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The second-time-around Christmas tree

By Rebecca Villaneda, Peninsula News
Monday, December 7, 2009 1:13 PM PST



Tom Underhill/Peninsula News

The Living Christmas Co.'s tree-rental service gives eco-families a chance to save a tree. Founder Scott "Scotty Claus" Martin and vice president Michelle "Jingle Bella" Alessi, pictured with Montana, are both Rolling Hills Estates residents. Their trees are grown locally and delivered via biodiesel trucks.

To give eco-friendly families another option, the Living Christmas Co., for its second year, offers a rental service that leaves tree huggers with no guilt.

Thanks to a gig he had delivering Christmas trees as a teenager, founder Scott "Scotty Claus" Martin found the spark to his business idea.

"It was absolutely the most fun you could possibly have at that age ... because everybody is happy to see you," the Rolling Hills Estates resident said. "It signifies that Christmas has really started and it's just this jubilant thing where you're singing Christmas songs, wearing silly Santa hats and just having a

There's nothing like the fresh, nostalgic smell that the arrival of your Christmas tree brings to your home. Not to mention the spirit and cheer.

But nowadays, with so many environmentalists trying to do their part in conserving a tree, artificial trees or having no tree at all has been a growing trend.

Online Poll

Weekly poll question and prizes coming soon!



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blast. That contrasted with, just two or three weeks later [seeing], those same trees laying by the curbside.”

Scotty Claus — everyone in the business has adopted a Christmas-inspired name — also has a successful landscape and architecture background that’s helped shape the Living Christmas Co.

And his mindfulness for sustainability can be attributed to his schooling in regenerative studies.

“It’s sort of the belief that humans have the intelligence to degrade the Earth pretty quickly — you’re also smart enough to replenish the Earth far [more] quickly than nature can,” he said. “And so [with] a business like this, we’re not trying to get back to zero, we’re actually having a positive impact with what we’re doing.”

Martin’s two-year business already has garnered a CoolCalifornia Small Business Award for promoting climate-friendly practices.

A customer has five types of trees to choose from — the taller they are the more expensive the cost. There’s the aleppo pine, the Monterey pine, the blue cedar, Leyland cypress and little sequoia tree.

Shoppers also can order sustainable and fair-trade holiday decorations, plus recycled wrapping paper.

To add to the company’s green-living aspect, the trees are locally grown and maintained, and a family can request the same tree the following Christmas season.

“We’ve found a lot of [parents] that grew up with a cut tree or an artificial tree, but they have small children now and they’re trying to educate their children on being environmental,” said Michelle “Jingle Bella” Alessi, vice president of The Living Christmas Co. “That’s been a fun client for us ... People with young kids that are really excited about starting this new family tradition ... That is in line with the kind of consumer they want to be.”

The process is simple: Order the tree online, have it delivered by a biodiesel truck and keep it for up to three weeks. Instructions for watering are given, and the reason for the three-week stay, as Martin explained, is so the tree doesn’t adapt to living inside.

“It’s like a mobile urban forest,” he said.

Next year, because one of the parcels is adjacent to the West Basin Municipal Water District, the company plans to utilize its reclaimed-water system to irrigate at least half of its trees.

The giving tree

While en route to drop-offs and pick-ups, the Living Christmas Co. also will pick up Goodwill donations from households. In speaking to Goodwill about their Tread for Good program, Martin found that their donations were down.

“The other thing we’ve offered is to pick up wrapping paper [after Christmas gifts are opened],” he said. “We’ll shred the wrapping paper and then we can use it [to make] wrapping paper for packaging the following year.”

The company also has contracted with Social Vocational Services to supply some of its work force to the nursery. The SVC, a nonprofit, gives adults with disabilities the support and training they need to live more independent lives.

"You just have to value that it is a little more work, but it feels good because the money you're spending you'd have to spend anyway. It's going to a good place," Martin said.

There also is a nonprofit arm associated with the company called the Living Christmas Foundation and "through that we can have individuals, as well as corporations, support efforts we're doing with children's hospitals and orphanages," Martin said. "One of the goals is to have a tree in all the local firehouses. Individuals can get involved with that through the foundation."

Added Alessi, "You can donate a tree to another person on the Web site ... You can give us, specifically, a family you want to donate a tree to or you can just put it in our hands because we [are in touch with] churches and nonprofits like the National Charity League."

When asked if he hopes his unique business becomes a trend, Martin said the company's mission is to change the way California celebrates Christmas.

To order a living tree, visit www.livingchristmas.com.

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