

HAVENS | Kellogg, Idaho

# A Mining Town With a Bleak Past Starts to Blossom

By MATTHEW PREUSCH

**D**OUg GREENWELL and his wife, April, took a ski holiday to Jackson Hole, Wyo., five years ago with the idea of looking for a vacation home. She found it too cold. He found it too expensive.

Besides Jackson, the Greenwells, who are from Richland, Wash., had been considering several other upscale ski areas in the West, including Bend, Ore., and Sun Valley, Idaho. None satisfied. But Mr. Greenwell had been following the environmental cleanup under way in the north Idaho town of Kellogg, a mining community at the center of one of the country's largest Superfund sites.

With the cleanup nearly done, the Greenwells saw potential for the mountain town to grow into a resort community built around the Silver Mountain ski area. In 2003, they paid \$42,000 for a 100-year-old miner's cabin a few blocks from the base of the gondola that carries skiers and snowboarders from the town to Silver Mountain's slopes.

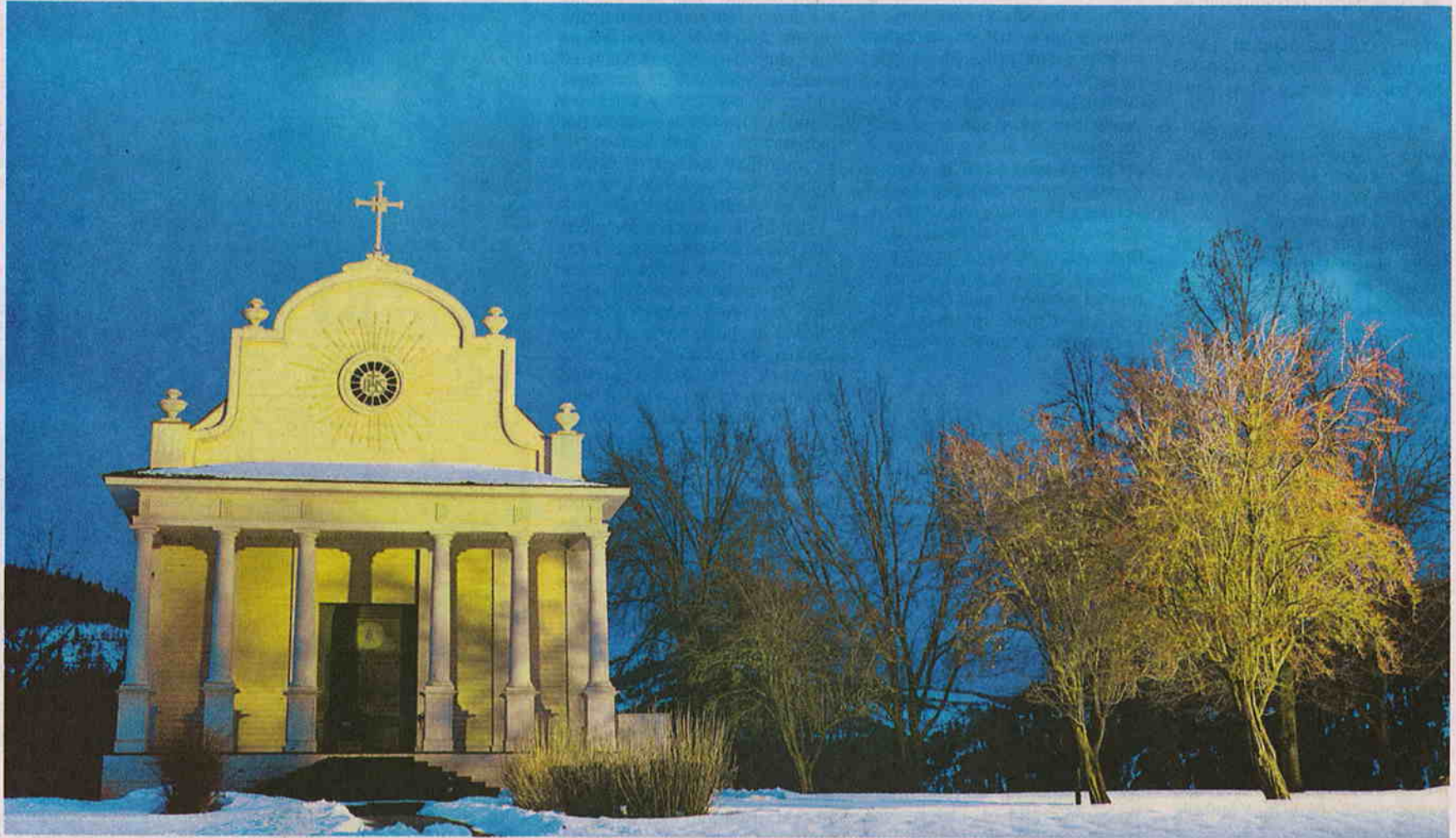
"Our thought was, 'Can we get something very affordable, enjoy it and see some appreciation,'" Mr. Greenwell said. "And it's worked out pretty well."

