

Squaw Valley on course to revamp its reputation

By Kathryn Reed

Renaissance – that’s what Squaw Valley’s makeover is being called by resort officials.

With plenty of snow on the mountain, the resort opens Nov. 23, though the ski team first took turns Nov. 9.

At a meeting last month put on by the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, CEO Andy Wirth talked a bit about the changes coming to Squaw. He was not shy in admitting improvements beyond on-mountain upgrades need to happen.



Squaw Valley is improving its grooming for the 2011-12 season.

Photo/Keoki Flagg

He revealed surveys consistently say three things about the resort:

- It’s not friendly;
- People don’t feel welcome;

- The mountain is intimidating, that people have a hard time navigating it.

“Everything we are doing with the renaissance is rooted in that,” Wirth said. “We are going to go back to where we started. That’s why we call it a renaissance – because we feel we can bring back the luster.”

Personality-wise, it is working on having less attitude.

“You’ll see the level of service increase. We will absolutely compete with Deer Valley, Vail and Beaver Creek,” Wirth said when it comes to hospitality.

There is no doubt Squaw is an epic mountain. And with its legacy of hosting the 1960 Winter Olympics, its mark in the history books is indelible. But in an era of “What have you done for me lately?” attitude, Squaw didn’t have much of an answer. Until now.

The ownership change a year ago from the Cushmans to KSL Capital Partners, then to the merger being finalized this month of Squaw Valley Ski Holdings running Squaw and Alpine Meadows, the North Shore resort is ready to be a player again.

While this season it’s still not possible to legally ski between the resorts, one day that may change. For now, the combined 6,600 acres will be connected via free shuttles.

The infusion of \$50 million in five years (one year is completed) will go a long way to upgrading Squaw physically.

From a marketing standpoint, the amount of time Squaw was portrayed in the latest Warren Miller movie will inevitably entice people to make a trip to North Lake Tahoe. It’s estimated 800,000 people will see the film this fall.

Part of the cash going into the resort was \$3 million on 10 snowcats.

“We think we have one of the most remarkable mountains. Imagine if we have world class parks on that mountain,” Wirth said. Six cats are dedicated to working on Squaw’s terrain parks.

In summer 2012, Granite Chief chairlift will be replaced.

A snowsports building is at the base of the mountain. This is where a ticket for any on-mountain activity can be bought.

It’s not all about skiing at Squaw.

The SnoVenture center features new and expanded activities for kids and families, including mini snowmobiles and enhanced snow tubing. Dog sledding, horse-drawn sleigh rides, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are operated out of the center, too.

Eight shops are opening this season in the Village at Squaw Valley – including Salomon, North Face and Oakley concept stores. Farrah Rale Jewelry Design allows guests to create jewelry.

Full Belly Deli and Euro Sweets will each open in early December. Batch Cupcakery will open closer to the December holidays. Wildflour Baking Company is expanding.

Rocker@Squaw is in the village offering lunch, dinner and late night fare. Its claim to fame is being the only restaurant in the country allowing guest-generated on-site video editing and screenings.

The historic Olympic House was completely remodeled. Gold Coast Lodge at the top of the Funitel has a new restaurant – Funi’s.

<p>Projected opening dates (weather dependent):</p>
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Alpine Meadows – Dec. 10
Boreal Mountain Resort – Open
Diamond Peak Ski Resort – Dec. 15
Donner Ski Ranch – TBD
Granlibakken Resort – Sled hill Nov. 24, ski hill Dec. 15
Heavenly Mountain Resort – Open
Homewood Mountain Resort – Dec. 17
Kirkwood Mountain Resort – Nov. 25, Fri.-Sun only, check website
Mt. Rose – Nov. 23
Northstar – Open
Royal Gorge Cross Country – Dec. 10
Sierra-at-Tahoe – TBD
Soda Springs –TBD
Spooner Lake Cross Country – TBD
Squaw Valley – Nov. 23

Sugar Bowl – Nov. 24
Tahoe Cross Country – Nov. 25
Tahoe Donner Cross Country – TBD
Tahoe Donner Ski Resort – Dec. 9