

# Wind Chill, Wind Schmill

Steady Eddy knows hype when he hears it.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

Of all the holiday communications we received this season, permit me to share with you one that is, at this very moment, posted on the beer cooler door of the American Legion Bar as a public service to the community. It is a circular letter from Steady Eddy, who never sends Christmas cards.

It may also be the most important document to be tacked up since Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door and started the great Lutheran migration that eventually filled every square foot of Minnesota with bachelor farmers.

"Tis once again the season," Steady's missive begins, "for Madison's crack meteorologists to give us our daily pounding on the wind-chill factor. It sounds as if an outerspace gunship is descending upon us. It's enough to scare you out of your mukluks."

"I am speaking mostly for the older generation and businesses. We are adults! We know when it's cold outside. It's cold when the snow squeaks under your feet. It's cold when there is frost on the thermopane. We know how to dress and care for our children. We

don't need a blow-dried China doll on TV hyping wind chill.

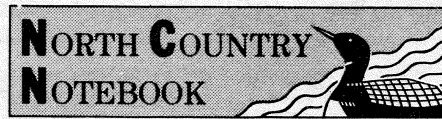
"Are we supposed to buy a truckload of canned goods and become couch potatoes for the weekend when 'Another one is coming'? How about some positive thoughts here, folks:

"Wax your skis. We've got a pile of snow.

"Tune up your snowmobile.

"Icefisherpeople, now we can walk on water and catch the best-eating fish in the world.

"Welcome to Wisconsin, news media! It gets cold here, damn cold. The older



generation made it through all these years without wind chill factors. What's the big deal? Wind chill does not mean a thing unless you go icefishing naked!

"On a daily basis, the winds are 5-20 miles per hour. Do you use the high side or the low? Quite a difference.

"I consider it cold when it's zero degrees or below. Some of my best days in the outdoors have been at these temperatures.

"My brother and I were icefishing on Lake Mendota when the wind chill was minus 72 degrees. Steady Eddy and brother Earl are alive and well, thank you! People are beginning to think in terms of wind chill rather than actual temperature. This is ludicrous.

"Your impact on business is devastating. People tend not to go out

because of your ridiculous hype. I know—I was in business for 12½ years. Some radio and TV quotes have been:

"A. 'It's dangerous out there!'

"B. 'Don't go out unless it's absolutely necessary.'

"C. 'If you must go out, make it short and quick.'

"You should conduct your own poll on this matter as to business impact. I think you will find that I am correct.

"A radio station a number of years ago gave the temperature at 40 degrees on a beautiful fall day, but the wind chill was 19 degrees! It was still a beautiful day.

"I could go on and on about this, but the bottom line is: PLEASE EASE UP ON THE WIND CHILL. We'll make it. We don't need your weather hype. Give business a break.

"If you insist on this weather hype, do private seminars for out-of-state people, off the air.

"Bass Wishes, Steady Eddy 'cc: WERN, WHA, WHIT, WIBA, WILV, WLHA, WMAD, WMGN, WMLI Lite, WNWC, WORT, WTDY, WTSO, WZEE, WISC-TV 3, WKOW-TV 27, WMSN-TV 47, WMTV-15, Madison Newspapers"

Steady appends a note: "Channel 27 has been the only response. They feel it's in 'the best interest of the public to report wind chill.' Channel 3 is now saying, instead of wind chill, 'feels like.' That's weird!"

The late, great Calvin Rutstrum, the Old Coot who lived up in the

Minnesota-Ontario border country, was on Steady Eddy's wavelength when he wrote his book *Paradise Below Zero*.

Many people, Calvin observed, avoided winter altogether and became "snowbirds," going south until spring. Those who stayed, often stayed inside.

"Physical and mental adjustment to cold and snow," Old Calvin lamented, "has become almost the indigenous isolated exception."

Calvin liked to cite the birth of a baby that took place in a suburban Minneapolis snowdrift a few winters back. The mother had been en route to the hospital and got into an auto accident.

"Because of the snow and cold fear complex," Calvin reports, "newspapers gave the story high, sensational treatment, until the receiving room personnel played down the cold factor.

"The doctor in charge said that the baby could not have been born under more viable conditions—that many babies might have been saved had they been born in a fresh snowdrift rather than in the questionable asepsis of a modern home or hospital."

"Never mind the wind-chill factor," Steady advises the weatherpersons. "Just learn how to pronounce Mazomanie before you move on to the warmer markets." ■

*George Vukelich reads selections from North Country Notebook Sunday nights at 10 on Wisconsin Public Radio, WERN (88.7 FM).*