

Squaw basks in its Olympic history

By Susan Wood

Squaw Valley USA opens one of its grandest years Saturday with a slate of events and improvements to mark a major double milestone.

Beyond a massive celebration for its founding in 1949 and the half-century turning as host of the VIII Olympic Games, Squaw will bring on a new season with a new chairlift at High Camp, an overhaul of the dining experience at mid-mountain, added ski and boarder programs and a dramatic drop in season pass rates.



Jonny
Mosley

The drama begins with professional base jumper JT Holmes launching opening day at 2:20pm with a leap out of Squaw's aerial Cable Car, which is marking its 40-year anniversary. That afternoon, the anniversary also features a balloon release from the Funitel, a screening of Squaw's history, and cake with a Champagne toast by owner Nancy Cushing and the resort's chief mountain host and Olympic gold medalist Jonny Mosely.

Mosely will be around all season. He plans to take Squaw riders out on "Ski with Jonny" days.

The Truckee-area skier from Marin County who grew up dazzling

spectators with his gravity-defying jumps and stunts has retired from competitive skiing. He promised those who go out with him he would “start out slow” but might perform “a few black flips” for posterity.

“I’ve learned you have to ski ahead to do that or they won’t see you,” he told *Lake Tahoe News* while ordering a Dr Pepper at a drive-through restaurant on his way to the San Francisco Ski and Wine Festival last weekend in Santa Clara.

Mosely took home the top Olympic honor at Nagano, Japan, in 1998 for his unique moves. Come this February, he will provide commentary for NBC Sports during three Olympic events “moguls, aericals and skier cross. The latter is an event his buddy and fellow Olympian Daron Rahlves will compete in.

“It’s great Squaw’s celebrating the anniversary. I love Squaw. I grew up skiing there, and I’m just in awe,” Mosley said. The resort known for its steep terrain, full facilities and rich history named a run after him off the KT-22 chairlift – advanced terrain that is not for the faint of heart.

Squaw will host a slew of activities throughout the ski season to generate excitement for the international gathering that returns to the West Coast in Vancouver in February. As part of Olympic Heritage week slated Jan. 8-17, Squaw will set up a men and women’s downhill course. Skiers may brave the slopes to simulate the exhilaration of the flagship Olympic event.

In addition, a Torch Relay will start from Sugar Pine Point State Park, go to the resort, followed by an Opening Ceremony with fireworks, music and reception. The festivities culminate with an Olympic Legends Ball at the Resort at Squaw Creek. During the weeklong celebration, events are either free or proceeds will be earmarked to raise funds for the construction of the Lake Tahoe ski heritage museum.

As a side note, there’s even a book by David Antonucci

chronicling the historic event called “Snowball’s Chance: The Story of the 1960 Olympic Winter Games and Lake Tahoe.”

Other notables for the year at Squaw include further enhancements to the \$3 million revamp of the Gold Coast Lodge, with the new, eco-friendly 39 North restaurant opening next month. Squaw also hired Executive Chef Scott Rutter to run the dining show. He comes with 20 years of experience, including a resume lined with the St. Regis, Ritz Carlton and J.W. Marriott.

It’s a new day

This year marks a monumental year on many fronts.

The last bastion of the high-priced season pass from a decade ago, Squaw substantially lowered its all-year rates from \$1,499 to \$469. The value pass costs \$369 and excludes holidays and Saturdays. This is in contrast to an all-day adult lift ticket of \$83, up \$4 from the previous year.

“We were always concerned that if we lowered them, it would ruin the Squaw experience. But with the other resorts dropping them, it was hard to justify spending \$1,000 more. And we thought we’d do it for 60- and 50-year anniversaries,” Squaw spokeswoman Savannah Cowley said.

Like the other resorts with their bargain rates and bonus packages, Squaw wanted to pass on a greater value in the hopes of creating another generation of skiers.

Squaw skier visitation has been up and down in the last five years. Snow can be a bane and blessing, with not enough between New Year’s and Martin Luther King birthday’s spreading a false sense of a poor year for conditions. But too much may scare many a Bay Area driver away from the mountains, no matter how the economy fares.

“Snow is really seen as a factor “ not so much the amount

of it, as the timing of it," Cowley added.

