Arapahoe Basin, Breckenridge, Copper, Mountain Creek, Sunrise Park Win Safety Awards

Seven Other Ski Areas Repeat

This year Colorado’s Arapahoe Basin, Breckenridge, Copper Mountain, New Jersey’s Mountain Creek and Arizona’s Sunrise Park are first-time winners of NSAA National Ski Area Safety Awards. Seven other resorts, including Colorado’s Aspen Snowmass, and Vail Mountain, Vermont’s Killington/Pico and Stratton Mountain, Arizona Snowbowl, California’s Heavenly and Utah’s Canyons Resort won repeat awards. Here’s a closer look at the winning 2010/11 safety programs:

Best Avalanche Safety Program

ARAPAHOE BASIN SKI AREA, Colo.

Colorado’s Arapahoe Basin has developed three programs tailored to educate guests, employees, and local children about avalanche safety.

The first of those programs is now in its seventh year. Arapahoe’s Annual Avalanche Awareness Day benefits the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) and includes avalanche beacon and transceiver clinics detailing proper search techniques and probing methods, one-on-one sessions and companion rescues, dog rescue demonstrations using students as “victims,” and rescue skills competitions that include both recreational and professional contestants. Overall, Arapahoe raised $6,000 for CAIC this season.

A second program is the after-work avalanche safety lecture series geared toward new employees with a focus on avalanche safety and backcountry etiquette.

“We recognize that for many of our first-year employees this may be their first experience in heavy snowpack conditions and the...”

In its promotion of National Safety Awareness Week, Heavenly displayed more than 50 banners and a host of other on-mountain safety signage. Here a 34-foot long banner stretches across California’s Highway 50, a major artery to the ski area of which tens of thousands of motorists drove under during Safety Week.
consequences can be serious if they don’t get themselves educated,” says Tony Cammarata, ski patrol director. “Our younger employees can be more susceptible to peer pressure when it comes to going outside the boundaries, so we try to impress upon them that they are part of the A-Basin family and we want them to be able to come to us and ask questions like we are their older sister or brother.”

Finally, A-Basin incorporates avalanche safety education as part of its Kids Club Arapahoe that introduces about 150 kids each season to basic first aid, overall mountain safety, and how to use a beacon, probe, and shovel. Arapahoe Basin’s safety award application was particularly poignant as just one week prior to submitting the application the resort’s snow safety director Leif Borgeson died while hiking Aspen Highlands. As Cammarata submits: “We recently just lost one of the most incredible snow and avalanche workers this industry has ever seen. Leif worked tirelessly to ensure that these programs were the best they could be for our guests. His hand is in everything we do here operationally.”

**Best Community Outreach Program**

**SUNRISE PARK RESORT, Ariz.**

Kids 12 and under were the main target of Sunrise Park Resorts community outreach program. As a way to introduce ski safety to local young skiers, blank posters and letters describing National Safety Week were delivered to local schools. Cards explaining the Responsibility Code were also offered to encourage the students to submit poster art to be used during Safety Week. Winners received snowboards and ski equipment.

As part of the ongoing outreach program, schools were also involved in ski and snowboard programs that Sunrise Park offers, which include discounts for lessons, rentals, and lift tickets.

Onsite efforts to promote safety included areas set up by the ski patrol where kids could enter and discuss safety with the resort’s patrollers. Coupled with safety displays throughout the base area, guests were constantly reminded of a variety of safety practices.

**Best Use of Social Media in a Safety Program**

**BRECKENRIDGE SKI RESORT, Colo.**

“This year (we) took it upon ourselves to own, personalize and elevate Breck’s safety awareness campaign,” says Keiran Cain, director of marketing and sales. “By involving our guests through social media in every step of the process, from creating the new slogan, ‘Safety At Its Peak’ to sharing exclusive safety videos via our social media channels, we were able to come up with a revitalized safety program that had buy-ins from executive staff, and our guests from around the world.”

Using the new slogan as the staff-wide mantra, the resort established a “culture of safety” that was interactive and highly visible to guests. Daily YouTube and Twitter presence helped maintain an interactive safety program among a variety of age groups. More than 8,000 Twitter followers and 43,000 Facebook responders interacted during the resort’s safety week programming.

Cain sums it all up: “Overall this was Breckenridge’s most successful Safety Week in history. Our staff...all embraced the safety culture and helped pitch in to create a unique experience for our guests that put the emphasis on safety but also set the stage for our employees and guests to celebrate safety all year round.”

**Best Helmet Safety Program**

**KILLINGTON/PICO MOUNTAIN, Vt.**

“The most important action a skier or rider of any age can take in an effort to stay safe is to choose responsible and informed on-hill behavior,” says Killington/Pico Risk Manager Anne Snyder. Such was the focus of Killington’s guest and staff education program during Safety Week and part of the overall safety focus involving programs to promote helmet safety among young skiers and snowboarders. Topping a variety of promotions was a free lift ticket for every helmet purchase made by guests during Safety Week. Killington sold 629 helmets during the week, the highest sales figures in 11 years. Meanwhile safety raffles held at base areas offered kids the chance to win free helmets. Other helmet safety reminders included Helmet FAQs, a National Safety Awareness Week quiz, and a kids’ safety poster contest.

