

The Westend Weekly

Bringing Communities Together



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Research station presents interesting farm tour

by Marlene Deschamps

There was a farm tour on Wednesday, July 29th starting at the Clover Valley Farmers' Market and ending at the Emo agricultural research station. There were about 15 people who took the entire tour and around 60 who showed up for the annual open house and BBQ featuring local foods. Joe Sletmoen who is on the Board of Directors for the Rainy River Soil and Crop Improvement Association co-ordinated the event along with Ted Zimmerman. Kim Jo Bliss from the research station had a table set up with three samples of the vegetable trial they did this year. Although they planted carrots and lettuce, Kim Jo brought along lettuce for people to taste and rate as to flavour, size, uniformity and color. People appeared to like all three samples and most said they would buy some if she brought it to the Farmers Market. While waiting for lunch to be prepared, Pat Cornell gave a tour of the Market. She explained how they are now involved in providing Healthy Food Boxes for Emo, Atikokan and Rainy River. They now supply 200-250 boxes a month and they work with the Sunset Country Metis. They also provide 40 boxes per month to the Healthy Babies & Senior program at Shoal Lake. She noted they are in need of more local vegetable that are retail ready and that the season for much of the produce is late this year. They also bring the market to Kenora and Sioux Lookout and Pat said they were really well received at both of the out of town markets. Stefan Szeder, President of the Association, who lead the farm tour, then told everyone about the tour and where they would be going after lunch.

The tour included: a stop at Farmer's Market; a tour of Mark Gerber's vegetable growing and processing farm; Joe

Sletmoen's bale grazing; Marvin Smith's farm in Devlin where he is doing a trial growth of new grass for the bio mass mill; Ted Zimmermans farm north of Emo where he is doing a green manure project which could reduce the high fertilizer bills all farmers have; Bernie Zimmermans where he is growing switch grass for the bio mass mill; Danny Teeple farm a mile west of the BlackHawk Store where he is growing reed and canary grass, again for the bio mass mill; Helvin Heatwole at the corner leading to the Manitou Mounds, who mainly has a large vegetable growing operation and then back to the Emo research station where a BBQ and tour was slated for 7 p.m.

The first stop at Mark Gerber's was a real treat and he and his family are very friendly and generous hosts. He explained that many of his produce was late this year and explained some of his problems with the explosion of the deer population. Along on the tour were Allan Mol and his wife Margaret from Thunder Bay. They are dairy farmers and he is the Regional Director for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association. When Mark found there was someone named Margaret on the tour, he picked some daisies and clover and presented her with them telling everyone that where his family originally came from this bouquet was called a Margaret so he was presenting Margaret with a Margaret. He showed us his fields and explained that he is mostly organic because he uses very little fertilizer and chemicals. Everyone then walked among the beds of squash, beans, leeks, cucumbers, spinach, turnips, beets, swiss chard, fennel, lettuce, carrots, onions, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, cantaloupe, cauliflower, broccoli, watermelon, cabbage and peppers. Everyone was

asking Mark when they would be able to purchase these fresh, local grown items and everyone was asking "When will the corn be ready?". Mark said that is the question everyone asks first and let everyone know - "Soon". He explained about planting dill by the carrots because it keeps away the carrot rust fly. He said this was the natural way to use nature's cures for various pests. He showed how grasshoppers can eat the heart out of a cauliflower and how they still today remain a problem at times. He showed how he planted some of his peas to trail up large poles and how it provided a wind break for the tomatoes. He then showed everyone where they process and clean all their produce and how they had gone very early to Kenora that day to sell produce and he would be going to Sioux Lookout on Thursday and then back for the Farmer's Market on Saturday. It was a very interesting and informative visit and really made one realize all the hard work expended for anyone getting into this type of agricultural business.

The tour then wound itself throughout much of the Rainy River District as it visited the stops listed above. Marvin Smith used to raise beef but has now switched to doing a trial growth of grass for the bio mass mill. He said he was getting too old to chase after cows with not that much reward. Hopefully with the new abattoir on the horizon, it will make it easier for our cattlemen so they need not consider taking this same course.

