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Season's Greetings

Tree: More and more people cutting their own

Continued from Page 1B
 Highway 126, the Montgomery Tree Farm welcomes visitors with the fresh smell of non-city air and the opportunity to browse through 60 acres of homegrown fir and pine.

David and Judy Montgomery, owner-operators of the Montgomery Tree Farm, planted their first evergreen seedlings in 1973. After seven years of careful cultivation and help from family members, they harvested their first crop of trees.

The farm is now a familiar landmark on Highway 126, sought out by those who choose to trade convenience for a more traditional experience.

"More and more people are no longer running down to their local Albertsons or other such retail outlets for their holiday trees," said Mike Montgomery, son of David Montgomery. "Instead, they are choosing the more traditional route of coming to a location where they can hand pick and cut their own."

Springfield resident Corina Ryder remembers years past of disappointment while touring local tree lots for that perfect holiday tree. "Most of the tree lots I visited consisted of pushy salesmen who were more interested in selling me what they were trying to get rid of instead of what I wanted to buy."

Montgomery Tree Farm visitors are greeted with warm smiles and steaming cups of hot chocolate and coffee to take with them as they go out into the farm and personally choose a tree to their liking. After marking the tree, the customer has the option of the farm cutting the tree for them or cutting it themselves.

Although many choose to cut their own tree, Mike Montgomery said he

prefers that the farm cut it.

"Customers are tempted to cut one tree and then cut another one when they come across one that they think is nicer," he said. "Sometimes they even try to hide the first tree, which means we find dead trees scattered around the lot."

Trees are not the only attractions for visitors when they come to the farm. The experience of a horse drawn hay ride is a big hit for many, and an integral part of one's visit, Mike Montgomery said. The farm also offers its own homemade arts and crafts including wreaths made from tree boughs — one of the most popular items, he said.

The farm has a wide selection of evergreens available. The Noble fir is the most popular holiday tree because of its more natural look, fuller branches and ability to hold its needles longer.

Although popular, the Noble and Grand firs are the most expensive because of the growing time.

"Whereas most of our other trees take about seven years to develop into a six-foot tree, the Noble and Grand take 10 to 12 years," Mike Montgomery said.

Besides the Noble and Grand, the Montgomerys grow Douglas firs, Scotch pines and White pines.

Growing trees require a lot of hard work and dedication. Mike Montgomery said few people realize that holiday trees are farm crops, and like most crops, trees require constant weeding, pruning, shaping and fertilizing.

The threat of hungry Pine Shoot and Gypsy moths in Lane and Douglas counties during the mid-1980s forced the Montgomerys to use pesticides.

"These moths are like locusts," Mike Montgomery said. "They can wipe out a whole crop of trees in a matter of days that took years of work. We had to act quickly to protect our crops."

Owner David Montgomery's years of experience in the woods and his Bachelor's of Science in forestry gives him a solid background in trees. The enormous Caterpillar tree skidder parked outside the property reminds visitors that he is a practicing logger.

"My father hates the stereotypical images many associate with loggers," Mike Montgomery said. "Yes, my father is one, but he is a timber manager first." For every tree the Montgomerys cut, at least one more seedling is planted.

