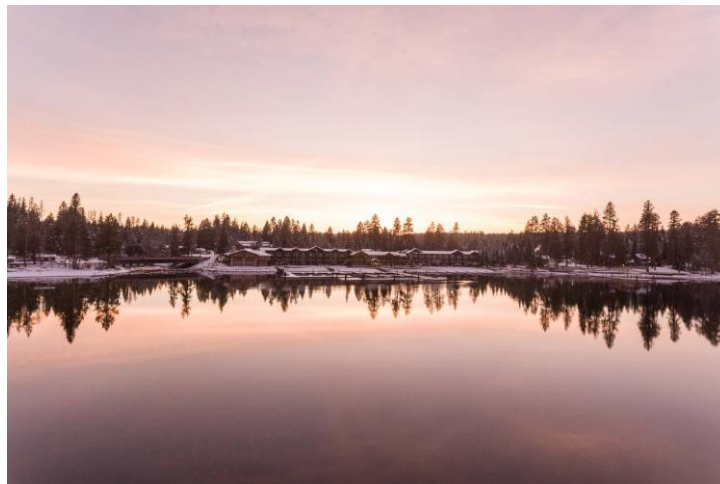


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

McCall, Idaho: A Ski Spot Without the Glitz

January 4, 2018
Nancy Keates

This former Idaho logging town attracts newsmakers and VIPs seeking an outdoorsy lifestyle away from the crowds of nearby Sun Valley; Dick Enberg's legacy home.



McCall, Idaho, is no Sun Valley—and many folks hope it stays that way.

While the resort town of about 3,000 has the requisite glacial lake and powdery ski slopes, McCall has retained the simple charm and small-town feel that's less evident in Sun Valley and Ketchum, Idaho, to the southeast. Those two towns have been reshaped, in part, by the influx of finance, tech and media titans—as well as celebrities—drawn to the annual Allen & Co. Summer Conference, which started in 1983.

If anything, McCall's lack of glitz has made it more attractive in recent years to newsmakers and other VIPs looking for a lower profile vacation spot.

McCall of the Wild

Outdoorsy types are flocking to McCall, Idaho, a former logging town where luxury homes have a low-key vibe.





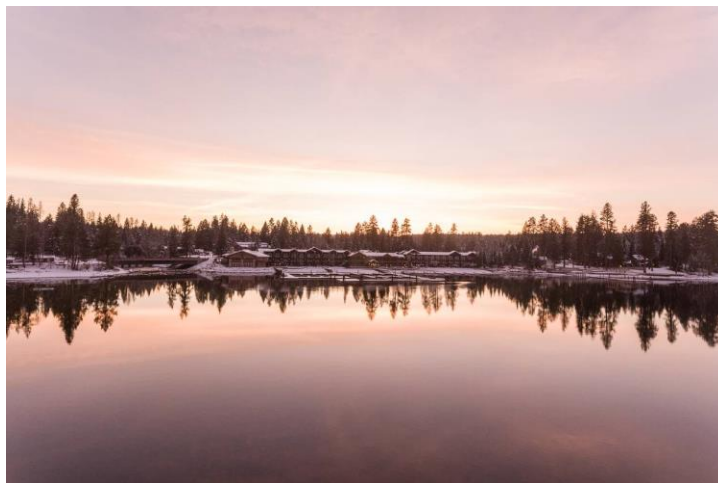












“This wasn’t about fur coats. It was about people loving the outdoors,” says Bill Whitacre about why he and his wife, Joan, bought a second home in a 1,300-acre luxury golf-course community called Whitetail Club.

Mr. Whitacre, the CEO of Simplot Co., an agricultural concern, bought a 3,500-square-foot, three-bedroom house and a 1,500-square-foot barn with two bedrooms in 2012 on 2.5 acres for about \$1 million. The couple then spent about \$350,000 on improvements.

When he's inside, Mr. Whitacre, 64 years old, spends most of his time in a small, bare office, working and planning motorcycle trips. "This is where I come to decompress," he says.



Whitetail Club has lured some notable sports figures, including NBC sportscaster Heather Cox, and football coaches Dirk Koetter of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Chris Petersen from the University of Washington. Chuck Pagano, former coach of the Indianapolis Colts, has been seen on the golf course. Legendary sportscaster Dick Enberg, who died last month at age 82, recently finished building a home at Whitetail.

Increasingly, young families from Silicon Valley, Texas and San Francisco are buying homes in and around McCall as weekend and summer getaways.

“I’d never set foot in Idaho. We’d thought of Idaho as potatoes and Boise,” says Jane Butler, 48, a managing director at Google. She and her husband, Ian Kennish, 46, formerly a senior director at Yahoo and now a stay-at-home dad, wanted a lakeside house near a ski mountain to spend vacations with their two children. They considered Lake Tahoe, but found it was crowded and expensive—not to mention what can be a 10-hour drive in the winter from their Hillsborough, Calif., home. Besides, Tahoe felt too much like Silicon Valley, with the same vibe and intensity. Friends suggested they check out McCall, and in 2014 the couple bought a furnished house at Whitetail, where home listings currently range from \$1.2 million to \$2.9 million.



