

Interview with Red McCombs

What attracted you to southern Colorado in the first place?

In 1975, I had some surgery, and my doctor hooked me up with a doctor in southern Colorado so that I could go up there to recuperate. Southern Colorado is not discovered like the rest of the state. It turned out to be a really fascinating place. So I started buying some ranches in the area. I bought four or five; they were not expensive. I really fell in love with that part of the country.

What prompted you to build a home in that area?

I met a guy from San Antonio who had sold his company and retired there. He was in love with a valley in southern Colorado around the little community of Cuchara. He headed up a group that was going to build a ski resort in that area. So I fell into that as a customer. I bought two or three lots, and I loaned them some money to build a 40-acre inn.* We built a pretty sizable home place covering a couple of lots at the end of the mountain where they were building the ski area. That was back in 1980. We still spend a lot of time there – both in the summer and the winter – to this day.

(Note: Poor snow conditions prompted the ski resort to fail, forcing the owners of the development to default on their loan and providing Red McCombs with several lots in lieu of repayment. Contrary to fails claims by his opponents, McCombs never held an ownership stake in the ill-fated ski area.)

What sort of businesses have you operated in Colorado over the years?

I was the distributor for Subaru in the five Rocky Mountain states, with headquarters in Denver, for 15 years. That was a very profitable venture. And in the mid-1980s, I acquired the Denver Nuggets basketball team. We built the team up real quickly and had a good run for three or four years. We were still on a roll when I agreed to sell the team to a friend from Houston during a phone conversation that lasted less than 20 minutes. That was one of the biggest blunders of my life.

How did you originally get involved with the proposed Village at Wolf Creek?

I had taken the lead in establishing a market for Texas Longhorn cattle, which were almost extinct at that point. I started a program in the Cuchara area and began marketing the cattle out of there. Through that connection, I met the Charles Leavell family.

The leader of the Forest Service had convinced Mr. Leavell to trade some private land for 300 acres of public land at the base of the mountains, because he wanted to see some facilities built there for lodging and recreation. That was all initiated by the Forest Service. Charles asked me if I would like to be his financial partner. He told me that the Pitchers – a delightful family that owns the ski resort at Wolf Creek – had agreed to take a 10% interest in the project, and we could each take 45% apiece. So I said yes. We were very excited about it.

How did you wind up in charge of the entire project?

Unfortunately, Mr. Leavell got ill and passed away. His family didn't want to carry on with the project, so (after initially selling my interest in the project to his estate), I agreed to buy them out. I thought that I was doing a good thing for the community. I didn't realize that I was going to be attacked by environmental types who didn't want a ski area.

What sort of opposition have you faced?

You never see the people who are actually doing all of the hollering. They're not locals. They have formed organizations like Colorado Wild and then used the federal courthouse to fight against me every step of the way. During a public meeting a few years ago, they outlined their concerns and agreed that, if we complied with their demands, they would no longer oppose the project. That was just one of many lies that they have told over the years. We did everything that they requested, and they immediately took us back to federal court, anyway. We've asked for an appellate court to hear our case. This could go all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. We will follow the legal process until we win.

Have you ever felt tempted to just cut your losses and walk away?

If I had even suspected that this might get dragged out for 10 years – let alone 30 – I probably never would have messed with it in the first place. I've had a lot of deals that didn't work out; I just sold them and moved on. But this is just the taking of my property without so much as a hearing. I've bought and sold in excess of 250 different businesses over the years, and this project easily ranks as the most frustrating venture of my entire career.

Why do you remain committed to this project despite the lack of progress to date?

We have conducted enough surveys to know that there is plenty of local support for this development. The people who actually live around there really need something like this. There are no jobs in that area. And we've already invested a lot of money in this project. It has probably cost us \$10 million to \$15 million so far – and the business opportunity costs have been overwhelming. My family probably wishes that they had never even heard of this thing, because I'm basically spending their money on it at this point. But I'm going to get this project done. I know that it is the right thing to do.

