

# Looking ahead at the cherry industry

By **KIMBERLY WARREN**

Record-Eagle staff writer

Put on those sunglasses, there's a cherry bright future peeking over the clouds.

Though the past few years have been gloomy ones for the cherry industry, Phil Korson said the market is only going to get better.

"I think there's a tremendous future for the cherry industry," Korson said. "The most exciting thing that we face as an industry is the health benefits work."

Korson is president of the Cherry Marketing Institute, which has been funding research into the health benefits of cherries — benefits, he said, unlike those found in any other fruit.

"It is by far one of the most touted fruits for its therapeutic effect," he said. "The health benefits have given us the opportunity to expand (the industry) in a very new way."

Korson said continued research yields new findings almost daily.

Besides relief from arthritis pain, cherries have also been proven to help in protecting against certain types of cancer, improve eyesight, protect the nervous system and maintain a healthy sleep cycle.

Though some of these advantages are just being discovered, Korson said some of them have been around for years.

"Anecdotal information goes back for hundreds of years about the antioxidant use of cherries," he said. "Ongoing research will continue to tell that story."

Korson said he believes the cherry industry will continue to grow and thrive in northern Michigan — especially because of these health benefits.

"Farmers will only keep farming if it remains profitable," he

said. "And the health benefits will be what keeps them growing — it's a very economically viable situation."

For Korson, the growers are the most important player in whether the cherry market wins or loses.

"It's about the growers," he said. "If they're not successful, we don't have a viable industry."

Northern Michigan is going to continue to be the top producer of cherries, Korson said, because of these growers.

"In northern Michigan, there's tremendous opportunity," he said. "The growers are truly dedicated to this industry, and they are good producers. The fruit sites they have are some of the ideal sites in the world."

"There will be a cherry industry in the Traverse City region for a long time to come."

Korson said much of the work CMI is able to do is because of its partnership with the National Cherry Festival.

"The National Cherry Festival is more connected to the industry than it has ever been," he said. "Their goal is to expand, promote and spread cherries. We are joined at the hip in so many ways — it's a unique partnership that grows in strength every year."

As part of this partnership, Korson said the cherry industry has the National Cherry Queen to thank for helping spread the cherry word throughout the last year.

Kelsey Hewitt has traveled to elementary schools during her one-year reign to educate kids on the benefits of including cherries in their diets, Korson said.

"She's using her talents as a teacher to spread the information and education about cherries," Korson said.

Korson said CMI is not only working locally, but nationally and internationally to get the

word out about cherries.

Currently, Korson said, CMI is working in Mexico, Japan, Korea and Europe to make the cherry market expand abroad.

"We need to maintain and expand markets domestically and abroad," he said.

On the national level, CMI is collaborating with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to increase the use of cherries in school lunches, Korson said.

"We have worked closely with the USDA to sell dried cherries to the school lunch program," Korson said. "We want to give the kids an opportunity to sample cherries."

Korson said kids will be the ones to ensure the health of the cherry industry and to make sure cherries do have a future.

"As I look to the future, it's all about kids," Korson said. "They need to know about cherries — the story of cherries — so they can look for them, buy them and consume them."



**Exhibit looks back at cherry industry**

"Welcome to Cherry Land: The Harvest and the Celebration" is an exhibit from 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. during the festival at the newly renovated Grand Traverse Heritage Center.

Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for children, with those under 5 admitted free at 322 Sixth Street, two blocks off Union Street.

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