

Caledon cider firm expanding tree give-aways at LCBO outlets

By Tabitha Wells

When you think about a modern day Johnny Appleseed, the first thing that comes to mind likely wouldn't be the producer of an alcoholic beverage.

But that's exactly what one would consider Nick Sutcliffe and his wife Lindsay, the Caledon-based owners of Pommies Dry Cider and Southern Cliff Brands.

Their brand of cider ? a beverage from apple juice produced like a wine but drunk like a beer ? is still fairly new to the area, but their campaign methods and love for local partnerships has helped the product take off.

?Alcohol companies generally give stuff away to promote their products, but it's usually stuff that goes into a draw and doesn't really have any benefit to everyone,? explained Sutcliffe. ?So we thought let's give something away because everyone usually does, but let's do it a little differently.?

When they developed the giveaway campaign, they wanted to do something that would have a higher impact, not just on the consumers of their product, but on the world around them. The idea was presented to give away apple trees, and LCBO came on board with the project.

The event was launched last year at four LCBO's in Ontario, including Orangeville. Out of the participating locations, the Orangeville branch had the greatest success, despite a few potential bumps along the way.

?The event in Orangeville was the home run of the four stores that we did last year,? Sutcliffe said. ?It was during a snow-storm and the store had no power as we pulled up. Literally 15 minutes before we were going to start, the power came back on in the store and we ran out of trees in about half an hour. It was unbelievable!?

He added that the advantage of living so close was that they were able to drive back home, pick up more trees and come back to keep the promotion going.

?The support that we've had from people in the community, out and about, and in bars and restaurants has been absolutely fantastic,? he said. ?We love the fact that we're here and we love the fact that people are drinking so much of the Pommies. They've been really supportive and it's a lot of fun.?

Part of what Sutcliffe believes has made their cider such a hit is that it is unique to many of the other ciders that are out there. While it's not a complex cider, it's balanced in both its flavour and presentation. One reviewer Sutcliffe spoke with called it the Goldilocks of ciders.

?I asked him to clarify what he meant and he said that it was because it's not too dry, not too sweet and not too bubbly ? just the perfect balance,? he explained.

This year, the Pommies apple tree giveaway will be expanding to include more LCBO. It will be at the Bolton LCBO at 30 McEwan Dr. East May 17 from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

?We are all about putting trees in the ground and knowing where our food comes from,? said Sutcliffe. ?This campaign takes local to a whole new level, literally into your backyard.?

Because of their Caledon roots, the Sutcliffe's believe in having a strong, local presence and keeping the product they use to produce their ciders from local producers as well. Their cider is served in local restaurants such as the Mill Creek Pub and the Barley Vine Rail Co.

?We make it a large point in everything we do to really be a big part of the community,? Sutcliffe said. ?In Orangeville we took part in the 150th birthday celebrations last year and we work with the owners of local restaurants, and we really pride ourselves on the fact that we really have good relationships with all of them.?

Even the apples they use for their cider are 100 per cent local, Ontario apples to help give back to the community that is helping them thrive. Because of that, they have high hopes that the giveaway in Orangeville will once again be a huge hit and provide more apple trees in the community.

?Last year's event was just a great example of how the community has gotten behind us,? Sutcliffe said. ?The fact that we were actually putting apple trees in the ground was just spectacular and it was a whole lot of fun. Orangeville is near and dear to us, and when we decided to do it again we said we had to do it in Orangeville.?

For more information on Pommies Cider or to find out about other Apple Tree Giveaway locations visit www.pommiesdry.com