

Peak 2 Peak Gondola Connects World Renowned Ski Runs



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PEAK 2 PEAK

By Cathie Bartlett

As designing and building projects go, the Whistler Blackcomb Peak 2 Peak Gondola gives new meaning to the words ‘exciting’ and ‘challenging.’ Connecting two world renowned peaks that will soon be a site for the 21st Winter Olympics made the gondola high profile from the start – not to mention its record-breaking dimensions.

More than three kilometres long, or almost three and a half times the length of the Golden Gate Bridge and 415 metres high, Peak 2 Peak is the longest unsupported span for a lift of this kind and the highest and the longest continuous lift system in the world.

Accomplishing that – on schedule and on budget – makes the contractor in charge proud, says David Thompson, president of Colony Management Inc., the Vancouver-based company that pulled the project off in conjunction with BEHLEN Industries LP.

Long known as ‘the company that gets difficult projects done,’ there are a few other factors that add to Colony’s pride in this case, including the project’s visibility.

“Most of our stuff is in very remote locations,” Thompson says. “People don’t see what we do.”

Another is the gondola’s striking appearance – a steel structure that presents well. Usually architects try to hide the fact that a building is a steel structure, “But here, the architect embraced that aspect and enhanced it,” Thompson says.

Producing a distinctive look while staying on budget was why the project’s owners, Intrawest Placemaking, called on Colony’s trouble-shooting reputation. As John R. Morley, Intrawest’s vice-president of

development, says: “When we obtained our preliminary pricing for the terminal enclosures, the conventional steel building design was significantly higher than our budget.

“Given the high profile nature of the project we really needed these buildings to be iconic in nature. ... Our architect had come up with a really great concept that the project team liked but it became clear we were not going to be able to deliver the icon we wanted within our budget using a conventional steel building.”

On reviewing the preliminary plans, Colony suggested that going the steel systems building route could maintain architectural integrity within budget.

“We could give them a firm price up front. If any changes were required we could say right away what they would cost. It made their decision-

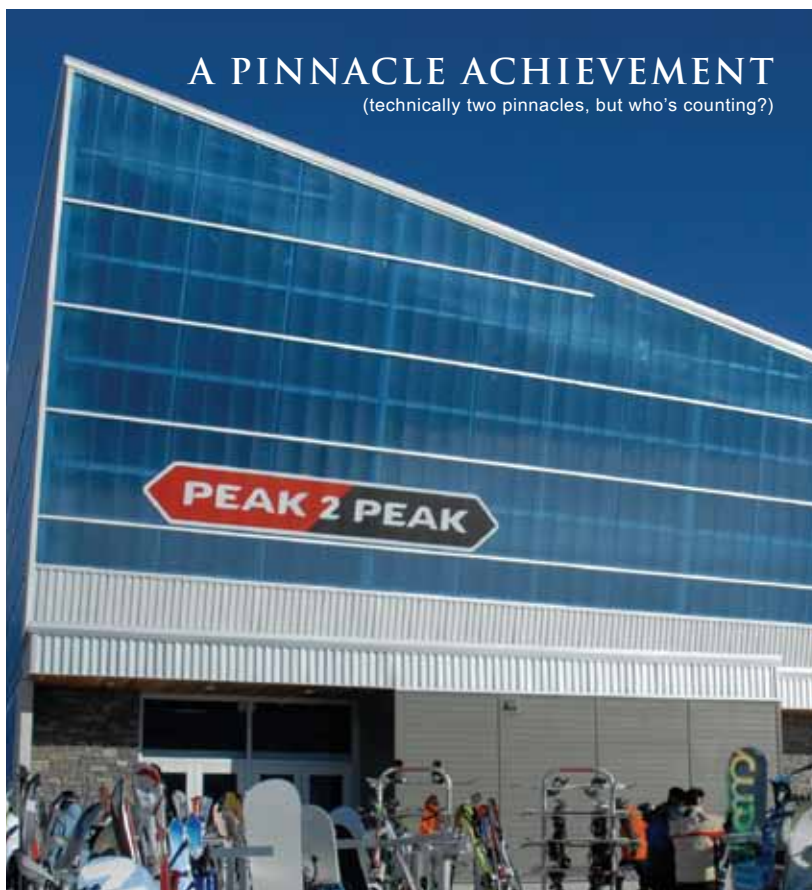
making a lot easier,” Thompson says.

This single source responsibility saved time and money. Rather than waiting for a final design from the architect and engineer and putting the design out to tender, then paying to accommodate changes, Colony did a structural design (based on the architect’s design) that captured the necessary look, was sound structurally, gave Intrawest a satisfactory cost figure and pushed on.

“We move right to the six-month stage right away,” Thompson says of his company’s expeditious manner.

Colony then contacted its long-time partner, BEHLEN Industries LP. “Our involvement was to engineer and manufacture the structural components,” Meredith Perez, marketing supervisor for BEHLEN Industries LP, the largest steel building manufacturer in Canada, says.

More than three kilometres long and 415 metres high, Peak 2 Peak is the longest continuous lift system in the world.



A PINNACLE ACHIEVEMENT

(technically two pinnacles, but who’s counting?)

PROJECT INFORMATION >>

THE WORLD WILL BE WATCHING THE 2010 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES IN VANCOUVER. FOR MANY COMPETITIONS, THOUSANDS WILL CLIMB TWO OF THE CONTINENT’S GREATEST VERTICAL-RISE SKI MOUNTAINS TO WATCH AND PARTICIPATE IN EVENTS. KEEPING CROWDS MOVING SMOOTHLY BETWEEN WHISTLER AND BLACKCOMB MOUNTAINS WILL BE AN OLYMPIC-SIZED FEAT ITSELF. BUT LEADING THE WAY IS THE MOUNTAINS’ NEW PEAK TO PEAK GONDOLA AND BEHLEN INDUSTRIES LP’S FLEX-SYS® STEEL BUILDING SYSTEM (SBS) TERMINALS.

CHALLENGES >>

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- CLEAR SPANS UP TO 300’ WITHOUT STRUCTURAL COLUMNS
- DURABILITY IN SEISMIC ZONES, CORROSION RESISTANCE, AND EASY SNOW REMOVAL
- ECONOMIC SAVINGS WITH QUALITY CONSTRUCTION, PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND EFFICIENT LABOUR COSTS
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No easy job that, especially considering the Whistler building stretches from ground level 80 feet into the air, Thompson says. Plus there was a time crunch due to bad weather delaying the concrete work the year before. The busy site also meant Colony had to co-operate with other trades, in one case leaving an end wall off one structure so ropeway engineers Doppelmayr could pull a cable across before Colony closed the building in.

At one point, "we worked two shifts and actually stood all the steel within six days on one of the buildings."

All worth it in the end for a company whose corporate strategy is all about challenging itself, he says.

"Getting the opportunity to work on challenging projects is our lifeblood, what we excel at and what we enjoy."

Perez recalls how it took a lot of communication with all parties and numerous group meetings to ensure the project went ahead.

"The fact we have two beautiful buildings is testament to (the project's) success," besides showing what Behlen can do in terms of handling a difficult location and strenuous conditions.

"It's a very unique project and we're very excited to be proud of it."

And as a skier, she's looking forward to skiing both mountains in one day thanks to Peak 2 Peak Gondola shuttling from one point to the other in just 11 minutes.



Photos courtesy of Precip www.preciproductions.com

