NSAA ANNOUNCED THE WINNERS of the 2015 National Safety Awards at a special reception May 4 during the NSAA Convention and Tradeshow in San Francisco, Calif.

The awards, sponsored by Wells Fargo/Safehold, recognize the exceptional initiatives resorts implement to educate guests and employees about skiing and snowboarding responsibly—not only during Safety Month in January but throughout the year. Also honored was the new Safety Champion, an award category introduced last year to recognize a resort employee who shows exceptional dedication and enthusiasm toward educating and promoting safety to guests and employees.

Judges for the National Safety Awards were: Melanie Hood, marketing and development director for the National Ski Patrol (NSP), and Dave Byrd, NSAA director of risk and regulatory affairs.

Here is a look at the 2015 National Safety Award honorees. NSAA congratulates them for their exceptional safety programs.

BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (350,000 OR MORE VISITS)

Sun Valley Resort, Idaho

In Sun Valley’s new YouTube safety videos, Bryant Dunn, patrol supervisor, is a natural in front of the camera as he discusses the resort’s commitment to safety...but even if he wasn’t, you’d still agree with his logic: Safety isn’t just about taking care of yourself; it’s about embracing the sense of responsibility to each other. Dunn refers to this as “the mountain community,” Sun Valley’s new safety mantra with a subtle but unmistakable appeal for integrity.

“We all enjoy and engage in the sport together, share a common passion and appreciation for the mountain lifestyle, and have a responsibility to respect each other and our enjoyment of winter recreation,” Dunn says. That reminder of how one person’s actions can affect others set the tone for all of Sun Valley’s safety initiatives last season, including a new Mountain Community Facebook page.

The community concept was a core part of Safety Month, with every department having a specific focus to reinforce the philosophy. The patrol discussed the subject in guest interactions, at local schools, with the ski teams, and with local newspapers and radio stations. Guest services handed out sunscreen as a segue-way to the broader discussion; the lift department distributed blinking safety lights attached to wallet cards imprinted with safe uphill travel policies; and instructors focused on helmet use and chairlift safety, providing a practice chair and positioning a wooden teddy bear at the lifts to help kids understand where to load and unload.

Sun Valley also launched a safe skiing initiative that led to a total redesign of slow skiing areas, along with a revised mountain map identifying the new zones.

“The Sun Valley mountain community is intended to lead to a change in thinking and therefore a change in behavior, and to result in a safer on-mountain environment for everyone,” says Dunn.
BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM
(UP TO 350,000 VISITS)

Angel Fire, NM

Angel Fire came up with a GREAT new acronym for its comprehensive safety program, as in: Grow your skills and take a lesson, Rock your helmet every day, Embrace the Code—know it and show it; Always ski in control; and Take your time.

The messaging was inspired by a growing realization that some guests have a skewed perception of what it takes to be a “great” skier/snowboarder (e.g., risky maneuvers), and by data that indicated a decline in helmet use. To renew the focus on safety, the resort based its safety theme on the question “What makes a GREAT skier or snowboarder?”

Angel Fire paired the GREAT acronym with a logo likeness of the ski patrol’s German shepherd mascot, Shadow the Safety Dog (in a helmet), and displayed the images liberally, especially during National Safety Month. Safety messages played on all the TV monitors, employees wore buttons with the Shadow logo, and housekeepers placed cards with the GREAT acronym and Responsibility Code in all the rooms. Employees handed out 2,500 safety cards to guests and placed 1,500 safety stickers on food items in the F&B venues. Staff painted “Rock your helmet” from the acronym in large red letters under the chairlift for high visibility, and gave stickers and candy to guests who rented a helmet or brought their own. The area even put safety posters in all the bathroom stalls and over the urinals to reach the ultimate captive audience.

Angel Fire incorporated a Safety Month blog into its Facebook page and website too. Guests who completed a quiz on the Code were entered into drawings for free lift tickets, and the resort awarded more than $1,300 in lift ticket value. In addition, employees were recognized for safe behavior throughout the season. For its scope and creativity, Angel Fire’s safety program truly is GREAT.

BEST EMPLOYEE SAFETY PROGRAM

Aspen/Snowmass, Colo.

It’s hard to imagine a more impressive approach to employee safety than Aspen Skiing Company’s Mind-Body-Spirit Wellness Program, based on the belief that wellness is a path to overall safety. With four resorts (Aspen Mountain, Snowmass, Aspen Highlands, and Buttermilk), two hotels, and a slew of retail/rental stores and on-mountain restaurants to oversee, ASC has a lot of reasons to go all out for employee safety.

ASC has a Wellness Advisory Board tasked with devising initiatives just for employees, and a full-time wellness coordinator offers individual fitness coaching year-round to any employee (fulltime or seasonal) who requests it, work related or otherwise. ASC retains the coordinator as a third-party contractor to assure confidentiality, removing a barrier that might otherwise prevent some employees from reaching out for coaching.

To incentivize participation, ASC structures its employee wellness programs as opportunities to socialize and enjoy the mountain environment, with free, regularly scheduled exercise classes, hiking and biking excursions, morning mountain uphill skinning sessions, and cross-country skiing. A wellness website offers tips on fitness, nutrition, special events, and workout classes too. All front-line employees have custom water bottles featuring proper hydration guidelines, and ASC purchased a binding check machine solely for employees. The company also insists on daily clinic safety breaks twice daily.

