

Southern Christmas Trees

The Southern Christmas Tree Association Newsletter Third & Fourth Quarter 2023 December 31, 2023

Highlights:

- 2024 Board of Directors Meeting 1/27/24
- Membership Renewal / Application
- September 13-15, 2024 Annual Meeting
- A New Idea Worth Exploring for The Next Annual Meeting
- August 2023 Annual Meeting Highlights
- A Don Rawls Attempt
- New Members

From the President

Greetings to all our wonderful members.

At the end of this month, I will be turning over the president's duties to my long-time friend and fellow grower Kevin Steele. Kevin will be a great president. He comes with credentials having started his farm in 1979 and served as our national representative and executive secretary for many years. Consider helping Kevin and the board of directors making 2024 the best year ever for the association.

It has been a most rewarding two years. I thank everyone for the opportunity to help fellow growers. That is what The Southern Christmas Tree Association is all about.

I have learned one thing for certain while growing Christmas trees for 42 years and being a member of an association of growers is that we are all in this together. Yes, we work hard to make our own farms successful and competitive but when one goes it alone the valuable experiences and knowledge of other growers is lost. A mountain of avoidable mistakes results. It is why I so strongly believe in our single word objective for our association and that is "sharing!" What comes from this is better growing and marketing, better bottom lines, and lifetime friendships.

It sure has been a most challenging year for growers with the worst cold damage and then the worst drought we have ever experienced. And I thought all I really had to worry about were bugs, diseases, and hurricanes. I am still smiling about my comment when I introduced the subject and speakers for our irrigation session two years ago: "I have never needed irrigation on my farm on the Gulf Coast." I sure am eating those words. Now I'm spending half my day dragging hoses around the farm trying to save fields of baby trees.

I leave you with one additional message or word of advice: "adopt change!" I do not like change but if one doesn't in business then you get stuck in the mud. Your business will have big trouble expanding because you failed to adapt. Think about it. We would all be still growing Virginia pine only, we would not have credit card machines, we would not be selling pre-cut fir trees, we would have no gift shops or concessions, we would be selling no wreaths, and we would not have any agritainment activities to attract and keep customers. Who knows what the next 20-30 years will bring? Bring what you think are silly, embarrassing, off-the-farm ideas to SCTA meetings. Forgo the embarrassment; it just might work. We must adopt the concept of change and improvement to grow. Change is the American way. SCTA discussions are where it happens.

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Change requires investment in both time and money. I know of no business that is truly successful that does adopt investment as a basic principle. So, if you need a new sales building or spray rig or whatever, invest in them even if it means going into debt at times. As an example, I surely wish I would have purchased the adjoining 45-acre piece of woodland property next to me 25 years ago at \$1,500 per acre. We could have used it for expansion; now it is a subdivision.

Sandra and I hope your selling season was a good one even if hampered by some real challenges this year. The blessings of Christmas with all its traditions are a wonderful conclusion for any year. We wish you all the very best 2024 and look forward to seeing you during our next meeting in north Alabama.

Steve Mannhard, President 2022/2023, SCTA
Fish River Trees & The Cabins at Fish River Trees
Summerdale, Alabama

From The Executive Secretary

Members and friends:

Like Steve Mannhard stated above, this was a seriously challenging year with damaging environmental factors in areas. As a result, and with the expansive power of social media, there was considerable media interest. My phone frequently rang. Unfortunately, most media inquiries began with the concern for the *loss of all* Christmas trees. Fortunately, many interviews handled by SCTA leadership and members belayed the concern for *totally losing* Christmas. The general response was yes there were losses in areas and trees were affected by extreme growing conditions, some farms closed for the season not just because of losses but because their trees were not their usual top quality, there are other farms and outlets for quality, fresh cut trees that were not affected, and next year there definitely will be REAL Christmas trees. It was expressed several times there is absolutely no reason to run out and purchase an imitation tree because *the sky is falling*. Incoming president

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Kevin Steele of Steele's Christmas Trees & Steele's SAJE Shearing Machine near Angie, Louisiana handled most media inquiries, including national, was able to bring reason and calm to hyped concern.

