

Wilderness Valley weather cam among '25 Most Interesting'

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 By James Martinez, Staff Writer

HAYES TOWNSHIP - Ken Borton's webcam started as a way of keeping family and friends traveling to the area updated on weather conditions. Now the webcam broadcasts Borton's wooded backyard worldwide over the Internet. The scene, complete with a thermometer, goose statue and wooden snowman measuring snow depths was recently voted as one of EarthCam's "25 Most Interesting Webcams" of 2006. According to their Web site, EarthCam Inc. out of New Jersey, is a webcam network providing webcam content, technology and software allowing consumers to view, create and share webcam content at anytime in any location in the world.

Borton's scene can be viewed with other unique sites around the world that show everything from chickens in Germany to a "Roach Cam" looking in on giant Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches in a research lab at the University of South Carolina. After launching the webcam two years ago, Borton eventually added the snowman and other accessories to create the winning scene. An early sign of the site's popularity occurred last January when Borton received an e-mail from EarthCam notifying him his site was in the top 10 for that month.

"I thought it was junk mail. I thought they were trying to sell me something so I deleted it," said Borton, who received a second e-mail this December. The second time around Borton read the e-mail and found himself at EarthCam's site which now shows his webcam in the top 25 for the past year.

"I have a feeling that the site stood out because the other ones are usually tropical or have a mountain scene. So whoever was looking at the sites - it caught their attention," said Borton, who guessed the viewing might have taken place during an early winter storm leaving the snowman snow-covered.

A press release from EarthCam states the sites were selected by 25 judges who used the criteria of creativity in concept, technology, visual quality and design. The judges included EarthCam executives and VIPs including Kristen Achee, Miss Hawaiian Tropic International 2006, to Ricky Paul Goldin from CBS's "Guiding Light," states the release.

Prior to the recognition from EarthCam, Borton's site received about 200 to 300 hits a day. The site now receives 2,000 to 3,000 hits each day.



As part of this attention, Borton's two winter homes he rents to tourists, have been booked every day since Christmas, despite the lack of snow. The homes can be linked to from the webcam along with several other links providing everything from snowmobile trail maps to current road conditions. Borton said last year business was "hit or miss" with a couple of weekends a month booked. Now he has people lining up for the homes, particularly after the next snowfall.

"It took off on its own. I wish I could take credit for it, like I had this master plan to market my houses. I wish I was that smart," said Borton, who explained he has had no contact with EarthCam other than those e-mails and a "thank you" e-mail he sent them. This year's 25 Most Interesting Webcams can be viewed at www.EarthCam.com/top25.

Borton's site can be seen at www.wildernesspines.com/LiveCam.htm.