

Resorts think of new ways to lure visitors

By Kathleen Lincove
The Grand Rapids Press

When it comes to recreation, consumers want their travel experience like their detergent: new and improved, convenient to use, and at a good price. And West Michigan ski resorts are working hard to entice winter travelers to try their product.

There's something new about every resort.

Skiers at Shanty Creek-Schuss Mountain Resort at Manistowishaug no longer have to go all the way to the lodge for a pick-me-up snack. There's a new outdoor snack bar right at the top of the slope.

The resort also posted new signs on all trails, marking the length and degree of difficulty. And they've installed a new Snowmax Snow Indicator, the snow-making equipment made by Kodak and used at the Winter Olympics in Calgary.

"It will enable us to make snow at higher temperatures, and it produces a fluffier, drier snow," said Craig Lesinski, director of marketing.

Resorts are spicing up their offerings with race leagues, snowboarding and telemarking, a ski event which combines Alpine and Nordic skills.

Shanty Creek-Schuss Mountain Resort will sponsor a free telemarking clinic Dec. 10 and will start a Tuesday night Alpine race league in January.

Timber Ridge Resort near Gable has found racing leagues — for men and women over 21 — very popular.

"When you're in Southwest Michigan, you're limited in what you can do on a hill, and it adds some excitement," said Lewis Buell, director of marketing and ski shop manager at Timber Ridge.

"If you can ski, you can compete

"In the Midwest, skiing is a very social thing. The night life and the people they meet is very important."

—Boyer Mountain's Stephen Kircher

on a race team. You don't have to look like the guys on TV."

Buell said that leagues, which meet on Monday and Thursday nights, are set up in three divisions, depending upon ability. Scoring is a team effort.

Also new this year at Timber Ridge — along with lights, more snow-making equipment and a re-designed ski run — is a Sunday race series. The race series allows skiers of all ages to accumulate points toward trophies and prizes, including season passes and ski equipment.

Racing is also big at Caberfee near Cadillac, where two giant slalom races are scheduled. The Caberfee Open Ski Race will be Mar. 5 and the Gold Cup Race is set for Mar. 12.

For the less competitive, there's an easy giant slalom race for couples over age 21 on Feb. 11 called the Sweetheart Race. The resort also will sponsor a Women's Ski seminar Jan. 26-27, patterned after similar seminars in California.

"This will teach women to ski a little more aggressively," said Carl Potter, general manager at Caberfee. "They'll be taught by qualified women ski instructors and the seminar will include ski clinics, a fitness exercise program and a nutritional program."

The ski racing program at Cannonburg north of Grand Rapids is already four years old. Andy Shape, 15, an East Grand Rapids teen on the Cannonburg Race

Team, has qualified to go to an Olympic training camp in Colorado. This week the rest of the team is at a Thanksgiving training camp in Crested Butte, Colo., southwest of Denver.

"Andy's the first one to come out of our program to develop at national caliber," said Rick Vontogen, Cannonburg ski school director.

"Our primary goals are safety, fun and learning. But we want to get our athletes into as many national point competitions as we can so they can progress up the ladder."

You don't have to have Olympic aspirations to ski Cannonburg because there's something for everyone.

The resort will open a new intermediate level slope for racers and will accommodate snowboarders this season. There's adaptive skiing for the handicapped, with sit-skis for those who use wheelchairs and three-tracks for those with one leg.

The resort also hosts a winter Special Olympics for mentally handicapped skiers.

And back by popular demand is the Silverstreak program, started last year with skiers over age 50. "We have 80 members and it's growing every day," said Vontogen.

The resort also will offer Ladies' Day on Wednesdays, offering free day care, a buffet lunch, a lesson and lift ticket for one package

price.

At Boyne Mountain and Boyne Highlands, staffers observed that skiers wanted more upscale accommodations and exciting night life in addition to the skiing.

So they've renovated the Snowflake Lounge and booked some entertainment. They've also added more suites to accommodate families and those who want roomier digs.

"In the Midwest, skiing is a very social thing. The night life and the people they meet is very important," said Stephen Kircher, special projects director at Boyne Mountain.

For more convenient skiing, the resort also plans to put in a four-passenger, high-speed, quad detachable lift system, which will get people back up the hill about three times faster, Kircher said.

