

# Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

September 2015

## *Special points of interest:*

### ♦ **Future Meeting Sites**

The NHVTCTA is always looking for possible sites to hold our Summer and Fall meetings. You don't have to have the perfect farm: there's no such thing, and besides, any "issues" on your farm just give the group more to talk about and learn about. We plan the agenda planning and help with the logistics; all you need is a willingness to host your fellow farmers for a day. And we like to move around, so it doesn't matter what corner of NH or VT you're in. If you might be interested, please talk with Jim Horst or Patrick White (contact information on page 2).

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## Fall Meeting: BRING A TREE!

The 2015 Fall meeting of the NHVTCTA will be held on Saturday, Oct. 3, at Asack & Son Christmas Tree Farm and Nursery in Barton, Vt.

More on the meeting agenda follows, but first is plea for all interested members to **PLEASE BRING A TREE WITH YOU!**

One part of the meeting will be the second annual **NHVTCTA Tree Competition**. This will be a contest for members, and judged by members. More on the competition can be found at the end of this meeting preview, but first is plea for all interested members to please bring a tree!

The fall meeting agenda



**Asack & Son Christmas Tree Farm and Nursery**

includes an update on the Christmas tree checkoff program, as well as a review of NHVTCTA business.

Rick Dungey from the National Christmas Tree Association will also be on hand for two important presentations: The first is "Who's Gonna Buy

*Continued on page 8*

## NCTA Update: New Membership Structure

New for 2016, NCTA membership categories have been changed to adapt to the state of the industry and the evolving role of NCTA with the new checkoff organization starting. The new model offers straightforward options and a simpler membership application process with dues levels

based solely on cost of benefits and NO per tree calculation.

Now, members will choose their membership level based on how involved they want to be with the national association and what types of information they want to receive.

*Continued on page 10*

## President's Message

Hi all,

The Christmas Tree Promotion, Research, and Information Order administered by the USDA is set to collect the first round of assessments this year. It's been seven years in the making and implementing of this checkoff program and I'm still left wondering how it will all play out.

The formula for assessing and actually collecting the fees is still vague for most people but I hope the learn-as-we-go approach will work. I believe the checkoff will be beneficial to the tree industry as a whole.

On a different topic, in spite of 13 western states filing injunctions in federal court to delay implementation of the current version of the Waters of the U.S. Rule, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers is forging ahead with it. The new rule took effect on August 28, 2015. The 13 states that filed an injunction are bound by the old version of the rule while the 37 remaining states (including NH and VT) must adopt the new version.

These two things are bound to affect our industry for years to come. Most growers are adept at changing with the times because we are used to being pushed around by Mother Nature and her varying moods. Working with a government agency will take the same fortitude and patience.

Closer to home, the trees are looking good again this year. Despite some winter burn and fungus problems in NH and VT and north into Canada, there seems to be a good supply of trees around. Please bring one to the fall meeting at Bill Asack's Nursery on October 3 and enter it in the association's tree contest. Last year the contest went very well but we need more trees. Only five farms entered trees last year and I know we can do better than that. Knowledge is power and that is the goal of this people's choice contest. Please bring all the information you have about the tree you are entering to share with the rest of us. See you all there.

*Daniel Beloin,  
President*



## New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



### 2015 Officers

President	Dan Beloin	belointreefarm@gmail.com
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Copies of the Association bylaws and policies are available to members at any time by contacting the Executive Secretary.

### 2016 Tree Line Publication Schedule

Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	Jan. 8
June	June 3
September	Sept. 2





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## Obsession with the “Blue Horse”

By Larry and Jimmy Downey

As Christmas tree breeders, we look out in the field and see many different traits; early or late budding, flat or rounded needle structure, needle retention, etc. However, what has recently caught our attention over the past years is the “blue obsession trait.”

Among all the green trees in the field, we see a different shade that catches our eye. We walk across the fields to see that it is a blue tinted balsam. It struck our curiosity and quickly became an obsession. We talked to our friends and they also had some blue tints in their fields. The blue tint trait had potential and growers were interested.

Today we are proud to offer this refined blue obsession trait through thorough selection and breeding. But first let us start with the beginning and work our way to why all Christmas tree growers should consider having this trait in their fields.