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.

Red McCombs: A Longtime Philanthropist Committed to Making a Difference (Notable excerpts from his 2011 autobiography *Big Red*)

“Charline and I have had a wide variety of philanthropic interests, not all of them in Texas. When I owned the Minnesota Vikings, for example, we raised \$400,000 for the University of Minnesota Women's Athletics Department. Having raised three daughters, Charline and I have a strong interest in supporting women's sports. We are actively involved in numerous local charities and schools in the Twin Cities region, and we were successful in getting our players involved in that community ...

“Because of my parents' influence, giving back and sharing have always been natural things for me. Charline has the same attitude ... I shared my resources with (my brother Gene) in a minimal way while he attended school. In his second year in the seminary, a mutual friend brought to my attention that Gene was living in absolute poverty. I was not aware of that, and I immediately went to Fort Worth, where I found a half-day's supply of food in his refrigerator. He had lost a part-time job and truly was in dire circumstances, which he had never mentioned. When I asked him what source of income he had other than the meager amount I was sending him, he said he had borrowed a hand mower and was mowing lawns. At that time, he was the pastor of a church that paid him nothing, and he had the expense of buying gasoline to get there.

“As a young car salesman, I wasn't exactly running around with hundred-dollar bills falling out of my pocket. Charline joined me in offering to share what we had. We all received more from Gene than we gave. I was so struck by his faith, and his insistence that he was fine and that everything would be okay, that I embraced him. I made a promise that, for the rest of his life, whatever my living circumstances were, I would commit to him that he would have the same. It was a privilege for Charline and me to be able to share our good fortune with Gene and (his wife) Mary ...

“We have shared our resources with others all our lives, and we have taught our three girls to do the same. Marsha, for example, has been deeply involved with San Antonio's Cancer Center Council, the United Way and the Partnership in Education, which supports the teachers and staff of local school districts ...

“I don't ever plan to retire. I will continue to offer the best that I can right up until the last breath that I draw. That's not because of any greed; it's because of my need to satisfy what I believe is God's intention for all of us, which is to be productive and to do things pleasing to Him. (So) our foundation will continue to grow, which will enable us to help a lot of people in the communities where we work and live ...

“Now that we have a lot more resources, we have a lot more to share. And that is as fun as it is fulfilling. We both get a thrill out of giving. The joy of giving is truly something that no one will ever understand unless they give. Our giving has made it possible to have that joy.

“I feel like God has been very generous with Charline and me. We love what we do, and we know that our daughters love what they are doing. I have a strong belief that the grandchildren will feel the same way ...

“We've never planned to leave a big estate for anyone to wrestle and fight over. We've been fortunate. We've made a lot of money, and we've given a lot of money away. If I'm fortunate enough to make some more money, we'll give even more away.”

Testimonials from Local Supporters of Red McCombs and the Village at Wolf Creek

“I’m a fourth-generation South Fork resident, and one of my first memories is hearing about this village going into Wolf Creek. We’ve literally been fighting for this for 30 years now! And the people who are fighting against us don’t even live here. They don’t understand what we’re up against.

“On a typical day in July, we might have 70 to 80 people on site at our lodge and bring in \$5,000 to \$6,000. But right now, (in early November), we just have three people staying at the lodge. We charge \$50 for a room, so we will make a grand total of \$150 today. And this will go on for another eight or nine weeks until the ski area opens. Even then, it’s just like turning on the faucet a little bit. It gets really hard to stay open for business. Every fall and spring, we fall behind, so we borrow money to make it until the summer. And then we barely catch up before the whole thing starts all over again.

“So here’s someone (Red McCombs) who wants to spend millions of dollars on infrastructure and create lots of jobs for our community. A place like that would generate a lot of interest in this area. Nobody knows that we’re even here. It would benefit this whole community.

“We’ve poured a lot of money into our property over the years. But now, we’re really struggling just to get through the slow season. We’ve been optimistic about this development for 30 years, but we’re getting tired. We really want – we really need – to see this happen.”

