Summer 2025

The Tapline

Newsletter of the Indiana Maple Syrup Association

Inside this issue

Message from the President	2
Board Member Roster	2
Hoosier Hall of Famer	3
Maple Love Story (cont.)	4
Canning Day 2025	5
Member Classifieds	5
Canning Day in Pictures	6
Pioneer Village Sign-Ups	7
Vendor Ads	7

A Maple Love Story

by JR Elrod

On a cold February evening in 1961, a lavender '47 Chevy sedan bounced down a country lane near New Castle, Indiana. Inside, an anxious Ball State student felt all the nerves of a young man on his way to pick up a girl for a first date.

Dave had just met the pretty young brunette a couple weeks earlier at a sock hop following a high school basketball game. Carol's coworker at the Oakville grain elevator had a daughter who went to high school with Dave, and she arranged for them to meet at the dance.

Things were a little rough from the start. Dave asked her to go to a high school basketball game, which did not really interest Carol, but she politely accepted. They had to reschedule when a snowstorm blocked the roads with fourteen inches of snow.

This night the roads were clear as Dave pulled up to the big white farmhouse. But he panicked as he saw smoke billowing high into the air up above it. Dave rushed to the door. Carol answered, and Dave blurted out, "The house is on fire!!"

Carol calmly explained that, no, the house was not on fire. It was just steam from boiling maple sap behind the house.

Her family had been making maple syrup for almost fifty years at that point, and Carol could not imagine someone so foolish. She thought to herself, "I don't think this guy is gonna last very long. He knows nothing about syrup." Dave had royally failed in his first impression.

Now that the "fire" was put out, the two headed to Sulphur Springs to watch the basketball game. Having graduated a year earlier, Carol put aside her bobby-socks and donned a nice skirt and sweater.

Dave was smitten and told a friend right afterwards, "That's the one." For Carol, the evening went well enough to agree to another date.

Without a whole lot of money, many of their dates were just spending time together while Dave milked the cows. Dave hated the dairy business; he was going to school to be a teacher.

(cont. on page 4)

Pioneer Village Sugar Shack

Set-Up Day July 31st at 9:00 a.m.

August 1st-17th (closed Mondays)

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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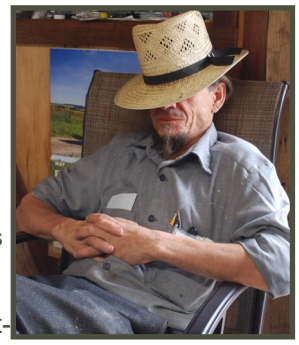
Message from the President by Dan Winger



Greetings one and all!!

How the last few months have flown past.

As many of you know Dave Hamilton was inducted into the International Maple Hall of Fame in New York. Ruth and myself where able to go. This was a very enjoyable time. There are a lot of different antiques to see. I would encourage people to make the trip sometime.

We were able to get about 90 percent of the syrup we needed from Indiana producers this year. It was all canned on May 24 by approximately 44 people. This was a great turnout, which I am thankful for. We had good weather that day.

We are still in need of people to work at the State Fair in the Pioneer Village. If you can help out, call or text me at 260-578-7382.

Purdue sponsored another grading class on June 17th, presented by Mark Isselhardt and Jason Lilley. This was attended by several folks. These classes are well worth attending. The day is packed full of info and hands-on exercises.

Looking forward, I would like to bring it to everyone's attention that on October 22-25, 2025 is the NAMSC annual meeting. This meeting will be at Port Huron, Michigan. This is about as close as it will get to IN until 2029. I would be glad to see several attend this year. If anyone is interested in going, you can call me or look it up on Michigan's website.

The NAMSC meeting is coming to Indiana in October 2029. It is going to be held in Shipshewana. The planning committee is starting to get things in line for it. We are going to need more help in the future on subcommittees. Please keep this in mind as we move forward. This will be the first time it has been held in Indiana. This event brings people from about 20-21 different provinces and states, along with people that have worked in the maple business all their lives. I will try to keep IMSA informed as we move forward.

In a few months it will be annual meeting time again. Plans are being made for this event, which will be held in Nashville IN. More will come in the next issue on this.

