



For Immediate Release

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**IMPRESSIVE LIST OF FORMER OLYMPIC, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND
WORLD CUP SKIING GREATS SETS SIGHTS ON VAIL FOR LEGENDS OF
SKIING EVENTS AT 2006 COUNTRYWIDE AMERICAN SKI CLASSIC**

VAIL, Colorado—The 2006 Countrywide American Ski Classic will serve as the stage for a unique history lesson in alpine skiing March 22-23 as an impressive list of former Olympic, World Championship and World Cup racing greats have set their sights on the Vail Valley for the event’s Legends of Skiing competitions.

Sponsored by Countrywide Financial Corporation, the nation’s leading home loan lender*, and featuring giant slalom and downhill races, the Legends of Skiing provides an annual opportunity for some of the greatest names in ski racing history to once again crank down the bindings and rekindle old rivalries, with the glory of a year’s worth of bragging rights hanging in the balance.

“It is truly amazing,” offered Ceil Folz, president of the Vail Valley Foundation, “when you start adding up the number of Olympic and World Championships medals, as well as World Cup victories, of our Legends field each year. We are fortunate enough to annually host many of the skiers that literally helped write the book on ski racing history.”

The 2006 Legends competition will get underway Wednesday, March 22, with the Legends Giant Slalom competition, the finals of which will be contested under the lights at Golden Peak, in conjunction with the weekly Bud Light Street Beat free concert series, featuring country-rock stars the Gin Blossoms.

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2006 Legends of Skiing

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Defending champions Cindy Nelson and Jake Fiala of the United States will be back to defend their titles, although strong challenges are expected to come from rookie legend Ylva Nowen of Sweden, the 1998 World Cup slalom champ, as well as a pair of legends that return to the competition following a lengthy hiatus.

American World Cup overall champion Tamara McKinney and Luxembourg's Marc Girardelli, a five-time overall World Cup king, will rejoin the Legends field for the 2006 event, combining with other greats, including Americans Phil and Steve Mahre and Sweden's Pernilla Wiberg to attempt to unseat Nelson and Fiala in Giant Slalom.

The Legends Downhill will take center stage on Thursday, March 23, with Switzerland's Bernhard Russi and Laurie Graham of Canada back to defend their 2005 crowns.

Austrian great Franz Klammer will be out for revenge, having seen his Legends Downhill win streak snapped by Russi last year, while the ladies field will once again try to find a way to dethrone Graham, who extended her Legends Downhill winning streak to five straight last March.

In addition to Klammer, other contenders for the Downhill throne could include rookie Swiss legend Paul Accola, a combined medalist in both the 1989 and 1999 World Championships in Vail and Beaver Creek, as well as 1992 Olympic Downhill champion Patrick Ortlieb of Austria or teammate Hannes Trinkl, the 2001 World Championships Downhill gold medalist.

Graham will need to contend with another Swiss rookie in Ariane Ehrat, the bronze medalist in Downhill at the 1985 World Championships in Bormio, Italy, along with perennial challengers Marina Kiehl of Germany, the 1988 Olympic Downhill champion, and Wiberg, who mined Olympic Downhill silver in 1998.

In addition to the Legends Giant Slalom and Downhill races, the former Olympians will also serve as captains for the Ford Cup celebrity team competition, Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25.

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2006 Legends of Skiing

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Rounding out the Legends portion of the 2006 Countrywide American Ski Classic will be the induction of Germany's Rosi Mittermaier into the International Ski Racing Hall of Fame on Saturday evening, March 25, at the annual Legends Banquet.

A triple Olympic medalist at the 1976 Games in Innsbruck, Austria, Mittermaier claimed the gold in Downhill and Slalom, while collecting silver in Giant Slalom. She also added an FIS World Championships gold medal in Combined at the Innsbruck Games.

The season-long 1976 campaign proved to be a special one for Mittermaier as well as she also earned the season-long World Cup overall crown, in addition to her Olympic exploits. During the course of her World Cup career, she posted a total of ten wins, eight in slalom and one in Giant Slalom, along with a Combined victory.

The 2006 Countrywide American Ski Classic is a project of the Vail Valley Foundation. For further information, contact (970) 949-1999 or visit <http://www.vvf.org>.

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***About Countrywide Financial Corporation**

Founded in 1969, Countrywide Financial Corporation (NYSE: CFC) – America's #1 home loan lender as ranked for 2005 by Inside Mortgage Finance (Jan. 27, 2006), Copyright 2006 – is a member of the S&P 500 and Fortune 500. Countrywide, through its subsidiaries, provides mortgage banking and diversified financial services in domestic and international markets. Mortgage banking businesses include loan production and servicing principally through Countrywide Home Loans, Inc., which originates, purchases, securitizes, sells, and services residential loans. The company is headquartered in Calabasas, California and has a workforce of more than 54,000 individuals and over 800 offices worldwide. For more information about the company, visit Countrywide's Web site at <http://www.countrywide.com>.