NSAA’S 2016-17 SAFETY AWARD WINNERS ENGAGE GUESTS & EMPLOYEES

REBECCA W. AYERS, EDITOR

THE NATIONAL SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION announced the six winners of the organization’s annual Safety Awards on May 6 during the NSAA National Convention and Tradeshow in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The awards, sponsored by Safehold Special Risk, recognize NSAA member resorts for their exceptional initiatives to educate the public about skiing and snowboarding responsibly—not only during NSAA Safety Awareness Month in January but throughout the year.

Also honored is the new Safety Champion, which recognizes a resort employee who shows outstanding dedication and enthusiasm to helping keep snowsports safe.

Here are the winners of the NSAA National Safety Awards for the 2016-17 season:

BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (350,000 OR MORE VISITS)
VAIL MOUNTAIN, COLO.

Vail Mountain covered all the bases in its sweeping approach to safety awareness last season, applying a consistent look to messaging, engaging the community in education and awareness, and rewarding responsible skiing and riding—all resulting in a noticeable change in guests’ behavior on the mountain.

Yellow is hard to miss, and the Vail Mountain Safety (VMS) program leverages the color’s visibility across the resort as the hallmark of its safety program. The heartbeat of the program is the Mountain Safety staff, who wear

The foundation of Vail’s comprehensive safety program is the Vail Mountain Safety team. These workers, outfitted in distinctive yellow uniforms, are always on hand to help spread the word about safety and the Responsibility Code.
unmistakable yellow uniforms as they work to educate guests about safety and enforcing responsible behavior. To unify the messaging, Vail has converted all the safety signage on the mountain to yellow also.

During Safety Month the VMS team held a scavenger hunt that brought 300 kids through interactive stations on the mountain where they learned about safe skiing and riding. A new safety blog, “The Mellow Yellow,” expanded digital outreach, as did the new “Safety Saturday” focus on the Vail Twitter account, which spread a safety message to its more than 58,000 followers.

Also in January a “Know the Code, Win a GoPro” contest challenged guests to learn Your Responsibility Code and recite it to a Mountain Safety employee for a chance to win a GoPro. By the end of the month, nearly 1,000 had entered the contest, with four happy winners. In addition, the resort partnered with the Vail Valley Medical Center to set up a helmet booth over Presidents’ Day weekend, giving out 35 helmets and raising more than $300 to help fit local kids with ski and bike helmets. Vail also produced a new safety pamphlet featuring the Code and other helpful tips, and gave out 2,500 free hot chocolate vouchers to guests spotted setting the example of safe, responsible skiing and riding.

Overall, Vail’s Mountain Safety Program aims to equip guests with the knowledge of responsible skiing and riding behavior before, during, and after their visit, reward people who do the right things, and correct behavior when necessary to maintain a safe, fun experience at one of North America’s largest ski resorts.

BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (UP TO 350,000 VISITS)
STRATTON MOUNTAIN, VT.

National Safety Month was a collaborative affair last season at Stratton Mountain, with department managers from across the resort staging a full slate of safety-themed events.

Sticking to the core topics of The Responsibility Code, mountain awareness, helmet safety, and lift safety, the team designated focused activities for each week in January that included poster contests, a safety scavenger hunt, a helmet safety event, lift operators handing out Clif Bars along with safety messages, and safety messaging at hotels and in all three lodges. The resort dispatched the Stratton Safety Bear for regular appearances at the seasonal ski and ride programs and Mountain Sports School, and reinforced the safety message with employees too, distributing 1,400 pins with the tagline “Work Safe. Work Smart. Enjoy the Mountain.” In addition, Stratton held numerous CPR/AED classes for the greater community.

One highlight was an evening presentation at the base lodge by the High Fives Foundation—which raises injury prevention awareness and provides resources to those who suffer life-altering snowsports injuries—and Smith Optics. High Fives showed a compelling film to an audience of seasonal program participants, junior skiers and snowboarders, and employees, while Smith Optics raffled off a helmet and a pair of goggles and talked about the importance of proper fit. In addition, Stratton’s ski patrol and mountain safety teams spoke about the resort’s terrain park safety education sessions.

“Safety is at the heart of Stratton’s culture, and this was an especially powerful evening,” said Jeffrey Cavagnino, environmental and safety manager. “Everyone learned new, or were reminded of, valuable skills to practice to help keep themselves and others safe while skiing and snowboarding.”

Supporting the helmet safety focus, the resort retail outlets offered helmet discounts throughout the month to employees and guests, resulting in 340 helmets sold in January.
BEST EMPLOYEE SAFETY PROGRAM
MT. HOOD MEADOWS, ORE.

Mr. Hood Meadows proves that workplace safety and employee wellness go hand in hand, and that employees who are well trained, feel empowered, and feel appreciated are more likely to promote a thriving safety culture.

Mr. Hood employees are empowered to take safety into their own hands from the start, at orientation. To reduce the stigma that identifying hazards is “tattling,” the resort emphasizes that all reporting is helpful. Supervisors and managers also take a three-part Safety Culture Training course (soon to be offered online) followed by a practical hands-on component.

