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U Pick Lane activities attracts visitors



Brad Etheridge stands on the huge hay hill. He said he has seen 50 children clambering on this hill at one time. He agreed to stand on it to give a perspective of its size.

Story, Photos and Videos By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 21, 2016 @ 2:07 p.m.

LEVY COUNTY – A new attraction opened Oct. 1 for people to see and enjoy farm fun in the Williston Area.

In the open rolling farmland near Williston, a parcel of land - about 640 acres, provides for farming and ranching opportunities for the Etheridge family.

The number of cattle on the ranch part of the property ranges between 1,200 and 6,000 head. The cattle are not part of the attraction for the general public, but any meat buyers are always welcome to see where that beef is grown.

On Wednesday (Oct. 19), Brad Etheridge provided a tour of a small portion of that parcel (about 40 to 50 acres). The area between the baptism pond and the watermelon-packing shed (warehouse) is known as U Pick Lane.



One of the monuments to view for a person in the maze and playing the extra game inside the maze.

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This is a view of the smaller maze for the very young children. It is built from square-shaped hay bales.

Etheridge said that he and his wife Shannon, his parents Frank and Nancy Etheridge, and his brother Todd Etheridge and Todd's wife Danielle Etheridge chose to create the attraction, which opened on Oct. 1.

Brad Etheridge, a member of the Levy County School Board, said he saw people at their neighbors' establishment -- Red, White & Blues Farm, which is a blueberry farm. Those visitors would be there for hours, he said, and it does not take that long to pick a bucket of blueberries.

People from urban areas like the cities of Gainesville, Ocala, the Tampa Bay Area and Jacksonville can come to these rural working farms that are open for visitors so they can enjoy the fresh air. Etheridge said his family wants to help others learn about where food comes from -- grown on farms and ranches.

The Etheridge family, he said, is providing a place where, for a \$10 general admission fee at the gate, every person can enjoy a hours of fun at U Pick Lane. Payment can be cash, or credit or debit card.

The general admission includes all of the games and the "corn" maze.

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The Pumpkin Eater monster combine ride awaits passengers.

Children who are 3 years old and younger can enjoy the attraction for free.

The Monsterbine Combine ride is \$5. Named "Pumpkin Eater" this combine is 17-feet, seven-inches from the ground to the platform where there is a 19-seat capacity on top.

This is a functional combine that is used to harvest Bahia grass.

As for pumpkins that people may pick in October, they are priced by size.

U Pick Lane can be found using a GPS and going to the address 2391 N.E. 140th Lane, Williston. Northeast 140th Lane is also named U Pick Lane, by the way, because the Levy County Board of County Commissioners agreed to the request.

This attraction is among the things that draw people to the area, where they may visit other fun places.

U Pick Lane is open each Saturday from 10 a.m. to dusk, and each Sunday from 2 p.m. to dusk.

In October, visitors are enjoying picking a pumpkin from the pumpkin patch or buying some small ornamental pumpkins for \$1.

There is an 8-acre maze of Sudan Grass, which looks a little bit like corn stalks with cattails on top of it. That maze will become cattle food after it completes its lifecycle in its current maze capacity.

Etheridge said participants can finish the maze in 30 to 45 minutes, or it could take an hour and a half – because there is a game within it that can be played as well.

There are stations as a person walks through the maze and they can read the instructions and become involved in the maze even more than just solving it by walking through it.

From the air, the maze is seen to be a bull, the FFA symbol and the Fresh From Florida logo of the Florida Department of Agriculture.

There are other fun things for children. A huge hill of hay has brought joy to scores of youngsters already.

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This is a picture of the feed trough train – absent the UTV that pulls it.

The trough ride is a set of feed troughs that are linked and they have wheels on them. This small train is pulled by a John Deere Gator UTV. By the way, the Etheridge family likes John Deere products.

The corn crib is an eight-foot wide bin filled with shelled corn.

Etheridge said he saw a group of college students in the bin, relaxing as if they were in a spa or a big, round bathtub.

Another place on U Pick Lane where fun-seekers can hit the shelled corn is at the end of a 20-foot long pipe slide. It is made of huge PVC pipe. Children and adults sit on Croker (burlap) sacks and slide down into a batch of corn.



The 20-foot long slide.

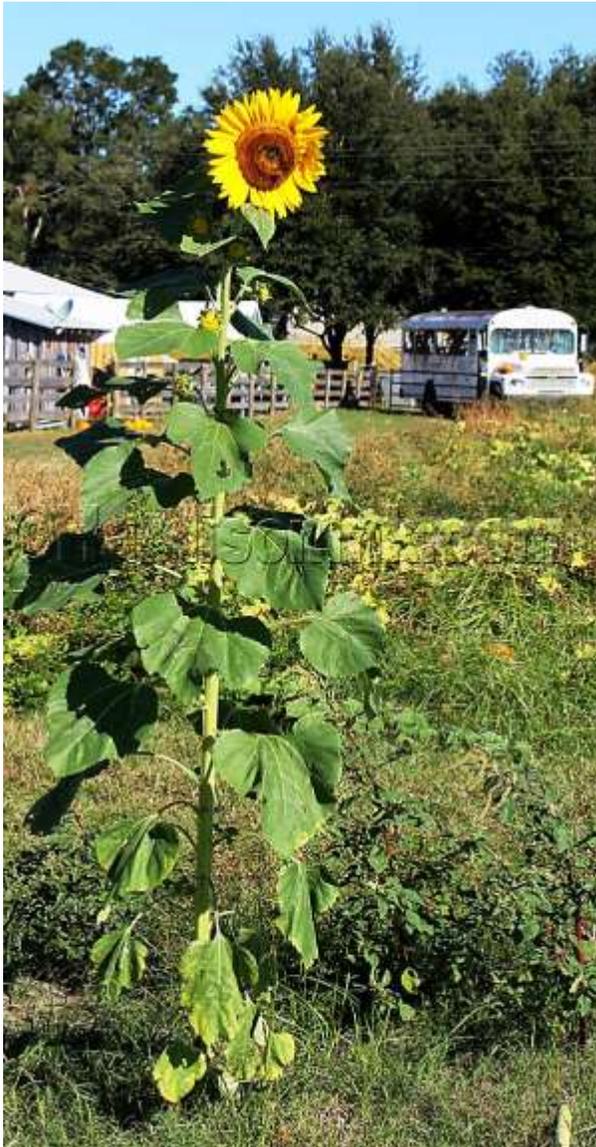
Small corn plants are starting to grow at the entrance to the pipe slide, where those corn seeds have been carried by slide participants who go back to the starting point to slide again.

