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Fire loss ignites good neighborliness

Upsala, Minn.
Ursula and Bob Lanners are tall, strong and used to hard work. They have Anita, 13, and Rodney, 12, who help them. The Upsala Lions Club and the Grey Eagles Jaycees, plus a lot of good neighbors, help too.

So it appears that the Lanners' Eagle Mountain Ski Area (downhill and cross-country, also tubing and camping or bunking in the chalet) among the fields and wooded hills 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis will recover from a heavy blow — an uninsured barn fire that wiped out so much on Oct. 24.

In the barn were new snow-making fans, two snow grooming tractors, two snowmobiles, 150 rental skis, footlockers of ski clothing, electrical transformers, a lot of hand tools — all vital to a functioning downhill ski area.

The Lanners were a badly shaken family. They had bought the struggling young area four years before, in the fall of 1972, and had been pouring work and money into it ever since.

Bob had met Ursula in Kaiserslautern, southwest Germany. He was there in the army postal service during the Kennedy administration.

She had been brought up on a farm. Bob's father had done farming and contracting around Marshall, Minn. Bob was a pre-army postal worker. A saver.

Ursula had completed a three-year apprenticeship in photography. She was a practicing photographer.

Back here in Bloomington, she did custom photo-finishing while Bob worked part time for the Postal Service and was second-shift "lead man" in a plastics factory.

They made enough money to invest in property. They owned 12 properties — houses in the cities, an apartment building and a farm.

Still, they yearned for the country life. Then they saw a want-ad. "Ski area for sale."

Eagle Mountain. Bob had skied at Garmisch. They drove up for a look. The maples were at the height of their autumn color, the hills gorgeous. The Lanners sold some property, bought the ski area for $40,000 from two owners who had been having partnership problems.

It was gangbusters. They acquired chickens, geese, ducks, a

Ben Kern
your weekend

Bob Lanners

Ursula Lanners

cow, beef cattle, three horses. They liked to ride. They added 100 more acres to the 80 they bought with the ski area.

There was a nice ready-built ski chalet. Keeping it open through summer for the customers, they platted out a campground with electric hookups, cleared trails through the woods, got saddle clubs to come in. Ursula rode guide for the clubs beside keeping a garden, doing candid photos at weddings, running the chalet kitchen with high school help, keeping books, and collaborating with Bob on the area planning.

They spent money. Over four years of ski area ownership Bob sold property each year to pay for improvements, added land, fixtures, equipment — some of it now fire-melted junk.

Fortunately a newly acquired Pomalift, from Inver Hills, had already been aligned and set in concrete. A rollicking five ropes feed into the Poma over dippy hills running this way and that, lending a lot of charm to 200 vertical feet. There are six miles of cross-country trails, two scenic rest areas, one overlooking 25 miles of long-view, and wildlife management land stretching in two directions.

Attendance has been rising (about 3,000 last season). Since the fire neighbors have been coming forward with hand tools.

German lineage is abundant here. New Munich is 15 miles south.

Back in the chalet two skiers ordered "some of that old kraut beer" and talked in German about a girl across the room and whether they should ask her to ski.

Ursula said, "Danke," when they paid. "I could see them trying to remember what they had said about the girl . . . It was fun."

Cross-Country Ski Clinics 7 p.m. Monday at **Golden Valley Community Library,** 830 Winnetka Av. N., and 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at **Southdale-Hennepin Area Library,** 7001 York Av. S., Edina.

The Minneapolis Municipal Hiking Club's **Christmas Party** will be 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Prudential Building, Penn Av. and Wayzata Blvd. Music by the Svenskarnesdag Youth Choir, desserts from foreign lands, and a visit from St. Nick. Reservations (adults $1.35, children free) to Minneapolis Park Board office by Thursday noon.

The **Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis** presents Walter Breckenridge, director emeritus of the Bell Museum, who will show four films ("Bemix Wasp and Ant Lion," "Nettles and Porcupine Grass," "Identifying Major Bird Groups" and "Territory Defense in Birds") in a **"Three B's — Birds, Bugs and Botany"** program 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Heritage Hall, 300 Nicollet Mall. Public invited.

Breckenridge will lead a free illustrated discussion on waterfowl and other birds using the Mississippi River as a migratory route, 2 p.m. Saturday at the **Walker Art Center,** as part of its "The River: Images of the Mississippi" exhibition . . . At 8 p.m. Wednesday Alfred Frankenstein, art critic, will give an illustrated lecture on **major themes in American landscape painting ($1).**

Wood Lake Nature Center, 735 Lake Shore Dr., Richfield: **Astronomy Watch** 8 p.m. Wednesday. Look at the sky through our 10-inch telescope; if it's cloudy we'll have some astronomy inside.

Pike Island Nature Center, Fort Snelling State Park: Make **Holiday Decorations** using natural materials 2-4 p.m. today . . . **Snowshoeing** film, two snowshoe demonstrations (care and emergency construction) 2-4 p.m. Saturday and next Sunday.

Lowry Nature Center, Carver Park Reserve west of Victoria: **Winter Survival Techniques** 1:30 or 3 p.m. today and Saturday .

Hyland Nature Center, 8737 E. Bush Lake Rd., Bloomington: **Cold Weather Camping,** "how to" and basic equipment 1:30 p.m. today. . . . **Natural Christmas Ornaments** workshop 1-3 p.m. Tuesday and Dec. 14. . . . **Square Dance,** learn calls and steps, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday ($1.50).

Whitney Eastman Nature Center, County Rd. 121 north of Hwy. 152, then east on Elm Creek Rd.: **Bird Nest Hunt** 3 p.m. today.

Sportsman's calendar

Park Gun Club: Practice and merchandise shoot, today, 1 p.m. at club range' Hwys. 6 and 12, west of Long Lake.

Big Thunder Gun Club: Open for trap, skeet, rifle, pistol, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. today and Saturday, noon until dark weekdays, closed Fridays; Bethel, Minn. Private shooting lessons by appointment.

Minnetonka Game and Fish Club: Open trap, skeet, rifle shooting, 1 to 5 p.m. today, 9 miles northeast of Elk River, Minn. on County Rd. 70.

Tri County Sportsman's Club: Public trapshooting on lighted trap fields 6 to 10 p.m. Wednesday, north on Hwy. 35W to Lake Dr., right to Flowerfield Rd., right to American Legion Post 566. Turkey shoot today, 12 to 6 p.m.

Ron

Five decades ago when John Vados was an impressionable 10-year-old from Nordeast Minneapolis seeking the good life, a fishing buddy offered some free advice.

Since fishing and hunting and lollygagging on the river bottoms was so much fun, it just figured that fetching and selling minnows to fishermen had to be one of the most lucrative businesses any fella could want.

Now after 40 years of sloshing around in minnow ponds, counting nightcrawlers and selling fish hooks and sinkers, John Vados knows full well that the bait dealer's business . . . well, lucrative it isn't.

"Oh, I've made a good living. But after 40 years I should know enough to have a dollar. I just bought a new car. Customers come in, look at the price and figure I make too much money. But they don't know that phone rings all night, and on weekends they're going north while I've got to stay here."

The John Vados Bait Company—one of the oldest in the state—occupies an obscure stretch of Hwy. 65 in Spring Lake Park.

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