



Mountain Careers

Changing the Mountain Living Narrative

BY LAURA LIEFF

Twenty years ago, Aryn Schlichting moved to the mountains and didn't think she would stay. At the time, she worked for the Vail Resorts human resources department and watched as friend after friend moved to the Front Range or out of Colorado, because they couldn't find the job they wanted, couldn't find one that paid the bills or both. It wasn't until she began working for the Town of Vail that she realized a variety of year-round career options were available.

"I was in the recruiting industry and still didn't know," says Schlichting, who is now the deputy director of human

resources for Eagle County and the founder of Mountain Careers. "The narrative around ski towns was the 'ski bum' mentality, meaning that it's expensive to live in a mountain town and seasonal jobs are the only choice. That wasn't accurate then, and it still isn't."

As a business owner and full-time working mother of two, as well as an industry leader, a community influencer and a recruitment expert, Schlichting understands the value of growing and developing the mountain town workforce. In an effort to get the word out and change the narrative, she founded Mountain Careers — a job board/network that attracts professional

candidates and employers to the most coveted mountain towns in the world. Created in 2015, Mountain Careers connects qualified, long-term candidates (who are experienced, local, career-driven and dedicated to making a life in the mountains) with professional positions in the places they want to live.

"When I started Mountain Careers, my hope was that mountain towns would focus on attracting the types of people who are willing to work locally and forge their own paths," she explains. "I realized that in order to be happy here, you have to want to be part of the community. I also learned that plenty of jobs here support that mindset."

MOUNTAIN TOWN STRATEGY

While the Mountain Careers network is diverse, what sets it apart is that the jobs posted are quality career opportunities (rather than seasonal jobs with a lot of turnover) for people who are serious about making the mountains their full-time homes. By working with start-ups, corporations, non-profits and local businesses, Mountain Careers finds and posts the best available long-term job openings.

That being said, in many cases, one job is not enough, so when people mention that having two is necessary to support themselves, Schlichting offers a strategy that serves her well. She explains that having a “career” job and a “perk” job is beneficial — especially when they connect.

“Through Mountain Careers, I had to learn how to create a website and manage social media, which are two skills that I now use for my human resources job,” says Schlichting. “I find that when people apply their skills across different channels and are deliberate about which jobs to seek out and take, they see the most success.”

On that note, Schlichting has noticed the difference between the candidates who really want to live in a mountain town — i.e. those who are willing to prioritize their surroundings over having a larger house or fancier car — and people who aren’t ready to make that commitment.

“It’s not that mountain towns don’t have opportunities,” she explains. “It’s that the people we attract don’t always know what they want. Those who survive here find a way to make it work by putting their skills to use or finding their own niche. They are also willing to restructure their mindsets and priorities and put forth the effort to live in these communities.”

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

During the initial few years of Mountain Careers, Schlichting worked on changing the narrative and reeducating the community on what was possible for both job seekers and recruiters. Eight years later, Mountain Careers boasts 10,000 newsletter subscribers, another 10,000

followers on social media and is bridging mountain communities by focusing on year-round professional prospects.

“We’re lucky that the Vail Valley is ahead of the curve in terms of career opportunities, salaries and diverse industries,” Schlichting points out. “While some towns remain more service industry-focused, the Vail Valley started working on a year-round economy way before other mountain towns, and now we have more options.”

Another aspect of mountain living that Schlichting understands is the value of community. “We live in a place where everything works better when we help each other,” she says. “Living in a mountain town is not for everyone, and people need to be strategic about deciding whether they want to do what it takes to live here.”

The type of strategy Schlichting is describing is what Mountain Careers has been doing more of the last few years — helping people understand what they need to do to thrive in a stunning place with a unique lifestyle. In addition to the job board, Mountain Careers provides webinars that educate both sides — employers and job seekers — on how to make mountain town living more feasible.

“No one was educating employers on how to be better, and no one was showing job seekers how to get on their path to success,” she explains. “One of the most rewarding aspects of this job is hearing all the success stories from those who found a career they love and feel secure about creating a life here. I remember what it was like to feel lost, and I don’t want anyone else to feel that way.”

Schlichting is also always looking ahead — both professionally and personally. “I want my kids to be able to live in the mountains if they choose to as adults, and I want to ensure that they have all the professional opportunities available,” she adds. “We are building something for the future, and I feel really good about that.” +

For more information, visit mountaincareers.com.



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