

First Mountain State Maple Day Rated 'A Sweet Success!' By Most Attendees

By Ken Bustin



The open evaporating pans filled the room with steam and enticing aromas as the maple sap boiled furiously, heated by a roaring wood fire in this "old school" evaporator, under the watchful eye of Jack Mountain Maple proprietor Kent Simmons on Saturday afternoon. Although maple sugaring has been mostly a hobby for Simmons up until now, his recent retirement has provided him with the time to step up the pace somewhat. In previous years, using only about 800-900 tree taps, he says their acreage has the potential for many more. He projects that, in the future, they may employ about 1,500-2,000 taps and substantially increase their previous production.

Photo by Simon Blodgett

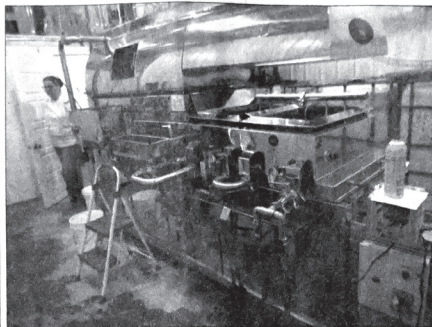
The weather didn't cooperate quite as well as it might have. It was windy and uncomfortably cold, with a few swirling snowflakes mixed in periodically. But despite that, the turnout was good and everyone appeared to be having a good time. The first Mountain Maple Day was declared a success by most participating in it.

"The first Mountain State Maple Day of 2022 was most definitely a sweet success!" enthused Lindsay Kazarick, Future Generations University Appalachian Program Outreach Associate. In addition to being the de facto organizer of much of the event, FGU also had activities of its own taking place at the former McCoy Mill on Thorn Creek Road, south of Franklin. Their mobile sugar shack was set up as a demonstration, and they had a "rocket."

"We heard from producers across the county and across the state on Saturday, as they participated in tree-tappings, syrup-making, and of course lots of pancake breakfasts and everyone was having a great time! Paul Ronk, West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association president, welcomed West Virginia Department of Agriculture

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The sap reducing process has evolved over time, from the most basic devices, like the wood-fired "rocket stove" illustrated above, set up and running at the former McCoy Mill in Franklin by Future Generations University, as part of their Maple Day demonstrations, to the oil-fired stainless-steel giant (below) employed by more serious producers, like M & S Maple in Upper Tract. The latter device, using conjunction with a reverse osmosis unit, which removes much of the excess water from the sap, allows M & S to produce 600-700 gallons of syrup a year without straining its capacity. In fact, says M & S proprietor Mark Kimble, their limitation is in the number of taps he can maintain by himself - 2,100 - and that, if he could buy more sap, he could easily at least double that production. In the photo below, proprietor Sarah Kimble emerges from the next room, where the reverse osmosis unit is kept, after a check on its progress.

Photos by Simon Blodgett

Commissioner Leonhardt to his farm for a ceremonial tree-tapping, and here locally we got to sample maple moonshine and a buffet of goodies throughout the county's restaurants. The partnership between the EDA, CVB, and WVMSPA worked to elevate the producers and local businesses and it did just that. We hope to do the same - or even better - on March 19," Kazarick concluded.

Laura Brown, executive director of the Pendleton County Economic Development Authority, was equally unequivocal in her assessment: "Blue skies greeted visitors this weekend in Pendleton County. Our office loved hearing the feedback from local businesses regarding how successful the first Maple Day was for them. Future Generations University organized a wonderful day for visitors and locals," adding, "Next week is our first business roundtable of the year and one

of our guests is actually Future Generations University Appalachian Program. They'll be speaking about their program and can give some details about the next Maple Days on March 19. Our office is always available for questions or anyone wanting to get their business showcased during the March Maple Days event. Make sure to follow the Pendleton County EDA Facebook page, too, for a giveaway featuring our county's five maple syrup producers."

Saturday's schedule for the Times reporter included visiting several of the participating businesses, and all reported surprisingly good turnout for a first-time event. They expressed optimism that the second Maple Day, on March 19, weather cooperating, might be even better.

Several additional businesses will be participating in the March event. Watch the Times for listings the week prior to the event.



At the former McCoy Mill, where Future Generations University had set up their mobile sugar shack and other displays, local coffee producer Valkyrie Farms had set up a booth. Here, proprietors Brandon Berg and Natasha Wilson stand by to greet visitors and answer questions. Valkyrie Farms introduced a new maple coffee just in time for Maple Days.

Photo by Simon Blodgett



At the Korner Shop Café in Franklin, our breakfast stop, where many breakfast menu items that day included local maple syrup, there wasn't an empty seat in the house, and the staff was scurrying like a swarm of ants to keep all of their customers supplied with good food and coffee. Speaking to the Times later, manager Tammy Linaburg said that their business that day had exceeded even the Treasure Mountain Festival days. The crew took advantage of a moment's time out to pose for a photo and to catch their breath. Front row (left to right) are Tammy Linaburg, Sara Harper, Kathy Eye and Susie Hartman. Back row: Nicki Herb, Megan Baneroff and Tina Stuber.

Photo by Simon Blodgett