

Fun for all at Ontario Barn Festival

By EMILY McFAUL
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ONTARIO — Toe-tapping music and fun for everyone from seniors to kids — not to mention a chance to find out how to do good for the earth — can be found at the fifth annual Ontario Barn Festival on Whitney Road, running from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday.

The festival is “loosely bluegrass,” says Ontario Barn Vineyards owner Christopher Staub, noting that the half-dozen bands set to take the stage at the event encompass an eclectic range of musical styles.

“It’s not a traditional bluegrass festival,” he says. “We have two or three bands that are pure, old-time bluegrass; the others stray a little bit more.”

On the “pure bluegrass” side are Norman Hasman & Friends, a Rochester-based crowd favorite that performs old-time country and bluegrass; Pennsylvania-based Waitin on a Train; and acoustic group String Fever, a quartet playing old-time fiddle music.

Groups that put a somewhat different spin on things include The Leafcutters, a duo that performs traditional and original folk rock; and Rochester-based acoustic jam band Hypnotic Clambake, known for playing with popular groups like Phish and the Dave Matthews Band.

“They’re really all over the place,” says Staub of Hypnotic Clambake, which incorporates not only bluegrass but also zydeco, klezmer, funk and accordion sounds.

The ages of the performers are just as varied; bluegrass guitarist and vocalist Norman Hasman, for instance, is a World War II pilot who was twice captured by Nazis and is in his ninth decade.

“Everybody in (his) band is over 80 years old,” says Staub, noting that their

ages don’t stop the musicians in Hasman’s group from opening the festival with a lively performance.

Other bands at the Barn Festival — like Serge & Friends, a group that puts a bluegrass twist on songs by classic rock and folk artists — comprise musicians closer to college age.

That likewise means the average age of the approximately 200 festivalgoers expected at Ontario Barn Vineyards this weekend will run the gamut, says Staub.

“The crowds we get range from college students to folks who have been listening to or playing bluegrass or roots music for over seven decades, to families with their babies,” he says.

To cater to the younger set, the Barn Festival offers face painting and free ice cream that’s brought out in the afternoon.

“Of course, everyone gets in line,”

laughs Staub. “When it comes to ice cream, we are all kids!”

For adults, there’s a wine tasting room on the property that just opened this past spring in a renovated barn.

“That’s new for this festival,” says Staub of the tasting barn, which will be open for business during the festival.

While Ontario Barn Vineyards is planning to bottle their own vintages, as a newly launched winery — the first in the town of Ontario — that won’t start happening until next spring. In the meantime, Staub has collected plenty of other worthwhile wines, ranging from rieslings to reds, for tasting and purchase. Current offerings include vintages from wineries like Billsboro, located in Geneva; Castel Grisch, in Watkins Glen; and Lamoreaux Landing, in Lodi.

“We offer some of the best wines from around the state,” says Staub.

Staub also uses the festival as an avenue to help people learn about individual steps they can take to improve their energy efficiency or to generate their

own power — a topic he has been passionate about ever since his college days in the late 1970s.

“I believe politicians are decades behind in having the ‘political will’ to do what needs to happen to save our earth,” says Staub. “We need to take things into our own hands, one household and business at a time.”

Each Barn Festival has featured an alternative energy vendor that operates in the area, such as Savant Solar, which offers festivalgoers information on financing individual solar or wind projects through State Energy Research and Development Authority loans and grants. The companies also offer a display of products like photovoltaic cells that can be mounted on roofs or freestanding platforms to generate solar energy.

There are also wares available for purchase from a handful of local artisans and vendors who sell potted plants, birdhouses, handcrafted silver jewelry, perfumed soaps and local honey.

“People can just kind of mill around and check out the vendors while they’re listening to the music,” says Staub.

While the farm’s organic apples are a bit on the early side, Staub says visitors are welcome to roam the orchards and pick a few.

“They’re good for cooking,” he notes.

There are also non-alcoholic drinks and grilled chicken, burgers, hot dogs and vegetarian options on offer from an onsite barbecue vendor for visitors who get hungry or thirsty during the daylong event. And in addition to wine from the tasting barn, festivalgoers can also opt to drop a few dollars in a collection box for the bands playing the festival and grab a beer donated for the event by Genesee Brewing Company.

“It’s kind of like, ‘You help the bands, and Genesee will donate a beer,’” says Staub.



About Ontario Barn Vineyards

Located on a reclaimed agricultural property that dates back to the mid-1800s, Ontario Barn Vineyards encompasses 11 acres of Christmas trees, orchards and vineyards. One of the newest stops on the Lake Ontario Wine Trail, Ontario Barn Vineyards is working on its first vintages of white wine, slated to be bottled in the spring of 2012, and is now offering wines from across New York state for tasting and purchase.

The winery’s newly renovated tasting barn is open to visitors from noon to 5:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, as well as for occasional Friday afternoon events. It will also be open from noon to 5:30 p.m. on Labor Day.

For more information, visit www.ontariobarnvineyards.com.

If you go ...

What: Fifth annual Ontario Barn Festival, featuring live bluegrass, roots and alternative music, as well as food, wine and vendors

Where: Ontario Barn Vineyards, 517 Whitney Road, Ontario

When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday
Details: Festival tickets are \$12 for adults and can be purchased online or at the door; kids under 18 will be admitted free when accompanied by an adult. Ticketholders can stay for the entire event or come and go throughout the day.

Visitors are welcome to take chairs or blankets to enjoy live music on the lawn; the event will move to the barn in case of rain. No pets permitted.

Barbecue, wine, beer and soda will be available for purchase at the event, along with free ice cream; no carry-in food or alcohol permitted.

Ontario Barn Vineyards has a small onsite parking lot that provides handicapped access; additional parking is available along the road.

For more information including directions, band schedule and online admissions, visit www.OntarioBarnFestival.com.



Submitted photos

At left, Norman Hasman & Friends open each Ontario Barn Festival with their old-time country and bluegrass. At right, Stephen LoVerme and Andy Smeltz, otherwise known as The Leafcutters, will play traditional and original folk at the festival.