

Outside it's frightful
Inside it's so delightful

Tomorrow:
Let it snow. Let it snow

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Uh, I forget. Just give me one of everything.

America's tree ready to light up Capitol

From Associated Press reports

When the switch is thrown Wednesday on the Capitol Christmas tree, it won't be just another lighting to the folks of Walden, Colo. For four years, Walden has planned so that one of its trees would be the centerpiece of the holiday season, America's Christmas Tree.

Through 28 presidents and half the country's history, it survived. Sprouting from a single seed, it grew as the nation did, from a few scented needles to a 74-foot sentry of the forest. When they cut it down just before Thanksgiving, the evergreen revealed a magnificent trunk girdled by 136 rings.

And now, because a handful of people in a depressed logging town believed they could do it, this noble Englemann spruce has emerged from deep woods near Walden, Colo., to make its way, by truck and train, to the front lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

America's Christmas tree is ready to light up the season Wednesday. This year's Capitol tree found its way from the Colorado-Wyoming border to the country's front yard because Pat Bunge, proprietress of Pat's Hair Hut, and retired school teacher Mary Rupp, and U.S. Forest Service specialist Carolyn Krupp, and Chris Christofferson, owner of the North Park Cleaners and Laundry, and other civic boosters had an idea four years ago.

They wanted to do something special to celebrate Walden's centennial in 1990.

Many in the town of 800 people looked around, and what they saw were trees — millions of them. Trees carpeted hillsides, made the air smell good, built their houses, fed their fireplaces and wood stoves through long, frigid winters, and most importantly, kept their

faltering economy alive.

Like most other Americans, the folks of Walden had watched Christmas tree lighting ceremonies on television. They were confused between the White House Christmas tree and the Capitol tree. So they investigated, and learned that the White House version is a living tree that is redecorated every year.

The Capitol tree, however, is always a freshly cut evergreen from a national forest and no public funds ever are used to transport or decorate it, truly making it a "people's tree."

So in the late winter of 1987, a few folks in Walden decided they wanted the 1.1 million-acre Routt National Forest that encircles the town to donate the Capitol tree in 1990.

Christofferson, then a town councilman, recalled that nobody had thought about celebrating the centennial before a local forest service official noted the 100th anniversary was fast approaching.

"But we got right on it, and sent a letter back to Washington to the head of the forest service, petitioning for the honor," said Christofferson. "We were competing with four other communities, and with the help of our congressional delegation, we got picked... Then we went to work."

Walden's Capitol Christmas Tree Committee met monthly. It commissioned a logo, mailed fliers to every school district in the state soliciting waterproof, fireproof decorations for the tree.

The committee brainstormed ways to raise more money in a town that long had been used to making do instead of making new. Its members were a cross section of the community — teachers, businessmen, state officials, foresters, a retired postman, even the school super-

intendent. It was grassroots, and it was effective.

Volunteers eventually raised nearly \$10,000.

Corporate sponsors were solicited. Union Pacific Railroad agreed to transport the tree to Washington; Louisiana Pacific donated trucks and cranes to get the tree from the forest to the train, and then move it from a rail siding in Washington to the Capitol.

Anheuser-Busch even pledged its famous Clydesdales to lead the town's Christmas parade and give the tree a grand send-off.

Boosters designed and sold souvenir mugs, hats and T-shirts to pay for cutting and wrapping the tree. More than 100 people, including at least 35 kids, signed up to go to Washington for the ceremony. Bake sales and car washes helped finance their expenses.

Before you could say "Tannenbaum," the whole community was united in Christmas tree mania.

But despite all the hubbub, Waldenites hung on to the original goal: find their best tree and give it to the country. Parents took their youngsters for weekend walks, scouring the back country for pretty trees. The committee offered a \$50 prize. Snowmobilers ventured far back in the wilderness in winter, hoping heavy snow would help them find that one perfect evergreen.

Foresters kept a confidential list of candidates and, by last July, nine trees were deemed suitable to show Paul Pinkus, landscape architect of the Capitol, when he arrived in Walden.

But that was old news to Walden citizens, who've been going through tough times so long even old-timers can't remember the boom years. They weren't about to let the obvious ruin their party.

One reason people get divorced is that they run out of gift ideas — Robert Byrne