

Vacation Spot Turned Into Profitable Business For Retired Couple

BY LINDA WILLIAMS
Bedford Co. Correspondent
CLEARVILLE (Bedford Co.)
— In 1956, Myrtle and Dan Haldeman began vacationing annually in the Clearville area.

"Because we lived in Washington, D.C., we were looking for a summer place that later could be used for retirement," Myrtle explained, "And a place where my husband could plant Christmas trees."

The first trees were harvested in 1969. At that time, the Haldemans were spending summer vacations and weekends at the farm that they say, "We fell in love with at first sight."

"Living conditions were primitive," Myrtle recalls. "But we didn't mind because we enjoyed the country so much."

In 1980, Myrtle and Dan began working on their modern, lodge-like home and decided to add a bed and breakfast to their Christmas tree farm business.

"We got the idea while touring Ireland," Myrtle recalls. "So far, we are doing well. We are only eight miles from Route 40-48 and that's bringing us a lot of business."

Conifer Ridge Farm has about 30 acres planted in Christmas trees. "We are constantly trying to improve our standards," Myrtle says. "That's what competition does and there is lots of that out there."

Christmas tree farming has been on the increase in Bedford County for a number of years, according to Dick Dale, Bedford County Extension Agent.

"You can usually find at least one variety that will grow on most any of the county farms," Dale continues. "Most find out rather quickly that Christmas trees are hard work. Some get weeded out when the truth is realized."

One of the biggest problems the growers have to contend with is deer," Dale says. "There is no effective way of keeping them away from the small trees. Free fencing is available to those who are already making at least a major part of their living from tree growing. For those trying to start out, it's tough."



Dan Haldeman shakes all of the dead needles off a Christmas tree before placing it for sale in the Christmas tree shop he and his wife, Myrtle, own near Clearville.

Bedford County presently has five major tree growers and 40 or more who are working at it part time. The major growers wholesale mainly to Washington D.C., Frederick, Philadelphia, and Delaware. The drought of 1988 was hard on all tree farmers and the over plentiful rains of 1989 made it difficult to get to the small trees for weeding.

"There's always problems," admits Bedford County tree grower Myrtle Haldeman of Conifer Ridge Farm near Clearville. "There are diseases, mice, deer, dry weather, wet weather, but somehow, we've managed to survive."

The Haldemans grow Scotch pine, white pine, Douglas fir, spruce, and Norwegian blue spruce trees. Their main market area is Baltimore, but they have many customers from Bedford

and Cumberland. As an addition to the tree business, Myrtle and Dan opened a Christmas shop in the barn where they display their trees. The shop features handcrafted Christmas items, many are made from pine and Myrtle creates some of them herself.

The shop also offers hot mulled cider to browsers.

Another calling card for the Haldemans' trees has been an offer to tag in October. "We advertise in the Baltimore-Frederick areas," Myrtle explains. "We encourage families to come and spend the day, bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the fall foliage while they pick out their Christmas tree. Then, we tag the trees and deliver them in December."

Dan Haldeman says they enjoy giving customers a little extra. "For instance, we have a machine to shake all of the dead needles off the trees before they are sold," he says. "Homemakers love us for that."

Myrtle recently retired from public teaching and Dan also will retire in a few months. His career has been with the U.S. Customs Department.

"When we do, we plan to spend even more time here," Myrtle says as she gazes out on the picturesque scene this Clearville varm allows.

"The people who come here for our bed and breakfast love the tranquility." She adds, "We knew they would, because we are from the city ourselves and know pretty much what they are looking for."

The cabin which housed Dan and Myrtle during the early years of their Christmas tree farming venture also is available for those families who don't mind roughing it a little. "It has electricity, but no running water," she explains. "Young families seem to enjoy it during the summer."

Looking around Conifer Ridge, one quickly gets the impression that retirement isn't going to slow life down for the Haldemans.



Dan Haldeman runs a Christmas tree through the baler. Grown in Bedford County, the tree will be enjoyed by a family in the Baltimore area.

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