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Batesville Ruritans Get Ready for Apple Butter Day

By Kathy Johnson

It's the time of year—falling leaves, pumpkins, cornstalks by mailboxes—to scout for the aroma of apple butter cooking over an open fire. The Batesville Ruritan Club members will host their annual Apple Butter Day on Oct. 28, at Page's Field across from the store in Batesville.

"For more than 25 years we've been providing the world's best Central Virginia apple butter," said Ruritan member and club treasurer Ross Weesner. "We make it the old-fashioned way. We start on Wednesday and we core and peel 2 large crates of apples (each containing 20 bushels)." Apples are donated by Henry Chiles of Crown Orchard.

Coring and peeling are just the first part of this traditional and lengthy process, explained Weesner. Club members work three nights (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday) starting at 6 and staying until around 10, except for Friday when some time that evening, kettles filled with apples and secret seasonings will be placed on the open fires.

"Some members stay with it all night, stirring the kettles and feeding the fire," he said. "To make the

best apple butter, it must be stirred constantly." The end product won't be ready until sometime after noon on Saturday and will yield approximately 120 gallons of apple butter in half-pint, pint and quart jars (sold for \$3, \$5, and \$7 respectively).

"Usually 10 to 15 Ruritan members and volunteers stay with the fire stirring the apple butter and we provide a safe environment for local teens to stay overnight. We might fix nachos or hot dogs or something to eat and sometimes we show a movie."

The event also includes an all-you-can-eat Pancake Breakfast (with sausage) from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. on Saturday morning. Cost of the breakfast is just \$4 per person and \$2 for children under 12. Peter Markush and Friends will provide music Saturday, and there will be other things going on designed to make this a full festival.

Pre-ordered and pre-paid jars represent 90 percent of sales. Pages Store will take pre-orders and pre-payments must be made at that time, or orders can be called in to Marianne O'Brien at 823-4549, but payment must be made prior to 11 a.m. on Saturday. "One year we



Ryan Weesner, seen here several years ago, helps to keep the apple butter stirred, during Batesville Apple Butter Day.

almost oversold," Weesner said, so those wanting apple butter should pre-order.

"Ninety percent of what we raise goes back into the community," said Weesner. Among those receiving support from the club's activities are the Crozet Volunteer Fire Department, Meals on Wheels, and local schools for their field trips. The club meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month (except for July and August) and is open to all. Meetings are held at the Batesville United Methodist Church at 7:30 p.m.

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The Real Crozet Blogger: Jim Duncan

The Gazette is not the only new media serving Crozet. There's also an online source now, the nine-month-old blog known as realcrozetva.com run by Jim Duncan.

"I started it because Crozet is such a unique place. We need a voice," he said.

"I post things as often as I think necessary."

Items tend to be news nuggets, event announcements and sometimes personal asides about the sweet life in our area. Duncan has a second blog, realcentralva.com, which he gives greater attention because it focuses on his livelihood, the regional real estate market.

"I started realcrozetva because I wanted to branch off from realcentralva and focus my business in Crozet," he said. He first moved to Highlands five years ago and lives in Parkside now.

"It's a great neighborhood," he said, though for a farm-raised boy it can seem like his neighbors are a little too near.

"I grew up in Culpeper and I have a small town mentality. I go back up there to get perspective. When I'm sitting through three cycles of a light I appreciate being in Crozet."

Besides that he's got a community spirit. "It's easy to get complacent and trust other people [to take care of town business]. But I don't want to wake up one day and say, hey, how did *that* happen?"

News websites like the Augusta Free Press, a web-based community "paper" based in Waynesboro, represent "a return to news credibility," Duncan said. "I think there will always be a place for print. It's easier to read. But it will get more targeted. The online environment is encouraging more discussion. Local is where it's at. Business is local. People are local. People want to influence what's around them."

"The blog is getting about 50 unique visitors a day," Duncan said. "Slowly but surely, it's been climbing. I have consistent visitors and I get regular emails offline. Something like 75 percent of Albemarle homes have broadband."



continued on page 21

Blog —continued from page 3

"I firmly believe in the KISS principle [keep it simple, stupid]. I struggle with the idea of ads. I don't want to detract from the purity of the site. I want it to be a news and community resource. Everything in the world, for better or worse, comes down to politics. You have to be involved. There are a few whose names you see a lot [connected to Crozet affairs], but they are not enough. All my thoughts are on the blog. I put something out and answers come back. You have to stay vigilant.

"Development can't be just stopped. It's a question of how we're going to manage it. As a people, we look at things myopically. We need to plan for this regionally. One of my favorite blogs is bacon'srebellion.com. He's focused a lot on land use issues."

And following the style of bacon'srebellion.com, he's trying to grow the Crozet blog to have multiple authors. "I'm always looking for authors. My

perfect world is that people will write to inform and provoke discussion."

He taught himself how to manage the site. He uses Wordpress, a free web log platform. "It has a community based on it that is out there to help," he said. "I've learned as I go. It's easy to do, but it's extraordinarily time-consuming to make it right, the way your imagination sees it."

He's plenty tech-savvy now, but he always carries a thick yellow double-columned steno notebook for notes. "It's easier for me to keep track of my life with this," he said, flipping it open as his cell phone rang.

The idea of Crozet blog also fits into his professional life, he acknowledged. "The more traffic on it, the more people will use it for real estate. The more I give to the community, the more the community will give back to me in business. Blogging is a way to build trust and credibility without doing a selling job. I'm hoping that as they come to trust me [through the blog], they'll do business with me."



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