NSAA Honors Top Safety Programs for 2012/13

FIVE SKI AREAS LAND INAUGURAL AWARDS, OTHERS REPEAT

Tirteen ski areas are being honored for the outstanding safety programs they implemented over the 2012/13 season to educate employees and guests about skiing and snowboarding responsibly. NSAA announced the winners May 2 during its National Convention and Tradeshow, held this year in Palm Springs, Calif. Here is a summary of the winning safety programs, sponsored by Wells Fargo Special Risk.

BEST USE OF NEW/SOCIAL MEDIA
CRESTED BUTTE MOUNTAIN RESORT, Colo.

Crested Butte launched Safety Week with www.safeslopes.com, a new all-encompassing safety website chock-full of useful messages and fun videos the resort created itself. Featuring the tagline “Committed to Safe Slopes” on each page, the site contains a common-sense Q&A section that elaborates on Your Responsibility Code, freestyle terrain safety videos, and a Smart Style quiz (and for those with a perfect score, the chance to enter a drawing for a free single-day lift ticket). Also featured are chairlift safety videos, a kids section with a downloadable coloring map, information about Kids on Kids, and a feature on the Crested Butte Ski Patrol’s avalanche dogs. During Safety Week, the site included a detailed schedule of all the events.

In addition the resort launched its “What Not To Do” social media photo campaign on Facebook and Twitter, which inspired heavy traffic and e-mail. The message “Don’t Do This” featured various Know the Code, Smart Style, and chairlift safety topics via comedic photos that are meant not to make light of safety but that would “gain attention in the busy landscape of social media,” according to the awards application.

Based on the statistics gathered from Facebook the resort did that very thing. With just shy of 20,000 fans, Crested Butte engaged more than 56,042 Facebook users, and the new website averaged 1,000 page views per day throughout Safety Week. The resort estimates that all told more than 70,000 people were impacted by its messaging and events during Safety Week — and the website continues to receive heavy traffic.

This is Crested Butte Mountain Resort’s first Safety Award.

MOST CREATIVE SAFETY INITIATIVE (TIE)
ASPEN SKIING CO., Colo.

Snowmass tapped into the creative talents of one of its employees to develop a safety mascot that is quickly becoming a beloved icon — and helping convey Aspen Skiing Company’s stepped up focus on skier/riding awareness and compliance with the Responsibility Code.

Jeff Teaford, a long-time instructor at Snowmass and cartoonist on the side, found inspiration for “Wally,” the woolly mammoth after the resort discovered bones from this extinct elephant species during a snowmaking pond excavation. With the goal of broadening the character into a complete skier/snowboarder safety campaign, Snowmass encouraged Teaford to help develop the mascot into a full-fledged “Wally Safety Program.”

Wally now appears on a series of posters, stickers, and coloring pages that depict each point of the Responsibility Code, and instructors use them as educational references in the children’s ski school. Throughout the new “Wally Safety Trail” for beginners, the character is featured on large cutouts that illustrate the different components of the code in a colorful, non-verbal context.

To keep up with the new mascot’s growing popularity, Snowmass is developing a Wally mascot costume to bring the character to life on the hill in 2013/14, and it also plans to debut a safety-themed story book about him that’s sure to be a hit with young guests. Wally will also appear on kids’ ski trail maps to highlight safety hints.

“We have found that children are a great resource in training adults, particularly parents,” wrote Steve Howard, director of safety and wellness, in the award application. “Wally
Before using any lift, you must know how to load, ride and unload safely.

The Aspen Snowmass mascot, Wally the Woolly Mammoth, is prominently featured in a series of posters, stickers, and coloring pages that depict each point of the Responsibility Code. The character is also featured in large cutouts along the new “Wally Safety Trail” for beginners.

This provides a fun and interactive avenue to promote the Responsibility Code with our youngest guests and ultimately the adults that ski and ride with them.”


MOST CREATIVE SAFETY INITIATIVE (TIE)
MT. HOOD MEADOWS SKI RESORT, Ore.

