

Old ski jump kindles fond memories

By MARTY BUDNER

Ski jumping is like a main artery in the sports heart of Dan Guthrie. Some 50 years ago the tiny hamlet of Rochester was the center of ski jumping in Michigan. Guthrie was an integral part of the action.

Now a self-employed bee supplier in Shelby Township, Guthrie watches ski jumping — either on television or in person — at every opportunity. He identifies with the "fliers" since he was one himself as an adventurous teenager.

"I still think about when we used to ski jump in Rochester, and I still watch it every chance I get," said Guthrie, who graduated from Rochester High School. "It's a tremendous feeling flying through the air with boards on. I know what jumpers feel like."

"You fly off the chute and into space, and the pressure of the air completely grabs hold of you. Then you kind of float on the air current. The more lift you get off the chute, the more you sail in the air."

"Once you're up in the air it's a sensation you've never experienced before," he said. "Once you do it, you just want to keep doing it."

Bloomer State Park was the site of the old Rochester Ski Jump, which attracted international, national and local competitors.

Rochester's unique jump was situated in the middle of 47 acres of trees, overlooking a sprawling 175-foot Bloomer cliff. The slide faced northward — towards what is now Parke-Davis & Co.

At the time it was the lower peninsula's largest jump.

THERE WERE actually two monstrous slides that rose above Bloomer. The first was built with steel beams and erected in 1925. Cable wires were strung tightly to stabilize the 124-foot high structure.

However, a "tornado-like" wind-storm toppled the monstrous tower during the summer of 1933. Local ski jumping enthusiasts were saddened at the structure's demise.

The community response to rebuild the ski jump was overwhelming.

Five years later, a second cable-suspension slide was transferred from Brighton and rebuilt. The scaffolding extended 180 feet skyward, with a length of 104 feet.

A 10-foot ladder near the chute allowed jumpers to "mount" the slide. Jumpers scaled to the top via a side walkway.

At the apex, a jumper's scenic view included miles of natural farmland, a horseshoe configuration of tiny spectators, 210 feet of hill and a snow-covered launching pad.

From the very top of the slide to the hill's bottom, a skier's promenade into space covered roughly 315 feet.

"I was 17 when I first went down that second jump," said Guthrie, who is 57 and presently living in Utica.

"The first time I looked down from the top, my heart was in my throat. The officials checked my skis, and everyone was as nervous as I was."

"The first two times I went down my knees buckled and I fell. But the third time I made it all right and I could

hear everyone clapping because I made it. It was quite an experience."

GUTHRIE WAS just one of many jumping addicts from Rochester.

A group commonly referred to as the "Rochester Boys" was the pride of the town. The contingent included a number of former Rochester High School teens who were infatuated with the thrilling sport.

From the first time men like Joe Tessmer, Walter Brown, Buddy Ruhn, Johnny Kinzie, Warren Schuler, Johnny Tessmer and Guthrie saw the huge slide, their fantasies were ignited. They were like excited children on Christmas morning.

"We had a junior jump, and finally the day came when we could go out and ride the big jump," recalled Guthrie, whose younger brother Ralph was also a ski jumper. "The Detroit Ski

Club owned the jump, and helped to keep it going."

"But it was an old slide and it just blew down in a bad storm one night. The people wanted another jump, so they brought the one over from Brighton and reconstructed it on the same site."

"The Hill brothers — there were about seven of them — were part of the first club. New members joined the club for the second jump, along with some of the Hill brothers."

"The old bugaboo was the weather. The club would put all kinds of money and bring ice in to run a tournament, and it would rain and ruin everything."

"I must have gone down that second slide a couple hundred times," said Guthrie. "It was a fantastic feeling."

Although there are only remnants of the old ski slide at Bloomer these days, ski jumping in Rochester will always be fondly cherished by men like Guthrie and the "Rochester Boys."

60th anniversary

Family and friends gathered in Nardin Park United Methodist Church on Sunday, Dec. 31, to celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of Marge and Anton Benish.

The couple were married in the bride's home, in Detroit, on Jan. 1, 1919, and resided in the Detroit area for 56 years until they moved to their retirement home in 1966, in Mullet Lake Village, Mich.

They are charter members of Nardin Park church, and retain their membership there. Benish, now 84, is a World War I vet-

eran and a retired employee of New York Central Railroad. He is a Life Mission and past president of Ionic Lodge. Mrs. Benish, now 79, served as a member of United Voluntary Service for 23 years.

The celebration, in Farmington Hills, is hosted by their four children: Leil Graham, of Denver, Col. Don Benish, of Clearwater Beach, Fla.; Ellen Morris, of Cincinnati, O.; and Dorothy Schwalb, of Northville. The couple have 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

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Actors' strike has little effect

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Actors and announcers in the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) are in their third week of a nationwide strike with no end in site.

Nearly 1,200 members—free lance performers who appear on commercials—are affected in the Detroit area. Picketing began Dec. 13, the first day of the strike, at the General Motors Building in Detroit.

AFTRA members who work for Southfield-based radio and television companies are not affected by the strike.

Dorothy Spears, public relations representative for AFTRA, said no talks have been scheduled but expects some movement now that the new year has started.

Rubin Weiss, who runs the AFTRA office in Southfield's Heritage Plaza Building and appears in many commercials, was involved in preliminary negotiations between the unions and the advertisers.

According to Weiss and an AFTRA spokesman in New York, the major stumbling block in negotiations is the advertisers' demand that union members be paid one "session fee" instead of a flat rate for each scene in a commercial.

MINIMUM PAY scale for on-camera actors represented by AFTRA is \$250 per commercial. Scale for actors or voices in a radio commercial is \$105 minimum.

At press time actors are paid for every scene produced even if the commercial is never used. Advertisers are proposing that union members only be paid if the scene is released as a commercial.

SAG and AFTRA call that a "retrogressive demand."

"It's like buying three suits and wearing two and then telling the store that you'll pay them for the third when you get around to wearing it," said Ms. Spears. "Advertisers are making entirely new versions of commercials with alternate takes."

Herb Neuer, regional director of AFTRA, said many units throughout the country have already settled contracts on an interim basis with advertisers that does not include the provision the union finds objectionable. Grand Rapids AFTRA members have signed an interim agreement and are back on the job, Neuer said.

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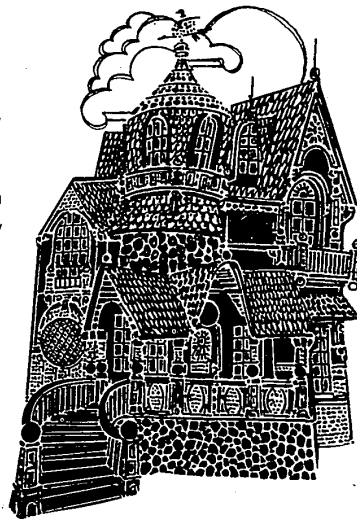
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