

## MEAFORD APPLE HARVEST CRAFT SHOW COMMITTEE

### THE WISH FULFILLERS

In 1983, a small group of Meaford residents decided to resurrect a craft show that had once been part of the local apple festival. Running it as a separate entity, the organizers personally underwrote the first show themselves. "We all breathed a sigh of relief when the gate attendance surpassed our investment," recalls Rod Brebner, one of those original organizers and for the past 29 years, chair of the committee. "It was pretty small that first year." Cut to 2012, and the show now includes over 200 exhibitors and booths taking up the local arena, auditorium and curling club. Average attendance is 10,000 visitors over the two days the show runs (the Saturday and Sunday before Thanksgiving). And most impressively, the not-for-profit show, organized entirely by volunteers, has put back over \$800,000 into the community, donating over \$130,000 to the Meaford Hospital Foundation, installing a \$35,000 'squirt park' at McCarroll Park, and spending \$23,000 to beautify the Meaford Harbour breakwall, ending with the Elmer Hodgkinson Lookout (named after one of the original group, now deceased). When the restoration of Meaford Hall was at the planning stage, the Apple Harvest Craft Show came forward pledging \$50,000 towards the project. When the local secondary school orchestra wrote a letter saying their instruments were old and in need of repair, along with a 'wish list,' the committee wrote a cheque for \$25,000 to cover the entire cost. "They were just so floored," chuckles Brebner. "I said, 'be careful what you wish for.' Things like that make it feel so worthwhile."

Just to be clear, this isn't your grandmother's craft show. Instead of 'church bazaar' doilies and macramé, you'll find original artworks, limited edition prints, wrought iron sculptures, hand-made pottery, one-of-a-kind clothing, handcrafted wooden games and toys, as well as jewelry, glass and many other unique items. The committee reviews each exhibitor application (including photos) and decides which items are best suited to the show. There is a waiting list every year. How big of an army does it take to pull this off every year? Would you believe 11 people? The entirely volunteer committee - made up of Kay and Dennis Freeborn, Rod and Betty Jane Brebner, Dave and Mary Hardie, Gerry Knight, Kathy Adams, Anita Hunter, Bill and Jennifer Pearson - has turned the show into a financial and tourism asset for Meaford, attracting vendors and attendees from across Ontario while putting the proceeds directly back into the local community. "It's been exciting to see what it has done for the community - when you see the number of people visiting and staying and doing business in the town," says Brebner. "One exhibitor I know personally had never been to Meaford before, fell in love with it and bought a home here." Because the committee is so small, it has figured out creative ways to handle all aspects of the operation, getting local service clubs and groups to help with things like ticket sales, parking, setup, security, door, and clean-up in exchange for a donation. "It's a fairly easy way for them to make good money, and another way we can give back," says Brebner. The Apple Harvest Craft Show heads towards its 30th anniversary in 2013, and Brebner says there will be something special to mark the occasion. "It's amazing how well we work together. Everyone knows what to do, it's a very co-operative effort, and everything has been so much appreciated by the community. It's very satisfying." The community is very satisfied, too. BY JANET LEES

LEFT TO RIGHT: Dennis Freeborn, Gerry Knight, Kay Freeborn, Rod Brebner, Betty Jane Brebner, Jennifer Pearson. NOT PICTURED: Bill Pearson, Kathy Adams, Dave Hardie, Mary Hardie, Anita Hunter.

