

Squaw basks in its Olympic history

By Susan Wood

Squaw Valley USA opens one of its grandest years Saturday with a slate of events and improvements to mark a major double milestone.

Beyond a massive celebration for its founding in 1949 and the half-century turning as host of the VIII Olympic Games, Squaw will bring on a new season with a new chairlift at High Camp, an overhaul of the dining experience at mid-mountain, added ski and boarder programs and a dramatic drop in season pass rates.



Jonny
Mosley

The drama begins with professional base jumper JT Holmes launching opening day at 2:20pm with a leap out of Squaw's aerial Cable Car, which is marking its 40-year anniversary. That afternoon, the anniversary also features a balloon release from the Funitel, a screening of Squaw's history, and cake with a Champagne toast by owner Nancy Cushing and the resort's chief mountain host and Olympic gold medalist Jonny Mosely.

Mosely will be around all season. He plans to take Squaw riders out on "Ski with Jonny" days.

The Truckee-area skier from Marin County who grew up dazzling

spectators with his gravity-defying jumps and stunts has retired from competitive skiing. He promised those who go out with him he would "start out slow" but might perform "a few black flips" for posterity.

"I've learned you have to ski ahead to do that or they won't see you," he told *Lake Tahoe News* while ordering a Dr Pepper at a drive-through restaurant on his way to the San Francisco Ski and Wine Festival last weekend in Santa Clara.

Mosely took home the top Olympic honor at Nagano, Japan, in 1998 for his unique moves. Come this February, he will provide commentary for NBC Sports during three Olympic events "moguls, aerials and skier cross. The latter is an event his buddy and fellow Olympian Daron Rahlves will compete in.

"It's great Squaw's celebrating the anniversary. I love Squaw. I grew up skiing there, and I'm just in awe," Mosley said. The resort known for its steep terrain, full facilities and rich history named a run after him off the KT-22 chairlift – advanced terrain that is not for the faint of heart.

Squaw will host a slew of activities throughout the ski season to generate excitement for the international gathering that returns to the West Coast in Vancouver in February. As part of Olympic Heritage week slated Jan. 8-17, Squaw will set up a men and women's downhill course. Skiers may brave the slopes to simulate the exhilaration of the flagship Olympic event.

In addition, a Torch Relay will start from Sugar Pine Point State Park, go to the resort, followed by an Opening Ceremony with fireworks, music and reception. The festivities culminate with an Olympic Legends Ball at the Resort at Squaw Creek. During the weeklong celebration, events are either free or proceeds will be earmarked to raise funds for the construction of the Lake Tahoe ski heritage museum.

As a side note, there's even a book by David Antonucci

chronicling the historic event called "Snowball's Chance: The Story of the 1960 Olympic Winter Games and Lake Tahoe."

Other notables for the year at Squaw include further enhancements to the \$3 million revamp of the Gold Coast Lodge, with the new, eco-friendly 39 North restaurant opening next month. Squaw also hired Executive Chef Scott Rutter to run the dining show. He comes with 20 years of experience, including a resume lined with the St. Regis, Ritz Carlton and J.W. Marriott.

It's a new day

This year marks a monumental year on many fronts.

The last bastion of the high-priced season pass from a decade ago, Squaw substantially lowered its all-year rates from \$1,499 to \$469. The value pass costs \$369 and excludes holidays and Saturdays. This is in contrast to an all-day adult lift ticket of \$83, up \$4 from the previous year.

"We were always concerned that if we lowered them, it would ruin the Squaw experience. But with the other resorts dropping them, it was hard to justify spending \$1,000 more. And we thought we'd do it for 60- and 50-year anniversaries," Squaw spokeswoman Savannah Cowley said.

Like the other resorts with their bargain rates and bonus packages, Squaw wanted to pass on a greater value in the hopes of creating another generation of skiers.

Squaw skier visitation has been up and down in the last five years. Snow can be a bane and blessing, with not enough between New Year's and Martin Luther King birthday's spreading a false sense of a poor year for conditions. But too much may scare many a Bay Area driver away from the mountains, no matter how the economy fares.

"Snow is really seen as a factor" not so much the amount

of it, as the timing of it," Cowley added.

Squaw is accessed a short jaunt off Highway 89 along the Truckee River, through www.squaw.com or by calling (530) 583.6985.