

Last winter a 'fiasco' for ice fishing

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efficient use of their equipment and time."

That axiom applies even to Christmas tree farming. John Klecher took up the pursuit in 1981, making use of 50 acres he'd purchased in Goodwood.

A manager with A&P-Dominion, Mr. Klecher soon realized that to thrive in a competitive market, he'd have to increase production volume.

"I figured, if I got bigger I could get better," Mr. Klecher said.

He eventually bought another 50 acres and leased 40 more, securing enough land to ensure a continuous cycle of planting and harvesting.

And he began growing trees for the landscaping industry, generating income in the spring and fall to supplement the busy Christmas season.

He hired a manager to oversee the operation full time, as he did not want to sacrifice his primary career.

"We became a victim of our own success," Mr. Klecher said. "We got more efficient at it and kept expanding."

Mr. Klecher, 52, has scaled back the operation to produce only Christmas trees.

But he's exploring more exotic species as a way of attracting a better dollar for his product. He said he now devotes 16 to 20 hours a week to tree farming.

"Unfortunately, my regular job is 60 hours a week," Mr. Klecher laughed.

Time is of the essence for the seasonal-business operator. This year, time ran out on outfitters, hut operators, bed and breakfast operators and other merchants who depend on ice fishing on Lake Simcoe for a significant percentage of revenues.

An estimated \$14 million was lost when winter refused to come and the lake, for the most part, remained open and inaccessible to anglers, said Daniel Girard, president of the Georgina Chamber of Commerce.

He calls the winter of 2002 "a fiasco" that illustrates the need for entrepreneurs dependent on seasonal business to package their attractions and services, luring lucrative tourism dollars from Toronto and beyond.

"We're all in this together," Mr. Girard said.

For instance, a pub is promoting dinner theatre packages at the Red Barn Theatre in Jackson's Point to boaters who dock at the municipal marina.

Such efforts would help put Georgina on Ontario's tourism map and allow business operators to make the most of their summer and winter seasons, he

said. "We definitely have the goods here," Mr. Girard said. "We've just got to package it right."

Another important element of seasonal business is the employment opportunities created, especially for students.

For example, Paramount Canada's Wonderland hires some 4,000 workers each summer, most of them young people, who perform ticket-taking, security, maintenance and perform in shows.

"Four thousand jobs; that's a lot," said Alicia Stanton, manager of public relations and special events at the park.

For more than two decades, university, college and high school students

have applied at Wonderland, some of them returning summer after summer, Ms Stanton said.

Young people are attracted by jobs, but also the prospect of spending a summer amid the buzz and thrills of the huge amusement park.

Mr. Hall knows well the anticipation and trepidation that accompany seasonal businesses. He is also becoming acquainted with the eternal optimism required to be a farmer.

"The hope of a good crop is a very powerful feeling," he said wistfully. "The hope that next year will be better is a very powerful feeling."

Sweet product popular

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their skewers, then putting out the cash to buy raw materials.

They set up a production process and schedule based on pre-market sales and also promoted the product through public announcements and flyer advertising — they even had a website.

Sales were held at various times throughout the year. And the young entrepreneurs admit to being blown away by the clamour for

their goods.

"There would be kids who would come right in the middle of our math class and ask when (the X-treme Kebobs) would be ready," said Evan Lloyd.

The class attended a showcase of Learning Partnership initiatives in early June at Toronto's First Canadian Place and the Holland Landing kids received a \$250 prize as winners of the Bank of Montreal National Student Innovation Award.

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