

# Delivering the 'perfect' Christmas tree

Local man harvests these giants to sell to far-off resorts

By Jeff Duewel  
of the Daily Courier

The bigger the trees, the harder they fall.

So George Jones of Grants Pass takes great care of the 40- to 75-foot Christmas trees that he harvests each year and sells to far-off resorts such as Sea World in San Diego and Ritz-Carlton hotels.

Last week Jones cut down six of the giants which supplement his regular Christmas tree sales in Azalea and in Los Angeles.

The operation involves sawing through the trunk while the tree is hooked to a line attached to a helicopter hovering above.

"The helicopter flies the hook into me, I hook it to the strap, shimmy down the tree, the chopper puts a lean on the tree, then I cut it," said Jones, who's been

cutting big trees for more than a decade. "It's like poetry in motion."

Jones decided to chase trophy trees several years ago after seeing a 50-foot blue spruce sitting in the fountain at the Ritz-Carlton in Los Angeles.

"I thought, 'Wow, is that an ugly Christmas

tree. I can do better than that,'" Jones said.

He'd seen plenty of trees working as a forester, so it didn't take long to find prime groves of white fir on private timberlands near Butte Falls and Howard Prairie Reservoir.

He tries to keep about 40 or 50 big ones in production, fertilizing and climbing up 50 feet or more in the spring and summer to cut the top off and trim the

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**George Jones**

on harvesting the giant trees **”**

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branches, forcing fuller branching.

"If I shear one for three or four years, they'll be premium trees," he said. "You don't just go out and find something that grows this beautifully."

Mother Nature also chips in, providing frost pockets crucial to the perfect conical shape.

"After the tree buds start to grow, a late frost will burn off the ends of the trees," Jones said.

"The inner ones don't get burned off. It's nature's way of shearing the tree. They have a good start."

During the harvest, Jones taps into his physical

strength from years of bicycling to scramble from tree to tree over as much as a mile. The \$2,000-per-hour helicopter fee offers a motive to hustle.

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Photo by George Jones

**This 75-footer, bound for a hotel in Vallejo, Calif., is the largest ever cut by George Jones and was too heavy to lift with a helicopter, so a crane was used.**



Photo by Pat Murphy

**A helicopter hoists a huge Christmas tree cut by George Jones, who has been harvesting the big trees for more than a decade.**

"Then they get tarped on a truck, as snug as a bug, like a big round cigar," Jones said.

Last week's haul included one bound for Florida and another for the city of Houston

for \$11,000, that was picked out in person by a staff member who flew out. Most clients settle for an online view of the trees.

Jones has done as many as 11 in a year, but the slow econ-

omy kept this year's haul at less than 10.

He used to do the Oklahoma state capitol but "I called the guy who bought it and they said they have a new governor who doesn't like Christmas."

His most lucrative job of all is the Ritz-Carlton in Vallejo, Calif., which has hired him to cut, haul and decorate the tree this year for a price Jones isn't comfortable unwrapping.

The 75-foot, 7,500-pound tree is the largest he's ever cut, too big for a chopper, so it had to be hauled by crane. Luckily it was close to a road.

"I just got it baled yesterday. I start on Nov. 17, and it could take a week to decorate that tree," he said.

The 25,000 lights were bought online, and Jones will end up purchasing close to 2,000 ornaments.

"I started buying out all the Home Depots in Los Angeles County in October," he said. "Most stores stock about 250. I'd buy them all."

Jones' son Stephen, his brother and his business partner and friend Jill Dean help make the operation go.

"It's a challenge to make this work," Jones said. "But over the years I've fine-tuned this business to where I can make a profit at it. I give the credit to God. He gives me the knowledge and keeps me safe while I'm working."