

So how did McMaze happen?

Many people ask us how McMaze started. Someday we may have time to sit down and write the story, but at present we're too busy making McMaze a fun place for all the family to be.

We've included here the text of some newspapers articles that have tracked our progress over the years.

Chesterville Record (no date, likely June 2001)

The McDonald family wants visitors to their Monkland-area farm to get lost. Of course, it's all in good fun.

The family is getting ready to open a 3.5 acre corn maze at the end of July.

The path has been carved out of the field, and, if seen from above, will look like some trees with clouds, a sun some raindrops and 2001 stretched across the bottom.

A line will cordon off one third of the field to create an easier path for young children.

Participants will receive a map and answer sheet upon entering the maze. And will find a question and a few possible answers at various stations throughout the field. Each question will lead you to the next station, until you find your way out again. The questions will be changed regularly.

The maze is the creation of 14 year old Sandy McDonald. He got the idea for it last summer after visiting the corn maze in Greely, and decided it would make a perfect addition for his annual Hallowe'en spoof. For the past two years, he has turned his family's home into a haunted house and trick-or-treaters must make it through before receiving their candy.

This year, McDonald will not be doing the haunted house. Instead, the ghosts and goblins normally lurking in their hallways will be taking over the family's barn and cornfield, making the farm an even scarier place to visit in October.

When asked if Halloween was his favourite day of the year, Sandy said "No, Christmas is". But he added that Halloween is a close second.

And though this maze is a first-time venture for the family, McDonald and his mother Valerie hope it will be a successful one.

"Last year, the haunted house was a huge success," said Valerie McDonald. "We normally only get about 22 kids and last year, more than 70 people walked through our house, and not all of them were kids. I ended up running out of candy and started giving them lunch stuff. It was incredible. People were going through it and then telling their friends. I hope that's what will happen with the corn maze."

Sandy has been designing and planning the maze since last fall, and the family and a few neighbours spent several days pulling corn out by hand to create the path.

"When we started pulling the corn, it was still very small, but by the time we finished, it was up to our waist," Valerie said. "It was very hard work."

But it already seems as though their hard work may pay off. The family has had enquiries

about the maze from a few local schools and have agreed to suit questions to the class's curriculum if necessary. As well, their friends and neighbours have expressed keen interest in going through the maze once it is open.

And the Tagwi Secondary School band may be helping with the haunted maze in order to raise funds for trips and equipment.

Sandy is making all the signs and props for his spooky event, though it may seem amazing where he finds the time for it. He is a member of a local swim team, training to be a lifeguard, working as a camp counsellor at a camp near Ingleside and is a member of the Air Cadets.

The maze will open July 18th. General admission is \$5 per person, and kids under 4 will get in free. The maze will be open seven days a week from 11 am to 5 pm.

There will be a Family Fun Day at the farm on Labour Day, September 2, from 11 am to 2 pm. After that, weekend hours for the maze will be 11 am to 4 pm. The haunted barn will begin October 5 and will take place each weekend night until Halloween from 7 to 9 pm. The haunted Halloween McMaze and Haunted Halloween Barn for October 20, 27 and 31 will be \$7 per person.



Standard Freeholder, September 20, 2002

McMaze is holding a Ryan's Well Foundation Day today. Ryan Hreljac, 11, the young founder of the organization will be on hand at the McMaze at 11 am.

Hreljac has been raising funds for projects in developing countries since the age of six. His work has helped to change the lives of thousands of people in Africa who might not otherwise have been able to lead healthy lives. He has dedicated his young life to building commitment, support and opportunities for children and youths to contribute to society through international cooperation.

Water will be sold at the McMaze as a fundraiser. Donations will also be accepted.

McMaze is located on Township Road 9 West, near St Andrews West, off Highway 138, at civic number 17049. For further information call 932-7630.



Standard Freeholder September 3 2001

Corny? Not really, but bring a companion.

Because he built it, they will come. One Bonville teen has found a summer job in his own back yard.

Sandy McDonald, 14, with the help from friends Leanne and Vicki Smar, have created the McMaze, a labyrinth of turns, twists and riddles nestled in a 3.5 acre corn field on the family farm.

Alien crop circles weren't a factor in his plan, neither was the film Field of Dreams.

McDonald, a grade 10 student at Tagwi Secondary School thought of the idea from a maze he visited in Ottawa the prior summer. "There wasn't anything like this in the city, so I thought I should build one," McDonald said. McDonald is not interested in video games or television

and doesn't mind spending the afternoon working in the fields. With the help from his two friends, and mother Valerie, in the early summer they began ripping thousands of corn stalks from the ground to blaze a trail through the field.

The end result of the hard work is a series of two mazes. McDonald said it take up to an hour to complete the maze, depending on the degree of difficulty one chooses. Parents who enter the maze complete a checklist/answer sheet and make their way through the course, searching for checkpoints and answering questions. About 4000 people have visited the maze thus far this year. (End of article, although it appears to continue on.)

McMaze continues to amaze (Seaway News, August 22, 2003)

In the movie "Field of Dreams", actor Kevin Costner built a baseball field in the middle of a farm in the hopes that the great past legends of baseball would return to play another game. And they did. Four years ago, the McDonalds of South Stormont, took 3.5 acres of their farmland to build a cornfield walking maze in the hopes that people would come and pay to "get lost". And they did.

Today, the McDonalds operate McMaze which started out as a dream of 16 year old Alexander "Sandy" McDonald, a grade 12 student at Tagwi Secondary School, and is consuming more and more time of the entire family. When Sandy isn't around operating the facility, you are sure to find mom and dad, Valerie and Steve or brothers Steve and Anthony or sister Keshia. All have put their mark on the growing family business just north of St. Andrews.