Serious farmers are committed and adaptive. They address challenges every day and invest in the future. Southern trees, while some are sensitive and needy, are resilient and fast-growing. Different age groups have varying characteristics with incredible recovery traits. Some do not. Farmers plant; farmers nurture; farmers learn. Real farmers do not plant to get rich quick or sit on the porch. With the South's extended growing season there will always be REAL Christmas trees. You know it.

It has been said many times before and will continue to be repeated that it is critically important that farmers maintain thorough, up-to-date records from the start. This is a perfect example of where too much might make a difference. Daily journals of time and expenditures are the basis for good record keeping all of which will be used to determine losses should they occur. Enlist a farm-knowledgeable certified public accountant. Make sure your insurer, county agent, state agricultural commissioner and state and federal agricultural representatives know who you are and what you do. Invite them to your farm. When the need or circumstances arise, their first-hand exposure to your farm will better position you for whatever.

During the composition of this newsletter, I painfully learned of Clarke Gernon's passing December 24th. Clarke was a founding member of the Louisiana Mississippi Christmas Tree Growers Association and a national representative for the National Christmas Tree Association. Clarke was actively involved locally, regionally and just as much nationally. His Shady Pond Tree Farm near Pearl River, Louisiana was a standard in the industry and one-to-follow for years where NCTA conducted a national marketing meeting. The North learned first-hand about The South because of Clarke. He constantly kept The South in the forefront. Our friendship began in 1980 when I became involved with Christmas trees as a state government forester. Clarke became a trusted confidant not only to me but to commissioners of agriculture Bob Odom and Dr. Mike Strain. His depth of knowledge, engineering approach, farming practices, marketing efforts, and the application and use of Internet platforms were recognized and admired throughout the country.



Clarke Gernon, Sr.
12/27/1944 – 12/24/2023



Shady Pond Tree Farm



Maude, Louisiana

During one of his nationally televised interviews, this one being NBC's *Today Show* in Rockefeller Plaza, New York, Clarke asked that I run his farm several days over opening weekend. Much was at stake for Clarke trusting someone from off-the-farm but he sincerely wanted to represent Southern growers during a nationally televised primetime event. That was the absolute busiest and until then every bit a record breaker event from which we established a newfound respect for each other. In 2010 when SCTA was searching for a new executive secretary, Clarke made *the call* to me requesting I accept the position. With Clarke posing the question and the number of friends I had in the association, I simply could not refuse. Our friendship strengthened even more. Whenever I traveled in his direction, I would pay a visit. I will forever regret not stopping in as I passed through two weeks ago while scouting the 2024 annual meeting. Staff writer Alex Luben of NOLA.com published a great article about Clarke. When I complimented Luben for his article, he responded "...It seems Clarke meant a lot to a lot of people. I was happy to give him the spotlight one last time in the paper." To read the entire article, go to NOLA.com and search Gernon or use the following link: https://www.nola.com/news/northshore/christmas-tree-farmer-dies-created-unique-tree/article_4ec208e4-a4e0-11ee-84af-af613ecab7a2.amp.html. Please see Clarke's obituary at <http://obits.nola.com>.



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I had not even finished the above paragraph when I was informed that Larry Haley of Holly Berry Hills Farm near Saucier, Mississippi passed away today (12/28/2023). I was crushed. Larry was an enjoyable person to be around and one who was adamant about sharing knowledge with other growers particularly beginners or those in the planning stages. As a leader, he was insistent on the sharing efforts of SCTA members and was always available to serve on the board. Larry was another confidant and a friend of mine.

I will never forget the day Larry, Linda and their late daughter Michelle drove up my driveway unannounced to deliver contributions from their White Plains United Methodist Church congregation to help offset some of the losses we suffered during the flood of 2016. I was absolutely stunned. My wife and I had never been the recipient of such, we are always on the helping / giving end. Maybe it was the log sawing connection or sharing how to listen to trees. There was something special about him. Whatever it was, Larry was a great person to be with.

