

## **Falling for Fall in Burlington's North: History, Fun and Fresh Air.**

For little four year old Lucy McCann, it was a perfect day. Not only did she get to watch the baby goats and flop-eared bunnies, she rode a pony, scrambled through the corn maze, watched a puppet show and was thrilled by the spiders and ghosts in the Boo Barn. Even better, there was home made apple pie and ice cream. When Mommy tucked her in to bed that night, she was a tired but happy little girl, with much to dream about.

And that's part of the enduring charm of Springridge Farm. This agri-tourism destination farm, tucked under the escarpment in Northern Burlington, is the perfect antidote for the sometimes too urban life of today's young people.

"We have no electronics here," explains Laura Hughes, who together with her husband John, members of her family, and a large team of well trained helpers, run the farm. "We want the experience to be direct and hands-on – no computer generated graphics or games. They get enough of that elsewhere."

"This is an authentic rural experience," she smiles. "Kids can walk up to the lookout and see how vast and beautiful our area is – the lake, the escarpment and the tree-covered hills that roll down to Lake Ontario."

Families have certainly discovered the appeal of Springridge and each weekend, they come to experience the seasonal adventures. Right now, it is time to celebrate the harvest season, and the grounds are full of pumpkins, from giants as big as a wheelbarrow to some as small as an apple. Lucy took home a baby pumpkin that now sits happily beside the big family pumpkin for Halloween.

There are also some strange ones, like the peanut, princess, tomato and knucklehead pumpkins, and there are hundreds of regular pumpkins to take home for carving into a jack-o-lantern.

Children can play with vintage tonka trucks and tractors in the sandbox, or watch an engaging puppet show that runs every hour. There's face painting and crafts as well as a walk through the scary barn – not too scary, just Halloween fun that won't panic even the youngest.

In the café/bakery, the grown-ups can pick up what Laura calls 'meal solutions', frozen meat pies, coq au vin, quiche Lorraine and lasagne, all designed to solve the last minute dinner problem. And of course there are delicious things from the bakery. In addition to the pies for which Springridge is famous, there are cakes and breads, cookies, muffins, warm biscuits and butter tarts. The season dictates the menu – from strawberry custard in Spring, to wild blueberries in August, to pumpkin pie in Autumn. Everything is made daily from scratch.

You can also have lunch in the café before you tackle the gift shop and gallery. There are seasonally themed gifts, many of them locally made, as well as prints and Springridge's own jams and preserves.

The farm hosts birthday parties that have become immensely popular. When I visited, Nicolas from Guelph was celebrating his fourth birthday with fifteen of his friends and they were having a great time. It's a good idea to book well in advance for the birthday party experience.

This is the kind of family experience that makes memories. When a child sees his first live turkey, or tries his hand at milking the experiential wooden cow, he begins to realize that his world is not made up of plastic containers from the grocery store. And

that is an important lesson to learn. It's a plus that the encounters with real life are fun – whether it's meeting a rooster in the yard, or unearthing a fossil on an escarpment hike.

A visit to Springridge is a year round affordable family outing, and with the Christmas season approaching, you can look forward to more holiday activities.

If Springridge awakens your interest in our region, you may want to explore some of its rich history through a visit to the Halton Region Museum.

This discrete museum sits inside the Kelso Conservation Area. The barn, farmhouse and the land which the museum occupies were once the working farm of the Alexander family. Adam Alexander was a stonemason from Scotland who came to work on Dundurn Castle and bought this farm property in 1836 with his savings. The site is now home to six historical buildings and a large visitor centre. The museum is the caretaker for over 35,000 artefacts from Halton's history and as such plays a pivotal role in preserving the area's story.

A visit to the third floor of the Alexander barn is a museum visit unlike any you may have had in the past. While the artefacts and history are captivating, the displays are very kid-friendly. In one end of the vast space are rooms where the more fragile artefacts are stored. There are shelves of special acid-free boxes storing dresses and military uniforms. Carpets and quilts are carefully rolled and stored inside cloth covers. Paintings and prints are filed in rows.

In the main section of the museum are shelves of historical objects, from cradles to vintage typewriters, all part of the daily life of the local inhabitants of the county and all displayed on open shelves. You can't touch but you can get very close, unlike most museums. On one wall are shadow boxes, a strangely intriguing hobby of Victorian women who would spend their leisure time creating these floral wreaths out of anything but flowers – wool, silk, dyed feathers and human hair. Bizarre but fascinating.

There is also the famous judge's chair from the Milton courthouse, as well as the prisoner's box.

But this is no dusty museum. There are lots of things happening here. The Alexander barn has been restored into a beautiful location for events, with a large fireplace, and kitchen facilities. It is perfect for weddings, parties and meetings.

For adventure, there are guided hikes along the Bruce Trail, and tours of the museum. The Hitching Post Café offers light snacks.

A gallery in the visitor centre has revolving displays. The current one is the History of the Ford Plant: Oakville Rising. In the past local artists, like Ann Kloppenburg, have shown their work here.

And the museum rocks! There's Jazz in the museum on a regular basis. For the Fall season, jazz vocalist Brenda Lewis will perform on Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, and the Ingo Anderson Harmonica Trio will play on Dec. 12. Each afternoon includes a light snack and a cash bar, with lovely music in historic surroundings. It's a pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

The Historic Christmas Feast which the museum hosts each year is a perennial favourite. This year's feast will be on Saturday, Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> and will include a full course 19<sup>th</sup> century dinner and live musical entertainment in the cosy Hearth Room.

"We are the keepers of heritage," explains Julie Sutton-Yardley, when I ask her to explain the role of the Halton Region Museum. This busy multi-dimensional museum is

one way to become acquainted with the complex history of Halton. Admission to the museum is free.

The conservation area that embraces the Halton Region Museum is a kind of museum itself – a showcase of nature at its best in every season, and a place to view it from the best angles.

Kelso Conservation Area is a 397 hectare park established in 1960 on the Niagara Escarpment. One of the big draws to this park in summer is the lake with its excellent beach and boating opportunities. There are no motorized boats allowed so the serenity of the park is maintained, but canoes, kayaks and paddleboats are available for rent. There is also excellent fishing here, particularly for trout.

While the season for swimming is gone, the park is still busy with activity. The campgrounds remain open for the hardy types, and the picnic sites, 17 in all, are still perfect places for lunch on a sunny autumn day, especially with the leaves in full colour.

Mountain bike and hiking trails draw many visitors to the park, with 16 km of trails including connections to the Bruce Trail. Many of the trails follow the edge of the escarpment, with unbeatable views of the area.

Hikers and bikers are often astonished to come upon one of the historic lime kilns in the park. These kilns are an ancient technology that was standard in America until the early 1900s. Limestone was burned in them to make lime which was used in mortar for building purposes. Production stopped in the late 1920s but the ruins have been preserved and are now part of Kelso. The picturesque ruins are part of the history of Halton, a touching reminder of a time and a kind of individual industry that has passed.

And when the snow comes, Kelso is home to the Glen Eden Ski and Snowboard Centre, with 12 slopes and snow tube chutes. With a triple chairlift, two quad chairlifts and carpet lifts, you can easily ski, tube or board from a slope at the top of the Golden Horseshoe.

There is so much to see and do in Halton in the Fall. Get out and experience Autumn in your backyard, the perfect place for family adventure and outdoor fun that is affordable, accessible and healthy.

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Length: approx. 1500 wds.

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