Welcome winter… although it's still officially autumn on the calendar.

Of course, anyone who's lived in the U.P. for any length of time knows that winter can show its face any time of the year, and sometimes has done so… remember those cold, parka-wearing Fourth of July fireworks we watched from inside parked cars?

Early winter weather is hardly a surprise in this neck of the woods, and I'm sure that every hunter, skier, snowmobiler, ice fisherman and other outdoor enthusiasts gave one big "Hurrah!" when old man winter dumped several inches of snow on us last week.

That was last week, of course, and then temperatures took a more normal outlook this week. Golf, anyone?

But that blast last week is a reminder of what's to come and we had better be ready, because once it gets here, it plans on staying in the area for a few months or more.

For most of us, getting ready for winter started in the waning days of September while the temperatures still had a 70-plus degree look about it.

We did the usual chores around the house in preparations for the coming cold and snowy weather. It was probably a good time to get the car in also to make sure it was ready for what is sure to come, including the treads on our tires.

As last week showed us, tires with poor treads make driving a little scary when negotiating slush-rutted roadways.

Our local school kids either got a day off last week or a delayed start, which was a definite treat for them, but it also meant motorists had to keep an extra eye out for them as well as the road ahead.

Winter means darkness comes early; however, it never means it leaves early, although by February the late afternoon starts to see a glimmer of light and the rest of us, a glimmer of hope that spring is on the way.

Of course, this is still the U.P. and we've learned the hard way not to rely on the month of the year for a clue to what weather lies ahead.

That's just part of the fun of living in the best place you'll find anywhere in the world.

--Allyce Westphal