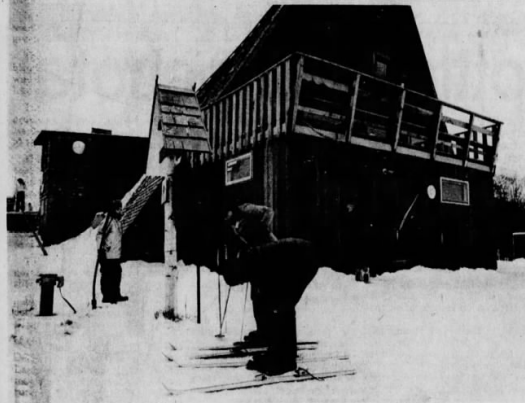


Local/area news



Times photo by Jackie Lorentz
(Foreground) Waldemar Oelschlaeger, Toronto, Ont., Can., helps his wife, Bev, with her ski boot in front of the lodge at Eagle Mountain, near Grey Eagle.

Running ski resort is 'all in the family'

By DAVE DALEY
Times Staff Writer

GREY EAGLE—Running the Eagle Mountain ski resort has become a family and neighborhood affair for owners Bob and Ursula Lanners.

The Lanners' two children help fit weekend skiers with the right ski shoes and wait on customers in the chalet's dining room. Neighbors lend a hand in early winter when the Lanners begin preparing the slopes for the ski season.

"There's never any exchange of money," Bob Lanners said last week. "In the summer we help the neighbors bale hay and in the winter they help us out. It's just being neighborly."

Neighborly is a good way of describing Lanners. A tall, lanky man with a ready smile, the 38-year-old Lanners and his wife Ursula have been operating the resort since 1972.

Eagle Mountain, located on 168 acres of wooded hills halfway between Grey Eagle and Upsala, has had an up and down five years, Lanners says.

"Our first year, if we had five skiers here on a Sunday, that was a lot," Lanners. "And Sunday was our biggest day," he added with a laugh and shake of his head.

This year, while not as bad, hasn't been good, Lanners admits. "I don't think we've had a hundred people skiing since Thanksgiving. We should have 50 people a day."

"Bad weather has been one factor. If it's too cold, you can have beautiful skiing conditions but nobody'll ski," he said. "And if it gets too warm, the snow thaws and you're out of business by February."

Despite the gambling nature it takes to run a ski resort, the Lanners plan to stay on. They've

made their home next to the chalet and half a mile from Mound Lake and both love the country after spending a number of years in the Twin Cities.

Both were raised on farms—she in Germany and he near Marshall—and have accumulated two dogs, four head of Angus cattle, two horses, some chickens and wild turkeys in their five years at the Eagle Mountain resort.

Most of the improvements at the resort have been made by the Lanners themselves. "We're trying to do as much as we can ourselves to keep the low rates as reasonable as possible," Lanners said.

The resort had two ski runs when the Lanners first took over. The couple added eight more, plus a 10 kilometer cross-country route and slope for snow tubing.

The resort straddles an 800-acre wildlife management area on the east and another 700-acres of state land to the west, Lanners said, making it perfect for winter recreational use.

"We're trying to make this a family place, a place parents can send their kids out to without worrying about them," he added. "Mr. and Mrs. can come out and they can go snow tubing if they don't want to go skiing."

Eagle Mountain is ideal for the beginning skier, Lanners says. "Our hills aren't that big and we aren't crowded—that's the main thing. A beginning skier has no control and needs a lot of room," Lanners said.

"With a laugh and a smile Lanners added, "Not too many skiers on the slopes—that's good for the beginner but bad for us."

Eagle Mountain almost went under in late October last year when the Lanners' uninsured pole barn burned to the ground—and

'Along the Way'

with it new snow-making machines, two snow grooming tractors, two snowmobiles, 150 rental skis and a variety of handtools.

"That really put us on the rocks," Lanners recalled. But with the help of neighbors, the Upsala Lions Club and the Grey Eagles Jaycees, the Lanners were able to bounce back.

They bought a used snow cat for \$10,000 ("A new one would sure warp the hell out of a \$50,000 bill," Lanners said) and just generally made do with what they had.

A new barn was built, partly with lumber sawed from red oak the Lanners chopped off the hills to make new ski trails and slopes. Other trees Bob Lanners chopped and split and sold for firewood.

Ursula was born in the Sudetenland and met Lanners while he was serving overseas in the Army. A professional photographer, she still takes pictures at weddings and other events in the area to supplement the income they make from the resort.

"After eight years in the Twin Cities we decided to move out into the country—and we've been starving ever since," Ursula says with a good-natured laugh. But she adds seriously, "You have to be a special type of person to make it out in the country. You have to be very flexible."

Most of the resort's skiers come from within a 50-mile radius of Eagle Mountain, Lanners said. The resort also caters to church groups and saddle clubs and has a bunkhouse for overnight guests.

"And if that's not enough room, we just move all the tables and chairs back in the dining room and let them lay down their sleeping bags in the chalet," Lanners said.