



Rick and LeAnn Koontz operate Seller's Tree Farm.

Making Christmas Wreaths Keep Them Busy

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Bedford Co. Correspondent
DUTCH CORNER (Bedford Co.) — The scent and even the taste of pine linger in the air at 7 Lincoln Drive in Bedford, from mid-November through mid-December.

LeAnn Koontz, together with husband, Rick Koontz, a Pennsylvania State Policeman, and Rick's grandfather, Charles Sellers own and manage Seller's Tree Farm located off Yantz Road in the Dutch Corner area.

Charlie started the tree farm in 1952 and even now as an octogenarian, he enjoys every aspect of this tedious business. From planting to harvesting, Charlie is at the tree farm every weather acceptable day.

A warm autumn sun with the wind playing soft music through the pine trees is good for the soul as he works at mowing and trimming.

Rick started helping his grandad when he was big enough to walk. "I really can't remember a time when I wasn't in there learning all I could," he says.

It was LeAnn who saw a potential for all the waste that Christmas trees produce. "I saw them cut off the bottoms to keep the trees trimmed and I also saw a lot of trees going to waste because a deer ate off of one side or a beetle decided to have lunch on the tree farm," she says.

LeAnn says her mother, Gloria Feight, has always been a crafty person, adding that "Mother is probably a frustrated florist."

Both Gloria and LeAnn's dad, Ron, helped with creating a side business for her daughter and son-in-law known as "Wonderland Wreaths."

LeAnn says it would be an ideal business, "if only we could spread it out a little. All of the work has to be done in a three week period."

Wonderland Wreaths are marketed wholesale through the same Baltimore/Washington D.C. broker, which wholesales the Christmas trees. Other wreaths are sold retail and this year LeAnn came up with another idea.

She created a website on the internet and advertised the wreaths as a fund raiser. For the second year, Summit Quest is

marketing the wreaths and this year, the Chesapeake Elementary School in Edgewood, Maryland, caught the website and took on their own project of selling Christmas wreaths.

"This is the fourth year for the business and every year, it has doubled," LeAnn says. In addition to the money raised by the organization, she gives a \$25 reward to the high salesman.

Wonderland creations include wreaths with bows ranging in size from 12 inches to four foot, door charms, mantle wreaths, candy canes made from pine, Christmas tree wreaths, swags, and mail box huggies.

Prices range from \$6 for a small wreath to \$37.90 for a mantle swag. "Most people are happy with only a big red bow," LeAnn says, "but we can add pine cones and holly berries for an additional charge."

"Mom is the resident bow maker," she adds. Gloria and Ron Feight as well as LeAnn and at least three additional hired employees create all of the arrangements for Wonderland Wreaths. This year she expects to make more than 1,000.

"We just eat, sleep and drink pine needles," she says of the business which has grown from a single to a three car garage in four years.

And, of course, Murphy and his discouraging law gets in the way. Last year, nearly everyone was down sick during the wreath-making season.

Rick also pitches in to help when he can get away from the Christmas tree fields.

There are 53 acres of the Sellers farm planted in Christmas trees which includes Douglas Fir, White Pine, Scotch Pine, Blue Spruce, and Frazier Fir.

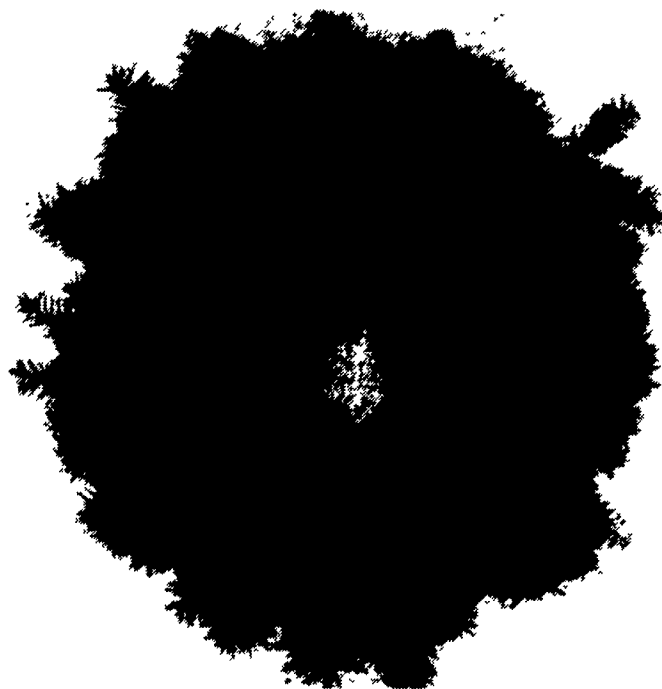
"Frazier Fir are very popular but do not grow well in this area," LeAnn notes adding this is the reason they are usually more costly.

The Seller farm has grown from doing everything with small equipment or by hand to some powerful tools. Trees are planted with a machine, bound with a machine, and loaded by a mechanical loader onto the tractor trailers which wind their way up the country lane.

"Christmas trees are a lot of work," admit both grandad and grandson. "A lot of people think you just plant them and let them grow, but that's not true. They must be trimmed, the ground kept mowed, and insects are a constant battle."

Harvest begins shortly after the second hard frost. For the Sellers' farm that is usually just before Thanksgiving.

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Wonderland Wreaths range in size from 12 inches in diameter to four feet.

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