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Section A

THE SUNDAY OKLAHOMAN

IT'S IN THE WORKS

Skiing in Oklahoma?

SAPULPA — It isn't going to be a luxury resort. Or really even a resort at all.

There are no towering mountains. Long slopes. Fir trees and aspen. Or fancy cabins and chic bars.

The scenery, in fact, although pretty, is a little less than spectacular.

But there will be snow. People will be able to ski.

And they'll be able to do it right here in Oklahoma!

No, it isn't the pipe dream of some visionary.

It's real. And its almost ready to go, its creator says.

Only one thing is needed — some cold weather.

Skeptical?

Well, you're not the only one.

"When I first talked to people in Creek County about starting a ski resort, they thought I was a candidate for the funny farm," recalls project director and entrepreneur Willis Barrows, a Vermont native who says he has been making ski slopes and creating artificial snow as a private contractor for the past 14 years.

But the laughter and skepticism are mostly over now, area observers say.

They are being replaced by eager anticipation as the Snow Valley Ski Area takes shape a mile north of the small hamlet of Kellyville, southwest of Tulsa and midway between Bristol and Sapulpa.

"This isn't any toy," declared the 39-year-old self-designated "snow engineer." This will be one of the largest man-made ski areas in the U.S. when we're ready to go. Eventually, before Christmas, we expect to have a total of 15 acres covered with 2 feet of snow," he said.

"We'll have five tows for the slopes, toboggans and ski equipment for rent, and licensed ski instructors. We won't have a ski lodge as such, but we will have a small snack bar.

"Our longest ski run will be about 900 feet long (the

length of three football fields), and it will have about a 25 to 30 per cent grade," Barrows said. "We'll also have three beginner's slopes about 400 feet long."

But why Oklahoma? Why not a more "natural" area?

Barrows explained that there were several reasons.

Among the most important were the prohibitive cost of real estate in more "natural" ski areas, plus the difficulty and expense of getting the water he needs for his snow-making machines.

His wife is another reason.

"Actually, my wife and I have been wanting to put in a ski area for a number of years, and she's the one who talked up Oklahoma because she's a native of Konawa," Barrows said.

"She had been checking areas where it would be cold enough to make it feasible to put in a snow machine, and we figured there would be enough cold weather so that we could operate a ski area from around the first of December to around March or even April," he said.

"As soon as it gets down to 28 degrees, I can put down a foot of snow over 10 acres in an 8-hour period, and I figure that with 10 to 15 freezing nights a month, I can keep snow for a month," the native of Stowe, Vt., said.

Barrows, a licensed ski instructor, said he had been creating artificial snow for 14 years and had installed 15 of the systems he had created, mostly in California.

Using compressed air and water, Barrows' system creates fluffy white flakes he swears you can't tell from real snow.

The system requires a lot of water, and that is one reason Barrows said he chose Kellyville as the site for his ski area.

Another reason he cited was its proximity to both the Tulsa and Oklahoma

City areas.

"I'd guess we have 7,000 to 10,000 people in Oklahoma who ski, and there's a big ski club in Tulsa and one in Oklahoma City," he said.

Barrows estimated that the ski area would be able "to handle" about 600 people a day — including those he says will be able to ski under lights from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m.

The ski area will never replace the "real thing" but Barrows said it wasn't meant to.

"Most Oklahomans who want to ski now either have to go to Colorado or New Mexico, which is a pretty good trip.

"We don't have the distance on the slopes or the height of some of the better ski resorts, of course," he said. "But anybody who wants to have fun can certainly find it here."

British Graduates Not Getting Work

LONDON (AP) — Fewer than 37 per cent of university graduates in Britain took jobs after earning their degrees in 1970, a government survey showed. About 40 per cent continued studies and the rest were still out of work six months after graduation.

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