



## **Holiday Farmers' Market At Penn Street**

READING --- The first two Fridays in December will find Christmas trees and other holiday greenery at Penn Street Market, located in the 800 Block of Reading. Geissler's Tree Farm of Leesport will be coming back to their roots of selling Christmas trees in the city, something that has not been done for several decades but which is how the family got started in the tree business. The current owners, Rickey and Kelly Geissler recalled how their family got started in the Christmas tree business in the 1930s when Rick's grandfather and Kelly's great grandfather, Earl Ruppert, bought trees from the Reading Railroad for 25 cents. He carried them 14 blocks to his home on North Front Street where he sold them to the neighbors so he could give his family a little extra at Christmas.

The family business was created when Earl's daughter Ruth and husband Russell Geissler bought 120 acres in Schuylkill County in 1954. Ruth and Russell formed the foundation of the company on hard work and dedication. They began growing Christmas trees on the property that was also shared by their campground. Ruth and Russell raised five children in Reading where they retailed trees from their farm in Schuylkill County. All members of the family worked the farm over the next 20 years.

Their middle son, Rickey, is a Reading High School and Penn State graduate. He bought 19 acres in 1976 at the nursery's current location near Leesport. He continued to grow and develop the family's nursery by specializing in evergreens. Rick has expanded his nursery to shade trees, grafted material, and ornamentals. Over the next 30 years, the nursery has grown to four farms and approximately 300 acres of nursery stock.

The middle of Rick's three daughters, Kelly, 24, Schuylkill Valley graduate, joined the now fourth generation business in spring of 2004. She is a graduate of Delaware Valley College, Doylestown, with a degree in Floriculture, a minor in business and has a degree from Hixon's School of Floral Design, OH. Kelly manages the wholesale nursery as well as the office throughout the year. She has also created her own business which currently focuses on weddings, Christmas wreaths and decorations, and special events. She is married to Jeffery Piccioni who is in charge of cut-your-own weekends during the Christmas season.

"We are thrilled that Geissler's Tree Farm has agreed to launch our Holiday Market on Penn Street," said Sheila Miller, Berks County's agricultural coordinator. "They will be offering Christmas trees in downtown Reading for the first time in years. They will be bringing an assortment of sizes and types of trees, along with wreaths, garland, cemetery

decoration boxes, and other natural decorations. They will have a tree baler to make transporting simple. Free parking is available in the lot at 9<sup>th</sup> and Cherry Streets.”

The Geissler family is also accepting tree donations for families of active military service men and women at the Penn Street Market location on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, kicking off the Trees for Troops weekend. Geissler’s were one of the host farms on the October Farm Tour, organized by the Berks Agricultural Resource Network. Pa Dept. of Agriculture George Greig visited their farm on October 18th as part of the farm tour promotion.

Penn Street Market is an open-air market located on property owned by the City’s Redevelopment Authority next to the Reading Hospital and Medical Center’s dispensary at Market Square. Berks County Agricultural Coordinator said non-profit organizations and other vendors have been invited to participate in this Holiday Market from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. on December 2nd and 9th . For more information about the Holiday Market or to have a stand, contact Berks Agricultural Coordinator Sheila Miller at 610-898-5482.

