

Sledding new winter activity at Kiwanis Park community hill

HARBOR SPRINGS — The young boy stepped into his skis and then shoved off from the biggest hill in a city renowned for its ski resorts.

The run down was fun and fast, but when he reached the bottom he turned around, sighed, took off his skis and made the long climb back to the top.

"It's a nice run down," he said of the ski hill in Harbor Springs' Kiwanis Park, "but it sure is a long walk back up."

It's made even longer by the fact that suspended down the slope is a tow rope, but this year, for the first time, the city of Harbor Springs decided not to operate its community ski hill.

There were a variety of reasons that led to the decision. The hill, which doesn't have snowmaking equipment, hasn't been operated on a regular basis the past three years due to lack of natural snow.

"Then there is the fact that the

'VENTURE KIDVENTURES

Jim DuFresne



tow ropes at Nubs Knob and Boyne Highlands are free," said city manager Fred Geuder of the two ski resorts right outside Harbor Springs.

Finally there was the problem with liability insurance. Geuder found that for every dollar the hill took in from rental equipment and the annual passes, half of it was spent for insurance.

"It was a hard decision to make, but we're just not in the ski business," said the city manager. "Besides, this was always just a local hill. We never did advertise it very much."

All right, the state lost a charming little ski hill, where over the years thousands of children mastered the snowplow because it cost

so little to enjoy.

But boy, did we gain a great sled run.

And a scenic one as well. Kiwanis Park is the highest point in town, and from the top of the hill you gaze down at Harbor Springs below, or look at rolling hills and ridges off in the distance.

Then you grab your sled and take on the long run and the moguls, which have been challenging skiers since the park opened 20 years ago.

The hill is equipped with lights, and the park features a small but pleasant warming lodge complete with picnic tables, bathrooms and a free standing fireplace in the middle.

Geuder said the city still plans to open the lodge and operate the lights to turn night skiing into night sledding.

"We hope the park gets just as much use as a sledding hill as it did as ski hill," said Geuder.