Hope all have a safe and good summer. Hoping to see all of you again soon.

The Sugar Shack at the Pioneer Village during the Indiana State Fair is our biggest outreach and our organization's only fundraiser.

The cost of dues and our Annual Meeting are significantly defrayed by the funds raised during the Pioneer Village. It also allows IMSA to send delegates to the NAMSC conference and have a voice in its operations.

More workers are needed particularly on the weekends. Workers receive free tickets or reimbursed admission and parking for the State Fair and $30 a day for meals. To sign up, contact Dan Winger at 260-578-7382.

Workers are expected to wear pioneer village attire. Typically men wear denim workshirts and bib overalls and women wear period dresses.

It is the highest honor a sugar maker may achieve. I share this honor with a number of people, both from Indiana and all the maple producing states and provinces, who have influenced me in many positive ways to make me a better sugar maker.

-David Hamilton on his induction into the International Maple Hall of Fame

Hoosier in the Hall of Fame by JR Elrod

Indiana is the forgotten state in the maple syrup world. Once among the top producers of maple sugar in the 1800s, the USDA had stopped reporting on Indiana production until last year. This is all the more reason for us to take pride in claiming a Hoosier as a maple syrup hall of famer.

On May 17, 2025, David Hamilton was inducted into the Maple Hall of Fame at the International Maple Museum Centre in Croghan, New York. He was one of only two recipients for the Class of 2025, the other being Timothy Wilmot, a botanist at the University of Vermont who conducted decades of research in the area of maple syrup.

Dave Hamilton is the proprietor of the Rutherford Sugar Camp. As told in more detail elsewhere in this issue, he married into the business. After 60 years in the business, he never incorporated—his word remains his bond.

The strides Indiana has made in the maple syrup industry are largely a result of Dave's efforts. He was a charter member of IMSA and inaugural vice president in 1991. In the decades that followed, he wore nearly every hat at one time or another: president, treasurer, Tapline editor, and director.

His most enduring contribution to the organization is his years of hard work on the Hoosier Sugar Shack at the Indiana State Fair's Pioneer Village. What began as a small display table in the Farm Bureau building has become a fair tradition for hundreds of families. The sugarshack is one of the largest and nicest buildings in the whole village, and thousands of people enjoy free samples of maple syrup, often for the first time.

The Hall of Fame Ceremonies began bright and early with, of course, a pancake breakfast. Several family members and Indiana Sugarmakers were in attendance. During the ceremonies, Dave was presented with a lapel pin and a plaque. A luncheon followed for more fellowship.

Congrats to Indiana's newest Hall of Famer, Dave Hamilton.

Editor's Corner

I had planned to start sugaring for years, but even after I picked up my equipment, I disappointingly still had to delay for another season. To salvage some sense of the maple spirit, I looked up the closest place to visit for Maple Weekend, and I came across Rutherford's Sugar Camp. The first thing we saw was a large maple with the sign "Laura's Tree." My wife sharing that name, I took a picture of her beside it.

The large oil-fired evaporator seemed imposing, but I was quickly set at ease as Dave Hamilton introduced himself and gave me a tour of the operation, both outdoors and indoors. I marveled at a display that marked each sugar season with total gallons produced, going back a hundred years, and arranged from highest to lowest. His wife Carol had wonderful confections to sample in the side room.

Lastly, we headed into the log cabin store. My son was about four and soon discovered a checkerboard in the corner. That moment became our first game of checkers, and it's something I will never forget.

At my first IMSA meeting, Dave was of course one of the first to greet me. He is the most humble, humorous, and generous person you could ever hope to call a friend. We should all be so lucky to know such a great example in life and maple sugaring.

—————————————————————————————-**J.R.E.**—————————

Maple Love Story (cont.) by JR Elrod

As is frequently the case, persistence paid off. After about a year, Carol realized Dave was the one, and the couple married on June 9, 1963. They honeymooned in Sault St. Marie, Michigan.

Marrying Carol meant marrying into the maple syrup business too. Carol's grandfather bought the farm and sugarbush in 1911. Her father Bill had 1,800 taps on buckets in those days. Some of Carol's fondest memories growing up were playing checkers with him in the old log cabin sugar shack. In those days, sugarmakers moved at a much slower pace. As the second youngest of six, these were special moments for a little girl to have daddy all to herself.

