

Tourism gurus want Amgen bike race to return

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The South Shore is hoping nine months from now elite cyclists will be racing again on local roads.

The Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority board has given staff direction to try to bring the men's and women's Amgen bike events back to town.

The event will be May 10-19, but the route has not been picked. Cities wanting to host a leg are putting their bid packages together now, with an announcement expected in October.

It cost LTVA about \$270,000 this year to host two stages for the women. This was more than what was budgeted mostly because additional signs were needed because of all the twists and turns the route took in the Carson Valley. Law enforcement and publicity came in a little above budget as well.

While most events LTVA is involved in are about putting heads into beds, not so with the bike race.

“It is really about the media value and the message that we are a cycling destination,” Executive Director Carol Chaplin told her board last week.

Most of the 5.7 million impressions about the Tour of California being in Tahoe were via social media. The value is worth \$1.6 million, which doubled last year's figure.



Climbing Kingsbury Grade in May made for one of the most difficult legs of the Amgen bike race. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

This event has a good international draw, which is perfect for LTVA which is continually trying to expand that market.

While the women's event is not televised live, portions of it are woven into the men's coverage.

The men have a bigger draw in terms of spectators and TV audience. This is in part why LTVA would like another stab at the men. They were here in 2011 for the aborted race (snow was the problem) and finished a leg in 2016. The women have been here the last three years.

LTVA board member Pat Ronan suggested the tourism bureau hire a helicopter to record the race. That might add another \$25,000 to the budget. A vote on that idea would come after Tahoe is awarded a leg of the race.

The agency had looked into getting drone coverage, but it is illegal to fly over people.

Bryan Davis, the board member who represents Edgewood Companies, talked about how at the celebrity golf tournament they flew drones to the side and not directly above people. This could be a future option as well. LTVA would then have that footage to use in various marketing endeavors, or just reach an interested cycling community. Contracts with the event's sponsors would play a role in what is allowed as well.

The idea would be to capture strategic locations that show off what the region has to offer in terms of beauty (Emerald Bay, Sand Harbor, Cave Rock) and intensity for riders (Spooner Summit, Kingsbury Grade, Luther Pass).

With Reno just being awarded the Interbike trade show starting in 2018, local tourism gurus believe this will be a complement to Tahoe's hosting elite cycling events like Amgen and establishing the region as a cycling destination.