



Friends of Maplewood State Park

PO Box 259

Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

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Maplewood Park's New Sugar Shack Ready for 2017 Season!

Featured maple tour operation for Vergas Maple Syrup Festival, April 8.

The Maplewood State Park "Sugar Shack" has been completed and the maple sap evaporator has been installed and tested. The Park's new facility will be the featured production operation as a part of the Vergas Maple Fest celebration on Saturday, April 8. The Friends of Maplewood State Park will host tours as a part of the annual Maple Syrup Day.

The sugar shack ground breaking was held at Maplewood this past August after years of planning and fundraising. It has been *the* priority project of the Park's "Friends of Maplewood" volunteer group.

John Nordstrom, president of the Friends of Maplewood says "*All systems are GO and our volunteers are now waiting for the sap season to begin*". Maple sap typically runs in west-central Minnesota at various times from mid-March to mid-April, when day-time weather is warm and sunny following cold hard freezing nights.

The new facility includes a food grade CDL wood-fired evaporator with Intense-O-Fire air injection in the fire box. It is a continuous flow, food grade, state-of-the-art stainless steel system. The nearly new unit was donated to the Friends of Maplewood and has been in storage awaiting construction of the Sugar Shack.

The evaporator was successfully test fired with water on March 1st and the first early run of sap was boiled on March 7th following the unusually warm weather that week. The volunteer group now has the challenge of transferring skills learned on the former outdoor batch system to the new continuous flow system, which boils three to four times faster than the former system.

For the past seven seasons, the Park's maple interpretive program has been conducted on a temporary facility in the parking lot. Park staff and Friends volunteers provided interpretive programming to over 400 area students and members of the general public in the 2016 season.

The new facility should allow for expanded numbers of area school children to participate and learn about maple sap flow and syrup production at Maplewood. School groups are encouraged to call the Park and schedule a maple outing at the Park.

After years of planning and fund raising, ground breaking for the new Sugar Shack took place in August 2016. Earth-work, concrete, plumbing and carpentry kept local contractors and Friends' volunteers busy. Volunteers under the supervision of licensed contractors worked through the fall and winter. Although the early warm weather in February and again in early March caused concern that the season would begin before the equipment was ready, the project is now ready for the anticipated March-April sap runs.

The sugar shack project is a cooperative effort between the Friends of Maplewood volunteer group and the Minnesota DNR Parks and Trails Division. According to Friends' treasurer and Sugar Shack project coordinator, Stu Peterson, the building construction was 100% funded with private donations, grants and fund raising events organized by the Friends of Maplewood. The MN DNR provided building design, selected the building site and will provide all needed landscaping and parking/access upgrades.

Under formal contract with the DNR, the Friends Group volunteers are permitted to tap a limited number of the Park's sugar maple trees to conduct the maple syruping interpretive program, primarily for the benefit of area schools during the week and the general public on weekends.

The Friends of Maplewood will "gift" the building to the Minnesota DNR, representing a further enhancement of the growing maple syrup interpretive programming. The Friends of Maplewood similarly sponsored, constructed and gifted the Park's Josh Hanson Memorial picnic shelter to Maplewood State Park in 2008.

Maplewood State Park is located in Otter Tail County on state Highway 108 at 39721 Park Entrance Road, approximately 12 miles west of Dent and 7 miles east of Pelican Rapids.

For further information, contact John Nordstrom, President- Friends of Maplewood at (218) 334-6567; Stu Peterson, Treasurer- Friends and Sugar Shack Project Coordinator at (218) 758-2796; or Maplewood Park Manager Don DelGreco at (218) 863-8383.

Story by Stu Peterson, Treasurer, Friends of Maplewood State Park