

June

Rosy Rhubarb Festival

Beginnings:

In the early 1990s, two factors in Shedden combined to create a community institution.

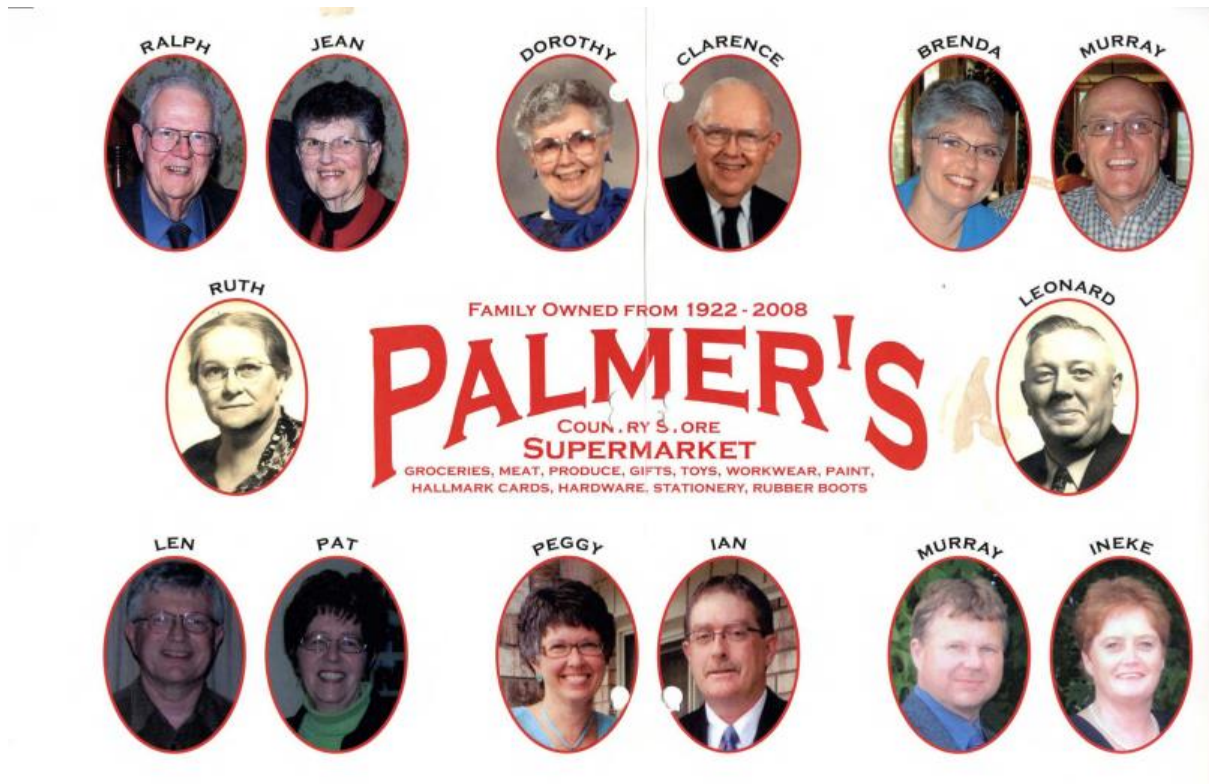
The Shedden Country Club was aging. The long-time facility that had housed Shedden Agricultural Society events and community dances since the late 1950s was in desperate need of replacement.

By the early 1990s, Southwold Township Council was contemplating construction of a new community centre. It was during this period that the idea of a festival to promote the community and serve as a fundraising initiative for a new social hub began to formulate.



The other factor was the number of diverse new businesses emerging that complimented Palmer's Red and White Store, the long standing anchor of Shedden's business community.

Photo: Elgin County Archives



Ralph and Clarence Palmer ran the country grocery, hardware and specialty item business that their parents, Leonard and Ruth Palmer, opened in Shedden in 1922. It was a staple of the community, providing groceries and a friendly atmosphere. Locals visited neighbours while doing their weekly shopping at "Palmer's"

Four generations of the Palmer family had served the community and been active participants and sponsors of local sports teams and community projects.

The store remained in the Palmer family for 86 years, eventually closing in 2008.

In 1983, Gary and Eileen (Koyl) Carr moved from London to Shedden, purchasing a number of properties on the south side of Talbot Road, west of the corner at Union Road. Eileen had grown up in the Southwold community so this was a return to her roots.



The enterprising couple had built and opened “The Village Pantry Boutique” in 1979. The business offered crafts, craft supplies, giftware, antiques, cards and local history books. Eileen managed the business.



The Village Pantry Boutique (left) and The Old School House Tea Room were two of the Shedden businesses opened by Gary and Eileen Carr in 1979 and 1984. Photos: **Elgin Heritage Archives**

The Carrs purchased the former S.S. # 9 Shedden School building and property, converting the structure into “The Old School House Tea Room” which opened in January 1984. Gary Carr’s sister, Nancy Smith managed the restaurant and cooking. The Carrs also made renovations to the former Judge Pro Hardware store and the Shedden Village Square was created with a number of small retail units facing Talbot Road.

