

Blueberry Festival entices visitors

By DONNA McARDLE
Special to The Times

PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — It was a “berry” beautiful day yesterday for the 22nd annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival as thousands of visitors streamed into historic Whitesbog Village for the day-long program of bluegrass and Pinelands music, crafts and vendors and food at the spot where the commercial American blueberry was born.

Many of the visitors flocked to the village’s general store, which contained the Whitesbog Post Office where copies of this year’s edition of the festival’s annual picture postcard were available.

Theresa Earley, coordinator of the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, called the photograph on the postcard “The Women of Whitesbog.”

It depicts women of different ethnic groups picking blueberries in the fields.

Earley said, “I really like this year’s post card because it shows the village’s multi-ethnicity,” she said.

The village, besides being a commercial processing operation for cranberries and, later, blueberries, was a seasonal communal home for the field hands and their families.

New to the festival this year was an Artists’ Row, costumed Elizabeth White and Jersey Devil characters serving as judges for the children’s pie-eating contest and a wolf and bear resource center.

Fourteen-year old Maranda Piccirilli, a village resident, was busy at the blueberry baked goods table, where throngs of visitors were scooping up muffins, bagels and slices of blueberry cheesecake.

“I know I’ll be exhausted by the end of the day,” she said.

Hamilton resident Donna Birone was showing her stained glass pieces in the relative cool of a tree’s shade. Her children, Alee, 7, and Christopher, 11, were ready to help any customers who wandered by their booth.

Other vendors offered jewelry, embroidered wares, paintings, photographs, candles, potted plants and a variety of items both eye-catching and distinct.

At the North Pemberton Train Station booth, volunteer Adrienne Leonard was busy at fielding numerous requests from train buffs and local historians eager to round out their collections.

“We’ve been coming here since 1997,” she said “and it’s well worth it for us.”

The Krivchenia family was there to help and have fun. Aaron, 6, and his brother Seth, 8, were with their mother, Ellen.

“We’re working with the volunteers from Deborah Hospital’s Foundation,” said Ellen Krivchenia. “We just helped set up the booth.”

And the boys, who were quick to lend a hand, were also just as quick to be distracted, wandering off to the next booth, where a crafter was deftly moving one of his animal marionettes.

As the inviting sounds of folk music wafted down the rows the boys were wandering again.

“This is our first time here,” said Ellen Krivchenia. “I think we’re going to have a really good time today.”

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