

# Sky Tavern wins the National Ski Areas Association Conversion Cup for 2021, the most prestigious award for any ski area.



What is conversion? Conversion is simply the process of turning beginner skiers and riders into repeat customers, and ultimately lifelong enthusiasts of the sport. With this, NSAA has developed the Conversion Cup Challenge, a competition among member ski areas that closely aligns with the industry's overall goals to grow the sport.

NSAA's Conversion Cup Challenge is designed as a way to pique competition among member ski areas and recognize those who make significant efforts to boost skier and snowboarder conversion rates. As part of the competition, applicants must provide a detailed overview of their program designed specifically to increase skier and rider conversion rates.

## Congratulations to the 2021 Conversion Cup Finalists

- Big SNOW American Dream, NH
  - For its dedication to improving accessibility and capitalizing on its unique location, Big SNOW American Dream was selected as a finalist for the Conversion Cup.
- Crystal Mountain, MI
  - For its focus on the community and commitment to every newcomer's current and future experience, Crystal Mountain was tapped as an NSAA Conversion Cup finalist.
- **Winner: Sky Tavern, NV**
  - For its devotion to teaching local youth the sport of skiing & riding, and resort mission to support those who would like to experience snowsports, this volunteer-run nonprofit ski hill was selected as the deserving winner of the 2020/21 Conversion Cup.

Some parameters judges look for when making their selections:

- Increase in Level 1 lesson volumes
- Level 1 lesson volumes in relation to total skier and snowboarder visits
- The quantifiable success of multi-lesson packages
- Season-to-date sales data on specific learn-to packages designed to drive repeat visitation
- Overall data collection capabilities and sophistication
- Marketing ingenuity, creativity, use of new media, etc.

**Sky Tavern is the only nonprofit, volunteer-staffed ski area to win the Cup. Previous finalists and winners include some of the largest and most famous resorts in the US and Canada. This is a huge honor that speaks to the quality of instruction and the passion of Sky Tavern volunteers. This belongs to all that have been part of the process of teaching snowsports for over 70 years at Sky Tavern. There is no bigger award!**





SUMMER  
2021

# JOURNAL

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## SKI AREA SIGNATURE

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# CONVERSION CUP

2020–21 Finalists & Winners

**HEAD**<sup>®</sup>

BY DAVE BELIN, DIRECTOR OF CONSULTING SERVICES, RRC ASSOCIATES

**THE 2020–21 SKI SEASON PRESENTED MANY CHALLENGES**, particularly for lines of business that traditionally take place inside or with groups of people, such as equipment rentals, food and beverage service, and snowsports school. Ski resorts had to act quickly and resourcefully as winter approached, making many operational adjustments to ensure a safe and healthy season for visitors and employees amid the pandemic. Case in point: nearly 90% of U.S. ski areas implemented group lesson capacity limits this winter, according to the 2020–21 Kottke End of Season and Demographic Report.

These challenges, however, did not dissuade several ski areas from their long-term focus on skier and snowboarder conversion — taking a multi-season approach to developing lifelong snowsports participants through their creative and dedicated learning programs. The NSAA Model for Growth identified this conversion process as the key inflection point in the growth of the business. The efforts made to catalyze conversion are critical for the longevity of the industry and did not go unnoticed, even amid an exceptional season.

This year's NSAA Conversion Cup contenders embodied the focus and commitment that it takes to not only get people to try snowsports, but to stick with it over the long term. They took unique and varied approaches to inspire conversion in different markets across the U.S. However, a few common themes emerged among this season's finalists that address some of the most pressing contemporary objectives of the snowsports industry. All three are making efforts to reduce some of the traditional barriers to entry of snowsports (e.g., costs, specialized gear, time commitments), and place particular focus on bringing youth into the sports. We applaud these exemplary ski resorts that are helping inspire a love of snowsports among diverse audiences, cementing the viability of our industry into the future.

## Winner: Sky Tavern, NV

The 2020-21 Conversion Cup winner is a ski area that is dedicated to the long-term development of young skiers and snowboarders — so dedicated that they don't even sell daily lift tickets to the public. Sky Tavern is a volunteer-run nonprofit committed to teaching the youth of Reno the life lessons that skiing and snowboarding instill.

The youth program at Sky Tavern has been in operation since 1948 (how's that for long-term commitment?). Over 2,000



kids go through the program each winter, which lasts eight weeks and costs just \$250, including rental gear. Additionally, scholarships are available for families that need it. The majority of the children in the program are first-time skiers, and many of the coaches are alumni of the program. Many kids graduate to become skiers at other local mountains, like Mt. Rose and Diamond Peak.

Most importantly, the program is available to all and has been since just after World War II. Everyone is welcome, as illustrated by this comment from a participant: "This is our first year with Sky Tavern. I don't ski or snowboard, so I was completely out of my element. The Sky Tavern team has been wonderful to work with and has been great about helping us figure things out. My son loves the program and has learned a ton from the instructors. Thank you for all you bring to our community."

