

# Prize-winning pumpkin squashes competition

**Diane Johnston**  
**Speaker Reporter**

**CHAMBERLAIN** – Never mind a flawless tomato or a prodigious hill of potatoes.

When Jeff Warner ponders his garden, he dreams big – really big.

And the Chamberlain Township man has now grown the pumpkin that others only dream of.

His entry in Pumpkifest, held in the Bruce County town of Port Elgin, tallied 1,683.5 pounds.

It was only 50 pounds shy of the winning behemoth grown in Shawville, Quebec.

It's a personal best, topping Mr. Warner's previous plump pumpkin by some 340 pounds.

But it's also the second largest pumpkin recorded to have been grown in Ontario.

It fell short of the 1,684.4-pound record-holder, produced by a Pickering grower in 2012.

"Unfortunately, I was a pound off of it," said Mr. Warner.

Nor was the pumpkin Mr. Warner's only champion.

He produced the event's largest cabbage, at 61.5 pounds. He also grew a 25-pound beet, placing third to the 26.94-pound winner from Georgetown.

He placed first in a mixed category of entries a 44.46-pound celery.

The "Other" category is essentially reserved for "whatever make the judges go 'wow,'" he explained.

But it's the pumpkin that is the apple of his giant-vegetable-growing eye.

"All my energy goes into that," he said.

## ROOTS

Gardening is in his blood.

He grew up in the family business, Aidi Creek Gardens. As a child, he exhibited produce at the Englehart Fall Fair.

Now 39, he became interested in the competitive side of pumpkin growing about half a dozen years ago.

Producing a champion pumpkin begins with research.

Growers study the background of winners online, charting their lineage and trying to avoid those that may be suscep-



**Jeff Warner and his prize-winning, 1,683.5-pound pumpkin are back home at Aidi Creek Gardens. His entry placed second in a competition that drew pumpkin-growing experts from across Ontario and even Quebec. He was also just a pound shy of a new Ontario record. (Staff photo by Diane Johnston)**

tible to rot or other weaknesses.

"You can find the whole family history of the seed you use," he said.

His seed came from Europe, but is linked to the famed Dill Atlantic Giants developed by the late Howard Dill of Nova Scotia.

He typically starts some ten plants, and as time passes focuses on the most promising ones.

After studying other growers' practices, he expanded his pumpkin plot by a third to 800 square feet per plant and extending a little beyond the greenhouse.

"At the beginning, there's lots of weeding," he said.

He manually rolls the greenhouse sheeting up and down, depending on weather and wind.

He pollinates the plant by hand as soon as male and female flowers appear, not wanting to wait on bees.

That could delay a pumpkin by a couple of hours – with two more hours of growth, he said he could have had the Ontario record.

He waters the plants and, on cool nights, covers the growing pumpkins in sleeping bags.

He also keeps a careful watch on vines.

When a plant sends a leaf up, he said it sends a root down. He buries the vines as they develop leaves to pull more nutrients and moisture from the soil for the single pumpkin.

Fertilizer is also key.

He said some growers scoffed when they learned he was using the same commercial fertilizer that the Warners use for flowers.

"I just kind of proved it works," he said.

He credited the weather as a factor in this year's success.

"I'd say the weather was a big help – a lot of sunny days."

He admitted there were nights when he didn't feel like tending to the potential prizewinners.

But if you want to work your way up, "you've just got to do it," he said.

## WEIGH-OFF

Just one week before the October 3 weigh-off, he said the bigger of his two pumpkins rotted and blew apart.

While he was confident that the remaining pumpkin was big, he could only estimate its weight based on different measurements of its size.

Pumpkins also lose weight during transport.

To prevent dehydration, he affixed plastic water bottles to the vine for the 10-hour drive to Port Elgin.

They were three-quarters empty by the time he arrived.

Waiting for the weigh-off was "awful," he said.

But his second place earned him \$2,000.

Considering the cost of supplies and transportation, "I might break even," he said.

But he's also earned recognition for the North.

The fact that he's the northernmost grower in the compe-

tion isn't lost on others in the field.

"They definitely hear about that," he said.

