

Champion Perspective

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THIRD SECTION — FEATURES

CHUDLEIGH'S APPLE FARM

A 13-year tradition brings young and old

Atop many teachers' desks in Southern Ontario rest many polished apples this morning. They were carefully hand-picked, no doubt, by school children who spent the better part of one day at Chudleigh's Apple Farm.

Spending a day at Chudleigh's has become somewhat of a tradition for school children. Each day for 15 days during the fall, 17 school groups are ushered into the grounds, out to the trees on a tractor ride, and back to the barn where Tom Chudleigh, the owner has set aside an area in the barn for playing.

Chudleigh has successfully turned a simple apple-picking farm into a total entertainment outing. His 72-acre farm on Highway 25 about three miles north of Highway 401 has become a hit with not only school children but adults as well who are trekking to the farm in increasing record numbers each year.

But it wasn't always this way. As a matter of fact, Chudleigh got into the pick-your-own side of the business almost by accident 14 years ago when a doctor friend suggested it.

"We were having trouble then selling the big apples to the market because they wouldn't fit into the bags," recalls Tom Chudleigh. "He told us we were sitting on a gold mine and when he said that, I listened very closely because no one turns down a gold mine."

"He said lots of people would be willing to drive to the orchard and pick the apples for themselves and

it's gone on from there."

The Chudleighs set up shop just outside their house with a small box collecting money.

"If we got 12 cars a day in those days," adds Tom, "it was a big day. Now if we get 12,000 people it's a big day."

Growth is the word for the farm. Up until last year, cars were lined up in the parking lot and along Highway 25 during Saturday and Sunday for five key weekends in the fall.

It reached such unmanageable proportions Chudleigh was forced to impose a \$2 parking fee this year between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Sundays in an effort to streamline the crowds.

"We really didn't want to charge on Sundays for parking but we had to do something to control the crowds. They were parking all along the highway. The police have since put up no parking signs."

"What the fee does is separate the serious people from those who come just for an outing. We were finding some people came, went on the tractor-ride, went out to the orchard and ate apples and then returned to the barn to play in the hayloft and weren't buying any apples."

The fee applies only on five consecutive Sundays, the fourth of which is next weekend. The rest of the time, there is no fee and relatively fewer customers as well.

Aside from the apples themselves, a large majority of people come to enjoy a day's outing in the country which Chudleigh enhances with entertainment features.

About seven years ago, he introduced the tractor rides, a play area in the barn as well as a corn roast and a commercial shop in the barn.

"I think we can entertain anybody," says Chudleigh proudly. "We found that entertainment is just as important as the apples. People come out for a day in the country as much as anything."

The farm produces about two million apples annually. Of the total, a whopping 98 per cent is sold retail, i.e., on the farm—while just two per cent is sold on the wholesale market.

Much of the production is turned into apple pies and apple cider. A facility in the barn produces about 200 pies a day which are sold almost as quickly as they are baked.

However, the cider business is a new aside to Chudleigh. He began two years ago with a modern press producing 6,000 gallons of cider. Last year, he produced 17,000 gallons and is aiming in the 20,000 range this year.

Looking into the future, Chudleigh looks ahead to perhaps marketing his cider to stores.

"We wouldn't want to mass produce it just like any cider," he explains. "But maybe something like Ziggy's (a specialty store) could sell the cider."

