

Skiing's **Future**

In a Nutshell

The ski industry is trying to boost the retention rate of young skiers by promoting lessons and offering package deals. There is no magical answer, but the industry is making progress.

Ski resorts are trying to entice participants into buying season passes. Vail Resorts and Alterra Mountain are engaged in a full-fledged season pass war that's making a multi-resort ticket more affordable. Online deals also are available for multi-day tickets.

Special on-mountain events may be a key to attracting a younger crowd. Summer may also hold the greatest potential for growth.

I need to preface this story by saying that Gene and I are, as many of our senior friends, exceptions to the rule. Our goal each year is to ski our ages. To do this we take advantage of every deal we can find.

⇒ *Senior Skiers*

They say old skiers never die, they just don't ski as much as they used to — and that's creating a challenge for much of the ski industry. I have friends that when they turned 60 decided they were too old to ski and quit. Our personal goal is to ski as much and for as long as possible.

Baby boomers led skiing through its dramatic growth in the 1970s and 1980s and have maintained the industry as loyal customers. Today the youngest of the baby boomers are now 54 years old, an age when aches and pains make themselves more known.

In 2005-06, baby boomers were responsible for 31.1% of skier visits nationwide. By 2014-15, that number dipped to 21.5%, according to a demographics profile by the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA). Last season, only 14.8% of skier visits were attributable to baby boomers.

Older skiers are valuable to the ski industry because they tend to have the time and money to spend more days on the slopes. The average number of anticipated days on the slopes was 9.1 for skiers over 65 years. That's higher than any group other than 17 and younger. In addition, older skiers have the means and resources to bring their grandchildren and greatgrands to the slopes with them.

The ski industry as a whole faces a flat skier visit environment. People have less free time and more competition for the valuable leisure time & dollars they do possess. Ski trips are competing with river and ocean cruises, beach trips to Hawaii or Caribbean, guided trips to Europe and exotic locales, sporting events, concerts and more. ■