

Making hay?

• ORCHARD FROM E1

Of the 49 orchards in the seven-county metro area, Minnetonka Orchards is the leader in terms of entertainment, said C.J. Johnson, outdoors specialist at the Minnesota Department of Tourism. "That's pretty much theirs," said Johnson. "A lot of other orchards or farms with orchards have programs, but I don't know of any that do agri-tainment to the extent that Minnetonka Orchards does."

For brothers Jay and Scott Schaper, the bigger goal is a story as old as the hills dotting this gorgeous pocket of western Hennepin County: keeping the 40-acre farm in the family. Land that was purchased for \$800 an acre is now worth 30 times that much, and the Schapers' parents have retired and could use a nest egg.

"My parents are cash-poor and land-rich," said Jay Schaper, "and the developers are salivating at the end of the driveway, leaving proposals. You see the offers, and it's like, wow."

Lowell Schaper, 72, said he "unofficially put [the property] on the market" a couple of years ago. But he never signed on with a Realtor, and his sons came up with a plan to expand the agri-tainment aspect. "It's a year-to-year thing at this point," said Lowell Schaper.

To implement the plan, the sons had to give up their "real" jobs — Scott, 44, in hydraulic engineering and Jay, 43, in technology. That was a no-brainer, as it turned out.

"If we let this go," said Scott, "I could never drive down Highway 26 again, ever."

A root-bound journey

In plotting their future, the brothers relied heavily on the past, even when their memories were not exactly soft and fuzzy. Their father, a Braniff Airlines pilot, had bought 28 acres in 1971 and built a house on the tallest hill (Lowell and wife Phyllis can see the IDS Tower from their deck). They planted alfalfa and then cucumbers — "He had this Gedney's Pickle dream," said Jay, chucking — before opting for apples in 1976.

That began a fruit stand, which began tractor rides, which began cider and even cider brats (a Lowell Schaper concoction) and, by the mid-1980s, a pick-your-own enterprise — all of which made two major chores that often fell to...guess who?

"As young teenagers, you had to force them to work," said Lowell, "because they'd rather be doing what their buddies were doing, which was virtually nothing, goofing off. But the work's got to get done."

Jay's memories are similar. "We had to plant trees, clear stuff out and everything else," he said. "We didn't understand why, because all our



Young turkeys roam free at Minnetonka Orchards.

Photos by KYNDALL HARKNESS • lharkness@startribune.com



Brothers Scott, left, and Jay Schaper run Minnetonka Orchards and try to provide activities beyond apple-picking.

friends were out having fun. Now that we're older, we think, 'Wow, those are chores that really built us.' We need to hang onto that and maybe have other people experience them."

Getting other people to do their chores is only a small part of the business plan, the part where guests pick clean their 3,100 trees. More important is routing those visitors in the mid-20th century, "that era that's going away because the farms can't make it," Jay noted.

So the cuttings from the apple trees became raw material for the sling-shot-making class. A Girl Scout troop came in and hand-painted animals and tractors on the recycling and garbage cans. Old-school toy tractors became one of the hottest items at the orchard's store (although his-and-hers tractor underwear also is moving well, said store manager Lori MacRander).

And Scott Schaper created what Jay calls a "very confusing" corn



Goats atop one of the barns at the orchard.

maze. "I made it easy to find the middle, but hard to get out," Scott said. "Even I got lost in there the other day."

A growing season

For this enterprise to succeed and fulfill the family patriarch's wish of having his sons buy the land from him, Minnetonka Orchards must be more than a seasonal destination for families, even with nearly 50,000 annual visitors.

Last spring, a 5,000-square-foot reception tent went up on a flat piece of land. "Target was among several companies holding retreats on the grounds this year and even had its design team develop packaging ideas for apples while sitting amid the trees. The orchards hosted a wine tasting last spring, and nine weddings already are booked for next year.

"You can't expand the apple season," said Lowell, "but you can expand the event season."

For most visitors, though, simple pleasures provide the allure. A wooden train, for example, was swarming with kids on a recent Saturday despite having no engine or seating.

"Some of these places can be pretty commercial," said Karin Westgate of Minneapolis, her two sons in tow. "This place focuses more on simple activities, the train, the silo, the animals, as opposed to products that are manufactured."

"We forget that kids' imaginations are much more interesting than any product we can make for them. You give them something static, and they'll make it dynamic" — not a bad description of what the Schaper brothers are aiming to accomplish.

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« YOU CAN'T EXPAND THE APPLE SEASON, BUT YOU CAN EXPAND THE EVENT SEASON. » Lowell Schaper, Minnetonka Orchards

Readers share a wealth of frugal tips

• EWOLDY FROM E1

Jenny Rice mentions a similar site that includes not only restaurants where kids eat free but also **free activities** at http://connect4parents.org/free_activities.htm.