Dave knew he was finally fully accepted into the family when Bill started to go inside to watch his favorite western and left his son-in-law to run the evaporator on his own. Dave wasn't doing it just to fit in—he had fallen in love with both the girl and the maple syrup business.

The young couple lived a couple years outside Indianapolis in Clermont before returning east, where he would teach history at Wilson Middle School for 35 years. Carol had a long career as the corporate secretary for the Blue River Valley school district. They built a house at the far end of the sugarbush, down the road from Carol's parents in 1967.

Their two sons came along, Doug and Craig, and they not only worked hard collecting sap, but recruited their classmates as well. Every winter, a dozen boys spent their evenings at the Rutherford Sugar Camp earning a little extra spending money. Carol always fed them at the end of their shifts, including fresh-baked cookies or brownies.

Bill remained a sugar maker in full until his dying breath. Even when facing down cancer, he ordered new pans. Dave asked about them, and Bill said, "Get them and use them." Those were the last words Dave heard from his father-in-law.

In 1982, Dave and Carol built a sugar shack beside their home. They also moved the old log cabin sugar shack to serve as their store. Carbon dating revealed it was built in 1841.

The historic cabin was nearly lost one season. The flue came loose and the surrounding logs caught fire. Dave stayed up the whole night hosing down the logs, too afraid to sleep. It's an adorable store, and one corner still has a checkerboard and chairs.

Today, the operation has 3,000 taps on tubing, an oil-fired evaporator, and a high capacity RO. Melvin Hawks has been Dave's right hand for thirty years. After working the nightshift at AC Delco, he would drive straight to the sugar shack and got things going while Dave taught at school. Melvin's brother Gary Hawks joined the team after he retired. And Brad Fellers did the same—he had helped Bill on the sugarbush back when he was around ten.

It remains a family affair, with help from Dave's nephew Gary Hamilton. Granddaughter Laura marks the fifth generation of sugarmakers at Rutherford Sugar Camp.

Dave became one of the founding members of the Indiana Maple Syrup Association, and long-time president. Retired from teaching, he began attending the North American Maple Syrup Council as a delegate. He believes his greatest contribution to the national association was deciding to summarize his presentation of the Indiana crop report, ending a long boring tradition of each state reading their entire reports verbatim.

For all of Dave's contributions to the maple syrup industry, he was admitted into the International Maple Hall of Fame. His worthiness of this honor is best found in his countless support of newcomers to maple sugaring.

When a young couple started a new operation very close to his sugarbush, Dave offered to help them set up their tubing. The wife of the novice couple was surprised, and she asked Dave why he would do so much for a close competitor. Dave said, "Two reasons: one, you're half my age and will be doing this long after I'm gone, and two, we'll both sell all we get."

While they are always home for sugar season, the couple still takes romantic cruises all over the world, as far as New Zealand, Iceland, and Panama.

Canning Day 2025 by Chris Slabaugh

Winger's Sugarbush and Supply once again hosted Canning Day for 2025. Around forty members, men, women, and children, young and old, all pitched in and canned about 600 gallons of syrup in just four hours.

Most inspiring was the good number of children working and playing—they are our future maple syrup producers. Also rewarding is the opportunity to meet other sugarmakers. My wife and I met a couple who set their sugar shack on a trailer with a 2x4 evaporator inside. It was the first mobile sugar shack we had ever seen.

The day started with coffee and yeast rolls around 8:00 a.m. in the morning.

With the bulk tanks loaded upstairs, tubing brought the syrup straight to the finishing pans. Once at the right temperature, the filter presses shipped the syrup through tubinig directly to the bottlers.

The bottlers were hard at work, and so were the runners.

From there, the bottles were taken outside for a dip in a tub to cool off and get rid of any syrup drips. The water was circulated through a milk tank full of ice to keep the water cool. Anyone who comes to Canning Day can learn lots of ingenious tricks like this.