The good weather held out for most of the day and the only time there was rain was while everyone was inside at the research station enjoying their hamburgers and smokies, which was all produced locally. There were trays of veggies and fruits available along with refreshments. There was also



Kim Jo Bliss explaining the various test areas at the research station.

some of the best relish as just one of the condiments. It tasted just like the stuff grandma used to make and it is available at Country Lanes in Emo minus the jars now sitting in my cupboard. The meal was over, the rain let up and around 60 people started out on the tour, led by Kim Jo of all the test crops that are grown at the research station. The variety and types of grains and grasses grown are more than people would realize when they see them from the highway. They are testing and doing research on switch grass, reed and canary grasses and it appears the switch grass is not as promising as the other two. They also have a green manure patch and are working on getting the funding they need so they can find cheaper and greener fertilizers for the soil. Kim Jo said funding is always a big challenge. They work with a group of individuals-NOARIN (Northern Ontario Agriculture Research Innovation Network) from all

over the north to develop cohesiveness for agriculture. They work on research, new innovation projects extension of services, education and work with the watershed group from south Kenora to Rainy River to identify projects and mutual benefit for the entire Lake of the Woods, Rainy River watershed. She said the work with Dick Trivers on the Environmental Farm Plan where he does workshops on growing farm projects. They are also committed to bring in speakers to educate farmers. This year Kim Jo had two students helping her. Matt McQuaker (in his second year taking Electrical Engineering at University of Guelph) and Shannon Darby who attend Brandon University and is studying music. Kim Jo said they also have a deer problem but so far the only thing they have gone after are the soy beans. When I asked Kim Jo to further explain green manure,

she said they plant red clover and different species and then they plough it under and then replant using the plough under as fertilizer. Neat idea-and it smells nice. The trees planted at the back of the research centre are Abitibi property and they are hosting the trees that are hybrid and popular cloned trees along with black spruce. They serve as a wind barrier to most of the other crops. Kim said the basic testing is done to raise grains and grasses that are bug and disease resistant. She did a great job on the tour as all participated to the end and everyone was very interested in what she explained about each section they walked through and/or past. Kim Jo was quite pleased with the amount of people who came out for the tour this year and said people should remember that they can stop by anytime- there are people at the station and she will be glad to explain what they do and why.

Halkirk holds 18th annual fish fry



Halkirk Township Fire Protection Team members Fire Chief, Garth Lockman and volunteer firefighter, Jim Luchka beside fire truck.

by Marlene Deschamps

Halkirk Township Fire Protection Team protect the Township on Hwy #502 to Nicickousemenecaning First Nation. Each year for the past 18 years they hold a Fish Fry to raise dollars for operational expenses and insurance on their truck and building. The Fire Team are volunteers from the Township and they, along with the community, come together to make this event happen. Bea Galbraith once again organized the fish fry and according to Garth's wife, Joy, this year was the best ever. They started out with 145 pounds of fish but unlike other years, no one brought home

any leftover fish as it was all gone by 5:15 p.m. although the fish fry was slated to last until 6 p.m.

People came in droves to have a great meal of fish, salad, beans, buns, refreshments and a chance to buy some homemade pie at \$1 a plate. One couldn't help notice that many of the vehicles parked in the area bore license plates from out of province and out of the country. Joy said the water was so choppy that many of the tourists and summer residents couldn't go out fishing so they decided to enjoy the fish fry.

The annual fund raiser usually garners around \$3,000 but

this year that amount shot up to around \$5,000. Joy said it was the best ever and a wonderful day for everyone. Even mother nature cooperated and the predicted rain storm held off until after the fish fry was over. The beautiful quilt that was being raffled off was won by Jim Pochailo of Fort Frances. They ran out of raffle tickets by 2 p.m. There was also a penny auction table full of terrific prizes donated by volunteers and businesses. Joy said she and Garth wanted to send out a big thank you to Bea, all the volunteers and donors and to the public who came out to enjoy the day.

Mother Nature wearing red ALREADY!



by Marlene Deschamps

This tree was spotted along the highway on the way to Bear's Pass. When this was mentioned at the fish fry, several people said they had noticed trees turning over the past few weeks. It seems that after our long harsh winter, our long cool spring, most people were looking forward to the hot summer the weathermen were predicting. Except for a few days

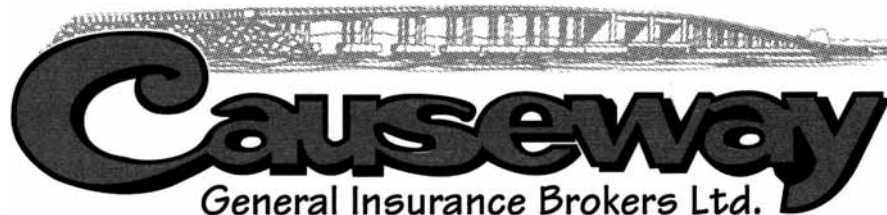
in late June when the temperature skyrocketed to 27 this summer has been a wash. We are already wearing sweatshirts and some of us have found it necessary to kick the furnace on in the morning to take the chill off. Most everyone's garden is anywhere from 2-5 weeks late, and at a time when people are usually canning vegetables and making pickles, they are still waiting for cucs,

beets, tomatoes and the various other produce to ripen.

If anyone has an unusual or particularly beautiful picture taken in our district that they would like to share with our readers, please send it in (in high resolution jpg form) to us at westendweekly@tbaytel.net. It might appear on our front page in colour.



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