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Steve & Sue:

The attached article appeared in Friday's edition of "Home News", the major central NJ newspaper.

It appears that the Festival was a great success, for Whitesbog, our visitors, and the vendors.

Richard

June 29, 2002

The Jersey Shore's
News Source

Blueberry funk shouldn't sour fest

Published in the Home News Tribune 6/29/02

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WHITESBOG VILLAGE -- In the world of cultivated blueberries, this corner of the Pinelands is Mecca.

But the shrine -- overgrown, untended and still suffering the effects of too little rain a year ago -- is barely producing any fruit.

That means not many people will be able to pick the sweet treats from some of the earliest people-planted blueberry bushes during today's blueberry festival here.

But the pie-eating contests, craft-selling, and boot-stomping folk bands will go on in a weekend that's sure to turn the mouths of Garden State berry aficionados bluer than the Smurfs.

The Whitesbog festival salutes the spot where Elizabeth White figured out nearly a century ago how to cultivate the wild blueberries native to the area. She had children help her find the bushes with the biggest berries. Then, along with researcher Frederick V. Coville, she grafted the best ones to produce commercially viable varieties.

In the Pinelands' sandy soils, blueberries still grow naturally, though they're far smaller than the ones found at farm stands and grocery stores. And they're easily confused with huckleberries, which are

similar in look and taste, but have bigger seeds.

White domesticated the blueberry, according to Lebanon State Forest superintendent Chris Bethmann. But no one has done the same for huckleberries.

That's why it's blueberries that are getting all the attention this weekend in southern New Jersey.

About 30 miles south of Whitesbog in Hammonton, the self-proclaimed Blueberry Capital of the World will hold its Red, White and Blueberry Festival tomorrow.

Part of the tradition for the 5,000 or so annual Whitesbog festival-goers is picking the berries from the very bushes planted by White up to 90 years ago. Normally, each carload of visitors gets a pint container to fill.

"Every other one goes in your mouth," said T. Stephan Thompson, executive director of the Whitesbog Preservation Trust. "To get a pint filled, you have to pick at least two pints."

But the historic bushes have been left largely untended for most of a decade. Some have grown up as high as a basketball rim.

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