

THE ASPEN TIMES

Tourists can save valley from flat on their backs

By Scott Condon
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Tourists who flock to Aspen can help preserve the Roaring Fork Valley by doing nothing more than sleeping here.

The Sky Hotel has teamed with the Aspen Valley Land Trust in a program to collect a small, voluntary fee from the hotel's guests to raise funds for open space preservation.

Here's how it works: AVLT had thousands of cards printed that feature a stunning black-and-white photograph shot from Wildcat Ridge, above Snowmass Village, looking west toward Mount Daly. The card explains AVLT's land preservation efforts. It informs the Sky Hotel's guests that a \$2 fee per night has been added to their bill to be used for preservation. Guests can have the fee removed if they want.

So far every guest has paid, and no complaints have been made, according to Sky Hotel General Manager John Curnow. He believes placing the promotional piece in the rooms is a key. "It's a hard thing to argue," Curnow said.

Shannon Meyer, associate director of AVLT, said The Little Nell Hotel will also join the program soon. Between the two 90-plus room properties, she hopes the program raises \$100,000 annually. Negotiations are under way to enlist other hotels and properties in Aspen.

Meyer said the program is modeled after a similar effort in Jackson, Wyo. Although land prices and conservation easements are expensive enough that the programs provide just a drop in the bucket, every bit helps, Meyer said. In addition, the programs have the potential to capture the eye of wealthy guests who want to play a larger role in land preservation.

The promotional pieces in the rooms will direct guests to seek more information at the AVLT Web site. Meyer believes the program has a good chance of drawing additional interest, considering the typical Aspen visitor.

"Open space is what brings people here rather than to Vail and other resorts," she said.

For more about AVLT and the Hotel Open Space Contribution Program, go to www.avlt.org.

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