



Finding fungus: Mushroom Festival brings season in full swing at Pere Marquette Lodge

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GRAFTON - Treasure hunters from across the region descended on **Pere Marquette Lodge** Sunday afternoon, seeking the elusive morel mushrooms.

After a brief hiatus, the Mushroom Festival returned to the Lodge at Pere Marquette State Park. During the mushroom festival, visitors to the park were invited to peruse several vendors stationed throughout the lodge, and go into the park to hunt for mushrooms. Beginners were even provided a guide from the lodge to assist in their hunts.

“It's always kind of a guessing game,” **Pere Marquette Lodge Marketing Director Leslie Franklin** said of morel mushroom season. “In previous years, we did it too early or too late in the season. This year, thanks to the farmers' almanac, we seem to have hit it right in the middle.”

Joe Bruce, the supervisor of the lodge's dining area, also acted as the resident mushroom expert Sunday afternoon. He was the guide provided to beginner hunters as they made their ways into the forest. Bruce has been hunting morel mushrooms for 25 years, he said.

“You hunt for trees, not mushrooms,” Bruce said.

Bruce has found more than 14 pounds of morel mushrooms this year already between looking through Pere Marquette State Park as well as his home in Calhoun County. He advised mushroom hunters to search for their prizes around dead elms with peeling bark, sycamores, ash trees and apple orchards.

“Hunting for trees versus hunting for mushrooms is the difference between finding five morels and five pounds of morels,” Bruce said.

He added he left special treasure spots in the forest for potential hunters he said were loaded with more than 50 mushrooms Sunday morning when he stumbled across them.

Franklin said those participating in the massive park-wide hunt would be able to keep all the mushrooms they found. The hunt itself was free as well. A free night stay in the lodge was awarded to the largest mushroom found, the smallest mushroom found and the most mushrooms found.

The staff at the lodge also provided a tip sheet for “the newbie mushroom hunter.” **Advice found in the sheet includes:**

- Wear long sleeves, long pants and tennis shoes due to “sticker bushes.
- Be mindful of ticks

- Look around wet areas adjacent to dead elm trees
- Pluck the mushroom from as low to the ground as possible and tap it with fingers to release spores for next year's hunt
- Place found mushrooms in salty water overnight after cutting them in half to get rid of bugs and hydrate them.

“False” morels were also featured at the event. Those mushrooms are somewhat similar to morels, but are poisonous to humans. Notable differences include an irregular shape of the cap, an outwards bulge and the cap hanging freely from the stem.

If there is any doubt about whether or not the species is a morel, Bruce advises someone cut the found mushroom in half. A morel will be hollow on the inside, but the false morel will have cotton-like white fibers inside.

Mushroom season should continue in the River Bend for about another week.

