



The Tapline

Winter 2024

Newsletter of the Indiana Maple Syrup Association

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Lots to See and Learn at IMSA Annual Meeting

by JR Elrod

The attendees at the IMSA annual meeting were greeted with a wonderful artifact from earlier days of maple sugaring back in simpler times: Jack Gabby's antique horse-drawn sap sled.

Inside, members were greeted with the unmistakable smell of sweet, warm, yeasty cinnamon buns. These treats were as big as softballs, and only the most disciplined could avoid the temptation to get seconds, or thirds.

The annual meeting had the feel of a three-ring circus with a full schedule of simultaneous break-out sessions, three at a time. Half the venue was filled with

the many vendors who took brought their wares to sell along with lots of free and good advice.

The business meeting quickly moved through the budget and elections. All but one of the board members up for election sought a new term, and Ethan Zimmerman filled the open slot.

The Board recognized Brent Tubbs for his hard work as Treasurer over the last year and a half. In a new tradition, a few long-time members were granted life-member status in appreciation for their years of service.

(cont. on page 3)



Maple Weekend

March 8-9 2025

Visit a Sugarbush Near You

Print off a membership registration at
www.indianamaplesyrup.org

2025 IMSA dues are \$25.00

Checks should be made out to IMSA
and sent to:

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Nappanee, IN 46550

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Message from the President

by Dan Winger

Greetings one and all.

I want to thank all that came to our annual meeting in December. It was good to see a large crowd along with some of our older members.

Thanks to all the North directors for putting on a good meeting and making all feel welcome!

It was good to see so many vendors at our event.

One thing that I noticed was the number of first time folks. This is encouraging to see.

If anyone has suggestions for future meetings please let a board member

know. We are looking for more topics you would like to hear about.

As the new year rolls in, I am getting ready for syrup season. I am hoping for a good year but will take what ever comes.

Out west in the big leaf maple area they have already started before Christmas. They are not doing very well due to lack of freeze thaw cycle.

At this point I would like to wish all you a happy New Year, along with a good syrup season.



Annual Meeting Wowed by Speaker Dr. Tim Perkins by JR Elrod

IMSA was blessed to have as its keynote speaker one of the most knowledgeable men in the maple industry. Professor Perkins has over 26 years of experience running the Proctor maple research institute at the University of Vermont.

Dr. Perkins made two presentations, and the first focused on Tubing Technology. He identified the six factors that determine sap production:

1. Weather: the length of the freeze and thaw patterns each season.
2. Tree Size: the bigger the tree the more sap (and why thinning is important— a few bigger trees are better than more smaller trees)
3. Sanitation: the more bacteria the more quickly the taphole will close
4. Tapping Method: diameter, depth, and seating of the spout matters in high vacuum a lot.

5. Tubing Method: tubing moves both sap and air, and the size of the mainlines and use of dual wet/dry makes a difference.

6. Vacuum: typically, sap production increases 5% with each inch of mercury.

A simple tap pulls sap descending from the branches downward. Vacuum is like a straw pulling sap back up the trunk from the roots.

Timing is everything because each sap run has a 3-6 hour peak when the great bulk is collected.

Because most of the sap flows in the first rings (those 1-1/2 inches next to the bark), shorter taps are more effective. Perkins worked with Middle Valley Maple to develop short taps with barbs that will stay put. Testing resulted in a 11%-24% increase in sap production over standard longer taps.

(cont. on p. 4)

We elves try to stick to the four main food groups: candy, candy canes, candy corn, and syrup.

-Buddy the Elf in "Elf" while pouring lots of maple syrup on his spaghetti.

Annual Meeting (cont.)

These well-deserving members were Jack Gabby, Art & Becky Harris, and David & Carol Hamilton.

