

**Contact: Nancy Hobbs, Chairperson,
USATF Mountain Ultra Trail Running Council
(719) 573-4133 or trlrunner@aol.com**

For Release: November 22, 2009

USATF Mountain Ultra Trail Council Announces Runners of the Year

Indianapolis, IN ---- The Mountain/Ultra/Trail Running (MUT) Council of long distance running has named the 2009 USATF Mountain Runners of the year, Ultra Runners of the Year, and Contributor of the Year. The following individuals will be recognized at the USATF National Convention in Indianapolis, on Saturday, December 5, at an awards breakfast.

Mountain men open: Joseph Gray, 25, Lakewood, WA, wins his second consecutive USATF Mountain Runner of the Year title. He started out the mountain season in Vail, CO, on the weekend of June 6 running an uphill half marathon (Saturday) and a 10km trail race (Sunday) finishing in third and second respectively. Later that month he finished third at Mount Washington Road Race and won the USA Mountain Running Championships at Cranmore earning a spot on his second Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team. He was the second U.S. finisher at the World Mountain Championships in Madesimo-Campodolcino, Italy, finishing in 16th place. Gray spent much of the summer in Europe racing and was fifteenth overall in the WMRA Grand Prix standings with only two WMRA Grand Prix race finishes (out of seven) to his credit.

Mountain men master: Dave Dunham, 45, Bradford, MA, took home the gold in the 45-49 at the US Mountain Championships at Mt Cranmore. He was also the USATF New England champion (45-49) at Northfield Mountain and was the masters USATF NE Mountain running series champion. Mountain results included: 1st 45-49 at Wachusett Mountain, 1st 40-49 at Pack Monadnock, 1st 45-49 at Northfield Mountain (USATF NE championship), 1st 45-49 at Mt Washington, 1st 45-49 at Mt Cranmore (US National championship), 1st 40-49 at Loon Mountain, 1st 40-49 at Mt Ascutney. In addition Dave continued to volunteer at the Association and National level. He was the official scorekeeper for the USATF NE Mountain series, directed multiple trail/mountain races, and served as the manager for the junior runners on the US Mountain team. Dunham was the USATF Mountain Runner of the Year in 2000.

Mountain women open: Brandy Erholtz, 32, Bailey, CO, is a repeat winner in this category having also won in 2008. In June, she finished first at the Native Eyewear Spring Runoff 10k in Vail, first at the Mount Washington Road Race, and finished second at the US Mountain Running Championships and was a member of the gold-medal winning Team USA at the NACAC Mountain Running Championships. She earned an at-large spot on her second Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team and was the top American woman finisher in Italy at the World Mountain Running Championships finishing 10th to lead the U.S. Women to a bronze-medal finish. She finished second at the USA 10km Trail Running Championships. She finished fifth at the Cheyenne Canon Mountain Race, first at the Barr Mountain Trail Race where she set a new women's course record, and won the VAC Vail Mountain Winter Uphill Snowshoe. She was first at the Montrose 10k uphill road race setting a course record and in international competition in Switzerland raced to a third-place finish at Thyon-Dixence, and fifth place at Sierre-Zinal, (top US finisher at both of these events).

Mountain women master: Laura Haefeli, 42, Del Norte, CO, was the 2004 and 2005 open mountain runner of the year and has earned masters' recognition for the second consecutive year. She finished third overall at the Cheyenne Canon Mountain Race, was second in the Native Eyewear Spring Runoff 10k in Vail, and was the USA National Mountain Running Masters champion and a member of the gold-medal US Team at the NACAC Mountain Running championships.

