By Christi Sevtap
Staff Writer

A year after grant approval, the Chester/Lake Almanor Snowmobile Park has officially opened for public use. The park, the pet project of the Lake Almanor Snowmobile Club, was made possible by the efforts of many organizations and people, particularly grant-writer and Snowmobile Club President-elect, Pat Roarty.

Her plea to the government took almost eight months to write, but resulted in a grant requiring only 20 percent matching funds; a donation of land from Rosenburg Lumber fulfilled that contingency and allowed planning to begin.

Actual construction was put on hold for nine months as the club struggled to secure an encroachment permit: Caltrans owned, and still owns, a right-of-way through the trailhead.

Once the club was given the green light, the process of paving and adding some light landscaping took less than 60 days.

Roarty's grant allowed for the area on the corner of Hwy. 36 and A13 to be logged, graded, and paved. Boulders were placed at the park's entry and a portable restroom was rented for snowmobilers' convenience.

The club pays for weekly maintenance of the restroom, but the park is now owned by the county, which provides other upkeep, such as snow-plowing.

"It's such a beautiful park," Roarty said. "I really hope that it can be used for other purposes in the off-season, like for swap meets and markets."

But, in the winter, the park will be used by an increasing number of snowmobilers.

"It draws people," Roarty said. "We used to all park in the mud."

The park allows snowmobilers to easily unload equipment and vehicles, but the real draw is the trails.

"After you leave the park, the trail splits two ways," Roarty said. "You can go down over Bailey Creek on 10 Road, or west toward the old dump."

The park can be the starting point to a full day-or even more-of exploring the snow-covered forests.

"You can go all the way up to Bogard, about 104 miles. If you have someone meet you there to gas up, you could keep going up toward Antelope Lookout or Crater Lake," Roarty said.

The trail winds in many directions through the woods, including into an area known as "experimental forest."

"You've never seen such beautiful trees," Roarty said.

The club is seeking a second grant to fund further development of the park. An information kiosk has already been acquired and paid for, and only waits to be put in place.

Other plans, however, await funding. Roarty says that the club plans to paint in parking spaces, build a permanent restroom, add a warming hut, and perform more advanced landscaping.

"We have a couple of landscapers in the club," Roarty said, "and they're going to help us put in trees with fall colors and a lot of other projects.

"It's going to be a state-of-the-art park."

For the time being, there is no charge to use the park. Roarty hopes it will stay that way, but doesn't rule out what the county, which owns the area, might do.

The snowmobile club, itself, is a nonprofit organization that spends its time not only in the woods having fun, but also in the community contributing.

"We're more than just a social club," Roarty said.

Their popular annual Poker Run-a 50-mile ride followed by a chili feed-held in February has been their most traditional fundraising effort.

According to Roarty, last year, the club raised $1,000 to buy Seneca's long-term facility an ice machine.

Plans for the 2001 Poker Run proceeds haven't yet been determined, but will definitely go toward something for the community, said Roarty.

And, as always, a portion of the money will be donated to the Blue Ribbon Coalition, an organization striving to preserve off-road recreation.

The club's activities are also expanding in the community; the members provided the three shuttles toting strollers up and down Main Street at last year's Merchant Night, and they plan to increase the number to five next year.

Also, on March 17, the snowmobile club will put on a safety seminar; a CNSA representative will take a group of snowmobilers into the woods to teach survival skills.

For more information about the new snowmobile park or the Lake Almanor Snowmobile Club, contact Pat Roarty at 530-596-4388.

Write a letter to the editor on this subject. Please include your full name as a signature, your town, and then your phone number for verification purposes only.