

## Visit: Marshfield

## The Littlest Christmas Tree Comes To Life Each Winter

By Meghan Diemel

Several years ago, I stumbled across a stack of vintage Christmas children's books at a resale store. Knowing I could make use of them in my Christmas decor, which is influenced by the decor I remember seeing in photos from my paternal grandmother's house in the 1950s and '60s, they went home with me for future use.

One of those books, which has been much loved by my daughter since then, is "The Littlest Christmas Tree." It details a tiny pine tree's desire to become a Christmas tree and his impatience with how long it is taking him to become tall enough. The story itself has been rewritten and republished since its inception many decades ago, and is now even a popular choice for elementary school holiday programs across the country.

It turns out the patience the Littlest Christmas Tree needed to have in the popular story isn't so far off from what's necessary in real life. According to two Wisconsin-based growers – Paul Vine and Therese Olson – Christmas trees usually take more than a decade of care before they're ready to be harvested and be the shining holiday focal point in so many homes across the U.S. and elsewhere.

Olson says that a future Christmas tree on their farm – Lowes Creek Tree Farm outside of Eau Claire – starts as seed that is planted in their seedling bed. The seedlings stay there for two to three years, before they're moved to the transplant bed. That allows Therese and her husband Tim to have more control over watering and weeding.

"It won't come out of the transplant bed until it's about five years old," she furthered. "And that's when we put them out into the fields for planting for Christmas trees. Once it's out there, we probably start shearing it when it's about seven years old from a seed. And then, of course, once it gets to a certain height it's sheared every year.

"Actually the year of harvest is more intense shearing; that's pretty important so the natural shape is there and the top is perfect for an angel or a star, or anything anyone wants to put on top," she added.

Paul Vine, whose decades-old, family-run tree farm is located in Granton, Wisconsin, has watched the trends in Christmas trees change over the last several decades since they started planting trees in 1987. In the 1980s, Fraser firs – native to the Carolinas – started to become more prevalent. In the 1990s they moved toward planting Fraser and Canaan firs in lieu of the Scotch pine that had been a popular choice prior to that.

"Since 1987 we've obviously planted more trees and have learned a lot," he

said. "Now we grow mostly Frasers, balsam and Canaan fir, with some white pine.

As Olson explained, a lot of thought is put toward emerging trends – ones that they need to prepare for more than a decade in advance.

"Given the fact it takes at least 10 to 14 years to grow a Christmas tree, we've had to stay on top of our trends," she stated. "For example, if we're planting a Fraser fir in the field right now, as a five-year-old, that would be for the individual who wants to cut the tree down in 2027."

There's also work to be done in ensuring the trees are getting the nutrients they need from the soil each year, as Vine explained.

"I do soil samples and then foliar samples of the trees once every two years to get an idea of what's happening with the trees. And, we fertilize each spring," he said.

Both Olson and Vine are committed to serving as stewards of the land they farm. Vine's family has lived on the property in Granton since 1864, when it was homesteaded by his paternal relatives who arrived from Buffalo, NY. Since then, it was most often a dairy operation that expanded and contracted over time. Following the sudden death of Vine's mother in the mid 1980s, his father retired from the banking business and was encouraged to start growing trees by a friend who was already in the tree farm business.

"My dad was concerned about how he could keep us connected to the land and to the property," Vine stated. "So in 1987 he and I, and I think my brother was involved at that time, we planted 5,000 trees that first year. Most of them were Scotch pine at that time. And we didn't know what we were doing; we had a two-bottom plow. It has changed a lot since then."

Now Vine, along with his siblings and their growing families, plant 3,000 to 4,000 trees a year. Then in the fall they gather once again to help with the harvest. He finds that continuing to build upon the farm's legacy, started more than 150 years ago, and the opportunity to gather with family each year, are his major reasons for staying engaged.

"I've seen with my kids – and now I have a new grandson who is 1 year old – and my nephews and nieces, that they really enjoy coming. Obviously it's the place I grew up; we know everything about the farm and the hard work it took – getting up to feed cows, thawing out of frozen water pipes, separating beef cattle in November. It's still work [as a Christmas tree farm], but there's joy in doing it with other family members and being part of it."