The couple are part of a wave of outdoors-oriented second-home buyers who are making over the once woe-begone Silver Valley, which straddles Idaho's panhandle. Kellogg is reinventing itself, as buildings are being renovated and condos and lofts built. And those who have a second-home pioneer spirit are taking notice.

Born in the 1880s silver boom, the valley's 14 communities — with names like Smelterville and Silverton — thrived for decades on the mineral wealth taken from the Bitterroot and Coeur d'Alene mountain ranges. Then in 1981 the Bunker Hill mine in Kellogg — known to locals as Uncle Bunker — closed. Some 2,100 jobs vanished. The population, which peaked at midcentury at more than 5,000, dropped below 3,000.

Two decades of hardship followed, during which the Environmental Protection Agency declared a 21-square-mile chunk of the valley a federal Superfund site because of mining and smelting waste. The E.P.A. has spent about \$440 million on the cleanup. Yards have been scraped of tainted soil and replanted with grass.

Now, million-dollar condos are rising above rickety miners' cottages on McKinley Avenue, the town's main street. Just two blocks from Gondola Village, though, there still stands a mountain of mining waste as big as a city block.



**HISTORIC SITE** The Cataldo Mission near Kellogg, a mining community that is reinventing itself, was opened in the early 1840s for the Coeur d'Alene Indians.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY INGRID BARRENTINE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



**The Scene**

## The Lay Of the Land

**POPULATION** There are about 2,300 residents in Kellogg and 13,180 in Shoshone County, which covers most of the Silver Valley, according to 2006 Census Bureau estimates.

**SIZE** The 40-mile-long valley is hemmed in by forested foothills at an average elevation of about 2,300 feet.

**WHO'S BUYING** Young families and boomers who like to ski, cycle and mountain bike.

**GETTING THERE** Commercial airlines fly into Spokane, Wash., which is an hour's drive west of Kellogg.

## The Scene

Kellogg is bisected by Interstate 90, which winds through the narrow valley of the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River about an hour east of Spokane, Wash. Hills of pine, fir and tamarack rise to the north and south. Some of those hills are stubbly with young trees after being stripped bare for decades.

South of the highway sits the historic city center, Uptown, and north of I-90 is Sunnyside, a newer area built on a former cedar swamp that is home to Dave Smith Motors, which bills itself as the largest Dodge dealer in the world.

Legend holds that the town site was discovered after a jackass belonging to Noah Kellogg kicked over a hunk of galena ore, setting off a mining rush. A sign at the edge of town used to joke that the place was inhabited by the descendants of Mr. Kellogg's donkey.

Residents are relaxed and jocular, with some wary and many hopeful, over the arrival of condo-buying Californians in their long-neglected rural region. Not that the changes are too dramatic. All-terrain vehicles can still be seen on the streets, and the local newspaper features full-page color ads for deer rifles.

"I wear jeans and Patagonia stuff, and sometimes I feel like I'm overdressed," said Patrick Ryan, a home designer and builder from central Washington who last year paid \$254,000 for an 1,800-square-foot, three-bedroom rambler in a subdivision built for mining executives in the 1960s; it's just one block from the gondola.

That gondola is important in practice and as a symbol, because Kellogg is relying on outdoor recreation to sustain its revival. Though Silver Mountain is a smallish ski area, with one high-speed quad, four smaller lifts and 1,600 acres of cleared terrain, it does get 300 inches of snow a year and has good tree skiing between its twin peaks, Kellogg (6,300 feet) and Wardner (6,200 feet).

"It's insane, dude," said Richard Grunburg, a snowboarder from Newport Beach, Calif., who bought a half-share in two condos at Gondola Village in 2004. "When it's good, it's really good."

## Pros

In addition to the allure of Silver Mountain, there is also a nearby system of snowmobile trails that stretches across Idaho's panhandle and into western Montana. Mountain bikers ride the same slopes in summer, while conventional cyclists cruise through the valley on the paved 72-mile-long Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes.

And should any outdoor adventures result in injury, there's the Shoshone Medical Center, a 25-bed hospital with emergency care, which moved into a new facility in Kellogg two years ago.

## Cons

Night-life decisions in Kellogg are basic and limited. If you smoke, grab a drink at Dirty Ernie's. If you don't, try

the Jackass Saloon, where city council campaigns can start over frosty mugs of microbrews. Most of Uptown Kellogg has yet to recover from the economic shock of the 1980s and 1990s, with several storefronts and historic buildings still boarded up.

