

# McPhersons Cultivate A-Maize-Ing Entertainment

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enlighten them as well.

Gretchen spent four months last winter developing and designing the circular maze, doing library research for authentication of her ideas. Three story lines were planned as part of the maze, from the Mayan civilization's history of corn cultivation, then moving into the story of how fruit is grown, and ending with a history of Maple Lawn's 50 years of agriculture production.

Stay on the paths and don't cut through the ribboned sides of the 8,000-plus feet of hand-groomed trails.

Don't cheat, or another group might hit you with their "flag."

Don't hurt the corn!

So, off they would go, small groups of no more than a half-dozen, adults accompanying children and reminding them of the rules spelled out carefully by Hugh McPherson and his employee team on hand for several weekends last fall to oversee the \$6 per person maize-maze challenge. Each group was given a small, brightly colored flag with a long pole, which could be held up in "surrender" if the group caved in and needed rescued from the intricate, criss-crossing conglomeration of paths through the six-foot tall corn.

"They were absolutely great," praised Hugh of the up to 10 employees, mostly in their early 20s, who made up the maze team, helping with everything from first layout to welcoming the last customers. "And they were excited about it."

Getting the corn fall enough in one of the area's worst drought summers was just one of the challenges tackled by McPherson and his maze crea-

tion team.

The design developed by artist Gretchen had to be laid out, block by graph-paper block; when the corn was a few inches tall. Maze-teammates spent nearly a month with hoes in their hands, hoeing out corn plants where the 8,000 feet of paths through two acres were plotted. Those paths were later tilled and raked smooth for easier walking.

During the hottest week of summer, the team constructed an 8-foot-high, 40-foot-long, self-supporting wooden bridge inside the maze; it was a winner with players because they could get a topside view of the layout. A central fountain, around which the entire maze revolved (since all agriculture revolves around and is dependent on water), was designed and constructed with farm-hand materials such as field-stone, black plastic sheeting, and a circulating pump.

Then, when the rains simply refused to come, the McPhersons ultimately made a choice to irrigate the plot from their four-acre pond, so that the corn would reach adequate height for maze use. It was an added expense for what was proving to be an already-then costly field of corn.

"This is fun."

"This is hard."

"I got too hot."

"Is this annual or perennial corn?"

Some visitors came back twice, or more, during Maize Quest's season, which ran Thursday through Sundays, Aug. 2 through Nov. 1. Some came to experience the night maze, made extra difficult by flashlight-navigation through the intricate, wandering pattern, then returned to see if it was any easier by sunshine and daylight.

About 80 percent of the participants, McPherson estimated, took time to read at least some of the dozens of

signs and pieces of historic and educational materials about agriculture that were posted along the four-season-progression of the maze. Each season was marked with its own color of plastic tape strung along the maze paths to keep visitors on the paths. Most stayed inside the ribbons. Some didn't.

"Maintenance was a major effort," said McPherson. As the several weekends the maze was open progressed, the ribbons became increasingly tattered and in need of daily rety-

ing and replacing.

Maize Quest was especially innovative in that McPherson developed and designed a unique stamping system, with sections of the stamper scattered at 17 spots among the maze. As players reached that point in the maze, they stamped that portion of the map on a mapping paper they had been given, using a device which located it at the proper spot. If they collected a stamp from each of the 17 points, they

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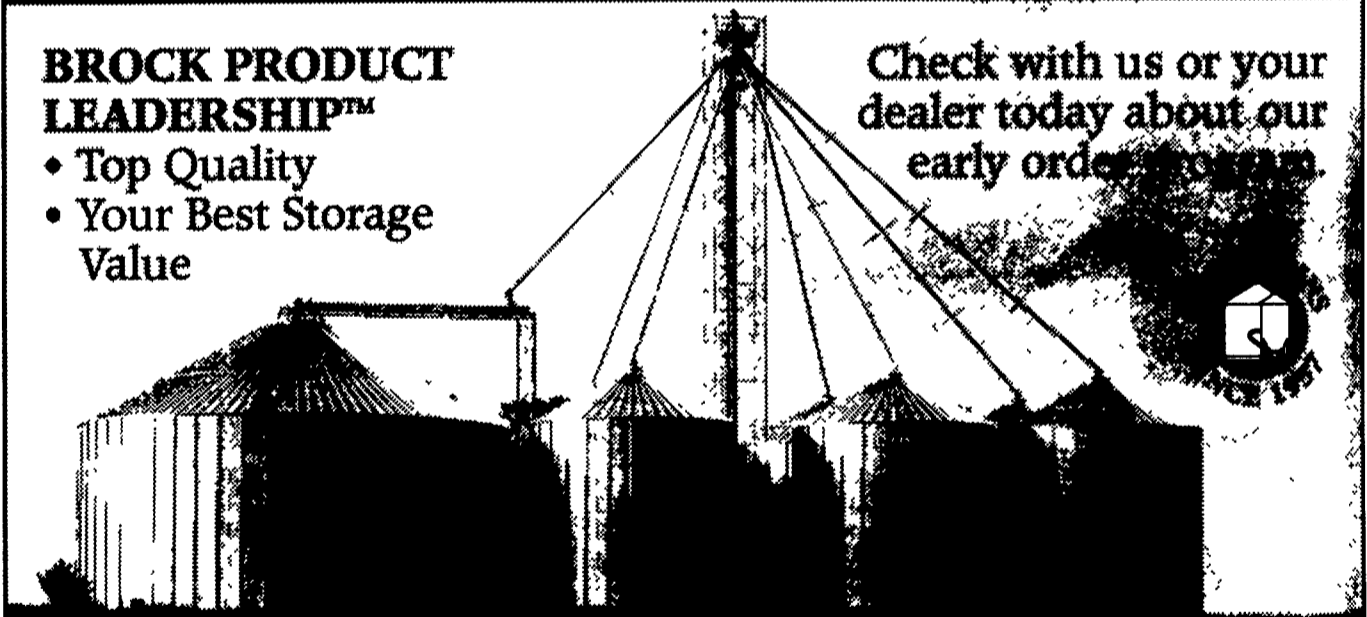
With their "help us" flag in hand, a laughing team departs to see if they can keep from getting lost in the maze of maize.

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