

Ski resorts add amenities

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gram. Available for ages 13-and-up, the cost is \$199, which includes the four lessons, rentals, and a lift ticket on lesson days.

The Homestead cut a new run called Borderline and redesigned several other slopes adding new terrain features, which will make the runs "a little more exciting," according to public relations manager Nick Nerbonne. The big news, for local skiers, is that the Homestead will now be open for skiing six days and nights a week instead of just weekends as in the past.

Caberfae Peaks is continuing the renovation of the historic Mackenzie Lodge, widened Easy Street, the resort's main novice run, added more snowmaking equipment, and reshaped the top of North Peak.

Skyline Ski and Country Club reconfigured their slopes and added 10 more acres of skiable terrain while construction of Hawk Ridge, its new 18-hole golf course, was on going this summer. The restaurant and day lodge received a new upgrade last season.

Treetops is under new ownership, and you can expect some upgrades over the next couple of seasons, according to longtime director of ski operations Pat Similak. Rick Smith, who's directed the golf operations since Harry Melling stated the resort in the mid-1980s, bought the resort this past summer along with some investors. This season they've beefed up the snowmaking system, added some more glade skiing and tweaked the terrain park adding more terrain features.

"The goal is to make this the best family resort in the Midwest," said Similak.

The restaurant and some of the lodging has also being upgraded, and the rest will follow in the near future. Treetops also sports one of the best resort cross-country systems in the state.

Searchmont is also under new ownership. Chicago entrepreneur Jack McDermott completed the purchase late this past summer and immediately put plans in place to upgrade the snowmaking system and lifts for this upcoming season.

Renovations were also made to the day lodge. More is expected down the road. McDermott reportedly has big plans for the resort in the near future.

This is welcome news for Grand Traverse area skiers. After a bank takeover three winters ago when the resort defaulted on outstanding loans, little has been heard from this popular resort just above the border in Sault Ste. Marie. With its large 700-foot vertical drop and real mountain scenery, Searchmont was always a popular winter getaway with area residents. Look for it to regain that status with an infusion of new money and enthusiasm.

Searchmont is once again offering free skiing from its opening through Dec. 12 when you stay at a partnered accommodation facility in Sault Ste. Marie or at the resort. With a favorable exchange rate and early season discounts on area lodging, it's hard to beat such a deal; especially if early season conditions are favorable for skiing. For more information, call the resort at (800) 663-2546.

Mt. Holiday has already announced it will not reopen this season due to a lack of operating funds. Plans call for continued fund-raising over the next year to facilitate an opening for the winter of 2003/04. The area is in the hands of the community with the initial purchase of the land and facilities, and they are already working on the next phase. It's a great story with a lot of dedicated people working behind the scenes to make it happen. Kudos to all those involved. It will be a big boon to the Traverse City area; especially with the closing of Sugar Loaf.

Hanson Hills, operated by the Grayling Recreation Authority, proves that skiing doesn't have to be an expensive sport. This may not be the biggest hill in the area, but they offer a solid product for kids and families just learning the sport. With a near 200-foot vertical drop and three surface tows, there's plenty here to entertain a bunch of kids. They also have complete rental facilities and a new tubing hill. The area's open Thursday and Friday from 3:30 to 8 p.m., Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and on Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lift tickets are \$9 Thursday and Friday, \$18 Saturday and \$12 on Sunday. Rentals are approximately the same price as the lift ticket for the corresponding day.

Hanson Hills offers a Family Learn to Ski Package for up to a family of six, which includes the lesson, lift and rentals for each family member. The cost is \$150 for the whole family. For more information or to sign up, call (989) 348-9266.