A multi-faceted Wellness Program is designed to improve employees’ experiences, health, and safety, on and off the mountain. The resort brings in health practitioners—massage therapists, chiropractors, physical therapists, and acupuncturists—who provide their services onsite to employees for free. Also offered are recreation exchanges at local climbing gyms and fitness centers as well as classes on stress management, nutrition, and financial planning. Mr. Hood hosts employee appreciation events with free food, drinks, and prizes, and even has a Bring Your Dog to Work program.

The resort’s Safety Committee members recently began giving rotating presentations on workplace safety topics, which has increased engagement at the meetings and provided members with tangible training topics to take back to their department.

Since focusing on more resources on workplace safety and the safety culture, Mr. Hood has seen a consistent increase in weekly employee satisfaction scores, with a corresponding reduction in workers’ compensation costs.

“We used to ask employees, ‘What could you have done to avoid this incident?’ We now ask, ‘What could we, as a company, have done...?’” said Anna Laxague, workplace safety manager. “We’ve worked hard to move from a reactive safety culture that is centered around safety plans and protocols to one that focuses on instilling safety as a value that we relate to everything we do.”
Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadow’s efforts to put guest safety in the forefront extend far beyond Safety Month, with a focus that encompasses every age and category of skier and rider throughout the season.

With the ski team, for example, the resort recognized a prime opportunity to teach safe behavior to the 1,500 athletes ranging from 4 to 19 years old. The Team Pride Mountain Wide program, introduced in 2015-16, helps coaches instill safety awareness, courtesy, and mountain stewardship in the athletes so these values become as intuitive and important as the development of skills. Clear consequences for poor decision making as well as recognition for outstanding conduct are an important part of the program.

To help the youngest team members use safe chairlift behavior, Squaw requires them to wear a special vest identifying them as needing to ride with a qualified adult (employees and season pass holders are asked to do so).

SV | AM also collaborated with Homewood, Sugar Bowl, and the local sheriff’s department on a Be Mountain Wise campaign to educate skiers and riders about avoiding behavior that is against the law in Placer County, such as ignoring resort boundary lines and closed areas, and sharing lift tickets and passes.

The resort also developed an acronym—STATE (Surface, Terrain, Ability, Traffic, Exposure)—to help coaches and instructors be mindful of tailoring lessons to each group. Yet another program, Safety First, encourages employees and managers to report near-misses and unsafe behavior.

During Safety Month, mountain hosts distributed 2,000 buffs printed with the Responsibility Code to guests; lift operators and coaches wore Know the Code buttons; and team members received cards bearing a photo of a patrol puppy and the Code.

For its resort-wide, holistic approach to safety education, SV | AM has seen a drop in behavior problems, stricter adherence to the rules, and more clarity for all on how to have fun, safely, every day.

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**By Chris Diamond.**

Part memoir, part confessional, and part management training, Chris Diamond’s new book is an honest account of the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of ski resort operations.

Newly retired from the helm of Steamboat Resort after four decades in the industry, Diamond shares priceless insights on everything from his own mistakes to the emergence of the ski resort conglomerate. With leadership skills honed in the Vietnam War, Diamond developed a unique management style notable for empowering his team. His story—along with his forthright vision for the changing landscape of the ski industry—is required reading for every ski area owner and operator.


Order your copy now at www.nsaa.org/store. Also available on amazon.com.
SAFETY CHAMPION
ELIZA SMITH, VAIL MOUNTAIN, COLO.

With the huge number of skier/ rider visits Vail Mountain sees each day, the resort doesn’t hesitate to enforce compliance with Your Responsibility Code. But the Vail Mountain Safety Team (VMS) is intent on minimizing the need for interventions, and they have just the person to lead the charge.

Eliza Smith—a member of VMS team and this year’s NSAA Safety Champion—oversees a comprehensive community outreach program that has expanded safety awareness from the slopes at Vail to living rooms and smartphones throughout the community and across the country.

Among the projects Smith coordinated last season was a “Know the Code, Win a GoPro” raffle that drew hundreds of entrants, many of whom might not have otherwise given much thought to the rules. She partnered with the local newspaper to reinforce to the community VMS’s commitment to safety, publishing the names of the raffle winners as well as the number of weekly safety violators. She was the driving force behind the resort’s Safety Month campaign, coordinating a safety scavenger hunt, working with the ski patrol to arrange a Flight for Life helicopter landing demo, and interfacing with the Vail Valley Medical Center to set up a helmet demo booth that gave out more than 35 helmets and raised hundreds of dollars for helmets for local schoolkids.

“ELIZA’S RE-IMAGINATION OF HOW TO REACH GUESTS WITH VAIL’S SAFETY MESSAGE HAS GREATLY CHANGED THE FACE OF VAIL MOUNTAIN SAFETY.” STEVE CLARK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF MOUNTAIN SAFETY, VAIL.

Smith designed “I Know the Code” buffs for the VMS staff and as a reward for guests who demonstrate safe skiing/riding. She also pushed to ensure that guests contacted for unsafe behavior understand the element of the Code they violated.

“Eliza’s re-imagination of how to reach guests with Vail’s safety message has greatly changed the face of Vail Mountain Safety,” said Steve Clark, the resort’s assistant director of mountain safety. “She has made outreach the foundation of VMS, changing interactions with guests from reactive to proactive, and envisioning safety as something that encompasses all parts of a guest’s experience.”