

By Sherri Telenko

From Buggies to Boutiques

St. Jacobs Village merges modern comforts with Mennonite mystique



PHOTO: ST. JACOBS COUNTRY

Easily walkable, St. Jacobs downtown has a surprising number of unique boutiques and artisan studios.

A 90-minute drive from Toronto, St. Jacobs has been a favourite get-out-of-town retreat since the mid-1980s when the village capitalized on its rural culture and Mennonite history to consciously become a tourist destination. It's changed a little since it invested in the restoration of the Old Mill (one of the first sources of hydro-electric power in

Ontario) into artist studios and restored the 1852 stagecoach house into a nine-room inn and restaurant.

St. Jacobs has also struck a careful balance between commercial interests and respect for the reclusive lifestyle of the Old Order Mennonites who have made this region their home since the 1700s. Drive west along Highway

401, exit onto Highway 8 towards Kitchener then follow Highway 85 into St. Jacobs. You will know you are there when the shoulder of the road widens — ploughed in the winter and packed hard in the summer — allowing just enough room for both the 21st-century automobile and 18th-century horse and buggy to share the road.

St. Jacobs Visitors' Centre offers maps detailing the locations of regional farm businesses.

PHOTO: ST. JACOBS COUNTRY



St. Jacobs is home to about 4,000 Old Order Mennonites who live private, simple lives, rejecting many contemporary technologies and embracing a strict religious code based on Christian principles. One of the best ways to learn about the Old Order lifestyle is to visit the **St. Jacobs Visitors' Centre** (519 664-3518), 1406 King Street North. New this year (and financed by the church) is an interactive educational exhibition called "Telling the Mennonite Story," which includes an 11-minute video. Admission is by donation. The Visitors' Centre guest book is filled with addresses from around the world. Apparently, an interest in Mennonite culture attracts international travellers making the car journey from Niagara Falls to Toronto.

While you are at the Visitors' Centre you can also pick up a detailed map pinpointing all the local home-based farm businesses in the area (which are closed on Sunday, of course). So if you want to interact with the Mennonite culture, decide upon some apples, maple syrup or a homemade pie and follow the map. Or head to the village's very popular **Farmers' Market** (519 747-1830), 878 Weber

Street North. The Farmers' Market is open Thursday and Saturday year-round from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Tuesday is added from mid-June to mid-September. About 100 vendors — many local farmers — cart in preserves, produce, meats, cheese, and baked goods.

On market days from April to October, Nathan Kuepfer harnesses two large horses to a red trolley car and offers **Horse Drawn Tours** (519 656-9989) from the market to a Mennonite farm that's been run by the same family for seven generations. Participants tour the apple orchard and maple sugar bush, learning how everything is farmed and how corn is dried for feed in a large outdoor vat. On-site is a small home-based gift store selling locally made syrup starting at \$8 and handmade quilts starting at \$550. The tours last about 75 minutes and cost \$15 per person (\$14 for seniors).

If you want to fill a shopping bag or two, St. Jacobs' compact "downtown" King Street North has a deceiving number of opportunities for drifting from shop to shop. Across the street from the Mill at the **Riverworks Shopping Emporium** are even more

shops stacked vertically so you can meander for hours.

But if you want to stay outside, King Street North is lined with four blocks of boutique, clothing, home decor, antique and gift stores. **Magnolia's** (519 664-3464), 1399 King Street North, combines quality contemporary women's fashions with household accessories. **La Crème** and its sister store, **Essentially Black** (519 664-3275), 1364 King Street North, sells women's clothing and accessories themed around colour (one store is notably darker than the other).

Magic Mountain (519 664-6350) is also filled with women's fashions, many pieces its own label and many for the cruise scene. This is one of 10 Ontario locations for this company, which locates its stores along neighbourhood street fronts rather than malls. Other interesting stores include the **Casa Latina** (519 664-9934), 1389 King Street North, selling artistically crafted silver and gold jewellery from pearls to amber. Angel lovers will rejoice to find **Angel Treasures**, (519 664-1599), 1389 King Street North. This store specializes in all things angel from concrete garden statues to



Produced locally, maple syrup is available directly from producers in St. Jacobs village and surrounding areas.



wall plaques.

The Farm Pantry (519 664-3626), 1386 King Street North, is filled to the brim with every kitchen gadget you didn't know you needed, along with local speciality foods such as jams and maple syrup. This store is beside **Stone Crock Meats and Cheeses** (519 664-3610) retail outlet that supplies many of the local eateries, including its namesake **Stone Crock Restaurant** (open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday to Friday and 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Sunday). This business was one of the first in town, launching in 1975 as a grocery store catering to the developing tourism trade at that time.

Stone Crock is synonymous with home-cooked simplicity. The **Stone Crock Restaurant** (519 664-2286),

1396 King Street North, is the ideal locale for a hearty country breakfast of French toast and summer sausage to start the day. And the rustic wooden interior of the **Stone Crock Bakery** (519 664-3612), 1402 King Street North, beside the restaurant is a good stop for afternoon coffee, scones, pie or a lunch of homemade soup and wraps.

Despite an influx of so many boutique stores — a common trend in many small villages like this one — St. Jacobs has remained true to its artistic roots. Visitors can buy handmade corn brooms at **Hamel Brooms** (519 664-1117), 1411 King Street North, starting at \$15. And the **Robert A. Brown Glass and Metal Studio** (519 664-1435) sells contemporary custom-made sinks, counter tops and shower

doors with swirling water-like designs embedded in the opaque glass.

