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It's a holiday tradition: you and your loved ones cram into the car, drive



down to your local Christmas tree lot, and pick out the tree that speaks to you. Then, you cart the tree home, lovingly decorate it and water it for about a month, and then when the holidays are over, you dump it curbside for garbage men to pick up and throw away.

We've all done it, and some of us continue to do it... but there's a company in Redondo Beach, CA that's working to change that tradition.

Launched by a man names Scott Martin - a.k.a. Scotty Claus - just last year, the [Living Christmas Company](#) allows holiday enthusiasts to order up their Christmas tree, have it delivered right to their door via bio-diesel truck, and then when all is said and done, they come get it from you... and return it to their nursery, where they nurture it until next season. Even more conveniently, customers can order their tree online from their Website.



Living Christmas Co.

But Scotty Claus and the company do more than "just save trees" after the holidays. They also donate trees throughout the city, work with non-profits on fundraisers for communities throughout Los Angeles, offer volunteer/internships at the nursery for the elderly and handicapped and participate in urban reforestation programs.



Though he's swamped with deliveries and orders, we were able to track down Scotty Claus so we could get an inside look at his innovative company... and how it brings joy to the lives of families all over Southern California.

How has the business evolved from last year to this year?

Last year was our first commercial year offering our service to the public, with only 120 trees. Prior to that I would just give clients and friends trees for the holidays to keep in their home in order to test my idea's viability. Given the enormous support we received, TLCCo expanded our inventory and now grow over 7500 trees!

We also took advantage of the 'off-season' to round out what it means to celebrate a living Christmas. We now offer fair Trade and recycled ornaments, decorations and wrapping paper.

I'd say the largest swing, however, is from a company that was simply about conservation of trees and the Christmas spirit to a fully socially conscious company that has found a way to make every step and resource reflexive and regenerative. For example, we have programs in place to for utilizing 'brownfields' for growing grounds, turning contaminated land into an urban forest, watering with reclaimed water, utilizing organic, liquid fertilizer, employing adults with disabilities for general care of the trees (cleaning, watering, etc.) and donating dozens of trees to local tree planting organizations.

How much business do you get?

The response has been overwhelming. The key is going to be to turn that excitement into sales. Our website is averaging nearly 1000 unique visits a day for the first week of December with over 80% of them as first timers. We've been blogged about in Russia, and received interview requests from Japan.

What has it been like to educate the community on the concept of "renting" their Christmas tree?

Most people look cross-eyed the first time they hear "rent" associated with a Christmas tree, but with a short explanation their face lights up.

Trying to change a paradigm, however, is like stopping a freight train. Its hard trying to get someone to give up their noble fir for a locally grown tree. Redefining beauty is a process that will undoubtedly take time. But

from the traffic, you can see the idea's catching.

Where we get the most traction is with the wee folk. They haven't been filled with information on what a Christmas tree is "supposed" to look like. It makes all the sense in the world that your tree should be alive and keep on living - especially when you empower them to care and water the tree. That's when they truly get filled with the spirit.

But the other message is that you don't have to be an environmentalist to support tree rental. Our in home delivery service make it perfect for those who can't lug the cut tree or have the storage space or patience for artificial trees.

Why is it important to have live trees on Christmas?

You'd be amazed how having a living tree changes the atmosphere of the room in a way that a cut tree and certainly a fake tree cannot. Caring for the tree is an investment in its health, rather than just prolonging it's death. You can name and sing to your living tree with the hope that he will go on living for generations to come.

There are also practical reasons. Because the trees are living and breathing, they do not pose as great a fire danger as cut trees or petroleum based trees and actually *add* to the room by transpiring oxygen! In fact, the Living Christmas Company is enthusiastically endorsed by Santa Monica Fire Marshall Jim Glew.

The third important part is with maintaining the spirit of Christmas. The tree is meant to symbolize renewed hope, rebirth, and new life. To me, this isn't fully embodied in a tree that is going to be discarded and with so many people going to a fake tree, there is a danger that we simply end up with a watered down ritual that doesn't speak to anyone.

Is it better to go live, or to get a plastic tree, in terms of being environmentally friendly?

The benefits of a living Christmas tree to the environment are innumerable. Our mobile forest of pine trees are still working in off-season, cleaning the air, reducing storm water run-off and beautifying under-used urban areas such as brownfields, where they are needed the most. Because the trees are grown locally and delivered on Bio-Diesel fueled trucks 20 to 30 at a time, they have tiny footprint when compared to they other piney counterparts. When they grow too big, more than 8', our Christmas trees are 'repurposed' and planted through an urban reforestation process.

While fake trees are often seen as the "eco-friendly" option, many people don't realize that fake trees actually contain petroleum-based materials like polyvinyl chloride (PVC), emitting toxic chemicals like lead dust. In fact, the 85 percent that do come from China are required by California Proposition 65 to have a warning label. The embodied energy in an artificial tree is immense – creating PVC or even polyurethane is a messy, energy intensive process. You might be 'saving' a tree for six to seven years, but you are also burdening the planet with a tree that won't decompose for millennia.

Any fun behind the scenes story of running the company?

Nope, none. We are *all* business here at The Living Christmas Company. Just ask Jingle Bella, or P.R. Blitzen, Reindeer Rob, Jim MiniChristmas, Just'in Season, Jan D. Cane, Kat kringle, Holly Hannah, Chris Mas, or Craig the Rexroad Reindeer!

The funniest experience is at our board meetings in April. We meet at California Pizza kitchen every week sporting our character specific Santa hats. One in ten will actually break down and ask what the heck we're doing...

What about great delivery stories?

One time, I literally had a woman break into tears when I delivered her tree. She said that was from Ohio and some of her fondest Christmas memories were centered around having a Christmas tree. Since moving to L.A., she had been unable to get tree by herself to her small place and fake tree just didn't feel like Christmas. Our service allowed her to celebrate Christmas again.

One the most heart-warming stories was last year at the EcoGift Festival. It dawned on me that we didn't have any ornaments for our trees. I couldn't just run to the nearest box retailer and buy ornaments imported from China and made out of who-knows-what. So I called on a kindergarten class to help me make ornaments. The next day, my little elves had made a giant box of glitter laden construction paper ornaments and daisy chains!

What's the best part of your job?

It's definitely an OMG kind of job. It's one of those things you'd do even if you didn't make any money.

Its exciting the ways we are able, through The Living Christmas Company, to give back to the community and the environment. Being a part of the magic and merriment symbolized by the entry of the Christmas tree into the home or business is truly rewarding, I love knowing that this merriment doesn't come at the cost of the environment. I love that we have a chance to offer people a way to celebrate the holidays with sustainable practices, without sacrificing the traditions.

For more information, visit LivingChristmas.com!

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