

# A homegrown connection for the holiday season

## Every household has a holiday tradition, as does every culture.

In Mexico, the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (December 12) is a public holiday. It is a Catholic feast to celebrate the belief that a man encountered the Virgin Mary, Mexico's patron saint, in Mexico City on December 9 and 12, 1531.

St. Lucia Day, on December 13, celebrates the tales of the monks who first brought Christianity to Sweden.

And of course, many families everywhere celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas Day.

As 2018 draws to a close, there is much to be thankful for. In Oregon, we celebrate a strong economy, fertile soil and elite growing conditions that enable the highest quality nursery plants in the country. Of course we should also be thankful for the community that is our industry.

One of the greatest holiday traditions is the Christmas tree. It may be purchased at a garden center, or bought at a fundraiser for athletics, which is what Team Stone does. You might even trudge up a hill with saw in hand, selecting the tree from the woods. Add in a wreath made from branch trimmings, and your home is complete for the holiday season.

### White House traditions

Anyone who reads my column with any regularity knows that I am a presidential history nerd. President Benjamin Harrison, the 23<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States, placed the first Christmas tree in the White House in the second floor Oval Room in 1889.

He was the grandson of the ninth president, William Henry Harrison — they were the only grandfather-grandson duo to have held the office. For him, family in the White House during the holidays was a priority.

In the modern era, first lady Jacqueline Kennedy began the tradition of selecting a theme for the official White House Christmas tree. She decorated a tree placed in the oval Blue Room. Oregon has had two trees as part of the tradition in the West Wing, in 1991 and 1992. After all, Oregon trees were a favorite of first lady Barbara Bush.

### U.S. capital Christmas tree

The National Christmas Tree is a large evergreen tree located in the northeast section of Washington D.C., near the White House. The tree has been decorated each year since 1923 and during early December. It is lit by the president of the United States.

Every president since Franklin D. Roosevelt has kicked off the holiday season with a message to the country.

2018 is a special year for Oregon as the state was selected to provide the National Christmas Tree. The Sweet Home Ranger District in the Willamette National Forest was selected. The tree will embark on a journey of more than 3,000 miles. Fittingly, it will commemorate the 175th anniversary of the Oregon Trail by following the path of the pioneers in the reverse direction.

It's fitting for our industry, as the Oregon Trail pioneers included the very first nurserymen who would found nurseries and orchards in the Willamette Valley.

### Tree controversy

Sometimes it seems like our nation's capital can make anything controversial.

The administration of William McKinley received harsh criticism for its tree display, with the *Chicago Daily Tribune* calling the practice "arboreal infanticide." President Teddy Roosevelt followed suit and did not display a tree, saying it was not environmentally friendly. The 1924 ceremony changed significantly. In April 1924, President Calvin Coolidge gave a speech to the American Forestry Association in which he criticized cutting down trees for use as Christmas.

Regardless of these criticisms, the tradition continued in times of peace and war.

### Ranking first

Oregon is the top producer of Christmas trees in the nation. We have more than 42,000 acres bringing over 5 million trees to the public. The \$90 million industry produces the highest quality noble, Douglas and grand firs that serve as the centerpiece of Christmas in households across the continent.

The nursery and greenhouse industry understands that it takes significant hand labor and time to produce a Christmas tree



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— typically, 7–9 years to produce a six-footer. Making matters more challenging, it's a rough and tumble market.

When the industry was threatened with unreasonable market barriers in Mexico around 10 years ago, the OAN joined forces with the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association to work with our Congressional delegation to reopen the markets. First, we took them on a farm tour to show them how the growers operate. There's nothing like chainsaws and helicopters to show the awesomeness of harvest.

We have only a few Christmas tree members in the association and they are valued. During this holiday season it is important to recognize where the symbol of the Christmas season has significant roots.

While dealing with significant shortages, Oregon's reach is international. The treasure of the holiday season extends to Japan, China, Hong Kong, Philippines, Mexico, Guam and Puerto Rico. Some 16 percent of Oregon's Christmas trees, and 23 percent of our Douglas firs, are exported to Mexico. International trade is important, and the OAN is working hard to keep foreign markets open.

### From my house to yours

The holiday season for my family is one that I treasure. With a daughter as a college sophomore and my youngest daughter as a junior in high school — my wife Jenn and I know that our time as a complete family unit is running out. Opening a small number of presents on Christmas morning sitting next to our tree is part of our holiday experience. I hope that you have a wonderful season of joy, no matter how you celebrate. ☺