

The 'Christmas Experience'

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through retail outlets such as supermarkets and for church and civic group fundraisers.

Barziloski noted that the majority of their sales are in the wholesale portion of their business, about 80 percent. However, it is watching families come to the farm to select their trees that the family truly enjoys.

"What is the perfect Christmas tree? Well, the perfect tree is what people like," said Barziloski. "It might not be what a professional grower sees. When a family comes to the farm to choose and cut a tree, it's really a treat because they will cut trees that they pick. To them, that's their tree. The kids will pick it out, and it may be less than standard (in a grower's eyes.) But, to them, it's their tree."

Bennie's Nurseries was began in 1932 by Veto's father Ben Barziloski. Veto entered into the business with his brother Bob in the 1970s after completing a tour with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Veto remained in partnership with his brother until Bob's death in 1996.

Today, the family raises an estimated 75 acres of Christmas trees, with the majority of the remaining lands in forests.

Varieties raised are Douglas fir, white pine, Fraser fir, Scotch pine, blue spruce, Norway spruce, and white spruce. During the summer, the Barziloskis have

a successful landscaping business.

Although Veto never went to college, he has kept up with information through other educational opportunities.

"I've been in the business all of my life," said Veto. "I have gone to a lot of seminars, educational updates, and meetings to keep up on things."

Veto credits Penn State extension, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), and agricultural research for keeping him up to date with the latest findings in Christmas tree production.

With an investment of 10 to 15 years into raising a tree from seed to maturity, the newest scientific information helps the Barziloskis with selection of seeds through seed sourcing and other tree handling techniques.

Veto notes that seed sourcing has helped him in the selection of what trees will produce well in this climate, helping with the seed-to-harvest results.

Although seed sourcing can improve tree development and increase harvest rates, not all trees grown are able to be sold. Some of the trees will not meet the farm's quality standards. The Barziloskis make use of low-quality trees in wreaths and garland.

"That's a good way to get rid of some of the trees that don't develop," said Veto. "You never get a 100 percent harvest for various reasons. Making garland and

wreaths is a good way to use those unusable trees."

Besides the decision-making process for selecting the tree genetics for growing trees another critical decision-making area is pricing.

"It's a one-time-a-year harvest operation and a one-time shot," said Veto. "If you don't sell your trees, you have blown your chance."

Christmas tree pricing is market driven, and Veto stresses a grower has to be "careful to avoid overpricing." He has seen many highs and lows in the Christmas tree market.

Although there is no official price formulation, the Barziloskis base their pricing off three factors—supply, demand, and quality of the trees.

While the Christmas season demands long hours and challenging days for the family, their Christmas tree growing experience has taken them to some amazing places. Their trees, wreaths, and garland are used in the homes of many famous people.

One yearly tradition is decorating Joan River's New York City apartment and the home of a magazine publisher. And through a tree stand they supply to in New York City, customers who have purchased their trees include Bruce Willis, Macaulay Culkin, Telly Savalas, and several rock stars.

Veto notes it is neat to

watch celebrities come and select their trees. They often pull up to the stands in limousines and with their children will continue the family's tradition of picking a Christmas tree.

For the Barziloski children, growing up on a tree farm is a great experience. They are happy for the opportunities that have come their way.

"It's not bad," said Adam, 19. "You did not have to go out and find a job, there was always one here. It's something fun to do."

Adam, a 2003 Tunkhannock Area High School graduate, hopes to take over the family business. He is not in college at this time, but Adam does not rule out going in the future.

Michael, a 17-year-old student at Tunkhannock Area High School, loves being on the farm. "It is work, but (more importantly), it's something you have for the rest of your life."

The eldest son, Veto, is studying business at Temple University.

As the tree-buying season begins to wind down and life slowly returns to a slower pace, there is no doubt of the love the Barziloski's have for their way of life and business.

"I do enjoy working in the fields," said Veto. "The trees, the fresh air. It's a great place to be, where we live—the most beautiful place on earth."

Manure Haulers Debate Start Of Association

**CHARLENE M. SHUPP
ESPENSHADE**
Lancaster Farming Staff

DAUPHIN (Dauphin Co.) — About 20 certified manure haulers gathered at the Dauphin County Ag Center Tuesday to debate the start of a manure hauler association.

With the changes on the horizon for the Nutrient Management Act and other legislation, concerns were debated on what haulers needed to do and what would be the purpose of a "custom applicator association."

Robb Meinen of Penn State mediated the discussion as the group began to formulate a plan of action.

Areas of concerns and needs listed by the group was legislative representation, information dissemination, networking, and public relations.

Problems with transportation department regulations expanded the challenges of defining the manure hauling industry and what type of industry it is.

While group reservations to deal with transportation issues were high, it exemplified how groups outside of the custom applicator industry continue to struggle on defining what it is.

Meinen noted that this industry has grown dramatically in the past 20 years to meet the needs of farm operations. "How many manure haulers did you know in 1980? This is a new industry. They (PennDot) don't know how to handle it."

Walt Peechatka of PennAg Industries Association assisted in the facilitation and discussion, sharing insight on how PennAg operates and chal-

lenged the group to define what their needs were.

The final decision and course of action of the haulers was to pursue an idea to form a "Custom Applicator Council" under the umbrella of PennAg. This idea has a long way to go to reality, with the first hurdle being approval from the PennAg board of directors.

The next PennAg director meeting will be Jan. 7, where Peechatka will present the proposal. The next step the group takes will be based on the board decision.

If PennAg approves the idea, in order to organize a "custom applicator council" under PennAg, a minimum of 20 businesses will have to join the organization.


A follow-up manure hauler meeting is planned for Feb. 5 for a final decision and to organize the haulers association.

Haulers in attendance were positive about what they accomplished.

"I did not know what to expect coming into it. I had some apprehension," said Steve Lehman of Hopewood. "I think it was productive. I'm satisfied with the outcome."

"I don't know how much we'll be able to accomplish, but we've tried," said Woody Martin of Shippensburg. "There are some issues with the nutrient management plans, I think it (an association) will help us make sure we get the right laws in the right place."


Meinen summarized the evening as, "We had a group come together with no organization, but a common interest. We were able to move and pick a direction. Hopefully (an association) will move the industry in a positive direction."




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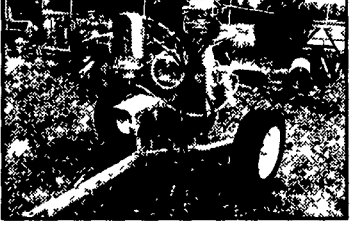
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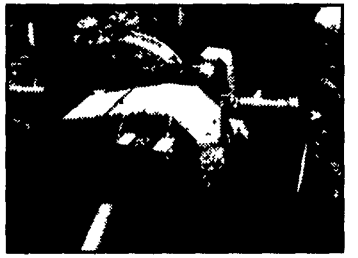


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