

New season for county

MAPLE IN THE COUNTY: Event big tourist draw

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Organizers of Maple in the County are suggesting the municipality add a fifth season to the calendar.

Preparations are well underway for the eighth annual edition of the event, scheduled for March 28-29, and long-time maple syrup producer Ron Hubbs suggested the Maple in the County event and maple season, in particular, be added as the fifth season.

Actually, Hubbs credits retired local newspaper man Jack Evans with the idea but only half-jokingly said the concept has a lot of merit. Speaking during a press launch Thursday at Vader's Maple Syrup in Athol, Hubbs, who serves as president of the local chapter of the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers, said the event has become a big boost to the region's tourism market.

"Winter hasn't quite let go yet and spring is still trying to get a grip on the weather, but the maple season has become quite important in Prince Edward County," he said. "It helps bring a lot of people to the area when they really wouldn't have any other reason to come here."

And come they do. Last year more than 5,000 people flocked to the area for the two-day event and sampled everything from maple cheese to maple chocolate.

Maple in the County has been sponsored by the Waring House since its inception in 2001 and owner Norah Rogers said it provides a big boost to local businesses, including a number of hospitality businesses operated by her and husband Christopher.

"Last year we served 40 people on Friday and 550 people on Saturday and we attribute that directly to Maple in the County," she said. "We really look forward to this every year because it's important not just to us, but a lot of businesses in Prince Edward County at a time when there otherwise wouldn't be a lot of people coming here."

One of the highlights will be pancake breakfasts served at three local sugar shacks – Hubbs Sugarbush, Fosterholm Farms and Honey Wagon Farms both Saturday and Sunday mornings. There will also be meals and activities at a number of locations throughout the municipality.

Grace Nyman of Taste the County said the event is drawing attention from across the province, which has helped attract more sponsors.

"Since Maple in the County was named as one of the top 100 festivals (in Ontario) we have been getting calls from a lot of people wanting to come on board as sponsors," she said.

"We take a good look at it and if they seem like a good fit, we bring them in. This year we have 34 participating locations, including places like the Legion and the local wineries and it just adds to the strength of the event."

While satiating taste buds will be a priority for most, there will be no shortage of entertainment.

Folk music icon, Murray McLauchlan will kick off the weekend with a special concert at the Regent Theatre on the Friday night. La Cuisine à Micheline, Les Airs de Chez Nous, a French-themed dinner and show, will be on the Saturday night at the Waring House featuring French songs by Jeanette Arsenault, Micheline Lortie, and Micheline Cox.

Downtown Picton businesses will hold Maple Madness celebration and sale, which will include including ice carving demonstrations, kid's games, art exhibits, face painting, maple bake sale, contests, music and much

more.

A full list of activities, events and locations can be found at the Maple in the County web-site—www.mapleinthecounty.ca, by calling 613-393-2796 or in the brochure and map available at the following locations: Rossmore Stop (Rossmore), Belleville Chamber of Commerce (Belleville), Campbell's Orchards (Rednersville), Sprenkels Variety (Carrying Place), Wellington Pharmacy (Wellington), Taste the County (Bloomfield), Books and Company (Picton), PEC Chamber of Tourism and Commerce (Picton), Hicks General Store (Milford) or any one of the Maple in the County participating locations.

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