District 1

• continued from previous page

each trail permit going into a provincial groomer fund, we hope to add two more in 2005-2006.

I think all this work is paying off. Craig Nicholson, aka "The Intrepid Snowmobiler," took a three-day ride in District 1 last winter. The frequent contributor to snowmobile magazines praised District 1 in a recent article. "The regional club trails are groomed to the same standard as that of the TOP trails. Eastern Ontario is home to 28 very active clubs that provide the motherlode of groomed trails in Ontario," wrote Nicholson.

Similar encouraging reports have been heard from visiting riders from Sudbury and Quebec. Believe me, it certainly is heartening to hear comments like this, especially with District 1 having the largest network of trails in all of Ontario. One thing is certain; this vast system would not be there without the support of the 5,000 landowners in District 1. Thanks again to all of them.

Of course, our clubs are much more than large trail committees. They perform charitable fundraising through clubhouse breakfasts and rallies, the most prominent being the upcoming 30th anniversary of Snowarama for Easter Seals kids.

I can't say enough about our volunteers. Every club appreciates a helping hand. If you have even just a few hours this winter, why not pitch in? You can feel good knowing that your help will benefit many others.

If the summer we just had is a sign of what's to come this winter, then bring it on!

Remember the summer of 2000? It was cool and wet, and we were riding from early December through to April 1. So buy your trail permit early, and buy where you ride. I hope to see you at the many club events scheduled for this winter and on the trails. Let's compare odometers at the end of winter. I'm aiming for 5,000 plus!

ABOUT DISTRICT 1

The district office is located in Morrisburg, and looks after administration and fieldwork inquiries for 28 snowmobile clubs and associations. The district consists of the area west to Napanee, north to Calabogie, and east to the Ontario/Quebec border. The district has over 5,000 kilometres of marked, groomed trails.

The clubs in District 1 sell over 10,000 trail permits annually to families in eastern Ontario. The OFSC mission is to provide strong leadership and support to its member clubs. It's the members who establish and maintain the quality of the trails, which are used in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, for the enjoyment of organized snowmobilers.



Girls on Snow

Snowarama 2004 raised almost $4,800 for the Easter Seal Society in Dundas County. Last year's ambassador was Alexander Smellink. At centre is Cory Shaver, a former ambassador and an Easter Seal kid. Surrounding are the Girls on Snow who organize the annual fundraiser ride, which begins with a pancake breakfast.

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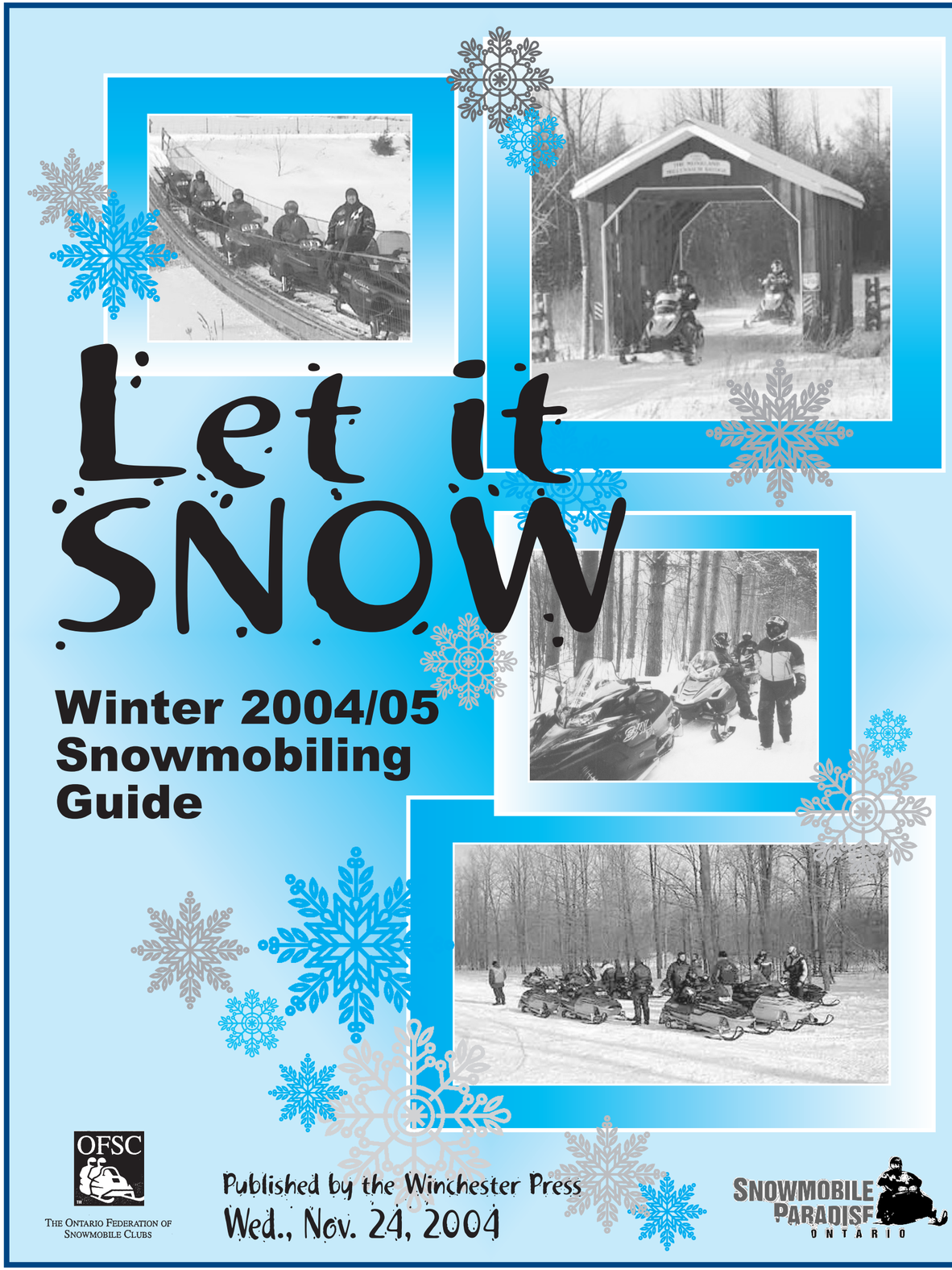
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Message from the President

