

Lewiston Auburn Magazine

Holiday Edition

Gentle Giants

**Hospice House
Fire House Grille
Christmas Tree Farms**

Issue No. 14 • Dec. 2011



\$3.95

Growing a Family Tradition

By Jennifer Boggs

Owni**O**wning a Christmas tree farm seems easy. You throw some seeds onto the ground, wait a few years and then watch the money roll in, right? Not according to David Rice, owner of Rice Tree Farm in Durham.

Like a lot of new Christmas tree farmers, Rice underestimated the amount of work involved. It starts in the spring with digging individual holes and planting seeds or seedlings in each one. Then, in the months leading up to the holiday season, the tree farm needs to be mowed and fertilized and the trees need to be trimmed, not to mention treated for pest control. "There's never a dead time," explained Rice. "There's always something to do out there." Christmas trees take four to ten years to fully mature, so taking care of the trees properly over the years is crucial.

Rice, a contractor by trade, started the farm in 1987. After attending several meetings of the Maine Christmas Tree Association, he planted balsam firs on a seven-acre field that, until then, had produced only hay. As with any outdoor crop, the weather is usually the biggest, most unpredictable factor in tree farming, whether it's frost or too much rain or not enough.

Last year, something else unexpected happened to Rice. His barn burned down in November, so they didn't open for the holidays at all. But you can't keep the Christmas spirit – or a Maine farmer – down for long. This year, Rice Tree Farm will be open and ready for business the weekend after Thanksgiving.

Roland Poussard has owned Poussard Plantation in Wales since 1996. He was trying to figure out what to do with four and a half acres of property that had been in his

family for more than 50 years.

He settled on Christmas trees after talking to Jim Mason who owned Mason's Tree Farm just a few miles down the road. Poussard loves working outdoors; however, he, too, didn't anticipate "all the work."

Poussard admitted that he isn't getting rich from Christmas trees (he works full-time as an electrician), but he enjoys the holidays and doing something that makes other people happy.

The real reward for any Christmas tree farmer is "choose-and-cut" season, which usually starts the weekend after Thanksgiving and lasts until the weekend before Christmas. "The fun thing is the people you meet, especially when they bring their children," said Poussard.

Customers are encouraged to take their time and enjoy the fresh air as they hunt for the perfect tree to bring home. Some people cut down their own trees, while others ask the staff for a little help; most tree farms are happy to do either. Many families go back to the same tree farm year after year, making the holiday tradition of buying a Christmas tree even more memorable.

Jenn Buschmann grew up around Dun Roamin', her family's Christmas tree farm in Lewiston. Her father Ed started the seven-acre farm as a labor of love to enjoy on the weekends while he ran E.A. Buschmann, Inc., a packaging materials company, during the week. When Buschmann bought her father's company recently, Dun Roamin' became Ed's "retirement business."

Though a hired staff of two does the heavy lifting, Jenn Buschmann still helps out, planting seedlings in the spring and standing out in the field selling Christmas trees in December. She even created the

farm's website two years ago so new generations of families can discover the joy of a choose-and-cut tree.

"It's the official start of the holiday for a lot of people, so they come with that excitement," said Buschmann.

The Dun Roamin' staff has started its own traditions, like handing out Christmas coloring books to children and offering complementary balsam boughs (with the purchase of a tree) for customers who want to make decorative sprays or wreaths.

Buschmann recalled that for years, every Saturday after Thanksgiving meant "greens" in her family. Her dad would pick an older tree and cut down the boughs, while she and her aunt, mother and grandmother would create their own sprays and wreaths. To this day, Buschmann has never bought a premade wreath. "There's something a little more personal about making your own," she said.

For Buschmann, all the time and effort of the farm is worth it to help families create their own memories, especially during the choose-and-cut days when the farm is "filled with folks just getting into that spirit of the season."

Karyn Small has been a Dun Roamin' customer for at least a dozen years. With her husband and three kids in tow, choosing the tree is a family affair. They've even seized the opportunity to take a family photo for the annual Christmas card.

"I like having a fresh tree because they smell so much better," said Small. "And picking out your own Christmas tree is just fun."



How to choose your Christmas tree

Most Christmas tree farmers agree that the biggest mistake people make when looking for a tree is picking one that is too big. So before you get in the car to grab your tree, measure your space! When you arrive at the farm and someone offers you a measuring stick or tape, take it and use it. Or, you can do what customer Lisa Kennedy does and go by her husband Andy's height (providing that Andy is around, of course).

In any case, don't think that you can "eyeball" it, because a 10-foot tree looks a lot different in a snowy field than it will in your living room. As Jenn Buschmann of Dun Roamin' Tree Farm said so eloquently, "The sky is a lot taller than your ceiling." And don't forget that once you put the tree in the stand it will be even taller.

According to David Rice of Rice Tree Farm, nonmeasurers also run the risk that their very tall tree may not fit on the roof of their very compact car.

Another thing to consider when choosing a tree, said Roland Poussard, the owner of Poussard Plantation, is whether you're putting it in a corner, in the middle of the room, or in front of a window.

Rice offered one final piece of advice for customers embarking on the "choose-and-cut" experience for the first time: wear appropriate clothes and shoes. He's seen his share of people wearing sneakers to tromp through the snow – and even high heels!

