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DEAL FAMILY NAMED GRAND CHAMPION

Smokey Holler Tree Farm in Laurel Springs, Alleghany County, North Carolina is the home of the 2005 Grand Champion Christmas Tree as selected by the National Christmas Tree Association at its Biennial Convention in Lake Harmony, Pennsylvania on August 13, 2004. Earl, Betsy, and Buddy Deal were presented an award for this honor and will present an 18.5 foot NC Fraser Fir - the Perfect Christmas Tree to the President and First Lady in 2005 for display in the Blue Room of the White House. This is the top honor for any Christmas tree grower and Earl Deal stated that he has been waiting 30 years for this to happen.

Earl first planted trees in Blowing Rock in 1972 with his cousin and college roommate. At a NC Christmas Tree Association meeting later that year, they met a gentleman wanting to sell a stand of trees in Laurel Springs. Looking at these trees in a very dense fog, they thought the trees looked great and a deal was made. When the sun came out those trees looked a little worse than they had on that foggy day back in the hollow – thus the name Smokey Holler.

This became a family farm and Earl, Betsy, Buddy, and daughter Meg commuted back and forth to Raleigh on weekends and spent every family vacation working together on the farm. In 1992 Buddy became a permanent resident followed by Earl in 1998 and Betsy in 2000. This move followed Earl's retirement from NCSU where he did Extension work with the Department of Wood and Paper Science and Betsy's retirement from teaching in the Wake County School System. Meg lives and works in Raleigh but still helps out at harvest time and is the farm's CPA.

The tree that won the National Grand Championship had Mount Rogers in Virginia as its seed source and was sent to Pennsylvania to grow in a nursery for three years before returning to North Carolina to grow for the next two years in a transplant bed before planting in the field. After seven years of nurtured growth, it was harvested for this special honor. To participate in the National

contest the Deals had to win the NC Christmas Tree Contest which they did in 2002. That December they were honored to present a tree to Governor Easley at a ceremony at the NC State Capital.



Over the years Smokey Holler has branched out to not only grow trees such as Fraser fir, White pine, Blue spruce, Concolor fir, Norway spruce, and Canaan fir, but they also do wreaths and roping to utilize low grade trees. Both Earl and Buddy emphasize that they branched out so as not to compromise the quality of the fresh Christmas trees from their farm. The Deal motto is displayed in their office: “Quality is in watching the details” and the family believes that if they take care of the details, the quality will come.

Betsy states that Earl teaches by example and demands hard work. Either he or Buddy is in the field daily with the crew. They actively participate and work with the crew in overseeing trees. Earl sees a large advantage in the fact that Buddy speaks Spanish fluently and can converse easily with the crew. Why all the working together? Earl states that his vision for the farm is to have the Deal “signature on their trees” and to have pride in the end product.

When first hearing the news of winning top honor, Earl had difficulty standing still. Buddy felt honored but a little nervous about taking a tree to the President and what that entire honor entails. Betsy “felt proud of her husband and son” and was thankful.

Earl stated that this honor “has been a group effort” and Buddy stated that the “quality of our trees is a product of county, state, and national association meetings and efforts.” They have attended meetings, seminars, and workshops at all levels and all they have learned has helped to make a sustainable farm. At the present time there are four NC State Extension studies going on at Smokey Holler. The Deals feel that the winning tree is a culmination of all learned practices working together.

Earl expressed thanks to his two great foremen who have been with the farm for years and to the friend who drove back and forth to Raleigh to cover the farm for them while they participated at the National level. He also thanked the NC Christmas Tree Association for the Tree Contest Committee. Some members of this committee made a trip to their fields to help Buddy narrow down the choices of the tree to enter in competition from twelve to two trees. The committee’s suggestions were invaluable to the selection.

The Deals chose 2005 to take the tree to the White House because of the extra time it would give them to seek that prime 18+ foot tree to present there. They already have their eyes on a group of big trees and Buddy will spend the next fifteen months working to produce that perfect tree. They also want the families who ultimately buy Smokey Holler trees from their customers to know that the tree in their home came from the same farm which produced the tree for the President of the United States.