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Michele Freiling

**Meet the
Colavita Family:**
Farming, Family and Holiday Fun
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The Colavita Family. Making the Season Bright



Photos by Michele Freiling

By Elizabeth Austin

As you drive along Dolington Road in Lower Makefield Township, you can't help but enjoy the beautiful scenery and pristine farmland along the way. You might notice a stretch of well-cared-for evergreen trees as you pass Colavita Christmas Tree Farm. If you haven't stopped in before, you are in for a treat this holiday season! With 38 varieties of fresh evergreen trees grown on the property, an owner with a passion for tree care and farming, plus a Holiday Shoppe stocked with beautiful ornaments, wreaths and collectables, Colavita Farm is a local treasure for the holidays!

The Colavitas have been in the Christmas tree business for more than 21 years, and while it's a well-oiled machine today, they've had their bumps along the way. Dory remembers their early years on the farm with humor and warmth; "I guess the funniest story I can remember was the day Bob, a city boy, was driving the large blue tractor around the pond. He came rushing into the house, exclaiming, 'The tractor is in the pond!' I went running out to see the tractor leaning precariously with one wheel in the edge of the water. What to do?"

The Colavitas have come a long way over the years. The farm is truly a family-owned and operated institution; "our entire family shares the distinctive experience of the Christmas season on a Christmas tree farm," says Bob Colavita. From the legal components to handing out candy canes to customers, each member of the Colavita family has a role in running the farm.

Bob and his wife Dory, now both 73, bought the property in 1997 after decades of fulfilling teaching careers in New Jersey public schools. They have three children and six grandchildren, as well as two dogs: a Boxer named Sophie and a rescued yellow Lab named Luca. Their eldest son, Bob Jr., works as a Business Administrator with the Hopewell Valley Regional School District. Kathy, his wife, is also an educator. They have two children, John (16) and Caroline (14). John plays baseball, runs track for Hopewell, and sings in the school choir. Caroline runs track, plays field hockey for Pennsbury, and participates in the school's theater program.

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Photos by Michele Freiling

Their second son, Matthew, works as an attorney for Haggerty, Goldberg, Schleifer & Kupersmith. Matthew's wife Mollie is a Regional Marketing Director at Merrill Lynch. Their daughter, Aidan (15), runs track for Council Rock, Nicholas (13) plays lacrosse, basketball, football, and guitar. Their youngest, Isabella (13), competes in cheerleading competitions. The family also has an English bulldog named Lola and a rescued French bulldog named Manny.

Christin, the youngest of their children, is employed as a Nurse Practitioner. Jim works as a physical therapist for Inner Circle in Langhorne. They have a daughter, Rowan (13), who plays softball and basketball, theater, and chorus. The family also has a three-legged rescued pitbull/mastiff mix named Lex.

Dory and Bob met during a summer math class at The College of New Jersey in 1965. This past June, they celebrated their 50th wedding

anniversary. They have been residents of Lower Makefield for more than 40 years. Of their marriage and their many years together, Dory says: "When we were first married we were two young teachers. We saw ourselves embarking on a career that we thought would take us through many years of educational challenges. But the years have a way of changing, not only the road you are on, but also the person you are. You are presented with unexpected opportunities not only to succeed, but to grow in unexpected ways. It can be exciting. It can be overwhelming. It can be both. So it was for us."

Bob was born and raised in Trenton, NJ. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a BA in Education, and went on to earn his MS in Reading Psychology from Temple University. He taught for 40 years at the elementary, high school, and college levels in public schools across New Jersey. During that time, he also developed an affinity for plants; "fruits, vegetables, flowers, trees of all kinds," says Dory, "until the backyards of our first and second homes were over populated with varieties of every kind."

Dory was born in Brooklyn, NY. She moved to western PA at age 10, then to Tulsa, OK at age 15, finally settling in Yardley, PA when she was 20 years old. She graduated from The College of New Jersey with her BA in Secondary Education, and went on to teach in New Jersey public school until she and Bob decided to start a family.

