

San Diego Daily Transcript & SDDT.com

Thursday, November 11, 2010

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Thursday, November 11, 2010

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Source Code: 20101111czf

SnowJam marks opening of winter season

By **DOUG SHERWIN**, The Daily Transcript

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Dozens of the top skiing and snowboarding retailers from the Western United States, along with several ski resort representatives, will converge on the Del Mar Fairgrounds this weekend for the 14th annual SnowJam San Diego.

The three-day event, which begins 4 p.m. Friday and runs until 6 p.m. Sunday, marks the unofficial opening of the 2010-11 winter sports season.

"It's just a really high-energy get together of everyone in the industry -- from ski resorts to shops," said Kent Bry, the owner of Adventure Ski & Snowboard School in Encinitas. "There are so many things you can see in one place. It's a great way to start off the season.

"We go there to show everyone how much fun and easy to learn snowboarding is."

Highlights of the expo include an X Games BMX bike show every two hours on a 12-foot tall, 50-foot-long half pipe vert ramp and the screening of an extended clip from the latest movie on the Ski Channel.

Additionally, retailers will offer products at up to 70 percent off and ski resorts in California, Utah and Wyoming will be providing discounted vacation packages.

"You can get a sweet deal on a pair of ski bindings, outerwear, accessories and just about everything on the retail side," said Ron Parent, head of SnowJam San Diego, who equates it to the Boat Show for snow sports. "And resorts crank up the deal-making and bring them to the show."

California accounts for 17.6 percent of the ski and snowboard industry's \$2.3 billion in equipment, apparel and accessories sales -- the most of any state -- according to the latest SnowSports Industries America (SIA) figures.

Parent said San Diego is a great fit for the show because of Southern California's outdoor lifestyle culture. Some SnowJam presenters agreed.

"We get a good percentage of our skiers from San Diego County," said Jon Christoffersen, sales, marketing and p.r. manager of **Brian Head Resort** in Utah. "It's a good market for us."

The event has been able to survive despite the troubled economic environment.

"We are a place where you can get a great, great deal on travel or equipment," Parent said, explaining the reason for SnowJam's success, "and people are more sensitive to finding deals in a recession."

Christoffersen said **Brian Head Resort** hasn't seen the typical dropoff of business other companies are experiencing.

"What has changed is we've picked up a different kind of skier -- people who may have gone to Jackson Hole (Wyoming) or Aspen (Colorado)," he said. "Instead of traveling that far, we're seeing them come to Brian Head. Last year was a record year for us."

Bry said his Encinitas shop has seen a 20 percent dropoff in business, but it's not unlike the previous dips he's seen in the company's 33 years. He jokingly refers to himself as a "snow farmer."

"We're like a farmer, who has bad years and droughts and has to preserve and do it again the next year," he said. "We're looking forward to a really good season with the economy on the comeback and what seems like a good start to the snowfall."

Parent said SnowJam is helpful to the San Diego economy.

"Everyone's impacted positively because we do a lot of media, and we try to get the word out," Parent said. "We're here for three days and then we're out. The market feels that residual impact and push well after we're out of town. It benefits retailers who are and who are not involved in the show because we create momentum."

Send your comments to Doug.Sherwin@sddt.com.

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