Squaw is accessed a short jaunt off Highway 89 along the Truckee River, through www.squaw.com or by calling (530) 583.6985.

Rahľves proves Sugar Bowl is a young 70

By Susan Wood

It's expected to be one sweet year for Sugar Bowl Resort atop Donner Summit.

The skier's paradise known for deep snow, much character and a magical Disney history will join Squaw Valley USA in celebrating a milestone during the 2009-10 season by commemorating 70 years of bringing joy to skiers and boarders. There's nothing "mini" about it.

Sugar Bowl lovers will want to mark their calendars Jan. 25-31 for "Season 70," a weeklong celebration.



Daron
Rahľves

To kick off the season slated to start Nov. 25, the resort will co-host with Alpine Skills International a "Backcountry Ball" featuring an evening of dining, music and educational

presentations from Sierra Avalanche Center on Nov. 21. Tickets are \$15. The event coincides with Sugar Bowl's opening of its Backcountry Adventure Center in the Village on the lower floor of the Ski and Sport Chalet building. Along with an array of backcountry rental equipment on hand, comprehensive survival training seminars and outings with certified guides will be on tap.

Backcountry skiing may be a growing trend for outdoor enthusiasts, but downhill or a version of it is still the name of the game at Sugar Bowl.

The season will ramp up like no other with Sugar Bowl constructing a skier cross/boarder X track on the Tunnel 41 trail that emulates the one to be built at Cypress Mountain for the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. The resort's own downhill racing great Daron Rahlves will train alongside Jayson Hale before going off to the Olympics in February to compete in the newly sanctioned sport.

Rahlves, the most decorated American downhill and Super G skier in history, came out of downhill retirement to make a splash in the skier cross scene. In 2008, the 36-year-old ski veteran took the top podium in the sport at the Winter X Games in a nail-biting win.

Rahlves calls the current evolution of his career a "transition" that harks back on his childhood on Tahoe's slopes.

"I used to have so much fun racing my buddies down the hill," he told *Lake Tahoe News*. "You can just go crazy with the sport, and it was time to do something new."

To get a closer glimpse of the sport, the resort will host more than 35 skier cross competitors March 27-29.

Also new in improvements this year, the Summit Chair can whisk 1,200 skiers and riders to the ridge top of the famed Judah

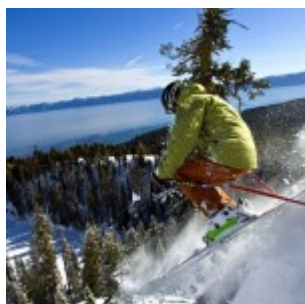
Bowl at every hour. Upon the return to the chair, the newly remodeled Judah Lodge will be in full swing with full food service and bar offerings from the Sierra Vista Bar and Grill. Eat, drink, watch a game or just relax by the fire.

The lodge will host a free screening of selected films from the San Francisco Independent Film Festival on Feb. 27-28.

Hitting the slopes of Sugar Bowl will cost an adult skier and rider \$66, \$72 on the holidays. However, bargains can still be had through programs such as "General Admission." Skiers and boarders ages 13 to 69 who buy any lift ticket Monday through Friday can receive daily bonuses on basic rentals or group lessons at any level.

To learn more, access Sugar Bowl at www.sugarbowl.com or (530) 426.9000. The ski resort is located off Interstate 80 at Donner Summit.

Homewood makes skiing affordable



By Kathryn Reed

Prices are plunging at Homewood Mountain Resort faster than one can schuss down the face of this West Shore resort.

This year it has some help from its sister resort Alpine

Meadows. The Homewood-Alpine combo college pass for \$299 allows skiers-boarders access to both resorts.

In these economic times, Homewood Mountain Resort is positioning itself to be even more friendly to a rider's wallet than it usually is. The resort on Highway 89 is billing it as nine ways to save on lift tickets. Some of those ways are:

- An online exclusive where Homewood has randomly selected days throughout the season when skiers may purchase adult, full-day lift tickets for just \$39, which equates to a savings of up to 30 percent.

- A guest who uses the Tahoe Area Regional Transit to and from the mountain receives \$5 off an adult, full-day lift ticket. Restrictions apply and proof is necessary.