ONCE A TREE...
John Smith and
his wife Nancy
with just some of
the products
available at
Once A Tree, lo-
cated in the
Shedden Village
Square.



In 1987, John and Nancy Smith opened “Once a Tree” in the former hardware store. The store featured solid wood products including: tables, chairs, beds, rockers, deacon's benches, armoires, mirrors, picture frames and small gifts. The signature item however, was “Smitty's Li'l Haulers, hand-made beauties that are the Cadillac of wagons”.



Joyce Boughner and Michele Englehart
(circa 1993)

Another active business in the Shedden mini mall strip, “Down Home Deli and Bakery” was now managed by the Smiths’ daughter, Michele Englehart. Along with employee, Joyce Boughner, “The Deli” featured a variety of meats, cheeses and homemade baked goods.

The movement to find a suitable festival opportunity was led by business leaders Gary and Eileen Carr, Ralph and Jean Palmer, John and Nancy Smith and several community volunteers.

“We need a Theme!”

Various themes were pondered by the group.

Zurich had their Bean Festival; Elmira had a Maple Syrup Festival. Brighton’s Apple Festival had operated since 1975. London rolled out Home County Folk Festival and later in the summer, Ribfest.

It was difficult to pinpoint a topic that would be unique to the Southwold community.

Someone on the committee suggested “rhubarb” and a consensus of the group agreed.



Almost everyone had rhubarb growing on the edge of the garden or behind the garage. Rhubarb doesn’t require a lot of maintenance and it comes up every year! Rhubarb is relatively easy to grow, especially in cooler climates like Canada. It’s a hardy perennial; meaning once established it can thrive for 10 years or more with minimal care.

What is Rhubarb?

Rhubarb is a fascinating plant with a unique identity. It's a perennial vegetable, though it's often treated like a fruit in cooking due to its tart flavour. The edible part is the stalk, which ranges in colour from green to deep red, while the leaves are toxic and should never be consumed.

Rhubarb is commonly used in desserts like pies, crumbles, muffins, squares and jams, often paired with sugar to balance its sourness. It's known for its medicinal history in traditional Chinese medicine.

What's In a Name?

Selecting a festival theme is just the first step in crafting a successful fundraising project. To truly resonate with people, the project must have a distinct identity—one that is instantly recognizable. A compelling image and memorable slogan are essential in creating a lasting impression and fostering engagement.

The name 'Rosy Rhubarb' and its logo emerged from a contest won by Joyce Boughner, a lifelong Southwold resident who worked in the “Down Home Deli and Bakery”.

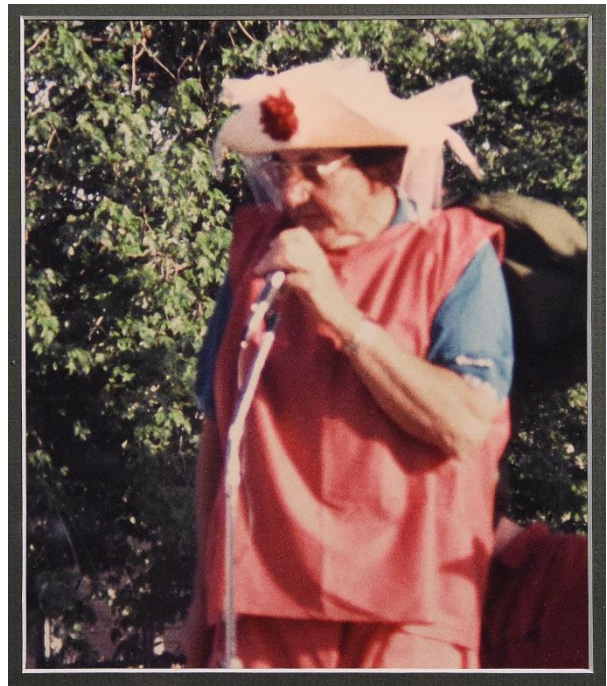
Gary Carr, a founding figure of the festival was chosen as the mascot. A seasoned businessman with a string of successful Shell Gasoline dealerships, Gary brought unwavering determination and infectious enthusiasm to the event, serving as a driving force behind its creation.

Respected by many, he embraced the spirit of the festival wholeheartedly, so much so that he confidently donned a pink costume, complete with a parasol, to parade as a rhubarb stalk!

Eileen Carr and Marie Hutchings used their sewing skills to craft a costume befitting the feature identity of Rosy Rhubarb.

A legend was born!

Gary Carr passed away in 1996. In his honour, The Rosy Rhubarb Costume has been retired.



Introducing “Rosy Rhubarb”



"HI"
I'M ROSY
AND I'M LOOKING FORWARD
TO SEEING YOU
REAL SOON

The premiere Rosy Rhubarb Festival was scheduled **June 11 – 13, 1993**.

The committee set out to craft a program of events that would captivate both participants and spectators alike. Securing traditional Southwold activities and venues was a priority.

The Shedden Ball Park was an obvious choice—softball had been a beloved community pastime since childhood days in Southwold schools. Local leagues thrived and Slow Pitch drew widespread enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, Shedden Soccer programs at the Fair Grounds provided a vibrant summer outlet for youth engagement, bringing together kids, parents, grandparents, and friends. And, of course, where there are kids, there's a demand for food—because let's be honest, everyone loves to eat!

