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PENNSYLVANIA SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION REBRANDING TO ENCOMPASS OUTDOOR RECREATION, WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SAM Magazine—White Haven, Pa., Aug. 5, 2024—The Pennsylvania Ski Areas Association (PSAA) is rebranding as the Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Association (PORA). The new entity will welcome a broad scope of outdoor-focused businesses to its membership and support the state’s outdoor recreation economy by expanding employee education, promoting employment opportunities, and strengthening lobbying efforts, according to board president and Ski Big Bear general manager Lori Phillips and new PORA executive director Lutricia Eberly, who spoke to *SAM* about the association’s rebrand and what it means.

Rebranding to Meet Member Needs

The decision to rebrand was the result of a spring 2022 strategic planning session held at Bear Creek Resort in Macungie, Pa., which has been operating as a four-season resort for several years—part of a growing number of ski areas in the state that are expanding their year-round recreation offerings. Twenty Pennsylvania ski areas attended the session to form a shared vision and set common goals on which the board of directors based its decision-making.

“It wasn’t that we were looking to—or needed to—make a change,” said Phillips. “[The board of directors] wanted to be sure we were representing the membership appropriately.”

Some common themes continued to emerge during the session, starting with education, which has always been a priority for PSAA, and employment. “But we also started looking at how we can involve other neighboring industries into some of our education components” to foster a more educated workforce, said Phillips, because many ski area employees can and do come from the outdoor recreation field, not just skiing.

Related to this, a key outcome of the session was the development of a new website specifically focused on outdoor recreation jobs called P*At*hToOutdoorRecJobs.com. The new site is designed to connect job seekers and employers in the outdoor recreation industry. Registration for job seekers is free. The association said there were more than 4,000 job seekers on the site during the months of May, June, and July.

Lobbying clout in the state was another PSAA priority identified as one that would benefit from greater unification since many of the laws that impact ski areas also impact other outdoor-related businesses. “There are other neighboring businesses that could also be impacted by legislation that’s being made,” said Phillips. “And if we were united with those other businesses within the outdoor recreation industry, we could have a larger voice.”

Another contributing factor in the choice to rebrand and expand its scope of membership is the momentum toward supporting the outdoor economy in Pennsylvania, which in 2023 became the 23rd state in the U.S. to form an Office of Outdoor Recreation, with the mission to “unite, grow, and strengthen Pennsylvania’s outdoor economy.” Philips was part of the committee that helped to develop the new state entity.

As it all came together, the PSAA membership agreed that trying to bring the membership support of other businesses into the fold wouldn’t be easy as a ski area association, so a name change was needed. “We knew we had to give up some of our ego in order to make this happen,” she said.

Ultimately, the membership voted unanimously in favor of rebranding and expanding the membership.

New and Continued Partnerships

PORA also plans to work collaboratively with other associations such as the Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association (PRLA) and local and state chambers of commerce. In a statement, PORA said, “This new association will offer strong leadership and unite the voices of many outdoor recreation providers, manufacturers, and users,” adding that it will share risk management and educational resources with its members with the goal of creating more vibrant communities across the state.

Potential new member businesses include everything from powersports (“There’s a big snowmobile community in Pennsylvania,” said Phillips), hunting and fishing, watersports, mountain biking, and even restaurants and lodging properties in areas that focus on outdoor recreation as a big part of their business model.

While the scope of the association will expand, the financial support and foundation for it came from the ski areas of Pennsylvania and skiing will still be a priority. The state ranks sixth in total skier visits in the country, and PORA will maintain PSAA’s existing relationship with the National Ski Areas Association.

“We’re not leaving the ski industry,” said Phillips. “We want to make sure we maintain the strength of the association as it has been for the ski areas. There’s value in us staying connected and having a united voice within the ski industry. But there’s also value in expanding our network to include others that may not be as well organized as we are, and to be able to share education resources, legislative resources, employment resources—all those things that make us a strong industry by including our neighboring businesses. I think there’s always a fear of diluting the ski message, but a rising tide raises all ships.”

New Leadership

In addition to the rebrand, PORA has new leadership. Lutricia Eberly joins PORA as its new executive director, as longtime PSAA executive director Linda Irvin transitions into retirement.

Eberly most recently served as chief membership officer with Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania (GSHPA), and was the organization’s director of outdoor and program experiences before that. She also has several years of ski industry experience, including nine years as director of sales at Roundtop Mountain Resort, Pa.

“I look back on everything I’ve done, it all pulls in together to what I’ll be doing with Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Association,” said Eberly. “My ski background, increasing utilization, finding members, building something from scratch.”

Eberly is overseeing the transition from PSAA to PORA, and working with the steering committee to determine a variety of important details.

“What exactly is the [PORA] URL going to be? What is the membership and benefit structure going to look like? What are the education events that we’re going to be offering? Who are the sectors that we’re going to be targeting first as members? And working with our lobbying agency to broaden the conversation to all of outdoor industry,” she says.

Additional financial support from a broader range of member businesses, an amplified voice, and more education opportunities for the outdoor workforce are all expected outcomes of PORA’s new direction.

Plus, as Phillips said, “Everything benefits when outdoor recreation is doing well in a local rural economy,” where most ski areas are located.

Reporting by Dave Meeker.

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