

STRAWBERRIES

Best crop 'in 20 years' ready

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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This year's strawberry crop is the best it's been in more than 20 years, according to Matt Passafiume, owner/operator of Applewood Farm Winery.

Thanks to the cool, wet, yet sunny spring, strawberries are peaking just in time for the long weekend and coincidentally enough, the Strawberry Festival.

"Strawberries don't like the heat," Mr. Passafiume said, however, they seem to be handling this week's heat wave rather well.

This year's crop is double the size of 2012's and the berries are bigger and juicier.

"It was a disaster," Mr. Passafiume said of his 2012 strawberry and apple crops. That was due to the early thaw, which was followed by a deep freeze and then a hot summer.

The king berries, which are the first to come off the vine, are weighing in around 20 grams at the McCowan Road farm and winery.

"If you're looking to impress the dinner guests (go with) the bigger ones," he said.

Jammers should wait a little lon-



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Matt Passafiume with children Ella (wearing a hat and also on the cover), Eden, Evan and Elora at Applewood Farm Winery, the family's McCowan Road business. The pick-your-own operation opened last weekend.

ger for the smaller berries.

For the past five years, the picking season has lasted 10 days. This year, picking is expected to be extended to three weeks — until July 15.

"It's a good, long season," Mr. Passafiume said.

His farm is one of several in the area. For more information, go to ontarioberries.com or foodland.gov.on.ca

To pick your own berries at Applewood, the cost is \$5 per person, which gets you a 1.5-litre basket to fill.

Or you can purchase pre-picked two-litre baskets for \$2.

Over the long weekend, people can also purchase strawberry and rhubarb fritters, along with strawberry wine from the winery.

For more information, go to www.applewoodfarmwinery.com

EDITOR'S PICKS FOR FESTIVAL WEEKEND

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival takes over the town this long weekend. (Programs are still available at our office.) Sun-Tribune editor Jim Mason has attended and covered all 28 previous festivals. Here's his take on what to take in:

· Tonight's Stouffville Lions beef barbecue precedes the festival. It also pre-dates it. Where else can you get a roast beef dinner for \$10, all in? While you're at it, thank the Lions for dinner — and 75 years of service to our community.

· The municipality's summer movies have been a hit. The 2013 series kicks off Friday night on the Memorial Park ball diamond. It's all free, including tomorrow night's snacks. Free is good.

· Main Street is always bumper to bumper on the Saturday of the festival, but with thousands of people, not cars. It's as much a series of class reunions as it is a craft sale. Expect to hear a lot of: "Hey, didn't you use to be _____?"

· You don't have to own a canine to attend Sunday's dog show, although it may help. Still, it's just plain fun to check out the variety of four-legged friends living in this town. And you wondered why there are so many pet supply stores on Main Street.

· Feel free to sleep in on Canada Day, but get up in time for dusk, which signals fireworks, leaving your dogs at home. The pyrotechnics are preceded by free cake, celebrating the birth of the best nation on the planet. Stand on guard for thee...

— Jim Mason

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