

Elgin County

Economic Development & Tourism

September/October Newsletter



Celtic Ridge Farms p.1



Backus Page House Museum p.3



Pawz N Clawz p.5



Horseshoe J Dude Ranch p.6



ElginCounty

Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com

elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca

Spotlight on Agriculture

The Family Tradition Lives on at Celtic Ridge Farms



In today's day in age, the vast majority of people do not have the opportunity to experience the lifestyle that many Ontario farmers do each day. For Rob and Maryjo Tait, husband and wife duo at Celtic Ridge Farms, they have been immersed in this agrarian lifestyle throughout their entire lives, and couldn't be more proud to share their story.

Maryjo was raised on a beef cattle and turkey farm, while Rob was brought up on the beef cattle farm that his immediate family now resides on. Rob's Great Grandfather moved to the Dutton area, 45 minutes west of London, in 1873, where he began raising a small herd of beef cattle.

It wasn't until 2013 that Maryjo and Rob took over the farm from Rob's parents; as the 4th generation to live on the farm. 2013 was an exciting time for the Tait's; not only did they take over their family farm, but they also welcomed their first child, Alexander. The tradition of raising both cattle and children on this beautiful 300-acre property was no longer a dream, but a reality for the Tait's. In 2016, they welcomed their second child, Emily, and have become blessed to share the farm with their children, now the 5th generation to live on the farm.

Although Rob and Maryjo work full time in other professions, their true passion is their children and the family farm. As a family, they now raise both beef cattle and lambs on their farm. Their livestock is raised pure and natural, meaning that they're raised without additives or growth hormones. The Tait's also practice what is called rotational grazing,

meaning their cattle and lambs are rotated from pasture to pasture, feeding on grasses and hay throughout their four farms. Their livestock's diets are also complemented with high-quality corn, to ensure they're providing the highest quality of meat to their clients.

Their beef and lamb is butchered at a local family-owned butcher shop in Highgate, Ontario. Once the beef has been dry-aged for a minimum of 21 days, in a climate-controlled setting, it's cut, wrapped, and ready to be sold with their cut and wrapped lamb to their customers on the farm.



At Celtic Ridge Farms, they offer a variety of meat packages for their customers to choose from. For those families with ample freezer space, the Tait's offer ½ cuts and ¼ cuts, which provides a large variety of hamburger meat, steaks, and roasts for their customers to enjoy. They also provide small variety packs for those who can only store small quantities.



Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca



Seeing as this farm is the only one of its kind within many kilometres, offering packaged meat straight from the farm, it is no surprise to hear that the farm is going strong.

In 2018, the Taites retrofitted an existing building into an on-farm store and meat shop. After months of hard work, the store finally opened its doors to the public in December 2018. With work from local artisans in Elgin and Middlesex County, as well as in-season produce, the farm is stocked with many local goodies.

Maryjo and Rob thrive on sharing their story, and of course, all of the farm's inhabitants with customers. Upon arriving at the store, you can bet that you'll be greeted by their loving dogs, Brea and Lucky, and of course either Rob or Maryjo.

By following Celtic Ridge on Facebook or Instagram, you can gain an insight into what it means to be a beef farmer. The Taites share a plethora of posts about their farm, events, and even where you can buy and try their meat. Their packaged meat is available at Talbotville Berry Farm Market, but can also be enjoyed on the menus of several local businesses: Tall Tales Café, Tasty Sweets Café & Bakery, The Tippy Pig, and 2 Guys & A Smoker. Even those in the big city of Toronto can have a taste of Southwestern Ontario, as Celtic

Ridge supplies Jacobs & Co. Steakhouse, located in the King West Village.

The Taites encourage everyone to get off of the beaten path and explore their family farm, open Saturdays May - December.





Spotlight on Local History

The History of Dunwich Township Lives on at the Backus Page House Museum

Mary Storey, the original landowner of where the Backus Page House now stands, would have no idea of the legacy she would leave behind one day. In 1809, Mary received a land grant for this property from Colonel Thomas Talbot, the Irish born settler of what we now refer to as the Municipality of Dutton Dunwich.

Mary Storey gifted this land to her grandson Andrew Backus, and in 1850, he and his wife, Mary Jane, built one of the first brick homes in the area. Andrew Backus died in 1885, leaving the house to his son, Andrew Storey Backus and wife Eliza Potticary.

After a few changes in ownership over the years, Jonas Page obtained the house and property in 1925, with his son Morley and wife Grace moving in the following year.

