

# Drysdale name will live on in forest

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Governor generals, Queen's Park politicians and television personalities have gotten their Christmas trees from Drysdale's.

Some of the celebrities, including then-premier Bill Davis and model Fabio, even ventured to northern Whitchurch-Stouffville to cut their own.

But after 62 years, the Drysdale family has decided to say goodbye to its Whitchurch-Stouffville tree farm near Ballantrae.

The family has donated the 136-acre property to the York Regional Forest. The land is adjacent to the Hollidge Tract on Hwy. 48, just south of Vivian Road.

The tree farm will only be open Dec. 7 and 8, 14 and 15 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"It could have closed sooner, but I wanted one more year," Doug Drysdale said.

"It's going to be a tough day for me," he said.

The family's tree farm in Essa Township remains operational.

Mr. Drysdale, 81, is a second generation Christmas tree farmer.

His father, Reg, started the business, but only as a hobby.

## CUT-YOUR-OWN PIONEERS

As a teacher in Flos Township (now Simcoe County) in the 1920s, Reg would take the students from his one-room school house to the Provincial Tree Nursery in Midhurst each year, where he and the students would each receive 1,000 red vine seedlings a year, according to Doug.

He encouraged his students to plant the seedlings on their farms and around the school house.

In 1926, when Reg was 19, in order to preserve some of the inheritance he received from his parents following their deaths, he bought two properties near the school and began to reforest them.

Prior to the Second World War, Torontonians would get their fresh-cut Christmas trees hauled down from the forests up north. But due to gas rationing during the war, it became hard to get those trees to the city.

Realizing Christmas tree farming may be a profitable venture, in 1945 Reg purchased some property and started planting. They

would not be harvested for another five or six years.

At 13, Doug started helping his father on their Essa-area farm.

In 1951, when Doug was in his first year of the forestry program at the University of Toronto, he convinced his father to purchase 117 acres in Whitchurch-Stouffville - lot 27, Ninth Concession to Durham 30.

It was a "hard scrabble farm" owned by Herbert Pegg, who had some cattle and "undependable" crop growing on it, according to Doug.

They decided to plant Scotch pines and turn it into a Christmas tree farm.

Around 1950, they exported about 1,000 of the trees to American grocer Kroger via a connection in the Holland Marsh.

"They were pretty well near wild," he said. In their second year of supplying Kroger with trees, the grocer decided it wanted 10,000.

"We had actually robbed our crop (from the next year) a little to get 1,000," Doug said.

Not being able provide more than roughly 1,000 trees themselves, Doug bought the remaining trees from other farmers, then resold them to Kroger.

Around 1960, the Drysdals heard about cut-your-own tree farms south of the border.

The Doug told fellow local tree farmer Keith Horton about them and that year they both started offering cut-your-own Christmas trees to the general public.

"This particular location was the very first in Ontario," Doug said.

"It turned out to be spectacular. We created quite a few traffic jams and so did (Keith Horton)," he said.

In 1968, Doug purchased another 26 acres fronting St. John's Sideroad.

Despite expanding their land, tree farming remained a hobby for the two generations of Drysdals. Doug spent 33 years with the Ontario government's forestry branch.

It was not until his son, Doug Jr., who also graduated from the University of Toronto's forestry program, but in 1981, did the operation, which included a tree farm in Essa Township, become a full-time business.

Within the 136 acres the Drysdals donated to the York Regional Forest, is the largest, in diameter, ironwood tree "anywhere", accord-



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Doug Drysdale wanted one more year at the family tree farm before it becomes part of the regional forest. On the cover: Zack Beauchamp and Sam Beauchamp carry a tree out of the Drysdale farm Saturday. Go to [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com) to see additional photographs.

ing to Doug.

Ironwood is the densest Canadian wood and it is used to make tool handles. It can grow to 12 metres in height and have a diameter of 25 metres.

"It will be carefully designated on the property," Doug said, noting a trail will go by it.

## LARGEST TREE IN CANADA

The donated land will carry the Drysdale name, according to the media release supplied by York Region earlier this year.

The property will provide an opportunity for tree planting and restoration of forest cover, as well as recreational opportunities and trail linkages.

"The Drysdale name has been synonymous with Christmas trees; we are very

proud to now have their name associated with the York Regional Forest," said Town of Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Vito Spatafora, chairperson of the region's environmental services committee.

In 1997, Reg was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame because of his work in pioneering the Christmas tree industry.

Drysdale's has been named the best Christmas tree farm twice by the National Christmas Tree Growers Association. The farm has also been named best Christmas tree grower in Ontario a number of times.

- Drysdale's Whitchurch-Stouffville Christmas tree farm is located at 16195 Durham Road 30, just north of Aurora Road.

For more information, go to [www.drysdals.ca](http://www.drysdals.ca)



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