**Even in black-and-white, you can see that this blue is pretty vibrant compared to the green branch at bottom.**

In 2009 on a warm summer day, a German specialized in evergreen breeding came to visit our farm looking for this so called “Blue Horse.” He was referred to us by another fellow grower in Vermont. At his arri-

val, he spoke about his journey looking for the Blue Horse (the Blue Balsam). He let my father speak about his blue balsam findings and after a moment of pause he looked at him and said, “You know, I traveled everywhere looking for this Blue Horse balsam and even though I have not seen your specimen yet, I come to the conclusion that the Blue Horse does not exist! Everyone thinks they have the Blue Horse but they do not, I tell you it does not exist!”

So my dad said maybe I do not have what you are looking for but for me this is the bluest I have. The next morning, we left to see my fathers Blue Horse. After seeing the trees the German Specialist looked at my dad and said “I have traveled across the USA from west to east and have given up on the existence of this Blue Horse. However today you have shown me the Blue Horse I was looking for.”

Mind you this specialist was not a Christmas tree grower but a evergreen breeder. He wanted the pollen of this tree to cross over to other species, like the Korean fir, to create new varieties with this Blue Obsession trait.

The mother tree is dense, pyramidal in shape. The tree has stiff upper branches, a round needle structure. More importantly, these rare specimens have an intense soft blue sky color needles and will stay blue throughout all the seasons. Ultimately, they prefer well drain, acidic soils. They require

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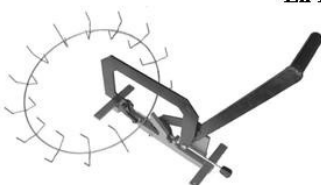
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## Fair Updates

The Big E was still underway as this newsletter went to the printer, but we did get reports from a few other fairs.

Mike Dannehy recapped the North Haverhill Fair in New Hampshire: "The fair went well, with large crowds every day and good weather. We had 11 trees to judge, all of great quality.

George and Mary Gilbert won best of show again."

Peter Lyon once again did a tremendous job of putting together a great display and tree competition at the Champlain Valley Fair, visiting many farms to personally pick up trees for the fair—if you see Peter, please thank him for all his efforts.



**Tunbridge Fair tree competition**  
Nichols Tree Farm won best of show.

Rich Rockwood again organized a terrific display promoting real trees and the NHVTCTA, as well as a tree competition at the Tunbridge Fair. He sent along this summary:

"The weather was great,

crowds were huge and it appears that people are spending money. People seemed interested about where to get a farm fresh tree, but no one asked about wholesale trees. Many were interested in planting trees as part of small Christmas tree farms."

"Nichols Tree Farm swept Best in Show wreath and Best in Show tree with a Canaan fir. Gilbert Tree Farm had a blue ribbon Fraser fir and Redrock Farm had a blue ribbon tabletop tree. Bunny Acres also participated with a really nice balsam and Fraser...competition was tough! Overall the Christmas tree display was the best we've ever had."

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## Blue Obsession (continued)

*Continued from page 4*

a sunny area that is moist and zone 3-6. The mother trees were taken in a natural state from an extremely isolated area thus creating a very isolated population that have been exchanging the same genes for many generations forming what breeders called a more or less homogeneous population. In other words, this was a breeder's gold mine.

The offspring of the Blue Obsession balsam trees has stiff upper branches, a round needle structure like the mother tree and excellent needle retention. These three traits are usually found more prominently in Fraser firs than in balsam firs, however, these trees were pure balsam. The round needle structure as opposed to the flat needle structure makes it easier for producers to create nice dense trees through the trimming.

The blue trait gene is not a dominant gene in the genetic code of the trees. Therefore the offspring's have a variation of the blue tint versus the mother tree. Finally, superior needle



**Larry and Jimmy Downey; Blue Obsession branch clippings**

retention allows for longer post-harvest storage as it retains its quality. Our needle retention test resulted in as good retention as the Fraser firs. Last but not least, the most important aspect of the Blue Obsession balsam fir is the fact that it brings an exotic sense without

bringing changes to the production. As a producer, it becomes difficult to produce many types of trees since they all require different care. For example, the Fraser firs are not always planted or trimmed the same way Korean firs are. Therefore,



the Blue Obsession balsam brings novelty to the industry without introducing new practices at the production level.

