



BY DIANNA STAMPFLER

Tapping into Michigan's Maple Moon wine

AS MICHIGAN'S WOODS THAW and awaken from winter, a clear fresh sap begins to flow from the sun-warmed trees that dot rural landscapes. Regarded as the state's oldest agricultural activity — dating back to the Native Americans — maple sugaring draws on a rich history.

Tapping trees has become a new tradition for the Petersen family in Petoskey, owners of Maple Moon Sugarbush and Winery — America's first and only maple winery. In 2011, after two years of backyard sugaring, Todd and Christi and their four children decided to commercially produce maple syrup as a family business.

As with any agricultural crop, sap varies from farm to farm and region to region,

depending on the soil content. The area's climate and the species of trees also play a role. The ideal spring weather conditions offer warm days with freezing cold nights, found predominantly in the northern states and provinces of North America.

The sugar maple is the preferred tree for tapping, due to its high sugar content of approximately 2 percent, although the black maple, red maple, silver maple and ash-leaved maple — with a sugar content of about 1 percent — also can be tapped to produce a different grade of syrup.

Although several Canadian provinces and states in the New England area are recognized as leaders in the maple-sugaring industry, Michigan has more than three times

the number of sugar maples than Quebec or Vermont, meaning the potential for growth is unlimited. Currently, Michigan utilizes less than 1 percent of its potential maple resources.

The Petersens, however, are taking full advantage of what nature has given them. Nestled among hardwood forests on a sprawling 80-acre site just east of downtown Petoskey, Maple Moon has grown into one of the state's largest maple syrup manufacturers. In 2015, they collected roughly 80,000 gallons of sap, which transformed into 1,600 gallons of finished syrup — 40 gallons of sap produces one gallon of syrup.

"It was a fantastic year," says Christi. "Almost a perfect year."

Every spring, each of their estimated 2,500 sugar maple trees are tapped — with as many as three taps, depending on size — and hooked up to an intricate, aerial tubing system that transports the sap to the sugarhouse. From there, the sap begins its transformation into a sweet, golden syrup. There is a detailed, multistep science to it all, including boiling, evaporating, filtering and



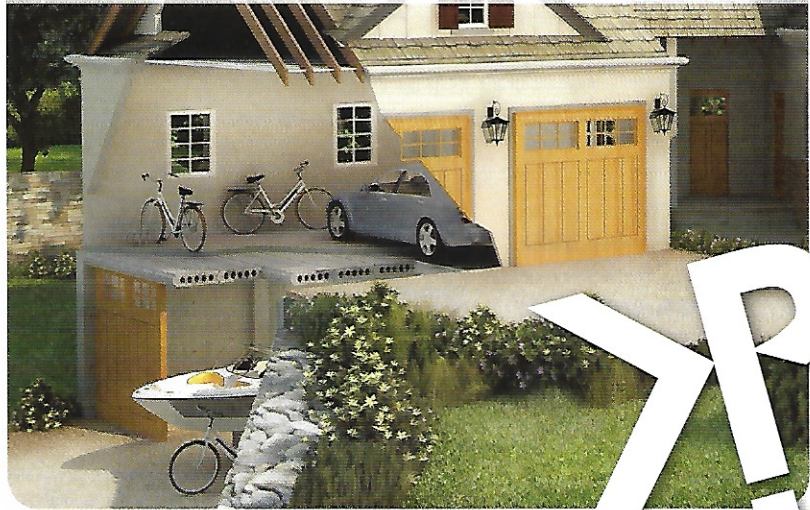
Christi
and Todd
Petersen

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storing — all of which are covered in-depth during a free tour offered each afternoon at 4 p.m.

Maple Moon's rustic tasting room and shop offer mouthwatering treats such as syrup, candy, premium ice cream, granola, jam, salsa — and now, wine.

In all, nine wines were offered in 2015, varying from semi-dry to sweet — each delivering maple tones with a cream finish. Unlike other fruit or fortified wines, Maple Moon doesn't just add maple syrup to its vino; the wine is fermented directly from the sugars in the syrup. Sample from Maple Blackberry, Maple Peach, Maple Cherry and Maple Blueberry as well as Early Spring Reserve, Maple Blanc, Maple Rouge, Maple Dessert and Maple Gold, a decadent port-style wine finished with bourbon, which is among the top-selling products. Unique beverages such as Maple Ginger Hard Cider and Maple Root Beer also are offered.

Maple Moon Sugarbush and Winery, 4454 Atkins Road, is open Thursday through Saturday from November to May, and Monday through Saturday from June to October. It is one of nearly 10 wineries that make up the Bay View Wine Trail (bayviewwine.com), which includes tasting rooms throughout Charlevoix and Emmet counties.

For more information on Maple Moon, visit mmsyrup.com or call (231) 487-9058.



Freelance writer Dianna Stampfler is president of Promote Michigan and resides in Peto-skey.

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