

## Eyes On You

Ed and Margaret Davidson, Kings County Farm

### I've got trees to do

After Ed Davidson's father, Gordon Davidson, passed on, it took Ed some time to regroup. But one day, it hit.

"Margaret!" Ed exclaimed. "Margaret! I've got trees to do!"

"Oh," started his wife, Margaret, recently retired after a 33-year teaching career, "are you going to make any money?"

"No," replied her husband, a little too quickly.

"Are you going to break even?" she ventured.

"No," he said without missing a beat. "But, I've got trees to do!"

With the help of their three adult children, the Davidsons were cutting, dragging and expertly building a load of trees for market soon after. Ed says a better load was never built. Moreover, today Ed is very optimistic about the Christmas tree industry and the Farm's bottom line.

### History

Ed Davidson remembers standing in front of the fire, watching from some distance. He was nine years old. Several acres were ablaze.

Beside him stood his grandfather, Lee Davidson. "A beef farmer," says Ed, "burning off small pieces of 'cut-off' forest land to forest pasture." The land, now cleared and seared, did respond the next year with lots of grass, but other things too, for instance, raspberry bushes and balsam fir trees.

After some years, his grandfather started cutting and selling those wild balsam fir Christmas trees, and made a business of it.

Ed's Mom and Dad – Virginia and Gordon Davidson – eventually purchased the farm, expanded the operation and sold more wild balsam fir trees.

Over the decades, the operation grew with the industry integrating fertilizer and a shape-and-shear process. A U-Cut operation was eventually added as the pinnacle of the business – or at least, the part of the business the family loves most.

Ed says he and his dad dragged, baled and sheared together for years; they walked the land just looking at trees. His dad was his mentor and Ed regrets now, that he didn't ask more questions.

When Ed's own son was a boy, some twenty years ago, Ed and he watched a good part of the same forest fall from a fire started on neighboring land. At the time, Ed believed the land would not grow again.

By this time, Ed had studied and chose a career as a Forest Technologist so he knew a thing or two about forests. He was surprised and delighted when little things started to sprout and at the 24-month mark, clearly prevailing were white and red spruce.

Ed recalls he and dad Gordon debating: Do they intervene with the growth, or go with "what mother nature" gave them? They banked on Mother Nature and kept the spruce.

Today, Ed and his son (named Lee, after Ed's Grandfather) view the lot as a nice stand of spruce, with value.

Ed says his three children, while always willing to lend a hand at the farm when they can, followed their own career paths—Lee just graduated with a Business Degree from St. Mary's University, Alanna is studying to become a Teacher and Mairead is a Registered Nurse.

Gordon and Davidson



### U-Cut Operation

For Ed the U-Cut operation is what it's all about. It's the reward.

When the u-cut is open, Ed's mother, 81-year old Virginia Davidson (See photo of Gordon and Virginia to the left) is still likely the first face visitors see. Virginia, treats in hand and smiles for everyone, welcomes the guests.

Ed says his mother urges every visitor to have a great time. Buy a tree, don't buy a tree. Who cares? Just turn off the phones, take the children and enjoy the Christmas tree forest. Breathe it in.

For Virginia and Ed and Margaret, each carload of visitors represents an opportunity for visitors to collect a cherished memory.

Always involved with the family business, Ed notes his mother still reads through every Journal, leaving the publication in "its place"—on the bedside table in the guest room, for Ed and others to read.



## The Plan

Ed is at the midpoint of a five-year plan he developed for the farm. He is happy about where he is and says that going forward he will work on a marketing push.

Ed sees real opportunity opening up, with the real tree promotions going on here and in USA.

## "Lifers"

Even as Ed grew up in the Christmas tree business, he says there is so much for him to learn. The industry people, says Ed, are generous with their time. So many – Murray Crouse, Marty Murphy, Bill Smith and many others – have spent time answering endless questions and giving advice.

For Ed, if someone wants to be a successful Christmas tree grower they must be willingly be open and have the capacity to learn from others. It's the only way. And, says Ed, they have to be what Mike Keddy calls, "a Lifer." Can't live without doing trees. Lifers.

So, it is not surprising Ed chooses to belong to two Nova Scotia Christmas tree Associations – Cobequid and Lunenburg. In fact, he is happy to join as many as he can as the information and knowledge he gets in return is so valuable to him and his business. Ed says when he attends meetings, trainings or other events he gets a snap shot in time, of the industry, by listening to the people around him.

## Industry Advantages according to Ed

1. The product is sustainable, renewable, recyclable – it's real trees.
2. The people in the industry and Associations are generous with their time and knowledge; there is always support.
3. The "Real Tree" trend is a throwback to unplugged life, nice to have in our busy world.
4. The industry employs many, many people in rural Nova Scotia.
5. The Christmas tree industry represents an important piston in the Nova Scotia economy.
6. The industry produces a tremendous product.

## Future

Ed would love to walk away from his work life and only work Christmas trees but it's not in the short term plan. However, a "Lifer" himself, he'll continue on with the Christmas trees until he can no longer. On his bucket list is to export a shipment of trees. At the moment, domestic sales and the U-Cut operation are the core of the business.

Ed likes to think the money for Christmas trees will be there by the time he is ready to pass on the farm, so that someone – be it fourth generation or someone else - will neither, be able to walk away from a life with the trees. 🌲

## Margaret and Ed Davidson



PHOTO Davidson Family



PHOTO Davidson Family



PHOTO Davidson Family