As it says on the winner’s safety certificate: “Our mission is to...give kids a chance to have fun and be creative while learning about slope safety.”

This is Killington/Pico’s fourth safety award with previous wins in 2005/06, 2002/03, and 2001/02.

**Best Terrain Park Safety Program**

**MOUNTAIN CREEK, N.J.**

It should come as no surprise that nearly half of Mountain Creek’s annual skier visits are through the area’s terrain park. For the past
decade Mountain Creek has been at the forefront of the industry with numerous awards and recognitions to prove it. As one of the first resorts to adopt the All-Mountain Terrain Park business model, they are among a very few worldwide.

Safety is built into Mountain Creek’s terrain parks “from the ground up.” Part of that safety awareness is expressed in the segregation of terrain park riders and skiers from the skiing and riding public. That all allows Mountain Creek to target safety messages in a concentrated effort to a defined user group. Other communications throughout the complex focus on the terrain park presence as well.

Another aspect of terrain park safety has been the formation of the Switch Academy, an offshoot of Mountain Creek’s Ski and Snowboard School. Safety, education, and progression are all key components of the school’s focus.

Pay-offs for such an emphasis on terrain park safety include a 20 percent reduction in guest collisions and nearly 100 percent compliance with the Park Pass education program.

As VP/GM Joe Hession says: “Mountain Creek has a long-standing history as being a leader in the field of terrain park design and fabrication…and also for the work we do in educating our guests about promoting the safe use of our parks. The two go naturally hand in hand. You can’t have a successful terrain park business without paying attention to both.”

**Most Creative Safety Week Program**

**ASPEN SNOWMASS, Colo.**

“Be Safe: Think-Focus-Anticipate” is an ongoing mindset effort at Aspen Snowmass. Call it the power of positive suggestion, but at Aspen Snowmass this slogan appeared creatively on more than 300,000 items throughout the resort. The idea was to firmly entrench safety in the minds of employees and guests alike. Trail maps, helmets, stickers, and other highly visible reminders were utilized to establish a strong identity through branding – and the use of the phrase as a safety logo.

Safety was incorporated into the daily mindset during Safety Week among 90 events spread out over four mountain areas. It was also the focus of the Risk Management Board that included a steering committee made up of a diverse group of various resort staff members. The group reviewed the resorts incident response process, developed an overall safety plan and helped identify risks and ways to further promote safety.

Ron Chauner, director of mountain access and integration, says the concept of a safety mindset drove the creative effort: “Our overreaching theme was centered around the concept of safety being seen as a part of, and woven into the daily lives of, our employees and guests relative to personal responsibility, health, happiness, success and survival.”

*This is Aspen/Snowmass’s eighth safety award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2007/08, 2006/07, 2005/06, 2004/05, 2003/04, and 2002/03.*

**Best Employee Safety Program**

**STRATTON MOUNTAIN RESORT, Vt.**

“Work Safe, Work Smart, Enjoy the Mountain” is the core principle of the employee safety effort at Stratton Mountain Resort. It’s all part of a comprehensive safety awareness program that complements the theme used for guests. Employees participated in several programs with skiers/riders including the wearing of helmets and practicing components of the Responsibility Code.

Stratton dedicated $400,000 toward safety improvements in 2010/11 including new safety equipment and installations, new on-hill safety signage, Safety Week initiatives, safety collateral, and a new helmet program.

Employees participated in promoting safety on several levels, including a presence in the lodge and on the slopes to encourage kids to be safe. More than 1,000 frontline staffers wore Live Well, ♦
Be Safe, Play Smart ribbons. Other Safety Week incentives included a Stratton Safety Hotline, safety messages on lift towers, and an Own Your Zone safety campaign that used a variety of resort communication networks to promote the safety message.

This is Stratton’s sixth safety award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2007/08, 2006/07, 2003/04, and 2002/03.

Best Chairlift Safety Program

THE CANYONS, Utah

“How do you mountain safely?” asks Murdock the Moose (named after one of Canyons’ peaks) as part of the resort’s new safety campaign. Written on easy-to-see boards mounted on all the chairlifts, the campaign promotes a variety of safety messages and reminds guests of tenets of the Responsibility Code,” says Ehlers, who adds: “We are constantly trying to find ways to enhance safety at Canyons.”

Yet what garnered Canyons’ second safety award is its chairlift campaign that encourages skiers and riders to “Sit on the Spot” through the use of a safety sticker utilizing a new color scheme and logo, and placed squarely on chairlift backrests.

This is Canyons’ second safety award with a previous win in 2009/10.

Best Overall Safety Week Program (tie)

HEAVENLY MOUNTAIN RESORT, Calif. & VAIL MOUNTAIN, Colo.