Club volunteers step up to challenges

by Ray Godard
President, Nation Valley Snowmobile Association

MOUNTAIN — As in the KFC commercial last summer where the woman goes into a screaming fit when she spots a red maple leaf on the ground indicating fall is fast approaching, it kind of makes me smile knowing that behind the leaves, the white stuff that is called snow is not too far behind. Although many took the summer off as far as snowmobiling goes, many of us were still quite active, just to make sure things flow smoothly for the coming season.

Last season brought the Nation Valley Snowmobile Association many challenges. The association and its member clubs were all faced with a $50,000 insurance deductible per occurrence. The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) came out with a program that reduced the clubs' deductibles to $2,500 per occurrence, but it came with strings attached. We had to put together a regular inspection program that would help us in meeting the new requirements this program brought with it. Due to a slow start with favorable snow conditions, it had its hiccups, but we have refined the plan and will continue with its concept for the upcoming season.

We also had a major breakdown that set us back financially in planning for the purchase of our next groomer. The purchase may have to be set back an extra year. Although we're down only three per cent in total permit sales this past season, it also marks the fourth year permit sales have declined. What this equates to is that we have $30,000 less per year to work with when compared to four years ago.

I have to congratulate the volunteers who help on a continued basis to make sure we have good trails at all times, but we have to introduce schedules that all must follow so we will be able to enjoy snowmobiling for years to come.

Good things also happened last season. We replaced our oldest groomer (nine years old) and we got some assistance from the OFSC and District 1 to help with the $105,000 purchase. Using the funds that we had set aside, and borrowing a substantial amount, we completed the purchase. We also got assistance from the District 1 to help with the major repair we faced.

On the trail side, we received 50 per cent funding to help with some of the sign changes we had to make to be within the OFSC sign guidelines. With this kind of help, and the executive's plan, your association is in a fairly good position to weather some of the challenges that will come in the future.

In closing, our sport is still in a serious crisis. We are again faced with a $20 permit increase. The cost of insurance has not increased, but it hasn't decreased. The OFSC has had to cut back or eliminate many of its programs that we all have used at one time or another. The permit increase will hopefully allow the OFSC to re-integrate some of these programs. Also, we are in the last year of the TSS program and as of this date, no other government program is on the table. The OFSC annual general meeting in September brought some good news. We have finally been able to stabilize the price of permits. The price for 2005-2006 will remain the same as far the 2004-2005 season.

I tip my hat to all those who have a hand in making sure that snowmobiling survives in this great province. Best of the season and we will see you on the trails.

District 1 receives funds

JCP project: 'Signs' of things to come

by John Boals
District 1 manager

MORRISBURG — Lots of good news to report for this coming season, but first I'd like to review what was accomplished since last year. District 1 was successful in its applications to the federal government for the funding of a job creation partnership (JCP) to develop and implement a groomer operator safety program.

Close to 200 groomer operators attended training sessions, each receiving a district-developed manual endorsed by the Ontario Safety Service Alliance.

In May, we received funds from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to produce 88 billboards to be placed at key intersections that will provide directions, safety warnings and other sled-related information to help promote eastern Ontario communities along the trails.

Later we learned that the district's application for another JCP was accepted. This one was to hire five people to develop a comprehensive trail-signing program. The temporary staff will also create a promotional brochure for District 1 and perform GPS mapping of Trans-Ontario Provincial (TOP) trails.

