

Annual historic site celebration planned

by Darlene Bakhoun
Community News Staff

BROWNS MILLS —

This month, a local festival will celebrate the birthplace of the modern blueberry.

The Whitesbog Preservation Trust, located at mile marker 13 on Route 530 in Browns Mills, will host the 22nd Annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival on June 25 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"The festival brings the local history of the blueberry to the front. It gives the people a chance to get involved and learn about the work of Elizabeth White, and the festival also allows an opportunity to discover the natural beauty of the Pinelands here at Whitesbog," Esther Kubiczky, bookkeeper and volunteer for the trust, said.

The festival celebrates the rich cultural heritage of this turn-of-the-century company town where the cultivated American blueberry was born, according to the trust.

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ketable crop.

"This is the birthplace of the cultivated blueberry, not just for Browns Mills, but for the whole world. With the festival we want to make more people aware of the unique history here at Whitesbog," Earley said.

The Blueberry Festival offers a one of a kind opportunity to see Whitesbog as it was in its glory, and the continuing restoration of what was once the largest cranberry farm in New Jersey.

"Whitesbog is truly the hidden gem of Burlington County," Earley said.

"Whitesbog helped Browns Mills become a focal point of interest in the area. The cultivation of the blueberry, right here in Browns Mills, created a new crop and provided work during the summer months in addition to the fall harvest of cranberries," Kubiczky said.

While at the festival visit Suningive, home of Elizabeth Coleman White, daughter of J.J. White, former owner of Whitesbog Village. It was at Suningive



came a lot of obstacles for a woman of her time," Earley said.

"When it was still in full operation, Whitesbog

was huge. Whitesbog Village and the neighboring villages of Rome and Florence was home to about forty permanent workers and their families and a few hundred immigrant seasonal workers," Beth Gensel a volunteer for the trust said.

and invite visitors to learn about the history of Whitesbog Village, the blueberry/ cranberry industry and the New Jersey Pinelands.

Last year's festival brought about 5,000 visitors, according to the trust.

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Photos courtesy of the Whitesbog Trust

Above, workers get off a train to start work. Below, immigrant workers gather at the site in 1930.

Whitesbog has so many stories to tell," Teresa Earley, executive director of the trust said.

The blueberry was designated New Jersey's official state fruit in 2004, according to Earley.

Prior to the cultivation of the blueberry at Whitesbog, the blueberry grew in the wild and was not a mar-

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Old fashioned festival fun and family activities is set among the unspoiled landscapes of the Pine Barrens, where visitors can experience the natural environment and wildlife of the historic Whitesbog Village.

"The festival also emphasizes the natural history of Whitesbog. There is a great deal of nature here that needs to be preserved. The people get a chance to learn about the natural environment with the guided nature tours," Kubiczky said.

Pineland historians and naturalists will give guided walking and wagon tours,

and invite visitors to learn about the history of Whitesbog Village, the blueberry/ cranberry industry and the New Jersey Pinelands.

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New this year to the Blueberry Festival will be an official Artist's Row. The festival will also feature Pinelands art and photography, and unique country crafts, a tractor parade and an antique engine display.

"Last year they had a tractor in the parade that threw fire, that was a big hit," said Beth Gensel, a trust volunteer.

Bluegrass and Pinelands Folk music will begin at 10 a.m. Scheduled performers include Home Cookin', a bluegrass acoustic country group, Valerie Vaughn, Pinelands folk singer, the Sugar Sand

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A variety of free activities for children will be available, including the children's blueberry pie eating contest, face painting and games.

Returning to the festival this year is the Discovery Museum's "Put Yourself in a Bubble", and the Teen Challenge Obstacle Course.

The historic Whitesbog Village is located at mile marker 13 on Route 530 in Browns Mills. Parking will be located on the airstrip, \$7 per car. Shuttle buses will transport visitors from remote parking.

Funding is made possible in part by the New Jersey Council of the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National En-

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