



THE LARWICK CHRISTMAS Tree Farm, owned by Loran and Jane Larwick, welcomes visitors to their Brush Prairie land every year with hot chocolate and cider. In this photo, 3-year-old Blake Larwick helps his father Lance Larwick, Loran and Jane's son, shake a tree. The entire Larwick family gathers each weekend to work on the farm during the holiday season.

Larwick tree farm brings Christmas joy

Brandy Grey
staff reporter

As Christmas Tree farmers, Loran and Jane Larwick have fielded their share of interesting questions from visitors.

But none of them, said Loran, beat the man who asked

him what they do with trees that don't sell that season.

"He honestly didn't know that we don't cut them all down and replant the whole farm next year," he said with a shrug.

Loran refrained from chastising the man and instead, he said, explained that it takes

more than one year to grow a tree.

While Loran doubts he ever would have asked the same question himself, he can understand being unfamiliar with farm practices. After all, even though Jane and Loran were both raised around plenty of

farmland in Iowa, they only began farming in 1990 with the hand-planting of 500 Douglas Fir seedlings.

The Larwicks now manage about 18,000 Christmas trees that cover 15 acres of their

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Brush Prairie farm. Walking across their farm, the serene atmosphere seems miles away from civilization, when it's actually only minutes away from Wilco.

"I was told this land wouldn't be good for farming, even though it was zoned agricultural when we bought it," he said. "They told me there was too much clay in the soil to grow anything. I looked around at all these trees growing and figured I could make that work."

In the first few years of business, said Jane, they would sit in the house and watch for a car to pull into the gravel driveway. Business grew with time. A former coach, Loran said members of his son's team began to come to their farm every year, even after his children were too old to play. Employers began to host company wide celebrations at the farm, where each employee got a tree, wreath or swag.

Now members of his children's former team are raising families of their own, said Loran, and they delight in the return business. Jane said every year feels like a sort of reunion. Nearly 80 percent of their business comes from repeat cus-

tomers.

"Everyone is happy here," she said. "Families, people are extremely friendly. We just have a lot of fun. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it."

Tall stacks of cardboard boxes stuffed with apple cider, cups and cocoa line the living room of their home. Each year, Jane said, they give out about 40 gallons of cider and 80 gallons of cocoa.

Jane makes all the wreaths and swags in a makeshift studio behind their home. Almost all of the materials used in the work come from the farm, she said, and she ties each ribbon on the nearly 100 wreaths and 75 swag segments herself. Next to her work station sits Santa's shop, where holiday figurines, antique tree stands, and decorative tree ornaments are sold to shoppers.

The Larwicks charge for tree variety rather than size. Doug Firs are \$19, Grand Firs are \$29 and Noble Fir's cost \$39.

Tree frogs, which very occasionally make it home with visitors, said Loren, are free.

The Larwick Christmas Tree Farm opens Fri., Nov. 26, at 10 a.m. They are open through Dec. 22, Mon.-Fri. noon-dark, Sat.-Sun. 8:30 a.m.-dark. They are at 12605 NE 132 Ave, Brush Prairie, (360)-256-7142.