The anchor of downtown is still the **Old Mill** building, 1441 King Street North. As previously mentioned, it was developed in the 1980s as artists' studios during a time when major malls in nearby cities were attracting shopping dollars away from downtown. Today, inside the Old Mill (and its attached silo) is a concentration of handcrafted merchandise, such as Daniel Kramer's carved bowls and woodwork at **The Top Drawer** (519 664-2421). **Fleur de Soleil** (519 664-1232), located on the third floor of the mill, features three women artists — Jan Fretz, Kathi Kelly, and Judy Gascho-Jutzi — specializing in printmaking, painting and fibre art.

There's also a potter, weaver and

The year-round farmer's market in St. Jacobs is a popular destination for visitors and locals.



PHOTO: ST. JACOBS COUNTRY

glass blower on-site, so there's a variety of one-of-a-kind pieces to add to any collection. For those interested in Native art, **Turtle Dove Native Gifts** (519 664-1377) represents 12 different artists from the Six Nations community.

A charming feature of the Old Mill is the fact the shopping-weary can distract themselves with several small exhibitions within the building. On the third floor is the **Maple Syrup Museum** (519 664-1232) where visitors learn about syrup production and the local industry. Syrup is available for purchase at many area stores and the Farmer's Market. Beside this room is the **Quilt Gallery** (1 800 265-3353), which showcases examples of art-calibre quilts, many made locally. There are a number of places in town to hunt for that special heirloom quilt: along King Street North is **St. Jacobs Mennonite Quilts** (519 664-1817) or near the Farmer's Market is Heirloom Quilts in the **Log Cabin**, which is open on market days.

One floor up is a recent addition to St. Jacobs' historical repertoire: **The Model Train and Exhibition**. This working model railway of Waterloo County's rural past features miniature local scenes including a barn raising, a Mennonite meeting house, and the village of St. Jacobs.

Head to the mill basement to see the **Electricity Exhibit** that briefly traces the story of electricity — from idea to commercial use — over the last 400 years. Here's where you'll find the original turbine that provided power to the mill and village in early days. According to Jenny Shantz of St. Jacobs County Marketing Association, they've been told that if the turbine was working again, it has the capacity of producing \$80,000 worth of power per year.

Beside this exhibition is the village's newest addition: **The Home Hardware Exhibit**. The national home improvement company started in St. Jacobs in 1964 and

co-founder Walter Hachborn can still be seen heading to work at the nearby head office each day. He donated many artefacts documenting the store's humble beginnings. Note also that the now-countrywide company hosts its annual trade show and conference once a year in early June, selling out regional hotels for miles.

Speaking of staying overnight, if you want to hit the hay in St. Jacobs, there are a few options. First, the historic nine-room **Benjamin's Restaurant and Inn** (519 664-3731),

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HANOVER HOLIDAYS		<p>Other East Coast tours include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritimes / Newfoundland • Viking Trail • Newfoundland Adventure • Newfoundland / Labrador Cruise <p>Lic # 1158989</p>
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A large volunteer force was needed. The event took place on Wanda's Ancaster property, and people were recruited to park cars, direct traffic, load plates and serve tea.

Three local high schools made all the sandwiches for the teas, and Robert Bateman High School made the desserts. Local businesses donated muffins and cupcakes.

Fifty local young people managed to get points for their volunteer requirement for their high school diploma by serving at the tea. And on tea day, Wanda's kitchen was filled with women — and some men — cutting sandwiches, plating desserts, and arranging strawberries.


There was also a silent auction with items donated by both businesses and individuals and guests had their fortunes read for a fee from fortune tellers who donated their time. There was also music by local entertainers.

No wonder the first tea, with tickets priced at \$75 per person, was sold out. And even though they increased the number of tables to 30 for the second tea, it was a sell out as well. In total, the two teas raised over \$50,000 for breast cancer.

Wanda took the season off last year because of difficult family pressures, but this year she is back in the tea party business and her son Jason has stepped up to the chairperson position vowing to help his mother make the 2008 version the biggest and best ever. The goal is to raise \$50,000, which will be targeted for local breast cancer treatment.


"What has really pleased me about this event," explains Wanda, "is the way that it has inspired so many people, many of them quite young, to donate their time and to become involved — often for the first time — in a charity event. The kids who serve at the tea are wonderful. My manicurist caught my enthusiasm and became involved and brought in her own friends to help. Volunteers seemed to appear from nowhere. One man gave us a cheque for \$500 and didn't want any tickets. He said, in explanation, that he had two daughters, and this was something that he could do for them."

"My parents taught me that if you are successful you should give back as much as the space you occupy," says Wanda. "Service is what you pay back. And now my son is shouldering this huge responsibility, and I couldn't be more proud of him."

The 2008 Tea for Two will be held in Ancaster on June 8. 

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1430 King Street North, offers quilt-covered bed guest rooms starting at \$100 a night. Think stagecoach inn with exposed beams and open fireplaces and that's the cosy experience in the 120-seat dining room. Second, **The Best Western St. Jacobs Country Inn** (519 884-9285), 50 Benjamin Road East, across from the St. Jacobs Farmers Market, has year-round traditional hotel accommodations starting at \$139.

As you can imagine, small towns are not about an active nightlife and this one is no different, but that doesn't mean there's nothing to do if you arrive during the right week. Start with dinner at **Vidalia's Market and Grill** (519 664-2575), 1398 King Street North, a bistro-style restaurant and bar with a menu of fish and chips, pasta, wraps and seafood crepes. Then take in a show at **St. Jacobs Country Playhouse** (519 747-7788). This live-theatre company's season runs February to December each year. The 2008 season includes the musical comedy *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, June 18 to July 12, and a British farce called *One for the Pot*, running from October 8 to November 2. Find out more about other shows at the theatre along with anything else you might need to know about St. Jacobs at www.stjacobs.com. 

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