



## The Little Brown Shack Out Back: Sapphire Valley Outhouse Race

Steve Martell takes the criteria for Sapphire Valley's annual Outhouse Races seriously: Five feet tall to the peak of the roof. One doorway. A place to sit, with a hole in it. A roll of toilet paper. And above all else, the outhouse must rest on a pair of regular snow skis. Martell should be a stickler for the rules. He is the Master Outhouse Craftsman.

Despite the competitive spirit of this 40-yard ride to the finish, humor is unavoidable here. The classic outhouse, that somehow equally stiff and lanky structure, identifiable by a crescent moon cutout, is inevitably a comic signpost.

"We're not a ski resort like Sugar or Cataloochee," says Martell, whose actual title is director of amenities. "We're small and intimate — a place where parents never lose track of their kids." About 40 percent of Sapphire Valley's business comes from the presence of skiers age 12 and younger. It's a love for these kids that had Martell and fellow staff members brainstorming ways to fund ski scholarships. Back in 2006, they stumbled upon outhouse racing — then put a North Carolina twist on it.

Typical outhouse races, including the World Championship Outhouse Races in Virginia City, Nevada, race on flat surfaces. But in Sapphire Valley, things are a bit more challenging. The races take place on a slope (albeit the bunny slope), and the result is mostly swerving, tipping, and face-planting.

"You can't really steer them," Martell says. Your pushers must start you off correctly. It's when one partner gives it that extra "HUUGHH" that the outhouse heads for a collision with the lane barrier, he says.

The group lining the racing lane enthusiastically cheers while pushers sprint to get their outhouses back on track with the focus and determination of a pit crew. Though the crowd is typically made up of many out-of-staters, most are North Carolinians. And you can tell, Martell says. "I think they view it as a NASCAR race."

The children are particularly engaged, their enjoyment affirming that the ski scholarships are worth a few face-plants.

When yet another outhouse topples into the snow, all traces of competition dissolve into laughter, proving once and for all that these outhouses, like their ancestors, just aren't built for speed.

### **8th Annual Sapphire Valley Outhouse Races**

February 15

Entrance fee \$125 with outhouse provided and \$100 without.

Sapphire Valley Resort

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1. According to the text, Sapphire Valley might be described as:
  - a) Large and impressive
  - b) Small and intimate
  - c) Small but filled with great shops
  - d) None of the above
2. What is not a criterion for entering an outhouse into the races?
  - a) It must be five feet tall
  - b) It must have one doorway
  - c) It must be made of wood
  - d) It must have a roll of toilet paper
3. What makes the outhouse races at Sapphire Valley different than most others?
  - a) It is run on an actual ski slope
  - b) The players get BBQ as their award for winning
  - c) No people from outside North Carolina can enter
  - d) It has been run for over 60 years
4. How much extra does it cost to enter the race *without* an outhouse?
  - a) It doesn't cost anything extra
  - b) \$10
  - c) \$25
  - d) \$55
5. The purpose for the outhouse races is:
  - a) To find the world's best outhouse racer
  - b) Mostly to have fun
  - c) To get people to learn about outhouses
  - d) To raise money for charities