The object of this project is to attract out-of-district riders by offering a series of proposed "loops" throughout the district. Local district riders will benefit as well, through new and improved trail signage with information on gas, food, lodging, and TOP trail identification.

Along with these non-permit sources of funding, Shell Canada supplied the district with over $10,000 worth of Shell Advantage two-stroke oil, and promotional clothing to encourage volunteerism at the club level.

District 1 showed its good will by participating in the Way Out Women ride sponsored by Polaris. District volunteers escorted the women through the local leg of the ride and over $2,500 was pledged toward breast cancer research in Ontario.



The federal government approved funding of a job creation partnership (JCP) with District 1 to hire five people to develop a comprehensive trail-signing program.

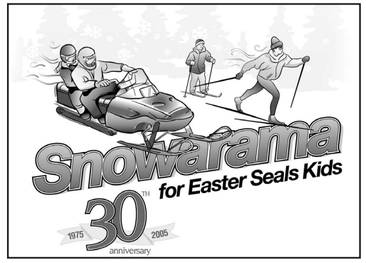
Snowmobiling in eastern Ontario had good exposure last season. The OFSC Sled Smart team was in the district promoting snowmobile safety. Club volunteers appeared alongside the Sled Smart crew during Breakfast@The New RO. We were also fortunate to have to chance to sit with Ontario Minister of Tourism Jim Bradley to discuss some of the important issues concerning the future of snowmobiling.

CURRENT ISSUES

Now, a few words on current and future issues. I often get asked where all those trail permit dollars are going, especially after the announcement of a price hike. Well, a small corps of dedicated volunteers managed to stretch this money in buying fuel for and maintaining 40 industrial groomers. They did over 10,000 hours of grooming. And they hired bulldozers and excavators for trail development and bridge upgrades. Two new groomers were added to the district's fleet, and with $20 from

• continued on next page

Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids in 30th year



MORRISBURG — "Whipper" Billy Watson organized the first Snowarama ride in 1975. At the time it was known as the Whipper Billy Watson Ride for Easter Seal Kids and it took place in Bradford.

The objective was to introduce an annual winter recreational event while supporting a worthwhile charitable cause. The first ride took place in 12 different communities in Ontario. There were 2,500 snowmobile riders who participated and they raised a total of $156,000. All funds were donated to the Easter Seal Society of Ontario to help kids with physical disabilities.

Since then, the ride now known as Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids, has grown to become the premier winter pledge-based fundraising event for the Easter Seal Society of Ontario. As a result of 30 years of Snowarama history, the event takes place in over 40 communities in Ontario and has raised over $15.2 million to help children with physical disabilities reach their full individual potential.

None of this could have happened without the support and endorsement of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, and more directly without the support of local snowmobile clubs and their members. Snowmobilers have been fantastic local heroes in their communities, helping to organize the events, groom the trails, and raise pledges. It's truly a great ride for a great cause.

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PIONEER

Riverside club focuses on winter fun

(Excerpts from the RSC newsletter)

RIVERSIDE HEIGHTS — Teamwork and focus are what keeps the Riverside Snowmbile Club operating, the clubhouse open and thriving, and the trails in top-notch condition. Like a chain, no link is more important than the other, so to everyone who attends monthly meetings, works on the trails, works at the clubhouse, or volunteers for events, we say thank you.

We are looking forward to a great season of snowmobiling, and all the fun and comaraderie that goes along with it. We have numerous great activities planned for this winter, but we do need volunteers to help them run smoothly, and to ensure that they will continue year after year. Without more volunteers, the club may have to give up some events. So please, anyone who has a little time, come and help out. The more the merrier.

ATTEND MONTHLY MEETINGS

There are a few easy and low-pressure ways that you can give a little bit of your time to help keep the Riverside Snowmobile Club thriving. Monthly meetings are held at the Riverside Snowmobile Clubhouse the first Wednesday of every month from October through March at 8 pm.

Attending meetings is a perfect way to have your say. If you come out, there is no pressure to take on a position. We would just like to have some different points of view and fresh input.

The meetings are the first and best opportunity to become an active member of the Riverside Snowmobile Club. It gives you a say in decisions on future improvements and developments. You might just have a great idea that will benefit every snowmobiler in the club. Meeting will take place Dec. 1, Jan. 5, Feb. 2,

The CHEO Ice Drags at Farran Park are scheduled to take place Feb. 5, pending the confirmation of sufficient volunteers. To run the charity event smoothly, about 30 volunteers are needed for the day.

Anyone interested in participating as a volunteer is asked to put their name on the volunteer list by contacting Dave Shaver at 652-2051. Leave a message.

VOLUNTEERING & EVENTS

The Riverside Snowmobile Club has one of the few remaining active clubhouses in eastern Ontario, and what keeps it thriving are the special activities and events that are organized and run by volunteers. These volunteers could use a little help.

