

Squaw-Alpine boss goes undercover at both resorts

By Kathryn Reed

New trainees throughout the season are par for the course at a ski resort. So when the “older” ski dude with what he describes as a blonde mullet and matching Fu Manchu beard showed up, it wasn’t any big deal. At least not at that moment.

The new kid, though, was actually their boss.

Andy Wirth, CEO and president of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts, changed his look and job title in January unbeknownst all but a few key members of his executive team. And it was being filmed.

On March 8 at 8pm, Wirth will be the subject of the CBS show “Undercover Boss”. The show is all about a chief executive officer going undercover to see how his or her company is really functioning, to talk to the people doing the real work, to figure out what needs improving and what is working. The underlying theme of the show, which is in its fourth season, is bosses find out how their decisions affect others.



Andy Wirth, CEO of Squaw and Alpine, goes undercover to give a snowboarding lesson.

Photo/Provided

(Wirth has not seen the final cut of the show.)

“Probably the most single compelling aspect that still resonates with me today is the depth of character, passion and how much people care about their jobs,” Wirth told *Lake Tahoe News*. “On the one hand I’m proud to say I didn’t find anything surprising. I always knew we had a hard working, dedicated staff.”

He was approached to do the show through business associates in the Midwest. At first he was hesitant, but then the producers had answers to all of his concerns.

With 2,300 employees between both resorts during peak season, it’s hard for any boss to know everything that is going on. Wirth recommends this type of undercover operation for any CEO.

He was already one of those bosses who would get in the trenches. He’s worked lift maintenance, climbing to the top of lift towers.

But the show took it to a new level.

“I will look like a dork, but I am OK with that,” Wirth said.



Andy Wirth –
what he really
looks like.
Photo/LTN file

At Alpine he worked in the terrain park and as a snowboard instructor; at Squaw he was on the ski patrol.

“I haven’t done a beacon search in a long, long time. That was a bit of a challenge,” Wirth said.

He took over Squaw in 2010 when KSL Capital Partners bought the resort, and added the job duties at Alpine when the resorts merged in 2011.

“The reason I’m CEO and president of a ski company is because I love this business. It includes the operations,” Wirth said. “To stand at the top of Squaw Peak and see the sunrise over Lake Tahoe in 30, 40 mph winds ... I love that environment. It is home for me.”