



# Check Stephens' "Christmas TREASURE"



*By Elishia Ballentine, Editor*

**D**id you know there were “Blue Pyramids” in Alabama? That’s the name given to one selection of a variety of Christmas trees grown at the oldest Christmas Tree farm in Alabama. Originally grafted from an Arizona cypress, this particular tree maintains a natural beautiful shape throughout its growing season and retains a vibrant look throughout the Christmas season if watered consistently.

Chester “Check” Stephens had actually started experimenting with trees when he was an ag student at Auburn in 1941. “Not long thereafter, I spent some time in Europe where an issue had arisen that demanded my assistance. However,” he said with a wink, “We took care of it.”

Eventually settling back down in Autauga County after the war, he established the Christmas tree farm around 1950, the first of such in the state. Located on 553 acres in the southeast section of the county, this legacy property had passed from generation to generation in his wife’s family since they had obtained it in a land grant back in the 1820s or 30s. The first Mrs. Stephens passed away several years ago, and some of the original land has been divided between the children.

Certified as a TREASURE Forest in 1997, Mr. Check’s primary objective was timber and his secondary objective was wildlife. In addition to Christmas trees, other multiple-use management practices on the property at one time included catfish ponds, beef cattle, cotton, and hunting. He conducted prescribed burns, maintained food plots, and carried out stand management plans.

Now retired and in his 90s, Mr. Stephens still lives on the farm, along with his new bride, Miss Margaret. While most of the multiple-use practices have ceased, he remains active in managing his timber interests and continues to enjoy growing Christmas trees. He understands the joy these trees bring children, as well as the TREASURED Christmas memories made by families finding that perfect tree, then cutting it, taking it home and decorating it . . . there’s just nothing like the fragrance of a “real” Christmas tree! 🌲