Superheroes have staying power, so Mt. Hood Meadows created its own to drive home the message about chairlift safety. The process started with the lift department’s idea to paint a star on the seats as a reference point for the proper sitting position (i.e., back far enough to see the star between your legs), and the momentum grew.

Inspired by the movie “The Avengers,” the department created two safety characters “Mighty Meadows” and “Millie the Marten,” easily relatable to kids and eye-catching to adults. The star imagery served as inspiration for the acronym “LIFT STARS,” which spells out proper loading and unloading behavior: Learn by watching others load, I remove my pole straps and check for loose clothing, Follow the chair out to the “load here” signs, and Turn and grab the chair bar. Sit back, hold on, There’s a bar I can lower if I can reach it, Absolutely no fooling around on the ride, Raise the bar at the top, and Stand up at the “unload here” signs.

The resort featured the characters and acronym on signage at all lifts, the rental shop, ski school, and daycare, and eventually Mighty and Millie appeared on signs conveying individual components of lift safety. The lift department also built a practice loading chair (with stars on the seat pads).

Mt. Hood Meadows now posts its lift safety policy on its website, which also includes a link to the NSAA Lids on Kids site and the PNSAA video clip on lift use. Parents are encouraged to reinforce LIFT STARS with their kids, and lift personnel are consistently trained and tested on their knowledge. All in all, the resort now has more “lift stars” than it can count.

This is Mt. Hood Meadows’s third Safety Award with previous wins in 2007/08 and 2006/07.

The Mt. Hood Meadows safety characters, Mighty Meadows and Millie the Marten, are the star attractions in signage about chairlift safety, drawing attention to proper loading and unloading behavior, as well as overall conduct while riding the lifts.
BEST SAFETY WEEK PROGRAM
MAMMOTH, Calif.

A new “Keeping Kids Safe” campaign proves that Mammoth means what it says when it comes to young guests. Using Safety Week to launch the long-term initiative, Mammoth challenged the entire community — guests and resort staff — to help ensure a safe environment for young skiers and riders.

Safety Week kicked off with a well-attended open forum breakfast where mountain operations and safety team staff presented the new “Kids On Lifts” initiative — 11 tips for safe loading and unloading that parents are encouraged to review regularly with their kids. Throughout the week, on-mountain staff espoused a “Know the Zone” mantra, a reminder to kids and other guests to observe 15 feet of personal space around every skier and rider. The resort’s beloved mascot, Woolly, donned a safety team vest and served as a safety ambassador, conducting a daily “Safe Skiing with Woolly” event that was so successful the resort decided to make it a regular gig.

An added benefit to the safety campaign is how it has engaged the community in a safety initiative that reaches beyond the season and resort boundaries. The resort used Safety Week and the Keeping Mammoth Kids Safe campaign to generate community support for forming an official coalition of Safe Kids USA (www.safekids.org), a network of more than 600 coalitions in the United States that partners with organizations in 23 countries to reduce injuries. According to the awards application, “this coalition will ensure more community support and involvement in the Keeping Mammoth Kids Safe initiatives (both winter and summer), and will bring the resources and programs of Safe Kids USA to bear on our future safety endeavors.”

This is Mammoth’s third Safety Award with previous wins in 2000/2001 and 2001/02.

BEST HELMET SAFETY PROGRAM
ARAPAHOE BASIN, Colo.

High praise goes to Arapahoe Basin for its popular helmet giveaway during Safety Week. Partnering with the Denver metro chapter of ThinkFirst!, a national injury prevention program founded by American neurosurgeons, and St. Anthony Hospital, a Denver-based Level I trauma center, Arapahoe Basin handed out nearly 100 helmets to any and all for a nominal donation, or for free, if they could not make a donation.

This is the second year the area has collaborated with ThinkFirst! and St. Anthony’s to promote helmet use along with intelligent decision-making and informed risk-taking. The Think First! tent also offered information on how to prevent brain and spinal cord injuries, and featured a beanbag toss brain game, brain candy, and anatomical models of the skull and its fragile contents.