- Starting Jan. 7, passholders from any mountain may present their 2009-10 season pass at any Homewood ticket window to receive an adult full-day lift ticket for \$25.

- Active duty military ski for free any day, including holidays.

It's with good reason that *Ski* magazine has raved about the views from Homewood. No resort is closer to the edge of Lake Tahoe. It's billed as skiing from peak to shore.

The 1,260-acre mountain has something for everyone. Don't let the views from the highway deceive you – there's much more to the mountain than what one sees driving by.

“Snow” and lots of it “is something that interests any skier or snowboarder. Considering that 09/10 is forecast to be an El Nino winter in Tahoe, there is more eager anticipation than usual,” said resort spokeswoman Rachael Woods.

Even though powder days are phenomenal at Homewood, the resort can't open until the entire mountain is covered in white

stuff supplied by Mother Nature. The resort is targeting Dec. 18 to open.

Check the website to know for sure â€“ www.skihomewood.com.

Alpine turns it up a notch with terrain parks



By Kathryn Reed

Alpine Meadowsâ€™ Errol Kerr is ready to bring home the gold in the skier cross event at the Olympics in Whistler in February.

But the Truckee resident wonâ€™t be wearing red, white and blue. This is because he will be skiing for Jamaica.

â€œI want to represent the land of my father,â€ Kerr told the *Jamaica Gleaner* last spring. â€œThatâ€™s the dream.â€

He could have skied for the United States, but his roots run deep to the Caribbean island nation.

For the thrill seekers, this North Shore resort that expects to open Dec. 5 has revamped its terrain parks. Features have been installed along several trails on the upper mountain. They are incorporated into the natural contours of the 2,400-acre mountain.

Park features will be scattered along parts of Kangaroo, Boomerang, Tiegel, lower Palisades, Terry's Return, and Loop Road.

Alpine is all about working with various types of skiers. Disabled Sports provides daily coaching and adventure to students with physical and mental disabilities.

Equipment is tailored to the athlete's needs. This may include a mono ski with riggers, stand-up outriggers or sit skis. Lessons are offered twice a day. For reservations, call (530) 581.4161.

Alpine Meadows will be home to Tahoe's only NASTAR racecourse.

To make the whole process of getting on the mountain easier, Alpine has installed radio frequency based turnstiles. This means no unzipping your jacket to find your pass. The ticket can be anywhere on you.

Tickets can also be purchased at home. Adult tickets are \$59/day.

All of this should eliminate lines for buying tickets and speed up the process to get on the chairlift.

Season passholders and Alpine Club members can link their credit card to this pass so it can be used at the resort's restaurants and retail outlets.

This durable plastic card is the size and weight of a credit card. It means less paper used each day to create individual lift tickets.

Another deal is the Homewood-Alpine combo college pass for \$299 that allows skiers-boarders access to both resorts.

The Alpine Club frequent-visitor program is still going strong. Members can ski for \$44, get discounts at Resort at

Squaw Creek on lodging packages, and other deals. Details are on the website.

After a day on the slopes, Alpine will take up to 20 people in snow cats up the mountain for a private dinner and an evening of stargazing.

For more information, go to www.skialpine.com.

Sierra's little touches make it a destination

By Kathryn Reed

Sierra-at-Tahoe's Huckleberry Canyon is part of those 8 minutes that's all about Lake Tahoe in Warren Miller's latest movie.

This backcountry terrain that opened last year has been accumulating white stuff since the snow started flying in September.

Located along Highway 50, Sierra expects to open some time in December. Sierra relies on the real white stuff, so opening day is dependent on Mother Nature.

Exploring the 320 acres of expert terrain in Huckleberry will be a little easier this year " but that doesn't mean it's for beginners or low intermediates. Free tours on Fridays at 10:15am and 1:15pm will be offered to small groups.



West Bowl is getting a new look.

Photo/Provided

“It’s to give people an introduction to the route of the canyon,” resort spokeswoman Kirstin Cattell said. Reservations are necessary “ call (530) 659.7453, ext. 150.

West Bowl is going to be bit more comfortable. An 1,800-square-foot deck was put in this fall. No worries, the Adirondack chairs are still there. The deck will allow employees to shovel out faster. The resort wants to have more parties at West Bowl this season, especially with the enhanced outdoor bar.

