

Shawn Adler of The Flying Chestnut New Documentary

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Grey County chef and filmmaker create 'Forage' documentary

SCOTT DUNN

A Eugenia restaurant chef is featured in a series of five-minute documentary shorts called "Forage," shot by a filmmaker raised in Markdale.

The camera follows Shawn Adler over 14 episodes as he forages for an ingredient in the forest and elsewhere, then makes something with it that you could make at home, Toronto filmmaker Jesse McCracken said by phone recently. "I'm really happy and proud that I am able to showcase some of what's going on in Grey County," he said. "It just felt really good to do a project here and help showcase its beauty a little more."

He shot the episodes, while co-creator of the series, Sam Larson, directed them.

McCracken left Markdale about 10 years ago, studied film production at Humber College, and has been working in the film industry in Toronto since, he said.

His 2017 documentary, Motel, which profiled an old Niagara Falls motel converted into affordable housing, its tenants and managers, was screened at Toronto's Hot Docs festival. CBC bought and periodically shows it on its documentary channel, he said.

A few Forage mini-episodes are available on CBC Life, an online CBC channel. In spring, a compilation of seasonal Forage shorts will be featured on Gem, CBC's online streaming service. They're also found on YouTube here.

Similar seasonal compilations will be shown of Adler's outings in summer, fall and winter on Gem too over the course of a year, McCracken said.

Adler opened his Flying Chestnut Kitchen restaurant in Eugenia almost 10 years ago. He used to run The Flying Spatula restaurant in Flesherton, which he sold three years ago. He also spent five years running the cafeteria at Chapman's Ice Cream in Markdale.

He opened the Pow Wow Cafe, in downtown Toronto's Kensington Market three years ago too. There he offers native "comfort food" including Indian tacos, scone dogs and more, just like he grew up eating at Southern Ontario powwows.

He said his menus use locally sourced foods as often as they can, including seasonal foraged produce which was either found by Adler or one of his forager friends.

Adler said he learned about foraging for edible plants from his mother, an Ojibwa member of Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation, an

hour-and-a-half drive northwest of Thunder Bay.

He never lived there; he grew up in Orangeville. But he and members of his family would boat in and stay at a cabin on the reserve, where he'd fish for pickerel.

He spent summers in his youth with his mother and grandmother, who spoke Ojibwa, in their trailer at Neyaashiinigmiing, also known as Cape Croker, on the Bruce Peninsula. His father's side of the family is Polish and Jewish, he said.

In the Forage series, Adler goes hunting for wild leeks, fiddleheads and crab apples, and goes ice fishing. In one episode, he forages for wild edibles in a lawn, rather than a forest. "The idea is there's wild edibles everywhere, you just have to know where to look for it."

He found lambsquarter plants in Toronto, puffball mushrooms, wild ginger, choke cherry and burdock root, which he fried like a french fry. The foraging was done mostly around Grey County.

"It was a good opportunity to bring ingredients that I just take for granted," he said. "I've said it before, a walk in the bush to me is like I see food. I think other people see nature."

Postmedia Network

Thanks Jess & Gail.

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Eugenia chef Shawn Adler, left and director Sam Larson, shooting an episode of Forage, a documentary about hunting for wild edibles and what can be done with them, shot in Eugene.

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Eugenia chef Shawn Adler with Forage web series documentary co-creator Sam Larson on a lake near Markdale.

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