



TREEmendous News



Florida Christmas Tree Association's Newsletter

September 2018

Linda Songer, Editor

JODI UTSMAN ELECTED FCTA PRESIDENT

Dear members,

I would like to thank the association for allowing me to serve as President, and be a part of the leadership of an organization that not only gives knowledge back, but fosters friendships within the industry. This organization was formed in 1980 and the individuals who formed this chapter were motivated and persistent in pursuing a goal of success for Christmas tree farmers in Florida.

I begin this journey with excitement and enthusiasm despite some apprehension in the face of our dwindling membership. We have the privilege of upholding the longstanding tradition of cutting a live Christmas tree as a family. Our farms hold a special place in the hearts and memories of our visitors. Our priority should be to recruit Christmas tree farmers in Florida to help sustain this tradition. As we have power in greater numbers, with an increase in membership we can amplify the voice of the Florida Christmas tree farmer on a state and national level.

I believe that there is renewed interest in farming among young people today, and I remain optimistic that we can tap into it. We need to ensure that new growers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to get started in the industry. I encourage members to play an active role in sharing their gifts of knowledge. Our association needs to evolve to meet the needs of young farmers. New growers may struggle to start up in our field, while maintaining jobs off of the farm as a primary source of income. By encouraging active participation in FCTA, in our National Christmas Tree Association, and in the various agritourism associations that incorporate all farm direct marketing venues, new growers can gain realistic expectations for crop growth and sales, knowledge of customer safety and crowd logistics, ideas for value added products and services, and insight into other offerings to generate income.

It has been my pleasure to be a member of FCTA, an organization that remains committed to sharing information with new growers and to maintaining the professional development of existing growers. Each meeting provides the benefit of interacting with members with decades of experience. Challenges are shared, and relevant education is expanded.

I am following the footsteps of some great leaders in the industry. My thanks are extended to Michael Songer who has lead this organization with his vision and countless hours of commitment. With his guidance, the guidance of my father Past President Jack Ewing, and the support of my husband whose hands are in the dirt at our farm, I hope to live up to the expectations of the membership. I invite you to help build on the achievements that this organization has had under Michael's leadership, as we advance our industry in the state of Florida.

Best Regards,

Jodi Utsman
President, Florida Christmas Tree Association

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FCTA Meeting

Unfortunately, the FCTA Board of Directors were unable to schedule a Fall Meeting for this year. Some of our farms have expanded their Agritourism to include pumpkin sales and Fall activities making it more difficult to find a meeting date in the fall. The good news is that plans are in the works for a Spring 2019 meeting at Jodi and Tom Utsman's farm, Santa's Christmas Tree Forest, in Eustis, FL. The tentative date is March 9, 2019. Save the date and watch for the Spring edition of Tremendous News for meeting information and registration. The board wishes a very successful Christmas season for all of our members and look forward to seeing you in the Spring.



SEEDLINGS ALERT 2018

Superior Nursery at Lee, Florida. Phone 850-971-5159 They have increased the cost of bare root Southern Red Cedar to (\$270..per thousand) . They have Sand Pine, and Virginia Pine seedlings (\$120. per thousand.) and Spruce Pine (\$140. Per thousand) available for the Fall Season. All seedlings have increased \$.01 from last year. One gallon cedars are \$3.25 each.

Dwight Stansel Farm & Nursery, 5553 164th St, Wellborn, FL 32094, Phone 386-963-2827, e-mail [dsfntte@windstream.net] raises bare root Southern Red Cedar which they sell for \$250. per thousand.

The Division of Forestry--Andrews Nursery, Chiefland, FL, Phone 352-493-6096, will have bare root Sand Pine at \$50. per thousand.

Aucker's Nursery, Williston, FL, phone 352-528-3889, has very nice Leland Cypress liners. See the Web Site: www.auckersnursery.com for current prices, and detailed instructions on planting, fertilizing, and trimming Leland Cypress.

BK Cedars (Susan Kossuth), Alachua, FL Phone 386-462-2060 has a good supply of three gallon (\$6.) genetically improved Southern Red Cedar ('Robin Blue') suitable for initial or replacement planting. They also have some 7 gal sizes of Red Cedar \$20. 15 gal \$30.,and 30 gal 7 to 8 ft tall for \$75. She also has some 15 and 30 gal Carolina Sapphire. I get a few of these to sell to customers who are thinking of digging a small tree. It is easier than digging, and I plant whatever is left over. Michael

Byron Lakeview Nursery, 2149 Lakeview Rd, Byron, GA 31008 has Carolina Sapphires in 3" pots for \$1.10 (Think minimum is 100.) www.byronlakeviewnursery.com

