

Muskoka Maple Festival
STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION SESSION
Culture Station | 26 Station Road | Huntsville, ON
Oct. 21, 2015

Introduction

Kelly Haywood (Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce) and Jordan Mulligan (Muskoka Tourism) presented the draft proposal to develop a maple-themed event in Huntsville and surrounding area in March/April 2016. The proposed event would include two components – a collection of maple experiences and products promoted for several weeks or months (March-April?) – possibly called a ‘Maple Trail’, and a culminating festival weekend featuring music, dining, and a maple marketplace (last weekend of April?).

Kelly welcomed everyone and stressed that our two groups are working together to lead this project, but that we are not experts in the maple business. The creation, and success, of a Muskoka Maple Festival will require support, engagement, and expertise from maple producers and operators.

Background

This concept was developed because several producers reached out to us indicating interest in this kind of event. Muskoka has a highly developed range of maple products and experiences. By simply celebrating the existing product and working together to combine these activities under a single marketing umbrella, we can situate Muskoka as a top maple destination.

Roundtable Discussion

Those in attendance brought up a number ideas and insights. Although not all of those are covered here, a number of themes and issues emerged as priorities:

Timing

- Proposed weekend for the festival was based on producers and the understanding that they would not be able to participate in an off-site marketplace during production season
- Several producers noted that we should be aware of other Maple Syrup Festivals:
 - o Powassan: Saturday, April 25, 2015; 2016?
 - o Elmvale: Saturday, April 30, 2016
 - o Elmira: Saturday, April 2, 2016
 - o Orillia & Area “Tap into Maple” March 1 – May 31, 2015
 - o Deerhurst Resort: focus on March Break
 - o Note: conflict between Elmvale and Huntsville Curling Club Breakfast last year?
- Length of ‘Maple Trail’ promotion? Perhaps March/April is too long; focus on April?

Marketing and Maps

- A website would be used to highlight available experiences, and potentially an app
- Map technology would be an asset
- Inventory of experiences: Kelly Ebbs noted that the Food Co-op is building a production map of the North and that they could start the project with an inventory of maple-related producers
- We could also request funding from BEAM (Muskoka Community Network)
- Marketing funds may also be available through Celebrate Ontario and/or Explorers’ Edge

Local Product

- Producers felt it was important that local maple syrup be the focus. Restaurants and products featuring local syrup should be promoted over those that do not

Producer Engagement and Resources

- OntarioMaple.com (Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association)
- Local Chapter: Algonquin Region

Festival

- In addition to music, adding another event would create more of a draw for visitors (for example: indoor antique show, quilt show and auction, logging or woodcarving exhibition); an overall heritage theme? We plan to apply for Celebrate Ontario funding to develop the festival component

Next Steps

Kelly and Jordan proposed that two committees be created – one to develop the ‘trail’ of maple experiences, and one to plan the festival. These committees will tentatively meet **Friday, October 30th, at 10 a.m.** Please contact us if you are interested in sitting on one or both of these committees and please share this idea with your networks. We are committed to providing administrative support for the initiative, but as maple producers, operators, and packagers, this is your event, we need your input!

Thank you all for coming!

Attendance

Jordan Mulligan, Muskoka Tourism Marketing Manager
Kelly Haywood, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce
Leanne Fetterley, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce
Kelli Ebbs, Muskoka North Good Food Co-op
Morgan Richter, Muskoka North Good Food Co-op
Michelle Shabatura, Farmer’s Daughter
Tom Stehr, Sugarbush Hill Maple Farm
Laura Kennedy, Deehurst Resort
Steve Carr, Comfort Inn/Huntsville and Lake of Bays Accommodation
Greg Pilling, Town of Huntsville – Manager of Sales and Customer Service
Scott Ovell, Town of Huntsville – Community Development Officer
Jennifer Pilon, Lake of Bays Township, Economic Development Intern
Helena Renwick, BIA Manager
Bill Hubbert - Hubbert’s Maple products
Mark Lupton – Mark’s Muskoka Maple
Art Robertson – Windy Acres Maple Farm
Josh & Sherri Campbell – Sweetwater Maple Syrup
Sara per Patricia Snell, Muskoka Roastery Coffee Company

Regrets:

Geoffrey Harriss, Henrietta's Pine Bakery
Bryan Wilson, The Lake of Bays Maple Company
Darren Smith, Lake of Bays Brewing Company
Lynn Murden, Yummies in a Jar
Randy Spencer, Spencer’s Tall Trees
Jeff Suddaby, 3 Guys and Stove
Clee Varon, Deehurst Resort
Scott Doughty, Hidden Valley Resort
Gerry Feltis, Mill on Main
James Murphy, Explorers Edge Executive Director
Kate Monk, Explorers Edge Travel Promoter