

Tales from the Fruit Loop



Photo by Julie Raefield-Gobbo

CAREFREE corn maze enthusiasts (front to back) Brynn Butler, 7, Bennett Butler, 5, Allyson Shannon, 5, and Madeline Shannon, 7, of Bend, tear through the Rasmussen Farms' annual labyrinth of stalks and dioramas. This year the painted-gourd scenes housed inside the maze celebrate 100 years of Girl Scouting.

Rasmussen's renews visitors with beauty and spirit

By JULIE RAEFIELD-GOBBO
News staff writer

The feel of crisp autumn air in your face. The contrasting crunch and give of a juicy, ripe pear in your mouth. The stunning beauty of an unobstructed view across the valley. The joyful shrieks of children as they race to the pumpkin field and on through the corn maze.

This is what awaits you: An entire harvest-season-in-a-day with one stop — and that stop is Rasmussen Farms in Hood River.

Since before I began bringing my own children to Ras-

mussen's, swaddled in harvest blankets a quarter century ago, this welcoming, authentic farm has quite simply, engendered happiness for my family, and countless others, year after year.

It is hard to sum up a quintessential experience like Rasmussen's. Looking up synonyms, I find that what I am trying to describe might also be expressed in words



Julie Raefield-Gobbo

like, "archetypal" and "exemplary," or maybe "perfection." Perhaps the best word of all is simply —ideal, which better reflects the dream-like feeling that accompanies a visit to the farm.

And though Rasmussen's is definitely ideal in its physical beauty and lovely valley location, what makes it more inspiring is the heart that beats underneath the outward appearances.

When you pull up to the red-graveled parking area, what you find is a place beloved.

Beginning with founders Dollie and Lynn Rasmussen,

the farm is cradled and nurtured by loving hands. Everyone who works at Rasmussen's, even those without a signature on the mortgage, cares about how each visitor feels when they enter the farm's gracious fields and well-worn farm buildings.

Rasmussen Farms is not the gleaming, pristine coldness of a new shopping mall; neither is it the flash and incessant pulse of the latest app or electronic gadget. It is a very welcome opposite — a patch of earth that loving hands have successfully transformed into a series of simple miracles.

To encounter a sea of pumpkins still clinging to the vine is good for the spirit. It reminds us that we are connected to the earth and that the earth is still providing for us.

The corn maze, in its nod to life's mystery, beckons us to lose ourselves for just a little while, and return to a time of simple wonders.

Inside the old red barn, we can look around and marvel at the innumerable variety and painterly beauty found in an abundance of apples piled high in wooden bins.

These are the small miracles, and ones that we rarely

take the time to ponder in our fast-paced world today.

At Rasmussen's, we can race, gather, sip, taste, pick, contemplate and get our hands dirty until we renew and soften our sometimes-closed, hardened hearts that still long for a genuine connection with one another and our lovely earth.

Fruit and whimsy

Please turn to page B14 for Esther Smith's story on Cody Orchards Farmstand in Odell.

At hoodrivernews.com: Kiyokawa's in Parkdale.

It's no secret — Apple Valley's treats are delicious

By BEN MCCARTY
News staff writer

The pear dumpling may be dangerous.

And not just for the obvious reasons of it being a piping-hot blend of ripe Bartlett pear stuffed with cinnamon and sugar and other spices and wrapped in rich buttery pie dough.

It may be dangerous because I've spent the last half an hour trying to find out the secret of what the "other" spices in the pear dumpling are, and now some of the Apple Valley Country store staff are chuckling deviously at me after I wondered aloud if the pear dumpling may be my equivalent of Snow White's apple.

Store manager Marcia Spooner assures me the dumpling is perfectly safe (once it's cooled down a

bit) and that they have not revealed any of the "tell you but then we have to kill you" secrets.

In the days running up to Harvest Festival the kitchen is a hive of activity as the staff will assemble more than 300 pear dumplings in one day.

They stuff the pear with filling (It's sugar and spice and stuff like that, says Josey Smith as she fills a test dumpling), wrap it in the dough and bake it.

Once it comes out of the oven it's covered in a delicious sauce. The sauce, too, is classified.

"That's a secret," Smith says.

In addition to all the goodies on the walls and the baked goods coming out of the kitchen, on many festival weekends the also offer slow

smoked barbecue.

That sets up a dilemma for visitors who gorge themselves on pulled pork and then wander into the store to be confronted with stacks of pie filling, jams and jellies and the smell of fresh-baked pear dumplings.

You can try listening to your inner angel which tells you to split a dumpling with your significant other, or you can wave the surrender flag and just acknowledge that you will likely leave the store with a dumpling or 10, five or so pies (one for you and the rest for "friends") and several jars of something tasty.

Determined to get at least some inside info on what makes everything so delicious, I try a different line of questioning and ask each staff member their favorite pie.

Some have to think for a minute, but Spooner does not even miss a beat before responding with pecan pie, and declaring Apple Valley's to be the best they ever had.

"What makes it so good?" I query.

"We have a secret ingredient," she grins.

Can't say I didn't try.



