



Robert Muise shows off the dish he's preparing for the Wild Game Evening in Quinan, NS—ducks, stuffed with apples and doused with cranberry wine—as his wife, Marcelle, looks on.

One wild evening (and auction)



This annual wild game event draws an enthusiastic crowd in Southwest Nova Scotia

by Sandra Phinney
Photography: Bill Curry

It's the first Saturday of March. Three hundred people are in attendance at the Wild Game Evening and Auction at Le Club des Audacieux, also known as the Quinan community hall. Locally, the hall is referred to as *Le Club*, and is situated in Quinan, one of the oldest Acadian communities in Southwest Nova Scotia. With a population of just under 400, it's hard to believe that such a wee place can hold such a big event. Even more surprising is the fact that tickets for this event were sold out weeks in advance.

It's all about harvesting bear, moose, goose, duck, deer, sea trout, eel, lobster, porcupine, beaver—you name it—from the wild. If it comes from the wild, you're likely to find it here. It's also about keeping traditions like hunting and trapping alive. And it's about raising money to keep the hall and events operating—and having a walloping good time in the process.

George Doucette, retired teacher and current co-chair of the event, credits Reg LeBlanc with the idea. In August 2006, Reg had tried to host a music festival called *Le Beausoleil*. Despite good intentions and buckets of hard work, it didn't pan out, and the festival was left with debt.

In fall 2008, the topic of fundraising to help eliminate that



From top: Leo LeBlanc and Roy LeBlanc fill their plates at the buffet; Larry Muise cooks up a big pan of fast-fry deer and moose steaks as appetizers for the hungry crowd; eager diners chow down.

debt came up with a group of friends at George's hunting camp. Since most of the locals would have a supply of game in their freezers come spring, what if they combined an auction and dance with a taste of wild food?

The group went for it: they formed an ad hoc committee, set a date, garnered support and donations and printed off 100 tickets at \$10 each. When the day arrived, along with a major blizzard, people still turned out. The event was a sellout.

The following year, the committee printed 200 tickets and upped the price to \$15. "We had to print 25 more tickets, and still we didn't have enough. Some of the locals complained that they couldn't get in," says George. Each year since then, the committee has printed 300 tickets and charged \$20. Before they go on sale to the public in the first week of February, residents of Quinan, all the volunteers, and the people who donate food and auction items get first crack. Then it's a free-for-all; by the middle of February, there's not a ticket to be had.

Celebrating culture and tradition

Robert Muise, co-chair of the Wild Game Evening and Auction is thrilled with the response—including both the interest shown by the general public, and the support from neighbouring communities that donate food and items to the auction. "It brings people together. It's been a great way to celebrate our culture and tradition," he says.

His contribution, aside from being on the planning committee, is to provide baked ducks. He says it's as easy as one-two-three. "I stuff them with apples, douse the duck with cranberry wine my brother makes, sprinkle some salt and pepper on top then bake them for a couple of hours."

Edward Doucette also loves the Wild Game Evening and Auction and does his share of cooking. "Grandfather was a great hunter and I spent a lot of time with him. We always had rabbits, ducks, porcupine and deer meat in our home."

Over the years, Edward's experimented with smoking everything from eel to bear. His favourite recipe lately involves putting hunks of bear into an 11-day pickle of salt, brown sugar, garlic, pickling spice and

water. "After that, I use maple wood and roast it slow, sometimes for the whole day. And now, my son, Joshua, is right into it."

Semi-retired boat builder Leo LeBlanc has hunted since he was 16. In his spare time, when he's not goose or duck hunting or making decoys, Leo loves to cook. His goose dish for the Quinan event was a huge hit last year. He also loves to make duck stew—especially with eiders. "People think they taste like fish, but sea ducks only eat mussels, so they are really sweet."

An event in Quinan just wouldn't be complete without Donna LeBlanc's r purre, or rappie pie—but it's not a really a "pie." It's made from grated potatoes squeezed to a pulp, with hot broth, onion, meat, salt and pepper. Acadians today make it the same way Donna's mother and grandmothers made it—from chicken, duck, clams, goose, pork, deer, moose or rabbit. "My mother often put the head of the rabbit in the corner of the rappie pie. This was considered a treat by some members of the family," she says, with a chuckle.

Phill Blanchard has a passion for porcupines, so one of his contributions is baked porcupine. "I cut it up quite fine and soak it overnight in salted water to draw some of the wild taste out. Then I cook it for about six hours in a slow oven, after I've added lots of garlic, onion, a Teriyaki marinade, and a black bean sauce. It turns out pretty good."

What about the quills? No problem. Phil's worked out a system that takes just seven minutes to skin, clean and gut a porcupine. But, as only about a quarter of the animal is edible, it takes quite a few porcupines to fill up a big roaster for the event. Phil says there's nothing that would keep him from taking part in this event.

And he's not alone. In spite of the temptation to sell more tickets, the committee has capped sales. There simply isn't enough space for more food or more people; they'd have to move out of Quinan, to a larger venue. It would be like taking the "wild" out of wild game—it wouldn't be the same.

No one's complaining, but everyone's watching the calendar to make sure they don't miss the chance to get their tickets for next time.

Deer or Moose Cabbage Rolls

Makes about 20 cabbage rolls

Courtesy George Doucette

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 large | cabbage |
| 2 tbsp (30 mL) | margarine |
| 1 large | onion, diced |
| 4 cloves | garlic, diced |
| 2 | celery stalks, diced |
| 2 lb (1 kg) | ground moose or deer meat |
| | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 1½ cups (375 mL) | cooked rice |

Sauce

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1 28-oz (796-mL) can | tomatoes |
| 1 cup (250 mL) | tomato soup |
| 2 7-oz (213-mL) | cans pizza sauce |
| 2 cups (500 mL) | tomato juice |

Remove the core from the cabbage. In a large pot, steam cabbage to remove leaves; this involves removing a few outer leaves at a time, then returning the cabbage to the pot and repeating this process until all leaves have been removed. Cool leaves.

While cabbage is steaming, melt margarine in a large frying pan; brown the onion, garlic, celery for about 5 minutes. Add meat and cook through. Add salt and pepper and rice; mix well.

Place a couple of spoonfuls of this mixture into each cabbage leaf; roll up and fold the ends over. Poke a toothpick through each roll to hold it together, and place all rolls in a large roaster or casserole dish.

Combine all ingredients for sauce and pour over cabbage rolls. Cover and bake at 325°F (160°C) for 2.5 hours.



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