Meanwhile, the prize-winning pumpkin is figuring prominently in photo ops with family, friends and fans.

He plans to salvage its seeds for future use. But it will eventually end up on the compost pile.

He himself is not resting on his pumpkin-growing laurels.

He has no plans to retire from competition.

"I'm still having fun," he said.



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Sometime between August 14<sup>th</sup>, and August 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, an aluminum sea doo ramp was stolen from a property on Lakeshore Road North in New Liskeard.

**FURTHER.** Sometime between the middle of July and the middle of August 2015, a 1995 Canbar boat was stolen from the shore of the Montreal River in Coleman Township. The boat has special markings that say "skin and bones" and "S&B" located on the front and back gunwale.

The investigating officer is requesting assistance from the public to identify the person(s) responsible and to recover the stolen property.

If you have any information involving these crimes or any other crime please call Crime Stoppers at this toll free number, 1-800-222-TIPS. The Crime Stoppers Civilian Board of Directors will pay up to \$2000 for any information leading to an arrest in this case or any other serious case.

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# MUD, STRUTS AND GLORY

## SPEAKER SPORTS

1 B

Wednesday, July 27, 2016

### Stan Martin Memorial offers good, dirty fun

**Diane Johnston**  
Speaker Reporter

CHARLTON – How much mud was there at the twenty-third annual Stan Martin Memorial Mud Bog?

Almost too much.

"We were pumping out since yesterday afternoon," said Nicole Loach, an event organizer, a couple of hours after vehicles began challenging the course July 23.

There have been times in the history of the event that water had to be dumped into the two trenches that drivers try to power through.

But heavy rains hit the Charlton fairgrounds July 21 and 22.

It wasn't until about two

hours into qualifying runs July 23 that New Liskeard's Cody Loach became the first to successfully make his way through the deepest trench.

But the mud-splattered drivers and spectators – who too got caught in the spray – didn't seem to mind.

"It's fun, going through the mud," said Robert Sauve of Iroquois Falls as he tweaked a purple '76 El Camino after its first run.

Overall numbers were down a bit for this year's event, said Loach.

There were more than 100 runs scheduled, down from a

record 150-plus in the past.

A planned truck pull was also cancelled because of low registration numbers.

But staunch supporters of the event returned, with participants coming from as far away as Iroquois Falls and Sudbury.

She herself is a long-time mud bogger, competing in the women's "powder puff" division.

What's the appeal of mud bogging?

"I like the excitement, the mud. I like getting dirty, I like loud trucks," she said with a smile.



New Liskeard's Cody Loach takes a victory lap after becoming the first to successfully make it through the trenches at a mud bog that, courtesy of heavy rain, truly lived up to its name. (Staff photo by Diane Johnston)



Temiskaming Shores area driver Colin Loach waited for a tow to free his vehicle, dubbed "Radical," from the mud. (Staff photo by Diane Johnston)



A 1976 Corvette driven by Ryan Sauve of Iroquois Falls was among the many early entrants that met their match in thick mud July 23. (Staff photo by Diane Johnston)



# Local athlete tees up his future in North Carolina

Steven Larocque  
Speaker Reporter

TEMISKAMING SHORES – With a drive to play golf at the highest level he can achieve, Christian Ethier has taken his game south of the border.

Ethier, 19, is in his first year at Mars Hill University (MHU), a small private school located in the small town of Mars Hill, North Carolina, about a dozen miles from the Tennessee border.

Ethier is on a partial scholarship to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) division two school, majoring in business administration.

“Mars Hill University is a school that suits me because of the small student population, making it easy to meet new people,” he said in a recent email interview.

“Also, the class sizes are similar to high school, averaging around 20 students per class, which makes it easier to learn and ask questions.”

Ethier, who was born in Thunder Bay, has called Haileybury his home the past 16 years.

“The town of Mars Hill... is also very small and is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This area may be difficult to manoeuvre by foot, but the

sights and sounds are amazing. Simply looking out of my dorm window gives me a view of the mountain range.”

He graduated from Timiskaming District Secondary School (TDSS) in 2015 and stayed in school for '15-16 for a “victory lap” because “I was unsure of what path I wanted to pursue in university. Another reason was to focus on my recruiting process.”

