

# Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

January 2016

## *Special points of interest:*

### ♦ **Promotion Board Reminder**

A reminder that this year begins the new mandatory filings and payments for the Christmas Tree Promotion Board, a national (and mandatory) marketing effort. **The due date is Feb. 15.** Learn more on page 8 and at [christmastreepromotionboard.org](http://christmastreepromotionboard.org)

### ♦ **Future Meeting Sites**

The NHVTCTA is always looking for possible sites to hold our Summer and Fall meetings. You don't have to have the perfect farm: there's no such thing, and besides, any "issues" on your farm just give the group more to talk about and learn about. We plan the agenda planning and help with the logistics; all you need is a willingness to host your fellow farmers for a day.

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## Winter Meeting at VT Farm Show

The Winter meeting of the NHVTCTA will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 26, at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Jct., Vermont, in conjunction with the Vermont Farm Show.

**Also, don't forget to bring a tree and/or wreath to enter in the Vermont Farm Show competition.** It is good exposure for the industry as a whole and a good marketing opportunity for individual farms!

On the agenda is the popular sales season group discussion, which is a great opportunity to hear—and share—reports about how the past season went for choose-and-cut farms, wholesales, and retail lots. There's plenty to be learned from the experiences of others—what types of trees sold best, what questions and concerns did customers have, etc.

For those farms that have had a hard time finding and

keeping good employees, representatives from the Vermont Department of Labor will be onhand with a presentation that includes tips on writing job descriptions, conducting interviews and background checks, and more.

After a BBQ lunch, Mark Cannella, UVM farm business management specialist, will provide information on leasing farmland that should be of interest to those considering expanding their farm, as well as those that might be contemplating leasing their land to another grower.

Finally, Dominique Golliot with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture will provide a pesticide safety update.

Registration for the meeting (without a guaranteed meal) is available on-site if you have not already sent in your registration form.

Contact Jim Horst at (802) 447-0660 with questions or for more information.

## NCTA Update

As was mentioned in the last issue of Tree Line, the National Christmas Tree Association has introduced a new membership structure for 2016. This has been done to help the

NCTA adapt to the state of the industry and the evolving role of NCTA with the new checkoff program. The new model offers

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## President's Message

Hi all,

I have recently been appointed to the Agricultural Advisory Board of New Hampshire. I've completed one of two training sessions administered by state attorney generals office for the governor's office. The second one will be this spring in Concord. How is this going to help the NHVT-CTA? I guess that depends on the members talking to me about any concerns they may have about the future of our industry. With a five-year term, this position may help us to implement some lasting changes that will benefit us all.

The U.S. Department of Labor / Wages and Hour Division

investigated my operation during the retail season and concluded that I was a BAD man. The investigator claimed that I owed several thousand dollars of overtime pay to my workers. Agricultural labor is exempt from overtime pay but the retail lot isn't considered agricultural. Being open 12 hours a day, seven days a week means 44 hours of overtime each week per-man. That's a lot of Christmas trees!

There were no complaints from any of my men to trigger this. The investigator told me that the tree farm industry was being investigated as a whole and they now have an investigator that lives in Ca-

naan, Vermont. Your guess is as good as mine as to who's next, so be aware.

The Winter meeting at the Vermont Farm Show should be a good one. There is always something new or different to discuss and pass along among our membership. **Please bring a tree or wreath for the contest at the Farm Show.** It's a great opportunity to showcase our industries products to a lot of people. You never know who your next customer may be. See you all there!

*Daniel Beloin,  
President*



## New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



### 2016 Officers

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Copies of the Association bylaws and policies are available to members at any time by contacting the Executive Secretary.

### 2016 Tree Line Publication Schedule

Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	Jan. -
June	June 3
September	Sept. 2

## Trees for Troops 2015

Christmas tree growers from the NHVTCTA contributed more than 450 trees to the national Trees for Troops program in 2015.

The Christmas Spirit Foundation, which conducts Trees for Troops reports that, nationally, 2015 was the third biggest year ever for the program. In total, 13,341 Christmas trees were donated directly by growers this year.