Aucker's Nursery

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Tree News from New York

By Jodi Utsman

My husband, Tom, and I took a quick trip to upstate New York to attend the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York - Summer Meeting. The meeting was primarily held at the farm of Chip and Sally Ellms, who offer choose and cut trees during Christmas and run a corn maze with an agritainment venue in the fall. We toured their farm, located in Ballston Spa, NY, extensively, and were also invited to visit two other nearby Christmas tree farms

The meeting was well attended by over 200 growers, vendors and speakers. There was a large tent with vendors, a childcare team, and water bottles and snacks available in every area. Many growers attending were from outside of the state of New York, some even as far away as Ireland! Most workshops ran concurrently, with topics including dyeing and shearing, insects and disease, wreaths, tax laws, fertilization, advertising, and handling customer complaints.

I attended a session on making wreaths and other greenery arrangements lead by a talented husband and wife team. They incorporated a variety of objects into their arrangements, including a pair of ice skates and a wooden antique sled. When asked how to keep wreaths fresh in our Florida heat, the couple suggested leaving greenery as long as possible, and applying a product called Wilt Stop, which is an anti-transpirant designed to reduce moisture loss. I was impressed with a simple one prong swag that could be made in 5 minutes, and was said to sell quite well with a quickly added red bow.

Tom attended a session on dyeing/painting trees in a variety of bright and pastel colors with a simple air paint sprayer. No one at the meeting could say that they had sold many of such trees as of yet, but they certainly make for good publicity. Our host, Chip Ellms, was featured on the local news shortly after our visit promoting the sample tree that had been painted deep purple during the meeting on his farm. The link to the segment was then shared on Christmas Tree Magazine's Facebook page. A simple attention getting item can go a long way! Growing trees may be sprayed in the field, and if they don't sell, they will continue to grow with no visible harm to the tree.

Marsha Gray from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board spoke to the group regarding the continued funding for her marketing efforts. Board Member Jim Rockis joined in to speak about the research efforts that had been funded by the Promotion Board. Tom and I have a personal interest in this research, as our farm has been visited twice by researchers from North Carolina State to study if hemlock scale will transfer from the northern grown Christmas trees that they sell onto our Florida grown Christmas trees. We are aware that other FCTA members have been contacted and contributed as well. If the scale was found to thrive in Florida, obviously it would cause damage to our Florida Christmas trees and growers would incur the cost of treating it. However, it would also become much more difficult to import these trees, which would impact the income of Christmas tree farms offering this pre-cut choice to the consumer along with the Florida choose and cuts. The mandated check off program that requires every grower who sells more than 500 trees annually to contribute \$.15/tree is quite controversial, and its continued funding passed by a narrow margin as was announced several weeks after the meeting.

The marketing and customer relations aspects of operating a Christmas tree farm were also addressed in sessions. Mark and Angela Saunders who run a very successful agritainment and haunt business on their once thriving Christmas tree farm in Canada, discussed advertising and customer service. Mark contends that most advertising dollars these days should be focused on internet advertising, such as social media platforms. Print media, radio and television are just not getting the return on investment that they once did. Angela shared the importance of planning responses in dealing with customer complaints, both face to face and through email. She presented several examples in which through listening, restating the problem, and offering a generous solution, she was able to turn angry customers into customers for life.

Finally, Chip Ellms gave us a thorough tour of his farm, including his agritainment venue and tree processing areas. He operates the two areas independently of each other. So, admission can be charged for the agritainment entrance, and is not charged to enter the Christmas tree area. (continued on next page)

Chip has large covered trolleys pulled by tractors to transport customers into the field. He prices the tree by the half foot, and he has a system in which he stops each car as they exit to view the paid receipt.

Agritainment attractions at Ellm's Family Farm are quite extensive. They offer a game area with basketball hoops and baseball throws, pedal karts, several slides up to 40 feet in length, mazes, paint ball, a corn and an apple cannon, duck races, a zip line, gem mining, a farm animal area, and more. He has planted several Christmas trees into a circular maze, and he has a corn maze available in the fall. Aside from the attractions, he has several beautiful restored farm buildings that he uses as a banquet hall for weddings and meetings, concessions areas, a wreath barn, and a kids camp in the summer.

The New York growers were quite a welcoming group. We enjoyed our conversations over delicious catered meals regarding the similarities and differences of producing trees in our unique areas of the country. Some members of the North America Farm Direct Marketing Association to which we belong were present at the meeting as well. Discussions with these members tended to trend more toward how to sell the product and how to move and entertain the crowds. So we had a nice healthy balance of discourse. We would encourage other Florida members to explore attending meetings outside of the state of Florida and at the national level. It is a wonderful opportunity to expand the reach of your knowledge, forge new relationships with other growers, and network with peers and vendors.

