

NORTHWEST

# BOOMER SENIOR

LANE COUNTY EDITION  
DECEMBER 2014 • **FREE!**

NEWS



## ON THE FARM

Northern Lights Tree Farm is a lifelong dream for Bob and Lynn Schutte

See story, page 16

### INSIDE

- Finding happiness – Page 2
- Author Geni White – Page 4
- Pink Martini's Thomas Lauderdale – Page 15

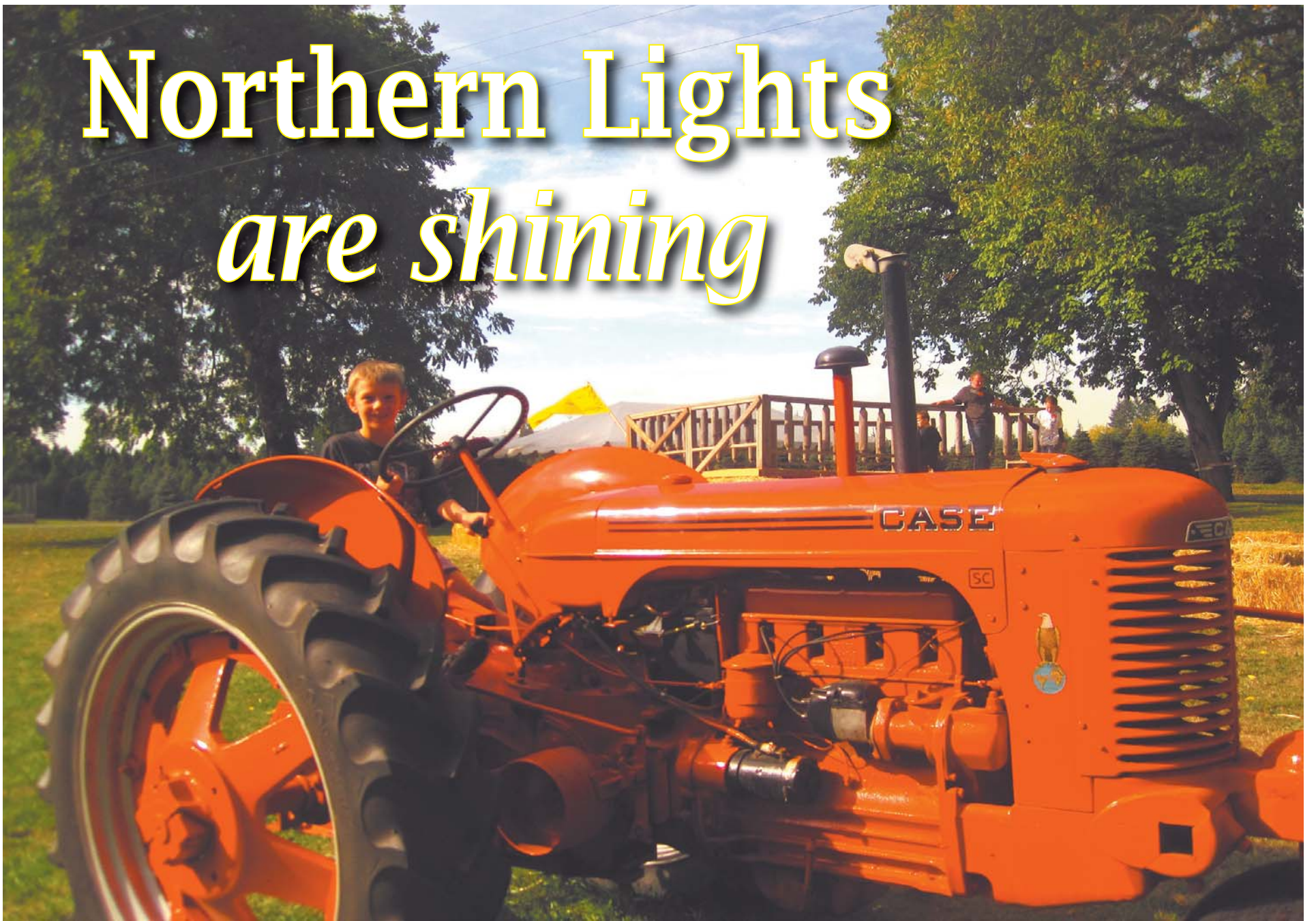


Want to see & hear what your community friends think and who said what?