Kowalski's, Lunds and Byerly's might not be low-price supermarket leaders, but even bargain shoppers might go out of their way for their specialties. Sue Jacobson of Minneapolis signed up in Kowalski's to receive a coupon each month for a **free product**. This month it's a free bouquet of flowers. Past freebies included a box of frozen burgers, a pound of cheese and sausage. Customers can request the coupon by mail or e-mail. Sign up in the store or at Kowalskis.com. Look for the "Let's keep in touch" program.

An anonymous tipster suggests signing up for Lunds' weekly e-mail coupons sent on Thursday mornings. A recent coupon offered \$10 off a \$50 purchase in the store or online. Other recent coupons: a gallon of milk for 99 cents, Lunds frozen pizza for \$1.99 (reg. \$6.99), and a free five-pack of corn on the cob with a \$10 purchase. Sign up at www.lundsandbyerlys.com.

Walgreens and CVS savings

I've written before about the uncompetitive prices on prescrip-

tion drugs at Walgreens and CVS, but maybe the profit margin on drugs is what allows good deals on other items. Kim Crumb of Bloomington suggests getting on Walgreens' e-mail list at walgreens.com. Near the end of the month, usually on a Thursday, you'll get a coupon for "\$10 off \$40 purchase" or "\$5 off \$20 purchase" good on a Friday and Saturday. It can be a good deal if the coupon is used on sale items, Crumb wrote.

Jenny Rice likes the **HeartSavers.com** site for those new to the CVS Extra Care Bucks program. The site helps to maximize your savings. She estimates that she's saved \$200 from the tips on the site.

Media deals

An anonymous reader is tuned in to the deals offered by local media. He/she mentioned **Startztribune.com/shopping** for coupons and notification of sales. Personal note: For my blog tip of the day, go to www.startztribune.com/blogs/dealspotter or the weekly video at www.startztribune.com/video. Sign up for drawings of "free stuff on demand" at **CITE\$97.com**. The site's 50 percent discounts on local "dining deals" is updated with new offerings on Thursdays. **KARE11.com** offers a "moms like me" tab with coupons and user groups that share frugal tips. Each site also offers free mer-

chandise drawings for DVDs, concert tickets and hotel stays. The odds are better since the drawings are local.

Online deals

Lee Havermeier of Rosemount always buys **gift cards on eBay** for stores he frequents, including Cabela's, Home Depot and Target. He figures he saves about 10 percent. For example, a winning bid of \$90 for a \$100 gift card. As a new homeowner, Havermeier has bought many gift cards for Home Depot. He also buys Target's cards for groceries at SuperTarget. He has bought more than 20 cards on eBay and has never had a problem with a card. To be extra careful, he uses PayPal and pays with a credit card. He checks the gift card balance immediately upon receipt (before leaving feedback), so he can contact PayPal and his credit card company if there is a problem. He often uses the "buy it now" feature to save time.

Havermeier also suggests looking for Lowe's or Home Depot coupons on eBay if you've got a big purchase. People will sell coupons that they can't use (often valid for only a few weeks) such as \$20 off a \$50 purchase or \$40 off a \$400 purchase for less than the stated value.

Jason Alvig of Mound trumped all of the tips I got about individual sites. He likes **www.ipromocodes.com**,

SPOTTED A DEAL?
Send your tips to dealspotter@startribune.com.

which compiles deals all over the Web from sites such as CouponMountain, SlickDeals.net, RetailmeNot, DealNews and DealCoupon.com. Another site that performs a similar service is www.boddit.com, but it has fewer listings and takes longer to wade through the deals.

Miscellaneous

Forget the expensive brands of dry shampoos such as Sephora, Avocado and Rene Furterer Natura for \$22 to \$24 mentioned in an article earlier this month. Nancy Elleby of Wayzata buys the **Possesst dry shampoo by Clairol** for about \$8 at Walgreens and thinks it's the best out there.

There are several coupons for the **Downtowner Car Wash** in St. Paul at www.downtownercarwash.com/coupon.cfm, wrote Chris Heck of St. Paul, but the best one is a free gold car wash (\$22 value) on your birthday. Coupon can be redeemed within a week of your birthday with ID. If the Downtowner isn't convenient, ask about birthday deals at closer car washes.

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Accent on punctuation

• PUNCTUATION FROM E1

Exclamation points have undergone fertility treatments, often appearing in multiples, as if a mere LOL can't truly convey the heights of hilarity.

Jeff Rubin founded National Punctuation Day five years ago. His newsletter publishing firm in Pinole, Calif., made him conscious of using proper punctuation in the business world. Not only does a well-placed apostrophe keep you from looking stupid, but correct punctuation makes for clear writing, lessening the chances for costly miscommunication.

Still, Rubin is no wild-eyed crusader. He advocates a low-key approach to observing the day by taking a leisurely stroll, noting store signs with incorrectly punctuated words, then stopping in to correct the owners.

Right ... Given that many of us still need to rise to the level of his expertise, a better bet may be to check out his website, www.nationalpunctuationday.com, where he explains exactly how each punctuation mark should be used.

Period.

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