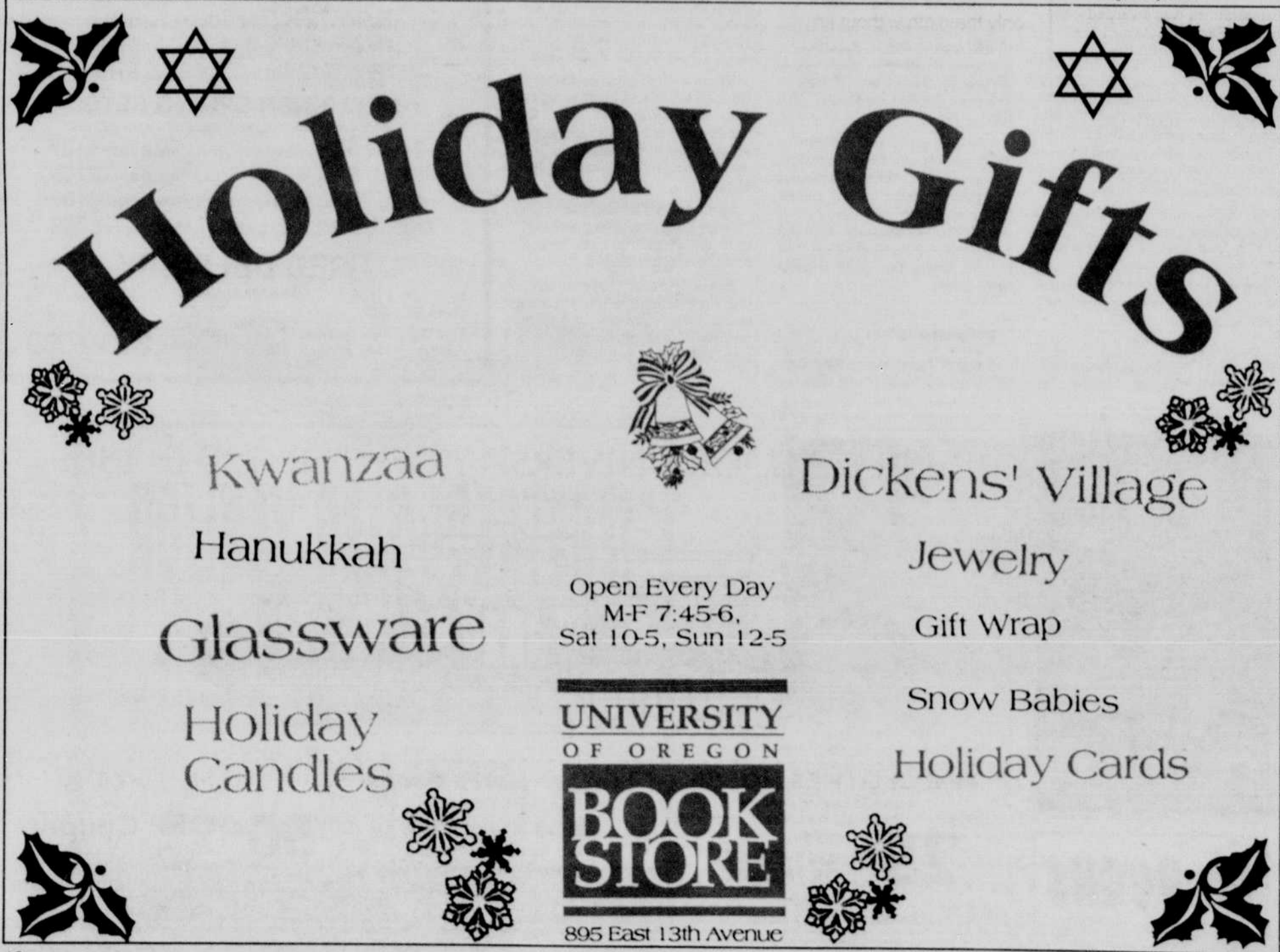
Montgomery's trees are not only celebrated in Oregon homes during the holiday season but also throughout Arizona, California, Nevada and Texas.

Since the tree market crunch of the mid-1980s, the Montgomerys have focused their operation on serving retail customers.

"A good year for a tree farmer would be to sell about 1500 trees," Mike Montgomery said. "Last year was a good year."

The farm opens for business seven days a week beginning the first week of December. Visitors may preselect their trees and come back at a later date to have them cut. Hay rides are offered on weekends only.

"Whether it's the trees, the fresh air or the opportunity to participate in a traditional holiday event, it's hard for farm visitors not to walk away without feeling they have participated in something special," Mike Montgomery said.



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