– Dee Plucinski, co-owner (with husband Rob) of the Spruce Lodge in South Fork

“I do a lot of work for Red and his family. His nephew is a client of mine and has been for years. I am 100% for the Village at Wolf Creek. I think that it’s a great business model. Some people say that it would put South Fork out of business, but it won’t. I own the largest ski shop in town – and I have no interest in going into business up in the mountains – and I am not worried about that development at all. When I was the president of the chamber of commerce, we polled 110 local businesses, and 95% of them were for the development, another 2% were on the fence, and just a few were actually against it. The bulk of the businesses around here are still hoping to see this happen.

“Most of the people who oppose the development don’t even live around here. They live in Denver or Los Angeles or San Francisco. Or they live in Durango, which is two hours away. What do they care? They might ski here two weekends out of the year. Why should they hinder the economy of little South Fork for that?

“I live in this very small tourist town year-round. That’s the reason why I have to own so many businesses. I used to own a little restaurant called the Malt Shop. On Aug. 20, I had 22 employees working there. On Aug. 21 (the day after the summer tourist season ended), I cut that number down to four. When families take off and head back home for the school year, the town just vacates overnight. Last September, I actually bought a liquor store because I needed something that was not based on water or snow. I don’t have the same kind of passion for the liquor store as I do for my other businesses, but it is definitely the most stable business that I own.

“I’m optimistic, though. Take a look at what Davey and Rosanne (Pitcher) are doing with their ski resort. They have already applied for an expansion and increased their skiable acreage – not just in anticipation of Red’s development but because they need to expand in order to grow. So the mountain is

growing with or without Red's development. That growth is going to happen no matter what.

“I've asked the McCombs group numerous times about whether they still expect this to happen, and they keep telling me, 'It's not a matter of if; it's just a matter of when.' Last November, the golf group auctioned off a bunch of lots, and two people bought 99% of that property: Red McCombs and the Freeman group (the new owners of the golf course). Red bought 70 or 80 of those residential parcels. That told me that both of those parties are serious about the future of this area; it provided me with a big boost of confidence.

“We have bought a lot of land ourselves, and we are sitting on several commercial parcels right now. If Red's project ever happens, I suspect that I will be able to sell those investments for a great deal more. I know that there are already people sniffing around to buy my businesses once they know that Red can break ground on the village. I'm optimistic that things are moving forward, and I'm just biding my time until they do.”

– Joel Condren, owner of five different businesses in South Fork

“I sat down one-on-one with Red and talked to him about the project. I specifically asked him if it could turn out like Cuchara (a failed ski resort where Red owns a vacation home). I also asked him why he needed to pursue another major project like this at his age. I could tell that he is totally committed to seeing this happen. It was a very good discussion. I like the man, and I like where he's coming from and what he's trying to do.

“I bought the old Denver & Rio Grande Railroad back in 2000. I spent a lot of time rehabilitating the railroad so that I could run it as a tourist operation. It was a good little business. Trip Advisor voted it the number-one tourist attraction in South Fork after it opened. But the city of Creede filed a lawsuit against me and my foundation, ordering me to remove the tracks from its city limits – which was our ultimate destination. I openly announced that I would be working with the Make A Wish Foundation out of Denver, and that I had committed to bringing kids with cancer here so that they could enjoy a special day out in the country, and Creede still fought against me, anyway.

“I don't understand that kind of opposition. I've dealt with it way too long. Now some of the same people who fought against my railroad are looking to buy it out. They are spending a lot of money on due diligence, and they are collectively working toward presenting me with an offer. We were so inundated with customers that we were selling out all the time and forced to turn a lot of people away. So my family and I decided to pass the baton; the railroad needed to move up to the next level, anyway.

“I remember Red asking me years ago, 'Don't you think that you're a little early with this railroad?' And I responded by asking him, 'Which end would you rather be on?' There is so much potential in this area. I have felt for years that South Fork is set to boom. I think that this area could really explode!”