Larry's service will be 2:00 PM Wednesday January 3rd at the White Plains United Methodist Church in Saucier, Mississippi. Visitation will begin at 1:00 PM.



Larry Haley
December 28, 2023



Larry & Linda Haley



August 30, 2016
The Day Larry Appeared

As of this writing, Larry's obituary had not been published online. Prayers and support are extended to both families.

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Membership Renewal / Application

This newsletter will be the first announcement for membership renewal or application. Please see specifics at the end of the newsletter. Your prompt attention during the new year will be appreciated by the officers, board members and executive secretary. Thank you.

2024 Board of Directors Meeting

The first board meeting of 2024 will be 10:00 AM Saturday January 27th at Lazy Acres Agritainment near Chunky, Mississippi. Board members will review 2023, make plans for 2024, especially the annual meeting, and discuss any number of topics that may arise. Michael & Cathy May have been great hosts at their centrally located farm. Thank you, Michael and Cathy.

2024 Annual Meeting

The 2024 annual meeting of The Southern Christmas Tree Association will be at the beautiful Lake Guntersville State Park, Lodge & Conference Center September 13-15 located in north central Alabama. The conference rooms, restaurant and lounging areas, including half the sleeping rooms, all face the lake over spacious patios. Fellowshiping will be easy. This is a location worth considering bringing family or guests or just completely relaxing solo by the fire for an extended stay. SCTA is fortunate to have member farms in the area. SCTA friends that did not make the 2021 Gulf Coast meeting should consider this the opportunity to make up for your loss. Just saying.

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The board has had numerous discussions trying to identify a more convenient and acceptable time to conduct annual meetings. This year the meeting was moved to mid-September. The prolonged, extraordinary heat experienced last summer was the driving force to shift the date. So, let's give it a go and see how you enjoy it.

September is a very popular time for visitors at the Lake Guntersville State Park, Lodge & Conference Center where it is "prime real estate". As you make your reservations, keep in mind the more attractive rooms face the lake on the upper floors of the lodge but any and all are good.

The 60-day advance deadline for reservations of our group block is July 16, 2024 with the room rate of \$148.00 (add resort fee & sales tax). Reference the association's name or, if necessary, the Group ID 9737. It is highly advised to make your reservations now so as to guarantee a room and of your choice. Since the lodge is in the middle of a state park, the closest options, including restaurants, are 10 miles distant across a big lake. Do not miss the cutoff date. There are rooms that are pet friendly and you must inform them for reservations. The state park offers recreational vehicle parking. Again you must make well-in-advance reservations (no SCTA group rate, handled directly by the park).

The lodge is located at 1155 Lodge Drive, Guntersville, Alabama 35976. The desk telephone is (256) 571-5440 where Shannon will answer your questions and direct you to Alyssa for reservations. Everyone at the lodge is excited. Have a look around their website. You'll feel like you're in a northern mountain lodge. Website: <https://www.alapark.com/parks/lake-guntersville-state-park>.

Friday, there will be open-farm visits at Moody Farms 40 miles southwest of the lodge near Oneonta & Springfield Christmas Tree Farm 17 miles south of the lodge near Boaz. Visit Facebook for both farms. The board of directors will meet during the afternoon in the lodge's Boardroom. Afterwards, everyone will enjoy the popular seafood buffet in the Pinecrest Restaurant with their families. All are invited to the seafood buffet. You will need an appetite and remember it will be a long, dark drive to the closest restaurant. The Hickory Lounge offers a comfortable and scenic view for fellowship.

Saturday's meetings and activities will be conducted in the lodge's Grandview conference room.

Benny and Susan Frazier of Frazier Christmas Tree Farm near Albertville will host the Sunday farm tour. Visit their website at <http://www.FrazierChristmasTreeFarm.com>.

Information, as it develops, will be posted on <http://www.SouthernChristmasTrees.org> and three Facebook platforms.



