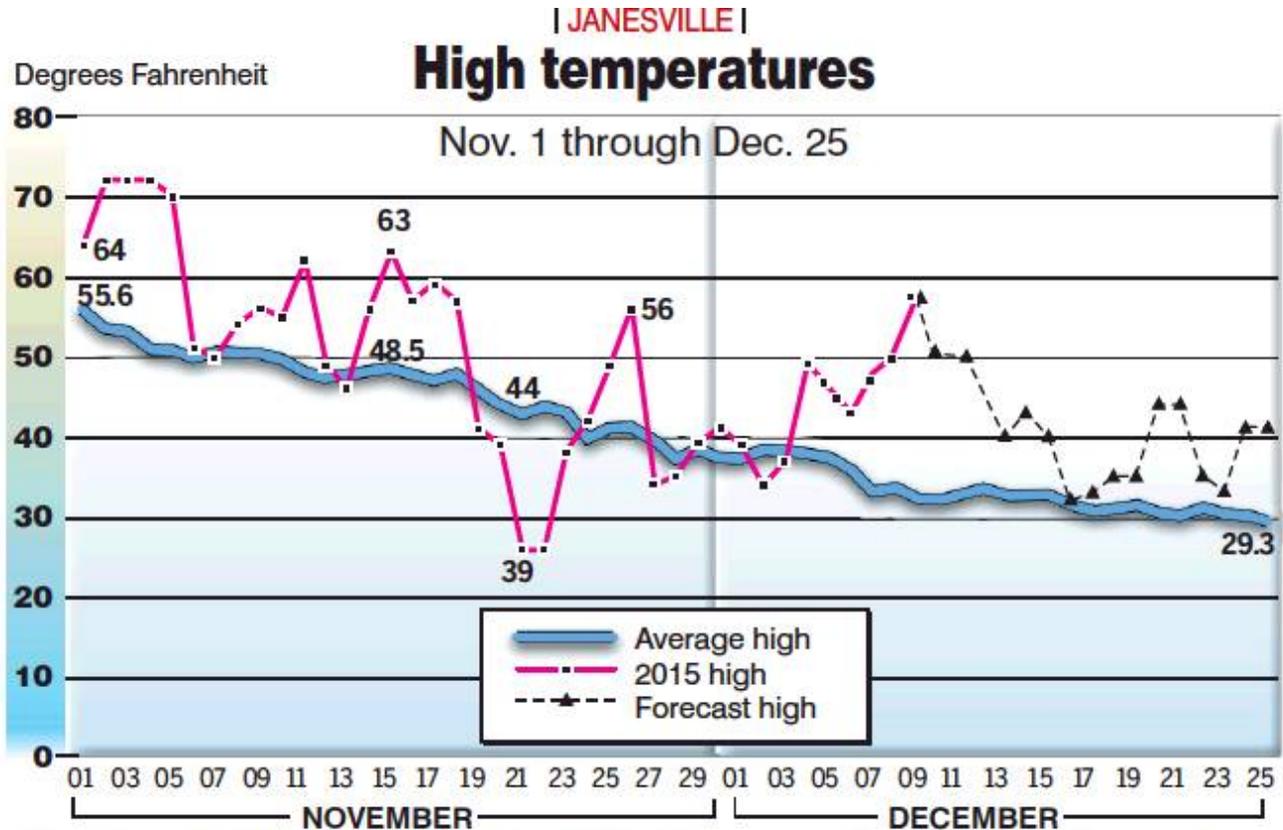


Will warmth last?

High temperatures may linger all month

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Through December 6, Janesville high temperatures were above average 25 out of 36 days since Nov. 1. Looking forward, Accuweather predicts all days will have above-average high temperatures through Christmas.

SOURCE: Gazette weather records and Accuweather

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JANESVILLE

You would be forgiven if it feels more like October and the holiday you're expecting in the coming days is Halloween rather than Christmas.

The high temperature in Janesville on Sunday was a scorching (for December, anyway) 63

degrees, according to the National Weather Service, representing the peak of an unusually warm and mostly snowless start to the winter.

From Nov. 1 through Dec. 13, temperatures in Janesville have eclipsed average highs 32 out of 43 days, according to Gazette weather records.

