



For Immediate Release

March 1, 2007

Media Contact: John Dakin
(970) 949-1999
jdakin@vfv.org

AMERICAN SKI CLASSIC CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATION'S ORIGINAL PRO-AM SKI EVENT

VAIL, Colorado--Perhaps it was fate that brought the idea and the venue together in 1983, resulting in the creation of the Countrywide American Ski Classic. After all, when great people and great mountains meet, great things are destined to follow.

Maybe it was just the right time and the right place for something magical to occur. Or perhaps, it was as simple as good friends coming together to celebrate their love of skiing and the Vail Valley.

Whatever the reason, the Countrywide American Ski Classic celebrates its 25th anniversary March 21-25 and for all who have been part of that special group of friends, we salute the unparalleled spirit that is the Countrywide American Ski Classic.

“The Countrywide American Ski Classic is truly a one of a kind original,” explained Ceil Folz, president of the Vail Valley Foundation. “It has helped to build innumerable relationships for the entire Vail Valley, while also serving as the springboard to many of the things we have accomplished athletically.”

The Countrywide American Ski Classic traces its roots back to the brainchild of President Gerald R. Ford, who reasoned that his already successful summer pro/am golf tournament needed a winter counterpart. The Jerry Ford Celebrity Cup hit the slopes of Beaver Creek in 1981 and the rest, as they say, is history. It would be the first event that the newly-created Vail Valley Foundation would ever produce and the first the event the newly-opened Beaver Creek Resort would host.

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Countrywide American Ski Classic Turns 25

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Over the years, celebrities from all walks of life have accepted President Ford's invitation to participate in the Ford Cup, while the slopes of Vail and Beaver Creek have provided for a somewhat less than level playing field, removing these stars from their individual comfort zones and placing them squarely into the heat of a different sort of competition.

Throughout the years, celebrity participants have included the likes of Clint Eastwood, Richard Dean Anderson, Peter Fonda, Mariel Hemingway, Robert Kennedy, Jr., Dan Fogelberg, Tanya Tucker, Florence Griffith-Joyner, Bart Connor, Nadia Comaneci, Greg Lemond, Doak Walker, Johann Olav Koss, Bill Elliott and Steve Lundquist.

"It has been a great deal of fun to see how some of our Ford Cup celebrities have 'matured' as ski racers," Folz continued. "Take Giancarlo Esposito for instance. His first year, his major accomplishment was making to down the course without falling. Now, he shows up in a one-piece race suit and a downhill helmet."

Ski racing celebrities were included into this the mix in 1983 as the Legends of Skiing element was added to the celebrity proceedings. Former Olympic and World Championship greats from 15 different nations have traveled to the Vail Valley to rekindle the competitive fires at the world's largest annual alumni ski reunion.

"The Legends have not only played an important role in the Ski Classic's success," Folz added, "but they have also become tremendous ambassadors for skiing in the Vail Valley. Who better to help you sell skiing than some of the greatest skiers of all times."

In addition to the Legends, the current stars of the ski circuit joined the party in 1983 as World Cup racing was included in the week-long celebration. This move immediately paid dividends as Americans Phil Mahre and Tamara McKinney recorded Giant Slalom victories on Vail Mountain's International course, en route to overall World Cup titles for both racers.

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Countrywide American Ski Classic Turns 25

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But not all the action during the Countrywide American Ski Classic has taken place on the racecourse. A full slate of public and private social events have helped to paint a festive backdrop for the competitions, while some of the hottest names in music have taken to the stage to rock the Ski Classic house.

1984 marked the creation of the Legend of Honor Award and Legends Banquet, which annually honors career achievements and contributions to the ski industry, while 1999 saw the creation of the Hope in Motion benefit gala to benefit the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation. Now known as Mountains of Hope, the evening raises funds for the Vail Valley Foundation's numerous educational initiatives.

"The past 25 years have provided us with a great many memories," concluded Folz, "and some even greater moments, both on and off the racecourse. But no matter how far we have come, the American Ski Classic remains a gathering of great friends, sharing their love of skiing with the world."

Happy 25th anniversary Countrywide American Ski Classic. Let the good times continue to roll.

The 2007 Countrywide American Ski Classic is a project of the Vail Valley Foundation. For additional information, contact (970) 949-1999 or visit www.vvf.org.