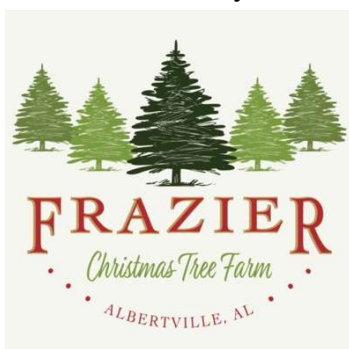
The Lodge & Lake



The Moodys



Springfield Christmas Tree Farm



Frazier's Gift Shop

An Idea Worth Exploring for The Next Annual Meeting

The suggestion of having a sitter available during annual meeting functions has been offered to the executive secretary on a couple occasions. The idea worth exploring. SCTA has always welcomed and enjoyed youngsters' participation but understands it might be distracting for parents while they try to listen and learn. The executive secretary suggests that a discussion begin on SCTA's private Facebook group "Members Only SCTA" topic "2024 Sitters". After release of this newsletter, the executive secretary will start such a discussion. A chairperson will need to evolve and a means for compensation considered. The annual meeting registration form will include the number, names and ages of children who would participate so the census will be accurate. Parents could either pay a value to be determined to the chairperson on-site or mail in with their registration form to the executive secretary. What is there for youngsters to do at the Gunterville State Park, Lodge & Conference Center? Without discussing risks and age limitations, there is a swimming pool, nature trails, zip line and playground immediately around the lodge. An obvious question: who would sit (SCTA member young adult or a lodge employee / contractor)? The chairperson or sitter/s could bring additional entertainment like games, etc. There will be lots of questions, some concerns and specifics to be addressed which can be discussed along the way. SCTA's board will meet the last Saturday of January with the 2024 Annual Meeting Planning Committee meeting sometime afterward either on-site or by Zoom. If a chairperson arises, that person would certainly be invited to the planning meetings (possibly 2). If you are interested, hit the button for SCTA's private Facebook group "Members Only SCTA" topic "2024 Sitters".

2023 Annual Meeting

The August 11-13, 2023 annual meeting in Hattiesburg, Mississippi was well attended and informative.

Friday, Wesley & Sandra Bass opened their gate for everyone to have a look around Bass Christmas Tree Farm (www.basstrees.com), ask questions and fellowship. The board of directors, with their families and friends, enjoyed an evening meal at Mack's on The River (Facebook: Mack's on the River) for a Mississippi style buffet. The Holiday Inn Hattiesburg – North served as the lodging hotel and did a great job accommodating everyone.



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Wesley's Tagging Instructions



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Photo Spot



Emma Hollering "Wait for Me!"

