Apple harvest season arrives in Lakes Region

Smith Orchard in Belmont offers seven different varieties for visitors to pick

By ED PIERCE | Sep 11, 2014

ROB RICHTER and his wife, Wende, operate Smith Orchard in Belmont which offers visitors an opportunity to pick their own apples from seven different varieties available.

BELMONT — It may have been the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, but to Rob Richter, growing apples is his own slice of paradise.

Richter and his wife, Wende, have owned and operated Smith Orchard in Belmont for the last 29 years and as apple season unfolds throughout New Hampshire, the Richters are gearing up for another bountiful harvest.

A visit to Smith Orchard is an annual fall tradition in the Lakes Region as families can pluck seven different varieties of apples right from the trees they grow on.

"The best part of being an apple farmer is living right here," Richter said. "Just look around. It's beautiful here all year."
Guests at the orchard can stroll through the trees and choose from McIntosh, Red Delicious, Cortland, Yellow Delicious, Jona Gold, Ginger Gold or MacGown apples.

"They may not be as pretty or as red as the new varieties on the market today, but what they lack in looks, they make up for in taste," Richter said. "They offer a taste that is genuine and true to the variety."

Trees carefully tended by the Richters were originally planted in 1929 by Charlie Smith and another 2,000 young apple trees were planted at the orchard over the past 15 years.

The Richters kept the orchard's name when they took over from Smith in 1985.

"I guess you could say this was one of the first pick-your-own apple orchards in these parts," Richter said. "Every season it amazes me how much the public loves our apples. They will clean this place out."

Apple season runs from now through Oct. 13, but Richter said customers will keep coming back until all supplies are exhausted.

"The trees bloom right around May 16 and that never varies more than a week," Richter said. "The blossoms last until the apples are pollinated and the petals fall. When the trees are in full bloom it looks like they are covered in popcorn."

He said every blossom is a potential apple, but by June some of the petals drop away and what are left on the trees develop into apples.

"Like clockwork, the harvest comes 120 days from when the petals fall," Richter said. "That's usually the Friday following Labor Day."

The orchard is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week, but is a popular destination on weekends when tractor rides for children are offered.

School field trips also will bring 800 students to the orchard through the end of the harvest season.

Richter said you can tell if an apple is ready to eat by cutting it open and examining the seeds.

"If the seeds are white it is not ripe and if they are white and brown they are still not ready," he said. "When the seeds are chocolate brown, they are ripe and ready for eating."

He advises visitors that when picking apples from the trees in the orchard to "leave the spur on the tree and then turn, twist and pull."

According to Richter, Cortland apples make the best apple pies because they retain their shape when baked and McIntosh apples can not only be enjoyed for eating, but also for making apple sauce.
"Ginger golds are great dessert apples and the MacGown apples are wonderful for cooking," he said.

Richter's 92-year-old father, Doug Richter, said he's a fan of all the varieties in the orchard.
"The Macs are delicious and the Cortlands are great," he said. "But when you get right down to it, they're all good."

Visitors to Smith Orchard can pick a half-bushel bag for $17 or a peck bag (half of a half-bushel) for $9.

Or for those who aren't interested in picking their own apples, Richter also sells half-bushel pre-picked bags for $20.

The orchard also has a small gift shop featuring local products like honey, apple lotions, creams and maple syrup.

Smith Orchard is at 184 Leavitt Road in Belmont.

For more information, call 524-1674.