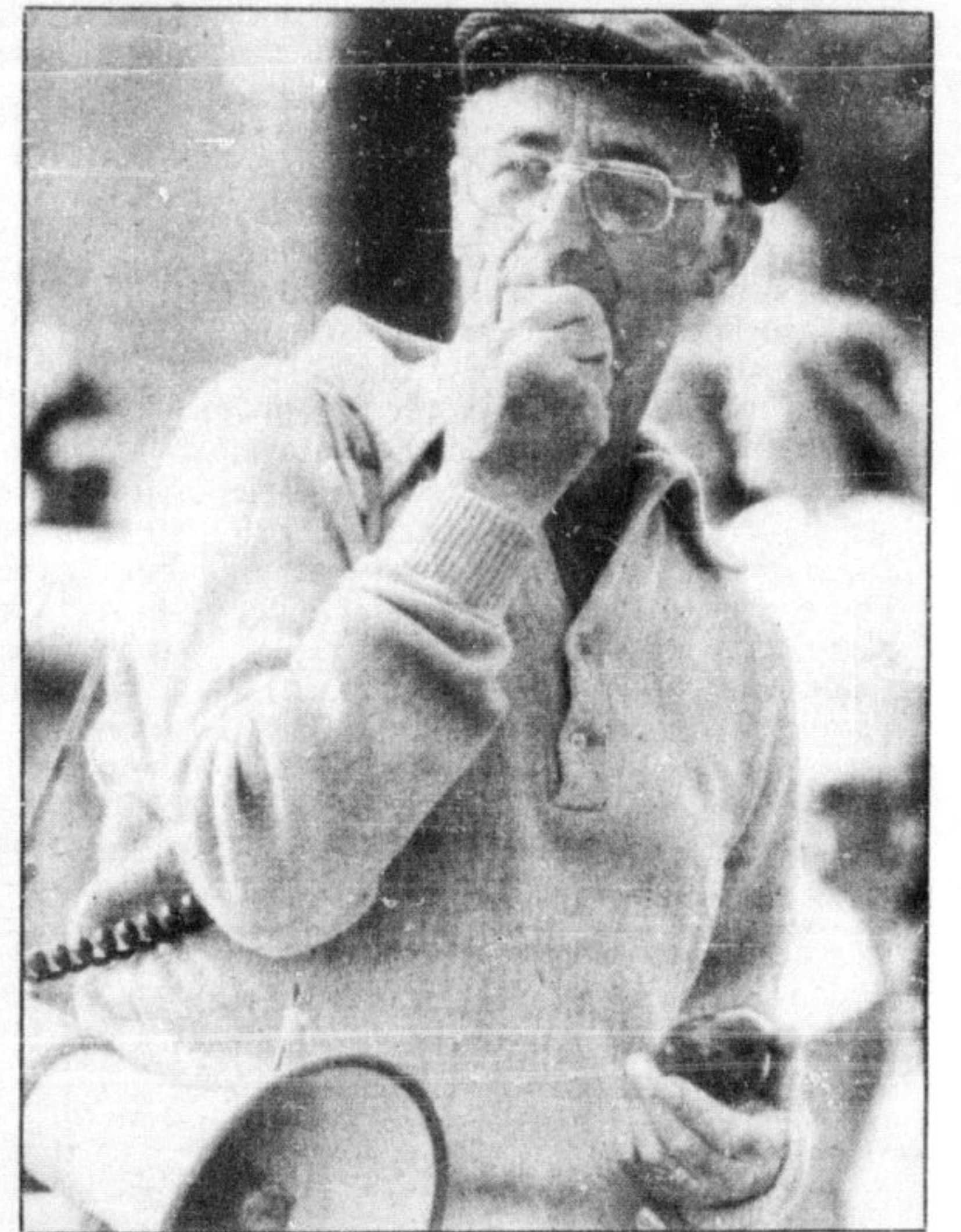
The farm is open from 9 a.m. to dusk every day of the week to Christmas. The best times to pick are during the week when crowds are small and Chudleigh and his staff can give personal attention to most.



GETTING SOME HELP from his mother, one-year-old Andre Picher proves age is no barrier. Mother Pam and her five-member

family found out about the farm through a neighbor, as many do.

Story and photos
by Michael Boyle



EVERY PATRON at Chudleigh's farm receives instruction in the correct method of picking apples. Bill Brown gives instruction, although he seldom repeats the same spiel. Mr. Brown is Carol Chudleigh's father.



JUST BECAUSE the apples are high in the tree doesn't prevent Kristian Curran from enlisting help from his dad, Dale, to get the sweetest apples of the lot. The more sunlight the apples receive, the sweeter they are likely to be.



CARTING OUT the apple-picking patrons of the farm is one of the several tractors the Chudleighs use during the season. Several tractors are used which provide the farm with another of its enter-

tainment features. The rides are a hit with school children but adults as well seem to enjoy the trip along the road.



TAKING A BIG BITE out of one big apple is eight-year-old Lori Marek. Most of the apples require youngsters to use both hands.



APPLES ARE ONLY an arm's-reach away as Jeffrey Marek shows. The Marek family came from Toronto for the 10th consecutive year.



PIE-MAKING HAS BECOME very popular. Norma Serafini finishes off one of the more than 200 pies the farm bakes daily.



CHILDREN DON'T COME to the apple farm just to pick apples. The Chudleighs started an entertainment aspect to their

farm seven years ago, which means children can play in the hay in the barn.