

NEWS RELEASE

County of Warren, New Jersey



Warren County Kicks Off Choose-and-Cut Christmas Tree Season

(Mansfield Township, NJ – November 21, 2017) – The beauty. The scent. The memories made when your family heads out to choose and cut a Jersey Fresh Christmas tree to decorate your home for the holidays.

Warren County farmers and officials are inviting you to visit the County, in New Jersey’s “Christmas Tree Belt”, to select the perfect tree this year.

Warren County Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner and Freeholder Edward J. Smith, along with members of the Warren Hills Regional High School chapter of the FFA, helped kick off the choose-and-cut Christmas tree season today at Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm in Mansfield Township by cutting the ceremonial first tree of the season. Most Christmas Tree farms are opening this weekend.

“A fresh tree not only provides the perfect holiday decoration for your home, it also helps to keep land in productive agriculture,” noted Gardner, who also is a farmer, raising beef cattle and pigs.

Warren County has become the Christmas Tree Belt of New Jersey with the NJ State Grand Champion Christmas Tree coming from Warren County three of the last four years and 10 of the last 12 years.

People come to Warren County’s farms from across the region, even from New Jersey’s neighboring states, Smith said, because the secret is out about the high-quality trees available in the scenic area.



Warren County Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner, Owen Donnelly and Elizabeth Wheelan of the Warren Hills Chapter of the National FFA Organization, Freeholder Edward J. Smith, and Marty McMekin gather around a Christmas Tree cut at McMekin’s Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm in Mansfield Township to kick off the “choose-and-cut” season. McMekin says the tractor is used as a backdrop for photos by people who cut their fresh trees at his farm each year.

“Warren County has more Christmas tree farms than any other county in New Jersey and the beautiful trees grown here are due to the county’s productive soils and favorable climate for growing,” according to Tim Dunne, Vice President of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association, and proprietor of Woodsedge Tree Farm near Belvidere in White Township, NJ.



Warren County Freeholder Edward J. Smith and Marty McMekin of Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm in Mansfield Township look on after Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner finished cutting a tree to kick off the choose-and-cut season at Warren County’s tree farms.

Warren County’s tree farms range in size from just a few acres to two of the largest choose-and-cut farms in the state.

Twelve of the association’s member farms are featured on Warren County’s “Explore Warren” tourism website along with several other choose-and-cut operations. The farms provide the freshest trees around and many of them offer related items – wreaths, evergreen roping, grave blankets,

tree stands – as well as ornaments, handcrafted keepsakes, and other holiday gifts.

Encouraging people to make their hunt for a Christmas tree a fun day in the country, some of the farms offer hot chocolate or cider, cookies, and even visits from Santa or Mrs. Claus.

The Warren County Freeholders and the Explore Warren County Tourism Partnership, a program of the county’s Public Information Department, are encouraging visits to the Christmas Tree Belt by providing a page on the website www.ExploreWarren.org with information about the choose-and-cut farms in Warren County, including locator maps and links to each farm’s website.

The website also includes an events calendar listing holiday happenings and other activities throughout the county, as well as restaurants and unique gift shops and galleries, so that visitors can plan their whole day.

“The journey is part of the fun. Enjoy a drive on scenic country roads to the tree farm, and be sure to check out other sights along the way that you’ll find on ExploreWarren.org,” said Art Charlton, Director of the Public Information Department and the Explore Warren program. “You’re sure to have a memorable day as you start your holiday season,” Charlton added.

Holiday events listed on the website include craft and gift shows, theater performances for the whole family, historic sites decorated for the season, holiday concerts, and even an old-fashioned carol

sing held in an historic church in Millbrook Village, the restored 19th Century village in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

Almost 69,000 trees are cut in New Jersey each year, according to the NJ Department of Agriculture, and the 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture ranked the state seventh in the nation in the number of Christmas tree growers, with 809 farms that grow more than 4,500 acres of Christmas trees.

Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm owner Marty McMekin has been growing Christmas trees for about 35 years at the farm near Port Murray in central Warren County, ever since he retired from the U.S. Air Force and took over his parents' farm on Mount Bethel Road. "I just love the outside work," he remarked.

McMekin said the 14-acre farm has about 11 acres in evergreens, but there's more to Mt. Bethel than just growing, shaping, and selling Christmas trees. "We sell the experience, not just the tree," McMekin said, noting visitors can roast marshmallows over bonfire, enjoy hot cider, and pose for their annual Christmas card photo by a large tractor decorated with a sign "Christmas 2017".

When making your trip to the Christmas Tree Belt, be sure to dress for the weather and have good footwear, a hat and gloves for your stroll among the evergreens to find the finest fir, a superior spruce or the perfect pine.

Find choose-and-cut Christmas Tree farms at www.explorewarren.org/places/choose-your-christmas-tree-warren-county.



Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner talks about the importance of the choose-and-cut Christmas Tree farms for agriculture and tourism in Warren County. From left are Mansfield Township Mayor Joseph Watters, Tim Dunne of the NJ Christmas Tree Growers Association and a Warren County tree farmer, Mitchell Jones of the Warren County Board of Agriculture, Freeholder Edward J. Smith, Jim McMekin and Marty McMekin of Mt. Bethel Christmas Tree Farm, Gardner, Elizabeth Wheelan and Owen Donnelly of the Warren Hills Chapter of the National FFA Organization, and Katie Moriarty of WRNJ Radio.

###