



# Burton

## BOARDING FOR THE PEOPLE



Jake at work and play

Look up snowboarding in the dictionary and you'll find one word that defines the sport: Burton. It's a guy's name (his middle name, actually). It's a company (the top one in the business). It's a way of life.

Jake Burton Carpenter, founder of Burlington, Vermont-based Burton Snowboards, loves to board. His personal jihad on many of the world's hills, it seems, is to get people on snowboards, get the snowboards on snow and have some fun. By focusing his vision on building the sport, rather than simply peddling boards, Burton (because no one calls him Carpenter) built one of the chilliest lifestyle brands—and one of the most socially conscious outdoor companies around.

The story of Burton is now legend. A Wall Street refugee, he retreated to Vermont in 1977 where love of a strange snow contraption called a Snurfer inspired him to evolve the snowboard. While Burton didn't invent the sport, his hand-shaped boards sold out of the back of his station wagon cornered the market. And Burton's domination endures.

Burton, and his boards, single-handedly transformed a somewhat whacky obsession into a global industry. Through it all, Burton, the man, and Burton, the company, set first tracks, pumping out trend-setting boards and pimping riders with the hottest schwag.

The secret to the company's success is its people. From Jake's obsession with the product to the Burton Global members, a tight-knit group of top pro boarders, and the company's legion of board-savvy staff, Burton's people have the on-mountain cred to set boarding trends. And this people-centric vision is at the heart of Jake's social ethos.

It starts with Burton employees and stretches far into the broader community. Burton practices a "Let them go snowboarding" philosophy (to misquote Patagonia's enlightened leader). The company offers employees free season passes to Stowe, discounted lift tickets to other mountains, a lending library of killer gear, flex time to score freshies after a dump and even cancels work if two feet or more fall on the Burlington office—so people can board, of course. Employees' dogs are an important part of the culture and there's a vert ramp out back for creative procrastination.

In 1995, Burton wanted to spread some of the on-snow fun to kids in the Burlington community who might not have the resources to try snowboarding. The Chill Foundation was born. Each season, it now kits out over 1,500 disadvantaged youth from nine North American cities with gear, buses them to a local mountain and teaches them to board. The program runs one day per week for six weeks and has reached more than 10,000 kids. Many have never left their cities, let alone stepped on a board. The outings improve self-esteem, attitude and even school performance. Proof that snowboarding can be good for anybody's soul.

It's not just inner-city kids that benefit from Burton's snowboarding-for-good crusade. In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Burton invited the families of New York City firefighters who had died in the line of duty to go snowboarding for a weekend at Hunter Mountain. The company outfitted over 140 kids and their families with gear, and smiles, for the adventure.

After the devastation of 2005's Gulf Coast hurricanes and Pakistan's earthquake, Burton reached out again—not with snowboards and jackets but with a helping hand. The company held a one-day sale at its worldwide stores and donated the proceeds to disaster relief efforts, including Habitat for Humanity and ASPCA.

Aside from the Chill Foundation, you have to dig pretty deep to learn of Burton's other good deeds. It says a lot about the man, and the company he founded. You won't read about it on the company website or in their ads. It's not a marketing ploy—it's straight from the heart. Jake's heart. And it's a big one.

Which leads to one of Burton's biggest mysteries: for a company that is based in Vermont (tree-hugger central) and relies on snow for its continued kicks (and economic survival), there's no sign of eco-concern. No emissions reductions. No eco-friendly board-making processes. No alternative energy use. No biodegradable packaging. Not even an organic T-shirt with a fight-global-warming-save-our-snow message.

Jake, you're a hero to generations of snow-loving groms, you board over 100 days a year, what gives, man? Once it's gone, even you can't bring it back. **H**

Photos: Burton Snowboards