The Ball Park delivered on that front, offering its signature staples: hot dogs and crispy French fries, Popsicles and cold drinks!

The 'Old School Tea Room' was the perfect setting for meals, seamlessly blending tradition with nostalgia. Housed in the former community school just west of Shedden's main corner, it naturally drew past residents eager to relive childhood memories. Adding to its charm, the school's blackboards displayed dining menus handwritten in chalk, while treasured school-day mementos adorned the venue, creating an inviting and sentimental atmosphere.

The old Shedden Fire Hall at the north west corner of the main intersection was booked to host the Rosy Rhubarb Bake Sale and Auction.

Community service groups were contacted. The Fingal Optimist Club took on refreshment duties at the old Shedden Country Club. The International Order of Odd Fellows would tackle a Sunday morning Breakfast.

Bethany United Church would host a "Sunday Morning Church Service".

Community Yard Sales quickly emerged as a popular weekend attraction, drawing visitors from outside the area. The more the merrier! Best of all, this was an event open to anyone in the community, creating an opportunity for broad participation.

Adding to the excitement, Sundance Balloons from London offered tethered balloon rides, lifting patrons up to fifty feet for a thrilling taste of floating on air. For one lucky winner, a draw prize fundraiser promised the ultimate experience—a full balloon ride soaring high above the landscape.

As planning gained momentum throughout the spring of 1993, anticipation buzzed across the Southwold community, setting the stage for a truly memorable event.

Getting the Word Out

In the days before social media, the need to promote Rosy Rhubarb Days was achieved through contacts with local media. CFPL-TV personality Jim Swan was secured as Master of Ceremonies for the opening night of the festival. Jim promoted the event “on air” at every opportunity. The television station also produced a Public Service Announcement, “What’s On” that aired in the weeks prior to the event. Weatherman Jay Campbell gave Rosy Rhubarb a further boost on his nightly forecasts a number of times leading into the big weekend.



Popular BX 93 Country Radio brought their “Roadrunner” Live production Mobile to Shedden for the opening ceremonies. Radio PSAs also ran prior to the big weekend.

The local newspapers, St. Thomas Times-Journal and Dutton Advance ran display ads promoting Rosy Rhubarb.

Palmer’s Red & White Store printed handout circulars for businesses to distribute the agenda of planned events.

Friday, June 11, 1993 - The First Event!

Friday, June 11 was a beautiful spring evening in downtown Shedden. The front lawn of the “Old Schoolhouse Tea Room” had been set up with bleachers and a temporary stage.

Locals flooded the main business section on Talbot Road and trooped to the former school house where many had earned their elementary education.

Friday night shoppers bustled through the Red and White store before stowing grocery bags in their cars and joining the assembled crowd down the street.

The St. Thomas Times-Journal reported on the event...

“Jim Swan (CFPL-TV) was master of ceremonies for the official opening held on the lawn of the Old School-House Tea Room when a program included “Gus Lunn and Friends Country Band”, Malt Mill Morris Dancers and Magic by Jeremy Locke. Horse and buggy rides were also available and a Teen Dance got underway at the Country Club.”



Photos: Elgin Heritage Archives



Rosy Rhubarb (alias Gary Carr) threw out the first pitch to officially start the Rosy Rhubarb Days softball tournament at the Shedden diamond on opening night in 1993.

Twelve teams from Elgin County and London played in the event, part of the village's first annual rhubarb festival activities.

Dressed in the colour for which she got her name and carrying a lovely, pink parasol, the official mascot says she *“may not be the prettiest Rosy through the years, but she's the first”*.

Saturday, June 12, 1993

Saturday morning kicked off with more than 25 families setting up for the community yard sales, while the slow pitch tournament swung into action.

At the Shedden Fairgrounds, young athletes took to the field for the Youth Soccer Tournament, competing in divisions for ages 12 and under, as well as 8 and under.

Meanwhile, the Rhubarb Baking Contest got underway at the Fire Hall, showcasing delicious entries that would later be auctioned off to eager bidders. The competition for the Largest and Longest rhubarb stalks proved both intense and entertaining, drawing laughter and admiration.

For those seeking a different kind of thrill, the tethered hot air balloon rides at the fairgrounds offered a breathtaking ascent—lifting participants 50 feet into the sky for a fleeting taste of flight.

Everywhere visitors turned, rhubarb was the star of the show. Local establishments served up an array of treats, from muffins and pies to ice cream with rhubarb sauce and refreshing drinks, ensuring no one left hungry.

As night fell, festivities culminated in a sold-out dance at the Country Club, where local favourites, Ramblin Fever, kept the energy high and the celebration going strong.



Ramblin Fever

Sunday, June 13, 1993

Sunday's festivities began bright and early with a hearty breakfast at the I.O.O.F. Hall at 8 a.m., followed by the Bethany United Church Anniversary service at 11 a.m., offering a moment of reflection and community celebration.

