



Staff photo by Bill Gross

To the average person making his or her way through the corn maze at Argos Farm in the Forked River section of Lacey Township, it's a confusing set of twists and turns. But an overhead shot reveals it's actually a pumpkin-headed scarecrow design.

Navigating a fall tradition

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Matt Mangold stood alone on a platform overlooking a three-acre cornfield at Butterhof's Shady Brook Farm in Mullica Township. Under the teenage farmhand's watchful eye, scores of children and parents, their heads barely visible over the towering stalks of green corn, attempted to navigate a maze cut through the field.

"I just kind of watch them, unless they ask for help," Mangold, 16, said. "But I don't even have the maze all figured out."

At one point, Steve Riis ducked under the ropes designed to keep people on the right (or wrong) path and climbed up to Mangold's perch to take pictures of his family down in the maze. At least that was the plan.

"You don't realize how high it is down there," the Egg Harbor Township father of two said. "One guy we're with is 6 feet 4 inches tall and they're all following him."

Getting lost in a maze has become a new fall tradition as more and more local farmers are converting their cornfields into twisting, turning tourist attractions. Tickets for corn mazes are packaged with hayrides, pumpkin picking and other autumn-themed activities.

Corn mazes are becoming a popular way for a family to spend an autumn afternoon

"It's a chance to have a day out with your kids and your family," said Angela Martin, who owns Argos Farm in Forked River with her husband Spyro. "And fall is the best time of year."

The corn maze has been an Argos farm fall staple for the past two years, and a popular destination for families with children too young for scary hayrides, haunted houses and other traditional October festivities.

"We're going to a corn maze guys! Let's see if we can go get lost," Jennifer Doderer of Bayville shouted excitedly as she herded a group of adults and toddlers towards the

Argos maze entrance one recent Saturday morning.

"Not too lost," Ed Doderer warned his wife. "Penn State plays at noon."

The friendly orange-clad farm workers assured the group that it only takes about 20 minutes to navigate the maze with the help of a map and lettered markers posted in alphabetical order. But between keeping three small children from going down dead ends and trying to follow the map, things weren't looking good for the Doderers, who had left navigating up to family friend Ben Keller.

"Guys, I'm officially lost," Keller admitted, gazing first at the map and then at the thick expanse of corn towering over his head. "I had it at the E; and now I'm not sure where we are."

There's more rhyme and reason to a corn maze's paths than people think. For the past two years the Martins have hired The MAiZE, a professional corn maze design company from Utah, to cut special images into their cornfields. This year's maze is cut into a scarecrow design.

According to The MAiZE founder Brett Herbst, his services can cost



Staff photo by Anthony Smedile

It's a matter of follow the leader as families navigate the area's corn mazes.

□ See Maze, D6

Children make their way through the corn maze at Butterhof's Shady Brook Farm in Mullica Township.



Staff photo by Anthony Smedile

Local corn mazes

Argos Farms

1250 Lacey Rd., Forked River, 609-693-3513.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Group reservations available 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays.

Maze admission: \$8 for adults, \$6 for children ages 3 to 6, free for children ages 2 and younger.

Also check out: hayrides, pony rides, face painting, cow train.

Butterhof's Shady Brook Farm

5800 White Horse Pike, Mullica Township, 609-965-1285.

Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Group reservations available at nights and on weekdays.

Maze admission: \$5, \$9 for maze/hayride combo.

R & J Farms

723 W. Herschel St, Egg Harbor City, 609-593-6180.

Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fridays through Sundays.

Admission: \$6, \$5 for maze/hayride combo. Discounts for children and groups.



Staff photo by Anthony Smedile

People walk through the corn maze at Butterhof's Shady Brook Farm in Mullica Township. It's an activity many area families are spending their weekend afternoons doing.

Maze: Navigating through a cornfield becoming an autumn tradition locally

(Continued from D1)

anywhere from \$3,000 to \$7,000 depending on the size and design of the field.

We've done Muhammad Ali, Larry King, Oprah Winfrey," Herbst said. "This year we did our own maze shaped like ("American Idol" runner up) David Archuleta."

Creating the corn maze at Shady Brook farms has been a family affair for more than eight years. Owner Al Butterhof has his niece, a former cartography buff, map out a design on a paper grid. In June, when the corn is only ankle high, Butterhof marks off the grid with stakes and then spray paints the maze trail through the corn.

Maze maintenance continues throughout the summer.

"We get a couple guys from the Sureshot Gun Club out there and they weed whack the entire path," Butterhof said. "Then I go through it with a lawnmower a few times as the corn comes up to keep the path clear."

The Butterhofs send customers into the maze armed with a scavenger hunt checklist and nothing more. The truly brave can try tackling the maze at night armed with flashlights, though it's a good idea to take Butterhof's cell phone number along.

"If they get lost, they can give us a call," Butterhof said. "Then we'll go in there after them."

Navigating a corn maze is an accomplishment valued almost as much by the adults as by the children.

Martin once took a memorable trip through her maze with a woman who suffered from severe claustrophobia and couldn't follow her teenagers into the field.

"I held her arm and we went together and we did it," Martin said. "She was crying at the end, she was so proud of herself."

Back at Shady Brook farm, Riis leaned on the railing at the top of the tower with Mangold and gazed out over the cornfield. Suddenly, he heard his name being called from the depths of the corn.

"Steve! Can you see which way is out?"

It was his wife and two young daughters, stuck in yet another dead end.

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