Consumers once again contributed to by visiting one of the 40 farms, retail lots or garden centers across the country that participated in Trees for Troops Weekend this year. Each of these locations hosted a 28' FedEx trailer at their location

all weekend so customers could purchase a tree and then place it on the truck to be donated and delivered to a military family at one of our participating bases the following week. In 2015, more than 5,000 trees were donated during Trees for Troops Weekend.

Deliveries to stateside military bases all over the country started after Thanksgiving and ended on December 11 with a grand total of 18,633 trees being donated to military families. These trees went to 65 bases in



the U.S. and spanned all branches of the armed services: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and also the National Guard.

The NHVTCTA will be collecting trees again this year—if you haven't donated in the past, please consider doing so in 2016.



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# How to Handle Bad Reviews on Social Media

*By Laurie Morse-Dell,  
Social Media and Personal  
Branding Coach  
lauriemorsedell.com*

One of the biggest fears that companies have about creating social media accounts is, “What if someone says something bad about us?”

Well, if you are that concerned about negative publicity, you probably have bigger problems in your company. If your customer base isn’t satisfied with your product or service, then nothing is going to stop them from talking about it. Whether your company has a social media account or not, people can still talk about you. It’s better that you provide an environment where you’re aware of their complaints and can properly handle the situation, rather than stick your head in the sand and hope the problem goes away.

So, let’s say your company has a positive image to begin with and you’re suddenly faced with a customer that is unhappy about something, big or small. Here is some expert advice on how you can handle the situation.

## DO

### **Do set clear social media policies**

First and foremost, establishing a clear social media policy with your employees and customers can help prevent PR headaches. Make sure your employees are aware of what to do if something goes awry on social media. Who should they report it to? Who is authorized to respond to the post and what steps will be taken to

resolve the issue? Having a plan in place to handle any unhappy customer is just good business sense and should be part of employee training, just like you would have a plan if an unhappy customer walks in the door or calls on the phone.

The second social media policy you need to have in place is for your fans. Let them know the best way to reach you if they have a concern. If you only monitor your social media accounts between the hours of 8-5 make sure they know that so they don’t pose a question on social media and expect your immediate response. Many times a question that goes unanswered for even a couple of hours is presumed to be bad customer service in these days of instant contact and can lead to unnecessary negative posting. If you’re signing off for the day simply say, “Signing off for the day, hope you have a great evening!” Little things like this can let fans know you’re not ignoring them.

You should also clearly post on your website and about sections of social media the best way to reach you and the hours you’re available to assist them, as well as the content you will allow from your fans.

### **Do respond promptly**

Even if you’ve set clear parameters with your fans on when you’re available and the best way to reach you, they may feel the need to publicly explain the problem on your social media account. It’s important to react in a timely manner to avoid a snowball effect of criticism. A prompt response, even if you don’t have a clear answer for

them yet, can go a long way to diffusing the situation and calming the person down. Let them know you’ve heard their complaint and you’re working to resolve the issue. Ignoring a complaint will not make it go away, in fact, it could actually grow into a much larger and more public problem.

### **Do be transparent**

Unless extremely inappropriate or vulgar, try to avoid removing the comment or hiding the problem. This will just add fuel to the fire and encourage them to post more. They’ll probably even spread the word that you deleted their complaint and this will lead to fans feeling like you don’t respect their feedback. If you do have to delete the comment, be honest and let your fans know that you did so. Then explain why with something like the following, “We recently removed a comment from our page. Although we appreciate feedback from our fans and encourage an open dialogue on how we can improve, we will not tolerate inappropriate language on our page. We are working to resolve the situation with the individual offline, and assure you that customer satisfaction is a priority of ours.” This is also a great opportunity for you to point them to your social media policy and expectations of the type of posts you will allow on your sites.

### **Do take the conversation offline**

Find any way you can to avoid a back and forth discussion online with the person making negative

*Continued on page 5*

## How to Handle Bad Reviews on Social Media (continued)

*Continued from page 5*

comments. Although you want to acknowledge to the rest of your fans that you're handling the situation, you also don't need to make the entire conversation public. Anything you put in writing can be shared without your permission or control. Simply state that you're sorry that they had an unpleasant experience or are upset, and you would like to resolve the issue promptly to ensure there is a happy ending to the situation. Provide them with a phone number for a direct line to a customer service rep that can solve their problem, provide a name of the representative if possible. Or, ask them to private message you with their con-

tact information so you can contact them immediately to resolve the issue. This let's other fans know that you are handling the situation and providing excellent customer service and can help put a stop to the negative comments. It may even prompt a thank you from the upset fan, which can go a long way in keeping your company image positive.

