

Man's dream now pile of snow

By DOUG BARBER
Independent Staff Writer

SOUTH OF PLEASANTON—A ski slope in Nebraska, are you kidding?

You can't have a ski slope in Nebraska, it's too flat. Cross country skiing, maybe, but it's not possible to downhill ski in the middle of the Great American Desert.

Well, if that's true, don't tell John Weber.

Weber has officially opened his "Prairie Hills Golf and Ski Club" about five miles south of Pleasanton on Highway 10, and he says it must be possible to downhill ski in this state, because he's sure getting a lot of business.

"We're packed on the weekends," Weber said. "I wasn't surprised, but everybody else was. People are coming back, if they come out they don't just come out once. We have people coming back already from as far away as Lincoln and Fremont."

The ski slope is about 110-120 feet long, and Weber said it's "sloped the same degree as any intermediate course in Colorado." He added that his ultimate goal is to build the slope up to a bowl, with the center about 200 feet.

Weber also uses snow-making machines, because he said natural snow has a tendency to blow right off the slope, and man-made snow can be controlled and made to stick to the slope better.

With the opening of the Prairie Hills Golf and Ski Club the Sunday after Christmas, Weber culminated a few years of hard work and lean times, and many years of ideas and dreams.

Weber said he's wanted to be involved in a golf course "since I was a little kid, that's always been a dream of mine." He added that a visit twenty years ago to Nebraska to visit in-laws near Kearney convinced him that that area needed a good public golf course.

The Saginaw, Mich., native moved to Nebraska in 1975 to help with his wife's family farm after her mother's death.

That year, he said, there was a big snowfall by Thanksgiving, and sledding down some of the hills convinced him a ski slope would be possible to build.

"I've always been used to winter sports, and when I found places where you could sled for almost half a mile, I thought a ski slope could be built out of one of these places," he said.

Instead of pursuing one or the other enterprises, "I thought 'Heck, why not put the two together and have a cash flow the year round,'" Weber said. "I knew the ski hill would go, and I figured that could also support a golf course."

So he went to Jerry Lammers, a land leveler, and said "Jerry, here's a stupid idea. I wanna build a ski hill and golf course and I need you to haul the dirt."

Lammers agreed with the idea, and helped with the hill, without a guarantee he would ever be paid.

"Only two other people believed in me," Weber said, "Jerry Lammers and my banker, Ercil Phillips of the Pleasanton State Bank."

I couldn't get financing anywhere else, but he agreed to give me the money, because he thought it would work, he said.

Although he's had a lot of skiers so far, Weber doesn't think it's just a new idea people will try once and give up on.

"I used to race boats," he said. "I'd race anything and everything I could get my hands on. It gets in your blood and skiing is the same way. You might not get to the mountains, but if you get it in your blood, you're going to ski one way or the other."

Weber said he didn't build a ski slope to try and compete with skiers in the mountains.

"I'm not competing with Colorado, because people are still going to go there regardless. My competition is going to be the movies and bowling alleys, the things people do for entertainment."

Nine holes of the golf course are complete, Weber said, adding he hopes to have it open this summer. The target date for the remaining nine holes is around 1983. The golf course is north of the ski slope, with a lodge between the two.

Getting the combination golf course-ski slope ready for operation has been a trying task, Weber said, and it hasn't been without its hardships.

"It put us in a financial bind because we couldn't get it open last year and we were running out of money," he said. "We were pretty shot till we opened."

"But now I'm not worried," he added.

The cost for a half day of skiing Sunday through Friday is \$5 for a tow ticket (it's a rope tow), and \$5 for rentals. Otherwise it's \$6 for each. It's also \$6 on Saturdays. Prices for children 5-8 are \$3 for tow and rental, and under five is \$2 for each.



DOWNHILL SKIER — John Weber has proven winter sports enthusiasts really can ski Nebraska. He opened Prairie Hills Golf and Ski Club five miles south of Pleasanton at Christmastime and business has been brisk ever since. This skier shown silhouetted against the Nebraska sun is trying out the 110-foot slope. Weber said the Prairie Hills slope is sloped at the same degree as any intermediate course in Colorado. He hopes to build the area up to a bowl with a center of 200 feet. (Colorphoto by Dennis Grundman)