

The comforts of Christmas

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TOWN OF WEST BEND -

When Aron and Tiffany Rodman first moved just south of the city of West Bend five years ago, Christmas was quickly approaching and they wanted to make sure their new home felt cozy with a fresh Christmas tree.

They drove around the city looking for tree lots, but felt that the trees were either far too expensive or way too big for their house.

"I got this sick feeling you get in your gut," Tiffany Rodman said. "We had our son with us and we couldn't go home with a tree."

The Rodmans put an end to that a year later when they opened up their own Christmas tree farm, complete with a genuine tree shopping experience.

White lights twinkle across the barn doors. Trees and wreaths fill the air with the scent of evergreen.

A campfire blazes in the backyard while children roast marshmallows and sing Christmas songs with their friends and family.

People can warm up in the small barn with hot cider and cookies. Outside kids can chase chickens around the property in and out of the maze of trees.

It sounds like something straight out of a Currier and Ives postcard, but the Rodmans said Christmas wouldn't be the same without it.

"What we really sell is a family experience with the chance to buy a tree," Aron Rodman said.

"Christmas is the one time each year people spend with their families and picking out the tree is a good start to that celebration."

Each year, the Rodmans open up their tree farm, an extension of Aron's business, Extra Mile Landscaping, the day after Thanksgiving and sell roughly 400 trees each season. This year, the Rodmans are donating \$1 from every tree sold to Habitat for Humanity. They hope to raise roughly \$500 for the organization.

Many Christmas customers return each year. Aron Rodman said it's the atmosphere that invites them in and brings them back.

"Other than the obvious reason, Jesus, the family is one of the most important aspects about the holidays," he said.

Because the Rodmans have three boys of their own, they make sure the experience is most memorable for the children. After receiving the tree shipment, Aron Rodman sets them up like a maze so his chil-

dren can run around and play hide-and-seek. If there's enough snow, he'll use his skid loader to build snow forts.

"(My) kids think it's the coolest thing in the world," he said. "Every night we go out there when everyone's gone and we play hide and seek and run around."

Babe Hawkinson of West Bend has been buying the family tree from the Rodmans for four years and she said, because it's a family holiday, it just makes sense.

"You can smell the trees and hear the music playing in the background," she said. "Everyone that goes experiences something different."

Aron and Tiffany Rodman even make their tree-picking ceremony unique.

"We pick one from our own lot and we make it a date," he said. "We'll go on a slow night, walk around and look at each one. We always have an argument because we never agree on the same one."

Another reason he stresses the family atmosphere at his tree farm is because the Christmas tree generally goes into the "family" room.

"People have busy lives, but any excuse to get out and spend time with your family helps," he said. "It's all about the tradition."