NSAA’S 2017-18 SAFETY AWARD WINNERS & THEIR PRAISEWORTHY PROGRAMS

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SNOwSPORTS SAFETY IS A FUndAMENTAL so ingrained in mountain operations that it can be hard to pick winners out of a sea of unique and effective safety techniques. The NSAA National Safety Awards recognize those that stand out above the rest.

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

Also honored is the NSAA National Safety Champion, an individual who shows outstanding dedication and enthusiasm toward helping keep mountain recreation activities safe and enjoyable. In addition, the Safety Impact Award, given periodically, recognizes a unique, far-reaching safety initiative that elevates safety education throughout the industry.

Here are the winners of the NSAA National Safety Awards for the 2017–18 season.

BEST OVERALL SAFETY PROGRAM (500,000 or more visits)

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN SKI AREA, CA

Unbound Wayfinding

With seven terrain parks, Mammoth prioritizes helping guests find the right one for their ability, so a dedicated webpage with maps indicates level of challenge. Also, last season Mammoth distributed 50,000 copies of the new Mountain Safety Guide containing universal safety guidelines, published by the California Ski Industries Association (and the winner of NSAA’s Safety Impact Award, page 60). The resort worked with local rental shops to provide safety cards to customers, and partnered with the local transportation agency to place posters in buses.

Mammoth used predictive analysis to identify and help prevent common injuries among its 3,000 employees. All workers attended collision prevention training, and those whose jobs require them to walk or hike received free STABILicer traction shoes. Lift workers also got a free helmet or bump cap. Weekly employee emails covered everything from preventing ACL injury to managing on-the-job fatigue.

The 2017–18 safety program was the most successful ever, said Gabe Taylor, Mammoth’s marketing manager, who cited a 31 percent reduction in the collision rate based on years with comparable conditions, a 29 percent decrease in employee injuries, and community-wide acknowledgment of the mountain’s commitment to safety.

When you have more than a million annual skier/snowboarder visits, going big with your safety program is the only option. In its sweeping approach, Mammoth Mountain identified four priorities for 2017–18: collision prevention, terrain park wayfinding, community awareness, and employee safety.

The resort focused on conveying two key messages to every guest—Know the Zone and People Ahead of You Have the Right of Way—using all manner of communication. Safety blurbs ran continually on 120 digital messaging boards in high-traffic areas, more SLOW banners were posted on the hill, and on busy days the ski patrol and other staff were out in force, at times requiring particularly careless skiers/snowboarders to watch the Live to Ride Another Day video.
SNOWBASIN RESORT, UT

Just when you thought there were no more memorable safety acronyms, Snowbasin has come up with a keeper, SAFER:

SMART – Make safety-conscious decisions
ALERT – Be aware of your surroundings and condition
FOCUSED – Don’t be distracted or preoccupied when on the mountain
EDUCATED – Understand your abilities, responsibilities, and associated risks
RESPECTFUL – Recreate together in a safe and friendly manner

Part of a broader SAFERmtn Team program unveiled in January, the acronym supports the tagline “Our Mountain, Our Community, Our responsibility,” which puts the onus on guests and employees to help keep the sport safe.

To get buy-in from all 600 employees, the ski patrol visited every department, distributing SAFER pocket cards and SAFERmtn Team pins. To put the message in front of guests, the website landing page detailed SAFERmtn Team and Safety Month activities, and the resort posted videos, photos, and Instagram stories on its social media outlets.

Different activities supported the effort each weekend.

SQUAW VALLEY | ALPINE MEADOWS, CA

“Actions speak louder than words” goes the saying, and Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows’ commitment to employee safety proves it. A safe environment not only contributes to a healthy workforce and reduces financial liability but also builds team loyalty and “is simply the right thing to do,” says the resort’s awards application.

