



Sugar shock
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WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

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Sled dealers, bars hope for snow

Dry November sparks worries about snowmobiling business

By NICK HALTER
WAUSAU DAILY HERALD
NHALTER@WDHPRINT.COM

For the businesses that depend on Wisconsin's snowmobile industry, there could be no better economic stimulus than a good, snowy start to winter.

That hasn't been the case so far, but local snowmobile dealers, bars and restaurants are crossing their fingers for a white December.

"Snowfall is the key thing. When people have it around them, and they see the snow and they see their friends riding, it gives everyone the itch to go," said John Ulrich, sales manager at Bill's Service Center in Stratford, a Polaris snowmobile dealer. The Wausau area was

the grateful recipient of nearly 38 inches of the white stuff last December and 63 inches for the entire winter, according to the National Weather Service. The seasonal average is about 59 inches.

A white blanket is more than just pretty and fun: A 2001 Wisconsin Tourism Department study said snowmobilers alone spend more than \$250 million a year on food, lodging and other expenses.

Trails have opened around Christmas in each of the last two years, but for several years before that, snowfall was bad and the season was shortened. Between 2002 and 2006, average winter snowfall averaged only 45 inches, and the area is off to a slow start for 2009-10. On

average, the first snowfall of an inch or more occurs by Nov. 14, according to the National Weather Service.

The last thing snowmobile dealers want is a dry winter that scares off potential buyers. Without snow, riders will wait another year to trade in for a new sled, which backs up inventory.

"It makes snowmobiling kind of a fickle process, because if you don't have good snow, you will sell prior-year models at a discount," said Bret Stegeman, sales manager for Harley-Davidson in Rothschild.

Harley-Davidson this year took over as the local Arctic Cat dealer, even though snowmobile sales nationwide dropped 30

percent in 2008, Stegeman said. But he said Arctic Cat is poised to rebound, because during the economic collapse, the company did not overproduce machines.

Also watching the gray November skies are restaurants and bars along the 780 miles of snowmobile trails in central Wisconsin.

"I'm hoping for snow, cold and a lot of ice," said Candy Layher, who owns Half Moon Bar & Grill on Half Moon Lake in Mosinee.

Layher and her husband, Norm, bought the bar in April. They're hoping for a good Wisconsin winter because they plan to hold two ice fishing tournaments and host plenty of snowmobilers.



XAI KHA/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD
Salesman Dan Niemuth, right, talks Friday with customer Scott Jagodzinski, of Hatley, at Harley-Davidson in Rothschild.

Rick and Cathy Toldness have owned Schmidt's Ballroom & Grill at 7085 Highway A in the town of Maine — right along a snowmobile trail — for almost four years, and riders generate more than half of their winter week-

end business. But they're not worried about a slow start to the season. There still is plenty of time for snow to fall. "I only get nervous when we get to the first of January and the weather is like this," he said.

Mild weekend boosts tree farms

By DJ SLATER
WAUSAU DAILY HERALD
DSLATER@WDHPRINT.COM

Local Christmas tree farmers saw either more people at their farms and retail lots this past weekend or about the same number as in recent years.

"It's been busier this year than in other years," said Charles Newby, the owner of Newby's Evergreen Farms in the town of Wausau. "We've sold more these past few days than we did last year during the same time frame."

Newby and other tree farmers declined to discuss exact sales numbers, but most had a positive outlook on the season, which typically starts the day after Thanksgiving.

Newby said he was a bit surprised so many people were coming to his farm and to his retail lot at 305 S. 18th Ave. in Wausau this early in the season. Most trees are sold the first and second weekends of December, he said.

"I think it was the nice weather over the weekend," he said. "People are just out shopping and getting into the spirit of the Christmas season."

Shannon Livingston of Wausau said her family's tradition is to pick out a tree on Thanksgiving weekend to avoid the crowds the first weekend in December. Livingston was with her husband, Jose, and 10-year-old son, David, on Sunday at Highland Trees in Wausau, searching for a Fraser fir.

"This is one of the nicer years we've had," she said. "Normally, we have to walk through frigid temperatures to find our tree."

Jim Martin, owner of Highland Trees, said he expects his overall sales to be normal or down slightly because of the recession, but he's not worried.

"We have such a good customer base that we feel we'll be just fine," he said. "We may sell less of our expensive trees this year."

Dale Howard, owner of Howard's House of Trees in Marathon, said the poor economy might cause his customers to cut back on other items, such as wreaths. When it comes to trees, however, most people are unlikely to give up the tradition.

"People will still buy their Christmas trees," he said.



XAI KHA/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD
Aidan Earll, 6, and his sister Erin, 10, watch their father, Mark, saw down the family Christmas tree Sunday at Newby's Evergreen Farms in the town of Wausau.

Local tree farms

Newby's Evergreen Farms
Address: 2910 Highway J, town of Wausau
Open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays
Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Trees: Balsam fir, Fraser fir, Scotch pine, white pine.
Contact: Charles Newby, 715-571-4497 or 715-574-7272, e-mail evergreen@newbysfarm.com or visit www.newbysfarm.com.

Newby's Evergreen Farms (retail lot)
Address: 305 S. 18th Ave.,

Wausau
Open seven days a week
Hours: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Mondays through Fridays; 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays.
Trees: Balsam fir, Fraser fir, Scotch pine, white pine.
Contact: Charles Newby, 715-571-4497 or 715-574-7272, e-mail evergreen@newbysfarm.com or visit www.newbysfarm.com.

Highland Trees
Address: T8501 N. 33rd St., Wausau

Open seven days a week
Hours: 8 a.m. to dusk
Trees: White pine, Black Hills spruce, blue spruce, Canaan fir, Fraser fir, balsam fir.
Contact: Jim Martin, 715-675-7585 or 715-581-2464, or e-mail h.treesjim@gmail.com.

Howard's House of Trees
Address: 15600 Highland Drive, Marathon
Open Saturdays and Sundays
Hours: 9 a.m. to dusk
Trees: Balsam fir
Contact: Dale Howard, 715-842-7253

Downtown Grocery cultivates awareness

By BRIAN REISINGER
WAUSAU DAILY HERALD
BREISINGER@WDHPRINT.COM

The folks at Downtown Grocery believe they offer shoppers something relatively distinct. Their rows of fresh produce and shelves of goods largely are produced locally and often organically, and that has built them a reputation among those in the buy-local movement and others who frequent downtown Wausau.

But the economy hit Downtown Grocery just as it has most everyone else.

Co-owner Kevin Korpela said sales fell about 10 percent from mid-2008 to late 2008, when the national recession deepened. One year later, the store's owners have brought sales back up through growing awareness, paying greater attention to what's popular in their inventory and other measures — and they have cut costs.

Korpela, an architect who opened the store in 2006 with farmer Blaine Tornow, sat down at a counter in the back of the store to talk with the Wausau Daily Herald about his business and the buy-local movement.

Question: Tell us about Downtown Grocery, because it's different from other food stores, correct?

Korpela: Well, yeah, the concept for Downtown Grocery is to provide one more unique business for downtown Wausau. Yet adding to that, how can we work to grow, nurture and support the local food and farm economy while providing a good place for a bowl of soup



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