### Do post as you normally would

Once the situation has been addressed and you've asked them to contact you offline, you can continue to make your regular social media posts. Unless the negative comment is the result

of a much larger public scandal, there should be nothing else that needs to be discussed.

While it's nice that by continuing your regular posts the negative comment will be taken further out of prime real estate on your site, this should not be looked at as your intent for posting and you should not try to make an unusual amount of posts to hide the comment.

You're trying to stay transparent, but you also need to move on with business. Continuing your regular posts simply tells the rest of your audience that the situation is under control and business will continue as normal.

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## How to Handle Bad Reviews on Social Media (continued)

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### DON'T

#### **Do not act in haste**

Yes, you want to respond promptly and you don't want fans to think you're ignoring a problem, but don't say the first thing that comes to your mind that you may end up regretting.

Write it down, talk it out with a trusted confidant, and make sure that your message can't be misinterpreted. Try to keep the message as clear and simple as possible, and then move in the direction of taking it offline to solve the issue.

#### **Do not tolerate nonsense**

In most cases, negative posts and comments on your social media profile will be related to a customer complaint about poor service or a faulty product, which is why customer service offline is of the utmost importance to prevent these posts.

However, if the post is blatantly inappropriate, volatile, or threatening there is no need to tolerate it. Simply remove the post. If the negative posting con-

tinues, you can also block the user or report them to the site you're using.

#### **Do not let your emotions get the best of you**

Whatever you do, don't get into a word war or shouting match with anyone on your social media sites (or any other sites). That is not the type of attention you want and it could do serious long term damage to your business. It's easy to feel a little bolder when you're staring at a computer screen rather than into a person's face, but remember that your public image relies on you keeping your cool. Even if you don't believe you're in the wrong, or you think they've done something seriously wrong, you'll need to suck it up and be the bigger person. The customer is always right.

#### **Do not alienate the rest of your fans**

Avoid talking badly about a particular fan or group of fans to the rest of your social media audience. You don't want your social media site to become an us-

versus-them situation because the fans that weren't originally involved could end up feeling alienated by you. If you keep your messaging positive and abide by your company culture and high standards, you'll make it through the negative posts and gain even more respect from your true fans.

#### **Do not try to justify or make excuses**

You might think that by stating a clearly outlined argument about why the negative post is false, you'll be able to prove the poster wrong and make yourself look better. You may also think that by providing a really good reason for what went wrong, then everyone will understand and be on your side. You're wrong. More than likely you'll just provide fuel for a back and forth argument. It can't be said enough enough that you need to acknowledge the conversation, take it offline, and then move on.

### Summary

It's hard not to be upset by negative comments but you need to keep in mind that it's nearly impossible to please everyone. At some point you'll probably have an encounter on social media that makes you uncomfortable, and it's how you handle the situation that will determine if it's just a bump in the road or the end of the road.

Keep your messaging positive, own up if you (or an employee) made a mistake, and move on.