Over the past two seasons SV | AM embarked on a mission to increase safety even more. In 2016–17 the risk management team and department leaders painstakingly reviewed hundreds of reports to identify trends. With a five-year average of 13 incidents—and $356,000 spent on work injuries related to employees struck by chairs—the group developed action items to mitigate hazards. One idea was to place brightly colored nylon brushes, or whisker gates, at the bottom of lifts as a constant reminder to operators of being in the path of large moving equipment. As a result, despite having 728 inches of snow in 2016–17, there were only two incidents of an employee getting hit by a chair (in both cases the operator was helping a guest).

The resort also developed Know Your Hazards posters as daily reminders of specific job risks, and conveyed Save Your Summer messaging in signage and emails, urging employees not to go too big while spring skiing and ruin their summer plans due to injury. SV | AM offers free employee wellness programs, including yoga classes and preseason strength training, and has an onsite athletic trainer, too.

Incident review—emphasizing fact-finding rather than fault-finding—Involves the injured employee, department manager, an executive team member, and a risk manager. The goal is to develop preventive measures to ensure a safer workplace, with the majority of actions coming from the employee.

Staff response has been extremely positive and injury rates are down, proving that consistent collaborative efforts, clear messaging, and a solid investment in the workforce pays off in ways that count most.
BEST GUEST SAFETY PROGRAM

GORE MOUNTAIN, NY

It’s hard to imagine anyone being immune to the safety messaging at Gore Mountain—mostly because the resort doesn’t portray safety as a separate (i.e., possibly ignored) topic. Like the parent who shrewdly sneaks kale into hamburger patties, Gore finds ways to integrate the good stuff whenever and wherever possible.

For 2017–18 the resort focused on increasing the number of touchpoints that communicate safety with guests, both on and off the mountain. Gore placed an eye-catching two-page spread in its widely circulated Echo Magazine, putting universal safety tips and mountain specifics in front of 200,000 viewers. In addition, safety messaging punctuates other relevant content on monitors in the lodges and on large display maps around the mountain.

Because the snow report is the most popular page on the website, it posts daily safety tips. Gore also maintains detailed photos and the updated sequences of all freestyle elements on its terrain park page, which features Park Smart and a link to TerrainParkSafety.org so guests know what to expect before visiting. Safety tips are in Gore’s daily podcast, snow phone recording, and conditions report for ski shops and area hotels too.

As expected, safety is a key element of events, including Represent & Ride Free each March. Kids get a Gore Mountain sticker for their helmet, then are photographed. They have their photo customized with the Lids on Kids logo and their personal shout-out, then receive a free ticket for the rest of the season. The Mini-Shredders JibFest, a non-competitive jam-style event, introduces kids to lower-level features with lots of guidance. This year the resort added a pre-event complimentary park lesson emphasizing Park SMART guidelines.

With safety such a large part of its everyday story, Gore Mountain is helping make responsible skiing and riding instinctive, just like other good habits that are ingrained thanks to someone else’s example.

BEST #RideAnotherDay SAFETY PROGRAM

COPPER MOUNTAIN, CO

When you hear the story of Elise Johnson, you don’t forget it—which is the point. Her death at age 5, when an out-of-control guest collided with her and her mom, was tragic. And it would likely be despairing if not for the fact that her parents chose to turn their loss into something good. The #RideAnotherDay (#RAD) safety campaign is the result of that decision.

Introduced for 2017–18, #RAD is designed to change unsafe attitudes and behaviors on the slopes by raising awareness of real consequences. While hundreds of resorts have embraced #RAD, Copper Mountain stands out for its comprehensive utilization of the campaign. Last fall, Elise’s parents, Kelli and Chauncy, visited Copper to share their story with management, mountain safety employees, and patrolers. Collision prevention has always been a priority at Copper, but the Johnsons’ visit inspired the team to raise the bar and reach an even larger audience, using #RAD as the touchstone.