Photos from Christmas Tree Farmers Assn. of New York Meeting



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Jodi's phone number is 352-357-9863 and her email is joditheelf@gmail.com

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Large stand	\$10.50	\$10.35	\$9.95
Reinforced stand	\$21.75	\$21.60	\$20.85
5 Qt. Water container	\$3.40	\$3.35	\$3.10
10 Qt. Water container	\$4.65	\$4.55	\$4.20
Tree Removal Bags			
50/case	\$50.00	\$47.00	\$45.00
Jumbo Tree bags 48/case	\$62.95	\$59.25	\$54.00
Kirk Netting		\$5.00 off per order	
Green/Red Netting		\$8.00 off per order	

KENTUCKY CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION MEETING 2018

by Michael Songer

On September 8, 2018, I visited the Kentucky Christmas Tree Association Fall meeting on the farms of Dale Barker and Tom Nieman near Lexington, Kentucky. Dale is shown in the picture with the drilling machine. They have a heavy soil with gravel, thus they use a drill for each hole. Note the sprayer designed by Dale to put the Round Up under the basal-pruned trees. It has 3 inch pvc with the bottom cut out to fit near the ground and reach under the trees. It is the best shield that I've seen.

Tom Nieman is the gentleman in the picture with the hat. He specializes in soil testing and nourishment before the trees are planted. His goal is to raise only No. 1 firs, and he gets a No. 1 price. His firs are hand trimmed, very uniform, and very beautiful. He charges \$110. for a 7.5 foot tree, and about \$20. for each additional foot. He has employees in the field that measure and price each tree before the tree is cut. He says his employees get sizeable tips, over \$100. per day. It takes Tom about 7 years to grow the 7.5 foot trees, which I think is three years faster than most growers.

It was a pleasure to visit the Kentucky Christmas Tree Association. They are a small but friendly bunch, and they have several new members that are just planting trees.





Shearing Equipment



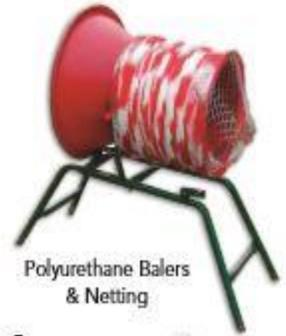
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Tips for Hurricane Season

by John Gregory

The hurricane season is approaching and climate experts predict another major hurricane season. Remember, it makes no matter how many hurricanes are named, it only takes one to damage your home and your Christmas trees.

The time is now to get your plan together in the event of a hurricane coming over your tree farm. What follows are suggestions you can use to include in your plan.

Create a printed list (not only on your computer) of family members outside of your home, your electric and water companies and your local farm agency office. Keep these items along with other important papers in an air-tight plastic bag.

Buy extra batteries and flashlights to give one for each member of your family. Harbor Freight has LED flashlights they give away free that are really great!

Make sure your generators are working and have extra gasoline to keep them running. Get enough heavy duty, electrical cords to keep your refrigerator and other items with perishable foods running. If not, you might have to throw food away after the storm is over when you have your power back on. Incidentally, there is something you can do to determine if your freezer has thawed. Take a small cup of water and place it in the freezer now. Just before a storm hits your farm, place a quarter on top of the frozen cup. If the quarter ends up at the bottom, you need to throw your food away. But if not, you can keep your food since it's still frozen.

Get your chainsaws ready and be sure to buy extra gasoline to run them. You want to get chain oil for it as well. You will need to use it to cut up limbs and trees that have come down.

For fallen limbs and trees, get large chains and pulling instruments to remove the trees and other blown objects from your house and Christmas tree farm.

First aid kit, non-perishable foods, bottled water, prescription medicines, duck tape, plastic sheeting, manual can opener, cell phones with chargers are things to have. Also if you have pets, be certain to get their supplies too. Plan on having your power out for 72 hours or longer.

Protecting your home and farm is important but don't forget your vehicle. For a hurricane warning, have your gas tank full and check the windshield wipers. Pack your vehicle with things you might need during a hurricane

If you are asked to evacuate, do so. Cash or travels checks, sleeping bags or a blanket for each person, sturdy shoes and a complete change of clothes for each person. Also have paper cups, plates, plastic utensils, mess kits, paper and pencil, paper towels and games, books or other activities for your children.

That's only part of what you might want to include in your plans. Each of you will have different things to place in your plan for the possibility of a hurricane coming down on top of you.

John Gregory

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T. Jay Rolland from Kirk Company Demonstrated their Kolors



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Sept. 14, 2018

Marsha Gray, Executive Director
517-242-1630
mjgray1@charter.net

Millennial Families Target for CTPB Campaign

With Christmas fast approaching, the Promotion Board has plans in place for the 2018 promotional season. The campaign will feature the experience of selecting the Christmas tree and the significance that this event holds for so many families.

