

Ski meet

How a former Wall Street couple turned Calabogie Peaks into Eastern Ontario's largest mountain resort and a popular corporate getaway venue

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Entrepreneurs from all corners of Ottawa's business scene are showing off their wild side by moving meetings from the office to the great outdoors.

As a result, organizers no longer have to choose between whether a host venue is for business or for pleasure. Because at a ski resort, meetings can be both.

This advantage is especially important considering a conference's setting can affect the productivity of participants, says Paul Murphy, president of the privately owned Calabogie Peaks Resort.

"Consider this: an individual finds themselves daydreaming during a meeting at work," he says. "But instead of looking out the window to see a boring parking lot and endless skyscrapers, they see trees and deer."

"Now, who is going to be more productive?"

From stocks to slopes

Mr. Murphy should know. He and his wife, Liz, have already experienced the transition from concrete jungle to rural wilderness when they moved from New York City's Wall Street to the Ottawa Valley six years ago.

Mr. Murphy was an investment banker

for nearly three decades before he made the move. He had no experience operating a ski resort, but it wasn't long before he started tapping into his rolodex to connect with ski resort owners in the eastern United States.

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"This isn't the type of business you can learn from a textbook," Mr. Murphy says. "You need to be on-site and apply unique solutions specifically tailored to a resort."

After speaking to those already experienced in the business, the couple began to plan the resort's overhaul.

"One of the things we discovered early on is that we needed to make an investment in all (four) seasons," says Mr. Murphy.

Throughout the spring and summer, the resort operates what it calls a 25-room boutique hotel, condominium and cottage

lodging facilities as well as a nine-hole golf course, lakeside bar and grill and docking and water activities combined with miles of hiking and biking trails.

Additionally, the couple has made major upgrades to Calabogie's alpine facilities.

This included a four-year, \$3 million installation of a new snowmaking system and \$3 million more to expand the resort to accommodate both larger meetings and more skiers.

The business of meetings

That's helped Calabogie Peaks earn the title of Eastern Ontario's largest mountain resort and attract some 150,000 visitors annually.

However, a growing share of the property's revenues is coming from hosting corporate events.

"The meeting scene here is growing steadily," says Ms. Murphy, who works as director of marketing at the resort. She estimates it currently makes up a quarter of the company's business.

"More and more functions are being held here to specifically escape from the city."

One such occasion was when Calabogie hosted a technology company whose intention was to cut cords and remain



MAKING A RESORT MEETING WORK

If attendees have expectations of reliving their youth by going out on the town and hitting the bar, Ms. Murphy said they may be disappointed. Many ski resorts are located outside of city limits, which means participants may have limited access to clubs and bars.

"We have people book meetings here for that exact reason,"

Ms. Murphy says. "They want participants to focus and not have those types of distractions that are found in the city."

disconnected for a weekend of distraction-free brainstorming.

"The group settled in at one of our remote cabins situated alongside the river, two hours from the main resort," * says Ms. Murphy. "We helped them go back to the basics with big easels and cork boards where it was just them and their thoughts."

** Correction: The remote cabin is a two hour hike or a 20 minute drive from the resort.*