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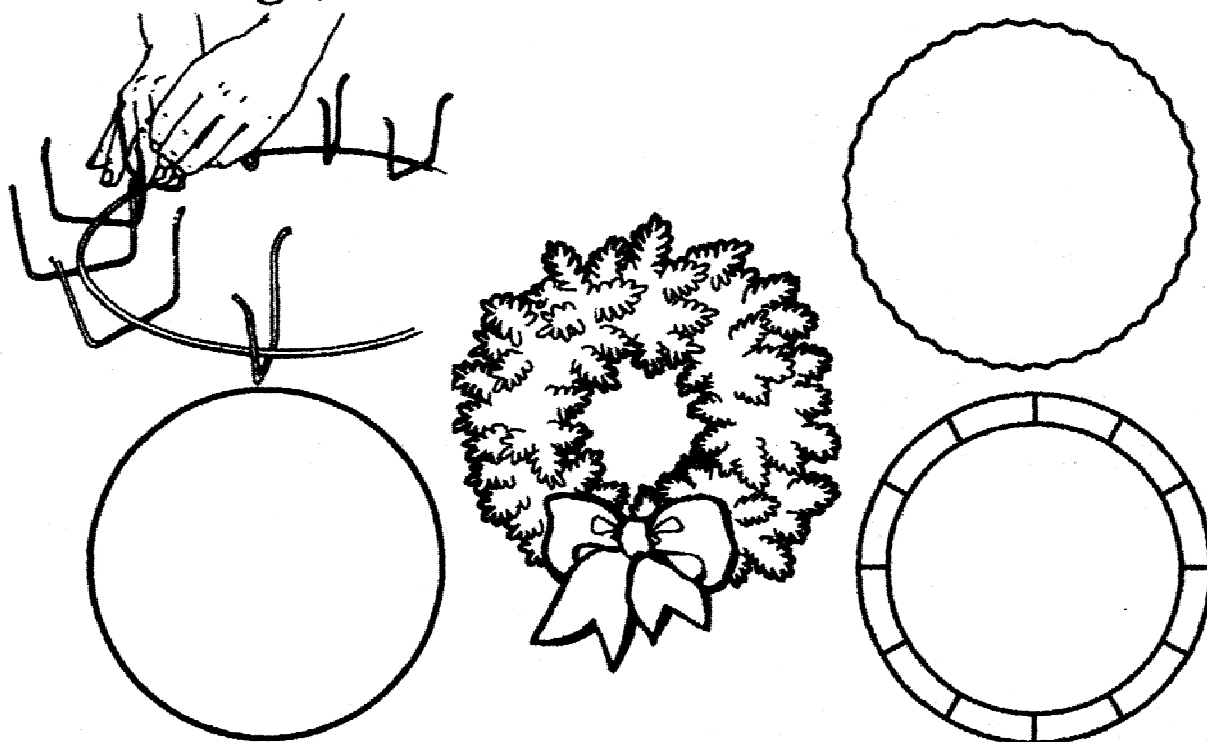




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## NCTA (continued)

*Continued from page 1*

straightforward options and a simpler membership application process with dues levels based solely on cost of benefits and NO per tree calculation.

Now, members will choose their membership level based on how involved they want to be with the national association and what types of information they want to receive.

NCTA Membership Options for 2016 include:

Introductory Member - \$99

Industry Member - \$299

Professional Member - \$599 + Advocacy Sponsorship.

On the right are more details about the benefits included at each membership level.

## 2016 NCTA Membership Structure

<b>1. Introductory Member</b> (NOT eligible to be an NCTA Director or to enter National Tree/Wreath Contests) <b>For those who run small operations or are retired Christmas tree growers.</b>	<b>\$99</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Christmas Tree Journal subscription</li> <li>• Access to NCTA's Member Directory (online)</li> <li>• Discounted member rates for NCTA educational events (in-person seminars, trade shows, webinars, etc.)</li> <li>• NCTA member logo, digital version</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Industry Member</b> <b>All benefits of Introductory Members, PLUS these additional:</b>	<b>\$299</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media &amp; consumer relations support from NCTA Staff in helping members prepare for and execute positive public relations whether with local news media or social media</li> <li>• Includes membership in NCTA Blog Army</li> <li>• Discounts and special offers through NCTA's Affinity Programs</li> <li>• Topline results from Research Reports</li> <li>• Listing in the Wholesale Locator on NCTA website (optional)</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Professional Member</b> <b>All benefits of Industry Members, PLUS these additional:</b>	<b>\$599 + Advocacy sponsorship</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to NCTA's Online Member Center with resources including the Marketing Tool Kit, publication archives, talking points, media tips, industry supplier lists, graphics &amp; photos, and more</li> <li>• <i>Elite Member Monthly</i>, an electronic publication with sections specific to various business sectors of the industry (choose and cut, wholesaling, retailing, etc.)</li> <li>• Complete Research reports including early access to the Harris Consumer Poll results, phytophthora, etc.</li> <li>• Access to NEW Facilitated Discussion Forums (online, conference calls, in-person events). Network with others in the industry and discuss trends and news on specific topics</li> <li>• Discounts on advertising in the <i>American Christmas Tree Journal</i> and <i>Elite Member Monthly</i></li> </ul>	

## Christmas Tree Promotion Board

By now you should have received a mailing from the Christmas Tree Promotion Board with information for paying the first assessment, due on trees sold during the 2015 season. The Promotion Board will use this money to fund marketing activities in the coming year.

