

# The Christmas Tree Guy

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BY MEGAN BARNES · DECEMBER 3, 2012



*George and Jill Jones sit in the pumpkin patch, which will soon be a Christmas tree lot, on the corner of 9th St. and Western Ave. (photo by John Mattera)*

Nothing says the holidays are around the corner in San Pedro like whizzing by rows of pumpkins on 9th St. and Western Ave., or driving by one night to find the glow of a towering, magnificently lit Christmas tree. For 25 years (24 of them on the corner of 9th and Western), George and **Jill Jones** have brought the holiday spirit to San Pedro and helped families make memories.

“I have faithful customers who buy from me every year and I’m very appreciative of it,” George says on an unusually scorching Halloween eve at the pumpkin patch. Tomorrow he and Jill will pack up and head back to Oregon, where they spend most of the year running their 12-acre Christmas tree farm. They’ll be back with their first haul of trees after Thanksgiving.

Moms trickle in throughout the afternoon to snap pictures of their kids in the pumpkin patch and give them a taste of country in the middle of a port town.

“Parents tell me that their kids will see me setting up in late September and get excited,” George says. “Kids have fun coming in here running through the pumpkin patch and looking at the pigs and chickens and going on hay

wagon rides.”

A San Pedro native, George actually ran his first pumpkin patch at a lot on 9th St. and Cabrillo Ave. in 1987, when there was more competition in town. As more empty lots were being built upon, he became the last man standing.

“This is a good location (speaking of 9th and Western), it’s not sandwiched between houses and buildings, so it does have a little bit of a country feel to it,” Jones says.

His neighbors have been supportive and helpful over the years, keeping an eye on the lot between Halloween and Christmas. One neighbor even brings him the paper every morning.

George buys his pumpkins wholesale, but grows between 6,000 and 10,000 Christmas trees on his farm in Oregon. The trees grow about a foot per year.

“People might think Christmas trees are cut down from the forest, but that’s not so; they’re specifically planted on farms to grow and to be cut and sold,” George says. “When you’re buying a Christmas tree, you’re really supporting the U.S. economy; it’s 100 percent U.S. product. You’re supporting the farmer that grew it, his farm help, his equipment, the fuel and fertilizers, you’re supporting the truck driving company that trucks the trees down here and then you’re supporting San Pedro because I hire all local kids to help me. Buying an artificial tree from China isn’t helping the U.S. economy; buying a real, cut Christmas tree is.”



For his 20th anniversary, George was convinced by a friend to put a giant tree on the corner of the lot (which is secured by a cement support in the ground). He was reluctant at first — putting up a giant tree and decorating it with 4,500 lights and 600 ornaments is no easy task — but it proved to be a hit and he’s done it every year since.

“A lot of people say how much they really appreciate that big tree and that they look forward to it coming up. I guess that’s what keeps me doing it,” George says. “When you get the affirmation from people that they like it and thank you for it, that’s good enough for me.”

He’s done large Christmas trees for Terranea Resort, Ritz-Carlton hotels and Six Flags Discovery Kingdom. This year he’s sending one to Houston.

George and Jill have collected many memories over the years. Only once they saw no rain during Christmas tree season. A few years ago, a police helicopter circled the lot when some concerned onlookers mistook a repo man trying to unlock a

Mercedes-Benz for a car thief, raising customers’ eyebrows.

“Every year there’s always something new,” Jill says.

The Jones family also has an annual get together on the lot in memory of George’s sister **Melanie Jones Barber**, who passed away in an automobile accident.

George says one of the keys to his to success has been keeping things simple.

“Over the years, I could’ve expounded on all this fluff that people do, like bounce houses and rides, but I just kept it simple. I don’t have a petting zoo, but you can come and see the animals, it doesn’t cost anything. Just come and enjoy yourself,” he says.

“It’s fine-tuned after all these years,” adds Jill.

“I couldn’t get it done without her,” George says. “We’re a team.”