

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

Last Saturday was another lovely day at the Aurora Farmers' Market with blue skies and temperatures in the low 20s.

The only thing missing for us was the fact that it was designated as our annual Strawberry Festival but our farmers have no strawberries yet. The cold, wet spring has caused about a two-week delay in the usual ripening time. Nevertheless, we continued with our plans for a Special Event, minus the berries, with the Aurora Community Band playing and a draw for a market bag. We are eagerly anticipating the arrival of fresh, local strawberries soon but they may not have a dedicated day to celebrate them this season.

As I mentioned previously, we're going to tell you about some of our long-time vendors who haven't been described in several years.

So, the next vendor you haven't heard about in a while is Andre Flys of Pioneer Brand Honey.

It's been almost 90 years since Charles Sauriol began tending his first bee hive at the Forks of the Don River in Toronto. When he bottled honey in clay pots, 'Pioneer Brand Honey', in honour of the Pioneers of the Don, was born.

They were saluting those who blazed the trails ahead of them and who brought 'European' honey bees or Apis Melifera on the boats with them.

Until then honey bees did not exist in North America.

Today, Charles' grandson, Andre Flys, is the one who bottles honey under the 'Pioneer Brand' name in Nobleton. Andre is inspired by his grandfather and his father, John, who share the passion for keeping bees.

Andre tells of spending the first Monday of each month with his Dad attending Toronto District Beekeepers Association meetings learning from their peers.

For almost 20 years, Andre and his dad were volunteers and organizers with the Royal Winter Fair Honey Bee education program.

Advocacy and education became more important to Andre as environmental concerns began to

seriously impact our pollinators.

He currently serves
as President of the Ontario Beekeepers Association and teaches Apiary
Management at Niagara College's commercial beekeeping program.

He also manages about
300 colonies of bees for their business, Pioneer Brand Honey. Beekeeping on
that scale requires trips to almost 20 locations where they keep 'bee yards'.

Andre's wife, Kerrie,
with daughter, Peyton, is managing their booth at the Aurora Farmers' Market
this season. His dad, John, works at their farm gate store in Nobleton serving
up honey samples and conversation.

Their products have
expanded since Grampa Charles bottled one size years ago. Today they have pure
Ontario Wildflower honey, Buckwheat honey, Blueberry blossom honey, skin cream,
bug repellent, foot bars, deodorant and lip balms.

In addition, they
carry dozens of different beeswax candles, bee pollen, royal jelly and
propolis.

Today, beekeeping is
a considerable challenge with fragmented forage space from development, highly
intensive pesticide use in modern agriculture and an ever degrading natural
environment.

While there might be
easier ways to make a living, Andre is committed to carrying on for a few more
generations.

His young children ?
10-year-old Peyton; five-year-old Wesley; and three-year-old Breen all seem to
have a keen interest in the bees. Andre feels that they will continue to be
'bee farmers' and advocate for their honeybees and native pollinators for
generations to come.

Do drop by their
booth on Wells Street to see what they have and to talk to Kerrie about bees.

We're working on a
plan to have Andre visit us with the bees and talk to us about the dangers that
bees face today and what we can do to help. We'll let you know when that visit
is scheduled.

See you at the Market!