

CHRISTMAS TREE LOTS CREATE JOBS



On November 26, the Monday after the storm of Black Friday had passed, Fraser firs, Scotch Pines and Blue Spruces pumped holiday scenery at Watson Tree Farms in central Michigan, according to The Orlando Sentinel. This Christmas tree lot, like many others, is great for several reasons. One of the biggest is they create holiday jobs for people, including students, in a tough economy. Watson also controls lots in Longwood and Casselberry. They send employees from Michigan but also bring aboard a handful of residents to assist at each lot. At Santa's Trees, a tent on U.S. Highway 17-92 in Maitland, all the employees are from the nearby area. Any age is welcome for all prospective employees. Michael Dever is a 16-year-old who works five days every week, in hopes of a new car. Tyler Holder is a 30-year-old landscaper scraping together some side cash while the winter settles in over the greenery he would normally work on. Randy Settle is a 53-year-old who works in commercial photography. There are no exact figures for how many lots there are and how many employees work there. It appears though, that those uncertain numbers are beginning to decline. Warren Brown has owned Santa's Trees for 38 years. He is 71-years-old. He grabbed the reins of the business after two years working as a volunteer. Brown used to hold 20 lots with a staff of 70 people. The one on 17-92 is his only one left. 12 people work part time to hold down the fort. "Like any other business, it's changed over the years," Brown said. "The big boxes have pretty well run the independents out business." Places like Home Depot and Lowe's have slashed into the midsize tree industry that adorns a majority of houses. Santa's Trees has stayed alive by specifying their niche; 15 to 20-foot trees in luxurious homes and public areas like buildings and hotels. They have already shipped 40-foot tree to Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando. Brown targets 800 to 1,000 trees sold for the holidays but he's not in it for the money anymore. "If it wasn't for the people who come back year after year after year, I probably wouldn't stay in the business," he said. "I'm selling to people who came here as kids with their parents. In some cases, *kids* of the kids." Jose Rivas owns lots in Oviedo and south Orlando. He is a lawyer in Winter Park and also owns an ice cream catering company. He retails Christmas trees for the joy of the season. He pays about a dozen workers amongst the pair of lots.