COME AND JOIN OUR BREAKFAST CLUB

The Riverside Snowmobile Club serves weekly Sunday breakfast while the trails are open and groomed. Breakfasts are expected to start Jan. 2, weather permitting. The Riverside Snowmobile Clubhouse has become a very popular Sunday morning destination for snowmobilers, and we would like to keep it that way. Help is needed in preparing and serving the Sunday morning meal, so we are asking that anyone who can volunteer even one Sunday morning this winter join the Breakfast Club. Anyone interested can call Barb at 543-3114.

FUN DAY & CLUB RUN

New this year is the Riverside Snowmobile Club Run and Fun Day. The snowmobile club executive decided at its first meeting that rather than organizing a rally this winter it would instead hold a fun day. The day will be filled with snowmobiling activities and fun for the whole family at the clubhouse. Fun Day is Sat., Jan. 22, starting at 11 am.

For anyone who wants to get out on the trails, the next day, on Sun., Jan. 23, there will be a self-guided 150-kilometre club run.

WING NIGHTS

Come out and chow-down on Jan. 7, Feb. 4 and March 4.

TRAIL REPORT

The Riverside Snowmobile Trails are looking good for the upcoming season, and there are no major changes to the trail system. We are always grateful to the landowners who allow us to have a great local trail system. The best way to keep them happy, and thank them for their support, is to keep the trails clean and to ride respectfully within the boundaries of the marked trails. Even though we had a shorter than normal snowmobiling season last year, we still groomed 331 hours on our 161 kilometers of trails.

TRAIL PERMITS

OFSC Snowmobile Trail Permits are now available, and we are willing to do what we can to facilitate purchasing the permits. The cost of a permit is $180 before Dec. 1, and $230 after Dec. 1, so buy early. Permits are available at various retail locations including Upper Canada Motors, Jim's Performance, Irwin Supply, Thompson Yamaha, Claude's Small Engines, Ingleside Lumber, and Hartley's Sport Shop and Gas Bar. They can also be purchased by calling Mark Shaver (652-4893), Barry McMillan (543-2925), Barb Rabideau (543-3114), or Jessie Boals (534-2342).

To better accommodate you, they will make arrangements with you to get you your permits. The OFSC implemented the price increase in trail permits to supplement the grooming program, which ensures better trails for everyone.

2004-2005 Snowmobile Permit Pricing

180 bucks doesn't go far, but it will buy a whole winter of OFSC snowmobiling!

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Mountain club still blazing trails after 30 years

Dave Plummer
President MTBSC

MOUNTAIN — It snowed today, and some of it actually stayed on the ground for a while. So what? So this is the first Nov. 11 in three years that it has actually seemed like late fall and this is the most "normal" fall we have had in a long time.

Events like this raise the hopes and expectations of all those hard-core snowmobilers still left in eastern Ontario and especially those who volunteer their time at the local clubs and at the association level. The Mountain Trail Blazers are no exception to the rule, as exhibited by the extra-large turnout at the bimonthly meeting held tonight (Nov. 11). With the clubhouse fairly packed, plans were confirmed by the membership for the upcoming season, and trail readiness reports were tabled by the trail boss. The concences is that we are ready for a busy and productive year.

Trails that we thought might be in jeopardy have been successfully renegotiated for the upcoming season and this means that there will be no major changes or detours on the club's section of Nation Valley Snowmobile Association's system.

Arrangements are under way to shore up a minor problem with the only water crossing on our section and "bush hogging" has already commenced in order to give us a smooth, obstruction-free ride. Fallen trees have been cleared, plans for the placement of the new destination signs have been finalized and the new, larger wood stove in the clubhouse is ready for its final installation. The clubhouse has been cleaned, wood split and stacked and the canteen equipment repaired and fired up. All in all, it has been a busy fall as once again those few dedicated volunteers worked hard to make the snowmobiling experience in our area the best it can be.

As we do every winter, Mountain Trail Blazers will host its annual Sweetheart Rally and Dance on Feb. 12 with tickets going on sale before the end of the year. Thanks to Shell Canada, we will have more prizes for the participants and we have decided to hold the price of the dance at last year's cost. There will be an all-you-can-eat spaghetti supper after the rally and kids under 12 will eat for half price. The dance will start later in the evening. This is our only major fundraiser of the year and those who come out to support us not only have a great time, but earn our gratitude as well. By patronizing this dance, you help to keep the club strong and our trails open.

The canteen will once again be operated on Saturdays by the First Mountain Baden-Powell Scout group and will offer pancake breakfasts and light lunches from 8:30 am to 2 pm. The Mountain Trail Blazers volunteers will operate the canteen on Sundays during the same time and will offer full breakfasts, weather permitting.