Ms. Butler declined to say what they paid for their four-bedroom, 4½-bathroom, 4,700-square-foot home, only that it would have cost far more in Tahoe. The trip to their Idaho house takes about three hours—a 1½-hour flight to Boise and then a half-hour charter flight to McCall. It’s a two-hour drive from Boise.



Residents say the small, former logging town, settled in the 1880s on the shores of Payette Lake, has only changed a little in the past few decades. It’s still normal to ski all day on nearby Brundage Mountain Resort without waiting in line, and there’s no residential mail delivery—everyone has to go to the post office. Aside from a Subway sandwich shop, there are no restaurant franchises. The inclusion of a Starbucks inside a newly remodeled Albertson’s grocery store last year was big news.

McCall’s high-end home sales have seen an uptick. Seven houses sold for more than \$2 million in 2017, compared with four in 2016 and none in 2015, according to Ambre Little, executive of the Mountain Central Association of Realtors. Still, the median sales price of homes in McCall is currently \$320,000—much lower than

the \$502,000 in Sun Valley. Some 70% of McCall's houses are second homes, says Bob Crawford, a broker with Crawford Olson Real Estate Services.

Large new homes are sprouting up along the lake where log cabins used to sit. There is no more land available along the lake to build, and about a quarter of the lakeside homes have been built in the past two decades, says Boise-based real-estate agent April Rinehart, who sold five homes along the lake in the past year that range from \$1 million to \$4 million.

Ryan Stratton, 40, an accountant in Boise who spent vacations in McCall as a kid, bought in October what he says was a steal along the lake in McCall: a 1948, 2,000-square-foot log cabin for about \$600,000. (It was listed at \$925,000.) "McCall still feels like the place I grew up, except maybe the boats are fancier," he says.

Whitetail Club was started by Doug Manchester, a La Jolla, Calif.-based hotel developer who currently is President Donald Trump's nominee for U.S. ambassador to the Bahamas. During the housing crisis in 2008, Mr. Manchester sold Whitetail, including the golf course and Shore Lodge hotel, to Joe Scott, grandson of the grocery magnate Joe Albertson, Rich Hormaechea of RMH Co. and John Sabala, Mr. Manchester's son-in-law.





In 2010, Mr. Scott, who grew up summering in McCall and is a bone fide Idahoan, acquired sole ownership of the club and lodge through his company Alscott Inc., although Mr. Sabala still owns a significant amount of land there. This year the club bought Mr. Manchester's former 11,000-square-foot mansion along the lake and spent about \$8 million remaking it into the resort's clubhouse.

"We wanted a place with incredible amenities for all our members," says Dan Scott, Whitetail's president and general manager and the half-brother of Joe Scott.

Of Whitetail's total 233 lots, which go for between \$292,000 to \$1.2 million, 102 have been sold. About 50 homes have been built, including 14 cabins built as speculative houses. There are five full-time residents.

Kristi Mitchem, 47, a banking executive, and her husband, Thomas Mawhinney, 49, a venture capitalist, bought a 2.8-acre lot in 2007 in Whitetail. They declined to say what they paid for the land, but a comparable lot would cost between \$1 million and \$1.2 million today, according to club management. The couple then built a 14,000-square-foot home, spending about \$200 a square foot—far less than what it would cost in Tahoe, Ms. Mitchem estimates.



The couple, whose main home is in Woodside, Calif., say they love the energy and buzz of the Bay Area, but they wanted somewhere to go where their children could get away from the “grit.”

Heather and Bill Cox also were looking for an antidote to Silicon Valley when they moved from Atherton, Calif., to Boise in 2000. They bought a $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre lot at Whitetail in 2010 and finished a 3,500-square-foot, three-bedroom, four-bathroom vacation home there in 2013.

In the summer, they and their two children, 10 and 12, golf and go waterskiing and wakeboarding. In the winter, the children are there every weekend for ski team. “It’s like a little bubble here. It’s so safe. It feels private,” says Ms. Cox, 47, a sportscaster for NBC.

Sportscaster Dick Enberg initially bought a 2-acre lot at Whitetail in 1995 for \$500,000 because he was friends with Mr. Manchester. Having never built a house, he went to McCall two years ago intending to sell his land. Instead, he and his wife, Barbara, decided to build, and they recently finished a contemporary mountain house.



Mr. Enberg, who was interviewed shortly before his death, said that building the house was “absolutely a romantic move on my part” and that he wanted to leave something for his children and grandkids that still felt simple and authentic.

Michael Hollenbeck, 44, a software entrepreneur, recently bought a five-bedroom, 2,288-square-foot house for \$323,000 with his wife, Crissy, sister Heather Mercy, and brother-in-law Shawn Mitchell. The property features vaulted ceilings and large windows overlooking a public golf course and a pond. Mr. Hollenbeck, whose primary residence is in Boise, says the family plans to spend weekends there together and to rent the house out. There’s no sense of grandiosity, Mr. Hollenbeck says. “It’s a place where Idahoans can still hang out.”