

# Two trees in Oregon for one Bush in White House

PORTLAND (AP) — The White House sent its landscaper and chief usher to Oregon during the last week of August to scout the state for two perfect Christmas trees.

"It's not too early to begin thinking about Christmas at the White House," Gary Walters said. "We began planning the ornaments for this year's Christmas almost two years ago."

As chief usher, Walters' responsibilities include all activities inside the 132-room structure. And that includes the presidential Christmas trees that are viewed by almost 100,000 tourists.

"We look at the character of a tree, either naturally grown into it or trimmed into it," said Erwin Williams, a horticulturist and superintendent of the White House grounds.

Williams has found perfect trees for the last half of his 29 years at the White

House.

The pair, wearing suits and ties in the hot sun, spent nearly an hour examining a Douglas fir in Tualatin and two firs in the Salem area.

The three trees were chosen as the best in Oregon by Gary Sander, a Corvallis Christmas tree grower and this year's National Tree Contest champion. Sander is the first winner from Oregon.

As national champion, Sander won the privilege of providing two Christmas trees for the White House — once they meet Williams' and Walters' approval.

For the Bush's personal room, the two aides chose a 12-foot Douglas fir growing in the Tualatin front yard of Sander's son, Todd.

"Actually, that's funny, because I was going to let the tree go wild because I've been shearing trees all my life," said Todd Sander.

For the Blue Room, the

main reception area of the White House, Williams and Walters chose an 18-foot noble fir from the farm of Jerry Barry, east of Salem. Barry had dubbed the fir "Mr. Bush."

"Gary knew about this tree," Barry said. His personal choice had been another tree rejected by Walters and Williams as being too short.

Any tree under 18 feet is too short, Walters said. The tree must be narrow enough to fit through a 54-inch-wide door and tall enough for its top to fit into a chandelier socket in the Blue Room, he said.

"It's hard to beat the noble fir," Williams said, declaring the tree perfect for the room. "It's the Cadillac of trees."

Oregon is the No. 1 supplier of Christmas trees in the nation.

Last year, farmers cut 7.8 million trees — one-third of the nation's supply.

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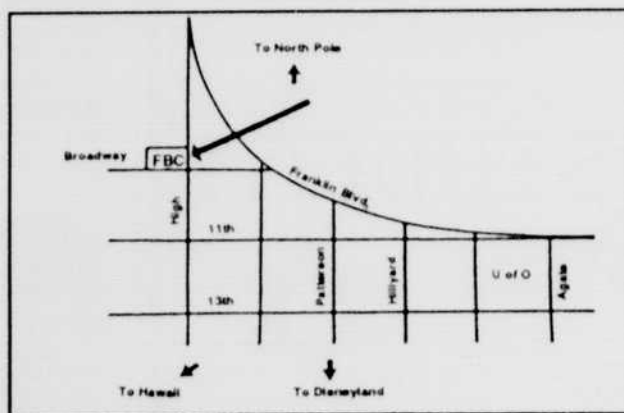
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