

SKI CAPITOL

Otsego County has a colorful history

Ski resorts have come and gone and come again in the area near the city once known as Ski Capitol of Michigan.

The Otsego Ski Club, which traces its roots to the Vanderbilt Ski Club near Gaylord's closest neighbor to the north, was started in 1939 by the late industrialist Don McLouth.

In the 51 years since the ski club, now located at Hidden Valley Resort on M-32 East, was started, the ski business has boomed and waned and boomed again in the Gaylord area.

At the end of World War II as the country returned to normalcy, several ski areas popped up around Gaylord.

In 1945 Al Almon was discharged from the Royal Canadian Air Force and took up an offer made by McLouth to work at the Otsego Ski Club.

Almon met McLouth while the Detroit business man was vacationing in Canada during the war.

After a few years at the club, Almon decided to open his own ski area and the result was the 1947 opening of Ski Village, near Waters.

"That was an ideal place to teach people to ski," Almon said.

It was also in the mid to late '40s that Sylvan Knob, near Sparr, was opened for skiers by Lynn and Ruth Meade.

Gil Well opened Snow Valley for business in 1948.

The site near Otsego Lake soon became a popular spot for locals and vacationers alike.



The Pinnacles, a ski resort that once operated northeast of Sparr, drew many

Tow ropes and poma lifts were still fairly primitive during this period.

At the old Vanderbilt Ski Club, now owned by real estate man Vern Converse, steel wheels from Ford Model A's were used as pulleys to pull skiers to the top of the ropes.

Almon said he was having a

ski enthusiasts. It later became known as Tyrolean Hills.

problem finding people qualified to serve as ski instructors during these early years.

Almon joined with others from the Boyne Mountain ski area to begin a program for ski instructors that evolved into the present day ski instructors certification course at Boyne Mountain.

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