Besides the famous Corn Maze, they have added the Haze Maze (walking in fog and the dark); the Ice Storm Post Maze (when the area was cleared following the Ice Storm of '98, the leftover wood wasn't much good for anything so the McDonalds created a "post maze" where you are only allowed to walk straight or turn right in order to find your way out. They've since added a petting farm of farm animals (although most of the customers zoom in on the brand new kittens that were born recently) and they also have a Haunted Barn (which the reporter was invited to tour, but chickened out).

If you've ever wondered how the corn maze is created, well it's done by hand. That's right, a field of corn is planted and the paths and designs are created simply by pulling out stalks of corn,, one at a time. In their first year of operation, they estimate they received approximately 3000 visitors and that number has grown for the past three years. Visitors come from around the world, including such places as Korea; Australia; Japan; Switzerland and Scotland. Sandy says that many American customers "drop in on a whim" after seeing the McMaze sign while travelling along highway 138.

As our interview continued, I could hear voices coming from the corn maze and it got to me, wondering if anyone ever really got lost. Sandy McDonald said in the three years of operation only one person ever really got lost but there is a system to find them. Behind the reception hut is an observation tower and each customer is given a flag to take with them. If they feel hopelessly lost, all they have to do is yell, hold up the flag and they'll be spotted from the tower. As we spoke, a small plane flew overhead and Sandy said "It happens all the time. Planes fly overhead and take pictures of our mazes."

The McDonalds realize they've tapped into a growing business concern, but they're still ready and willing to give back to the community. This year they are supporters of Ryan's Well Foundation. McMaze is open to all, although those under 12 years of age should be accompanied by an adult. Sandy McDonald, who had a dream four years ago is enjoying seeing that dream come true.



Seaway News October 17, 2003

Harvest day at McMaze

Thanksgiving Monday, October 13th, 2003, was a perfect day for some time on the farm and some 500 people had the same idea as they visited McMaze Cornfield Maze on Willy Allen Road, just north of Bonville in South Stormont. Everyone took part in the second annual Harvest Day sponsored by the Tagwi Secondary School Interact Club. Members of the club were on hand to donate time and effort during the day, with all proceeds from the event going to the club for its humanitarian work in El Salvador and to the high school's senior band. Sandy McDonald, Interact Vice President said about a dozen of the club's students showed up to "work the day". The day included lots of food, games, wagon rides, and of course, the myriad mazes that are on the farm. "The goal is to raise funds so the Interact club members can travel to El Salvador with toys, food, clothing and medical supplies for the children in that country. That trip takes place next March break," according to McDonald.

The Glengarry News, Alexandria (not dated)

Getting to the McDonald's small beef farm is easy, but getting out may be a little tougher. For at least a couple of reasons.

One, you might get lost; two, you may not want to leave so soon.

Young Sandy McDonald has designed and – with the help of three friends – blazed two sets of mazes through a 3.5 acre field of silage corn on his parents' property.

The tools Sandy, a 14 year old entering grade 10 at Tagwi, used were simple - graph paper and two tree shaped mazes from a pastime booklet.

"He made each graph square correspond to 40 square feet," said his mother Valerie, as sandy held up the two mazes from the booklet.

One is larger and more intricate than the other, making it more challenging for older children or adults to weave through.

But that was the easy part during construction of "McMaze", its name. "They had to pull each stalk individually to make the trails," Valerie said. The first plants were easy, because the plants were only inches tall. By the end, however, the last stalks had grown up to their waist or higher. The results are extremely accurate judging by an overhead video taken of the field from a plane.

"It takes about an hour to do either one, " said Sandy. "But I don't know how long it is."

Finding your way through, though, isn't the only reward. Sandy has placed stations throughout the maze which poses questions. A visitor can write the answer on the map. "You can be eligible for a prize." Sandy said.

The maze isn't the only attraction at the McDonald's farm, about two kilometres west of highway 138 on Willy Allan Road, four minutes south of Monkland. The family's barn is undergoing work so it will be haunted. It will be open on October 5, leading up to special events for Halloween.

"We got the ideas from going to other haunted hay rides in Vars and Munster Hamlet," Valerie said. The mazes will be open July 18th. The admission fee is \$5 per person. Children under 4 get in free.



Standard Freeholder, December 15, 2003

McMaze gets into holiday spirit with special activities

In a few short years, McMaze has garnered the reputation of the halloween spook capital of S,D and G.

So, with that under their belt, the McDonald family has decided to extend their farmland creation even farther and branch off into the Christmas Season.

The Bonville area attraction has put out the welcome sign for those looking to get into the Christmas spirit in the great outdoors by offering good old-fashioned horse-drawn sleigh rides in the forest, some hot chocolate by the fire in a secluded cabin, and even a visit from Santa Claus himself.

“The horses are here anyway, so we figured we might as well try it and see how it goes,” said McMaze proprietor Stephen McDonald, who, along with his wife Valerie, were kept busy this weekend entertaining groups of friends and families with sleigh rides.

Family Reunion

On Sunday, the farm opened it’s doors to roughly 30 family members who held a reunion at the farm’s cabin, which is hidden amid bush and trees. “So far, it’s been going fairly well,” McDonald said.

But the Christmas season may not be the only advancement for the attraction, which first gained popularity for its corn mazes built by son Sandy McDonald. The family is also considering offering activities at both Easter – egg hunts in the forest – and St. Valentine’s day as well. But for now, the McDonald clan will focus on Christmas.

The farm will be open for sleigh rides and other activities all this coming weekend, as well as the Monday and Tuesday just prior to Christmas, from 11 am to 3 pm.