There’s nothing like a steaming, chocolatey drink on a cold, wintry day. Being offered hot cocoa for correctly answering a safety question makes the cup that much sweeter! The warming brew was one of the many ways to bring attention to safety during Heavenly Mountain’s weeklong “Safety is Your Responsibility” activities.

Staff and guests alike engaged in myriad events focusing on safe operations and actions throughout the resort, including in injury prevention program, ski patrol open house, the CALSTAR air ambulance, avalanche dog training, and a snow sculpture entitle “Don’t Gamble with Safety.” Even sandwiches were marked with safety message stickers (6,000 in all!). More than 30 safety-oriented activities were held throughout safety week.

To enhance the awareness of safety week, 36 safety banners reminded guests of the safety theme while a scavenger hunt tested their knowledge of the Responsibility Code. Heavenly even extended the safety awareness campaign throughout the community by hanging a banner across a local highway.

As one of the resort’s promotional items says: “Safety is Heavenly.”

This is Heavenly’s fourth safety award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2004/05 and 2001/02.

Vail Mountain’s approach to safety awareness included a full frontal assault on every aspect of safety awareness possible. Using “Safety in Seven Easy Steps” the campaign relied on employees to take the lead in promoting safety. It paid off: employment injuries were reduced by nearly 35 percent. In addition, safety was driven home to 85 ski safety violators who attended safety classes to appease their infractions.

Many safety initiatives are woven into Vail Mountain’s overall ongoing safety effort. The resort’s helmet initiative has been successfully targeting young skiers, 12 and under, since 2009. The
ski patrol increased presence on the slopes as part of a “Ski the Beat” program to increase the patrol’s visibility to guests. Mountain signage, weekly safety initiatives, and a “Stay Safe Center” all reinforced the safety theme throughout Vail Mountain.

“Vail places the highest value on safety in every facet of our operations and we’re determined to continue advancing our efforts wherever possible. We’re already collaborating on next season’s safety program!” says Julie Rust, ski patrol director.

This is Vail Mountain’s 12th consecutive safety award, having won every year since the awards were launched in 1999/00.

Best Overall Safety Program (Less Than 250,000 Skier/Snowboarder Visits)

ARIZONA SNOWBOWL, Ariz.

The staff at Arizona Snowbowl began the 2011 season with a goal to win a third consecutive safety award, and they achieved that goal. The program features a live Safety Sheep on the mountain, safe driving reminders posted along local roads, and Safety Camps sponsored in part by “safety minded” locals. Six partners contributed $10,000 to help to fund the 2010/11 camps. The funds bought customized pop-up Safety Camp tents, message banners, table tents, and other safety awareness paraphernalia.

Portable Safety Camps were used to encourage safety discussions and be a resource for a variety of collateral safety items.

Entrants to Snowbowl’s terrain park had to correctly answer a safety rule question to gain access. More than 3,100 users participated in the camps during the season.

The highly visible presence of Sammy the S.H.E.E.P. (Stop, Hear, Evaluate, Eliminate & Proceed with caution) the safety mascot was utilized to promote safety on the slopes. In addition, the “Be Alert…Accidents Hurt” (B.A.A.H.) campaign reinforced Sammy’s message. Other safety initiatives included avalanche safety clinics, community outreach to more than 900 local students, and weekly staff safety meetings.

“That spirit and determination led to new ideas, expanded staff and guest engagement, and a very high profile approach to safety on the mountain. Reaching out to community partners was the cornerstone of the program,” says J.R. Murray, Snowbowl’s General Manager.

This is Arizona Snowbowl’s third consecutive safety award with previous wins in 2009/10 and 2008/09.

Best Overall Safety Program (More Than 250,000 Skier/Snowboarder Visits)

COPPER MOUNTAIN RESORT, Colo.

“Safety has always been important at Copper Mountain, but over this past season we really notched up our efforts,” says David Roth, media relations coordinator. “With enhanced communications and new exciting safety initiatives, Copper re-enforced its commitment to safety.” Roth’s words emphasize Copper Mountain’s efforts to provide education information and services to improve the overall safety at the resort.

The resort’s safety program included catchy safety phrases: “Go Wet Yourself,” “Sport a Skid Lid,” and “Practice Bromance” to encourage staying hydrated, wearing a helmet and skiing with a buddy as ways to skiing safely and responsibly. Other incentives and initiatives included new signage, television messages throughout the resort, safety information cards issued at check-in, and a local elementary school Responsibility Code poster contest. Copper again held it Safety Fest during Safety Week.

Charlie Payne, risk and safety manager, sums it all up: “There is nothing more important than the safety of our guests and employees. Safety expectations and education information on how to prevent incidents is a critical component of our business.”

Find applications for the 2011/12 NSAA National Ski Area Safety Awards and a list of all past Safety Award recipients in the Heads Up section under the Safety & Education menu at nsaa.org.