PSCTA Annual Meeting Minutes

January 27, 2024

Meridian Grange, Covington

Those in attendance:

Christmas Creek Tree Farm; Todd & Jenny Kuspert

Crystal Creek; Harvey and Janet Hawken, and guest Maureen Maland

Double 4 Tree Farm; Bob Moore

Five Springs Tree Farm; Doug Kingsbury

Good Boy Farms; Nicole Yumen

Helping Hearts Farm; Joe Larson

Lochsloy Acres, George & Andre King

Noble Grove Tree Farm; Daniel & Elke Hawken

Ohop Ridge Christmas Tree Farm; Mike & Denise Roosendaal

Outpost Tree Farm; Josh & John Dove

Pfaffs Old Time Farm; Eric & Britt Pfaff

Red Rooster Ranch; Byron Nelson

Serres Farm; Bill & Nancy Serres

Shine Flower Farm; Todd & Kris Elledge

Shining Star Tree Farm; Hugh Messer

Smith Family Tree Farm; Bryan Smith

Three Trees Farms; Mike Scott

Wilson Hill Tree Farm; Rich McDonald, Ben Kauffman, Liz Gingrich Smith, Marianne

Brad Tower, Washington Christman Tree Growers Lobbyist

Gary Chastagner, Guest Speaker

Kirk Company; Stacy Peacock

President Bob Moore called the meeting to order.

Janet Hawken from Crystal Creek Tree farm introduced her friend and assistant Maureen; who helped out with the tree farm last year. Harvey was recuperating from surgery and was not able to work his farm.

Minutes from the fall meeting were mailed out to everyone. Bob asked if anyone had any questions on the minutes, of which there were none. A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes as written. Motion passed unanimously.

A copy of the treasurer’s budget report for 2023 and proposed budget report for 2024 was available for all attendees. The line item for the Washington State Fair will be removed as we will no longer be involved. Discussion followed on the best way to position money coming in to cover all of the expenses. One item was the cost of the grange; while we were able to rent it this year for $75, the person in charge informed Rich that in the future they will want to charge the market value for the hall, which is about $400 plus a $150 deposit. She did agree to rent it to us in 2025 for the $75 fee. After that, it sounded like we would have to pay the going rate or find another place to hold our annual meeting.

Discussion also followed on the fee for the website. We could raise the annual membership fee and lower the marketing fee, but would it encourage people from using the website?

We also discussed raising the membership fee to $100 and leaving the fee paid to the lobbyist at $2,500 and the fee to research at $1,000.

A motion was made to keep the 2024 membership dues at $75 and the fees to the lobbyist and the researcher the same; with another discussion regarding the 2025 budget numbers to be discussed at the summer meeting.

A motion was made, with a second; to accept the treasurer’s 2024 report. Motion passed unanimously.

Bob introduced our lobbyist, Brad Tower. This is his 24th year working with Christmas tree growers! We’re officially one-third of the way through the 2024 legislative session, and this coming Wednesday we reach our first significant milestone – the policy committee cutoff.  After that, bills that haven’t passed out of their respective policy committees will be considered “dead” for the remainder of session.  I put the term “dead” in quotes because nothing is truly “dead” until the Legislature adjourns Sine Die on March 7th, but the legislative universe shrinks considerably after Wednesday.  Subsequently, fiscal committees will have just five days to hear and pass bills – including holding rare Saturday committee meetings next week – ahead of the next milestone of the session, the fiscal committee cutoff, on Monday, February 5th. This is the first time in 12 years that there is an open race for Governor, Attorney General, Insurance Commissioner and Land Commissioner.

Brad talked about a couple of bills in the senate he is keeping an eye on; house bill 6036 and 1868. For more details on these bills, he encouraged everyone to get your name on his email list so you will get the most current and updated information from Washington. His email address is: brad@thenicholsgroupgr.com.

A lot of good discussion followed on various different topics, too many to keep track of; you needed to be there to hear it all.

Bob then introduced Dr. Gary Chastagner, Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Plant Pathology at the WSE Extension Puyallup Campus. He stated that he is officially retiring at the end of April 2025.

He had two hand outs he passed out to everyone in attendance. The first handout he explained was regarding the issues involved with the increase in dying trees in Oregon and King County. He explained the disease Armalaria (spelling?) killed over 7,000 trees in King County. It is a new concern, and he is doing a lot of research to narrow down the problem. He will be talking more extensively on this topic at the Short Course this February.

