

Streetsboro farm to host first Ohio Lavender Festival

by Miles Jung-Kilbreath

Reporter

STREETSBORO — After five years of growing lavender and producing homemade products, DayBreak Lavender Farm looks to grow even bigger by hosting the first annual Ohio Lavender Festival July 7, 8 and 9 at 2129 Frost Road, while having just opened a store at 8376 Route 14.

Husband and wife co-owners Mike Slyker and Jody Byrne met in 1996 when Byrne answered Slyker's personal ad, describing himself as an "aging hippie."

Byrne said she had always loved lavender and when she discovered that Slyker had done some farming with his family, she decided to try a test bed of lavender in 2001 to see how well it could grow.

"We heard it was hard to grow lavender in Ohio, but we were able to make it work," Byrne said.

Byrne said she has high hopes for the festival and what it could do for lavender farming in the area. She said she hopes to make Northeast Ohio the "lavender capital of the Midwest."

"It's come together pretty easily for us," Byrne said about hosting her first festival. "Almost all the women at City Hall have volunteered for the event."

Guests at the festival will be able to pick their own lavender from the field and children will be able to go on a treas-

ure hunt around the farm that will help them learn more about the flower. Byrne also will demonstrate how to make soap and will have guided tours and nature walks around the farm.

Byrne said guests can compete in a lavender cook-off (hint: Byrne says lavender can be used in place of rosemary in many dishes), but contestants need to register at the farm's Web site. Guests also will be able to taste lavender foods during the festival.

The festival will close Sunday with a harp concert by Lee Ann Anderson starting at 5 p.m.

Tickets for the event are \$5 a person or \$15 for a family pack for two adults and up to four children under 13 with \$5 for any additional children. For more information, check out the festival Web site at:

ohiolavenderfestival.com

Hours on July 7 and 8 will be from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and July 9 will be from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The festival is still looking for volunteers. Anyone who wishes to volunteer and works a four-hour shift will receive a \$50 gift certificate for DayBreak soaps and a free T-shirt. To volunteer, call



Michael Slyker, left, and Jody Byrne are the owners of DayBreak Lavender farm and creators of more than 190 lavender products.

The farm is the first in Ohio of its kind and has received a resolution of congratulations from the Ohio General Assembly.

RPC Photo / Miles Jung-Kilbreath

Byrne at 330-212-3135

DayBreak started selling homemade products—more than 190 items total—on the Internet at www.daybreaklavenderfarm.com (soaps, scrubs, cream and lotions) and found it to be quite successful, according to Byrne.

The couple opened a store selling their products June 16 inside Sandy's Notions Florists at the intersection on Route 14 and Diagonal Road.

Making soap

Slyker makes all the soaps after Byrne designs their look and fragrance. Slyker said a biology degree has come in handy when creating the soap, because a lot of the work at the beginning of the process is finding the right percentage of lye, which is created by running water through wood ash, fats, and oils to create a certain consistency.

After creating the right mixture, he said heating it creates a chemical reaction called saponification, which burns out the lye and bonds the water, fats and oils together. Slyker then pours the soap into molds to cool and to create unique shapes.

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Purple waves of lavender greet visitors to DayBreak Lavender Farm in July when the fragrant plant is in full bloom. (Photo courtesy of Mary Averill of Averill & Associates Creative Lab and DayBreak Lavender Farm.)