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2-11-2009

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### WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Haenicke, Diether, "Despite the winter jokes, you just can't put Michigan and its weather down" (2009).  
*WMU President Diether Haenicke*. 38.  
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/haenicke/38>

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## **Despite the winter jokes, you just can't put Michigan and its weather down**

*By Diether Haenicke  
February 11, 2009*

If you consider it a sport to gather your food by drilling through 18 inches of ice and sitting there all day hoping it will swim by, you must be in Michigan.

If you are proud that your region makes the national news 96 nights a year because Pelston is the coldest spot in the nation, you must live in Michigan.

If you instinctively walk like a penguin for five months of the year, you must live in Michigan.

These and other disparaging remarks about our beloved home state and its citizens can be heard these days in sunnier parts of the country, particularly in Florida and Arizona, where many snowbirds begin their days with an extensive study of the national weather map. While bougainvillea and oranges bloom on the patio, the happy snowbird steps barefoot on the warm tiles of her lanai and dials her neighbor's Kalamazoo number. Knowing full well what the temperatures in Michigan are and how much snow has fallen, the temporary Florida dweller nevertheless inquires about the weather "up there." The concerned question is all fake, of course. There is no commiseration in the inquiry, just pure pleasure in the misery of those who stayed at home blanketed by mounds of snow.

After the conversation about weather, other put-downs come to mind. If you have more miles on your snow blower than on your car, you may live in Michigan. If your local Dairy Queen is closed from November through March, you may live in Michigan. If you carry jumper cables in your car and your girlfriend knows how to use them, you may live in Michigan. If driving is better in winter because the potholes are filled with snow, you may live in Michigan. If you design your children's Halloween costumes to fit over a snowsuit, you may live in Michigan.

I hear these and other semi-humorous statements a lot because I live in Michigan and have friends in Florida. I am sure there are hundreds of variations of such verbal pokes for other

temperature-challenged states such as Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Dakotas. I just accept all the winter jokes, secure in my knowledge that the Michigan summers and falls are unequalled and that, for a few months each year, our state turns into God's own glorious country.

But other states are being put down, too. Last year, I noticed a Michigander wearing a T-shirt on the plane to Fort Myers. It had the inscription: Florida -- a great place for your grandparents to die. Unfortunately, I did not observe who welcomed him at the airport. But here was someone from our state who may have heard too many Michigan-in-winter jokes and sought cheap revenge with a tasteless piece of clothing.

One of the nation's smallest states is put down by a T-shirt asking : "Dela...who? Dela...what? Dela...where?" Once I saw a T-shirt on a Michigan beach that I would not advise wearing in the Mormon state. It said: "Utah ... A great place to find a wife or two." One has to know American history to appreciate the following T-shirt: "South Carolina -- if at first you don't secede, try and try again." I like the state of New Hampshire, but there are T-shirts that warn: "Friends don't let friends live in New Hampshire." It can't be that bad. My collection of T-shirt inscriptions is rounded off with: "New Mexico -- barely better than the old one."

This all goes to show that when my friends in Florida tease me on the phone with Michigan jokes, I can remain unperturbed. I know that if I lived in New Jersey or Kansas, there would be other slights, most of them good-humored and meant to amuse rather than hurt.

I take comfort in the sayings about Michigan that actually show how comfortable it is to live here and that reflect on the friendliness of its people:

If someone offers you assistance in a store, and he doesn't work there, you may be in Michigan.

If you have a long telephone conversation with someone who dialed the wrong number, you might live in Michigan.

And you definitely know that you can live in a thumb, if you live in Michigan.

*This column was published in the Kalamazoo Gazette [mlive.com/kalamazoo](http://mlive.com/kalamazoo)*