According to the awards application submitted on Arapahoe Basin’s behalf, “It can be difficult to quantify your individual ski area’s [safety] efforts, let alone our stronger collaborative impact across the industry, but the overall accident rate at Arapahoe Basin is consistently low. We believe this isn’t solely a result of luck, but of our continued commitment to encouraging safe on-mountain behaviors.”

Making sure that everyone who wants a helmet has one is a great place to start.

This is Arapahoe Basin’s second Safety Award with a previous win in 2010/11.

BEST TERRAIN PARK SAFETY PROGRAM
CANYONS RESORT, Utah

Inspired by the Burton Mountain Festival it hosted, Canyons Resort turned up the volume on terrain park safety, emphasizing its new “Know the Code” campaign within a park-specific context during Safety Week.

Canyons terrain park experts, the “Diggers,” offered clinics on Smart Style, ATML, park flow, feature styles, and staging zones, with a focus on enjoying the parks safely. To reinforce positive behavior and the use of Smart Style in the parks, employees distributed green “positive cards” to guests who exhibited responsible behavior, making them eligible for special prizes. The resort also ran the NSAA Smart Style video at various resort locations, including the retail/rental

Special Recognition:
Vail Resorts Inc.

NSAA wishes to recognize Vail Resorts, Inc., for its continued efforts in safety innovation and its unfailing commitment to unify its messaging throughout the industry. For the last 50 years, Vail Resorts has been the frontrunner in leading by example, and we are proud to honor the company with a special recognition award of Best Company-Wide Safety Program for the 2012/13 season.
shop and base area restaurants, and required all departments to view the video and discuss it as their weekly safety topic.

Canyons promoted Know the Code heavily in the parks and on the rest of the mountain. Season pass-holders received a Responsibility Code card attached to their pass, and those who produced it upon request became eligible for various prizes. Employees also got the card (with the area’s accident reporting procedures on the other side), attached to a new lanyard emblazoned with Canyons’ slogan, “Be Safe Out There.”

The resort’s Safety Task Force is the impetus for these and other safety initiatives at Canyons. This season the task force expanded to include members from all departments, which are given safety grades based on safety meetings, facility inspections, and task force attendance. This winning combination of positive reinforcement and personal accountability helps keep Canyons’ terrain parks as safe as they are fun.

This is Canyons Resort’s fourth Safety Award with previous wins in 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12.

BEST EMPLOYEE INVOVLVEMENT
SUN VALLEY RESORT, Idaho

Every mountain department at Sun Valley participated in Safety Week, each with specific responsibilities to ensure a comprehensive take on safety awareness.

The snowsports school championed helmet use, anchoring the message with Lids on Kids, and sponsored a poster contest for young guests. The school also invited the ski patrol and avalanche dogs to give presentations to kid’s groups.

Guest services zeroed in on slope signage and Smart Style, emphasizing the message in the Dollar Mountain Terrain Park. Retail operations encouraged equipment safety, offering guests a 50 percent discount to have DIN settings checked. The ski patrol publicized Safety Week extensively on its Facebook and Twitter accounts, and stepped up the Know the Code message with ample signage throughout the area. At Dollar Mountain, a snowcat covered with safety signs was displayed on a snow pedestal, and an impressive “Safety Shrine” stood on top of Bald Mountain, a structure the patrol constructed from a huge pile of snow amassed by the snowcat operators.

The patrol, lift operations, and snowsports school partnered to debut the “Chair Aware” program, with a practice chair for beginning skiers and riders. Guest services beefed up its presence at the Dollar Mountain beginner lift too. Overall, the efforts resulted in a 50-percent decrease in lift stops during peak season traffic.

Snowmaking and ticket sales staff developed a safety awareness game for kids to underscore the importance of knowing the mountain map, and those who turned in the results at patrol headquarters received gifts. Patrollers also handed out hot coco certificates at the top of the gondola where guests answered safety week questions.

