

# Silverton Appeal

50 CENTS • VOL. 126 NO. 48

WEDNESDAY • DECEMBER 5, 2007

## Farmers encourage use of real Christmas trees



**Children and teachers** from A Special Place Pre-School in Silverton get their tree from Silverton's White Christmas Tree Farm & Nursery.

### Real trees are said to be better for the environment

**By Jo Garcia-Cobb**  
*Special to the Appeal Tribune*

"Get real this Christmas." This is the message that local Christmas tree growers want consumers to consider.

"Artificial trees have been taking market share away from real trees," said Charlie Grogan, the owner of Silver Bells Tree Farm in Silverton. Grogan, who's been in the business for 32 years, is shipping more than 100,000 trees nationwide and overseas this season.

Although the National Agricultural Statistics Services shows the Christmas tree industry in Oregon is growing, local farmers such as Grogan have reason for concern.

A consumer survey commissioned by the National Christmas Tree Association shows about a quarter of the trees purchased in the U.S. last year were artificial.

The total retail value of these trees, numbering 9.3 million and mostly made in China, is \$631 million.

There's a good chance many of the real trees were grown within a 30-miles radius of Silverton.

This area, home to half of the eight million trees grown in Oregon annually, extends to Molalla, Sublimity, Stayton, and parts of Salem. According to Bryan Ostlund, the executive secretary at the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association, 98 percent of these trees leave the area.

Grogan thinks local farmers and consumers shouldn't take for granted the common misunderstanding that artificial trees are better for the environment.

"I think this misunderstanding is a universal concern among Christmas tree growers these days," said Chuck White who has owned White Christmas Tree Farm & Nursery in Silverton for 22 years.

The idea that artificial trees are better for the environment is simply not true, Grogan said.

“Real trees produce oxygen. Each acre of Christmas trees produces the daily oxygen requirements for 18 people,” he said. “They provide wildlife habitat. Moreover, artificial trees made in China have been shown to contain lead and will sit in the landfills for hundreds of years.”

A growing artificial tree market share would affect more than 10,000 people employed by Oregon’s Christmas tree industry. Ostlund said business is booming, and the association has been heading a campaign to educate the public about the sustainability of buying real Christmas trees.

Another misperception is the idea that artificial trees are better for the forests.

“Forests are not cleared to make room for Christmas trees, which are grown on land zoned for agriculture,” Ostlund said. “In many cases, Christmas trees are grown on soil that won’t support other crops.

As part of its awareness campaign, the PNWCTA Web site offers a wealth of information about local growers as well as how consumers can recycle their trees. The association also is busy attending to media from many parts of the country who usually have their eyes on what’s up in Christmas tree land.

Small growers such as White are getting creative in their efforts to maintain their market share by offering, not only quality trees, but a fun and memorable way to get a Christmas tree.

“Our customers like the idea of coming out to get their Christmas tree,” White said.

To make the experience special, White’s family has created a festive atmosphere at their home farm by the Abiqua Creek.

Customers are treated to hot chocolate, candy canes, and Christmas background music. The trees at White’s farm sell for \$20 each.

“This agri-tourism approach to selling Christmas trees is something that we’ve seen only in the last five years,” Ostlund said.

Coming out to the farms and meeting the farmers can only help to deepen consumers’ awareness of the part that they play in one of Oregon’s most vital industries, Ostlund said.

“Those of us who live in the area shouldn’t take for granted the fact that we live in the Christmas tree capital of the world,” said Ostlund.

He pointed out that visitors from European countries have found it worth the trip to visit the area to learn about successful Christmas tree growing practices and to enjoy the beautiful farms we have here.

“Getting real,” this Christmas, suggested Ostlund, ultimately means more than just buying a real tree, but looking at the big picture of what it takes to grow our Christmas trees, as well as in finding peace that they’ll

biodegrade.