



Syrup bottles of difference sizes



THE SWEET TASTE OF SPRING

By Lisa Crandall

It must be a seasonal thing. As the chilly days of winter begin to ease and the snow pack melts back, Canadians begin to get a hankering for the sweet sticky taste of pancakes swimming in a pool of maple syrup. This homegrown golden goodness is unique to parts of Canada where the right

temperature cycle combines with the right kind of trees.

Hunter's Maple Products, located near Spencerville, is the 2nd oldest sugar bush in Eastern Canada. Owned and operated by the Hunter family, it is located on their ancestral homestead, settled by immigrants from Scotland, who arrived in 1821.

These days their great, great, great grandson John Hunter plays host to locals and visitors at the family run pancake house, which is open for the two months that comprise the sugar season. The Pancake House traditionally opens the 1st Saturday of March and weather permitting, stays open until the end of April. It can seat up to 60 people at a time. It is a popular destination on the bright sunny weekends of late winter.

Sugaring off is a fleeting period of time at the end of winter. In order for the sap to run, the day time temperatures must be consistently above zero and the night time temperatures must be below zero. Old timers say that you can tell when it's time to tap by watching for that moment when the snow begins to melt from around the base of the trees. An average season is three to four weeks long.

At Hunter's Maple Products, they put 1800 taps in almost as many trees. Some of the

older trees are big enough to be tapped in 2 or 3 places without injuring the tree. According to Hunter, in their sugar bush, some of their biggest trees are almost 300 years old.

In the old days, each tap had a sap bucket attached to it and they had to be emptied by hand, delivered back to a central processing area, then boiled down over a wood burning fire. It was a very labour intensive process.

These days most of the trees are connected to long strands of narrow tubing that allow the sap to be pumped out into massive holding tanks, then processed in huge open pans in covered sheds. It takes 40 gallons of sap to produce a single gallon of finished syrup. Hunter figures on a good day they can average 300 gallons an hour over the six to eight hour day.

Hunter uses buckets on about 300 of the trees closest to the sugar shack so that visitors can see for themselves the clear thin sap that is the starting point of the finished product. They are also welcome to view the whole process, from boiling off to bottling, making for an informative educational experience.

The Hunter's Maple Products Pancake House is located at 1909 County Road #21. Look for the sandwich board sign at the end of the road. It is open from 8AM until 3PM, weekends only, during the months of March and April. It is a cash only venue so plan ahead. Bring extra cash because you are sure to want to stock up on hand bottled maple syrup and other sweet treats. Special group visits can be arranged. Details and contact information are available on their website at www.huntersmapleproducts.com LH



Close up of the dripping spile



Sap buckets in trees