Parent volunteers are an integral part of Sky Tavern's operations. They run lifts, shovel snow, cook food and donate other needed labor to keep Sky Tavern running. Not only does Sky Tavern teach kids, it also teaches parents so they can keep up with their children on the slopes. The program thrives due to this focus on building social ties. For over 70 years, Sky Tavern has fostered a community of snow lovers who continue to pass down this passion to future generations.

## Finalist: Big SNOW American Dream, NJ

Big SNOW is a unique ski area; it's the first indoor ski slope in North America and is located inside the American Dream Mall in New Jersey (right across the Hudson River from New York City). The combination of year-round skiing and immediate access to the largest metropolitan area in the country makes

Big SNOW exceptionally positioned to introduce many new people to skiing and snowboarding — particularly those who have traditionally been underrepresented in snowsports. Big SNOW's research shows that the customer base is, indeed, much more diverse than a typical ski area.

Big SNOW wants to get people on snow by removing location/access, equipment and cost barriers. But more than that, the team at Big SNOW wants to develop lifelong participants in snowsports. Perhaps the most important barrier that Big SNOW removed is the traditional ski lesson. Instead, the ski area uses ambassadors, which are complimentary roving instructors, and signs with QR codes for those who would prefer the self-taught YouTube route.

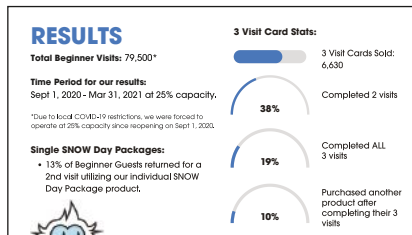
Big SNOW hosted nearly 80,000 beginner package skier visits in the 2020–21 season, and they plan to conduct a longitudinal study to track these beginners over time. The ultimate goal for Big SNOW is to generate 20% more trials of skiing and snowboarding nationally.

“Our goal was to mix entertainment and sport to introduce skiing and snowboarding in a new way, and to remove as many of the traditional barriers of entry to sport as we could in creating our products for this facility,” said Hugh Reynolds, VP of marketing and sales for SNOW Operating/Big SNOW.

## Finalist: Crystal Mountain, MI

Like many ski areas, Crystal Mountain is located in a rural area with pockets of lower income families and many youth on free or reduced school lunch. As such, a primary focus of the beginner conversion effort at Crystal is on local youth, working to instill healthy habits, inspire a love of the outdoors and foster the social aspect of the sports to keep kids engaged over time.

The ski resort founded a nonprofit, the Crystal Community Ski Club, to facilitate progress toward these goals. The Ski Club



is engaged through partnerships with schools, grants from local and industry nonprofits, and local volunteers. Funds are used for scholarships, to pay instructors and purchase equipment.



Crystal takes an equipment-agnostic approach to getting local youth involved in snowsports. The resort has both Nordic and alpine components to their beginner conversion programs. For the Nordic outreach, Crystal brings all skis and other equipment to local schools, where they coach kids in Nordic skiing on the school grounds, eliminating the key barriers of equipment and transportation.

For the alpine program, the resort has the same youth-based approach and offers a variety of coaching and teaching, from recreational to racing tracks. Over 650 youth participated in the alpine and Nordic programs at Crystal Mountain in the 2020-21 season. Additionally, the conversion program provides an opportunity for a work pathway, including junior ski patrol and junior ski instructor roles. With a renewed emphasis across the industry on welcoming and inclusion in ski area staffing, this pathway is an important tactic to diversifying Crystal's future employee base.

As noted, a common theme of the Conversion Cup finalists is the focus on reducing barriers to participation in snowsports. The pandemic accelerated technology improvements at many ski areas, which is further lowering barriers and removing friction related to skiing and snowboarding. We look forward to seeing how these innovations make the experience better for people learning to ski and snowboard and anticipate that these technology upgrades will be highlighted in future Conversion Cup applications. 📌







**HEAD PROUDLY CONGRATULATES**



**WINNER OF THE 2021 NSAA CONVERSION CUP**

HEAD AND NSAA HAVE TEAMED UP TO OFFER THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS AWARD IN THE SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRY. LAUNCHED IN 2010, THE CONVERSION CUP CHALLENGE PROMOTES FRIENDLY COMPETITION AMONG MEMBER SKI AREAS, AND RECOGNIZES THOSE WHO HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT EFFORTS TO BOOST SKIER AND SNOWBOARDER CONVERSION AND RETENTION RATES. HEAD CONGRATULATES SKY TAVERN AND ALL PREVIOUS CONVERSION CUP WINNERS FOR THEIR FOCUS ON ENCOURAGING SKIERS AND RIDERS TO BECOME LIFELONG ENTHUSIASTS OF THE SPORTS. WE ENCOURAGE YOUR RESORT TO BE THE NEXT RECIPIENT!

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