

# Winter's here! Across Oakland County, residents wonder: Do we celebrate or curse?

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STAFF WRITER

**B**aby, it's cold outside. Finally. And depending on your perspective, the cold temperatures may be a blessing or a burden.

For the trio of smiling valets planted outside the Kroger grocery store in Birmingham last week, the sunny 37 degree afternoon was a welcome respite from the bitter cold of previous days. The parking service is provided by employees of First Class Valet, Inc. of Troy.

Wearing layers of clothing is the key to valet Ed Dion's battle against the cold.

"I put on lots of clothes. I've got long johns and a pair of sweat pants on under these pants, and that works pretty good out here," Dion said as he greeted customers outside Kroger.

"Today's a beautiful day, but last week was a killer. It was 14 degrees when I started at 11 in the morning and the temperature just kept dropping all day long."

Stepping inside to warm up for a minute or two between cars helps valet manager Marcus Korijan keep from freezing. A sturdy pot of hot chocolate, always at the ready just inside the store, also keeps things toasty for the trio.

Still, once the day is done, it takes a while to thaw out.

"It does take a long time to warm up after work," offered Ernest Johnson, who has been a valet for four years. "But you just take a hot bath and everything's okay. It's no big deal."

Cold winds — but no snow — is a very big deal to owners of the King Brothers shop in Oxford. They sell and service snowmobiles, lawn, garden and outdoor power equipment.

Sales and Marketing Manager Michael Hong said sales of 1998 model snowmobiles have been "extremely brisk." But the '99 models aren't moving as swiftly. In fact the shop has plenty to choose from right now.

"It hasn't been record-setting or anything to write home about," Hong said. "I may have to discount some of the products even further pretty soon now because I don't see any great movement on the horizon."

Unseasonably balmy temperatures prevented Pine Knob Ski Resort near Clarkston from marking their usual mid-November opening day. Instead, the slopes finally welcomed skiers in the days before Christmas as the thermometer hit the 30 degree mark.

"We were anxious but not panicking because we knew it would get cold," Pat Deibel, Director of the Ski School at Pine Knob and Mt. Holly said. "And now the cold weather has given us a huge boost."

When the heavy white stuff is scarce Pine Knob starts cranking out home-made snow. They have 65 snow guns and one gun can turn 100 gallons of water into snow in a minute. While some natural snow would be nice, Deibel said as long as the temperatures stay frosty the snow making machines will be making mountains of fun at the Knob.

"We've got a ton of snow at there now," Deibel said. "And as long as we remain open now and in January and February we'll have a good season here."

Organizers of a Birmingham winter festival weren't as confident about the forecast for the coming months and canceled the February event. The festival's main feature was ice sculptures. The Downtown Birmingham Principal Shopping District set aside the event due to unseasonably warm temperatures last year.

"(Last year) The ice was melting when they were taking it off the trucks before it was even carved," said Dawn Booker, director of the Downtown Birmingham Principal Shopping District.

The district had hosted the event for a dozen years, the last few at Shain Park, downtown. They plan to re-evaluate the situation for 2000.

"I think people will miss it this year, but when it's too cold people don't come and when it's too warm the carvings melt so it's kind of a Catch 22," Booker said.

Despite both of these possibilities, Rochester is jumping right back in and hosting its second-annual winter event downtown. Called "No Ordinary Sales," the event will have over 150 merchants taking part on Friday

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—First Class Valet, Inc.

and Saturday, Jan. 29 and 30.

Merchants will be able to purchase ice sculptures to place in front of their businesses during the sale. They can even be designed to their specifications with a store logo or anything else they'd like, according to Kristi Trevarrow, director of community relations for the Downtown Development Authority.

"The ice sculpture company does a really nice job and this is going to be great event," Trevarrow said. "People will be able to come to Rochester on those two days and see something interesting and different going on at all of the stores."



STAFF PHOTO BY LAURENCE D. McKEE

It's a deal: Larry Abitheira (left) of Sterling Heights hopes for snow this winter, at least enough snow to run the snowmobile he just purchased from Carl Coker, manager of King Brothers in Oxford.

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