

Cherry Connection offers a look at the industry behind the festival

BY SARAH HENRY

Record-Eagle staff writer

Where do all those cherries in pies and tarts come from, anyway? Find out by taking a tour at the Cherry Connection.

The Cherry Connection offers an educational venue for families, adults and children to learn more about the cherry industry, how cherries grow and sample cherry products, said Jennifer Berkey, director of the Cherry Connection.

Shuttles running every 15 minutes from the Visitor Center across from the Open Space to the Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center will be available from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The farm, an extension of Michigan State University, hosts tours of the cherry orchards and provides information about why Michigan is perfect for cherry growth.

"This is where they do research for the best practices for growing cherries," Berkey said.

Some components involved are the bay, which acts as a temperature moderator, the valleys of the hills which protect the trees from harsh winds and the sandy soil.

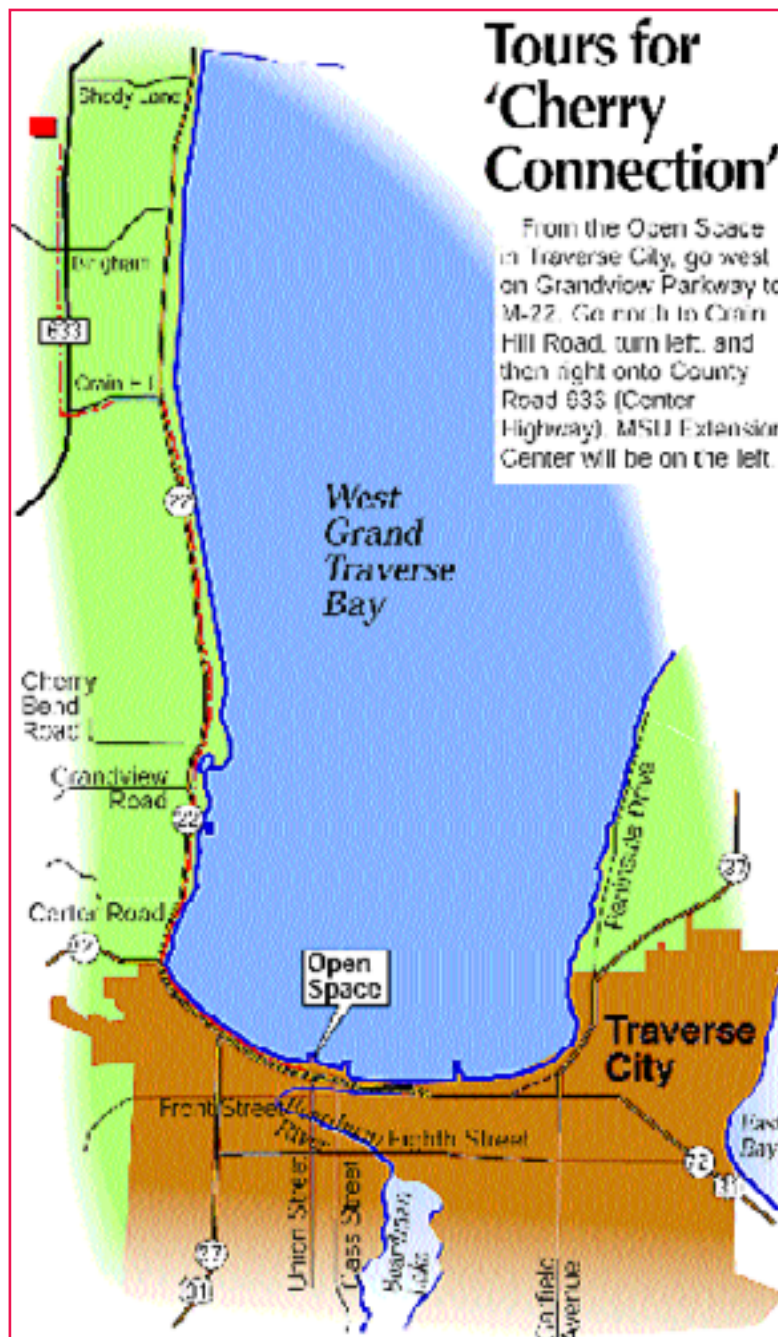
A petting zoo, hosted by Leelanau County 4-H youths will be set up outside. Children can pet the animals while learning about how to care for them, Berkey said. The Humane Society will set up a similar venue, with small animals to pet.

Inside the horticulture center, many different food items featuring cherries will be available to sample. Traditional items include jellies, jams, cherry butters and honeys, but the list doesn't stop there.

"We really try to highlight some of the new and cutting edge products in our region," Berkey said. "They can walk away with a shopping list of cherry products."

Record-Eagle file photo

The Cherry Connection gives children a chance to experience the agricultural industry firsthand.



Visitors can taste anything from cherry hot fudge sauce to cherry mustard to even cherry sausage and pepperoni, called Plevaroni.

"One of my goals is to show Festival-goers they can incorporate cherries into their everyday cooking using local cherry products," Berkey said.

Cherry growing displays will be set up in the building, as well as a daily coloring

contest for children.

At 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 8 a program called the Cherry Story, Get Connected will take place at the horticulture center. Retired Sen. George McManus will speak on behalf of the cherry industry. The program will also honor the Industry Person of the Year, Jim Reynolds and the Cherry Promotion winner, Dave Barrons.

Welcome to the Cherry Festival!

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