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SPORTS
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AWARD
WINNERS**

PHOENIX EDITION

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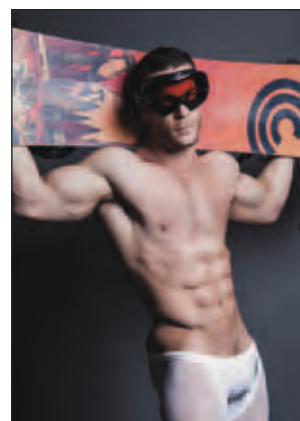
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COVER PHOTO
Photo by Landis Smithers

Correction: October’s cover was taken by
photographer Cedric Terell



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By Michael McVean
Photos by Landis Smithers

SIERRAS ELEVATION MAMMOTH UTAH LAKE'S LARGEST

Winter temperatures can mean hibernation for some. As another season of swimsuits and pool parties cools, there are those who would hunker down, bundle up and wait for the warm weather to return. Tom Whitman is not one of them. And with his annual LGBT ski weeks - Elevation Mammoth, Elevation Utah and the soon-to-be-announced Elevation Tahoe - returning bigger and better than ever, he isn't just braving the cold. He's owning it.

"LGBT ski weeks are very different from other destination gay events," says Whitman, who launched Elevation Mammoth in 2002. The event combines the sports and athletic focus of a traditional destination ski trip with the seductive Southern-California gay scene. "Unlike a 'circuit party' or a pride weekend, gay ski weeks are equal parts party and sports. Yes, you're surrounded by cute guys and girls from all over the country (and the world), but the sole focus is not the party.

Elevation Mammoth and its Park City incarnation, Elevation Utah, offer something that gay nightlife simply doesn't have - daytime. The events answer an increasingly loud call from the community - we want a point to our party. Strong libations? Good. Hip gyrations? Great. Add athletic inclination. Next level.

"I started Elevation years ago with a purely selfish motive," says Whitman. "I wanted to combine two things I love to do - produce big gay events and ski at incredible resorts."

That broad appeal has taken Elevation: Mammoth from a simple weekend retreat to a total mountaintop invasion. "Twelve years ago we tested the waters by emailing a few friends," explains Whitman. "More than 300 people showed up to dance, party, snowboard, ski and make memories. Now we have more than 2,500 riders and skiers coming to the High Sierras for Mammoth Lake's largest event of the year."

The popularity of events like Elevation, combined with fresh (and sexy) faces of LGBT athletes like Robbie

Rogers and Alan Gendreau continue to redefine what it means to be gay. To play sports. Or both. It isn't just about showing up, it's about coming together.

"Sports are a way to unify the community," says former Major League Baseball player and current StandUp vice-chairman Billy Bean. "Gay Night at the Dodgers, men like (openly gay NBA player) Jason Collins, they are about increasing visibility. About not keeping secrets."

We live in a time where visibility still is not a liberty afforded to everyone. Russia's gay-ban on the Olympics is a glaring example of the work still ahead of us. "There are tons of sports-minded gay men and women," says Bean. "It's important to show that sports is an option. That it's a way to come together deeply, because you share that common love. It can have a massive impact."

Eager to embrace your inner jock? Or flirt with the jock next to you? Whitman shares his formula for the full experience. "Wake up early. Put on a really cute snowboarding outfit. Snowboard or ski all day, wearing your Elevation bandana with 2,000 other guys and girls on the mountain. At 4:00 p.m. get on the gondola and head to après-ski. Drink one beer too many. Meet a cute guy who will become a lifelong friend. Meet another cute guy who will be Mr. Right Now. Dine in a gourmet restaurant full of flushed, friendly gay faces. Put on a tight T-shirt and head to the night-time party. At 1:30 a.m. fall into bed. Rinse and repeat." It's easy to get lost in the magic of Elevation.

Slopes? World-class.

Mammoth is not only a giant mountain (size matters) it also features over 150 trails and abundant snow fall (impressive inches). Park City has you riding the same slopes as the 2002 Olympians.

Entertainment? Epic.

Whitman knows how to throw a party. It wouldn't be one of his events without an all-star DJ lineup, sexy go-go boys and a few famous faces. Mammoth 2013 included cult favorite Coco Peru headlining the comedy night and Lance Bass broadcasting live on Sirius Radio as he hosted Elevation Mammoth's "Party at 10,000 feet."

Attitude? Nope.

Perhaps Elevation's biggest accomplishment is bringing thousands of gays and girls to the slopes and skipping the frostiness. "Elevation is known first and foremost as a friendly event," says Whitman. "People leave the attitude at home. Year after year, I hear stories from people about the new friends they made at Elevation, the boyfriend they met or simply the camaraderie they experienced."

It's that magic that keeps attendees coming back year after year. "I have been to Elevation every year since 2006," says Jordan Brusso, who has attended the event with his husband John Manelski. "Elevation feels like a huge group of friends who all came to one city to enjoy a sport they mutually love."





tom whitman & flipevents present
ELEVATION
2014 UTAH
4TH ANNUAL PARK CITY GAY SKI WEEK

“I didn’t expect to see such an amazing group of gay and gay-friendly ski and snowboard enthusiasts grow year after year,” adds Manelski. “I didn’t expect to make and keep so many good friends I still talk to today. I have gotten to experience new friendships and reaffirm old ones.

Finding warmth from the locals as well as from the LGBT attendees is another special element to Elevation’s success. Hot tubs and long nights might mean trouble in some quaint slope towns, but Manelski explains, “My biggest surprise is seeing how much the town likes seeing us year after year and how friendly people are when they learn we are with Elevation.”

“It was really gratifying to see how quickly the town of Mammoth Lakes adopted the event,” says Whitman. “The Mayor and City Council write us a welcome letter each year.” The success of Elevation stems partially from Whitman’s own passion for the sport. “I grew up skiing. My parents put me in ski school for a week when I was 5 years old ... all day long for seven days straight. I cried every day but by the end of it, I was hooked.”

From reluctance to revelry, Whitman has spun his love for the slopes into a post-summer mecca. His time on the UCLA ski team may have planted the seed. “Every weekend, the team piled into vans to drive up to Mammoth,” he grins. “Testosterone, cute guys and skiing ... it sounds like foreshadowing of Elevation.” ©

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ELEVATION
MAMMOTH 12th annual gay ski week



