



Trees & Teens

Nichols Logging is as much about saving lives as harvesting trees

By Jeff Mullins

While loggers leave behind stumps and slash, some, like Roger Nichols, leave a legacy. Roger viewed logging as a “hands on” way to help people better their lives. Today, nearly 15 years after his passing, Roger Nichols’ bequest includes the 533 acre Nichols Tree Farm, Nichols Logging Inc., and Teen Trees Inc., a not-for-profit company that continues to improve countless lives around the world.

Teen Trees was founded in 1963 by Roger and his wife, Lynn, in Columbia County, Ore. A professional logger since 1951, Roger’s faith produced a passion for helping troubled teens. Over the next 27 years, the tree farm was called home by 75 troubled teens. They learned the meaning of love, the value of life, and how to put in a good day’s work.

The kids were paid fair wages to perform every type of manual labor imaginable, including harvesting hundreds of thousands of 12-foot long alder saplings annually to be used in aluminum refineries.

Stepping into Roger’s Shoes

Dan Kloppman was one of the “at-risk” foster kids who began working at Teen Trees in 1983, at age 16. Today, as president of Nichols Logging, Inc., he and Lynn Nichols continue the work Roger began. Lynn does the books, while Dan harvests 430 MBFT of timber annually, the equivalent of 5-6 percent of Nichols farm’s growth.

In addition to managing the tree farm to ensure a sustainable harvest, Nichols Logging specializes in mechanized commercial thinning for other small landowners to supplement the farm’s income.

Although never legally adopted, Dan Kloppman became heir-apparent as he worked and learned at Roger’s side over a ten-year period.

“It was only through Roger’s sacrificial giving and God’s grace that I was transformed from being a hopeless teen into the person I am today,” says Dan. “Out of the 75 foster kids Roger and Lynn Nichols took under their wing, only one has committed a major crime. Most are responsible citizens — several have become pastors, and others are company managers. I can only imagine where most of us would be today if not for Teen Trees.”

While Teen Trees no longer takes in foster children, Nichols Logging continues to arrange for, and underwrite the cost of, shipping care containers to those less fortunate in other countries. Local youth learn the value of



giving as they prepare materials and pack the containers. And the revenue from the contract thinning operations and tree farm pays the costs.

Sustainable Forestry

Today, certified as a Master Woodland Manager, Dan relies on a few machines capable of multiple functions. A D6C Caterpillar, a 450C Timberjack skidder with dual arch winch/grapple and a Caterpillar 235 log loader are used for traditional harvest operations.

The D6 is also useful for construction and maintenance of more than six miles of roads on the tree farm, and its scarifying blade prepares ground for planting. Dan loads gravel from the farm's four rock pits into Nichols' Chevrolet C60 12-yard dump truck, with 745 Allis Chalmers loader. With a four-yard bucket with forks attached, the loader can be used to manipulate smaller logs.

"In recent years, we have worked very hard to open up the existing forests to maximize growth and establish viable stands wherever possible," says Dan. "Since 1993, we have planted over 112,000 trees, and the extensive all-weather roads enable us to access and implement intense management practices." With 60 acres of the farm located in the 100-foot riparian zone of the Clatskanie River and its tributaries, the task is made even more challenging.

Helping the Neighbors Too

In 2002, the company purchased a used Blondin 810 harvester with a Rottne processing head, as well as a Rottne Rapid harvester.

"Loggers in the northwest tend to be 20-30 years behind those in the south when it comes to adopting new technology," says Dan. "In 1986, this harvester was the first processor operating west of the Mississippi."

Dan says he bought this equipment to be more efficient in thinning operations on the tree farm. "We also saw opportunity to supplement income beyond the farm's sustainable harvests. Many small woodland owners do not have access to mechanized thinning equipment. Obtaining it allowed us to provide them a profitable and valuable service."

On the day TimberWest visited, the 810 harvester was thinning a customer's tight 40-acre stand of 25-year-old Douglas fir to roughly 14-foot spacing. The harvester's articulated arm selected stems up to 16" in diameter from as far away as 33 feet, felled, de-limbed at a rate of 12 feet per second, and cut to length before the single grip Rottne head placed them in piles.

"Rather than targeting a specific spacing, in this stand it was best to cut corridors, reach back into the stand and remove unwanted stems so that the remaining stock spacing would allow for maximum growth rates," says Dan.

After processing, the 10-ton Rottne Rapid forwarder collects logs and transports them to the landing. Dan deftly threads logs between standing stems to fill the bunk.



Extreme care is exercised to avoid damaging remaining trees. In winter all logs are loaded and then sorted at the landing to reduce the number of trips. When the ground is dry, Dan first removes the saw logs with tops as small as five inches in diameter and then returns for the pulp.

At the landing, the forwarder's knuckle boom is used to load hired trucks for transporting logs to nearby mills. Thinning services are provided per/ton for pulp and per/1,000 for saw logs.

Staying Busy

Demand for thinning services keeps Nichols Logging thinning equipment busy year round producing the equivalent of 250 MBFT in pulp and saw logs.

In addition to thinning their own tree farm, one nearby customer utilizes his thinning services throughout the winter, leaving Dan available to fulfill contracts for smaller landowners in the summer.

Dan says it will soon be time to replace the forwarder and harvester. "The machines continue to work well, but their age will limit parts and good technical support availability." He's likely to stay with Blondin/Rottne because he appreciates the service and support he's received.

The Next Generation

It's been decades since Dan learned from Roger Nichols that logging is a "hands on" opportunity to help people better their lives. And today, he's committed to doing all he can to ensure the legacy does not end with him.

As Dan's children grow, he intends to pay them well for helping to manage the tree farm. He hopes they learn how to work, what it means to be loved, and the value of life.