Then there are the poisonous metals. A century of mining in the Silver Valley dumped lead, zinc and cadmium into the soil and water in and around Kellogg, the E.P.A. says. But last year the agency and the mining companies cleaned up the last of contaminated residential and commercial land; 3,200 properties and streets have been cleaned.

## The Real Estate Market

The Silver Valley's second-home market started in earnest in March 2004, when the resort developer Jeld-Wen Communities of Klamath Falls, Ore., offered the first phase of condominiums at Gondola Village in Silver Mountain.

"We basically had a muddy parking lot with some pink tape showing the outline of the buildings and a couple of Realtors saying, 'No, seriously, it's going to be really nice,'" said Neal Scholey, sales manager for the Silver Mountain Corporation.

Buyers were persuaded. The 68 planned studios and one-bedroom units, priced between the low \$100,000s and low \$400,000s and designed in the style of what the company calls eclectic mining architecture, sold out in four days in 2004. In 2005, 110 units sold in a day. The next year 99.

The average price of homes sold in the Silver Valley has nearly tripled in the last five years, from \$55,836 to \$152,054, according to Multiple Listing Service statistics.

Things have slowed a bit, though. So far, Silver Mountain Corporation has sold just over a third of the first 49 home sites for sale at its new golf course-centered Galena Ridge development west of town. Quarter-acre lots there are selling for between \$169,000 and \$309,000.

Back in town buyers are still fixing up old cottages in the Uptown area or building ski chalets in the adjacent city of Wardner. But much of the development right now centers on condos or other multifamily developments, real estate agents say. The three-story red brick Lincoln School is being converted into 17 lofts with 14-foot-high ceilings. They range in price from \$299,000 to \$499,000, and are meant to attract young urban couples.

"The terms 'condos' and 'lofts,' you did not hear those terms here three years ago," said Roger Crigger, president of the Shoshone County Board of Realtors. "In fact, most people didn't know what a loft was."



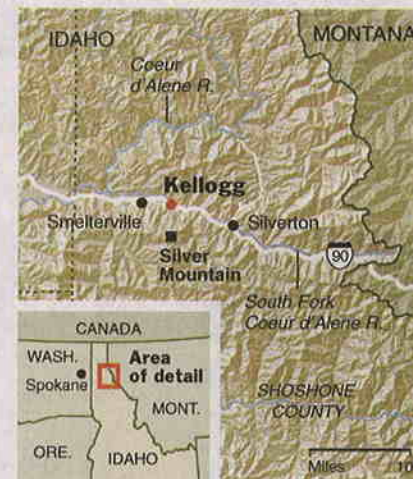
## TO THE SLOPES

The communities around Kellogg thrived for decades on silver mining, but in 1981 the area's main mine closed, the prosperity ended, and an era of downturn set in. The gondola, left, carries skiers from Kellogg to the slopes of Silver Mountain.

times fly into Spokane, Wash., which is an hour's drive west of Kellogg.

**WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING** For proximity to the ski gondola you can't beat Morning Star Lodge (610 Bunker Avenue, 877-230-2193; realestate.silvermt.com), which has studios starting at \$109 a night and eight-person suites that start at \$319.

Across the street from the gondola is the clean and pet-friendly Baymont Inn and Suites (601 Bunker Avenue, 800-785-5443; www.baymontinns.com), which has rooms ranging from \$55 to \$150 a night, depending on the season.



THE NEW YORK TIMES

## THREE FOR SALE

# Million-Dollar Condos Rise Above Old Miners' Cottages



**WHAT** 3-bedroom farmhouse  
**HOW MUCH** \$239,900

This creekside house sits on a half-acre outside Kellogg. It is about 1,500 square feet, has one and a half baths and comes with a fenced pasture. Agent: Rose Breazeal, Tomlinson Black Silver Valley Realty, 208-783-1121; www.homesinsilvervalley.com.

Information on properties was supplied by the listing companies.



**WHAT** 1-bedroom condo  
**HOW MUCH** \$349,900

Part of the commercial and residential center at the base of the gondola that carries skiers from Kellogg to Silver Mountain, this 760-square-foot furnished condominium comes with granite countertops in the kitchen and is designed in the eclectic mining style. Agent: Neal Scholey, Silver Mountain Resort, (208) 783-1123; www.silvermt.com,



**WHAT** 3-bedroom lodge-style house  
**HOW MUCH** \$598,500

Part of a new development in Wardner Canyon, this 1,995-square-foot house was built last year around a common area with a fire pit and a barbecue. Sitting on a tenth of an acre, it has a slate fireplace and stainless-steel appliances. Broker: Karen Hulstrom, Century 21 Silver Heritage Realty, (208) 786-0100; www.silverheritagerealty.com.