

Maple Syrup Festival set for Feb. 22-23 and March 1-2

Written by George Browning

Tuesday, 18 February 2014 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 February 2014 13:58

One of the biggest events annually in Washington County is the Maple Syrup Festival held at LM Sugarbush, LLC, at 321 N. Garrison Hollow Road in Salem. This year's event will be Feb. 22 and 23 and March 1 and 2. The time will be from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day.

Admission and parking is free.

Those attending are encouraged to wear sturdy warm boots.

In addition to lots of great food from breakfast to supper and snacks inbetween, there are plenty of activities from people of all ages.

The following is a list of those activities:

(Some activities have a small charge, ie. Straw maze, merry go round, candle making, Jacob's Ladder)

**Sugarbush tours every hour from 10:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

**Self-guided tour of sugarhouse with operating evaporator

**Indian and Pioneer syrup making demonstrations, 11:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

**Crosscut sawing

**Maple leaf branding on your slice of log for a free souvenir

**Mini museum of maple related antiques

**Tomahawk throwing

**Tractor drawn wagon rides

**Outdoor Craft Vendor area

**Candle making

**Children's game area and activity center

**Straw maze

*Old time merry-go-round

**Jacob's Ladder

**Music – acoustic, traditional, gospel, bluegrass, etc. - 10 A.M. – 4 P.M. (Schedule posted on the website)

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****Christian worship service – Sundays 8:00 A.M. – everyone welcome**

****In 2013, Leane and Michael's Sugarbush changed its name to LM Sugarbush LLC. The business is now owned and operated by Mike and Leane's daughters Jennifer and Emily, along with their husbands Nic and Robert. Leane is the festival manager and is involved in many aspects of the farm. While there will be minor changes, our goal is to continue to run a family oriented business and festival that is both affordable and enjoyable to attend. Pure maple syrup is still produced on the farm for both retail and wholesale customers. Below is a brief description of the history of our farm and the maple syrup making process.**

Imagine a scenic valley tucked between two wooded hills, an ice and snow-covered creek running nearby, and steam billowing from the tall smokestack of a large, low barn. The sap gathered from the nearby maple trees is being boiled down into thick, sticky, pure syrup, soon to be enjoyed by a family on their pancake breakfast.

A scene from New England or Canada? That is often what comes to mind, but you can enjoy this craft, rich in history, without leaving Indiana. Nestled in the scenic Southern Indiana hills is our farm, LM Sugarbush, one of Indiana's largest producers of pure maple syrup. During the early winter months you can find us busy preparing for the maple syrup season and our annual festival.

We have produced over 17,000 gallons of pure maple syrup over the last 30 years. The first few years saw us boiling sap in an open pan under a winter sky and bottling the resulting dark syrup in quart canning jars. In 1982 we bought our first evaporator made especially for making maple syrup and began modernizing our operation. Since changing over to a larger evaporator in 1988, we added and now use the most modern equipment available in the maple industry – plastic tubing, vacuum pumps, and a reverse osmosis machine.

The fundamental process of making pure maple syrup has not changed since the Native American Indians made it and later taught the process to the early pioneers hundreds of years ago. Drawn from the maple trees in late winter, maple sap contains an average of 2 % sugar and drips like water from the tapholes drilled into the trees. It takes an average of 50 gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup. The basic process requires an average of 49 gallons of water to be evaporated from each 50 gallons of sap collected in order to turn it into syrup. Although our technology gives us far different equipment with which to do this, the process is still the same as that used in the earliest days of North America's history.

Our sap is collected through plastic tubing, gently drawn into large tanks with vacuum pumps and then put through a reverse osmosis machine that removes 50% of the water, leaving a more concentrated sap. It is then boiled in the evaporator until it is 67% sugar, drawn off into buckets, and poured into drums where it is stored until being bottled and heading off to grace someone's breakfast table with its rich, wholesome goodness.

Even with this modern equipment, one thing has not changed since the Native American syrup making days – it is still labor intensive, requiring many hours of hard work. When syrup season rolls around each year we don't have to look for help; many friends and neighbors call us to see

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if it is time to come to work. The hard work fosters a spirit of community, while everyone contributes to and benefits from the sweet success of the season.

Our website includes information about our operation, online syrup sales, frequent updates about the current syrup making season, information about our festival and links to our favorite area attractions for those wishing to make a family trip during festival time. We also have a free online unit study about maple syrup covering the subjects of Language Arts, History, Science, Math and Art. Maple syrup making is rich in history and scientific principals and lends itself to the study of many other areas as well.

The festival includes activities for all ages – food served all day, FREE tours of our syrup making operation, Native American and pioneer demonstrations of maple syrup making, our store with 2014 pure maple syrup to purchase (and a large variety of other items), many children's activities and games, tractor drawn wagon rides, craft vendors, live music and more. There is NO parking fee or entrance fee for the festival! We take all major credit cards in the store and dining room.

Visit our website at www.LMSugarbush.com for more information about our family business and the Annual Maple Syrup Festival.