With a very small budget, the Promotion Board was able to create a limited marketing and social media campaign during this past sales season. For example, it created the Web site [www.freshcuthomegrown.com](http://www.freshcuthomegrown.com) for consumers to get information on buying and caring for a real Christmas tree. You can also find links to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram pages.

At [www.christmastreepromotionboard.org](http://www.christmastreepromotionboard.org), growers can

find more about the program and information on the required filings and payments that are due. If you did not receive a mailing, there is information there to get on the list and to download filing forms.

Below is a brief refresher on the program:

### **What will the CTPB do with the money?**

CTPB will invest its resources to achieve its vision and mission of enhancing the value and demand for cut Christmas trees, improving the future of the industry by creating and increasing opportunities for growers, importers and others in the industry through promotion, research and education programs.

### **Who is required to pay the assessment?**

The payment of assessments on domestic Christmas trees that are cut and sold will be the responsibility of the producer who produces the Christmas trees or causes the trees to be cut. Any producer who cuts and sells less than 500 Christmas trees in a fiscal period or any importer who imports less than 500 Christmas trees in a fiscal period may obtain an exemption from the assessment.

### **What is the assessment rate?**

The assessment is 15 cents per Christmas tree produced domestically or imported into the United States. **All assessment payments are to be received by the board no later than February 15 of the following year in which they are cut and sold.**



## Ticks in the News

*The news media turned their attention to ticks this year, with articles reporting the discovery of ticks (many turned out to be aphids) in Christmas trees in several different parts of the country. That led to concern among some consumers. The National Christmas Tree Association created the following document to help growers address customers who might ask about ticks:*

Recent news reports include a warning from health officials that above-average temperatures increase the risk of ticks bearing Lyme disease being in Christmas trees. While above-average winter temperatures

can increase the activity of insects and ticks, the risk of finding either on your Christmas tree is highly unlikely. Public health officials are experts on human diseases, but they are not experts on entomology at Christmas tree farms.

Here are some facts about Christmas trees to consider:

- Christmas trees are grown all throughout North America and Hawaii, including areas where temperatures are typically mild in December, so warmer than average weather in some areas is not new or unusual for Christmas trees.
- It is possible for a Christmas tree to have insects on it, but very uncommon. Nationally

there are 1 or 2 per year reported to NCTA out of 28 million trees displayed.

- The most likely insect to be found on a cut Christmas tree is an aphid, not ticks, although they are similar looking. Aphids are innocuous plant-feeding insects that are never a health concern.

- According to entomologists who work with Christmas tree farms, the chances of finding insects in a tree are less than 1 in 100,000.

- According to entomologists who work with Christmas tree farms, ticks are most likely to occur in grass, not on conifer trees, and they over-winter in groundcover such as leaves, grass, etc.



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## Editor's Note: 24,000 Fraser Fir for Sale

*I received the following note from long-time NH-VT Christmas Tree Association member Peter Mollica.*

*Peter has provided tremendous expert assistance over the years to the association and its members in helping to explain the complex tax issues surrounding the sale of Christmas trees. So it's nice to be able to return the favor by helping him spread the news that his farm—and trees—are for sale:*

I have my house and farm on the market. I'd like to retire sometime soon. The problem is that the potential buyers who can afford my place don't want to be Christmas tree farmers and many of the people who would like to grow trees, can't afford to

buy it. Therefore, I would like to sell the remaining trees on the farm separately. There are approximately

24,000 viable, healthy Frasers, planted between 2005 and 2013.

Terms and prices are very negotiable. I could envision a contract under which the tree buyer would agree to buy the trees, but pay for them over a four or five year period, as they were harvested. This part of the contract would be locked in concrete and the tree buyer would

be guaranteed time to harvest the trees. However, it would be quite possible to continue to farm if the future buyer of the property and the tree buyer agreed.

There are all sorts of possibilities. If anyone is interested let's talk. Contact Peter Mollica, (802) 885-9597, or email [mollica@christmastreesoft.com](mailto:mollica@christmastreesoft.com).



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