

Resorts cater to skiers, non-skiers alike

The earliest snowfalls in memory hit northern Michigan this fall, and skiers hope that's a sign of good things to come as they head to the slopes to try out new equipment, runs and improvements reported by more than two-thirds of the state's 41 public ski areas, reports AAA Michigan.

The National Weather Service predicts this winter will be similar to last year, with normal or above-normal snowfall. That's good news for downhill and cross-country enthusiasts, who enjoyed one of the best snow seasons in years in 2000-2001 season. Many ski resorts also reported great seasons at the cash register, and this season 28 are responding with many improvements.

In addition, one west Michigan ski area has reopened, while two have closed. More fun for the fast-growing snowboarding segment has been added to 16 resorts, while major improvements from runs and snowmaking to new base facilities have been announced by the rest. Nearly all also offer senior citizen discounts - some for people as young as 50 - to lure skiers back to the slopes.

In west Michigan, Sugar Loaf, near Cedar, is reopening under new management. Children younger than 6

sleep and ski free, and people 65 and older ski free. Unlimited-use ski passes also are available along with snow tubing and cross-country ski trails. Near Mount Holiday, near Traverse City, has closed. Near Farwell, Silver Ridge's ski slopes are closed, but its restaurant remains open.

At Boyne Mountain, completion of the new multi-million-dollar Mountain Grand Lodge has been pushed back to 2005, but it expects to have several new slope-side log cabin condos available to rent this season. The terrain park has been doubled in size and the tubing park relocated to a gentler slope, served by a rope tow. Boyne also has increased snowmaking capability.

Sister resort Boyne Highlands, near Harbor Springs, is offering new trailside condos for rent plus guided cross-country and snowshoe tours customized to experience levels, with lunch included. Nordic trails are now groomed for classic and skate skiing. Crystal Mountain, near Thompsonville, announced a 10-year plan to build a three-story main lodge, add a dozen ski slopes and additional lodging along with a Nordic center and golf course.

Crystal has also expanded its snowmaking, light-

ed two more slopes for night skiing (now 27 of 34 slopes) and improved lighting on two more.

Nub's Nob, near Harbor Springs, added a double-black-diamond, gladed run that's the resort's steepest, along with one beginner trail. Additional snowmaking, another groomer and high-performance demo skis were added to rentals along with women-specific boots and step-in snowboards.

Shanty Creek, near Bellaire, doubled the amount of snowboard rental equipment, added performance ski rentals and announced a learn-to-snowboard program for children 6-12 years old. Caberfae, near Cadillac, moved 14,000 cubic yards of earth to add 10 vertical feet to North Peak, widened other runs 33 to 50 percent, increased snowmaking capability and added to its ski rentals.

The Homestead, near Glen Arbor, replaced one-third of its ski rental. Parents can watch kids learn through picture windows at the Snowdrop Observatory at the beginner-only area. Hickory Hills, near Traverse City, increased snowmaking coverage 20 percent.

In northeast Michigan, Skyline, near Grayling, built a ski and snowboard terrain park, added three cross-country ski trails on its golf course and added snowmobile parking. Treetops Resort, near Gaylord, doubled its snowmaking capability, built a new tubing-run warming hut, added more rental snowboards and skis and bought a terrain park groomer. Snow-sake, near Harrison, added to its snowboard rentals, including some with step-in bindings.

Hanson Hills, near Grayling, is adding a tubing hill served by a rope tow, and Apple Mountain, near Freeland, increased shaped ski rentals by 25 percent.

Southwest Michigan's Bittersweet, near Otsego, doubled the length of its terrain park served by its own triple chair lift. It increased snowmaking capability and new rentals include snowboards with step-in bindings. Cannonsburg, near Cannonsburg, added ski rentals, and Swiss Valley, near Jones, expanded its terrain park, improved snowmaking and rental equipment and bought a groomer. Timber Ridge, near Gobles, improved its



snowmaking capability, added a tubing hill and expanded its terrain park.

In southeast Michigan, Alpine Valley, near Millford, increased its snowmaking capacity. Mount Brighton, near Brighton, bought 300 step-in rental snowboards along with shaped skis and boots. It enlarged the half-pipe and upped snowmaking capability 15 percent. Mount Holly, near Holly, increased its snowmaking capability and snowboard rental fleet 20 percent and reduced its snowboard rental rate by \$10. Pine Knob, near Clarkston, added 10 percent more snowmaking capability, doubled dining area seating and bought a snowboard park groomer.

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