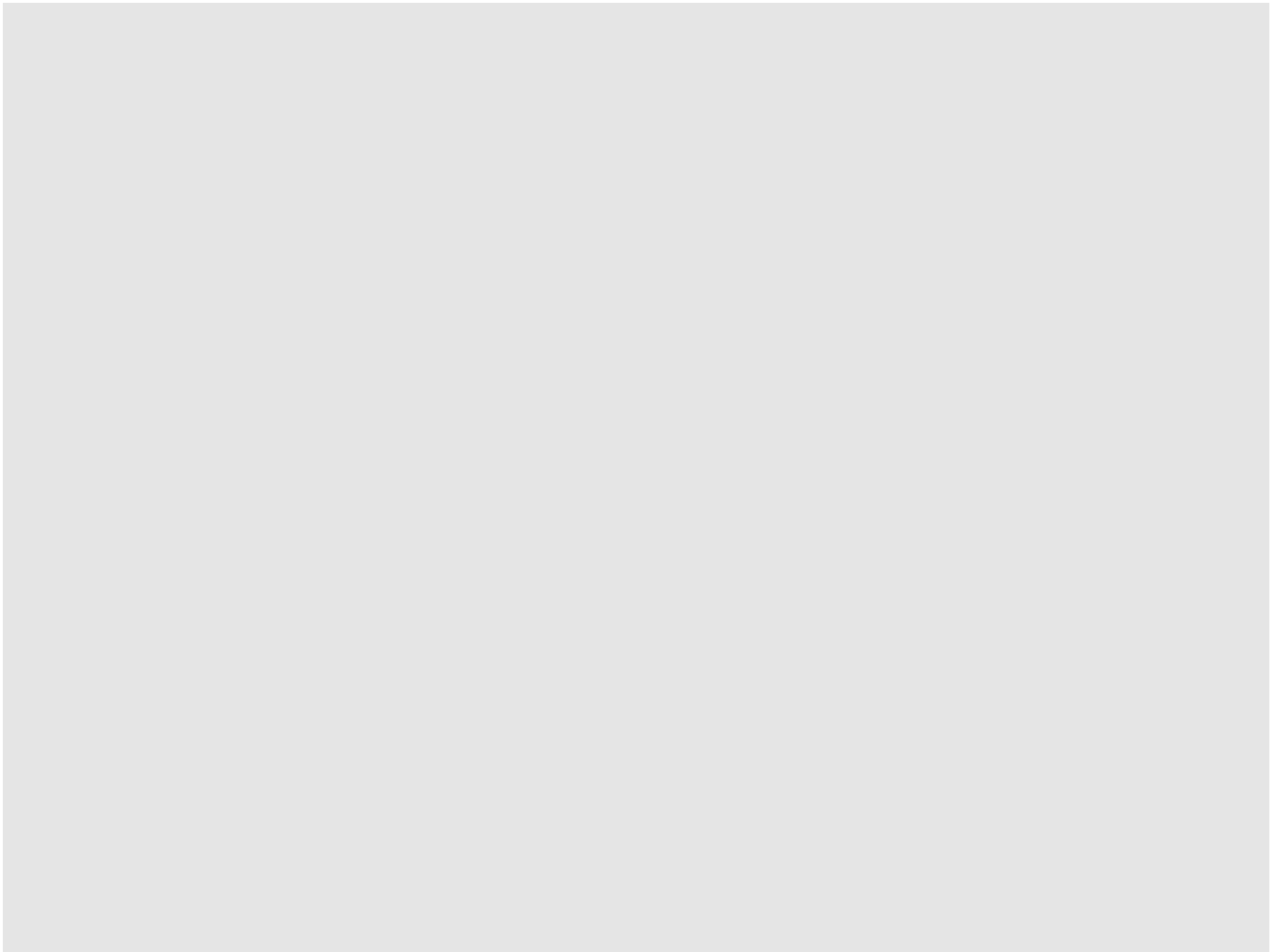


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BIG SKY — In her goal to travel to all 50 states, Texas resident Lynda Blackburn decided why not get as high as possible without an airplane when she visited Montana. So she rode the **Lone Peak Tram** to the top of the 11,166-foot tall mountain on July 5.

“I loved it,” the 82-year-old said after stepping out of the large, windowed cabin that dangles from a cable for the 4,600-foot ride. “It’s amazing.”