This is Sun Valley’s second Safety Award with a previous win in 2011/12.

BEST EMPLOYEE EDUCATION
MT. ASHLAND, Ore.

Mt. Ashland is helping transform the youths of today into candidates for the ski operators of tomorrow. The resort has created two annual programs that introduce teenagers to mountain operations, with an emphasis on safety.

The “7,500 Crew” is an eight-week internship that familiarizes 28 teenagers, ages 14 to 18, with various resort positions. Each week participants rotate to different departments (the rental shop, terrain park, ski school, etc.) where they learn how to do jobs safely and properly, and why they need to perform tasks a certain way. They are paid for their morning shifts, ski/snowboard for free in the afternoon, and receive discounts on food and retail items along with free rentals and group lessons.

Also offered is the “Youth Summer Service Program,” a week-long introduction to summer operations. Here youths in eighth and ninth grade learn how to work outside safely in an alpine environment. Participating in a variety of summer enhancement projects, they learn about a wide range of safety topics as well as gain a sense of environmental awareness and stewardship. In return they receive a discounted season pass for the next season.

Overall Mt. Ashland has been able to educate some 70 teenagers a year about mountain operations that include safety procedures and best practices. The programs are so popular the resort has had to turn down applicants due to limited space. The initiatives create a sense of ownership for the youth that participate and, more important, they become of Mt. Ashland’s most knowledgeable guests in regard to safety.

This is Mt. Ashland’s first Safety Award.

BEST CHAIRLIFT SAFETY PROGRAM
SUGAR BOWL RESORT, Calif.

In December 2011, John Henderson, a 7-year-old Sugar Bowl Ski Team member, fell approximately 50 feet from the resort’s Mt. Lincoln chairlift. While a swift and well-executed response and evacuation was performed by the area ski patrol, attempts to save the young boy’s life were tragically unsuccessful. (This was the first time a child...
has died resulting from a chairlift fall in industry history.) Yet, as stated in the resort’s safety award application, from tragedy comes inspired innovation.

Working in close cooperation with the Henderson family for more than a year, key Sugar Bowl staff reviewed existing policies, analyzed current procedures, and scrutinized best practices related to the loading, riding, and unloading of chairlifts. As a result, the resort’s “John Henderson Chairlift Safety Initiative” was born. The program included goals and guiding principles largely focused on training, educating, monitoring, promoting, and fostering an overall culture of safety at the resort.

As part of the initiative, web-based cameras were installed at loading terminals of the resort’s Christmas Tree and Lincoln chairlifts. The cameras capture the loading process and monitor lift operator practices and guest conduct. Also, the resort placed “seat targets” on its chairlifts to help guide riders to the recommended position. In addition, Sugar Bowl implemented an “Under 51” program that requires chairlift operators to lower the bar for all riders under 51 inches, even if riding with an adult. Intensive and regular training for chairlift operators as well as ski team coaches, trainers, and other key staff is also a large component of the initiative. The resort worked closely with John’s parents, who will be provided updates on the initiative and the resort’s progress. Many resorts around the country are also closely following Sugar Bowl’s efforts, looking to adopt those practices that improve overall chairlift safety.

This is Sugar Bowl’s first Safety Award.

BEST COMMUNITY OUTREACH
KEYSTONE RESORT, Colo.

Keystone launched a top-notch community outreach program to grade school kids during Safety Week, and the program promises to be a mainstay. Developed by Trish Reynolds, ski patrol supervisor, the program zeros in on the next generation of locals, kids ages 5 to 11, and invites them to be a part of the solution to reckless skiing and riding behavior.