Before the German evergreen breeder left to return to Germany, he told my father, "You know, you're working for your children."

The reality is that it is hard to adapt to an ever changing taste in clientele needs with a crop that requires 10-15 years of growth. However, the Blue Obsession balsam has been in production for the past 4 years and has yielded excellent results at the production level.

It can withstand less drained soils than the Fraser firs, it is a tree that fills up faster than normal balsams and it has excellent needle retention. Blue Obsession balsam looks like a Fraser fir, but is produced like a balsam fir.

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# Compost Experimentation

*By Paul Lemire,  
Noel's Tree Farm*

In September of 2014 the fall meeting of the Christmas Tree Association was held at our farm in Litchfield, N.H.

After lunch we had a field tour of the farm. While discussing our composting operation, Bob White asked if I would like to do a test with the compost. Bob suggested putting compost down in the rows of trees, then observing if there was any change in the test area.

In April of this year I had my workers put down 4 or 5 inches of compost down the middle of 6 rows of Canaan fir trees. The trees had been in the field for two years.

While observing this test area through out the summer, I began to see a significant difference in the appearance of the trees. The trees were growing taller and the color was greener than the rows around the test area.

In September, trees with no compost looked good but the composted trees—what a difference! The color was brighter and many of the leaders were 1 to 2 feet taller than the rest of the field. Test trees seemed to have more buds and the trees looked healthier.

I plan on doing more composting next year.

The best part is that much of our compost comes from our own trees. We start our compost

by collecting fall clean-ups from local landscapers who dump their clean ups consisting of leaves, pine needles and grass. It saves them



**Customers can return their trees for a discount coupon; the trees are then chipped and used to make compost, which is then used to fertilize the trees.**

and one wreath. Every year we get back more trees.

We chip the trees next and add this to the fall clean ups. This mixture heats up all winter.

In the spring we turn the pile over every 3 weeks, continuing for the next 2 years. It makes a great compost, usually generating about 80 to 90 cubic yards of compost—it's an inexpensive way to fertilize our trees.

money because we don't charge them like local landfills.

Then, when we sell trees in the fall we ask all our customers to help us recycle our trees by bringing them back after Christmas and we give them a coupon for \$5.00 off the following year when they buy one tree

## Transplants

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## Fall Meeting Preview (continued)

*Continued from page 4*

a Tree in Five Years,” a look at emerging trends and how they will shape the market for Christmas trees in the near future. The next topic Dungey will discuss is the changing role NCTA will play to assist the industry now that the checkoff program will focus on promotion, as well as a revised NCTA dues structure.

After lunch, host Bill Asack will lead a field tour of farm, covering everything from his nursery operation to his mature trees. It’s a chance for growers to see the full life cycle of a Christmas tree on one (incredibly well kept!) farm.



**Rick Dungey, NCTA**

The contest rules will be simple and straight-forward: There is no fee to enter a tree and any member may enter one tree of any species.

Tree stands, a ballot box and ballots will be provided. Trees will be identified only by number until after the judging is complete. All members attending the meeting can inspect the

trees and vote for the tree that he/she thinks is best. After the judging is complete, farms names will be placed on their respective trees.

If you are entering a tree, please be ready to talk about the seed source, planting info, soil type, cultural practices, etc. That way we can all learn. Email President Dan Beloin (belointreefarm@gmail.com) with any questions about the contest.

Registration for the meeting (without a guaranteed meal) is available on-site if you have not already sent in your registration form. Contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-0660 with questions or for more information.

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# NHVTCTA's Nigel Manley Receives Two National Awards

The National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) and Christmas Spirit Foundation (CSF) recently presented two awards to Nigel Manley, the Iron Horse Award and the Outstanding Service Award, during the association's biennial event in Spring Grove, Ill. Manley, who hails from Bethlehem, New Hampshire, was presented with the Awards at the general session held on Friday, July 24.

First created in 2001, the Iron Horse Award is given to an NCTA director who has gone above and beyond in their service to the board and the association, and is one of the highest honors that NCTA bestows upon individuals.

The Christmas Spirit Foundation's Outstanding Service Award is given to a director who went beyond the normal call of duty in advancing the mission of the organization.