Using a cane to steady herself on the tram platform she moved to a four-wheel-drive pickup. The truck, outfitted with seats in the bed, whisked Blackburn and the rest of the group “a comically short distance,” noted guide Tim Dietz. The shuttle stopped at the top of the Swift Current chairlift so tour participants could glide back down to the ski area’s base.



Lynda Blackburn steps off the Lone Peak Tram after a tour to the top of the 11,166-foot peak. The cars can hold 75, but are limited to about 50 in the winter. At top speed the tram runs at 23 mph.

Brett French

New tram

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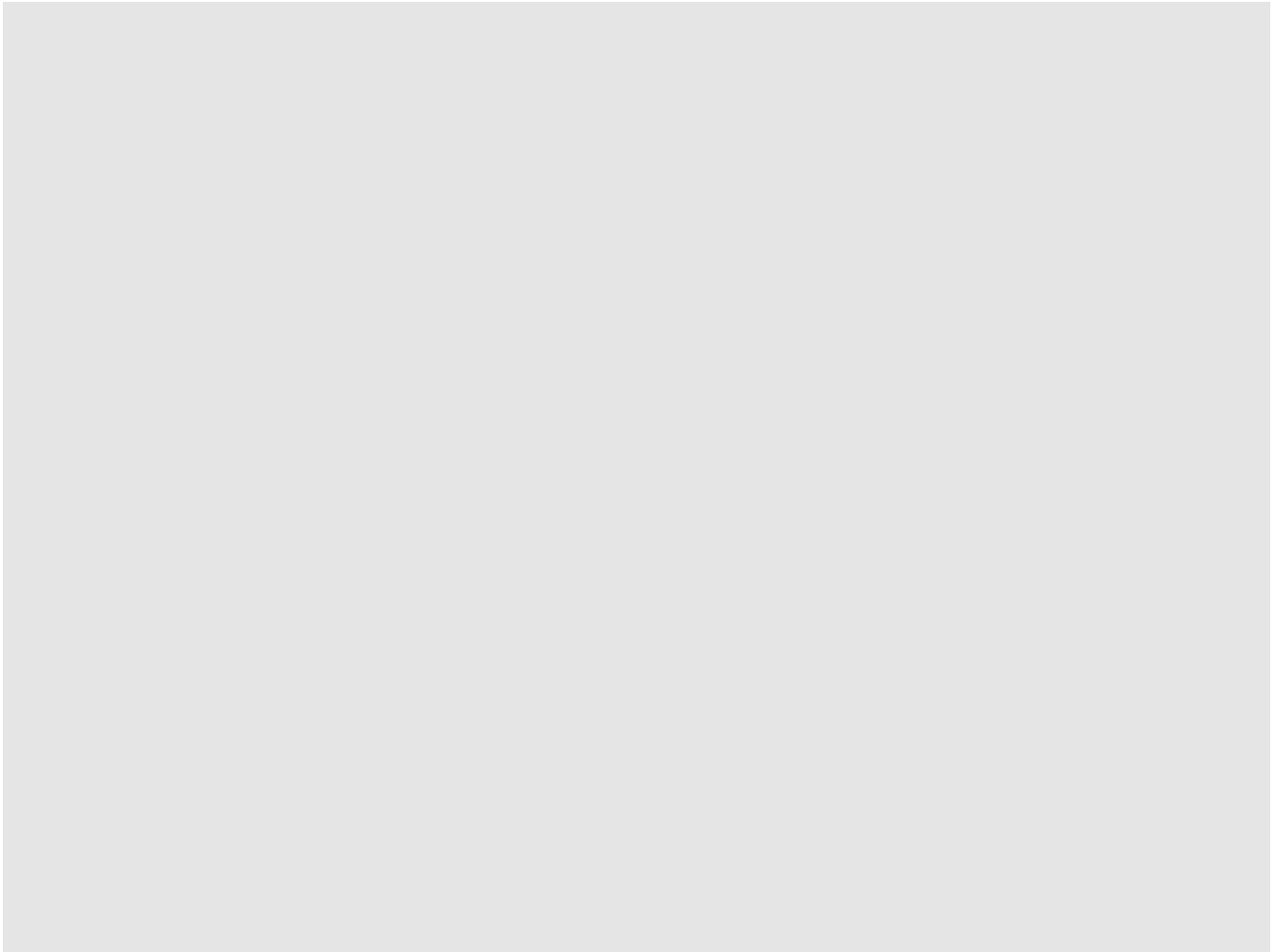
Although the Lone Peak Tram's grand opening was celebrated during the ski season, parts of it are still under construction. The framework for a clear geodesic dome is being assembled next to the tram base by crews working on weekdays. That limits tram tours, like Blackburn took, to the weekends.

