

## ***Elmore Vance Tree Farm: 2020 Washington Tree Farmer of the Year***

*“Cascade mountains have a hold on me. They say home is where you find it. These mountains are home to me. Logging trucks and blacktail bucks, Cascade mountains have a hold on me.”*

The inspiration for these music lyrics is the 149-acre Elmore Vance Tree Farm, which is the 2020 Washington Tree Farmer of the Year and the home of Patty and Rory Vance.

Patty is the second-generation owner of the tree farm that her father Ernie Elmore purchased in 1965. In 1980, Patty married Rory Vance and they moved to the rural property. “For those first 20 years, we had to produce our own electricity,” she says. Their property is now fully electrified, with a house whose windows overlook the expansive Gifford Pinchot National Forest and provide the views that inspire Rory, who’s a songwriter and musician.

In 1993, following the passing of her father, Patty and her brother Bob Elmore assumed ownership of the property, and Patty became the manager. Although she worked for the US Forest Service as a field technician, she wasn’t fully prepared for the work required to manage a tree farm or write a management plan. “Thirty-two years ago, I harvested my first clearcut and submitted the forest application myself,” she says. “I can’t believe I was brave enough to do my own planning, permitting, burning and planting.”

In 2008, 122 acres was certified by the American Tree Farm System. Patty credits fellow tree farmers for serving as mentors, and the Lewis County Farm Forestry Association for connecting her with educational resources.

“Patty has been the pillar of membership recruitment and maintenance for Lewis County Farm Forestry Association for many years,” says Devon Powell, the past president of the Lewis County Farm Forestry Association. “Patty has always been eager to learn more about managing her forest by attending Lewis County Farm Forestry Association meetings. Patty’s enthusiasm for learning about forestry is obvious when she attends our chapter meetings.”

Patty manages the tree farm for multiple objectives: generate income from commercial harvest, provide opportunities for family recreation, and enhance wildlife habitat. Along the half-mile-long stream and wetlands that runs through the property, she’s removing the mature red alders and planting western redcedar to increase the presence of conifers. There’s 15-year harvest plan in place, and in addition to the commercial timber harvests, trees are harvested for Rory’s hobby of furniture making.

Connecting the next generation to the family tree farm is also a priority for Patty. Fourth-generation grandniece Annalise Combs also calls the tree farm home, and family members frequently visit for family reunions or outings. Hiking, berry picking, and mushroom gathering are a number of the activities that everyone enjoy and connects the next generations to the tree farm.

“I feel my family is fortunate that my father planted the seed that the property remains in our family for generations and generations to come,” says Patty.