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West Nipissing This Week



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Alex Gingras and Mitch Primeau enjoy some of Leisure Farms' freshly picked sweet corn during the Feast on the Farm on Sunday, August 7. The corn was one of several offerings by local farms and area chefs, as guests went from station to station to savour them all.

Feeding a growing appetite for local food

Feast on the Farm doubles tickets, sells out

BY ISABEL MOSSELER
TRIBUNE

"It was a total success and it was an experience," raves Isabelle Spence-Legault about the sold out Feast on the Farm, which nearly doubled attendance from last year's inaugural event. She was one of the local farmers whose produce was featured at the August 7 feast hosted at Leisure Farms, and part of the WN Agricultural Task Force who put on the event under the umbrella of the WN Chamber of Commerce.

The warm Sunday evening saw 497 guests sampling locally produced foods prepared by area chefs while being entertained by local musicians in the natural ambience of cornfields and berry bushes. "There was a different feel this year, with people walking through the fields, holding hands. It felt like what food should feel like, a total experience," describes Spence-Legault of Field Good Farms in Cache Bay. There was some-

thing to please every palate, from sweet to savoury, including lamb, pulled pork, fresh sweet corn, gnocchi, crème brûlée and raspberry pie – living up to the title of "feast."

It was a bold move to increase the tickets from 300 in 2015 to 500 in 2016, and the plan paid off. Spence-Legault credits the driving energy of Jolene Greer, the Chamber's Project Manager. "I can't believe the things Jolene can do! We give her direction, and she has a way of supporting that vision. She put in so many hours of work – she really impresses me."

"It's really miraculous that we had such an intimate experience with 500 people. I heard so many conversations, people meeting up, hugging each other," she adds.

She says the event met the WNATF objectives of promoting local food. "There were [many local] farmers at the event... and those are the conversations that need to

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Gagnon hired as CAO for French River

"Your loss, our gain," says mayor

BY SUZANNE GAMMON
TRIBUNE

After being fired from his job as Director of Public Works for the Municipality of West Nipissing in late January of this year, Marc Gagnon has just been hired as Chief Administrative Officer for the Municipality of French River.

The appointment was announced by news release on August 5, and Gagnon began of-

ficially on August 8. "Marc has over 27 years of municipal experience, where he gained expertise in several roles applicable to roads, water and sewers, environmental, public works, economic development, community services and recreation. He has managed and led large teams of staff and has successfully administered and implemented multiple projects while continuously working with in-

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Little derby turns into big event with support from Bob Izumi

BY ISABEL MOSSELER
TRIBUNE

Uncle Tom's 3rd annual Kids' Fishing Derby was held on July 23rd up in the River Valley area, and this year it was sponsored by Bob Izumi's Kids, Cops and Canadian Tire, with 47 little fisher people aged 3 to 14 taking part. 'Uncle Tom' is Tom Lambert, a Nipissing First Nation Economic Development Officer and West Nipissing Chamber of Commerce director. His small family tournament has become a highly anticipated community event on Lake Manitou.

How did Tom Lambert become Uncle Tom? "My wife Yvonne and I camp up at Ranger's Point, Lake Manitou, River Valley, off of Hwy 805. We have been in that area camping since 2008. My niece was about 5 years of age then, and she always calls me Uncle Tom. So every time she would come to visit and to play with the other children at the campground and called me Uncle Tom, all the other children thought that was my name. So I am known to all of them as that."

Tom and Yvonne Lambert are com-

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"Uncle Tom" Lambert (second from left) presents thank you gifts to MNR Conservation Officer Richard Nadeau, OPP Sargeant Gerry Malette and OPP K9 Unit Sgt. Rob Mondor, for their part in making his kids' fishing derby a big success.

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Feeding a growing appetite for local food

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happen. ... There were a lot of people who told me it was even better than last year. I felt it was really well organized, really professional [on the part of the chefs]. (...) Everybody upped their game. Leisure Farms made their raspberry pies, extra special, with extra raspberry, served in a field of raspberries!"