The additional tram construction is just one of several projects Big Sky Resort has underway this summer as heavy machinery rumbles across the mountainside, welders crackle and crane arms swing large hunks of metal rebar into place. One such project is the building of foundations for a new gondola that will climb from the base area to the tram.

“In a couple of years when we finish our new gondola you'll be able to walk out of your hotel room, hop right on the gondola for a fully enclosed ride,” Dietz told the tour group on the way to the tram. “Take that gondola all the way up to the base of the tram ... and then take the tram all the way up to the peak. And you could theoretically do that in your slippers with your coffee in your hand. You don't need ski boots on. You don't need to be an avid skier at all. Which is awesome.”

The variety of people taking the tour to the top of Big Sky Resort captured perfectly what Stacie Harris envisioned when her employer, Boyne Resorts USA, announced summer tours to Lone Mountain would resume on July 4 after a three-year hiatus — that one of the most extreme environments would be available to anyone.

“So hypothetically in future summers this tour would be self-guided,” said Harris, Big Sky Resort's public relations manager. “You could be to the top of Lone Peak in 18-20 minutes.”



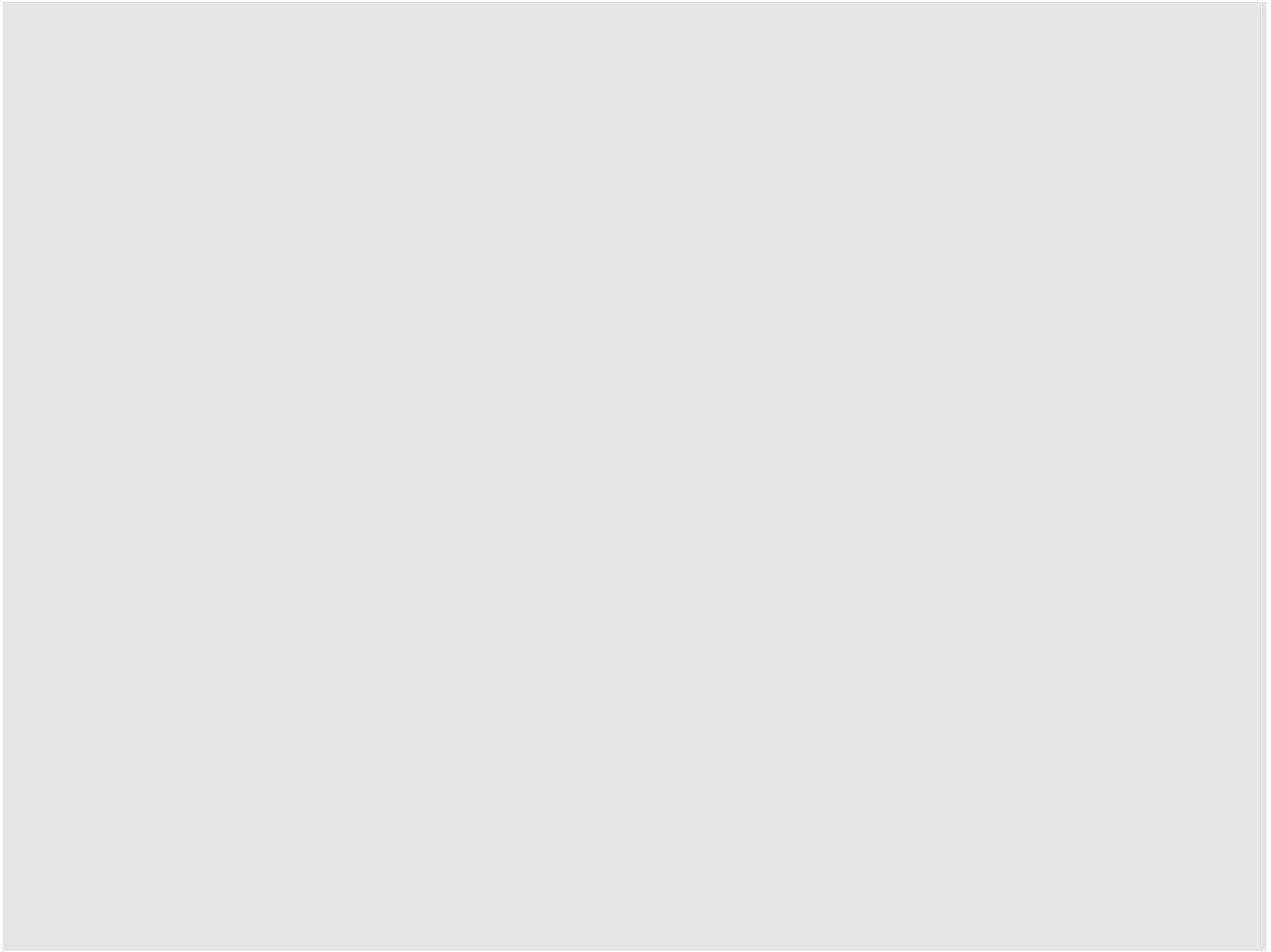
Lone Peak Tram tourists spread out across a snow field atop Lone Mountain to snap photos looking across the Madison Range on July 5.

