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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blue Room Christmas Tree Presented to First Lady Michelle Obama

Chesterfield, MO - (November 27, 2009) -- A beautiful Douglas-fir from Shepherdstown, W.V., was presented to the First Lady in a ceremony at the North Portico today. It will be the official White House Christmas Tree for 2009.

The Blue Room Christmas Tree was officially presented to First Lady Michelle Obama by Christmas Tree growers Eric and Gloria Sundback. The Sundbacks earned this honor by winning the National Christmas Tree Association's (NCTA) national Christmas Tree contest held in August 2009 in Chattanooga, Tenn., and becoming Grand Champions.

The Blue Room Christmas Tree was handpicked by Director of the Executive Residence and White House Chief Usher Stephen Rochon and Superintendent of Grounds Dale Haney on Oct. 20, 2009. The tree, which was planted by the Sundbacks in 1996, was cut in late November and sent to Washington, D.C.

“It’s an honor to represent Christmas Tree farmers throughout America as we present this fresh tree from our farm to the First Lady,” said Eric Sundback, 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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The couple first began growing Christmas Trees in 1956 in western Pennsylvania. In 1959, Eric's work as a landscape architect took them to the Washington, D.C., area where they began a search for land to continue their Christmas Tree farming on the best soil possible, settling near Shepherdstown, W.V. In 1967, Eric and Gloria started retail lots in Bethesda, Md., and Washington, D.C., which they operated for 40 years before passing the retail side of their business to two veteran employees. Both in their 80s, Eric and Gloria continue development of the seed orchard part of their farm.

"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 and her daughters Malia Ann and Sasha greeted the farmers and their families while the tree made its way to the front of the portico.

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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