

Focusing on... *The Pumpkin Lady*

By Darlene Lawson

From the delighted voices and happy faces of the Grade 1 students of the Rexton Elementary School, it is plain to see why Martha Bowman, The Pumpkin Lady, states: "I love what I do!"

Every year the Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes visit the vegetable farm of Stuart and Martha Bowman in Jardineville, Kent. Co. The children are treated to a hayride where they can experience how vegetables are grown, and then have the thrill of choosing their own free pumpkin from the 1 ½ acre pumpkin patch. "It's the children who named the farm" Martha states, "whenever they saw me around town, I could hear them say to their mother's, there's 'the pumpkin lady'."

Martha grew up on the farm which she and Stuart now work. As teenagers they met through 4H and then both attended McDonald College in Montreal. After working in Eastern Ontario and Quebec for eight years, they returned to the family farm in Jardineville in 1984 and started a dairy farm. Along with the dairy, they had the usual farm garden which kept increasing as their family grew. They soon had a one acre garden where their children, nephews, and neighbor kids sold produce just for spending money. As the demand for their produce increased, they added more acreage.

In 1991, Stuart and Martha built a small green house because Martha could not find plants "just the way she liked them." People noticed her unusual plants with the beautiful colors and soon began coming to their farm for flowers and asking for vegetables. Martha started selling her produce from a little shed and a small table, moved to a wagon, and then to a tent and a table until a big wind storm came and blew down the tent. In 2002, Stuart built a permanent structure.

The present 27' x 50' greenhouse was built in 1996, and they slowly kept adding to their produce. They now farm 11 acres, which includes 15 varieties

of vegetables, 10 varieties of herbs, 45 varieties of flowers and 24 varieties of perennials. They begin their season with 720 trays of plants and 246 hanging baskets and window boxes. Plus Martha is responsible for all the lovely flower beds and hanging baskets throughout the Village of Rexton. Martha chooses her own color schemes throughout the Village and delights in trying something new each year. Their most popular item is the Gourmet Super Sweet Corn, "we have customers come from as far away as Fredericton and Moncton for our corn".

To most of us, it looks like gardening season is just about over at this time of year, but for Stuart and Martha, it's starting all over again. They buy all of their seeds from Stokes in Ontario, and in the fall a salesman comes to go over their seed orders and to advise them of new items for the coming year. November is ordering month for flowers. January is ordering month for vegetables. February is obtaining supplies and trays. March is seeding, where they start their seeds in the smaller green house at 80 degrees F., and keep moving them to the larger green house as the weather permits; then it's back to planting.

Stuart and Martha are wonderful promoters of farming and the horticultural industry. "Working in the horticultural industry never brings a dull moment" Martha comments, "and it is just plain fun, learning something new every year. Taste is a big issue for us, so we choose varieties that will give us the best taste. As for flowers, I look for those that make great combinations. Every year we try something new and different. Last year it was sunflowers; this year it is broom corn (sorghum). The broom corn is just starting into tassel because of the very cool weather in June. But this is the chance you take when trying something new. Our goal is to make a difference in the way children view farming, with the hope that they will in turn influ-



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

ence others around them by pointing out farming to their parents and relatives.

Maybe as they grow older they will continue to go to a pumpkin patch each fall."

The Pumpkin Lady employs nine summer students.

Both Stewart and Martha enjoy the diversity that the different clientele brings to the farm each season, and the freedom to experiment with new adventures.

'New adventures' contribute to the success of The Pumpkin Lady, as anyone who has driven

past their field of sunflowers can testify. As the sunflowers, broom corn, and pumpkins surprise and delight us, Martha assures that the surrounding communities can look forward to even more surprises in future gardening seasons.