

New lift means big investment in Beaver Valley

(by Don Crosby)

The Beaver Valley Ski Club is investing \$3.4 million into new ski lift and snow making equipment.

"This is probably the largest single investment that Beaver Valley Ski Club has made in its 48 year history," said Tim Oliver the club's general manager. "Our goal is to make sure that we keep investing to ensure that we have the highest chance of being successful depending on what the weather is."

A new chair lift valued at nearly \$3 million along with \$500,000 of new snow making equipment will give the club an edge in the upcoming ski season

Oliver explained that the

new snow making equipment will increase the chances of making snow in temperatures as warm as minus 2.5 C.

At least one ski lift and a series of runs will be available to skiers and snow boarders during warm weather days.

"We're going to redo 11 acres of snow making equipment and that's a combination of some new pipe, fixing some old pipe and adding 52 new tower guns... We're going to put this all into a condensed area that is specifically designed for making snow at minus 2.5 C or colder."

Last year, most of Ontario and Quebec ski resorts didn't open until the first week of January because of warm weather.

"It was probably one of the warmest since 2006 when we had a similar weather pattern with unbelievably high seasonal temperatures going into the year compared to the last 20 years," said Oliver.

The club is also replacing a 34-year-old three-person chair lift with a new four person chair lift with increased capacity and speed.

The new chair lift will increase the operating speed to 2.3 metres a second and reduce passenger ride time up to the top of the hill from 6.8 minutes to 5.5 minutes. It will carry 17 more chairs (112 vs 95) than the outgoing three chair lift. And it will also include a loading conveyer system that will create a smooth transition for skiers onto the chairlift similar to those slow moving floors at airport terminals.

"The club is in the process of reinvesting in itself. . . we have five chair lifts here . . . we want to increase our uphill capacity to ensure our members don't have lift lines that you would find at public clubs that tend to be a little bit busier," Oliver said.

The club ruled out purchasing used chair lift equipment after government regulations about 10 years ago introduced stringent maintenance regulations which has prolonged the life of many ski lifts.

"From a skiing public point of view (Ontario) operates some of the safest lifts in the country . . . the spin off from that is that lifts are lasting longer. People don't generally get rid of them after 25 years . . . but when it's time to replace them there aren't as many used ones," Oliver said.

The private Beaver Valley Ski Club with a membership of 750 families is situated in the Beaver and is home to 29 trails covering 104 acres of skiable land.

Oliver estimates the club generates more than \$ 2 million into the local economy.

He said operating a ski resort is a lot like farming in the winter time with so much of the business dependent on winter weather.

Oliver said predicting weather in southern Ontario is becoming much more very difficult and he attributes that to the effects of climate change

"I think it is affecting us in a manner that we see waves

of weather now with extreme highs and lows unlike the 1970s 70s, 80 and 90s. Our windows of opportunity for cold weather are shorter and sharper in their peaks and valleys. The amount of thaws that we see during the winter are coming faster," he said.

"There are changes happening and it will be imperative that ski areas invest in their snow making technology and infrastructure because it's something that has to be done every year at some level otherwise you are going to be left behind."

Oliver said he looks forward to the opening of Talisman Springs Mountain Resort next door to the ski club.

He said it will offer new club members a place to stay during the winter months and in the end will benefit both the club and Talisman.

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