

WINTER GAMES

Gourmet food maker to sponsor ski jumpers

Along with funding, Stowe will offer nutritional advice

BY BRUCE CONSTANTINEAU
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver gourmet food entrepreneur Lesley Stowe has bailed out Canada's national ski jumping team with a one-year sponsorship deal worth close to \$100,000.

For at least the next year, the team will be named Lesley Stowe Fine Foods' Canadian Ski Jumping Team.

National ski jumping officials said the deal comes at a crucial time for the team, which recently lost federal Own-the-Podium funding because it doesn't have an athlete expected to win a medal at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

"It's like a life raft being thrown to us," Ski Jumping Canada chair Brent Morrice said in an interview. "This is fantastic timing. By stepping up like this, Lesley has ensured we will continue to develop men and women to become future Olympians."

(Women's ski jumping is not an Olympic sport now, but a group of female jumpers has filed a lawsuit to get the discipline included in the Games.)

He said the team — with four men and three women — has a \$150,000 annual budget, so Stowe's contribution eases the pressure to secure money through various fundraising efforts.



Lesley Stowe will help out Canada's ski jumping team.

The deal is for one year, but Morrice said he wants to establish a multi-year arrangement with Stowe's company, which makes the popular Raincoast Crisps snack foods.

Stowe, a longtime skiing enthusiast, said she decided to support the ski jumping team after becoming fascinated with the sport while seeing a recent World Cup event in Whistler.

"Our company had been thinking about how we could somehow get involved with the Olympics and support something that needed help," she said in an interview. "This is a great fit for us."

"We're not in the sporting goods business at all but sports and great food work together so well. It struck a chord for them and it struck a chord for us."

Stowe said her company doesn't have "really deep pockets" so

it searched for a group — possibly a lower-profile team — that could really benefit from its help.

"What we're able to give is very helpful to them," she said. "It's also a positive reflection on us to support something like this."

Stowe's sponsorship comes just two months after Morrice attracted a lot of publicity by saying Canadian ski jumpers could all afford to lose 10 pounds.

"I never said they were too fat," he said. "It's just that ski jumpers can't eat like regular athletes. They have to eat a little lighter. The nutritional value of [Stowe's] food is fantastic and it really aligns with what we're trying to accomplish with our athletes."

Morrice said the sport demands that athletes be extremely lean, with strong muscular legs. He noted a six-foot-two-inch, 163-pound jumper on the Canadian team could improve his performance by losing 10 pounds.

Stowe said the fat-ski-jumper story was overblown but feels she can help team members with their nutritional needs and expects to give them hands-on training in food preparation.

"I want to show them some great, healthy, easy things they can make," she said. "Maybe they haven't had the time or the inclination to worry about the food they eat because they just see it as fuel for the body. But you have to make sure it's the right type of fuel."