ASC implemented a Work-Ready Physical Assessment program last season for all new and returning on-mountain employees. Leading up to the assessment ASC offered summer and fall training classes and coaching to help employees prepare, and many of them said the classes helped them lose weight and begin regular exercise routines.

ASC uses outside auditors to evaluate safety practices, training, and facilities. Over the past four years, the mountain operations department has improved to a 97 percent safety rating, and two of its mountains now have a perfect 100 percent rating. >
BEST GUEST SAFETY PROGRAM

Wachusett Mountain, Mass.

Hosting one of the largest after-school programs in the U.S. is good motivation to have a top-notch guest safety education program. Located less than 90 minutes from the major population centers of Boston, Worcester, and Providence, Wachusett Mountain sees about 10,000 first-time skiers/snowboarders each week—strong incentive to help educate guests about safety.

Last season the resort rolled out a multi-level guest safety program with an emphasis on learning programs for after-school participants and even younger skiers/snowboarders. Partnering with local hospital UMass Memorial Health Care, Wachusett also developed a new safety video highlighting Your Responsibility Code, and posted it on Wachusett’s YouTube channel and website, generating thousands of hits.

Wachusett-UMass reinforced the safety message with new lift tower signs and safety banners featuring elements of the Code. Guests who submitted a “safety selfie” next to one of the banners or posted it on Instagram during National Safety Month became eligible to win a lift ticket or a $50 gift card.

A “Helmet Head Contest” helped raise awareness of the importance of helmet use, eliciting a variety of entertaining photos of “helmet hair” for the chance to win a Bern ski helmet and a $50 Wachusett gift card. The area posted the winning photos on its Facebook page.

Wachusett also encouraged guests using the terrain parks to submit a 60-second “Safety Viral Video” highlighting various elements of Smart Style, and posted the videos on YouTube and Facebook for judging. The winner received a 2015-16 season pass.

Throughout the season, patrollers and ambassadors randomly asked guests throughout the mountain to cite at least four elements of the Responsibility Code. Those who answered correctly received a free hot chocolate voucher and were entered to win a 2015-16 season pass.

Kudos to Wachusett for its excellent program to raise safety awareness among many thousands of new skiers and riders.

BEST 50TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN FOR YOUR RESPONSIBILITY CODE

Arizona Snowbowl, Ariz.

It’s hard not to disengage from a message you’ve seen or heard over and over again, which is exactly why Arizona Snowbowl decided to put its own fresh spin on Your Responsibility Code signage—just in time for the 50th anniversary of the long-held “rules of the road.”

To encourage guests to look at the Code with fresh eyes, Arizona Snowbowl’s safety committee challenged employees to reinterpret its tenets as if they were writing a jingle—a rhyming message to break down the Code in a new, memorable, and fun way. Employees submitted a variety of catchy responses, including this one that was posted on four sequential lift towers: (1) Take a lesson… (2) Learn all the rules… (3) If you do… (4) You’ll have all the tools.

Winners received a prize package that included dinner for two, a new helmet, and other SWAG. Responses to the program were so positive that Arizona Snowbowl plans to create new messages yearly to maintain energy and employee engagement. After all, it’s hard to get a jingle out of your head, especially when it’s a good one.
NATIONAL SAFETY CHAMPION

Adam Wunderlich, Boreal Ridge Corporation, Truckee, Calif.

Since Adam Wunderlich took a job as a patroller at Boreal Ridge Corporation (BRC) 10 years ago, he’s become a core part of the leadership team and has developed an aptitude for initiating effective safety programs, policies, and procedures.

Wunderlich’s commitment to snowsports safety is impressive. In 2013 he took on the lead role in BRC’s risk management program in addition to managing the patrol. In this new role he developed Boreal Mountain Resort’s (BMR) comprehensive Incident Response Plan and effectively led the season-long IRP training series.

“Adam has been resourceful and creative in positioning safety so notably into our culture. Our staff and guests see it, hear it, feel it, and ultimately benefit from it,” said Amy Ohran, general manager of BMR. “He keeps information fresh and is incredibly skilled at facilitating training that is clear and relevant and that inspires ownership of our safety initiatives.”

Wunderlich introduced safety topics during morning reports and in weekly departmental meetings, and initiated bi-monthly resort-wide safety training sessions. He also developed a set of safety forms that encourage discussion, lead to follow-up action plans, and give recognition to those employees who take steps to prevent unsafe practices. These systems have increased communication in all departments and helped to get front-line employees involved in safety procedures. He also helped develop BMR’s two safety videos focusing on Kids on Lifts.

“Adam’s strength in developing safety systems, processes, and standards has been fundamental to our resort and summer camp operations,” said Ohran. “Moreover, his success in leading safety initiatives is a result of his ability to influence those he works with. Adam shares his passion for his work, inspires his own team, his peers and resort leadership.”

AVAILANCHE TRAINING FOR OPERATIONAL SKI AREAS

CLASSROOM SESSION

SNOWBIRD, UTAH

OCTOBER 25-29, 2015

SUPPORTED BY:

CHECK OUT AVALANCHESCHOOL.ORG FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION