

Weekend

OCEAN COUNTY



OBSERVER

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, JUNE 25-27, 2004

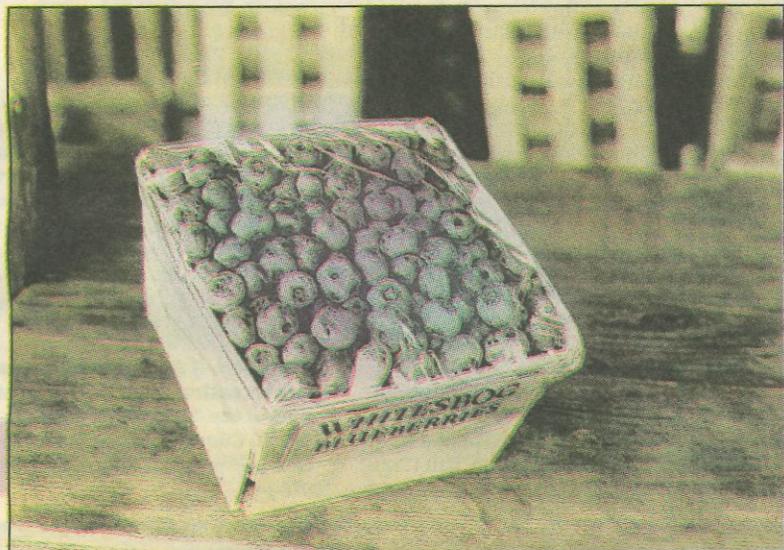
**BLUEBERRY FESTIVAL
TAKES OVER WHITESBOG
TOMORROW**

**BERRY
NICE**

INSIDE

CALENDAR D2
BROADWAY D10
MOVIES D16

Sweet Po



Special to the Observer



Whitesbog Blueberry Festival homage to New Jersey

STORY BY SUSAN MONTGOMERY

Less-informed, more pop culture-oriented New Jerseyans, may think of Violet Beauregard, from Roald Dahl's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," as a blueberry queen, but they'd be mistaken.

The pushy, bad-mannered child, whose near addiction to chewing gum left her filling up and headed to the juicer when last seen, may have had her share of the tiny fruit, but the organizers of Whitesbog Blueberry Festival have their own representative, another female character who is much more closely related to the state fruit of New Jersey.

The real blueberry queen is Elizabeth White, the daughter of Joseph J. White, an early leader in Whitesbog's cranberry industry, said Steve Thompson, executive director of the Whitesbog Preservation Trust. "J.J." was born in 1846 in Springfield Township in northern Burlington County and started out with 100-acres given to him by his grandfather in 1866.

"Like most entrepreneurs of the day, J.J. White didn't believe his daughters belonged working in the family cranberry business," Thompson said. "But he had one who was determined to carve a niche of her own. (Elizabeth) branched out into nursery stock and plants and then to the berries that grew wild."

Elizabeth White's move to an interest in some of the wild berry plants that scattered the woodlands of the region found right in her own backyard — rolling fields of wild huckleberry and sweet wild blueberries — brought a new industry to the state, and the commercial cultivation of the blueberry began in 1916.

"She undertook finding the best blueberries in the wild and proceeded to graft the plants with a number of plants that grew wild. That started the industry," Thompson said. "Today (her) original test field is still growing with the first 100 varieties she developed. It spread out of the county and into the state and into various parts of the world."

The festival, which celebrates all things blueberry, is

tomorrow at Historic Whitesbog Village, Browns Mills (near mile marker 13), from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

White's descendants still farm the region's blueberries — the site's original crops. But the festival, which is held at the Whitesbog Village, is the center stage for this annual festival. The berries are hand-picked, the same way they've been for the last 90 years.

The blueberry festival itself started at Whitesbog farm, only 21 years ago, through a group of concerned citizens who were saving the Whitesbog Village.

"It started out as a fairly small event aimed at drawing people into the village and was designed as a resource to support the restoration of the Whitesbog Village," Thompson said.

It worked, and the event now attracts people from throughout the region who come to the fruit with origins strongly rooted in the state — both as wild and cultivated plants.

"It has grown over the years — almost where it can't get any bigger," Thompson brought a lot of attention to the village."

The event continues to support the restoration and preservation of the site that includes the rolling fields and cranberry bogs where natural history tours and demonstrations are held to the public on the New Jersey tradition.

The festival is like an overflowing quiver of blueberries — everywhere you look there is one form or another, Thompson said.

"We have blueberry fields where (visitors) can pick the berries themselves, and we'll have fruit for sale. We'll have a pie-eating contest, cakes, muffins, snow cones and blueberry sale," Thompson said.

If you really like blueberries, you can e

County Berry Festival pays Jersey's state fruit



RY/Staff Writer

Route 530 in
n 9 a.m. to 4
ion for cran-
e blueberry, a
till takes the
fruits are still
harvested for
well after the
h the work of
interested in
med at bring-
veloped as a
forts there,"
hundreds of
ontinue to be
nected to the
t to the point
on said. "It's
storation and
e old blueber-
re walks, his-
o educate the
art of fresh
e's blueberry
ors) can pick
resh blueber-
st, blueberry
ry plants for
ven take your

own crop home. They like sandy soil, plenty of water and more or less full sun exposure, he said. "They don't need much more than that, maybe a little pruning once in a while."
Thompson said all blueberries and blueberry products from the show are supplied by local growers and artisans. Plants come from local nurseries and close to 50 crafters and artisans are responsible for the creation of other blueberry products, as well as a variety of other homemade crafts that are featured at the event.
Organizers say the event is also a chance to get a first-hand look at what life in the pines was like in Elizabeth White's time. The event will feature Pinelands art and photography, an operation antique engine display, tractor parade, walking and wagon tours guided by Pinelands historians and naturalists.
There will be plenty of food, and beginning at 10 a.m., bluegrass music will fill the air. Dave Orleans, songwriter and storyteller, will host a day-long ensemble of musical entertainment. Scheduled performers include Home Cookin' with their blend of bluegrass and acoustic country, folk singer Valerie Vaughn, Sugar Sand Ramblers, Jim Albertson and Bad Dogz.
The day's events will also feature programs for children including a perennial highlight: the blueberry pie eating contest. There will be animals, games, face-painting and contests as well.
Thompson said parking (which will cost \$7 per car) is the only fee charged for the event. The lot is located on the old airfield near the village (about 1/4 mile down the road) where the old crop-dusting planes would land. Shuttle buses will run the entire day between the village and the airfield.
Thompson noted Whitesbog is only about a 25-minute ride from the Toms River area, west on Route 70 and then right onto Route 530.
Contact the village at www.whitesbog.org, e-mail whitesbog@hotmail.com or call (609) 893-4646.



ef din-
rst
ld Free-
et,
5 p.m.
or
es 4-10.
73-0059.
a four-
riting
t the
Vash-
eeting
12:30
a
will
Upper
ounty
Bring
ora-
page
ork-
vide
regis-
guage
et at 6
f the
kson
(732)

fice.
ons,
m