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Precious Metals Summit stakes claim as a top junior destination

BY ANTHONY VACCARO

VAIL, COLORADO — Think of a gold mining conference, and your mind probably goes to the annual, four-day Denver Gold Forum, which remains one of the year's premier events of its kind.

And while there are plenty of top-level executives, deal makers, fund managers and sell-side representatives hobnobbing at the forum, which is put on by the Denver Gold Group, it has never been a great platform for junior miners.

It was a set of circumstances that never sat well with Jessica Levental, the Denver Gold Group's former head, and this year she did something about it.

Levental was executive director of the Denver Gold Group for over four years. But when her contract expired last December, she pursued her idea of making a more junior-focused conference — one that remained close to the Denver Gold Forum so participants could attend both, but one that would foster a more intimate atmosphere than the larger-scale forum allowed.

"I realized there was a gap," she says about the junior-focused idea. "The only other shows were [run by] the Prospectors and Developer's Association of Canada, Hard Assets and Cambridge House, and they're not really adequate for exposing juniors to larger institutions."

With the undisputed success of the inaugural Precious Metals Summit here in Vail, Levental proved her instincts were right.

But bringing an idea into the crowded world of mining conventions is a long process, and Levental is quick to credit key people in the investment community who offered early support.

Those people include: John Hatha-



PRECIOUS METALS SUMMIT CONFERENCES

At the summit, from left: Precious Metals Summit's VP of operations Nancy Larned; CEO Jessica Levental; and event manager Emily Berman.

way, senior managing director of Tocqueville Asset Management; Robert Cohen, vice-president and portfolio manager at Dynamic Funds; Joseph Foster, portfolio manager at Van Eck Associates; and David Harquail, chief executive at **Franco-Nevada** (FNV-T, FNV-N) — all of whom now sit on the Precious Metals Summit's advisory committee.

"Their enthusiasm exceeded my expectations," she remarks. "They all said that I had to go for it, and that there was a need for this because no one else was doing it."

As for how the desired intimacy was attained, in part that came from keeping the number of companies in the program below 100, with 82 in attendance, and registering 340 delegates to keep the number below 400.

By way of comparison, the Denver Gold Forum had over 1,100 delegates last year, with 150 companies in the program.

Another advantage to keeping the show small was the pace at which it was able to unfold. The Precious Metals Conference opened on Sept. 14 with a gala dinner and a speech by Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper columnist George Will, and a full day of presentations on Sept. 15 with a half-day of presentations on Sept. 16.

But how does the average junior become a part of such cozy confines?

"I developed a list of over 200 companies, some of them were ones I had to turn away from the Denver Gold Forum," Levental explains. "Then I looked at research from a variety of brokerage firms

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that cover the junior space, and used *The Northern Miner*, and created a big list and vetted it to a half-dozen investors.”

The vetting process clarified which companies institutional investors were most interested in, and those companies made the cut.

Over at the Denver Gold Group, the screening process was simpler and left a number of interesting mining stories out in the cold. Juniors were ranked by market cap and the 25 largest earned a pass—only juniors with market caps between \$250 million and \$800 million got in.

The Precious Metals Summit, on the

other hand, had over 20 companies with market caps in the US\$25 million to US\$75 million range.

The summit also imported small-company enthusiasm. Cocktail receptions were bristling with activity, one-on-one meetings were steady and executives and other industry types consistently commented on the conference’s air of approachability.

In short, this wasn’t the sort of event where a big-time CEO flies in for a quick presentation, and is whisked off to another part of the world to attend another function.

“The juniors need exposure and are warm and open, and want to intermingle, as opposed to seniors, whose CEOs can be suffering from conference burnout,” Levental says.

The event attracted 60 institutions and 120 investors, including a host of fund managers whose firms manage an excess of US\$1 trillion.

Also in attendance were 11 senior miners with corporate development teams, and 30 sell-side delegates made up of 20 analysts, plus 10 from institutional sales.