

## □ Slopes/Couple to open snow ski area near Springfield

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"bunny slopes" for beginners, while the other six hills will be of intermediate difficulty.

The two bunny slopes — dubbed "Mom's Way" and "Easy Way" — will be what are known as green slopes, the Durbins said.

Green slopes are the easiest to ski, they explained. Blue slopes are moderately difficult, while black slopes are the most difficult.

Their steepest slope — called "Go For It" — will be a black slope, the Durbins said.

The others will be blue, or intermediate, slopes. Only one of those — "Slippery Rock" — has been named.

The longest hill will be a third of a mile, Becki Durbin said. The slopes will have a vertical drop of about 200 feet.

■ The Durbins plan to install a 300-foot tow rope for the two bunny slopes.

A 600-foot chair lift will carry skiers to the top of the other slopes. The chair lift will go over the bluff for which the ski area is named.

■ Although the hills are now covered with rocks, they will be covered with snow this winter.

The Durbins will install a snow-making machine to pick up where Mother Nature leaves off. The machine shoots compressed air and water into the air. The temperature freezes the mixture, which then falls to the ground as snow, they said.

The ideal temperature for making snow is 28 degrees Fahrenheit, Becki Durbin said. But temperatures in the 30s will suffice.

The Durbins hope to keep the ski area open for a 60- to 80-day season while temperatures are cold

enough to maintain the manufactured snow.

■ The ski lodge at the foot of the slopes will contain an equipment rental area, a restaurant and bar, a pro shop, offices and a first-aid station.

■ The ski area will employ as many as 50 full-time and part-time workers, the Durbins said.

■ The slopes will be open daily from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. The hills will be lighted for night skiing, the Durbins said.

Skiers will pay \$25 per day to rent skis, boots and poles and purchase a ticket for the chair lift, they said. Skiers with their own equipment will only have to purchase a lift ticket.

All skiers need to bring are warm clothes, Becki Durbin said.

■ The ski area now fills only about 17 of the 120 acres. The Durbins plan to expand in the future, adding more slopes, a ski racing area and possibly another chair lift.

The Durbins, who own a contracting company and several other businesses, got into the ski business in a roundabout way.

A few years back, Becki Durbin's parents gave the couple a trip for Christmas — to wherever they wanted to go. After much discussion, they decided on a snow skiing trip.

But they had never been snow skiing. So rather than look foolish when they arrived on the slopes in Colorado, the Durbins headed to a ski area near St. Louis for skiing lessons.

"I think from that day on, Bill decided that's what he wanted — a ski slope of his own," Becki Durbin explained. "It just fascinated him."

There are three other ski areas in

Missouri: at Eureka, southwest of St. Louis; at Weston, northwest of Kansas City; and at Kirksville, said Steve Kappler, public relations manager for the state Division of Tourism.

In addition, a former ski area near Ironton in southeast Missouri may reopen, he said.

"The ones that are in operation generally do pretty well," Kappler said. "They don't draw people from far, far away. They primarily take advantage of giving people an opportunity to learn to ski or brush up on their skills."

That's how the Durbins became interested in skiing, and that's what they hope to offer to Ozarkers — those who make annual skiing pilgrimages to other areas and those who just want to have fun.

"They can come here and learn and get comfortable on skis so they don't have to waste a lot of time on the beginner slopes," Becki Durbin explained. "And you can get rusty when you haven't skied for six or seven months."

The Durbins dismiss questions about locating their ski resort north of Springfield, rather than nearer the Branson tourist area to the south.

They list advantages they see in their location, such as proximity to Interstate 44 and access from a four-lane state highway.

The ski area will operate during the winter season and attract local people as well as tourists, Bill Durbin said.

"We'll take up where the tourist season leaves off," he said.

In addition, the couple also may adapt the ski area for summer use.