When her children were in school, she returned to work,

finding employment with the Mobil Oil Corporation as part of the Oil Spill and Crisis Response Teams, working to organize worldwide training programs. When Mobil closed their Pennington campus, Dory returned to school to pursue a long-held interest in psychology. She earned her Master's in Counseling Psychology from Temple University in 1997, and went on to earn a PhD in Counseling Psychology in 2004.

While Dory was furthering her education, Bob expressed an interest in pursuing his long-held desire to

own land and cultivate his gardening interests. "When the opportunity presented itself to expand this hobby," Dory says, "he met it with both excitement and apprehension. He was often heard speaking with great excitement about the varieties of trees, and at the same time expressing consternation at the daunting number of chores and time that needed to



be invested in their care.” Dory and Bob began their search for property that would support Bob’s horticultural interests and eventually found the current farm property for sale and very close to their then-home on Independence Drive.

Along with his passion for farming and gardening, Bob brought his love of education to the tree farm business. Dory says, “Bob remains the consummate educator, only now he shares with the families that he serves as much information as time allows.” Bob will often engage the children who visit the farm, asking questions such as, “What is the color of Santa’s suit?” and “What are the names of Santa’s reindeer?” The answers (right or wrong) are all awarded with candy canes, parents permitting.

The Colavitas have found that older children and adults visiting the farm are often most interested in the different varieties of trees and the process of growing them. Currently the farm boasts 38 different varieties of trees. Bob speaks enthusiastically about the different characteristics of each variety, and encourages families to wander through the fields: “At this hectic time of year, what a pleasure it is to walk among the thousands of trees and catch a glimpse of the wildlife, or walk in the softly fallen snow.” Some of the children eventually



return to the farm as teenagers to work, and even come back each year as adults with their own children to pick out the perfect Christmas tree, effectively passing on the tradition to the next generation.

Today, the farm’s Christmas Shop is maintained and managed by Kathy, featuring “a treasure chest of Christmas accessories, ornaments, and gifts.” Rob Bradley, a longtime friend of the Colavita family, delivers and sets up Christmas trees for customers in their homes or businesses, as well as local government displays.

Bob Jr., Matthew, Mollie, and Christin inform the legal, financial, and safety concerns of the farm. Since 1997, the farm has also sold handmade and decorated wreaths, originally made by Bob’s aunt, Sister Charlotte, a nun in the Felician Order. For the past two years (since her retirement), the wreaths have been decorated by Bob’s cousin, Frank, along with several family friends.

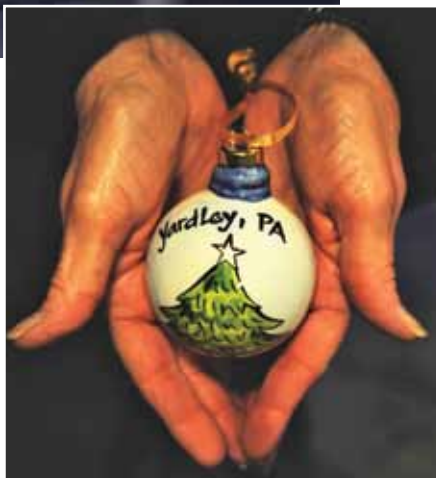
Finally, “John, Aidan, Caroline, Rowan, Nicholas, and Isabella are active participants in cutting trees, greeting customers, giving out candy canes to children (and adults!), and tending to the many behind-the-scenes activities that keep a farm running smoothly and productively.” The six grandchildren all work together to gather pinecones, prepare meals, bake holiday treats, decorate the family’s Christmas tree, pick up string, run miscellaneous errands, and gather firewood to keep a fire burning in the fireplace. Each Christmas, Bob and Dory’s home is decorated with an elaborate light display, adding to the wonder of the season.

