

## DeKalb County

# Savor Another Magical Season

By Pat Szpekowski

There's something purely magical about the fall season. It heightens the senses with images of trees ablaze with rich colors, crunching sounds of leaves underfoot and intoxicating scents of crisp apples, pumpkin pies and more.

Now's the time to make new memories and traditions by exploring all of the amenities autumn brings to DeKalb County.

"Fall is a very special time to get out into the country and enjoy what we offer," says Debbie Armstrong, executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau. She knows this region west of Chicago is ripe with family-owned apple orchards and farms, wineries, theaters and museums, and she has plenty of ideas for making the most of a day trip to the DeKalb area.

There's something special about picking your own apples, pumpkins and raspberries right on the farm, and every fall Jonamac Orchard, in Malta, and Honey Hill Orchard, in Waterman, overflow with a wide variety of apples to suit every taste. Jonamac offers 35 varieties on its 105-acre farm. Honey Hill serves up 17 apple varieties grown among 2,100 apples trees and an additional 500 trees at a second farm. Honey Hill welcomes raspberry picking through September.

Step inside these orchards' country stores for plenty of other goodies. At Jonamac, try hand-dipped caramel apples, baked goods, apple cider slushies, fall gifts and exclusive apple butter. Visit the new Cider House to watch cider being pressed and try a variety of hard ciders, apple ale, and apple wines, the latter made by Prairie State Winery from fruit grown on the farm. Check out Jonamac's 10-acre corn maze, which becomes a Haunted Maze Friday and Saturday nights in October.

The Apple Barn Country Store at Honey Hill is a late-1800s farm barn converted into a unique market. It's filled with fresh produce and salsas as well as easy-to-use baking, dip and soup



Jonamac Orchard, in Malta, serves up many fall favorites, including wines produced locally by Prairie State Winery.

mixes – among other treats. With 20 beehives on-site, Honey Hill produces its own pure raw honey, too.

A stone's throw away from Honey Hill is Waterman Winery, a 10-acre sustainably-minded vineyard. Visit on Saturday or Sunday for tastings of these unique red and white wines, all grown on site. Tours are available, by appointment, for a ride through the vines to see how it all begins.

For another take on local wines, Prairie Sate Winery, in downtown Genoa, serves up food and wine pairings prepared by an in-house chef. The beautiful atmosphere inside and cozy patio outdoors provide an idyllic backdrop for wine tastings and live music on the weekends. Soon, you'll also be able to sample some of Prairie State's wines at a new satellite location arriving in downtown Sycamore.

"Nature lovers also have so many opportunities for fall outdoor recreation in DeKalb County," adds Armstrong. "We have three bike trails, nature trails, 44 parks, a forest preserve, and Shabbona Lake State Park for camping, fishing and boating."

DeKalb County has many hidden treasures, as well. Tour the Ellwood House, in the city of DeKalb, and explore the magnificent estate's gardens and structures. Later this season, look for the holiday decorated mansion tours and open house.

DeKalb County also is home to big-city arts and culture with award-winning live entertainment, music and museums. Enjoy performances and a fall film series at the Egyptian Theatre; a play at the Stagecoach Players Theatre; and many cultural institutions at Northern Illinois University, including the NIU School of Theatre and Dance, NIU School of Music, NIU Art Museum and NIU Pick Museum of Anthropology.

Grab your comfy sweaters and be prepared to find something new this fall in DeKalb County. For more information, visit [dekalbcountyvb.com](http://dekalbcountyvb.com). ■



Visit Jonamac's Cider House to find a country store and apple goodies.