The second hand out was regarding the COFER project; which Gary gave detailed information. This was very complex and I couldn’t keep up with him; he encouraged anyone needing more information to attend his Short Course this February.

Another handout Gary passed around was regarding the Dr. Gary Chastagner Endowment fund. This endowment delivers a dependable, perpetual source of funding and will ensure funds are dedicated to research involving ornamental crops, Christmas trees and nurseries for the future. Once established, funds distributed from the endowment will be used exclusively as outlines in a Gift Use Agreement. These agreements are legally binding documents between WSU, WSU Foundation and you, the donor – guaranteeing your donation continues to the program you’ve chosen to support.

We broke for lunch at this point.

When we came back together, we did the election of officers. Because we discussed the positions opening up in 2024 back at the fall meeting, where people in their current positions were willing to serve another term. Bob asked if anyone had any questions, if anyone wanted to step and take a spot………(crickets!), a motion was made and seconded to keep things the same. The vote was approved.

President – Bob Moore

Vice President – Rich McDonald

Secretary – Denise Roosendaal

Treasurer – Sheila McKinnon

Harvey let everyone know that he brought a bunch of 5 gallon buckets with lids, if anyone wanted one, or two or all of them. If you want more, let him know, he has them.

Bob gave a quick update on his project of culturing 31 random trees; and of those, he only had to put a stick in 1 of them. So by starting early, you can limit the time spent on your trees. So, no procrastination!!

Topic – how was everyone’s selling season:

Bob provided the phone number to Google, so you can call and claim your website; because if you don’t, anyone can claim it and make changes to your listing. That number is: (650) 507-4676. He found that out the hard way!

Double 4 Tree Farm also included electronic tipping for their customers; using Square and Ipads. At the end of the season, with the number of tips that were processed, it increased his staff’s hourly wage $4.50 above and beyond their regular wages. A number of other farms use the electronic tipping feature with Square, Shining Star has that available and his farm collected $13,000 in tips for his staff; he said 1/20th of his sales were in cash and that he received nothing but over the top compliments on his staff.

Harvey helps his staff get tips; and he explained that it’s not about the product, but the customer service.

Bob used barcodes on his items this year, some where already usable and some he had to create himself. He found it was very successful in keeping a more accurate record of his sales. He will be attending the gift show down in Vegas the next 3 days with his daughter.

Shining Star used the barcodes this year for the first time and loved it! They moved Santa over from where he was to a place where families were placed in front of his gift items. They sold out of everything each weekend because of that change.

They moved their balers out front of the barn, which reduced the noise and reduced the traffic congestion. They closed two of their four barn doors, giving them better traffic flow: seeing an increase of 33% in sales. They figured their price range in the gift shop ranged $5 - $20.

They have a Santa, which is paid to be there. This year Santa had an ear bud in and his wife would be out with the families asking questions, like the child’s name and what they wanted for Christmas; giving Santa a distinct advantage when talking with the kids. They were astonished that he knew so much.

They sold 450 trees their first day open, which was the most in one day for selling. They are going to put signs in their fields next year with a number to text if the customer has a question or needs assistance. That way they can send a crew member out to help them out in the field. They also saw over 40,000 hits on their website.

Wilson Hill tree farm moved Santa inside, so while the kids were waiting to see Santa, they were in front of their merchandise, which helped to increase their sales.

Lochsloy Acres has an old phone booth they had on display. Next year, they are thinking of putting someone on the other end of the line, so when someone picks up the phone, maybe they will be talking to Santa!

Crystal Creek farm had 900 train rides; Janet Hawken ran the farm this year because Harvey was still in the hospital. Harvey’s son and wife created a website for their tree farm, Noble Grove Tree farm and people found their farm from that. She included the history of the farm, which customers loved to read about.

Mike Scott and his family, from Three Trees Farm were featured on the cover of the North Maple Velly magazine – way to go Mike!

Christmas Creek out in North Bend had their best opening weekend since 2013. Don Douglas had built a custom hayride wagon and it was used this year, it was going non-stop every day, all day. Their trees are just getting to the sellable size. They also expanded their gift store.

Liz from Wilson Hill expressed her appreciation on seeing so many new, young farmers in the industry.

Are there any changes farmers are looking at for 2024? Shining Star has a wedding venue available and currently has 8 weddings scheduled for this summer. His goal is to have 10.

Lochsloy Acres is looking at having a weekend set aside for photographers only and they are looking at the program they have for people reserving a time to come and get a tree.

A motion was made, a second recorded and a unanimous vote to adjourn the annual meeting.