You can do that NOW! See the video clips at  
[NWBoomerandSeniorNews.com](http://NWBoomerandSeniorNews.com)

Check in every month to see what's been happening!

# Northern Lights *are shining*



## Pleasant Hill farm is a year-round attraction

By VANESSA SALVIA  
BOOMER & SENIOR NEWS

Northern Lights Christmas Tree Farm may have “Christmas tree” in its name, but it offers more than just holiday greetings.

Owners Bob and Lynn Schutte began as a Christmas tree farm, and added many other products and attractions over the years. Honestly, though, “Northern Lights Christmas Tree, Pumpkin Patch, Grass-Finished Beef, Pasture-Raised Turkeys, Chickens and Ducks, Goats, Pigs, Corn and Hay Farm” was too long to fit in their website address.

The Schuttes didn’t start their lives as farmers, though it was Lynne’s ultimate goal. The pair, who both turned 70 this year, met as high school juniors on their first day of chemistry class in San Jose, California.

“We were lab partners,” Bob says.

Lynn adds, with a laugh and a hug, “The chemistry was great.”

Northern Lights now hosts hundreds of visitors during the peak pumpkin and tree seasons. On a sunny, warm Friday in October, Lynn estimated she would

have at least 400 visitors. “On a weekend, we probably see about as much maybe more,” she says. “It depends on the weather.”

Today, the farm has 70 acres planted in five different fir trees: noble, grand, Douglas, Nordmann and Fraser. Three acres are in pumpkins, two in corn and 30 in hay. They raise goats and pigs (cared for by the Biancalana family in Springfield), about 120 cows and dozens of turkeys, chickens (for eggs and for roasting) and ducks (for pets).

One of Bob’s most visible jobs on the farm is driving the tractor. “OK, everybody ready for the ride?” he says, in his big booming voice. Thousands of kids know him as “Farmer Bob,” and he looks and acts the part, with his jeans, ball cap, round face and neatly trimmed white beard.

He gives each trailer load a glimpse of the farm, driving them past the tree fields and talking about how long it takes to grow one to the point that it can be harvested.

Bob shows his guests the flock of turkeys, and reminds parents that the turkeys can visit anyone’s home for Thanksgiving if they get their



Photos by Vanessa Salvia

Top, a vintage tractor attracts 7-year-old James Hoopman, a Pleasant Hill boy visiting the farm on a warm autumn day. Above, a big, juicy pumpkin is a special treat for these cows in the fall.

order in soon enough. He takes them by their log home, where they host weddings, and tells the kids to look across the water to the uninhabited island, where “nothing lives but wildlife.”

Finally, he tells them, “Keep your eyes open, kids. You might see a deer.”

At each stop along the way he takes time to answer questions, some silly, some serious, from both parents and kids alike, before finally depositing them in their field of choice, promising to return for them after they’ve had time to find the very best pumpkin or tree in the field.

While Bob is fulfilling his farm duties, Lynn is most often at the retail store,

where visitors pay for their tractor rides, hot chocolate and trinkets.

### Coming together

During high school, Bob and Lynn dated, then both went off to begin their post-high-school lives. They attended college for a year or so. Bob took a motorcycle trip to Mexico, while Lynn joined the Peace Corps and served in Brazil. “After we got out of both of our hitches we rediscovered each other,” Lynn says.

Bob was drafted into the Army in 1965. They married in 1966, and made their first home together in DeRidder, Louisiana, while Bob was stationed at nearby Fort Polk.

“Then we came back to San Jose and we were both enrolled in school again,” Bob says. “Lynn became an elementary school teacher and I became a mechanical engineer. I had my first engineering job in the Bay Area.”

After that, the couple moved north to Washington, where they lived and worked for 10 years. They moved to Alaska in 1981, where Lynn continued working as a teacher and Bob worked on the oil fields of Alaska’s North Slope.

While in Alaska, they often traveled to the Eugene area to visit Bob’s brother in Pleasant Hill, and began looking for a small farm to which they

See *FARM* p. 17

# FARM

CONTINUED FROM P. 16

could relocate. Bob's brother used to live right next door to the farm that is now Northern Lights, and told the couple about the farm when it came on the market.

