

Special events drive skiers to Tahoe slopes



A crowd watches Olympic snowboarders face off at the poker table and the big air jump at High Roller Hold 'Em at Heavenly. Photo/Heavenly Mountain Resort

By Kathryn Reed

Events have long been said to be an economic force – no matter the location. It's true for the greater Lake Tahoe Basin as well as the hosting venue.

While it can be hard to put a definitive dollar amount on what the various ski resort events add to the economy, these activities are bringing people to the area who may not otherwise have come. The industry as a whole brings more than \$500 million to the basin each season, according to economic

studies.

Events give added value to the passholder and day lift ticket buyer.

“Though I do not have specific numbers, our special events definitely attract locals as well as traveling visitors. Several events do draw tourists to the resort; who plan their trips around these exciting activities,” Cass Walker, spokeswoman for Northstar, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Paul Raymore with Homewood Mountain Resort, said, “These events are really designed to give our customers unique experiences that they wouldn’t normally get.”

Thea Hardy at Sierra-at-Tahoe, said, “These events are important to build excitement during the season and to give back to the community that supports us all year. Whether they are for spectators or not, Sierra-at-Tahoe events are an important way to communicate our mission and to give our guests an extra incentive to connect with Sierra and feel like they are part of its animation.”

Plus, the promotion associated with the various events gives obvious added attention to that particular resort as well as triggers the thought of Lake Tahoe as a whole to people.

“We think that events at our South Shore ski resorts enhance the visitor experience, which creates the potential for social sharing of that experience and/or enticing a visitor toward a repeat visit,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “From the destination differentiation aspect, the events send a brand message. That message boasts the high-energy vibe we have both on and off the slopes. We also know that event marketing helps to heighten awareness and inquisitiveness that might lead to visitation.”

Events also give guests a different view of a resort – more

whimsical, more hardcore – depends on the attraction.

“There is more to Heavenly and South Lake Tahoe than incomparable skiing and beautiful views. Events like these take the resort experience to the next level, where guests can go all in with world-class entertainment, après ski parties, and nonstop casino nightlife,” Liesl Kenney with Heavenly told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Resorts are always looking toward the future. While tradition is important, so is being innovative and having big dreams.

“It is important to continuously create new, unexpected traditions that allow guests to celebrate with each other,” Walker from Northstar said.

Mt. Rose aspires to be an Olympic venue or host an international extreme skiing competition. This could be possible as it is eyed to be one of the few resorts that could host the Olympic men’s downhill.

Homewood would also like to host more high-profile ski/snowboard racing events/competitions.

“Homewood has a racing heritage we’d like to bring back,” Raymore told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Ski resorts were asked to share what they believe are the top three events for this season.

Northstar:

- **Bubbles on the Slopes**

New this winter, Northstar will host *tōst*, the celebratory culinary tradition that redefines the art of the daily toast. Celebrating the mountains, Lake Tahoe and the tradition of toasting to friends and family, Northstar invites guests to raise their flutes and sip bubbles each day on the mountain at

2pm.

- **Mountain Table**

Epicureans are invited to discover the essence of Northstar's laid-back California luxury through Mountain Table, the new mountaintop culinary experience at Zephyr Lodge, which features an entire menu of California-sourced ingredients. Meals will be paired with regional artisan wines, craft beers, and distilled spirits. Each Mountain Table dinner will donate proceeds to one of North Lake Tahoe's nonprofit foundations. Dinners are: Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Jan. 30, Feb. 13, Feb. 27, March 13, and March 27 from 6-9pm.

- **Northern Lights**

The inaugural Northern Lights festival will commence Dec. 12 by welcoming connoisseurs to the Brewmaster Dinner at Zephyr Lodge. The five-course menu will feature fresh, seasonal produce and meats from California's finest sources. Each course will be customized to highlight select craft brews and seasonal specialties from Lagunitas Brewing Company. Northern Lights culminates Dec. 13, during which kids and families partake in a day and evening of light-filled revelry and activities, a torch light procession and snowcat light parade – all of which leads to the Village at Northstar where the festivities and entertainment continue with a fireworks grand finale.

Mt. Rose:

- **Chutes Fest**

The Feb. 21 extreme competition is the 10th anniversary celebration of the notorious Mt. Rose Chutes.

- **Local Craft Brew Festival**

This is a gathering of many Tahoe-Reno craft brewers, combined

into an outdoor ski festival on March 7.

- **Burner Party**

March 21 is the second annual party recognizing the Burner Spirit on snow.

Homewood:

- **New Year's Eve Party**

Dance to the infectiously funky grooves of Lake Tahoe's Drop Theory from 9pm-1am while enjoying beer, wine and cocktail specials at the Fireplace Tavern bar, inside Homewood's South Lodge. Tickets are \$25 in advance online, or \$30 at the door.

