

The one sure sign of spring

by JOHN CAMPBELL

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Warton has its Willie, and Punxsutawney its Phil but neither can hold a candle to Sandy Maple. Unlike his furry rodent cousins and their spotty record of predictions, Sandy the six-foot squirrel is flawless with his prognostications. When he makes his first public appearance of the year, you can be certain of one thing: The Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival is but a month away, and the festival, my friend, marks the beginning of spring.

Sandy, the festival's mascot (and part-time local radio personality), was handling his usual gladpawing duties Feb. 10 at the annual preview that is held for news media, local politicians, municipal staff, and schoolchildren. What can you expect to find March 12-13 at the 19th annual festival? More of the same that has proved so successful in the past. At George and Alice Potter's Sandy Flat Sugar Bush west of the village, there will be demonstrations of how maple syrup is made, entertainment including step dancing and clogging, generous servings of pancakes and sausages by the Warkworth Community Service Club, log-sawing contests and snowshoe races, and sleigh rides. In the village there will be an antique show and sale at Percy Centennial Public School, a seniors tea and white elephant sale at the fire hall, a juried art show organized by the Northumberland Hills Art Association, a Wood, Works and Wonders show and sale at the Warkworth Town Hall Centre for the Arts and the Masonic Temple, a petting zoo, and pony rides.

New this year is an indoor mini-golf course at St. Paul's United Church.

The festival, which attracts on average 8,000 people a year, has appeal for everyone but it's especially nice for young families because it's not expensive, Carol Hamilton said.



John Campbell photo

George Potter displayed an experienced hand in whipping up scores of flapjacks for visitors to his pancake house at the Sandy Flat Sugar Bush last week. He and his wife Alice were once again hosts for the annual preview of the Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival that will be held March 12-13.

Her co-chair for the past decade, Brenda Partridge, said the main purpose of the special event is to foster economic development. She noted a number of new residents, including the owners of several businesses, decided to move to the community after attending the festival.

"We put in a lot of long hours here but when you see people returning, and telling us how much they enjoy themselves, that's what keeps George and I going year after year," Ms. Potter said. "We look for-

ward to it every year."

"We meet so many nice people," Mr. Potter said. Some have been returning for 30 years and have produced a second generation of faithful festival-goers.

The Potters collect sap from 5,500 spiles on trees spread across 50 acres at their Sandy Flat sugar bush. Some of the trees have been tapped for more than 100 years.

They have won four world championships for their maple syrup at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto (1988-94).