

# Christmas is in the air at El Dorado tree farms

By Kathryn Reed

CAMINO – One aroma above all says Christmas – the scent of a freshly cut evergreen.

It's everywhere in the foothills of El Dorado County this time of year.

It didn't matter that the temperature was dropping and snow was beginning to fall, it just added to the magic of the countless families eager to get their tree on Thanksgiving weekend.

Friends Sandy Baker and Kellie Kijanka used to live next door to each other. Their tradition was to get their trees together at Indian Rock Tree Farm in Camino each year. Now they live 120 miles apart – one in Davis, one in Foresthill – but they still meet at the tree farm. They've been doing so for 20 years.



One tree isn't always enough. Photo/Kathryn Reed

That's one of the special things about Indian Rock, the people who return each year.

Larry and Geri Hyder bought the 33 acres – of which 15 acres are the tree farm – in 1961. They started selling trees in 1976. They have about 15 varieties.

“What we have here is magical. A lot of people all they are able to have is a flat lot. You are able to walk up the hill here. We call it the Sherwood Forest,” Geri Hyder said in reference to Robin Hood. “The main thing is we want to give people service.”



Larry and Geri Hyder have been in the tree farm business for 40 years. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Multiple generations work at the tree lot – from parking, to sales, to helping cut trees, to selling hot cocoa.

Customers are likely family, too. They seek out the Hyders to say hi, shake hands and give a hug.

A few years ago Indian Rock earned the state award for best tree farm.

On Saturday the lot was bustling with people. This was true of most of the tree farms in the area. Thanksgiving is their busiest weekend, with the next few weeks when they make all of their money for the year.



Binding a large tree for transport takes some effort.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's a different kind of frenzy at Rapetti Farms. This is the second year they have sold trees via a membership formula. This means the general public cannot buy from them.

Owner Randall Rapetti told *Lake Tahoe News* they went this route to avoid the parking hassle, arguments, fights and people leaving without paying.

"We have formed almost like a membership base. They get postcards in the mail and they don't have to compete for trees," Rapetti said.

They have mostly Nordmann fir, with some noble fir. The whole farm will eventually be Nordmann, Rapetti said. They come from the Republic of Georgia.



Christmas trees dot a large swath of the landscape in El Dorado County. Photo/Kathryn Reed

At the Hillside Tree Farm customers have 10 varieties to choose from, with Swift silver being the best seller.

“It’s a real family event. We may sell three or four trees at a time,” Peg Perron at Hillside told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Customers come from all over – the Bay Area, Reno, Redding – even people from Los Angeles headed south with an El Dorado County tree on board.

“I don’t think the economy has ever affected us,” Phyllis McGee told *Lake Tahoe News*. With her husband, Michael, they have been running the McGee Tree Farm in Placerville for 32 years. “Sometimes people like to do the simple things.”

People will sacrifice other things to ensure they have a Christmas tree.

And with trees from the northwest – where many stores get their trees – being more expensive this year, cutting a tree locally might be a lot more economical. Many of these farms will also cut the tree you select, so you don't need to be experienced with a saw.