

A group attending the Pinelands Month kickoff at Whitesbog Village yesterday watch the cranberry harvest taking place in the bogs owned and operated by J.J. White Company.

Staff photo by Randall Hegadorn



Pinelands Month opens with cranberry bogs tour

By MIRTA D'AMATO
Staff Writer

PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — Pinelands Month kicked off with a berry unique experience yesterday at Whitesbog.

About 70 people toured the cranberry bogs and learned about harvesting, history and the area's environmental concerns.

"We want to raise awareness of how unique and special the area is," said Sally B. Price, executive director of the Pineland Preservation Alliance. "The whole idea is to get residents to see how nice the area is and tell people the Pinelands are a very special place."

The elusive Jersey Devil actually put in an appearance, and several modern-day speakers were on hand to speak about the Pinelands history, and its agricultural importance and the importance of pro-

tecting the aquifer. Robert Shinn, commissioner state's Department of Environmental Protection, addressed the issue of water.

"It is important to understand the unique diversity that makes the Pinelands work," said Shinn, referring to the area's agriculture. "Berry farmers' best protection is to watch the quality of the water."

A computer-generated art poster illustrating the cranberry harvest, the Jersey Devil and an endangered tree frog, native to the area, was presented to Shinn.

Following the presentations, guests boarded a bus or followed in cars along a sandy road that cut across Routes 530 and 70, to the bogs.

Plenty of floating cranberries greeted the curious onlookers as three farmers loosened the berries from their underwater evergreen vines. The sight brought home Commissioner Shinn's lesson about

water.

"You know corn and tomatoes are big in New Jersey and are dependent on rain," said one of the visitors, Dan Collins of Toms River. "Cranberries, I learned, are dependent on local ground water, its quality and availability."

After the tour, visitors returned to the village of Whitesbog for a slide presentation, and to learn more about the history of the cranberry, which the Indians called "itamee" or "sasemineash."

"The settlers didn't like the name and decided to call it *craneberry*," said Ann Darlington, the tour guide, "because the cranberry flower resembles the head of a crane. Eventually the name was changed to cranberry." She spoke about the importance of cranberries to New Jersey. The state ranks third as a producer of cranberries, she noted.

That surprised Marilyn Collins,



Staff photo by Randall Hegadorn

The Jersey Devil, legendary haunter of the swamps, made an appearance at Whitesbog Village yesterday as part of the kickoff festivities.

who uses cranberries for a variety of dishes. "I didn't realize that New Jersey is so big on cranberries," she said.