

The Loudon Ledger

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Mission Statement...

To provide a comprehensive source of information and education about business, government, and community organizations within Loudon in order to facilitate and encourage informed citizen participation.

First Farm Feast a Huge Success!



See pages 16-17 for more pictures of the Farm Feast.

Loudon's first Farm Feast was held at the Loudon Elementary School on November 7th.

This event was collaboration between Recreation Committee and the Agricultural Commission. Melissa Minery, newest member of the Recreation Committee, approached both committees with the idea of bringing the community together for an affordable meal of locally grown food, highlighting our local farmers and the plethora of food grown right here in our community! Not only was this event a community gathering, but it also brought awareness to the agricultural heritage of our town and the variety of crops and agricultural products available in Loudon. Eating locally is much better nutritionally for individuals and their families than buying produce shipped many hundreds of miles. It is fresher, tastes better and supports our local economy.

A total of 148 tickets were sold. The goal was to use 95% of locally grown food in our ingredients. Melissa Minery created a slide show showcasing the Loudon farms and handouts were available. There was a special, live display by Misty Richard, of Our Place Farm spinning wool. A raffle was held and the lucky recipients received the floral arrangements donated by D.S. Cole Growers and Garden Center.

The menu included Beef Stew, Vegetable Soup, Squash Soup, Baked Apples, Baked Apples & Blueberries, Pumpkin Custard. All food was provided by our amazing farms right here in Loudon. This event would not have been possible without the support of these farms.

- Aznive Farm – wild blueberries (donated)
- B&B Syrup – maple syrup
- Meadow Ledge Farm – cider, apples (donated)
- Merrill & Sons – eggs
- Miles Smith Farm – beef
- Minery Eggs – eggs (donated)

- Mudgett Hill Mumbling Maples – maple syrup (donated)
 - Our Place Farm – goats milk, eggs
 - Ramsay's Farm Stand – onions (donated)
 - Red Manse Farm – garlic, carrots, kale, black beans, corn, pie pumpkins
 - RNG Farm Stand – tomatoes (donated)
 - Windswept Maples – beef, potatoes, maple syrup
- Alicia Grimaldi, Loudon Recreation Committee Chair, would like to express appreciation to the following people for their varied and valued contributions to the event:

- Melissa Minery, Loudon Recreation Committee Member for the event's inspiration and her organizational efforts.
- Jenn Pfeifer, Loudon Recreation Committee Member, for bringing her love of cooking to the palettes of Loudon residents. Jenn created the menus and prepared the food with the help of Recreation Committee Members and community volunteers. The recipes will be featured in her column of this month's recipe section of the *Loudon Ledger*.
- Earl and Alice Tuson of Red Manse Farm who coordinated contact with the farmers.
- Bob Bahr who made a generous monetary donation in support of the event.
- Samantha French and Roseanne Storrs for their help in the kitchen.
- John Cronin, Owner of the Egg Shell for his donation of baked bread and his support of this endeavor.
- The Loudon Recreation Committee Members, Loudon youth and community members who volunteered there time to make this event a success.

Proceeds of this event go back to the Loudon Recreation Committee's Revolving Fund to provide ongoing affordable, diverse programming for the community of Loudon. ■

Loudon Locavore: *Meadow Ledge Farm*

By Lee Laughlin

I love apples. They are an easy way for me to snack healthy. Once when I was at Meadow Ledge farm, getting my weekly fix, I asked, "So, what do you guys do in the off season?" I got a friendly snort. "Off season? What's that?"

You might think of the Meadow Ledge Farm when you drive by in June and see the sign for strawberries. Or more likely in the fall when the air turns cold and it is time to enjoy all things apple, like pie, cider or one of Meadow Ledge's legendary cider donuts. Maybe you even get your Christmas tree at Meadow Ledge. But, come January, you have probably moved on and don't give apples a second thought.

Most of us only think of apples as fall approaches. The Roberts family thinks about apples 24 hours a day, 7 days a week 365 days a year. Ernie and Kris Roberts own Meadow Ledge Farm and Country Store on Rt. 129. Ernie and son Shawn run the day-to-day operations. Kris and daughter Krystal pitch in on weekends and with the baking of all the delicious home made treats sold in the store.

Come January, when we have put apples behind us, Ernie and Shawn are hard at work preparing for next season's crops. Winter is the time for pruning the trees and repairing the farm equipment and storage containers. Come March, the first of their seasonal laborers will return from Jamaica. Final repairs are made and preparations begin for the secondary crops such as strawberries, peaches, pumpkins, tomatoes, and squash.