Copper’s Safety Advisory Committee brainstormed collision prevention action items with guests. The resort showed the powerful video, Live to Ride Another Day, to all employees and ski club coaches, and made it required viewing for guests in safety education classes. Copper’s buses (transporting a million people annually), sported #RAD Snow Angel posters, and the resort also distributed thousands of #RAD cards, buttons, and stickers to guests. Safety Advisory Committee member Katherine Jeter tirelessly promoted the campaign at a safety table, and the ski patrol gave out hundreds of cups of cocoa while engaging guests in collision prevention discussions. A Safety Fest weekend drew 800 guests who won prizes for collision prevention knowledge. And, the Employee Experience staff won a free snow-cat trip for a clever “Dumb Ways to Collide” employee collision prevention campaign.

Copper Mountain’s efforts are helping keep the slopes safe, allowing others to enjoy the sports that gave Elise Johnson so much joy.
SAFETY CHAMPION

KATHERINE SCHIFANI, VAIL MOUNTAIN, CO

Katherine Schifani is well suited to the title of “champion.” The epitome of employee initiative, she continually envisions ways to encourage the Vail community to embrace safe skiing and snowboarding.

A member of the Vail Mountain Safety (VMS) team, Schifani is the originator of a lot of good ideas. She conceived the transformation of an underutilized building into the Mountain Safety Center, a thriving hub where guests warm up, get snacks, and learn about safety. She spearheaded the Safety Sunglasses program, with VMS distributing 1,000 pairs as a conversation starter on safety. And, she envisioned the Shadow a Mountain Safety Employee program to help transform safety violators into safety advocates.

With training in LEAN and Six Sigma process management, Schifani found a way to reduce the time it takes to pack and sort ski patrol toboggans and decrease the distance to carry them over icy, uneven ground, contributing to a zero-injury result within the department. She devised a method to track VMS interactions with guests, helping quantify the team’s influence, and a more precise way to track 200 slow signs across the mountain. As a result, signage is more standardized, and adjustments are more seamless and transparent to guests.

Schifani also set up radio station interviews with VMS staff, connecting with a large, varied demographic. For Safety Month, she scheduled school visits throughout the county, organized a safety scavenger hunt that reached a record number of kids, and worked with the Vail Health Hospital to expand helmet safety demonstrations. Schifani also generates prolific content for VMS’ social media sites. She revised the resort’s Slope Safety pamphlet, emphasizing Your Responsibility Code too.

Schifani embodies Vail’s mantra of Own It, Elevate It, Personalize It, according to the awards application submitted on her behalf. She weaves fun and safety together to extend attitudes toward safety to all the other departments working on Vail Mountain.

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SAFETY IMPACT AWARD

CALIFORNIA SKI INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

If repetition is the mother of all learning, there's a good case for consistency over customization. That was the rationale behind the new Ski California Mountain Safety Guide—an unprecedented education tool developed by the California Ski Industry Association to help ingrain universal safety tenets among all levels of skiers/snowboarders at all types of areas.

The guide was conceived by Ron Cohen, a member of CSIA's executive committee and the deputy counsel and senior vice president at Alterra Mountain Company. Cohen, who has had several safety roles at ski areas, recognized the potential for making messaging more powerful through consistency from one resort to another. CSIA embraced the concept, and compiled safety guidelines from numerous resorts, associations, and other organizations into one uniform message. The team decided to present the material on the familiar template of a standard trail map (of a fictional area, Mt. California) for practicality and guest convenience. The guide touches on all aspects of how to have a safe and fun skiing/boarding experience, including pre-visit planning, mountain etiquette, deep snow and avalanche awareness, lift safety, terrain park safety, and trail signage. There's also a complement to Your Responsibility Code—an “Our Commitment to Safety” statement outlining the steps resorts take every day to support a safe guest experience.

The Mountain Safety Guide, available in print and in digital format, is distributed by all of CSIA’s 20 member resorts in California and three in Nevada (to the tune of 100,000 guides handed out last season). Media praise has been very positive, as has the feedback from other associations, ski patrollers, and risk managers. CSIA is clearly making an impact with its guest education outreach, proving you don't have to re-invent the wheel to convey the importance of safety on the slopes.

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