– Don Shank, owner of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in South Fork

“Early on, I really believed that the process that Colorado Wild and other groups like that had initiated would provide some meaningful friction that could result in a better product. But somewhere along the way, it became obvious to me that this was not their goal. They just wanted to kill the development. For years, I watched Red's group try to integrate their ideas, but they kept demanding more and more. It no longer seemed like a productive process any more. I could see that they were just obstructionists. That was really disappointing to me; it provided me with an education on how these things really work.

“My sense is that there is more local support for the project than resistance – by a lot. I would say that many of the locals who oppose it for environmental reasons get their information from hyper-environmental groups, and once they become aware that some of that is hyperbole, they tend to moderate their views. My feeling is that the real energy behind the fight is coming from outside this area. And that is very frustrating to those of us who actually belong to these communities and see a project like this as manageable.

“Meanwhile, the ski area itself continues to expand. If there is nostalgia for the way things used to be, I don't understand it, because the ski area has added many new lifts and buildings and expanded the base area. It's not the same ski area that I went to as a kid. Nor should it have to be.”

– Mike Hurst, Present of Del Norte Bank in Del Norte
and former president of Upper Rio Grande Economic Development

“Everybody who has to make a living here totally supports Red McCombs and hopes to see the Village at Wolf Creek become a reality. The business owners around here understand the importance of having a more stable economy. During the summertime, we do pretty well. But the rest of the year, we struggle to make a living. And there is nothing to keep young families here.

“I'm 34 years old, and I have been hearing about the Village at Wolf Creek – along with this lawsuit and that lawsuit attempting to block it – for as long as I can remember. This area really needs something like that. We would love to speak with Red and do our part to make that happen. We honestly feel that it would be great for our entire community.”

– Brenda Maze, co-owner (with husband Charles) of the Old Firehouse Restaurant in South Fork

“My wife and I purchased the Wolf Creek Ski Lodge, a 50-room hotel, as a stepping stone to our retirement back in 2011. Even though we had spent a year researching the business and the competition in the area, we didn't know a thing about Red McCombs' proposed development at the time. I learned about the project while going through some old files, and I got really excited about it, because I knew that something like that could help our business a lot.

“As a newcomer to the area, I tried to listen to both sides. I realize that some people want the mountain to themselves. I get that; I don't blame them. But that mountain is for everybody, and Red owns property there. This project would be great for our town and our businesses, so I can't find a way to justify not moving forward with it.

“But we've got these big-money environmentalists trying to tell us what is good for the mountain. I

don't like people from Durango or Denver – or anywhere else in the country – stepping in to fight the battles over the future of my hometown. I realize that some of the locals who moved here to live by the ski area may not support the development, but I know that plenty of others – including most of the business owners – realize that we need to grow. Otherwise, this place could soon become irrelevant.

“When we first bought the lodge, I saw some research saying that nine out of ten skiers stayed Pagosa Springs (a neighboring town located further away from Wolf Creek the ski resort). We don't even have a bar in our town! You can get a drink at a restaurant, but there is no nightlife here. And visitors don't want to go skiing and then just go straight to bed. We need to find a way to convince more of those people to stay with us instead.

“As a new business owner in town, I see so many things that are not right around here. It's going to take a long time – or somebody who has the vision and the money – to change the situation. Do I see the town moving forward? I think so. But it needs some help. And I think that Red's project would provide the town with plenty of that.”

– Bob Mason, co-owner (with wife Sherry Mason) of the Wolf Creek Ski Lodge in South Fork

“Red has always had a strong commitment to Colorado. He's got a house in Colorado and a lot of connections to the state. The last thing that he would ever want to do is hurt that area. I think that he has been unfairly attacked on many fronts. His opponents have portrayed him as this big out-of-state developer who's going to come in and tear everything up. I would never be a proponent of the project myself if I felt like it would hurt the area. I think that if you went door to door in South Fork and Pagosa Springs and informed everyone about what would really happen, you would be surprised at how much support you would find for the development. This whole area really needs a shot in the arm. It is very much undiscovered and so under-utilized. This would be a win-win for just about everyone.”

