



“IT JUST MIGHT WORK”

Jack Thomas looks back on his four years as Park City’s mayor

Park City Municipal Corporation: As mayor, you advanced several high-profile projects and initiatives. What’s your secret?

Jack Thomas: I think I was the right person at the right time. This job is all about possibilities. I take a big-picture approach to problem solving, and my motto has always been, “It just might work.” Don’t worry about whether something might fail: worry about how to make it work.

PCMC: In the past year, you helped craft deals to save Bonanza Flat, create the Arts & Culture District, and develop a tentative alternative to Treasure Hill. How did they come about?

JT: An unusually high number of opportunities arose in the past year; in each case, it was my responsibility to present the possibilities to the community and the voters. But it really took a City Council and community that were willing to objectively evaluate each of them on their merits.

PCMC: Other communities would have looked at Bonanza Flat and said, “It’s just a piece of developable land.” Why did we have a different vision?

JT: We’ve always known who we are. Our core values—which are the foundation of our strategic plan—are small town, historic character, sense of community, and natural setting. We know open space is not valuable because of what it could be: it’s valuable because of what it is now. We know what we value as a town, and we’re willing to pay for it. And we take the long view.

PCMC: How did the Arts & Culture District come together?

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JT: Sundance and the Kimball Art Center are two cherished Park City institutions, but there had been angst in the community for quite

awhile about one or both of them leaving. I had had a conversation with Robert Redford a few years ago in which he expressed a desire to build a permanent home for Sundance in Park City, so I always knew it was possible. When Kimball Arts left Main Street, I was worried they might relocate outside of Park City, but the city kept the channels of communication open with both Sundance and Kimball so that we would be ready when an opportunity presented itself. All three entities also believe in the power of small towns to make a big difference.

As for the location, Bonanza Park was the perfect place for the district. We had spent years with stops and starts of Bonanza area redesigns, but they always felt too urbanizing. With the transient room tax as a funding mechanism, we have the ability to redefine the neighborhood with a scope, scale, and vision that are authentically Park City, and vibrancy that will attract year-round residents and tourists alike.

PCMC: What do you say to people who worry we're spending too much money?

JT: In the case of Bonanza Flat and the transit and transportation taxes, the decisions rested with the voters. With regard to Treasure Hill, we will present the alternative to the Planning Commission and voters: ultimately it's their choice. Comparatively, we have very low property and sales taxes, and residents seem to agree that these initiatives are worthy investments for enriching and maintaining our sense of community.

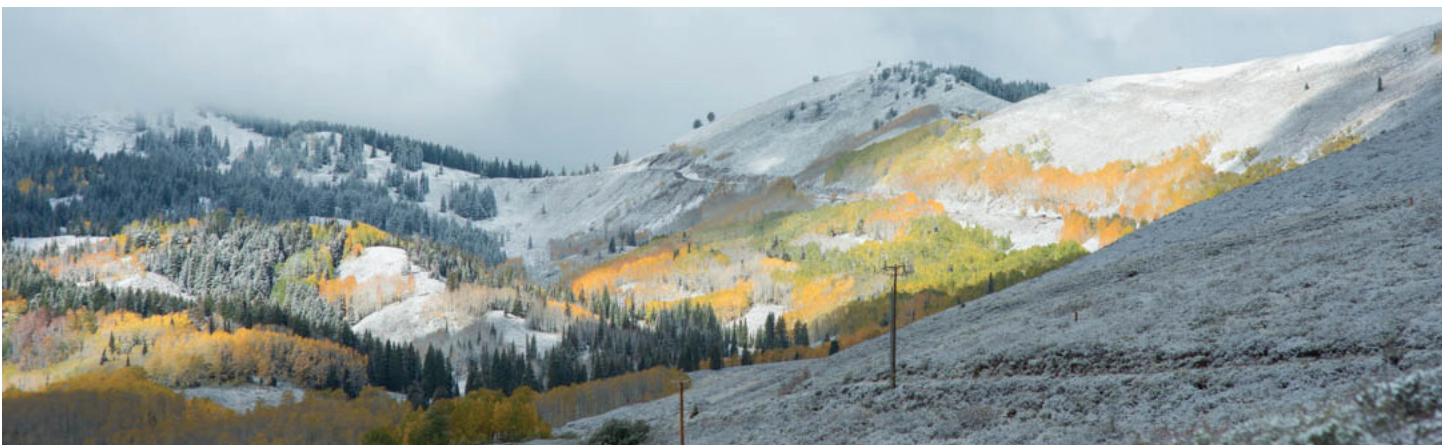
For the Arts & Culture District, we were able to take advantage of an undercapitalized resource, the transient room tax. What's interesting is that we've actually raised our bond rating through this process: we now have the highest rating of any resort community in the U.S., and the municipality is very, very strong financially overall.

PCMC: These three deals—Bonanza Flat, Treasure Hill, and Arts & Culture—all hinged on bringing the parties to the table to strike deals. How did you approach the discussions?

JT: In each case, we needed to build trust with the folks across the table. There are four components to building trust: propriety, commonality, clear intentions, and competence. Focus on what you have in common and don't throw any curveballs. If you lay the groundwork—sometimes years in advance—and maintain open channels of communication—you'll be able to act when the opportunity finally arises. It's never too late until the shovels are in the ground.

PCMC: Latino residents are a quarter of our town's population but are often overlooked as part of our community. You took a particular interest in this community and helped to raise our collective awareness. Why was this so important to you?

JT: From the day I got into office, I wanted to make this a priority. I grew up in downtown Midvale, and most of my neighbors were Latino. We grew up in a context of scarcity but were surrounded by opportunity. I have a very high regard for Latino culture—for the work ethic and family values. As an architect, I've watched Latino men and women work their way through the hierarchy



of trades. Many started in landscaping and excavation, then moved to footings and foundations, then framing, then suddenly they're electricians and general contractors. And now many own their own companies. That's the American dream; that was my hope and my own experience. When I see this threatened by national politics, frankly, I'm embarrassed and I'm enraged because I know they're such a key part of who we are as Americans. And I feel like they're a part of my family.

PCMC: How would you sum up your approach to governing?

JT: My job is very much an advocate's role, and our Council is "proactive-planning" personified. This is very different from trouble-shooting or dealing with problems after they arise. Taking a conservative approach means you let things unfold as they may, sometimes without purpose and without involvement, suffering whatever consequence occurs. We've seen too much of that in America and in the built environment. We live in a small town where we have passionate people with the willingness to make a difference and be engaged. So, as a Council, we try to put ourselves in the best-possible position to anticipate opportunities and listen to our residents.

PCMC: What would you like your legacy to be?

JT: My legacy is my family and children, and I'm very proud of that. This job is not about legacy building. It's about—has always been about—the community. I didn't do this for me.

PCMC: What worries you about the future?

JT: I think what will catch us off guard is the unchecked growth of Salt Lake City, the Wasatch Front, and the

other areas just outside Park City. Those folks will be coming here to play and work, so it will be more and more difficult to preserve our identity as a small town. The short answer is to build affordable housing and ensure our town is more complete: our core values won't change.

PCMC: What advice do you have for future mayors and City Council members?

JT: The thing we have to fear most as leaders is our own ego: it can blind us, distort our vision. Our job is to represent the whole of the community. I said it the first day I got into office: It's not about me—it's about us. Simply said, but hard to do. We should never lose perspective.

PCMC: Any final thoughts?

JT: I want to thank my family, City Council and staff, and the residents. It has been my greatest honor to represent this community.

