

# Mount Notch opens ski runs

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AVON — Larry Notch Sr. realized an almost 30-year-old dream Saturday when Mount Notch Ski Area opened near Avon.

Since his high school days, Notch, 45, had envisioned skiers gliding down the slopes of family-owned land tucked in the wooded hills off Interstate 94.

The new ski area, owned by Notch and his brother, Leander, both of the Avon area, features five hills served by rope tows and a log lodge that rents ski equipment and serves fast food.

About 30 people showed up Saturday afternoon to try the three runs that were open.

"We expect to have all the runs open as soon as it's cold enough to make snow," said Larry Notch Jr., manager.

A grand opening is tentatively set for Feb. 4 and 5. "I think once the word gets out we'll have some pretty good crowds," he said.

It may not be the Alps, but Mike Konsor, 25, Avon, gave the slopes high

## Mount Notch — up close

**Location:** Take Avon exit off Interstate 94, go left across bridge and take left on frontage road to Stearns County Road 50, go right for 2½ miles. Signs also mark the way.

**Features:** Five ski runs (a bunny hill; beginners' hill and three intermediate to advanced hills) served by tow rope lifts. The runs are lighted at night.

**Lodge:** A 42-by-100-foot log lodge can accommodate 460 people.

**Food:** Lodge serves fast food such as hamburgers, hot dogs and French fries.

**Hours:** 4 to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, open to groups during the day by appointment; 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

**Fees:** Lift tickets — \$12 a day on weekends; \$8 week nights. Ski rental — \$8 a day on weekends, \$6 week nights.

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marks.

"It's Minnesota," he said. "You can't ask for anything bigger. We're victims of geography. We have to take what we can get."

## Notch/12A

Konsor taught skiing in the Italian Alps last year when he was in the Army.

This isn't the first time the area has been used for skiing, according to the elder Notch. About 40 years ago, Don Dean, who owned Royal Tire and Supply in St. Cloud, leased the area from his father, cut trails through the woods and installed one small rope tow, he said.

"He had it for about two years and a lot of people came to ski."

Notch and his brother began cutting trees in the early 1960s with the idea of developing a ski resort. "I think the area needs a place like this for winter vacations," he said.

Notch said he has been surprised at how helpful other Central Minnesota ski resorts have been. "It's not a cut-throat operation," he said. "They help us and we help them. It's creating more business."

They expect to draw skiers mainly from the St. Cloud area, but have had inquiries from around the state.

The closest ski operations are in Kimball and Alexandria, said Notch, who noted the area has three colleges and a substantial population.

"We had a whole bunch of monks out

here last night (for a sneak preview) and they just loved it," he said.

The Notches built the 42-by-100-foot lodge with timber cut from their land. Preserving the environment was a priority, Notch said. "We've blended this in with nature and wildlife as close as you can get it."

The operation now employs about 15. That is expected to double when the business is in full operation.

The Notches plan to add a ski school, a small skating pond and warming house and perhaps a T-bar lift next year.

"The five-year plan is to get a chair lift," said Larry Notch Jr. "It would have cost more to install a chair lift than to build the whole place," he said.

Future plans include adding more runs — for an eventual total of about 20. "We have a lot of room for expansion," said Larry Notch Jr., who has a degree in business management from St. John's University and has taught skiing at Powder Ridge near Kimball.

And there are plans to add lodging in the "far, far future," he said.

For now, they're content to be open. "It's a start," he said. "You have to start someplace."



Times photo by Mike Knaak

With the log lodge in the background, skiers glided up the tow rope on the first day of busi-

ness at Mount Notch Ski Area Saturday. The ski area is located 2½ miles south of Avon.

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