

DEVELOPMENT

A Chair of One's Own

A Tahoe skier turns his backyard into his own resort.

If tahoe resident troy caldwell had his way, his backyard would be the link between Squaw Valley and adjacent Alpine Meadows. And it would be a profitable expansion like the one that turned Whistler and Blackcomb into one megaresort in 1997. Too bad Caldwell and the two rival resorts couldn't agree on the execution. The chair would have operated on Caldwell's property—which just happens to be a 460-acre, steep, south-facing ridge that stretches between the two resorts. But now, instead of a lift for the resorts, he plans on building one for himself and his friends. "We had so much skiable terrain that when plans crumbled to join the resorts, we decided to build our own chairlift," Caldwell says.

In 2002, after more than a decade of applying for permits and overcoming legal problems—including a lawsuit filed against him by a neighboring homeowner's association—Caldwell received permission from Tahoe's Placer County to build the private lift, which he dubbed White Wolf. The catch? No more than 25 skiers a day, no selling lift tickets, and every skier needs proof of avalanche training.



This is Troy Caldwell's backyard. Be jealous.

Trading labor for the promise of free rides on private powder, Caldwell's friends helped install 17 lift towers and pour cement by hand on a triple chair with a 1,123-vertical-foot rise. He collected the cable, chairs, and a bullwheel from nearby resorts.

But in 2005, Squaw Valley filed a breach-of-contract lawsuit against Caldwell over messy property rights. Pending closure of that suit—which is expected to take place this winter—Caldwell plans to run his chair for the first time during the 2008–2009 season. "I have the opportunity to pioneer a new ski area. And I'm not going to stop now," he says. "This is my dream." —MEGAN MICHELSON

COURTESY OF TROY CALDWELL