



For More Information:
Rick Dungey
636-449-5071 (voice)
636-449-5051 (fax)
dungey@realchristmastrees.org (e-mail)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blue Room Christmas Tree Presented to First Lady Laura Bush

Chesterfield, MO - (November 30, 2008) -- A beautiful Fraser fir from Creston, N.C., was presented to the First Lady in a ceremony at the North Portico today. It will be the official White House Christmas Tree for 2008.

The massive fir was officially presented to First Lady Laura Bush by Jessie Davis and Russell Estes, owners of River Ridge Tree Farms. Davis and Estes earned this honor by winning the National Christmas Tree Association's (NCTA) national Christmas Tree contest held in August 2008 in Des Moines, Iowa, and becoming Grand Champions.

The Blue Room Christmas Tree was handpicked by Director of the Executive Residence and White House Chief Usher Stephen Rochon, Superintendent of Grounds Dale Haney and White House Chief Floral Designer Nancy Clarke on Oct. 21, 2008.

“It represents all tree farms to the nation,” says Jessie Davis, about the White House tree presentation.

“The White House deserves the best quality tree, and we believe that a tree grown right here on an American farm can represent the nation well.”

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River Ridge Tree Farms was founded in 1983 by Jessie Davis and his father-in-law, Joe Pennington. After Pennington passed away in 2003, Rusty Estes became Davis' partner. The farm has trees planted in locations throughout northwest North Carolina and southwest Virginia. Following the presentation to the White House, the tree was set up in the Blue Room, where the White House Floral Department staff and volunteers will decorate it.

"Winning Grand Champion status is very difficult and represents the pinnacle of Christmas Tree farming," said Mark Steelhammer, president of the National Christmas Tree Association.

Steelhammer also attended the ceremony on behalf of the farmers and retailers of natural Christmas trees. "Each farm that wins and provides the official White House Christmas Tree is proud to represent our entire industry. And, not to put too fine a point on it, we think it very apropos that they use a Real Christmas Tree grown by an American farmer in the most famous house in the country, instead of an imported plastic one."

The First Lady greeted the farmers and their families while the tree made its way to the front of the portico. "This is the eighth time we've waited for the very first event of the holiday season, and that's when the big tree is brought," said Mrs. Bush.

Members of the National Christmas Tree Association have presented the official White House Christmas Tree for display in the Blue Room since 1966. For Real Christmas Tree selection and care tips, or to find a Christmas Tree farm or lot in your area, visit www.realchristmastrees.org.

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