



Left: What could be a more memorable family activity than bringing home the family tree from an area tree farm.



Middle: The community Christmas tree bonfire in Athens is always a special conclusion of the holiday season each year.



Right: Visitors to Mensons Tree Farm will meet Bumble, the abominable snowman from the Rudolph movie. He appears on their Christmas parade float each year and puts the star on the top of the Christmas tree.

REAL CHRISTMAS TREES

Create Family Memories While Supporting the Environment

By Sally Smid

While Christmas trees seem to have a German origin, Canadians have claimed them for their own, from the large trees in our village squares to the family trees that grace our living rooms. While there has been a history of artificial trees of aluminum, plastic, and even feathers, many still opt for a tree of pine, fir, or spruce. Perhaps it is especially fitting that evergreens have been given that special role as they are the trees that remain green throughout the frigid winter, a Christian symbol of eternal life and perhaps, also a symbol of never-ending holiday memories.



The Mensons Tree Farm cultivates and grooms' rows of trees in anticipation of the Christmas season each year.

For many families it has become a tradition to take out an ax and a sleigh to find the "perfect tree" on their own rural property or on an area tree farm where the local economy is also supported. Cutting your own tree also means that you may likely have trimmings to use for wreaths and centerpieces.

The tree cutting event can also include a bonfire with hot chocolate and caroling. In a memorable tree cutting outing, as the tree is brought into the house, it is then decorated

with ornaments that often hold many sentimental memories. Under the tree is the traditional space for the placement of those "secret gifts". Its boughs provide the perfect climbing place for the family cat, who most likely will toss an ornament to the floor. The pine smell that fills the house, the twinkling lights and the snapping of pine cones in the evening warmth, all add to the joy of the season.

There is often the debate over buying a real or fake tree. While many prefer real trees due to tradition, proponents of artificial trees often find them more convenient and less messy. Such trees however, are often made of non-biodegradable materials that go into the landfills once they've been used a number of years, and pose environmental hazards. Real trees can be chipped for mulch, are biodegradable and support the environment in a variety of ways. Conservationists from Tree Canada say that when you choose a live tree you are helping the environment.

Real trees are planted like any other crop and provide wildlife habitat as they grow until they are harvested and replaced by new saplings. They represent more than \$100 million to the rural Canadian economy.

Christmas trees are often grown on family farms such as the Mensons Farm near Soperton. Josh Menson explains that the trees are trimmed yearly to help in shaping them. After their fall season of corn, squash and pumpkins, it is time to prepare for their

Christmas tree business. This involves an invitation for local families to come and choose the tree that they want to take home. They make it a festive time which includes hot chocolate as well!

There are also those who decide on a rooted tree in a pot that can be decorated and enjoyed for the holidays and then planted outside later on. Some even put their tree into a snowbank after the holidays, where it can be a great shelter for winter creatures. Decorations of popcorn, nuts and seeds for the birds can be added. If placed near a window visiting birds can be easily viewed and enjoyed through the winter months. A discarded tree could even be used for firewood in the household fireplace. For some communities, many trees are collected for use in a festive bonfire celebration. Participants gather around the blazing fire for warmth and connect with neighbors in a spirit of community, while reflecting on the joys of the past season and anticipating what the new year may hold! **LH**

You can visit the Menson farm and make an appointment to pick your tree at (161 County Road 42, Delta, Ontario 613-928-2555) you can also visit their Facebook page @ facebook.com/Menson-Farm-138754269660756/ they also sell farm fresh produce and also have a gift shop.