

## BONNERS FERRY NURSERY

# Location provides a niche

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**  
For the Capital Press

**BONNERS FERRY, Idaho** — Bonners Ferry Nursery, located along the Kootenai River 30 miles from the Canadian border, was started in 1985 and was one of the first nurseries in the area.

Gene and Pat Andrews purchased it in 1997.

“I was an environmental engineer looking for a way to get out of the city and still make a living,” Gene said. “We looked at 37 farming options — from central California to northern Idaho.”

He found out about this nursery through Capital Press.

“There was a picture of this nursery in an ad, and we drove right over here to look at it,” he said.

The nursery grows about 70 varieties of ornamental trees, which include deciduous, conifers and a few fruit trees.

“Our main customers are in colder regions. Our trees are ready to ship when colder regions are ready to accept them. Sometimes trees grown in warmer climates can’t be shipped to Montana or Utah because it’s still too



From left, Peter Koehn, Susan Moe-Shope and Gene Andrews of Bonners Ferry Nursery.

cold there when the trees are ready to ship and they won’t survive well,” he explained.

“We ship to Denver, Lake Tahoe, Salt Lake City and all along I-90 toward Missoula, Bozeman and Billings,” he said.

Some of the trees are propagated onsite. “We grow crab apples, poplars, willows and a few others here, and order very young trees from other nurseries. We transplant and grow those large enough to send out to market,” he said.

Some come in as ¼-inch to ¾-inch caliper in size and are grown up to four-inch caliper trees. Most are sold at

1¾ to 2½ inches.

“A four-inch caliper tree has a root ball that weighs about 3,200 pounds, with its soil. Transport becomes an issue, especially today with high fuel cost. This may become a market-limiting feature; we may not ship very many more trees as far as Denver, since it now costs \$4,000 to \$5,000 for the trucking,” he said.

The trees they grow are listed on the website: [www.bfntrees.com](http://www.bfntrees.com).

“We also post photos of various trees in summer, winter, spring and fall so people know what they look like

through the seasons.”

He encourages his employees to become entrepreneurs.

“One of them handles the retail customers and also has some of his own trees that he grows on his land. He buys some from us and plants them to grow for retail customers,” Gene said. This program helps encourage employees to take a serious interest.

“We’ve allowed them to take a half-acre or more of the farm here and grow their own crop. Instead of buying some of the smaller trees from outside sources, we buy

from our employees. They enjoy doing that, and they’ve all made money this way,” he said. “They can take pride in their own efforts.

“This saves us the problem of shipping trees in from out-of-state. When we get them here they’ve been on a truck for a week, with about 100,000 trees piled inside that truck,” he said.

Some are crushed and have broken branches. “We don’t have that problem when we buy young trees from our own employees,” he said.

In 2016, Michael Powers and Kathy Konek took over

the day-to-day operation of the field and office. Susan Moe-Shope joined the team in 2020 to manage the office, inventory and sales.

“I’m 77 years old and trying to retire,” Gene said.

“Mike was already working here when we bought the nursery; he’s been here 26 years and managing the field operation the past 5 years,” he said.

One of the youngest employees, Peter Koehn, started as Mike’s assistant when he was 14 and he’s now 22.

“Peter is very enthusiastic and wants to be a nursery person,” Gene said.

The Bonners Ferry Nursery’s claim to fame is the Perfect Purple Crab Apple.

“The previous owner developed it a year before we bought the nursery. He had a reddish-green crab apple tree, and suddenly at the top of one of the limbs a mutant purple branch stuck out. He used buds from that mutant branch to create the Perfect Purple Crab Apple variety,” Gene said.

“This tree nursery has been a great experience for all of us. We wish we’d bought it earlier!” Gene says.

Bonners Ferry Nursery



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