

A blueberry festival to help Whitesbog

By Kitty Dumas
Inquirer Staff Writer

All around Ann and Mark Darlington were signs of the blueberry festival. There were crafts displays, music and food — blueberry pie, blueberry cheesecake, chocolate-covered blueberries and purplish blueberry bagels.

There were also thousands of people, with children and dogs in tow, milling about in the stifling heat yesterday afternoon in search of yet another event at Whitesbog Village in Pemberton Township, the site where the modern blueberry industry was born.

For most of the estimated 4,000 people who attended this year's festival, a visit to blueberry country is a novelty. But for the Darlingtons, blueberries are a way of life and a generations-old tradition.

Mark Darlington is a fifth-generation descendant of Joseph Josiah White, founder of Whitesbog and an innovative engineer and cranberry farmer.

In its heyday at the turn of the century, Whitesbog was the largest cranberry farm in the state. In addition to its year-round workers, it employed about 600 Italian immigrants as seasonal employees. There was a general store, a post office, a nursery and a number of homes and other buildings.

Today, many of the buildings are still standing, but most are dilapidated and worn by the elements. Whitesbog is practically a ghost town.

But the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, a nonprofit corporation formed in 1982 by a group of people from the area, has been working to preserve Whitesbog in the hope it will be declared a national historic site.

This is the fifth year the group has sponsored the blueberry festival to raise money for repairing the century-old buildings. Trust members also hope to eventually open an educational center to teach visitors about the cranberry and blueberry industries.

The festival has grown from a small affair to an event with races, country music bands, bus tours and 60 crafts booths.

Mark Darlington, 35, helps out with the festival by conducting three bus tours across the old farm. His wife, Ann, 34, organizes the craft show.

But for Mark Darlington the festival is also a time to think about the innovations that his family is responsible for in the cranberry and blueberry industries. He and his father, Tom, and brother, Joseph, operate a 500-acre farm near Whitesbog, and

(See BLUEBERRIES on 3-B)



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Sue Thompson feeds blueberry pie to 13-month-old Rebecca.

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BLUEBERRIES, from 1-B
still farm about 500 acres of the Whitesbog land.

"It certainly gets me thinking," he said, watching the festival.

Bill Bolger, a trustee of the Preservation Trust, said Whitesbog's origins can be traced to 1857, when Col. James Fenwick bought a large tract of land for an experimental cranberry farm. White, an experienced cranberry farmer, married Fenwick's daughter Mary and became the farm's manager.

White took over the 3,000-acre farm after Fenwick's death and developed it into the largest cranberry farm in New Jersey in the early 1900s.

Mary and Joseph White produced a book on the business, *Cranberry Culture*. He wrote the text and she drew the illustrations. Ann Darlington said the family still uses the book.

Early in the 20th century, White's oldest daughter, Elizabeth, worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop a large, commercial blueberry from the small berries native to the area's swamps. It was the beginning of commercial blueberry



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Racing for the pies at the start of the blueberry pie eating contest are (from left) Debo-

rah Cioffin, Daniel Deens, Tim Harrison, Faye Burman and Nancy Moller. Deens won.

farming in America.

Bolger said the family sold the farm to the state in 1967, and established a more modern facility on a 500-acre farm two miles away.

The family is also working with the Trust.

"We're trying to get it declared a

national historic site," Ann Darlington said.

"This is actually the house my husband was born in," she said, sitting on a porch swing with her two daughters, Emily, 7, and Tessa, 6. Mark Darlington was sitting nearby, but his mind was on the next blue-

berry harvest, which he hopes to begin July 5.

For all of his family's five generations of experience with blueberries, the business is still laced with uncertainty.

"I never bank on the blueberries till I have them sold," he said.