

Keeping traditions and making memories

By Meagan Moellers

Christmas tree farms

Thousands of years ago, people believed that evergreen trees were magical. Why else would they stay green when all the others were brown and bare? The evergreen therefore came to symbolize life and a promise of spring. As the boughs of these evergreens and then the trees themselves were brought into homes, it was only natural that decorations be added. Martin Luther is generally given credit for first putting candles on the tree, representing stars illuminating the darkness.

Each year as we bring home our tree and decorate it with electric “stars”, we should reflect on the many Christmas traditions and the meanings behind them. “Getting the tree” is a tradition that can be shared by the entire family. Five Christmas tree farms in Hawkeye’s service territory make for very real and exciting memories. Please turn to pages 6-7 to read about each of these unique tree farms.



Kenny, Stacey, Nathan and Logan Monteith haul their hand picked tree from the 35-acre tree farm at Holiday Pines northeast of Decorah.

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**Hawkeye REC employees
and directors wish you
and your families a safe
and happy holiday season**

Christmas Tree Farms in

Pine Acres

956 E Main • New Hampton

When Mel and Jan Pacovsky bought a farm near New Hampton in 1959, they knew it wasn't going to be a traditional crop farm. Jan's love of Christmas and Mel's passion for growing trees quite naturally grew into Pine Acres Christmas tree farm! After six years of nurturing, pruning and patience, the first trees were sold. Can you believe that some of those first customers are still coming back to Pine Acres each year? Jan says, "It's neat to see their children and their families making our trees a part of their traditions as well!"

For Jan, the Christmas tree business involves more than just growing and marketing. She serves on the National Christmas tree board, a group that educates and promotes natural trees. For the second year this group is partnering with FedEx in a "Trees for Troops" effort. Iowa trees, including some from Pine Acres, will be delivered to military bases in the US and overseas and given to families at no charge.



A Pine Acres "Hot tip" – Jan suggests using very hot water in your tree stand as it keeps the sap softer and the tree fresh longer.

Holiday Pines

1846 Whitetail Rd. • Decorah

Dave and Norma Bappe take pride in offering their customers a true historic tree selection experience. Families can cut and choose their tree from 35 acres of pines and firs. "We have a large number of families that come each year to our farm. It's nice to know that we are part of creating those special memories as dad cuts down the tree and mom grabs a snapshot of the kids with smiles from cheek to cheek," says Norma. The Bappes provide trees to three families of German descent that still use real candles on the trees in memory of their ancestors and heritage. Talk about tradition!



The Bappes: Dave, Norma, Jarred, Tina, Teesha and Jim of Holiday Pines Christmas tree farm.

Their son Jim and wife Tina are also very involved in the tree farm. "My favorite part of the business comes in the spring when the weather is nice and our whole family can help plant the trees," says Jim.

Evergreen Hills

1849 Whitetail Rd. • Decorah

Twenty years ago, Lawrence and Steve Tjossem of rural Decorah were searching for a way to utilize steep land unsuitable for conventional crops. Trees became the crop that would prevent erosion. But it would be several years before the Scotch and White pines, Frasier, Balsam and Concolor firs and Colorado & Blue spruce trees would return anything



for the investment and labor required to produce the Christmas trees. Steve admits that growing Christmas trees is labor intensive, but it seems worth it when the holiday season arrives and people come personally to select a tree.

For a number of years, Evergreen Hills wholesaled as many as 800 trees annually. Now the Tjossem's concentrate on providing trees to customers that come to their farm from all across northeast Iowa.



Steve Tjossem of Evergreen Hills Christmas tree farm near Decorah uses a tree shaker for a freshly cut tree, to remove loose needles.

Hawkeye's Service Territory

Johnson's Oneota Slopes Farm

2689 Lannon Hill Rd. • Decorah

Conservation of the earth's natural resources has always been important to Pat and Paul Johnson. Knowing that it would prevent erosion and in fact restore the soil, the Johnson's dedicated a portion of their farm to Christmas trees. "As we harvest this year's Christmas trees, we remember that next spring we can plant trees to replace the ones our customers chose the year before. It's a natural life cycle," says Pat. "We also like to see all the wildlife that benefit from the habitat." So the decision that the Johnsons' made twenty-five years ago has proven to be a great return for them and the earth. They are able to harvest nice trees each year without using chemicals, fertilizers or artificial green coloring. Their son Andy markets some of the all-natural Christmas trees to natural food cooperatives in the

Twin Cities, Rochester, La Crosse and Cedar Falls.



Owner Pat Johnson provides hand-saws for her customers as they venture out to choose and cut their own Christmas tree.



Curtis Trees & Gifts

3258 – 333rd Ave • Cresco

"I've always liked trees," states Ward Curtis. "Ever since I was a young boy and helped my father plant and prune trees. I enjoy every stage as the tree grows from a seedling to a tree that one of our customers can take home with them. That's what makes me happy." Ward and his wife Judy planted their first Christmas trees in 1973 and now plant several thousand each year.

One of the most important steps in producing a quality tree takes place during the summer, long before the holiday season is on everyone's mind. But for Ward's family, this is a crucial time of the year. Ward and his daughter Wendy go through the fields to trim and prune the trees, a process they choose to do by hand which allows more control and better shaping of the tree. In the fall, Ward walks through the fields again to mark which trees are to be sold that year.

Over the years, Ward has kept a daily log of the weather and number of trees sold. Since many of their sales are pre-cut, this has enabled him to better match fresh trees with the number of customers expected. His records also include the types of trees sold and has helped them to plan what species to plant. A big part of the business is anticipating what type of tree will be in demand several years later. For instance, in recent years, many customers have been asking for more traditional looking trees such as Fraser Firs.

Ward Curtis in front of their impressive 15-foot real evergreen wreath. Trees are not the only reason to visit Curtis Trees. They also offer wreaths, swags and a huge selection of unique seasonal gifts.



Once you have selected the perfect tree, count on Hawkeye REC to provide the reliable and safe energy needed to light up your holiday! Turn to page 8 to learn about the new LED Christmas lights and other tips to stay safe this holiday season.

