

Builder asked for more lodges

by Marcy Nicholson
Free Press staff

Sitka Log Homes' contract to build the 2002 Winter Olympics ski day lodge at Snowbasin Resort in Utah has been compared to winning the gold medal of the building trade.

What then could be compared to their latest success at earning a contract to build two additional, yet smaller, day lodges, Middlebowl Day Lodge and the John Paul Day Lodge, on the same hill?

"They were basically just handed to us after the first one," said John Johnson, Sitka Log Homes owner.

He credits the success of the 23,000 sq. ft. main day lodge construction and his good rapport with Ruscitto-Latham and Blanton Architectural Firm for his latest contract.

105 Mile-based Sitka has not forgotten its roots. "We're supplying the logs from here," said Johnson who uses 80- to 120-year-old, tight grained dead-standing timber.

While the average log home is built with 12-14 inch diameter logs, Sitka's three lodges are built with 24-40 inch logs.

"The biggest challenge was getting the wood, because it has to be standing dead. Everything was pre-assembled here and reassembled on the site," said Johnson.

In fact, it took 38 semi-loads by local trucking firms to transport the wood down to the site at the base of the ski venue.

Now that the initial challenges of locating and transporting the logs are over, as well as the completion of the main day lodge, the construction of the smaller day lodges pose another unique obstacle. They are situated at the starting gates of the Super G and Giant Slalom.



Marcy Nicholson photo

Sitka Log Homes owner, John Johnson unrolls the blue prints of the main day lodge that his company has built for the 2002 Winter Olympics scheduled for Salt Lake City.

"The biggest hurdle is building these two buildings at 9,000 ft.," said Johnson.

D-7 Caterpillars pull the logs on a wagon up the steep incline to where the buildings are being constructed. Each load takes half an hour.

"It's just a goat trail," he said. "The logistics are crazy."

The day lodges, one 7,000 sq. ft. and the other 11,000 sq. ft., look out over a mountain range. "The hill is straight down," said Johnson. "Trying to make a job work in such a limited space and time frame has been a challenge."

The two upper day lodge structures that were started in April will be finished in a couple of weeks, said Johnson.

Johnson began building log homes before they were fashionable. In fact, after building his own log home through trial and error and at only 20 years of age, people started asking him to build log homes for them.

"It just started as an interest in building log homes," he said.

By the '70s he was exporting log homes to Europe and by the '80s his business expanded into Japan.

"I wouldn't have thought the industry would have grown like it has," Johnson said.

The company just sent a restaurant to Korea three weeks ago.

But while Johnson makes his living by building traditional homes, he has not been left behind by technology. In fact, the Internet played a vital role in his building opportunity in Utah.

In 1999, Sitka Homes Marketer Bonnie Lawes and some local professionals, designed the company's first Web page (www.sitkaloghomes.com). Johnson said the page is what brought Sitka's existence to the attention of the Olympic architectural firm.

Johnson won't be there to see his lodges being used during the Olympics, but he will enjoy taking in the atmosphere that he has had a role in creating, after the event.

"I'm going to sit there in the lounge after the Olympics," he said with a grin.



Middlebowl Day Lodge artist's rendering.



Snowbasin photos

John Paul Day Lodge artist's rendering.