Ben McCarty



Photo by Ben McCarty

JOSEY SMITH, Marcia Spooner, Leila Coe (right to left) put finishing touches on Bumbleberry pies.



Photo by Adam Lapierre

FREE FUN: Hayrides and farm tours are part of the fall festivities at Mt. View Orchards in Parkdale.

A hay ride down memory lane

By ADAM LAPIERRE
News staff writer

For me, a trip to Mt. View Orchards is a trip down memory lane.

Parkdale was my stomping grounds, and the Trout Creek Ridge Road farm and fruit stand was just up the street; past a few hay fields, a couple notorious bike-chasing dogs, some noisy neighborhood chickens and a ginormous bull that would charge the fence if you got too close.

The 50-acre orchard is owned and operated by the McAlexander Family, with Ruth and Lyle at the helm for about the last four decades. When I was a kid, Ruthie gave me one of the first jobs I ever had, outside of mowing lawns and bucking hay for neighbors. The official Fruit Loop didn't exist yet, but the

farm stand was still a popular stop for people on their annual autumn pilgrimages around the valley in search of farm-fresh fruit and produce.

I can't remember everything I did at the farm, but for sure my best memories are of operating the cider press (and taste-testing juice) and driving a four-wheeler through rows of trees in search of whatever variety apple or pear the farm stand was low on. Picking the fruit, if I recall correctly, wasn't nearly as much fun.

A stop at the farm this weekend yielded a number of pleasant surprises, including something I haven't done for probably 20 years but used to absolutely love when I was a kid: hay rides through the orchard.

I don't know what it is about taking a bumpy, dusty ride behind a tractor while sitting on scratchy bales of straw that I find so appealing. I'm even allergic to hay.

It must be the nostalgia; the true country-boy memories it brings back of afternoons spent wandering through orchard rows as young explorers; playing hide and seek and capture the flag, catching butterflies and grasshoppers, playing water-wars with the big metal sprinklers, telling scary stories in the dark and, sorry mom, partaking in the most unruly rotten pear fights imaginable.

I remember as a kid, I always wanted to live in Hood River. Life seemed so slow and boring growing up in the country. My family didn't own a farm; I just was just surrounded by them. What fun and crazy things were those lucky city kids doing down in Hood River? I felt like I was missing out on something, living waaaaaaayyyy up in the sticks.

That angst is all but gone now, and I relish any chance I can to spend time in the country.



Adam Lapierre



Cody's Orchards Farm Stand is filled with fruit – and whimsy

By ESTHER K. SMITH
News staff writer

I first went to Cody Orchards Farm Stand because I know the owners, Glen and Donna Cody, having been Glen's classmate at Hood River Valley High School.

But what has kept me coming back is Donna's amazing cheerfulness, helpfulness and knowledgeability on every aspect of fruit, and the sheer variety of things the stand has to offer. And it's always a fun visit.



Esther Smith

The stand is Donna's "baby," and opened in August 2008 in a former fruit-packing barn. It has evolved from a long, mostly empty space to a long, every-inch-filled treasure trove of fresh fruit, jams, honeys, ciders, pies, fresh flowers, antiques, handmade crafts and many gift items.

As stop number 11 on the Fruit Loop map, Cody's participates in all of the major Fruit Loop events, including the upcoming Harvest Fest, Oct. 20-21. Special activities

this weekend will include a cake walk (every half hour), piñatas, orchard tours (either a hayride or walking tour, depending on the weather) and more.

Visitors come from all over the state — and country — to the rustic old barn, for the fruit and for the whole experience. On a recent weekend, the Chard family of Canby — Ken, Jen, Mairén and Jamison — stopped by after a swim meet for some U-pick apples.

Donna took them on a short walk through the orchard to the striped Delicious trees, explaining to the family how that variety is the one that chosen for its flavor, and blended with another, prettier apple variety to create the Red Delicious.

"They may not be as pretty, but they taste great!" she told the family. She also pointed to a row of "Mystery Apples," ones that turned out to be different than what she and Glen thought they were planting.

"We don't know what they are, but they're really good," she said.

She gave the Chards instruction on picking apples: "Lift upwards so that the

apple comes off easily; don't pull down or you'll be taking the bud for next year's fruit with it!" she laughed.

Jen Chard said the family first came to Cody's a couple of years ago after asking local friends and family for a recommendation.

"They said this is the 'insider' place," she said. "And Donna is so knowledgeable and so nice; we always feel so welcome. Now we tell all our friends: 'Come to Cody's.'"

Only two weekends remain in the 2012-13 season, and both are busy ones: Harvest Fest weekend is followed by the Fruit Loop's Heirloom Apple Days, Oct. 27-28. Cody's will remain open until Oct. 31, and then will offer self-serve-only after that; weather permitting.

Cody Orchards Farm Stand is located at 3475 Graves Road, just off Highway 35, where the Odell Highway (OR 282) meets Graves Road. Hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday; noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. For more information contact Cody's at 541-354-1085 or codyorchards@hrecn.net or visit www.codyorchards.com.

Photo by Esther K. Smith

BEYOND FRUIT, Cody's Farm Stand is filled with fresh produce, pies, jams, ciders, antiques, hand-crafted gifts and many other items.

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