By the afternoon, the fairgrounds buzzed with activity, featuring a stunning antique car show, a spirited mini tractor pull, and the return of the ever-popular balloon rides, giving attendees another chance to soar.



Photo: sundanceballoons.com



Rhubarb treats remained a hot commodity, with demand soaring throughout the festivities. In fact, nearly every delicious dessert was devoured, a clear sign that attendance had far exceeded even the most optimistic expectations!

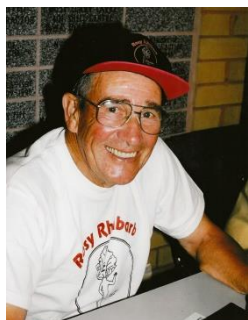
Capping off the day was a sold-out beef and pork barbecue—an incredible value at just \$8 for adults and \$3 for kids aged 5 to 10—bringing people together to enjoy great food and great company.

Rosy is a Success!

By the end of that first festival weekend, the Rosy Rhubarb Committee was exhausted but uplifted—the turnout had been overwhelming, proving that people truly loved rhubarb. It was clear they would need to provide even more of the tangy vegetable for the next event.

Visitors explored everything Shedden had to offer, with cars and trucks lining Highway 3, Union Road, and the town's side streets. Families welcomed loved ones, turning the festival into a heartwarming homecoming filled with laughter and nostalgia.

Most importantly, the community had come together, working side by side to raise funds for a new community centre, reinforcing the spirit of unity and celebration that made Rosy Rhubarb so special.



Lorne Spicer

Rosy Rhubarb Evolves

During the first five years of the Rosy Rhubarb Festival, vending opportunities primarily centred on Shedden's local business community.

Festival-goers could find an array of rhubarb-themed goods, including baked treats, cookbooks, souvenir T-shirts and hats, flower pots filled with rhubarb plants, and various novelty items—many of which were available in local establishments.

As the festival gained momentum in its early years, organizers began sourcing rhubarb from area suppliers to ensure local reserves weren't depleted before eager patrons had satisfied their enthusiasm for purchasing the tangy vegetable. This strategic move allowed the festival to sustain its popularity while supporting regional growers.

BINGO!

While the festival itself generated income, substantial expenses remained, and the goal of funding a new community centre needed an extra boost. In 1995, the Rosy Rhubarb Committee was fortunate to gain access to local BINGO halls, which at the time required registered service clubs and charitable community organizations to operate.

Committee founding members Lorne Spicer, Keith Orchard, and Eileen Carr took the lead in organizing the twelve volunteers needed for each scheduled BINGO duty. The fundraising activity proved highly successful, with the “pot o’ gold” from this popular pastime significantly strengthening Rosy’s coffers!



Keith Orchard

Keith Orchard has dedicated thirty years to BINGO fundraising, noting that in 2025, only two volunteer participants are required to run each session. With annual profits of \$30,000, Rosy Rhubarb continues to give back—every dollar reinvested into the Shedden/Southwold community.

A key goal of the event—funding a new community centre—was proudly realized with the opening of the Southwold Keystone Complex in March 1998. Rosy Rhubarb had become a unifying force, fostering a strong sense of community pride that extended throughout Southwold.



1998



RIBBON CUTTING – Doing the honours to officially open the new Southwold Keystone Complex on March 21st were, left to right: Connie Silcox, Allan Bogart, Elgin M.P.P. Peter North, Ann McLean, Southwold Mayor Perry Clutterbuck, Eileen C. Pat Quin, Glenn Doan, Ralph Palmer and Christine Roberts.

Following the Keystone Complex's completion, the festival's operations shifted from downtown Shedden to the Complex, offering a centralized location that enabled organizers to welcome outside vendors specializing in unique food and craft offerings. Over time, the event evolved into a vibrant country fair, solidifying its place alongside the historic Shedden Agricultural Fair (established in 1854) as one of Southwold's most anticipated and successful annual attractions.



On June 7 2002, festival organizers arranged a special rail service in collaboration with Canadian National Railway, allowing patrons to travel the 9 miles from St. Thomas to Shedden by train. Shedden, having been built around the railway's arrival in 1873, had seen its

tracks become dormant by the 1980s, though occasional specialty runs were still permitted.

Television personality Jim Swan, who continued his role as Master of Ceremonies for the festival's opening festivities, fondly recalled the excitement surrounding the train's arrival:

"I remember we had a delegation meet the train where the old Shedden Train Station once stood. We welcomed the arriving passengers and were carted off to the Opening Ceremonies at the Keystone Complex on a hay wagon!"

Jim McIntyre, a dedicated committee member, supplied the hay wagon and took the wheel of the tractor—a fitting role for a man who would serve multiple terms as Southwold Township Mayor before his passing in 2017."



Jim McIntyre

A New Era

Rosy Rhubarb Festival has steadily moved forward since 1993. Many of the original volunteers have retired or passed away. The spirit of festival founders has been replenished by new volunteers over the years.

New people bring new ideas. A project can get stagnant if not allowed and encouraged to progress.

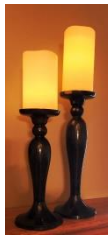
A **Kids Zone** was added, featuring bouncy castles, a Petting Zoo, and various interactive events, creating a vibrant space for young visitors. As today's children grow into tomorrow's parents, this cherished tradition will continue to thrive.





