

Back on the Farm

Tilly Foster Farm Museum Officially Reopens Saturday, April 25

By Abby Luby
Picture a quiet country road, waiting for a hundred cows to amble across. Or cracking into tree bark with a spigot craving the sweet taste of maple syrup. How about sneaking peaches from the orchard in the moonlight?

These scenarios are from a time when American farming was a noble profession and independent land holders, emulating Thomas Jefferson, formed the backbone of the country. It's an era long gone, but not entirely - thanks to philanthropist George Whipple and the Tilly Foster Farm Museum in Brewster.

"It's most gratifying," says Whipple about the farm preservation program at Tilly Foster Farm. "I grew up in Putnam County and there were a lot of dairy farms on the road I lived on. But we have suburbanized the area and the farm experience is lost."

Whipple lives in Kent on his grandfather's farm, but also resides in New York City where he is a reporter for the NY1 television. The Whipple Foundation for the Preservation of Putnam County is a non profit organization that Whipple established expressly to manage the farm, raise rare and endangered Early American farm animals and educate the public about

local, agricultural history.

"Tilly Foster is the gem of eastern Putnam County," said Ann Fanizzi, chair of the Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space. "It is a prize that the residents, county and my organization really campaigned to preserve, and we're overjoyed that it has been preserved. We feel that it will be in good care with Mr. Whipple."

Putnam County owns the some 200 farm acres and Whipple has a 40-year lease on the property. The farm first opened to the public last July as part of a three-year trial run. The last ten months of operation has been overwhelmingly successful, says Whipple.

"We keep the farm open 365 days a year and it's free. Parents have been bringing their kids and feeling a connection with nature. It's a farm they own, we're just running it."

The success of the farm may have to do with the participation of other area farms and what Whipple calls 'farm related constituencies.'

If you want to meet a real show horse, Meadow Creek Farm of Dutchess County has their high stepping horses at Tilly Foster Farm showing off their struts. Other equine activities include horseshoeing, therapeutic riding for the handicapped and mentally disabled and pony rides. Want to know how to keep your horse healthy? A veterinarian from Mid Hudson Veterinary Practice talks about keeping your horse healthy, including the brushing their teeth. Mike Sealbach from



Students keep their horses at Tilly Foster Farm.

Custom Forest Products Barn Building builds a cow barn on the spot. Sheep Sheering happens on a regular basis. Over \$1 million in old tractors and farm machinery have been loaned to the farm by the Putnam County Antique Machinery Museum, on display in a larger barn.

"Each independent group has a respective piece of the farm and our visitors have a farm community and a cohesive farm museum to visit," says Whipple.

The farm has also become a small Mecca for rare and endangered farm animals. The list growing list includes guinea hogs from Saunders Farm in Vermont, American Blue Rabbits from Iowa, Randall Lineback Cattle, considered the rarest farm animals with fewer than 400 in the world and whose



herd has increased by three this year with two boys, Tillingham Foster and Rundell Bloomer, and one girl, Miss Tilly Foster. Also there is the endangered American Jacob Sheep, the American Mammoth Jack Donkey which is a descendent of the donkeys on President Washington's Mt. Vernon Plantation (It's believed that Washington often stayed at Tilly Foster during the Revolution).

Running Tilly Foster Museum Farm employs three full time people and costs about \$10,000 a month, says Whipple. Some revenue comes from the different farms and business on the farm, but most is raised by Whipple's foundation while other funds are through grants.

"We want to make the farm self sufficient and keep it free to the public. The important thing is that we want to create an experience for people that would be like going to visit their grandfather's farm. Now they can have that experience."



An old tractor loaned to the farm.

HISTORY

Tilly Foster (1793-1842) owned the original farm and started one of the largest iron ore mines in the 1800s known as the Tilly Foster Iron Mine. The mine closed in 1897 and you can still see the remains of the mines off Old Mine Road. In 1943 Foster's farm was purchased by a New York businessman and it became a dairy farm with up to 75 head of cattle, producing 8 to 10 cans of milk daily. A few decades later the farm was breeding horses and was one of the leading thoroughbred farms in New York State producing such champion horses as 1969's Silent Scream and 1997 DelMar Derby Winner. In 2002 Putnam County purchased the Farm for \$3.9 million from NYC DEP funds to protect water supplies. In 2004 the Putnam County claimed the Tilly Foster Conservation Area as Parkland.

The Tilly Foster Farm Museum will have its official reopening for the 2009 season on Saturday, April 25 from 11 AM to 4 PM (Rain Date: Sunday, April 26)

Tilly Foster Farm Museum, 100 Route 312, Brewster, NY 10509
845 279-4474. <http://www.preserveputnam.org/TFF/index.html>

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