

FEATURE

Mild winter scrambles schedule of outdoor activities

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Meteorologist Kevin Williams' commentary about the recent weather is a lot more biting than the weather itself.

Going back to the late 1970s, when he attended Ithaca's Cornell University, Williams rates this season "the wimpiest, most pathetic excuse for a winter I've seen" in the 12-county area covering the Rochester Diocese.

Take that!

Williams — who attends Sacred Heart Cathedral and St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield — is president of Weather-Track Inc. and also gives television, radio and newspaper weather updates. As of Jan. 22, he noted, only 15 inches of snow had fallen this winter at the Greater Rochester International Airport. To attain a normal winter's snowfall, he said, it would now have to snow 1 inch every day until mid-April.

This hasn't boded well for winter sports enthusiasts. Despite large snowfalls in Buffalo, people who enjoy downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and sledding have been stymied until recently in the Rochester, Finger Lakes and Southern Tier areas.

The conditions forced plans into the "tentative" mode for a youth-group ski trip out of Brighton's Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Matt Whelehan, youth minister, said he learned only a few days before the set date of Jan. 21 that Bristol Mountain Ski Resort in Ontario County would have sufficient skiing conditions.

So the trip went on as scheduled, ex-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

A barely-covered ski slope at Powder Mill Park in Bushnell's Basin is desolate Jan. 17.

tending a Martin Luther King Day tradition for Our Lady of Lourdes. The holiday outing was originated by Johan Engstrom, now the coordinator of youth ministry at St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield. Engstrom is such a skiing enthusiast that as a teenager living in the country of Sweden, he said, "I joined the (parish) youth group because they were going on a ski trip. That was the first and foremost reason."

Engstrom said the mild November and December weather was frustrating, forcing him out of plans to ski on Thanksgiv-

ing weekend. On the bright side, he remarked, temperatures are now cold enough for area slopes to make snow, even though few flakes have fallen from the sky. He has planned a youth-group outing to Bristol on Feb. 19, and St. Joseph's will also join three other parishes — St. John of Rochester and Church of the Assumption in Fairport, as well as St. Pius Tenth in Chili — for an annual outing March 22-24 at Stowe, Vt. Approximately 55 skiers are expected.

Maryellen Bashaw, youth minister at St. John of Rochester, said this will be the

ninth time she's made the Stowe trip, which has gradually become a multi-parish venture. While returning from Stowe five years ago, she recalled, her group ran into a gang from Assumption — at a McDonald's Restaurant in Albany — that was also on its way back from Vermont. She and Assumption's youth minister, Marie Claus, agreed on the spot to combine their groups in the future.

Engstrom and Bashaw noted that the Stowe trip will include prayer services throughout the weekend; participants will also attend Palm Sunday Mass together that Saturday night.

"You see people in ski clothes going up for Communion. You knew you were just skiing with them, and now you're worshipping together. It's kind of a nice feeling," Bashaw said.

Skiing is a popular sport not only for youth groups, but also many priests. Father Raymond Booth, a retired diocesan priest living at Pittsford's St. Louis Church, has skied with a group of clergy friends for nearly three decades. He offered quick assessments of his cohorts: "Jim Schwartz, most daring; Tom Erdle, most avid; Pete Clifford, the bomber; Gerard Krieg, most determined; Win Kellner, the strongest — and myself, most cautious."

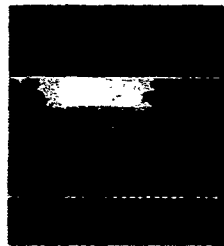
However, Father Booth said his season debut didn't occur until Jan. 17, at Bristol.

"This is the worst that I can remember in terms of skiing," he remarked. "Usually you get in a few times before Christmas. The weather was not at all conducive, we played golf in December instead."

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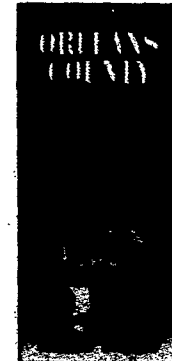
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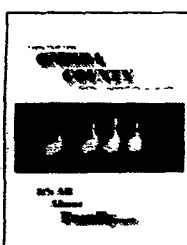
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