– Ron Eudy, Texas attorney with a second home in South Fork

“I would say that 95% of the people around here are for the ski area. And the 5% who are against it would be against anything. Some of them claim that it would damage wildlife in this area, but that's just crazy. I'm 67. I've been coming up here since I was a little kid, and I have never seen more animals than I see in the town of South Fork right now. I see bears and turkeys and tons of deer. They all migrate to where people settle. There won't be one animal that decreases in number because of this development. If anything, we will see a huge increase instead.

“The environmentalists have held this project up for years. They may think that they're doing a good thing, but they're not. There may be more traffic on the only road that goes up through the mountain, but I guarantee you that it will be a safer road than it is right now. If you slide off, you might get help within minutes rather than hours or even not at all.

“Everybody keeps waiting for the ski area to come in and bring some money into this area. It would be an absolutely boom for South Fork and every other town within a 100-mile radius of this place.”

– Bruce Steffens, owner of Steffens & Co. Realty in South Fork

“I'm behind Red and this project 100%. He does everything first-class, so this has the potential to become a world-class ski area. He's a legend with everything that he has accomplished in his life. It's really not fair the way that he's been treated. If I would fault Red for anything, it would be for trying to be too accommodating. I'll grant you, I'm sure that he's a lot smarter than I am, and he's probably done the right thing, but that hasn't worked. He's got to fight back and get the truth out there.

“He's a good businessman, so I'm sure that he will go about this in a very professional and organized manner. I know that it won't be anything but great for everybody. And I actually do think that it will happen. One reason for that is because Red has had ample opportunity to pull the plug on this, and he hasn't. I don't know why. Maybe he just hates losing, or maybe he just believes in the project so much. But for whatever reason, he hasn't quit. And that's who you put your money on. I just hope and pray that he lives long enough to actually see it happen.”

– Keith Nichols, Texas businessman who owns property in South Fork

“I think that Red is a person who genuinely puts his heart into everything that he does, and he is totally surprised that Colorado is against him. Look at all of the wonderful things that he has done! He has given away millions of dollars to places like the University of Texas. Just think what he could do to economically boost this area.

“There are fewer businesses in South Fork now than there were when Red started this 20 years ago! It's tough to make a living here; you have to work your butt off. I would say that there are probably half a dozen businesses that make it in South Fork, and the rest of them struggle or rely on some kind of subsidy. I know that it's been a real struggle for me the last 20 years, but the Lord has blessed us, and we have found a way to get by. We just keep looking down the road and hoping that this will get approved so that things will finally get better around here.

– Lowell Hicks, owner of Doc's Outdoor Sports,
Elk Country Storage and Elk Country Construction in South Fork

“I'm the general manager of the Rio Grande Club & Resort. We were ranked as the sixth-best new golf course in the country in 2003. The golf course is a pretty good draw during the summer months, but in the winter, not so much. And we have all of the amenities here for a year-round resort. So something like the Village at Wolf Creek would really help traffic for us.

“I'm sure that most of the local businesses would be for it. I realize that it's not going to happen overnight; it would be pretty controlled, with numerous phases, so it would take a number of years to build out the whole thing. It would certainly stimulate activity around South Fork. I think that it would be a really good thing for this area.”

– Todd Small, manager of the Rio Grande Club & Resort in South Fork
and former president of the South Fork Chamber of Commerce

“Quite a few people don't want things to change around here, and I understand that, because I've seen what's happened to other parts of the state. The reason that I support this project is because it will benefit three different communities (Creede, Pagosa Springs and South Fork), with the impact spread out across that entire area. So I think that there will actually be very little change here – and all of it positive. We haven't changed very much over the last 10 to 20 years, so I think that we definitely have room to expand. Still, the geographical area will limit the extent of that expansion. The ski area does not have to grow leaps and bounds. It could never do that. So the change is going to be limited.

