

How We Became “Berries & Blooms”

In January 2011, we announced our intention to re-brand our main event from the Beamsville Strawberry Festival to **Berries & Blooms: A Lincoln Family Festival**. How we got to that point was a 34 year journey.

The Beamsville Strawberry Festival started out as a little street fair on King Street, Beamsville in 1976. It grew pretty slowly but steadily over the years. In the early 90s, there were less than 20 vendors lining the street for the Saturday event. The bed races were added in 1994 so the festival expanded to incorporate Fri evening and all day Saturday activities. In 1999, the maximum number of vendors that could be accommodated on the street was 25. So when King Street was undergoing road work in 2000, the Festival moved to the Beamsville Fairgrounds for the Saturday activities. The convenience and the ability to accommodate many more vendors made the Fairgrounds a very attractive option, so we continued to have the festival there.

The last 10 years have seen a lot of advances. We started the Strawberry Idol competition in 2002. It was in 2005 we took a big step forward and became incorporated. Now our association, which is entirely staffed by volunteers to this day, is a registered non-profit association. Having this designation grants us a certain legitimacy when applying for funding. The fireworks were added in 2006 when, for our 30th anniversary festival, we staged a two and a half day event with Sunday activities as well and Grand National Recliner Races along with the bed races. In 2007, we combined everything into a 1 day festival, which was much easier on our volunteers!

It was at our 2008 festival, that we started going greener. With the assistance of the 1st Beamsville Scouts, we added the Eco-Defenders Recycling Challenge, where people could turn in their recyclables in exchange for rewards that ranged from candy to helicopter rides. We have received several commendations from the Region for our recycling efforts. Now going green is one of our top priorities. We successfully added composting to our Pampering Fest event and are looking into adding that to Berries & Blooms this year.

At our 2010 festival, we had grown to over 110 vendors, a large Kidz Zone, 100 vehicle Car Show and two stages of entertainment plus the extremely popular fireworks. The cost to run the festival is \$25,000 to \$30,000, which means our committee spends a lot of time doing fundraising. We have staged youth dances, Celtic Celebrations, Murder Mysteries, yard sales, raffles, ice cream sales at the Sunset Music Series and more to raise the funds. Our most successful fundraiser is our annual Pampering Fest which attracts about 800 women every year. We get support from the Town of Lincoln every year and we could not put on this event without them. We also pursue corporate sponsorship and apply for grants. In other words, we work all year to put this all together.

For the past 2 years, our Association has been taking a long, hard look at our events and procedures. We view our event as something that brings the whole community together. And whenever possible, we try to either give funds to other groups or provide them with

the opportunity to raise funds or promote their group or business. But, frankly, the festival needed an upgrade so we began the process of re-branding our event into something new and exciting. So just in time for our 35th anniversary Berries & Blooms was born. We are moving to Beamsville High School in order to bring the festival closer to the heart of the community. Plus the extensive grounds give us more opportunity to expand and include other activities.

As part of our refocusing, we set ourselves some goals:

- 1) To provide, as we have for the past 34 years, a family oriented event that celebrates the season and our community;
- 2) To maintain a connection with our traditional, agriculturally-based festival that focuses on strawberries but to broaden that focus to encompass all types of berries and berry-related products;
- 3) To add to the berries the beauty of anything that blooms and thereby recognise the importance of horticulture and agriculture in our area;
- 4) To incorporate as many local groups, businesses, organisations and individuals in our community event as possible and provide for them an opportunity to showcase, inform, fundraise and/or conduct business;
- 5) To bring new energy, excitement and ideas to our event and to our community.

On March 3rd, 2011, we invited anybody and everybody to join us in a discussion about the festival and many great ideas were raised. We will continue to work on many of these but can always use more ideas and more people who want to get involved. This festival belongs to the entire community so if you are interested, drop us a line. From September to June we meet on the second Thursday of every month at 7pm at Town Hall and we invite you to join us. Let's show the world our community spirit at the new **Berries & Blooms Festival!**