### HOW HE GOT THERE

Ethier was a multi-sport athlete, playing basketball at TDSS and minor hockey in Temiskaming Shores, including a year's stint with the New Liskeard Cubs. He took up golf when he was 11.

“Growing up I always enjoyed playing basketball and hockey. Basketball was actually a sport I was very passionate about and still am passionate about, wanting to take my game to the collegiate level and beyond. My passion really took a turn for golf when I was 14 or 15 years old. This is when I realized how quickly I was picking the game up and decided to fully commit to it,” he said.

“I was noticed by Mars Hill University by investing in a recruiting program called the NCSA (National Collegiate Scouting Association) and by

spending three hours on the computer every night, searching for schools who would suit me and vice versa.”

The NCSA is a business that, for a fee, helps students and their families connect with prospective post-secondary schools and coaches.

But it was back on his home turf that Ethier garnered a reputation as a hard-working and ambitious player.

“Golf gives me a motivation to constantly improve and to deal with whatever comes my way,” he said.

“Different from many other sports, golf is individual. Whether you are playing a round of golf with friends or competing in a tournament, each and every shot requires your full attention and it is only yourself who has to accept and deal with the consequences of your play. This is what inspires such dedication to golf, the fact that you can never lose focus on what you are trying to accomplish.”

His goal after school, he said, “is to compete on the tour.”

“Some people may look at hard work as being tiring or difficult. In my eyes, hard work is work that has to be done. It is fun. Learning and implementing ways to improve is what it



Christian Ethier on the course at Reems Creek Golf Club in North Carolina. (Supplied photo)

is all about.”

Getting to this point, far from home with wide open fairways yet to conquer, has been made possible thanks to a supportive family.

“My mentors and greatest influence to this point are my

mom and dad,” said Ethier.

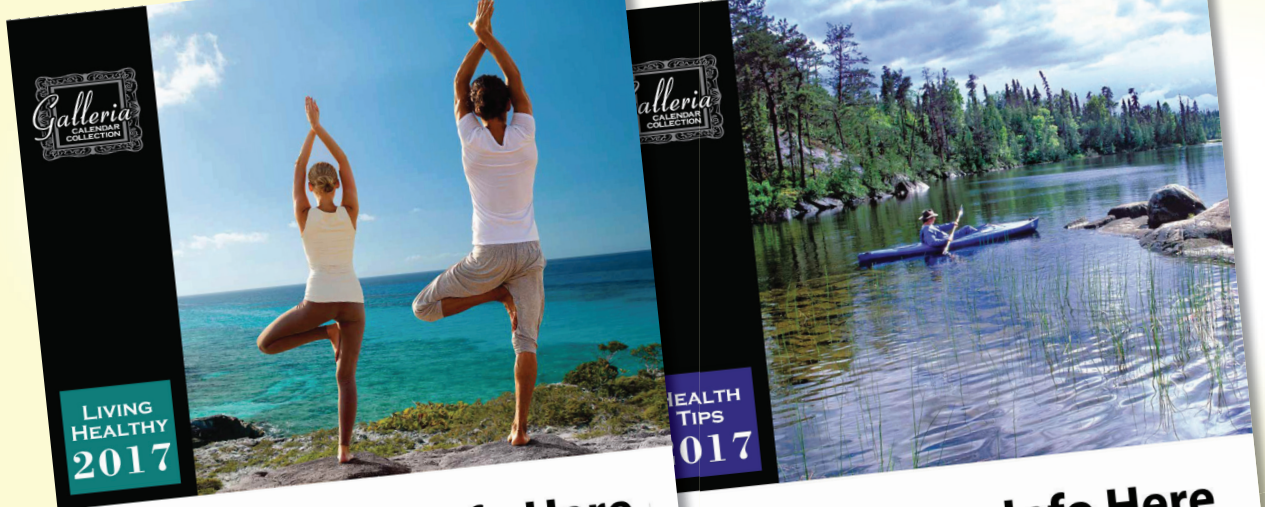
“Without them, I wouldn't be where I am now. They have taught me valuable things and gave me the opportunity to study and play golf in the United States which I can't thank them enough for.”

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