"We were looking for 10 or 15 acres and we got 162," Bob says. "When we saw this place we fell in love with it. It was a decision of the heart, nothing practical about it at all."

They purchased the farm in 1986. At that point Bob's nephew was caretaker of the farm and planted their first batch of Christmas trees. Lynn was able to take early retirement from the Alaska school system, and they moved here full-time in 1994. That year, they had their first Christmas tree harvest.

### On the farm

Their first year on the farm they lived in the milk house, which is a concrete block building attached to a large barn. "It was the old milking parlor," says Lynn. "This used to be a dairy in the 1940s. All I know about the owners is that they were childless. The husband had died previously so when the wife passed away there were no immediate heirs so the estate went to the cousins and one of the shirttail relatives became executor of the estate and put it on the market. We came and looked at it and we fell in love with it."

After moving to the farm, they began building their large log home, which now sits on a beautiful site adjacent to a channel of the Willamette River. Lynn continued to work as a substitute teacher while they got their new home established, although farming was what she really had her sights set on.

"Being a farmer was always my ultimate goal," Lynn says. "And when I did do the substitute teaching it was simply because we hadn't developed the farm activities to the point where I had to be here like I am now. As the farm activities grew I decided I wasn't going to do that anymore."

The Schuttes started out wanting a little bit of elbow room, and they got that plus more. "When we fell in love with this place we had to revamp all of our plans. We had to ask ourselves, 'What are we going to do if we buy this place?' The only way we could make it work was to have a working farm, a farm that produced income, because we were a working family. So that's what we've done. It's grown and developed into activities beyond our means. We're busy 11 months out of the year here."

Lynn says that to make it financially they had to be inventive. "I think the days of traditional farming for, especially a small farm like ours, are over," she says. "You have

to have some kind of a little gimmick or something that's going to help you pay the bills. We just don't have the volume so we have to look at being innovative."

Each year they wholesale about 2,000 Christmas trees, shipping them to retailers around Oregon, from Alaska to California and sometimes as far east as Missouri. And their choose-and-cut operation "has exploded" in popularity, Lynn says. October is field trip season, with numerous area schools scheduling pumpkin patch visits. During October, children climb on and around a replica of the Mayflower made out of hay bales.

Throughout these busy years, Bob continued working as a facilities engineer in Alaska. That meant flying to the North Slope for two weeks and being home for two weeks, from February through September each year. "He just retired," says Lynn.

But given Bob's engineering background, he's incredibly handy to have around. "Things break and he's

there fixing it," Lynn says. "I recommend everybody marry a mechanical engineer. They're very handy, that's for sure."

### Looking ahead

Despite her lightheartedness, it's not easy work. "Most of the time we managed with great difficulty," Bob says. "The psychological stance that I took was, 'I'm just going to do the best that I can.' I can always do more and sometimes things don't happen at just the right time but I'm going to do the best that I can and that's what we do. And, we've had some good help along the way." Lynn concurs, "We have great help and we certainly couldn't do it without them."

Bob returns from his last tractor ride of the day and hears Lynn talking about the different decisions they've had to make since turning 70.

Lynn says they haven't figured out what to do when they can't farm anymore.

"I hope we can be open to making the right decisions," she says. "In that regard we're just like a lot of other boomers and seniors. We're facing those decisions that come with aging and having a career and when do you decide, 'Well, I've had enough of that?' Hopefully we'll know when either physically we're no longer able to do it as well or all of a sudden financially it doesn't make sense anymore."

For now though, things are continuing. The hay for next year is ready to sprout, the baby pigs and baby cows are growing up, and next year's pumpkin patch is getting tilled. Northern Lights Christmas Tree Farm has managed for another year. ■

*"We were looking for 10 or 15 acres and we got 162. When we saw this place we fell in love with it. It was a decision of the heart, nothing practical about it."*

~ Bob Schutte



Photos by Vanessa Salvia

Bob and Lynn Schutte kept full-time jobs when they first bought their farm, but eventually retired to work on their property.



During the fall months, children can play in teepees made from corn stalks.