Club meetings will be held every second and fourth Thursday from 8 - 10 pm and all registered members are encouraged to come out and see your executive and volunteers at work. There is a lot of effort that goes into the preparation for winter snowmobiling and it has to be done whether we get tonnes of snow or the meager amount of last year.

When you are out this winter, think about the members who make this all possible for no other reward than the satisfaction they get riding the sleds and seeing others enjoying the result of their hard work. You can also help us to preserve this winter activity by staying on the trails and treating the landowners' property with care and respect. Not much to ask in return for all the work that went into making this system the best it can be for you.

GIRLS ON SNOW
Saturday, February 5

'Girls On Snow', sponsor of ***Snowarama***, will be starting at the firehall in Morrisburg. With $25 or more in pledges, receive a

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Debbie Strader, 613-543-2757 or Heather Erwin, 613-989-6145

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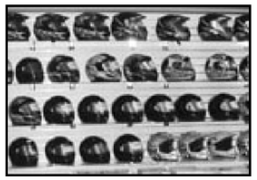
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Put safety first when you ride a snowmobile

(NC) — If you're a snowmobile owner, it's a good idea to review the legal and safety aspects of riding your snowmobile before you head out onto the trails this winter.

KNOW THE FACTS

Owners and operators of snowmobiles in Ontario are subject to the rules and regulations of the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act, including:

• All snowmobiles must be registered with the Ministry of Transportation, even if you operate them only on your own property.

• Unless you operate your snowmobile exclusively on your own land (or in certain parts of Northern Ontario), you must pay an annual fee for a validation sticker and attach it to your registration decal.

• Apart from operating your snowmobile on your own property, you may also drive on private trails belonging to an organization of which you're a member, or where you have the owner's written permission.

• Snowmobiles may travel in public parks and conservation areas except where prohibited.

• Snowmobiles are prohibited on all 400 series highways and other major expressways in the province.

• Except where prohibited, you may drive your snowmobile along the road allowance between the plowed portion of the shoulder and the neighboring property line or fence.

• You may not drive faster than 20 km per hour where the speed limit for cars is 50 km per hour or less.

• You may not drive faster than 50 km per hour where the speed limit for cars is more than 50 km per hour.

• Both the owner and the operator of the snowmobile are responsible for any violations of the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act and both are liable for any injury or property damage caused by the vehicle.

• The driver must be at least 16 years old and hold either a valid driver's licence or motorized snow vehicle operator's licence in order to drive along or across a highway or public roadway.

SNOWMOBILE INSURANCE

In Ontario, snowmobiles are required by law to be insured under an automobile insurance policy and the driver must carry proof of that insurance, unless you operate your snowmobile strictly on your own land. The owner, as well as any driver, is liable for injury or property damage caused by the operation of a snowmobile. (Note: personal and farm liability policies are not automobile insurance policies.)



SNOWMOBILE SAFETY TIPS

Snowmobiles are powerful, heavy vehicles and must be operated responsibly and with safety in mind.

• Don't drink and ride. Alcohol is a factor in more than 70 per cent of snowmobiling fatalities. If you're convicted of driving a snowmobile while impaired, you will lose your driving privileges for all types of vehicles, including personal automobiles, commercial vehicles and motorcycles.

• Anyone driving or riding on a snowmobile is required to wear a helmet that meets the approved standards for a motorcycle helmet.

• Reduce your speed at night and be alert to fences, guide wires and other objects that are harder to see in the dark.

• Always wear outer clothing with reflective trim on your sleeves, back and helmet at night.

• Dress in layers of winter clothing made of high-tech materials and carry dry clothing. Hypothermia can happen fast and is accelerated by wind and wetness.

• Exercise caution at road and rail crossings.

• Avoid driving on frozen lakes and rivers.

• When driving with others, use appropriate hand signals before you stop, slow down or turn.

• During the day wear good quality sunglasses with 100 per cent UV protection.

• Carry a survival kit that includes a first aid kit, trail map and compass.

Additional tips on how to operate a snowmobile safely are available at the Ministry of Transportation's website at www.mto.gov.on.ca. More insurance information is available at the Financial Services Commission of Ontario's Auto Insurance website at www.autoinsurance.gov.on.ca.

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OFSC-operated trails open for business this winter

MORRISBURG — Snowmobile trails operated by the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) will be open for the upcoming season, providing much-needed stability for this important snowbelt industry. The OFSC recently announced that it has secured the trail liability insurance necessary to protect its OFSC volunteers, clubs, trails and landowners for 2004/05. With this coverage in place, the OFSC's 43,000-kilometre system will continue as Ontario's premier winter tourism product, generating $1 billion for the provincial economy this season.

"We don't see OFSC insurance expenses returning to the lower levels of five years ago any time soon, but current costs should be covered by 2004/05 permit fees," said OFSC general manager Paul Shaughnessy. "So our trails will once again contribute to the economic, social and recreational well-being of hundreds of rural communities. Best of all, snowmobilers and their families will continue to benefit from this healthy outdoor activity."

