

Dew Downtown

BY MEGAN TROUTMAN

Adrenaline pumps through the heart of Flagstaff as skiers and snowboarders prepare for a weekend of freestyle competition.

For the past four years, Flagstaff has hosted one of the most popular urban ski and snowboard festivals — sponsored by Mountain Dew — known as Dew Downtown. Once a year, snow is molded into a freestyle ski and snowboard course down San Francisco Street. Students, locals and professionals are welcome to register and participate in this highly anticipated event Jan. 24-25.

“It’s an opportunity to be in the middle of a downtown environment with a bunch of people lining the street,” said City of Flagstaff spokeswoman Kimberly Ott. “Part of it is to win and have fun, but part of it is because it’s unique.”

Ott has been involved with Dew Downtown since it first started in 2012. Since then, each year has been more successful than the last, corralling a significant number of locals and students to the downtown area.

“[I am most excited] for the people. Not only the competitors but the people who come and see it,” Ott said. “It’s a big festival that everyone will enjoy and the weather’s going to be perfect so despite the protests and controversy behind man-made snow, locals were excited to see what kind of competition was in store for the weekend.”

Certified urban skiing and snowboarding judge Stu Howe was just as excited for the event.

“[I’m excited for] the caliber of riders. There’s a lot of good riders out here — we’re going to be seeing a lot of cool tricks, keeping the crowd entertained, maybe some big crashes, but hopefully no one gets hurt,” Howe said.

Howe is head judge for Dew

Downtown and has been judging this event for the past three years. Judges specifically look for difficulty, amplitude, variety and execution when scoring contestants.

“We’re looking to see all-around good riding. Somebody who can take the course and turn it into a canvas, making it almost like a piece of art,” Howe said.

In order to become certified judges, Howe and the rest of the judging panel had to take certain classes and tests to familiarize themselves with high-scoring tricks.

“There are crowd-pleaser tricks, which the crowd will go crazy for, but a lot of them won’t even score you points,” Howe said. “A front flip will not score points in a competition like this.”

Each judge had to watch past events like X-Games and other freestyle competition footage in order to differentiate which tricks will score higher than others.

“The first year I had no idea what I was doing, but you learn as you go,” Howe said. “I get nervous talking to the riders because they all want to yell at you [as a judge].”

Nerves play a huge role in any competition, especially for the

participants.

“Yeah [I was] super nervous,” said Flagstaff local and snowboarder Alan Splitter. “For whatever reason, this contest makes me more nervous than a lot of contests out there.”

Splitter placed first in the men’s open snowboarding division. He has been snowboarding for the past seven years and has participated in Dew Downtown each year.

“You kind of forget that people are watching,” Splitter said after receiving his \$100 first-place prize. “If you’re doing [the competitions] right, that’s the goal to forget that people are watching.”

While each course of Dew Downtown has been different from the last, this year’s course was particularly favorable among the contestants.

“It was a lot better than it’s been in the past few years. It’s faster and they limited the amount of features so it’s a little easier to keep speed,” Splitter said.

Most participants came to the agreement that this course was the most successful course in Dew Downtown history. This year, the slope was steeper so riders were able to maintain their speed throughout the course.

brings carve-onation to the streets of Flagstaff

“The difficulty is the size of the features — they’re a little bit bigger, giving us a better spread to see how everybody’s riding,” Howe said. “It’s real flowy — it’s fun to ride this year. It works really well.”

Jan. 23, the day before the weekend event, snow was brought in to be packed down on San Francisco Street. Shortly after the snow was brought in, workers began to carve out the course.

“This year we’ve shortened the course, partly because it’s been so

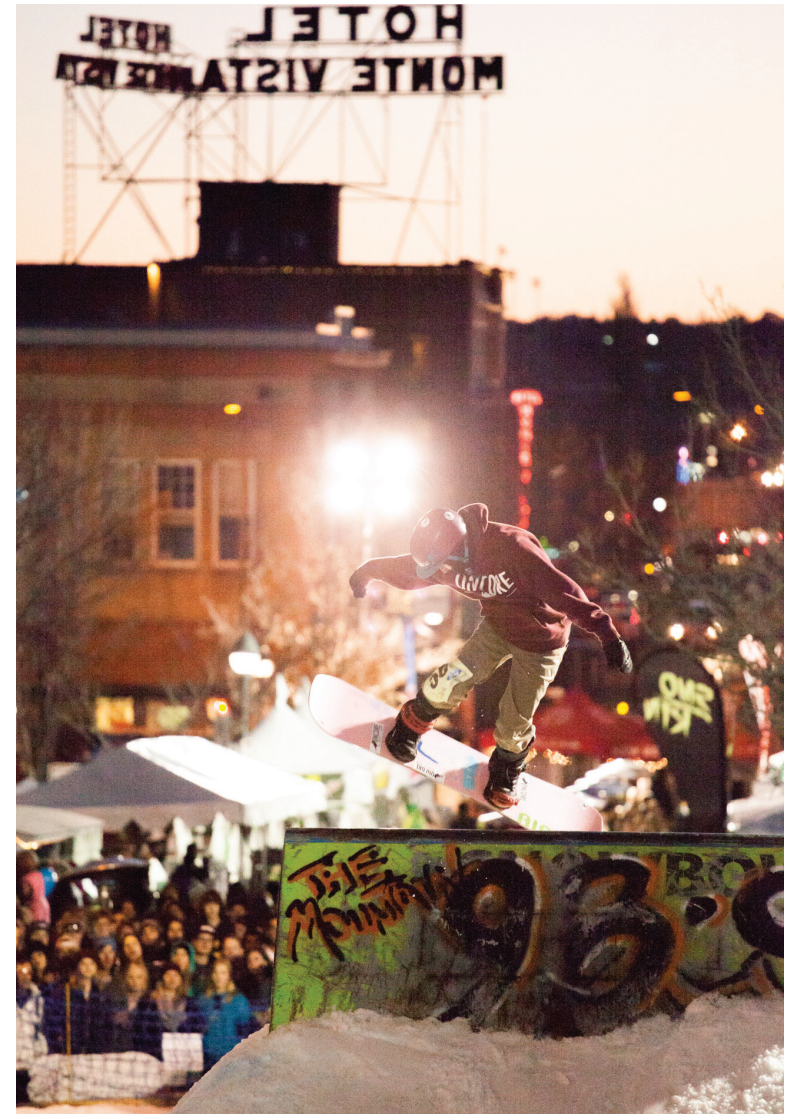
warm,” Ott said. “We’ve shortened the course up so it amounts to a little over a city block. In years past we’ve had it run two blocks.”

Splitter was happy with the competition results and was excited for his next opportunity to compete.

“I just hope that I can continue to shred for cheaper than average for as long as I can,” Splitter said. “I just really like to snowboard.”



A participant of Dew Downtown takes a drink during a break Jan. 24 (Photo by Zac Velarde)



A snowboarder jumps the ramp at Dew Downtown Jan. 24. (Photo by J. Daniel Hud)