

Downhill business

Visions of snowflakes dance in heads of Buckeye State's ski resort operators

Bill Staley has been offering the same little prayer for years. Sometimes the Man upstairs listens — sometimes He doesn't. Staley owns Sugar-creek Ski Hills near Bellbrook and his personal intention this time of year goes something like this:

"Lord, please let it snow . . ."

According to Staley, "It's the same prayer that gave us the miserable winter of 1974-1975 (no snow) and the winters of 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 (lots of snow)."

So here it is, Dec. 10, 1980 . . . and Staley is looking out a rain-splattered office window at green slopes.

"Pray for snow," he says.

Actually, Staley's message got through Nov. 19 when an early-season storm covered Sugar-creek's slopes with six inches of white stuff. Conditions were less than ideal, but eager skiers thronged to the slopes.

"WE HAD 10 DAYS of skiing, which wasn't all that bad," Staley said.

But December's unusually mild weather — and the rain — washed Sugar-creek's slopes clean.

Staley and the owners of Ohio's seven other ski resorts don't depend on natural snow to grease their slopes. Usually, there's never enough of it, even in the upstate snow belt.

The exception may have been the winter of 1977-1978 and its record 63 inches of snow. That's three times the normal amount for a winter in this neck of the woods.

Staley and the other Ohio ski resort owners have invested heavily in snow-making equip-



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ment and can begin covering slopes when temperatures dip to 28 degrees.

Natural snow is a bonus because it comes with cold weather. But more importantly, it puts people in a mood to ski. That's why Staley is eager for the rain to stop.

SKIING HAS BOOMED as a winter sport in the Buckeye state. Sugar-creek, with last winter's mild but reasonably good 79-day season, drew 75,000 skiers to its slopes.

The winter of 1977-1978 was something else. More than 90,000 skiers visited the Bellbrook resort, and Staley thinks attendance would have reached 100,000, but for a late season blizzard.

It took 10 days for things to return to normal as authorities encouraged people to stay home.

The people at Boston Mills, a popular upstate ski resort, would like to see a little snow — enough to get skiers in the mood — and then have it turn cold and stay cold.

"That way we could make snow and not worry about the roads being closed," a spokesman said. "That would make everyone happy." Amen.



A skier is 'like the sailor at sea, in a little world all his own.'

STALEY SAID THE best temperature range for making snow is 10 to 20 degrees. He figures with a real shot of cold weather — say 15 degrees for a 72-hour period — he could

blanket Sugar-creek's slopes with more than two feet of snow.

"It could warm up through the day and that wouldn't hurt us," he said. But he'd like



Times and rates at Ohio trails

ALPINE VALLEY, Chesterland (18 miles east of Cleveland), 216-285-2211.

BOSTON MILLS, Peninsula (between Cleveland and Akron). Five tows, two double and three triple chairs. Seven slopes and trails; longest run 1,700 feet; vertical rise 240 feet. Ski shop, sandwich shop, lounges, ski patrol, lodging nearby. Weekdays 10 a.m.-11 p.m.; weekends and holidays, 8:30 a.m.-11 p.m. 216-657-2334.

BRANDYWINE, Sagamore Hills (south of Cleveland). Ten tows, one double, one triple, four quad chairs. Ten slopes; longest run 1,710 feet; vertical rise 241 feet. Ski shop, cafeteria, snack bar, lounges, lodging nearby. Chairlift \$6 to \$10, rentals \$7 to \$9. Weekdays 10 a.m.-11 p.m.; weekends and holidays, 8:30 a.m.-11 p.m. 216-467-8198.

CLEAR FORK, Butler (southeast of Mansfield). Four tows, two J bars, one quad and two double chairs. Nine slopes; longest run 1 mile; vertical rise 300 feet. Ski shop, cafeteria, snack bar, lounges, ski patrol, lodging nearby. Adults: weekdays 10 a.m.-10 p.m. \$9, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. \$8; weekends and holidays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. \$12, 4-10 p.m. \$9.50. Children under 12: weekdays \$7, weekends and holidays \$9, 4-10 p.m. \$7. Monday, noon to 10 p.m.; Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; weekends and holidays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. 419-883-2000.

ECHO HILLS, Logan (south of Columbus). Two

tows and one T-bar. Beginner, intermediate and advanced; longest run 2,500 feet; vertical rise 250 feet. Ski shop, snack bar, lounge, lodging nearby. Weekdays \$8, weekends and holidays \$10. 614-385-8760.

MAD RIVER MOUNTAIN, east of Bellefontaine. Four tow, one T-bar, two double and one triple chair. Open slopes, three trails; longest run 3,000 feet; vertical rise 300 feet. Ski shop, restaurant, lounges, cafeteria, snack bar, overnight lodging. Weekdays 10:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; weekends and holidays 9:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Weekdays \$7.50 beginners, \$9.75 adults; weekends and holidays \$9.50 beginners, \$11.75 adults. 513-599-1015.

SNOW TRAILS, Mansfield. Five tows, two T-bars, one double and two triple chairs. Open slopes, four trails; longest run 2,000 feet; vertical rise 300 feet. Ski shop, cafeteria, lounge, lodging nearby. Weekdays adults \$10, children 12 and under \$9; weekends and holidays adults \$13, children \$12. Weekdays 10 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; weekends and holidays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. 419-522-7393.

SUGARCREEK SKI HILLS, Bellbrook. Two tows, two four-place chairs. Open slopes, longest run 1,700 feet; vertical rise 200 feet. Ski shop, cafeteria, snack bar, lounge. \$10 daily, \$7 after 5 p.m. Rental \$10. Daily 9:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. 848-6211.