The OFSC credits several factors for making this stability achievable. The OFSC has developed many industry-leading safety and risk management programs, which clubs and volunteers have successfully implemented. These initiatives played a major role in convincing insurers that the OFSC is a responsible, professional and risk-averse client.

The OFSC made progress on its claims history, thanks to snowmobilers who have taken its "ride with care and control" message to heart. Individual snowmobilers have also demonstrated a greater willingness to assume more of the risk inherent in this popular off-road activity. Tens of thousands of these riders showed their support for the OFSC during last winter's Save Ontario Snowmobiling (SOS) campaign, which added significant impetus to the OFSC's two-year effort to combat rising insurance premiums.

The OFSC also reports tentative movement on personal lines (sled) insurance. Sled coverage in Ontario is currently under the auto insurance umbrella and the McGuinty government is committed to reform in this sector. It recently unveiled Customized Coverage, a menu-driven proposal that could also reduce sled premiums.

Meanwhile, the OFSC sits now on a special working group formed at the direction of Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara. This working group is charged with developing solutions to high snowmobile premiums and also includes the Ministry of Finance, the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC), and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, the government agency that regulates Ontario insurance. The OFSC has also been consulting with IBC on the legislative changes necessary to deal with snowmobiles differently than automobiles.

"Whatever form premium reduction in personal lines may take, it quickly became apparent that new legislation would be involved and that takes time," concluded Shaughnessy. "The good news is that the insurance market appears to have relaxed and settled somewhat, so by shopping the market, many riders may find more accessible and acceptable coverage this year."

The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs is dedicated to providing strong leadership and support to member clubs and volunteers, to establishing and maintaining quality snowmobile trails which are used in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, and to furthering the enjoyment of organized snowmobiling.

For further information contact OFSC general manager Paul Shaughnessy or senior policy analyst Ron Purchase at 705-739-7669. Or, visit the OFSC website at www.ofsc.on.ca.



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THANKS TO OUR
LANDOWNERS

Throughout our trail system, generous landowners allow the winter use of their property for the enjoyment of snowmobiling. This land use privilege is crucial to the existence of the snowmobile trail which provide many social, recreational and economic benefits to our entire community. Without the continuing cooperation of these unselfish friends of snowmobiling, the quality of winter life throughout our area would be significantly diminished.

We ask everyone in our community, but especially snowmobilers and those who benefit most directly from snowmobile trails, to say a special thanks to our landowners for the use of their property again this season.



OFSC 37 Years
Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs

Thank you from
Riverside Snowmobile Club

Landowner gets a ‘charge’ from grateful District 1 snowmobilers

BRINSTON — Murray Blair, landowner in the Riverside S.C. trail system, got an electrifying experience on April 23, 2004, as his name was picked in the yearly draw for District 1’s Landowner of the year. Indeed, he was awarded a brand new Polaris 6000 watt generator for his generosity.

The $2500 prize, sponsored by the OFSC and Polaris Industries was certainly a surprise to Murray, who almost forgot about his contribution to snowmobiling.

“You couldn’t even tell there is a trail on my property”, he said, commenting on the virtues of organized snowmobiling.

The presentation took place at Tibben Equipment Limited, the Polaris dealership in Brinston. Doug Tibben, owner, was on hand to show Murray the features of the new generator, while John Boals was there, representing Riverside Snowmobile Club.

John wishes to thank Polaris Industries and the OFSC in recognizing landowners for their indispensable contribution to snowmobiling. “Without people like Murray, there would be no organized snowmobiling,” he said. Riverside Snowmobile Club would like to thank Murray, once again, for his support. Appreciation also goes out to Polaris Industries, the OFSC and Tibben Equipment for making this happen.



Landowner Murray Blair (centre) poses with John Boals of Riverside Snowmobile Club (left) and Doug Tibben, owner of Tibben Equipment on the right. Murray was presented with this new Polaris 6000 watt generator for his contribution to snowmobiling as a landowner.



Fast Facts

• The 30th anniversary of Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids events in Ontario will be celebrated in 2005.

• Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids was the brainchild of Whipper Billy Watson and started with 12 events in communities across Ontario, raising over $130,000 in its first year.

• In 2004, over 40 Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids events took place across the province from January through to March and raised more than $273,000 for children, youth and young adults with physical disabilities.

• In its 30-year history, Snowarama events, with the help of local clubs and heroes, has raised more than $15.27 million for Easter Seals kids.

• Combining the thrill of riding 100-plus kilometres of picturesque Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) groomed snowmobile trails across Ontario, with making a difference in the life of a child with a physical disability, is what attracts hundreds of snowmobile enthusiasts to participate each winter in the Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids.

• Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids is proudly endorsed by the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs

• A winter fundraiser that encourages community spirit and fun, Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids participants collect pledges from friends, family and co-workers.

• To fuel and award people who are geared and committed to helping kids with physical disabilities, participants at some locations receive breakfast, a barbecue and engage in hot chocolate stops throughout the day.

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What’s happening on the trails?

by Bruce Robinson
OFSC District 1 governor

MORRISBURG — As many of you know, I attend a lot of snowmobile meetings and meet a lot of snowmobilers all across the province. Everywhere I go I hear about the problems that some clubs are having with lack of volunteers and falling permit sales. Every club is affected to some degree. Let’s look at the reasons.

Falling permit sales are reflected in the fact that snowmobile sales are down all across North America. The manufacturers blame a combination of below-average weather conditions for snowmobiling and the high cost of insurance. I think it goes beyond that; there are many more factors involved.

Here is my top 10 list of reasons, in the order that I have heard them, of why we are not selling as many full-season permits as we used to:

1. I traded in my sled for an ATV.
2. It has become too expensive to snowmobile for the short season.
3. I can’t afford the insurance.
4. I can’t afford to put permits on all of my sleds.
5. I have no time to snowmobile.
6. There are too many rules enforced on the trails controlling drinking, speeding, insurance, and permits.
7. My friends have quit and I have no one to ride with.
8. I only snowmobile in Quebec now.
9. I only buy day passes when I want to go snowmobiling.
10. I have lost interest in the sport.

Now here are the 10 counter arguments and the reasons snowmobiling should start to see a come back:

1. ATV sales have peaked. Buyers are faced with trying to find a place to ride them. Without a trail system like the snowmobilers have, the ATV crowd is having trouble with trespassing and illegal road travel. I think that we have already lost most of those who were going to jump ship from snowmobiles to ATVs.

2. Our seasons have been very erratic. In the last four years we have experienced a 14-week season, a three-week season, an eight-week season, and last year a seven-week season. The average of the last four seasons is eight weeks, which is very typical of our area. The problem is the lack of consistency. I agree that we spend a lot of money to snowmobile, so we need to get our money’s worth. Because we have no control over the weather, I suggest looking into purchasing a good trailer. It is surprising how the conditions change just a couple of hours from home.

3. I think we have finally turned the corner on insurance. There were lots of indications last season that there were companies willing to insure, for a reasonable sum. Ask around. I heard of coverage without collision going for under $100 per sled. With a decent driving record, there is no reason to be paying big amounts for insurance.

4. Permit prices are high, no doubt about it. The last $40 increase was to pay for liability insurance for the trails, landowners, and volunteers. The $20 increase this year is to pay for grooming machines that need replacing. The trails are expensive to keep up and today’s snowmobiler wants well-groomed trails. A new groomer costs at least $135,000. The price of diesel fuel is going up every year. OFSC and all of the member clubs are non-profit, so you have my word that no one is getting rich off of the permit funds. But the fewer volunteers we have, the more people we have to hire to get the work done. I believe that the $180 early-bird permit is good value for your money. Think of all the work that buys you. Someone has visited landowners for permission to cross their land. Where permission is not given, someone has found a way around. Brush has been removed, bridges built, field stakes and signs put up every year, lake markers put up after the ice has been tested for strength, and grooming, which some clubs run on a 24-hour basis. Then there are the administration costs of meetings, payrolls, banking and newsletters. Lack of volunteers is the reason the ATV crowd is not organized. Think of the permit price if we did not have volunteers; $275-$300 would be a good estimate.

5. Everyone complains that they have no time for anything anymore. I only have one comment to make: turn off the TV and shut down the Internet. Instead of watching life on the tube, get out and experience life for yourself. Don’t be a couch potato. The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) is promoting family snowmobiling.

• continued on next page

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On the trails

• continued from previous page

Snowmobiling is one of the few sports that can be enjoyed by the whole family — together. It's a wonderful way to spend a winter day.

6. If you have quit snowmobiling because fear of getting caught drinking on the trail, then we don't want you back until you decide to leave the drinking for after the snowmobiling. Speeding should be left for those lake runs where you can see for a long distance. In order to save our sport, enforcement had to increase, otherwise the insurance companies would have closed the trails. I think everyone will agree that our trails are much safer now than ever before.

7. If you're suffering from the "no one to ride with" blues, then look to your club for support. That's why clubs were formed. The majority of people do not like to snowmobile alone. It's a social sport and clubs cater to that. Some clubs host a weekend away where you can enjoy a guided trip to an overnight destination. Participate in club activities to find riding partners.

8. If you live in Ontario and you're going to invest thousands of dollars in a snowmobile and insurance, I just don't understand why you would not spend another $180 to ride the in-province trails. If you only buy Quebec permits you're missing out on a lot of good trails right here at home. Quebec does generally have a longer season, but in Ontario, the trail is right at your door. So unless you leave the machines at the cottage in Quebec, then I urge you to buy an Ontario permit and get the most out of your investment.

