

Alpine Ski Resort Grew From Warren Cow Pasture



Skiers Line Up At Tow at Alpine Resort

BY BILL THOMAS
Assistant Travel Editor

Lester Houston is a big man with a big hat and who thinks to match.

He has, among other things, turned a Warren County cow pasture into what may become a multi-million-dollar resort. In fact, it is set for completion by late this year or early 1966, and at the past Mr. Houston is keeping it well under his target date.

The Alpine Ski Resort of Morrow four years ago was just a dream in the mind of Lester Houston. But not any more. Last year, close to a quarter million people filed into that dream... as customers at Alpine Resort.

THE SKI SLOPES were installed first, along with a swanky lodge that would match up with ski lodges anywhere in the country. Skiing was a novelty in southwest Ohio and it went over big.

"We had 'em backed up half way to Cincinnati," said Mr. Houston, who talks as much like a Texas as anybody in Ohio, but claims he's a native Kentuckian. "You never saw traffic like we had here last winter. People from all over came here to ski... we just couldn't take care of all of them."

But this year, Lester Houston hopes to take care of more of them. He has installed more rope tows and more ski slopes. The chair lift still will take the major portion of the skiers to the top of the 1800 foot slope, however.

A DOUBLE toboggan run has been installed and was set to begin operation in late October. It will run year-around on water and promises to be as great or greater an attraction as skiing.

Archery ranges have been installed and rifle ranges laid out for practice firing. Fishing holes have been stocked and will be ready this year of catch to test the skill of the best fishermen. Changing areas have already been designated, although it's still in the rough, and will be another year.

Plans call for installing first-class camping areas, however, in a large woods on the original 600 acres Lester Houston began with.

PRESENTLY, a blacktop strip is being constructed — one that will handle planes up to the size of a DC-3 and other twin-engine aircraft. Sports car and stock car race tracks, all shagopped, are also presently under construction. Riding stables have been installed and in operation all summer and a stable of 30 horses tops. Riding carts have already been leased.

A giant swimming pool that will be under within the next year awaits the winter swimmer, as well as the summer one.

An ice skating rink will be built this year, as well as a 160-foot model. Plans call for the construction of 20 "A-frame" type cabins that will sleep eight persons each.

"WE'VE ALREADY made arrangements for those,

said Mr. Houston. "We expect construction to begin any day now. Switch Boxes is going to put them up for us, probably at the rate of one per day."

Another 40 cabins will be constructed this year. An 18-hole golf course has been constructed, but golf players were not encouraged until this year.

"We want the grass to get a good start," said Mr. Houston. "Right now, it's growing fine, but we want to give it a good start before getting too many players out there."

The dining room and dance floor in the lodge will accommodate several hundred persons... and until lodging is available on the grounds, arrangements have been made with motels in the area, including the Congress Inn at the intersection of Ohio 43 and Interstate 75.

MR. HOUSTON also has an interest in that and several other motels in the area. He figures he has nearly a million dollars tied up in the operation to date and will spend at least two million more before the resort is completed.

"You've got to have something worthwhile if you're going to attract tourists," he said. "And I believe we have something here worthwhile for all ages."

Last year Alpine Resort drew crowds from as far away as Louisville, Lexington, Cincinnati, Athens, Portsmouth, Indianapolis, Toledo, Columbus and Dayton. And on one weekend, they had more than 3000 college student skiers booked.

"IT'S INDUSTRY the most progressive thing that's happened in Southwest Ohio," said one Morrow citizen. "We just think it's wonderful. The resort sprang

from a progressive idea by a progressive man.

Lester Houston is 54 now, graying, wrinkled, but with a youthful glint in his eyes. He's thinking, always thinking, and planning.

He drove up and designed all the plans for the resort, wrote up the specifications for the lodge, for the chair lift and the rope tows. Yet he only has a high school education.

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