

Andrews Scenic Acres is in danger of closing if buyer can't be found

By Eamonn Maher
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The front gates of the Andrew Scenic Acres' farm are in jeopardy of closing for good come spring-time as its longtime owners, Bert and Laurie Andrews, are set to retire from the multi-faceted agricultural business.

Bert Andrews said last week that the operation has been up for sale for a little more than six years and unless a buyer can be found before the spring planting season, the farm will close and result in the loss of seasonal employment for 120 people, including about 100 local-area students and 15 foreign workers from Mexico.

"It's time to move on one way or the other," said the 72-year-old Andrews, who just returned from a visit to Ottawa to see his newborn ninth grandchild, William.

"This is disappointing for a lot of people, not just ourselves. Our customers talk to us all the time and they'll be sad if we have to close down. We'd never talked about doing that until this year. (But) when you don't have any offers, it's kind of hard to sell."

The Andrews family purchased the 100-acre

"run-down" 10 Sideroad property at the west end of Halton Hills in 1980 with the intention of operating a pick-your-own-berries farm, but it has grown to include literally hundreds of varieties of vegetables, fruits and consumer goods today, as well as its award-winning Scotch Block Winery.

They've also delved into the entertainment aspect of farming with a "gently" Haunted Forest for Halloween, hayrides, birthday party hosting and a variety of farm tours, with an estimated 10,000 schoolchildren visiting the farm annually to learn about agriculture.

Andrews said that competition from nearby Chudleigh's and Springridge Farm in Milton isn't a problem because he considers those businesses as complementary to Scenic Acres in that "they do their own thing and we depend more on our crops."

Another economic impact of the pending shutdown of Andrew Scenic Acres is the 450 acres that Andrews rents from other farms in the region for growing.

"You're caught in a bit of a no man's land in this area," he said.

"On one hand, the good news is that we're

not in the Greenbelt or the Niagara Escarpment, but they do surround us and there's always that threat that we'll all be lumped in with either of those, which would decrease your land value. People are nervous about buying that land because they're afraid they might get pulled into that."

The couple also travels to farmers' markets through the week in Georgetown, Brampton, Milton, Oakville, Sherway Gardens and Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto to sell their products, with a work schedule that begins at dawn and ends at dusk on most summer days.

Andrews said the operation remains profitable, but like many pick-your-own farms around the GTA, fewer people are willing to make the commitment and put in the long hours involved to keep it sustainable.

"We're on the doorstep of millions of people here and they travel some distance to visit us because we offer things you can't get anywhere else," Andrews added.

"Last Sunday, both of our parking lots were full and we had more than a thousand people here, so it's not like we're hurting for business. The thing is, most people like their weekends off."



Andrews Scenic Acres' owner Bert Andrews displays the various types of pumpkins grown at his farm on 10 Sideroad near Hwy. 25, including varieties from Australia, France, Japan, China and the peculiar "warted" pumpkin.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

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