



Vendor Spotlight: Ripley's Maple

By Laura Kirkpatrick

Neil Ripley has been in the maple business his entire life. Before he was born, Ripley's Sugar Camp in Fenwick, NS was owned and operated by his grandfather and then his father. Now, Neil runs the farm and has been collecting sap and making syrup for the past 51 years.



At the young age of 13, Neil started helping around the farm with his family. Back then, they had 3,600 buckets attached to the trees to collect the sap. Neil's job was to drive around and collect each bucket of sap to turn into delicious maple syrup. Now, at the age of 64, Neil shows no signs of slowing down.



The Ripley's have a family bond like no other. Four generations of their family work on the farm: Neil and his wife, Linda; their daughter Tracey; their granddaughter Brittany and their baby great-granddaughter

Lexxi. On an average day, you'll find each member of the family working around the sugar camp and in the shop.

Their farm is open all year, but the tapping season only runs for six weeks of the year. "Prime season is anywhere from the 20th of February to the end of April," said Neil. "It varies from one year to the next."

Each year, Neil has to re-tap each one of his 16,000 maple trees before the sap starts running. "We always hope to have the holes done before the sap comes, but it's anybody's guess when it will start," said Neil.



Once the sap goes through the pipeline system, it goes through reverse osmosis to have the water removed. Next, it's boiled down and eventually turned into thick, dark maple syrup. To make one gallon of syrup, 40 gallons of sap is needed. From this delicious syrup, the Ripley's make maple cream, maple butter and maple sugar.

“During the sugar-making season, we see thousands of people at our camp each week,” said Neil. The weekends during peak season are the busiest time.

“We always say everyone is welcome anytime,” said Neil's wife, Linda.

“Sugar making is the time you see the most. It's when everything is happening.”



Members of the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market staff visited the sugar camp earlier this year and had a great time touring the facilities and learning about the process of making maple syrup.

Aside from work on the farm, the Ripley's attend the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market every Saturday, as they have been since 1989.



“We drive down here every Saturday from Amherst, which is a two and half hour drive,” said Linda. “It can be tiring. That’s why we leave right at 3:00 p.m. to head home.”

When asked what their favourite thing is about the business, they both replied at the same time, “*People!*” They love having conversations with people at their farm and at the Market. Every person who stops by their table is shown pictures of their sugar camp and their family, along with many stories.



Stop by the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market on Saturdays and visit the Ripley's table. If you'd like to visit Neil, Linda and their family at their sugar camp, follow these directions below. Make sure you call ahead at 902-667-3978 or 902-694-6560.

- Starting from the intersection of Hwy 2 and Fenwick Road, head south on the road to Springhill.
- A little less than three km at the bottom of the hill, the road curves to the right.
- You will see a guardrail and then three No Parking signs in a row.
- Maple Lane, the turn-off to Neil R. Ripley's sugar camp is on the right.
- There are three camps on the road and Neil's is the last camp.

Directions courtesy of: <http://ripleyresearch.weebly.com/the-ripley-sugar-woods.html>