Another fun activity on the farm is a 250-foot long zip line. Riders travel through the air on the zip line.

While there is a fish pond with a fountain shooting water up at the middle of the pond,



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and the bream and bass come to the top when fish food is scattered on the surface, Etheridge said the fish pond has become a baptism pond too.

The Etheridge family members are Christians, he said. Youth groups from area churches have come to the attraction and there to participate in worship services on the grounds.

Several young people have made the decision to accept Jesus as their personal Savior, and the pond provides a place for full immersion baptism.

Sunflowers are among the plants seen during the past week at U Pick Lane.



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THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Just as the Bible reflects in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (KJV) (as quoted below), there is a time for everything

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

“A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

“A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

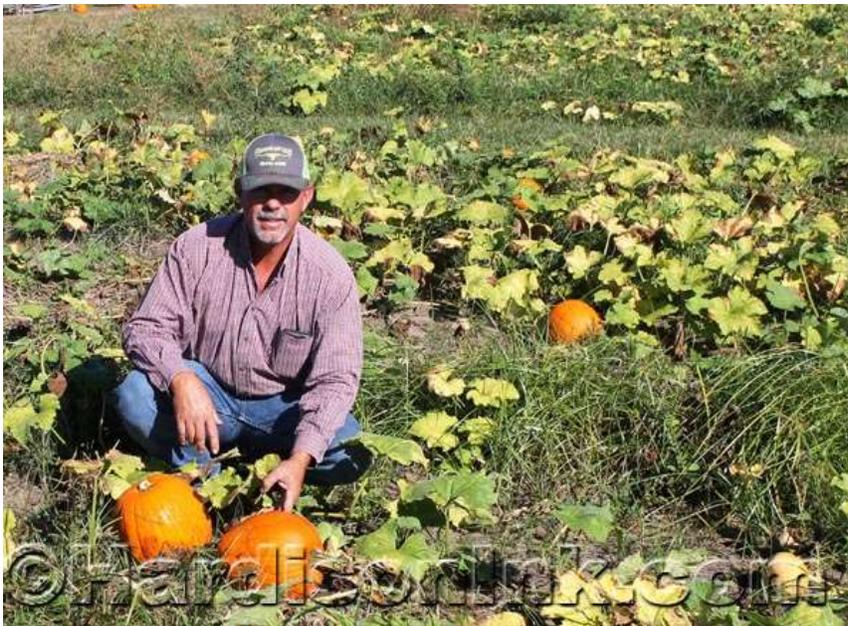
“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

“A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

“A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

“A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

“A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”



Brad Etheridge kneels near a couple of pumpkins.

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PUMPKINS

So this is the time for pumpkins. In the spring and summer, there is a potential for people to come pick tomatoes, green peppers, other types of peppers, squash, cucumbers and any of the many types of spring and summer crops.

Last summer, the new packing shed (metal warehouse) was built, Etheridge said. There were watermelons available for purchase by the public then and there.

Not this December, but in December of 2017, people might be seeing strawberries in the fields of U Pick Lane that will be ripe for the picking, Etheridge said.

One of the key concepts Etheridge and his family hope to convey is that farming and ranching are the sources of food. Chocolate milk does not come from a brown cow. Sugar-frosted corn flakes are made from corn.

The beans in cans are not growing off the shelves of Winn-Dixie, Publix, Walmart, Save-A-Lot or other grocery stores already canned.

Another thing that everyone can rest assured of – is that if this family grows it or raises it, this food is good to eat. Etheridge said he would never grow or raise a product for sale if he and his family would not eat it.



This is a view of the maze from about 18 feet high looking over the maze and toward the watermelon packing shed.

GREAT CONCESSIONS

The concessions at this attraction merit his seal of approval as well.

The grilled hotdogs are the best to be found anywhere, he said. There are also hot boiled peanuts, fresh corn on the cob, snow cones and homemade pumpkin rolls.

These are the very same pumpkin rolls, by the way, that are cooked by Janet Owens.

UNDERLYING FORCE

Just as Etheridge now thinks he understands why he felt moved to create the fish pond in 2004, he feels no qualms about sharing another underlying principle to this attraction.

U Pick Lanes is not an attraction like Disney World. It is a place to enjoy as a family. This attraction shows people a little bit about modern agriculture while providing a place for wholesome fun.

And it is about Christianity as well. All of the Tri-County Area's churches' youth groups have been invited to a Wednesday night service.

On Thursday (Oct. 20), separate from the time when the attraction is open to the general public, more than 200 students from the combined schools of Creekside Christian School (Otter Creek); Riverside Christian School (Trenton); Williston Central Christian Academy and the Williston Homeschoolers Group visited the attraction.

And so there is a time for all things. Saturday and Sunday (after church services) is the time for the general public to visit U Pick Lane.

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The watermelon packing shed (warehouse) is one end of U Pick Lane.