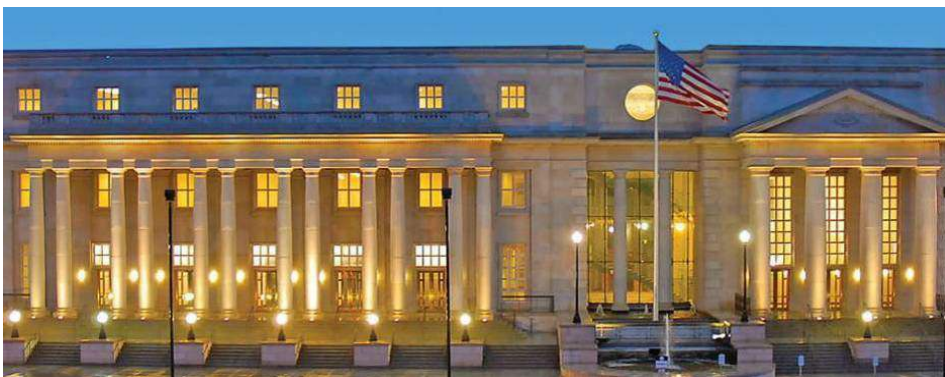


Mack's Buffet

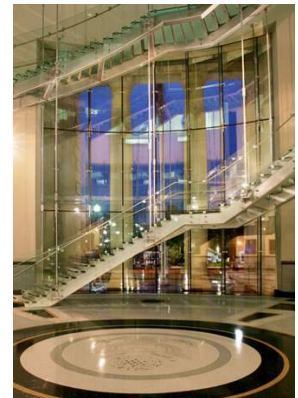


Holiday Inn – Hattiesburg North

The Saturday conference was conducted in the beautiful Trent Lott National Center on the University of Southern Mississippi campus. The facility was perfect and the USM catering staff prepared delicious meals. Everyone did a wonderful job accommodating every need for the meeting and comfort of the participants. The evening auction was a hoot for which SCTA appreciates the tireless efforts of Auctioneer Bentley Curry and Barker Michael May and all those who provided and purchased items.



The Trent Lott National Center, University of Southern Mississippi





SCTA Gatherings Begin with Prayer & The Pledge



Concurrent Sessions Are Always Popular



President Steve Mannhard, Fish River Trees



Dr. Alan Hunn, Mississippi State University



Always Learning: Wendy Ellis & Connie Gersch



SCTA Boss Ladies1, 2, 3, 4 & 5



Tree Competition Winners:
Frank Wadsworth, Beverly & Kevin Steele,
Gray Anderson & Bentley Curry
with President Mannhard



Wreath Competition Winners:
Brittany Anderson & Connie Gersch
with President Mannhard



Grand Champion
Louisiana 1st Place
Joe & Connie Gersch, Jr.
Yawn Station Christmas Tree Farm
Independence



Mississippi 1st Place
Aaron & Brittany Anderson
Tolson Farms
Laurel



Grand Champion
Louisiana 1st Place
Kevin & Beverly Steele
Steel's Christmas Tree Farm
Angie



Alabama 1st Place
Frank & Lucie Wadsworth
Wadsworth Christmas Tree Farm
Wetumpka



Louisiana 2nd Place
Gray & Mollie Anderson
Grant Farms
Grant



Louisiana 3rd Place
Bentley & Sandy Curry
Curry Farms
Rayville



Fellowship Primer Hour



The Auction Begins



Steve, I want that.



Hey Bentley, my bid!



I won!



It's OK Steve; it's all fun. Sure it is honey.

SCTA sincerely appreciates and enjoys the opportunity to visit with our exhibitors:

Steele's SAJE Shearing Machine
Evans Christmas Products
Grant Farms
Aunt B's Naturals
Mills Gourmet

Their presence and support of SCTA is one of the reasons SCTA's meetings are successful and fun.
Thank you!



Steele's SAJE Shearing Machine



Evans Christmas Products



Grant Farms



Aunt B's Naturals



Mills Gourmet

The Sunday Farm Tour was hosted by Robert and Vickie Smith with their entire family at Smith's Christmas Tree Farm (Facebook: Smith's Christmas Tree Farm) near Moselle, north of Hattiesburg. Robert is the third generation working the farm where they have continued the hard work and dedication of their family. They have a jewel to be proud of. You would have never known they recently suffered a total loss of their home from a catastrophic fire. The Smiths were determined to provide everyone an opportunity to see and learn. They did that and much more. Thank you!



A Packed Barn



Opening Prayer



The Pledge



Smith Crew Members



Good Skipper Farms Coffee



Tool & Equipment Demonstrations



SAJE Shearing Machine



Wreath Demonstration



Dr. Jeremy Pickens



Flocking Demonstration



Four Generations!

A Don Rawls Idea

After the August 2023 meeting, Don Rawls of Precious Memories Christmas Tree Farm and liner nurseryman near Calhoun, Louisiana did some research and reached out to our neighbors up north who grow fir trees. He simply wanted to talk to them about how they grow their trees. Now, that is a loaded question but from one farmer to another a question worth discussing.

Don said “Just about in every case they used this Diehard Ecto Root Dip when they planted their trees. So, I did some reading and it sounded pretty good. So far, we have planted 970 trees using the dip and they look good. Time will tell. We, as growers, do not have much to lose at \$43 a bag but, if it works, it just might save us some money in the long run.”

