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WHITE ROCK LAKE WEEKLY

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COMMUNITY NEWS



Photo courtesy of For the Love of the Lake

Lake lovers unite for common cause

Dallas Park and Recreation Department (DPARD) is allowing the For the Love of the Lake (FTLOTL) office to open Saturday, Dec. 12 at 8 a.m. for a drive through only (do not get out of your vehicle) to pick up supplies for a restricted cleanup service program. The trash grabbers (litter sticks) will be sanitized before being placed in your vehicle. While picking up trash in the park, please comply with Governor Abbott's orders by wearing a mask and practicing social distancing from anyone other than those living in the same household. Always wear your gloves. If the vehicles are backed up to Buckner Blvd., do not block any lanes on the road. Find a safe place to park and wait for an opportunity to get in line. Group gatherings must not be larger than 10 people. Please return trash grabbers no later than noon. Let's show DPARD that volunteers can do this program safely so FTLOTL can continue the program for months, if necessary — FTLOTL Staff Reports

DALLAS' BEST LIVE EVENTS GUIDE — page 5

WRR needs help sweeping lake

CELEBRATING 45 YEARS IN WHITE ROCK! Busy corner provides trees, memories

By David Mullen

They are the original pop-up stores that every winter transform a vacant space or parking area into the neighborhood Christmas tree lot. But this is not your ordinary retail pop-up. The Christmas tree lot owned by Jeff Patton is lit up by his wry sense of humor and colorful stories.

Patton owns Patton's Christmas Trees at 6444 E. Mockingbird Lane at Abrams Road and talks about repeat business. "I started in 1975 where the CareNow is in Lakewood at Belmont and Abrams," Patton said. "You look at that and it was an old service station. Belmont and Abrams. It was an old Gulf station. I started in that station in 1975."

The SMU business school graduate and longtime Swiss Avenue resident — "I've been in the same house since 1953" — got his start selling Christmas trees in part because of another kind of horticultural experience.

In a low voice sprinkled with his charming bravado, Patton said, "A lot of kids, they go to Europe after college, but I went to Mexico. To Boys Town [a sketchy part of Nuevo Laredo]." He was



Photo by David Mullen

see TREES on page 8 Jeff Patton (right) and grandson Jeffery Patton III.

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found with flora frowned upon by *Federales*. "We stayed down there about three months. I came home and my brother-in-law said, 'Do you want a half a load of Christmas trees?' I said, 'Why would I want a half a load of Christmas trees?' I never heard of it; you know. He said, 'Well, rent a vacant service station or a vacant lot and set them up.' I said 'OK. Well, let me see.'"

"I started looking around where I lived and there it was, and I rented it out and the rest is history."

Throughout the years, Patton has developed a relationship with a small Christmas tree farm in North Carolina. "They are fresh as could be and you can't find a bad tree." The farmer grows them specifically for the

holiday, cuts them down and ships them via refrigerated truck. No need to forecast the number of trees he requires. Reaching back on his experience, Patton knows how many trees he will sell each year "to the tree." Only once has he faced opposition about his profession. "This one time, 40 years ago on an airplane," Patton said, "this woman said 'I can't believe you cut down trees.' I said 'Ma'am, do you wear cotton clothing? I can't believe you cut down that cotton plant to make cotton clothes.' The farmer planted the seedling to make money. It is a money crop, not from the forest. There is not one tree ever going to be from the National Parks because No. 1, it is illegal, and No. 2, these trees have been hand cut and fertilized three times a year. That's what makes them look like this."

Trees are displayed

outside on the parking lot asphalt and inside a large circus-like tent. Trees vary in size, including a stunning 18-footer. Some trees are available with lights already in place. Because of the pandemic, aside from wearing masks, Patton had to make one major change. He now makes contactless transactions. Patton had to modify his old trailer on the lot — the official corporate office — with two sliding windows. Patton has had the same owner of the parking lot space for decades. Patton is hardly new to the neighborhood. He once owned a store called Patton's Corner's, which eventually closed. "I just got tired messing with it," Patton said. "I was there before Home Depot and Lowes. At Home Depot, they are selling landscape material for the price that I paid for it. So, I can't compete. I was put out

of business by Home Depot. But I can't complain. That's just part of business, dude. You just got to get over it."

Patton stays busy during the 10 months he isn't peddling firs. "Hunting, fishing, go to Alaska [he is fond of catching halibut and sockeye salmon] and I got a house in 'Colla-radda' [known to Yankees as Colorado]." He branched out by turning his profits from Christmas tree sales into buying land. "My dad had a farm, and I would buy land right by him. I'd get it owner financed and pay it out and I eventually ended up with 500 acres." He later sold the land. "Basically, I just travel and chill out. I got a motorhome. That's just what I do."

Particularly fond of Alaska, Patton pontificated that "the first year we went there, we scheduled to stay in Anchorage for three or four

days to make sure we could see it all. I was ready to go after half a day. I said 'Let's go rent a car.'"

Subsequently, he would dispense with a rental car and grab a motorcoach. "We are going down the Kenai [Peninsula] and this guy had a skid steer holding up a 425-pound halibut," Patton said. "I said 'Turn this [male offspring of a female dog] around.' The captain was already drunk celebrating because it was gonna' be the biggest fish caught all year. And that's a big bonus and he was waiting for the reporter from the Anchorage newspaper to drive down to take pictures. So, I said 'How do I go fishing with you?' He said 'Well you can go up on the hill and check in to the lodge for \$1,000 a day or you can go in this for about \$250 a day and I said 'I believe I'll go with you.' We've been fishing

with him ever since."

As young grandson Jeffery III joined the conversation, Patton said that everything you need to do in Alaska is within two and a half hours of Homer, and Denali is not worth the trek. "Denali is this huge mountain out there. The only way to see it is to get on this huge bus with 100 other people, who you don't know, and you are on this bus for 13 hours and you got to take your lunch with you. I wouldn't do it."

"When he was four years old," pointing toward Jeffery III, "I took him to see Santa Claus. They got this make-shift North Pole up there." "It's real," Jeffery emphatically stated. "It's the real Santa!"

"Yeah, I know," Patton said. "It's the real Santa. I was talking about the North Pole." Who knew that selling Christmas trees could lead to a fairy tale life?

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RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Chili and Molasses Glazed Salmon

4 salmon fillets, about 6 ounces each
1/2 cup molasses (dark or blackstrap)
Juice of 2 limes
2 tablespoons chili powder
Salt and pepper

Heat oven to 350F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Place salmon fillets skin side down on prepared sheet.

In a bowl, whisk together molasses, lime juice and chili powder. Using a pastry brush, coat the surface and sides of each fillet. (Use about half the glaze.)

Bake salmon 7 minutes. Remove from the oven, brush with remaining glaze, and bake until flaky, about 7 minutes more.