**Nigel Manley receives the Iron Horse Award (left) and the Outstanding Service Award (below).**



Christmas Trees to armed forces members in all branches of the military and their families. Since its inception in 2005, Trees for Troops has provided more than 157,000 trees to military and their

Manley has served both the Association and the industry through the Christmas Spirit Foundation for the past 10 years. The Christmas Spirit Foundation works to support the true spirit of Christmas and keep Real Christmas Trees at the heart of the Christmas celebration.

To accomplish its mission, the foundation administers the Trees for Troops program, which provides free, farm-grown

families.

“Nigel has provided endless dedication and has led by example through his role as the chairman of the Christmas Spirit Foundation for the past 10 years, said Blake Rafeld, NCTA president who presented the award to Manley. “To develop and grow such a program as Trees for Troops takes strategic leadership, diligence, and hard work. Nigel exemplifies all of those with humility and class.”

In addition to his many years working with the Trees for Troops program and the Christmas Tree industry, Manley is also the Director of The Rocks Estate, the Forest Society's North Country Conservation and Education Center. The Forest Society is a non-profit membership organization founded in 1901 to protect the state's most important landscapes and promote wise use of its natural resources. The 1,400-acre Rocks Estate includes numerous buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places and offers Agri- and Eco-tourism opportunities throughout the year.

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# Editor's Desk

*Continued from page 1*

NCTA Membership Options for 2016 include:

Introductory Member - \$99

Industry Member - \$299

Professional Member - \$599 + Advocacy Sponsorship.

On the right are more details about the benefits included at each membership level.

The NCTA Executive Committee also recently authorized an incentive for new members to join. Join for 2016 with the new membership structure and receive a general membership through the rest of 2015 *for free!*

The NCTA's Rick Dungey will be onhand at the NHVTCTA Fall Meeting to share more information on the new membership structure.

## 2016 NCTA Membership Structure

**1. Introductory Member** (NOT eligible to be an NCTA Director or to enter National Tree/Wreath Contests) **\$99**  
 For those who run small operations or are retired Christmas tree growers.

- American Christmas Tree Journal subscription
- Access to NCTA's Member Directory (online)
- Discounted member rates for NCTA educational events (in-person seminars, trade shows, webinars, etc.)
- NCTA member logo, digital version

**2. Industry Member** **\$299**  
 All benefits of Introductory Members, PLUS these additional:

- Media & consumer relations support from NCTA Staff in helping members prepare for and execute positive public relations whether with local news media or social media
- Includes membership in NCTA Blog Army
- Discounts and special offers through NCTA's Affinity Programs
- Topline results from Research Reports
- Listing in the Wholesale Locator on NCTA website (optional)

**3. Professional Member** **\$599 +**  
 All benefits of Industry Members, PLUS these additional: **Advocacy sponsorship**

- Access to NCTA's Online Member Center with resources including the Marketing Tool Kit, publication archives, talking points, media tips, industry supplier lists, graphics & photos, and more
- *Elite Member Monthly*, an electronic publication with sections specific to various business sectors of the industry (choose and cut, wholesaling, retailing, etc.)
- Complete Research reports including early access to the Harris Consumer Poll results, phytopthera, etc.
- Access to NEW Facilitated Discussion Forums (online, conference calls, in-person events). Network with others in the industry and discuss trends and news on specific topics
- Discounts on advertising in the *American Christmas Tree Journal* and *Elite Member Monthly*



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Balsam Fir: Cooks Strain Vermont Seed Source	Spring 2016	2-2	\$0.95
Balsam-Fraser Hybrids: Vermont Seed Source	Spring 2016	2-2	\$0.95
Fraser Fir: N.C. (Rogers Mtn.) Seed Source	Spring 2016	2-2	\$0.95
Fraser Fir: N.C. (Ayers) Seed Source	Spring 2016	2-2	\$0.95
Mystery Tree: Late-Breaking Fraser Fir	Spring 2016	2-2	\$1.10
Canaan Fir: West Virginia Seed Source	Spring 2016	2-2	\$1.05