The property the Olsons purchased in 1981 for their eventual Christmas tree farm outside of Eau Claire also has its

roots in farming. When the Olsons purchased it, it was a worn-out soybean field.

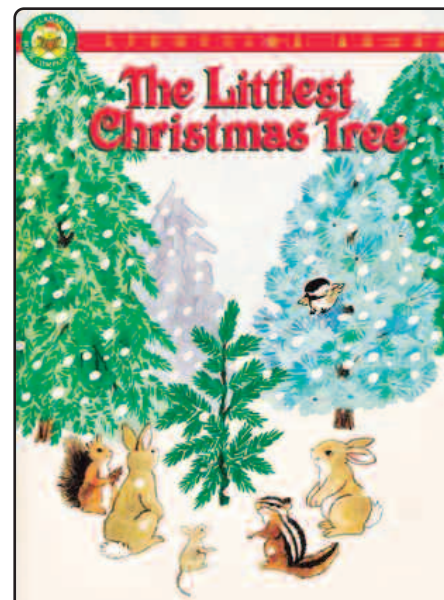
"It was a family farm that had been farmed for many years as soybeans and was in a state of disrepair," Olson explained. "When we purchased it in 1981, we had always wanted to do something along the line of planting and the family experience. So through trial and error we started planting trees. Quickly we decided we wanted Christmas trees, and we wanted Christmas trees for our family, friends, and individuals to come out and experience like we had in the natural setting and enjoy their Christmas experience with a fresh Christmas tree."

Now, not only have they created a space for people to get into the holiday spirit and enjoy nature's blessings with their loved ones, but they've also literally brought life back to what was a barren piece of land.

"As we have said many times over the years, there's was nothing like this," she added. "There was a lot of unknown. We didn't know if people would want to come out to the farm, if they'd want to cut their tree, if they'd want to come out to the country.

"We are fortunate that now this is our 27th selling year and it was accepted and appreciated by the surrounding communities for all those years," she added.

Local Christmas tree growers have not only made it their mission to ensure the health – and future – of the land they harvest on, but they also take special care in



making the day a well-rounded event. Whether it's apple cider and baked goods, sleigh and horse-drawn wagon rides for visitors, or special Christmas shops with unique gift-giving ideas, growers have expanded the industry as their place in agritourism has evolved over the last several years.

Olson said she enjoys watching the progression of families who come back year after year.

"They come as children, then teens, then as college students and eventually with their own kids," she said. "It's fun to watch and over the years with time, we've watched families grow."

"There are so many people who haven't grown up on a farm," Vine added. "We want them to have a fun experience."

*The* **Daily Grind**

**GOURMET COFFEE & TEA**

*Daily Breakfast & Luncheon Specials*

Hours: Mon-Fri 6:30am-6:00pm • Sat 7:30am-2:00pm  
236 S. Central Ave. • Marshfield WI • (715) 387-6607

2 Miles North of Fleet Farm On Hwy. 13, Then 1.25 Miles West On Mann Rd.

**Quilt Kits & BEYOND LLC**

5549 W. Mann Rd.  
Marshfield, WI 54449  
Phone: 715.384.8004  
www.quiltkitsandbeyond.com

Like Us On Facebook!

**STORE HOURS:**  
Tuesday-Friday: 10-6  
Saturday: 9-3  
Closed Sunday & Monday  
*Please check our website or call to verify open hours because we also exhibit at many quilt shows.*

**Open Sew Any Time We're Open!**

**Sewing Machine Repair Service**  
Drop It Off Any Time & We'll Have Our Repairman Fix It!

**Shop Will Be Closed**  
December 25-January 1  
And Will Re-Open January 2

**Pick An Ornament From The Tree In December To Receive Your Gift.**

**DMC Embroidery Floss Has Arrived.**

**Stop In To See All The Beautiful Colors.**

**Longarm Quilting & Embroidery Service Available!**

**Gift Certificates Available Year 'Round!**

Entire Collection Of Robert Kaufman  
Kona Solids: 340 Colors Plus Color Of The Year (COTY)  
King Tut Threads • Sulky Threads: Blendables & Solids • Quilting Notions