Greer reflects on the changes to the event, noting that last year's tickets sold out early and many people were left disappointed. "When selling tickets this year, I would ask 'Did you attend last year?' and I would get the comment 'We missed out last year, and we really wanted to get our tickets but they were sold out.'" By the Thursday before the event, there were only 50 tickets left, and only 3 tickets remained unsold.

Organizers also went with suggestions from last year's attendees. "There was a significant amount of waste [last year], so this year we went with all compostable flatware, plates, knives, forks, cups," in keeping with the underlying theme of healthful living and respect for the environment, notes Greer. "It's very important, because the whole point of the event is to be supporting our local producers, and there is an ecological side to it."

The feast included some of the same chefs as 2015, along with some new additions. White Owl Bistro made a return, with chefs Laura and René Dubois offering pulled pork tacos, a big hit with guests. Everything in their offering was sourced locally, with pork from their own farm as well as Freedom Heart Farm in Verner. "They are one of those flagship restaurants that are ambassadors for local food, and they consistently purchase from local producers – they do as much as they can. ... We were very happy to have them back," says Greer.

Of course, there were more offerings from hosts Leisure



Dan Lelièvre, of Chez Jean-Marc Bakery, torches some of his strawberry maple crème brûlée for the 500 hungry guests at the Feast on the Farm.

Farms, with their sweet, freshly picked corn, and raspberry pie topped with whipped cream.

New on the block were two North Bay restaurants. The Best Western's "Farina", with chef Denis Valiquette serving a classic mushroom gnocchi (prepared from spelt flour) and a side of new potato salad. Caterer Savoir Faire, with chef Patricia Spencer, served rack of lamb on a bed of garlic mashed potatoes and courgettes. For many, the pièce de résistance was the strawberry maple crème brûlée prepared by Dan Lelièvre of Chez Jean-Marc Bakery. "We try to include chefs that are already working with local food, to support them, because they are living what we're trying to do," comments Greer.

Mitch DesChatelets of Leisure Farms, had high praise for all the chefs who contributed. "I'm hoping it opens the eyes of people in the area as to how good local food is, and how lucky we are to have those chefs from really good restaurants. We need to support them. Without those chefs, this event wouldn't happen. So go to those restaurants and support them!"

He adds the Feast on the Farm is well worth all the work put in. "It's always a big, big effort, but it really encourages people to eat local and makes connections between the farms and the chefs. A lot is good promotion for our farm. About 10% of the guests have never been here before, and maybe they'll come back." He adds that the event is one of his favourites. "I enjoy it a lot, especially the day of. It's a huge commitment for Leisure Farms, but it's worth it. It could get bigger, but at the moment it's just right. We will look at it every year. We ran out of wine too soon this year, so increasing the size a little at a time allows us to adjust and plan."

This year's set-up was changed to curb congestion. The wagons made continuous circuits to give guests rides, but instead of a designed progress, people could choose which stations they wanted to go to first. "We tried to improve our flow, so there was no blockage, or wait times. ... We also set up another bar in the field with portable wash station." The two stations closest to the entrance were dessert stations. Others were designated as main courses or side dishes. "People could meander whichever way they wanted."

The event also boasted two local brewery options, Stack Brewery from Sudbury, and New Ontario Brewery in North Bay, as well as Boreal Winery from Warren. "This year, instead of just a tasting, we could actually sell wines from Boreal Winery. Regulations have changed ... so we went with his Haskap wine, and we had a white VQA wine made with only Ontario grapes," describes Greer. The event did run out of wine, even though they doubled the volume over 2015.

Among the local food suppliers were Field Good Farms, Somewood Farms, Wind Farms, Creative Meats, Sprucedale Quality Meats, Séguin Sugar Bush, Leisure Farms, Valley Growers, Freedom Heart Farm, Posch Haven Farms, Yoder Family, Joyful Soil Farms, Spruce Hill Farms, Larry Craig Farms, Spring Hill Farms, and Don Poulin Potato Farm. Each of the stations sported a black board that told the guests where the offering was sourced.



