

Competitors become partners to lure skiers, snowboarders to both ends of Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

No ski resort is going to please all of the people, but it is possible one pass can please most of the people.

That is the hope of officials at Sierra-at-Tahoe, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. (Alpine and Squaw have the same owners.) All three resorts are unique – in terms of terrain, amenities, and vibe. It's not about becoming a homogenous, non-descript corporate (though all are corporate entities and not indie resorts) mountain.

“What it's about is the different experiences. The differences and variety each can offer customers,” Andy Wirth, who runs Squaw and Alpine, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw is legendary. After all, it hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics. Terrain is steep. Cliffs are rugged. The mountain is sprawling. Alpine is definitely more laid back. It's known more for its bowls than traditional ski runs. Sierra is all about the mountain – no village necessary – exceptional terrain parks and being a place all ages can feel comfortable.



When it's windy at Squaw,

those pass holders will find plenty of sheltered area at Sierra. Photo/Provided

Squaw and Sierra are home to a slew of past and current Olympians and X Gamers – think Tamara McKinney, Jonny Moseley, Julia Mancuso, Travis Cabral, Hannah Teter, and Jaime Anderson. So their mountains aren't just for the recreational skier – though that is mostly who is schussing down their slopes.

“We are partnered with two of the best resorts in the United States,” John Rice, general manager of Sierra, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I have had days at Squaw Valley in terms of quality that don't compare to anything else in the U.S. It's got it all.”

Rice has intimate knowledge of Squaw, having worked there early in his career. He started as an intern and left as director of all outdoor operations, which included managing a staff of 350.

What he believes Sierra will offer Squaw and Alpine pass holders is terrain parks like they aren't used to.

“I think we will see a huge sampling from their youth to see what we are about,” Rice said.

The three-in-one pass is a one-year deal – at least to start with. Head honchos and money crunchers will assess how the partnership is working throughout the winter and figure out what to do for the 2013-14 year.

(Both resorts have limited deals with other ski resorts that are separate from this offer.)

While resort officials can't completely attribute the bump in season pass sales to the Nov. 12 announcement of this promotion, they know people are excited about it.

Wirth said, "Since the announcement we have seen an overwhelming response from the marketplace. We've clearly seen a lot of new customers through our season pass sales."

He said people have upgraded their passes so they can ski at Sierra.

"On opening day we had 12 Squaw people," Rice said. This was Thanksgiving Day and Squaw was open.

For most pass holders at Squaw-Alpine, it means being able to ski at Sierra throughout the season. For most Sierra pass holders, it means access to Squaw-Alpine until Dec. 21 and after April 15.

With Squaw and Alpine during normal snow years having closing dates in May, this will mean another month of skiing (for free) for Sierra pass holders.

Having a north-south option was appealing to Rice because he had it before when Booth Creek also owned Northstar. He saw the benefit to a deal like that even if skiers are apt to predominately be at one end of the lake.

Wirth likes that Sierra attracts a sizeable crowd from the Sacramento area. Now he hopes they'll take Interstate 80 a few times instead of Highway 50.

Once a rider is at a resort there's more money to be spent beyond having bought the pass. There's food, gear, rentals, lessons, preferred parking and more. That's one way the resorts will cash in on the deal.

It's also about the perceived value of the pass. Even if people don't take advantage of skiing the multiple resorts, the possibility always exists.

