

# Gilford Steamer

## Kids get a sugar high during 'Maple Sugar Madness'

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For the past ten years, Prescott Farm has invited students to join in on the "Maple Sugar Madness" program, and this year, second grade students took sugaring into their own hands prior to this favorite field trip.

Gilford Elementary School teacher Patty Smith, along with Cathy Duffy of Prescott Farm in Laconia, decided to introduce second grade students to the process of maple season and sugaring this fall, as a preview to their field trip mid-March, the peak of tapping season.

Smith said GES students are fortunate to live in the Lakes Region, where resources such as Prescott's Environmental Education Center are located, as well as the maple trees in the elementary school's backyard—the nature trail.

According to New Hampshire Maple Producers, the state produces about 90,000 gallons of syrup per maple season. The maple sugaring season, the process of tapping the trees and boiling sap down to thick and sticky syrup, runs between mid-February and April, and is a weather dependent procedure.

As the frozen sap within maple trees begins to thaw, the sap builds up pressure within the tree, and is ready to tap when cool nights and sunny days begin to emerge from a dark winter.

Smith's students happen to be experts at identifying maple trees ready to tap, and were already familiar with the process prior to their field trip last Wednesday.

After extracting sap from several trees on the grounds of Prescott Farm and watch-



PHOTO BY LAUREN TINER

GES students Lily Burleigh, Taryn Fountain, ShuShu Sawyer, and Bethany Tanner dance along to different maple inspired tunes at Prescott Farm on last Tuesday.



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GES second grade teacher Patty Smith helps students identify different types of bark, including maple bark, at Prescott Farm Tuesday.

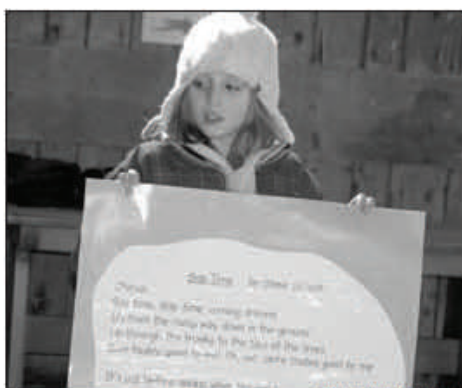


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Second grade student Taryn Fountain holds up the lyrics for "Sap Time" during a sing along.



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GES students Allison Carr, Julia Spooner, Alyzabeth Havonglason, and Leilani McMath clap along to some of their favorite songs also performed at the school showcase earlier this month.

ing the sap slowly drip through a spout and down into the bucket below, GES students are always ready to enter the Sugar Shack and watch the sap boil into syrup, eager for samples.

Smith said her students highly anticipated their field

trip this year after doing some sugaring of their own in the nature trail, a project which started back in the fall.

"This is the first time we have done this in Gilford. We tapped 21 trees. The students were tapping for sap, which they brought today,

and learned how to identify sugar maple trees," said Smith.

Second grade students recited original song and dance numbers, such as the "Sap Time" song, also performed at the annual Showcase at GES, in celebration of maple syrup and sugaring season. Students then patiently waited their turn to enter the Sugar Shack to watch their own sap turn into syrup good enough for any pancake, and reviewing the basics of sugaring.

When identifying a maple tree ready to tap, Smith's students said they look for "tadah" branches that stick up

high in the air, for a lack of leaves in the winter, and also for white spots on the bark of the tree. Trees must also be a standard 30 inches around or more before tapping a tree.

She explained that students certainly wouldn't want to tap just any tree, since pine tree sap, for example, may not taste so great.

With the help of Duffy, these students named all 21 maple trees in the nature trail, and created a map for all to access the trees on the trail. Trees named "Pancake," "Maple," "Spiky" and "Sweetie," produced a satisfactory amount of sap, al-

though a tree named "Bob," produced a record for cups of sap.

"We have been collecting data twice a week and will graph the data to do some comparisons. We have also kept a journal," said Smith. "It's cool that we can bring our own sap to Prescott. I'm hoping that this will continue on next year, and that second graders will integrate this into their curriculum every year. They see this process and become a part of this process."

Throughout their project, students have practiced reading, writing, math, science, and also integrated singing and dancing into their multi-purpose project.

While both Smith and Duffy spearheaded the project this year, they are hoping to expand the invitation to all second grade classrooms next year.

"We like to make the projects real; something that will stay with the students," said Smith. "We are lucky in Gilford to have the nature trail and to incorporate it into our curriculum."

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