

Wallowa Community Yard Sale celebrates 10th anniversary

Megan Futter
For Wallowa County Chieftain

The Wallowa Community Yard Sale has been going for over ten years. This year 37 sales were listed on the yard sale flyer. Bargain hunters could find anything, including the kitchen sink.

The most popular sale in this year's line up was Ron Van Grunsvan's estate sale on Upper Diamond Lane, despite his sale not even being on the map. Van Grunsvan said he was holding the sale to thin things out, he plans on moving and doesn't want the burden of hauling so many things. There wasn't a dull moment. According to Van Grunsvan, the most popular items at this sale were reloading supplies and equipment. He also sold a lot of big farm equipment, driving harnesses and cast iron. This sale also advertised a big ticket item — a banner on the barn read "10 acre farm for sale". Van Grunsvan said "There has already been 8 or 10 people interested, before they even heard a price." Next to the farm, a carriage for a large (actually, HUGE) horse was one of the more unusual items. "Most horses are smaller and won't fit," said seller Ron Van Grunsvan.

The Friends of the Library book sale was also well attended. Volunteers stayed open an extra hour on Friday because customers just kept coming, according to a Friends member. The Friends of the Library hold their book sales to raise money for their summer reading program, to purchase books and for anything else the budget falls short on. The majority of books for sale are donated or have been weeded from the library's collection due to poor circulation.

Wallowa's yard-salers were out for a variety of reasons, to stock up on clothes and other items for their children. Some were in search of that special rare antique they hope can be resold for profit. Others were looking for specific items to add to their collection. Those just looking for a bargain were often the luckiest — and happiest — of all.

High-altitude, drought-resistant trees a specialty

Dianna Troyer
For the Capital Press

Teton Trees, a flourishing 300-acre wholesale nursery near Rupert in southeastern Idaho, traces its roots to a couple of what-if and why-not questions.

About 20 years ago, farming partners Rod Jentzsch and Joe Kearl brainstormed.

What if potted trees were purchased, watered in a pivot corner where row crops could not be grown, then sold for a profit after they had matured in the fall?

Impressed with their profit, the sugar beet and potato farmers brainstormed again. Why not start a nursery to diversify their agricultural investments?

In 2006, they established Teton Trees, named for the Teton Range in Wyoming, the source of irrigation water along southeastern Idaho's Snake River Plain.

Today, the wholesale nursery has grown considerably, from a brainstorm into a vast and complex enterprise that raises higher-elevation, drought-resistant trees, shrubs and perennials for many landscapers, re-wholesale nurseries and garden centers throughout the Intermountain West.

"We're a finish grower, producing trees known for their hardiness," said Scott Blauer, general manager. "Our trees grow well wherever they're planted because they've survived plenty of wind, cold winters, and hot summers here. Our biggest sellers are ornamental pears, crabapples, maples, pines, spruce, poplars, honey locust and oaks."

He estimates the nursery sells about 60,000 trees a year and replenishes the stock every season. Teton Trees encompasses three locations in Minidoka County: 200 acres of field trees northwest of Paul that will be placed in burlap to protect the root ball when harvested; about 80 acres of trees, shrubs and perennials grown in pots that are placed inside permanent sockets in the ground at Acequia northeast of Rupert; and 20 acres of potted trees just north of Acequia.

Their trees range in sizes from slender unbranched trees called whips to 5- to 10-gallon pots and 15- to 25-gallon pots with trees up to 12- to 18-foot-tall with an average of a 2-inch caliper.

Their business model has been so productive that they expanded and have similar businesses that also produce and use the grown plants in Boise and Kimberly, Idaho; Boring, Ore.; Pleasant Grove and Kaysville, Utah; and Parker, Colo.

"It's a labor-intensive business, so we have to be innovative with use of space, equipment, water and energy," Blauer said. The Rupert nursery has 25 full-time and 60 seasonal employees.

"To maximize efficiency, we imported and use specialized equipment developed in



Dianna Troyer/For the Capital Press

Scott Blauer, general manager, checks on drip irrigation at Teton Trees, a nursery near Rupert in southeastern Idaho.



Dianna Troyer/For the Capital Press

After trees are potted, they are placed on a trailer bed that was built with a conveyor belt.

Europe," he said.

A mobile platform with adjustable height can be driven down rows, allowing workers to prune branches and pound tall slender fiberglass stakes next to trees to help them withstand the wind.

Another machine enables 5,000 shrubs to be planted in a day. An over-the-top pruner trims groups of shrubs quickly.

"We also had three custom trailer beds built, each with a conveyor belt, so trees planted in pots at the planting shed can be quickly moved to the field."

Their customized potting soil blends shredded bark, peat moss and nutrients.

"We're still tweaking ratios with that to maximize growth," he said.

To conserve energy, LED lights were installed in offices and sheds. Variable speed frequency drives pump water from wells and canals, and trees are watered with drip irrigation.

"We can control irrigation from a computer in the office," Blauer said.

To maximize use of space, instead of planting a field full of trees that will mature in four years, the middle rows are dedicated to trees that will be harvested at two years.

"When the two-year-olds are ready to go, it makes room for the four-year trees to mature," Blauer said.

Last year, a 20-acre field was converted from row crops to a nursery for trees in 15- and 25-gallon pots.

"The soil didn't drain well and had a lot of rocks, so the land there is more productive being used for trees," he said. "Wherever our fields are, we're proud our rows are weed-free."

As Teton Trees expanded, in 2019 a management company called TreeSource Systems, was developed to provide oversight and systematize all of the entities associated with Teton Trees. The management team, based in Acequia, developed customized software to handle customers' orders, logistics for growing, sales and marketing, and delivery.

Will Teton Trees convert more fields from row crops to trees?

"We'll see what the market tells us to do," Blauer said.

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