Don, it looks like you earned a spot on the 2024 & 2025 agendas. Take plenty of pictures. Thanks!

Online Payments

As a reminder, SCTA has implemented an online payment / transfer method as an alternate choice for hand-written checks by using bank-to-bank transfers (ACH) with Zelle through your mobile banking application. Most banking institutions incorporate Zelle transfers between “your known users” like friends, family, businesses, organizations, etc. Look for the Zelle payment / transfer option in your mobile banking application. If there is a Zelle option, there is no need to download the Zelle app. If your financial institution does not use Zelle, download Zelle to process payment from your bank. Since SCTA is a known user to you, the only information required about the payee is telephone number and email (SCTA: 225.505.6335 & SCTAES@gmail.com) to process payment. There are no fees. Please include a notation for the reason with your payment. For dues payment, workshop and annual meeting registrations it is still necessary to print and complete the forms and mail to the executive secretary. Be sure to reference Zelle payment information on your forms. Thank you. To learn more about Zelle, visit www.ZellePay.com. *Note: you may use Zelle to purchase auction items, pay membership dues, advertisement fees, registrations and other SCTA transactions - just be sure to include a subject notation on your transfer.*

New Members – Welcome All!

Listed below are new members who have joined since the last published newsletter. The executive secretary tries to recognize all new members but sometimes, with apologies, someone might fall between the roots. If you have not been introduced, please contact the executive secretary. Established members are encouraged to welcome SCTA’s newest folks. Be sure to introduce yourself during the annual meeting. New members will be designated as such on their annual meeting name tag.

Mary and Glenn Snapp, Villa Rusticus, 165 Country Road 659, Hanceville, AL 35077, Cullman County, Telephone (256) 636-0442, MaryTSnapp@gmail.com

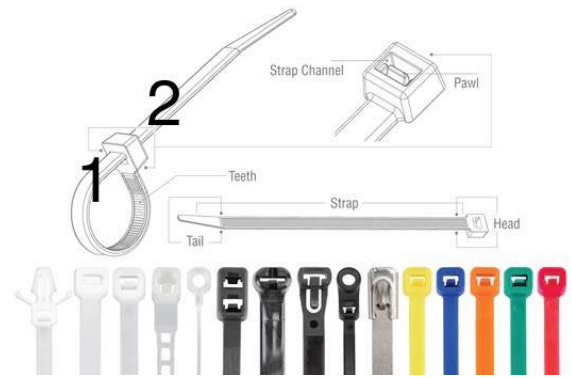
Jeff and Gwen Knee, Country View Christmas Trees, 445 Memory Lane, Carrollton, AL 35447, Pickens County, 334-538-9745, CountryViewChristmasTrees@gmail.com

Tidbits Learned along The Way or Whatever

The executive secretary encourages readers to offer tidbits (ideas, unique marketable items, tricks of the trade, inventions, ingenious methods or techniques, anything off the wall that works, especially gizmos) that might be of value, interest or amusement to SCTA’ers. Simply text or email a statement and pictures to the executive secretary who keeps an on-going list of such. *Somebody surely has a tidbit or whatever.*

Tidbit / Whatever #15: Reuse Cable “Zip” Ties

Sure, they are inexpensive. How many times have you randomly cut the ties and thrown everything away? Yet cut correctly, you could be left holding a good piece of strap with a functional head. To reuse, cut the strap against the lower side of the head (position #1) then pull the severed tail through. Voila! Chunk them in your toolbox or wherever. You will be surprised how many times you reach for them. *Come on, someone has got to be able to top that one.*



Executive Secretary Request

The executive secretary is on a project where he is requesting farm or exhibitor / advertiser t-shirts (size not critical but does wear large), even from long since closed farms. Your gesture will be appreciated. Please, either mail to SCTA, 1830 West Fairview Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70816 or deliver during the annual meeting. Thank you.