Camping areas have been designated for many years as visitors roll into Shedden and set up a small community adjacent to the festival grounds.

Breakfast has proven to be one of the most popular activities and is now available both Saturday and Sunday mornings. Patrons enjoy a hearty meal of pancakes, eggs, bacon, and more while connecting with friends and neighbors.



The Sunday Morning Non-Denominational Church Service welcomes attendees from surrounding communities, providing a space for those who embrace traditional religious values to gather in fellowship and reflection.



Always seeking new attractions for the festival, Rosy Rhubarb introduced marathon runs in 2024. The response was popular and the event will continue in 2025.

Also new this year is an adult beverage tent with an adjacent extended Seating & Shade Tent! Enjoy a selection of cocktails and mocktails crafted just for the festival!



Through heat waves, storms, and even a global pandemic, the Rosy Rhubarb Festival has stood the test of time. Since 1993, Rosy Rhubarb has contributed more than \$500,000 to community projects and improvements. As a beloved tradition, the Festival remains a FREE event, sustained entirely by attendee donations and the sale of rhubarb products.

In addition to the initial project of helping fund the Keystone Complex, Rosy Rhubarb's influence in the Southwold community can be seen every day.



In addition to spearheading fundraising efforts for the Keystone Complex in 1998, Rosy Rhubarb provided funding to the volunteer Southwold Landscape Committee to create the pergola, War Veterans Memorial, and Memorial Forest, all of which now enhance the park's beauty. The work, completed between 1999 and 2003, transformed the area into a cherished community space. One media pundit even described Keystone Park as 'The Jewel of the Township!'

On September 6, 2012, Rosy Rhubarb proudly hosted the world-famous Royal Canadian Mounted Police Musical Ride. The renowned equestrians captivated an audience of over 2,500 spectators during the unforgettable performance at the Southwold Keystone Complex grounds.





On June 9, 2017, the Southwold community proudly celebrated the official opening of the Southwold Township Library in Shedden. Thanks to Rosy Rhubarb's generous contribution of over \$40,000, this invaluable resource centre now serves as a vital hub in the heart of the township.



Rosy Rhubarb committee members Len and Sharon DeGraw (left) joined dozens of Southwold volunteers in the "Old to New Library Book Chain" transitioning the inventory to the new facility.



Rosy Rhubarb's "People Movers" have become a cherished asset in the festival's fundraising efforts. Primarily used to shuttle crowds during the festival weekend, they also make a festive appearance at the Fingal Optimist Santa Parade each December. For the remainder of the holiday season, these vibrant vehicles add a splash of Christmas cheer to the Keystone grounds, serving as a colourful and spirited decoration.

Traditions

The first Rosy Rhubarb Festival established several traditions that became standard fare over the years. The old adage, "If it ain't broke... Don't fix it!" certainly applies in Shedden.

Rhubarb Sauce

The signature rhubarb dessert treat was introduced at the first Rosy Rhubarb Festival. If you're searching for a sweet treat that's effortless to make, easy to store and a breeze to serve, rhubarb sauce with ice cream is the perfect choice—it ticks all the right boxes!

The kitchen crew responsible for the rhubarb sauce assembled in the kitchen at the Old School House Tea Room to produce the first batches of the sweet treat. After Rosy Rhubarb moved to the Keystone Complex, the sauce was prepared in the new stainless steel kitchen.

Over 30 years since that first taste, Rosy Rhubarb Sauce is prepared and served by Southwold volunteers who stick to the recipe and tradition that inspired the motto:

"It's our Rhubarb Sauce that made us famous!"



Photo: rosyrhubarb.com

Baking Contest & Auction



The inaugural Rhubarb Baking Contest featured an impressive 61 mouth-watering entries, showcasing the community's passion for this beloved ingredient. Local businesses eagerly stepped up to support the event, with Palmer's Red & White store sponsoring the pies, The Old School-House Tea Room backing the muffins, and Down Home Deli championing the 'special desserts'—all made with rhubarb, of course!

The baked goods were auctioned off at 1 p.m. with bids ranging from \$5, all the way to \$140, raising a total of about \$1200.



For many years, the Prize Winning Bake Goods Auction was held on Friday evening and there have been many memorable auctions.



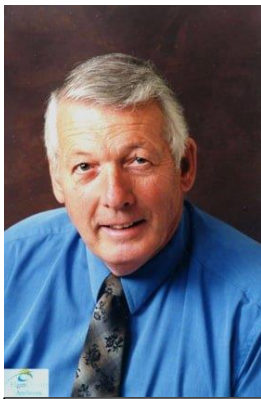
In 1994, MC, Jim Swan (*right*) conducted the auction of prize winning Rhubarb Bake Goods. Also on hand were (*l – r*) Jim McIntyre, John Smith and Alan Brown.

Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives

After relocating to the Keystone Complex several years later, the bake goods auction gained new energy with the arrival of auctioneer Tom Shoebottom. His sharp wit and lively storytelling turned the event into a spectacle, drawing competitive bids from high-level buyers while leaving the audience roaring with laughter.



