

The Happiest Place on Earth has a Portage County competitor

- Walt Disney proclaimed Disneyland as the Happiest Place on Earth.

That's only because he never went to Beckwith Orchards.

It is here that every day is Arbor Day with apple, pear, peach, and plum trees, surrounded by forest. April is the month to plant new stock. Mother's Day brings the riot of blooms that rival the cherry blossoms in Washington, DC. You will be glad that you biked or hiked the Portage Park District Hike and Bike Trail for the summer Sweet Corn Festival, so you don't have to search for a parking space.

The prime time is fall harvest. Tractors chug in laden with bulk bins of apples, and the first smell that hits you is a freshly baked pie.

There is only one rule for visitors. Customers are forbidden to hurry.

Winter is calm as the 1500-plus fruit trees go dormant. Skis and sleds replace tractors.

Critters abound here. There are bluebirds and eagles and the "flying garbage cans" as Charlie Beckwith calls the turkey vultures that soar overhead. Maybe a Rocky the Flying Squirrel will buzz from one tree top to the next.

If you are lucky, you may spy a bear, like the Portage County deputy that rounded the bend on Lake Rockwell Road late one night and saw one snacking from the dumpster.

A deer hunter spotted a bear at the orchard. That bear was struck and killed the next day on the Ohio Turnpike, presumed to have attempted to head back to Pennsylvania to be with family. John Beckwith knows his scat and tracks, and only one creature could snap off a Honey Crisp trunk.

Walk or ride the path from Kent or Ravenna to the century farm and you may spot more than a wild thing. The place is crawling with celebrities. Among the rich and famous to have tramped around the old sod include actress Eve Arden; and the last NFL player picked in the draft and ended up playing on the great 17-0 Miami Dolphins team — Don Nottingham; Cleveland Browns players Jay Thomas and Colt McCoy; and British Open champion Ben Curtis.

Paul Beckwith teaches sixth grade science at Angola Middle School in Angola, Ind. Green Portage is a monthly feature in the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.

GREEN

PORTAGE

Paul Beckwith
Portage Park District



The architecture includes the classic white farmhouse straight out of the painting, "American Gothic." The red barn has rustic hand hewn beams, a cupola, and slate roof. A corn crib sits next to a hand-dug well.

The tool shed is where Jay Beckwith sold apples. Grace Beckwith would leave the dinner table at the sound of a car horn, record the transaction on a yellow Goldenrod tablet, and put the cash in a tin candy box.

The outhouse is a rare four-seater, featuring a window from a Model T. It seems that a family that sprays together, stays together. This is a popular stop for the more than 4,000 students that tour the orchard each fall. "Does it still work?" they ask. (Answer: As long as there is gravity.)

A favorite building is the original Man Cave, a cabin built in the heart of the forest by Jay Beckwith, his brothers and their friends. Most of the action today takes place at the Cider Mill, sort of a Portage County version of Sam Drucker's General Store.

IF YOU GO: Beckwith Orchards is located at 1617 Lake Rockwell Road, Kent, Ohio. It is just about halfway between the tropics and the North Pole, and just about halfway between the Hopewell Mound overlooking Lake Phippen at Towner's Woods and Standing Rock on the Cuyahoga River. There is a trailhead at the Portage Park District Hike and Bike Trail, but sadly Grace Beckwith is no longer there to cook for the hobos that used to ride the trains.

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