It wasn't until 1968 that the land was sold to its current owners, Ontario Parks. The area surrounding the Museum was developed into the John E Pearce Provincial Park, while the land and house are currently leased to the Tyrconnell Heritage Society, a group that has incorporated 25 years ago. This Heritage Society formed in 1994 due to rumours that the Backus Page House was going to be sold, or even worse, potentially torn down.

Over the years, the Tyrconnell Heritage Society has restored the house and property back to its (almost original) 1850's state. The house was renamed as a tribute to both of its long-time owners, the Backus and Page families. The Society has made it their mandate to preserve and

educate the public about the estate and the Talbot Settlement era. Today, the Backus Page House Museum invites the public to tour the grounds and Museum on Tuesdays through Sundays and Holiday Mondays, from May to Thanksgiving. Private tours can be arranged outside of the Museum's regular hours for individuals looking for more information or for school tours.

The current Museum exhibit "Anniversaries and Ancestors," pays tribute to the 25th anniversary of the Tyrconnell Heritage Society forming and the 200th anniversary of Scottish ancestors who settled in Aldborough and Dunwich Townships.

For Angela Bobier, Cultural Manager of the Museum, one of her favourite exhibit pieces is the family Bible that once belonged to the Backus Family. Back in the day, family trees were documented in Bibles, otherwise known as the Ancestry.ca of the olden days. Births, deaths, and marriages were recorded in the blank pages of Bibles to keep records that could be passed down through generations. Guests of the Museum can look at many local family Bibles, including the Backus' to understand a piece of the community's history.



Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca



The Museum and its grounds see hundreds of people attend events that relate back to the time periods and ancestry of the Backus and Page families.

There are still a few events including a couple of breakfasts and A Very Victorian Christmas, where the decorated museum will be open on weekends in December. Although the signature Museum events are done for 2019, you'll want to mark these historical happenings into your calendar for 2020.

The Museum's event season kicks off on Family Day, with activities geared towards children and families. This event is the only time that the Backus Page House offers free admission, but donations are always welcome.

History comes to life in the summer months at the Backus Page House. On Victoria Day weekend, The Road to Culloden event draws reenactors from all over to the Museum's grounds. This event revolves around Bonnie Prince Charlie of Scotland and his quest to reclaim the throne.

In June, the annual Living History Weekend event focuses on an era specific to the Dutton area, although this event changes every year. In 2020, the event will be based on the War of 1812, a war that saw some of its action in the Tyrconnell and Port Talbot area.

As summer begins to wind down, and harvest draws near, the Museum hosts its annual Heritage Farm Show on Labour Day weekend. This event acknowledges the farming community that was and still is present in the area.

The Backus Page House Museum is currently awaiting its approval to begin building an agricultural centre. This centre will become home to historic farming equipment and artifacts related to farming in western Elgin County, a key industry in the area.

Follow the Backus Page House Museum on Facebook and Instagram to stay up to date with their events and exhibits. www.backuspagehouse.ca



Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca



Spotlight on Local Business

Spoil your VFD (Very Important Dog) at Pawz N Clawz Boarding

For many families, a pet is like another member of the family. At Pawz N Clawz Boarding, owner Trish Wilcox provides a nurturing space for your four-legged companion to feel right at home. Whether you're at work or on vacation, Trish provides your canine or feline best friend with the same love and care as if they were her own.

Trish's passion for animals began in 2006 when she started breeding Siberian Huskies. Originating from Northeastern Asia, this breed is known for sled-pulling, guarding, and being an excellent companion. What makes this breed unique is that they are incredibly active, energetic, and resilient. Huskies are not for everyone, as they require a lot of exercise and dedication. For Trish, she always enjoyed the challenges and rewards that accompanied being a husky breeder.

Not long after her first husky litter went home with their new families, Trish began receiving calls about where they could board their pups. Thus began a new business venture, in boarding dogs at her home. After fourteen years in the pharmaceutical field, and ten years of breeding Siberian Huskies, Trish knew that a change of career was the right move.

In 2016, Trish and her husband moved to a serene farm, in the Dutton Dunwich countryside, to start an official boarding company. The desire to move into Elgin County stemmed from the cheap cost of land in comparison to other regions in Ontario. Trish's business required her to purchase agricultural land, and where better than Dutton Dunwich to find a small, friendly, and supporting community. Through starting her home business, Pawz N Clawz, this allowed Trish

to start a family of her own. While raising her son, Trish began the process of building a new facility to house 14 dog runs. This facility now provides daycare and overnight boarding for both cats and dogs. With this expansion came an almost 2-acre fenced-in 'puppy playground' for the dogs to roam.