First Tracks in West Bowl will be offered most Saturdays to a lucky few who are pass holders or sign up for the text alerts.

TransWorld Snowboarding’s 2010 Resort Guide ranked Sierra ninth best park, ninth for best pipe and sixth best resort overall.

That’s one of things about Sierra, it appeals to skiers, boarders and free healers. In fact, the telemark center is moving out of its closet-like setting to the base of Grand View. Even patrollers at Sierra tele.

Olympians call Sierra home as well “ and possible future Olympians. Hannah Teter, Elijah Teter and Jamie Anderson may be making the trek to Whistler in February.

Sierra is keeping its daily lift prices the same as last year – \$69. But three-packs are available through the end of the

year for \$45 per ticket.

The usual \$95 for a learn to ski-snowboard package is now \$35 if bought in advance online.

“This is a big, big deal. When you think about what you can do for \$35, you wouldn’t throw skiing in that bucket,” Cattell said.

Last year was a mixed bag for Sierra because of the snow and economy.

“We had great holiday weekends in terms of snow. Presidents weekend was probably one of the best we’ve ever had,” Cattell said. “Last year was a bit of roller coaster. People were not sure where the economy was going to land.”

But she also knows that die-hard riders put a pass into the budget each year.

For more info about Sierra, check out www.sierraattahoe.com.

Wider trails, bigger burgers at Heavenly

By Kathryn Reed

A mix of natural and man-made snow will allow Heavenly Mountain Resort to open Friday on a limited basis.

The resort that straddles California and Nevada always strives to open before Thanksgiving “and often hits the mark because of its state-of-the-art snowmaking system that is one of the largest in the world.

In addition to what drops from the sky, 69 percent of Heavenly's trails are covered with another 120 inches via snow guns.



Heavenly's tubing hill doubled in length.

Photo/Provided

Improvement to some trails will be noticeable – especially to snowboarders who may have had some trouble accessing places like Milky Way Bowl.

Meteor, Sky Shoot and Auto Shoot trails have all been widened.

Near Pinnacles some larger rocks are gone and wind fences are up to make it easier for groomers to get on the slope.

For a change of pace or for the non-skier, the tubing hill at 450 feet is now double the length it was, it's four lanes and has a 65-foot vertical drop – the same as falling four stories.

The zipline is still closed pending clearance from the U.S. Forest Service and CalOSHA after a death on the ride last summer.

Fun areas that will be open once enough snow accumulates are the various terrain parks. More recycled features are part of the mix.

Adventure Session for \$119 a person is like hiring a guide to

take skiers/boarders to areas of the mountain they might not be familiar with. Groups will be limited to a handful.

Food is a big component of what's new at Heavenly this season.

"This year we have completely reworked the hamburger," Russ Pecoraro, Heavenly spokesman said. "We sell more hamburgers than anything else."

The Epic Mountain Burger is available at all Vail Resorts owned ski areas. At Heavenly it costs \$12.95 for the two quarter-pound Angus beef patties on a gourmet bun shipped in from a Denver bakery.

Lunch value meals "entrée, side, drink" run \$9.95.

"We are trying to step up the vegetarian options. We are trying to diversify," Pecoraro said.

Heavenly relaunched its website " www.skiheavenly.com – to offer features to make people feel like they are on the slopes by integrating Google mapping.

A booking engine allows users to store a trip folder on Heavenly's site.

"You can retrieve data, share it with friends, retrieve old itineraries. There are a lot of cool aspects with that," Pecoraro said.

Heavenly is notorious for not releasing its daily lift prices until moments before it opens. Often early season is less expensive than when the whole mountain is open. The resort's website is the place to check for pricing.

Kirkwood's snowfall is off the charts

By Kathryn Reed

Don't ever rely on Lake Tahoe storm totals to know what the conditions or accumulations are at Kirkwood Mountain Resort.

Even when it's not snowing at the lake, it might be at the 'Wood.



Not all the terrain is this gnarly at Kirkwood.

Photo/Provided

That's one of the things that makes Kirkwood so special – all that powder, all that natural snow. For the loyalists, it more than makes up for the lack of high speed lifts.

