



# Epic Soul

Olympian Katie Uhlaender in skeleton (copyright Pat Hendrick)

**April 9, 2014**

By: **Kevin Fixler**



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Epic. It's a big word to live up to. It's a state of affairs, a frame of mind, and, ultimately, the perception of a person, place, or thing that is heroic, extraordinary, or larger-than-life.

It's an idea that's become synonymous with Vail Resorts over the past few years. Good branding strategy? Sure. But it's more than that. The quality of feeling, being, and experiencing "epic" has seeped into the very heart of Vail Resorts. It's become a social identity. We asked a handful of folks from the Vail Resorts family to think about what "epic" means to them. Here's what they told us:

*Bobby Brown, Breckenridge resident, five-time X Games medalist, 2014 U.S. Winter*



*Olympian — slopestyle skiing:*

“Just the camaraderie amongst people. I grew up skiing Breckenridge my whole life and some of my best friends are people I've met skiing the park there.

Breckenridge has the best terrain park in the entire world, so it was pretty nice having that in my

backyard. They just put so much emphasis on it. They have, in my opinion, the best park builder in the world—a guy named Eric [Armfield]. When I was growing up and skiing, I'd get a ride to the hill, and there'd be some of the best pros in the world skiing the same park; I mean, it's been a mecca for professional skiing for a long time, and it's just one of those spots that continues to get better and better. Having Breckenridge be part of the Epic Pass—and now [Vail Resorts] has Canyons in Park City, Utah—they've got the best places in the world, I think, as far as parks. It's just pretty awesome.”



*Bobby Brown on the Red Bull Mega Slope. © Red Bull Media House.*



*Estelle Sullivan at the Breckenridge Ski and Ride School. Photo by Chris Miller.*

*Estelle Sullivan, employment supervisor for Breckenridge Ski and Ride School:*

“People have different interpretations. It's the great Rocky Mountains, all the great peaks we get to ski. It gets really epic especially with good conditions. I was coming from a country [The Netherlands] below sea level, so the first thing I saw was the mountains. When my husband—who is American—and I decided to move back to the United States, it wasn't difficult to find a ski town, and Colorado was a top choice with more than 300 days of sun a year. We looked for a big resort, lots of terrain, and an authentic town. Also quite important was the proximity to Denver, a bigger city with an

international airport. We kept coming back to [Breckenridge](#). It's just so picturesque. Plus, you don't have to go over any of the passes with bad weather, so getting to Denver is pretty easy.”

*Katie Uhlaender, three-time U.S. Winter Olympian — skeleton (2006, 2010, 2014):*

“The [Steadman Clinic](#) and [Howard Head Sports Medicine](#) are epic for me. I would not be who I am without Vail in that respect. I go there quite a bit to patch myself up. I've had eight surgeries and every single one of them has been at the Steadman Clinic in Vail Valley. I'm blessed to have been from Vail and to be able to go back there. I was born there, and skied there forever as a kid. I shattered my kneecap in West Vail on a snowmobile and they brought me right in, took care of me. It was crazy. I mean, it was an epic injury. I ended up breaking it twice before going to the Olympics. I broke down, quite a few times, and



*U.S. Skeleton Winter Olympian Katie Uhlaender. Photo credit: © NBC Olympics / USOC*

because of their experience with elite-level athletes, they knew how to pick me back up...It's all about the epic recovery.”



*Jeff Wiles at the Eagle Bahn Gondola at Vail Mountain. Photo by Chris Miller.*

*Jeff Wiles, longtime Vail local, 24-year Guest Services employee at Vail Mountain:*

“When you think of ‘epic,’ you think, one-of-a-kind; something you don't see everyday. In 1989, Vail hosted the [Alpine World Ski Championships](#). This kind of defines when Vail went from a national ski area to an international name. The day before the men's downhill, we got two feet of snow. We were out

until four o'clock in the morning trying to move all of it, but there was no way and we had to cancel racing for that day. So everybody just went skiing, and they went and filmed these world-class skiers in the [Back Bowls](#) with snow going over their heads. They broadcasted that all over the world, and the next day, the phones were ringing off the hook for reservations. That one moment where people got to see Vail in a way they hadn't previously—that kind of put Vail on the international map. If we'd had the Internet, Facebook, and the social media of today, it would have

been outrageous. There would have been [GoPro](#) videos. It would have been wild. People often hear about other ski areas, but internationally, anybody who skies knows the name Vail.”

Tags: **Vail, Breckenridge, Multi-resort, Ski, Snowboard**

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