

Fire chief stokes Christmas spirit

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Pendleton fire chief Mike Ciraulo is a sucker for the charms of the holiday season. Having been instilled with a love of Christmas pageantry at a young age by his mother, Ciraulo said he won't hold back for his first holiday light display since moving to Pendleton in 2015.

When he purchased his historic Queen Anne Victorian home on the North Hill, its potential for Christmas decorations wasn't far from his mind.

Although he's been stringing up lights for the past few weeks, Ciraulo he still abides by his mother's traditional approach toward decorations — the full display won't be lit until after Thanksgiving.

The fire chief promised that his display would be classically appealing tribute to the holiday season.

"It's my gift to the community," he said.

Ciraulo wants Pendleton's other great light displays to be recognized as well and is working with the Pendleton Chamber



Pendleton Fire chief Mike Ciraulo strings Christmas lights on the landscaping in his front yard.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

of Commerce to revive a Christmas light contest.

Ciraulo said anyone is open to nominating their own or a neighbor's light display, although the

Pendleton Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors will keep their own look out for especially dazzling Christmas decorations.

Ciraulo's role in orga-

nizing the contest means he'll be ineligible for any of the prizes, but that hasn't stopped him from getting involved in another holiday event.

The fire chief lent his hand to the inaugural Pendleton Holiday Stroll, which will bring carolers from local choirs, hot chocolate stations, Santa

Claus and more to downtown Pendleton Dec. 10 from 4-7 p.m.

Co-sponsored by the chamber and the Pendleton Downtown Association, Ciraulo said he hopes the event will eventually become a regional attraction for tourists and visitors.

As a fire chief, Ciraulo is wary of the holiday season's riskier charms — like deep frying a turkey, which he does every year.

Although LED Christmas lights don't present much of a fire hazard, other holiday staples like chimneys and live Christmas trees do.

Ciraulo said he's seen several fatalities caused by live trees catching on fire in his career and advised those who insist on one to keep it away from heating sources and candles, water it regularly and dispose of it as soon as Christmas is over.

For anyone worried that their holiday festivities might turn dangerous, Ciraulo said the Pendleton Fire Department will be there to help.

"We will come to any house for any reason for a safety inspection," he said.

Oregon farmers see Christmas tree shortage

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Retailers across the U.S. are coming to an uncomfortable realization as the holiday season approaches.

The abundant supply of Christmas trees they've come to expect in recent years has now turned into a shortage.

"They didn't realize how quickly we had rolled over to an undersupply," said Bob Schaefer, CEO of Noble Mountain Tree Farm near Salem, Ore.

While farmers are benefiting from higher prices, the shortage has sparked concerns of market share loss to artificial trees.

The industry won't be able to quickly ramp up production because trees typically spend two years in the nursery before being planted out in the field, Schaefer said.

The problem is aggravated by insufficient recent seed crops, he said.

For Noble fir, the most popular tree species, an adequate supply of seedlings may not be available until 2019, Schaefer said.

The immediate impact is on prices.

Trees are selling for 8 percent to 15 percent more than last year, Schaefer said. Noble fir is selling for roughly \$28 while Douglas fir is selling for up to \$18, he said.

In terms of supply, the shortage isn't so severe that retailers will end up with empty tree lots, said Betty Malone, co-owner of Sunrise Tree Farm near Philomath.



Workers load Christmas trees onto a truck at Noble Mountain Tree Farm near Salem in this Capital Press file photo. Farmers are reporting a tree shortage that has driven up prices this year.

Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

"I think everybody will get something, just maybe not the species or size they want," Malone said.

Much of the is shortage was caused by farmers getting out of the tree business during the recent glut, which suppressed prices, she said.

Between 2010 and 2015, the number of Christmas tree growers dropped more than 30 percent, from 699 to 485, according to Oregon Department of Agriculture data.

Tree sales in Oregon plummeted 26 percent

during that time, from 6.4 million trees to 4.7 million trees, according to a survey by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Meanwhile farmers were planting fewer trees than they were selling.

About 3.7 million trees were planted in 2015, down from 5.6 million in 2010, according to USDA NASS.

"A lot of people got burned in the last decade," said Casey Grogan, whose family owns Silver Bells Christmas Tree Farm near Silverton.

"I think everybody will get something, just maybe not the species or size they want."

— Betty Malone, co-owner of Sunrise Tree Farm

Planting Christmas trees has also appealed to fewer farmers due to growth in alternative crops, such as hazelnuts and grape vines, Grogan said.

Grogan said he is worried that high prices could push some consumers toward artificial trees, but he said growers need to recoup years of losses.

"There's ground to make up financially for people who stuck it out through the oversupply," he said. "We need higher prices to stay in the game."

Drakes Crossing Christmas Trees, which also grows seedlings, is cautiously increasing production as the industry's

financial outlook improves, said Jan Hupp, its manager.

"We're not going whole hog, but we are doing it," Hupp said.

With few seedlings in the pipeline, it's unlikely the Christmas tree industry will face another major surplus until 2025, he said.

However, the industry will likely again swing into overproduction eventually, Hupp said.

"Name a single commodity crop that doesn't have a cycle like that," he said. "It's going to be good for a while, but not forever."



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