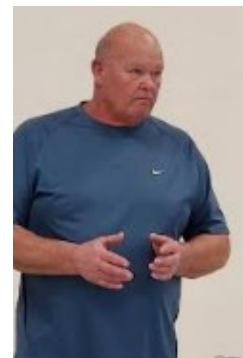


The most important part of the day was the break-out sessions. Arthur Martin presented on Maple 101—The Basics of Sugarmaking. He is a firm believer in using bags. You can leave the bag affixed to the tap and simply tilt and pour into bucket. He also uses the same mix of wood for consistent firing timing and auto-draw.



John Kuhn presented on proper canning. He emphasized keeping temps below 190 degrees to prevent niter build-up while you bottle. Glass bottles should be warmed if filling in a cold environment to avoid cracking. Always triple rinse if you wash with bleach.

Ron Rhynard, who also directed the syrup contest, presented on How Syrup Is Graded—For Contests and Public Sale. Color meters are a must, and it is best not to submit a bottle if it is on the edge of two color ranges. Don't fear boiling heavy, dilution is easy.



Brian Cunningham presented on R.O. for the Small Producers. His main advice: "Stop thinking and just get the R.O." He uses food-grade 80 gallon trash cans for his storage tanks and likes to have at least 30-40 gallons of sap before running the R.O. Concentrate spoils quickly, as short as 6-8 hours, so he boils immediately after concentrating.



Dan Winger led a break-out session on the plans for Maple Weekend 2025. Board Member Mike Smith is heading up the Committee. Great presentations were also made by Mike Czajkowski on Maple 101 and Harley Yoder, who led a discussion on Candy Making. There was something for everyone, from beginners to veterans.



Editor's Corner

I felt quite hopeful as I filled out my entry for the first IMSA syrup competition at the Annual Meeting. I thought I'd receive positive reviews if not a ribbon.

I am only a hobbyist, but I have prided myself on doing things right, with proper equipment and best practices. I spent years planning before my first syrup season. I sold my '64 Pontiac Tempest convertible—which I'd had since college—so I could buy a decent used evaporator and steam hood for my first season.

My score? Disqualified: light at 65.1 brix. I didn't mind too much—I haven't quite mastered the Murphy Cup yet. I give all of my syrup away, so I'm not cheating anyone.

Then came three gut-punches: "very off flavor," "aftertaste," and, worst of all, "slight spoiled sap flavor." Ouch. But then, another judge wrote "good flavor."

I grabbed my bottle, rushed out into the parking lot, and took a big swig straight from the bottle. Tasted fine to me. I sat in my truck and swished four more mouthfuls, slowly savoring. Not my best flavor, I thought. But I still couldn't detect anything bad.

My color score was fine. But as to clarity, one gave a 10 out of 10, and another a 6.

So, with these mixed reviews, I'll persevere and put all my thoughts on the next batch.

—J.R.E.—

Dr. Perkins (cont.)



The spouts also have a curved arc, rather than an elbow, which reduces friction. These taps have also been made with anti-microbial properties, to keep bacteria in check.

In his second presentation, Dr. Perkins gave his Top Ten Tapping Tips. Dr. Perkins

ran out of time at the meeting and did not get beyond tip number 8, but he was kind enough to follow up with the editor and finish the list.

1. Tap at the Proper Time. Tapholes have a limited lifespan before they heal over, though vacuum expands them. He recommends tapping no earlier than mid-January.
2. Select the Right Size Trees. Bigger trees have more sap because they have more leaves. Leaves “are the engine” for producing sugar. Over a season, trees produce about 2 more gallons per inch.
3. Evaluate the Tapping Band. The tapping band is the

stretch of bark all around the trunk at tapping height (whatever is convenient). The point is to avoid stained wood: the percentage of stained hit by a tap proportionately reduces sap production. Research suggests the “good” side of the tree varies year to year, so there is no point in only tapping the sunny side.