Keystone patrollers along with an avalanche dog and a member of the mountain safety team visit local schools to give lively safety presentations with an emphasis on fun. The presentation is designed to fully engage the kids, interspersing sports-focused stretching exercises with interactive safety quizzes, a Q&A on Your Responsibility Code, and various prizes. The highlight of the presentation is a 15-minute safety video starring local kids who are on the “Keystone Safety Avenger Team.” In the video, the team helps the ski patrol find and educate a well-intentioned but misguided guest named “Dangerous Dan.” Punctuated with great sound effects and an original catchy score, the footage is

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2012/13 NSAA SAFETY AWARD WINNERS

**BEST USE OF NEW/SOCIAL MEDIA**
Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Colo.

**MOST CREATIVE SAFETY INITIATIVE (TIE)**
Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Resort, Ore.
Snowmass, Colo.

**BEST SAFETY WEEK PROGRAM**
Mammoth, Calif.

**BEST HELMET SAFETY PROGRAM**
Arapahoe Basin, Colo.

**BEST TERRAIN PARK SAFETY PROGRAM**
Canyons Resort, Utah

**BEST EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT**
Sun Valley Resort, Idaho

**BEST EMPLOYEE EDUCATION**
Mt. Ashland, Ore.

**BEST CHAIRLIFT SAFETY PROGRAM**
Sugar Bowl Resort, Calif.

**BEST COMMUNITY OUTREACH**
Keystone Resort, Colo.

**BEST AVALANCHE SAFETY PROGRAM**
Kirkwood Mountain Resort, Calif.

**BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (350,000 OR MORE VISITS)**
Copper Mountain Resort, Colo.

**BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (UP TO 350,000 VISITS)**
Blue Mountain Ski Area, Pa.
as entertaining as it is memorable. Impressively, the patrol produced the video for zero dollars.

More than 600 students have seen the presentation thus far, and Keystone has received an enormously positive response from the community. The resort plans to extend the program to kids in group reservations in 2013/14.

“Groomed to lead by example, grade-school kids inherently like to be part of the solution,” wrote Reynolds in the award application. “Once they learn proper behavior and have fun doing so, it becomes second nature to lead by example.” Kids who are touched by Keystone’s new outreach program are likely to do just that.

This is Keystone’s first Safety Award.

BEST AVALANCHE SAFETY PROGRAM
KIRKWOOD MOUNTAIN RESORT, Calif.

Kirkwood knows a thing or two about avalanche safety. Managing terrain with a Class A avalanche rating requires that, as does managing an abundance of snowfall. Fittingly, then, the resort’s top-notch avalanche education program influences virtually every aspect of its operations.

Safety Week was a perfect opportunity to showcase Kirkwood’s focus on avalanche safety and mitigation and how each department has a role in that regard — all with the underlying goal of increasing general avalanche safety awareness. At the ski patrol open house, for example, the patrol displayed avalanche slide path maps and discussed how all the lifts and the majority of trails may be impacted by avalanches. The trail maintenance department held snowcat demos, discussing the function of grooming in snow safety, and the local Care Flight air ambulance crew talked about its role in avalanche response, including the transport of avalanche dogs and their handlers to remote avalanches to help locate victims.

A mainstay for avalanche education in the region, Kirkwood hosts workshops throughout the year, including weekly American Institute of Avalanche Research and Education courses. During Safety Week Kirkwood hosted free avalanche awareness and backcountry awareness education clinics, beacon training sessions, avalanche dog demos, mock burial searches, and airbag backpack demos. In addition, the local Alpine County Winter Search and Rescue Team set up its command center, exactly as it would for an actual avalanche.

Avalanche safety is ongoing at Kirkwood, but Safety Week helped the resort raise avalanche awareness to new levels. Kudos to Kirkwood for bringing a sobering reality to the forefront.

This is Kirkwood’s first Safety Award.

BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM
(350,000 OR MORE VISITS)
COPPER MOUNTAIN RESORT, Colo.

A sweeping safety program that embraces employees as well as guests helped Copper take the prize in this category for 2012/13. Concurrent with National Safety Week, Copper hosts its own “Safety Fest” to showcase season-long safety initiatives.

During the week St. Anthony’s Medical Clinic held sessions on helmet safety (selling helmets for $25 each), and Summit County Rescue provided beacon use and backcountry safety training. There were also daily avalanche dog drills, tours of the Flight for Life chopper, and the chance to join the patrol on sweep each day.