Brett French

Vision quest

The work is part of Boyne Resort's **Big Sky 2025 vision**, an ambitious 10-year upgrade affecting all facets of the Michigan-based company's southwest Montana property. Located on the edge of wildlands north of Yellowstone National Park and south of the university town of Bozeman, the resort's construction is just part of the region's continuing growth powered by wealthy newcomers.

The upgrades and changes have far exceeded what television news announcer Chet Huntley proposed to members of the Bozeman Chamber of Commerce in the 1960s. When Big Sky first opened for skiing in 1973, the resort had four lifts. Now it has 24 chair lifts, 12 surface lifts and the ability to move more than 50,000 passengers an hour.



Tom Marshall, vice president of Mountain Operations, stands in front of the new Madison 8 base area on the Moonlight Basin side of Big Sky Resort.

Brett French

Mad 8

The most recent skier improvement is construction of a new eight-person chairlift, the **Madison 8**. Located on the Moonlight Basin side, it will be operational by December. When completed, the lift will be the longest eight-passenger covered chair in the world.

“The former Six Shooter lift was one of the coldest and longest rides on the mountain,” Harris explained. “So whenever we made improvements on our other chairlifts, we always had people asking when we were going to replace Six Shooter. So it was one of our most highly requested projects.”

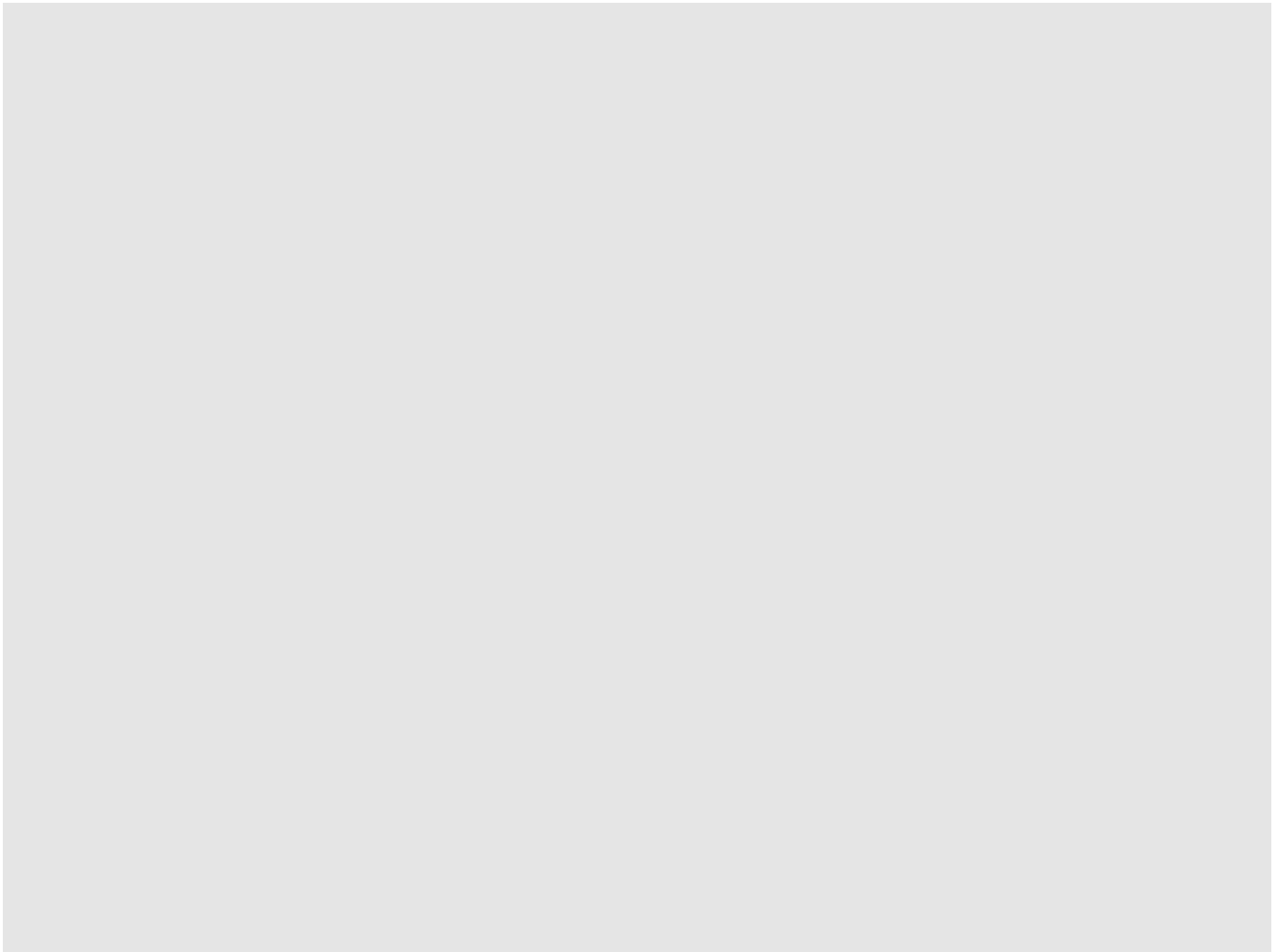
The north side of Lone Mountain, where the new lift will be located, is also more shaded and therefore typically colder, especially earlier in the season, Harris said.