In the early spring, bees are hired to pollinate the apple trees and then Mother Nature takes over to bring the trees to blossom. As you can imagine, New England is not the easiest place to grow fruit and vegetables. Our springs can be a roller coaster ride with regards to temperatures and this can have a devastating effect on tender apple blooms. Ernie has developed a method for protecting the tender blooms from freezing. His trick? Air circulation. Apple blossoms can survive temperatures down to about 30 degrees and even last



up to 2 hours at 28 degrees before the blooms begin to die off. During this past bloom, Ernie awoke at 3 a.m. to find the temperature at 32 degrees. When he checked again at 4 a.m., the temperature had dropped to 25 degrees. All hands on deck! Ernie and Shawn and the others were out in the orchard with tractors that towed trailers mounted with huge fans. The circulating air is warmer thus offsetting the dangerous effects of the cold. These late night efforts combined with the use of alternate water sources to combat our lack of rain this summer resulted in an average crop for Meadow Ledge when other local orchards saw a decrease in production.

As the apples grown, farm hands hand trim the trees and thin the crop so that the best apples can grow to their full potential. As we progress in to June and July there is mowing and weeding to be done and strawberry crop ripens and August brings the first apples and the peach crop. Then it is crunch time. During the fall, the pick-your-own business and store operations take center stage. Louie, a full-time store

employee enjoys the chaos that is pick-your-own season. "The day just flies by and you get to see so many people." PYO brings many families from near and far to enjoy a day in the fresh air picking apples. They have welcomed visitors from as far away as England and Kuwait. Numerous local schools (including LES) bring in busloads of kids to learn about the process of apple picking and to pick apples for themselves. The decline in the economy has seen an increase in families searching for a fun, budget friendly activity.

However the increase in visitors brings a few challenges. Over the last few seasons, Ernie has noticed a decrease in respect for the property and an increase in people walking off without paying for the apples they picked. "People have even said, 'What's it to you, you have thousands of apples out there.' Well, my money grows on trees. We love having people here, the majority of them are respectful and a pleasure to have." That said, there has been an increase in people (kids AND adults) climbing trees and throwing apples. So reluctantly Meadow Ledge has had to implement security measures to head off potential damage and theft.

Don't think for a minute that any of the apples at Meadow Ledge go to waste. Ernie is a stickler for quality. The pickers are only allowed a 5% bruising rate and they are required to pick 8-10 bushels an hour (no easy task). "I'm all about quality, quality, quality." As I was talking with him, he spied a bruised Granny Smith in one of the bins and it is driving him bonkers. Finally, Jess, a store employee left her station labeling jars of homemade preserves and searched for the sub-par fruit. Louie joked from across the store "Ernie is the only guy I know who can see a bruise in the dark!" Apples that don't meet Ernie's high standards are set aside and sold to cider mills, or as animal feed or deer bait.

Two Businesses Under One Roof.

Most people don't realize that nestled in the barn just behind the store, is an apple slicing business that functions year round to supply fresh, preservative free, peeled, sliced apples to local companies like The Pie Guy, Plymouth State University, and the Berry Delicious Bakery and the national grocery chain, Trader Joe's. This year the week before Thanksgiving, Meadow Ledge expected to peel more than 20,000 pounds of apples to meet the needs of consumer looking pies for their Thanksgiving celebrations.

The apples are unloaded a bin at a time into a hopper where they are scrubbed and then travel down a conveyor belt to the machine that peels the apples. A farm hand staffs the machine loading two apples at a time on alternating mounts. The apples spin around a rapidly rotating sharp blade. The peels and apples travel down separate conveyers. The peels are sold as deer bait and animal food to local farmers. The peeled apples continue to the slicer where they are cored and sliced. Then they are shaken to separate the seeds and finally the slices are bagged in twelve-pound bags. The slicing room is also home to the commercial kitchen where Meadow Ledge Bakers create homemade apple breads, whoopie pies, and even the batter for those delicious cider donuts. For the record, I asked Ernie what was in the batter and his answer? Cider. I guess he keeps that recipe under lock and key.

Fresh, sliced apples are in demand year round, but apples are notoriously challenging to store over the long term. That's why, two years ago, Meadow Ledge built a controlled atmosphere unit or CA. Apples are loaded by the bin into the CA. Once sealed, the temperature is dropped to around thirty-three degrees. The humidity is





increased and the oxygen level is lowered to 5% (down from the 21% humans breathe). The apples will give off carbon dioxide, which then must be removed via a lime based filtration system. The CA is now stocked with apples from this year's harvest that will supply the slicing business through next summer. The diversity of business is what has sustained Meadow Ledge.

Ernie has always enjoyed farming. He likes animals, but lacked the appreciation necessary to raise them. He has a degree from UNH's Thompson school of Applied Science and has been working in orchards in 1989. He and Kris bought Meadow Ledge in 1994 and Ernie is optimistic that Shawn will take over the business someday. Farming

today is less about luck and more about science and math. He encourages anyone who has a love of the outdoors and abilities in science and math to consider the field. It is not easy work, much of the year Ernie and his team put in 70-hour weeks, but the work is rewarding and the results taste good.

For more information about Meadow Ledge Farm visit their web site www.meadowledgefarm.com. The store is open until December 23rd Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm and Sundays, 9am to 5pm.

Lee Laughlin is a freelance writer and blogger. Currently she blogs at thisnlife.com and livefearless.com. She can be reached at lee.laughlin@gmail.com. ■



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