9. Same argument as above if you are only buying day passes. Unless you have an antique sled and only take it out once a year, get a full season pass and find time to enjoy the trails every weekend. Yes, I'll say it again. Turn off the TV.

10. You have lost interest in the sport!? Well the next time you are out for a drive in your car on a bright, crisp winter day and you see a group of sleds crossing the road or going through the field, take a moment to remember the fun you had when you were snowmobiling. Also, the sleds they build today are much more comfortable and reliable than they were a few years ago. I think many of you should give it another try.

WE NEED YOU

In summary, we need avid snowmobilers to be good ambassadors for the sport. Invite friends and neighbors who show an interest to try snowmobiling. If you have someone new in your neighborhood, tell them about the sport. Get people involved with the club. If every active volunteer brought a buddy, volunteer corps would double.

That's all for now. I'm predicting a good, long winter based on the cool wet summer we had. Have a safe and enjoyable snowmobile season.



Groomer an essential expense

Machinery, such as the groomer shown from Riverside Snowmobile Club, is only one of the expenses that are partially funded by trail permits, but are essential in maintaining great trails for snowmobiles.

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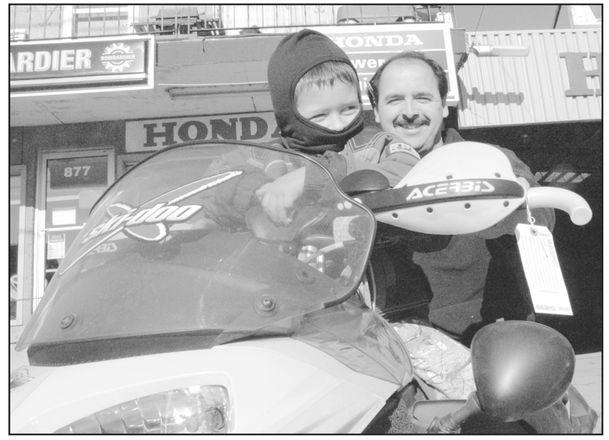
Sleds to snow blowers - they're at Loiselle

by Sean Meagher

EMBRUN — A newly renovated Loiselle Sport in Embrun ended its annual open-house celebrations on Nov. 14. Customers had the chance to shop for vehicles ranging from motocross bikes to snowmobiles, all of which were being sold tax-free.

"We've completely redesigned the store," said Etienne Blanchard, owner of Loiselle Sport. The dealership sells ATVs, snow blowers, watercraft, dirt bikes and a variety of related products.

The shop is located in the heart of Embrun at 877 Notre Dame. Customers were invited to participate in the annual open-house celebration and enjoy free coffee and doughnuts throughout the four-day event from Nov. 11 to 14. Loiselle Sport emphasizes a positive and fun atmosphere in the shop.



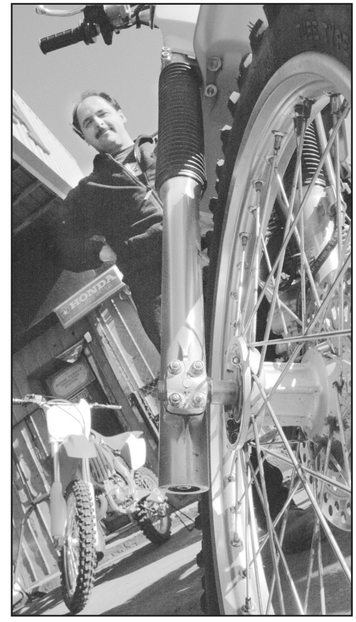
Etienne Blanchard, owner of Loiselle Sport in Embrun, sits with his four-year-old son Alex on a Ski-doo. The sled was one of the many machines on display at the open house held this month.

"People work all week to get the weekends off, so when they come in here to look, we want to make it as fun possible," said Blanchard. He has been with the company since 1986 and loves working with different kinds of sports machines.

Not only does Loiselle Sport supply various equipment, clothing and accessories for the machines it sells, the shop offers repairs to help clients maintain their machines. The area near the back of the store has been renovated, which is where snow blowers, watercraft, dirt bikes, and a variety of other machines can be fixed.

According to Blanchard, changes in the repair area of the store have attracted the most attention from customers. "We also call our customers who have purchased here to let them know about the opportunity, that way everyone can come," said Blanchard.

A collection of snowmobiles and dirt bikes lined up outside the store helped to draw attention to the open house. The event featured bright signs, balloons and even an inflatable Santa sitting on one of the snowmobiles. For more information call 613-443-3260.



Blanchard stands with a collection of the dirt bikes sold at his store. The bikes were attracting shoppers to Loiselle Sport's open house, which was held from Nov. 11 to 14.

Photos—Meagher

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