

Tahoe resorts hope Amgen bike tour is economic boon

By Jeremy Evans

Next year's spring shoulder season will be physically and economically dependent on hundreds of people literally being on the shoulder of Tahoe's roads.

With this week's official announcement of the Amgen Tour of California starting in South Lake Tahoe in May 2011 and incorporating Northstar-at-Tahoe and Squaw Valley into the frenzy, people are already projecting an economic boon to the region during a time that is usually slow and quiet.

"To have an international event like this take place at Tahoe is a gift to our economy and will have a very positive impact on our exposure globally," said Marc Sapoznik, marketing and public relations manager for the Resort at Squaw Creek. "We anticipate not only selling out our property, but the entire Squaw Valley area will likely be sold out over the dates of the event. The combination of Lake Tahoe and a major cycling event should provide a terrific incentive for travel."



Lance Armstrong is a regular on the Amgen bike tour.

Steven Holt, regional public relations director for the Ritz-Carlton Hotels of Northern California, echoed Sapoznik's thoughts.

"This is a huge opportunity for Lake Tahoe," Holt said. "Bringing a marquee event like the Amgen Tour of California will shine the national media spotlight on the entire region and attract new destination guests and cycling enthusiasts. It will be great for business, especially in a month like May."

What the region will have to spend to get ready for the event is not known. Nor is it known where the money would come from since all of the jurisdictions are struggling to stay solvent.

Nor are people predicting what kind of dollars might actually flow into the area.

The tour itself has been losing millions of dollars each year, according to published reports. One former host city, Santa Cruz, didn't apply to be part of next year's event because of the costs involved.

Although Highway 50 over Echo Summit, the principal artery connecting Sacramento to South Lake Tahoe, will be closed during the time of the race because of work on the retaining wall, some local cyclists are convinced the race will still attract new visitors who can easily use an alternative highway to reach the South Shore.

"I am pretty excited for it to be coming here, especially in May when nobody is usually around here," said Stateline resident and cyclist Will Davenport. "This is a pretty big deal that gets all of the top guys. Biking is part of the lifestyle here, and I don't know if we're on the map like Moab (Utah). But if we have a good showing and it comes back year after year, it could get there."

Now in its fifth year, the Amgen Tour is an 800-mile, 15-stop tour of the Golden State. South Lake Tahoe was chosen as the

Stage 1 start community. Cyclists will depart from the California-Nevada state line and travel 1½ times around the lake before finishing at Northstar. Stage 2 will depart from Squaw and end in Sacramento.

The event is May 15-22; with Thousand Oaks the last stop.

“We think it’s our best route ever,” said AEG President Andrew Messick, whose company is the event’s title sponsor. “Lake Tahoe is a place where we always wanted to go. There is great bike riding culture there. It’s gorgeous and it’s in a part of the state where we’ve never been. It’s a place where we couldn’t go when we were racing in February. It’s a great place to start the 2011 race.”

For more information about the event, go online.