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Francis Groeters of *Catskill Native Nursery* sells blueberry plants each year and shares his knowledge of the native plants of the Catskills and Shawangunks. Heidi Wagner of *Sam's Point Preserve* debuted a photographic exhibit of the huckleberry pickers at the first festival, and the idea of a land conservation expo, with emphasis on the Shawangunks, was born. *Sam's Point Preserve* (The Nature Conservancy) and *Minnewaska State Park* return this year, as well as newcomer, the Open Space Institute.

These three entities were vital to the preservation of approximately 15,000 acres in our Town of Wawarsing. The NYS DEC is invited as well as sportmen's groups and *Save the Ridge. Shawangunk Ridge Coalition* and NYNJ Trail Conference will no doubt point out that Wawarsing is indeed the Catskill Shawangunk Gateway, the future crossroads of the **D&H Canal Rail Trail & The Long Path**.

Though the Farmers' Market didn't return for its third season (yet!), we resolved to keep the festival going with our sponsor since 2002, the **Ellenville-Wawarsing Chamber of Commerce**. At the same time, the **Chamber** helped us plan for **Ellenville Market Square**, a permanent festival and outdoor market site for downtown Ellenville. Marc arranged for Bob Lusk, a local musician, to perform his Catskill Mountain and Hudson Valley songs, as well as some tunes that Marc had written about huckleberry picking.

When the third Saturday in August arrived cold and rainy, it was the music that turned that festival into a big party at the alternate site, the *Ellenville Public Library*. (I even saw a librarian dancing!) The *Cragmoor Historical Society* ran the bake sale, and *Mohonk Mountain House* donated blueberry-filled cakes and pies, served up by the **Ellenville-Wawarsing Chamber of Commerce** volunteers.

A shuttle bus brought guests of the *Nevele Grande*

Resort, and would even take the hardest festival-goers to **Sam's Point**. (The Ulster County Legislature and Cynthia Ruis at U.C. Rural Transportation supplied the bus.)

Mountain Wings was not able to display a hang glider due to the rain. (But we hear that they plan to come this year!) Shawangunk Mountain exhibits and local arts & crafts lined the library Community Room, and the festival was packed, despite the cold, rainy weather.

I couldn't have been happier when Karen Osterhoudt, former president of the **EWCOG**, suggested having the long-running **Harvest Music Festival** on the same day as the Blueberry Festival, with the entire day being blueberry-themed.

The **Festival Committee** has been laboring hard since last winter to create a day of fun for both locals and visitors. Chairperson Dianne Turner has taken on this project like a second job, and **Chamber** President Mark Craft and the other **Chamber** members have supplied us with everything we need to make this a great day. Dozens of "Friends of the Festival," our local businesses, have generously opened their wallets to pay for the many features at the event.

Two new features this year are Dr. Heinz Meng, who will bring a peregrine falcon, and the Inner Wall's new climbing wall.

Finally, we take no credit for the rare opportunity to see Mars at its closest point to the Earth in 50 years, around the time of the festival. How tantalizing it will be someday when someone standing on Mars looks up into the night sky, back toward home, and sees that juicy little wild blueberry up there seemingly just beyond reach.

Come to the **Shawangunk Mountain Wild Blueberry & Huckleberry Harvest Festival, Saturday, August 23rd**, and celebrate the history, culture, and future of Wawarsing. 