There are a lot of roadblocks being thrown up that I just don't understand. To Red's credit, he has gotten the ski area to support the project now. I've been optimistic for years, but I'm still concerned. Look at all of the time, money and effort that poor Red McCombs has poured into this project. I would really like to see this happen.”

– Tom Slade, President of Upper Rio Grande Economic Development and South Fork Ranches HOA

“I used to live in San Antonio as a kid, so I remember hearing advertisements for McCombs Ford on TV all of the time. Red has since gone on to do a number of really good things in the San Antonio area. My brother-in-law serves on a board with him, and he's always talking about what Red is up to. You hear his name come up in the news all of the time.

“I actually went to school with one of Red's daughters back when I lived in San Antonio. I attended school with Connie McCombs from the third through the seventh grade before my family moved away. I remember that she was always taller than the other girls, and even at that age, she was willing to take more risks than others in our class. I believe that she actually went on to become the first female student admitted to TMI (Texas Military Institute), which was an all-boys military high school in San Antonio at the time that I lived there. She was always the type who wanted to do something for the very first time. She was the first to break the mold in this case.

“When I first moved to South Fork in 2004, I introduced myself to a number of people – bankers, realtors, contractors, etc. – and asked them how they felt about Red's proposed development. A lot of them told me that they had been hearing about that project for as long as they have lived here. I can't say that anyone, with the exception of the owners of the ski “area” business, see that development as the next catalyst for this area. The Pitcher family (which owns the ski resort) needs to be very vocal about their support of the project. They could win over all of the skiers, who would start telling all of their buddies in the surrounding states that the Pitchers now endorse the development. I would love to see this project happen. And I would love to be a part of it as well.”

– Keith Helmstetler, local architect based in South Fork

“I am 110% for this project. If it doesn't happen, I think that we'll continue to thrive for three months out of the year and struggle for the rest of the time. That would be incredibly sad. I find it worrisome to even think about that possibility.”

Hap Chapman, longtime South Fork resident with strong ties to the local business community and the father and father-in-law of the owners of the Spruce Lodge in South Fork

“My sense is that most of the people who live here don’t really care one way or another (about Red McCombs’ proposed development). But the people who are against things tend to be very, very vocal. They tend to scream and yell a lot ...

“I really take exception to the information put out by the groups that call themselves ‘environmentalists.’ The way that they promote their agenda to people who don’t know what’s really going on makes it sound very legitimate. But what they are pushing on their websites is just flat-out wrong. I do not believe what they are saying is even remotely correct, and that bothers me a lot. Being against a development is perfectly fine. But lying about the reason for that opposition is not.

“Now some people oppose the development because they like that Wolf Creek is a cute, quaint ski area and they don’t want to see it change – which I completely understand. That makes total sense to me. It might be a little bit selfish. But if you have the place to yourself, and you can ski right onto the lift, you don’t want to see anything happen that would change that.

“There are always going to be advantages and disadvantages with any kind of development. When I started working at Wolf Creek, there used to be these huge lift lines. Now that the ski area has expanded, it doesn’t have lift lines any more. So even though two or three times as many people now go skiing there, it’s actually less crowded than it was before.

“Based upon the size of the ski area, Wolf Creek will never be like an Aspen or a Vail, though. In some places, it can increase quite a bit more than it has. But it will never be one of those huge mega-resorts. Not a chance in the world.”

– Larry Fisher, owner of the Ski & Bow Rack shop in Pagosa Springs and former director of the ski school at the Wolf Creek ski area (1980-1985)

“I like the McCombs family, and I really hope that this happens. But there has been a lot of talk about this development for more than 20 years now. I don’t know why (Red) has even stuck with this project for so long. I do hope that it happens, though. During the winter months, you’ve literally got to check the newspaper to find out what restaurants will be open for business!”

– Dan Murphy of Team Murphy Realty (with offices in South Fork, Pagosa Springs and Lake City)