To attract more non-skiers and expand its winter season, the Grand Traverse Resort in Traverse City has spent nearly \$500,000 on lights, decorations, entertainment and a dinner theatre production, "Celebrate Me Home," during December.

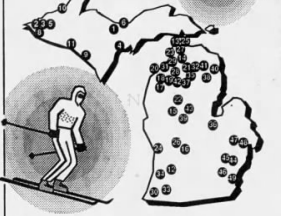
The "Northwoods Fantasy Holiday" includes animated forest animals in the lobby, storytelling for kids, stained glass ornament workshops for all guests, and Saturday night productions of a holiday musical, "Celebrate Me Home."

Plenty of other special events weekends are planned too, said Kelli Munro, assistant marketing director at Grand Traverse.

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IT'S SKI TIME IN MICHIGAN



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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Al Quail, Ishpeming | 26. Potoski, Potoski |
| 2. Big Powderhorn, Bessemer | 27. Potoski, Potoski |
| 3. BlackJack, Bessemer | 28. Schuss Mt., Manistowishaug |
| 4. Chaudron, Gladstone | 29. Shanty Creek, Ionia |
| 5. Indianhead Mt., Wakefield | 30. Ski World, Buchanan |
| 6. Marquette Mt., Marquette | 31. Sugar Loaf, Gable |
| 7. Mount Hiley, Hancock | 32. Sylvan Resort, Gaylord |
| 8. Mt. Zion, Iron Mt. | 33. Tanglefoot, Gaylord |
| 9. Potoski, Potoski | |
| 10. Potoski, Potoski | |
| 11. Ski World, Buchanan | |
| 12. Silverstreak, Gaylord | |
| 13. Boyne Highlands, Harbor Springs | |
| 14. Boyne Mt., Boyne Falls | |
| 15. Caberfee, Cadillac | |
| 16. Cannonburg, Belmont | |
| 17. Crystal Mt., Thompsonville | |
| 18. Hickory Hills, Traverse City | |
| 19. Mt. Holiday, Traverse City | |
| 20. The Homestead, Glen Arbor | |
| 21. Midway, Midway | |
| 22. Minnow Lake, Lake City | |
| 23. Mt. McDevitt, Charlevoix | |
| 24. Mulligan's Hollow, Grand Haven | |
| 25. Nub's Nob, Harbor Springs | |
| 26. Potoski, Potoski | |
| 27. Potoski, Potoski | |
| 28. Schuss Mt., Manistowishaug | |
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BOOTH NEWS SERVICE CHAPMAN

Whatever you look for in skiing, a Michigan resort has it

By D.J. Herda

Skiing the Midwest is a real good news/bad news proposition.

The bad news is that, in order to enjoy skiing at its best, one must be willing to risk a few inconveniences (early rains, late rains, thermometers bottomed out at 40 below, bare spots the size of Soldier's Field, lift lines from here to Potoski...)

On the flip side, you're less than an hour's drive and a 20-dollar bill from some of the best downhill skiing in the Midwest.

So here are my picks for top ski areas within a day's drive of Grand Rapids. Keep warm. Stay dry. And happy skiing!

Most scenic view

Marquette Mountain, P.O. Box 487, Marquette, Mich. 49853, (800) 225-1155.

There's no skiing right to the door of your rented chalet at this day area, the closest lodging is in Marquette. But you'll have a magnificent view of your digs and the rest of the city from the mountain's summit. The view to the north is a gorgeous panorama of Marquette Harbor and the waters of Lake Superior.

All this scenery is courtesy of Marquette Mountain, parts of which are so steep, the U.S. Olympic Luge Team once accessed two of its runs for a permanent practice site.

What that means for the serious skier is a 600-foot vertical drop and some of the most challenging skiing around. Marquette Mountain boasts the longest, steepest constant-grade run in the Midwest at 440 feet, a genuine Rockies-style slope sure to test the mettle of the most jaded Midwesterners.

The runs are served by two double chairs, a T-bar and a rope tow which combine to keep skiers out of the lift lines and on the slopes on all but the busiest holiday weekends.