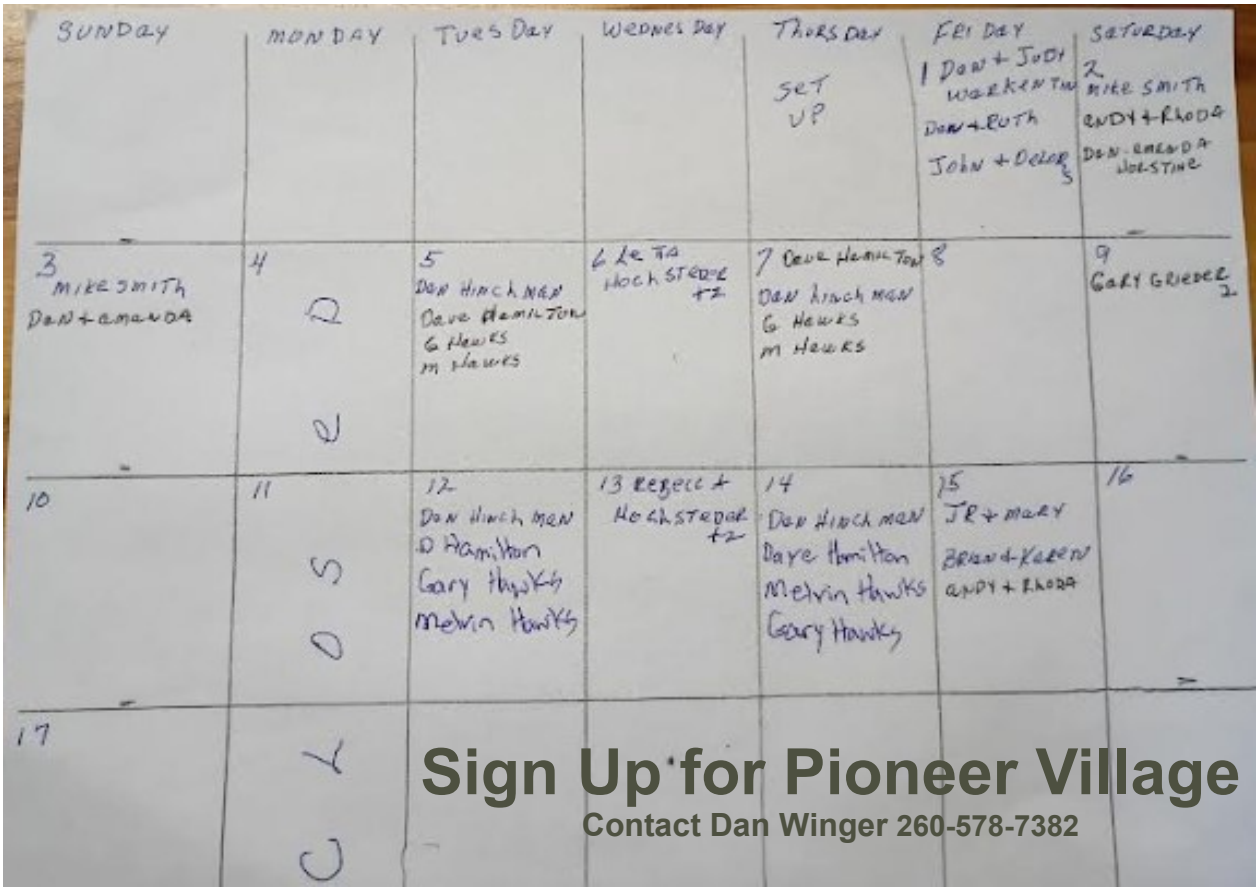
And finally they are stacked in the trailer for storage until the State Fair.

But of course, the boys still found time to play.

Member Classifieds

Have some maple equipment to sell? Just e-mail the editor and get it posted here. Free for members.

Canning Day Photos taken by Deb Grider



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.

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(260) 982-7382 (fax)

D&G DOMINION & GRIMM INC.

~Sweet Spot Maple Supply~

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

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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

- **Pioneer Village Set-Up Day**
  July 31, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.
- **State Fair Pioneer Village**
  August 1-17 (closed Mondays)
  8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- **Annual Meeting**
  December 6, 2025
  Nashville, Indiana

Rusted Flatbed Farm 2025

"The trees of the Lord are full of sap . . . ."
Psalm 104:16 KJV