

Mountain Orchards, says co-owner Bob Hobson, draws 3,000 people on a good day. Of that crowd, 90 per cent will be from Ottawa.

One of the largest pick-your-own apple orchards in the area, it has become a fall tradition with many city residents whose outings on the field account for 40 per cent of the orchard's business.

"It's a day, you know," says Mr. Hobson. "It's an outing for people with their kids. It's pleasant out here and there are no hassles."

Those coming out to the orchard are supplied with ladders and charged \$10 a bushel.

With portions of the orchard open to sometimes inexperienced pickers every day there is a problem with wastage, Mr. Hobson says. But the wastage is considered one of the prices that have to be paid in maintaining a seven day a week pick-your-own operation.

Les Bale of Ottawa came out to the orchard for the first time last week, lured by an ad in the Ottawa Citizen.

"It's just the idea of a family outing," he said of his reason for coming. "I don't think you look at the price of gas or anything. It's the idea of getting out into the country."



Reg Harper prepares to take another load of apple pickers to the trees at Mountain Orchards. For the last 14 years, portions of the orchard have been open to people who want to pick their own apples. Orchard co-owner Bob

Hobson says pick-your-own sales now account for 40 per cent of the business. And of the people who come to the orchard, sometimes as many as 3,000 in a day, 90 per cent are from Ottawa.

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Mr. Gibson, take a bough



Most years, he aims at selling a thousand trees during the traditional two-week selling period before Christmas. This year snow brought the people out earlier. "Snow always puts people in the Christmas spirit," he says.

For Gibson, selling Christmas trees is more than a business. Bigger growers have told him he's crazy sticking to a small scale operation. Gibson says there's more to it than money.

"It's kind of gratifying to grow a tree and grow it nicely," he says. "I also enjoy the people. I spent 28 years in the orchards and I got away from it. It's good meeting people again."

"Kids get a big kick coming out here. I've seen people stay out here a whole afternoon while they get their tree."

Bill Gibson points out some of the Scotch pines on his 10-acre Christmas tree plantation just east of Mountain. Gibson, a retired apple orchard operator, got into

Christmas trees almost by accident. Nine years later, despite the small income of selling trees, Gibson says he's hooked by the challenge.

Press Photo—Riley

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MOUNTAIN — Bill Gibson is ready for Christmas now.

The 73-year-old Hyndman Road resident's 8,000 to 9,000 trees ("there might be more") have been clipped into shape for the 1989 Yuletide season.

For the past 12 years, Bill has been growing mostly Scotch pine with some spruce to sell at Christmas time. According to the Christmas Tree Growers' Association of Ontario, the most popular Christmas trees in eastern Canada are white spruce, balsam fir and Scotch pine.

When he entered this field more as a hobby than anything else, Bill says he did not anticipate the amount of work that was involved.

He admits he was like many people who think a Christmas tree just naturally acquires its pleasant conical shape, perfectly formed for layers of decoration, with a resting spot on top for an angel or star.

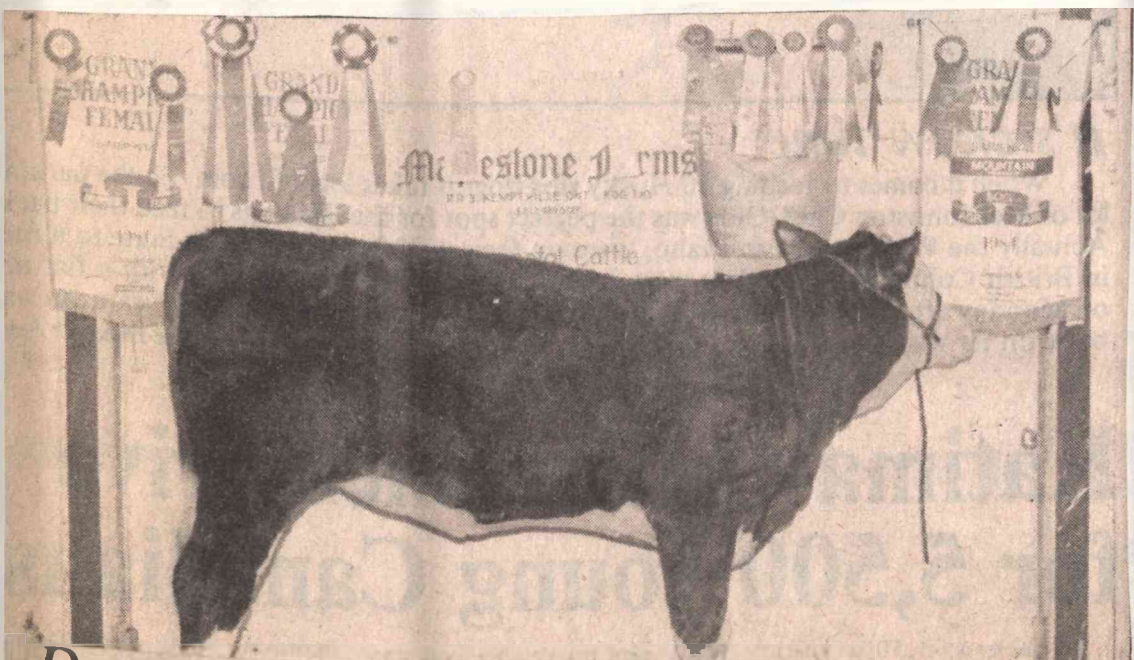
"I didn't know anything about it," said Bill.