Of the area's 16 runs, Ridge is the longest and one of the most popular at nearly 1 1/2 miles. But there are plenty of novice and intermediate runs, too, so take your pick.

Food is typical ski-area fare in the cafeteria, and a full-service bar features entertainment on weekends. For more adventurous dining, check out Clark's Landing on U.S. 41 for excellent seafood and steaks.

Toughest run

Sugar Loaf, Route 1, Cedar, Mich. 49821, 229-5461.

Awful-Awful is an appropriately named run that has earned the dubious distinction as the toughest in the Midwest.

Thankfully, it is but one of 22 runs accessed by a J-bar and five chairs, including a triple on the front side. There are six novice runs (even a super-mellow powder puff called Nice-Nice, what else?), nine intermediate and seven advanced, many boasting spectacular views of Lake Michigan and both Marquette Islands.

Sugar and Spice, one of the area's most popular intermediate runs (lighted for night skiing), is a long, rambling cruiser overlooking Lime Lake, named for its green limestone-encrusted bottom. It's a popular stopover for skiers with cameras and for the white-tail deer that regularly drop by to drink.

Sugarloaf features excellent snow-making capacity, and offers overnight guests 150 hotel rooms plus two- and four-bedroom townhouse condominiums from which to choose.

In addition, the Four Seasons Restaurant, three lounges, game room, outdoor heated pool, four indoor tennis courts, daily NASTAR races and 32 miles of cross-country trails plus rentals and instruction.

The nearby Leelanau Country Inn on U.S. 22 specializes in homemade pasta, while the Bluebird and the Cove in nearby Leelanau serve fresh seafood at moderate prices.

Best snow

Nub's Nob, 4021 Nub's Nob Road, Harbor Springs, Mich. 49740, 526-2131.

Snow. That's the forte of this Michigan ski area. "We have only 10 hotel rooms on-site," according to area manager Jim Bartel, "so we don't have to worry about mints on the bed and water in the Jacuzzi. We just concentrate on making sure our skiers get to ski."

And they do so some of the finest snow this side of Toot.

James Dillworth, whose death two years ago left a void in the Midwest ski industry, designed snow-making systems for both Toots and Nub's Nob, which lays claim to the world's largest ski lift.

The Nub's runs are a comfortable mix of eight novice, seven intermediate and three advanced. Of the latter, two are rated among the top five advanced runs in the state — Chute and Scarface.

Chute starts out gently enough at the top, then the bottom drops out, and you get a feeling of what it's like free-falling from an airplane. Scarface offers a wildly changing fall line. Nub's Nob South, on the other hand, is a beginning skier's paradise — a novice-intermediate run served by that popular with the



mediate area with its own lift and long, graceful trails covered by 100 percent snow-making.

The base area consists of a huge rustic lodge with three massive stone fireplaces, all of which are kept well-stoked.

A recently expanded cafeteria offers everything from peanut butter sandwiches to a new broiled chicken creation sporting country-made buns — a step-and-a-half above typical ski area food. After skiing, stop by Nub's Pub, a cozy lounge with a panoramic view of the area. Also available: a general store, ski school, ski rental shop, free cross-country skiing and a well-stocked ski shop. Additional accommodations nearby.

Best family skiing

Crystal Mountain, Thompsonville, MI 49883, 378-2911.

Skiers ski Crystal for many reasons. Mom and Dad like the wide range of special packages, some of which include free skiing and lodging for kids under 12 when accompanied by skiing adults. College kids like the one-price night skiing (adult lift is \$5). Would-be Olympians enjoy aggressive NASTAR racing program (Crystal has ranked as high as 10th in the country in NASTAR racing). Seniors 55 and over ski Crystal for such special incentives as free lift tickets and lessons throughout February.

Crystal offers five novice, 10 intermediate and seven advanced runs served by one quad and three double chair lifts plus a single rope tow.

Buck is a long, steep cruiser that's popular with the locals, while Chere, located right outside the Hamlet condos, is a popular intermediate run lighted for night skiing and NASTAR racing.

More challenge? Check out The Gorge, a steep, short run packed with moguls that just keep getting bigger as the season progresses.

Crystal offers country club atmosphere. After skiing, take advantage of the area's ski shop, cafeteria, dining room, lounges, sleigh rides, and outdoor heated pool. Condos and additional accommodations are nearby.

