

Olsons: Couple finds a variety of ways to help

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“This community stepped up just like they always do,” she said.
Stacy coached track — something she’d never done — and Neal picked up football.
“Idle time is dangerous for adolescents,” she said. “That is a really critical time for kids to get connected to something. As they go into high school, if they’re connected to something or they have something to belong to that’s important, then they connect in the right places. Some kind of positive activity.”
Stacy works with the county’s juvenile diversion program and has worked

with youth in the court system for a long time. Neal is a deputy chief for Polk County Fire District No. 1. Both know the importance of volunteers to make things run smoothly, and say that may be one reason they are both so ready to pitch in themselves.
“In my job — this is my 32nd year in teaching and coaching — you see so many people that say they’re committed, but any small reason, they can break away from that commitment,” Hedrick said. “But you see those two, who, no matter what it is, they’ll make a bad thing good. I can’t even imagine the number of

youth (they affected) that we don’t even see.”
The Olsons opened their homes to foster troubled boys who had been in and out of homes and at risk of being on the streets, Kimber Townsend said.
“They took in kids no one else would and turned them around,” she said.
Altogether, the Olsons fostered 13 boys.
“She had all these kids she was trying to manage and really able to make a small difference in a lot of kids’ lives, but our kids were little, so she wanted to be home with them, and we wanted to have a larger impact,” Neal said of their foster par-

ent years. “It might have been in fewer kids’ lives, but we wanted to have a larger impact.”
In truth, the impact left by the Olsons can be felt throughout the community.
“There’s not enough time in the day to talk about what they’ve done for me and my family,” said Matt Connery, president of Polk Fire’s Volunteer Firefighters Association. “I can’t tell you the numerous times they’ve helped me.”
In addition to bending an ear after a tough call at the fire district, Neal and Stacy saved Matt’s marriage.
“With having as much life experience as they do,

they’re able to relate really well and help a lot of other couples with issues they might be having,” he said. “My wife and I were having some problems, and (Neal) invited us over. We all had some real powerful conversations that helped us have a turning point in our own marriage. And they have helped so many people other than just me and my family.”
Stacy said there’s a lot of things to do if you just want to do it. Neal and Stacy find adventure while doing just that.
“It’s divine appointments,” Neal said. “I think God just gives you little

things to do, and if you listen and do what he says, he’ll put it all together for you.”
The Olsons don’t seek recognition for what they do.
“They put other people in the community ahead of themselves,” Connery said. “In my mind, there’s no greater hero than that. To say I look up to Neal is an understatement.”
In truth, the biggest reward for the Olsons is seeing others succeed.
“Whatever you’re winning at, just win,” Stacy said.
“To see other people happy and succeed, that fills my cup back up,” Neal said.

Trees: Alternatives to Noble firs available

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In the meantime, the three growers said there’s a look-a-like alternative to Noble firs that is gaining in popularity: Nordmann or Turkish fir.
“It’s a deeper green, with silver on the bottom of the needles,” Schafer said.
He said the tree would be even more popular if seeds were easier to obtain — the tree originates from mountains in Turkey and Russia.
“We would sell more if we could plant more,” Schafer said. “It’s the new kid on the block, and sales are really going up.”
Beal said he will suggest the Nordmann to people looking for Nobles in short supply.
“The Nordmann, they are just beautiful trees,” he said. “To the untrained eye, they are often mistaken for Noble firs.”
Beal said they have another advantage, especially for his farm.
“They grow better on the valley floor,” he said. “Nobles are better at higher elevation.”
For that reason, Brown has switched over to growing Nordmann trees for his



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Noble firs have a dusty green hue to their needles.

U-cut farm.
“It’s a little harder to grow,” he said. “It takes a year longer to get to Christmas-tree size.”
But he said he worries less about them suffering sunburn or current-year needle necrosis, a disease affecting new growth, turning the needles brown.
The 2017 Christmas tree season and its production shortage nationwide may result in higher prices for trees — even Beal’s had to raise prices modestly this year after keeping costs down over the last few sea-

sons — so competition from reusable trees could be a concern.
Schafer said he isn’t overly worried customers will go the artificial route because they can’t find the real tree they are looking for.
He said buying a real tree creates an experience for the customer that artificial trees can’t.
“I think the fragrance of the real tree is probably the thing that will be bring them back,” he said. “A lot of families like the experience of going to a tree lot and pick-



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Westwinds and Beal’s will be open to the public on Friday.

ing out their tree and the fragrance. I’m not too concerned about losing customers to artificial trees.”
Westwinds and Beal’s open to public on Friday and

say they are ready for those who make a tradition of hunting for the perfect tree.
“Everybody is looking forward to the Christmas season. Trees are going to be

everywhere,” Beal said. “We’re open officially the day after Thanksgiving, but we’ve had people come get their trees early, which is fine with us.”



Polk County Thanksgiving Edition

Turkey? Check. Mashed potatoes? Check. Pumpkin pie? Check. Wine?
With so many local choices for great wines, it may be easy to get lost in the endless labels and types.
Which pairs best with Thanksgiving dinner?
It depends on the drinker. The old adage of red wines with red meat and white wines with white meat can be tossed out the window.

The popular choice with turkey is a white wine. Depending on taste, sweet and dry wines are available in whites.
For sweeter whites, go with a Riesling or Gewurztraminer. For those who like a white wine that is a little dryer, go with a pinot Gris or chardonnay. Both go well with a traditional turkey dinner—but avoid cranberries, which may kill the wine palette. Be sure to eat other foods to cleanse the palette between cranberries and sipping wine.
For those who prefer the red wines, a pinot noir or zinfandel pairs best with turkey.
Don’t discount sparkling wines, which go

with just about anything.
Both Eola Hills Wine Cellars and Left Coast Winery offer a variety of wines—including sparkling varietals—for your holiday table. What better way to decide your favorites than by visiting their tasting rooms?
Eola Hills will have extended hours all weekend, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. On Black Friday – better known as Pinot noir Friday – enjoy 40 percent off case deals. Sunday, kick off the morning with brunch at the winery and leave the cooking to them. After the long weekend, you deserve it.
Monday, Eola Hills will have \$1 shipping for Cyber Monday.
At Left Coast, the wood-fire stove will be on all weekend cooking up delicious wood-fired pizzas, inspired by local flavors. The tasting room is open from noon to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday. All pizzas on the menu come with suggested pairings to try together.



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