Membership Renewal / Application

SCTA has three (3) levels of membership:

- 1) Regular grower (actively selling trees) dues are \$120.00 (after March 31st \$130.00) annually
- 2) New growers just starting out or people considering the adventure, may join for \$50 annually and can pay the \$50 rate for a maximum of 3 years or until they begin selling trees, whichever is first. After March 31st \$10.00 is added to established new members.
- 3) Growers in states other than Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi may join for \$60 annually and will be listed on SCTA's website under their state link. Such growers are non-voting members. After March 31st \$10.00 is added to established out-of-region members.

The executive secretary respectfully requests timely submission of dues for it is a time consuming effort to shake all the trees. Thank you.

SCTA's Website

If you have recently created your own website or made any changes to your farm contact information please inform the executive secretary by e-mail so the updates can be made to the association's database. It is important you review occasionally.

For those members who do not have a website, SCTA provides a dedicated sub-page (until you have your own website) to facilitate exposure of members actively selling farm grown trees. If you are opening in the coming year, SCTA will post your page with the expected sale season the year before you open. Information posted will be static in nature, i.e. farm name, address, telephone number, county and a brief location description.

If you utilize SCTA's website and have a Facebook page (highly recommended) the executive secretary will provide a link to your Facebook page. However, if you are not already signed in with Facebook the link may not follow through but at least the farm name should get you there.

New growers who are not yet harvesting should consider promoting their farm through social media to develop an early following but be prepared for early arrivals since many will not read the fine print.

SCTA Advertisement, Exhibits, Sponsorships

Feel free to inquire about advertising, exhibiting or sponsoring events with SCTA. SCTA's advertising platforms are the quarterly e-mailed newsletters, the association's website membership page and the annual meeting program packet. When you advertise with SCTA, your placement is with each platform for a 12 month period. Advertisers are requested to provide electronic file (.jpg or .pdf) copies of logos, art work and text suitable for placement in Word documents.

SCTA's 12-month advertisement fee schedule is as follows. Please note, when an advertisement is placed, it is for the following consecutive 12 months beginning with the next full quarter and not bound to a fiscal or calendar year.

One quarter page: \$200.00. A one quarter (approximate) page ad is placed in the quarterly newsletters, annual meeting packet and on SCTA's membership web page.

One half page: \$400.00. A one half (approximate) page ad is placed in the quarterly newsletters and annual meeting packet. A one quarter page ad will be placed on SCTA's membership web page.

Annual meetings are usually late summer rotating in the order of Alabama, Louisiana & Mississippi. Exhibitors and sponsors are always welcome during annual meetings or other events hosted by SCTA. Exhibitor fees vary per event with SCTA keeping costs at a minimum. SCTA strives to make fees agreeable for all. SCTA members or yearly advertisers who exhibit benefit with a \$40 exhibitor discount. If you are interested in partnering with SCTA, please contact the executive secretary.

Current advertisers and sponsors should always check SCTA links for correctness.

Announcements, Deaths, News, Tidbits, Whatever

If you have information worthy of mention in the newsletter, including deaths of past members or significant industry contributors, please inform the executive secretary.

Southern Christmas Trees is a multi-page, quarterly newsletter of activities and interests of the membership including ideas and information beneficial to the industry. The newsletter serves as the official venue for information dissemination to membership. Content is provided by members and secured or derived elsewhere. Every effort is made to use factual information from established, credible sources with references. Subscription is a membership benefit.

Distribution is by e-mail.

SCTA's official website is www.SouthernChristmasTrees.org administered by the executive secretary.

SCTA's "open" Facebook page "Southern Christmas Tree Association" and associated "Members Only SCTA" private group are member benefits administered by the executive secretary. Up-to-date, paid SCTA members qualify for inclusion in the private group "Members Only SCTA".

Michael Buchar, Executive Secretary, 1830 West Fairview Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70816 USA

Telephone: 225.505.6335. www.SouthernChristmasTrees.org, E-mail: SCTAES@gmail.com

SCTA's Advertising Supporters:

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Keelson Partners
Veldsma & Sons / Peak Seasons

Steele's Saje Shearing Machine
Evans Christmas Products



Attachments: none.