The hundreds of inches of snow the resort receives each year allowed it to hit its projected skier visit numbers in 2008-09.

"While a lot of resorts around the lake reported losses and down counts, we stayed right on par with the previous year's performance," Julie Koster, Kirkwood spokeswoman, said of last year's numbers. "We did really, really well. We had a great season."

With El Nino being the phrase of the pre-season, Koster said Kirkwood would love another 2005-06 season when more than 400 inches of white stuff fell, which led to more than 70 powder days with 6 or more inches of freshies. That was the year the resort had more snow than any place else in the world.

Changes to the terrain parks and evening snow cat tours are features to look forward to when the resort opens – which is dependent on natural snowfall. It's usually around Thanksgiving.

Skiers and boarders can practice their Olympian moves on the expanded boarder cross course. Kirkwood expects to double the length of this obstacle course of sorts.

The terrain parks are still off chairs 5 and 7, but with more and bigger features to test skier and boarders' skills.

To keep up ones energy, the resort has revamped its food selection at all the restaurants.

The chef is infusing the French fries with a sour cream and onion chip flavor that Koster says is something worth traveling the 45 minutes from South Lake Tahoe to the resort that encompasses three counties – El Dorado, Alpine and Amador.

Healthier options are a large part of the changes at Bub's and Off the Wall.

Closer to the December holidays Kirkwood will begin evening snow cat tours to the top of Red Cliffs or Caples Crest. Appetizers and drinks are part of the \$75 package.

Expedition Kirkwood continues to offer a slew of classes like avalanche beacon training and women specific clinics.

Daily lift tickets went up \$2 to \$74 a day for adults. For those 13 to 18 years in age, it will cost \$59 to ride Kirkwood.

Events are a large draw at Kirkwood. Each Saturday from noon-4pm there is live music on the village plaza. Saturday nights are the snow cat tours.

Other events include:

Jan. 23 – Snowbomb Slopestyle and JETs GS Race

Jan. 24, Jan. 31 – USASA Skier/Boarder X

Feb. 6 – JETs Rail Jam, JETs Skier/Boarder X

Feb. 7 – USASA Slopestyle

Feb. 25-27 – North Face Masters of Snowboarding

March 3-7 – North American Freeskiing Championships

March 13 – JETs Big Mountain Comp

April 2-4 – Kirkwood Jammin' XVII

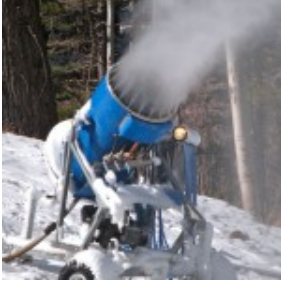
April 3 – JETs Banked Slalom

Kirkwood is online at www.kirkwood.com.

Ski season is here

What's new and going on at the ski areas in the greater Lake Tahoe area for the 2009-10 ski season?

Lake Tahoe News has the answers and then some beginning Monday. Nine of the region's downhill resorts will be featured Nov. 16-20.



Northstar-at-Tahoe makes snow Nov. 13.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe News will be a source of information about the ski industry throughout the season.

Road conditions are available 24 hours a day via the Home page.

Check out the Events page to know what is going on as well.

USFS closes Tahoe sites for the winter

The U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit has begun seasonal closures at recreation sites and forest roads.

Effective today, Forest Service gates will be closed and locked, and wheeled-motorized access will be prohibited for the winter.

Seasonal road closures allow for winter road maintenance, soil protection and increased public safety.

The public will continue to have non-motorized access, as well

as access to snowmobiles where permitted and in accordance with regulations.

A complete list of closure dates and locations is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/conditions/closures.shtml>.

Tahoe City fish hatchery to open to public

An infusion of cash means a historic fish hatchery will open to the public next July as a science exhibit.

UC Davis officials secured \$350,000 in grants and from other sources in the last few months. The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association cut a check in the form of a grant for \$200,000. That money will be spent to market the Tahoe City facility.

UC Davis owns and manages the Field Station. Scientists have been working there even though it was not open to the public.

More than \$2 million was spent last year to renovate the nearly 90-year old building in hopes of allowing public access.