

Milton Means **Business**

✓ Springridge Farm an ever-growing business

Springridge Farm celebrates its 40th anniversary this year

By **FANNIE SUNSHINE**
The Champion

What started out as an ordinary cherry farm turned into an ever-growing business.

Now known for its strawberries, Springridge Farm was a cherry business when Laura and John Hughes took over in the early '70s.

Les and Jane Hughes (John's parents) originally bought the farm in the late fall of 1960 when their fruit farm in Dixie was sold for development.

Springridge, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, re-opened on Easter Friday after being closed for the winter.

"This has always been a fruit farm because the southern exposure of the escarpment is beautiful for fruit growing," Ms Hughes said.

When the Hughes' realized there wasn't a future for cherries in the wholesale market, Ms Hughes decided to post a pick-your-own cherry sign and waited to see what would happen.

"When people came to pick the cherries they wanted to know what was in the barn, so we cleaned it up and now we have a garden area, eating area and home decorating area in the barn."

But when cherry growing became too expensive the Hughes' turned to strawberries and raspberries.

And listening to what their customers wanted, the Hughes family slowly expanded the 70-acre farm to what you see today.

Twenty acres of strawberries were added along with five acres of raspberries. School tours and birthday parties were created, along with a corn maze, an animal barn filled with chickens, turkeys, goats, bunnies and a pot bellied pig.

But the most important addition was the food.

"People were asking if we sold fresh farm honey, jams and pies," Ms Hughes said.

"John's mother taught me how to make the jams. We make the jams in the winter and store them until we open in the spring. Our business is totally customer-driven."

When school children come to visit the farm they partake in one of several programs.

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LAURA HUGHES

"We have the Babies, Bees and Blossoms program which teaches children how bees are important to the flowers," she said.

"They go on a wagon ride and play with the animals. The kids make gingerbread men at Christmas time and we also have a Thanksgiving and Halloween program where the kids can make a scarecrow. The teachers love the programs. We had 20,000 children last year."

The birthday party idea started six years ago when Ms Hughes' son Tom had a party at the farm.

"They went on a wagon ride and collected eggs from the barn. It was so successful we decided to do it for the public."

The farm has three birthday party rooms so parties can run simultaneously, allowing for 18 parties a weekend.

"The birthday party aspect is perfect for us because while people are here they can pick up a pie for dinner. We offer products at a price that's affordable for our customers."

Business will begin to pick up in June with the start of strawberry season, Ms Hughes said.

"We make strawberry muffins, pies and tarts. We do the same thing for raspberry season in July. We romance each season. Our biggest crop is strawberries because people love them so much."

The farm is best known for its jams and the strawberry, cherry and summerberry (combination of blueberry, raspberry and strawberry) pies they make from scratch, she added.

"We provide the best service we can. The customers keep coming back and word of mouth really works for us. We see a lot of three-generation families like daughter, mom and grandma or sons and granddads. We appeal to all generations."



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Springridge Farm on Bell School Line celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. Here, operators John and Laura Hughes show the pies that have become popular at the pick-your-own farm.



Springridge Farm

NOW OPEN DAILY 9-5

Baking & Preserves, Country Lunches, Decorator & Garden Items
Farm Animals, Straw Jumping, Weekend Wagon & Pony Rides

FLORAL HANGING BASKETS – Early May

MOTHER'S DAY TEA & CHILDREN'S POT PAINTING – Sun. May 13, 11-5

7256 Bell School Line, Milton • 905-878-4908 • www.springridgefarm.com