

North Shore ski resorts putting Tahoe on the map

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – “It is finally Lake Tahoe’s time.”

Those are the words of Squaw Valley CEO Andy Wirth. His peers Bill Rock, COO of Northstar, and Art Chapman, president and chairman of JMA Ventures, concur.

The three shared the stage Thursday during the 59th annual membership lunch for the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association. More than 100 people listened to the three executives talk about Squaw-Alpine, Northstar, and Homewood, respectively, and what it means in terms of Lake Tahoe competing with destinations in Utah and Colorado.



Andy Wirth of Squaw speaks Oct. 27 as Art Chapman of JMA and Bill Rock of Northstar listen.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

“What a great time to be in North Lake Tahoe,” Rock said. He said this is the most interesting place to be in all of North

America when it comes to the ski industry.

Vail Resorts bought Northstar last year and this summer infused \$30 million into the resort. When KSL Capital Partners bought Squaw last year it pledged \$50 million in upgrades in five years.

Homewood Mountain Resort, which turns 50 next year, is ready to spend millions as well. JMA is awaiting the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's potential approval of its overhaul of the resort at the Dec. 14 meeting before it can go forward.

While the three consider each a friend and competitor, they recognize upgrades to one resort enhance the overall experience for visitors. They also know with the multitude of resorts in the greater Lake Tahoe area that skiers seldom stick to one property during a weeklong vacation. Even locals like to ski more than one place, as evidenced by the popularity of combo passes.

With Vail Resorts owning Northstar and Heavenly, it has the Tahoe Value Pass.

Wirth said sales of the Tahoe Super Pass – which gives riders access to Squaw and Alpine – are three times greater than what was anticipated.

Homewood and Kirkwood Mountain Resort also have a combo pass.

KSL's partnership with JMA, which had been the sole owner of Alpine Meadows, is expected to be finalized within two weeks so the new firm called Squaw Valley Ski Holdings Inc. will run Squaw and Alpine. The last hurdles are for the California Tahoe Conservancy to approve a lease agreement today and the U.S. Forest Service to do the same in a matter of days.

Wirth pre-empted a likely question about what happens with White Wolf, the property owned by Troy Caldwell that separates (links?) Squaw and Alpine. Caldwell was at the lunch, but

didn't speak.

"We are working on ways to accomplish great things on a long-term basis," Wirth said. He added that the resort has a good relationship with Caldwell. After all, Caldwell owns KT-22.

Wirth brushed by the fact Squaw is in talks with the U.S. Forest Service that might lead to access changes.

"There may be an announcement in the next three weeks," Wirth said without elaborating.

Wirth and Rock praised those who operated Northstar and Squaw until last year, recognizing they laid the foundation that allows the new owners to elevate the level of skiing beyond what it has been in Tahoe.