



VISIONARIES

THE MAYOR

A powder-day interview with Ogden, Utah, mayor Matthew Godfrey.

Sometimes you have to wait for the mayor on a powder day. It's dumped 12 inches overnight and I'm at the gondola at Snowbasin, standing around impatiently. Matthew Godfrey, the mayor of Ogden, Utah, a suburb 40 miles north of Salt Lake City, is late. When he shows up, he's carrying Atomic skis and Goode poles and wearing a Salomon jacket, Descente gloves, and a Suunto watch. I point this out because all these companies are now based in Ogden—thanks to Godfrey.

A few Snowbasin staffers recognize the mayor, escort us to the front of the lift line, and give us a gondola to ourselves. Godfrey admits that he doesn't ski a lot of powder—with five kids and an intense job, it's hard to find the time. But he's still passionate about skiing and the ski industry. I grill him during the 15-minute lift ride and learn that Ogden was a thriving railroad town until the 1960s but then fell into decline.

Godfrey says he grew up in the Ogden area, where he was raised Mormon and was an all-American track runner. After college at Ogden's Weber State, he worked in the high-tech and real-estate industries and then, at age 29, decided to run for mayor. "I got into politics by mistake," he says in the gondola. "If something isn't right, I'm not the kind of guy who's going to sit around and complain. So I came home and said to my wife, 'I think I'm going to run for mayor.'" He was elected on his first attempt, narrowly beating an older and more experienced candidate. Now 39, he's serving his third four-year term.

At the top of the gondola, he points to the town of Ogden, 15 miles in the distance. He was working on building a tram straight from town to the ski resort, but plans were foiled by environmental concerns. We click into our skis and I float blower powder back to the gondola. At the bottom, I'm waiting for the mayor again.

On the next lift up, he tells me about the ski-industry companies that have relocated here.

"I'm not the kind of guy who's going to sit around and complain," says Matthew Godfrey while riding the gondola. "So I came home and said to my wife, 'I think I'm going to run for mayor.'" He was elected on his first attempt. Now 39, he's serving his third term.



Rob Greener knee-deep at Snowbasin.

During his first three years in office, he tried to recruit high-tech companies to revitalize the downtown, but none of them moved. But two and a half years after Godfrey took office, Curt Geiger, vice president of Descente North America, a ski-clothing company then based in Denver, visited Ogden. Geiger had been challenged to reduce the company's overhead and move the headquarters closer to skiing. Godfrey offered Descente aggressive tax incentives on an inexpensive building lease. The town's low cost of living and the three powder-laden ski resorts less than a half hour away were impossible to refuse: Descente moved to Ogden in 2005. Godfrey then began recruiting other ski companies at trade shows, and in less than three years, 15 other ski-industry brands followed. Amer Sports, parent company of Salomon and Atomic, relocated thanks to \$8 million worth of tax incentives.

Since Godfrey has been in office, the town has

redeveloped 150 acres, allocated \$1.1 billion for new private-sector development, and created 7,000 jobs. "When I came into office nine years ago, there was a lot of work to do," he says. "We went to Boulder, Colorado, and realized we have as much to offer—two rivers, hundreds of miles of biking and hiking trails, ice climbing, bouldering, and world-class ski resorts. We realized that this is what we could be the best at."

He's not far off. The 2002 Olympic downhill and super G were held at Snowbasin, and this winter the Dew Tour is making a visit here. Nearby Powder Mountain offers heli-, cat-, and kite-skiing. The Salomon Center, a public rec building opened in 2007, has indoor rock climbing, surfing, and skydiving. The town built a BMX and skate park and is planning a velodrome and a third whitewater-kayak park. All that, and you can buy a nice house for less than \$200,000.

At the top of our fourth interview-heavy gondola ride, I'm itching to ski some fast powder laps and I'm starting to run out of questions. Ever the astute politician, Godfrey reads my mind. "You go ahead without me," he says. "You don't have to wait for the mayor anymore."

—MEGAN MICHELSON