We would take a conservative stand on any issue involving natural resources. I think that we have answered every question that our opponents have raised, and we have done everything that they have asked us to do. But it's like we just keep on getting punched by our opponents, anyway.

Why do you think that your father still remains committed to this project and confident in its ultimate success?

He might walk away from a project if he has determined that, economically, it is not viable for some reason. But he sees this as an economically positive venture, so he's been willing to stick with it. This whole time, he and the rest of us have felt somewhat dumbfounded by the opposition that we have faced. It seems almost illogical to fight against something so good. My dad is unwilling to give up, because he knows that what he is doing is a good thing.

How do you plan to help your father with this project going forward?

My father still has many active years remaining and a lot of contributions left to make. At this point, I am his successor. I don't disagree with how he has handled the project, so I will just pick up wherever he leaves off. It will be my job to execute the plan and get it done.

My dad still has hope that he will see this happen. I hold out that same hope as well. I can't imagine it NOT happening. It's such a good thing for the region. It's a great thing for families who want to spend time in this area. It's a great thing for local businesses, and it's a great thing for local residents who want a future there for their children. I can't see any negatives at all.

What sort of charitable contributions can the local community expect from your family?

My father feels almost like he's restricted from making any major financial contributions in that area right now, because his critics always try to paint everything he does in a negative light. (They have unfairly accused him of making donations in an effort to curry favors in the past.) But any time my parents become part of a community, their natural inclination is to be charitable and share with those around them. They like to find groups or organizations where their gifts multiply in value by involving people who are making a difference. Our family makes over 300 charitable contributions a year in the communities where we work and/or live. Wherever my parents are, they always give. So that would definitely happen in this area, too.