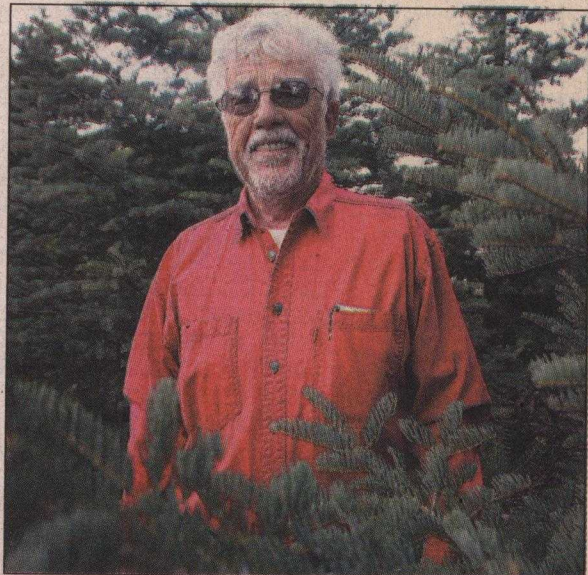


TREE TIME

A Cut Above

FAMOUS TREE FARM OPENS TODAY



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

TOP: Fred Jensen owns Crest Ranch Christmas Tree Farm just outside Santa Cruz. Crest Ranch is the oldest choose-and-cut Christmas tree farm in California. ABOVE: Crest Ranch Christmas Tree Farm is spread out over 50 acres just off Empire Grade Road.

Crest Ranch decks the halls with pines and white firs

By MARISSA CEVALLOS

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SANTA CRUZ — Even Hollywood has heard of Fred Jensen's Christmas trees.

The 78-year-old owner of Crest Ranch drove to Los Angeles last month in heavy rain and storms, hauling 60 pines, white firs and Douglas firs in a trailer.

The trees made cameo appearances in a Payless ShoeSource commercial, to be aired after Thanksgiving.

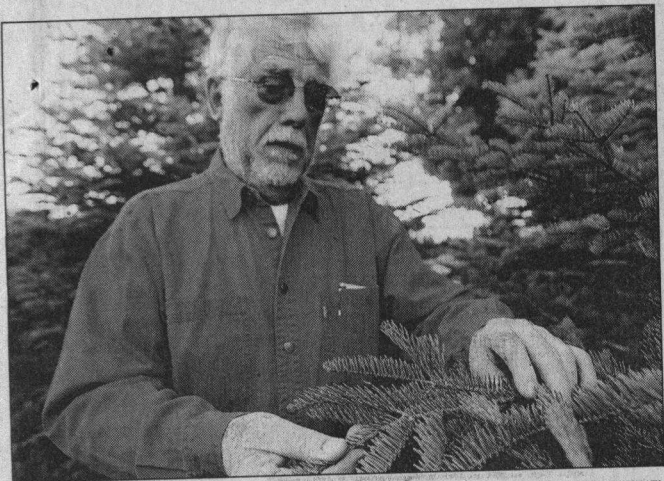
Twenty of the trees are given to Roaring Camp Railroad for its Holiday Tree Walk on Nov. 27-29 and Dec. 5-6.

Jensen's Christmas tree farm, the oldest "cut and choose" farm in California, opens at 8 a.m. today, though cars sometimes line up earlier eager for the gate



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

SEE TREES ON A13 Crest Ranch Christmas Tree Farm grows more than 15 varieties of trees.



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

Crest Ranch owner Fred Jensen inspects one of the large commercial trees grown on the property. Crest Ranch will open to the public today.

TREES

Continued from A1

to open. The parking lot fits about 300 cars, and around Thanksgiving, it's packed, Jensen said.

"Some people have been coming here for more than 50 years," said Jensen, in an accent that almost gives away his Denmark origins.

He came to America when he was 19 and worked as a landscape artist before buying the ranch in 1973.

People can cut their own trees — he has 150 handsaws — or buy a pre-cut tree. Some families make second and third visits to the 116-acre ranch with a view over Boulder Creek.

"People come because the place is open and they can enjoy it and walk around," Jensen said.

Around the holidays, Jensen sets up picnic tables and a stand serving hot dogs, soft drinks and apple cider. Dogs are welcome too, said Jensen. His own dogs, a 5-year-old Rottweiler and boxer mix named Gypsy and a 7-year-old yellow lab named Buster, chase Jensen in his motorized cart as he drives around his property.

This weekend and next are the busiest days for the

IF YOU GO

CREST RANCH
CHRISTMAS TREE
FARM

WHAT: 50 acres of Christmas trees starting at \$33

WHERE: 12500 Empire Grade Road

WHEN: The ranch opens today and stays open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Dec 24. Open Thanksgiving.

HOW: Cut down your own tree with a handsaw (provided); carry it back on your car.

INFORMATION: www.crestranch.com

ranch. When it's not the holiday season, Jensen and another employee yank out weeds and prune the thousands of trees. It takes about seven years for a baby sapling to mature into a tree big enough for plenty of ornaments, so among the 15- to 20-foot giants are tiny trees trying to establish roots below the granite soil.

What starts out as a round bush is carefully shaped into an iconic Christmas tree cone.

"Often, when people bring a tree in, I know exactly where they got it," Jensen said.