

Rumblings of funding shortfall from Rural Ramble

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Faced with an \$11,000 funding shortfall for 2004, Northumberland Rural Ramble organizers are asking county council to consider financial support. Last year, the county contributed \$275 in advertising.

"If Rural Ramble continues, the county benefits are many," Rural Ramble Cochair Cathy McCann outlined November 27.

"The organization is already in place and has proven its competency. Our financial obligations and budgets have been adhered to, Rural Ramble has broad support from private, public and volunteer agencies, and Northumberland County gets tremendous complimentary exposure.

"Rural Ramble is a great example of a successful grassroots organization," Ms. McCann maintains. "The interaction between the urban and rural leads to better appreciation for each other's lifestyles."

Rural Ramble is a weekend event. In its first year, 1999, an estimated 2,000 people visited the farms of five couples across Northumberland County. Cancelled the next year because of the hoof and mouth scare, the event went ahead again in 2001 attracting an estimated 4,000 people. This past August, the third annual Rural Ramble attracted between 3,000 and 4,000 visitors.

Those visitors spent estimated



Rural Ramblers at County Council: from left, Cochair Cathy McCann, Gaye Hoskin, Marvin McComb, Harold McCann and George Ryken.

PHOTO BY MANDY MARTIN

\$350,000 in the county during their visit, Ms. McCann says.

"It is a unique event," Ms. McCann notes. The committee and host farm families and the phalanx of helpers are all volunteers. To date, adults buy "passports" to gain admission, no

charge for children.

"People are very appreciative" the assessment surveys indicate, Ms. McCann says. "We have strong municipal and media support. It isn't often so many people from so many walks of life and working to the same goals.

For 2004, the Rural Ramble organizers are facing a financial challenge. Former grant sources have dried up.

"We are looking at a number of options to increase revenue in future," Ms. McCann says. "One was to increase the cost of ticket

sales for adults to \$10 in advance (was \$8) or \$15 at the gate (was \$10). Another would be to charge \$5 for children aged 6-12 years. We might also increase or commercial host fees (\$150 now)."

"We supported the jazz festival in Port Hope," Alnwick/Haldimand Mayor Bill Finley noted. "This is a rural setup. I hope when we look at our budgets we look at this for support. I certainly will be supporting it."

Keep the children's admission free, Brighton Mayor Lou Rinaldi urged; children are often the instigators for family activities.

"With the jazz festival (in Port Hope), it was my understanding that the money—we provided last year was seed money for the first year. We did not make any long term commitment to that committee. We need a policy so we treat everybody (seeking funding) the same. I think our support is there (for Rural Ramble), but we need to be very fair. I'm prepared to support something to keep Rural Ramble alive."

Trent Hills Mayor George McCleary urged the Rural Ramble organizers to solicit corporate funding. Port Hope Mayor Rick Austin suggested the selling of hats—as opposed to T-shirts.

County council referred the Northumberland Rural Ramble funding request to its Tourism and Economic Development departments for a recommendation for 2003 budget considerations.

CULBORNE CHRONICLE DEC. 5/02