Fryeburg Fair is all about agriculture, farming and Maine products. Jim Corliss of New-
burgh, Maine has been Super-
intendent of the Christmas
Tree and Wreath exhibit since
1987. Located just outside the
pulling ring, Jim and his wife
Norma can be found among
the most spectacular Christ-
mas trees and wreaths in New
England. Jim has also been
doing wreath making demon-
strations for nearly 30 years.

Jim Corliss and Norma Ruiter
grew up in the Richford-Berk-
shire area of northern Vermont. They married in 1954. Jim enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1955 and
was selected to train in air traffic control. After leaving the Air Force he was hired by the FAA and was
transferred to Bangor in 1968 when Dow Air Force
Base closed. By this time they had five children, three
daughters and two sons. One daughter has since
passed away. They have nine grandchildren, all boys,
and two great grandchildren. Jim retired from the
FAA in 1988 after 33 years in air traffic control.

When they moved to Maine, the Corlisses purchased
a former small dairy farm. They became interested
in growing Christmas trees on the 30 acres of fields
on their new farm. Jim started with Scotch pines in
1970. “They were a popular species at the time and
grow fast. The problem was I killed 990 of the 1,000
I planted the first year because I didn't know they
would not grow in turf. The Maine Christmas Tree
Association taught me about herbicide and things got
better.” They sold their first trees in 1970. Jim went
on to become the President of the Maine Christmas
Tree Association as well as President of the Nation-
al Christmas Tree Association. In the latter role, he
represented the association’s membership when pre-
senting the White House Christmas tree to First Lady
Laura Bush in 2001. That same year, Jim appeared
on the Martha Stewart show and delivered his vast ex-
pertise on Christmas trees. This archival video can still be seen on www.marthastewart.com and is very enjoyable and educational.

The Corliss family has sold thousands of cut-your-own Christmas trees to generations of holiday buyers. Piper Mountain Farms has a seasonal gift shop and a mail order business selling wreaths, centerpieces, garland and gift combinations of Maine produced food items. Visit www.pipermtn.com.

Despite the pre-holiday schedule, Jim and Norma arrive at Fryeburg Fair every year to set up the tree and wreath exhibit and sell seedlings to the public to benefit the Maine Association of Christmas Trees scholarship fund. They credit the late Jim LaCasce and his wife Jeanene for much of their past success and shared enjoyment. Unfortunately Jim LaCasce was killed in a woods accident on September 7, 2018. Jim Corliss says, “Jim LaCasce laid out the tree exhibit every year and Jeanene arranged the wreath exhibit. He was an exceptional balsam fir tree grower, setting a standard few others have reached. Jim and Jeanene helped for several days each year and made huge contributions to our department and the Fryeburg Fair.”

Jim Corliss will be conducting daily wreathmaking demonstrations at 11 am and 2 pm. On the last Sunday he will offer the 11 am demonstration only.

Back on the farm changes are in the air. On January 1st, Piper Mountain Farm will go to new owners, retired Navy Captain Larry “Mac” McMullen and his wife Anne. The business will live on. Jim and Norma will continue to act as mentors for as long as they are needed. Jim and Norma have bought a smaller house in Hampden, 11 miles from the farm.

Be sure to stop by the Christmas Tree and Wreath Department at Fryeburg Fair. For more information go to www.fryeburgfair.org.

Written by Rachel Andrews Damon