Once again, the CTPB is working with its two partners, Concept Farm and Fleishman Hillard, to develop a creative and engaging story that shares our messaging in a compelling way. Success is measured by the ability to reach the target market. Each of these partners has a role to play in insuring the success of the campaign and their work is guided by the CTPB internal team of Marsha Gray, Executive Director, Rex Korson, Promotion Committee Chair and Chris Maciborski, Promotion Committee Vice-Chair.

Concept Farm will be creating a series of videos featuring real families; first sharing some of their holiday traditions, then allowing us to follow along as they select their Christmas tree. These families will be actual customers, pre-identified by industry retailers and growers. In addition to capturing the family tree selection experience, Concept Farm will be capturing interviews with growers, retail lot operators and other customers along the way. All this footage can be turned into usable content. Like the grower videos, this series will be shared on our social media platforms and “boosted” to expand our reach.

In addition to the family videos, Concept Farm will also be sharing some of the tremendous grower videos from last year on our social media platforms and industry members are encouraged to share the content on their social sites. Last year, hundreds of industry members engaged with the “It’s Christmas. Keep it Real” Facebook page and made a big impact in expanding our campaign reach. At the same time, those growers had access to professional content for their own Facebook pages.

Public relations partner, Fleishman Hillard, will be expanding the reach of the campaign by securing several opportunities including a satellite media tour, influencer partnerships and through a feature story on a popular on-line entity with great Millennial reach. “Real People. Real Trees” will be the theme of a contest, encouraging consumers to share their real Christmas tree photos on social media.

The Promotion Board plans to partner with Red Tricycle, an on-line media outlet with a massive millennial reach, by sharing the experience of selecting the family Christmas tree and all the fun that goes with it. The Red Tricycle mission is “to help every parent feel like a rock star by inspiring them to do fun things with their kids. We offer ideas that are aspirational and actionable that you can do at home, in your city or wherever your adventures take you.”

Further spreading our message, we will work with influencers on social media; popular with young moms and dads. These influencers have great sway with their followers and both the influencers and Red Tricycle can announce our “Real People. Real Trees” contest.

Of course, the public relations efforts will also include press releases to traditional and on-line media and will also include a repeat of last year's successful satellite media tour. This opportunity allows us to schedule as many as 30 television interviews across the country in one morning; using a paid spokesperson along with a Christmas tree grower.

Finally, the campaign will also include a cross promotion with the Christmas Spirit Foundation's Trees for Troops program as it did in 2017.

In all the work that is planned for the season, the key messages that real Christmas trees are better for making family memories and better for the environment will be incorporated and reinforced. The goal is to expand the reach to consumers, particularly millennial parents, and share the rallying cry; *It's Christmas. Keep it Real!*

Merchandise Shop Now Open!

The Christmas Tree Promotion Board is happy to announce that industry members can now purchase merchandise featuring the "It's Christmas. Keep it Real" message and logos.

CTPB has agreed to allow Screen Designs, Inc. to open an on-line merchandise store where growers can order t-shirts, sweatshirts, caps and more. Growers will order directly from a special site created by Screen Designs, Inc.

In addition to wearable merchandise, growers can also order printed campaign banners in several designs. Check out the website and plan your order now!

http://custom.screendesignsinc.com/its_christmas_keep_it_real/shop/home



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If you haven't paid your dues for this year, complete the form below ASAP.

Florida Christmas Tree Association 2018 Dues

Name _____ Spouse _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

email _____ website _____

Farm Name & Address _____

City _____ Farm Phone _____ County _____

Brief directions to the farm _____

Opening: date _____ days of week _____ hours _____ Choose & Cut Wholesale Retail Lot Potted Gift/Craft Shop Hay Rides Petting Zoo Wreaths other _____ Tree types: Virginia Pine Red Cedar Sand Pine Leyland Cypress Spruce Pine Carolina Sapphire Blue Ice Northern trees other _____

Acres in production _____ Acres planted this year _____

Member of National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) Yes _____ No _____

Associate Membership (retired; not selling trees) \$20 total enclosed _____

Membership dues \$60 total enclosed _____

FCTA cooperates with the NCTA in Trade Industry Partner (TIP). FCTA sends \$20 per member to NCTA to support the marketing efforts by the NCTA and Real Tree Advertising campaign. This means that you do not have to be a member of the NCTA in order for you to advertise your farm for free on the NCTA's website. (www.realchristmastrees.org). You must complete the NCTA form and mail it to them (address on website). FCTA also pays \$12 for a subscription to Christmas Tree Magazine.

mail to: John Gregory, Treasurer, FCTA 3605 NW 69th Street Gainesville, FL 32606