

Getting Lost in a Maze of Maize

By John Burton

HOLMDEL – The corn maze visitors try to maneuver each fall at Casola Farms is actually planned much earlier in the year.

The 30-acre Casola Farms, located at 178 Route 34, has been doing the annual maze for the last 15 years, according to manager Joe Casola.

The maze is cut through “a beautiful crop of corn that is 12-feet high,” covering a 5-acre area just south of the main farm property, Casola said.

The planning begins with the actual planting, Casola said, with the corn planted in square blocks, “in perfect lines.”

Casola’s twin brother, Christopher, undertakes the design, using graph paper, with each square on the paper representing a plant.



JOHN BURTON

Joe Casola in the corn maze at Casola Farms, Holmdel.

Continued on Page 4

Maze

Continued from Page 1

On the graph paper, Christopher draws what the maze is going to look like for the year, Joe said.

When the stalks get to be about a foot tall, Christopher leads a crew of three employees to walk through the field while referring to the drawing, which serves as their map. The workers then cut those plants down using hand-held hoes, Casola said.

The actual cutting covers what Joe estimated to be about 5 miles of trail through the cornfield and takes the workers about four days to complete.

"It's been fun helping my brother with planning it," he said.

This year's theme is a haunted mansion. When it was done, "you can tell it's a haunted mansion if you're looking at it from the sky," Casola said.

The maze is now open for visitors and will be available through Halloween. Participants take a hay wagon ride to the maze and then get to take their time making their way through it.

"It's easy and accessible for all ages," Casola said. The paths are 6-feet wide to allow for baby carriages and strollers.

Actually getting through the maze of maize is another story for some participants. "There are some people who take half a day to make their way through it," Casola said. "You have to take the right turns."

The maze has been a feature of Casola Farms for most of Casola's 22 years. Each year he looks forward to the "challenges my brother has created."

Every year about 10,000 people undertake the maze challenge, which is available

*The maze is now
open for visitors
and will be
available through
Halloween.*

to the public from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekends and Columbus Day until the end of October. Admission is \$5 per person.

When visitors make their way out, the participants find themselves at the farm's pumpkin patch, where they can pick and purchase, Casola said.

There are other attractions available including a Wild West show, pony rides, petting zoo, a haunted hayride, a variety of plants and fruits and vegetables grown on site for sale, and "pretty much all of your fall decorating needs," Casola said.

Casola Farms has been conducting its Halloween Festival for 30 years. Joe Casola's father, Antonio Casola, started the business of allowing the public to pick their own pumpkins about 37 years ago when he was just 16 and was the first in the area to do so, according to Casola.

The Casolas have had a long history in farming in the Holmdel area. The family came from Italy in the early 1900s and went into the business. Joe's mother's family, the Weigand family, has a more than 200-year heritage of farming in Holmdel. So it's no real surprise that Joe found his way into the family business. "I've been here my whole life and I enjoy working with my family and enjoy raising crops," he said.

Casola Farms and Greenhouse is open seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.