His advice to someone considering starting his own Christmas tree business, as a sideline or as a major income source, is straightforward.

"Get to know someone who knows how, that's the best way. It saves a lot of headaches."

Bill says it takes about two weeks for one person to properly shear all of his trees, which are planted when they are about two years old. A tree will bring in the top dollar if it is ready to be sold when it is six feet tall, a height it reaches between six and eight years, explains Bill.

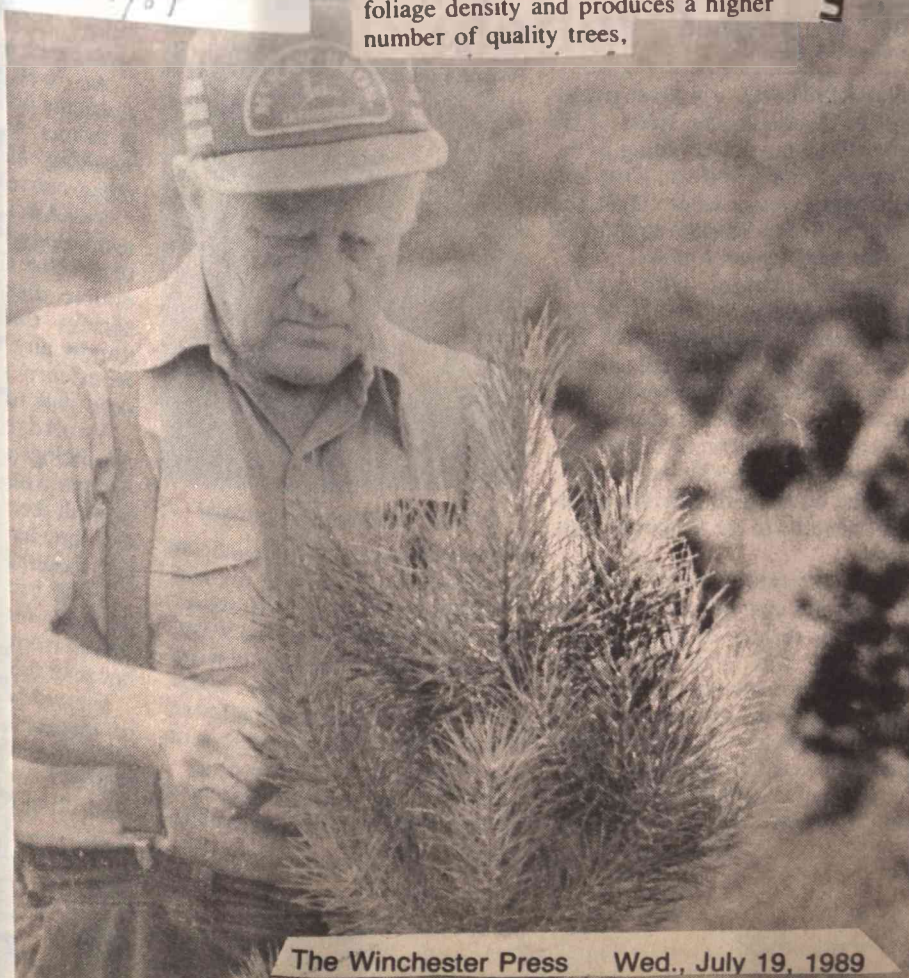
Shearing controls tree shape, promotes foliage density and produces a higher number of quality trees.



Dream come true for local breeders

Two years of time and money paid off earlier this month for Jim and Dorothy McGill of South Gower when their heifer "Maplestone Fantasy" took fourth in her Simmental class at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colorado. There were about 2,800 animals at the show, which is one of the top competitions in North America. Behind Fantasy are some of the ribbons and banners she took last year in shows.

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