

## Interview with NSAA President Michael Berry



*Michael Berry has served as the president of the National Ski Areas Association, the trade association for U.S. ski area owners and operators, since January 1993.*

*As president, Berry provides leadership and oversees the association's operations, including industry trends, issues, regulation, educational and market research programs.*

*Prior to NSAA, Berry was president and CEO of Kirkwood Mountain Resort in California.*

*Before Kirkwood, Berry worked at some of the most prominent resorts in the United States, including Keystone, CO, Sun Valley, ID, and Vail, CO. He currently serves on the board of several non-profit organizations including the United States Ski and Snowboard Association.*

**Q: During your tenure at NSAA, what have been some of the greatest challenges – weather aside -- you have seen in the snow sports industry, and how has the industry responded to those challenges?**

A: The biggest challenge facing the industry has been to maintain and grow our core customer base. Twenty years ago, predictions were for a decline in the number of participants if the industry did not become more proactive in encouraging trial and conversion. The industry has responded to this challenge, and the effort has contributed substantially to the stability in participant numbers. We have been effective in replacing those dropping out with new skiers and boarders. In the 13/14 season we introduced over 1 million new participants to the sport, and 68% were under the age of 35. We can certainly do more and need to, but comparatively, snow sports is a far better place than many other recreational activities...golf for example has seen a 17% decline in its customer base.

**Q: How would you describe cooperation and willingness to work together among the industry stakeholders? Have you seen improvement in recent years?**

A: We believe that the current dialogue between organizations such as NSAA, SIA and NSSRA are truly important discussions. Over the past 36 months the amount of information and research that has been shared has been an important first step in the process. The challenge will always be to define the programmatic elements that will prove beneficial to all parties. Existing programs like LSSM and BAF can be adapted to meet the needs of shop owners as well as being the foundation of the resort side effort to grow participation.

**Q: Now that we're in the middle of Summer, what steps can specialty snowsports retailers and ski areas take to create cost-effective marketing plans and promotions to increase ski and snowboard participation next season?**

A: Get involved with the LSSM programs, <http://www.skiandsnowboardmonth.org>. Spend some time understanding how a shop-based program could be developed and implemented. All the work has already been done for you...contact Mary Jo Tarallo at [lifes2shortmjt@gmail.com](mailto:lifes2shortmjt@gmail.com). You will find that she has a wealth of information and templates that are available for shop owners to us to help grow participants.

**Q: What are some of the successful promotions that area and retailers have been able to put into action in recent years?**

A: A couple of examples jump out, one is the effort by the folks at Ski Haus near Annapolis, MD. They tap into the Bring a Friend Challenge by working with local ski areas like Liberty, Whitetail and Roundtop. Another is Ski World Orlando which has LSSM/BAF programs with ski resorts in North Carolina.

**Q: Do you see the role of the specialty snow sports retailer changing? How do you see retailers adapting to meet new challenges?**

A: I feel very strongly that in order for specialty retailers to grow and continue to succeed a well-defined value proposition has to be a key component of the retailer's branding. The specialty retailer has a critical role to play in growing the sports that we sell, and the way we have done things in the past may not be the best model for the future. One thing I strongly believe is that our existing customers will bring us our new customers, and there is no better place to do that than in the specialty retail environment. All of us need to remind ourselves that someone delivered us to snow sports. How do we task our existing customer base to work with us to deliver the next generation of skiers and snowboarders? What we sell is magical, it changes people's lives. We need to communicate to our existing customers that someone changed their lives forever and that we need to work together to bring people to snow sports to allow the same life-changing experience to be shared.