The family follows all of the Philly sports teams. They speak fondly of their vacations to Ocean City, as well as to the Poconos. Dory and Bob have been members of the Piazza Nuova Lodge of the Order of the Sons

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*“a treasure chest
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of Italy in America since 1992. Over the years, Bob has served as Vice President of the Lodge, and Dory and Bob have served as Trustees on the Board as well as “chaired many committees, including the Scholarship Committee, awarding secondary school and college scholarships to local

students.” They have participated and contributed to countless fundraisers in the community benefitting Alzheimer’s and Cooley’s Anemia Foundations. In addition, Bob has also served in the roles of both President and Vice President of the Bucks County Christmas Tree Growers Association.

The Colavita family looks forward to the holiday festivities each season, particularly the opportunity to share traditions with their local community, and to be part of their neighbor’s and community’s traditions in turn; “We thank them for their patronage and the spirit of peace and goodwill that are such an essential part of the holiday season. We would like to thank Lower Makefield Farmland Preservation for allowing us to develop the land for the production of evergreen trees, and the use and preservation of the land in serving the needs of our community.”

Photo by Michele Freiling

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Fresh Tree Tips

by Heather DiPrato

Bob and Dory Colavita love sharing stories of their years on the farm! They've been asked on several occasions "are all your trees real?" (they are, though Bob likes to joke otherwise). They've also built strong and loyal relationships with clients, who often make a family event of picking their tree. If you're curious, come visit Colavita Farm for yourself! The Colavita family and their team truly enjoy helping families find the perfect tree to help make the season bright!

During my most recent visit to Colavita Tree Farm, I asked Bob Colavita for inside tips on how to select and preserve fresh

cut trees. Here is some of Bob's expert advice...

When Should I bring my fresh-cut tree home? A good rule of thumb is 12-15 days before Christmas. Of course, many families enjoy bringing them home sooner, others prefer to wait until closer to the holiday. The longer a tree has been cut, the greater likelihood of dropping needles, etc. Investing in a quality freshly cut tree at a tree farm (versus a big box store) will yield a fresher, longer lasting tree.

Which Variety is Best for my Family? This depends on many factors – lifestyle, aesthetic preference, budget, etc. Want a soft, touchable tree? Consider a Nordmann Fir. It's actually so pretty it's hard to believe it's real, with a vibrant coloring and soft needles. Want a tree your pets will avoid? Try a Colorado Blue Spruce. The needles are sturdy yet unpleasant to the touch, making pets and kids avoid them! If you visit the farm early in the season (before the holidays), you'll likely be treated to a tour by Bob who can help you choose the perfect tree for your needs and family.

How often should I water my fresh-cut tree? This depends on the type of tree and its' size, but a good rule of thumb is to keep water filled to the top of the tree holder's reservoir, adding water at least once daily, and more often when you first set it up. Use lukewarm water and Prolong (a tree preservative). When you bring your fresh-cut tree indoors, the conditions mimic spring, so the tree will be "thirsty" for extra water. Check water levels 2-3x daily. You may need to refill the reservoir several times the first day.

How early in the season can I choose a Tree? You can "tag" a tree starting in October. But it's not uncommon for people to reserve a tree a year or more in advance to ensure the exact variety, shape and size that works best for their family. Colavita cares for these trees throughout the year until they are ready to be cut for holiday enjoyment! If you need an extra-large tree, be sure order in advance. The 14' to 16' trees can be ordered and delivered by Colavita Farms but are not grown in Lower Makefield. These go quickly! Be sure to plan in advance with larger trees!

What is the Best Tree Stand? Nobody wants a toppling tree! Choose a stand that will protect your investment for many seasons to come. The Colavita's stock a variety of quality stands in their shop to help keep your tree fresh and stable. A quality stand and proper installation is one of the best investments you'll make. A good tree stand for an average size tree (6' to 7') will run \$30-\$50. For a super-sized 14' or 16' tree, a quality stand can be up to \$200. Bob points out, "it's something you invest in once, to protect your trees, ornaments and home for many years."



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