

# Jersey's gem <sup>BCT</sup> 9-30-01

## Pinelands Month offers rare chance to research a resource

The sun glints off the red-tinged swamp maples with particular intensity, making the leaves glow from the inside.

The smell of pine and cedar is sharp in the air, and the newly chilled air feels bracing as it clears away the brain's cobwebs. Flocks of geese honk their way across a crystal sky.

This is autumn in the Pine Barrens, the million acres our state claims as its most precious jewel.

During New Jersey Pinelands Month, Burlington County residents are invited to learn more about the forests, waterways, plants and animals that give the region its unique identity.

Festivities kick off next Sunday at Whitesbog Village, the historic company town in Pemberton Township whose cultivation of blueberries put it on the map.

During the ensuing four weeks, visitors will take guided tours along the sugar sand roads lining cranberry bogs ready for harvesting. They will hear naturalists describe the wildflowers, trees and animals along the Barrens' back roads.

They will gaze at the "Pinelands Memory Wall," an exhibit showcasing the culture, history and emotional heritage of the vast area and its residents.

And they will be held spellbound by tales of the legendary Dr. Still, who tapped into the indigenous plant life to create folk remedies for generations past.

Most importantly, they will become Pine Barrens "emissaries" — regular men and women who have seen the deep, dark beauty of the land and feel compelled to share it with their neighbors and friends.

As tensions simmer between developers who seek to build there and activists determined to keep such development at a minimum, the events are designed to present the land in all its pristine beauty.

A project of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance and the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, the celebration deserves a notation on every county resident's calendar.

The opportunity to get up-close and personal with nature helps guarantee that the fragile resource that makes up the eastern and southern border of Burlington County continues well into the 20th century relatively intact.

Call it our gift to generations yet to come.

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*The celebration is designed to showcase the million precious acres and make supporters out of visitors.*

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