

Skiers 'weather' the worst

By Brent Frazee
Journal Times Staff

"And now for the weather ...

"Partly cloudy today with a chance of snow in the southeastern portion of the state. Highs in the mid-20s.

"Cold Monday through Wednesday with chance of snow Monday. Lows Monday around 10 above in the south, dropping to around 5 below Tuesday and Wednesday."

We interrupt this regularly-scheduled weather forecast to bring you the following announcement:

Winter has arrived.

And while most of you might be cursing, Judy O'Neal, Joyce Robers, and Maureen Wendt have broad smiles on their faces.

No, they're not sadists. They're employees of area ski hills.

And the way they see it, the two inches of snow that already has fallen and the additional precipitation that is supposedly on its way couldn't be more welcome.

"Isn't that wonderful?" said O'Neal, of the Paradise Valley slope near East Troy. "I'm looking forward to a frigid front coming through. A lovely eight-inch snowfall would be beautiful.

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And if there's one thing Paradise Valley and the other area ski hills don't need, it's added

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**— Judy O'Neal
Paradise Valley ski hill**

costs. The entire month of December, which produced only a trace of snow, had a disastrous effect on skiing.

"Last year was an official disaster," O'Neal said. "There was so much snow and then the cold weather, that people didn't even want to come out."

"This year has been an unofficial disaster. We were closed down for the whole Christmas vacation and that's probably one-fifth of our normal business. All we had were patches of snow, and the temperatures were too warm to make the stuff.

"Two years in a row. It makes you want to go into the golf business. I just hope we can get start getting some snow now so things get back

to normal."

But O'Neal isn't alone. Robers is sharing that sentiment.

"December was the worst that I can remember," said Robers, of Wilmot Mountain. "But with the new year, we knew our luck had to change.

"The snow is definitely a relief. Let's put it this way, no one here is complaining. The natural stuff always helps. As soon as Chicago has some snow on the ground, the people start coming out and our business picks up.

"And the cold weather helps, too, because we can make snow."

Robers indicated that three-fourths of the Wilmot ski area is open, with an 18-inch base.

The weatherman has also helped the Alpine Valley ski area near East Troy, where Wendt says, "People are finally thinking about skiing."

"We've been making snow since mid-December, but no one could get in the mood because of the warm weather," she said. "But with this snow, people are coming out now. Our business has been quite a bit better the last few days."

And those skiers have been greeted by what is termed "very good" conditions at Alpine Valley, with a base of 12 inches-two feet of snow.

"We aren't concerned with the quantity of snow," Wendt said. "Last year we had so much that it kept people away. We want just enough so that people will want to come out and play in it."