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Kansas Mound Eyed for, of All Things — a Ski Resort

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LAWRENCE — Ski resorts and Kansas — two things that seem to go together about as well as water skiing and the Sahara Desert.

But businessmen from, of all places, Colorado say they want to turn their backs on the Rockies and open a ski resort on a bump in the Kansas landscape four miles southeast of Lawrence.

Called Mount Blue by local residents and Blue Mound on topographical maps, the rounded, tree-covered hill soars 230 feet over the surrounding farms.

Ski resorts in Colorado dot snow-covered mountains that soar as high as 14,000 feet above sea level.

"When I mention to Colorado people that we're going to start a ski area, they think we're out of our minds," said Marcus McCloud, a Denver resident who plans to move to Lawrence to become the resort's advertising and marketing director.

The group, called the Kansas City Ski Co., has applied for a use permit with the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Commission and is working on lining up investors, McCloud said. The company is

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headed by two men described by McCloud as the managers of a major Colorado ski resort.

They hope to open their first 110-day skiing season on Dec. 10, he said.

And, even though Kansas lacks the mountains and the snowfall of Colorado, the company is luring investors into the business by

promising to draw crowds of frustrated skiers from Kansas City and the neighboring University of Kansas, McCloud said.

The company also hopes to offer an alternative "to families that aren't necessarily ready to drop \$2,000 to \$3,000 in a weekend just to find out that they don't like skiing," he said.

If the resort opens, it will be the only ski area operating in the Sunflower State. But, its opening would not mark the first time entrepreneurs have tried to turn Mount Blue into a ski area.

More than 20 years ago, the hill was transformed into the "Mont Bleu" ski area complete with a rope tow, home-made snowmaking machines and a ramshackle, wooden ski lodge. It closed in the early 1960s.

The resort drew so few people that its employees used to spend many of their shifts skiing instead of working, said James Church, who worked at the resort when he

was a teenager. Church, a 30-year-old house painter, lives with his wife and two children in a mobile home next to the old lodge.

The Colorado group plans to keep the old name (spelled "Mt. Bleu" this time), McCloud said.

The company will cope with the region's sparse 15- to 18-inch average snowfall with a battery of snow-making machines that will pull water from the nearby Wakarusa River, McCloud said.

The planning commission will meet June 25 in Lawrence to review the company's application.