Tom Shoebottom



Bob McCaig

One of the festival's greatest supporters, local businessman and entrepreneur Bob McCaig, played a major role in shaping Rosy Rhubarb. His generous donation outfitted the Keystone Complex kitchen, and his passion for the festival extended to baking his own rhubarb pies for competition year after year.

Under Shoebottom's playful encouragement, McCaig eagerly outbid all challengers for dessert items. In one unforgettable moment, Tom sold Bob a rhubarb pie for \$600—only for McCaig to donate it back to Rosy Rhubarb, where Tom promptly resold it for another \$150!

Other local business representatives joined in the fun. The auction competition became one of the most popular activities of the Opening Night festivities for many years.

It was the perfect blend of generosity, humour, and community spirit.

Largest and Longest Rhubarb Stalk Contest

Village Pantry Boutique initiated and sponsored the Largest and Longest Rhubarb Stalk Contest which brought 25 entries. Justin Drewitt of St. Thomas was the first contest winner in 1993. The winning stalk of rhubarb measured at 39".



AND THE WINNER IS – Matthew Drewitt, St. Thomas, is pictured with his trophy and his entry, the largest and longest stalk of Rhubarb at Rosy Rhubarb Days. Also pictured are Rosy (Gary Carr) and Denise Riley who assisted in the contest, sponsored by Village Pantry Boutique.

Always a popular event, every competitor seems to have a secret process to ensure their rhubarb stalk is a winner.

The Drewitt family must have found the secret early in the competition. After Justin won the first event in 1993, his brother Matthew copped the prize in the second year of the event!

The Largest and Longest Rhubarb Stalk contest remains a popular event at the Rosy Rhubarb Festival.



Antique Car Show



One of the festival's most beloved attractions over the years has been Rosy Rhubarb's Antique Car Show. Since its inception, car enthusiasts have meticulously polished, shined, and decorated their vintage automobiles, hot rods, pickup trucks, and tractors—proudly displaying anything with wheels!

The event's long-standing organizers, the Fingal Optimist Club—now the Fingal - Shedden and District Optimists have kept the energy high, often setting the mood with iconic tunes from the 1950s and 60s playing over the loudspeakers.

Each year, for one nostalgic Sunday afternoon in June, the sounds of The Beach Boys, Johnny Bond, Ronny and the Daytonas, Jan and Dean, Wilson Pickett, and The Beatles transport festival goers back in time. As they stroll through the Keystone grounds, admiring the classic cars, they can't help but relive their youth, humming along to familiar lyrics:

"It's Fun, Fun, Fun 'til Daddy takes your T-Bird Away..."



Yard Sales

When the founding Rosy Rhubarb Committee introduced Community Yard Sales in 1993, participating families were charged a modest \$5 fee to set up sales tables on their driveways and front lawns. Official counts showed 25 families paid the fee, though actual participation was likely much higher.

It quickly became clear that yard sales were a beloved summer weekend tradition. After the first year, the fee was dropped, allowing even more residents to take part.

The shopping frenzy began early Saturday morning, with vehicles lining the roads in and around Shedden. One resident, attempting to leave for work, barely had time to start his car before an eager bargain hunter pulled into his driveway and dashed across the street to browse a neighbour's display!

The excitement wasn't limited to Shedden. Savvy Southwold residents from nearby villages and rural homes along Union Road and Talbot Line seized the opportunity to clear out used toys, tools, furniture, clothing, and collectibles—adding to the bustling marketplace that defined Rosy Rhubarb Weekend.

By the end of the day, it was clear—everyone had a great time, and the tradition was here to stay!



Entertainment

From the time the “Gus Lunn and Friends Country Band” took the make shift stage in front of the Old School Tea Room on opening night in 1993, a tradition of variety entertainment has prevailed for Rosy Rhubarb.



Festival organizers acquired and converted a used truck trailer into a stage providing a useful location for feature performances.

Live music, dazzling performances, and non-stop fun! From local bands, magicians, community groups and talented dancers, there's something for everyone to enjoy.



Vendors

Craft, manufacturing and specialized artisan vendors, food trucks and many more groups display and sell their wares. Fresh homemade rhubarb sauce & pie and ice cream, rhubarb salsa and jam along with rhubarb plants and fresh stalks are readily available.



A walk through the Vending area is a must for festival patrons!

Vendor space is limited to 100 spots, and eager participants submit their requests early each year due to high demand!

Rosy Rhubarb – Little Known Trivia

The Battle for Ontario's Rhubarb Capital

Both Eagle Lake and Shedden have proudly vied for the title of 'Rhubarb Capital of Ontario.'

In 1993, the council of Dysart et al, a municipality in Haliburton County, officially bestowed the honour upon Eagle Lake. In 1994 Elgin MPP Peter North issued a proclamation recognizing Shedden as the rightful holder of the title—an accolade even noted by Wikipedia!

The friendly rivalry took a spirited turn in June 1995 when representatives from Eagle Lake traveled to Shedden to take part in the Rosy Rhubarb Opening Ceremonies, solidifying the camaraderie between the two communities.