- **First Tracks Breakfasts**

Skiers and snowboarders will want to set their alarms early on select weekends throughout the season as Homewood expands its lineup of First Tracks Breakfasts. Early-birds looking for untracked powder tracks or pristine corduroy are invited to load the Madden Chair from 7:45-8:15am and enjoy all the fresh tracks they can find off the Old Homewood Express chair before the general public is allowed to start loading the Madden Chair at 9am. In addition, participants will enjoy a hearty breakfast at the mid-mountain Big Blue View Bar anytime from 7:55-9:30am. Free for Homewood season passholders, the First Tracks Breakfast events will cost \$40 in addition to the normal lift ticket price for non-pass holders. Dates: Jan. 10, Jan. 24, TBD in February and March.

- **March Music Series**

Dates to be determined.

Heavenly Mountain Resort

- **Winter Ignite**

It spans two weekends, Dec. 5-6 and Dec. 12-13, culminating with a free concert by Young the Giant on Dec. 13 at 7pm in Heavenly Village. Winter Ignite will jumpstart the 2014-15 ski and ride season with on-mountain activities such as pop-up DJ Cat and Unbuckle après kick-off parties as well as off-mountain events like “Pretty Faces” movie Dec. 12 at Harrah’s and comedy from Daniel Tosh at MontBleu Dec. 12.

- **High Roller Hold ‘Em**

Three Olympic athletes from the inaugural U.S. slopestyle snowboarding team will arrive in South Lake Tahoe on April 4. Olympic gold medalist Sage Kotsenburg will place his bets against fellow Olympians Billy Morgan and Chas Guldemond, as well as High Roller Hold ‘Em veterans Gjermund Braaten and Eric Willett. Developed in partnership with Snow Park Technologies, High Roller Hold ‘Em combines the thrill of snowboard Big Air with the strategy of high-stakes poker into an event that sends the winner home with \$50,000. This event is free and takes place on the World Cup run at Heavenly’s California base area.

- **Unbuckle at Tamarack**

Rated as the No. 1 après ski party in North America by *Forbes* and confirmed by CNN Travel, is Lake Tahoe’s highest elevation après ski party featuring music, drinking, dancing and the Heavenly Angels. Après takes place daily from 3:30-5:30pm with half-priced drinks and food specials and, exclusively on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, a guest DJ. There is no cost for admission to this event.

Diamond Peak

- **6th annual Ullr Fest**

The Jan. 23-25 event to raise funds for the Diamond Peak Ski Team. The action-packed weekend kicks off Friday with a Torch Light Parade, bonfire, and live music, and continues through Sunday with other events including races, competitions, food, entertainment and more. Come dressed in the best Ullr attire as the event is named for the Scandinavian god of winter and snow, who is widely regarded as the patron saint of skiers.

- **Last Tracks Wine/Beer Tastings**

Every Saturday Feb. 7-April 11, enjoy beautiful views of Lake Tahoe from Snowflake Lodge while tasting fine wines or craft brews paired with tasty appetizers. At the end of the event, ski or snowboard down a freshly groomed run at sunset. Last Tracks tickets are \$34 and include a lift ticket valid from 2-4pm. Participants must be 21 years old to attend and ski or snowboard at an intermediate level.

- **15th Annual Dummy Downhill**

The Dummy Downhill (March 15) has been a favorite community event for past 14 years and every year it gets better.

Participants build a dummy on skis or snowboards that get launched off of a big jump and watch as unique characters fly down the hill or crash hard. This is the flugtag for dummies. Dummies will be judged on creativity on the Base Lodge deck, followed by the jumping and an awards ceremony. Prizes and certificates will be awarded for creativity, best crash, furthest distance, and more.

Sierra-at-Tahoe

- **Jamie Anderson's Give Back with Love Sponsorship** (not for spectators)

Women's snowboard slopestyle Olympic gold medalist Jamie Anderson will partner with Sierra and the Lake Tahoe Unified School District to sponsor local students again this winter. Less fortunate students in the community have a chance to experience what it is like to be a sponsored athlete for a season. Each winner receives a season pass at Sierra, complete snowboard set-up including board, bindings, boots and outerwear, and a day of snowboarding with Jamie Anderson.

- **Equinox Spring Festival**

Sierra-at-Tahoe Resort will kick off the spring season on March 21 with the second annual Equinox Spring Festival. The festival includes a free concert series, events, parties, and more, giving guests an opportunity to enjoy the outdoor Solstice Plaza, listen to live music, reminisce about a great day on the mountain and celebrate spring in the Sierra.

- **Ski With Maddie Bowman Day** (not for spectators)

Women's freeskiing halfpipe Olympic gold medalist, Maddie Bowman, hosts an annual Ski with Maddie Day where up-and-coming skiers in Sierra's Rippers program have the chance to ski with Bowman and receive expert tips. Bowman, being an ex-Ripper, wants to inspire younger kids to follow their dreams and share how her dream came true.

--

Notes:

- More info about events may be found on the resorts' respective websites.