For those families looking to pamper their pooch, Pawz N Clawz offers VID (Very Important Dog) Suites to its customers. These suites provide owners with peace of mind, as they can see their dog in live-time through a smartphone app; it's as if they're right at your side.

Customers of Pawz N Clawz can be confident in knowing that their dog won't be cooped up all day in a kennel. The dogs are provided with ample space to run and roam in the fenced-in yard to play with all kinds of breeds.

It wasn't long after the opening that Trish decided it was time to take her business to the next level. Through attending Pets Beautiful schooling in London, she soon became a certified dog groomer. With this education in her back pocket, Trish now grooms dogs, big or small, and offers brush-outs for cats. These services are available to both boarders and non-boarders looking for an affordable and reliable groomer.

Follow Pawz N Clawz on Facebook or Instagram to see what services Trish has to offer, or to brighten your day with the daily photos she posts of the dogs playing in the 'puppy playground.' One day you just might see Trish offering dog training!



Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca



Spotlight on Agri-Tourism

Experience the Western Way of Life at the Horseshoe J Dude Ranch

Dutton Dunwich may not be the “Wild West,” but this Western Municipality is home to a thriving western-style horse farm, the Horseshoe J Dude Ranch. For more than 60 years, the Dude Ranch has been a hot spot for horse lovers of all ages. With acres of rolling hills and a beautiful Carolinian forest, this property was made for scenic trail riding.

For Sue Stiles, one of the Ranch’s current owners, she has fond memories growing up on the farm, taking care of the horses and mucking stalls with her family. Sue’s parents, Richard and Helen Steele, took over the Dude Ranch some 45 years ago from the original owners, the Hauka Family. Richard Steele was a school teacher who decided to merge his passion for working with children and being a rancher into one.

The Ranch is and always has been a serene and welcoming space for all. In 2004, Sue and her husband decided to build a home of their own on the family farm to experience the serenity for themselves every day. 2004 was also when Sue began to take the reins from her parents, to start developing the Ranch into what it is today. Over time Sue has diversified the farm into four main activities for the public to enjoy: horse camps, horse and pony clubs, western riding lessons, and trail riding/parties.

Every July and August, Sue’s life becomes a bit crazy, with more than 150 children visiting the farm for summer camp. Children ages five to seventeen can partake in their day camp, two - and three - night camps, or a week-long residential camp. The residential camps

are relatively small, offering spaces for 25 kids per week, to ensure personal attention is given to each “wrangler,” as Sue likes to refer to the campers. Wranglers gain a real ranching experience, by choosing if they want to bunk in a Conestoga covered wagon, or in a cabin.

What makes the Dude Ranch unique is that the Wranglers are paired with their own horse for the duration of their stay. The Wranglers are taught basic horsemanship, grooming tactics, saddling techniques, and how to care for their new companion. Once they are comfortable with their horse, together they set off on a guided trail ride through the rolling hills and valleys on the property.



Economic Development & Tourism

progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1

T. (519) 631-1460 X168

E. info@elgin.ca



Family values are extremely important at the Horseshoe J Dude Ranch. For three weekends a year, the Ranch invites families to spend time with one another in the peaceful atmosphere that the farm provides. Families can sign up for a one-night stay in either June or on Labour Day weekend to gain an insight on ranching. Trail riding, swimming, hayrides, outdoor games, and a good old fashion campfire, are some of the activities that families can expect to do on the Ranch. Campers are welcome to stay in their own tents or camp out in one of the Ranch's cabins or covered wagons as a family.

With over 42 horses and ponies on the Ranch, Sue also hosts horse and pony clubs that run from September through June. Members of these clubs have the opportunity to not only ride a horse but learn a lesson about farm safety, proper grooming, and many other essential components in being around horses each week. All are welcome to join the club, but children must be in JK or older to participate.

For those looking to learn more about western riding, Sue offers weekly horse lessons in the fall, winter, and spring months. Both beginners and those who have been in the saddle for years are welcomed to take lessons. These lessons focus solely on western riding, with private and group lessons available.

The Ranch welcomes anyone interested in public trail riding to make a reservation by calling (519) 762-5402 or emailing duderanch@xplornet.ca. Trail rides can be arranged for private functions such as birthday parties, or corporate wellness events, with overnight stays as an added option.

Escape everyday life and spend a day ranching at the Horseshoe J Dude Ranch. Follow the Ranch on Facebook to learn more about the western way of life!



Economic Development & Tourism
progressivebynature.com
elgintourist.com

450 Sunset Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5V1
T. (519) 631-1460 X168
E. info@elgin.ca