

END OF AN ERA

# Christmas tree grower retires after 66 years

Christmas trees

By CALVIN MEN

calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com

FELTON — After 66 years of selling Christmas trees from his Felton tree farm, Ron Ballauf is retiring from the business.

At age 78, Ballauf said he wanted to stop worrying about pruning the trees year round and chasing away the deer.

"It's the end of an era," he said.

But with a small batch remaining, giving them away seemed like the best option.

"I wanted to give the trees away because any trees left, I have to go cut down myself," he said. "I want it to be easier to mow the grass."

While people cutting the trees down for Ballauf was partial incentive, he also wanted to bring some happiness.

"I hope it brings good cheer to the right people," he said.

Ballauf's tree farm traditionally had 6,000 trees that he pruned throughout the year. Whenever a tree was harvested for the holidays, a new one was planted in its place. But six years ago, Ballauf decided to retire and stopped planting replacement trees. And after years



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Erika Harrington, left, and Perry Harrington walk with one of the last trees from Ron Ballauf's tree farm in Felton on Saturday.

of not replanting trees, there are only a handful of trees left. Most of them pint-sized, standing at just 3 feet tall.

"People like to buy big, scrawny trees instead of these little beautiful trees," he said.

But the size made it easy for people to cut down the trees. Many were able to saw the trunk within minutes and carry their tree with one hand to their vehicles. Some tree buyers even playfully swung the trees above their head.

Diana Nickel, 40, of Santa Cruz saw the a flier advertising the free trees in a grocery store and didn't mind

the pint-sized trees.

"It's the perfect size," she said, adding that she didn't have room for a large Christmas tree in her studio apartment.

"You don't need a huge tree," she said. "There's no point in wasting a huge tree that will end up in the landfill."

She'll likely use the tree as compost once the holidays are over.

James "Turk" Dess gave Ballauf a hearty hug after he pulled up to pick out a tree. Dess, 61, of Santa Cruz is a loyal customer of the tree farm for years.

"It's as much of a tradition

## IF YOU GO

ROSE ACRES  
CHRISTMAS TREE  
FARM

**WHAT:** Free Christmas trees.

**WHERE:** 7000 Rose Acres Lane, Felton.

**WHEN:** The lot is open till Christmas but there will be less desirable trees as the holiday approaches.

**INFORMATION:** 831-335-4061

for him as it is for us," Dess said.

In the years Dess has bought trees from Ballauf, the tree farm has always been full. But the farm was mostly empty save for a few dozen miniature trees scattered about.

It didn't take away from the magic of the holiday though.

"When I looked out and saw the small trees, that didn't mean I'm going somewhere else," Dess said. "This is the last year I can get a tree from Ronnie."

Follow Sentinel reporter Calvin Men at Twitter.com/calvinmenat-work