

Apple crop a gift for owners and for public



People who come to picnic and pick their own apples at Pieter's Appleyard east of Colborne are warmly and enthusiastically welcomed. Above, left to right, Anne Wyminga, Jennifer Madamba and Pieter Wyminga.

Jesse Madamba carefully reaches to pick a ripe Macintosh apple from the tree at Pieter's Appleyard. Jesse and Jennifer Madamba are the new owners of the agribusiness east of the village of Colborne. Photos by Mandy

By MANDY MARTIN
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COLBORNE - Pieter Wyminga is thrilled. A Toronto couple is enjoying an outdoor picnic lunch in his apple orchard.

"You are what growing apples is all about," Mr. Wyminga happily declares to the diners. "It makes me so happy to share our farm with you. To see you enjoy this place."

The apples are coming on two weeks early this year.

"I am very grateful," Pieter says. "We did not suffer nearly the hail damage so many others did. We still have apples and a wholesaler who wants our apples."

But the effects of the hailstorms two weeks ago are slowing harvesting down. The local people he employs for the harvestings have to scrutinize the fruit, ensuring the drupes are not cut or badly bruised.

"Keep the eye to the sky," Pieter instructs for proper harvesting. "You barely hold the apple in the palm of your hand and then turn it more by the stem than the fruit so the eye is to the sky. That way, the apples will not be marked by finger pressure after several months in cold storage."

For Anne and Pieter Wyminga, the apple orchard



Carefully gathering in new apples are at left, John Scheepstra of Cramah Township, foreground and new orchard co-owner Jesse Madamba, behind; to the right, front to back: Warren Fraser of Brighton, Rose Bird of Brighton and Linda Webster of Castleton.

has been a way of life, the end itself rather than the means to an end. Nothing about the property is without importance, which has led to an integrated approach in everything they do.

The honey bees used to pollinate the spring apple blooms produce honey sold

at the orchard. There is a "good bug/bag bug" approach to pest and disease control.

"We are one of 10 plots selected in the province for research," explains Pieter. The research thus far has fascinated him, and led to a significant reduction in the use of sprays.

While Pieter helps the hired pickers in the orchards, Anne guides the pick-it-yourself enthusiasts, offers cooking tips and suggestions for storage, as well as staffing the small honey and apple retail setup.

His seasonal staff of pickers delight him. Pieter is anxious everyone be introduced.

They are all fascinating and valuable people to his livelihood and - hence - to his life.

"A good picker is so important. It can make so much difference," he says of the people who gentle his apple crop.

"During a break, we were talking about the most beautiful place we've visited in the world," Pieter reflects. "I said to the group I really feel my farm is the most beautiful place I have ever been."

A van pulls up. It's a reunion of sorts as a Toronto family disembarks, a return annual visit, kids clamoring for "different" apples Pieter and Anne are always introducing them to. The kids - and parents - love hearing about any new techniques, new varieties and the often rare varieties available at the

Colborne orchard.

Pieter has authored a new brochure, "Apples: The Famous Fruit". It offers a detailed history of the apple, a description of the seasons in the orchard, the varieties, apple trivia and the complete version of the poem "Johnny Applesseed".

"The poem was based on a real person," Pieter says with admiration. "He was a very fine person."

Like Johnny Applesseed, Pieter has an elementary school presentation he loves to give to children. With illustrations and real apple varieties, he grabs the children's attention. He's particularly thrilled when a school tour comes to the orchard.

"I feel like the Pied Piper as they walk behind me through the trees," he smiles.

A transfer, not a sale

There's a change ahead for Anne and Pieter Wyminga. They have sold their orchards business.

But, true to form, the transition is infused with care and loving enthusiasm. New owners Jesse and Jennifer Madamba are living at the farm with the Wymingas, experiencing the daily operation and sense of seasonal scheduling with the experienced growers.

From Cambridge, the couple and their three children moved to Colborne in July.

Jesse, a Sir Sandford Fleming College-trained forestry technician, has operated his own business cleaning firm after forestry jobs were scarce.

"We were looking for something else," explains Jennifer, "and we found this mainly through the Internet. I was sold my Pieter's description long before I ever saw the place!"

Jesse, juggling Cambridge responsibilities along with the orchard in Colborne, is enthusiastic and marvelling of the crop on the trees.

"It's been an introduction by fire," he smiles of the hailstorms. "But we have been miraculously spared. We have a crop."