Janesville did have a storm that dumped about 11 inches on the area on Nov. 20 and 21. Other than that, however, the area has had only traces of snowfall.

For the final 18 days of December—including Monday—forecast highs will surpass the averages 15 times, according to Accuweather.

Accuweather meteorologist Rich Jaworski didn't have Janesville-specific historical data, but he said that 35 miles south, in Rockford, records were being set. Dec. 10's high of 57 degrees tied a record set in 1911, while Sunday's unofficial high of 62 would break a record of 57 degrees set in 1975.

Jaworski said that Rockford has had an average temperature 11.4 degrees above normal throughout December so far. He said 2012 was the last time the area experienced similar warmth, with temperatures on average staying eight degrees above normal.

Back in Janesville, there shouldn't be another day in the 60s, but the forecasts as of Sunday predicted eight days in the 40s and one in the 50s to round out the month.

There does exist a chance of flurries Friday—with temperatures expected to stay below freezing for once—but any snow on the ground isn't expected to hang around long. It's not looking good for a white Christmas.

As the warmer air lingers, it creates other positives and negatives.

Ted Peck, a fishing guide and outdoors columnist for The Gazette, said the weather has been kind to those harvesting food from the water.

Those hunting pheasant, though, will have to do without tracks in the snow, Peck said.

Local outdoor ice skaters have also been kept indoors. Normally by this time of year, the lagoon at Traxler Park is frozen over. Not this year.

Snow removal companies are also having a rougher go at it, of course. Steve Grover, the owner of MKR Property Services, said his company hasn't been hit too hard, given that it also provides lawncare and performs light construction work.

He said the warmth has allowed his construction crews to keep working, but seasonal employees that only perform snow removal duties are getting left out.

"That's what upsets me the most," he said.

The warm weather has also meant an extended season and extra revenue for golf courses in the Madison area. But the balmy start to the season has ski hill operators worried.

Nearly a dozen golf courses in the Madison area are earning some extra money by staying open, or re-opening this month, the Wisconsin State Journal reported. Pleasant View in Middleton had more than 170 golfers show up to play Dec. 5 and the Oaks near Cottage Grove had more than 100.

“I never could have predicted that we’d be that busy,” said Pleasant View general manager Jeremy Cabalka. After one of the warmest Novembers on record, temperatures in Madison have averaged 11.6 degrees warmer than normal through the first 10 days of December.

But the warm weather has operators of ski hills worried if they’ll be open for Christmas. Most of the ski hills are closed in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

While Little Switzerland in Slinger and some other hills have runs open for skiers, snowboarders and mountain bikers, most ski hills in Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula will stay closed until temperatures drop into the 20s for at least 12 hours and they can make enough snow to supplement what’s already on the ground.

Christmas Mountain in Wisconsin Dells has already used 3.5 million gallons of the 5 million gallons of water it needs to cover the resort in man-made snow, but it can’t open until it fills the gaps, said Matt Vohs, director of retail recreation.

“Those nights of single-digit temperatures are what we need to complete the job,” Vohs said. “We can’t miss Christmas. That would be a significant hit. We could lose 25 percent of the revenue for the entire winter if we miss Christmas season.”

Workers at Tyrol Basin in Mount Horeb were hoping to keep one run open over the weekend while finishing work on a new people mover that has replaced the old rope tow on the bunny hill. The hill is a weird combination of manmade snow, mud and lush green grass.

The warm weather is courtesy of El Nino, the warming of waters off the coast of South America that affects weather around the world and usually leads to mild winters in Wisconsin. Weather experts predict this El Nino could rival the strong one that occurred in 1997-98 the led to such a mild winter in Madison that mosquitoes were biting in January and tulips were pushing through the soil in early February.

“I remember that winter was rough,” recalled Joe Vittengl, general manager at Devil’s Head Resort in Merrimac for the past 26 years. “We opened Dec. 20 that year. That was the latest we ever opened, and we closed sometime in February.”

But it wasn’t a financial disaster, Vittengl said. He said the key to survival for ski hills during mild winters is to open before Christmas and keep enough man-made snow around to stay open through the holidays and every weekend in January and February.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.