The resort ramped up the focus on collision prevention, introducing an icon of a toothless smiley face with the tagline “Protect Your Grill, Look Uphill.” The simple but powerful graphic is the latest in a series of icons that support common-sense safety tenets such as helmet use, hydration, and skiing/boarding with a buddy.

Copper emphasizes progression training at the terrain park, coupled with Woodward at Copper, which teaches terrain-based skills in a controlled environment. Also useful is the practice chairlift set up for beginners.

The resort imparts the safety message to its own employees too. This season the ski patrol used Safety Fest as a catalyst to provide safety training and overall wellness education for skiing and non-skiing departments alike. Departments follow a detailed safety training matrix for employees, and managers hold regular safety meetings with staff to reiterate objectives and conduct safety audits.

The site of numerous industry safety workshops and seminars, Copper hosted NSAA and NSP last season in the development of lift safety videos, and also sponsored an accident investigation practicum, with participants from 14 other resorts in Colorado and Utah.

Copper solicited considerable media coverage of Safety Fest and other events in 2012/13. The resort regularly updates its mountain safety page on the website, and also sends out biweekly e-mail blasts with a message from the patrol.

Focusing on a proactive approach, Copper stations mountain safety patrollers in high-collision areas to monitor downhill traffic and educate guests when needed. For those guests identified as high-collision risks, the ski patrol and safety patrol issues a “red card,” which requires the passholder to attend a safety class, and the resort may even suspend passes for those who don’t comply with the Colorado Ski Safety Act and Your Responsibility Code.

This is Copper Mountain’s third Safety Award with previous wins in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

www.nsaa.org
BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM
(UP TO 300,000 VISITS)

BLUE MOUNTAIN SKI AREA, Pa.

It’s hard to imagine not wanting to participate in the 2012/13 Safety Week at Blue Mountain, where management sweetened the message with fun activities and prizes. Having identified a broad target audience, the resort made sure to offer a little something for everyone, bringing safety awareness to a level that’s unlikely to fizzle anytime soon.

To draw attention to helmet safety, Blue Mountain sponsored a hugely successful safety awareness video contest on its Facebook page, with the winner receiving a 2013/14 season pass, and an equally popular “helmet hair” photo contest, the prize being two lift tickets and being featured on highway billboards promoting helmet safety.

Free helmets went to those who purchased a 1st Time to Ski/Board package, and the resort offered 25 percent discounts on helmets, goggles, wrist guards, and protective pads. The tuning shop gave free binding checks to all guests also. Blue Mountain hosted a school group scavenger hunt for safety awareness, and those who completed the exercise received a free lift ticket.

To emphasize chairlift safety, the resort introduced “Café Cash Chair,” in which the mountain host director gave prizes to guests who answered questions about Know the Code and lift safety. Winners could wager basic prizes, such as soft-drink vouchers, for the chance to answer another question with higher-value prizes, such as lift tickets. The resort also introduced “Bars for Bars,” in which lift personnel distributed bite-size candy bars to guests using the safety bar.

Ski patrol and mountain host personnel staffed safety booths throughout Safety Week, dispensing Know the Code buttons, lift safety awareness cards, and Smart Style cards along with lip balm, sunscreen, cookies, hot cocoa, hot dogs, and popcorn. The grooming department held safety talks and gave rides on its mini groomer, and special activity stations made it fun for kids to participate in the NSAA Safety Poster contest and decorate their helmets. In special appearances, the resort mascots, Snowball and Bucky, distributed cards and buttons on Know the Code, Smart Style, and lift awareness.

Before the video contest and photo contest, Blue Mountain’s Facebook page reach was about 100,000 a day; during the contests, the number spiked to about 850,000 per day. Blue Mountain went the extra mile to make Safety Week and its ongoing initiatives successful at imparting the message that you can be safe on the slopes and still have a blast.

This is Blue Mountain’s first Safety Award.

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