

BUSINESS

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INTERVIEW

A conversation with Roberto Moreno, founder and president of Alpino

Q:

Vail Resorts just donated \$600,000 to help you bring 10,000 urban kids into the mountains. What's next for your group?

A: Hopefully after the next two years, we'll call it the Colorado 20,000 program. The idea is to get kids of color and urban kids interested in mountain sports and in understanding the options mountain recreation creates for them.

The secondary goal is to convince ski areas — and the smartest ski areas, like Vail Resorts; Aspen Skiing; Diane and Tim Mueller at Crested Butte and Okemo; Eldora; Arapahoe Basin; and Loveland, certainly understand this — that programs promoting diversity and inclusivity build future business for them.

Q: You've given several speeches at major ski industry rallies recently. How have those been received?

A: Very, very positively. We have had so many people coming up to us after those meetings and a steady stream of calls from across the United States. We are now working with more than 20 ski hills nationally to create some form of diversity and inclusivity program.

Q: Why has the ski industry been so slow to recognize the potential of minority skiing?

A: It is not, and let me emphasize this, it is not because of racism. Most of the leadership in the ski industry lead geographically, politically and

socially isolated lives. If you are not spending a lot of time in major metro areas like Los Angeles or D.C., or Denver for that matter, you are not in touch with the multicultural emergence that is happening in the United States.

The other problem is that our industry traditionally has been more reactive rather than proactive in its marketing initiatives. Our group, Alpino, is designed to do things, to get kids to the mountains and to make the business case to support diversity and inclusivity at ski resorts.

Trust me, snowboarding is very, very cool to minority kids. The fact that we have a flattening out of snowboarding visits simply means the industry has failed to reach out to its multicultural model.

Q: How can ski resorts entice more minorities to visit?

A: It is clear that most people end up developing an affinity for the mountains because their friends or family took them. But if you come from a family that doesn't have any historical participation in mountain sports, the industry can build stuff until the cows come home (and) you are not going to come.

We have a responsibility to bridge that gap and get kids into the mountains through alternative ways. That's the key to Alpino's success. We need to enable kids with lift tickets



Jerry Cleveland | The Denver Post

"People who recognize the opportunities found in mountain recreation can save kids' lives," Roberto Moreno says.

or lunches or transportation or whatever to get them up to the mountains.

Q: Do you feel minorities are ignored by the ski industry?

A: They have been ignored, and they have grown ambivalent. Living here in Denver, where we are bombarded with images of mountains and where we cannot turn on a television newscast without seeing a snow report in the winter, I think it is sad that that snow report is irrelevant to half the population.

That is the core of what we

are doing. We want to make that snow report relevant to the entire population because we understand the life-changing characteristics of mountain recreation. And we want to show kids that there is a life out there that may be better than what they are living right now.

Q: What's your story? You're an expert skier from East L.A.

A: I was born and raised in East L.A., Gangland USA. At the age of 10, I was fortunate enough to hook up with a local playground group ... that took us to the mountains. I did not have a family that was involved in mountain sports, but for me, the mountains symbolized an opportunity to do something with my life, (a symbol) that I didn't have to live my entire life in East L.A. and get involved in gangs and drugs and all that.

Based on my own experience, I think that if you introduce kids to the joy of mountain sports and mountain recreation, ultimately they will find a way of continuing their involvement. I really believe that people who recognize the opportunities found in mountain recreation can save kids' lives.

Edited for space and clarity from an interview by staff writer Jason Blevins.