



The Mitchell family (Ben, holding Lucy, and Clara) venture to Traders Point Creamery in Zionsville, Beasley’s Orchard in Danville and the Terre Haute Children’s Museum.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FOCUS

Destinations Educate and Entertain

By Charlee Beasor

I’m not sure who was more excited by this particular assignment – me, or my children.

This story – using my own first-hand experiences at three family-friendly locales in and around Central Indiana – is one of my all-time favorites.

My husband and I and our two children, Clara (3) and Lucy (1), spent back-to-back weekend afternoons at Beasley’s Orchard in Danville, followed by Trader’s Point Creamery in Zionsville. Later, the girls and I ventured on a weekday to the Terre Haute Children’s Museum.

Beasley’s Orchard

Beasley’s Orchard started as Milton and Irene’s family farm and small orchard in 1946. It is a Hendricks County staple today. The orchard grows 21 types of apples on 4,000 trees; it includes a 15-acre pumpkin patch, and all of the Hoosier fall festivities a family could want.

We visited on Halloween and despite the cold temperatures and sprinkles throughout the afternoon, the parking lot filled up quickly and a steady stream of patrons soaked up the last vestiges of October.



While I went to find the owner, Clara enjoyed climbing to the top of a hay bale mountain and both girls were enthralled with scooping thousands of dried corn kernels in a sandbox turned cornbox.

On the porch of the 150-year-old Civil War-era barn that houses the produce market in the front and the apple packing and cider mill in the back, I found Calvin Beasley, operations manager and third-generation Beasley to run the family business.

Beasley acknowledges a two-fold mission: tourism and agriculture education.

"We are a fully-operating farm. Our location is vital; we're within an hour drive of Indianapolis. That is very useful for us," he offers.

On busy weekends, Beasley notes that the orchard pulls in about 4,000 people a day. Numbers that high have maxed out the infrastructure, he acknowledges; adding, "That's not a bad problem to have."

Beasley was waiting to greet a group tour while we spoke. Private group outings can be customized with wagon rides, bonfires, apple cider refreshments and other "add ons." Later, I saw Beasley himself driving the tractor that was hauling the wagon full of guests.

While we waited for a tractor to take our own hayride, I spoke with Heidi, Jon and Chloe Pyron of Indianapolis. Halloween was Chloe's third birthday, and they were celebrating by picking out a "big" pumpkin, at Chloe's request.

"We went to a different pumpkin patch (recently), and they were all out of pumpkins, and she said she wanted a bigger pumpkin than the ones they had at the grocery store," Heidi tells me.

It was their first time visiting Beasley's. "I'd like (coming here) to be a tradition, and it's extra special since (Chloe's) birthday is on Halloween," she adds. Later, I saw the pumpkin Chloe made her dad lug to the wagon, and it was indeed a very big pumpkin.

Between all the excitement, warm winter clothing and a just-bumpy-enough wagon ride back to the produce market, Lucy was lulled to sleep. Clara and I went into the store to buy some apples and have an apple cider slushy. Altogether, we paid about \$30 for our afternoon of pumpkins, apples and fall fun.

And then Clara dumped her apple cider slushy all over herself on the way home.

Traders Point Creamery

It dawned on me as we began exploring Traders Point Creamery on the northwest side of Indianapolis that this was the first animal farm Clara had ever experienced.

Naturally, her relentless question was: "Where are the zebras?"

Once I explained we weren't going to find any zoo animals, she was sure she'd find horses (no horses, but there are pigs and chickens raised on the farm, along with the cows). It was an amazing educational experience for her, as we explained how we

get milk and cheese and some of her other favorite foods.

Communications assistant Lauren Bobbitt says that educational component is one of the benefits of having a certified organic working dairy farm so close to the city.

"We take for granted how disconnected we have become from our food and where it comes from," she asserts. "The school groups that come, sometimes I lead those, and it's having kids realize that it's not white milk that comes from white cows and chocolate milk that comes from brown cows. It's such an eye-opening experience, and most of us in the world we live in now miss out on that."

The farm opened in 2003 and features a number of historic barns from the 1860 to 1870 time period that were moved to the property and reconstructed. The landscape is reminiscent of English countryside, with rolling hills and grassland, ponds and a garden that supplies fresh vegetables to the farm-to-table restaurant, The Loft.

"The restaurant is that keystone that brings everything together and full circle; it is literally from the pasture to the plate. Primarily, it is the restaurant that we advertise as the destination so you can come and experience the farm and eat," Bobbitt adds.

Being at a dairy farm, I wanted to experience some of that – aka ice cream – at the Dairy Bar. And while the ice cream was delicious (of course), it was elevated by the surroundings. The Loft is located on the



Family-friendly fun at three Indiana stops includes making friends while waiting for a tractor ride, a pumpkin patch, enticing the attention of a boa constrictor, making giant bubbles and gobbling up delicious fresh ice cream.



upper level of one of the restored historic barns and exudes rustic charm. You can also get an up-close look at the cheese case, where rinds of cheese are aging.

There are several ways to take advantage of all that Traders Point Creamery has to offer, including private tours and tastings. Purchase tickets to the 1.3-mile self-guided walking tour of the nature trail and property before 2 p.m. though, as it closes down after that for the daily cow milking at 4 p.m.

We didn't get to see the cows milked this time, due to an unfortunately-timed 3-year-old temper tantrum. And since the sign said to be quiet while the cows do their thing, we chose to leave them to milk in peace. You're welcome, cows.

Terre Haute Children's Museum

While our third destination was the furthest away, it was worth the drive.

Being no stranger to the Indianapolis Children's Museum, we were excited to see what a different children's museum would have to offer. We saw everything from a boa constrictor that got very animated when Lucy toddled over and stood in front of its cage (giving me all sorts of nightmares) and a large treehouse climbing structure to exhibits that included space exploration, architecture, agriculture and more.

One of the aspects I appreciated about our experience was how many science-focused exhibits there were. It spanned everything from how weather events form, to how two-way mirrors work, to aviation concepts and plenty of hands-on science fun.

Executive Director Lynn Hughes explains that the education emphasis is paramount for the museum.

"We are a children's museum, we have a science and technology focus and we integrate that into our exhibit areas. It's not like it's going to be heavy science concepts, but in ways that it makes sense to (children)," she explains.

The museum, so close to Illinois and a one-hour drive from Indianapolis, welcomes families from throughout the region. About 55,000 people visit annually.

Hughes offers that the museum works in conjunction with the local convention and visitor's bureau; billboards promoting the museum along Interstate 70 were provided by the bureau, for example.

"If you haven't been to Terre Haute (recently), or never have been, some people maybe have a perception about Terre Haute," she states. "The museum is definitely one of those places that's changed people's perceptions."

Clara told me her favorite part was the top of the treehouse, where one can stand and shoot yellow foam balls out of air cannons at targets on the opposite wall. As for Lucy – aside from her new best friend, the boa constrictor – she had a blast playing in the toddler area on the museum's second floor.

My favorite part? A giant water table area that included a fountain you can program and play back your pattern. Seriously, I could have played with that all day long.

My second favorite part? Both kids took long naps on the way home.

RESOURCES: Calvin Beasley, Beasley's Orchard, at www.beasleys-orchard.com | Lauren Bobbitt, Traders Point Creamery, at www.traderspointcreamery.com | Lynn Hughes, Terre Haute Children's Museum, at www.thchildrensmuseum.com