Leisure Farms was not just the site of the Feast on the Farm, they were suppliers for two of the most popular stations, most notably this dessert station featuring fresh raspberry and strawberry pie - right in a raspberry field no less!

The event still has potential for growth and change, says Greer, but it may take a different level of organization, planning and manpower. "We've reached our threshold and there's a risk that it could [decline] if we don't meet expectations," she cautions.

Fortunately, at the current level, Greer says the Chamber has a good network of volunteers and community partners to draw on, for everything from music to the loan of tents. She adds that producers who want to participate in future events are asked to come forward. "Who are the farms in the area that we don't know? They don't have to be big commercial operations, they can be small."

As an interesting aside, she says that when chef René Dubois was sourcing additional pork, he discovered that the owner of Freedom Heart Farm in Verner was his cousin. The Chamber provides the chefs with a list of local farms they can source from, and this strengthens the networking throughout the community. "We want that network to get bigger and bigger. And it makes the event easier on the chefs as well. Serving 500 people is a lot of food; [chefs] may have to go to more than one producer."

"It's great to see how passionate they all are [chefs and farmers]," adds Greer, noting there were twice as many volunteers this year.

Chamber of Commerce president Patrick Keough is extremely happy with the results. "It went even better than expected; excellent food, highlighting local produce, local livestock, food prepared by local chefs, local musical talent, and all the local people, as well as people coming into the community. It brought increased recognition of what we have right here, and it helped to make connections." He adds that the entire event promotes the chamber objective of Buy Local, Eat Local. "I think people walked away with a feeling of pride in this community. It was a really good gathering. It was relaxing, it was energizing, and hopefully it's contagious!"

Help and hope for Hunter

BY BRAD AUBIN
TRIBUNE

The Verner Golf Course was packed on Saturday, July 30, as the community came out with high spirits and big smiles to support a local boy through a friendly golf tournament.

Hunter Penasse, 8, was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy last April. The disease causes progressive weakness and loss of muscle mass, as abnormal genes interfere with the production of proteins needed to form healthy muscle.

"It's a lifelong illness," says Hunter's great aunt Ellie Penasse-Lafleur. "So I decided to help the family with some fundraising."

Since July of last year, Penasse-Lafleur

has been holding fundraisers for the youngster, selling tickets for three draws of \$5,000 each and the tickets are going fast.

"We've printed over 3,000 tickets... and there are only a thousand left," she notes. "We've been holding events since last year – garage sales, fish fries, things like that. So if you buy a plate, you get a ticket. If you buy \$10 worth of stuff at a garage sale, you get a ticket. The events we hold, we always hand out tickets for the draw. It's always nice, and the community feedback has been great. For example, at last month's garage sale, everything was donated. People came and shopped, got a pop and a burger or a hotdog, and it's all for a good cause.

Everyone wins!"

The tournament was a big hit, with almost 50 golfers taking to the links.

"It was such a great day, and it went so well," says Penasse-Lafleur. "We raised over \$2,500 on the day and everyone really seemed to have a great time. Our big hit was the pickerel dinner we had for lunch, which was included in the entry fee. It's great to see the community come out and really help. It was so successful we're juggling with the idea of making this an annual fundraiser for him!"

The tournament winners were Bob Couchie, Henry Penasse, Phil Penasse and Ron Berthelette.

But the biggest winner is young Hunter, who has to travel for medical care and buy specialized equipment.

"It's tough because he has two younger sisters and it's hard financially on the family," Ellie stresses. "We just recently bought him some braces for his legs, and they're form to fit, so as he grows we'll have to buy more pairs. They're quite expensive. But he really is in great spirits."

Hope for Hunter will be holding more events soon, including another Fish Fry at the Verner Golf Course.

"It's their end of the season tournament, and they asked us to cater it. All the funds will be going towards Hunter."