

Maynooth Garlic Festival to celebrate local food



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By Nate Smelle

Back by popular demand, the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council's Maynooth Garlic Festival will return for a second year on Saturday, Aug. 18. Once again, the now annual celebration of local food will take place both inside and outside the old community centre where the Maynooth Farmers' Market is held each week throughout the summer. Recognizing how successful the event was in its inaugural year, BASC member and Garlic Festival organizer Keith Buck said they are planning to build on that success in 2018. Of the more than 1,500 people who attended the event in 2017, he said they only received one complaint ? the five-hour long festival needed to be longer. In response to this feedback, Buck said BASC has decided to run this year's festival from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.

?Being our first year we had no expectations, so we just said well if Bob and Sue and their cousin come that's a good thing; but the impact was huge,? said Buck.

?The vendors who came out for the festival had a banner day, and many of them sold out. For the community of Maynooth, the streets were lined with cars and the shop owners told us afterwards that it was one of their best days of the entire year. The bank machine at one of the local corner stores even ran out of money.?

Buck and his wife Donna own and operate a certified organic farm in Hastings Highlands called The Red Barn Door. He said he joined BASC in late 2016, with the intention of contributing to the council's decades of promoting stewardship by raising awareness regarding the wide-ranging benefits of growing and consuming local food. For example, he explained that the less distance food needs to travel from farm to plate makes good sense ecologically and economically because it translates into fewer greenhouse gas emissions needlessly polluting the atmosphere and heating the planet. Remarking on how ?farmers feed cities? he said most farmers tend to be good stewards of the land and water because they understand that it is essential to their health and livelihood.

Realizing that there were not any festivals celebrating local food in the area, Buck came up with the idea to hold a garlic festival in Maynooth in hopes of raising awareness of how the local food movement and environmental stewardship go hand in hand. The goal with this event, he said is to further the conversation about local food and the strength of the community, so that the benefits of the Garlic Festival extend beyond that day and carry on throughout the rest of the year. Buck said he also hopes that it will encourage people to come out and support BASC's other stewardship initiatives such as Wetlands Day and the native tree and shrub sale.

?Events like the Garlic Festival obviously have an impact on what we actually have to go through to get food from Mexico or California onto our plates here in North Hastings, but it is also about helping people know where their food comes from and what goes into our food,? said Buck.

?While there isn't a large producer community up here and this isn't a huge farming area, there are some very dedicated people committed to growing great food locally. It's important that they be given an opportunity to promote the message of local food. The idea of local food fits in very well with the whole world of stewardship and sustainability.?

As a longtime advocate for local food, Buck said there is so much in this area can be proud of, and the local farming community is one of them. One of the reasons the Garlic Festival is so unique is that it is truly a community event, explained Buck. He said this was something that BASC has remained conscious of since they began organizing the first festival. When they looked at the feedback they received after the 2017 festival, Buck said nearly everyone told them that they really enjoyed how comfortable they felt and how pleasurable the experience was. He said the fact so many people pitched in to support the event last year, and that even

more are stepping up again to contribute this year is a testament to the community's spirit of volunteerism.

?When you look at what we can all do to support our local communities, finding ways to get people engaged, whether it's with a full-time or a seasonal resident it doesn't matter, is very important at all levels,? Buck said.

?One of the things last year that made a big difference for us comes down to that whole notion of volunteerism. We are very grateful to Christine Hass and the folks at the Maynooth Farmers' Market for inviting us into their fold and allowing us to bunk up on their Saturday event. There has also been great support from the municipality of Hastings Highlands on all levels. All this support has been very helpful in the task of bringing the festival together and making it more meaningful.?

Enhancing the community feel of the event again this year, Buck said will be a performance by Jim McPherson and the Bad Breath Blues Band. Noting that the band has added a few more musicians to the group, and that they have been practising together for the since early spring, he said they will again play a huge role in making the Garlic Festival a success. Also returning this year, Buck said is the Art of Garlic exhibit which will be held inside the community centre.

The festival will also feature plenty of fun activities for the kids, he said. To help bolster their fundraising efforts, BASC will also be selling food, as well as hot and cold beverages at the Garlic Café in the community centre. For more information on the 2018 Garlic Festival visit the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council's Facebook page, or website at www.bancroftstewardship.ca.