In embracing this shared distinction, Dysart and Southwold have become the true beneficiaries of the competition. The unwavering dedication and volunteer efforts behind these claims have fostered excitement, joy, pride, and a sense of purpose—leaving lasting benefits for both municipalities.



A Sign of Success

Following the festival's growing success in the mid to late 1990s, Rosy Rhubarb was granted permission to install promotional signs at the entrances to Shedden, proudly marking the town's connection to this beloved tradition.

Lorne Spicer, a founding committee member and well-known Southwold volunteer, seized the chance to prank his wife, Rosa, by discreetly swapping her face onto a sign posted directly across from the Spicer family home at the Union Road entrance to Shedden.



The family delighted in the joke for several days before Rosa finally spotted her own likeness staring back at her!"



Rhubarb Favourite: A Saucy Tradition

For the very first Rosy Rhubarb Festival, the famous sauce was lovingly prepared in the kitchens of Jean Palmer and Sandy Orchard, yielding just three pails of its delicious, tangy goodness.

The overwhelming response to the festival led to an increased production of sauce the following year.

Once the Keystone Complex kitchen was built, the operation transformed into a true "mass production" effort, turning sauce-making into a spirited and celebratory event for volunteers.

Today, these kitchen wizards whip up an impressive 30 pails of Rosy Rhubarb Sauce, keeping this cherished tradition alive!



The Caped Crusader Loves Rhubarb



In June 2018, Gotham City was left temporarily undefended as an original superhero headed the Batmobile to Shedden. It appears that Batman likes rhubarb sauce!

Rosy Rhubarb welcomed the Caped Crusader who became an immediate favourite with the kids attending.



Train to Rhubarb Glory



On June 7, 2002, Rosy Rhubarb welcomed the St. Thomas Community Railway to Shedden, marking a memorable moment for the community. Videographer Charles Beckett captured the scenic journey from the St. Thomas CASO Station to

Shedden, featuring a lively group of Rosy's fans on board. We sincerely appreciate "Railpast" for preserving these cherished memories by sharing the footage on YouTube. This video stands as a tribute to the event, allowing viewers to relive the experience.

(CTL + Click on link to view)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gspNLJPSHII&list=PLrsxb_fX7ZEAnOZJjAiKG_4an2etHo9K3&index=7



Stamp of Approval



On the morning of June 13, 2003, Postmaster David Vince anticipated a stir as he opened the Shedden Post Office at 8:30 a.m. That day marked the launch of a special, personalized postage stamp celebrating Rosy Rhubarb Days, featuring Rosy herself. The stamp's release added a unique touch to the festivities, delighting locals and collectors alike.

Canada Post had personalized postage stamps; valid stamps with a “blank” middle. Anyone could purchase via Canada Post, personalized small labels for the middle of the stamp by sending in a picture which was miniaturized and printed on a label that could be affixed on the valid stamp.

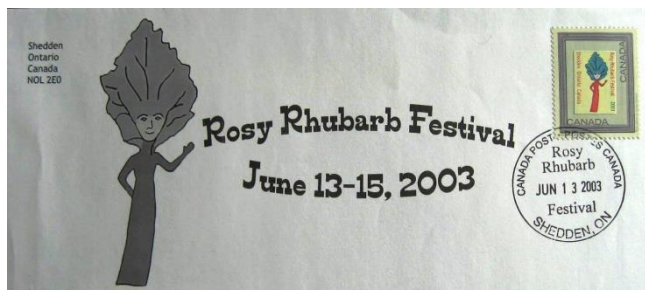
In 2003 and 2004 Shedden Postmaster Vince ordered a quantity of the Rosy Rhubarb personalized postage stamps. They were sold as unused stamps, or on a special philatelic cover with a “cancel stamp”.



Postmaster Thea Mills was able to get Canada Post to create a commemorative Rosy Festival “cancel” in 2020. This cancel is available for use upon request at any time even today!

A full list of commemorative “cancels” is documented by Canada Post. From this list philatelic cancel collectors around the world have sent

requests to the Shedden Post office to acquire a copy of the cancel, usually on a self-addressed envelope that they’ve sent in to be cancelled with the Rosy commemorative cancel.



Rosy is a Star!

Rosy Rhubarb was introduced to Canadian and international newspaper readers when a feature article was published in the Toronto Star on June 16, 2004.

Stan Lidster, then Deputy Mayor of Southwold, shared his views on his difficult but delicious task as judge for the Rosy Rhubarb Baking Contest.



Stan Lidster, shown in a decorative Shedd rhubarb patch, had the delicious task of judging the rhubarb baking contest during Rosy Rhubarb Days. He's also deputy mayor of the Township of Southwold.



Sherry Doxtator baked this year's blue ribbon rhubarb pie. She's shown here at her Oneida of the Thames First Nations home.

Sherry Doxtater (*left*), a resident of Oneida of the Thames First Nation, garnered recognition for her award winning Two Crust Rhubarb Pie at the Rosy Rhubarb Festival in 2004.

Fingal pie maker Rosemary Player (*below*) showed off her Rhubarb Delight Dessert, one of the entries in the 2004 Rosy Rhubarb Baking Contest.



