

CHRISTMAS TREES & WREATHS AT FRYEBURG FAIR

Fryeburg Fair is all about agriculture, farming and Maine products. Jim Corliss of Newburgh, Maine has been Superintendent 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 Christmas trees and wreaths in New England. Jim has also been doing wreath making demonstrations for nearly 30 years.



*Jim Corliss, Superintendent of Fryeburg Fair's Christmas Trees & Wreaths Department
Photo by Ellen Guilford*

Jim Corliss and Norma Ruitter grew up in the Richford-Berkshire 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.



*Award Winning Wreath - Fryeburg Fair
Photo by Ellen Guilford*

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 National Christmas Tree Association. In the latter role, he represented the association's membership when presenting 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-

vertisement 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



*Jim & Norma Corliss of Newburgh, ME,
Fryeburg Fair's Christmas Trees & Wreaths Department*



*The Big Winner - Fryeburg Fair
Photo by Ellen Guilford*

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