

# Sweet success for Fadden's Sugar House in Woodstock

By JOHN KOZIOL  
Union Leader Correspondent

WOODSTOCK — When and if Hollywood makes a movie about maple sugaring, it'll call Jim Fadden, who, in addition to being straight out of Central Casting in exemplifying the appearance, crustiness and clever self-reliance of a New Hampshire Yankee, is, once again, the producer of the best maple syrup in the Granite State.

For a sixth time on Jan. 25, the New Hampshire Maple Producers Association at their annual winter meeting in Lebanon bestowed the Lawrence A. Carlisle Memorial Trophy to Fadden's Sugar House.

The trophy is awarded annually for excellence in the production of maple syrup and is presented, according to the NHMPA, in recognition of Carlisle's service and devotion "to the welfare and development of the Maple Industry of New Hampshire." To even be considered for the Carlisle, an NHMPA member has to have previously won first, second or third place at a New Hampshire fair and also survived a review during the association's prior summer meeting.

Fadden's syrup, which he stressed is made possible by the efforts of many people, including his family and the employees of his contracting business, is a perennial contender for many honors, many of which are documented and displayed along the walls of the Fadden General Store on Main Street in North Woodstock.

Directly behind the store is the sugar house, a high-tech affair that Fadden on Friday said disappoints some visitors — especially those who have preconceived, Norman Rockwell notions about flannel-clad men and women tapping trees by hand and then carrying buckets of sap for boiling to a dark sugar house — but which continues to produce award-winning syrup with an international following.

The popularity of Fadden's product can be seen in his guest log, which is signed by visitors from throughout the United States and beyond. Thanks to the U.S. Postal Service's flat-rate shipping, which Fadden raved about, Fadden's sends its syrup around the world and, in turn, gets inquiries from all over.

A Woodstock selectman for the past 20 years, Fadden is a proud Republican but he is also a consummate pragmatist whose bottom line is about working with people in a decidedly non-partisan way and saying "thank-you" often for the bipartisan compliments that Fadden's Sugar House receives.

During his administration, then Gov. John Lynch, a Democrat, bestowed a Governor's Cup for the best maple syrup in North America to Fadden's.

Fadden's Sugar House began making maple syrup more than 100 years ago. It is a time and labor-intensive craft that relies heavily on the kindness of Mother Nature and that on occasion also feels her sting.

In 2014, the weather's been plenty cold, said Fadden, and the warm spells have been quick and pronounced. The last time there were such similar conditions, Fadden recalled, was in 1972, when the first boil was done on April 1.

"I had a full season then," Fadden noted, "but it just came at one time," in an 800-gallon burst. The earliest that Fadden's boiled was Valentine's Day 1999, he said, adding that this year's boil could come at "any time." He hopes that, as in 2013, the 9,000 maple trees will again yield about 2,500 gallons of syrup.

Making maple syrup requires patience and perseverance, said Fadden, while a sense of humor also helps.

"The best way to get sap to flow," said Fadden with a straight face, "is to do something else." At Fadden's Sugar House, that "something" is most of the behind-the-scenes stuff, which begins by making sure that the sugar maples have ample room to grow in the sugar bush. There is then the tapping of the trees, the checking of 25-miles worth of plastic tubing that connects the trees to collection tanks and, finally, when the sap starts flowing, the turning on of the equipment that eventually turns the sap into syrup.

Fadden said he is extremely proud of his family's "reverse osmosis machine," a relatively-new device that he wished he had put into operation years sooner. Not only is it the "greenest" part of the process, but the machine, whose technology is more than 20 years old, removes up to 75 percent of the water from the sap, creating a concentrate that then goes into a four-foot wide, 12-foot long, enclosed, stainless steel evaporator. After boiling, the syrup is passed through a filter press and then poured into containers of various sizes for sale.

Despite having grown up when maple sugaring was less high-tech, Fadden doesn't remember those days with the same romanticism that some people do, although his passion for maple sugaring hasn't changed along with its means of production.

"There's just something about doing it. It's an addiction," he said, as well as the continuation of a tradition of which he considers himself fortunate to be a part.

Fadden is harvesting sap from trees that were planted by his forebears and in turn he is planting trees that will be tapped by his descendants.

The success of the overall operation is measured in the final product and the loyalty of customers.

Awards are nice, too, said Fadden, but not the goal.

Fadden downplays his role in making good maple syrup, which he stressed is a team effort and one that doesn't always pay all the bills which is where the General Store and Fadden Construction come into play.

"I can take some credit as the cook," he summed up, "but a lot has to do with the trees. I can ruin it (the maple syrup) but it's tough to make it any better than it is."