Rosemary Player of Fingal poses in her patch with a freshly baked Rhubarb Delight. Rhubarb is mixed with strawberry Jell-O and poured into a baked crust.

Over 750 pies are sold each year at the Rosy Rhubarb Festival. Hungry visitors can purchase whole pies or by the slice!

Rosy's Recipes

As the Rosy Rhubarb Festival gained popularity, requests for award-winning treat recipes poured in. While some chefs kept their baking secrets close, Rosy happily shared hers!

In 1994, the first cookbook was published, featuring cherished rhubarb recipes enjoyed by Southwold families for generations. Since then, three volumes have been released, preserving the town's sweet traditions.



RHUBARB SAUCE

Louise Collard

1 L fresh rhubarb or 600 g pkg frozen rhubarb	25 mL cornstarch
175 mL sugar	50 mL water
250 mL water	15 mL lemon juice
	2 mL vanilla

Cut fresh rhubarb in 3 cm/2 inch pieces. Combine sugar and 250 mL water. Bring to a boil and boil 5 minutes. Add rhubarb and simmer until almost tender, about 5 minutes. Combine cornstarch and 50 mL water. Add to rhubarb mixture; stir and simmer until clear and thickened. Blend in lemon juice and vanilla. Chill. Makes 800 mL.

Slogans



Rosy Rhubarb’s most recognized slogan came about by chance. In the festival’s second year, organizers decided to order T-shirts to create a unified look for volunteers. The shirts were purchased from Pete’s Sports in London, a business specializing

in team uniforms, crests, sports equipment sales and repairs.

As the design took shape, the artist needed something to balance the image and lettering. The sales representative—most likely Larry Janes, the store’s current General Manager—called Shedden with a suggestion. And so, the now-iconic slogan was born: ***“It’s Our Rhubarb Sauce That Made Us Famous”***.

The second slogan, which continues to draw attention, is proudly displayed for motorists passing through Shedden. With



approval from Southwold council, Rosy Rhubarb graciously requested a message encouraging drivers to slow down as they enter the community.

The result... a charming and memorable expression from Festival Co-Founder John Smith: ***“Slow Down and Listen to the Rhubarb Grow”***.

The Mural

In October 2021, artist Candy McManiman began work on a mural. Her canvas was the wall at the Keystone Pavilion, in Shedden.



In addition to the railway theme inspired by Shedden's railway heritage, a certain famous Southwold vegetable became a presence in the artist's creation.



Rosy Says “We have big plans!”



Ron Carmichael

Rosy is intending to be around for many years to come! She will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of the residents of Shedden and Southwold Township to make this area one of the most beautiful and fulfilling places to live and play.

There are plenty of projects under consideration.

Projects on the horizon include:

- Co-sponsor new LED sign at Keystone entrance at Talbot Line (2025)
- Replace bench in Keystone Playground (2025)
- Continue annual \$5,000 commitment to Keystone landscaping & maintenance PLUS additional \$5,000 in 2025 for Memorial Forest Management Plan (2025)
- \$10,000 commitment toward Splash pad (at Southwold Council discretion)
- Protective overhead SAIL CURTAINS at Keystone & Corsley Park (TBD)



Thank You Rosy!

The Rosy Rhubarb Festival has enriched the Southwold community for decades. What began as a humble initiative in 1993 has blossomed into a thriving annual tradition, thanks to the dedication of Southwold's volunteers. Their commitment has forged an enduring legacy that continues to shape and strengthen our community.

The spirit and vision of co-founders Ralph and Jean Palmer, Gary and Eileen Carr, John and Nancy Smith, along with the early volunteers, still resonate in Southwold today. Their passion and generosity laid the foundation for this beloved festival, inspiring new generations to carry the torch forward.

As with any community organization, sustaining success relies on welcoming new volunteers to keep the festival vibrant and evolving. We encourage the people of Southwold to lend their time and talents by joining one of the township's most treasured initiatives.

Long live Rosy Rhubarb!



References:

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the **Elgin Heritage Archives** and the **Rosy Rhubarb Committee** for generously providing the materials and images that made this historical retrospective of the Rosy Rhubarb Festival possible. This tribute has been carefully crafted in celebration of Southwold Township's 175th anniversary, honouring the festival's rich legacy.

The personal recollections of original organizers—Keith and Sandy Orchard, Michele Englehart, and Joyce Boughner—were invaluable in reconstructing the early years of the festival. Additionally, Ron Carmichael's contributions helped refine details from the most recent celebrations, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of this cherished tradition.

The following resources have been utilized and are equally appreciated:

<https://www.rosyrhubarbfestival.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/p/Rosy-Rhubarb-Festival>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhubarb>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/rhubarb>

<https://www.tasteofhome.com/article/what-is-rhubarb-plus-how-to-cook-it/>

<https://www.canadapost-postescanada.ca/cpc/en/personal/pictorial-cancels.page>

<https://www.escf.ca/scholarships> (Bob McCaig Photo)

<https://lfpres.remembering.ca/obituary/tom-shoebottom-1081854540>

<https://www.sundanceballoons.com>

<https://www.thecreativebite.com/rhubarb/>