



skiing

Barry ZeVan

## Groundhog Day signals winter skiing's final stretch

Editor's note: Barry ZeVan, television weatherman, is The Observer & Eccentric's new columnist who will share his thoughts on skiing and include area downhill and cross country events. ZeVan, a Livonia resident, started his column with the Washington Star in 1975. After coming to this area in 1978, he wrote a ski column for the Detroit Free Press before joining the O&E last week.

Today is Groundhog Day and that means local ski areas are gearing up for the final push into spring skiing which usually ends in southeast Michigan by mid-March — at least one week before spring begins.

The local hills are a blessing to novice skiers as well as intermediate and advanced diehards who have been forced by the economy to forego their usual treks to the Rocky Mountains or European tundra, not to mention the Laurentians or western Canada.

Mt. Holly is the oldest of the four most popular nearby ski areas. Celebrating its 26th year in operation this season, it was founded by New Yorker Morton Graddis. Graddis is retired with a Golden Pass to the western ski areas near his Glenwood Springs, Colo., home.

GRADDIS AND HIS partner, one-time builder Grant Hanks (current owner of the operation), along with Willis Stoick and Joseph Kosik who own Alpine Valley, leased their original site from the state until 1969.

They then bought property close to Wildwood Park to establish Mt. Holly's present location.

Kentucky Hanks, who "never dreamed of ever being on skis, let alone owning a ski area" is proud that Mt. Holly was the "first area in southeast Michigan to provide man-made snow."

New snowmaking towers were installed last season to add to Mt. Holly's snowmaking capability.

Hanks' says "snowmaking has improved one million percent since it first began." His thoughts are echoed by other operators in Michigan.

Mt. Holly, which dubs itself as "where the north begins," has 327 vertical feet, the highest hill between Detroit and Boyne Mountain. It features seven chair lifts and six ropes.

One of the intermediate runs is called Grant's Trail, named after Hanks, on which Hanks claims he will "meet his doom."

Mt. Holly's average season is Dec. 10 through March 10.

WHAT ONCE was an orchard on M-59 west of Pontiac, Alpine Valley now offers an annual run for more than 200,000 skiers.

Stoick and Kosik, Alpine owners, have a ski school staff of more than 100,

plus 80 more at their co-owned Mt. Holly.

Alpine's hills, shaped from sand and clay, are continually under development during the non-skiing season.

The resort has the largest lift capacity in southeastern Michigan with nine chairs and 16 ropes. Depending on the weather, its season usually lasts from Dec. 10 through March 15.

Just south of Mt. Holly and east of I-75 on Sashabaw Road is the "magic mountain" of Joe Locricchio and Gary Francell. They bought Pine Knob in 1971.

The site includes 180 skiable acres with three triple chairs, two double chairs and nine ropes plus 300 vertical feet.

More than 200,000 ski tickets are sold annually at Pine Knob where skiers can venture over to Hamburger Mansion, a popular gathering place featuring tuxedoed waitresses.

EXPANSION PLANS include a ski "tower" which will enable skiers to enjoy a longer vertical drop than now exists on a ramp specially constructed as a man-made run.

Just the thought of it boggles the mind, but Pine Knob's owners are looking forward to its completion in time for next season.

West of Detroit, about 45 minutes from Southfield off I-96, is Mt. Brighton. It was founded 20 years ago by the late Percy Guardhouse, an attorney who owned some 1,000 acres around Brighton.

Gene Hill, Bill Riskey, Doyle Tippet and Bill Ryan bought the area from Guardhouse 13 years ago and usually succeed in their attempt to be the first ski area in southeastern Michigan to open each season.

More than 200,000 tickets also are sold annually at Mt. Brighton where there are seven chairs and nine ropes lifting skiers to 250 vertical feet spread over 100 skiable acres.

There is an additional 150 acres for parking, a restaurant and shops. Last summer, building additions included a new ski shop and lounge facilities.

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SOME RACING champions will show their professional skills at Pine Knob Saturday and Sunday when the Michellob Great Lakes Tour features top female racers in head-to-head competition.

Total purse is \$50,000 for the 13-area tour in conjunction with the Peugeot Grand Prix Downhill races.

Last year's overall winner, Linda Davis, will return to defend her crown. If you have never witnessed professional downhill racing competition, it's worth attending.

Monday, February 2, 1981

(S.3FC)

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