



AMY DAVIS/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO

"We're doing what the skiers and snowboarders are doing — watching the forecast and hoping," says Liberty marketing director Anne Weimer.

# Ski resorts try to cope with unwintry weather

By CANDUS THOMSON  
The Baltimore Sun

**L**iberty Mountain Resort has \$1 million in new snowmaking equipment ready to roar, but the ski area one hour northwest of Baltimore can't buy a flake this season.

The lifts are quiet at nearby Whitetail Resort, which has a Santa video on its website pleading for winter weather, and at

Roundtop Mountain Resort, where crews are laboring to lay down a thin layer of white on Fanny Hill and Lafayette's Leap.

Even Wisp Resort in colder Western Maryland is operating only four of its 32 ski runs.

Unseasonably warm temperatures and heavy rains have kept many ski areas in the region from filling their chairlifts during what traditionally is one of the busiest times of the season. Although the forecast is for

colder weather today and Thursday, the mercury is expected to rise for New Year's weekend.

"We're doing what the skiers and snowboarders are doing — watching the forecast and hoping," says Anne Weimer, Liberty's marketing manager. "Everything is ready to go. When the temperatures drop, we'll be ready to pump up the snow guns."

Cameras trained on the region's slopes  
See **SKIING**, page 13

## SUMMARY OF THE NEWS

### MARYLAND

**VIDEO SWEEPSTAKES:** Del. Eric G. Luedtke, a Montgomery County Democrat, plans to introduce a bill in the General Assembly next month that would outlaw video game rooms that offer cash prizes for playing a "sweepstakes," saying such operations could effectively put "slots on every corner." **NEWS PG 2**

### SPORTS

**TOP STORIES:** IndyCars roared around the Inner Harbor, the Ravens wrecked the Steelers and Gary Williams retired after 22 seasons of coaching at the University of Maryland at College Park. These are just a handful of the top sports stories *The Sun* reported in 2011. Check them out. **SPORTS PG 4-5**

### TODAY'S WEATHER

PARTLY SUNNY

43

HIGH

22

LOW



Still chilly Thursday **SPORTS PG 14**

### inside

bridge **sports 13** • lottery **news 3** • movie directory **news 12** • business **news 10** • obituaries **news 14**  
opinion **news 16** • puzzles **taste 5, sports 13** • tonight on tv **taste 5** • comics **taste 4** • classified **sports 13**

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# Watching the sky, hoping for freeze

**SKIING,** *From page 1*  
show disconnected blotches of white surrounded by fields of brown and green.

"It's definitely soggy in places, and you definitely have to be able to steer," says Wisp's Lori Epps. "But there's so much pent-up demand. The die-hards are out there."

Wisp has been able to cover enough ground for snow tubing, the snowboard and freestyle terrain park and to hold snowboarding and skiing lessons. It is going ahead with plans for a New Year's Eve party.

"You have to work with the hand you're dealt," Epps says.

The lack of snow has been tough on the seasonal employees who groom trails, run lifts and work in resort shops.

"Everyone is hired and trained. The uniforms have been handed out. We want to be there for the customers, but there's nothing more we can do," Weimer says.

Not everyone is cursing the warm weather. Golfers have been taking advantage of the extended season, and anglers are still catching and releasing striped bass on the Chesapeake Bay.

"I fished 31 out of the last 33 days. It's been spectacular fishing," says Capt. "Wall-eye" Pete Dahlberg, a guide who expects to be offering trips next week to the mouth of the bay.

And Baltimore County's dog sled operator is finding something to smile about. Maryland Sled Dog Adventures LLC has rigs that run on wheels and dogs that are happy as long as temperatures stay below 50 degrees.

"We tend to book most of our trips in early July, and people know we go snow or no snow and our customers prefer more moderate temperatures," says owner Catherine Benson. "Obviously, you get used to this in Maryland."

Tom Kines, a meteorologist for Accu-weather, says the ski areas "aren't going to be catching a break for at least the next couple of days. The weather will turn colder for maybe two days but will go back to warmer temperatures by the weekend."

Blame two weather features: the Greenland Block and the jet stream.

The Greenland Block is like the Ray Lewis of high-pressure systems. When it sets up shop over Greenland, it forces the jet stream, like a Pittsburgh Steelers running back, to change course. The jet stream veers south, and arctic air rushes into the East Coast. But just as the Ravens linebacker missed a portion of the season, so, too, has the Greenland Block.

"Ski areas need a big snowstorm to pull some of that dry, cold air south," says Kines. "It can't stay this mild forever. Something's got to give."

Some computer forecasting models are



AMY DAVIS/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO

Liberty Mountain Resort was closed Tuesday because of the weather. The last winter with weather this warm was in 2006.

indicating that a storm might develop early next week, but other models show the change will be nothing more than a few days of below-average temperatures.

Without below-freezing temperatures and low humidity, snowmaking machines are powerless to compensate for nature.

"Snow farming is a tough business. It's a 90-day business, especially in this region," says Kelly Davis, director of research for SnowSports Industries America, a trade association. "But this isn't abnormal, and resorts learn to deal with it."

If there's any comfort, says Weimer, "it's that we know we're not alone."

Whiteface Mountain outside Lake Placid, N.Y., home of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, has just 32 percent of its trails open. A huge swath of New Hampshire and Maine has just 2 to 4 inches of natural snow cover. None of Vermont's ski resorts has even 50 percent of its runs open.

In the meantime, the region's ski resort operators are biding their time, hoping to have snow-covered slopes by the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend.

"Winter always comes," says Weimer. "There's still a lot of season left."

candy.thomson@baltsun.com

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