Ultra men open: Michael Wardian, 35, Arlington, VA, wins his second consecutive Ted Corbitt Memorial USATF Ultra Runner of the Year Award in 2009. Wardian finished ninth at the 2008 (November 2008) IAU World Cup 100km in Tarquina, Italy, and at the 2009 IAU World Cup 100km in,

Torhout, Beligum, he finished in sixth position and was the first US finisher. Wardian earned a bronze medal at the IAU 50km World Championships in Gibraltar and was the first US Finisher. He was the US 50km Road National Champion, and the US 50 Mile Trail Champion. Wardian showed his prowess in shorter distance competition with his finish at the US Cross Country National Championships in 46th place overall. At the Marathon Des Sables-Sahara Desert, Morocco, Wardian finished in eighth place overall which was the highest finish ever by a U.S. competitor. He was fifteenth overall at Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run, just eight days after finishing sixth overall in the IAU World Cup 100km. He posted a third place finish at The North Face Endurance Challenge-50 Miler, Washington, DC and ran eight marathons in 2009 and set a PR in the marathon in 2009 of 2:21:09.

Ultra men master: Roy Pirrung, 61, Sheboygan, WI, is a repeat winner in this category having won this award in 2007 and 2008. Pirrung's results included in November 2008, first 60-64 finisher and a pending 60-64 American record in the open race held concurrently with the IAU World Cup 100km in Italy, and at the 24 Hour Championships in McKinney, TX, a fifth place overall, first 60-64. In 2009 Pirrung won his age group at the following events, the USA 50km Road Championships, the Mad City 50km, the Door County Fall 50-mile, and the Ice Age Trail 50-mile. He finished second in his age group at both the USA 50 Mile Trail Championships and the USA 100km Trail Championships. The Door County 50 was Pirrung's 150th Ultra race. Pirrung serves as the vice-chairperson of the USATF Mountain Ultra Trail Running Council and is active in his local USATF association.

Ultra women open: Kami Semick, 43, Bend, OR, is the Ruth Anderson USATF Ultra Runner of the Year 2009 having posted an outstanding year on the road and trails. She was the USA 50km Road Champion, and the USA 50 Mile Trail Champion. At the IAU World 50km Road Championships Semick finished first overall. Semick won the individual gold medal at the IAU World Cup 100km to lead Team USA to a gold-medal performance. She also won the American River 50 mile and the Miwok 100k. In addition in 2008 at the IAU World Cup 100km Semick earned a silver medal to lead Team USA to a silver-medal podium appearance.

Ultra women master: Anita Ortiz, 45, Eagle, CO, won the Moab Red Hot 50k, was first at 12 hours of Moab (team race), finished second at the Miwok 100km, turned in an outstanding first place finish (setting a "rookie" record) at Western States 100 Miler. She won the Pikes Peak Marathon and finished first at the San Juan Solstice 50 mile. Ortiz was a two-time USATF Mountain Runner of the Year (2002 and 2003) and two-time USATF Masters Mountain Runner of the Year (2004 and 2007).

Contributor of the Year – Paul Kirsch. Kirsch was the race director for NACAC/USA Mountain Running Champs where one of his duties was to coordinate housing and transportation for elite athletes (more than 30 in total from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico). Kirsch serves as the USATF-NE Mountain Ultra Trail Chairperson. He provides website design and maintenance for the US Mountain Running Team website & blog (usmrt.com). He headed up the USATF-NE Mountain Running Circuit which saw increased participation this year, and he was the Co-Race Director for the Loon Mountain Race. He also coordinated housing and transportation for elite athletes for the Mount Washington Race. He successfully recruited the Rhode Island 6 Hour Ultra to be USATF-NE Ultra Championships and attended as volunteer liaison from the mountain ultra trail council of USATF NE. Kirsch is President of the White Mountain Milers Running Club. He served as race director for the Inov-8 Summer Series in North Conway, NH, and the USSSA Snowshoe Race (National Champs Qualifier). He provided timing/results and course setup for a number of races in New England near his home in Madison, NH.

In order to be considered for the USATF Mountain and Ultra running awards an athlete must show top results in U.S. competitions for 2009 (November 1, 2008 through October 31, 2009) to include mountain races (these may be on paved/gravel surfaces as long as there is significant elevation loss or gain) and trail races of varying lengths, as well as road races for the ultra category (distances beyond the marathon). International results are also considered. The nominee must be an ambassador for the sport. Nominee must be a USATF member for 2009, and to be considered for the masters' category athlete must be a minimum of 40 years of age. For a list of past winners in the other categories, please visit www.usatf.org.