

The Patriot Ledger

Families fall for colorful foliage at Blue Hills estates

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The Patriot Ledger

Posted Nov 4, 2018 at 3:19 PM

Updated Nov 5, 2018 at 12:32 AM

MILTON -- With fall foliage just about at its peak, three historic estates in the Blue Hills opened their doors this weekend for visitors to enjoy the scenery along with some fall activities.

The properties, the Eustis Estate and the Mary Wakefield Estate in Milton and the Eleanor Cabot Bradley Estate in Canton, held the same event last year. The tour included a viewing of the grounds and gardens, crafts for children and other activities, such as face painting, scavenger hunts and outdoor games for families to enjoy.

The Wakefield Estate tour included a scavenger hunt for children, which enlisted kids to find various leaves and sculptures on the property, along with guided tours through maze-like gardens. Adults sipped hard cider, and children were treated to homemade caramel apples by the estate's Executive Director Mark Smith.

Leaf peepers flocked to the properties to get a glimpse at the spectacular display of red, orange and yellow hues on trees.

"We time this event to be at the peak of fall foliage to showcase the estates at the peak of fall color," Smith said.

Adriana Veliz of Rockland was at the event with her camera in hand, ready to capture some of the colors of the autumn leaves.

"I just wanted to check it out," she said. "Check out all the trees and the foliage, peep some leaves."

The whole weekend is a fundraiser for the three properties and their educational programs, Smith explained.

“Our whole mission was around experiential education and environmental education,” he said.

Mary “Polly” Wakefield owned the estate and lived there for most of her life. When she died in 2004, she left the estate in a trust so that it could be preserved and used for community engagement and education. Wakefield was an environmental advocate as well as a trained landscape designer and horticulturist. The Mary May Binney Wakefield Trust works to carry her legacy and ensure that her vision for the estate is carried out.

For Smith, the highlight of the event is “just to see these kids out enjoying nature the way it should be and not inside focused on screens,” he said.

Alissa and Matthew Keegan, Jamaica Plain residents, were at the garden estate with their 4-month-old daughter, Lizzie.

The trio took in the scenery and explored the grounds, enjoying an afternoon of what both Matthew and Alissa called “beautiful fall weather.”

“It’s the perfect day,” she said. “My favorite part was the domesticated rooster that greeted you at the entrance.”

Nina Culbertson, a Milton resident, was driving home with her daughter, Isla, 3, when she spotted a sign for the event along the side of the road. On a whim, they decided to stop and see what was going on at the estate.

“It’s the perfect fall afternoon,” Culbertson said. “The kids’ activities are awesome. The little scavenger hunt for animal statues is great. It’s just the perfect fall day.”