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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: USATF Mountain Runners of the Year 2004

On Saturday, December 4, the 2004 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year awards will be presented at the Hilton Hotel in Portland, Oregon during a breakfast banquet as part of the USATF annual convention.

The USATF Mountain Runner of the Year award recipients in the open category are Paul Low, Amherst, MA and Laura Haefeli, Del Norte, CO and Andy Ames, Boulder, CO and Anita Ortiz, Eagle, CO in the masters category.

Paul Low, 30, Amherst, MA was a member of the Teva US Mountain Running Team earning his spot on the team as the top American finisher at the Mt Washington Hill Climb (USA Mountain Running Championships). Low was the top US finisher at international events including Sierre Zinal and the WMRA Grand Prix race in Susa, Italy where Low and teammate Simon Gutierrez finished fourth place in the team competition. Additional top finishes in 2004 included 19th at the World Mountain Running Trophy race in Sauze d'Oulx, Italy (2nd American) and 3rd at the Teva Vail HillClimb, host of the first NACAC Mountain Running Championships where Low and teammates Simon Gutierrez, Peter de la Cerda, and Mark Werner were the winning team. Low was born and raised in Mount Pleasant, Michigan where he graduated from Central Michigan University in 1999 with a B.S. in Biology and Geology. He recently finished his graduate studies at UMass Amherst in Geoscience and is enrolled in the doctoral program at UMass Amherst. Low represents the Central Massachusetts Striders (CMS) running club.

Laura Haefeli, 37, Del Norte, CO. Haefeli earned her spot on the 2004 Teva US Mountain Running Team as the second US finisher at Mt Washington and finished a solid 15th place at the World Mountain Running Trophy (second American to Anita Ortiz). She is the 2004 USATF 10K Trail National Champion and winner of the 2004 Teva Vail HillClimb. Equally talented in summer biathlon (running and marksmanship), Haefeli is a seven time National Champion in the sport ('90, '94, '98, '00, '01, '02, '03) and a nine-time National Team Member. Running since the sixth grade, she competed in the 800m, 1600m, and cross country in high school, was an All-American during her senior year in college at the University of Dayton and was twice named All-Ohio Runner of the Year. Her PRs include 34:47 for 10K, 8K - 27:33, 5K - 16:50. Laura and her husband Tom are beekeepers and sell honey and wax. She is the mother of three young children.

Andy Ames, 41, Boulder, CO. A long time mountain runner, 2004 is Ames' first time to be named to the Teva US Mountain Running Team and the only masters' runner on the team this year where he finished a solid 47th overall. Ames was the second American masters runner and 6th overall in the WMRA Master's World Mountain Running Championships the week preceding the WMRA Trophy Race. He was the top masters finisher at the Mount Washington Hill Climb (6th overall) and Teva Vail HillClimb (8th overall) as well as the US Trail Running Championships (5th overall). He is a two-time winner of the Vail HillClimb as well as twice US Skyrunning Champion in the Vertical Kilometer. Also, an accomplished Duathlete, Andy is a two time medalist in Duathlon World Championships and was named Male Duathlete of the Year by USAT in 2000. Ames is a buyer for the bicycle mail order company Excel Sports.

Anita Ortiz, 40, Eagle, CO. Ortiz is a two-time USATF Mountain Runner of the Year (2002 and 2003), three-time Teva US Mountain Running Team member, and top American at each of the three WMRT events she has participated in (11th in 2002, 8th in 2003, 11th in 2004). Ortiz came back from an early season stress fracture which prevented her from racing on the trails much of the season. Fortunately she maintained her fitness through elliptical training, versa climbing, pool running, and mountain biking and won her fourth Pikes Peak Ascent in August setting a new masters record this year. She was the overall winner at the WMRA World Masters Mountain Running Championships the week before the WMRT. Ortiz is a graduate of Colorado State University and received her Master in Education at Florida State with an impressive 4.0 average. Ortiz teaches kindergarten at Eagle Valley Elementary and has four children.

This is the sixth year for the USATF Mountain Runner of the Year awards. Past winners include Colorado athletes Danelle Ballengee, Matt Carpenter, Cindy O'Neill, Anita Ortiz, New England runners Craig Fram, Dave Dunham, and Eric Morse.

Criteria for this year's selection included top results in US mountain/trail competitions and international competitions during 2004, current USATF membership, and serving as an ambassador for the sport. For the USATF MUT Contributor of the Year, the North Texas Trail Runners earned top honors for their support of the Ultrarunners Supporting Ultrarunners (USU) fund. The NTTR club donated \$1200 raised from the Rockledge Rumble and Cross Timbers trail runs to help this year's United States 100Km team that competed in The Netherlands. NTTR was formed and began the Rockledge Rumble eight years ago specifically to raise money to offset the travel expenses of the USATF organized ultra team. During that time the organization has donated over \$10,000 to the U.S. 100Km team. The other Contributor of the Year nominees were Teva for their continued support of US mountain running (and a past winner of this award in 2002), and Vail Recreation District for their support of US mountain running including a nationally acclaimed mountain running circuit and hosting the first NACAC Mountain Running Championships at the Teva Vail HillClimb in July 2004.