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The topper to the season is the Small World World Cup for Mighty Mike skiers, Feb. 28, including slalom, giant slalom and a day full of fun.

Cannonburg's sprawling lodge houses a cafeteria, brown-bag area and lounge with live entertainment on weekends; a sit-down menu is served in the bar. Wednesday Ladies' Day when a \$11 lift ticket buys a lesson, buffet luncheon and free nursery service; due Thursday for men.

Not to be missed: College Weekend, Feb. 19-21, including a Saturday bikini competition and a Sunday freestyle mogul challenge.

Most picturesque resort

Boyne Mountain, Cherry Hill Road, Boyne Falls 49713, 548-2441.

The granddaddy of Midwestern skiing, 30-year-old Boyne is a scene straight from the pages of Heidi. When viewed from the mountain at dark, the miniature Alpine village looks as if it's strepped out of the Christmas window of Marshall Field's.

The first ski area in the United States to install a four-place chairlift over a decade ago, Boyne today boasts 11 lifts — six doubles, four quads, and a T-bar — to move skiers uphill at a remarkable clip while the area's 17 runs sprawled over 200 acres of skiable terrain keep them from bottlenecks at the bottom.

Don't get me wrong. Boyne can resemble a sardine can on peak holiday weekends. Luckily, more than 100 hotel rooms and even more condos and trailside lodges assure several thousand skiers a place to stay the night — providing they make reservations early.

After skiing, guests turn to the pool, Jacuzzi, exercise room and lounges (featuring live entertainment). The hotel dining room features excellent food. For a little different northwoods experience, try the cuisine at the Crow's Nest Restaurant in nearby Cross Village.

Après-ski activities include ice skating, ski movies, nightdive at Houseguest Race award presentations held each Thursday.

Most luxurious resort

The Homestead Resort, Wood Ridge Road, Glen Arbor, Mich. 49838, 334-5000.

You drive up to the resort and hand your skis to the host, then wander around the village, checking out the signs before stopping for a light breakfast of croissants and coffee. A quick yawn, a slow stretch, and it's back to the lift where your host meets you at the lift with your skis waxed and ready to go.

That's skiing The Homestead. A Robert Kurus resort community. The Homestead installed downhill skiing just three years ago. Today the resort boasts 11 runs from gentle Lamb's Quarters to expert Yellow Rock, plus some of the most spectacular scenery in the Midwest. You can count the whitecapped breakers churning up Lake Michigan as you begin your descent down White Trillium, a steep leap off a short shelf followed by a run-out to the lift just 300 feet from where the breakers pound home.

The Homestead's runs are served by three chairs (two triples and a double) plus a Pony for beginners. Maximum lift capacity is more than 2,000 an hour, although ticket sales are limited to 700 a day — a thoughtful touch more reminiscent of a private club than a public resort.

Access to the base lift is from the Village, a Vail-like cluster of quiet cedar buildings nestled around a series of man-made ponds groomed for skating. The buildings house numerous retail shops, Homestead ski school, rental shop, ski shop, several gourmet restaurants and bars, ticket sales hut, ski patrol shack, and a popular outdoor beer garden.

Between runs, take time to enjoy The Homestead's fantastic cuisine. The main winter restaurant is Andre's Hearthside, a cozy little eatery serving American fare, and The Inn, a three-story, luxuriously appointed brick structure with a magnificent view of Lake Michigan.

Lighter appetites retreat to Kit and Caboodle, a delicatessen. Top off a hard day's night at Whiskers, a cozy little bar located beneath Andre's, for libations and hearty sandwiches accompanied by live jazz and chamber music.

Although the outdoor pools and spas are closed during winter, you can take a dip in your private Jacuzzi (available in many rental units) or unwind beneath the stars with a brisk game of platform tennis.

The trailhead for hundreds of miles of the most scenic Nordic trails in Michigan (rentals and lessons available) starts a short walk from the village center.

Accommodations at The Homestead are strictly four-star. Various condominiums offer everything from fully stocked kitchens to sunken living rooms with dramatic fireplaces. Many overlook the slopes and offer a fantastic panorama of Lake Michigan, to boot.

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