

Women in the Industry

Kit Armour
Breckenridge Grand Vacations

When I was asked to compose an article about the woman who I have always considered to be my mentor, I consequently took an in depth look at what qualities are necessary to become a woman in charge of one of today's top independent resort families. For those who know her, Kit Armour is the epitome of what it takes to be an influential female leader in the resort management arena. She is both tough-skinned and compassionate. She is a straight shooter who can tell you something without having to actually come out and say it. She somehow manages, on a daily basis, to be a core part of the front line team while still handling a tremendous workload to support back end operations. It's these kinds of best-of-both-worlds characteristics that make Kit stand out amongst the rest.

As the General Manager of Breckenridge Grand Vacations for the past nine years, Kit is responsible for all of the ongoing operations at Grand Timber Lodge and Gold Point Resort, as well as the Grand Lodge on Peak 7, which is currently under construction. Kit is known for her hands-on approach to managing all three of our company's Breckenridge, CO based properties. She sits on the Advisory Committees for all three resorts' homeowners' associations, makes lodging reservations, checks guests in at our front desks and will even make a bed when duty calls. She also serves as a member of the company's Executive Team, and was the only female executive of this nine person leadership organization, until just recently. Kit is viewed by many of the 175 employees that work under her stewardship as "a mentor, leader and friend," although she is also a self-proclaimed "goofball." Evidence of this is clearly found in her annual company-wide seminar on how to have fun at work, where she promotes such activities as Office Olympics and Chair Yoga. Having a sense of humor is obviously one of the reasons why Kit has endured through many career triumphs and challenges.

A 1984 graduate of Fairfield University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mathematics with a Concentration in Computer Sciences, Kit moved to Colorado right after college. Kit began her career in the travel industry at the Breckenridge Resort Chamber (BRC) in August of 1987 as the Data Base Manager for a few months before she was quickly promoted to the Director of Central Reservations. Kit served in this capacity for nine years until she was promoted again, this time to

Executive Director of the Breckenridge Resort Chamber. During her time at the Breckenridge Resort Chamber, she completely computerized the reservation system for the entire Central Reservations office as well as for fifty other property management companies. In addition, Kit instituted an incentive program to motivate the Central Reservations staff and reduce employee turnover. She also secured an Airline Reporting Corporation (ARC) license and several airline bulk air contracts to allow Breckenridge Central Reservations to be a full service travel agency. These actions resulted in an increase of total revenues by over 250% during Kit's tenure with the BRC.

In 1999, Kit left the BRC to begin working for Breckenridge Grand Vacations, a four-time winner of the American Resort Development Association (ARDA) Gold Award in the Project Team category. Since joining the Breckenridge Grand Vacations family of resorts, Kit has remained active in the BRC and currently sits on the Breckenridge Central Reservations Board of Directors. As part of her role as General Manager for Breckenridge Grand Vacations, Kit is responsible for managing a \$5.8 million homeowners' association budget for Grand Timber Lodge alone. For the 2007 fiscal year, Kit was able to bring over \$500,000 in savings to the Grand Timber Lodge Owners' Association (GTLOA) through her efforts to generate revenue and decrease expenses. Kit directly oversees eight Operations Managers, including the Director of Guest Services, the Director of Housekeeping, and the Director of the Grand Victorian Day Spa & Salon. As my direct supervisor, Kit has taught me most of what I know about resort management, but more importantly, she has taught me about having what it takes to be a good leader. She supports the management team working under her with unending patience and the coaching abilities of someone who was born to teach.

Kit also won the first-ever Grand Timber Lodge Community Service Award and has also received the company's Great Vacations Award on several occasions. In 2005, I couldn't have been happier when Kit was recognized for outstanding accomplishments in the vacation ownership industry when she was awarded the American Resort Development Association's ARDY Gold Award for General Manager and she has also earned her Registered Resort Professional (RRP) accreditation with ARDA. She currently serves on three ARDA Committees

including Resort Management, Rockies Regional and HOA Outreach and also speaks at various ARDA conferences and serves on industry related panels whenever asked.

Kit's unyielding strength and calm direction during difficult times has also earned her the respect of those who work with her. I remember my first encounter with Kit during an interview for an upper-management position that had been vacant for some time, and Kit had been filling in as the department head for a staff of more than ten people in addition to her normal responsibilities. No one else could have made it look easier. When the going gets tough, Kit rallies her team with a favorite inspirational message, "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!" because she says, "there is always a way to get through something, no matter how difficult times get or how horrible you think a situation is, as long as you persevere."

Kit's own challenging moments come from having what she calls thousands of bosses, made up of Breckenridge Grand Vacations 13,000 homeowners, and trying to make them all happy, but she draws inspiration from her mother, Maureen Armour, whom she says, "can talk to anyone about anything with coherent intelligence." In regards to leadership, Kit encompasses a multitude of outstanding leadership qualities such as honesty and patience, but the leadership skill she believes is most important is something she practices every day. Whether she is "dumpster-diving" with a maintenance technician to look for a set of false teeth that a guest accidentally threw away or driving the resort's courtesy shuttle through blizzard like conditions, Kit demonstrates that leading by example is something she is committed to at all times. It is this style of leadership that Kit has shared with so many, like me, in the hopes that we will "pay it forward."

Kit currently lives in unincorporated Summit County, 6 miles south of Breckenridge. She is originally from Haworth, New Jersey and has been married to her husband, Russ, for twelve years, although they have been together for twenty-one years because according to Kit, "You never want to rush into anything!" Kit and her husband are the proud parents of two dogs; Monty (3) and Fritz (6), as well as two horses; R.G. (16) and Tater (5). In her free time, she enjoys beading, knitting, spinning natural fibers in her at-home creative studio. An avid horseback rider, Kit's got more than a touch of cowgirl in her, and is also part owner of a ranch in Wyoming. She skis both cross country and alpine terrain. And true to her profession, Kit

certainly loves to explore new places and cultures and has travelled to many foreign lands including Mexico, Germany and Morocco.

Writing this article gave me a unique opportunity to look closely at what a woman in a leadership role in our industry must encompass in order to be an inspiration to others and a resource for both knowledge and experience. What I discovered was how truly unique of an individual my mentor is to possess all of these top notch qualities and handle such responsibility. Kit Armour has certainly proven to be the right woman for the job!