4. Stagger Your Tapholes. Each year the next tap should be staggered 2 inches horizontally and six inches vertically from any visible prior taphole or wound.
5. Long Droplines. Longer droplines ensure you can avoid stained wood by reaching the right spot.
6. Use a Tapping Bit. Tapping bits are specially manufactured to clear the taphole of wood shavings. A sharp clean bit is less likely to tear the wood and spread microbes. Dr. Perkins recommends using DSD, LaPierre, or Bulduc brands.
7. Drill to the Proper Depth. On vacuum the proper depth is 2 inches, and no more than 3 inches.
8. Proper Sanitation. Research indicates that 68% of microbes come from the tap. Change your taps often.
9. Tapping Technique. Avoid trying to tap overhead. Select a spot (see tips 3-4), put the drill on that spot. Stabilize with both hands. Use full drill speed. Go in and out in a smooth motion, lasting 2-3 seconds total.
10. Proper Depth. If too shallow, the tap will be unstable. If too deep it will block out the outer rings that are most productive.

In addition, he included a “10+ Know If/When to Add a Second Spout,” and a “10++ Don’t Skip the Red Maples.”

Vendor Spotlight: The R.O. Bucket

Carl Nylen joined us at the Annual Meeting, and he has a great backstory:

I was a high school chemistry teacher and began a sugaring club with some of my students several years ago. While this was a lot of fun, I would find myself staying late at night to finish boils long after my students had gone home. Being a chemistry teacher with a master’s degree in chemistry, I knew that reverse osmosis could be a potential solution to this issue. However, all the existing commercial systems were far too expensive and far more complex than what was needed for my club’s 50 tap operation. This is when The RO Bucket was born!

After making the original unit, I found that there was a lot of



interest locally and started making units for hobby producers in my area. Things grew quickly from there and I found that I truly enjoyed teaching small producers about the benefits of reverse osmosis with respect to sugaring. I enlisted the help of my brother, Dave, to run the business end of things. I have since focused on providing on-demand customer service and constantly improving our systems. We are now able to support maple operations up to 500 taps with our RO units and I recently developed a filtration/canner system by popular demand. We are very proud of our products and the value that they provide for hobby producers!



First Maple Syrup Contest Winners

By JR Elrod

Our members submitted a total of 26 entries across the four categories. 5 were disqualified for density.

Golden/Delicate: (1 entry, disqualified)

Amber/Rich: 1st. Dean Witmer
2nd. David Mast
3rd. Andy Hochstedler



Dark/Robust: 1st. Jack Brown
2nd. Dan Winger
3rd. Joe Miller



Very Dark: (1 entry, not award-worthy)

IMSA extends its thanks to all of the participants who put their syrup to the test in the inaugural Indiana maple syrup contest.

Indiana is partnering with Purdue to have a class on grading and tasting maple syrup. Seating is limited. If you would like to participate, please reach out to Dan Winger.

The contest will be an annual event with a goal of improving the quality of our syrup throughout the state.

Thank You to our Vendors

Many of the vendors also contributed wonderful door-prizes that were raffled off at the Annual Meeting. Please consider patronizing these businesses:

Winger's Sugarbush & Supplies

R.O. Bucket

Sugar Bush Supplies

Harris Sugarbush

Sweet Spot Maple Supply

Maple Hollow

Sunrise Metal

Mazurek Maple Supplies

Purdue Acer Grant

Maple Syrup Wanted

In preparation for the 2025 Sugar Shack at the Pioneer Village during the State Fair, the Canning Committee will be purchasing 600 gallons of medium amber syrup at \$3.00 a pound.

Barrels must be 5 gallons or larger, with a sample to be tested for density, color, and flavor. It must be 100% Indiana maple syrup.

In addition, the canning committee is looking for other value-added products to be sold at the fair:

- 1,500 1-pound containers of maple cream
- 1,000 1/2-pound containers of maple cream
- 150 1-pound bags of maple sugar
- 1,500 2-ounce (8-piece) bags of maple candy.

Please contact Canning Committee Chair Andy Hochstedler if you are interested or have any questions.

Member Classifieds

Have something to sell? Just e-mail the editor. Free for members.