“So having those heated seats and weatherproof bubbles will be really nice over in this area,” she added.

The ride time will be faster, eight minutes compared to 12 on the old Six Shooter.

This is one of the first infrastructure improvements Big Sky has made on equipment it purchased from Moonlight Basin in 2013. Prior to that, Moonlight operated as a separate ski area. The other upgrade was the installation of a magic carpet.

“I know the magic carpets aren’t the big lifts, but for the kids and the new people that are learning to ski and ride, and the instructors teaching them, they’re just as important, maybe more important,” said Tom Marshall, vice president of Mountain Operations as he toured the chairlift construction site.



Big Sky Resort has added more new employee housing near the base area which includes dormitory and apartment settings.

Brett French

Employee housing

Back near the main base area, below Huntley Lodge, new housing for workers is getting close to opening. The units are next door to the first apartment-style housing project, **Levinski Lodge A**, which opened in 2023. Levinski A is a mixture of mostly two bedroom and one bedroom furnished apartments for 35 workers.

Levinski Lodge B is similar while Levinski C has dormitory-style three-person rooms. Each room has a private bathroom. Inside Levinski C are six large communal kitchens containing 24 individual cooking stations.

“Previous to last year a communal kitchen or a kitchen in general wasn’t something we had in our team member housing facilities,” said Michael Henry, Team Member Housing manager. “So having the ability to have those spaces ... it’s been a game changer, for sure.”

Cable television, utilities and wifi is included in each room, as is a full-size refrigerator and freezer. Downstairs is a communal room for washing and drying clothes, quiet spaces for phone calls, a game room, equipped gym, bicycle and ski storage area with a small workshop to tune skis or bikes.

“One of the things we’ve tried to do over the years is get more of our team members living in Big Sky, and specifically within walking distance to the resort,” Harris said, lessening the need for transportation.

Previously the resort had mainly dorm-style lodging and also rented out condos in the area.

“We try to keep all of our units, no matter apartment style or dorm style, to be within 50 to 60% of market rate,” Harris said.

So a similar two-bedroom apartment, if rented locally, would cost about \$2,800, Harris said. Big Sky Resort will rent the two-bedroom units for \$1,700 or \$850 for each tenant. Dormitory tenants would pay around \$390 to \$600 a month. The rent is also pro-rated daily, so residents only have to pay for the days they are actually in-house. Workers can stay through the off-season if they have a contract for the next season.

On average, housing costs account for less than 13% of an employee's average monthly gross income, Harris said. That's based on an average daily cost of housing of \$15.48 a night and eliminating all high-income employees.

The surrounding community of Big Sky boasts about 3,500 residents. For visitors there are about 400 hotel keys and 1,200 vacation rentals. The median single family home price in 2022 was \$2.34 million. Harris was fortunate to purchase a two-bedroom condo through the Big Sky Community Housing Trust that helps lower the cost for local employees.