



RAISING A FAMILY OF TREE FARMERS

# Bryon & Donna

Loucks

By **KATHLEEN**  
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Bryon and Donna Loucks might be described as old-fashioned parents. They have a plan for their children, and it is strictly followed. They believe that their children should support them during their retirement years, and they plan to make certain their expectations are met.

Of course, these Washington State Tree Farmers are caring parents, too. They work diligently to share the virtues of their children with others, demanding that the children share their best qualities with the community around them. The Loucks continually adjust their expectations of the children as they mature and change their courses in life.

Do the Loucks appear to be model parents? This is how they refer to themselves, although in their family those precious "children" are their Tree Farms!

It's a family that has roots in Bryon's childhood, when his interest in the woodlands around him began. His "backpacking parents," as Bryon described them, opened the door. And his childhood home on the edge of the Olympic National Park gave Bryon an appreciation of the natural world.

He pursued forestry as a profession, meeting Donna while she was employed as a forestry librarian. She, too, had grown up with the out-of-doors as a first love. Together the Loucks found their woodland home in Centralia, Washington, where they both worked for the Weyerhaeuser Forestry Research Center in the early 1970s.

They bought their first tract of forested land in 1979, claiming this was "the child who went bad." The land had many issues, including difficulty in getting any tree species established. A second, 160-acre parcel was purchased in 1987. This time they found a "favorite son" in a well-established stand with lots of potential for management. The "middle child" boasts the site of their homestead. Each parcel is about a 35-minute drive from the next.

### Laughter in the Woods

Throughout the trails through one of the largest of the Loucks' Tree Farms, a 200-acre woodland west of Chehalis, Washington, are often heard the sounds, questions, and laughter of area school-children. For 21 years, fifth-graders from a nearby school have learned about

trees and wildlife during a two-hour walk through the Tree Farm.

Bryon and Donna have shared their Tree Farm woodlands, hearts, and extensive knowledge of the forest with eager and energetic young students. Now teachers, who were once those very students, are returning with their own classrooms of young people.

Bryon and Donna credit Lynne Ferguson, director of environmental education with the Washington Forest Protection Association of Olympia, Washington, for connecting them with Project Learning Tree® and its opportunities for using their Tree Farms as educational tools.

The couple has hosted the Washington Farm Forestry Association, visiting European foresters, and area legislators' civic and service organizations. The Loucks' annual summertime Twilight Tour draws a crowd of friends and members from the Lewis County Farm Forestry Association for a tour and picnic.


The Loucks harvest their woodlands when the markets warrant the activity. In mid-May, the weather finally allowed them to finish cleanup from a harvest in January and February. Nine acres of 60-year-old trees yielded 371,800 board feet. "The price was in the \$600-per-thousand area," Bryon says. "We like to have cash flow every other year, but the last one was four years ago. The market just wasn't there until now. We figure to harvest between 5 and 10 acres a year for the next 20 to 25 years."

As the Loucks talk of harvest, they continue to tend new plantings. "Last summer we made 40,000 different tree visits to move the netting up, protecting the trees from the deer," Bryon explain. "We're planting trees for the next person after us to harvest."

One of the Tree Farms grows a 10-acre stand of Danish blue noble firs, which is a specialty crop. The trees, which

have been bred for the color of their boughs, are producing an abundant crop this year and will likely be harvested, according to Bryon. They are marketed nationally for holiday season greenery and decorations.

The Loucks have been working their Tree Farms by investing time and energy, with an eye toward keeping a steady paycheck coming in. According to Bryon, "Donna did a search and found out it cost as much to raise 100 acres of trees as it did to raise one child."

"Instead of raising the average 2.1 kids, our goal was to have 210 acres," he said. "I tell people: 'Our children will support us in our old age. Will yours?' " 

*Kathleen Preece owns a natural resource publishing office in Bemidji, Minnesota, where she publishes Tree Farming for Better Forests magazine, dedicated to the stewardship of private forestlands of the Midwest.*

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