

# Festival celebrates all things blueberry

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PEMBERTON TWP.

A blueberry festival in Whitesbog Village on Saturday drew thousands of people hoping to taste an assortment of pies, muffins and cakes — and revive memories of summers long gone.

“Coming here brings back memories of the fun we used to have,” said 75-year-old Joseph Mallace, who was at the 19th Annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival at the farm he worked on from 1946 to 1949.

“They were the best years of my life,” he said. “A whole bunch of us came here from the city (Philadelphia) to pick the blueberries and scoop the cranberries. It was hard work, but it was adventurous, mysterious and the most fun imaginable.”

The event, held by the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, celebrates the place where blueberries were first cultivated 85 years ago by Elizabeth White and Dr. Frederick V. Coville.

This is where White figured out how to cultivate wild blueberries native to the area. She had children help her find the bushes with the biggest berries. Then, along with researcher Coville, she grafted the best ones to produce commercially viable varieties.

“Their work and this village was very important to this area,” said Janet Robbins, vice president of the trust. “It provided a way of life for the people and allowed them to earn a living.”

The trust was established in 1982 in an effort to preserve the village, in the Lebanon State Forest, and to register it as a historic site with the state, Robbins said.

Robbins said many of the

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buildings were vandalized in the abandoned village before the trust became involved, but are now in various stages of restoration. They are being used to house educational activities and residents.

The festival is the trust's largest fund-raiser and all the money goes toward restoration of the village, according to Sue Goldstein, the trust's events coordinator.

Two organizations in the village are among several groups that help maintain it, she said. The Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies educates schoolchildren and the Pinelands Antique Engine Association runs a museum in the village's old powerhouse, and helps maintain the fields and wagons for the village.

The festival featured a display of old engines, log cutting demonstrations, crafts, bluegrass and

folk music, and of course, blueberries — despite the loss of this year's Whitesbog crop to poor weather early in the spring.

"It's sad," said Robbins. "The frost hit us just as the blossom was at its peak, but the farmer who provided us with all our berries today is from Pemberton, and he is part of the Tru Blu Cooperative Association that Elizabeth White started in 1927."

For Cherie Edwards and her son Domenic of Marlton, the festi-

val provided a connection to some family history.

"My mother and all my uncles always told me about this place. They spent summers here working on the farm," said Edwards. "I heard so many stories and had to come see it for myself. I really enjoyed the festive atmosphere, and I especially liked the Indian crafts and the music."

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