

# Ginn Company Promises Quality Development At Burke

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## EAST BURKE VERMONT

While workers hustle to get ready for the upcoming ski season, the new owner of Burke Mountain ski area says his biggest challenge is developing the area while retaining the quality that brings people to this small town.

Bobby Ginn, founder and president of the Florida-based Ginn Company, who expects to spend more than \$100 million on his latest acquisition, talked about that challenge during a telephone interview Tuesday morning.

"You have to have all the ingredients needed without destroying the culture," Ginn said. "That is always a difficult task."

Ginn has been looking at Burke Mountain for over three years and made his decision to buy the resort from Burke Mountain Academy for \$3 million last week. He was introduced to the area by Donald Graham, a successful Pennsylvania businessman and a longtime supporter of the ski area whose children attended BMA, a private high school with an emphasis on ski racing.

During those three years, Ginn said he made several trips to Burke and talked with Graham "dozens of times."

"Our company makes markets," Ginn said. He said he looks for places not already on the front pages of newspapers, goes in and makes a brand. Burke Mountain is one of those areas which, Ginn said, does have all the right ingredients to become a successful, four-season resort. The mountain is already a ski area, has good access from Interstate 91 and is beautiful. "People all over the world recognize Vermont for its beauty," Ginn said.

An international marketing campaign is already in progress, he said. The company hopes to buy about 1,500 acres in addition to the core ski area of 750 acres. Ginn is still in the process of buying property, he said. Three pieces on Route 114 in East Burke have been closed on, according to papers filed in the Burke Town Clerk's Office. A house and four acres were bought from Gerald and Elaine Derry for \$250,000; Rob Conn sold his house and automobile repair shop along with 15 acres for \$400,000; and Richard and Marie Burrington of Hatfield, Mass., sold 110 acres to Ginn for \$750,000.

Ginn said development will include private homes, condominiums, a hotel and a golf course. When complete, Ginn said "well over \$100 million" will have been invested.

Whether the golf course will be public or private has not yet been decided, Ginn said. It could be semi-private and available to guests. How many units will be built will be determined by how much land the company can acquire, Ginn said. The ski area will remain open to the public, he added, and the company will continue to work closely with BMA.

## The Ginn Company

Incorporated in 1998, Ginn Clubs and Resorts, a privately held resort development and management firm, was founded by Edward Robert "Bobby" Ginn (pronounced with a hard "g" as in "get"). The business now has more than 1,200 employees, according to the company's Web site.

Current projects include Cobblestone Park in Columbia, S.C., Belvidere Club and Resort in the Charleston area, Hammock Beach and Yacht Harbor Village near St. Augustine, Fla., Reunion Resort & Club of Orlando, Bella Collina north of Orlando and Tesoro in Port St. Lucie.

The company also owns and operates Mahogany Run Golf Course in St. Thomas and has several projects under development in North Carolina and Colorado, according to its Web site.

## **Burke A Destination Resort**

Ginn said he believes his company can succeed in accomplishing what so many have failed to do in the past - turn Burke Mountain into a destination four-season, high-class resort. He said past development on Burke has happened without any direction.

"Development without a plan is not good," he said. "It takes everything to work like a chain. If one link is broken, it is no longer a chain."

But the theme or direction must be followed with the idea to preserve the culture of the area. "That's what brings people here," Ginn said.

It took Ginn more than three years to come to the decision to buy the ski area and it could take another three years before any effect from the development is felt, he said. The company needs to finalize its plans, obtain both local and state permits before construction can begin.

"It's a long process," Ginn said. "It could be one to two years before you see any activity."

In the meantime, improvements to the ski area are evident with a new high-speed chair lift, called the Sherburne Express, already in place, and expanded snowmaking capabilities. The Sherburne Base Lodge is also undergoing extensive renovations.

Charlie Hardiman has been hired by Ginn to be the on-site overseer of operations. Hardiman worked for the Disney company for 28 years and helped develop Pleasure Island in Florida. Dick Andross and Ford Hubbard, who have been managing the operations of the ski area for five years, will be staying on, Hardiman said.

"Ford is my mentor and spiritual guide," he said.