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An apple experience like you have never imagined

We've all heard 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away' but what about an apple festival every fall? On Salt Spring Island, that gets you hundreds of apple varieties at a family-friendly, day-long event, scrumptious pies, learning opportunities, funds for community projects and more!

This year, the 13th Annual Salt Spring Island Apple Festival on October 2 promises to be fruitful as ever. It all starts with apple displays at Fulford Hall, complemented by farm and orchard tours throughout the day, apple pies, apple education, apple sales and of course, infamous Captain Apple, featured last September in *Island Tides*.

Organizer and apple farmer Harry Burton told *Island Tides* there will be over 300 apple varieties on display this year, all of which are grown organically on Salt Spring Island. About 100 varieties will be available for tasting, and can be purchased from the farms where they grow.

There are two new farms in this year's Festival: Jean Brouard, aka 'The Pie Lady', and the Salt Spring Island Apple Company. The harvest looks good—only two farms bowed out due to lack of apples, whereas five could not attend last year.

'We have one of the best locations in Canada for growing such a variety of apples,' Harry explained to *Island Tides*. Although some treefruits need the heat of the Okanagan, apples benefit from cool Island evenings and a bit of dew of every morning. The most important part of growing apple trees is to keep them growing vertically from the time the tree is planted, so they won't topple out out of dry soil with a heavy fruitload, as happened to a few trees this year.

The Festival is becoming a real community event. For example, last year a grandmother attended with her four grandchildren—it cost them $10 to get in (kids are free). 'To me, that is really neat', said Harry. 'We make some money and the money we make we plow back into the community.' The 'Thank a Salt Springer' awards, a bursary, and donations to the arts are some of the ways the Apple Festival grows community on Salt Spring. 'Apples are helping in all different areas.'

Past Festival proceeds have also allowed the purchase of twelve fruit dehydration systems, valued at about $500 each. Half will operate in a permanent location and the others will be lent out to help local fruit growers develop value-added products.

The Festival always finds fun ways for people to learn about apples. This year there will be a re-enactment of an historical figure with apple connections. A local actor will become Mr JH Monk, who farmed in the Ruckle Park area from 1904–1943. He was a schoolteacher at Beaver Point School and he sold apples from his farm. Farm records from 1920–22 show Monk received about $2 for a 35-pound box of apples. Now it's about $2 per pound.

An evening talk, co-sponsored by the Salt Spring Garden Club, will take place at the Lions' Hall at 7pm on Friday, September 30. Dr Bob Norton, an apple expert and apple elder from Seattle, will speak about '50 Years of Apple Growing'.

Back at Fulford Hall, a team of almost 40 volunteers sets the stage for the Apple Festival. It doesn't happen overnight though—wait, actually it does! Check out the timelapse video of the Hall setup at youtube.com/ssiapplefest to see how hundreds of apples are put in place by a team of busy bees on Saturday night. 'They are apple crazy,' said Harry.

Speaking of bees, orchard bee and honey bee experts will be on hand, too.

Harry thinks apples, and all food, are one of the secrets to bringing people together and fostering world peace. One could say 'an apple fest a year brings peace and love very near'.

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