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Ski NH Annual Meeting Recognizes Snowmakers, Marketing Efforts

During their recent annual meeting at Church Landing in Meredith, Ski NH highlighted the heroes who helped to save the 2015-16 ski season when Mother Nature failed to cooperate.

DRED Commissioner Jeff Rose presented a Commendation from Governor Maggie Hassan recognizing the state's snowmakers and groomers for their efforts to ensure that the slopes were more than skiable in the face of limited natural snow. He also spoke about the importance of New Hampshire's ski industry to the state's economy.

Ski NH honored three people with awards during their event. Bertie Holland, director of snowsports at Pats Peak, won the H.H. "Bill" Whitney Award, which recognizes an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the ski and snowboard industry in New Hampshire. This award is named after the late owner of Black Mountain Ski Area and Whitney's Inn in Jackson. Holland has been the ski school director at Pats Peak since the 1980's. Year after year she has managed a ski school staff of around 200 instructors, and it was estimated by her award presenter that she is responsible for teaching nearly 1 million people to ski, and for making lifelong skiers out of thousands of people.

Arthur "Sonny" Demers, retiring after 23 years at Eastman Cross Country, was given the Al Merrill Award for his contribution to cross country skiing in the state. This award is named after Merrill, Dartmouth College's cross-country ski coach and Director of Outdoor Affairs for more than 30 years. This award was particularly dear to Demers, who told the crowd that Al Merrill was his high school ski and track coach at Lebanon High School, was a mentor who taught him the art of ski waxing as well as cross-country skiing technique and training programs, and remained a personal friend for many years thereafter.

NH State Senator Dan Feltes, who represents the Greater Concord area, was given the Legislator of the Year Award, which recognizes a New Hampshire legislator who has taken the time to understand and highlight important ski industry and tourism issues. Senator Feltes played a critical role in developing legislation this year that was key to NH's ski industry.

At its annual business meeting, Ski NH's Chairman of the Board and President and General Manager of Cranmore Mountain Resort Ben Wilcox reported that overall total winter visits during 2015-16 were down year-over-year by 31 percent, and alpine skier visits were down 29 percent. On a 10-year average, total visits were down about 26%, and alpine skier visits only were down 24.5%. According to Jessyca Keeler, Ski NH's executive director, total winter visits were approximately 1.77 million, down from more than 2.57 million in the previous year, which was also the 4th best season on record. Keynote speaker Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association, was optimistic about the coming winter, and predicted a bounce back of skier visits next season.

During the Ski NH business meeting, Executive Director Jessyca Keeler outlined some key marketing accomplishments, including the creation of a new Ski NH logo, new website and sponsorship of the Polartec Big Air at Fenway. NH Division of Travel & Tourism Director Vicki Cimino also discussed plans for the state to have a bigger presence at the Boston Ski & Snowboard Expo in November.

Ski NH is the statewide association representing 33 alpine and cross country resorts in New Hampshire. For more information on ski areas, vacation planning, and updated winter events at Ski NH resorts, call Ski NH at 603.745.9396 or visit the Ski NH website at www.SkiNH.com. For statewide travel info, visit www.VisitNH.gov.