

Backyard hill steep in fun

INVER GROVE HEIGHTS, Minn. (AP) — The hill in the backyard of the McGroartys may not be a gold mine, but the Inver Grove Heights family holds it just as dear.

The hill has seven ski runs, one steep enough for racing, and a panoramic view of four counties.

"To let one more good area go for a housing development — I just don't think it's right, you can't replace it," said Steve McGroarty. "I hope we're here to stay. It seems like a shame not to use it."

The family closed the ski operation in 1975 because it wasn't making money. But during the 10 years it ran the slopes, which first opened in 1947, skiing became a way of life.

Daughter Cheryl, now 23, worked for the Afton Alps for four years, headed for Colorado, worked at Copper Mountain, and got a two-year degree in resort management from the Colorado Mountain College; Julie, 22, worked and skied at Copper Mountain and in Aspen for two years.

Father Steve, raised in the farmhouse up the street, now says he wouldn't stay in Minnesota if it weren't for the hill;

he'd go to Colorado, ski, and keep an eye on skiing daughters.

But their Inver Hills operation is open again, and doing fine. Its slopes gleam with several layers of artificial snow, spewed from four aluminum guns that have to be hauled up and down the slopes.

The three daughters, including Diane, 20, toil there when they're not taking college classes.

McGroarty retired in 1970 from his job at the St. Paul Ford plant after 21 years. But he's now putting in 80-hour weeks, both on the slopes and puzzling over publicity.

"Everything's going well except we need some more bodies," he said. "We gotta re-educate people that we're back."

Until 1975 the hill was heavily used by high-school teams, which he says "dug the daylight out of it."

McGroarty is not eager to have the teams back. He wants other local business, kids and families from Inver Grove Heights and Rosemount, South St. Paul and West St. Paul.