Annual Meeting Photos



A Sugarmaking Church

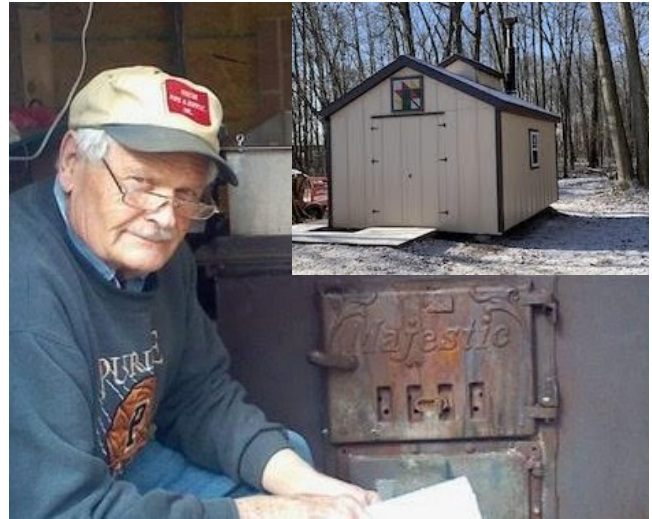
By Julia Jones and JR Elrod

New IMSA members Bub and Julia Jones attend St. Mark's Church in Decatur, and their church grounds include a sugarbush and a sugar shack. This is the story of how one parishioner brought the congregation together.

Gary retired from a career in HVAC. After a couple of other pursuits, he discovered a new passion: crafting maple syrup. In the winter of 2008, while gazing out at the maple trees in his yard, he noticed tiny droplets forming on the branches. The sight sparked curiosity, leading him to explore how sap could be transformed into syrup.

His first attempt was a humble one. Using homemade spiles and buckets to collect sap, he boiled it down in the back of his 1984 S10 pickup truck with an old turkey fryer. The process was not without challenges. During one of his first boils, Gary left the sap unattended and fell asleep, only to wake to the smell of smoke and a fire in the pan. Undeterred, he refined his methods and built an 8x8-foot sugar shack to house his growing equipment.

A turning point came when Gary noticed the abundance of maple trees on his church's 25-acre wooded lot. Granted permission to tap the trees, he expanded his production. The operation remained largely a solo effort as he transported the sap from the church to his home five miles away. When Gary, in his Kubota side-by-side, driving along



the county highway caught the attention of the DNR, Gary's wife Nancy explained how the sugarmaking supported the church's maintenance fund.

As the physical demands caught up with him, Gary decided to sell his equipment. But the church formed a forestry group to maintain the operation. Gary donated his equipment to the church, and the local high school trades class constructed a new sugar shack on the church property.

Now, Gary mentors the next generation, teaching them the art of syrup production. His retirement built a legacy and tradition that will endure for years to come.

Winger's Sugarbush & Supplies

Winger's offers D&G equipment and supplies. Winger's also stocks glass jugs from Artisan Printing with the state of Indiana outlined. A large supply of containers is on hand. Marcland products are also available. Contact Dan for prices on equipment and supplies.

Dan Winger
11571 N Ogden Rd
North Manchester, IN 46962
(260) 578-7382
(260) 982-7382 (fax)



Sweet Spot Maple Supply is excited to serve you in the 2024 maple syrup season. We carry CDL equipment and supplies. Our shelves will be fully stocked to enable us to serve you better. We have all sizes of glass and plastic containers, labeled and unlabeled. We also install high vacuum tubing systems to increase your sap production.

We aim to have quality customer service, so contact us today for all your sugaring needs. We can find an answer for all your questions

Sweet Spot Maple Supply

3590 N ST RD 5

Shipshewana IN 46565

Marcus Miller

(574-364-0538)

Sweetspotmaple@outlook.com



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We want to hear from you!

- Share a favorite picture or story from your sugarbush this season
- Ask us a question on best practices



Upcoming Events

- **Maple Syrup Weekend**
March 8-9, 2025
- **Dave Hamilton Maple Hall of Fame**
May 17, 2025 New York
- **Canning Day**
May 24, 2025
- **State Fair Pioneer Village**
August 1-17



“The trees of the Lord are full of sap”

Psalm 104:16 KJV