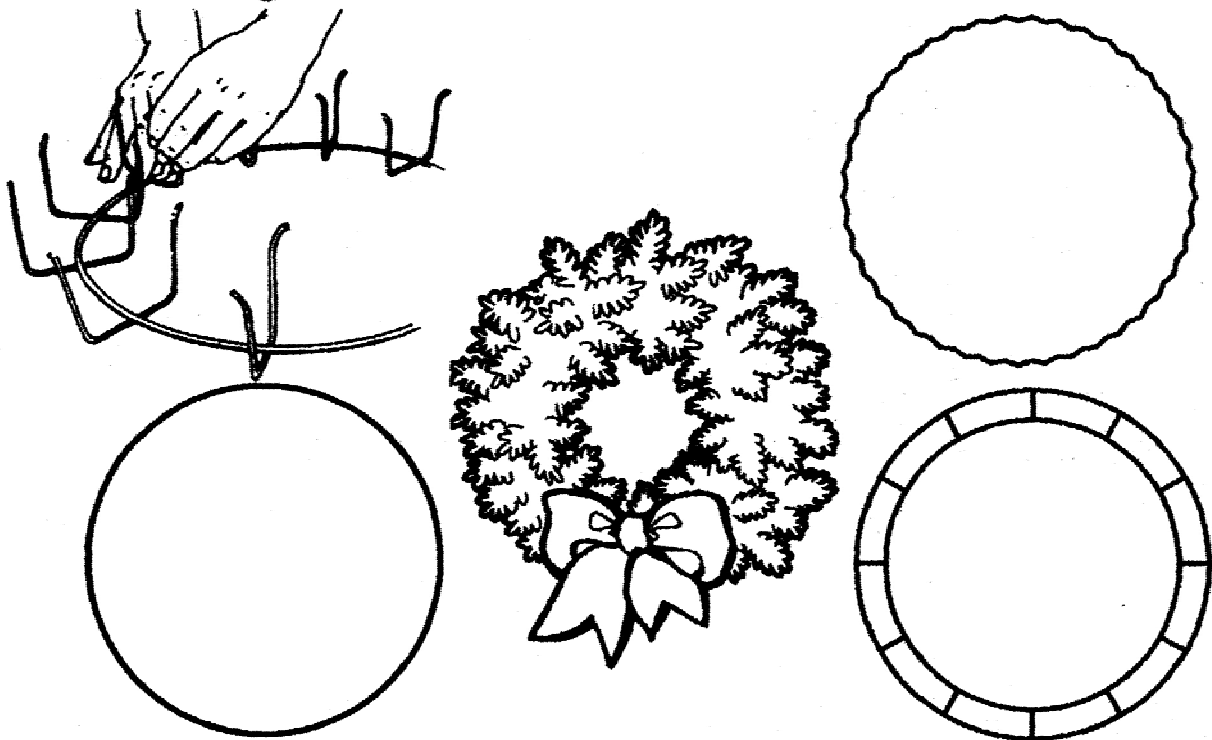
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## Overtime Rules

One important role that the Christmas tree industry will rely on the NCTA to handle is lobbying on issues that can affect farmers. NCTA has joined a group called Partnership to Protect Workplace Opportunity and submitted a letter to the Director of Division of Regulations, Legislation and Interpretation at U.S. DOL urging the Department to withdraw a recent proposal to dramatically change overtime rules. Following is a review of the issue from NCTA:

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) proudly proclaims that it has been advocating for small businesses since 1953 with a goal to pursue the best outcome for over 211,000 small businesses that employ over 1.8 million workers.

As many organizations voice their concerns to the Department of Labor (DOL) in opposition to its proposed changes to the overtime rules, SBA's Office of Advocacy is living up to the claim. DOL intends to amend its regulations under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) governing the "white collar" exemption. So far, the SBA's Office of Advocacy has held roundtables to learn more on the issue. Most recently, SBA has requested an additional 90 days for interested parties, including the Federal agency itself, to evaluate and reflect on the impact of the proposed overtime rule on small businesses.

While uncertain, it is very likely that DOL will have to grant an extension to its original

September 4 comment deadline in view of the SBA letter.

Under the proposed rule, DOL is considering increasing the minimum salary threshold from the current \$455 per week to \$970 per week - an increase of over 100%. This massive increase will impact our organization's member employers and employees and could significantly increase their costs. Additionally, DOL is planning to tie the minimum salary threshold to either the Consumer Price Index-Urban or the 40th percentile of weekly earnings of full time salaried employees. This is an unprecedented change.

NCTA members may request a copy of the letter by contacting Rick Dungey at the NCTA office.



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